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## Alcoholics Anonymous: The Maoist Movement in Jharkhand, India

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# *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Maoist Movement in Jharkhand, India\**

ALPA SHAH

*Department of Anthropology, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross,  
London, SE14 6NW, UK  
Email: a.shah@gold.ac.uk*

## Abstract

From millenarian movements to the spread of Hindu rightwing militancy, attacks on *adivasi* (or tribal) consumption of alcohol have gone hand-in-hand with the project of ‘civilizing the savage’. Emphasizing the agency and consciousness of *adivasi* political mobilization, subaltern studies scholarship has historically depicted *adivasis* as embracing and propelling these reformist measures, marking them as a challenge to the social structure. This paper examines these claims through an analysis of the relationship between alcohol and the spread of the Maoist insurgency in Jharkhand, Eastern India. Similar to other movements of *adivasi* political mobilization, an anti-drinking campaign is part of the Maoist spread in *adivasi* areas. This paper makes an argument for focusing on the internal diversity of *adivasi* political mobilization—in particular intergenerational and gender conflicts—emphasizing the differentiated social meanings of alcohol consumption (and thus of prohibition), as well as the very different attitudes taken by *adivasis* towards the Maoist campaign. The paper thus questions the binaries of ‘sanskritisation’ versus *adivasis* assertion that are prevalent in subaltern studies scholarship, proposing an engagement with *adivasi* internal politics that could reveal how *adivasi* political mobilization contains the penetrations of dominant sanskritic values, limitations to those penetrations and other aspirations, such as the desire for particular notions of modernity.

## Introduction

*May 2000, rural Jharkhand, India:*

\* I would like to thank Stephan Feuchtwang, Crispin Bates and Chris Gregory for comments on an early draft of this paper. I am grateful to the participants of the ‘Savage Attack: *Adivasi* Insurgency in India’ workshop that Crispin and I organised in London in June 2008, and to the anonymous reviewer at *Modern Asian Studies*, for engaging in the ideas and ethnography that have shaped this paper.

Fatra Munda and his wife, Somvari Mundein, were sitting amidst their aluminium and clay pots under the *plas* tree in Luratu village market. They had travelled eight miles from Tapu to make a few rupees to keep them going through the dry months of the year. Fatra served freshly prepared *mahua* wine to women and men who ventured to the market to buy their weekly supply of kerosene, oil, spices, tea and a few vegetables. Somvari, meanwhile, threaded dried grass through *sal* leaves to make leaf cups as they were running out of steel bowls. Dusk was falling and it would soon be time to go home. Husband and wife decided to treat themselves to a few cups of *mahua* wine as they sat and joked and gossiped with neighbouring *mahua* wine and *hadia* rice beer vendors and customers from Luratu village, whom they had not seen for a few weeks.

Suddenly their banter was broken. They watched five motorbikes speed towards them and screech to a stop, throwing the loose mud from the road into their faces. About 15 men in olive green uniform, some with sticks and batons in hand, leapt off the bikes and headed straight towards them. The men started kicking over and hitting the aluminium and clay pots, shouting, 'Stop drinking and selling alcohol!' 'Long Live MCC!' In the mayhem that followed, pots cracked, alcohol poured onto the ground, and villagers started screaming and running away. Fatra took Somvari's arm and the couple ran away into the forest and back to Tapu.

Had Fatra and Somvari been able to read, or been in touch with those predominantly rural elite who live in the Block administration headquarters of Bero, 20 miles from Luratu, they would have known that the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), a faction of the Maoist revolutionaries in India, had given prior warning of their anti-drinking campaign in the area. A few weeks before, Bero had seen the pasting of posters against the drinking and selling of alcohol, signed by the MCC. These villages in Bero Block were experiencing the early signs of the spread of the Maoist insurgency. The MCC, reputed to be the most extreme faction of the Maoists in India, was expanding in the area. The previous year had seen the MCC capture all arms held by any resident of the area. In 2000, a series of campaigns followed, the most prominent of which was an anti-drinking one.

With the arrival of the new millennium, the re-emergence and spread of the Maoist insurgency (commonly called the Naxalites after the 1967 roots of the rebellion in Naxalbari, Darjeeling), *adivasi* rebellion has been brought centre stage in political analysis in India. Alongside Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal, Jharkhand, which

separated from Bihar in 2000 after a long struggle originally based on an idea of ethnic separation for the state's *adivasi* populations, has become one of the major guerrilla zones of the Maoist parties. The received wisdom is that Maoist rebel support in many parts of central and eastern India is buttressed by the country's disenfranchised, marginalized and exploited *adivasi* poor.

*Adivasi* insurgency of course has a long history in the subcontinent and was put to the centre stage of historical analysis on the publication of Ranajit Guha's seminal book, 'Elementary Aspects of a Peasant Insurgency'—most of Guha's data relied on tribal insurgencies of the nineteenth century. This book was foundational for the subaltern school of history.<sup>1</sup> Against the arguments of peasant action as prepolitical, as action without consciousness, or out of false consciousness, subaltern studies historians importantly placed the centrality of agency and consciousness at the heart of the analysis of peasant (and *adivasi*) protest.

As is the case in the current Maoist insurgency, campaigns against drinking have historically been a part of many of these *adivasi* rebellions. In Jharkhand, for example, anti-drinking campaigns were not only part of the recent Jharkhand Movement, but were also part and parcel of the Birsa Ulgulun, as well as the anti-colonial Tana Bhagat movement.<sup>2</sup> The influence of subaltern studies has meant that *adivasis* have been valorized as consciously participating in these movements, as embracing and following their grassroots leaders, prophets and gods, even if it has meant giving up alcohol consumption and selling. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the examination of the relationship between alcohol and *adivasi* assertion explored in David Hardiman's excellent study of Western India in the 1920s when several thousand *adivasis* followed the commands of a new goddess who asked people to give up fish, meat and alcohol.<sup>3</sup> In analysing this 'Coming of the Devi,' Hardiman asserts that such movements embodied a challenge to the upper castes and the social structure and as such should not be reduced to M. N. Srinivas's concept

<sup>1</sup> Guha, Ranajit. (1999). *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983). Duke University Press, Durham N.C.,

<sup>2</sup> See Singh, Kumar Suresh. (1966). *The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist*. Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta; Fuchs, Stephen. (1965). *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (1908). Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

