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## The Sabar Ways of Knowing: Sustainable Ideas towards Educational Ecology

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### ABSTRACT

In common conception, art is often confined to a painting, sculpture, architecture or performance; we maintain however that what enables any art or artistic practice to become aesthetic is human experience. Arts and aesthetic practices are integral to the everyday lives of the indigenous Sabar tribes of India, particularly, in ascertaining Sabar 'ways of knowing, being and doing'. This article describes the nature of Sabar aesthetic experience, and its educational relevance, through an empirical study employing ethnomethodology and innovative participatory tools. It examines definitions and identifies limitations considered through an indigenous lens before introducing the social actors of the study. Findings illustrates how aesthetic practices empower voice by enabling multitextual expressions, rebuilding trust with the community and generating data that other methods may render invisible. The article offers discussions on how everyday aesthetic experiences and practices are imperative to the development of an authentic being. It conceptualises an educational ecology towards the realisation of sustainable educational systems and culturally critical ideals of education. We argue for an education for emancipation, through difference not domination, through enabling aesthetic and authentic beings. Ultimately, we urge a critical and creative future citizenship that is empowered by education, not constrained by its demands.

### KEYWORDS

aesthetic and authentic being, aesthetic practice, authentic listening, authentic education, educational ecology, sustainable ideas

### Introduction

This article examines the sustained disengagement of a particular *Adi Jan Jaati* (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group)<sup>[1]</sup> from conventional systems of education in India. In particular, it ascertains the marginalised voice of indigenous<sup>[2]</sup> Sabar peoples of Jharkhand, India, before elaborating their epistemic traditions and priorities. Grounded in an empirical study, it was undertaken by Author 1 (supervisor) and Author 2 (supervisee) for the purposes of a doctoral investigation. The research is distinctive in its extended engagement with this 'geographically isolated, shy' community (National Commission Report for Scheduled Tribes 2005) who barely feature on the Government of India's surveys and official tables. Acknowledging difference (see Delva *et al.* 2010; Boughton & Mason 1999), the study developed an innovative process of inquiry to locate educational constructs and processes from the rich repertoire of the local. This empowered the Sabar voice (individual and communal) towards reconstructing an education authentic to their context. The study is thus able to make pertinent contributions to ethical, empirical and epistemic traditions. The article subsequently offers an epistemic perspective negotiated by the 'insider', and emboldened by its inherent knowledge, practices and capacities. This directs discussions which elaborate emergent educational ideals and ideas that cater to 'curricula of difference' (Greene 1995) and sustainable 'ways of being' (Smith 2012). In conclusion, we relate the relevance of this study in interrupting 'the uneven global flows of intellectual influence ... and to explore ways to recognise "other" epistemologies' (Takayama *et al.* 2015, vi).

## Retelling the Sabar story

Hidden within the deciduous hills of East Singbhum district are six hamlets where the Hill Sabar of the study have resided in peaceful isolation. Avoidance of cultural contacts, however, has become increasingly difficult. Due to the increasing demands of economic India on their abundant, mineral-rich lands (Kundu 2003; Roy 2010), these communities continue to be marginalised from their own forests. Clearly, having a voice is important. UNESCO (2012, 5) asserts that to involve indigenous participation in education, 'psychosocial and interpersonal skills such as assertive communication, self-esteem, decision-making and negotiation' must be addressed. Whilst this may be a start, we feel that it is a rather simplistic and myopic vision. As the study made evident, the Sabar are capable decision-makers with a strong sense of self and valuable interpersonal skills. The study encouraged participation by acknowledging 'another knowledge is possible' (Santos 2008), listening, co-creating and contextualising the research process and tools.

The Sabar arise by 3–4am to start their daily chores, and leave for work in the jungles by 7am only to return by sunset. Community members are referred to in familial terms, and the elderly are respected and cared for communally but this does not suffocate individual agency. Instead, the Sabar are encouraged to improvise, and new knowledge is shared with members. For instance, a young Sabar adult living in the interior where electricity was unavailable had adapted the knowledge of solar batteries (shared by members from the adjoining Sabar village) such that his hamlet could listen to traditional songs on the radio.

