

**SUBALTERNITY AND RESISTANCE IN THE BHIL HEARTLAND:
HISTORICIZING CONTEMPORARY ADIVASI RESISTANCE IN WESTERN INDIA¹**

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1) INTRODUCTION

On 10 May 2012, a “show cause” notice was issued to Madhuri Krishnaswamy – a leading activist with the Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan (JADS), a local movement of Adivasis² in Badwani district in western Madhya Pradesh. In the notice, Madhuriben, as she is known in local communities in the district and fellow activists in the region was called upon by the District Magistrate to provide reasons as to why she should not be subject to externment from Badwani and six other districts of the state. The reason why Madhuriben was to be externed was that she and her organization had allegedly hindered ‘the development work of the administration’ and created ‘an atmosphere of fear among the government functionaries’ engaged in the implementation of this work (see Singh, 2012a; Ghatwai, 2012; AHRC, 2012). Immediately decried by leading national civil society activists like Jean Dréze and Aruna Roy as constituting a profoundly

¹ Some of the empirical data presented in this article have been discussed in previous publications (Nilsen, 2010, 2012a/b). Segments of the data discussed in the first part of section two of the chapter was also initially presented in a paper at the workshop “Democracy and Poverty” at the Third International Conference on Democracy as Idea and Practice at the University of Oslo, January 2012. I am grateful to the organizers and participants at the workshop – and in particular Sanjay Reddy – for their instructive engagement with my arguments.

² The term adivasi literally means “first inhabitant”, and was coined by tribal rights activists early in the twentieth century to express their claim to being the indigenous people of India. The Indian government does not recognize Adivasis as being indigenous people, but defines Adivasi communities as belonging to the category of Scheduled Tribes as per the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian constitution. The Fifth and Sixth Schedules – schedules are basically lists in the Constitution that categorize and tabulate bureaucratic activity and policy of the Government – provide an array of protective legislation, special entitlements and reservations for Adivasis.

unconstitutional attempt at silencing an activist that had dared to challenge the local administration, it soon surfaced that among the criminal cases that were listed in the notice to justify Madhuriben's externment, all but one were old cases in which JADS activists had been acquitted of all allegations. The remaining case had not even made it to the courts at the time the notice was issued. Valsingh, an Adivasi activist from JADS, drew a parallel to past and less democratic times in India: 'This reminds us of British times. Is the government scared to face us? It is our constitutional right to organize and agitate and it cannot be taken away by the collector' (Singh, 2012a). Madhuriben herself responded to the allegations by pointing out that:

Far from "obstructing" government schemes our campaigns and protests have been for the proper implementation of these schemes according to law.

Needless to say, in the process, we have upset the completely corrupt bureaucracy and political interests who have thrived on siphoning off funds for public services and who are responsible for the complete failure of delivery of entitlements to work, food, health services, forest rights etc. These interests have been made very uncomfortable by an adivasi population that is confident, aware, organised and very vocal in demanding their legal rights. Hence, when we have refused to be cowed down by repeated false cases against us, they are trying this new tactic of externment (Krishnaswamy, 2012).

The achievements that Madhuriben refers to in this passage are in fact part of a trajectory of activist achievements through which JADS has succeeded, since its formation in the late 1990s, to effect a considerable reversal of the entrenched disenfranchisement that characterizes the relationship between tribal communities and the state in western Madhya Pradesh.

Perhaps most significant in this regard is the considerable headway that the movement has made in securing accountability and efficiency in the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee in Pati block of Badwani district. Ever since the NREGA was

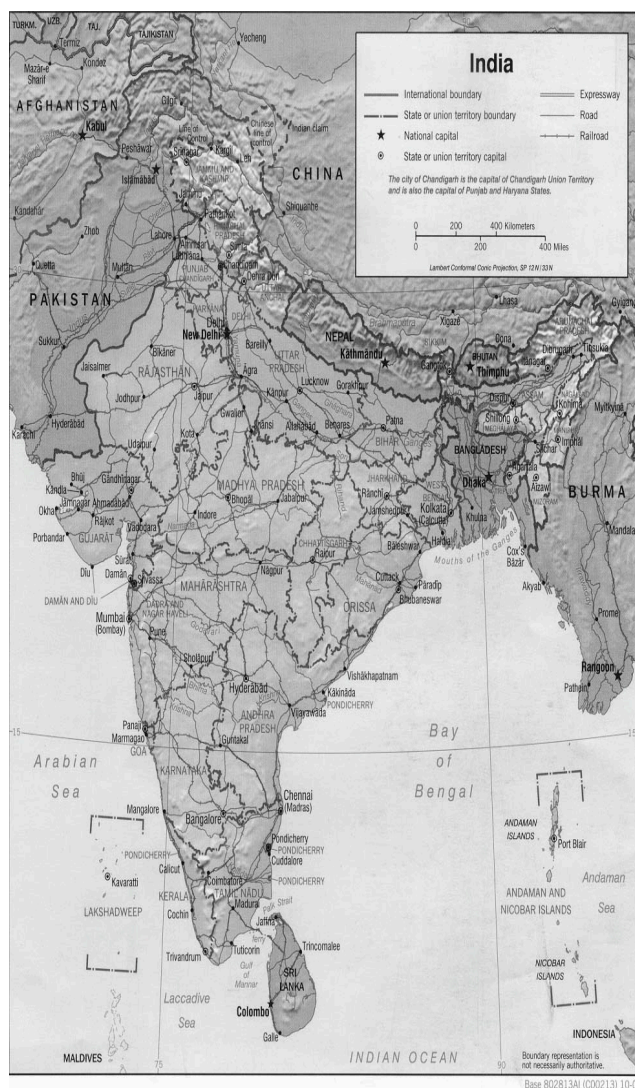
introduced in early 2006, JADS activists have engaged with the local administration to ensure transparent and effective implementation of the programme – ensuring, for example, that job cards are issued, written applications for work are accepted by the administration, and that the minimum wage is in fact paid. Initially in 2006, state authorities refused to implement work schemes under the NREGA. Consequently, JADS demanded that an unemployment allowance should be given to people who would otherwise have been able to find work under the NREGA. A long and ardent agitation followed, in which activists faced threats of violence and false criminal cases. Lasting from June to October 2006, the struggle ultimately succeeded in forcing the authorities to pay unemployment allowances to 1,500 to 2,000 applicants. In the following years, Pati block attracted attention as one of the areas in India where NREGA was being implemented with the highest level of success. A 2008 survey that covered 10 districts across six Hindi-belt states showed that almost half the workers from Pati that had been interviewed had been able to obtain nearly 100 days of employment through the programme, and on average, workers from Pati block had secured 85 days of work under NREGA in the 12 months preceding the survey. This compared very favourably with the results from the other states, where the average number of work-days obtained under the scheme numbered a mere 43 and only 14 per cent of all interviewed workers had managed to secure a full 100 days of work under the scheme. The incomes that JADS activists obtain from NREGA have been put to good use in securing necessities like food, seeds, and clothing, and in improving the quality of agriculture in the villages, at the same time as it has reduced the necessity to migrate to urban centres to find work in the lean season. Even more significantly, the experience of engaging successfully with the state over the implementation of the NREGA has created a sense of empowerment and entitlement in local communities in the area (Nayak, 2008; Khera, 2009; Dreze and Khera, 2009). As Nandini Nayak (2008: 1) notes, a common refrain among JADS activists runs as follows: “Rozgaar guarantee amra kanon che” (The employment guarantee is our law”).

I have chosen to describe this episode and the mobilizational trajectory that preceded it at some length here as it constitutes a significant example of some of the central dynamics that tend to unfold when subaltern groups in the Bhil heartlands of western India stake their claims in relation to a state apparatus that is more often than not unaccountable, unresponsive and indeed predatory in its everyday workings. On the one hand, it is possible to discern the 'adverse incorporation' (Hickey and Du Toit, 2007) of Adivasi communities into the regional political economy, manifest in a grinding poverty that is compounded by political disenfranchisement. On the other hand, it is possible to see how democratic mobilization by these communities has made some headway in terms of challenging disenfranchisement and enabling Adivasis to relate to the local state in an assertive and competent manner, ensuring the implementation of social welfare programmes and demanding recognition of their constitutional rights. In response to the inroads made by subaltern claims-making, the state in turn mobilizes its repertoire of coercive resources – in this case, ultimately, legal sanctions, but, as we shall see further on in the chapter, violent repression is also a central element in this repertoire. Ultimately, the attempt to drive Madhuriben out of Badwani district foundered in the face of extensive national and international protests.³ However, as I will argue below, the state tends to be historically constituted and organized in such a way as to allow dominant groups superior possibilities to act in and through it and to mobilize the resources that inhere in this institutional ensemble in order to reproduce and extend hegemony.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the 'strategic selectivity' (Jessop, 1990) that is intrinsic to the historical structuration of state power imposes certain constraints upon the extent to which subaltern groups will be able to stake their claims and pursue their political projects in relation to the state, and that these should be at the forefront of debates over

³ Indeed, even Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister for Rural Development, wrote to the Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh expressing his concern over what he referred to as an 'extreme step' taken against an activist and an organization acting entirely within constitutional bounds (Singh, 2012b).

possible strategies for social movements from below in contemporary India (Nilsen, 2012a/b). In this paper I make a 'first cut' attempt at moving towards a historical-sociological analysis and conceptualization of how this structuration took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, in the next section, I first present a brief account of poverty and disenfranchisement among the Bhils of western Madhya Pradesh, focusing on the erosion of subsistence farming as a form of livelihood and the turn to



labour migration as a survival strategy in the region. I then discuss how this abject poverty is compounded and reproduced through a local state-society relation that I refer to as everyday tyranny; that is, a predatory and coercive relationship between Adivasi communities and state officials (forest guards, police constables, revenue officials) who imposed a cruel and extortionate regime of corrupt exactions on people who were in effect rightless subjects in relation to the local state. The next part of the paper then moves on to present a historical-sociological analysis of the processes through which the adverse incorporation of the Bhils into the

regional political economy was constituted from the nineteenth century onwards. I extend outwards in scope to cover a region that I shall refer to as the Bhil heartland, which consists of Khandesh in north-western Maharashtra, the Dangs in south-western Gujarat, Mewar in southern Rajasthan, and the former princely states of Alirajpur and Badwani in western Madhya Pradesh. The analysis shows how the construction of what Manu Goswami (2004) has called 'colonial state space' led to socioeconomic

dispossession through usury and land alienation and political subordination through a transition from shared to exclusive sovereignty in the Bhil heartland, and the concurrent expansion of the 'infrastructural power' (Mann, 1984) of the colonial and princely states in the region. I conclude by outlining how these relations were reproduced in postcolonial India and what this entails for subaltern mobilization in the Bhil heartland.

2) POVERTY AND DISENFRANCHISEMENT AMONG THE BHILS OF WESTERN MADHYA PRADESH

In the late autumn of 2009, the poverty that blights the lives of Bhil Adivasis in western Madhya Pradesh was made chillingly and abundantly clear as a series of news reports started to appear in national newspapers, warning of a dire food situation among the Adivasis of western Madhya Pradesh. In Agasia and Madora, two villages in the district of Jhabua where Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute 86 per cent of the population, 25 children were reported to have died in the course of only two weeks. The children died as a result of malnutrition, which had caused a dramatic fall in their immunity levels, thus rendering them vulnerable to dengue and anaemia (Singh, 2009a). By February 2010, the situation had deteriorated even further, as 46 Adivasi children were reported to have died of malnutrition in three villages in Jhabua (Singh, 2010a; Jain, 2010; Dutta, 2010).⁴

At the same time as the malnutrition deaths among tribal children hit the national headlines, other stories were emerging that helped to explain some of the underlying socioeconomic dynamics of Adivasi poverty in western Madhya Pradesh. In August 2009, *The Hindu* reported that Jhabua district was 'on its way to becoming Vidarbha-II' (Singh, 2009c). Over the past decade, agriculture in the district has witnessed a shift in cropping

⁴ Indeed, the malnutrition deaths in Jhabua in 2009 and 2010 are part of a larger picture, in which Madhya Pradesh has recently registered child mortality rates that rank among the highest in the world and malnutrition levels among children that surpass those of most sub-Saharan African countries (Singh; 2009b; Chauhan, 2009).

patterns away from pulses, coarse grains and oil-seeds towards cash-crops such as BT cotton, tomatoes, and chillies. The turn towards a high-input cash-cropping system has come at a high price for local Adivasi peasants, primarily in the form of a vicious debt cycle. In order to cultivate cotton, peasants have to buy the necessary inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. Whereas in 1970, peasants in the area used some 20 kilos of fertilizer per hectare of land, today they use between 600 and 800 kilos, and the burden of loans to cover the expenses incurred in purchasing inputs has become four times that of the annual income of most peasants in the region. One cycle of cropping will put a small farmer in debt to the tune of 15,000 to 20,000 Rupees, and average loans taken by local peasants have increased from 2,500 rupees in 1991 to 35,000 rupees in 2010 (Singh, 2009c; Jain, 2010).

