

## TWO DAYS IN THE VILLAGE OF BINJLI: PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE EFFORTS TO BUILD UP THE VERRIER ELWIN MEMORIAL

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This article is an analytical account of the two days that were spent in a village in Narayanpur (Bastar) in connection with the building up a Memorial dedicated to Verrier Elwin, one of the leading anthropologists who stayed in villages of Bastar for a long time in connection with his books on the tribal communities in this part of India.

**Key words:** Binjli village, *ghotul*, Elwin Memorial, tribal and non-tribal perspectives.

When Dr. K.M. Sinha Roy, the then Head of Office of the Regional Centre of the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) at Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh), told me in mid-August, 2017 that the inhabitants of the village of Binjli in Narayanpur district (Chhattisgarh) had approached him to persuade the AnSI to build up a memorial in their village commemorating the love of Verrier Elwin for tribes of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, I instantly promised him to look into this proposal favourably. The village of Binjli also reminded me of an unfortunate incident of January 1985, the month I joined the Delhi Anthropology Department as a lecturer in social anthropology, when one of the post-graduate students of my Department was drowned in a dam of the village. He was a member of the class of students which has stationed itself in this village for their round of a fortnight's fieldwork on the basis of which they would write their respective dissertations. This village of the erstwhile Bastar was chosen primarily because it was one of the famous abodes of Muria, a community that Elwin's celebrated book titled *The Muria and their Ghotul* (1947/1991) immortalized.

I sought more details from Dr. Sinha Roy. The Binjli people fondly remembered the place where Elwin had built his hut, which stood the test of time for more than half a century, before it finally collapsed and its debris had to be removed. Few years ago, its mud-plastered base was also removed and the ground levelled. I was also told about the decision of Binjli to have the Elwin Memorial built near that area. Dr. Sinha Roy and I speculated on the probable structure of the Memorial in case it were to be built. We thought it could just be one large room, built solidly, housing on the right side Elwin's publications and all the other publications on and about him, in English and the other Indian languages, if any, so that a reader has access to all his writings. Not only that, in case his field photographs and notes

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could be made available, they would all be kept in this wing, fully laminated and treated with conservation technology.

The left side of the room would have a photo gallery of Elwin. In case we succeeded in getting the ‘personal things’ of Elwin – such as his pens, neck-ties, glasses – we would display them in glass cases. The centre of the room would have a table and six chairs for the readers and researchers. I also learnt about the willingness of local people to provide a couple of men to take care of the Memorial. It was clear from the talk I had with Dr. Sinha Roy that the dwellers of Binjli considered Elwin as one of them, a member of their own community. They knew that he had written a book on them, but being non-literate, they could never read it; their teachers also did not have the kind of proficiency that was required to read a book of that calibre. The fact that a book existed on them was greatly comforting to them. Later, I came to know from some local men that whenever the book was shown to them they satisfied their quench to know about themselves from the photographs that it contained. They were able to recognise many of their tribespersons in these pictures; they also told me that their elders recalled the fact that Elwin used to take large number of photographs wherever he went. His camera was always ready.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not he took the permission of people before taking their pictures was not known to them.

After Dr. Sinha Roy left, I started thinking about the Elwin Memorial Project in approbative terms. I also picked up a couple of books, released recently, on Elwin, and greatly enjoyed the debate on whether he was an anthropologist, social scientist, folklorist, ethno-journalist, or fiction-writer (see Sinha, 2016). Discussions on Elwin were lively, with different opinions being voiced on his writings, but the unanimity in all of them was that he truly wanted to capture in his writings the lives of Indian tribal men and women and also, their cultural knowledge. Painstakingly, whenever he could, he collected the folkloric material about the tribes he was studying, thus indeed providing a plethora of information for the future researchers.

## 2.

The opportunity to visit Jagdalpur in connection with an official work came in early September. I avidly seized it, for it also meant a visit to Binjli. I was a little confused about the name of the village because Binjli does not figure much in Elwin’s works and the students of my department who were members of that fateful fieldwork, mentioned earlier, also remembered this village as Bijli. But when I was there, it was clear that the village was called Binjli, although Elwin spelt it as Binjhli (1947/1991: 7).

In any case, the villages were unimportant to Elwin, for his work was principally a ‘community study’ rather than a typical ‘village study’, like M.N. Srinivas’s study of Rampura or McKim Marriott’s of Kishangarhi. Members of a tribal

community are dispersed over a large area, in a number of villages. Therefore, one would not be tied to a single location. Rather one would be expected to visit as many locations of the people as possible so as to have a all-round picture of their living. Thus, Elwin visited as many settlements of the community, known by the same name, in which he was interested, as was possible, rather than settling down at one place, and understanding the life of the people from a 'within' perspective. His work was typically encyclopaedic – assembling at one place all that he was able to collect about a community of people within the time he was able to spend with them. However, time was overgenerously on his side. He could spend years on years with people, and thus afforded the luxury of traveling to different settlements of the people he was interested in, which certainly is not possible in highly time-bound field studies, or where the anthropologist has to combine his fieldwork commitments with other academic duties. In the latter case, the field sites are chosen in close vicinity. Fieldwork is carried out in short spells, interspersed with phases of writing. N.K. Bose is regarded as an example of this style of fieldwork, which André Béteille has called 'extensive fieldwork' by comparison to 'intensive fieldwork' (see Bose, 1975).

With the style of field investigation that Elwin adopted, which may be termed 'peregrinating', by contrast to the 'sedentary', of which Malinowski (1922/2014) was the prototype, he collected volumes of information, as said earlier, about the 'cultural artifacts' of people, and rendered for his readers and future generations detailed accounts, which may be subjected to further critical analysis. Incidentally, *The Muria and their Ghotul* was so full and overcrowded with cultural facts and details that it was considered wise to prune it to *The Kingdom of the Young* (1968), thus making a text that principally focused on the structure and functioning of the bisexual youth dormitory-club known as the *ghotul*, which was the 'central focus of Muria life' (Elwin, 1989: 39).

A day earlier to our visit to Binjli, Dr. Sinha Roy invited some distinguished persons of the town of Jagdalpur to interact with me. Small towns have their own mores of informality – local people may walk in to the government offices as and when they like; they may be informally dressed, as if they are moving from one part of their house to the other; they have cross-cutting ties with the officials whom they meet frequently at public places; in local celebrations, the officers are invited and they are supposed to attend and their absence, if any, is conspicuously noted and questioned; the people expect the officers, though outsiders, to accommodate to the local cultural patterns and be respectful towards them.

