

The labour of love: Seasonal migration from Jharkhand to the brick kilns of other states in India

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Seasonal casual labour migration in India has conventionally been understood as the result of extreme poverty whereby villagers are forced to become migrants for the dry six months to subsist or merely survive. This article draws on fieldwork in a village in Jharkhand and a brick kiln in West Bengal to argue that migrants do not understand their movement in economic terms alone. Many see the brick kilns as a temporary space of freedom to escape problems back home, explore a new country, gain independence from parents or live out prohibited amorous relationships. It is suggested that Jharkhandi activists and policy-makers' construction of such migration as a 'problem' is as much about their vision of how the new tribal state ought to be as about exploitation. Migration to the kilns is seen by them as a threat to the purity and regulation of the social and sexual tribal citizen. This moralising perspective creates a climate that, paradoxically, encourages many young people to flee to the brick kilns where they can live 'freely'. In this way, the new puritanism at home helps to reproduce the conditions for capitalist exploitation and the extraction of surplus value.

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I

Introduction

Clutching a small bag of clothes, Sanicharwa Mundein left Tapu village¹ one frosty January morning to board a bus for Ranchi, Jharkhand's capital, the first leg of a journey to a brick kiln in West Bengal. I walked with her to a nearby village where she was to join other villagers and the labour contractor, Ganga Yadav. Two months before, after a devastating argument, her husband Rana had fled to a brick kiln with Ganga. Sanicharwa said she was afraid to lose Rana to another woman at the kilns. She had to join him.

Following Meillassoux (1981 [1975]), seasonal casual labour migration of people like Sanicharwa and Rana is usually understood as part of a broader system of exploitation and oppression characteristic of capitalist production (Bremner 1985, 1994, 1996; Mukherji 1985; Standing 1985). A result of this analysis is a conflation of the role of migration in the broader social system and the migrant's point of view. The migrant is rarely depicted as opting for departure and is usually assumed to live in extreme poverty with little alternative but to leave the home area for the dry six months of the year to subsist or survive (Bremner 1985; Shah et al. 1990).

In recent years the migrant has acquired more agency. Yet, most often he/she is seen as a rational actor striving for an economic optimum (Lal 1989), or participating in a defensive coping strategy in the context of debt and extreme economic vulnerability (Mosse et al. 2002). Although some object that the migrant is not just '*homo economicus*', and consider social, religious and 'ethnic' factors, their accounts argue that it is mainly economic choices that drive such migration (De Haan 1994; Rogaly and Coppard 2003). Those who integrate the social and cultural contexts of migration do so more in their analysis of change in the areas receiving immigration (Appadurai 1996) or generating emigration (Gardner 1995; Osella and Osella 2000, 2003), rather than in their consideration of why people move.

argument presented to them. Thanks to Chris Fuller, Rob Higham, Toby Kelly, Ben Rogaly, Orlanda Ruthven, Kathinka Sinha-Kherkoff and Patricia Uberoi for comments on earlier drafts. Special thanks to Jonathan Parry for encouraging me to follow up stories from the brick kilns and for critical reading of several drafts.

¹ I have changed most place and personal names.

Based on eighteen months of fieldwork in the undulating, degraded landscape around Tapu village in Bero Block of Ranchi District, I suggest in this article that, from the point of view of those who migrate from Jharkhand to the brick kilns of other states in India, it makes little sense to understand seasonal casual labour migration in economic terms alone. In focusing on such movement, marginal but increasingly important to labour studies (Bremner 1999: 416), my aim is to further important recent contributions to the study of migration (Osella and Gardner 2004; De Haan and Rogaly 2002). These show that while economic considerations might shape or constrain it, seasonal casual labour migration is a dynamic sociopolitical process. I argue here that the migrants do not see brick kiln migration just in terms of money; nor as the irredeemable torture and drudgery that much of the literature portrays. Rather, they view their migration as a temporary escape from a problem at home and an opportunity to explore a new country, gain independence from parents, and live out prohibited amorous relationships. These are important dimensions of seasonal casual labour migration which, though occasionally hinted at, have generally been neglected in the literature and are rarely projected as a primary impetus for migration. For many migrants, life at the kilns is seen as 'free'. The desire for freedom is historically situated: its motivational force cannot be assumed as self-evident. I am not suggesting that the kilns give Tapu migrants freedom, but I do see it as significant that Tapu migrants often describe the kilns as a place where they can live 'freely'.

Thus, I do not aim here to conduct an economic analysis of migration, nor do I contest the view of migrant labour at the brick kilns as part of an exploitative system of capitalist production. Indeed many migrants acknowledge that they are cheap labour for wealthy industrialists and that they expect to be cheated at the kilns. As Willis has proposed with regard to why working-class children in England want working-class jobs, 'there really is at some level a rational and potentially developmental basis for outcomes which appear to be completely irrational and regressive' (1978: 120). In other words, I suggest that it is not contradictory to view brick kiln labour migration as exploitative, while also understanding that most migrants not only view their movement as a choice but also see the brick kilns as an important, if temporary, space away from the social constraints back home.

A brief context to seasonal casual labour migration from Jharkhand is followed by an extended story of the escape of Burababa from my courtyard in Tapu to a brick kiln in Uttar Pradesh. This story reveals that

Burababa's children also had complex reasons for migrating. I then look at the other side of the picture of unmitigated misery in the brick kilns, and at the reasons people give for migrating. These are quantitatively documented in the penultimate section. In conclusion I suggest that the Jharkhandi anti-migration campaign partly reflects a desire to redefine Jharkhand as a tribal state and to reimagine a 'purer', *adivasi* state citizen. Opponents of migration, who see the kilns as a threat to the ideas of purity and regulation of the social and sexual tribal body, create a moral climate that paradoxically encourages many young people to flee to the brick kilns where they think people can live 'freely' away from these regulations. I suggest that these discourses of freedom point to transformations of power in which the new puritanism at home helps to reproduce the conditions for capitalist exploitation and the extraction of surplus value.

II *Context*

Gardner and Osella (2003) show that contemporary patterns of migration are not merely a result of modernisation but have long been a central feature of life within the subcontinent. Migration from Jharkhand to other states is no exception. Indeed, De Haan (2002) has argued that circular out-migration from Bihar, the state from which Jharkhand seceded in November 2000, is at least a hundred years old. In the late 1800s, West Bengal, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Assam, Bhutan and even Burma attracted migrants from Jharkhand. These 'aboriginal', 'tribal' or 'jungli' hill people of Chotanagpur were preferred in railway and road-building projects, and especially tea plantations, where they were considered 'more industrious and tractable than other classes' (Government of India 1861: 2). By 1895, at least 50 per cent of workers in Assamese tea plantations came from Chotanagpur (Badgaiyan 1994: 177). Weiner (1988: 161) estimates that by 1921 nearly a million tribals, one third of Chotanagpur's tribal population, had emigrated. In Tapu there are many adventurous tales of forebears, and some personal recollections of those who went to build roads and pick tea near the Chinese border, where the rain fell in little white flakes and one's feet turned to ice.