In March 2014, the Sabar invited Author 2 to their ritual ceremony of *Maghi*. *Maghi*, shows gratitude to forest gods since the Sabar rely on the 'kindness of the forest'. While *rasi* (traditionally fermented rice drink) was being served, assembled members were asked what they felt was unique about Sabar culture or what makes one a Sabar. To this, there were a variety of answers. As evident from the extract below, *parampara* (culture) as understood by the Sabar entails identity, living in forests, everyday aesthetics, traditional practices and places of meaning.

Male 1 : ... *house-making, red-ant chutney making, broom-making; living and playing in the jungles with animals and storytelling, all are our culture.*

Male 2 : ... *our jungles, singing, hunting makes us Sabar.*

Male 3 : *Our culture has a lot of dancing, mandol (drum) playing and handiya (traditional drink). Especially Karam puja, if there is not a lot of singing and dancing around the tree branch we sow, it will wilt and die.*

Female 3 : *Maghi puja! ... We repair and replaster our houses then, make floral paintings with grounded rice to welcome our ascendants, good omen and the gods to our houses. We cannot be Sabar if we don't follow these.*

## A postcolonial imperative to education

Postcolonial India boasts a significant rise in its literacy rates (from 12% in 1947 to 74.04% in 2011) but are its masses truly educated? Or does education merely serve the needs of the state, the elite or those



Figure 1. a) A traditional Sabar hut; b) Traditional dance at Maghi; c) A Sabar couple

in power? The World Bank Report (World Bank 2011, 29) further asserts that Scheduled Tribes today (2004–5) 'appear to be at risk of becoming locked out of sharing in India's growth and prosperity'. Whether there is a lack of energy for a mammoth problem or considered apathy, the 'invisibilisation of Adivasis' by the Indian education system has failed to provide them 'adequate, relevant and quality education' (NIAS Report 2012, iii). It is criticised further for its compliance with neoliberal trends, of educational 'metagovernance' and policy borrowing (Ball 2012, 10–11). The study recognises Chambers' (1997) polarising world, and the dominant society not only monitoring the wealth of the world but exhibiting power also by its claim on knowledge and culture (Chatterjee 1993; Smith 2012; Spivak 1998). How literacy is defined, what a nation or community's educational imaginings are and who implements them, then seem pertinent considerations. This article urges examination of epistemologies of difference, located literacies and people's 'living heritage' (UNESCO 1995, 178) towards emergent educational thinking. We subsequently offer an indigenous narrative to arts since Sabar everyday inquiry is abundant in multitextual literacies and aesthetically significant moments, which education in India is primarily not.

### Arts as an indigenous narrative

Art as a subject may appear to be a minefield of contestations, but for the purposes of this article the authors observe an indigenous interpretation to the arts – as integral to ways of 'being', expansive, and engendering ecological behaviour and reciprocity. In doing so, we relate to wider scholarship in anthropology, medicine, indigeneity, human geography and arts education (Dissanayake 1999; Geertz 1993; Sacks 2008; Battiste 2000; Hart 2010; Smith 2012; Hart 1979; Greene 1995, respectively). These direct attention to the capacity of arts for locating the self, diverse narratives, cultural production, place-making and critical thinking (Efland 1990; Eglinton 2013; Hickman 2010; Vidyarthi 1980; Bourdieu & Passeron 2000; Burke & Grosvenor 2003; Titman 1994; Harland *et al.* 2000).

For the Sabar, art is not relegated to '*maya*, the material or outward' formality of beauty; instead, it is an extension of *lokottara*, 'supersensuous wonder' that 'exhibits the inner relations of things' (Coomaraswamy 1918, 35–43). For instance, the everyday aesthetic practice of making brooms does not rely only on the formality of the field (quality of line, proficiency at skill or individual interpretations). It is a reflection, also, of inner relations evident in considerations of where and when materials were procured, the time and place dedicated to the practice, the custom of passing on that knowledge and exhibiting gratitude for it.

