



**UNIVERSITY OF DELHI**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

Delhi School of Economics, Delhi - 110007

*Professor*

4<sup>th</sup> March 2017

The Editors  
*Modern Asian Studies*

Dear Editors

This is with reference to the article ‘British Rule and Tribal Revolts in India: The curious case of Bastar’ published in *Modern Asian Studies* 50 (5) 2016.<sup>1</sup> I would be grateful if MAS could publish this letter.

This article is deeply problematic for several reasons: (a) It covers empirical ground which has already been well explored without appropriate citations; (b) it lacks awareness of colonial and post-colonial state policy towards scheduled tribes; (c) it is ignorant of Naxalism in India and (d) it is factually incorrect in many respects and replete with howlers like referring to the Munda rebellion led by Birsa Munda as a rebellion by ‘Birsas’, and claiming that there are two Naxalite groups in Bastar, the CPI (ML) and People’s War Group (p. 1641). The name of the party before it merged with the MCC and became the CPI (Maoist) was actually CPI ML (People’s War).

The difference between princely states and British India is a complicated one, mediated by the way in which indirect rule was practiced, and not a simple axis along which one can write ‘compare

<sup>1</sup> Editors’ note: Verghese, A. (2016). British Rule and Tribal Revolts in India: The curious case of Bastar, *Modern Asian Studies* 50:5, pp. 1619–1644, doi:[10.1017/S0026749X14000687](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000687).

and contrast' essays such as Verghese's. Bastar was scarcely unique – growing British intervention and unrest over land and forest policies are common features across the Chhattisgarh feudatory states and Eastern states agency, as well as other states in princely India. On the other hand, the British responded to rebellions within their territories by carving out spaces of exception from colonial law and bureaucracy, namely excluded and partially excluded areas. These later became the scheduled areas of independent India (along with some areas under princely states).

In contrast to Verghese's argument, the spread of the Maoist movement today also has little to do with princely India vs. British India and more to do with a host of other factors like the nature of socio-economic stratification, Maoist strategy (including proximity to its early centres), the form that social movements have taken, regime responses, and so on. Further, it is not the only or even primary expression of tribal resistance in contemporary India.

Verghese' article is like a term paper summary or bowdlerized version of some of the key themes of my book, *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar* (OUP 1997, 2007) albeit with some archival research of his own. The book had undertaken extensive documentation of, among others, colonial policies to do with land and forests, the causes and forms of resistance from the colonial to the post-colonial period, and the way in which ideas and practices of indirect rule moved across empire and were used to displace the indigenous polity while deploying its legitimacy. What appears to be in bad faith is that Verghese draws upon my work for minor empirical support without acknowledging and engaging with its larger formulations and findings. I recognise my research is not the final word, but retreading old ground does not advance scholarship.

Yours,

Nandini Sundar