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Saturday, June 29, 2013

In Conversation with Dr. Daniel Rycroft

30th June is a red letter day for Santhals, 158 years ago, on this day the Santhals of Damin-i-koh declared an open rebellion against tyranny and corruption. It is a special day for all freedom loving people of the World, as the message of the Great Rebellion still echoes in the hearts and minds of Santhal no matter where they live. Each year I commemorate the “Santhal Hul” in my own way; last year I published an article in my blog which [covered the trial of Seedo](#), one of the celebrated leaders of Santhal Rebellion. I am thankful to the readers for giving it good response and sharing the article in social networking websites.

This year I am pleased to have [Dr. Daniel Rycroft](#), Lecturer in the Arts and Cultures of Asia at the School of World Art Studies, University of East Anglia, with him we will talk about the Santhal Hul and Adivasis in general.



Sumit Soren: Dr. Rycroft, Thank you for giving me the opportunity to take this interview. It is a great pleasure to talk to you especially on the 158th year of Santhal Rebellion. For over two decades through your research projects and personal interest you have associated with the Adivasis and closely observed their life and culture. You have also organized many International Conferences and Exhibition on the Adivasis. The exhibitions, documentary films, you were involved with presents a rare sight into the Adivasi world, and of course in a creative manner makes us conscious about our rich cultural and historical heritage. You have also authored books on the Santhal Rebellion and the Adivasis. Combining all these aspects and experiences of you I am

excited to know your perspective on the Santhal Rebellion and its relevance in today's world.



Dr. Daniel Rycroft: Thank you for inviting me. The fact that this interview will be shared with people who are interested in Santal (and Adivasi) history is a key point for me. The Hul or ‘rebellion’ of 1855-57 was such an important moment in the history of India. This movement has a critical bearing on how and why Jharkhand now exists as a state, and of course it is keenly remembered in other areas, such as West Bengal and in North-eastern India. So, it is with pleasure that I am able to communicate with you and your readers and other people who have views on this and related

About the Blogger



Sumit Soren is from Berhampore, a small town in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. From schooldays he had immense interest in the history of Murshidabad, the 18th century capital of the Bengal Province during Mughal rule. He is an active blogger and regularly posts articles on historical relics of the district. His writings sheds light on the otherwise unlooked and generally unobserved aspect of history. His interests are in 18th and 19th English graveyard symbolism and in the innovations of firearms in the same period. Sumit is actually an Agricultural Engineer and alumnus of Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya and Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur

It may, at first glance, seem odd to some people that a non-Indian person has anything much to say about a Santal-led event, or even about other aspects of Adivasi culture and heritage. But I would say that people outside of Jharkhand, and even outside of India, should aim to learn more about and understand these moments in the history of Adivasi people. This is because the ‘first’ peoples of colonized countries have much to contribute to the political, socio-cultural and intellectual life of various regions, including Europe.

To my mind, not enough people in Britain understand how British colonialism shaped the experience of modernity for many people world-wide. During and after the Hul, The British East India Company (and later the Raj) attempted to suppress and then re-colonize the area now known as the Santal Parganas. Through this process of domination they attempted also to learn about Santal customs and religion. They also aimed to heavily industrialize areas of Jharkhand. This has clearly led to a critical situation ever since the Hul, and the effects of the counter-insurgency campaign against the so-called ‘rebels’ are still being felt.

Sumit Soren: Please tell us about your first visit to an Adivasi village in India. This must have been really special, what additional feeling it gave you compared to what you had read, or what you had seen in documentaries or photographs prior to the visit?

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: I first visited India from Britain as a school-leaver in the early 1990s. At that time, my knowledge of Indian art or colonial history was minimal, but I was interested in modern art more generally. I did some voluntary work in South India and met a wonderful Bengali family from Purulia District (on the border of West Bengal and Jharkhand) whose youngest son was being treated at CMC Hospital in Vellore. I had the opportunity to visit them on later visits, at their home in Baghmundi.

So arriving at Baghmundi I had what would become my first encounter with Adivasi people, Adivasi culture and Adivasi regions. I was studying the History of Art at the time as an undergraduate, and developed an interest in the aesthetics and social interactions of Adivasi (Santal) and non-Adivasi people. I ended up writing an academic article on the wall paintings of Santals, Bhumij and Kurmi communities, which was published in 1996. This was really the start of a long journey for me, as the period of time that I spent in Baghmundi, between 1992 and 1994, was very inspiring. It taught me some of the values of people whom I would otherwise not have met, in all likelihood.

So from then onwards I became more interested in issues about how Santal culture and heritage had been documented and interpreted, about how the Chho dance had been appropriated by non-Adivasi (Bengali) dance groups, and about how the colonial government had dispossessed Adivasi people in the period before the Hul took place.

I had not really heard of any Adivasi-related news or cultural events before visiting Baghmundi. That may have been because I was young and naïve, but it may also have something to do with how limited a view most British people have of the realities that comprise life in most parts of India. There were some very memorable events from my first visits to Baghmundi: such as visiting the Chho mask-makers and artisans in neighboring villages; dancing with Santal people during the nighttime Sohrai festivals in villagers in the nearby Ayodhya hills; interacting with and playing host to visitors at the Baghmundi tea shop (which was run by the family whom I knew in the village).