Consider too, Sabar reflexive arts-based responses created to conclude the study. Here, groups of 3–5 adults were requested to reflect on the research process, the researcher's presence or about education, employing only resources available from their environment. One group produced a song while the other three responded with landscape art. Figure 2a illustrates an artwork created out of pebbles and rocks found on the road. This portrays the interlinked aspects of humanity and other entities. The first ring represents the Sabar, the second and central orb Mother Nature and all its attributes, while the third ring is symbolic of the researcher. This third aspect denotes 'new ideas', educational growth and research in the Sabar lived-world.

Figure 2b portrays a found boulder near an ancestral site. The Sabar considered this a final worship to the jungle gods on my behalf, for having kept me safe from troubles and snakes throughout the investigation. The third artwork (Figure 2c) consists of wooden pieces, which represent people and their growth, and are aligned from dead wood (dark thin pieces on the right) to strong, healthy wood (left). It also signifies the role of education in strengthening inquiry and human development. The presented artworks reveal Sabar aesthetic understanding to be minimalistically elegant in its expression but laden with symbolic quality. It directs attention towards Sabar translation of metaphoric and symbolic concepts through textural and ecological materiality. The undertones of the artworks also reflect an acceptance of the 'outsider' within their lived-world.



Figure 2. (from top left) Reflexive Arts-based Responses by the Sabar translated as landscape art

## Locating the study

*Adivasis* or Schedule Tribes constitute over 84 million people (Census of India 2011) of India's population but their narrative reveals a constant struggle for existence, identity, and against oppression. Historically, the British Raj's interest in establishing the *zamindari* feudal system on tribal lands with non-tribal partners led to suppression and, ultimately, the alienation of tribal communities from their lands. This resulted in a series of insurgencies<sup>[3]</sup> by indigenous groups in Bihar and present-day Jharkhand<sup>[4]</sup>, and their subsequent criminalisation under martial law. Rebellion by indigenous peoples was significant in establishing the tribal voice of India. Through the constitution of the Wilkinson Rule (1937) and the Act of 1855, tribal communities gained recognition as self-governing units, particularly in matters of civil justice and other affairs (Oraon 1983).

More recently, the Sabar of the enquiry site had to take arms against Maoist guerrilla rebels who claimed to protect them. Incensed by the latter's growing demands and pillaging of livestock and granary, the Sabar drove them out with bows and arrows. Indigenous peoples face newer challenges today as imperialism and colonialism are substituted by words such as 'globalisation', 'multiculturalism' and 'postcolonialism' (see Appadurai 2003; Congdon & Blandy 1999; Smith 2012). Since these terms no longer refer to historical constructions, they open up new forms of predicaments or resistance. Furthermore, reminiscent of colonialism, the imperial system is entrenched within Indian discourses, practices and attitude (Chatterjee 2012; Kumar 1991; Nandy 1983). Such knowledge and structure have amplified disparities (Krishna 2008; Chambers 1997; World Bank 2011).

The research reported here responds to such quandaries by offering an epistemology of difference grounded in a doctoral investigation, 'Emergent Education in the Homogenised World'. Commencing in August 2013, the study was conducted over a period of ten months with the participation of 23 Hill Sabar families from six conglomerating hamlets, and members of three neighbouring villages in Jharkhand.

Jharkhand, the 28th state of India, was created in 2000 to ascertain the voice and political representation of its tribal peoples but its reality is questionable. The state accounts for 40 per cent of India's mineral resources (mostly found in indigenous peoples' lands) and has the second highest concentration (27.85 per cent) of indigenous population, most of whom are economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, the literacy rate amongst the majority of indigenous tribes barely extends over 40 per cent, with only 27.2 per cent women being literate (Government of Jharkhand 2011).