With the saturation of tea plantation labour, many of the offspring of Assam and Bhutan migrants went instead to the new brick kilns of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They joined a stream of seasonal

migrants from across the Indian landscape in search of work. Although it is difficult to estimate Jharkhand's annual migration, most agree the figure is at least several hundred thousand.² Of the 100 Tapu households, at least 47 per cent of the adult population has ventured at some stage to the brick kilns in those states. The Yadavs, descendants of the old landlords, do not generally migrate. It is mainly the Munda, Oraon, Maheli, Badaik and Lohra tenant descendants, classified by the government as either Scheduled Tribe (ST) or Scheduled Caste (SC), who do. In 2000–2001, 36 per cent of Tapu's ST and SC population above the age of 16 migrated—a total of 73, of whom 47 per cent were male and 53 per cent female.

It would be easy to conceive of this migration as merely a survival strategy. At first glance Tapu strikes the outside observer as an economically-depressed Jharkhandi village in an underdeveloped region (Devalle 1992; Prakash 2001). All the villagers live in mud houses; there is no electricity and no schools or public health facilities. Literacy rates are low. Apart from those still studying, only 15 per cent of Tapu people have attended school up to Primary Class 8; 8 per cent have passed Matriculation, and only 4 per cent have passed Intermediate. Although every household owns some land, limited irrigation means that many harvest only one main crop a year. After the November harvest, livestock-rearing, and manual labour in the village stone-chipping industry and in nearby government schemes are the main sources of livelihood. It would therefore be reasonable to assume, as the Department for International Development (UK) and the Indian government development projects in the area do, that people from the 'deficit' classes of the village, especially ST and SC families, have little option but to migrate. But in Tapu the situation is more complex: economic motives may be significant, but they are not incompatible with others on which I concentrate. Indeed, it is the latter that the migrants stress most.

III

Escaping to the brick kilns

It was an August night in 2001, during the run-up to the rainy-season festival of Karma. I could hear the distant beat of drums in the *akhra*, the

² Rogaly et al. (2001) highlight the problems of quantifying the scale of seasonal migrant labour in an interesting attempt to estimate the number of seasonal migrants entering Bardhaman District, West Bengal, in the rice-harvesting season.

village dancing circle. Suddenly there was a commotion in my courtyard. Somra Munda told me that his father, Burababa, had not been seen for two nights. Somra had just discovered that Burababa was on his way to the plains of Jonepur, Uttar Pradesh, to join his second son Mangra for the rest of the year at the brick kilns.

Somra was upset that his father had run away. The past year had been frustrating. Against Somra's wishes, Burababa, well over 60 years old, had chosen to work as a *dhanger* (a live-in year-round general manual labourer³) in the house of a Yadav, who was a descendant of the old village landlords. Somra had wanted his father to live at home, and to be able to feed and clothe him like any decent son. He also needed him to look after the family's cattle and work in their irrigated fields. Yet Burababa wanted to work and eat at the Yadav's, sleep wherever he liked, and earn a meagre Rs 1,200 for the year. With the beginning of the rains and the rice-transplanting season, Somra had finally convinced Burababa to leave the Yadav and come home.

The rice-transplanting season is the great annual festival period. The village is a hive of activity. All the seasonal migrants have returned. The mornings are filled with hard work. The men exchange labour to plough and prepare each other's water-logged fields. The women, with their legs coated in oil and *sarees* hitched up, sing and joke as they sow rice in the fields. The children have mud baths and catch crabs and snails to eat. In the afternoons the high spirits of the fields are carried into the village. The owners of the fields sown that day host a lunch for the men and serve them rice beer (*hadia*) and wine from the *mahua* flower. The women are served the alcohol as well as nibbles of fried lentils and wild mushrooms. The party begins at noon and continues into the evening. Those with energy to spare (especially youngsters), then move on with their singing and drumming into the *akhra* where the night is danced away. At four in the morning the new day begins with new fields to be ploughed and sown and a new party to be hosted.

For Burababa and others, the rains are a time for merriment and bonding. But his return to his son's house had become a great strain due to the restrictions imposed on him. Several years ago, Somra and his immediate

³ In this part of India, a *dhanger* was a person who, in return for their availability at any time for a multitude of tasks ranging from farm work to general cleaning and building work, was provided meals, clothes, housing and a nominal annual wage by his employer. Most *dhangers* in Tapu and the surrounding village were children between the ages of 5 and 13.

family had become part of a group of Mundas who call themselves Bhagats and who consider themselves a class above the impurity and decadence of the Munda households of their birth. Somra's bitter memories of his childhood are dominated by moving from house to house as a *dhangar*, Burababa's lack of concern about his children's education, and his developing fondness for the local brew. At some point, Somra ended up working as a *dhangar* in a nearby village where he fell in love with his Munda employer's beautiful daughter, Ambli. To Somra's dismay, after ten years of living in Ambli's house, her father married her off to a man from a neighbouring village. However, Ambli was soon back with Somra.

Somra now felt the need to prove his worth to Ambli's parents who had given their other daughters in marriage far up the social scale—to armymen and policemen. He decided to emulate Ambli's father and become a Bhagat, training intensively for several months. He joined a group of Mundas living under strict rituals of secret prayers, refraining from food cooked by others and non-vegetarian food (all but sacrificial meat), and who had given up liquor (except the foreign or 'English' varieties, beautifully sealed and packed in bottles labelled 'Old Monk' or 'Royal Challenge'). By this cleansing and ritual training they derive secret powers to cure minor illnesses and drive away troublesome spirits. Apart from the whisky and rum, Somra's lifestyle became closer to some Brahmin families that I knew in neighbouring villages than to that of his brother Mangra or his sister Jitia. Somra today thoroughly disapproves of his siblings' and his own former lifestyle.

