

Locating Adivasi Politics. Aspects of 'Indian' Anthropology After Birsa Munda

Abstract: The article assesses the ways in which a historic Adivasi figure, Birsa Munda, entered into the national imaginary in India before Independence. The pivotal role of early anthropologists, notably Sarat Chandra Roy, and the formation of 'Indian' anthropology (as a field of intellectual and cultural politics) are emphasised. The analysis focuses on the ways in which the posthumous presence of Birsa Munda becomes significant in two phases, following his untimely death in Ranchi prison in 1900. First, the period immediately after the suppression of the Birsaite *ulgulan* (insurgency) of 1898-1900 is addressed in terms of the convergence of administrative and anthropological priorities. The second phase (1912 to mid-1930s) raises the question of how the nationalisation of anthropology and culture in India was premised in part on the 'integration' of Munda pasts. I argue that in the wake of the Government of India Act (1935) and in advance of the annual assembly of the Indian National Congress (1940) opportunities arose for Birsa Munda to become a vehicle of what Radhakamal Mukerjee had earlier termed 'intermediation', i.e., the synthesis of national and sub-national, or tribal, entities. The visual aspects of integration and the cultural politics of intermediation are debated with specific reference to time and evolution, and in advance of conclusions concerning real and metaphorical archives.

Keywords: *historical framework, national heritage, temporal dynamics, indigenous pasts*

In the Hindu scriptures such great personages [i.e. those people who – following episodes of cultural integration – were celebrated for generating cultural 'progress' through their elevated dharma or 'right' living] are regarded as incarnations of the Deity. Such exceptional personages, though rare, are not quite unknown even in the lower cultures.... In primitive societies their activities generally take the form of religious reform or revival. Such was the Birsaite movement among the Mundas of Chotanagpur in 1898-1900.

Sarat Chandra Roy, "An Indian Outlook on Anthropology"

Relocating Birsa Munda

This article addresses the shifting presence of Birsa Munda, an Adivasi (indigenous/tribal) prophet and insurgent, in national imaginaries in the early-20th century. Although Birsa is now remembered singularly as a 'regional' freedom fighter within central India, during the pre-Independence phase his historic identity was more fluid. Activating a revolutionary political consciousness during the 1890s, a period before 'Indian' approaches to political and social science came into existence, Birsa and his movement have since been the focus of much anthropological and heritage work, as intimated in the above quotation from Sarat Chandra Roy. Nowadays, this work largely emphasises the historic contribution of

² Nandini Sundar, "Laws, Policies and Practices in Jharkhand", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40.41 (2005), 4459-4462; Marine Carrin, "Jharkhand: Alternative Citizenship in an 'Adivasi State'", in Peter Berger and Frank Heidemann, eds. *The Modern Anthropology of India: Ethnography, Themes and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2013), 106-120.

³ See Kumar Suresh Singh, *Dust-Storm and the Hanging Mist* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966).

⁴ Roy, "Indian Outlook", 148.

⁵ For an overview of this, see Daniel J. Rycroft, "Revisioning Birsa Munda", in Nava Kishor Das and V. B. Rao, eds., *Identity, Cultural Pluralism and State* (New Delhi: Macmillan Publishers, 2009), 261-280.

⁶ Daniel J. Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta, eds. *The Politics of Belonging in India* (London: Routledge, 2011), 59-63.

⁷ See for example Select Committee on the Amendment Bill, *Report: Chotanagpur Tenancy (Amendment) Bill 1903* (18 July, 1903), IOR/L/PJ/6/649.2245 (British Library), citing the committee members' reflection in April 1903 on histories of Munda 'agitation' in Ranchi district.

⁸ On the formation of 'Indian' anthropology, see Daniel J. Rycroft, "Indian Anthropology and the Construction of Tribal Ethnicity before Independence", in Swarupa Gupta, ed., *Nationhood and Identity Movements in Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 141-166, and Patricia Uberoi et al., "Introduction", in Patricia Uberoi et al., eds., *Anthropology in the East* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007), 1-63.

Birsa to the discourse of collective rights in Jharkhand (a region intimately associated with Adivasi protests and identity movements).² In the post-colonial decades it highlighted the significance of the *ulgulan* to histories of agrarian and anti-colonial unrest.³ In the pre-Independence era, Birsa's posthumous persona assumed other characteristics. These alluded to his embodiment of 'Munda' ancestry and tribal consciousness, and the relevance of his 'visionary' personality both to modern India and to Indian civilisation.⁴ The pivotal role of 'Indian' anthropology, in linking histories of Adivasi rebellion to national aspirations and to national time, is therefore addressed here. So, what is the preferred starting point for this enquiry: rebellion as a historical fact, or empowerment as a collective prospect?

Whilst much historical work has elucidated his subaltern and activist being,⁵ the period *following* Birsa's demise in 1900 as a captive at Ranchi jail has received relatively little historical attention. Even as this period (1900-1912) witnessed the birth of what one might call a pro-Munda sentiment amongst anthropologists and administrators, which called for a greater understanding of the socio-political and cultural dynamics of regions inhabited by Adivasis and prompted widespread engagements with the neglected issue of tenancy rights in Chotanagpur, the epistemological and representational complexities defining this moment *after* Birsa have yet to be addressed. In this article I contend that two periods following the capture and death of Birsa are significant, especially in terms of the interface of Indian anthropology and politics. These incorporate the periods of 1900 to 1912 and 1912 to the mid-1930s respectively. Besides their provision of worthwhile entry points into subaltern and Adivasi studies,⁶ these periods each raise important methodological and conceptual issues. The article continues with an exploration of these historical frameworks before broaching the temporal dynamics of Birsa's posthumous integration within the emergent nation. This discussion precedes an analysis of the ways in which Birsa's presence became identifiable as a site of national intermediation and traversed both post-*ulgulan* and pre-Independence phases.

