Chapter 1
Introduction

This thesis attempts an exploration of the representations of Tribal India in literature by looking at selected texts from Anglo-Indian fiction, Indian English fiction and Indian fiction in English translation. Using novels and short stories from these categories, the study foregrounds the crucial historico-political contexts which facilitated the construction of images of Tribal India from colonial times to the present. This will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the changing tribal identity over the years and underscore the insights of sociologists by showing a complementary fictional view. It must be admitted that Tribal India is a large subject. Geographical, racial, cultural variations in terms of tribal life and behavior are enormous. We must therefore show enough critical discernment not to homogenize them under an all-purpose "Tribal" entity: whenever we talk of the tribals at the pan-Indian level, we must do so by acknowledging these variations and by, of course, understanding the common elements binding their life and culture, against the background of difference.

Though there exists a large body of creative work about tribal life and culture in India over the centuries, there seems to be inadequate critical literature on the subject. The portrayal of the tribals in fiction has largely been overlooked by critics. One reason for this might be that the critics, mainly from an urban elite background, tended to interest themselves only in exploring broad, pan-Indian subjects and not specific and local variations of culture. Anglo-Indian novelists like Rudyard Kipling, and John
Masters have been examined extensively in terms of large themes like East-West relations and the representation of India. However, the representation of the tribals, which is a local and specific cultural issue in these works, has remained largely unexplored by critics except for a few stray references. Indian English novels such as Arun Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Manohar Malgonkar’s *The Princes* (1963), Kamala Markandaya’s *The Coffer Dams* (1969), Gita Mehta’s *A River Sutra* (1993) and Ruskin Bond’s short stories also give a glimpse of tribal life, but critics have said little about the tribal motif in these texts. Novels in Indian languages about the tribals have, no doubt, supported critical works in Indian languages like Oriya, Kannada, Bengali, and so on. A few works of these writers have also appeared in English translation. Critical writings on the Oriya novelist Gopinath Mohanty by Sitakant Mahapatra and on the Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are cases in point. Sitakant Mahapatra’s *Reaching the Other Shore: The World of Gopinath Mohanty’s Fiction* (1992) and Gayatri C. Spivak’s article—“Woman in Difference: Mahasweta Devi’s Doulati the Bountiful” (1993)—and her introductory essays in *Imaginary Maps* (1995) and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (2002) are works that draw our attention. Apart from these, the studies done by researchers like Rajkumar, Ivy Imogene Hansdak and others are worth mentioning.

These studies, however, have limited themselves to the works of the concerned writers. Adequate effort has not been made in putting things into perspective by contextualizing their work in relation to the Anglo-Indian and Indian English writers’
representations of Tribal India. The endeavour in this study, therefore, is to examine selected novels dealing with Tribal India from the colonial period to the present time. This range will help in focusing on the representations of Tribal India at different times from a chronological perspective. Further, the study foregrounds the different points of view of these novelists and shows how these were shaped by an on-going historico-political discourse as discussed by critics like Allen Greenberger and others. The analysis of these texts largely depends on postcolonial theory and theory based on subaltern studies, and attempts to discuss the texts from the subaltern’s point of view.

The selection of the texts is not exhaustive. Writers and their texts are selected with a definite purpose. Rudyard Kipling’s short stories have been included because he is known as an advocate of colonialism and is quite popular as a writer of colonial India. The rationale for including Verrier Elwin does not require much explanation. Elwin had a long association with Tribal India so much so that he was synonymous with the word ‘Tribal India.’ He travelled through the tribal regions, and produced not only works on anthropology but also two important novels on the tribals, namely *Phulmat of the Hills* (1937) and *A Cloud That’s Dragonish* (1938). The reason for including John Masters is that he has had a long association with India. In fact, his family served India for many generations. Though the tribals constitute only the backdrop in his novel, *To the Coral Strand* (1962), it reflects his perceptions of the tribal people.

