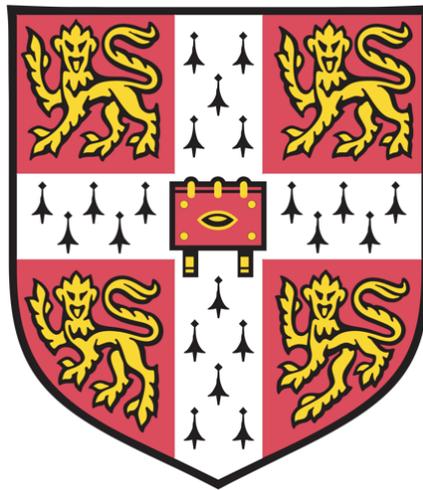


Faculty of English
University of Cambridge

**Evidence and Sustenance
in Transnational Indigenous Literatures**



Ananya Mishra
Corpus Christi College

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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*To those who remain my first and fondest memories from Sonapur,
the departed, Khirari and Mama (Satyabhama and Sachala), and the elders,
Bada nani and Sana nani (Renuka and Meera). To the Peepal and the Neem,
and the two lost Guavas. To the submerged stories of grandmothers and aunts
(Nalini, Haimabati and Lopamudra) from Sambalpur, Papermill and
Rampela. To the Mahanadi that flows through us all.*

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee. It conforms to the stylesheet of the Modern Language Association.

Evidence and Sustenance in Transnational Indigenous Literatures

Ananya Mishra

The thesis compares literatures from two political contexts, the postcolonial Indian nation-state and the settler colonial states, Australia and North America. I examine the ways in which Indigenous sovereignty and transnational solidarity is established in literature. This thesis demonstrates that Indigenous demand for land redress is inseparable from claims to literary sovereignty. I theorise a paradox of evidence—between the state’s erasure of Indigeneity and colonial knowledge that objectifies Indigeneity to appropriate it in claims of nationhood—that facilitated imperial acquisition of Indigenous land. I argue that the post-independence Indian nation-state replicates this paradox for similar purposes. The thesis studies how Indigenous writers reformulate the literary as evidentiary to resist continued colonisation by the global industrial complex, and intellectual colonisation by the dominant Euro-American and Hindu nationalist discourse in national institutions (universities, museums, and archives). Accordingly, the thesis places Adivasi writings from India in conversation with Native American and Australian First Nations literatures and methods. Chapter 1 provides literary readings on evidence. I explore the “archival poetics” (AP1) and “ethnographic refusal” (A. Simpson 95) in the works of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Jeanine Leane, Natalie Harkin, and Wendy Rose. Chapter 2 explores the literary manifestation of land-based Indigenous philosophies. I examine Adivasi mythology as political discourse and study the transnational scope of Simon Ortiz’s poetry to query the future poetics of the Adivasi factory worker. Chapter 3 focuses on Indigenous literary evidence of the climate crisis. I compare the poetry of Joan Naviyuk Kane

and Jacinta Kerketta to study the imagination of absence of *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen* (water, forest, land), and ice. I historicise the recurrent environmental slogan *jal, jangal, jameen* as climate vocabularies. Lastly, I provide a literary reading of Adivasi philosophies of the non-human in the songs of Bhagban Majhi and Dambu Praska. In Chapter 4, I examine the pan-temporal processes of literary sustenance imagined by Indigenous women writers. I examine the works of Alexis Wright, Basanti Majhi, Regina Marandi, and Mary Tallmountain to study Indigenous literature's movement towards, as Wright terms, "a self-governing literature" (SGL).

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A peaceful residence was the greatest gift last year. I remember these places from Cambridge with deep fondness—Leckhampton and 163 Water Street—Copper Beech, and the River.

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Apart from the names of books and for the rare emphasis, I use italics for words from languages other than English. Word meanings and translations are mentioned within brackets for comprehension.

When videos, interviews, websites, and other unpaginated sources are referred, the in-text citation follows the MLA format, with the full reference, link and DOI (where available) provided in the bibliography.

Texts referred multiple times have been abbreviated as follows.

Works by Alexis Wright:

- **SB** *The Swan Book*. 2013. Constable, 2016.
- **AL** “The Ancient Library and a Self-Governing Literature”. *Sydney Review of Books*, 28 June 2019.
- **SGL** “A Self-Governing Literature”. *Meanjin*, 2020.
- **WH** “What Happens When You Tell Somebody Else’s Story?”. *Meanjin*, 2016.
- **“Purpose”** “The Power and Purpose of Literature”. *Meanjin*, 2018.
- **POL** “Politics of Writing”. *Southerly*, 2002.

Works by Jeanine Leane:

- ***Walk Back*** *Walk Back Over*. Cordite Books, 2018.

- **Guwayu** *Guwayu - For All Times: A Collection of First Nations Poems*. Magabala Books, 2020.
- **Mythscape** “Living on Stolen Land: Deconstructing the Settler Mythscape”. *Sydney Review of Books*, 6 Nov 2020.

Works by Natalie Harkin:

- **Remap** “The Poetics of Re(Mapping) Archives: Memory in the Blood”. *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 2014.
- **Thesis** *I Weave Back to You: Archival-Poetics for the Record*. University of South Australia. PhD dissertation, 2016.
- **Manus** *Poetry Manuscript. I Weave Back to You: Archival-Poetics for the Record*. University of South Australia. PhD Dissertation, 2016.

Archival Poetics Dossier

- **AP1** *Archival Poetics 1: Colonial Archive*. Vagabond Press, 2019.
- **AP2** *Archival Poetics 2: Haunting*. Vagabond Press, 2019.
- **AP3** *Archival Poetics 3: Blood Memory*. Vagabond Press, 2019.

Others:

- **Prakrutika** Kashipur Pamphlet. *Prakrutika Sampada Surakhya Parishadra Ghosanapatra*. Bagrijhola, 22 May 2002.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All English translations of songs, interviews, and quoted excerpts from literary texts in languages other than English are my own, unless otherwise specified. Dambu Praska's song "Lament of Niyamraja" (directed by Surya Shankar Dash) is translated from Kui to Oriya by Arna Majhi, Rabishankar Pradhan and Devidas Mishra. I acknowledge another English translation of Dambu Praska's song by Jitu Jakesika that appears as the subtitles to Dash's film. Salu Majhi's "Origin Song" from *Mahua Memoirs* (directed by Vinod Raja) has been translated from Kui to Hindi by Anchal and Saroj Mohanty. Clarifications of text in the original language has also been aided by the advice of Mahendra Kumar Mishra, Arna Majhi, Rabishankar Pradhan, Devidas Mishra, Ranjana Padhi and Nigamananda Sadangi.

There was a time, O brother,
 this land had no humans—
 some wild goats lived,
 and some wild buffaloes,
no birds, no beetles—
only a deep forest,
 and earthworms.
There was once such a time, O brother.

- Salu Majhi

INTRODUCTION

Evidence and Sustenance

Adivaani is an independent press founded by Santhali editor and publisher Ruby Hembrom. They are an initiative dedicated to archiving and privileging the “expression and assertion” of Indigenous “first voices” in India (“About Adivaani”). In 2014, Adivaani produced an imprint of Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s slim volume on Nishnaabeg philosophy and storytelling: “We published Leanne’s *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back* in India because we think a resurgence of indigenous consciousness and thinking processes is very much needed” (Hembrom and Simpson). The cover, designed by Luis A. Gomez, carries an image of a bronze turtle (a First Nations symbol for North America as Turtle Island) crafted in the *dhokra* style alongside Adivaani’s insignia of two geese designed by Boski Jain, from the Santhali story of creation.¹ In the introduction to this edition, Simpson writes: “How could something that started as a personal reclamation project

¹ As narrated in another publication by Adivaani, *We Come from the Geese* (2013), written by Ruby Hembrom and illustrated by Boski Jain, the Santhali community is believed to be born from two geese, Hās and Hāsi. In the Santhali story of creation as narrated in Regina Marandi’s novel *Becoming Me* (2014), which I explore later in the thesis, it is the tortoise that holds the corners of the earth, while the earthworm collects mud to place on the tortoise’s back. Thus, enough land is collected “until it sufficed the whole world” (11-12).

resonate with other Indigenous peoples from different territories and culture [...]?” (*Dancing* x-xi). She responds to her own question: “The short answer is land. Land is critically important for Indigenous peoples, in terms of our continuance and survival” (xi). This contemporary encounter between Adivasi and First Nations peoples through literature, to spark a resurgence of transnational Indigenous solidarity, traces back to the brewing of a sovereign Adivasi consciousness that identified land as “inalienable”. A conception of Indigeneity in the Indian context is perhaps nowhere more distinctly discernible and formulated as in the life and speeches of the political intellectual and leader Jaipal Singh Munda.

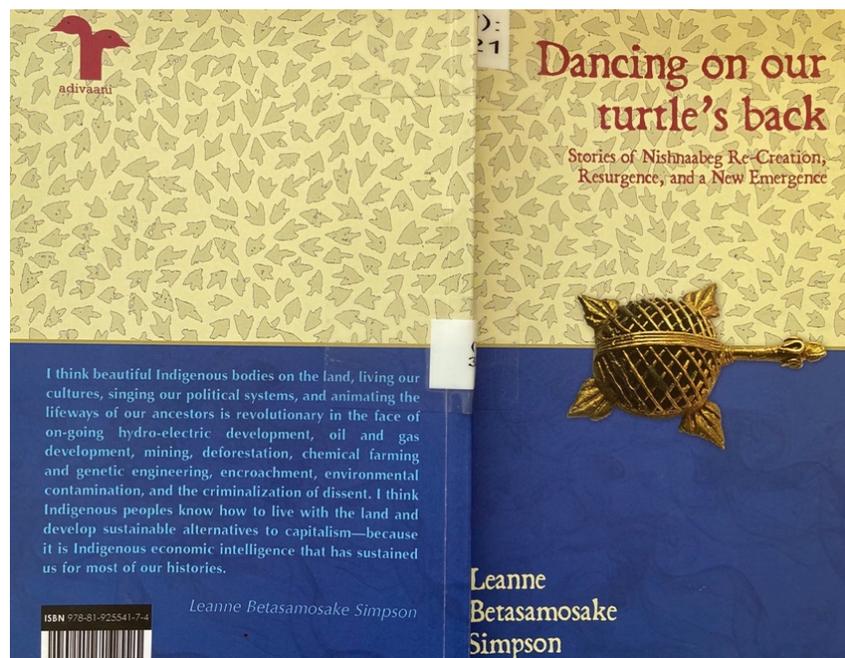


Figure 1: Front cover, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*, Adivaani, 2014.

In 1922, a young Jaipal arrived in the academic heart of the British Empire: the University of Oxford. He studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics before preparing for the Indian Civil Service, a training program for British colonial administrators. During Jaipal's time in England, the countless unnamed and named 'uprisings' and 'revolts' in the colonies had developed into steady calls for independence, and organised demands for nationhood. Indian independence campaigners under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi participated in civil disobedience and marched for non-cooperation in the 1920s. During this period, Jaipal, as a subject from a British colony was racialised in relation to whiteness when he represented hockey in the Olympics in 1928 (Pankaj 152). In India, he occupied another marginal position. Born as Pramod Pahan in Khunti village of present-day Jharkhand (east India) Jaipal Singh belonged to the Munda tribe. The ethnographical categories shaped during the nineteenth century by institutional discourse in Britain assigned 'primitivity' to his community, deeming them in local parlance to be *jangli* (of the jungle). These were communities who acknowledged themselves as Indigenous to South Asia, as *Adivasi*: residents from the earliest times.

Jaipal's trajectory in Oxford did not follow the course of other Indian contemporaries who entered imperial administration in the colonies. He dropped out of the Indian Civil Service. After working as a lecturer of Commerce in Ghana between 1934 and 1936, Jaipal returned

to become the president of the Adivasi Mahasabha in 1938. The “Sabha” was a council that had been set up in the late 1930s to address the specific concerns of the Adivasis that had gathered momentum from the mid-nineteenth century onwards: sovereignty of *jal, jangal, jameen* (water, forest, land) from the exploitative structure of the zamindari system, a British colonial land holding system managed by the caste elite. The Adivasi movement under the presidency of Jaipal called for a “separate province” for the “aboriginal tracts” of east and central India (106). This province was realised much later in 2000, with the making of Jharkhand, years after Jaipal’s death. However, as he claimed in his speeches in the 1940s, the success of the movement was “in the universal acceptance of the word Adibasi” (88); Adivasi was a self-definition, as much as a unifying term.² During the debates for the Objective Resolutions in the Constituent Assembly in 1946, before India became a sovereign nation-state, Jaipal stood up to declare:

As a *jangli*, as an Adibasi I am not expected to understand the legal intricacies of the Resolution. But my common sense tells me that every one of us should march in that road to freedom and fight together. Sir, if there is any group of Indian people that has been shabbily treated it is my people. They have been disgracefully treated, neglected for the last 6,000 years. The history of the Indus Valley civilization, a child of which I am, shows quite clearly that it is the newcomers—most of you here are intruders as far as I am

² This thesis uses ‘Adivasi’, which is the commonly used spelling in contemporary discourse.

concerned—it is the newcomers who have driven away my people from the Indus Valley to the jungle fastness [...] My people have been suffering for 6000 years because of your racialism, racialism of the Hindus and everybody else. [...] I do not consider my people a minority. We have already heard on the floor of this house this morning that the Depressed classes also consider themselves as Adibasis, the original inhabitants of the country. [...] There will again be many tribal republics, republics which will be in the vanguard of the battle for Indian freedom. [...] Let us fight for freedom together, sitting together and working together. Then alone, we shall have real freedom. (Munda “Constituent”)

Jaipal Singh Munda speaks of a longer settler history of the subcontinent, of “old wounds” (Parmar 506) that are to be addressed for the Adivasis to be truly sovereign. To recognise the separate identity of the Indigenous people of India, he demanded their recognition as “Adibasi” apart from the ‘special provisions’ and ‘welfare’ for tribes envisioned by Jawaharlal Nehru. To this end, he debated with Babasaheb Ambedkar, architect of the Indian constitution and author of *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), to incorporate “Adibasi” instead of ‘Scheduled Tribes’. Ambedkar stated that Adivasi was a “general term which has no specific legal *de jure* connotation” (Parmar 515). Jaipal recognised early on that a jurisdictional identity under a paternalistic state did not adequately address or strengthen Adivasi sovereignty. Scheduled Tribes minimised the essential basis of Adivasi sovereignty, and hence their identification as Indigenous: land. He

consistently maintained: “Land is and must be the bulwark of aboriginal life” (511). For Adivasi sovereignty, land is “inalienable”.

Anticipating contemporary literary encounters and resonating with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s assertion that land is indispensable to Indigenous continuance, Jaipal Singh Munda’s speech at the Assembly offers critical insight regarding Indigeneity as envisaged in the Indian context. It reveals a sovereign Adivasi imagination that operates within and contributes to a global Indigenous intellectual framework. *Adivasidom* (2017), a compilation of selected writings and speeches of Jaipal Singh Munda, edited by A. K. Pankaj, offers a curious image that may attest this connection: with minimal context, the penultimate page of *Adivasidom* consists of a black and white photograph from the time Jaipal was welcomed by the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma.³ Jaipal is photographed in a headdress, as he joyfully smiles raising the emblem of the rooster (emblem of the Adivasi Mahasabha, and later the Jharkhand movement). With an imprint of the turtle, the typed description reads: “President All India Adivasi Mahasabha Honorary Chief (Pelichi) of the Chickasaw Nation” (Pankaj 160).

³ Dated 1963 according to Jaipal’s signature, his travel to Oklahoma was could have been in 1959 according to the chronology provided in *Adivasidom* (Pankaj 155).

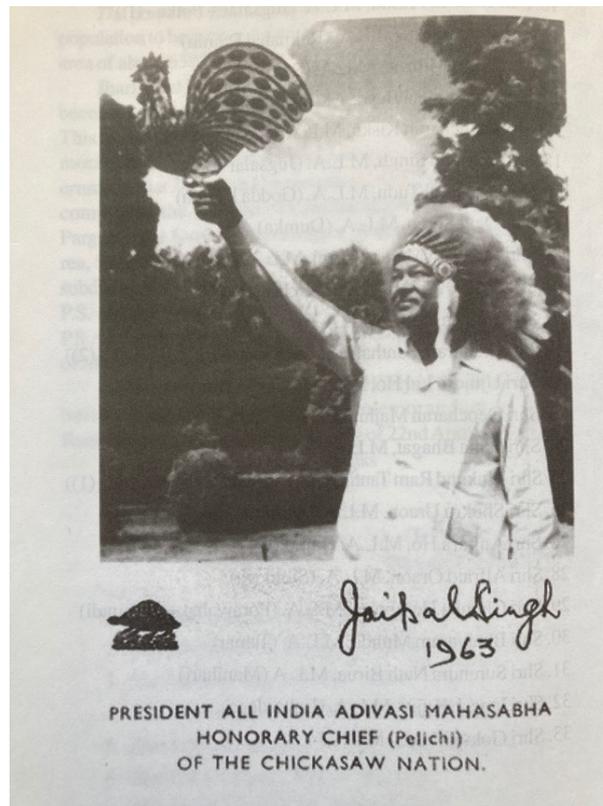


Figure 2: Jaipal Singh Munda at Chickasaw Nation in 1963, penultimate page of A. K. Pankaj ed. *Adivasidom: Selected Writings & Speeches of Jaipal Singh Munda*, Pyara Kerketta Foundation, 2017.

The above instances suggest possibilities of other literary and cultural encounters that have facilitated conversations and solidarity between Adivasi and global Indigenous communities. To productively explore these intellectual engagements, Adivasi Indigeneity needs to be located in the broader context of calls to Indigenous sovereignty within settler colonial nations. The following thesis aims to create a space in literary studies to address and compare Indigenous sovereignty as it is

envisioned in the postcolonial state and the settler colonial nation. I consider the ways in which literature founds political Indigeneity. Following Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz's transnational scope of "literary sovereignty" (Weaver et al. vii-xiv) and Waanji author Alexis Wright's vision of "a self-governing literature" (AL, SGL), I explore how sovereignty is remembered, envisioned, and reinforced, through the literary mode.⁴ Literature exceeds the bounds of the state and its terms and provides the expansive space to establish Indigenous autonomy.⁵ Literature builds vital linkages for transnational solidarity to establish land as 'inalienable' for Indigenous sovereignty. This thesis demonstrates how Indigenous demand for land redress is inseparable from claims to literary sovereignty. In fundamental ways, as envisioned by Alexis Wright, literature *is* sovereignty. My thesis approaches this claim by way of thematic comparison: I compare two political contexts, postcolonial India and the settler colonial nations, Australia, and North America. I make a

⁴ Ortiz's 1981 essay "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism" was a founding work on "literary sovereignty" in Native American national contexts, a precursor to Robert Warrior's publication of *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1995) and subsequent scholarship on literary nationalism. Wright defines a sovereignty of the "imagination" and "sovereign thinking" for Australian First Nations communities in her speeches and essays archived in *Sydney Review of Books*, *Meanjin* and *Overland*. As I shall read later in the thesis, this thinking is an extension of her literary work *The Swan Book* (2013), where the central character Oblivia is on "a quest to regain sovereignty over [her] brain" (4).

⁵ Sovereignty as defined or 'protected' juridically by the nation-state, the legal negotiations for Indigenous sovereignties or as examined within political philosophy is referred to briefly, but a thorough discussion of this scholarship is not in the remit of this thesis.

case for Adivasi literatures to be retrieved from the area-specific limits of South Asian studies and placed in conversation with Native American and Australian First Nations literatures.

A conscious “building”⁶ of Indigeneity has sustained Indigenous thought. Chickasaw scholar Chadwick Allen in his introductory chapter to *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (2002), writes that a set of “discursive practices” has been adopted by Indigenous writers in the context of a “deep and enduring settler colonialism” of the latter contexts (2). The “construction of Indigeneity” is imperative in the face of erasure to hold on to distinct positions as Indigenous (7). To resist erasures, genocide and assimilation, Indigeneity is politically organised, and narrativised in literary traditions. My thesis demonstrates how Adivasi thinkers too build political Indigeneity. I compare the narrative and poetic measures of Indigenous writers from Australia and North America with Adivasi writing to argue for a transnational solidarity made possible through resonances in literary imagination. Indigeneity, as much as it is tied to land, needs to be discursively sustained to resist assimilation into the dominant white nation as well as the Hindu nationalist state. My thesis examines how political Indigeneity as established in literature in these two contexts emerges from shared experiences of distinctive histories of colonialism, and shared

⁶ I refer to the words of an Australian First Nations elder quoted in Michael Dodson’s essay on “The end in the beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality”: “You build Aboriginality or you get nothing” (Grossman et al. 25).

thinking on the ‘sacred’ and ‘ethical’ kinship to land.⁷ It is further strengthened by the annals of settlements and migrations, and testaments of land ownership present in oral traditions.⁸ Literary craft, whether it is in origin myths or contemporary fiction, therefore, is essential for the sustenance of political Indigeneity. Because of this collective remembrance of intellectual traditions and its present renewal in the intellectual sphere, the transnational solidarity between Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s writing and Adivaani, or the Chickasaw nation’s recognition of Jaipal Singh Munda, is made possible. More importantly, this thesis attempts a recovery and ‘repatriation of voice’.⁹ Through cross-cultural textual analysis, I demonstrate how methods provided by Native American and Australian First Nations literary critics contribute to a recovery of Adivasi voice and vice-versa.

Through a critical engagement with Indigenous methods and frameworks, this thesis argues for the expansion of the ‘literary’ in English literary studies. My thesis refers and responds to the diverse thought traditions that have gathered strength to become a field of academic enquiry broadly termed Critical Indigenous Studies. This field has followed the publication of Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou (Māori) scholar

⁷ My discussion on this ‘ethical’ relationship and the literary manifestation of a ‘sacred code’ in Chapter 2 initiates from Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday’s essay “A First American Views His Land” (Mckibben 570-581).

⁸ See AL, SGL, Womack and Skaria; an elaboration on this concept is included in Chapter 2.

⁹ Here, I refer to “literary repatriation” and a “repatriation of story” discussed by Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker in their introduction to the restored texts of David Unaipon (Unaipon xliii).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) and later, *Critical Indigenous Studies: Engagements in First World Locations* (2016), edited by Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson. The thesis extends the breadth of engagement on Indigenous studies within Euro-American institutions by going beyond a sole focus on literary and critical texts in English. Apart from dominant Indian languages such as Hindi and Oriya, I provide translations and examine literatures written and sung in Adivasi languages and dialects such as Kui and desia. These texts are new to English literary studies and are yet to be considered in postcolonial literary criticism. These texts bring in Adivasi voices and their methods of reading. *Decolonizing Methodologies* further critiques histories and discourses by which Indigenous communities were racialised in the nineteenth century. My thesis considers how these discourses informed literary studies in the imperial centre and the colony.¹⁰ Indigenous writers and thinkers intervene across disciplinary boundaries in critical texts emerging from Anthropology, History and Geography. I use literary criticism to engage with these texts and demonstrate how English literary studies can thus converse with aligned concerns within the Humanities and the Social Sciences to contextualise the Indigenous literary text.

¹⁰ Moreton-Robinson has discussed the transition from “the study of race to the study of culture” of Indigenous peoples between the nineteenth and the twentieth century. This meant that the discourse of the former invariably influenced disciplines such as “history, archaeology, linguistics and political science” (*Critical Indigenous* 6). She provides a detailed analysis in her essay titled “Race and Cultural Entrapment: Critical Indigenous Studies in the Twenty-First Century” in the same volume (102-118).

I want to clarify certain terminologies, commonly occurring terms, and political specifications that underpin this work: as self-defining and re-defined terms for Indigenous peoples from India and Australia, I refer to Adivasi and Australian First Nations communities. As unifying terms prevalent in academic writing, I use Native American to refer to Indigenous literatures from North America, bearing in mind its 'academic' nature: as Joy Harjo writes: "There is no such thing as a Native American [...] We call ourselves Mvskoke, Dine, or any of the other names of our tribal nations" (Harjo et al. 3). Therefore, in writing about particular authors, writers and peoples, I acknowledge the name of the community and nation to which they identify as belonging. When the thesis uses American Indian, Aboriginal, and tribal, it is in reference to the particular usage in literary text or writers who identify as Indigenous. Indigenous, and Indigeneity are capitalised throughout the thesis. As Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice writes: "We begin with Indigenous. The capital 'I' is important here, as it affirms a distinct political status of peoplehood" (*Why Indigenous Literatures* 6). Claiming Indigeneity is not based on an *essence* as much as it is about evoking specific histories of disenfranchisement. In North America and Australia, the long settlements of sovereign Indigenous nations were interrupted by settler colonialism: with the period of the Columbian Exchange post 1492, and in the latter context, with the arrival of James Cook in Australia in 1770. Despite similar histories of elimination and genocide of Indigenous peoples, colonisation in these two contexts still transpired in distinct forms. While

there was at least a history of treaties in North America that recognised Native nations, Australia was declared *terra nullius* on arrival and Australian First Nations peoples deemed 'absent'. Not until the recognition of Native Title Act of 1993 has the traditional law and land rights of Australian First Nations peoples prior to British settlements, been legally acknowledged by the Australian nation-state.

In settler nations, Indigenous communities as Indigenous have been moderately, if reluctantly, acquiesced to juridically. However, the Indian constitution's definition of Scheduled Tribes does not acknowledge Adivasi peoples as Indigenous. As Jaipal Singh Munda mentioned, India has a longer settler history; the Supreme Court judgement of 2011 *Kailas & Ors vs the State of Maharashtra*, was perhaps one of the only legal occurrences where this account is confronted by Indian law (Parmar 491-522). For this thesis, I will focus on the more recent colonial history of the nineteenth century, to study the three contexts in analogous terms, positioning three figures of power that have interacted: the British empire, the nation-state (in three contexts) and the upper caste settler (in the Indian context). The Permanent Settlement Act in 1793 created the zamindari system in India (Dungdung *Whose Country* 7). This system allowed an influx of upper caste settlers into Adivasi land and claim land holdings for agricultural settlements. In eastern India especially, as I demonstrate in this thesis, with a special geographical focus on the state of Odisha, the nineteenth century saw an advent of a particular structure of colonialism. Empirical revenue and caste

exploitation colonised Adivasi communities and their geographies.¹¹ While there were methods implemented by the colonial government to appease the growing disquiet of Adivasi communities to ‘govern’ their several resistances (such as the Santhal Paraganas and Chotanagpur Tenancy Acts), these laws were easily trespassed. When Jaipal Singh Munda called for the “inalienability” of land to uphold the sovereignty of Adivasi communities, he spoke with an awareness that protectionist measures of the Nehruvian era would prove insufficient, as the nation-state continued colonial categories and logic.

My comparative arc follows the trans-oceanic work of Chadwick Allen who has discussed the discursive and narrative methods that establish political Indigeneity. The thesis is written keeping in mind the possibilities, limits, and questions posed by Allen in his introduction to *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (2012):

Perhaps more so than their non-Native colleagues, some Indigenous intellectuals wonder how a single scholar or even a small group of scholars can possibly know enough to bring together multiple Indigenous literatures emanating from multiple distinct cultures and histories on a truly equal basis. If together equal is the primary goal, they ask, what kind and what quality of scholarship can be produced? Whose interest can it serve?. (xiii)

¹¹ See Pati *South Asia* 23-38, for nineteenth-century colonial history of Odisha; for a similar history from western India, see Hardiman 68-77.

Considering the context of my thesis and positionality, I choose to use the word transnational reflecting on Allen’s “productive tensions” of “trans-Indigenous” and “transnational” as methods (Lyons 239). I qualify my own use of transnational as dual: the thesis refers across multiple Indigenous literary traditions, and simultaneously and consistently makes visible the colonising and patriarchal structure of the nation. My readings mainly reflect on the nation-state, with references to the tribal nation.¹² The transnational Indigenous space serves to especially subject the Indian postcolonial nation to critical enquiry in its position as a recently decolonised nation. The Indian nation-state as a site for the emergence of postcolonial thought—instrumental in “provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty 3)—has relatively precluded a global critique of the Indian postcolonial nation’s authoritarian measures. I suggest that transnational Indigenous studies as a sphere to conduct further enquiry on Adivasi literatures is particularly emancipatory as the postcolonial nation spells dual entrapment for the Adivasi peoples. Calls for Indigeneity in India are oppositional to Hindu nationalism and its caste hierarchies. The industrial complex has therefore served the convenient purpose of further eliminating the Adivasi as the ‘Maoist insurgent’ or the ‘Naxal’ whose political Indigeneity poses a threat to the Hindu nation. The Indian state’s protectionist categories of Scheduled Tribes, on the other hand, still carry

¹² Here I refer to discussions on the tribal nation and the nation-state, “transnational” and “trans-Indigenous” emerging from the North American context, see Lyons 1-16; 239-256; 283-269; Huhndorf *Mapping* 1-24.

the registers of an ‘imperial copy’¹³ of the ‘primitive’ subject of colonial evidence-based disciplines. The critique of this dual position cannot be limited to the area-specific context of South Asian Studies alone. Adivasi voices challenge the global industrial complex and their concerns echo those of Indigenous peoples in settler colonial contexts. Mining giant Adani, for instance, impacts Indigenous communities in India and Australia. Indigenous critical theory complicates or rejects postcolonial claims and centers the question of land for Indigenous communities. It re-directs discourse to understand Adivasi positionality within the postcolonial nation, revisits Adivasi demands for sovereignty as separate from its appropriations within Indian nationalism and recognises settler colonial logic replicated by the Hindu nationalist state.

Histories of Adivasi resistances have formed the crux of postcolonial studies on the ‘subaltern’. These studies unearth peripheral voices to resist the monolith of Indian nationalism. However, the intellectual thought of Adivasi thinkers has rarely been called upon in postcolonial studies to theorise a way in which Adivasi thinkers define Indigeneity.¹⁴ In 1993, Stephen Muecke posed the question for postcolonial literary studies in the Australian context: “Where are the Aboriginal intellectuals?” (qtd. in Grossman et al. 4). In the Indian context,

¹³ ‘Imperial copy’ is defined in reference to Pratt’s discussion on how the colonies and the colonial subject were documented through “imperial eyes” of a “global classificatory project” (1-36) and Smith’s discussion in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (49-65).

¹⁴ A growing scholarship by Adivasi scholars defines Indigeneity in the Indian context, see V. Xaxa 223-239, and V. Xaxa and Puia 85-101.

one might ask: Where are the Adivasi intellectuals? As the perpetual 'subaltern', Adivasis "embody the limits of representation as the limit horizon of modernity itself" (Varma "Representing" 103). Adivasi voice is still accessed either through the 'imperial copy' of ethnographical disciplines like folklore, or through the subaltern in representational narratives. This continues despite a thriving movement towards an Adivasi "self-governing literature" that has been ongoing since the early twentieth century: the speeches of Jaipal Singh Munda and poetry of Sushila Samad are testaments to this history. Though literary studies (global and national) can point to the sheer diversity of literatures across several Adivasi languages and literary forms, and scarcity of translations to access these literatures in order to explain their oversight, it is in fact the continued marginalisation of Adivasi voice and the literary value of Adivasi literatures that preclude impetus to translation, transmission and publication. As Koitur writer and journalist Akash Poyam quotes a fellow Adivasi thinker: "People want Adivasi literatures, not Adivasi writers" ("Ten Voices"). Diversity of language, therefore, is a weak excuse for the failure of literary studies to centre Indigenous voices. It relies on an unproductive binary created by the institution between literary studies and comparative literary studies, literary studies, and folklore, where the latter is considered the realm of the non-anglophone literatures or non-classical literatures.

An access to imaginations and representations of Indigeneity or Adivasiness of the Global South in transnational discourse, especially in

literary studies and history, has been aided largely by postcolonial theory. However, these methods have been dominated by caste-privileged critics; here, I want to acknowledge my position as one, and hence I am cautious of my voice operating within this structure. Engaging with Adivasi voices from an institutional position in the United Kingdom, my first introduction to understanding the position of subaltern voice was Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Similarly, the first primer to 'Adivasi literatures' was the representational narratives of Gopinath Mohanty, and Mahashweta Devi.¹⁵ These texts are representative of the textual decolonisation of the dominant canon, and decolonised syllabuses; in postcolonial studies they occupy the positions of canonical literary and theoretical treatises. Both are crucial to challenge the continued Eurocentrism of institutional discourse, and in critical ways have shaped and informed criticism by the minority. They do not in themselves form the primary problem. The concern, however, is that Adivasi voice is accessed twice removed. In transnational literary studies, these postcolonial texts become the exemplary to understand Adivasi concerns, and while becoming representative texts *on* the 'subaltern', end up marginalising Adivasi voice and positionality.

Chadwick Allen in his critique of Spivak's confession of a "scandal" in *Death of a Discipline* (2003), calls this exclusion of Indigenous literary

¹⁵ A. K. Pankaj similarly writes, "Because tribal discussions in the present times are organized only by the non-tribals and in these the voice of the tribal is absent. The basis of these discussions are on the fictions (fictional literatures) written by non-tribals like Mahashweta Devi on Tribals [...]" (9).

expression an “institutional aporia” (“Decolonizing Comparison” 5). He observes that comparative literature has assigned “intellectual value, primarily on those literary traditions designated as ‘major’ that emanate from parts of Western Europe and, occasionally, to similarly designated ‘major’ literary traditions that emanate from parts of Asia, in their original languages” (4). If I am to read the positionality of Indian literatures as one of “these major literary traditions from Asia”, then similarly here, the “institutional aporia” excludes Adivasi literatures, in original languages and translation. What we access as comparative literature in Euro-American institutions is primarily those written by upper-caste writers, and in state-approved and dominant Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, among others. When Spivak writes of the “scandal of comparative literature” (*Death* 81), and her inability to access “First Nations orality” as a personal “shortcoming”, it is a telling omission that this confession only includes American First Nations (as she remembers “older U.S marginalities”). It does not reflect on her own twice-removed access to Adivasi orality when a considerable amount of Spivak’s work on the ‘subaltern’ has relied on Mahashweta Devi’s fiction on Adivasi communities (“Draupadi”, “Pterodactyl”, for example). The transnational sphere aside, in South Asian literary studies, the Adivasi is still the *subject* of discourse, not an equal writer and critic. To re-iterate and add to Allen’s “institutional aporia” in the context of the settler state, caste structure and its associated intellectual and cultural privilege has determined discourse on Indigeneity in India, thereby deferring Indigenous voice.

Chapter 1 titled ‘A Question of Evidence’, therefore, introduces my thesis and forms an essential core to the literary reading and analysis in subsequent chapters. Rather than focus on standpoint or positionality that might determine the *nature* of the narrative (although, I do engage with the subject in Chapter 4 regarding Indigenous women’s standpoint), I emphasise the *need* for voice to present evidence. This enquiry initiates from Alexis Wright’s speech archived in *Meanjin* “What Happens When You Tell Somebody Else’s Story?” (WH). Wright and other Indigenous thinkers such as Bhagban Majhi and Lisa Brooks, who are referenced in this thesis, have dedicated significant time and energy to negotiating land rights and claims for Indigenous peoples in their separate contexts. As Wright mentions in her speech, in these negotiations, Aboriginal evidence that determines the resilience and sovereignty of the people is forced into a “dependency” on other languages. The “dependency” is on the language of legality, academic writing, scientific and anthropological discourse, among others, for the Aboriginal story to be framed “in the language of the court” (WH). The result is a displacement of voice. She writes, “Often the original storyteller would be hard pressed to recognise the language of the story being put to a judge in a court of law” (WH). This is a problem in addition to the fact that there anyway is a reluctance to accept the legitimacy of Indigenous evidence given the juridical history of framing Indigenous rights.¹⁶ To destabilise the notion of ‘evidence’

¹⁶ See chapters on “Law Matters” in *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters* (2007) for further discussion on Indigenous rights and legality in the Australian context (15–64).

from its legal definitions, Indigenous writers reformulate the literary as evidentiary, that is, a literary work as providing evidence or supporting the formal and personal basis of an argument. Literature functions as an emancipatory site where evidence can be re-imagined, recovered and accessed. Here, evidence is for the Indigenous person and the generational continuity of the community. If necessary, it can be invoked in a court of law.

I propose that it is vital to recover Indigenous voice to re-centre Indigenous evidence, not only because it is invariably erased to claim land ownership in the modern nation-state, but also because evidence is burdened by a longer history of oppression of Indigenous peoples. Bringing Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Patrick Wolfe into a space of associative, though not similar, echoes on colonial discourse *on* Indigenous communities and “the logic of elimination” (Wolfe 387) based on a “blood/land” binary, I theorise a paradox of evidence. This paradox—between the state’s erasure of Indigeneity and colonial knowledge that objectifies Indigeneity to reappropriate it in claims of nationhood—facilitated imperial acquisition of Indigenous land in settler colonial nations. I claim that the post-independence Indian nation-state replicates this paradox to identical ends. There is an erasure of Adivasihood for industrial invasions and an assimilation by the Hindu Right into the caste-fold of the Hindu nation, while welfare state institutions like Tribal Research Institutes continue to objectify Adivasis in colonial categories. In this regard, I examine the “ethnographic refusal” (A. Simpson 95)

practised by the central character in Santhali author Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's short story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" in his collection by the same name. Some of the questions regarding evidence that this thesis puts forward include: what are the forms of literary evidence that are deemed as legitimate and 'literary' in contemporary literary studies? How does the reader gather Indigenous voice from Indigenous evidence that has been invariably passed through and collected in colonial exchanges and encounters? What is the problematic of demanding, and confirming veracity of evidence from Indigenous communities whose ways of storing evidence have been delegitimised? What are the narrative and poetic strategies that Indigenous writers use to reformulate evidence?

Blood has been used as a violent tool to classify and subjugate Indigenous evidence through scientific racism. I explore the "archival poetics" (AP) of Narunnga poet Natalie Harkin (*Archival Poetics* 2019) and Wiradjuri poet Jeanine Leane (*Walk Back Over* 2018), who, in significant ways, respond to the material and metaphorical thematic of "blood and memory", identified by Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) and theorised by Chadwick Allen (*Blood Narrative* 160-193). Exploring a transnational form of elegy that connects Native American literary response to Australian First Nations' history, this chapter also examines Hopi/Miwok poet Wendy Rose's poem "Truganinny". Given that "blood", "land" and "memory" as theorised by Patrick Wolfe and Chadwick Allen forms an essential component in the readings of Chapter 1, I would like to clarify its relation to caste. Hindu

nationalism in its reinforcement of caste hierarchies does indeed employ a language of Aryan purity and bloodline, ironically, to claim indigeneity to the subcontinent. This is distinctly readable in the ideology propagated by the Hindu Far Right organisation, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Caste relies on bloodline (determined by birth); however, unlike the particular racial constructs, and violent histories in North America and Australia that has created a disenfranchised group of people with the racial notions of 'count' and 'authenticity', caste is a malleable social structure. A hierarchy of 'castes' (plural) with presupposed character, maintains a system of "graded inequality" which is "capable of self-preservation" (Ambedkar "Untouchables" 84). Indigenous communities in India unavoidably get enmeshed within caste dynamics. The "faultline" lies at the juncture of dispossession of land, where the forces of religious conversions function (Dash). Upper caste settlements have spelt forced or strategic conversions into the Hindu caste fold. Conversions to other religions do not necessarily afford a release from caste's insidious structure; therefore, several Adivasi communities are also trapped in the aspirational mould that caste maintains. It is useful to situate the paradox of evidence reproduced in the "blood/land" binary in complex frameworks to understand how eugenicist principles continue to inform the Hindu nationalist state's assimilative agenda that is legitimised within national institutions, like boarding schools and museums. Although caste and race can be studied analogously to examine these histories of assimilation, as I will briefly explore in the chapter, it is in their differences that a productive

discussion of either is possible. Therefore, the primary comparative between India and the settler nations that this thesis emphasizes, is land.

Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks offers metaphorical possibilities of *awikhigan* and *wólhanak*, illuminating their inextricable linkage (36–63; 64–113): *awikhigan*, or forms of writing, emerge from *wólhanak*, the “place-world”¹⁷ of “the river intervaes, where Abenaki families flourished” (4). A literary work, as well as the act or engagement with the literary, emerges from and is sustained by a “place-world”; the place sustains the people, the non-humans and literature. She calls this “place-world” *wlôgan* or “the common pot” (3). Given this thesis is primarily grounded in east India, I wondered about the resonances that “the common pot” held. Any rich agricultural “place world” is commonly termed *bhata handi* (rice pot) in my native language from Sambalpur, a dialect of west Odisha. Therefore, the phrase recurs in local reportage regarding the industrial invasions on western Odisha’s landscapes. *Bhata handi* commonly applies to agricultural plains; the imagination of “place worlds” of hill slopes, forests, and riverine regions, in many Adivasi languages, are of course, distinctive, some of which we shall encounter in the following chapters. One such *bhata handi* was submerged under the reservoir waters of Jawaharlal Nehru’s “modern temple”, the Hirakud Dam; this was a pioneer project as part of his vision of the nation’s ‘progress’ based on

¹⁷ Here, Brooks provides a reading of Keith Basso’s concept of a “place world” (6) explored in his book *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996).

industrial development. When I pursued Hirakud's stories, I heard several that made an evident but rarely acknowledged case in popular discourse: the largest number of people displaced, and not sufficiently compensated, were Adivasi and Dalit families. The industrial invasions into the "place-worlds" of Adivasi communities had begun in the nineteenth century (as Chapter 3 will historicise at length), but the exodus following Hirakud, began a chain of forced displacements for Adivasi peoples by the Indian nation (Damodaran 100).

Following 1991, when India's economy opened up to global investments, Odisha signed Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) with global industries (Padhi and Sadangi 16). As Gladson Dungdung writes, the inaugural government of Jharkhand led by a Santhali Chief Minister in 2000, similarly, allowed "107 MoUs with several national and multinational companies" (*Whose Country* 7). Unlike the drain to an outer empire, or the state with its panoptic centrehold, industrial power has a shifting seat to become all-pervasive, one that operates through a nexus of the state, the corporate and the dominant alliance, where power is at once proximate and elsewhere from the site of catastrophe. Industry, therefore, is a menacing presence in the land and literatures with which this thesis engages; Adani fells the Talabira forest in western Odisha, hounds the Galilee Basin in Queensland; Vedanta invades southern Odisha, settles in Zambia, poisoning Vamsadhara, Mushishima and Kafue, with its headquarters firmly secured in London. The "pounding feet" (*Blood Earth* 5.08-5.14) in the deep memorial oral epics of Kondh singer Salu Majhi no

longer allude to the terror of tigers in the *agamyā jangal* (untraversable forest) of Koraput, where the tiger is still interwoven with the *biripidka* (earthworms), and *dongar* (mountains); the “pounding feet” are the invading wheels of trucks and crushers of the factory. In such a terrain, words of nourishment and succour, ones recalled in the songs of Salu Majhi, sustain the memory of a “place-world”. I use the word sustenance to ground the thesis in the “place worlds” of Odisha, the nurturing plains, forests, and mountain slopes of east India, to evoke the earth of Kondh singer Bhagban Majhi’s rhymes, the seeds of Dongria Kondh priest Dambu Praska’s epic and the combined epistemologies contained in the ecologies of *jal, jangal, jameen* (water, forest, land). My hope in a literary comparison is to explore the particularity of this “remembered earth” (Momaday *The Man Made* 45), and all that it memorises, and to engage with “other place worlds at distant spaces and times” (Brooks xxiii). Given the specificity of ‘sacrality’ associated with sites in a village and lived geographies and water bodies to a certain tradition of literature, my literary readings depend on divergent contours of thought, on historical and geographical springs. Here, the literary unfolds.

Indigenous thinkers have imagined and reframed the literary. Land as literature, mythology as political discourse, country as archive, “songlines as vectors”,¹⁸ are some of the ways in which this thesis communicates the composite forms of the Indigenous literary. Brooks

¹⁸ Jeanine Leane referred to “songlines as vectors” in a panel discussion on “Towards a Transnational Imaginary” at the *Climate Fictions/Indigenous Studies* conference 2020.

writes: “For me, the line between what is literary and what is historical, particularly in Native American writing, may be as problematic as the divide between imagery, orality, and the written word” (xxiii). Her idea resonates with similar theorisations: Munda poet Anuj Lugun claims “Adivasi songs and stories are their histories” (qtd. in Poyam “Ten Voices”), Alexis Wright considers storytellers of song-cycles as geographers (SGL) while Sioux scholar Vine Deloria writes of “geomythology” (*God is Red* 76). Chapter 2 titled ‘Land as Literature’ provides cross-cultural readings that elucidate these complex imaginations of the Indigenous literary. I consciously choose to elaborate on the fundamental theme of ‘land as literature’ through two distinctive sections to tie seemingly disparate, but interconnected ideas: the political necessity of mythology, and sacrality as a material requisite for imagining labour rights. Relying on Creek scholar Craig S. Womack’s work on orality and politics (56–61), I examine a section of a Kondh origin myth *Gova Utra* or *Janam Khena Puran* (M. Mishra 90–98) sung by Pramanand Jani from Kalahandi.¹⁹ Working on Mahendra Kumar Mishra’s English translation of the *jani*’s desia Kondh words, I read it as a political negotiation between the Kondh and Gond community.²⁰ Revolving on the essential question of ethical relationship to land and how this ‘sacred code’ is re-imagined in the contested space of a factory, this chapter further analyses the transnational scope of Simon

¹⁹ *Jani* usually refers to a priest in Kondh communities.

²⁰ Desia is a pidgin of Oriya and other Adivasi languages spoken in west and south Odisha.

Ortiz's poetics alongside Kashipur's history. This section reasons that land redress is imperative for Adivasi workers' rights in the modern-day factory.

Literary studies, especially in an institution like Cambridge, which still has a logocentric adherence to the literary as one solely belonging in the realm of the 'written word', is in fact too limiting to hold the many canons that each literary tradition of Indigenous peoples holds. Indigenous writers often defer and reject claims to mere inclusion. "We are the canon", as Womack proclaims (7). It is not incumbent on Indigenous literatures to fit legibly into the formal categories provided by the institution, to offer analogies with Euro-American discourse for theoretical clarity. I hope this thesis by consistently engaging with Indigenous forms and methods is able to intervene in an intellectual praxis that drives the institution into reading beyond its formal structures. Close reading of the text (that includes transcribed and translated oral materials) is not impersonalised; the text as much as the writer, and the reader, inhabit particular contexts, indicating subjective experience, while in relation to others in a web of resonances. The personalised 'I' appears to suggest that I am an outsider-reader to embodied understandings in Indigenous literatures, as much as I am an outsider in a white institution. In the gate-keeping and structural privilege that this institution protects, my engagement in the English language will always be one of a non-native speaker. I consider the creative possibilities of this position to

respond to the historical encounters that have formed it;²¹ here, I displace the centrality of the literary text in the English language. Keavy Martin writes:

[Does] the canonization of predominantly English language Indigenous novels, short-stories and poetry truly constitute the privileging of Indigenous intellectual traditions? Or is this a mere extension of the Enlightenment principles of the university, which continue to encourage scholars ‘to contribute to knowledge’ by gathering more and more remote content into the benevolent halls of learning? (4)

She further asks whether the realm of the literary or intellectual tradition is at all the right nomenclature for Indigenous thought (6). Like the radically different storytelling traditions of Inuit peoples Martin engages, Chapter 3 titled ‘Annals of the Earthworms’, dives into Adivasi philosophies. The songs of Bhagban Majhi and Dambu Praska inhabit the place-worlds of Kashipur and Niyamgiri and archive traditional knowledge of *biripidka* (earthworm) and *penka* (seeds), in the desia and Kui languages. I hope my English translation on page honours these “fleshy philosophies” (Davis and Todd 767), and that they communicate with other literary texts, and Indigenous epistemologies, referred to within this thesis. To elucidate the interdependence of “place-worlds” and distinct geographies, where anthropogenic impact on one is discernible on the other, this chapter situates the poetry of ice of Inupiaq poet Joan

²¹ On the colonial history of English language education in India and the beginning of English literary studies in the colonies, see Viswanathan.