The decade after Birsa gave the British administration an opportunity to question its own imperialistic approach to colonial governance, and to find ways to redress, albeit from above, the historical grievances of some subordinate groups. Of these, it was the Munda population and the Birsaites (the Munda followers of Birsa and Birsaism) who became subject to re-imagining. This happened in ways that transgressed the existing administrative memory of Mundas, for example by differentiating between political agitators and non-political Birsaites.⁷ These adjustments served as a prelude to subsequent representations of Adivasi society that were exemplified by the new 'Indian' anthropology and the colonial response to this.⁸

As an emergent field that incorporated political and epistemological concerns, 'Indian' anthropology grew during the 1920s-30s by building bridges and

generating intersections between colonial ethnology and an ethically-aware 'Hindu' or indigenous sociology.⁹ Roy was integral to the public understanding of this phase of anthropological thinking.¹⁰ By the mid- to late-1930s it had become a credible and engaging crucible of scholarly exposition, political solidarity, and cultural affirmation, with 'culture' then being thought of in accordance with evolutionary and modern/national perspectives.¹¹ In the first decade of the 20th century, its ideational aspects – which sought a productive relation of culture, presence and time – had yet to be articulated. It was during this post-*ulgulan* phase, however, that such seminal writers as Roy responded by producing a series of text-based and administrative tracts that gave epistemological and political currency to wide-ranging Munda, Indian and western/colonial ideas.¹² The performative role of these texts, in identifying, analysing and picturing the distinctiveness of 'the Mundas' and their experience of various political regimes is noteworthy. The period from 1900-1912 captured these transformations, and culminated in the publication of a series of anthropological vignettes by Roy on pre-colonial and contemporary Munda history, with this latter concept being defined in lieu of an active Birsait movement or presence.¹³

A subsequent phase, starting *after* these publications, i.e. from 1912 to the mid-1930s, can thereby also be conceptualised. Like the period that preceded it, this phase occurred *after* Birsa (and in accordance with linear time). Unlike the period that started with Birsa's capture and death in captivity, the phase after 1912 was inaugurated by Roy's public dissemination of Birsa's portrait. The duration of this phase broadly correlates with Sangeeta Dasgupta's exploration of the mid-1910s to mid-1930s, in respect of Roy's Oraon-facing anthropological work.¹⁴ Heralded by the re-publication of these vignettes and some additional material in 1912 as *The Mundas and Their Country*, this period of India's intellectual, political and cultural activity culminated in the highly contentious Government of India Act (1935), Roy's articulation of "An Indian Outlook on Anthropology" (1938) and the congregation of the Indian National Congress (INC) in Jharkhand (1940). Unlike Dasgupta's historical framework, my analysis of this period focuses on Roy's Munda-oriented anthropology. At one level, this period can be considered in linear or sequential terms. I posit that it can also be apprehended through non-linear or deep time, given the political and intangible forces that made the representation of Birsa meaningful in the lead up to national independence.

As will be highlighted, the Government of India Act rendered conspicuous, via the use of 'anthropological' idioms, histories and materials, the supposed social and spatial distinctiveness of Adivasi *vis-à-vis* non-Adivasi populations.¹⁵ Some 'tribal' areas were thereby excluded from those zones deemed (by colonials) to be governable by the INC.¹⁶ The phase from 1912-1930s witnessed the birth of pro-tribal protectionism, an attitude that traversed both colonial and national anthropological discourses. In the terms of the present article, it is important to note that the nationalisation of anthropology also assumed visual form. By the

⁹ Uberoi et al., *Anthropology in the East*, 22. On the relation of 'Hindu' ethics to modern India, see S. Radhakrishnan, "The Ethics of Vedanta", *International Journal of Ethics*, 24.2 (1914), 168-183; S. Radhakrishnan, "The Hindu Dharma", *International Journal of Ethics*, 33.1 (1922), 1-22; R. Mukerjee, "Conscience and Culture: A Biosocial Approach to Morals", *Ethics*, 60.3 (1950), 178-183.

¹⁰ See Sangeeta Dasgupta, "Recasting the Oraons and the 'Tribe': Sarat Chandra Roy's Anthropology", in Uberoi et al., eds. *Anthropology in the East*, 132-171.

¹¹ D. Raina and S. I. Habib, "The Moral Legitimation of Modern Science: Bhadraklok Reflections on Theories of Evolution", *Social Studies of Science*, 26.1 (1996), 9-42.

¹² See, for example, Sarat Chandra Roy, "Origin of the Kol Tribes", *The Modern Review*, 6.4 (1909), 320-7; "The Early History of the Mundas", *The Modern Review*, 8.1 (1910), 15-26; "The Curious History of a Munda Fanatic", *The Modern Review*, 9.6 (1911), 545-554. Also see N. K. Bose, "Foreword", in S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1970).

¹³ See previous references, plus Sarat Chandra Roy, "The Medieval Period of Mundari History", *The Modern Review*, 8.3 (1910), 233-242; "The Modern Period of Mundari History", *The Modern Review*, 8.5 (1910), 391-395; "Agrarian Discontent and the Protestant Missions in Chotanagpur", *The Modern Review*, 8.6 (1910), 615-628; "The Catholic Mission", *The Modern Review*, 9.5 (1911), 454-459.

¹⁴ Dasgupta, "Recasting the Oraons", 132.

¹⁵ Also see Daniel J. Rycroft, "India's Adivasis (Indigenous/Tribal Peoples) and Anthropological Heritage", in J. Hendry and L. Fitznoor, eds., *Anthropologists, Indigenous Scholars and the Research Endeavour* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 80-93.