There is evidently sparse literature and research in relation to the Sabar peoples. This is attributed to their migratory and isolated nature. Upadhyay (2001) disagrees, asserting that fluctuation in data occurs due to ill-trained and undedicated investigators as in the case of census enumerators who confuse the Sabar with the Savar, Saber or Kharia tribes. The available scholarship, primarily presented by the 'outsider' and the dominant, offers data founded in cultural anthropology, ethnography and socio-economic surveys (see Roy & Roy 1937; Upadhyay 2001; Vidyarthi & Upadhyay 1980, respectively). There is an evident gap in literature pertaining to indigenous epistemic traditions, education and the voice of the 'insider', particularly by the insider. This is the context in which we discuss the focus and concerns of a postcolonial study.

### Designing a postcolonial study

The authors locate the study within the paradigm of marginalisation, postcolonialism, indigeneity and emancipation, which necessitated careful consideration of its methodological priorities, discussed here on. In doing so, we acknowledge difference, and our own positions of power as the dominant outsider. Thus the research was envisioned as a process rather than 'typology of behaviours' (Delva *et al.* 2010, 3), with a priority to diminish barriers of literacies, codes of practice and privileges.

This led to the implementation of three phases (Figure 1) of inquiry that augment deconstructionist literature in social sciences and design studies (See Spivak 1998; Buchanan 1992). To elaborate, the authors defined these as: *construction* (exploring members' meaning-making, assimilation of relevant constructs and processes, assessment of prior knowledge); *deconstruction* (critical analysis of 'ordinary' activities, systematic unravelling of constructs, breaching experiments<sup>[5]</sup>); and *reconstruction* (reflexive activities, re-assembling and re-imagining related constructs). Each stage was open to interception by the researcher and the 'researched', which provided space for the improvisation of tools and plans or for furthering specific knowledge.

Advancing this epistemological deliberation, ethnomethodology was adapted alongside audio-visual and spatial participatory tools innovated in situ (and upon consultation with the participants). As the term suggests 'ethno' relates to the (voice of) social actors of the study (including the researcher's), and 'methodology' indicates their processes and practices. EM analyses ordinary methods employed by ordinary people to realise their ordinary actions. Ethnomethodological enquiry thus enabled participation in the Sabar people's 'everyday accomplishment of everyday practices' (Coulon 1995, 2), determined and demonstrated by them. This also assigned the researcher's learner status, which transferred power to the 'researched'. Concomitantly, contextualisation of participatory tools created spaces for deep conversations, generated 'thick' data and prompted multitextuality of expressions. They facilitated Sabar members' exploration of their daily activities, prior-knowledge, rights and necessities, place-making, and educational concepts and priorities (Figure 3). Ultimately, the methodological process enabled Sabar participation 'in the nature of the object of the study', grasping the 'dynamics of disruption of the object, the breaking and the relinking of the chain' (Spivak 1998, 272).

The study presents its own limitations and areas for potential development. It acknowledges the barriers that emerge from difference (textual knowledge, cultural registers, power, gender), and the narratives lost in translation. By studying the language and site before research commenced, we were able to negotiate these to a great extent but remained conscious of the value of research conducted by the 'insider'. Furthermore, our research envisioned as a process was able to observe Sabar capacity and textuality, but due to time

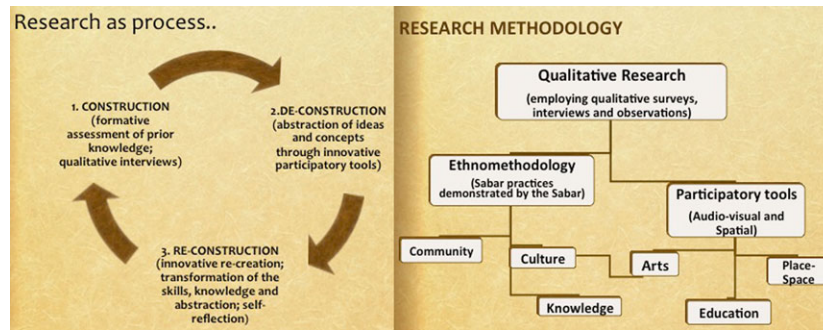


Figure 3. A methodological map and research as a process

limitations we were unable to extend examination of their potential advancement in each tool through repetition. This would extend understanding and resource development. Due to the very nature of its 'sample size', the study may be critiqued with regards to generalisability. The research aims to extend knowledge with the involvement of a larger cohort, even pursuing longitudinal data in the future. Its validity, however, is ascertained by the emergence of the Sabar voice, the triangulation of knowledge, and its transferability across ages, hamlets and gender. We acknowledge that such a qualitative inquiry also presents dilemmas of funding, practitioner training and commitment, and ensuring ethics of reciprocity, which may all be overcome if dominant intentions are not misplaced.