Local shopkeepers and moneylenders, in turn, provide inputs at prices that are 200 to 300 per cent higher than the original cost of the products, and loans are given with compound interest rates ranging between 24 to 48 per cent annually. As much as 60 per cent of all debt in the district is owed to non-institutional lenders, such as shopkeepers and moneylenders, whereas banks, co-operative societies, and self-help groups provide the smallest amount of credit to cultivators in the district (Singh, 2009c). Studies have uncovered a dramatic escalation of debt levels among Adivasi peasants in Jhabua: in a sample of 10 villages, it was found that the total annual income of all villages amounted to 1.10 crore Rupees, whereas total debt amounted to 4.18 crore Rupees. In one village, it was found that the annual income of all families amounted to 13,93,234 Rupees, but the combined annual debt stood at 63,29,558 Rupees (Jain, 2010; Singh, 2009c).

The impact of the debt burden has in turn been compounded by the sharp decline in the yields of BT cotton, which has been promoted in the area since the early 2000s by state authorities, metropolitan corporate interests, and local businesses. Between 2004 and 2008, cotton production dropped from 27,225 bales to 3,983 bales; the germination rate of BT cotton seeds declined from 85 per cent to 27 per cent between 2005 and 2006. In

2005-06, the BT cotton crop stood at 442 kilos per hectare; the subsequent year it had declined to 370 kilos, and ultimately, in 2008-09, it stood at 151 kilos per hectare. When cotton productions started to fail, tomato cultivation was encouraged among Adivasi cultivators. This entailed further indebtedness, as it is necessary to spend as much as 9.700 rupees on chemical fertilizer in order to cultivate tomatoes on one hectare of land. Tomato cultivation also requires six times more water than traditional food crops, and as a result of over-consumption of water, there is now a drought in Jhabua every second year, which further undermines local agricultural livelihoods (Jain, 2010). The local administration, however, refused to even acknowledge the problem. When confronted with the question of indebtedness among farmers, an official in the district administration quipped: 'Arrey, they are poor farmers. Who will give them credit? They are not even creditworthy' (cited in Singh, 2009c).

In a district where 71 per cent of all families live below the poverty line, with annual per capita income at a meagre 8,541 Rupees, and in a region which figures in the lower rungs of the Madhya Pradesh Human Development Index,⁵ the failure of agriculture means that many Adivasi villages will witness 'half of the adult population ... absent for half of the year, most working intermittently as casual seasonal labourers in urban construction sites, leaving only the old or the injured; in some villages here will be almost nobody' (Mosse, 2007: 16; see also Mosse et. al., 2005). A 2010 study by a local NGO surveyed 2528 households in 15 villages in Alirajpur district, and found that 82.5 per cent of all families surveyed migrated for part of the year in search of work; 60 per cent migrated for more than three months every year (DGVK/KMCS, 2010).

Migrating during the lean season between Diwali and Holi, and during the summer rains, between Holi and the onset of the monsoon, the Adivasis of Alirajpur typically head west, towards the booming economy of south Gujarat (Baviskar, 2008). Taking part in what

⁵ See GoMP (2007). The districts in question are Alirajpur, Jhabua, Khargone, and Badwani. In 2007, when the last human development report for Madhya Pradesh was published, Alirajpur was still a tehsil in Jhabua district.

Baviskar (2008: 9) has aptly called 'the political economy of desperation' the migrants work in groups for piece rates negotiated by labour contractors that function as intermediaries for the actual employers. As a result, the names of Adivasi workers do not figure on factory payrolls, and their vulnerability is enhanced by the fact that 'adivasi migrants lack political representation; they fail to become a constituency for labour departments, unions, municipal authorities or political parties' (ibid.: 9).

The vulnerability of Adivasi migrant workers within the cauldron of Gujarat's informal economy – characterized by Jan Breman (2003: 221) as 'a regime of exploitation and exclusion' – is illustrated in the tragic fate of many of those who have found work in the 24 quartz-crushing units in Kheda and Godhra districts. In these factories, a series of official studies have shown air pollution levels are up to 660 times higher than the threshold limit value regarded as the international standard; exposure for more than a few months is associated with high risks of contracting silicosis. In fact, due to the risk of contracting silicosis, local workers stay well clear of the quartz-crushing units, the owners of which have consequently turned to the border districts of western Madhya Pradesh – and Alirajpur in particular – in order to recruit labour (Baviskar, 2008; Patel, 2009).

Adivasi workers are hired to feed the stone crushers with quartz rocks and fill bags with the silica powder thus produced. During a day, they fill between 600 and 700 bags of silica, earning between 1,50 and 2,00 Rupees per bag (Singh, 2011a). During a workday, which can be anything from eight to twelve hours long, they inhale large quantities of silica dust, and this has in turn resulted in a series of deaths due to silicosis among labour migrants from Alirajpur. A 2007 report by a local NGO documented 489 persons from 218 households in the district as having been exposed to silica dust. Out of these, 158 people had died, and 266 people were ill with silicosis. In other words, 86 per cent of those exposed to silica dust in Gujarat were either dead or incurably ill, and 94 per cent of silicosis deaths had occurred within three years of exposure to the deadly dust (Baviskar, 2008). By 2010, Shilpi Kendra, the local NGO who first documented the

spread of silicosis in Alirajpur, reported that the death toll had increased to 386 people across the three districts of Alirajpur, Jhabua, and Dhar. Alirajpur district authorities put the number of dead as a result of silicosis in Alirajpur at 277 people altogether (Singh, 2011a/b). As the majority of those affected by silicosis are primary wage earners for their families, it goes without saying that their illness and deaths have direct and dramatic impacts on the livelihoods of a great number of Adivasi households in the region (Baviskar, 2008).

These glimpses of the lived reality of poverty among the Bhils of western Madhya Pradesh is expressive of the fact that Adivasis are among those who 'have gained least and lost most from six decades of democracy and development in India' (Guha, 2010: 1). In more concrete terms, this means that almost half of India's Adivasis – some 44.7 per cent – live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2011; Mehta, Shepherd, Bhide and Shah, 2011). Scheduled Tribes registered far lower levels of poverty reduction than the non-ST population during the decades that witnessed the onset of India's recent growth story (early 1980s to 2005). Indeed, according to World Bank figures, Adivasis, who number some 84.3 million people and constitute approximately eight per cent of the Indian population, made up as much as 25 per cent of the poorest decile of India's population (World Bank, 2011: 41-2; Mehta et. al., 2011: 47; see also Thorat and Mahamallik, 2006).

Now, as Hickey and Du Toit (2007) have pointed out in their instructive discussion of poverty dynamics, the 'adverse incorporation' that undergirds and produces the material deprivation which is manifest in the form of malnutrition deaths, stagnant subsistence agriculture, flawed transitions to cash crop farming, and distress migration and incorporation into the most exploited sections of India's informal economy, is multi-faceted and tends to have political as well as socio-economic dimensions. Thus, in political terms, persistent poverty is related to the fact that subaltern groups have been incorporated in a given polity in such a way that mobilization around, politicization of,

and public awareness around issues and concerns that are relevant to their livelihoods and lifeworlds – be it in the form of recognition or redistribution or beyond – is effectively limited and constrained (Hickey and du Toit, 2007: 9-14, 22-23; see also Mosse, 2010: 1165-9; Hickey, 2010; Hickey and Bracking, 2005). In the data discussed above, these limitations and constraints are evident, for example, in official disregard towards the plight of indebted Adivasi peasants and migrant workers. Indeed, continuous petitioning to secure the health and well-being of Bhil migrant workers, both in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, since 2003 onwards has failed to elicit anything remotely resembling a substantial response from responsible authorities (Baviskar, 2008; Singh, 2010a/b). Adding to the impacts of official neglect, the state itself often appears as an opaque and unfamiliar entity to many in the Bhil communities of western Madhya Pradesh. For example, the DGVK/KMCS study of migrant workers cited above revealed that the vast majority of Adivasi construction workers do not have any contact with the police, administration, labour department officials or politicians in the areas they migrate to. Only a very small number of migrants have contact with the Member of the Legislative Assembly from their area of origin, and knowledge of laws, policies and institutions that safeguard migrant workers' rights is extremely scant (DGVK/KMCS, 2010).

This scenario can in turn be considered as one of many manifestations of a state-society relationship that I have elsewhere referred to as 'everyday tyranny' (Nilsen, 2010, 2012a/b). I use this term to refer to a situation in which the 'everyday state' was encountered in rural villages in the form of officials – forest guards, police constables and officers, revenue officials and so on – who imposed a predatory and coercive regime of corruption and violence that effectively denied even the most basic rights and entitlements of Adivasi communities in the region. The corruption and violence of the representatives of the local state articulated with an absence of any kind of substantial awareness of civil liberties, democratic rights, and constitutional provisions among the Bhil communities to produce a culture of fear and deference that effectively reproduced everyday tyranny over time (see also Baviskar, 1995).

A key hinge in the machinations of everyday tyranny in the region was the clash between, on the one hand, Adivasi use of the forest for cultivation, grazing, and as a source of timber for construction, wood for fuel, and minor forest produce for market exchange, and, on the other, state ownership and control over forests. For example, for Bhil communities in western Madhya Pradesh, clearing forestland and using it for cultivation – a practice known as *nevad* – is an integral survival strategy. However, when they engage in this practice, Adivasis are effectively in breach of forest laws that posit the state as the exclusive owner of forests in India and which categorizes *nevad* and other uses of the forest for livelihood and survival as “encroachments” on state property (see Gadgil and Guha, 1993; Prasad, 2004).

The fact that the customary practices of local communities were in fact illegal in turn came to serve as a lever for corrupt and coercive exactions by the forest guards that patrolled the Bhil habitats. Suraj,⁶ an activist with the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan, gave the following account of the corruption of the forest guards in Badwani and Khargone districts:

The Adivasi are nothing without the forest. The Adivasis’ work is never complete without going to the jungle. If we want to make *rotis*, we need wood but we have to pay to bring that wood from the forest ... Sometimes, in the wind and the rain, if our huts fall down and we need wood to repair them, even for that we would have to pay. If we want to make a hut with one small room, then we have to pay them 1000 Rupees. If we want to make a hut with two or three small rooms, then the person who makes this has to pay at least 5000 Rupees. And only then would they let them make this hut. Otherwise they would beat the person and torture him. (Interview, November 2009).

⁶ Not his real name.

Suraj proceeded to explain how the forest guards would extort bribes on a regular basis from the villages: 'The forest-*wallahs* would take *chanda* as and when it pleased them. Chicken, ghee – they would just take it from our homes as and when they wished. Even for doing *kheti*, they would take *chanda*.' The word "chanda" actually means "donation", but is used here to refer to the fact that forest guards would claim money, chicken, ghee and other assets as something that the villagers owed to them due to their position in the state hierarchy. In fact, in some villages, providing "chanda" to the forest guards in order to be able to use the forests had become so regularized that the *patels* – the village headmen – would approach the local forest department outposts carrying "donations" on behalf of an entire village. Serving also as the conduit through which the state extended its reach into village communities, the *patels* would pocket a share of the money collected from the village (interview, Rameshbhai,⁷ March 2010; field notes, February 2003).