Three gentlemen came to see me – elderly, highly educated, migrants from the other parts of Madhya Pradesh, but had settled down in Jagdalpur long time back, after a successful career. Perhaps, Bastar meant 'Verrier Elwin' to them; and so, after the preliminary exchange of greetings and introductory notes, the conversation funnelled down to Elwin. They claimed to have read *The Muria*, and were impressed,

as they told me, with the language and ‘flowery expressions’; however, one of them, who retired as the principal of a college, thought that at places, it was an ‘exaggerated account’, but he quickly excused him by saying that it might be an uncharitable and wrong comment since he was not an anthropologist and was speaking as a layperson than as a specialist.<sup>2</sup> His honesty impressed me.

Of the three, he seemed to have seen Elwin, who paid a visit to his middle school. For some time, Elwin worked as a census official in Jagdalpur. The principal remembered the fact that Elwin was the only ‘white man’ he ever saw those days who wore the Indian dress of a loose long shirt almost touching the knees (*kurta*) and a pair of loose long pants tied by a drawstring around the waist (*pyjama*). Because of the pleasant climate, Jagdalpur was quite popular with the foreigners. They all wore formal, western dresses. Elwin was the sole exception. He looked benign, spoke softly with ‘light’ (*patli*) voice. After Elwin left the school, not only the students but the teachers also, were deeply impressed with his demeanour: unlike the other westerners, he lessened the gap between the ‘colonized’ and the ‘colonizers’, the ‘erstwhile ruled’ and the ‘erstwhile rulers’. At that time, they did not know that Elwin was an ardent supporter of the thesis of philanthropy.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.

We were scheduled to visit Binjli the following morning, 5 September 2017. Dr. Sinha Roy’s team, which would accompany me, comprised an extremely well known, a highly-respected, Jagdalpur-based, social worker, bearing affiliation to the Congress Party, who was born and brought up in the village of Binjli, and still had her relatives living therein. She was articulate, spoke Hindi well, and greatly enjoyed narrating facts about her community. However, right from the beginning of our conversation, she sowed the seeds of confusion in our mind. To the question whether Binjli could be called a ‘typical Muria village’, her answer surprised me when she said that the people of Binjli were all Gond and not Muria. Drawing a circle with her finger, she said: “This entire area is of Gond, Muria are situated far off.” To this, she wanted Dr. Sinha Roy’s nod, for he, being an anthropologist, was expected to know more about the local area and the communities living therein than her; but he was as intrigued as I was since he knew that Binjli was a Muria village and what the lady was saying was an ‘imaginary assertion of the upward mobility of her community.’<sup>4</sup>

By this I mean the fact of telling an outsider a ‘wishful fact’, ‘what one would like to be’, although one knows that it may not be or simply is not true; however, the presumption is that the listener would accept it without an expression of skepticism on his face, and also, without making an effort to verify the claim, and in the process would start according a high status to the claimant and his community. This certainly is not an isolated incident as I have observed many ‘marginal men’ in rural and tribal areas who would try to present their respective communities in

better (and ‘respectable’) terms before the outsiders, since by doing so, they think that they are also able to raise their own status.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, the movements for asserting a high status have their origin in such sporadic claims. Some members of the community, mostly the educated, politically powerful, economically well off, and holding high social status, start reiterating such claims, or claiming a different identity. Then, they gradually start gaining support, with their dependents and the other interested people joining the movement. In the process, they silence all voices of dissent, if any. In course of time, the community comes to acquire a new identity, although the old identity is not completely erased.

The issue of identity and nomenclature came up later, during our interaction with a group of Binjli-dwellers in the afternoon of 5 September, when the lady social worker raised the issue of whether ‘Binjli is a Gond village or a Muria village’. Addressing a group of men, she said, pointing towards us: “Tell them who we are? Aren’t we Gond?” The men were thrown in a state of confusion – on one hand, they had to muster enough courage to contradict the lady, for besides being politically well-connected and powerful, she was highly respected and many of the young men and women called her ‘mother’, and on the other, they had to tell the reality as it was. I understood why they were silent on this issue; but then, they were expected to respond. One of them, also a party worker, said: “From time immemorial, we are Muria; this is what I have learned from my forefathers; this is what we have been told time and again.” The other men nodded.

The lady responded: “The word Muria is also ‘going on’; but since beginning, we are Gond. As far as I know the relations of commensality and marriage (*roti* and *beti*) do not exist between them. The Gond are one, a big group.” Pointing toward the hilly terrain, she said: “That is the Muria habitation.”

I could see the streaks of disbelief on the faces of men, who were being addressed, for it amounted to putting their geographical and sociological knowledge up side down. One of them said softly: “That is the Maria area”. One of the men wanted to put an end to this conversation, for he knew as did the others that they ‘are Muria’, and are different from the Gond. He said: “The Muria inhabit the plains; they are the original inhabitants (*mul nivasi*) of this area. In hilly regions live the other communities of people.” It was absolutely clear from his assertion, and the nods of others that they differed from the opinion which denied them Muria identity, although its protagonist kept on reiterating the Gond identity of the Binjli-dwellers. Later, during the day, at lunch hours, and also, on the second day we spent at Binjli (21 December 2017), the lady social worker raked this issue, but it was clear it was falling on deaf ears.

One could see a clear divide between the opinions of a town-settled, affluent, political-aspirant, who looked remarkably different from the local people in terms of her attire and manners, and the local people.<sup>6</sup> It was clear that people like her aspired to move up in the ‘hierarchy’ of tribes. They certainly do not want to

identify them with a caste, or to make it clear, a Hindu caste. In fact, as I learned during the first day in Binjli, the Muria did not want to identify them as Hindu. They followed what they called 'Muria *dharma*', which they described as a 'religion based on the worship of nature'. The Brahmin priest has no role to play in their religious or ritual life, although they said that some of them, who have moved to towns and taken up modern occupations, have started following the 'Gayatri *dharma*', a variant of Sanskrit Hindu practices, and they often visit the Hindu pilgrimage centres and get the rituals performed by Brahmin priests, and also get their names entered into the 'books' (*bahi*) that their religious patrons keep. However, their number was counted to be in minuscule. The lady activist described her religion as 'Gondi *dharma*', which is different from Hinduism. Against this backdrop, it may be surmised that for the Muria, the reference group of upward mobility is not a Hindu caste. It is, thus, either class mobility, which comes from their successful participation in the new economic frontiers, or new jobs, or it comes from their identification with another highly-placed tribal group.<sup>7</sup>

This incident also tells us that we should not assume that all tribes are equally placed and there is no hierarchy among them. The case under consideration shows that the Gond are believed to be placed above the Muria, and this fact is acknowledged by at least some individuals from the community of the Muria, and therefore, they would like to identify them with the community they consider as superior to them. A tribe is placed higher to the other not because of its 'internal cultural characteristics', such as religious practices, language, or folklore, but because of its numerical strength, political power, the power to aid the victory of a particular candidate in election; in other words, it comes to occupy a higher place because of its number to impact social and political processes. This kind of dominance is different from that of the case of caste where the ritual and religious aspects play an important role in determining its dominance, besides of course, the control over economic resources. Mobility in the ladder of tribal societies has not been studied, perhaps because of the thinking that since all tribes are equal, there is no question of upward mobility. However, the case we have outlined above gives clear indication of upward tribal mobility, which for want of a better term, may be termed, borrowing a term from Owen Lynch (1969), 'elite-emulation'.