Sumit Soren: After that visit, you made many more visits to Adivasi villages and you associated with them very freely. You have often highlighted in your research papers and writings about the representation of the Adivasis in the colonial times. Times have changed since then; do you see any major difference or change in outlook about the Adivasis from Western perspective?

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: This is a good question. It can be quite difficult to understand exactly how colonial people experienced the region one hundred and fifty years ago, for example. They would have been there as part and parcel of the imperial economy and related political frameworks. Whilst staying in Purulia District I did not see myself as an anthropologist, even though many of my more recent engagements with Adivasis, and with Adivasi history, have had a clear anthropological dimension to them. Much of this can be found in my edited book entitled *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi*.

But earlier on I found that it was important to understand the colonial perception of Jharkhand by researching the imperial representations of the region. My PhD focused on a British surveyor (and visual artist) named Walter Stanhope Sherwill, who closely interacted with the horoko and diko people of what was then called the Damin-i-koh before and during the Hul. He got to know some of the Paharia and Santal inhabitants of the area whilst finding out about the geology and society of the Rajmahal Hills in the 1840s. He was directly involved in the suppression of the Hul in 1855. Some of his sketches of the suppression were published at the time in the *Illustrated London News*, including his now infamous portrait of Sido Murmu (which I published in a book called *Representing Rebellion: Visual Aspects of Counter-insurgency in Colonial India*).

I thought it important to share my research with people in the Santal Parganas. So I came into contact with members of the Parganait Ram Soren Memorial Trust (Dumka), who helped me interact with the inhabitants of Bhognadih, which is where the Hul began. This was also a very eye-opening experience for me. Not only could I visit places associated with the rebellion, but also I came to understanding how important it is to remember the Hul in such a way that a degree of re-empowerment could be achieved through processes of remembering.

Sumit Soren: I must mention this documentary film- Purvajo-ni Aankh: Through the eye of the ancestor. You were the Project Director of this film, tell us more about it.

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They like the blog do you?

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: Yes, for sure, we can discuss this. This is a short documentary and promotional film detailing an exhibition of old anthropological photographs that was held in Gujarat. It was my second film project, the first being Santal-related. We can talk about this later. In 2011 I convened a meeting in Germany with museum curators who held collections of Adivasi-oriented photography. We agreed to commit to the task of involving more Adivasi people in the display and interpretation of these photographs, many of which remained hidden from public view until recently.

I organized this meeting in my capacity as an academic researcher, based at the Sainsbury Institute for Art at the University of East Anglia in Norwich (UK). I involved two key Indian participants: first, Joy Tudu (an Adivasi rights activist), who I had met whilst researching the collective memory of the Hul in the Santal Parganas; and second, Ganesh Devy, the director of the organization called Bhasha (at Vadodara), who had inaugurated the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh and through that helped to found the Adivasi Museum of Voice, called Vaacha. The exhibition was directly curated by Narayan Rathwa of Vaacha, and involved curators from Leipzig (in Germany) and Cambridge (UK). The film shows how Rathwa Adivasis viewed and responded to a selection of photographs that depicted Bhil and other Adivasis, which were produced mainly in the 1920s to 1940s.

Sumit Soren: I personally think it was an excellent idea, I remember once while browsing through the book, *People of India*, I saw two photographs of Santhals taken in 1850's or 60's. It was an amazing experience, like the Rathwa people in the film trying to associate themselves with their ancestors through the photographs, it was same with me!

Sumit Soren: In this film there is a scene which explains that the Rathwa people previously used to sacrifice buffalo to please the god. That underwent a reformation and now they release the buffalo, as a personal sacrifice. It was exciting to learn about this important change in ritual, which perhaps suggests that Adivasi rituals, religious philosophies changes with time, am I right?

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: It is very interesting that you highlighted this section of the film. Firstly, yes, it shows how the Museum of Voice and the photographs came together to generate a conversation about changing rituals, beliefs and images. But more than this, the project showed how Rathwa Adivasis were very open in the selection and interpretation of specific photographs. There was very little attempt to see the images as a colonial-era anthropologist might expect or hope them to be seen, that is as documents that show a particular 'tribe' or 'tribal' cultural identity.

Rather, there was a clear sense that the people shown in the photographs were seen as ancestors of the Rathwa people, regardless of whether there were shown as being inhabitants of western India, central India, southern India, or whatever. There seemed to be a sense of national-Adivasi solidarity between the Rathwa people of today and the Gond, Santal, Chenchu people of yesteryear. The photograph of the buffalo that inspired the conversation about sacrifice was in fact a photograph belonging to the William Archer Collection at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. It was taken in the Santal Parganas, and depicted a Santal scene. Yet this was of little concern to the Rathwa group, who took the image to portray a ritual that was meaningful to their ancestors, and hence they talked about it in that way.

