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Research article

Dhumkudiya: A Lost Adivasi Cultural Space and Its Decolonial Reclamation

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Abstract

The term 'Adivasi' embodies a long history of colonial oppression, dispossession, and political struggle. Recognised as "Scheduled tribes" by the Indian Constitution, Adivasis continue to experience a disconnect between their identity that was shaped by colonial powers and their precolonial identities that they want to be identified with. The erosion of collective Adivasi consciousness during colonisation led to the loss of *Dhumkudiya,* or youth dormitory. Community members, Adivasi poets and intellectuals came together to mourn its loss, produce alternative knowledges, and disrupt the much-reified canon. These writers, unified by a movement resolved to return to their pre-colonial fold, which was trustworthy and superior. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's concept of decolonisation, understood as a continuous process of overcoming colonial alienation, followed by cultural reclamation, this paper examines the contemporary revival of *Dhumkudiya* as a site of resistance and revival. Using Poka Laenui's five-phase model of decolonisation, the study also analyses the artistic expressions of Adivasi intellectuals and interviews with members of the Oraon community to envision the renaissance of a lost institution.

Keywords: Adivasi, Colonisation, Dhumkudiya, Decolonisation, Reclamation

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1. Introduction

The Adivasis of Jharkhand remember the colonial period as an episode of foreign domination and an imbalance of power between the Europeans and the natives. Memory of the territorial seizure by outsiders and the classification of community members as inferior subjects rather than equal citizens shall remain etched permanently. Colonialism, therefore, was not only a forceful occupation but a reconstitution of subjectivity wherein domination was naturalised through discourses of superiority and progress.

Chinua Achebe discussed the positive legacies of colonialism and noted that, during the colonial period, the colonised underwent ultimate misrecognition and exhibited "a constellation of delirium." The colonisers invested fervent efforts in civilising the colonised, which resulted in cultural mummification and in fertile institutions being declared archaic and inert. There came a point when the natives yearned to occupy the master's place (Gilley, 2016). Achebe was a critic of the forms the colonial encounter took and criticised how colonialism disempowered colonial societies. Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) argues that European colonisers had devalued the colonised society's culture and their past. He celebrates that phase in history when the colonised reclaimed their past and destroyed the colonialist ideology.

Fanon further notes that decolonial forces aspire to change the world order, and that these changes never go unnoticed. Decolonisation, according to Fanon, is neither reformist nor gradual. It is a world-making project that seeks to overturn colonial rule. It reconstitutes agency by converting "spectators crushed with their inessentiality" into historical actors illuminated by "history's floodlights." In Fanon's vision, decolonisation inaugurates not merely political independence but a new rhythm of existence, a new language, and the possibility of a new humanity (p. 36).

South African psychologist Chabani Manganyi, in his text *Being Black-In-The-World* (1973), discusses the impact of race and racism and describes four consequences of racially oppressed societies: alienation from the body, alienation from material objects, alienation from community and alienation from time. These psycho existential complexes show how the colonised live in apathetic conditions.

Decolonisation is a phenomenon fuelled by violence and marked by the absolute substitution of one race of men for another (Fanon, 1963, p. 35). This transformation embodies the fervent desire of colonised people to break free, and this unleashing leads to disorder. Magical practices, discussions, and amiable relationships cannot initiate this historical process between the colonisers and the colonised. The natives who decide to proceed towards decolonisation also prepare to consistently uproot the power that had bound colonised life with prohibitions

Sylera Tamale (2020) conceptualises decolonisation as a return to the annals of history to find oneself, to become fluent in cultural knowledge systems, to cultivate consciousness and reclaim one's humanity. Scobie and Smyth (2021) share two features of epistemological decolonisation: challenging Western superiority and acknowledging that decolonisation is an ongoing rather than a one-time process.

Memories of the precolonial days, grown faint with colonial discrimination, are revived during decolonisation. Janus-faced, the colonised, declared 'insensible to ethics,' 'enemy of values,

absolute evil' by the colonisers, look back to gather courage from ancestral wisdom and march ahead to expel the governing race (Fanon, 1963, p. 41). The colonised pause to understand the present even as they reclaim the past. A change of fundamental importance in the colonised person's 'psycho-affective equilibrium' (p. 210) fills the seekers of decolonisation with meaning and zeal.

The colonised, as they march ahead, learn to insult and mock the values of the colonisers. They refuse to be tamed and no longer consider themselves inferior. They discover that their breath, their beating hearts, are the same as the settler's (p. 45). They learn not to trust outsiders, not to be afraid, and fervently desire liberation from the clutches of the colonisers. They employ decolonial perspectives as a tool to reclaim agency and a survival kit for sustenance.

