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Edited by Biswamoy Pati

ADIVASIS IN COLONIAL INDIA

Survival, Resistance and Negotiation

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Adivasis in Colonial India

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Survival, Resistance and Negotiation

Edited by

BISWAMOY PATI

Indian Council of Historical Research

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ADIVASIS IN COLONIAL INDIA

ORIENT BLACKSWAN PRIVATE LIMITED

Registered Office
3-6-752 Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029 (A.P.), INDIA
E-mail: centraloffice@orientblackswan.com

Other Offices
Bangalore, Bhopal, Bhubaneshwar, Chandigarh, Chennai,
Ernakulam, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kolkata, Lucknow,
Mumbai, New Delhi, Noida, Patna

© Indian Council of Historical Research 2011

First published by Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd. 2011

ISBN 978 81 250 4094 1

Lasertypeset in Giovanni Book 10/12
by Eleven Arts, Delhi

Printed in India at
Aegean Offset Printers
Greater Noida

Published by
Orient Blackswan Private Limited
1/24 Asaf Ali Road
New Delhi 110 002
E-mail: delhi@orientblackswan.com

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FOREWORD

The Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) brings before the readers the present collection of essays with a sense of satisfaction. The distinguished scholar who has edited this volume was requested by the ICHR to focus on the theme Adivasis in Indian History, when he guest-edited an issue of the *Indian Historical Review*. That special number of the journal was widely appreciated and hence it was decided to bring it out in the form of a book for a wider readership. There is another reason why I attach importance to this volume—this marks the resumption of ICHR monographs after many years. About ten monographs of this kind were published from the ICHR in the past from time to time, but it lacked continuity as a series. Moreover, no such monograph has been published in recent years.

It is now felt that there is a need for an ICHR Monograph Series in order to put together research contributions that possess a thematic focus—for instance, the output of conferences the ICHR organises, or specially commissioned books by authors, as well as articles selected from among those published in the *Indian Historical Review*. Since we have already handed over the technical management of the journal to Sage Publications, soon it may be redundant to reprint articles from the journal which are in demand, because these will be available online upon payment of a small subscription. However, this facility may not be widely available for a while in our country and it is expected that selected volumes in print such as this, will continue to be in demand. It is also eminently desirable that research in the form of conference papers or specially commissioned volumes should be published as early as possible. Hence, our decision to resume the publication of volumes like this in the form of the ICHR Monograph Series.

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I am grateful to Dr Biswamoy Pati who has edited this volume and written a perspicacious Introduction, and to the Member Secretary of the ICHR, Dr Ishrat Alam, who has ably piloted this project through the press. I would also like to thank Ms Hemlata Shankar as well as Ms Mimi Choudhury of Orient BlackSwan for their unstinted cooperation in producing the first publication in the new series of ICHR Monographs.

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya
Chairman, ICHR
General Editor, ICHR Monograph Series

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been the result of a collective effort and would not have been possible without the active support and cooperation of the contributors at every stage. At the publishers' end it was indeed a pleasure working with Ms Rinita Banerjee of Orient BlackSwan, who attended to the copyediting process very meticulously and with patience. I would also like to thank the Indian Council for Historical Research for taking this project under its 'Monograph Series'.

Biswamoy Pati

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Introduction
Situating the Adivasis in Colonial India*

Biswamoy Pati

Caught between myths and legends, the world of the tribals remains largely invisible. Of course, this cloak of invisibility gets unveiled during the terror campaigns that were/are directed to wipe them out, or during negotiations, as people who had to make sacrifices to sustain and legitimise the existence of brahminical Hinduism and its structure of exploitation. The case of the Pandavas, led by Krishna and Arjuna (and supported by *Agni*, the 'god of fire') who burnt the Khandava forests for seven days to build a beautiful palace, Mayasabha, can be cited as an example here. As modern readings of the Mahabharata suggest, this needs to be located as a metaphor to explain the process of clearing geographical spaces by the Aryans which saw the extermination of the tribal people. Thus, the reference to the Nagas (in the text) in this particular context has been cited as an example of the tribal people.[1] Also, the story of the resolution of the challenge faced by Arjuna, the 'greatest archer of his age', from Ekalavya (described variously as a tribal prince, of low caste) perhaps illustrates the second dimension. Thus, *guru* Dronacharya demanded Ekalavya's right thumb as his *guru dakshina*—since the latter had

*I am indebted to Archana Prasad for her inputs that enabled me to finalise this Introduction. I would also like to thank my M.A. (Final) Social History students (2009–10) at Delhi University for helping me to develop some of my arguments in the course of my interactions with them. We use the terms 'adivasi' and 'tribal' in this book fully conscious of the associated complications.