Sumit Soren: The religion of the Adivasis is quite unique; it is also distinct from the major religions in the world. However some anthropologists and sociologists argue that the "conversion" of Adivasis to some other religion changes their basic identity, and makes them disregard their own culture. On the other side if I take the example of the Bengalis, and the "Language Movement" where Bengalis placed community above religion, which ultimately led to the liberation of Bangladesh; I grow doubtful about the notion mentioned above. What is your view on this?

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: This is a very loaded, but also very interesting, question! I am not convinced that Adivasi religion is unique. I am unsure what you are referring to when you say Adivasi religion, but I assume that you mean the sacred-grove or sarna religion. I think that there are important parallels with other traditional Indigenous religions outside of India, but in terms of India, yes, it is unique to the extent that there are no other groups or communities (beside Adivasis) whose group or community identity is premised on the significance of the sacred-grove, or of the forest, or of ancestors and ancestral dwelling. But the issue gets quite complex when one begins to address the very idea of an 'Adivasi' community. It is clear that there is something about being Adivasi that is unique to India, and yet if one tries to contend that there is such a thing as an Adivasi religion, it only really gets us so far.

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I mean that one would also need to think about the particular beliefs, and the related parameters of religious action and participation that came into existence to enforce those beliefs, if one is to understand a religious community as such. In India, there has been a lot of cultural transfer between groups, so the project of trying to pin down any one aspect of a religion as belonging to any one community may be limiting. The question, and your mention of the language movement, points to the value of addressing such issues historically.

This is where the census, for example, comes into play as a politically-motivated practice that not only documented aspects of culture and society, but also went a long way towards the interpretation and evaluation of cultural identity and social participation. If we think back to the 1930s, the categories of 'race' and 'religion' were of particular interest to those colonialists and nationalists who were interested in documenting and interpreting Adivasi identity. They went with the idea that ethnic identity was a more prominent marker than religion.

Speaking personally, I am broadly sympathetic to the need to generate contexts (cultural and political) whereby people are free to practice their own religion without the threat of harassment. This corresponds with Indian secular ideals anyhow. I would also contend that with that goes the freedom to shift one's own cultural allegiances and to develop one's own spirituality in multifaceted ways, should that trajectory be of interest to anybody. I am of course aware of the significance of conversion in colonial Jharkhand, and of the role of Hindutva in creating conditions for 're-conversion' more recently. I am broadly critical of, or unsympathetic, to any attempt to politicize dominant religions in such ways.

Sumit Soren: Talking about Adivasi art forms, I believe our songs, dances, handicrafts even the murals on the walls of an Adivasi house has imprints of tribal identity and origin. It is like the Santhali painter in the film-'Hul Sengel' who paints pictures of Santhal Rebellion using his imagination and observation. You may have come across many things like this, please share with us a few.

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: Yes, you are very wise in pointing on that much Adivasi art carries with it older aspects or pre-modern worldviews. This may have something to do with the role of art in ritual and other social activities, with the availability of materials to artists and artisans, with the environmental knowledge that these people carry with them, and also with the generation of specific visual and material forms by people who have deep expressive capacities. Initially, I was very interested in the domestic mural arts of Santals in Jharkhand and West Bengal as I had not seen such engaging art forms anywhere previously. One of my PhD students is now doing some interesting research on Santal architecture in Singhbhum. The place and role of Adivasi art in the wider domain of Indian cultural heritage is something that is also important to consider, as it may also shed light on the history of inter-cultural art appreciation and on the marketing and consumption of new works by Adivasi artists.

Pujahar Soren was the artist who worked with the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP) who has painted some scenes of the Hul for educational purposes, and discussed these in the film Hul Sengel (now available on youtube). This film was made as my response to the need to document the voices that seemed to emerge as new statues of Sido Murmu and Kanhu Murmu and others associated with the Hul were constructed in the Santal Parganas. It came about via my association with the ICITP in 2004. Members of the All India Sido Kanhu Hul Baisi, and of the All India Santal Welfare and Cultural Society, etc. have been very supportive of this film initiative. It was co-directed by Joy Tudu, who is keen to build more awareness in Jharkhand and beyond about the heritage of Santals and about the history of the Hul. It is amazing to think that we first worked together ten years ago.

Pujahar spoke very carefully about his art works. He clearly sees the need to bring about visual expressions of the Hul that correspond to the shared Adivasi experience of displacement. Personally, I am also drawn to the vocal responses to the Hul and its aftermath as articulated by Rup Chand Murmu (who is a sixth generation descendent of Sido Murmu) at Bhognadih. I have written some academic works on these points, and would happily respond to any of your readers if they'd like to discuss anything pertaining to these works (D.Rycroft@uea.ac.uk).

Sumit Soren: Often when we want to know about any events or happenings in the colonial times, we have to rely on the British writers of that era. Of course we do not always share the same perspective, but the historical value of these records and accounts are enormous. Some of these writers were from the army like W.S Sherwill, Col. James Tod, others from the Indian Civil Service like L.S.S O'Malley. I may be exaggerating, but it appears to me that the British were naturally good when it came to documentation, what's your opinion on this?