Somra had, for instance, arranged the marriage of Mangra to a suitable girl, only to find that Mangra had brought from the kilns a Ho tribeswoman from south Jharkhand. Mangra's Ho-speaking partner had difficulty with Nagpuria, the local language, and felt ostracised by other villagers. Unlike most other brick kiln migrants, Mangra has since chosen to live at the brick factory almost all year round, bringing his family to Tapu only occasionally for a few weeks in the rains. He thus chose not to farm the fields that are his share and not to live under the eyes of his watchful elder brother Somra. Jitia, Somra's sister, had also been married off to a man from a neighbouring village, only to return a year later declaring her love and determination to live with a married man named Minktu in her natal village. After one night in the *akhra*, several years ago, Minktu and Jitia had met secretly. On Jitia's return, Minktu left his first wife and child. The new couple ran away to the kilns to escape the accusations of dishonour and came back the following season, Jitia expecting her first

child. As for Somra's remaining sibling, Budhwa: Ambli (Somra's partner) had a paternal cousin, Chotki, who spent all her days at their house and who fell in love with him. Chotki and Budhwa eventually ran away to the brick kilns to consummate their love in peace. After having two children, the couple decided to stop migrating, look after their village fields, and follow in Somra's footsteps to become Bhagats.

Although Budhwa's fate was slightly different from that of Mangra and Jitia, what is common in all the stories is that at some point migrating to work seasonally in brick factories provided an escape mechanism from the claustrophobic restrictions of their brother and others in the village. So Burababa's escape that rainy season was, in part, only a repetition of what had happened in that courtyard several times before. When Burababa returned to Somra's house, he also returned to a strictly vegetarian, tee-totaler life—too restrictive for the old man. By night, I had seen and heard Somra's disapproval when Burababa stole away to enjoy the company of his friends. By day, I had seen Burababa's quietness in the confines of our own courtyard grow. Eventually, at a time when few remain at the brick kilns, the old man made a secret arrangement with a labour contractor and left for the kilns.

I was struck by the contrast between scholarly views on seasonal labour migration and what it might have meant for Burababa. Burababa's story might seem exceptional because of his son's puritanism. However, life in the village can be restricting for many people in different ways. From the stories of migration I heard and witnessed, I began to wonder if migration scholars might perhaps have overlooked the possibility that many migrants see migration as a liberation from the constraints of village life. Though my time there was short, the week I spent with a friend at the Daisy Brick Factory in Bengal reinforced this suspicion.

IV

The misery of the Daisy Brick Factory?

The Daisy Brick Factory, apparently the largest of approximately 350 such factories in Hooghly District, produced around 500,000 bricks a year. The main entrance to the factory skirted a six-floor mansion. This was one of the factory-owner's houses that he wanted to convert into a five-star luxury tourist resort with a swimming pool and golf course stretching to the Ganges banks. A crowded labour camp of approximately 200 brick shacks was adjacent to this mansion. Each shack was 6 by 3 metres in size with a low tile roof. It housed about four people, had a

mere line for hanging clothes, a coal-fired stove and sometimes a single rope bed. At one end of the compound, three taps supplied water to the camp. There was no sanitation, no bathing facilities and no electricity in the camp, although the furnace a few metres away was floodlit at night.

Most labourers worked in the beating heat six days a week on one of three shifts: 5.30–8 A.M., 10 A.M.–noon and 2–6 P.M. While low-caste Bihari labourers specialise in moulding bricks and Bengali labourers extract clay, Jharkhandi tribal and low-caste labourers carry bricks to and from the furnace, trucks and stores. In the Daisy Factory, Jharkhandi labour accounted for almost half the labour force. Factory owners told me that, unlike Jharkhandis, Bengalis could not endure carrying bricks and considered it a menial task.

Jharkhandi women balance up to eight uncooked bricks on their heads. Men either receive these bricks from women to line the furnace, or carry greater loads of up to sixteen cooked bricks on a bamboo sling across their shoulders. Payment is at piece rates. Labourers expect that, subtracting living costs, hard-working couples will bring home Rs 8,000–9,000 for the six-month season. Such couples are, however, rare. It is far more common to hear stories of individuals who managed only Rs 2,000. Although it is likely that the major reason for this shortfall is cheating on the part of employers and contractors, the explanation other labourers give for this low total wage, as I will elaborate shortly, is that the individuals were too busy having fun.

V

The love of labour

It is difficult to imagine that the motivation to endure such hard working and living conditions could be anything other than the migrants' extreme poverty. But what did migration mean for those who moved? The answer—hardship, torture and drudgery—often seems so straightforward and agreed-upon that the question itself is rarely seen as worth posing. Were the stories about the fun of brick kiln migration I had heard back in Tapu simply a consequence of the migrants' reluctance to admit that the brick kilns are actually awful and that the only reason for migration is the economic constraint of staying at home? I doubt this, and for two reasons.

The first is that although many Tapu people could have earned as much at home, they preferred to go to the kilns. Take the Mahelis. Stigmatised as the lowest, filthiest, most drunken caste by other Tapu residents, they

have a lucrative business making bamboo baskets. The work is usually done in husband–wife pairs. A bamboo stick is bought for Rs 10–40. One person skins it, making long, thin strips. The other weaves the strips. In a week the pair make an average of fifty baskets with material costing Rs 200, earning them a net weekly profit of Rs 400. The baskets are sold in the Bero bazar twice a week. The peak season is from October to December, when large baskets are in demand for harvested husked rice. From December to June, smaller baskets are bought for vegetable-picking and cowdung-gathering, as baskets made in this season are the strongest.

The Mahelis have a lucrative and sustainable business indeed, earning a couple Rs 1,600 a month almost all year round, particularly in the brick kiln season from December to June. In comparison, what do migrants come back with? Even if we take the salaries of hard-working couples in the kilns (Rs 8,000–9,000 for the season), the monthly average is lower than what the Mahelis earn at home. Given that very few migrants come back with such money, why do some Mahelis prefer to migrate when they could easily earn more in the village? Etwa Maheli, a dashing young man, and his two brothers usually go to the kilns, though in 2001 the youngest stayed home to look after their elderly parents. Etwa himself had been to the kilns for the previous seven years, for two of which he had been an assistant contractor. The first year he went with a Maheli woman from the village. They married and had a child, but a few years later she left him for another man. Eventually Etwa ‘made another woman’—a Lohra from a nearby village. Even after the birth of two children the couple continued to migrate. When I asked about the economic logic behind their migration, Etwa simply said, ‘Money isn’t everything.’ Life in the factories is fun, a welcome break from making bamboo baskets, and it enables encounters with diverse people. Most significantly, at the kilns all labourers treat each other with respect as ‘everybody is equal there’. Coming from a village environment in which he and his family are severely stigmatised, this was very important to him.

I do not have space for a full-scale economic analysis here, and I offer the Maheli example merely to illustrate my claim that when my informants say that economic considerations are not the most important ones behind the decision to migrate, there is some reason to believe them. For many who migrate, there are indeed options at home. For those without the skills of the Mahelis but also without much productive land, contract labour is always available. Analyses that prioritise the economic constraints of village life are therefore not always convincing.