Naviyuk Kane alongside the poetry of *jal, jangal, jameen* of Oraon poet Jacinta Kerketta. In their poetry with a confounding sensibility of materials, non-humans convey impending absence creating a cognitive tremor in the enmeshed interface of geography-author-text-reader.

In chapter 3 that further presents the “stakes of the Anthropocene” (Todd and Davis 767) for Indigenous communities, my readings query whether the intellectual possibilities within the ‘new’ discourse surrounding the non-human, the Anthropocene, and the climate crisis, are adequate to comprehend that which has already been foretold and archived in Indigenous knowledge systems.²² Consequently, this chapter unearths the crisis in metaphors. Rob Nixon echoes a call for a return to metaphors, thus: “Sometimes [metaphors are] just hibernating, only to stagger back to life, dazed and confused, blinking at the altered world that has roused them from their slumber” (“The Swiftness”). I claim that Indigenous literatures hold early warnings of the climate crisis in metaphors we do not yet centre in climate discourse. Accordingly, I trace the history of the recurring set of popular slogans *jal, jangal, jameen* (water, forest, land) in east India to read them as climate vocabularies.²³ These vocabularies recur in environmental movements because of a specific climate history of the nineteenth century (meteorological and

²² A note on terminology: for this thesis, I use the term Anthropocene to respond to its current usage in literary studies by relying on the critique of the term by Davis and Todd (761-780), and Damodaran (93-116).

²³ The plural form of ‘vocabularies’ used in this thesis is to encompass the translations and transmutations of *jal, jangal, jameen* in several Adivasi and other vernaculars.

anthropogenic) and because they integrate a notion of collective Adivasi epistemologies organised around *jal, jangal, jameen*.

Here, I shall briefly note my use of humanism when I qualify certain readings in my thesis as humanist. While presenting sections of this thesis to a mixed group in academia, I have encountered a certain bewilderment when the words ‘humanist’ occurs alongside ‘Indigenous’, or when quoting Indigenous thinkers who convey the climate crisis as ‘universal’. If I attempt to adapt their hesitation into a question, it can be expressed thus: can Indigenous voices speak of the crisis in humanist terms, given that their position was made vulnerable in the climate crisis by colonial history, and this suggests the need to critique the framing of the crisis as ‘universal’? Humanism, as I use the term in this thesis is not related to the Euro–American philosophy of Humanism. Humanism, here, is not one of human solidarity alone but rather follows Indigenous epistemologies to refer to ‘all our relations’, a deference that is extended to non-humans. Within global Indigenous literatures, several Indigenous thinkers have consistently framed the human position that accommodates Indigenous understanding of what it is to be human, and how literature assists this universal question. Simon Ortiz’s humanism theorised a form of “critical thinking” about the “human condition” and “our relationship to others” as one of the central concerns of literary criticism (Ortiz and McAdams 4). Alexis Wright, similarly, recognises the fundamental query of the “emergency century” (SGL) as one where humans address “what the Earth needs”; like the world of *The Swan Book* that overturns

geopolitical boundaries, her way of imagining universal human reliance transcends the physical and philosophical divide between “the Global North and South”. To frame planetary questions that are cognisant of existing social, political, and economic disparities, is for her the responsibility of contemporary writers. She asks, “What makes a good ancestor?”—a question repeated by Daniel Heath Justice in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018), a work that incisively theorises Indigenous humanism. In questions posed and theorised as chapters, “How do we learn to be human?”, “How do we behave as good relatives?” and “How do we become good ancestors?”, Justice offers an expansive understanding of humanism through readings of Native American stories. It is an understanding of humanism that does not “limit the category of *person* solely to the *human*” (38). Humanism is theorised through “kinship” with the non-human world and networks of relations that require of humans the “acknowledgement and importantly, mindful accommodation of difference”.

Thus, theorising humanism is to distance it from existing ideas of “human exclusivity”; Justice critiques this framing of humanism that is “deeply entrenched in settler colonial societies” (40) as the remnants of Enlightenment philosophy and Abrahamic traditions. Indigenous humanism as “kinship” is at once to place humans in a network of interdependence, and to assign political and social responsibility to the human. It encompasses an understanding that the planetary future expects humans to honour mutual co-existence and care for non-humans, and

through agential politics of the present repair and restrict human-induced harm that have created the crisis. Consequently, Bhagban Majhi's humanism recognises his particular position within the Kondh ecology where humans are *biripidka* (earthworms) and where mountains hold agency over humans through providence; at the same time, Kondh humanism does not abdicate Majhi's political agency as essential to claim sovereignty and defend the mountains from mining. Given a conception of humanism based on kinship where the human exists in equation and does not occupy the centre, one might ask why use the term humanism at all. As Justice explains in relation to Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's talk "The Dangers of a Single Story", "complexity challenges manipulation" (37). Even removed from the Euro-American philosophical tradition, humanism is a much-contested word that still privileges the humanity of certain populations alone. When reframed and reasoned through Indigenous discourse, it expands the way we think of the human condition. Through a multiplicity of Indigenous epistemologies attributed to humanism, it thus challenges histories of dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples, the marginalisation of Indigenous voice and co-options of Indigenous ideas within dominant discourses on humanism.

Humanism as it recurs in this thesis is not about human centrality, but of human responsibility. While Indigenous discourse critiques the 'universal' framed from Euro-American centres that depoliticise the inequality of the climate crisis, it does not reject the fact of the crisis *as*

universal. I argue that the crisis as universal demands to be theorised from vulnerable peripheries, in this case, from the place and perspective of Indigenous peoples—it is only from the discursive location of Indigeneity that the structures which create (and reproduce) an unequal crisis, resulting in the divisions between the more vulnerable and the privileged, can be destabilised. When the climate crisis as universal endures in the locality, the forms of humanism that have been precluded command attention. Indigenous land rights are humanist, and ‘human poetry’ should concern itself with the thriving songs of resistance by Indigenous peoples. Settler colonial history that has devastated Indigenous communities, making them more vulnerable and the crisis unequal, *is* human history that requires collective contemplation, and accountability; it is not an alternative history demanding a separate place of critique. When Heather Davis and Zoe Todd write about the need to “decolonise the Anthropocene”, and when Indigenous thinkers reframe the Anthropocene as one that addresses settler colonialism and industrial capitalism, it needs to be read as humanist discourse, not a minority discourse within climate studies. This brings me to the responsibility of literary studies at large to engage with Indigenous history and intellectual traditions. Edward Said writes, “[The] critic is responsible to a degree for articulating those voices dominated, displaced or silenced by the textuality of texts” (53). He writes about the commitment to articulate against dominant discourse as a responsibility of the critic; he does not delineate the responsibility as a prerogative of the *minority critic*. Engagement with the violent vestiges of colonial history, and its continued forms, the way

they disenfranchise Indigenous voices and discourse is the responsibility of *any* literary criticism; it is not the duty of diversity, an onus on that section within a literary department where the minority enquires about ‘minority’ history and criticism to be called upon by other Eurocentric ‘universal’ subjects to present proof of exclusion whenever required.

In the winter of 2019, 40,000 trees of the Talabira Forest were felled for a proposed coal mining project by Adani. Fellings in west Odisha have acquired a banal regularity in the past three decades, one of such ordinary occurrence that truth-telling of another deforestation becomes either insignificant or purely sentimental in its polemics. “But who wants an axed-up mind”, as Alexis Wright writes on the nature of “truth-telling” that is censored for being polemical (“Purpose”), a critique often harboured toward Indigenous writing and political organisation for Indigenous land rights. Paradoxically, and in poignant ways, an “axed up mind” is quite a fitting expression, if one is to comprehend themes in contemporary Indigenous writing: “axed” evokes material catastrophe, and destruction of “place-worlds”, as much as “axed-up mind” implies the loss of expansive imaginations of the literary, the deep-time literary cultures that archive “an epic of sweeping themes” (WH). Wright has spoken of the pan-temporality of Australian First Nation literary cultures invoking the Mexican writer, Carlos Fuentes. She writes: “All times are important to us. No time has ended and all worlds are possible” (POL). Similarly, Jeanine Leane titles and introduces her edited collection of Australian First Nations poetry as *Guwayu—For All Times*: “Guwayu—a

Wiradjuri word—means *still and yet for all times*. Guwayu means all times are inseparable; no time is ever over; and all times are unfinished” (*Guwayu xi*). Wary of essentialising or evoking a nostalgia, Chapter 4 titled ‘A Sustenance for All Times’ engages with the pan-temporal literary imaginations for sovereignty. Instead of the jurisdictional definitions of sovereignty, which is outside the scope of this thesis, I wish to direct the reader to the imaginative and literary vision of sovereignty, that defines land redress as inseparable from intellectual sovereignty. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes, “Indigenous sovereignties are in and of the earth” (“Incommensurable” 259). Thereby, the earthen word ‘sustenance’ roots literary sovereignty to land. Along with this grounding, I choose to retain the French etymology of sustenance—*soustenir*—to sustain. Consequently, by sustenance I imply the imaginations of sovereignty *sustained by* Indigenous women that transcend national limits and build long-term processes to create a “self-governing literature” (SGL). Sustenance as a word to tie thematic concerns in the following chapter is indeed an homage to Chippewa scholar Gerald Vizenor’s “survivance”: Indigenous literature and narrative as seeking and providing a “narrative estate of native survivance”, as triumphant over “dominance, detractions, obtrusions, [...] tragedy and the legacy of victimry” (*Survivance* 1). Instead of aligning with and exploring the postmodern potential suggested by his work, for this thesis, I wish to retain Vizenor’s sense of the recuperative nature of words. Sustenance, therefore, imbibes the meanings of survivance and continuance, as much as it imagines itself as a vessel of

meaning imbibed from words from other languages placed within this thesis.

The fact that Indigenous writing is becoming a legitimate discipline of enquiry within Euro–American academia, as intellectual histories with clear genealogies, owes much to the work of Osage scholar Robert Warrior’s “intellectual sovereignty” (*Tribal Secrets* 122) as much as to Vizenor’s offering of a “narrative estate” (*Survivance* 1). Warrior collectivised resonances in Native American intellectual traditions in his book *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1995) influencing further and similar work on literary and intellectual histories in other Indigenous contexts. This thesis chooses to gather Indigenous women’s voices in framing “intellectual sovereignty”. Following “a self-governing literary landscape” (AL) as theorised in Wright’s fiction and speeches, Chapter 4 considers the work of Indigenous women writers and their enduring processes of intellectual sustenance that imagine sovereignty beyond the patriarchal principles of the nation–state and national literary traditions.²⁴ Reading this temporal vision as forms of sustained literary critique by women writers, and reading sovereignty as “open–ended” (SGL) and as “unimpeded” literary imagination, I bring together the many imaginative sovereignties in Alexis Wright’s novel *The Swan Book*, Kondh writer Basanti Majhi’s short fiction “Gadhe Chadei”

²⁴ The chapter will refer to and draw ideas from intellectual histories written by Indigenous women scholars like Bandana Tete, Shari Huhndorf, Mishuana Goeman, Aileen Moreton–Robinson in the transnational sphere.

(“Gadhe Bird”), and Santhal writer Regina Marandi’s novel *Becoming Me* (2014). As a safe and nourishing world for women’s literary imaginations, the final section of the thesis imagines a metaphorical *jilimi*, “a women’s camp” (Bell 15-17) created in Athabaskan-Koyukon poet Mary Tallmountain’s triptych *Continuum*. It recovers Laguna Pueblo poet Paula Gunn Allen’s contribution to Indigenous women’s literature by reading her mentorship and literary guidance as remembered in Tallmountain’s poetry. I discuss how Allen’s literary visions are created and sustained in Tallmountain’s body of work and life. I hope this *jilimi*, though explored in the concluding sections, presents itself in spaces throughout the thesis; it is my attempt to allow the literary readings that unfold in the following chapters to convey the nurturing aspects of literary sustenance while parsing the difficult histories that have formed the question of evidence.

I draw my own picture, and invent my own grammar,
I make my own tools.

— Abhay Xaxa

1

A QUESTION OF EVIDENCE

The Sovereign Forest is an art installation curated by Amar Kanwar in collaboration with Sudhir Pattnaik and journalists at Samadrusti.²⁵ The installation was launched in global art galleries,²⁶ and housed in Samadrusti's office space in Bhubaneswar, Odisha (India). I visited the exhibit in the summer of 2014. Walking into *The Sovereign Forest*, one enters a minimally lit hall: a blend of sepia from lightbulbs cast upon parts of the installation, and white reflected from the video projection "The Scene of The Crime". As one gathers from sections of the installation, the affect desired is one of postponement; the affect produced is reasonably sinister, rousing a certain apprehension of having walked into an

²⁵ An independent media organisation in Bhubaneswar founded by Sudhir Pattnaik.

²⁶ It opened at Yorkshire Culture Park in the UK in 2013 ("YSP: Amar Kanwar").

interrogation, or perhaps a room housing prospective absence. A piece of cloth, a poem, photos from Adivasi protests and movements in Odisha are displayed; samples of Indigenous rice are contained in careful rectangular boxes. In the silence of the room, broken momentarily by the sound of lapping water from the video, the installation urges the observer to ponder on a question, to archive methodical disappearances and to understand the nature of evidence beyond legality. The installation presents evidence of systemic violence against Adivasis, especially from Kashipur and Kalinganagar, that have been sites of sustained struggle against mining giants Aditya Birla, Vedanta, and Tata. Typed templates on walls enquire, “Can ‘poetry’ be presented as ‘evidence’ in a criminal or political trial?” (Kanwar “The Sovereign Forest”).

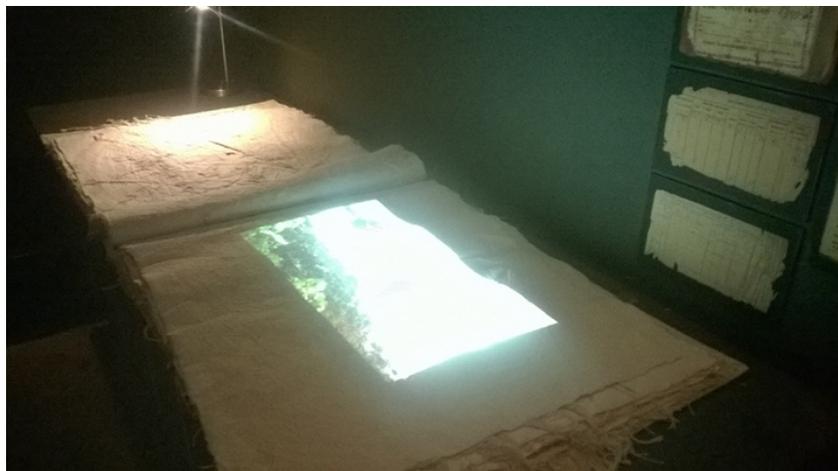


Figure 3: Projection from Amar Kanwar’s installation *The Sovereign Forest* at Samadrusti’s office, Bhubaneswar, 2014.



Figure 4: Boxed Indigenous rice from Amar Kanwar’s installation *The Sovereign Forest* at Samadrusti’s office, Bhubaneswar, 2014.

The figure of power, the state, or the company variously, is mostly absent from *The Sovereign Forest*. Kanwar steps back from the violence in “The Scene of Crime” to create the stillness that precedes it, or the silence that follows. Kanwar’s purpose is to alienate evidence from its wholly legal and often abstract underpinnings, to make a space for conceptualising evidence as material or literary. Poetry, or songs, sung by Dongria Kondh villagers as part of *Gram Sabhas* (Village Councils) during the Niyamgiri movement, for example, formed material evidence presented in front of the Supreme Court, India’s highest court of law.²⁷ In these songs, the villagers referred to Niyamgiri as the Mountain of Law, and to the

²⁷ These testimonies were archived in documentaries by Samadrusti such as *Referendum* (2014), and by video journalism of other independent journalists and collectives such as Amitabh Patra, Video Republic, Revolucinema, among others.

Dongria Kondh god Niyamraja, as one who determines legality. They listed agricultural produce, minerals and water, materials over which *Niyamgiri* granted community ownership, and that were threatened by mining giant Vedanta. Therefore, while representing similar Indigenous movements, and articles presented to defend the land, it is useful to theorise evidence. Kanwar, however, apart from acknowledging his collaboration with Samadrusti, does not centre the many Adivasi voices that own and have informed the evidence presented as part of his installation. They occur as part of the curated art, as the subject, but not necessarily as primary curators of the art or owners of Indigenous evidence. The projection, the display of endangered rice varieties, records of farmer suicides and fingerprints of Adivasis, photographs and records that Samadrusti has collected over the years of their activism, make essential evidence of Adivasi resistance. In this installation, they come to the observer twice displaced. Who, then, is presenting the “evidence” of Adivasiness that Kanwar theorises in his installation? Where is the Adivasi’s sovereign definition of evidence and its presentation? How, then, does “the sovereign forest” establish its sovereignty?

The Sovereign Forest elucidates the continuation of a familiar historical format in art and literary studies on and about Indigenous peoples, that of presenting Indigenous evidence by erasing Indigenous voice. Ownership of land relies heavily on the question of evidence. However, evidence is a fraught space for Indigenous peoples. In the settler colonial states, Australia and North America, colonial expeditions, and

anthropological research during the nineteenth century, collected and *curated* bodies and artefacts (including literatures) as evidence for the ‘disappearance’ of Indigenous communities. Simultaneously, settler colonial regimes *erased* Indigenous bodies and materials through violent means. This paradox of evidence—between colonial knowledge that objectifies Indigeneity to assimilate it in claims of nationhood and the state’s erasure of Indigeneity—facilitated imperial acquisition of Indigenous land. I argue in this chapter that the post-independence Indian state replicates this paradox for similar purposes. Despite existing legal safeguards, there is an obliteration of Indigenous evidence for land acquisition and a simultaneous curation of Indigenous ‘cultural’ evidence within national institutions like museums and archives. The imposition of this paradox requires systemic oppression on Indigenous materials, variously of land, bodies, and literary resources, to sustain colonial ideas and impose “unthinkability” (Trouillot 35).²⁸ Given this history, the question put forward by the installation “Can poetry be presented as ‘evidence’ in a criminal or political trial?” (Kanwar), requires reflection on where the Indigenous voice lies and what the Indigenous writer defines as ‘evidence’. I demonstrate that this schizophrenic duality of simultaneous erasure and curation influences the ways in which Indigenous writers present evidence in contemporary literature. There is a withholding of evidence, an “ethnographic refusal” (A. Simpson 95) to critique being made into the anthropological subject and also a practice of evidentiary

²⁸ I define “unthinkability” later in the section based on Trouillot’s ideas as explored in *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History* (1995).

poetics that relies on literature as an alternate historical archive that emphasises the contemporary material realities of Indigenous existence. Staying in this interstitial space of evidence is also to build on the ‘fringe’ as a political space. It is to denounce assimilation practices and to resist integration into the idea of the ‘nation’. To this end, in the latter sections, I discuss “ethnographic refusal” in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s (Santhal) short story “The Adivasi Will Not Dance”, the “archival poetics” of Natalie Harkin (Narunnga) and Jeanine Leane (Wiradjuri), and Hopi/Miwok poet Wendy Rose’s poem “Truganinny” as a new form of transnational elegy.

For this chapter, I define the limits of the evidentiary as those Indigenous materials that have been the subject of scrutiny in academic disciplines and employed as evidence to impose the paradox. These include colonial anthropology (and complementary areas like folklore), and cultural institutions like museums and archives (human remains, state records). Such evidence, then, becomes a burdened site for literary engagement given its indeterminate repurposing in the subjection as well as erasure of Indigenous existence. My attempt is to demonstrate how Indigenous writers engage literature to resist this paradox. Although, Indigenous forms of the evidentiary have been entangled with legal proof as defined by the nation-state as well as Indigenous communities, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to elaborate the methods of their presentation in courts of law.

A Paradox of Evidence

Based on the historical framework of Haiti, and different from settler colonial contexts, Michel-Rolph Trouillot's text on the "unthinkable history" (35) of the Haitian revolution, nevertheless provides a starting point to theorise the shift from the "unthinkability" of human agency of the colonised subject based on a philosophical claim, to the *making* of unthinkability through a reliance on materials. Trouillot argues that it was a "historical impossibility" (35) to think about the agency of the Haitian slave subject, because of the absence of categories in European rationalist thought that even allowed such a conception: philosophical notions of the human, of *who* was considered human and who had agency, influenced this "unthinkability". Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Trouillot defines the "unthinkable" as "that for which one has no adequate instruments to conceptualize" (38); eighteenth-century thinkers had no pre-existing epistemological tools to conceptualise the humanity of the slave subject, let alone, the agency to revolt. The common contention to justify absence of agency of the enslaved subject or their "unthinkability" was based on "ontology" and not on "empirical evidence". He further argues, therefore, that although "colonialism provided the most potent impetus for the transformation of European ethnocentrism to scientific racism" (36), scientific racism existed ideologically within Enlightenment thought "on both sides of the Atlantic" much before the nineteenth century. My concern with the construct of "unthinkability" is during this

shift, when the Indigenous subject was made an unthinkable human through using constructed stereotypes of ‘extinct’ and ‘primitive’ with the formation of evidence-based disciplines within institutions. Concurrently, the Indigenous subject was constructed as unthinkable on their land through elimination in the context of North America, or in the context of Australia, the doctrine of *terra nullius*. I discuss how the making of this unthinkability since the nineteenth century relied on the use of Indigenous materials as ‘evidence’.²⁹

Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s critique of the epistemological frameworks of the nineteenth century informs my analysis of the paradox of evidence concerning Indigenous contexts. Similar to Trouillot, Smith echoes that the discourse of the “universal human subject” invariably excluded the Indigenous subject and therefore made their agency as creators of their own “history, knowledge and society” unimaginable (27). She writes that from the nineteenth century onwards these “dehumanizing imperatives” (27) were steadily couched in moral claims of civilization, as well as used to justify imperial and colonial invasions. These invasions allowed what she terms “the disciplinary carve-up of the Indigenous world” (29), which “fragmented” every aspect of Indigenous life as evidence for organised disciplines of study. The fragmentation of Indigenous life, their exclusion from the writing of these disciplines and defining their own evidentiary, Smith remarks, was simultaneous with the “material redefinition of our

²⁹The collection of these materials earlier, which existed as ‘trophy’ or ‘plunder’, gathered a legitimacy as ‘evidence’ for scientific enquiry.

world” (34–35), the dispossession from land. I see this time-period as one where the nature of evidence concerning the Indigenous subject evolves from being a construct of the “unthinkable” based on ontology to a construct of the “unthinkable” that relied on material evidence to complement the claim. Colonialism and governmental necessity that required evidence-based disciplines created a complementary context which aided the search for material evidence. The careful categorisation and classification in the natural and race sciences influenced concomitant developments in the field of anthropology and ethnography that progressed as a result of expeditions to Australia, the Pacific and the Americas, and other colonised regions. This relied on Indigenous materials, variously of their land, minerals, bones, skin, and blood, on Indigenous material productions, the meticulous collection of artefacts and literatures, to “carve-up” disciplines. Furthermore, the “unthinkable” Indigenous subject underwent the physical dissection of bodies, the remains of which, bones and genitalia, were displayed after death within museums and archives for the posterity of ‘universal knowledge’. Evidence-based disciplines within institutions employed Indigenous materials as “adequate instruments to conceptualize” (Trouillot 38) and legitimise the “unthinkable” Indigenous subject as either ‘extinct’ (for instance, the myth of extinction of Tasmanian Indigenous communities, a subject of Wendy Rose’s elegy) or ‘primitive’, providing grounds for race-based theories to become a sociocultural convention.

Similar to settler colonial contexts such as Australia and North America, the Adivasis in colonial India were subjected to myths of ‘disappearance’ and ‘primitivism’. In nineteenth-century Odisha, for instance, the expansion of the rich agricultural terrains of Koraput required the British colonial and upper-caste populations to construct the ‘barbaric’ Kondh subject. The conversion of a once princely and self-sufficient kingdom into a site of anthropological inquiry on primitivism, required full-scale invasions and the constructed idea of a ‘dying’ race.³⁰ To make the Kondh “unthinkable”, it relied on their materials, in this case, their rituals and collected oral literatures. J. H Campbell, a Scottish army officer working for the East India Company who was part of these invasions, discarded the “foolish legends” of the Kondhs to write, “Probably these performances have degenerated like the people who flock to them, and are vestiges of musical and poetical excellence that flourished in the ancient kingdom” (Campbell 17). Published in 1864, we can read here a simultaneous curation of Adivasi literatures ongoing as part of expeditions, while constructing the Adivasi as a disintegrating community.

Notwithstanding the racial and scientifically suspect theories, nineteenth-century constructs of “unthinkability”, however, required materiality. The evidence conceptualised in the making of “unthinkability” within museums and archives is one built on proximal handling of blood,

³⁰ This coincided with the anti-Meriah offensives in mid-nineteenth century (Pati *South Asia* 26-27).

bones and skin, that is the ‘maintenance’ and ‘curation’ of Indigenous bodies. Given such proximity to physical evidence, the paradox is unambiguously insidious, when this curation happened simultaneously to the erasure of Indigenous existence on their land. This erasure was not merely a discursive move; although affected by race-based theories that were being framed within socio-scientific disciplines, the erasure of the Indigenous subject, turns out to be access to land and territoriality, rather than ethnic elimination based on the constructs of race. As Patrick Wolfe argues, “Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific irreducible element” (388). He further discusses how the “logic of elimination” of the Indigenous subject in settler colonial contexts, is tied to a “blood/land” binary which brings about the racialisation of the “Indian”. While the ‘blood’ of the enslaved subject was ‘capital’ for colonialism, the ‘blood’ of the Indigenous subject was inconvenient evidence. Wolfe writes:

As opposed to enslaved people whose reproduction augmented their owner’s wealth, Indigenous people obstructed settler’s access to land, so their increase was counterproductive. In this way, the restrictive racial classification of Indians straightforwardly furthered the logic of elimination. (388)

Such an elimination of the Indigenous subject in different settler colonial contexts is not homogenous; even within national contexts, the execution of this logic has stark differences. Smith reads these differences as one informed by colonial experience with governmentality for Indigenous communities (27); the nineteenth-century “elimination” of the Indigenous subject, whether it was Native American removals in North

America or negotiations carried out by British colonies in the South Pacific, was not similar to the Spanish conquests of the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Moreover, as Wolfe discusses, the making of nation-states like Australia, or as I discuss later, the Indian nation-state, *needed* the idea of 'Indigeneity' to claim independence and a long history to solidify national identity (389). The new American's nativist search, similarly, took Native American 'blood quanta' as evidence to claim their indigeneity to the American nation. Therefore, settler colonialism's lasting impact on Indigenous identity is the duality this enforces on Indigenous existence. Indigenous existence (not ontological, but as material body/blood) as evidence was to be nullified to justify occupation, but at the same time, the idea of Indigeneity was needed for settlers. This is why, I consider it a *making* of "unthinkability" of the Indigenous subject through the imposition of a paradox that takes the form of violent elimination (or assimilation), and a curated absence, as I discussed earlier in this section.

What is yet to be forcefully posited in this discourse is that this paradox serves settler colonialism as much as it is replicated in modern nation-states. India serves as a principal site to examine how the paradox of evidence has unfolded in nations that do not have white settler colonialism similar to Australia or North America. As a postcolonial nation-state, India claims independence from British colonialism and yet retains colonial era laws, cultural institutions and categories that continue nineteenth-century constructs of the 'primitive' tribe. Concurrently, India

practises a modern-day internal colonialism led primarily by dominant groups, mostly upper castes, that prepares ground for a peculiar power complex that lies in the intersection of religion, caste, and gender dynamics. The paradox of evidence in India, therefore, did begin as a colonial project in interaction with dominant groups but now serves to fortify the myth of the Hindu nation. The idea of Indigeneity is at once needed to claim the long history of belonging to the Indian subcontinent but claims of Indigenous sovereignty by Adivasis are considered oppositional to the caste hierarchies Hindu nationalism serves to establish. The postcolonial welfare state alongside the work of Hindutva groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) strengthen a colonial paradox, where the Adivasi is simultaneously erased for industrial access to land, and curated within national institutions like Tribal Research Institutes, and associated museums. Supported by the state police and the paramilitary, increased armed presence to combat 'insurgency' or Maoist activities, eliminates the figure of the Adivasi and declares the demand for Adivasi sovereignty as oppositional to national interest and therefore deserving of force.³¹ A revision of the laws of tenancy and land acquisition, most recently the revision of the India Forest Act (1927) that called for the eviction of a million people from Adivasi landholdings in 2019, followed decades of sustained invasions (national and industrial) into Adivasi land and forests. Simultaneously, the Tribal Research Institutes set up in 1953 to collect data and address concerns faced by 'tribal' groups, serve as

³¹ For more discussion on the invasion of security forces, state oppression on Adivasi communities, see Dungdung.

libraries, archives and museums that ‘protect’ Adivasi material cultures. The state’s ‘protection’ in these museums is not limited to a display of traditional garb, weapons and tools, to signify a pre-technological pre-civilizational context. As part of annual exhibitions, the institute displays living Adivasi women and children within enclosures, much alike sexualised Hottentot Venuses, to present them to a majority upper-caste audience as ‘evidence’ of progress vs primitivism, urban vs tribal and similar dichotomies maintained within the spaces of the exhibition and museums (*The Human Zoo* 3:20–6.25). Here, the Adivasi’s physical existence is necessary to maintain epistemological evidence of the ‘primitive tribe’ reinforced in state tribal institutes.

While there may not be straightforward similarities in state-legislated policies to Australia’s Aboriginal Protection Act of 1909, the work of the welfare state and the quasi-state organization such as the RSS, have created a methodical system of assimilation of diverse Adivasi communities into the Hindu-led national fold. In settler-colonial contexts, ‘blood quanta’ determined assimilation into the white mainstream, in India, Adivasi communities which were mostly ‘animist’ or followed Indigenous faiths like the Sarna religion, are assimilated into the caste order. The network of RSS Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams set up specifically for the “upliftment of Vanvasi” (“Vanvasi About Us”),³² have a section of residential schools for Adivasi children. The logo that reads “*tu*

³² *Vanvasi* meaning ‘resident of the forest’ is an archaic term used for Adivasi peoples.

main ek rakt” meaning ‘you and I are of the same blood’ claims Hindu caste groups’ relationship to Adivasis to assert indigeneity, and in turn assimilates Adivasis into the caste hierarchical fold. Similarly, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), that prides itself as being the largest ‘tribal’ school in the world,³³ and the Ashram schools (residential schools) set up by the Odisha state department that house nearly 55,000 students between 2014–2015 (Gedam “Amid Rising”) have led to strengthening the dominant Oriya language and culture, that invariably delinks this generation of children from Indigenous languages spoken in their villages.³⁴ I note this form of assimilation in order to draw parallels with the histories of conversions by Christian missionaries, boarding schools and reservations in North America in the nineteenth century and the Assimilation policies of the Australian nation-state in the early twentieth century, leading to the stolen generation of children.³⁵ My aim, here, is to suggest how contemporary concerns for Adivasi communities in

³³ Dungdung terms Kalinga Institute for Social Sciences as “factory schools” that stigmatises Adivasi children’s identities. He further mentions the racist remarks of its founder Achyuta Samanta, who is celebrated for his work to ‘preserve’ Adivasi culture (“Lessons in Destruction”).

³⁴ In the villages near Jalaput I visited during late 2017 and in ensuing discussions, several women confided the absence of their children and the disconnect they feel owing to a disruption in speaking Oriya, the dominant language in Odisha as opposed to their native languages.

³⁵ I initially developed and presented the research for this section as part of a panel on “CRASSH Decolonizing the Curriculum: Perspectives from South Asia” in 2016. Recent anthropological work presents a casework of the largest ‘tribal’ school in Odisha, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, drawing parallels with nineteenth- and twentieth- century boarding schools in North America, and the ‘stolen generations’ in Australia, see Gupta and Padel.

India, are allied to contemporary Indigenous poetry written by Natalie Harkin, Jeanine Leane and Wendy Rose, which I discuss in the latter sections of this chapter. The evidentiary literature of these poets, that engages with histories of assimilation and child removals, and the search for generational memory within archives, serves as a caution for the ramifications of state assimilations. It is also an extension of literary solidarity to contemporary Adivasi generations in state schools to develop a language of resistance. Therefore, my reading of Harkin and Leane's poetry specifically, is to frame the repetition of a familiar and not-so-distant history of removals in the Indian context, and to anticipate a comparative space for such a future poetics.

As discussed in this section, the paradox of evidence that gained a stronghold in nineteenth-century settler colonialism, is reformulated in the postcolonial Indian nation-state. Adivasihood is at once eliminated (or assimilated) and generated as a subject of ethnographic curiosity in the Hindu nationalist state. This duality informs the critique in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's short story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance", which I discuss in the next section. Shekhar's narrative argues against the ethnographic idea of the Adivasi and of Adivasi performance constructed in folklore publications and studied within colonial ethnographical categories, from an upper-caste positionality and lens. His depiction of Mangal Murmu's refusal to dance critiques this erasure and presents material evidence of contemporary Adivasihood: the land mined by extractive colonialism in the Indian nation-state. These materials of

evidence, the land, literature and Adivasi voice, which featured twice removed in Kanwar's installation *The Sovereign Forest*, here, are defined and presented through the positionality of the Santhali performer.

“Ethnographic Refusal”

I only said, ‘We Adivasis will not dance anymore’– what is wrong with that? We are like toys– someone presses our ‘ON’ button, or turns a key in our backsides, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our tamak and tumdak, or start blowing tunes on our tiriyo while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds. Tell me, am I wrong?. (Shekhar 170)

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar is a Santhal writer from Ranchi, who works as a medical officer in Pakur, Jharkhand. His oeuvre includes *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupy Baskey* (2014), *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories* (a collection published in 2015), and *My Father's Garden* (2018). Shekhar primarily writes in English and can be considered as one of the leading contemporary writers of contemporary Adivasi fiction in English, outside of Indigenous fiction from the north-eastern states; this accounts for his relative visibility within recognised Anglophone Indian literature. The titular piece of his short story collection “The Adivasi Will Not Dance” is an exemplary for “ethnographic refusal” (A. Simpson 95) in modern Adivasi literature. The character, Mangal Murmu, a Santhal farmer and performer, evocatively rejects performing in front of a representative of the Indian government. He resists the anthropological

construct of the Adivasi and the consumption of Adivasi culture in state-sponsored occasions that is removed from its rootedness in Adivasi autonomy and land ownership. In this refusal to perform, the Adivasi artist withholds evidence of Santhal culture to demarcate a distinctive position of Indigeneity to resist assimilation.

Mangal is a musician who has lost his farmland after land acquisition by a mining company. He speaks in the first person to the reader. His tone is matter of fact, cynical, with a wry sense of humour, as he narrates the aftermath of a long struggle for land rights. He critiques the culture of parachute solidarity that lands on Indigenous political movements against industrial displacements—the political parties, missionaries, academics and activists, variously—which then leaves once the land is lost. When “Rashtrapati babu” (187), the President of India is called to lay the foundation stone of a new power plant in their village, the local officer calls upon members of the Santhal community to prepare a twenty-minute performance to honour the President. Mangal, being a well-known instrument player, receives this letter, which promises a generous compensation to each performer. Having lost his farmland and sustaining himself through ‘selling’ their art form, Mangal agrees. However, remembering the long history of dispossession of Santhals in colonial India and the modern invasive regime forces Mangal to a final act of resistance. He presents a straightforward claim, “We Adivasis will not dance anymore” (170). Embedded in this refusal is his opposition to the construction of the power plant; additionally, the decisive act of denial to

conform to state expectations from the Santhal, defines his idea of Adivasi art and its purpose.

Colonial and upper-caste classifications arising from nineteenth-century anthropology, folklore, and census collections, have essentialised Adivasi art forms as ‘folk’ separate from the more ‘classical’ categories of high art which are accorded a legitimate historicity. Here, Mangal’s act resists the ethnographical Adivasihood enforced by these categories and posits an Adivasi reconfiguration of literary evidence. This form of protest is not novel but can be situated within the long history of protest in Adivasi oral tradition transcribed and translated by colonial anthropologists in the early twentieth century. Even in these early songs, one can read into the withholding of Adivasi evidence while being transcribed by the anthropologist/folklorist. The Adivasi singer/writer has continuously negotiated and prioritised the kind of information to withhold and release to better formulate the literary evidentiary.³⁶ This form of resistance in withholding evidence is emblematic of what Audra Simpson terms “ethnographic refusal”. She bases the idea of “ethnographic refusal” in “method and representation”, on the Kahnawa’kehró:non refusal to state authority and occupation, and their everyday refusal based on a strict membership code of the community. For Simpson, such a form

³⁶ A literary analysis of songs transcribed by Verrier Elwin, Shamrao Hilvale, among others, reveals Adivasi critique of state and upper caste oppression, land loss and infringement of forest rights. To elaborate on these readings is beyond the scope of this chapter. I specifically referred to Elwin’s *Folk Songs of Chhattisgarh* (1946) and Elwin & Hilvale’s *Folk Songs of Maikal Hills* (1944).

of sovereignty is also vital to resist at the methodological level of knowledge formation given its “jurisdictional authority”. To “not speak”, or to practice a refusal is to first, present the unequal positions of the researcher and the ethnographical subject, and thereby protect the interests of the community by choosing to withhold evidence. On the part of the ethnographer, Simpson writes that this act of “shutting off the tape recorder” (113) is to account for the history that has created the discipline, halt ethnographic representations and “statist forms of recognition”, to reposition the subject in their present contexts (105-113). I draw a literary scope from Simpson’s method to read Mangal’s act of refusal both as an Adivasi performer and a representative for the performative craft of his community. Mangal’s act of refusal is “theoretically generative” given that it reminds the audience of his performance rooted within a specific Adivasi context and the history within which Adivasi communities have been constructed as performers. He critiques the continuity of such forms of subjectivity that are simultaneous with the violent suppression of Adivasi sovereignty in the Indian nation-state.

The government official’s demand for a performance from Mangal in turn reveals how state-sponsored folklore in Tribal Research Institutes constructs the performing Adivasi subject and essentialises Adivasi literature and performance as an ‘exotic’ genre with ‘primitive’ attributes. It is this constructed idea of Adivasi evidence, an ‘imperial copy’, that dominant communities access, rather than as a literary genre studied

beside more ‘sanitised’ performative traditions like Odissi or Kathak, or read beside Hindi or Bengali literatures. Mangal is acutely aware that such a classification is the continuation of colonial evidence-based disciplines that have classified Adivasi literature as folklore. Moreover, it has resulted from an upper-caste appropriation of literary and performative spaces in canonising their traditions while relegating Adivasi art to the fringes of ‘folk’ that is marked by an expectation to be rural, primitive, simple and unpolished. The Adivasi performer, Mangal claims, is asked for the odd “athletic meet, or inauguration” (179) where invariably an upper-caste person in a position of power, consumes their art. Besides, Adivasi art is essential to claim state borders, to denote the state’s long history. This further strengthens museums and archives such as Tribal Research Institutes across different states to preserve ethnographical Adivasihood. However, their literatures and performances are not accorded the standing and richness of a literary canon in itself, worthy of time, critical insight and reading:

[In] the name of Adivasi culture and Jharkandi culture, it is necessary to make the Adivasi dance. Even Bihari and Bangali and Odia say that Jharkhand is theirs. They call their culture and music and dance superior to those of us Adivasi. Why don’t they get their women to sing and dance in open grounds in the name of Jharkhandi culture? For every benefit, in job, in education, in whatever, the Diku are quick to call Jharkhand their own— let the Adivasi go to hell. But when it comes to displaying Jharkhandi

culture, the onus of singing and dancing is upon the Adivasi alone.

(179)

Each of the states, Bihar, Bengal and Odisha, which Mangal calls out, has a large Santhal and other Adivasi population, each with historically rich and thriving literary and performative cultures. However, during state formation, the dominant languages such as Bengali, Odia and Bihari retained a stronghold in culture and the dominant communities have retained power as landholders on Adivasi land, since the nineteenth century or as part of recent migrations. Mangal critiques the state for its continued demand of ethnographical Adivasiness in the form of performance while refusing to acknowledge the material evidence of Adivasi dispossession. Jharkhand or 'land of the forests', where Shekhar's story is set was to be left to the governance of Adivasis by the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act 1876 and later by the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908. These two acts prohibit the sale of Adivasi land to non-Adivasis. However, even after attaining statehood, unmitigated land acquisition by state and private coal and resource mining companies has significantly diluted these agreements. Mangal therefore opines, "[How] can anyone force Santhals to vacate their land in the Santhal Pargana? Didn't we have the Tenancy Act to protect us?" (181).

The encroaching industry and nation-state fail to read the intricate connection of land and legality embedded in Adivasi literature in Mangal's definition of his performance. By reminding the reader of the Tenancy Act, he is aware of the differences in ideas of legal ownership of land, and

therefore negotiates a position that combines Adivasi customary law with that of legality defined by the nation-state. By presenting evidence of their “dancing ground”, Mangal defines his performance, here signifying the Adivasi literary tradition, as both historical archive and legal document for land ownership. He places his performance in the canon of Adivasi literary traditions containing origin epics and myths that have acted as testaments for land rights consisting of claims over land, rituals, and other non-human entities, a concept that I elaborate in Chapter 2. Mangal specifically accesses the history of protest from the oral culture surrounding the historical Santhal figure, Birsa Munda. Birsa’s activism that began in the decades following the Indian Forest Act of 1878 was in significant ways a beginning of Indigenous movements against land dispossession in central India. Songs surrounding Birsa Munda initiated the demand for forest rights (Zide and R.D. Munda 47-49), and are precursors to the call for *jal, jangal, jameen* (water, forests, land). Mangal’s affirmation of difference for the protection of the Adivasi’s “dancing grounds”, the land, invokes this anti-colonial resistance of Birsa in his contemporary negotiation with the postcolonial nation-state.

Mangal engages the reader in conversation, putting forward arguments and analogies to justify his position as if he were being asked to testify in court. He is aware of his mostly upper-caste audience and cleverly places them in their socially privileged position, addressing the reader as “sir”. Moreover, in ending the story with a suspended dash with Mangal’s speech being interrupted as he gets beaten by the police, Shekhar

indicates that there has been no closure to Adivasi dispossession. The text's desire, therefore, is to achieve a level of transparency with the reader to demonstrate the schizophrenic nature of the continued paradox imposed by the nation that demands cultural evidence that is inextricably tied to land while denying the material and empirical reality of dispossession of that land. The zealous demand of performance by the state is intrinsically bound to the question of territoriality and occupation. In relation to Indigenous displacements in the North American context, Vine Deloria writes, "[T]he white always presents opportunities for cultural enrichment when he is trying to steal Indian land. When the white sincerely wants to develop capital resources of the Indian people he invariably strengthens Indian cultural traits" (*Custer* 187). The statist consolidation of "cultural traits" that Shekhar's text supposes, makes Indigenous evidence in contemporary literary disciplines twice removed. It does not retain Indigenous voice. It traps Indigenous literary evidence in a schizophrenic in-between of the primitive and the already lost, lacking contemporaneity and its specificity to land. In material ways it reinforces what Deloria claimed as the nature of existence for American Indians within the American nation-state: "To be an Indian in modern American society is in a very real sense to be unreal and ahistorical" (2). Mangal refuses to conform to this state of the in-between.

When Amar Kanwar's art installation *The Sovereign Forest* poses the critical question "Can poetry be presented as evidence in a political or criminal trial?", Mangal's "ethnographic refusal" helps theorise the

positionality from which the question is posed, and who is asked and needs to present evidence in the postcolonial nation-state. Given that Adivasi communities continue to be subjected to a paradox of evidence, it becomes paramount to uphold Adivasi authorial positions while presenting evidence of Adivasi displacements from mining and extractive colonialism as part of art installations, or literary productions. In the next sections, I specifically examine ‘archival poetry’ and the ways in which it has become a site for re-conceptualising evidence. This evidentiary poetry holds a literary ‘trial’ of colonial archives and institutions that have practised erasures and constructed the “cardboard prison” (*Walk Back 3*) for Australian First Nations.

Archival Poetry

“This cardboard prison they call an archive
is cold, airless and silent as death.”

–Jeanine Leane, “Cardboard Incarceration” (*Walk Back 3*)

“A violent truth on the state’s record sits wedged in my stomach; logged, wax-sealed, ring-bound and pinned with too many data-files that should have warned, *likely to cause anxiety sharp enough to cut you in halves, quarters and one-sixteenths*, it has become my addiction and I can’t get enough, compelled to do something-anything with this mountain of surveillance that refuses to peak,

and I know there is so much more, so much more, to gather.”

-Natalie Harkin, “Archive-Box Transformation” (*Manus* 15)

While Shekhar’s story critiques statist constructions of Adivasiness, Jeanine Leane and Natalie Harkin’s poetry uncovers what Harkin terms an “archive fever paradox” to elucidate the schizophrenic nature of colonial archival evidence that has simultaneously erased and constructed the Aboriginal subject. Here, reconstituting the evidentiary involves a re-confrontation and engagement with colonial institutions, to physically occupy these spaces and handle records, and recover Indigenous evidence from gaps and erasures. Harkin engages Jacques Derrida’s title “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression”, to communicate the established problematic of the archive, here, the Australian state’s, that “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (Derrida and Prenowitz 11). Access to memory, adequately, an access to the memory of a people, builds cultural capital and lays the foundations of institutions. But, the archive’s power, that Derrida describes, becomes distinctly sinister, when the state archives the memories of those who the state has deemed ‘absent’. For the descendants of the ‘absent’ and ‘stolen’, to occupy the space of the archive, together with a feverish retrieval of evidence of one’s history and selfhood, is also a deeply unsettling rediscovery of a past that holds evidence of trauma, death and removal, that delinked them from generational memory. The paradox of evidence is acute in the Australian First Nations’ imagination

shaped by two key processes in history. Declaring Indigenous land as *terra nullius* propagated the idea of the “unthinkable” existence of Australian First Nations communities. Leane’s work defines this Australian national condition as the “settler mythscape” (*Mythscape*). She writes:

The modern invaded space of Australia as a nation has depended for its survival since 1788 on the creation of a mythscape of ‘arrival, progress and belonging’. Settler colonies are not just built by armies and governments [...] The flesh and blood of the invaders comes from the stories that they invent and import. This is the mythscape of the settler nation. The empty land, the peaceful and gradual settlement, the underdeveloped peoples, the sparse population are just some of the settler myths handed down through the cultural transmission [...]. (*Mythscape*)

I read the critique of state archives in her poem “Cardboard Incarceration”, the introductory poem to her book *Walk Back Over* as a critique of the Australian “mythscape”. This serves as a prelude to writing back evidence onto landmarks that outline the second half of the book titled “Country” (21-29).