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: I personally do not value their records in this way. I think that their documentation of Adivasi people and culture was very biased and aimed to cultivate a sense of cultural superiority amongst people in the urban areas and in Britain. But what is interesting is the way in which their documentation and portrayal of everyday lives and even of some political figures (such as Sido Murmu) has become the focus for more recent attempts by Adivasis to reclaim aspects of their past. This has been evident in their re-using of Sherwill's portrait of Sido Murmu, and this is also evident in the level of interest generated by the colonial-era anthropological photographs there were displayed at the aforementioned Through the Eye of the Ancestors exhibition.

There was seemingly very little interest in what some historians call the colonial encounter. There was more interest in who was photographed and in what context, incorporating cultural events, sites of performance, dress, environment, etc. and less in who was taking the photographs and why. The latter questions are of interest to me as an anthropological historian, because they lead to new areas of understanding about the relationship between the Adivasi people and those leading the documentation process. I think some Adivasis in Jharkhand would be more interested in discussing these points, especially given the participation of William Archer in the anthropological and cultural field.



Sumit Soren: *What was the idea or the motivation behind the 2005 film- Hul Sengel: The Spirit of the Santal Revolution? Do you think that the reasons which started this rebellion still exist today, even after 158 years?*

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: The motivation came from discussions with members of ICITP: if we were to document the Hul statues, using audio-visual formats, we should also aim to make the end products available for use by Adivasis in Jharkhand. This concept then extended to the level of making a fuller documentary that could incorporate many sites of memory, especially in respect of the Hul and its aftermath. We were all keen to involve Sido Murmu's descendants as much as would be appropriate, and to focus to some extent on the Bhognadih environment.

There were many reasons why the rebellion started. Of course, there are some causes for on-going mobilization and resistance. But I don't think that these are a direct continuation of the pre-Hul conditions that provoked the movement then. Rather, I think that they are shaped by newer social, political, economic, industrial and technological issues, which have assumed relevance to Santals in the same space of the Hul (that is to say the Santal Parganas and beyond) and that to some extent become meaningful as legacies of the anti-Santal suppression of the movement (such as the re-colonisation of the districts).

But Santal people are facing a plethora of issues in different areas and contexts, so I doubt that if a Santal rebellion was to happen now that it would assume the same proportions as the Hul. It would be bigger. And I don't think it would be conceived or addressed by any ruling administration as a Santal rebellion. This term, to me, is one that resonates better with the colonial rather than the post-colonial setting.

I think it is very important to understand how more recent Santal social and political movements address the Hul and its legacy.

Sumit Soren: *An individual feeling is associated with our profession or work, it may be philosophical but in one way it justifies the work we do. Your work is specifically interesting since you deal with people who live very closely with nature, they are simple and so is their way of life. Have the life and culture of these people influenced your own view of life?*

Dr. Daniel Rycroft: It is a charming idea, that Adivasis are simple. But I disagree with such notions. There are many complexities involved in everyday lives that simply get ignored or discarded if one arrives at a social or cultural setting with the assumption that these are natural entities. The history and ongoing tensions surrounding Adivasi lives, livelihood and engagements with the past tell quite different stories.

Yes, my interactions with Adivasis and non-Adivasis in central/eastern India do influence my own view of life. I am continually inspired by the capacity that many Adivasis (in my experience) have for cultivating their humanity and finding expressive channels for this. I am also inspired by artists from non-Adivasi communities who have been able to identify - in their representations of Adivasis and of social interactions - aspects of their shared humanity.

I am inspired by those who commemorate the Hul, as I remember with great clarity and purpose my own participation at the Hul Maha in Bhognadih in 2005, on the 150th anniversary of the Hul. Bitiya Hembram, an elderly woman who had married one of Sido Murmu's descendants, and I walked together from their ancestral



Memorial at Bhognadih, photo courtesy- Dr. Rycroft

home to the nearby field where commemorative statues of Sido Murmu and Kanhu Murmu had been installed. We both acknowledged these historic figures and paid our respects to them. The ability to be in the proximity of people who care for and remember Indigenous pasts so personally and effectively was truly awe-inspiring. I carry such memories with me as I continue to address issues in Adivasi history and cultural heritage.

I feel that I have come a long way since I first met Santals and other Adivasis in Purulia. Then, of course, I enjoyed the Tusu festival and witnessed the Marangburu festival at Mathaburu and these events have also stayed with me. I particularly remember how impressed I was with the Tusu goddess made by the daughter of the Bengali family with whom I was living. The notion that there are regional events that bring together the members of diverse social groups is one that has helped me understand many of the cultural dynamics and social realities of Adivasis in India. It points to histories of 'tribal integration' (to coin an anthropological phrase) that show how strong and vibrant Adivasi cultural practices come to acquire real significance to non-Adivasis. But as I have changed and matured, and gained more insights into the issues engulfing Adivasi people's participation in Indian modernity. So I have also come to appreciate the value of Adivasi history and heritage, via events such as the Hul and its suppression. Much of this appreciation was encapsulated in my participation at the Hul Maha in 2005.

I hope that others continue to have inspiring engagements with such events and that we all

may find ways of sharing our aspirations and realizing our dreams in the future.

