The London School of Economics and Political Science

Scales of Difference

An ethnography of the family dynamics of livelihood transition,
affirmative action, cultural objectification and state recognition
in Andhra Pradesh, India.

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and Political Science for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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I confirm that Anna Gawthorpe, Jason Brooks and Branwen Spector, each proof-read sections of this thesis for conventions of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Maps have been prepared for this thesis by Sebastian Ballard, and kinship diagrams produced by Cecilia Alini. All photographs are by the author, except where I have clearly indicated otherwise.

Thesis Abstract

This thesis investigates indigenous adivasi experiences of livelihood transitions and policies of affirmative action in the Southeast Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted with people from across the Koya adivasi group, this research shows how the benefits of affirmative action policies filter unevenly through communities and households. Koyas are categorised by the Indian government as a Scheduled Tribe (ST), and on this basis are eligible for affirmative action measures such as land protections, subsidised grain, and reserved seats in schools and state employment. Unequal access to such policies, which are broadly intended to integrate adivasis into the regional economy and society, exacerbates class distinctions within the Koya community. Through the process of transition away from small-scale shifting cultivation towards greater dependency on the state, Koyas' sense of having a "distinctive culture" is reified, as their inclusion is premised on the reiteration of their "backwardness". The thesis charts an objectification of community identity as the logic of state recognition becomes intertwined with emic understandings of cultural differences and affinities.

To investigate these processes the thesis moves through ethnography at various scales of social life: the household, the village, and the wider region. By exploring how interlocutors differentiate themselves from others within these spaces, I show how particular notions of ethnic, gendered and generational difference are produced, experienced and reiterated, through social reproduction, social interactions, and engagement with state discourses. This argument is grounded in fine-grained ethnography of social relations and informed by a historical perspective on entrenched forms of ethnic, and caste/tribe difference in South Asia. The empirical material stretches from the differences in aspirations between siblings and closely related families within a village of shifting cultivators, to the differences felt to be deeply ingrained between caste and tribe communities across the wider region.

Contents

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the result of deep and longstanding interest in the societies of South Asia, and the discipline of Anthropology. The privilege to be able to pursue these interests is a gift that has been shaped by many, but above all given to me by my parents Mary Flaherty and (late) Adrian Herzmark. It is one that I will never take for granted.

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My initial application to study social anthropology was undertaken while engaged as a circus skills teacher with Performers Without Borders (reg. charity no.1182403). For trusting in my ability to work in India at a young age, Johnny Forbes and Matt Morris deserve a special mention here. Their continued encouragement has been a resource and a comfort. It is increasingly clear that the awkward questions I posed to them, during our 10-month circus tour in South and Central Asia – regarding who counts as a "street child", and how the boundaries of such criteria are drawn and upheld – reached at central themes in development, sociology and anthropology, which continue to animate my research.

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The most important thanks go to my long-term partner, Anna Gawthorpe, for her understanding and love through such lengthy fieldwork after many long stints of study away from her. Thank you for being patient, caring and driven, and for being an amazingly attentive reader and listener.

This thesis is dedicated to my father. He would have dearly loved to read this and would have been an exceptional interlocutor throughout the process. I will always miss his sincere engagement with concepts of fairness, context and truth, which I hope come through, at least partially, in these pages.

List of Figures

Note on transliteration

In the villages and on the hillslopes of Northern Andhra Pradesh, where most of the fieldwork for this thesis was completed, the unscripted Koya language is the vernacular, and was the language I learnt through an inductive method, similar to that outlined in Burling (1984). For most Koya participants in this research, Telugu is a second language, learnt informally through interactions outside the village. For some, it is learnt at school. Koyas living close to the neighbouring states of Odisha and Chhattisgarh also understand and speak Odia and Chhattisgarhi Hindi. The dialect and accent of spoken Koya language varies considerably across the Gōdāvari region. Styles of speech are inflected, to varying degrees, by the linguistic zones that the contemporary state divisions represent. Many words are borrowed from Telugu, and some from Hindi, Tamil, and English. There are "purer" and more diluted accents of spoken Koya, and many native speakers informed me that the "real" "Gondi-Koya" was spoken further north, in Adilabad (Telangana) and Gaḍchiroli (Maharashtra). Hence, the Koya language I have learnt is inherently syncretic and contains several Telugu-ised terms and conventions. This is reflected in the glossary, which includes many Telugu words that are embedded in the vernacular spoken language. Distinctly Telugu terms are listed separately.

Throughout the text I use italics to note non-English words. If the language is not specified, it is a Koya word, translated by the author. In cases where a distinctively Telugu or Hindi word is used, that is not already commonly incorporated into spoken Koya, this is stated in the text. Where translation between more than two languages is required, I have indicated this using the abbreviations "Ko." for Koya, "Te." for Telugu, "Hi." for Hindi, and "En." For English. I have used following transliteration of long vowels and retroflex consonants to convey the correct pronunciation of words and proper names within the area of study:

ā: long "a", as in "ah"

ō: long "o", as in "code"

ē: long "eh", as in "air", "care" or "bear"

ū: long "u", as in "boot"

ḍ: retroflex "d" similar to "adult" and "drum", pronounced with the tongue folded back to the top of the palate.

ṭ: retroflex "t" similar to "internet" with a hard "t", as above, with the tongue folded back.

Glossary

Koya words and phrases

adavi hakulu pattas	forest rights documents
aluwat ille	he/she doesn't have the habit
āmu doḍa	maize
aski īyal mattond	when father was alive
asha worker	voluntary health worker
āriselu	a fried rice-flour and jaggery sweet
bābai	father's brother
bava	brother-in-law
balam	strength
berre gundakai	large heart
beriond	bigger; elder
bhēnda kusīr	wild sorrel leaves
bhūt teliu	know nothing
coolie pani	manual wage labour
cinna gundakai	small heart
cinna nar mansud/mansulu	small village person/people
cinnana	father's younger brother
dadal	older brother
deng miri vatond	he ran back
doḍa	cooked rice or other cooked grain; a meal
donga	thief
dubkuwarlu	those who have money, literally, cash people
erram vanji	red rice
girijanulu	hill dwellers, peasants; sometimes translated as tribals
ganji	the starchy water in which rice has boiled
ghatti road	steep, untarmacked road
godava	fight
īdawal	to give
ippa sāra	liqueur distilled from died yellow flowers
īṭapaṇḍu	tamarind
jāmkai	guava
jeedimāmidi pappu	cashew nut seeds
jeedimāmidi mokka	cashew nut tree saplings

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jeeriga māra	fishtail palm
jeeriga kallu	palm wine from *jeeriga* trees
jonna	sorghum
kāpilai tungawal	protect
karve	hunger
kerismarțe	medicinal root
kompany pani	informal paid labour in a factory
kodel kusir	wild spinach
koitawal	to cut
kusīr	curry
kutumbam	relatives
lotpeder	surname groups, which indicate clan affiliation in Koya kinship.
lungi	a wrap-around sarong worn by men
māmaya	mother's brother
mancham	a raised shelter on a hill slope
mandawal	to stay
markai	mango
menth eir	good water
mondo	lazy
Musalord	literally, old man; colloquialism for Old Admiral brandy.
nanna talptan nimma kella	tell that I am asking
nātu sāra	country liqueur made from ammonia powder and jaggery
padmarțe	edible wild root vegetable
panasapanḍu	jackfruit
pēkor agga mannor	boys can't stay there
peddalōr	big people; older people
peddamansulu	literally, big man; leader
peddananna	father's elder brother; ritual specialist
pel lon	marriage house
permam	mountain buffalo
pogo	black tobacco
poyi	father's sister
rālithin	unbalanced
renḍu ēkham	two together; side by side
rythulu	farmers
saddariwal	to share
sadavarlu	educated

sainda	shifting cultivation; and the slopes on which this is practised
sai ille jong	not a good match
sai vatawal	to keep well stored
sardariga	fun
sāru	tamarind broth
sigguru	home-distillation of *jeeriga kallu*
sītapaṇḍu	custard apple
sonte	our own, implying close relative
sonte kutumbam	close relatives
sowkarvārlu	businessmen
sudievva	mother's sister
sumerāti	enough, sufficient
talpawal	to ask
tāpi pani	plastering work
tappu tungwondor	wrongdoing
tarḍāku	palm leaves
thontha	orchard
tīsawal	to take
tomond	younger brother
togay sondawal	to clean or maintain
tungwodmara	teak
unnōnd	he doesn't drink
ūrawal	to look at; colloquially, to watch over
vattawal	to put
veddūr	bamboo
vāndru	boss or business owner

Telugu words

chutam	guests
dimpadu kālam	last resort
fituri	uprising
intiperu	surname; surname group
jala samadhi	watery tombs
pelli chūppudu	marriage arrangement
samskriti	culture
sampradhayam	tradition
vaire jāti	different caste

Hindi words

chālak	clever, sly
dharam	lit. thread; colloquially, garment factory work
muttadari	a system of indirect rule

siwa-i-jamabandi	a system for land taxation used in the Nizam's domain of Hyderabad

Proper Names

Badina, Thellam, Kurusam	surname groups in Koya kinship
Konda Reddi, Koya, Valmiki	groups of adivasis, which are each respectively listed as Scheduled Tribes in the state of Andhra Pradesh
Padmashali	a caste name, included as an Other Backward Caste in Andhra Pradesh
Muthyalamma Talli	a major female deity in Koya religious practice
Potraj	local deity to Illūru villagers
Salla	local deity to Illūru villagers
Thul	local deity to Illūru villager

List of acronyms used

AGS	Agency Girijan Sangham (Agency Peasants Organisation)
BEd	Bachelor of Education
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
GCC	Girijan Cooperative Corporation
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ITDA	Integrated Tribal Development Agency
LLB	Bachelor of Laws
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC	Other Backward Caste
PDS	Public Distribution Service
PLSI	People's Linguistic Survey of India
PO	Project Officer at the Integrated Tribal Development Agency Office
RCS	Rythu Coolie Sangham (Agricultural Workers Organisation)
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
YSRCP	Yuvujana Sramika Rythu Congress Party

Key protagonists [1]

In Illūru village:

Pochamma Thellam: The female head of a Thellam household in Illūru village, Pochamma is a dedicated shifting cultivator. She is also the village health volunteer or *asha* worker.

Akkamma Badina: Pochamma's mother is the eldest living person born in Illūru village, and granddaughter of the first settlers of the village.

Lokesh Thellam: Educated until 10th class, Lokesh is Pochamma's eldest son and one of the more aspirational men in Illūru.

Pravin Thellam: Pochamma's youngest son who works on the family hill slope.

Janiki Thellam: Pochamma's youngest daughter who has also completed 10th class and aspires to study further.

Vikkai Thellam: Husband to **Vijaya**, and father to their children **Cinnabhai** and **Lila**.

Kothanna Thellam: Husband to **Bulamma**, and father to their children **Tejaswini**, **Dari**, **Buchanna**, **Indira**, and **Anu**.

Suresh Kurusam: The most financially successful cultivator in Illūru, who also trades in livestock and palm wine. Suresh is Vice President of the Panchayat.

Roy Kurusam: The first member of Illūru village to gain a salaried job as a contracted staff member of the Forest Department.

Vignesh Badina: Cross-cousin to Lokesh, Pravin and Janiki, Vignesh assists Kurusam Suresh with various jobs around the village.

In Rampachodavaram town:

Raj Badina: An influential mother's brother to Thellam children Lokesh and Janiki, paternal uncle to Badina Vignesh, Raj has been pivotal in securing temporary labour for several young Illūru men.

Timmy: A permanent Forest Department staff ranger.

Arun Maravi (LLB): A Koya advocate from the town of Chintūr, now practising in Rampachodavaram.

Gaurav Palla (LLB): An advocate who trained with Arun, Gaurav is originally from the Thellam's ancestral village Dōraguḍa. Gaurav can identify as either a Konda Reddi or as a Koya (he is the son of an inter-tribal marriage).

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[1] The names used in this thesis are pseudonyms. Village names, and names of local organisations, have also been changed to protect the anonymity of these participants.

In Chintūr town:

Ganganna: A young adivasi activist and volunteer for the Dandakaranya Rakshana Samājam (Forest Area Protection Society).

Prasad Kurusam: Unrelated to the Illūru Kurusams, but belonging to the same surname group and clan, Prasad has studied post-graduate (MPhil) anthropology.

Uruma Ramesh: A teacher and campaigner for the preservation of Koya language.

Introduction

"We plant seeds then keep watch over crops, then sleep and keep birds
and other animals away. Then we cut our corn, our millet and our lentils
and de-husk them, and store them. Then we eat together and sleep".

- Pochamma.

"My village is on top of a hill. There isn't any road. So many applications have been put in
for a road but still it hasn't come. Here, we have a major water problem. There is only one
bore well, one that has good water, and another that has dirty water. My village is very far.
We don't have electricity".

- Janiki, Pochamma's daughter.

These two Koya adivasi women inhabit very similar worlds. They share in each other's
everyday work and co-contribute to each other's aspirations. Yet their two statements reveal
very different perspectives on life in the village that both call home. At the intimate scale of
daily family life they hold very different positions. Between mother and daughter is a gulf in
experience; for Janiki, the world is a very different place than for her mother. That difference
is the central concern of this thesis. Within a single generation much has been transformed. In
terms of livelihood, there has been a partial transition from shifting cultivation to precarious
migrant labour and greater dependency on the state. There has been a corresponding transition
from relatively autonomous social organisation typical of adivasis groups to incorporation into
the regional Telugu hierarchy of caste. Ostensibly, the religious practice of this family has
shifted from seasonal worship of highly localised deities to tentative adoption of popular
Hinduism. And there has been a transition from parentally approved cross-cousin marriage to
"love-cum-arranged" marriages.

This thesis investigates processes of integration through livelihood transition and affirmative
action by charting how Koya people in Andhra Pradesh differentiate themselves from others at
different scales of social life. I show how these layered transitions reinforce each other to
accentuate and essentialise the differences between people, ranging from close family relations

to inter-community interaction to perceived cultural difference across the Gōdāvari region. The narrative of transition becomes a foil for a more nuanced story of overlapping frameworks of relatedness, distinction and recognition, as processes of cultural identification, aspiration and family conflict make these two women so different today. Such processes at an interpersonal and community level correspond to wider political, developmental, economic and religious changes across the region.

Figure 1: Illūru women and girls dancing at *Vijjapandum*

In villages such as Pochamma's and Janiki's – let's call it Illūru, a pseudonym – the annual seed festival, *Vijjapandum*, is celebrated through a week of song, dance, communal meals and ritual hunts. This is an occasion to bless seeds and ensure a successful season of mixed-crop shifting cultivation. During *Vijjapandum*, Illūru women participate in daily dances in a clearing between three tamarind trees, by linking arms, forming a circle, and following a set of familiar movements: stepping in, right foot first, rocking back, left foot out. Each dance is preceded by a melody sung to the lyric "*rela rela*", a call to recognise the song by its intonation and tempo. Dances are led by one person who pushes the pace of the dance and cajoles others to join, a role that rotates between Illūru women as they instigate the next dance when the previous one has wound up. Lyrics are sung in time with the dance and take the form of a call and response. Verses are improvised, and recount stories of relatives and friends, of trips for labour and for love, as well as village ancestors, and other deities associated with

nearby hills and rivers. On festival evenings men and boys join in the dances but during the days of *Vijjapandum* they go out hunting unless they are sick, injured or elderly.

On some occasions Illūru women feel unmotivated to dance while the men are in the forest. They sit and chat and only begin to dance on hearing the men returning early. In such cases appearances must be maintained, and the women hastily get up and dance, as if they had been dancing all morning, only to be "interrupted" by the returning group. Strangers rarely enter Illūru village as to do so they must climb two kilometres through the forest from a jeep track. But on one festival day in 2017, two non-Koya men in shirts and trainers, stumbled upon the dance. They were contracted staff of the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) briefed to measure the distance to the village in preparation for the much anticipated construction of a tarmac road. Having found the village deserted, they encountered the women under the tamarind trees and became an audience to the dance, which was in their presence transformed into a performance. Equipped with the ubiquitous technological tool of the age, they pulled out an iPhone and made a video recording. At the end of the dance they volunteered a ten-rupee note (approximately 12 pence) to Sitamma, a tall, physically imposing woman who may have appeared as the most senior. She refused it, leaving them embarrassed and feeling awkward. After conferring they produced a more generous amount of ₹500 (rupees, approximately £6). Sitamma hesitated momentarily before signalling to them to hand this to Pochamma, her classificatory younger sister, who accepted the note, tucked it into her blouse and continued to dance.

This incident exposed two radically different understandings of what that dance represented. For the women of Illūru the *Vijjapandum* dances were fun, fairly spontaneous social and religious practice, through which ancestors are remembered, and relationships with deities reaffirmed. But for the non-Koya men the dance was a spectacle to be enjoyed, for which they felt obliged to pay. Dancing had never before been objectified in this way, in that particular place. In Illūru, dances are not performed to entertain audiences, and were never discussed as things that could be performed on demand or in return for cash.

Elsewhere in the Koya-speaking region in the market town of Chintūr, 50 kilometres northwest of Illūru, dancing for an audience is a well-recognised expression of community identity. Chintūr hosts a bi-annual cultural festival called *Rela Pandum*, which showcases the performing arts of adivasis from across South and East India, including Dhimsa dancers from Odisha, Gond dancers from Gadchiroli and distant Koyas from Karnataka. Alongside highly choreographed "tribal" dance routines from other states, *Rela Pandum* features the local Koya percussion band who are famous for energetic performances in red costumes, white *gamchas*

(cotton scarfs) and bison-horn head-dresses, who have performed as far afield as Delhi and Mumbai. Other acts are lifted directly from nearby villages, from where performers arrive in ritual loincloths, with baskets, bows and arrows, to re-enact festival games and dances. Placing such rituals on a huge bamboo stage shapes them into public facing cultural representations, designed to establish a distinctly adivasi culture, as encapsulated in references to *"Koya samskriti sampradhayam"* (Koya culture and tradition), and other common refrains like *"mananku samskriti vaire"* (our culture is different).[2]

Figure 2: A staged performance of a hunting ritual at *Rela Pandum* in 2016

Local dignitaries are seated on chairs and a carpet is provided for other spectators to sit, while hundreds more stand in the open ground. After each performance donations are made by wealthy attendees, whose names are announced along with the value of their donation. One regular performer is a local Koya Forest Department employee, who in 2016 dressed in a grass skirt and headdress as an *adavi biddalu* (a child of the forest). As he sang Koya folk songs directly to his audience, hysterical comedy was generated through the disconnect between this caricature and the man's day job. In 2018, he cast himself as an older Koya woman and enacted domestic scenes portraying the bickering between her son and daughter-in-law over who would serve whom. The humour played on the sexual tension between these relations and made light of the gendered expectations of Koya family life.

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[2] Of course, the semantic range of "culture" is not a direct correspondence to *samskriti*, but, as we embark on tracking the movement of concepts between contexts, the translation holds.

The *Rela Pandum* event is convened by the Dandakaranya Rakshana Samājam (DRS) (Forest Area Protection Society), a "tribal organisation" made up of students overqualified to work as labourers, aspiring politicians, and community activists. One of their full-time members described them as "our anthropology team". Many studied anthropology to prepare for civil service exams but redirected their training towards local community organizing. These relatively well-educated Koyas often lamented to me in despairing tones that their "culture" would become extinct. In contrast, cultivators such as Janiki in Illūru, complained that their village was still unconnected by road, insufficiently served by state infrastructure.

Exposing and analysing these differences, this thesis explores the experiences and subjectivities of Koya people at very different scales of self and community identification. Where Koyas have been industrious or privileged enough to become educated spokespeople for their community, they emphasise adivasi autonomy and yearn for a simpler life of uncharted access to forests, often romanticising the routines of traditional forest agriculture and domestic life. These more assimilated Koya cultural activists view their distinct culture in terms of what has been lost, and have internalised the notion of a cultural end-point into their political and professional activities. Conversely, young Koya people in less-connected villages, like Illūru, perceive themselves as yet-to-be-integrated into the wider economy: still lacking and desiring what the state and the market has yet to provide them: schools, health centres, mobile connectivity and road access. Meanwhile, women and men in Pochamma's generation in Illūru continue dancing and cultivating with a distant ambivalence to aspirations for development and processes of cultural objectification.

In Illūru, festival dances are performed for the benefit of the whole village: today's residents, ancestors and spirits. Everyone present is involved - reflecting the lack of class differentiation between participants. The moment of uncertainty caused by the monetary gift by outsiders was indicative of the different cultural and economic worlds in which the two parties operate. By contrast, the large audience and cash donations made public at *Rela Pandum* festival indicate interlocking hierarchies between organisers (curators of culture), performers (who embody culture) and between seated and standing spectators (who consume adivasi culture). This reflects Koya adivasis' graded incorporation into a wider regional economic and political sphere, in which their distinct identity is increasingly perceived as threatened and in need of consolidation.

This thesis shows how the notion of adivasi difference is historically produced, as distinctive patterns of labour, social organisation and agriculture developed; before engaging with the reification, exoticisation and decline of the very practices that came to define adivasis as

different. As displayed on the stage at *Rela Pandum*, the rituals of production and the gendered norms of social reproduction have become defining characteristics of Koyas, which are re-interpolated as markers of difference, and can be reclaimed assertively. In other contexts, these can be associated with stigma. In the current historical moment, the more Koya peoples' everyday lives become homogenised towards regional (Telugu) cultural norms, the more heightened their perception of cultural and ethnic difference becomes. As distinctions must be drawn to avoid total assimilation, or "de-tribalisation", a flattened figure of collective identity is operationalised to emphasise that Koyas are distinctively different. Thus, Koyas' sense of having a "distinctive culture" is reified, as their inclusion is premised on the reiteration of their "backwardness".

The concept of scale remains salient through these processes, ethnographically and analytically. Scale implies a level at which a social scientific analysis can operate. This may be a limit, a framing, a boundary or a remit within which an analysis holds true. Scale refers to a level of social life, often correlated with a mode of production, and associated forms of social relations. Hence, we can refer to the scale *of* a family, a village, a type of agriculture, or a region, caste or tribe. But a scale is also a measure of something, in this case, difference, and affinity. A scale should be agreed upon mutually with others, if not objectively, at least collectively invoking reference to an external standard. A scale can be balanced or unbalanced; its load evenly or unevenly proportioned. Further, the verb *to scale* means to rise to overcome something, which we all as interlocutors, researchers and communities must endeavour to do.

To further illustrate these scales of difference, consider the stark contrast between the life-expectations of children in inter-ethnic towns with transport links and government schools, and those living in smaller villages in the hills, where traditional forms of shifting cultivation are still practiced. Among school-aged children across these locations a *scale* is a 15cm plastic ruler. In the market towns a scale can be found in almost every home. In the more remote Koya villages of the Gōdāvari region, a scale is an unusual symbol of aspiration and achievement. The possession of an item like this confers on its owner an aura of prestige.

For Janiki, a scale is a useful object, both in school and in her village. She uses it to reinforce the faintly ruled lines that cross the page of a record book she maintains for a handsome Forest Department Officer, who delegates to her the tiresome duty of recording animal sightings. For Janiki's mother Pochamma, such an item holds value through its association with her children's efforts to craft more officially recognisable lives for themselves, lives which are made up of tasks like keeping records, filling applications, communicating with non-Koya persons. Although Pochamma is one of the most industrious of her generational cohort, ready

to embrace the logics of her children's generation, she does not read, write or engage in such tasks herself.

This thesis aims to illustrate local understandings and experiences of such contrasts. I show how attitudes to different types of work, different modes of providing for others, and even different types of people have been generated through economic and historical processes and powerful discourses. By doing so, I illustrate the ways in which, at an incrementally expanding scale as we move through the thesis, the historical production of cultural and ethnic difference has become so sharply defined that Koya people in this region are induced to identify as belonging to a Scheduled Tribe (ST) in everyday parlance and interaction. Through the subsequent chapters, I hope to orientate my reader to the dynamics of difference in generation between a mother and daughter, to the differences in dispositions held by members of their family, to the different livelihoods and religious practise of neighbouring families in Illūru village, before exploring (at another scale) different classes within the Koya adivasi group as evoked by the contrasting performances above. Eventually, we will reflect on the differences between Koyas and other Scheduled Tribe and non-Scheduled Tribe communities.

This kaleidoscopic view of an adivasi community illustrates how the logics of historical processes of state recognition and cultural objectification extend deep into the intimate spaces of families and households. When positioned on the scale of the competitive world of representative politics and affirmative action in South India, my Koya interlocutors are confined to their caste/tribe identity as if it were definitive; or, as Rohith Vermula insightfully wrote, reduced to an "immediate identity and nearest possibility" that structures the experience of the world from a particular social location (Guru 2017; Nayar 2019: 30). Through this history of the production of objectified cultural difference and class differentiation in South Asia, and by understanding the configuration of young adivasi people's aspirations to be included, this thesis shows how adivasi identity and Koya "culture" becomes a kind of value. It is a value to be drawn on in various ways and transacted in exchange for an advantage in state affirmative action, in lieu either of a more powerful caste network or a more established discourse of positive public representation.

But for now, let us move slowly and maintain our balance as we shift from a mother-daughter relationship, to their family, their village and their nearest town – before considering the region, state and nation in which they are located. The next section provides an overview of overlapping constructions of difference among Koyas. I then describe the historical measures of community classification that are relevant to the Koya participants in this research, tacking between local and national processes. These are the starting point to trace out important

literatures on tribes and castes in India. Subsequently, I explore the connection between these literatures and debates on social construction, recognition, and indigeneity, and discuss the wider scope and contribution of this thesis. I include a brief summary of the ethnographic methods used in this research. Finally, I lay out a plan of the chapters that follow.

Framing constructions of difference

This argument is grounded in the study of an indigenous community in the Gōdāvari region of South India and its history, but seeks to provide broader insights relevant to all ethnic and cultural groups whose lives are over-determined by a reductive and essentialising sense of their community identity. The thesis aims to reinvigorate the discipline of anthropology's capacity to ask fundamental questions about how ethnic and cultural differences are historically produced and embedded, and how they become viewed as essential and resilient – both by anthropologists, and by "people" themselves. By analysing the ways in which legislative protections and state interventions have codified and governmentalised cultural and ethnic difference, and how these are reified in popular understandings of difference among Koya adivasis themselves, I show how perceived cultural difference is consolidated by and accentuated through affirmative action and economic integration. Furthermore, I examine how processes of recognition of difference relate to new and established inequalities and hierarchies within indigenous communities. Clearly these questions invoke a challenge that straddles theoretical frames as much as it addresses multiple empirical contexts. Anthropologists have certainly addressed such questions, but, as I outline below, in the adivasi situation, the inherited terms of debate are deeply problematic. There is a rich and varied literature, discussed below, analysing the categorisations of caste and tribe in India (Béteille 1986; Fuller 2017; Paidipaty 2010; Xaxa 1999). Significant research has addressed the incorporation or assimilation of adivasis and both the subtle and egregious aspects of cultural, material and religious changes (Bailey 1960; Froerer 2007; Fürer-Haimendorf 1982; Sachchidananda 1970; Shah 2010; Vitebsky 2017a). There has been a recent resurgence of work on adivasis by historians and ethnographers, yet despite these important contributions, the reverberations of an outdated anthropological notion of difference remain at play in wider public debates.

This thesis seeks to contribute to these literatures by attempting to navigate the disjuncture between cultural and ethnic identity as putatively fixed and available to state policy makers, and more unstable and contingent anthropological notions of identity. Given that bounded concepts of culture continue to circulate in wider politics (Moore et al. 2008), despite being dismissed by social scientists, how are socially constructed differences between groups mobilised in different social political and cultural contexts? How, I ask, do emic articulations

of difference relate to externally articulated political and cultural claims, such as those underpinning "identity politics", affirmative action and other claims to ethnic and cultural authenticity in the public sphere? And how do externally produced and legitimated categories become interpolated into sentiments of relatedness and difference within communities? Difference, often passed off as socially constructed, may be constituted as the expression of an "already existing community coming to consciousness of itself" or as "historical conditions and political practice producing new senses of community and difference" (Pandey 2010: 69, quoted in Hegde 2010: 82–83).

In Andhra Pradesh where I conducted 22 months of fieldwork, the category of "tribal" or "ST" operates *as if* it were fixed, monolithic, and ultimately binding. People are defined by this governmentalised face of caste/tribe, even in dense forests, and are marked out as *adavi* (wild, Te.) *venukaku* (backwards, Te.) or *cinna* (small, Te. and Ko.), as they journey deep into the institutions of the modern bureaucratic state.

The category of "Koya" operates as a broad, institutionalised caste/tribe category that comprises people from a spectrum of social backgrounds in several states of Eastern India: Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Koyas in Andhra Pradesh include small-holding farmers, peasants, wage labourers, students, teachers and other professionals, low ranking civil servants, ambitious politicians and shifting cultivators. Across this spectrum of livelihoods, 590,739 people in Andhra Pradesh, according to the 2011 Census of India, claim the identity of Scheduled Tribe: Koya (Census of India 2011a). Koyas are considered to belong to the larger Gond tribal group, under whose umbrella Koya language is grouped. The 2011 census recorded 243,000 speakers of Koya as their mother tongue in Andhra Pradesh, 341,354 Koyas whose first language is Telugu, and 772 who are first language Gondi speakers.[3]

This thesis takes as an initial premise, that the category of Koya adivasi people in India is non-monolithic and heterogeneous. Though broad and contested, the thesis also tries to do justice to the ways in which people accept and embrace the legitimate, corporate reality of such categories as Koya, "tribal", and "ST", and how these have become resilient, culturalised, quasi-ethnic blocks.

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[3] The Koya spoken in Andhra Pradesh is highly influenced by Telugu. Colloquially it is referred to as *Gondi bhasha*, *Koya bhasha*, or *Koithur*, which also means person in Koya. Recent linguistic revivalist projects, which I discuss in Chapter 9, have courted some controversy through the "discovery" of an ancient Gondi script (Singh 2013).

Among Koya adivasi people in Northern Andhra Pradesh the arbitrariness and simultaneous empirical truth of their Koya-ness became increasingly salient through my fieldwork, or as Comaroff and Comaroff (2009: 40) highlight, their cultural identity revealed itself as self-consciously both "ascriptive and instrumental […] innate and constructed". Despite this degree of expansiveness of Koya identification, as we will see in the chapters below, it is understood as signifying something innate, taking on a quasi-ethnic quality. The category is the sedimentation of historical processes of recognition, and people are aware of the instrumental and ascribed nature of the ethnonym. But crucially, it is also an emic term for those people belonging to Koya families, part of an ostensibly endogamous kinship network. The tribe name "Koya" becomes, at certain scales of sociality, a kinship term that defines who is related and who is not.

For Pochamma, almost every Koya person within a 20 kilometre radius of her home in Illūru is known by name, family name, and by their kinship relation to her, and to her children. People belonging to the Koya community generally intermarry with people who are also Koyas; conforming to a Dravidian kinship system in which the mother's brother's daughter is the preferred partner for a young man, within exogamous clans and according to patrilineal descent. Koya people behave very differently with those in their *intiperu* (surname) group, *gotra* (clan) groups, or their *jāti* (caste/tribe), compared to those who belong to different castes or tribes (*vaire jāti*). Like most places in the world there are clear ethnic and cultural groups and borders between them.

Thus, in certain senses the term "Koya" signifies relatedness between people, although, for Pochamma, there is simultaneously an awareness that it is an administrative category, and that a "Koya" person may, in an exceptional case, become someone very different from her and her kin. The next section describes some of the key historical classifications of people like Pochamma. This will be crucial to understanding how the sedimentation of those processes has shaped contemporary notions of who people understand themselves as being related to, or different from, in Northern Andhra Pradesh today.

Historical measures of classification

Responding to heated debates around the status of "caste" in pre-colonial Indian society (Cohn 1996; Dirks 2011),[4] many scholars contend that "tribe" was at least as tenuous and contentious

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[4] It is generally accepted that the British colonial representation of India, which came to be understood as "Traditional India", privileged an upper-caste (Brahminical) understanding of Indian society (Fuller 1996).

a categorisation (Béteille 1986; Das Gupta & Basu 2012: 12; Xaxa 2008: 2–3). The term tribe was used to describe, categorise and eventually indirectly govern those communities who were not integrated into the hierarchy of the rural caste system. Such groups were thought to lack the reference points of rank and symbolic status regarding their respective purity or pollution, which were so vital to classical sociological accounts of caste differentiation. A community's non-correspondence with Hindu stratification was the criteria on which such distinctions were made, and thus tribe can be interpreted as being as much a Brahminical (upper caste Hindu) category as a colonial one (Das Gupta & Basu 2012: 3).

Paidipaty (2010) engages in re-tracing the problematic definitions of colonial Indian anthropology, a "frontier science" concerned with discovery, implicated in military conquest and the indirect rule of "tribals". As British scholars produced comprehensive handbooks listing the key features of the castes and tribes of India (e.g. Thurston 1909; see Fuller 2017), the colonial state restructured the economic and social fabric of much of rural India in the course of resource extraction (Guha & Gadgil 1989). Even before the production of these voluminous handbooks, rebellions in the early 19th century had been explained by British officials by defining unruly communities as "primitive autochthones, as the subcontinent's original inhabitants" forced into forests and hills by the progress of more advanced neighbours (Paidipaty 2010: 6). The first schedules drew on contemporary ideas of evolution, to set certain areas apart spatially, politically, and temporally "offset from the historical progress of British India" (Banerjee 2006, 2016; Paidipaty 2010: 9).

As explored in Chapter 2, certain "unruly" territories were deemed unsuitable for British rule and were "excluded" (Francis 1992: 58; Jaya Rao 1988; Panigrahy 2009; Sundar 2009: 199). Colonial anthropology was complicit in the justification of such manoeuvres: "grafted onto mid-[19th]century understandings of race, the term tribe came to signify aboriginality" (Paidipaty 2010: 6). The logic of exceptionalism for these areas was securely embedded in legislation when The Scheduled Districts Act (Act XIV) of 1874 listed all the areas to be "Excluded or Partially Excluded". Colonial officers qua anthropologists played a significant role in developing frameworks for understanding difference in India's vast and diverse population.

Xaxa (2008) building on Vidyarthi (1982), places the works of the early scholar-administrators into context. In the "formative period" (1784 to 1919) tribes were believed to be of a different race, and their physical features thought to correspond with their aptitude and social behaviour (Risley 1891; Russell 1970 [1916]; Thurston 1909). The "constructive" period (1920-49) saw the introduction of anthropology into university departments, before the "analytical period"

(1950 onwards) produced a rise in action-orientated approaches to studying tribes (Xaxa 2008: 2). These broad brush-strokes suggest that the objectives of tribal studies, anthropology and tribal policy in India shifted, but the analytical and conceptual baggage was largely retained. Though administrators turned ethnographers conceptualised their work as "discovery", or as a descriptive pseudo-science, such distinctions increasingly became the basis for wide-reaching social and economic policy. In the Government of India Act (1930) (Galanter 1984), which prefigured India's constitution, there was an applied aspect to caste/tribe distinctions as they justified the implementation of interventions. These categorisations culminated in the Vth Schedule of the constitution in 1953, which conferred special powers to "the governor" in Scheduled Areas of several states in India, intended to protect tribal people from land alienation and disenfranchisement by non-tribal communities.

Against the backdrop of colonial accounts, eminent sociologist G. S. Ghurye (1943) published an influential critique of static conceptions of India's tribal people, accounting for complex migratory histories of the subcontinent. Re-reading colonial reports, Ghurye revealed much uncertainty about how to classify isolated "autochtonous" rural populations. He argued that the "so-called aboriginals" were on a single continuum with caste societies but had not yet developed sufficiently to be integrated into the Hindu fold.[5] He supported policies of assimilation rather than exclusion. His key opponent at the time was Verrier Elwin who advocated that central government should allow India's tribal populations to adapt to modernity at their own pace (Elwin 1944; Guha 1996: 2379, 1998), believing that tribal India constituted a distinct society that needed to be protected.

F. G. Bailey (1961: 11) criticised those, including Ghurye, who believed there was no concrete difference between castes and tribes, as well as those who had posited that caste and tribe were radically different (e.g., Naik). Bailey offered a more analytical framework for the distinction than Elwin, concluding, based on detailed ethnography in Odisha, that "the only solution to this problem is to postulate a continuum" (Bailey 1960: 264). While Ghurye and Elwin's debate was regarded as a matter of public policy, the caste/tribe division became a topic of concerted sociological debate in the 1960s. Bailey asserted that "if they have direct command over resources, and their access to the products of the economy are not derived mediately through a dependent status on others, then they are to be counted as a tribe" (1960: 265). Yet this was not just a matter of definitions. The social form of caste, as an endogamous group which is politically active across a linguistic region, was becoming the mould into which both

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[5] Dirks has suggested that Ghurye's work was an influence on scholars such as Redfield and Lewis, rather than vice versa (2013: 246).

tribes and the traditional rural castes were being merged (1960: 266). For Bailey, as for many others, there was an urgency to understand the social processes by which "tribal people become incorporated into the caste system and whether or not this process ought to be hindered or pushed forward" (1960: 265).

In Bailey's (1960, 1961) work the emphasis shifted from established criteria that were not sociologically precise, towards considering the social organisation of castes or tribes as imperfect materialisations of ideal types, a formulation made more distinct in Sinha (1965: 58).[6] The greater proportion of people with direct access to the land, Bailey asserted, the closer they are "to the tribal end of the continuum" (Bailey 1961: 13). Where rights to land are achieved through a dependent relationship, the closer those people are "to the caste pole" (Bailey 1961: 14). Bailey placed the distribution of land and power at the centre of the debate. Highlighting the "segmentary" aspect to tribal societies, in comparison to the internal hierarchies and specialisation of labour present in caste society, Bailey made the issue a political-economic debate – rather than focussing on the two forms as radically different types of people.

According to French structuralist anthropologist Louis Dumont, Bailey downplayed the importance of religion and tribal cultural isolation (Dumont 1962: 121). Dumont questioned whether a linear continuum was an ideal representation, suggesting instead a multi-dimensional scale, and critically asking whether castes could be taken as "whole" societies in the same way as tribes. Dumont also countered Bailey's emphasis on territory, pointing out the caste system "shows a great flexibility when it comes to settlement patterns" (1962: 122). Sinha's exposition similarly highlighted the "*degree* of hierarchy in the regional land tenure system" (emphasis added) rather than simply "access to land" through dependent relationships that should define the caste end of the spectrum (Sinha 1955: 60).

Bailey's work, and Dumont and Sinha's responses, developed a more fine-grained notion of what distinguishes tribes from castes than that which characterised the earlier debate between Ghurye and Elwin. Castes had hereditary occupations and hierarchical interrelations, whereas tribes formed self-contained "segmentary" social units, without hereditary division of labour (Bailey 1960: 263–6), class stratification or organised state structures (Xaxa 2008: 15).[7] This literature brought to the surface the disjuncture between administrative, sociological, political

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[6] These criteria included isolation, language, religion, economic backwardness. As Middleton (2016) has shown, these have retained importance in the contemporary period.
[7] Xaxa concedes that not all groups recognised as tribes conform to these features but shows that this is an important part of the discourse around tribes.

and historical characterisations of difference between adivasi society and caste society. Clearly there was no justification for maintaining that the difference was solely on the basis of differential access to land, for, as shown in Bailey's and Sinha's contributions, these can fluctuate and become open to dispute. Within these debates, subtle divergences surface between those accounts that implicitly represent a fundamental difference between these communities, and those that approach differences as merely transient outcomes of material and historical process, such as access to land and other resources.

A key question to take forward concerns the status that we ascribe to caste and tribe difference today. The transition can be understood as the outcome of economic and historical processes, solidified over generations of living in different material circumstances. In some adivasi contexts particular "segmentary" social relations have been fostered in contrast to caste hierarchy (Shah 2016). In others, distinctive religious traditions have been partially forgotten, or preserved (Vitebsky 2017a) as adivasi communities have become incorporated or retained autonomy to varying degrees. Where adivasis are now seen as isolated, this may be due to migration caused by economic expansion elsewhere. Commentators today must consider how can we represent those differences in ways that emphasise their historicity and do not "re-primordialise" those "tribes" who do retain distinctive social relations as living fossils (Thirumali 2006). Furthermore, how can we mitigate against the risks of further contributing to the "identity machine" (Graeber 2004: 101-4; Leve 2011: 514) however unintentionally, when we describe their social relations as "relatively egalitarian" (Shah 2019: 225-26)?

These debates captured the attention of sociologists and anthropologists and a rich literature emerged on processes of change, as putatively isolated segmentary tribal societies were absorbed into heterogeneous hierarchical caste societies across the subcontinent. This work highlighted the celebration of pan-Indian festivals in tribal areas, the adoption of pollution taboos and conversion to vegetarianism, as examples of "tribals" or adivasis becoming more like castes (Sachchidananda 1970; Sinha 1965) and also questioned the degree of agency that communities had in their "absorption". Bose (1953) for example, argued that the overlapping interests of Hindu kingdoms and tribes living on their fringes led to the latter becoming integrated into the former. Kosambi (1975) and Sinha (1962) also attributed agency to the tribes who integrated themselves into larger kingdoms and caste societies, but Xaxa (2005: 1367) argues that in the post-independence era, state administration practices constitute a non-violent coercion of tribes to become absorbed. Broadly these themes remain prevalent in both scholarly and popular understandings. As we shall see in the ethnography that follows, concepts like Sanskritisation (Srinivas 1956) and "de-tribalisation" are in fact usurped and repurposed by tribal people themselves.

Politics of adivasi recognition

Other than the term "tribe", used by the administrator-ethnographers of the colonial regime, communities that existed outside well-established and integrated caste systems of exchange and interaction have been labelled *vanvasi*, or *janjāti*, both neologisms coined by the Hindu right (Banerjee 2016: 151; Dasgupta 2018: 8; Shah 2010: 20). As Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011) note, each of these terms carries its own identificatory limitations and baggage. The grounds for grouping together diverse societies such as Nagas in Eastern Assam, Pathans of the Northwestern Provinces, and South Indian Gond and Koya communities were tenuous. Though these communities had few features in common, they shared historical exclusion and difference from the caste system. Moreover, the processes by which diverse groups were governed by colonial and post-colonial states mean that they do indeed find themselves in similar predicaments today (Banerjee 2016: 133; Xaxa 2008). Across the Indian subcontinent, these groups' social and cultural identities as communities have arguably been formed through similar modalities of opposition and exclusion.

The term adivasi (literally, first inhabitants) is by no means an original self-descriptor. It dates to 1930s attempts by Christian missionaries to build political consciousness and mobilise across regions of India (Das Gupta & Basu 2012: xv; Radhakrishna 2016: 9; Shah 2010: 15). In many contexts "tribal" and adivasi are used interchangeably by those who identify with them, and by others who mark themselves out as being from a different category of person. The English language term "tribal", although suffused with colonial-era overtones and the suggestion of primordiality, is nevertheless used as part of everyday vernacular in many South Asian languages, and is generally not, I contend, interpreted as necessarily being explicitly derogatory.[8]

For some scholars, such as Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011: 2), the term adivasi is untethered from the imperialist tone and radical difference implied in "tribe", but others such as Van Schendel argue that "adivasi" continues to incorporate the idea of innate distinctiveness (2011: 16). In social scientific discourse, most authors opt for the generalised term adivasi, rather than adopting the statist term of "Scheduled Tribe" or simply "tribal".

A growing number of scholars focus on the constructed nature of the adivasi subject, with an awareness of the real implications of such constructions as objects in the public sphere. Van Schendel contributes a useful perspective on the terms of designation and definition of tribes

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[8] In the same way, terms such as "Asian", as in "British Asian", can be used impartially, but also retain the potential to assert a disparaging tone, or to insult.

and adivasis, echoing Banerjee and Xaxa that despite huge differences in the communities so designated, the term tribe became a valid descriptor of the power relation between such people and the colonial power: "to be tribal meant to be subordinated to a superior power with a civilizing mission" (Van Schendel 2011: 21). Seeking to explain why South Asianists remain comfortable with the term, while colleagues working in Africa firmly discarded it, Van Schendel suggests "the category of "tribe" is an undeniably important tool of identity politics […] could it be that identity politics resulting from state policy towards tribals determine how anthropologists conceptualise their subject?" (2011: 25–26).

Yet in contemporary parlance, Koyas, like many adivasi groups, are locally recognised as a caste group. The Sanskrit origin word *jāti* is the local Telugu term for endogamous castes or sub-castes, and this is used by my Koya research participants to denote their own belonging to "*Koya jāti*".[9] They also self-define as "tribal", as *girijanulu* (hill dwellers), *rythu* (farmer) and "ST". Within electoral politics Koyas also are inclined to behave as if they were a caste in relation to formal party-political processes. Natrajan (2012) details the "interest group" model of caste which I find surprisingly applicable to contemporary "tribes". As we will see, the political effects of affirmative action (or "reservations" - the common Indian English term for community quotas) makes the concepts of caste and tribe more or less interchangeable in terms of how they operate to mediate and separate groups within the modern secular frameworks of education and state sector employment.

Before moving to discuss the wider import of collapsing the tribe/caste distinction, as this thesis disaggregates and probes the different categories of identification at play within Koya lives today, a short detour is necessary to consider how theorising of caste itself has changed. Dumont's classic structuralist account of caste as a system (1970)[10] does (eventually) consider debates about how caste was changing, approvingly citing Ghurye's description of castes grouping themselves into quarters and creating cooperatives and associations, configurations that "represent new forms of solidarity and caste consciousness" (Dumont 1970: 268). Acknowledging forms of "caste patriotism" (ibid.), Dumont credits Ghurye for discerning the process of "substantialisation" of caste through the condition of modernity: "the transition from a fluid structural universe in which the emphasis is on interdependence and in which there is no privileged level, no firm units, to a universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient,

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[9] *Jāti* is thought of by Natrajan (2012) as a fetishisation of blood, as opposed to *samaj*, which is a fetishisation of culture.
[10] Dumont's analysis was based on a scriptural understanding of Hinduism and proposed a fourfold classification of caste (*varna*), which subsumed within smaller individual castes and sub-castes (*jāti*). Dalits are so low they fall outside this fourfold structure. Tribal people are completely absent from this cosmology.

essentially identical and in competition with one another, a universe in which caste appears as a collective individual, […] as a substance" (Dumont 1970: 269).

Many scholars have built on this substantialisation process, which captures precisely the way castes have become solidified into the modern political and cultural system (see Fuller 1996: 12; Natrajan 2012: 12; Reddy 2005: 549).[11] The cultural element to this reification of substance has proven increasingly important. As Fuller (1996: 13) has argued, caste has come to operate as a relational form of culture difference, or at least is coded as such in public discourse, as caste discrimination on the basis of rank become publicly unacceptable. Moreover, Fuller continues to assert that "[c]astes are still being historically constructed, or perhaps more aptly being 'deconstructed' as a vertically integrated hierarchy decays into a horizontally disconnected disarray" (1996: 26). Fuller is here consolidating and revamping Dumont's half-hearted theorisation of substantialisation, through which caste structure yields to substance, and each caste becomes like a collective individual with its own distinctive culture and "way of life", which confront each other for resources (1996: 12).

This thesis will demonstrate how similar processes are well underway among adivasi groups who are also incorporated into that horizontal competition. A variant of this substantialisation process has occurred to the Koya people of Andhra Pradesh as, to paraphrase Fuller, they have become collective individuals facing off against others in competition for resources. The argument that emerges inductively through this thesis, which supports Fuller's vision of such processes, is that culturalised difference has become increasingly ingrained and, despite the relative tribal autonomy and access to land, the notion of Koya difference from other communities has become a contemporary caste-like distinction. The substantialisation argument is particularly resonant when we consider the implementation of India's affirmative action policies and the varied impact they have had on different communities. Most clearly, in the Andhra Pradesh case, this is exemplified by the heated objection that many Koyas express towards the inclusion of Lambadas on the Scheduled Tribes list. The Lambadas, who are migrants from the northwest of India, are numerically much larger than Koyas in Andhra Pradesh (Office of the Registrar General 2001). Lambadas are perceived to have been able to access the resources of state benefits much more successfully than Koyas and Konda Reddis (another adivasi/ ST group, who are indigenous to the Gōdāvari region). This example, which I will return to through this thesis is indicative of the larger politics of entitlement and resentment that are now associated with affirmative action in India (Deshpande 2013; Kapila

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[11] Dumont subsequently diminished the substantialisation "transition", which he dubbed an "alleged modification" relevant in the politico-economic domain that he deemed to be encompassed by the larger religious frame (1970: 275).

2008; Michelutti & Heath 2013; Moodie 2015; Shah & Shneiderman 2013; Still 2013; Subramanian 2019). It is to these policies and their development that we now turn.

Affirmative action in India

As suggested in the foregoing sections, two competing forms of state affirmative action policies have been crucial in shaping the contemporary situation for Koyas in Andhra Pradesh. These mirror the contours of classic debates around caste and tribe. On the one hand, legislation has tried to "exclude" adivasis, to protect their access to land and forests, and to encourage them to live on their own terms.[12] On the other hand, affirmative action policies have sought to redress inequalities by reserving large proportions of seats in schools, universities and state employment for Scheduled Tribes, as for other so-called backwards classes.[13] The former policy was directed towards creating autonomy, while the later intended to facilitate inclusion. Henceforth, affirmative action is viewed as having two distinct aspects: one that is built on an ideology of isolation and preservation; and one that seeks to integrate tribal people into the larger nation. Many commentators emphasise the importance of one or the other of these principles but seem to overlook their co-presence in today's state-society relationship in adivasi areas. Paidipaty is the exception, when noting explicitly that the "two systems of constitutional protections were really at odds with one another" (2010: 93).

Inclusive "reservations" were implemented on a short-term basis, not as a matter of principle but as means to precise ends, i.e. to achieve better representation of lower castes, classes and tribes in public institutions, and to support the formation of community consciousness and wellbeing (Rodrigues 2005). The idea that policies and interventions could generate community consciousness is embedded in Ambedkar's writing but has a longer history across the subcontinent. The enumeration of population through the colonial census had a profound effect on how Indian people see themselves in terms of distinct "communities" (Cohn 1996). As indicated above, the drive to classify and enumerate *types* of people (castes, tribes, ethnic groups) featured prominently through colonial rule into independence. Chakrabarty (1995: 3377) shows how "community" and "ethnicity" were imbued with three connected meanings: first, that enumeration of a group was possible and indicative of their political clout; second, that social and economic progress was measurable through that community's share of public life; and third, that governments could objectively test a group's progress or "backwardness". This informed the assumption that community groups should develop a political consciousness

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[12] These policies are critically examined in Chapter 2.
[13] These have been defined as Backwards Castes, Scheduled Castes, Other Backwards Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

of their own, which laid the ground for the inclusion-orientated face of India's affirmative action regime, based on reserved positions in civil service and government jobs, seats in schools and colleges and electoral offices for historically marginalised communities – including adivasis qua Scheduled Tribes. Yet these policies clearly contradict the other side of affirmative action for adivasi people, the land protections noted above, which "exclude" certain tracts of land, in order to protect.

Unlike academic anthropology, which has increasingly favoured the use of fluid and ambiguous understandings of how social groupings should be delineated, the Government of India has had to define what constitutes each of these listed categories. State ethnographers of the Anthropological Survey of India review the classifications of tribes to ascertain whether or not they constitute a Scheduled Tribe using the criteria of "primitive traits, distinctive culture, isolation, shyness of contact and backwardness" (Middleton 2016: 96; National Commission for Scheduled Tribes 2015: 26–27). These criteria are used by anthropologists working at the interface of governmental and anthropological modes of categorisation. Irrespective of trenchant critiques of such characterisations, they are the conditions upon which state support is granted or withheld, and are accepted, internalised and employed as distinctions between tribal groups across India today. At a certain scale of interaction, Koyas are inclined to identify themselves as being ST – as it is on this basis that their lands are protected, and jobs and education made more accessible to them. This potential for Koyas to see themselves and their experiences from a state-like perspective is coupled with the potential for political movements that oppose the state to draw on the same modalities and allegiances in forming resistance (Parkin 2000; Schleiter & Maaker 2010; Shah 2010: 182). The ST category becomes a marker of shared historical discrimination (now positive) retaining the ambivalent position of being desirable – a qualifier for state support – and derogatory – associated with "backwardness" and "primitive traits".

Popular and scholarly ideas about adivasis are arguably more closely informed by the principles that belie the first set of policies (towards protectionism and isolation), yet it is the second set (fostering inclusion and integration) that have become a much more powerful force in the everyday lives of adivasis today. In fact, policies promoting autonomy and isolation have been increasingly eroded – through poor implementation, the migration of outsiders into adivasi areas and the undermining of protective land legislation for commercial industries. Meanwhile, the impact of affirmative action driven towards inclusion has grown as more and more Koyas have been schooled and gained new types of employment. These wider changes mean that fewer Koyas in the Gōdāvari region continue traditional livelihoods of shifting cultivation and local religious practices. Those that do continue such livelihoods are a rarity

and have become understood through the paradigm of their own exceptionalism. For most Koya adivasi participants in this research, processes of livelihood transition, economic development and the uptake of inclusive affirmative action involve a reiteration of their cultural difference from others.

Contribution of this thesis

In the much fabled "wider world" outside academic anthropology it remains a given that individuals and social groups are often divided into cultural units which have fairly discrete boundaries (Gupta 2000: 18; James 1990; Natrajan 2012; Reddy 2005: 546; Shneiderman & Tillin 2015: 4). These cultural identities (e.g., "Northern", "Asian", "English") are, according to most social and cultural theorists, unstable and inherently messy categories. No one is ever comprehensively defined by such labels; nor can one adjudicate on where one category starts and another ends. However, these sorts of categories exist in public arenas in which they are highly durable and often have a life of their own (Hacking 2002; Karlsson 2003; Li 2000).[14] These categories and the supposed cultural blocks they describe also play an important role in politics, as they unite social movements and inform policy decisions.

The possibility of a category having the power to produce political consciousness or shape self-identification can be found in various disciplinary registers. Hacking (1999, 2002) has investigated the ways in which labels have material, political and cognitive effects on social life. He asserts, "the primary use of social construction has been for raising consciousness" (1999: 6). The constructionist turn in the social sciences, of which Hacking's work is one example, are prefigured in Ambedkar's critique of Hindu concepts of difference (see Natrajan 2012: 9). As noted above, in India the principle of developing community consciousness is constitutionally mandated. In fact, the concept of "dynamic nominalism", or a "looping effect" can be traced in several ways particular to South Asia. It is implicitly relevant to Paidipaty (2010), Karlsson (2001, 2003, 2013) and to Shah and Shneiderman's (2013) introduction on affirmative action; it is explicitly referenced in Chakrabarty (1995: 3376), Kapila (2008: 130), Middleton (2016: 74), Mosse (2020: 22) and Reddy (2005: 555). Building on this trend, this thesis seeks to accommodate perspectives that are "constructionist" in their assessment of adivasi identity, acknowledging the generative and synthetic power of identity categories, without dismissing the presence and validity of "essentialist" accounts of difference in public and political arenas. While the classification of the Koyas as a Scheduled Tribe may be deeply

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[14] Wood and Schaffer (1985) argue from a developmental perspective, that policy making requires processes of labelling. This necessarily involves stereotyping and standardisation of complex human phenomena that have to be flattened or compartmentalised.

problematic to many readers, and while it flattens out so many of the nuanced differences between Koyas that are elaborated through this thesis, it has very tangible implications. It is a label that is simultaneously real and constructed (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009; Shneiderman & Tillin 2015: 4).

The common sense notion of ethnic and cultural difference remains alive and well, despite decades of sociological and anthropological critique.[15] After all, people and communities have shared histories, and shared cultural reference points in their lives. People are stereotyped. Discrimination occurs, and arguably prevails. Ethnic violence, racism, and caste-based prejudice are contemporary realties. If academic anthropologists can learn anything from the global rise of right-wing populism or from the trenchant communalism that pervades South Asia (Das 1995, 2003; Froerer 2007; Van der Veer 1994), then it is that social scientists have not won the argument about society, ethnicity and culture. While social scientists keep reminding people that identity categories are historically and socially constructed, the rest of the world clearly still believes that the world is made up of distinct blocks of people; people who can ultimately be defined by having an identity. Or at least people behave as if they believe this to be the case. Moore, Held and Young (2008) astutely convey the paradox of anthropology's withdrawal from such debates, at precisely the historical moment that a hardened, reified, post-historical notion of cultural identity is taking hold across a range of contexts they describe as Global Cultural Politics. I envisage an anthropology that takes into account the material and historical conditions through which cultural identities are produced, reproduced and embodied, *as well as* the generative political power that objectified cultural categories wield in the wider world. Such a perspective is especially urgent in contexts where categories of indigeneity and ethnicity marginalise those identified as such, but are also the potential vehicles for combatting such marginalisation and articulating alternate narratives of identification. Through this thesis there are moments where indigeneity, adivasi-ness and ST identity, are mobilised for an instrumental value (Oskarsson & Sareen 2019: 3; Schleiter & Maaker 2010; Steur 2011).

This research suggests a framework for interpreting the collective, yet often individuated ways in which people engage with culturalised ideas of understanding themselves in their social, political and material economic context (c.f. Bourdieu 1990: 78). Over time, people are exposed to, engage with, and themselves reconstruct ideas about who they are with others. Ideas of what constitute people and communities are invariably co-produced by other people,

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[15] Yet the globalisation and widespread use of the culture concept is relatively recent. Sahlins (1995: 13-4) suggested that anthropology was mistaken to abandon the concept just as the wider world was adopting it.

and, to a certain extent, every individual person can learn to contribute to them, though this agency to contribute to collective representations of self, community, and others, is unevenly distributed. People experience and engage with the world, according to external stimuli and concepts of what a person and their society is, that are learned and internalised (Wagner 1981: 46). Most people's idea of themselves is as a person in relation to others, and is contingent on a set of learned objectifications about who people are.

Arguably, within such a theory of socialisation, difference is essential to the production of society. Cultural and moral frameworks, allow people to make distinctions and draw boundaries around some people but not others, thereby enabling people to abstain from the obligations they have towards others, with whom they are constructed as unrelated (Bubeck 1995: 225; Wagner 1981: 46). These concerns will be elaborated in relation to ethnographic material on networks of provision and care between Koya families.

Scope of the argument

Through processes of economic development, state recognition, affirmative action and social integration, Koya people are "assimilated", "detribalised" and become akin to a caste. The term Koya increasingly operates as a caste name ("*Koya jāti*") in vernacular distinctions of identity, as well as being reaffirmed in the uptake of affirmative action ("ST: Koya"). This thesis examines the complex and multivalent kinds of difference that are established, performed and objectified through these processes. Hence, this thesis intervenes in debates on caste/tribe difference in contemporary India, and addresses specifically Indian questions of adivasi culturalisation, assimilation, and political and cultural representation.

Drawing on the historical construction of the Scheduled Tribe category and thinking contextually and comparatively about the contemporary representation of an adivasi subject (and Koya adivasi subject), I will examine how adivasi political subjectivity has been represented and misrepresented, and how caste/tribe difference has been discerned, applied and re-inscribed. In a perceptive paper, Prathima Banerjee (2016) argues that appropriate analytical perspectives have yet to be coherently developed, as ideas about adivasis have remained until now highly over-determined by out-dated anthropological criteria of tribe, and the governmentalisation of these criteria. As a historian, her claim seems to disregard much rich ethnography of adivasis, which has significant theoretical import (e.g. Bird-David 1999; Froerer 2007; Kapila 2008; Middleton 2016; Shah 2010; Vitebsky 1992, 2017, among many others). There is, however, a key comparative insight here. Consider the resources that have developed in the field of Dalit studies, where successive generations of "native" theorists have

emerged, and schools and centres have been established to further the theoretical and analytical study of those communities, identities, and social experiences. We might also compare the more sustained theoretical debates that have emerged in relation to indigenous communities in other parts of the world.[16] Debates on indigenous difference in India have focussed heavily on the degrees to which tribe and caste distinctions should be collapsed, and on the state's role in categorisation and governance. A lighter scholarly focus has been placed on processes of reification of indigenous adivasi difference, and on how these are experienced. My thesis seeks to contribute to this, by exploring the looping effects of exoticised ideas about tribes, adivasis, and how these impact everyday family and community dynamics.

Through this engagement, my ethnography also speaks to a wider literature on indigenous identity politics, and the politics of recognition (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009; Coulthard 2014; de la Cadena & Starn 2007; Merlan 2009), anthropological work on the state (Fuller & Bénéï 2000), and the anthropology of affirmative action (Shneiderman and Shah 2013). The term adivasi certainly references a wider global community of indigeneity (Karlsson & Subba 2006; Steur 2017; Xaxa 2020). Many adivasis claim to be indigenous inhabitants and the two discourses dovetail in critical ways, though powerful critiques have been made (e.g. Béteille 1998). Shah (2010: 13–16) has problematised the fascination with adivasis as indigenous, questioning the articulation and appropriation of a romanticised indigenous adivasi by middle-class environmental activists, who primordialise insiders (2010: 137). Both these discourses invoke broader conceptual resources in foregrounding rights and autonomy (Brown 2007; Burman 2003; Sylvain 2014), in which challenges of recognition and authenticity are central. As in adivasi politics, putatively inauthentic indigenous people who live in cities can be misrecognised and their concerns overlooked (Merlan 2007). This research shows, supporting the arguments of Shah (2010), that such projections into the rubric of global indigenous rights are available only to certain classes of adivasi people in India. This thesis further unpacks what it means to be adivasi, and examines how the connotations of various socially constructed categories circulate within and between insiders.

My central argument is that through the processes of affirmative action, state recognition and cultural objectification, distinctive features of adivasi worlds have often been transformed and turned back to face adivasis as essentialised "identity slots". These constructions have taken on a life of their own and are re-articulated within adivasi communities, and elsewhere. To speak

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[16] For example, debates on indigeneity elsewhere have incorporated constructivist theorisations of those identities and comprise arguably more diverse range of accounts of indigenous personhood and experience (e.g. Bessire 2014; Povinelli 2002; Viveiros de Castro 2015).

of the social construction of the adivasi subject, or adivasi "culture", is not to argue that the world of the *Parha* outside the state (Shah 2010), the *sonum* of Sora mediums (Vitebsky 1993), the *ghotul* of the Muria (Elwin 1947), or the Koya fertility rituals described in Fürer-Haimendorf (1943), Ramaiah (1981), and Murthy (1991) are not real, vivid, vital social worlds which hold enormous and increasingly rare value. Rather, I hope to show through this thesis how such worlds have become reified as cultural constructs, through a feedback loop between adivasi people, states, and other caste and tribe communities, reinvented and reflected back to those communities in essentialised and often, in the end, constrictive forms as monolithic cultural blocks – seemingly over the course of only two generations. This scenario correlates with widespread commodification of ethnicity and cultural identity on a global scale (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, Leve 2011). This thesis contributes a delineation of such processes of cultural objectification as they impinge on the dynamics and trajectories of family life within an indigenous community. It shows how differences in culture are produced through historical and economic changes and politicised through engagement with affirmative action, state recognition and processes of social integration, as Koya people increasingly see their community in terms of such differences.