Further to the creation of the “mythscape”, the assimilation policies from the twentieth century onwards that resulted in the ‘stolen generations’ of children was rooted in the evidence of ‘blood quanta’ used to systematically erase Indigenous trace. Informed by nineteenth-century scientific racism, policies such as the Aborigine Protection Act of 1909 intensified the focus on *blood as evidence*. It involved a surveillance of daily

lives and family relationships of First Nations peoples, to remove children for assimilation into white society. This was a lived history for Natalie Harkin's grandmother and great-grandmother, a history that she returns to in *Archival Poetics* and her artwork. The era of assimilation, which began in the early twentieth century and continued well into the 1960s, was simultaneous with the systematic archiving and surveillance of Indigenous populations that led to the making of modern-day Australian archives, a site that is at the poetic core of the archival poetics of Harkin. These two processes used Aboriginal evidence to eliminate Aboriginal trace, so that the Australian national imagination shaped by the state's archive sustained the idea of the Aboriginal person as "disappearing" or "destitute". Therefore, Harkin transforms Derrida's title "Archive Fever" into "archive fever paradox", theorising that within and because of this "archive", the "paradox" is a reality lived by Indigenous populations alone. To resist this paradox, she employs the paradoxical concept of "blood memory" theorised by N. Scott Momaday and Chadwick Allen. She presents the evidence of "blood on the archives" (*Manus* 8), at once the eugenicist principles of the Assimilation era that quantified Aboriginal blood, as well as the histories of violence on Aboriginal bodies, by incarceration, domestic abuse, and separation. The confrontation of 'blood in the archives' is accompanied with a recuperation of memory, and filling gaps to arrive at knowing herself and her maternal family. Her poetry, therefore, is suffused with the paradoxical language of "blood memory" to overcome the paradoxical nature of evidence that defines the condition of many Indigenous children of the stolen generation. Goorie

researcher Evelyn Araluen Corr and Mathew Hall, have also identified the dual nature in which Australian First Nations writers, like Leane and Harkin, work “within and against the archive” (Corr “Silence” 487). Corr writes that for Aboriginal women today, the archive is both “a repository of family history” and a “site of recovery”. She reads in Harkin’s articulation, the archive as “a site of bloodshed but also genealogy” (490). Similarly, Hall reads Harkin’s engagement with the archive as a “rewriting of historical documents” (69). Both position Harkin’s “archive fever” as ways to resist silences and erasures, working “within and against the archive”. My reading of Harkin’s poetry will demonstrate that because of the paradox of evidence that underpins the nature of the Australian state archive to render Aboriginality either absent or an ‘imperial copy’, Harkin’s resistance to this state repurposes the paradox of “blood memory” through her poetry.

i) Country as Archive

Jeanine Leane, currently resident lecturer of Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne, grew up in Gundagai which is part of Wiradjuri country in New South Wales. She is the author of two poetry collections titled *Dark Secrets after Dreaming* (2010) and *Walk back Over* (2018), and a novel titled *Purple Threads* (2011). Her second poetry collection, *Walk Back Over*, published by Cordite, with a forward by fellow poet and writer Ellen Van Neervan, is divided into four sections: “Walk Back Over”, “Country”, “The Montego-Yangshou Express”, and

“Walk Back Over”. The book performs the subject matter of the title: the first section frames the Australian nation-state as a “mythscape”. Her poetry is an act of ‘walking over’ this “mythscape” to recuperate the “country” as archive. In the following sections, she restores stories to particular landscapes she had known as a child or places of cultural importance, and for which her generational memory serves as archive for the Wiradjuri people.

“This cardboard prison they call an archive
is cold, airless and silent as death.” (*Walk back 3*)

These lines taken from the introductory poem of the book, “Cardboard Incarceration”, are one among eleven poems on evidence in the first section, where Leane rejects the notion of the archive as a hallowed space of knowledge production. From her positionality as a Wiradjuri woman, the archive is a “cardboard prison” (3). It is a critique of the nation-state’s archives, of the meticulous curation of the ‘imperial copy’ of Aboriginality in these “cardboard” boxes. The archive becomes a “perverse space” (Harkin “Poetry and Poetics”), a site of violence, which is not self-reflexive or consciously hides and erases the evidence of its own violent history. Given that it serves as a cultural institution for the Australian nation-state, it has formed and continues to inform the “settler mythscape”. The nation-state *is* the “cardboard prison” (*Walk Back 3*) which is “silent as death” for it is built on the enforced absence of Aboriginal bodies and voices and continues to incarcerate them in colonial stereotypes and

modern-day prisons. To substantiate her argument of the nation-state as a “prison”, the ensuing poems in the section use the factual for a poetic intervention. She builds a steady critique of particular policies that have propagated ideas of ‘authenticity’ and their effect on personal histories. In “Unassimilated”, “Real Australian Girl, 1975”, and “Australian Now”, she critiques Assimilation policies by revealing the way it has fractured Aboriginality: first, by fragmenting Aboriginal families through the Stolen Generations and then by asking the community to ‘prove’ Aboriginal ‘authenticity’ to access state resources, once the ‘imperial copy’ of Aboriginality is lost through forced assimilation. The blood-quanta assimilation into a dominant colour, along with cultural assimilation into an Australian history that begins in 1788, do not allow Indigeneity a self-definition, based as they are on a “mythscape”. Therefore, in the latter two poems, she juxtaposes the incessant queries asked of Indigenous communities on the “mythscape”, the offensive use to enquire whether one is “Abo” or whether one is a “real Australian” (14).

In “Australian Now” (15), she caustically points at the denial of present-day Australia to confront its past. The poem is an ironical nod to the right-wing Australian government’s discourse of ‘move on’ when met with the reminder of settler history and the monumental cost at which First Nations communities from the stolen generations have been assimilated into a national Australian identity to be able to claim, “Australian Now”. Similarly, in “Remote Community” (16), she critiques the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act in 2007 by naming

specific sites that faced the Australian state's armed presence to present the evidence of the incarcerating nature of law. Her use of irony pervades the tone of many poems in this section; in the face of political gaslighting, irony aids historical critique. It also serves to heighten the conscious act of oversight of evidence of Indigenous communities that is at the foundation of the Australian nation, which in the present, takes the form of forgetting its engendered violence.

“Nobody recorded those other syllables in time,
full of sound, fury, punctuation
of blows, blood and screams.” (*Walk back* 11)

This denial makes Leane uncover the violence that has been erased from the archives. Her constant struggle is to make visible that which the state forgets to archive or that which it overlooks as ‘evidence’ of Aboriginal dispossession. In reading into these absences in the archive she evaluates the founding myth of the Assimilation era, that of racial purity for maintaining Australian national identity. That nation which is a “cardboard prison” (3), is also the “cutting board” (8) employed by race science to dissect the blood and bodies of Indigenous communities. The de-mythification of the “settler mythscape” (*Mythscape*), therefore, is a bloody confrontation, in a majority of the poems of the first section, especially “Cardboard Incarceration”, “Lady Mungo Speaks” and “Off the Cutting Board and Outside the Box”. The enforced ‘silence’ on archival evidence, and consequently on Australian national imagination, is jolted

into awakening to acknowledge complicity. That is why in stark italics “Cardboard Incarceration” ends:

*“Read this Black angst against
these white pages.” (Walk back 3)*

The definitive syllables of “angst against” rap the “white page” and resound with the material repercussions of colonial knowledge that she uncovers in the poems of *Walk Back Over*. Evoking material spaces through nouns of containment, she reminds us of the continued imprisonment of Aboriginal bodies. The state is the “cardboard box”, the institutions, universities, laboratories, and archives variously are “the cutting board” that dissected the Aboriginal body for ‘scientific’ evidence whereas the “suitcase” signifies the trade of Aboriginal bones and remains from Torres Strait Islands to western halls of knowledge like the British Museum, the anthropological museums of Cambridge and Oxford as well as the Royal College of Surgeons of England, among others. “Vaults”, “reams”, “boxes”, “records” and “cells” (3), a repetition of containments in the plural, bring out the scale of evidence-based research missions conducted in Australia that are housed in archives. She demystifies every box “tucked tidily”, “every neatly dotted *i/* and symmetrically crossed *t*” of the archives (3), rewriting into them the histories of how Indigenous evidence, of body and blood, was collected, curated and maintained—no cultural institution exists without a “cutting board”, her poetry conveys. Therefore, Leane refuses the notion of the ‘archive’ as defined by the

nation-state. She disowns it as a “cardboard prison” which ‘they’, the white settler state, considers an archive. The purpose of her book is to theorise, and re-establish, country as archive. As Harkin describes, Leane’s “archive intervention” is a “deep contemplation on country and the history of place” (“A Deep Archive”), to write back hidden and erased histories into institutions and the land through her poetry.

Following the resurfacing of evidence of the stolen generations, in the form of the Link-Up report in 2000, Australian citizens walked over many bridges in Australia, including the Sydney Harbour Bridge, as a sign of solidarity and reconciliation. Leane acknowledges the event as an important gesture, however, she says, that reconciliation is never done as a “project”, but rather requires understanding a process. In my conversation with her, she said: “There are a lot of things in Australian history that need to be walked over and back over and back over to see what has been missed, to see the voices that have been missed” (Leane). The book, especially the section titled “Country”, is written to communicate this “process” of walking back over, in this particular case, the Murrumbidgee bridge in her home country of Gundagai, to relate the histories that have been forgotten, and to ‘re-story’ the land. Rather than focusing on a particular poem, I read this section as a continuum of a narrative, consisting of stories. Leane does not abide by the impositions of genres; she affirms that from a “non-western position, genre appears to be a self-imposed border” (*Mythscape*). “Country” becomes a genre-evading set that intertwines personal narrative, with settler myth, and a rewriting

of Wiradjuri history onto landmarks, in an arrangement which would perhaps, for the purpose of accommodating the uninitiated, fall as poetry on the page. She reconstructs Aboriginal evidence by reviving community histories writing “back/Black” onto invaded land.

Leane redefines evidence by bringing the immediate impacts of policies into the level of the interpersonal, the effects that it has over a generation of aboriginal bodies, on the bodies of Lady Mungo of the Muthi-Muthi people, and her grandmother. She remembers personal narratives of her mother, aunty, and grandmother, and of Gundagai where she grew up. However, the ‘return’ is anything but a reconciliation with the known, for the absence of people and country, history is acutely felt, to the extent that her selfhood evades her— “the child is long gone” (*Walk back* 21), and “she’s gone!” (22), is how she abruptly ends “Evening of the Day” and “Kumbilor, hill in my country”, an allusion to her generational history, as well as the children of the stolen generation. The country too, a silent scape, is in want of its Wiradjuri readers to instil meaning: “A dry creek bed—thirsty for a time, / now faded stones no longer shine sharp/ rounded by what has passed.” (22). Her ‘return’ asks the reader to look up from the history textbook to follow the “grey countries” on which the “historyless people dwell” (29); the “process” of reconciliation underscores a listening. The “Other Side of History” is an Indigenous reader intimating stories of specific geographies. For Leane, this takes the form of reading the Murumbidgee river of her native Gundagai country, who she calls the “eddying and flowing Mother of/

Wiradjuri children.” (23). She writes how a deep track of time embedded in this landscape, has been disrupted by the jarring “building over” by “steel, guns and disease– poured out concrete”. She “walks back over” the track, the bridge, recovering deep histories and memories written over by invasion to fit the myth of Australia as having the “shortest history”.

What was their history? My Grandmother said

this place is old.

[...] The bend

of the Murrumbidgee– a deep archive– flows
steady and slow.

.....

I come back after seeing the world.

I hear my Grandmother again.

The bridge is shorter now.

The history of place– still

long and deep. (*Walk back* 25)

This section in “River Memory” distils her redefinition of the archive, where the deep time, of land and river, human history, and personal memory, are in continuum, “a deep archive” (25) that holds both the slow flow of the river over ancient eternal archives of the land and her generational inheritance in the form of stories she heard from her grandmother. The recovery of such an imagination of the archive, requires an undertaking of “Indigenous storywork”, which is “fluid,

organic, and inherently place-based” (Q’um Q’um Xiim et al. 12)—resisting the dominant forms of the colonial and national archive that inform Australian “mythscape”, by a ‘re-storying’ of the land to recuperate erased and missing links to the continuum.³⁷ Elsewhere, in her foreword to an anthology of First Nations poetry she edited, Leane evokes a similar idea with the Wiradjuri word *Guwayu*, meaning “all times are inseparable; no time is ever over; and all times are unfinished” (*Guwayu xi*), lending to the notion of an archive Murrumbidgee’s flow of an ever-evolving “process”.

Leane and Harkin are connected as poetic and archival companions. They connect personal history to archival research in poetry that throws light on the material consequences that the Assimilation policy had on women, specifically “targeting Aboriginal girls for removal from their families and those enabling indentured domestic labour” (*Thesis iv*). Harkin concentrates on the core of the discourse on assimilation: Aboriginal ‘blood’. The “cutting board” of the “cardboard prison” (*Walk back 3*) of Leane’s poetry is the site of ‘archive fever’ for Harkin. Harkin’s recent work *Archival Poetics* (2019), a poetic dossier in three volumes, grows from her doctoral dissertation and poetry submitted as part of the thesis titled “I Weave Back to You: Archival Poetics for the Record”. In the next section, I examine her concept of “re-mapping” the archives, and

³⁷ This act falls in a contemporary tradition of Australian Indigenous poets who carry out a ‘re-storying’ of land through their poetry, as included in *Guwayu* (2020).

through this re-mapping her recovery of personal memory, and community history. By studying her poem “Blood in the Record” from her doctoral thesis that later transforms into “Seep/Stir/Signify” in *Archival Poetics*, I demonstrate the way she unravels ‘paradoxes’ in her dossier, to critique the paradoxical nature of the archive.

ii) Arterial Arrivals

Natalie Harkin is a Narrungga poet and activist from Adelaide, South Australia, currently working as a research fellow at Flinders University. In 2002, Harkin and her cousin approached the Link-Up SA program on behalf of their grandmother. The program had been working to help descendants of the Stolen Generations trace their family history and records, to ‘link-up’ with lost family members who had survived forced separations and removals during the Assimilation era. Harkin’s grandmother wanted to gather information on her childhood, her removal from her family, and more importantly on her domestic placements and her mother’s, Harkin’s great-grandmother, who, she calls the “spectral Matriarch” of the family (Remap 1). Their case worker presented them with a ‘dossier’ of information about her grandmother’s life under the Aboriginal Protection Board and the State Children’s Welfare department. Confronting her grandmother’s past from a state record revealed the state’s surveillance and imprisonment of their generational memory, filling the gaps of a past to which, until then, they were outsiders. Access to slivers of memory in case files, drives Harkin’s

“fever” to locate herself within the archive, to uncover sites of erasures. She makes the personal search for her great-grandmother’s record in the state archives rhyme in with the larger desire of the children of the stolen generation to piece together their family genealogies and histories from colonial archives in order to reconstruct and strengthen their present-day Aboriginal identity.

Harkin’s personal journey as a poet who searches a personal history from the archives, serves to retrieve the larger dispossession of Indigenous body, land, and knowledge. She, therefore, connects the surveillance on her family between the 1920s and 1950s to the long durée of racial discourse in Australia that had influenced land and public policies to promote a state-supported removal from Indigenous land under the guise of paternalistic protection: reports from the Aboriginal Affairs legislation between 1844–1939 are connected to Assimilation era documents to chart out a history of racial discourses that constructed the “Aboriginal Problem” (Remap 4). Moreover, her grandmother’s response to Link-Up’s dossier reveals her memory’s dissonance with the ‘imperial copy’ that the state archived to justify her removal. This paradox, between Aboriginal generational memory, or “memory in [the] blood” (Momaday *The Way* 16) and the archival construction of Aboriginality based on eugenicist principles, underpins Harkin’s poetic use of paradoxes. She locates ‘blood’ at the centre of the archival paradox; blood as Aboriginal evidence has been used for elimination, as well as the construction of Aboriginal ‘authenticity’.

But these reports revealed something else that was both visceral—reality and created-imagined fantasy; something that anchored and centred and pulsed to and from the heart of it all. And that was blood. [...] The racialized assumptions underpinning a so-called real and true Aboriginality became absolute on the colonial blood-dilution scale, and reinforced the actions of government. Blood everywhere...everywhere blood on the record. (Remap 5-6)

Harkin's conceptualisation of blood as evidence, that congeals the materiality of Aboriginal body with collective memory of the community, traces its flow from N. Scott Momaday's use of "blood memory" or "memory in [the] blood" (16) from his literary memoir *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969). Momaday metaphorically uses "blood memory" to build a Native chain of remembrance in the North American context, which, similar to Australian removals, has a history of removals that brought about an erasure of memory. He remembers his grandmother and her ancestors, the Kiowas who had begun a "long migration" (4) down from the mountains of Montana to the plains of the South and East, where they met the Crows. In time, the stories from the Crows intermingled with the mythical traditions of this Kiowa community, an archival link between the mountains and the plains. Momaday affirms that the memory of these stories and landscapes, lay with his grandmother, and that the memory of the land was "memory in her blood" (16). Chadwick Allen explains this trope that underscores Momaday's literary work: "The trope's provocative juxtaposition of blood and memory transforms that taxonomy of

delegitimization through genetic mixing into an authenticating genealogy of stories and storytelling” (“Blood and Memory” 94). The conception of memory and blood, therefore, destabilises eugenicist notions of identities based on bloodline, and allows a genealogy through interrelated stories from fragmented Indigenous memories. Harkin re-conceptualises “blood memory” as follows:

Here, the body (blood) serves as a metaphor for the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and heritage, through individual and collective memory, particularly in the face of enormous loss; this includes common understandings of landscapes, distinct cultural knowledges and diverse histories. This understanding of blood-memory connects us intimately to country and place. (Remap 7)

Harkin strives to maintain this generational link through the memory of her grandmother, and with it, to the deep-time history of Narunnga country, affirming Momaday’s conception. However, unlike Momaday and Leane, her act of ‘re-storying’ does not comprise a “walk over” land, rather it consists of an intervention on institutions built on the land, and those that have disconnected this ancestral chain of remembrance. Like Allen’s reading, Harkin’s invocation of blood as evidence, is a symbolic reclamation of “two highly charged terms”, “blood” and “memory” (Allen *Blood Narrative* 15): one, to reclaim the genealogical chain, and the latter to reinstate community histories for Indigenous communities, that need to be retrieved in ‘pieces’ from the archives. Leane,

“walks over” the “mythscape” of Australia, with the purpose of reinstating Indigenous stories onto land, while Harkin’s poetry is concerned with a “re-mapping” of the archives. She evokes the trope of the Aboriginal bildungsroman, the search for Aboriginal self which takes the form of travel back to one’s roots or origins through country, common to contemporary Indigenous self-narratives, by theorising the archive as a ‘map’. Like maps that remember the contours of past journeys and hold possibilities of arrivals onto the unknown and uncanny, family archives for Harkin present a similar duality. She writes that these maps “haunt” as well as “guide” the children of the stolen generations. Her response to this paradox through an act of “re-mapping” is physical. She enters these archives that have sustained racial discourses on blood to respond to them by making these histories visible.

Her doctoral work on poetry titled, “I Weave Back to You: Archival Poetics for the record” (2016) consistently uncovers the violent evidence of eugenicist discourses by responding through poems like “Eugenics”, “Quantum Query” and “Blood on the Record”. Her response to these physical acts that quantify blood and curate Aboriginality in the dossiers of state archives, takes material form. As a refilling of these gaps in history, she makes an installation titled *Weaving Letters*, a woven basket of letters from archival records charged with erased stories. Like the returning stitches on her weave, a recurring idea that braids her poetry is the historical evidence of genetic engineering data to which her ancestors were subjected. She asks the reader, more specifically the white reader:

“when they come to claim me name me frame me
will they slice me in half
or quarters
or one-sixteenths?” (*Manus 8*)

The query with its chopping incantatory rhyme of “claim me name me frame me” bring to mind Leane’s image of the “cutting board”, and the complicity of institutions to materialise nineteenth-century racial discourses through Assimilation era policies. This re-invocation of ‘blood’ is to magnify for the reader the severing of Aboriginal families through racial ‘piecing’ out of Aboriginal blood and memory, to curate an ‘authentic’ white population. Her concept of blood as evidence is to make visible these racial acts within institutions. In her doctoral dissertation, she titles this poetic uncovering as “Blood on the Record” (*Manus 8*). The same poem occurs as “Seep/Stir/Signify” (AP3 17) and is part of the third section of *Archival-Poetics*: a dossier of three files titled “Colonial Archive”, “Haunting” and “Blood Memory”, respectively. The work is materially designed in a form to remind the reader of state files, the “two-inch thick, ring-bound files” (Remap 1) that Harkin received from the state. She reconstructs her personal genealogy from the “slices” of information within the archive, and reveals the “slices” of blood quanta, the essentialist discourses of the state, that has broken a chain of remembrance for the community. Her repetitions of the quantifications too, of “half”, “quarters”, “one-sixteenths” or “quadroon” and “octoroon”, is not only to render

racial quantifications meaningless, but also to unsettle the fixated idea of Aboriginal authenticity based on bloodline. “Blood Memory”, therefore, is to imagine an Aboriginal identity that stems from collective memory interconnecting the generations that have been dispossessed by a similar history. Re-mapping, for her, is a collective act of creating, and re-filling erasures. The three booklets of *Archival Poetics* are woven together with associations with other writers of “blood memory”, interspersing her voice with those of her peers and contemporaries, to build an archive of familiar resonances to re-create a map of interconnected histories that are unconcerned with national frontiers. Her poetry is set beside the works of Momaday, Okwui Enwezor, Angie Morill and Eve Tuck, Julie Gough, Judy Watson, among others.



Figure 5: Ngarrindjeri basket, Natalie Harkin, *Archival-Poetics 1: Colonial Archive*, Vagabond Press, 2019, 30.

The booklets are an intervention in form; they materialise a modern archival dossier intertwining poetry, theory, photographs of records, reports, and stills of her woven basket, theorising the Indigenous literary as a composite form. The fluidity of this form allows the paradoxes of archives to be juxtaposed. The white space and gaps on and between pages signifying state erasures overwhelm the dossiers to make it evident to the reader the painstaking work of retracing genealogy. Her words set between these erasures, and snippets of records and reports, appear sometimes in notations, sometimes in gushes, to embody the haphazard organisation of memory, as well as the feverish gasps of retrieving missing links of her history as she handles the files given to her by the state. The sporadic arrivals of information replicate the propelling force of arterial blood, that paradoxically holds survival and a definitive end, a nature she extends to the archive.

“archive-fever-paradox
my blood it pumps

where hearts
 have
 stopped” (*Manus 4*)

These lines introduce her poetry manuscript, and are repeated through the pages of *Archival Poetics*, as a reminder of the idea that binds her volumes and the files of the state archive. In the booklet titled “Blood

Memory”, they rightfully find their place beside Momaday’s words from *A Way to Rainy Mountain* and occur as a continuation of the poem “Seep/Stir/Signify” renamed from the earlier version “Blood on the Record” (AP3 18-19). The poem grows into verbs, reproducing her active intervention in archives. If read in continuation between her volumes, the reader grows aware of the ‘fever’ that has prompted the poet for sifting through more files to find traces of memory, for she repeats “but always something else again” (AP3 17). This “something else” signifies that there is more yet to be uncovered about her past, and also that the archive has represented her memory as “something else”, a copy of what it actually had been. She must “gather fragments” from these “magnificent landscapes of deep colonialisms” (17), and always be in a state to probe “something else”, to arrive at signification. She is aware from her encounter with “gaps” and “voids”, that she would never arrive at complete meaning, that the re-mapping too would be a fragmented piece. But she draws hope from the fact that meaning-making is dynamic, that always “there is a movement” toward “new collections/recollections/imaginings”—that is why in “Seep/Stir/Signify”, she adds the qualifiers “fixed and limiting” to “scientific labels” (17), to break free from the limitations of nineteenth-century quantifications that have fragmented a continuity, the continued movement of generational memory. She dwells on these dualities that haunt her encounters with archival records. She communicates to Indigenous communities that this paradoxical nature of the archives and their occupation within it to access

their pasts, is also a state of paradox, of “strength and fragility”, of “mourning and hope” (17).

As I elaborated in my reading of Leane’s and Harkin’s poetry, a paradox of evidence is manifest when an Indigenous person accesses evidence in colonial state archives to re-build generational memory and trace genealogy. The poets respond to this paradox and re-define Indigenous evidence: Leane situates country as archive, while Harkin redefines ‘blood as evidence’ uncovering the paradoxical nature of the state archive to allow Indigenous communities a poetic method to mitigate the schizophrenia of this encounter. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore how this paradox is legally apparent when an Indigenous person presents archival data as evidence in a court of law to claim rights. From the 1980s and 1990s when organisations like Link-Up and the Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission began to investigate the silent histories of child removals, and the latter came up with the impactful report titled *Bringing Them Home Report* (1997), it mostly relied on individual testimonies and built genealogies of Indigenous families by ‘reading into’ these archives. However, as Rosanne Kennedy writes, this form of evidence is received differently within legal institutions and cultural institutions (“Australian Trials” 340-345). While these testimonies have increased visibility of Assimilation era policies and necessitated a critical ‘look-back’ at Australian national memory, they do not qualify in a court of law when Indigenous communities demand rights based on these testimonies. The inability of the law to reflect on its

own narrative quality (Goodrich 112), and extend legal legitimacy to these testimonies and Indigenous literature's historicity, has further strengthened the nature of Indigenous archival poetics.³⁸ There is an urgent need felt by Indigenous writers to revisit colonial archives, make the paradox of evidence visible and respond to the question raised in Kanwar's installation, "can poetry serve as evidence" in a court of law? Therefore, Harkin confronts this paradox that many Australian First Nations' citizens have to gather individual histories to re-build identity within the same spaces that hold their erasures. As part of a keynote panel on "Contemporary Aboriginal Poetics", she said, "We actually have to enter these perverse spaces. They are the spaces that perpetuated the violent acts. But they are the spaces we need to enter to access our family history" ("Poetry & Poetics"). To resist and reformulate this idea of evidence that has been a tool to dispossess, the two poets, Leane and Harkin, place themselves within this "perverse space", and restructure a new language of evidence.

Having explored how Leane and Harkin uncover 'blood in the archives', in the next section I examine the archaeological poetry of Wendy Rose which is concerned with the collection of human remains from Indigenous communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and their preservation in western museums and institutions of learning.

³⁸ Goodrich writes about the "literary quality" of law, defining it as a "language that hides its indeterminacy in the justificatory discourse of judgement; it is a procedure based upon analogy, metaphor and repetition, and yet it lays claim to be cold and disembodied prose" (112).

Rose unearths the bones and physical remains of ancestors from Australian and American Indigenous histories to create a space for transnational mourning in the form of an elegy dedicated to deceased figures that are primarily remembered by their remains. Rose writes another form of evidentiary poetry; her poetry questions the unwarranted demand for evidence from communities that have suffered violent removal of their bodies and histories. She chooses to use unarchived historical preludes privileging Indigenous voice from oral narratives.

Truganinny's Elegy

You will need
to come closer
for little is left
of this tongue
and what I am saying
is important. (Niatum 240)

Truganinny (also known as Trucanini)³⁹ is widely mythologised as the last member of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, and the last speaker of the Nuenonne language, following invasion in Tasmania between 1820 and 1832, which is often termed as the Black War or Tasmanian war. Born on Bruny Island in 1812, Truganinny had

³⁹ I spell Truganinny's name in this thesis according to the title of Rose's poem.

witnessed the violent death of her family, and was abused and displaced constantly between British settlements. She had appealed for her ashes to be scattered over D'Entrecasteaux channel. Disregarding her wishes, she was buried, to be later exhumed by the Royal Society of Tasmania. Following some years, her skeleton was displayed as 'proof' of the 'last' Tasmanian Aboriginal in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery until the centenary of her death in 1976 when she was finally cremated (Turnbull 203-204). Following this event, since 1976, First Nations activists from Tasmania and Torres Strait Islands have campaigned for the repatriation of other human remains from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, the Natural History Museum, England, the National Museum in Scotland, and several medical institutions that have held remains of their ancestors. Truganinny, and her story, has evolved in multiple narratives in oral history to become 'legend', and 'myth', and has led to several competing 'historical' accounts of her life.⁴⁰

Before apprehensions commence as to the veracity of these narratives, Wendy Rose halts the reader. She begins her poem titled after Truganinny by quoting Paul Coe, an Australian First Nations activist. Coe's statement offers an oral narrative of Truganinny's history. He states that Truganinny "had seen the stuffed and mounted body of her husband and it was her dying wish that she be buried in the outback or at sea for

⁴⁰ The most recent historical work on Truganinny is by Cassandra Pybus titled *Truganinni: Journey through the Apocalypse* (2020).

she did not wish her body to be subjected to the same indignities. Upon her death, she was nevertheless stuffed and mounted and put on display for over eighty years” (Niatum 480). Due to multiple versions of this history, the veracity of Paul Coe’s statement might seem yet another version of Truganinny’s death. However, by providing such a preface, Rose probes the reader’s immediate demand for evidence from Indigenous communities to prove historical ‘authenticity’. Through this recognition, Rose directs the reader to reflect on the paradoxical demand for evidence from communities that have been subjected to a systematic annihilation of evidence, by the myth of ‘terra nullius’ and the myth of extinction. A demand to prove ‘authenticity’ of evidence from a community whose ways of storing history have been systematically desecrated (through occupation of land), amounts to a racial act that refuses an acknowledgement of practiced erasures within the nation–state. It further dispossesses the community of its agency to reckon with a history of trauma by meaningful processes of mourning and history–making through oral narratives. Rose is aware of such a practice and privileges the oral account of an activist over other written sources which would be institutionally considered historically reliable as a preface to her poem. Her extensive research documenting Native American literatures and publications to “compile a definitive annotated/analyzed bibliography of books” (Hunter and Rose 70), further sheds light on her act of privileging Indigenous evidence, by preserving Indigenous voice. She is critical of the disenfranchisement of Indigenous literary traditions and voices by academic and cultural institutions, and the relegation of diverse and

numerous traditions of oral and written work to the annals of anthropology. By choosing an indeterminate narrative and privileging Coe's voice, in a manner similar to Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's critique, Rose interrogates consistent erasures of Indigenous voice and evidence in literary studies. She demands, instead, to pay attention to the 'myth' of extinction enforced on Tasmanian Aboriginal communities by a discourteous exhibition of Truganinny's bones as evidence to perpetuate a myth.

Here, withholding the evidence of Truganinny's history makes way for the reader to reflect on the evidence provided by the resurrected Truganinny in Rose's poem. By resurrecting the body, she is concerned with presenting material evidence of desecration of Aboriginal bodies to the reader rather than the discourse, which, through a non-participatory narrativizing of her death to sustain a myth of disappearance, has erased the memory of living communities. "Truganinny" that reads both as a persona poem and elegy, allows the Tasmanian ancestor a voice to present *her* evidence. Rose allows Truganinny to speak through the means of poetry and mourn her dead daughters. She invents an elegiac mode that is archaeological,⁴¹ in that it interrogates the colonial history of archaeology and reframes the concept of preservation. Much like Leane's "Lady Mungo Speaks" (*Walk back* 6), it falls in a contemporary genre of

⁴¹ I use the term 'archaeological' as used by Rose, to refer to burial grounds of Indigenous ancestors that have been used as archaeological sites, and human remains within museums.

Indigenous poetry that re-purposes the elegy, to allow agency to historical Indigenous figures as well as to offer ceremonial mourning that has been denied to them. As a Hopi/Miwok poet honouring the history of a Tasmanian Aboriginal woman, her intervention in this form serves a purpose for transnational Indigenous solidarity. Consequently, the poem begins with a sense of urgency, appealing to readers to pay attention to the “little” that is “left of a tongue” (Niatum 240). She says it is “important” for it is not just the voice of a dying language but also a voice that bears witness to Aboriginal history and is directed at Indigenous descendants and more importantly to white settlers who choose to forget the difficult aspects of occupation. The urgency is also because of impending death as Truganinny waits for her body to be taken by anthropologists and scientists to be tested and displayed in the museum: “They will take me. / Already they come/ even as I breathe” (Niatum 240). The present-continuous of this act of ‘taking’ is symbolic of a continued form of colonialism that dispossesses Indigenous communities of their land and language, an invading industrial culture that awaits communities to “finish [their] dying”. A verb like “take” has colossal significance for Indigenous women given the act of ‘taking’ that they have survived: their rape, the forceful ‘taking’ of their children for assimilation, their removal for indentured domestic labour, similar to the histories that concerns Harkin’s and Leane’s poetry.

As a final act of resistance against these atrocities and also to oppose the disrespect to her wishes, Truganinny requests to be rescued by

appealing to the reader, her fellow Indigenous communities. She sustains the need to speak of histories till the moment of her death: “Do not leave me/for I would speak, / I would sing/ one more song” (Niatum 241). Her urgent need to be released appeals for her body to be taken to the desert or buried under a mountain or the sea where she can escape the eventual desecration that has hounded the descendants of her community. She commands, “put me where they will not find me” (241). She hopes to be taken back, buried in the “grass gold earth” (241) where she can be reconciled with the land. This, Truganinny realises, cannot be achieved physically but by a memorialising of her history, through a literary act by Indigenous communities who take her “hand/ black into black” (241) to sustain her inheritance. For the history of an ancestor whose remembrance is often relegated to morbid repetitions of the circumstances of her death, and display in a museum during the better half of the twentieth century, Rose’s elegy by a figurative resurrection of Truganinny’s body and individuality offers to Tasmanian descendants a literary corner to honour her memory.

Rose, similarly, revives another museumised Indigenous figure, Osceola, in her poem “Retrieving Osceola’s Head” to eulogise the death of the Seminole Chief, a Native American leader. Similar to the use of preludes in “Truganinny”, she quotes Dr. Weedon’s granddaughter as a prelude to “Retrieving Osceola’s Head”. The granddaughter’s voice informs the reader about her grandfather’s act of desecrating Osceola’s body: he chopped off the Chief’s head after his burial and used it as a

punishment to scare his children. Rose's elegiac form invents an archeological poetry, which through a resurrection of remains serve as a critique of museumisation of Indigenous bodies, and acts of desecration often suppressed in the rhetoric of 'preservation' within cultural institutions. Carol Hunter's *Melus* interview with Rose, offers critical insight into some of Rose's experiences that might have informed her archeological poetry. Although trained as an anthropologist, with a doctorate from University of California, Berkeley, Rose did not believe her work in anthropology prompted her to commemorate archeological remains in her work. As a researcher and poet working in California during the 1970s and 1980s, she was part of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and unofficially mediated conversations regarding burial grounds between city developers, archeologists, and the AIM. Her political alignment was consistently frowned upon and her professional training as an anthropologist disregarded during these conversations, when she defended the preservation of Indigenous burial grounds. Her concerns bring out the paradoxes of archeological work: although archeologists worked alongside her on the grounds of preservation to oppose construction work, she was disillusioned with the work of archeology, saying that the burial grounds needed to be protected equally from the probing digs of an archeologist's tool given it has essentially served as a colonial weapon on Indigenous bodies. She believed that "the business of the Indian anthropologist is to protect, not to expose, to use the exploiter's tools to deflect attempts at exploitation" (Hunter and Rose 72). She communicates a dissonance with the idea of 'preservation'

of objects and history within cultural institutions, given the histories of colonial expedition and unequal encounters through which these objects were collected, and which sustains the colonial museum and its disciplines. Her method of preservation is to defend the property rights, intellectual and material, of respective Indigenous communities to honour their remains through ceremonial passages which have been interrupted when the object or body has been uprooted from land to the confines of a museum glass case. Her intervention in decolonial archaeology manifests in her poetry. Museumised bodies, burial grounds, excavations, and other archaeological symbols figure prominently in Rose's poems like "Truganinny", "Retrieving Osceola's Head", "Lost Copper", "To Some Few Hopi Ancestors", "I Expected my Skin and my Blood to Ripen" and "Three Thousand Dollar Death Song". She confronts Indigenous bones auctioned as museum specimens, and simultaneously finds herself at junctures where she has to physically encounter the deaths of ancestors, their stolen objects and items recovered from the earth. Her poetry, therefore, becomes a site where she performs a dual archaeological task: excavation of colonial histories of museum 'objects', and preservation of Indigenous memory.

Like the modern anti-elegy, as defined by Jahan Ramazani, Rose's archaeological poetry keeps the 'wound' open as a political act of resistance against a tradition of forgetting. Ramazani recognises that "the modern elegy more radically violates previous generic norms than did earlier phases of elegy: it becomes anti-consolatory [...] anti-Romantic

and anti-Victorian, anti-conventional and sometimes even anti-literary” (2). At the same time, her form of elegy that uses transnational historical references, drawing parallels between Australian and American Indigenous histories, offers an occasion for reconciliation by forging ties of solidarity among Indigenous communities. Arnold Krupat in *That the People Might Live: Loss and Renewal in Native American Elegy* (2012) initially wonders as to the existence of elegy as a genre in Native American literature and writes that the form and “approach” is different to ones found in the traditional Euro-American sense of an elegy (3). The vast body of Native American literatures, which includes a majority of oral literary traditions, does not have an equivalent of elegy as a traditional genre, he writes. Moreover, the highly diverse and linguistically and culturally different communities hardly have a pan-Indian form of elegy, although they may have had their ceremonial forms of mourning distinct to communities. However, Krupat discusses how Native American writers have often used the elegiac mode not as a mode of expressing personal loss or to mourn a specific person, but to serve a more social function: the elegiac mode is employed to “overcome [their] grief and renew their will to sustain communal life” (3).

I would add that in contemporary writings in English where colonial languages and literary forms within it are appropriated and re-formulated as a form of resistance, elegy is re-imagined through a material grounding in colonial history; the occasion of mourning afforded by the form serves a wider purpose for Indigenous transnationalism. Elegy,

especially the one that Rose creates, is a way of historicising communal loss of Indigenous ancestors and a form that incorporates oral evidence of these histories to permeate into written literatures. Collective mourning through her archaeological poetry is to help recuperate from generational trauma and ease the “isolation” (Hunter and Rose 80) of descendants through a “healing process” afforded in literature.⁴² Rose is conscious of her political act of creating a space for collective Indigeneity in poetry, where her engagement with personal history and identity supports the collective political affirmation of Indigenous communities. In the preface to her collection titled *Bone Dance: New and Selected Poems 1965-1993* (1994), she writes:

What force could be more powerful than people moving together with a single voice? What could be more important and life-affirming than the unique-universal poetry of life itself? [...] Some of the poems refer to events in which I took part or remember that have become history. Because the personal is political [...]. (xvii-xviii).

Conclusion:

In the summer of 2013, Dongria Kondh villagers defended their ownership of Niyamgiri; the evidence largely consisted of a listing of agricultural produce and stories from Dongria Kondh literary tradition, (I

⁴² While discussing her poetic process and purpose, Rose responds in her interview with Hunter, “With the poetry [...] I reach out to other people to end the isolation. That is a healing process” (Hunter and Rose 80)

elaborate on one such literary evidence, a song by Dongria Kondh elder Dambu Praska, in Chapter 3). This convinced the Supreme Court of India to overturn Vedanta's plea to mine the hills of Niyamgiri for bauxite. However, increased armed presence sustained during the course of a decade, had already consolidated grounds for the common paradox now utilised by the Indian state to weaken resistance and allow land acquisition. In recent years, Dongria Kondh villagers have lived with the fear of 'Maoist insurgency' amongst them and were commonly imprisoned under suspicion of it. Simultaneously, to sustain Odisha's pride in housing the oldest of east India's Indigenous populations, they continue to be curated in the Tribal Research Institute at Bhubaneswar.

If I re-invoke Amar Kanwar's question "Can 'poetry' be presented as 'evidence' in a criminal or political trial?", poetry or literature pushes the imagination of the evidentiary beyond the state or legality's legitimation of it. Indigenous writers are acutely aware of the historical specificity in which evidence has been delegitimised and erased in a way that made the paradox, the in-between of erasure and acute subjectivity, a socio-cultural convention. I elaborated on how this paradox needed to rely on materials. The paradox of evidence is not only a part of settler colonial governmentality but is extrapolated in modern nation-states. The Hindu Far Right ensures a cultural violence that is assimilative in ways that resemble the history of North American boarding schools, reservations, and the Assimilation era in Australia. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams established by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and their

growing influence on state archives and museums directs the ways in which Indigeneity is defined in the South Asian context. It is, thus, critically generative to study present-day Hindu nationalism as analogous to settler colonial contexts in North America and Australia. Moreover, upper-caste settlers within the nation-state are safer in their claim to power and often beyond critique in contemporary discourse, given their own assertions of indigeneity and an existing subaltern identity as part of a recently decolonised nation-state.⁴³

Such a comparison enables an understanding of the deterministic nature of the caste system that the Hindu nation seeks to establish, which has a longer history of a form of apartheid within South Asia prior to British colonialism's structured ethnographical divisions. Placing these transnational histories beside the poetry of Natalie Harkin, Jeanine Leane and Wendy Rose, presents new queries. What would it mean for future Indigenous literary studies to examine the archived Adivasi voice that has had no agency in forming its own archive? What will it mean for the children of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams, and Odisha ashram schools to access the twice-removed materials when they place themselves within these archives? Is there at all a possibility of recuperating an Indigenous Adivasi history following the on-going epistemic violence? In the next chapter, I discuss a 'sacred code' that exists

⁴³ The recent abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, and India's ongoing settler colonial enterprise, therefore, occurs as a minor political event, because of India's continued framing as a 'postcolonial' nation.

between land and the community and established in literature. I elaborate on the concept of land as literature that can serve as political archive and as evidence for ownership. The chapter will examine how in the absence of histories related to particular landmarks that were interrupted by colonialism, contemporary Indigenous writers imbue meaning and history to urban spaces.

We begin with the land.

— Joy Harjo

2

LAND AS LITERATURE

A Sacred Code

In “A First American Views His Land”, an essay originally published by the National Geographic in 1976,⁴⁴ N. Scott Momaday reflects on the “peculiarly native” (Mckibben 575) kinship of a Native American person to the American soil. He ruminates on Indigeneity as a particularity of relationship developed between the place (here, American earth) and the resident humans over a significant period of time. The long “tenure” (574) of habitation on American earth, a span of nearly “thirty-thousand years” has necessitated a specific commitment to the landscape

⁴⁴ Here, I refer to the essay as re-published in *American Earth: Environmental Writing since Thoreau* (2008) edited by Bill Mckibben.

that is based on a code of “trust” that is “sacred” (579). Given that “sacred” is a recurring term in describing the Indigenous relationship to land, here, Momaday’s poetic invocation of sacrality universalises a ‘code’ that has specific religious and epistemological connotations in different Indigenous communities. Momaday theorises sacrality as a form of ethical practice.⁴⁵ He clarifies that such a relationship with the land is “accomplished by means of an act of the imagination that is especially ethical in kind” (579). This ethical notion of what constitutes the “sacred” is also reinforced in Simon Ortiz’s conception of the distinctive characteristic of Native American literature; Ortiz frames the sacred code as a concern for the land as “responsibility and the insistence on that common or shared responsibility” (Ortiz et al. 365).⁴⁶ Although Indigenous communities ‘use’ the land, the solely utilitarian relationship defined by property ownership, profit and ‘consumption’, is fundamentally discordant with their belief systems.⁴⁷ The code of sacrality is an understanding of the human’s ‘appropriate’ place on earth, which, is also considered a living entity: Momaday writes, given that the land

⁴⁵ I will discuss interpretations of the ‘sacred’ in Adivasi epistemologies in Chapter 3.

⁴⁶ Alexis Wright in “Politics of Writing”, frames her work as a writer of literary fiction as one who upholds the belief that “all life is sacred and this belief is the ethical responsibility” (POL). She has further explained that this responsibility is not only to sacred country for Indigenous communities, but a universal responsibility to the planet (SGL). Ortiz and Wright share thought-provoking similarities in the way they frame ‘ethical responsibility’ and sovereignty arising from the interconnectedness of “culture, land and people”. A focused comparative between their writings is the subject of further work.

⁴⁷ Joy Harjo defines this relationship as one that does not see the human as separate from the land, she writes “We are the land. We cannot own it, no matter any proclamation by paper state” (Harjo et al. 1).

accommodates him, he has to “affirm [himself] in the spirit of the land” (579). Momaday’s reflection provides the groundwork for this chapter—I discuss how Indigeneity is equally an act of literary imagination as much as it is about the material centrality of land. Literature, in the composite forms imagined in Indigenous literary traditions, forms an essential medium to maintain an ethical kinship with land. Given that the literary tradition around land ritualises ownership and strengthens political Indigeneity, ‘land *as* literature’ serves as a literary methodology comparable across diverse Indigenous traditions.

Within abundant scholarship examining land and Indigeneity, postcolonial studies have cautioned that reading land as a thematic has a tendency to reformulate land purely as a motif (Hodge and Mishra 92–97) or a “truism” (Adamson xviii) in literary studies. Hodge and Mishra claim that Indigenous conceptions of land (in Australia) have been consistently imbued with a certain mysticism in Australian settler discourse.⁴⁸ They spell out a need for “some kind of materialism” (30) while situating Indigenous conceptions of land in Australian literature. Therefore, to distance from similar evocations of ‘mysticisms’, I read the interpretations of ‘sacrality’ as voiced by Indigenous authors in the framework provided by Unangax scholar, Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang in “Decolonisation is not a Metaphor” (1–40). They examine the problematic of the

⁴⁸ Colonial discursive practices have sought to reconstruct and represent Indigenous history as purely ‘cultural’ for preserving the ‘mystic’ around the ‘Aborigine’ (Grossman et al. 1–16).

institutional reading of land especially in the context of settler colonial states, where the settler is present and part of the narrative on land. They emphasise that “decolonisation is not a metaphor”, meaning that land, materially, is the irreducible basis of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism operates by a “mode of total appropriation of Indigenous life and land, rather than the selective expropriation of profit-producing fragments” (5) which occurs in the case of internal colonialisms within nation-states. However, their materialist reading also includes the violence to Indigenous epistemology and cosmologies, resulting from the disruptions to Indigenous relationships to land. They underline that the particular nature of settler colonialism as “structure” (Wolfe 388), where land is defined by the settler-owner in terms of ownership (resource and capital), renders the ‘sacred’, the Indigenous ethical relationships to land as “pre-modern and backward” (Tuck and Yang 5). The materialism of land cannot be studied separately from Indigenous belief systems connected to land. A materialist reading of Indigenous land-based literatures needs to be sceptical of a tendency to impose a universal secular that can overlook Indigenous evidence and particularity of voice in conceiving radically different relationships to land embedded within forms that integrate the literary and religious. While it is appropriate to critique Indigenous representation in settler discourse imbued with ‘mysticism’ to preserve a pre-modern idea of Indigeneity, the critique needs to recover philosophical conceptions that may exist in categories that are universally considered religious, for instance, origin stories and cosmologies. In some instances, these literary imaginations of land in mythologies (which form

the basis of my reading in the next sections) can also be categorised as mystical within institutions that have privileged Euro-American theory; it is illustrative of a fundamental dissonance arising from reading a literary mode through the lens of divergent categories, especially those arising from the colonial metropole. Land, in Indigenous literary traditions, has radically different modes of literary production and theory; furthermore, given that the knowledge systems that shaped them are distinctive, using tools and genres provided by the Euro-American theory often generates the appearance of phantom gaps while studying Indigenous texts. Evelyn Araluen Corr claims that literary theory (even within postcolonial studies) has served a “binary of applicability: either it is unconcerned with our material realities and processes of cultural production, or it has seized upon our creations for its tropes and metaphors” (Q’um Q’um Xiiem et al. 189)—a concern replicated in contemporary readings of Indigenous land. The binary of materialism versus mysticism that nervously shrouds any reading of Indigenous conceptions of land is perhaps one arising from the disciplinary categories that have served colonial enterprise (which I discussed in Chapter 1); one that has also influenced the ‘landscape’ writing tradition in literature, categories, and methods through which we often read Indigenous literatures on land, and from which Indigenous land-based literatures practise a departure.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Here, my concern is with the canonical landscape tradition, meaning those writings written during the same period as imperial enterprise; I refer briefly to Romanticism, and Transcendentalist writers as well. I am aware of a generalised reading of the Euro-western traditions in this section; however, my purpose is to show how their canonical influence has shaped ideas of the landscape, through

A significant measure of landscape writing in Euro-American literatures reproduces a literary thematic of ‘pioneering’, ‘discovery’ and ‘nationalism’. The “seeing man” (Pratt 7), the explorer, that was born as part of the “global classificatory project” (28) often inhabits the positionality of an external observer. Landscape writing as one privileging the human eye and human agency, was not only identified by Native American writers (such as Silko),⁵⁰ but in poetry within Euro-American tradition. In German poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Eighth Elegy”, the human always looks on and not *from* the land: “and we: spectators, always, everywhere” (241). The imperial act of naming land by the Euro-American explorer not only acted as signifiers of possession of Indigenous land, but also established Europe as the “center of civilization” (Pratt 12) that controlled the peripheries by “baptising” (McClintock 33) already peopled land and locating the original inhabitants into an “anachronistic space” (30). This history framed literary landscape in the colony as well as the imperial center. The predominantly Anglo-American man who not only establishes control over nature, but also over ‘labour’ and his own spiritual self, formed the basis of American literature: Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman were as much landscape writers as they were

which we access Indigenous land-based literatures, that often require different methodologies of reading.