Sumit Soren: I must say it was absolutely wonderful to know about your travels and interactions with the Adivasis. For some time I was trying to visualize all that you narrated so patiently and meticulously. What I liked again is your level of interest and association with the Adivasis, which I mentioned at the very beginning of this conversation, not interview, since this is most fitting word now I think when we have come to the end. Being Adivasi as you rightly pointed out is not all that simple, and of course there are number of issues that concern us in many ways, but over the years Adivasis have been struggling to address these issues and to struggle has become our habit. I thank you again for taking the time out of your busy schedule to take part in this exciting conversation and wish you all the best in your ongoing projects and those coming up in near future.

Posted by [Sumit Soren](#) at 9:29 PM No comments: [Links to this post](#)

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Sunday, June 16, 2013

HAPPY BIRTHDAY CHE: LIFE IN PICS



Child Che: One little step for this kid and a giant step towards Revolution!



Che with Rugby players

"(Che Guevara)Born a chronic asthmatic in Buenos Aires, his father sent him up to Cordoba for the clear air and crisp climate and it was there at the age of 14, in 1942, that he was badly bitten by the rugby bug, playing with Estudiantes de Cordoba. His father, also Ernesto, was alarmed and pleaded with him to give up but his single-minded son famously replied: "I love rugby. Even if it kills me one day I am happy to play it." There were no more arguments after that.

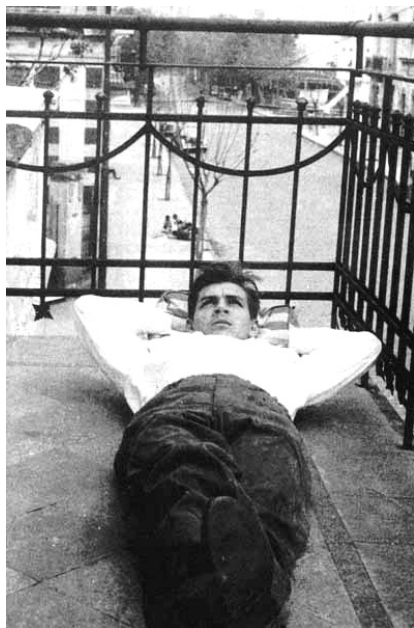
Essentially a tough inside centre in the manner of Felipe Contepomi, he was happy to play anywhere in the back division but had to box clever, as he did for much of his life. Every 20 minutes or so he would slip off and use one of the primitive inhalers of the time, or inject

himself. He also undertook a series of exercises which allowed him to catch his breath. Half-time would be the same."

By Brendan Gallagher
12:01AM BST 05 Oct 2007, Telegraph.co.uk



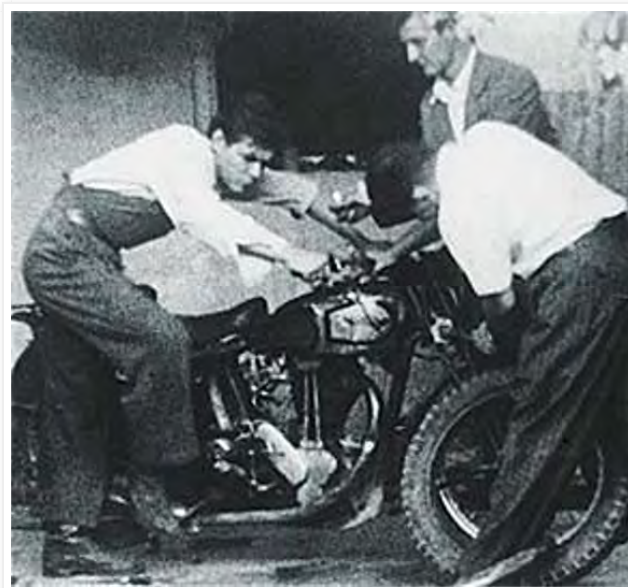
Che while on vacation in Mar del Plata. Argentina. ca. 1945



A 20 year old Ernesto Guevara (then a medical student) lying contemplatively on the balcony of his family's new home on Calle Arooz in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



The motorcycle he rode for the famous motorcycle travel -Norton 500cc motorcycle – *Poderosa II*



The bike indeed became legendary!

The bike of course became famous, since it had the name Che imprinted on it. But it was a real mess, with broken chains and frequent disasters and all!

"The epic trip, which was recounted a half-century later in the film "The Motorcycle Diaries," was Dr. Granado's idea. At 29, he had full-time work as a biochemist, but he also had a taste for beautiful women, fine wine and dancing the tango. He sought one final thrill before settling into a life of middle-class comfort.

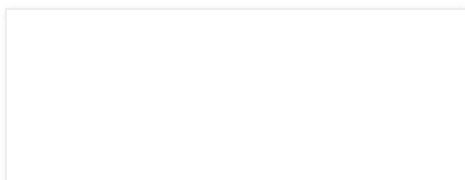
"I needed to see the world, but first I wanted to see Latin America, my own long-suffering continent," Dr. Granado wrote in his diary. "Not through the eyes of a tourist, interested only in landscapes, comforts and fleeting pleasures, but with the eyes and spirit of one of the people."