As indicated by the contrasting dances described in the pages above, today's young Koya people experience their own *samskriti sampradhayam* (culture and rituals) as the culture of the *munnetōr* (the old ones, literally, the people before us). These are self-consciously *agency formalities*; practices that can and should be recorded by anthropologists. That is not to say that animistic beliefs themselves are constructed or inauthentic, or that cultural heritage is not worthwhile here. The *rela* songs of ritual dances in Illūru enthral and induce a collective euphoria. The festivals involving week-long hunts and sacrifices to *Muthyalamma Talli* and *Bhudevi* are in no way archaic or out-dated. For the middle generation like Pochamma, they are the rites of their contemporary lives. But for the younger generation, such events are explicitly objectified and celebrated as a distinct tradition, as *mananku samskriti sampradhayam* (our culture and rituals). Updating our conceptualisation of such cultural processes would be essential before heralding "adivasi studies" as a distinct field (Banerjee 2016; Chandra 2015; Dasgupta 2018).

At a wider scale this thesis contributes to understanding how ideas about culture, ethnicity and recognition shape everyday economic social and religious life and will be relevant across social sciences. It poses ethical questions for development studies, of how to balance the demands of culturally embedded practices and livelihoods, with the explicit desire for tangible improvements in life expectancy, health and education, and opportunity, the integrity of which is often flattened by terms such as "loss of culture" and "assimilation". Where this research

goes further than previous studies is that it shows how the transition involves a double-edged reification of "traditional" culture – simultaneously placing it on a pedestal as an ideal form of sociality and devaluing it as backward.

This thesis also makes a broader contribution to South Asian ethnography, providing a contemporary account of adivasi family life, exploring extant categories of kinship and relatedness within this Dravidian kinship system, drawing on emic understandings of social relations and gender roles. My data shows how decisions are made within adivasi families, how resources are allocated between relatives and communities, how real and fictive kinship relations are cultivated and how networks of provision and support are extended to include institutions of the state, especially in moments of family crisis. This thesis seeks to offer a lived perspective on an adivasi community that reveals a complexity, depth and unevenness to everyday family life that is often obscured by the longstanding emphasis on adivasi identity, territory and autonomy. When viewed from the perspective of the day-to-day experience of working, feeling, caring members of a Koya adivasi household these framings lack the capacity to elucidate the nuance of lived experience, and flattens the otherwise textured history and intra-community positionality of Koya social relations and social life.

A note on ethnographic methods

The fieldwork for this research was conducted over two years, from 2016 until 2018, during which the village of Illuru was my primary fieldsite, and became my home. The first six months involved a deep immersion in the daily routines of *sainda* cultivation and the vernacular Koya language. I participated in, observed, and recorded daily life in that village, particularly on agriculture and its associated rituals. I noted the labours, diet and changing family composition of three households in especially precise detail. Moreover, I became a part of a productive unit for that agricultural cycle. This process of "engaged learning" (Carrithers 2005: 437) is often glossed over, but the intimacy, insight and potential friction that comes from the experience of living closely with others as an anthropologist is formative in shaping the contributions and the limitations of this thesis.

After the *sainda* was cut and grains stored, I began to follow Illūrites in and out of the village, in various directions. Some regularly travelled on foot to the riverbank villages of their ancestors and kin. Others appeared to define themselves in terms of their journeys into towns, either hitching rides or walking to take an auto rickshaw. One or two slightly exceptional Illūrites travel frequently to cities elsewhere in the state. Others hardly ever leave the village. Accompanying such movements has given me not only a perspective from which to document,

but also a framework with which to analyse the Koya community. Walking at length with many others, adjusting to different paces, allowed for a rich, spontaneous and honest communication. This was one form of unstructured interview among many.

During the second year of fieldwork, I conducted household surveys of the villages of Illūru, and a second village, Permam Bossa. I travelled to schools and hostels, where Koya students were studying. I conducted structured interviews with teachers, parents of school-going children, and completed a survey of time spent in formal education in three villages. I also entered the spaces where Illūrites and their relatives found work, and undertook a survey of experiences of wage labour outside the region.

In the final months of my fieldwork I conducted structured, recorded interviews with people who are informally understood as spokespeople for Koyas, in Chintūr, Rampachodavaram, and Bhadrāchalum. During these visits I stayed with a network of Koya lawyers, and their associates, some of whom belong to other adivasi groups. More deliberative research was conducted in libraries, and through interviews in Rājahmundry and Hyderabad, in the final days of my fieldwork period.

Plan of the thesis

The first chapter introduces the Koya families of Illūru village, taking the reader into the forests of Southeast India, via oral history of the Thellam lineage, charting their migrations within the Gōdāvari basin. By immediately locating ourselves in a putatively "isolated" Koya adivasi village, and taking that as the centre-point of a kinship network and a social history of different types of people, this initial chapter challenges our perceptions of interiority and marginality. This disorientating introduction represents the cultural distance between the reader of this thesis and Illūru Koyas, in spite of regional, national and global processes of homogenisation. From the outset the reader is exposed to material historical causes of difference and how they are experienced through local vernacular idioms.

The second chapter provides reassurance by grounding the Illūru Koyas within the regional history of East Gōdāvari's Agency areas, and within a broader social history of adivasis in South India. This is a historical chapter with two distinct angles. First, it tells the story of the Gōdāvari sub-region. Second, it delineates the history of the official construction of the adivasi subject through the scheduling of land and affirmative action policies, which will be a crucial reference point in later chapters.

The third chapter returns to the village of Illūru to focus on livelihoods. It describes a season of mixed-crop shifting-cultivation, interspersed with hunting, foraging, collecting subsidised grain from a government depot, and a few days of state sponsored daily wage labour. Here, we identify the differences produced and enacted through the dynamics of the agricultural season and show how these develop into more resilient forms of inter- and intra-household inequality. The narrative of a transition from one livelihood to another (and the corresponding shift in social relations) masks the deep interpenetration of the economic strategies available to Koya shifting cultivators.

The fourth chapter investigates the production and consumption of food in Illūru. The chapter contributes to our understanding of how culturalised differences of status are historically produced by providing insights into moments in which individuals negotiate different cultural schemas and social relations. Attitudes to foodstuffs reveal the relationships that Illūru families have to the state, the wider economic market, as well as their position in extended kinship networks, and local hierarchies of culturalised difference.

The ethnography in the fifth chapter explores the contradictions and ethics implicated in daily *kallu* (palm wine) consumption within the village, as well as the practicalities and social relations of the wider trade in it. *Kallu* provides an index of social relations and throws into greater relief the power relations between kin and affines, and between men and women in Illūru. When *kallu* is consumed within households women have important positions of responsibility, but the growing trade in *kallu* places a greater proportion of this valuable resource into the control of men. *Kallu* is analysed both as a cash crop but also as a crucial substance for maintaining social relations and hierarchies.

The sixth chapter describes the excursions that young Koyas make out of the village for education, wage labour, or romance, and occasionally all of these. It reflects on the impact of these experiences and how they are perceived by older family members. Living out these narratives of transition into adulthood involves the transgression of local networks of kinship and dependency, in favour of consumption patterns and identities that are valorised across the region. These narratives of transition – which appear as cultural scripts in the minds of Illūru's young people – appear to reify either side of the spectrum.

The seventh chapter explores, at a granular level, dialogue between Koya interlocutors from different social locations of class, education, and integration with the region, to show how people position each other in relation to essentialised notions of authenticity, assimilation, and status. Interaction between differently positioned Koya people accentuates cognisance of Koya

distinctness and suggests that forms of recognition, counterpoised with processes of assimilation, provide a yardstick for finer-grained distinctions within the community. The recognition of difference valorises something "authentically adivasi", which can entitle Koyas to benefits such as affirmative action, that facilitate further assimilation, but can also be highly stigmatising.

The eighth chapter scales up the issues of this thesis to a wider communal level across the district. Drawing on biographical data of Koyas who have become advocates for their community, honing in the views of Koya teachers, this chapter reflects on the challenges of accessing affirmative action. The chapter analyses responses to the implementation of a Government Order to reserve 100% of teaching jobs in the Scheduled Area for Scheduled Tribe candidates. The debates around this policy reveal schisms between Koya people with different expectations of their future and contrasting ideas of how the state should support Koya people.

The ninth and final chapter asks how we should understand and respond to the internalisation of essentialist conceptions of Koya adivasi culture. Emphasising the wide internal differentiation within the Koya community, the chapter investigates how Koyas imagine building community resources for the future and their different approaches to the past. This chapter groups attempts at cultural revivalism or re-tribalisation as decolonising forms of salvage anthropology. In doing so I ask implicitly what the role of anthropology should be in the adivasi context.

Chapter 1 – Locating ourselves in Illūru,
East Gōdāvari, Eastern Ghats

The ethnography below communicates the texture and family dynamics of agricultural change and livelihood transition, and the uneven experience of development and affirmative action within Koya households. By doing so, I show how at different scales of social life, and different scales of social analysis, Koya people relate to each other and perceive themselves to be different from others. Through this lens, I promote local perspectives on global processes of cultural objectification and prioritise lived experience over oblique identity categories, arguing for a recognition of heterogeneity and difference within the Koya community. Before scaling up to these broader issues, this chapter situates the village of Illūru and its households within a local history of identification and difference.

Sonta kutumbam (our own relatives)

Imagine yourself brought up in a village on a hilltop clearing surrounded on all sides by moist deciduous forests, a three hour walk uphill through bamboo thickets from the banks of the Gōdāvari river. We are at high altitude – approximately 370m above sea level – but it is not a peak that affords a view over other people and places. It is an hour's walk to the next village through densely forested hills, which are covered in mist for many months of the year. The hill slopes, once cleared of forest, are called *sainda* – a term that denotes both the land itself and the labour of shifting cultivation that is undertaken here. This is not the classical "Indian village" of ethnographic lore – understood in the literature as a caste-divided sociological unit (Mayer 1960, 1966; Srinivas 1980); neither is this the archetypal highland of a stateless tribe, or *zomia*, though comparisons do emerge (Scott 2009; Shneiderman 2010; Vitebsky 2017b: 20). This village, Illūru, is the home of 14 families who belong to three surname groups or lineages: Kurusam, Badina and Thellam. These families speak Koya language and identify as Koya, relative to other adivasi groups and other castes. Within the village, since all are related, people know each other as mothers, sons, sisters, brothers, daughters, fathers, and various affinal social relations. This is a stark contrast with South Asia's many larger inter-caste and inter-ethnic villages, in which kinship distinctions are superseded by larger frames of caste and religious difference. Important distinctions of seniority and hierarchy between surname groups and corresponding clan mark out people's relative status. Younger siblings remain junior to their elders even in their old age and these hierarchies of seniority denote who wields decision-making power, and who is served first at mealtimes and drinking sessions.

The first settlers of Illūru were from the Thellam surname group who, according to oral historical accounts, came in search of more fertile land from a village called Nallametta, 40 kilometres upriver, in approximately the 1920s.[17] Several families initially migrated downstream to Dōraguḍa, one of the cluster of villages in the fertile Kathanūru valley on the northern bank of the Gōdāvari river. From Dōraguḍa, one family of four, Thellam Cinnabhai, Buchamma and their two young sons, climbed into the hills to the north and found a high clearing surrounded by forests inhabited by *gurre* (barking deer). They cut the surrounding trees, cleared the land and began cultivation on the hill slopes, planting seeds they had carried with them: *jonna* (sorghum), *āmu* (millet), *mokka jonna potta* (corn heads), *candi* (toor lentils) and *enni* (black lentils). The resources of the surrounding forest provided an abundance of various fruits such as *īṭapanḍu* (tamarind), *panasapanḍu* (jackfruit) and *markai* (mango), green leafy vegetables such as *bhēnda kusīr* (sorrel leaves) and *kodel kusīr* (wild spinach), nutritious roots like *padmarṭe* and *kerismarṭe*, and materials for constructing houses including *tungwoḍmara* (teak), *veddūr* (bamboo) and *tarḍāku* (palm leaves) for thatching roofs. The higher altitude forests also comprised plentiful wild animals, as well as *jeeriga mara* (fishtail palm) from which both palm wine and a filling starchy pulp can be produced. These resources remain central to household economics in Illūru five generations later.

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[17] In today's political-administrative terms, this is in Vararamachandrapuram Mandal.
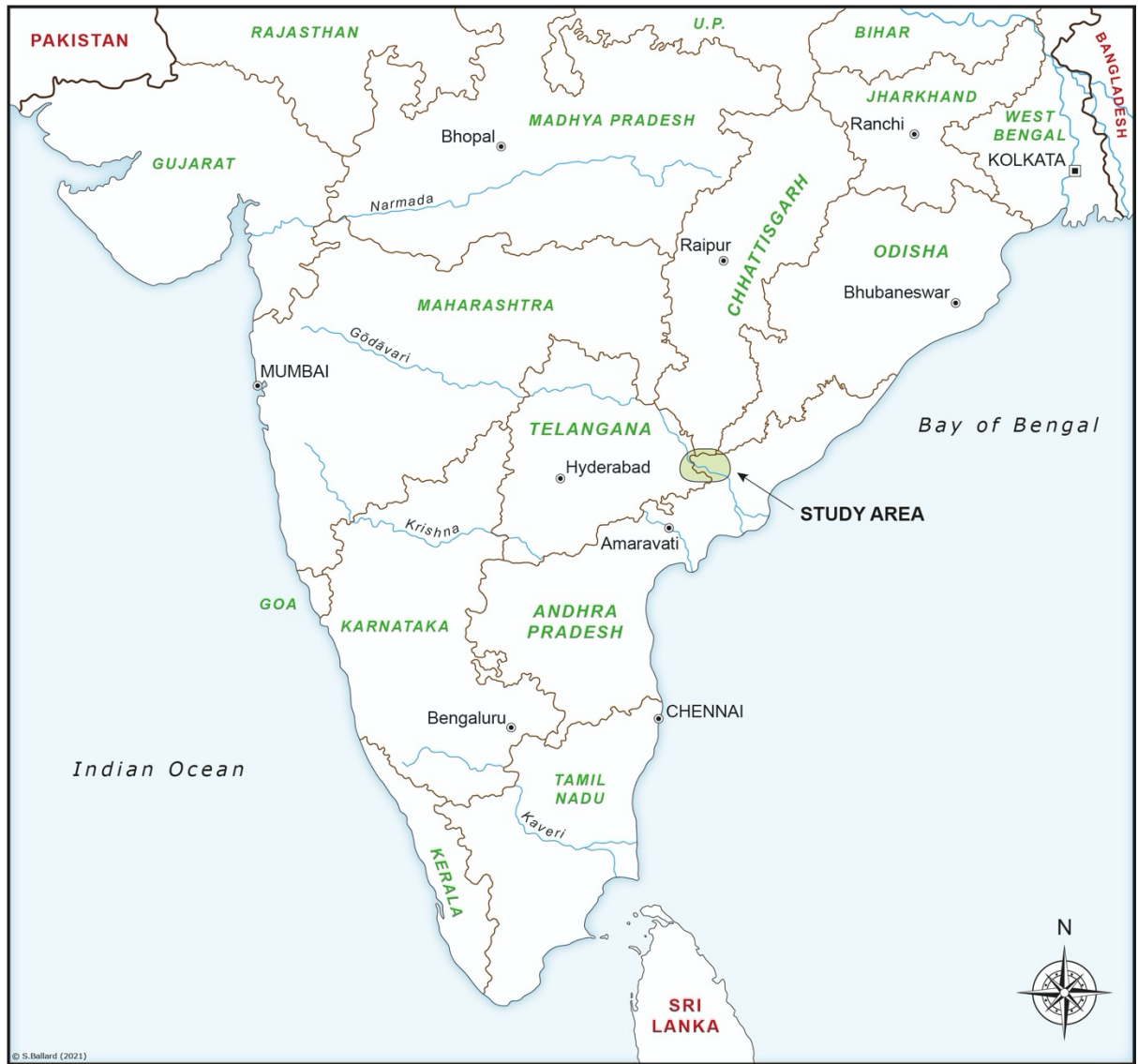
Figure 3: Map showing study area, in the Indian Subcontinent

Figure 4: Map showing fieldsite to the north of the Gōdāvari River

However, this is not a history of self-sufficiency, original affluence or isolation and solitude. Rather, it is a history of interdependency, care, labour, inequality and intermeshed social hierarchies. Illūru's first settlers maintained relations with their kin in Dōraguḍa, and returned occasionally to visit the weekly *shanta* (market) at Kathanūru, where they replaced the metal tips for their digging sticks, axe blades, and arrow heads. Iron products last a long time, but salt and red chilli powder are used daily – these were acquired in exchange for bundles of dried tamarind, which grows abundantly around Illūru.[18] Other products like dried meat, jackfruits, mangos, pumpkins and lentils were exchanged for fresh green chilli, dried fish, onions and black tobacco. The long-standing relations of exchange with *sowkar* (non-tribal businessmen) on the riverbank continue today.

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[18] Precise data on earlier rates of exchange is difficult to source. Older villagers recall exchanges of equal measures of tamarind for other vegetables like onions and aubergines. In the early 1990s, a kilogram of tamarind could be sold for 12 or 14 rupees, which was then enough to buy a few kilograms of vegetables.

Of the two sons of Illūru's first settlers, Thellam Kannan died without a wife or children while Thellam Thamanna married four times. His first wife, Rami, came from Dōraguḍa, and together they raised four children, who are the parents and grandparents of people I befriended during my fieldwork. His second wife, Viramma, came from the village of Lottawarlugūḍem, and was the mother of Akkamma, the oldest living person who was born in Illūru. Akkamma was born into a Thellam surname family, who belong to the third *gotra* (clan) in Koya kinship. She married out of Illūru to the village of Permam Bossa (where she still lives), to her *bava* (her classificatory mother's brother's son) named Badina Bojje. In doing so, Akkamma became part of the Badina surname group, who belong to the fourth *gotra*, conforming to the preference within Koya kinship towards exogamous marriage into matching *gotra* groups. Akkamma's grandchildren are the people with whom I built the closest relationships during my fieldwork in Illūru, and they are central protagonists in the ethnography that follows.
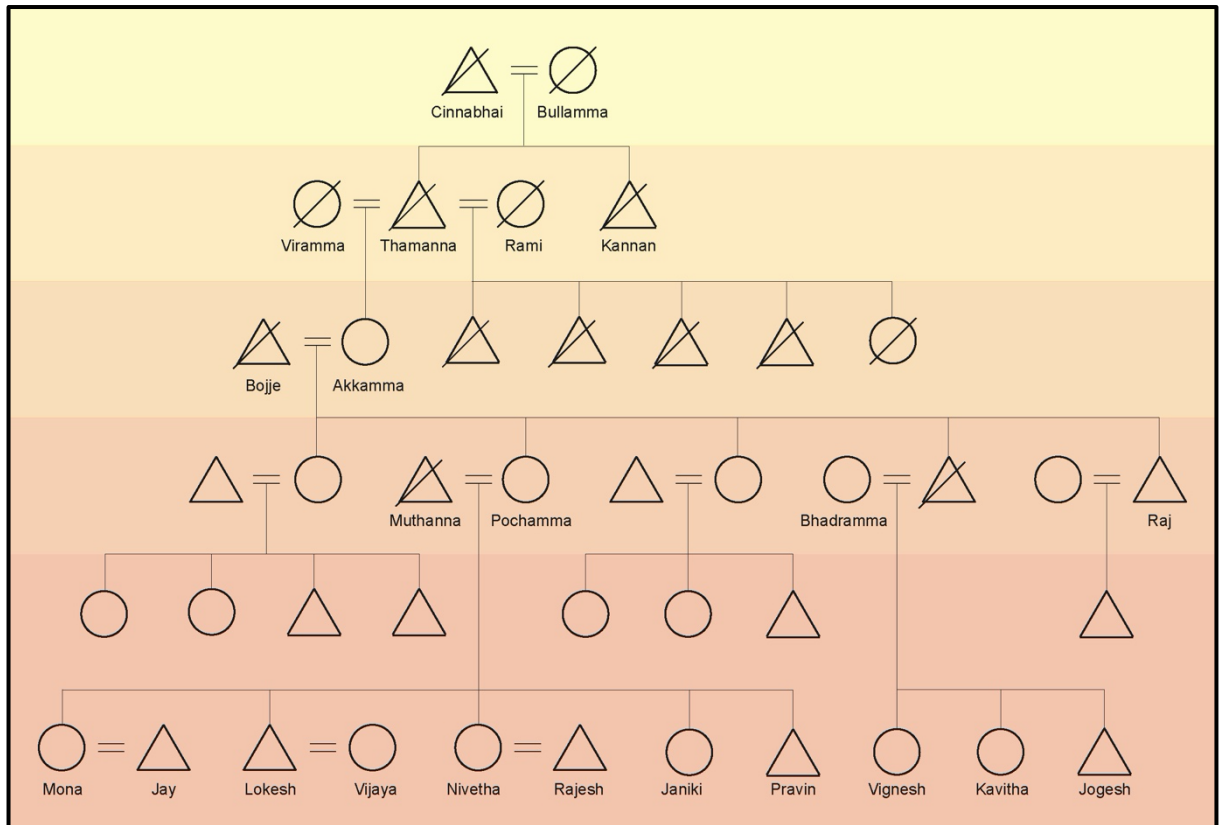
Figure 5: Kinship diagram of Thellam Koyas in Illūru – Viramma's descendants
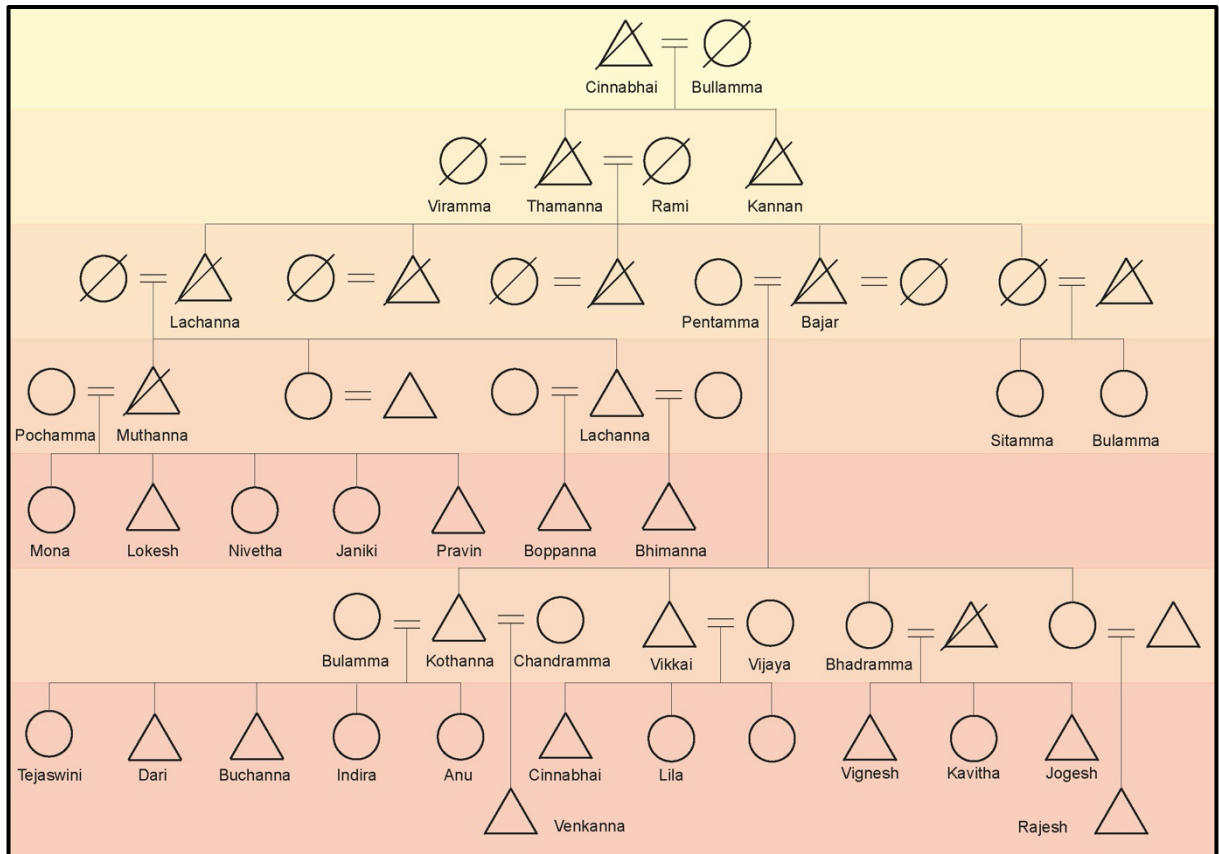
Figure 6: Kinship diagram of Thellam Koyas in Illūru – Rami's descendants

For Akkamma and her descendants, as across Koya kinship patterns, and similarly to
Dravidian kinship more broadly, the children of same sex siblings are considered siblings
themselves, and children of cross-sex siblings are considered potential spouses or in-laws. Two
sisters' daughters, and the daughters of two brothers are, in effect, sisters. They are permitted
to marry their mother's brother's sons, or cross-cousins. Likewise, the sons of two brothers,
and the sons of two sisters, are brothers, but sons of a brother and sister are brothers-in-law –
called *bava* for the elder, and *bamardi* for the younger – and they can and do marry each
other's sisters.[19]

Hierarchies and equalities

Akkamma's daughter, Pochamma, was born into a Badina family in Permam Bossa, and
married her mother's brother's son, Thellam Muthanna, in Illūru. Since Muthanna died,

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[19] Exogamous clan groups are made up of many lineages or "house names" – *intipēru* (Te.), *lotpedēr*
(Ko.) – which I gloss as surname group. So the Thellams, Kurusams and many other surname groups
who belong to the 3rd *gotra* (clan), are considered "brothers", but they are not expected to be as close as
brothers within the Thellam surname group, who are almost as close as brothers within the same
household. See also Arunakumari (2015), Murthy (1991: 25–26) and Tyler (1966: 696).

Pochamma has become a respected female family head. Many Koya families are *de facto* headed by women – either widows or women whose husbands are absent, twice married, or distracted by drink. But the overall pattern is one of patrilocal marriage, and patriarchal control of resources and social life.[20] Across the Koya speaking region, it is the most senior men who are the village heads and ritual specialists (*peddamansulu*), who eat their meals first and who sleep in the most comfortable positions in the house. As across Dravidian kinships systems, the mother's brother of a boy or girl is a crucial relation, who performs special duties at the occasion of their marriage and other life-cycle rituals. Relative to the wider comparative picture among caste society, and across South Asia more generally, Koya women have a large degree of autonomy and are valued as economic actors in a way that is striking (Shah 2019; c.f. Still 2014). As explored in Chapter 3, there is no strong distinction in these villages between different types of productive labour inside and outside the home; labour performed predominantly by women is highly valued.

The networks of kinship and family dynamics on which I focus, sometimes appear as horizontal and mutually supportive – certainly relative to other ethnographic settings in South Asia. As we will see in the chapters that follow, relations of reciprocity and care are central to Koya sociality across related villages. But these are in their own ways intrinsically hierarchical according to clan, gender and generation. The chapters that follow record extraordinary commitments to maintaining close supportive social relations between generations of kin and affines in Illūru, Permam Bossa, Dōraguḍa and elsewhere, in moments of illness, crisis and bereavement. Though I periodically emphasise these relatively egalitarian features in labours of production, care and hospitality extended across these families, it is important to note that these kinship relations reproduce hierarchies between more or less senior individuals, who nevertheless live within patriarchal family structures in which males are heads of the family and have many privileges and decision-making powers.

Similarly, there are more or less senior clans and surname groups. The Badina families that married into Illūru are considered to have less claim to land, and have lower status than their Thellam neighbours and affines. Wealthier Kurusam families, however, who migrated more recently to Illūru, located their houses on the side of the village closer to the roads, as opposed to the Thellam side of the village, which is closer to the forest paths leading towards the Tarseir river – a tributary of the Gōdāvari. Kurusams, being a dominant surname group across the wider region, have become dominant in the village too. In more recent years, these

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[20] For a systematised description of these patterns of interaction between Koya relatives, see Tyler (1965: 1430–33).

Kurusam families' geographical position has become even more advantageous, as the bore wells, and even more recently the solar lights, have been erected near their homes. Taking advantage of their wider connections through a network of kin in the villages towards Rampachodavaram, they were able to capture more proximate access to these valuable infrastructures.

This network of the Thellam families and their Badina and Kurusam affines is approached in this thesis as a contemporary mode of connectedness. The relations between Illūru's families, though determined by traditional Koya kinship patterns, are inflected by interaction with dominant religious and cultural norms of Telugu Hinduism and caste society. These lineages and their interrelations are not isolated from potent ethno-religious distinctions of superiority and inferiority based on caste hierarchy and the non-tribal/tribal (adivasi) distinction. These relationships between families are also shaped by the history of capitalist extraction of resources from local forests, reflecting larger processes across the tribal belt of India.

The different surname groups have constructed separate clusters of homes on different sides of the village. All have close access to a shared space in the centre of the village and share access to two clearings around large tamarind trees, which are where festival dances and meetings are held. Each surname group has proximity to *sainda* hill slopes surrounding the village, and access to large stone shrines, *gāmmam*, dotted around the edges of nearby forests. These are the sites at which ritual offerings are made by specialists from the Thellam and the Kurusam surname groups, when the first fruits of each crop appear, as part of a calendar of syncretic, animistic practice, which is tightly bound up with *sainda* cultivation. It is animist in the sense that deities are representative of natural phenomena in the physical geography of the village and surrounding hills. The Badina surname group have no specialist of their own, and depend on Kurusam specialists to complete these rituals on their hill slopes.

Markaipandum, and *Īṇṭapandum* are the largest of first-crop celebrations. Offerings are made to deities residing in the hills surrounding Illūru: Habalakonda, Tarsengkonda and Kiddikonda. Potrāj, his teacher Salla, and Thul, are called on, worshiped and fed. The annual village-wide festival of *Vijjapandum* is presided over by the specialists of the two dominant surname groups together. These are occasions where relatives from outside and high-status guests are invited to join festivities of feasting, which place the village in highly localised, animistic religious world.

There is a tension throughout the thesis between these internal and external relations of hierarchy and competitive positionality, and social bonds and relations that reinforce

reciprocity and mutuality. These tensions are apparent not only at global, national, and regional scales, but also within and between clans, surname groups and individual families. We will reflect on this layered constellation of embedded social relations again. In the meantime, let us return to the everyday livelihoods and economics of Akkamma and her descendants.

Munne kālam (earlier times)

In Akkamma's generation, who were born between 1940 and 1950, *erram vanji* or "red rice" was cultivated in Illūru, as well as *sainda* (mixed-crop shifting cultivation on hill slopes). Today, at the fringes of Illūru, wooden ploughs lie unused. Akkamma's daughter, Pochamma, remembers visiting her mother's natal village as a child. Her own life-course would continue the reciprocal intermarriage of Badina girls and Thellam boys between Permam Bossa and Illūru. When she paid this visit, and when she later moved into her husband's home after marriage, the two types of cultivation were practiced side by side (*renḍu ēkham*). Nowadays, people struggle to manage their *sainda* (shifting cultivation), and knowledge of how to use a plough has not been passed down the generations. In her words:

> "*Aski sakkam matti. Anta pōlam urritanōr. Bhaga ekua gatti, potta, vanji, āmu vitanōr. Inje donka ekua mindi. Inje pani tungatamp illōr*".

> "Back then things were good. It was all cultivated land. With much strength, they planted corn, rice and millet. Nowadays, there are too many weeds. Nowadays, there is no one to do that work".

Rice cultivation – which takes a lot of physical labour – is rare in Illūru today, but almost all the 14 families cultivate a hill slope or *sainda*. During the two years I spent in and around Illūru, one of the Badina families gave up on this livelihood, as they lacked the *balam* (strength, implying numbers, resources and energy) to maintain their *sainda*. For many others, the transition away from shifting cultivation is more gradual, and graded over generations. Rice cultivation was possible in previous generations, when the village had a larger population and sufficient labour to put towards it. *Sainda*, in contrast, is done in small family units and involves the whole family relocating to live on the hill slope, and sleeping on a *mancham*, a raised shelter that looks over the crops. Ideally, all the daily labours of the home are carried out on the hill slope: filling water from the stream, collecting firewood, cooking, bathing, and washing clothes. Doing this ensures better security for the crops – therefore greater yields – and reduces the amount of to and fro between home and hill slope, *lōn* and *sainda*.

When Akkamma was young, the staple grains were the millet, corn and sorghum grown on the *sainda*, accompanied by lentils and vegetables, hunted meat, and forested greens. But she also recalls great hunger in her youth (*aski karuwu ekua*). Rice cost half a rupee per kilogram at the markets at Rampachodavaram or at Kathanūru. There are no accounts of opportunities for regular wage labour or other ways of acquiring cash from before the 1980s, so people were rarely able to buy grains in the market. When they did need supplies of rice, spices, or other commodities for weddings and other functions, they took fruits like tamarind to sell at the Gōdāvari riverbank at Kathanūru and bought back what they needed. The Rampachodavaram market is 35 kilometres from Illūru. The round trip would be completed occasionally, with an overnight stay on the roadside or in the "sister village" of Permam Bossa. The Kathanūru *shanta* can be reached in a few hours' walk through the forest.

The earliest wage labour performed by residents of Illūru was when, in the 1980s, women and men living in the village were recruited to clear tracks in the forest for the construction of a network of *ghatti* roads to transport bamboo, and to cut the bamboo and load it onto lorries. The forested hills between and Kathanūru and Illūru were thus opened up to non-tribal business, as the Paper Mill Company began sourcing timber from that tract of forest. Illūru villagers, including Akkamma and her sister-in-law Pentamma, were employed to remove trees and foliage to clear the path, carry rocks and stones to the road, break the stones and place them together to construct the road. Once completed, Illūrites were paid to cut bamboo, which was transported by trucks along these roads and out to Rājahmundry, as well as by boat from Kathanūru on the Gōdāvari river. In Pentamma and Akkamma's youth, the wages received from the Rājahmundry based Paper Mill Company were 1½ rupees per day, which they collected from a *vāndru* (boss, or business owner). Younger villagers recalled being paid four rupees for women, and five rupees for men to do this labour.

This private logging was conducted in contravention of the Forest Act (see Chapter 2), and in the 1990s the Forest Department stopped this, replacing it with paid work on teak plantations in the forest. During these times, the Naxalite movement was strong in the Gōdāvari districts. The hills around Illūru and the sister village of Permam Bossa were spaces in which Naxalites variously stayed and hid from police. Some villagers remember them distributing books and providing basic education to village children while residing in their villages. The Naxalite cadres negotiated, as mediators with the logging company, to secure higher wages for Illūru villagers doing road construction and loading work in the 1980s and 1990s. These two forms of labour are recalled today as Paper Mill *coolie* (a common Indian term for manual wage labour) and Forest Department *coolie*. Through such labour Illūru's older generations interacted daily with the agents of the Paper Mill Company at Rājahmundry, who arrived via

the river and then walked into the forests, or drove in lorries along the road Illūru men and women had built with their hands. These outsiders are recalled as *faristīr* (from the English "forester"), which can refer to either a person representing the Forest Department or a logging company.

While Illūrites were working on constructing a *ghatti* road for the timber loggers, and cultivating *sainda* in family units, their relations in Dōraguḍa and other villages on the bank of the river became engaged in a long struggle over their land, in a more complex unfolding of tribal/adivasi relations with non-tribal outsiders. For many decades, non-tribal businessmen travelled weekly by boat between Kunta, then in Madhya Pradesh (MP) (now in Chhattisgarh), and the wealthy city of Rājahmundry, in Andhra Pradesh. These boats stopped for the night at Kathanūru – an extremely fertile valley where two smaller tributaries join the Gōdāvari. Seeing the wealth of natural resources, non-tribal businessmen began to acquire this land in the 1950s. Initially they resided as itinerant traders and sold oil, salt, and items required for marriages such as large pieces of cloth to Koyas and Konda Reddis, on credit. Businessman, acting as money lenders, acquired their debtors' lands, which became the only available form of payment by adivasi cultivators, who had no other access to the necessary cash.

Countless variations of this process have been recounted, by which adivasi people become dispossessed of their land for the sake of some black tobacco (*pogo*), a lungi, or even a fried rice-flour and jaggery sweet (*āriselu*). A local account from Kathanūru valley, tells of the arrival of many non-tribal businessmen in the 1960s from Tuni and Sāmalakōṭa, at the other end of East Gōdāvari district: "They took our lands in return for loans they cleared for our people […] They took the lands to give them ₹20 […] called tribal people over, fed them, and overnight, on the sly, took possession of over 15 acres!" (Umamaheshwari 2014: 204).

In the 1960's, none of the adivasi population were literate, so they were unaware of the bureaucratic processes of land ownership. When the Kathanūru area was surveyed in the 1970's, most of the land was officially entered under ownership of non-tribal people, despite the 1970 legislation specifically outlawing this. In many parts of the valley, this resulted in the Koya and Konda Reddi farmers actually being employed as daily wage labourers on their own ancestral land, from which the non-tribal landlords reaped the harvest. Farmers of the Kathanūru villages were, in 1969, mobilised by activists of the Agency Girijan Sangham (Agency Peasants Community), who sought to educate the tribal people about their rights and encouraged them to resist the appropriation of their land. Taking the non-tribal landlords by surprise, this "occupation" was successful in implementing the "immediate response", but ill-

prepared for the level of backlash it would provoke, in the form of police aggression against those actively asserting their rights over land (Sinha 1989: 191-6).

The non-tribal settlers called on police to protect their claim to the land, and a police outpost was established in Kathanūru village. In an act of defiance, adivasi farmers continued to cultivate the land and harvested their crops surreptitiously at night and stored the grain in vessels hidden from view. The resistance movement required secrecy, coordinated surveillance of crops, and gradual harvesting, which was orchestrated at regular meetings attended by Koyas and Konda Reddis. Occasionally such meetings were raided by the non-tribal land occupiers, who threatened them with violence, and sometimes also by police. At one meeting, in 1982, policemen were refused entry as they were attempting to raid. The police shot and killed two adivasis – Madhi Lakshmaya and Kunjam Rajulanna – one Koya and one Konda Reddi. Their two bodies were carried by villagers immediately to the mandal office at Rampachodavaram and presented to the local officials in protest. In response, the mandal officer took the view that the police presence in Kathanūru must be curtailed, and land returned to the ancestral owners. Since then, the land has been cultivated by adivasis, who continue to harvest their own crops, though an uneasy tension prevails. Many sections of the Kathanūru valley are still recorded as being owned by those non-tribals, who retain written documentation of their ownership.

It was only through the struggle to re-assert control, and after the killing of two young men, that the land was restored to the tribal cultivators. This peasant agitation was led by the Agency Girijan Sangham (Agency Peasants Community), which along with the Rythu Coolie Sangham (Agricultural Workers Community) remained active in civil and political affairs in the villages of Kathanūru. The establishment of local wings of these leftist organisations were inspired by wider politics outside the region. Both these organisations are associated with the wider Naxalite movement that had an ongoing presence across Northern Andhra Pradesh during the 1980s and 1990s. As noted, the accounts of older Illūru women recalled mediators from these organisations, who forged the trust of local villages by helping to negotiate better rates for daily wage labour on logging and road-building work. Sundarayya narrates, from the perspective of Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) leadership, that during this period a thousand or more Koyas joined village squads that were set up to oppose exploitation by landowners, forest officers and government officials (Sundarayya 1972: 248–49).

The Illūru villagers were not directly recruited for this struggle, but their kin in Dōraguḍa were. Moreover, the experiences of farmers and villagers in Kathanūru's villages are indicative of the processes of land alienation and struggle across the region, through which people's ideas

of "non-tribals", and "other caste people" have been reciprocally produced. These narratives have been formative of collective ideas about in-migrating castes from outside the Agency area.

Connectivity and provisioning

"Pustiga mindi kota nar avashram ille (with a full tummy, there is no need for a new village)"*.

The first cash crop was introduced to the area in the shape of cashew nut saplings, by Rama Rao's Andhra Pradesh government in the 1980s. Some industrious families, including Pochamma and her husband Thellam Muthanna, registered for this project and planted cashew trees, interspersed with their *sainda* cultivation. Some people allege that the government's cashew seeds never took root in these hills, and that the successful cashew trees sprouted, instead, from seeds distributed by Naxalites in the 1990's, who came from across the river in West Gōdāvari.

During the early years of Pochamma and Muthanna's married life, the Andhra Pradesh government implemented the national policy of highly subsidised white rice, known as PDS (Public Distribution Service) (see Deb 2009). Lentils, kerosene, sugar, soap and other commodities are also "rationed" to families, though these have had much less impact than the provision of grain which is sold at ₹1 per kilogram. This provision is, like *sainda* cultivation, notoriously unreliable, but for quite different reasons. Initially the quotas were very low, but over time this policy has transformed the diet of Illūru villagers. Nowadays, although all the families maintain their mixed crop *sainda* cultivation, they also collect their quota of government subsidised rice on a monthly basis, from the state-run depot (Girijan Cooperative Corporation, or GCC) in the next village, Telligūḍem, an hour's walk away. Or, to put it another way, despite their access to publicly distributed white rice, almost all Illūru families continue *sainda* cultivation, which provides a wider range of grains and vegetables.

Even today, distribution is often postponed at short notice due to lack of rice or lack or staff. Information about the timings must be sent from the depot shopkeeper via a verbal communication chain that has to operate smoothly for the system to function. When the GCC is open for service, villagers can buy a monthly quota of subsidised kerosene, soap, up to half a kilogram of sugar and up to a litre of cooking oil, as well as the *veghi okaṭi* rice for ₹1 per kilogram. The subsidy is not as generous on other products as it for rice, but the costs are still lower than buying from the open market at Rampachodavaram. Each family can claim five kilograms per month per person, at the discounted rate, which might sound generous to most

non-rice-eating people. Assuming that rice is the main component of a person's diet, and there are no snacks or sweets available between meals – which is the case in Illūru – a growing boy with a healthy appetite is locally expected to eat about a sixth of a kilogram each meal.

Older people (*peddalōr*), who grew up before these subsidies, consider such portions to be enormous. Of course, meals are not cooked individually but this gives an indication of how far the subsidised rice might stretch. Most families in Illūru eat twice a day. Each day, someone with a healthy appetite may eat a third of a kilogram, meaning that five kilograms might last a single person two weeks. Women and older people eat considerably less than that in Illūru. When rice is running low, mothers and older people tend not to eat, or to eat very little. It is uncommon for the mother of a family to serve herself before her sons and daughters, in any circumstances; an example of gendered hierarchy within the family and in the village.[21] Occasionally, trips to Telligūḍem are successful, and villagers manage to collect their provisions. But when the store has not been stocked or staffed, senior villagers spend the money intended for kerosene and sugar on "quarter" bottles of *Musalord* (old man – the local name for Old Admiral brandy), and enjoy small drinking parties in the forest on the path home.

Older villagers recall the two-day expeditions to the market at Rampachodavaram, where grain and spices were cheaper than at Kathanūru. Before dawn, they would wake and set off on foot to travel 35 kilometres down through the forest and arrive in the heat of the day. Having completed their marketing, Illūrites would, by nightfall, reach the homes of relatives in villages closer to the town or sleep halfway along the paths that criss-cross the steep *ghats* up into the hills. These epic marketing trips would have been done only every few months, and families would keep a stock of chilli powder, turmeric and red onion in preparation for the summer marriage season.

The construction of the tarmac road connecting Eddiwāḍa to Rampachodavaram in approximately 2005, as well as the accessibility of auto rickshaws on Sundays (market day), has enabled the market to become a more regular feature of life for Illūrites over the past two decades. Equally important was the construction of the major Bhadrāchalam to Rājāhmundry highway, an older road which was re-laid in the 1970s. This increased the trade between the two sides of the hills, and between the two sides of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. It has also taken commercial traffic away from the Gōdāvari river, which has become more associated with

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[21] The Indian state is by no means the first to quantify what counts as "enough" rice to live on. The French geographers of Indochina referenced in Scott (1976: 16), arrived at a more generous estimate of 300kg per person per year! But clearly, the minimum physiological need is a different calculus to what people survive on, desire, aspire to, or enjoy.

tourism than with river trade. There is still a lively tradition of exchange of forest produce between *rythulu* (farmers), *girijanulu* (hill dwellers) and *sowkarvārlu* (businessmen) across the two Gōdāvari districts, centred in Kathanūru.

For today's Illūrites there is no need to found new villages today, because they no longer feel the hunger of earlier times. The initial migration to raise a village on this hilltop clearing was itself a way of staving off the hunger and scarcity that stemmed – according to late Badina Sukkanna Dora – from a lack of access to forests. Nowadays, the Koya youth are said to lack the knowledge, nor have the strength, to found new villages. They have stomachs full of white rice. The emic explanation of the older generation emphasises the absence of hunger. Younger villagers highlight the contemporary challenges to raising new villages in the nearby forest. From an etic perspective, which we engage with in the next chapter, the greater reach of the Forest and Revenue departments would also make such a project considerably less feasible.

The relationship that Illūru has to the forest resources has changed over these generations. Where previously Akkamma's cohort and their parents had spontaneously roamed and cultivated forest land, her descendants are aware of Forest Rights documents, and almost all families have *adavi hakalu patta* (forests rights record) of their ancestral rights to a plot. Some Illūrites were granted a different documentation in the form of revenue *pattas* for cultivated (non-forest) land that they "owned" around the village. Before Pochamma's husband, Muthanna, died, he had been trying to register the subdivision of a large swathe of land in Illūru between his brothers and himself. At the mandal office, he was told to submit the original document and that it would be considered. Despite several requests and repeated trips to collect the records of the sub-divided land, his document was never returned and remains pending. His son, Lokesh, as well as inheriting the ancestral right to forest land, has taken on responsibility to follow up this continuing saga, to regain documentation for their family's land.

The current situation of Illūru

Electricity pylons arrived briefly in the mid-2000s but the current was soon cut off again, after a matter of days. It was alleged that villagers had used these power lines to hunt, tethering them to the forest floor along the tracks of larger animals, who were electrocuted. In fact, it was not Illūru villagers who did this, but rather villagers from Telligūḍem, some six kilometres away, who had roamed into the Illūru forests. When this was reported the suspicion fell on Illūru and, despite some protests offered to the authorities in Rampachodavaram, the Electricity Department was instructed to cut the newly installed power lines to Illūru. More

recently, the Forest Department has built two permanent buildings where the forest path to Illūru meets the old, broken, Paper Mill road. This gives the department a much stronger presence on this side of the forest nowadays. They also stationed cameras inside the forest, in the tributary valley, to track the movements of larger animals. Forest officials must know that some villagers hunt in these forests, but Illūrites, as well as Forest Department officials, both dismissed the notion that the cameras were ever conceived of as providing surveillance on such activities.

Figure 7: A government subsidised house in Illūru, with overgrown *sainda* in the foreground and cashew orchards and new *sainda* in the background

Most Illūru villagers live in government subsidised, un-plastered, breeze-block homes, with corrugated iron roofs. These homes were funded by the Andhra Pradesh government between 2010 and 2012, under the Congress Party administration's national Indira Awas housing scheme, which provided subsidised homes to all those "below the poverty line". These were left unfurnished, without windows in the frames or plaster on the walls, as received budgets for the works only covered the basic structure. Some, like Kothanna, with whom we will soon be well acquainted, was not able to get the grant to build a breeze-block home as he "could not get his name on the form" because he missed the visit of the official surveyor. Kothanna and his wife Bulamma live in a house made of bamboo-thatched walls plastered with mud, with a

tarḍāku palm thatch roof, which were the norm until the past few decades. The legacy of an earlier wave of government housing is visible too. In the period of the Andhra Pradesh government of N.T. Rama Rao, in the late-1980s, red clay roof tiles were distributed to tribal villages to provide more sturdy roofs. Of these, only Pochamma's survives with the original roof intact today. The house was built with an enormous wooden central *tungwoḍmara* (teak) pillar that makes it unusually sturdy for Koya homes in this area. Her family also received a subsidy for a new breeze-block home too. Other families, like Vikkai and Vijaya retained the red clay tiles, which are carefully arranged as shelving, on the porch of the breeze-block house, balanced on each other in piles leaving gaps to store small items. Some families re-used their clay tiles on the roofs of shelters for their livestock. The breeze-block homes are not ideal, since they have no indoor hearth and get very hot in summer, but they do have a raised step up onto a porch, which is a feature characteristic of traditional Koya homes, that protects residents from snakes. The transmission of traditional house construction skills across generations, as with other skills in the village, is at risk of discontinuing, as priorities shift and state provision becomes marginally more dependable.

Figure 8: The hearth in Pochamma's house

The village still maintains close links with relatives in Dōraguḍa, Kathanūru, Permam Bossa and even with the villages far upstream, in the area around Nallametta, from where those

earlier ancestors came – though there is no village of that name today. Such persons are still considered to be *sonta kutumbam* (our own relatives). In earlier generations guests would cross the forests and hills on foot to reach the marriage ceremonies of their relatives many miles away, or travel upriver by boat, and then inland again. Today, circuitous journeys can be made by hopping on a string of connecting auto rickshaws along the roads to the north, or by motorbike, though only one Illūrite has yet acquired such independent means of transportation. Every three years, the ritual specialist from Kathanūru comes to Illūru on foot, to officiate at the festival of the goddess *Muthyalamma Talli*. This is a protective ritual for all Illūrites who are suffering with poor health. The Kathanūru specialist, during these visits, also performs protective rituals for individual children who have seen sick. Between here and the ancestral villages of Dōraguḍa and Nallametta, there remains a network of footpaths and trails that few outsiders traverse.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

In what follows I retain the perspective of these villagers as they experience the wider region, differing patterns of agriculture, livelihoods, labour and migration, unequal access to resources and the sociality of other caste groups. As I do so, I establish a picture of the great diversity within the Koya group across the region, though this will become fully clear only in later chapters. The bigger and more challenging task ahead is to understand the different forms of moral and economic incorporation into the wider region. This chapter has outlined the circumstances from which decisions to migrate out of the village are made and described the social networks and livelihoods that may be left behind in that transition. As noted, within the village of Illūru there are well-embedded and accepted hierarchies of seniority and gendered and generational expectations and protocols. Yet from this village a plurality of positions are taken up vis-a-vis dominant regional norms in contemporary South Indian society. As these histories inform presents and futures, as particular life-choices are enacted, differences emerge between people who otherwise might have led very similar lives. In the chapters that follow, I seek to explain how these different positions are generated, and how they should be understood.

Taking Illūru as a nodal centre of a network of kinship reveals a very different perspective on the region than one focused on the roads that penetrate from towns into an unknown forest area. Most non-Koyas, and non-Konda Reddis perceive a very different social geography of the Gōdāvari region (c.f. Bird-David 2014: 32-37). But as we have seen in the recent history of Illūru, this is by no means a village of people disconnected from larger social and political projects. Rather, as I hope to illustrate, political and economic dilemmas are keenly felt in the

homes and hill slopes of Illūru. The next chapter will further contextualise the theoretical imperatives of this thesis, in relation to differences sedimented through the administrative, political and economic history of the wider region surrounding these hills, providing a counterpoint to the highly localised view from Illūru itself.

Chapter 2 – Situating the Illūru hills:
Historical resources for Koya people in Andhra Pradesh

The scale of local migration and inter-generational memory described in the previous chapter is very different from that of the geographical taxonomies and regional political and economic history I cover in this one. This historical outline of the region will contextualise this research for those unfamiliar with the Gōdāvari basin and with adivasi peoples. Furthermore, by locating the Koya cultivators of Illūru within the regional political economy of adivasis in the Gōdāvari region, this chapter tracks the events, processes and narratives that are formative of contemporary relationships between people, territories, and the state-like entities that have governed them. This history will help us to establish and contextualise local ideas of difference between people who inhabit certain social and geographical spaces and environments who make up tribes, castes, and ethnic groups. As a result, they are eventually understood, I argue, as embodying different cultures. Historical accounts are introduced here, to animate the arguments made later in this thesis, rather than to comprehensively explain my research interlocutors' contemporary experiences.

Figure 9: Map showing Nizam's State of Hyderabad and Madras Presidency in 1940s

The hills around Illūru village, flanking the Gōdāvari River between Bhadrāchalam and Rājahmundry, historically formed a hinterland between two large polities (see Figure 9). To the west of the hills was the erstwhile Nizam's dominion of Hyderabad – a princely state in the Deccan plateau. To the south and the east was the Madras Presidency of British India. Further north was the kingdom of Bastar and the Central Provinces of British India. On the fringes of these territories, this sub-region's history could be charted through several connected themes. Perhaps the most dominant perspective through which it has been documented is through records of struggles for land and efforts to preserve shifting cultivation in the face of the penetration of the market economy. Gadgil and Guha (1995: 154) suggest that this area may have witnessed the most sustained resistance to such processes anywhere in India. Attempts by adivasi communities to push back against the "opening up" of their forest lands, and the forms of extortion involved therein, have been characterised as rebellions. Such "uprisings" justified the scheduling of the Agency areas, in which, as noted in the Introduction, colonial-era anthropology was complicit. The retelling of those events constitutes the history of territories, but is also a history of relationships between peoples (Konda Reddi, Koya and Konda Dora adivasis) and outsiders seeking to claim dominion over them. Various documents formalise these social relationships. Hence, this history also emerges through the legislations, rulings and schedules that define and crystalise arrangements between human agents, which write into existence the economic, political and social relations between people, and shape those relations for the future. The chapter attempts to follow these processes in tandem, chronologically, since social, economic and political aspects are intertwined with the "scheduling" of these areas.

Through these processes, a robust notion of difference between people has become solidified. Hence, the chapter argues that what is today perceived as ethnic and cultural difference is tightly bound up with the history of colonial conquest, the production of anthropological knowledge, with quashing rebellions and exerting control over natural resources in tribal regions. It is widely accepted that ethnic groups, populations, and "cultures" are constructed as such historically and relationally over time. As we see below, adivasis – excluded from the nodes of political and economic power – have been defined through the terms of those who purported to rule over them, as "marginal", "isolated" and "culturally distinctive". This chapter, which forms the etic counterpart to the previous one, shows how this region has been imagined as peripheral, and lays the groundwork for the rest of this thesis to reveal what is occluded from historical and contemporary projections of this "hilly tract".

To grasp the scope of these processes, we need to locate the fieldsite in (historical) space. In the broadest geographical terms the field of this research comprises the adivasi populated areas

of the Deccan plateau of Central India, and the Eastern Ghats – a hill range that runs down the eastern side of the peninsula. More specifically, the villages and towns represented in this study are situated in the northern part of East Gōdāvari district in Andhra Pradesh, Southeast India, near the borders with the neighbouring states of Telangana, Odisha and Chhattisgarh (see Figure 10). The forested area around Illūru village is bordered by the Gōdāvari river in the south, the Saberi River in the west and by a tarmacked road to the north, that connects Bhadrāchalum to Rājahmundry, via Chintūr and Rampachodavaram (see Figure 11). To the east, beyond the town of Rampachodavaram, are the fertile and more affluent plain areas of the Gōdāvari delta.

Figure 10: Map showing the Gōdāvari region today, and surrounding states

Figure 11: Map showing the fieldsite to the north of the Gōdāvari River (repeated)

The first section of the chapter sketches the colonial and pre-colonial history of the region surrounding Illūru village. During this period the hills were loosely governed remotely through a system of indirect rule known as *muttadari*, which was well-embedded by the end of the 19th century (Arnold 1982: 101). The second section discusses the late colonial period and the pressures that were brought to bear upon the *muttadari* system by external interests seeking to "open up" the region to economic development. This is traced through a series of uprisings or *fituri*, which were responses of tribal inhabitants to new forms of economic exploitation and imposed taxes. The third section describes the scheduling of the East Gōdāvari Agency area under the Madras Presidency, and the parallel processes of land settlement occurring on the western side of the hills, drawing on Fürer-Haimendorf's work surveying tribal land and forwarding recommendations to the Nizam of Hyderabad, whose princely kingdom included many adivasi and specifically Koya areas. The fourth section covers the amalgamation of colonial land settlement arrangements and "protective" exclusions into post-independence legislation for adivasis and for Scheduled Areas. I highlight the land alienation and resistance engendered by waves of in-migrations of adivasis and the continued arrival of non-tribal businessmen from coastal Andhra Pradesh. In-migration contributed to the rise in support for

leftist political movements that promised to reclaim autonomy over land. The fifth section looks at the post-1990's provisions that have sought to incorporate and legislate for "forest dwelling" communities, such as the Illūru cultivators, in order to grasp the broader scope of affirmative action in the region.

In a concluding discussion I examine how these processes have informed the contemporary construction of adivasi communities like the Koyas through the prism of uprising, resistance, and land. The disproportionate focus on land and adivasis' "attachment" to forests is a double-bind. Their material (and immaterial) culture is correctly described as dependent on forest resources. Yet, as noted in the Introduction, this repetition has served to eco-incarcerate and a-historicise adivasis, who continue to be defined precisely through their relationship with nature and forests (Banerjee 2016; Shah 2010: 131).

The establishment of the Muttadari system

The hills surrounding Illūru, 80 kilometres north of the city of Rājahmundry, had rarely been brought into regular, direct contact with larger administrative centres before or during British rule in India, according to Fürer-Haimendorf (1945: 27). As with a larger portion of Central India, territories deemed unruly have been constructed as peripheral to the centres of political and economic power (Bhukya 2017). These areas were marked out as "Excluded Areas" in the colonial period, distinctions that still have important ramifications. David Arnold suggested, presumably with Elwin and Fürer-Haimendorf in mind (though this is not explicit), that "although anthropologists have emphasised the isolation of these communities, one to another, to a historian of popular movements it is striking how much communication was possible between hillmen (sic) scattered over this vast area" (1982: 91). Arnold describes the whole southern and eastern arc of the uplands, between Rampa and Gudem, as part of the territory with which hillmen identified themselves (1982: 93). I would suggest instead that the territories within which "hillmen" and women and children identify themselves is much more localised, a divergence that stems perhaps from the contrasting scales of attention between the reports Arnold analyses and my own participatory fieldwork. Where adivasi communities have become more localised, it may have been in response to encroaching state and market forces.

Archaeological evidence cited in Fürer-Haimendorf's monograph indicates that a population of "advanced social organisation" inhabited the Gōdāvari valley in the Early Iron Age, leaving megalithic graves containing iron implements. It is noted in Umamaheshwari's social history of the Gōdāvari river (2014: 47), that Hyderabad-based archaeologist M. L. K. Murthy identified "rainforest adaptations" from 5000BC onwards in the Gōdāvari districts. This

suggests cross-breeding and cultivation of rice grains consistent with "farm practices" that are not associated with the region. This evidence counters any assumption that the tribal people have exclusively practiced shifting cultivation in forests, and are living artifacts of an earlier civilisatory time. There is little in the historical record between this and the medieval period. The hilly areas flanking the Gōdāvari were on the fringes of the Hindu kingdoms of Pallava and Chalukya dynasties, which did not have much impact on the development of "interior" populations in the Gōdāvari valley. The influence of Hinduism did make its way along the river as exemplified by the Shiva temple at Kathanūru, and the temple at Sivagiri (Fürer-Haimendorf 1945: 27).

As power in the wider region was wrested between Kakatiya kings of Warangal, the Vijayanagar empire, and Mohammedan Kings of Golconda, the Illūru hills we will soon know intimately were controlled by local rulers known as the Reddi Kings, associated with the eponymous land-owning caste. The tribal population in the hills were not brought under direct control; instead, the tribal headmen were designated as chieftains or *muttadars*. Fürer-Haimendorf speculates, based on local claims, that this is how the name of the tribal group "Konda Reddis" (literally, "hill" Reddis) emerged, indicating that that they were the local headmen answerable to, or representative of, Reddi kings in the plains. Even in this pre-colonial period, tribes were thought to be capable of bold acts of political volition, and were not solely confined to their hill tracts, as evidenced by the purported plunder of the wealthy city of Ellore by hill Reddis in the late 16th century (Fürer-Haimendorf 1945: 29).

While the British East India Company expanded their control of the east coast of India in the 17th century, the kingdom of Golconda, ruled by the Nizam of Hyderabad, to the west of the hills, was brought under the control of Emperor Aurangzeb (in Delhi). Also obligated to pay tribute to a distant suzerain in Delhi were the Gond kingdoms of Chanda and Deogarh to the north (Fürer-Haimendorf 1948: 8; Poyam 2017). At this time the areas toward the east and south of the hills – the Gōdāvari delta and the plains around Rājahmundry – became a province of the Northern Circars, the name given to the coastal strip of present day Odisha and Andhra Pradesh controlled by British *sarkars* (rulers).

In the mid-18th century, the Nizam of Hyderabad gained independence from Delhi and appointed his own officials in the province, but the region around Rājahmundry remained within the Madras Presidency (Fürer-Haimendorf 1945: 29). The hills between Chintūr and Rampachodavaram were effectively a buffer between these two domains. Increasingly through the 19th century various outsiders moved into the Gōdāvari region: British officials, their Indian troops, police and civilian subordinates, as well as Telugu traders. In Arnold's

characterisation of the development of rural class identity, a local elite gradually formed in response to this contact, in order to resist external interference and control. This elite was formed of landowners (*zamindars*), kings, or ruling families (*mansabdars*), and their subordinate chiefs (*muttadars*). There is ambiguity in Arnold's account, around whether these chiefs were headmen from the same endogamous groups to whom they gave protection, or already of a different class or status to those who paid them taxes in kind. Arnold does acknowledge that relative poverty limited the degree of socio-economic differentiation, and that the "lines were not always clearly drawn" (1982: 90). Some *muttadar* lords could be "drawn back into the peasant mass". These were likely dominant headmen within Reddi and Koya lineages, who were identified as representative "lords" by outsiders attempting to interpolate a recognisable structure into the kinship-based social organisation of the hill villages (Arnold 1982: 90).[22]

The precise origins of the *muttadari* system remain unclear in the sources Arnold and Fürer-Haimendorf have drawn on. The term is of Persian origin, so may have been a vestige of the period of Muslim over-lordship from Golconda in Hyderabad (Arnold 1982: 98) or may have been transposed from Reddi kings of Rājahmundry. *Muttas* could consist of between three and 30 villages, and revenue was collected in kind through unpaid *vetti* labour, or as grain or forest produce (Arnold 1982: 99–100). The *muttadars'* position was hereditary. They received customary gifts and would have been approached by villagers for permission to marry.[23] They were expected to pass on shares of their revenue to the rulers in the plains and were the salient nodes of power in connecting villagers to remote figures of political authority in Hyderabad, Delhi or Madras (Arnold 1982: 101).

The 19th century witnessed a broad transition in how external powers conceptualised hilly areas as potential revenue sources. Instead of forests being solely viewed as prospective agricultural land, they were identified as a source of timber. As early as 1805, the Madras Presidency proclaimed royalty rights over teak and prohibited any unauthorised felling of trees (Springate-Baginski et al. 2010: 15). The British drive to create and expand the railway network, as well as shipbuilding operations in the ports of Malabar and Goa, produced an increasing demand for strong timber such as sal, teak and deodar. Teak was also exported from India to the British Isles (Guha 1983: 1883–84). Administrative control over forest areas was

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[22] See also Vitebsky (2017: 15) on the ambiguous position of tribal headmen in pre-1950s Odisha, who tax, but also provide feasts for villagers with the revenue they withhold from their overlords.
[23] Given that even today many marriages are not formalised, the relationships uncovered through Arnold's sources are best understood as figurative archetypes of what was recorded, rather than taken as an account of common practice in Gōdāvari villages in the 19th century. Village headmen do, in certain circumstances, have authority to approve marriages, as discussed in Chapter 6.

tightened with the introduction of the Indian Forest Act of 1865, which legislated for an Imperial Forest Service to survey, manage and police the forest lands, and to identify and extract valuable produce. A further Act in 1878 removed any customary rights to the forests despite vocal opposition. Staff of the Board of Revenue Proceedings of Madras Presidency asserted that, "it is a known fact that all the jungles of this country are the common property of the people and that the poor persons who live near them enjoy their produce from immemorial time" (quoted in Springate-Baginski et al. 2010: 16). Despite this, the separate Madras Forest Act was penned in 1882 specifically for the Madras Presidency. Forest Settlement Officers were detailed to extinguish customary or traditional rights or privileges before officially issuing notification of the reservation of forests. Because of the vast areas of land to be surveyed, these processes were very drawn out. As a short cut, areas were provisionally reserved or "deemed" without knowledge or consideration of their use, arguably an intentional tactic to appropriate control over land and forests. Many water sources, pastures, cultivable lands and areas of *podu* (Te.), or *sainda* (Ko.) cultivation were taken out of the hands of their inhabitants and listed under the provisionally reserved "deemed" forests (Springate-Baginski et al. 2010: 16). In the 19th century there was no road beyond Rampachodavaram into the Illūru hills, but the region was accessible by river. The Madras Forest Act would have extended *de jure* to the hill on the northern bank of the Gōdāvari, although areas close to Illūru may not have been directly impacted until much later. Nevertheless, these events are indicative of the wider patterns of trade and interaction that were ongoing in southern India, which were formative of local notions of difference and entitlement.