<sup>3</sup> Hardiman, David. (1987). *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

of 'sanskritisation',<sup>4</sup> the process by which low castes or tribals changed their customs, rituals, ideology and way of life to emulate higher and 'twice born castes' in order to claim a higher position in the caste hierarchy. In contrast to 'sanskritisation', Hardiman argues that the adoption of certain Hindu values does not indicate an acceptance of the caste system and, moreover, might in fact be part of a broader challenge to the existing social structure.<sup>5</sup>

Placing the importance of agency and consciousness at the heart of peasant protest has been an important part of the early subaltern studies scholarly contribution. Nevertheless, this emphasis has come with some costs. The first is the risk of romanticizing the homogeneity of the peasant community that has participated in rebellion. The second is the risk of glossing over the internal politics of the movement. And the third is the cost of the stress on domination without subordination that leads to conclusions about peasant assertions as being autonomous and against dominant values such as 'sanskritisation'. This paper explores these risks through an analysis of the relationship between alcohol and the initial spread of the Maoist insurgency in a rural area in Jharkhand, Eastern India. In analysing the effects of the Maoist anti-drinking campaign, this paper argues against the homogenization of *adivasi* community and consciousness. It focuses on differential practices of alcohol consumption amongst *adivasis* to explore the centrality of intergenerational and gender conflicts in the initial spread of the Maoist insurgency.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, it questions the binaries of 'sanskritisation' versus *adivasi* assertion that are prevalent in some subaltern studies scholarship. Instead, the paper suggests that a focus on *adivasi* internal politics may show that *adivasi* political mobilization might embody the penetrations of dominant *sanskritic* values, limitations to those penetrations, as well as other aspirations such as the desire for particular notions of modernity. As such the paper is an experiment to explore the questions that

<sup>4</sup> Srinivas, M. N. (1956). A Note on Sanskritisation and Westernization. *Far Eastern Quarterly*, **XV**:4, 481–96.

<sup>5</sup> Hardiman, *Coming of the Devi*, pp. 157–160.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that this paper is based largely on research conducted between 1999 and 2002 in an area of rural Jharkhand where the Maoist movement was just beginning to spread. My current field research, in an area where the Maoists have been present for the last 20 years, shows that the sociology and dynamics of the movement and its recruits are likely to transform as it becomes more established in an area.

contemporary ethnographic analysis may raise about interpretations of the past.

### Alcoholics Anonymous?

Despite scholarly interest in peasant insurgency in India,<sup>7</sup> dominant images of South Asia have focused on Gandhian, 'passive', non-confrontational resistance underwritten by the stereotypes of the caste-ridden villages characterized as stagnant, passive and apolitical. As Michael Adas argues,<sup>8</sup> India was not mentioned in Eric Wolf's (1969) study of the major 'peasant wars' of the twentieth century. And Barrington Moore (1966), while noting the revolutionary potential among Indian peasants, ultimately argues that in comparison to other places (especially China), the Indian peasant was stasis-prone, self-repressive and ultimately displayed Gandhi's nonviolent and non-revolutionary approach to decolonization.<sup>9</sup>

However, transformation through violent rebellion is evident if we revisit South Asian history and look at the ways in which rural people are involved in rebellion today. Such investigation warns against the facile view of rural people as marking a 'postideological' or 'postpolitical' epoch. This view was taken up and thoroughly explored by Ranajit Guha in his *Elementary Aspects of a Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, first published in 1983, and which became foundational to the work emerging out of the early subaltern studies group.<sup>10</sup>

Guha opposed the writing of Marxists, such as Eric Hobsbawm,<sup>11</sup> who treated peasant rebellion as action without consciousness of 'primitive rebels' and who felt that it was only the industrial proletariat who were truly capable of revolutionary mobilization and

<sup>7</sup> For an insightful review see Ludden, David. (2002). 'A Brief History of Subalternity' in his *Reading Subaltern Studies: critical history, contested meaning and the globalisation of South Asia in India*. Anthem Press, London, pp. 1–43.

<sup>8</sup> Adas, Michael. (1991). 'South Asian Resistance in Comparative Perspective' in Haynes, D. and Prakash, G. *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, Berkeley, pp. 290–304.

<sup>9</sup> Wolf, Eric. (1969). *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*. Harper and Row, New York; Moore, Barrington. (1966). *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: Lord and peasant in the making of the modern world*. Penguin, London.

<sup>10</sup> Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*.

<sup>11</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric. (1959). *Primitive Rebels: Studies in the Archaic forms of Social Movements in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

developing a class consciousness. Instead, Guha was inspired by Gramsci's treatment of the peasantry as a living political, cultural and social force. Gramsci offered degrees of consciousness and solidarity between the proletariat and peasant, revolutionary and reactionary, with the possibility of both to become revolutionary classes.<sup>12</sup> The early subaltern studies historians read against the grain of history to show the traces of consciousness in apparently unstructured movements of the masses and tried to find the 'elementary aspects of peasant insurgency' through which a genuine class-consciousness could emerge.<sup>13</sup>

Guha's book, although concerned with peasant insurgency more generally, focused particularly on tribal areas of Eastern India where there had been several rebellions against the colonial governments—he devoted much of his key text to discussing the Birsaites, the Santhal hool and the Kol insurrection. A few articles focusing on *adivasi* rebellion were published thereafter,<sup>14</sup> but *adivasi* political mobilization was brought centre stage to the subaltern studies project by the publication of David Hardiman's (1987) *The Coming of the Devi*.

In the nineteenth century the relatively isolated *adivasi* regions of Southern Gujarat were severely transformed by a new influx of state officials, especially Parsi landlords and liquor dealers, who came to control the sale of alcoholic beverages that were vital to *adivasi* sociality. In response, the *adivasis* began an autonomous movement in the 1920s to reform their established ways of life and thus overthrow the economic domination of the Parsis. They followed a new goddess known as Salabai, who spoke through spirit mediums, and asked people to give up alcoholic drink and meat consumption and to bathe twice a day. Although later on middle class Congressmen had some influence over the movement making it more Gandhian and less against the Parsis, Hardiman's core aim was to show how these oppressed subaltern groups were capable of initiating and sustaining a movement of self-assertion. Hardiman importantly pointed out

<sup>12</sup> Gramsci, Antonio. (1971). *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*. Lawrence and Wishart, London.

<sup>13</sup> See Arnold, David. (1984). Gramsci and peasant subalternity in India. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 11:4, 155–77.

