



2nd Dr Kumar Suresh Singh Memorial Lecture

**"Proud to be Adivasi :
The Importance of Jaipal Singh Munda"**

By

Prof Nandini Sundar

Dept. of Sociology,
Delhi School of Economics,
University of Delhi



Rev Fr Ajit Kumar Xess SJ

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Dr Kumar Suresh Singh
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Organised by:

Dr Kumar Suresh Singh Tribal Resource Centre

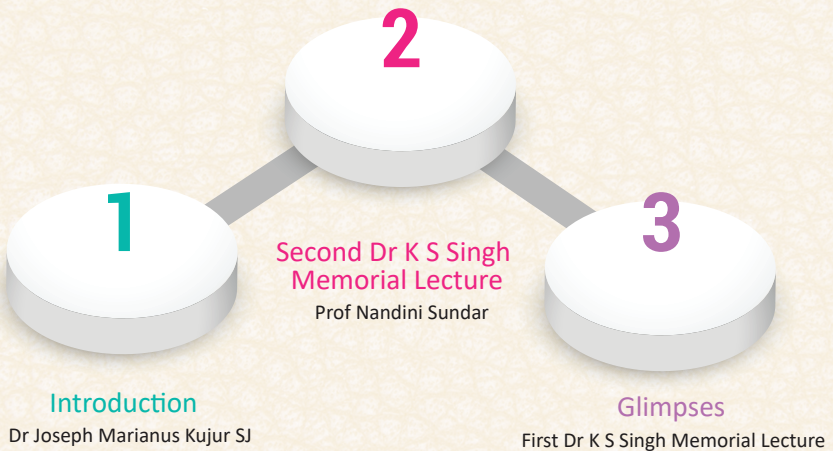
Under the aegis of

Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS), Ranchi



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**Second Dr Kumar Suresh Singh Memorial Lecture
Delivered on 19 November 2024**



Introduction

It is with great pride and anticipation that I welcome you to the introduction of the publication titled **Second Dr Kumar Suresh Singh Memorial Lecture** featuring the insightful discourse on “**Proud to be Adivasi: Importance of Being Jaipal Singh Munda**” delivered by renowned sociologist and academic, **Prof. Nandini Sundar** from the Delhi School of Economics.

This volume honours the legacy of Dr Kumar Suresh Singh, a distinguished scholar and advocate for the rights and recognition of Adivasi communities in India. His contributions to the understanding of tribal identities and their socio-economic conditions have been invaluable, and through this memorial lecture series, we continue to celebrate and reflect on his impactful work.

Dr Singh was not just a distinguished scholar; he was a visionary advocate for the Adivasi communities, dedicated to uplifting their voices and promoting their rights. His extensive research on tribal culture, identity, and socio-economic issues provided invaluable insights into the complexities faced by tribal populations, particularly in states like Jharkhand.

One of Dr Singh’s most significant contributions was his commitment to highlighting the importance of preserving indigenous cultures and empowering tribal communities through education. He firmly believed that education is the cornerstone of empowerment, and he fought tirelessly for access to quality educational resources for Adivasi children. Through his efforts, many initiatives were established that aimed to address the educational disparities faced by tribal youth, encouraging them to embrace their cultural identities while pursuing academic success.

Moreover, Dr Singh's advocacy for land rights and social equity was unparalleled. He championed the cause of the tribal populations, emphasizing their connection to land and natural resources, and opposed practices that led to displacement and exploitation. His tireless work in this area helped lay the groundwork for policies and legal frameworks aimed at protecting tribal rights, including the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

In addition to his scholarly achievements, Dr Singh was a mentor to countless students and young researchers, nurturing the next generation of leaders and advocates for tribal welfare. His guidance and support inspired many to pursue careers centered around social justice, anthropology, and public policy, ensuring that his vision for a more equitable society continues through their contributions.

As we remember Dr Kumar Suresh Singh today, let us commit ourselves to carrying forward his legacy of advocacy, education, and respect for tribal rights. His life's work serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of acknowledging and respecting the cultural identities of Adivasi communities.

In her lecture, Prof Sundar thoughtfully examines the pivotal role of Jaipal Singh, a prominent tribal leader and activist, who played a crucial part in advocating for Adivasi rights and raising awareness about the rich cultural heritage of tribal communities. Jaipal Singh's legacy as a visionary leader serves as an inspiration for many, embodying the pride and resilience of Adivasi identities.

Prof Sundar's deep understanding of tribal issues shines through in her exploration of the importance of cultural pride and identity among Adivasis. Her work not only reflects academic rigor but also embodies a passionate commitment to social justice and equity.

Jaipal Singh Munda's importance lies in his multifaceted contributions to the movement for tribal rights and identity in Jharkhand. As a leader, advocate, and thinker, he significantly impacted the political and cultural fabric of the region, emphasizing the need for recognition, empowerment, and pride among Adivasi communities. His legacy continues to inspire individuals and movements striving for equity and justice in contemporary India, reinforcing the relevance of his work in the ongoing journey towards social justice for tribal populations.

This Lecture is not merely an academic publication; it is a testament to the ongoing dialogue surrounding tribal identities and rights in India. We hope that it will serve as a valuable resource for students, researchers, and practitioners interested in understanding and supporting the aspirations of Adivasi communities.

