REVISITING THE LIFE AND WORKS OF VERRIER ELWIN IN NORTHEAST INDIA: DIGITAL PRESERVATION AND PROPAGATION OF ELWIN'S WORKS

2648: Sinkeo, daughter of Wangam's brother, in her wedding attire at Senua, Tirap

PROJECT REPORT

SUBMITTED TO

NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL

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SUBMITTED BY

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Shillong

2025

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SECTION I

VERRIER ELWIN PROJECT

Verrier Elwin (1902-1964) was one of the best known anthropologists in India. His prolific research produced 26 books – ethnographic accounts of Indian tribal culture and traditional ways of life, anthologies of folktales and songs, books on the local artistic practices of Central and North East India, and monographs on subjects as varied as the philosophy of love and Gandhi's doctrine of *Satyagraha*. He was based in Shillong in Meghalaya for the last 10 years of his life, and through his role as an adviser for Tribal Affairs to the Governor of Assam he had a considerable impact on the policies that were devised for the integration of the tribal communities of the North East region following Indian Independence. However, today little is known about his motivation and the humanitarian commitment towards protecting the tribal cultures and ways of life.

Elwin's biography has captured the imagination of scholars. Born in England, he first studied English literature and then theology at Merton College at Oxford University, where he was an outstanding student. But instead of pursuing what promised to be a brilliant career in academia, he went on to spend most of his life in India: he claimed that his ambition was for personal reparation for what he perceived was the injustice of colonialism. Elwin was first based for almost three decades in the central Indian region that now comprises the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. His direct approach to research had been to settle down in the village and to share the life of the community as far as an outsider could and this famously gave his writing a special poignancy that most anthropologists in India did not possess. After his relocation to the North East, his publication *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1957) became the cornerstone of India's political philosophy for its large tribal population.

However, today, 55 years on and Elwin's work is at present widely neglected, out of publication and sidelined.

1.1. Background of the Project

This project began with late Ashok Elwin, youngest son of Verrier Elwin, a resident of Shillong, and holding copyright to all of Elwin's collection, as a step towards studying Elwin's legacy. It was strongly felt that the bequest of Verrier Elwin (specifically a collection of original photographs, writings, diaries etc.) needed to be studied and propagated as far as possible. There were also films in the repository which could not be salvaged, and were damaged beyond repair. This effort (towards digitization) would centralize the contribution made by Elwin to the historical documentation, interpretation and protection of the tribal cultures of the North East India at a decisive point of post-colonial transition. Thus, the project aimed to restore, digitize and make available this unknown documentation by Dr Verrier Elwin (visual and textual) from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, and to review this work in the contemporary socio-political context.

1.2. Limitations and Hurdles

Originally proposed for three years, since the task of descriptive documentation was perceived as herculean (and decidedly so), the sanction of North Eastern Council (NEC) was given for a period of 18 months. This time was also stretched to a large extent due to a number of reasons – administrative, Covid social distancing, death of Mr. Ashok Elwin, and identification of resource persons who could help in contextualizing the photographs of almost 80-90 years ago. In all a total of 16 resource persons/ consultants were involved in the project over a period of 3 years.

Objectives and Methodology

1. To digitize over 8,000 black and white photographs, and contextualize the photographs with proper metadata as far as possible,
2. To conduct exhibitions (including workshops/seminars), and
3. To study and understand the relevance of Elwin in modern day context.

In order to fulfill the above objectives, the following activities were planned.

1. Digitization and Archiving

(A) Photographic Materials: This included cleaning, and digitization of black and white photographs taken by Dr. Elwin from the 1930s to early 1960s.

(a) High resolution scanned images – 2 sets were prepared. They were to be stored at (i) Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong, and (ii) as Ashok Elwin's personal archive.

Total photographs digitized – Only a total of 7019 photographs could be salvaged, while a large number of photographic and film reels could not be recovered.

(b) Low resolution scanned images – 2 sets. They were to be: (i) made available free of cost through the NEHU website, and (ii) donated to the library at North Eastern Council, Shillong.

(B) Written Notes and Diaries

These were scanned and digitized for research material.

2. Research

(A) Elwin's Contribution: The books, diaries and photographs were studied in order to understand the relevance of Elwin's contributions, especially to North East India. Prof. T. B. Subba, one of our consultants, meticulously went through all the written (printed and unprinted) documents and noted Elwin's contributions.

(B) Descriptive data: Creation of descriptive data on all the digitized photographs took several months. This effort included identification of resource persons/ consultants and verification of data generated. This cultural meta data remains with the Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.

(C) Verrier Elwin Endowment Lecture: The Verrier Elwin Endowment lecture was held in November 2022, where eminent anthropologist Prof (Retd.). Bapukan Choudhury delivered the lecture.

3. Dissemination

(A) The existing Verrier Elwin Memorial Museum at NEHU was reorganized with a contextualized selection of 200 large prints to expand the existing collection of smaller sized prints.

(B) A set of black and white prints were mounted, framed and submitted to NEC Library.

(B) Seminar and Workshop: A seminar on the works of Verrier Elwin was originally proposed which could not be held due to no grant. However, special lecture is scheduled to be held in the last week of October 2025 where Prof. B. V. Sharma, Director, Anthropological Survey of India will deliver a lecture. This will mark the culmination of the project.

1.4. Project Output

1. A digital archive at NEHU (both high and low resolution), NEC (low resolution) and Ashok Elwin (both high and low resolution) consisting of approx. 7019 scanned photographs.
2. A set of black and white photographic prints (24'x 24' and 20" x 30") for permanent display at NEHU and a second set of prints NEC, Shillong.
3. Research on Elwin's contributions and his diaries.

Granite plaque regarding the NEC funded project as per NEC guidelines placed near the Verrier Elwin Museum, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.

1.4.1. Identification of Resource Persons/ Consultants

For creation of descriptive data – identification of qualified resource persons was extremely difficult. This humungous task took several months to complete. Nevertheless 16 resource persons were included in this project.

1. Dr. Amo Konyak, independent researcher
2. Dr. G. Riangmai, independent researcher
3. Dr. R. Shimray, independent researcher
4. Ms. M. Manong, research scholar
5. Dr. Yekha U, independent researcher
6. Dr. V. Neli, Assistant Professor, Meghalaya state university
7. Mr. G. Wancho, independent researcher
8. Ms. J. Rera, Assistant Professor, Saint Claret College, Ziro
9. Dr. T. Mene, Assistant Professor, Rajiv Gandhi University
10. Dr. W. Mongchan, Assistant Professor, Rajiv Gandhi University
11. Dr. R. Amung, Assistant Professor, Rajiv Gandhi University

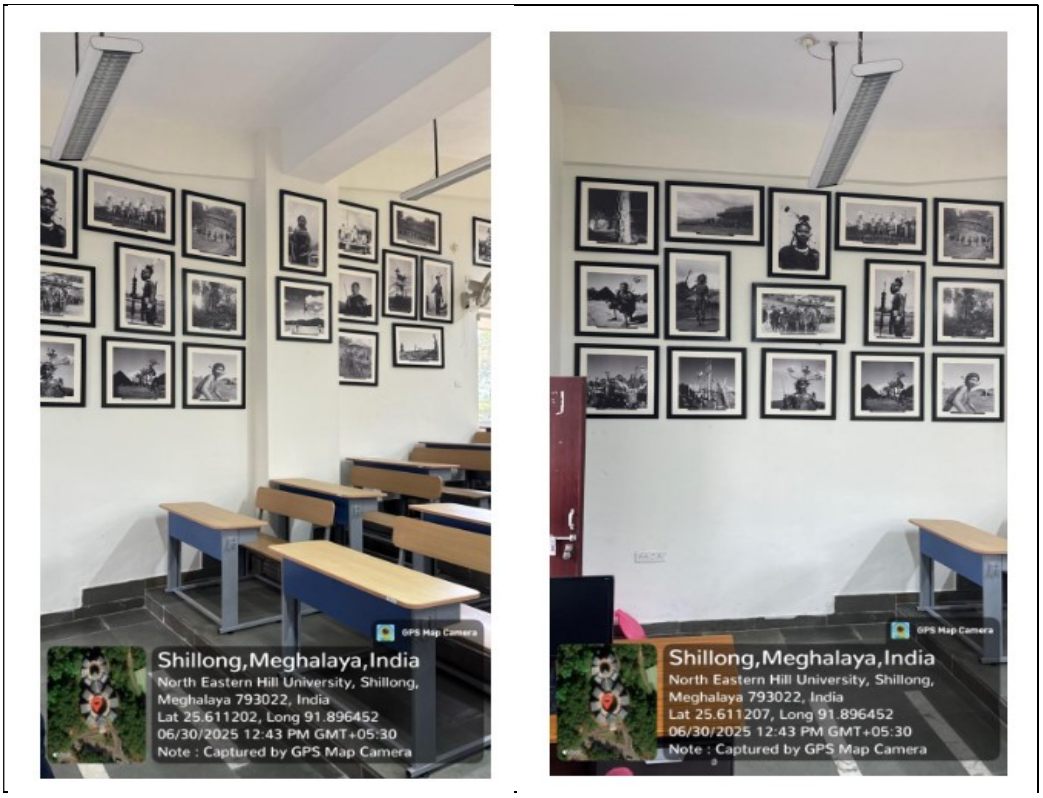
12. Ms. A. Puri, independent researcher
13. Ms. Y. Mihu, independent researcher
14. Mr. L. Opo, independent researcher
15. Prof. T. B. Subba
16. Mr. Ashok Elwin

1.4.2. Digital Archive

1. NEHU – high and low resolution of scanned photographs and notes and diaries.
2. NEC – for low resolution of scanned photographs.
3. Elwin's family – high and low resolution of scanned photographs and notes and diaries.

1.4.3. Permanent Display

1. 200 black and white photographs laminated and framed have been put up as permanent display at the Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.
2. 100 black and white photographs laminated and framed have been handed over to NEC, Shillong for permanent display.



Permanent display the Elwin Gallery, Room 101, Cluster Classroom, Social Sciences, NEHU, Shillong

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Permanent display at the Elwin Gallery, Room 101, Cluster Classroom, Social Sciences, NEHU, Shillong

Permanent display at the Elwin Museum, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong

Permanent display at the Elwin Museum, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong

1.4.4. List of Photographs submitted to NEC

These are the photographs with catalog no and minimal descriptions submitted to NEC for permanent display, as per the project requirements.