2. Colonial and Decolonial Phases in Adivasi Cosmology

The colonisers invested their energy to bring about absolute cultural estrangement of the colonised, held the natives in their grip and emptied their heads of all cultural memory, distorted and disfigured their past. The Adivasis came to be addressed as 'tribes', autochthones and noble savages by the colonisers; and the assigned terminologies were burdened with implications, particularly of 'backwardness, geographical isolation, simple technology and racial connotations' (Das Gupta, 2020, p. 1). Subhadra Mitra Channa (2020), in her book *Anthropological Perspectives on Indian Tribes*, shares:

> Many tribes do not identify themselves by the terms by which they are known to outsiders. Most tribes consider themselves to be the original work of the creator and as possibly the centre of the Universe. Roy (1912:358) has written that the Mundas call themselves Iloro-Ko (men) and their race Iloro (man); in other words, they are just 'human', not any subdivision or group within a larger entity, but that entity itself. To outsiders, they are 'marginal', 'backward' and 'primitive', among other derogatory terms used for them…Many see themselves, quite simply, as one of the main races or divisions of mankind (pp. 1–2).

With the dawn of decolonial consciousness, members of Adivasi communities grew indifferent to the nomenclatures imposed upon them. They withdrew psychological and moral consent to colonial doctrines and refused to internalise colonial values. While the state and the colonial forces continued to classify them, they began to inhabit a space sustained by ancestral knowledge and sustainable ecological practices. Their epistemology, rooted in intergenerational lived experiences, challenged colonial assumptions of primitiveness, particularly within the broader decolonisation process. In his poem "Adivasi", Anuj Lugun resists colonial epistemic hierarchies and reclaims Adivasi subjectivity by presenting traditional knowledge not as superstition but as ecological intelligence:

> They [Adivasis] know to heal with herbs,
>
> can prophesy by observing animal
>
> weather patterns, and potential outcomes.
>
> Every tree, plant, mountain, hill

rivers-waterfalls know

their identity (Lugun, 2024, p. 13).

The precolonial transformation of Jharkhand's historical trajectory may be classified into three phases. The advent of the Asurs and the Oraon communities was the first phase. The rise of the *Nagavamshi* dynasty was the second milestone, while the Mughal invasion was the third. The transitions did not immediately dismantle Adivasi lifeworlds. The process of economic exploitation and social reorganisation intensified after the ascension of the *Nagavamshis* and continued in the Mughal era and the colonial period. Romila Thapar and Hayad Siddiqi (1979) observe in their chapter "Chotanagpur: The Precolonial and Colonial Situation" that during the colonial period, Adivasi cultivators became peasants and land acquired a commercial value (p. 64). This brought a significant change in the Adivasi socio-economic order. Land that was earlier embedded in collective and sacred cosmology was commodified, and Adivasi communities were integrated into colonial agrarian structures. Colonial interventions, therefore, intensified the dispossession and alienation of the Adivasis.

Anthropologists and ethnographers describe Jharkhand as a 'living museum of tribes', capture them in the ethnographic present and deny them historical dynamism. The Adivasis positioned within the category of the subaltern were reduced to objects to be studied rather than agents. Colonial discourses accused them of possessing an 'absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics and absurd theology' (Macaulay, 1869, p. 10). Even those colonial officials who harboured admiration for certain Adivasi customs seldom engaged seriously with Adivasi philosophy and worldview. They propagated the superiority of Western knowledge instead and dismissed all Adivasi systems of learning, including the *Dhumkudiya*. and regarded them as one that would 'delay the progress of truth' (Macaulay, 1869). This made the imposition of colonial pedagogy and erasure of Adivasi intellectual traditions easy.

Uday Chandra, in his paper, explains how the imperial project of primitivism functioned to justify the subjugation of the so-called 'wild savages'. Within this framework, Adivasis were constructed as childlike subjects, incapable of pursuing their self-interest and in need of paternalistic supervision. Colonial knowledge was believed to be the corrective remedy for alleged primitiveness and cultural decay. The colonised subject, therefore, was the subject not only of colonial authority but also of the epistemic regimes of colonial knowledge (Chandra, 2013).

During both the pre-colonial and colonial periods, Adivasi communities remained actively engaged in sustaining and reviving their cultural practices and asserting claims over their lived and sacred spaces. Despite political control, the Adivasis continued to nurture their cultural institutions, rituals, and ecological practices. Colonial authorities, however, failed to appreciate the Adivasi cosmology as an organic, living network of thought that perceives everything as more than the sum of its constituent parts. Unable or unwilling to acknowledge the epistemological foundations of Adivasi life, the colonisers dismissed these traditions as primitive. Yet the devotion of the Adivasis towards cultural practices safeguarded their consciousness from complete epistemic domination. Despite all efforts, the colonisers failed to colonise the Adivasi mind. In his poem "Their Symbols", Anuj Lugun captures the lived traumatic experiences of the Adivasis:

People called us untamed

> And uncivilized
>
> Our ancestors were called demons
>
> We never uttered a word
>
> Never in return did we
>
> Tarnish the adjectives of our language
>
> We remained engrossed
>
> Pulling mandal strings
>
> Or steadying bows
>
> We composed our songs (Lugun, 2024, p. 15).

