

## 4 Notion of territory and the formation of pre-state political order and beyond

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Drawing boundaries is an essential process in the crystallisation of the notion of collective self. However, the scholarly world is divided over the relative importance of constitutive elements. For some, social boundary is more important than territorial context (Barth 1966: 15). But generally speaking, a community is identified with a distinct geographical space, where they have a preponderance of number (Barth 2000: 23). So, when identity is constructed on the basis of 'shared sameness and their distinction from others', there is a certain reference to a place or territory (ibid.: 18-19). But what constitutes this territory or landscape? The notion of landscape emerged in the 15th- and early 16th-century Europe as 'a way of seeing the external world' (Cosgrove 1985: 5-62). But gradually, the idea of landscape came to signify historically 'deep organic ties between a native people and their land' (Cosgrove, Roscoe and Rycroft 1996: 536). Therefore, in Africa, the identity of a tribe has been characterised by a close link with 'unique territory' (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 142). Ranajit Guha underlines that territoriality or the linkage with a particular geographical landscape is composed of *consanguinity* and *contiguity* (Guha 1983: 279). For this reason, often a group of people come 'to think of themselves, as being rooted in place' and 'they derive their identity' or sense of 'nativity' from this rootedness (Lund 2005: 372). The question is how far territorial root is central in determining Adivasi identity in Jharkhand. More so, how far their claim of nativity is justified?

Though lexically 'tribe' denotes 'a group of people of the same race', 'living in a particular area', it does not confirm nativity. But its other variant 'indigene' specifies people 'belonging to a particular place rather than coming to it from somewhere else' (Hornby 2005: 1638). In that sense, an indigenous community constitutes the native or aboriginal, rather Adivasi. However, in view of large-scale global human migrations, due both to environmental and existentialist

factors during prehistoric and historic times, territorial identity often becomes specious. Therefore, the claim of nativity is widely considered rhetorical and political. But since the claim of 'indigenous slot' has lately emerged at the global level, it becomes topical to comprehend the very context and content of their territorial assertion. This underlines, as Sergio Sauer observes, their '*self-definition or self-recognition* as a socially differentiated group with an identity of its own and a close relation to a specific territory and land' (2012: 85). Likewise, Vinita Damodaran writes:

The reference to land or territory has been an important part of the definition of the word 'indigenous', and environmentalists have argued that for those people who consider themselves indigenous a special relationship with the land is a fundamental aspect of their identity. (2013: 1)

Before taking the above discussion forward, we should comprehend the difference between symbolic and physical landscapes. The former is invoked in this study to mean the amorphous and undefined idea of a physical space or environment, around which Adivasi 'lifeworld was (is) imaginatively constructed in myth' (Ingold 2000: 9). However, the latter is constituted by the actual geographical territory where people live and pattern their life world. There is a close link between the invention of self and this changing idea of landscape. Symbolic or imagined landscape has a necessary relationship with people at a hunting-gathering stage for whom it was to occupy a 'natural' rather than an 'artificial' or 'built' environment of the sedentary people (ibid.: 56). What I argue is that change in selfhood from itinerancy to sedentary way of life infuses the sense of definitive and bounded landscape or 'boundary', the twin word for 'borders' (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 167). The sensitivity 'to meaningful features of their immediate environment' or landscape prompted the Adivasi communities 'to adjust their thinking and doing to what seems contextually relevant' (Leary and Tangney 2012: 84).

Therefore, this chapter engages with scholarly debate around the changing linkage between indigene and habitat/homeland, the latter comprising cradle and diaspora as caused by dispersion and displacement. The following sections will study the emergence of pre-state Adivasi polity and consequent political control over their landscape. This will be followed by its loss with their entry into state systems and finally the advent of the Jharkhand movement to assert their claim for a separate state for the Adivasis.

### Linkage between indigene and habitat/homeland

To recollect, despite the knowledge of migration and resettlement, ethnic groups generally claimed nativity, rather the status of original settlers of Chota Nagpur-Santal Parganas. This ethnographic information largely fed into the portrayal of these communities as indigenes by historians, anthropologists and Adivasi activists today. The claim of Adivasiness emerged for the first time at the national level (Hardiman 1987: 13), and gradually escalated into a global movement which utilised such national and international fora as the Working Group of Indigenous People (WGIP), Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP) and World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) founded in 1994. Their voice also resonated at the UNO, ILO and the World Bank. The movement focussed on some broad issues: rejection of the nomenclature of tribe; their projection as indigenous but marginalised and vulnerable people; and their claim of the right of self-determination largely within their nation states. Significantly, the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples made by the UNO in 1994 underlined territorial linkage as the indissoluble mark of indigeneity (Bowen 2000: 12–6; Karlsson 2003: 403–23; Kingsbury 1998: 414–57).

During the sessions of the WGIP, indigenous delegates insisted that their link with land they lived on, rather 'Mother Earth', was 'spiritual' (Karlsson 2003: 406).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, rightist groups underlined native people's 'special cultural and historical tie to their territory' as the basis for their right of self-determination within that territory (Bowen 2000: 12). Moreover, they focussed on continuity of occupation of 'ancestral territory' or 'common ancestry with original occupants' as charter for territorial claims (Kingsbury 1998: 419). On this basis, B.G. Karlsson asks, 'Is this mere political ideology, and thus a strategic use of "myth" to get control over (disputed) lands and resources?' (2005: 188). Damodaran adds that this claim unpacks the meaning of indigeneity which leads to their 'understanding of landscapes, their stories of nature, their lived histories' (2000: 4).