<sup>14</sup> Sarkar, Tanika. (1985). 'Jitu Santal's Movement in Malda, 1924–1932: A Study in Tribal Protest' in Guha, R. *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Oxford University Press, Delhi; Dasgupta, Swapan. (1985). 'Adivasi Politics in Midnapur, c. 1760–1924' in Guha, R. *Subaltern studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.

that such movements should not be equated with M. N. Srinivas's description of 'sanskritisation' because a challenge to the upper castes was a crucial feature of them. The Devi stressed that people should have nothing to do with exploitative upper castes, in particular the Parsis who monopolized the liquor-distilling market.

Hardiman's book was important because it took a stand against the reduction of religion to a primeval consciousness, or a hegemonic ideology, imposed by the dominant class in order to divide and rule: it treated seriously the religiosity of *adivasis* as a means of assertion. It was also important in its critique of the 'sanskritisation' model—actions such as abstinence from the drinking of alcohol were not reduced to the appropriation of Brahminical notions of purity but as a means to deprive these notions of their power of domination.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Hardiman's aim was to write a history which tried to understand the consciousness which informed political actions taken by *adivasis*, as a subaltern class, independently of any elite initiative. Like other writings of the early subaltern studies group, it took a stand against arguments of 'false consciousness' and instead treated seriously the consciousness, agency and autonomy of *adivasis* political mobilization.

This analysis was in part a result of the influence of Gramsci's ideas that class-consciousness developed from within a social group (and was not to be imposed from outside).<sup>16</sup> In essence, the subaltern studies project tried to explore the relationship between revolutionary theory and mass struggle, through, in particular, studying the 'spontaneous' and 'elementary' passions of the subalterns—passions that could be nurtured and developed in order to make them into a true revolutionary class. In the early years of subaltern studies there was hope that the subaltern could be a force for a socialist future. The group was highly influenced by the disillusionment of the demise of the Naxalbari peasant insurgency in the seventies. Guha (who was actively involved in Maoist student organizations)<sup>17</sup> thus understood the task of Marxists to develop a critique of subaltern ideology and culture so as to expose its 'negative' features and to educate and strengthen its 'positive' ones. In this project, Hardiman's book demanded not only that the religiosity of *adivasis* was to be taken seriously but also various

<sup>15</sup> Hardiman. *Coming of the Devi*, p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> Arnold, Gramsci and peasant subalterneity, p.159.

<sup>17</sup> Chaturverdi, Vinayak. (ed.). (2000). *Mapping the Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. Verso, London, p. 10.

purifying practices such as abstinence from drinking alcohol were to be seen as a means of assertion and not 'sanskritisation'.

Anti-alcohol consumption campaigns, such as the one that Salabai, the Devi, mobilized in Southern Gujarat in the 1920s, have been part of *adivasi* assertions across India. In the Chotanagpur plateau of Eastern India, they were a central feature of the Birsa ulgulan, where at the turn of the nineteenth century, thousands of *adivasis* in Ranchi and Singhbhum Districts, became followers of Birsa Munda, a rebellious prophet, an alleged insurrectionary, who prohibited his followers from consuming alcohol,<sup>18</sup> as well as the powerful messianic movement amongst the Oraons, the Tana Bhagat movement.<sup>19</sup> More recently, as described above in the story of Fatra and Somvari's experience, they have been part and parcel of the spread of the Maoist insurgency in the *adivasi* heartlands of Jharkhand.

These assertions have been commonly described as uprisings of the countries disenfranchised, marginalized and exploited *adivasi* poor. However, several related issues are unclear in all these movements. The first is the extent to which we can generalize about those who are allegedly mobilizing as one uniform and homogenous group. The second is the extent to which we can gloss over the internal politics amongst the communities who are allegedly mobilizing. Both these romanticizing tendencies in subaltern studies concerned several scholars. Sherry Ortner,<sup>20</sup> for instance, called the overall effect of resistance studies literature as 'sanitising politics' and 'thinning culture' and David Ludden<sup>21</sup> was concerned that subaltern studies threw away those studies of agrarian society which focused on the complexities of production and class.

A third issue is the extent to which we can attribute agency and autonomous consciousness to the forms of resistance being deployed. This was a crucial concern for Gayatri Spivak who was concerned about the subaltern being a master of his own destiny.<sup>22</sup> It was also a concern for Rosalind O'Hanlon who argued that subaltern studies contributors

<sup>18</sup> Singh, *Dust Storm and Hanging Mist*.

<sup>19</sup> Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets*.

<sup>20</sup> Ortner, Sherry. (1995). Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37, 171–93.

<sup>21</sup> Ludden, David. (2001). 'Subaltern and Others in the Agrarian History of South Asia', in Scott, James and Bhatt, Nina. *Agrarian Studies: synthetic work at the cutting edge*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

<sup>22</sup> Spivak, Gayatri. (1985). 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in Guha, R. *Subaltern Studies IV*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 335–337.

were describing peasants in essentialist human terms derived from the Enlightenment concept of the unified human consciousness.<sup>23</sup> This, O'Hanlon argued, led the subaltern studies scholars to assume that the subaltern can be treated as a subject/agent 'in his own right', if history was reclaimed for him on his own terms and not those of an elite. Moreover, it resulted, as Dipankar Gupta argued, in a kind of ethnicization of the peasant mind, where history almost appears as being transformed by the independent organizing principles of the peasant insurgent rather than as a product of structures of power.<sup>24</sup>

The rest of this essay examines these three interrelated issues of homogeneity, internal politics and autonomy in the context of the anti-drinking campaign of the Maoist insurgency in Jharkhand. Alongside providing an analysis of the anti-drinking campaigns of the Maoist movement in Jharkhand, the modest aim here is to explore the ways in which ethnographic analysis of the present may raise questions about interpretations of the past.

### **Maoists and the two faces of *adivasi* wildness**

*Adivasis* were a crucial part of the early Maoist uprisings of Naxalbari (1967), Midnapore (1969–1970) and Birbhum (1970–1971)<sup>25</sup> but also in Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>26</sup> Here, they attacked local landlords, forcibly occupied land, burnt records and cancelled old debts. The overall goal, as stated in the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) programme of 1970, and reiterated again in the Communist Party of India (Maoist) programme of 2004, was to form liberated areas in rural zones (base areas) and then encircle and capture the cities.<sup>27</sup> Massive state repression, which included the imprisonment of most of the Naxalite leaders, as well as factionalism within the Maoist ranks, meant that by 1973, Maoist activity in these base areas largely subsided. While different Maoist factions chose

<sup>23</sup> O'Hanlon, Rosalind. (1988). Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia. *Modern Asian Studies*, 22: 1, 189–224.