Unrest in the fringes of the Madras Presidency

While the British were putting in place legal foundations for the extractive capitalist development of the Eastern Ghats, the area directly around Rampa (close to Rampachodavaram, to the east of Illūru) was ruled by its own local *raja* (king) or *mansabdar* (ruler) who collected tribute via *muttadar* chiefs from Konda Reddi villages. In practice, this may have been more akin to sporadic extortion than a coherent system. In 1802-3 this non-tribal *mansabdar* seized control of some plains villages and was pushed back by the British. A settlement was agreed permitting this *mansabdar* to retain these villages, on the condition that he maintained order in hills adjoining the plains. Effectively, this formalised the buffer between the highland villages and British-controlled revenue areas in the plains. The resolution brought the Rampa region under the indirect rule of the Northern Circars of the Madras Presidency. Several generations later, the eventual heir to this position of *mansabdar* in Rampa attempted to extort new levies from the tribal villages. On top of increasing animosity around these payments, he introduced a *chigurupannu* tax on toddy tapping.

Litigation through the courts at Rājahmundry allowed these levies to be enforced by the police, though tribal villages resisted such extortion of their cattle and property. It is hard to overstate the importance palm wine production would have had in the daily subsistence of tribal families. The levy on palm wine incited resistance from those expected to pay it. This caused the first instance of the Rampa uprisings. Police stations at Rampachodavaram and Adateegala were attacked and burned (Arnold 1982: 115; Umamaheshwari 2014: 63). Unrest continued through 1879 until 1880.

Until this stage, the political relations between the *muttadars* (chiefs), *mansabdari* (overlords), and the more distant suzerains would have had little impact on the everyday life of shifting cultivators in the hills. In addition to levies on palm wine, the implementation of wood cutting fees – in effect a tax on shifting cultivation itself – provoked tension within villages. British forestry officers believed the method of shifting cultivation to be wasteful and cause soil erosion. Taxes on axes were trebled in the Rekapalle area, to the west of the Illūru hills, which had recently been transferred from the Central Provinces to the Madras Presidency. This meant the uprising quickly spread to Rekapalle and Bhadrāchalum too.

Arnold understands the position of the *muttadars* to be ambiguous as they were "both exploited and exploiters". During the unrest they were vulnerable to lose their land and influence. At the same time, the incursion of traders and the increased monetisation of forest produce meant that their inherited privileges could be used to secure profits in the new economic order. One of the key protagonists was a Koya *muttadar* named Thamman Dora who co-ordinated the capture of six policemen who were tied to a tamarind tree at Boduluru for days, and beheaded two senior officers in the presence of 200 tribal people (Fürer-Haimendorf 1945: 32–33; Raghavaiah 1971: 34). Accounts of this extraordinary event note that the execution took the form of a ritual sacrifice.

A second period of uprisings, in the same areas surrounding the Illūru hills, in the early 1920s have been portrayed as an anti-colonial struggle. They were led by a high-caste leader from the plains, Alluri Sita Rama Raju, whose strength was to grasp the "primary contradiction of the hill people's interests as against colonial exploitative needs [and] to locate the grievances of tribals within the framework of colonial rule" (Atlury 1984: 9). The image of this upper-caste freedom fighter outsider became popularised in local legend. Today, Rama Raju is represented with a syncretic combination of references. He was fiercely intelligent, highly-literate and, inspired by earlier rebellions, advocated violent means. He is memorialised through statues and in schoolbooks, with a bow and arrow, and adorned by a snake. This image reminds us of

the capacity for popular Hinduism to incorporate local narratives, and of the extent to which the meanings of popular struggles of tribal people can be reshaped.[24]

These Rampa uprisings reveal how the interface between local entitlement to ancestral forest resources, and outsiders seeking to exploit resources or levy taxes, resulted in violence. Tribal communities sought to protect their wealth that others sought to acquire. Arnold conceptualises the earlier revolts as struggles for primacy between elites, but sees their 19th century counterparts as a mass revolt against the newly imposed economic exploitation (1982: 107). Atlury (1984, 1985) asserts that greater emphasis must be placed on the anti-colonial impulses in these rebellions. While historians debate the degrees of continuity across these uprisings, or whether to attribute greater or lesser importance to the personality of Rama Raju himself, the key aspect we take forward is that this period popularised the association of this region with tribal-outsider conflict, within a regional and nationalist frame. The precedent was set long before independence, that the hills surrounding Illūru were a dangerous territory for outsiders. The continued memorialisation of such incidents, for instance at the ruined police station at Adateegala, contributes to historicising notions of what kind of subjects Koyas and Konda Reddis are in the local collective memory, and reaffirms whose interests will likely be protected by state interventions. The presumption of antagonism between tribal and non-tribal interests connects the earlier forms of indirect rule to uprisings in which local adivasis asserted their autonomy over their forest resources of palm wine and timber. These themes remained salient through the processes of scheduling and the implementation of Land Transfer Acts that we move to now.

Scheduling the Gōdāvari Agency areas

In an effort to curb the uprisings, Rampa itself was not subjected to the restrictions on shifting agriculture until 1920s (Arnold 1982: 116). Intent on preventing future rebellions, the colonial administration tried to ameliorate the conditions for adivasis. They put in place the Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act (1917) (Rao et al. 2006: 5401), which set important precedents that land could not be transferred from a tribal to a non-tribal. In 1927, however, a further Forest Act emerged that prohibited charcoal fires, grazing of livestock, stone quarrying and any form of cultivation.

The recommendation of a British officer elsewhere in the Northern Circars of the Madras Presidency was an early and influential intervention that sanctioned the exclusion of those

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[24] Compare Froerer (2007) and Shah (2010; 2011).

tracts of land considered unsuitable for normal rule. In 1836, in Ganjam district, Odisha, a British officer, Russell, was assigned to quash bands of "looting tribals" and advised that the region should be exempted from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts and placed solely under the control of a local collector (Jaya Rao 1988; Panigrahy 2009). On this recommendation, the Ganjam and Vishakhapatnam Act XXIV of 1839 was passed. It sanctioned the partial exclusion of areas unsuitable for normal rule to be administered directly by the collector (Francis 1992: 58). Partial exclusions also occurred in Bengal in the form of the South West Frontier Agency, as laid out in the Bengal Regulation XIII of 1833 (Sundar 2009: 199). The "agents" in charge of these areas reported directly to the Governor General, and were mandated to prescribe special rules for these Scheduled Areas. This policy was further ingrained in legislation through the Scheduled Districts Act (Act XIV) of 1874, enabling local officers to determine whether laws should be applied. In the Scheduled Districts Act, we find the seeds of the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Early judgements such as these, and the exclusionary policies they justified, have had a profound impact on the economic and political history of areas that remain scheduled today, under the jurisdiction of the Fifth Schedule.

The classification of Scheduled Districts did not go without contestation and British officials were aware of arguments against the suspension of these areas from the laws of British India. One critique of the logic of exceptionalism claimed that, even in the Partially Excluded Areas of Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, and East Gōdāvari, *muttadars* had been granted authority to extract rent from adivasis, undermining the entire procedure of protection for these areas. Such claims were refuted on the grounds that governors could recommend whether or not areas should be fully or partially "excluded". The general for Berar in the Central Provinces argued that adivasis have been preserved in a state of "semi-barbarism" and claimed that it was "a pretence to hide the innumerable economic wrongs that are inflicted on these people by the British administration" (Council of State 1939: 11). The advocates for de-regulation emphasised that regulation prevents a person quarrying a stone for his own use on his own ancestral land unless he pays for a permit.

Letters from the central government to provinces show concerted debate about whether – and on what basis – such areas should be scheduled. A reply from the Governor of Madras Presidency to the Central Government in 1935 states that East Gōdāvari was less backwards than Ganjam or Vishakhapatnam districts and contains 25 villages in Polavaram Taluk that are "entirely similar to the adjoining plains" and therefore should be removed from the Partially Excluded Area. The rest of the district should remain as a Partially Excluded Area so as to "ensure the present special form of administration will continue and that the interests of

primitive tribes are as well protected as they are at present" (Government of Madras 1935). A response from the Government Agent shows that he had considered the different "stages of development" of these areas but concluded that, apart from 25 villages that were to be annexed and returned to "normal" law, the rest were "not yet fit to be subject to the normal consequences of popular government" (Government Agent East Godavari 1935).

It is unclear in these debates whether tribal people were being provided special protections based on geographical features, community identity, or their status as "backwards" and "uncivilized" (Paidipaty, 2010: 87). This obscurity can be seen in many of the legislative protections for tribal people including the Fifth Schedule. Reading this history today, it appears that policies intended to apply to territory have ended up being grafted onto persons, who have become understood as indelibly defined by the characteristics of their environment.

Neighbouring the Madras presidency to the northwest was the princely state of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Here, the first Forest Department was established in 1857, placing thirteen valued timber species under its control, while all other forests officially came under the purview of the Revenue Department. In 1890 the Nizam's government caught up with the acquisitive practices of the Madras Presidency by appropriating forested lands and restricting local access. By 1894, 3390 square miles of forests had been reserved as state property under the Forest Department (Thaha 2000). The Nizam's Forest Act transferred all tree species to the Forest Department and classified forests as either "reserved" or "open". The Forest Act was updated periodically and was superseded by the Hyderabad Forest Act of 1945, modelled on the 1927 Indian Forest Act. Few forest areas were "open" to adivasis; most were "reserved" and any cultivation or use constituted an "encroachment" or trespass. Traditionally a system of *siwa-i-jamabandi* had operated in the northern parts of the Nizam's domain, in which adivasis cultivated land for an officer of the government paying an annual fee to a revenue collector. As such adivasi communities such as the Gonds were never registered as owners or cultivators of land but enjoyed customary rights. The revenue collectors were often persuaded or bribed by non-tribal landowners to provide papers registering the land in their names (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1982: 55). In this way, many adivasis were evicted from lands they had inherited, but had no documentation of ownership.

Shifting cultivators were taxed through a system called *watandari* as the forests came to be viewed by the Nizam – as for the British – as a commodity that could be managed and made profitable. Varied tropical forests were transformed into plantations for fast-growing timber (Nalabolu 2014: 3). The labour power of adivasis living in these forests concomitantly became a commodity that could be harnessed. Fürer-Haimendorf claims that in order to prevent

adivasis like the Gonds becoming a floating population of landless labourers, the Nizam decided to resettle them on allotted lands. This posed administrative and logistical challenges as many potential beneficiaries were illiterate and unable to fill in applications to gain ownership. To overcome this, groups of villages were assigned land rather than individual applicants. In Adilabad and Warangal districts these resettlements were quite successful despite resistance from non-tribal landowners who colluded with police and revenue officers to delay allocations, allowing time for counter-claims to be made on designated land (Fürer-Haimendorf 1982: 57). Adivasis were also threatened with violence in the areas assigned to them as the landowning classes resisted changes that prevented them from exploiting adivasi labour through the previous *siwa-i-jamabandi* system.

The gains made through these settlements in favour of adivasis are small in comparison to the scale of land alienation. They may be read, as Xaxa suggested (see Introduction), as a form of coercive absorption. But at the very least they enshrine in collective memory the notion that the state – in this case the Nizam's dominion, which is today the Telangana region, to the west of the Illūru hills – might allocate land to displaced tribal groups.

Post-independence legislation and in-migration

The post-independence period saw attempts at progressive protective legislation that built upon colonial precedents. These attempts, however, were not sufficient to forestall increased land loss to in-migrating newcomers. Nor could they have foreseen the processes of insurgency and counter-insurgency that surpassed any of the rebellions of the British period.

In 1956 the Nizam's kingdom acceded to the independent union of India and the state of Andhra Pradesh was created. It comprised the northern and coastal sections of the Madras Presidency and the Nizam's nine districts of Telangana under the rubric of this being a linguistic region, uniting the speakers of Telugu language. For the first time in several centuries the region between the Saberi and Gōdāvari rivers became part of a single state within the Republic of India.[25] The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department was formed, and a commission established to integrate the two existing Forest Acts. This culminated in a more stringent set of legislations on forest activities.[26] A government order in November 1978 extended these measures into the Scheduled Areas of the state (Springate-Baginski et al. 2010: 20).

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[25] The two sides of the state retained distinct identities and dialects, and after a protracted struggle the districts formerly comprising the Nizam's dominion became India's newest state – Telangana – in 2014.
[26] Andhra Pradesh Forest Act 1967; Forest Offence Rules 1969; Andhra Pradesh Forest Produce Transit Rules 1970; Andhra Pradesh Minor Forest Produce (Regulation of Trade) Act 1971.

For Koya and Konda Reddi cultivators in the hills there would have been no fanfare when, in 1953, a bespectacled graduate of the London School of Economics consulted with other legal scholars through the constituent assembly debates in Delhi and drafted India's constitution. Although B. R. Ambedkar is criticised for ignoring the unique plight of adivasis, the document continues to provide far-reaching positive discrimination legislation to ensure the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.[27] Policies were enshrined that encouraged the integration of historically marginalised communities through reservations in education and state employment. In the same stroke, specific provisions were made to safeguard the autonomy of tribal territories under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, which reframed the precedent set by British exclusions. In practice, the Fifth Schedule has been poorly implemented, and laws applicable to the other states of India have been routinely extended into the Scheduled Areas. State governors rarely exercise their discretionary powers to regulate land transfers, land allotments and money lending, and the premise of protective discrimination is routinely undermined.

In addition to the consolidation of the legislative control on forests and the development of national affirmative action policies, the post-independence period brought waves of in-migrations of many other caste groups. High-caste agriculturalist businessmen arrived from the coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh and sought to establish new farms and settle in the fertile valleys of the Gōdāvari and its tributaries. Large-scale migrations of the Lambada adivasi community in the 1970s and 1980s from the northwest of India have meant that other tribes became proportionally even smaller minorities. Muria Gonds migrating from neighbouring Chhattisgarh have been accused of evicting other adivasis including Koyas by threat or by physical violence (Nalabolu 2014: 6).

Antagonism between in-migrating groups seeking to acquire land and the locally established castes and adivasis became deeply embedded. These are the wider processes that led to the situation we observed in Chapter 1, where Kathanūru became the site of a protracted struggle over land ownership. There is a longer history of Marxist politics in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana that exceeds the scope of this chapter. Briefly, however, the rise in support for left political movements in this sub-region must be contextualised within the failures of legal protections for tribal land to be effectively implemented. Left-wing politics in the Telugu states has been marked by subdivisions. A key point of bifurcation between different

[27] The Constitution of India does not, however, attempt a substantive definition of a tribe, see Heredia (2016: 128–29).

communist parties in the region, has been whether to focus strategy on formal politics at state level, activism at local level, or, in the case of the Naxalites, armed struggle. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) made a concerted effort to recruit in tribal areas, grounded in providing resources and taking up the struggles of tribal farmers in the various districts of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh (Sundarayya 1972: 249).

Political support from CPI (M) and from the Naxalites ebbed and flowed in the Illūru hills through the 80s and 90s, while waves of migration continued from coastal Andhra Pradesh and from Chhattisgarh. These are historically well-trodden paths that adivasi communities have walked in search of land, but have been accelerated by internal displacement as the counter insurgency force in Chhattisgarh has implemented aggressive measures to combat the threat of the Naxalite movement (Sundar 2006). Suykens (2011) suggests south-bound migration in recent decades is best understood as on a continuum between historical labour migration from the erstwhile kingdom of Bastar, and recent forced migration. Many villages of migrant Koyas and Murias claim to have come in search of land, while some say they fled the ongoing counterinsurgency in Chhattisgarh. Basing my assessment on conversations with those who have made these journeys, justifications for such relocations could be adjusted, and tailored to different audiences.

While land alienation has remained a pressing problem across the region, with non-tribals owning half the land in Andhra's Scheduled Areas in 2001 (Rao et al. 2006), the thicker forests of the hills around Illūru remained a relatively open frontier to Koya and Konda Reddi shifting cultivators. The history covered thus far is suggestive of why the Thellam Koyas climbed up into these hills to clear a new village, and how they have remained largely isolated from the types of absorption and assimilation seen elsewhere. Migration within and between these regions on the peripheries of India's states are part of the fabric of adivasi history. Such movement is understood from the state's perspective through the lens of political displacement and land alienation. Adivasi groups are increasingly fixed as belonging to and being entitled to certain tracts of forests. The Forest Rights Act, which we turn to in the next section, further governmentalises the notion that the ancestral right to cultivate forests is tied to proof of longevity and formal recognition.

Contemporary forest rights

In this final section I show how historical exclusions and (limited) protections have sedimented into particular types of state-society relations, reference points that will be returned to in Chapter 8 and 9. Certain aspects of these processes are muted or less pronounced in Illūru

village itself, but are indicative of the wider trajectory of the interface between adivasis and non-tribal people and between adivasis and the state.

The important legislation of the Andhra Pradesh Land Transfer Regulation in 1959 and the subsequent 1/70 Land Transfer Act prohibit the transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal persons. Despite this, legal redress has proven to be ineffective in preventing the loss of land. The protections for adivasis contradict the economic interests of the state and of politically dominant groups (Springate-Baginski et al. 2010: 21) and many public and private industries have acquired lands in Scheduled Areas.[28] The Tribal Welfare Department's record states that of 63,170 cases of tribal land alienation, just 23,635 have been restored to adivasis (Springate-Baginski et al. 2010: 21). This should be read as an optimistic estimate given the difficulties faced by adivasis in taking such cases to court; one suspects that many more unresolved cases are undocumented.

Adding to intensifying pressures on limited land, the planned displacement of 33,708 families due to the ongoing construction of the Polavaram dam across the Gōdāvari River (downstream from Kathanūru) will increase the competition between adivasis and other rural communities. Only families who own registered land will be compensated for lands that are inundated. The Andhra Pradesh government have enacted a Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act in 1998, which aims to safeguard community resources, prevent land alienation, and preserve traditions and community resources. In practice, however, other institutions tend to assume primacy over the decisions of local *gram sabha* bodies (village assemblies). Balagopal (2007: 4032) suggests that the Polavaram dam project should have been the ideal test case for the PESA Act to be implemented. It is a clear example of a situation in which adivasi interests will be damaged by a planned intervention from outside the area.

A landmark case came in 1997 when a non-governmental organisation, Samata, filed a case against the government of Andhra Pradesh for routinely flouting the law by granting contracts to private companies for calcite mining ventures in Scheduled Areas. The Supreme Court of India ruled that the state government could be construed as a (non-tribal) person who had illegally acquired and sold protected tribal land. The case set an important precedent by taking view that the state government was a non-tribal actor, confirming the illegality of future transfers of any state owned land in tribal areas. Nevertheless, adivasis are still faced with the reality that bringing such cases to a court is in many cases an impossible challenge.

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[28] Note that even the government buildings in Scheduled Areas stand in violation of constitutional law (vis-à-vis the Fifth Schedule).

The Forest Rights Act (FRA)[29] was drafted in 2006 to counter the trends toward land alienation by according legal status to village common property in state forest land and recognising individual occupations in forests (Reddy et al. 2011). This act explicitly recognised the tendency for implementation to fail due to recalcitrant bureaucracy and contradictory legislation in the shape of the Indian Forests Acts, but still required cooperation from the Forest Department and the Department for Tribal Welfare in its implementation. To have rights affirmed, a village community must form a Forest Rights Committee and prove their status as traditional custodians of a tract of forest, as verified by Tribal Welfare, Revenue, and Forest Department staff. This form of recognition has contributed to the erosion of community relations within villages. It has placed women and elderly members of forest dwelling communities in a dependent relation to younger men who normally make up the Forest Rights Committees, rather than having shared responsibility to cultivate land (Reddy et al. 2011: 75; Nalabolu 2014: 8). Forest users must mould themselves into bureaucratic committees in order to gain rights.

Where the Forest Rights Act has been effectively deployed, adivasis may establish new-found autonomy, though this is dependent on the state's recognition. In one example near Chintūr, a lengthy dispute with the Forest Department culminated in a village *gram sabha* independently auctioning off their harvested bamboo to the highest bidders (Sreenivas 2014). In other cases, it is alleged that industrial enterprises such as the paper factory at Bhadrāchalum encouraged adivasis with forest rights to grow eucalyptus to sell to their industries (Nalabolu 2014: 8; Benbabaali 2018: 137). In this way the adivasis are drawn to adopt the very principle that has historically disenfranchised them; that the forest is a commodity that may be cultivated for individual profit.

The recent implementation of the Forest Rights Act shows that the best intentions of legislators remain out of touch with the history of how protections have been implemented, a few small successes notwithstanding. These processes bear a strong colonial influence and policies and laws directed towards adivasis have been suffused with even more problematic contradictions as India became an independent republic and as the State of Andhra Pradesh seeks to open new avenues for profit-making. Springate-Baginski et al. (2010: 25) go as far as to suggest that "since independence the forest bureaucracy has not significantly revised its quasi-feudal/colonial relationship with its tribal citizens".

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[29] The full form is: Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006.

Returning to the national level of debate, Chhatrapati Singh (1986) reminds us that the same state that seeks to protect adivasis has rendered them poor and vulnerable. He asks whether "what has been given to the forest dwellers through affirmative state action is proportionate to what has been taken away from them through the Forest Act" (Singh 1986: 46). Singh criticises the manner in which state committees and commissions have never sought to understand an adivasi perspective on customary rights to land. He states that the "law defines "adivasi" in such a way that it is impossible for any forest tribal to claim his rights; but on affirmative action the law is explicit in its definition of adivasi, and, as noted, uses a different criterion [of Scheduled Tribe]" (1986: 46).

An equally vigorous critique is posed by Savyasaachi (2016) who asserts that the law can never be the arena through which equality is restored to adivasis. He argues that forest policies mark the end of any alternative paradigm of governance since the state is accepted as extending its reach into these aspects of life. Adivasi conceptions of forest ownership are officially foreclosed when their only claims to forests are those legislated in state statutes (Savyasaachi 2014: 58). Widespread acceptance of the validity of state laws in the thick forest suggest new forms of tribal citizenship and sovereignty are emerging, or, as (Bose et al. 2012) argue new forms of "forest governmentality". These emerge from the amalgamation of contradictory legislations that combine protectionist land policies with new "joint management" approaches to forests. These processes have made the fabric of everyday life and material culture of forest dependent communities the concern of legal scholars, debated in a language foreign to those whose lives are affected by those proceedings. The communities whose resources are in question are thus drawn to see their own activities through the lens of legislative categories as they internalise "new" ethnic identities. Overall, the framework of legislative protections for individuals and for communities retains much of the language and sentiment of colonial paternalism. It is the layering of contradictory legislations on top of this, however, that further reifies and complicates the coercive aspect of colonial approaches.

Resources for the present

There is a long continuity in relations between adivasi tribes and the state, in which both anthropology and the law are implicated. Through the chapters that follow I show how the premises of state law and anthropology have infiltrated into local conceptions of society and identity. We will presently observe the social effects of self-identifying as claimants within a state legal framework. To formalise ancestral rights to forest resources and access the benefits of inclusive affirmative action policies, Koyas must adopt the mindset of a modern citizen-

subject and enter processes of self-recognition through external categories. As described below, in this process traditional gender equality and relatively egalitarian practices may be eroded.

The Koyas and their adivasi neighbours, the Konda Reddis, are foregrounded in writing focused on rebellions, uprisings, far-left insurgency, land and forests rights, and more recently in literature on large-scale development projects that threaten to displace them. What lessons can be learned from the ways these communities are documented in relation to these themes? These discourses reiterate the sense that adivasis are a distinct group with particular interests, who are different from, and non-commensurable with other communities in Andhra Pradesh and India. While it is important to recognise the particular aspects of their social history, we must also resist over-determining our accounts of adivasis on the basis of these associations.

Histories, like all forms of writing, are embedded in their own agendas of narration. Based on the accounts examined above I propose a synthesised history of the fieldsite explored in Chapter 1. The economic policies of the British on the eastern side of the hills were broadly successful in stopping shifting cultivation in lower-lying areas close to the town of Rampachodavaram. Their reach, however, would not have been felt uniformly in the hilltop villages, save for the occasional extortion of grain, or forest produce. When external forces did arrive in less accessible villages, inhabitants would have fled into the forests and may have returned to find their homes plundered, or during the peak of the rebellions – towards which they might have been ambivalent – their villages burned.

To the west of the hills the Nizam's administration was less punitive on shifting cultivation and at times attempted to make settlements that were favourable to indigenous tribes, based on Fürer-Haimendorf's recommendations. Shifting cultivation may have continued for longer in the late colonial period in the western side, in villages above Chintūr. After independence, the combination of the expansion of agriculture in the plain areas and the implementation of Forest Acts meant that pressures on the land on both sides of the hills intensified and new waves of non-tribal settlers sought to cultivate the riverine tracts on the Gōdāvari and Saberi as well as lower lying hills around Chintūr and Rampachodavaram. Continued waves of in-migration from Chhattisgarh (from both seasonal and politically forced migrations) would have placed even greater strain on resources of land and water in and around Chintūr, causing more local migration of Koyas down-stream along the Gōdāvari into more isolated hills that were sparsely populated by Reddis in the 1940s when Fürer-Haimendorf surveyed them. Hills around Illūru were the sites of small Reddi hamlets, but those inhabitants were induced away from the

thicker, higher altitude forests by the development of timber industries and settled on the river-bank, or more proximate to towns, creating a vacuum of sparsely populated hills.

I speculate that the Illūru families we met in Chapter 1 retained a greater autonomy over resources for longer than the Reddis Fürer-Haimendorf encountered who were already in the throes of integration and Hinduisation in the 1940s. The Koyas in Illūru and Permam Bossa are more recent migrants and do not have the same stability as the large, more established Reddi villages such as Telligūḍem. Hypothetically then, we can conceptualise their migration as an attempt to create a new life for themselves with greater access to resources, and not subject them to a narrow framework of simply preserving or maintaining a livelihood. The ancestors of the Illūru Koya cultivators may have remained autonomous for longer than other groups but a later wave of migration placed pressure on land resources in their ancestral village of Nallametta. This speculative model accentuates the ways people have responded to pressure on various valued resources and are impacted by historical political and economic processes across the region.

In the latter half of the 20th century, we see a new pattern of extraction as the capacity of the state to monitor and control the forests increased exponentially. As noted in Chapter 1, many decades ago a village could be founded in a fairly open forest frontier. Today, however, such a clearing is less viable, both in terms of the law, but also in terms of how tribal people conceptualise their own rights and autonomy. Through the period of Naxalite influence on the region, local Koya and Konda Reddis have been exposed to competing narratives of how their rights might be protected or alternatively extinguished by the state. The continued struggle for better pay, and for the repatriation of land in the Kathanūru valley – in which higher-caste Naxalite leaders have provided support – form conceptual precedents to the notion that the state, and external business agents can be resisted through political means and be challenged on paper as well as through uprisings. Yet along with this shift is the increasing awareness that tribal people are always at a larger historical disadvantage in terms of their intergenerational acuity for the processes of bureaucratised struggle.

The introduction of the Forest Rights Act has shifted the responsibility of thinking through such challenges onto the communities and individual "dwellers". This has rightly been characterised as the governmentalisation of forests, as people become responsible at an individual level for proving their ancestral use of forest resources (Bose et al. 2012). These more recent legislations have altered the paradigm around rights in a way that filters into the minds of young tribal people – they are the ancestral bearers of rights granted by a paternalistic state. It is incumbent on individuals to claim or squander such opportunities. Recent measures

have fostered awareness that the forests are inalienable to the tribal people, but only through the mechanisms of the state's legal framework can such rights be secured. This introduces a fresh layer of complexity onto the historical situation of these communities as they become induced to see their own agency through the terms of a state that has excluded their territories from the normal workings of the law.

Let us take forward to the next chapter an appreciation of the limits of how the adivasi subject has been written through history, thematically constructed in relation to colonial era exclusions, development projects and antagonisms between the state and "forest dwellers". In addition, let us bring an understanding of the historical spectrum of types of people who inhabit, govern, and move in and out of these hilly areas. Although their history is entirely bound up with national and regional politics and economics, young adivasis access in towns, history books, schools, and colleges a distorted history of their own cultural difference that emphasises cultural distinctiveness, primitiveness, and their lack of integration. In conclusion, these hills are precisely the territories on which modern politics have been substantiated, and their construction as "remote" must be registered as a recent, modern phenomena. The chapter has shown that it is precisely through the layering of historical processes of state recognition and relatively uneven development that communities such as the Koyas in Illūru are constructed as being a distinctively "tribal", forest-dependent group.

Chapter 3 – Shifting cultivation and modalities of care: three family profiles

Out on the family hill slope, Pochamma and her daughter Janiki are weeding. Both are crouched close to the ground, backs bent forward, hands moving quickly and smoothly as they pull out the thinner roots of new unwanted growth. The brown soil is interspersed with rocky outcrops, and when they come across a tougher root, they use a metal-tipped wooden digging stick to cut it away from the soil. As I carefully pick my way across the steep slope, learning which of the shoots are weeds, which are wild sorrel (*bhēnda kusīr*), and which are cashew saplings (*jeedimāmidi mokka*) planted the previous year, Janiki teases me mercilessly – calling me lazy (*mondo*), fat (*boduga*), and unbalanced (*rālithin*). She reminds me that I know nothing (*nimma bhūt teliu*). Janiki's characterisations reflect a longer discourse about non-tribal bodies as unbalanced and unfit, and reveal local perceptions of knowledge, skill, and capacity for labour associated with different types of people. At times her mother chastises us for chatting excessively and not working fast enough. Though I am keen to contribute to the weeding I know that Janiki's conversational insights as well as her insults are invaluable. Beyond the taxonomy of plants and people on the hill slope our conversation moves to Janiki's larger aspirations and impending life-choices.

Janiki implores me: "*Thamasanna, nanna college andawal nimma Lokesh anna toh kella* (Please Thomas brother, tell my elder brother Lokesh I *have* to go to college)". She gives the impression she thinks I have the power to influence the thinking of her elder brother who, in the absence of their late father, is responsible, she implies, for making such decisions. But beneath this façade we are both aware that much more power lies with her mother, who is working alongside us. Janiki finished her 10th class a few months earlier and is considering returning to a government college to study for her Intermediate qualification (equivalent to A-levels in UK), or to take up a long distance learning option for a similar course instead. Should she complete these studies, Janiki would be the first person from Illūru to do so. In the short term, she is doing what most young women do in Illūru and labouring as part of a family unit on the *sainda*.

When Pochamma's husband was alive the whole family would relocate during this agricultural season to the *sainda*, where they would live for several months, sleeping side by side on the *mancham* – the shelter on the hill slope. The fire they kept lit, and the sounds and smells of human habitation, would discourage any boars from snaffling their crops at night and ward off

birds and monkeys during the day. Pochamma's refrain, "*aski īyal mattond*" (when father was around) became a ubiquitous descriptor for the best practices of highly productive shifting cultivation. Nowadays, with two daughters married out, occasional days of wage labour through the government MGNREGA scheme, and two children – Janiki and Lokesh – ambitious to inhabit a wider social space through pursuing education and seasonal migrant labour, it has become much harder to maintain the "traditional" practice. Perhaps as important, nowadays white rice is available from a state depot. This rice is stored in a padlocked steel drum in a house which now contains many more material possessions than were common in Pochamma's childhood. Though many of the grains stored in the rafters are the same as they were back then, it is now much harder to tie the door shut with handmade string and leave that house unguarded.

Challenging transition narratives

Throughout field research among shifting cultivators in Illūru village, family aspirations were expressed in decisions regarding the allocation of everyday labour. Concerns for the future were embedded in negotiations about who should keep watch over (*ūrawal*) and protect (*kāpilai tungawal*) human and non-human resources. Children, animals and agricultural crops all need to be looked after, cared for. People, relatives are often "asked after" in a manner in which the act of asking, or remembering, is expressed as a form of affection or concern (*Nanna talptan nimma kella* – tell that I am asking). Houses need to be inhabited (*mandawal*) and maintained (*togay sondawal*). White rice and other grains must be stored well (*sai vatawal*) once harvested (*koitawal*) or taken (*tīsawal*) from state depots. Other resources such as palm-wine, meat, gourds and pumpkins from the hill slopes are shared (*saddariwal*), given (*īdawal*) and taken (*tīsawal*) by guests (*chutam*), relatives (*kutumbam*) and "close relatives" (*sonta kutumbam*) across a network of related villages.[30]

The detailed way that people and material resources are provisioned for through a variety of labour across generations and seasons, suggests Koya people here are orientated toward future care for their household, kin, and across their wider surname groups. This immediately counters the popular stereotype that adivasis are conscious only of the short-term. The explicit value placed on everyday caring labour expresses a well-established, cross-generational goal to maintain and reproduce a nourished healthy family. This chapter explores the dynamics of

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[30] *Sonta kutumbam* means one's "own relative", and is used to indicate the proximity of a direct blood relation, such as one's actual mother's sister (*sudievva*) – who will not share a surname – rather than a fictive or more distant "mother's sister".

labour, care and responsibility among three families in Illūru who – with varying success – practise the traditional form of shifting cultivation called *sainda*.

Sainda cultivation is bound up with local morality, animistic religious practice, and seasonal festivals as well as with local understandings of gender roles, home, and kinship. It is augmented by other livelihood strategies, such as the cultivation of cash crops like palm-wine and cashew nut, sporadic wage labour employment, and the purchase of highly subsidised white rice. I argue that *sainda* cultivation should be understood as part of a rational ethic of family care, which is implicitly syncretic and integrated into the wider networks of state affirmative action and the regional agricultural economy.

By exploring these narratives I show how Illūru families are engaged in navigating complex inter-generational decision making processes: How much is it wise to rely on shifting agriculture? How much is it worth investing in cash crops such as cashew? And how necessary or desirable is the struggle to capture limited state resources? Hence, this ethnography connects larger moral and economic processes with the intimate workings of family life. Through the exploration of these processes, we gain an insight into the establishment of distinctions and differences within the village, between siblings and closely related families.

To summarise the key arguments: Firstly, I show that the values placed on shifting cultivation are malleable and part of broader strategies and decision-making processes for Illūru families, since *sainda* labour is part of a wider scope of possible livelihoods across the region. It allows families to position themselves in relation to wider political projects but also towards their extended surname group/in-law network. Secondly, I problematise the popular narrative of transition from shifting to settled agriculture, showing a more complex picture. Instead of framing adivasi populations as defined by their relationship to land, there is an urgent need to understand local practices of relatedness, kinship, care and provisioning, within a broader framing. The transition, if that is what it is, is one from a situation in which care is provided through networks of related villages to one where it is increasingly provided by the state through its affirmative action programs, supplemented by income from stints of precarious migrant labour.

Viewed through the prism of this transition in modalities of care and provision, the chapter invites a reconsideration of what constitutes a change in social relations. Empirically grounded academic writing is always likely to infer a close correlation between a mode of production and types of social relations, as emphasised with reference to shifting cultivation in Fürer-Haimendorf (1945: 77–89, 238). While my material broadly bears out this important contrast,

this chapter, following Li (2014: 152), presents a more complicated picture of continuity of social relations across modes of production. Aspiration for development is tangible even on the hill slope and, as we see below, autonomy is equally sought through the channels of state social security initiatives.

Figure 12: The homes of Pochamma, Kothanna and Bulamma, and Vikkai and Vijaya

I emphasise a continuity in Illūrites endeavours to provide for their kin, drawing on a fast-changing context of potential sources, or resources for their own material, economic and religious reproduction. The focus on caring labour enables us to see that the use of state subsidies does not constitute a clean break from more traditional social formations and social relations. Even when collecting grain from GCC, families pool their labour, and there are a string of rituals that ensure (to an extent) that this state subsidised grain is redistributed within the village, through communal meals. This chapter attempts to theorise the interplay of processes of state affirmative action and capitalist development in the surrounding region, through the daily reproductive labour and the shifting cultivation cycle of three Illūru families.

In the post-James-Scott-era of theorising about shifting cultivators and state-society relations, we tend to be drawn into a false dichotomy between emphasising either agency or exploitation. Rather than thinking of this livelihood transition in terms of loss of agency, there are important reasons to be wary about common-sense stories of resistance – both in academia and in the field. In dominant theories of modernisation and tribal integration in India, shifting cultivation

is associated with low population density, greater self-sufficiency, uncurtailed access to land, and territorial autonomy (Bailey 1960: 66; Ghurye 1943). In Scott's later work, shifting cultivation can represent part of a mixed portfolio of subsistence techniques that allow autonomy to be retained and the state avoided. Livelihood transition towards settled cultivation exposes shifting cultivators to increasingly hierarchical and unequal social relations when integrated into caste-dominated societies in the agricultural plains of India (Bailey 1960, Xaxa 1999). Although in the Koya case the decline in shifting cultivation is concomitant with a move towards more hierarchical social relations, this is only partly the case. Certainly, there is agency in not being governed, but in the Andhra Pradesh context, the picture on the ground is more complex. Through a focus on the continuity of inter-generational care, we open up a slightly different picture of what constitutes "resistance" and "state avoidance".

Typically, ethnographies reveal more complex and historically grounded reality. Significant contributions from anthropologists have complicated the assumption that there is a single movement away from shifting cultivation. Tania Murray Li (2014) argues in the context of Lauje shifting cultivators in Indonesia, that the very processes of individualisation of land and capital accumulation that have led to dispossession and alienation were initiated by the actions of the indigenous community. This emphasis on how individuals and families first sought to profit from cash crops enables her analysis to account for the internalisation of aspiration, and highlights unintended and uneven consequences of the introduction of cash crops. She moves beyond the dichotomy of representing shifting cultivators as either fearful of the state, or as potentially insurgent autonomous political agents.[31]

In Illūru, as we shall see, there is a similar diversity of aspirations and desires for cultural and economic inclusion. As well as maintaining shifting cultivation, they strive for resources that sustain them into a modern post-agricultural identity in market towns: cash, phones, motorbikes. It is crucial not to underestimate the power of the development discourse (Escobar 2011), which has the capacity to construct very real and legitimate desires for consumption. De Vries' (2007) work on the desire for development seems apposite to aspects of the Koya experience, and echoes Li's evocation of desiring subjects (2014: 33) for whom care and kinship can eventually fail (2014: 141).

Through this ethnography I hope to map the changing modalities of care and provision but also the concentric circles of relatedness in which Illūru's villagers position themselves (see

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[31] Li retains a sense of cultivators actions being powerless in response to wider political economic forces, though her interlocutors explain these processes to her in terms of individual fortunes (2014: 152).

Brubeck 1995: 223). The crops that were cultivated by Illūru's first settlers are still enjoyed across a network of relatives most notably in Dōraguḍa and Permam Bossa. Mangoes, pumpkins, jackfruits, meat, palm wine and corn are sent to relations elsewhere. These kinship networks are remade in contemporary young people's movements, decisions and acts of providing for others. A focus on care enables us to keep the larger historical frame in view as we move to the domestic, agricultural everyday lives of Illūru's cultivators. That focus also reminds us that in all acts of care, limits must be drawn to restrict the network of others to whom we are obliged. The discussion below is informed by literature on acts of care and caring labour far removed from Illūru's hill slopes (Gutierrez Garza 2019; Roberts 2016; Stack 1997) and shaped by theorisation of care as an invisible but essential part of the capitalist economy.

As indicated in this chapter's opening overture, among Illūru's shifting cultivators, acts of caring labour are absolutely intertwined with what is explicitly valued as productive work. Within and between Illūru households there is a distinct visibility to care work. These actions need to be performed and are explicitly discussed as such. This contrasts starkly to the division between "economic" and "domestic" work that underwrites the exploitative potential in capitalist modes of production. This all suggests a different modality from the capitalist one which is the focus of much literature on care (Bear et al. 2015; Fraser 2016; Shah & Lerche 2020).[32]

In Illūru, even cash cropping and collecting subsidised grain are undertaken in small family units. In these ways particular social relations are maintained even as capitalist work practices enter into the spectrum of labour performed in Illūru. The ethnography below shows how these different types of work become incorporated into the social relations of the village, and sets up the story of how these logics do slowly take root within, and change social relations, but only partially. The key point to take forward on care, is that the literature distinguishes a feature of capitalism which is extractive and makes invisible the wider caring labour. The inverse is true in Illūru, where caring work is highly valued. In what follows, my focus on embodied practices of caring enables an exploration of the subtle continuities and disjunctures in the shifting cultivating economy. Thus, I focus not on applying the Illūru data to theoretical frameworks of care, but rather on social relations of three Illūru families in a way that draws out and complicates a simple narrative of transition.

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[32] For an overview of the debates on care, see Held (2005); for the gendered dimensions of care see Gilligan (1982).

My ethnography establishes the ways in which overlapping schemas for personal and collective wellbeing coalesce within shifting cultivating families. As is evident in the opening quotes from Janiki and her mother Pochamma, Koya adivasi families aspire to greater support from state infrastructures as they simultaneously seek to maintain and consolidate traditional cultivation methods. Though the two women provide radically different accounts of life in their village, they collaborate in the daily labour of each other's projects considerably. Even as my Koya interlocutors aspire to state resources, they are establishing and consolidating various state and non-state resources that are legitimate ways of maintaining autonomy and caring for their family. From an external perspective, this looks like the last gasp of a particular way of life, but the ethnography below shows how there is much continuity in these transitions, and how what may appear to be quite different schemas or cultural scripts for success and failure are in fact dispositions that co-exist within extended families and even households. New frameworks and spaces of differentiation are opened up through the encounters between external bureaucracies of affirmative action, adivasi social movements and everyday life-processes within the Koya community. Greater fixity and heightened consciousness of cultural differences emerge through the processes of development, livelihood transition and affirmative action, which in turn are reflected the routines of contemporary shifting cultivation.

Figure 13: Two brothers tend to their *sainda*

Returning to the *sainda* slope: Pochamma and (late) Muthanna Dora

Janiki's elder brother Lokesh is out of the village in Rājahmundry, having told his mother that he is following up the paperwork in pursuit of her widow's pension for which he recently applied at Rampachodavaram on her behalf. While he is "down" (*idapa*) in the market town he also seeks the assistance of the panchayat president (also a Koya, from the next village) in pursuit of a land *patta* (title). This bureaucratic work is typically done by young men. In this case it represents the continuation of a long saga to regain documentation for their family's land after it was divided decades ago between his father and uncles. Janiki's younger brother Pravin is shooting birds with a catapult with other Thellam boys, his classificatory brothers. At this time of year (June until August) there is no *kallu* (palm wine) to be tapped, and hunting trips are rare as the families devote themselves to clearing the weeds from their slopes, so the youngest sibling Pravin is free to play for now. Like many young boys he is an important volunteer in communal village activities like preparing meat for shared meals, going hunting and herding livestock. He was uninterested in school and "ran back" to his village several years earlier. Pravin sometimes stays for days on end with other families to labour or to help prepare for functions in other villages. At this time of year the village cattle are still permitted to roam around, but once the planting is done and shoots of corn and lentils start to poke through the soil, a cattle herding rota will be implemented for each surname group: one rota for the Thellams, one for the Badinas and one for the Kurusams.

Pravin's duties reflect the way that much of the time of young men in the village is spent on collective tasks for the benefit of all the households, leaving only some tasks to be done individually. In the preparation of communal meals for seasonal festivals, labour is pooled across the whole village, as it is while collecting various forest produce. For cattle herding, labour is pooled within surname groups. When state benefits (e.g., subsidised rice, and cashew saplings) are to be received, labour is pooled in the same way as it is during the preparation of village feasts. But for the harvesting of cash crops, such as cashew and palm wine, families do not offer each other any support. Responsibility for feeding and nurturing younger members of the village is diffused across many households.

The sky darkens with heavy clouds at the same time each afternoon and Pochamma commands us home. We collect as many pieces of wood as we can comfortably carry and walk a kilometre back to the house, a task that is traditionally done by women in Koya shifting cultivator families. When the family cut the forest earlier that year, and burned the shrubs on their *sainda*, it was Lokesh who felled the larger trees, which is a man's job, while Pochamma

and Pravin gathered together fallen branches into piles to be burned, dotted over the slope. The first task to do at home is to call Pravin back to fill water. "*Pravin-oow-*" yells Pochamma, her voice rebounding from the Kurusam hill slope on the opposite side of Illūru and echoing back across the village. "*Pravin-oow!*" she calls again.

"*Oi, evva?*" Pravin shouts back from a thicket of trees somewhere near his uncle Vikkai's *sainda*.

"*Ira varao! Eir monstin nimma* (Come here. You have to fill water)". By the time he comes, Pochamma has lit a fire and filled a pan with the "good water" (*menth eir*), carried to the house in the morning. This is placed on hearth in the house, which is topped with red clay tiles – the only surviving edifice of a much earlier wave of government housing subsidy in the late 1980s.[33] Pravin returns and tips the remaining water from two metal water pots into a plastic drum, which is used for bathing but not to drink. He and I take turns to pump water at the bore-well and carry the two vessels on a bamboo shoulder yoke back across the village to the house. The older water is heated for bathing by Janiki, who sweeps the floor of the porch, chops green chillies and onions for the evening curry and sifts a whole kilogram of *vēghi okaṭi* white rice ("1000 to 1" – the government supply brand). By this time the water in the pot inside has boiled and Pochamma spoons the rice into the water by hand and replaces the lid.

Unlike Janiki and Lokesh, Pochamma's three other children – daughters Mona and Nivetha, and youngest son Pravin – did not finish school. The two elder daughters married outside the village: Mona to a Badina boy in Biyamwāḍa, and Nivetha to a non-Koya of the Gappala (Konda Reddi) surname group near Chintūr.[34] However, the "ration card" for subsidised rice still bears the names of these two out-married daughters, meaning that the family is able to purchase a greater share of subsidised grain. This puts Pochamma's family in an advantageous position. Lokesh, Janiki and Pravin are all at home to contribute to the household economy – and as we have seen, the labour of both male and female children is an important resource. In some senses, education removes young people from this household economy, though the linguistic and bureaucratic skills and experience that school-goers develop are highly valued in Illūru too. Hence, schooling represents an ambitious but potentially risky investment of time, a dilemma further unpacked in Chapter 6. Lokesh completed 10th class, then dropped out of

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[33] See Chapter 1.
[34] It was Vikkai and Kothanna's elder sister who married out of the traditional *gotra*. She married a Konda Reddi and it is their son, who, of course, takes his *father*'s caste/tribe identity and surname, who married Pochamma's daughter.

Intermediate after being bullied. He has since gone for several stints of labouring at a prawn cultivation plant in the distant city of Bhīmavaram.

Pochamma's family were well organised in the early stages and planted their patch before the other families, but still ended up disappointed by their eventual harvest. They did not have the numbers to keep a close watch as they intended, and complained that many of the corn seedlings were eaten by pigs. Their yield was however much higher than that of the two neighbouring families.[35] Pochamma's family's predicament echoes attitudes among High's (2012) informants in rural Laos, which are framed as explicit desires for the material benefits of state policy. For Pochamma however the maintenance of *sainda* cultivation is an important mode through which they remain connected to a wider kinship network who receive occasional gifts of produce from the hill slope.

A less cared for hill slope: Thellam Vikkai and Vijaya

Pochamma's family are not the only ones negotiating the dilemmas of where to allocate their time and labour through the agricultural season. Later that year, sat in the shade of another hill slope, Pochamma's classificatory sister and close neighbour, Vijaya, reflected on the dynamics of her family's cultivation efforts. Perched on the trunk of a fallen tree, she confided that throughout the season she had cultivated their *sainda* slope on her own – while nursing her two-year-old daughter Lila. Her husband Vikkai had made several extended visits to relatives in Dōraguḍa – the village from whence the first settlers of Illūru came, and where Vikkai had spent his teenage years. The couple had initially prepared the hill slope together, and planted seeds when the first rains arrived. But Vijaya weeded and kept watch over them alone, which was ultimately unsuccessful. Once the first sprouts of corn are tall enough to attract animals, cultivators must start *kāpilai* (keeping guard) to ward off monkeys in the day and boars at night. This ideally involves families sleeping and eating at their *sainda*, though larger families keep watch in turns. Like caring for her daughter Lila, this is a full-time job. The villagers' own cattle and goats are initially the primary threat to the crop until a shared herding cycle is devised. Vikkai and Vijaya were so slow to take up their sleeping positions in the *sainda* that cows ate all the crops, meaning everything had to be re-planted. Had it been the Kurusam families' cattle that destroyed the crop, they might have complained to their Kurusam neighbours, and demanded compensation by way of assistance with the extra labour, but since it was their own Thellam cattle that ate their crop this was not an option. By the time Vikkai and Vijaya had sown a second crop, the rains had subsided, and the crop was very poor. Vijaya

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[35] Across most shifting cultivator villages people perceive their agricultural yields to be in decline.

complained to me while keeping watch over cattle, frustrated but serene, that Vikkai never earns any money and is always drunk. Clearly there are different templates for how dedicated Illūru cultivators need to be when keeping watch over their shifting cultivation plots. For Vikkai and Vijaya, cultivating their *sainda* was done half-heartedly – and they planted fewer varieties of seeds than Pochamma's family.

Expectations have shifted as people become more accustomed to monthly state subsidised white rice. But here too, Vikkai and Vijaya are less well-endowed than Pochamma's family. Their marriage was never formalised and Vijaya's name and that of their daughter Lila are missing from the "ration card". Only Vikkai and their son, Cinnabhai, are listed, so the family claim only 10kgs of white rice per month from the state run depot.[36] Rice runs out and fresh vegetables are seldom purchased from market.

Vikkai and Vijaya both worked away in Hyderabad at a garment factory for several months, 8 years ago, but their accumulated earnings did not last long. Cinnabhai studies in 6th grade at the government hostel school near Rampachodavaram where he gets three meals a day and two sets of clothes a year. Vikkai and Vijaya have many cashew trees planted by Vikkai's father, through the earlier state cashew nut scheme (see Chapter 1), but their orchard is so poorly maintained and overgrown that the trees produce few nuts; most of the nutrients in the soil are absorbed by other plants.

One reason that Vikkai's own orchard (*thontha*) and *sainda* get overlooked is because he maintains numerous friendships across the region. Famed for his hospitality, groups of young men travel to stay in Vikkai's breeze-block home and make hunting trips around Illūru. They usually bring a sack of rice and a few vegetables from market when they do, but even so, their visits place a burden of care and resources on Vijaya, who collects the firewood as Illūru women do, on her way back from *sainda*.[37] Vikkai returns the visits to friends across the river in West Gōdāvari district. Though highly unreliable in the eyes of his wife, Vikkai has status among Thellam relatives and across the network of friends.

Within Illūru, Vikkai performs important duties as a headman (*peddamansud*) though he is the most junior of the four men who have that title in Illūru. Younger men remark that he isn't *really* a headman, since he is often absent, drunk or too preoccupied with social events in distant villages. When Vikkai is present in Illūru, he is at the centre of village meetings,

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[36] Families are eligible for five kilograms per person per month.
[37] Vikkai and Vijaya, as mentioned in Chapter 1, live in an unfurnished un-plastered breeze-block home with a corrugated iron roof, subsidised by the Andhra Pradesh government between 2010 and 2012.

funeral rituals, and orchestrates the drinking circles of his Thellam brothers. He performed the ritual role of the *māmaya* (mother's brother) at the Badina wedding, and was the honorary chief mourner at a Badina funeral, when many other Thellam men were (it seemed to me) equally qualified for the role in terms of their kinship relation.

Twice I accompanied Vikkai on his spontaneous return visits to Dōraguḍa, which sometimes last for weeks. When there, he is welcomed warmly in many houses for drink and food and excitedly rushes between houses to catch the *kallu* (palm wine) sessions of numerous friends and relatives. Vikkai – like most Illūrites – has no regular mode of earning cash. His cashew orchard is overgrown and he doesn't maintain *jeeriga* trees to produce palm wine. He seems at times to survive more directly than most on his relatives' generosity. This charisma is generated through his own hospitality as a host himself and through occasional stints of labour at harvest time when the Dōraguḍa Thellams cut and thresh their crops in winter. Vikkai hunts regularly but never sells his meat – he eats it or dries it to preserve it and sometimes (but not always) shares it with other Thellam houses. At home, Vijaya and Lila often have no food. The occasional visits of friends or relatives who do not think to bring a sack of rice impacts on what Vijaya, Vikkai and Lila eat for months.

When the time came for the Thellam cattle to be herded, Vijaya covered all their family's duties through the late-monsoon and winter months. When that work was finished after the disappointing harvest she collected *tentemkai* pods around the village for long days during winter, a job so unremunerative it is not worth the effort for some villagers.[38] Even in tough seasons Vikkai and Vijaya don't sell their few cattle, but when crisis is more extreme or more drawn out, selling livestock is a solution.

Food shortages, which were fairly common, are surprisingly unmitigated by obligations to provide for close kin.[39] Vijaya's candid comments about her husband's failure to collaborate on the family *sainda* were not easily forgotten. Although they are affectionate and often laugh and joke together they also occasionally have loud arguments and Vijaya can be heard crying at night. Vijaya and Vikkai perhaps represent a middle ground between Pochamma's family, about whom we have already heard, and Kothanna's family, to whom we shall soon turn. They draw on state resources and their wider kinship network, continue half-heartedly to cultivate a *sainda*, and also have done limited stints of migrant labour. Spreading themselves between

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[38] *Tentemkai* pods contain tiny seeds that can be sold for ₹150 per kilogram in Chintūr, where they would eventually be pressed for oil. The price dropped to ₹15 per kilogram, so it was not worth making the five hour journey by auto rickshaw and bus.

[39] The sharing of meat, and of palm wine will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent Chapter 4 and 5.

various livelihoods, they have not been consistent enough to have the success of accumulating stocks of either home grown or state subsidised grain. In this way they echo the precarity of Li's (2014) Lauge highlanders, after the take up of cash cropping. It is easy to envisage a similarly perilous future for small families such as Vikkai and Vijaya's. Where they have been consistent is in their commitment to the wider kinship group in the villages around Dōraguḍa and in Vijaya's natal village Permam Bossa.

Immediate provisioning: Thellam Kothanna and Bulamma

Next door to Vikkai and Vijaya is the bamboo-woven house of Vikkai's younger brother Kothanna and his wife, Bulamma, thatched with *tarḍāku* palm and plastered around the walls with mud. Kothanna does not roam around like Vikkai. He hardly leaves the village. According to the local Illūru logic his presence makes it easier to commit time wholly to his *sainda*. However, there are other resources that Kothanna prioritises over the labour-intensive time investment in cultivating a forest hill slope. Kothanna is one of the keenest hunters. He is a regular provider of fresh meat to others, especially to the other Thellam families.[40] Kothanna is also one of the major *kallu* producers and, as we will see later, he is very generous with his supply when his trees are producing.[41] Kothanna has a second wife Chandramma, who also lives in Illūru. They married after her first husband died. With Chandramma, Kothanna has not had children but often treats Chandramma's son Venkanna as a father would. He and Bulamma have 4 children together, and Kothanna is also responsible for Tejaswini, the 18-year-old daughter of Bulamma from a previous relationship. Kothanna eats and sleeps in the houses of both wives.

When there is no cash available for vegetables, Kothanna's children eat their rice with only red chilli powder and salt. In Illūru these are added to tamarind water to make *sāru,* the simplest of flavour-enhancing broths. In some periods that year, even these items ran out. Bulamma's children did not want to eat. Bulamma herself was breast-feeding her baby girl and told me that she had not eaten for days and had stopped producing milk. At times like this it is well known that Kothanna goes and eats with his other wife. In these circumstances, families whose corn heads ripen first keep it a secret that they have ripe young corn to eat. Heads of corn are either roasted and eaten at the *sainda*, or carried home surreptitiously, under a scarf or shirt. This compares interestingly with Li's fieldwork where, similarly, there is reluctance to over-provide for neighbouring kin but an obligation to share if the food is seen by others (2014: 67).

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[40] As discussed in Chapter 4.
[41] See Chapter 5.

Bulamma has been caught several times stealing rice and vegetables from neighbours on both sides – both from Pochamma and from Vikkai and Vijaya. Because of this, Bulamma is not always welcome at neighbouring drinking sessions, though she helps herself to flowers to decorate her hair from her neighbour's gardens and is seldom declined direct requests, for instance asking for a head of corn for a ritual or borrowing the grindstone or ladder of another family. In many ways this could be seen as a form of demand sharing, as Bulamma is asserting her right to be supported by her kin, who complain (to me) about this, but do not have the cultural reference points to outright deny her the provisions that she takes/steals (Bird-David 1990; cf. Peterson 1993; Widlok 2013). According to several accounts, Bulamma and Kothanna have also stolen money and even clothes from neighbouring families. In Pochamma's house next door, rice is stored in a metal barrel with a small padlock on it and the door of the house is fastened tightly with a string.

Bulamma's status is very low in relation to her more aspirational neighbours. She is referred to as a thief (*donga*), for she plucks flowers from Pochamma's garden to adorn her hair; flowers she has not helped to grow or bothered to plant herself. Yet when Pravin is left on his own at night and feels scared, either guarding the *sainda* or keeping watch at the village house, it is Bulamma and Kothanna's children Dari and Indira, who come to keep him company.

Because of this pattern, and despite the sharing of food and mutual support, when Bulamma has come to the house during a drinking session, the *kallu* pot is hidden from view. When Indira playfully grabs a small plastic scale, Pochamma's returning daughter gives her a slap, explaining: "that family are bad and steal from us, so keep things out of sight from them". Such close neighbours are clearly not trusted and, reflecting on these instances, there are traces of regimes of untouchability. On the other hand, Janiki and Bulamma's oldest daughter, Tejaswini, who are classificatory sisters, often sleep through a cold night in a warm embrace.

Tejaswini studies in the government hostel school near Rampachodavaram. She is a year younger than Janiki, who is a role model to her, but their relative positions within their families are quite dissimilar. Being the eldest of her siblings Tejaswini is expected to care for multiple children when she is at home in the village, whereas Janiki has far fewer responsibilities. Tejaswini, unlike Janiki, is used to seeing fights between her parents result in physical violence, into which others do not intervene. Next-born after Tejaswini, Bulamma's eldest son, Dari, aged 12, has never been to school. He stays and helps his father hunt, cultivate their hill slope, and tap palm wine. Dari is skilled in catching birds and squirrels. He is comfortable working with all the other men in the village, and confident in these and other

interactions. He plays daily with other children and, like Pravin, helps out in communal meals on festival days.

The relative independence of his role can be seen, in particular, in these festivals that punctuate the seasonal cycle of shifting cultivation. The most important of these is the seed festival *Vijjapandum* at the beginning of the rains. Upon the arrival of the first semi-cultivated crop – a squash called *teriakai* – each family makes a sacrifice of a chicken on their hill slope before consuming any of the fruit.[42] Similarly, up until the harvest festival *Sankranthi*, a series of offerings are made to local deities. In the summer the first appearance of foraged forest fruit such as tamarind, then subsequently mango, are celebrated with sacrifices of livestock. In all these events the children who do not attend school have important roles in coordinating communal meals. They collect items donated by each family, such as chickens, heads of corn, quantities of rice, and prepare them to be cooked. Dari will, like the other boys, head off to help cater for and enjoy the marriages of his father's relatives in villages up to three hours walk from Illūru, where he may stay for days on end with no warning and carrying no luggage.

Kothanna, Dari's father and the head of this family, takes a leading role in the preparation of meat for communal meals in Illūru, directing Pochamma's son Pravin alongside his own children. Kothanna shares meat that he hunts with his Thellam neighbours, and expects assistance in his hunts from Pravin. It is important to recognise, here, that while the hunt may not provide huge quantities of food every day, the enormous amount of protein acquired through a single very successful hunt will sustain this large family, and help support their kin next door, for several weeks. Furthermore, beyond the physical and economic need to feed the family, there is a cultural and religious value in this form of provisioning. In my assessment – through which I seek to connect the economic, social relational and moral values that Kothanna lives by – this can be understood as an older generational modality of care. The sourcing of meat as a form of providing for others, though outmoded in the eyes of some villagers, remains highly valued by kin across the related villages, who benefit from the hospitality, support and generosity that Kothanna and Vikkai provide.[43]

Nonetheless, Kothanna and Bulamma are by no means putting all their resources into their *sainda*, hunting, and the moral relations with which these are associated. They are also versatile in their approach to parenting. For example, they send their third oldest child, Buchanna, aged nine, off to school. He comes home for all his holidays with a pensive

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[42] The Koya verb *koitor* (to cut) can mean both sacrificed or harvested
[43] This dynamic will be explored further in Chapter 4.

disposition, at times appearing unfamiliar with the labours of his father and elder brother. Younger still is seven-year-old daughter Indira. She stays at home and often babysits Vikkai's daughter and now her baby sister, who is six months old. Kothanna and Bulamma's *sainda* is quite far from the village, but that gives them access to resources and wildlife in that area of the forest. Kothanna and Bulamma however do not guard the *sainda* with the same concern as Pochamma's family, and their yield tends to be much lower. The initial planting was not done in time and to compensate for this Kothanna cleared a patch of communal land in the centre of the village to grow *mokka jonna* (corn heads). This plot was fenced with bamboo weave to protect it from animals and it provided a small, late harvest. Divided between their more remote *sainda*, and this unconventional temporary plot in the village, Bulamma and Kothanna do not prioritise the work, valued by their neighbours, of collecting drinking water from the cleaner bore well on the Kurusam side of the village. Despite their unsuccessful harvest in the winter of 2017, the following year Bulamma and Kothanna cleared a new *sainda* and completely relocated to this new slope. With the labour of Indira and Dari, they were able to take a more substantial crop come harvest time. Given their disregard for opportunities to acquire cheap grain from the state, Kothanna and Bulamma resemble the informants of Shah (2010, 2016) whose disposition is to keep the state at bay, and to prioritise "relatively egalitarian" modes of reproduction, in this case, somewhat ad-hoc small-scale forest agriculture.

The differences between these three families' dispositions towards their agriculture and hunting are noteworthy. While Lokesh and Pochamma appear more hardworking, even puritanical, Vikkai and Vijaya seem more happy-go-lucky and Kothanna and Bulamma combine elements of ritual commitment with those of neglect. Diverse dispositions thus exist within a single surname group in one village, and to characterise them as having uniform or homogenous types of social relationships and forms of livelihood would be misleading. What unites them is a concern with being able to provide for relatives, but they are not even-handedly egalitarian in their provisioning. At several points in the cycle of a single shifting cultivation season, particular families – such as Vikkai and Vijaya – are eager to establish and consolidate hierarchies that emerge from traditional kinship, while at other points of time, their behaviour may fall short of the moral standards that are encouraged within the surname group.