Resonance of these ideas may be found from Latin America also, where history and memory were inscribed into the landscape. Santos-Grenaro elaborates: 'Their importance does not lie in their fidelity to what "really" happened, but in having become an integral part of the historical consciousness and the identity of the peoples that bear them' (1998: 144). These issues make it crucial to know how the Adivasis of Jharkhand anchored their selfhood territorially and how they 'molded, defined, and used' the landscape (Damodaran 2005: 115, 122–4).

### The notions of cradle and diaspora

We are natives of this county,  
 Yet they are driving us out;  
 They are driving us from our birthplace.  
 Be learned, brother, be knowing, be a man.  
 (Orans 1965: 109)

In a recent study on South Asia, two factors coined as 'rights of occupation' and 'rights of conquest' have been considered crucial in the formation of territorial identity (Bates 1995b: 111). According to the first, occupation determined the territorial identity of the indigenous groups in India. These factors seem relevant in the context of tribal Bihar. Here, after the occupation and habitation in a forest tract, ethnic communities colonised a much greater geographical area. This gave rise to the concept of cradle and diaspora among them and the corresponding imagery of their 'remembered landscape'. However, since they had been invaded and often dislocated from their earlier habitat in the plains by the Aryans (Dalton 1866: 153), the logic of history created a strong sense of 'landscape of servitude' in them while ruminating the memory of their 'remembered landscape'. However, conquerors like the British derived from this historical experience the 'rights of conquest' over Adivasi-dominated territory. Next, since belonging to hills and forested region was in British perception the mark of their cultural retardation, 'the white man' derived the legitimacy to conquer their territory in order to carry out their historic civilising mission.

Major Adivasi communities in tribal Bihar believed that since they had cleared primeval forests and founded their villages, they had earned the status of *khuntkattidars* or first settlers. Therefore, the Mundas-Oraons, Santals and Hos, respectively, considered the Chota Nagpur plateau, Damin-i-Koh and Kolhan-Porahat as their homeland. The concept of homeland was nonetheless saturated, more prominently among the Mundas and Santals, with the idea of the original seat or 'cradle' and the creation of a diaspora through occupation after the rise in population. The Hos generally do not have the notion of a unified cradle; rather, they reminisce about killi-specific mother villages and the subsequent founding of satellite villages. However, the Oraons recalled the story of their displacement from their pre-Chota Nagpur original home at Rohtas and later settlement in Chota Nagpur. We find that the absence of recorded evidence required the colonial ethnographers and the anthropologist like S.C. Roy to draw on oral tradition to reconstruct the history of the precolonial Jharkhand

region. We can, therefore, safely say that the supportive historical evidence is a sum of both self and other representations.

Reid noted that the Mundas and Oraons of the Ranchi district considered themselves 'the pioneers or descendants of the pioneers' and they felt 'pride' to address themselves as a 'descendant of the original founders of the village (a *bhuinhar* or khuntkattidar)' (1912: para 20). During Sardari Larai, a Munda related to Rakhal Das Halder, the official supervising the survey of ancestral low-rent lands in Ranchi during 1869-80, comments:

We claim *bhuinhari* rights because (Chota) Nagpur is our *fatherland* (italics added). We consider Nagpur as our Gaya, Ganga, Kasi and Prayag (sacred places in Hindu traditions). The bones of our ancestors lie buried in the bowels of Nagpur. We are no colonists from other countries, but derive our race from Nagpur.  
(MacDougall 1985: 60-2)

Interestingly, a similar claim of nativity echoed from Latin America, where the Andean indigenes asserted: 'We are all descendants of our ancient tributaries from whom we have our titles that secure our lands' (Rappaport 1994: 31). Significantly, the claim of aboriginality, as reproduced from the Adivasi tradition in Jharkhand, was also occasionally supported by archaeological proofs of ancestral graves and the ruin of a fort. We later witness that *sasandiri* test was officially practised as a more dependable evidence to determine the first settler. We note that the idea of cross-checking of legendary history with the archaeological evidence of grave sites was deployed in other countries also.<sup>2</sup>

Both Munda and Oraon traditions depict that the latter immigrated and peacefully coexisted with the former in the Chota Nagpur plateau. Traditional Oraon history related that they were driven out of their earlier stronghold in Rohtas probably by Cheros or Kharwars. Subsequently, one of their branches settled in Palamau (Hallett 1917: 22). The Munda informant also said: 'We allowed the Oraons of Ruhidas [the modern Rohtas, a famous fortress about 150 miles north-west of Ranchi District] to come to this country. They came peaceably, and we allowed them to occupy the country in peace' (MacDougall 1985: 62).<sup>3</sup>

Traditions, stone memorials and ancient Sanskrit texts reveal that before the arrival of the Aryans, the Mundas and their allied communities controlled large parts of northern India. The hilly tracts of north-western India were their earliest bastion. This association was

inscribed in their creation myth through the metaphor of Marang Buru. It was here that they achieved settled village life. If the achievements of Dasyus, with which the aboriginal races were generally associated, are added, then they had been able to raise several cities, enviable castles and wealth. This is depicted by the Rig Veda. But the Kolarian race was gradually driven to the Gangetic valley by the Aryans. After forming several intermediate habitations, they finally settled at Chota Nagpur plateau (Roy 1970: 13-14).<sup>4</sup>