Undoubtedly carrying bricks is tough, but it would be a distortion of my experience of the Daisy labour camp to portray life there as unremittingly bleak. We were living in one of the five shacks of migrants from Tapu—that of four unmarried and unrelated girls who, despite their parents' pleas, had all migrated. The eldest, 20-year-old Shila, had left the village overnight without her parents' consent. In the winter months, disappearing children were a common phenomenon in Tapu. Although parents were usually upset, they rarely worried. It was assumed that they had gone to some brick kiln and that they would be heard from in due course. By the time we arrived at the factory, Shila had been there three months, and I was struck by her transformation from a tatty-blue-school-skirt-clad girl into an elegant woman dressed in a saree. She was proud to show that she had learnt to cook at the kilns. This, however, was the least of my surprises. As with the case, reported by Rogaly and Coppard (2003), of a woman separated from her second husband, who migrated from Puruliya to the rice fields of Bardhaman in order to have an affair with the labour contractor, it also transpired that the relationship between the labour contractor, Jeevan, and Shila was more than platonic. In fact, as is common in relationships between younger brothers and their elder sisters-in-law in Tapu, I often found Jeevan's younger brother flirting, teasing and joking with Shila. In the week we were there, some complications developed in Jeevan and Shila's romance.

Jeevan had been married for twelve years but, though his wife and child were in the village, the other girls did not think him a suitable match for Shila. They had found Shila a quiet young boy from Ranchi whom they referred to as '*bhatu*' (Nagpuria for 'brother-in-law'). The Saturday before my arrival, there had been a night of drinking and dancing in the celebrations of Saraswati Puja. That night Shila had served rice-beer to the *bhatu* and Jeevan had danced with a female labour contractor. A jealous tension thus developed between Shila and Jeevan. On my second evening, Jeevan disappeared to the market for a few hours in his shiny new jacket. At around the same time the female labour contractor, in lipstick and high heels, left the camp. After his return from the market, Shila sarcastically taunted Jeevan saying he ought to leave his door open that night so that his '*mal*', or 'property' could slip in.

The next night Shila invited the *bhatu* back to the shack where he sat quietly while the other girls giggled and joked. Jeevan got increasingly infuriated. When the *bhatu* left, Jeevan shouted at the girls to shut up, bellowing that the shack had turned into a 'free zone', and that they were ruining their reputations. He threatened to send Shila's father a message

telling him what she was up to. This outburst produced an uncomfortable silence. Shila stopped eating, trying to make the point that Jeevan had hurt her. On Sunday, a holiday, everyone dressed in their best and while some went to explore the Hooghly Bridge and the Planetarium in Calcutta, I went with Jeevan, Shila and a few others to visit the 1599 Roman Catholic church in the nearby town of Bandel. After gazing in awe at the statues and pictures and climbing to the roof for an aerial view of the brick factories lining the Ganges banks, Jeevan bought Shila a necklace. In the evening Shila made chicken curry for Jeevan, his brother, the girls and us. After a few cups of *hadia*, relations between Shila and Jeevan seemed to be sunny again.

Shila and Jeevan's affair was only one of the flirtatious relationships between young men and women that I saw that week. As is true of the casual and contract labour in Bhilai, described by Parry (2001: 808), joking and flirting between men and women were common as they worked, but it was within the confines of the labour camp that amorous relationships were expressed more fully. Indeed, I was surprised to find that unmarried men and women openly flirted with each other there, sat on each other's laps, held hands, lay next to each other on the floor or in rope beds—things I have never seen in Tapu.

When we arrived at the factory, I had expected that I would sleep in the girls' shack, and François in Jeevan's in-law's larger shack. However, when the rest of the girls left to sleep in the in-law's shack, I realised that since we had turned up together it had been assumed that we were a couple. We were given the single rope bed in the girls' shack, sharing the room with Jeevan, his brother and another man. When I asked the girls if I should sleep with them, I was told that I would be more comfortable with the men! Later I realised that sleeping arrangements were indeed quite flexible and that, while food was always consumed in the 'correct' shack, some nights some of the girls slept in Jeevan's in-law's shack and some nights in their own. With the scrap metal door always unlocked, I was never certain who at any particular time was sleeping in that small shack.

Tapu villagers say that amorous relationships are pursued with ease in the kilns because most young people choose to go to different kilns than their siblings or other immediate kin. In many cases, having family around is indeed likely to cramp one's style. This explanation resonates with Parry's reports from Bhilai that husbands and wives generally avoid taking work on the same construction site because of the sexual banter and flirting that is characteristic of such work sites and the jealousy that this

produces (2001: 808). To some of the youth from Tapu, the brick kilns provide a convenient temporary space away from the authority of, and responsibility to, immediate family.

VI

The social constraints of the village

To understand why people feel constrained in the village it is necessary to know something of the sexual norms of the ST and SC communities in Tapu. First, intra-clan, inter-tribe and inter-caste unions are prohibited. Thus, as in Chopra's story of how migration to Punjab allowed an Oraon man from Ranchi district to elope with an unsuitable girl from a lower-status family (1995: 159), migration provides the space to explore such prohibited unions. Second, unlike among the Girasias of Rajasthan (Unnithan-Kumar 1997) or the Muria of Bastar (Gell 1992), divorce and postmarital affairs in Tapu are now, if they ever were, not readily accepted. Nevertheless, they do occur and often end in secondary unions. In Tapu I calculated that of the eighty-three married ST or SC men in the village, approximately 30 per cent were not with their first spouse. Affairs after marriage, or continuation of premarital relationships once married, as in Somra's sister's case, are pursued with greater ease in the kilns. In at least 50 per cent of the secondary unions of ST and SC Tapu men, migration to the brick kilns had enabled the development of the second relationship.

Premarital sexual relations were, in general, common in the village. The restriction on such relations, however, is that they must not become permanent. Thus, a third village norm encouraging migration is that marital partners must not be of the boy's or girl's choice but must be selected by their parents. Although it is not necessary for a woman to be a virgin, marital partners should not have previously engaged in sexual relations with each other. In fact, some of my more skeptical informants even suggest that this is the main reason why parents prefer brides for their boys from outside the village—to ensure that the potential partners have not had sexual relations. As was the case for Somra and two of his brothers, premarital lovers who want a more permanent relationship commonly deploy the tactic of leaving for the kilns and returning after the woman is several months pregnant. In the village pregnancies resulting from illicit affairs are aborted early in the term. After childbirth, however, such affairs are legitimised.