### The Sabar ways of knowing, being and doing

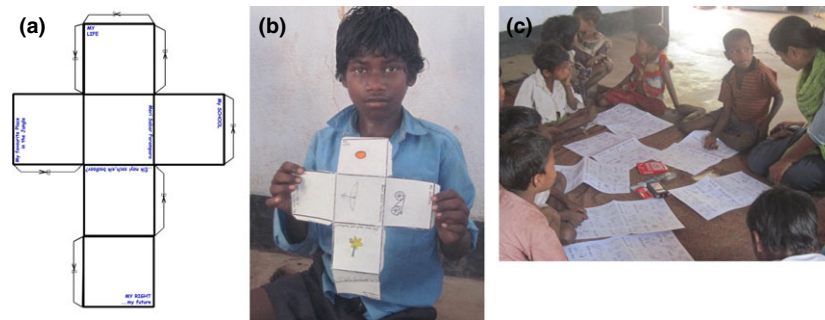
The Sabar ways of 'knowing, being and doing' (Martin 2003) are intrinsically linked with aesthetics, culture, community and environment. Their individual and communal sense of being and becoming, both arise from shared knowledge and ontology, cultural identity, situated practices, a reverence for Nature and fauna, and place-making. Here, we elaborate one key construct before relating the Sabar epistemic traditions, priorities and concerns.

#### Aesthetic significance and the Sabar voice

Abundant in indigenous ways of life, Sabar aesthetic practices and spatialities are considered essential for self-creating pursuits and ordinary accomplishments. Everyday practices that encourage agency and self-inquiry include broom and leaf-plate making, creating toys and wooden utility objects, bow-arrow and trap making, storytelling, dancing and singing amongst others. By providing spaces for improvisations, they inculcate not only a Sabar identity through individualistic expressions but also provide tools for survival, teaching and learning. The practices are occasions, too, to introduce children to the codes of conduct, and are relied upon greatly to sustain trans-generational passage of ancient knowledge and practices. For instance, Sabar singing and dancing are not simply ritualistic; they are also means of demonstrating reverence for nature, and instilling ecological and tolerant behaviour in children, early on. Everyday aesthetic significance thus ascertains ways of bonding, reciprocity and ecological solutions.

For the study, arts and aesthetic practices were invaluable in listening authentically, and generating data that other methods may not have elicited. Local support practitioners and teachers asserted this, consistently advising against research with the children – 'These children will not pay attention for longer than 15–20 minutes, with you'; 'They are shy; will run away saying they have work at home' or 'They are *boka* (useless), they will not understand.' Within the first two days of stimulating initial conversations and elaborating research intentions, I could see children's interest waning.

This led to the introduction of the Cube of Hope (Figure 4) activity, which investigated: My Sabar life, a Sabar culture, my school, a new learning, my right and my favourite place. These categories explored the



**Figure 4.** a) Cube of Hope net; b) An example of Sabar children's work; c) Children working communally

spaces for the Sabar children's ideas to be expressed, particularly with regards to place, culture and education. To illustrate, for My School, the children imagined lessons under trees, school buildings made out of natural materials with better ventilation, better roads, animals, kitchen-gardens, and ponds nearby to counter water issues. Others related school to lunchtime, pictorial books and play. Upon drawing their ideas, children created a three-dimensional box from the two-dimensional nets provided, and added a token for the future, as a memory or promise. Next day, for the first time, children had arrived before the researcher and set up the classroom. This small gesture was most revealing of finally earning the children's trust. Stimulating their expressions and intrigue, the tool had built the children's confidence (in themselves, the process and the researcher). Spaces for multitextual expressions, creating aesthetically significant moments and reflection had thus enabled a gradual but authentic access to the Sabar children's lived world.

