Social and Political Exclusion, Religious Inclusion

The *Adivasi* Question in Education*

NANDINI SUNDAR**

Abstract

The talk focusses on adivasi children in central India, their transformation through formal schooling and the way in which new kinds of knowledge comes to replace or co-exist with older forms. On the one hand, there are occasional acknowledgements that adivasis or indigenous people have great knowledge of biodiversity which can be of use in the emerging biotech industry, on the other hand, there is very little done to tap into this in a holistic or sustainable model. Indeed, the formal schooling system often destroys the knowledge that children already possess. Schooling is an important avenue for not just career mobility but identity formation and the creation of personal and professional networks. However, the focus of studies in India has been on issues of educational deprivation or at best on social exclusion and discrimination regarding access within the existing system. It has not looked at the content and effect of formal schooling with regard to indigenous knowledge, or the way in which adivasi identity is transformed through the kind of competitive proselytising that is undertaken through schools, by both the R.S.S. and other organisations. At the same time, a discussion of schooling implies some idea of 'normalcy'. In fact, in large parts of adivasi India, people live in a state of absolute abnormality, where the state has undertaken both large scale displacement and relentless repression. The paper asks if and what kind of schooling is possible in these circumstances, and what kind of citizen is ought to be produced?

I am grateful and honoured to be invited to give–2009 B.M. Pugh Memorial lecture. Prof Pugh is a model for us all not just in terms of his scholarship and dedication to institution building, but also a model of the best we can hope for

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** Nandini Sundar is a Professor of Sociolgy, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi.

in terms of tribal, indigenous or *adivasi* education. In particular, I want to quote from a few lines about him: "During 1926-28, he worked with the famous entomologist Professor D. P. Clausen on *tiphia,* an insect also known as the Japanese beetle. B.M. Pugh incidentally had known an insect very similar to this early in his childhood at Laitkynsiew. His work with the Berkeley faculty yielded spectacular results, which were eventually responsible for saving the apple orchards of California from the marauding Japanese beetle." Not only did B.M. Pugh draw on his own practical experiences as a child, he translated this into scientific knowledge that helped people in a country far from his own. When I think of what I would like to see as the educational future for *adivasi* children, I think of a combination of indigenous knowledge, formal school training which gives one the confidence to compete with others, and a concern not just with helping one's own community, important as that is, but with contributing to the wider world.

Sadly, my lecture today is focused not on this optimistic future, but on the dismal present, the constraints that come in the way of realising this educational dream for the vast majority of *adivasis* in central India. The situation is, of course, different in many states of the North-East with their high literacy rates, but the problem of cultural destruction and political discrimination that underlies the educational process is perhaps not dissimilar.

One of the areas taken up by the National Knowledge Commission, set up in India in 2005 to enable the development of India as a knowledge-based economy has been 'traditional knowledge.' Arguing that principled commercialisation of our cultural, creative and legacy practices has the potential of generating employment for at least 100 million people and an annual revenue of at least Rs. 600,000 crore per year', it lists a number of aspects of 'traditional knowledge', many of which refer to tribal practices in medicine, art and agriculture.[1]

Thus scheduled tribes recognised as possessing traditional knowledge of a kind that is not only useful to them, but has implications for national growth and sustainable development more broadly. However, other aspects of government policy towards *adivasis* systematically denigrate any knowledge that they

[1] The principles and basic premises that should govern the documentation and use of our traditional knowledge, that is our creative, cultural and legacy industries. Plant based drug formulations of which we have over 40,000 that have come to us through the Ayurveda,Unani, shiddha, Tibetian (all documentd) and the non-documented tribal systems of medicine. Traditional agricultural practices of which 4,502 have been documented by the I.C.A.R in a series of volumes, with 86 have been validated and 38 cross-validated till December 2005. Our culinary traditions which use some 150 documented vegetables for which nutritional and other information is available, and an equal number of fruits. Culture-specific tourism for example, through indenification of tribal art centres, promoting authentic local performing arts and making use of the unusual sites and practices which ave been well-documented, for example in a book brought out by CBSE., New Delhi. Our traditional products, services and art forms that are not included above".

possess, and make it impossible for them to develop, leave alone adopting their path as the model for others. The large-scale displacement, and the growing deforestation and degradation of environmental resources, reduce the habitat in which indigenous knowledge survives. Equally importantly, the formal schooling system often destroys the knowledge that children already possess, and transforms social relations which are relatively equal in the direction of greater patriarchy and hierarchy. While schooling is an important avenue for not just career mobility but identity formation and the creation of personal and professional networks, it is not clear that, as they stand, these networks will help to tap into or enhance the knowledge of *adivasis*. Instead, there is a danger, that unless there are other factors that affirm cultural pride in *adivasi* identity, education will become a means for alienation from the *adivasi* community.

My lecture will attempt to illustrate the manner in which *adivasi* children in central India are transformed through formal schooling and the way in which new kinds of knowledge comes to replace or co-exist with older forms. It is important to keep reminding ourselves that 'educational processes are fundamentally culturally processes' (Luykz, 1999, xxxiii). The material for this lecture is drawn from 19 years (1990-2009) of fragmentary observation of schools in (undivided) Bastar district of Chhattisgarh as well as more specific research I did in 2001-2002 on schools in Jashpur district of Chhattisgarh. I have also drawn on writings by other scholars on *adivasi* schooling elsewhere in central India, such as Orissa or Andhra Pradesh. I regret that I have not looked into educational processes in the North-East, as that would have provided a useful foil.