Another restriction on premarital sexual relations is that the older generation must not come to know of them. This is the reason why parents

hold contradictory views about their children running away to the kilns. On the one hand they are upset, not just because a child's departure means one less hand in the fields, but also because they know that the kilns provide space for developing amorous affairs. On the other hand, many parents understand the youngsters' desires—they had been in the same situation themselves, and had often met their own marital partners in the labour camps. Thus when parents express displeasure and hurt when their children take off to the kilns, this is usually because—as parents—they ought not to endorse the sexual freedom that everyone knows brick kiln migration entails. This is not to say, however, that every young person who goes to the kiln engages in amorous relationships. The important point is that the ability to explore amorous relationships more fully in the brick kilns than in the village makes migration attractive.

VII

Further reasons for migrating

Not all Tapu migrants at the Daisy Factory, however, had come to live out prohibited sexual relations, or for the fun and games of the kilns. I look at the other four shacks of migrants from Tapu to highlight their reasons for migration. In the shack neighbouring that of the four girls lived an old man who had run away from his son under similar circumstances to Burababa, and hoped that on his return his son would treat him better. Pera Munda, in his mid-thirties, his Oraon wife Sanicharwa and their son lived in the third shack. Pera had been coming to the kilns for the past seven years, for various reasons. Initially, migration was a means of escape from his father. Between the age of 6 and his late teens, Pera had been a *dhangar* in a village near his own. When he returned to live in Tapu, he argued with his father continuously. Migration to the kilns provided some relief from the tensions at home. When his father died, Pera inherited land and livestock and considered staying in Tapu throughout the year. However, soon afterwards, Pera's elder brother was accused of a murder and jailed. Pera and his brothers mortgaged their lands to pay a *zamindar* descendant who claimed he could get the brother released. Pera had thus continued going to the kilns to pay off the debt. At the kilns he fell in love with Sanicharwa. In Tapu, their inter-tribe union was stigmatised, and this provided another incentive to continue migrating to the kilns. By 2001 circumstances had changed: Pera had not only recovered enough of his family's land to stay in Tapu all through the year, but Sanicharwa also gave birth to a child. As a result, the couple's

union became more legitimate. Pera now wanted to settle in Tapu, where they had a bigger house, livestock to look after, and fields to cultivate. But while Sanicharwa recognised the difficulties of looking after a baby in the beating heat in a tiny tiled house, she was convinced that life in the kilns would be liberating in comparison with the claustrophobic atmosphere of the village, where she would be looked down on for her lower-caste status. At the kilns 'all people are equal', she said, and people forget the rules of 'purity and pollution'. This is clearly not always the case (for example Jharkhandis rarely mixed with low-caste Biharis), but it is also true that at most kilns there would be only a few people from home for whom the hierarchy of the village and the rules of purity were relevant.

Next to Pera lived his father's brother's son, 45-year-old Samu, his second wife Anita and their young son. Anita said that she would continue to migrate as long as she could do the work. Another exceptional family that had been going to the kilns for more than ten years, their reasons had changed over time. Before her first marriage, Anita had gone to the kilns with her sister's husband and other young people, 'for fun'. She subsequently eloped with her first husband to the tea gardens, staying there for four years until her partner was caught having an affair with another Jharkhandi woman. When she returned to her natal village she felt ostracised as a single woman. This, and the fact that she had a daughter to marry off, gave her reason to continue migrating to the kilns, where she eventually became an assistant labour contractor. One Karma festival, Samu (a widower) visited her village. Anita seemed to be the perfect partner for him and he took her back to Tapu. Each season they migrated to be 'alone' at the kilns, until Samu was able to build a hut for them to live in, thus enabling their separation from the extended family. Puzzled as to why they should continue to migrate, Anita finally confirmed that in Tapu she was accused of witchcraft and that the brick kilns provided a welcome space of escape from the malicious village gossip.

Fatra, a middle-aged Munda man, and his 14-year-old daughter lived in the fifth shack, while his wife and four other children were back in the village looking after the fields and livestock. He had mortgaged some of his fields as his family in Tapu had suffered recurrent bad luck with malaria and he had had to spend much money on sacrificial chickens and on medicine given by the healers. Fatra said he was at the factory that year for the sole purpose of earning money to redeem his land. In some years he went to the kilns, while in others he stayed in Tapu. He explained that it was not always necessary to migrate, as he could get by by tilling his

fields and working as contract labour. However, in years when their financial situation was precarious, as in 2001, it was safer to go to the kilns where he was sure to save money. Like many others, he explained that in the village money rapidly flows away into drink and celebration with relatives and friends. In the kilns one saves more, not necessarily because one earns more but because one spends less, since wages are paid only at the end of the season. For him the brick kilns provided a space away from home where he could concentrate on hard labour without the distraction of kinsfolk.

It is clear that the migrants from Tapu were motivated to come to the Daisy Brick Factory that year by a range of different reasons. However, the most striking feature of all the stories is how rarely migration was seen as *solely* an economic necessity, and how often it was also perceived in terms of the temporary need to be in a space away from the village and from the constraints and obligations of kinship, from domestic disputes and a narrow-minded and oppressive village environment. For six months of the year at the kilns, migrants could lead what they saw as a more autonomous life without disrupting kinship and friendship networks in the village or a long-term connection with their house and land. Brick kiln migration, after all, was almost always seen as a temporary phase in a person's life.

VIII

Some quantitative indicators

In Tapu, 155 persons, that is 47 per cent of the adult population, have at some point been to the brick kilns. Of these, 57 per cent say that they migrated the first time for one or more of the following reasons: to explore and roam; to escape from a problem at home; or to live out a prohibited amorous relationship. Regardless of the compulsion to earn money, the migrants themselves rarely stressed economic motivations. They saw the brick kilns as a space in which they could do certain things and be with certain people away from home.

I have summarised the various reasons people gave for migrating from Tapu in 2000–2001 in Tables 1 and 2.⁴ In that year there were seventy-nine migrants (seventy-three of them above the age of 16). Fifty-six of

⁴ *Sardars*, or labour contractors, no longer force people to migrate in the way they are alleged to have done in earlier periods (especially to the tea gardens). They are, however, still important in determining *where* people migrate to and sometimes *whom* they go with.

the total number of migrants for that year, just above 70 per cent, felt that there were sufficient resources in the village (from cultivable land, livestock, forests and casual labour) and that they did not need to supplement their lifestyle with money from the kilns. More than half of these migrants (accounting for nearly 40 per cent of total migrants) were unmarried youth, who say they went for the fun and adventure of amorous relationships, life away from parents and to visit new places. This point struck me the day Onga, the assistant to the Munda spiritual head of Tapu, came to ask—‘Please come and help me make your brother [his son] Manju understand that I need him to stay at home and not venture to the kilns.’ Despite the fact that Onga had more fields than he could look after, his only son Manju had migrated for the past three years. Onga explained this as a result of the seduction of the kilns, where meat, fish and alcohol were consumed every day. Although Onga knew that this was not literally true, he was expressing his broader exasperation with Manju who said he migrated because life at the kilns was more ‘fun’.