Inclusion of an Anglo-Indian woman writer would have made the chapter more representative. However, since no text by such a writer on tribal India is available, it has
not been done. Nevertheless, in the following chapters on Indian English novels and Indian novels in translation, an attempt has been made to strike a balance by including texts by women writers along with texts by male writers. In the rest of the chapters also availability of the English translations of the texts and the writers’ engagement with the tribal people have been the criteria for selection. Other texts on the theme could also have been included, but due to my need to focus sharply and the scope of my work being narrow, I could not take these up. Hence only a few novels and stories have been selected as samples, but these other works have been referred to as the contexts arose. My study, therefore, is by no means exhaustive but it has the merit of close and particular analysis of specific texts, and by a process of extrapolation, larger conclusions could be drawn.

A word may be said about the use of the term tribal. One is aware that the term has a negative connotation as it has been designated by the British and a brief history of it has been given in the second chapter. It has been used hesitantly as short hand for the sake of clarity and easy communication. For convenience the word ‘tribal’ is used for the Scheduled Tribes and members of Denotified Nomadic communities. G. N. Devy in his *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature* (2002) uses the term for the same communities. Regarding this issue he points out: “Given the difficulty of defining tribal identity we are forced to fall back on the official listings that make up the Scheduled Tribes and enumerate the Denotified and Nomadic communities”(Devy ix). In this dissertation too, the term ‘tribal people’ includes the Scheduled Tribes, and the Denotified and Nomadic communities as used by G.N.Devy. The documentation in the

This study consists of eight chapters. The **first Chapter (Introduction)** outlines the aim, scope, significance, and approach of the thesis. It is followed by the **second Chapter**, which includes a general profile of Tribal India. It also examines some important questions relating to tribals such as: Who is a tribal? How and why were tribals notified as tribes? What were the implications of this classification? It is also to be noted that even before the formal notification, dominant categories in Indian society had contributed to the marginalisation of tribal cultures. Terms like ‘tribe,’ ‘indigenous people,’ ‘adivasis’ and their implications have been explained so as to allow us to arrive at an understanding of the politics of representation. The insights from anthropological works like K.S. Singh’s *The Tribal Situation in India* (1972), L.P. Vidyarthi and V.K. Ray’s *Tribal Culture in India* (1972) and M.N. Srinivas’ *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays* (1989) have been used to put together such a background. An exploration of the Indo-British connection in general has been made to locate these novels in the larger discourse of Anglo-Indian fiction. Bhupal Singh’s *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (1934), Allen Greenberger’s *The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880-1960* (1969), Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) have been useful in this respect.

This profile of Tribal India provides a perspective through which subsequent chapters of the study can analyse specific examples of Anglo-Indian, Indian English and
Indian novels and short fiction in English translation concerning Tribal India. In chronological order, it seeks to highlight important motifs, symbols, ideas and themes in this writing. Employing a diachronic mode of analysis, an attempt has been made to trace the shifts in attitudes and modes of perception of Tribal India. The pattern in these chapters comprise invariably a general outline of the relevant context, a brief survey of the particular writer and his/her background and sharp focus on the selected texts, while highlighting specific features particular to the texts.

Following this pattern, the third chapter surveys Anglo-Indian novels about Tribal India. Rudyard Kipling's short stories, Verrier Elwin's novels, *Phulmat of the Hills* (1937) and *A Cloud That's Dragonish* (1938), and John Masters' novel, *To the Coral Strand* (1962), have been discussed. In these novels and short stories the writers show the tribals as 'the ethnic other,' at times as 'barbarous' in relation to the dominant classes of society, and assume that British rule was meant to improve the lot of these people. The chapter also explores the patronizing and imperialist attitudes of these writers. Masters' protagonists demonstrate their superiority to the tribals who are shown as living in remote and deep jungles and as carrying on their old ways of life in an unchanging way. Another way of looking at the tribals has been to romanticise them. The chapter therefore discusses Masters' 'romantic' view of the tribals and his description of their physical features, which betrays his voyeuristic technique of dwelling on the seamier aspects of tribal life, in particular of tribal women. This is a variation of the male, and in this case, western 'gaze.' This exoticism is meant to entice western lovers of the antique. Verrier Elwin's celebration of the tribal woman Phulmat's beauty in his novel
Phulmat of the Hills is an obvious example of this. This example is particularly noteworthy, considering his otherwise ‘inward’ explorations of Tribal India in his scholarly work. The chapter shows that the writers’ ideas about the tribals were also shaped by anthropological findings. “Anthropology” as K.S. Singh reiterates “is the child of colonization” (Singh, “Colonialism” 399). The novelists are also not free from colonial bias. In this connection, the chapter also reflects on the ideas of the anthropologists regarding tribal culture in relation to literary representations of the tribals.