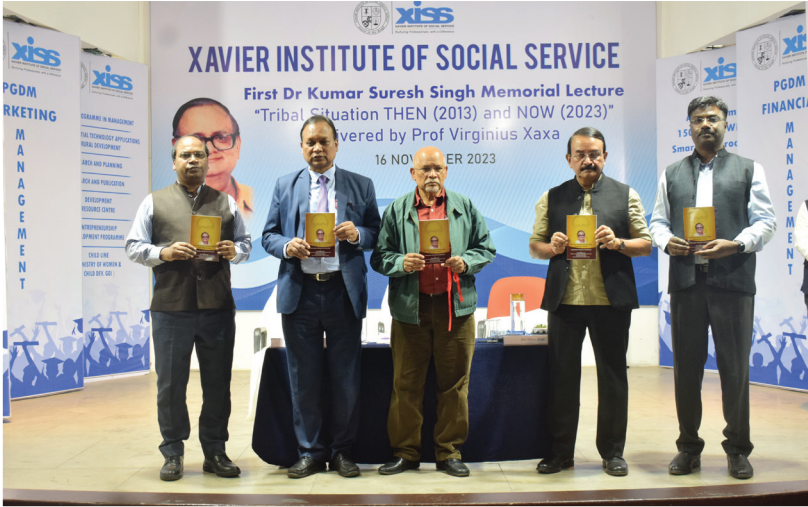
I encourage everyone to engage with the ideas presented in this Lecture, as it lays a foundation for discussions on identity, empowerment, and the importance of remembering and honouring the contributions of those like Jaipal Singh and Dr Kumar Suresh Singh.

Thank you for being a part of this important event, and I look forward to the impactful discussions that will emerge from this lecture series.

Our special thanks to Rev Father Ajit Kumar Xess, SJ, Chairman of the XISS Governing Body and Board of Governors, for gracing the occasion by his presence and message!

Dr Joseph Marianus Kujur SJ

Director, XISS



Release of First Dr KS Singh Memorial Lecture 2023



Second Dr KS Singh Memorial Lecture 2024

Nandini Sundar

Department of Sociology, University of Delhi

I am deeply honoured to be asked to give the second KS Singh Memorial Lecture, and grateful to the Director of XISS, Dr. Joseph Marianus Kujur, SJ, for inviting me. At the start, I would like to reproduce an obituary I had written in 2006, the year that Dr Singh passed. This was much before I had decided to write a biography of Jaipal Singh, but it also shows how fitting it is that this 2nd Memorial Lecture should be about Jaipal Singh.

K.S. Singh: Honorary Munda

“One of my major regrets of late is that I did not spend time with K. S. Singh before he died. His stories, and he had several, deserved to be widely told – but something or the other always came up and interviewing him took a backseat. For the last two years or so, he had been ill with Parkinson’s disease but his death itself, say his family, was unexpected, a callous mistake that ended a mind still struggling with ideas, with unfinished projects which he worked on till the very last morning.

I heard of his death from his fellow Jharkhandi, the then editor of Prabhat Khabar when we were travelling together in Chhattisgarh. We had just met senior officials who dismissed the

local Adivasis as ‘primitive and promiscuous’ and knew so little of the area they lived in that they described the Gond inhabitants of Bastar as ‘Bhils and Bustars’. It was sad to think that Kumar Suresh Singh may have been the last of a distinguished lineage of anthropologist administrators, people who were not only institutional innovators, but had a deep concern for the people they worked with combined with impeccable scholarship. There are plenty of people in the services who do PhDs and write books but they become so insufferably confident that they are the best of both worlds, that they are lost to real learning.

KS Singh, on the other hand, retained a remarkable humility all through his life and an interest in new work and ongoing research. I remember attending a conference with him in Shillong in 1998, when he regaled us with claims that he had actually seen witches dance in Jharkhand, his eyes glinting behind his spectacles in his round face. At another conference on whether caste should be counted in the census, he pointed out several problems with doing so, but also noted that caste censuses predated the colonial period, and that the current worry that it would lead to further divisions in society was unfounded. It is this combination of historical knowledge, ethnological detail and non-partisan stances that made him both such a distinguished scholar and such an interesting companion – as we discovered when our flight back from Gauhati was delayed by ten hours.

KS Singh was born in March 1935 and started his career in the Indian Administrative Service in 1958 as an assistant settlement officer among the Hos in Singhbhum. He surveyed some 100 Ho villages, wrote detailed village notes and prepared genealogical tables. In those days, IAS officers posted to tribal areas had to

learn one of the local languages – it was not enough simply to learn the language of the state like Hindi or Gujarati – and on his next posting in Khunti (then south Bihar) Singh learnt Mundari. A fascination with Mundari songs led to research on the rebellion of 1895-1910 led by Birsa Munda and his first book, titled *Dust Storm and Hanging Mist*. Embarrassed by this display of romanticism, he later changed the title to a more prosaic, *Birsa Munda and his movement, 1874-1901*. Yet the first title was more revealing of both the origins of the book and the man that Dr Singh really was. As he said in his preface to the second edition:

“My research for this study began with a song of the ulgulan, the great tumult, I had heard in the sleepy hours of the night of 30 December 1960 at Birbanki, about twenty-eight miles south of Khunti, across the wide range of winding and crooked hills. Lyrically rendered in the Bhajan melody, and vigorously accompanied with a corresponding dance number around the winter bonfire, it spoke of the impending revolution:

O brothers, sisters, children, run and seek shelter,
A dust-storm draws near,
A storm fills the earth, a mist overhangs the sky,
Our land drifts away.
Afterwards you will not find the pathway.
Our land was filled with darkness.”

One can easily picture the young Suresh Singh, huddled around that bonfire, bringing Birsa to life in his own imagination. This work also served as his PhD thesis, and inspired Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar*, and a revival of the Birsa Munda myth.