Sl. No.	Catalog no.	Description
1.	VE_0603	Row of houses in an Apatani village.
2.	VE_0632	Apatani girls in traditional attire.
3.	VE_0637	Apatani girls in traditional attire.
4.	VE_0639	Apatani boy practicing with a bow and arrow.
5.	VE_0640	Apatani man in traditional attire.
6.	VE_0641	Apatani boy shooting an arrow.
7.	VE_0648	Apatani man in traditional attire.
8.	VE_0651	Apatani men performing the Ropi ritual.
9.	VE_0656	Apatani children playing the traditional Pakhu game.
10.	VE_0657	Apatani boys playing the traditional Daka Sila game.
11.	VE_0659	Apatani children playing a balancing game on an adult's back.
12.	VE_0662	Apatani girls performing a folk song.
13.	VE_1017	A view of an Adi village
14.	VE_1027	Paddy left to dry in the sun in an Adi village
15.	VE_1028	An Adi woman on the loom
16.	VE_1033	Young boys of the Adi tribe
17.	VE_1038	Hanging bridge over the Siang river in Upper Siang District
18.	VE_1098	An Adi man
19.	VE_1102	Adi man in festive attire.
20.	VE_1108	Adi girls collecting firewood
21.	VE_1123	An Adi Ponung Miri
22.	VE_1125	An Adi Ponung Miri with a group of children
23.	VE_1135	Adi graveyard.
24.	VE_1136	Funeral altar of the Adi
25.	VE_1137	Funeral altar of the Adi
26.	VE_1139	Funeral altar of the Adi
27.	VE_1140	Ritualistic site of the Adi.

28.	VE_1145	Funeral site of the Adi featuring Mithun sacrifices.
29.	VE_1146	Sacrificing a mithun as part of Adi funeral rites.
30.	VE_1318	Adi man in traditional attire.
31.	VE_1321	Verrier Elwin with young Adi boys
32.	VE_1368	Idu Mishmi man in traditional attire.
33.	VE_1369	Idu Mishmi man in traditional attire.
34.	VE_1497	A young Adi woman in traditional attire
35.	VE_1498	Adi girls collecting firewood
36.	VE_1502	Young woman of the Adi tribe
37.	VE_2009	Digaru Mishmi men resting in a jhum field.
38.	VE_2011	A Digaru Mishmi grave.
39.	VE_2015	Digaru Mishmi girl in traditional attire.
40.	VE_2017	Digaru Mishmi girls pounding paddy.
41.	VE_2024	Digaru Mishmi girls fetching water.
42.	VE_2026	Digaru Mishmi boy using walking sticks.
43.	VE_2029	Digaru Mishmi man smoking a pipe.
44.	VE_2031	Digaru Mishmi man weaving a basket.
45.	VE_2033	Young girls of the Digaru Mishmi tribe cleaning and husking rice.
46.	VE_2041	Digaru Mishmi boys fishing on a lake.
47.	VE_2042	Digaru Mishmi boys fishing with the use of a raft.
48.	VE_2051	Digaru Mishmi girls resting in front of the house.
49.	VE_2056	Digaru Mishmi girl in traditional attire.
50.	VE_2058	Digaru Mishmi man in traditional attire.
51.	VE_2066	Digaru Mishmi girls fetching water.
52.	VE_2070	A young Digaru Mishmi girl winnowing rice.
53.	VE_2157	A young Digaru Mishmi girl in traditional attire.
54.	VE_2163	A young Digaru Mishmi girl in traditional attire.
55.	VE_2165	Young women of the Mishmi tribe of Lohit Valley
56.	VE_2169	A young woman of the Mishmi tribe smoking pipe
57.	VE_2177	A young Digaru Mishmi girl in traditional attire.
58.	VE_2184	A father and son duo of the Adi tribe
59.	VE_2187	Funeral altar of the Mishmis of Lohit Valley
60.	VE_2194	Traditional Mishmi house in Lohit Valley
61.	VE_2197	Idu Mishmi man wearing traditional coat and necklace.
62.	VE_2198	Adi (Minyong) man from Siang Valley
63.	VE_2199	A Mishmi shaman
64.	VE_2205	A young Idu Mishmi couple
65.	VE_2208	An elder of the Mishmi tribe smoking pipe
66.	VE_2209	Ritual altar of the Mishmis of Lohit Valley
67.	VE_2211	Idu Mishmi man capturing mithun
68.	VE_2212	Idu Mishmi priest.
69.	VE_2214	A young Idu Mishmi woman in traditional attire.
70.	VE_2216	A young Idu Mishmi mother
71.	VE_2218	A young Idu Mishmi woman on the way to the fields.
72.	VE_2220	A young Idu Mishmi boy playing the traditional *Aahega* game.
73.	VE_2221	Young Adi boys playing a traditional game.
74.	VE_2223	Idu Mishmi man with bow and arrow
75.	VE_2226	Idu Mishmi man with a crossbow.
76.	VE_2227	Young Mishmi boys of Lohit Valley
77.	VE_2228	An Idu Mishmi man with a crossbow
78.	VE_2229	Idu Mishmi man in traditional attire.
79.	VE_2238	A Mishmi man smoking a metal pipe
80.	VE_2239	A young Idu Mishmi man playing the traditional *Sumaga* game.
81.	VE_2250	Tai-Khamti traditional mill
82.	VE_2252	A Tai-Khamti woman weaving on the loom

83.	VE_2255	A Tai-Khamti dancer in a mask
84.	VE_2265	Tai-Khamti monastery
85.	VE_2274	A ritual altar of the Tai-Khamti
86.	VE_2277	Traditional mill of the Tai-Khamti at Empong Village
87.	VE_2284	Funeral procession of a Tai-Khamti monk
88.	VE_2590	A Wancho woman carrying firewood.
89.	VE_2605	Carved wooden figure from a Wancho Morung at Wakka. (Photo taken: January 6, 1956)
90.	VE_2607	Double-headed carved pillar at Mintong, Tirap District. (Photo taken: December 1, 1956)
91.	VE_2648	Sinkeo, daughter of Wangam's brother, in her wedding attire at Senua, Tirap District.
92.	VE_2670	Wancho warrior in traditional attire.
93.	VE_2671	A young Wancho warrior
94.	VE_2672	A Wancho man with traditional adornments.
95.	VE_2707	Chewang Yogli, head interpreter of the Tangsa, Tirap. (Photo taken: Jan 1956)
96.	VE_2709	Tangsa man firing a crossbow at Khimiyang. (Photo taken: Jan 16, 1956)
97.	VE_2711	Tangsa man at Khimiyang Longye, Tirap. (Photo: Jan 1956)
98.	VE_2714	Gaonbura of Laju smoking opium. (Photo taken: Jan 9, 1956)
99.	VE_2724	Tangsa girls (Minjon, Hamjon and Minham) at Khimiyung and Longye, Tirap. (Photo taken: Jan 16, 1956)
100.	VE_5025	*Naomei* (warrior) from Kongan Village in Wakching area. (Photo taken: June 9, 1947)

1.5. Copy Right

SECTION II

ELWIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NORTHEAST INDIA

Prof. T. B. SUBBA[1]

2.1. Introduction

On the last day of the year 1953, Elwin arrived in Northeast India to first serve as Anthropological Consultant for North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and subsequently as Adviser for Tribal Affairs to the Governor of Assam for NEFA, Manipur and Tripura, which he continued till the end of his life in 1964. In those ten odd years, he made valuable contribution to Northeast India in general and NEFA in particular. He framed a policy for their development and administration, issued specific directives for officers posted there, and provided training to them on how to conduct themselves in tribal areas. But his contribution to the development and administration of Northeast India has never been assessed objectively. Although praised by many scholars and administrators, his policies for tribal development have been alleged to be regressive and anti-national. He was alleged to have proposed to keep the tribes confined to the hills like animals in a zoo, and not allow them to interact with the Hindus from the plains of India. Although his policies received unflinching support of none other than the first prime minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, he was never allowed to breathe peacefully by some of his detractors like G.S. Ghurye and A.V. Thakkar and several anthropologists from India and abroad. In fact, his policies continue to be criticized, rather wrongly, even today.

In this report, I wish to draw upon various sources to present what I think is the real picture of what Elwin had recommended for the development and administration of the tribes of the region. I will base myself here not only on what Elwin himself had published, but also on what he had written in his diaries which are hitherto unpublished. I will also use the writings of his detractors as well as supporters to present a narrative of Elwin's contribution that is different from the dominant narrative in his time and even later.

[1] Prof. T. B. Subba, formerly Professor in the Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong was one of the Consultants of the project.

I am also writing this because Elwin was undoubtedly one of the best-known anthropologists of India, despite not being trained as an anthropologist. His knowledge of tribal life and culture, based on his own experience of living and interacting with the aboriginals of Central and Eastern India for more than two decades was unmatched. Also being an activist, he fought for their rights over land and forests. In my view, India has not seen another anthropologist who was as empathetic as he was about the tribes of India, wrote as influentially on them as he did, and was as concerned about their future as he was. I would also add, India has not seen another anthropologist who sacrificed every opportunity to lead a life of fame and luxury and decided to live among the poorest, most backward, and the most marginalized sections of Indian society. In Central India, he not only lived among them, but also provided them education and healthcare by raising funds in every possible way – giving lectures and radio talks, writing books and articles, writing book reviews, etc. and by soliciting donations from Indian philanthropists in Mumbai and some friends and well-wishers in England. It is perhaps important to mention here that J.R.D. Tata, the father of the Indian industrialist Ratan Tata, was his biggest and most regular sponsor and sympathizer. Important because Elwin is falsely alleged to have lived in Patangarh, Madhya Pradesh in luxury with foreign money, and not among but away from the tribal people.

Although this report is concerned mainly with his contribution during the last decade of his life and career, it is not possible to delink the Elwin who lived among the aboriginals of Central and Eastern India for more than two decades, often under very dire circumstances, from the Elwin who now had an official position to do something for the tribes of the region. This is because most of his ideas about tribal development were informed by his more than two decades long experience with some of the most 'primitive' tribes of India before coming to Shillong.