Traditional history of the Mundas identified different original seats. According to one tradition, they formed their first settlement at village Omedanda in the Ranchi district or Nagpur (Hallett 1917: 22). But another tradition revealed that Satyomba was 'revered by the whole tribe as the cradle of the race' (Dalton 1866: 154). About the foundation of the cradle, there was yet another story. This story depicted that with 21,000 people, Risa Munda, the legendary Munda culture hero, moved towards the east and first settled in Murima village; Korumba, his follower, set up the village named after him as Korumba; Sutia, another follower, founded the village Sutiambe. Mundas inhabiting central part of Chota Nagpur still referred the latter two villages as the 'cradle of "Konkpat" Mundas' (Hallett 1917: 22). We further learn that after the 'more prolific' Oraons set their feet in the plateau, they wilfully allowed them to occupy the central part. Thus, 'the remote ancestors of the Mundas finally secluded themselves in the valleys and jungles of Chota Nagpur'. They cleared forests and set up new villages, the boundaries of which 'were laid down by the Pater familias'. As growth in population caused space problem, new villages continued to be founded. In the process, not only the number of villages proliferated, but also a 'number of separate families belonging to the same killi' grew. To prevent marriage liaisons, new killis were added to the mythic 12 families/killis, which increased to 21 during Risa Munda's time. Gradually, the Mundas colonised the south-eastern and north-western parts of the old Ranchi district (Roy 1970: 62-70).

Oraon traditional history recounted the story of their origin in south india at a remote period. Their folklore, as reconstructed by Rev. Dehon, narrated their participation in the clash between Ram and Ravan. Presumably, being on the wrong side of this feud, they were forced to migrate first to the Narmada region and then to the valley of the river Sone. It was here that they developed their 'ancient seats' at Aramnagar (Arra) and Byaghra-sara (Buxar). Later, they formed their settlements in the Ruidas hills region (ibid.: 68-9).<sup>5</sup> As mentioned earlier, they entered Chota Nagpur and entrenched themselves in its central part with the help of the Mundas.

The Ho informants mentioned that groups of Mundas had originally migrated from Chota Nagpur plateau. They inhabited northern Singhbhum and developed Ho identity. They were involved in clashes for supremacy with the Bhuiyans<sup>6</sup> and Saraks (Tickell 1840b: 696-7), the earlier inhabitants of this region. Later, they consolidated their control over southern Singhbhum. The Hos named this area *Hodesum*, although the Hindus called it Kolehān (ibid.: 694-8). According to Tickell, 'a tract of open undulating country, averaging from sixty miles in length north and south, from thirty five to sixty in breadth' (ibid.: 699). However, Dalton identified a total area of 4,503 square miles to be Ho or Larka Kol territory. Of the total area locating the Hos, 1,905 square miles was identified by him as the 'exclusively Ho territory known as the Kolhan' (1973: 178).

The notion of territorial identity of the Hos was derived primarily from the logic of numerical preponderance, rather political control. According to Tickell, they constituted 85 per cent of the total population of Kolhan (1840b: 700). In 1867, their exact number was estimated at 118,281, though the percentage could not be calculated due to the non-availability of non-tribal figures.<sup>7</sup> By the 1890s, the population in Kolhan rose to 237,320, of which aboriginal tribes numbered 175,683 (i.e. 74.2%) of the total (Craven 1898: para 66). During the Tuckey land revenue survey and settlement (1913-18), the official notion of Kolhan as the exclusive Ho land was further challenged, when it was found that a large number of villages had originally been made and dominated by non-Hos (Tuckey 1920: para 18). Even then, Kolhan continued to be regarded as exclusive Ho territory not only officially, but also by the Hos. The latter claimed that they were the khuntkattidars of primeval forests.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, they often ignored the earlier history of village making by the Saraks and Bhuiyans (Sen 2012a: 34-40).

The Santal creation myth narrated that they had carved out their homeland from the beginning of time. But with gradual dispersion, their habitat changed over time. Subsequently, they crossed the Damodar River and settled down at Sikharbhum or modern-day Hazaribagh. From there, they moved to Manbhum (roughly the present-day Purulia district of West Bengal) and Santal Parganas (Roy 1970: 60). But scholars are not uniform about the modern-day equivalents of the places they settled. *Hibri Pipri*, their cradle, was identified by Hunter as the Himalayan region (Hunter 1975: 155). Though their intermediate habitats are not identified, they gradually entered Chota Nagpur plateau. 'Cae Campa', which scholars generally identified with 'the

country to the northwest of the present Chotanagpur', represented the acme of their political rise. But later, their power declined as they lost the fight against the Hindus and were forced to move to Tore Pokhori. This was 'generally taken to be situated somewhere to the northwest of the sources of the Damuda (Damodar) river'. Next, Sir and Sikhar denoted their habitation somewhere in the Chota Nagpur region and that in Tundi in Manbhum. Similarly, Ajay River signified the extreme limit of Santal territory, beyond which existed the 'country of the Muslims'. The story ended with their movement to their final destination Santal Pargana during British rule (Bodding 1994: 3-22). This relates Santal identification of a compact homeland around the cradle and diaspora.

### *Emergence of Adivasi pre-state polity*

The dominant idea of the Adivasi polity is that of pre-state village republics. But indigenous tradition, colonial ethnography and postcolonial anthropological and historical researches on India (Sinha 1962, 1987; Singh 1971) also relate the emergence of chieftaincies among them, largely due to the impact of Sanskritisation. Their autonomy further dissipated when they were merged into Mughal and British state systems.

