Chapter - 4

The Construction of the Non-modern:
The Adivasi as a Site for the Anxieties of the Modern

Earth is our place; this is the truth we have forgotten. What the civilized human being can forget the real inheritors of earth cannot. Now, when the humans are trying hard to create the right ecological awareness, there are some people who know the earth, know nature. Janu is their representative. Today, she is a sign, a symbol, a problem.

Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to chart out how the debates against modernity have tried to use the Adivasi as a site. Apart from other texts, this charting is attempted through a reading of a K.J. Baby's novel *Maveli Mantam*. The text is read in the context of the debates in Kerala on ecology and sustainable development especially after the 1980s. A reading of the novel in this context might provide us with a key to open an important way in which the dominant culture uses the debates on Adivasi issues.

I have attempted to read two diverse and perhaps not usually compared texts for this purpose. I have taken the environmental theorist Ramachandra Guha's articulations on the Adivasis, especially his biography on Verrier Elwin and K.J. Baby's *Maveli Mantam* for the study. The selection was made after a reading of many theorists on ecology and parallel readings of many novels, which focused on the Adivasis, which appeared in Malayalam.

Guha's is a scholarly text, perhaps what can be described as an intellectual biography of an eminent anthropologist. The other is fiction, a novel that uses the technique of myth to express its own vision of a Utopia. Ramachandra Guha wrote in English and his book was published in the nineties. *Maveli Mantam* on the other hand is written in Malayalam and was published in the eighties.

With all these differences, the texts beg comparison. It is my contention that the ideologies that informs both Guha's as well as Baby's texts are similar. Both can be
placed in an anti-modern rhetoric of retrieving the past. Both find Adivasis a platform to express their anxieties about modernity. They demand serious consideration and comparison because this is a very common idea especially amongst the urban ecological debates.

A word on the term "anti-modern". Modernity has come under attack from many quarters, post eighties. Theoretically, the premises on which modernity has been built, the tenets of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity have been analyzed to reveal the non-inclusion of various groups. Poststructuralist critique on modernity has focused on the impossibility of complete inclusion under the banner of any Universal term. There has also been an essentialist critique of modernity. This group, I wish to call as "anti-modern." They have taken the critique from the poststructuralists, but have charted their own trajectory also. According to them, modernity itself is a problem. Modernity's efforts at universalizing, both philosophically and materially (through industrial revolution and colonization) is seen as its will to power. In India, this group is represented by Ashis Nandy who sees himself as defending the "innocence which confronted modern Western colonialism". Though the anti-modernists might trace their lineage to Rousseau and even beyond, when I use the term, I mean specifically the post-seventies theorists. The related term "non-modern", points towards an imagination that these theorists have about a "pure" space uncorrupted by modernity.

These ideas are not particular to Kerala or India itself. The ideas that traditional societies did have the means of living a more sustainable life are quite common amongst ecologists. For instance the Norwegian politician who popularized the concept of sustainable development speaks thus:

For generations, traditional cultures have lived in harmony and balance with the natural environment. People have managed to survive without compromising the ability of subsequent generations to satisfy their needs. Traditional cultures are generally characterized by their respect for and
ability to live within the constraints of nature. Such cultures regard the irrational use of natural resources as sin.\textsuperscript{5}

In this scheme of things, the Adivasi issues become a site to express the dominant culture's own dread against a possible impending apocalypse, very often expressed in ecological terms.\textsuperscript{6} In the context of Kerala, where the anti-modernity debates are quite powerful in intellectual circles, this examination, I feel, has deep significance.

Ramachandra Guha and His Theorization on Adivasis

Ramachandra Guha is an important theorist who has taken up the cause of the Adivasis in the academia. His famous biography \textit{Savaging (be Civilised} is introduced in an advertisement as asking such important and relevant questions of the twentieth century as "...the future of development, cultural assimilation versus cultural difference, the political practice of post-colonial as opposed to colonial governments, and the moral practice of writers and intellectuals."\textsuperscript{7}

A reading of his texts will be useful to understand and analyze the connection between the anti-modernity arguments and the connection they draw between Adivasis, ecology and anti-colonial struggles. The recent interest in ecology and Adivasi identity can also be traced to the conceptual understandings of the "new social movements." These connections, which are made are quite important since these represent to a large extent the eighties theoretical connection that is evolving between these categories.

I am limiting myself to his work on Verrier Ehvin, the anthropologist of modern India. He has published a biography of the anthropologist as well as a theoretical piece on how to read Ehvin in this context in \textit{The Economic and Political Weekly.}\textsuperscript{8} Both are extremely well researched works and perhaps one of the few pieces that combine archival history with the category of tribes. While admitting that he might be a pioneer in the writing of the history with a special focus on the category under discussion, especially
during the colonial times, it is also important for us to see how he has done this, and analyze the framework he has used for this.

A note of introduction about the style employed by Guha in writing the biography is in place. Paraphrasing is the usual style employed by him to speak about Elwin's life. As Guha himself says: "...the interpretation is in the saying."9 One engages with it almost as if it were a piece of literature, though the copious notes and references do remind one that it is part history, part life-story. Guha can be placed among such historians who take life-story as History. What makes the method interesting is that one does not know where Guha's own opinion comes through and where Elwin's opinions are aired. Guha's choice of the subject itself can be read as revealing his leanings. Elwin, a white missionary social reformer turned anthropologist is not important in himself for Guha. Rather, he uses Elwin to apparently speak about the subject matter that Elwin returned, again and again in his works- the Adivasis.

Elwin is quite an important figure when one has to consider the history of policy of the Indian government towards the Adivasis. As Rudolph C Heredia points out, Nehru's Introduction to Elwin's Philosophy for NEFA outlined the future policy about the Adivasis of India in general, and the Adivasis in the north-east in particular.10

Towards the end of the 20* century, with the rise of the new social movements, there has been a growing interest in ecology as well as in identities, especially subaltern identities, as a theoretical category. There are many diverse theoretical strands that have interacted with this. The essentialist schools have gone back to a pure non-modern position (theoretically of course!), drawing their sustenance from the cultural primitivists of the Romantic times in Europe. Many of the ecological arguments which keep going back to a lost Eden before modernity, and which keeps invoking the tribes as a lost world, have this very air about them. For instance, see the influential environmentalist
Anil Agarwal speaking about the "groups like tribals" living in "total harmony with the forests."  

It is in this context that one has to see Ramachandra Guha and his work. My own work draws a lot from the material that he has used for his research. His work has a surprising range and deals with apparently diverse topics like Ecology, struggles of the indigenous people, biographical writings, especially of anthropologists, forest history and history of cricket. One can perhaps see that the connecting link between these is the assumptions about modernity.

Before getting into what he has dealt with I would like to make an oblique entry point—what he has not dealt with! In other words, I would like to see the untold exclusions that the kind of work like Guha's necessarily has to make. It is not arbitrarily that one can speak of these exclusions also. If it is the situation of Adivasis that interested Guha, or if it is the anti-modernity argument that he wanted to propagate, then it becomes interesting why he left out some possibilities and took others. This I feel is a legitimate entry point to analyze why and how he has taken up the life and times of Elwin for detailed study.

There are three figures I want to consider whom Guha has left out from his detailed analysis of the tribal situation. The first is Kosi Elwin, Elwin's Gond wife. The second, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. A third figure is Jaipal Singh, the Adivasi leader who raised issues of tribal identity politically during the nationalist and post-independence times. These exclusions are not chosen randomly. They actually point to the subject that Guha has finally chosen and its inherent problems.

Kosi's exclusion as an issue has already been raised. The choice of the research topic raises questions about the politics of selection. If one wants to talk about Adivasis, why is it mat an anthropologist who worked among Adivasis becomes a more easily chosen subject than a non-descript "ordinary" Adivasi like Kosi? Arundhati Roy in her
defense of herself of Guha's attack, mentions that she would have been more interested in Kosi's life than Elwin's. What she finds in the anthropological endeavours of self-search is a barely concealed will to colonize, like Conrad's. Guha claims that his project is one of recovery. He says the debates, which took place between Elwin and his contemporaries, though of national importance, have been long forgotten. Thus, it is definitely a project of resurrection. For he says, these are not irrelevant debates for today's India. Thus, Kosi would not have helped him reconstruct debates of "national" importance that have resulted in major policies of the nation. Roy in her feminist zeal is also hinting at a project of recovery. The life of a tribal woman who married and subsequently split from a white anthropologist who came to "study" her and her people. She is trying to suggest that the "objects" have more interesting life stories and histories than the anthropologists.