Guevara, an asthmatic 23-year-old one semester short of graduating from medical school, agreed to go along. They set out from their native Argentina in December 1951 on a 13-year-old motorbike nicknamed "La Poderosa" - the powerful one"

By [Emma Brown](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, March 8, 2011; 11:00 PM





Whatever it be, but Che was quite good player of chess!

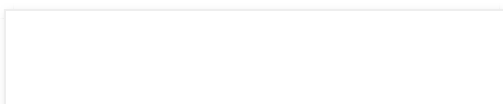


And now he is on it

Che was a good chess player and once said to his friend, *"I'd like to be either a chess player, or start a revolution."*



Che and his cigar!





This time a pipe note the etchings at the butt!



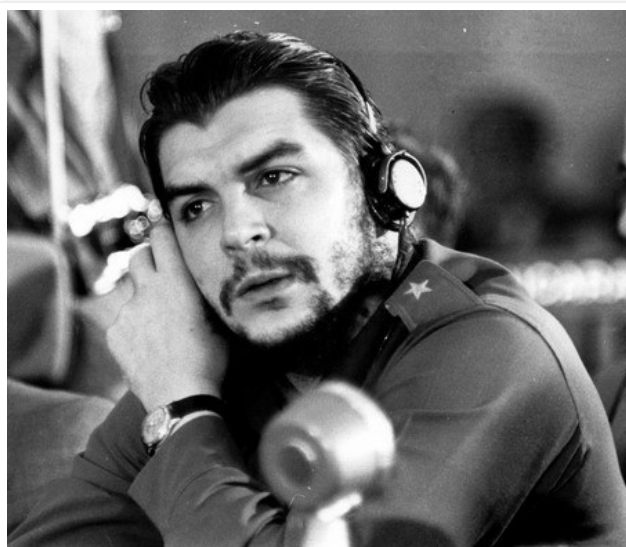
With his daughter and Fidel Castro



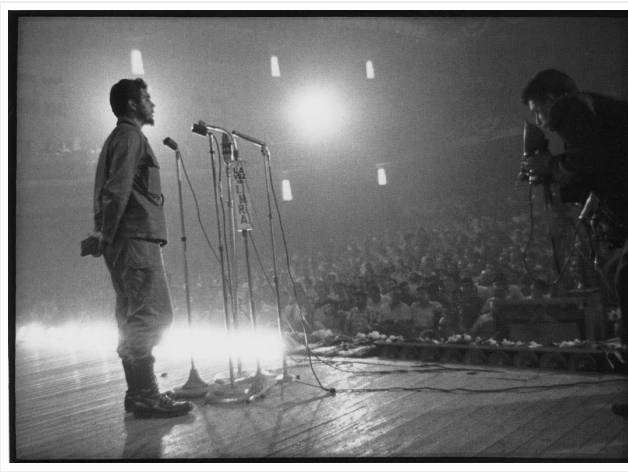
A comrade is not a friend, but someone who walks with you on the same road in the same direction.



An amazing look on the face



At times he was very an ardent listener



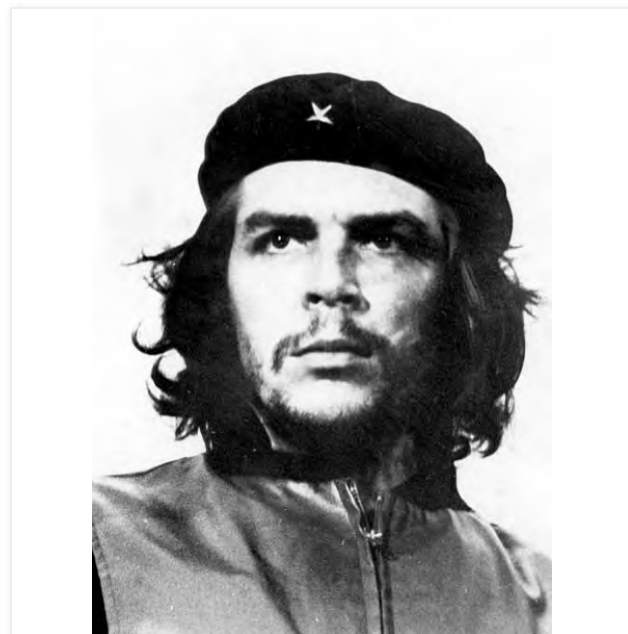
Che had an absolute presence

One of his most famous quotes I still remember, and it appears in many banners and it says, *"Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love"*



Have a look at that face!

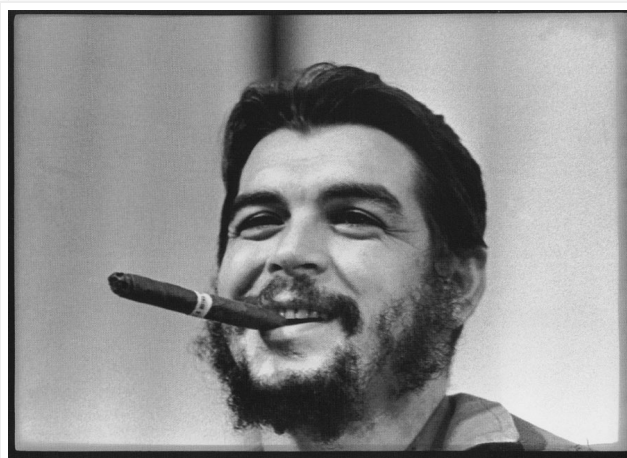
This is the man who placed him second to Jesus Christ- Korda, whose real name was Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez, Korda was the man who took the famous photograph which ultimately made the man and the photograph famous all around the world, from Latin America to India!



