Postcolonial research as relevant practice

Abstract (Article Summary)

Located within movements for social justice and ecological restoration, Chatterji assesses public forest lands reform initiatives in Orissa, a state in eastern India. The use of research as liberatory practice within postcolonial contexts is addressed.

Full Text (6948   words)

[Headnote]
ABSTRACT

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Located within movements for social justice and ecological restoration, this paper assesses public forest lands reform initiatives in Orissa, a state in eastern India. It addresses the use of research as liberatory practice within postcolonial contexts. Referring to advocacy research processes within public lands reform in Orissa, this paper questions whether such reforms destabilize the inequities that shape gender, class and caste relations in Indian society. Elaborating a critique of participatory research efforts within Orissa, this paper assesses the contexts and inherent inequities that make such efforts precarious, yet necessary.

RELEVANT PRACTICES

Emancipatory research is generated through political action that interrogates the unpredictable sites of its efficacy. Such research seeks to create knowledge relevant to the communities it purports to serve. Relevant knowledge is necessarily partial, producing multiple and contradictory effects. Yet the legitimacy of such research precisely hinges on the consequences that result. Emancipatory research as advocacy addresses problematics and enters into contested representations. It confronts the truths that sanction existing power relations[1]. This paper uses advocacy research within public lands reform processes in Orissa, a state in eastern India inhabited by over 50 million people. It questions whether such reforms destabilize the inequities that shape gender, class and caste relations in Indian society, to produce contexts where the subaltern might be heard.

A CRISIS OF COMMITMENT

In India, development remains unattainable for 350 million of its poorest citizens. Gandhi's vision of development has been undermined through large-scale industrialization, urbanization and modernization (Saxena, 2000a: p. 6). Since 1951, five year economic plans have been adopted to propel India's development in industry and agriculture, and to remedy the political dissension, debt, and infrastructural disarray that plagued the newly independent country (Indian Social Institute, 1988). Development actions have succeeded in exponentially increasing India's industrial, military and agricultural production, its national income and middle class. Yet, in 2001, almost fifty-four years after independence, development has failed to alleviate poverty and related socioeconomic oppressions within the most disenfranchised caste, class and tribal (adivasi) communities. The scale and implications of this poverty and the magnitude of the bondage it reinforces is experienced by most nations of the Global South, forcing its citizens to live within a constant state of war. These conditions are languaged as impoverishment, in circumstances where people's most basic human rights are violated.

International bodies, such as the World Bank, national development ministries and departments in Southern countries, corporations and oligarchies, have institutionalized development ideologies into action plans that promote the globalization of cultural, political and economic systems. Their performance has devastated the Earth's ecology and resources, enhancing social dislocation and alienation, and furthering the dominance of technological rationality. Such rationality involves the quantification of life based predominantly on market productivity rather than social capability. The international community has at best been concerned with adequate representation, not self-determination, of marginalized communities within development. Neither have the European and North American nations taken accountability for the political and economic crimes they have committed through colonization and neocolonization. Such considerations do not factor into organizing reparations to the disenfranchised in the once colonized countries of the Global South. Rather development institutions continue to assert processes that systematically delegitimize traditional livelihoods by impoverishing the natural resource base upon which the lives of subsistence communities depend (Escobar, 1995). Aggressive deforestation continues to haunt rural communities globally. In Sri Lanka 23 percent of its land remains forested, in India 8%, in Pakistan 4.5%, and in Bangladesh 6 percent (IUCN, 2000).

The failure of dominant development and its promised freedoms bear testimony to a deep unconcern for social and ecological justice. In response to such neglect communities across India are operationalizing frameworks for sustainability that link economic and ecological well being. Informed by local concerns, along with those of equity and diversity, these frameworks generate an impassioned quest for a new praxis of freedom. Such practice endows sustainability as central to the assessment of the health of society, where well being must be calculated in relation to the empowerment of the most marginalized, respect for diversity, and political integrity.