The fourth chapter looks at Indian English novels like Arun Joshi’s The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971), Kamala Markandaya’s The Coffer Dams (1969), Manohar Malgonkar’s The Princes (1963), Gita Mehta’s A River Sutra (1993), and at short stories by Ruskin Bond. These writers deal with the life of the tribes living in different parts of India. The chapter shows that even in the case of Indian English writers, tribals have been romanticized. They are also perceived as ‘loyal’ and ‘devoted’ people, a stereotype about the tribals that is cherished by the urban elites—a class to which many of the Indian English writers themselves belong. Their writings conceptualise tribals as people living in a peaceful and undisturbed environment, untouched by and cut off from the rest of the country.

The fifth chapter discusses Gopinath Mohanty’s novels, Dadibudha (1944) or The Ancestor, and Paraja (1946) (both in English translation), and other novels by him (in Oriya), and highlights his concern for the primitive world of the tribals which is affected by modernization. Since Mohanty’s other three novels—Amrutara Santana
(1947), Siba Bhai (1955) and Apahancha (1961)—have not been translated into English, I have translated the relevant passages and quoted them to substantiate my arguments. The chapter focuses on the issue of why the Indian writers were concerned with the modernization of tribal life. It also takes into consideration debates as to whether the tribal should adopt modernization or live in the primitive mode of life.

K. Shivarama Karanth's Kudiyara Kusu (1951), rendered into English as Headman of the Little Hill, is also discussed in this light in the sixth chapter because the novel dwells on the Kudias, a small hill tribe living in the Western Ghats, and on the way they have been affected by the outside world represented by the moneylenders and missionaries. In his Preface to the novel, Karanth explains his urge for writing this book on the tribals. He points out that what made him write his novel “were the social problems they [the Kudiya tribes] faced and the outside interference which they could no longer withstand” (vi). This chapter also throws light on the attitude of these writers to the tribals and their life. An attempt is made to relate these novels to those by Masters and Elwin. This shows that the colonial writers either exoticize them because they find tribal culture to be quite different from their own, or sometimes they look at the tribals with contempt. However, the Indian writers, because of intermixing with tribal culture and because they are motivated by reforming attitudes, do not find the tribals to be exotic, nor do they look at them with contempt. Instead, they want the tribals to improve their standards of living without compromising their traditional values and institutions.
The seventh chapter examines Mahasweta Devi’s novels and short stories and makes an attempt to trace her attitude to the issues raised earlier. The chapter shows that unlike the above-mentioned novelists, she does not romanticise or idealise the tribals but presents them in their raw humanity or in what Said would call “brute reality.” Her short stories, “Draupadi,” “The Hunt,” “Salt,” “Arjun,” and “Shishu,” and her novel Operation Bashai Tudu (1978), are but a few examples of her method of exposing sexual and class exploitation. Three of her novels, Sal Girar Dake (1984) or In the Name of Birthday, Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir (1980) or Chotti Munda and His Arrow and Aranyer Adhikar (1977) or Rights of the Forests, portray tribal revolts, and shows her attempts to highlight tribal history. Of these, Sal Girar Dake and Aranyer Adhikar have not yet been translated into English. Therefore, I have used the Hindi translation of Sal Girar Dake and the Oriya translation of Aranyer Adhikar and translated the quotes into English.