⁵⁰ Leslie Marmon Silko writes that ‘landscape’ in the English language, which has been used to describe Indigenous land, “the hills, canyons, cliffs and the plants, clouds and sky”, can be “misleading”. She explains that the word assumes distance, separateness and a ‘portion’ of what the human eye sees; whereas the human, and human consciousness who ‘sees’ is as much a part of land and the non-humans occupying it (*Yellow Woman* 27).

products of the frontier who formed the ‘pioneer’ spirit.⁵¹ In Australia, however, before the Indigenous person was represented, it was *terra nullius*, the landscape that needed to be internalised and accommodated. The hostility of the Australian landscape, its emptiness, and distances, is portrayed as a necessary penance for the eventual possession of a new country,⁵² a stark contrast to the fullness of histories and “plenitude of resources” contained by land in Australian First Nations’ myths, which I discuss later. Descriptions of landscapes or the ‘outback’ appear for the transformation of characters (Hodge and Mishra 144). In Australia, this preoccupation with landscape was to maintain “a false consciousness of what it is to be Australian” as the coloniser had “to legitimate the illegitimate” (143), meaning the dispossessed land of Indigenous Australians (Bernard Smith qtd. in Hodge and Mishra 143).⁵³

⁵¹ Apart from “Pioneers! O Pioneers” in his canonical collection *Leaves of Grass* (1855) that is an ode to expansion of the American west, Whitman celebrates a “Passage to India”, exoticising the “primitive fables” and the “elder races”. The colonial anthropologist Verrier Elwin quotes the latter poem to introduce his anthology of Adivasi myths of Odisha, see Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa* (1954). Similarly, in 1841, Thoreau writes of Western expansion over Indigenous lands in a poem called “Our Country” that universalises the American soil as a place for “the gathering congress of the world” where “the manly Saxon [leads] all the rest”. Native American communities are represented as the “heathen without reproach”. He writes, “See the red race with sullen step retreat/ Emptying its graves, striking the wigwam tent” (Clarke 61). For more on Thoreau re-read through the lens of Native American literary history, see Brooks 247-251.

⁵² It is also the site in “Botany bay Eclogue. Elinor”, where English poet Robert Southey depicts the English convict as forsaken to find his redemption. Australian *terra nullius* is a barren “pathless” expanse that is “unbroken by the plough”, where in the “deepening distance” the only company is the “rude native” (Lansdown 120-122).

⁵³ Representations of Indigeneity in Australian pastoral literature has been discussed by Indyk (837-855) and Dunk.

In India, the colonial officer and the upper-caste native writer who worked as a government officer together construct the ‘forests’ where the Adivasi resides as a ‘primitive’ and rebellious ‘problem’.⁵⁴ The forests of Chotanagpur and the Gondwana region, much like the colonial fictions of Jim Corbett or Rudyard Kipling’s northern tracts, are ‘treacherous’ and dense. Into them the colonial officers gain access to report on the feuding Adivasi populations.⁵⁵ There was a pre-existing knowledge of Indigenous discourses on land given the familiarity of colonial officials with Adivasi myths,⁵⁶ however, these myths were relegated to colonial anthropological categories while the construction of ‘landscape’ in colonial literature and travel writings displaced Indigenous land-based ideas with an act of “retrospective discovery” (McClintock 29). The ‘wilderness’ of North America, the *terra nullius* of Australia and the ‘wild’ forests of India, are landscapes that became silent and de-peopled as a result of colonial invasion, and the literatures on land were silenced as a result of appropriation and erasure. Colonisation involved destabilising Indigenous

⁵⁴ Fakirmohan Senapati, the celebrated nineteenth-century Oriya writer exhibits a disregard for Adivasi land history. It can be gleaned from his narrative of the Bhuiyan revolt of 1892. As he negotiated between the king of Keonjhar and the colonial officer, he reports that the Bhuiyans were “hard-drinking, ignorant savages” who take to revolts and riots as they “blindly believed that the kingdom of Keonjhar was theirs”. The stories of forced land acquisitions and checks on forest-use prior to the rebellions in the nineteenth century do not feature in Senapati’s account (95-97).

⁵⁵ Nineteenth-century personal narratives of colonial officers are testaments to this history, see Campbell and Macpherson.

⁵⁶ This is evident from the large body of colonial collections of folklore and Adivasi oral traditions. In reference to ongoing collection in the nineteenth century, see O’Malley 108.

land-based methodologies as mere 'legends' without intellectual value; this further weakened Indigenous evidence to land ownership: losing land-based literatures meant losing testaments and agreements by which descendants could claim Indigeneity (Grossman et al. 35). For instance, Australian country deemed as *terra nullius* not only made the Indigenous person absent but also unmoored the land of its ability to generate literatures, disabling Indigenous Australians of the right to laws and mythologies based on country.

Given this history, Euro-American landscape writing as a methodological category (similar to literary theory as discussed by Corr) creates a dissonance while grounding the material and literary scope of Indigenous land-based philosophies. Therefore, the recovery of the Indigenous philosophies of land I mentioned earlier in this section, requires a privileging of Indigenous methodology to read land-based literatures. Such a reading reveals thought-provoking connections across Indigenous traditions and land-based thought and often reveals why and how the imagination of global political Indigeneity is strengthened, despite the specificity of context. For instance, the code of sacrality explained by Momaday from his Kiowa standpoint, has a theoretical relationality with Dene scholar Glen Coulthard and Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's exploration of "Grounded Normativity/Place-based Solidarity" (249-255). Momaday's affirmation of "the spirit of the land" (Mckibben 579) and his idea of appropriate, ethical living with the earth, is similarly affirmed by Coulthard and Simpson: they extend a

solidarity, political and epistemological, to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations (human and non-human), underscoring the fact that a praxis of knowledge is essentially place-based and reciprocal (Coulthard and Simpson 254).

In her other writings, Simpson further explores a method of storytelling, an “ancient code of ethics”, that sustains such a place-based practise basing her essays on the land-based literary traditions of her community. She devises a form that interweaves storytelling with the format of the academic article: her essays (and conference talks) are delivered with an awareness of the modes of writing favoured within the institution. In “Land as Pedagogy”, she further explains a Nishnaabeg epistemology through the story of Binoojinh who learns harvesting sap and making maple syrup. She theorises Binoojinh’s practice of learning ‘from’ and ‘with’ the land as “place-based” ‘theory’, an undivided human-non-human communal practice that is sustained over generations of learning from the land, through the method of storytelling (151). She writes, “The land, Aki, is both context and process”—Binoojinh learns to harvest only when he is enfolded in the specific context that has sustained Nishnaabeg thought, and his mode of learning is through practice (151). Responding to further queries on the text through email, and clarifications of the story narrated during the context of a conference (Simpson “Keynote”), Simpson communicated that ‘oral stories’ such that of Binoojinh are connected to a set of ethical and political practices as a form of continuance: it is indeed a story from her childhood, but also a practice

of harvesting sugar she has enacted over a decade with her children. Removed from the context of learning, here, I quote her reply at length to retain voice from the context she writes:

This story is meant to be shared in the sugar bush, and that context is from which meaning is derived. Textual versions of story provide some challenges— the story has already been removed from the land, the language, sound, the people and much of the relationality that gives it meaning. If you came to visit me, and I took you to make maple sugar in March in the sugar bush, and I told you that story, I think you would experience the story differently and derive different meaning from it, than if you read it alone, or heard me speak it in Cambridge in a conference room. Context is very important in Indigenous Knowledge systems in terms of meaning making. Physical, mentally and spiritually engaging in the practice of making making [sic] sugar is an act of knowledge production as well. In a sense, you and I would be re-acting [sic] Binoonjiinh's story, embodying the story, while re-writing the story in real time. If you went home, you would have a story to tell about our visit that would be different than my story to tell. The meaning you derive through carrying the story and thinking about it in the context of your own life and work would be different than mine. (Simpson “Re: Grounded Normativity”)

“Grounded normativity”, therefore, although it appears on the page as a theoretical position developed by the two writers, is an invitation

for communities to practice “reciprocity” in their lived environments. Furthermore, the literature then becomes one produced by the community, rather than retaining a mode of single authorship—the story is passed on, retold and engaged with by other communities. Similar to “grounded normativity”, literary methods of reading land are diverse, and unique to each Indigenous community. To carry out my study of ‘land as literature’ I use Momaday’s definition of a sacred code, to retrieve a literary imagination of Indigeneity as ethical kinship with land, to engage a comparative analysis across traditions. My attempt in the later sections is to examine how this ethical kinship is imagined in the context of political sovereignty and workers’ rights in the factory. In the next section, I draw from excerpts from Krim Bentrak, Stephen Muecke and Paddy Roe’s text *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* (1984) and David Unaipon’s stories, in order to examine a method of reading where land is a literary site to be read, an archive of mythologies intersecting with a historical archive of resources and events.⁵⁷ Later, I discuss Craig S. Womack’s emphasis on the relationship between oral tradition and sovereignty, in order to initiate a discussion on political ideas and negotiations in Adivasi myths. My attempt is to elucidate these concepts as literary methods that serve a transnational comparative; for this purpose, I compare selections of mythologies and origin myths, archived by Indigenous writers or available through anthropological transcription.

⁵⁷ Some of the other methods and frameworks of readings like Storywork, Kinship and Relationality, Indigenous Standpoint Theory, are briefly referred to; it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss them in detail while conceptualising land-based literatures.

I re-iterate, here, the need to access Indigenous voices in archived literatures. This is emblematic of a larger problem while reading oral traditions, origin myths, and archived Indigenous literatures, that the researcher accesses removed from its context, through translation or ethnographic work. However, this does not discourage readings of these texts; literary studies require a privileging of methodologies of reading oral texts formulated by Indigenous theorists. Womack critiques the ongoing ‘problem’ of American Indian texts (oral, performative and written) characterised as ‘lost’ in translation’ as opposed to translations from other dominant cultures (64–65). Therefore, rather than searching for the primacy of the original text and postponing analysis of context because of translations ‘falling short’, it is necessary to evaluate the translations existing at the interface of Indigenous voices and encounters within the history of anthropological collection and recording. A search for the primary text in translation often ends up resorting to measures of authenticity. Rather than a rejection of early twentieth-century folklore and collections of Indigenous songs, myths and legends by non-Indigenous anthropologists and ethnographers, I read them as Indigenous texts operating within the milieus of their historical encounters and adapting to colonial methods of collections and archives (some of these texts will be referred to in Chapter 3). Such a methodology of literary reading provided by Womack, Muecke and Shoemaker, among others, helps recover Indigenous voice from the aporias around both oral texts

and translations built by structural categories in colonial ethnography—this allows for the text’s reinstatement as literary and political.

Readers of Country

Renewal of land *as* literature requires a restoration of community mythologies held in Indigenous oral traditions. The invocation of mythology not only serves to resist the “mythscape” (*Mythscape*) of *terra nullius* in Australia imposed by settler colonialism, but also to revive intellectual traditions and address their literary aesthetics and politics. Alexis Wright interprets dreaming or *Tjukurrpa* as storied knowledge of deep time; stories of ancestral spirits who determine laws of the land are archived in collective memory (AL). This recuperates dreaming from the static construction of ‘dreamtime’ used in colonial writing to demonstrate the ‘outer worldly’ nature of Australian Indigenous myth that had previously displaced a methodology of reading land. Australian thinkers Krim Benterrak, Stephen Muecke and Paddy Roe, similarly, recover ‘dreaming’ as a literary methodology of reading country as a text and historical archive (similar to Jeanine Leane’s poetic recovery of country as archive). Reading country through storytelling uncovers history and kinship with the ancestors, and which is a way to sustain this relationship, and ownership of historical documents connected to particular tracts and resources. To make these ideas available within an institutional scope, *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* serves a dual purpose: documenting Nyigina artist Paddy Roe’s dreaming in textual form, retains

voice and preserves the particularity of his literary form. The writers' juxtaposition of dreaming with Euro-American literary theory, clarifies how language mediates this land-based methodology, and creates an uneasiness for the reader while the reader expects to read through the imposed forms of the academic institution. In way of form, the book includes Paddy Roe's dreaming of Roebuck Plains (north-west Australia) with accompanied paintings on Broome's topography by Benterrak, transcribed into the format of testimony and theory by the writers—the introduction clarifies that the text is one way of representation or a “political stance” to create a “politics of place” (Benterrak et al. 16), and not representative of all Australian Indigenous cultures.

Contradicting the pastness of dreaming, Paddy Roe's reading of Roebuck Plains, demonstrates a dynamic methodology of speaking about specific sites of this particular tract of country: “the way of talking” or talking law or *bugarigarra* (18) provides an enmeshed map of the present landscape of the plains, where the sites and mythologies of the community co-exist. Fusing myth and everyday speech by talking of stories associated with physical landmarks, the meaning of the land is made in language. The mythical creatures like the rainbow serpent from Paddy Roe's childhood memories transpire in speech as the writers overlook Roe's ancestral hill at Garrigarrigabu:

Oh these trees bin here before I born (laugh) I born in that hill
that's the camping ground belong to my old people you know that
hill that's the hill there that's the hill I born there in the

bush...Now all these springs here today that's all my spirit (laugh)
'cos I born here I born 'mongst these yungurugu yungurugu is
the rainbow snake he hold that water always never go dry must be
something there underneath. (41-44)

The above paragraph is busy with material sites that acquire meaning in Paddy Roe's narration. The "trees", "hill", "camping ground", "bush" are invoked as present-day landmarks to which the community's mythology is connected. Paddy Roe invokes the 'spirit' of this particular tract (meaning his kinship with the land), that is familiar in the community. This is what makes the reading culturally and historically determined (16), rather than an authorial one that is readily available as meanings to an outsider-reader. The writers, therefore, privilege the voice of Paddy Roe as the text, because only in the interpretation of the country by a member who has continued a long chain of community remembrance by storytelling, does land become literature. The chapters, with Roe's dreaming, and the writers' engagement with postmodern theory, colonial history and anthropology and the way it has constructed Australian Aboriginality, speak to one another, offering the reader the possibility to move back and forth to gather answers. The displacement of linearity actuates on the page the method of learning from land through "nomadology": moving over sites repetitively bring up new meaning, and remembrance of myths. As the three writers wander, the reader too can appear at any point in the book, chancing upon a story by Roe, a land-based painting by Benterrak, or gather familiar references from the writers'

analysis as they disentangle the idea of the text critically, and formally. At one point in the book, Paddy Roe is quoted as saying:

*“You people try and dig little bit more deep—
you bin digging only white soil -
try and find the black soil inside ...”* (189)

His claim performs a critical distancing from disciplinary frameworks that have either erased or primitivised his dreaming—he positions himself as a reader of country; he breaks down temporal barriers, situating himself as a conduit in the present reading passed-down mythologies. The mythologies connect him to a land-based literary tradition allowing him to lend meaning to landscape deemed barren. I read his demand to the reader to “dig little more deep” as a metaphor, where “black soil” is the Australian First Nations literary landscape. Digging with the method imparted by him would perhaps allow access to meaning and understanding mythology connected to land, which institutional methodologies have not read as literary or political discourse.

In the context of some readings of Australian country, the sacred code takes the form of law determined by ancestors remembered in storytelling—stories that Alexis Wright defines as the “ancient scripture of land title” (“Purpose”). In particular myths that contain cosmogonies, the first beings decide the laws that are remembered by present-day Indigenous communities.⁵⁸ Laws can be read on specific sites because they

⁵⁸ Vine Deloria writes that origin-myths provide tools of self-reflection (*Red Earth* 233). I read this claim according to Momaday’s contemplation: a literary methodology to read the place of the human in relation to the land.

have been arrived at and served human habitation for a significant “tenure”: as Momaday affirms, the land provides and holds rightful place, for which humans are bound to it by an ethical code. Relevance of particular myths and characters sustained over time hence reveal the functionality they have served for the community. The characters within myths have travelled ‘over land’ and have named sites and at times created landmarks (Narogin *Aboriginal Mythology* xi). Therefore, to occupy land is also to violate these laws and customary codes. One of the examples of a traditional ancestor who determines law is Naroondarie, narrated in the collected myths of David Unaipon. Unaipon, the Ngarrindjeri storyteller, considered the first published Australian First Nations’ writer, describes how the laws of Naroondarie are narrated to children in the form of stories (5-6). Here, the idea of ownership of literature replicates that of ownership of land, meaning that both land and literature are collectively owned rather than defined by individual property rights. Literatures are “produced to be handed over, circulated rather than accumulated” (xx). Unaipon’s reading of Australian Indigenous myths, with a “literary repatriation” (xliii) by Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker, reveals further facets of how land as literature holds histories of migration and settlements, resulting in the ‘songlines’ of stories over particular tracts of country. Similar to Jeanine Leane’s statement that “songlines are vectors”, Unaipon’s reading of mythology demonstrates the deep histories of migrations of Australian Indigenous communities for which literature too acquires a compass, becoming directionally dependent. The myths combine genres in a way in which the fictional entwines with early

archived oral testimonies of migration documents: Unaipon remembers the ‘traditions’, created by the ‘Great Spirit’ and teacher Naroondarie, that have tracked early Indigenous migration into present-day Australia “out of the north-west” (5). Travelling through country and the songlines, thereof, has relied on the “four winds of the earth—Wolkund (the north), Kolkami (the north), Tolkami (the west), and Karami (the east)”.

Parsing Unaipon’s ideas and inputs in his narration collected in *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines* (2001), provides further critical methods to analyse the specificity of place in Indigenous mythologies. Collected mythologies are replete with characters (predominantly non-humans) embarking on journeys.⁵⁹ In each of these myths, the locations traversed are described in detail, documenting the availability of food, water source, sustenance, and dangers. The myths thereby function as documents on land-use for the community in a way similar to Paddy Roe reading the present Roebuck Plains, locating springs (and the water source) alongside the story of the rainbow snake. To elaborate an instance of this characteristic in myths, in the “Bandicoot ancestor Song of Ilbalitnja”, each aspect of the landscape, “crimson soil”, “white creek sand”, “limestone band” or “rich yellow soil” among others, is named and evoked where the encounter between the ancestor and Karora’s sons takes place (Narogin *Milli* 27-31). Similar stories depict the characters ‘making’ themselves into rocks, which can be identified as specific landmarks by

⁵⁹ Unaipon writes that the “moral” recorded from observing non-humans (‘animals and birds’) are “woven into legends” (164).

subsequent generations. They metamorphose once their purpose is fulfilled. Occasionally the characters have agency in their metamorphosis, while in other myths expedient situations make them transform. The particularity of the place where the character changes shape (or into resource) retains significance in storytelling as it details the continuity of the community in that place (Berndt and Berndt 33). Aspects of landscape therefore become meaningful sites of history, stories, and survival strategies to be *read* as valid documents (64).

In a reading of country, mythology and history exist in intertwined retellings. Such a methodology can be productive in gathering traces of recurring themes, prayers to the land, and resources and reconstruct internal diasporic histories according to changes in landscapes. This not only invites a contextual reading of literary materials but further serves to embed the ‘sacred code’ in material histories. More importantly, it directs literary study to privilege Indigenous voice, for these methods of reading country are ungrounded without the readers of country. Alexis Wright, therefore, qualifies Indigenous storytellers and those who remember these mythologies as “master geographers” who remember particular sites with its accompanying history and “song cycle” (“Purpose”). Mudrooroo Narogin, similarly, asserts the centrality of embodied practice in the artworks of the Papunya Tula painters, claiming that without the chain of connection working between the “land-painter-work-dreaming-land”, the art produced is simply an imitation (*Us Mob* 166-167).

Mythology as Political Discourse

Mythology, and country read as literature, consequently, is required for claiming Indigeneity. Removal from ancestral land discontinues mythological traditions and dispossesses the community of vital evidence of ownership and land use. Therefore, in the Yirrkala Bark Petitions, the issue raised was not only about hunting grounds in Arnhem Land threatened by Nabalco but also the ancestral land, which was “sacred” and “vital to their livelihood” (“Yirrkala Bark Petition 1963”). Arnhem land is believed to record several acts of creations by ancestral spirits in specific places—this land-based literature contains Yolngu people’s ideas of sovereignty. “Within the issue of Aboriginal sovereignty there is more at stake than the use of lands; there is the right to control the production of Australia’s mythologies” (Benterrak et al. 144)—the “mythscape” of the Australian nation hence recedes with the resurgence of Australian First Nations stories. Wright, similarly, asserts that each land claim battle in Australia has been “a war over the ancient story maps, the original land titles of this continent” (“Purpose”), where the original owners have fought for self-governance.

Craig S. Womack’s political reading of Creek oral tradition further seeks to clarify Indigenous ideas of sovereignty and nationhood, often embedded in mythologies and stories of cosmogony. In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), Womack separates Creek oral

tradition from structural impositions of Euro-American anthropology and linguistics to read them as essential narratives that hold Creek conceptions of sovereignty and political discourse.⁶⁰ To elaborate on the argument, he quotes an example by his student Kirk Zebolsky, upholding the essential characteristic of orality used in appropriate ritualistic contexts. However, here the reading of orality is not a reading of the performative form. He discusses how the *telling* of stories and their repetition within and outside the community directly affect the discourse of “land redress” (16-17). The act of retelling or narrating the community’s story, drawing from particular myths and cosmogonies, is to establish sovereign definitions of land ownership, to present literature as valid evidence of the community’s political ideas.

Supported by these readings of oral tradition as political discourse on sovereignty, I examine a section of a Kondh origin myth from Kalahandi *Gova Utra- Janam Khena Puran* sung by Paramanand Jani of Doto village, as a document of land negotiation. Adivasi myths have distinctive ways of archiving historical evidence. Adivasi myths interweave the historical and fictional. The oral tradition serves as land

⁶⁰ Here, Womack refers to the specific work by Dennis Tedlock, Dell Hymes, Jerome Rothenberg (part of Ethnopoetics collective) who have focused on translation and performance, without necessarily addressing them as political documents (63). Womack’s reading of orality retrieves it from formal frameworks to address how these oral literatures serve an emancipatory purpose in the context of land rights. He, furthermore, rejects the binary often imposed on the reading of archived traditions, by arguing that textual reproduction of Indigenous myth should be read in conjunction with the oral tradition, rather than rejecting the former for issues of translation and authenticity.

memories, of rights of ownership over land, gods and forests and internal migrations.⁶¹ These require them to be read as customary laws which also served a purpose for maintaining clan divisions. Therefore, Adivasi communities refer to origin myths as proof of land ownership. In the Kondh origin epic of *Gova Utra* (*Oral Epics* 90-98) specific sites are invoked. They contain instances of referring back to community myths to enable land negotiations along with the distribution of earth goddesses to mark respective clan identities. The epic is usually sung by the *jani* with other singers, on the day before the ritual of buffalo sacrifice (93). Here, the words as sung by Paramanand Jani appear on page twice removed from its context in Kalahandi. The text has undergone translations from desia Kondh-Oriya-English by Odisha-based folklorist Mahendra Kumar Mishra. I have explored the limitations of Adivasi oral traditions collected and studied within the remits of folklore in Chapter 1 (I argued that they retain ideas and classifications of colonial ethnography). The reading bears in mind the varied contexts through which the text has travelled. As Mishra also clarifies, this epic is sung once in twelve years; the contents of the song, hence, changes and is subject to updating and is “corrected by senior Kondhs or the audience” (93). My purpose is to gather an essence of Kondh land-based political discourse from this milieu.

⁶¹ These ideas are relevant to multiple Adivasi traditions across South Asian geography. They have been discussed in relation to Adivasi oral narratives from west India, see Skaria 1-34, on north-eastern and eastern tribal histories see Blackburn “Colonial Contact” 335-365; Sen 13-15; 32-34.

The Kondhs came to Sitli village.
The Majhi Gonds and the Majhi Kondhs were present.
The Gonds had settled there.
The Gonds thought,
What shall we do?
The Kondhs have come and want to settle here.
The Gonds have no weapon.
They have no evidence of their land ownership. [...]
Who owns the land and
What is the proof of title to the land?
A debate was going on.
The Gonds proved that the earthen hearth
was the proof of their settlement in that village
The Kondhs said, the stone hearth
Was their proof of settlement in that village [...]
What is the proof of settlement?
Who is the actual owner of the land? [...]
They divided the land, gods and goddesses,
Distributed the ancestors among themselves.
Thus they distributed the land.
The Gonds got their territory
And the Kondhs got their territory. (Mishra *Oral Epics* 95)

In the above extract, a negotiation unfolds between the Kondh and the Gond peoples, both populous Adivasi communities in eastern and

central India. Given the nature of oral transmission and given that the myth has been collected around 1985 (Mishra published the book in English in 2007), the negotiation itself has an indeterminate historical reference. Nonetheless, it can allow the reader to infer multiple interpretations. The text is indicative of a longer settler history in Kalahandi and the changes in community relationships. Kalahandi came under direct rule of the British colonial government in 1863, and thus began decades of increased agriculture, exacting taxes, and export of grain to the empire (I discuss this history in Chapter 3). As Biswamoy Pati notes, these invasions unsettled the resident Kondh, Gond and Domb communities leading to resistances (often termed as the ‘Kondh rebellions’). The resistances comprising of several Adivasi and Dalit communities were not only against the incoming settlers, but also “internal, tribal exploiters like Gonds and Oriyas like Mohantis” (*South Asia* 29). Additionally, the industrial intrusions in south Odisha since the latter part of the twentieth century (after economic liberalisation in the 1990s) caused further displacements and resettlements of Adivasi communities. Given that these resettlements are enforced by regulations of state, rather than inter-community negotiation, the language of property rights comes into opposition with customary laws. Instead of choosing one over the other, the above extract demonstrates how colonial language is appropriated and reformulated within the oral tradition, to invent new methods of community negotiations.⁶²

⁶² The relationship between Kondhs and Gonds archived here can also be informative of a longer history: Gondwana land and Kondh states (present-day

This epic destabilises several colonial constructions imposed on Adivasi communities. As opposed to the notion of the Kondh people as ‘primitive’ inhabitants and countering the romanticisation that has constructed them as ‘isolated’ from civilisation, this epic narrativises inter-tribal relations and the contested relations with other Dalit communities. Kondh communities, who have often been represented as warring tribes whose rebellions were a constant colonial ‘problem’ that needed to be suppressed during the nineteenth century, carry out a peaceful negotiation by referring to each community’s land history. Having arrived at Sitli village and seeing the land already occupied by the Gonds, each community assesses the other’s weapons anticipating a possible confrontation. The specific village is named: this was a part of “ritual naming” (Blackburn *Singing* 220–21) that might have acted as formal codes to maintain land divisions. During the nineteenth and twentieth century, when land ownership acquired a rigidity and needed written proof of *patta* (title) the customary rights observed by communities were interrupted. Therefore, the communities ponder upon the “proof of settlement”, or the title to the land that had become a growing concern with the negotiations of land holdings with the British and upper-caste

south Odisha, which was also renamed ‘Kondistan’ by colonial anthropologists), were princely states and had inter-community negotiations before colonial intrusion, the history of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is interesting to note that in the first part of *Gova Utra*, Kondhs and Gonds are represented as brothers along with eight other Adivasi communities such as the Bhunjia, Paharia, Baiga, among others. They are part of the same creation story according to this origin epic.

landlords. As opposed to *kaagaz* or paper that had become a dreaded proof for land deeds, the communities refer to earthen evidence: the “hearths”, one made of stone and the other of clay, are presented as evidence. Here, “hearth” is an anglicised translation for *holu* (in kui) or *khandaa* (in the desia dialect of Kalahandi), which, rather than an internal fireplace, refers to an outdoor site for a fireplace specifically meant for cooking. It is used every day or set up before larger community feasts and rituals. The peculiar linguistic orientations around land in Indigenous literatures is conveyed by *khandaa* as a symbol of sustenance, which, in this myth is used to claim ownership.

Recovering *khandaa* from its culturally specific setting allows for meaningful readings between diverse linguistic traditions: Lisa Brooks writes of the Abenaki term *wlôgan* or ‘dish’ in the American north-east, as that which has co-relations with the riverine hollowed spaces, *wolhanak*, which were home to Abenaki families (4). Similar to *khandaa*, as a symbol of sustenance of a community, Brooks describes *wlôgan* as “a metaphor of ‘the common pot’” (3), an earthen metaphor (made from clay, birch trees or also symbolising Sky Woman’s body) that both sustains the community and maintains their network of relations with the non-humans of the particular environment. She further demonstrates that the understanding of this ethic of co-dependence was not an “altruistic ideal” but a “necessity” for Algonquian and Haudenosaunee communities to share resources for survival, “to ensure social stability and physical health” (5). In similar ways, *khandaa*, therefore can be read not only as the literal evidence for dietary sustenance, but a negotiation that provides the Kondh and the Gond

communities with the stability of land and its network of non-human relations that retains the 'sacred code'.

The negotiation between the Kondh and the Gond peoples, therefore, does not stop with material divisions: when the earthen hearth of the Gonds is washed away in the rain and they lose their evidence and hence their land to the Kondhs, there is still the question of a just division. By questioning the 'actual owner', the epic problematises the idea of Indigeneity as a fixed notion of belonging to land: both the Kondhs and the Gonds are Indigenous communities but what necessarily makes them Indigenous or the criteria by which they can claim political Indigeneity is not limited to geography (moreover, adding to this diverse communities can have conflicting definitions of Indigeneity). In this epic, following the equal distribution of their gods, goddesses, and ancestors, they settle on their respective lands. This instance illustrates that Indigeneity is not limited to the material evidence of a landmark, but it is the imaginative sense of belonging that encompasses the literary traditions, the rituals, and collective religious symbols that the community owns on that land. After dispossession, the literary imagination is utilised again to 'build Indigeneity'.

This notion depicted in the epic further helps explore my argument that political Indigeneity requires a literary imagination: 'building Indigeneity' politically engages with the act of literary creation. Political Indigeneity as imagined today acquires a forceful sense of

ownership of land as it takes its root from early literary traditions: cosmogonies narrate migration onto specific sites and how communities lawfully settled on land. In origin myths, from which contemporary retellings draw, both land and literature are treated as a single act of creation: the history of a particular landmark evokes stories, while a tale is often about how a particular place got made. Land-based literatures therefore rather than being 'simplistic' legends, can be read as early forms of literary self-reflexivity that were concerned with the act of literary creation. While these literatures engage with the materiality with which earth got made, in describing the 'making' they seem to symbolise the literary act of making itself.

In these literatures, there is intricate detail and a clear ideology behind the construction of land. The placing of humans is not accidental but according to the availability of suitable materials for sustenance and the possibility for continuity of the community. While it is the animals that live underwater, humans are created *with* earth or the animals rescue 'mud' to create a place for humans. In her reading of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) creation myth of Sky Woman, Brooks writes that creation requires 'thought'. Sky Woman falls to a uterine world: the non-humans, (here muskrat), gather 'mud' onto the turtle's back for Sky Woman's survival (2). This resonates with the Santhali story of creation, where the earthworm piles mud on the tortoise's back (Marandi 11-12). In a Kondh myth collected from the Ganjam district, Nirantali and Sarantali, two sisters and earth goddesses or *Dharni penu*, emerge out of the earth in

Saphaganna, a landmark believed to be the origin place of the Kondh community in this landscape (Elwin *Tribal Myths* xlvi). The story describes the world in water and when asked about “an earth to live on”, Nirantali uses “four handfuls of earth out of the bun of her hair” and creates earth in four directions (7). In another Kondh myth, Nirantali uses metals such as gold or copper to make mountains (xlvii). Resonating with the story of Nirantali and Sarantali, in an Acoma myth, the female spirit Tsitctinako creates two women in the underground. They are aided with baskets of seeds that grow into trees to help them climb up onto the earth. Humans, like seeds, grow out of the earth and use earth or ‘mud’ as a material to create other things. For example, Ia’tik in the same myth creates seasons and mountains “taking earth from her baskets and giving it life” (Erdoes and Ortiz 104). The action of ‘throwing mud’ or ‘earth’ can be read as a ritualistic practice in these myths that may have informed later invocations and prayers to the soil. Moreover, the characters often find themselves in rocky landscapes and ask for ‘soil’ or ‘mud’ to sustain themselves—an allusion to internal migrations following loss of land and access to forests. Consequently, humans implore the goddesses Nirantali and Kapantali, thus: “You are gods: you can live anywhere. We are human beings and cannot live in water” (8). Soil is a revered material in these myths which is not pre-possessed, but which needs to be found out or asked for. The fact that earth is searched for and requires accountable actions for survival, destabilises human entitlement, and further explains why the ‘sacred code’ needs honouring.

In this section, I examined methodologies of reading ‘land as literature’ to demonstrate how mythologies serve as essential archives for political discourse, to claim ownership and facilitate negotiation between communities. I would like to mention here, the problematic of contemporary claims to Indigeneity based on mythology—Hindu nationalists carried out the Babri Masjid’s demolition claiming the site as the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram based on the mythological epic of *The Ramayana*. This allowed them to claim ownership over an imagined place of belonging where the resident minorities were displaced. My argument about Indigenous communities who refer to mythological literary traditions that strengthens claims to Indigeneity, is to demonstrate how Indigenous political uses of literature are rendered ‘mythical’ and ‘primitive’ in the context of land rights of communities who have been displaced from their land by colonial enterprise. The question of whether myth can serve as legitimate means to establish nationhood is beyond the scope of my current argument and needs to be addressed further. A critique of tribal nationhood and the “limits of nationalism” has been examined by Shari Huhndorf in *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture* (2009). While the use of mythology to claim Indigeneity can tend towards a particularity of context that Native American nationalist critiques like Womack, Robert Warrior and Jace Weaver have termed “literary separatism” or “literary nationalism”, the contexts and forces that have weakened the formality of these mythologies and also frame its renewal, are global. Huhndorf explores the limits of ‘tribal sovereignty’ in the context of Native

American nations that only cohere around ‘nationalism’ (*Mapping* 3–4), reminding us that the forces of empire and colonialism, and contemporary global capitalism, are transnational forces that radically alter the local.⁶³ The renewal of ethical kinship to land, then, requires a transnational imagination. Huhndorf reads Simon Ortiz as such a transnational visionary. Ortiz’s was a genre of poetry that aligned national sovereignty and the resurgence of “deep, long-standing ties to the land” alongside transnational concerns that plagued the worker in the twentieth-century uranium mines (*Mapping* 6). Following dispossession, the space of the factory or the mine, variously, becomes a site to claim land redress, and imbue the context of workers’ struggle with the ‘sacred code’. In the next section, I elaborate further on the transnational scope of Simon Ortiz’s poetry to discuss Kashipur’s recent history in the aftermath of industrial settlement by companies such as Utkal Alumina International Limited (UAIL), Aditya Birla and Vedanta. My purpose is to explore how the ‘sacred code’ will be sustained in future discourse on the rights of Adivasi workers. I discuss that Adivasi working class’ rights in factories cannot be separated from land redress: land redress that entails a material return of ancestral land, as well as the reaffirmation of Adivasi ideas of ethical relationship to the land.

⁶³ I address Huhndorf’s analysis of the “limits of nationalism” in relation to gender in Chapter 4.

Simon Ortiz foretold Kashipur

Industrial invasion renames ‘storied’ lands in terms of profit and turns them into ‘contested property’. Indigenous literatures have subsequently attended to a re-imagination of these sites. Having to forcefully migrate or re-settle, the Indigenous person has to grapple with a new vocabulary to reconfigure industrial terrains that are untethered from oral traditions. It is at this juncture that language of the coloniser gets appropriated to re-interpret the ‘sacred code’ to imbue meaning in sites which hold urban Indigeneity: “suburbs, office blocks, factories and farms” (Benterrak et al. 16). Given the composite forms of Indigenous literatures, this reclaiming is not uniform. Some of the literary tools consist of remembering historical sites and events, referring to community myths, and practising a documentary or evidentiary form of poetry. The practise of rendering literary writing invocatory, creating for the reader a rattled sense of cognitive dissociation when language makes visible an industrialised land’s fullness and captures its instability (as evident in Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book*) had precedents in the twentieth-century evidentiary writing of Simon Ortiz who welded language of mines and factories back to the earth.

Simon Ortiz was born in Albuquerque in 1941, to a family from the Acoma Pueblo reservation in Deetseyamah (McCartys, New Mexico), speaking the Acoma Keres language. Ortiz theorises Indigeneity as an intersection of “land, culture and community” (Weaver et al. xi). He

provides an accommodative vision to reclaim Indigeneity; his concept is one that founds “literary sovereignty” in Native American orality and simultaneously re-imagines the medium of English through his literary work (xiii-xiv) for political resurgence and transnational solidarity. Ortiz’s work as a miner in the uranium mining industry in the 1960s, as a writer and teacher across state universities, including Iowa, San Diego and New Mexico, his activism, and his collaboration with the Ethnopoetics group to co-edit *Alcheringa* (a journal of transnational Indigenous poetry), informed and illustrates his transnational poetics. I associate his poetry with a transnational activism based on his affirmation that “cultural consciousness as Indigenous people *is* the bottom line” (xi); an Indigenous transnationalism has been made possible given the political organising force provided by literature to enable this collective consciousness. His ability to connect the particular to the universal, makes his poetry accessible and comparable with Adivasi movements in Odisha, as I will discuss later.⁶⁴ He connects the subjectivity of his identity to a transnational Indigeneity that is intersectional with working class concerns and prescient to the racial and religious divide in the American south-west. Even though he affirms himself as a person “of the Eagle clan and a child of the Antelope clan” (vii) of the Aacqumeh Hanoh, his practice of affirming sovereignty is by defining a literary universal.

⁶⁴ Eric Cheyfitz reads “global indigenous resistance” in Simon Ortiz’s *Fight Back*, drawing comparisons with Indigenous and workers’ movements in South America, global resistance against uranium mining and the US war in Vietnam (Lyons 215-235).

The land. The people.
They are in relation to each other.
We are in a family with each other.
The land has worked with us
And the people have worked with it. (Ortiz *Fight Back* 35)

Similar to Momaday and Simpson, Ortiz affirms land as “a material reality as well as a philosophical, metaphysical idea or concept” (Ortiz et al. 365). The human is tied to the land through ethical relationship which is based on ‘practice’: in the above lines, Ortiz manifests this practice in the verb form of “worked with”. The human worker *of* and *with* the land, universalises a kinship to land that can be realised in workers’, farmers’, environmental movements, where land is threatened. The continuance of a land-based cultural consciousness following industrial intrusion is an enduring theme that is at the poetic core of *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land* (1980) and *From Sand Creek* (1981).

As a poetic follow-up to the question put forward by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz in the preface to *Fight Back*, as to why “Indians are rarely viewed as workers” (vii) and simply the cultural aspect of their communities essentialised, Ortiz writes about miners, company labourers and workers, documenting the varied positionalities embodied by “that Indian” (2) in the twentieth century. Ortiz’s experience as an Acoma Pueblo miner in a mixed setting introduced him to the concerns of workers from other mining towns and white working-class labourers,

who he expressed as also having “land-based backgrounds” (*Woven Stone* 22). He writes that this experience contextually placed *Fight Back* with a focus on the uranium mining industry of the 1960s, alongside his coming-of-age as a poet and a worker. During the 1960s, the high point of the Civil Rights movement, was also a time when Ortiz consistently questioned the sovereign politics and welfare of Native Americans within the larger discourse of justice for minorities ongoing in American politics. This was following the Indian Termination era of the 1950s when the federal government had denounced welfare treaties with reservations, and a decade that spelt migrations to urban landscapes, “the suburbs, office blocks, factories and farms” (Benterrak et al. 16) in search of a livelihood, and a slow devastation from alcoholism and lack of health care in reservation life.

Well, later on,
when some folks began to complain
about chemical poisons flowing into the streams
from the processing mills, carwrecks on Highway 53,
lack of housing in Grants,
cave-ins at Section 33,
non-union support,
high cost of living, and uranium radiation causing cancer,
they-the Chamber of Commerce- pointed out
that it was Martinez
that Navajo Indian from over by Bluewater

who discovered uranium [...]

it was that Indian who started the boom. (*Fight back* 3)

As a poem that reads like an evidentiary document of the mining belt of the Pueblo region, the above poem “It was That Indian” is written with a lived sense of being ‘that Indian’. In 1960 Ortiz began working in Kerr McGee, one of the mining corporations alongside Philipps Petroleum, Anaconda and Homestake that had turned the ancient earth of the New Mexico region into a corporate mining work-pit. Ortiz configures a character around Martinez: Paddy Martinez, of Navajo and Mexican descent, was meant to have ‘discovered’ uranium at Haystack mesa near Grants after which the largest open-pit uranium mining site was set up in operation and employed predominantly Indigenous workers from the nearby villages. Ortiz’s re-telling of individual stories is to distinguish a larger problematic of Native American and global Indigenous communities caught in the twentieth century corporatisation of their ancestral lands: the Indigenous person as both the displaced person and the labourer at the site of dispossession, where the profit is for the company. Following Martinez’s ‘discovery’, Indigenous villagers are recruited as labourers for a company that displaces the Pueblo, Navajo and Hopi communities’ kinship maintained with land, replacing it with the idea of land as a resource ‘owned’ as property to produce capital. The ‘boom’ for corporate mining in the American south-west had few benefits for the resident Indigenous peoples—they were ‘cheap labour’ for the companies, and the racial carceral mechanism operating in reservations

ensured “the city had a jail full of Indians”. In the poem, “non-union support” reveals two possibilities: workers’ unions may have fought for support and better working conditions, against “cave-ins”, “lack of housing” and “high cost of living”; the “jail full of Indians”, however, seem to confirm that they were frequently under required numbers to adequately represent their concerns. Or the union was not concerned with Indigenous workers nor could accommodate the land-based ideas of Indigenous labour rights.

The poems in *Fight Back* form a detailed account of the mineral boom and its aftermath on the region. In “Returning it Back, You will Go On” (41-44), Ortiz names uranium companies as an evidentiary tool, similar to contemporary naming of bauxite and coal mining companies in slogans during Adivasi movements. On the other hand, by naming workers, Wiley, Ray and Agee, and narrating their individual stories, Ortiz’s attempt is to personalise the stories of Indigenous workers who become statistics, or less, with an industrial death. He vividly describes their states of toxicity or captivity within factory spaces; their material incarceration is exemplified in his poem “Ray’s story” by reiterating phrases such as “we got put down...the pit”, “plugged it up”, “stuck out” and “pulled him into the jaws of the crusher” (7-9). Ray’s death in a crusher seems symbolic of Indigenous entrapment in the global industrial machine that suffocates the local landscape and feeds the chain of weaponry. Indeed, Ray’s crushing, and the image of Wiley and Ortiz in “Stuff: Chickens and Bombs”, packaging “the yellowcake for bombs and

reactors and experiments” (30), reveal the insidious policies of the U.S government, where relocation following termination of treaties creates positions of dispensability of Indigenous bodies. In this relocated space, Indigenous communities serve as workers for the arms industry, or fulfil a military need in the Vietnam war. These processes although not of causation, exist with a simultaneity, because they stem from the same paradox, I explored in Chapter 1: here, elimination of the Native American person on ancestral land is simultaneous with the increase of labour in the mining industry. Furthermore, Indigenous communities, as residents on the peripheries of the mining site, suffer from radiation poisoning, but their families are also caged in a system that sustains the production of this poison by their labour.

In poems like “Affirmative Action” (11), Ortiz’s critique of the ineffectiveness of policies and grants, which promise to alleviate Native American poverty in reservations, reveal the intertwined structure of corporate and state mechanisms. Ray, Wiley and Agee, representative of wider Indigenous communities in the sprawl of the factory landscape, are victims and at the mercy of this complex once ancestral land is lost, as affirmative action does not adequately accommodate land redress. Therefore, reiterating the essential argument put forward by Wolfe, that “territoriality” is “settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (388), any form of redress or affirmative action, that does not lead to land redress, is embroiled in settler colonial structures that reproduce the “logic of elimination” (387). This “logic of elimination” allows the state and the

company to avoid accountability and rather traps the Native American person as the ‘problem’: in “It Was That Indian”, therefore, Martinez is blamed for the plight of Indigenous labourers and the uranium ‘boom’ that eventually poisoned the landscape.

Consequently, Ortiz structures his poetry around contested sites as ones arising from the commencement of settler colonialism: he wrote the collection as “tribute” to workers, present and past, honouring the Tricentennial celebration of the 1680 Pueblo revolt against Spanish colonialism (*Fight Back* ix). He connects the conditions of the twentieth-century Aacqumeh Hanoh, Navajo, Chicano and Apache workers in the mines of New Mexico, with their longer history of being colonised on ancestral land. His attempt to organise a community and transnational consciousness is to remind the readers that their ancestors, the Pueblo and Athabaskan-speakers, “the mestizo and genizaro”, as well as African ancestors brought to American soil as slaves, rose in revolt in 1680 against the armed oppression of the colonisers and the church (57-60).⁶⁵ The resistance was not only against the ‘thieving’ of land but religious oppression that sought to erase land-based social and religious practices of the communities. The dispossession of Indigenous land through ‘conquest’

⁶⁵ Ortiz also writes with an awareness of how economic policies changed the dynamics of inter-tribal relations. In relation to a relocation due to coal mining affecting the Navajo population at Big Mountain Arizona (which had weakened Navajo-Hopi relations), he summarised that the “real struggle” of land was not between tribes, “rather a joint struggle against U.S government policies [...] against economic development that’s not of their own making, that’s not their own initiative” (Ortiz et al. 371).

translated into a state-mandated gathering of assets when Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, for the process of nation-building, sought Indigenous land as ‘capital’. This change organised settler colonial enterprise, resulting in bloody annihilations, unnamed and named, such as those in Sand Creek 1864, Wounded Knee 1890, among others. This “logic of elimination” continues in twentieth-century relocation, mining, and war machinery. Ortiz, therefore, seeks to historicise the precarious positionality of the twentieth-century Indigenous factory worker as one arising from the “irreducible element” of land dispossession.

