

Georgetown Qatar Professor's New Book Offers Insight on Modern Indian Politics

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When Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) Professor Uday Chandra graduated from Grinnell College in Iowa, USA, with a B.A. in economics, he never imagined that his path to becoming a professor would lead deep into the forests of Jharkhand, India, to live among tribal communities. This unexpected journey culminated in his first book, *Resistance as Negotiation: Making States and Tribes in the Margins of Modern India*, a work that challenges traditional notions of resistance and state power.

“I knew that economics was a valuable major,” he reflects, “but my interest lay in understanding politics and society using a wider range of techniques.” This realization propelled him towards a Ph.D. in political science at Yale University, where his curiosity about the dynamics of power and

resistance began to take shape.

Professor Chandra's dissertation, which won the prestigious Sardar Patel Award, focused on tracing how the notion of "tribe" has co-evolved with modern state-making processes in South Asia and beyond. "My specialization emerged fairly organically," he says. "I went to rural eastern India to study youth in the growing Maoist movement at a time when the Indian prime minister had labeled the Maoists the greatest internal security threat since independence. I wanted to understand why youth from marginalized rural communities took up arms against the government." This problem-driven research led him to delve into the history of forest communities and their interactions with colonial and postcolonial states over the past two centuries.

Living among the Adivasi or tribal communities for thirty-six months, Professor Chandra immersed himself in their lives, listening to their songs, stories, and histories. He gained a profound understanding of how they negotiate their rights and entitlements with the state, leading him to develop what he calls a "politics of listening," a research approach that prioritizes the voices and experiences of ordinary people. In doing so, he illustrates how [writing your history](#) involves using marginalized voices, shifting perspectives, making one's mark, and negotiating for change.

Four Lessons from the Adivasis on Writing Your History

1. Use Your Voice

Marginalized voices play a crucial role in shaping history. Tribal communities have shown that by speaking up and being heard, they can assert their identities and rights even in the face of powerful state structures. Every voice matters in the narrative of our shared history.

2. Shift the Perspective

Break away from binary distinctions between insiders and outsiders. The fluid dynamics between these groups reveal how identities are continuously constructed and reconstructed through interaction. Your perspective can reshape the story.

3. Make Your Mark

So-called “tribal” societies in India are as modern as any other, with their unique cultures, morals, and ideologies. Including these diverse perspectives enriches our understanding of modernity itself.

4. Negotiate for Change

Resistance should not be seen merely as opposition to state power but as a form of negotiation.

Resistance can be a strategic tool to achieve meaningful change, transforming both the powerful

Professor Chandra's book, *Resistance as Negotiation*, redefines resistance as negotiation with power rather than mere opposition. "Instead of a binary view, I suggest we see resistance as struggles where the powerless negotiate with the powerful, extracting concessions," he explains. His fifteen years of research reveals how modern Indian states and their tribal subjects have continuously shaped each other through these negotiations over the past two centuries.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Professor Chandra's work is his exploration of "tribalism" and its contemporary relevance. Around 2016, he noticed the terms tribes and tribalism used to describe the polarized support for various populist leaders. "As a scholar from the Global South, it was striking because these terms had long been associated with colonialism," he notes. Professor Chandra's book examines how the notion of tribalism, once primarily used to describe Indigenous communities as primitive, has resurfaced in Western political discourse. "That tribalism would make its way back to the heart of debates over the future of Western democracies is astounding to me," he says.

Since joining GU-Q in 2015, Professor Chandra has benefited from a supportive academic environment that has been instrumental in shaping his work. A workshop hosted at GU-Q in 2016 marked a crucial turning point in his research, bringing together scholars from around the world

to critique and refine his manuscript. “I am indebted to them and the Center for International and Regional Studies for making this possible,” he says.

Professor Chandra’s journey from an economics student to a government professor exemplifies the transformative power of the politics of listening, offering new ways to understand the world.

As he continues to push the boundaries of political anthropology, his contributions promise to inspire scholars and practitioners alike with nuanced and profoundly human insights into the complexities of state-making and resistance.