Political processes are underway throughout India that link ecological restoration with social equity. These processes are rooted in social movements that have impacted all levels of Indian society, from marginalized communities in rural areas to policy makers in national government. The precarious, problematic and enduring alliances across vast cultural strata make India an exciting example of social change in a hierarchical and multicultural society. While the need for sustainable development is crucial in urban environments because of their intensive resource consumption, one of the primary sectors forging sustainable change has been rural communities who live in contiguity to forest areas. This is evidenced in movements for public forest lands reform (Chatterji, 1998).

Toward Public Lands Reform

Forest lands in India are nationalized and under the legal and managerial jurisdiction of state agencies, such as the forest or revenue departments. The primary stakeholders of forest lands are the communities that depend on the forests for subsistence, state agencies, development organizations and the industrial sector. Since the eighteenth century, India's forests have been savagely degraded through commercial exploitation during colonization and post independence felling for supportive infrastructure for national growth (Poffenberger and McGean, 1995: p. 127). The colonial and postcolonial state's custodianship and policing of forests has vitiated human-nature interactions. In 1950, 48 percent of the total land area was under healthy forest cover. Subsequently, in the late twentieth century only 19.4 percent of the country's total land area was under some forest cover, and 8 percent of it was healthy (Poffenberger, 1995: p. 2; and Mukhopadhyay, 1994: p. 35). By the 1950's, increasing numbers of people became dependent on the few remaining forests. These communities no longer had any rights over forest lands, only 'privileges'. Unilaterally, with a few honorable exceptions, women were the most adversely affected by forest degradation (Sarin, 1999). Poor rural women in India, constitute the lowest sociocultural and economic 'caste'. Rural women perform housework, agricultural work, and non formal forest-based and other industrial work (Chatterji, 2000a: p. 22). Their work days are invariably 1.5 times longer then men's workdays (Tinker, 1994: p. 98).

In response to the crisis, various strategies for ecological restoration emerged in independent India, some exclusively among community groups, others that involved community groups and state agencies in collaboration. Community, Participatory and Joint Forest Management systems emerged out of the failure of colonial and social forestry and the Indian government's forest policies in general. The term Community Forest Management (CFM) refers to local community initiatives and organization toward regenerating, protecting and managing public and other forest lands. The state forest departments are generally unsupportive of such initiatives and would like to extend a state-community co-management framework instead. Participatory Forest Management (PFM) is widely used when describing forest management systems that are collaborative in nature, involving local community groups and state forest departments and other agencies. Joint Forest Management (JFM) is the preferred forest department option of formalized agreements between local community and the state relating to protecting and managing public forest lands (Chatterji, 1998).

These forest management systems were meant to include and empower community. In post-independent India, initiatives for a transition to PFM and JFM systems emerged during the 1970's-90's, preceded by thousands of communities forming CFM groups since the 1940's to protect their degrading forests, primarily in eastern India's tribal forest tracts (See Poffenberger, 1995).

In 1988 and 1989 respectively, the Governments of Orissa and West Bengal passed a number of

resolutions clarifying the terms of inclusion of local community groups in forest management, recognizing the village as the formal unit of management. The National Forest Policy of 1988 legitimated the prior claims of forest dependent communities to these public resources. The Government of India passed a resolution in 1990 encouraging community-state collaboration in forest management. In response to the 1990 circular, 24 states have issued formal JFM directives in the last decade. It is estimated that 44,000 villages are currently engaged in organized forest protection. The Government of India revised the guidelines in February 2000, more attentive to the complex conditions under which JFM operates (Saigal, 1999 and 2001; and Government of India, 2000)[2].

Stabilizing India's natural forests and watersheds is seen as a significant step in sustaining a rural environment that can support a still expanding population. The fundamental premise of J FM and CFM is sustainable forest management through peoples participation and a reinstatement of their subsistence rights over forests. Operationalizing such rights would engender the empowerment of the millions of people that live under survival conditions. Their empowerment would in turn make possible a devolution of authority over forest lands from state agencies to community groups. The state would begin to play a supportive role in management Community groups would take responsibility for sustainable use and conservation using decentralized mechanisms for local self-governance.