Variable harvests and uneven access to resources

After the winter harvest, workloads in Illūru become lighter as the marriage season begins and the *sainda* slopes lie fallow for the dry months. For families eager to generate cash income the summer season brings the possibility of trade in *jeeriga* palm wine (discussed in Chapter 5) as

well as the cashew harvest, in mid-summer. The *mancham* on the hill slopes are used as base from which to weed cashew orchards and to tap *jeeriga kallu* from trees in the surrounding forest, demonstrating how the resources and skills of shifting cultivation are being transferred to cash crop cultivation. The most successful family is Pochamma's, whose large orchard was planted by Muthanna when he was young. Pochamma, Lokesh and Pravin go twice a day, during the peak season, to collect their cashews and bag them up for delivery to market on Sunday. Before this, they do extensive weeding to ensure the trees catch as much sunlight and ground nutrients as possible leading up to harvest.

In this respect the families differed considerably. Lokesh would arrive in Rampachodavaram every few weeks in spring with up to 170 kilograms of cashew, spread across five sacks. Kothanna, in contrast, did not weed his orchard and took a much smaller harvest to market. He only made two such trips selling around 50 or 60 kilograms each time. Vijaya was the only woman taking produce to market when she carried a 25 kilogram load into town and received around ₹3,000 (£35). In comparison to Kothanna's ₹8,000 (£90) and Lokesh's ₹21,000 (£240), Vijaya's earnings were relatively small. For all the families in Illūru, these were very large sums – enough to do a significant shop, keep cash for future market trips and still make a deposit at the bank.

The cashew crops harvested now are from trees planted 15 or 20 years ago. Young saplings are distributed for free by the government Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), upon providing proofs of land ownership and village and Scheduled Tribe identity in the form of a caste certificate. Nurturing these new saplings is incentivised by the authorities who give bonuses of ₹30 (35p) per tree to those who prove that they have successfully planted the saplings and cleared that land of other weeds. For this scheme, photographic evidence is accepted on cell phones (which are rare in Illūru). This incentive was given to ensure that the saplings were planted in discrete orchards rather than in mixed crop (shifting cultivation) patterns, showing the reach of the state even into the remote location of the *sainda* slope.

Administration of these incentivised cashew programs will likely increase the discrepancy between the families still further, as their ability to capitalise on future schemes becomes more uneven. Just as Pochamma's family are more interested in maximising the potential benefit that a single tree can provide (by thorough and continuous weeding around the tree), so too are they more disposed to maximising the benefit that any potential government scheme can offer. The time, know-how and capacity to travel to town, complete forms, wait, and apply to officials for benefits are resources in themselves. These practical tasks directly result in the

acquisition of pensions, subsidised rice allocations, land documents and new state supplied cashew saplings.

It is Pochamma's son Lokesh who is most adept at doing this, and he also, to an extent, helps others in their pursuit of the same. Pochamma has privileged access to state authority by virtue of being an *asha* worker, a responsibility towards her family as well as to the whole village. This role, for which she receives limited training, is administered by the local government Primary Health Centre, and involves distributing medicines and testing for malaria whenever someone in the village is ill. Hence, she too positions herself in a mediatory role between state services and resources and fellow villagers as she administers polio injections, food supplements, medicines, and can secure access to nurses, hospital staff and paediatric care. But neither is Pochamma removed from the morality of care associated with the older forms of provisioning and hospitality. She seasonally produces and shares large quantities of *sāra* (a traditional distillation of palm wine, not to be confused with *sāru*, a tamarind broth), she keeps a careful stock of seeds for traditional crops which benefits all the families, she contributes her children's labour to village communal work, and to hunts, she leads the dances at weddings and festivals, and provides counsel and support to other families and cares for the sick.

So how do these families evaluate each other? And what are the ideological scripts that underpin or retrospectively justify these differences? There are ways in which each of them perceives its members to be doing well, and other ways in which they all feel they are disadvantaged. All three families are securely settled on extremely valuable land with access to abundant resources that they hold in high esteem. Yet the forest alone does not provide enough for a large family to continue to grow, and never has done. Kothanna's family may have very limited wealth in terms of cash, and do not have stored surplus of any kind of grain, but he and Bulamma do not behave as if they consider themselves to be poor, any more than Pochamma and her children. Even the theft of grain from their neighbours must be contextualised within the reality of their close kinship relations. Kothanna and Bulamma do not seem to place value on the things they lack, like clothing, soap and a concrete house. Furthermore, that family, by neglecting to engage in the forms of affirmative action that Pochamma (and to a lesser extent Vikkai and Vijaya) take up, are keeping for themselves a sense of sovereignty and autonomy that is increasingly rare. Their use of forest resources is not even encompassed by the Forest Rights Act. Their autonomy is not that which is underwritten in the Vth Schedule, but a more informal and unregulated access to their forest resources. Theirs is a sense of obligation and care for their children that is mobile, transformative, unattached, and unconcerned by the value systems of external agents such as that of state agencies based in Rampachodavaram (or, for

that matter, my own analysis). Bulamma and Kothanna's provisioning is one that exists independently of the infrastructure of etic categories and government agents.

Pochamma's family have dried heads of corn stored in the roof, maize and lentils stored in baskets and seeds kept for future planting. They have a large drum of white rice with a padlock on it and greater knowledge of and access to government services for health and agriculture. With two daughters happily married out, whose names are still listed on their ration card, they can continue to claim rice for them. But despite all this, they experience themselves to be deprived of something, especially in respect of the Lokesh's future marriage. Here, they are keenly aware of their need for more cash. To increase his independence and to grow his palm wine business, Lokesh would need to invest in a motorbike, which is far out of reach for him. Vikkai, in contrast, never seems to complain about his lot, whereas Vijaya occasionally does. Their expectations for their children reveal aspiration for a different kind of life for them. Their son studies at school and they have chosen not to invest time and energy in risky agriculture, nor to keep him at home to assist them in this work. Vikkai and Vijaya are unfazed by a failed crop. They have a knack for finding enough for immediate expenditure by borrowing from neighbours rather than stealing or "demanding" a share. Kothanna is even more fiercely independent than Vikkai, and even more obviously unconcerned and uninterested in accumulating wealth in grain or cash for the future. So why do Pochamma's family seem so much more concerned with doing better than their neighbouring kin? What aspirational notions of family provision are driving this work ethic? Has a parsimonious, accumulative protestant ethic developed in Illūru, of the kind identified by scholars such as Geertz (1956: 156) and Weber (2002)?

Lokesh's short stints of work outside the village have generated further aspirations. Those short-term injections of cash have influenced his prospects, expectations of family life and aspirations in the medium and long term, but have not completely changed the way in which he directs his time. Vikkai and Vijaya also, but to a lesser extent, took on a more worldly disposition for material consumption when they worked in Hyderabad. But Lokesh has a nous and entrepreneurial sensibility that marks him as different from other men in Illūru. Apart from meeting his non-Koya future wife, Lokesh gained communication skills and an understanding of how to get things done in the urban spaces of the region. This in turn has allowed him to be more enterprising and effective in acquiring government benefits in his local market town, Rampachodavaram. His enterprising nature would likely not have developed had he not

studied away at state funded tribal welfare schools.[44] In comparison with men who "ran back" from school or never went, Lokesh's path is very unusual.

Although from a distance they seem quite similar, the three Thellam families analysed here differ remarkably. Small differences over generations have been compounded into more durable differences and developed into competing approaches to family life and wellbeing. In these families, children are looked after in very different ways. In Vikkai's and Vijaya's house Lila is adored and is bought fancy new dresses on her birthday – even when they don't have cash to buy vegetables. In Kothanna's house, the children seldom change their clothes, and the second youngest daughter Indira carries out her chores wearing two rags pinned together. In Pochamma's house, by contrast, they get looked after so well that they increasingly compare themselves to people outside the village. Intuitively the families who gained concrete houses feel they have benefited. These houses provide secure places to store grains, to keep things dry in monsoon season and allow more space for more guests to sleep and eat indoors. Yet other aspects of affirmative action make all these three families *feel* more disadvantaged in relation to a broad kinship network, as they become aware of distant relatives becoming more educated and employed further away.[45]

Illūru families are engaged primarily in shifting cultivation but also in sporadic state sponsored wage labour, cashew and palm wine production, daily labour to fill water, seasonal forest labour, and very occasional migrant labour in factories.[46] For Pochamma's diligent family, the capacity to care for each other is enhanced by the astute capture of state resources, and through the acquisition of cash from selling cashews at market. Cash too may be considered a source of future provisioning and guarantor of family wellbeing. For this family – more so than their neighbours – the state is sought out as an alternative provider of care, aspired to, even desired (see also Buitron-Arias 2017; High 2012). What does this do for our understandings of shifting cultivation labour? I suggest state benefits, such as subsidised grain and cashew saplings, may be understood as another form of resource that are collected, harvested, conserved and redistributed within the family (cf. Bird 1983 on "wage-gathering" among Naiken hunter gatherers). Ceasing to cultivate *sainda* need not imply an end to caring.

In Kothanna's family the emphasis is on traditional forestry, and the provision of resources and labour for internal village festivals and the communal meals where Kothanna directs the

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[44] This opens up the point that state affirmative action can prepare adivasi people not just for state dependency but also for more success in private sector employment, however informal that may be.
[45] Each family's outlook for the future, embodied in their treatment and expectations of children, is developed more substantively in Chapter 6.
[46] These profiles are synthetic and overlap and should not be considered absolute.

work of many related young men. He is invested in immediate provision and the extension of a local form of hospitality to proximate relatives in Illūru, especially his Thellam kin and his own "family". His wife Bulamma labours on their *sainda* with her young children, on an empty stomach. Vikkai and Vijaya also have shortages of food, and Vijaya still hosts guests from outside the village. In their family, the important caring relations are embedded in a wider network of kinship across several related villages, between which reciprocal hospitality and labour sharing ensure continued wellbeing and sociality. In comparison to Li (2014), and Shah (2010), whose interlocutors appear shaped in response to capitalism, dominant hierarchies and political processes, Vikkai and Vijaya, and Kothanna and Bulamma, could be presented as iconoclasts – representatives of an older network of care outside and beyond the state. However, their mode of life could also be seen as embodying neglect, and their children may yet reject those networks in search of other kinds of resources.

These contrasts signal emerging class distinctions, and gradual shifts in social relations. But I represent these as different practices of care and mutuality that cut across families and generations. This emphasis enables an appreciation of continuity, as expectations of resource provision are now placed on state agencies as well as on family and kinship networks.

The family dynamics of *sainda* cultivation

My ethnography of contemporary agricultural labour and family life shows that shifting cultivation is not practised in isolation. It is undertaken alongside other livelihood strategies, and while cultivators have become increasingly dependent on state subsidised grain and eagerly participate in sporadic state employment, these interventions have not overhauled local values of care and hospitality. For some cultivators, struggling to access state resources is more worthwhile than for others. For many, part of the enduring value of *sainda* cultivation is that it diversifies the overall scope of resources available to them and their wider kin, spread out across many villages. Thus, Illūru Koyas maintain shifting cultivation because it emplaces them in networks of kinship, and religious practice, and because it forms a platform from which to provide for their families, in ways shaped by the economic and developmental history of the East Gōdāvari region. These cultivation practices bound up with religious significance and redistributive feasts that we shall explore in the next chapter, thread the generations of these families together, as much as their differing approaches divide them – although meanings and attachments to this form of cultivation are themselves shifting across generations.

Illūru's shifting cultivators are mobile and strategic in their adaptation to economic transitions and state development initiatives, and syncretic in their adoption of new aspirations while

maintaining traditional ritual and ceremonial practices. The profiles of the Thellam families undermine a simplistic reading of Scott that focusses on resistance, that might presume shifting cultivation to be associated with radically egalitarian social structures and the outright rejection of the state. The ethnographic evidence suggests that there is no sharp distinction between shifting cultivation and dependency on the state, as both are livelihood strategies that may be taken up by different members of a family, and sometimes even one person, in the course of a single day.

Stemming from the relative success or failure of agriculture, and from the uneven access to state resources, this chapter has identified inequalities of wealth and resources, and showed how these discrepancies can be mapped onto changing conceptions of care within and between households. It also suggests that hierarchies produced in the dynamics of the agricultural season could develop into more resilient forms of inter- and intra-household inequality.

The family dynamics within these households offers an insight into the ways that differences are produced and compounded over seasons and over generations. Differences in productivity and success can become entrenched and turn into class-like distinctions, though these are subject to change and, at a different scale of analysis (which we shall engage with in subsequent chapters), would appear almost irrelevant. Equally, it must be recognised that these fluctuating yields and hierarchies can dissipate over the course of seasons as hierarchy and egalitarianism can ebb and flow (Wengrow & Graeber 2015). Furthermore, I have shown some of the reference points that guide Illūru people's notions of success and failure; there is a huge diversity of views on this within the village. We see the heterogeneity of labours matched by a diversity of villagers' schemas about what is most valued and what constitutes a well maintained home. From outside, these might appear to be distillable into emerging class distinctions. But the chapter has sought to show how these might fruitfully be considered as micro-units of much longer decision-making processes, which are motivated by an ethic of care towards one's relatives, and a desire to provide necessities to one's immediate kin.

I have outlined local socio-cultural expectations for women's, men's, boys' and girls' daily workload on the hill slope, in the forest and in and around the house, which overlap considerably: for boys this includes cultivating, foresting, hunting, tapping palm wine; and for girls it includes cultivating, foresting, filling water, sweeping and cooking. The importance of these tasks can barely be overstated; they are consistently performed with pride and pleasure. According to newer conceptions, which also emerge from this ethnography, there are gendered expectations for interactions outside the village: adult men are increasingly encouraged to be communicative and resourceful in accessing state benefits and selling produce in the market,

while women are increasingly expected to become educated and resourceful on matters of public health. These responsibilities are being added to the established role of Koya women in attending markets and maintaining household provisions. These everyday gendered labours provide the material basis for Koya social life and hospitality. They constitute a significant part of the lived everyday reality in the Koya region and reflect vernacular ideas of care and family wellbeing.

Outside Illūru, relatives of the village admire the seasonal commitment of families who relocate their lives to the slopes. "*Sai ūrondor, sai tungtor sainda*", they say. There is a local cultural script that values the cultivation of *sainda* slopes. Yet this chapter has shown that this form of cultivation is practiced in tandem with various other livelihood strategies. These more diverse livelihoods conjure up a quite different cultural script for providing for one's family. Both these scripts implicate a wider network of related persons for whom to provide for, not only the small family units in which *sainda* work is undertaken. There is a dignity in cultivating one's *sainda*, but there is also a dignity – often overlooked in these contexts – in seeking the care of the state.

We shall now turn to the subsequent chapter to investigate, in sharper focus, how these three families' diet indexes emerging differences, and how these are understood through the prism of culturalised notions of identity and community.

Chapter 4 – Eating, sharing, and providing: reciprocities and hierarchies of kinship and taste

Across the Koya speaking region the most common expression of concern for others is the ubiquitous greeting: "*doḍa tintinna* (have you eaten rice)?"[47] Predominantly, this refers to boiled white rice with an accompanying dish. However, *doḍa* colloquially refers to any type of grain, and may be translated as "food" or "meal", as well as "cooked rice". As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, white rice is heavily subsidised for Illūru's cultivators through state distribution depots in accordance with national poverty alleviation measures (Deb 2009; Mooij 1998). This means that for families like Pochamma's, Vikkai's and Kothanna's, there is an ever-decreasing imperative to concentrate resources on *sainda* (shifting cultivation), as the necessity of self-sufficiency in the production of a staple carbohydrate diminishes year on year. The increase in opportunities for migrant labour, the gradual rise in the number of children attending schools, and the possibility of maximising the yields of seasonal cash crops (cashew, palm wine) all contribute to the explicit narrative, explored in the previous chapter, that *sainda* cultivation is irredeemably in decline – that this traditional agriculture has an ever-decreasing half-life (cf Simpson & Tilche 2016).

By analysing the ways in which food is sourced, distributed and appreciated, this chapter refines our understanding of social relations and hierarchies in Illūru and shows how local livelihoods draw on resources of both forests and state affirmative action. The ethnography shows how dietary habits are formed through necessity, taste and desire, and become interpolated into regional cultural frameworks. Through the consumption and distribution of food, distinctions of status are established and reaffirmed: in some cases traditional hierarchies of seniority within Koya kinship are exacerbated, and new class-like generational hierarchies are emerging.

The focus on food and eating cuts across themes that are often discussed in separate terms: nutrition, gender, care, access to state resources; production and reproduction, household economy, and decision-making; taste, culture, identity. Moreover, mealtimes reveal intimate practices and make explicit the internal family hierarchies that structure daily life. Analysing the varied, syncretic diets of Illūru families – and thinking through these food choices historically – reveals important variations and continuities in Koya adivasi livelihoods,

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[47] This concern, and its regular expression in vernacular greetings, is common across South India, and arguably South and Southeast Asia, see High (2014: 26).

relations to the state, and positionality vis-a-vis each other, as well as broader regional cultural schemas that motivate these choices.

Firstly, my ethnography shows that Illūru families consume foods from four distinct spheres of production: those harvested from the forest; those produced in shifting cultivation plots that surround the village; those purchased from the market; and those bought at highly subsidised rates from the state distribution depots. Secondly, investigating these spheres of production and consumption shows how deeply interdependent these spheres are in the lives of Illūru cultivators. Thirdly, the material shows some recent transformations in practices of production, consumption and reproduction of Illūru families, and highlights the gendered and generational lines along which such change is experienced. These contrasting generations have quite different expectations of food provisioning, which reflect relative degrees of integration into regionally dominant conceptions of food and family wellbeing. Fourthly, state policies as well as changing economic markets produce wide disjunctures in the norms and expectations held by different generations of Illūru Koyas, but these should not block us from appreciating specific continuities in Illūrites' practices of production, reproduction, and in their dietary conventions and tastes.

The central argument is that both hunted meat and government-subsidised white rice make up the "traditional" meal in Illūru today. This counter-intuitive image of locally hunted meat paired with low-grade subsidised white rice represents the syncretic contemporary form of social reproduction prevalent in Koya society. Despite their origin in different modes of production and association with radically different forms of sovereignty and citizenship, white rice and hunted meat are both prized in Illūru, but for different reasons: hunting is valuable not only because of the dense protein it provides, but also as a mode of locating those who consume it within the hierarchies of village kinship systems and also within a culturalised spectrum of identity within the region. Hunting establishes bonds of co-operation and produces excitement, and is implicitly redistributive as the produce is usually shared between participants. White rice is important not only because it can be reliably stored, easily cooked and ensures large families can be fed, but also because it represents the state's obligation to provide, therefore bolstering new awareness of entitlement.

The chapter will show the relationship that Illūru families have to the state, to the wider economic market, and to regionally dominant moralities of diet and food that are mapped onto communal/ethnic/caste identities in South Asia, as well as their position in extended kinship networks. Understanding those relationships contributes to our awareness of how difference is historically produced. The discussion below registers the symbolic hierarchies within which foodstuffs are located, which will animate the insights gained from moments in which

individual people engage in conflict as they negotiate different culturalised schemas of food consumption. Building on the preceding arguments, this chapter shows how the livelihoods implied by terms such as peasants, shifting cultivators, adivasis, "rural poor" and "hunter-gatherers" often overlap. This situated ethnography shows how Koya cultivators have drawn on and unevenly responded to a variety of state and non-state resources.

I begin by developing a framework to address the prevalence of scarcity and hunger in Illūru via James Scott's formulation of the subsistence ethic before introducing regional literature on the symbolic import of food and diet in South Asia. Primed with these reference points, I then present ethnography of a mealtime in Pochamma's house during which the sourcing of grain was discussed. The next section presents ethnography on the sourcing of meat, and the reciprocal labour sharing between Thellam households this involves. Thereafter I discuss the provision of food to guests and outsiders and the symbolic capital that meat holds in Illūru and across the wider region, exposing the social hierarchies that are produced through exchange and sale of food. Finally, I describe communal meals in Illūru as a counterpoint to increasingly hierarchical exchanges. Thus, the chapter shifts through different scales at which food is sourced, distributed and consumed. This material allows us to return, in conclusion, to evaluate the implications of practices of redistribution, and on this basis to reflect on the changing social relations and emerging class distinctions within and between Illūru families.

Moral economies and symbolic hierarchies of foodstuffs

Important cultural values and narratives are attached to the decline in shifting cultivation. Families like Kothanna's, whose livelihoods remain enmeshed in the seasonal cycles of shifting cultivation, are reluctant to diversify their livelihood. His family prefer to hunt and cultivate the land they can, rather than exhausting their energies on "capturing" state hand-outs. They collect a minimum quota of subsidised rice, as several of their children remain unregistered on the "ration card", a misfortune that Kothanna seems unhurried to rectify. On the other hand, families like Pochamma's are eager to capitalise on a wider range of benefits from the state, such as sponsored housing and the cashew nut plantation scheme. Pochamma and her family can justify greater risks as they diversify their economic base, since they still collect government subsidised white rice for two daughters married outside the village. As we observed, the family of Vikkai and Vijaya seems to oscillate between these two models of household economics, as they half-heartedly cultivate but focus more of their energy on a

wider kinship network across many other villages, and the resources that are exchanged between them.[48]

As Scott (1976) has argued, building on Chayanov (1966), peasant economies based on family units of production tend to develop so as to avoid the risk of absolute scarcity, producing a moral economy with its own internal redistributive mechanisms. This insight applies in Illūru, where the number of working children and healthy adults who can cultivate the land determines household capacity to sustain the labour-intensive work of shifting cultivation. Seasonal festivals to celebrate the arrival of each crop involve communal meals to which each Illūru family contributes a chicken and a measure of rice. I interpret these as redistributive events through which shortages are spread between families, taking inspiration from Scott's portrayal of a moral economy. Fishing and hunting trips are also forms of redistributive food provisioning, as the catch is usually divided evenly between those who participated. But how far can this analysis be extended in the context of Illūru's shifting cultivators? Could the collection of subsidised rice from the state depot also be incorporated? Though rice is the preferred staple of Koya meals in Illūru, there are numerous other grains and other foodstuffs that represent quite different strategies, politics and practices of providing and caring for the family.[49]

All peasant families experience periods of maximum dependency when children are too young to labour, but must still be fed and cared for. Kothanna's family fall into this predicament: with only Dari being old enough to contribute significantly to either hunting or shifting cultivation, and with Indira and her baby sister unable to labour, it was perhaps unrealistic to expect a successful yield from the shifting cultivation plot. Comparing them to neighbouring Pochamma's family reveals the latter's relatively high labour capacity. Since Lokesh, Janiki and Pravin are all able to work on the hill slope and there are no family members who are unable to contribute labour, the proportion of able-bodied members is high. Yet even for this family, present-day harvests are compared unfavourably by Pochamma to her past yields "*aski īyal mattond*". This earlier period of relative affluence for Pochamma's family was temporary, and her current dependence on her children's labour seems disproportionate in comparison. Pochamma knows well that good health and able-bodiedness is by definition a transitory state of affairs. As discussed in Chapter 3, she has organised her family so as to maximise the

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[48] Such oscillation has significant precedent in anthropological writings (Geertz 1994; Leach 1970).
[49] The analysis provided in this chapter moves between material and symbolic registers of why food matters. The focus on food production and redistribution would intuitively suggest thinking through social relations as determined by the means of production, access to land and forest resources, yet we must also integrate the ways that status attached to foodstuffs, and their exchange and have a role in maintaining hierarches, cohesion and feelings of relatedness.

potential of both traditional agriculture and forest resources as well as state resources and opportunities.

Pochamma's multipronged approach resonates with Scott's risk-averse subsistence ethic. The metrics of profitability of investment yield per unit of land and of the productive potential of labour are in their oblique form abstractions unfamiliar to Illūru's cultivators. But extending these notions into empirical analysis, follows my assertion in Chapter 3 that Illūru cultivators make pragmatic economic decisions regarding their labour and their future. The concept of safety-first decision-making – in which peasants would rather avoid absolute destitution than gamble on potentially generating a large surplus – feels intuitively relevant to the younger generation of Illūru cultivators. Within these terms we may analyse Illūru's generational transition as one in which younger Koyas choose to gamble on education, migrant labour or business opportunities, rather than settle for the relatively risk-free combination of shifting cultivation and subsidised rice on which their parents have brought them up. The increasing desire to sell labour in the wider market is itself a way of mitigating the risks inherent in shifting cultivation.

In Illūru, family size varies considerably as life expectancy is low and infant mortality high. Kothanna and Bulamma have six children and this strongly influences the economic possibilities for them. Lokesh is one of five siblings whereas Vikkai and Vijaya have only two children. Scott's analysis directs us to question whether a type of agriculture implies a specific moral-economic outlook that is eroded as people transition into other livelihoods. Subsequently, if a greater proportion of food is sourced from state subsidy and from cash crop earnings, what does that change about the moral and cultural act of providing for the family?

Scott outlines the institutions outside the immediate family that act as support networks: kinsmen, fellow villagers, powerful patrons, and even (though rarely) the state. The most reliable of these support networks – close relatives – is the least well-resourced. Conversely, the best-resourced – the state – is the network or institution with which the peasant is least familiar and from which "he" (Scott assumes a male peasant) feels most remote.[50] The first port of call for a peasant family in times of crisis is their immediate relations. When Bulamma became desperate, she took grain from her immediate neighbour and classificatory sister Pochamma.[51]

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[50] Scott was analysing a very different historical period, which is arguably incommensurate with the huge reach of the developmental state in India. Nevertheless, despite historical and geographical differences, this theoretical ignition-point obliges us to think of economic and moral questions side-by-side.

[51] As observed in Chapter 3.

Slightly less reliable but potentially possessing a greater amount of material resources is the wider network of kinsmen and villages. For Scott, this form of reciprocity is still part of the intimate world of the peasantry in which people can presume shared values and depend on mutual assistance, though one can never be as certain of support from other villagers as from one's own close relations. These kinds of relations of reciprocity are evident in the large-scale hunts and in communal meals in Illūru. Beyond that, patron-client relationships are a mechanism one step further removed and less reliable, but potentially one that provides access to a much larger pool of resources (Scott 1976: 22). Lastly, (and perhaps somewhat incongruously when we consider Scott's later oeuvre) comes the identification of the state as a repository of support in times of crisis. This is pertinent in present-day Illūru, where marked changes are on-going regarding villagers' responses to illness, hunger and childbirth complications. The state has potential capacity to provide much more than any family member or slightly better-off relative-turned-patron, but is much less likely to recognise the peasant's need as its responsibility. This is certainly borne out in the cases of Illūru cultivators' attempts to access state rice provisions; their access to grain being dependent on the whims of the Girijan Cooperative Corporation's staff and an imperfect communication chain. Yet Illūru's cultivators are aware of their status as designated beneficiaries of state support, and draw on this resource with increasing levels of entitlement.

The unevenness between the situation of Vikkai, Kothanna and Pochamma's families can also be understood within the schema of Hinduisation, within which food carries important weight. Those who are more eager to integrate into a regionally dominant religious "mainstream" are those who purchase vegetables from markets and hunt meat less frequently.

For readers unfamiliar with the symbolic import of food in South Asia, popular upper-caste understandings associate vegetarianism with superiority and purity, and meat-eating with inferiority and pollution (Osella 2008; Osella & Osella 2008). While religious and political discourses of food symbolism, hygiene, and the transference of substance through touch (Daniel 1984), certainly filter into popular understandings in Andhra Pradesh, the region is also an important site for counter-hegemonic narratives, especially for Dalit communities (Illaiah 2004; Sebastia 2019; Staples 2017, 2018; Still 2014). For the Mala and Madiga communities of Andhra Pradesh, eating beef (which is traditionally served at village weddings) has become a political act – performed in cultural festivals on University campuses (Sebastia 2019). For Koyas, in contrast, beef eating has not yet been understood as integral to public performances of identity-making, but remains the traditional meat to serve at weddings and other functions. In the neighbouring state of Chhattisgarh, caste Hindu narratives around beef as polluting are more established and Koyas there prefer to serve mutton instead of beef at marriages, presumably due to the greater contact with non-beef eating Hindus. As Herzfeld

(2016: 34) remarked, on food as an index of social identity, "all stereotypes also represent the complex effects of historical processes of encounter". This is certainly true in respect of the cultural stereotypes of taste and culture in adivasi/non-tribal relations and interactions.[52]

Everyday mealtimes and the family politics of eating

"doḍa kusīr waddu, āmu doḍa kovang (not white rice and vegetables, maize and red meat)"!

On a cool and misty early winter morning in Illūru, once the bulk of domestic-economic work is done (one round of the *sainda* to harvest gourds completed, animals fed, floors swept, water filled) Pochamma's family sit down to eat a morning meal. Food is a focal point for conversation and mealtimes are often the only time that Pochamma interacts for more than a just a few seconds with her two sons Pravin and Lokesh, and her daughter Janiki. Meals facilitate sustained interaction, nutritional energy, and pleasure, and structure time through the day. Today's meal in Pochamma's home is white rice with curried *dōndakai* (tiny gourds) and a second dish, left-over from the evening before, of dried meat stewed with onions, green chillies, turmeric, salt, and tamarind water. The *dōndakai* are cultivated in the courtyard of a close relative, Pochamma's late husband's classificatory brother, Lokesh's *peddananna* (paternal uncle). The dried meat was hunted locally and preserved by smoking it above a fire. The rice – a large grain variety called *vēghi okaṭi* – was collected from the government depot, where all the Illūru families are entitled to a quota at a heavily subsidised rate.[53]

Vegetables like *dōndakai* are plentiful for a short season, sprouting from tangles of vines that run along the bamboo thatched awnings and fences around the houses. Earlier in the harvest season Pochamma's family consumed piles of smoky *bīrakai* and *teriakai* gourds, and as the winter draws on and the grains and lentils ripen on the *sainda*, *gumoḍkai* (pumpkins) and *ānapakai* (bottle gourd) will be the last of these large fleshy vegetables to ripen. However, during the summer and the rainy season, local gourds are unavailable. During those months Pochamma's family buy vegetables from Rampachodavaram market. They spend the money they generate through the sale of cashew nuts and *kallu* (palm wine) on vegetables such as aubergines, cabbage, cauliflower and okra. This is seen as quite an extravagance by relatives who have not been as shrewd and did not maximise the yields from cash crops. For most families the Rampachodavaram market is used to source red onions, green chillies, dried fish,

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[52] A Valmiki adivasi woman warned that in remote Koya and Konda Reddi villages "they eat everything […] all from the same pot; tea and curry are prepared in the one vessel". Her tone disclosed the stigma associated with such varied diet.

[53] There is a hierarchy of value attached to rice varieties in which the larger grained rice are considered heavy, harder to digest and unappealing in upper-class, and upper-caste Telugu society. Smaller grains are associated with refinement, achieved success and are more costly (Still 2015).

turmeric, salt, cooking oil and red chilli powder. These items are long-lasting and are used to make *sāru*, a simple tamarind broth. *Sāru* is prepared by people who visit the market only a few times a year. Other accompaniments to grain that do not require market provisions include preparations of the mango and jackfruit seeds, which can be dried, roasted and ground, and then rehydrated to produce types of porridge. These preparations are very rarely consumed today and are associated with earlier "*karve kālam*" (times of hunger).

At the end of the meal, Pochamma and Lokesh discussed the dwindling supplies of white rice, which should have been available several days ago at the GCC. A contingent of Illūrites had been informed that the date for their village's collection had been fixed. As noted in Chapter 3, this labour of collecting the government-subsidised grain is undertaken in the same way as forest produce is collected from the hills (cf. Bird David 1983). Each family had sent one member with their "ration card" to making the six kilometre journey on foot to Telligūḍem. After waiting for the staff to begin distributing, they returned empty-handed as the rice allocated for them was not available. Due to a miscommunication the depot staff never arrived.

The reliance on GCC subsidised rice is particularly striking, since the Illūru families all grow grain on their *saindas*. Yet every family has adopted government-subsidised rice as their staple, since it is cheap, "sweet" in taste, easier to prepare and, according to most Illūrites, more filling. In earlier generations *āmu doḍa* (a variety of maize) was a staple, but Illūru families could not produce enough of this to eat their fill in the way they can eat white rice now. The Public Distribution System (PDS) has been functioning in Andhra Pradesh since 1983 (Deb 2009: 70) but has been serving the villages such as Telligūḍem and Illūru only since the early 2000s. Among some Koya and Konda Reddi people we will meet in subsequent chapters, home-cultivated grains were said to be much more nutritious and healthily fibrous. But in Illūru this was not emphasised, as people strongly prefer the sweeter, subsidised rice.

Returning to the after-dinner discussion and Lokesh's concerns over the dwindling supply of rice, I pragmatically volunteered the suggestion that we could eat instead the locally cultivated grain – *āmu doḍa* (sorghum). I earnestly pointed out that we had all worked hard in the *sainda* to protect this grain from birds and other wild animals, and it was now safely stored in the ceiling of the house. Pravin and Lokesh found this suggestion hilarious. "*Sai ille anna, dībe pani kaval* (it's not good, and requires too much work)" they both laughed. Pochamma, also amused but perhaps a little disappointed by her sons' response, confirmed that it does take a lot of work to de-husk, clean and cook. "But surely", I asked, "that is what everyone used to eat before white rice was available (*konni, monnekālam, aski vēghi okaṭi illmatkin, ā doḍa andor tittōr, gedda*)?" Pochamma agreed, adding that "*aski karve ekua* (back then, there was much more hunger)". "*Periville*" she continued, "*nanna tungitan sayantram* (don't worry – I

will make it this evening)". Thus, it was agreed that *āmu doḍa* would be prepared and eaten that evening, and the remaining white rice could be eked out a little longer.

That evening, Pravin and Lokesh turned their noses up and giggled as Pochamma served me a plate of *āmu doḍa*. The grains were creamy brown and denser and more chewy than white rice. They tasted more wholesome, fibrous and sharp, and after eating I felt an almost-comforting bloatedness from the dense carbohydrate to which my stomach was unaccustomed. To my surprise, the two boys wouldn't eat it. Anticipating this, Pochamma had also prepared, as well as the *āmu doḍa*, a pot of white rice for the boys, as usual.[54]

Apart from showing how taste is highly culturally relative, this vignette reveals the contradictory ways in which this grain is viewed by different members of Pochamma's family. These divergent attitudes hinge on generational and class distinctions within the family. The produce grown on the family's *sainda* is held in low esteem by the younger men, where women of the older generation were more neutral. However, this dislike is not extended to all "traditional" foodstuffs, and especially not to meat. The traditional accompaniment to *āmu doḍa* is curry prepared from meat hunted in the surrounding forests. Such nutritious proteins are much more palatable to Lokesh and Pravin.

Forest resources, reciprocity and family hunting trips

"*Nimma vadilin, niku pōguile* (you didn't come – there is no pile for you)"!

Meat in Illūru is sourced by hunting in the nearby forests, predominantly in small groups of male kin from a single surname group. This section focuses on smaller hunts, at the scale of the surname groups. Male household heads like Kothanna hunt several times a week, usually at night by torchlight. During peak rainy season and when the moon is full, hunting is less efficient as animals can spot and outpace their attackers more easily. Thellam brothers Kothanna and Vikkai hunt together, leaving their wives alone with their children, but occasionally Kothanna and his wife Bulamma hunt together, leaving their children to look after one another. Typically, Kothanna and Vikkai decide spontaneously in the early evening to hunt that night and will send a message around to their nephews, Lokesh and Pravin, recruiting a small batch of participants. By taking younger boys along with them, the adult men train their sons and nephews and provide a share of the meat to those extended families. From Pochamma's family, Pravin is often recruited by Kothanna. On some instances Pravin is reluctant to join but is then chastised by Pochamma, who urges him, "who will go if you don't

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[54] A Konda Reddi boat owner explained how the traditional grains *are* more nutritious, but people don't like to eat them anymore.

go?" Though the two families are closely related, Kothanna has no obligation to share his meat with his neighbouring kin if they don't send Pravin along to help. Having willing younger men and boys in the group makes hunting more successful, as smaller and more agile boys can drive animals through thicker foliage into the path of the more senior marksmen. Groups of four or five are most efficient. To sustain the productive labour of hunting, the capacity of families to continue the reproduction of healthy able-bodied young men is extremely valuable.[55]

The hunting group usually returns home in the early hours of the morning and waits till daybreak to portion the meat, storing it until then out of reach of the village dogs. The meat is divided into equal shares or piles and then carried back to each household in a bundle of leaves or a metal pot. It is then up to each household to dry and store the meat, and to divide it again into smaller portions to share with other relatives. Meat is often redistributed to relatives in other villages, who don't have access to the forest resources that are relatively abundant in Illūru. In Koya homes closer to town, in Biyamwāḍa and elsewhere, dried deer meat is considered a delicacy. In Kothanna's case, he tends not to send his meat on to anyone, but will distribute it to his two wives in Illūru. More than anyone else, he is invested in a resolutely local mode of distributing his resources.

Family hunts are exemplary of Scott's suggestion that the primary network for provision are the closest kin, who participate together in regular subsistence hunting. For some families this network extends outwards in concentric circles of relatedness, but for Kothanna – who is usually closest to the line of absolute scarcity – it is made up of directly neighbouring relatives from the Thellam surname group.

Not all the Thellam men are equally invested in this modality of providing for kin. Pravin's brother Lokesh dislikes going on hunts and finds them tiring and "boring". However, he enjoys eating the meat that his paternal relatives bring home. This is consistent with Lokesh's cultivation of a more urbane disposition and his general scepticism about Kothanna's means of providing for his family. Hunts can often involve a degree of physical discomfort since the participants "sleep" on the damp forest floor awaiting the sounds of passing animals. This can be dangerous as is evidenced by the large scar across the back of Badina Sukkanna, one of the most competent Illūrite men, sustained in an encounter with an aggressive brown bear. One Illūru man died in such an attack. The men and women on hunts also get wet, tired and cold as they walk through the night, but such hardships are not experienced evenly. Kothanna and his son Dari laugh when these challenges are mentioned, though Pravin, who periodically suffers

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[55] Within Illūru village the leg meat of certain animals is only to be consumed by men born in Illūru.

from malarial fevers especially during the rainy season, sometimes returns home from hunting trips shivering and distressed.

These smaller hunts are instances of collaboration and exchange of labour between the neighbouring Thellam families. Accounts are not kept, but there is a constant exchange of labour between all the Thellam families on this side of the village extending to childcare, hunting, the borrowing of elder children to help with household tasks, and the sharing of larger household utensils like the grindstone, ladder, shoulder yokes and digging sticks. Only cattle herding has an explicit rota among the Thellam families, as mentioned in Chapter 3, but they are interdependent in many other ways.

When family hunts are successful and a large amount of meat is brought back to Illūru, it will be dried, packed in leaves and then distributed across a wide network of kin. For Pravin and Pochamma, a portion of dried meat will be transported to Mona, their out-married daughter/sister, and to Pochamma's brother Raj in Permam Bossa. Depending on the availability of someone to carry and pass on the meat, it may be given to relatives beyond Rampachodavaram. Gifts like these were never explicitly conceived of as reimbursement for debts, but these are the same relatives who provide care and hospitality should anyone from Illūru make extended visits to Rampachodavaram's government hospital, or repeated visits to any of the administrative offices. A large animal like an adult deer can provide meat for many months – a hugely valuable resource in a world of potential scarcity, where earlier "times of hunger" (*karve kālam*) linger in many people's memories. In colloquial speech hunger is phrased as leading directly to death, as exemplified by the explanation offered to me by Pravin on passing a dead mouse. He informed me, "*ūru. Karve sondi, dūlatti*. (Look. He became hungry and died)".[56]

From reciprocity to hierarchy: charismatic hosts and exoticised hunts

"Reṇḍu korr tiriondi, sutor vator (two chickens are talking, guests are coming)"!

Moving now to the scale of the whole village, larger hunts that include members of different surname groups (Thellams, Kurusams and Badinas) are planned days in advance, often when relatives from outside Illūru are expected. The arrival of guests is celebrated with the killing of a chicken to provide their first meal: hence the Koya proverb above. The Illūru men who most regularly provide this form of hospitality are Suresh Kurusam and Vikkai Thellam, and these

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[56] Hunger itself is culturally relative between families in different economic positions, but even in Pochamma's more well-resourced home, when kerosene liquid accidentally spilled on a pot of cooked rice, it was not thrown out.

hunting trips can be the liveliest as they are social events that involve drinking and joking. Vikkai, as noted in the previous chapter, is heavily invested in receiving and providing this sort of hospitality to guests from his ancestral village, Dōraguḍa, and his wife's village, Permam Bossa. Some guests are senior to Vikkai such as his elder brothers and uncles (*dadal, bābai, peddananna, cinnana*), and his wife Vijaya's father (his *māmaya*). For a visit by these men, a chicken would be killed and cooked for them to eat. On other occasions younger, unmarried men travel to Illūru bringing supplies of rice and locally distilled spirits (*sāra, siggur*). As they are junior to Vikkai, a chicken need not be killed on their arrival and therefore the chickens would not be heard talking to one another fearfully!

A different class of guests are more distantly related young professional Koya men like school teachers, and government employees, labourers and farmers from Telangana towns of Manuguru, Bhadrāchalam, and even a handful of landowning non-Koya friends from West Gōdāvari. Though Vikkai will make reciprocal demands on these men when he comes to marriages near their villages in the summer, there is a clear power imbalance in these interactions. These friendships are embedded in a culturalised hierarchy of place. The "cultural capital" of Vikkai's location, and his knowledge of hunting, are highly valued, but only within a restricted paradigm of backwardness. He is a subservient host who waits on his higher-status guests, in a different way to how he behaves with close relations from Dōraguḍa. There is a clash of cultural repertoires here and of codes for hospitality. This claim will be bolstered by and compared to the highly gendered forms of hospitality that exists in the homes of these sorts of people – government employees, and local politicians in towns and larger villages, in which radical politics of adivasi autonomy are discussed as the tea is prepared by the wives of the politically aspirational Koyas.

To illustrate a contrasting pattern of hospitality that involves the exoticisation of hunting – as an outing or pastime to be enjoyed by people not from the village – I introduce another of Illūru's *peddamansulu* (headmen), Kurusam Suresh. The most financially powerful man from Illūru, Suresh was one of the first to establish a trade selling palm wine. He also invested in livestock that he buys from other Illūru villagers and sells in the cattle market at Gōkavaram. He entertains a large network of friends from villages as far away as 80 kilometres near Rājahmundry, and with these guests conducts his own hunts out of Illūru. Many of his friends are political connections through the YSRCP (Yuvujana Sramika Rythu Congress Party; the ruling party in Andhra Pradesh as of 2019) to which Suresh is affiliated as local panchayat Vice President. Some guests are business partners, moneylenders or livestock traders – two of Suresh's part-time occupations. These wealthier men arrive from the city of Rājahmundry to enjoy their hobby of hunting with Suresh. Like Kothanna and Vikkai, Suresh also calls on younger men from the village to assist in his hunts, including Pochamma's son Pravin. In order

to claim a share of meat for the family, and to maintain close ties with Suresh, Pravin's mother Pochamma instructs him to go along. However, on Suresh's hunts the share of the meat is rather different. Pravin will be sent home with a small parcel, but the bulk of the produce of Suresh's hunts will be sold or given to guests to take home.

This practice of selling valuable forest meat is a rare and relatively recent innovation. The (limited) availability of motorbikes means that meat can now be transported further afield. Other distant relatives have been rumoured to supply meats and valuable animal products to distant markets such as Hyderabad, 450 kilometres away. Consumption of meat is stigmatised by many non-tribal caste communities in the nearby towns like Rampachodavaram, where there are concerns about the cleanliness and healthiness of eating hunted meat. Nonetheless, many in Rampachodavaram who would publicly denounce the practice of hunting enjoy such produce as a clandestine delicacy.

When Suresh calls an evening hunt the catch is his to decide what to do with. If a large animal is caught, he will have the meat cut, divided and sent for sale elsewhere, drawing labour for free, but taking cash profit himself. This indicates a more individualised practice. The young boys who help him catch and butcher the animal can expect a share of the meat, and a snack from the intestine and the liver which are highly nutritious, but not an even share. By contrast, on Vikkai and Kothanna's hunts meat is divided between everyone who took part and never packed for sale, because they place a higher value on this product as a food than the income it could potentially generate. If a larger animal is caught and there is a surplus, the meat will be smoked over the fire until it is completely dry and then stored and distributed to Thellam relatives, and their in-laws.

The material culture of hunting is dependent historically on relations of trade with outside communities, as well as being reliant on craft and hereditary transmission of indigenous knowledge. Most hunting is done with dogs and bows and arrows, while younger boys use slingshots made by the neighbouring Konda Reddi tribe. In Rampachodavaram market, iron arrowheads are sold alongside tips for digging sticks and axe-blades from ironware traders who are traditionally from low-caste blacksmithing communities. The arrows are crafted carefully from iron heads, which are attached to a shaft of very straight, smooth, bamboo, sourced from the forest, and five feathers collected by hand from the forest floor. The bow and the "string" are made by hand in Illūru from local bamboo, though the younger men lament that they "don't know" how to craft these as well as their fathers did.

But certain hunters have more advanced tools for their labour. Some acquire shotguns (which are contraband) and small explosive mines to catch wild boar on tracks near hill slopes. During the first year of fieldwork in Illūru I became very familiar with Dasser and Johnny, the two

hunting dogs belonging to Pochamma's family.[57] I once noticed how quiet the house was and asked Lokesh where the dogs had gone. He replied unflinchingly, without hesitation or emotion, that they had been killed by an explosive device in the nearby forest, intended to kill a boar. Shocked that live landmines were positioned in the surrounding forest for a number of reasons, but retaining my sociological interest, I asked whether there would be any compensation due to Pochamma and Lokesh, from whoever had laid the mine. The answer was no.

Much later that year Pravin and Lokesh were summoned over to Suresh's house to help with some butchering. A large wild boar had been caught with the help of an explosive. In return for their work, the two boys received a small parcel of meat they had butchered, including portions of fat, red meat, and skin with bristles intact to use as needles or toothpicks. Lokesh returned with the small leaf-wrapped parcel and I asked whether that was enough (*adi sumerāti bela*?) since both he and his brother had spent several hours cutting meat. He said, "it's not enough, we should get one more (*sumer ayou, inca oka kavali*)". Lokesh had interpreted my "enough" to mean "enough to eat well", whereas I – perhaps overly preoccupied with ideas of fairness and inequality – had meant it in the sense of "enough of a reimbursement for the work". This misunderstanding was nonetheless suggestive. Lokesh promptly returned to Suresh's house to purchase from him another parcel of boar meat, at a price of ₹100 (approximately £1.20) an action that remains puzzling. To my knowledge this was the only commercial exchange of forest produce between two Illūru people that occurred during my fieldwork.

Lokesh's willingness to become a commercial customer of Suresh's in a context where meat is almost always shared out evenly between those who help produce it seemed quite unusual. How should we account for this exception? Was Lokesh motivated by a desire to eat more meat, or to display his financial capacity to spend? Lokesh's acceptance of Suresh's terms of engagement reveals Suresh's superiority to Lokesh as a patron. On the one hand Lokesh provided his labour to Suresh in exchange for a portion of the meat. But beyond that portion, Lokesh is obliged to pay the market rate that non-related persons outside the village would have to pay. Lokesh's willingness to do so indicates not only how he values the meat, but also how he aspires to engage in non-reciprocal forms of exchange (see Graeber 2011: 109, 405). Secondly, it provides an index of Lokesh's complicity with Suresh's valuation of the meat. Between these two men an understanding exists that it is legitimate for Suresh to profit from Lokesh. Suresh, according to my understanding of Lokesh's logic, is more senior (*beriond*,

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[57] These were the first two dogs in Illūru to be named – which tells its own story about the human animal relationships fostered by this family.

Ko.), smarter (*chālak,* Hi.), and better-resourced than Lokesh, and he has been able to acquire this meat as personal property from which he can now profit.[58] To this extent they both buy into a conception of themselves as separate economic actors, and both participate in, and endorse as legitimate, the monetisation of forest produce. What kind of display of wealth, or status, is implied by Lokesh's "purchase" from his classificatory *māmaya* (mother's brother)? Such a transaction would be impossible between any of the other men in Illūru. For most people the suggestion of financial payment for hunted meat would be acceptable only as a joke.

This indicates the co-existence of different sets of norms regarding the distribution of meat. On the one hand, meat is a product to be shared among those who contributed to its "production", but on the other it is a newly marketable forest product from which cash value can be extracted. Arguably, this is evidence that the logic of saleable "forest produce" has fully taken root in the village and is incorporated into local understandings, at least between these two men. This process can be traced historically: from colonial rulings over which types of person were permitted to hunt (Pandian 1995), through post-independence bans on hunting in reserved forests, to recent policies for Agency areas encouraging forest dwelling tribals to sell "minor forest produce" directly to the government depots. This rare example from Illūru involves the sale of meat between close kin relations within adivasi villages.

Furthermore, Suresh's relations with Pochamma and Lokesh's family are indicative of a patron-client relation, in which Lokesh accepts a subservient role for himself and his brother as a worthwhile trade-off, since their continued close relationship with Suresh guarantees future support and security in times of need. This transaction is striking when compared to the even distribution of meat after hunts within surname groups. Such a contrast suggests that Lokesh has a much more transactional and hierarchical relationship with his (classificatory) *māmaya* (mother's brother: Suresh), than he has with his *babailu* (father's brothers: Vikkai and Kothanna).

Collective provision and redistribution: communal meals

Shifting the scale of analysis to the distribution of food across the village community as a whole, Lokesh and Suresh's transaction also contrasts starkly with the co-operative nature of larger hunts during the annual seed festival (*Vijjapandam*) that initiates the planting season in

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[58] The Hindi loan word, *chālak*, which implies slyness as well as cleverness, was occasionally used by Lokesh, to describe Suresh, and adds another layer of nuance to the interpretation. The term conveys a muted criticism, perhaps a backhanded suggestion that Suresh could be more generous in such circumstances, but Lokesh never made such expressions more explicit.

June, which draws participation from the whole village and where meat is divided evenly regardless of who killed the animal. Communal meals, like the ones held during *Vijjapandum,* are a regular feature of life in Illūru, occurring approximately once a month, and more regularly during the marriage season in the summer, which is also the season for funeral feasts and "maturity functions".[59]

After the rainy season, the arrival of each new crop on the hill slope is celebrated with a family ritual on the *sainda*, including the sacrifice of a chicken. Many of the "first crops" (e.g., wild mango, broad bean, wild tamarind fruit) are also marked by a village-wide feast. Every family contributes a chicken and two kilogram measures of rice, which is then reallocated in portions to each house to be cooked. The grain is collected by children on behalf of the village as a whole, who receive the measure of grain from the senior woman of each house in a blanket, along with a chicken. In this process, uncooked rice is given, and the same amount is then received back, to be cooked, since there is no pot in the village large enough to cook rice for everyone. Objectively, it would be simpler if each house provided a certain amount of cooked rice for the feast. The practice of contributing a measure of raw rice, receiving a portion of raw rice back, and then cooking it to bring it to the communal meal, makes explicit the fact that each house has contributed the same amount. It also means that all the different rice is mixed together.

When each household has brought cooked rice to the clearing, and the chicken has been prepared, the women sit first and are served by younger children. Steel trays and other large vessels are loaded with several servings of food. The women eat as they are served but return home with cooked food to last their families several days. Those who have many children are permitted to collect several servings for them. In the second sitting, men eat from leaf plates, but do not take home parcels. Finally, those men and boys who have been serving sit and eat the remainder of the food, often eating directly from the cooking pots. This is the inverse of the daily routine, in which women eat after ensuring the men of the house have had their fill.

For communal meals every household contributes the same amount of raw produce, but those who have more mouths to feed take home a greater share of the cooked food. Compliance with these norms is essential for people to get along in their day-to-day interactions. At the festival for the first *sukoḍokai* (broad bean) crop in the winter of 2017, Vikkai and Vijaya were busy with other commitments – preparing for *Sankranthi* celebrations with relatives outside the village. They neither contributed a chicken nor participated in the communal meal, and for several days after were unwelcome at the drinking sessions of their neighbours and quite

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[59] These are a Telugu import to the calendar of life cycle rituals – but one which incorporates many aspects of "traditional" Koya festivals, such as the sacrifice of cattle.

publicly out of favour with Pochamma. This was an unusual instance of animosity and explicit anger between the two families. The reciprocity of contributions to the village feast is an instance in which economic, moral and kinship obligations are tightly intertwined. Failure to fulfil one's obligations is met with ill-feeling.

Conclusions

So, what does all this tell us about the moral economy of food distribution in Illūru, and what are the implications for our developing map of social relations? Clearly there are mechanisms through which food is redistributed between these villagers, at a variety of scales of relatedness, and clearly there are some instances where people neglect or override their responsibilities, or seek to change the dynamics of those norms and social relations, aspiring to new hierarchical relations. The four sources of food (shifting cultivation, forest foraging/hunting, state distribution, market) represent distinct histories and practices of providing for others, which are interwoven in the everyday lives of Illūrites. Different families in Illūru provide examples of ways in which these are balanced, although the families to a large extent participate in each other's projects and are relatively co-dependent. People demand what they need (whether labour or food) from those closest to themselves, and expect to be provided for in return.

There are a variety of moral codes that underpin the provision of food to Illūru's villagers. There are clear expectations to share meat and contribute to communal meals, but not all the villagers endorse these wholeheartedly. Families are able to draw on the resources of each other's labour to hunt in the nearby forests, but some convert this meat into a saleable product, and in doing so foster a different type of social relations.

This suggests more hierarchical form of relatedness between autonomous individual economic actors. These more hierarchical relations may be traced to a particular form of absorption into a more individualistic sense of property, potentially connected to the inculcation of the concept that forest produce may be commodified and sold for profit. But on the other hand, there are also many more reciprocal social relations being consolidated in this ethnography. Somewhat counter-intuitively, it is precisely through the state's constitutionally enshrined protections that these more redistributive modes of food production (hunting and shifting cultivation) are enabled to continue in Illūru. The high degree of autonomy and entitlement to use forest resources to hunt, is made possible through the constitutional provisions for these communities, with the caveat that implementation of protections has been poor. Indeed, both these archetypes of social relations can be historically traced through the partial preservation

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of adivasi rights to the forest, and to adivasis' incremental incorporation into the regional economic present.

Throughout the chapter there are references to an older conception of livelihood in which dependency on state support was unimaginable. Yet in Illūru today, those who still engage in autonomous guardianship of the forest are by no means ideologically opposed to those who pragmatically and strategically attempt to maximise resources of state, market, forest and cultivation plot.[60] Rather than establishing and consolidating autonomy, hunting is also a way in which Koya shifting cultivators are engaged economically with non-tribal traders. Hunting practices show the Illūru Koyas' historical embeddedness in trading relations with non-Koyas and in wider kinship networks. Suresh's selling of forest meat and the dependence on blacksmithing communities for metal arrowheads are two examples.

As we learned in Chapter 1, Illūru is a village only five generations old, and a world in which people cleared forest-land to establish entirely new settlements is not beyond living memory. To build a village in this way now would be illegal under the Andhra Pradesh Forest Act, and so we must acknowledge that young Koya people today live in a world with very different forms of potential resources from those their parents exploited. Yet much of this history is retained in the way young people co-operate in hunting and other communal activities, such as preparing communal meals. Similarly retained in recent memory are experiences of scarcity and *karve* (hunger). Even among the youngest generation, Illūru people are aware of the threat of scarcity as demonstrated to me by Pravin's explanation of a starved mouse.

Experiences and concepts such as hunger must be seen in cultural context. From a critical economic or development studies perspective, food scarcity and hunger should be viewed as a broad political issue, constructed through the management of resources at the level of the state as regulator of markets and mediator of development (Sen & Drèze 1995: 3, 35). While this larger frame of institutional accountability is important, this chapter has highlighted local practices of distribution of food. Following Scott, we can assume that related individuals feel much more obligated than state infrastructures to satisfy the hunger of fellow Illūru cultivators. Local common sense and hospitality dictates that when someone asks for food it should be given. While accompanying Vikkai on a sojourn to Kathanūru, we were invited to eat lunch with some of his relatives. After waiting outside the house for the food to be prepared we were called to sit. A third man who had been milling around outside heard the invitation and entered the house, washed his hands and sat down to eat as well. Both Vikkai and I believed him to be a neighbour, but when the meal was completed our hosts revealed he was unknown to them,

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[60] Historically, there is ample evidence that adivasis have adapted different types of agriculture, see Kela (2006: 505) and Umamaheshwari (2014: 47).

but they served him without question as it would have been too much of an affront to call him out on his presumptuous behaviour.

The concept of reciprocity is used so widely that it is "often unclear whether what is being described is a matter of empirical fact, indigenous theory or anthropological assumption about the nature of human behaviour" (Parry 1986: 466).[61] In the context of Illūru shifting cultivators, reciprocity refers to the local practices that show mutual obligation to provide consumable food, hospitality and labour for relatives, which occurs between families of the same surname group, and usually affinal surname groups too (who belong to a different clan in Koya kinship). I suggest local practices of redistribution and reciprocity emerged through the cross-generational imperative to nurture and provide for one's kin, in response to variable and changing resources, shaped by processes of contact, trade and exploitation by other communities.

How then, should we accommodate the state's provision of grain into the world of reciprocity in the village? My suggestion is to take a longer historical view. Bhangya Bhukya shows how the monetisation of forest land by the colonial state caused adivasi Gonds to migrate deeper into forests to evade new forms of taxation (2017: 16, 76). If, in a similar way, as the oral histories in Chapter 1 suggest, Illūru cultivators were inclined to migrate to these forests due to a lack of land in Nallametta and the scarcity of resources in Dōraguḍa, then we should view their "earlier", "traditional" forms of reciprocity as having been generated by, and shaped by wider economic and political processes. Hence, the more recent potential for gathering grain from the state – which is undertaken in large kinship groups in a co-operative manner – should not be seen as a paradigm shift in relations of reciprocity. Rather it should be viewed as another resource on which Illūru Koyas are able to draw, which they do so with a large degree of collaborative responsibility for their close kin (c.f. Bird-David 1983). The distribution of PDS rice provides a more reliable proposition for shifting cultivators than their own traditional grain, and the organisation of their engagement with such a resource resembles the redistributive practices of forest resources.

Hunted meat is highly valuable, but not in the ways we might expect. Meat symbolises not only the autonomy that Illūru Koyas enjoy over ancestrally cultivated forest land, but also Illūru's unique form of hospitality. Koya relatives and non-Koya friends, who have grown up without these privileges, hold activities like hunting for meat in high esteem, though this is

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[61] Parry continues: "Moreover if – as Mauss argues – gifts are the primitive analogue of the social contract, then they clearly carry a social load which in centralised politics is assumed by the state. In other words, gifts can assume a much more voluntaristic character as their political functions are progressively taken over by state institution".

also in some contexts exoticised or stigmatised. A certain status, nutritional wealth and cultural capital is accrued through hunting – even before it is converted into a cash product itself. Similarly, subsidised white rice is crucial to Illūru villagers, but not simply because of its nutritional content. Rather, it is so sought after because it symbolises their inclusion in a cultural hierarchy of white rice consumption, and provides a tangible "gift" from the state. Illūru youngsters value the continuity of taking on their parents' livelihood practices, but appreciate these within a denigratory cultural model – of themselves as distinctly ethnicised by their food consumption practices, especially in relation to more desirable regional tastes and consumption habits. Young Illūru men hold the produce grown on the family's *sainda* in low esteem, as hierarchies of value are absorbed into everyday desires and consumption habits, but this does not extend to meat.

Sainda cultivation remains an important base from which to sustain kinship networks, organise hunting and fishing trips, and extract palm wine, which we explore in the next chapter. While internal mechanisms of redistribution (family hunting, communal meals) superficially suggest forms of reciprocity that operate at a very different scale to the state's forms of redistribution (provision of subsidised grain), when viewed in historical and ethnographic context they may be understood as complementary resources that are consumed synchronically by Illūrites.

For the Illūru peasant cultivators, we can think of a moral economy that includes both family and village wide redistribution, but can also accommodate and incorporate state provisions of rice to them as citizens below the poverty threshold. Viewed in this sense, I propose a more malleable and historically variable notion of moral economy. This chapter has exposed how the categories autonomous vs. assimilated tribes, obscure the ways in which these overlap in the analysis of Koya shifting cultivators, and may be unsuitable across the tribal belt of rural India.

By historicising the types of food sources that sustain Illūru Koyas today, we see that categories such as peasant cultivator, adivasi, or hunter-gatherer fail to render the complexity and variability of these livelihoods that exist on the constructed periphery of development in tribal Andhra Pradesh. These families appear as if in transition from the remote margins of regional economies, to dependency on the state, yet they actually provide an insight into the central overlaps between economic, political and cultural processes in contemporary India. Their experiences of hunger and scarcity despite practices of redistribution can perhaps be understood in the context of the preceding chapters as an ethnography of the democratic, post-colonial, caring state.

Chapter 5 – Drinking, socialising, and making money: sharing and selling *jeeriga kallu*

This chapter explores the social and economic importance of *jeeriga kallu* (a variety of palm wine) in Illūru.[62] This seasonal, mildly alcoholic drink is a central part of daily social life in the village and is drunk in the early morning and evening in extended household groups. In peak *kallu* season (February until April) there is sufficient *kallu* to hold three drinking sessions daily, at which drinkers may enjoy five or more *dōku* (a dried hollowed-out gourd, which is used as a serving measure) or glasses. When *kallu* is in short supply, at the start and end of the season, *kallu* is shared only with one's closest or most respected kin, by whom a small glass will be savoured as a delicacy. In contrast to socially-embedded daily drinking sessions – which have been conducted for as long as anyone can remember – the past five years have seen an increase in the number of families seeking to make money from their *kallu* supply. The distinctive *jeeriga kallu* of Illūru has begun to be transported and sold through a network of plastic cans and vats, motorbikes and service boats that allow this sought-after beverage to be consumed in villages many miles upriver.

When observed from the perspective of education, healthcare or infrastructural development, Illūru is an out-lying hilltop village, yet to be incorporated into networks of development and transport. However, when we highlight the production, consumption and distribution of palm wine, an altogether different perspective emerges. Illūru is the centre, rather than the periphery, of a network of economic activity and social interactions encompassing lively drinking circles among extended families and friendship groups, relationships of hospitality across villages, and relations of trade and commerce that extend across the Gōdāvari region. This myriad of everyday social interactions generate enjoyment, humour, nutrition, cash, emerging class identifications and forms of political and social patronage.

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[62] *Kallu* is produced from various types of palm trees across South India. In the forests surrounding Illūru this is made from *jeeriga mara,* solitary fishtail palm, a reference to the leaf shape, or *karyota urens*. The Latin epithet means "stinging", references the palm's tendency to irritate sensitive skin (Riffle & Craft 2003: 292). The more common variety in the Koya speaking region is *tarḍmara* (Ko.) or Asian palmyra palm (En.) or *borassus flabellifer* (binominal nomenclature). The spiky, structured leaves, *tarḍāku,* are used to thatch roofs, and for making vessels and storing produce such as meat and fruit. Fürer-Haimendorf noted (1945: 20, 67) that the palmyra palm grows in great numbers in the lower valleys and on the banks of the Gōdāvari, which is still the case today. That variety of *kallu* is especially famous in the villages around Chintūr and the Kathanūru valley.