<sup>24</sup> Gupta, Dipankar. (1985). On altering the ego in peasant history: Paradoxes of the ethnic option. *Peasant Studies*, 13:1, 5–24.

<sup>25</sup> Duyker, Edward. (1987). *Tribal Guerrillas: the Santhals of West Bengal and the Naxalite movement*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

<sup>26</sup> Sinha, Shanta. (1989). *Maoists in Andhra Pradesh*. Gyan, Delhi.

<sup>27</sup> Communist Party of India Maoist. (2004). *Party Programme*. Communist Party of India, (CPI) Maoist.

different methods, guerrilla warfare re-emerged in the 1980s and spread to the central plains of Bihar, and into sociologically similar areas of Northern Jharkhand, where *dalits* and other lower castes became mobilized. However, in the 1990s, *adivasis* once more came to the centre stage of the Maoist insurgency as central and Eastern India became guerrilla zones—the areas often represented as the dark underbelly of the *adivasi* heartlands of the subcontinent. In fact, media reporting now usually depicts the Maoist insurgency as an *adivasi* rebellion—as the poorest, most marginalized and exploited sections of Indian society shattering the illusion of ‘India Shining’.

While Maoists leaders have been acknowledged by some scholars to be higher caste,<sup>28</sup> the movement is said to be both buttressed and appropriated by the disenfranchised *adivasi* poor.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the perspectives (and prejudices) of higher caste and higher class leaders are quite clear in the Maoist documents and campaigns. While certain aspects of what is imagined to be *adivasi* lifestyles and values are valorized for the service of class struggle, others are clearly condemned.

Running through both these valorizations and condemnations is the idea of ‘wildness’, a concept that Ajay Skaria has superbly analysed in the context of the Bhils and Koknis of the Dang region of Western India and the reactions to these groups by the British colonial rulers.<sup>30</sup> Skaria argues that the British held both respect and contempt for the wildness of these *adivasi* groups. On the one hand they viewed them as masculine, brave and noble survivors but on the other hand, as wild children to be socialized and even to be protected from themselves. There is a genealogical continuation of thought between this British treatment of *adivasis* and that of Maoist leaders who have also valorized certain aspects of *adivasi* ‘wildness’. For instance, the CPI (Maoist) party programme treats *adivasis* as the foot-soldiers of the movement—they are seen as the natural vessels of a revolutionary consciousness that needs only to be unleashed.<sup>31</sup> Some of the Maoist leadership,

<sup>28</sup> Bhatia, Bela. (2000). *The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*. PhD Thesis. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.

<sup>29</sup> Corbridge, Stuart. (2002). The continuing struggle for India’s Jharkhand: democracy, decentralisation and the politics of names and numbers. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 40:3, 55–71.

<sup>30</sup> Skaria, Ajay. (1997). Shades of wildness tribe, caste, and gender in Western India. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 56: 3, 726–45; Skaria, Ajay. (1999). *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

<sup>31</sup> CPI (Maoist) (2004) Party Programme.

clearly had ideals of *adivasis* as natural insurgents, confirms Sumanta Banerjee, reflecting on his own participation within the movement.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as is the case of the Maoist treatment of Indians by the Shining Path of Peru,<sup>33</sup> ideals of *adivasi* original primitive agrarian communism make them the prototypical propellers of a vision for the organization of future society. Here, time works in complex ways—ideas of the past of *adivasi* lifestyles do not just inform the anachronistic thought (mapping the past in the present) that Skaria<sup>34</sup> argued was the case of the British agents, but are used in the production of the project of a future society. Ideas of the future are in fact ideas about the past.

There are certain aspects of *adivasi* wildness that many British colonial rulers condemned and which for the Maoists clearly needed to be tamed. One example is the prohibition of *adivasi* propitiation of spirits with blood sacrifices, *adivasi* use of spirit mediums and their beliefs in witchcraft. In Nepal the Maoists crucially curtailed annual village festivals and death ceremonies, preventing shamans from attending, assuming that they represent barbaric activity and imprison villagers in erroneous beliefs.<sup>35</sup>

Another deplorable trait to be tamed among the *adivasis* that the Indian Maoists found in common with some colonial agents ruling the *adivasi* (and low caste) families of South Gujarat,<sup>36</sup> as well as the

<sup>32</sup> Banerjee, Sumanta. (2009). 'Reflections of a One-time Maoist Activist', in Shah, A. and Pettigrew, J. *Windows into a Revolution: Ethnographies of Maoism in South Asia*. Special edited collection of Dialectical Anthropology, **33**: 253–269.

<sup>33</sup> See de la Cadena, Marisol. (1998). 'From Race to Class: Insurgent Intellectuals *De Provincia* in Peru', in Stern, S. *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995*, Duke University Press, Durham North Carolina, pp. 22–60; Mallon, Florencia. (1998). 'Chronicle of a Path Foretold? Velasco's Revolution, Vanguardia Revolucionaria and "Shining Omens" in the indigenous communities of Andahuaylas', in Stern, S. *Shining and other paths: War and society in Peru 1980–1995*. Duke University Press, Durham North Carolina.

<sup>34</sup> Skaria, Shades of Wildness.

<sup>35</sup> See de Sales, Anne. (2009). 'From Ancestral Conflicts to Local Empowerment: Two Narratives from a Nepalese community', in Shah, A. and Pettigrew, J. *Windows into a Revolution: Ethnographies of Maoism in South Asia*. Special edited collection of Dialectical Anthropology, **33**: 365–381; Lecomte-Tilouine. (2009). 'Terror in a Maoist model village in mid-western Nepal', in Shah, A. and Pettigrew, J., *Windows into a Revolution: Ethnographies of Maoism in South Asia*. Special edited collection of Dialectical Anthropology, **33**: 383–401.

<sup>36</sup> See Hardiman, David. (2006). 'From Custom to Crime: Politics of Drinking in Colonial South Gujarat', *Histories for the Subordinated*. Permanent Black, Delhi. (Essay

Nepali Maoists, is their indulgence in drinking alcohol. In Jharkhand, anti-drinking campaigns were one of the first measures through which the Maoists sought to spread in *adivasi* areas.<sup>37</sup> Maoist involvement with temperance is part of their tactical measures which they think will better suit the needs of the populations they are spreading amongst. In the plains of central Bihar, Maoist tactics of concrete social and economic reforms, focused on driving out the exploitative landowners, was crucial to the spread of the revolution. However, in these parts of Jharkhand, where land issues are not as marked as the Bihar case, and where the first points of support were descendants of the old landlords<sup>38</sup> rather than the lower castes and classes, other tactics were sought that could reach the *adivasis*.