The unethical conditions of workers in factories are then, tied to the displacement of ethical kinship with the land: the redress of rights, of the miner and labourer, variously, lies in the resurgence of the ‘sacred code’, in affirmation of rights *of* the land (I explore further on the agential positions of non-humans in Chapter 3). On being queried as to what he meant by “the bones of this nation will mend after the revolution” in his book-length poetic sequence *From Sand Creek*, he replied: “I mean revolution in terms of change and the acceptance of responsibility” (Ortiz et al 374). I read his evocation of revolution, a workers’ revolution, as well as his framing of resistance against the Vietnam war as a form of responsibility to the American people, as one that cultivates “responsibility” to the land. His idea of “revolution” lies in his interpretation of the ‘sacred code’ as “an insistence of shared responsibility”. This conception creates a ‘universal’ emancipatory paradigm for Indigenous workers in factories. Further, his poetic renewal of an ethical relationship with land as

‘common responsibility’ situates him as an environmental humanist.⁶⁶ His poetry was an early itinerant of contemporary poetry in anti-mining movements and spearheaded a tradition of transnational poetic practice. Furthermore, his body of work can serve as methodologies for reading those forms of poetry that are movement-based and act as pamphlets of resistance, such as the poetics of Kashipur movement that I explore in this thesis.

Ortiz’s poetry speaks to contemporary Adivasi concerns as it preconceives the vicious circle that enfolds Indigenous communities following land dispossession to industries. Here, I briefly discuss the aftermath of the Kashipur movement to draw parallels with Ortiz’s description of the Grants mining belt, as well as to anticipate the future poetics of Adivasi factory workers. In southern Odisha, the *malis* (hills) and *dongars* (mountains)⁶⁷ are the non-humans around which several Adivasi communities like the Kondh, Paraja and Jhodia Paraja peoples are

⁶⁶ Ortiz writes about his humanism, as well as his literary kinship with his contemporary Gary Snyder. Although they write about similar concerns, he distinguishes their particular voices and references. He writes that like other Native American poets, his Acoma Pueblo heritage along with his individual history, make his work distinct from that of Gary Snyder and others within the “American cultural context” (Ortiz et al. 366).

⁶⁷ *Mali*, *dongar*, *houru* are words for hills and mountains in the desia and Kui languages that recur in the thesis. To clarify, these words are specific to the conception of mountains and the landscape of the Eastern Ghats in the communities of South Odisha. In dimensional comparability these are hill ranges rather than mountain ranges—I translate them as ‘mountains’ to retain the imagined dimensions within the language and geographical context, meanings of which I gathered through conversations.

organised. The resident communities, “landless Dalits, fisherfolk, Adivasis, small and marginal peasants” (Padhi and Sadangi 12) depend on tilling the hill slopes: the *dongar* provides and working on the *dongar* is essential for survival. Therefore, even for the landless, being part of the community ensures their rights to the land (12). In 1992, after Utkal Alumina Refinery Limited (UAIL) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Odisha state government, companies like Aditya Birla and Vedanta steadily invaded to lay claim on the bauxite-rich hills of Doraguda, Ramibeda, Baphlimali, Kondingamali, and several other hills near Kashipur in the Rayagada district.

Initial negotiations with Adivasi communities failed because the state was unable to comprehend the language of ‘working the land’ entwined with the legal conceptions of the community: the *dongars* provided space to grow *mandia*, *kandula* (indigenous varieties of lentils) and maize, and labour belonged to the land for sustenance, rather than a private enterprise for economic profit, which was an abstraction. Furthermore, as the speeches by Bhagban Majhi (Kashipur) and Lado Sikaka (Niyamgiri) reveal (Sikaka “An Interview”), there is an acknowledgment of labour *by* the land (and *dongars*), the deep histories during which the *mountains have worked* to maintain the intricate functioning of ecology (I discuss this further in Chapter 3 when I examine ‘Kondh songs of the Anthropocene’). Companies such as Larsen & Turbo, Hindalco, and later Birla and Vedanta arrived promising ‘development’ and economic benefits, with a conception of labour that was unequal and

monetised. Following resistance from the resident communities of Kucheipadar, the Odisha state positioned the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to quell protest: several people were detained, false cases registered, and police ‘encounters’ resulted in violence in Maikanch and Basangamali villages that killed more than thirteen villagers, including five children.

The Maikanch killing on 16th December 2000, coincided with *Pus Parab*, a festival to offer prayers to *Dharni* (*Dhartani* or the earth mother) and celebrate the end of the harvest.⁶⁸ The occupying CRPF battalion opened fire on the gathering, killing three and injuring several people. The community so far had been on the receiving end of police brutality; that the state could eliminate Adivasi people to protect the company’s economic propositions was received knowledge, but not expected. The Maikanch killing became a significant marker for the Kashipur movement: following 2000, the communities assembled to remember the martyrs. Bhagban Majhi, one of the leaders and singers of the Kashipur movement, who was also imprisoned on false charges in 2015, composed a song remembering Maikanch. Here is a translation of his song originally recorded in Oriya:

Remembering the season of Paush,
remembering that Monday,

⁶⁸ It was a commonality during the Kashipur and Niyamgiri movement where rituals and prayers to the hills were simultaneous with protests against UAIL and Vedanta: gatherings to pray and protest co-existed.

remembering the sixteenth of December—

O brother, tears still roll,
O to remember is to weep.
Until our final breath,
we shall remember,
the sixteenth of December.

Martyred on this day:

Raghu, Abhilash, and brother Damodar.

(“Bhagban Majhi remembering”)

Similar to Ortiz’s naming of industrial deaths, Majhi names the martyred and the injured—Ganga, Purna, Arjuna, who, as he claims in the song, died or suffered for “respecting the earth” and fighting for the “liberation of Dalit communities”. Majhi’s use of naming is characteristic of his songs that functioned as slogans and pamphlets during the Kashipur movement. In another, he meticulously names hills, “Baphlimali, Kurtumali, Shiji dongar” and “Ramibeda, doraguda, *pani jharana*”, that were threatened by UAIL and Aditya Birla (*Prakrutika* 23). His oral pamphlets were chanted during the movement to remember the land and the crops, and in the above song, the martyrs. This trope in sloganeering kept the movement vigilant and formed allyship between diverse communities. This literary act of imagination in oral tradition powerfully built political Indigeneity uniting the concerns of Adivasi and Dalit communities, and more importantly, emphasised the centrality of land. His song memorialising

Maikanch as a place where members of the Jhodia-Paraja community were martyred, is comparable to Native American poets, such as Ortiz, Momaday and Rose, who similarly historicised sites commemorating massacres in American history. While Momaday (“December 29, 1890: Wounded Knee Creek”) and Rose (“Wounded Knee: 1890-1973”) dedicate their poems to the deaths on the site of Wounded Knee, Ortiz writes a book-length poetic sequence dedicated to the Sand Creek massacre. In doing so, these poets establish the history of Indigenous dispossession as a continual process rather than a single event of rupture: colonial history continues as part of internal colonialisms when industrial and mining conglomerates occupy Indigenous land and engender state-sponsored violence, as evident in the case of Maikanch.

The Kashipur movement sustained a long resistance for more than a decade despite ongoing violence. Early on, the leaders of the main organising committee (*Prakrutika Sampad Surakhya Parishad* or committee for the protection of environmental ‘wealth’) realised the necessity for uniting voices. Bhagban Majhi and Lima Majhi sang in collective invocations the trials of the Adivasi farmer, with that of Dalits, labourers, and factory workers. While Lima Majhi sang of the importance of organising “committees in all villages” to resist the company’s invasion, Bhagban Majhi called for a trans-Indigenous unity in his song *Gaan Chadiba Nain* (We will Not Forsake this land). He sang: “We are Gouda, Paika, Adivasi, Harijan, we are farmers” (*Prakrutika* 19). Although not a marked presence during the Kashipur movement, it was primarily in

Kalinganagar and Niyamgiri, that political parties of the Left, especially the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML), assembled during protests which resulted in a diverse song culture during the movements. There was a plurality to movement culture when songs travelled through the medium of Adivasi activists, political parties, researchers, and videographers. Not only were *lal salaam* (red salute) slogans and songs common, one of the songs during the Niyamgiri movement connected the concerns of the Adivasi communities in Kashipur with that of workers and migrants in other states, as well as Dalit, Bahujan and Kashmiri minorities (“Rendezvous Niyamgiri”).

My intention is to initiate a query as to the convergence and departures of political consciousness organised by the political Left (here, particularly referring to the parties and activists from urban metropolises in India) to that of one perhaps imagined by Kondh leaders like Bhagban Majhi, although both streams attempted to unite voices.⁶⁹ Has the political Left recognised the centrality of the ‘sacred code’, the particularity of ethical kinship maintained with land in Adivasi discourse and movements? Has it acknowledged that, while demanding rights for farmers and workers, the communities demand sovereign rights *of* the land to not be

⁶⁹ I am cautious writing about such a binary—even though in urban metropolises, the constituents of a party might also include a sizeable number of Adivasi individuals, in the context of Kashipur and Niyamgiri, the presence of the political party as active participant in forming the rhetoric of land-rights movements against industrial intrusion, is recent, beginning mostly from early 2000s onwards, as discussed in an interview with Saroj Mohanty (Mohanty).

exploited as resource? Has this disjunction then impacted the Adivasi workers' struggle for rights, and does it continue to do so, if not re-imagined through the categories of Adivasi political thought? Bhubaneswar-based writer and activist, Debaranjan, who travelled to Kashipur during the resistance, writes about the disjunction of ideas urban non-Adivasi activists faced once in Kashipur ("Kashipur Sangharsa" 126). Marxist ideals from the urban centres still held preconceptions of Adivasi people as 'primitive'; for Adivasi 'progress' and 'employment', industrial production was a needed 'stage' in Kashipur. These stages did not match the lived temporality or the political language of the community. The 'sacred code' and kinship with the land is irreconcilable with the land used as resource for industrial progress. As Coulthard argues in "Grounded Normativity", to understand the intersections of Indigenous rights, environmental degradation and class exploitation, there needs to be a shift from the "temporal" and "normative developmentalism" of Marx's primitive accumulation theory. He writes that these "stages" should not be considered as "necessary condition for developing the forms of critical consciousness and associated modes of life" to envision alternatives for capitalism (Coulthard and Simpson 251). To understand how the 'sacred code' intersects with the idea of labour rights, could perhaps help us think through one of the many alternatives suggested by Indigenous thinkers. The writers in Odisha who visited Kashipur took time to arrive at this understanding through conversations with village elders;⁷⁰ political parties

⁷⁰ Debaranjan writes further on the diversity of community concerns: there were a significant population within Adivasi communities in Kashipur, consisting mostly

were further away from familiarity with Adivasi ideas of land, and if any, it stemmed from a romantic notion of the ‘noble savage’. Adivasi thinkers, therefore, communicate a disenchantment with ‘parachute solidarity’ and a disillusionment with political parties.⁷¹ Bhagban Majhi sang remembering Maikanch:

Company middlemen all—
the *babus* of political parties who feed
the police state—
part of a reigning collusion, all.
 (“Bhagban Majhi remembering”)

While attention, state and global, shifted toward Niyamgiri and the Dongria Kondh community after 2006, Aditya Birla and Vedanta had already made inroads into Kashipur and Lanjigarh. When I visited Kucheipadar village of Kashipur in 2017, I was narrated the stories of a ‘failed movement’—unlike the Dongria Kondh community who were able to successfully halt (or postpone) bauxite mining in Niyamgiri in 2013, the decade-long protest at Kashipur resulted in displacement. Increased distrust of the state’s interests positioned many of the leaders in a precarious nexus between armed violence and state incarceration, a duality similarly faced in central India, in the context of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Moreover, the company’s ‘benefits’ through bribes and

of young members, who showed pragmatic interest in knowing about the benefits from the market and the company (128).

⁷¹ In reference to Bhagban Majhi’s concerns expressed during an interview in December 2017 (Majhi).

handouts fragmented the community, leading to suspicions of ‘sold-out’ leaders and the eventual disintegration of the organising committee (Mohanty). The company’s housing, medical and schooling facilities (as often cited in the Corporate Social Responsibility reports of companies) did not benefit Adivasi communities; electrical supply was intermittent in Kucheipadar. Some of Majhi’s generation, women, and their adolescent children protested in front of company walls for promised employment, while some worked in the factory with minimum wages (Padhi and Sadangi 33).⁷² In a telephonic communication, Bhagban Majhi narrated that from the surrounding districts comprising Kashipur, Rayagada, among other districts where the companies have displaced communities, 4052 Adivasi people work in the factories. To his knowledge all of them are chiefly unskilled labour. He said, “It is true there has been no development for the displaced, more importantly there is none of the sovereignty or self-dependence that we fought for” (Majhi).

For those who had lost their land to the company even after a sustained struggle, the sense of precarity no longer afforded them power to unionise. More importantly, they were left alone in the struggle, and part of a community physically and epistemologically fragmented by the invasive idea of land as a for-profit resource. When asked in a telephonic

⁷² Padhi and Sadangi describe how Kashipur villagers were cautioned by Damanjodi displacees against accepting the company’s ‘rehabilitation’ colony. They, further, write about Kashipur teenagers demanding employment, and the company’s mechanism to bribe men with money and “mado au macho” (alcohol and fish), to discourage organized protests (33).

communication about the situation of current workers in Kashipur, Saroj Mohanty, one of the organising leaders during the Kashipur movement, replied: “There are no workers’ songs [...] Union at Kashipur is fragile and weak” (Mohanty). Like Ortiz’s poem, Bhagban Majhi, similarly, confirmed the absence of union strength in the factories, saying the parties who visited the movement did not really bring a lasting idea of a ‘trade union’. The Adivasi worker too is a captive of the industrial complex following land dispossession, like the Native American worker as demonstrated by Ortiz. Therefore, the rights of Adivasi workers in a mine or factory, cannot be separated from land rights,⁷³ a conception of land rights that further envisions rights *of* the land. The idea of labour prevalent in political organisation was perhaps unable to recognise the ideas of the Kondh and the Jhodia-Paraja communities: that this labour afforded a literary imagination of kinship, that because the land provided, humans were tied to it through an ethical code of responsibility. For the Adivasi or Indigenous working class, therefore, rights also include the reclamation and re-affirmation of land-based knowledge systems. To demand justice as labourers is to demand justice for the land’s labour. Therefore, many villagers in Kashipur claim they have lost “much more” than just land

⁷³ Contemporary Dalit movements in Gujarat, similarly, demand for redistribution of land to Dalit peoples as proper repatriation of rights and justice; Rashtriya Dalit Adhikar Manch, the Navsarjan Trust and Dalit leader Jignesh Mevani, have organised and campaigned for this demand in Ahmedabad; Moreover, Dalit and Adivasi concerns were united in the case of Kashipur. Therefore, Majhi sings how the Maikanch incident united a Dalit consciousness around Kashipur: on 20th December several thousand from the nearby villages, comprising mostly of Dalit groups assembled in the Rapkana police station demanding answers and justice for the dead.

(Ambai Majhi qtd. in Padhi and Sadangi 24): materialist concerns during political organisation, and literatures on the movements, require a focusing on the “much more” that is at stake, the literary imagination of Indigeneity. The universal concern of an ethical relationship to land as ‘common responsibility’ as expressed by Ortiz, is tied to the universal language of workers’ demand for ethical conditions of labour. Bhagban Majhi, likewise, reflects on the transnational concerns of the global Indigenous worker. Given that the villagers of Kashipur were promised development that would replicate the capitalist wealth such as that of North America and Great Britain, he queried in our telephonic conversation: “I would like to know what happened to the Adivasis of America? What happened when they lost their land?” (Majhi).

Conclusion:

In my correspondence to learn about ‘land-based pedagogy’ that grounds itself in context and practise, I asked Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, whether one could learn a form of solidarity that was not appropriative. She spoke of reciprocity as a practice of “building solidarity—a thinking through together” (“Re: Grounded Normativity”). Although, she expressed wariness against appropriations by white settler populations and extended this understanding only to communities with similar colonised histories. The context-specific nature of ‘land as literature’, makes it a monumental task to adequately address the specificities in particular literary traditions, laws and beliefs observed by

diverse Indigenous peoples. In this chapter, therefore, I attempted to gather the literary understanding of ‘a sacred code’ that ties together several resonances from land-based philosophies. I have argued that materialist readings of land need to accommodate the literary imagination of Indigeneity, given the intricate connections that methodologies of reading land have with the way political rights are claimed. This chapter was limited in its scope to address community-specific research on Australian ‘country’, and linguistic revitalisation work in North America.

A grounded research on land *as* literature would perhaps be through “reciprocity” that Simpson underlines: a reciprocity between communities, researchers and more importantly, the land itself. Such a concept of reciprocity raises pertinent questions: what would a pedagogy that intends to honour centrality of land, involve? How does institutional theory (a paper or a doctoral thesis) in imperial centres and Euro-American metropolises of learning accommodate the land-based literary forms of Indigenous cultures, removed from its specific context? Is reciprocity possible in a structure that still privileges white and caste-privileged researchers and their positionalities, where the premise of research on Indigenous communities and knowledge systems is unequal, and the resource to research is built on a history of imperial acquisition? Furthermore, one of the questions, that this chapter raised, is the political need of mythology for Indigenous sovereignty. However, given the use of myth-based demands to land by dominant communities (*Ramjanmabhumi* by the Hindu Right in India) and their contingent

impositions of religious and ethnic hierarchies, critical Indigenous studies needs to enquire into the limits of mythology while arguing forms of nationalisms and ideas of sovereignty.

In the second half of the chapter, I explored Simon Ortiz's collection *Fight Back* as significantly transnational in its scope: I placed his poetry alongside a discussion of Kashipur movement to question the future poetics of the Adivasi working class. I argued for the need for land redress (material and literary) for the Adivasi factory worker. I hope this points to more research on the literatures of the Adivasi working class and union formations in mines and companies in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand. My intention was to emphasise that the 'ethical' relationship with land contemplated by Momaday, Ortiz and Simpson, can enrich present conceptions of labour rights. I briefly discussed the re-definition of 'working' the land as inclusive of the labour *of* the land and that of the people. What are the material manifestations of such a notion for workers' rights? What role would literature play in this imagination to include land as a participant worker? In the next chapter, I explore the rights and agency of non-humans as represented in poetry that may speak to aligned concerns raised in this chapter. I discuss Indigenous evidence of the climate crisis and provide further literary readings of Bhagban Majhi's songs alongside Dambu Praska's oral epic to discuss Kondh epistemologies.

A pile of rock holds the land securely from the sea—
a terminus, a vantage, a venture.

A rope twined below a prominent cliff. Here
we must sing before we continue.

—Joan Naviyuk Kane

How shall we adorn
Recognition with our speech?

— N. Scott Momaday

3

ANNALS OF THE EARTHWORMS

The Crisis in Metaphors

In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), Amitav Ghosh writes: “it was exactly the period in which human activity was changing the earth’s atmosphere that the literary imagination became radically centered on the human” (66). There was a general ‘turning away’ from the “presence and proximity of non-human interlocutors” (30) during the Industrial era. In recent decades, with growing climatic concerns, there has been a contrary rejuvenation, this time with an “interest in the nonhuman that has been burgeoning in the humanities”, together with the rise of “object-oriented ontology, actor-

network theory, the new animism” (31). Observing this phenomenon in literary studies, Stephen Muecke in his critique of Timothy Morton’s *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013), notes “postmodernism has returned with a vengeance, bolstered with all the moral force of global ecological concerns” (“Global Warming”). While reading Ghosh, and Muecke’s piece, I gathered two corresponding strands of thought: as in the history of philosophy that centred the human, this ‘renewal’ of engagement with the non-human too, is yet again overpowered by the position of its production—one predominantly representative of the global North, and particularly the Euro-American man. From this positionality, literary fascination with the climate crisis, the non-human and the Anthropocene, can claim postmodern newness to the extent of having rationally discovered the relevance of the concepts themselves, solely, by virtue of occupying the discourse position of the Euro-American centre. For communities, and their histories deemed “unthinkable” (as discussed in Chapter 1), literary studies are yet to centre Indigenous literary traditions as *literary* beyond the reams of anthropological proof; that Indigenous communities may have articulated early forms of the crisis still remains in the realm of the “unthinkable”. When Indigenous land, people or artistic practises are referred to, if at all, they create the “hypersubject” (Muecke “Global Warming”). Peripheral geographies, and the oppressed on the peripheries of the enquiry are called upon to be reinstated as the representation of ‘outerwordly’ crisis (reproducing visual constructions similar to colonial encounters of ‘contact’) but never to qualify their own concerns. It is precisely a “crisis

of the imagination” (Ghosh 9), that has foreclosed a literary reading of Indigenous philosophies of the non-human and paying attention to those Indigenous articulations (oral and written) that intimated the crisis.

Metis scholar Zoe Todd’s essay “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: Ontology is Just Another name for Colonialism” (4-22), provides a critical starting point to discuss Indigenous ideas on the climate crisis. An elaboration from her blogpost, the article is a critique of contemporary Euro-western philosophy’s continued elisions of Indigenous thought.⁷⁴ The absence of Indigenous voice in framing the crisis, while being the most vulnerable to its impact, “elide[s] decades of Indigenous articulations and intellectual labour to render the climate a matter of common political concern” (13). What results, yet again, is that the Anthropocene is framed as a Eurocentric universal, with the Arctic (in the case she presents) serving as a symbolic space for a universal human crisis. Furthermore, Indigenous epistemologies of the non-human that have centred around the essential co-existence of humans and non-humans, with lived practices that acknowledge ‘all our relations’, are

⁷⁴ In this essay, Todd critiques citational practice of contemporary philosophers such as Bruno Latour and his work on climate and *gaia*, who rarely cite Indigenous thinkers who have been articulating similar concepts. She specifically addresses how Inuit climate activists like Sheila Watt Cloutier, Rosemarie Kapatana, among others, have for decades led public campaigns to address climate change and how their voices are yet to be privileged (4-7). A detailed analysis of concepts such as Actor network theory, Mesh Theory, ‘reciprocal alterity’, among others, is beyond the scope of this thesis and requires further research. I classify them collectively under contemporary Euro-American philosophies of the non-human.

overlooked.⁷⁵ As an example, she provides the Inuit term *Sila* that for Inuit communities serves to organize human relationships to non-human atmospheric elements. She privileges the work of Rachel Qitsualik and Keavy Martin, who define *Sila*: in its varied use in Inuit languages *Sila* encompasses a material understanding of climate as tangible phenomena (climate as combined influence of land, air, and sky) and a community-held belief in its separate presence and animacy (Todd 5; Martin 4-5).

That the current form of the climate crisis is largely anthropogenic, and to comprehend and repair the interface between humans and non-humans is paramount for a sustainable future, has been consistently articulated by Indigenous thinkers. Then, why has there been a slow arrival in contemporary humanities to recognise these literatures as critical archives of reference? I believe these elisions reveal a problematic regarding what are considered as evidentiaries of the climate crisis, which vocabularies and whose voices are deemed as legitimate to frame the Anthropocene. For philosophies built on the metaphysics of a centre, a metropole or a symbolic universal space of human crisis, the Anthropocene as conceived in Euro-American geographies situates the

⁷⁵ The conception of what Lynn Keller terms as “nonhierarchical orientation” (147) in her book *Recomposing Ecopoetics: North-American Poetry of the Self-Conscious Anthropocene* (2017), has existed in a tradition of Indigenous conceptions of acknowledging ‘all our relations’. As I explored in Chapter 2, this concern is central to recent work by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Glen Coulthard’s “grounded normativity”, as well as Robin Wall Kimmerer’s “grammar of animacy”, Winona LaDuke’s “all our relations”, the Native Hawaiian conception of ‘Ea’ or Inuit concept of ‘Sila’, among several others.

crisis as events, or marked instances defined by a state of significant visibility, the “hyperobject” or the experience of the “uncanny” (Ghosh 30)⁷⁶ of extreme events, melting of polar icescapes, alone. This practice may unconsciously displace the seemingly insignificant particularities of ‘localised markers’ in peripheral geographies as adequate evidence. Besides, it depoliticises the fact that the climate crisis in the peripheries is the result of excesses of the Euro-American centre not just historically but in contemporary global industrialism (Agarwal and Narain “Global Warming”). The way the Kondh songs of Bhagban Majhi and Dambu Praska that I discuss in this chapter, are linked to the United Kingdom, for instance, is that they sing against mineral extraction by Vedanta, a bauxite mining giant with its headquarters in London. The capital flow from the company’s profits is felt predominantly in centres of capital and culture in the global north, rather than outside the company walls in Southern Odisha, where the Adivasi communities are displaced. Therefore, going beyond the question of why Indigenous literatures continue to occupy particular corridors in literary studies which is the subject of continued engagement in decolonising syllabuses, attending to the voices of resident communities in these geographies in our literary readings of the Anthropocene is not only to render the crisis in these geographies visible, but to disrupt the inequalities and centre-peripheral binary which global

⁷⁶ Ghosh describes his experience of a tornado in Delhi as “uncanny” and points out that the word has recurred significantly in the discourse related to climate change to describe the “freakish” and “improbable” events. He writes that they appear uncanny because it’s a moment of “recognition” (a *re*-cognition as he explains) of the “presence and proximity of nonhuman interlocutors” (30-31).

capital does not follow but insidiously maintains. Historicising the “locality in the Anthropocene”, Damodaran writes, “challenges planetary debates by earth scientists through a historical and political engagement with capitalism, democracy and resource extraction and to focus on communities in particular periods and places and specific places in the Global South” (96).⁷⁷ Her work in environmental history foregrounds the local and Indigenous in eastern India, specifically Jharkhand and Odisha. I emphasise Indigenous literary articulations as fundamental evidence of this history, given that an account of climate vocabularies cannot be assembled outside the realm of Indigenous literary traditions that serve as historical archives.

Indigenous knowledge systems unearth imaginations of crisis already felt in peripheral geographies. These imaginations present ‘localised markers’, the local impact on non-humans, that does not necessarily intimate an apocalyptic imagination of sudden colossal change, but rather directs attention to long-term changes in ecology, that frequently go unarchived in established cultures of documentation. It directs us to question *what* is considered as legitimate evidence of the crisis. Heather Davis and Zoe Todd discuss that the language of evidence in documenting anthropogenic impact, especially the one measured and conceptualized in scientific disciplines, does not necessarily accommodate

⁷⁷ As Damodaran mentions in the paper, a “series of regional histories” has been written in India since the 1990s, focusing on the ‘local’, namely by Richard Grove, Mahesh Rangarajan, Rohan Dsouza, Vasant Saberwal and K. Sivaramakrishnan (20). I present Adivasi voices who speak of these regional histories in literatures.

the possibilities of imagining evidence from material and embodied community histories. In order to theorise the Anthropocene from situated epistemologies, the writers provide methods to understand the particular place that the non-human occupies in Indigenous knowledge systems. On discussing personal narratives of seeing “a flash of a school of minnows” (767) and memories of growing up beside the prairie lakes as “tracers” to the way they see ecological change, Todd argues that these “fleshy philosophies and fleshy bodies are precisely the stakes of the Anthropocene” (767). Documenting the “school of minnows” as the tracer, here, serves to connect the material and the epistemological; the writers communicate that not only has the Anthropocene aggravated “existing social inequalities and power structures”, but it has separated people from the land/material (here, minnows in the prairie lake) “with which they and their language, laws and knowledge systems are entwined” (767). The argument that is made here is not to juxtapose the scientific and the social to serve as evidentiary for the climate crisis, given that making binaries of these categories itself is not a productive endeavour in either discipline, but rather to reveal that the crisis has profound political and social repercussions within communities. That the crisis is not impersonal and distant but is keenly felt and interpreted by different species—human and non-human—and these localised markers and personal memories of climate change likewise need documentation.

As Ghosh notes briefly, in relation to people living in the Sunderbans and Yukon, Indigenous communities in fact “never lost this awareness” of “non-human interlocutors” (63-64). How, then, to recuperate these imaginations which would serve as early evidence to the crisis? An emerging glossary in contemporary English literary studies has served us to accommodate the climate breakdown such as the ‘realisation’ of living in the epoch of the ‘Anthropocene’, ways to comprehend the dissimilar magnitudes of ‘historical and geological’ timescales.⁷⁸ Indigenous languages, likewise, have imprinted in them the distinct registers of historical processes markedly felt as a ‘crisis’, in vocabularies that we do not yet centre in climate studies. Apart from the meteorological terms of analysis that are required to write climate history, it is imperative to foreground recurring terms and popular vocabularies that have served as means to communicate similar phenomena. Given that these vocabularies might not necessarily be historically archived, literary studies need to *trace* the occurrence of terms that have echoed increasing anthropogenic impact. Although acknowledging that these connections may not occur as direct lines of causation, of exact historical co-relation between events and literary responses (in songs, oral narratives, or written literature), it necessitates literary criticism to ponder on and *imagine* a potential map of

⁷⁸ This discussion refers to the understanding on temporality and scale, planetary and historical, by Chakrabarty “The Climate” (197-222), “Anthropocene Time” (5-32), Davis and Todd (762-765) and Damodaran (95-100). For discussion on Euro-American poetry and the “scalar challenges of the Anthropocene” see Keller’s critique of the varied perceptions of human and non-human agency, disparate temporalities, and how this defines the condition of the “self-conscious Anthropocene” (1-60; 136-173).

literary traces from significant historical junctures to mine a consciousness that is often absent or erased given that these have essentially been minority histories and voices. Accordingly, I discuss *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen* (water, forest, land) as climate vocabularies, later in this chapter. As I discussed in Chapter 2, in the context of South Asia, Native American oral history and Australian Indigenous literatures, among others, Indigenous ways of making historiography and archiving memory span across literary genres. While a significant scale of resources is available for history-writing and literary studies for dominant communities (given they have claimed ownership and access to knowledge as settler colonisers or caste hierarchies in India), Indigenous histories and vocabularies from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, exist between the crevices of anthropological constructions, and erasures. This necessitates for literary studies to create interpretative spaces, where metaphors and repetitions of particular words can be imbued with meaning, to assemble a repository that restores gaps in the deliberations around the crisis.

Language, consequently, is paramount to comprehend the ‘loss’ of the material that has occupied a temporality other than human. Poetry especially serves as a pathway to grasp these divergent magnitudes that are as yet unaccommodated in human cognition. Cultivation of attention to perceive deep time in the minute details of the local is facilitated by the metaphorical function of language. The poetic documentation of the crisis destabilises passivity and short-term profit timelines accorded to non-human elements in extractivism. Robin Wall Kimmerer, the

Potawatomi plant scientist and writer, calls such a function a “grammar of animacy” (*Braiding* 55). She writes that along with being a plant scientist, she is a poet: “the world speaks to me in metaphor” (29). She theorises that a “profound error in grammar” in scientific conceptions of the natural world, (and consequentially of the climate crisis) is because of “a grave loss in translation from native languages” (48). Language calls for a cognitive switch to conceptualise the non-human. The “grammar of animacy” (55) together with providing a ‘linguistic pathway’ to understand the deep time of non-human elements is committed to an understanding of historical time. Indigenous poetry, therefore, provides rich sites that amalgamates a political critique of colonialism in history alongside epistemological tools to situate the non-human. The “grammar of animacy” and its recovery is conscious of its fast depletion due to centuries of linguistic assimilation, and colonial dispossession. Therefore, when Kimmerer recovers *pigan* as an Indigenous word for the English word pecan, she presents evidence of the history of Trail of Death through which settlers came upon *pigan* in Kansas. In the colonial languages of English, Hindi and Oriya, the struggle is thereby to recover ideas lost in assimilation, the undivided human-non-human relationship that is central to Indigenous languages and epistemologies.

Climate consciousness in the context of land rights movements, takes the form of naming elemental loss, of verbalising the calamity incurred on non-humans (as I will discuss later in this chapter). However, this is not the only facet of Indigenous literary response to the crisis.

Indigenous poets grapple with language to articulate the centrality of elemental loss: *jal, jangal, jameen* and in the context of the polar extremities, ice. In literary output, especially in dominant colonial languages, this has taken the form of a struggle between the material and the metaphorical to write evidence of the absence of these materials. Not humans imagining absence but *materials imagining absence* acquires significance since that which is visible is not enough as a call to action. The ‘disappearance’ is visible to humans but not noted as essential. Then, going beyond the merely visible is a political act of inspiring urgency in a population that refuses to understand the fundamentals of a loss. Consequently, Joan Naviyuk Kane and Jacinta Kerketta structure new pathways in their poetry to direct human understanding of non-human absence. Their poetry queries ways of documenting extinctions of materials in language; it equally allows a resurgence of these materials as sovereign and agential. To address a blind human condition or “a great derangement” (Ghosh 11)⁷⁹ sustained through philosophies and a perception of language centred on presence, the poets privilege and query the nature of absence. They feel a need to formulate a wholly different poetic language for evidence to signal climate breakdown and legitimise that which has already been articulated for more than a century. If ice and *jal, jangal, jameen*, or water, forest, land, as words, are not enough, then is a metaphor for absence or disappearance needed more urgently to re-imagine the ‘material’? And

⁷⁹ Ghosh writes that if contemporary art and literature continues in its reticence to engage with the climate crisis, and rather functions through “modes of concealment” for a time celebratory of its “self-awareness”, then futurity will term this era that suffered a “Great Derangement” (11).

why exactly we are at the juncture to be re-imagining the immediate and the material is the question their poetry asks. In the next section, I consider Kane's *The Cormorant Hunter's Wife* (2012) and Kerketta's collection *Jadon ki Jameen* or *Land of the Roots* (2018). Placing the works of these two poets in conversation, opens a literary space to relate the colonial histories of exploitation of *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen*, and ice that have created the crisis at the tropical and polar extremes.

Non-humans Imagine Absence

Ice is sentient and undivided existence and accorded varied vocabularies in Indigenous Alaskan knowledge. In history it also inhabits the position of "racialised materiality" (J.R. Smith "Ice"). In relation to the materiality of ice and settler colonialism in Alaska, dAXunhyuu (Eyak) scholar Jen Rose Smith says: "There is a kind of material refusal of ice and its inability to be territorialized. It is the elusive North Pole, a liminal substance, recognized neither as land nor water [...] Ice does not support agriculture, it does not give root, it refuses to submit to the paradigms of the colonial" ("Ice"). She, furthermore, connects how climate race science of the nineteenth century that figured Alaska solely as a place of transit, racialised Indigenous Alaskan communities as non-Indigenous. This "indeterminacy" of classifying Indigenous Alaskans, she argues, emerged from the longer history of drawing "explicit connections between climate and race" by European philosophers like Hegel, who, in "Geographical Basis of History", claimed that communities living in particular climatic

zones should be excluded as having any influence as “historical actors” (J.R. Smith “Exceeding” 5). Much like declaring Australian land *terra nullius*, and the colonisation of Australian Indigenous communities on the basis of this ‘absence’, classifying the materiality of ice beyond the realm of history influenced the way in which the Arctic and its communities were colonised: the material of ice as merely ‘transitional’, and thereby ahistorical, and Indigenous Alaskans as not Indigenous but (like the material) a people in transit from other places.⁸⁰

Smith’s assertion, therefore, is that the evocation of ice in literatures of the Anthropocene and of other depictions of climate breakdown that represent the glacial meltdown as one of ‘universal’ human calamity fail to read the social construction of ice, as well as the deep-time histories of ice and Indigenous epistemologies connected to it. Smith suggests that the ‘absence’ or ‘disappearance’ of ice is something that has become commonplace in imagining ‘universal’ climate breakdown (“Ice”). This imagination of apocalyptic ‘disappearance’ synthesises well with the human imagination of loss, and yet human cognition fails to conceptualise

⁸⁰ Shari Huhndorf writes about the distinct form of settler colonialism in Alaska. Alaska was the “final frontier” and the American “nation’s first non-contiguous acquisition” (*Mapping* 30). Colonisation of the region was not specifically for settlement but central to US imperialism’s “commercial dominance in the Pacific” along with competing with global interests on Alaskan natural resources. She further writes that unlike Native American communities in the United States, Alaskan Indigenous communities were neither recognised as Indigenous nor any treaties were signed that would have helped in legal negotiation of rights and sovereignty (69–70).

ice as a material that has glacial-temporal histories in Alaska, similar to the histories *read* on contours of ‘country’ in the Australian Indigenous context. Smith, therefore, engages with Joan Naviyuk Kane poem “Exceeding Beringia”, and here, continuing from Smith’s theorisation of “racialised materiality” (“Ice”), I consider the position of ice in Kane’s poetry. For a people deemed ‘ahistorical’, and for a material that is deemed absent because of its indeterminacy (and hence, which can be colonised), and also currently a symbol for universal climate breakdown, in Kane’s poetry, ice as agential, reflects its own materiality and impending absence. Euro-American philosophy and dominant ways to imagine existence, as one built on *presence*, is contested by privileging absences.⁸¹ Meaning for several Indigenous communities is built around absences; memory relies on a history of absences, on archival absence, material absence (of body and ice) and Indigenous presence deemed absent—in the history of the Arctic, by perceiving communities as non-Indigenous. The recovery of meaning, therefore, requires restoring Indigenous presence, which in Kane’s poetry, is carried out by ice, the deep-time memorial.⁸² Ice considers its untimely disappearance and possible re-formation; it inscribes histories that are often invisibilised given its ephemeral

⁸¹ The conceptualisation in this section may be read as a departure from Vizenor’s survivance built on Indigenous “presence”, to demonstrate the re-imagination of absence through materials in Indigenous poetry. Rather than the “victimry” of “absence”, my attempt is to show how Indigenous writers do not abdicate the responsibility of human ‘truth-telling’ of the crisis, while establishing Indigenous presence through a revitalisation of language.

⁸² Robert Macfarlane writes, “Ice has an exceptional memory” (*Underland* 339).

materiality which cannot be imagined in the same manner as *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen*.

Joan Naviyuk Kane, an Inupiaq poet from Anchorage with roots in Indigenous Alaskan communities of King Island and Mary's Igloo, is a poetic historian of ice and in her anthologies *Hyperboreal* (2014) and *The Cormorant Hunter's Wife* (2012) articulates through ice. I examine two poems in this section: "The Sunken Forests" from the first part of *The Cormorant Hunter's Wife* titled "Antistrophic", and the second poem "Variations on an Admonition" that appears in the second part titled "Otherwise, Sky". In both poems, the human observer is displaced and the poem registers absence that pushes beyond human cognates, and in the second poem ice states itself. The audience may be human or indeterminate, or perhaps with no conception of a prospective reception. In "The Sunken Forest", Kane is witness to a disappearing forest—the fallen *jangal*, in turn, is evidenced by the rising ocean. The forest has "sunk" into melting ice and the elements are welded into one another, the *jangal* into the ice, "fallen together", so that Kane has to "scratch" the remaining bit of earth at her feet (*Cormorant* 5).

Just above the waterline
Jut the bone-white
Crowns of drowned trees
They are bare, they are
Fallen together. I

Scratch the earth
At my feet: I can
No longer draw water.
I recite the ice that has thrown
The river over its banks. (*Cormorant 5*)

Ice has thrown “river over its banks”—it is a new geography, one which is undivided, with one element morphing into the other and where the separation of earth/water/forest gives way to a unity of topographies. The immediacy of meaning ceases, as the reader, especially one unaccustomed to such a conception of undivided existence, fumbles with known references to accommodate the unknown domain of the poem. The new imaginary does not subsume these elements but weaves it organically in a way that registers the loss as well as creates a resurgence of a new elemental form. Shari Huhndorf, therefore, writes of Kane’s poems, “restoration does not mitigate loss” (“Review” 149). The loss is registered in absences and injuries, drawing analogies with the human body— “jut”, “bare”, “gape”, “split”—words that appear mute but evoke the bodily violence on the Alaskan landscape and Indigenous communities (Kane *Cormorant 5*). And yet, despite chronicling these disappearances, what Kane visibilises are the histories inscribed on the materiality of ice and the way ice itself has formed and changed topographies of the living. She writes, “I recite the ice”, signifying the various vocabularies in Indigenous languages assigned to ice and ice forms and that can be remembered in reciting in those

languages and syllables. Will these material forms remain only if recited in human memory or will the recitation peter out with the disappearance of these forms, her poetry enquires. She chronicles her own forgetting, of names, of fast-disappearing materials that follow a chain of material loss, in language:

“I have misremembered, for
Always it is a gray,
Tint, clay and salt.” (*Cormorant* 6)

To struggle against these varied forms of misremembrances in colonial history and the cultural and linguistic assimilation forced upon Indigenous Alaskan communities, Kane takes the position of a historian of ice where she walks through the new and “altered terrain” which has thrown up “annotations, new and innumerable” (5). Her agency to archive these annotations is preceded by the terrain’s agency to inscribe on her, the human, its changed form. Her individuality is consumed, taken over by this new world in a way she describes as a “jostle” (6) for her imagination. Human memory is radically altered by the form as it finds its presences through annotations that Kane is unable to forget and is perplexed as to why she is unable to forget. As a poet, Kane adopts her native Inupiaq language to write her poems. As one of the last 100-150 speakers of the King Island dialect, her choice to articulate through her native language is a restoration from the forgetting imposed upon Indigenous languages and Indigenous Alaskan children through assimilation. Language, like ice, is welded to the new elemental form she

creates, one contributing to the other, borrowing from the specificity of physicality and embodiment in the Inupiaq language. She says, “There’s a certain physicality that I associate specifically with the Inupiaq language... I know of more words in Inupiaq that have to do with the body or the natural world” (“Why Native Poets”). On using both languages, she further states, “I enjoy the syntactical and conceptual reversals between English and Inupiaq” (“Poems Against Loss”).

The “altered terrain” (*Cormorant* 5), therefore, that inscribes on the human is a resurgence of philosophies in specific Indigenous languages like Inupiaq, where language and material are undivided. It is similar to Robin Wall Kimmerer’s recovery of the non-human and ways to comprehend it using Potawatomi epistemology. To understand *a bay*, a non-human element of the landscape, Kimmerer recovers the word from its ‘containment’ as a noun form in English (*Braiding* 55). She explains that the Potawatomi word for a bay *wiikwegamaa* is a verb that assigns agency to the non-human feature of landscape; *to be a bay* is the bay making its presence known (55). The other elements around it, the water or ‘cedar roots’ variously interact with the bay as animate entities striking alignment through their specific channels of communication. This eases the human-non-human divide: when a Potawatomi person uses the verb form for a bay, it is not from the position of an observer, but as an equal element of the natural world or as Lynn Keller writes “a nonhierarchical orientation” (147). Bathsheba Demuth in *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (2019) historicises this human-

non-human divide in the Bering Strait, noting the intricate connection between whales, walruses, glaciers, and Indigenous communities, where “everything transforms into everything else—otherwise it cannot be” (77). Therefore, the ‘reversals’ in Kane’s poetic use of language embodies the reversals of a “temperamental material world”, which the Yupik, Inupiaq and Chukchi communities perceive as “an incorporeal social realm” where materiality is constantly shifting but has “sentience, judgment and perilous whims” (20). It is similar to stories in which the Rainbow serpent is remembered, and the way Alexis Wright speaks of Australian ‘country’. She writes, “country is always alive and forever powerful, and which, if its deep laws are broken, can turn against us” (SGL). Restoration of the material world, where this cognition is sustained, requires a resurgence of the language, and its embedded histories.

When the concept of ice is like that of a material that is shifting, and that always exists as the other, then how is the disappearance of ice, the glacial melts, registered in language, and spoken for in poetry? Absence is articulated by ice, other than the human perception of its absence in climate catastrophe. Ice states a statehood in “The Sunken Forests” and later animates “Variations on an Admonition” (Kane *Cormorant* 51). Ice active, declares a “coast” that has “altogether vanished” and the ozone layer that has disappeared— “above has passed”—leaving behind “a certain brightness” that ice asks of (perhaps) humans quite sharply to “mind not” (51). Ice gathers its inscriptions, frozen, often perilous, morphed and disappearing, as the nature of memory and

memorialising. Ice is at once aware of its own elemental shift, and wary of its own absence as ice; its crisis is not so much existential, for ice is well-accommodated in the temperamental and ever-shifting nature of being in the Arctic. The crisis for ice is a loss of agency within non-human causality. Its terror is consequently discrete, separate from the sense of human terror of the “perilous whims” of melting ice, the melting permafrost that has so far practised a certain containment of disease, and deluge; the language of ice is not cautionary of revelation but rather of interfered temporality. An elemental shift before its time has profound consequences. With an authority, ice commands:

[...] After all,

I have whittled you into life-size—
I will divide you into many men

With time for me to gather
The bones of all sorts of animals
And the life into them. (*Cormorant* 51)

For ice to address is a colossal form of resistance against a history of archival work and expeditions that has stratified the polar in the imaginary of the settler colonial explorer.⁸³ Ice states its response to readings of ice in

⁸³ The space of the polar, and Indigenous communities as subjects of ‘environmental determinism’ in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonial

human knowledge-making, contemporary engagements to imbibe material histories which attempts to refresh human memory of the primacy of elements as a tool to acknowledge the climate emergency. Ice refuses for itself a memorial position of paleo-oceanic history for the advancement of human knowledge in the present, solely in the intellectual categories made by humans; it claims the position of the chronicler of non-human and human history in a language quite its own. In Kane's "Variations on an Admonition", ice from the temporality of deep-time reinscribes in a way that challenges our cognitive ability to process the lived forms of materials—taking life and giving life in the epoch of climate extremes. Ice claims for itself an autonomous method of remembrance that it is in fact the materiality of ice that "[gathered]" the bones of all sorts of animals", "[divided] you into many men" to allow the human a geological understanding and a historicity (51). Furthermore, it is not the human that "whittles" ice into habitats, material sculptures and "gathers" empirical findings, but it is ice that has "whittled" humans into "life-size", instilling a certain humility to displace human centrality within conceptions of the Anthropocene. Decisively, ice demands sovereignty over temporality, that it is "with time" it shall perform its tasks, change forms in accordance with the lived temporality of non-humans and not through human encroachment, and re-form in a way that is a "jostle" (*Cormorant* 6) to our imagination. This poem could be contiguous to the

scholarship, and the effects of the 'Bering Land Bridge' hypothesis in rendering Indigeneity of Alaskan communities 'absent' is discussed by J.R. Smith ("Exceeding" 5-9).

first section of the book titled “Antistrophe” given that along with “The Sunken Forest”, it, like an antistrophe, has the ‘nature of a reply’, here, a response from the form we deem as disappeared. Further still, ‘antistrophe’ can remind the reader of the similar sounding ‘anisotropic’, perhaps to connote that ice too acquires properties that are directionally dependent: melting to the rising oceans which in turn affect both the Arctic and the Global South, in a way that unites those living in the immediate geographies of its material transmutations, uniting ice and *jal, jangal, jameen* into an undivided terrain of anthropogenic impact.