Statues of Birsa are visible all over Jharkhand today, and if the state of Jharkhand itself exists, KS Singh must surely be said to have some role in it. One major project that Singh was collecting material on was a history of the Jharkhand movement which would have included a life of Jaipal Singh. This would, no doubt, have been an authoritative account, but he has written so much on Jharkhand and its people, that they have reason to be grateful. Even a cursory glance at a list he had compiled before his death reveals some 200 books, articles and reports, many but not all on Jharkhand. Many of his later works, on the 1967 famine in Chotanagpur, the tribes and their economies, tribal movements in India, state formation in tribal society, and customary law are classics and indispensable to any student of Adivasi history and society in India.

Yet even this substantial history of research is overshadowed by the *People of India* project which took up all his time in his later years. Dr Singh regarded the project with a curious mixture of pride, apprehension and regret – when a colleague and I visited him some years before his death, he asked anxiously, “do you really think it was a waste of time?” Singh believed that the task of an organisation like the Anthropological Survey of India, of which he was Director from 1976 to 1978, and then Director General from 1984 to 1993, had to be different from university departments of sociology and anthropology. While the latter could afford to work intensively on a particular area, building models and theory around it, the former had to establish base line data which could be widely used. The People of India project, which identified 4694 different communities was meant to map the diversity of India and to show the linkages between the

different sections. Conscious of the fact that the project sounded suspiciously like the colonial census and ethnographic surveys, Singh was keen to highlight the nationalist, developmental and scientific value of the project. An honest appraisal of the project still needs to be carried out.

For most of us it would be enough to research and write all these books and articles. But in between Singh served in a variety of administrative posts – for instance, as Director, National Commission on Labour; Deputy Secretary, Department of Food; Commissioner Chotanagpur Division; Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Rural Development and Welfare Department, Bihar, and so on. But for all the posts he held and the awards he got – including the Padma Shri which he declined – his dying wish was to be accepted as an honorary Munda. His ashes have been released in the river Tajna that flows from the Munda heartland. Following Munda ritual, a memorial stone is being erected in his name near Asurgarh, a pre-Mundari site which he discovered. And perhaps the next time that a young officer huddles around a bonfire with villagers, they will tell him the story of Kumar Suresh Singh whose life is now part of the history of the people that he loved.



Inauguration of Dr. Kumar Suresh Singh Tribal Resource Centre



Proud to be Adivasi : The Importance of Jaipal Singh Munda

Nandini Sundar

- PART I -

“I am an Adibasi, I call myself an Adibasi. I cannot understand why you wish to give us another name. The fact is that the name ‘Adibasi’ would be most welcome to us. (5th September 1949, Discussion on the 5th Schedule, CAD 9.132.214)

Had Jaipal Singh's suggestion to use the term Adibasi in the Constitution not been rejected, we would not have had judgments like the one in *Prem Mardi vs Union of India*, 2015, where the judge rejected the demand to ban MSG 2 for glorifying the killing of Adivasis, on the grounds that the Constitution did not mention the term Adivasi anywhere.

In the four years that the Constituent Assembly of India met from 1946-1949 to frame the Constitution, the Adivasi leader Jaipal Singh was a consistent thorn in the flesh of some of its upper caste Hindu members. He reminded them repeatedly that the 'adibasis' whose existence they considered a 'stigma' on the nation for being insufficiently civilised and 'developed', had in fact, the first claim on the nation:

Sir, if there is any group of Indian people that has been shabbily treated it is my people. They have been disgracefully treated, neglected for the last 6,000 years. The history of the Indus Valley civilization, a child of which I am, shows quite clearly that it is the new comers--most of you here are intruders as far as I am concerned--it is the new comers who have driven away my people from the Indus Valley to the jungle fastnesses. This Resolution is not going to teach Adibasis democracy. You cannot teach democracy to the tribal people; you have to learn democratic ways from them. They are the most democratic people on earth. (11th December 1946, responding to the Objectives resolution)

The years before independence were years of intense contestation – between communities and ideologies jockeying for space within the new Indian nation. In the Constituent Assembly where several people spoke as the representative of their communities,

the depressed classes, or women, Jaipal Singh took on the representative role of Adivasi spokesman. Apart from the Rev JJ Nicols Roy from Meghalaya, the other four Adivasi members of the Constituent Assembly barely seem to have opened their voice.

Jharkhand too was a microcosm of the larger political contest: between the Christians, Hindu Mahasabha, Congress, Muslim league and the Jharkhand party. Jaipal Singh did not see himself as a “tribal” leader – as the leader of a backward group of people, but as one more contestant among others, arguing for a form of self- determination which would be part of new and innovative federal arrangements in an independent India.

The view from the 3rd floor of the Hotel Imperial

In the world of the Constituent Assembly, however, high-minded abstemious Gandhians had first purchase on the moral approbation of its members. The social worker A V Thakkar, or Thakkar Bapa, as he was commonly called, fitted the bill; and compared to the less than abstemious Jaipal Singh, who protested in the Constituent Assembly against prohibition on the grounds that it violated Adivasi religious customs, he was taken as a more reliable voice for Adivasis. As Biswanath Das, his fellow member of the Servants of India Society said:

“I would not compare my Friend Mr. Jaipal Singh with Shri Thakkar Bapa. It would be ridiculous for me, and for the matter of that for anyone, to be taken anyone, howsoever great he may be, as the sole representative of the

hill tribes. (sic) A person, from his residence in the second or third floor of the Hotel Imperial, ill compares himself with a person like Thakkar Bapa.” (5th September 1949, 9.132.223)