I feel Guha is quite justified in going back to the debates on the "aboriginals" that happened during and soon after India's struggle towards independence. The debates on assimilation and isolation, the policy of integration and protectionism, have determined the fate of these people for the past 100 years. It is important to go back to these debates placing them in the context of the formation of the nation.

But, I also feel that it is not just the reconstruction of "national" debates that would have pushed Guha to exclude Kosi's life. She is more a mute subject for him. She is the passive photograph, the confident woman who looks into his camera and allows her photo to be taken by an awe-struck historian reconstructing her life, among others. The romance with which he describes Kosi is unmistakable:

It is late afternoon, the most written-about hour of the Indian day, the time the cows come home and the sun starts to set. "Aap Kosi beban bain," we ask. "Jihaan." She answers, "wo lii boom." Yes, I am Kosi. The moment will not return, so I ask her at once whether I can take a picture. She nods in assent, adjusts her sari, smoothens her hair, and pulls her palloo more closely around her head. The ease and grace, the sheer naturalness with
which she composes herself, takes my breath away, for she has not, I think, stood before a camera in half a century.14

For Guha and others in today's India, Kosi would not have represented the theoretical anxieties around modernity. She herself is the non-modern for Guha, and if we can believe Guha, for Elwin as well.

That prompts one to move on to Jaipal Singh. If it is the reconstruction of national debates on tribal policies, the one person who would have been of the greatest help to Guha is undoubtedly, Jaipal Singh. An Adivasi, very often compared to B.R. Ambedkar, Jaipal Singh can also boast of similar backgrounds and achievements like the maker of the constitution. His debates in the Parliament where he raised issues of the Adivasis are remembered to date. If Guha's project was to trace the history of policies related to Adivasis, then Jaipal Singh's is a striking exclusion. For, the choice of Elwin will immediately raise the question of why a non-Adivasi voice was given prominence when an Adivasi voice was readily available in history.

It is significant that Guha finds it more convenient to write a biography of Elwin rather than of Jaipal Singh, who almost at the same time as Elwin was raising crucial questions on tribal identity with an insider's perspective. Jaipal Singh was leading a militant movement in what is today Jharkhand, articulating the Adivasis' needs for more autonomy, both political and social.

In Guha's biography, Jaipal Singh comes as a fleeting presence. He only comes as a supportive voice for Elwin.15 Guha recounts that the opposition to the policies outlined in Elwin's A Philosophy for NEFA came in the form of Lok Sabha debates between an Assamese member of parliament Hem Barua and Jaipal Singh. Here, Guha recounts that Singh supported Elwin. I quote Guha: “Dr Verrier Ehvin,' he (Singh) reminded his colleague, ‘is more Indian now than Shri Hem Barua. He is more tribal now than Jaipal Singh.”16 His references to Singh in his essay are also fleeting but

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perhaps more telling. As part of building the atmosphere in which Elwin lived, Guha writes:

But in the run-up to Indian independence, it was not Elwin alone who was concerned with the tribes. After the elections of 1937, Congress governments, while urging the scrapping of "Excluded Areas", commissioned a series of reports on the condition of the tribes, in belated recognition of a long neglect. Christian missionaries and the University anthropologists also contributed to this spurt of interest, while in Bihar a militant movement to distinguish aboriginals from Hindus was taking shape under Jaipal Singh, a tribal who had been up at Oxford at the same time as Elwin.17

Surprisingly, the exclusion of Jaipal Singh from Guha's analysis becomes even more stark because he deals with all the different representations of Adivasis; A.V. Thakkar's and Elwin's debates, the former representing the Gandhian/Congress position, the missionary position as well as Elwin's arguments with the anthropologists, represented by G.H. Ghurye. He only leaves out the Adivasi activist from his analysis.

There is one other reference to Jaipal Singh, when Guha describes the post 50s scenario where he casually mentions that Singh had already joined the Congress.18 In Jharkhand itself, there is now a studied distancing from Jaipal Singh because many feel that he had betrayed the Adivasi cause by finally compromising with the Congress. Is this the reason why there was no consideration of Singh's trajectory by Guha? Or, is it some other reason?

Even as we leave these questions unanswered, another figure Guha had not taken up for detailed analysis rises before us—Gandhi. It will not be obvious why Gandhi should be treated as an exclusion. For, he had little to say about Adivasis. According to Guha himself, Gandhi, when once asked why he had paid little attention to the tribes, replied: "I have entrusted that part of our work to A V Thakkar."19

I want to consider Guha not taking up Gandhi as a figure of analysis, because he is deeply respected, and now being recovered by many theorists who analyze the social problems of India and other third world countries as connected to the imposition of a
Western modernity. Thus, it is strange and quite surprising that he does not deal with this figure. For this school, Gandhi is the most convenient figure because of a variety of reasons. He represents not just the will to power of the Indian bourgeoisie that culminated in the birth of the Indian State in 1947, but also its discomfort with the very modernity that was the legacy of its masters. Thus, in the figure of one person is combined the urges of nationalism and anti-modernity at the same time.

Gandhi never dealt with tribes as he dealt with the emotionally close (for him) issue of untouchability. In his whole career, his efforts were to keep a united front of Hindus against the British colonialists. He mainly addressed the caste Hindus and appealed to their conscience in which he had immense faith. But, the changes he sought were reformist in nature and not radical. He wanted to retain a form of varnasramadharma with caste divisions on occupations remaining the same. He justified this with the clever shift of argument about the dignity of all labour, when it was clear beyond doubt that there were groups forced into lifestyles and professions which cannot but be termed undignified. While he speaks about a lost wholesome world, he infuses it with a Hindu religious colouring and names it Rama rajya.

He never took up the issue of the Adivasis as he claimed to take up the women problems and “harijan”. Perhaps his identification with the Hindu might have prevented him from addressing the Adivasi problem. For, the Adivasis were, from the beginning defined, as outside the Hindu folds by the colonialists and Gandhi also seems to have accepted this definition. Moreover, he was dealing with the problems of women and Dalits also because he saw a scope of reform within the Hindu fold since the colonialists were using these examples of inhumanity in Hindu society to continue the rule of the Empire. Probably because of these reasons the tribes were marginalized in the rhetoric of the nationalists as well because they figured nowhere as "burdens in the upper caste Hindu conscience."
But let me come back to why Gandhi does not appear as an interesting personality for Guha to work with. Interestingly, Gandhi does figure quite importantly in his narration of Elwin's intellectual journey. In fact, he emerges as a figure to be rejected. While tracing out Elwin's life, Guha does give a lot of importance to his break with Gandhi. Elwin's initial enthusiasm for Gandhi peters out once he starts his life amongst the tribes. Once Elwin's honeymoon with the missionaries ends so does his sermonizing life. Alongside this, he also starts questioning Gandhi, especially his ideas on sexuality. Guha rightly approves of Elwin's rejection of the social service mode that Gandhi advocated. In Gandhi's scheme, the Adivasis were people to be uplifted and improved. This stage in Elwin's life is portrayed as an explorative one, where he is experimenting with sex and relationships with women.

But Guha does not at all find it problematic that Elwin takes the tribal women as his site for explorations. It is after Gandhi comes between Elwin's first choice of a life partner, that Elwin enters into a stage of random experiments with the body. The language in which Guha describes this definitely does not bring out the relative power difference between a White, male, anthropologist/philanthropist in a third world tribal area and the tribal women who are around. Any relationship that develops will also necessarily be inscribed in these contours. Yet, it is the "freedom" of the tribal culture, especially in contrast to the rigid Hindu and Christian cultures that is celebrated. Elwin is portrayed as a student, humbly learning in the school of liberated and natural Adivasis.

Elwin and Gandhi represent respectively two different streams of anti-modernity positions. The "Mahatma" would definitely not have approved of Elwin's numerous experiments with the body for numerous reasons. One of the reasons would be the condescending way in which the upper castes look down upon any other culture and their code of conduct. Gandhi's urge to "reform" does smack of this kind of a condescension and I feel, Elwin's rejection of Gandhi on this basis is justified.
Yet, while one agrees that other codes (other than that of Victorian rigidity) of sexual behaviour do and have existed, one also becomes wary of the free celebration of "liberated" Adivasi sexuality. This very stereotype is used in justifying the continued exploitation of tribal women's bodies. Men who want to experiment with their sexuality find the exotic "other" women, who for various reasons do not or cannot afford to have rigid moral codes like the women from the elite groups, to be always their first "teachers" in such matters.