However, the term 'tribalisation' may not be used for this because it means 'becoming more tribal'; a caste may 'tribalise' itself, as happened with the Badaga (Hockings, 1980/2011). Or a tribe *en route* to giving up its tribal traits (the process of de-tribalisation) under the impact of the extraneous forces realises the need to consolidate its culture, for it gives them a 'solid identity' to stake their claim for a better deal with the political state. Educated tribal youth are reading the writings of the colonial administrators-cum-anthropologists and the other anthropologists of independent India to know about their past customs and practices that could viably be revived for their 'identity-assertion' movements.<sup>8</sup> This process may be termed

‘tribalisation’, but the process under consideration here is of a tribe trying to identify itself with the other tribe, and this would require an understanding of the hierarchy of the contiguously-placed tribal societies, where a lowly-situated tribe tries to identify itself with the ‘upper tribe’. The latter has no objection to such attempts. In fact, when seen from inside, the ‘upper tribe’ may comprise several sub-tribes which at one time were independent tribal groups. It is also likely that within the ‘upper tribe’, in course of time, a distinction may evolve between those who are ‘original’ (and thus ‘pure’) and those which are not.

What I found engaging my attention in the lady social worker’s claim, which as I have shown earlier was politely rebutted by many local people who had no doubt about their Muria identity, was the simmering of a process of upward mobility that may speed up with the forces of urban growth and politicisation. It also shows that the identities at the local level are porous, if not fuzzy. Undoubtedly, an approach that lays emphasis on the study of processes at work will show the emergence and merging of different identities. If pursued, it will also show the emergence of a ‘greater tribal identity’ against the non-tribal. Interestingly, a sub-tribe may exist as an ‘identified whole’ within the womb of a larger tribe – so Muria may exist as Muria within the rubric of the Gond, so may result hyphenated tribal names, such as Muria-Gond. In a similar way, Gond may exist as they are under the larger category of ‘tribes in India’, and the latter as the ‘tribes of the world’.

#### 4.

Although these issues fascinated me, the actual purpose of our visit was to focus on Elwin, the memorial that has to be built, and have a discussion with the Binjli-dwellers about our agenda, especially with those who mattered in decision-making. As is expected in a situation of a group interview, a number of topics, from youth dormitory to education, or from transporting of gods and goddesses to the erection of memorial stones, came up for enquiry, but since our emphasis was on Elwin, we tried to formulate all questions that concerned his stay in this area: When did he come to live in Binjli? Who all came with him? Where did he live? Why did he come? And, so on.

More than eighty years had passed since Elwin stayed in Binjli. There was only one old lady, in her late eighties or early nineties, who had faint memories of Elwin’s stay, but could not say more than a couple of sentences on him. We met her on both the occasions of our visit to Binjli. Each time she had the same information to impart – that he was fair-complexioned; he was fond of hunting; identified the place where he lived; that she sometimes carried food for him. That’s all. But the most important fact was she was the only one in the village who had seen her; all the others told us what they had heard from their parents and grandparents. And, what the others remembered were the isolated segments of information they had assimilated from their previous generations. On the basis of

such snippets of memory, an attempt to build up a memory ethnography is likely to be an onerous exercise, and not free from criticisms.

We were shown the place where there stood a big mango tree, presumably bearing sweet and delicious fruits, as one of the local residents said, that Elwin had planted, in the vicinity of which he had built his house.<sup>9</sup> The Binjli-dwellers called this place ‘Sahab *marka*’ – the term was used not just for the mango tree but for the entire complex.<sup>10</sup> For people, it actually meant “Elwin’s residence.” The work Sahab was used for Elwin, as it was for all officers, a practice that still continues. The Sahab shifted here with his Gond wife named Kosi, we were told, who has stayed in the memory of people as a ‘lady who wore frocks’, like the other western women, and often drank the local spirit more than what could keep her in the limits of sanity.<sup>11</sup> She spoke a dialect of Gond. Initially, she had difficulty in understanding the Muria dialect, but soon picked it up. However, her carefree attitude, coupled with undisciplined drinking and loitering aimlessly in the village, was Elwin’s worry.<sup>12</sup> Despite best efforts, he did not succeed in bringing about a positive change in her demeanour. She persisted with her manners incorrigibly. Then, we were told, she went away for good.<sup>13</sup>

The village of Binjli was Elwin’s ‘headquarter’ – he kept all his belongings there, and from there travelled to different villages of the Muria and Hill Maria. After several weeks and months of stay in different parts of Bastar, Elwin would return to his ‘headquarter’, where he would stay for weeks. In those moments, he was mostly seen as writing. His hours of leisure were spent in gossiping with people and going to Narayanpur to meet his friends or attend social functions.

Memories concerning Elwin were not many, and that too came to people from their now-dead elders. However, the memories of outsiders who came to live in Binjli after Elwin, more so in recent times, were fresh in the minds of people. That Elwin’s ‘niece’ (*nati*) lived in the village for three years in the early 1970s was known to everyone. How exactly was she related to Elwin was not known to them and why was she there was again not clear to them: Did she come with the aim of writing a book on the Muria or just experience the village life? People did not remember whether she ‘did a lot of writing’, or spoke to men and women at length, as did Elwin. They remembered that she distributed chocolates (and sometimes coins) to children, she used to play a musical instrument, which people called *tamura* (a string instrument, perhaps, a violin), she used to visit the *ghotul* as it was in operation those days. One day, I was told, her *tamura* came under the feet of a running bull and was broken to pieces. Then, she often was seen weeping as she missed her *tamura* all times.

Who was she? For people, any white-skinned person who came to their village was conjectured to be Elwin’s kinsperson. The visitors were believed to have travelled to Binjli on being inspired by Elwin. It is difficult for me to guess who that lady could be, who lived in Binjli for three years. Initially I had a strong



suspicion that she could be Simeran Gell (1992), a Cambridge anthropologist, the author of a book on Muria *ghotul*. Her husband, Alfred Gell (1980), also worked on Bastar, and advised C.A. Gregory (1997) to keep Bastar in his mind while undertaking the studies on economic anthropology. However, the name of the Bastar village that the Gells studied is Manjapur, which may be a pseudonym, for I was not able to locate this in the list of the villages in the *tehsil* of Narayanpur.