In Alirajpur district, just north of Badwani, activists would tell stories about how how, if the forest guards found villagers walking along the road carrying a sickle, they would accuse them of going to collect fodder and beat them up; without fail, the officials would bribe in exchange for dropping criminal charges. Similarly, if people were caught carrying an axe or a load of firewood, they would be at the receiving end of beatings and extortion (field notes, February 2003). Claiming to intervene in the name of law and order, local police would crack down on the illegal distillation of *Mahua* liquor in Bhil homes or disputes between households in the villages and, similarly to the forest guards, demand bribes in money or in kind in order to turn a blind eye to the offence (field notes, 2003, 2009-2010). Thus Suraj mused: 'Earlier on, the police and forest-*wallahs* had total command over this area.' (Interview, November 2009).

This command was reproduced over time as the absence of an awareness of the basic rights of citizenship combined with a knowledge of the harm that state officials could

⁷ Not his real name.

inflict to produce a culture of fear and deference. A group of activists from a village in Khargone district portrayed local perceptions of state officials as follows:

They didn't know and whenever any authority came to their house; they thought that God himself had come. They were very afraid and whenever someone came, they would get even more frightened and start to tremble with fear. If the forest or police-*wallahs* came, then along with the children, even the elders would disappear into their houses. At that time, the looting was extreme and whatever was asked for had to be given to these people. We didn't know anything about any laws or rules. The *patel* only would communicate with the *sarkar*, the forest guards and the police, and everyone was scared to interfere with what the *patel* said. They were afraid that if they did interfere, they wouldn't be allowed to live in the village anymore. If we went to the *thana*, the police would say: "Why have you come here? Are you the *patel*? Go back and come with your *patel*." They would say like this. (Group interview, February 2010).

Dediya,⁸ a prominent activist from Alirajpur district, argued that the everyday tyranny of the state and its officials had come to be entrenched as a tradition in the area – the blatant illegalities of forest guards and police were assumed to be acting in accordance with what was their right: 'People, well, they had seen this happen for a long time, even before independence ... so there was always a fear of the State, from rule in that sense.' He went on to explain how this culture of fear and deference had become sedimented as tradition: '(Local people) just thought these must be the rules – that there must be some rule about chickens, to beat must have been a law – because these *thanedars*, police, they represented the law and they were always beating people up, so that must have been the law, so they thought. A lot of people assumed these were the laws, accepted them, and it became tradition.' (Interview, April 2010).

Thus, in western Madhya Pradesh, the everyday tyranny of local officials had been woven into the fabric of daily life to such an extent that it had become a guiding principle of how

⁸ Not his real name.

relations and interactions between Adivasis and the state were supposed to be structured (see also Baviskar, 1995). There may well have been discontent with the rapaciousness of state officials – indeed, it is hard to believe that there wasn't, given the persistent brutality and condescension that was meted out – but a 'public transcript' (Scott, 1990) of deference and obedience was adopted as a survival strategy in the Bhil communities of western Madhya Pradesh. Acquiescence in the face of a seemingly all-powerful state whose workings are at best opaque is of course entirely understandable when considered in terms of the compulsions of marginality⁹ – the necessity of securing a livelihood leaves little scope for anything but the path of least resistance, especially when considering the severe punishment that defiance of any kind is likely to provoke. However, there can be no doubt that the public transcript of deference and obedience contributed to cementing the adverse incorporation of Adivasis in the regional political economy. As Hickey and Bracking (2005: 851) have argued, challenging 'structural and deeply embedded poverty requires the sustained (re)allocation of resources and shifting of power relations within which chronic poverty is embedded', and this in turn necessitates political mobilization by subaltern groups in the public domain – but it was precisely such mobilization that was undermined by the reproduction of everyday tyranny. In order to understand the deep-rooted nature of Adivasi subordination – that is, in order to understand, as Dediya put it, that people had come to understand everyday tyranny itself as the law – I believe that it is necessary to probe the historical lineage of adverse incorporation among Adivasis in western India. Thus, in the next section of the chapter I delineate a two-pronged transformation that occurred in the Bhil heartlands of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan during the colonial era: on the one hand, the dispossession of land and forest resources as a result of colonial primitive accumulation; on the other hand, the political subjugation of Adivasi forest polities to the singular sovereignty of colonial state space.

⁹ I owe this term to Prakash Kashwan.

3) LINEAGES OF ADVERSE INCORPORATION IN THE BHIL HEARTLAND

3.1: Bhils in Precolonial Western India – A Thumbnail Sketch

The current scenario of poverty and disenfranchisement in western Madhya Pradesh is rooted in the transformation of the political economy of the Bhil heartland that started unfolding in the wake of the British defeat of the Marathas in 1818 and as a result of the consolidation of colonial power in western India.

Broadly speaking, the precolonial era had been one in which Bhil communities were embedded in 'unstable regimes of accommodation and conflict' (Guha, 1999: 112) with the tributary states of Rajput and Maratha elites which established themselves as royal overlords in the region from the early medieval era onwards and up to the late eighteenth century. Bhil communities were largely constituted around a mode of production that can best be described in Eric Wolf's (1999) terms as 'kin-ordered'. Shereen Ratnagar explains:

Kinship bonds and joint tenure are logically interrelated. It is in the ideology of descent of all members from a common ancestor that closeness is expressed, and the morality of kingship makes it feasible to hold resources as a collective ... In short, kinship is the relation of production (Ratnagar, 2003: 18, 19).

Bhil livelihoods were predominantly based on shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering, fishing and foraging, as well as various forms of exchange with communities of settled peasant cultivators in the plains of what is today north-western Maharashtra, southern Rajasthan, southern Gujarat and western Madhya Pradesh.

Politically, the Bhil communities were constituted as chiefdoms – or what, following Guha (1999) and Skaria (1999), I shall refer to as 'forest polities' – in which kinship was the

structuring principle. Bhil chieftains were typically the *primus inter pares* of a *bhauband*; that is, a fluid and loosely structured network of kinfolk, in which authority was decentred and shared to a significant extent, and in which the principal chiefs could only reproduce their position by constantly distributing surplus resources so as to secure the allegiance of his followers. As Skaria (1999: 83) writes of the Bhil chief, 'it was the very process of sharing authority that constituted his kingship'.

Whereas it may be tempting to conceive of the kin-based modes of organizing economic life and political power in Bhil communities as the Other of the tributary states of the Rajput and Maratha rulers of western India from the early medieval to the early modern period,¹⁰ it would be fundamentally mistaken to construe the Bhils of precolonial western India as always-already subaltern autochthons existing in an autonomous space beyond the reach and influence of the political institutions and cultures of Hindu kingdoms. Rather, as the work of Guha (1999), Skaria (1999) and Kapur (2002) has demonstrated, the Bhils 'were in fact deeply integrated into the political economy of medieval India' (Guha, 1999: 121). Bhils would engage in widespread exchange with Hindu peasant communities, trading wood, honey, lac and other forest products with them, and serving as village watchmen and guarding hill passes and forest routes in Rajput and Maratha kingdoms. When called upon to do so, they would join the ranks of the armies of the Rajput and Maratha rulers when they entered into conflict with external forces (see Kapur, 2002; Skaria, 1999; Guha, 1999). Bhil chieftains would also claim dues known as *haks* or *giras haks* from the peasant villages in the plains, and, crucially, Rajput and Maratha rulers recognized these claims as legitimate. If these dues were withheld, the Bhils would conduct raids in plains villages as a way of sustaining 'claims to giras and through it political power and sovereignty' (Skaria, 1999: 135). And significantly, tributary rulers would not necessarily interpret this as an unacceptable attack on sovereign territory, but rather as an indication that it would be necessary to renegotiate Bhil claims on the villages within their realm. In this sense, then, the relationship

¹⁰ Note on the Mughals.

between Bhil forest polities and Hindu tributary states were mediated through the construction of what Skaria (1998: 208) has called 'shared sovereignty'.

Following on from this, shared sovereignty can arguably be understood as a foundational principle for the structuring of political power in tributary states. Given that tributary states were congealed from a mode of surplus appropriation in which monarchical rulers depended on a complex lattice-work of relations with aristocratic fief-holders and landowners, they were of course also faced with what John Haldon (1993: 156) refers to as 'the tributary constraint' – that is, the challenge posed by the countervailing and centripetal forces constituted by the ruling elite that actually appropriates surplus from the peasantry (see also Banaji, 2010: 18-26). In this context, governing does not centre so much on the territorial extension of sovereignty outwards from a singular and central point of authority within a clearly defined territorial space, but rather hinges on attempts to 'manage the ebb and flow of this internal tension that was part and parcel of the historical dynamics of all traditional agrarian, subject-peasant ... societies' (Berkta, 1991: 260). The recognition of Bhil *haks*, the acknowledgement of the authority of Bhil chieftains, and the negotiations of claims in the wake of raids – these are arguably best understood as a set of manifestations of one particular way of managing this ebb and flow of internal tensions. The coming of colonial rule, however, set in train a series of transformations that over the course of a century would fundamentally alter the terms of Bhil incorporation into the regional political economy of western India. In the next section, I turn towards an analysis of this process.

3.2: Colonial State Space and the Making of Bhil Subordination

The term 'colonial state space' has been coined by Manu Goswami (2004: 8) to refer to 'a spectacular reworking of the institutional, political-economic, and spatial coordinates of the colonial state, its technologies of power, and its material and epistemological modes of reproduction' in the transition from mercantile to territorial colonialism that followed in

the wake of and as a response to the uprising of 1857. In this process, Goswami argues, the socioeconomic geography of colonial India was transformed, the modalities of state power were consolidated, and the reach of state-generated classificatory schemes was deepened (ibid.: 9).¹¹

Significantly, the construction of India as 'a single territory governable by the institutions of a unitary colonial state' (Wilson, 2007: 963) was not so much a question of imposing a distinctly European state on an Oriental periphery. Rather, as Branch (2012: 278) has argued, the conception of territorial sovereignty as the sole basis for governance in fact has its origins outside Europe, in 'early modern colonial practices' where the establishment of linearly defined territorial authority served as an effective means towards making claims on newly conquered territory (see also Hobson, 2009). Now, it is my contention that in the Bhil heartland of western India, the making of colonial state space pre-dates the 1857 watershed, and can be traced back to the 1818 victory over the Marathas. It is my contention that the roots of contemporary poverty and disenfranchisement can be located in this process, which unfolded gradually and unevenly across the nineteenth century and ultimately redefined the terms of Adivasi incorporation into the regional political economy. In the following, I trace this process along two axes – the economic, where a process of primitive accumulation unfolded partly as a result of the form of the implementation of strategies to promote peasantization and the commercialization of agriculture and partly as a result of forest enclosures, and the political, where shared sovereignty was extirpated and Bhil communities subjected to technologies of rule that greatly enhanced the infrastructural power of the state in the late colonial period.

¹¹ Note on parallel with Nandini Sundar (2007: 10).

3.2.1: Usury, Land Alienation and Forest Enclosures

Promoting settled agriculture so as to generate revenue for the state was a cornerstone of colonial policy from the Permanent Settlement of 1793 (see Guha, 1996; Washbrook, 1982; Stokes, 1980). From the perspective of the British colonizers who took power in Khandesh in 1818, the task was nevertheless a pressing one, given that prior their conquest of the Marathas, the region had been devastated by endemic conflict and devastating famines and crop-failures that caused a massive out-migration of peasant cultivators. The Khandesh Gazetteer of 1880 described the scenario that confronted them as follows:

In 1818, the British found Khandesh overgrown with forest and brushwood, the towns in ruins, the villages destroyed, the soil though fertile and well watered untilled, the roads cut up, the country empty of people, and the revenue collected with great difficulty and generally with the help of military force (KG, 1880: 272).

As Maratha rule unravelled in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Khandesh Bhils had turned to widespread raiding: 'The Bhils, who had before lived with the other inhabitants, and had, as village watchmen been the great instruments of police, retired to the hills, and when the famine was over, pillaged the rich plains villages' (ibid.: 254). The British clearly perceived the unquiet Bhils to be an impediment to the advance of settled agriculture: peasants, the Khandesh Gazetteer reports, were so afraid of the Bhils who 'carried sword and fire over the greater part of the province' that they refused to accept advances from the authorities for seed and tillage (ibid.: 257; see also Paranpaje, 1981; Guha, 1999).