This takes us to the gender and race angle involved in the resurrection of a White, male anthropologist in an unproblematic way. An earlier Elwin might not be too displeased with the allegation or attribution that his marriage to an Adivasi actually proves his closeness to the tribals as a group. He published an essay entitled "I Married a Gond" where he describes in great anthropological detail his wedding to Kosi according to Gond customs. But, after a bitter divorce with Kosi, he decided to be more reticent about academically proclaiming his love for the Adivasis. Guha quotes the correspondence between a scholar who wrote an essay on Elwin and Elwin himself. In the essay, the scholar had praised Elwin for his choice of an Adivasi woman as wife, and said that it showed his appreciation of the tribal people. By now, Elwin was visibly embarrassed about this kind of an interpretation. He wrote back saying that this reference to his private life was in bad taste and also "...the fact that I could marry two or twenty tribal girls would not necessarily give any indication of my appreciation of the tribal people in general but would merely suggest that in erotic matters I was not limited by racial considerations."

The earlier interpretation of the tribal culture, as more free and closer to nature, and therefore liberating in sexual attitudes has another implication. To portray any culture as more or less liberating than modernity is already entering into a theoretical problem because the discourse happens within modernity, using its scales and terms. To
compare, we are going back (or into imaginary utopias) and trying to read cultures that were functioning with different codes for good and bad. It is not that comparisons are absolutely impossible, but the easy way in which certain cultures are seen to be "more" liberating does not take into account, the culture under study might not share our ideas of liberation at all.

I feel that the tribal woman is also very often made a site in this manner. The ideal situation of an untouched tribe is very often invoked in many a discussion about them. Sexuality of the woman (tribal) serves to score some point over modernity for the discussant. In itself, however problematic it is, it becomes more so when one understands that there is also a comparison involved between tribes themselves, then one gets at the nature of this nostalgic going back to a free primitive sexuality.

As Guha says, for Elwin there are pure and fallen tribes. This binary informs his works. And Elwin serves as a spokesperson for the "pure" tribes, a culture that is fast going off. Though Guha elicits from Elwin's writings this binary, he does not work towards deconstructing it, but he elucidates it further. He finds out the character of this "pure" tribal from a reading of Elwin's works. He finds out that Elwin's "pure" tribal has an absolute connection with the forests/nature, has a joyful rather than guilt ridden relation with sex, because of this perhaps the tribes treats their women with respect; children, irrespective of their gender are loved and cared for and there is a definite idea of unity and solidarity, a community feeling among these tribal. Moreover, Elwin's idea of the tribal life is marked by a kind of democracy where decisions were taken in consensus rather than on the basis of representation. Equality did not mean uniformity and boredom and each month there was a sharp break with some celebration or the other, which allowed the Adivasi to indulge in dancing and drinking, a symbol of the joy of life.
Guha's self-confessed attempt is to try and save Elwin from the parody he has become, as a supporter of the idea of isolation for the tribals. He proves through the biography the changes that the idea of isolation undergoes in Elwin's own career. Guha says that Elwin, unlike what his critics never tire of repeating, was not for complete isolation of Adivasis. According to him, after Elwin's critics, both from the academia and from the nationalist camp attacked him, Elwin clarifies his position on the much-misunderstood concept of isolation. He says that it was only for the Adivasis who were living in relative isolation that this policy was to be adopted. Moreover, it was not for ever that he foresees isolation as a policy for the tribes. Once India gained independence, Elwin was forced to accept the nationalist story of assimilation so that his own identity as a racial outsider was not to be questioned. He regretted the unfortunate word "zoo" which he used in connection to the isolation of some Adivasi groups. He later clarified that he did not like the idea of zoos where the animals were not in their natural settings and was arguing for just the opposite-to leave the wild and the untamed free.

In his elucidation of Elwin, Guha proves more than ever that Elwin was for a "pure and unfallen" tribal culture that he saw in quite essentialist terms. Perhaps his capsule form of dealing with Elwin's ideas of a pure tribe is very useful in deconstructing these very notions. I have already attempted to deconstruct the idealized notion of Adivasi woman's sexuality that the anti-modernity theorists have in this chapter. The political implications of many of the ideas which idealise the tribes and resurrects a "noble savage" are similar.

Just to take one more example—the most important one I feel, connected to the Adivasis: the Forest. It occupies the pride of place among the various attributes associated with the unfallen tribe. The relationship between the Adivasi and the forest is supposed to be an essential one, where one cannot survive without the other. In this
notion, the Adivasis’ not-yet-lost connection with the forest allows him/her to practice a self-sufficient lifestyle. Only there, can they have a liberated notion of sexuality and therefore not try to put controls over their women-folk. Only in this scheme will children be seen as community responsibilities and hopes, not the burden and private (and therefore obsessive) possessions of nuclear families. This culture is also imagined to possess a community consciousness, which is more sophisticated than the individual rights concept of modernity, where decisions are arrived at on the basis of a limited representational politics. In the imagined life-style of the community-oriented groups, decisions are arrived at on the basis of consensus, and this magically seems to dissolve the violent differences arising out of representational politics, which anyway does not represent all the interests. Moreover, it has the added advantage of not alienating individuals. The monotony of modernity which brings along with it uniformity is also not there in the community existence.

Somehow, it is a Utopia that manages to contain within it all the positive claims of modernity (like democracy and individual growth etc.) without having its negative aspects. How all this is executed in various communities is never studied, but it is a taken-for-granted proposition in these theorists.

One way this is achieved is by studying cultures as isolated. Thus, tribe after tribe are studied as if other groups do not matter in their scheme of things, whereas, the particular tribal identity itself might gain meaning only with the interaction and comparison with other groups, both tribal as well as non-tribal. Even a peripheral knowledge of Wayanad, through its history and fieldwork convinces one that this is the condition of Adivasi identity (perhaps any social identity). Though at this stage I am not in a position to generalize, I suspect, this will be the case in most of the other areas as well.
Another problem is that the marginal voices within the community are given scant attention by these theorists. Or, they are dismissed as having been corrupted by the influences of modernity. One of the critiques against communitarian thinking has consistently come from women of marginalized sections. One can perhaps take the questioning coming from the Dalit women's side as symptomatic of the questions that can be raised from within other identity movements as well. Indira Jalli and Swathi M Margaret, while accepting many precepts of the Dalit movement and the mainstream women's movement, also criticize them for not accepting the Dalit woman's identity as a conceptual and analytical category. These identitarian critiques are completely ignored by the worshippers of non-modernity.

As Sangeeta **Kamat** who has unleashed a scathing critique against this model of looking at tribes says:

The ideal of the "tribe" has provided for the production of images of organic cultures and identities, detached from the more differentiated and modern set of political, economic and social relations typified by caste, religion and commerce. Such theorizing predicated as it is on an image rather than an actually existing situation has allowed both for a romance with, and a rejection of, tribals. The modern subject's nostalgia for a "lost" state of freedom, on the one hand, and its censure of the non-modern on the other, coalesce around this image. Thus, debates among Indian anthropologists have tended to operate within the dualism of tribal as "noble savage" who must be protected from the ravages of modernity and tribals as 'primitive' needing to be urgently assimilated into the State processes of a developing society. As such the binary represents the continuation of colonial thinking in a postcolonial context, where the Colonial/National self battles over the fate of the Exotic other.

It is my contention that the new environmental movements draw mostly from this kind of stereotyping though many of them might be seeing themselves as valorizing, rather than denigrating the tribes. **But**, this valorizing, again as Kamat points out, loses out on history and does not consider the Adivasis themselves as subjects and agents of history. Guha's problems with Gandhi, if connected to a rejection of Gandhi's "reformative" urge, especially regarding the "degraded sexuality and drinking habits" of
the tribes, does not become pointed because he takes Elwin as representing the alternative. This is the same contradiction that new environmental movements also contain.

The binaries, which have informed the State policy discourse on the tribes, range between protectionism from corrupt modernity to immediate assimilation into the dominant groups. These two are diametrically opposite discourses. The contradiction is evident when theorists are trying to grapple with the situation after years of study also. Thus, Bipan Chandra's analysis of those times rings with this contradiction: "The preservation of tribal people's rich social and cultural heritage lay at the heart of the government's policy of tribal integration."

The very act of integration was against the preservation motive. But the tribal policy was supposed to contain both. Perhaps, the confusion in the Nehruvian policy of slow assimilation was precisely this—that it tried to bring opposing paradigms in one instance. Chandra says that Nehru rejected both the approaches of isolation and assimilation. The approach of keeping the tribes in the "non-modern purity" as museum pieces to be written about, he thought was an "insult" on them. Moreover, isolation, even if desirable was impossible at this stage. But neither did he want them to be 'engulfed by masses of Indian humanity." But I feel, rather than a rejection of these two approaches, it was a combination of both. As an administrator, he could not be an aesthete and an academician like Elwin. (However much the latter influenced him.) He believed in a principle of slow assimilation of the tribal people into the mainstream. He believed that they would choose the pace.