### **An epistemic voice of difference: the Sabar narrative to education**

While Sabar epistemology decidedly manifests their ontological predispositions, their epistemic voice was a gradual emergence over the period of research. In the study, the majority of the Sabar were found to be conventionally illiterate since schools were located as far as 15–20 kilometres away a generation ago, and almost 30 kilometres away before that. The current school (located 2–12 kilometres away from the varying hamlets) was established four years ago but children remain disengaged. The Sabar related it to the teacher's infrequent attendance and alien curricula, contrary to dominant assumptions that indicate their lack of interest in formal education.

Examination of how the Sabar learnt revealed wide-ranging process. Primarily, they learnt by observing elders or community members, following demonstrations and recreating the same. For instance, children as young as 6–7 go on hunts with the adults, thus learning about the places to hunt; by age 10–12 they engage in making miniature versions of bows and arrows before they go on their own hunts with other Sabar adolescents. Moreover, the Sabar learnt within the broader landscape of their jungles and its resources and, often, learning was a collective pursuit as observed in fish-hunting and fruit-collecting activities. But topical educational systems do not allow for such freedoms in understanding. Traditional Sabar education entails not only survival skills but also teaches responsibility towards the community sharing of knowledge, respect for their lands and its resources and preservation of cultural productions.

In investigating the value or purpose of education, a majority spoke about how education advances *budhhi* (wisdom) and would enable the community to contradict dominant imaginaries of them as *boka* (naïve, useless). They felt education would empower children to interact with the dominant world with confidence and create an easier life. Some talked about education being a necessity for becoming professionals, but it was a rare Sabar who equated education with better economic or social status. Most Sabar people acknowledged the necessity of integrating Sabar knowledge and practices towards educating their children effectively and creating spaces of learning. Some were simultaneously cynical, as evident from the following statements:

M1 : *If there's no master, forget new ways of teaching you suggest however, good they are.*

M2 : *Sabar parampara (culture, cultural traditions) teaches them everything they need to know to live here. The jungles are better for them, it provides for all their needs. The children have been going to school for 4–5yrs but not even learnt to write their names.*

## Emergent education in a homogenised world

The discussions elaborated here respond to the resonating disparity between Sabar and dominant notions of education. They are located within the broader construct of decolonisation (see Smith 2012; Nandy 1983; Said 1978), which urges the mind-set of nations to question what makes dominant epistemologies the right one to follow. In response, we propose localisation of education translated through educational ecology. These, in turn, empower the individual by catering to differing capacities and capabilities alongside his or her sense of living, and not borrowed aspirations.

### Difference not domination, localisation not globalisation

In a nation like India, where half of its population is afflicted by poverty (Planning Commission 2009; World Bank 2011), education is considered a necessary means for social mobility and equalising opportunities (Krishna 2008; Sen & Dreze 2006). Laconically, Kumar (1991, 19) asserts that education in postcolonial India remains 'an agency contributing primarily to the maintenance of law and order'. Responding to the debates surrounding multiculturalism, marginalisation and hierarchy of knowledge, the study advances an analysis of authentic education through localisation rather than globalisation of education, and engages with difference not dominance. Postcolonial authors argue that refusal to recognise non-Western epistemologies as 'legitimate knowledge' has resulted in the silencing of cultural knowledge (Liamputtong 2010; Smith 1999; Swadener & Mutua 2008).

In pragmatic terms, localisation examines what forms sustainable and authentic systems of education may take, how authentic ideals and systems may be achieved with regards to education, and what authenticity in education would achieve for the human condition. Localisation proposes that education should 'initially be built from within the cultures it serves' and then accommodate other theories and processes 'without disrupting the essence' (Teaero 2002, 15) of the community. But the dominant world's apathy to indigenous priorities and the 'universalisation' of educational ideals and ideas further disempower their voice and beget disengagement.