Table 1
Reasons Given for Migration by the Tapu Migrants, 2000–2001: Migrants Who Say They Have Sufficient Resources to Stay in the Village All Year

<i>Reasons for migrating</i>	<i>No. of migrants</i>	<i>% of total migrants</i>
Fun, adventure, amorous relationships	31	39
Young families wanting to set up a new household	13	16
Escaping after a problem with kin	3	4
For a one-off saving	9	11
Total (n = 79)	(56)	(71)

Note: The data this table draws on were obtained from stories of people’s departure and open-ended interviews with every single household in Tapu. Hence, the classifications are my own.

Table 2
Reasons Given for Migration by the Tapu Migrants, 2000–2001: Migrants Who Say They Would Have Difficulty Making Ends Meet in the Village All Year

<i>Reasons for migrating</i>	<i>No. of migrants</i>	<i>% of total migrants</i>
Social exclusion (e.g., accusation of witchcraft)	10	13
Inter-tribe marriage	6	8
Old, single men, not wanting to live with kin	3	4
Young, separated, single women	4	5
Total (n = 79)	(23)	(29)

Note: See note to Table 1.

Many young people like Manju stressed that the migratory process was an individual, exploratory one. Of course, as Parry (2003) remarks of long-distance labour migrants to Bhilai, there is a contradiction between the actor's perception of individual autonomy in the migration decision and what actually goes on.⁵ As with the migrants in Tirupur in Tamil Nadu described by De Neve (2003), kin did not necessarily form the most important social network at the kiln. The youth usually migrated with people from surrounding villages and socialised with other Jharkhandis at the kiln, repeating the pattern of earlier migration.

More than 20 per cent of the migrants who said there were enough resources at home for them not to need to migrate—that is, 16 per cent of the total—were people with young families who wanted to be independent from joint households. In these cases, paternal land had not yet been divided, precluding their setting up their own households, and the young families did not get on with their parents. While the parents wanted newly-married sons to stay in the village and help in the fields, these young couples, like the Darana women in Jaipur reported by Unnithan-Kumar (2003), rebelled by leaving for the kilns to be free of family constraints and to earn enough money to return and set up their own households. They were not migrating just for 'fun'.

Three of the Tapu migrants in 2000–2001 had quarrelled with their relatives and left abruptly in protest. Like Sanicharwa who followed her husband to the kilns in the aftermath of a marital argument, in 2000–2001 one woman who left the village after a fight with her husband was followed by him to the kilns. Dupont (2000: 109) also notes the importance of familial tensions and quarrels in explaining why houseless people in Old Delhi had migrated there.⁶

Just over 10 per cent of the 2000–2001 migrants wanted to get away from kin for a different reason, that is, to ensure they saved a certain amount of cash that year. This was usually to pay off a loan (as in the case of Fatra Munda) or to buy some cattle. Although they could earn this money in the village, they said it was easier to save at the kilns.

⁵ Parry (1999) also draws attention to this contradiction in Wolf's (1992) data on factory women in Java.

⁶ Dupont (2000) says that 24 per cent of houseless migrants surveyed cited familial tensions as the primary reason for migrating. People are of course often reluctant to admit in brief questionnaires that familial tensions resulted in their migration. This is perhaps evidenced by the fact that of the thirty-six respondents Dupont selected for in-depth interviews, about one third mentioned familial tensions as important in their migration trajectory only when pressed (Dupont 2000: 123, fn 35).

Twenty-three migrants, just under 30 per cent of the total in 2000–2001, said they would find it difficult to make ends meet in the village. Of these, four were women whose husbands had left them and who, as a result, felt vulnerable and ostracised in Tapu. They had no land, and because of their marginalisation had not developed survival strategies to cope with village life all year round. Three were older men, now single, who could not live with their siblings, sons or daughters. They had no desire to productively cultivate their share of land, especially because they could not rely on help from kin. Sixteen were individuals who felt ostracised in the village either because of inter-tribe marriages or because they were accused of witchcraft. They felt more comfortable at the kilns and had therefore neither made their land productive nor developed alternative livelihood strategies.

It is perhaps possible that, at a practical level, economic imperatives may be more salient than many Tapu migrants allow. Indeed it may well be that without seasonal migration, Tapu people would not have the same standard of living. However, what these figures and the complex stories that lie behind them suggest is that, from the migrant's point of view, the economic motivations are eclipsed by a discourse that stresses the space that brick kiln migration provides for both social and cultural autonomy from the village.

IX

A threat to the Jharkhand State

As Jonathan Spencer (2003) has pointed out, social theorists and policy-makers tend to perceive migration as 'a problem', and policies and development strategies are often aimed at reducing pressures to migrate (De Haan and Rogaly 2002: 4). Jharkhand is no exception. Not only is this evidenced by development projects in the area quantifying their 'success' in terms of a decrease in seasonal casual labour migration, but also by Jharkhandi activists who lead a strong anti-migration movement. Towards the end of November 2001, I read in the Ranchi daily newspaper, the *Prabhat khabar*, the views of a Jharkhandi activist vehemently arguing for an anti-migration bill to be passed in Jharkhand:

Why should tribal girls ... be oppressed by the brick-kiln owners, contractors and middlemen? Why should they be forced to work as bonded and low-waged workers? These questions are about protecting

the reputation of the glorious history of this land and are about living freely in a democracy with equality of rights, the protection of human rights and the right to freedom... (*Prabhat khabar*, 28 November 2001).

On the day this article was published, I had spent several hours chatting to Sonamani, a woman from a village about 40 kilometres from Tapu, who had taken up labour-contracting with her brother after a failed marriage and after she had been gang-raped in her marital village. For the previous thirteen years, she had spent half the year at the kilns and half in her natal village. In 2000, however, a long-running dispute culminated in the theft of some cement and bricks recently purchased by her family. Sonamani suspected an act of revenge by a rival contractor whom she feared had the backing of the Naxalites. Seeing this as a dangerous threat, Sonamani wanted to avoid staying in her natal village and was desperate to return to the kilns. When I told her of all the stories I had heard of the atrocities to women at the kilns, she insisted that I had got it wrong.