¹⁶ On related concerns, see Crispin Bates, "Congress and the Tribals", in M. Shepperdson and C. Simmons, eds., *The Indian National Congress and the Political Economy of India 1885-1985* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988), 231-252.

¹⁷ See, for example, the emphasis on ‘primitivism’ as a modern art discourse re-tuned according to East-West relations, Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India’s Artists and the Avant-garde, 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 12, 33-36, 78-83, 90-98; also see Daniel J. Rycroft, “Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Art and Swadeshi (1909-1911)*”, in D. Newall and G. Pooke, eds., *Fifty Key Texts in Art History* (London: Routledge, 2012), 63-68.

¹⁸ See N. Datta-Majumder, “The Tribal Problem”, in Government of India, ed., *The Adivasis* (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1955), 21-27.

¹⁹ For example, see the copy-print of ‘Birsa Munda’ displayed in C. A. Bayley, ed., *The Raj: India and the British, 1600-1947* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1991), 347. Interestingly, this copy-print is described as being derivative of the initial photograph rather than of the drawing, thereby overlooking Maharathi’s artistic intervention.

1930s, modern Indian artists had begun to develop new *post*-primitivist attitudes, referring at once to colonialist tropes whilst validating alternative ways of perceiving social and ethnic difference.¹⁷ These generally corresponded with the national idea/aesthetic of social integration.¹⁸ Interestingly, the 1912-1930s phase is also characterised by the production and dissemination of overtly national or ‘integrative’ representations of Munda history, as elaborated by Roy and as expressed visually in Upendra Maharathi’s portrait of Birsa: see Figure 1. It was through such representations that Birsa’s intangible presence accrued legibility, in terms of an elevated dharma, which could be taken up both in objective and subjective domains, such as ‘history’ and ‘the present’ respectively.

Depicted as ‘Lord Birsa’ (Birsa Bhagwan), this almost devotional portrait as well as the photograph that informed it have since been subject to many revisions.¹⁹ Like other textual, oral, and politico-cultural legacies associated with Birsaism, the visual afterlives of Birsa engaged various temporal trajectories. The complex temporal dynamics of anthropological and visual representations are key to my analysis. I will use Maharathi’s drawing to explore how the posthumous Birsa and, by implication, the various periods *after* Birsa contributed to an engaging ‘national’ and anthropological dialogue. How did this dialogue engage the political and cultural aspects of national and tribal pasts? Were the *inter*-cultural complexities of bringing different pasts together – for example via new visual and mnemonic practices – resolved? In more particular terms, how could civilisational or evolutionary time coexist – via processes and articulations of ‘intermediation’ – with tribal or insurgent time?

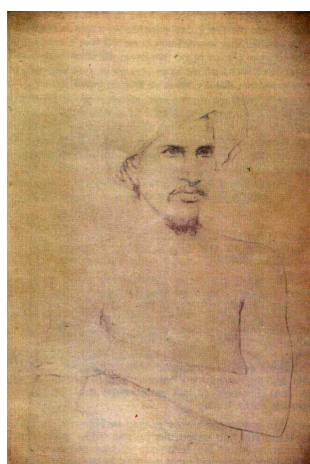


Fig. 1: Upendra Maharathi, *Birsa Bhagwan* (Lord Birsa), 1938, pencil drawing, Patna Museum; photograph courtesy of the author.

Images like Maharathi’s point to the historical reality that such issues were broached productively in the mid- to late-1930s, thereby suggesting that further attention can be directed to the relation of anthropology and art in modern India. Maharathi’s drawing introduced (a) a time of retrospection, by referring to Birsa’s eventful and elevated life, (b) a time of prospection, by heralding Birsa’s renewal in the present, and (c) a time of introspection, by offering the image as an opportunity for the cultivation of personal and/or collective *swaraj* or freedom. Remembering that devotional attitudes often came to the surface in nationalist Bengal,²⁰ the posthumous relationship between Birsa and his interlocutors can be underscored. The article will broach this relationship and assess its intercultural dynamics, but what of anthropology *per se*?

²⁰ Andrew Sartori, “The Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi Bengal, 1904-1908”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23.1 (2003), 271-85.

Mediating 'Birsa'

Roy's monograph (1912) was the first site at which Birsaite pasts and national futures came to exist publicly and, in turn, coexist as they were embraced by other 'civilisational' idioms, such as Indian art.²¹ The publication emerged from a political milieu that was conspicuously *post*-Birsa. Based in the Ranchi area of Jharkhand, which was adjacent to the initial locus of the Birsaite rebellion, the colonial administration of Chotanagpur endeavoured to work with Roy and diverse 'experts', such as European missionaries, regional land-owners and Bengali administrators, to create some semblance of justice for dispossessed Munda Adivasis.²² This administrative community came up with the idea to re-visit the controversial issues of ancestral land holdings and associated tenures, to the extent that Ranchi was re-formed as a district to reflect the patterns of these *khunt-kattidar* (original clearer of villages) practices.²³ Three decades later, this district became embroiled in the Reforms Office debates on the political status of Partially Excluded Areas (PEAs) within the Government of India Act. It was considered a PEA given the relative predominance of its Munda inhabitants, its history of conflict, and the perceived necessity of implementing policies of 'minority' representation.²⁴ In other words, the Birsaite (insurgent) and post-Birsaite (post-insurgent) dynamics came to coalesce, meaning that opportunities arose for Birsa to be remembered in accordance with both Munda and non-Munda, or non-Adivasi, value systems.