The educational context for *adivasis* in central India is primarily one of social and political exclusion or discrimination. But there is a widespread desire for education, a need which is being filled by private schooling. According to NCERT (2007:15) there are over 40,000 unrecognised private schools in rural India. In many places, particularly urban or semi-urban areas, this proliferation of private schools has exacerbated social differentiation, with the poor being confined to vernacular government schools and anyone with the slightest ability to pay sending their children to private 'English-medium' schools.

There is also a growing religious or cultural gap between those who go to private denominational schools and those who go to government schools. The biggest organised players in filling the educational gap are Christian missionaries and Hindu chauvinist organisations like the R.S.S.[2] or soft Hindu organisations like the Ramakrishna Mission, or the Mata Rukmini Devi Sansthan (followers of

[2] As of March 2002, Vidya Bharati, a front of the R.S.S., had 17,396 schools across the country (both rural and urban), 2.2 million students, over 93,00 teachers 15 teacher training colleges, 12 degree and 7 vocational and training institutions.

Vinoba Bhave). All of them are interested in 'uplifting' *adivasi* children, and making the experience of educational social mobility a simultaneous experience of cultural transformation. On the one hand, these schools provide better education than most government schools (except Central Schools and Navodaya Vidyalayas etc.) in the sense of getting children through examinations, but on the other hand, the extra-curricular activities they engage in have significant consequences for *adivasi* self-understanding. Increasing class and communal divisions, promoted through differential schooling, thus diminish the promise of a more meaningful common citizenship held out by higher literacy levels (see Vasavi, 2000; Jeffery, et. al. 2002).

The critical need of the hours is a kind of education that enables children both to compete on equal terms in the world of formal employment and not just at the lowest levels, and to affirm their *adivasi* culture, languages and knowledge.When the government talks of 'Mainstreaming' it has only the former in mind, but even the mainstreaming is aimed at integrating them only into the lowest levels of the market economy.

The State of *Adivasi* Literacy and Education

As the following table shows, despite some improvement between 1991 and 2001, literacy rates among STs in India are abysmally low. The figures are not differentiated by region and if we take out states in the North-East where STs have high literacy rates, the figures will look even worse.

Literacy Rates

	2001	*1991*
Rural female ST	32.4	16.0
Rural female non-SC/ST	50.2	35.4
Rural male ST	57.4	38.5
Rural male non-SC/ST	74.3	63.4

Source: National Focus Group on Problems of SC and ST Children, based on Census of India 1991 and 2001 (NCERT 2007: 32).

Much of the existing research on *adivasi* education in the central Indian belt highlights the lack of educational access, or the poor quality of education received : the absence of conveniently located primary schools, teacher absenteeism, abysmal infrastructure manifested in leaking roofs, non-existent toilets, furniture, blackboards and educational materials such as textbooks, maps, etc. (Furer-Haimendorf, 1982; Ananda, 1994). In the early 1990s when I lived in Bastar, I even heard of a school where liquor was sold from the premises. The exact nature of the linkage between poverty and schooling is contested, with studies by Tilak (2000), Jha and Jhingran (2002) among others, arguing that poverty, with its attendant hunger, malnutrition and ill-health, is a major cause for low attendance. Other studies by Dreze et. al. argue that it is not the cost of absent labour power that is the problem but the cost of sending children to school, as well as the poor quality of education that makes it not worth the expense (PROBE, 1999; Furer Haimendorf, 1982 : 134).

Although the central government and state governments have a number of schemes for *adivasi* children, such as stipends, a book bank scheme, special coaching for entry into engineering and medical college, and construction of hostels (see National Commission for Scheduled Tribes 2006, Chapter 5), they do nothing to address the larger structural inequalities which are responsible for the poverty of *adivasis*. At an underlying level, literacy and the denial of minimum educational provision is clearly fundamental to the exclusion of *adivasis* from full-fledged citizenship rights - displacement for large infrastructural projects like dams is lubricated by illiteracy and having people thumbprint away their land, an influx of outsiders for skilled industrial jobs is facilitated by the absence of trained *adivasi* youth, and exploitation by traders and moneylenders is made easier by having a population without even functional literacy in accounts. The low literacy rates also have implications for people's ability to make themselves heard politically since they cannot then document their own problems, write in the media or send representations to government.