He felt happy to see the changes in his life after coming to Shillong. He had a big bungalow, a car, servants, staff, and for the first time a telephone bearing the three-digit number 420 which, according to Indian penal code, is associated with theft and burglary. Apparently, he did not like the number of his telephone, but he was happy that it was not something worse like 302 which is associated with murder. He loved the city and the location of his house in Nongthymmai, which then was surrounded by forest, but which in late 1990s was clearly visible from the faculty room I was allotted in our Nongthymmai

campus. Actually, it was just a stone's throw away, but for a barbed wire fencing between my room and Sridam House, where he lived. With the new assignment, he regained his sense of importance: while he needed permission to enter the region earlier, he was now reading and advising the government of India and the Governor or Assam on the most secret files relating to the region. Yet, he was no less committed to knowing the conditions of the tribes of the region and doing something to ameliorate the same, just as he was about the tribes of Central and Eastern India. So, at the slightest opportunity, he would leave everything that he enjoyed doing in Shillong and left on a tour of the region, which was mostly on foot.

While discussing his contribution to tribal development and administration in the region, I have reproduced his own words, interspersed with those of Nehru, as often as possible, because I cannot match the clarity and beauty of their language, no matter how hard I try. I thought that paraphrasing their words would only be a parody of sorts.

I thank the project PI and Co PI, Prof. Lucy Zehol and Prof. Q. Marak, NEHU, for the opportunity to write this report, and Dr. Jelle J.P. Wouters, Associate Professor, Royal Thimpu College, Thimpu, for his useful comments on the draft.

2.2. Material Development

Elwin was hugely concerned with the art and culture of the tribal people, but he thought that material development was something more urgently needed for them. He did not like the word 'uplift' in the context of tribal development because he found it 'patronising' and 'condescending' (Diary No. 1, October 1941). He later wrote, perhaps rather insensitively of gender in today's context, 'The only thing to which the word "uplift" can properly be applied is a brassiere' (Diary No. 5, March 1948).

In an interview with the *Times of India* in Delhi, Elwin spoke about placing utmost priority on dealing with 'appalling poverty and alarming incidence of diseases' among the Adivasis. (Diary No. 15, August 1952). He made extensive documentation of poverty and diseases among the tribal people and how they dealt with their health issues, which was with the help of shamans, ethnomedicine-men, and the herbs collected from the local forests. After touring extensively in Northeast India, he found a similar situation with regard to poverty and health among the tribes of the region as he did in Central and Eastern India. He also thought that it would be difficult to preserve their art and culture,

their dances and songs, and their religion if they were not first brought out of the morass of poverty and ill-health.

Elwin, as the chairman of a five-member expert committee appointed by the government of India to examine the working of Multipurpose Tribal Blocks, highlights several problems of poverty in tribal blocks, but writes that

> the greatest of these problems is poverty and that it is essential to press forward with development schemes, especially for improved agriculture and irrigation as vigorously as possible, so that the tribal people may enjoy a standard of living comparable to that of the rest of the populations.' (Diary No. 28, February 1960)

Elwin further wrote: 'If the tribal people are to be developed at all they must be developed well, and we must send our best men and spend a great deal of money on this programme. We must atone for our long neglect of the tribes by intensifying development among them.' According to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, the Elwin Committee mentioned above concludes: 'We look forward to the day when it will be no longer necessary to use the word "tribal" at all.' (Diary No. 29, August 1960)

An editorial in the *Times of India*, dated 20 October 1960, however, provides a rather critical reading of the Elwin Committee report. It comments:

> The committee has done well to stress the need to pay more attention to such fundamental issues as ownership of land, amendment of local forest rules, the revival of tribal self-government, relief of indebtedness and "a correct approach to the people". But it surely goes too far when it says that in predominantly tribal areas the forests should be managed not basically for profit or for conservation but for furthering tribal interests.'

Advocacy for land and forest rights, however, is not merely for material development: it is for restoring the historical linkage between land, forest and tribes, a linkage that was disturbed by various legislations that went directly against the tribal rights and ways of life. That material development was not the only or ultimate goal of development according to the philosophy of Nehru and Elwin is clear from Nehru's reply to a question by one Mr. Verghese of the *Times of India*:

> … I think that in the course of the last few years, our government has done a very creditable job in developing NEFA…It is not merely a question of building roads. Of course we build roads, we put up schools, we put up dispensaries and hospitals

> here and there. It is a much deeper and a more intricate problem which has interested me personally very greatly. The problem is how to deal with rather primitive tribal people who live there; one has to strike a balance between developing them in this way and not imposing ourselves on them, on a primitive culture, which produces sometimes very harmful results. It breaks up something without giving something in its place. I have written about it – there are very interesting books, one or two specially written by Dr. Verrier Elwin. Broadly speaking I agree with his approach to this problem. For instance we have tried to avoid for administrative or like reasons pushing in too many outsiders there…The principal part of development in these areas is always communications which we want to develop. Then come schools, better farming, even community development schemes and all these have been applied there. (Diary No. 28, October 1959)

Nehru certainly wanted roads, dispensaries, schools, and better farming techniques, but at the same time did not want outsiders to go into the tribal areas in any big number. While I see no reason to grumble about this policy, in practice, it was perhaps very challenging to achieve any of the above objectives in NEFA without the people from outside at least in the initial stage because there was hardly any local expertise available in any of these fields. On the basis of my limited reading of their writings, there is however no elucidation in the writings of either Nehru or Elwin of how they envisaged achieving development without the people from outside.

2.3. Detribalization

Elwin believed that any contact of tribes with 'civilization' would lead to 'acculturation', which in turn would lead to detribalization. According to him, this is the greatest danger to tribal people whose lives were fairly 'virile, progressive and free' prior to coming in contact with civilization. He cited examples of how the practice of child marriage was growing in the Gond society that did not know of such practice earlier, or how the Saoras of Orissa had started practicing untouchability, or how dancing was being discouraged among them after they came in contact with the larger Hindu society (Diary No. 15, August 1952). According to Elwin, 'puritanism' played havoc with tribal people and 'assimilation' of the tribal people with the dominant Hindu society was a 'subtle form of domination' of the tribal people. The result was a rapid process of 'acculturation', which

in turn had resulted in xenophobia among the tribal people and all that was turning them towards communism. (Diary No. 15, August 1952). Elwin noticed similar trends among the Nagas who had embraced Christianity. According to him, there is

> a tragic decline in the arts of the people. In many villages the dance has almost disappeared… dance as an integral part of tribal life is going. The beautiful music and singing is (sic) also disappearing in favour of American hymn and cinema tunes… The beautiful ornaments and style of personal decoration are disappearing in favour of a parody of European dress. Even the exquisite weaving, with its fine sense of colour, is going before the passion for western fashions. (Diary No. 15, December 1952)

This is what Elwin disliked to see happen and Nehru was hugely concerned about. While there is selective acceptance of the traditional cultures and traditions among the educated Christian Naga youths in the recent past, mainly on account of their clamour for indigeneity, there is still a strong avoidance of the pre-Christian cultures and traditions by them.

2.4. Tribal *Panchsheel*

The five principles of tribal development and administration, elucidated by Nehru in his foreword to *A Philosophy for NEFA* by Elwin (1959), often alluded to as his 'Tribal *Panchsheel*', are as follows:

One, the tribal people should be allowed to develop along the lines of their own genius. Both Nehru and Elwin wanted development of the tribes as the tribes themselves wanted it. They did not want any imposition of development plans from outside, including from the government of India.

Two, tribal rights in land and forest should be protected. Nehru was aware of the infringement on tribal rights on lands and forests through various sources, including the writings of Elwin, and very much wanted that their rights should be protected. This has been largely achieved in the VI schedule areas, but the situation in V schedule areas is rather pathetic, owing mainly to development and conservation policies of the governments but not excluding other forces in operation in such resource-rich areas as the tribal areas are. The tribes have also lost a lot of their lands to moneylenders and other rich people who show no qualms about exploiting the loopholes in the laws that are

supposed to protect the tribal interests. Even the lower judiciary and administration, which are dominated by the people from the dominant groups, provide little succor to the tribal people in most parts of the country.

Three, the NEFA administration and development should be, as far as possible, in the hands of trained tribal people themselves. This principle was taken seriously by Nehru by establishing a training centre for the Indian Frontier Administration Service (IFAS) cadres who were, however, largely from non-tribal backgrounds to start with but needed to be trained on how to conduct themselves in tribal areas.

Four, the tribal areas should not be overwhelmed with too many schemes at a time, and should be administered slowly, one by one and through their own social and cultural institutions. This principle is often expressed poetically, as 'hastening slowly'. When the Second Five Year Plan was announced with rapid industrialization and economic growth as its main goals, Elwin wished that NEFA had a 'Fifty-Year Plan rather than a Five-Year Plan. For, according to him, 'if tribals move too fast, they tend to move downwards.' (Guha 2014, 264).

According to Elwin, the pace of development in tribal societies should be such that the tribal people get enough time to adjust with the changes that development projects bring about in their cultures. If too many development projects are ushered in too short a time, the result in such areas would be harmful rather than beneficial to the tribal people because their cultures, institutions, customary laws, etc. would not get the necessary time to adjust with the changes that any development plan would bring about. None but Elwin could have written so with confidence, for no one had lived and travelled among the tribes as much as he had done. It is a different matter today that many tribal elites want as many development projects in their areas as possible, so that they can make fast money and appropriate community- or clan-owned lands in the name of development. Further, although tribal societies have been intimately connected with land and forests, the new generation tribal youths are not interested in eking out a living out of land and forests but are ever ready to exploit their natural resources. He notes in his diaries how the youths avoided working in their forests and agricultural lands and instead preferred to work on road constructions or do other such menial jobs.

Five, the results should not be judged on the basis of statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character evolved. Of the five principles, I

particularly like this one, which I think should be the criterion for assessing the development projects in the entire country and not just in the tribal areas of the region. Everyone knows how unreliable the statistical data are and how prone to manipulation such data can be.

There is no denying the fact that Tribal *Panchsheel* is an ideal set of principles for tribal administration and development. To what extent are they practical in real-life situations is a different question. But even as principles, they are highly relevant even today in the V Schedule areas where the tribes have much lesser opportunity to exercise their choices and decide their own destinies than their counterparts under the VI Schedule areas.