Here, I identify 1912, replete with metaphorical 'release' via Roy's monograph of Birsa from the administrative archive to the public domain, as a pivotal moment in the representational and political histories under consideration. It marked the culmination of Roy's historical and anthropological work on 'the Mundas' and the origin of Birsa's iconic presence in the public sphere. As such, a phase post-1912 becomes traceable. I would argue that this latter period culminated in the mid-1930s, as the contests over the definition and administration of PEAs came to the foreground of nationalist politics. The production and use of Maharathi's portrait of Birsa by the INC in Jharkhand was an expression of this. It activated synergetic ideas of national/tribal political consciousness, and thereby came to contest the colonial assertion that Ranchi and the 'Munda country' was unfit for governance by Indian nationals.

Given the political transformations embodied by Birsa during his life, from being a healer and a (jailed) prophet to becoming the leader of one of India's infamous 'subaltern' rebellions – and then dying as a second-time prisoner – it is no easy task to trace the ways in which he acquired a broader cultural presence and historical legibility, first after 1900 and then after 1912. As suggested, influential members of the Congress movement engaged new temporal notions, pertaining to both Jharkhand-after-Birsa and India-before-Independence, through Birsa's memory. As such, the emergent political reality of Congress-oriented tribal

²¹ Daniel Rycroft, "Capturing Birsa Munda: The Virtuality of a Colonial-era Photograph", *Indian Folklore Research Journal*, 1.4 (2004), 53-68.

²² See Select Committee Papers, IOR/L/PJ/6/1654 (British Library) and later tracts, such as Sarat Chandra Roy, "The Aborigines of Chotanagpur: Their Proper Status in the Reformed Constitution", *Man in India*, 26.2 (1946), 120-136.

²³ H. H. Risley, "Formation of the new Khunti sub-division and certain changes to the district of Ranchi" (26 September, 1906), IOR/L/PJ/6/778.3165 (British Library).

²⁴ Reforms Office, "Report", Government of India to Secretary of State (24 December, 1935), IOR/L/PJ/9/240 (British Library).

²⁵ P. K. Shukla, “The Adivasi Peasantry of Chotanagpur and the Nationalist Response (1920-1940s)”, *Social Scientist*, 39.7 (2011), 55-64.

²⁶ Bhangya Bhukya, “Unmasking Nationalist and Marxist Constructions of Adivasi Uprising: An Exercise in Historical Reassembling”, *Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India*, 2.3 (2015), 61-73.

²⁷ Sarat Chandra Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* (Calcutta: The Kuntaline Press, 1912), 72.

²⁸ Singh, *Dust-Storm*, 130.

²⁹ Ibid, 66-68.

³⁰ Ibid, 63.

³¹ Roy, *The Mundas*, vii.

organisation in the region was imbued with historical depth.²⁵ It is the pictorial image, therefore, that needs to be situated within the historical matrix under consideration, as a means to understand Birsa's posthumous presence. Interestingly, this opens up the need to consider the visual and cultural effects of the portrait, in particular its devotional temper and its operation of intangible factors in respect of other Birsa-oriented activities, such as story-telling and the symbolic naming of sites, at the INC's session at Ramgarh (just north of Ranchi) in March 1940.²⁶

Any re-drawing of Birsa's portrait to establish a national (rather than strictly 'tribal') devotee-divine relation could not have happened during the first phase *after* Birsa (1900-1912) as the image itself was then bound up, literally, in the colonial archive and therefore largely invisible. Rather, this relation came about as the INC sought to affirm its presence in and relevance to Jharkhand (then southern Bihar). After Birsa's photographic portrait was first published in 1912, see Figure 2,²⁷ opportunities arose for Birsa to acquire a new posthumous visibility raising important issues of cultural and historic interpretation. The photograph depicts Birsa as a captive. Even though some commentators have assumed that this image portrays a 'Sick Birsa', photographed at the time of the suppression of the *ulgulan*, i.e. after his capture and imprisonment in March 1900,²⁸ I speculate that it may pertain to a much earlier phase.

In September 1895, Birsa was held captive as a political visionary, rather than as a committed insurgent, and was very visibly put on trial at Khunti, near his Chalkad residence, having been charged with incitement. At this moment, Birsa assumed an efficacious visual form, becoming the focus of a highly politicised devotional interaction with his followers who wanted to join him as prisoners in Ranchi jail.²⁹ If the photograph dates from 1895, rather than 1900, one is able to see the captive figure afresh: (a) as an object of a devotional or Birsaité gaze, rather than solely as the trophy of an oppressive regime, and (b) as an embodiment of the subaltern worlds, through which the colonial penal technologies could be contested, for it was the Birsaité belief that the prisoner could and would transgress his containment.³⁰ Unlike the other photographs that Roy used to illustrate his historical ethnography, which were produced, patronised and/or preserved by various European missionaries in the region,³¹ no provenance was provided either for this photographic portrait of Birsa or of a



Fig. 2: Anonymous, *Birsa Munda*, c. 1900, photograph, as republished in Roy (1912: 72); photograph courtesy of the author.

related full-length image depicting 'Birsa Munda Captured and Conducted to Ranchi' (alongside three armed sepoy).³²

Despite the uncertainties, concerning the timing of the photographic portrait, there is much visual evidence to support the contention that it became the source image for many later reproductions or 'liberations', including Maharathi's portrait.³³ As noted, this portrait was produced to coincide with the assembly of the INC in 1940. Redrawn as a figure of remembrance, this portrait located Birsa's legacy at the interface of (a) the future or young nation, i.e. India, as inhabited by prospective citizens or citizen-subjects (embodied by INC leaders, such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi), (b) customary and tribal traditions, i.e. 'Munda country' or Chotanagpur, as inhabited by anthropological and minority subjects (embodied by Birsa), and (c) the evolution of ideational, philosophical and political currents in modern India, involving Mundas and non-Mundas and related sites of resistance, rupture and 'truth' (embodied by Maharathi *et al*, through the interplay of (a), (b) and (c)). It thereby prompted the question of how the bridging of the old and the new, or of the particular, i.e. the 'tribal' heritage, and the general, i.e. the 'national' future, could be taken up by scholars and activists to become a societal as well as an anthropological issue. Just as Maharathi's portrait brought Birsa visually into the folds of national devotion and national evolution, so Roy had anticipated such inter-cultural dynamics by highlighting as early as 1912 how the topic of human evolution was of shared interest to Munda, Hindu and anthropological communities.³⁴ As will be discussed, it is quite significant that Roy used the photograph of Birsa to illustrate 'ancient' rather than 'modern' Munda history.