Political and operational constraints have slowed the transfer of rights to user communities. Community protection and natural regeneration have been remarkably effective in halting further degradation and restoring productivity to these environments, now estimated to cover around 35 million hectares (Government of India, 2000). While financial support from government and development agencies for JFM increased exponentially during the 1990's, numerous issues remain unaddressed. Such issues include critical J FM policy weaknesses, and the need for procedural, tenurial and legal changes. There is a felt absence of effective mechanisms to operationalize field learning and forums for dialogue between primary government planners, state forest departments, and the diversity of development agencies entering the arena at the state and national level.

At present, the National Ministry of Environment and Forests has limited capacity to guide the transition in public forest management systems. To shift the enduring injustices that characterize development interventions and civil society, forest reform processes and programs require major political and legal reframe from the state custodial and industrial management models operational for almost a hundred and fifty years. There is a sense among participants and supporters of JFM in India that new initiatives are required to maintain the larger national effort to reform public forest lands management (Poffenberger and Chatterji, 2000). Rather than endorse the formal inequitable agreements between the state and community groups, JFM's and CFM's non-governmental stakeholders are stressing the need for the transfer of authority overforest lands to local community groups. They are opposing agreements related to benefit sharing that allocate a greater percentage of profits and resources to the state forest department. They are also organizing against the unsustainable management practices, such as annual felling, employed by the forest department. Community groups are concerned about the lack of infrastructural investment into watershed and microcredit development, and availability of processing and marketing facilities for non timber forest products. The growing mandate for a complete reform of the jurisdictional and managerial policies related to public forest lands is an extremely significant development.

Local resistance to historical oppressions that continue to function in the present shapes movements for public lands reform. The convictions behind such reform prescribe a more revolutionary stance. Shifting the very fabric of agreements between the state and community for forest management, ongoing social and political processes seek to alter allocations and entitlements related to all nationalized forests. They advocate abrogation of state control over

public forest lands, tenurial and custodian rights for marginal communities, and the initiation of community management frameworks. In a postcolonial state where public lands represent resources critical to the survival of marginalized peoples, these reforms foreground issues of livelihood in the context of ecological sustainability for 300 million people living in close relationship to the forests[3].

EXPLANATIONS OF RESEARCH

In Orissa, public lands reform movements are premised on unequal relations of power, productive of impassioned social activism and critique. These movements raise questions related to the role and responsibility of the postcolonial state to marginalized rural communities, and of community access to public resources. For the 8,000 community groups working toward public lands reform, their resistance affords hope, sustains lives and manufactures conflict (Chatterji, 1998: p. 14). Speaking to social and ecological restitution that reallocates authority over resources, public lands reform propagates safeguarding rights to livelihood and to land. Defending these rights asserts the role of self-determination in local economies that confront the invasion of global capitalism.

These postcolonial movements have used research as a technique to explicitly resist inequity. Producing knowledge through generative methods offers insights into social processes. Postcolonial research prompts contested narratives that make certain voices, factors and players relevant and visible. The priorities of such production shift continually, and in their mobility, they navigate a deconstructive practice that stories and responds to change. The last decade has produced extensive research from Orissa that is action oriented and locally situated, relevant as an intervention within processes that facilitate further intervention. Local community members, non-governmental organizations, institutions and allies have initiated research processes as a mechanism of reform. These inquiries interrogate public lands reform in Orissa and foreground recommendations for policy and social action.

Within the Global South the practice of action research was shaped in the 1960's-70's. Framing the relevance of research as a tool for social change, participatory and participatory action research methods were generated as instruments of social action[4]. These frameworks were influenced by neo-Marxist and human rights activism in postcolonial Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka in Asia, and by liberation theology in Colombia and other areas in Latin America. Research was discoursed as a practice, as a process of empowerment where participants are agents rather than subjects of inquiry. Knowledge was legitimated as coproduced, shaped through collective agency. The objective of such knowledge was to facilitate social dynamics that reorganized power relations.