2.5. Tribes in a Zoo?

Elwin did not want to keep the hill people away from the plains people, but wanted to protect the former from the debasing influence of the latter, because he believed that 'contact with civilization debases the aboriginal'. He wrote: 'I am not myself, any more than Mr. A.V. Thakkar, in favour of "isolation" from all contact, but I am in favour of isolation from degrading contact' (Diary No. 1, October 1941). That is why, he believed that an unabated contact between the hill and plains people would result in negative consequences for the former. This view was not informed by his so-called 'romantic' ideas about the hill people or his alleged bias against Hinduism. On the other hand, it was based on his over two-decades-long observation of the results of such interaction in Central and Eastern India.

Elwin was frustrated about a continuous tirade against him, especially from Thakkar that he was an 'isolationist'. He wrote: '… opinions he has attributed to me have no basis in anything I have written (in 'Loss of Nerve'), and are totally and entirely false.' He goes on: 'The hostility of Mr. Thakkar and other Indian Liberals to anthropologists (like G.S. Ghurye) is hard to understand.' (Diary No. 1, November 1941). Elwin tried to explain his position one last time in the following words:

> Let it be said clearly and finally that no anthropologist wishes to keep people "as they are" or as specimens in a zoo or museum: but he may well desire to see the often very attractive primitive culture (religion, poetry, dancing, dress and social institutions) preserved. The anthropologist does not want to deprive the hillman of

> the blessings of civilization; but he does want to save him from being degraded by that parody of civilization which characterizes all too many of the inferior people of the plains. The anthropologist does not want to keep education from the aboriginal; but he does insist that education should be of the right kind. (Diary No. 1, November 1941)

It is alleged by some of his critics that keeping tribes in a zoo is in the interest of anthropologists, because they will get a constant supply of 'subjects' for their anthropological studies. Such critics are obviously being spiteful or jealous because of the attention and importance that Elwin received from the greatest leaders of the country at that time. Further, it appears that for some of his critics, anthropology and tribal studies are coterminous.

While a major interest of anthropologists has been tribes there are anthropologists who have been working on every possible field of study, including the study of peasants and urban-industrial societies. Some critics even go to the extent of saying that the discipline of anthropology would vanish if the tribes were to change into something else. First of all, study of tribes is not the sole monopoly of anthropologists anywhere in the world: there are historians, political scientists, sociologists, and even botanists and environmental scientists, who study tribes and have contributed immensely to understanding the different facets of tribal societies. And, secondly, tribes have never been the only subject of study for anthropologists. Therefore, the critics need not worry about the future of anthropology if the tribes change into something else, which they may in any case, whether anthropologists like it or not. Like all disciplines, anthropology will also adapt to the changing world and evolve accordingly.

One of Nehru's most bitter critics was the socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia who came to the border of NEFA twice, but was not allowed to enter without a valid pass. In his second visit he was arrested for trying to enter the territory without a permit, which if he had applied for, would be easily granted to him for a paltry sum, as per the statement issued to the press by the then governor of Assam. And for not being able to walk in freely, he blamed the 'former clergyman', referring to Elwin (Guha 2014, 268-69). In fact, there was no dearth of Indian leaders who hated Elwin, albeit for different reasons.

'It is not true', he insists time and again, 'that anthropologist wishes to keep aboriginals in a zoo as specimens for study… What the anthropologist wishes is to see

aboriginals living their own lives, following their own customs, preserving their own rules of food and drink, delighted with their own simple pleasure in the glorious freedom of their hills.' Then, in a sarcastic tone, he writes about who he wanted to keep in his zoo:

> If I wanted to have an Anthropological Zoo, I would not fill it with Marias and Baigas. I would have a very different company. I would put in one enclosure the whole of the Sevagram Ashram, in a pleasantly furnished cage within speaking distance of the Mahatma. I would confine the President of the Muslim League. Some way off the office bearers of the Bombay Purity League would draw crowds of sightseers eager to watch them sip their lemonade. Elsewhere, carefully segregated, I would include a selection of Hindu Sanatanists as well as a sprinkling of the more diehard officials of the Indian Civil Service… (Diary No.1, January 1942).

He then clarifies: '… many years ago, I was in favour of isolating the Adibasis to some extent, but my discussions with Thakkar Bapa changed my view on this, and I came to feel with him that any kind of keeping these people in a sort of zoo or museum was bound to lead to harm.' (Diary No. 15, December 1952). The ideas of people do change over time. Therefore, to blame him for his entire life and even after for what he thought in his initial years in India is certainly not a civil attitude. In a secret note dated 19 August 1954, Nehru in a certain sense goes beyond what Elwin had actually advocated:

> I do not agree with the criticism that the preservation of tribal art and tribal dress indicates a desire to keep the tribal people as museum specimens. The danger is that these people will lose their culture and have nothing to replace it… I would rather that they remain museum specimens than become such representatives of so-called modern progress. Of course, I do not wish them to feel that we are stopping the "clock of progress", though I have my grave doubts as to whether this clock is one of progress or not. (Diary No. 19, August 1954)

When the tribes lose their art and culture there will be no vacuum but something else will replace what they have lost, but they will find it difficult to call the new acquisitions and embellishments as their own, no matter how much of nativisation takes place over a period of time. They may resemble the so-called 'civilised', but all that they exhibit in their lives would be exhibits of cultural traits borrowed from the dominant societies. Would the tribesmen and women feel proud of such symbols of 'acculturation'? Elwin,

whose knowledge of tribes in India was both intensive and extensive, and Nehru, whose concern for the future of tribes was not less than any other leader's, certainly did not think so. It is certainly not something philosophical to call such changes in tribal societies as 'progress'.

In March 1963, there was a brief but rather vicious debate in the Lok Sabha between Nehru on the one hand and Hem Barua and P.C. Barooah on the other. The two Assamese lawmakers wanted NEFA to merge with Assam and NEFA schools to be taught in Assamese language, which they argued would bring emotional integration of NEFA with Assam and ensure better security from the Chinese. Nehru, like Elwin, was not against Assam, but he thought that any integration with Assam would harm the NEFA people in multiple ways. (Diary No. 33, March 1963) There were several Assamese intellectuals and leaders who attacked Elwin for what they mistakenly thought, i.e., he wanted to separate NEFA from Assam. Even professional anthropologists from his own former organization, i.e., Anthropological Survey of India, were in a turf fight with Elwin, as they thought that he was responsible for restricting their entry into NEFA for research. For all this, the timing of his coming to NEFA might have been partially responsible because he came at a time Indian nationalism was at its height and anything that was perceived as against integration of India was not taken kindly by most Indians.

'A Tribal View' was articulated through a Letter to the Editor by one Tindai Imsuk on January 11 the same year: 'I am a tribal, and since my future appears to be the deep concern of every one (bless their souls), I have a right to say something. Integration with Assam is dreaded by us tribals… It surprises us to find that our Assamese friends are so hostile to NEFA administration as to suggest that the IFAS should be abolished.' (Diary No. 33, January 1963)

Defending Elwin and countering the views of one Rajkhowa, expressed in his letter to the editor, the newspaper *Patriot* writes: 'He is widely accused of urging isolation, yet he has written on several occasions strongly condemning this policy. He is accused of trying to separate N.E.F.A. from Assam, yet in his book he has urged that every scheme of development should be put to the test of whether it helps to integrate N.E.F.A. with Assam or not.' (Diary No. 33, January 1963) Also countering the views of one Satis Ch. Kakati, who wanted Nehru's NEFA policy to be scrapped, L.K. Padmanabhan writes from Rourkela on 25 December 1963 that 'Mr. Nehru's "twin

attitude" tribal policy, which aims at preserving richness and individuality and at bringing the benefits of civilization to tribals, is perhaps the best policy to continue in NEFA and this course undoubtedly has the support of Dr. Verrier Elwin.' (Diary No. 33, December 1962)

I end this section with a report that Elwin, as the chairman of a five-member committee to examine the working of Multipurpose Tribal Blocks, submitted to the government of India. In the report, he has highlighted two problems of development. According to the report, 'the first priority was to open up the tribal areas by greatly extending communications, which would bring the tribes out of their age-old isolation and unite the people of the hills and plains.' 'At all costs', he urged, 'this isolation must be brought to an end so that the tribes can be fully integrated with the rest of India' (Diary No. 28, March 1960). The second problem, according to his report, was 'to bring the tribals out of their isolation and so unite them with the rest of India that they can make their own special contribution to the country as a whole.' (Diary No. 28, February 1960)

If someone still wants to debate Elwin's purported theory of isolation, he or she is most welcome to do that, but that would amount to flogging a dead horse.

2.5. Development Without External Interference

Elwin has always advocated that the tribes should be allowed to develop according to their own genius and not according to how the government of India or some Indian nationalists would want them to develop. For instance, he was against the idea of uprooting the people in distant villages and bringing them to one place so that amenities like education and health can be extended to them. He knew how much both education and health amenities were needed by the tribes living in the remote parts of the hills. He had himself seen evidences of abject poverty and diseases in the hills of the region wherever he went on tour. On 15.5.58, Nehru wrote:

> In the report on Tripura, reference was made to the scheme of colonization of the tribal people, the idea being to collect them from the villages into larger communities. Dr. Elwin did not like this at all as this went against one of our basic policies of not upsetting and uprooting the tribal people. Probably this was suggested to make it easier for the authorities to deal with them or to give them amenities etc. But it does seem to me a retrograde step. Our whole policy is not to

interfere in their normal life even if in our opinion that is for their good. (Diary No. 27, January 1959)

Yet, regrouping of villages took place in Mizoram and Nagaland as a counter-insurgency measure against the insurgency. The regrouping of villages would have resulted in massive uprooting of the villagers, which in turn would have destabilized their daily lives in many ways. How much has this strategy helped in containing insurgency in the two states is difficult to say, nor does one know much about the changes in their cultures, institutions and dialects/languages after the regrouping. Some doctoral research has taken place on the subject but much more needs to be done to know both the manifest and latent consequences of the regrouping of villages.