The national ideal of integration, expressed in Indian anthropology via histories of inter-cultural exchange and in Indian society via human and social/cultural evolution, was advocated by some of Roy's and Maharathi's contemporaries, notably Brajendranath Seal and Radhakamal Mukerjee.³⁵ That the contemporary histories of India and Jharkhand could merge, and become simultaneously observable through the iconic figure of Birsa, suggests historical attention can also be brought to what Mukerjee termed 'intermediation': or the specifically Indian socio-political process of decentralised and morally-charged collectivisation, involving the integration of 'diverse social groups [such as tribal and village communities] and intermediate bodies'.³⁶ Whilst Mukerjee was primarily interested in documenting historic processes, he was also speaking to a community of social actors aware of the need to find, and then to demonstrate through their actions high levels of synergy between self and other, culture and politics, etc. Interestingly, the visual and conceptual transformations under consideration in this article are all expressions of the processes and patterns of intermediation that Mukerjee envisaged.

I contend that as intermediaries Roy and Maharathi brought about, at different times and in different ways, notable cultural transformations, for example:

1. of anthropology-into-politics (Roy), or culture-into-history;

³² Roy, *The Mundas*, 342. This image accompanied Roy's retelling of the suppression of the *Ulgulan*. Like the portrait of 'Birsa Munda' (Roy, *The Mundas*, 72) that has been republished as 'Sick Birsa' (Singh, *Dust-Storm*, 130) this image was reworked and retitled as 'Captive Birsa' (Singh, *Dust-Storm*, 129).

³³ Rycroft, "Capturing". Also note the earlier point, concerning the ability of Maharathi's work to generate its own visual legacy.

³⁴ Roy, *The Mundas*, pp. 325-6.

³⁵ See Brajendranath Seal, "The Meaning of Race, Tribe and Nation", in G. Spiller, ed., *Papers on Inter-racial Problems* (London: P. S. King, 1911), 1-13; Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East: A Study in Comparative Politics* (London: P. S. King, 1923).

³⁶ Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 77.

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2. of observation-into-devotion (Maharathi), or photography-into-culture;
 3. of past-into-present (Roy and Maharathi), or culture-into-heritage;
 4. of humanity-into-divinity (Roy and Maharathi), or time-into-transcendence.

That these transformations were also reflected in the shifting parameters of Roy's own anthropological attitude and methodology suggests that his own oeuvre can be addressed in terms of intermediation. By the 1930s, Roy (1938) sought to revalidate India's own pre-modern anthropological knowledge, and to re-integrate 'the human' as a synthetic philosophical notion within anthropology. Initially subsuming these concerns within his ethnographic tracts, his 'Indian outlook' re-affirmed the potential of a holistic anthropological world-view to work as a political intervention. Here Roy aimed to highlight the equality of different cultures, and the cosmic 'soul' linking Indian anthropology, Adivasi peoples, and human civilisation together.³⁷ As noted by Dasgupta, by the 1930s Roy's production of an Indianised anthropology meant that his work broached 'the interstices of several cultures. His voice changed over time as he sought to capture [sic] the cultural heritage of the marginal societies'.³⁸ Roy's willingness to speak for Indian anthropology, which enabled him to locate Birsa and Birsaism afresh within an overtly 'national' or civilisational framework, as conjured by Mukerjee in terms of comparative politics and philosophical synthesis,³⁹ is therefore of immense interest. Not only did this shift parallel (and perhaps even prompt) the visual transformation of the Birsait legacy, which involved Maharathi and the INC. It also enabled the anthropologist to return to the constructed relation of 'the Mundas' and dominant ideas concerning time, such as cultural and human evolution.

These issues have not hitherto featured in studies either of national visual culture or of the *ulgulan* of 1898-1900. Even as the initial photographic portrait apprehended Birsa as a visible entity, the visual reproductions of the portrait after his imprisonment and after his death point to the fact that they too could become re-used in broader struggles over power, knowledge and representation. As such, there are some interesting historical parallels and intersections between the cultural politics of the Birsa portrait, the anthropological history of 'the Mundas', and the administrative politics of Ranchi. Whilst these parallels and intersections could be emphasised, and indeed assessed in terms of the nationalisation of Birsa's political heritage, I aim now to locate the temporal dynamics that facilitated the transmission of such historical power. This is because these dynamics reveal how the colonial 'archive' became a national resource that, in its facilitation of spiritual and intellectual prospects, made Jharkhand's heritage-scape accessible and transmittable.