The last team of fieldworkers came to Bastar in January 1985. It hailed from the University of Delhi. They had barely started with their work, I was told, when an unfortunate incident of drowning occurred. Two boys went to the dam (known as 'Binjli dam') for a bath. The corner they chose for getting inside the water had a big root of a tree, not visible from outside, which obviously they did not know, in this the feet of one of the boys got entangled, and unable to extricate himself from it, he was drowned. Two days later, his dead body, still draped in a towel, was flushed out. The then Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Pravesh Sharma, helped the team in many ways, arranging the medico-legal formalities and getting the funeral arranged, and sending the shocked team members back to Delhi. When this story was being narrated to me, a lady said that the Muria believe in the existence of *jalpari*, a 'fairy that lives inside the water', who can pull anyone entering into the water to her abode, and this is exactly what happened with that boy!

After that incident, Binjli was not a favourite location of fieldworkers. We were appreciated for choosing the village not only for the Elwin Memorial but also, for long-term field research.

## 5.

After our return from Jagdalpur, Dr. Sinha Roy continued to stay in touch with different government departments for the finalization of the deal with the village of Binjli. The village council conveyed to us in writing on 5 September, on our first day in Binjli, about their intention to donate the land for the Elwin Memorial. Soon, Dr. Sinha Roy informed me that we should fix a date when the ceremony publicly declaring the building of the Memorial would take place in Binjli in proximity to the site where Elwin had built his house. We mutually decided to hold this function on 21 December, followed by a two-days' seminar on the 'Tribal World of Verrier Elwin'. Response to invitation letters to the seminar was exceptionally encouraging. An important invitee to the seminar was Ashok Elwin, the son of Lila and Verrier Elwin.<sup>14</sup>

Binjli was often described as a *nirmal gaon*, meaning a village where each household had built a toilet, where open defecation was non-existent. It was also regarded as an *adarsha gaon*, where people were getting the benefits of all the governmental schemes, where people were aware of their rights and duties, where people were health- and hygiene-conscious. It was a dual-crop village, growing both wheat and rice. The people were proud of their village, in spite of the fact that

fear enveloped their lives every moment because of the rise of left-wing extremism. I heard people saying: 'Anything can happen anywhere, at any point of time'; 'We here are living on the blade of a razor'. Difficult areas, difficult times, but social life goes on; people laugh, enjoy, take delight in telling stories of their past, sharing their woes and tears with their visitors.<sup>15</sup>

The school compound where the ceremony had to take place was decorated beautifully. The stage was set, with a podium, where the villagers, visitors from Narayanpur and the other neighbouring villages and towns, and the representatives from the AnSI were expected to be seated. The ceremony began with a group of thirteen dancers from Binjli, dressed in traditional attire, giving a power-packed performance. This was the traditional welcome accorded to us. After that we were led to the stage. One by one we were called to speak on Elwin or the event that was being organized there. I shall in rest of this article present an analysis of the speeches that the local people (not only the Muria but also from other communities) delivered on this occasion, for the discourse it generated was of great importance, in how Elwin was deconstructed. The speeches that the anthropologists delivered dealt overwhelmingly with a cursory evaluation of the works and persona of Elwin. Most of them were in Hindi, but those who found it difficult to put forward their view in the national language, spoke in English. In fact, Elwin's son, Ashok, wanted to speak in English, for he had lived and was educated in Shillong, where English is almost the *lingua franca*, and I offered to translate his speech into Hindi, but seeing the crowd, he switched on to Hindi and expressed his thoughts as lucidly as he could.

The local speakers and invitees, as said earlier, could be conveniently classified into two categories: the tribal and non-tribal; and the first could further be broken into Muria and non-Muria tribal. The non-tribal invitees came from the towns of Narayanpur, Kondagaon, and Jagdalpur. They constituted the intellectual cream of the local society. Some of them had retired from the educational service, some were still teaching, and some of them had published a number of books documenting the local folklore and history. Needless to say, with the educational background backing them up, they were forceful in their speeches, lacing each argument in suitable words, and speaking in a comparative manner, bringing cases from other societies for juxtaposition. In their formal speeches as well as informal conversations, they almost emerged as the 'spokespersons' of tribal people. It was clear that the tribal voice was stunted before them. This is another kind of 'ideational domination', in the sense that the 'views of the outsiders on tribal matters' prevail over the 'views of the tribal people on their own ways of living.' The tribesmen are unable to counter the views of the outsiders, for the latter are economically and socially powerful, and for many administrative and political matters, the tribespersons have to depend upon them. The outcome of all this is that the tribal people maintain their silent posture in the presence of the non-tribal outsiders, as if

they are agreeing with everything that is being said about them. However, the English saying ‘silence gives consent’ is not applicable to this situation, as when the tribespersons are alone, or with a sympathetic listener, and anthropologists fall in this category, they have a different story to tell. It is well known that the structures of dominance silence people, whether they are women in a patriarchal society, or prisoners in an oppressive, highly incarcerating system, or tribes in relation with the powerful outsiders. Although time was limited, I tried my best to speak to the speakers after their formal addresses, over lunch in the Narayanpur Forest Guest House, so what is being reported below is an amalgamation of what they said publicly and the clarifications they offered on their speeches in private spaces.

## 6.

The first Muria speaker was Meghnath Kumeti, a retired school teacher. He began by stating the changes that have come in the life of the village. Many of the local lore and knowledge have been lost. The traditional, local language (*purani gondi*) has been forgotten by the new generation; it is only spoken by the old people, and with the death of each one, the language is also lost forever. It was in this language that the traditional culture of the people was stored.

As he proceeded, he compared the past with the present. For example, people of different communities lived far more cooperatively and amicably in yesteryears than they do now (Guha, 2006). One of the institutions, Kumeti continued, that instilled these values of love and peace was *ghotul*, and here, the boys and girls acquired a new identity of a responsible person. The mere fact that each one of them was given a new (and special) name was an indication that he or she was entering into a new role. It is sad that the tradition of *ghotul* has now come to an end. Elwin was one of the first foreigners who studied this institution, emphasizing its positive aspects. Since Binjli occupied a central place in Bastar, Elwin decided to live here. Kumeti heartily appreciated the efforts of the AnSI to ‘adopt’ the village of Binjli. He hoped that once the Memorial is built, it will be an excellent place for study and research.

After the meeting was over, I asked him for the causes that led to the decline of *ghotul*. He identified two main reasons. The first pertained to the emergence of modern schools, where the curriculum was starkly different. If *ghotul* was the seat of learning the traditional culture and its practices, the schools provided learning which connected the students to the wider world. The courses taught at schools demanded hard work, solitarily carried out. Against this backdrop, *ghotul* proved to be a big distraction. The adolescents spent their entire time in *ghotul* activities and with their friends. The Binjli-dwellers started realizing gradually that all those practices that are thwarting their children from seeking modern education must be set aside. That was the reason why *ghotul* was pushed to the backdrop.