From this focus on *jeeriga kallu*, several important findings emerge. Firstly, the ethnography provides an index of the social relations within and between Illūru's households. The dynamics of provision and assistance are indicators of the ways people see each other as dependent or superior. In some instances, kinship relations are exploited, or at least managed in particular ways to ensure certain families and certain interests are looked after. In other cases, patron-client relations emerge between classificatory in-laws. Secondly it emerges that during consumption within Illūru households women have important positions of responsibility for serving and distributing. But the growing trade in *kallu* puts a much greater proportion of this valuable resource under the control of men. Thirdly, in terms of establishing a family trade in *kallu*, this chapter reveals situations in which efforts to maintain relations with kin, and fulfil obligations to relatives outside the village, have the potential to diminish success in the *kallu* trade and also result in less frequent and less plentiful household drinking sessions. *Kallu* is an arena in which family decisions reflect the larger priorities of these actors, and where the wish to make money can come into direct tension with social obligations. As in various other forms of agriculture, this trade favours those who are consistent and dedicated in their labours and who are insulated from risk and from distractions that take them away from their trees. The value placed by Illūrites on having a plentiful supply of *kallu* is evident from the commitments they make in order to produce and supply others with this product.

The ethnography presented here provides a base, therefore, to explore the social relations, contradictions and ethics implicated in the world of *kallu* drinking in Illūru, and the *kallu* trade outside. But beforehand let us take a brief look at some of the existing trends in the anthropological literature on drinking.

Drinking surveyed

Alpa Shah (2011) alludes to the stereotype of the male adivasi drunkard in the upper-caste imaginary, in which it is presumed that homemade liqueurs are the cause of domestic violence and financial ruin in adivasi households. Her ethnography of the Maoists' campaign to prohibit home-brewed alcohol reveals that *hadia* (rice beer) and *mahua pani* (liqueur produced from the flowers of the mahua tree) are consumed by Munda adivasis in both ritual and everyday settings, across genders and generations, with in-laws and across hierarchies of seniority. By contrast, in upper-caste drinking circles, alcohol is consumed exclusively by men – behind dark curtains – and never openly with in-laws or across generational divides. According to the Maoist narrative, home-brewed liqueur is a vice that keeps adivasis stuck in an exploitative social position. Beyond the "upper caste and even bourgeois influences on the [Maoist] movement, who consider the consumption of alcohol a degrading and disreputable practice"

(Shah 2011: 1106), there are, however, multiple ideologies advocating abstention in rural adivasi India (see also Hardiman 1987; Shah 2014).

These include the democratisation of Sanskritic values of abstention that make adivasi youth embarrassed by aspects of their own background, the allure of living like a rural elite, and adivasi aspirations for a certain type of modernity. Fürer-Haimendorf noted in 1945, of a Hindu religious leader adopting the role of patron to Konda Reddi villagers, "since he has become the Reddis' guide on the path to economic prosperity he strives to wean them from such habits and customs as are evil in his eyes: the drinking of palm wine, for instance, and the bloody sacrifice of animals" (1945: 274). In addition to the secular revolutionary ideology, and upper caste Hinduism, abstention is also connected to purity, clarity and mental sharpness within Protestant Christianity in India. Specifically, in Andhra Pradesh, drinking alcohol is associated, from the point of view of some converted Koyas, with animism and with the worship of village deities, and with personal recklessness and lack of self-control.

Three important schemas prioritise abstention from alcohol: Hindu conceptions of ritual purity; Protestant Christian notions of moral correctness and proper bodily comportment; and revolutionary Naxalite ideals of astuteness to rouse adivasis from historical class-based exploitation. As we continue into the ethnography, we will see that these pervasive ideologies influence the narratives of the most aspirational Koya people, but they do not curb the established modes of sociality in Illūru, in which alcohol is used profusely.

Mandelbaum (1965) historicises the changing social acceptance of alcohol in Indian literary sources, where there is a separation between cosmic and quotidian contexts. In contexts of religious purity and high-caste spaces abstention is required, but in the parochial world of village solidarity and ritual alcohol can be used liberally. He suggests that shifts in drinking habits offer anthropologists clues to societal change more generally. Few anthropologists have set out explicitly to study alcohol and drinking, but as Mary Douglas (1987) pointed out, anthropologists had nevertheless written much about alcohol as it occupied an important place in anthropological subjects' social lives.

Outside of rural India, frameworks for anthropological consideration of alcohol consumption have focused on drinking as a mechanism for social cohesion (Douglas 1987; Heath 1975, 1987) and emphasised normalcy and togetherness in contrast to sociological representations of alcohol drinking as antisocial and inherently problematic. Strands of medical research link alcohol to neglect and family breakdown, although according to Heath's (1987) literature review it is in Western Europe and the United States that the negative impact of alcohol

consumption on social relations is most visible. This, he argues, has produced a eurocentric bias in literature on drinking worldwide, predisposing this literature to view alcohol in terms of the negative and wayward behaviour of individuals. Attempting to correct this imbalance Heath (1987: 46) notes that drinking is a social act, embedded in values and norms, rarely associated, either historically or in contemporary cultures with physical, economic, psychological or social relational problems. Douglas curbs Heath's emphasis, asking with characteristic fusion of intuitiveness, wit and provocation: "does cultural training which enables individuals to hold their drink more easily protect their livers from damage? Most likely not. Does the individual breaking out of a set of cultural constraints drink more deeply and more dangerously than one whose heavy drinking is culturally expected and approved?" (1987: 5). More recent reviews suggest more vehemently that this emphasis on cohesiveness has gone far enough (Dietler 2006) and propose we draw the limits of attempts to stress the integrative impact of alcohol drinking.

Alcohol has also been analysed as an important substance in defining social categories, identities and boundaries. Its consumption has been treated "as a significant force in the construction of the social world, both in the sense of creating an ideal imagined world of social relationships and in the pragmatic sense of strategically crafting one's place within that imagined world, or challenging it" (Dietler 2006: 235). As such, drinking habits can be understood as an index of gender differences, ethnic or religious identification, class, occupation and lineage. This stress on shifting boundaries enables us to think of consumption practices as more unstable and changeable over time, and is not limited to the type of alcohol consumed, but also to the spacial and temporal, and quantitative distinctions that are made when drinking alcohol. These dimensions will be kept in mind when considering the drinking of Koyas in Illūru.

A theme running throughout the existing literature on alcohol consumption is the notion of normal, "expected" patterns of drinking behaviour, as indicative of wider social structures. I take forward an attentiveness to the shifting parameters of what is considered acceptable, respectable and socially condoned drinking behaviour. I outline the ways in which expectations of Koya drinking are variable and dynamic, but conform to key principles of sociality, etiquette and treatment of others. The protocols for drinking alcohol index a multitude of social relations, internal hierarchies, kinships ties and emerging class dynamics. Some individuals challenge and reject the range of possible styles of consumption and distribution of alcohol. In parallel to the presentation of Shah's (2011) Munda informants, alcohol becomes an important site for the expression of larger axes of cultural and political conflict within communities and even families. Before coming to the exceptions and

challenges to the norms of drinking behaviour, I must first outline the established range of possible behaviours and the conventions that might be reaffirmed or undermined.

Climbing and cutting *jeeriga* trees

Figure 14: An Illūru man climbing a *jeeriga māra* to tap *kallu*

Well before dawn the young men and boys of Illūru walk into the surrounding forests to climb and cut their *jeeriga* trees. The *gelle* (lower off-shooting branches of *jeeriga* trees) are cut thrice daily in a single upwards slicing motion with a *gīnta kasēr* (a thin, sharp, curved blade) to encourage the tree to produce a sweet alcoholic sap – *kallu*, which is tapped or collected in an earthenware pot or a plastic drum. Once the rains die down in October, until they come again in May, the mature *jeeriga* trees in the higher-altitude forests of the Gōdāvari region can be tapped to collect as much as ten litres of *kallu* a day, from a single tree. In Illūru *kallu* is tapped by all the conjoined families in the village and thus they all have a steady source of *kallu* throughout this season. *Jeeriga* trees are not cultivated but are inherited in sections of forest that are considered the property of individual families, sometimes as far as an hour's walk from the village. Illūrites know which areas of the forest bordering the village belong to which family. Occasional disputes have occurred over the ownership and maintenance responsibilities of trees farther away from the village, but these are rare. When an Illūrite finds a young tree in the forest belonging to their family, they clear the ground around it of any other plants to give that tree a greater share of ground nutrients and water.

The taste of each family's *kallu* varies significantly. Some tappers wash out the drum in which *kallu* collects on a daily or weekly basis, in which case the fresh morning *kallu* will be light

and *tiang* (sweet). Others choose not to rinse the drum at all, allowing a sticky residue to build up around the sides, which makes the *kallu* go sour and continue to ferment in the drum. This will give their *kallu* a distinctive *pulang* (sour) taste and *ōnj* (strength or "kick"). On a hot day the fermentation that occurs in the drum is accelerated. Most drinkers prefer a balanced *kallu* that is milky and slightly grainy in consistency, at once sweet, sour, tangy, refreshing and filling. But *kallu* should not be so filling as to prevent one drinking several *dōku*. Similarly, if *kallu* is too sickly sweet is it almost undrinkable; if it is too sour and makes one wince, it should be distilled into *siggur*, a distilled beverage we will return to. Sometimes the dregs of the *kallu* are so thick and grainy that they are porridge-like in consistency. This thicker, heavier residue fills the stomach too quickly, and is known to be unpleasant to eat, but it is considered wasteful by elder drinkers to discard this residue as it is a source of nutrition.[63] Many of the older *kallu* drinkers perceive *kallu* as a substitute for an evening meal of *doḍa kusīr* (rice and curry).

Thellam Pravin, the youngest son of Pochamma's family, cuts their three trees before dawn, at midday and at dusk, a responsibility he reluctantly shoulders when his elder brother is out of the village. Tapping the trees requires knowledge and a skill set that is transferred from fathers and uncles to their sons and nephews. Although it is a job usually done by the younger boys, sometimes older men or women climb the trees to cut the *gelle* and collect *kallu*. In full season the three trees of Pravin's family produce between 20 and 30 litres of *kallu* a day. When he brings the plastic cans and bottles back to his house, a five litre carton is hung up for drinking before the morning meal to be enjoyed by his mother, Pochamma, his *peddananna* Lachanna (his late father's classificatory elder brother, who is the most senior of the headmen of the village), and his *peddamma,* Sitamma (his mother's classificatory elder sister, and Lachanna's wife). Infrequently, Pravin's *poyi* (father's sister), and his *sudievva* (mother's sister), may join the drinking session, as may numerous proximate kin, visiting friends and relatives, and occasional visitors to the village such as Forest Department officers looking for a refreshing drink. Typically, consumption of *kallu* in this village is an activity that includes all members of Koya families across generations, and any number of their relatives, guests and acquaintances, a situation that is rare compared to broader Indian conventions of sociality.

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[63] In earlier "times of hunger" (*karve kālam*) "*kall jawa*" or "*kall doḍa*" (palm wine porridge, or palm wine rice) was consumed as a staple carbohydrate. This starchy sago-like pulp from the stem of the *jeeriga* tree was sun-dried, powdered and boiled with water to make a porridge. In a similar way, in times of scarcity, the stones of mangos were dried, powdered and re-hydrated by Koyas and Konda Reddis before the rainy season.

Figure 15: A young man slicing the *gelle* of a *jeeriga māra* to keep the sap flowing (Photograph by Thellam Pravin)

Kallu drinking etiquette

"Dōku, nanju, āku (gourds, nibbles, leaves)".

Three things are needed to drink *kallu*: *dōku*, *nanju*, *āku* (gourd, nibbles, leaf). This colloquialism reflects the fact that drinking *kallu* is an inherently social activity: a *dōku* is a serving measure to be passed around; *nanju* are snacks, invariably shared; and the *āku* gives each drinker a vessel with which to control the flow of liquid from the *dōku* to their mouths. In the simplest form, a single leaf is cupped to the mouth, although many intricate leaf cups are constructed and discarded everyday across the region (see Ramnath 2015). The *kallu* at Pravin's family's session is almost always served by Pochamma. Invariably Lachanna, the most senior person in the family is served first before other guests and children. Before taking his first sip*,* Lachanna will remove his sandals and tip out a drop of *kallu* as a libation to his deceased brothers who cannot drink.[64]

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[64] Similar practices are performed by Munda drinkers of homemade beverages in Jharkhand (Shah 2011:1109) where the first drop is customarily spilled for ancestors. In Illūru the first drop is explicitly

The server is referred to as the *tossanōr* and ensures fair distribution. When the *dōku* is passed to a drinker it is polite for them to drink promptly and pass the *dōku* back to the *tossanōr* to allow the next person to drink. Holding onto the *dōku* while talking and making others wait can be a sign of someone's power. It is common for drinkers to bring a vessel to carry home *kallu* for a family member who couldn't come to drink. Their vessel is given a place in the round and is served as much as those who attend in person, sometimes grudgingly – especially if there is a shortage of *kallu*. Illūrites have a habit of asking each other how many measures they have drunk (*nimma bechod dōku untin*?). The convention when responding to this is to round down, or outright lie and claim to have consumed much less than one actually has. There are a number of reasons why people do this. Firstly, one may wish to appear less intoxicated than one actually is – and therefore more capable, more dignified. At other times, people suspect (often accurately) that whoever is posing the question might call on them to join another drinking session, in which case admitting the extent of their current consumption would deter their questioner from inviting them. Similarly, when questioned about a recent drinking session, it is not uncommon for Illūrite *kallu* drinkers to deny that it was *kallu* they had been served and claim instead that they had been drinking tea, or *ganji* (the starchy water in which rice has boiled).[65]

If you can tell the other person convincingly that there is no *kallu*, or lie that the *kallu* is in fact *ganji*, then there is no shame in letting a thirsty friend or relative leave without a drink, as long as they do not see you drinking and enjoying a session. When carrying *kallu* around the village in plastic bottles Thellam Pochamma would insist that the liquid in her possession was in fact *ganji* and refuse to admit to others that it was *kallu*. One evening when walking by torchlight with a large plastic bottle of *kallu*, Badina Sukkanna (her classificatory brother) stopped Pochamma to ask us what she had in the bottle. Sukkanna was clearly searching for an invitation to drink, but so long as Pochamma denied that the liquid was *kallu* there was no impoliteness in us failing to invite him along.[66]

Similarly, whenever Badina Bhadramma passed the house of Thellam Lachanna while a session was going on, Lachanna and his guests stayed quiet and kept their glasses down. It was up to her to come. If she observed the session, they would gladly serve her, but it was not

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for recently deceased kin. *Kallu* is also offered at the funerals and memorials of the dead in Illūru and offered to deities during sacrifices at religious festivals (cf. Elwin 1939: 44).

[65] *Ganji* is drunk by people who are sick and lack the strength to consume their meal, and by those working long hours on hill slopes.

[66] These playful, but also sincerely moral, relational dilemmas, are remarkably similar to those described in Vitebsky (2017: 40).

appropriate to call her and draw undue attention. There is a subtle prestige in having a smaller drinking circle without being seen. When other people do come and sit it is compulsory to share.

To contextualise these formalities, let us explore the wider landscape of alcoholic drinks in the region. Koyas, like many adivasi communities across Eastern India, produce a distilled wine from the dried yellow flowers, *ippa pungār*, of a large *ippa māra* (Ko.) or *mahua* (Hi.) tree. The liqueur produced, *ippa sāra,* is enjoyed at religious and life cycle rituals and is an important substance in everyday Koya sociality (Murthy 1991: 62). *Ippa sāra* has a dry, aromatic and salty taste and even more so than *jeeriga kallu* it is recognised a regional delicacy. *Nātu sāra* (country liqueur) is modelled on the taste and clear colour of *ippa sāra* but made from ammonia powder and jaggery, which can be bought at relatively low cost from local markets. When Koya villagers fall into debt the production and sale of *nātu sāra* is often a quick solution. *Nātu sāra* is rumoured to put holes in the lungs and diminish eyesight, but is nevertheless enjoyed at Koya weddings, festivals, cock-fights and other outings. Due to its affordability, it is also the drink of choice for alcoholics in nearby market towns Rampachodavaram and Chintūr. *Siggur* is a third clear spirit made of distilled *jeeriga kallu*. Mass produced alcoholic beverages such as beer and brandy are occasionally consumed by Illūrites, but the difficulties in transporting these, and their relative expense, make them substantively different from *kallu* and locally produced liqueurs in terms of how, why and by whom they are consumed. These are only available to a very select group of younger men in Illūru, who have the cash, cultural capital and mobility to leave Illūru and visit "brandy shops" in Rampachodavaram. The etiquette of drinking *kallu* in Illūru does not apply to these other drinks. But the obligation to include those who are in view of one's drinking, extends to *nātu sāra* too, so much so that people dislike drinking in view of anyone else.

Drinking is not only a mechanism for social inclusion, but also for exclusion. It is a context in which everyday boundaries are re-established between families and hierarchies of seniority reproduced. Within a family *kallu* drinking circle however, no one is left out of a session. It is often the only time in the day when people sit with their extended family since Illūrites tend to be very busy cultivating their hill slopes especially in the early part of the *kallu* season. Later in the *kallu* season, during the summer, wedding invitations, maturity functions and funerals in other villages tend to pull people out of Illūru and disrupt the regular rhythm of the Illūru *kallu* tappers. Let us now turn in greater detail to the Illūru families as they collect and distribute their *kallu*.

Provision, consumption and obligation

Similarly to Thellam Pravin and his mother Pochamma, each of the other families in Illūru have a network of kin who drink together. In fact, as well as being divisible into three surname groups that live in 12 distinct households, the village can be divided into a potential five or six fairly discrete *kallu* drinking circles, or units of *kallu* production and consumption. The shape and discreteness of these units fluctuates as the *kallu* season progresses, until eventually, as the heavy June monsoon rains beat down on the varied rooftops of Illūru's homes, only the most skilled, dedicated and iconoclastic *kallu* tappers maintain a small and prestigious drinking circle. I was fortunate enough to participate in three *kallu* producing seasons, and hence was privy to the fluctuating formation of the *kallu* production units of Illūru.

The two Kurusam families have independent drinking circles and plenty of trees so they have an unusual degree of autonomy – but they both need help at times to maintain the cutting of their trees. They own the land closer to the road and near the bore well, and are economically better off than their Thellam and Badina neighbours. Kurusam Roy was the first and only Illūrite to hold a regular salaried position as a local assistant for the Forest Department – a position of privilege in Illūru, but of low status within the Department itself. He later lost his job after falling out with a senior beat officer, following disagreements regarding him taking excessive leave. Kurusam Roy's father Kurusam Buchanna Dora is the headman of the village with responsibility for rituals and village festivals. Their drinking sessions are loud and exciting affairs. Roy's *bava* (elder brother-in-law) often visits from Permam Bossa to help tap and drink the *kallu.* Because of Roy's period of salaried employment, he is able to spend on chickens purchased from market relatively often (once a month). This is a luxury for most Illūrites, that is usually reserved for annual festivals such as *Sankranthi*, and for marriage feasts.

As noted in the previous chapter Suresh Kurusam is the headman of the village responsible for political affairs, paperwork and inter-village issues and disputes. He is the panchayat Vice President and a member of the local YSRCP. Suresh Kurusam is a popular man with a wide network of powerful and wealthy guests who come from as far away as Kākināḍa and Rājahmundry. The provision of his distinctively sweet *kallu* is a key part of these political social events though Suresh himself does not drink *kallu* or homemade liqueurs. On rare occasions he drinks "English" wines (cf. Shah 2011) such as Indian-made brandy, beer, whisky or alcopops.

In the winter of the 2016 *kallu* season, Suresh Kurusam teamed up with Badina Sirumanna, his *bava* (elder brother-in-law) and Sirumanna's wife Shankuramma (Suresh's classificatory

sister). The bulk of the labour of cutting and tapping the trees was done that season by Sirumanna and also the bulk of the drinking. The two brothers-in-law had found an arrangement that suited both of them as Suresh's trees were maintained and *kallu* collected and made available for his guests, while for Sirumanna, he and his wife and daughters hosted the drinking session and drank their fill each day from Suresh's trees.[67]

The next year – in the *kallu* season beginning in winter 2017 – Sirumanna and his wife teamed up instead with Sirumanna's own classificatory elder brother, Badina Sukkanna, who was no longer healthy enough to climb his own trees. This left Kurusam Suresh without the assistance he needed to maintain his supply of *kallu*. Having no sons of his own he called on members of the Thellam families to assist him.[68] For most of the year, Badina Vignesh was the thrice daily assistant to Kurusam Suresh in return for which Vignesh's widowed mother (Pravin's *poyi*, father's classificatory sister) drank her fill at each session. This meant she rarely came that year to drink with Thellam Pochamma, Lachanna and Sitamma – with which we began our discussion.

Badina Sukkanna, meanwhile, has for many years been debilitated after falling from a *jeeriga* tree in his youth. In previous years, with the help of his brother's son, Sukkanna maintained regular drinking sessions on the Badina side of the village.[69] However, whenever his nephew was absent from the village, the *jeeriga* trees were overlooked and cut irregularly. This meant that the Badina supply of *kallu* was inconsistent. Each time guests visited the Badina house that season, Sukkanna would immediately start apologising for having nothing to drink, indicative of the implicit expectation in Illūru that guests be provided with *kallu*. In winter 2017, with the aid of Sirumanna and his wife and eldest daughter, *kallu* was consumed again on a daily basis outside Sukkanna's house. This is important for their relations with in-laws in other villages as they feel embarrassed when their daughters return from their patrilocal villages with their husbands and children and there is no *kallu* to serve. In these instances when *kallu* is not available at the Badina house, Sukkanna's sons-in-law will head off around the village to Thellam drinking circles, dissatisfied with the hospitality of the Badina household. Badina affines appear as the poorer relations of this village – less able to co-operate and support each other, typically having just too few fit and healthy members to manage their work without needing to call on their in-laws (the Thellams and the Kurusams).

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[67] That year these two families had also combined their labour to cultivate Suresh's large hill slope.
[68] This is part of a broader trend of patronage between Kurusam Suresh and younger members of Thellam and Badina families.
[69] During my fieldwork his health deteriorated and in October 2018 he sadly died.

One of the more open and well-attended drinking circles of the village – where the in-married husbands of visiting Badina women might wind up along with other visiting relatives – is the daily session hosted by Thellam Kothanna. Often in a clearing in the forest above the Thellam houses, this is the largest and most lively drinking circle in Illūru. By drinking in the clearing away from his house, Kothanna limits the number of passers-by who are likely to join, and demands his guests walk up and see, or keep an ear out to know he is there. When his supply is plentiful, he drinks and shares directly outside his house and will refuse no one. Kothanna prides himself on having lots of *kallu*. He spends more time than most Illūrites in the forest and tends to many trees, some as far as an hour's walk from the village. Unlike most other tappers, Kothanna only began selling *kallu* in 2017. Kothanna's habit was previously to drink and share whatever he had on a daily basis. He is invariably generous with his *kallu*, though sometimes in order to do this he must sneak cans or bottles away for drinking with others who are not present. Hence his idiosyncratic generosity has bounds, and can involve being quite secretive. The sequence of stashing a bottle for later could be interpreted both as generous to those who arrive later, but it is also a way of staggering and maximising his own portion. When sharing a two litre can of *kallu* with a relative later in the morning, Kothanna would drink his fair share too, and so consume for himself a greater proportion of his drink.

The younger men of the village proclaim Kothanna as having a *berre gundakai* (large heart) which refers to his capacity to drink *kallu*, not his capacity to share *kallu*, as the English translation would suggest (though he has a propensity for sharing too). Having a *cinna gundakai* (small heart) means that you get drunk quickly and therefore are advised to drink less. Kothanna can consume five litres of *kallu* a day, spread across two or more sessions. His ability to drink and share his *kallu*, even with those who – unlike him – sell *kallu* to middlemen outside the village, sometimes puts him in the curious position of enjoying his product with close relatives or affines who have sold their own product for cash (e.g., Thellam Pochamma, Kurusam Roy). No one seems to find such circumstances remarkable, except the visiting anthropologist. Kothanna's daily drinking circle includes his first wife Bulamma, his son Dari, his daughter Indira, his second wife Chandramma and her son Venkanna, his brother Vikkai, his wife Vijaya and their daughter Lila, and visiting relatives from Kathanūru and Permam Bossa. Despite hosting so many drinkers, Kothanna's session will normally have so much *kallu* that everyone will consume at least three *dōku*.

The other large open session is that of Kothanna's classificatory elder brother Thellam Nagesh. When *kallu* is plentiful the two will both host sessions at their respective houses enabling drinkers to go from Kothanna's session to Nagesh's session. Thellam Lachanna (the eldest man in the village) will join both sessions after drinking with Thellam Pochamma, making the

most of the privilege of his seniority. Throughout the summer months when there is little agricultural work on the hill slopes the *kallu* produced by these families will be consumed and enjoyed within the village and also delivered to relatives in other villages who do not have the luxury of *jeeriga* trees to tap. In summer 2017, when Kurusam Roy became the first Illūrite to own a motorbike, he and Thellam Lokesh began daily trips to their in-laws in Permam Bossa to deliver *jeeriga kallu*. This was initially related to me as a business venture, but it later became clear that their well-loved *bavalu* (brothers-in-law), *sellollu* (out-married sisters), aunts and uncles were enjoying the *kallu* and not selling it on.

Summer in this part of the subcontinent lasts from January until May and by the end of the season the village will have gone several months without rain and had numerous wedding invites. These celebrations can be hard for *kallu* providers as people are distracted from caring for and tapping their trees. As most of the trees now stop producing, Kothanna's session swells even more and becomes the one attended by everyone. His dedication to his trees is clear from the number of weddings he does not attend. It is he and Thellam Nagesh whose trees keep producing the longest, since they are most diligent in their responsibilities of regular cutting. In April or May, the two men pool their resources and host a single session together. Even after the heavy rains start in June, Nagesh and Kothanna will hold *kallu* sessions daily, though with a diminishing quantity to share. Their drinking sessions become increasingly elusive as they switch location and fewer and fewer people join.

Towards the end of the most recent *kallu* season, joining an evening session outside Kothanna's house, I asked him why he gives so much *kallu* to everyone (*ichot kallu bare ītin?*).[70] Kothanna, who had had a few *dōku* already and was the centre of a large circle of his guests, responded succinctly by saying "I am the biggest (*nanna beriond*)". The next morning, he explained that now he has only one tree still producing – a good one – all the way down at the river *tarseir*, a tributary of the Gōdāvari an hour's walk from Illūru. In search of a more relational or interactionalist explanation I asked him again why he goes *so* far three times a day to cut and to collect *kallu* which he then gives to others. He replied "*na dokatku samarāti* (there is enough for my stomach)". This statement implies a generosity to share, but one that is dependent on his own thirst being satisfied first. Kothanna's approach combined a consciousness of sustaining crucial relationships with a drive to satisfy the desire for the physical satisfaction of moderate intoxication.

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[70] When referring to *kallu*, Illūrites usually use the verbs to pour (*tossawal*) and to give (*īdawal*). The verb commonly used for sharing in Koya (*saddariwal*) is used as an adverb applied before the verb to eat or to drink. For example, the common refrain: *saddari saddari unjondom* (we share and drink).

Networks of distribution

Jeeriga kallu is considered to be delicious as well as nutritious and, given the appetite for *jeeriga kallu* across the Gōdāvari region, it should be considered a regional delicacy. Its status as a product that others in far-off villages want to consume and cannot produce gives it a high economic value. *Jeeriga* trees grow in higher altitude forests and hence it is a small group of villages that produce *jeeriga kallu*. It is much less commonly available than *tarḍe kallu*, which can be produced in many of the plain areas of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Apart from Illūru, only two other nearby villages produce *jeeriga kallu*.[71] Despite the huge volumes consumed daily in Illūru, it is a rare and sought-after drink outside.

The Permam Bossa in-laws of Thellam Lokesh and Kurusam Roy were fortunate that for a month or two the pair began a habit of making morning trips to share their *kallu*. In Dōraguḍa and Permam Bossa too, relatives often request consignments of *kallu* for weddings and funerals. These functions are times when hosts are expected to serve vast quantities of food and alcohol and it is considered to be very poor hospitality if guests leave without the satisfaction of being treated to their fill. Permam Bossa villagers regularly walk to Illūru to arrange for the next morning's *kallu* to be delivered, usually as a favour but occasionally as a purchase. When the out-married daughter of Thellam Pochamma lost her one-year-old baby child, a small group of Illūrites carried a ten litre can of *kallu* to the hastily arranged funeral, 25 kilometres on foot.

Figure 16: Cans of freshly tapped *kallu*

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[71] Lottawarlugūḍem and Bhēndamāmidi. Beyond that certain Konda Reddi villages 50 kilometres away on the other side of the Bhadrāchalum-Rājahmundry highway produce *jeeriga kallu*.

As motorbikes have become more common and villages therefore more accessible, a thriving *kallu* economy has sprung up. From these three villages *kallu* is transported by middle-men on motorbikes who wake very early to collect from their suppliers and deliver either to shops, or to distributers who transport the *kallu* further afield by boat along the Gōdāvari. Kailash Reddi, who manages his family owned provisions shop in Potūru, collects *kallu* from Illūrites to sell for profit. Some middle-men are young Koya men who took loans to buy second-hand bikes, while other already owned bikes and saw the opportunity. Others are the sons of Konda Reddi shop owners. The three small shops in Telligūḍem all keep a bucket of *kallu* bought from the motorbike *kallu* carriers to sell on to Koya and Konda Reddi villagers throughout the day. *Jeeriga kallu* is the most frequently traded item in these village stores when it is in season, purchased by old and young.

According to the Illūru *kallu* producers, this business took off five years ago. Before then, occasional purchases were made but not daily. During the winter of 2017-18 and into the early summer, more than a hundred litres of *kallu* was sold out of Illūru every morning; collected on Kailash's motorbike fitted with plastic vats. The price varied as the season progressed: in October, few producers are able to tap enough to sell, and a ten-litre can is sold for around ₹150 (₹15 a litre). The retail rate for this first *kallu* of the season may be as much as ₹25 for a *lōta* (a steel tumbler of approximately 300 millilitres, making a litre roughly ₹100 retail). As the *kallu* starts to flow more easily from the trees the wholesale rate comes down to ₹120 and eventually ₹100 per 10 litre can. The retail rate in local village shops like Potūru or Eddiwāḍa will descend to ₹15 and then to ₹10 per *lōta*. But where the *kallu* has travelled a long distance to be sold, such as upstream Gōdāvari villages and in Vararamachandrapuram and Chintūr, the price never goes below ₹20 per *lōta*. *Kallu* production allows Illūru families to generate a cash income that far surpasses their annual agricultural yields – which are mostly grown for subsistence rather than profit. Only a successful cashew crop can compare to the cash generating capacity of *jeeriga kallu*.

Owner	No. of Trees	Quantity drunk (litres)	Tapper	Carrier to road	Bike courier	Buyer	Quantity sold (litres)	Longevity of business (in years)
K. Suresh	4	0-10	B. Vignesh	B. Vignesh	Kailash Reddi	Kailash Reddi	10-20	5-6
T. Nagesh	6	10	K. Roy/ T. Nagesh	T. Nagesh	K. Roy	M. Laxmi	40-60	4-5
T. Kothanna	10	15	T. Kothanna	K. Roy	K. Roy	M. Laxmi	20	1
T. Vikkai	2	5	T. Vikkai	-	-	-	0	-
T. Lokesh	4	5	T. Lokesh/ T. Pravin	T. Lokesh/ T. Pravin	Kailash Reddi	Kailash Reddi	20	3
B. Sukkanna/ B. Sirumanna	7	10	B. Sirumanna	B.Rajamma/ B. Durga	Kailash Reddi	Kailash Reddi	15	4

Table 5.1 A snapshot of the ratios of *kallu* produced and sold, on a mid-winter day in peak season 2017

During this season Kurusam Roy had teamed up with Thellam Nagesh and Thellam Kothanna to deliver their combined *kallu* on his motorbike. He would drive all the way to the Gōdāvari bank near Kathanūru to sell directly to M. Laxmi, who trades on the service boat along the Gōdāvari. The other Illūru sellers trade with Kailash Reddi who collects at the jeep track, two kilometres from Illūru village. In most cases, the family who own the trees are also responsible for tapping, collecting and carrying the product down to the road for sale. Kurusam Suresh, aided by Badina Vignesh, is the only tree owner who delegates the entire labour of cutting, collecting and carrying the product. When Badina Vignesh had to leave the village to attend weddings in Hablūru and search for a potential spouse of his own, Thellam Pravin was asked to do the cutting of Kurusam Suresh's trees. Though this added to his burgeoning workload, Pravin would always oblige. Unsurprisingly, Kurusam Suresh, who does not drink *kallu* himself, was also the first Illūrite to start marketing his *kallu*. As a proportion of his overall production, he sells more than anyone else.

Figure 17: Illūru men depositing *kallu*

The main producer of *kallu* is Thellam Nagesh who hosts generously but sells the bulk of his product (about 80%). The other large producer is Thellam Kothanna who drinks and shares almost half of his supply. Behind each of these rows there is also a network of labour involved in supporting the male tapper and the tree owner. Women (such as B. Rajamma and B. Durga) help to carry the *kallu* down to camp and cook *nanju* for the drinking sessions as well as meals to be had after the sessions are done. Women also have responsibilities towards serving *kallu* inside the village. But when we look at the growing trade in *kallu*, and look closely at who is responsible for collecting cash and for maintaining business interactions with non-Illūrites, we suddenly get an all-male picture of the *kallu* trade, with the notable exception of M. Laxmi – not from Illūru – who buys and sells on the service boat on the Gōdāvari River. The trend towards selling a larger proportion of the family's *kallu* seems at the moment to place greater control over the output of household resources into the hands of men.

In winter 2017-18 Thellam Pochamma and her sons' trees were several years old and did not produce as much as they had hoped. Thellam Lokesh had been away for several periods and so the cutting had not been well maintained. Bereavements outside the village

and the serious ill-health of Lokesh's future wife had kept him away from his trees and placed an unexpected responsibility on his younger brother Pravin. The outcome of these events is that there has not been enough *kallu* to sell regularly, but Pochamma has sent Pravin to the road with *kallu* when there was a surplus. In this family's case it seems that their efforts to maintain close relations with kin outside Illūru and the responsibilities that arise from these have contributed to their diminished success in the *kallu* business for the season. The *kallu* business – like many other agricultural trades – favours those who have stability and are able to make the commitment to nurturing and caring for their produce without interruption. It seems there are two successful models for doing this in Illūru. The first option – that adopted by Thellam Kothanna and Thellam Nagesh – is never to leave the village and to forgo all distractions in order to prioritise the regular maintenance of the *jeeriga* trees. The alternative practiced by Kurusam Suresh is to recruit others to do the work, though other families lack the clout and largesse to seemingly effortlessly persuade others to contribute their sons' labour.

The trade in *kallu* opens up forms of social relations, which would otherwise be barely visible, such as the exploitation of other's labour. This type of arrangement – performing voluntary manual labour for another Illūru family – would be common in certain contexts, for instance assisting tasks such as weeding a hill slope if a family were bereaved or had a member unable to work, but it is thrown into sharper relief when the output of the labour is tangible cash income from outside.

Figure 18: *Kallu* trading on the Gōdāvari River bank

When searching for the causes of the differentiation in *kallu* trade between Illūru families, it is tempting to suppose that distinctions exist between those whose decisions differ. Kothanna's relative reluctance to prioritise trade in *kallu* above its consumption may be read as a reluctance to enter the world of commodified goods (cf. Gell 1986) but may also be a fairly accurate measure of what is important in Illūru: having the resources to bring people together, to serve others and to enjoy oneself. Within the elder generation of Illūrites, enjoyment is achieved through entertaining drinking circles, rather than through the acquisition of market-bought clothes and the other commodities that might be obtainable with a larger cash income. But the prioritisation of trading *kallu* also enables a form of family planning and connectedness that is afforded by the cash earned in this endeavour. For Kothanna to prioritise his own drinking circle above external trade, he also prioritises himself over his children in the eyes of other Illūrites.

For Lokesh, for Nagesh and for Roy, the endeavour to transport their *kallu* out of Illūru in exchange for cash is an investment in their wellbeing and that of their family. This involves putting time and energy in cordial relationships with non-Koya traders. The commitment to turn up at the road with the product is not always easy to fulfil, particularly if one wishes actively to participate in the drinking circles within Illūru itself. To trade in *kallu* is implicitly an act of aspiration and speculation that exhibits a higher value placed on the potential benefits of goods to be purchased in the future rather than on satisfying the thirst of one's family and friends. Lokesh strives for a level of financial independence and connectedness that is undesirable for Kothanna, but even for Lokesh – who abstains from *kallu* drinking himself – he will ensure that he has delivered *kallu* to his mother, Pochamma, and *peddananna,* Lachanna, before selling to a trader. I venture so far as to say that, for Lokesh, trading in *kallu* is an extension of the responsibility he has to provide for and care for his immediate family. The dynamics in other families would suggest that the two practices are potentially in conflict. In framing his actions as such, I argue that Lokesh is acting within a different morality of care for his family than Kothanna and others.

Dynamics of drinking, selling and caring

The ethnography above shows far greater ambivalence and complexity than in scholarly debate on whether collective drinking is a mechanism of social cohesion or an avenue of individual and social breakdown. Yet that binary can be fruitfully retained here to shed light on how individual and collective behaviour is locally judged and assessed.

Drinking circles reinforce ties of solidarity and dependency between extended families, as well as being an important form of hospitality when more distant relatives visit the village. At the beginning and end of the season when *kallu* is scarce, the whole village will share the *kallu* supplied by one or two tappers combined, which suggests a high degree of inter-village care, reciprocity and interdependence, even perhaps a momentary egalitarianism. *Kallu* can even be shared with others who have sold their own *kallu* for profit (as Thellam Kothanna serves Kurusam Roy). But this generosity is not indefinite and eventually even the "biggest" providers choose *not* to pool their resources and become more selective as secretive drinking sessions are held. So *kallu* drinking and sharing can equally reinforce relations of exclusivity and secretiveness even as it is almost always a pleasure to be shared.[72] It is clear from Kothanna's prioritisation of providing *kallu* above selling *kallu*, that he values being a provider to his kin more than he values the cash he could earn from his product. To an extent this is true for all the *kallu* producers. Illūrites ensure their own family have a supply before profiting from the thirst of other villages – even Kurusam Suresh would sooner provide for his guests than sell. When the *kallu* diminishes towards the end of the season, the middle-man will be left waiting at the collection point for cans that never arrive, as the smaller quantities will not suffice for both in-house consumption and wholesale.

Through closer attention to the realities of production and consumption of *kallu* we can draw out many more complex modes of connectedness between Illūru villagers, beyond those based on reciprocity. These are primarily kinship relations but also hierarchies within and between families: in the case of Badina Sukkanna, and Badina Vignesh who were called on to assist Kurusam Suresh, these are relationships that suggest something closer to patron-client interactions between classificatory in-laws. The provision of *kallu* to other villages may be understood as a form of establishing and reaffirming connections with dispersed kin, but it might equally be read as an investment in mutual hospitality.

There is scope to explore the impact of Thellam Kothanna's prioritisation of *kallu* drinking and sharing more critically. In devoting his energy to the production and distribution of *kallu* he often overlooks responsibilities that other Illūru adults take very seriously – for example the nutrition of his children. Kothanna's insistence on maintaining his *jeeriga*

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[72] Drinking *kallu* alone is not generally acceptable but neither is it an outright taboo. Portions of *kallu* may be saved for a drinker who is busy with childcare or tending to animals.

trees means the family's small cashew orchard is overgrown and less productive, and his reluctance to travel to town to sell the cashews and build resources of cash result in his family being among the poorest in Illūru. In certain situations, his children are among the least able in Illūru to access healthcare as they do not have money for transport to hospital, and have an unvaried diet of government subsidised rice and *sāru* (tamarind water, chilli and salt). Commodities like green chillies, onions and fresh vegetables are rare in Kothanna's home. When he does take his cashew crop to market, the cash will likely be spent on a bottle of *nātu sāra*, whereas other families tend to buy items of new clothing for their children. The rare occasions when it is possible to see these differences enacted in the market town tend to involve other Illūrites commenting critically on Kothanna's choices. Given this accusation of neglect, it must be noted that the narrative of anomie and individual recklessness that Heath feared had blighted the balanced discussion of cross-cultural beverage alcohol consumption, is alive and well in Illūru, and visible in judgements about Kothanna by others (Heath 1987).

The ethnography above indicates that attitudes to *kallu* consumption can operate as an index of class and gender. It is clear that Lokesh and Kothanna aspire to very different profiles of what a successful household head looks like. In many ways their different capacities to care for their families express the fast-emerging class differences in Illūru as reflected in their divergent perceptions of family responsibility. For Kothanna, to be the "biggest" is both a privilege and a responsibility to provide for others. While Lokesh's outlook is geared towards having an identity outside Illūru, he too takes great pride in acts of *kallu* distribution within his extended family. It seems these two Thellam men represent different gendered, generational attitudes towards family wellbeing.

Analysing *kallu* drinking opens up clear divisions in terms of class, aspiration and mobility between the majority of Illūrites who are comfortable within a village *kallu* session, and the few who are not, who have aspirations to transcend the village through education, a political role, or through marriage. Kurusam Suresh, his wife Kurusam Adilaxmi, Thellam Lokesh and Thellam Janiki are the only four who explicitly decline to drink *kallu* in Illūru. Common phrases to explain someone's lack of taste for *kallu* such as *aluwat ille* (he/she doesn't have the habit) and *unnōnd* (he doesn't drink) are also signifiers of an attitude or class aspiration, as much as descriptors of individual tastes and preferences (though perhaps we might assert that the latter is a measure of the former cf. Bourdieu 2010). Those who abstain from *kallu* are also rejecting a form of sociality and attempting to

incorporate themselves into a much larger moral and economic system. Apart from these four, every other member of Illūru village consumes *kallu*.

The habit of mutual joking and teasing about how much *kallu* someone has drunk – to which Illūrites subject each other regularly – may be embedded in a long tradition of jovial sociality, but may also have taken its cue from the external disapproval by colonial, upper-caste, or Christian representations of "tribal" drinking, through which a negative stereotype has emerged of the lazy, feckless, drunk adivasi populations, who have no capacity for forward-planning and live only for short-term pleasures. Perhaps in the assertions of being able to handle more drink, and by denying the full extent of their intoxication, Illūrites resist and challenge these pervasive stereotypes. On the basis of the current ethnography, I suggest that the provision of large quantities of *kallu* requires skill, dexterity, agility, deep botanical knowledge, patience and long-term planning. In this sense the *kallu* collectors are making an investment in the wellbeing of their extended family in a way that undermines the projection of irresponsibility and short-termism that is often imagined of adivasi society.

The relations inculcated by the marketing of *kallu* are superficially of a completely different nature from those expressed within village drinking circles. As is visible in the interactions with traders who collect *kallu* from Illūru tappers, this is a world that privileges those who are at least semi-literate (quantities of *kallu* are noted on paper), who are comfortable dealing with cash, and who can communicate confidently with non-Koyas such as middle-men and shop owners from other villages. So where does this distinction bring us, in terms of analysing social relations between Koyas in Illūru, and between Koyas and non-Koyas outside? Should we conclude that there exists in Illūru a survival of an older economy, a world of reciprocal hospitality in the distribution of *jeeriga kallu*? On the other hand, is the sale of *jeeriga kallu* by individual producers indicative of increasingly hierarchical relations within and between tribal communities? The two archetypes of social relations here seem to co-exist fairly amicably. While some focus on the wider network of trade and accumulate cash reserves, others are content to provide refreshment and company to their fellow villagers.

Kallu – even as it is marketed – retains a sense of being a leveller within the village since the majority of the daily product is shared. Compared to the impact of cashew crops, *kallu* represents hospitality and reciprocity between families. Cashew, in comparison, has huge

potential to produce inequality between households, based on how diligently orchards are maintained and weeded, how old they are (that is, how early the head of the family was able to access the state scheme for cashew cultivation). Cashew is harvested in April and May, at which time every year a large cash income will be felt by those who have the larger orchards. *Kallu*, on the other hand has a longer season and is collected daily, meaning the benefits are spread out more evenly.

To conclude, I suggest that the most aspirational Illūrites intend to transcend a perceived divide between the distinct social worlds of village hospitality and market competition. The stereotypes alluded to above are pervasive even in the context of a Koya speaking village in remote Andhra Pradesh. For Thellam Lokesh and Thellam Janiki (two of the most educated Illūrites), to insist on abstaining from the *kallu* their family produces, and for which their village is renowned, implies a disconnect with the formality, tradition and parochialism of village drinking circles, in favour of what they perceive to be more desirable beverages that are mass produced and sold in wine shops. As with many other aspects of their everyday lives, the formalities and practicalities of Illūrites' drinking sessions are similar to those of adivasi communities across Central and Eastern India. The gradual incorporation of Illūrites into the economic and moral world of caste-Hindu Telugu culture is ongoing, and drinking is one arena in which we can view the increasing class distinctions being made and remade on a daily basis.

Chapter 6 – Narratives of transition:
young adulthood beyond the village

This chapter addresses a set of experiences in the lives of Illūru's young people that involve a transition away from the close-knit networks of provision and care within the village, towards a broader horizon of adult selfhood. These experiences of transitions, and their narrativisation, encapsulate processes of change across the Koya community. Conflicts that are played out in everyday scenarios reflect larger generational divergences, and broader social processes. Motivations for embarking on life outside Illūru are varied, but are often understood by young Illūrites in relation to aspirations for inclusion in wider social milieux. A recurring theme in the ways these experiences were narrated to me, was the ambition to live a life that registers on a wider scale than that of the immediate family and kin in surrounding villages. These projections of the future include the allure of a love marriage, the drive to have a career, the attraction of conspicuous consumption patterns that are valorised across the region. The material focusses heavily on education, which is the primary reason young people are removed from the daily cycles that were the focus of the previous three chapters. But schooling is often a gateway through which alternative visions of adult life are developed, as young people are socialised into very different people outside the village. Education in hostel schools away from their families is one of many ways in which young Illūru children begin to craft adult lives for themselves that take on different patterns than those their parents led. Hence the chapter touches on several themes that exceed a deterministic analysis of the impact of education on Illūru's young people.

Experience of life outside the village is desired by those who wish to inhabit a wider cultural space. It is also formative of new expectations and aspirations among young Illūrites. Many undertake stints of labour in market towns and some travel further afield to Bhīmavaram or Hyderabad. Despite tough working conditions and huge distances from their families and other relatives, young Koyas – both men and women – opt out of the local network of bounded exogamous kinship within clan groups, and travel to live quite insecure lives in cities and towns. For many, this is a temporary rejection of patriarchal social values and parentally approved marriage, but for some this break with their family becomes permanent and irreversible. At the time of writing, at least one child from each family attends school outside the village, and several Illūru young people envisage continuing their studies in the future. The schools attended are almost all *Ashram* schools, a common type of residential state school in Scheduled Areas of Andhra Pradesh, administered by the Tribal Welfare Department at state

level, and through ITDA Education Officials at district and mandal level.[73] In one or two cases Illūru students have been sent to mission school on the other side of the river, in West Gōdāvari. No one from Illūru has attended a private school and no one has – at the time of writing – continued their studies past 10th class (roughly equivalent to GCSE's in the UK education system). Other closely related villages, like Dōraguḍa and Permam Bossa, have a similar educational profile.

Romances are another significant pull away from Illūru; some young villagers have numerous "lovers" – flirtatious friendships with similarly aged potential marriage partners – who reside elsewhere. As discussed in the ethnography below, these romances signify transition into a wider Telugu society, and are locally understood as a breach of embedded kinship patterns. They are viewed with ambivalence and suspicion by those who remain emplaced in Koya villages. This is evidenced by outright scepticism regarding the younger generation's choice of marriage partners.

From their perspective, young people's experiences *idapa* (down) in relatively heterogeneous towns and cities, allow them to economically and culturally transcend their village networks through education, romance, and labour migration. These trajectories are often partially guided by the generative potential of powerful popular discourses that place traditional adivasi care networks and modes of production in a culturally inferior position vis-à-vis the regional and national expectations of gender roles, nutrition, consumption, language, and culture. Building on the social relations observed in the previous chapter, young people seem increasingly eager to adopt more hierarchical relationships and conform to regional standards of family structure, with men earning cash and women performing domestic duties.

Aspirations for more urbane Teleguised lifestyles – or narratives of transition – appear as cultural scripts in the minds of Illūru's young people. These tend to relegate the networks of care and hospitality, within which young adivasis have grown up, to a symbolically lower status. Young Koyas often essentialise their own family networks of care as that of *cinna nar mansullu* (small village people) or, in contrast and more rarely, project these as a romanticised image of village solidarity. The working and caring practices of small-scale cultivation are reified and objectified within a wider regionally dominant cultural hierarchy. These narratives of transition end up as self-fulfilling prophecies in the life-course of young Illūrites. In other adivasi contexts, the conversion to Christianity offers redemption from a religious world that

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[73] For an overview of the establishment of *Ashram* schools, and case studies from Andhra Pradesh see Sujatha (1990).

has been made to appear degraded from the dominant national perspective (Vitebsky 2017a, 2017b: 19). In this context, participating in narratives of development, and self-development, seem to take on the emancipatory tone of a radical transformation. Stories of transition are told and re-told, in ways that regenerate their meaning as parables for younger children. As in Katy Gardner's use of narrative among migrant Bangladeshi women (Gardner 2002), the conscious and structured accounts of events across time were ways to make sense of experiences. Strikingly, young people's narratives focussed on fields of life which all hold out a promise of transformation (education, employment, and romance), yet these are also arenas in which people's social class and status can be sharply highlighted, and where they might become most trapped.

Taking cues from the work of Peggy Froerer (2007, 2011, 2012, 2015) we cannot speak of education without engaging in local concerns, often differentiated across generations, around the accruing of different forms of cultural capital that are relevant to adivasi communities' aspirations (Froerer 2015: 366–7). The benefits and "risks" of education impinge on wider negotiations with economic and social mobility, marriageability and "de-skillment". A key variable in Froerer's ethnography of education and young people in Chhattisgarh is the distinction between Christian and Hindu communities, which is almost absent in Illūru, but I draw on qualitative data from the related villages of Dōraguḍa and Permam Bossa to make some comparative insights. Although education is an uneven and somewhat contradictory resource, its effect overall can be to produce and reproduce new hierarchies and differential access. Following Froerer, I view education as tightly bound up with people's sense of their community identity, as well as with individuated calculations about marriageability and future prospects.

The picture that emerges in Illūru is one in which the perceived purpose or "use value" (Froerer 2015: 351) of schooling varies considerably between interlocutors, ranging from attitudes that reflect the positions uncovered by Froerer, that "5th standard is just right" – to more utopian visions of "being somebody". But as well as the gendered and generational axes of difference in perceptions of schooling, I observed, similarly to Froerer, a highly variegated situation in which the motivations for and meanings attached to education oscillate even within families and between siblings, in whose families balance is sought, between allocating resources to longer and shorter term goals. Education can mean very different things to different people and even to the same people in different contexts and at different times. That said, the consensus emerging from my material is that the positive value of a base-level of linguistic cultural assimilation – in terms of literacy and capacity to receive state benefits – has a pan-generational appeal. Pragmatism and a capacity to move swiftly between life-courses is

prized among young people. With reference to young people's experiences in Chhattisgarh, the challenge of translating education into secure work (Froerer 2011), and the gradual process of expectations aligning with more pragmatic aspirations (Froerer 2012, c.f. Bourdieu 1974), have uncanny similarity to themes in the Illūrite narratives below.

In what follows, discussions of schooling, romance and labour migration are interwoven since they are all part of a broader process of establishing adulthood. As is the case elsewhere, aspirations and motivations to earn, to love, and to be temporarily liberated from the restrictions (and surveillance) of village life are intertwined (Shah 2006). In certain contexts such as same-sex social spaces in Illūru, romances are something to boast about but in others the existence of a "lover" may invite teasing, especially by older classificatory siblings. Within such processes I suggest that there are many instances in which the "adivasiness" of my interlocutors becomes incidental and their experiences are likely paralleled by those of other communities. But in other scenarios, as explored below, the specificity of their "ST: Koya" identity becomes crucial, especially in terms of how they are retroactively understood as being determined, or shaped by it.

The broader picture of education in rural adivasi India is one of poorly resourced schools, poorly trained teachers and conservative and out-of-date curricula (Premji 2004; Sujatha 2002). In adivasi contexts, 65% of students drop out before completing their 10th class of school (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay 2007, quoted in Rao 2010: 168). Even when a young person does succeed in completing school and graduating from a degree college, this by no means guarantees employment. In fact, adivasi students, similarly to Dalit students, are less likely than their peers from other communities with equal qualifications to find employment (Kannan 2018: 41, reprinted in Shah et al. 2017, see also Shah & Lerche 2017: 18–19). Even when Koya children in nearby Telangana have been able to go through higher education, very few get government jobs and they tend to remain jobless in their villages (Benbabaali 2017: 125, in Shah et al. 2017). These support Froerer's emphasis that decisions to become educated are fraught with risk. There is the risk that a child will fail to reach a benchmark at school, while simultaneously failing to contribute their labour to the family, and losing agricultural knowledge or "deskilling" (Froerer 2015: 374). If a student does not succeed and pass 8th, 10th or 12th class, this will likely not "translate" into an economic benefit in the long run, as the student will lack the "necessary connections and economic capital that will allow him to successfully navigate the world outside of the village" (Froerer 2015: 367). This notion of "connections and economic capital" will be discussed further towards the end of this chapter. In other adivasi contexts it has been shown that schooling can further entrench conservative values and class identities, and exacerbate a vicious cycle of low-expectations and

underachievement for those who start at the bottom of established social hierarchies. These connections are supported by recent empirical evidence from Jharkhand, India (Higham & Shah 2013) which worryingly suggests that local conceptions of adivasi inferiority are further ingrained during school years, reflecting arguments detailed in Willis (1977) and in Bourdieu's work on education (1974).

	Illūru	Permam Bossa	Dōraguḍa
Young people surveyed, aged 5-25	30	36	101
Completed 10th class (as percentage of those surveyed)	6 20%	6 17%	29 29%
Discontinued before 10th class (%)	7 23%	12 33%	32 32%
Discontinued between 6th and 10th class (%)	6 20%	9 25%	6 6%
Discontinued between 1st and 5th class (%)	1 3%	3 8%	13 13%
Never enrolled in, or attended school (%)	12 40%	10 28%	24 24%
Total attending school (%)	7 23%	8 22%	29 29%
Currently studying class 1-5 (%)	4 13%	8 22%	23 23%
Of which currently studying class 6-10 (%)	3 10%	0 0%	6 6%

Table 6.1 Table showing number of years spent in formal education by young people from three Koya villages, as of academic year 2017-18

The key insight that this table confirms, is that the three villages surveyed all have disproportionately low numbers of students completing 10[74] standard schooling.[74] The highest number of young people who never enrolled in or attended school is in Illūru, although the other two villages have similar proportions of students who complete 10th class. It is noticeable that in Dōraguḍa very few students discontinued once they were in the later stage of their education, i.e., after 6th class. In each village every family was surveyed and hence there was no sampling process necessary. The number of respondents is too small to draw strong, concrete conclusions about the educational situation in the region, and the practice of sampling by age carries some inaccuracy as ages may have been misjudged as these are not always known to young people. However, the survey indicates a trend of high drop out rates, and shows that significant numbers of people in the past two decades have not undertaken any formal schooling.

To give this table some context, across Andhra Pradesh, among young people aged 5-25 belonging to Scheduled Tribes, 58% were recorded in the last census as attending an educational institute. Among the narrower age group of 5-15, 76% were recorded as attending.[75] That picture is very similar among ST: Koyas in Andhra Pradesh alone: 58% of 5-25s were indicated as attending education, and 79% of Koyas aged 5-15. With this context in mind, let us return to the specifics of the lives of young people in Illūru.

Journeys to school

After the Sankranthi harvest festival in January 2018, seven children from Illūru returned to school to start the new term: five girls and two boys. Several children, their siblings, came to see them off.[76] The journey begins with an hour's walk through the forest to the nearest village of Telligūḍem. The first two kilometres descend steeply downhill through bamboo forest until the path joins a disused logging track where the Forest Department outpost known as "base camp" was built in 2014. A further four kilometres along a barely motorable road is the village of Telligūḍem, and another 10 kilometres along this rocky track is the larger village of Eddiwāḍa where there is a girls' school and hostel for 1st to 8th class students. From there, the boys travel a further 15 kilometres along the concrete road to Rampachodavaram, or further to

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[74] The data collection for this survey on education in three villages, included out-married daughters who no longer reside in those villages, but not in-married daughters-in-law of the households surveyed. This reflects the local idioms of "belonging to" each respective village.

[75] Based on calculations of figures from the national census data for Andhra Pradesh (2011): "ST-9 Populations attending educational institutions by age, sex, and type of institution (by each tribe separately) – 2011".

[76] This is the only major Telugu festival that coincides with the Koya calendar. It marks the transition from a long agricultural season, from June until January, into the summer season, between February and May, when *kallu* is plentiful and marriages, maturity functions and funerals are celebrated.

Jirnagūḍem. Older girls, between 8th and 10th standard, study in a large government school, 12 kilometres beyond Rampachodavaram, in Koketgūḍem, a total of 47 kilometres from their homes. The Illūru school-goers all stay in hostels attached to their schools and return twice a year for holidays in the summer and in the winter. Eleven children (aged between five and 18) were not attending school and stayed in Illūru as the summer began.

On hazy market-day-Sunday afternoons, the red soil of the broken road is kicked up by the auto-rickshaws outside the Eddiwāḍa hostel. Balaji, the wiry driver, teases the girls in his vehicle – pinching them and pulling their hair – as he waits impatiently for Illūru mothers to pass on home-cooked treats to their daughters on their way to or from market in Rampachodavaram. Children in other hostels do not see their parents between holidays. Thellam Laxmamma is glad her daughter Devakka has continued into 6th class and comes whenever she can to see her for a few minutes at the gate.

Back outside Laxmamma's house in Illūru, pressed on *why* she sends Devakka off to school but not her brother Sittu, Laxmamma explains her view that her daughter must continue till 10th class (*tenth dwaraku sadawāl*). Devakka's elder brother Sittu ran back (*deng miri vatond*) from school after two years in a hostel in Rampachodavaram due to *mondu vati* (laziness), which is the most common response to the question of why children, especially boys, drop out. Laxmamma herself is in her mid-thirties. When she was a child there was neither a school in Eddiwāḍa nor an awareness (as there is now) of the distant government schools that villagers might attend. No one in her generation went to school. Only Pochamma – who grew up in the closely related village of Permam Bossa and married into Illūru – had some early years of education at the government school in the Konda Reddi village nearby. In a slightly younger cohort, another young mother, Vijaya received some education within the village from groups of Naxalites who came periodically to stay in the villages in this region. Things are different nowadays. For these parents, having one of their children in the Eddiwāḍa hostel is seen as a positive move, although they are happy for other siblings to drop out and return home to work with them in the village.

When the mothers of Tejaswini and Bajamma (both studying 10th standard) collected their daughters from the hostel for their winter holidays, they were invited for a parent meeting at which they were told not to let their daughters do hard work over the festive period, and not to allow them to carry water or to work in fields where they would become tired and be bitten by ticks. Bajamma's mother Varshamma said she didn't listen carefully and didn't remember what the headmistress advised, but her daughter did. Bajamma explained that she knew the advice is meant to help them return safely to school, and succeed in their 10th standard exams

(which they both later passed), but she did the village work anyway. Tejaswini also declined to adhere to this advice and bounced the question back to me with a smile: "I do the work, why not? Is it good for my mother if I do no work when I'm home?" echoing the sentiment expressed to Froerer (2012: 344). As we learned in Chapter 3, Tejaswini has a complex, ambivalent relationship with her father and makes herself at home in various other houses in Illūru and other villages. She often avoids returning home to Illūru when the school closes during school holidays, staying instead with relatives elsewhere. Despite these absences, she takes pride in providing care to her siblings and support to her mother when she does return. Tejaswini has several potential marriage partners in other villages, and her spontaneous visits to Hablūru and Potūru suggest she has significant autonomy over this process. As the chapter unfolds, we shall observe that it will be on her terms that she will soon become engaged to one of her *bavas* (brothers-in-law/potential husbands).

Before the boys were discharged for the *Sankranthi* holidays they were explicitly told they should not climb trees "because we might fall and hurt ourselves", Thellam Cinnabhai, aged nine, explained to me. Important work and play is undertaken in trees, and this does carry risks. Boys climb trees to pick fruits like *jāmkai* (guava) or *sītapanḍu* (custard apple) and to gain an advantageous angle from which to shoot small birds with catapults to roast and eat. Boys are sent up trees for coconuts when guests need refreshment, during festivals, and when the village ritual specialist needs to perform an offering for someone's health. Trees are also climbed to escape a charging *permam* (mountain buffalo). But most regularly and importantly, trees are climbed daily to cut, tap and collect *kallu* (Chapter 5).

The paternalistic guidance to schoolboys not to climb trees is a directive away from traditional games and work of boys and young men, intended to wean boys away from *kallu* drinking.[77] It went unheeded, but Cinnabhai was also reluctant to follow the instructions of his father and father's brothers to fetch things or pass messages, which the other village-educated boys would follow. Over the winter holiday, Cinnabhai adapted and completed his duties around the village, helping his father Vikkai and uncle Kothanna tap *kallu*, carrying water for his mother, alongside hunting birds and giant squirrels with the other boys. He was nonetheless happy to return to school at the end of the holidays. Cinnabhai said that when he finishes school he will work in *kompany pani*, which is shorthand for paid employment in a city. Specifically, he will do *dharam* (literally, thread in Hindi; colloquially, garment factory work). Completing at least

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[77] Cultural steer or not, two days after my interview with Cinnabhai, his classificatory brother, Thellam Pravin, fell 20 metres out of a tree, while cutting and collecting *kallu*. He was carried down from the village in a plastic chair on a sling, and transported by auto rickshaw – summoned on foot from Telligūḍem – to the Government Hospital in Rājahmundry, with several fractures. His treatment and recovery was slow and painful but eventually he did regain full range of motion in his fractured wrists.

some schooling gives young people, especially boys, a foothold in the outside world and knowledge of how to interact with others, as we will see in the elder boys' narratives. When prompted about his family's *sainda* (hill slope for shifting cultivation), he said he would return to do that later, a projected timeline that would repeat his parents' paths. Both Vikkai and Vijaya worked for a stint of six months in a garment factory in Hyderabad before returning to Illūru to start a family. Cinnabhai expresses with clarity a narrative arc of his own future that mirrors precisely that of his parents, who had even less formal education. He envisages a continuity in his family's agricultural livelihood punctuated by formative periods of income-generating wage labour.

For Buchanna, Cinnabhai's classificatory brother, the eight-year old son of Kothanna and Bulamma, the transition has been more difficult. Throughout the holidays he was chastised by his father for failing to help with village tasks: preparing for the festival, collecting firewood and importantly tapping *kallu*. He is less skilled in butchery and less familiar with the workload of the village and forest than his elder brother Dari, whose proficiency in these skills was facilitated after he dropped out of school very young. Buchanna does not enjoy hunting or drinking *kallu*. But neither is he particularly confident in speaking Telugu or in his school life. He professes that he is fearful of the teachers at school and seems similarly intimidated by his mother and father, neither of whom had ever been to school. A slower learner and less adaptable he may be, but he is not short of imagination. During the summer holiday in 2017, Buchanna, along with his younger sister Indira, constructed from twigs and leaves a large and intricate miniature model of a wedding ceremony, with catering facilities, a stage for the couple, a roof for shelter and vehicles to transport people to and from the celebration.