It is not surprising that given the virulence with which these ideas on the tribes were fought on the intellectual arena of pre-independence India, these two approaches had to pit themselves as the only way to see these communities.
The analysis of the Orientalist discourse on India can provide a useful entry point into the analysis of the binary in which the Adivasis were forced to function in India, i.e. the binary of protection and integration. India was seen by the colonizers either as barbaric or boasting of a better history than Europe. Though there were many schools among the Orientalists, finally what remained were these two opposing camps that defined themselves against each other. Though there was enough valorization of India's past, the golden-Vedic-past school also agreed to the corruption that had befallen that great civilization and in effect did not make any attempt to speak against colonization of the land. The valorization of an alien culture was convenient for them who were intellectually questioning their modernity. The breaking of spiritual sources of respite due to modernity in the West is supposed to have opened up the Eastern religions and cultures as alternatives to the jagged Christianity bogged down by the Church.

One of the main sites where the nation was constructed was the Orientalist texts dealing with India. There are many theories about the Orientalist constructions of India. According to the Saidian notion, the Orient was constructed to justify the colonization by the Western civilization.

There are so many connections between how the Orientalists considered India and the nativist scholars are regarding the Adivasis now. The Orientalists had brought into play the "epochal deployment of time" as Tharu and Lalita put it. To quote them:

The Indologists regarded the three thousand years that followed the Vedic culture age as degeneration. But since the spiritual power of ancient India was also prescribed as the cure for contemporary ills—in a gesture that connected the present directly to this, past—the entire span of India history from the Vedic period until the nineteenth century froze into a single ill.\(^{33}\)

This is exactly how the tribes have been considered by the neo-primitivists. In fact, Elwin is even compared to an Orientalist by Guha himself. For instance, Guha spells out his mission in writing the biography quite clearly in the very first pages itself.
He places his work in the context of the different kinds of history writing available - the British variety that sees the adventures, and sacrifices and the gallantry of the colonial authorities in the figures of Younghusband or Mountbatten, or the Indian nationalist who sees the triumphant struggle against the White masters. Or yet again, the subalternist historian who is trying to recover the small voice of history obliterated by either schools. Guha thinks all groups see history as the struggle between the White and the Brown and cannot account for the complexity that he feels persons like Elwin represent. But immediately, the figures he compares with Elwin are Annie Besant and he uses Shiv Viswanathan's term "the other side of Raj" to refer to these figures. Annie Besant is now seen to be an orientalist who was not questioning the caste hierarchies in India at all and her contribution to the history of India's elite is duly acknowledged. It is not as if she is forgotten in nationalist history at all. Yes, Guha does mention in passing that Besant knew only "one kind of India." Elwin is a more complex figure. But it is also clear that his complexity will be seen in the context of Indian nationalist historiography. As Guha himself puts it

To write about Verrier Elwin is to throw fresh light on men of influence like Gandhi and Nehru, to focus once more on forgotten and oppressed peoples, to travel through all parts of India, to anticipate (by decades) current ideas of religious dialogue and cultural pluralism, to explore the practice of governments colonial and nationalist. In his life, and more so in his work, some of the great debates of the twentieth century find eloquent expression. A book on a man as public and controversial as Elwin shades the difference between self and society, biography and history.

What is the effect of resurrecting a figure like Elwin in today's political milieu in India? What are the debates that are feeding into this? What is the effect of this on tribes themselves? These are questions to be asked.

The connection between the Orientalists of India and the romantic viewing of tribal life is the consideration of the tribes as having been frozen in time-and-of existing without any connection with history. Many studies draw direct connection between the
Stone Age and the present existing tribes. For instance, many works on Wayanad will mention that the Edakkal caves are supposed to be from the Megalithic period and then try to see connections between the present tribes of Wayanad.\(^{37}\) If they fail to do so, they only blame it on the corruption of the Adivasis rather than rethink the framework of freezing living cultures onto a past time. The famous thesis of Johanna Fabian on the time and the other (also the tide of his book) is relevant here.\(^{38}\)

The forest, in this scheme of things becomes a space frozen in time and history that Guha chooses to leave without comments. The essential connection between the Adivasi and the forest has been a favourite theme with the new environmental movements. It is portrayed as space, not just of physical sustenance but also of emotional and spiritual sustenance. The crisis in global environmental scenario has led people to search for alternatives for a capital and resource-over use centric mode of living, among other "non-modern" lives. The Adivasi of course comes out as a "natural" choice. But the implications for this mode of thinking on the Adivasis themselves are quite serious.

Perhaps one can say that Elwin represents the complexity of the debate that has centered around Adivasis in India—of autonomy and isolation. There was no way questions of political and social autonomy of the marginalized sections can be asked independently as far as Adivasis were concerned during Elwin's time. They had to be necessarily combined with questions of isolation. Perhaps, during Elwin's times it was also the easiest possible way to deal with questions of autonomy that the Adivasis are raising right now in India. It is unfortunate that the debate got bogged down in their life styles which has to be "preserved" not just for them but for the whole of humanity.

In one way, Guha is absolutely right, that the great debates of the twentieth century were codified in one life. But, the tragedy of Adivasi existence, perhaps anywhere in the world is that these questions come together. As long as questions of
isolation are not articulated politically by the Adivasis themselves, they remain the soul searches of the white anthropologist in search of the exotic other, to valorize, to worship and even love. But, it ceases to see these groups as agents of history and of struggle, even of negotiation. It becomes a requiem for a lost world, a nostalgic and already doomed attempt at preserving the Utopia of humanity’s pasts.

Moreover, with the combining of environmental theories and an interest in the indigenous technologies, this becomes a site where the Adivasi has to preserve his/her own lifestyle not just for the sake of "science", but also as a survival mechanism for other mainstream cultures. This in itself might now sound problematic.

But, when one considers the fate of other "sites", which have preserved culture for the sake of others, then the problems related to this viewpoint becomes clear. The dominant caste woman was forced into this role by the nationalists to oppose the white colonialists. She became the repertoire of Indian values and culture. This also gave the dominant caste woman a set of peculiar problems related to "Indian" femininity defined only as motherhood and chaste wifehood.

I wish to end this section with a recounting of a contemporary event in Kerala and how these debates actually impinge on the daily struggles of Adivasis. The Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha had formed as part of the ongoing agitation for land that was articulated by the Kerala Adivasis. For the first time in the history of the Kerala Adivasi a regional/state identity of the Adivasi became possible politically.

One finds the strange phenomenon of both the Adivasi and the non-Adivasi, supporting the issue as well as opposing it, taking recourse to the same rhetoric of the Adivasi’s essentialised connection with the forest. C.K. Janu in a personal interview said: "If you make land into a human being, then that human is the Adivasi." Her biography also draws direct connection with the Adivasi and the land. Though there are many
quotations about the land struggle I have chosen a paragraph which draws a symbolic connection between her Adivasi self and the land/earth. I quote from the book:

When we were young, there was no mirror in our huts. I first saw a mirror when I went to work at Vellamundu, to look after a child. It had a wooden handle. Some parts of it looked fungus-covered. In those parts I could not see my reflection. On returning from Vellamundu, in our hut, on the back wall, a piece of mirror was stuck with dung. A small piece of mirror. We stick seeds for future use like this on the walls of the hut. I do not know who had pressed the mirror piece like a seed on the wall. Because the mirror was a small piece I could now see myself completely in it; only some parts were reflected. Must buy a whole mirror.  

The mirror can also be read as an oft-used image for the self is employed here to show a fragmented, still forming individual self. This self is likened to the seeds on the walls of her childhood. It is self, her Adivasi self, connected to land, to the earth, and to the dung where the seeds are stuck.41

The non-Adivasis who were expected to support the struggle for land did not actually do so. For instance, Sugathakumari, a famous poet from Kerala had written a number of articles supporting the Adivasi cause.42 But, when the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha decided to take over the Muthanga sanctuary as part of the struggle, Sugathakumari was the first to protest, saying the sanctuary was the habitat of the endangered elephants and the Adivasis should give up their rights over forestland. Moreover, the Prakruthi Samrakshana Samithi, the ecologists of Kalpetta has served legal notice to C.K. Janu and others for encroaching on forestland.

These arguments serve to draw attention to the Adivasi-forest connection. The very people who were speaking of such a connection are now opposing the struggles of the Adivasis. Rather than showing that it is a contradiction that has happened without any special reason, we should see it as the expression of an inherent contradiction in the arguments of the ecologists who see the Adivasi a site for their struggles.
It is keeping **this** context in mind that I would like to analyze a text written in **Malayalam** which takes up the Adivasi identity as a major point of delineation.

