Chapter - 3
The Tribe in the Early Census Reports:
Constructing the Nation, Hindu and Outside Hindu

So, by standards of missionary scholarship…Vedic Aryans were not Hindus; nor were Harappans whose civilizations the Aryan "invaders" destroyed. And now we are told that tribals are not Hindus. In short, Hinduism does not exist.

The previous chapter dealt with the ways in which the Western society has constructed the "tribe" as primitive, focusing on the myth of primitivity ascribed to contemporary communities. This chapter examines the construction of tribe in colonial India that finally led to the post-colonial administrative category of the Scheduled Tribes. In this chapter, I have used the term "tribe". A difference is to be noted in the usage here from the previous chapter, where the term was used to signify the way Western anthropologists used it to evoke the image of a primitive society still existing in contemporary times. The usage of the term in this chapter, on the other hand, is to denote the groups who have been classified as an administrative category.

The State systems and their constructions are necessary to analyze what "tribe" is here I go along with Morton Fried who says: "...the numerous communities described as tribes could not be defined independently of State systems with which they are associated." While affirming that the notions of primitivity examined in the previous chapter did play a role in these constructions, the chapter is also organized with an understanding that indigenous notions of tribal people also fed into the final shape that the category assumed.

While examining how the tribe was constructed in colonial India, it becomes imperative to show how the nation evolved based on the constructions of certain
categories, especially religious in nature and how the identity of the tribe figures in the history of these constructions.

**The Impossibility of Defining**

As Wiercinski mentions, there is no official definition of a tribe according to which the list of Scheduled Tribes is compiled in each Census. He elaborates:

The famous Article 342 of the Indian Constitution states that the President may specify the tribes or tribal communities, or parts of, or groups within, any tribe, which shall for purposes of this constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes and the Parliament has the right to include or exclude names from the list of Scheduled Tribes. In this way the problem of the definition of a tribe was avoided and left for theoretical dispute by academics.³

There are numerous controversies, both academic as well as political, of communities that are included as well as excluded from the Scheduled Tribes list. Many anthropologists feel that the government has not done justice to many communities by excluding them from the list. Others feel there are communities that do not exactly deserve to be treated as tribes included in the list due to their political clout.

This means that the problem of definition is not just an academic problem but one which has urgent political implications. In spite of this, there has been no effort to standardize the definition of the tribe. Examining the history of the category the reasons for the predetermined failure of such a venture become clear.

This does not mean that efforts at defining have not happened. In fact, the history of the category gives us numerous attempts at definitions. Virginius Xaxa who has tried to theorize tribal identity in the Indian context thinks that, however informal it was, some criteria did seem to work for drawing up the list. According to him:

These ranged from such features as geographical isolation, simple technology and condition of living, general backwardness to the practice of animism, tribal language, physical features, etc.⁴
The problem was not that any criterion did not exist but that diverse criteria were used interchangeably and according to the convenience of the moment. The commissioner of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in India in his report of 1952 noted eight common features in explaining how to identify the Scheduled Tribes. These ranged from places of residence to habits of communities. For instance he gives these characteristics to define the Scheduled Tribe, "Dwelling in forests and hills; ethnic origins like autsroloid, mongoloid or Negroid; animists worshipping nature, ghosts, spirits; primitive hunters and gatherers; carnivorous food habits; naked and semi-naked; fond of food and dance." It should be noted that not even one fifth of the notified Scheduled Tribes possessed these characteristics.\(^5\)

Again going back to Xaxa:

The result is that the list includes groups and communities strikingly different from each other in respect of not only size of the population but also the level of technology and other characteristics.\(^6\)

The Absent-Presence of the Mainstream Society

Though the criteria of definitions of the tribes are never clearly pointed out, even a brief survey of some of these definitions will prove that there is a hidden yardstick used to compare societies working in them. The hidden yardstick is the "mainstream society" or rather, what the definer thinks of as mainstream society. For instance Vidyarthi and Rai in their famous classification of the tribes that has become a standard in Anthropology classrooms define the tribe thus:

A - the lowest (as defined) stage of economic development (hunters and gatherers, shifting cultivators), today usually connected with the dying tribes
B - tribes largely assimilated with general society
C - assimilated tribes.\(^7\)

In this classification what is clear is a never fore-grounded but always present notion of mainstream society where the tribal society is imagined in contrast to this. This
mainstream society is homogenized and the tribe exists only in connection to this. Xax has pointed out the problem with such a conceptualization:

...tribes have come to be primarily studied in relation to features and characteristics of the larger society. The focus is on how tribes are getting absorbed into the larger society, the so-called mainstream, by becoming caste, peasant, class and so on. With such conceptualization, the identity of the tribal group or community is indeed put at risk. This is because of the way tribes have been conceptualized in anthropological literature and the reference with which tribal society in India is studied.

