Chapter — 6
Conclusion

The dissertation examined the construction of tribal identity by the dominant culture. The examination of the dominant culture made one aware of the predominant stereotyping of the tribe as primitive. This made me examine the literature available on the subject and led to a reading of the Western debates on the construction of the primitive—especially the academic construction of this concept. Chapter 1 of the dissertation set the context of doing research on Adivasis. This chapter defined the terms and concepts used in the work and also drew attention to the limitations of this study.

Seeing the concept "tribe" as a post-colonial construct also made one look to the West to see what their dominant stereotype about the primitive was. The second chapter, which examined this concept did it through two major sections—the examination of the barbaric primitive and the concept of noble savage. It was found that the notions that gave rise to these stereotypes were racist in nature. The chapter concluded that the fear of the "other" and the trials at appropriation that simultaneously happen, are both connected to the fear of oneself. The primitive was a site for the White culture to examine itself.

It was these notions that would have interacted with the dominant indigenous notions of the tribe and helped construct the Indian Adivasi, and its administrative form, the Scheduled Tribe. Drawing its difference with the American Indian and Australian aboriginal identity, the Indian tribal identity was seen to have constructed itself as distinct from an indigenous category—caste. The method of examination was the early colonial reports. The construction of India as essentially Hindu, the Hindu as caste based and tribe as distinct from caste were examined in this chapter. This chapter revealed the orientalist constructions behind the dominant construction of the Adivasi identity.

The next chapter examined a manifestation of these ideas in contemporary Kerala. Taking an important spokesperson for Wayanad Adivasis K.J. Baby and comparing him with Ramachandra Guha, an environmental historian and theorist on Adivasi identity, the thesis had reexamined the noble savage myth in its contemporary expression. The effect of using Adivasis as a site was examined through this. It was
concluded that the use of Adivasis as a site by the new social movements might be to \textbf{refuse} to see the Adivasi as agential and as the maker of history.

The last chapter primarily based on fieldwork experiences tries to imagine the \textbf{self-construction} of the Wayanad Adivasi. Running throughout is the common theme of modernity and the varied negotiations of the Adivasis with it. By examining religion, especially conversions or change of belief systems the thesis was attempting to read how the modern Adivasi negotiates with the changing circumstances around her/him. The perception of the Adivasis that they have been wronged in history had also been examined in this chapter. This perception, which was all-pervasive in Wayanad, I conclude was happening in the context of the land struggle. This had to battle with the existing stereotypes of the Adivasis as betrayers and thieves to create a counter myth. The political movements showed the history of today's land struggle and the easy way in which subaltern political movements are forgotten. It also pointed to the gendered way in which each person in the same movement reacts to situations.

1. Though one cannot presume to draw clear conclusions from a study of this nature, I feel I can venture to state some of the tentative ones. They are:

2. There is no single dominant construction of Adivasi identity.

3. They are varied and span different times. The dominant western notions of the construction of the primitive is crucial in understanding any post-colonial tribal identity. So too the construction of the national identities and the place of the tribe in these identities. This means a variety of dominant constructions are constantly interacting with contemporary tribal identities and very often, we have to examine the past for an understanding of contemporary identities.

4. Contemporary dominant constructions of Adivasi identity, especially the apparently positive ones, need close re-examination. When closely examined they often reveal racist western roots. The reinvention of the noble savage by ecology movements is a case in point.

5. Self-construction of the Adivasis is affected by the dominant constructions. They often talk back to one or the other dominant construction of themselves. Quite often there are attempts at subversion embedded in these talking back also. In many way, one can safely say the \textbf{primitivity} is a constant negotiation with modernity.
Future of Adivasi Studies

No thesis comes to a full stop in asking questions or has the complete and final answers. While writing these chapters I kept asking myself what if I had gone another way and not this? So, a short note on what could be the ways that an examination in the similar area might yield in future.

One of the major flaws of the thesis, which I have also indicated in chapter 1, is the neglect of the post-colonial national scene. I did not follow the trajectory of the administrative category called "tribe" to its present status. The story of the tribe in India ends in this study with its birth. It could have been interesting to take it forward.

The criticism that I raised against Ramachandra Guha. That he did not examine Jaipal Singh as an important figure in the Indian Adivasi movement can be raised against me also. I feel this is another area that requires urgent attention from academicians.

In Kerala, the still unfolding struggles of the Adivasis for land require urgent documentation. That is also an area that I did not feel competent to enter since the dynamic quality of the present prevented me from analyzing it. The figure of C.K. Janu who is leading the movement also requires careful and serious study. The fact that I have not analyzed her biography with the respect that is due to it remains a flaw in this work.

While documenting the history of political struggles in Wayanad, I came across a wealth of oral narratives available in people's recorded memories of them. These also require a more systematic investigation.