Educational Discrimination Blaming the Victim

Many of the supply problems regarding the poor functioning of schools are shared in varying degrees by non-*adivasis* in regions across the country (PROBE, 1999), but there are also some issues which are peculiar to *adivasi* areas, such as the language gap between students and teachers who do not speak any of the local languages, blatant discrimination or at the very least unequal treatment by teachers compared to non-*adivasis* or upper caste students, and general concessions which makes the educational experience particularly alienating. *Adivasis* are blamed for their own lack of educational progress, such as in the following extract from the Class IX Social Studies Textbook in Gujarati, Chapter 9 under the heading "Problems of the Country and their solutions:

"There is very poor socio-economic development among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India, although they constitute one-fourth part of the total population. They have not been suitably placed in our social order, therefore, even after independence they are still backward and poor. Of course, their ignorance, illiteracy and blind faith are to be blamed for lack of progress because they still fail to realise importance of education in life" (reproduced in Patel et. al. 2002: 246).[3]

Contrary to this view, studies have shown there is a great desire for education among both *adivasis* and *dalits*. A study as old as 1977, of 9 villages in Utnur *Taluk* (Andhra Pradesh) by Abbasayulu (quoted in Furer-Haimendorf, 1982: 133) noted that while a greater number of non-*adivasis* sent their children to school compared to *adivasis* in the same villages, 98.46 per cent of *adivasis* thought education was a good thing compared to only 76.3 per cent among non-*adivasis*. *Adivasis* were often more interested in education than non-*adivasis* because they knew it was

[3] Reproduced in Padel, A.–2002, (246)–3.

their only option for 'advancement', but did not send their children to school either because of poverty or because the schooling process made their children feel inferior, or as Nanda shows, schooling, as practiced, was a waste of time. A study by Ranjit Tigga in 1991-92, comparing the background of children who went to two Jesuit schools in then Raigharh district – Loyola and Prakash – found that while over 80 per cent of children's families were agriculturists and had incomes under ` 10,000 p.a. and in the case of Prakash, 90 per cent of parents could not fund the education of their children, the vast majority of parents (90 per cent and 72 per cent respectively for Loyola and Prakash) sent their children to school willingly. The sample was 100 per cent *adivasi* (Tigga, 1992).

Displacement is a major factor in lower rates of schooling among *adivasis*.[4] Impending displacement often serves as an excuse for not providing schools and conversely, the lack of schools in *adivasi* villages has been cited as a justification for displacing them. The Supreme Court Judgement dismissing the petition of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, 2000 stated:

"Residents of villages around Bhakra Nangal dam, Nagarjun Sagar dam, Tehri, Bhilai Steel Plant, Bokaro and numerous other developmental sites are better off than people living in villages in whose vicinity no developmental project came in. It is not fair that tribals and the people in undeveloped villages should continue in the same condition without ever enjoying the fruits of science and technology for better health and have a higher quality of life style. Should they not be encouraged to seek greener pastures elsewhere, if they can have access to it, either through their own efforts due to information exchange or due to outside compulsions." (Maj. Judgement, pp. 172-73). "At the rehabilitation sites they will have more and better amenities than which they enjoyed in their tribal hamlets. The gradual assimilation in the mainstream of society will lead to betterment and progress" (Maj. judgement, p. 48).

In other words, *adivasis* in general, and not just their children, are seen as people for whom compulsion must be exercised in their own best interest. Inevitably, when it comes to children, then, the disciplinary and civilising aspects of schooling take precedence over the idea of opening them up to new intellectual experiences. The parallels with the schooling of Native Americans and Australian aboriginals are striking.

Language[5]

There are several policy documents and a constitutional provision (350A)

[4] A very conservative estimate indicates that during the last 5 decades approximately 21.3 million people have been displaced in the country owing to big projects such as mines, dams, industries, wild-life sanctuaries, field firing range etc. Of this, at least 40 per cent, approximating 8.5 million are *adivasis*. Considering that *adivasis* are approximately 8.1 per cent of the country's population, this is an unacceptably high proportion (Ekka and Asif, 2000)

[5] Some sections, like this one, are taken from an earlier note on *adivasi* education I had written, and which was replicated verbatim in NCERT (2007), the report of a a focus of which I was a member.

recognising that linguistic minorities should be educated in their mother tongue at primary level. However, even languages like Bhili, Gondi or Oraon which are spoken by over a million people (Nambissan, 1994 : 2747-48) are not recognised in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, and Bodi and Santhali which are spoken by 1.2 and 6.5 million people respectively, were added only in 2003. Correspondingly, there is practically no education in *adivasi* languages. Although states in India were organised on linguistic grounds, in the absence of political power, none of the major *adivasi* groups managed to carve out states for themselves. Consequently, these groups are distributed across state boundaries and the languages they are taught in, are those of the state in which they live, so that even if they share the same customs and have marriage relations across state borders, the educated youth of these states do not develop a sense of oneness. Coupled with the fact that only 6 per cent of primary teachers are from *adivasi* communities, and several do not bother to learn the language even after several years of being posted there (Kundu, 1994 : 31, personal experience), the general picture at primary level in *adivasi* areas is often one of mutual incomprehension for students and teacher.

In common with stories of indigenous people's education in Australia and America, *adivasi* children in India have been punished for talking in their own languages (Saxena and Mahendroo, 1993; Kundu, 1994 : 31). Quite apart from the pedagogic problems this creates –such as destroying the child's self-esteem, and reducing the possibilities of successful learning in later years–the denigration of *adivasi* languages amounts to denigration of *adivasi* worldviews and knowledge.[6] Even outside the confines of school, educated youth often speak to each other in the language of the school, perhaps also to mark themselves off from their 'uneducated peers'. As one Halba student at Dilmilli ashram school in Bastar said *Jyada shikshit hote ja rahein hain to hindi bolte hain.* (The more educated we become, the more Hindi we use). Where Hindi is the medium of education, *adivasi* languages are themselves changing to use more Hindi words, and Hindi grammar.