Mahasweta Devi’s “Pterodactyl, Pirtha and Puran Sahay” (1955) makes an attempt to revive the tribal myth and gives evidence of the advanced cultural heritage of the tribals. The chapter also explores the relationship between the tribals and mainstream society in post-Independent India. In this context it reflects on the change of attitude towards the tribals and their identity in the modern Indian Welfare State.

The eighth chapter is the Conclusion. It sums up the main arguments of the study, highlighting the difference in the representation of Tribal India in Anglo-Indian, Indian English and Indian fiction in English translation. It suggests that different writers depict the tribals as barbaric, exotic, romantic and human. It suggests that the Anglo-Indian writers had a very specific imperative of unravelling the Orient and therefore, they
focused only on limited aspects of the tribal reality. The economic exploitation of the tribals by the British and tribal resistance movements found no expression in their novels. The study makes a case for the significance of Indian writers in Indian languages available to us through English translations who highlight the tribal problem. A thorough sense of the historical interchanges and intermixing between Tribal India and mainstream Indian society and their relationships through the ages is one factor that might account for their more satisfying work. While not entirely shunning the position of 'the other', they are strongly conscious of the bonds of interaction. Just as for the colonial writers, for the Indian writers also, the tribals are the ethnic other. It is for this reason that the thesis has been titled –*Imagining the ‘Other’.* The study also takes into account the difference in points of view among Indian writers like Gopinath Mohanty, Shivarama Karanth and Mahasweta Devi on the tribals, and suggests that their perceptions overlap. The study tentatively concludes by suggesting that the representations of all these writers provide a near comprehensive understanding of Tribal India from the colonial period to the present time. It argues that the authenticity of these representations needs to be tested by comparing them with tribal writings expressing the tribal experience coming from tribals themselves—much of this material is in the oral form and is only now being gathered and preserved by scholars like G.N. Devy and B. K. Tripathy. Since not much of the latter is available in English translation, the study does not dwell much on it and to that extent the study is a pointer to future possibilities. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to characterize the tribal writings emerging at present and available so far, and to juxtapose them in relation to their (non-tribal) predecessors. This has been done not to refute the representation of tribals by non-tribal writers but to understand the perceptions about
Tribal India through the centuries. This analysis will hopefully open up new perspectives on the study of fiction on Tribal India written in English and in translations about Tribal India. Above all, it will be an advance on the criticism available so far on the subject. It is hoped that the study will stimulate further work in these areas in future.
Notes


2 These texts are cited according to their importance in their treatment of the theme of Tribal India and not on the basis of chronology (year of publication).


4 Rajkumar has also studied Mohanty’s *Paraja* as a text of ethnic exploitation in his M.Phil. dissertation titled *Forms of Oppression: Caste, Class and Ethnicity* (1993). Critics have not adequately explored K. Shivarama Karanth’s *Headman of the Little Hill* though his other major novels have been examined extensively. Mahasweta Devi’s fiction and short stories however, have been discussed by a number of critics, the important one being Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She has directed discussions from feminist, poststructuralist and historical perspectives.
revolving around the tribal theme. Ivy Hansdak in her M.Phil. dissertation titled
*The Tribal as the 'Primitive' Other in Indian Literature: A Study of Three Texts*
(1996) analyses one novel each by Gopinath Mohanty, Arun Joshi and Mahasweta
Devi. However, her dissertation limits itself to the study of only three novels.

5 This term is derived by Ranajit Guha from Antonio Gramsci’s writing
“implying non-elite or subordinated social groups” (qtd. in Patil 200).

6 Kipling’s stories have been taken from *Kipling’s India*, ed. Khushwant

7 A number of texts on the same theme such as Birendra Bhattacharyya’s
or *The Primal Land*, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandhopadyaya’s Bangla novel *Aaranyak*
(1939) or *Of the Forest* are available.

8 G.N. Devy’s *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature* is a unique
collection of tribal literature. Devy is also engaged in collection, translation and
documentation of tribal narratives. B. K. Tripathy is in the process of
documenting oral narratives of different tribal communities of Orissa.