Second, in the wake of the rise of left-wing extremism in Bastar, *ghotul* used to be the site where the Naxalites used to secure refuge. They misbehaved with girls, often demanding sexual favours. Thus, first of all, girls were withdrawn from the *ghotul*; and when there were no girls, the charm of *ghotul* was completely lost. The boys, instead of having *ghotul* visitations, reluctantly stayed at home. Gradually, the tradition of *ghotul* declined, and the *ghotul* building, still known as such, was used for housing guests to the village. During the heydays of violence, the para-military forces occupied the *ghotul* premises. Today, therefore, the *ghotul* is a deserted, dilapidated embodiment of its past, reminding people of the glorious days, when it was central to the Muria society. Now, the institution that Lingo, the supreme god of the Muria, had created has been completely de-centred.

Do the Muria miss *ghotul*? Kumeti said that in some interior villages the *ghotul* in an incipient form is still continuing. Sometimes the boys from Binjli, while visiting other villages, stay in their *ghotul* for the night, but the splendour that once was associated with it is now conspicuously missing. People in Binjli do not miss *ghotul*, for many young children do not know what it used to be at one time. No attempt is being made to revive it. Emphasis is now being laid on demanding newer institutions (for example, an undergraduate college) as well as strengthening the already existing ones (like the primary health centre, school). Essentially, what Kumeti said was that when today anthropologists provide colourful accounts of the *ghotul*, they are either rendering a description of its past, as it used to be, the detailed description of which was in Elwin's book, or it is just a figment of their imagination. They are afraid of telling the world that the institution which was central to the Muria at one time is now moving towards its marginalization. An important research question is a documentation and understanding of this process: 'How institutions do not remain the same at all point in time?'

## 7.

Shyam Lal Dugga, the chief (*sarpanch*) of the village council, was the next Muria speaker. In one of the shortest, shyly-delivered speeches, he appreciated our efforts to think about the village of Binjli. He described the only memory he had of Elwin. In his father's house, he found a pair of shoes. When he asked his father about the owner of the shoes, he was told they belonged to the Sahab. He did not know what happened to those shoes later. The old lady, who is supposed to be more than one hundred in age, also spoke a couple of sentences about having seen Elwin, and that she often carried food for him from her house. The last Muria speaker was Devnath Usendi, who repeated most of the things we had learned earlier from him and the others, about the mango tree that Elwin had planted; the animals he had hunted; and that he was a smoker. Elwin was always prepared to fight the wild animals whenever he came to know of their entry into the village. He was very friendly with local people. His best friends in Binjli were Rukji Majhi and Devdhar Chandel.

People remembered him as a man who was always asking questions and writing down the answers. I have come across this brief description of the anthropological work in many other contexts; anthropologists are generally remembered in the following words: 'They record in writing the conversations they have with the people with whom they live for a long time!'

A teacher from the Dhurva community, who was also engaged in writing a doctoral dissertation on his people, was another impressive speaker on this occasion. Whilst appreciating that it was the first time that such a programme was taking place in Bastar, he raised an important methodological issue. He said that in social research, people unfold the reality, which the investigator studies. If the perspective of the researcher is important in grasping the reality, it is equally important that the bearer of the culture places the facts before the researcher as clearly and as honestly as possible. He did not discount the fact that the respondents may misguide the investigator. They may tell him what they imagine, and not what the reality is all about. Thus, if there are ethical principles for the researchers, there should be a set of similar codes of conduct for the people of study. In any case, the researcher, he said, has to 'walk on the sharp blade of a sword'.

Gangaram Kashyap, the Dhurva teacher and a research student working for his doctorate on a topic pertaining to his own community, rued the fact that the local culture was gradually disappearing. Attempts to record the characteristics and the details of the tradition have not been made.<sup>16</sup> The major reason has been the lack of education on part of the native communities; that is why, culture was only passed orally. Now the local researchers, like him, are trying their best to record their cultures. We have to depend upon others – the English colonial officers – for information about our culture. Those who wrote on us at that time, like Elwin, have become immortal. Some of them – like Elwin – were the 'messiahs' of the communities they studied. He went to the extent of saying that 'Elwin was the Ambedkar of the tribal people'.<sup>17</sup>

The irony is, he proceeded, that the others are telling us about ourselves, our ways of living. We were not able to 'study and record' our cultures because of our illiteracy, but we are now on 'road to learning'. Just because we could not read and write, the outsiders wrote on us whatever they thought was right, and in their perception and understanding, often they committed errors, and these errors have persisted over a length of time. 'It is high time that these mistakes are rectified', he said, a mission for which all the educated people would be expected to join hands. They should also inspire the others to study, for education could life all. He spent a substantial portion of his speech on the local heroes from his community, who fought against the British, and now have been deified.

An important part of the local discourse was on the 'avowed simplicity' of local people, which actually meant 'gullibility'. Brought up in the 'lap of nature' and 'cohesive societies', people longed for 'love and respect', and not wealth and

affluence. Those outsiders who accorded them even a 'bit of concern' were able to win over their hearts. This also became, in several cases, the *raison d'etra* of their exploitation. At this point, the Dhurva teacher's lecture picked up the issue of Elwin's marriage to Kosi, a Gond girl. He said that Kosi was only thirteen when Elwin, at the age of thirty-eight, married her on 4 April 1940 under the Indian Christian Marriage Act (Act XV of 1872). This was clearly a case of child marriage – Elwin was marrying a girl twenty-five years younger to him. "Both Gandhi and Nehru knew about it, but alas! They said nothing. They didn't advise Elwin against it." He stopped for a while, then continued: "Elwin married her because he wanted to know more about the local *adivasi* communities."<sup>18</sup> In other words, Kosi became his 'primal respondent'. Not only would she tell her husband whatever she knew about her community, but also he would have an easy access to his affinal relatives. By this act of his, he would be in a 'community of respondents.' In addition, through her, Elwin could enter into the private recesses, including the world of sexual details, of the Muria. One does not know whether it was the real motive in Elwin's mind; or it was imputed to him by the others. However, the argument sustains: One of the ways of establishing rapport that some fieldworkers have resorted to is to have matrimonial ties with the local people.<sup>19</sup>

### 8.

Barring the Dhurva researcher, the rest of the 'tribal speakers' were short in their respective speeches and were bereft of rhetoric. They stated the facts, true to their knowledge and understanding, and impressed me with their non-judgemental stance. They purposefully avoided any kind of 'philosophisation' of the information, although they could have presented their perspectives in abstract terms as well. They all seemed to shy away from public speaking, but when contacted privately, they were mines of information. That was the reason of my 'latching onto them', so to say, in private spaces.