Even where *adivasis* are passionate about their own language, they do not expect schools to teach in them. Indeed, for many *adivasi* parents, the main advantage of schooling is that it gives access to the regional languages, and enables people to deal with the bureaucracy and non-*adivasis* (Grigson, 1944 : 398; Patwardhan, 2000 : 82). Tigga (1992) notes that in his survey 58 per cent of both teachers and *adivasi* parents saw tribal language as a barrier to their children's education. On the other hand, if *adivasi* languages were given official recognition by the state and if they were connected to job prospects, there might be more people who would

[6] Although there are 400 *adivasi* languages in India, several languages, especially those spoken by small numbers, are dying out. Given that so much knowledge is stored in a particular language, particular words for things that have no existence in other languages, (Geertz, 1983:88), loss of a language means the loss of a certain way of knowing the world.

want education for their children in their own language (Nambissan, 2000 : 197). And indeed, wherever *adivasis* have been politically mobilised to celebrate *adivasi* identity, they have been more clear and open in their demand for education in indigenous languages (Patwardhan, 2000; Nambissan, 2000 : 213). One of the reasons why the Maoists are so popular across the central Indian belt is that they have developed Gondi literature, and have cultural troupes which perform Gondi songs and dances, which makes their message accessible to the people.

There is a concrete problem, however, in determining which language will be taught in primary schools as the 'mother tongue', given the common feature of several *adivasi* communities inhabiting the same village but speaking different languages. Using the local *lingua franca*– Sadani or Nagpuri in Jharkhand, Halbi in Bastar, etc. – is one option, but even this will not address the problem. Finding teachers who will teach in the local language is another problem, unless *adivasi* teachers are more heavily recruited. Currently, there is no political will on requiring non-*adivasi* teachers to learn *adivasi* languages. One positive feature however, is the emergence of a large literature in some *adivasi* languages like Bodo and Santhali. Curiously, the growing commercial culture of music videos and low budget films enabled by digital technology, have led to a proliferation of media in *adivasi* languages like Nagpuri, Santhali, Mundari, Halbi etc. Although the themes remain modelled on Hindi films, and they are usually of very poor quality, popular demand has ensured a certain engagement with various vernaculars. Many of these films also incorporate some degree of ethnographic description. It is possible then, that where official apathy has failed, market forces may come in to atleast somewhat save *adivasi* languages.

Curriculum and Textbooks

Adivasi children are not only denied their own languages, but also their culture and history. The curriculum is usually based on the experiences of urban middle class children, and the kinds of objects they refer to, are often unlikely to be found in a rural home (see Kundu, 1994: 61). Not only is the knowledge and linguistic or cognitive ability that *adivasi* children possess ignored e.g., the capacity to compose and sing spontaneously, to think in riddles and metaphors and their intimate knowledge of their environment- but schooling also actively encourages a sense of inferiority about *adivasi* cultures, which persists into later life.

Adivasis rarely feature in textbooks, and when they do, it is usually in servile positions to upper caste characters; or as 'strange' and 'backward' exotica (Kundu, 1994 ; Kumar, 1989 : 71). Nanda quotes from a second grade textbook that Bonda children are made to learn: 'Bonda life is very strange indeed. They live in tiny huts built of mud. The entrance to these huts is rather narrow. They enter the huts by bending forward. For the upliftment of the Bondas, the government has planned development programmes. Cash loans are being extended to the Bondas for the purpose of improved agriculture and animal husbandry. There is now a steady improvement in condition. Hunting in the forest is no more their primary occupation. There are changes in their

disposition and diet. Now they know how to count cash.' (State Board textbook quoted in Nanda, 1994 : 173). In a marvellous essay titled, 'Learning to be Backward', Krishna Kumar points out the cleft position that such texts place *adivasi* children in. If children fail to answer questions about *adivasi* backwardness based on readings from the text, they are judged educationally backward. If they acknowledge that the texts are correct, they accept an external judgement about their cultural backwardness. Either way, 'there is no escaping the label of backwardness. As a social institution, the school has set up a situation in which the tribal will acquire responses that match his description in society as a member of a 'backward community' (Kumar, 1989: 68).

While the general problem is with the absence or denigration of *adivasi* culture, in RSS schools, there is a more specific problem with the use of additional textbooks that have a communal slant meant to promote Hinduism and denigrate other religions. Among private religious schools, only the RSS seems to pose this problem.[7] In the Ramakrishna Sharada Sevashram, Jagdalpur, the Principal explained that there was no question of teaching outside textbooks because the students are unwilling to learn more than the bare minimum and even colleges use guidebooks. In the Gyanodaya school in Jagdalpur, run by the Catholic community, while the school has its own textbooks for Classes I and II, these do not have any religious content and are chosen because of their large format and illustrations. Most of the Vidya Bharati (RSS) schools are affiliated to CBSE or their local State Boards. In general, these schools follow the syllabi (and the textbooks) published by the NCERT But in addition, Vidya Bharati brings out its own textbooks, which 'supplement' and 'correct' the history that is taught in the official books, working as much by selective emphasis on certain figures as against others, as by crude propaganda against Muslims and Christians. *Itihas ga Raha hain* (history is singing) for Class V blames 'internal disunity' for the invasions by the Turks, Mongols and Mughals, but notes that even in the medieval period the 'freedom struggle' was kept alive (Singh, 1997 : 9). While professional historians point to the presence of Hindu generals in Mughal armies and the fact that Shivaji, the archtype Hindu king had a Muslim general, as evidence of the fact that medieval power struggles cannot be understood in religious terms, the RSS sees this as a betrayal of Hindus and reserves its greatest criticism for such 'collaborators' (Singh, 1997 : 78). Christian pastors are described as one of the main instruments of colonialism (Singh, 1997 : 27), thus strengthening the association in children's minds between Indian Christians and anti-