Pacifying the Bhils was thus made a priority by the authorities, and initial efforts centred on the use of military force and harsh retaliatory measures against raiding chieftains. The ultimate failure of this approach prompted Mountstuart Elphinstone, the Governor of

Bombay, to call for a two-pronged change in strategy, in which 'fresh efforts should be made to encourage the wild tribes to settle as husbandmen, and to enlist and form a Bhil corps' (KG, 1880: 256). The change of policy is widely celebrated in colonial documents as a liberal and humanizing turn towards 'a conciliatory line of policy' and 'kindly measures' (Graham, 1856: 1; KG, 1880: 258). Indeed, D. C. Graham (1856: 1) proclaimed that Elphinstone's orders 'breathed the purest spirit of philanthropy' and that their implementation would 'lead the hitherto wild man within the pale of civilized life, and to unfold to him the blessings of peace and good order'. I will discuss the Khandesh Bhil Corps and its significance at length below, but first I focus on efforts to promote sedentarization among the Bhils – the consequences of which fell far short of Graham's panegyric vision.

In order to make tax-paying peasants out of the recalcitrant Bhils, Khandesh was divided into three Bhil Agencies, each of which was placed under the charge of a resident European officer. The efforts to promote settled agriculture among the Bhils were focused on the southern Bhil Agency, covering the districts of Jamner, Bhadgaon, and Chalisgaon, as well as the districts near the Satmala range. Two British officers were put in charge of 'bringing the Satmala Bhils to tillage' (KG, 1880: 259).

Their efforts appeared to be quite successful as 'the Bhils continued to settle in the plains; the south colonies prospered and many of the wild Bhils in the east of Jamner took to agriculture'. The Bhils, colonial authorities asserted, 'were now reclaimed' (ibid.: 259). Indeed, in 1854, the Gazetteer of the East India Company in celebratory tone declared that 'the Bheels, from outcasts have become members of civil society, daily rising in respectability and becoming useful and obedient subjects of the state' (cited in Paranpaje, 1981: 6; see also Graham, 1856: 220). However, a more measured assessment was presented by Captain J. Rose (1856: 225) who served as acting commandant of the Khandesh Bhil Corps in the mid-1850s. In his view, it could not be said that the Bhils had become 'successful and prosperous farmers' as they lacked the

experience in cultivation. Agricultural land in the jungle tended to become unproductive as the soil was not manured; crops did not grow satisfactorily and could not be efficiently guarded. As a result, the Bhils would often earn their keep by working as crop-guards for other, non-Adivasi peasants (ibid.: 225). This scenario would in turn worsen as the colonial authorities in Khandesh sought to promote commercial agriculture in the region from the late 1850s onwards.

The transition from Company Raj to colonial rule proper from the late 1850s onwards witnessed the onset of processes that would spur land alienation and the growth of bonded labour in Khandesh. During the early 1850s, survey settlements had been implemented and revenue levels assessed anew. Alongside this, the administrative structure in the district was streamlined in order to function more effectively, and a civil court system was established. By the early 1860s, railroads had connected Khandesh to Bombay – one of the key nodes through which colonial India was linked to the orbits of global capitalist accumulation (see Paranpaje, 1981; Upadhyay, 1986). The sum effect of these changes was to encourage a massive and rapid influx of Gujar peasants who settled in Khandesh and expanded cotton production. Taking advantage of the global market opportunities that the US Civil War had generated in this sector, the Gujars, with the enthusiastic backing of the colonial state, colonized the fertile lands along the Tapi river, and thus propelled a significant expansion of tillage in Khandesh: in 1852, an average of seven to eight per cent of all land in the district was cultivated; by 1878, districts like Nandurbar, Shahada, and Taloda had witnessed increases in tilled area ranging from 60, via 72 to 78 per cent respectively (Upadhyay, 1986: 46). Writing in the late 1860s, a British official celebrated the changes in Khandesh:

To one who knew Khandesh twenty years ago ... the change seems wonderful. T that time a vast belt of good soil, covered with a tangled growth of *babhul* or *pilas* trees, stretched for miles from the Satpuda hills south towards the Tapti. In almost every sub-division were wide stretches of bush land broken by isolated patches of tillage. Now, save in parts of

Chalisgaon on the borders of the Nizam's territory, no tracts of good land lie waste. Scrub jungle there still is, but this is confined to rocky lines of hill or rolling stony ground that will yield no crop save grass. Cultivation has been pushed almost to the very slopes of the Satpuda hills, and even in the west where the climate is bad and population scanty, the area of arable waste has been immensely curtailed (KG, 1880: 297).

The advance of commercial farming, however, was far from a blessing for the Bhils in Khandesh, Rather, as demand for land and labour increased, the rise of commercial agriculture in the region created 'the basis for the initial subsumption of the Bhils by the landed gentry' (Upadhyay, 1986: 46).

The dynamic that was set in train was one where Bhils became indebted to the Gujars, who had also established themselves as the key moneylenders in the region. Loans at usurious interest rates were taken for cultivation, for paying revenues, and for consumption. As prices for agricultural produce declined in the late 1860s and crop yields were undermined by scanty rains, creditors increasingly forced their Bhil debtors into the newly installed and profoundly unfamiliar system of the civil courts, and effectively took control of their land. Thus dispossessed, the Bhils were forced to turn to agricultural labour in order to survive, and a situation of semi-bondage underpinned by usury emerged as a common scenario in Khandesh:

Of late the demand for Bhil labour has increased, and wages have greatly risen. On the other hand, the settlement of their disputes with their employers has been transferred from the magistrates to the civil courts, and the Gujar, by the ignorance and carelessness of the Bhil, has again at his mercy. The Gujar agrees with the Bhil that the Bhil is to till the Gujar's land and that they are to share the produce. An advance is made to the Bhil to buy bullocks, and a bond is drawn up with a premium of twenty-five per cent. The Bhil grows the crops and is fed by the Gujar. At the end of the year the Gujar takes the crop and puts off the Bhil on the ground that he has to pay for the bullocks. Next year the Bhil again gets clothes and food and is told he has still something to pay. He asks for a settlement of his

account, and as a preliminary is sent for a new stamped paper. With a few soft words, some money to buy a robe for his wife, and a little liquor, a new bond is made, the meaning of which the Bhil does not understand, and he goes back to his work hoping for better luck next year. After struggling on for a year or two he determines to leave. Then he finds that his partner, or master, has his acceptance for £20 (Rs. 200) or more; that the bullock he had toiled for is not his, and that he and all he has are at his master's mercy. A decree is passed, and the Bhil's goods are seized and sold. Then his master offers him a chance of return, and he serves for some time more. Again he grows tired of his position and refuses to work. The master has still some outstanding debts/and the threat of the civil court again brings the Bhil to order. Thus things go on from year to year (KG, 1880: 197-8).

In this way the Gujar peasant-moneylender was able to keep Bhil debtors in his power 'in spite of the great rise in the value of their labour ...' (KG, 1880: 83).

Another form of bonded labour often resorted to by landless Bhils was annual labour mortgages, in which a landless labourer and a rich peasant would sign a *saalkhat* – a labour mortgage bond – in which the former pledges to work for the latter for a full year against a stipulated sum of money that is advanced to the *saaldar* – the labourer – either in part or in whole. 'Under this system', it is estimated in the Khandesh Gazetteer, 'a labourer takes from three to four years to work off a debt of Rs. 100' (KG, 1880: 199).

This process can be understood as a particular moment in the more general process of capitalist development that unfolded in the Deccan in the nineteenth century, which, as Jairus Banaji (2010: 301) has argued, revolved around the penetration of the monied capitalist into the small-production economy of the Deccan ...'. Across the region, an ascendant class of big peasants established control over small producers through usury, which on the one hand effectively dispossessed the small peasantry – for example, the Khandesh Bhils – and, on the other hand, rendered possible the exploitation of the peasantry by the revenue-collecting colonial state (ibid.: 301-17; see also Hardiman,

1996). Although the power of the *sahukars* (moneylenders) came in for a challenge in the Deccan riots of 1875 and legislation was subsequently passed to come to grips with the problem, the colonial state never managed to effectively check usury in rural western India – a fact which was amply demonstrated by a 1938 report which found Bhils to still be extremely dependent upon moneylenders throughout the region (see Guha, 1999: 184; Catanach, 1970: 162).

It should be noted, however, that Khandesh is perhaps the sub-region within the Bhil heartland that, due to the demand for land and labour that flowed from its structural integration into the global cotton economy,¹² has witnessed the highest levels of land alienation as a result of usury.¹³ In particular, the more interior parts of the Bhil region in western India seems to have avoided the problem to a larger degree.¹⁴ Thus, in western Madhya Pradesh, land alienation seems to have been far less pronounced than in Khandesh. Aurora (1972: 181) notes that whereas some land had passed from Bhils to commercial castes as a result of indebtedness prior to 1947, merchants and usurers never took much interest in Adivasi land as it was considered to be 'of submarginal productivity'. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the colonial imperative of peasantization pushed the Bhil cultivators into their current position of dependence on *sahukari* (moneylending) as '(t)he necessity of raising money to pay taxes in cash put both ordinary peasants and patels in the power of sahkars' (Kela, 2012: 208). Indeed, this was the central complaint made in a petition that was submitted to colonial authorities by a group of Bhil patels in 1883; it complained that the *sahukars* charge us with compound interest, and when we are unable to pay ... file claims against us' (cited in Kela, 2012: 208). Indebtedness in turn enabled many moneylenders to exercise control over the land and labour of Bhils *without* actually formally taking over their land. A study of the Bhils of Ratanmal in Gujarat in the 1950s describes the process as follows:

¹² See Banaji (2010: Chapter 10) for a brilliant analysis of this process.

¹³ Note on Warlis of Thane, land alienation in South Gujarat, and in Rajasthan.

¹⁴ I owe this point to David Hardiman (personal communication, December 2012).

Indebtedness among the Bhils was rampant at one time and is so, to a considerable extent, even now. Since their income is sufficient just for about ten months even in a good year, there is usually a period of three to four months before the harvest ... when they are forced to depend on the traders and the money-lenders for sustenance and seeds. The usual rate of interest ... varied from 50 to 70%, compoundable once or twice a year, and with the next harvest as security. As soon as the crop was ready, the money-lender ... or his agent would get the crop evaluated by the *talati* at a rate considerably lower than the rates prevailing in the market and take away the bulk of the crop in part payment of the loan. Thus once a Bhil gets into the talons of a *sahukars* ... there is little hope of his getting out of it. Debt would go on mounting, till a time might come when he would be dispossessed of his lands and sometimes, as a measure of mercy, be allowed to cultivate it as tenant on a crop-share basis (Nath, 1960: 50).

To this day, in large part due to poorly developed rural credit systems, indebtedness remains a substantial problem among the Bhils of Badwani and Alirajpur in Madhya Pradesh (see Banerjee, n.d.).

A more direct dispossession of natural resources occurred in the form of the enclosure of forests that unfolded during the second half of the nineteenth century in India (see Grove, 1996; Rangarajan, 1999; 1999; Gadgil and Guha, 1993). The process was ignited by economic compulsions generated by Britain's rise to the status of hegemon within the capitalist world-system. Having exhausted other available sources of forest resources through the expansion of ship-building, iron smelting and farming, India's vast forests, especially its teak forests, moved centre stage in the colonial project. The early days of colonial exploitation of forest resources were driven partly by the need for timber for ship-building to sustain British naval supremacy, but also by the revenue orientation of the land policy, which demanded that forests be cleared so as to expand agricultural cultivation. After 1853, the extension of the railway network in India, and consequently the need for durable wood for railway sleepers, came to fuel forest extraction. Moreover,

forests also supplied fuel for the steam trains before coal became a viable option (Gadgil and Guha, 1993: 118-23).