Tribes are primarily seen as a stage and type of society. They represent a society that lacks positive traits of the modern society and thus constitutes a simple, illiterate and backward society. With change in these features on account of education, modern occupation, new technology, etc. tribal society is no longer considered to be tribal. If transformation is in the direction of caste society then it is described as having become caste society. If the reference is peasant then it is posited as peasant society and if the general direction of transformation is social differentiation, then it is described as differentiated or stratified, and thus ceases to be tribal society. In the process it is forgotten that tribe besides being a stage and type of society is also a society alike and similar to any other kind of society, say Oriya or the Bengali.

Apart from this major theoretical problem, as Wiercinski mentions, the statistical details about the tribal population in India is severely limited due to the fact that the numbers enumerated sometimes club whole communities that have distinct identities under one banner. Moreover, whole communities are left out of enumeration altogether. All this confusion makes us ask the question urgently: "Who are the tribes?"

“Tribe”: Primitive or Modern?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the category "tribe" in this thesis is taken to be a modern category. Thus, rather than taking it as a category that has existed from time-immemorial and as a surviving relic of the past, (which is theessentialist way of constructing tribes), the dissertation sees it as having evolved in modernity. Also, it understands that the modern articulation of tribal identities has been varied in different parts of the world and India had its own peculiar history of constructing the tribe.

When it is said that tribe is a modern category, it is not meant that the communities that are right now referred in that way did not exist before modernity. In
fact, what is meant is that these communities have been re-forged and put under one
banner “tribe” during colonial rule and this bracketing affected not just the identities of
the members of the community, but also their destinies in modernity.

Sumit Guha thinks that rather than taking these communities as actually being
primitive, we have to see them as having been “primitivized” in modernity. In his
outline of the book, *Environment And Ethnicity In India: 1200-1991*, he observes:

The role that the modern regime of the forests played in isolating one
segment of the population within the newly drawn boundaries of the
forest is highlighted in order to make the point that the resulting
primitivisation of these peoples is a recent consequence of the breakdown
of their political system... It is argued that by concentrating solely on the
truncated remnant of the old hierarchy, observers overlooked the living
apex of the new one, succumbed to the notion of the simple, primitive
and egalitarian forest tribe, and hence failed to see the simplified,
primitivized, silvicultural proletariat that it was being hammered into
becoming.

Another point that should be mentioned is the way in which colonial categories
are treated in the thesis. "Tribe" as we know it today as the category that was officially
consolidated in the post-colonial India as the Scheduled Tribes was first categorized by
the British. But this does not mean that the native categories were all made from thin air
by the colonialists. The British constructions were importantly influenced by the already
existing elite constructions in Indian society. Also, the native constructions underwent
major changes after the colonial categories were consolidated. Thus, it should be seen as
a dialogue that was happening between the Enlightenment constructions of modernity
and the native constructions that were available.

Following this logic, the dissertation also examines in a very brief way the
precolonial dominant (read Brahminical) constructions of tribes. Also, this will make it
clear that the stereotypical notions about the tribes were not peculiar to the colonial
attitude. (The massive effort at categorization was peculiar to the British colonial rule).
Methodology

For the pre-colonial dominant constructions of the tribe, I have followed the readings from the works of historians who have worked on the topic. This reading is given so that it will not be assumed that the Indian colonial construction of the tribe is only coming from the West. Rather, it is an interaction that might have happened.

The second part of this chapter attempts a reading of the Census reports from 1872 to 1901 when the administrative identities consolidates in the reports.

Pre-colonial Dominant Construction of the "Tribe"

Many researchers have focused on the colonial times for studying "tribal" communities. Neeladri Bhattacharya blames them for not paying any attention to the pre-colonial experience:

The social lives and practices of forest dwellers and peasants, shifting cultivators and pastoralists, were crucially affected by the way they were seen by state and society, as well as the self-conceptions of their own practice. Research on the theme, limited as it is, has tended to focus on the colonial period, and arguments about dramatic changes in state attitudes have often been made on the basis of implicit unexplored assumptions about pre-colonial societies.¹⁰

This makes it imperative to at least take a quick look at the pre-colonial dominant constructions of the tribes. K.S. Singh thinks that though the colonialists claimed that all references to the tribes in pre-colonial India were contemptuous, it was not so. This is his quotation from Kiratarjuneyam: "The Kirata King is a master of martial arts. Do not disregard him as a mountain dweller."¹¹ But rather than proving the point of K.S. Singh this unfortunate quotation proves the opposite point—that mountain dwellers were generally looked down upon, but the 'Kirata king was an exception.

Unlike Singh, Romila Thapar does not find it necessary to see the dominant culture's perception monolithically—i.e. either as positive or negative. In her work, she examines the image of the barbarian in ancient India.¹² She thinks the image draws its genesis from "the curious situation of the arrival of the Indo-Aryan-speaking nomadic
pastoralists in northern India who came into contact with the indigenous population (possibly the remnants of the urban civilization of the Indus) and regarded them as barbarians."