Lugun's poem describes how Adivasis, instead of internalising colonial oppression, remained engaged in their artistic expressions. Cultural practice thus became a means of quiet resistance and a method of preserving memory and collective identity in the face of epistemic invalidation.

A similar cultural steadfastness can be traced in the writings and speeches of Professor Ram Dayal Munda, a renowned scholar, musician, and activist. While addressing the members of Adivasi Students' Fellowship at Ranchi, Munda expressed his angst against discriminatory tendencies that were pushing the Adivasi communities to the point of cultural erosion. He rejected colonial and missionary viewpoints that categorised Adivasis as animists and heathens. He expressed the need to educate the Adivasis, which would in turn help them reclaim agency. In his famous speech, he urged that a curriculum for the Adivasis be developed, tailored to meet their needs. Reflecting on his efforts in Ranchi, Munda shared that the establishment of the *Dhumkudiya* experiment was 'struggling against the heavy odds of poor finances.' He urged that, despite difficulties, many more Adivasi schools must be established throughout the country (Munda, 2003, pp. 12–13). By supporting the revival of the Dhumkudiya, Professor Munda sought to counter epistemic invalidation and linguistic erasure.

Dhumkudiya, or *Dharamkuria*—as it is popularly known —played a prominent role in defining the social and moral fabric of Adivasi life. *Dhumkudiya*, derived from the words *"Dhum Ta'a"* (meaning rhythm or movement) and *"Kudia"* (meaning hut or centre), refers to a traditional, community-run learning centre. Etymologically, it signifies a space where children and youth are trained through oral traditions and performative practices.

In the absence of hegemonic patronage or institutional protection, Adivasi knowledge systems were particularly vulnerable to the coloniser's project of primitivism. The Adivasi nature-centric worldview was subjected to racist assumptions, and their cultural practices were labelled as a product of furtive attempts and wild guesses. Their native epistemologies were constantly targeted, and their close-knit social formations were declared backward and stunted. Betty Bastien (2003) explains the totalising impact of colonialism that extends to include identity, knowledge, and legitimacy:

> Economically, colonialism means the destruction of indigenous self-sustaining economies and the imposition of market or socialist economies. Politically, it means the destruction

> of traditional forms of governance. Legally, it means that indigenous oral law and historical rights are invalidated. Socially, it means the destruction of the rites of passage. Physically, it means exposure to contagious diseases. Intellectually, it means the invalidation of the Indigenous paradigms and the dominance of an alien language. Spiritually, it means the destruction of ceremonial knowledge (p. 27).

Colonial forces affected even those Adivasi communities that had remained isolated from external forces and had preserved the antiquity of their culture. Neglect of precolonial history resulted in cultural estrangement of the natives, and in the 'coloniality of knowledge' (Mignolo, 2011, p. 41), wherein Western rationality was positioned as the sole arbiter of legitimacy and rendered subaltern epistemologies invisible or inferior. After considerable effort, the decolonisation process re-centred Adivasi knowledge systems, cosmology, and sacred beliefs (Channa, 2020). This epistemic reorientation signals not merely a recognition of Adivasi knowledge but a broader critique of colonial-modern hierarchies that had delegitimised alternative epistemologies.

3. Review of Literature

The discourse on *Dhumkudiya* or other Adivasi youth dormitories has been examined from ethnographic, sociological, educational, and cultural perspectives. Sarat Chandra Roy (1915) observes that the *Dhumkudiya* was a significant socio-economic unit, a training ground for Adivasi youth, and a space for the performance of magico-religious rituals. Verrier Elwin, in his seminal text *Muria and their Ghotul* (1947), characterises *Dhumkudiya* as a semi-military settlement where young men were trained in hunting, warfare, religious rituals and regulated pre-marital interests of the Adivasi youths. Sachidanand (1958) interprets *Dhumkudiyas* as sleeping houses and training schools for dance and music.

Subsequent research moved beyond descriptive ethnography and focused on Adivasi pedagogy and cultural continuity. Meena Kumari (2017) provides valuable historical insights into the evolution of youth dormitories and affirms their significant role in the traditional pedagogy of the Oraon community. Suchita Kujur (2019) sheds light on the philosophical and ethical dimensions of youth dormitories. Her paper focuses on the *Ghotul* or youth dormitory of the Muria tribe and reveals that it was a democratic space for youth interaction, responsibility-sharing, and cultural continuity. Aditya Raj and Vibhuti Nayak (2017) conceptualise the *Dhumkudiya* as a site of cultural preservation that enables Adivasi youths to identify their passion and potential. Jessy and Vijyanand (2023) highlight the need for an inclusive and culturally palatable system of education tailored to the lived realities of Adivasi communities. The authors advocate for a model of education that may enable Adivasi children to remain rooted in their tradition while adapting themselves to modern educational demands.

