

Sorrow Songs of Woods: Adivasi-Nature Relationship in the Anthropocene in Manbhum

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History of the tribal communities remains one of the most contested arenas, of academic writings in India with complex normative terminologies like 'adivasis', 'tribes', 'Scheduled Tribes' referring explanations to indigeneity which in many instances doesn't qualify with the African, First Nations, Native American and Australian Indigenous academic discourse on indigeneity. Indian (India) versions of indigenous studies categorically explain themselves in diverse rhetoric of 'Adivasi', 'Vanvasi' and even Tribal studies. Thus, while we explain or contest the exclusivity of idea of indigeneity in India as 'Adivasi' or 'Tribes', yet we do categorically tend to situate our debates on 'adivasi/tribes' in the global narratives of indigeneity. The present book by Nirmal Kumar Mahato is a vivid and assiduously probed research work on indigenous/adivasi identity formation and delineation in Manbhum region of India. While endearingly explaining the ecological theories of tribal studies in India, the author has delved himself into the postcolonial academic discourse on environmental histories. The human-environmental debates which works beyond the realms of watertight compartments of science and social sciences, is well understood through this study. The ecological-anthropogenic connections clubs together diverse systems of knowledge and discipline into one stream of understanding which is often now studied under 'environmental history'. Human environmental relations are complex layered systems of cultural practices, traditions, knowledge systems etc. The Anthropocene is the stage of a co-dependent relationship of human societies with the nature. It is seen as the human-nature

stage of changing patterns of life on earth. It has become a subject of wider academic debate and interrogation in the nature-society-human relationships. How could we evaluate the transition with the stages of Anthropocene in historical contexts? The present study is an ardent attempt to look into identity questions of indigeneity in context to theory of Anthropocene in India's context. Author through his empirical research and comprehensive ethnographic review and analysis brought into light several aspects of human-ecological relations. The title of the book begins with the metaphoric expression 'Sorrow Songs of Woods', where the ecological transition in the region is manifested in the folk traditions. The sorrow songs of woods are in folk expressions of communities living in the Manbhum region which recurrently comes in the historical narratives engaged in the book.

The work encompassed in the book is primarily based on the empirical evidence, which are explicitly shared in the second, third and fourth chapter of the book. The book is divided into five chapters. Apart from these chapters there is acknowledgement, list of abbreviations, introduction, conclusion, appendices, glossary, bibliography, and index. In the acknowledgement section author explains his reasons for undertaking the empirical research of his homeland areas. To have an analytical study of the place to which we belong has its own assets and misgivings. However, in changed circumstances when perceptions of the self-narration are gaining primacy and outsider's world views are bringing limitations in their interpretations. The work of Nirmal adds to wider perspectives expected in the field of adivasis or indigenous studies in India. Through acknowledgement, author has extended his gratitude to his institutions and to the scholarly legacy which is already there in the field of environmental history.

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In the Introduction chapter, the author introduced his book, its various arguments pertaining to environmental history and Anthropocene debate and its legacy in Indian history. The different chapters and their arguments are also presented in the introductory chapter. In the first chapter titled: *Ecological Setting, Administrative, Geography and Creation of 'Tribal Place'*, region of empirical study i.e. Manbhum is introduced with its pre-colonial and colonial legacy. In the second chapter, *'Nature and Adivasi Society'*, author brings out the ethnographic and his own empirical observations about the society and its communities living the Manbhum region since the historic times. Within the second chapter with such sub-topics as: Adivasis perceptions of landscape and aesthetics, methods of site selection for the establishment of a village, Imposition of Sacredness on Landscape, Water Management Systems and Horopathy: Medico Ethnobotany, author brought some of the most valuable empirical findings for the research and indigenous studies in Indian academia. With the empirically studied ethnographic narrations about the human-nature relationship of the Manbhum author builds the argument about the harmonious Anthropocene. Anthropocene as also argued in the works by Prakash Kashwan (2017), is often studied in academia as a pessimistic phase of human-nature relationship. With this chapter, author presents an approach of balance and harmony which essentially works as a foundation of ecological harmony (also referred as 'Ecocene') in Anthropocene (Lawrence, 2012) and becoming part of the ecological resilience theories as well. In the third chapter titled *'Colonial Intervention in the Adivasi Landscape'* the colonial exploitation of adivasis lands and disruption in the ecological harmony is explained. British colonial intervention brought transition in the land tenure systems. The colonials bringing new tools and methods of private property, and leases created huge imbalance in the harmonious Anthropocene of Manbhum. Further

the exploitative policy of forest laws adversely affected the community-forests relationships, which further accelerated the atrocities over communities of Manbhum by the incurring powers. The crisis of adivasi-nature relationship couldn't be resolved in post-colonial era because colonial exploitative policies were continued. The irony of power struggle with regional cultural identities is well posited in the arguments of this chapter. In the fourth chapter, *Crisis in Nature and Society*, the nuisance of colonial rule and its implications in the adivasis society brought with its pathos and pain. How a harmonious ecological terrain got devastated because of colonial and post-colonial regime is vividly addressed under topics like Famine, Diseases, and exodus towards Assam in search of livelihood. In the local dialect, in one such sub-topic exodus issue is addressed as *Chal Mini, Assam Jabo* (Come Mini, let us go to Assam), where indebtedness induced forced migration, human trafficking and often excessive penury led the people of the Manbhum to seek livelihood option in tea gardens of Assam. In chapter five, *Adivasi Movements*, the consciousness to regain the balance and harmony of Anthropocene is addressed. While analysing the legacy of adivasi assertion against the exploitative native, colonial, and post-colonial rule, author brings his argument about diverse factors which lead to the adivasi movements and also in the Jharkhand movement. In the conclusion, the highlighting aspect of study remains the formation and consolidation of the adivasi identity based on the human-nature relationships. The people of Manbhum, although were displaced, overpowered by the neighbouring Bengali, Bihari, and Odia identity, yet they nurtured, and retained their relationships with their land and ecology. This resilient factor of their identity became explicit when the Jharkhand movement came and successfully the stated could be founded due to efforts of people and their determination to bring back the harmonious Anthropocene in their lands.