Localisation necessitates a (re)imagination of education, of located authentic ideals and ideas emerging between the spaces of duality. Education that disregards such knowledge may provide 'world class standards' (Greene 1995, 32) but not critical consciousness or the ability to formulate one's own questions (Freire 1985; Gandhi 1932). We believe situating education and creating a framework for listening may overcome this. As with the study, listening authentically could facilitate a third space defined with the community, where disparate philosophies and strategies evolve into progressive reconstruction.

### Towards an ecology of education

We locate authenticity in/of education to sustainable responses as conveyed by educational ecology. The term 'educational ecology' was established in reference to ecological forms prevalent in indigenous and socio-ecological postcolonial literature, responding particularly to the ecology of, rather than in, education. In translating Sabar ideals of development and ecology, we found means of vivisectioning stagnant or replicative education, and mediating sustainable ideas. Thus, educational ecology evolves from its situated realities: first,



from 'within' (its own socio-cultural and environmental context), then, 'without' (entailing geo-political contexts, national goals and inter-relational aspirations of the global mechanics).

Educational ecology or sustainability of education in the context of indigenous peoples and their self-determination is dependent on the attitudes, systems and ideologies of the larger structures of interaction such as systems of governance, political frameworks and ecological schemes. It may be realised through interpretations of cultural material, environmental resources and social factors. The argument for research tools located in notions of educational ecology is established upon its success in eliciting data beyond the barriers of language, culture, gender and race. Thus educational ecology iterates the importance of listening, and devising tools and systems that reflect local voice and identity.

The study integrated indigenous or located Skills, Place, Arts and Aesthetic practice, Culture, Community and Environment (SPAACCE tools) for such purposes. The constructs of SPAACCE encompass what the fields of social science, arts education, indigeneity and economics refer to as Vernacular Art Environments – VAE (Rex & Woywod 2014), Visual Material Culture (Eglinton 2013), 'living cultural heritage' (Kurin 2004) or 'spatiotemporalities' (Appadurai 2003). By engaging with located perspectives and priorities, SPAACCE tools facilitate 'self-critical awareness of epistemologies' (Chambers 1997, 32). They provide a 'liminal space ... the site where concepts and experiences exert complementary influences on each other' (Jokela 2008, 6). Consequently, they lend themselves as tools for social justice, self-determination and empowering the marginalised voice.

### **Authentic education and the aesthetics of being**

The hierarchy of knowledge and its distribution by 'discursive consistency' has become 'cultural praxis' amidst which the 'modern Orient ... participates in its own Orientalising' (Said 1978, 273–325). At a fundamental level, this creates imbalanced representations of the 'authentic' self. Denying diversity and imposing an otherness to self engenders a 'third space' (Bhabha 1994, 52–6) that enunciates authenticity of being through mimicry of dominant culture. This perpetuates negative ontologies, delivering the marginalised 'self' against the colonising or dominant 'other'. The study in contrast argues for spaces of difference (within self, communities, nations or academia) in sustaining identity, authenticity of life choices and an aesthetics of 'being'.

Here, authenticity relates to features inherent in an individual's environment (whether social, political or economic) that influence their development and fulfilment of life. The Sabar indicated these to be aesthetic and socio-cultural practices, sense of community and environment, and the passing on of traditional knowledge. This is not some essentialised view of 'self' rather it is informed by indigenous rights and literature. They indicate the suppression of the authentic indigenous self owing to the dominant world's tendencies to assimilate and ameliorate the peoples (see Smith 2012; Santos *et al.* 2008). Authenticity is thus observed as a significant construct of education for emancipation and decolonising strategies.