Informed by middle class urban elite activists, like other political programmes before it (such as that of the Jharkhand Mukti Morch),<sup>39</sup> the Maoists mobilized anti-alcohol campaigns. Within the armed forces of the movement the drinking of alcohol is totally banned and in the villages of their spread, Maoist rhetorical arguments focused on the practical reasoning that *adivasis* spend too much off their money on alcohol and that when inebriated they are more easily manipulated by cunning exploiters. However, in practice such anti-drinking campaigns also represent the upper caste and even bourgeois influences on the movement, who consider the consumption of alcohol a degrading and disreputable practice.

The political nuances of who argues what and who remains silent of course get ironed out in dominant journalistic and scholarly accounts of Maoist spread in Eastern India which stress the agency of *adivasis* in nurturing the movement in these regions: the movement appears as one led by and for India's subaltern classes. It would hence, not be surprising if in 50 or even 30 years' time, historians argued as they have done of other *adivasi* assertions—that *adivasis* who began to abstain from consuming and selling alcohol when propelling the Maoist

published earlier in 1985, ed., *Subaltern Studies IV*. Oxford University Press, Delhi); Skaria, *Shades of Wildness*, p. 737.

<sup>37</sup> For a comparative ethnographic analysis of the Maoist movement in India and Nepal, see Shah, Alpa and Judith Pettigrew. (2009). 'Introduction' to Shah, A. and Pettigrew, J., *Windows into a Revolution: Ethnographies of Maoism in South Asia*. Special edited collection of *Dialectical Anthropology*, **33**: 225–251.

<sup>38</sup> Shah, Alpa. (2006a). Markets of protection: The 'terrorist' Maoist movement and the state in Jharkhand, India. *Critique of Anthropology*, **26**:3: 297–314.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*.

insurgency, were not 'sanskritising' but were in fact transforming their practices in their broader project to resist dominant rural forces. However, ethnographic research reveals that the situation is clearly more complex and it is to this complexity that I now turn.

### The many ways to drink

Alcohol is crucial to *adivasi* sociality in rural Jharkhand. Two kinds of brews are prepared at home in the region. The first is *hadia*, a beer made from rice. Husked rice is boiled with a little water and then dried. The husks are partially removed and the rice is boiled again. Before softening, the rice is removed from the heat and cooled. A jungle root and herb mix called *ranu* is crumbled into the rice. The mixture is left in a pot covered with *sal* leaves and kept for three days inside the house till it ferments. In the cold weather, the fermentation process can take eight to ten days. Water is added before the brew is drunk as *hadia*.

The second is *mahua pani*, a distillation made from the *mahua* flower. The white *mahua* flowers are collected from trees in the village in the hot season in April and then dried. To prepare the wine the dried flowers are drowned in water. *Ranu* is added to the mixture before it is left for five to six days in the hot weather and up to fifteen days in the cold weather. The mixture is ready to be distilled when it has stopped producing bubbles. Distillation takes place through a combination of four pots. The first, which goes directly over the fire, holds the fermented *mahua* flowers and water mixture. Directly on top of it is another pot, with holes at the bottom to let through the steam from the *mahua* ferment. Inside this second pot, a smaller clay vessel collects the distilled liquid, the *mahua pani*. A last vessel, which holds cold water, is placed on top of these pots in order to enhance the condensation of the distilled liquid into the clay vessel. This water in the pot at the top needs to be kept cold and is changed at least five times over the process of distillation.

In the village I call 'Tapu', where I lived between 2000 and 2002 and have visited almost every year since, every Munda household produces *hadia* and *mahua pani* at various times during the year. These drinks are not only enjoyed once a week after visiting the local market where surplus vegetables from the fields are sold and weekly household necessities purchased, they are crucial for all festival of the agricultural cycle, all occasions of the life cycle (births, deaths and

marriages in particular), propitiation of the ancestors and spirits of the house, as well as to welcome guests.<sup>40</sup>

At festivals, these village brews (along with blood sacrifice) are given to the various concerned spirits of the village—they were crucial for their propitiation. ‘Without the alcohol, we fear that the spirits will become very angry and will cause havoc in the village: misfortune, disease and even death’, said Jatru Munda to me at the Khalihani festival in November 2000. Likewise, spirits of the house and ancestral clans demand propitiation with alcohol on their special days and need to be remembered with alcohol at village festivals and when consuming alcohol more generally—whether for market days or for marriages, births and death ceremonies. On the latter occasion of commemoration, the production and consumption of insufficient amounts of alcohol runs the risk of dissatisfying the spirit of the dead person and turning it into a malevolent *bhut* (ghost) who will continuously trouble and haunt the village.

Higher castes often perpetuate the stereotype that *adivasis* are drunkards. There is a gendered dimension to this stereotype—that it is the men who drink and the women who suffer the consequences when inebriated men return home to beat wives or steal their hard

<sup>40</sup> For comparative material on *adivasis* and customs of alcohol consumption, see the excellent essay by Hardiman (‘From Custom to Crime’) as well as Froerer, Peggy (2007). *Religious Division and Social conflict: The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in rural India*. Social Science Press, Delhi; Lakra, John. (2001). Rice-beer in tribal culture. *Sevartham*, 26: 21–30; Rao, S. V. A. Satyanarayana, and C. R. Prasada Rao. (1977). Drinking in the tribal world: A cross-cultural study in ‘cultural theme’ approach. *Man in India*, 57, 97–120; Roy, J. K. (1978). Alcoholic beverages in tribal India and their nutritional role. *Man in India*, 58, 98–326. Froerer’s account explores the conflicts and tensions which arise around the consumption and production of alcohol in *adivasi* areas and especially how these tensions are appropriated by the spread of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, a militant wing of the various Hindu Nationalist parties and groups in India. Unlike the *adivasi* areas I describe in Jharkhand in this paper, in the village of Mohanpur across the border in Chhattisgarh, *arkhi*, mahua wine is differentially produced and consumed by different *adivasi* groups. In particular, Hindu *adivasis* (e.g. Ratiya Kanwar) consume the liquor produced by Christians *adivasis* (mainly Oraon). It seems that there men and women do not drink openly together and in fact Hindu *adivasi* women, concerned about their husbands stealing and spending household resources on drink, accused the Christian Oraons of producing and selling drink to their men. Most Oraons felt that these growing tensions were really about Hindu jealousy over increasing Oraon wealth and material status. Froerer argues that such ongoing tensions would have been contained and resolved locally. However, RSS activists in the area transformed them into issues of communal concern, of Hindus *versus* Christians (as opposed to Ratiya Kanwar *versus* Oraon for instance), thereby ethnicizing the tensions and linking Christian acquisition of land through liquor sales to similar practices elsewhere in India.