[7] This observation is based on a survey I carried out among five schools in Bastar and Jashpur districts of Chhattisgarh, including the Loyola boys school in Kunkuri; Nirmala Kanya Unch Madhyamik Shala, Navatoli, Kunkuri; Mata Rukmini Devi Sansthan, Dimrapal and Chhindgarh; Ramakrishna Sharada Sevashram, Jagdalpur; Gyanodaya school, Jagadalpur.

national activities and laying the roots for divisions between Hinduised and Christianised *adivasis* (for more discussion of the content of these textbooks, see Sundar, 2004).

All students from Class III upwards in the Vidya Bharati schools also take the Sanskriti Gyan Pariksha, a cultural general knowledge test once a year, for which they get certificates. The examination is, on the face of it, a disinterested test of knowledge about the country's geography, history and culture based on the Sanskriti Gyan primers published by Vidya Bharati at Kurukshetra. The primer is in question-answer format, and has sections on pilgrimage sites, actual and mythical Hindu figures, events from the *Mahabharata, Ramayana* etc., including some pure inventions such as the idea that Christ roamed the Himalayas and that Homer's *Illiad* was an adaptation of the *Ramayana*. Needless to say there are no references to anything Christian, Muslim or *adivasi*, and the version of Indian culture that is produced is thus an exclusively Hindu upper caste (mostly Northern) culture.

Hidden Curriculum

In all schools, however, textbooks are only one instrument for transmitting cultural messages–most of this takes place through the composition of students and teachers, with both Christian and Hindu schools engaged in some amount of boundary keeping,[8] extra-curricular activities like morning and evening prayers, especially in those schools which have hostels attached, and the general atmosphere of the schools (see Sundar, 2004, 2006). The communicative function of schooling extends much beyond the actual curricular content, through what Corrigan calls a 'repertoire of forms' that include space, time and textuality (Corrigan, 1990 : 160).

The fact that, even in regular government schools, most teachers are Hindu influences the manner in which annual days or other school events are celebrated. Breaking a coconut and lighting incense at the base of the flag pole on Republic or Independence Day is common practice. When teachers talk about imparting 'sanskriti' to *adivasi* children, they usually have in mind upper caste, non-*adivasi* practices, and this is something that is internalised by *adivasi* teachers as well. In one scene at examination time in a primary school in Bastar, I was witness to this. Ranu Nag, one of the few Dhurwa school-teachers, and keen to revive the use of Dhurwa, was acting as external examiner. He asked the children their names. Yet as they called out each distinctive *adivasi* name, like Gagru or Aitu or Devli, he ironed it out to standard Hindu names like Gagru Ram, Aitu Ram, Devli Kumari etc. On the other hand, government schools are not marked by the kind of intense religious exposure that private schools provide, and beyond one or two pictures on the wall of Gods or Goddesses, there is no strong effort to culturally transform the children. It is true that children who go to these schools come out thinking for example, of Diwali and

[8] For example, in the RSS schools the children were predominantly Hindu, while in the Loyola School in Kunkuri they were largely Christian.

Holi as more important than their own festivals, because they are 'national holidays', but this is as much due to the way the academic calendar is structured and the wider media, as due to the specific efforts of teachers.

By comparison, even in those soft-Hindu schools which see themselves as 'secular', ideas of cultural change are so engrained that they seem synonymous with schooling. At a school run by the Mata Rukmini Ashram in Chhindgarh, the girls were taught to observe *Makar Sankranti*, *Ganesh puja*, and so on, and the money that was collected from their sale of tamarind was used to buy the *Ramcharitmanas*. Statements like these from a school teacher from Uttar Pradesh are common: "If people hadn't come from outside and taught them, how else would they have progressed" or "earlier their parents used to insist they come home for the seed sowing festival – but now they don't. The girls have learnt all our festivals".

In RSS organisations, we see the most conscious attempt to turn *adivasi* children into Hindus. This is carried out not only through the schools, but especially through hostels. The RSS, following the Church before it, sees hostels as nodal points for Sangh extension activities in the villages:

We know that not all students of our *chhatrawas* (hostel) will become full-time workers. But all of them will have received our *sanskars* ...of all our activities, the most important one is the running of the hostels. The rationale behind our hostels is different from the usual ones. We want to make our hostels the focus or centre of attention for the region. Through this medium we want to bring about awareness in the whole region (Deshpande, 1990 : 17).