The contrast was with the non-tribal speakers. Today, as a result of the strict rules, the outsiders may not alienate tribal people of their land, but, given an opportunity, they certainly usurp the tribal right to speak about them. Well, the non-tribal outsiders take advantage of the public silence of tribesmen, and want to emerge as their 'spokespersons', not only of their problems, but also, their 'cultural wealth'. Underlying this is the idea that the educated non-tribal people can represent the tribesmen better than they themselves; so they take the lead. The structural distance between tribes and the non-tribal people has substantially narrowed because of towns coming closer to villages and the easy, regular travel of tribesmen to urban areas. Tribespersons often consult the urban elite, which is largely non-tribal, on various issues, and seek their help on matters of revenue, law, administration, admission to schools, and treatment at hospitals. Thus, on occasions of social importance, in which outside guests are expected to participate, the non-

tribal acquaintances of local tribal people are often extended invitation, for their presence supposedly 'strengthens' the hosts as they would be able to speak on behalf of the people. Needless to say, the structures of dominance silence the lowly and deprived. In this way, the system of stratification continues.

As expected, there was a bunch of non-tribal 'intellectuals', retired teachers and government officials, some of whom had distinguished them as essayists in Hindi language. They all spoke extempore, except a sociology teacher who had written a short paper for this occasion, which in all earnestness, she read out. The audience were eagerly awaiting their speeches, for they all thought they would throw new light on Elwin's work in Binjli.

### 9.

Shiv Kumar Pandey, a well-acclaimed scholar, was the first non-tribal speaker. He thought that the meeting on that day, 21 December, was so auspicious that it almost amounted to laying down the foundation stone of the Elwin Memorial, along with a 'worship of the land' (*bhumi puja*). For almost seven years, from 1935, Elwin lived in Binjli and the villages in its near vicinity. Whatever we know about Elwin, he said, "has come to us from our fathers and grandfathers. Today, none of those men and women are alive who could tell us about him. Those who saw him were children at that time, and they do not remember anything about him except his face or a couple of errands they might have carried out for him at that time." Thus, the Elwin which has come to us is a result of the 'piecing together' of a number of disparate incidents, to which the strands of 'fertile imagination' have also been liberally added.

Elwin was amazing, he was not an ordinary man, Pandey said. He would penetrate deep into the lives of the tribal people; he would immerse into the tribal world, and also embody it.<sup>20</sup> With this experience of living as intimately as was possible among tribespersons, Elwin succeeded in rendering a sensitive account of the people with whom he lived. Pandey claimed to have read his works that were translated into Hindi. If some of the details and interpretations that Elwin provided were acceptable to him, there were others with which he disagreed. Pandey conceded the point that the lacunae in Elwin's understanding could be because he did not know the local dialect well, and was constrained to depend upon the translators and interpreters. The latter part of Pandey's lecture was an expansion of this idea.

First, Elwin's understanding of the *ghotul*, Pandey submitted, was heavily vitiated by his western outlook and perspective. For him, this institution legitimised permissiveness, which is not really true.<sup>21</sup> For a correct appraisal of local institutions and practices, one would be required to grasp the organisation of the villages. Of greatest value was the system of *gotra* (patrinymic clan). Marriage or sexual ties between people of the same *gotra* were punishable, sometimes even with death

penalty. This principle of tabooing intra-*gotra* relations of intimacy was closely under surveillance in the *ghotul*. Boys and girls kept an eye on the members of their *gotra*, and this surveillance was enough to keep the rule of intra-*gotra* ties intact.

The question at this juncture is: Were there sexual ties in the *ghotul*? Pandey was silent on this issue. What he said was that intra-*gotra* sexual ties were proscribed. What about such relations between members of different *gotra*? On this, he said nothing; his point was: 'He [Elwin] should not have talked about it in a detailed manner' (*vistrit rup se nahin kahna chahiye*). Whether there were sexual ties or not, where pre-marital pregnancy was not permitted, is a silent issue (*maun vishaya*).

Towards the end of his speech, when he returned to this issue, he observed: 'No one should have said all that so openly about any tribal community' (*kisi janjati samaj ke bare mein itna khul kar nahin kahna chahiye*). Pandey also noted that perhaps those who were helping Elwin understand the local institutions might have focused more on the pre-marital sexuality, and Elwin, being western, might have thought of expanding on it in his book. It was clear from Pandey's speech that although sexual encounters might have occurred among boys and girls of different *gotra*, it is a subject on which Elwin should not have spoken so openly as he did, with the result that the Muria came to be known to the wider world as permitting sexual licentiousness, and the outsiders started looking at Muria men and women as 'easy targets'. In other words, the reputation of the community was badly bruised, adversely affecting its relations with tribal and non-tribal outsiders, whose men sometimes unabashedly mustered courage to approach Muria women for a carnal relationship. Only a handful of people could afford to read Elwin's book, and that too who had good command over English language, but almost everyone, including those who had not ever seen, thought that Elwin had described the Muria as sexually lax. Because of this thought, the image of the community was badly tarnished.

The second point on which Pandey expressed his dissent was not quite justified, as I shall spell it out soon. He spoke about the practice of tattooing, locally called *godna*, among the Muria. Elwin's interpretation of this was, Pandey said, that it is 'of interest (*shauk*) to the Muria.' Pandey tried to place what he thought was an alternate explanation. He said: 'Couple tattooing to the concept of beauty. Muria women like to beautify their bodies; they are the lovers of decoration and aesthetics. On some occasions, they adorn their entire body.' Elwin should have explored the Muria concepts of beauty, rather than dismissing it just as an interest of the people.

## 10.

Pandey did not say – or wanted to say, but could not – what another non-tribal speaker, Harihar Vaishnav, a distinguished scholar of Hindi literature, said in precise terms. Perhaps, these speakers missed out the fact that right from his first book on



the Baiga (1939) and later publications, Elwin (1939: 18-9) put forth in his writings the native perspective on tattooing. In case of the Baiga, Elwin said that the tattoo marks constitute the 'jewellery of the women', founded on the belief that what would go with them after their death is the tattoo mark, when all other things they have accumulated were left behind. The same belief was recorded in the Muria case.<sup>22</sup> Thus, to say that Elwin did not know of this local belief is blatantly erroneous.