Insurgency and Integration

Following the release in 1912 of the first major ethno-history written by an Indian anthropologist of an Adivasi society, opportunities arose for the pro-Adivasi anthropological agenda to gain ground. Although only a few years had passed since the death of Birsa in Ranchi jail in June 1900 – following attacks on non-Birsaites institutions, people, and properties in and around Ranchi district in 1898-1900 – the administrative tide had turned in respect of the previous generation's neglect of Munda land rights.⁴⁰ The social critique that became prominent in this post-insurgency milieu directly informed the constitution of anthropological knowledge in the period under consideration.⁴¹ Although such ideas would later be characterised in terms of a dichotomous discourse, of pro-Adivasi protectionism versus national assimilation, Maharathi's portrayal of the Bhagwan suggests that intangible features also came to prominence. These may be assessed in the light of what one might call Roy's anthropological spectrum, which ranged from the historical, the legal and the anthropological (1900-1912) to incorporate the transcendental, the cultural and the national (by the 1930s). If one considers the compelling shifts in Birsa-oriented historical interpretation, understanding, and consciousness that propelled certain forms of anti-colonial cultural nationalism amongst political elites in India, it becomes possible to think radically beyond the terms of the aforementioned dichotomy. This is because the nationalist discourse was not solely concerned with political assimilation, and the colonialist discourse included but was not defined by protectionist attitudes. Rather, it may be understood that both nationalists and colonialists contributed however unevenly to the 'integration' of Birsaitism.

Given their collective search for a national approach to 'tribal' heritage, the efforts of Roy, Mukerjee, *et al* prompted a prolonged and in many cases unresolved re-interpretation of 'the Mundas' and 'their country'.⁴² Unlike colonial efforts that addressed Birsa as a dangerous leader, traced his involvement in the insurgency, and evaluated the divergences between pacifist and militant Birsaites, the new anthropology, as initially written by Roy (1912), broached the more widespread tenets of Munda ancestral heritage, territoriality, dispossession and political mobilisation. These different facets of Munda/Adivasi and subaltern history and culture engaged both distinct and overlapping temporal frameworks. It is important, therefore, to dwell on these for they point to how, for non-Adivasi intellectuals and activists, Birsa and the *ulgulan* became portals through which another past and another future could be absorbed within the national (as distinct from colonial) present.

As noted, in 1912 Roy published the photographic portrait (Fig. 2) of the captive Birsa that was, in all likelihood, taken from a European missionary archive. Roy, however, used it to elaborate an early chapter on the 'traditional history' of the Mundas, i.e. the mass migrations towards the Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand in

⁴⁰ Select Committee on the Amendment Bill, *Report*, 1903.

⁴¹ See also Rabindranath Tagore, "The Problem of India", *The Modern Review*, 8.1 (1910), n. p.; Bipin Chandra Pal, "Race-Equality", *The Modern Review*, 9.4 (1911), 319-324.

⁴² Also see Bijoy Chandra Mazumdar, *The Aborigines of the Highlands of Central India* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1927), 19-20, 49.

⁴³ Roy, *The Mundas*, 27-60.

⁴⁴ Roy, *The Mundas*, 102-3.

the pre-colonial era, rather than the chapter on Birsa's contribution to the religious, social and political history of Jharkhand.⁴³ This more recent period was marked by dynamics of Hinduisation, Christianisation, inter-local landlordism, class-based tenancy struggles, and colonial governmentality.⁴⁴ In using the image to invoke early histories of Munda migration and notions of Munda heritage, Roy opened up other temporal horizons that could be suggested by Birsa, beyond those of the *ulgulan* and beyond that of the recent past.

In some ways, this slippage, or the shift in emphasis towards the pre-*ulgulan* past, could be seen to parallel the colonialists' attempts to justify their new approach to the administration of 'Munda country', via their belated attention to ancestral land holdings and related patterns of tenure. Yet I would contend that it also became possible, through Roy's conspicuously 'historical' and visual methodology, to read the figure in accordance with multiple and 'national', rather than distinctly colonial, registers of time. Of course, Birsa would then have been known primarily as the Munda rebel. Yet in administrative, legal and anthropological discourses, the temporal horizons embodied by 'the Mundas' were expressed both in relation to and beyond the contemporary. Included in Roy's section on early Munda history, Birsa became emblematic of the 'racial' facets of the so-called Kol (dark) civilisation that were harnessed in the ethno-history as a means of validating the idea of an indigenous, or what was then considered as a pre-Aryan, Munda society characterised by customary institutions, such as the Munda-Manki political system, and exemplified by present-day 'tribal' Mundas and their collective experience of dispossession.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Also see Roy, "Origin of the Kol Tribes".

This approach to racial or inter-racial representation can be contextualised. In respect of the critiques made by the likes of Bipin Chandra Pal at the time of the Universal Races Congress in 1911,⁴⁶ Brajendranath Seal also emerged as an important thinker. Seal and Pal rejected Eurocentric versions of what anti-racism should be, that is to say a 'universal' civilisation that would herald a new phase of western cultural hegemony. Rather they favoured ideas of inter-cultural and 'national' integration and inter-racial unification, which were seen as civilisational processes that belonged to or grew from India's collective human experience. I have addressed Maharathi's portrait and, more broadly, the periods *after* Birsa in line with these ideas. As a contemporary of Roy, Seal's philosophies of 'race' and human evolution filtered into debates on inter-racial understanding, 'Indian' anthropology, and anti-racism. *The Modern Review*, for example, at times encouraged contributors to stand apart from the 'dangerous experiment', or the new 'universalism', of (anti-)racist western anthropologists.⁴⁷ Interestingly, it was in these pages that Roy first articulated his initial views on Munda history and collectivism. His later, and self-consciously nationalist/humanist alignment of Birsa to the 'racial', inter-racial and inter-cultural heritages of India therefore becomes intriguing.

Although 'racial' thinking very much was in force, especially within the

⁴⁶ Bipin Chandra Pal, "The Problem of Race-Sympathy: The Universal Races Congress", *The Modern Review*, 10.2 (1911), 60-64.