I was stunned by the stark contrast in the two viewpoints, coincidentally revealed to me on the same day. Did those who railed against brick kiln migration not know of its non-economic significance for the majority of the migrants, or that many workers find a silver lining in the 'romantic' possibilities of such spaces? In Tapu, everyone was aware of them. This was true even of the higher-caste Yadavs who do not migrate to the kilns, despite the fact that some engage in hard manual labour in the village and are now often less well-off than some of the migrant families. For the Yadavs, such migration signifies an impure life of low bodily self-control in food, drink and sex—something demeaning for higher castes, if 'natural' to tribals and untouchables.

People like the Bhagat, Somra Munda, with whom I began this paper, were on the other hand keen to distance themselves from this representation of tribal people. One of the main ways in which they did this was by emulating certain higher-caste values (in attitudes to food, drink and sex) and by stigmatising life at the kilns. Most of the ST and SC older generation in Tapu had more ambivalent views on brick kiln migration. On the one hand they respected Somra, but on the other they also quietly appreciated that, as tribals or lower-castes, their values were different from those of the higher castes.

The most vehement protestors against brick kiln migration are, however, well-meaning middle-class tribal activists in Ranchi city, like the one writing for *Prabhat khabar* (quoted above). These activists are generally urban-based and highly educated—even having Ph.Ds from foreign

universities. Some are educated tribals from Christian convert backgrounds. Others may often use only their first names, to hide their upper-caste identity.⁷ They say seasonal migration is compelled by extreme poverty and that migrants not only leave behind their home traditions but are also exploited and oppressed at every stage, from the labour contractor at home to the managers and bosses at the kilns. In the following paragraphs I suggest that, behind the moral façade of this human rights appeal, these opponents of brick kiln migration are at some level aware of the motivations for migrating that I have been discussing, and seek to draw a veil over them.

Jharkhandi activists demanded a separate state of Jharkhand on the basis that the tribal-dominated communities of greater Jharkhand had historically been a majority in the region, that tribal livelihoods and ways of life were under threat from *dikus* (outsiders), and that the territory should thus be reclaimed in the name of the true 'sons of the soil' (Weiner 1988).⁸ Jharkhand finally gained statehood in November 2000, but this, as Corbridge (2002) argues, hardly signalled a success for India's democracy—autonomy having far more to do with political bargains between a restricted number of elite actors than with pressures from below.⁹ Moreover, when the BJP came to power in Jharkhand, it did so with the votes of 'outsiders', *dikus* and *sadans* (long-settled, non-tribal communities), reflecting the views of those BJP politicians who had been advocating that, as Jharkhand was no longer numerically or economically dominated by tribals, the new state should be called Vananchal.¹⁰ The separation of Jharkhand from Bihar was a long-standing ambition of the

⁷ Baviskar (1997: 217) also reports tribal activists in Gujarat hiding upper-caste surnames.

⁸ Although the demand for a separate state of Jharkhand initially focused on the idea that the culturally-autonomous tribal people of the area should have the right to govern themselves, in later years the movement did become more inclusive. The new rhetoric also asserted that Jharkhand had become an internal colony of the state of Bihar.

⁹ The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi, which granted statehood to Jharkhand, had calculated that the separation of Jharkhand from Bihar would deprive the latter of substantial sales and excise revenues, and also subsidised electricity (Corbridge 2002: 57), and would thereby weaken Laloo Yadav and his Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) government in Bihar.

¹⁰ Granting the region separation from Bihar had been on the BJP agenda since 1988, but its proposition had been that the new state would be called Vananchal, 'land of the forests' (Hocking 1994). Unlike Jharkhand (also 'land of the forests'), Vananchal essentially has an Aryan–Sanskritic connotation. Jharkhandi activists claimed that the real reasons for the renaming were that the BJP wished to divorce the region from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), or 'Jharkhand Liberation Front', the 'true' pioneer of the Jharkhand

activists, but they see the particular way in which it happened and the scant regard that was paid to the tribal communities in the process as undermining the idea of Jharkhand as a state in which tribals would be protected. Angry and disappointed, the Jharkhandi activists are more than ever driven to 'protect' tribal livelihood and cultures.

One aspect of this protectionism is the campaign by activists against informal sector seasonal casual labour migration from Jharkhand to the brick kilns of other Indian states, a movement which threatens the rich traditions of tribal life in village Jharkhand and undermines the rationale of the new state. Thus, in an evaluation of the Jharkhand movement in 2000, Prof. R.D. Munda, then at the Department of Tribal and Regional Languages at Ranchi University and also a member of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, argued that if the trend in out-migration continued, 'the real Jharkhandis will be all gone from the region before it is too long. Therefore, a new development policy is needed, such that it should discourage displacement' (Munda 2000: 22). In the rhetoric of the Jharkhandi activists, *adivasis* are the true 'sons of the soil', historically wrenched from their land by rapacious outsiders, *dikus*, who transport them to far away places. This chimes with Spencer's insightful analysis of political modernity in which a central image of the nation-state is that it consists of people 'living in the same place' (2003: 44). An obsession with controlling migration is a symptom of the quest to maintain this illusion. Seeing migration as the exception rather than the norm of human experience, the ideology of the nation-state attempts to maintain the purity of its citizenry by controlling the movement of people.

In fact, Jharkhand has for centuries seen movements of people (cf. Roy 1995), and even in earlier periods there is evidence that migrants had in many cases actually run away from home. For instance, in the report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, Rev. Van Hecke notes: 'The people are of a peculiar temper, they get angry very easily and run away from home' (Government of India 1906: 13); and Father Hoffman points out that, 'The Mundas are very impulsive and sensitive; young people often run away from home, after getting a scolding about something' (ibid.: 14).¹¹ It may be that in those days economic motives for

movement. Countering the BJP, the Jharkhandi activists began to prove the historical legitimacy of the name Jharkhand in preference to Vananchal (see Areeparampil 2003).

¹¹ Much later, Bailey also notes the case of a young Kond man who impregnated a girl in Baderi, Orissa, and chose to run away to the tea plantations in Assam rather than hold a ceremony of purification (1960: 22).

migrating were more prominent in people's minds than they are for my informants today. However, while motivations may change with the politico-economic conditions of the time, it is worth remembering that several movements—such as the spread of Christianity from the late 1800s and of the Tana Bhagats from 1914—probably also produced local tensions of the sort that had prompted Burababa to flee his puritanical son.