**Maveli Mantam**

This part of the chapter will examine the text, *Maveli Mantam* in the light of the arguments evolved in the previous section of the chapter. This analysis of the text is also a re-look at the essentialist debates on the connection between the Adivasis and a harmonious life with nature, especially in the context of Kerala of the 1980s.

K J. Baby is known in Kerala for the alternative educational institution for Adivasi children. He is a non-Adivasi activist and thinker who is right now engaged in the running of an experimental school in Nadavayal, Wayanad for Adivasi children. The school is named *Kanavu*, which means "the dream". Teaching stresses the image of the dream, or utopia, a powerful symbol which keeps recurring in his novel also. In a way, Baby's play with reality and fiction (which is the subject to be analyzed in the following section) seems to be continuing in his various identities as a social activist, educationist and creative writer.

*Kanavu* is also seen as an experiment in preserving the threatened Adivasi culture for the children from these communities. As Baby himself elaborates:

...I believe strongly that learning of history is not the knowledge of various Kings and monarchs and their numerous attempts at reform, colonization or descriptions of the battles they fought. Nor is it the eternal love story of Shah Jahan and *Mumtaz*. That can also be history, that is all. Beyond all this, is the understanding of one's own culture and capturing one's destiny.\(^{43}\)

Thus, cultural revivalism is seen to be an important part of teaching in *Kanavu*. The same revival is seen to be connected to ecological knowledge systems.

*Maveli Mantam* won the prestigious Kerala Sahitya Akademi award for the best novel in 1984. It was hailed as a bold experiment in the use of language and in Kerala, this was seen to be novel and daring. In a way, in **Kerala**, it has become a canonical text.
as far as the subject of the representations of Adivasis is concerned. These are all, I believe, reasons for taking the text as an important site to see the representation of the Adivasis.

The following trial is a sketchy attempt to introduce the complex text in a capsule form for the non-Malayalee readers. It deals with the Adivasis of Wayanad—especially the Adivasi community enlisted as Adiyas in the Indian Constitutional Schedule. They are also called Ravulas, the name by which the community calls itself. Maveli Mantam can safely be characterized as Utopian fiction. It is the mythical search for the land of Maveli which serves as an image for an Adivasi ideal/utopia.

The story behind the myth of Mahabali is circulated in the mainstream society of Kerala. It goes like this:

According to the myth, Mahabali, or Maveli as he is popularly known in Kerala, was an Asura King. His rule was famous as the rule of the just. The Brahmin boy Vamanan, an incarnation of Vishnu was sent by the jealous Devas to destroy the Asura King. Vamanan asked for three steps of land from the generous Mahabali. Unsuspectingly he complied. With the first step, Vamanan measured the whole of the earth, with the next, the heavens. For the third, the just King showed his own head. Vamanan sent him to the pathala, or the netherworld. Once a year, Mahabali is supposed to visit his subjects to enquire after their well-being.

This myth is also behind the festival of Onam celebrated in Kerala. The songs behind the festival celebrate the oneness of people, the lack of cunning and dishonesty and the equality mat prevailed among the subjects of Mahabali. It is definitely a theme for Utopian writers.

The time dealt with in the novel revolves around a historical happening—during and after Pazhassi’s revolt against the East India Company. This happened in the last part of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. The main incident in
the novel is the selling and subsequent escape of a slave Kaippadan from his master's field. He also takes his lover, Ira, with him. Thus, the text serves as an exposition of the oppression unleashed on the Adivasi slaves by the masters and the trials of the slaves to escape this oppression. The novel also progresses through memory and the talks between two old people, Jevaran and his sister, Mutha. Finally, there is a reunion of all the Adivasi characters in the woods, where they exchange ideas of alternatives to the world in which they find themselves.

The text uses the myths of Ravulas to explicate the vision given. The myth of Maveli Mantam serves as the central organizing principle of the text. The myth of the Maveli Mantam is analyzed here to see what the non-modern alternative and the role of the Adivasis are in this narrative.

The novel progresses building on certain binaries and trying to find a fictional resolution through their delineations. For the sake of analysis I have divided them into binaries of reality and fiction which I have taken as organizing the whole text. The other sub-binaries come under this main difference which is built. For instance, the difference in language between the language of myths or music and the language of swearing, the state of slavery and the state of escape, the condition of being brutish and the condition of being human, ignorance and knowledge, and factual history versus mythical time—all this are connected to the reality-fiction binary. The central myth of the Utopia creates "our world" as opposed to the reality which is the thampuran's (the master's) world. The field where the Adivasis experience servitude and the forest where they experience freedom is also contrasted. The following section tries to get into the text through an analysis of these binaries that shape the text.

**Reality and Fiction: The Constant Tension in the Text**

One of the main binaries that determine the organization of the text is the binary of reality and fiction. This binary, expresses itself in the form and content of the text.
The text itself provides a theoretical explanation for the presence of the mythical elements in it. The following excerpt from the text proves this.

This happens at a stage in the narrative when a boastful Ravula man, Kakkiri claims that he, in the middle of some commotion between two groups of slave owners, had broken the sacred thread of a Brahmin as well as scratched the skin off his back. But others dismiss his claims, as Kakkiri is known to be an empty windbag, a coward, who was hiding in the woods when the commotion was happening. An argument starts about the truth of the matter. Jevaran, another character, in his old man's wisdom thinks:

Whether it is truth or fiction, it is great mat Kakkiri felt like saying that. Only when you think like that can you speak like that. Let many such thoughts flower. Let many a thread of the Brahmin break. Let many of their backs break.45

This can be read as the claim made by the text too. It also throws light on the interspersed technique of using reality and myth, the form adopted by the text. It is a political choice to intersperse the form of the text with both—history and desire. It is the central idea of Baby's vision of Maveli Mantam. Whether it is truth or fiction, let such thoughts flower. It does not matter, so long as the thought itself is there. This play with truth and fiction is there throughout the organization of the text and appears to be a political choice for the author.

**The Reality Effect in the Narrative**

For instance: the text is very much like an ethnographic text with Adivasi songs almost quoted in full. Baby has given the *Pulappattu* of the Ravulas in various parts of the text. Each time the lay reader encounters difficulty, the text provides footnotes. This makes the novel resemble a collection of folksongs and ethnographic information about the Wayanad Adivasis.

Also, the novel ends with an appendix, a very important part of the text itself. There is a photocopy of an original court order in Malayalam. The judgment of the
Wynad Munsiff court dated 1834, file number 92 is quoted in full. This endorses the pawning of the lower caste labourer, Kaippadan for Rs.8 to Meethale Ayyassami Pattar by Kammath Edechana Achu.

This gives the reader a sense of the times, and the impersonal bureaucratic language of the courts, which so coldly stand by when a human life is "sold" as an unimportant commodity while two people settle their accounts. Baby moreover assures us that this small piece of paper disturbed him enough to write a novel about the incident in the appendix itself.

Moreover, there is an acknowledgement naming his "sources" which many creative writers do not do. It is almost like that of a thesis acknowledgement. The novelist gratefully remembers the people, who have parted with their stories, which has led to the writing of the novel, many of them, Adivasis. They are remembered along with the intellectuals who have helped Baby in conceptualizing his text, in some way acknowledging their equal importance.

The novel has combined various narrative strategies— of academic writing, history writing and folklore (ethnography) writing. It even uses archival research. It can also perhaps be seen as a creative use of language parodying how the Adivasis have figured in the dominant group's writings. It uses all the strategies of the dominant culture, especially its ways of speaking, but uses it for a different purpose.

Reality also comes to the reader not just through the form of the text, but also through its thematic divisions. The terrifying slavery to which the Adivasis are subjected is described in great detail and this evokes the effect of reality. Each part of their lives are delineated in a repetitive way so that the reality of slavery in its everyday form strikes the reader's minds.
The Reality of Work

One such theme is the work done by the slaves. The detailed recounting of all the work done, along with the feelings behind the doing of repulsive work is clearly mentioned in the novel. The work ranges from physical to sexual labour.

When Mutha suspects that Kaippadan is sold off to some other thampuran, she speaks about all the work he does, counting them one by one. It is like a ritual chant, but what enters the mind is the repetitive and tedious nature of Kaippadan’s work.

In a similar vein, the Adivasi woman's work is recounted by an irate Ira who refuses in her mind to go to work at least the day Kaippadan disappeared. She thinks:

Let whoever wants clean the yard and the house of the master,
Let whoever wants wash the dishes.
Let whoever wants prepare the medicine mix for the master's head and the lady's scabs.
Let whoever wants clean their shit today.
Let whoever wants pound the grains, make rice, sift it, clean it, wash it, cook it, sieve the water out of it and serve it.
No.
I can't.
I just can't.47

This kind of detailed recounting of work done, is not just to show the amount of unpaid labour, but also the care the slaves actually take to do the master's job and the ingratitude which is their due. It also shows the humiliating circumstances under which the work proceeds. Images of revulsion are always combined with the slave's labour.