Dr Ambrish Gautam and Abhaya Ranjan (2023) discuss the youth homes of the Mundas, *Gitiora,* in detail. Young men, they share, were taught life skills like mat weaving and broom knotting. Young girls swept the premises clean and arranged for *karanj* oil to keep the night lamp burning after sunset. Sakshi Singh and Keya Pandey (2024) briefly mention the *Dhumkudiya* while elaborating on cultural practices prevalent in the Adivasi communities. Alok K N Mishra (2013) mourns the loss of traditional training centres in villages as villagers send their children to English

medium schools. Some studies provide ethnographic descriptions, incorporate fieldwork data and community dialogues to present a rich depiction of Adivasi life. However, none have explored the voice of the Adivasi poets of Jharkhand to interpret the cultural significance of *Dhumkudiya* or the reclamation of youth dormitories through a decolonial lens.

4. *Dhumkudiya* in Adivasi Folklore

Dhirendra Nath Majumdar (1950), in *The Affairs of a Tribe: A Study in Adivasi Dynamics*, documents the *Gitiora* or youth dormitory of the Mundas as a prominent structure overlooking the *Akhra.* that housed musical instruments, hunting equipment, and weapons. He mentions that a ceremonial mat was woven by village girls and gifted to the inmates of the *Gitiora.* Majumdar's accounts indicate that the youth dormitory was not merely a residential space but a socio-pedagogical institution that played a significant role in the economic and cultural life of the Adivasis (p. 45).

As a site of cultural transmission and community bonding, *Dhumkudiya*, even today in some regions, sustains Adivasi identity, reinforces moral codes, and ensures the continuity of indigenous knowledge systems in a communal, participatory environment. Some researchers have referred to these learning centres as "Youth Dormitory" and have wrongly portrayed it as a place of sexual exploitation, while certain anthropologists have dismissed it as outdated. However, most thinkers recognise its significance and praise it as a necessary social institution.

Dhumkudiya, in the precolonial period, was a significant centre of learning that sustained epistemic and cultural continuity. Around the age of five or six, boys of the Oraon community were enrolled in the *Dhumkudiya*. They learned about collective responsibility, communal living and the ethos of close-knit communities. The elders of the village volunteered to spend their free hours with the inmates of *Dhumkudiya*, extend emotional support and guidance in the absence of biological parents. However, external observers, particularly during the colonial and missionary period, misinterpreted the *Dhumkudiya* and reduced it to an outdated, regressive space.

The initiation of an Adivasi boy or girl in a *Dhumkudiya* was an identity marker that defined the individual's transition from one phase of their life to another. A child growing up in this cultural space was educated not with formalised curricula but through embodied participation in rituals, oral traditions and everyday communal life. Mahadev Toppo, a poet from Jharkhand, recalls this institution with reverence. In an interview, he shared:

> *Dhumkudiya* is not a *Kudukh* word. We call it *Jonkh edpa* and *Pello edpa*. The Bitishers inferred that a *Dhumkudiya* was a 'sleeping quarter' and mutilated the essence of the space forever. Boys were enrolled in *Dhumkudiya* in the month of *Magh* (mid Jan to mid Feb). After admission, the boys brought earthen lamps and karanj seed oil to keep the space aglow in the evenings. Children who were trained in a *Dhumkudiya* did not follow a clock. They woke up with the crowing of cocks in the morning. They just looked up at the sky and knew the time. They followed the stars and knew the seasons. They volunteered to work on the fields of their community members and readily repaired leaking roofs (Mahadev Toppo, personal communication, November 5, 2025).

Scholars regularly reduced the *Dhumkudiya* to an object of ethnographic scrutiny, reduced its social and philosophical depth, and even suggested that youth dormitories were secluded spaces that enabled young couples to cohabit, 'a communal sleeping house' (Roy, 2006). Such representations dislocated the cultural space from its relational, ethical, and pedagogical contexts.

5. Decolonial Reclamation of the Dhumkudiya in Jharkhand

In response, the Adivasis recognised the need to reclaim their cultural practices and institutions. Decolonisation, in this context, consisted not only of political assertion but also of dismantling the matrix of power that had pushed the *Dhumkudiya* to invisibility and disuse. The revival of the *Dhumkudiya* in Jharkhand can be traced through Poka Laenui's five-phase process of decolonisation, which includes rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action (2000, p. 81). The first phase, "Rediscovery and Recovery", forms the epistemic ground of *Dhumkudiya's* renaissance. It marks a decisive shift from colonial marginalisation to self-expression, in which colonised subjects look back to the precolonial age to retrieve their traditional knowledge system. Ancestral knowledge declared archaic, irrational or primitive is retrieved and re-centred. This process is similar to Frantz Fanon's idea in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), where he describes the colonised intellectual's turn toward the "quest for a national culture" as an urgent and politically charged endeavour. Fanon contends that in the aftermath of colonial rupture, the native intellectual initially engages in an archaeological labour, excavating suppressed myths, symbols, and collective memories to counter the colonial narrative of cultural inferiority (p. 212). The recovery of *Dhumkudiya* is an act of counter-discourse that contests the epistemological violence of colonial modernity.