Figure 19: Buchanna's *pel lon* (marriage house)

Buchanna was shy when asked about his school, as if not accustomed to expressing himself. He took time to think about what he would do when he finishes school before replying that he would become the "PO" (Project Officer at the Integrated Tribal Development Agency Office). I was astounded by this ambition. He has limited support from his family in becoming educated, and seems unaware of how far he would have to study in order to reach that position. No one from the Koya community has ever achieved the rank within civil service required for the "PO" post (within IAS, Indian Administrative Service). It is much easier to imagine a Koya student from one of the larger towns like Bhadrāchalum reaching that level. I asked Buchanna who would do the *sainda* work on his family's land if he were to become "PO" and after a moment's pause his measured reply was that it would be his sisters.

We will recall Buchanna's three sisters from Chapter 3: Tejaswini, Indira, and Anu. Indira seems destined never to attend school. From a young age she has been responsible for the care of Vikkai and Vijaya's daughter Lila, her classificatory sister. From the age of four, Indira carried baby Lila, while both sets of parents worked their hill slopes or drank *kallu*. As Lila started walking around the village herself, falling over, crying, playing, and demanding her share of sweet *kallu*, Indira maintained a central role in her life, but now aged 6, Indira has new responsibilities to her recently arrived baby sister. Vikkai and Vijaya plan to send Lila to school as soon as she is old enough, and speak to her exclusively in Telugu language. Lila is

an extremely adventurous and curious child, unusually bright and more confident than other children her age when interacting with strangers.
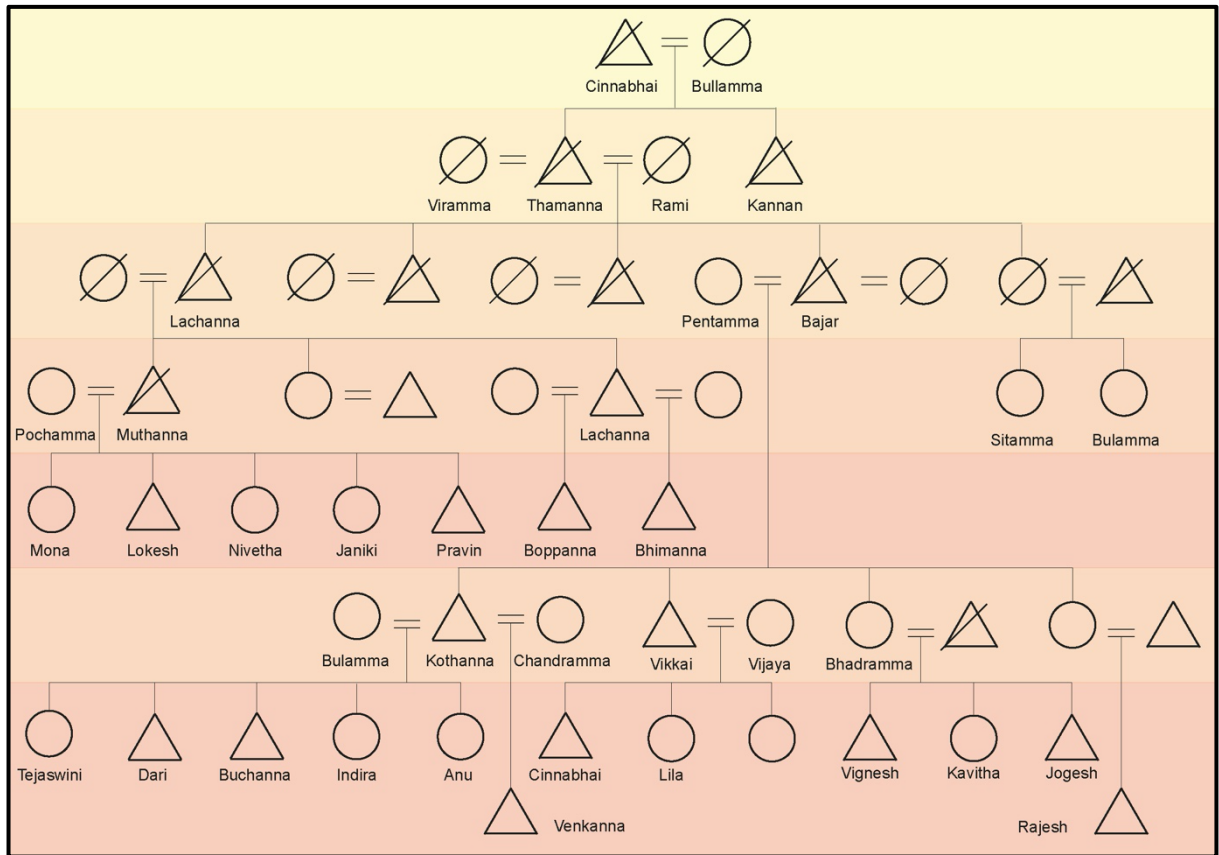
Figure 20: Kinship chart showing Illūrites – Rami's descendants (repeated)
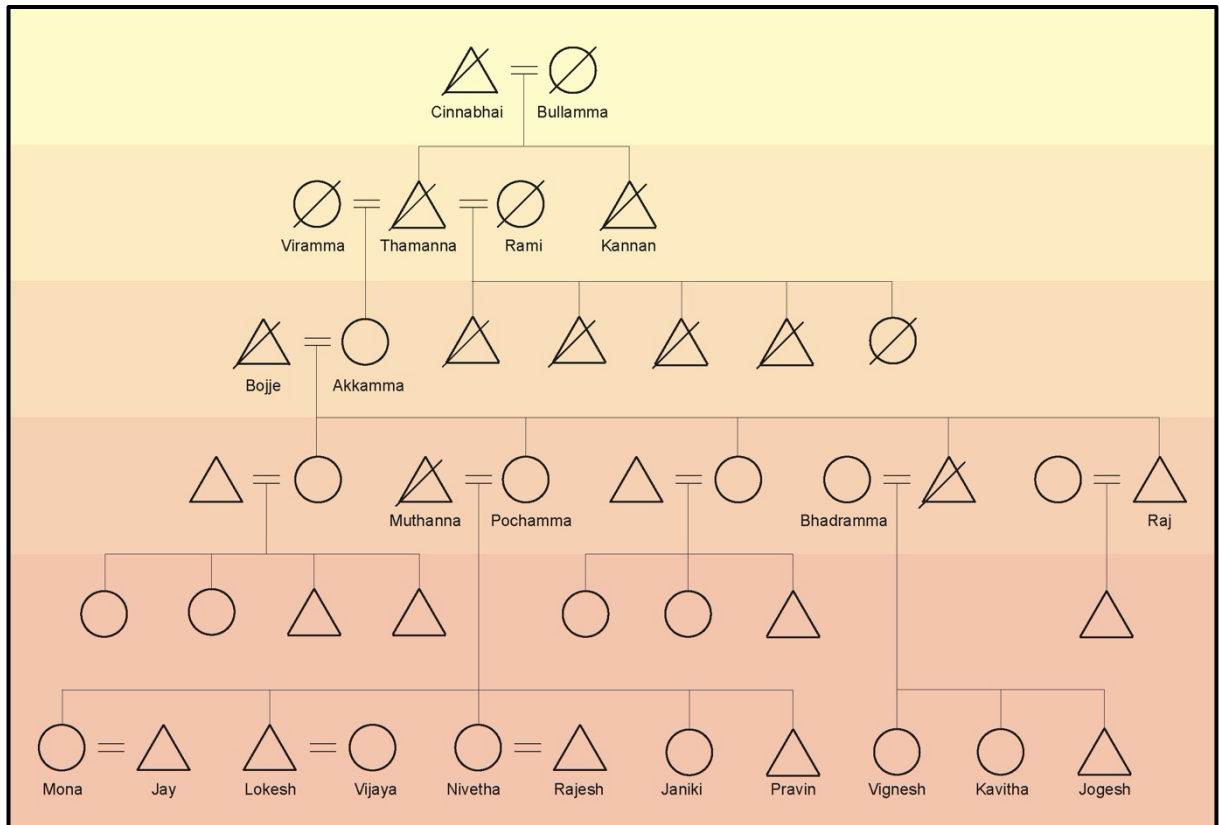
Figure 21: Kinship chart showing Illūrites – Viramma's descendants (repeated)

But what explains the stark contrast in the expectations that Indira and Lila's parents hold for their daughters' futures? Can this difference perhaps be traced to the differing attitudes the two brothers have towards their livelihoods, as we saw in Chapters 3 and 4? Vikkai and Vijaya feel disappointment when they do not have money to buy new clothes for Lila around the time of her birthday. Kothanna and his wife Bulamma on the other hand, like most Illūrites, did not keep records of their children's birthdays and Indira wears threadbare hand-me-downs from older siblings. Their eldest daughter, Tejaswini who has continued to study outside the village and so, they need their second daughter, Indira, to stay and help at home and on the *sainda*. Indira works tirelessly during the agricultural season, carrying water and firewood, planting, weeding and harvesting maize, lentils and gourds with her mother.

As the middle sister, Indira's prospects are impacted by the trajectory of her family's eldest daughter Tejaswini, who is unsure of her next step when she finishes school. Tejaswini's Telugu teacher enthuses her to continue education and go for Intermediate (equivalent to "A"-levels in the UK), but Kothanna believes 10th standard is "enough" education (*sumerāti*), and her mother Bulamma agrees, in tones strongly reminiscent of the "correct" amount of education in Froerer's (2012: 349, 2015: 374) examples. "After 10th Tejaswini will help with the housework and search for a groom", Bulamma told me, quite proudly, with a smile. It

appeared to me the search had already begun. Yet crucially for Illūru women, finding a partner does not imply the daunting constraints that are often associated with post-marital life in rural India (Shah 2019: 230–31; cf. Kapadia 2019; Still 2014; Trawick 1992). As highlighted by older women's narratives, such as Vijaya and Pochamma in Chapter 3, married women possess significant decision-making power.

Visions of life beyond school

"Enda kālam selava (summer holidays)"!

This section shows how the outcomes for those who strive for further education reinforce the idea that such endeavours can lead either to unexpected and often undesirable events, but can also be a primary mode for achieving social mobility and higher status. Through the summer months, marriages and Teleguised maturity functions were celebrated across the Gōdāvari villages. Funerals that had been delayed due to lack of funds were eventually conducted. Cashew orchards were weeded, and cashew trees shaken down, and while new swathes of *sainda* were cut, plenty of *kallu* was enjoyed, shared and sold. The village-educated boys have been climbing trees and helping the village ritual specialists celebrate the start of the *īṭapaṇḍu* (tamarind) season in April, and then the *markai* (mango) season in May, which both involved sacrifices of a chicken from each household and large communal meals. Dari has been helping Kothanna hunt as forests have dried up and powerful streams became passable. Pravin has been climbing trees to cut *kallu* each morning, dropping his plastic cans for sale after hanging the other can on the bamboo fence for his mother to distribute and drink. So too Vignesh has cared for his trees and dropped off his cans, and hung others up for his family members to enjoy.

Meanwhile, Tejaswini and Bajamma completed their 10th standard exams and joined Lokesh and Janiki in the small group of Illūrites to reach that esteemed level of education. Waiting for her certificate to be processed, Tejaswini told me excitedly she would get a reserved seat to study in a college in Rājāhmundry. Though many seats are reserved for "ST" candidates, each one has to be obtained through lengthy processes of form-filling and streams of connected certificates that document your previous hostel, school, and cleared mess (canteen) dues. Documents need uploading at computer centres in town and these obstacles can be significant for Illūrites. Tejaswini sounded confident that she would overcome them.

The only Illūrite to have attempted Intermediate level studies is Lokesh who joined the government college in Mārēḍumilli in 2011. After being dropped off at the hostel by his mother's brother Raj (*māmaya*), with whom he had a close relationship since his early

childhood, Lokesh recalls being unimpressed by lacklustre teachers and distracted by his father's deteriorating health. He left and informed Raj. The narratives and strong opinions of this mother's brother, and others in his generation, provide an interesting contrast to the more aspirational young Illūrutes today, and show the generational relativity of what success looks like. Vikkai and Raj *māmaya* had briefly studied in Eddiwāḍa in the early 1980s before it was converted into a girl's school. They also studied in a temporary school among the tamarind groves with Naxalite units who lived sporadically in some of the nearby villages. They supplied Raj with books and cultivated his enthusiasm for learning. In turn, Raj sat daily under the mango tree and gave lessons to all the Illūru children in the early 1990s before it became possible for any Illūru parents to send children away to hostels. When Raj *māmaya* was told that Lokesh had dropped out he was very cross. He yelled, "Why was it not good there? Why have you come back? You can't stay here. If you won't continue studying you should go and work in Bhīmavaram" where Raj *māmaya* had a friend who worked in the prawn factory. The next day Lokesh was sent to Rājahmundry by bus and then by train to Bhīmavaram.

Arriving at the company Lokesh was given clothes, shoes and a cap to wear under thermal overalls in -30ºC, packing prawns into ice vats to be shipped to Australia. They slept and had food in their company hostel. He remained there on and off from summer 2011 to 2015, returning periodically when he took leave. One of the advantages of the "*kompany pani*" arrangement was that informal packers could take leave at short notice and walk back into the job on their return. This flexibility has made the Bhīmavaram prawn factory a popular choice for seasonal labour for a generation of Koya men from the Rampachodavaram area. The monthly salary is ₹6,500 rising to ₹8,000 after training, and food and accommodation is included.[78] In Bhīmavaram, Lokesh began a secret romance with a Padmashali girl called Lalitha, the daughter of a builder's assistant, who worked in the factory as a cleaner.[79] Eventually, after four years he took her all the way home to Illūru. He had previously maintained that he was from Rampachodavaram town, and his lover was shocked by the long journey uphill and eventual arrival into Lokesh's village through thick bamboo forest.

Dangerous transitions

Education can open up the possibility of bringing young Illūru people into contact with others of much higher status. But as we shall see in the next example, this is not always advantageous

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[78] This is a similar wage to most informal service sector jobs across the state, such as working in restaurants, at which salaries for live-in workers range between ₹5,000 and ₹8,000 per month with accommodation and food provided. Long hours and no rest days are also part of these arrangements.
[79] Padmashalis are a caste group who traditionally worked as weavers. They are recognised as a "OBC" (Other Backward Caste) in Andhra Pradesh.

and carries another set of associated risks, which can be heightened or downplayed in parents' and students' visions of their life-course. As we will recall from Chapter 3, one of Illūru's more ambitious students, who almost progressed beyond 10th class is Lokesh's younger sister, Janiki. She had implored me on the *sainda* hill slope to persuade other family members that she should be sent to college and was, at that time, determined to study despite her father's recent demise, which could have ended her plans for further formal education. Janiki had been a very bright student and topped many of her classes through school. She told me she had even been to Kuwait on a school athletics trip, which indicated in itself a narrative of worldly adventure that she projected for herself. More locally, she was provisionally betrothed to a boy from Kapilgūḍem village, from a "matching" Koya clan, who was studying in Rājahmundry, with the aim of becoming a doctor. Janiki's labour at home was highly valued but so too was a vision of training as a nurse – lofty and progressive ambitions in a village from which no one had yet availed a salaried job. A sum had been paid for her to sit an entrance exam for the Intermediate program. She has told me she hopes to live in Rājahmundry after getting married if they both find work there.

Janiki's ambitious outlook should perhaps be interpreted as an aspirational script for how her life could progress. When she narrated this trajectory to me, she may already have known her life might not involve moving permanently into urban formalised employment, but at that moment it was the narrative of her future she claimed for herself. That September, Janiki took an overdose of chloroquine tablets, an antimalarial kept in the village medical box.[80] Boys were called back from the forest to see to her lying unconscious, frothing at the mouth, limbs splayed, with a very weak pulse. Before collapsing, she revealed to her mother Pochamma that she had eaten 30 of the pills. She was carried through the forest to "base camp". Fortunately, Timmy, the local Forest Department official, was able to drive her to the government hospital in Rampachodavaram, by motorbike, where her stomach was pumped and she was put on a drip.

A week earlier she had spent the night with Timmy in the forest hut. Timmy is 30 years old and already married to a woman in a larger village of Eddiwāḍa. Kurusam Suresh, who is one of the headmen of the village had seen Janiki on Timmy's motorbike and informed Janiki's mother who scolded her severely. When Janiki returned home from hospital four days later the atmosphere was tense. She didn't discuss the incident with her siblings and behaved in her usual cheerful manner while a meeting was scheduled to resolve the matter. Prior to the

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[80] Janiki's mother Pochamma is the *asha* worker (voluntary health assistant) who, as noted in Chapter 3 has received basic medical training and is authorised to prescribe and administer common tests and drugs to villagers. Janiki helps with this work and hence has access to those medicines.

meeting, most villagers envisaged Timmy would be obliged to take Janiki as a second wife, and thus the meeting was heralded as a formal marriage arrangement (*pelli chūppudu*, Telugu). Although people felt Timmy was not an ideal partner (*sai ille jong*) or match for her, they were aware of, and accepted the affair. Most relatives believed the Illūru *peddamansulu* (village headmen) would approve their marriage. The couple had made it clear, by sleeping together, that they wanted to be together. The village council was convened and would ask the couple, "do you really love this person (*nizamga nimma istam*)?" If they both did, the council would force them to wed.[81]

Janiki's mother's brother Raj came to the village to help with these negotiations and so did Janiki's older sister Mona, along with her husband Jay and their son. Pochamma's old house was suddenly full of family. Jay was inclined to be sympathetic to Janiki, and through a long night of discussion stood up for her right to choose her partner. After several days of postponement, the village gathered together at the *īṭamara* (tamarind tree) near the eldest man's house – the political centre of the village. Janiki wore a soft blue and white salwar – the type that young girls wear to school.

Kursam Suresh, Thellam Lachanna, Thellam Kotesh and Kurasam Buchanna Dora were the four headmen (*peddamansulu*) presiding over this. Thellam Vikkai (also a *peddamansud* "big man") acted in a mediatory role. Vikkai had been to Eddiwāḍa and had spoken to Timmy's parents whose response had been quite clear: "if he comes back with a second wife from your village we will hang them both". In light of this news the Illūru village council ruled that the marriage could not go ahead as Timmy was not in a position to take Janiki as his second wife. To protect her from his parents they ruled that the pair must stop seeing each other and had both done wrong (*tappu tungwondor*). They were both fined ₹10,000 (over £100) and each had to give a feast to the village including alcohol for all. Timmy's parents' response, who are Koya "caste" (*jāti*) but do not speak Koya language, suggests more vehement opposition to the principle of double marriage, probably due to closer proximity to the conventions of Telugu morality. Illūrites are much less incorporated into the moral as well as the economic spheres of those in larger villages and towns.

The compensatory meal was given by Janiki's family that evening. A goat from the family's small herd was butchered. Many kilograms of subsidised rice (collected only the day before) were exhausted; spices were borrowed from the Badina family at the end of the village; leaves

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[81] These reflect the normative ideas of acceptable and unacceptable marriages among Koyas discussed in Brukman (1974).

were collected from the forest and leaf plates were hurriedly stitched. Vikkai, the intermediary at the meeting, was the first chef to work at the large fire. Kurusam Suresh took over and co-ordinated much of the cooking. Everyone drank *siggur* (home-distilled spirit) at Janiki's family's expense.

At the time of paying the fine the next morning, Janiki was dressed in a very clean yellow salwar, and went off to administer medicine to a sick person in the village. Most of her family had not washed and were in the same clothes as yesterday morning as they had been preparing a compensatory feast (which she did not help with). The payment was witnessed by all the headmen, and a literate member of Janiki's family, Raj *māmaya*, wrote up a statement attesting the payment of the fine (later spent on three large aluminium pots for cooking meals during village festivals). The headmen and other witnesses signed this with their fingerprints. Janiki did not acknowledge these events and seemed distant, perhaps feeling guilty for the burden her family had to bear but still adamant she had done nothing wrong.

There was considerably more debate about Timmy's compensatory meal, since he requested four days' grace to prepare his meal and fine, as he was waiting to be paid. Janiki's family objected to this: "What if we give this fine and he does not?" Raj *māmaya* said. Lokesh and Raj pleaded with Kurusam Suresh to enforce his authority as a headman, and to make Timmy pay promptly. The idea of a salaried person needing this leeway was preposterous to Janaki's family, in which no members have ever had a permanent salary. In the end they had to accept that they would pay their fine before any reconciliatory act from Timmy, which was perceived as a risk. Raj asked with anguish, "what if he continues to harass her, and doesn't pay his fine?" Timmy did eventually provide a feast with six chickens and an appropriate supply of alcohol: brandy for older Thellam men, Bacardi Breezer for Kurusam Suresh and Lokesh, and *nātu sāra* for the rest of the village. The provision of suitably classed beverages revealed the relative status of their consumers (see Chapter 5) and was appreciated by Janiki's relatives, partially clearing the ill-feeling that had set in.

Janiki is caught between conflicting sets of expectations of her future, and apparently contradictory models of what marriage can be. This is exemplified by the way that the prior expectations of her village's elder headmen was undermined by the strictness of her lover's parents. Furthermore, her *babai* (father's brother) Kothanna has two wives, both of whom were previously married. Pre-marital relations and extramarital relations are accepted in her village, but not, it appears, for her. Village headmen will approve a second marriage if the families also condone it, and as long as the pair belong to matching clan and surname groupings (see Chapter 1). Simultaneously she is part of a modern, aspirational Koya kinship

system where a Badina boy from Kapilgūḍem of a matching clan, from a similarly ambitious family, has been provisionally paired with her. This match closely resembles the format of Telugu arranged marriages but preserves Koya clan pairings. In practice in Illūru village it seems that Thellams only marry Badinas although there are other *lotpeder* groups (in other villages) into which they could marry. That earlier match would propel Janiki into a better quality of life in a more developed village, and possibly a future city life in Rājahmundry, if they were successful in their training and job applications. She has also been exposed to regional, national and global ideas of romantic love through films and music at school and in the hostel. She and Timmy both confess to loving each other passionately, and expressed this in the village meeting. Their conception of their relationship as romance inspired by mutual "love" is in itself representative of class identities they inhabit – both aspiring to a life beyond the village kinship network. As has been identified by Ahearn's (2004) work in Nepal, literacy itself opens up new possibilities for experience and communication of ideas of romantic love. Salient here too, is Srivastava's (2007) emphasis, that the modern experience of love is something that is consumed within a specific cultural, historical moment and should be thought of as predicated on class identity or, at least, in this case, aspiration. But, contra Srivastava, the importance of romantic love among Koya villagers is "fervently attested to" by women and men in Brukman's much earlier account (1974: 313). Nevertheless, Janiki's specific enactment of her romance disrupts expected trajectories of love and marriage, in a way that suggests an intergenerational schism.

Pochamma brought up her daughter to marry into a better quality of life and was upset by the fact that Janiki was willing to be a second wife, a path that represents a different type and status of family from the one her mother intended for her. But what upset Pochamma further, I suspect, is not the fact of the relationship, but the fact that it became a matter of village politics. It is taken for granted that Janiki may have relationships with other men before she gets married, as Tejaswini and others have done. Where Janiki erred, in particular, was in starting a relationship with a married man, which became visible to senior men in Illūru. Their encounters were clandestine at first, but were deemed to be brazen by the time she was spotted riding on his bike. Clearly, Janiki is negotiating between several different registers of expectations of how a young woman should behave and what romantic liaisons are acceptable.

Importantly, and in contrast to typical narratives of young women's romantic lives in South Asia, the focus of conflict was never her virginity and the rubric of shame was not invoked, though perhaps such associations are made outside the village. As Brukman describes (1974: 310), based on fieldwork in the 1970's, and echoing accounts from the Bison Horn Maria (Elwin 1960), there is a precedent of woman – known as a *paitu* – independently choosing to

co-habit with a man and thus becoming bound to marry him. Similar precedents were reference points for villagers' understanding of this affair. Many Koya couples do live together before marriage. In villages surrounding Chintūr, it is especially common for girls to be sent from their village to live with another family, to cook and clean the house, and behave ostensibly as an in-married daughter-in-law, several years before the marriage actually happens. In these situations, it is several years before finance is accrued to have the desired type of marriage ceremony, which can be financed by both parties. The rupture in this example was not caused by the infidelity in Timmy's case, nor the pre-marital sexual relationship in Janiki's. Rather it was a predicament that revealed a schism between competing narratives of proper behaviour. The original marriage planned for Janiki was one through which upward mobility would be solidified. Her potential marriage to Timmy was couched as a resolution to their improper behaviour, but would have been legitimate by Illūru standards. Yet the events that transpired through the interaction with the more Teleguised values of Timmy's parents and the redistributive aspect to the punishment that was then doled out, seemingly reinscribes the sentiment that Illūru is an outlier. The village is reconstructed as less morally correct, and is externalised from the codes that govern behaviour elsewhere. After this episode, both Pochamma and Lokesh dissuaded Janiki from further study as her labour and time were needed through the rainy agricultural season.

This episode can be compared to another affair that involved the transgression of expected paths of transition into adulthood. Here we return to Tejaswini, Janiki's classificatory sister, whose narrative we explored earlier. At the time of Lokesh's much anticipated marriage to Lalitha – the first marriage of an Illūru person to a non-Koya – Tejaswini had been applying to colleges in Rājahmundry, a task that involves determination and mobility. During the marriage preparations it emerged that Tejaswini had been having an affair with Rajesh, the husband of her classificatory sister, Nivetha. When questioned they admitted to having a six-month romance. As Janiki had done, Nivetha confided in Raj, asking him how to get a divorce. The two young women remained on speaking terms and Tejaswini continues to sleep, eat and drink in Nivetha's family home. Nivetha exclaimed the intention to deny Rajesh access to their three-year-old son, but seemed unlikely to ever assert this. Meanwhile Rajesh continued to help out in his in-laws house despite the unravelling of this secret.

Unlike in Janiki's case, this affair was not dealt with through any formal dispute resolution process. After this disclosure, Tejaswini's mother Bulamma was adamant that she should study no further, insisting that Tejaswini would soon be with new in-laws, the family of a suitable partner from Hablūru. Sending Tejaswini off to new *poyi-mamal* (in-laws) immediately so as to prevent her from contacting Rajesh was one convenient way of preventing animosity

between the two neighbouring houses, but the terms through which the affair was dealt with never took on the damaging tone of a scandal. Nivetha, overwhelmed by the news and busy with the marriage, seemed not to have time to process or react. Nivetha's mother Pochamma told me after the wedding that even though Tejaswini was still sleeping, eating, drinking and helping at their house, "I will put a case on Rajesh. But we cannot have a *godava* (fight) now [at the time of a wedding]". To put (*vattan*) a case is something Pochamma has no habit of doing and it would not be easy for her to access legal resources. Suffice to say this threat never materialised and the two families continued to co-habit each other's homes, share labour and whatever explicit animosity there was quickly faded.[82] The different affairs were treated in starkly contrasting ways, in part, because in Nivetha's case the adulterer was already part of the family. Notably, since the two women are so closely related, there seemed no recourse to a higher authority. Moreover, this affair did not involve higher status people from outside Illūru, and was subject to much less scrutiny.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Eighteen months later I spoke with Janiki again. She had since left Illūru and had another relationship. We had both been called to provide support during a crisis in health of another family member. Janiki was reluctant to return to earlier events, a wish I respected. She was, however, eager to revisit the broader questions of the challenges faced by Illūrite students in schools. She reflected that although her own studies had been discontinued, it was easier for girls than for boys to reach 10th, and possibly to surpass that stage.

Four of the first six to pass 10th class from Illūru are girls. Boys, Janiki asserted, "can't [manage to] stay in hostels" (*pēkor agga mannor*). Girls can keep "perfect" in terms of their dress, their food and are less frequently beaten by the teachers. Masters are more sympathetic to the girls, Janiki claimed. If a girl had not done her homework, she would make an excuse and be given five minutes to complete the work, whereas boys would endure corporal punishment. In Jirnaguḍem, Janiki explained, "they have food, water, a nurse on site, and if you are seriously ill they take you to hospital". In a "good" school the teachers' attendance is monitored, too. "To succeed in school you need to make friends", Janiki went on. "Teachers don't help, it's mostly friends". She, Tejaswini and Bajamma all made good school friends. Pravin Vignesh and Dari did not, and that, according to Janiki, is the key reason they ran back.

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[82] From the perspective of one relative of the Illūru Thellam families, who is trained as a lawyer, Gaurav Palla, such cases are very common but rarely reach court. Since many marriages are never legally formalised, there are rarely grounds for compensation. Even when marriages are registered, compensation is unlikely unless circumstances fall inside purview of marital domestic violence legislation.

She also explained that earlier hostel canteens gave very small portions of rice. "Nowadays they give better food in the hostels, but that is why Dari and Pravin dropped out". She explains concisely, "*Karve sondir, mirri vattor* (they felt hungry and ran back)". "It would be good if they did study", Janiki pondered, "so they could know which bus to get, or help another person get the right bus". These odd examples are clearly relevant to living a life outside the hills, in towns and cities with transport connections, and other types of people. State education, for Janiki, is not simply to improve chances of getting a job, but to be better able to handle life in foreign cities as a migrant labourer in private company work, in Bhīmavaram, Vijayawāḍa, Guṇṭūr, Hyderabad or Chennai.

When I asked Badina Vignesh why he discontinued, he replied: *"Sadivitku dumma – Lon atkin enjoy!"* (If you study you bunk – being at home you enjoy).[83] Vignesh was sent to a convent hostel in Rājahmundry for his 2nd and 3rd class. After his father died, he shifted schools a second time to a Tribal Welfare primary school in Machilūru, where he completed class 5th before joining a junior school in Rampachodavaram for his 6th and 7th class. Never settled in any of these schools, Vignesh came back to Illūru where he works on his family's *sainda*, weeds his family's cashew orchard and occasionally goes hunting. After the rainy season in 2016 he went to Rampachodavaram, aged 17, to work as a plastering assistant (*tāpi pani*) for two months, but was never paid, though he earned some cash from informal security work. He stayed in a rented house with his father's brother Raj (*māmaya* to Lokesh and Janiki) who arranged the work. In town he enjoyed seeing movies at the cinema and made friends with two unrelated young Koya men. After the two months in Rampachodavaram he went to Mārēḍumilli, where he worked for another contractor loading trucks, who paid him ₹3,000 for a month's work. He has no bank account and was unable to save any of the payments he received but was able to buy new clothes and sunglasses and gave ₹2,000 to his mother.

From Mārēḍumilli he went to Hablūru where another relative arranged for him to work at a tourist resort owned by a non-tribal man. When asked how it was to work for this non-tribal businessman, Vignesh replied, "I worked for myself". He was paid ₹1,200 and returned to his village on foot. The next time he went to Hablūru he didn't take any work and only went for fun (*sardariga*). Vignesh informed me that he won't go again for temporary jobs and is investing more time in *jeeriga* trees. Cutting *kallu* is a commitment to being around and tending to the trees every day to ensure plentiful *kallu*. This matches the daily and seasonal

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[83] The literal meaning of *dumma* is "fatty" but it is slang in Telugu for bunking class. No one has ever returned from hostel to Illūru overweight.

rhythms of the *sainda* season but not those of labour outside the village. Vignesh seems to be at a juncture between these livelihoods, where the wages available in the short term never justify taking the risks that might result in more stable work. Yet, he is not quite willing to forego all opportunities and adventures outside the village in order to focus on those works close to home.

Narratives of transition to adulthood

These narratives of young people's transition towards adulthood reveal crucial insights into the production of perceived cultural difference between Illūru's young people and others. Simultaneously, we learn about the relationship between parent's and children's aspirations, the impact of more years of schooling and of completing 10th standard. The emotive nature of many of these experiences exceeds a reductive analysis of the outcomes of out-migration from the village. But I suggest the amorous relations in which Illūru's young people immerse themselves, Janiki in particular, are evidence of the high stakes that are in play in family decisions to encourage their younger members to embark on such transitions and become more educated.

In Illūru it is accepted that many young people will desire to establish lives for themselves outside the village and to some degree transcend the village social norms. But many parents, in encouraging local choice of spouse and discouraging education beyond the 10th standard, are seeking to protect their children from unknown risks and uncertain futures. It is in this context that parents accept their children's rejection of education and return to the village, even as education is valued both by literate and illiterate villagers. "Running back" is not considered a significant disappointment. Only Raj *māmaya* was ever angry with anyone for dropping out. The standard of education received up till 10th standard does not necessarily transform young people's possibilities, but does generate a confidence in staying outside in inter-caste and inter-ethnic towns. Even after completing 10th, the only realistic employment options are local casual labour *coolie pani* and distant *kompany pani*. Even those who have studied until 10th are not significantly better equipped to earn more than peers who dropped out earlier. Education may be construed as part of a wider spectrum of affirmative action, that broadens access, and enables attainment of basic qualifications. But this wider access does not extend to support progression through Intermediate to degree level. Nor does it guarantee a job in formalised, salaried settings, in *naukari* (secure employment, Hi.) as opposed to *kam* (insecure wage labour, Hi.) to use Parry's terms (2013). Local administrative posts such as Village Revenue Officers and Mandal Office Assistants remain far out of reach even to those who succeed by relative local standards. Crucially, there is less support for students from 10th class onwards.

After this point, Intermediate colleges – though they offer reserved seats for STs such as Illūru Koyas – do not give the same support as state secondary schools, which provide books and study materials to their students. Other candidates (from other ST groups as well as other communities) are better connected than those from Illūru, and better prepared to meet these challenges. The internalisation of this situation leaves Illūrites without strong ambitions to enter salaried employment, even when they have achieved well, as Tejaswini and Janiki did, similarly to what Froerer describes as the problem of "translating" one form of capital to another (Froerer 2015: 371).

These challenges are also impinged upon by another set of issues. As those young people gain experience of interacting with others outside the village, and develop relationships, their independence can also lead them towards different decisions and aspirations. There are broad differences in the prospects of those who discontinue at a young age (who drop out after 6th or 7th class) and those who completed 10th. The young people who stayed longer in school become more accustomed to being outside the village, gain more experience of forming relationships with other communities, and build habits of delegating village work to others. Lokesh is more confident than other young Illūrites when interacting with non-Koya, higher caste people, and this is bound up with his longer-term engagement with school. As we saw in Chapter 5, Lokesh refuses to drink *kallu* and very occasionally enjoys an expensive beer or Bacardi Breezer with friends. This consumption choice would rest oddly on a man who had never left the village. But, as we will see in Chapter 8, even he can become cowed in the presence of wealthier people in Rampachodavaram. Vignesh can hold his own outside Illūru in a different way. Though less confident in Telugu than Lokesh he has also cultivated a distinctive independence and sense of self. When he wasn't paid for work he had done in Mārēḍumilli, he was powerless to protest, though equally he made an astute assessment of the situation and opted out of a futile pursuit of his wages. Others might have consulted a third party in the hope that external pressure might yield at least partial payment for the work done. Vignesh has passed through seven years of schooling, and is timid and self-conscious in certain settings, but boisterous and hyper-productive in Illūru, a contrast we return to in proceeding chapters.

The notion of "de-skilling", of losing the capacity to cultivate one's own land, seems pertinent here. The embodied expertise necessary for enduring success in *sainda* cultivation, hunting, and tapping *kallu*, can only be learned through years of honing one's craft, through extended informal apprenticeship. Vignesh and Lokesh are active and busy farmers while shaking cashew trees, herding cattle or climbing to collect *kallu*. This characterisation may capture nothing more than their youthful energy, but their partial socialisation into hostels, and time

spent "down" in the towns, has, I suggest, changed their attitude to their crops. They are less casual, move faster and enjoy listening to music on a mobile phone charged up outside the village as they work. Despite their industriousness, the notion of "de-skilling" remains relevant. In a longer timeframe they have not developed the finer grained dexterity for hunting and stamina that Dari has, for instance, even at a younger age. Across the village as a whole, fewer young people are as knowledgeable about the forest as Kothanna, Vikkai and Lokesh's late father. The material from Illūru urges that the "risks" Froerer identifies (2012, 2015) should be conceptualised along a generational continuum, and are crucial in the shorter timeframe at particular junctures for particular young people. Beyond 10th standard, almost no one has tried to "risk" the financial and emotional investments in further study.

Direct comparisons may be problematic, given that Froerer's research refers to a much larger, mixed village (around 900), yet concepts and trajectories are certainly shared. In Mohanpur, Chhattisgarh, villagers work in a wider range of employment, and access training and opportunities that are not comparable to those available to Illūrites. Yet there is a parallel challenge to establish the "connections and economic capital that will allow [young people] to successfully navigate the world outside of the village". In this context Badina Raj is one of very few mediators of the type of connections that can enable the translation of the cultural capital of schooling into economic capital of secure work (cf. Froerer 2012: 701–3). The "perception" of risk is present in Illūru, as in Froerer's emphasis, but in Illūru there is perhaps slightly less to lose in terms of de-skilling as Illūrite young people – even when educated – never seem to become as fully embedded or firmly incorporated into institutions outside the village as Jerome or Raj in the Chhattisgarhi setting, for instance (2012: 371). Nevertheless, schooling in both sites is a form of preparation for a life outside the village. In Illūru it is expected to be a more temporary experience than it is for Froerer's interlocutors. The myth of return is in Illūru usually more palpable than illusory. For Illūrites the dilemma of whether to study further is one aspect of an ambivalent attitude to education and to all opportunities of life far away. This more circumstantial and temporally bound decision-making process may be connected to the smaller scale of family units of labour and the greater fluidity associated with shifting cultivation than with rice cultivation in Chhattisgarh.

The divergence in fortunes between Vignesh who dropped out at 7th class and Lokesh, who finished 10th, can be represented in terms of how far and how successfully they have travelled for labour. While both have left the village for stints of labour, Lokesh went to Bhīmavaram and secured regular, stable work and saved. Vignesh went monthly from job to job in the local towns. This may also be understood in terms of Lokesh's greater family support encouraging

him to leave. He persisted in school and studied further, built up more interactional skill in Telugu language, and developed the capacities and habits of living far from his home.

To what extent then, does education produce a split between children who go and who stay? Even when young people migrate for stints of work, most young people return to settle down in the village or marry into a similar situation. Yet some may have very different futures. Dari and Pravin both rejected school at an early age and are indispensable to the labour of their households, to producing *kallu* and food for their family, and their family's guests. They are both highly skilled in hunting and know the agricultural season precisely: when to start watching the corn crop at night and when a young *jeeriga* tree will be ready to produce *kallu*. Whichever direction they have taken, boys like Pravin, Dari, Vignesh and Lokesh rarely behave as if they have made an active individual decision by either running back and staying in their village, or by fervently sticking to their task and making sure they *did* get educated. The exception is Lokesh, who, with his "Manohar Spoken English" tuition book and his romantic commitment elsewhere, explicitly conceptualises his own transition to adulthood as an attempt to transcend his community. He asserts that he is a big city person (*pedda nagaram mansud*) who would live elsewhere but for his mother and younger siblings here.

Through the processes described above, class differentiation seems to arise within families, even between siblings, for example between Lokesh and his younger brother Pravin. Lokesh asserts that more educated young people should be more calculative and organised in their approach to their cultivation: they should be shrewder in timing their arrival with cashew crop when the price is high, not waiting for the price to descend as the season wanes; they should plant seeds in the *sainda* as soon as the first heavy rains come. This sense of maximising resources and being diligent to one's agricultural work is certainly more prescient among those with some years of education. The antecedents of different attitudes in this regard are observable across the three generations.[84]

But these dispositions can be quickly undercut or superseded by unexpected events or changes in family circumstances. Some forms of inequality operate on a short-term cycle, others on a longer-term one. But, on the scale of analysis of the wider Koya region, the inequality observed within this village is miniscule in proportion to larger inequalities. Within Illūru we can observe discernible class identities, and vocabularies of self-imagining expressed in these narratives, related to schooling, marriage and labour. Being educated (*sadavarlu*) is shorthand for greater awareness of how to interact with a wider network of people including urban, non-

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[84] This may be traced back to divergent family histories in Chapter 1 and 3.

tribal populations, and state agencies. This is evident in the behaviours and judgments of Lokesh, Kurusam Suresh and Gaurav Palla.

Reflecting a dominant development discourse, Illūru people are often judged by others from Rampachodavaram or other villages as being uneducated. In daily village life this rarely surfaces but in relation to people from other villages, development operates as a form of cultural capital as that underpins local understandings of class differentiation. With greater access to this educational capital comes a correctness, access to more powerful people (local lawyers and teachers), and enhanced ability to register one's family members for pensions, caste certificates, MGNREGA work, and "ration" cards. As Illūru people learn to succeed in the world outside the village, they are confronted with more stigmatising ideas about the type of village they have grown up in. Some are determined to overcome this, but others seem to seasonally lose motivation to be part of this wider world in which they may be devalued.

Another insight revealed by the ethnographic material is that children who have strained relationships with their parents may have less motivation to run home than others. For example, Tejaswini has a fractious relationship with her father and dislikes being at home for long periods. Incorporating Janiki's views on the quality of care in schools, Tejaswini probably has lowered her expectations of her home life, where, as we observed in Chapter 3, food shortages are common, and neighbours are implicitly expected to provide rice, salt or chilli. This lower expectation of care, attention and nutrition gives Tejaswini more reason to stay in school and less incentive to run home.

Many children are not actively encouraged to become educated but are rather sent to school by parents who struggle to provide for them. Others *do* get encouragement for their studies such as Janiki, Lokesh and Cinnabhai. There is a strong precedent for them to run back so staying on must require serious personal engagement with their class work and some friends. Very few of the parents in Illūru had attended school themselves, so adult role-models are few. Pochamma went to day school in Manchampalli and a few more were educated by Naxalites who stayed in nearby villages in the 1980s. These parents do aspire for their children to do well at school and are definitely glad when they return after 10th, but the overwhelming majority of parents were quite ambivalent about their children's relative success or failure in education. This was revealed in moments when parents expressed little displeasure at a child "running back".

Just as the possibility of moving into successful employment and a settled middle-class life is one distant script that can be imagined, or projected into the lives of a young adivasis, so too

the suicide attempt is a kind of cultural script with its own history in South Asia, as elsewhere. Farmers commit suicide when their crop fail and they cannot repay loans for seeds and agricultural equipment; students at universities commit suicide when faced with the insurmountable challenge of institutionalised caste-based discrimination that leaves them unprotected from academic failure and turns government universities into spaces of defeat; and young lovers whose lives together are curtailed by socially conservative restrictions and family disapproval, commit suicide to emancipate themselves from the suffering of being apart. In Janiki's case this cultural narrative was ironically inverted for a few days while it seemed possible, after her attempted suicide, that the village council would urge them to wed since Illūru morality permits women to be second wives to married men.

Another perspective on education will be uncovered in Chapter 8. There we explore attitudes and experiences of more educated Koyas, including graduates and school teachers, who spoke about being overlooked for seats, treated poorly by peers and professors, and experienced caste/tribe discrimination. These experiences reveal another layer of reasons why education is perceived as a fruitless endeavour and why parents remain ambivalent when their children "run home". Among the experiences of young people from Illūru, none of them mentioned experiencing caste discrimination though it was on the fringes of many of their narratives. One teacher at the Eddiwāḍa hostel school explained that the higher ST children go in their education, the more common such practices are. Such discrimination in education is another factor that may later pull them back into the world of the village, should they get far enough away to be identified as distinctively Koya, or adivasi, among a larger group of students. This seems to echo Janiki's assessment of Lokesh's return: though he never admitted it in his interviews with me, his younger sister claimed that "ragging" (an Indian-English term for the bullying of junior peers in school and college) was the real reason for his return after only one day and one night in the hostel at Mārēḍumilli.

Within many of the families in Illūru there is an unspoken balance of members being inside and outside the village. Every family with children has sent some of them out to school and no family has insisted all of their children remain in school. Like most ethnographic work, this is merely a snapshot – however long the exposure. Priorities in each family shift in response to various crises and events within and beyond the village. A stronger comparison will be the one that is formed across several years of passing time and through continued conversation with those both in and out of formal education. Nevertheless, this portrayal of young lives in the context of family and educational modalities gives us insight into the complex character of transition with which this thesis is concerned.

Chapter 7 – Relational recognition:
articulations of caste, class and tribe difference

Preceding chapters have drawn on ethnography from a range of constituents within the Koya community. In Chapter 3, 4 and 5, Illūru villagers who practise shifting cultivation in small family units were central protagonists. As we moved through the chapters, we focused more on those who have sought to assimilate into the wider mainstream of Telugu culture, especially in Chapter 6. Some of them were socialised into the cycle of *sainda* cultivation as children but have come to see that world as inferior to the world of salaried employment and consumer culture in which they aspire to participate, accessing this through education in government schools and seasonal migration for short-term labour.

As young Koya people make this transition between different spheres of interaction, there are subtle changes in their relationships. Expectations of who they are responsible to provide for, and who they are dependent on as they produce, use, claim, and redistribute various resources, shift dramatically. In Chapter 6 we saw how young Koyas construct narratives to enable themselves to navigate the transition from one set of cultural reference points to another as they integrate into the wider cultural space in Telugu speaking towns, transcending their village networks of daily labour, kinship and hospitality. This comes with the risk of losing networks of care and responsibility that support them. Both the cultural world of the village and family, and the externality and anonymity of the wider world, *idapa* (down) in the market towns, are reified in this process – as are the identities and characteristics of those who inhabit those spaces. Despite considerable uncertainty in individual outcomes we observed a heightening of processes of recognition: people see themselves as more distinctly different from others as they interact with a wider network of non-related persons. The concept of a continuum between traditional and modern society is reified through the experience of that transition.

Through processes of integration – whether trade, education, affirmative action or migrant labour – cultural differences become increasingly sharply defined and reiterated as if they were innate. In the present and in subsequent chapters I propose that "more educated" Koyas have begun a process of seeing their own "cultural identity" as meaningful, in a way that Illūru Koyas do not. Some Koyas are explicitly conscious about this objectification of their culture, as referenced by their use of the phrase "*Koya Samskriti Sampradayam*" as a gloss to explain

things to me, and to others. Other explanatory phrases include, "*agency samskriti*" (Agency area culture) and "*manank samskriti*" (our culture).

Many of these "more educated" interlocutors are settled in towns such as Chintūr, Bhadrāchalum and Rampachodavaram where they work as teachers, lawyers and in small businesses. They have in some cases completed post-graduate education and tend to be less fluent in Koya language. They are often spokespeople for their community and act as mediators between village and town. Some of these mediators are so assimilated that they are no longer able to integrate back into the networks of their kin practicing shifting cultivation in the villages, a situation illustrated in one of the examples below. A select few have navigated the transition into life in the town while remaining fluent in the vernaculars of both village life such as Raj Badina who facilitated the employment of his sisters' sons in towns but also participates in dispute resolution in Illūru and Permam Bossa (Chapter 6). In the present chapter we look more closely at revealing moments of interaction between different constituents of the Koya community.

Moments of interaction reveal how the Scheduled Tribe category and the stereotypes it insinuates circulate within the Koya community. This ST classification, which emerged through colonial ethnography and governance (see Introduction and Chapter 2), became constitutionally mandated and remains an administrative category that applies to over 105 million people in India today (Radhakrishna 2016). The ethnography below shows how such classifications can reproduce the categories they refer to and how, as the ST label becomes a vehicle for community politics and affirmative action measures, it can compound existing inequalities and reiterate historical failures of recognition at a micro-level.

Through exploring, at a granular level, the interactions between different Koya interlocutors from different constituencies of class, education and integration with the region, I show how people position themselves and each other in relation to essentialised notions of authenticity, assimilation, status and power. I argue that these processes of recognition are central to understanding social relations within contemporary adivasi societies and crucial in grasping the heightening of hierarchies of class, caste and tribe in South India more broadly.

The ethnography in this chapter builds on scholarship on how the state categories of recognition shape identities in India, where residues of colonial descriptors of caste and tribe are embedded in politics, development and affirmative action as well as being intertwined with emic notions of community. Recalling Virginius Xaxa's discussion of critiques of indigenous identity (see Introduction), Scheduled Tribes are in no sense a single indigenous group but

have been governed for several hundred years as if they were fundamentally different from neighbouring communities (Xaxa 2008). My material exposes the subtle, relational ways in which this problematic category of recognition has become a marker of status and distinction, produced and reiterated between different groups of Koya adivasis, and at times a form of stigma, advancing the debates in Shah and Shneiderman (2013) around the complex, contested and productive field of affirmative action in South Asia.

As argued by Higham and Shah (2013) and Moodie (2013), it is crucial for ethnographers to offer a perspective that moves beyond a simple debate on positive or negative impacts of policy interventions. Research that highlights the nuances of affirmative action policies (which ascribe putatively pre-existing identities, but also generate new forms of community consciousness) connect closely to literature on the politics of recognition. In the following chapter I claim, following the impetus of Shah and Shneiderman's (2013) special issue on affirmative action, and in dialogue with other ethnographies of social mobility and affirmative action (Still 2014, Moodie 2014, Higham Shah 2013) that "flat" or homogenising claims for recognition can exacerbate other forms of difference along class and gender lines as the Koya community becomes integrated into regional caste society.

As we have already established, state recognition – to the extent that it preserves rights to forest land – is central to the social reproduction, religious and material culture of Koya people in Illūru. But the recognition of Koyas as having a distinct cultural and political identity is also important in enabling access to education, and as we shall see subsequently (Chapter 8 and 9), crucial for generating symbolic and cultural resources and to political organising. This places Koyas in a familiar double-bind: appeals to, and mobilisation around state enshrined categories, mean that authenticity must be recognised and adjudicated on externally. As Middleton (2016: 74) has shown, this representational economy involves performing a narrative of distinctiveness to state ethnographers. Kapila's (2008) work on Gaddi politics of recognition and reclassification (as ST), also makes explicit the reflexive and instrumental use of possessing a distinctive culture.[85] Pressing this point a step further, this chapter develops the argument that an etic construct – the Scheduled Tribe category – has become central to emic understandings of identity in the Koya context. The material below explores how such reflexive and heightened acts of recognition continue away from the spheres of formal politics or community activism, but are redeployed in everyday interactions.

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[85] Kapila (2008: 121) writes, "the definition of Scheduled Tribe contained an inherent contradiction and one which arose from the problem of culture. While Scheduled Tribes were to be developed, they were also to be protected as autochthones or *adivasi*" (emphasis in original).

This line of analysis opens up debates on essentialism and constructivist accounts in other "indigenous" contexts. Empirical studies of indigenous identities risk entering a double-bind where the complexity and nuance of any fine-grained approach undermines identity-based claims and indigenous political agendas, a tension identified by Glen Coulthard as the "essentialism challenge". What I hope to show, with greater emphasis than Coulthard on the differentiation within indigenous groups, is that by focussing on recognition and self-recognition, we can move beyond a simple trade-off between academic nuance and strategic essentialism. I argue that Koya people – aware of the double-edged potentiality of recognition within the ST category – draw selectively on narratives of cultural identity in response to specific situations.[86]

A key premise of scholarship on the politics of recognition, since Taylor's influential essay, is that groups of people define themselves in relation to the characteristics that significant others acknowledge as salient (Taylor 1994 in Coulthard 2014: 16). This framing downplays the full force of the power relations that determines which distinguishing features are deemed relevant in defining such differences. It underemphasises the straitjacketing of people into narrow "cultural scripts" of what a person can be (Appiah 1994).

Liberal discourses of recognition tend to ignore the longer historical impact of politics based on that principle, and draw attention away from the fluidity and complexity (Lyshaug 2004) that is crucial to the debate, since no one is ever really reducible to the traits or characteristics that they are labelled with. Pushing back on the normative focus on honour and dignity that marks the literature, Nancy Fraser (2000, 2003) provides the critique that politics of recognition must be understood alongside politics of redistribution, which are often more urgent. In many cases the frames of recognition available to Koya shifting cultivators, as they engage in redistributive affirmative action measures – which, as I outline presently, aim to level-up material and cultural inequalities – serve only to stigmatise and reiterate a perceived lack of social mobility and economic integration. Yet, in the claims of some Koya advocates I discern a form of resurgent recognition (à la Coulthard 2014) through which the differences between adivasis and others are hyper-politicised as claims for sovereignty beyond the Indian state's recognition as Scheduled Tribe. These examples are the subject of Chapter 9. In

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[86] A larger point about fluidity emerges, that adivasis cannot be fluid in the same way as other identity groups, see Sarukkai (2012: 33–37).

this chapter, by retaining a critical focus on recognition, we gain an insight into the trajectory and circulation of such categories as they gain cultural and political currency in different scenarios.

Several social scientists have connected the recognition of castes and tribes in India to Ian Hacking's concept of dynamic nominalism, or his "looping effect", through which the existence of a category can generate the sorts of behaviours described within it.[87] The phrase certainly resonates with the calls of Koya activists, who campaign passionately for another group, the Lambadas, to be removed from the Scheduled Tribes list because they are perceived to be "already" economically advanced and not authentically adivasi. These critiques reiterate a linear progression. The more desirable the ST status becomes, and the more competitively it is contested, the more aware people are of their genuine entitlement to that classification (see Kapila 2008). My ethnography bears out that affirmative action is crucial for Koya people, over generations, to develop such conceptions of their community, as an autonomous community, discrete from others. Through being categorised as a Scheduled Tribe, a process that involves self-identification within state-affirmed categories of difference, Koya people in turn make further claims on the state, which we will explore in Chapter 8.[88] This accentuates cognisance of Koya distinctness – in a looping effect. The recognition of difference valorises something "authentically adivasi", entitling Koya people to benefits that facilitate further assimilation.[89]

The push and pull of affirmative action that includes and excludes, serves to reify the sense that Koyas are indeed a distinct corporate group, as they partially integrate into the wider caste society of the region. For many of my interlocutors these two faces of affirmative action (see Introduction) are reflected in the cultural schemas that motivate everyday decisions. Many aim to be included in wider economic networks that promise broader horizons of consumption based on new income streams. Others invest more of their labour in close kin relations, inter-family provision of meat, palm wine and the produce of *sainda* cultivation – like pumpkins – that can be brought to relatives who do not have access to a hill slope. The present chapter argues that such livelihoods are evaluated on the basis of a widespread internalisation of the values of state recognition (cf. Nandy 1983: 7, 31). The Scheduled Tribe category provides important cultural reference points for adivasis as they are excluded and included within the

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[87] Chakrabarty (1995: 3376), Kapila (2008: 130), Middleton (2016: 74), Mosse (2020: 22) and Reddy (2005: 555).

[88] As noted in Introduction, the constructivist turn was arguably prefigured by Ambedkar (see Natrajan 2012: 9).

[89] A critical inconsistency, noted in Paidipaty (2010), is that policies for development vs protection as autochthones were rooted in characterisations of territories rather than people.

regional economy and society, as identities have become increasingly fixed – a process that is ongoing at a global level too (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, Moore et al. 2008). Beyond simply applying Hacking's argument to the Koya case, I suggest this form of recognition, counterpoised with processes of assimilation, provides a yardstick for finer-grained distinctions within the community. Life in adivasi societies incorporates the state's framework of recognition into "their" culture and understanding of the world.

Disaggregating recognition

By now it should be clear that I am proposing a disaggregated typology of integration, through which to compare the ways in which collectively held notions of ST difference circulate and filter into everyday evaluations and distinctions. Yet the division of Indian tribal communities into subgroups of socio-economic class or status – or degrees of integration – is of course nothing new. Both Fürer-Haimendorf and Elwin advocated for variegated policy interventions for Indian tribal communities. They endorsed enhanced protections for tribal land, and wrote at length about assimilation, which remains today an influential paradigm at a local level.[90] Although aspects of their respective legacies are associated with an over-romanticised idea of tribal people in India, they can and should be read in a more nuanced way, since both were attentive to the competing needs for respectability, material protection at the level of policy and law, and broader forms of representation. Both anthropologists were sensitive to degrees of integration among the communities about whom they wrote, while opposing assimilation in its crudest sense.

In Elwin's (1943) pamphlet, *The Aboriginals*, four "classes" of aboriginals are devised. The first class are those protected by geographical conditions from the "debasing contacts of the plains" (1943: 8) who live a "largely communal life [and] still share with one another". For them, shifting cultivation is more than a form of agriculture, it is a way of life: "they cannot visualise existence without it" (1943: 9). The second are those tribals who have "become more individualistic". These populations "no longer share with one another", there are distinctions between rich and poor and houses are built in separate compounds, rather than facing a shared common space.[91] Unlike with the first class, possessions are taken as personal, axe cultivation is more of a habit than a way of life, and people are accustomed to visiting markets. The third class are those who have become comprehensively dispossessed of their land and culture, but who have not received the benefits of better integration. Quoting Hutton, Elwin asserts that

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[90] Fürer-Haimendorf is still revered today in parts of Telangana, and his book *Struggle for Survival* (1982), translated into Telugu, adorns the bookshelves of some Koya activists.
[91] In Illūru, the village is built around the shared common ground of a clearing. The social geography of the village is also divided into clusters of the three surname groups (see Chapter 1).

tribal land ownership is superseded by "a code…in the name of law, either by alienation to foreigners or by transferring the trusteeship of a tribal chief into absolute ownership of a kind quite foreign to the customs of a tribe" (1943: 12).[92] Elwin characterises this third group as victims of culture contact. Pointing out health problems caused by the arrival of clothing (worn wet and dirty as tribal people can afford only one dress), and the grime of villages close to polluted roads, Elwin claims there has been a decay of tribal cultural life and an evisceration of tribal autonomy. In the midst of forgotten myths, neglected gods, abandoned hunting and cultivation practices, "tribal life and tradition have begun to appear slightly ludicrous, *even to the tribesmen themselves*" (1943: 13, emphasis added). In the current situation this passage appears quite visionary since in certain settings tribal culture has become an essentialised parody of itself, reduced to simplistic self-representations in low-budget pamphlets by tribal political organisations (see Chapter 9).

The fourth "class" of aboriginals are the tribal aristocracy who according to Elwin retained ancestral privileges, tribal names and totems, while adopting Hindu faith and living "with every modern comfort". This example of the Gond Raja of Sarangarh, whose "well-stocked library includes the works of Aldous Huxley, Bernard Shaw and Malinowski; he is a brilliant cricketer, and tennis-player" (1943: 10–11) has not aged as well as Elwin's other characterisations. Although there are some who can claim, based on their *intiperu* (surname group), that they are "original" adivasi nobles, such examples are very rare. One such person, who boasts an authentic Gondi-Koya surname, will be introduced below – Arun Maravi.

From Elwin's account it appears that original difference was in some sense a fundamental attribute of tribal society, which could be erased or reduced through contact. Indeed, the paradigm of cultural contact and its opposite, of assimilation/isolation, has been the dominant theoretical framework for understanding tribal communities in India (cf. Redfield 1955). As I argue, dilemmas around assimilation remain highly relevant to tribal life today; they are part of the framework through which tribal communities evaluate their own lives and futures. In debates across the literature it remains a given that tribal society in India is in some fundamental sense alternative to the more hierarchically stratified caste system (e.g., Fürer-Haimendorf 1982; Kornel 2006; cf. Bailey 1960; Vitebsky 2017, for a more complicated documentation). The notion of a tribe-caste continuum which has filtered through academic, and administrative understandings in the post-independence period to dominate contemporary

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[92] This description is deeply evocative of the processes of land alienation in Chapters 1 and 2, but also of the more ambiguous land ownership in Illūru itself. In Chapter 1 we learned of Pochamma's late husband and his brothers, who took their land documents (*pattas*) to the mandal office in Rampachodavaram, in order to be officially divided, but this was never resolved. The different "codes", in this sense, have not been aligned.

popular understandings of the tribal situation, is grounded in a teleological modernisation paradigm in which societies move from simple to complex. As outlined in the introduction, anthropology itself is intrinsically implicated in any review of the production of such a narrative but, as we see below, the categories that have been disseminated into everyday Koya and Telugu parlance have the stamp of outdated anthropological ideas, and intersect in complex ways with processes of classing and local notions of assimilation.

My aim is to illuminate how different frameworks of difference coalesce and interweave in the minds, actions and articulations of tribal people in Andhra Pradesh today. It is well established that ethnic difference can thrive and become clarified through contact, because it allows boundaries to be established and redrawn. Drawing on Barth's theorisation, I focus not on the origins of categories of difference, which were established earlier in this thesis, nor on the extent to which these differences are "real" or socially constructed, but rather on how they are reproduced relationally.

Contexts of recognition: village, town, and city

Differences within the Koya community are starkly highlighted in contexts where state categories determine entitlement and status, such as in public healthcare provision. Within Illūru village itself, one the most diligent *sainda* cultivators, Pochamma, is trained as a volunteer health worker to administer basic medicines and test for malaria. Beyond Illūru, the primary health centre 10 kilometres away is the closest node of state healthcare provision, but also the least reliable.[93] For more dependable care Illūru villagers travel 35 kilometres to the hospital at Rampachodavaram, while serious problems result in trips to government hospitals in the cities of Rājahmundry and Kākinaḍa 95 and 120 kilometres away.

Pochamma's daughter-in-law, Lalitha, stayed in the Government hospital at Kākinaḍa after contracting malaria and jaundice. The doctor – according to the couple – gave her priority as she came from the *tribal* area. Though Lalitha was born into the Padmashali caste (recognised as an "Other Backward Caste" (OBC), not a Scheduled Tribe), Lalitha's actual caste identity was irrelevant in this instance: she simply passed as ST. She was referred to as "the wife of her husband Lokesh", though the couple had not formalised their marriage at this point. Lokesh had carried a photocopy of his Caste Certificate (that proves *his* tribal/ ST: Koya identity). In order for a person identifying as a Scheduled Tribe to benefit from these "advantages" they must have already engaged in the bureaucratic system and claimed that identity through the

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[93] See Scott's (1973: 27) scale of proximity in relation to reliability, referenced in Chapter 4.

formal channels in order to acquire the caste certificate. However, in the hospital the Scheduled Tribe identity of Lokesh and Lalitha was assumed and never verified. Proof of this status and accompanying entitlements operates here at the level of inter-subjective judgment, as an assumption, based on linguistic diction, comportment and appearance.

There is no affirmative action policy that mandates a doctor to privilege the emergency healthcare for an ST patient above others in a hospital setting. I suspect she was prioritised because of the immediate severity of her illness, but the fact that experiences are couched in these terms is suggestive of how they are understood, and of the frameworks that produce them.

Lokesh and Lalitha accept the jurisdiction of state categories to distinguish people and inform who is given priority, or treated as a competitor for resources. In general, I found their assessments corresponded with official caste categories. As with all legal injunctions there are blurred boundaries, but there is an implicit understanding that the category (ST) represents a marker that is beyond individual discretion and judgement, hence it may be taken as self-evident. Conversely, where bureaucratic processes *are* placed under numerical strain, burdens of proof do become central to debates about who should be entitled.

As Lalitha recovered slowly from her illness, and Lokesh slept on the floor of the hospital ward beside her bed, camaraderie developed between neighbouring patients of different caste backgrounds. Class and caste distinctions were temporarily transcended: treats from outside the ward were shared and small favours given and received. Fictive kinship terms were used to address the family of the patient on the adjacent bed. Yet affinities fostered while cohabiting this shared space of mutual dependency were not maintained beyond the immediate interaction, and the narrative of caste difference was never far removed. Privately Lokesh and Lalitha expressed to me that they felt themselves to be very different from those with well-resourced networks of relatives living closer to the city. They insinuated that those marginally better-off people – who they caricatured as *dubkuwarlu* (cash people, Te.) or *peddalōr* (big people, Ko.) – had fewer understanding of hardships, little knowledge of agriculture, and had a different "culture" (*vāru samskriti vaire*) and a different caste (*jāti*).[94]

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[94] Often, this blurred into caste distinctions. When discussing the possible sex of an expected baby, Lokesh laughed that in Koya culture there is no need to check. Prenatal scans are illegal in India, due to the prevalence of female infanticide, but in Koya culture, and among adivasis, the relative value of women as productive assets in traditional agriculture and the absence of dowry payments mean that boys are not necessarily preferred. Hence, so Lokesh's humour goes, there is no need to check in his community.