She adds that the distinction that was made with the indigenous population was a linguistic one (between the Sanskrit speakers and the non-Sanskrit speakers) and to a lesser degree, a racial one.

The word that was used to describe the "other" in Sanskrit was mleccha. This word did not always refer to the tribes. Its usage varied according to the circumstance and times. But we have to follow the trajectory of this word to find out what the attitudes towards the tribes were by the Aryans.

Once the distinction with the language was made, the territorial distinction was also made with Arya-varta were the correct rituals were performed, or as Parasher-Sen points out, as the area where the dharmasstra prevailed. This definitely places the areas other than Arya-varta at a disadvantage. She also thinks that the establishment of the varnashrama society also went hand in hand with these developments. Thapar says that by the second half of the first millennium B.C. that saw the extensive urbanization of the Ganges valley, the city dwellers were made to look down upon the forest and hill dwellers who were the tribes. The names of tribes mentioned during this period include Sabara, Pulinda, Mutiba and Kirata. By now it included groups ranked as mixed castes, technologically backward tribes and communities along the frontiers as well as people speaking a different tongue. Later foreigners like Yavanas and even Arabs were included among the mlecchas. More than what the barbarian did, her/his exclusion was based on certain notions of ritual purity.

Even the Jains and Buddhists had pejorative terms to describe the tribes. Parasher-Sen proves that it was the social organization of these societies that were
supposed to place them at a barbaric level from the societies of the janapadas. Jain monks and nuns were warned to avoid the areas of "unlearned and barbaric people."^{17}

As mentioned, it was the social organization of those societies that is pointed out to be the reason for their barbaric nature. The social organization not based on varnasrama dharma was seen to be outside civilization. This is particularly interesting because Buddhism is seen to be a religion that came to be as a questioning of the varna social structure.

Parasher-Sen examines the Mauryan attitudes towards the tribes in detail. Though the Mauryan Empire was supposed to be the first centralized government in the subcontinent, Parahser-Sen argues that the unconquered territories in the fringes of the empire determined the structure of the centre too. The attitude of the centre towards these fringes varied from fear to attempts at appropriation. In a quote from Kautilya, Parasher-Sen proves that the jungle tribes were equated with wild animals, all of who were considered unnecessary in an ideal janapada, or settlement.

The earlier Brahminical view was to avoid contact with the forest dwellers (known as mleccha atavikas). But, Kautilya advises direct contact with them and to use them against the enemy as spies. This was supposed to keep them from looting and plundering.

By the time of the Mauryan Empire, a distinction seems to have emerged about various tribes amongst the dominant culture. Thus, Kautilya mentions aranyacaras and atavikas. The atavikas have connotations of a "wild and savage tribe well entrenched in the jungle fastness who were ostensibly a nuisance to the State."^{18} The aranyacaras were on the other hand, tribes who were entering into some kind of negotiations with the centralized State. They were seen to be lower than the people inhabiting janapadas but tamed unlike the atavikas.
Another level of the pre-colonial construction of the tribe also betrayed some grudging respect to the jungle tribes. Thus the *atavikas* were seen to be "well-organized and brave, practically autonomous and fond of looting and killing."\(^{19}\)

Yet, Thapar believes that *mlecchas* were also incorporated in practice into the social, political and religious systems and were the progenitors of many of the essentials of Indian culture.\(^{20}\) Bhattacharya sums up Parasher-Sen's work: "...the forest people were feared but also tolerated: political thinkers of the time, in fact, preferred a policy of non-interference."\(^{21}\)

As mentioned in the beginning of this section the detailed summary of some of the dominant pre-colonial constructions of tribes is given here so as to counter the argument that colonialism alone stereotyped the tribes. In fact, the connections with the pre-colonial dominant constructions and the colonial constructions can be seen with the introduction of caste as a defining category in understanding tribes. Probably, the definition of the *tribe* that later the colonialists arrived as "outside caste", and which they interpreted as "outside culture", might have direct connections to the pre-colonial way of defining what is "civilization" by the Brahminical and later Buddhist-Jain systems of thought.

**Colonial Construction of Tribe in India**

The colonial times saw large scale remoulding of the Indian society. It not only witnessed the introduction of the idea of a centralized State, but also changes in the native sensibilities. Very often, these changes were talking to and taking from earlier forms of power available in India. It was a dialogue between European constructions of categories and native constructions. Surely, they operated with a power difference between groups evolving the categories. All categories were remoulded to suit modernity. The category "tribe" was one such.
There were many institutions that were connected to the colonial production of categories. Among others, this broadly includes the colonial State, academic, especially anthropological writings, and missionary writings. It is not as if these are watertight compartments. In the works of a figure like Edgar Thurston is combined the administrator and the anthropologist. So too, the figure of Verrier Elwin combined the philanthropic missionary and the anthropologist (curiously called “philanthropologist”). Moreover, the State policies were very often determined by the impressions and discourses around the categories dealt with. They were serving as inter-textual material and were interacting with each other.