It is important to mention that some of the major critiques of participatory research and action emerge from the spaces in which they are practiced. Participation is often solicited without reflection or capacity building. Transition from autocratic inquiry to collaborative practice is sporadic. When attempted, unequal social relations engineered through class/caste privilege, differences in education, language, gender socialization, and comprehension of capability disrupt it. Collective knowledge production demands questions related to the process of research. What epistemological and political determinants govern the production of knowledge and enable and constrain the engendering of relevant knowledges? How are political and social shifts reorganizing research as intervention?

The voices and silences we encounter during research resound with histories of domination and the rigid ordering of difference. Endemic to the very process of intervention is the danger of reproducing the interests of those dominant, or misrepresenting the interests of those marginal. Postcolonial research seeks to shift power relations by inclusion of multiple constituencies in the process of knowledge making and the product provisionally defined as knowledge. The inevitability of privileging certain voices and reproducing existing social hierarchies demands continual attention to the power dynamics that shape knowledge. The inquiry is made necessary because of the very inequities of class, gender, race and caste that privilege us. How do we-challenge the very ground that defines our social being as we strive to dismantle the conditions that produce us as voiced and others as voiceless?

I have been practicing advocacy research connected to public lands reform in India since 1990. My work has been closely linked to the lives of marginal people within a few hundred villages. Since 1994, the Asia Forest Network has provided me a platform to work from. The Asia Forest Network is a policy and advocacy program founded in 1991, housed in California. The Network provides a framework for exchanges related to research, advocacy and policy, connected to public forest lands reform in Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. The Network has regional, national and local affiliates, groups and centers in these countries, and it consists of members from local community groups, institutions, nongovernmental organizations, state and national forest departments. The Asia Forest Network works on forest resource management, ecosystem regeneration, public lands reform, and issues of gender and equity. This work responds to deforestation and livelihood, promoting responsible development (Poffenberger and Chatterji, 2000).

The Network works to effect policy within local, regional, national and global dialogues, engages mediation processes and develops methods for enhancing tenure security of local communities. Viewing the relationship between the ecology and people as integral to practicing and learning effective procedures for sustaining natural resources allows us to look for varieties of applicable methods that empower and encourage communities to protect the environment. We use applied and participatory action research, qualitative and quantitative tools, geographical information systems and other technologies. We situate ourselves within relevant local, genealogical, anthropological, environmental and historical approaches. Alliance building frameworks reflect our commitment to working with multiple stakeholders to enable a transition in forest management toward devolution of authority from governments to local community groups. Alliance building utilizes advocacy research as deconstructive practice, as an act of bearing witness, resource making and capacity building. Such practice questions the essentializing of truth, identity, thinking and action that often organizes political processes[5]. Building alliances is seen as necessary within shared political processes that empower collaborative social action. Such collaboration neither infers a lack of conflict, contradiction or dissonance, nor does it assume consensus. It refers to strategic relationships that advocate justice.

CONTEXTS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The politics and integrity of research is manifest through the collaborative construction of agendas, the process of research, mediated by relationships that make various stakeholders accountable to each other. Commitment to a shared process that is diverse in its priorities is both problematic and necessary. Conflict and contestation do not lead to a questioning of commitment, rather, it leads to clarification of our different approaches and priorities. It is perhaps the engagement of differences that permits relationships to endure.

Alliances within Orissa at the village, district and state levels have been integral to my work[6]. They are provisional and enduring, fraught with the subtext of unjust histories. Certain state level coalitions that ally with village institutions to identify priorities for necessary research and action, have participated in determining the relevance and focus of the research I facilitated.

Participation, ones own and that of others, in the process of knowledge production is inherently flawed. It varies with entitlement and access. It is impacted by the process of its solicitation, and it is framed by the level at which it was being solicited. Participation must be profoundly linked to empowerment, while understanding both as always partial and incomplete. My work has afforded an intellectual understanding of the organization of social movements related to public lands reform. It has rendered problematic development alternatives and interventions within the social particularities of class, caste, gender, power and government in rural Orissa. In such overdetermined contexts, how do we foster relations that make necessary explanations of action at every juncture?