Writers and poets engage in what may be conceptualised as intellectual decolonisation, an effort to dismantle colonial epistemic hierarchies by singing praise of and recovering forgotten ancestral knowledge. Their creative expression is not merely commemorative; it functions as a counter-hegemonic intervention that challenges colonial modernity. In his work, *The Third Space of Sovereignty*, Kevin Bruyneel posits that post-colonialism represents an intermediary condition situated between colonial rule and true decolonisation (2007, p. 21). The "third space" includes a liminal political condition in which formally colonised communities are neither fully assimilated into the dominant order nor entirely liberated from its structures of power. Under such circumstances, cultural production becomes a site of struggle where marginalised groups contest dominant narratives for recognition and acceptance. Genuine decolonisation begins when formerly colonised people actively reclaim their identities and cultural heritage in the face of dominant cultural forces that have marginalised them.

Despite material displacement and sustained cultural marginalisation, sections of the Adivasi community members continued to have faith in the regenerative powers of their ancestral cosmologies. Instead of assimilating into the dominant epistemological hierarchy, they remained anchored to their culture and consciously distanced themselves from all foreign practices and influences.

They coped with cultural discrimination, yet adhered to prescribed rituals and cultural practices. For them, memories and ancestral stories became tools of reconstruction, which were used to

restore their culture, agency, dignity, and language. They helped sustain an alternative epistemology that colonial institutions sought to erase. The Adivasis transformed memory into a strategy of survival and continuity.

Oraon village elders believe that the youth dormitories were built to address spatial constraints within extended households, while some others believe that the *Dhumkudiya* was designed to preserve Adivasi culture and cohesion. Edward Tuite Dalton (1872) observed that the youth dormitory was a pedagogic space where community, cosmology and corporeality intersect:

> The *Dhumkudiya* fraternity is under the severest penalties bound down to secrecy in regard to all that takes place in their dormitory, and even girls are punished if they dare to tell tales. They are not allowed to join in the dances till the offence is condoned. They have a regular system of fagging in this curious institution. The small boys serve those of larger growth, shampoo their limbs, and comb their hair, etc., and they are sometimes subjected to severe discipline to make men of them (p. 248).

The *Dhumkudiya* was an institution where village boys transitioned from childhood to adulthood. It played a significant role in community festivals, puberty initiation rites and instillation of a sense of collective identity. The gendered social conditioning of youths took place in the space. It was thus not just an architectural structure but a symbolic microcosm of the community's moral and cosmological order. During inter-tribal conflict, the institution assumed a paramilitary role. The space sustained unity among community members and also participated in the production of cultural memory.

Ethnographic accounts by scholars such as S C Roy (1915) document the presence of phallic symbols in both *Pello erpa* (youth dormitory for boys) and *Jonkh erpa (youth dormitory for girls)* indicate that the *Dhumkudiya* was not a neutral communal structure but a gendered ritual site where the gendered identity was assigned and performed. The traditional Oraon *Dhumkudiya* Hall had a sacred emblem, a Bull-roarer hung from the ceiling. Two ceremonies were observed at the time of admission: Cicatrisation and *Juro-era,* and both served as an institutional apparatus of gender formation.

Cicatrisation, according to S.C Roy (1915), constituted an inscription of adulthood. At the age of twelve or so, seven or more scars known as *Sika* were made on the arm. Older boys of *Dhumkudiya* placed seven or more consecutive rings of cow dung on the young boy's arm, and the space inside the rings was burnt with the help of a lighted wick. This controlled infliction of pain may be interpreted as a disciplinary ritual through which the body became a site of social memory. *Juro-era*, S.C Roy shares was another significant ceremony that marked the close of childhood and initiated adulthood by tying the hair of inmates for the first time. Women from each family poured drops of mustard oil on the heads of the boys. The streaming oil that poured down from the heads of boys was used to massage their heads. Their hair was tied into a knot, and a wooden comb was placed into it. The ceremony ended with a celebration and the serving of rice beer. This ritual marked the transition of a village boy into a *Dhangar*—a recognised adult member of the community. With the gradual decline of the traditional *Dhumkudiya* system, these initiation practices have also witnessed erosion.

