



Institute for
Social Anthropology

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ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

Performing Indigeneity and the Politics of Representation: the Santals in Jharkhand, Orissa and Assam

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Thursday, 17th of April 2014, 4.00 pm [s.t.]

Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA), seminar room 1
A-1030 Vienna, Apostelgasse 23

The Santals, the largest Austro-asiatic group in India, are known for their rebellion of 1855, and have a long tradition of exploitation and migration. I shall compare Santal responses to economic and political crisis in Jharkhand, Orissa and Assam. In Jharkhand, the Santals and other Adivasis ("tribals") have evolved a powerful form of political imagery, generated by official and subaltern legacies, which have contributed to create the political space of the recently formed Jharkhand State. Adivasi populations have been emotionally invested in questions of identity, but factors related to the exploitation of natural resources (forests, mines, water) have brought dispossession and exploitation. Bordering Jharkhand, Mayurbhanj, formerly a princely state in Orissa, is seen as the bastion of Santal identity, though illegal mining, migrations, and the activism of the Hindu right threatens the tribal economy, curtailing the rights of indigenous people on resources. Santal migration to the Bodo region of Assam, in the 1880s, was planned as a missionary utopia. Today, Assam has become the theatre of ethnic conflict between the Santals and the Bodos, where the Santals are targeted as outsiders. From Jharkhand and Orissa, this conflict is seen as a struggle for Santal identity. The Santal community of Assam is economically and politically entrapped, since many have left the region for fear of Bodo attacks. I shall show that while the Santals try to claim their rights in Jharkhand and Orissa, promoting new forms of indigeneity, such as pilgrimages, they have organized resistance in Assam as the Santal Tiger force, thus adapting differently to the various situations of political and economic crisis. Their involvement in these crises depends on the political situation in the locality, as it is informed by their various and evolving forms of consciousness.



Marine Carrin is Director of Research (CNRS), Centre d'Anthropologie Sociale, Toulouse, France. She has recently co-edited *Voices from the Periphery* (with L. Guzy, 2012) and her book on Santal Ritual Discourse is in press. She is currently working on indigenous knowledge.

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