So how did the representative of India’s “most backward” groups, Jaipal Singh, end up on the 2nd or 3rd floor of the Hotel Imperial, even today one of the most expensive hotels in the heart of Delhi? This was not a one off - as he describes in his memoirs, *Lo Bir Sendra*, at the start of his political career in 1939, when he was invited to address the Adi-Hindu conference at Lucknow: “I stayed in Carlton hotel, the rendezvous of snobs. This rather shocked my Adi-Hindu admirers.”¹ As a union leader, he confessed that while he totally sympathised with the Adivasi workers, he failed because he was socially intimate with the management, and was eventually relieved that the communists came in.²

Unlike several other nationalist leaders across the world who inhabited the dual world of English education and nationalism, Jaipal Singh was not a traditional elite and nor was he a nationalist in the regular sense, his politics generally pitting him against the Congress, the ruling nationalist organisation of the time. Instead, his peculiar trajectory must be ascribed primarily to the influence of the principal of St Paul’s High School, Ranchi, an Irishman called William Frederick Cosgrave, or more usually, Canon Cosgrave. In 1919, Cosgrave took Jaipal from Ranchi to England, originally to train for the Church. He was enrolled at St Augustine’s College, Canterbury which supported him at Oxford on the assumption that he would return for holy orders.

1 *Lo Bir Sendra* (henceforth LBS), pg. 102

2 LBS, pg. 111

However, an almost full time engagement in hockey and a growing scepticism about church doctrine, as well as nationalist feelings caused Jaipal to abandon that idea.

The second major influence on Jaipal Singh's life was undoubtedly, Oxford. The range of contacts he made at Oxford, as a hockey player, a protégé of leading members of the Church, and as one of several Indian students more or less engaged in nationalist causes, shaped the future course of his life.³ For instance, he writes, on arriving in Calcutta as a boxwallah with Burmah Shell:

“I searched through the telephone directory to discover people I possibly knew. The world is small. I found many names: Sir Ganen Roy, Postmaster General of India; the Maharajadhiraja of Darbhanga; the Maharajadhiraj Bahadur of Burdwan; ... Shaukat Ali; The Governor of Bengal, Sir Stanley Jackson; Fred Bartley, Deputy Commissioner of Police; .. Father Brown, superior of the Oxford Mission; Father Douglas of Behala; Slade, Collector of Customs..”

And yet, his political heart was firmly with his people; and it is as a leader of Adivasis, that he is primarily remembered. In 1938, Jaipal Singh took up leadership of the Adivasi Mahasabha and extensively toured Chotanagpur as well as adjacent Adivasi

³ In 1917, Ambedkar could not find accommodation in Baroda and his Hindu, Muslim and Christian friends – even Columbia contacts – turned him down. By contrast, there seems to have been no caste prejudice against Jaipal, maybe because of the Singh surname. In the ICS records, there is no mention of his 'aboriginal' background, only that his father was a landowner in Chhota Nagpur.

areas, drawing thousands of people to his meetings, which he addressed, as he says, in Mundari and in Oxford English! Unlike the Congress, he supported the war effort, seeing employment for his people in the labour corps, and in 1946, the Jharkhand party won enough seats to send Jaipal Singh to the Constituent Assembly. He remained a parliamentarian till his death in 1970, eventually joining the Congress, the party he had spurned all his life.

But if Adivasi politics was his lasting public contribution, hockey was the defining passion of his life. As a student at Oxford, apart from playing in the college and varsity teams, he organised tours of Indian students to play hockey on the continent, thus bringing awareness about India to diverse publics. This attachment to sports lasted till the end of his life. He was asked to play an exhibition match of ex-Olympian hockey players vs the Indian hockey team in Calcutta in 1969, the year before he died. And while Indian sports people are notoriously apolitical, Jaipal Singh deserves a place in that pantheon of players who take a stand – whether it is taking a knee to protest racism, or men like Paul Robeson, for whom politics and sports were both intrinsic parts of his life.

While there is no evidence that Jaipal Singh felt in his inner soul the double consciousness that WEB Dubois writes of, or unease at the different worlds he moved in, his goals as repeatedly stated in the Constituent assembly were clearly those that Dubois outlined:

“The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife — this longing to attain self-

conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius.”⁴

The early 20th century was a time when men like DuBois, Ambedkar - and Jaipal Singh - thought that integration of historically oppressed minorities was possible, but fought for equal terms as against the rejectionism of later movements. They were open to all cultures, but were proud of their own and refused condescension. Speaking in the context of reservations or quotas for affirmative action in the Constituent Assembly, Jaipal Singh asserted

I do not come here to beg. It is for the majority community to atone for their sins of the last six thousand odd years. It is for them to see whether the original inhabitants of this country have

4 WEB Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006: 9

been given a fair deal by the late rulers. But the future can be brightened up. What has happened in the past, let it be a matter of the past. Let us look forward to a glorious future, to a future where there shall be justice and equality of opportunity. (24th August 1949, discussion on reservations)

In some senses, men like Jaipal Singh, Ambedkar or DuBois were translators, translating across cultures, ideologies, and political ambitions.

One question that is often asked is why Jaipal Singh never became a pan-Indian Adivasi leader, as Dr Ambedkar was for Dalits. There are several answers to this. First, in terms of numbers, the depressed classes or Dalits were much greater than the Adivasis, and they were spread across the country, whereas Adivasis were confined to specific pockets within each province. Second, the cause of ‘untouchability’ and the uplift of the Harijans was central to Gandhian politics, and thus closer to the nationalist centre-stage than the concern with aboriginal rights or upliftment. Ambedkar’s disagreement with Gandhi and the Poona Pact was more central to nationalist politics. Third, Dr. Ambedkar’s training as a lawyer propelled him to the role of the Chair of the Drafting Committee, and thus a wider national role. By comparison, Jaipal Singh, even though he was Oxford educated and had got into the ICS, was not seen as having the requisite intellectual credentials. Playing hockey, even if it brought the nation fame, was not seen as a mainstream career, unlike the lawyers or social workers who populated the assembly. Fourth, whereas Dr Ambedkar was speaking for the rights of the depressed classes in general, Jaipal concentrated his energies on the demand for a separate Jharkhand state, in which Adivasis

would have the same rights as other states peoples. Finally, there were crucial differences in their characters. Dr. Ambedkar was more single-mindedly dedicated to his cause; whereas Jaipal Singh suffered from several weaknesses of character, which included a desire for easy living, an inability to manage money, a liking for alcohol, and a propensity to political opportunism.