Elwin's contribution to the administration of the thinly populated but strategically important region of NEFA is often remembered even today. In the first chapter of his book titled *Important Directives on Administration of NEFA* (1967), Elwin et al discuss the three policies or approaches to the development and administration of tribes in India. Talking about the policy of 'Leave them as they are', they write:

> … nobody now (least of all the scientists themselves) wants to keep the tribesmen as specimens in museum for the benefit of science. To wish to preserve and develop the best elements in tribal art, religion and culture is something very different from wishing to keep the people in a zoo (Elwin et al. 1967, 1).

Regarding the policy of assimilation, they write that it brings a break with the past, makes the tribesmen ashamed of their own culture and religion, and creates an 'inferiority complex' and hence must be discarded. But the policy which is associated with Nehru's vision, according to them, is best suited for tribal development, as this

> approaches the historical development of tribal life and culture with respect and the people themselves in a spirit of affection and identification that eliminates any possibility of feelings of superiority. It would bring the best things of the modern world to the tribes but in such a way that these would not destroy the traditional way of life, but would activate and develop all that is good in it. (Elwin et al. 1967, 2).

In a chapter titled 'A Philosophy of NEFA (1960): The Fundamental Problem', Nari Rustomji, who was twice Advisor to the Governor of Assam on Tribal Affairs and one time Dewan of Sikkim, has an epigraph from A.V. Thakkar, the architect of assimilation theory, that says: 'Separation and isolation are dangerous theories and strike at the root of

national solidarity. Safety lies in union and not in isolation.' Rejecting this theory, much as he rejected the theory of isolation, Rustomji argues in favour of Nehru's policy that promises to bring the best in the tribes without losing their art, culture, religion and all the beautiful things associated with them. This is easier said than implemented, but there is some kind of hazy road-map when he endorses what B.P. Chaliha, a former chief minister of Assam, said about how he handled the sensitive hill tribes 'A little understanding, a genuine respect, a lot of affection.' (Rustomji, 1989, 247)

2.6. Conclusion

One of the closest friends of Elwin, Nari Rustomji writes so about Elwin's position vis-à-vis the hill tribes of India:

> Despite the deep respect in which Elwin was held by the highest in the land, including Mahatma Gandhi, Vallabhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru, he was yet much misunderstood and much maligned by many who had an entirely perverted concept of his ideas. It is surprising that there should still be people imprisoned in a vast Zoological Game Reserve! Protection yes, but not the protection of prison bars. (Rustomji 1988, 1).

He further writes:

> In being misunderstood, Verrier Elwin was also no less maligned. It has been represented that in seeking a place in the sun for the tribal people, he was creating divisions in the country and thwarting their integration into the mainstream of India's culture. (Rustomji 1988, 2)

And, according to another friend of his, Fürer-Haimendorf:

> No other anthropologist, neither British or Indian, has made as massive a contribution to our knowledge of Indian tribal societies as Verrier Elwin, and books such as *The Muria and their Ghotul* and *The Religion of an Indian Tribe* are sure of a place among the classics of ethnographical literature… He was one of the greatest romantics of anthropology and the most inspired chronicler of India's tribal people'. (1964)

I cannot summarise Elwin's views or his contribution to the knowledge of Indian tribes in any ways better than how Rustomji and Fürer-Haimendorf have done. I can only leave the readers with a few questions that have crossed my mind on several occasions: One, would

the scenario of the tribal societies of Northeast India in general and Arunachal Pradesh in particular be different if the government of India and the Arunachal government had continued to follow the Nehru-Elwin philosophy of tribal development? Two, would the forces of change be too strong after independence to blow away their philosophy soon after Nehru and Elwin were dead and gone? Incidentally, both Nehru and Elwin died in the year 1964 in a gap of about three months. And, finally, have the tribes of the region, who have been largely Christianised or Hinduised, proved the apprehension of Nehru and Elwin about the fate of their art and culture, or their future generally, to be true? If I, as tribal myself, were to answer these questions, it would all be in the affirmative. I would of course need more contemporary data to say a resounding 'yes' to these three questions.

2.7. References

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SECTION III

ELWIN'S DIARIES [1941-1963]

PROF. T. B. SUBBA[2]

3.1. Introduction

Of the various genres of literature, diaries constitute one of the most interesting of them. They take the readers deep into a world of secrecies that only the diarist would have experienced or thought about. Every page of a diary can hold immense possibilities for excitement as well as frustration for the reader as much as it must have been for the diarist. So, if the diaries are published, the consequences may be most unpredictable. The widow of Malinowski least knew how anthropologists across the world would react when she got his diary translated from Polish and published it. Luckily for her, his diary not only provoked very sharp criticism but also extracted unwavering support (Powdermaker, 1970; Symmons-Symonolewicz, 1982).

One of the most comprehensive accounts of what diaries are has been provided by Steven Rendall (1986). The other scholar of diaries who provides an exhaustive account of what diaries are is Irina Paperno (2004). According to her, 'Notwithstanding the diversity and variability of its form, the diary is committed to the calendar, day after day' (2004, 562). Elwin's diaries almost invariably start with a pocket calendar showing the entire year on the first inside page, which indicates that his diaries are, so to speak, 'committed to the calendar'. Elwin's diaries also exemplify that 'The diary is also … committed to the first-person narrative; but not to an addressee. What follows is the diary's special relationship to privacy, intimacy, and secrecy.' (2004, 562) She further writes that, 'the diary is a text written in the first-person, in separate installments, ideally on a daily basis, and ostensibly for the purposes of giving an account of the writer's personal experience in a given day, which is not necessarily addressed to someone other than the diarist' (2004, 562). Elwin's diaries much fit this definition of a diary, but his diaries also 'account for one's time, the diary stems from the fear of watching life grow

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shorter with each passing day.' (2004, 563). He writes quite a few times how he was growing older and less 'flexible'.

This report titled 'Elwin's Diaries' is actually about my commentary on Elwin's diaries. So, the blame for any possible backlash should be directed to me, the commentator, and not to the person who is long dead and gone. I am ready to take the blame for my words, my thoughts, and my summations of what Elwin wrote in his diaries.

This report is based on the 31 diaries that were digitalized and made available to me by Ashok Elwin, the youngest son of Dr. Verrier Elwin and Mrs Lila Elwin. Diary Nos. 22, 23, 24, and 25 are missing and no one, not even Ashok, knows where those diaries have vanished. Since these diaries are related to Elwin's life and works in Northeast India, the story I am going to narrate here will be in a sense circumscribed by this loss. However, I have tried to compensate this loss by taking account of all his diaries starting from 20 November 1941, which provides an account of the southern Muria country till his last diary dated 18 February 1964, four days before his death in Delhi due to heart attack.

It is indeed difficult to say from Elwin's last diary that that would be the end of it. Philippe Lejeune and Victoria Lodewick (2001), in their interesting essay titled 'how do diaries end?' looks at 16 endings of diaries to find an answer to this question but shows how intriguing this can be. The last page of his diary includes entries for 15 to 18 February 1964. It is mostly about his decision not to cancel the ticket to Delhi, riot between Khasis and Assamese in Nongthymai, a locality of Shillong where he lived, about his phone being cut off, and returning home under escort after over-eating at lunch in someone's house. There is no indication that he had any premonition about his death. But when one looks at his handwriting on the last page it does seem to say something. But, as Jacques Chocheyras has observed, the diary is 'perhaps the only literary form which is by definition incomplete' (cited in Rendall, 1986, 61).

Elwin's diaries contain a varying number of pages, ranging from as few as 30-odd pages to as many as 200-odd pages, and covering a couple of months to several months, at times spilling over the next year. They not only contain what Elwin wrote in long hand, but also what he typed out, especially the tour reports and letters he sent to authorities, friends and family members. The diaries also contain newspaper clippings, letters from

the then prime minister, home minister of India, governor of Assam, their invitation cards for dinner, restaurant menu, cinema tickets, etc. The diaries also reveal his closeness with Shamrao Hivale who he fought with almost every day but without whom he was incomplete. Hivale was actually a friend and close associate of Elwin for 34 years. Born just one year after Elwin and studied theology at Mirfield in England, he was sent, like Elwin was, by Gandhi to Mandla district for serving the tribal people. The two were known to the people in the district as *Chote Bhaiya* and *Bade Bhaiya*, or younger and elder brother. His book titled *Scholar Gypsy: A Study of Verrier Elwin* (1946) provides one of the most intimate readings of Elwin.

His diaries were often marked 'Private', 'Secret', and so on and they contained what he thought of whom, including some of the icons of Indian anthropology who were his contemporaries, his regular visitors, his own family members in India and England, his own self, and the men and women he came across. The diaries also contain his very private thoughts at different points of time, described in the most ruthless manner one can think of. So, I am really grateful to Ashok Elwin for the permission to write about his father based on his diaries. In fact, he even endorsed this write-up with a few corrections here and there for which I am truly obliged. He of course asked me to be a little discreet while writing about a few aspects of his father's diaries. But when I drew his attention to the section titled 'Elwin, the Lover' and offered to take it out, he told me that there was no need to do that and reminded me of how his father was chastised by Gandhi for having an affair with one woman while living with him in Sabarmati Ashram.

Indeed, there are serious ethical issues in writing on other people's diaries. I am perhaps conscious of what Andrew Hassam (1987) talks about 'vestigial guilt' of having violated the 'secrecy clause' of Elwin's diaries. I am aware of a possibility that some of the details in his diaries may have some consequences for his children and grandchildren if I am not discreet about what I write. I certainly do not wish to be a cause, not the least knowingly, of any embarrassment for any one of them and not certainly for Ashok, who is a dear friend who opened his library and archives for me on several occasions during the last three decades of my association with him. We have, so to speak, grown old together.

At the time I accepted this assignment from my former colleague Prof. Lucy Zehol, Dean of the School of Human & Environmental Sciences, I had the least idea

about the number of diaries or the number of pages I would have to read, which were a lot more than I had expected. But I do not regret having undertaken this assignment and am actually thankful to her for the opportunity to discover Elwin through his diaries. I am also thankful to Dr. Jelle J.P. Wouters, Associate Professor at the Royal Thimpu College, Thimpu, and Prof. Geetika Ranjan, Head, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, for their encouraging comments on the draft.

I have organized this report on the basis of some of the themes that have drawn attention in public discourses as well as some others that have not.