For detailed analysis, I plan to examine the State construction of the tribes in this part of the dissertation. The post-colonial Indian State's perception of the tribes was directly connected to the colonial construction of the tribe. Kamat proves this point in the following way:

Scheduled Tribes list and Scheduled Tribe areas refer to the Government taxonomy of tribes introduced in 1950, though it is substantially based on the 1936 Census by the British Government.

Therefore, it is quite clear that it is important to look at the colonial administrative category that emerged through their Census to get an idea of what the roots were of the post-colonial administrative category. The Census documents should be taken as one among many sites of the construction of the category though it does not claim to be exhaustive in any way.

As mentioned above, the pre-colonial times also had notions of the forest dweller, the city-dweller etc. However, what is argued here is that the "tribe" with its anthropological and evolutionary meanings of "not advanced" and lagging behind in the evolutionary scheme developed along with colonization and modernity. In India, the notion of the tribe developed as communities outside caste and there also developed definite notions of primitivity along with it. Also, the notion of hitherto unconnected
communities coming together was a contribution of the colonialists' homogenizing tendencies. This has also led to the post-colonial Adivasi identity creation.

There are different theoretical frameworks by which the British documents have been looked at by the disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences. There has been works on the British Census operations itself. I find Nandini Sundar's summary of the different positions within Social Sciences quite useful for my purpose. I quote hen

At the risk of considerable simplification, it is possible to range philosophical positions on classification into three broad camps. The positivist or objectivist camp sees classifications or categories as corresponding to some objective reality or concept. The prescriptive or constructionist school sees classifications as based on symbolic conventions or social constructions. Finally, there is a sort of middle ground, which claims an objective reality for its classifications and definitions, but recognizes that the apprehension of this reality is mediated by language, or by particular discourses, and will almost definitely be partial, selective and sociologically situated.23

As Ranajit Guha says: "It is the ideology of 'Statism' that gives the status of 'history' or truth to anything."24 The positivist reading of British documents would do precisely that—give the legitimacy of "truth" to State documents. Without taking the State's version of history as truth, one can still take it as an important material to analyze the process by which "truth" is created.

The Enlightenment way of writing history, of keeping records as markers of truth is largely a Western way. I would like to see them as narratives—official narratives about people. I feel it is important to see the frameworks used by these narratives so as to understand the compulsions that produced particular representations that later came to get the legitimacy of "truth".

Thus, my analysis will be closer to the constructivist school of Social Sciences than the positivist school. However, the way in which this school has interpreted categories is also problematic. The agency of creation or invention is given mostly to the State agencies and the analysis almost takes it for granted that the British invented India
through the categories that make it up as an administrative unit. But I feel what was happening is that local constructions of categories were interacting with colonial notions and inventing themselves anew to suit the modern circumstances.

**The Census as Discourse**

The dissertation considers the Census, especially colonial Census as discourse that is primarily responsible for constructing the category "tribe". To repeat, I do not mean that the communities now designated with the tribal identity did not exist before the Census operations and that it was a "fictitious" creation. What I mean is that the idea that Bodos in Assam and Paniyas in Wayanad could be brought under the same column was something new. Significantly, the post-colonial term for the tribes is Scheduled Tribes. This is the new belief that that they both have essentially something in common. It is this claim of commonness, which was emerging in colonial India. Census provides a very important arena to analyze this commonness.

Census is the enumeration of people. According to a definition, "in the literal sense the term 'population Census' is primarily an official enumeration through a direct risit of all the people either physically present or regularly residing in a country of any of its subdivisions." Taking the number of people was a modern concept connected to the management of resources and people by the State. It has certain presuppositions. 1. Governance is management of resources and people. 2. That it is important to have the data of people and resources for effective management. Census assumes importance in that it gives the necessary demographic data of governable people and resources.

Philosophically, it can be traced to the Enlightenment tradition of the State as the expression of the fully developed individual who consents to be enumerated as a population. The idea of people becoming a population is very much there in the act of Census taking. The governable subject who willingly submits to the mechanisms of the State power is the imagined subject of European Census.
But, the Indian Census, though drawing from these roots, does not imagine a hilly formed individual. Instead, what is enumerated is a wealth of communities. There are resistances to these classificatory processes, which are recorded, very often from perspectives, which are both pre-modern and therefore non-rational, or from local powers, which were contested and therefore disturbed by the act of Census taking. The classificatory methods used by the British, angered many a native subject. Thus, the 1881 Census shows that the resistance of the Bhils against the Census operations had to be quelled by the deployment of the army because they were “superstitiously” against it. Risley's list of Indian castes, which was published in their supposedly hierarchical order, was contested vehemently by the Hindus. Rajendralal Mitra's publication of the caste names based on Sanskrit sources claims that they were engaging with the British in textual terms, but texts of their choice.