But it is also important to remember that Dr Ambedkar was not the only widely recognised Dalit leader that he has become today, and even in the Constituent Assembly, there were several other claimants to being the Dalit voice. If Dr Ambedkar is seen as a pan-national Dalit leader, it has as much to do with Dalit politics today, as in his own time. Birsa Munda is now slowly achieving that pan-Indian recognition as an Adivasi leader, partly due to the success of Adivasi mobilisation in Jhrkhand, but also propelled in part by the RSS's efforts to promote Adivasi icons as part of a wider Hindu fold. It is also helpful that the images of Birsa with his bow and arrow can be used to represent the primeval 'Vanvasi', whereas the image of a suited booted Jaipal Singh defies such easy categorisation and demands a different kind of constitutional equality.

Despite their differences, there are also many parallels in the lives of Dr Ambedkar and Jaipal Singh – both fought unsuccessfully against the Congress electoral machine; Jaipal eventually succumbed; and both died defeated men politically, having failed to achieve the larger vision they sought in their lifetimes.

There is also an interesting similarity in terms of how their views diverged from the sociology/anthropology of their times. Among his many writings, Dr. Ambedkar had written academic papers

on caste. However, his clear-eyed perspective on caste as discrimination found no takers in the sociological curriculum of his times, which was taken over with discussions on jati versus varna, the origins of both in fission versus fusion, purity and pollution. It is only now that *Annihilation of Caste* is a regular feature in syllabi on caste.

Jaipal Singh was no professional anthropologist, but his ideas of Adivasi autonomy were way ahead of the anthropologists of his time. As against Elwin the protectionist, there was Jaipal the self-determinist. Jaipal Singh and Verrier Elwin were almost exact contemporaries in Oxford and both were members of the Student Christian Movement. In his autobiography, *Leaves from the Jungle*, Elwin mentions Jaipal Singh as one of the few Indians he knew. Decades later, they both found themselves together on the Dhebar Commission, making common cause against prohibition being imposed on the tribes. But whereas the Elwin vs Ghurye debate on isolation vs assimilation vs integration came to define the field of tribal policy, Jaipal Singh's views on tribes as nationalities or peoples deserving autonomy were sidelined as a potential academic perspective.

Neither those who spoke of assimilation nor the protectionist anthropologists recognized Adivasi agency. DN Majumdar and GS Ghurye both described the demand for Jharkhand as a 'fissiparous tendency'. While speaking of the need to protect Adivasis, what Adivasis themselves wanted is curiously lacking in Elwin's work – whether it was people being attracted to revivalist movements like Birsa Ulgulan or Tana bhagats, or the communists or the Adibasi Mahasabha. Maybe Elwin had a better pulse of the everyday Adivasi life, and maybe, as Swami Sahajanand

claimed, Jaipal and the Adibasi Mahasabha represented middle class concerns. However, they were drawing mass audiences to their meetings, which also spoke of the land question, forced labour and other issues.

The overwhelming focus in studies of Adivasi politics has been on antagonism and distance. The Subaltern School historians entrenched the idea that indigenous consciousness in its 'pure form' could only exist outside of or in stark opposition to the state, as against a nationalist focus on appropriating existing state power.⁵ Unlike Dalit politics which traces its history through Ambedkar and the Constitution, Adivasi politics has largely been studied through the prism of armed rebellions (both colonial and post-colonial) around resources, resistance to displacement, participation in environmental movements, or ethnicity and autonomy movements in northeast India. Despite the fact that contemporary Adivasi organisations have succeeded in bringing in two major constitutional innovations – the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Tribes Act (PESA) 1996 and the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, their involvement in constitution/law making as well as parliamentary politics has been a neglected field.

In policy terms, one might see two routes or two different histories in understanding the concept of 'Adivasi'. One is the history of 'Scheduled Tribes', which is a history of Scheduled Areas and indirect rule, government paternalism and administrative lists under Article 366 (25) and Article 342 of the Constitution, which don't define so much as name Adivasi communities. The other history of the term Adivasi is rooted in the 1930s Adibasi Mahasabha struggle and Adivasi movements over two centuries.

5 Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, OUP 1983

These two histories intersect and inform each other. For instance, scheduled areas were created as reaction to Adivasi rebellions in the 19th century. Conversely, Adivasi demands for community control under PESA are an internalisation of government descriptions of them as isolated bounded communities.

Jaipal Singh's story brings together these different strands to provide a more complex understanding of how Adivasi politics might be understood. In the following section, I will provide a brief overview of the very early years of Jaipal's life, focusing on the unknown aspect of how he almost joined the Church.