Spoken from an Inupiaq standpoint, it is also a form of instilling remembrance and establishing Inupiaq and Indigenous Alaskan epistemology as central to articulate Alaskan ice. For a community that has been colonised and forced into varied forms of disappearances through relocation, residential schools, separation from embodied and materially inter-related forms of living, to re-inscribe is to “walk over” (like Leane) colonial imaginaries that have aided these dispossessions. In her poem “Exceeding Beringia”, where Kane evokes the writing of Herbert Anungazuk from Anchorage, she compares and contrasts the anthropological imaginaries of Alaska and facilitates a return to learn through the lens of Indigenous Alaskan epistemology: “This poem has allowed me to draw upon the beautiful intricacies of rhetoric, observation and sensibility embodied in the life work of Herbert Anungazuk (NPS Native Liason) and contrast those with those of John Muir” (“Imagine Our Parks”). This comparison and contrast of landscape literatures and the

way ice or ‘country’ as materials have been inscribed in literary tradition is one that is practised by Alexis Wright, and more recently by Evelyn Araluen Corr in the Australian context (“Snugglepot”). These re-inscriptions are a way to rewrite in English, and to speak to a tradition that has been unable to articulate non-human forms that speak and exist as legal entities in Indigenous epistemologies. Such imagination can be archived through poetry for only in language is there a restoration possible in sites that have undergone a disappearance. Therefore, in “Exceeding Beringia”, Kane names lakes and places in Inupiaq, *Kuzitrun*, *Iyat*, *Auksquaq*, to respond to the renaming of glacial sites by John Muir and similar expeditions that have “renamed straits” (“Exceeding Beringia”). *Iyat*, the Inupiaq name for Serpentine Hot Springs is considered sacred with an ancient history of being inhabited, a memory interrupted by colonial naming. *Iyat*, also means ‘cooking pot’ and resonates with the “place worlds” of Brooks’ *wlôgan*, western Odisha’s *bhata handi* and Kalahandi’s *khandaa*: here, words enlivened in poetry become sites where diverse peoples meet to exchange sustenance. This re-inscription is again a form of restoration of Indigenous language, to restore the voice of “the land with its laws that serve as wire and root to draw us together” (Kane “Exceeding Beringia”). It is to remember the inscriptions on ice, of a ‘disappearing’ material, through the means of language and through it a form of return for a dispossessed and relocated population, for regaining ownership.

In the Indian context, colonial expeditions *made* and segregated Adivasi populations variously as the ‘tribe’ or the ‘jangli’ in spaces of the *jangal* and at the same time, *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen* as materials were rendered as sources of high productivity that needed to be invaded and owned. Placing the interpretation of *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen* written in Hindi by Jacinta Kerketta alongside articulations of ice in the poetry of Joan Naviyuk Kane, allows a relationality between the representation of climate breakdown in tropical and polar extremes. In the poetry of Kerketta and Kane, the non-human (*jal*, *jangal*, *jameen*, and ice) supplants human agency to articulate its own absent futurity and memorialise a history for the human species and materials. While both poets draw a direct line of connection between anthropogenic extraction and extinction of species, instead of a dystopian future, the non-humans in their poetry carry out a resurgence of their own historical record and creation of a complex new world that seems to lie beyond present human cognition.

Jacinta Kerketta is an Oraon poet from Manoharpur, located on the Jharkhand-Odisha border. She is a journalist and has published two volumes of poetry in Hindi, *Angor* (2016) and *Jadon ki Jameen* (*Land of the Roots* 2018), translated into English by Bhumika Chawla-d’Souza, Vijay K Chhabra and Fr. Cyprian Ekka. Her first volume was published by Adivaani, and both volumes have been supported and distributed by Draupadi Verlag Press, based in Heidelberg. *Land of the Roots* builds on the lived experience that was central to *Angor* and furthers her poetic testimonies of land dispossession and the devastated landscape of present-

day Jharkhand and Odisha, following the heavy extraction of the last two decades.

The eyes of a disappearing sparrow see
In the city
A forest axed down to the ground
Beside whose last vestiges
This city sits with its memories
And whiles away the evening. (Kerketta *Land* 17)

In *Yahin Kahin Is Sheher Mein* (“Somewhere in the City”), *jal, jangal, jameen*, acquire their own world, peopled with a map of absences, references and observers, where the locus is other than human. The poem inhabits the struggle to articulate *through* the disappearing materials the truth of their absence: how does absence make itself known to the reader, or how to imagine material absence of water, forest, and land (*jal, jangal, jameen*), when they as materials have ceased to exist? The poem locates disappearance of materials through the perspective of disappearing non-human species. Humans have not yet registered the ‘calamity’ to articulate the extent of disappearance. Instead, here, the disappearing sparrow and other elements in the city register the breakdown in the mining towns of Jharkhand and Odisha. The disappearing bird “sees” the vestiges of trees and senses the dying and suffocating riverlines. And it is the disappearing bird who will hold memories, recollections of the ‘imagery’ of a disappeared waterbody to replicate a picture to its future generation.

There is a hidden irony here—for will these memories exist if the sparrow does not, and if not, then what becomes of these recollections of materials, and to which archive will the future generations refer?

Hope is not assigned to human agency to attempt a restoration or wind back on the anthropogenic change they have brought upon these elements. Human children are described as having put their faith in the existence of a single remaining flower to maintain the existence of species. And yet, their hopes seem dismal as they plod through “graves of butterflies” (17) with the last remaining flower on earth in their hands. It is a dual language of absence embedded in this imagination of *jal, jangal, jameen*, to communicate persuasively about material absence. The absence of *jal, jangal, jameen* is in the memories of absent or “disappearing sparrows”, meaning the calamity has transpired, and in the second phase of extinction of species, the sparrows leave a cautionary afterword. The poem is weighed with words connoting absences—*gayab* (vanishing), *katkar* (felled), *nishano* (vestiges), *smritiyon* (memories)—and the poem’s complex prospective tense arrangement conveys the tragedy that the recollections of these absences equally are endangered.

Faisle ka Sach or “The truth behind decisions” (which appears later in the collection) is the anthropogenic precursor that has created the world of the city, that has resulted in the ‘absence’ evoked in *Yahin Kahin Is Sheher Mein*. Similar to Dambu Praska’s and Bhagban Majhi’s evocative critique of the postcolonial nation-state’s idea of *unmati* or progress (*vikas*

in Hindi) which I discuss later in this chapter, Kerketta writes about *vikas ke bandukh* or “guns of progress” that have effectively been a death sentence to *jal, jangal, jameen* in central and east India. Again, to coherently and explicitly make it known to humans, similar to Kane, she writes of the ‘death’ of materials by equating human body parts with parts of *jal, jangal, jameen*—the injured and severed parts of the body are “land’s forehead” (*mitti ka matha*), “the jungle’s thigh” (*jangal ki jaangh*), “the village’s spine” (*gaon ki peeth*) and “the songbird’s eye” (*chidiyon ki ankh*) (*Land 35*).

Birds hovering in the sky
Capture live coverage in their eyes
An old woeful parrot perched atop a tree
Bears a living testimony.
.....
And all of them together
Hand over to Time all the proof.

For centuries now Time shall show
The solid proofs to the new generations
And tell the truth behind decisions. (*Land 36*)

The agency of archiving and the power of recollection are yet again a realm of non-human species—the birds capture the moment of truth and

bear testimony and together *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen* bear evidence to the human violence that heralds climate breakdown. These birds may allude to the members of Adivasi communities, and that the communities (that exist undivided with non-humans) register the violence and will bear testimony. Evidence is presented yet again through the means of *jangal* and *jameen*, forest and the land, given that the human language of loss is insufficient to convey the urgency and estimate the extent of loss. This also critiques human systems of legality that have segregated the human and non-human in ways where the former understands the latter merely through frameworks of ownership and profit. The legal standing of non-humans, for example, Niyamgiri as the ‘mountain of law’ for the Dongria Kondh community challenged the Indian legal system when it was presented as evidence in the village councils conducted by the Supreme Court of India; a reason why the ‘fleshy epistemologies’ of cucumber seeds in Dambu Praska’s poem as the law-making agency (discussed later in this chapter), goes unarchived in legal conceptions of land and ownership.

By consigning the right to bear evidence to the realm of non-humans, Kerketta ascertains her position as one enduring a crisis of faith regarding human responsibility to understand and process the relationship between colonialism and climate breakdown. Jharkhand is a state that has been *protected* by Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908 and Santhal Paragana Tenancy Act 1876 that prohibits sale of Adivasi land to non-Adivasis. These laws of the nation-state to protect *jangal* and *jameen* are trespassed to bring in a nexus of mining giants and armed military presence and

ravaged by colonial laws of land acquisition (Land Acquisition Act 1894). From her standpoint as an Indigenous poet, where she sees state legality along with Indigenous conceptions of law delegitimised, human evidentiaries and legal systems are rendered inconsequential. She sees contemporary industrial dystopia as merely a repetition of colonial greed for land, both of which dispossess Indigenous land rights. Therefore, as the titular poem to this collection, a two-line afterword that appears on the last page, is a summing-up of the “the great derangement” (Ghosh 11) that drives increased mining and extractive colonial systems. She says that the reason *they* cannot tolerate the presence of trees is because the roots demand land and this form of non-human need is unimaginable and therefore unaccommodated within human systems of legality. Land rights, here, evoked as the right *of* the land, have always been “the stakes of the Anthropocene” (Davis and Todd 767).

Abstracting through the lens of non-human elements, similar to the exasperating obscurity of the swans and the swamp in Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book*, is to render human vocabulary powerless given it has proved ineffectual to convey the devastation. Is it then possible, the poets hypothesise, to speak through other vocabularies, to imagine a language of absence as conceived by the land and the forest? In *Faisle ka Sach*, the non-humans carry “the solid proofs to the new generations” (*Land* 36). Kerketta, yet again, designs a future only with non-human agents and their memories. She theorises a form of non-human memory, but more important still, a non-human memory of absence. Here, the experiments

in language do not take the form of representation of sound in nature, the organisation of syllables or their visual representation on the page. The language attempts a sparseness, with a gesture towards the non-human where cognition is external to, and in excess of the written word. There is an obscurity in voice, which shifts agential positions, to create a sense of indeterminacy. A non-human memory of absence creates an instability of the signified with already absent signifiers, where each non-human element remembering absent elements, becomes that and absent, thereby evading tangibility and obscuring the manifestation of its own idea—revealing an undivided relationality of elements where the absence of one creates that of the other—a gut-wrenching abyss of infinite gestures towards meaning that eludes arrival that the poets create to push humans to cognise the steady and rapid extinction of elements and their memories.

Kerketta's urgency and persistence to communicate the absence of *jal, jangal, jameen* is rooted in a longer climatic history of India. In the next section, I will discuss how early warnings of a 'crisis' were registered in the recurrence of concerns around *jal, jangal, jameen* from the late nineteenth century onwards. I frame *jal, jangal, jameen* as climate vocabularies. *Jal, jangal, jameen* is a ubiquitous refrain in diverse Adivasi movements. These vocabularies work as a "common organizing force" (Todd 6) for Adivasi concerns because they evoke a common climatic history, and encompass specific non-humans in ecologies of *jal, jangal, jameen* that organise Adivasi knowledge systems.

Jal, jangal, jameen as Climate Vocabularies

The radical impact on *jal, jangal, jameen* had been noted as a significant climatic concern albeit in a language and scale that was localized. The loss of the *jangal* was registered as a “calamity” in a song transcribed by Verrier Elwin in the 1930s:

Such a calamity had never been before!
Some he beats, some he catches by the ear,
Some he drives out of the village.
He robs us of our axes, he robs us of our jungle.
He beats the Gond; he drives the Baiga and Baigin from their jungle.
(Elwin *The Baiga* 130).

Here, the “calamity” is described as unforeseen, and of a form not encountered previously; the song proclaims that the hand of colonial power and anthropogenic intrusion on the *jangal* practised excesses that surpassed the accustomed bearings and regularity of a natural “calamity”. In this section, I explore the history that manifested such a consciousness of the crisis. The climate history of Odisha is largely anthropogenic: mineral extraction of the last few decades have exacerbated the crisis in ecologies already fragile from a history of exploitation of *jal, jangal, jameen*.⁸⁴ Odisha, which, in recent years, has been known as a cyclone-

⁸⁴ Given that the processes I chart in this section have affected Adivasi communities in what are parts of present-day Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Telangana (east and south-east India) which were earlier princely states and provinces such as Chotanagpur, Gondwana, Santhal Parganas, I draw from a wider source of histories of these regions, rather than limiting myself to the geography of present-day Odisha.

prone region, was infamously called *marudi anchala* or Land of Droughts. Apart from El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) occurrences that caused meteorological dry periods in the region, hydrological droughts significantly increased because of changes in land use during the nineteenth century, especially with the growth of commercialised agriculture and deforestation.⁸⁵ The time period in Odisha’s history that is primarily remembered for its scarcity, is also, ironically a time when land use becomes largely agrarian to increase revenue. Prior to 1850, upper-caste communities from the plains of Sambalpur and Raipur, had started migrating for settled agriculture in the KBK districts (Kalahandi, Bolangir, Koraput), areas with the highest population of resident Adivasi communities in eastern India (*Pati Situating* 100–103). Shortage of grains owing to changes in the crop cycles, had begun during this period, leading to resistance by Adivasi peoples (101–102). The scarcities become acute in the 1860s.

J.P. Das in his historical-fiction *A Time Elsewhere* (2009), translated by Jatin Nayak, earlier published in Oriya as *Desa Kala Patra* (1992), effectively describes the years leading up to 1866, the year of the deadly Odisha famine. It was a decade of paradoxes for the region: the reigning leaders and litterateurs like Madhusudan Das, Fakir Mohan Senapati, and Radhanath Ray eagerly awaited Odisha’s first printing press to establish

⁸⁵ Mike Davis delineates two forms of drought: a meteorological one that depends on natural rainfall and local climate, and a hydrological drought which he notes, “always has a social history” (18).

the eminence of Oriya literature and in turn, Oriya nationalism, rescuing it from the colonial impact of Bengal. During this time, houses were steadily declaring scarcity of grain. The famine ravaged with soaring market prices, exports to the empire, stocked rice controlled by zamindars and colonial officers, imported relief that was stranded in ports and that delayed reaching the famished. Das describes the onset of the famine in Cuttack (then, akin to a capital city), thus:

The reports predicted a rise in the price of rice and a shortage of foodgrains in the market. The Panas and the Bauries, who belonged to the lower orders of society, survived on roots and tubers gathered from the forests. One could get twelve seers of *mandia* cereal for a rupee. So, even people from good families had started eating *mandia*. (Das ch. 2).

The food culture of caste-privileged families that Das describes here as “good families”, was largely based on a diet of rice, which had steadily become a commercialised crop in Odisha. A failure of rains for a year would anticipate a shortage of *all* food grains. Rice being a revenue crop with exacting taxes meant there was little left to sustain farmers. The drought, and the Great Famine of Odisha in 1866 killed a million people, nearly a third of the population of Odisha at the time (Odisha division of Kolkatta presidency), leading to vast demographic and geographical change (M. Mohanty 608).

Following this year, the famines of 1876-79 severely impacted east-Indian geographies, with a total of 50 million deaths across India

(Grove 144). This was a severity similar to 48-55 million deaths between 1492 and 1610 because of disease, enslavement and famines that has been read as the beginning of the crisis for Indigenous communities in the Americas (Lewis and Maslin 75). The Odisha Famine of 1866 had served as a warning to the famines that followed: Henry Blanford, was appointed as imperial meteorological officer to the government of India on the recommendation of the 1866 Orissa Famine Commission, to study the failure of monsoons and the persistence of droughts (Davis 217). Climate studies on east-Indian geography were furthered given that agricultural failure directly impacted the empire. Richard Grove discusses this history: severe droughts and shortage of rainfall of the 1870s and 1890s have been determined to be a result of El Niño and the Southern Oscillation (ENSO), extreme warm events that have a global climatic impact, leading to similar drought conditions in South Asia, Australia, Southern Africa, the Caribbean and Mexico (124). However, as he mentions, this is based on climate studies that had already begun from the 1700s to record the periodicity of droughts and study the reason for long-term weather conditions. Colonial researchers like William Roxborough who had been collecting tropical meteorological analysis had identified the relationship between climate change and recurrent famines as relating to colonial impact (even leading to afforestation efforts in the nineteenth century).

Given that global meteorological surveys and climate studies, were yet again, within a limited realm of knowledge, controlled by the empire, it could be argued that the scientific conception of a world climate system

and its effect to generate conditions of crisis, did not yet exist as community knowledge (or it requires further research). However, the severity of drought and famine conditions as a result of exploitation of *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen*, in order to facilitate revenue-generation for the British empire, framed the climate vocabulary of eastern India. Anthropogenic impact on these geographies (the *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen* of Adivasi communities) had rendered them incapable of cushioning the force of periodically occurring calamities. More than a singular ‘event’, the year of 1866 and the following famines, have been read as part of a “process” that was a direct continuation of land-loss to *zamindars* (landlords), commercialised trade of grains without adequate returns to the farmers (M. Mohanty 609). The easy accumulation of *jameen* was aided by the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. Changes in the use of *jameen* meant that Adivasi communities were assimilated into the caste system, serving under highly oppressive forms of bonded labour like the *bethi* and *gothi*, systems in which existence was defined by a perpetual state of debt and enslavement to the landlord. A significant number of Adivasi communities migrated to forest tracts, given the increase in agricultural settlers on their land. However, the India Forest Act 1865 drawn up specifically to clear forests for railways, and later the Forest Act of 1878, heralded the ‘reserved’ forests to increase timber production, and grow more cash crops such as jute, and indigo. This act prohibited use of the *jangal* and curbed Adivasi agricultural practices such as *bewar*, *jhum* or *podu chasa*, various forms of shifting cultivation practiced on forest slopes. The *jameen* and *jangal* (and *jal*), the non-humans that sustained Adivasi

communities, were appropriated as resource, but furthermore, they were regimented to disallow interconnected living. The onset of the fragility of east-Indian geographies was brought about by an accretion of control on *jal, jangal, jameen*. This lent itself to a lived sense of a ‘crisis’, owing to fractured ecologies and growing inequalities, felt in the apocalyptic proportions of the century’s famines which Mike Davis describes as “late Victorian Holocausts” that formed the “Third World”. Having lost *jal, jangal, jameen*, the once-princely communities were “destitutes” (Davis 147) within half a century. When the colonial government imported “poorhouses”, Davis quotes a missionary document as saying, “Confinement was especially unbearable to the tribal people, like the Gonds and Baigas, whom one missionary claimed, ‘would sooner die in their homes or their native jungle, than submit to the restraint of a government Poor House’” (147). He claims that such antipathy was less about confinement and more revealing of the diet the poor houses served: flour and salt. For Adivasi communities, these decades prefigured a dire future, when their essential organising ecologies were not only colonised, unresponsive, and crumbling but they had to depend on the drastic measures of the coloniser for survival.

While these early instances of a seismic shift in eastern India may have found utterance and been archived in Adivasi oral traditions of the nineteenth century, these are ones to which we may have lost access in transmission. Moreover, apart from the climatic constants of famines and droughts, the micro-climates of eastern India were heavily altered with

the beginning of mineral extraction that aggravated ongoing concerns of land dispossession. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were increased invasions on the east-Indian landscape through mining for mica, slate and chromite (A. Mishra 30). We see articulations of mining activity in myths transcribed by Verrier Elwin in *Tribal Myths of Orissa* (1954) collected in the 1940s-50s, and we can assume that these literatures had already been in circulation in popular memory before these decades.⁸⁶

One of the Bonda myths from Koraput reads:

There was no money in the old days. But after Mahaprabhu gave the kingdom of Simapatna to Sima Raja and Sima Rani, a government office was made to deal with everything [...] One day Mahaprabhu took Sima Rani to the Silver Mountain and showed her great heaps of silver. ‘That is silver’, he said [...] Then he took her to the Gold Mountain and showed her great heaps of gold [...] Then he took to the Copper mountain and showed her great heaps of copper. (Elwin *Tribal Myths* 561)

The myth not only demonstrates land transactions, as Sima Raja and Sima Rani are ‘given’ the kingdom, but also the entry of a third entity that carried out these transactions, “the government office”. That a scanning of the landscape to determine sites for mining minerals was on-going gets reflected in how Sima Rani is ‘shown’ these riches of the land and that she subsequently mints into coins, signifying a transition of imagining

⁸⁶ A significant limitation in my research from early twentieth century is that some texts are accessible only through translations in English in the folklore collections by Verrier Elwin and Shamrao Hilvale. Further work on Indigenous languages may challenge this reading and provide a more informed analysis.

mountains as living entities to mountains as capital.⁸⁷ Such occurrences in mythical narratives coincide with increased mining in the region. Coal and iron ore exports steadily increased with the expansion of railways and industries from the 1880s; Tata and Sons and the Bengal Iron and Steel Manufacturing Company started sustained mineral extraction in 1905 (Pati *Adivasis* 257). Das and Padel explore the history of bauxite in Odisha (a mineral that has become a site for struggle in recent movements, which I discuss in the next section). The bauxite-rich hills of Kalahandi were documented as resource by geological surveys carried out by T. L Walker in early 1900, who named the rock Khondalite, after the resident Kondh community (58). Subsequent surveys continued through the twentieth century until the last decade when liberalisation of economic policies of the 1990s allowed multinational companies access to mine the hills. The mining excesses of the last three decades, drastically affected an already fragile ecology, and forms a significant period in the climate history of Odisha after the decade of 1866. Therefore, Majhi and Praska's poetry situate the present crisis as one with a longer history.

⁸⁷ While the idea of mountains as assets was tied to existing ideas of co-dependence between humans and non-humans, negotiations for Adivasi rights adapted the state's language of mineral-rich mountains as resource and capital. The beginning of the Jharkhand Province Movement, to demand a separate state for Adivasis of Chotanagpur and Santhal Paraganas, was also built on Adivasi ownership of 'resource' to claim statehood. Jaipal Singh Munda claimed that the 'deficit area' argument could be easily countered, given Jharkhand was "unquestionably the richest mineral area in Hindustan". He further adds, "We have mountains of bauxite. We have a monopoly of mica and lac. Besides we have gold, silver, asbestos, manganese, [...] coal, valuable forests and an admirable climate" (Pankaj 58).

Localised resistances to counter the crisis were ongoing from the early nineteenth century; it was Birsa Munda's uprising or *ulgulan* in Chottanagpur province in the 1890s that provided an impetus for *jal, jangal, jameen* to become a 'common organizing force' for Adivasi communities. Birsa specifically demanded the re-instatement of the *Khuntkatti* system, which was based on collective ownership of land and forests by Adivasi communities. His resistance was against *beth begari* (similar to *bethi*, or forced labour), that was part of the zamindari system introduced by land reforms. Subsequent struggles led to the Chottanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 that prohibited sale of Adivasi land to non-Adivasis. In his reading of Gond history, Akash Poyam claims that the slogan *jal, jangal, jameen* as a unified call for protection was later coined by a Gond Adivasi leader from Telangana, Komaram Bheem ("Gondwana" 131). To resist against exacting taxes and oppression by landlords, Bheem used the call during the Gondwana movement against the Nizam government of Hyderabad (Telangana) to demand complete land and forest rights. Poyam writes how in later literatures, Komaram Bheem is often appropriated as a 'nationalist' for his resistance against the Nizams; he contends that the vocabulary of *jal, jangal, jameen*, was specific in its concern to establish Gond sovereignty and autonomy over *jal, jangal, jameen* ("Komaram"). *Jal, jangal, jameen*, therefore, frames the context of Adivasi sovereignty. When later movements, like Narmada Bachao Andolan, or the more recent Pathalgarhi movement, voice sovereignty, it is to reinstate rights over *jal, jangal, jameen*, that have been steadily encroached upon by the Indian nation-state. Contemporary discourse on

climate change and environmental conservation, therefore, cannot be studied separately from the long history of Adivasi movements for land rights and autonomy. These contexts reveal Adivasi vocabularies that signal the history of structural inequalities which makes them more vulnerable to the current crisis.⁸⁸

Jal, jangal, jameen, apart from evoking a common climatic history for diverse Adivasi communities, unifies a common understanding of material ecology, and provides a holistic basis to ‘sacred’ philosophies present in Adivasi knowledge systems. A recent resolution was passed in Jharkhand for Sarna to be accepted as a religious code which would include Adivasi religions similar to Sarna under its fold. It was claimed that the acceptance of Sarna as a separate religious group by the Indian government, would also regulate ‘resource politics’ (perhaps, in favour of the Adivasis), given that the religious identity of Adivasis is founded on the natural resources of *jal, jangal, jameen* (Alam “Why the Sarna”). *Jal, jangal, jameen*, is able to organise a unified political consciousness, because it is tied to a common understanding of ecology, a material and ‘sacred’ organisation of non-humans around which diverse Adivasi communities, their living and knowledge systems orient. The three words, with their

⁸⁸ Recent archaeological models mapping a span of 12,000 years reveal how agricultural practices and changes in land use by “hunter-gatherers, farmers and pastoralists” had “largely transformed [...] earth’s terrestrial ecology” and that agriculture has been one of the major drivers for global warming (Stephens et al. “The Deep Anthropocene”). The last two hundred years, therefore, might appear irrelevant in such a timescale but the beginnings of industrial farming together with mineral extraction, contribute to the crisis manifested in long durée.

transmutation across languages, work as a democratic idea because they encompass an ecological whole to accommodate ‘all our relations’, while being particular to specific non-humans in the locality that form essential basis to particular Adivasi religions and knowledge.

Munda communities are organised around the *jahara* (*jaheer*) or the sacred grove, and Santhal communities worship the *sarna sthal*, while Oraon communities offer prayers to the resident god of the Karam tree, Dharmes, the god of crop fertility. Marang Buru (the great mountain) and Sinbonga (the sun god), hold sacred relevance as providence or uniting principles, rather than as deities. Sarna or Aadi Dharm, Koya Punem, and other Adivasi religions are centred around non-humans that refer to interpretations of the ‘sacred’, and organised cosmologies archived in literary traditions. Oraon scholar Abhay Xaxa defined it as “a philosophy of ecological ethnicism” that has been “collectively articulated and carried forward by different Adivasi communities” (“Karam Parab”). He provided a reading of the growing significance of the Karam festival as a space for a common Adivasi identity: *Karam Parab* which was mainly celebrated as a harvest festival by the Oraon community has now “melted the ethnic, geopolitical and religious boundaries to bring forth ecological wisdom of Adivasis” (“Karam Parab”). These intricate systems that combine a philosophy of ecological interdependence, religion, and literary tradition, have often evaded colonial classifications.⁸⁹ Many of the central Indian

⁸⁹ Akash Poyam discusses how in Adivasi “social structures, there’s an obligation to protect and take care of non-humans”. Claims to rights are based on the protection

Adivasi communities were, therefore, classified as generally “animist”, or assimilated along with caste Hindus. Poyam writes how Verrier Elwin, who worked as an advisor to the government of India in 1941, classified the Madia community as Hindus, as their practice resembled Shaivism (qtd. in Markam), a form of worship of the Hindu god Shiva. Similarly, Gopinath Mohanty documented an interaction during a census collection in 1941 in Odisha when an official was baffled with the religious system of the Kondhs. On being asked about religion, the Kondh person replied: “Mountains” (Das and Padel 58). These classifications into animist groups in colonial census collections presupposed Adivasi ‘primitivity’ and intellectual inferiority. Perhaps for this reason, the archival transcriptions of colonial anthropologists like Verrier Elwin and Shamrao Hilvale, among others, carry the warnings of crisis, without further consideration of the predicament articulated by Adivasi communities.

The crisis of the human, especially after the theorisation of the Anthropocene in geology in 2000, in dominant Euro-American centres has critical precursors in the peripheries. Given the orientation around *jal, jangal, jameen*, a fragmentation of non-humans essentially signalled a crisis of Adivasi selfhood, and a common cause thus anticipated in the calls to protect *jal, jangal, jameen*. *Jal, jangal, jameen* rhymed and echoed to sustain material and epistemological continuity after the calamitous impact of the

of “sacred groves” and “village spirits” (“ISDG”). Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren claimed recently, “Adivasis were never Hindus and never will be” (Angad “Adivasis were”). For more on the recent movement toward a Sarna code, see Tank and Markam.

nineteenth century. Therefore, the *ulgulan* initiated by Birsa in the Munda community in Chotanagpur in the 1890s, could be sustained by the Gond community few decades later in Telangana. *Jal, jangal, jameen* were adapted variously in slogans in the twentieth-century movements against hydraulic reserves, dam projects, notably Hirakud Dam in the 1940s and Sardar Sarovar Dam in the 1990s. The forced exodus of over five million people since the 1940s, majorly comprising Adivasi communities for hydraulic and mining projects (Damodaran 100), further aggravated the sense of a crisis-ridden existence that still retained memories of the deadly famines. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide further literary readings of archives and transcribed myths and songs, my intention is to direct literary studies to revisit the recurrence of *jal, jangal, jameen* and read them as climate vocabularies. These vocabularies are recurrent because they archive a generational memory of lived crisis during climatic occurrences and anthropogenic impact on non-humans around which Adivasi epistemologies are organised. The political consciousness of Adivasi movements on land rights that is deeply committed to the indispensability of protective measures for *jal, jangal, jameen* is indeed contemporary climate discourse prefigured.⁹⁰ To this climate history and genealogy of resistance, the songs of Bhagban Majhi and Dambu Praska, claim allegiance. Their invocations of the mountain,

⁹⁰ In contemporary movements, similarly, common slogans in the songs and poetry of Adivasi poets like Bhagban Majhi, Lima Majhi, Rajkumar Sunani, among others, provide variations of *jal, jangal, jameen* across several languages like Kui, desia, Oriya, and Hindi.

earthworm and seeds, present vital evidence of the enmeshed ecology of *jal, jangal, jameen*, particular to their contexts in south Odisha.

Kondh Songs of the Anthropocene

i.) Of Mountains and Earthworms

Bhagban Majhi, a Kondh singer and leader from Kucheipadar village (Rayagada district in southern Odisha) was one of the leading voices of Kashipur resistance against bauxite mining by Utkal Alumina International Limited (UAIL), and later, Aditya Birla.⁹¹ The movement began in the early 1990s and continued for over two decades, a momentum of resistance that was later carried forward by the Dongria Kondh community to oppose Vedanta in Niyamgiri.⁹² Despite a sustained struggle by the Kondh-Paraja community in villages of the Rayagada district, Aditya Birla acquired land, and in the present day, the Adivasi communities of Kashipur live in the peripheries of the factory walls. Bhagban, as a teenager, along with Lima Majhi, composed several songs in Kui and desia (which was later adapted in Oriya and Hindi), that transmitted widely to unite the communities. I discussed his composition

⁹¹ While, scanning and documentation of these hills feature in early twentieth century geological surveys, the Memorandums of Understanding signed by the Odisha State government in the 1990s, allowed access multinational companies such as Norsk Hydro, Tata, Hindalco, Sterlite-Vedanta, POSCO, claiming it would help 'development' in Adivasi regions (Padhi and Sadangi 16).

⁹² For details of the movement, see Padhi and Sadangi; Ratha B. et al.

following the killings in Maikanch in Chapter 2. From those specifically composed for the movement, *Gaan Chadiba Nahin* (We will not forsake this land), was identified as a common anthem in various resistances against mining and forced evictions in India. Having found utterance in a dominant language such as Hindi, with a popular video *Gaon Chodab Nahin* subsequently produced by K. P. Sasi, the song acquired pan-cultural presence. Apart from its rhyme that was predisposed to transmission across linguistic and regional borders, *Gaan Chadiba Nahin* remains one of the most subversive songs to be formulated as part of Adivasi literary song traditions in recent decades. Bhagban's political critique is embedded in Kondh-Paraja epistemology particular to south Odisha. His interpretation of *jal, jangal, jameen*, which in this song, is articulated as *dongar-jharan-jangal-paban* (mountains-waterfalls-forests-winds), connects it to the long history of Adivasi climate consciousness.

We will not yield,
we will not give up,
no, we will not forsake this mountain.

[...]

Our hills: our companions,
our growth, our progress.

We are the children of this earth.

With folded hands,
we bow down to our earth mother.

[...]

We are the people of this earth—
we are earthworms—
mountains—streams—forests—winds—
if we forsake this earth
how shall we endure?
Worlds shall collapse,
lives will crumble, when
the pathways drown,
how will we endure?
We will be nowhere
we will be no more—
there is no hereafter—
no, we will not forsake this land. (*Prakrutika* 19)

My translation is from an Oriya transcription of the song archived in the Kashipur movement pamphlet, *Kashipur Ghosanapatra*, published by *Prakrutika Sampad Surakhya Parishad*, an environmental protection committee founded during the Kashipur movement in 2002. Here, Bhagban presents two fundamental ideas, *unnati* (progress/development) and *matrubhakti* (love for the mother). *Matrubhakti* for the mountain or *dongar* as the mother, as invoked in Bhagban's song, departs from invocations of the motherland/mother-earth in the context of Indian nationalism. Additionally, *matrubhakti* linguistically may have its roots in songs composed during other environmental movements such as in Gandhamardhan in western Odisha against Bharat Aluminium Company

(BALCO). In epistemology, however, it digresses from the Hindu mythical motifs that became the driving force in Gandhamardhan. Here, the salutation bows to non-human elements. *Matrubhakti* is ethical kinship with ‘all our relations’,⁹³ *matrubhakti* is perhaps for the earth mother, *Dharni penu*. Notably, because of the conception of mountains forming the essential basis to all human-non-human life forms, they occur invariably as gods, or kings, as entities who are agential, in the religious beliefs prevalent in Kashipur as well as Niyamgiri. Through a general use of *dongar*, Bhagban alludes to Baplamali, Kutrumali and Sijimali, the bauxite-rich ranges of south Odisha, which have formed “through the alternating rhythm of rain and sun continuing every year for about 40 million years, eroding layers of feldspar and other rocks” (Padel and Das 32). Bhagban presents evidence of this elemental bind that sustains the ecology of eastern India: *dongar-jharan-jangal-paban* or “mountains-waterfalls-forests-winds” exist because of the mineral-rich mountains. The Kondh community is intricately bound to this ecology.

His song, consequently, offers the Kondh understanding of humans as *mati ra poka* or *biripidika*—earthworms.⁹⁴ As part of the movement against mining, Bhagban Majhi had demanded: “We ask one

⁹³ The prayer can be read as acknowledging the sisters, Baplamali and Palangamali, characters in one of Kondh the mythologies of the region. The two sisters played in moonlit-drenched water and turned into *malis* (hills) as they ignored the warning cries of a bat, bat meaning *bapla* in Kui (Das and Padel 71).

⁹⁴ Das and Padel further note how people of Kashipur refer to themselves as ‘frogs and fishes’ presenting themselves as part of an undivided human-hon-human ecology (102).

fundamental question: How can we survive if our lands are taken away from us? [...] We are earthworms. [...] What we need is stable development. We won't allow our billions of years old water and land to go to ruin just to pander to the greed of some officers" (qtd. in Das and Padel 394–395). For Bhagban, notions of *unnati* or development are embedded in a cosmology that has decentred the human; for *dikus* (outsiders) to such a conception, his poetry conveys a radical understanding of progress that necessitates discerning the temporalities of the earthworm and the mountain. The “fleshy philosophy” of the earthworm opens a ‘pathway’ to grasp the dissimilar magnitudes of temporal perceptions that the Anthropocene commands: the *dongar* of deep geological time, and the *dongar* as capital in the history of mineral extraction. Kondh conceptions of the human as *biripidka* or earthworm, the human as part of the elemental cosmology of the Kucheipadar landscape, enables a comprehension of mountains as autonomous annals of knowledge beyond their reductive quantification as ‘resource’ for a nation’s progress. To understand the extent of irredeemable loss of the *dongar* would require understanding its existence as separate from human history, with its own agency through millennia of slow formation and evolution.

Unnati and *matrubhakti* having essentially formed the ideological basis of the Hindu nationalist state’s divisive enterprise and the nation-state’s invasion of Adivasi land for industrial progress, Bhagban’s interpretation of these words becomes crucial. He frames recognition of

the crisis as the political responsibility of the present to resist complicit governments whilst having a deep-time consciousness of the mountains, a dual task that delineates human positionality in the Anthropocene. In his speeches, and testimonies, *unnati* as imagined by the Indian state and mining companies for short-term profit that would deplete this ‘resource’ within thirty to forty years, is juxtaposed with *unnati* rooted in a comprehension of the mountain that has a profound dimension: “Sir, what do you mean by development? Is it development to destroy these billions of years old mountains for the profit of a few officials?” (qtd. in Das and Padel 10). He represents and communicates a Kondh humanism in his songs through his interpretation of development as one that honours the human’s ethical relationship to land; humans as earthworms in kinship with the mountains orients human perception, and equally counsels on the fragility of these enmeshed interfaces. During our conversation in 2017, Bhagban Majhi presented this thought as a “fairly basic” idea which he had attempted to convince people of during the movement: human impact on land is fuelled by industries, and to oppose destruction of ecologies is a universal responsibility. He said, “People think this is for Adivasi’s self-interest. This resistance is against ‘loot’. The riches of the land that is being destroyed is not of the Adivasi alone. The environment, sky, this is not of the Adivasi alone. It belongs to the living, and the living suffer. The profits are for the company” (Majhi).

Majhi’s political thought, beside a consciousness of ‘humans as earthworms’ pose further questions to our belated understanding. Is the

binary by which we understand the Anthropocene today, of geological and historical time, adequate to comprehend the lived temporalities of non-humans? For is it not again, through the scales of human measurements and the grammar of theory we arrived at our understanding of the non-human. What is it to imagine scale and inhabit temporal dimensions as earthworms and living mountains? As in several Adivasi creation stories, the earthworms collected earth until it sufficed living beings. The *dongar* is a law-making entity as much as its creation and sustenance depends on the enterprise of the earthworms. And yet again given the mutuality in their relationship, can the temporality of the mountain alongside the earthworm be imagined at all through progression or variations in scale. Like the question ice raised in Joan Naviyuk Kane's poetry, the *dongar* and *biripidka* claim sovereignty on temporality, equally on the forms of annals they maintain. As a conduit to their claims, Bhagban Majhi's political activism becomes critical. For young Kondh leaders of the movement, understanding the metrics used by the company was equally important to predict the "calamity" mining would ensue. To thoroughly investigate the statistics proposed by the state and the company, the 'tonnes of bauxite' as opposed to a living *dongar*, was vital, so that Kondh ideas of progress could be proposed and reasoned. To examine the measures of employment and education that was promised by *unnati* was to ascertain whether the villages would be direct beneficiaries or marginalised again. The annals of the earthworms and the mountains had to be juxtaposed with metrics that stem from and accommodate human centrality, and that are estimated to have higher

‘pragmatic’ value. As we shall come across in the next section, the translation of Dambu Praska’s song carries a similar duality: “a measuring has begun of *Leka dongar*” (Dash “Lament”). Praska, similarly, juxtaposes temporal scales of his origin epic and company metrics. The elders of the village, and singers like Bhagban Majhi, were consequently part of a philosophical struggle to grapple with the modes of adopted languages to convey Kondh epistemologies connected to the *dongar* and *biripidka*. This leads me to explore yet another ‘fleshy philosophy’ of the earthworm in Dambu Praska’s epic rendition.

ii.) Of Mountains and Seeds

Listen, O elder, O brother,

the story I tell you:

this mountain is our ancestor, our Darmuraja.

This mountain is cucumbers, pumpkins, and all that was created.

Listen, O brother, our only story.

.....

The king summons the elder brother to the feast,

the middle ones with tattered clothes,

are asked to leave—

crossing mighty rivers, the middle ones are scattered

.....

A call resounds from village to village—

assemble on the mountain—

But we shall not leave.
There, lives Darmuraja...
(Dash “Lament”)

The late poet Dambu Praska’s song “The Lament of Niyamraja” is rooted in Dongria Kondh oral epics. As the *jani* (priest) of the community, he sings in a literary form of Kui. The singular long-form of this rendition is archived in the video documentary by Bhubaneswar-based filmmaker Surya Shankar Dash titled *The Lament of Niyamraja*.⁹⁵ Here, my English translation is based on a recent full-text translation by Arna Majhi (from Kui to Oriya) that has clarified the complex text of Praska and helped bring previously unconsidered aspects of the song to light.⁹⁶ The song was collected in the years leading up to the village council hearings held in Niyamgiri by the Supreme Court of India in 2013. India's apex court demanded legitimate reasons why the Dongria Kondh community opposed Vedanta’s proposal to mine bauxite on their hills. One afternoon during the movement, Dash asked Dambu Praska that if called by the state to a hearing, what would he give as a reply on behalf of his community. In reply to Dash's question, Dambu Praska sang “The Lament of Niyamraja” presenting evidence of legal ownership of the hills: the intimate knowledge of *penka* (seeds) which for him are “the stakes of the

⁹⁵ Another English translation by Kondh translator Jitu Jakesika is available as subtitles of the video is in “The Lament of Niyamraja”.

⁹⁶ An oral translation from Kui–Oriya by Arna Majhi has been transcribed by Rabi Shankar Pradhan, and then later adapted into Oriya language and form by Devidas Mishra. My translation into English, has been aided through this process across two languages, as well as the previous translation by Jitu Jakesika.

Anthropocene” (Davis and Todd 767). Through metaphors in his poetry, he communicates legal conceptions embedded in *penka* or seeds of the pumpkin (*kumda*) and cucumber (*mundra*), the Dongria Kondh cosmology as having its origins from non-human elements like the earth and its earthworms (*biripidka*), and Darmuraja who transmits this law and knowledge.

Darmuraja, or Niyamraja is believed to be an ancestor, an animate entity who holds a religious position and is resident on the hills of Niyamgiri. The name ‘Niyamgiri’ itself suggests why it is essential to read this song through the philosophies of the non-human articulated in Dongria Kondh mythology. ‘Niyamgiri’ as the name of the hill of Darmuraja, might have been a Sankritised import: *giri* means hill, *niyam* means law in Oriya and some other Indo-Aryan languages, not in Kui. It is unclear when the words may have entered into Dongria Kondh vocabulary: it is worth pondering whether it is a recent import, or a result of interactions with dominant traditions like Oriya, Telugu, Hindi among others, during the nineteenth and twentieth century, or earlier. Therefore, contrary to what is widely believed in non-Indigenous readings of Niyamgiri, that Niyamgiri is the ‘mountain of law’, with ‘Niyamraja’ or ‘Dharmaraja’ presiding as the ‘king of law’, might be our error in translation or an idea growing out of assimilation in language. *Dharma* is a Sanskrit term for just action or duty, whereas *Darmuraja* refers to the Dongria Kondh ‘ancestor’, who decides the law of the community. A possible reading of Darmuraja might be related to the Dongria Kondh

‘king of the sky’ who is the brother of *Dharni* (earth mother). The law that Dambu Praska sings about is distinctive, and not related to ‘dharma’ in Hindu traditions. A possible reading of law that Dambu Praska sings about is perhaps embedded in the seeds of the pumpkin and cucumber.

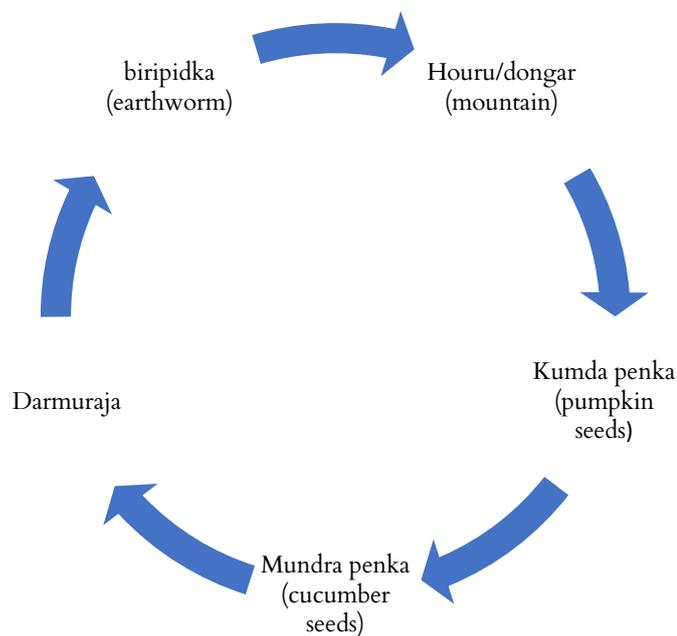


Figure 6: Mountains and seeds as the non-human links of Dongria Kondh philosophy.

Praska braids the origin myth of the Dongria Kondhs with the narration of a present-day call to a court hearing. He speaks through numerous voices in a tense arrangement that alternatively straddles the temporalities of the origin myth and the present day, where the mythical

elder brother of Darmuraja called to the king's court to decide on the proposed settlements of their community coincides with the Dongria Kondh villager called to a state hearing. Both, the brother and the villager, are asked the same riddle:

“How many seeds in a pumpkin?

How many seeds in a cucumber?

How many will sprout and how many are hollow?” (Dash “Lament”)

Dambu Praska's song performs a struggle to answer the riddle of the seeds, an answer that would form communal evidence of belonging to their hills. At one point, Darmuraja sits beside him to offer answers through a secret understanding, an answer Dambu Praska does not reveal to us, the listeners. Praska's metaphorical use of the riddle of seeds could form the basis of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to judge those seeds (*nida penka*) which would yield a healthy crop, a local knowledge passed down through generations in the form of a riddle.⁹⁷ Traditional knowledge of ownership is often guarded and closed to non-members of the community—Darmuraja offers the knowledge to Praska, and not the listener. Therefore, Dambu Praska sings that both acts, of sharing and denial of this ‘sacred’ knowledge, threaten him. At once, he cannot break the code of intellectual property of his community, while withholding this proof of ownership would displace his community. At one point, the narrator in the song, therefore, refuses seeds that are offered to him, to

⁹⁷ Kyle Whyte synthesises scientific and policy literatures alongside Indigenous embodied definitions of Traditional Ecological Knowledge or TEK (“On the role” 2-11).

protect their hills. Here, the *penka* or the seeds become an allusion to non-indigenous seed varieties that were introduced on Adivasi land promising a high yield, but which were essentially seed varieties that yield monocrops and are not suitable for cyclical sustainable production. Robin Wall Kimmerer, similarly, writes of corn and essential Indigenous epistemology and history associated with varieties of the crop that have been deemed as ‘primitive’ by colonial settlers. The industrial production of corn is “waste producing”, she writes, far removed from the relationship between maize and human as planted and consumed within an “honor system”: “[The] human and the plant are linked as co-creators; humans are midwives to this creation, not masters. The plant innovates and the people nurture and direct that creativity” (“Corn tastes better”). When Dambu Praska similarly rejects the seeds that are offered to him in a ‘pouch’, a non-indigenous variety for a high yield, he maintains the Dongria Kondh ‘honour system’ for seeds indigenous to the hills. The hollow seeds (*hatun*) also suggest the history of settlements by colonial and upper-caste communities in southern Odisha since the nineteenth century, that I discussed earlier in this chapter.

The poetic repetition of seeds, the apparently simplistic and straightforward listing of vegetables and grain, are evidentiary of sustainable practices embedded in complex knowledge systems. The question of the number of seeds in a cucumber, the materials of pumpkins, fruits, and grains that Darmuraja provides, is the vital materiality that determines Dongria Kondh law and survival, and this relationship that

binds Niyamgiri's ecology to the Dongria Kondh community stands threatened in the Anthropocene. Consequently, invocations of vegetal produce of Niyamgiri were a recurrence in the oral testimonies of Dongria Kondh villagers presented to the Supreme Court of India to protect Niyamgiri from bauxite mining. Dambu Praska, similarly, comments on the incoming dispossession by the mining industry; he laments that the answer to the riddle of the seeds is ultimately irrelevant if the land is threatened:

Seven days in the sun,
the seeds of the pumpkin and cucumber dry up.
Listen, O brother,
with the sunrise, the earth warms, the mounds crumble—
the mountains grow muddy,
flow murky in the streams—
know this, O brother,
a measuring has begun of *Leka dongar*.
Tell me, O brother,
how many seeds of the pumpkin are hollow?
how many will sprout?
Here are nine pouches of pumpkin seeds,
here are nine pouches of cucumber seeds—
if the land is lost, how would seeds matter?
(Dash "Lament")

Praska's voice conveys a disillusionment with the government hearing. The supreme court hearing was limited to a few villages in Niyamgiri. By then, continued industrial mining (more regularly since the 1990s) had already displaced several Adivasi communities and destroyed the ecology of the neighbouring hills and villages in south Odisha. His image of muddy mountain streams is a reference to the toxic industrial mud ponds constructed by the company. Vedanta alumina refinery not only consumed water that forms perennial streams of Niyamgiri hills, but also constructed an ash pond at the mouth of Vamsadhara River. The river and streams on the mountains, were polluted, rendering them unusable for human consumption. Praska is aware of the ongoing devastation to their hills and performs a series of refusals towards the end of the song. He turns down the offer of seeds, buffaloes, mangoes, metaphorical allusions to the material gains that the company and state offered in the name of 'development' and progress. The narrative voice in the song realises and communicates the indispensability of the *dongar*. Similar to Bhagban Majhi, Praska communicates that mining their *dongar* would herald a breakdown destroying the slow and prolonged elemental bind of the mineral that has formed the ecology of eastern India: the continuity of seeds, and consequently of his community depends on the continuity of the *dongar*.