For the woman, apart from these jobs, is also included the reproductive labour. The text also mentions it. When Ira warns her friend Champi that the master has whistled in the early hours of the morning to go for work, Champi says:

If he is making the sound of a male goat, it is to mount one of us. Just go to sleep. Otherwise, like me, you also will have to bear the child of the master.48

The text not only sees the sexual harassment on the Adivasi women as unseen labour. That their wombs are potentially usable, with or without the master raping them
is an understanding the women characters in the novel share. The oath that the three friends, Ira, Jevani and Champi take that they will never bear children is a resistance to this exploitation. They know that if they produce babies they are only increasing the size of the master's fields.

The name of the main character also bears his close connection to work. Kaippadan means, the one with the mark in his hand. It is the mark of labour that the Adivasi characters carry in their hand.

The connection between the myth element and work in the novel is also telling. It is by giving up on the dreams that the Adivasi labours for the master. When Jevaran asks Kaippadan to create his own music, he says-he has no time for all that.

**Brutish Masters and Slaves** made **Brutes through Labour**

Another way in which the reality of slavery comes into the reader's imagination is through the play between brutishness and humanity. It is also an important technique used to draw the difference between the two worlds—of the master's and the slave's. The efforts of the masters are to constantly reduce the slave into a brute of labour. This happens through constant swear words addressed at the slave which often evoke animal imagery. "You-son-of-a-bitch" and "you-son-of-a-boar" are constantly used to address the labourers. Speaking about Kaippadan's sale the narrative voice says: "Even if he knows what can he, who is brought and sold like cattle do? Nothing." 49

The implications of being considered brutes for the Adivasi women are more severe. Menokki, or the manager, of the new master's fields comes to the shacks of the slaves in the wee hours of the morning. His intention is to see to it that the slaves have intercourse amongst themselves so that the women will soon become pregnant. 50

But, in contrast to the wishes of the masters, the imagery in the text constantly portrays them as brutish and evoking disgust. It is clear from his name onwards—one of the masters is called "Karadi" which means a "bear". As mentioned earlier, the Adivasi
women speak amongst themselves about the male goat sounds Ambu thampuran makes during sexual intercourse with absolute repulsion.

The way the slaves refuse to fit into forced brute identity is by realizing the brutishness of the masters themselves. Also, they are shown not to lose a sense of humour even under dire circumstances. Thus, they notice that the masters are greedy to a suicidal extent. The first reaction of Karadi Thampuran when the frightened Ravulas tell him that there are strangers in the wood is to gobble the food, which is already in his mouth, and only then attend to such an important matter.

imagining the Utopia

All the above mentioned narrative techniques help the text locate itself in a curious plane of the too “real”, of the historical. Yet, it is also located in the absolutely imaginary fiction of Maveli Mantam. The imagined Utopia of the future, the fictionalized and mythical, criss-cross with the present and the past realities/history of the Adivasi existence in Wayanad. The result is the effect of life that has "actually happened", yet which is parallel, imaginary too.

As all Utopias, this is also imagined in the future. Yet, for it to evolve, an understanding of the past as well as the present is important. This is perhaps the reason why the text starts with the fictionalized version of the "actual" or historical figure, Kaippadan.

The inherent connection with history and the evolution of Utopias, or ideals, are dealt with in the text through this mixing of reality and fiction. Only people who know their past/history can resist the oppression of the present. It might be with this idea that Kaippadan, a "real" historical character is resurrected in a fictional form as the main character in the novel. This "reality" of Kaippadan is juxtaposed into the clearly mythical search and escape of both Ira and Kaippadan in search of ‘Maveli Mantam’ in the text. This fiction, the escape and the idea of "Maveli Mantam", can be read as the desire for a
better world, a search for a more dignified and perfect existence from the squalor of the present. This content creates thus the form of a mythical narrative, interspersing with the hard reality of history and the flight of mythical fancy in the form of “Maveli Mantam”. The woods to which both the lovers escape fleeing oppression and slavery, and where they search for the mythical "Maveli Mantam", serves as a powerful symbol of Utopia.

Thus, for the sake of analysis, we can see that there are two parts to the text. The "reality" bit and the "imagination" bit. The reality bit is the exposition of history as well as the present reality of Adivasi existence in Wayanad. The bitterness of slavery and its day-to-day resistance is a historical reality of the Adivasis experience. This is clearly explicated in the events as well as the style of the novel, pertaining to the "history" and everyday oppressions of the Adivasis. It should be admitted that the ways in which the text deals with the oppression of the Adivasis, and some trials of resistance are unique and never dealt with in this way in Malayalam literature. The fictional bit, or "Maveli Mantam" itself, is the search for an alternative to escape the slavery involved in daily existence of the Adivasis.

The Myth Of “Mavelimantu”

The myth of “Mavelimantu” is the central myth of the narrative. This myth holds together the whole structure. These myths are supposed to be ethnographically collected by KJ.Baby himself and therefore carry the stamp of "reality" or research. Unlike the other myths of the Adivasis this myth is one of hope.

In the narrative, Jevaran passes this myth on to his community, represented by Ira and Kaippadan, the rapt listeners of his stories. Also, in the text, it comes as an answer and a counter myth to the hopelessness of keyoolokam. The myth of "Mavelimantu" begins as follows:
Long ago, we also had a golden time. When we were no one's slaves. It was the time of Mavelimantu.

It was a small manram who knew how to slash and cultivate the woods. They also knew how to wait and reap the crops. They would irrigate the crops with the river water. They cultivated together, reaped together and lived sharing everything together. Mavelimantu was the chief of the manram. There was no Adiya or Paniya, neither Kurichiyan or Kuruma, nor Nayar or Nambiar.

All were human beings. No deceit or dishonesty, just ordinary people. When they were existing without any problem like that, three rogues of masters arrived. They went there wearing a man's smile. Mavelimantu welcomed them warmly. But, the first chance they got, those three masters stole the earth of the manram.

When the chief found this deceit out, he asked for the earth and the manram back.

The masters kicked Mavelimantu and his blood spluttered on the soil of the manram. 51

This is how the myth understands, the creation of slavery. But more than that, it is a myth about a golden time that the Adivasis or human beings seem to have had and then lost to the greed of the people who finally created masters and slaves.

Along with this is given a myth existing among the Paniyas of Wayanad—the myth of keeyoolokam. The Paniyas believe that keeyoolokam is the place where they reach after death. This is where they will enter unending slavery without any hope of escape.

Analyzing Baby's Utopia

This myth is the best way to get into the idea of what Baby means by his Utopia. The idea of "small" keeps repeating in his narrative. "It was a small manram." The smallness of the manram is in its economic organization as well as the number of people who constitute the manram.

Perhaps, as Sachidanandan says in the Introduction to the text, it was a kind of "primitive communism" that Baby was envisaging. The idea of Schumacker's Small is Beautiful that comes as a questioning of the huge development models before the seventies has clearly influenced him. The origin of private property, which is mythically expressed as the masters stealing the land, is also a sign of Baby's Marxian leanings.
Thus, there is a connection drawn between the manageable and small primitive economies and the egalitarian set up which is "naturally" supposed to follow. The connection between self-sufficiency as an economic principle and the lack of differences among the various groups of humans, i.e. an egalitarian social set up, are emphasized in the myth.

But, is there any factual truth about the existence of egalitarianism and "small" economies? The groups, which are propounding the concept of return to a village economy and self-sufficient villages, have close connection with these ideas. In the nineteen eighties, such groups which took up this idea in Kerala were the ecology groups who were deeply influenced by a brand of neo-Gandhism. The unlikely combination of a materialist Marx and a culturalist/spiritualist Gandhi formed an easy marriage among the rhetoric of these groups. They were mostly disgruntled Marxists who had been with the radical left for some time. Influenced by the new social movements, especially the rise of the Green party in Germany, they translated these ideas to read Indian social reality.

K.J. Baby's own personal history is a disenchantment with the left, connection with the radical left in its cultural activities, and then, a dialogue with the ideas of ecology and alternative education, in the form of Kanavu, the alternative school he runs for Adivasi children.