A handbook for the private use of *Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram* workers notes that in addition to the hostel warden, an additional worker should set up a centre in or near the *chhatravas* to keep in touch with a circle of 20-30 villages around and organise them through pre-school centres, *eklavya khelkud kendras, gram samitis*, dramas, etc. (A.B.V.K.A.; Sapre, 1991). Children are trained to hold *bhajan mandalis, satsang kendras, shakhas* and other activities when they go home for the long summer vacations.

The hostels are in much demand and even some Christians apply. Although the surroundings are shabby and food is basic, there is a proliferation of Hindu visual imagery–all of which is part of a carefully planned design to expose children to Hindu idioms. At the same time, there is an attempt to integrate what they call '*vanvasis*' into the wider Hindu fold, by saying that the hostel should be named after a famous *vanvasi* man or woman. At the pre-school centres (*Balwadis* or *Bal sanskar kendras*) children learn the rudiments of reading, writing and *sanskars*, including learning to say *pranam* instead of their own *adivasi* greeting *johar*, and singing the *Saraswati Vandana*. Not every child understands what they are chanting, but sustained exposure to these centres inevitably inculcates respect for Sanskrit as a language worth knowing, and a belief that 'civilisation' consists in Hindu markers of behaviour. More important than the actual information that children may or may not remember is the symbolic message transmitted at the *Eklavya khel kud centres* for older youth. The *sangh* teaches the children 'indigenous' games

with names like *Agnikund* and *Rama-Ravana*. Here, as in the *shakha*s, the referee calls out directions in Sanskrit. While local languages are not forbidden in RSS schools and hostels, Sanskrit and Hindi are glorified. Like the Catholics before them, who set hymns to local tunes, the Sangh may keep in references to the Singbonga or local gods in their *bhajans*, but Hindu gods like Ram and Krishna inevitably involve pride of place. There is a real reluctance among Kalyan ashram students to admit to knowing *Kurukh*.

Much of what the RSS schools are doing was done by the Christian mission schools in the early part of the 20th century. Now, however, the Catholics confine their religious teaching to their own community. Non-Christian children do not have to attend Cathechism classes, and can carry out their own prayers or study during prayer time. For the Catholic children, however, the education is deeply Christian. The model, overall, is modern Western culture – when children see fathers in Loyola school, Kunkuri, eat with forks and knives, this becomes something to aspire to.

Each type of school has its own version, thus, of what constitutes suitable culture for *adivasi* children to learn, but there is very little attempt to find out what *adivasi* culture itself is, and how it can enrich the school curriculum.

School Regimen

In all private schools, whether R.S.S., Christian, or otherwise, the hostel regime emphasises discipline and prayer, creating a totalising and intense experience. Government schools are far more relaxed. In these private schools, children normally wake up at 4:30 a.m., pray for an hour or so, then bathe and breakfast, and attend classes. They may do some exercise either in the morning or evening, but are bound to pray again in the evening. So much prayer is in sharp contrast to their homes, where there is no such practice of daily prayer, and life is far less regimented. The following two timetables show how regimented and prayer filled the school day is:

***Dainadin Karyakram* (daily programme) of the *Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram*, Jashpur, as pasted on the wall**

Pratah (Morning)	
4:00-4:30	Jagaran Prarthna;
4:30-4:45	Ekatmata Stotr;
4:45-6:00	Surya Namaskar;
6:00-6:30	Ramayan Path;
7:00-9:00	Swadhyay;
9:00-10:30	Bhojan;
10:30-4:30	Pathshala.
Sayan (Evening)	
5:00-6:00	Khelkud, Vyayam;
6:00-6:45	Kirtan, Bhajan, Aarti;
6:45-8:00	Bhojan.
Ratri (Night)	
8.00-8.30	Sawadhyay;
9.30-9:45	Prarthna Deep Nirvan.

Note

1. On Sundays, children are given information of national and social happenings, stories and life histories of famous people.
2. Children must maintain cleanliness in the *chatravas* and its compound.

Daily Time-Table at the *Loyola* School, Kunkuri, as related by students

A.M.	
4:45-5:15	Wake up and wash
5:15-6:00	Prayer in Church for Catholics (non-Catholics worship separately in classroom or study)
6:00-7:15	Study in hostel
7:15-7:30	P.T. drill
7:30-8:15	Cleaning hostel premises, collecting vegetables from garden
8:15-8:30	Bathing
8:30-9:15	Breakfast (dal and chawal)
9:15-9:30	Religion class (in classroom)
10:00-10:15	Assembly prayer
10:15- 4:00pm	Classes (with three short breaks)
P.M.	
4:00- 5:00	Hostel high school games
5:00-5:15	Washing up
5:15- 6:00	Dinner
6:00-6:15	Church prayer
6:30-10:00	Study (with two 15 minute recess Breaks in between)
10:00 pm	Sleep

In general, both Sarangpam and Padel point to the way in which the school regimen of timing, discipline, hierarchy is alien to children socialised in a world where individuality is respected from early on and where parent-child interaction are relatively egalitarian(Sarangapani, 2001 : 24-27: Padel, 1995 : 224).