- PART II -

From Takra to Oxford via Ranchi and Canterbury

Barely a few years before Jaipal was born, the Birsa led *ulgulan* or uprising had swept the area. Khunti, where Jaipal's village Takra is located, was the epicenter of Birsa's movement. From early Christian convert to founder of his own religion, Birsa reflected the angst of the Mundas and Hos at the sweeping changes in the agrarian landscape introduced by colonial rule, the breakup of their traditional collective tenures under the pressure of private landlordism, as well as onerous taxes. Birsa and his comrades were arrested and the movement was brutally suppressed like all other Adivasi movements, before and after. Yet surprisingly, or perhaps not so surprisingly, given that Jaipal left his village at the age of eight for a mission school and did not properly return to Jharkhand till he was 36, he only heard of Birsa once he had become active in the Adivasi Mahasabha. While the *ulgulan* succeeded in getting some protection in the form of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA), 1908, agrarian troubles were far from over. Indeed, though the Mahasabha's and later Jharkhand party's dominant focus was on a separate province for Jharkhand, agrarian rights continued to be the underlying base motivating its followers.

The period from the turn of the 20th century when the Birsa movement ended till the end of WWI was a time of major changes in this heavily forested region – with the collieries expanding, the railways coming in, the Tata Iron and Steel Company being set up in Sakchi, or what is now Jamshedpur, bringing in several thousand European engineers, railway men and clerks. Adivasis

had started migrating in large numbers to the newly established tea plantations of Assam, including 38 in one year from Takra parish alone. During WWI, a few thousands also joined the labour corps working in Mesopotamia and later, the NW Frontier. Missionary work expanded along the railway lines and other sites of commercial activity, like mines and tea gardens, to cater to the Europeans who had come in. But the equally important and more glamorous part was mission work in the hinterland to evangelise the 'heathens'.

At the start of the 20th century, there were three missions competing on the Chhota Nagpur plateau – the German Lutherans who were the first to arrive in 1845, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), which started its work in 1869 and the Belgian Jesuits, who arrived around the same time. By the end of the 19th century, there were some 120,000 converts. The Catholics led with over half the converts, followed by the Lutherans, while the Anglicans had a much smaller number, although they were closest to the government. The SPG was the oldest and most prominent of the High Church Anglican missionary organisations. Its vision aimed at 'Anglican imperialism', or the expansion of the Church of England not just in England but in all of Britain's colonies; but as official support waned and other missions came in, the SPG vision became one of independently establishing and populating local dioceses with Anglican clergy, setting up schools and other centres of work. The diocese of Chhota Nagpur was established in 1890, with its headquarters at Ranchi.

Takra village in Khunti, was one of the SPG parish centres, serving a circle of 25 villages. However, Jaipal Singh came from a family of Pahans or traditional priests, who had resisted conversion.

Pahan *toli*, the hamlet they lived in, was a little distance away from the Church and the school. Jaipal's father, Amru Pahan, was one of four Pahan brothers of the Kachap clan, who came from Saudag and settled Takra Pahantoli. Between them, the brothers owned about 215 acres.⁶

Now Pahantoli has two graveyards, a Christian one and a Sarna one where Jaipal Singh is buried, a simple stone slab marking the spot, next to the graves of his parents. His second wife Jahanara is buried there too. But Jaipal Singh was never fully Sarna, nor fully Christian. When he died there was a long argument between the Christians and the Sarnas of Takra, and finally it was decided that a Christian padre would read the last rites and leave and the Pahan would take over and complete the burial in the Sarna graveyard.⁷

St Paul's School, Ranchi

Jaipal's first schooling was at the Takra school run by the SPG, where "Lucas Master, a kindly teacher" taught children the basics of Maths and English, in return for one mound of paddy at the end of the harvest. In 1911, his father took Jaipal, then named Pramod, to St Paul's school in Ranchi, and his sister Kistomani, to St Margaret's school across the road, both run by the SPG.

It was in school that Jaipal's birthday was registered as 3 January 1903, a date which is now entrenched as the official date of birth. Perhaps January was chosen because his mother recalled that he was born in winter. It was common for children who had

6 Interview with Samrai Kachap, Jaipal's nephew, 9.5.2018. According to Jayant, the *khatian* mentions 215 acres.

7 Interview with Jayant Jaipal Singh, 5.8.2019; corroborated by Rev Cyril Hans, Gossner Theological College, 8.5.2018.

been baptised to take on a new name, and Pramod's name was changed to Ishwardas Jaipal Singh. The Ishwardas was dropped when Jaipal became a BoxWallah.⁸

St Paul's High School was established in 1908, to pre-empt the Jesuits from poaching their students. Till then it was only a middle school. St Paul's was the last of the High Schools to be set up in that period: the Dublin University Mission at Hazaribagh with SPG co-operation had an English school (1895) and St Columba's College (1899), the GEL's Gossner High School was established in 1896 and the Catholic St Johns's in 1905.⁹ As Joseph Bara has noted, the government was conspicuously absent from the educational field, concentrating its resources on Bihar, and leaving education in Chota Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas to the missionaries.

To meet the Catholic competition, the SPG not only obliged with funds for St Paul's school but also sent out WF Cosgrave in October 1908 to teach there. Cosgrave threw himself into the project, raising money from the SPG, the Government, friends at home and even put in his own money. Religious instruction, daily services in the Church, and exhortations to replace Europeans as the native missionaries of the future was an important part of the school routine for all students, and evidently persuasive enough to lead "many of the non-Christians (to) buy New Testaments for themselves." In 1909, there were 400 boys in the day school

8 My speculation is that the name Jaipal Singh came from combining the names of two Indian preachers at the time, Jaipal Suraj working in Murhu and either W. Luther Daud Singh, a Rajput convert turned Pastor or PL Singh, Principal of the St Columbas High School, Hazaribagh.

9 Joseph Bara, *Schooling Truant Tribes*, p. 156

of which 79 were non-Christians. The boarders were almost completely Christian.