Many scholars have theoretically debunked the return to the self-sufficient village, B.R. Ambedkar being the foremost among them. For instance, Surinder S. Jodhka says that while Gandhi firmly believed in the idea of the self-sufficient village, Ambedkar, firmly from a dalit perspective, on the other hand, found the city a more liberating space than the exclusionary village. The egalitarianism, which was a claim of the more micro spaces like the village, turns out to be a complete myth as far as the Dalits were concerned.\textsuperscript{52}
But, is there any truth about the self-sufficient and therefore more egalitarian tribal groups imagined to be prior to the advent of caste system and therefore of village communities? This "Rousseauan" myth also has been debunked. For instance, see the *Invention of the *Primitive*, where Kuper argues that the imaginary primitive was invented so as to correspondingly contrast to all the qualities that characterized modern Europe. Since modern Europe was based on capitalist system based on private property and since it was characterized by class society, theorists like Morgan who played an important role in the invention of the primitive, imagined the primitive society to be characterized by just the opposite attributes - primitive communism with no private property and egalitarian social organization. More than reality, it was the necessity to create the "other" of the capitalist modernity that prompted the invention of the primitive.

Baby is working on the same myth. He is inventing a primitive utopia. But, what about his claim that fiction need not be real, but the imagination itself might lead to reality, and therefore, it has a legitimacy to exist. This claim is quite legitimate. At one level, he can also be seen as speaking about the political implications of representations. Yet, it is important to analyze Baby's Utopia to know its various strands. While imagination need not prove its legitimacy by its connection to "truth", it definitely will have to prove legitimacy by the reflection of whom it is going to help.

The myth of Mahabali is a purana myth of the Hindus. This is the myth behind the Onam festival. In the curious way in which the majority community's festivals becomes national festivals, Onam has come to symbolize Malayalee identity and Kerala state has adopted this harvest festival as its state festival. The way this myth of the Vamana pushing the just king to the netherworld is interpreted is as the coming of the Aryans and the colonization of the non-Aryans. Baby is using this myth of the dominant culture, to rework it, allegedly to represent the history and interests of Adivasis.
In ways that is very “literary”, Baby is interpreting it in universal ways—of oppression of the just and innocent. But, the way in which Onam is celebrated in Kerala, as a harvest festival with feudal roots is forgotten in this mythical recreation of the story. The festival was an opportunity where feudal relations were reasserted in the past. The landlord would get presents of agricultural product from his tenants and this would be the ritual way of asserting his dominance and the subservience of the tenants. In return, he would bestow his ritual blessings on the lower caste tenants. The Dalit castes did not get any special treatment during Onam. In fact the saying "Even if Onam comes or a boy is born, Koran still gets his gruel in a leaf bowl” symbolizes the unchanged situation of the agricultural slaves.

The Adivasis of Wayand were agrestic slaves. It would have been interesting to read what they think about the myth of Onam. The masters imagining a Utopia "all were one", "where divisions did not exist", yet at the same time, in practice asserting the feudal divisions in its practice... what would it have meant for the slaves themselves?

I argue that it is in this central myth that the text deconstructs itself. The alliances that are thrown upon as alternatives to the Adivasis seem to be pulling the argument of oppression down. This will be elaborated more in the next pages.

The alternatives to slavery come as the mythical or Utopian part of the novel. The alternatives to oppression are given as three fictional choices to the main characters, who run away into the woods to escape slavery. This comes at the end of the narrative. They are recounted by various narrators when there is a reunion of all the Adivasis in the woods with the runaways. The following are the stories:

1. Chikkannan's Story-The fleeing Ira and Kaippadan meet a runaway slave who has joined the British plantations. He invites them over to work in the fields. But, they refuse. For this is not their "Maveli Mantam".
2. **Kakkiri’s Story**—Ira and *Kaippadan* meet *Komban Mooppan*, an outlaw who roams the forest and who has a band of robbers who focus on the feudal lords. He invites them to join him. But both refuse since this is not the vision they have of "Maveli Mantam".

3. **Chamayan’s Story**—They meet *Chami*, the upper caste medicine man in the forest, who cures *Kaippadan*’s illness. Then they also see *Chirutayi* and her husband, *Kelappan* who are both roaming the woods. The couples decide to be together. Chirutayi gives birth to twin boys. They suspect they have reached "Maveli Mantam".

These three alternatives have to be analyzed in detail to understand the Utopian vision of K.J. Baby.

In the first alternative, *Kariyan*, the runaway slave who joins the plantations as a labourer comes as the main character. The invitation by Kariyan is to lose their Adivasi identity and join the proletariat, without caste/tribal identities or oppressions. The changes he describes are all the transformations of a feudal economy into a capitalist one. According to Kariyan the pleasures of working for the White plantation owner are the following: You work according to the ringing of the bell, there is no unlimited labour, you are paid in rupees, and you can buy anything with money. Most importantly, you don't have to follow caste rules in wearing clothes and they don't consider the workers as mere animals.

But this alternative is rejected by Ira and Kaippadan without much discussion. This is because they see the burnt forests and also place Kariyan as a parodic character who is a coward.

It is true that the capitalist labour would have been exploitative for the Adivasis. But, even to arm themselves against the feudal economy, the narrative does not allow
this alternative. This is because of the ecological vision of the text, which places British colonization as a worse evil than feudal exploitation.

The second alternative which comes in the form of Kakkiri's story speaks about the politics of outlaws. Komban Moopan reminds one of the forest brigand Veerappan, who also, like Moopan sports a hanging moustache. He is a Robinhood-like character who is the saviour of the poor and the oppressor of the rich. He steals from the latter to distribute to the poor.

This alternative, to be a kind of Robinhood, is also rejected by both Ira and Kaippadan, and therefore by the narrative. The reasons for rejection are not clearly mentioned in the text. What we understand is that this life will not provide them with the decision-making capacities, and that is what they need in their "Maveli Mantam".

In many ways, this section does acknowledge the connection between crime and poverty and the subversive potential of criminal gangs. But, it is also rejected in that it is not a perfect solution to the problems of the Adivasis.

The third alternative as explicated in the story told by Chamayan requires more elaboration. The couple first encounters Charmi, a medicine man who himself has run away from the master's house. He is already introduced to the readers as the more benign face of the master's house. Chirutayi, and her whole family are already seen to be kind. Chirutayi's family has been fighting the British. Her grandfather leaves her with her uncle who has deserted the family and has come to stay with his relatives. Chirutayi undergoes untold miseries in the house and the slaves develop a deep intimacy with her. She later runs away from the home and joins a Kurichia warrior of the chieftain Pazhassi, who is hiding in the woods.

Pazhassi is a historical character. He led an armed revolt against East India Company between the years 1800-1805. He was killed in battle. Many Kurichia and
Kuruma Adivasis, along with Nair chieftains of Wayanad, were involved in this resistance against the British.

In the fantasy, what is reconstructed is the reunion of the Adivasis with this supposedly benign part of the master's culture. It is also significant that Baby chooses the setting of Pazhassi's struggle to explicate these relations. Though there is a mention that Pazhassi's struggle against the British did not give anything to the Adivasis, the narrative also describes the doomed fight in quite romantic terms. Chirutayi's grandfather is talked of as a man with flowing white beard like the clouds. The imagery of nature is reserved in the text only for positive portrayals. He is the man who is valiantly fighting the British even in his old age.

Pazhassi's struggle has been variously seen as the valiant struggle of the indigenous populations against the British colonizers as well as the struggle of the losing feudal system against a new form of power. The participation of Kurichia and Kuruma Adivasis have given it the colour of a tribal revolt against the British. While it does have those qualities, there is also the criticism that the tribes who were into agricultural slavery were not affected by all this and only the peasant tribes were part of it. O.K. Johnny dismisses the revolt as the old system which was resisting any modernization and warns against people who are trying to revive Pazhassi's history now. K.K.N. Kurup does not take Johnny's stand. But he also reads Pazhassi's revolt as the revolt of the traditional society. (He reads traditional society itself in positive terms). Margaret Frenz also sees the figure Pazhassi as following the raja dharma or the King's ethics, a value of traditional society.

Thus, we see that the scholars are varied in their assessment of Pazhassi struggles. But, from what is given in the text, we see that Baby did see the possibility of the struggle against the British being of use for the Adivasis.
But, I feel that in many ways this is quite an impossibility. The revolt of Pazhassi's traditional society, no one claims, was for the uplift of the agrestic slave communities. It was to keep the traditional society alive, and this society considered ritual slavery as an important part of its social organisation. The fight was for the preservation of Pazhassi's rule over the British suzerainty. Here, the Ravula and Paniya communities were not, to my knowledge, involved.

In this condition, it is also strange that Baby's Maveli Mantam is a desire for an alliance with one part of the oppressor's group and not another group, with whom the Adivasis would be having at least a non-committal relation. The rejection of an alliance with the British colonizers and the outlaws and criminals are quite justified. But, they are not, when one considers the final alliance which is projected in the text. Strangely, the immediate oppressors, like the upper caste woman and the Kurichia man are seen to be their comrades.