earned money for more brew. In Tapu there was little evidence to support this idea. Other villagers in fact reprimanded the one man who drank day in and day out.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, *adivasis* in Tapu held strong customary norms about how the alcohol should be consumed. The first drops of any alcohol produced are given to the ancestors of the house that produced it, on the stones marking the ancestral clan. Subsequently, at the beginning of every act of consumption, the first drops are always spilt on the ground for ancestral spirits. A crucial feature of the consumption of these village brews is that men and women drink together. Either men or women can produce the alcohol, serve it and drink it. Moreover, married men and women, their fathers and mothers as well as father-in-laws and mother-in-laws, and even grandparents, can enjoy the consumption of alcohol together. Rather, than the image of drunken men beating women, the evidence from Tapu shows the relative freedom of the consumption of alcohol that is equally enjoyed by both men and women.

The contrast with drinking practices amongst higher castes in the region could not be more marked. In the case of Tapu, these are the Yadav *ex-zamindars* of the village. Alcohol has no sacred function for the Yadavs and is not given to the various gods they worshipped nor to their ancestral spirits. Men can drink. Women can not. Nevertheless some Yadav women do enjoy their drink, though they never indulge in front of other people and moreover, men and women will never drink together. Besides this gender inequality in alcohol consumption practices, there is also an intergenerational hierarchy. Married men rarely drink in front of men from the generation above—and never in front of parents or parents-in-law. And one last difference in drinking practices between the higher caste and *adivasis*, is that the former consider home made brews (*mahua pani* and *hadia*) with contempt.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Douglas (ed.) (1987). *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge); amongst others (see also Dwight Heath. 1975. 'A Critical Review of Ethnographic Studies of Alcohol Use' in R Gibbons, R. Israel, Y. Kalant, H. Popham, R. Schmidt, W. and Smart, R. *Research Advances in Alcohol and Drug Problems. Vol 2*. John Wiley and Sons, New York) have argued that the focus on alcoholism and 'problem drinking' expresses a strong bias of western cultural norms and that from the wider comparative standpoint of anthropology, 'problem drinking' is rare and alcoholism is almost absent, even in societies where drunkenness is frequent, actively sought and highly esteemed. In India, in his analysis of the consumption of *toddy* and *mahua*, David Hardiman also reports that although consumption of alcohol was customary among the tribals and lower castes of South Gujarat, very few villagers were real addicts and drinking certainly did not lead to crime and acts of violence (See Hardiman, 'From Custom to Crime', p. 190).

While they drink these village brews on some occasions, for these higher castes the far more superior varieties of alcohol are the ones that come beautifully packaged in glass bottles and bought in the *line hotels* (roadside truckers restaurant and hotel) and shops of the market town of Bero. These are the various liquids that pass for rum, gin, whisky or beer, labelled, 'Royal Challenge' or 'Old Monk,' for instance. Described as 'Indian Made Foreign Liquor' (IMFL) by the state government licensing authorities, they are commonly called '*shishi*' (referring to the packaged glass bottle) by the villagers, although the raising of half an arm to represent the bottle is enough for most people to know what was being referred to.

So when the Maoists pasted anti-drinking posters across the region and roamed the local markets, breaking pots of *hadia* and *mahua pani*, who did their campaign appeal to and who did it alienate? Undoubtedly it was the higher caste rural elite who nodded with approval and the older generations of *adivasis* who were left rather upset. Although *adivasis* are commonly thought to be the vanguard of the Maoist insurgency in Jharkhand, I have argued elsewhere<sup>42</sup> that the initial Maoist spread in these parts of rural Jharkhand was through the rural elite and not through the poorest *adivasis*. Since the abolition of landlords in the early 1950s, these elites (many of whom came from landlord families) had been sustaining their position in the rural hierarchy through appropriating state-related resources (jobs, and especially government development contracts). The Maoists sought initial support in rural Jharkhand by offering better protection (than the existing sources such as MLAs) to access these state resources and thus inevitably came into contact with the rural elite and not the poorest *adivasis* who wanted to keep the state away.<sup>43</sup> So these anti-drinking campaigns, which did not harm the rural elite who sold and consumed the more expensive 'foreign varieties' of alcohol commonly called '*shishi*', alienated poor *adivasis* for whom the production and consumption of village brews was a crucial part of their sociality.

However, the situation gets more complex if we explore the internal politics and transformations amongst the *adivasi* communities. There have always been a few exceptions to *adivasi* drinking habits. A handful of older *adivasi* men and women in the village, those who are generally a bit more prosperous than the rest, have given up drink in an attempt

<sup>42</sup> Shah, *Markets of Protection*.

<sup>43</sup> Shah, Alpa. (2007). Keeping the state away: Democracy, politics and the state in India's Jharkhand. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, **13:1**, 129–45.

to raise themselves above the status of their kith and kin.<sup>44</sup> Such men and women usually accompany their abstinence from alcohol with giving up meat and fish and becoming *bhagats* and *bhagteins* (a form of spirit mediums) who have the powers to cure minor cases of illnesses by following the teachings of a secret guru. They generally believe themselves to be a class above the decadence of the houses in which they grew up.<sup>45</sup> Despite these exceptions, the majority of *adivasis* remained rather disapproving, if disparaging, of those trying to 'purify' themselves in order to rise above the rest.

More recently, however, over the ten years that I have known Tapu and the surrounding area, I have also witnessed the development of a particularly marked generational differentiation rising amongst the *adivasi* communities. A new generation of educated *adivasi* youth, who have either matriculated or passed intermediate examinations, is now emerging amongst the Jharkhandi countryside. Unlike their illiterate parents, some of these youths no longer want to till the soil and work as manual labourers. They increasingly seek to engage in state-related practices and do not see the state as something to keep away from. Meanwhile, their parents strongly disapprove of their sons' involvement in state activities<sup>46</sup> and now see the dangers of the state in many more forms—including the Maoists. Most importantly, for the purpose of this paper, these new *adivasi* youth want to join the rural elite who they emulate.