[1]See for example Irawati Karve, *Yuganta:The End of an Epic*, Hyderabad: Disha Books, 1999, pp. 106–9.

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accepted him as his guru, even though he had been spurned by Dronacharya, who had not accepted him formally as a pupil due to his non-Kshatriya (tribal/low caste) origins. Similarly, one needs to also keep in mind the legend related to King Indradyumna procuring *Nilamadhaba*, the 'god of the Sabaras', and its subsequent installation as the trinity of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra. This act needs to be perhaps seen not only in terms of stealing tribal gods, but also as a metaphor related to tapping forest resources and the incorporation of tribal belief systems by brahminical Hinduism, leading to the invention of what is known today as the 'cult' of Jagannatha.[2] Of course, seen in a broader perspective the parallels of such negotiations exist in some form or another in other contexts as well. Thus, it is impossible to miss the cowboy—a figure valorised in North American mass culture. Beyond reel life, it hardly needs to be stressed that the single most important activity of these real life 'heroes'/mercenaries of American history was to 'clear' the geographical spaces that were occupied by the indigenous people. Consequently, this book explores the shifts and change that tribals were to experience in colonial India. In this sense, it examines aspects associated with their survival, negotiations and resistance.

There have been serious debates among sociologists and social anthropologists about defining tribals. By the nineteenth century a 'tribe' came to be seen not only as a part of a particular type of society, but also a particular 'stage of evolution'. A closely related presumption was that the tribe was an isolated, self-contained and primitive social formation. In fact, the classic conquest/colonisation of North America and Australia served to reinforce such positions. Nevertheless, such arguments are difficult to sustain if one was to talk of the South Asian world, where interactions between the tribal/non-tribal people have a serious past.[3] Seen this way, it would be difficult to refer to the tribals in colonial India as indigenous people.

But then, how do we define adivasis? A typical post-modernist approach can locate them as 'colonial constructs'. Nevertheless,

[2]I am not comfortable with the usage of the term 'cult' since this is rooted in the assumption that validates brahminical Hinduism as a religion and all the other challenges and contestations that it faced and/or incorporated as 'cults'.

[3]See Andre Beteille, 'The Idea of Indigenous People', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1998, pp. 187–91; Virginius Xaxa, 'Tribes as Indigenous People of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 52, 1999, pp. 3589–95; and Bengt G. Karlsson, 'Anthropology and the "Indigenous Slot": Claims to and Debates about Indigenous Peoples' Status in India', *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2003, pp. 403–23.

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tribals were not just a creation, based on the fantasies of the colonial masters. They were very much a part of the South Asian reality at the time of India's colonisation. It is of course another matter that what is often labelled as colonial construction would not have been possible without the active participation and collaboration of the upper caste, brahminical order, at every stage of this knowledge production. It is here that one ought to keep in mind not only the race theories in the West but also their interactions with the pre-colonial ideas and institutions that existed in colonial India. Equally significant were the agrarian interventions and the way they impacted the process of production and the social structure. Consequently, one has to not only take into account the 'figment of the white man's imagination', but other complex nuances while studying tribal society.

SITUATING TRIBALS IN COLONIAL INDIA

The world of the tribals was not a monolithic one at the time of India's colonisation. However, the structure of stratification got reinforced significantly with the advent of colonialism, with its diverse interventions. This was precipitated by a set of complexities that ranged from the land settlements to the commercialisation of agriculture. Whereas historians have tended to stress the anti-colonial dimension, what needs to be also studied is the way the adivasi society negotiated with itself, along with the shifts and changes that it went through. The outward manifestations of this process were visible in the acts of resistance. However, the deeper implications need to be explored and researched.