Mourning constitutes the second epistemic stage within the decolonial process, which involves "lamenting the continued assault on the historically oppressed and formerly colonised others' identities and social realities" (Laenui, 2000, p. 83). Mourning in the decolonisation process is not just a passive expression of grief but a politically charged act of recognition. It becomes an acknowledgement of cultural dispossession, epistemic erasure, and depletion of communal world order. In their discussion on decolonial poetics, Benjamin and Jonathan (2025) share Walter Mignolo's viewpoint to argue that writers who "retrieve repressed histories and dream up futures beyond colonial temporality" transform writing into a ritual act of memory. Literature, therefore, operates as a site where the colonial wound is neither denied nor naturalised, but revisited, retold, and processed. Mourning is intertwined with reconstruction. Storytelling becomes a counter-colonial archive through which communality is reassembled (p. 33).

Mahadev Toppo's poem "They Are Lighting Lamps in Dhumkudiya" (2020) may be read as an act of decolonial mourning. The poem evokes memories of a cherished past when young men played traditional instruments like the *mandar* (a hand drum), *nagada* (kettledrum), *dhol* (double-headed drum), *dhak* (a large percussion drum), *bansuri* (bamboo flute), *theska* (a local percussion instrument), and *bher* (an Adivasi drum) within the spirited walls of the *Dhumkudiya.* Playing musical instruments and singing songs were not just aesthetic expressions; they enabled them to revitalise their embodied knowledge systems. When together in the *Dhumkudiya,* the youths honed tool-crafting skills such as the *hal* (plough), bow and arrow, *balua* (spade), and *kudal* (hoe), while elders wove fishing nets and fashioned *gulels* (slingshots). They used their imagination and creativity to decorate *tokri* (baskets) and storage bins. But that world, Toppo laments, feels distant, like the flicker of a lone lamp on a faraway hill. Adivasi youths now express a desire to reconnect with ancestral knowledge and are once again eager to learn, to reclaim their roots and ancestral wisdom, but there are few left who can guide them. Mourning is thus a double-edged sword: it grieves the loss of tradition while simultaneously expresses the urgency of cultural reclamation. In this way, Toppo's poem celebrates decolonial aesthetics as a mode of collective healing—an act of self-expression that opens the possibility of epistemic restoration of the traditional culture.

During a field visit to Silagain, near Ranchi, an interview was conducted with Harinandan Bhagat (73), a farmer and former *Dhangar* (initiated member of the *Dhumkudiya*). When asked about his experiences and learning, he paused briefly and shared that festivals such as *Karma*, *Sarhul*, *Holi*, *Ram Navami*, *Rath Yatra*, etc. were celebrated in *Dhumkudiya* with collective fervour. He recounted that two days before the Holi festival, selected boys were required to go unclothed to nearby villages to collect soil. Shorn of their clothes, young boys collected mud in the darkness, which was later burnt, and the ash was used to play Holi in the *Akhra*. Punishment for deviance of any kind was severe, but the intention was corrective and disciplinary. Girls enrolled in the *pello edpa* were required to weave mats of date palm leaves and present them to the head of a *Dhumkudiya*

Bhagat also recalled how elders treated all sorts of illnesses and diseases within the *Dhumkudiya.* They possessed indigenous knowledge of medicinal trees and plants. They imparted this knowledge to the youths. Even the diseases of cattle were treated by them. This was done by reading the colour and texture of the saliva of animals. People worshipped the trees and plants and sought permission before plucking leaves for healing purposes. Through Harinandan's testimony, it becomes evident that the erosion of the *Dhumkudiya* was much more than a mere decline of a communal dormitory (Harinandan Bhagat, personal interview, June 14, 2025).

Mohra Oraon (46), another farmer from the same village, accepted that the institution had undergone a significant transformation. People in the present time, he shared, meet in the *Dhumkudiya* to engage in political discussions or resolve issues related to the village governance. He fondly remembered the *Dhumkudiya* of his childhood days, where boys and girls learned about traditional practices, rituals and most importantly, to take special care of the elderly. Oraon mournfully observed: 'Those who wandered away from the *Dhumkudiya* have distanced themselves from Adivasi culture.' (personal communication, June 14, 2025). His reflection aligns with the argument advanced by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), where colonial domination is shown to produce self-alienation. Fanon argues that the colonised subject experiences a condition in which he has "no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (p. 110), which suggests a crisis of recognition and selfhood.

The colonised "other", according to Poka Laenui, explores its cultures and invokes its histories, worldviews and indigenous knowledge systems to theorise and imagine other possibilities, which marks the third phase of decolonisation, that is 'dreaming'. The colonised "other" turns toward culture, collective memory and indigenous epistemologies to theorise alternative futures (Laenui, 2000, p. 84). Dreaming is not an escape from reality but an act of envisioning the world through the lens of Adivasi epistemology.