In 1995, citizens' bodies challenged the Orissa Forest Department - the state agency with jurisdiction over forests -to reformulate its policies related to public forests to prioritize community custodianship. They requested that the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) instate a review of the Orissa Forest Department's policies before continuing further funding to the Orissa Government. The review was advised by citizens' bodies in Orissa through sustained consultation with community groups at district and state level workshops. SIDA, the Swedish Government's international development assistance program, was a primary donor facilitating the forest department's commitment to democratic forest management. SIDA agreed to this petition in 1996, and at the behest of local activists, invited the Asia Forest Network, particularly my colleague Mark Poffenberger and I, to be a part of this review. In 1997-98, I was involved in conducting a state-wide assessment of forest management systems in Orissa within the SIDA project. A primary objective was to understand what is working and what is not within existing systems, and to use this knowledge to frame the structure of decentralized environmental management (Chatterji, 1998).

There is considerable strategy necessary in sustaining movements. My colleagues from non-governmental organizations were reluctant to participate in the review as it would deflect energy from their alliance with local people. Being an outsider and an ally, one is best positioned at times to arbitrate confrontation between the state and the people. They required that I organize platforms where oppositional stakeholders, the forest department and community groups, could participate. This research utilized existing dialogical platforms at the village and district levels that allowed various stakeholders to engage in this process. The research supported community stakeholders in understanding and clarifying their involvement within forest management processes. The primary task was to enable and monitor the equity of representation in the process.

The SIDA review used participatory methods of inquiry. Those involved in the review and connected to academic practice drew on traditions of postcolonial anthropology, cultural studies, geography, development, environmental management and historiography. Others drew on indigenous knowledges, human-nature relationships and life histories. The review engaged oral and literary traditions, and it was conducted in Oriya, in languages spoken by Deori, Juango, Molhar, Sabar and Santa! tribal communities and in English. About 1200 villages participated directly and through representation, in Dhenkanal, Karanjia, Ghumsur South, Rayagada and Bolangir-five of the twenty-eight forest divisions in Orissa. These divisions were identified together with Orissa Forest Department officials, community groups and non-governmental organizations, based on their ecological and social importance (See Chatterji, 1998). The review focused on the following areas: 1. Programmatic and operational constraints. 2. Benefit distribution from forest management. 3. Transition to collaborative forest management. This study used various participatory and action approaches to research, analysis and planning. Research activities included community profiling and resource mapping, narrative assessments, quantitative profiling, ecological audit, assessments of village level JFM-CFM and district level citizens groups.

Through diagnostic and impact analysis and qualitative micromanagement analysis, the SIDA

project sought to understand existing resource forest use patterns and conflicts along with the different protection and management units in the area, and the social groups that collaborate or dominate in this management. The inquiry addressed the context within which the social composition and control of these protection units manifest, their objectives and present legal and functional status, management boundaries and microplans. The inquiry mapped the formation histories, shifts in leadership, management and people's participation, resource distributive mechanisms and gender, class and other equity issues.

The research processes were wide-ranging and varied, mediated by certain ethical practices related to methodology. Supporting research agendas that are contingent to the needs of local communities, made necessary that the review emphasize the inclusion of local knowledge and involve communities in the inventorying, monitoring and planning of local forest management. Yet, in assessing the enormity of this project, participation of the 50 million people that this research sought to represent was very limited.

Primarily, qualitative participatory action research approaches, and anthropological tools were used which facilitated collection and analysis of information by and for stakeholders within CFM and JFM projects. Participatory action research approaches allowed for greater dialogue between the forest department staff, and facilitated teaming and sharing of information among the different levels of the forest department, bending the rigidity of bureaucratic boundaries. The review attempted to generate a systemic picture of community resource use by prompting the community to speak for itself. This was critical in understanding community needs and forging alliances between the forest department and community. Methods, such as manual geographical information systems, were used to help create forums for communities to pursue discussions among themselves concerning their own goals and objectives for the protection and management of their forests.