Conclusion:

Kuni Sikaka, Arjun Samad, Dodhi Kadraka, Manisha Dinde

Adivasi Lives Matter, a social media forum for young Adivasi thinkers, shared four names listed above, following the arrests of climate activists in India in early 2021 (“Young Adivasi”). Extending their solidarity and raising their voices against the detainment of Disha Ravi, they remembered and recognised the contributions of young Adivasi climate activists who have resisted industrial invasions and have been similarly arrested or incarcerated for demanding protection of their ecologies. Adivasi voices on climate action remain largely marginalised, while Adivasi communities have steered and sustained ‘this battle’ for climate justice ‘for generations’ in the Indian context. Like Zoe Todd in the North American context, Akash Poyam articulates allied concerns for the absence of Adivasi voices in India: “Even though Adivasis are said to be in the frontline of the crisis, their voices are not there in the discourse. It is an upper-caste dominated environmentalist discourse” (“ISDG”). In this chapter, I have focused on Indigenous voices on the crisis and attempted to recuperate elisions of Adivasi thought. *Jal, jangal, jameen* as climate vocabularies of the Indian context historicise Adivasi literary tradition’s concerns with anthropogenic impact on land. It will be productive to think of the articulations of agricultural growth and vegetal produce in Adivasi songs alongside similar writings on the vegetal world

written by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Oral Adivasi literatures provide micro-histories of Indigenous varieties of millets, rice, and other grains. What are the other possibilities of imagining climate vocabularies? How will these literary readings support work on micro-histories of particular geographies, and documentation of specific Adivasi epistemologies? What are the ways to archive the “fleshy philosophies” (Davis and Todd 767) such as that of earthworms and seeds present in the songs of Dambu Praska and Bhagban Majhi? Furthermore, close reading of literary evocations in broader Adivasi traditions might locate legal positions of elements in landscapes (such as Niyamgiri), to compare with the legality of non-humans in the Maori context. This further raises the question of the various forms that climate vocabularies can take in different Indigenous traditions and languages. In a paper entitled “Inventing Climate Consciousness in Igbo Oral Repertoire: An Analysis of *mmanu eji eri okwu* and Selected Eco-Proverbs” by Dr. Chinonye C. Ekwueme-Ugwu and Anya Ude Egwu, the two Nigerian writers specifically trace a climate consciousness embedded in Igbo proverbs. Similarly, Nicole Furtado’s evocation of “Ea”, a concept stemmed in Hawaiian Native epistemology, and reading within the climate vocabulary framework also inform such a discipline.⁹⁸ In the next section, which is the concluding chapter of my thesis, I discuss sovereignty as envisioned by Indigenous women writers.

⁹⁸ Both papers delivered as part of *Climate Fictions/ Indigenous Studies* Conference, University of Cambridge, 24-25 January 2020.

What do we make of the foundation stories millennia in age...?

— Alexis Wright

4

A SUSTENANCE FOR ALL TIMES

“A Self-Governing Literature”

In an essay titled “The Ancient Library and a Self-Governing Literature”, Alexis Wright offers a visionary understanding of sovereignty by situating it alongside her process as a novelist. Writing is to uncover the continual disavowal of Indigenous self-determination by the Australian nation-state’s notion of juridical ‘sovereignty’ (AL). Given Australia’s settler history and given that the nation-state’s governmentality does not serve Indigenous communities, the word presupposes invalidation (POL). Wright conceptualises a sovereignty of the ‘imagination’ or imagination as sovereignty as paramount and as being analogous to re-imagining a sovereign and “responsible” form of literary fiction (in Wright’s case, the Indigenous novel). This literary form is one

that is rooted in the “powerful, ancient cultural landscape of this country” (AL).⁹⁹ Her political thought, hence, materialises in her literary fiction: even in a future-world of *The Swan Book* where First Nations communities have attained partial or “unresolved sovereignty” (Mead 524), Oblivia is in “a quest to regain sovereignty over [her] brain” (SB 4). Theorising “intellectual sovereignty” in the Native American context, Robert Warrior wrote: “The decision of sovereignty provides the beginning point from which resistance, hope, and most of all, imagination, issue” (“Intellectual” 19). In an important distinction, Wright’s literary work and in the other readings that I provide in this chapter, sovereignty of land and thereby Indigenous self-determination through land redress, is inseparable from the sovereignty of a literary tradition. In Chapter 2, I explored land *as* literature and how Indigeneity is equally about literary imagination and the capacity to sustain the literary tradition which validates rights to land. Moreover, I also discussed how N. Scott Momaday, Simon Ortiz and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson emphasise ethical kinship to land, and how this imagination is rekindled in contemporary spaces such as a mine or factory. Wright, through her fiction and essays, has consistently mapped this interconnected form of thinking—“the relationship to our land, culture, and people”—where “a self-governing literary landscape” is principal to sustaining “the knowledge of always governing ourselves” (AL). She foregrounds a need to envision long-term

⁹⁹ In a forthcoming edition of *The Cambridge Companion to the Australian Novel*, Klee and Birns explore how the form of the Australian novel as a tradition is radically altered by Wright’s literary fiction (“Introduction”).

processes for building Indigenous self-determination, where a deep learning from the foundational literary histories of the land informs future survival.¹⁰⁰

Wright's concept of imagination as sovereignty is a way forward for Indigenous self-determination; I explore whether the forms of intellectual sustenance which envision and materialise this sovereignty would be characteristically a gendered domain. Indigenous women writers have resolutely proposed a "self-governing literature" to reclaim sovereignty; it is in their imaginations that sovereignty limited by nationhood, assimilation, and communal identities, are transcended. I will discuss three cases by which these structures are exceeded. The first section will examine how Oblivia's character in Wright's novel *The Swan Book*, resists assimilation into any definition of sovereignty that continues to replicate what Moreton-Robinson terms the "white patriarchal sovereignty" ("Writing Off" 87) of the Australian nation-state even when it is one formed by Aboriginal nations. Moreton-Robinson defines "white patriarchal sovereignty" as a "regime of power that in the Australian context, derives from the illegal act of dispossession" (87) and assumes the absence of Indigenous notions of sovereignty, or Indigenous agency to self-govern. Wright's is a literary refusal of national sovereignty—sovereignty requires an expansive imaginative process, and one that is

¹⁰⁰ Warrior provides an intellectual history of Sioux writer Vine Deloria to discuss Deloria's ideas of sovereignty as "open-ended process" (6). In this chapter, I discuss the long-term 'open-ended process' as envisioned by Indigenous women writers.

rooted to ‘country’. As Jeanine Leane maintains in relation to *Carpentaria*, Wright’s vision “disavow the nation. [...] The nation becomes part of a bigger story—that of Country” (Ng 212).

A refutation of the nation-state and the dominant national literature, similarly, is a concern central to Adivasi women’s autonomy. Reading Basanti Majhi’s short fiction “Gadhe Chadei” (Gadhe Bird) and Regina Marandi’s novel *Becoming Me* (2014), the second section will explore Adivasi women’s “self-governing literature”. Adivasi women writers establish a sovereign literary expression to resist the violence on Adivasi women’s bodies and erasure of voice. Their writing reveals the making and maintenance of the Indian nation-state and its national literary tradition as patriarchal, and one that continues to violate Adivasi women’s sovereignty for industrial access. Similar to Wright, Marandi approaches sovereignty as “self-talk” (Marandi 58) which is crucial to resist integration into the nation-state, as well as the assimilated Adivasi community. The culmination of this chapter, and the thesis, involves an exploration of a sovereign space of solidarity, a transnational *jilimi* (Bell 16) connecting “Spider woman’s granddaughters” as evidenced by the poetic kinship between Mary Tallmountain and Paula Gunn Allen. Recuperating the intellectual kinship of women poets, as this section will demonstrate, is essential to privileging the non-formal networks established by women writers that have created and continued Indigenous intellectual traditions outside and beyond Native American nationalisms that have been “predominantly a male endeavour” (Huhndorf *Mapping* 4).

For Indigeneity to be sustained politically, Indigenous women writers imagine an embodiment of literary transmission through non-formal channels of knowledge-making. Given the onslaught of colonisation on Indigenous knowledge and kinship systems, this journey for knowledge often takes the form of painful self-exploration and crossings to find lost connections to rebuild fragmented networks, metaphorical and literal. Moreover, women’s “self-governing literature” is an arduous undertaking for it rebuilds selfhood in the context of violent nationalisms and national literary traditions. Indigenous women writers scrutinise and separate misrepresentations, stereotypes, and erasures to narrate their own stories. Therefore, Regina Marandi’s “self-talk” as a form of “intellectual sovereignty” becomes essential— “self-talk” denotes that the negotiations with and departures from the existing canon or dominant tradition can be carried out through the sovereign literary voices of Indigenous women alone. Additionally, “self-talk” for the Indigenous woman writer is critical to continually establish selfhood. “Self-talk” is a method of self-healing through literature, to recover from the trauma of sexual violence that the contemporary nation continues to wield as a weapon for conquest, specifically of the bodies of Indigenous women. Furthermore, “self-talk” for Indigenous women transnationally is the cultivation of a sovereign literary voice that resists assimilation when the sought out Indigenous space has succumbed to the forces of assimilation.

Intellectual sustenance as a form of political Indigeneity realises “survivance” or “renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry” (Vizenor *Manifest* vii) through literary undertaking. Indigenous women writers have been building a literary tradition that succeeds acts of survivance and encompasses long-term processes so that imagination as sovereignty helps realise a political template beyond “the succession or reversion of an estate”. Indigenous women writers sustain themselves intellectually at the fundamental level of literary creation—land. However, sovereignty of the mind cannot be achieved where the land is contested, or intellectual institutions (universities, museums, archives) are built on Indigenous land (Moreton-Robinson “Towards” 336).¹⁰¹ The land itself can be suffused with meaning and a “reversion” of ownership possible when the informal networks strengthen literary ties to the land that have been eclipsed by colonial discourse within institutions. This form of intellectual sustenance privileges a generational *continuum* of literary solidarity. The literary endeavours of Indigenous women, as shown by Tallmountain’s poetic series *Continuum* I, II, and III, comprise intense physical and psychological labour to glean connections that have been lost through years of separation and erasures. Relying on ancient forms of knowledge-gathering, thus, acquires heightened significance where Indigenous women writers undertake a journey to construct a metaphorical *jilimi*, a site for Indigenous women’s solidarity. In this space, there is a vibrant practice of healing based on the understanding that generational trauma can be overcome by strengthening those intimate

¹⁰¹ For more on Indigeneity, gender, and contested land, see Barker 1-44.

forms of patronage weakened by colonial atrocities. Women writers continually attempt to root literature, and histories on the body, to the land or to which Wright defines as “the ancient library” (AL), in order to revive non-formal channels of literary sustenance. Therefore, using a word like ‘sustenance’ roots the practice of women’s literature to the land and its associated symbols of nourishment. At the same time, temporally, a word like ‘sustenance’ carries within it the pulse of “all times”—the relationship with the ancestors and “the ancient library”, present selves, and futurity.

Intellectual sustenance carried out by Indigenous women writers is a pan-temporal task, a gathering ‘from all times’, “*guwayu*”, where they have to search from deep historical processes to envision a future for the following generations. Joy Harjo writes that the “strongest writing in the United States is women’s writing” given that women are “tunnelling into themselves, into histories and roots” (Coltelli 33). Correspondingly, the pan-temporality of this literary endeavour sustains the past. On writing *Carpentaria*, Wright maintains that her present act of storytelling is directed *to* the ancestors, as listeners (SGL). Wright’s vision of ‘imagination as sovereignty’, therefore, draws continuance from a tradition sustained by Indigenous women thinkers—her tribute to Oodgeroo Noonuccal demonstrates how Oodgeroo herself engaged with the persistent idea of sovereignty of the mind during the Assimilation era in Australia. Wright reads Oodgeroo’s poetry as a “charter” of Indigenous self-determination as well as “templates” for the Australian nation-state to

re-think negotiations of treaties with Indigenous First Nation communities (“Alexis Wright remembers”). As she mentions in “A Self-Governing Literature”, in relation to Tilmouth Tracker’s belief, the reigning question for the Indigenous thinker is ‘sovereignty’, which is in a constant struggle to resist the forces of assimilation (SGL). In sustaining this central idea that Oodgeroo engaged with in her poetry, Wright reiterates:

Oodgeroo absolutely understood the power of belief in the fight for sovereignty over this land—that if you could succeed in keeping the basic architecture of how you think, then you owned the freedom of your mind, that unimpeded space to store hope and feed your ability to survive. (“Alexis Wright remembers”)

The act of building a “self-governing literature” is then to consistently resist assimilation, both into the nation-state’s fold and the assimilated/dominant notions of sovereignty existing within Indigenous communities.

Oblivia’s Sovereignty

In her literary vision of the future, *The Swan Book* (2013), Alexis Wright illustrates her struggle to regain “sovereignty of my own mind” (SGL), through her central character Oblivia. Through Oblivia, who survives as the sole carrier of ancestral knowledge, Wright fosters an intellectual domain of women, as the only means to regain sovereignty, when a world devastated by climate change brought about by industrial

excesses has continued to reproduce and retain patriarchal nations. Oblivia remains mute throughout the novel and refuses to engage with her surrounding world or impart the knowledge she carries. A dystopian novel that fuses a complex mix of myth, climate change, and Indigenous and white politics, Wright's text prophesies a future that reflects the contemporary political and environmental landscape of Australia. *The Swan Book* begins with a prior acknowledgement that with a continued history and the conditions of the present where Indigenous First Nations are yet to attain self-determination on their land, the future devastated by climate change would have Indigenous communities in a position where they are severely and unequally affected. Wright reveals the fault lines of a constructed 'Aboriginality' within institutions of learning following assimilation in nation-states. In such a setting where cultural oppression that like a "cut snake virus" lodges in Aboriginal mindscapes, Oblivia begins her journey in the prologue declaring that this is "a quest to regain sovereignty over my brain" (SB 4). Wright makes Oblivia representative of a non-formal chain of remembrance that will sustain Indigenous knowledge when existing formal structures engender this neo-colonial "virus". Oblivia's journey seeks an answer to what Wright posed as a question before working on the novel: "[How] far we could go to retain our sovereignty of the mind in Aboriginal culture?" (AL)

Wright christens the character as a manifestation of her state. Raped and perceived as dead, Oblivion Ethylene takes refuge in the hollow of an ancient Eucalyptus tree. Oblivia is representative of the

oblivion forced on Australian First Nations peoples. Her desertion is symptomatic of the Australian nation-state's *obliviousness* to Indigenous welfare. Rendered mute by the incident, Oblivia herself is *oblivious* to the reigning chaos of her surroundings: she survives within the bowels of the tree and learns the ancient language, which has been lost after the arrival of the "strangers from the sea". Unlike the other characters in the novel, Oblivia remembers the history of her land but given her muteness is unable to articulate it. Wright expertly entwines global mythological references in depicting Oblivia's education in an ancient tree: a tree of knowledge evokes Ygdrassill, the tree of life in Norse mythology, where Odin the god of wisdom sacrificed himself to gain knowledge. Given that in a Koori myth the tree is a passageway for shamanic knowledge and the domain only for fully initiated men (Narogin *Aboriginal Mythology* 51), Wright attempts an inversion where Oblivia is one who gathers this ancestral knowledge. Her education is therefore a contentious matter even for the Aboriginal Brolga nation, one of the Aboriginal nations that has been successful in regaining its self-determination. For the Brolga community, who have chosen Warren Finch, the young Aboriginal boy as their promised leader, Oblivia can be accommodated as the promised wife. Oblivia's story is feared, noted as a punishment for the people of the Swamp and a dreaded incident that Warren Finch must not discuss.

The fictional Aboriginal nations serve to demonstrate the dangers of intervention policies and direct the reader to understand the enormous stakes if First Nations cede their sovereign imaginations to assimilate into

the Australian nation's narrative. In significant ways, *The Swan Book* derives from the historical context following the Northern Territory (Self Government) Act 1976, and the intervention measures that began from the 1990s. Intervention policies took a dangerous turn affecting the welfare of Indigenous Australians with the Howard government's legislation of Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007. Wright satires the "experiment" (WH) of the Northern Territory Government through the fictional representation of the Aboriginal Brolga nation. She indicates to the reader that unless Aboriginal land councils are heard for an "Aboriginal-defined vision" of sovereignty (WH), even a nation headed by an Aboriginal leader will continue to enforce the patriarchal sovereignty of the white nation-state. The Brolga nation while seeming to enable Aboriginal self-determination remains colonised by intervention policies. It is written as an intellectually stagnant, non-evolving political structure where Indigenous people have taught themselves and their next generations to be "yes-men" in Australian politics, to be "good black people, not seen as troublemakers, radicals or people who made Australian people feel uneasy" (SB 97). Following long years of fighting for Indigenous rights, the Brolga Nation had finally secured Aboriginal self-determination. After securing a treaty, the Brolga Nation despite its 'independence' is closely supervised by a white Observer who scrutinises the "amount" of politics in their public discourse. The censorship of political thought is acute—an elder of the community who had helped secure the treaty is condemned for talking "too much politics" (SB 118). The reader comes to realise that the treaty

was agreed upon the cost of sacrificing the welfare and sovereignty of other Indigenous communities such as those living on the Swan Lake and all army-held areas. The Brolga Nation is symbolic of the quintessential colonial ‘middlemen’ (much like the landed upper-castes in India or the inaugural Adivasi government of Jharkhand in 2000) who have been assembled by an oppressive white capitalistic state that sustains an ‘empty’ tradition for cultural profit where the idea of sovereignty is regulated. Warren Finch and his political cohort are represented as well-ironed yes-men that intellectualise “the swamp full of war fossils” to maintain colonial power structures within nation-states. Wright describes them as “these rich sell-out Aboriginal people with mining royalties and a treaty” (118).

Wright has referred to the contested claims to sovereignty that exist in contemporary Australia as a “storytelling war” (WH)—their current existence as opposing claims are materialised as nations in the futuristic setting of *The Swan Book*. Philip Mead reads the opposing tensions that unfold in the fictional political scape of the novel as the “multifaceted and self-reflexive address to political and social aspects of sovereignty as they co-exist in the past and the present” (Mead 528). These differences are not just a binary existing between the white Australian nation-state and its Indigenous First Nations, but rather the political challenges and opposing frames of imaginations within “Aboriginal intellectual and leadership community itself” (531). He particularly refers to the opposing claims or constitutional itinerants of sovereignty reinforced by Indigenous thinkers like Marcia Langston and Noel Pearson.

The Aboriginal president Warren Finch epitomises the assimilated Aboriginal citizen or those who are used as “pawns” (WH) by the nation-state to drive forward a narrative of the need of Aboriginal dependency on the Australian nation’s welfare measures. In significant ways Warren Finch provides a fictional characterisation to Warren Mundine’s and Noel Pearson’s arguments. As Wright claims:

[The] issue of welfare dependency was frequently spoken about and driven by Noel Pearson. [...] Many Australians, including those involved in the powerful Reconciliation movement, joined Pearson’s brigade, desperate to be led by an Aboriginal leader who fitted in with many middle-class sensibilities, and wanting to form a relationship with Aboriginal people who were the target of the welfare dependency rhetoric. They joined the vast majority of other Australians who just had a historic gripe about Aboriginals, but found an Aboriginal hero of their times in Pearson. He perfectly understood that their favourite story was titled ‘The problem with Aboriginal people’, and he served up what all these Australians wanted, to give Aboriginal people a good kicking. (WH)

The “problem of Aboriginal people” (which includes stereotypes of inability to self-govern) that is consistently used as a method of governmentality by the white nation-state to suppress Indigenous sovereignty is symptomatic of the history of discourse on Indigenous peoples, largely strengthened within academic institutions. Language of

storytelling versus that of the academy, therefore, becomes yet another contested aspect of the novel. Wright's "self-governing literature" cannot exist or be re-imagined in categories or constructs of dominant discourse (significantly Euro-American) formalised in national institutions. Wright's imagination of sovereignty distances itself from juridical aspects alone, to re-define a sovereignty where the literary tradition or the "value of stories" (AL) is ineluctable to achieving self-determination. Although Warren Finch is raised by the Traditional laws of the Brolga Nation and is depicted as educated by the land, Wright characterises this system of learning as a perfunctory institution that is sustained as an exoticised scheme for the UN and is closely scrutinised by the white Australian state. Sardonicly referring to the language of Euro-American theory and criticism, enforced by the western academe she describes Warren Finch as "the postmodernist, deconstructionist champion" (SB 119) who heads the Brolga nation through bombastic speeches made in the name of Aboriginal sovereignty. The critique indicts the clinical language of contemporary disciplines that 'study' Indigenous communities as the subject while marginalising Indigenous First Nations methodologies or literatures. The Brolga nation, then, becomes an ominous emblem of intellectual stagnation in futuristic sovereign nations, if the dominant intellectual traditions and canons within contemporary institutions remain unquestioned and unchanged. Even though the Brolga Nation has fought for its self-determination, the structures reproduced are colonial. By setting the Brolga nation on contested land that is occupied at a significant compromise by one section of Indigenous communities,

Wright thus anticipates two obstacles to the possibility of attaining a more expansive conception of sovereignty: any contract with systems of power invariably compromises Indigenous welfare. The assassination of Warren Finch toward the end of the novel demonstrates how the Indigenous person's life is invariably compromised in any contract with the white nation-state, much like Ortiz's characterisation of Martinez in "It was that Indian". Furthermore, long imaginations of sovereignty need to be developed by Indigenous people through transnational solidarity, or none; it cannot be achieved solely at the communal level, as by the Brolga nation. Wright's vision of "intellectual sovereignty", thus, consistently informs and converses with transnational literatures that have similarly offered emancipatory ideas and are not bound to the Australian nation (Ng 6).

Sovereignty remains controlled and caged if ideated only within formal institutions on occupied land. The fictional world of the Brolga educational institution reveals the disruption of Indigenous theory as 'land-based' praxis. Warren Finch is depicted as having learnt from the land; however, the contested land here is barren of Indigenous knowledge—the 'country as archive' that Jeanine Leane imagines or Wright's "ancient library", is disrupted by 'assimilation' and 'integration'. The invaded land does not sustain storylines given the destruction of generational networks. Even though the education of Warren Finch symbolises the ritual initiation of men, Grandmother's laws, the kinship systems that sustain questions of maintenance of land, nurturance of relationships and health, are absent. We see a lack of women in the treaty

made by the Brolga nation; apart from Big Red, it is an Aboriginal nation devoid of women and the voices of women, or any relation to ‘women’s business’.¹⁰² Juxtaposed in this manner, the two nations and the two central characters Oblivia and Warren Finch represent gendered forms of knowledge. However, the way this knowledge might function in collaborative community sustenance is absent. The Brolga Nation wants to save its heir Warren Finch from the story of Oblivia and educate him in a curriculum officially described as “culturally holistic in all its philosophical, political and environmentally sustainable economic approaches for a school’s curriculum which honoured traditional law and the art of sustainability for culture and land” (SB 107). What such a curriculum lacks, however, is an embodiment of Indigenous knowledge and its rootedness to land. Oblivia in her resolute silence, then, practises an active “separation of epistemology” (Alcoff and Potter 1-15) from knowledge systems that reproduce normative understandings of sovereignty. Her separation is distinctly Indigenous and separate from other forms of feminisms in its rootedness in contested land aligning with the ideas argued for by Aileen Moreton-Robinson.

Moreton-Robinson reasons for a movement “Towards Australian Indigenous women’s standpoint theory” (331-347) where methods of knowledge-production are constitutive of Indigenous women’s embodied experiences of ‘country’. By this, she not only challenges the

¹⁰² For a discussion on Grandmothers’ Laws and men’s and women’s business, see Bell 11-38; Dudgeon and Bray 5-7.

“cartesian mind/body split” (336), but also the division imposed between human and country. ‘Imagination as sovereignty’ centres the land to which knowledge-production and the Indigenous body are inextricably linked. Given that institutions are set on contested land, the ideas of sovereignty within them are “racialised and gendered” and “underpins and legitimises the existence of these universities and their everyday activities through its regulatory mechanisms of government and law” (336). She deliberates further that given the “omnipresence of patriarchal white sovereignty”, and Indigenous women’s subject positions existing within a hierarchy of social relations, Indigenous women’s experiences differ, and this affects the way they embody relations to the country.¹⁰³ Therefore, when Finch (educated in an assimilated system) marries Oblivia, he is unable to communicate with her. It troubles him, and he expects destroying the Swan Lake and her past will finally make Oblivia forget her homeland and her years in the tree, but Oblivia remains stubborn in her muteness sustaining a land-based language, which, Warren Finch never absorbed.

Oblivia’s quest to “regain sovereignty over [her] brain” is an act of resilient struggle against assimilation—this exclusion makes her undergo intense psychological labour amounting to a ‘madness’. Wright plays with the ‘madwoman’ metaphor to depict Aboriginal women seeking

¹⁰³ Moreton-Robinson has also argued how Indigenous sovereignties are “incommensurable” with state sovereignty, the origins of the former are “in and of the earth” (259) and “challenge the philosophical premise of state sovereignty”, see the chapter on “Incommensurable Sovereignties” (Hokowhitu et al. 257-268).

sovereignty through acts of the imagination. Oblivia resolves that the only way her brain can reject assimilation is by escaping into “illusionary ancient homelands”: “I have become a gypsy, addicted to journeys into these distant illusionary homelands, to try to lure the virus hidden somewhere in its own crowded globe to open the door” (SB 4). When the land is contested, this act of ‘making’ of an imaginary homeland much like Basanti Majhi’s ‘outer world’ (discussed in the next section) becomes significant in regaining a sovereignty that is made unavailable by existing structures. Moreover, Oblivia’s psychological labour replicates Wright’s own literary struggle as an Indigenous storyteller “vexed” (“Alexis Wright remembers”) by the process of writing a “self-governing literature”, the immense “responsibility” she holds for the land, and the continuum of temporalities she seeks to manifest through her work. She defines Indigenous positionality as one “born with responsibility locked into our psyche”, where this responsibility to land and sovereignty is continually caught in a “soul-destroying battle” against assimilation and oppression. The impact of such a labour she recognises in her community is characterised through Oblivia’s madness. However, this ‘mad’ resolve to gain “sovereignty over [her] brain” is emancipatory. Through Oblivia, Wright seeks to answer her own query, that even in the ‘heightened’ oppression of nation-states devastated by climate change, sovereignty of the mind will remain central to Indigenous survival. Oblivia’s resolute silence protecting her mind’s sovereignty is an act of establishing ‘existence’ free from assimilation just as it has been necessary to reinforce Indigenous existence on a land that was deemed *terra nullius*.

In a Pen dialogue in 2013, Wright said: “The black swan has to fight for its place” (Wright “The Future”). Her many swan references alluding to stories in the western cultural tradition ranging from Leda to Tchaikovsky, attempt strategic inversions of myths to challenge cultural hegemony and racialised stereotypes. Oblivia, read as Odette from Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* or Leda from Greek mythology, never succumbs to the machinations of Von Rothbert or Zeus, represented in the figure of Warren Finch. She is sovereign because she sustains ancient stories that encompass knowledge of the interconnectedness of the land, humans, and non-humans. Consequently, it is Oblivia who is able to communicate with the black swans. The shifting topographies that have resulted in the displacement of species where riverlines have changed and a conglomerate of land masses are surrounded by high seas, the black swans, who are not considered migratory, have become migrants. In an “unresolved” ending (Mead 524), Oblivia survives with her intimate connections to these migratory birds that guide her journey, similar to the ancestral spirits of the country. Country too, then, transforms into another literary paradigm, embodied in a knowledge of the black swans, that guide Oblivia. Voicing her contemporary, Amitav Ghosh’s preoccupation in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Wright affirms that the global climate crisis is as much a “crisis of the imagination” (AL). Her adaptation of ‘climate literature’, much like her re-imagination of the novel, re-invents a genre amalgamating facets of climate fiction, the dystopian novel or speculative fiction. As I discussed earlier, regarding

the pan-temporal vision of intellectual sustenance, *The Swan Book* as a novel cannot be classified solely as ‘speculative’ or ‘futuristic’, given that it designs a *continuum*. It has a setting that aligns well with the format of a futuristic novel, but where the concerns are thoroughly grounded in the consequences of settler history in the present. It may not even function solely within the genre of ‘climate fiction’, given the preconception by many Indigenous novelists that “all Indigenous literatures is ultimately climate literature” (qtd. in Champion “O Multinaturalism”). Given a history of surviving settler violence and erasure, Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte writes that for Indigenous communities, the climate crisis is a “déjà vu” (“Is it” 1); Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo writer Rebecca Roanhorse, similarly, claims, “We’ve already survived an apocalypse” (qtd. in Alter). In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I discussed the humanist conceptions of Indigenous poets such as Bhagban Majhi and Simon Ortiz who consistently voice universal concern rooted squarely in the realm of their particular community. Wright, similarly, designs a “swan narrative” to evoke universal concern regarding a shared future, choosing to classify the novel as “survival literature” (AL). Black swans become the novel’s emblem of universal emancipation and collective responsibility following climate crisis. However, as I have demonstrated in this section, this “survival literature” and the universal emancipatory paradigm is predicated on the need to affirm autonomy from structures that reproduce “patriarchal white sovereignty”. In the next section, I examine Kondh writer Basanti Majhi’s short narrative “Gadhe Chadei” and Santhal writer Regina Marandi’s novel *Becoming Me*, to discuss Adivasi women’s “self-

governing literature”. Similar to the labour to resist assimilation, Adivasi women critique the Indian nation-state and its nationalism that violate Adivasi women’s bodies and erase their voices. In turn, the critique practises a departure from dominant literary traditions (predominantly Hindu nationalist) that colonise Adivasi literary imagination.

Sovereignty of the *Gopis*

i.) A History of Violence

“Gadhe Chadei” (Gadhe bird) is a work of short fiction narrated in Kui by Tumdibandh-based Kondh writer Basanti Majhi and translated into Oriya by Pramod Pattnaik in a collection titled *Kuttia Kandha Loka Kahani* (*Kuttia Kondh Folklore*, 2011). In this story, Majhi re-interprets the oft-used motif of Krishna stealing clothes from *gopis* from the Hindu *puranic* (epic) tradition.¹⁰⁴ Transmitted predominantly in the dominant languages in India, puranic traditions have been chiefly controlled and adapted by upper-castes.¹⁰⁵ Considered as representatives of the Indian

¹⁰⁴ *Gopis* is the plural form of *gopi*. *Gopis* are generally a group of women represented as Krishna’s companions, who, in visual and literary depictions, are often depicted as bathing women beside a water body.

¹⁰⁵ Given these are a wide and sprawling set of oral epical traditions and transcribed stories, myths and legends, consisting of stories from *Puranas* and Hindu epics *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, there are multiple versions of each story, interpreted in several languages (Ramanujan 131-160), including versions prevalent in different Indigenous communities (Gond Ramayani being one such example). My critique through an analysis of Basanti Majhi’s story is for the versions predominantly adapted by upper castes that have been normalised to represent a Hindu caste-based monolith; myths that have been ‘historicised’ to

national literary imagination, a particular set of stories are replete with the motif of Krishna stealing women's clothes. This act is often elevated and presented as the playful antics of this Hinduised god. Basanti Majhi attempts a critical subversion by privileging the *gopis* and giving them an agency denied to them in these established stories. This motif used in an Adivasi woman's story becomes significant for she not only distinguishes the characters of the *gopis* in the dominant literary tradition as Indigenous, but she also recognises that the *gopis* have often been represented as under a sexual spell or enticed by the music of a Hinduised god.

Rasananda's pet, a *gadhe* bird, flies one day over a group of *gopis* bathing by a pond.¹⁰⁶ He chooses the most beautiful among them and steals her clothes.¹⁰⁷ Under his spell, the *gopi* follows the bird to Rasananda's home and eventually becomes his wife. After some years, when she is bathing by the pond again, guarded this time by the bird, the other *gopis* return. The *gopis* violently throttle the bird. A chain of deaths follows—their friend, Rasananda and his family are killed, punished for the action of the bird. Majhi's *gopis* hold the molester accountable in an imaginary 'outer world' where they have sovereignty and not on earth, which they see as the contested land, where their rights can easily be

claim an 'indigenous' identity for Hindus and claim to the Indian subcontinent, and in recent years used as 'proof' to justify building the 'Ram Mandir' on the site of the demolished mosque in Ayodhya. Representing a 'recovery' of Hindu masculinity to build the myth of the 'Hindu nation', it further entrenches the patriarchal narratives existing in the stories.

¹⁰⁶ Rasananda is a name that often alludes to Krishna.

¹⁰⁷ In the conversation that ensues between the *gopi* and the bird, the *gopi* mentions caste differences to refuse his proposal for marriage.

trespassed upon. When they discuss in this ‘outer-world’, the *gopis* reason with their friend, rather than the Gadhe bird. Majhi designs a tale in which *gopis* re-group and rescue themselves out of a ‘spell’—I read this instance of short-fiction to examine Adivasi women writers reclaiming their rights of self-definition to create a ‘self-governing literature’ in a national context that violates Adivasi women’s bodies, assigns notions of ‘primitivism’ and assimilates them into the dominant literary and linguistic culture. Majhi’s adaptation performs an inversion of power relations and disrupts a history of representation that has sexualised Adivasi women and denied them agency. Like the *gopis* that break the spell cast upon their friend to rescue their fellowship, Majhi’s short fiction is symbolic of a similar movement in Adivasi women’s literature.

Majhi responds and critiques within the published material that carries her fictional narrative. As a nurse working at Seba Bharati in Tumdibandh village, western Odisha, Majhi did not receive formal schooling. She speaks Kui and claims to have acquired Oriya while working at Seba Bharati (12). She chooses to narrate “Gadhe Bird” using the Oriya script (the kui version is often transcribed by Narendra Majhi). By utilising the Oriya script and an Oriya translator Pramod Pattnaik, she allows the Oriya literary tradition an access to her voice. The publisher Raghunath Rath, similar to a majority of publications of Adivasi literatures, confines Majhi’s work within the colonial ethnographical category of *loka kahani* or folklore. Additionally, he introduces Majhi as a writer belonging to a “primitive tribal group” (5). The introductory notes to Majhi’s

collection that still uphold notions of backwardness and primitivism for the writer is emblematic of the ‘spell’ of forgetting enforced by dominant upper-caste literary traditions on Adivasi literatures. As I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, postcolonial literary criticism while writing on the subaltern to challenge the mainstream nationalist narrative, has often failed to read into the disquiet within Adivasi literary traditions. This is all the more visible in the absence of reading into the complexities of Adivasi self-definitions within what is standardly classified as folklore. The journey toward a ‘becoming’ of Adivasi women’s literature wrestles against the lack of Adivasi voice in postcolonial studies along with critiquing the structures of nationalism and religious oppression. Thus, their writing demands accountability from the metaphorical “gadhe bird”. In “A Politics of Writing”, Alexis Wright, theorises the act of writing as holding the “snake” in the hole accountable. Writing is representing to the world “[t]he snake, that has killed, maimed and stolen’ and left them with an inheritance of trauma” (18). Majhi’s critical enquiry, similarly, demands responsibility from the “gadhe bird”.

Adivasi women’s literature provides a sharp critique of the Indian nationalist imagination and the postcolonial nation-state. Indian Independence movements while claiming a separate national identity, had to define a ‘native’ identity and a ‘native’ culture in a colonised state. As a result, Gandhian claims to ‘swadeshi’ (native) put forward rural life in villages as the true spirit of India. However, the ‘swadeshi’ had to be reformed or assimilated into the Hindu fold for the making of the Indian

state. Adivasi culture was appropriated into nationalist discourses on art and culture, to negotiate with ‘colonial culture’ and to make claims for the long history of the sub-continent.¹⁰⁸ The Adivasi woman was absent from this imagination. She was elided despite being instrumental in resistance against colonial rule in sites away from the metropole. She (as part of the larger Indigenous population) could be claimed as ‘indigenous’ or the true ‘swadeshi’ in the writings of Verrier Elwin, but she could not be accorded the intellectual status of a visionary. Adivasi women’s imaginations of sovereignty continue to be suppressed or marginalised in literary writing because they destabilise the upper-caste male order that constructed Indian nationalism. This may have prompted many Adivasi writers of early twentieth century, including Sushila Samad (discussed later in this section), to acquiesce to the demands of the Hindi language or the dominant nationalist narrative to be accepted in the movement toward nation-building. Adivasi women’s “self-governing literature”, therefore, is fundamental in defining Adivasi Indigeneity as separate from the national imaginary of the ‘swadeshi’. Through this movement, not only does the Adivasi woman sustain a sovereign imagination separate from the national imagination but also through an act of trans-Adivasi solidarity rejects the male upper-caste creation of the nation writ on the female body.

¹⁰⁸ Archana Prasad has discussed the position of the Adivasi in the making of the Indian nation-state, the different definitions of ‘swadeshi’ used by M.K. Gandhi and Verrier Elwin, and how Elwin’s “ecological romanticism” contributed to Hindutva’s idea of indigeneity, in her book *Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the Making of an Anti-Modern Tribal Identity* (2003).

A woman's body served to organise Indian national imagination (*Bharat Mata* or India as the mother figure) and continues to be used as a site where the nation and its peripheries are maintained. Rashmi Varma writes about how sexual violence is weaponised as a force to maintain "the ideological project of nationalist, patriarchal, dominant caste and capitalist subjugation of women and sexual minorities" ("UnModifying India" 60). She argues that such violence is especially targeted toward disciplining the "absolute and literal margins of the nation" (61), meaning Kashmir and the north-east, and the dispensable minorities within the nation: Muslim, Adivasi and Dalit women. Varma provides a reading of Mahashweta Devi's short story "Douloti The Bountiful", connecting the ravaged body of the Adivasi character Douloti with the continued sexual violence on Adivasi women. To make this connection, Varma mentions Soni Sori, an Adivasi woman activist from Bastar, who was arrested and sexually assaulted and who has consistently fought against police violence of the invading industrial state in Chhattisgarh. Devi's "Douloti" and "Draupadi", where the latter is characterised around the Hindu epic figure of Draupadi from *The Mahabharata*, are perpetual victims and price of nationalism. Douloti dies on the Indian map, whereas Dopdi Mehjen or Draupadi is violated by the paramilitary. Varma reads the final image of Douloti's body on the Indian map as the inseparability between nationalism and sexual violence against Adivasi women. Mahashweta Devi, who is revisited often in postcolonial literary studies, is renowned for her commitment to narrativise Adivasi struggle through her rich oeuvre. She has subverted pivotal instances of Hindu epics such as that of Draupadi's

assault from *The Mahabharata* to reveal the violence on Adivasi women. However, Adivasi women writers similarly have critically subverted dominant narratives and rendered the experience of their lived violence in their own voice, as I have demonstrated in my reading of Basanti Majhi. Reading the literary negotiations carried out by Adivasi women writers reveals a history of the movement toward a “self-governing literature”: a journey not only marked by a forceful enactment of rights as performed by Basanti Majhi’s *gopis* but also pragmatic religious and linguistic assimilations as a form of survival.

It is imperative to delve into the methods of sustaining literary agency by Adivasi women: linguistic compromises within literary traditions and religious negotiations. Let me briefly situate the context in which such modes of survival are adopted. The choice of language has been a prickly trail in the history of Adivasi women’s literature to arrive at a self-governing voice in a context where literary hegemony is tied to oppressions of the nation-state and caste. In their critique, Adivasi women recognise the importance of the conscious use of a dominant language that they judge suitable to fulfil a literary purpose in the complex and constantly shifting linguistic and land relations in India. As I discuss in this section, Basanti Majhi uses the Oriya script, Sushila Samad adopted Hindi while Regina Marandi chooses English to write her novel. Bandana Tete, a Santhal writer and activist, examines the finer fault lines in Hindi literary tradition that carried out an epistemic violence through a conscious elision of Adivasi women’s writing in the twentieth century. In her introduction

to the volume of the first Adivasi woman poet in Hindi, Sushila Samad, Tete critiques the Brahminical Hindi literary tradition that has dominated vernacular literary culture, not only as the central voice in Indian ‘national’ literatures but exercising control on publications and publishing houses. She claims, (and here I translate her words from Hindi), that ‘their’ (national) incompetence in finding Adivasi women’s writing should not be an excuse “to elide the very essential existence of women in the history of poetry writing” (Samad 7). Tete delves into Samad’s poetry and essays to piece out Adivasi women’s literary anguish and linguistic loyalties eclipsed by a dominant Hindi tradition that enforced assimilation for bestowing recognition. Samad is revealed as a woman conscious of her fringe identity within a larger nationalist tradition who attempts to establish her position by conforming to an acquired Hindi language. Given that most of her literary works are in Hindi, Samad writes, and I translate: “Hindi is not my mother tongue. My mother tongue is Mundari. However, I consider the national language Hindi more worthy than my mother tongue. If my writings are considered unworthy and incompetent, even then, I shall derive satisfaction by using this language” (15). Her acquired linguistic identity allows her to negotiate with a predominantly upper-caste Indian nationalist movement in the early twentieth century despite her dual fringe position, that of an Adivasi and of a woman. Her negotiation, furthermore, allows her the sovereignty to meet issues of women’s education in her town and become an influential political figure in 1932. She is aware that her Hindi poetry will not be well-received in literary circles of a Hindi high culture, which had relegated the figure of

the Adivasi woman to a 'jungle' and could not accommodate her as a figure challenging this category with her literary voice. Similarly, Basanti Majhi's choice of Oriya, or Regina Marandi's choice of English reveal the ways in which Adivasi women writers have responded to structural inequalities embedded in the literary tradition. Tete re-reads this strain of negotiation practised by Adivasi women writers not only as the common misgivings of a literary persona but as a testament to the perils of Adivasiness within the strict boundaries of nationhood and the greater dilemma of Adivasi women writers to establish their sovereignty within and against established discourse.

Here, I will briefly mention religious negotiations. Although intersections of Adivasi and Hindu mythologies have had longer histories owing to exchanges in oral transmission (Haimendorf 153), given the hegemony of Brahminical literary cultures, religious and linguistic appropriations were never straightforward but connected to a complex history of disenfranchisement. In Chapter 3, I discussed the history of changes in landholdings and upper-caste acquisitions of Adivasi land in eastern India during the nineteenth century. These invasions invariably accompanied religious encounters between upper-castes and Adivasi communities, an encounter that continues in instances of industrial invasions in recent years. Moreover, since the early twentieth century, the entry of Hindutva organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh (RSS) and the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams,¹⁰⁹ have introduced Hindu religious and mythical traditions, those oral traditions which have had their own history of modifications with the oppression of Brahminical patriarchy. With changes in agricultural and thereby religious power positions (Pati *South Asia* 56), sections of Adivasi communities have carried out religious conversions in order to counter the oppression of *zamindars* and their Brahminical Hinduism.¹¹⁰ Since the nineteenth century, the juncture of these invasions has also resulted in many Adivasi peoples (such as Parajas in Southern Odisha) identifying themselves as Hindus—this often results in strengthening Hindu connections in mythmaking (45).¹¹¹

Given the impositions of Brahminical patriarchy on Adivasi communities, Adivasi women writers engage and respond to these structures in their literary retellings and negotiations.¹¹² The hinduisation

¹⁰⁹ As I discussed in Chapter 1, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams aim to incorporate Adivasi children into the nationalistic mainstream to “prevent Christian conversions” and “anti-nationalism”; Since 1952, this chain of institutions aims to “spread the message of Dharma, national integration and development”, discussed in Surya Narain Saxena’s *Wide Wings of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram: A Tale of Service and Struggle* (2004).

¹¹⁰ In anthropological transcriptions we can trace and examine how Adivasi gods interact with Hindu gods (Mishra *Oral Epics* 65).

¹¹¹ These identifications often vary locally. In 2017, some Paraja women in Jalaput, for instance, claimed themselves as Hindus in my interactions with them, and narrated stories of gods and goddesses from dominant Hindu mythologies.

¹¹² Re-reading motifs from Hindu epics, such as the *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* or the Puranas, from Adivasi women’s negotiations becomes essential, given that these motifs are central to the patriarchal and supremacist enterprise of the Hindu nationalist imagination. The gods Ram and Laxman are represented as the bastion of the Hindu male order who ‘protect’ Sita (variously read as the

of Adivasi literary traditions is often accommodated by Adivasi women writers much like the linguistic acquisition of Basanti Majhi or linguistic conformation of Sushila Samad as methods to traverse the changing power structures in villages. When the critique cannot be meted out more forcefully, it often takes the form of resistance at the fundamental level of metaphors as evident in Basanti Majhi's retelling. Working within the motifs popular in Hindu mythology, Majhi is able to destabilise established power relations and critique a history of sexual violence against Adivasi women that has been celebrated in Hindu mythical traditions. My intention, therefore, is to direct literary studies in English beyond reading 'the representation of the Adivasi' woman, given that the subaltern invariably 'cannot speak' or continues to 'embody limits' in representational narratives. Postcolonial thinkers like Spivak, and Varma, read Mahashweta Devi's works to situate subaltern Adivasi identity; here, it is necessary to pose the question as to the absence of voices of Adivasi

daughter of an earth goddess) from the 'demon' Ravana who is in fact worshipped and characterised numerous in vernacular narratives as a Dravidian, or a Gond king slain by Aryan invaders. In the process, the gods assault the 'demon-woman' Surpanakha and burn the kingdom of Lanka. Surpanakha (and Holika) in Hindu epics have been read as Dalit women characters who are demonised and often depicted as temptresses who trick innocent gods till, they reveal their demonic selves, only to be slayed or disfigured to 'shame' or depict the eventual victory over 'evil' (C. Gupta 58). These motifs recur in contemporary appropriations of Adivasi myths in Hinduised retellings. In the Niyamgiri hills, for instance, several versions persist about the myth of Niyamraja. One is the version that is often sung by the Dongria Kondh elders (I discussed one version in Chapter 3), whereas the other is a more Hinduised legend with similar motifs from *The Ramayana*. In this retelling, Niyamraja had a beautiful wife who had a liaison with a demon. Therefore, Niyamraja, as a punishment for his wife, chopped her breasts and threw one on either side, and those made the two mountains of Niyamgiri (Dash).

women writers who have framed this condition in the postcolonial Indian state. Soni Sori is mentioned in Varma's reading of Devi's literary narrative, however, Sori's sovereign voice is not privileged, although her activism has strengthened contemporary Adivasi women's narrative across India against state violence. Adivasi women's narratives, such as that of Basanti Majhi, Regina Marandi and Bandana Tete, and literary readings of their work allow for the creation of a "self-governing literary landscape" where the subaltern no longer *remains* the subaltern but embodies sovereignty. As Moreton-Robinson argues from the context of Australian Indigenous women's standpoint, it is similarly vital to direct attention to Adivasi women's literatures written from a positionality that embodies the marginalised body, as well as the invaded land. Like Patrick Wolfe's argument that "territoriality is settler colonialism's irreducible element" (388), in contemporary India, territory is acquired by the dispensability of the Adivasi woman's body. Consequently, nation as a structure, and imaginations of nationalisms that refuse to question their patriarchy, prove inadequate in imagining Adivasi women's sovereignty.