Satyomba village was the nucleus around which the parhas of the Mundas grew up. A parha, comprising 12 or more villages, was headed by a chief who conducted the ordinary business of the parha community. In case of 'extraordinary occasions', 'the Parha chiefs met and took counsel together'. This suggested the existence of an informal supra-parha institution (Dalton 1866: 159), rather parha confederacy. Dalton wrote: 'Left to themselves, the Kols increased and multiplied, and lived a happy arcadian sort of life under their republican form of government for many centuries' (ibid.: 160). However, this polity may be linked to their material backwardness. Being 'in a very wild state', they drew largely on the forests and rudimentary cultivation. This forced them to share their territory with the Oraon community who were equipped with 'large herds of cattle and implements of husbandry', as also with the tools to reclaim the country and extend the area of habitation (ibid.: 159). Naturally, this help somewhat strengthened the republican political system of the Mundas and Oraons. But the existing administrative set-up was found inadequate with the rise in population and number of villages. It was around the sixth century that the Mankis and parha rajas decided to

form a centralised institution, following which they chose Madura, the Manki of Sutiambe as the chief Manki or raja (Hallett 1917: 24). The chief of Sutiambe, or the place itself, was preferred as 'the cradle of the race' (Dalton 1866: 160). This was how the Munda and Oraon village republic took the form of an endogenous chieftaincy. On this nucleus, the feudal state structure of Chota Nagpur raj soon developed.

Ethnographers revealed that precolonial Hodesum was united around a 'constitution of confederate village communities' or republics, lacking the notion of a centralised government (Dalton 1973: 178; Baden-Powell 1972: 153). They had developed their grid of village administration which was uplinked with pir, a conglomerate of villages of varying number. But British ethnography revealed that a pir had grown out of Ho subordination to the chiefs of Porahat. The latter had grafted it on the native body politic in order to maintain fiscal and judicial control over the villages (Tuckey 1920: para 32).

Santal tradition highlighted a state of flux among them due to recurrent migrations. Yet, there is some hint of how they had been able to evolve the state of polity. At the pre-Champa phase, they laid the foundations of their kin-ordered village and parha/pargana institutions. This system was retained till the advent of British rule (Bodding 1994: 3-10, 20-1). This broadly formed the background when due to the extraneous contact Jharkhand region entered the phase of state making. At this stage, the Adivasi conception of landscape changed from that of loose politico-cultural territorial boundary to that of rigid territorial demarcation or border that emerges with the formation of a state.

### State formation and Adivasi subordination

Sivaramakrishnan defines state formation or state making as the process that shaped 'the forms and legitimations of government and governmentality'. Elaborating the idea, he further adds that state making is the analysis of 'the pathways and modes through which locality, region, nation, and transnational bodies become spatial and cultural entities' (1999: 5). This section seeks to comprehend how pre-state indigenous republics in Jharkhand gradually became a part of the state system and developed exogenous demographic and spatial relations. More interesting is to analyse whether the formation of a state was organic and indigenous in nature or whether this was grafted into their body politic by an extraneous agency.

Scholars have two perceptions about state formation in Chota Nagpur plateau. The dominant view is that of the Rajputisation of the tribe (Sinha 1962: 35-80). K.S. Singh proposes the alternate idea: 'Chotanagpur Nagbanshi chiefs were a branch of the Dravidian Nagas, who ruled over middle India as late as the 14th century.' The Chota Nagpur raj did not, however, emerge out of 'Munda culture-matrix' (1971: 170). In their case, the exogenous intervention was unavoidable because the Kolarian material foundation, based on their 'communal agrarian organization', was not conducive for state making (ibid.). Against this, the neighbourly Chero Kingdom of Palamau, which survived for more than two centuries, could be sustained because of its solid economic and military base (ibid.: 167-9). These two ideas largely agree that besides weak material foundation, such factors as the absence of strata formation due to 'kin-ordered mode', egalitarianism, the inability to produce surplus wealth, democratic values and technological lag precluded the emergence of a unified centralised state system.<sup>9</sup>

It appears that the Mundas and Oraons responded to external material and moral influence favourably. First, signs are rationalisation of physical subjugation, mentioned earlier. Next was the softening of cultural hegemony when they invented the Brahmanical and Nagbanshi legends of the formation of Chota Nagpur raj (Dalton 1866: 160-2; Roy 1970: 74-6; Singh 1987: 51-71; *Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes* 1890: 51-3). Dalton revealed that 'a child of his house, reared in it if not born there, was, through his (Madura) influence and by the advice of a Brahmin he had taken into his service, elected supreme chief over the whole confederacy' (1866: 160). It emphasised that as Madura found the earlier republican polity inadequate to govern an expanding network, on the advice of a Brahmin, he decided to import a more advanced administrative mechanism.

Heterogeneity within Munda ranks seemed to widen as the raj entrenched itself. To abjure a supposed lowly link of a Kol, a superior pedigree was fabricated. This presaged the invention of Brahmanical origin of the dynasty. The story revealed that the dynasty originated with Pundarik of the Naga or Serpent race. To avert the wrath of Janmajay, raja of Hastinapur, he took on the persona of a Brahmin. To assimilate himself into the Brahmanical fold, he studied the *shastras* at the house of a Brahmin living in Benaras. The Brahmin, impressed by 'the intelligence and grace of his pupil', got his daughter Parvati married to him. On their return from a pilgrimage to Puri, when the couple reached Jharkhand or 'forest land', she gave birth to a son. But when she insisted that Pundarik should reveal his true identity, he assumed

his 'proper form' of a snake and disappeared into a pool of water. Out of grief, Parvati committed sati. The abandoned child, named Phani Mukut Rai, was 'taken to Madura's house who adopted and brought him up with his own son' of the same age. When the child was 12 years of age, Madura 'convened the Purha chiefs' and other neighbouring rajas. It was decided that the more accomplished of the two children should be selected as the future raja. The annals of the Nagbansi family claimed that inherent qualities of the boy prompted the chiefs to select Phani Mukut as their raja, but the Munda tradition narrated that when Madura found him to be more deserving than his own son, he first 'named him as his successor', after which 'other Mankis and Parha-Rajas unanimously elected Phani Mukut Rai to be their Chief' (Dalton 1866: 160-1; Hallett 1917: 24).