Certain thematic considerations that underpinned all activities within these research processes were: 1. The critical need to involve field level forest department staff in the studies and activities. 2. To ensure the participation of all the various stake-holders within CFM/JFM programs. 3. To address equity issues related to gender, class and social identities (such as caste/tribal identity) by enabling the participation of marginalized sections in the process and reflecting their concerns in the project document. 4. To create research collaborations that deemphasize hierarchies and help to identify resource needs and sustainable use systems; and to encourage partnerships within the forest department, between the forest department-community, and among community groups. 5. To make accessible the process and products generated by the specific activities to local communities and department field staff through translations of reports and other documents. 6. To instate in-built process mechanisms for sharing research findings and receiving feedback from CFM/JFM communities, non-governmental organizations and local forest departments.

Assessments

Methodological practice within postcolonial research can only emphasize critical intellectual activity within a context of social activism. Within the research process this paper refers to, such practice shifted the focus of inquiry from interpreting and representing knowledge, to the emergent participation of various and subaltern stakeholders within knowledge making. Such research resides within a complex diagnostics of power/knowledge relations, emphasizing knowledge making as relational and vulnerable. It undermines the obsession with 'truth' at work in knowledge construction. It problematizes universalistic and relativist approaches to knowing and

being. Such shifts permit research to live as an emancipatory practice, rooted in a relation of identification with its colonial past and challenged by its subaltern practitioners. It fosters a relentless, genealogical critique of society.

The SIDA review produced openings for limited participation of citizens in decision making within consultative governmental forums on public forest lands management. In 1998, India conducted nuclear experiments; and, in 19992000 SIDA retracted its support, citing its differences over India's nuclear politics as a primary reason for its withdrawal. Revoking aid severely impacted the most marginalized sections of Orissa, who, ironically are not involved in decision making on nuclear policy. The lack of donor commitment to the Orissa initiatives is symptomatic of development practices where donors (or governments) responsible for disbursing substantial financial contributions fail to ensure continued support for social change (Taken from Chatterji, 2001).

In working within such politicized human rights' struggles, assessments of failure and success are complicated. While the SIDA review failed to induce radical' policy changes, it powered certain meaningful processes. An informal citizens forum of non-governmental organizations, institutions and individuals was functional in the state capital in Bhubaneswar. This body had been responsible for voicing the concerns of its constituents. It had grown over a period of time and was the most extensive state-wide forum to represent stakeholder concerns related to CFM and J FM. The leadership was provided mostly by larger non-governmental organizations existent at the state level. In 1998, in order to resist governmental oversight on human rights and to contribute formally to policy processes, this state level group sought to formalize into an elected Citizens/Non-Governmental Organization Advisory Group on forest management in Orissa.

Cognizant of the proficiency of the Advisory Group, the SIDA review recommended that the group be responsible for electing non-governmental organizational representation to the Orissa JFM Steering Committee, and other state forums. It was endorsed that consistent entry points be established for implementing feedback from this forum to planning and policy bodies within the state. The Orissa Forest Department formally invited the Advisory Group to participate in the JFM Steering Committee in August 1999. This group has been critical to the development of political will and infrastructure that enables complex negotiations in JFM and CFM policy. It has effectively represented multiple positions of alliance and opposition to the state. The Advisory Group articulates its specific political and social mandate to represent community interests and strongly advocates public land reform. There is concern that this, or any such body that elects to represent the JFM and CFM community at the state level must be equipped with certain functions that make it a representative and ethical entity with adequate checks and balances. Some organizations have recommended that the Advisory Group periodically undertake a social audit and hold regular meetings to negotiate the divergent positions among them (Chatterji, 1998).