In her seminal study of Adivasis and state formation in Bastar, Nandini Sundar (2007: 5) has remarked that the '(c)olonial transformation of local economies was achieved through administrative and legal means', and this is certainly true in terms of the establishment of colonial control over India's forests. An imperial Forest Department was established in 1864 due to the perceived need for 'checking the deforestation of past decades' and for 'forging legal mechanisms to assert and safeguard state control over forests' (Gadgil and Guha, 1993: 122). In 1865, the first Indian forest act was formulated. This act 'was passed to facilitate the acquisition of those forest areas that were earmarked for railway supplies' and 'sought to establish the claims of the state to the forests it immediately required, subject to the proviso that existing rights not be abridged'. More or less immediately, the search commenced 'for a more stringent and inclusive piece of legislation' (ibid.: 123). This was brought about by the Indian Forest Act of 1878, where the prime concern was with removing the existing ambiguity about 'the absolute proprietary right of the state' (ibid.: 124). This concern was in turn embodied in the abolition of usufruct rights: 'the act was a comprehensive piece of legislation which, by one stroke of the executive pen, attempted to obliterate centuries of customary use by rural populations all over India' (ibid.: 134).¹⁵

¹⁵ It is imperative to note that the forest laws were accompanied by the development of legislation that 'allowed the acquisition of land by the crown' (Singh, 1986: 10). Starting with the Bengal Regulation I in 1824, this process proceeded via the extensions of the principles of this act to Bombay (1839), Calcutta (1850), Madras (1852), the whole of India (1857), and finally, following amendments (1870), yielding the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (ibid.: 9-10). At this point the colonial state had 'established and consolidated its authority over and ownership of land and other natural resources' (Parasuraman, 1999: 38) through the establishment of eminent domain.

In Bombay Presidency, institutions geared towards management of forest resources were established as early as 1847, with an initial focus on generating revenue for the colonial state by taxing on-going felling of trees by Bhils and timber contractors. As Guha (1999: 165) notes, this was an approach that 'would obviously produce an easy revenue, but would have little effect on the actual management of the forests, and hence on their conservation'. As the profits of the Bombay Forest Department started to decrease from the late 1850s onwards, the forest bureaucracy sought to extend its control by 'instituting departmental extraction of timber instead of relying on contractors as it had hitherto done' (ibid.: 165). At this point, a conservationist critique of existing practices started to gain ground and exercised significant influence on the legislation that was to follow in 1865 and 1878. The impact of these changes on the Bhil communities can be seen most clearly, perhaps, in the Dangs (Hardiman, 1994; Skaria, 1999).

The trade in timber itself was nothing very new in the Dangs; indeed, in the precolonial times, Bhil chiefs would engage extensively with timber merchants from southern Gujarat and then funnel the income from this trade into the maintenance of alliances and positions within their *bhauband*. In the 1830s, the timber merchants of Gujarat sought to work the Dangs through more intensive lease agreements with the chieftains. Although this potentially increased the power of the timber merchants relative to the Dangis chiefs, they nevertheless had to recognize their authority, could only access the forests through them, and were in no position to impose any limits on the way in which ordinary Dangis used the forest (Skaria, 1999: 179-81). This all started to change in the 1840s, when the British, who until then had bought the timber they needed for ship construction from Gujarati merchants, felt that they were paying too much (Hardiman, 1994: 113). Thus, in 1842, the Dangis chiefs signed a series of leases with the British, allowing them direct access to their forests. This, in other words, was a moment, as Skaria (1999: 179) puts it, in which 'the growing subordination of the forest polity was made visibly manifest ...'. The chiefs were quick to realize that they had signed leases that 'took a lot while giving

very little in return' (Hardiman, 1994: 113) and therefore withdrew from the agreement. The leases were then redrafted and signed anew the following year (Skaria, 1999: 181).

The new leases gave the British full and exclusive power to cut, conserve and plant timber in the Dangs, and empowered the government to establish customs posts and to levy taxes on timber and other commodities that were removed from the forests. Furthermore, the leases were supposed to be restricted to sixteen years, but this was inconsequential, as the British insisted on being granted the prerogative of renewing the leases according to their own wishes (Hardiman, 1994: XXX). Thus, whereas the Bhil chiefs saw the leases in terms of the shared sovereignty that had prevailed in the region prior to 1818, and as an alliance that affirmed their political power in the Dangs, this was not how the British perceived the arrangement:

British officials were ... set on treating the leases as granting them a control over forests which excluded even Dangi chiefs. At the request of the chiefs, the leases had permitted Dangis to retain the ability to cut timber for their own use. But colonial officials interpreted these provisions very restrictively, and tried to prevent Dangis from felling timber or using the forests ... (B)y excluding Dangis from the use of trees, the British implicitly made a claim to political sovereignty, and denied Bhil raj. And all this for a payment that the merchants would have willingly topped (ibid.: 185).

From the 1860s onwards, the rise of discourses of forest conservation in colonial policies coupled with the increase in timber extraction from the Dangs engendered demands for stronger protective interventions in the Dangi forests. The Forest Department conceived of protection primarily in terms of protecting the forests 'from the people who lived there' (Hardiman, 1994: 121). Thus, the Forest Act of 1865 established the category of "Reserved Forests" as areas in which the government could ban all cultivation. The subsequent Forest Act of 1878 further extended colonial attempts to exclude the tribals from the forest by adding the category "Protected Forests". Now, the Dangs were of course formally under the authority of the Bhil chiefs and the laws of the Bombay

government did not apply there. This, however, was addressed in 1879, when the Forest Department was instructed to delineate forests for reservation in the region. Ten years later, the demarcation of the forests had been completed and 34 per cent of the area was classified as “Reserved Forest”, thus banishing many Dangi Bhils from their habitat and livelihoods (ibid.: 122-9).¹⁶

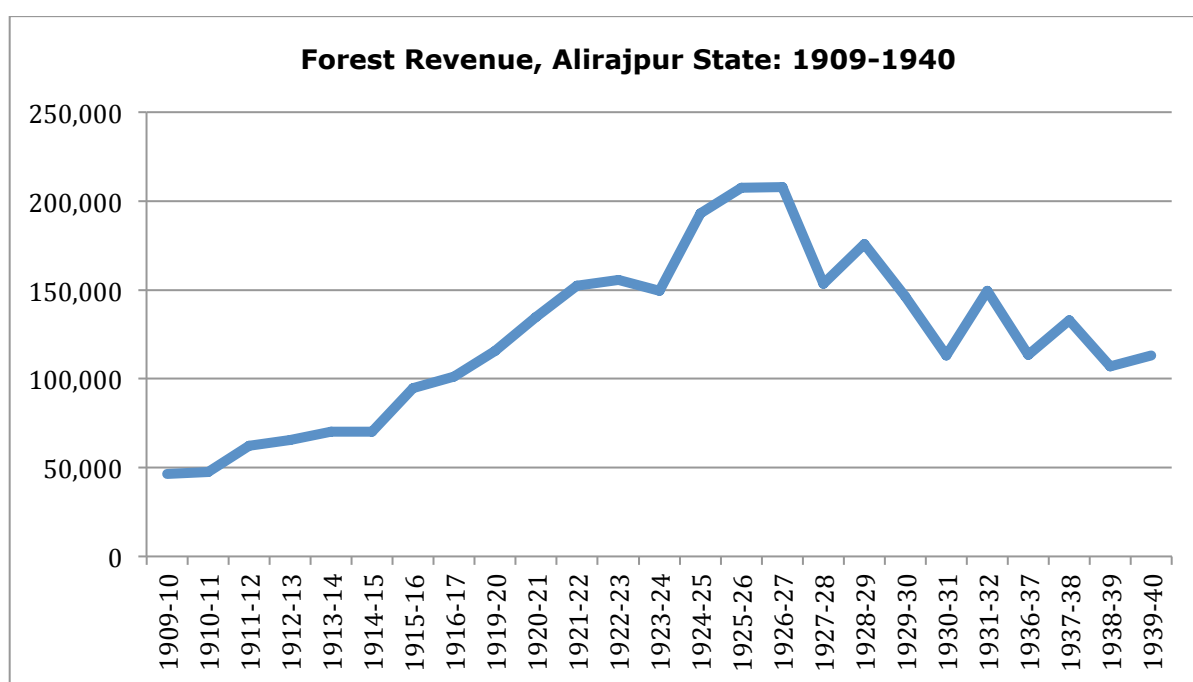
In western Madhya Pradesh, the enclosure of forests started in 1869, when the British deposed Gangadev, the *raja* of Alirajpur, and put the state under the superintendence of the Bhil Agent, Thomas Caddell (Kela, 2012: 204). At this point in time, the state treasury was empty and the state was in dire fiscal straits, owing some 113,990 Rupees to various creditors and with expenditure far in excess of receipts (Alirajpur Administrative Report, 1869: 8, 2). The forest, therefore, was eyed as a potential source of much-needed revenue. However, Caddell noted that ‘(t)he forests formerly rich in teak have been ruthlessly destroyed, and they now contain very little valuable timber’ (ibid.: 6).¹⁷ Nevertheless, there was a rich yield of bamboo, Mahua, lac, honey and wax, which was being ‘exported in considerable quantities to Guzerat and Malwa’ (ibid.: 6). Some of these products had been subject to taxation before 1869, but the new arrangements that Caddell put in place declared the forests to be the property of the state, and even the sale of bamboo and timber within Alirajpur state was subject to taxation (Kela, 2012: 206). Between 1870-71 and 1880-81, duties on timber and bamboo yielded as much as 26,253 Rupees (ibid.: 207).

A more comprehensive forest policy was put in place in Alirajpur in the early twentieth century. At this point, ‘indiscriminate clearing of forest for cultivation (was) prohibited and (t)imber cutting was brought under the control of the Forest Department’ (Luard, cited in Kela, 2012: 223). In 1909-10, the Diwan of Alirajpur still complained that the

¹⁶ Note on forest enclosures in Khandesh.

¹⁷ This contrasts to a comment made by a colonial officer in 1839, who remarked that Alirajpur at this point had ‘a great export of teak timber’ (Kela, 2012: 202).

local staff of the Forest Department 'is not such as can be relied upon and requires strict and constant supervision by the higher officials of the state' (AAR¹⁸, 1910: 19). At this point in time, 289 square miles of forest had been declared as falling into the category of "Reserved Forests" – that is, more than one third of the entire area of the state. Outside the reserves, local Bhils could apply for permits to fell trees, but this system was widely abused by the Forest Rangers, who enriched themselves through the extraction of bribes (ibid.: 19). However, the Forest Department was gradually restructured and, if the collection of forest revenue is any indication, seems to have become a far more efficient apparatus as a result of this:



(Compiled from AAR, 1909-10 to 1939-40)

As is evident from the forest revenue figures provided in the state's administrative reports from 1909-10 to 1939-40, forest revenue increased from 38,473 Rupees in 1910 to as much as 115,534 Rupees ten years later, and after 1917 forest revenue never fell below 100,000 Rupees per year, thus contributing substantially to the fiscal recovery of

¹⁸ AAR is used throughout to refer to the annual Alirajpur Administration Report, published from 1910 onwards by the Alirajpur court in cooperation with the Central India Agency.

the state (see statistical tables appendix for details). Timber sales remained the most important source of forest revenue throughout the period.

Although the data offered by colonial records is somewhat more limited in the case of Badwani state, it is quite possible to discern a similar process unfolding there (see table below). An administrative report from 1865 reports that the state at that point was rich in teak and other kinds of valuable timber, but that no steps were being taken to conserve the state's forests. There was at this time a great demand for timber, and 'large quantities were being cut and the forests were being greatly injured; it therefore became necessary to preserve them' (BSAR, 1865: 4). Interestingly, at this point the Bhils were not being singled out as the chief threat to the forests, as it was assumed that 'their numbers are so small that they cannot do much injury' (ibid.: 4).

As a protective measure, the cutting of teak was prohibited, and by 1870 timber exports were being taxed. Within a decade a forest department had been established and rules introduced that allowed the Bhils to cut timber for sale during one month every year. Additional taxes were imposed on forest produce for sale and consumption, as well as on grazing and the collection of firewood in the forest. By 1894 a forest officer had been appointed and in 1897 forest boundaries were demarcated in the state (Kela, 2012: 230). By 1909, when the state was to pass from British superintendence to the rule of Rana Sahib Ranjit Singh, it was claimed that the introduction of forest taxes and 'the establishment of a proper forest administration' had contributed greatly to improving Badwani's fiscal position (ibid.: 233).

Forest Revenue, Badwani: 1911-41	
1911-12	68,470
1912-13	73,216
1913-14	71,232
1915-16	66,701
1916-17	76,618
1918-19	58,628
1923-24	87,844
1939-40	45,222
1940-41	55,425

(Compiled from BAR,¹⁹ 1911-12 to 1940-41)

The enclosure of forest resources were thus an integral facet of the socioeconomic processes that throughout the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries undermined the precolonial livelihoods of the Bhils and gave rise to the marginal subsistence peasants who today are joining the ranks of western India's informal proletariat in large numbers in order to eke out a living (see Breman, 1996).