Just as they feel different to those who are "bigger" and have more cash than themselves, Lokesh and Lalitha differentiate themselves from the *cinna nar mansud* (small village people) who hail from similar socio-economic backgrounds to theirs but who are less adept at navigating their ST status. In parallel to Frøystad's ethnography, my interlocutors "constantly classify people as either above, on a par with, or inferior to themselves", distinctions which map onto caste affiliation (2005: 269). In a Barthian sense, self-ascriptions are produced through the process of boundary-making, by othering those who are different.

Small village people, Lokesh told me, were unaware of opportunities and healthcare options available to them and would come to the hospital only when symptoms were severe, whereas Lokesh's family pre-empt serious illness and seek medical care at the earliest opportunity. Lokesh describes most of his own village as "small" in these terms (*cinna nar mansud*). At the extreme end of this cultural polarisation Lalitha believes her own mother-in-law Pochamma to be small-minded, "backwards", and *tappu* (wrong) in many of her habits: she drinks alcohol, leaves children to work alone, and is not clean and economically objective and rational in ways that Lalitha sees as important. Even though Pochamma herself is a volunteer health worker, and therefore embedded in the state's provisions of biomedical treatment and advice, she is still – in Lalitha's perspective – a small village person.

Within the hospital Lalitha and Lokesh perceived themselves as benefiting from preferential treatment to which they are entitled as people with ST identity, though Lokesh would not wish to be constrained by the label elsewhere. He is an ambitious young man, who has in many ways transcended the social status of the village – and wants to be recognised as such. One of four Illūrites ever to pass 10th standard (equivalent to GCSEs), he has migrated for work, married outside his community and fostered relations with local businessman, thus cultivating a personhood for himself that fits into the wider regional lower-middle class. In many ways Lokesh is an example of the success of affirmative action in both senses alluded to above. He exercises *de facto* autonomy over his ancestrally cultivated forest-land, while maximising the cash-crop potential of state-supplied cashew saplings.

Yet there remains a gulf between him and his non-tribal peers in how confidently he conducts his agricultural business, how assertively he would ever bargain over the price of his cashew crop, and how competitively he would put himself forward for a labouring opportunity in a situation where caste identities were clearly stratified. He has benefitted from affirmative action, but also internalises the terms of this inclusion, aware that people like him need to be supported in a world of "cash" people. With inclusion into the wider space of opportunity and entitlement comes an affirmation of something radically different, to which the ST classifier is

only a referent. This difference is described by some adivasis, but not by Lokesh, just as the colonial ethnographers of South India concluded – as something profoundly "aboriginal".[95]

For members of Scheduled Tribes like Lokesh, operationalising that identity requires a reflexive awareness of the institutionalised nature of their difference, which appears in the hospital as a kind of advantage or value to be extracted – in lieu of the potential value of a local caste network that others might possess. In doing so, and through his aspersions cast upon other people, Lokesh accepts a world-view that implicitly grades people relative to their caste/tribe, and to a teleological notion of community status. Compared to his "small" village kin, Lokesh's competence in mobilising ST status signals his inclusion into the bureaucratised spaces of the state, in which entitlement is tied to backwardness and requires formal recognition.[96] Lokesh's sense of self enables a temporary objectification of his own status as an ST, in which the victimhood encapsulated in that category stands instead for entitlement.

The ST category is made visible to mobilise entitlement encased in a two-letter acronym, which Lokesh in certain contexts embraces with opportunistic verve. He remains however sharply aware that this is a misrecognition of other aspects of his personhood, in which he has dignity and seniority over many of his relatives. In other words, Lokesh switches between conceptualising himself in a difference-blind level playing field of social mobility, a meritocracy in which his achievements are his own, and a difference-aware setting where that difference can be traded as a transactional asset legitimately entitling him to preferential treatment.

In the wider national context, the difference that carries most significance in determining the types of interactions and engagements that are possible and socially acceptable is that of caste. Kathinka Frøystad suggests, drawing on Eriksen (2002: 12), caste operates similarly to ethnic difference as it is "an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves culturally distinctive from other groups with whom they have a minimum of interaction" (Frøystad 2005: 19). Returning to Barth's formulations, Frøystad asserts that caste is ethnicised to operate as a quite fundamental criterion of difference "primarily pertaining to ascription and self-ascription of group membership and cultural characteristics" (ibid). But for such ascriptions to be "ethnic", "they must also include some ideas about the origin and background of each of the communities" (Barth 1969: 13, as quoted in Frøystad 2005: 19). As she expands in her ethnography of caste, class and changing ideas of identification in Hindu

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[95] Lokesh also enjoys celebrating pan-Indian Hindu festivals like Diwali, but he does so with an inbuilt sense that his "own" culture is an inferior one in some crucial sense.
[96] Compare Elwin, *A Loss of Nerve* (1942).

North India, extrapolations of other communities' identity are essentialised and hierarchised relationally. This establishes one's own community as "good", "big", and "clean" relative to others who are not (2005: 4). The specific "other" may shift as is socially or politically expedient (from Muslim to Dalit), but the process of objectifying and evaluating caste or religious groups and using them as a yardstick for community self-making is constant. Clearly, this work is powerfully shaped by Barth's emphasis on social units being dependent on the maintenance of a boundary for their continuity. As Barth (1969: 14) has claimed: "[t]he cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed […] yet the fact of continuing dichotomisation between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of the continuity".

Trepidation and misrecognition

One Sunday Lokesh and I came down from Illūru to the market at Rampachodavaram. I was eager to introduce him to my friend Arun, one of the Koya speaking advocates. Arun lived in a rented house with his wife, Shalini, who belongs to a different ST group, Konda Dora, and was the teacher of Lokesh's classificatory sister from Illūru. I assumed that Arun, a champion of the Koya language and passionate defender of the rights of shifting cultivators, would have plenty of time for Lokesh. Arun is fascinated by documents showing that the British legislated for *sainda* cultivation – though they only did so to further their own extractive agenda. Arun is an advocate both in the literal sense as a lawyer, and in a wider sense as a representative who promotes Koya farmers in their encounters with state bureaucracies and with non-Koya, non-tribal publics like the police, senior educators, and civil servants. To all of these, Arun emphasises the honest and authentic nature of adivasi life.

Equally, I assumed that Lokesh would be keen to meet Arun. He was an aspirational networker himself, who often represents his villagers and other relatives within the administrative spaces of the town. I even imagined they might benefit from their interaction. But outside the gates of the rented house Lokesh paused. "*Nanna andagud* (I shouldn't go in)" he told me. "*Nimma an. Nanna shanta antan le* (you go ahead, I'll do the shopping)". It was striking to me that Lokesh would feel such trepidation, given that he was a high achiever who embraced state social security measures and spoke disparagingly of the "small village" mind-set of others, who embodied the archetypal features of a progressive locally valued masculinity, and who was the first Illūru man to marry a non-Koya woman, as Arun had also done. When I asked him why he wouldn't come in, he explained confidently that Arun was a big man (*pedda mansulu*), and he was a small village person (*cinna nar mansud*). I told him there was no need to be fearful of Arun, but Lokesh replied that it was not his fear, but it was his "choice".

Lokesh instinctively knew that entering the house would not be a positive experience for him, a viewpoint I struggled to understand. Perhaps he was intimidated by the iron gates, though Arun himself had actually grown up in a cramped thatch-roofed house. I repeated that Arun was a Koya language speaker, which momentarily almost swayed Lokesh. But even so, Arun was still a lawyer. By virtue of his LLB qualification and his position as an advocate he was too "big" for Lokesh to meet.

In Arun's hometown, people called out to him in public without inhibition. Like a politician or an anthropologist, he cultivated an approachable persona. But from Lokesh's perspective Arun was so senior – his aura of officialdom so powerful – that he could not be engaged with face-to-face. At the time I was tempted to see this as a failure of my own ability to mediate, but it became clear that there were larger structural causes for Lokesh's hesitation.

A few months later, back in town with a slightly younger Illūrite man – Badina Vignesh (introduced in Chapter 6) – I was again due to pay Arun a visit and again invited my interlocutor along. Vignesh obliged, perhaps less alert to the hierarchies to which Lokesh was so sensitive. On entering, he was urged to sit, as is customary in Koya homes where there is furniture. But Vignesh didn't want to sit. He stood with his hands clasped together in front of him, head slightly bowed, as if in school. Vignesh was not used to being in homes with furniture, nor had he spent much time at school. The cultural cues were not ones with which he was familiar.

As his hosts persisted in cajoling him to sit on a chair, he compromised and sat cross-legged on the tiled floor. When they insisted, he eventually took a seat, visibly uncomfortable and out of place. I felt intense remorse for having placed him in that position. "You are from Illūru", Arun enquired, a form of identification that would not be out of place in a school or government office, in which people are identified by name, family name, caste, village, district, and state:

"Vignesh; Badina Vignesh; ST: Koya; Illūru village; Rampachodavaram Mandal; East Gōdāvari District; Andhra Pradesh". Vignesh confirmed he was Badina Vignesh, from Illūru village.

Arun had never been to Illūru – very few people in Rampachodavaram had – but he knew I had stayed there for many months and had cultivated the slopes along with the families there. "*Sainda tungtina* (do you practice *sainda* cultivation)?" Arun demanded.

"*Awunu*". Vignesh nodded.

"*Mare gumoḍkai bare tattilin* (so why didn't you bring us a pumpkin?)" asked Arun.

Although he ostensibly extended the hospitality appropriate for a guest, Arun was speaking to Vignesh as if he were an inferior type of person, whose identity could be pinpointed and from whom produce could be demanded, combining mockery and rural stereotyping with paternalism. This example, echoing aspects of Parry's work in which class distinctions become more salient than caste affiliation, evoked a Weberian sense of social class, in which Arun's pride at having become someone who represents people like Vignesh, in the end left him so enthralled to a notion of authenticity that he assumed superiority. The division between the two men emerged precisely from the different frameworks of recognition that the two assume each other to embody: Vignesh appeared to Arun as a caricature of authenticity, while Arun represented for Vignesh a world of intimidating impersonal authority.

Arun is used to interacting with people from small villages. In his professional life representing STs in pro-bono land cases, Arun puts people like Vignesh on a pedestal, eulogising their strength and resilience in the face of the infringements of non-tribals and the state. But Vignesh proved more awkward and aloof than these villagers. Perhaps because there was no clear objective or transaction at stake, Arun fell back on an established formality of speech which betrayed his own assimilation and social mobility, leaving him unable to relate to Vignesh other than by projecting onto him the image of an unassimilated and authentically Koya cultivator who had failed to bring a pumpkin to town.

Arun fundamentally misrecognised Vignesh. The power of the categories that Arun worked with on a daily basis – that he sees as having emancipatory potential – provided Arun with a means of asserting himself, as he presumed he had overcome any prejudice. His assuredness in his own capacity for recognition enabled him to completely miss the point that Vignesh is so much more than a provider of pumpkins. Vignesh enjoys socialising, dressing up for trips to weddings and to the cinema. He aspires to a life unbounded by the routines of *sainda* agriculture and his obligations to his kin. As with Lokesh in the earlier interaction, I saw Vignesh as a different person at that moment. Instead of the skilled, confident, boisterous and accomplished young man who could prepare a strip of land for cultivation, or survive in the forest with a blade and a box of matches, I saw a "small village boy" who had never learned to

take his seat, use a mobile phone or speak confidently with his "seniors".[97] Vignesh was momentarily eco-incarcerated in Arun's presence (cf. Shah 2010: 130–37)

Although Arun and Vignesh belong to the same tribe and the same official category of identity, they are confined by the structures of their lives and their habits of conversation to treat each other as if they were totally different. Despite their affinity in the eyes of the state, they have been socialised into such radically different ways of interacting with others that conversation between them was strained. Vignesh, unable to fathom the sudden imposition of obligations that he associates with close kin, promptly left the house.

This example shows the breakdown in identification through misrecognition and demands a notion of social class that can disaggregate the ST: Koya identity. The affinity in terms of ascribed caste/tribe identity flattens the difference in their experiences and in the vernacular interactions they participate in. They saw each other as belonging to different social categories[98] – and were unable to communicate though they share the same unscripted "mother tongue".[99]

Relational recognition, assimilation and integration

Thinking back to Ghurye and Elwin's debates over assimilation and isolation, and recalling the graded classification of "tribals", we might conceive of Vignesh as inhabiting a different "less-assimilated" class from Arun. Construed as such this example could endorse the proposition to disaggregate the "Scheduled Tribe" category to protect the benefits for those whose need is greatest, and avoid adding to the creation of a "creamy layer" of those who have already benefitted from inclusive policies but continue to capture limited resources. However, in making that distinction, we risk endorsing the paradigm of authenticity that makes Vignesh a "real" aboriginal, and Arun inauthentic. In this example the pumpkin signifies a bond of close kinship that Vignesh deems inappropriate, and therefore patronising. In Appiah's (1994) terms it straitjackets him; it is a cultural script that allows Arun to impose himself unilaterally, leaving no opportunity for a counter-recognition or a repudiation.

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[97] There is a wider constellation of representations of adivasis in popular Telugu culture beyond the scope of this thesis. One well-known local example is the Telugu language film, *Adavi Biddalu* ("Children of the Forest") directed by R. Narayana Murthy (2006).
[98] See Parry (2020: 46) on Weberian framework.
[99] Barth (1969: 13–14) asserts "a categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background".

Unlike Lokesh who is fairly skilled at moving between different regimes of identification without a crisis of recognition (and who astutely declined the introduction), Vignesh and Arun seem more constrained in their frameworks for recognising each other. But what experiences and positionality does a person require in order to competently oscillate between such frameworks? What enables people like Lokesh flexibly to overcome the limits of formal objectification of his tribe? What enables Arun to objectify Koya identity, so far that he is unable to take a less rigid, more relatable position? Simultaneously, is there interpretative space for us to hold out for the possibility that Arun is in fact engaging in a resurgent politics of recognition (Coulthard 2014: 24), but that this is lost on Vignesh, who aspires to partially assimilate rather than to be recognised as an authentic adivasi?

Elwin foresaw in the 1940s that "tribal life would appear slightly ludicrous, *even to the tribesmen themselves*" (1943:13 emphasis added). This "slightly ludicrous" appearance is a complex internalisation of negative stereotyping that has been further ingrained over time. Entering the inter-caste spaces of towns and cities, where they are ethnically marked as "tribal", Illūrites have to navigate their difference, sharply aware of how they appear to others.[100] Dilemmas around assimilation have become a framework through which adivasi communities evaluate their own experiences and aspirations. The notion of a tribe-caste continuum grounded in a teleological modernisation narrative has filtered through academic and administrative perspectives into popular understandings of the Koya situation. Young Koya people from Illūru struggle to move from relative autonomy and geographical and economic isolation, to positions of respectability, without passing through the degrading gaze of more assimilated parts of their own community. Even those who are ostensibly advocates for their cultural and economic wellbeing, fail to offer the form of recognition they seek.

As affirmative action has enabled some Koyas to receive Telugu-medium education, to migrate for work, and train as advocates, it has reiterated the essentialisation of Koya people, which has a significant impact on relations between different parts of the community. Alongside the substantialisation of caste groups into individuated cultural blocks competing for political and economic resources, adivasi groups like the Koyas – through engaging in a politics of recognition – develop a heightened awareness of themselves as culturally distinct, and "smaller" than others. Difference has become a commodity that can be transacted to claim entitlement, and preserve autonomy through engagement with the infrastructure of state categories, a process in which stigma, as the flip side of the coin, seems unavoidable.

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[100]This chapter explores everyday expressions of recognition of their caste/tribe, rather than interactions that involve explicit stigmatisation.

The limits of ST affinity

Debates on the politics of recognition need to acknowledge much more carefully, the layered complexity in how constituents within any single "community" self-identify, and are typified by others. The struggle for redistribution in adivasi South India demands a much sharper awareness of how recognition operates differently at various levels. Even as Vignesh was caricatured, he retained the sense of autonomy to leave the room, and rejected the hospitality he was offered. This exposes a complex positionality that is at once spontaneous and rebellious, and recognisable as adivasi, but also indicates a sensitivity, and a masculinity that could never be defined by such a politics of identity.

British social anthropologists have discussed caste/tribe both as an *ascribed* identity that is historically and politically constructed – that we might yet mobilise to overcome – while in other contexts it is taken as an indigenous framework for social organisation. There is an unanswered tension around the status we give to caste difference; the least we can do is aim for greater transparency in how we construct caste as an anthropological object and as a sociological category. My focus on recognition allows an insight into an implicit but under-emphasised distinction in the literature on caste and tribe difference, between caste/tribe as externally given, or ascribed, and caste/tribe as lived or experienced.

Koya people in South India recognise themselves as such through externally given categories of differentiation as well as through indigenous kinship arrangements and associated patterns of patronage and commensality. The interactions discussed here contain the residues of colonial anthropological knowledge that are bolstered by post-independence ethnicisation and politicisation through affirmative action. But these caste/tribe distinctions cannot be passed off as merely constructed, as a narrow "identity politics".[101] The differences implied are also embodied and substantiated in daily social relations, and provide a framework for family life.

This chapter has sought to bring constructivist and relational analyses of caste/tribe together, and to show how interpersonal interactions let us speculate at how a caste/tribe difference is understood, and embodied across a network of people, each in their own web of social hierarchies and material concerns. Such differences embed themselves in social relations which require reiteration and maintenance (cf. Barth 1969). The categories then become objectified within interactions. These relational ideas of difference throw into relief the fact

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[101] Menon has suggested we cannot allow the "ontology of caste to become nothing more than an effect of governmentality" (2006: 6).

that anthropologists of South Asia still hold a presumption that there is a degree of compatibility between caste as it is ascribed as an identity, and caste as it is lived and experienced through social relations with other people, related and unrelated.

Though we can be critical of Arun's charmless demand for a pumpkin, in his misrecognition of Vignesh, perhaps there is also an invitation to a mode of recognition beyond the hierarchy of assimilation. A more generous reading of Arun's politics would posit that he was evoking a resurgent politics of recognition, and extending to Vignesh a fictive kinship of utopian proportions, as relatives do who indeed share cultural reference points. Sadly, the dominant frameworks of assimilation and stigmatisation prevented Vignesh from accepting such an invitation to envision relatedness across the evident gulf in status. Like all social constructions the class, caste and tribe distinctions exposed between these two men have very tangible effects.

The combination of local ambition for certain forms of assimilation, and simultaneous stigmatisation of certain symbols such as those representing the "primitive" mode of shifting cultivation, means that the space to claim an identity as both "authentic" and different becomes narrowed to a very small, political slot. This is the outcome of various waves of contradictory policy and cycles of developmental inclusion, which have panned out in a manner that surely neither Elwin nor Ghurye could have imagined. At a quotidian level, the vernacular of the state's categorisations of Koyas as Scheduled Tribe (ST) filters into a defining social type in everyday interactions. The promise of inclusion as a "ST" leaves a residual stain of difference on those who claim such advantages. In the following chapter we turn to take a closer look at the contested space of implementation of policies designed to advantage those who are identified as such.

Chapter 8 – Affirmative action and the "GO3 heroes"

In late afternoon in Chintūr town it is easy to spot the "GO3 heroes". Dressed in tracksuit bottoms and t-shirts, having changed out of shirts and trousers worn to teach in local village schools, they alight from shiny motorbikes and gather to eat *dosas* and *parathas* from the street vendors while planning evening trips to cinema halls. The neologism (Government Order Number 3 "heroes") refers to young Koya men from nearby villages who graduated from local degree colleges with Bachelor of Education (BEd) degrees, before being appointed to teaching jobs, assisted by the Government Order passed in 2000, which extended the recommended reservation for Scheduled Tribe teachers in Agency area schools to 100%. This chapter asks to what extent these young men's (and few women's) new-found job security and financial independence constitute a success for local Koya people. Through engaging with the impacts, challenges and possibilities of their access to state employment through affirmative action, I explore a specific kind of experience of tribe-state-society relations.

We observed in previous chapters how the experience of schooling and migration away from kinship networks can generate, or at least heighten, divisions within families, as young people perceive themselves to be caught between competing logics of aspiration and obligation. In the preceding chapter we saw how powerful discourses of recognition circulate in everyday interactions, between differently situated Koya people and how state identity categories provide a measure of relative status. Here we begin to see how those different constituents within the Koya community hold different notions of how the community should be supported by state policy and differentiated ideas about their relation to the state.

Drawing on the biographies of Koyas who have become leaders within their community, I narrate the experiences of Koya students and professionals who have pursued post-graduate education and entered state employment either as teachers or in local government offices, or established careers in courtrooms or local politics. Attaining such positions of relative privilege and authority garners widespread respect and attracts scrutiny from within and outside the Koya community. Such exemplars are made responsible for shaping new subjectivities of community identity, collective upliftment, dependency and autonomy.

I focus on the post 2014 implementation of a Government Order Number 3 (hereafter GO3) that mandates 100% of teaching positions in Agency areas should be filled by teachers from local ST communities. Local cohorts of teachers and students belonging to Scheduled Tribes have celebrated this as it helps alleviate graduate unemployment. But for some parents and

teachers this was not welcomed, as it brought a decline in teaching standards in local government schools. Teaching positions were increasingly filled by young Koya men with BEd qualifications from local degree colleges, rather than by purportedly better qualified non-tribal candidates from other parts of the state. This meant many local Koya people gained secure employment, but the region's teaching staff became less diverse, and allegedly less competent in English.

Affirmative action bifurcates opinion within the more educated and upwardly mobile sections of Koya society. Reading between the lines of the ethnography below, we will discern two distinct attitudes. Some Koyas are seeking greater state intervention in order to counter-intuitively consolidate autonomy by creating opportunities, generating role-models of success and protecting Koya language. Other advocates would rather Koya schoolchildren were exposed to wider competition, and adopt a more transactional approach, as if the whole community was an interest group, formed in the model of a caste association. In many ways, this *is* what caste (*jāti*) means today, in the modern, political sense of the term.[102] Both these Koya responses to the issue of affirmative action share an (increasingly stable) notion that Koya people constitute a coherent and discrete cultural and ethnic bloc, the collective interests of which may be served or inhibited by state policy.

Caught between such emotive contestations, Koya advocates have little leverage to de-escalate the terms of such debates, and can either embrace the state support available, and lobby for better implementation, accepting the new forms of stigma and caste-based hostility, or alternatively take a cynical or disillusioned view of the situation and become transactional and assertive in their own choices. Either way, these options draw Koya people into behaving in a self-interested, or community-interested manner.

Galanter's (1984) assessment of India's affirmative action measures balances the advantages and disadvantages of "compensatory discrimination" in juristic sociological terms.[103] His account supports the argument that the production of community consciousness is a key result of these policies. As suggested in the thesis introduction, this is a major aim of affirmative action in India, as envisaged by Ambedkar. However, the re-inscription of simplistic notions of difference, hierarchy and entitlement makes it highly problematic (Béteille 2006; Michelutti & Heath 2013; Rodrigues 2005; Shneiderman 2013; Still 2013). Corbridge (2000: 65) claims that

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[102] Thus the chapter returns us full-circle to the Ghurye-Elwin debate (between protectionism and integration/assimilation) here projected back from the educated Koya person's point of view.

[103] A helpful representation of many of the key debates is to be found here in which the formal principles of equality making are counted against the limitations of such manipulations of society (1984: 81).

the reservations system has helped to "crystallise a conception of adivasi identity that recognises the exploitation and marginalisation of many tribal communities, and which demands compensation". Research elsewhere bears this out, also showing the stigmatising impacts of putatively pro-meritocracy arguments against reservation policies. Both Still (2013) and Subramanian (2019) highlight the way that affirmative action has provoked a backlash of anti-reservation sentiment through which a "new language" of caste discrimination can be expressed (Still 2013: 76). In the case of Dalits in Andhra Pradesh, this anti-reservation discourse remakes caste anew as illiteracy becomes code for untouchability, dirtiness an index of ritual pollution and class implies caste, bolstering the argument that caste has become an identity, rather than a hierarchy (Still 2013; see also Fuller 1996).

It has been convincingly argued that affirmative action can increase inequality within historically marginalised communities (see Shah and Shneiderman 2013). The notion of a "creamy layer" who have disproportionately benefited from such policies has become commonplace (Béteille 1992; Chaudhury 2004). Corbridge (2000) highlighted that the middle class, or local elites within marginalised groups, existed well before reservations enabled social mobility, and therefore emphasises that such internal class inequality was not simply produced by policies of reservation. As Moodie (2013) points out, the argument that affirmative action increases inequality can re-entrench an "either/or" approach to such policies, which brushes over the complex ways that such opportunities need to be evaluated. Given the fractious and varied impact that affirmative action policies have had in India, both within and between communities, there is a sense of urgency to forward nuanced anthropological perspectives on these processes. Shah and Shneiderman (2013) astutely propose that historically situated ethnography enables an analysis of the "dialectical relationship between the *formation* and *effects* of policies for differentiated citizenship". The field is typically one in which quantitative data has been crucial in assessing policy effectiveness (e.g., Deshpande 2013; Thorat & Neuman 2012). However, large scale research this can fail to uncover the unexpected outcomes of such policies. Shah and Shneiderman's approach works at the "intersection of politics, policy, and practice to investigate how cultural difference is claimed and produced, how the politics of grievance validate and undermine modern identities, and how the resulting transformations shape sociality". This chapter furthers that agenda by showing how, both at an inter-community level and within the Koya community, cultural differences are reaffirmed through the evolving discourse around the scope and implementation of affirmative action in Andhra Pradesh.

Where this chapter goes beyond the insights of Shah and Shneiderman is by showing how conflicting attitudes to affirmative action within the Koya community cancel each other out

and annul any potential political mobilisation around the issue. This further entrenches narratives of cultural difference both among those who perceive the state as a legitimate provider of protection, support and upliftment, and also among those who treat the state as an adversary. The trajectory of the debate, especially since the GO 3 was quashed in a supreme court judgement in February 2020, has become polarised in such a way as to leave little space for a politics or sociality of co-operation, solidarity or allegiance with other communities in similar predicaments, and has seemingly exacerbated the competitive rivalry between Koya, Konda Reddy, and Lambada Scheduled Tribe communities.

The ethnography below reveals schisms between Koya people with different aspirations, experiences and expectations of their future. Many retain an optimistic hope that the promise of the state may yet enable greater autonomy, while others seek a retreat of the state, arguing that their Koya community should be treated just as any other community. But this is not the retreat from the state implied in Shah (2010), rather, it is the retreat from the state to a greater dependency on the open market and an embrace of the ideology of meritocracy. Both these perspectives are framed within ideas of the community having distinct interests and needs and both are in some respects teleological in their understanding of community development. Both involve configurations of a relationship between state categories and community identity.

In many ways these differences hinge on contrasting ideas of what constitutes Koya culture, and on whether it is considered outside of, supported by, or even produced by the state. This chapter assesses the ways in which the families at various scales of social and developmental incorporation position themselves in relation to the wider Koya community and culture, and to the agencies of the state vis-a-vis local institutions of learning, employment, adjudication and administration. These experiences enable us to reflect on Koya perceptions of larger political structures and their disposition towards future change. In doing so, the perspectives below connect to theoretical themes of change and continuity, and tribe state society relations.

First, I discuss the politics of those who demand better implementation of the reservation, some of whom have faith in the state, others are more cynical, and introduce critiques of the policy of 100% reservation in Agency area schools, which are contextualised by my interlocutors through a holistic appreciation of the wider challenges the community faces. I then flesh out these ideas through the biography of an aspiring anthropologist from the Koya community, who feels he has been overtaken by peers in terms of local status and the cultural capital education generates. According to him, these GO3 heroes are not only less qualified than he, but also less aware of what the Koya community, and adivasis in general, need from each other and from the state. This material forms the basis of an analysis of the GO3 policy

and its future, from the perspective of those who it should seek to uplift, and a consideration of how these attitudes towards affirmative action index subtle differences in Koya perceptions of their relationship to the many layers of the state.

Seeking autonomy through affirmative action

The first from his family and his village to be educated past 10th standard, and the first to become a teacher, Uruma Ramesh set up the regional branch of the Adivasis Teachers' Union (ATU), after feeling that he was not represented by the existing local unions. The key aim was to campaign for better implementation of the existing reservation policy prescribed in GO3. This goal was achieved in 2014 when 100% reservation in Agency area schools was recommended across the area, heralded as a huge success for the ATU. Ramesh feels that by campaigning for the fulfilment of the GO3 in local schools, new cohorts of Koyas will have opportunities to participate in and consume contemporary culture in a way that puts them on a level footing with other caste communities. The pride with which Ramesh regales these events recalls the close affinity with the state expressed by Moodie's Dhanka interlocutors. The elder generation of Dhanka in particular had cultivated a "disposition of willingness in relationship to norms of citizenship that includes civil service, literacy and community investment" (2015: 158–159). Moodie's characterisation of "collective aspiration as a lived daily project" (2015: 6) among the Dhanka is apposite here, and is mirrored in Ramesh's logic. By holding a position of decency and respectability in relation to the Telugu norms of social prestige and comportment, Ramesh believes the children of this generation of Koya professionals will grow up to be more assertive and confident of accessing their rights, and participating in institutional life.

Implicit in his approach is the idea that the state and the judiciary can be mobilised to intervene in the historical marginalisation of Scheduled Tribes. Undergirding this is a strong belief that there is a difference between Koya STs and others, which needs to be re-affirmed and made more explicit through the implementation of strong affirmative action. Again, this mirrors Moodie's work, as she suggests that members of Scheduled Tribes are positioned in a dual temporality in which, on one hand, difference and "tribalness" is embraced, and on the other, the community must project a willingness to become citizens of the state, and deserving beneficiaries of affirmative action. This paradoxical disposition of timeless difference encapsulated in collective aspiration for progress resonates equally with Kapila's somewhat self-exoticising Gaddi activists and with Banerjee's reading of the "double-bind" of temporality for India's adivasis.

In all these examples the re-affirmation of Scheduled Tribe status is cause for celebration. Moodie renders tangible the complex subjectivity of women and men who must identify as having been other – adivasi – in order to aspire to a more promising future. The state, more than the market, is the realm through which those hopes may be realised and it remains to be seen whether this community aspiration shifts as the state continues to recede. In the Koya context, such a process seems yet to be anticipated, but certainly the GO3 heroes championed by Ramesh constitute a generation of newly state employed Koya men, and some women, who embody a sense of "collective aspiration". However, in the Koya case, the "era of service" may be much more short-lived than in the Dhanka example from Rajasthan.

Ramesh's argumentation, however, has its own distinct emphasis. He explained that when his children see the houses of their peers from other communities they immediately feel inferior as those other people have cars, TVs and well-decorated homes. "In our villages our rituals are different, our norms are different, our manners are different", Ramesh asserts, but this should not prevent Koya families possessing and enjoying the trappings of modernity. It is vital, according to him, that young Koya children see that Scheduled Tribes people can also live in relative affluence, and retain such difference. They must not internalise the idea that Koyas can only live under thatched roofs without consumer goods. His mission incorporates the view that the more teachers in posts in Agency area schools, the more local role models will be speaking Koya language, while earning a salary, and wearing what he sees as dignified clothes: shirt and trousers.

Superficial officialdom signifies for Ramesh an entry into the modern world that must be democratised, by any means possible – whether or not this is seen by others as tokenistic. In this sense Ramesh's politics are radical by local standards, though they reflect indigenous movements and debates elsewhere around ideas of authenticity (e.g. Appiah 1994, 2008). He foresees a future in which the Koya language need not be only spoken by "small village people" but also embraced by those with official roles and decision-making power. By dominating the teaching positions available to them, teacher-activists like Ramesh perceive themselves to be creating a space in which Koya language and culture can be elevated and promoted through official spaces in classrooms and school offices, instead of relegated only to the realm of the home, the forest and to village drinking circles.

A prominent Koya activist named Bhimanna, with whom we will become acquainted in Chapter 9, also campaigns for the full implementation of GO3, although it is, for him, a less pressing issue than opposing the Polavaram dam and the urgent exclusion of the Lambada community from the Scheduled Tribe list. Bhimanna and Ramesh both believe in maximising

the Koya representation at every stage of administrative life, without a clear distinction between a superficial and a more genuinely representative politics. For Bhimanna there is no inconsistency in making claims on the state to fulfil their obligation, for example, to implement constitutionally enshrined protections, while demanding the creation of a separate adivasi state.

While numerous Koya activists and teachers campaign for better implementation of GO3, others, such as Gaurav Palla, introduced below, believe these to be counter-productive to the longer term objectives of community development. Gaurav is a lawyer and the son of a locally renowned politician and activist, Ramamurthy Palla, and experienced a tough childhood, in part because of his father's political involvement. During periods of his father's imprisonment for pro-tribal political activities, Gaurav took responsibility both for his own distance education and for the wellbeing of his junior siblings. From Kathanūru – from where Illūru's first settlers migrated – he travelled to Rājahmundry and later to Hyderabad to eventually graduate from the Law School of Osmania University with LLB Having been mentored by more senior advocates in Bhadrāchalam and Rājahmundry, Gaurav began his own legal practice in Rampachodavaram and Chintūr.[104] When he returned from Hyderabad with a LLB degree, he married a woman, Ashwini, from his mother's ancestral village of Nimmalpāḍu, continuing the tradition of marriages from either side of the Kathanūru/Chintūr divide. Ashwini shared his experience of education outside the Agency area and his disposition towards public service. She held a BEd degree and applied locally for teaching positions. She now works as a teacher in a nearby village. With Gaurav's income from his work as an advocate they built a concrete house for their family in Chintūr.

Gaurav's family's situation encapsulates some of Parry's (1999) account that the material benefits that result from affirmative action policies for often subordinated communities must not dismissed in debates on the topic. Parry underlined, contra Béteille (1992) that regardless of the dangers of reifying difference or producing inter- or intra-caste or tribe animosity, the tangible, material benefits accrued through a secure job with a pension, acquired through a caste or tribe quota, as Ashwini has done, should not be understated.[105] Gaurav's siblings have focused on channelling community disadvantage through pen and paper, as minor bureaucrats,

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[104] The work of a small town advocate in Chintūr revolves around family disputes and land cases. Since 2007, the majority of cases have been related to Polavaram.

[105] Parry was responding to Béteille's (1991a, 1991b; 1992) various critiques of the reservations policy by addressing the material aspect of the issue, rather than creation of political consciousness. His ethnography of Satnamis, who received jobs through a Scheduled Caste quota, shows that it is most often through kinship connections that people become knowledgeable about, and capitalise on, reservations. Due to intra-caste nepotism and inefficiencies in job allocation, his support for this form of affirmative action is considerable but not unreserved.

rather than any other means. Similarly to many aspirational families in Andhra Pradesh, and much like Parry's Satnami interlocutors and Moodie's Dhankas, Gaurav and Ashwini are proud to receive the security and stability of Ashwini's government salaried position.

The family are in other respects atypical. They have an exceptional role model of self-sacrifice and community leadership in their father, and this is a rare privilege. It gives them status in the eyes of the wider community and constitutes a kind of social capital. Gaurav's father has instilled in Gaurav and his siblings an extraordinary work-ethic. Although several of his children have salaries, he tirelessly continues his campaign. He also maintains the same everyday workload as the other adivasi farmers in their home village of Kathanūru, where their crops are as liable to failure as anyone else's. Beyond this, Ramamurthy has filled his children with high expectations of literacy and competency in dealing with bureaucratic processes. He has also given them a confidence that the state, although powerful, can be challenged and that justice can be sought and demanded. Gaurav, however, is more cynical and world-weary than his father.

Gaurav and Ashwini, alongside their respective forms of professional employment, draw on the labour resources of Ashwini's village to cultivate lentils on the bank of the Saberi, enabling a greater investment in the education of their son and daughter. Alongside daily wages, Ashwini's natal villagers demand ever-increasing amounts of palm wine at harvest-time from their brother-in-law/employer, causing Gaurav embarrassment should he opt to refuse these. Such negotiations are extremely light hearted but have a serious edge; this is a relationship that goes beyond the normal daily wage labour arrangements in Chintūr area villages.

As educated and locally powerful professionals, Gaurav's and Ashwini's opinions on matters such as education are well respected. Both are exasperated with those campaigning for a full implementation of GO3, opining that it will have negative longer-term consequences, even though Ashwini is in some sense a beneficiary of such arrangements. Gaurav explained that, if all teaching positions in tribal areas were filled with local Koya candidates who possessed only BEd, learning would stagnate as all teachers would lack broader experiences and skills that can only be developed "outside". Scheduled Tribe candidates who are eligible for teaching positions with BEd from local degree colleges tend not to know the syllabus well and have studied transactionally in order to get qualifications, and become employed by the state. Recruitment processes favour those with connections to the Educational Department at the district level, who are able to expediently get Scheduled Tribe caste certificates processed at the Mandal Office. They are unlikely, in Gaurav's view, to be students who have taken a

sincere interest in their studies. ST students who were passionate about their studies would likely have applied for a wider range of degree courses at institutions outside of the local area.

Candidates who might have studied more widely or have more experience tend to come from non-tribal backgrounds, so reserving local teaching positions for local ST candidates continues a cycle of low achievement and low expectations within Agency area schools. Ashwini confirmed that as the same syllabi is taught year-on-year, a smaller and smaller proportion of the material is passed on and comprehension and mastery of specific topics declines. A similar point was made convincingly in Béteille's (1992) critique of affirmative action policies, that reserved positions for disadvantaged groups reduce the efficiency of institutions through poor performance and poorly qualified staff. So many people are now qualified with BEd that local nepotism from within the ST candidate pool prevails in teacher recruitment. Without the implementation of GO3, a much wider range of candidates would potentially be qualified and other qualities or experience would be considered. Hence Gaurav objects to the way that GO3 combines with established recruitment practices (c.f. Parry 1999). With the proper implementation of GO3, these candidates who lack any motivation or understanding of the larger historical predicament of the community will have a high chance of becoming employed in the schools within the Agency area.

What's worse, according to Gaurav, is that these policies produce "GO3 heroes". The relatively high salary attached to these teaching posts means they have a disposable income that is huge compared to the average spending power of most local residents. They have long holidays and plenty of free time in the evenings. This can suddenly elevate them to high status within their families and villages. Higham and Shah (2013) argue that in Jharkhand the material impact of affirmative action and education is to further reinscribe and exacerbate class differences, which certainly seems to be the case among these newly employed Koyas. Instead of making divisions disappear, interventions end up helping the *most advantaged* adivasis join the ranks of the lower middle classes leaving many more unaffected. Hence, they characterise reservations as a "contradictory resource".

In the Koya case it would be a stretch to conclude that reservations absorb privileged sections of their beneficiaries into the local elites, as Higham and Shah argue is the case in Jharkhand. In both settings larger economic problems are pushed from the centre of local political debate, which as clear from the divergent opinions expressed by Koya people here, has shifted towards interrogating who should be entitled to state resources. This increases division within marginalised communities, further separating the very poor members of these communities from those who benefit, as in Higham and Shah's case. Even worse, in the Koya context, is

the backlash of antagonism and animosity that is generated by the perceived advantage being granted to only a few.

What Gaurav finds difficult to accept is that the people he dubs "GO3 heroes" are presented as solutions to problems of wider employment inequality, though in fact they represent a continuation of that problem. Once enabled to have this lifestyle by virtue of a strong affirmative action program that seeks to uplift the community, the consumption choices of these teachers reproduces the established hierarchy of valorising Telugu language cinema and generic South Indian street food items. Thus, Gaurav suggests, their behaviour contributes to reproducing a cycle of symbolic demoralisation of Koya language and culture in favour of Telugu culture. This echoes another aspect of the argument of Higham and Shah (2013), that the standard of education received by students is of such poor quality that it actually entrenches the conservative notion that adivasis are uncivilised; the assumption of a natural social hierarchy is reinforced rather than dissipated. Similarly, the consumption choices of this emergent class of teachers are seen by some to endorse the broader de-valuation of adivasi culture in favour of more "mainstream" regional popular culture.

Other candidates such as Prasad Kurusam and Kranthi Podiyam, who we will meet now, have studied much further (MEd and MPhil) than is necessary to gain positions as local school teachers, yet find themselves unemployed. Instead of GO3 working to improve the prospects of the Koya community, it reproduces the problem of poor education while attempting to solve another problem of high unemployment rates. Once in post there is very little monitoring of the standards, and no professional development for these teachers, hence year-on-year school standards decline, according to Gaurav.

Navigating disappointment

Prasad is a Koya who has studied to a much higher level than most of his counterparts. In doing so he has gained a nuanced and renowned perspective on the prospects of Koya students entering into degree and post-graduate education, but, as he explained to me, he has not gained in this process a steady job nor the salary and subsequent respect that comes with it. Having completed his Intermediate in the local government college in Chintūr, Prasad joined Pondicherry University and studied anthropology as his degree subject before joining the University of Hyderabad to study Anthropology MA. In comparison with other social sciences (particularly economics and political science), the entry requirements to anthropology courses are very low. The discipline is known to be useful for candidates intending to take competitive exams to enter Indian Administrative Service positions, as those exams contain compulsory

papers on anthropology. It is accepted in anthropology departments in Indian universities that many of those who take up the seats are looking for a ticket to gain campus hostel accommodation, which is considered a useful place to reside, from a networking perspective, while applying for jobs or preparing for competitive exams. As the least prestigious of the social sciences in India, it is also disproportionately popular with students from ST and SC (Scheduled Caste) backgrounds.

At Hyderabad University, Prasad found that studying this discipline opened up larger philosophical questions that deeply interested him and so applied to continue into the MPhil programme. He was encouraged to apply for PhD, but seats were oversubscribed. Determined to pursue his dream of conducting research on traditional and panchayat-based forms of dispute resolution among his own community – the Koyas – he applied to other institutions and was accepted to begin his PhD in 2015 at Pune University, Maharashtra, where like in Hyderabad, the majority of the professors and lecturers are from the Brahmin caste.

Prasad was assigned a supervisor who he felt never really supported him. Though he tried sincerely to write well and submit written work regularly, his supervisor accused him of copying sections of written work and often rejected his ideas. Despite his awareness of his own shortcomings – particularly in written English, the medium of most social science in India – and always ready to admit that he was in the "learning stage", he felt insulted at times by his supervisor's lack of trust in him. In summer 2016 after two semesters, he got married, and in the 3rd semester he left the programme when his wife gave birth to their first child. Rather than blaming his family circumstances for his discontinuation, Prasad points to the lack of institutional support. Initially he was encouraged by a senior faculty member in a leadership role as director, which countered the difficult relationship he had with his supervisor. However, when this director moved on to another institution, Prasad felt he had no backing from anyone in the university and left the course.

After returning home, Prasad found a job working as a Koya to English translator for an international non-governmental organisation, which has a base in Bhadrāchalum from where it co-ordinates health clinics in remote parts of neighbouring Chhattisgarh. He worked long days traveling with the doctors and appreciated the regular salary, but complained to me that the work was extremely repetitive. The same sorts of cases and health problems were presented day after day. There was no scope for him or to contribute strategically to the projects or to advise on the effectiveness of the clinics. Neither was there a way for him to progress into a more senior position within that organisation, despite his detailed knowledge of local demographics and previous reading in social sciences.

Of Prasad's contemporaries in the Chintūr area, many outwardly successful "batch-mates" are young men who have recently attained permanent jobs as school teachers. It is fair to say that Prasad bears some resentment about how his own efforts and multiple university degrees have failed to bring him the respect that these local school teachers command. His perception is that they have studied only to the minimum requirement to get a secure and lucrative job, and have not taken any personal interest in their studies. Neither have they endured the hardship suffered by more academically-minded students, or gained life experience in metropolitan cities. By passing the required tests and becoming teachers they have achieved what still eludes Prasad, permanent employment. Furthermore, they are locally revered in their community as high achievers. Prasad also echoes Gaurav and Ashwini's concern that GO3 implementation has simultaneously expanded opportunities for these candidates while contributing to a decline in standard of education. The candidates know as much of the material as they were taught in school, but may have had poor teachers themselves. "They will teach the same as what they learnt", Prasad says, explaining how substandard learning gets passed down to subsequent generations.

There are several strands to take up from Prasad's biography. On one level it is evident that education, as in aspects of Froerer's work (2012, 2015), is for him as much about respect and social status as it is about achievement. On another level, his experience also gives him the basis on which to pose a critique of the policy. Prasad's belief is that there should be a change in how GO3 operates. Instead of guaranteeing local Agency school teaching posts to local Agency area teachers, it should send 3 teachers from the Agency to a city to broaden their knowledge, while 3 teachers move in the other direction, from a highly developed city to the Agency area. In this sense Prasad is calling not for a retreat of state affirmative action, but for a more careful and nuanced policy for tribal education that keeps pace with its wider implications.

Language is crucial in this narrative. All the government tribal welfare schools are Telugu medium schools. None of the teachers are fluent in English and the next generation of incoming ST teachers maintain this perceived deficiency. Because Prasad himself studied for so long in Telugu medium, he was hampered when a command of English really mattered in his own education. He believes that if he had studied in English medium from primary level upwards, he would have increased his chances of succeeding. In Prasad's view, the education system does a further damage to Koya students in that it marginalises the Koya language and prioritises Telugu. Neither do tribal festivals or rituals get mentioned in the content of school syllabi. Telugu festivals like *Vijaya Dashimi*, *Sankranthi*, and *Dipawali* are overrepresented

and given great prestige in Agency area schools, even though both the students and the teachers are predominantly Koya. Even Christmas is covered in the school syllabi in Koya Agency areas. This is connected, in Prasad's view, not only to the implementation of GO3 but to the larger problem of how Koya language religion and culture is classified in regional popular culture and education in particular. Without proper recognition and elaboration in contemporary media and popular music and literature, the Koya language itself appears as a kind of relic, unfit for use in India today.

The local festivals of *Muthyalamma Pandum* and *Vijjapandum*, are, according to Prasad, not given a suitable platform but are instead shrouded in obscurity, which is often blamed on their inconsistent timing, at the behest of village headmen and seasonal factors such as rains or the emergence of a first crop. Low-budget government-published Koya language books are produced by the educational wings of the ITDA offices, but without a more formal syllabus and pedagogical plan these seem to only add to the perception that Koya language is a curiosity that is the pet project of a particular PO (the posts change every year or two). They also intensify the sense that there have been centuries of denigration and misrecognition: that British-era stereotypes about tribals have been grafted onto postcolonial and current attitudes, and that there is lack of tribal representation in media and public affairs. Umamaheshwari (2014: 374) writing on the same region captures this sentiment:

> The real challenge is not about saving the few tribal groups as mere names within our constitutional apparatus but undoing the very idea of politics and economics that rules over the communities who lived with pride as their local histories reveal are today rendered as some poor cousins needing protection. They do not exist in any significant numbers in our public institutions, or in our government offices. Did they choose for themselves this state of permanent exclusion and "special" provisions in the name of further exclusion? On the other hand, if at all they must be "assimilated" should it not be from the point of view of their cultural difference being accepted as a respected and respectable part of the democratic rubric and not a patronisingly donated charity to the lesser mortals? How many tribal festivals are assimilated in our list of "public holidays"?

Prasad describes himself and the Koya religion as "animist" or "nature worshippers". His pride is atypical, and he invokes these terms with positive, rather than the more common negative connotations. His own festivals are important, he claims, but there are no official holidays for the Koya festivals. Prasad's position here is worth quoting at length, as it encapsulates the double-bind of education as a process:

> It's okay to know about others' beliefs but what about the children's own customs and traditions? This is also part of the reason that GO3 is there [exists]. Koya teachers *should* teach Koya festivals but no one has any idea about them. Because of this, we [the Koya community] are losing students. They are nervous to go to village events after studying. Without community you cannot do

anything! If no village-mate comes you cannot do a death ceremony. Students cannot do this [participate]. They may get a job, but at the same time they are losing their culture.

Elwin's points on the impact of education pre-empt the findings of Umamaheshwari (2014: 374), Shah and Higham (2013), and others who have argued that education in tribal areas can delegitimise the culture of those studying, teaching only the festivals of Hindus, Christians and Muslims, but never about the "old gods of the soil to whose worship their parents are deeply attached" (1943:16). By the resonant phrase "we are losing students" Prasad means that those young people who have studied are lost to (disappear from) their communities – poignantly inverting the position espoused in educational settings that the schools lose students when they run home to villages at unusual times for seasonal festivals! The students do not know how to behave in those "village" situations (e.g., the death ceremony) because they have been removed from those village events since a young age and are unfamiliar with the proceedings. Hence, students feel ashamed and useless in their villages, and embarrassed of their "nature worshipping" culture within the school setting. Hence the students are lost to their culture and have themselves lost their culture. Prasad's monologue captures the Fanonian sense of displacement, brought about precisely through the implementation of a state policy designed to ensure upliftment for Scheduled Tribes. This clearly demonstrates the intractable double-bind of the concomitant processes of assimilation and the assertion of community identity that my research seeks to describe. Prasad continued:

> I have studied towards PhD, and studied other societies. But someone who has done 12th standard and BEd has got a teacher's job. He thinks he knows about society, the world, his community, but he doesn't know about society, teaching or community. In front of me he is like a hero with a Pulsar motorbike. He simply got a job and is paid ₹40, ₹60 thousand or ₹1 lakh [₹100,000, approximately £1,000], and got a teacher training certificate. But he doesn't know how to do competitive exams [required for entry to more advanced degrees or civil service jobs]. Once they become teachers they forget all the problems they have come from. They get a monthly salary and then enjoy their life. I'm well educated but nobody cares for me because I'm roaming the road still now.

This characterisation, Prasad asserts, applies to 90% of the teachers today. The advantage of GO3 is that these teachers should be able to teach the culture of the tribal students and relate to their situation, giving them more chance of inspiring Koya students to become educated, in comparison to a non-Koya teacher. The teachers should know that, Prased opines, and should take the opportunity to contribute more fully to their community to "bring up our society". Since 2014, when Ramesh and his colleagues in the Adivasi Teachers' Union were successful in their campaign and the policy was more strictly implemented, the problem Prasad identifies has increased. It has created, in Prasad's account, a new class of employed but poorly educated Koya teachers and facilitated the internalisation of lower aspirations through which the larger

potential of the policy is lost. The outcome of this new accessibility of success is a new transactionalism that has severe implications for the longer-term reproduction of a living culture, which can already be observed in a generation of disengaged young people.

Role models of success

The situation was further clarified through interviews with other teachers in the Agency areas, who struggle to balance the competing challenges of achieving the basics of good attendance, reducing drop-outs, and bridging the divides between illiterate parents and children who want to participate in a Telugu-medium world. Many respondents also reported that in classrooms the policy is to teach in Telugu. School children, however, lack prior knowledge of Telugu, which slows the pace of learning to accommodate these pupils. One teacher responded, "when all kinds of teachers are working in the community, the community will get developed: ideas will change, "thinking" changes. When one kind of teacher is working in the community, the knowledge won't progress".

Financial problems were cited as a major cause of drop-outs, especially after primary level when the government stops supplying textbooks. Given the data uncovered in Chapter 6, we can conceive the myriad of competing responsibilities and role models that might be at play behind the scenes, in the phrase that appears, in context, to be a reductive simplification – "drop out". However, even students who do continue and complete BEd, BA or PG degrees may end up doing agricultural labour, relying on *upadi pani* (MGNREGA), or labouring at the local Chintūr bamboo depot.

One Koya candidate, Kranthi, who works as a teacher as well as being a mother of 2 children, sought to study the problem of tribal education as a PhD research project, asking, "why are they backwards (sic) in the Agency area?" Eager to explore the need for more appropriate curricular syllabi, and with the target of intervention to improve absenteeism, she applied to the Education Department at Kakatiya University in Warangal, in which at PhD level four seats are reserved for one woman, one BC (Backwards Caste) candidate, one SC (Scheduled Caste) candidate and one OBC (Other Backward Caste) candidate. Her research synopsis was approved and she was encouraged to apply. Her interview was a difficult experience. The admissions panel explained that "there are lots of dropouts" from the area she comes from and, in a decidedly discouraging manner, asked "what will you do here?" Eventually the professor who had initially supported the application explained "I can't do anything […] there are no ST seats".

During our interview and in many wider conversations, references were made to the few Koya people who have continued in post-graduate study in the prestigious institutions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Their names and qualifications are incanted with reverence. As well as the handful of Koyas who have LLB qualifications, Virajju Kuttūru completed MEd at Osmania University and now works as a teacher in Kansulūru, and Appuka Nageshwar Rao was the first to get a PhD in 2010. Now, Gummadhi Anuradha from Yellandu, whose father is a former MLA, has also achieved PhD. Cidem Kishore Kumar has done his MPhil at Osmania University. As well as these achievements, Sopaka Arunakumari became the first woman to be awarded a PhD when she submitted her thesis *Koya Jati Samskruti Sampradayamulu* (Culture and Tradition of the Koya Caste) to the Telugu Department in Osmania University. In 2017/18, Rega Ramesh was expected to submit a thesis in Zoology at Kakatiya University and Issam Narayana at Kakatiya University, is the first from the Koya community to be a Head of Department. People in Chintūr are very proud of these successful candidates.

But when Kranthi herself attempted to apply elsewhere after this rebuttal, she had problems finding the time to collate the many forms, hall-tickets and hostel records, that are required and this prevented her from finishing several applications. The next notification inviting applications will be from Andhra University in Visakhapatnam. Again, she will write an exam for entrance and submit paperwork documenting her education so far. When we spoke, Kranthi was not confident of her chances and while she is sharply aware of the role-models who signal success, she is also aware of how slim her chances are and how draining such processes can be as they impinge on her other commitments.

Nuancing affirmative action

Through these discussions, which are the subject of fierce debate and contestation within households of Kranthi, Gaurav, Ramesh and many others, Koya teachers expound their own policy ideas that are undergirded by local theories of affirmative action. Gaurav jokes that Kranthi's family are all educated people, asking: "what will they do with more government work?" He continued: "look at the villages close to Rampachodavaram. With complete implementation of GO3, those families [who are already relatively wealthy and have access to the state] will capture all the reserved positions. How will people from villages like Illūru ever grow?" One idea forwarded is that, within any family unit, reservations in state employment should be limited to a single position. This would protect against a family monopolising the available opportunities and would encourage those families with the number and capacity to invest in resources like education to diversify and grow into other fields: to start new businesses or agricultural enterprises. It would serve to prevent those families who do know

how to access the system from dominating the reserved positions, and thereby presumably enable other families to benefit more evenly.

The limits of progress that for some students and their families appear to be intangible barriers, remain for others completely out of reach. The heated and emotive "feeling" (as in sentiment, or passion, see Still 2013) that is produced by policies and implementation of reservations is itself only available to the more socially and economically advantaged among my Koya research participants. Even to reach the limit that Kranthi has come up against is a mark of her relative success. Kranthi's struggles to continue her studies do not make her appear as any less of a leader in Chintūr: an exemplar of how to behave, to aspire and achieve.

Kranthi, Gaurav and Prasad share a resentment of GO3. For Gaurav it represents the monopolisation of the positions by specific sections of the ST communities – to the detriment of others. For Kranthi, the hidden impact of GO3 is the enabling of a false sense of complacency about apparent inclusion and success – embodied in the new forms of consumption of snacks and drink by the "GO3 heroes" as soon as school hours end – is what she most dislikes about the policy, which she believes to be a longer-term blight on Koya people's future.

To some extent these narratives play into the argument that education in Scheduled Areas functions as a contradictory resource that can reinforce conservative ideas about the community's backwardness, and reproduce, if not exacerbate, inequality in life expectations, even as people tangibly benefit from the process as well as the outcomes of becoming more educated. However, the present material goes beyond an emphasis on outcomes of individual trajectories of learning, and beyond a focus on positive or negative impacts on communities. My interlocutors interpolate their experiences into a collectivised experience of institutional entitlement. The allure of education ignites strong opinions, which reflect teleological notions of community and the relationship between the community and the state. The key question then becomes: what is education perceived as doing within the Koya community, and who is it for? If education is for enabling social inclusion and aspiration, it also reiterates certain narrow narratives of success, and reproduces an idea of dependency in the state in order to carve out some autonomy.[106]

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[106] This connects to a wider discourse both at the level of the Koya community and in social science, around whether we think of the affirmative action as a process of governmentalisation of difference, and whether we think of the state more broadly as coercive and antagonistic, or as a legitimate means through which people are represented, governed and cared for.

The assistant head teacher of one local school, Gopal Reddy, expressed the tension in very similar terms, between competing approaches to community wellbeing, asking: "what is school for?" If it is for learning the skills to "compete" in wider society, he suggests, then non-tribal teachers are good for tribal students. If, however, it is about enabling a progression to salaried employment within the tribal areas, then teaching positions are a source of local jobs that simultaneously enable some cultural and linguistic autonomy to be embraced within official channels. Gopal explained: "GO3 is only useful to provide the opportunities for ST people but they are not using it [to make] the specifically tribal students to reach the higher positions…. genuine STs are not good in teaching them the higher-level education".[107]

Drawing out this contrast Gopal Reddy continued: "The urban people are competing with the world … looking at other opportunities [moving] towards global technology, but still rural people, especially tribal people, are not focusing on the methods of urban area and other caste people". Interestingly, Gopal uses the term "methods" to refer to both cultivation (agriculture) and networking strategies (for caste upliftment and searching out of labour). Gopal asserts that most ST people are satisfied with small opportunities and meagre employment as teachers or clerks, which for them represent high-salaried, high-status positions. "The ambition of genuine tribal people", Gopal opines, "is very low". In certain ways Gopal endorses the GO3 policy as an appropriate measure to provide employment to ST people. But he is critical of the fact that such employees neglect their duty – to impart a high standard of education to the next generation of pupils in the Ashram and Tribal Welfare schools.

Gopal believes that non-tribal teachers have particular skills of special relevance to the tribal pupils, like how to manage in inter-caste settings, strategies for success "in this society", knowledge of how to "compete with others", and an awareness of what are good opportunities in life:

> A good teacher should not focus on their subject but they should focus on the contemporary issues and should teach the pupils how to face the current problems in the society; how is the world today? What are the problems we're facing today? These are the facts. I think the tribal teachers lack sufficient knowledge themselves to input that knowledge into the minds of the tribal pupils especially.[108]

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[107] As we have seen in earlier chapters, authenticity, here evoked in the notion of "genuine" ST is an important local reference point. For Gopal Reddy "genuine STs" are those residing in this area for 60 or 70 years, who still follow the old methods of shifting cultivation as opposed to either more recent migrants, or those who have moved to find wage labour in urban areas: working in hotels, sweeping, temporary security work.

[108] Gopal Reddy also expressed his owcn experience of caste-based discrimination which, in his view, becomes more pronounced as students progress further. His experiences resonated with those of lower caste and tribal students across the country and he referenced the suicide of Rohit Vermula on the

Gopal's phrasing mirrors the findings of other ethnographic accounts of education and employment, such as the work of Jeffrey and Jeffrey, that emphasises intra-community competition for opportunities as well as inter-community competition with classes of other – disproportionately more qualified – others (see Froerer 2012: 351).

State-tribe-society relations

To pull these responses together, how do people feel about the implementation of affirmative action in the Agency area? What does it mean to people when the scope of state reservation measures expands or contracts? And why does the implementation of GO3 matter to generations of Koya people? How does this reflect the wider conflicts and complex predicament of the "community" at large?

Recouping the impetus of important research on affirmative action in India (Shah Shneiderman 2013, Corbridge 2000, Moodie 2015), this chapter has shown how the procedures of affirmative action implementation (and withdrawal) produce a reorientation of identity politics among Koya people. In the Koya case, affirmative action has accelerated a solidification of local notions of cultural difference between adivasi groups, while exacerbating inequalities of opportunity within Koya communities; the state's regime of recognition and redistribution has had polarising effects. Fluctuation in the remit and implementation of affirmative action add to disunity and the sense of powerlessness among Koya adivasi teachers.

The responses to GO3 also expose the different ways that people conceptualise their relationship to the state, and how they envisage their community's future development would best be served. Gaurav conceptualises the community like a caste group that has particular interests. These are, primarily, to become better resourced and progress economically and socially. Hence, he supports an idea of development that demands contact with educated outsiders to educate and inspire. But others, like Ramesh, who seek greater support of the state, are less concerned by the quality of the teachers and believe that the community has unique short term needs for employment within the state sector, that should provide tribal families with secure incomes. In this model of community development there is a desire for control over what is taught in their classrooms – regardless of whether or not it enables longer-term "success". There is an aspiration for greater autonomy over their representation and knowledge production that is not predicated on competing with other castes groups in other

university of Hyderabad campus in 2014, to illustrate the point that many teachers and professors feel discomfort when attributing high grades to lower caste persons.

sectors, and in electoral politics. This paradoxically involves the claiming of a state category, which is the condition through which such autonomy can be enabled. Ironically, the extension of the state's affirmative action becomes a celebration of community autonomy. The poignant trade-off in this approach is that some advocates are willing to accept a somewhat marginal space in order to gain autonomy over their local classrooms and capture the salaries paid to teaching staff. Unfortunately, this almost appears to endorse an idea of second tier of citizenship, as future generations in adivasi dominated areas seem set to receive a second tier education.

People may, of course, justifiably shift their perspective as the terrain of affirmative action implementation changes and even those with vehemently held positions may take a different angle should the GO3 cease to apply. It appears that the only way to engage is through competing narratives of identity politics, by either becoming more like a caste group, in the substantialised, political sense of the term. This involves thinking transactionally, and competing with other castes for resources. In doing so it also involves a submission to a predicament of being second-tier citizens, as that hierarchy is one that is entered from a position of need, and of inferiority.

The chapter has foregrounded a range of forms of respectability: the respectability of being able to pass in a Telugu linguistic world has a completely different tone to the form of respectability that well-educated advocates strive for as they champion Koya language over Telugu and become outwardly revered. Clearly people do not all want to assimilate to be the same – but assimilation, in particular ways, must be understood ethnographically as having a value in particular contexts, to the extent that gaining respectability in the terms of dominant local prestige is a legitimate aim for some research participants. In some cases, Koya people want to be different, but have first to acquire access to education and equality of opportunity within which to be able to stake out such a claim for difference. As we have seen, the spaces available to express such ethnic or cultural difference are already value-laden in ways that stigmatise and de-value Koyas. Taking forward the momentum of the previous chapter, and the thesis as a whole, these conditions conspire to narrow the space in which Koyas may be respectably different from others, to certain political and cultural spaces.

A less obvious aspect of these debates is the question of how gender divisions are impacted by these processes of employment and education. Assimilation or greater integration into regionally respectable models of family often involves the adoption of more patriarchal internal household relations, and a different set of role models of respectability for young women in the public sphere, as seen in Still (2014) and Moodie (2014). What is often taken as

given in discussions of the relation between gender roles and integration is that male family members' positions are stable and benefit from the normative local notions of integration and development. The material here suggests some notable diversity, variability and even at times insecurity among Koya men in how they inhabit the space of the ST role model.

There are quite different ideas of self and community expressed by the teachers and parents engaged with: some feel most at home in the forests while others are at ease in a school building or government office. While Koya advocates have an interest in presenting a coherent and unified position on affirmative action, I have license and responsibility to represent divergent possibilities of feeling among Koya teachers, to register the plurality of positions and a range of relationships between these actors, their community and the state. This diversity is often elusive in any analysis that seeks to summarise the situation for any community, caste or tribe group. We must also acknowledge the ambivalence to these processes that many Koya people feel – who in the midst of heated debate might just be trying to make do and get on, eager to become educated and employed themselves.