Vaishnav was far more acerbic in his speech than his earlier speaker. He lent a wholehearted support to Pandey, submitting that the latter had said all that he wanted to place before the audience. Elwin came, Vaishnav said, with the prime objective of converting people to Christianity, but when he was face-to-face with the local culture (*sankriti*), he forgot his original aim of coming to India, and subjected his intellect to a wholesome understanding of the local peoples, their societies and cultures. Needless to say, he wrote authoritatively about the lives of people, their ground-level reality, living with them, sharing their food, habitation, and joys and woes. That is the reason, Vaishnav said, why Elwin's books are read and interrogated even today.

Without implicating Elwin on the interpretation of *godna*, Vaishnav referred to the outsiders' views on this practice. He cited the example of a story where in relation to tattooing, it is said that the "number of tattoo marks a woman has implies the number of males she would have for 'pleasure' (implying sexual)" (*jiske sharir mein jitne godne honge wo utne purushon ka sukh bhogegi*). This voyeuristic explanation, Vaishnav said, is ridiculous, completely missing out the 'real reason' of tattooing, which, as Pandey had earlier pointed out, was to embellish the body, to wear a 'jewel that became an ineluctable part of the body'.<sup>23</sup>

The next institution Vaishnav chose for deliberation, as I had expected, was of youth dormitory. Like his predecessor, he also came heavy on Elwin's interpretation of *ghotul*, which was laced with pre-marital sexuality and the training of youth in matters of body and carnality. Vaishnav went to the extent of saying that Elwin's account of *ghotul* spread like wild fire, with the consequence that the outsiders started thronging to Bastar with the objective of 'seeing' the display of human 'primal scenes'. The communities that had *ghotul* came to bear the stigma of 'permissiveness', almost bordering with 'immortality'. It was Elwin's interpretation that brought the local people to the outsiders' gaze. With the alarming interest of the visitors in the personal lives of the Muria, the local communities ruled in favour of closing their *ghotuls* down.

The outside observers were so obsessed with the themes of sexuality that they did not really understand the 'meaning' and 'objective' of *ghotul*. What they should have understood and emphasised is that '*ghotul* is the university of the whole tribe. It is a sacred institution. It is a place where youngsters learn about the norms and values of their tribe. It is not a night club as it was depicted by the outsiders.'

Vaishnav heaped his anger on all those visitors, lugged with powerful cameras, come to several fairs that are held in Narayanpur with the sole purpose of photographing 'semi-clad women'. These fairs are a fine combination of religious and economic dimensions of their society. 'As you know, here women, especially of earlier generations, have upper parts of the body sky-clad, and it is their pictures that the news reporters, writers, and exhibition-arrangers want to capture', Vaishnav was understandably caustic in his remarks when he said that these pictures were not only meant for satiating the hidden sensual urges but also for bringing economic gains to those marketing these pictures. With the same breath, he continued: 'Local tribespersons go to these places because their gods and goddesses also come there. People register their faith in them. These fairs are sacred places. There, they meet their relatives who hail from other villages. They also meet people whom they had not met earlier. And, they also buy goods they need for their respective households. People come in the same attire to which they are accustomed.'

To these fairs, I was told, people come from far-off places, sometimes from a distance of almost fifty kilometers. What attracts them to these places is the 'sacredness of the occasion.' The latent functions of these gatherings are that they are able to barter (or sell in monetary terms) the products (largely forest) they bring with them, and social functions (of fortifying their interpersonal ties) are equally important. For the visitors, these fairs have a different meaning, for they provide them with an opportunity to photograph people (without seeking their permission) and collecting information for their professional ventures. Vaishnav's submission was that 'one should not see Bastar with the western perspective.' In an acidic tone, he concluded: "*Ghotuls* were closed, much to the chagrin of the youth and annoyance of the traditionalists who favour continuing with their customs and practices, because of the western view with which they were being looked. At no time, no one brought the questions of nudity in the western world, the abominable practices of wife-swapping, and several others." For him, the western authors (that included Elwin) created *ghotul* as an 'object of notoriety'; thus, a sacred institution, the school where the youth learned their ways of living, thus graduating as 'culturally-abled and -empowered', was sullied.

That the west should have looked into its 'sleeves' before presenting Muria in the mould of a community of 'sexually-free' people, was Vaishnav's conclusion. Responding to this, another non-tribal speaker said that the image the Muria acquired as a result of Elwin's writings lowered their self-respect, and as a result, they became more aloof and silenced.

## 11.

In this meeting, some anthropologists (including me) also spoke, and so did Ashok, Elwin's son from his second wife. The two days' seminar titled 'The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin' that the Sub-Regional Centre of the Anthropological Survey of

India at Jagdalpur had organized took place after this historic meeting at Binjli. I call it 'historic' not only because on this day was a formal announcement of building the Elwin Memorial made, but also because the meeting had a string of speakers who were anthropologists and non-anthropologists, and tribal and non-tribal. In other words, the meeting was a juxtaposition of multiple voices. It was like hearing different discourses on Elwin, his anthropology and field methods. In this article, I have not included the phonations of the anthropologists, for this will be the subject of another paper. Here I have attempted to compare the views of the tribal and non-tribal speakers, which I collected, as said earlier, not only from their presentations in the formal meeting but later also during an extended lunch period.

Tribal speakers were publicly shy, but eloquent later, when they spoke to me privately. Their public reticence was a product of the rampart of domination that the presence of the non-tribal outsiders imposed on them. The non-tribal speakers spoke unhesitatingly, both in public and private spaces, for they were free from any dominant force that could have muted them. I was pleased to note that the anthropologists were seen as bereft of power that might not have imposed censors on them.

Both tribal and non-tribal speakers agreed that Elwin was a 'lover of tribal people'; that he forsook comforts to live with tribes in their natural habitat for years when these areas were completely devoid of any facilities; that he recorded the songs, idioms, poetry, and stories of tribes and made them immortal by writing them up; that through his published works, the wider world came to know of the existence of Bastar tribal groups and also their problems; that since he was close to the national leadership at that time, he was in a position to apprise them of the strategies that could have been adopted for the uplift of tribal people.

However, tribal speakers did not touch upon either the issue of tattooing or the youth dormitory. In fact, several tribal men spoke after the speeches of Pandey and Vaishnav were over, and one would have expected that any one of them would comment on them, but they were quiet with respect to these issues which were raised with an emotional fervour. When the non-tribal people were speaking, I was keeping an eye on the facial expressions of the tribal attendees – they seemed to be unperturbed or particularly concerned with whatever was being said. My interpretation is that the tribesmen knew that their morality and understanding is different from the idioms in which the outsiders were expressing it. However, they did not want to contest it, for they knew that their logic would not make the non-tribal change their opinion. Thus, the best path they chose was of 'intellectual retreatism' – 'let them hold the views they want to, but we would proceed quietly according to our thoughts.' They knew the once-upon-a-time reality of *ghotul*, and the fact that it has changed in many areas, and has come to the brink of extinction in many others.<sup>24</sup> They also knew, as the Muria teacher said, that the *ghotul* was incompatible with the pace with which their society was changing under the

impetuous forces of modernization, migration, educational and employment opportunities, and violence and threat. What Elwin saw was the reality of that time, and over time, the institutions that were 'functional' at that time became anachronistic, and obviously they had to fall outside currency. To expect that the same institutions would continue as they were at one time is a defiance of the law of change.