Berger (2009, 9) asserts that all societies observe the capacity for 'symbolic thought' and making extraordinary gestures, which invoke self-transformation. An aesthetic being is a result of such self-transformations and authentic interactions with their immediate and changing environment (Bronfenbrenner 1995). Traditionally, an aesthetic being espouses the formality of aesthetic traditions (of line, form, patterns) and aesthetic inquiry (creativity, dialogue, critique, reflection). For the Sabar, the occurrence of this aesthetic being in Kantian (see Kant, 1952) estimation also makes the individual realise the aesthetic magnitude of nature, and his or her own limitations, which inspires deep respect for it. Aesthetic traditions in education would thus facilitate individuals in reaching their own sensitive and judicious approach to the world. This aesthetic nature of their inquiry and choices cultivates an authenticity of 'being'. Living life authentically, as 'the kind of beings we really are' (Cooper 1983, 16), cannot rely on education that caters to developing human capacity as a state resource (Greene 1995; Chomsky 2002; Freire 1996). It can only be accomplished when education itself is aesthetic and authentic in its realisations.

## Conclusion: a third space in education

In this article we have discussed the implications of acknowledging difference in epistemic and research traditions, and ascertaining a marginalised voice. Engaging with the Sabar peoples we have learned the significance of space, arts, culture, community and environment (SPACCE tools) in indigenous ontology, found wanting in formal educational practice. This creates dissonance, then disengagement. The article furthers the importance of devising methodological pathways that reflect the literacies and cultural systems of its context. It illustrates their substantial role in overcoming barriers of privilege, language and hierarchy, and empowering voice. In doing so, it hopes to encourage novice researchers towards situating their studies 'without being limited by the legacies of past research' and current approaches (Smith 1999, 183). Research designed as a process, an ethical praxis, stimulated the 'third space' (between the dualities of self–other, dominant–marginal, colonised–colonialist, hegemony–difference) of authentic inquiry and not mimicry. Educational and individual fulfilment then depends primarily on efforts of co-creation stimulated by authentic listening as illustrated by tools developed by the study.

Our study thus offers deliberations towards (re)imagining an education beyond Majority World ideologies. It ultimately urges emergent educational thinking that is located, caters to difference not domination, and empowers marginalised communities. Furthermore, the attributes of Sabar epistemic traditions broaden awareness and invigorate discussions within dominant institutions. But some questions remain. Why have member-states and their well-intentioned partners disregarded such translations in favour of universalised ideologies and agendas? Are the dominant and elite of postcolonial India and the majority world prepared to listen and invest in the 'other', and the marginalised beyond tokenism? If this is so, how should it confront 'the invisibility of the processes of oppression' (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008, 139–40) and the limitations of monocultured (Shiva 1993) perspectives? What are the possibilities of postcolonial theorisation and indigenous research in academia and education? And how may we integrate located heritage and practices in 're-imagining' an education beyond postcolonial and neoliberal dilemmas.

## Notes

1. Till recently, the Sabar were categorised by the Indian Constitution as Primitive Tribal Group (PTG), the term was problematic since it confirms hierarchies of power and postcolonial quandaries, and was amended in 2012. The Sabar of the study prefer not to be categorised within any generic terms applied to them in India such as Schedule Tribe, *Adivasi*, *Adi Jan Jaati* or *Kharia*.
2. With reference to India's tribal communities, the term 'indigenous' is rarely employed in official texts or literature since it raises questions of who may or may not be considered indigenous in India's history. Contrarily, the authors acknowledge their status as first-inhabitants who have 'a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies' (Martinez-Cobo 2004, 2) thus do not hesitate to employ the same term. 'Indigenous' is also extended in the text to aspects that are located 'within' or inherent to one's context.
3. For example, the Kol rising (Oraon 1983) and Santhal insurrection (Sinha 1990).
4. Landlocked on all four sides, Jharkhand shares its border with Bihar in the north, Chattisgarh in the west, Bengal in the east and Orissa in the south. They form the Naxalite belt renowned as the insurgents' refuge.
5. Ethnomethodology considers that by making familiar activities unfamiliar provokes the phenomenon of interest by producing reflections on an 'obstinately familiar world' (Garfinkel 1967, 38). For instance, Sabar adults could effortlessly make bow-arrows but in teaching me, they needed to visit appropriate steps systematically, which also demonstrated their teaching strategies.

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