Contemporary Adivasi women writers, therefore, demand caution narrativising sexual violence in relation to Adivasi women in literature. In a recent instance, a section of Santhal women writers challenged the representation of sexual violence in Santhal writer Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's stories, which they interpreted as conforming to the 'sexualisation' of Santhali women's bodies replete in dominant narratives, and contemporary media. Shekhar's stories "November is the Month of

Migrations” and “Just a Whore” in his Hindu Literary Prize-winning book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (which I discussed in Chapter 1) came under sharp critique from diverse Santhal women writers’ forums around the same time as the Jharkhand government (with an Adivasi constituency) called for a ban on his work in the state. The above two stories by Shekhar feature Santhal women being forced to acquiesce to sex work to survive and migrate to urban cities from the ravaged villages of Jharkhand. Some sections of Santhal women, supported the state ban. At the same time, the India Tribal Women Writers’ Meet organised by Sahitya Academy along with *Jharkhandi Bhasha Sahitya Akhra* opposed such a ban on freedom of speech but still condemned the representation qualifying it as “objectionable to the dignity of tribal women” (“We were there”). They supported Shekhar’s freedom while mentioning that this freedom “carries a concomitant responsibility”. Santhal publisher and founder of *Adivaani*, Ruby Hembrom, supported Shekhar and the representation of women in his writings as an honest insight into the Adivasi plight affected by coal mining in Jharkhand. She advocated for the writer’s realist narratives that depict the ongoing situation rooted in the larger problem of sexual violence on Adivasi women in industrial conflict zones (qtd. in “Jharkhand bans”). The diverse reactions of Santhal women to Shekhar’s body of literature is representative of an Adivasi women’s intellectual tradition vehemently attempting to reinstate its own rights for self-representation, within the complex flux of dominant thought traditions instated by the state, caste hegemony as well as Adivasi patriarchy. Here, the movement is to uphold the positionality of the Adivasi woman, and

her voice, while narrativising the Adivasi body, given that the violence on the body operates across several spheres: Indigenous women's sexual oppression and the use of their bodies as sites of occupation in the making of nation-states and for contemporary resource exploitation. Tonowanda Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman, in her reading of Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1994), writes about how it is essential to locate "the various scales of space, starting with the body" ("Ongoing Storms" 101). The representation of the Indigenous woman's body (in fiction) extends from the "individual body" of the woman, to the space of the land, the community, and the nation-state (101). Goeman reads "bodies and land as conduits of connection"—thereby, the discourse and 'social processes' that separate these spaces (and scales) replicate colonial forms of maintaining expendability of the Indigenous body on Indigenous land, thus, enacting erasures. This inseparability of land acquisition and sexual violence takes a particular form in the Indian nation-state because of the insidious and warring patriarchies of virulent Hindutva and assimilated Adivasi communities that Santhal writer Regina Marandi discusses through her first-person narrative. Marandi reveals the violence against women that accompanies Adivasi displacement from their land—the girls in Liya's school distance themselves, choosing to narrativise the lived experience of women from the community in a discourse limited to their circle.

ii.) A Terrain of Contradictions

Regina Marandi's voice resorts to a narrative device which she terms "self-talk" (58)—her novel *Becoming Me* (2014), written in English, is her literary process to arrive at a self-definition of Adivasiness through the central character Liya. I examine Marandi's novel to explore the larger narrative of Adivasi women's literary repositioning that critiques the postcolonial welfare state and struggles for literary sovereignty within the contradictions and assimilations of Adivasiness. As an Adivasi novel, it is pioneering in its scope exploring the ambiguities encountered while claiming political Indigeneity in the Indian context. The Santhals in Assam, the community to which the central character Liya belongs, were removed from their land by the British colonial government in the nineteenth century to be indentured laborers in Assam's tea gardens. The community identifies as Adivasi, but unlike in central and east India, the Santhal community in Assam were not included among the Scheduled Tribes (STs) post-Independence. They were categorised under OBC or Other Backward Classes. The Constitution Scheduled Tribes Order Amendment Bill 2019 proposed to include Santhals and several other excluded communities such as the Mundas, Oraons, Kondhs, Kharias among others in Assam within the ST category. Apart from the history of indenture labour, they are marginalised further in the broader tribal politics of Assam, which Marandi refers to but does not name while portraying the riots in the region. The riots, therefore, maybe in reference

to the 1996 Santhal-Bodo conflicts which also affected Assamese Adivasi communities other than the Santhals.¹¹³

As a young Santhal woman, Liya Kisku is pinned onto a flux of diverging narratives—a nationalistic curriculum, a patriarchal Santhal society and the intersections of tribal politics. What would perhaps have been part of her association within her community, Liya's self-realisation as an Adivasi woman sharpens in the Indian school system which enforces an oppressive nationalist narrative. In the chapter titled "Crossing Over", she describes a quintessential Indian school assembly where the students are assembled to take the Indian pledge. Until the incident of the riots in her village, Liya never questions the composition of this "collective". In the "collectives" she encounters through her education, her position is juxtaposed with non-Adivasi students and north-eastern tribal communities who have Scheduled Tribes status. As part of an ambivalent Nehruvian concern for the welfare of Indigenous communities, a group of Indigenous communities were categorised within Scheduled Tribes and accorded special sanction by the Indian nation-state for the ownership of their land. However, the ambivalence stems from a colonial pre-conception of a certain 'primitivity' of Scheduled Tribes, where the sanction enjoins a greater degree of assimilation through the language of

¹¹³ Indigeneity of tribal nations in the North-Eastern states of India has a separate history and context, with a history of tribal nationalism by Bodo, Naga and other tribal communities. As we see in the case of Marandi's novel, Indigeneity of some north-eastern tribes in Assam, and the Indigenous position of Adivasi communities often comes into conflict. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this relationship at length and requires further research on north-eastern texts.

national inclusion. Given that she belonged to the Santhal community in Assam, they were excluded this sanction while suffering the conditions of other Scheduled Tribes, along with bearing the aftermath of a history of indentured labour. The complex history of political Indigeneity in Assam, where some tribal communities such as the Bodo demand for separation from the state while Adivasis demand ‘protection’ within state-defined categories have led to opposing demands in the region. Concurrently, land and linguistic divisions between Adivasis and non-Adivasis, where the power of the latter is protected by the state, make Assamese Adivasis inhabit the margins in the region: in this intersection, Liya claims in exasperation, “Being Adivasi in Assam meant being *bagania* for the *dikus*” (102).¹¹⁴

These Adivasi-tribal divisions, fuelled often by *dikus* (outsiders), leads to power imbalances and riots that Liya experiences in her village. Following the riots and her family’s displacement, Liya’s mistrust of other communities becomes acute: when they pledge “unity and devotion to the country” (23-24), she recognises the dispensability of her narrative and body from the ‘well-being’ that is promised by the Indian nation. This is the juncture in the novel where her sovereign imagination distances itself from the nationalist narrative. Her lived experience of the riots and the

¹¹⁴ *Bagania*, from the word *bagan* (tea garden) was used as a term for Adivasi generations in Assam. They are often categorised as ‘tea or ex-tea garden tribes’. Adivasi students in the novel, therefore, organise protests to demand inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes category, and to be known as Santhals, Mundas, etc to retain Adivasi identity, rather than be called *baganias* (129).

aftermath, results in her recognition of the fringe status of her community within national and tribal categories, thereby, waking her up to her Adivasihood. “This is the second time that the villages have been pushed back to relief camps and the sad part is even this time around the government has failed to rescue our people’s lives” (46). It is no longer an individual exclusion, but one felt by the Adivasi community in Assam; she describes how Adivasi students separate themselves and Adivasi girls narrate stories about rape and pillaging that the women from their community suffered. Moreover, the girls are conscious that with the loss of their land and sovereignty, their education will cease; the girls decide that whoever amongst them continues an education “will go right up to higher academic levels” (49). Sustaining a voice is a material necessity, the means by which stories of Adivasi suppression in their villages will be archived and revealed. Marandi’s choice then, to write her novel in English ensures a wider transmission.¹¹⁵

Liya’s violent rejection of the Indian nation-state’s idea of sovereignty, at once frees and traumatises her. She refuses to accept the categories and ‘welfare’ promised by the nation, while remembering the displaced and raped Adivasi people relocated to relief camps. Remaining within the national curriculum proves daunting; she finds herself unable

¹¹⁵One of the reasons why Regina Marandi’s voice exists in the Indian-English literary scene is perhaps because of Adivaani which is a publishing house dedicated to publishing Adivasi narratives. Similar to the David Unaipon Award to encourage Australian First Nations literatures, the founders of Adivaani instated *Pickle*, a literary award for Adivasi writers, of which Marandi is a recipient.

to accommodate a school system that is unaware of her trauma and fails to acknowledge her Adivasi sovereignty and knowledge (which she acquires through stories from her father). Like Oblivia, her attempts to regain “sovereignty over [her] brain” (SB 4) vehemently refuses received education. In Liya’s case, it further rejects the voices of her male teachers who belong to the tribes that perpetrated violence in their village. Her positionality as a Santhal woman, from a community with a recent history of experiencing violence and displacement has separated her enough to make her incapable of compliance to a national institution on the disputed land of her tribe. As she leaves school, she figures the only way she can remain loyal to the Indigenous narrative, people in the relief camp, “the girls her age” and to her family, is through a method of “self-talk”, a “self-governing” voice that she fosters in her mind. “This self-talk gave me the zeal to perceive life with a new perspective” (58). Her “self-talk”, much like Oblivia’s muteness that helps her hold on steadfastly to selfhood, not only allows her sovereignty from nationalism, but also when she encounters the assimilated selves from the Santhal community. When she joins university, she is encouraged by the presence of an Adivasi majority: “as the majority of the faculty were Adivasi I was banking on them for mental support” (67). However, she is rudely awakened as she encounters the colonised selves of her community members in an institution where the dominant national narrative has diluted the Adivasihood she seeks. Like Warren Finch and members of the Brolga nation, their assimilation makes them akin to *dikus* (outsiders); they act “obliged” to those from dominant castes and do not hold on to the hard-fought sovereignty of the

Santhal language. She is troubled finding herself amongst more members of her tribe only to realise that the idea of Adivasiness is “inaccessible” (72).

For Liya, displacement is dual. Her community inhabits a marginal position in Assam. Elsewhere, even though she is a Santhal, she neither has access to the ST category nor to the east-Indian Santhal community which denies her the language and acceptance. Moreover, the riots continue to haunt her, interrupting her conversations. She resorts to the “self-governing” voice she cultivated to help her resist the overwhelming patriarchal strains and assimilation her community has internalised. She contemplates whether the sovereign idea of Adivasiness exists exclusively in her internal monologue. The “self-talk”, an inner monologue and archive of ideas that she nurtures, is her way of sustaining herself intellectually in institutions that do not co-relate to her experiences as an Adivasi woman. Like Oblivia’s withdrawal, Liya’s “self-talk” dominates the novel. Her “self-talk” at once positions and disentangles her selfhood from the shifting terrains of political Indigeneity in the Indian context: she is a marginal Santhali Christian in Assam, an outsider-Santhal in other states, Indigenous with ancestors who were indentured labourers, and outside the category of Scheduled Tribes. Moreover, her sovereign inner voice allows her to examine these ambiguities of political Indigeneity intersecting with influences of religion, patriarchy, and assimilation within the community and outside. It is ultimately her “self-talk” that sustains her identity as an Adivasi woman. Her stream-of-consciousness

narrative, a sovereignty of thought that she refuses to share in her engagement with others, announces an innovative form of Adivasi women's novel in English.

It is productive to place Marandi's novel in a genre of *bildungsroman* by Indigenous women writers in the transnational sphere. Jeanine Leane explores the genre of the YA (Young Adult) fiction of Australian First Nations writers such as Tara June Winch and Melissa Lucashenko. She writes that the coming-of-age novel has served as an essential 'rite of passage' for Indigenous writing ("Rites" 107). Although genres do not occur sequentially in a literary movement, the coming-of-age narrative usually follows or accompanies the memoir in the first wave of Indigenous women's writing, especially in the adopted colonial language. This is perhaps because they are closest to literary forms of testimony. Leane writes that the making of Aboriginal identity in YA fiction often involves inhabiting "transition" for a "discovery" of self. Marandi's novel too takes the reader along Liya's passage through opposing systems and social boundaries as we read about her school and university years. In yet another significant solidarity between the representation of Adivasi and First Nations youth in fiction, the characters consciously query and seek "the right to an education, the right to a safe, stable living environment, the right to make one's own decisions about the future, and most importantly the right to belong (108).

In *Daughters of the Dreaming* (1983), while writing about Australian First Nations knowledge in the Northern Territory that have been gender-exclusive, Diane Bell explores the *jilimi*, “a women’s camp”, a meeting ground for senior women, widows, young girls, divorced and single women, as a gendered space that is separate and a powerful “expression of women’s solidarity” (16). It is in these spaces where women learn about ancestral history regarding land, ownership, and nurturing roles. The contemporary transnational sphere of Indigenous women’s writing, that grows through the passageway of a life-narrative to broader literary forms of writing, is one that seeks and creates the space of the *jilimi*. A ceremony that recurs in the journey of Oblivia and Liya, is the search for a metaphorical *jilimi*, seeking generational and communal ties, the links to the “ancient library” that will strengthen their sovereign imagination. This intense state of pursuit is an intellectual and emotional labour given that generationally women have undergone abuse, rape, poverty, and a steady erasure of their sovereignty through assimilation. Healing lies in the need to imagine and build a metaphorical *jilimi*, an intellectual chain of sustenance that rebuilds their relationships, and regenerates deep ties with the land. Imbuing meaning into land made barren of stories, through resilient literary practices, is a mode of subsistence. Harvesting stories for survival is alongside strengthening legal claims to the land. These long-term methods of sustaining sovereignty, which Alexis Wright defines as a necessity, requires a grounding through ‘root’ metaphors, interconnecting the land, with the Indigenous body. As I demonstrate through a reading of the *Continuum* series in the next

section, Mary Tallmountain through her literary kinship with Paula Gunn Allen renews an old form of patronage to strengthen the motif of the mythical Spiderwoman that envisions long-term sustenance of Native American thought.

Sovereignty of “Spiderwoman’s Granddaughters”

In her critique of Native American literary nationalism, Shari Huhndorf contends that nationalism (here, of the tribal nation) has been “predominantly a male endeavour” (*Mapping* 4). Although nationalism has served as “an essential anti-colonial strategy”, it overlooks the lasting influence of patriarchy that European colonialism had on Indigenous communities and prevents self-reflections on patriarchy within the tribal nation. She evaluates native American “literary nationalism”, thus:

Nationalist critics have devoted little attention to writing by Native women, especially those works that attend to issues of gender, and they have thereby reinforced the marginalisation and political containment of indigenous women under colonialism. The ways in which colonisation has positioned indigenous women demand a feminist thinking of Native politics and culture, a task to which nationalism is inadequate. (4)

She emphasises the need for literary studies to move beyond nationalism as the only site of anti-colonial resistance given it is mired by binaries that prove unhelpful in a just imagination of sovereignty—placing sovereignty and feminism as opposing concepts has not adequately addressed issues of

patriarchy that shape Native American communities. More importantly, gendered violence as a colonial weapon has been central to the logic of invasion and continues in industrial invasions of Indigenous land. Indigenous women writers, therefore, imagine a significantly transnational sovereignty that connects varied tribal histories by moving away from national structures (and institutions that I discussed in Chapter 1) that are predominantly male and that has focused on sovereignty within the demands of nationhood alone.¹¹⁶

In this section, I examine sovereignty as a form of intellectual sustenance carried on outside the realm of formal institutions and re-created through intimate spaces of solidarity in poetry: I demonstrate that the metaphorical *jilimi* created by Mary Tallmountain was as anti-colonial, and radically imagined sovereignty, during same time as Native American nationalist movements. To take the discussion outside formal institutions is not to discredit or elide the immense intellectual capital that Indigenous women have contributed to the academy. However, as Huhndorf notes in her examination of sexism in the context of theatre and activist spaces, women's intellectual contributions have been significantly diluted or erased, in the writing of Indigenous histories (*Mapping* 113). In turn, institutional discourse and spaces have been shaped in ways that do not accommodate or acknowledge the specific positionality of Indigenous

¹¹⁶ Huhndorf provides a critique of imperialism and Indigenous nationalisms, to position Indigenous concerns in the transnational sphere, and defines transnationalism as a critical framework of enquiry (*Mapping* 1-24; Lyons 283-296).

women, despite a steady contribution in literature and mentorship. Given that institutional knowledge has significant cultural capital, and yet women's participation is marginalised, the non-formal methods of intellectual sustenance that Indigenous women practise have remained largely absent in literary studies. I examine Mary Tallmountain's triptych *Continuum* as one that sustains a non-formal chain of remembrance: her poetry is a space where the intellectual contribution of Paula Gunn Allen can be recovered and re-read. Warrior's reading of her work explores the tradition of "essentialist emergence of women's voices" ("Intellectual" 11). Bearing in mind Allen's essentialism of Native American matrilineal traditions as "gynocentric", such a form of feminism is of course not the only non-formal channel of knowledge-making by women poets, or the only possible reading of Allen's influence in poetry. At the same time, Indigenous women's bodies have often formed the physical sites of occupation through rape, genocide and forced assimilation (Barker 19). Their bodies continue to be objectified by eroding intellectual roles. This is evident from the recurrent theme in Alexis Wright, Basanti Majhi and Regina Marandi's works discussed in the previous sections. How, then, to interpret a form of intellectual sustenance that centres the body? It is necessary to acknowledge the bodies of women in the production of knowledge (Grosz 187-217), but more importantly to inscribe intellectual histories on bodies.

Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1939, to a mixed-race family, Paula Gunn Allen identified closely with her mother's Laguna

Pueblo heritage. As a poet, writer, and teacher at the University of California, Berkeley, Allen consistently imagined forms of solidarity and patronage beyond the boundaries of the formal institution. In her literary and theoretical works such as *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), *Spiderwoman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women* (1989) and *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Source Book* (1991), she depicts the goddess from a Keres myth, Spiderwoman, as a thinker who "weaves" the world into existence. She establishes the mythical Spiderwoman or Grandmother Spider as the supreme creator of "thought" (*Sacred* 35-36). She upturns Descartes' understanding of 'being' by shifting the agency of creation outside the individual to Spiderwoman, claiming, "she thinks, therefore we are" (*Grandmothers* 33). Allen's Spiderwoman is a symbol of an intellectual fount that needs to be reached to understand one's Indigenous roots and undergo a reawakening to survive. In the Bay area of the 1970s and 1980s, Paula Gunn Allen, Wendy Rose, and Mary Tallmountain, among others, formed an intellectual space of patronage, a *jilimi*, that embodied through their relationships and literary kinship, the mythical Thought-Woman who sustains thought. The actual and figurative literary mentorship of Allen and Rose, nurtured a generation of Native American women's poetry, including that of Mary Tallmountain, reinforcing an intellectual movement during a time-period that saw intense literary work produced by women. By the end of the twentieth century, Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird nurtured women's literature by shaping anthologies "around the kitchen table" (Harjo and Bird 19)

compiling “the voice of tribal, land-based women writers with ties to community, history and language” (22).¹¹⁷ Mary Tallmountain began her poetic practice in the late 1970s solely for the encouragement from this “informal support group” of the Bay area women poets (Bruchac and Tallmountain 13). She began to write and publish poetry with The Friars Press, and later was actively involved in founding the Tenderloin’s Women Writers’ Workshop in 1987, mentoring local women of colour, immigrants, and elders, who formed the predominant demographic in the poetry workshops and readings in the Mission and Tenderloin districts of San Francisco (Welford 141).

Born in 1918 in Nulato, Alaska to Kuyokun–Athabaskan parentage, Tallmountain was separated from her family at a young age. She grew up with a couple, the Randalls, battling a life riddled with alcoholism, depression and what Allen calls in a forward to Tallmountain’s collection, looking “directly from the precipice” (*The Light* 1). She finally found her literary calling in her late fifties with Allen’s mentorship. Allen and Tallmountain’s creative association spanned more than two decades during which Allen not only was involved in her own literary creations but also into moulding the Athabaskan poet and mentoring her work through an “elder reawakening” (*Lincoln Sing* 282). Allen’s re-reading of the Spiderwoman myth as the creative space where women retain agency

¹¹⁷Allen affirmed that Indigenous women’s literature cannot be classified under “women’s literature” but need to be read as “tribal women’s literature”, an old and honoured literary tradition in its own right (*Spiderwoman’s Granddaughters* 24).

and sovereignty of imagination, significantly influenced the way Tallmountain imagines her search for ancestral roots in her body of poetry. The figure of Spiderwoman occurs in Tallmountain's resurrection of her grandmother in her poem "Matmiya" from "The Matrilineal Cycle", as well as a personification of Allen in *Continuum*, which, I discuss later in this section. In "Matmiya", Tallmountain envisions her grandmother as an ancient earthmother; Matmiya's body grounds the volume firmly on earth, and interweaves a genealogy of Native American poetry imagined as if it were by the Keres goddess Spiderwoman:

"I see you sitting
Implanted by roots
Coiled deep from your thighs." (*The Light* 84).

In a 1989 interview with Nulhegan Abenaki writer Joseph Bruchac, Tallmountain reminisced about her grandmother, thus: "Have you seen an Indian woman sit on the earth? She just seems to grow out of it" (Bruchac and Tallmountain 20). The poem, thus, begins by rooting Matmiya strongly to the fertile earthscapes by her "centuries pale" (*The Light* 84) roots that dig firm. She sits ancient and immovable, nourishing the layers of earth that spread into cavernous depths. Tallmountain melds the physicality of her grandmother with roots that resemble the web of Spiderwoman's weave, interweaving her personal relationship with that of the community, where a genealogy of literary tradition is transmitted through Grandmothers' tales. "Matmiya" is suffused with images invoking the animacy and movement of roots with verbs such as "wound", "gnarled", "wrapped", "curved" and "coiled" that not only seem to

entwine her associations to earth but also vividly communicate to the reader the deep times through which poets must navigate seeking literary nourishment. She establishes grandmothers, the maternal line, as the origins of Indigenous literary traditions by referring to them as ancient “mother-vine” that hold the “rich dark roots”, the histories that the contemporary poet re-learns to sustain sovereign thinking.

Matmiya becomes figurative in Tallmountain’s three-poem series *Continuum* when she attempts another quest, to allow her rebirth, replenished and nourished by Spiderwoman. *Continuum*, that was published as a disconnected triptych in the collection *The Light on the Tent Wall: A Bridging* (1990), undertakes a literary journey to seek the patronage of Spiderwoman, in the same way Tallmountain had undertaken a literal journey back to her native Alaskan roots on the advice of Allen. Similar to Matmiya’s earthscape, “where each layer feeds the next” (84), the three poems flow into the other, feeding the next, root-like. “Continuum I” interconnects histories of Indigenous women to allow them a rebirth in “Continuum II”. In “Continuum III”, Tallmountain finally reaches the figure of Matmiya or Spiderwoman, the intellectual origins of Native American literary tradition, here, personified by the figure of Paula Gunn Allen. These three poems when read as a “continuum” develop into a rich tapestry of interconnected metaphors.

“Continuum I” begins with the poet Tallmountain walking alongside Ariel, the rebel angel as they “watch” history unfolding in

continents (*The Light* 40). The earth where these histories evolve is not the nourishing earthscape from “Matmiya” but one that is devastated with “ruined hills” and polluted air in wallowing spectres of cities and metal prisons. Tallmountain depicts images of women “sewing in airless lofts”, “shrieks of thousands/ headed hopeless to ovens”, “enclosed in barbed wire”, “born in ghetto cradle” and “torn from [my] tribes” (40-41), to sketch a history of women transnationally, and the chain of slavery and destitution that has linked them in the past centuries. By interconnecting them, Tallmountain builds a space of solidarity among women from minority communities. In “Continuum I”, she portrays women from varied Indigenous cultures, to demonstrate that centuries of colonisation have made them “faceless, alone, forgotten”. However, there is a brewing of voices under the surface of the poem that awaits a prophetic time, perhaps when Matmiya will rise and “move large and slow/ When it is time” (84). This tribal woman lies waiting in “earth/ which waits for my resurrection” (41). The woman in Tallmountain’s poem awaits to exercise her creative energies to voice out the colossal crimes as “poems leap potently/ out of my wistful dreams” as she lies shackled in her “prison cot” with the innumerable forms of imprisonment that colonialism entails. Similar to Alexis Wright and Basanti Majhi’s image of holding the “gadhe bird” or the “snake” accountable as a form of literary responsibility, the woman in Tallmountain’s poem awaits to begin her “self-governing” literary journey. She asks Ariel, to take her “back to the beginning” (41) to find the source of “truth”. She desires to be under earth’s “mothering mass” in order to “break free”. This tribal woman seeks to find the

beginning of Thought when Spiderwoman spun all creation so that she can inherit her knowledge to sustain the ‘sovereignty of her imagination’. And hence she enters the second “layer” in “Continuum II” where she finds herself once again in the womb to be ‘reborn’.

Tallmountain’s vision of origins in “Continuum II” (*The Light* 60-62) draw directly from biological maternity as the earthen ‘roots’ from “Matmiya” become the rootlike “threaded mass”, “woven web”, “velvet cords”, “finned” with “silken strands” within the womb, much like the way Allen envisions Spiderwoman’s ‘web’ of Thought. It is significant that Tallmountain’s vision of origins of Thought that might release her, are rooted in the body, given that Spiderwoman, the creatrix figure, has been read as a representation who transcends the body/earth divide and is an amalgamation of intellectual and biological creation. AnaLouise Keating writes that, in the metaphorical language of Allen, these creatrix figures like Spiderwoman, are a political act in “writing the feminine in open-ended non-exclusionary ways” (96). Therefore, they situate an intellectual release, by salvaging this “river of nurture” (61), within images of the body.

sounds to sunrise
one clear voice in tongues
of fifty friars wakened
in the dark dawn
for the new song

afar the silken strands tremble
someone is reborn (*The Light* 61)

Tallmountain preserved memories of her catholic upbringing and struggled to reconcile both parts of her identity, as a Koyukon-Athabaskan person and as a converted Christian brought up by a white missionary couple. This schizophrenic duality, the need enforced upon her at a young age to fit into a world dominated by settler imagination was overpowering and led her to the “brink of a precipice”. She was also acutely aware of the impossibility of returning to her native Nulato roots. In “My Wild Birds Flying”, she writes, “The spirits in the graveyard can’t show me where my mother lies; and I will not let them persuade me to return here. But I know who I am. Marginal person, misfit, mutant...” (179). Christian metaphors occur frequently in her poetry and intermingle with her use of Indigenous myth. In complex ways that attempt a reversal, she talks of her own Indigenous rebirth using Christian motifs, demonstrating yet again, like Sushila Samad and Regina Marandi, how Indigenous women negotiate survival by re-adapting religion and language. Here, Tallmountain writes of the poet being ‘reborn’, referring to her own rebirth to know her Indigenous roots but also the resurrection of Matmiya, that she had prophesied earlier in “Matmiya” and “Continuum I” which is announced by one voice “of fifty friars awakened” (*The Light* 61). It is Ariel, the rebel angel that guides her quest to eventually find Spiderwoman, the Keres creator of thought.

The request to Ariel that was made in “Continuum I” to go “back to the beginning” (41) to know the “truth” is granted in “Continuum III”, when after the poet’s rebirth, she is mentored by Spiderwoman who weaves ‘thought’, here personified by the figure of Paula Gunn Allen (*The Light* 78-79). Tallmountain dedicates the third poem in the series to Allen who appears like the metaphorical Grandmother Spider at the beginning of time to create Indigenous literary traditions. The poem begins with Allen reciting poetry in her native tongue, Laguna Pueblo, to Tallmountain, and then develops into a series of short remembrances of Allen. She especially remembers a time “twenty years ago” in Oregon, where, both poets attempted literary strengthening drawn from the elements of the earth—a time when Tallmountain was awakened to continue her literary tradition. Tallmountain establishes Allen as a figure of authority in the poem, as one who leads this literary encounter while she follows her command— “you rode”, “you told”, “you remembered”, and “you showed” (78). Their encounters and acts of discovery around the mesa seem to exemplify Tallmountain’s literary awakening; the materiality of the “cabin” where they stay allows the reader into her mindscape that is being invited out to create literature. It is striking to note the aspects of landscape that visualise the mind as material, the mindscape curving onto the landscape, through a comfortable permeability. Although visually definitive, the landscape is fluid, gathered from images of Oregon, Allen’s New Mexico region, but also from Tallmountain’s memories of Nulato, the details of which Tallmountain in the fifty years of separation from her ancestral land, still remembered “to

a stick and stone” (Bruchac and Tallmountain 14). To Bruchac, she confided: “You *must* be with the land. I have to go out on the porch all the time and see what’s happening in the sky and see what it feels like where the moisture is [...]” (17).

“Continuum III” invokes Indigenous women’s literary kinship, as well as symbolises the many forms of mentorship, and patronage that Tallmountain and Allen initiated in the Bay area workshops. Here, Allen appears as the fount of intellectual creation, whose art has already developed and fortified “poured over ancient rock” (*The Light* 79). She is the one who is cognisant of the “mesa”, of how the elements interact with the land, of what colours the light creates and the sounds the wind makes, symbolising her long years of poetic engagement through which she has moulded her literary craft. Whereas Tallmountain is the one who is depicted as struggling to learn, whose mindscape signified by the cabin has “cracks” and “rough walls”. In the process of learning she is said to have “crawled” and “took turns; gritty and hot; wet and cold” like a stone that is being chiselled to pursue the “magic beyond the headland”. She writes that she follows Allen, walks to “her beat and strum”. Together they pursue the voices of ancient women, “the clashing pans of supper” and the “calling voices” that seem to be communicating with them for a continuation. Allen like grandmother Spider explains the “weave of things” to the granddaughter poet. From Allen, Tallmountain inherits the knowledge of transmission; the idea that connects her present to “untold time”. The “congruence” that Tallmountain, and Indigenous women

writers eventually sustain, is perhaps a knowledge of time. Similar to Alexis Wright and Jeanine Leane's emphasis on the existence and permeability of "all times", *guwayu*, and the need for this pan-temporal resurrection in writing for the sovereignty of the imagination, Tallmountain realises that her literary enterprise necessitates the difficult journey of 'going back' to the roots in her individual lifetime. Tallmountain returned to Nulato, her native place, on the advice of Allen. The poet's voice within *Continuum* accompanies this journey to find Thought Woman (or 'the ancient library' of her native land of Alaska) who can advise her and 'nurture' her infant literature. Although she was unable to 'return' or rekindle her ancestral links with her mother (who died of tuberculosis), her reconciliation with her Indigenous roots fortifies through her literary association with Allen. In an autobiographical essay titled "You Can Go Home Again", she describes this literary kinship as an intellectual inheritance, "conveyed to [her] in some subtle manner of [their] minds" (8). She says that for all their differences in tribal origins, they were "Indian women bound by the enduring thread of a common dream, a powerful purpose". This *jilimi* she creates in the Bay area is 'home', one that gives her the courage to 'go home' to Nulato again. From this association with Allen, she finds the 'release' she had requested from Ariel as she learns of the 'obligation' she has to herself and her peers to use and channel her literary energies to sustain, "rebuild [...] some part of the world I live in". Of herself, and Rose, and other mixed-race poets working in the literary scene of the 1980s, Tallmountain qualified their positionality as "the Inbetweens". She said, "We're a connection between

two different cultures and that's what we're going to be [...] Nobody else is going to come along and be Inbetweens. We are the Inbetweens" (Bruchac and Tallmountain 21). I read the "Inbetweens" as temporally suggestive—women writers, are placed in the 'Inbetween' of the present moment and tasked by a momentous undertaking of gathering from "all times", to be a conduit of "the ancient library" in their minds to herald an imaginative process of sovereignty.

Conclusion:

In the Mabo Lecture delivered at Alice Springs in 2013, Alexis Wright recognised the voices of Indigenous First Nations ancestors, and the "stories of the country" as the "template and fundamental principles" to imagine a shared future (qtd. in Mead 531). This gathering from "the ancient library", generously offers an understanding for the re-imagination of sovereignty across transnational Indigenous traditions. Sovereignty of the 'imagination' as a process that carves a literary space and renews intellectual traditions to rejuvenate ties to the land frees sovereignty from juridical and nationalistic definitions alone. I discussed how the forms of intellectual sustenance that imagine such a sovereignty are gendered. My purpose in exploring this gendered dimension was to demonstrate that the futurity of Indigenous sustenance has been largely proposed and keenly envisaged by Indigenous women writers, but I also sought to illustrate that the structures they attempt to destabilise, are patriarchal and hence, like the *gadhe* bird and the snake, require

accountability. It initially seems a warring consideration to accommodate the semantic extremes of violent redressal, determined silences and loving kinships in a holistic conception of intellectual sustenance. I queried how I was to define an earthen and nurturing word such as ‘sustenance’ to contain the insurgency as well as the transformative universality of autonomy as imagined by Indigenous women writers. Literary imagination as sovereignty holds such a multitude of possibilities: it accommodates with comfort and reverence Basanti Majhi’s renegade *gopis* alongside Liya and Oblivia’s “self-talk” and silence, and the poetic *jilimi* of Mary Tallmountain. The violent histories to which these writers respond, and the patriarchal structures they seek to dismantle, have been retained and reproduced, by global imperialism, and nation-states in establishing ‘territoriality’—my reading demonstrated how women writers recuperate connections of the body and the imagination to the ‘land’ from the utilitarian and inherently patriarchal imagination of ‘territory’.

The defining term of this chapter, ‘sustenance’, that brings together the material (of land, and body) and the temporal (“all times”) to discuss Indigenous women’s literature, puts forward leading questions for literary futurity and literary form. Does the pan-temporal literary vision that has arisen from and been fortified significantly by the contexts of political Indigeneity, presage a new literary form? Given the visionary re-imagination of the novel, the incendiary subversion of Brahminical puritanism, or the generational linkage materialised in poetry, will the

barriers of English (and other) literary forms be enough to contain the ongoing experiments, or will it strive toward a “self-governing literary landscape” that allows vernacular intermingling? Consequently, will these literary forms provide the “charters” for Indigenous rights, inform policy changes, and direct the legal enactment of land redress. Given the literary imagination of sovereignty, and the “basic architecture” (“Alexis Wright remembers”) that defines a literary world and holds its rationale intact, what are the limits of this new landscape? Will these limits be imagined analogously to borders (national and communal), or like Wright’s visions of landscapes in *The Swan Book* permeate defined peripheries ever-postponing arrivals? These are some questions not only limited to literary form, but which might inform future enquiries in Indigenous studies at large. I elaborate further on the future scope and challenges of transnational Indigenous literary studies in the next segment which is the concluding section of my thesis.

CODA

In the winter of 2017, I visited Kucheipadar. This is a village in south Odisha that served as an organising ground for the Kashipur movement for over a decade. Despite long years of struggle against company and state encroachments, Utkal Aluminium International Limited (UAIL) occupied Balphlimali for bauxite, Vedanta established an alumina refinery in Lanjigarh. In the evenings, the village is in darkness with a haze of smoke and blinking lights from the factory visible in the horizon. On the final days of my stay, I was accompanied by my aunt and translator for the journey, Arna Majhi, to meet the old Kondh bard, Salu Majhi. Following aunt's introduction, he said in Kui, "Sit, granddaughter". I had previously worked on English translations and literary readings of his songs collected in the documentaries *Mahua Memoirs* (2007) by Vinod Raja and *Blood Earth* (2013) by Kush Badhwar and Taru Dalmia. Ahead of meeting Salu Majhi to record the oral epics he was about to sing, my curiosity as a researcher was already burdened with a certain expectation of themes. I sat clutching a pencil, a notebook, and a recorder, fidgeting slightly at any noise that might ruin the clarity of my recording. As he settled with his single-stringed instrument, I waited for him to turn performer, for my language to turn inadequate, to plunge into suspended

meanings conveyed by my aunt, and to return with the knowledge of his literary world to challenge the structures within my academic institution. All exercise of meaning, I rested on him. Probably aging close to eighty years or more, wasn't he one of the last Kondh oral poets of east India? As he had already performed for listeners before me, would he not mourn the destruction brought by the "pounding feet" of company trucks into the deep forests of south Odisha? Salu Majhi sang for four hours while aunt and I recorded and translated between pauses. By early evening, the epic was unfinished, and he asked me to return the next day to document more of all he remembered. On preliminary verbal translation following this journey, I discovered that none of my anticipated themes on loss and displacement were addressed. None of the literary materials I expected to fit squarely with the questions I had at that point for my doctoral thesis would serve purpose. He sang of sentient tigers: an epical world where all the characters and incidents involved the adventures of tigers and other non-humans.

Given the unequal structures that my thesis has addressed, I am aware that the research process at times operated within this structure, imposing expectations on the artist and a literary text. This thesis has been an exercise in being mindful of inequalities that frame research on Indigenous literatures, cultivating humility, and consciously listening. Like the oral epic, the process is ongoing and unfinished. Given that one of my central aims has been to address Indigenous voice in contemporary literary studies, I acknowledge the limits of this thesis, bearing in mind

positionality of language, caste, and institution. Often as literary critics we approach a text already presuming its alignment with our institutional training: discourse often informs the questions we ask. These queries can be creative as long as they are grounded and when not addressed, hinder an expansive reading. It is crucial for Indigenous voices to direct and inform the questions we pose within discourse. To aid such sustained engagement and to allow slow time, where, meaning can be arrived at through collaboration and mutual understanding, is the responsibility of the institution. A neoliberal academia that rushes publications and supports quantifiable outcomes, does not enliven the direction of our queries or the act of listening, that is fundamental to Indigenous literary studies. I re-iterate Chadwick Allen in the challenge he anticipates in the field of comparative Indigenous studies: “Whose interest can it serve?” (*Trans-Indigenous* xiii). This thesis, by placing Adivasi literatures in conversation with global Indigenous studies in settler colonial nations, has been an attempt to foreground Adivasi voices in the transnational sphere and in turn contribute to a broader reading and analysis of Adivasi literary traditions. Consequently, by bringing in new texts that have not yet been examined in Critical Indigenous Studies, the thesis opens a comparative space for researchers to bridge the gaps that exist between area-specific studies of South Asia, North America and Australia, postcolonial literary criticism, and Indigenous methodologies. In attending to interdisciplinary concerns by Indigenous thinkers, and using Indigenous methods of reading, this thesis contributes to expand the ‘literary’ within British institutions. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I have endeavoured for my

engagement with Native American and Australian First Nations literatures and history to be as thorough as with Adivasi literatures and languages; however, I acknowledge that more community and linguistic knowledge in the Australian and North American contexts might have allowed me a deeper analysis of texts in this thesis. I hope further studies on this intersection explore new ways of literary comparison and spaces where Indigenous writers are co-creators of the knowledge that is produced in critical enquiry.

Adivaani founder and director, Ruby Hembrom, expresses the need for such co-creation for the sustenance of museums and archives. Her essay “Indigenous Contemporaries: Leaving Otherness Behind” (Elliott 126–133), charts her rethinking of the Indigenous archive and its futurity. Her thoughts on visiting and collaborating with the Bodding (Santhal) Collections, the Museum of Cultural History, Norway, and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), Cambridge, pose pertinent questions about the practicality of ‘physical repatriation’ of objects collected in colonial encounters, and the future of Indigenous co-curation. One of the two reigning themes of this thesis being evidence, I have posed questions as to the nature of the archive and how it curates and erases Indigenous evidence. Hembrom’s collaboration with Mark Elliott for the *Another India* (2018) exhibit at MAA, can help rethink Indigenous evidence within the historically fraught space of the western museum. The exhibit showcased contemporary Adivasi artists and their work; they responded to archived photographs and existing exhibits and chose to

depict contemporary Adivasi realities in industrialised India, through their artistic creation. Agency, Hembrom underlines, is essential to how Indigenous histories are remembered and represented. Objects and labels created and curated for display by the community announces the new Indigenous archive. She writes:

Being a museum artefact or being displayed is a validation of existence...Museum artifacts help set some records straight, provide agency—and certainly elicit an acknowledgment from observers of an assertion of a people’s ethnicity and identity [...] These objects assert the necessity to leave otherness behind. These objects form the links that connect us to our ancestors and next generations. (Elliott 131)

I raised the following question in the conclusion to Chapter 1: what would be the archives to which contemporary ‘stolen generations’ of Adivasi children refer when they have no agency in the making of the archive? Cross-cultural collaborations such as that by Hembrom, Natalie Harkin’s archival installation, can perhaps provide blueprints for the futurity of Indigenous archives. They can assist efforts for a transnational form of remembrance that connects histories of child removals across the three continents. Though, this imagination needs to address the existing structural disparities which forecloses access to institutions for large sections of Indigenous peoples across class and geographical boundaries. This reveals why social media platforms and web archives have become democratic tools for many young Indigenous thinkers and activists.

Adivasi Lives Matter, *Adivasi Resurgence*, *Archival De-colonist [-o-]*, among other burgeoning social media handles, are lively and thriving archives that research and address contemporary concerns, and document Indigenous histories and oral traditions. As these sources are open access, replicating the nature of orality in Indigenous traditions, they are active agents of literary and cultural transmission and exchange of ideas across communities and geographies. In an online panel discussion titled “Climate Change, Infrastructure and Adivasi Knowledge”, panellists Akash Poyam, Archana Soreng, Raile R. Ziipao and M. Yuvan, shared some of their ongoing documentation of Indigenous knowledge traditions, ecological vocabularies, and sustainable practices (“ISDG”). Poyam emphasised the absence of Indigenous intellectual property rights, for which Indigenous-led collaborations on archival work are essential to challenge continued appropriations and erasures by the state. These methods, moreover, are vital to urgently rethink innovative archives as more Indigenous communities face climate-induced displacements.

This thesis has also argued for an excavation of metaphors from Indigenous literary traditions to collect early warnings of the climate crisis. I presented a climate history of eastern India to situate the recurring words *jal*, *jangal*, *jameen* as climate vocabularies. I hope this micro-history channels further comparative work that connects the climate histories of India with settler colonial nations, and Indigenous literary responses in the respective contexts. Similar to India, ENSO occurrences have impacted Australian geographies resulting in severe drought conditions in the

nineteenth century. Settler colonialism's lasting impact on North American and Australian land through forced removals, disease and genocide radically altered ecologies. The global industrial complex further impacts Indigenous communities in all three contexts. The raging bushfires of Australia in 2019, the wildfires of California in 2020 and the recent forest fires on the Similipal reserve, eastern India in 2021 are one of the many symptoms of insurgent eco-systems, where Indigenous communities are affected by climate change and ironically held responsible. In India, the conservation narrative excludes Indigenous participation and sustainable practices and penalises Indigenous communities for environmental encroachments on their own land; Adivasi peoples are displaced to 'protect' wildlife and habitats. Kharia climate activist Archana Soreng, therefore, demands that Adivasi communities lead the narrative and efforts on conservation, rather than be made "victims" ("ISDG"). I suggest forthcoming discourse on climate, conservation, and the pandemic, reflects on the role of authoritarian nationalism and racism in abetting already fragile conditions. For instance, as I discussed in the thesis, Indigeneity and land rights of Adivasi communities are oppositional to the Hindu nation and aligned corporate and industrial interests. Here, Adivasi and other minority communities become dispensable bodies in their lands as well as in urban centres where they work as migrant labourers. The exodus of migrants from urban metropolises following the Indian state's overnight lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 was an authoritarian measure. In so far as the pandemic is indicative of the climate emergency, the exodus was also a

climate-induced displacement.¹¹⁸ How to rethink and safeguard Indigenous climate justice in authoritarian nation-states? This concern is not limited to the Hindu nationalist state; appropriations of Indigeneity in Europe, and Britain has led a rise in xenophobia claiming indigeneity of the ‘original white’ population. Claiming such indigeneity, the Far Right draws a dangerous analogy between immigration of minority populations to UK, and colonialism in settler nations.¹¹⁹ This ideology can influence conservative anti-immigration policies. At a time when climate-induced displacements and violence within authoritarian regimes of the Global South render Indigenous and minority populations homeless, these policies if realised will deprive alternatives of safety to climate refugees.

The above query further directs research to ask how the dominant group’s co-options of Indigeneity complicate political Indigeneity. I briefly addressed the concerns regarding Indigenous claims to land rights and nationhood purely based on mythology. Whether between Indigenous communities or between political Indigeneity and dominant white or Hindu settler populations, mythology serves as the ground for competitive claims. The Hindu nationalist state’s claim to the grounds of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya or the Israeli state’s claim to statehood in

¹¹⁸ A recent exploration of the non-human in climate studies historically situates the emergence of the COVID-19 virus in the long history of unstable relations between humans and pangolins. Shivasundaram writes that zoonotic transfers are inalienable from the climate emergency and the unequal pasts on which it is built. In the paper, he reads the descriptions of pangolins found in Sri Lankan Indigenous literatures, to historicise this frontier of relations (1-30).

¹¹⁹ For discussion on Indigeneity as co-opted by the European and British Far-Right, see Introduction and chapter 3 by Mackay and Stirrup 1-24; 59-83.

Palestine is myth-based. These instances are cautionary because these cases of contemporary colonialisms are reinforced by peoples who were previously oppressed. Mythology, in so far as it can serve as literary and political archives of oral traditions for Indigenous communities, and can aid material claims to land, however, needs mindful consideration. For Indigenous communities, this consists of yet another task to defend the 'sacred code' to land, literary and religious identity encrypted in mythology, which often is termed "pre-modern" and "backward" in discourse, as noted by Tuck and Yang (5). How to imagine political Indigeneity that retains this 'sacred code' while underpinning the basis of land rights as a material claim? How to strengthen the material basis of 'evidence' that is bolstered by the language of the "ancient library" and not undercut by the language of legality? This thesis, thus, attempted to connect resonating ideas of transnational Indigenous thinkers and writers who have created through literature an expansive understanding of sovereignty. I hope this points towards research that will contemplate a transnational intellectual history of Indigenous literary sovereignty: "true freedom" for the Adivasis in the postcolonial Indian state, as noted by Jaipal Singh Munda ("Constituent") connects to the demand for Warrior's "intellectual sovereignty", Ortiz's "literary sovereignty" and to Wright's "self-governing literature". The poets and writers discussed in this thesis sustain a consistent renewal and reclaiming of Indigenous sovereignty as a process rooted in material and sacred connections to land. Literature serves as the organising ground in which such an imagination is continued. Like the songs of Bhagban Majhi that became literary

pamphlets across Indigenous movements in India, words and the “remembered earth” endure in the repeated call to self-govern: “We will not forsake this land” (*Prakrutika* 19).

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The Bibliography is divided into the following sections:

- i. Art Installation
- ii. Authored and Other Textual Sources
- iii. Emails
- iv. Interviews and Telephonic Communication
- v. Keynote and Conference Papers
- vi. Panel Discussions
- vii. Video Sources
- viii. Websites

Each section maintains alphabetical order. Authored materials found on web pages or online platforms are included in Authored and Other Textual Sources, whereas entire websites referred are included in the section on Websites. All video sources, including films and documentaries, are included in the section titled Video Sources.

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