Equally importantly, however, as a result of the introduction of colonial legislation, the forests of western India also came to be vigorously policed. Thus, in Alirajpur, for example, throughout the period from 1909-10 to 1939-40, the overwhelming majority of offences committed against the forest law consisted of illegal felling of timber, and the majority of those involved were Bhils (see statistical tables appendix). And this brings us to a crucial point: forest enclosures did not just dispossess Bhils of access to a crucial livelihood resource; it also contributed directly to the subordination of Adivasi communities to the state.

As the forest departments in various parts of India started to exercise a greater degree of control over the use of forest resources, an institutional infrastructure was developed in the form of extensive networks of outposts to allow forest rangers to patrol the forest

¹⁹ BAR is used to refer to the annual Badwani Administration Report, published from 1911-12 onwards by the Badwani court in cooperation with the Central India Agency.

areas. It is through this process that the all too familiar figure from the narratives of everyday tyranny – the forest guard – emerges as a fearsome and predatory character in the Bhil lifeworld. In the Dangs this process got under way as early as 1903, inaugurating an era in which '(t)he power of the guards was all too evident to Dangis – they could demand forced labour, impose restrictions on forest use, stop cultivation on any site on the grounds that rules were being violated or even in some cases the evacuation of villages. They used their position to make heavy demands from villagers' (Skaria, 1999: 213).

Along with police officers and the revenue officials – the *patwaris* – the guards and rangers became 'the new kings of the forest' (Guha, 1999: 160). Indeed, the complaints recorded in Thana district in the late nineteenth century are almost identical to the contemporary narratives of Bhil Adivasis discussed above (see section 2): 'If the (forest) guard meets us he ill-treats us. He makes us give him fowls for nothing, when we cut wood for our houses'. In fact, in this case the giving of bribes to use the forest had taken on such a regular character that '(each) hamlet pays annually bribe of 2 rupees to the forest peon for allowing villagers facilities for cutting wood for building etc. We have been paying this money for many years' (Guha, 1999: 170). Similarly, in 1923, the Forest Grievances Committee of Bombay Presidency found that '(a)lmost everywhere the villagers directly or indirectly conveyed ... that the lower subordinates in the (Forest) Department practised zooloom (oppression) in manifold ways' (ibid.: 170). Testifying even further to the extent to which the everyday tyranny of the forest guards had been woven into the fabric of social life in Bhil communities, a colonial official in 1938 wrote that in west Khandesh 'instances of assault, beatings, and hurt are of such constant occurrence that they do not arouse much comment locally, unless unusual brutality has occurred' (ibid.: 170). This in turn spilled over into the postcolonial scenario. The 1960 report from the Elwin committee noted the tendency of forest rangers to 'adopt a dictatorial attitude towards the people' and to 'dominate the scene as petty dictators' (Elwin, 1960: 62, 59). In 1970, finally, a survey of Akrani district in west Khandesh,

found that Forest Guards conducted themselves like 'little Hitlers' in relation to Adivasi communities (Guha, 1999: 149).

At this point, socioeconomic processes of dispossession can clearly be seen as fuelling developments along the second axis of adverse incorporation that I want to discuss here, namely the political subordination that fundamentally reshaped the structuring of sovereignty the Bhil heartland during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

3.2.2: Towards Singular Sovereignty in the Bhil Heartland

The constitution of colonial state space, Manu Goswami argues, was fundamentally concerned with the restructuring of sovereignty:

Committed to spreading its authority evenly throughout the territory, to filling up the geographical space of colonial India with its authoritative presence, the post-1857 colonial regime made territorially comprehensive claims to rule. Territorial consolidation involved the attempted monopolization of regulatory powers by an increasingly centralized apparatus, the development of an elaborate, hierarchical bureaucracy that surveyed, mapped and measured both land and people, the deepening and widening of the administrative and military reach of the state, and a determined reinvestment in epistemic modalities of rule (Goswami, 2004: 31).

In the Bhil heartland of western India region, this process unfolded gradually and unevenly across the nineteenth century and ultimately redefined the terms of Adivasi integration into the polity from shared to singular sovereignty. The process can be thought of as unfolding in two phases: firstly, military pacification and the extirpation of raids; secondly, the development of a state apparatus with considerable 'infrastructural power' (Mann, 1984) – evident above all in the fiscal and coercive domains of the state.

'From 1818 till 1825', writes James Outram in his memoirs, 'Candeish stood to Western India in the relation which Ireland still bears to Britain'. The commander of the Khandesh Bhil Corps proceeded to argue: 'It was "*the difficulty*" of the government. It was a difficulty which all regarded as insuperable ...' (Outram, 1853: 8). In the aftermath of the vanquishment of the Marathas, the British had adopted a policy towards the erstwhile rulers of Khandesh and Malwa that was centred on the maintenance of 'an elaborate network of subordinate treaties which guaranteed the rights of the larger Maratha houses Shinde, Holkar, Pawar' (Gordon, 1994: 153). In addition, the rights of the Rajput houses that were subordinate to the Marathas were guaranteed. 'The immediate result of these treaties', Stewart Gordon argues, 'was peace on the plains of Khandesh and Malwa, an area ravaged by two decades of war' (ibid.: 153). However, the British were still confronted with the challenge of dealing with the Bhils, who according to the leading colonial official John Malcolm had 'become the enemies of order and peace' (cited in Gordon, 1994: 158). Malcolm's statement is expressive of the fact, as Skaria (1999: 157-61) has pointed out, that from the perspective of the colonial state, raids could not be conceived as anything other than a hostile attack on a sovereign territorial domain. The Bhils, from this perspective, were a group 'whose sole occupation was pillage and robbery, whose delight alone consisted in the murderous foray, and whose subsistence depended entirely on the fruits of their unlawful spoil' (Graham, 1856: 210). And their raids were therefore not to be met with negotiation, but rather with retaliation and reparations aimed at putting an end to the practice once and for all.

In 1820, Captain John Briggs turned his attention to the task of subduing the Khandesh Bhils for the first time.²⁰ The initial strategy was centred on dispatching military troops into the hills to quell the unruly chieftains. The chiefs who were willing to cease raiding were offered state pensions in exchange for functioning as watchmen over a certain part of the district. Despite some initial successes, these efforts eventually foundered as the insurgent Bhils refused to settle in the plains (KG, 1880: 257). 1822 witnessed new

²⁰ Note on preceding measures against other groups – mercenaries, Pindaris.

outbreaks of raiding and revolts among the Bhils, and when Captain Briggs departed from the area in 1823, 'Khandesh was still harassed and unsafe' (ibid.: 258). By 1825 it was evident that military efforts had been an abject failure, and a change of strategy was called for. Under the aegis of Elphinstone's 'conciliatory' approach, this change came in the form of the establishment of the Khandesh Bhil Corps (KBC) in the north-eastern division of the district. Spearheaded by James Outram, recruits for the KBC were enlisted from among the Bhils, and over time the strength of the corps rose to some 690 troops headquartered at Dharangaon. Several successful military expeditions were made in response to raiding and revolts among the Bhils in 1826 and 1827, and in 1828 the Khandesh Collector 'reported that, for the first time in twenty years, the district had enjoyed six months rest' (KG, 1880: 259). Indeed, the success of the KBC in suppressing tribal resistance was such that it would be emulated through the establishment of the Mewar Bhil Corps in XXXX and the Malwa Bhil Corps in 1838.

Having thus secured 'the overthrow of the patriarchal authority of the Naiks' (Graham, 1856: 214) by military means, the colonial authorities proceeded to promote the settlement of the former insurgents as peasant cultivators. A pardon was offered on condition that the Bhils not challenge British authority in the future, and this was inscribed in a *kowl*, signed by the Bhil Agent, that all Bhils had to carry with them:

You have lived in the hills, and plundered the roads and country of the Sirkar, and committed thefts and various crimes: now you are present, and have petitioned the Sirkar that if pardoned you will not again offend, and that if Tukavee be given to you, you will cultivate and thus earn a subsistence. On this your prayer has been considered, and the Sirkar has shown favour to you, and has this once pardoned your past crimes, and has given you for your support Tukavee, and land to cultivate; and this Kowl is written and presented to you that you may remain in your village, and cultivate, and thus gain your livelihood. After this, if youn again commit any offence, your former crimes will not be considered as forgiven, but you will have to answer for both them and the new crime (Graham, 1856: 218).

As part and parcel of what the British in fact believed to be a 'liberal system of government' (ibid.: 220), the *haks* of the Bhil chieftains were investigated and settled, and, in order to bring an end to raiding, paid as 'colonial pensions' (Guha, 1999: 141). Vainglorious self-congratulation was never in short supply among colonial officials, and Graham accordingly summed up the outcomes of the strategy as follows:

The result of this reticulated settlement was shortly manifested, and these districts, formerly the scene of every outrage, where neither life nor property was secure, now enjoyed tranquillity; the roads, formerly hazardous for the armed party, were traversed at all hours by single passengers; the formidable list of crimes had dwindled down to the report of a few petty thefts; and the Bheels, from outcasts, had become members of a society daily rising in respectability and appearance, and becoming useful and obedient servants of the State (Graham, 1856: 221).

Drawing the Bhil communities more closely and firmly within the parameters of the colonial state was also effected by a redefinition of the role the *patels* – the traditional village headmen – who were now made responsible for assisting the British in promoting settled agriculture and for 'forwarding to the Agents correct returns of all the Bhils within their range, of the mode by which they subsisted, and of the adequacy or otherwise of the provision allotted by the state for their maintenance' (Graham, 1856: 214). Here, in fact, lie the roots of the present-day role of the *patels* and their co-optation as the state's bridgehead in the Bhil communities. Furthermore, arrangements were made for strict police surveillance of the Khandesh Bhils (ibid.: 214; see also Kela, 2012: 123).

It was the Dangs that would provide the KBC with its next 'opportunity of displaying its soldierly qualities in the field; and it surpassed the expectations of even its most ardent friends' (Outram, 1853: 27). Early in 1830, the KBC undertook a three-month campaign against Dangi chiefs who raided in the Khandesh plains (Skaria, 1999: 160). The incursions of the Corps, notes Skaria, made it clear to Dangis that the British could not

be kept out, and simultaneously generated 'a profound fear of British military power' (ibid.: 161). Eventually, 'all the Rajahs of the Daung ... were captured; their followers subdued; their whole country explored' (Outram, 1853: 28).

The process that followed, in which the chiefs' claims to *giras haks* were settled by the colonial state, illustrates the centrality of the extirpation of shared sovereignty in the construction of colonial state space. The key transformation, much like in Khandesh some years before, was that *giras haks* now came to be paid to the Dangi chiefs from the coffers of the Khandesh treasury. Ajay Skaria has captured the significance of this change well in the following passage:

Formerly, *giras* had been a marker of shared sovereignty over specific villages, and its receipt from the Gaekwads had been part of the formation of shifting alliances with Baroda. Its irregularity and variability was constitutive of *giras*, and indexed the shifts in alliances and power. Now as a fixed annual sum paid regularly from the Khandesh treasury, the right to it did not have to be demonstrated any longer through the regular wielding of power. Also, new *giras* dues could no longer be created through raids, nor could old ones be modified. Furthermore, the association between *giras* and shared sovereignty over specific villages in the plains was weakened. An annual lump payment associated with no particular village, *giras* was not so much a right claimed from plains villages as a conferral from above. Its association with the active wielding of power, and with a role in plains polities, was attenuated and made superfluous (1999: 162).

Thus, constituting *giras haks* as a pension payment from the colonial state rather than as a right claimed by the Dangi chiefs from plains villages over which they exercised a certain measure of authority in effect amounted to a de-recognition of the forest polities' claim to be co-sharers in sovereignty. This is in turn expressive of how 'the British understood sovereignty as exclusive, which is to say, they felt that there should be only one sovereign over a particular region ... Now, the British insisted on making each Bhil

chief owe allegiance only to one plains power – themselves in the case of the Dangi chiefs' (ibid.: 166).

The British also sought to promote singular or exclusive sovereignty as the organizing principle of political power internally among the Dangi Bhils. Gradually, the fluid and decentred organization of authority within and between *bhaubands* was eroded, and in its place emerged a system centred on the singular authority of a group of fourteen chiefs singled out by the British, who exercised absolute authority over a clearly demarcated territorial area within the Dangs. In this way, the sharing of kingship between Dangi chiefs was undermined. Moreover, individual chiefs were strengthened in relation to other members of the *bhauband* as they became the sole recipients of colonial largesse: they had greater control over the distribution of resources and could easily give less to rivals and contenders (Skaria, 1999: 232-6).