The Adivasi tradition, therefore, reflected that Chota Nagpur raj was the product of a kind of social contract. But this contract seemed to be violated, when the raj acquired exogenous features. First was the marriage of Phani Mukut with the daughter of Sikharbhum or Panchet raja against the indigenous norm of marrying within Munda or Oraon fold. Significantly, this could happen only after Pundarik reappeared and contrived a noble pedigree for his son. Since then, 'the Nagbunsis have always intermarried with the best Rajpoot families' (Dalton 1866: 160-1). Violation of endogamous norm seemed to disaffect the Munda and Oraons. Consequently, an internecine feud ensued at the marriage party, which calmed down only after the intervention of other guests.

Imbibing in extraneous political institutions and practices was the other violation. At Sutiambe, the first capital of the raj, a mud fort was built; later, the capital was shifted to Chutia where a masonry fort and some stone temples were erected; at the next capital Doisa, the raj raised 'some fine buildings'. These symbolised both the entrenchment of chiefly and Brahmanical traditions, as also progress 'in art and in civilization'. Next was the adoption of expansionist strategy. Previously, Chota Nagpur raj's area of control did not extend 'beyond the plateau or fringe of hills'. This was later extended further to include Silli, Tamar, Barundah, Rabey and Bundu. These parganas of the raj elected their own rajas, assumed Chatri identity, wore sacred threads and married into Kshatriya families. They were later brought under the control of the Chota Nagpur raj and forced to pay tribute to him in the form of diamonds (ibid.: 161-3).

The third transformative stage arrived with the gradual incorporation of the chieftaincy into imperial network. The chieftaincy, rather Chota Nagpur and the adjoining hill states known as Jharkhand, was 'an inaccessible frontier country' for the ruling kingdoms down to the

Mughal Empire. Attracted by the rumours of diamonds, the Mughal army attacked this area during Emperor Akbar's reign and made the raja of Chota Nagpur a tributary. He was compelled to provide military assistance during Mughal expeditions to the adjacent provinces. This was followed by a military expedition sent by Emperor Jahangir for 'more complete subjection' of the region by removing raja Durjan Sal, 'the unknown petty Raja' of Chota Nagpur. He was captured and sent to Delhi, but later released and ordered 'to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 6000'. Thus, the chieftaincy of Chota Nagpur was incorporated into the Mughal Empire, with the chief allowed to run the internal administration of his territory.

Administrative imperatives forced the chiefs to incorporate ideologies and practices which systematically alienated the raj from its endogenous moorings. The pressure of regular payment of tributes, which often fell in arrears, forced the rulers to promote large-scale in-migration of Hindu and Muslim mercenaries, Brahmins, Hindu peasants and traders. Ignoring the authority of the old Munda and Oraon chiefs, the raj farmed out villages to them. Furthermore, they deployed Brahmins, Rajputs and other non-Adivasi peasants and traders for 'religious and secular services'. The inevitable result was the large-scale dispossession of the Mundas and Oraons from their villages and lands (ibid.). Paradoxically, the traditional system of village administration by the Munda and Manki continued to govern their life as per their customs. The raj appointed them in mopping up revenue and maintaining law and order. But, the Chota Nagpur chieftaincy was reduced into a disparate and extraneous institution.

After the grant of Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765, Chota Nagpur came under the control of the British. But instead of enforcing direct authority, the area was left under the charge of Chota Nagpur, Palamau, Ramgarh and other smaller chiefs. However, the military collectorship at Ramgarh functioned as a controlling agency. Incessant squabbles among the chiefs, the failure to pay tributes regularly and efficiently govern their territories disaffected the aboriginals. Recurring popular protests led to the establishment of police *thanas*. This marked 'the beginning of the disappearance of the feudal authority of the Raja'. But the ethnic people were subjected to rack renting and forced labour. Also, some of the *thikadars* indulged in the worst crime against women. These factors triggered widespread uprising of the Mundas, Oraons and Hos of Chota Nagpur in 1831-32. Though the insurrection was suppressed, it became clear to the British officials that more effective control was urgent. This saw the establishment of the South-West Frontier Agency in 1834, comprising Chota

Nagpur proper, Palamau, Kharkadiha, Ramgarh, Bundu, the Jungle Mahals (excluding Bishenpur, Sainpahari and Shergarh), Dhalbhum Pargana and dependent Tributary Mahals, with Kishanpur (Ranchi) as its headquarters. Thomas Wilkinson was made the agent to the Governor General and the area was declared as a non-regulation territory. He framed his set of criminal and civil rules to administer this territory. Though the British introduced a paternalistic form of governance under the charge of the district heads and co-opted the village officials within colonial bureaucracy, Chota Nagpur plateau came under the canopy of the colonial state system (Jha 1987: Chapter V).