⁴⁷ Pal, "The Problem", 62; "Contemporary Thought and Life", *The Modern Review*, 10.3 (1911), 275-281.

colonialist and missionary imagination, its relevance to leading exponents of 'Indian' anthropology or 'Hindu' sociology, such as Roy, Mukerjee, or Seal, was more nuanced. In these emergent epistemologies, racial difference and the prospects for inter-racial justice and coexistence were key ideas that would, in part, define the moral positioning and social efficacy of 'Indian' knowledge, then defined as something that could elevate one's political and ethical being *vis-à-vis* European, western and/or colonial epistemology.⁴⁸ Even though he was conspicuously 'universal' in his approach, Seal conceptualised the future of India's human heritage in terms that brought a Vedanta-inspired humanism into a direct relationship with the 'national race', described as the relation of the present to the future, and the 'cultural race', envisaged as the relation of the present to the past.⁴⁹ Mukerjee, a committed follower of Seal and, like Roy, an exponent of neo-Vedanta, applied this thinking to the reconstruction of the new 'social body', deemed to be evolving in India via intermediation. He advocated 'politico-genesis' at local, regional, national and international levels as a means to extend and surpass debates on ethno-genesis.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See Dasgupta, "Recasting the Oraons", 158-9, on Roy's social evolutionist representations of 'the Oraons', whose village-level democracy confirmed India's own progressive civilisation.

⁴⁹ Seal, "The Meaning", 9-11; Pal, "Contemporary Thought", 277.

⁵⁰ Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 22-3.

It may be noted that in the years immediately following Roy's wave of Munda-related publications, Mukerjee began to re-inscribe the idea of Munda self-rule and other aspects of Adivasi political heritage: 'The Manki [Munda headman] is an essential factor in the original political organisation of Munda races [that included 'the Mundas', as a tribal society] and as such has existed everywhere among them'.⁵¹ According to Mukerjee, the reconstitution of India's village-level polities pertained to Adivasis in terms of their 'systems of agrarian distribution and settlement, and tribal government'.⁵² Even though these systems focused on the lived experiences of Bhil, Santal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Maria and other Adivasis, the inclusive/integrative agenda of the national episteme meant that these decentralised entities (and the pathways to autonomy that they seemingly signified) could be recast in terms of India's collective history, culture, civilisation, heritage, and modernity.

⁵¹ Radhakamal Mukerjee, "Race Elements in the Indian Village Constitution", *Man in India*, 3.1 (1923), 3.

⁵² Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 2.

So, rather than treating these post-*ulgulan* intellectual and social dynamics as evidence of cross-cultural appropriation, of national elitism or of 'Hindu' chauvinism, it is of analytical value to address the journeying of 'Birsas Munda' and, to a lesser extent, of the 'Birsaites' (as absent witnesses) into and out of new epistemological sites. For in the wake of the colonial suppression of the *ulgulan*, and in association with the anthropological fieldwork of Roy, new levels of administrative and scholarly attention were afforded to the ancestral heritage of some Munda groups. Interestingly, these new epistemological and utopian sites sometimes cross-referred to the colonial archive, either directly as per Roy (1912) or indirectly as per Maharathi.

In 1903, as it attempted to rediscover its moral and administrative purpose, the colonial administration reassessed the precise locations of 'Mundari Khunt-kattidar' holdings, as these were deemed to have pertained to the direct

⁵³ Select Committee on the Amendment Bill, *Report*, 1903. Also refer to the use Edward Cadogan's report on India's 'aboriginal' areas to inform the future status of EAs and PEAs: Reforms Office, *Report*, Government of India to Secretary of State, 24 December 1935, IOR/L/PJ/9/240 (British Library).

⁵⁴ Select Committee Papers, *Opinions on the Chotanagpur (Amendment) Bill* (n. d., c. 1905), IOR/L/PJ/6/1654.1237 (British Library).

⁵⁵ See, for example, C. W. Bolton, "Letter", to Secretary of the Government of India (10 January 1900); and A. Forbes, "Report II", Camp Khunti (12 January 1900), IOR/L/PJ/6/531 (British Library).

⁵⁶ S. Moore and S. Pell, "Autonomous Archives", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 16.4-5 (2010), 255-268; David Zeitlyn, "Anthropology in and of the Archives: Possible Futures and Contingent Pasts", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012), 461-80.

descendants of the original Adivasi cultivators in the Ranchi region.⁵³ The Munda concept of patrilineal descent was taken by colonialists as evidence of the region's 'aboriginal' identity, which itself was both lost and found at the time of the *ulgulan*. Importantly, Roy became one of the administration's legal advisors in this phase and, in this capacity, he generated a series of recommendations that were aligned to those of other consultants.⁵⁴ Relating closely to sites and experiences of insurgency and counter-insurgency, Roy's dual identity as legal representative and anthropological researcher connected with both the administrative archive and the national public sphere. The Munda-oriented archive, which was given form by colonialists in Ranchi and Calcutta and by nationalist writers and editors, may be considered in real and also in more metaphorical terms. For it was Roy who, in the post-insurgency phase, would act as the conduit between 'the Mundas', the real colonial archive, and Birsa's more immaterial afterlife.

In real terms, the colonial archive comprised documents that highlighted the various issues that administrators and their informants faced in locating and capturing Birsa, quelling other leaders and their followers, and legitimating various administrative, legal and military measures.⁵⁵ Given Roy's direct contribution to the post-*ulgulan* administrative effort, his anthropological knowledge might be seen to sit cosily within this colonialist matrix. Yet if one addresses the administrative archive with a more nuanced attitude, which couples the notion of administrative memory with the retrieval/contestation of archival entities in national arenas, it becomes impossible to think only in terms of real or material archives.