Census is not just the data of the number of human beings. It is the data of classification. And this classification gives us an idea about how the people are imagined to be divided. This means that while the British thought they were just recording the groups available in this country, what was happening was that they were defining and constructing through these classifications. They remoulded the communities. This is why I say tribe is a modern category.

The Imperial Census makes visible an interaction of both the classificatory mechanisms of locally existing classifications of people and regions and the classifications as the British were used to at home. It takes it for granted that a particular self that sees itself as part of a nation (India) and a self, that sees itself as belonging to a particular religion, has already emerged. Yet it is the process of evolution that one finds rather than the taken for granted way in which these categories are used today.
Pre-history of the Census

Before we proceed to the examination of the construction of identities and where the tribe figures in this, a short pre-history of the Census in India is given below. The first All India Census was held in 1871. Before this, there were attempts by smaller administrative units to conduct Census. Bernard Cohn traces the early attempts at population estimation and the taking of Censuses from 1820-70. But he traces a pre-history to the Census-taking in India 40 years before this. In a sense, the British had tried to collect information about the local regions from the time they started systematic collection of revenue. Thus in 1769 the British had appointed Revenue Supervisors for Bengal and Bihar. The governor of Bengal drew up instructions, which included collecting information on the history of the districts, history of leading families and their customs. For these factors affected the landholdings. Later, this developed into the gazetteers. The first gazetteer was Walter Hamilton's published in 1820 and can be taken as the pre-Census document. The first Census of the northwestern provinces was taken in 1847. In 1853, it was repeated due to the inaccuracies of the first.

But the moment, which I wish to focus, is the moment of enumeration of tribes in India—the time of the first Imperial Census. I begin my examination from 1871 onwards, which is the first All India Imperial Census. In many ways, the formation of the modern Census in India can be understood to have happened between 1871 and 1901.

The Terms Used in Census

I am giving a summary of the terms used from 1891 onwards. Both the 1872 and 1881 Census are described in detail in the following pages so I have not given them in the columns.
The Terms Used for Tribes in Various Census Reports

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Term Used for Tribe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>&quot;Forest Tribes&quot; under &quot;Agricultural and Pastoral Castes&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>&quot;Animists&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>&quot;Tribal Animists or People Following Tribal Religion,&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>&quot;Hill and Forest Tribes&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>&quot;Primitive Tribes&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>&quot;Tribes&quot;</td>
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The tribe finds a place as "Forest Tribes" in the 1891 Census. Their population is estimated to be about 16 million. In the Census report of 1901, they were classified as "Animists" and in 1911 as "tribal animists or people following tribal religion."

The Tribe and the Hindu

The history of the connection between the categories "tribe" and the Hindu religious identity goes back to the construction of both these identities. The beginning of the consolidation of these identities shares a common story. In short, to ask who is a tribe in this country necessarily forces us to ask who is a Hindu. This is because the Hindu has been defined in particular ways in the British documents and the tribe has been defined in this category's shadow.

It is clear that the British considered "religion" as a major identity, which had to be enumerated and categorized. This was probably the follow-up of how society was perceived back home in Europe. Apart from Christianity, the other religions, which they were familiar with, were of course Islam and Judaism. A prophet, a holy book and sacred places where the religion is supposed to have originated defined these religions. They were of course familiar with the subdivisions within Christianity itself, the division of churches in Catholic and Protestant lines.

But, it should be noted that though they understood the importance of religion they refused to enumerate it back home. In fact, they thought it was necessary to do so in India. R.B. Bhagat thinks it is because of different reasons, the colonialists had in
taking Census in both places. In Britain, the Census was introduced as a result of the debates on population and poverty in the second half of the 18th century. While Census operations in Britain had direct economic and perhaps welfare motivations, in India, it was "the desire of the colonial government to learn all it could about the people and the land under its control."27

In India from the beginning of Census taking itself, that is, from 1872, the first Imperial Census, the data about religion had been collected. The colonial Census of India had questions on religion, caste and race from 1872 onwards. Moreover, religion was used as a fundamental category in Census tabulating and data and this was published without any restraint.

"What is a Hindoo?"

In their innumerable efforts to define the category "Hindu", we can see the Census reporters losing their ground and slipping. They very readily accepted that they were not on sure grounds.