The story was somewhat different in the case of the Santals. Their traditions related that in Campa, their village republican polity was transformed into a chieftaincy headed by their Kisku 'kings'. This consolidated their politico-cultural position that presaged their ascent as a 'great people'. Taking cue from the Munda history, we presume that their pargana chiefs had offered kingship to the Kiskus to make their polity more efficient. Efficiency was further added through division of specific functions among the killis. The Kiskus or rapaj were kings; Murmus were priests; Sorens were soldiers; the Hembroms were 'princes or nobility'; the Marandis were the undefined 'wealthy class'; the Tudus performed assorted jobs of drummers and makers of iron implements; Baskes as 'merchants' did 'buying and selling'; Hasdas were cultivators. Nonetheless, this thriving community life was threatened by enemies. So, for protection, they built 'great many forts'. An interesting fact is that these forts in major cases were killi-centric forts.<sup>10</sup>

Here, other Gurus, differing from what Kolean related earlier, underlined the village-centric Santal culture. Villages were self-sufficient. Interestingly, these were 'called gar (forts)' disputing the popular idea of fortification. All villagers were called 'kings' (raj, landholders) (Boddington 1994: 20), thereby contesting Kolean's notion of a distinct royal social order. Moreover, implicit in this is the message of an egalitarian society anchored in their village republican polity. But, internally critiqued, this avowed idea is at variance with the existence of 'comparatively poor', as also division of occupations and the event of internal squabble between Kiskus (royal order) and Marandis (wealthy people) (ibid.).

However, Kolean's text is pregnant with a greater meaning. First is that their polity appeared to have been organised around killi-controlled spaces, where resources were reproduced within the killi itself. This is reflective of a killi confederacy that anchored the centralised polity controlled by Kisku kings. With this polity, they in 'olden

times . . . had possession of the country on both sides of the Ganges river'. But political recession started ever since the Hindus occupied their territory. Instead of surrendering to them, a large section left their habitat and migrated to carve out new homes. The same thing happened during the Muslim invasion, when they confined themselves to the periphery of the Ajay River. These underlined their collective effort at avoiding subjugation. But their migration to Santal Parganas, their insurrection and European help to the Dekos, which forestalled their plans to drive them beyond the Ganges, messaged their final submission to the colonial political structure (*ibid.*: 10-14).

We do not have detailed knowledge about Ho polity from fragmentary colonial ethnography. Moreover, confusion prevails as to whether this was a politico-administrative or a cultural institution. Tickell's construction of the political history (1840b: 696-7) of pre-British Kolhan from folklore revealed that at the time of Ho immigration, Singhbhum was under the occupation of the Bhuiyans. They were represented as 'the inoffensive simple race', 'rich in cattle, and industrious cultivators'. It perhaps suggests that the Bhuiyans were organised under some kind of chieftdom headed by a 'Bhooian Mahapator or Zamindar' (*ibid.*: 696). They allowed the immigrants 'to form settlements in the neighbouring woods', and then 'to reside in the central open fields'. Tickell related the entry of Saraks and their later fight with the Ho, which resulted in the expulsion of the former (*ibid.*: 697).

Another major change was the foundation of the Porahat raj with the help of the Hos (*ibid.*; Dalton 1973: 179).<sup>11</sup> The latter accepted the supremacy of the Porahat dynasty. As a mark of obedience and respect, the Hos occasionally paid the Porahat rulers 'salamees in different taxes or "Russoomat" at periods of Hindoo festivals' (Tickell 1840b: 698). They gradually colonised large parts of south and west Kolhan, founded their permanent villages and organised their customary social order. This was identified as the Kole territory. Venturing into this Ho bastion was fatal for any Brahmin, Rajput or Muhammedan.<sup>12</sup>

A recent essay contends the British ethnographic projection of the Ho as a pre-state order and avers that with the acceptance of the supremacy of the Porahat dynasty they became a part of the Porahat state system.<sup>13</sup> But early colonial ethnography related that the Ho considered the Porahat rajas as an ally rather than a suzerain. We learn that the Porahat rajas and the Hos mutually agreed to divide their spheres of influence. The former chose the rich open plains towards the north, then called Singhbhum, with the seat at Porahat. We can presume that some of the Ho groups continued to inhabit Porahat and accepted the supremacy of the rulers (McPherson 1906: paras

141-7), while others gradually spread across the 'remaining tract of open land' (Tickell 1840b: 697) and finally colonised Kolhan. They warded off the attempts of the chiefs of Chota Nagpur, Porahat and zamindar of Bamanghaty to subjugate their territory. They also carried out incessant raids of their neighbouring chiefs. They also carried out their military support was courted by the chiefs of Porahat, Seraikela, Kharsawan and Mayurbhanj in their contest for political superiority (ibid.: 698). These facts contend the claim that the Hos had been conclusively incorporated in the feudal state system of the local chiefs. Moreover, conceptually speaking, this would not fit into the idea of a state that defines statehood as a political institution, evolving organically out of internal socio-political dynamics but not extraneously imposed through conquest. A major and permanent incorporation into the state system occurred only after the British conquest of the 'Kole territories' in 1837 when these were demarcated as the Kolhan Government Estate.

The political subjugation of their homeland brought in its trail slow but steady demographic marginalisation of Adivasis. Before the onset of feudal and colonial rule, they were numerically superior in the tribal belt of Bihar. But during the feudal era, Jharkhand was subjected to the steady influx of non-ethnic and spatial outsiders known as Diku. Though the inflow of functional castes in Adivasi villages had been promoted by the Adivasis themselves, the inroads made by Hindu and Muslim farmers, traders and merchants were encouraged by the local chiefs (Singh 2002: 2-9). The Diku influx proliferated during colonial rule when new elements such as government servants, lawyers, teachers, medical practitioners, contractors and miners trooped in to take advantage of the new avenues of jobs and professions which the British created. These new elements largely chose urban centres for habitation resulting in the conversion of towns and cities as Diku preserves. Even in villages, the percentage of Adivasi population registered a steady decline (Craven 1898: para 66), which sharpened as the years went by. The Census of 2011 records that out of a total 32,988,134 in Jharkhand, STs number only 7,087,068 (i.e. 26.3%) of the total (Indian Census Report of 2011, Primary Population Abstract). This systematic dwindling of Adivasi number weakened their political control over Jharkhand.