As a means of generating some conclusions and further research questions, the *metaphorical* archive is here defined in terms of the porous boundaries of the archive, that is to say the ongoing tension between the reality of the archive as a closed entity (that usually privileges its production and usage in the past) and the prospect of the archive as a site of release, liberation, or future empowerment. Similar notions have been addressed by other historians and anthropologists in terms of autonomous, radical and utopian archives.⁵⁶ Roy and his early work on 'the Mundas' fits uneasily between the real and utopian archives. His work, particularly his dissemination of the portrait of Birsa, reveals how the colonial archive can also be addressed via its transformation and the resultant hold, on some facets of the national imagination, of archival time. For in this more intangible arena, the liberated archive engendered new intersections between Munda (tribal), national (anthropological) and humanist (as well as transcendental) ideas of power and truth. These post-archival relations, characteristic of 'Indian' anthropology in this pre-Independence phase, were less about specific bodies of materials, images or information, or even attitudes of preservation and control. Rather they propelled new temporal dynamics, which acquired intercultural significance through their ability to translate or indeed recreate the archive-as-social.

Conclusions: Archives in Transition

In anthropological and archival terms, the politics-of-time in the phases after the *ulgulan* encompassed (a) the belated colonial recognition of ancestral Munda settlements, (b) the first anthropological attempts to knit Adivasi resistance into the fabric of both tribal (particular) and national (inter-ethnic) heritages, and (c) subsequent practices of visual remembrance and social reconstruction. The concept of archival time can here be engaged primarily via ‘heritage politics’ and their national value:⁵⁷ the opportunity established through ‘Hindu’ sociology or ‘Indian’ anthropology for non-Adivasis to inhabit a timeframe or temporally-defined dynamic that could be shared with Adivasis, real or imagined, insurgent or otherwise. As Birsa’s legacy became mobile, and reproducible across differing social and conceptual terrains, the national efficacy of the *ulgulan* was established and, indeed, could potentially be re-embodied.

This concept of coexistence pertained to the re-charting or the re-imagining of the national future in ways that provided a heightened visibility for the convergence of quite distinct subaltern and civilisational idioms: notably ‘insurgent’ (historic/political) and ‘dharmic’ (transcendental/cultural) time. Through this convergence, other boundaries became collapsible between, for example, the ‘tribal’/the Hindu, rebellion/social order, the visual/the historical, the future/the past, and so on to the extent that the convergences acquired their own cultural value. Maharathi’s portrait and Roy’s ‘Indian Outlook’ (1938) demonstrated a broader national revitalisation of the cultural heritage of southern Bihar, in terms of ‘great’ personages, such as Birsa. Via Maharathi’s sensitive artwork, Birsa became visible in ways that made him comparable, for example, to the Buddha who was another of Maharathi’s Bihar-based muses. Informed by broader political philosophies of economic, artistic, intellectual and cultural self-reliance, Maharathi’s invocation of the region’s spiritual leaders sustained a pluralistic heritage, of unity-in-diversity. This heritage focused on spiritual cultures of devotion, and was updated by the likes of Maharathi. His portrait, one part of the Jharkhandi *pandal* (temporary pavilion), redrew the temporal coordinates of this heritage by enabling its users to switch seamlessly between Adivasi pasts and national futures, as if finding their own terms of intermediation and thereby generating their own ‘presence’.

In their invocation of this elevated and moralised cultural plane that heralded a ‘comprehensive consciousness’,⁵⁸ Maharathi as well as Roy defined a new kind of anthropological aesthetic for young India. This was premised on the joint apprehension of (a) insurgent/post-insurgent time and (b) historical/utopian horizons of national freedom. Within this dialogic experience, (a) ‘rebel time’, or the radicalisation of ancestral pasts and autonomous futures by insurgents in the present, and (b) ‘heritage time’, or the invocation of civilisational identities and values, came to coalesce in such a way that their mutuality confirmed the modern

⁵⁷ Michael Rowlands and Ferdinand de Jong, “Reconsidering Heritage and Memory”, in F. de Jong and M. Rowlands, eds., *Reclaiming Heritage: Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), 13-29.

⁵⁸ Citing Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 157; see also R. Prasad, “General Introduction”, in R. Prasad, ed., *A Historical-Developmental Study of Classical Indian Philosophy of Morals* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2009), 1-12, citing 6.

⁵⁹ On the ethical aspects of *dharma* in sociology and in society, see Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 157.

(temporal) and regional (locational) dynamics of Munda/Adivasi heritage. Whereas Roy de-archived Birsa according to a conspicuously anthropological agenda, Maharathi's addition of a more transcendental layer fostered a new kind of anthropological 'dharma'. It created opportunities for viewers to engage a visual experience that functioned both as a historical memory and as a social/ethical commitment.⁵⁹ This new way of seeing Birsa harmonised the past with the present (and future) to contradict the linearity and epistemic violence of colonial time, which rendered Birsa criminal and Munda pasts archival. Maharathi's de-archiving attitude also served the purpose of de-criminalising the prophet and nationalising Birsa's posthumous role as a guide pointing metaphorically towards what Mukerjee claimed was 'democracy in the East'. Maharathi's artistic creativity thus engendered a complex representational history, through which the entanglement of mainstream (and anthropological) and subaltern (and 'tribal') experiences of time would create new possibilities for inter-cultural recognition and socio-political reconstruction.

I have shown how Roy anticipated such notions in his early work. In 1912, for example, he had complicated the notion of a pre-*ulgulan* Munda heritage, by locating Mundas, and Birsa in particular, within overtly 'tribal' and what were then considered as conspicuously universal, human, or 'national' evolutionary flows. Even if a full appreciation of Birsa's cultural resonance had yet to be established, by 1912 the so-called Munda 'fanatic' had become writable and visible across and between administrative and anthropological cultures, and within both contemporary (linear) and deep (non-linear) time. His 'historic' persona thereby presented subsequent users and interpreters of his image, notably Maharathi, with a plethora of political, temporal and aesthetic possibilities. I have elaborated many of these above, largely in historical and conceptual terms, with a view to rethinking the era *after* Birsa.