It is true that there was no language to understand the religious system that the British saw in this country. As Bourdillon writes in the 1881 Census:

.. .concerning some of the faiths exhibited in Bengal, there could be no doubt. They stand distinctly apart. Their creeds are capable of definite formulation, and their followers are an acknowledged people, and an appreciable body in commonwealth. The Sikhs and Mahommedans, the Jews and the Parsees have an individuality which is impossible to mistake. The Christians profess a faith which separate them from all other classes of the community, and the Buddhists and the Jains, though they have been said to possess much in common, differ from each other by such imperceptible relation, and are separated from each other by such impalpable partitions, that is impossible to say where one ends and the other commences, so that the border land between each one and the next is a misty valley, now narrowing, but always thick with the exhalations of ignorance and the fogs of doubt.28

Due to this confusion, Hindu was defined against Islam primarily. As the 1891 Census report unabashedly claims about Hinduism:
Primarily and historically, it is the antithesis of Islam, and thus includes all Indian forms of faith in which the uncompromising Unitarianism of the adherents of the prophet detected signs of the worship of idols.²⁹

The fuzziness of the category "Hindu" made many a Census official eloquent. The default religion of this place was named Hindu. But, this does not mean that the Census officials themselves knew what it meant. It was in the process of being formed precisely in these pages of the Census among other sites. Thus, the perplexity of Beverly who wrote the Census report of 1871 is evident in his exasperated questioning: "What is a Hindoo?"³⁰ Baines who writes the Bombay report for the 1881 Census repeats it when he says: "Beginning with Hindooism as the religion of the majority, we are met at the outset by a not uncommon difficulty, that of definition."³¹ Beverly, who asked the perplexing question, also admits defeat with the definition:

No answer in fact exists, for the term in its modern acceptation denotes neither a creed nor a race, neither a church nor a people, but is a general expression devoid of precision, and embracing alike the agnostic youth who is the product of Western education, and the semi barbarous hill man, who eats, without scruple what he can procure, and is as ignorant of the Hindoo theology as the stone which he worship in time of danger or sickness.³²

In this perplexity, he is clubbing completely different groups as one—the tribes and the "Hindoos", among many others, thus theoretically share a brief stint of being one. Yet, with all these confusions of whether they were Hindu or not, the tribes seem to have been finally declared out of the Hindu fold. In fact, there is resentment from the colonial authorities if they are included as Hindu in the categorization. In fact, to avoid confusions, the 1881 Census even considers "tribal" as a separate religious category. The Imperial Census report of the year complains against Madras that refused to show a single aboriginal in the religious category:

Madras...does not show a single aboriginal in its religious classification, but it is unquestionable that in the Neilgherries there are races who, if they profess any religions at all, are nature worshippers and not Hindoos, Mahammedans, or any one of the religions shown in the Madras tables. I understand these aboriginals have been entered as Hindoo.³³
These attempts to mark tribal identity as a religious category are also visible in the methodology of organisation of the reports. For instance, the 1871 Census does have data on "Hindus", "Sikhs", “Mahomedans”, “Buddhists” and Jains”, "Christians", and "Others". There is also division which says, "Religion not Known." It is true that the tribes might have been conceived of as belonging to the "Others", or "Religion not Known" category, apart from being included in "Hindus."

Yet, the 1881 Census is very different. Here we find that "Aboriginal Religion" is a religious category that occupies the third position as far as population is concerned, with 6,426,511 people as members. (Hindu and Mahomedan religions being the first and the second.) My argument is that the trials in the 1881 Census to include tribal identity as a religious category was to mark its difference with the Hindu religion.\(^\text{54}\)

Here is how the "aboriginal" is defined in the 1881 Census:

A very large number of persons is shown in the Imperial tables under the somewhat dubious term, dubious so far as religious designation is concerned, "aboriginal." Those whom I have grouped together under this term in the religious classification consist of the aboriginal tribes, who, not having been converted to Christianity, or to Islam, or to the Hindoo belief, retain, if they have any religion at all, the primitive cult of their forefathers, adoring nature under the various forms or images they have chosen to select as representative of Deity.\(^\text{35}\)

We can find the confusions in the birth pangs of the category "tribe" in the index of this Census itself. There is a mention of the aboriginals who are Christians. If aboriginal is a religious category, then this is a contradiction in terms. For, one religious identity usually excludes others. For instance, one cannot imagine a column for Muslim-Christians in the Census.

It was quite natural that the category "tribe" was displaying such confusions in the early years of its trajectory in the country-for all the categories, religious or otherwise, were in the process of evolving. They were evolving precisely in these pages. At the time of the first Census the religious identity itself was being formed and people returned
the columns for marking religions with a caste name or a sect name. A humourous quotation from the Census report proves the confusion which itself finally crystallized as various religions that we know of today. Interestingly, the quote is about who are today known as tribes:

The Deputy commissioner of Ellichpur, writes as follows: "When the hill people were pressed for a reply as to what their religion was, sometimes after much parleying, they said either that they were Hindoos, or that they knew nothing about religion, that they were arani log, ignorant people. All they knew was they were Korkus by caste. In one instance, two Korkus, brothers, one gave the one answer, and the other, the second... Now yesterday at Chikkalda there were representatives of eight villages present. Of these I called six Korkus, one Gaolan and two Nihals. All of the Korkus, when asked what their religion was, commenced by naming all the gods they worshipped as above. When further pressed as to what name the religion had in which these gods were worshipped, five answered without hesitation, Hindoo, and one said he really could not tell. What could he, a Korku, know about his religious name? The Gaolan replied that he worshipped exactly the same gods the Korku did. What ever their religion was called, that was his. He did not know its name. Of the two Nihals, both said they worshipped exactly as the Korkus did the same God; but they could not give the name the religion was entered by. How should they know it? Asked if they knew anything of the religions Mahommadans and Hindoos professed, one replied that the "deos" being the same, he supposed their religion was a branch of Hinduism. The other thought they were more like Mussalmans, except that the latter abhorred pig's flesh, which they Nihals liked."

There was a general sentiment among tribes to be enumerated as Hindus, perhaps because of the vagueness of the identity "Hindu", or because of local associations with the upper castes. The same Census complains of Berar report:

Where 37,388 only are showing "Aboriginal" under religion, but in the Tribal statement, to be found at page 78 of the report, 164,981 are entered as aboriginals without distinction of religion. I must question whether the provincial authorities have rightly acted in showing so large a proportion of these aboriginals as Hindoos.

There is resentment when the tribes themselves ask to be enumerated as Hindus. Thus Drysdale, referring to this topic, writes in the Central Provinces report

The instructions to enumerators required they should as Gonds and all alike what religion they professed, and accept their reply as conclusive,
but the Hindoo agency were so influenced by individual views and prejudices, that a great variety of practice prevailed in the record of the religion of the hill tribes. The result however shows very clearly, there is, among the aboriginal races, a very general desire to be regarded as of the Hindoo religion.38

Yet, they were very clear of including the Dalit castes as Hindu even if they did not ask to be enumerated as such. Thus, it is reported in 1881 Census:

Another general doubt was what should be entered as the religion of debased castes like the Dher and Mang, who are generally ignorant of any religion except the superstitions of their caste, and are not admitted to the Hindoo temples. Many of the more bigoted High caste Hindoos employed as Census enumerators or supervisors objected to record such low persons as of the Hindoo religion. This was illustrated by numerous instances brought to my notice of such persons having been recorded as that of Dher, Mang or Chandal religion. Possibly some in their humility or ignorance may not even have claimed to be of the Hindoo religion. More probably they were not even asked. In my office they have all been tabulated as of the Hindoo religion, unless recorded as of some other recognized religions.39

The ignorance of the people was the ignorance of the category that was in the process of emerging—Hindu. Along with Hindu was also emerging the category under discussion—Tribe. It was the complexity of the forging of the categories in a particular way that one finds reflected in the Census pages.

Just to recount whatever has been discussed so far—Hindu has been defined against Muslim and other religions with Semitic properties. It has been seen as the default religion of the country. The tribes have not been included in the religion Hindu though constantly there are references to their closeness. In fact, even when the tribes themselves have specifically asked to be included in the category, they have been excluded from the category. Moreover, the brief trial at including the tribe as religion in the 1881 Census also shows that the British Census officials maintained the distinction between the Hindu and the tribes. At the same time, the Dalits have been without any doubt included in the category, Hindu. There are constant references to the
indistinguishability between the lower forms of Hinduism and the tribal religions. Yet, this distinction is made and also maintained between these groups.

This, I feel is important because of the way Hinduism was defined. It was defined as Brahmanism in its pristine form:

What then is the text of faith which is to define the real Hindoo from the semi Hindooised aboriginal? Living for centuries side by side the two communities have acted and reacted on each other. On the one hand, the savage tribe have renounced their barbarism and adopted many of the rules and customs of the invader, on the other, the Hindoo religion has itself been debased from the Vedic monotheism of the middle land. Those who have made the subject their study, tell us that the Hindooism of the present day is as unlike the Hindooism of the Vedas.40

I feel, this argument is permeated by the absent presence of the criteria of defining Hindu religion—caste. The Census officials, like many other Britishers, felt the essential characteristic of the Hindu religion was caste. The ease with which the British excluded the tribes from Hindu was because they were conceived of as outside caste, and therefore as outside Hindu.

But, the Dalits were not given this opportunity of being seen as outside caste. In the eyes of the British, they were both united in a system that recognized communities placed in a particular hierarchy. The quotes from the Census do prove that they viewed caste as the distinguishing feature of Hinduism. For instance: "It is true that very high authorities have described caste as the "express badge of Hinduism."41 Barthes is quoted in the 1891 Census to prove that "...this institution [caste] is not merely the symbol of Hinduism, but its stronghold and a religious factor of the very highest order."42 Moreover, caste is defined as "the perpetuation of status or function by inheritance and endogamy."43

I feel, in the definition of tribes the distinction that the British made with the castes is crucial. Why did they not include tribes as part of the default order they found in this country, Hinduism? Why were they perceived as outside caste?
To seek answers for this, perhaps one should go back to the Enlightenment idea of the tribes that was being constructed in the West. As already discussed in the first chapter, the Western society, according to this worldview, was the fully developed society. Progress was marked in terms of how close you were to being the fully realized individual who enters into social contract with other individuals. State was this individual's social expression. In direct contrast was the society imagined to be practising primitive communism—the tribal society. In this hierarchy, caste was seen both as an expression of progress into a more complex power structure and falling short of being the fully individuated Western society. In this scheme of things, it was necessary to see the tribe as outside caste- therefore more egalitarian but also more primitive.