In the nineteenth century, tribal society meant different things to different people. However, a point that seems to be a part of 'common sense' is that tribal society existed on the fringes of the sedentary peasant society. For the colonial rulers, the yardstick that determined how 'uncivilised'/'civilised' a particular tribal community was depended upon how for or close they were from the caste Hindu peasant society in relation to social and cultural practices and rituals. This served to be the rationale for the colonial officials to see them as 'wild' people who needed to be 'tamed' or 'civilised'. When it came to pastoralists, they were considered as 'wandering tribes' who needed to be 'settled'. The effort to survey the tribes led to descriptive accounts being written that highlighted their distinctive character.

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In colonial documents and *Census Reports* the tribal people were often classed as 'aborigines' and 'semi-Hinduised' people.

The stereotypes

The colonial officials and anthropologists were the pioneers who collected materials related to the lives of tribal people and documented these through descriptive accounts.[4] However, these documents they were based on the interactions with the brahminical order. Moreover, what might have started as a matter of curiosity did assume a serious dimension with the taking over of India by the Crown in 1858. This led to the beginning of a serious enterprise of acquiring knowledge in order to administer the tribals effectively—a process that was significantly reinforced during the census operations that were launched in the 1860s.[5] By the end of the nineteenth century, with the experience of four Census operations, the colonial officialdom could think of defining the tribe. Thus, as H. H. Risley put it:

> A tribe as we find in India is a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which as a rule does not denote any specific occupation; generally claiming common descent from a mythical or historical ancestor and occasionally from an animal, but in some parts of the country held together by the obligations of blood-feud than by the tradition of kinship; usually speaking the same language and occupying, professing, or claiming to occupy a definite tract of country. A tribe is not necessarily endogamous.[6]

What needs emphasis is the effort to in some way or another make the tribe definable, possibly for administrative reasons. One can also see in this the idea of classifying tribes and viewing them differently from caste. What is simultaneously observable is that the early descriptive efforts gradually lost their fluidities and got polarised to incorporate typical stereotypes like the 'brutal' and 'wild' tribals. Fuelled and reinforced by the pressures of increasing

[4]See for example E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1872, and E. Thurston, *Anthropology of the Todas and Kotas of the Nilgiri Hills*, Madras: Superintendent of Government Press, 1896.

[5]The First *Census Report* was completed in 1871–72.

[6]H. H. Risley, *Census of India, 1901*, vol. 1, part 1, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1903, p. 514.

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racism over the 1850s and 1940s, this colonial knowledge system drew upon diversities that ranged from scientists, ethnographers and medical theorists to colonial officials, travellers and fiction writers to justify and/or argue its positions.[7]

Certain typical aspects of colonial anthropology and classification strategy determined the way the tribal was constructed. Thus, it drew upon various facets that range from the glorification of the 'ancient people of the east' to emphasising the essentially 'brutal' and 'violent' nature of the tribals. Of course, certain elements like the image of the 'violent tribal' retain a level of unparalleled continuity. Colonial brutality associated with conquering the tribal tracts (or, jungle *mahals*, forested hills, etc. as they were called) were often justified on the basis of this image of the tribal. Interestingly, along with other aspects, it stressed their violent nature on the basis of the 'fact' that they were always 'armed'—viz. with sticks, pickaxes, or bows and arrows. What needs to be articulated here, is that these were as common as the pistols and guns carried by colonial officials while touring forests and mountains, or the books, papers and laptops carried by historians and anthropologis today. These ideas about the 'barbaric' and 'wild' tribes were also reinforced by sections of Indian people, given their fears and insecurities of the popular masses. Nothing illustrates it better than the writings of those who upheld and defended the upper caste/class order. As an example one could perhaps cite Fakirmohana Senapati (1843–1918), one of the most fascinating creative writers of Orissa. As the assistant manager of the princely state of Keonjhar, Senapati had crushed what is labelled as the 'Bhuyan *meli*' of Keonjhar (1891–92).[8] Along with upper caste/class Oriya memory virtually celebrating Fakirmohana's 'brain power' and this 'victory', one witnesses the development of stereotypical images associated with the Bhuyan tribals in the Oriya literary tracts since the early years of the twentieth century that drew upon this encounter.[9] Consequently, any scholarly effort to negotiate the world of the adivasis has to be

[7]Meena Radhakrisna, Vinita Damodaran and Satadru Sen explore some of these dimensions in this book.