Kundu(1994) points out that testing procedures too are based on urban middle class values—the competitiveness and system of rewards that examinations represent is often culturally anomalous to *adivasi* children who are brought up in an atmosphere of sharing in classroom interaction too, non-*adivasi* children dominate, even they are in a minority, by virtue of their greater social confidence. In one classroom interaction I observed at Loyola school in Kunkuri, two of the boys who were very vocal turned out to be from the local trader community, and it is they who set the terms of debate,. One of them complained that it was impossible for children these days to go into medical school as seats are reserved. But when I pointed out that this would not be a problem for most of the children in the class, who were *adivasi*s, they again spoke up and said 'but we are not'. The complaint of the upper caste is thus used to silence the experiences and claims of the rest of the children.

Learning among *adivasi* children is usually intimately connected to the work process - children learnt the names and medicinal uses of many plants and trees while accompanying their parents on foraging trips in the forest (Sanrangapani, 200 : 41). When children are away at schools, they lose connection with this world of labour and their capacity to learnt form it. Nanda describes a walk in the forest with Bonda children in eastern India. While some children wandered off to explore the forest and collect edible items, those who had been to the residential schools, kept to the path and were indifferent to their surroundings (Nanda, 1994:177). Parents used to be reluctant to send their

children to school because they lost the capacity to engage in agriculture (Nanda, 1994 : 173). However, with high unemployment rates, many hostel returned *adivasi* youth have no option but to stick to agriculture or do manual wage work.

Given such a 'demeaning educational experience' (Kumar, 1989: 76) in a setup which privileges the 'visions and meanings' of dominant groups in society and teaches *adivasis* subservience, it is hardly surprising that drop-out rates among *adivasi* children are much higher than those of other students and literacy rates much lower (Nambissan, 1994 : 2747).

Education in a Time of Counterinsurgency

The logic of using education or the lack thereof, to justify displacement has also been used in counterinsurgency operations in central India, where villagers have been herded into camps as a form of strategic hamletting. In Chhattisgarh, since 2005, the government forces in collaboration with civilians whom it has armed and christened the Salwa Judum, euphemistically calling it a 'people's movement', has been burning villages, killing people and raping women. Officially 644 villages, comprising some 3 lakh people, have been affected by Salwa Judum, and live under the daily threat of attack and displacement. Some 50,000 were forcibly herded into camps, similar to the regrouping that happened in Nagaland in the 1950s and Mizoram in the 1960s. Those who escaped the regrouping – a lakh or so – migrated to Andhra Pradesh.

In 2006, all the children in Dantewada were promoted for the academic year 2005-06, because no examinations could be held. Curiously, in 2007 while this mayhem was still ongoing, the Dantewada administration got the National Literacy Mission-UNESCO award for spreading adult literacy. In 2007, I visited a Salwa Judum camp on the border of Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh at Maraigudem. The teacher in-charge of the ashram school said that the population in the hostel kept fluctuating because their parents would bring the children in when conditions were particularly disturbed, and then take them back again.

One of the big casualties of this war has been school buildings, in a region where they were scarced to begin with. The security forces use schools as military camps because they are the only *pucca* building in the villages, and in turn the Maoists blast schools to prevent this happening. They bring in villagers from neighbouring villages to destroy the schools, since they know people find it hard to break buildings they have themselves built. In one place, a strong local leader prevailed upon the Maoists not to destroy the school in his village, but then the CRPF moved in and children were moved out. In response to a court ordered investigation, the NHRC recommended that the security forces be moved out of schools, but the Chhattisgarh government has done precious little on this.

But even where the school buildings exist, the government has moved all the teachers and children from affected

zones to camps, ensuring that if children are not in camp, they have no access to education. In 2007, the government also issued directives that the children would not be allowed to go home for the summer. Ostensibly this was for their own safety; but also worked as a way of forcing the parents to come to camp if they wanted to be with their children. Most of the people have now come back from the camps to their villages, but schools and teachers continue to work only in the camps, and not in the villages where the majority of children are now. Salwa Judum leaders refer to teachers as 'their property': "These teachers belong to our government. We have kept them (teachers) all together in one place. Those who don't join the Judum will get no school or be allowed to go to school." As a further attempt to 'capture' the children, and wean them away from Maoist influence in the villages, the government is building 1,000 seater ashram schools. These, however, are next to Salwa Judum camps and police stations, ensuring that their education will take place under the watchful eye of these Salwa Judum leaders. The physical space of the schools is also restricted, with rooms in narrow lines.

Even the UNICEF has colluded in the argument that children are better off in camps, with a UNICEF film made for educational purposes noting how great it was that these *adivasi* children who were in Salwa Judum camps had now learnt to brush their teeth with foaming toothpaste. At a time when these children had lost their homes and in many cases, seen their relatives or co-villagers killed before their eyes, learning to brush with toothpaste which they can ill-afford, as against their traditional *datun*, would hardly seem like a big achievement for either UNICEF or the Indian state. UNICEF tents, meant purely for educational purposes, are being used for shooting cover and to house paramilitaries; and yet UNICEF has been silent on these violations.

For the teachers themselves, always reluctant to travel to interior villages, the Salwa Judum has been a period of pay without work . Officially, the government claims that it is the Naxalites who have driven teachers and other government staff away, but this is denied by many villagers. In December 2008, I was shown a threatening letter written in red ink, in a purposely illiterate hand, ostensibly from the Naxalites to the school principal, commanding him to shut the school down within two weeks or else! On enquiring into the issue in the village concerned, we learnt that it had originated from a disgruntled teacher, upset with the principal's insistence that he come to work on time!