The non-tribal outsiders were a product of a particular morality, where pre-marital amorous relations were tabooed. It was natural that for sustaining a relationship of comradeship with tribal people they would emphasize (or rather, overemphasize) the non-sexual aspects of *ghotul*. So, the argument that *ghotul* was the 'university of tribal life', hence a sacred (which means non-sexual) institution, had precedence over all others, which tended not to miss out the sexual content of the relations between boys and girls. The dominant discourse they were trying to create was that even if sexual concourse was expected to result it should have been kept concealed. It should not have been the subject of a book; in other words, they were defending a 'biased and partial ethnography.'

The Muria knew the truth. They listened to the interpretations of the non-tribal outsiders. *Ipsa facto*, they had been listening to that for ages, but whether they are swayed by that is a moot issue. Perhaps not. That is the reason, why we should give a patient hearing to them, the tribal voice.

### *Notes*

1. Elwin (1964: 195) wrote that the Muria and Maria "were very good about letting me photograph them." He called his camera 'ubiquitous'.
2. Two opinions on this book may be compared. Sarma (1949: 205), in his review, says: "[the book] presents its subjects as people rather than as peculiar beings." And, Gell (1992) regarded Elwin's picture of the Muria as 'idyllic', 'care-free', and 'romanticized'. She thought it was inaccurate and alienated from its actual social context, which she tried to correct in her monograph.
3. For him, anthropology was 'philanthropology'; he wrote (1989: 19): "The essence and art of anthropology is love. Without it, nothing is fertile, nothing is true."
4. Here, it may be noted that Elwin (1947/1991: 14) found this confusion in the names of the communities. Thus, he used the term Muria (which means 'aboriginal') for the people of Kondagaon and Narayanpur *tehsils*, whose life was centred on the institution of *ghotul*.
5. The term 'marginal man', coined by Robert Park, means an individual suspended between two cultures. He tries to establish his individual identity, generally opting for the 'superior culture', for this will bring him respect and prestige.
6. It was clear to me that whilst this lady was trying to move up in the local hierarchy of tribal groups, the others were keen to keep their identity intact, notwithstanding the fact they remained at a lower stratum. Later, I could understand this against the backdrop of the lady's biography – she had married a man, who was a civil servant, from another tribal group, lived in the town of Jagdalpur, was rich, having her own business enterprise, and had earned tremendous social and political capital. Against this backdrop, she wanted her

identification with a higher tribal group, which would only be possible when not only she, but also her kinspersons spoke the same narrative.

7. What I understood in these two days was that the people aspired for class and occupational mobility. One of my respondents proudly spoke of the boys from his community who were seeking recruitment in police and army.
8. For this, see the excellent ethnographies on the Oraon and the Sumi respectively by Ghosh (2006) and Choppy (in press).
9. Elwin writes (1947/1991: 7) that Binjli is located among 'great mango grove and palms.'
10. The term *marka* is used for mango (*Mangifera indica*) (Elwin, 1947/1991: 717).
11. Elwin (1947/1991: xvi) wrote that people thought that Kosi was a Maria, with the result that he came to be known as 'Maria Sahab'.
12. Guha (1999: 187) speaks of the 'troubles' that brewed at Elwin's home, particularly because of Kosi's frequent quarrels and her weakness for alcoholic drinks and the other intoxicants.
13. Although people did not remember, Elwin writes (1947/1991: XVI) that his son was 'conceived in the shadow of the ghotul'. He was only a fortnight old when he came to the Muria land.
14. A girl from Pradhan community, called Kachari, whom Elwin named Lila, was Elwin's second wife, whom he married on 20 September 1953 (Guha, 1999: 193, 229). Ashok was born in October 1954 (Guha, 1999: 246). In his interview to *Thumb Print – A Magazine from the East*, Guha (2013) said that after Elwin broke up with Kosi, he was 'broken and disconsolate'. Lila 'rehabilitated him as a person.' The other difference between these two women was that while Lila helped Elwin in his research, Lila was essentially a homemaker.
15. To quote Guha (2006) here: "Elwin found the Bastar tribals at peace, but now they are at war – with one another. He wrote of the Maria of Dantewara that they were 'communalistic people', who 'still have a great deal of village solidarity.' Now each village is split down the middle, clan pitted against clan, family against family. Had Elwin seen Bastar today he would have wept."
16. He was drawing the attention of the audience to the objectives of 'salvage anthropology'.
17. What he meant was that what Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was to the *dalits*, Elwin was to tribal people. That Elwin loved the tribal communities was made clear when at the time of his marriage with Kosi, an old man in his Marriage Sermon said: "He [Elwin] is English. He has come from another land to love us" (Elwin, 1940: 249).
18. Elwin (1947/1991: XVI) acknowledged Kosi in the following words: "To get information from the motiari's point of view was almost impossible for a party of men; Kosi filled the gap and obtained some unique experiences from her friends in the ghotul." As she was married, she was not given *ghotul* membership. The term *motiari* is used for the unmarried girl who is a member of the *ghotul*.
19. An example which instantly comes to my mind is of Kenneth Good who married a Yanomami woman. See his 1997 book.
20. Elwin (1964: 142) said that during fieldwork, he "did not depend mainly on asking questions, but knowledge of the people gradually sank in until it was part of me."
21. In this context, I may mention the Royal Anthropological Institute's film on the Muria. The description accompanying it notes: "Elwin's ethnography...portrayed ghotul life in a way that continues to embarrass the Indian government as well as [raises] ethical questions about

the anthropologist's use of public and private information." The adviser to this film was Simeran Gell, who had written a doctoral thesis on the Muria, but she got her removed from the film, for she thought that its final version did little to correct the stereotypes that are found in Elwin's monograph of almost 750 pages. See <https://www.therai.org.uk>, accessed on 30 March 2018.

22. The Muria say: "If a [woman] dies without being tattooed, Mahapurab [god, the great master] will punish her. But if she brings him beautiful drawings from the Middle World, he will keep her with him and look after her" (Elwin, 1947/1991: 77).
23. Later, after the meeting was over, I asked him about the full reference of the story that he had cited in his lecture. He did not remember it instantly but promised to provide its reference at the earliest.
24. In Kondagaon *tehsil*, Elwin had counted (in 1941) 278 *ghotuls*. He also says that it was an underestimate (Elwin, 1947/1991: 7).

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