Worse was the creation of the problem of land alienation (Singh 2002: 2-9). Some of the Dikus were engaged in acquiring Adivasi lands on *thika*, some even purchasing their lands.<sup>14</sup> This naturally became an irritant for the ethnic groups all over tribal Bihar. But the greater problem was of the state-sponsored land alienation from Adivasis to the

colonial government, companies and individuals (Sen 2011b: 69–72), followed by the sociocultural marginalisation of Adivasis (Singh 2002: 9–19). Diku religions like Hinduism and Christianity and languages like Hindi, Bengali and Oriya spread. These combined to relegate Adivasi culture to the background, creating in their minds a feeling of minority.

### Assertion of territorial identity

Politico-cultural marginalisation compelled Adivasis in India to assert their territorial specificity so that their control over the resources and pattern of life might be safeguarded. The Adivasis of Midnapur in West Bengal started a political movement during 1760–1924. This came in the wake of their systematic marginalisation commensurate with the loss of political power, subjugation, dispossession, usurpation of customary rights over the landscape and loss of culture. During this long stretch, they staged the militant Bhumij Revolt (1832–33), resorted to *haat* looting, refused to cultivate their lands and pay rent and finally merged their resistance with the all-India Non-Cooperation Movement (1921–22) (Dasgupta 1990: 101–35). In 1876 and 1910, the Adivasis of Bastar rebelled against the king and colonial rulers in defence of their land and customary rights (Sundar 2008: 79–150).

Likewise, territorial selfhood was articulated by Jharkhandi Adivasis both through militancy and constitutional ways. It is worthwhile, therefore, to understand how this ideology crystallised and was articulated. For the Hos, Kolhan rather the Hodeusm was not merely a piece of territory they had occupied and lived but was their *Nirul desum* or Holy Land. This sensibility decisively inspired them to turn it into their sacred preserve denying even pilgrims passage in their journey to Puri and outsiders the opportunity to settle in their territory (Tickell 1840b: 697). To maintain their control over their habitat, they fought against the local chiefs of Porahat and Seraikela-Kharsawan in 1819–20 and the British in 1836–37 and 1857–58 (Sen 2014: 94–9). During the famous *Hul* of 1855–56, the Santals gave the call of *Delaya birid pe, Delaya tingun pe* (Arise, awake! Found the Santal Raj) to set free their cherished homeland from the control of the non-Adivasi landlords, moneylenders and the British (Sen 1992: 18–31). Similarly, during the Sardari or Kherwar movement (1858–95), the Mundas and Oraons in Chota Nagpur plateau sent petitions to the commissioner of Chota Nagpur (1867) and the lieutenant governor of Bengal (1881), to assert their status as ‘aboriginal’ and hereditary rights over the land (MacDougall 1985: 260–2).

The pathos of loss of control over the sacred homeland is evident in the following song sung during the historic *Ulgulan* of the Mundas and Oraons under Birsa Munda (1895–1900):

O Father of the earth, ours is the land, the country.  
 You have made us live under others.  
 You brought us from the Original Home,  
 In Nagpur, our ancestors left their footprints.  
 In the country reclaimed by us, you have made others sit  
 On our property.

(Singh 2002: 313)

Similarly, riddled by the deep sense of moral and material deprivation, the Santals of Midnapur fervently recalled their arcadian life in Champa (Dasgupta 1990: 121).

Memory of the 'remembered landscape', as contrasted from 'the landscape of their current servitude' not only embodied their territorial and political sensitivity, but also simultaneously reinvented Adivasi selfhood.<sup>15</sup> Originally, this was an autonomously governed but culturally imbued notion of territorial identity, which was fractured when the feudal elements and the colonial state converted ethnic landscape into a subordinate politico-cultural space and circumscribed their traditional control over it. With this, systematic marginalisation of the indigenes of Jharkhand emerged as a grim reality. They were forced to rationalise servitude and gradually adapt themselves to a constitutional and legalistic mode of political action. The graduation to this changed modality of collective protest was evident during the Sardari Larai, when the indigenes of Chota Nagpur plateau sent several petitions to the British government to defend their land and forest rights (MacDougall 1985: 260–2). This took deeper roots after the opening up of modern education in the Adivasi region and adoption of the literacy criterion, in the appointment of village and pir heads. These village officials, besides the Adivasi employees of the district administration, played a significant role in socialising the legalistic mode in Jharkhand. But the most significant impact of the diffusion of western education was the emergence of Adivasi literati as the vanguard of political action through press, public association and public meeting in place of the traditional arsenal of bow and arrow and battle axe (Sen 2014: 93–112). During colonial rule, an assertion of political identity peaked in the form of a claim for a separate state, more popularly known as the Jharkhand movement. Initiated and led by urban literate groups, this movement imported association politics in Adivasi body politic.