The strategy for pacification and settlement that had been pioneered in Khandesh and the Dangs was also applied in other parts of the Bhil heartland. As Skaria (1999: 174) notes, when it was applied in smaller princely states in the Central India Agency and the Rajputana Agency, the outcome was often that the British 'helped small kings consolidate their authority' in relation to Bhil chieftains whose power and claims they had previously been compelled to acknowledge.²¹

This trajectory is clearly present in Shashank Kela's analysis of the process of establishing settlements with the Bhil chieftains of Alirajpur and Badwani. In the Vindhya hills where Alirajpur state was located, colonial bureaucrats negotiated a series of agreements as early as 1818 onwards. According to the terms of these agreements, the Bhil chiefs would cease their raiding and undertake to protect roads and passes in exchange for a grant of revenue villages or monthly payments called *tankha*. In this early

²¹ NB! A future revision of this section of the paper will include a thorough discussion of how this process worked itself out in southern Rajasthan (Mewar).

stage of the process, Malcolm was more than ready to deploy military force against those chieftains who failed to live up to the terms of the agreement, and Kela shows, this was something that local Rajput rulers were keen to turn against the Bhils in order to squash their claims to dues and stipends from the courts (ibid.: 105-20).

On the southern banks of the Narmada river, in Badwani state, military pacification and settlement picked up momentum from 1833 onwards, when the KBC, with Outram at its helm, entered the Satpura hills in pursuit of a fugitive. Outram disapproved of the law and order situation in the state, and the Resident Officer argued that it was necessary to guarantee 'the Bheel Naicks of this district the regular payment of their acknowledged dues from the Burwanee Rajah and by holding an even balance between them to prevent oppression on the one hand and to secure obedience on the other' (cited in Kela, 2012: 130). Such sentiments, however, had little impact: the payment of dues to the Bhils was still in arrears in the late 1830s, and raiding consequently continued. Until the early 1840s, the colonial strategy centred on military reprisal against raiders, now aided by the Malwa Bhil Corps that had been founded in 1838 (ibid.: 130-36).

By the mid-1840s, the time was ripe for a more conciliatory approach. Leading colonial officials toured the Badwani hills on an annual basis and an investigation into the chieftains' claims was ordered. The payments of dues were to be closely monitored by colonial officials, but as Kela (2012: 138) correctly points out, there was little incentive for the Rajput courts to comply with the agreements that had been negotiated given that raids were subject to military retaliation by the colonial state. This situation finally came to a head with the outbreak of a large-scale rebellion in 1857 under the leadership of Bhima Naik. Lasting for five years, until 1862, a significant cause of the uprising was the non-payment of *haks* by various Rajput courts. Indeed, in a letter written in the wake of an attack on a large peasant settlement in the Narmada Valley in 1857, Bhima and another insurgent Bhil chief justified their actions by pointing out that 'we have plundered the village of Dutwada because we have not received our Huks ... due from the

Sirkar Holkur since the arrival of the British here' (cited in Kela, 2012: 150). When Bhima's rebellion was finally suppressed in 1862, the British were quick to establish military outposts in the Satpuda hills in order to be better prepared to counter future outbreaks of unrest and rebellion. In doing so, they strengthened the hand of local rulers in relation to the Bhils significantly, and ensured that Badwani state and the wider Nimad region joined the ranks of those princely states who by the late nineteenth century 'possessed almost uncontested authority over (their) 'kingdom' ... These developments increasingly led small kings to dissociate themselves from the now relatively powerless forest polities' (Skaria, 1999: 174).

In western Madhya Pradesh, and particularly in the Satpudas²², the 1860s spelled the onset of sedentarization among the Bhils. This marked the second phase of colonial hegemony in the Nimad region, and witnessed the onset of efforts to craft princely states with a far greater degree of 'infrastructural power' (Mann, 1984) than had hitherto been the case – especially in terms of the fiscal and coercive capacities of the state.

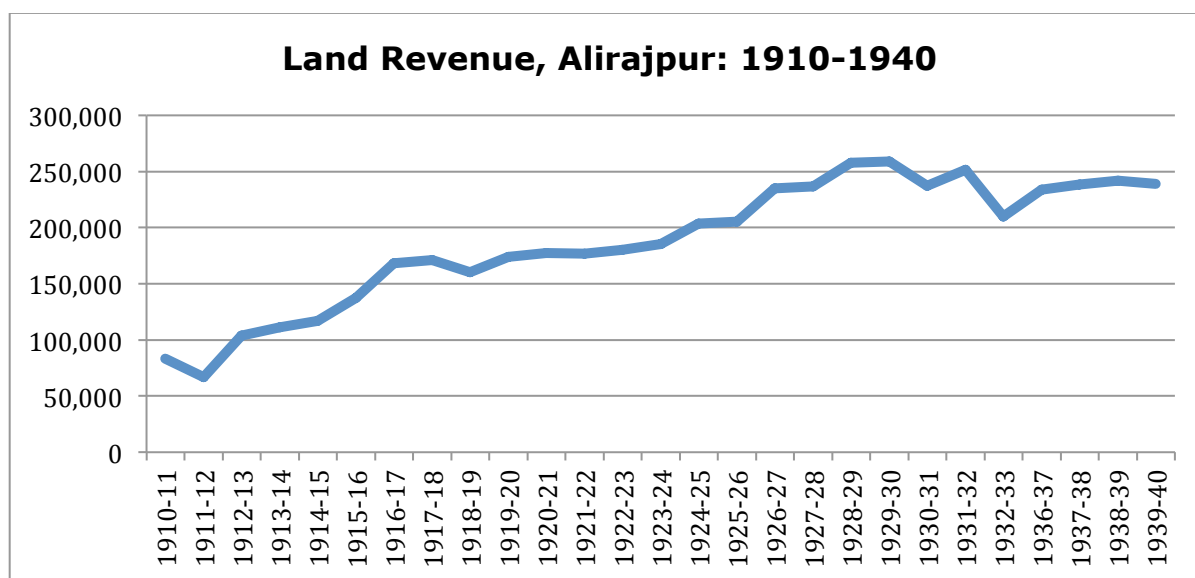
In 1839, the annual revenues of Alirajpur state amounted to less than 20,000 rupees. Land revenue was collected both in cash and in kind, with taxes being levied collectively on village communities and collected in a single instalment (Kela, 2012: 202). When Thomas Caddell arrived in the state in 1869 he 'found the treasury empty, and this was said to be its chronic state' (AAR, 1869: 1). As the state was taken into British superintendence, fiscal reform became a priority and was reflected in a number of initiatives (Kela, 2012: 204-5): collective assessments were replaced by plough rates calculated between five and fifteen rupees; the *patels* were awarded rent-free ploughs and an award of five to seven per cent of the revenue collected from their villages by way of compensation for the abolition of other perquisites; the office of the village *patwari* was created in 1870 in order to create a group of men 'who were directly interested in exacting the greatest amount of revenue from the cultivators' (cited in Kela, 2012: 205).

²² Note on how the Vindhyas were already more sedentarized than the Satpudas (Kela).

In addition to this, and very significantly, regulations were also introduced on the distillation of liquor where before there had been none in order to be able to extract revenue for the state in the form of excise duty (ibid.: 205-6). The reforms clearly had an impact: total revenue in Alirajpur state increased from 39,521 Rupees in 1868-69, via 79,176 Rupees in 1869-70, to a record 94,893 Rupees in 1870-71 (ibid.: 206). At this point, however, the level of land revenue and taxation caused a mass emigration of Bhil peasants to Badwani state, and land revenue plummeted. Indeed, the discontent generated by the fiscal reforms of the late 1860s and 1870s were integral in fuelling the fires of the Alirajpur rebellion in 1883, which, after it had been savagely suppressed by military force, elicited only 'trifling concessions' in the form of temporary abolition of the *patwari* system, minor relaxations of the forest laws, and on taxation levels (ibid.: 221).

A new phase in the crafting of fiscal capacities began from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards. In the administrative report of 1909-10, the Diwan of Alirajpur complains bitterly about the shortcomings of the plough system that was introduced in the 1860s that it prevented the cultivators from developing a concern for agricultural improvement: 'The Bhils and Bhilalas are accustomed to this system which is of very long standing and they would scarcely be inclined to favour any other, being by nature averse to any kind of innovation' (AAR, 1910: 6). The plough tax, he argued, created a situation in which the Bhil peasant would try and cultivate as much land as he could with the smallest possible number of ploughs: 'It is, however, now high time to introduce some method under which the extent of each holding should be fixed and assessment levied on a consideration of the quality of the land comprised in each' (ibid.: 7). Once bitten by the rebellion of 1883, however, the Alirajpur rulers were twice shy of introducing a more rigorous revenue system, as they feared that the Bhils would resent it (AAR, 1911: 7). Even though land revenue was found to be 'way below the mark' (ibid.: 10) the plough tax was retained for some years still, until 1925, when a system was introduced that imposed different levels of taxation for different qualities of soil. The *patwaris* had at this point been reintroduced as stipendiary servants looking after

designated groups of villages, and although complaints about the insufficient levels of land revenue persisted throughout the entire period of 1910 to 1940, the trend was nevertheless one of a steady increase, which in turn is testimony to the enhanced fiscal capacities of the state.

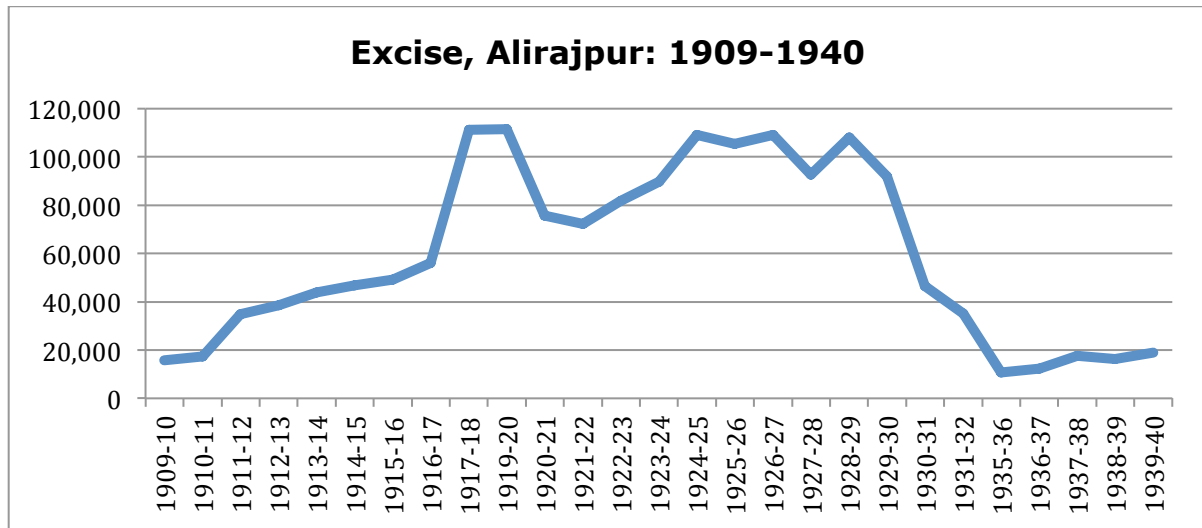


(Compiled from AAR, 1910-11 to 1939-40)

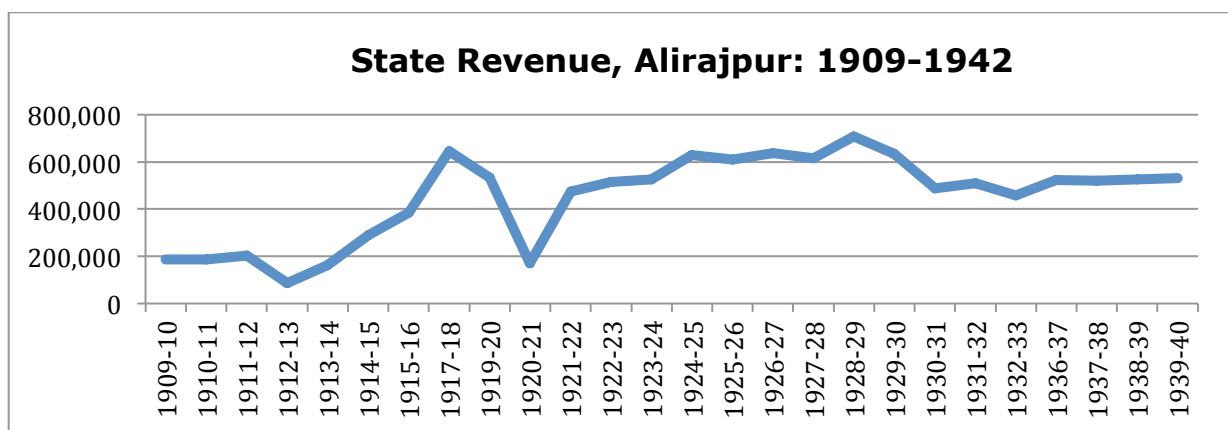
The strengthening of the fiscal capacities of the state is also evident in the excise system. In 1909, the so-called Madras system was introduced in Alirajpur. Sixty-four liquor shops were established in the state, and alcohol depots were built in the market towns of Rajpur, Bhabra and Umralli. Moreover, the Alirapur Darbar passed laws to punish violations of the ban against private distillation more severely; this was explicitly done to target Bhils and Bhilalas and their customary distillation of Mahua liquor (AAR, 1925: 18).