This is where we have to go back to the central myth of the Maveli Mantam. As mentioned earlier, the myth of the Onam, a Utopia created by the oppressors themselves is used as a myth of the Adivasis. Can this be the liberating utopia for the Adivasi? This is a question we have to ask.

These questions become urgent because of the context of the new social movements, especially the ecology movement which is raising the alliance between all the oppressed groups and a more sane use of the environment. While the professed aims are laudable, what is actually happening is an obliterating of Adivasi history and struggle and a romantic revival of an imagined traditional society.

Ramachandra Guha's revival of Elwin and his idea of the tribe and K.J. Baby's efforts to write an Adivasi novel are both important. The portrayal of slavery and its oppressions in K.J. Baby assume such poignancy, which one can safely say, Malayalam literature has not seen. But, it is precisely in showing the agential Adivasi that the text
seems to be advocating a return to a non-existent past. The means of achieving this utopia is even more problematic. It is by advocating an alliance with the traditional society which the Adivasis might have to oppose to break loose from their state of slavery. Thus, the text is replete with the contradictions that the ecology movement which has found an articulation in Kerala also shares.

Guha shares this contradiction with Baby. He has chosen a very relevant topic, the construction of tribal identity, and has also chosen an important figure to work with—Verrier Elwin. But, the hagiographic way in which the biography proceeds, leaving the interpretation apparently open, but actually closing it for the reader by almost sharing the voice of Elwin, makes his work problematic. This works as an essentialist revival of tribal culture, which Elwin advocated. The combination of isolation of the tribes and their autonomy in Elwin’s writings makes it problematic to revive him at this stage.

Both the texts raise the questions of the complexity of the outsider speaking for any issue. While the personal motives of sincerity are not doubted about both the writers, their works also expose the difficulty of speaking for others, or, the impossibility rather.

The theoretical framework that I have employed draws from the critique of the mainstream environmental movement by the groups standing for social justice. Manus, for instance, argues that the mainstream environmental movements should listen to the critiques that are coming from the various social movements. He takes the critiques by the Native American, Black and women’s movements of the mainstream environmental movement. This kind of study, I feel, is a useful starting point to speak about meaningful alliances rather than one concern overshadowing every other concern and possible allies finding themselves in wrong camps. 61
Notes

1 These ideas, especially on the anti-modernity debates, have evolved through constant discussions with the Rethinking English Studies Project group and P. Thirumal.
2 Bhaskaran, 2002: Publisher's note by Ravi, D.C. (Translation mine).
3 For instance see Guha, R, 1990; Guha, R 1991; Gadgil and Guha, R 1993; Rangarajan, 2002 gives a good summary of all the debates so far. Also see Guha, S, 1996; Guha, S, 2002; Guha, S, 1999. Rangarajan and Sumit Guha have a different take on Ecology from Gadgil and Guha. The main difference, I feel, is the way they have both dealt with British colonization. For the Malayalam debates on ecology, see the little magazine Padhabhedam published by Padhabhedam group, Thrissur.
4 Nandy, 1992, ix.
5 Gro Harlem Bruntland quoted in Weeratunge, 2000, 249.
6 Utopias have been imagined in the Western culture at various points. The romantics imagined a Utopia connected to the myth of the noble savage which has direct connections with the twentieth century imaginings of the ecologically noble savage. The construction of the "organic community" by certain modernists like F.R. Leavis can also be seen as paving a base for the late twentieth century.
"The University of Chicago Press had advertised the book thus.
9 Guha, R 1999, x.
11 Agarwal, 1986, 376.
12 "Take his [Guha's] book — his biography of Vender Elwin. It's competent and cleanly written. But our political differences begin with his choice of subject - personally, I think we've had enough, come on, enough stories about white men, however interesting they are, and their adventures in the heart of darkness. As a subject for a biography, frankly, I am much more interested in Kosi Elwin, his Gond wife." Roy, 2001, 5.
13 Conrad, 1983. In this novel, Conrad speaks of the journey of his white protagonist into Africa, the colonized continent. It is an excruciatingly painful self search where he discovers to his horror, his own cruelties and lacks. The colonized never appear in any powerful way, except as mute sites on which the White man's self journey is inscribed. Anthropology has been long blamed as a discipline of gazers, the powerful field worker looking on the mute objects of her/his enquiry.
15 Moreover, the index of Guha's book does not have an entry for laipal Singh.
16 Guha, 1999, 277.
17 Guha, 1996, 2376.
18 Guha, 1996, 2378.
19 Guha, 1996, 2380.
20 For instance, Nandy, 1980.
21 To draw an analogy from the nationalist movement, Sudipta Kaviraj speaks about the discomfort that the elites in this country had with modernity. While they were the main consumers and benefited most from modernity, the upper castes of this country had, at the same time, an ambivalent relation with it. This might also be because the very modernity which gave them a lot of benefits also meant loss of power and hurt to the sense of their self worth, since it came along with colonisation. For the uppercastes, the white masters were to be emulated as well as despised precisely because of this ambivalent relation with modernity.
In the late 20th century, with the rise of the new social movements, there is a growing interest in Ecology as well as identities. There are many diverse theoretical strands which have interacted with this. The essentialist schools of the post-modernist strand have gone back to a pure non-modern position (theoretically of course!), drawing their sustenance from the cultural primitivists of the romantic times in Europe. Many of the ecological arguments which keep going back to a lost Eden before modernity, and which keep invoking the tribes as a lost world, have this very air about it. Kaviraj, 1992, 1-40.
22 Savarkar tried this in a different way. Gandhi had differences with that brand of nationalism and Hindu assertion.
23 A White woman who also shared his interest in missionary work. Her name was Mary Gillet.
24 Swati Margaret speaks about the effects of a similar stereotype working on Dalit women. I feel the same argument can be safely extended to include the Adivasi woman as well. Margaret, 2001.
25 It is an allegation because this goes against the theory of objectivity of the anthropologist.

32 If one can believe Guha, even Elwin changed his stand after the compulsions of the administrator took over.
33 Tharu and Latha, 1993, 50.
34 Guha, 1999, viii.
35 Guha, 1999, ix.
36 Guha, 1999, x.
37 For instance see Rajagopalan, 1999. Here he tries to draw connection between the Edakkal cave drawings and contemporary communities living in Wayanad.
38 There is a discussion of how Fabian's thesis on time is useful to look at the dominant group's construction of the tribe in this dissertation. Fabian, 1983.
39 Apart from the effects of this on the dominant caste woman on which there are any number of books by the feminist scholars in India, there are critiques of this position from the Dalit woman's perspective as well. One of the critiques is that the dominant caste woman was built as a site through the "invisibilising" and brutalizing of the Dalit woman. Personal Communication with Indira Jalli.
40 Jana, 2003, 21 (Translation as given in the magazine The Dalit)
41 Chitra Panikkar makes this interesting point that the demand for land by the adivasis constructing themselves as children of nature is strategic essentialism from the Adivasi point of view. There is a construction of them as children of nature or forest and when a demand is made for forest land it uses the same essentialist arguments as political strategy. See Panikkar, 2002.
43 Mamballi, 2002, 7 (Translation mine).
44 I have used the term "Ravula" to avoid the connotations of slavery which 'Adiya' carries.
45 Baby., 1999 (a), 176. (All translations from this text are mine)
46 The Pulappatu describes the story of Melorachan and Keeyorathi, the mythical ancestors of the Ravula community. In the story, Melorachan and Keeyorithi plan to escape from Karippur Kotta where they are slaves to Pakkathappan.
47 Baby, 1999 (a), 41.
48 Baby, 1999 (a), 42
49 Baby, 1999 (a), 51. (Emphasis mine)
50 The word used is "Chavittuka", literally meaning "stamp", but which is used for the forcible intercourse of domestic animals for reproduction. Baby, 1999 (a):38-39.
51 Baby, 1999 (a), 21.
53 Chapter 2 deals with these ideas in detail.
54 It is curious to note that the Adivasis from all over Kerala had reached Trivandrum to protest against the starvation deaths happening in Adivasi villages and went without food on Onam day to mark their protest against the apathy of the Government and the mainstream culture which was busy celebrating the tourist week in 2001.
55 Kaippadan is the son of Chotta, a Paniyan, who had run away fearing the East India Company and the Pazhassi soldiers. This shows that the Adivasi was only caught between the fights of two powerful forces and never got anything out of this fight. Both groups were harassing him/her.
He says that the traditional society was characterized by certain values like keeping a word if
given even to the enemy etc. Kurup, 1999, 137-139

In Wayanad Kunchia community also maintains strict untouchability rules with Paniyas and
Ravulas. They were integrated into a feudal economy with (he Nairs and Nambiar.s.

Manus, 1996.