Jitu Munda is one example, a young man who, in the years I had lived in Tapu, had been living with his aunt in the town of Bero studying for his Matric (SP) (GCSE) examinations. In 2007 when I visited Tapu, Jitu was back in the village and, unable to find a job, had been hobnobbing in the streets and restaurants of Bero with the higher caste

<sup>44</sup> In 'From Custom to Crime', David Hardiman is careful to draw attention to the existence of individual *adivasi* families, usually more prosperous than the rest, giving up alcohol in order to rise above other *adivasis*. He notes, however, that such isolated types of renunciation that have long existed in *adivasi* villages is different to the wholesale temperance movements such as the 'Coming of the Devi' whereby communities which were undergoing pauperization attempted to give up liquor and toddy in order to save themselves from further impoverishment (pp. 223–224).

<sup>45</sup> See also Shah, Alpa. (2006b). Labour of love: seasonal migration from Jharkhand to the brick kilns of other states in India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.), **40:1**, 91–119.

<sup>46</sup> I have elsewhere (Shah, Keeping the State Away) described and analysed the *adivasi* desire to keep away from the state in this area which emerged both from their historical experiences of the exploitative state as well as rural elite reproduction of the state as beyond the moral pale for the Mundas.

rural elite. He drunk only the '*shishi*' alcohol behind closed curtains in Bero town, refrained from touching village brews and returned home on a borrowed motorbike on many a late night, shouting at his parents, telling them to reform their 'backward' practices in producing and consuming village brews. Such young men are begging to question the use of alcohol in *adivasi* festivals. And the women that this new generation marry, as is now the case for Jitu's wife, are prohibited from drinking *hadia* or *mahua pani* and are increasingly confined to the private spaces of the household (if the men can afford to keep them there) and are not allowed to go out to work. Meanwhile *adivasi* parents worry about the kinds of men that their sons are turning into, but are afraid of the violence that might befall them should they take issue with their sons prescriptions and new way of life.

While *adivasi* parents were generally proud to be of the *Jungle Raj* and have values and lifestyles that were different to those of the higher caste rural elite, these young *adivasi* men seek to become like the rural elite—they are 'sanskritising' and, unlike their parents, there is no obvious challenge to the higher castes in their personal transformation. Moreover, there are other values to which both they and the higher caste men are aspiring such as those which manifest themselves through riding motorbikes, holding guns and being particular kinds of macho-men. Asides from the rural elite, it is now these *adivasi* youth who are supporting the initial spread of the Maoist movement.

## Conclusion

Who were the 15 men on the five motorbikes and how do we analyse their actions when they screeched to a stop in Latratu village market that May evening in 2000 and broke Fatra and Somvari Mundas' pots? As the final version of this paper goes into the publication queue of *Modern Asian Studies*, nine years after the Latratu event, I am in the midst of new fieldwork in a different part of Jharkhand where the Maoist movement has been established for at least two decades. As the Maoists become more established in an area, it is clear from my current field research that the sociology and dynamics of the Maoist movement and its recruits are likely to transform over time. This paper, however, is based on the period when the Maoists were first entering an area—on the circumstances of field research in the Tapu region I was focused on between 1999 and 2002 (although I have continued over the years

to observe developments in the area). Although it is now not possible to verify their exact identity, knowing the historical sociology of the area as well as the dynamics of the spread of the Maoist movement in *adivasi* areas, one can predict that the men would have been both the higher caste elite of the area and young educated Munda and Oraon men like Jitu Munda. The latter tribal young men, who participated in these Maoist actions, would have been emulating their upper caste mentors and, like the higher castes, they would also have been aspiring to hold guns, ride motorbikes and be particular kinds of macho-men. Apart from a rhetoric of their fight for the exploited and oppressed *adivasis*, their participation in the Maoist movement perhaps also results in both the democratization of *sanskritic* values as well as aspirations to particular notions of modernity.

What light does an ethnographic analysis of the contemporary Maoist movement shed on the analysis of *adivasi* assertion historically? The rise of subaltern studies in the study of South Asia marks a move within history to draw on anthropology. As Dipankar Gupta has argued,<sup>47</sup> this is not just a move towards using anthropological conclusions for processing historical arguments, it is also a move towards trying to analyse historical material with anthropological techniques—a genuine attempt to bring the people back in. One problem, for the anthropologically-minded historian, however, is the limitations of sources. How does one recover those ‘small voices of history’ from the records that are mainly written by the various elite?

If, in 50 years’ time, historians tried to recover those small voices of history on the Maoist movement at the turn of the new millennium in Eastern India from newspaper archives, police records, personal communications between various state officers, district collectors offices, forest officials, journalists accounts or personal diaries of ex-combatants, what would they find? While state officials might construct the rebels as criminals or terrorists, the search for the small voices of history might find a movement of *adivasi* autonomous assertion whereby after centuries of exploitation and oppression at the hands of state officials, landlords, industrial interests and labour contractors, *adivasis* have taken up arms to fight against the dominant systems which oppress them. They might also find accounts of the ways in which *adivasis* have sought to reform themselves to better fight their oppressors—accounts of how alcohol consumption have been given up

<sup>47</sup> Gupta, On Altering the Ego.

by *adivasis*. Perhaps they might come to similar conclusions to those subaltern studies historians writing in the 1980s who stressed the autonomy of *adivasi* assertion in the 1920s.

Ethnographic research in Maoist areas shows, however, that these ‘small voices’ are indeed likely to be very diverse. While it might be the case that some *adivasis*, for various reasons, are supporting the assertions, others from the very same households, might actually be quite alienated from and in conflict with those who are participating in the political mobilization. In contemporary Jharkhand, the initial spread of the Maoist insurgency is emerging alongside an intergenerational conflict amongst the *adivasis*. While some educated *adivasi* youth are attracted to the early spread of the movement, their parents are often fearful of the paths that their children are treading.