No wonder then, that Jaipal Singh was soon converted, a year or two after he joined: “As against her (mother’s) innermost feeling, I developed a leaning for the Canon’s religion. He baptized me.” Jaipal’s confirmation took place some years later, with Canon Cosgrave, Rev AC Chatterjee and Rev Gee helping him prepare for it. The ceremony was performed on 14 April 1919 at Bishop’s Chapel, Ranchi by the Bishop of Chhotanagpur.

At St Paul’s there was a strong emphasis on sports, with hockey being the leading game, though boarders were expected to play either football or hockey daily. Across the road, at St Margaret’s High School for girls, which acquired its current beautiful red brick building in 1921, the girls were taught not only ‘bookish education’, but other ‘womanly’ attributes such as cooking, gardening, and nursing. But Radhamuni did not approve of girls getting educated, so Kistomani was withdrawn and married to a school teacher.

Some of the boys passed the Calcutta University entrance exam, eventually joining the administration in some capacity, or serving as local preachers. But the numbers were very small, which made Jaipal’s subsequent BA from Oxford stand out even more. Even in Calcutta, Adivasi boys faced the additional burden of having to learn three languages other than their mother tongue (Hindi, English and a classical language), as well as financial constraints, and even when they did graduate could not get jobs compared to graduates from Bihar who flooded Chhota Nagpur.

Following differences with the then Bishop Foss Westcott over discipline in the school, Cosgrave left for England in November 1919, taking Jaipal Singh with him. Why Jaipal was chosen can be seen from Cosgrave's recommendation for him for the ICS on June 25, 1924:

“For five successive years he stood first in his class. He was good at football and was captain of our hockey team. He had a very strong influence with the other boys – Hindus and Mohammedans, as well as Christians – who seemed to look to him as a leader, and he always used his influence for good. When the Great War broke out he went to Howrah and worked at a Munition Factory for eight months. He afterwards helped the present Metropolitan greatly in recruiting Chota Nagpuris for the Labour Corps. During the influenza epidemic we organised a cycle corps to take medicine to the villages around Ranchi and to give the people simple hints for help. Jaipal's work then was most valuable and I believe saved several lives.’

But the Canon also took Jaipal to England because he hoped that he would come back and finish the work that he had been unable to do. His deep hope was that Jaipal would be ordained, and with a good education, would play a major role in the Church in India. Writing to Bishop Knight, Warden at St Augustine's College, Canterbury, the Canon presciently noted:

“He is a fellow of strong character, the only Christian in his family, and (I think) cut out to be a leader. He will take nothing for granted but is keen to be fully persuaded. He could, I think be, by Gods blessing, a great power in Chhota Nagpur or elsewhere.”

Sadly, the Canon died in 1936 and did not live to see his prophecy coming true.

Canterbury

Having brought Jaipal to England, the Canon was preoccupied with figuring out what he would do. In the summer of 1920, Jaipal had just sat for his London matriculation, and results were awaited. English and History seem to have been his problems, though he was “above average” in Mathematics, mechanics and Sanskrit.

In July 1920 Cosgrave wrote to Bishop Arthur Mesac Knight, asking if he would meet Jaipal Singh with a view to admitting him to the St Augustine’s College (SAC), Canterbury. SAC was a missionary training college with close connections to the SPG. It was designed initially to serve colonial dioceses and cater to European congregations overseas. But what really attracted students was the adventure of evangelism in difficult lands, among unreached populations. Students from St Augustine went out all over the world. St Augustine’s also became the Oxbridge of the Anglican convert from the colonies, where Africans and Asians, among others, came to study; from 1862 onwards there was a separate building for the international students. In the 1920s, in

an effort to raise academic quality and attract public school boys to the Church's foreign missions, the College decided to send its students to Oxbridge to study for degrees before they were ordained. It was also this feature that attracted both Cosgrave and Jaipal to Canterbury.

When Jaipal went to Canterbury, the College was slowly building itself up again after the war, when many of its students had gone to fight or to work as Chaplains in different places. In December 1920, Jaipal Singh was one of 20 probationers, in addition to 12 senior students who were registered to be ordained. Most of the students in residence then were slightly older than Jaipal, "veterans of the 1914-18 war and not from society".

Jaipal describes a quiet life of study and dining together with the others; every Friday, somebody from the High Table read the Bible. Weekly visitors included Bishops from various outposts of the Empire like New Guinea and Lebombo, South Africa, Brazil and Sarawak, as well as clergy from closer home. The students were exposed to the Church of England Temperance Society, the Boys Scouts Movement and the League of Nations among other concerns. The college also had various clubs – sports like hockey, football, cricket, tennis, ping pong and swimming; as well as the dramatic and literary and debating societies. Jaipal played both football and hockey, getting colours in both at Canterbury. In 1924, the college magazine reported that Jaipal played for Oxford against Cambridge in hockey and was "the only Augustinian to represent either university in Athletics." Jaipal was doing well in his studies, in his first term, he was third among the probationers in exams.

Oxford 1922

In October 1922, Jaipal went up to Oxford, to St Johns College, as a student on deputation from St Augustine's College. By this time he had decided to join the Church, and Bishop Knight therefore felt justified in using the college endowment to fund Jaipal at Oxford. Knight also mobilized funds from the Hertfordshire Missionary Studentship Association for him. SAC students who went to Oxbridge were required to give an undertaking to attend morning service daily, to study as many hours as they would ordinarily have in SAC, to keep full accounts which would be shown to the warden every term, and to come back to SAC for the remainders of each term when not at Oxford.