The SIDA assisted process identified the need for closer collaboration between the various stakeholders at the local divisional level. Intensive discussions were held with local forest officers, community groups, and other organizations regarding the creation of a platform that would allow for such collaboration. There was much support for forming divisional level working groups. These working groups, convened by the forest department, were to promote greater dialogue concerning varied goals and objectives. The forest department in 1998 initiated three divisional working groups (Chatterji, 1998). While this was an important endowment, its utility is undetermined. State-wide political shifts increasingly endorse greater democratization through communitarian governance in the form of panchayat rule (Saxena, 2000b)[7]. The political will in this process is committed to enabling community control at the micro level that foregrounds local self-governance. Such shifts will revolutionize the allocation of power over land. To support these shifts, forums like the divisional working groups need to be dissolved. Community participation in forest department controlled forums must be replaced by the department's participation in community convened platforms.

Such departure would necessitate that forest management objectives must be made compatible with the 1988 Forest Policy and 1996 legislation for extending the Panchayati Raj system to adivasi areas. The role and function of the forest department needs to be reassessed and its revenue generation practices relocated. Currently, the state determines and defines the structure of institutional arrangements between itself and community groups as they operate on public forest lands, and it does so through mechanisms of decision making that are neither participatory nor equitable.

Questions of Knowledge Production

Postcolonial justice is fictive in so many ways. Land reforms have not endowed the landless in Orissa. The present balks at its own reflection as countless women, adivasis and children live lives of severe economic depravation. The lives of the most disenfranchised have incrementally improved in the last century, as an afterthought of development. Postcoloniality struggles with the death of memory where its promises to the poor are least honored. Their actions for survival and agency for self-determination are policed to benefit the advantaged. In such a context, when I broach the subject of human rights to those suffering from its most severe violation, I am faced with silence. Their survival struggles render abstract the discourse of human rights. Human rights has failed to language itself in ways that resonate with the concerns of the marginalized.

A conversation I had with Kali Babu, a community elder in Arabari, West Bengal, leads me to reflect on the role of resistance. Non-violent civil disobedience has been an integral practice in public lands reform. The practice of resistance seeks a radical shift from inherited conditions where the structural predicament of inequity endures. A key element of resistance has been the emphasis that alleviation of poverty must be distinct from the dissolution of culture. External structural interventions that attempt to mitigate poverty encourage a decomposition of local cultures. The rationality of progress and the infrastructure of monopoly capitalism require the quantification of culture into its productive and profit capability. Such quantification undermines local efforts. Diversity and sustainability are detrimental to such homogenization. Community leaders and non-governmental organizations in Orissa are aware that misrepresentations of their cultures and lifestyles are assembled to augment irresponsible development. Dominant development is neither sustainable nor organic. It rewrites the premise of development from local enfranchisement to cultural, economic and ecological mutations that sustain inequity.

Local research agendas are attentive to such disregard. These agendas focus on addressing poverty and sustainability. Identifying what is working and what is not allows for a prioritization of necessary interventions. It also detects aspects of local social conditions that must change to support self-determination. Internalized colonization, caste and gender relations are yet to be explicitly engaged. Such engagement is critical to renovating the infrastructure toward equitable self-governance.

It has been a privilege for me to be a part of this process. I have learned accountability in labor. I have witnessed anger and resistance as magnificent and humble, fraught with tension and contradiction. The ethics that define these ongoing associations have produced work and relationships that nurture places of profound meaning. Such collaboration finds courage to acknowledge the impossibility and absolute necessity of this labor. It lives in a complex relationship to irredeemable differences, and its own power. My role has served a function within the movements to which I am committed. Yet, it is crucial to continually foreground the purpose of such research. Democratization of knowledge demands a subordination of the researcher to

processes of social change.

Since 1993, 1 have been working both in India and the United States as a university teacher and activist. The task of intervention is continually problematic as I inhabit the contradictions and estrangement of bi-nationality. It is a chosen diaspora that seeks continual, if impossible, return. In this context, how might I, as a woman from postcolonial India, presence the political horror of 'First' world inequities in the context of 'Third' world resistance? How might concerns of 'Third' world subsistence live within the 'First' world Academy through critical intellectual activity and social action? How might particular forms of knowledge constructed through collective practice in both places question their relevance?