3.2. Elwin, the Family Man

Elwin never forgot to mention about the health of his family members and his own health in his diaries. There is hardly a single entry where he has not mentioned something about them, even when he was on tour, or away from his family members. What his wife or his sons said to him or did, whether it was something to be happy or sad about, was always a part of his diary. He also got very much perturbed when his family members fell ill, which they often did, much as he himself was ill most of the time. Rarely was there a single day he was free from headache, fever, gall bladder problem, dental pain, and so on.

There is a considerable number of his diary pages where his first wife Kosi, belonging to the Gond community, features, albeit more often than not, as a source of his agony by getting drunk and creating scenes in high profile parties to which Elwin and Kosi were often invited. Yet, whenever she was suffering from fever or some other ailment he was disturbed. Sadly, the marriage did not last for long after she gave birth to Kumar. When the marriage ended, he was in a way relieved, but that happened only after his sincere attempts to save the marriage failed.

Compared to Kosi, Lila – his second wife and from the Pardhan community – was much better adjusted with him, although the age-gap between the two was 18 years. From Lila, three sons were born – Wasant, Nakul and Ashok. Of the three, Nakul is not mentioned in his diaries as frequently as Kumar, Wasant and Ashok are.

It also appears from his diaries that he was very close with his mother and his sister Eldyth. He wrote letters to both of them as frequently as he could, describing how he or his wife were doing and what his children did or told him. In more senses than one,

Shamrao Hivale was also a member of his family and Elwin never forgot to mention about his fights with him or how he was 'abused' by Hivale.

It is very clear from his diaries that none of his sons did well in their schools, but there is no clue in his diaries as to how he might have felt as their father. For instance, in his Diary No.4 related to the month of June 1950, Kumar, then studying in Standard III, gets a zero in History and Mathematics. It is a little surprising that he does not express any sense of remorse or pain for this. Elwin did write a nice letter indirectly requesting the Principal of St. Edmund's School to keep his son Wasant after he was advised to take him elsewhere but the letter was never delivered. He certainly could not give them enough time or attention, except occasionally when he sat with them trying to help them with mathematics or some other subjects. On most days, he used to have a stream of visitors from morning through the day and till late evening. He often had to sit with them in spite of him not keeping well or finding the conversation a wastage of his time. But it will be unfair to him if I do not mention that he took his family members to zoo, circus, cinema hall, and restaurant as frequently as possible. His diaries, however, also contain details of how much was spent on the tickets at the cinema hall, zoo, or at the circus, what they ate and how much he paid to the tune of rupees and *anna*s (one *anna* = 6 paise, one rupee = 16 *anna*s). He remembered the birthdays of every member of his family in India and England and never forgot to write to them or celebrate their birthdays.

On occasions, he wrote as many as 17 letters in a single day, such as he did on 30 November 1950 (Diary No. 10). He also kept detailed note of how much he spent on buying the gifts for the tribal villagers, which were mostly clay or wooden toys, but also sometimes salt and rice, and how much was spent on the parties, including the number of whisky or rum bottles emptied or half-emptied. But there is no account in any of his diaries of how much he spent towards his philanthropic activities like the dispensary, leprosy home, and schools for Adivasis. Otherwise, his diaries always had details of the expenses incurred in parties, menu and the guestlist whether the party was in his house or in someone else's. He also never forgot to mention whether the food was great or not.

For many years of his life in central India, he earned from writing articles and book reviews for the Statesman, Times of India, and the Illustrated Weekly of India. He also had some sponsors in Bombay, some of who were Parsis. He kept meticulous account of how much was received from whom. He passed through phases of financial

difficulties and wished he had a small but steady source of income to make him happy and independent. Yet he took care of almost every need of his family members. If he failed as a family man, he did so because he used to be on tour most of his time, constantly moving from one village to another, at times visiting half a dozen villages in a single day. His being tired or sick never came in the way of his writing, travelling, eating or drinking. His long tours within the country or abroad obviously deprived his family members the feel of his presence. Even when he was not touring, he was reading or writing books, articles, book reviews, stories, poems, letters, and so on or attending to visitors, visiting people, eating out, etc. Except when he was very ill, he would not sit idle, which would certainly take his time away from his family. And, his diaries show more than clearly that he was himself critically aware of the feeling that he had failed as a father as well as a husband. Some of his new year resolutions, such as to cut down drinking and to love his wife more, were breached on the very first day of the next year, but his resolutions always included the promise to be a better father and a better husband.

3.3. Elwin, the Workaholic

One of the most important reasons why Elwin had an acute sense of failure as a father and as a husband was because he was a workaholic. 10 to 12 hours' work a day was common even when he was not well. He would write more than one book at a time along with articles, book reviews, letters, tour diaries, etc. While he was writing one book, he would be correcting the proofs of another or doing the index for the third one. At times, he often published more than 20 articles in one single year, the highest being 60 in 1953 (Subba 2004, 141). He also published as many as 28 books between 1930 and 1961, which is almost one every single year. Actually, he published two books in some years. He was a voracious reader and he loved reading good quality English literature. He would often type his manuscripts till past mid-night, get up early in the morning, and finish a book review before the breakfast. The only times when he would not be working are, of course, when he was very sick, when he would be having lunch, drink, or dinner, or someone would visit him, or when he would visit someone's house for lunch, evening tea/drinks or dinner.

That he was a workaholic may be clear from the following excerpts from his diaries. For instance, in Diary No. 1, on 10 July 1942, he writes: 'Began work on the folk-

tale book this morning although there are many odds and ends still to be done on the Ghotul, but it will be good to give it a rest for a few days.' 10 days later, on 20 July 1942, he writes: 'Good progress with the folk-tale book and it looks very nice indeed'. On 13 August 1942, in just about a month from the day he started his work on the book, he writes: 'The folk-tale book is now practically finished and Shamrao and I have begun work on the song book'. Just 10 days later, on 23 August 1942, he writes: 'The Ghotul book is rapidly nearing completion. Went on working at the songs, photographs, etc. but felt unwell all day with a heavy cold'. Another two days later, on 25 August 1942, he writes: 'Felt unwell all day but managed to get a fair amount of useful work done'. How hard he worked is also evident from the following information from his diaries:

1.9.46: Started work on "The Bondos"

2.9.46: Typed 11 pages

3.9.46: Typed 14 pages

4.9.46: Typed 17 pages

5.9.46: Typed 25 pages

6.9.46: Typed 22 pages

On 24.9.46, which is less than one month from the date of starting the book, he writes: 'Finished typing Bondo Highlanders, 354 pages.' Two days later the manuscript was sent to the publisher. And, on the last day of 1946, he summarizes the year thus:

> So ends 1946, in this lovely spot among the Pavlakimidi Hills, a year notable for the wonderful Bondo, Saora and Kond tours of the early months, and the happy days at Benares at the close. One book was published, but two others were completed, in the last week of the year I passed the final page-proofs of "The Muria".

By now, it should be clear to any reader as to why he thought he was a failure as a father as well as a husband. Even for what went wrong in his relationship with Kosi, he blamed himself as much as he blamed her, not so much for her drinking and quarreling habits, but for 'being a victim of acculturation' (Diary No. 2, August 1946).

3.4. Elwin, the Photographer

Between 1941 and 1963, Elwin took 7-8 thousand photos and made several documentary films on day-to-day life of the aboriginals. His diaries reveal that many a time his photos did not come out well due to under-exposure. That is perhaps the reason why he chose the

time and place for his photographs. His knowledge of photography was that of a user and not of a professional. He had a high-end camera called Rolleiflex, originally made by the German company Franke & Heidecke. More than anything else, the camera was a very important tool of his ethnography for capturing what he thought would be lost forever soon.

There is a lot of nakedness in his photos, naked breasts, naked penises, or naked bodies showing tattoos or ornaments. The raw nakedness one sees in his photos is in itself, according to him, a sign of 'primitiveness' of the tribes. To him, the degree of nakedness was more or less directly associated with the degree of primitiveness, for he strongly believed that 'contact with civilization debases the aboriginal' (Diary No. 1, October 1941). He did not consider it interesting to photograph those who were ugly-looking, or those who covered their private parts, often with factory-made cheap clothes. Covering the breasts with necklaces was, however, something artistic and hence worthy of his photography. In my limited reading of his photos, the nakedness in them is however blown out of proportion by some of his critics. As a matter of fact, naked photos are far fewer in number than the covered ones or the photos of other objects of art or material culture. So, like an optical illusion, what one sees in his photos is perhaps what one is interested in, not what the photographer was perhaps obsessed with.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that his language itself was not less than photographic. One can almost see and feel the things he has described in his diaries. His power of expression in the English language, which though is his native language, is something to be marveled at, which comes from his background in English literature, which he nurtured throughout his life. Till the very last years of his life, he wrote poems and quoted poems that reflected his emotional state.

Most of his photos are 'arranged': arranged in the sense that they are taken at a time and place decided by him, although it rarely happened the way he wanted because either the subjects did not turn up in time, or they were not beautiful, or the weather suddenly turned foul. He was interested in taking photos of dances, beautiful village damsels, decorations on the bodies of both men and women, tattoos, their objects of art and craft, the wood carvings on their gates, on the main doors, etc. He also arranged to get women photographed while ploughing and 'fishing with a palnar trap' (Diary No. 1, March 1942). One of his photographs taken in Northeast India – the one showing a Naga

woman at a handloom – was chosen for converting into a stamp for which he readily gave the permission to the government of India. (Diary No. 19, January 1955) His diaries also reveal that, in the early months of 1942, he took many photographs for Dr. B.S. Guha, who was doing fieldwork in Madhya Pradesh. It is coincidental that Dr. Guha later became his boss at the Anthropological Survey of India for a period of three years.

At a couple of places in his diaries Elwin talks about going on a 'photo shikar', meaning photo hunting (Diary No. 4, May 1948). Presumably after one such photo hunting expedition on 16 December 1950 he writes: 'Astonishing sight of women bathing quite naked all day long. Tiring, but very happy day.' On the women who covered themselves when men approached, he writes in his diary (Diary No. 14, February 1952) so: 'The way Oraon women cover themselves at our approach makes me feel as if I had gone into a Ladies Lavatory by mistake and everyone was hurriedly letting down their dresses.'