Initial progress reports on Jaipal's academic performance were positive, but he was not a good exam taker, and a year later his tutors were wondering whether he would cope with an Honours degree. The challenges before Jaipal were great, and no allowance seems to have been made for his background. Apart from having to read Latin and Greek in his first year, he also had to pass exams in a European Language like French, Italian or German. Learning four new languages in such a short period would be a burden for anyone. Jaipal was also at this time fully immersed in hockey, and active in his college debating club, the Student Christian Movement, and other extra-curricular activities. St Augustine put pressure on Jaipal to settle for a pass degree and return to the college to be ordained but both Canon Cosgrave and Jaipal were keen on the Honours, knowing that anything less would leave him open to the snobbishness of Englishmen and upper caste Indians.

In 1924, Jaipal abandoned the idea of holy orders. By now, he was being exposed to nationalist views. He heard Lala Lajpat Rai speak at the Oxford Majlis, ‘On Duty at the Present Crises’, and was impressed at the ‘moderate and Christ like manner’ in which he spoke, despite having been jailed often. By this time Jaipal had also become skeptical of the missionary enterprise, writing to Bishop Knight that he had

“changed in his attitude towards life and thought... I have spent most of my time in learning and thinking philosophy from the pages of modern as well as some ancient writers. As I grow in years I am step by step learning to think for myself.. Hitherto I have been compelled to take many Church doctrines and Christ’s morals as final and indisputable. But now a little study of philosophy has taught me to accept nothing except what I can reduce to the reason and the heart, both of which are complementary. Reason cannot fathom sometimes where heart keeps its head above the water. Hence I am in a terrible turmoil intellectually. Scepticism has laid hold of me; what was anteriorly taken for granted has ceased to be such. Undoubtedly, I cannot expect to know everything; this would be irrationally foolish. But nevertheless I am skeptical about a good many vital questions, tenets which are absolutely essential to be convinced of, for any ordinand. It is not

necessary to enumerate my difficulties so I will say this much that to hold the views I do hold at present is impossible and inconsistent with being a student of St Augustine's College, Canterbury. It would be a foul crime if I were to dissemble before you. I am not an aesthet, far from it. Christ is still my highest conception of morality. But I cannot swear to the doctrines of the Church as regards the sacraments. Undoubtedly, I am in a transitional stage and soon I shall come back to common sense, but I do not want to leave you all in suspension. I must tell you frankly that my intellectual problems put any idea of ordination out of view at present, and with great regret I must ask you to release me from my obligations."

The Canon was naturally disappointed but supported Jaipal in this decision as with everything else he did. The money spent on his education by St Augustine's was repaid by the Canon. Jaipal then concentrated on hockey and on passing his Oxford exams – which he did with a fourth. Finally, in 1927, he got into the ICS, but failed the probation exams a year later.

The remainder of this story – what happened at the 1928 Hockey Olympics, in which Jaipal did not play the final two matches, and why Jaipal left his teaching jobs at Achimota in the Gold Coast and Rajkumar College Raipur - must await the publication of the fuller biography.

Conclusion

Jaipal Singh achieved public recognition for his hockey, as a leader of the Adibasi Mahasabha, Member of the Constituent Assembly and ideologue for a separate Jharkhand state. However, his life is fascinating for many other reasons, in that he achieved an unusual degree of border and identity crossing, in his two marriages to women from elite families, his career as a Boxwallah with Burmah Shell and a teacher at two public schools. But the fundamental lesson we can draw from his life is that even as he crossed multiple worlds, he never let anyone forget that he was Proud to be Adivasi.



About the Speaker



Nandini Sundar is Professor of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University. She is currently writing a biography of Jaipal Singh. Her research interests include constitutionalism, academic freedom, democracy, law, inequality, and agrarian ecologies. Her publications include, *The Burning Forest: India's War against Maoists* (Verso 2019, Juggernaut pb 2022), which has been translated into several Indian languages; *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar* (2nd ed. 2007); and the co-authored *Branching Out: Joint Forest Management in India* (2001). She has also edited *Legal Grounds: Natural Resources, Identity and the Law in Jharkhand* (2009), *The Scheduled Tribes and their India* (OUP, 2016); and co-edited *A New Moral Economy for India's Forests* (Sage, 1999), *Anthropology in the East: The founders of Indian sociology and anthropology* (2007), *Civil Wars in South Asia: State, Sovereignty, Development* (Sage 2014), *Inequality and Social Mobility in Post-Reform India, Special Issue of Contemporary South Asia* (2016), *A Functioning Anarchy: Essays for Ramachandra Guha* (2021), and *Reading India: Selections from Economic and Political Weekly 1991-2017* (Orient Blackswan, 2019). She is currently on the editorial advisory boards of several journals.

About Dr Kumar Suresh Singh Tribal Resource Centre

The Dr Kumar Suresh Singh Tribal Resource Centre (DKSSTRC) is a dream come true for Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS), Ranchi.

The need of the resource centre arises particularly from the Institute's special responsibility towards the tribal population of the region. The Institute is aware that Adivasis of Jharkhand and central India belt have attracted advanced scholarship, not only within the country at reputed centres of learning but even, perhaps more, in the West.

There is a need to interrogate the existing and emergent approaches, views and theories on Adivasi development and public policy.

The Institute is immediately inspired for this venture by a fortunate donation of a large corpus of books and private papers to it by a celebrated scholar on Adivasis, the late Dr K. Suresh Singh I.A.S.

The need of such a unit was necessary since there is none at present in this part of the country. Besides promoting quality research locally, it attracts scholars from India and abroad. The DKSSTRC is conceived as an academic unit. It is primarily involved in research and documentation works. To add vibrancy to its research activities, the centre generates discussion on Adivasi issues.