Moreover, while at one level the political mobilization of young *adivasis* is against the dominant elite of the region, an ethnographic study of those who are mobilizing reveals that part of the attraction, for those involved in the initial spread of the movement into an area, is about living like the rural elite. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the transformation of their drinking habits and norms—changing from consuming openly-shared village brews which have a sacred dimension, to indulging in foreign varieties of alcohol consumed behind closed dark curtains and solely with other men of the same generation. So while the movement may claim to be for *adivasis* and against landlords and higher castes, and may have taken up anti-drinking campaigns as its leaders felt these represented the needs of *adivasis*, the *adivasi* youth who joined the initial spread of the movement at the grassroots level are emulating the higher caste rural elite while at the same time trying to shed those aspects of their inherited lifestyles and values which they now see as ‘backward’. They are to some extent both ‘sanskritising’ and perhaps aspiring to particular ideas of modernity.

In her analysis of a 1992 movement of a *mata* (mother) through the Bhil region, similar to the 1920s Devi movement described by Hardiman,<sup>48</sup> Amita Baviskar argues that it is possible that such movements are not necessarily a challenge to ‘sanskritisation’, but may mark a ‘democratization’ of upper caste values.<sup>49</sup> Baviskar emphasizes

<sup>48</sup> Hardiman, *Coming of the Devi*.

<sup>49</sup> Baviskar, Amita. (1995). *In The Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

that, 'the values endorsed by the *mata* were a departure from the *adivasi* norm and involved adoption of upper-caste Hindu practices [and] to the extent that *adivasis* gave up drinking liquor, eating meat and worshipping their gods through animal sacrifice, they were repudiating their *adivasi* identity and embarking on a round of Hinduisation'.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly the anti-drinking campaigns of Salabai in 1920s southern Gujarat might have been very different to the Maoist temperance campaigns of the 2000s in Jharkhand. In his outstanding essay, 'From Custom to Crime', David Hardiman is, however, careful to point out that even during the Devi Movement there were many peasants who did not feel the need to change their habits and that the movement had a more lasting impact in areas which had an influential class of upwardly mobile *adivasis*.<sup>51</sup> These internal differences and tensions are, however, glossed over in the final analysis of the 'Coming of the Devi' which stresses the wholesale autonomous *adivasi* assertion represented in the 1920s movement. It might indeed be the case that those following Salabai were not 'sanskritising', and that there are all sorts of precautions to be taken in reading from the present into the past.

However, the modest suggestion I wish to make from this cross-temporal and regional comparison is that there is a pressing need for a collaborative approach between anthropologists and historians in which ethnographic analysis of the present may raise valid questions about the interpretations of the past. Since the first publication of Bernard Cohn's 1980 essay,<sup>52</sup> which called for a greater effort to bring the two disciplines together, it has become impossible for anthropologists to pursue their research outside of history. The issue is not simply one of how the past is valorized,

<sup>50</sup> Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*, p 100. To the thesis of 'democratization of Hindu values', Baviskar notes important qualifiers—one, that the *mata* greatly profited the non-*adivasi* traders who sold the items of worship and clothes the *mata* desired, and two, that such movements are often temporary—most people regarded the *mata* as a goddess who had to be propitiated so that life could get back to normal. Thus attempts to evaluate the degree of Hinduisation (or challenges to 'sanskritisation') involved must ultimately assess the permanence of changes in beliefs and practices induced (p 103). Three, 'possessed' women frequently identified marginal women as *daakans* who were then put to death, thereby worsening the social position of women who were already badly off (p. 101). This latter, point, reemphasizes the need to differentiate the *adivasi* community participating in such movements to show the important internal politics and conflicts which also emerge and which act to marginalize some *adivasis*.

<sup>51</sup> Hardiman, 'From Custom to Crime', p. 231.

<sup>52</sup> Cohn, Bernard. (1980). History and Anthropology: The state of play. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22: 198–221.

interpreted and transformed by research informants it is also one of historicizing societies, categories and events. This move not only situates transformation over time and connection to other places into anthropological analysis but also leads to questions about how contemporary events, such as the Maoist temperance movement, may have happened before or have some historical continuity with events of the past. This forces anthropologists to situate their material in historical context and reflect on how prevailing conditions and situations might be different or similar to those of the historical past. Historians in turn have treated seriously the archive as a field site, exploring the ways in which their sources are a contested domain of interpretation and a reflection of particular relations of power. In promoting this symbiotic relationship between anthropology and history, the aim here has been to promote an approach in which anthropological analysis of contemporary events may be used to ask questions that may lead historians to interpret their sources in a different light.

In the case of the Maoist temperance movement, it is possible that in perhaps 50 years' time, historians interested in subaltern history might come to very similar conclusions as the writings of the early 1980s subaltern school about the *adivasi* support of the Maoists at the turn of the new millennium. If, however, we analyse such conclusions against ethnographic data, we might find that we need to be wary of focusing on subaltern autonomous agency and first examine the internal politics of the movement, looking out for the conflicting and diverse perspectives that may emerge. In this case the *adivasi* community affected by the insurgency needs to be differentiated. While a new generation of educated *adivasi* youth are becoming mobilized in the initial spread, their parents are clearly quite alienated from the movement. Moreover, it is especially the women who are likely to suffer the purifying consequences that the educated *adivasi* young men bring with their participation in the Maoist movement. The spaces in which women can act on equal terms in public life with their men gets reduced and the prohibitions on women drinking openly together with men is one marker of this broader shift that is taking place throughout rural Jharkhand.

Also we need to examine the tensions between what people say, or are recorded to say, and what people do. In the Maoist insurgency, while the rhetorical aims proposed by its leaders are that the movement is against the dominant and upper castes, its leaders are overwhelmingly upper caste, and at grassroots level the movement,

in its initial spread into other areas, uses the higher caste rural elite. The *adivasi* youth who have begun to support the movement are attracted to some of the values and lifestyles of these rural elite and are embarrassed by aspects of their own backgrounds. It is in the context of the fine details of the internal politics of the Maoist early spread, that we must analyse the anti-drinking campaigns. At one level, it is a marker of peasant insurgency against the forces which oppress them, but at another level it is also a marker of *adivasi* acceptance and emulation of dominant higher caste values as well as a marker of *adivasi* aspiration to particular notions of modernity.

Such an analysis disrupts the binaries of 'sanskritisation' *versus* peasant assertion and thereby questions the importance of agency and consciousness that have marked the early subaltern studies scholarship. In this case, *adivasi* support of anti-drinking campaigns does not mark a situation in which they are 'Alcoholics Anonymous'. From this follows the tentative suggestion for further research on which I wish to conclude this paper—in contrast to the implication of the arguments of the early subaltern studies historians, revolution can not arise from autonomous, spontaneous peasant agency.