Add caption- this tells you that I never thought of writing caption for this one!



"The 5th of March 1960 the Belgian arms transport "La Coubre" exploded in Havana harbour, killing 136 people. As a staff-photographer at the Cuban newspaper "Revolution", Alberto "Korda" Gutierrez was assigned to cover the following memorial ceremony held in Havana. Among the prominent guests were Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Fidel Castro held one of his endless speeches and Korda was shooting away, when Che Guevara suddenly appeared on the stage. Korda pointed his Leica at Che and managed to shoot two frames of him, before Che turned around and disappeared. Back in his darkroom Korda enlarged, among others, one of the Che frames. The editor at "Revolution" picked a Castro-picture for the newspaper and returned the rest. Korda liked the Che picture and put it on the wall in his Havana-studio." Rest is History!



I would like to end this way, the smiling Che with his favorite cigar!

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Friday, June 14, 2013

SANTHAL REBELLION, PART I: THE BEGINING

Until June 1855, Santhals and the entire region of Damin-i-Koh were unknown to the entire world. But something extraordinary happened this year that gave birth to one of the most memorable struggles for freedom in India- the Santhal Rebellion. And when that

occurred, each event were closely followed by Marx, and it found place in the writings of the Britain's most celebrated writer of that era-Charles Dickens.

It all began with the creation of Damin-i-Koh the area surrounding the Rajmahal Hills. In 1832 an effort was made by the British authorities to separate the territories of the local zamindars and that of the hill men (paharias). Masonary pillars were constructed to mark the areas of these two territories, that of the plain land, which belonged to the zamindars, and the hills which belonged to the hillmen. Sandwiched between these two, basically the skirt of the hills, a huge portion of afforested land lay unoccupied. The East India Company with the intention to earn revenue from this unused, unpopulated land invited the Santhals to occupy it. The Santhals at that time were scattered all-round Cuttack, Singhbhoom, Dhulbhoom, Midnapore, Bankura, Manbhoom, Barabhoom, Panchete, Chota Nagpur, Palamow, Ramgarh, Birbhum, and parts of Bhagalpore. The Santhals in these places were not happy with the new tax laws brought by the local zamindars, the promise of a new land, a new beginning motivated them to make this great exodus.

Although the migration had started from the 1790's, from 1830's it gained a new momentum, year on year the Santhal population in Damin-i-Koh multiplied in extraordinary pace. The Damin-i-Koh was a massive extent of land measuring about 1366.01 square miles, of which 500 sq miles were heavily afforested land; of this 254 sq miles were cleared by the Santhals for their own settlement. In 1838 there were 3000 Santhals in Damin-i-Koh, who lived in 40 villages; by 1851 they numbered about 82795 souls living in 1473 villages! The Santhals were allowed a rent free usage for first three years, thereafter an entire village had to pay about 3-10 Rs per year as revenue, and subsequently another five year settlement plan was made, which according to the British records quite nominal. Nominal, yet when we compare the revenue generated from this we see a major profit. In 1837-38 the revenue collected was Rs. 6,682 and rose as high as 58,033 in the years before the rebellion!



Two Santhal Men from the book Tribes of India

Their hard labor and toil converted this impregnable forest to a thriving tribal metropolis. "This valley," wrote Captain Sherwill in 1851,"viewed from any of the surrounding hills affords an admirable example of what can be done with natives, when their natural industry and perseverance are guarded and encouraged by kindness. When Mr. Pontent took charge of the hills in 1835, this valley was a wilderness, inhabited here and there by hill men; the remainder was overrun with heavy forest, in which wild elephants and tigers were numerous, but now in 1851 several hundred substantial Santhal villagers, with an abundance of cattle and surrounded by luxuriant crops, occupy this hitherto neglected spot."

The revenue collection of this province was placed in the hands of Mr. Pontet. As far as the judicial and the criminal matters were concerned, there was only one resident Magistrate at Deoghor. For addressing the judicial matters one had to go as far as Bhagalpore, Aurangabad or Birbhum to obtain justice. Sometimes though in colder climate, Mr. Pontent took a stroll along these lands reviewing the status of the inhabitants and often addressing their grievances. But he was basically a revenue collector with little power over judicial matters for which one had to travel Bhagalpore. This was a very tedious and no-result process. Firstly the distance was great; secondly was the inaccessibility of a Santhal to the court in case he had to solve any issue. The great Indian judicial machinery restricted his

entry in every way possible and extorted heavy tips for the most minor favor. He would be surrounded by an impregnable barrier of Munshis, Amlas, Mokhtars, Munshis, Chowkidars, Burkandazees, and what not. And there inaccessibility to the court was a major point of advantage for the leeches called moneylenders and extortionists who crawled around for prey in this part of the country.