Within this framework, several Adivasi poets and writers interrogate colonial distortions and revisit the stories of the past in their writings. The deconstruction of colonial viewpoints and the reconstruction of indigenous selfhood appear effortless in the web of words that the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning poet, Dr Parwati Tirkey, weaves. In her poem "Dhumkudiya: One", she paints vivid imagery of *pello edpa*, traditional training homes for young girls. She situates young maidens within the ecology of ancestral knowledge, where nature itself becomes a co-participant:

> …like some night flower
>
> Shone and in their completeness
>
> Were blooming.
>
> On the door of that house
>
> Moonlight was knocking.
>
> The girls opened the doors
>
> for moonlight
>
> This was their *pello edpa* (Tirkey, 2025, p. 73).

In this dream vision, Tirkey celebrates the institutional space of *pello edpa* as an embodied, ecological pedagogy. Moonlight, personified as a visitor, sanctifies the space. Visiting moonbeams bathe the walls of *Pello edpa*, painted with water lines, with their soothing glory. In her poem "Dhumkudiya-Two" she sings the praises of *Jonkh edpa*, the training homes for boys and young men where they learn to "beat the mandar". In "Hunting Festival of Women", Tirkey discloses the martial and political dimensions of *pello edpa:*

> In Pello edpa

They had learned combat skills and songs

For fighting against intruders.

Women had come together in the past too (Tirkey, 2025, p. 89).

In these verses, Parwati Tirkey disrupts colonial and patriarchal boundaries that confine Adivasi women to passive or domestic roles. Dreaming, therefore, is a recuperation of institutional memory, an imaginative return that reclaims the Adivasi cultural spaces and practices. In the "Editorial Introduction" to *Bloom Again* (2025), the English translation of *Phir Ugna* (2023), Dr Tarun Tapas Mukherjee highlights the political and pedagogical stakes of Dr Parwati Tirkey's poetic project. He observes that Tirkey laments the disappearance of the *Dhumkudiya* and critiques the marginalisation of Adivasi cultural spaces. He writes:

> *Dhumkudiya*, like its counterparts among the Munda and Kharia communities, was a living institution of ancestral knowledge, ecological ethics, and communal practice. She clearly states the consequence: children growing distant from their language, traditions, and cultural identity. This loss is existential in nature and marks a rupture in intergenerational transmission, resulting in the silencing of voices that once conveyed wisdom through storytelling and rituals (xii).

Parwati Tirkey's poems do not remain confined to lamentation. In her poem, "Return"*,* she reconstructs the image of a functional *Dhumkudiya*. The poem centres on an old widow who voluntarily agrees to spend time with children. Creative capacities are interwoven with knowledge and skill acquisition in *pello-edpa.* She recounts:

In her village home, Old Khopo

Passed down ancestral wisdom to the children.

A special room in her house

Was set aside for Dhumkudiya—

Classes for all the village children

Were thoughtfully organised.

Small children learned to craft catapults,

And guarded the crop-filled fields.

The responsibility for safeguarding

Against mischievous animals

Was given to them (Tirkey, 2025, p. 126).

Parwati Tirkey mourns the loss of *Dhumkudiya,* and yet amidst the clouds, a ray of hope can be discerned. The poet hopes to nurture individuals imbued with Adivasi culture, like Old Khopo in her poem "Return" (2025). The poet mourns the erosion of the *Dhumkudiya* and also gestures toward futurity. Old Khopo becomes symbolic of the restorative possibility, an agent of continuity who embodies the Adivasi way of life.

According to Laenui (2000, p. 86), the phase of "dreaming" is followed by "commitment", a moment in which the community assumes collective responsibility for ensuring that its voices, knowledge system and selfhood are acknowledged. "Commitment" is a transition from imaginative revival to organised praxis; it is the stage at which decolonisation becomes materially embedded in social structures.

The Adivasi communities in Jharkhand actively channelised their efforts to recuperate and revitalise their diminishing cultural traditions. This led to several state interventions, one of the notable examples being the revival and institutionalisation of the *Dhumkudiya*. Recent governmental initiatives include the planned construction of thirty-six *Dhumkudiya* sites in Pahariya villages ("36 Dhumkudiya houses will be built," 2021) and the appropriation of a budget of 1.5 crore rupees dedicated to the construction of a central *Dhumkudiya* building in Jharkhand's capital, Ranchi, signals an official endorsement of the reclamation and preservation of Adivasi heritage ("Hemant Soren laid the foundation stone," 2021).

In the fifth and final phase, "Action", outlined by Poka Laenui, dreams and commitment translate into strategies for social transformation. The fifth step of decolonisation consists of proactive action and decision based on community consensus and engagement (Laenui, 2000, p. 87). Action, as Laenui lays down, is a stage when decolonisation ceases to function as an aspiration and transforms into an embodied, pedagogical, political practice.

The literary and cultural interventions of the Oraon community members become an example of decolonial praxis. The Oraon community members of Jharkhand have also initiated various efforts to revive traditional *Dhumkudiya* in response to the current societal imperatives. Notable examples include youth-led libraries of the Oraon community in Gumla and other parts of Jharkhand, where the Kurukh language is being taught, and cultural knowledge, such as folk tales and songs, are read out in the evenings.