This revamping also paid dividends, as revenue from excise duties increased from 15,687 Rupees in 1909-10 to a high of 111,424 within a decade, before vacillating between good years (from the point of view of the Darbar) that yielded in excess of 100,000 Rupees to

bad years when, due to an erosion of purchasing power among the Bhils, yields stooped to as low a level as 10,682 Rupees.



The overall impact of the fiscal changes in these three decades can also be discerned in the overall revenue levels of Alirajpur state, which display a steady process of improvement from 1910-11 to 1939-40. A similar process also took place in Badwani state over the same time period (see statistical appendix).



(Compiled from AAR, 1909-10 to 1939-40)

Whereas the increase in fiscal capacity that clearly took place in the Rajput royal houses of western Madhya Pradesh in the early twentieth century are significant as indicators of

the increased infrastructural power of the princely states, and therefore the ability of these states to exercise their authority in relation to Bhil communities in a far more unequivocal way than before, it is also an important development in that it brings into being the institutions and actors that are at the heart of the everyday tyranny that has effectively disenfranchised Bhil Adivasis. This, of course, was the case not just in western Madhya Pradesh area, but indeed in the entire Bhil heartland of western India. It was the gradual development and consolidation of infrastructural power among the royal houses in the region that brought into being the forest guards and the police force, the jails and the courts, and the revenue officials (*patwaris*) that, backed by forest and excise legislation and the fiscal imperative of generating revenue for the state, exercised everyday tyranny over Bhil communities. When this insight is coupled with the fact that the processes of political subordination in the Bhil heartland is inextricably related to the socioeconomic processes that yielded the marginal subsistence peasants who in contemporary western India are utterly dependent on rural usurers and labour migration, it is becomes possible to understand the historically entrenched nature of the power relations that local movements like JADS are mobilizing against and in relation to.

There is indeed no shortage of evidence of how everyday tyranny was reproduced in the aftermath of independence in western India,²³ and in Alirajpur and Badwani this seems in particular to have been related to the reproduction of princely power after the formation of Madhya Pradesh state in the first half of the 1950s.²⁴ As Christophe Jaffrelot (2008, 2009) has shown, Madhya Pradesh is one of the states in India where princely upper caste elites have been most successful in retaining their social and political power after independence in 1947. In 1948, the princely states of what had been the Central India Agency during the British Raj merged into Madhya Bharat (comprising 25 princely states from the western parts of the Central India Agency, including Alirajpur and Badwani) and

²³ Note on the literature.

²⁴ Madhya Pradesh was constituted as a state in 1956, after a merger of Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh, and Bhopal state was effected.

Vindhya Pradesh (comprising 35 princely states from the eastern parts of the Central India Agency). The dominance of the traditional ruling groups were particularly strong in these two states, and in Madhya Bharat it was the Rajputs who were the dominant group (Jaffrelot, 2008: 1-2). The social predominance of the erstwhile princely rulers was reproduced due to the electoral strategy that the Congress party, which ruled almost uninterruptedly in Madhya Pradesh from 1956 to 2003, adopted after 1947. As Francine Frankel has argued, 'succeeded by adapting local power structures':

Within each region, they recruited from among those who were typically members of the dominant landowning castes ... Such local notables put together the basic units of the Congress party organization ... The introduction of electoral politics under these conditions tended at the outset only to reinforce the strategic position of the dominant landowning castes by enlarging their role as intermediaries in relationships between the village and outside authorities in the administration and government (2005: 25).

In Madhya Pradesh, this strategy was implemented by 'aggregating 'vote banks' owned by former princes or jagirdars' (Jaffrelot, 2008: 2). The central role played by former princely rulers in postcolonial politics in the state was reflected in the dominance of the upper castes among the elected representatives of the Congress party in the Madhya Pradesh legislative assembly (Members of the Legislative Assembly, MLAs): from 1957 to 1961, the upper castes constituted between 40 and 51 per cent of all Congress MLAs (ibid.: 3). Adivasis constituted one of the most important non-caste groups in the aftermath of independence, but as Jaffrelot notes, 'these MLAs, who were often uneducated, did not form powerful lobbies'. Rather, they had been co-opted into the ranks of the Congress party as a result of the introduction of reserved seats in state legislative assemblies for Scheduled Tribes after 1947 (ibid.: 3). The political dominance of the upper castes is further reinforced by the fact that they retained control of the Congress party machinery, and dominated among the ministers in the state governments that Congress formed in Madhya Pradesh between 1956 and 2004 (ibid: 4). Specifically,

Jaffrelot notes, recent attempts by the last Congress Chief Minister in Madhya Pradesh, Digvijay Singh, to promote Adivasi leadership within the Congress party failed dismally to yield anything remotely resembling substantial results (ibid.: 6). The right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has similarly constructed its political infrastructure on support from dominant castes and classes, and thus their rise to governmental power in Madhya Pradesh has done little, if anything, to alter the power relations first constituted under Congress hegemony (ibid.: 6-7; see also Jaffrelot, 1998; Ramshankar, 2004; Gupta, 2005). In other words, in postcolonial Madhya Pradesh, the princely rulers who were able to extricate themselves from relations of shared sovereignty with the Bhil forest polities through their engagement with colonial state-making strategies could reproduce their hegemonic position through their integration into the 'dominant party system' (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000: that emerged in India after 1947.²⁵

Coupled with the fact that Madhya Pradesh did not witness the kind of 'silent revolution' (Jaffrelot, 1973) that other Hindi belt states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have witnessed, in which Dalits and lower caste groups have successfully challenged the political hegemony of the upper castes and classes, this goes a long way to explain the resilience of the everyday tyranny of the state in Bhil communities in Alirajpur and Badwani, as well as the ability of the state to curtail or quell the advances of local social movements such as the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath, the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan, and the Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan in their efforts to democratize local state-society relations. This is not, of course, to say that these movements have not made inroads in terms of challenging everyday tyranny and Adivasi disenfranchisement: as the introductory vignette suggests, and as I have shown in detail elsewhere, these local movements have played a crucial role propelling processes of mobilization and confrontation that have

²⁵ In the Indian context, the term 'dominant party system' is used to refer to the scenario in which the Congress party 'came to occupy not only the centre ground of Indian politics but also much of the terrain to the left and the right' through its national political organization and its network of political affiliations, thus 'assimilating divergent interests upward to the centre' (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000: 53).

brought about changes in emotional dispositions, cognitive resources, and practical skills so as to enable Bhils to engage with the state in a competent and assertive manner, contributing thus to what might be called the vernacularization of democracy in the Bhil heartland (see for example Nilsen, 2010: Chapter 3, 2011, 2012a/b).²⁶ However, it also remains a fact that these movements, once they have built up enough momentum to challenge more fundamental power structures in the region, have encountered a veritable barrier to further advance in the form of organized state repression (Nilsen, 2012a/b). This in turn demonstrates how state power is organized and constituted in such a way as to create 'differential access to the state apparatuses and differential opportunities to realize specific effects in the course of state intervention' (Jessop, 1982: 224). I hope that this paper, albeit preliminary and partial, has made some progress in terms of moving towards a historical-sociological explanation of how such a structuring of state power has unfolded in the Bhil heartland of western India.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM AUTHOR UPON REQUEST

²⁶ Note referring to the literature on similar struggles in Maharashtra and Gujarat from the 1970s onwards.

APPENDIX – STATISTICAL TABLES

(All tables compiled from AAR and BAR)

Forest Revenue, Alirajpur: 1908-1940	
Year	Rupees
1908-09	38,473
1909-10	46,326
1910-11	47,400
1911-12	62,379
1912-13	65,601
1913-14	70,353
1914-15	70, 353
1915-16	94, 536
1916-17	101,131
1919-20	115,534
1920-21	134, 654
1921-22	152,437
1922-23	155,524
1923-24	149,624
1924-25	193,020
1925-26	207,407
1926-27	207,917
1927-28	153,561
1928-29	175,720
1929-30	146,238
1930-31	113,209
1931-32	149,571
1936-37	113,564
1937-38	133,015
1938-39	106,998
1939-40	113,219

Forest Offences, Alirajpur: 1910-1940		
Year	Number of offences	Number of people involved
1910-11	44	
1912-13	47	
1913-14	61	
1914-15	56	
1916-17	111	305
1919-20	43	
1921-22	27	
1922-23	77	291
1923-24	74	394
1924-25	181	
1925-26	58	140
1926-27	54	135
1927-28	22	89
1928-29	40	97
1929-30	57	286
1930-31	46	105
1931-32	13	69
1932-33	18	64
1936-37	43	
1937-38	43	95
1938-39	24	
1939-40	29	60

Land Revenue, Alirajpur	
Year	Rupees
1910-11	83,156
1911-12	66,855
1912-13	103,761
1913-14	111,367
1914-15	117,187
1915-16	137,252
1916-17	168,275
1917-18	171,128
1918-19	160,132
1919-20	174,137
1920-21	177,446
1921-22	176,740
1922-23	180,000
1923-24	185,598
1924-25	203,591
1925-26	205,532
1926-27	234,755
1927-28	236,846
1928-29	257,733
1929-30	259,079
1930-31	237,536
1931-32	251,518
1932-33	210,151
1936-37	233,659
1937-38	238,509
1938-39	242,061
1939-40	238,811

Excise, Alirajpur, 1909-40	
Year	Rupees
1909-10	15,687
1910-11	17,387
1911-12	34,836
1912-13	38,657
1913-14	43,989
1914-15	46,795
1915-16	49,101
1916-17	56,180
1917-18	111,174
1919-20	111,424
1920-21	75,612
1921-22	72,280
1922-23	81,787
1923-24	89,848
1924-25	109,055
1925-26	105,440
1926-27	109,228
1927-28	92,722
1928-29	107,963
1929-30	91,856
1930-31	46,609
1931-32	35,247
1935-36	10,682
1936-37	12,393
1937-38	17,590
1938-39	16,332
1939-40	18,972

State Revenue, Alirajpur: 1909-1940

Year	State Revenue (Rupees)
1909-10	186,572
1910-11	186,578
1911-12	203,174
1912-13	86,581
1913-14	163,727
1914-15	288,865
1915-16	385,886
1917-18	645,605
1919-20	533,952
1920-21	171,111
1921-22	473,630
1922-23	514,021
1923-24	525,048
1924-25	629,497
1925-26	611,256
1926-27	636,206
1927-28	615,499
1928-29	707,125
1929-30	635,734
1930-31	487,498
1931-32	509,729
1932-33	459,479
1936-37	523,005
1937-38	521,701
1938-39	525,325
1939-40	532,280

State Revenue, Badwani

Year	Rupees
1909-10	543,507
1912-13	706,085
1913-14	742,144
1914-15	604,766
1915-16	695,553
1916-17	694,852
1917-18	681,278
1918-19	670,796
1923-24	1,153,714
1941-42	1,164,760