One of the highlights of his career as a photographer is the exhibition of his 50 selected photographs of the aboriginal tribes of Central and Eastern India at the Art Gallery in Ceylon on 23-29 October 1950. A reporter from Ceylon who had not read Elwin's books yet but was otherwise praiseful of his photographs, writes: 'Saora women weeding a rice field is a beautiful piece of composition although I suspect Dr. Elwin was more interested in his subject than its composition'. (Diary No. 9, October 1950) The same reporter also notes that Elwin's photos were lacking in technical standards, as they were taken when air-conditioned dark rooms were not there for him to use the thermometers and light meters to produce the best results out of the negatives.

The only lacuna I can see in his enormous collection of photographs from Central, Eastern and Northeastern India is the absence of metadata or alt-text. As a result, one is unable to know the name of the person in the photo, the place where it was taken, the date on which it was taken, and what is the person in the photo wearing or doing, and so on. This makes it extremely difficult for someone to make an ethnographic reading of the photos he took and to reflect on the society and culture of the aboriginals of India at that time. I think this is an important lesson that budding anthropologists of today should learn and keep in mind before embarking on their own 'photo hunting', should they so desire to embark upon.

3.5. Elwin, the Lover

From Elwin's diaries it is clear that he never hid his attraction for any beautiful man and woman, naked or clothed; dark, brown or white in skin colour; half his age or contemporaneous; tribal or non-tribal; and absolutely raw or the highly cultivated. Even the boundary between love and lust, if there is any, seems to disappear or at least looks opaque. But, for him, 'The (very) essence and art of anthropology is love. Without it, nothing is fertile, nothing is true.' (Diary No. 4, p. 27)

He married two women, both from tribal background, but if wishes were horses, he would have married several other women from different backgrounds to whom he was attracted and who he loved deeply and at times rather desperately. I will devote this section to those real women who brought a lot of sadness and pain to his life because he loved them with all his heart but could not marry them. But, what is love if it does not bring pain and sadness upon the lover? For the sake of the privacy of those women and to some extent his, I will however not reveal the real identities of the women he loved.

Before coming to his failed relationships, let me quote what he once wrote when he was 48: 'What a loveless life I have had! I was thinking today that I have only written about 3 love-letters in my life. And now the years are rapidly taking from me the capacity to excite love in others, if indeed they have not already taken it.' (Diary No. 10, December 1950). Whether or not the years had taken from him 'his capacity to excite love in others', most beautiful women could excite love in him. This was the fertility, the truth, that he talks about while defining the art of anthropology. In fact, he wrote and lectured on his philosophy of love.

One of the first women he fell in love, as per his diaries, and wanted to marry was a lady from Bombay, who he had met in Uganda during his African tour (Diary No. 11). He had a brief affair with her. She, according to him, was 'a beautiful, delicious and intelligent' lady (Diary No. 11, July 1951). But this did not work out because he did not know if and how he should propose to her. He also had long talks about his marriage with one African girl who, according to him, had 'a body of strength, clear pure lines and a golden light. Her face is humorous and intelligent, her breasts are a perfect oval. Her smile is exhilarating and never withheld.' (Diary No. 8, September 1949). Even presents were listed out by her parents and the entire village knew and teased him about his imminent marriage with her.

The third woman he fell heavily for was an American woman, a journalist who had come in contact with him along with a friend of hers. She was much younger than him and yet his love for her was so strong that one day he braced himself, despite the fear of being rejected for his age, to tell her how much he loved her. Actually, he approached her four times, the fourth time being on his behalf by his friend Shamrao Hivale who must have felt pity for him, seeing his condition of sadness. Elwin's only hope was that she might be attracted by his 'celebrity' status. On being rejected, he writes to his friend Vic (Victor Sassoon, a fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute): 'What a disaster! I am possessed with sadness that I have rarely felt in my life, for something infinitely rare and precious is going out of my life, and there will never be another chance – I will never have the self-confidence for another chance.' He describes why he was enchanted by her in these words: 'She is adorably pretty, with the sweetest expression and the loveliest smile I have ever seen on a human face. Everything about her is radiant with light and grace. She is pure melody…' (Diary No. 15, February 1953).

The last love affair that Elwin was serious about was with a woman who was apparently well-educated, sophisticated, and belonging to an illustrious family. She was actually married to someone who was quite close to Elwin and in the course of their interactions she and Elwin had 'some kisses and a few small things together', fallen in love with one another madly, written numerous letters to one another, each time reconfirming their love for the other person and yet helpless about not being able to take the relationship any further. It also appears that this woman was much younger to Elwin. For instance, she writes in one of her numerous letters to him: 'I miss your letters. I wish I were older, or you younger, only then everything would have been, or would be, so much worse – or difficult for us – not that it isn't now.' (Diary No. 32, June 1962).

The only intriguing thing about his love affairs is that the voices of women are represented by Elwin in his own handwriting, albeit under double inverted commas. I do not believe that the women he fell in love with were creations of his imagination, although I think he was capable of that. The details provided in his diaries make me believe every word of what he has written, and that is what diaries are supposed to be, i.e., confessions that are honest to the core. But it is not clear why were at least some of the love letters written by the women he loved not presented in their own handwritings.

Did he do so to protect their identities? I am not sure, but not doing so makes his love stories a little mysterious, if not a little poetic as well.

3.6. Elwin, the Anthropologist

Elwin has been known as an anthropologist to everyone. Although he was aware that he had no training in anthropology he was fully convinced that he was nothing but an anthropologist. Of course, no one other than him had lived with the 'aboriginals' of India for more than two decades without caring for the modern comforts that he could have easily afforded if he had accepted the plum appointments that he was offered or if he had not chosen the tribal way of life. He also served those who few wanted to serve – the lepers. His beds were often too hard for his comfort. His house walls made of grass would be eaten up by animals. He would be bitten by insects and flies like any other villagers. But he continued to observe and document the lives of the people, their art, their crafts, their wood-carvings, their dances and songs, their stories, their institutions, their dress and ornaments, their suicidal and murderous behaviours, their menstrual behaviours, the rain and the heat, the flies and the insects, the hills and valleys, and how the people he met looked like. He also fought for their land and forest rights, but more importantly he fought for their right to their freedom, their life and culture, unaffected by the influences of either Hinduism or Christianity.

He not only claimed to be anthropologist but was accepted as an anthropologist by most anthropologists. He was invited to set question papers for master students of anthropology in Calcutta University and Delhi University. He evaluated PhD theses in anthropology sent by several universities in India, including Gauhati University. He was invited to deliver the presidential address to the anthropology section of the Indian Science Congress in 1944. He knew and interacted with many of his contemporary anthropologists in England as well as in India. He had excellent relationships with J.H. Hutton, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, Daryll Forde, Raymond Firth, Edmund Leach, and some of those who worked at the Royal Anthropological Institute and the Pitts-River Museum. Among the Indian anthropologists he knew the following rather intimately to be able to comment on their personal characters: A. Aiyappan, N.K. Bose, B.S. Guha, S.S. Sarkar, N.D. Majumdar, D.N. Majumdar, T.C. Das, and so on. He was appointed as Honorary Ethnographer in Bastar State in 1940, Honorary Anthropologist to the

Government of Orissa in 1942, and was appointed as Deputy Director by the Anthropological Survey of India for 1946-49. In 1953, he was first appointed as Anthropological Consultant for NEFA and later as Advisor for Tribal Affairs for NEFA, Manipur and Tripura by the government of India. He continued to hold this position till the end of his life. He formulated the principles of tribal administration and development for NEFA and his recommendations were fully endorsed by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, much to the chagrin of some Indian nationalists like G.S. Ghurye and A.V. Thakkar, and several anthropologists serving in the Anthropological Survey of India such as N.K. Bose, Surajit Sinha and K.S. Singh. To this list of his detractors, one may also add Indra Munshi, P.K. Misra and A.K. Danda (Subba and Som 2005).

To briefly discuss what some of them have said, sociologist Indra Munshi (Subba and Som 2005) argues that neither the Hindu nor the Christian missionaries have been successful in wooing the tribals completely away from their culture the way Elwin apprehended. She also argues that Elwin paid scant attention to social inequality, particularly gender inequality. Another sociologist Virginius Xaxa writes, 'Though Elwin lived among the tribes, he did not live with them. He did not think, act, believe and live like the tribes. He set up house not among the tribals but away from them, made his living on support from benefactors, dressed, drank and ate differently vis-a-vis the natives....' (2001, 1520). Anthropologist A.K. Danda makes several charges against Elwin: one, he deliberately stayed away from the trained anthropologists for the fear of being asked awkward questions about theory and methodology; two, he failed to see internal dynamics of tribes; and three, his vision of tribal development was "truncated", mired with contradictions, simplistic and top-heavy. P.K. Misra also charges that Elwin's idea of the relationship between tribes and non-tribes was Eurocentric and ignorant of Indian civilization (see Subba and Som 2005 for details)

Munshi's charge about Elwin not paying enough attention to gender is countered by Guha who writes, 'his interest in nature and gender, and his literary sensibilities, perhaps allow a more sympathetic consideration of his significance today' (1998, 325). Xaxa's charges sound hollow and baseless if one reads Elwin's diaries because what he writes about Elwin is far from the truth. I also think that Danda knew very little of Elwin to make the charges he made. Contrary to avoiding trained anthropologists, Elwin was in regular touch with almost every anthropologist of some reckoning from England and

India at that time. Many anthropologists from Calcutta visited him regularly for drinks or for simply discussing certain things with him. His vision of tribal development was not only endorsed by a statesman-scholar like Nehru but also by the best-known anthropologists and administrators of his time. And, as regards his charge that Elwin's anthropology had neither theory nor methodology, Rodney Needham gives a befitting reply:

> In modern anthropology, amid all the academic altercations and the play of such fashions as structuralism and transformational analysis, there is one fundamental conception of the subject which tends to be put at a discount. This is the view that the prime business of an anthropologist is to record the varieties of social life. The main point of theory, accordingly, is to permit the ethnographer to make more exact and comparable observations, and it is his factual reports which really constitute anthropological advance.' (Quoted in Fürer-Haimendorf 1985, 12)

Similarly, Misra's charges are based on a rather limited reading of Elwin's writings. Elwin had not only read about Indian civilization but also experienced it the way the aboriginals did. Ramchandra Guha writes: 'But Elwin did not regard himself merely or even primarily as a scholar: all his books were written in the hope that they might help forestall, or at least delay, the degradation and exploitation of tribes.' (1998, 330). But not all Indian anthropologists were critical of him. For instance, on 13 January 1947, B.S. Guha, the director of the Anthropological Survey of India, wrote to the government of India, recommending Elwin as his successor, in the following words: 'Dr. Verrier Elwin is an outstanding man of international reputation in social anthropology and there is no Indian who can take his place either as a scholar or possessing the wide experience necessary for directing research in social anthropology' (Diary No. 3).