### **Jharkhand movement**

However, the purpose of this section is not to elaborate how the movement originated and developed and the problems it encountered, its various weaknesses and pitfalls as also the modalities that followed. This will focus rather on how the notion of state was territorially defined and what final form this assumed. With the initial motive of providing welfare to the Christian tribals, associations such as the Christian Association (1898) and Dacca Students' Union (1912) were formed. The Chotanagpur Tribal Association, founded in 1912, opened its membership to the non-Christian sections also. The claim for political rights, particularly statehood, was raised by a new forum named as the Chotanagpur Improvement Society or Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj. The literate section of the Society advocated for the reservation in jobs and legislative bodies, the creation of a substate comprising the tribal parts of Bihar; their demand for a full state was placed before the Simon Commission in 1928. That this state comprised only the Chota Nagpur division becomes clear from the avowed objective of the Adivasi Mahasabha formed in 1838. This state was deemed necessary to end Diku dominance, besides improving the socio-economic and political conditions of the Adivasis. Under the leadership of Jaipal Singh, the Mahasabha forged a strategic link with the Muslim League and helped the British war efforts during the Second World War. On the eve of Indian Independence, the association reiterated the demand for a separate Chota Nagpur state.

After independence, the Mahasabha converted itself into a political party and reconstituted itself as the Jharkhand Party. This reiterated the demand for a separate state comprising Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas. The resounding victory of the Adivasi candidates at the general elections in 1952 to the Bihar Assembly so enthused their leaders that not only a memorandum for separate Jharkhand was submitted, but also, more significantly, the territorial expanse of the state was reframed. This transcended its earlier politico-administrative identity and chose to denote Adivasi homeland as a distinct sociocultural and ecological formation of the indigenes. This included, besides the six Adivasi-dominated districts of Bihar, nine districts of West Bengal, Orissa and the then Madhya Pradesh. Though the Jharkhand movement continued to register its presence in the coming decades, it was plagued by internal bickering. This led to the birth of various Jharkhand-based outfits like the All India Jharkhand Party, Birsa Seva Dal, Hul Jharkhand Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), Kolhan Raksha Sangh (KRS), All Jharkhand Students' Union and Jharkhand

People's Party. The splits, occasional links with the nationalist parties like the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the failure to strengthen its demographic base seriously sapped the movement from within and diluted the basic idea of homeland. The failure to spell the exact boundary of the claimed state was palpable. Sociocultural boundary remained merely an emotional rather than a political idea; Kolhan Raksha Dal was found active in the creation of a separate Kolhan state under the union government and cutting across party affiliations 50 MLAs and MPs of tribal Bihar made a demand for making Chota Nagpur-Santal Pargana a Centrally Administrative Territory.

The formation of a separate Jharkhand state in 2000 registered perhaps the fulfilment of a long demand for an Adivasi state, comprising in all 22 districts of Chota Nagpur and Santal Pargana. Significantly, ethnic political preponderance over the new state was retained through the declaration of the state as a scheduled area, the provision of reservation of the 28 assembly seats for the STs out of a total of 81 and the post of Chief Minister enjoyed by an Adivasi till 2014 assembly elections. But the fact is that the Adivasis are clearly in minority with less than 27 per cent of the total population, where a large number of seats (general 44 and SC 9) held by the non-Adivasis and levers of economy decisively controlled by the latter.<sup>16</sup>

The historic invention of territorial identity was reinforced through the environmental articulation of their collective selfhood around land, water and forest. The next chapter therefore explores their transformation from an itinerant to a settled rural community by narrating the very process of village making as a factor in their relationship with the landscape.

## Notes

- 1 For a claim as first settler on the basis of 'priority of residence', see Bowen (2000: 13).
- 2 Bowen refers to 'tribal claims to grave sites as on the basis of long term occupation' (2000: 13).
- 3 The link with this place survives in the Munda tradition as narrated in Roy (1970: 59).
- 4 For these intermediate locations, see *ibid.*: 35-59.
- 5 For their migration to Chota Nagpur and also for the suggestion of forcible entry, see Campbell (1866: 3). Campbell writes: 'They must have been strong, to effect an ingress to a country not originally their own' (*ibid.*).
- 6 Campbell considered them 'the original occupants of much of the lower country to the south of the Chota-Nagpore plateau, great part of Singhoom and Bonai, and the borders of Orissa'. He also noted: 'These Bhooyas or Bhooyians have been reputed to be the Aborigines of Bengal' (1866: 52-3).

- 7 Dr. W. H. Hayes, deputy commissioner of Singhbhum to the commissioner of Chota Nagpur, No.30, 22 February 1867, Revenue Department, June 1867, No. 122, 127.
- 8 Copy of memorial presented by the Hos at Chaibasa, dated 9 July 1914, vide resettlement of the Kolhan Government Estate in the district of Singhbhum, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Revenue Department, FN S/6 of 1915, Nos 1-12, Enclosure (5) to Proceedings No. 6, Appendix C, para. 9.
- 9 For an incisive play of some of these factors, see Wolf (2010: 88-100).
- 10 While Kolean considered Baskes as 'merchants', other Gurus called them cooks (Bodding 1994: 8-10, 20).
- 11 According to the tradition of the family, the dynasty was founded in the sixth century AD, while according to the British their rule commenced from the 13th century AD (Sahu 1985: 8-10).
- 12 Roughsedge to Metcalfe, 9 May 1820, para 13.
- 13 To quote: 'State system of the Singhbhum Raj had over time entrenched itself in the countryside' (Dasgupta 2007b: 100-4).
- 14 Details are provided in village-wise thika list in Craven and Tuckey Settlement Village Papers or Diku Reports.
- 15 This idea has been inspired by Damodaran (2002).
- 16 This study of Jharkhand movement is based on Singh (2006: 1-30); Vidyarthi and Sahay (1978: 85-91); Corbridge (1988: 1-42); Devalle (1992: 136-8); Amit Prakash (1999: 461-96); Kesari and Munda (2003: 216-31); Damodaran (2005: 133-43); Damodaran (2006: 179-96); Stuligross (2008: 83-97).