This is not quite a new argument. Many theorists have proved that by the mid-nineteenth century, this distinction between the caste and tribe was in place in India. As Ajay Skaria says: "By mid-nineteenth century, as is well known, colonial officials routinely distinguished between the castes and tribes of India, seeing the two as fundamentally different." My attempt was merely to see the process happening in the Census records.

**Outside Hindu, Outside Caste**

To summarize the argument so far, in India, the tribes have been defined in contrast to another category--caste. This section has seen its definition like that.

It is argued that the colonial machinery constructed India in relation to the identity of the British colonizers. Many studies proved that while the colonialists thought of the West as characterized by the rational self, India or the Orient, being its "other" was constructed as its' opposite. These arguments are elaborated by Edward Said's by now well-known arguments.

Among all the countries in the Orient, India was seen in particular as spiritual. Among Indian Orientalists, we can trace two major streams—the Utilitarians and the
Both groups who were apparently against each other in their perception of India, agreed on one point—that India was basically Hindu. While Hinduism itself was portrayed as otherworldly and non-violent, the Utilitarians saw this as cowardice. The Romantics, on the other hand, saw this very character as gentleness that the Western rational self had lost in its march towards modernity.

If India was Hindu, and non-violence and spirituality were portrayed as characterizing the country's essential nature, its social expression was paradoxically seen in the hierarchical order of caste. Thus, like all other attributes, caste also came to define essential India. Again, both Utilitarians and Romantics differed in their interpretation of this order. The former saw it as a redundant system well suited to the successive conquests that India underwent. The Romantics tried to either justify varna, the "uncorrupted" theory of social stratification as a system that accords the station in life according to each person's inclination and abilities or saw jati as a fall from this pristine state.

One is struck by the absence of the category "tribe" in all these arguments about India. While the essential nation was being constructed, they were almost forgotten. This must be because, if the Orient is constructed as the "other" of the West, then the tribe is the "other's other". Thus, even in the construction of the Orient, there is a civilized orient and a primitive one.

To conclude, the difficulty of defining Hindu continues in a dogged way to haunt the definition of the tribe as well. It remains elusive and I hope the section above has proved it, with good reasons.
Notes

1 Hotly debating the question of whether the Adivasis are Hindus a right wing website counters the missionaries, argument that they are of course Hindus this way. Prakash, "Nailing a Lie Floated by Missionaries", 14-04-2003.
2 Quoted in Guha, S. 1995, 2.
4 Xaxa, 1999 (b), 3589.
6 Xaxa, 1999 (b), 3589.
7 Vidyarthi and Rai. 1976, 71.
8 Xaxa, 1999 (b): 3589-90.
9 Guha, S. 1999, 8.
10 Battcharaya, 1999, 166.
13 Thapar, 1978, 152.
14 Thapar, 1978, 152.
16 Thapar, 1978, 159.
17 Parasher-Sen, 1999, 177.
18 Parasher-Sen, 1999, 179.
19 Kautilya quoted in Parasher-Sen, 1999,179.
23 Sundar, 2000, 113.

He further goes on to say that the voice of the Adivasis is marginalized in the Statist discourse.

26 Table created based on the classification given in Verma, R.C, :1990,9-10.
28 Census of India, 1881,19.
29 Census of India, 1891,158.
30 Census of India, 1881,20.
31 Census of India (Bombay Report), 1881,22.
32 Census of India, 1881,20.
33 Census of India, 1881,18.
34 The other groups which are seen as separate religious groups like the aboriginals are Satnamis, Kabirpanthis, Nat Worshippers, Brahmos and Kumbhpanthas. Nat Worshippers must be nature worshippers who again come under tribes. All the other groups challenged the British notion of Hinduism, either by questioning caste hierarchy like Satnamis or combined the imagined opposites of Hindu and Muslim as in Kabirpanthis.
35 Census of India, 1881,18.
36 Census of India, 1881,19.
37 Census of India, 1881,19.
38 Census of India, 1881,18.
39 Census of India, 1881,18.
40 Census of India, 1881,20.
41 Census of India, 1891,182.
42 Census of India, 1891,182.
43 Census of India, 1891,182.
44 Skaria, 1997,729.
46 Inden, 1986,401-446.