In the face of such historical mobility, the anti-migration campaign serves to recreate and reinforce the image of Jharkhand as a tribal state. The control of migration enables both an opportunity for a better and clearer display of the ideal vision of the state (Spencer 2003: 21) and space for the manipulation and recreation of that image. The anti-migration campaign thus allows the Jharkhandi political elite to manipulate and recreate the image of the ideal *adivasi* citizen of the state—an embodied image of a socially and sexually transformed Jharkhandi. The campaign contests the old high-caste representations of tribals as morally impure, drunken and sexually promiscuous, to produce an image of purer *adivasi* bodies—the aboriginal citizen not only of Jharkhand but also of the Indian state. The purifying project is uncomfortably similar to that of the BJP, which argues that Jharkhand's tribals are merely fallen high-castes whose proper status should be restored by converting them into 'real' Hindus through emulation of higher Hindu castes. For fear of being hijacked by the BJP, the Jharkhandi activists are not in favour of sanskritisation, the adoption of upper-caste values by lower castes in order to increase their status. As Hardiman (1987) points out in the context of the Devi movement in western India, sanskritisation as a concept conceals the challenge to upper-caste power by lower castes. Jharkhandi activists are outwardly hostile to the upper castes, who they claim have exploited tribals and whom they identify as BJP supporters, and to sanskritisation as a means of improving social status. Instead they aim to raise tribal status by presenting the tribals as the authentic 'sons of the soil', the 'original Indians', the *adivasis*.

In seeking to recreate Jharkhand's 'authentic *adivasi* tradition', institutions like the *dhumkuria* (better known in Muria areas as the *ghotul*), a village dormitory where post-pubescent unmarried youth would sleep and participate in erotic song and dance, are being revived as learning institutions, rather than as spaces for pre-marital sexual relations (cf. Elwin 1947 and Gell 1992). In similar fashion, the *akhra* is being revived as a village meeting place, emphasising the so-called communitarian nature of *adivasi* villages, rather than as a village dancing circle where

girls and boys dance together to sexually charged songs and rhythms. In Tapu I was often told that it was actually the increasing Brahminical and Christian influence that led to the disappearance of the *dhumkuria* and the decline of the *akhra* in some areas.

Efforts to divorce the image of sexual promiscuity from the notion of 'authentic' tribal communities have also been conspicuous in the Tapu area in campaigns to strengthen the so-called 'traditional' tribal system of governance, the *parha*. These campaigns were begun by one Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in the late 1960s and intensified by another in the 1990s. Of the twenty-nine disputes I recorded which had been 'solved' by the *parha*, the most common were postmarital love affairs or elopements, locally called '*dhuku-dhara*'. One of the most famous *dhuku-dhara* cases, in which an MLA from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) party in the 1990s was involved, was that of Tela Munda's daughter and Sukra Oraon's son, who were engaged in a passionate affair. When Tela began to arrange his daughter's wedding to a suitable boy, the girl ran away with her boyfriend to the brick kilns. A JMM member from the village decided to involve the *parha* and went with party members, in the name of the *parha*, to the brick kiln to put an end to the affair. In this case, the interventions were unsuccessful as the couple resolutely refused to separate. The girl was pregnant and, when the two finally returned, they were married off to each other.

As this case illustrates, notions of sexual propriety are crucial to the dislike of migration to the brick kilns that middle-class Jharkhandi activists share with working-class people with aspirations to upward mobility (including many of the local *parha*/JMM members). But the problem is significantly gendered, for at its heart is a concern with the sexual purity of migrant women. While many JMM and *parha* members (exclusively men) privately admitted to having had premarital or extramarital affairs, their rhetoric exclusively focused on the chastity and modesty of women, never on men: 'We have to protect the honour of our *ma*, *beti* and *bahen* [mothers, daughters and sisters].' It is this 'honour' that they—and probably many Ranchi-based Jharkhandi activists too—feel is threatened at the brick kilns.

This situation has significant parallels in the history of early European industrialisation where middle-class constructions of female sexuality were important in forming public attitudes to the female industrial labour force. In a fascinating analysis of the outcry that led to the first sex-specific protective legislation in Britain, the 1842 Mines Regulation Act, Humphries (1988: 118–19), for example, argues that the most significant

pressure that led to the reforms was the affront to bourgeois notions of sexual propriety and proper femininity that the supposed promiscuity of the mines represented.¹² In Jharkhand perhaps an additional dimension to the middle-class discourse is that it lays blame not just on the women themselves, but above all on immoral or 'outside' men who seduce and steal 'mothers/daughters/sisters' away and thus corrupt the moral core of Jharkhand. The likely effect of this double-standard, moralising discourse, I suggest, is to limit the freedom of women in an area in which they have been relatively autonomous.

Stories from the Tapu area seem to suggest that the brick kilns have become a 'functional surrogate' for the space of freedom once provided by the *akhra*, the village dancing circle, or the older *dhumkhuria*, the village dormitory for youth. My suggestion is that as a space of freedom, the brick kilns represent an obvious threat to the image of tribal society, and more specifically tribal womanhood, that the elite would like to have accepted. Towards the end of my stay, I came to know of a survey by a university professor in four districts of Jharkhand investigating the reasons why people migrate to the kilns. Its results indicated that the majority of those who left went in order to escape from a fight at home, to explore a new country, or to live out amorous relationships. Since this result was at striking odds with the arguments of his colleagues and friends who were vehemently protesting against brick kiln migration, the professor decided not to publish his results.

Whereas Jharkhandi activists are able to talk about migration to the brick kilns in terms of a human rights discourse—as a movement to be stopped on grounds that it furthers *adivasi* exploitation—brick kiln migration enables many migrants to reject Jharkhandi tribal elite notions of an authentic, 'morally pure', *adivasi* citizen of the state.

Ironically, the spaces of 'freedom' provided by the brick kilns serve to maintain older notions of the tribal self. Thus, rather than being a phenomenon dictated by mere economic necessity, migration to the brick kilns may also be seen as part of a distinctive Tapu politics of challenging

¹² Whether this bears relevance for Jharkhand is a question for further investigation, but one insightful explanation that Humphries (1988: 120) gives for the obsession of ruling-class men with female sexuality is that female infidelity and impurity threaten the integrity of the bloodline. Promoting chastity and modesty as ideal female virtues was a means to safeguard property rights, eventually developing into the idea of the control and domination of women themselves as men's property. This ideology was absent amongst the propertyless colliers, and their 'sexual promiscuity' thus became the focus of the bourgeois investigators.

the purifying discourse of the *adivasi* state. In her critique on the 'romance of resistance', Abu-Lughod (1990) has observed that such acts of resistance should be treated as indicative of historically changing relations of power. Tapu conceptions of the brick kilns as a space of freedom perhaps point to broader structures of power in which the new puritanism at home helps to reproduce the conditions for capitalist exploitation and the extraction of surplus value.

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