In the broader context of utility, how can the Academy foreground knowledge production through pertinent engagement with the concerned community? How can the Academy understand practice intimately as an ally to the marginalized? How can the Academy in the United States be concerned with growing an intellegensia that asserts a will toward justice? How might difference operate as an active force toward knowledge? How do we sustain and advocate the labor of freedom? Michel Foucault, speaking to the injustices of the penal system, stressed that the discipline of philosophy would be altered if the penal system were to breakdown through insurrection (Foucault, 1977: p.228). I would contend, similady, that were the persistence of colonization to be acknowledged seriously within international institutional contexts, the Academy would be forced to radically rethink the methods of knowledge production and their effects.

GLOSSARY

CFM: Community Forest Management

JFM: Joint Forest Management

PIPAR: Peoples Institute for Participaton search

PFM: Participatory Forest Management

SIDA: Swedish International Development Agency

[Footnote]

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[Footnote]

Translations, and insertion(s) within [] in the quotations used in the text are mine. My association with public lands reform movements since 1990 enables this work. While I take responsibility for

[Footnote]
ENDNOTES

Foucault. See Michel Foucault, 1977, 1980 and 1994, for his formidable conceptual framework languaging the facticity of power that is produced within the diversity of human relations and social practices.

[Footnote]
[2] Sushil Saigal. Personal Communication. 1999 and 2001. Also see Government of India. 2000. Guidelines for Strengthening of Joint Forest Management Program. Ministry of Environment and Forests. No 22-8/2000-JFM (FPD). Febru

[Footnote]
ary 21, 2000. New Delhi: Government of India.

[Footnote]
[3] Postcolonialism - The diverse field of thinking, resistance, and action, within the North and the South, defined through a critical relationship to colonized history. It does not refer to the 'end' of colonization. It delineates the relations of power defined within the context of the North and the South, South and the South, and the East and the West, since colonialism began. Postcolonialism is a contested space that operates within specific histories and contexts (See Payne, 1997; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1994).

[Footnote]
[4] Participatory Research is primarily concerned with collaborative knowledge making. Participatory Action Research is concerned with inquiry that is enacted through participatory processes and seeks to facilitate action. Participatory research or participatory action research is not located within a particular disciplinary frame. It utilizes a variety of qualitative, quantitative and organic tools as appropriate. FalsBorda, Fernandes, Freire and Tandon are some of the key proponents of participatory (action) research in the South. See Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals-Borda, Muhammad Anisur Rahman, Walter Fernandes and R. Tandon. Fernandes and Tandon are two of the major proponents of participatory action research in India. During the years of 1989-1991, I have been privileged to work with Walter Fernandes. Also, see the work of the International Council for Adult Education and Budd Hall in Toronto. Also, see Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Gupta and Ferguson, 1998 and 1999; and Marcus and Fischer, 1986.

[Footnote]
[5] For an elaboration of deconstructive practice, see Derrida, 1967 and 1968; and Shapiro, 2001. For Orissa research, see publications authored by Agragwamee, Peoples Institute for Participatory Action Research, Singh, Regional Council for Development Cooperation, Sarin, Saxena, Sundar, Chatterji, Kumar, Poffenberger.

[Footnote]
[6] Orissa Administrative Boundaries - Orissa has thirteen districts and twenty-eight forest divisions. The districts are administrative boundaries and the district administration oversees legal, jurisdictional, land and rural development matters. The forest divisions are forest boundaries; the forest departments, at the divisional levels, oversee forest jurisdiction and administrative, legal, and financial matters related to the specific forest division. The forest division usually falls within the administrative boundaries of the district it is located in.

[Footnote]
[7] In independent India, the panchayat system of government, or Panchayati Raj (rule), refers to the three tier structure of local governing bodies from village to district level: gram (village), samati (block - a collective administrative unit constituted of a group of villages), and zilla (district an administrative unit constituting of a group of blocks). The passage of the 72 and 73 Constitutional Amendments in 1992 enabled Panchayati rule, enforcing a national man

[Footnote]
date for greater democratization and decentralization (See World Bank, 2000).

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