This chapter has borne out Béteille's (1992) assessment that reservations give caste (or tribe) a new lease of life as they collectivise the notions of entitlement and equality. In the midst of such a hardening of the notions of difference, there is a wide diversity of responses to policies of redistributive policies. Such heterogeneity and disunity might be demoralising for those concerned for the longer-term wellbeing of young Koya people, who are about to embark into such a world. But that plurality may also be read as a sign of constructive engagement with their own recent history, with state policy and with other Scheduled Tribe groups. There is no clear compromise or solution to the contradictory efforts of those who have formed unions to push through the implementation of affirmative action measures, with those who feel those very initiatives are contributing to stagnation and to a dumbing down of cultural heritage. Such a situation captures a crucial paradox evident in the application of positive discrimination measures globally.

Coda: The recent judgment by the Supreme Court dealing with a civil appeal against the State of Andhra Pradesh (February 2020) on the issue of GO3 deemed that the policy of 100% reservations was "irrational", "unfair" and "unmeritorious". It was judged that the policy was "discriminatory […] wholly impermissible and cannot be said to be constitutionally valid". This judgment and its fallout may sway the views of those interviewed during the research for this chapter.

Chapter 9 – Decolonising salvage ethnography?: cultural objectification and self-representation

In this final chapter I explore a range of self-representations of adivasi culture articulated by Koya people. I group these cultural revivalist efforts as potentially decolonising forms of salvage ethnography that seek to invert the terms of historically lop-sided power relations in the representation of adivasis. Through preceding chapters there have been echoes of movements for autonomy and sovereignty among Koyas based outside Illūru, for whom such a village is paradigmatic of the wider conflicts and transitions facing the community at large. We have also heard reference in descriptions of Vikkai's and Suresh's hunts to the idea of Illūru itself as an essentialised or exoticised space in which people from outside Illūru construct a fantasy of authenticity, which accrues cultural capital. In this chapter, we zoom out to a wider scale of analysis, beyond both the family networks of Illūru and the heightening caste distinctions in Chintūr and Rampachodavaram. Instead, we focus on how to respond to the internalisation of essentialist conceptions of a distinctive adivasi culture across these settings in self-representations of Koya people.

In this larger context of social movements, regional politics, public discourse and journalistic writing about adivasis, ideals of indigeneity, self-determination, and linguistic and political autonomy are prominent. These may seem dislocated from the material realities of Koya narratives we have thus far encountered. As we saw in the Introduction and in Chapter 2, representations of adivasi autonomy have significant historical basis. The categorisation of tribes was made because those groups were not subsumed into the caste system. As Bailey (1960) emphasised, they had retained a distinctive segmentary social organisation, often through retreat into more isolated areas, or migration towards better access to forest resources (Padel 2011: 17). Ideals of autonomy were reaffirmed through legal provisions intended to ensure adivasis' rights to forest in the Vth schedule of India's constitution. Yet, in practice, affirmative action to preserve rights over land have been repeatedly undermined. The most pressing example of this is the impending crisis of Polavaram dam, a hydroelectric project in the Gōdāvari river, expected to submerge large sections of the Koya speaking region and displace tens of thousands of Koyas. The capacity of adivasis to push back against this and to reclaim some autonomy is hampered by internal division among Koyas and the lack of co-ordination and solidarity between adivasi groups. Moreover, the resources available for such struggles are tiny in relation to the scale of the challenge. Given this horizon of submergence, the larger story is one of land alienation, "de-tribalisation", and perceived loss of culture, and

is mirrored across the tribal belt of India (see Elwin 1944; Fürer-Haimendorf 1982; Padel 2011; Vitebsky 2017). For many activists, the decline in spoken Koya language – an unscripted language of the Gondi family – is symptomatic of this sense of loss. Much of this research has sought to understand processes of change from the ground up and render these processes with the patina of lived experience in which actual people have participated. But in scaling up to a wider focus in the current chapter, it is essential to identify that such changes are not precipitated by the protagonists foreshadowed in the opening pages of this thesis. As Padel (2011: 21) perceptively describes, echoing a point of Xaxa's (2005: 1367) touched on in the Introduction, processes of development, integration and assimilation have been instigated by larger authorities; the colonial and post-colonial state, and the business interests of national and regional elites. Even Koyas who are upwardly mobile within their communities and who could be described as local elites are relatively powerless in relation to the larger hierarchies of power and access to resources across the district, state, and nation. This wider situation is relevant as we proceed to discuss the objectification of culture in this chapter.

With this broader view in mind, the present chapter seeks to explore the stratification of different groups within the Koya community, who hold contrasting notions of culture and community. I consider how these might explain different conceptions of the community's future and propose a framing to analyse what are ostensibly highly reductive and essentialised representations of adivasis in historical context. For certain cohorts of educated and politically active Koya people, concepts such as indigeneity and distinct cultural identity are expressed daily in constructions of their past and in their imagination of the future. These advocates for the community suggest that indigenous knowledge, dance and language can be a basis for cultural revivalism.[109] Others who are less incorporated into the Telugu mainstream sometimes actively desire greater integration, if not assimilation, as we have seen in earlier chapters.[110] They seek to disavow traits of cultural difference (such as their language). Meanwhile, the elder generation of Koya cultivators in Illūru are, for the most part, unconcerned by what counts as cultural difference between themselves and others. There are arguably more pressing and immediate challenges. People are less preoccupied with Koya identity as something that needs to be recognised by others, as was clear from the initial hesitation and then nonchalance displayed by the women who continued to dance at *Muthyalamma Pandum* as described in the

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[109] While Steur (2011) disaggregates different strands of indigeneity in the adivasi political discourse in Kerala (organic, autonomous, democratic and communist), in the Koya context these threads are too tightly overlapped to justify an attempt to separate the intonations referenced by different actors as they invoke indigenousness.

[110] Of course, "mainstream" Telugu culture is itself a broad and heterogenous entity. My use of it in this oblique sense, refers to Koya perceptions of the wider Telugu region, as one among many cultural blocks in India.

opening pages of this thesis. For them, their Koya distinctness becomes highlighted through interactions outside the village. Within the village, the resources necessary to reproduce daily social life are not as tightly tethered to an objectified notion of their community identity. Hence, this chapter draws out the contrasting scales of Koya culture as it becomes more sharply objectified, scales of analysis that will be further elaborated in the conclusion.

The situation can be fruitfully compared with the contrasts developed in Karlsson's (2003, 2013) research on Northeast India, and with Tania Li's (2000) work on the "indigenous slot" in Indonesia. In the latter context, through the focus on processes of articulation, we learn that some Lindu people have been able to advance representations of their indigeneity that are compelling to a range of audiences, and facilitate material benefits. Their success in doing so is dependent on their use of familiar tropes, and on finding a "place of recognition" (Li 2000: 163). Comparatively, Li's Lauge interlocutors in the mountains have never had the confluence of resources available to represent themselves within the appropriate frames of reference that would relate their predicament to outsiders. Or, in Li's words: "the specificity of their identity has not been made explicit, nor does it serve to conjoin local projects to national or global ones" (Li 2000: 150).

The contrasting forms of Koya dance observed in the Introduction are one illustration of processes of extreme differentiation within the Koya community. Dances performed within villages at the beginning of the agricultural season represent a very different scale of community to dances performed at a bi-annual adivasi cultural festival – an event that explicitly seeks to unify and express a distinctive Koya adivasi culture. Convenors of such cultural events and exhibitions of Koya indigenous knowledge, as described below, mobilise a highly essentialist notion of who Koya people are. These events eulogise the "authentic aboriginal culture" of village dances while lamenting the inauthentic, de-tribalised culture of those in transition. The previous chapter uncovered attempts to call on the state to protect Koya interests which are in competition with those of other castes and tribes in terms of recruitment procedures amidst internal debate about how autonomy and social uplift can best be fostered by the state. This chapter provides examples where Koyas are taking initiative to document and preserve what they perceive to be the end-point of their culture. These examples support the larger argument of this thesis that – in the process of transition away from shifting cultivation towards greater dependency on the state, and integration into the wider cultural and religious Telugu mainstream – Koyas' sense of having a "distinctive culture" is reified, and repurposed as a value. Their inclusion is premised on the reiteration of their "backwardness".

By making a comparison between these different groups of Koya adivasis' conceptions of culture (*samskriti*) – or the absence of such a conception – expressed through dance, language and religion, this chapter highlights the legacy of colonial-anthropological ideas, techniques, and education in producing and articulating "culture" that circulate among upwardly mobile Koya adivasis. Analysing this troubling continuity, I conclude that the Scheduled Tribe category, in its constant re-inscription through affirmative action, has great purchase in shaping the landscape of everyday essentialisation and cultural objectification of adivasi people. The ethnography below of students and political activists who operationalise self-exoticised ideas about "aboriginal" and "deeply indigenous" adivasis leads us to confront the possibility that such cultural revivalism constitutes a contemporary form of salvage ethnography. We must understand this essentialism in relation to the historical constraints on self-representation of adivasis in India and contextualise the use of out-dated anthropological categories. Instead of dismissing the work of cultural revivalists as naïve forms of strategic essentialism, or criticising them for being upwardly mobile or "middle-class" and therefore inauthentic, I view these approaches as discussed below, as decolonising forms of salvage ethnography. They have inverted the terms of colonial ethnography and post-independence categories of affirmative action to make cultural and political claims in an overcrowded public space – with no guarantees of a receptive audience to recognise such claims.[111]

Seemingly static representations of adivasi-ness, which provide the framework for Koya claims to autonomy and undergird efforts to preserve Koya language and culture, must be viewed in the historical context of impending displacement, "de-tribalisation",[112] and large-scale land alienation. The paucity of more nuanced theoretical resources for thinking through adivasi experience, representation and politics, that might develop into a critical field of "adivasi studies" (as suggested in Banerjee 2016; Chandra 2015; Dasgupta 2018) surely correlates with the forms of education and public representation available to current and previous cohorts of adivasi scholars and activists.

By grouping attempts at cultural revivalism or re-tribalisation as forms of salvage ethnography I emphasise the role of anthropological categories in the adivasi context. I show the continuity between the categorisations of India's tribes in the colonial era, and contemporary

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[111] In the thesis thus far, I have sought to validate the incorporation of state-like categories of recognition as they have been internalised into everyday conceptions of difference among Koyas. But there is also a need at different scales to register the damage that can be done by accepting these categories. In many ways the activists discussed here are reaching for a discursive frame beyond the ST label, that has a more universal appeal – yet the ST label itself remains a focal point, that conditions and enables a degree of solidarity (see Parkin 2000). There are echoes here of Glen Sean Coulthard's (2014) notion of a resurgent politics of recognition, which rejects the categories of state recognition.
[112] See Verrier Elwin (1939: 3).

mobilisations around the notion of adivasi. Though this continuity may be seen as deeply problematic, I propose embedded ethical justifications for salvage anthropology: these forms of salvage can promote dialogue between anthropologists and Koyas of various class backgrounds, at varying stages of integration into the wider Telugu society, and can enable a reclaiming of entitlement to self-advocate for adivasi sovereignty. Hence the chapter goes beyond establishing diversity within the Koya-identified community and contributes to debates on de-colonisation, indigeneity, and linguistic and cultural heritage.

Struggle for survival

In the words of Bhimanna, a Koya activist in Chintūr town, the region is in the throes of "non-tribalisation", echoing sociological terms of reference. Recounting the experience of in-migration of other castes since the 1950s, Bhimanna laments the successive failures of implementation of land protections across the decades. Such an apocalyptic message is the result of a life dedicated to fighting the injustice of loss of autonomy.

A central issue for activists like Bhimanna is the inclusion of the Lambada group in the Scheduled Tribe list for Andhra Pradesh. Lambadas do not have Scheduled Tribe status in other Indian States and are considered a more economically "advanced" community (Benbabaali 2018; Rattord 1984). Their inclusion is considered objectionable by many Koyas because Lambadas do not deserve or need the benefits of these reservations, compared to others, like Koyas or Konda Reddis. As Bhimanna explains, Lambadas are categorised differently in other Indian states. Their migration into Andhra Pradesh was significantly motivated by the fact that, since the 1970s, they were included in the ST lists, and thus became eligible for land protections. Bhimanna's account is corroborated by academic writing that notes this migration.[113] He recounts: "In 1950 there were no non-tribal people here; in 1978 there were 8,000 non-tribal people; and now there are more than 60,000. This is a process of total non-tribalisation!" Such an apocalyptic message contrasts with the more hopeful priorities of the students and teachers voiced in the preceding chapter. This is the result of a deep-set weariness with decades of battling historical injustice.

Competitive relations between caste groups facing off for resources is a crucial aspect of the substantialisation theories discussed in the Introduction. The substantialisation concept was not conceived to capture the tensions around land disputes but it is strikingly relevant in the Andhra scenario. In-migration places greater strain on land, but also places numerical strain in

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[113] For a sensitive discussion of the interaction between incoming Lambada communities and established Gonds, see Bhukya (2017: 165). See also Benbabaali (2018: 22).

limited seats for STs in schools and colleges, making them more competitive. These both serve to heighten the perception of Koyas as a distinct "interest group" who must adopt increasingly transactional approaches (see Natrajan 2012: xiii). Most tangibly in the Koya speaking areas of Andhra Pradesh, this animosity is felt in relation to the Lambada community and their capture of state resources. Lambadas' eligibility is precisely the same as the Koyas, despite having relatively recently migrated into the region, and despite already possessing closer access to the more intangible resources that are so vital in consolidating the protection and support of affirmative action. Comparatively, much less animosity is felt to exist between Koyas and Konda Reddis, who are recognised in the state's affirmative action as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).[114]

Cognisance of this category, as both a unifying marker that denotes a supplicant position in relation to state, and also as a sign of cultural difference guaranteeing entitlement, is strong. Alongside the reification of Koya distinctiveness, there is an ongoing process of substantialisation and governmentalisation of the wider Scheduled Tribe identity. Rather than mobilising collectively as STs or adivasis, the combined circumstances of substantialisation (in Natrajan's terms the culturalisation of difference), and the lack of implementation of land protections, conspire to leave these communities fighting for resources, rather than collaborating.

The situation of land loss that was identified in Chapter 2 is tightly bound up with in-migration. This is a cause of migration into the thicker forests, to access natural resources, as in the original founding of Illūru village. But later waves of in-migrations by other caste and tribe groups have had a slightly different impact, as they become rivals for limited state resources. These processes are also highly variegated in different geographical localities, where slightly different histories of boundary making have taken place and distinctions between those who are entitled to forest and state resources have been configured in slightly different ways. Overall, the picture is one of heightening perceptions of difference between Koyas and others as well as an intensification of degrees of class differentiation within those communities as they become competitively engaged over the limited resources available.

As well as demographic shifts as non-tribal communities continue to migrate in, the region faces the prospect of large scale displacement as a multi-purpose irrigation and hydroelectric project is being constructed across the Gōdāvari River, known as Polavaram Dam. River levels

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[114] This category is a subset of Scheduled Tribes and was previously termed Primitive Tribal Group, before the language was revised in 2006.

upstream will rise and are expected to submerge 276 villages, displacing approximately 237,000 people in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana according to official estimates, over 50% of whom are adivasis.[115] This includes a huge swathe of the Koya-speaking territory including the market town of Chintūr and the ancestral villages of my Illūru interlocutors.[116] Rather than dwell on the specifics of the dam, as other social scientists have done (Trinadha Rao 2006, Sivaramakrishna 2006, Banerjea 2010) or explore the local perception of these seismic changes to the river itself (Umamaheshwari 2014), I use the example of impending inundation to reflect on tensions within the community as a whole.

According to Bhimanna, the Koya villages on the river bank will become "watery tombs" (*jala samadhi*). The towns at higher altitude, unaffected by the dam, will be taken over by non-tribal populations who settle in this region to extract plentiful natural resources, fertile land and cheap labour. Bhimanna confidently predicts that in 50 years the Koya language will no longer be spoken. With such slim chances of Koya people's linguistic, cultural and political survival, why does Bhimanna devote his energy to these campaigns? This question brought a wry smile, as if he had been wondering the same himself. For him, this is a "last resort" (*dimpadu kālam*).

Many activists, such as Ganganna Rao, a young member of the tribal organisation Dandakaranya Rakshana Samājam (DRS) (Forest Area Protection Society) refer to an unrealised claim for an adivasi state in central India between the Narmada and Gōdāvari rivers. There is historical evidence of autonomous Gond adivasi kingdoms between the 15th and 18th centuries in what is now Maharashtra (Bhukya 2013, 2017: 24; Fürer-Haimendorf 1948; Fürer-Haimendorf 1982: 14). This idea of a wider Gondwana territory became the repository of an essential primitivism, that captured the imaginations of geologists, historians and anthropologists (Chakrabarti 2019) not to mention adivasi activists and politicians, and the wider populace (Patankar 2017). The narrative of an autonomous adivasi past is a political and ideological tool in the hands of today's Koya activists, who lack both the economic and cultural capital of other groups. This vision of adivasi unity is invoked in the *Rela Pandum* festival described in the opening vignette of the Introduction. DRS volunteers seek to consolidate and project a pan-adivasi *samskriti* (culture). It is a vision that surpasses the framework of state recognition.

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[115] Government of Andhra Pradesh, I&CAD (Irrigation and Command Area Development) Department, Note on Indira Sagar (Polavaram) Project, Dowlaishwaram, as reproduced in the appendix of Umamaheshwari (2014: 427) which provides statistical data and official circulars regarding Polavaram Project. See also, the edited volume *Perspectives on Polavaram* (Gujja et al. 2006).
[116] Illūru is 10 kilometres uphill from the river and will not be submerged according to current official plans.

As noted in the discussion of the resistance movement in Kathanūru (Chapter 1), the lack of literacy and formal spoken Telugu limits the capacity of Koyas and Konda Reddis to claim their land through official channels. From the 1960s until today Koyas and Konda Reddis in Kathanūru (see Chapter 1) have maintained an uneasy resistance to the occupation of their land. Intrinsically bound up with their historical alienation from land is Koya adivasis' historical exclusion from formal education and relative lack of literacy. This has prevented them from objecting to land dispossession and creates a disproportionately arduous journey to correct or challenge historical injustices and recover land that has been illegally acquired. Land and forests are presented in much scholarship as the paradigmatic issue in the sociology and development of adivasi people (see, e.g., Munshi 2013).[117] Of course, such themes are central to any critical exposition of adivasi life. And yet such connections are so consistently emphasised that we risk becoming blinded to the simple anthropological observation that land use and ownership is tightly bound up with governance, kinship, economic organisation and education. It is important to note the connections between historical alienation from land and forest resources, and the lack of access to education and political power among Koyas. The narrative of "survival" has its origins in the struggle over land, and land rights, but also has taken on a cultural and political tone. The struggle for survival is now a struggle for cultural visibility and electoral representation.[118]

Ganganna highlights how communities such as the Koyas need resources which are hard to come by; not just forest produce or market consumables but also education and legal representation that continues to be highly concentrated in urban and higher-caste population groups. While the attentions of the Koya community's few advocates and lawyers are focused on land cases relating to Polavaram, other long-standing issues have become deprioritised. Complaints are made by adivasi groups such as DRS that the rehabilitation and resettlement programs for the soon-to-be-displaced are mismanaged and that compensation packages are distributed in a corrupt manner. These complaints are ignored by state agencies such as the ITDA. Typically, the authority receiving such petitions are the same institutions that are responsible for administering the compensation packages.

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[117] This is an excelent and necessary collection, yet the framing redoubles the our eastblished association. Simialarly, Bates & Shah (2014) helpfully bring together connected processes of insurgency, that re-crystalise the terms of for how adivasi/state antagonisms are conceptualised in the future.

[118] The pre-eminent ethnographer of this region, Fürer-Haimendorf, titled his last book – a reflection on the changes he observed over four decades of engagement with adivasi across India – *The Struggle for Survival* (1982).

Activists like Ganganna and Bhimanna oscillate between a utopian vision of unity across the contemporary administrative boundaries, and a resigned acceptance of the futility of these aims. Both men also note that among the tribal organisations, NGOs, and activists in Chintūr, there are often disagreements about strategy that result in impasse. Unified political action and solidarity between local groups is rare because they are often competing for limited resources.

Even in the different mandal divisions of the region – and even more so between the different districts – tribal groups campaigning against the construction of the dam have adopted different strategies and lack cohesion and unity. The potential displacement of Koyas and others from Godavari villages highlights wider processes of fragmentation, "non-tribalisation", and perceived culture loss. The "habitat" and natural resources of these communities is sacrificed and put to a "greater" national use.[119]

For Koya activists like Ganganna and Bhimanna, the failed implementation of state legal protections of adivasi land in the Indian Constitution is not surprising. In fact, it fits the dominant narrative around state-tribe relations. Advocates operate within the paradigm of a "last resort", salvaging what autonomy they can from a systematically uncaring state, while attempting to preserve their own cultural forms for posterity. This simultaneously mirrors the language of state discourse about Scheduled Tribes who are designated on the basis of "distinctive culture", "primitiveness" and "isolation" (Middleton 2013, 2016: 95–6), while also searching for an articulation of their predicament that exceeds that fragmentation. As we see in the next section, claims to originality, and indigeneity are one mode of doing so.

Advocating for indigeneity

Outside the Koya speaking area, another group are working to generate traction for their ideas of Koya cultural identity under the banner of Birsa Munda Youth Association.[120] These efforts culminated in an exhibition promoting indigenous knowledge of Koyas, in the village of Kamaram (a place visited both by Fürer-Haimendorf in 1978 and by me in 2013 and 2014).[121] In this exhibition:

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[119] The term "habitat" is used both in official discourse and in social scientific analysis (Rao 2006).
[120] Birsa Munda is presented in history books as an anti-colonial hero, and martyr, from what is now the state of Jharkhand. His political biography and the movement he inspired was crucial source material for Guha's classic work in subaltern history (Guha 1999). Debates on Birsa Munda, his legacy, and the larger spectrum of adivasi groups that take up his name, exceed the scope of this chapter, but for an introduction to his contested memorialisation see Chandra (2016) and Shah (2014). Suffice to say the name signifies anti-colonial struggle, as well as contemporary adivasi political resurgence. It has been repurposed in a range of contexts, for various revivalist movements.
[121] Kamaram village, Bhoopalpalli district (formerly Warangal district).

> …the living practices of Koyas in the form of their belief system, their festivals and folklores, their cultural historical knowledge of seasons, knowledge of astronomy, geometry in production, conservation and consumption of food, and the corresponding relation of these to their festivals were documented with utmost precision and clarity. This has been done with an assertion and identification to the lineage of the Indigenous Knowledge System to find their rightful place in the modern socio-political order.
>
> The researchers closely studied all the three seasons—summer, rain and winter—of the year to document the Koya lives and to make these propositions. Owing to this study, the Birsa Munda Youth had begun their research on 10th day of May. The chronology of the events in the book, with respect to the food habits and the pattern of food gathering, that can be seen being unfolded in the lives of Adivasis, has a deep symbiotic relation to the climate and seasons.
> (Birsa Munda Youth Association 2018)

These efforts were warmly reviewed by public intellectual Kancha Ilaiah (2018), who described the village as "deeply indigenous". But what does Ilaiah mean by this term? In this context, the heightened sense of Koya indigeneity has been enabled by access to ideas of culture and identity that originate externally. The visits of anthropologists may have accelerated processes of self-exoticisation that are underway, but it is striking that here, where Koya language is *not* spoken, the claim for distinct cultural representation is most vehement.[122] The process of assimilation, of Koyas "forgetting" their language, is framed by the Birsa Munda Youth, echoing Bhimanna, as a tragedy.

The work of these students explicitly seeks to carve out a space of dignity for Koya adivasis, which displaces the presumed superiority of "Brahmin Culture", replacing it with a different culture. The group produced a book, "Indigenous Knowledge of Koyas", that they contextualise as follows:

> The book has been written with the spirit of modern universal inclusive egalitarian rational spirit offering its difference and dissent to the brahmanical hierarchy and patriarchy. The tools, foods, cultural productions, paintings, scripts etc., which has been documented in the book, would also be displayed during the three days of this event as an identity assertion to reclaim the cultural history of the Adivasi-Koyas.
> (Birsa Munda Youth Association 2018)

The Birsa Munda Youth discourage the adoption of regional languages and the construction of concrete homes, arguing that the traditional Koya houses of bamboo woven walls and palm-thatched roofs are more suitable for the seasonal climate. Arguably this further exoticises adivasis and leaves some Koyas looking down on others who have "forgotten" their language.

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[122] In Ilaiah's article promoting the conservation work of these educated Koyas, there is curiously no mention of the names of those who have undertaken the work of curating the exhibition, prompting the question of whether intellectual property rights need to be safeguarded too.

An element of Fanonian self-resentment is evident in the way the students evaluate their own parents' life-choices, to live in concrete houses, for instance (cf. Coulthard 2014: 131–47). These young Koya people are engaged in complex acts of self-positioning and class identification.[123] Those who seek to emphasise the distinctive cultural identity of Koyas do so from a position of privilege in comparison to Illūru Koyas, but that privilege is minor when compared to the resources of neighbouring communities who have far greater access to education, affirmative action, media and modes of representation.[124]

Most people in Illūru by contrast would consider these arguments through quite different terms. Choices about housing, or education, are not deemed indicative of essential features of who someone is. Many Illūru people work to acquire the most comfortable and waterproof shelter possible. Villagers invest, for instance, in blue tarpaulin covers to line their thatched roofs or their shelters in the *sainda* slopes, with no expectation that these choices express anything of their essential character. Teachers like Ramesh, who we met in the last chapter, would argue that good housing is as essential to Koyas' success as it is for any other caste or tribe community. Gaurav Palla, a Chintūr-based lawyer, similarly emphasised the importance of secure, dry housing. His development-orientated approach was to encourage people to ensure physical comfort and wellbeing. He occasionally chastised his relatives in Illūru for not ensuring their young children received the basic health and nutritional provisions from the state, to which they were entitled.

Linguistic autonomy

As noted in the Introduction, Koya language is an unscripted Gondi language of the Dravidian family, but at a regional level Telugu is the vernacular, while Hindi and English are dominant at a national level. Activists like Bhimanna and Ganganna know the importance of retaining Koya language but often converse in their professional roles in Telugu or Hindi, since their work is focused on enunciating adivasi issues to a wider audience.[125] Gaurav Palla, who was born to a Koya mother and a Konda Reddi father, conducts his legal practice in Telugu and some English, speaks to his children in Telugu, and speaks to his wife and his maternal relatives in Koya.

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[123] See Xing (forthcoming) for a more intensive exploration of tribal organisations like the Birsa Munda Youth Association.

[124] Important parallels emerge here between this scenario and the explicit use of the culture concept in other indigenous locations. In Oakdale's work, for instance, Kayabi Indian individuals in Brazil are developing notions of culture not only in a two sided indigenous and non-indigenous dialogue, but also between Kayabi with reference to local issues (Oakdale 2004: 61). Oakdale describes a process in which identity is actively refashioned to locally specific purposes.

[125] Bhimanna grew up speaking Koya but also speaks Telugu, English, Hindi and Deccani Urdu – the language widely spoken by Muslims in Telangana and western parts of Andhra Pradesh.

Despite projects designed to document and revive endangered languages, such as the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), there is a dearth of high-quality materials for many adivasi languages. The PLSI describes Koya as being "in the stage of endangerment and losing the limits, boundaries, existence, expansion, etc. due to the influence of English and Telugu languages in all walks of their lives" (sic) (Devy 2011). Debates on "endangered languages" have been taken up sporadically in the Indian adivasi context. As Peter Ladefoged argues (quoted in Thomason 2015: 88) speaking of the Todas, some adivasi communities accept that language loss is a necessary part of assimilation into "modern India". This perspective seems to presume that communities are united in their opinions on such matters, whereas I note a wide diversity of attitudes to the preservation of spoken Koya.

To delineate the conflicts around language, I now draw on ethnography with those who are in the process of transition, who speak both Koya and Telugu, who celebrate both animistic seasonal agricultural festivals, as well as mainstream Hindu ones. Where Koya remains the lingua franca, it is referred to as simply *bhasha* (language). Where Telugu is widely spoken, the act of speaking Koya develops a different meaning – it marks people out. Many students use Telugu when they are in hostels, or in towns, as they wish not to be identifiably different to others. This applies even when speaking on the phone to Koya relatives, for fear of being overheard. The same young people who boisterously sing and shout in Koya *bhasha* at village dances, are fearful to use that language in the presence of non-Koyas. In specific inter-caste spaces, the Koya language can invite stigma, rather than being a resource for community strength or solidarity.

In opposition to Ladefoged's point that the wishes of the community must be honoured above all, Nancy Dorian argues that if members of a community believe it is in their interests to lose their "threatened language" they almost certainly do so from a position of low status within the region in which they live. Such community assertions must therefore be understood contextually and later generations may resent the fact that their language is less available to them than it was to their elders who were "conditioned by dominant-language prestige, economics and politics to abandon their language" (Thomason 2015: 88). Koya populations in Kamaram (where the exhibition was held) have already become Telugu speakers. As Dorian suggests, this *is* a source of disappointment for the students of the Birsa Munda Youth Association.

Returning to the Koya-speaking areas, many parents speak to their children exclusively in Telugu. Jay – the husband of Pochamma's daughter Mona – speaks strictly in the dominant

regional language to their two-year-old son. He is confident that his son will learn Koya through exposure to his maternal relatives. In their village, Biyamwāḍa, which is close to Rampachodavaram, many people speak Telugu, so Telugu must be learned. "When he gets big it will come", he assured me. Nivetha's husband, Rajesh, also opines that Telugu is a more difficult language and therefore needs to be taught and spoken from a young age. Rajesh likewise assured me that their son will pick up his mother-tongue as he grows up. Similarly, Lila, Vikkai and Vijaya's two-year-old daughter in Illūru, has been brought up speaking only in Telugu. Her parents claim she doesn't know Koya language (*bhasha teliyu*). As an adult who learned Koya in close proximity (and almost simultaneously) to Lila learning to speak, I have an insight that her parents overlook: she knows Koya like everyone else in Illūru, but her parents have chosen to address her in Telugu (which is spoken by most villagers as well) instead of their own mother tongue. This is a symptom of her parents' implicit acceptance that Telugu is a more useful language in the longer term and enables better communication outside of the village.

The government Tribal Development Office at Bhadrāchalum have produced early years' school books to teach basic Koya vocabulary through the medium of Telugu. These resources are seldom used in schools and are not compulsory curricula in government schools in Koya-speaking areas. Though some teachers in the Chintūr area do encourage students to speak in Koya, they are fearful of being seen to neglect teaching children the more important language of Telugu. A research officer of the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) in Mysore, Karnataka, has collaborated with scholars at a college in Rājahmundry to make ethno-linguistic fieldtrips to Koya-speaking areas and they have recorded some 25,000 words of Koya language in a word list (personal communication). The CIIL have not, at the time of writing, yet published any resources for Koya language.

There is a marked difference in how Koyas who live in close proximity to other Telugu speaking communities perceive their language in multi-lingual environments, compared to those Koyas who live in unilingual villages. The latter may slowly adopt the regional language but the former group will likely have differentiated responses to their language being stigmatised, ranging from eagerness to assimilate, to reactive efforts to revive Koya as observed in the exaggerated performance of domestic Koya conversations in *Rela Pandum.*

Salvage anthropology

The concept of salvage anthropology enables me to group together the diverse range of social actors – both state and non-state, individual efforts and wide-reaching organisations – who are

seeking to capture and preserve the social and cultural lives of Koyas. In doing so I hope to situate these essentialising narratives in a proper context and intervene in debates that tend to leave social scientists wrong-footed, between academic nuance and strategic essentialism. Anthropologists have a strong tradition of documenting social and cultural entities, yet have a broader, and well justified, disciplinary instinct towards cultural relativism. As noted in the Introduction, sophisticated and nuanced views of cultural groups allow us to abstain too often from engaging openly with the terms of debate as they face our interlocutors.[126]

In the adivasi case, ethnographers have documented and published prolifically on the Gonds, the Baiga, and the Konda Reddis, expressing deep concern that these communities are systematically exploited and under-resourced by their respective states. Unfortunately, these authors have been repeatedly dismissed as naïve and on that basis their anthropological work tainted with the criticism that they are overly romantic (e.g., Prasad 2003). The notion of salvage can be very problematic. It has been taken to imply that certain cultures are to be showcased in museums, while other cultures make history and curate museums. Arguably the word carries a presumption of a static theory of culture (Baker 2013; Deloria 1998; Gruber 1970). By resuscitating the somewhat hamstrung concept of salvage anthropology, with all its resonances of "butterfly-collecting" ethnography of the late-colonial period, this chapter seeks to overcome disjuncture between engaged and detached anthropological traditions.

In claiming that adivasi cultural revivalists are engaging in a decolonising salvage anthropology, I highlight continuities between the colonial ethnographic archive of adivasi life, the first principles of salvage archeology, and contemporary adivasi self-representation. In some sense all ethnographic documentation is an act of salvage, as it seeks to characterise and communicate human experience: processes, meanings and culture which would otherwise – without the work of the anthropologist – remain unknown, ethereal or misunderstood. Anthropologists are engaged in endeavours to capture and translate forms of human value because something in that social field needs explicating to access a theoretical, analytical or rhetorical power. Anthropology seeks to bring the social under the control of academic vocabulary using writing as a means of freezing the tumult of meaning, practices and relationships that constitutes lived experience. This necessarily involves a simplification of cultural complexity, and the omission of other aspects of human experience. Implicitly, such

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[126] Of course there are many exceptions and several earlier calls to arms. See Kirsch (2018) and Scheper-Hughes (1995) for classic examples, among many others, of anthropologists engaging with real-world dilemmas and becoming active participants in the worlds about which they speak. But these debates face familiar challenges, generation on generation, as global cultural identities have become increasingly reified (Moore et al. 2008).

work participates in much longer processes of interaction and communication between audiences, and between cultures.

After emerging in North American cultural anthropology, the concept of salvage was applied to archaeological contexts in which cultural data was at risk of being destroyed. It has been suggested (Hester 1968) that salvage ethnography should be undertaken in situations where large areas of human habitation might cease to be habitable – something that is certainly the case in areas at risk of inundation. In archaeological research, the aim is to reconstruct a cultural and social scenario from fragments of the material culture and remains of human societies. Social anthropologists have, in comparison, an excess of data, and therefore our skill lies in condensing, rather than extrapolating from, empirical data.

Hester (1968: 41) reflects on the disproportionate imbalance in the salvage anthropology that was done in the Aswan reservoir in Egypt, where several hundred researchers were tasked with archaeological work while a handful of scholars worked on "ethnographic salvage" and cultural anthropology. He argues for a panoramic snapshot of large reservoir areas that are soon to be inundated, suggesting aerial photography to record land settlements. His approach values the process of collective learning and accumulation of data for future generations, a concern that resonates powerfully in the Gōdāvari valley and unites many of my Koya informants though they hold different notions of what their culture is.

As an anthropologist rather than an archaeologist, my data comes through the medium of engagement with the realities of contemporary life, rather than being inferred from the imprints of earlier inhabitants. Yet in the context of post-Narmada India, and in the longer context of what Bhimanna called "non-tribalisation", the parallel with salvage efforts on riverbeds is pertinent. The riverbanks and gorges of the Godavari may soon become underwater riverbeds, as their Koya and non-Koya inhabitants undergo displacement. They may become landless, relocated, or alienated. They may join the ranks of the urban poor. Or perhaps new hilltop villages will be raised on the slopes above the river, throwing people into fresh conflicts with the Revenue and Forest Departments. The world into which I delve to gather social data will be changed irreversibly. Moreover, the imminent destruction of that cultural data surfaces as an emic discourse at a certain scale of Koya society.

Anthropological research in Indian universities, as a more applied discipline with its own interface with civil service qualification requirements, favours a more static notion of culture and works more readily within the notions of identity that are used in everyday settings (rather than reconsidering all identities as constructed). I suggest that such working with a more

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accesible concept of cultural identity allows greater dialogue with other actors and fields for Indian anthropology graduates. Could locally grounded salvage ethnography open a collective space in which diverse efforts to document adivasi culture and language might collaborate? Could such a field engage more closely with Koya people themselves, both educated activists and villagers whose language, oral histories, music and dance might yet become valued in new contexts by new audiences. These provocations certainly risk reinforcing essentialised notions of Koya culture. But given the longer-term lack of representation of adivasi interests at a wider regional and national scale, this is a risk many Koyas are willing to take.

In promoting their distinct yet diverse adivasi culture through showcasing performance art, Koya activists in DRS – many of whom studied anthropology themselves – engage in a type of decolonising salvage anthropology. Their programmes are successful in exposing young Koya and non-Koya people to performances by diverse adivasi people, and within that to Koya language and dance as a distinctive ethno-linguistic world.

In a different adivasi context, Alpa Shah (2010: 135) has argued that the class distinctions between upwardly mobile adivasi activists and NGO employees mean that their efforts further "eco-incarcerate" adivasis in Jharkhand. Certainly class, and degrees of assimilation, do condition the types of perspectives that can articulate Koya and adivasi culture. There are reasons to question the legitimacy of the more educated Koya advocates to faithfully represent those who still cultivate and do not objectify their own cultural practices in the same ways (Appiah 2008). In the contemporary Koya context it is imperative to focus on the future outcomes for a diverse range of Koya people. In light of the construction of Polavaram Dam, the risks of strait-jacketing Koyas into narrow cultural scripts, or "eco-incarcerating" them, are outweighed by the immediate need to generate and consolidate claims for cultural and political representation and autonomy.

Though self-exoticising and essentialising, these attempts at cultural revivalism must be evaluated with an awareness of the historical lack of representational capacity. Such platforms open a collective space in which diverse efforts to document adivasi culture and language can collaborate. These must be supported if further resources are to be developed to generate more inclusive and varied cultural outputs for Koya people in the future. While academic audiences may be very wary of essentialising indigenous communities, I suggest there is a disproportionate fear of the threat posed by raw descriptive cultural material passing for the

output of our discipline.[127] Should efforts to record unanalysed cultural material render us merely storytellers or merchants in parochial anecdotes? I propose that if the fruits of anthropological research take the form of information that might constitute a radical history in the near future, and if it is appreciated within the community among whom that knowledge was produced, we should embrace such collaboration. Of course, as I have shown, the Koya community is by no means a single group with shared interests. But this heterogeneity and internal differentiation should not invalidate or undermine efforts to record that which can be salvaged of a vanishing world.[128]

Preserving culture

Having raised such questions about the role of cultural revivalist efforts, (which I have termed decolonising salvage ethnography) I now expand such dilemmas to a national and global scale. Clearly the production of such cultural narratives involves labelling and stereotyping which, as we have seen, can be quite inappropriate for many of those classified, and can become highly contested.

Many commentators are highly critical of the internalisation of labels that are externally constructed with the effect of marking differences from the politically dominant culture (Xaxa 2008: 28). In terms of the loss of indigenous languages, we have heard arguments from the Birsa Munda Youth Association who consider the adoption of a dominant language to be an act of cultural imperialism. We have also reviewed the work of academics such as Dorian who emphasised that the choice to adopt a dominant language is always made from a position of low status. Taking a different approach to cultural imperialism, Kwame Anthony Appiah (2008) suggests provocatively that we should – in general – allow global homogenisation to proceed, as it is mostly for the good (i.e., the development of better housing, sanitisation, education and access to healthcare). When people seek to use cultural imperialism as a justification for intervention, he reminds us to allow the concerned communities and individuals the autonomy to choose whether to make a stand on these issues rather than

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[127] Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) alert us to this too, although from within a different trajectory; their intervention purports to be concerned with the production of theory but subsumes this into the vocabulary of globalisation, capitalism and modernity. Nevertheless, they emphasise the asymmetry between the "reservoirs of raw fact" of the Global South, and the invariably western-modern project of adding value and refinement to these empirical sources to produce "testable theories and transcendental truth" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012: 114).

[128] Arunakumari's (2017) PhD thesis, *Koya Jati Samskruti Sampradayamulu*, written in Telugu language, can be understood as a contribution to this wider project. Similarly, Vitebsky & Monosi (2011), in Sora language, offers a model of collaborative, long-term engagement with these concerns. There is huge potential and intrinsic tension in all this work, since all forms of recording necessarily involve freeze-framing what is otherwise dynamic and syncretic. See also Mahapatra (2006: 142).

speaking on their behalf. As I have shown, the dynamics of who speaks on whose behalf are complex within the Koya community, where a significant proportion of people have not benefitted from what in Appiah's view are the positive aspects of global homogenisation (e.g., schools and access to healthcare).

Appiah (2008: 237) asserts that he is "all for" preserving "*culture*" in terms of tangible activities and cultural artefacts, broadly conceived, but does not have sympathy for preserving "*cultures*" in the sense of ensuring discrete cultural groups retain their "authentic" ways.[129] In any case, "what makes a cultural expression authentic?" Appiah asks, and, furthermore, "shouldn't the choice be theirs?" He points out that the cultural preservationists tend to claim: "*they have no real choice*" (echoing Dorian's point on language loss).

In the Koya situation described above, the "cultural imperialists" policing Koya culture are from the same community; but this research has revealed a highly disaggregated notion of community. There is in fact a wide spectrum of relationships of belonging to the Koya community. The more assimilated and better educated Koyas in the Birsa Munda Youth Association have arguably no authority to promote what they perceive as "authentic Koya culture" to those in remote villages, like Illūru. They are not from the same economic or geographical community as villagers who aspire to construct concrete homes, and gain better road access to market towns. But they do, I assert, have authority to leverage what they can of the constructed idea of the authentic and isolated Koya, if their goal is to carve out a larger space for those types of people to inhabit with dignity and with respectability.

It is very difficult to separate out the cultural artefacts (such as dance forms, of whose revival Appiah might approve) from the simplistic notion of their "culture" as something that "needs saving" (of which he certainly would not). Indeed, the two versions of culture (objectified collective identity, and representative artefacts) seem to have been collapsed onto one another in the adivasi situation, or at least they are deeply interwoven as the later indexes the former. These contemporary conceptions of culture are – as I have suggested through this thesis – co-constructed by state and non-state actors, and have hardly transcended the definitions that were prevalent within colonial period of anthropology in India.

Although the adivasi subject has been constructed in the literature as capable of insurgent activism and revolutionary politics (Bates & Shah 2014; Guha 1999; Hardiman 1987; Shah

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[129] His tangible examples include festivals of Welsh bards, the preservation of Old Norse and early Chinese and Ethiopian manuscripts: as a "valuable part of human heritage" (2009: 273).

2018), these also constrain the idea of adivasis within an oppositional politics, as they are also constrained by the aforementioned association to forests and land. We are yet to see self-representations that enable us to envisage adivasis as the authors of their own theories about themselves, without internalising to some degree the traits by which they are defined by others, outside of the loaded salvage paradigm. Educated members of adivasi communities are limited by the poor quality of education they receive in rural schools which have been shown to reinforce outmoded constructions of ethnic cultural difference and traditional values (Froerer 2012; Higham & Shah 2013). For adivasis, it seems there are few resources and little space to build a narrative that challenges, or contradicts the terms of the dominant discourse that represents them.

The Koya adivasis' predicament remains overdetermined by the negatively coded stereotypes about them. The only way to articulate their situation and their difference is to reiterate the tropes that are ultimately constraining. Among adivasis, processes of re-signification have yet to take root.[130] In a vital contribution to Dalit political philosophy, Gopal Guru and Sunder Sarukkai (2017) highlight *experience* of certain social locations as crucial for the production of theory. Guru describes the social context of intellectual hierarchies in India and laments the lack of capacity for theorisation among Dalit intellectuals. Arguably, his points are even more relevant for adivasis who are even more under-represented in knowledge producing industries.

Guru explains how Dalit scholars gain positions in academic institutions but do not have "community resources for theorisation". Where they *do* attain positions in academic institutions they are only engaged in empirical work, not theoretical work. Yet rather than interpret this as a repetition of collective devaluation, Guru observes that it is a conscious choice of Dalit scholars to pursue empirical work. They believe that "their lived experience … can stand on its own authentic terms and that it does not require any theoretical representation" (Guru 2017: 23). Furthermore, "they have privileged access to their reality, they can capture it with a full view without any theoretical representation" (2017: 23).

Dalits – and adivasis even more so – need much greater institutional support to follow an academic agenda "on more meaningful and dignified terms" (Guru 2017: 16). Among Koyas, community resources are neither strong enough nor deep enough to fight for the

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[130] Among Dalits, processes of re-signification have occurred, which explicitly seek to counter the internalisation of low-status (see Still 2014; Karanth 2004). Analysis of these processes debunks Dumont's implicit assumption that low-caste people passively accept their subordinate status in the hierarchy. The material presented in this chapter could also be read as a re-signification of previously stigmatising characteristics.

implementation of what is already enshrined in India's constitution, let alone fight for autonomy on multiple fronts. However, self-representation and cultural revivalism continue through the work of various organisations. The task of projecting a more nuanced and textured representation of Koya history and cultural identity – should that be desired – cannot be achieved easily. The emergence of Dalit theory suggests that through the uptake of education, and the gradual construction and development of institutional, political and cultural resources for generating a diversity of representations and resignifications, attention can be directed in ways that benefit a wider sense of community. This should not be taken to imply a linear model of political and intellectual emancipation, or to gloss over considerable outstanding challenges. Proliferations of self-representations from adivasis – although essentialised – may enable younger Koyas to grow up with a heightened awareness of the constructed and synthetic nature of their indigenous cultural identity.

Many communities in India are vying for marginality status in the world of policy and development and simultaneously occupy a peripheral and restricted space as regards their language, culture and history (compare Bhukya 2017; Kapila 2008; Karlsson 2003; Middleton 2013; Shah 2010). The intersection of state anthropological apparatus development politics (á la Middleton 2013) and new opportunities for "eco" tourism makes for an extremely competitive, overcrowded space in which cultural distinctiveness and minority identity can be periodically emphasised or expunged as appropriate by the Gaddis, Lambadas, Gorkhas, Bondas, Gonds and other adivasi groups. It might be characterised as a competition to fill the "tribal slot", both in terms of a public attention and in terms of the state's allocations of resources through affirmative action. These spheres require the articulation of particular narratives of community identity. The narratives that have most traction emphasise need, vulnerability, and uniqueness, and latch onto the features that were first recognised and recorded by colonial British officials to justify exclusions later adopted and re-entrenched by post-Independence governments.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored a huge heterogeneity within the Koya community. In doing so, it has offered a layered account of the historical production of, and perception of difference within an indigenous community. I have shown how the idea of belonging to an adivasi group is highly relative and dependent on the scale of analysis. At various scales of Koya social relations, the processes through which people feel themselves to be different from, or share affinity with others, have been made evident. Being adivasi, being Koya, and being a member of a Scheduled Tribe, are identifications that are dependent on particular material circumstances and on social and interpersonal contexts in which people find themselves.

We began in Chapter 1 with Akkamma, the eldest living person born in Illūru village, who is now a great-grandmother to young children who identify as ST Koya in a radically different way to her. When I left the field in February 2018, Akkamma's parting words to me were, "*nanna dulataski, na dinanku nimma varra* (when I die, come to my funeral)". Until now I have not had the sorrowful privilege of being called to make that journey, but the request remains vivid in my minds-eye. Whenever Akkamma's funeral does transpire, there will likely be loudly amplified Telugu "DJ-music" dance versions of the older adivasi "*rela*" songs, to which she would be quite ambivalent, alongside cyclical dances and vocal choruses orchestrated by her daughter Pochamma and granddaughters Mona, Nivetha, and Janiki.

In Daniel's ethnography of Tamil personhood, the organisational structure facilitates the processual opening up of the boundaries of a village, the walls of a house, the skin of a person (Daniel 1984: 9). In many ways we have taken an inverse journey. We have moved from the lineage of a one person in a particular place, to the construction of the person as a "type", as a political and cultural abstraction in the plural, diffused across a region of a nation state. This is arguably a more well-trodden path; it mirrors the transition narrative that adivasi shifting cultivators are putatively traversing themselves. This projection is apt because the collective communities have come to be thought of as akin to individual identities. In the current configuration of community in India, caste/tribe identity is represented and enacted as if it were individual; some people are equivalent, and others are different. Even among castes or tribes who encompass different religious faiths, they exist as "types" in a wider public arena of identity. In the present moment of state recognition, capitalist development, and historical change, the experiences of individual Koya people is refracted through a notion of their collective identity as Koyas, as adivasis, as STs. As I have shown, great diversity underlies these collective representations.

The eldest living participants in this research, like Akkamma, grew up in a world in which villages were founded according to spontaneous requirements for forest land across an open frontier in which small family units collectively hunted and practised shifting cultivation. Those elder Koyas and their children have witnessed vast changes in the way the families of this region engage with other communities and with the state. Both the social-reproductive modes through which Koya people seek to sustain themselves and their families, and the terms on which they engage with others from outside their family and their community, have shifted dramatically in recent generations. The grandchildren of the eldest living generation, in some cases now parents themselves, hold very different outlooks for their future and have quite different notions of who they are, as individuals, and as a community.

We have explored differences produced, experienced and reiterated through social reproduction, interaction, and engagement with state discourses. The opening chapter established narratives of differentiation between villages, clans and families in a particular place as captured by an inter-generational history. We observed the historical formation and categorisation of the people who cultivated that forest as a community defined as – scheduled as – Koya people, in East Gōdāvari district. We engaged with everyday local and externally induced models of differentiation in life expectations and class aspirations between siblings and closely related families within a village of shifting cultivators in Chapter 3 and 4. As we learned, some differences can be produced and reproduced through a season of shifting cultivation itself. Rather than imagining this to be an egalitarian scale of social relations, we registered the hierarchies of kinship, patriarchy, generationality, and inter-familial status within even the smallest units of close-knit families. But these inequalities are minuscule when compared to larger imbalances across the region and the nation. Straddling issues of representation, we recorded the nuanced and occasionally ruptured modes of care and reciprocity within and between the surname groups of Illūru. These fluctuating inequalities and aspirations were further developed in Chapter 5, in which we saw how palm-wine has become both a marker referencing traditional hospitality, and a substance through which the relations of that form of hospitality can be transcended via trade and accumulation of capital. Yet even within that process the product is still anticipated, savoured, and mutually shared in a manner that defies the simplification invoked by a social scientific analysis. We shifted gears, moving into a multi-scaled world of trade and exchange as the actual value of the crop, both in terms of material enjoyment and as a source of cash, transformed as it was relocated and redistributed. In that process of transformation, the social relations reaffirmed by consumption and exchange were remade again. But some differences between classes of aspirational young men became much more pronounced and solidified in relation to the wider economic market,

as opposed to their relative transparency within villages of animistic religious practice and family drinking circles.

As young Koyas make transitions into the wider Telugu world outside of the hills, as we saw in Chapter 6, they adopt culturally loaded ideas about the superiority and inferiority of caste, tribal and ethnic groups. Their everyday relationships tend to become more hierarchical. Some parents seemed to encourage contact with higher status outsiders, but were also aware this could have undesirable consequences. Some children's labour at home was too valuable to let go. Again, this material breached the limit of a neat analysis, as parents, children and young adults simultaneously negotiated competing material, economic and social pressures. Outside the village fewer everyday interactions and exchanges are moral obligations, and many more are explicitly transactional or economic. Among Koyas who are settled in towns without access to land, gender divisions are sharper and the relative power of women within their families is diminished. In semi-urban Koya households a wider kinship network remains a resource for care and support through money lending and sharing childcare, but Koyas increasingly live with expectations of care and opportunity from the state and the market.

Outside of shifting cultivation, the network of people to whom Koya people are directly responsible for becomes smaller and narrower in the immediate sense, but broader in an institutional sense, as it incorporates state development initiatives and their agents. Koya people over generations making this transition have relinquished a degree of autonomy in favour of a more dependent relationship to the state, and proximity to markets. For many of the families that participated in this research, this transition is thought of as a positive progression in their own family and community development. For some it is a collective matter, for others an individual choice, and for a few activists it is a tragedy. Shifting cultivation ceases to be the dominant mode of production and becomes a platform from which to cultivate cashew nut, tap and commodify palm wine, to grow and distribute pumpkins to relatives afar, and to share corns with close kin. Through these changes, people strive to earn more cash and are more able to participate in locally attractive consumption practices. They tend to adopt the religious practices of the wider region (Hinduism, and for some, Christianity). As they do so, they enter into a different mode of personal responsibility for their family, and a change in the modality of caring relations. In many ways the transition might be analysed as a self-fulfilling prophecy that reifies either end of the continuum. The notion of difference, between two contrasting social worlds, reproduces each type as distinct from the other in a collective imaginary.

Other Illūrites, like Kothanna, remain emplaced in the village world of reciprocity, and embody an older morality of support between families. Through the thesis certain protagonists

seem to exemplify particular modalities of behaviour, provision for others, and types of social relations; ranging from older cultivators who pragmatically and diligently seek to maximise resources from forests, kinship networks and state agencies alike, through to their children who embody aspiration, and the desire to enter into a world of cash, individual choice and new-found mobilities. Kinship networks are not diminished by livelihood transitions or irrevocably altered by affirmative action policies, but they are modified. These changes in social relations I characterise as shifts in practices of care and provision, and augmented forms of responsibility to the group of kin one is obliged to care for.

In Chapter 7 we regathered these narratives of difference around the notion of relational recognition. We examined how the stereotypes insinuated by the reductive ST category are operationalised through interactions within the community itself, and how those narratives provide frameworks, or reference points, for situated, emic understandings of who others are. From this material emerged a theory of social interaction as interlocutors place themselves and others within already constituted and highly loaded frameworks of recognition. As they do so they recreate and reapply those stereotypes and judgments, producing and reproducing the relation between themselves and those with whom they converse. The chapter goes beyond a critique of a reductive politics of recognition, by showing how frameworks circulate and are re-enacted within different spaces. This ethnography generated a multi-layered view of how discourses are latched onto in particular circumstances, and used to shape present interactions and potentially model future social relations.

At the level of the village, culture was just a mode of being or doing; in Illūru explicit references were not made. *Samskriti* was a word that others gave to the embodied activities of ritual hunts or dances, that only became a thing to be remarked upon when observed by an "other", non-Illūru person. For those on a journey of transition from the village into the town, the Koya culture was something that could selectively be participated in and lived out, or alternatively objectified and transcended. Culture could be invoked as authentic or inauthentic, opted in or out of. Recall the parents, Vikkai and Vijaya, who dissuaded their daughter from speaking Koya. Remember the youth who revel in Koya dances at marriages but speak Telugu when calling Koya relatives from their school hostels, for fear of being audibly tribal. These interlocutors were aware of processes of objectification and did not want to be constrained by rigid notions of authenticity. Meanwhile, for activists, advocates and representatives for the "community", culture was an objectifiable reality that needed to be nurtured, endorsed and cared for, and which would potentially perish were it not for the effort of leaders, societies and organisations both within and outside the adivasi community. These are the salvage ethnographers I have dubbed as decolonising, although much of their rhetoric is undergirded

by a much older colonial anthropological vocabulary. Their endeavours are situated within a public sphere where they are pitted as unlikely heroes, politically under-resourced and lacking in the forms of capital required to command real power in the cultural realm of public representation.

I have given a picture of the incrementally enlarging scales of difference felt to be deeply ingrained between caste and tribe communities across the wider region. As the aperture of the lens of the ethnography edged wider and wider, this allowed us to notice the everyday life of social categorisations and stereotypes as they are reiterated. I have connected this closely to dramatic material changes in people's lives as housing, transport, diet, education, love and livelihoods have shifted over generations.

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Beyond the distinctions of class, caste and tribe identity in the Gōdāvari region of Northern Andhra Pradesh, this thesis pitches up to larger-scale debates on the role of the state, and the role of anthropology in the historical production of difference. The desires for development, autonomy and recognition expressed in Chapters 7, 8 and 9, are closely bound up with the history presented in Chapters 1 and 2. I have sought to describe state-tribe relations in their historical context. I thematise these national and regional processes of identification and community experience as the historical construction of Koya difference. But this trajectory of enquiry inevitably confronts questions of how ethnic, cultural and religious difference is constructed within our discipline. Although anthropologists have maintained an engagement with fundamental questions of what constitutes difference (e.g., Chua & Mathur 2018; Graeber 2015; Moore 1994; Sahlins 1995), anthropology has struggled to develop a critique of the sheer rigidity of categories of person that transcends the discipline itself. Embedded social types, or "identities", are rendered fixed in the public sphere and continue to powerfully shape the worlds about which we write.

For my Koya interlocutors, regionally valent historico-political categories shape the ways they inhabit the space of a caste, of a community, in relation to other persons and groups, in schools, hospitals, markets, streets and even forests. Their situation is simultaneously shaped by their being an "indigenous group", a distinction which barely registers in villages but becomes salient at a particular scale of community organising or social science analysis. One key contribution of this thesis, then, is to draw a line of continuity between processes of differentiation at various scales, and to map national and historical constructions of difference, and processes of identification, onto intimate experiences of family life, and micro-level

interactions and expressions. I have shown that the incorporation of Koya people into the regional economy and society – a transition mediated through affirmative action, agrarian capitalism, religious homogenisation, and rural development – has brought younger Koyas to see themselves as being of a radically different ethnic/cultural group, the associations of which are subsequently yardsticks of status and superiority within villages like Illūru.

This difference is highlighted in relation to the experiences of those younger people compared to their parents and grandparents, for whom such differences might have been self-evident but were not exacerbated and articulated in the way they are today. This radical sense of cultural difference is surprising in a context where the everyday fabric of life, in other respects, is becoming increasingly similar across ethnic, caste, tribe communities. Putatively homogenising social and economic processes have complex and uneven consequences. Through livelihood transition, development and integration, culture has become an increasingly bounded and objectifiable entity. Especially for the young, notions of cultural difference weave in and out of daily dilemmas, motivating decisions and animating social life. Culture is something that can be ascribed to another person to justify how they are, and it can also be ascribed to oneself, actively performed or rejected. Yet at the same time culture can also be ignored or overridden and people can be treated as relatives though they are different, or treated as others even within the same family. This thesis has sought to appreciate how this process of reification is deeply problematic, but it is a necessary condition of a form of integration that many people strongly desire.

The construction of difference between some people is an important aspect of Koya social life, even away from the reification described through transition. Without distinguishing others one could never refuse anyone's legitimate demands. Difference, to a certain degree, is crucial to the maintenance of sociality, in limiting the network of people for whom one is obliged to care. Every person needs to be variously set apart from others, and at other times subsumed into a collective. At some point the closest daughter needs to become an adult woman in her own right, and the closest siblings end up belonging in different families. As those generational changes take shape in the lives of my interlocutors, and they become more integrated into larger towns and villages, their affinities as members of particular surname groups from particular villages recede in certain contexts. At wider scales, the finer-grained distinctions are less salient and in spaces in which a substantialised logic of caste is dominant, these differences are usurped by an emphasis on their ST Koya identity as the defining characteristic of their personhood.

For Pochamma, as much as she is pragmatic, generous, and eager to provide for related persons – there must be a criterion of relatedness. When sending me off to Rampachodavaram with heads of corn to pass to a relative from Dōraguḍa, Gaurav, who I would meet, Pochamma must restrict that provision, urging me not to share with other non-related Koya associates of Gaurav. She cannot care for everyone. In practice, whatever delicacies he receives from his relatives' *sainda*, or from their forests, will be shared with his fictional kin in the town – the network of young advocates who are, to him, intimately related as *tomond*, *māmaya*, and *bava* (brother, mother's brother, brother-in-law).

For those who have become educated and advocate for their Koya kin in Illūru, they are aware of their burden of caring responsibility, which does not completely disappear as people transition into more assimilated spaces in the region. As these processes of integration continued through this thesis, the presence of women became more muted, reflecting a wider pattern among marginalised communities (see Still 2014). In some cases, men like Gaurav bring forward progressive masculine values, shaped in their villages, into a wider and more sharply patriarchal environment of the towns. The broader picture, however, is that the competitive world of inter-caste and inter-ethnic towns are distinctly more male-dominated than small Koya villages.

For many educated Koyas, as they move into the heterogenous spaces of the towns, that category becomes a heightened marker of both connectedness and social access. For those pursuing lives in modern institutes, like state universities, there can be no overemphasising the burden of simultaneous expectation for them to represent others who have not had opportunities to inhabit those spaces, and simultaneously to transcend their own identification as ST within those spaces. Such complexities are part of the spectrum of culturalisation of ST identity through state recognition and affirmative action in its broadest sense.

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In the introductory framing I raised the question of how social scientists can navigate the disjuncture between cultural and ethnic identity as putatively fixed and available to policy makers, while at the same time working with more unstable and contingent anthropological notions of identity. These concerns are key to work on recognition in a range of indigenous contexts. I have sought to address this problem by focussing my analysis on the terms of difference that are salient in the vernaculars represented. This thesis has been a contextualisation and analysis of the lives of really existing Koya persons. Through this representation of those people, I hope to have contributed to scholarship which has established

a nuanced view on adivasi people in general, and on the imagined adivasi subject in social science literatures. Just as the transition from the life-world of Akkamma's childhood to that of today's "ST: Koya" produces and calls into existence the subject it interpolates, so too this thesis brings forward a more complex and multifaceted idea of an adivasi subject.

I have shown how the category of adivasi can obscure a more textured and historically situated understanding of the lives of those classified as such and I wish to amplify calls to rethink and re-evaluate the term at large (Dasgupta 2018, Banerjee 2016). In the same way as race, ethnicity, culture and gender have *had* to be completely re-thought, the term adivasi is due a thorough re-appraisal. This thesis has documented some of the baggage attached to the labels "adivasi" and "ST" and shown the effects of these as they recirculate.

In seeking to understand how difference is made and consolidated, I have given an account of how the identity that has been given to those excluded from larger political processes (ST), has become mobilised and reclaimed as a means to counter capitalist expansion into the territories and resources of those communities. This process occurs both within and outside the state. Affirmative action itself is already a model of redistribution and recognition of historical injustice. Through such a state framework the Adivasi Teachers Union worked to assert autonomy and generate role models ethnically marked as Koya, while the "non-political" tribal organisations like Dandakaranya Rakshana Samājam make more utopian claims for a separate state, and create platforms for distinctive cultural performances. There are others too envisaging a utopian order who like all political movements play a role in reiterating the Scheduled Tribe or adivasi person as someone on whose behalf they campaign. It is precisely through, and in opposition to the state's frames of recognition that the contemporary adivasi subject exists.

Rather than thinking of people like Akkamma as resisting or attempting to evade the state, this thesis suggests a reading of her life as one in which she has come to terms with the state's intimate role in her life, and that of her family, as a provider of rice, as an arbiter of identity categories, and as an actor from which she may at times be ambivalent and distant, but not, on balance, antagonistic. One corollary of this research has been to show that the notion of antagonism between adivasis and the state serves to mask the ways in which the former is conjured through the prism of the latter. As we saw in various ways, the state enables forms of subjectivity, autonomy and a notion of collectivity that is generated increasingly through the language of out-dated anthropological discourse, but articulates closely enough with a really existing category in indigenous social ontologies of kinship, relatedness and everyday interaction and exchange, to have traction and become as much a part of an emic vernacular, as

it is a governmentalised ascription. The narrative of transition thus becomes even more than a self-fulfilling trope. It is also a way of thinking about social interactions and social relations being established and solidified at incremental scales. The boundedness of Koya culture is, I suggest, produced precisely through the mediation between emic and etic understandings of who those Koya people are.

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