Many teachers, who are either outsiders, or educated tribals, who have got alienated from the poor villagers who comprise the Naxal base, have been active with the Salwa Judum and made enough money to become contractors. The Salwa Judum leader in Kutru, Madhukar, was a middle school teacher, who by his own admission, rarely attended school or only *beech-beech-mein*, whenever he could spare a few hours from his Salwa Judum activities. Following court cases against Salwa

Judum,[9] the government woke up to the need to signal accountability. An article in the Indian Express describes the bewilderment of one 'leader', Soyam Mooka, who was served notice:

Soyam Mooka, a teacher in a school being run by the department, is among the frontline leaders of 'Salwa Judum', ever since the anti-Naxalite campaign was launched in South Bastar in June 2005 to isolate the Maoist rebels and to create awareness among the masses against the Naxalite menace. Like Mukka, a number of other school teachers of Konta and Bijapur regions are closely associated with the movement.

The state Government, which has been extending support to 'Salwa Judum' terming it as a spontaneous movement by the locals against bloodshed and violence in the tribal region, had encouraged these Government employees to actively participate themselves in the movement during the last three years…

Mukka told The Indian Express that he had received a notice from his department asking why action should not be taken against him for making 'political statements' at 'Salwa Judum' meetings and not attending to his duties. "The department knows of my association with Salwa Judum for the last three years", he added.[10]

Luckily for Soyam Mooka the government was never serious about implementing the notice against him and recently has strongly defended him in the Supreme Court on rape charges, a defence it has mounted by virtue of simply asking him to justify himself and dismissing the girl's complaint on this basis. In other words, these Salwa Judum leaders have got rich on government salaries, contracts, as well as relief money they have siphoned off from camps, and it is they, rather than the government, who effectively run the local administration where then is the question of doing anything as mundane as teaching?

Consequences of Schooling

But dismal as this picture sounds in terms of *adivasi* identity and indigenous knowledge, the consequences of formal schooling are often considerably complex. Even as residential schooling creates a certain 'educated *adivasi*' identity that makes it difficult for ashram school alumni to relate to the occupations of their parents (agriculture or the gathering of forest produce), the interaction with children of other castes and villages that residential schools make possible, allow new networks or 'new epistemic communities' (Bayly, 1999) to develop. It is interesting, for example, that many of the male youth activists of the Communist Party of India

[9] WP 250 of 2007, Nandini Sundar and others versus Government of Chhattisgarh, and WP 119 of 2007, Kartam Joga and others versus Government of Chhattisgarh and Union of India.

[10] Tribals see conspiracy in notice to Salwa Judum leader before election. Joseph John, *Indian Express*, 16 October 2008.

in Bastar came to know each other in the residential schools, and it is these networks that have helped them to organise for land rights and in defence of a particular *adivasi* identity. Again, although Christian missionary education often led to an initial loss of *adivasi* identity, culture and religion, it is often in the areas where such education has had a long history that we now see the strongest movements for tribal autonomy and identity (e.g. in the North-East or Jharkhand). Educated *adivasis* take the lead in such movements, which in turn creates a demand for the institutionalisation of tribal languages in schools (Nambissan, 2000: 212-213; Devalle, 1992 : 175-176). Inevitably, however, the language they seek to preserve may not be the language as it is actually spoken, but a more 'civilised' version that follows the structures and written codes of the dominant languages (Devalle, 1992 : 177). In short, formal education may both destroy and create 'indigenous' identities and claims to possess indigenous knowledge.

Advocates of indigenous knowledge and concerned educators argued that it is possible to combine formal schooling with a concern for the preservation of indigenous knowledge, such as the curriculum developed by the Maori in New Zealand and the *Inuit* in Canada which draw on culture-specific learning expectations, use local languages etc. (Michie, 1999; Bartels and Bartels, 1995). In India, however, although there have been some attempts, such as the Dhumkuria school in Kanke, Bihar, based on the indigenous dormitory system among Oraons and in which children were taught both local crafts and prepared for state board examinations (Toppo, 1978) or the attempt by Kundu to use *adivasi* riddling practices to develop curriculum–such efforts are still rudimentary. There is also the danger that unless such efforts are part of a political agenda that is led by indigenous people themselves and aims to empower them, the transmission of indigenous knowledge through schools will amount to no more than the colonial model of schooling in which crafts and agriculture or hygiene and applied sciences were seen as the most suitable subjects for native children (Grigson, 1944; see also Simon, 1998). While education was seen as essential to enabling *adivasis* to avoid exploitation, it was also felt that too much literary education would alienate *adivasi* children from their own culture (Prasad, 1994: 276-277). As Kelly and Altbach argue, in the absence of appropriate history and science education and by denying native children skills for anything other than what s/he had traditionally done, such schooling 'represented a basic denial of the colonised's past and withheld from them the tools to regain the future' (1978 :15). To reiterate then, what I started with – the model for *adivasi* schooling that we should aspire to is one where children are introduced to new skills and knowledge but in a manner that builds upon their existing knowledge and culture rather than in a way that destroys it. And here, I must once again mention B.M. Pugh as the inspiration for such an endeavour.

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