The coming of the Santhals in Damin-i-Koh proved a blessing in disguise. Considering the worst case scenario they perhaps were much better under the local zamindars with all their new taxes and extortion machinery. But, in Damin-i-Koh there lurked another blood sucking entity called "mahajans" or the moneylenders who enticed the Santhals with credit or loans and subsequently confiscated their lands. They actually allured the Santhals to sell their surplus land, and using short term credits as baits they virtually got hold of their best lands and made the sellers utterly wanting for more and more credits, until they were reduced to landless cultivators. When they were nothing but cultivator and jungle clearers, they were again enticed by credits with assurance of providing some sort of temporary relief, and compelled to sign bonds through which they had to serve the creditor, at any time called upon. The rate of interest was exorbitant, even forty to fifty percent was very normal! This went on in a cyclic order, obviously the burrower would default, since the whole bond was devised for default, subsequently his son would become a bonded laborer who would work tirelessly, without pay, to repay his father's debt.

Sir William Le Fleming Robinson (later appointed as a Deputy Commissioner of the Santhal Parganas) who actually stamped out the bonded labour system doing a fair bit of justice with the Santhals mentions, "...I have had a bond brought to me in which Rs. 25 was originally burrowed by a man who worked in his lifetime, his son did ditto, and I released his grandson from any further necessity; it had been running on for over thirty years, if I remember rightly!" In this all time of thirty years the burrower had only food from his debtor and in some time, he would be provided with a piece of cloth to cover his shame. Eventually this spread a great discontent among the Santhals, the loss of land, which they had cleared, they had cultivated, by their great toil aggravated the rousing sentiments of general public against the extortionists. The ancient word of advice, "don't trust the outsiders," filled their minds with hatred and all the more instigated them for vengeance. It's a basic tendency for any human being to find a home, to look for a place to settle down. And after all this tiring exodus, clearing massive forest, making cultivable land, when their basic need for life was taken out, they were craving for independence for freedom. They wanted a land of their own, where there would be no influence of the outsiders, there would be no compulsions, the land will belong to the tillers. This was the singular cause of the rebellion, as the journey to independence kicked off on 30th June 1855.

The capital of the entire Santhal villages was Burhait, and half a mile south west of it is the village of Bhognadih, where the celebrated leaders of the Santhal rebellion Seedo Kanho lived. Seeing the repression of their fellow brothers and of their own, they called a grand gathering at Bhognadih. About ten thousand Santhals from all parts of Damin-i-Koh attended this meeting. I must relate an extraordinary event which preceded this gathering. One night when Seedo and Kanoo were discussing over the grievous state of the Santhals, a bit of paper from above fell on Seedo's head. What followed next was a remarkable thing, the God (thakur) himself appeared before them, he was of fair complexion but dressed in native fashion. He had ten fingers in each hand, and held a white book in his hand, he then wrote something in it, and presented twenty pages in five batches to the brothers. Following this another set of paper fell on Seedo's head and again to their amazement two men appeared before them. They explained the Thakur's order to them and vanished soon after. This was not just once but many revelations by the Thakur continued for many days. The brothers erected a proper figure of the Thakur within the enclosures of the house, and this was revered by all the villagers of this area. They brought milk and other offerings for the Thakur daily, and respected it with the utmost faith.

In the appointed day before ten thousand Santhal men, the order of the Thakur was announced. On the basis of these announcements, letters were drafted by Kirta, Bhadoo and Sunno Manjhee by Seedo's order to the Commissioner, Collector, and Magistrate of Bhagalpore, The Collector and Magistrate of Birbhum, to several Darogahs and zamindars from whom a reply was called within fifteen days. The Declaration of Independence or the Order of Thakur, no matter what you call it contained the following demands-

1. The Revenue collection would be done exclusively by the Santhals and remitted to the State.
2. The rate of the revenue would be- Rs 2 for every buffalo plough, 1 Anna on each bullock plough, a half Anna for each cow-plough, per annum.
3. The rate of interest upon money loaned will be 1 paise for each Rupee yearly.
4. The immediate banishment of all the moneylenders and zamindars from Damin-i-koh and sever all connections with them.

With the proclamation of Independence the Santhals now were on the move. Seedo and Kanoo were obviously the commanders of this great uprising. In 7th July a massive body

of Santhals appeared at Panchkhetia, a place little north of Burhait. Hearing the news of this assembly the Darogah of Dighi or Buri Bazar set out to meet them along with few armed police men. He may be called upon to do so by the already fearing moneylenders who may have given some bribe to him for the arrest of the Santhals. However this proved to be dangerous expedition, when he met Seedo and his men in Panckehthia, the Santhals informed him that they had come to levy a tax of Rs. 5 from every businessman around the place. After some heated dialogues the Darogah angrily ordered the guards to bind Seedo which was a fatal mistake, this act fueled the anger of the Santals and he was cut down by Seedo himself. About nine men were murdered that day, as the shops and property of the shop keepers and businessmen were torched, any resistance was met with extreme vengeance and this marked the beginning of the Santhal Rebellion.



The Martello Tower in Pakur

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