If some Indian anthropologists were critical of Elwin the latter was not less critical of them. He writes:

> There has been more shoddy and second-rate work done in India than in any other country in the world. 'Tip-and-run' anthropologists visit an area for two or three weeks, take hundreds of hurried and inaccurate measurements, ask a lot of leading questions, and retire to their Universities to write pompous articles about what they have failed to observe' (Quoted in Guha 1998, 331).

Further, for Elwin, S.S. Sarkar was ‘less impressive than he expected’, and Aiyappan was ‘a curiously negative character’ (Diary No. 5, Feb-March 1948). Elwin was also glad to know that B.S. Guha considered D.N. Majumdar a ‘humbug’. But the funniest gossip is about what Guha had told him about T.C. Das ‘whose knowledge of English was so poor that after studying Westermarck on human marriage announced to his astonished pupils that animals married one another, when he meant was that animals had intercourse with one another.’ B.S. Guha also shared the following about Ananta Krishna Iyer ‘who, shortly before his death, produced a book which was submitted to the Indian Museum for publication but which on examination they discovered to be made up almost entirely of quotations from old and rare works, though in no case were quotation marks added or references given. This masterpiece of plagiarism had to be rejected.’ (Diary No. 1, February 1942)

Elwin did not think much highly of N.K. Bose and his critique of Gandhi’s ‘experiment with truth’, which included sleeping with young women. Elwin himself had the experience of sleeping with Gandhi many times, and on the basis of his personal experience, the ‘truth’ was blown out of proportion by Bose. Gandhi slept in a room with several women, including some old women, but the room had, according to Elwin, little or no privacy to really experiment with ‘truth’, as both men and women constantly came in and out of his room. He also wrote to Justice Mookerjee, the then President of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, protesting against the selection of Bose for the prestigious Annandale Memorial Medal in 1949 saying that his contribution to Anthropology was far too insignificant to deserve such a prestigious medal (Diary No. 6, January 1949).

Elwin called himself ‘a field anthropologist’. According to him, ‘the real fun of anthropology lies in being a field worker. That is where the adventure and fascination comes (sic). Your laboratory is right there with you in the field and in the forest.’ (Diary No. 9, October 1950). About a year later, he writes: ‘It is one of life’s minor mysteries that someone like myself who is so passionately attached to the haute cuisine should have become a field anthropologist.’ (Diary No. 10, December 1950).

It is true that the kind of fieldwork he did was not in line with the British tradition of fieldwork, which was marked by going to a distant place, learning the native language, living with the natives for fairly long period of time, and writing their monographs on the

basis of the data collected through genealogical method or the technique called 'Participant Observation' in the sense Bronislaw Malinowski understood it. Much unlike what his contemporary anthropologists did, Elwin moved from one village to another, sometime with one or two of his family members, his friend Shamrao Hivale, his cook, and some people to carry his belongings which included one petromax, gramophone, video-film projector, manual typewriter, books for reading and writing reviews, ration including his rum, etc. At times, he visited more than one village, spoke to the villagers in the Hindustani language, or at times used an interpreter, took a lot of photos or videos, wrote extensive notes on the people, their dress and ornaments, their looks, their overall economic conditions, their merry-making habits, their institutions, and so on (see Guha 1998, 331-38; Subba 2020 for details). His fieldwork appeared like he was chasing the cloud, chasing stories, chasing songs and dances, chasing beautiful men and women, chasing something he never had enough of. This constant chasing of, perhaps his own shadow, cost him his health, his family, his love for food and drinks, his youth, and the adulatory attention he received from men and women of class and taste while he was in cities like Bombay and Calcutta. But he never expressed regret for the life or the people he had chosen to live with.

His retinue used to be much larger and the tour much longer when he was holding official positions. He travelled with about a dozen people hired to carry his camp equipment, rations, his books, his typewriter, etc. In such tours, there would be advanced parties who would reach the next destination before he did and kept the tent with a nice view of the mountains ready and informed the village headmen or other village functionaries about his imminent visit. He would be welcomed by the village headmen with one or two eggs or one fowl, which was the most the poor villagers could afford. Some village headmen could not even afford that much and so avoided welcoming him.

Whether it was an official tour or a private one, he travelled by every possible means of transport available to him – bus, car, bullock cart, elephant, or simply on foot. And he slept anywhere – tent, male dormitory, make-shift hut, or the verandah of someone's house. Having a private place for bathing was never an important part of his tours and he could do without a hair wash for three months! And, no matter how tired he was, he would never miss the sight of beautiful women while passing through houses and fields, and rarely go to bed without reading a book or typing some pages.

3.7. Elwin, a Messenger of Gandhi and Nehru

In the Preface to the second edition of *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1958), Elwin wrote: 'I have called myself a missionary of Mr Nehru's gospel and it is from that point of view that I have approached the many problems facing us. I did not come to tribal India… from a school of anthropology, but from Gandhiji's ashram at Sevagram.' (Elwin 1958, ii)

On 20 May 1953, the Ministry of Education, New Delhi, wrote to him asking if he would like to be considered for directorship of the Anthropological Survey of India. While profusely appreciating the offer, he replied from Patangarh in Madhya Pradesh with the following words: 'Gandhiji sent me here. I have been here over twenty years; there are many people dependent on me… And although the life here is often hard and lonely, the place is an ideal one for research, and our research centre here, small as it is, is doing some useful work. How am I to bring all this to an end?' (Diary No. 15, June 1953). He makes pretty much the same reply when the offer for directorship of the same anthropological organization came from the Secretary of the Union Public Service Commission on 24 October 1953.

He was personally close to both Gandhi and Nehru, but perhaps emotionally closer with the former and intellectually closer with the latter. Nehru never failed to acknowledge the letters from Elwin and endorse the views expressed by him about the present or the future of the aboriginals in India. Nehru, who is often criticized unfairly today, and there are attempts to even miniaturize him in India, if not write him off completely, was actually not just a prime minister but a statesman, a thinker, a scholar, and someone who was deeply and personally concerned about the future of tribal people of India and their rich cultural heritage. Between Nehru and Elwin, the latter was never short of ideas for tribal development, thanks to his more than two-decade long experience with the tribes of Central and Eastern India, but Nehru also never failed to endorse his idea if it was worthy of his endorsement. On 19 August 1954, for instance, Nehru writes a secret note: 'I have read Dr. Verrier Elwin's report on the Tuensang Frontier Division with some care. I have also read the other papers attached to this file. I have found Dr. Elwin's report so important and interesting that, in spite of other heavy work, I have found time to read it thoroughly. I think it is an excellent report and, broadly speaking, I agree with his approach to this problem.' (Diary No. 19, August 1954). Also, on 18 August 1960, Nehru said on the floor of the Parliament: 'If you are interested to know

what our policy and philosophy are in that area (N.H.T.A.), then, in my opinion, you should get from the Library here a copy of the book that Verrier Elwin has written on the subject in which he has dealt with all these points and to which I have written a foreword. I would like you to make it a point to read it, because there is a great deal of discussion on these topics in that book.' (Diary No. 29, August 1960). It may be remembered here that the then administrative responsibility of the Naga Hills Tuensang Area or N.H.T.A. was in the hands of the Governor of Assam under the control of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

One should not deduce from the above that Nehru listened to every advice of Elwin. On the contrary, Nehru endorsed only what he thought was good for the nation. For instance, Elwin's suggestion to Nehru that Ramunny should succeed K.L. Mehta as the Adviser to the Governor of Assam on Tribal Affairs was very nicely turned down by Nehru vide his letter dated 3 October 1958. But Nehru had a lot of respect for Elwin, which brought him to visit Elwin's home-museum, much against the effort to stall that visit of Nehru by none other than Jairamdas Doulatram, the Governor of (undivided) Assam.

Nehru held Elwin in high regards because he knew the value of Elwin's knowledge and experience in tribal matters. For instance, the prime minister's note of July 1955 has this: 'As I have said, we should take full advantage of Verrier Elwin's presence. One of the important ways of doing so is to get him to train some young men. We lack such trained persons and we have very very (sic) few qualified persons who can train. Therefore, I think it is important that some kind of training establishment should be set up under Verrier Elwin to train a number of young people'. (Diary No. 20, July 1955).

3.8. Conclusion

This report contains only some selected aspects of Elwin's persona, and it excludes more than it includes. Elwin was a multi-faceted personality. He was a poet, a novelist, a folklorist, an administrator, a tireless fieldworker, a prolific writer, a voracious reader, a philanthropist, and a freedom fighter. Talking about his philanthropy, he maintained a leprosy home, a dispensary for poor Adivasis, schools for Adivasi children where they were taught a curriculum designed by Elwin himself, and a social welfare centre. Above all, he knew his failures and limitations. He also resolved at the end of every year to

correct them, albeit he failed miserably. While he liked being called and treated as *Bada Bhai* or 'Elder Brother' by the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh, in certain other circles in Bombay or Calcutta he liked to be treated 'appropriately', and if that did not happen, he did not like it. He liked to eat good food and if the food in a party was good, he overate and suffered the next morning. He also liked to drink, and if the ambience was good, he overdrank only to wake up the next morning with a heavy hangover. He liked to smoke cigar, but when the same was not available he even smoked *bidi*s. And, in the enjoyment of everything good in life, nothing came his way, not the least his sickness or dental pain. Was he a hedonist just as the people he lived with were thought of? If he was a hedonist in the Muria or Gond sense of the term, I guess, hedonism is not such a bad thing to embrace if our age allows it, if we have the stomach for it, and if we have the opportunity for it.

3.9. References

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