Another example of the revival of *Dhumkudiya* in the present is a boarding school "Budhu Bir Lurkudiya" where ''Lurkudiya" can be roughly translated as *Lur* meaning "knowledge" and *kuria* meaning "house", thus a "house of knowledge". It is a boarding school situated in Merle, Lohardaga district of Jharkhand, where girls and boys learn cultural values along with modern education. This school adheres to the National Education Policy's (NEP) three-language formula, uses Kurukh, Hindi and English as the mode of instruction. The school principal, Sanjeev Oraon, in an interview during fieldwork, expressed that his idea to establish the school materialised out of his concerns regarding children's disconnection from their cultural roots. He explains that to bring young children closer to their culture, it is important to bring them closer to the indigenous knowledge system, and *Lurkudiya* is an initiative that tries to fulfil this urgent need.

The transition from Commitment to Action via the establishment of the *Budhu Bir Lurkudiya* school and youth-led libraries represents the final stage of Fanon's decolonial trajectory: the creation of a New Humanity. Fanon famously warned that decolonisation is not a magic formula but a "veritable creation of new men" (Fanon, 1963, p. 36). For the Adivasi community, this newness does not mean abandoning the past for a Western version of modernity. Instead, it involves what Fanon calls shaking off the great mantle of Europe to start "a new history of man" (p. 315). By centring Adivasi *lur* (knowledge) alongside state-mandated curricula, the Adivasis

become epistemic agents, no longer positioned as an alienated subject striving for colonial validation (Fanon, 1967, p. 643)

The *Budhu Bir Lurkudiya's* use of the three-language formula (Kurukh, Hindi, and English) is a strategic defence against what Fanon termed the "pitfalls of national consciousness." He warned that if the colonised merely mimic the administrative and technical structures of the occupier, they remain trapped in the same cycle of exploitation (Fanon, 1963, p. 149). As Laenui suggests, to refashion a society effectively, we need to assess how colonisation and decolonisation actually work. If we don't, we risk sinking deeper into the very systems, values, and power structures the colonisers had created in the first place (2000, p. 88). By centring Adivasi "Lur" (knowledge) alongside modern education, these initiatives ensure that the Adivasi child is no longer an alienated subject trying to win the white man's approval (Fanon, 1967, p. 43). Instead, the contemporary *Dhumkudiya* functions as a site of collective catharsis. In these spaces, the muscular tension created by centuries of colonial cruelty is released through the collective movement of traditional dance, song, and language (Fanon, 1963, p. 54).

Ultimately, the renaissance of *Dhumkudiya* is an act of gaining sovereignty of thought. It proves that the Adivasi worldview, once dismissed by Macaulay, is the very sustainable lifestyle the modern world now seeks. As Fanon concludes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the goal of decolonisation is to "set afoot a new man" (Fanon, 1963, p. 316), one who, like the graduates of these modern *Dhumkudiya*, will not only be equipped to face challenges of the modern world but also remain spiritually and culturally anchored in the ancestral wisdom of Jharkhand's Indigenous Knowledge System.

6. Conclusion

The colonial regime's lust for power and its structural inability to comprehend non-Western ontologies are evident in the historical narratives that attempted to erase Adivasi identity. *Dhumkudiya*, one of the oldest institutions and a storehouse of several prominent social practices, is now on the brink of erasure. A deeper understanding of the cause that led to its loss can ignite a new zeal in the community to understand and appreciate its worth.

Privileged urban dwellers disregarded Adivasis and their capabilities of having any meaningful culture. Regardless of this, Adivasis of Jharkhand demonstrated a deep understanding of nature, sustainability and the true meaning of development. It is not a surprise that now the viewpoints have taken a reverse and people have learned to appreciate Adivasi culture, their tradition of healing with herbs and their nutritious culinary practices, etc. The global shift towards deep ecology and sustainable living suggests that the Adivasis were never backward, but rather visionary. The Adivasi worldview has proven to be an irrepressible force of resilience. Through the five phases of decolonisation: Rediscovery, Mourning, Dreaming, Commitment, and Action, the community has transitioned from being subjects of colonial knowledge to architects of their own renaissance. As demonstrated through the evocative verses and interviews of Adivasi poets and the lived experiences shared in the fieldwork, *Dhumkudiya* is being reclaimed not as a relic of the past, but as a *Lurkudiya*, a dynamic house of knowledge.

Dhumkudiya's revival represents more than just the retrieval of a lost cultural space; it is a strong assertion of epistemic sovereignty. To refashion a truly decolonised society, we must continue to listen to the reverberations of these ancient spaces. The dawn of *Dhumkudiya's* renaissance signifies that the Adivasi voice is no longer a whisper in the river, forest and land, but a leading philosophy for a world seeking to heal its own colonial wounds.

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