[8]In fact, besides the participation of the Juangs, other non-tribal people of Keonjhar were largely sympathetic to it; besides, the *meli* attracted the state people of neighbouring states like Bonai, Singhbhum and Mayurbhanj.

[9]What needs emphasis here is the manner in which Fakirmohana describes the Bhuyans. See Fakirmohana Senapati, *Atma Jiban Charita*, first published 1927, Cuttack: Jagannatha Ratha, 1965, Chapter 19, where he describes them as 'born

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sensitive to see the process of terror that was unleashed by the colonial and the internal ruling classes. In fact, a closer look at the history of different tribal groups in the country shows us that the colonial attempt to define and classify the tribes and tribal societies often ignored the real life situation of the tribal people.

A classic example that perhaps illustrates the way in which tribals were stereotyped , is the following table from the Census of 1911, which shows the average life expectancy of the tribals and 'reveals' that the 'Hinduised' tribals lived longer than the non-Hinduised tribals.[10]

TABLE I

AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY OF TRIBALS:
CENSUS OF 1911

TRIBE	ANIMISTIC		HINDU	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Kandha	39	37	43	44
Munda	44	53	50	55
Santhal	37	57	55	42

Thus, the term 'animism' conjures typical aspects of colonial anthropology and its remarkable ability to create a serious knowledge system. The logic invoked is rooted in locating tribals in terms of how similar or different they were from caste Hindus, and to prove the 'logical superiority' of the latter—a point that is clearly proved by this table given above. Moreover, the method of reaching such a 'profound' conclusion is not outlined and one can easily see that the data is cited and organised to outline what seems to be a clearly subjective position of a colonial official.

Thus, the stereotypes associated with tribals are riddled with contradictions, ambiguities, fantasies and remarkable inventions

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trouble makers', who were 'hard-drinking', 'ignorant savages', 'cruel', 'vicious' and 'stupid'—these match the colonial stereotyping of the tribals. Equally significant is the manner in which this perception stabilised, with Oriya tracts like Keshab Chandra Mishra, *Bhuyan Jati*, Cuttack, 1925, London: India Office Library, and subsequent writings of scholars like Mayadhara Mansingh, *History of Oriya Literature*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademy, 1962, pp. 171–72, which reinforced these ideas.

[10]L. S. S. O'Malley, *Census of India, 1911, vol. V, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim Part I Report*, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat, 1913, p. 274.

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that tend to haunt our imagination even today. Moreover, one has to see shifts and changes in the development of these stereotypes which is the only way to understand and demystify how these influence scholarship. After all, one is told even today how the tribals 'love' shifting cultivation, about their food habits—that include 'delicacies' like white ants,[11] or that they prefer millets to rice in western Orissa, and the presence of categories like 'criminal tribes' that haunt our imagination even after more than six decades of independence. Unless seen in the context of colonial and internal class exploitation which marginalised them, such erroneous conclusions can be drawn, sometimes even by apparently sensitive and sympathetic scholars.

Besides, one needs to also bear in mind the ambiguities and areas of grey while drawing distinctions between the tribes and the outcastes.[12] A tribal group being identified as both an 'outcaste' and a 'tribe' is not an unusual find in several official reports and archival sources. Consequently, one has to be careful and be flexible about boundaries that seek to differentiate between the tribes and the outcastes. Similarly, it is not unusual for large groups of amorphous people to be labelled as a tribal community. The Malangis (of south eastern India) and Pindaris (of central India) could be cited as classic examples here.[13] The process of 'integration' that led to the incorporation of tribals into the brahminical order of caste needs to be grasped as well. Although projected as a 'harmonious' affair—which draws upon the method of colonial anthropology (of situating tribes in relation to the similarities/dissimilarities between them and brahminical caste society cited earlier)—this process was marked with complexities that ranged from brutal terror strikes that aimed to 'civilise the tribals' to sections of the latter in certain cases also opting to get incorporated. Here one has to be sensitive to see the process of conversions (that some scholars call 'integration')[14]—

[11]I am reminded about the comments of one of Orissa's ex-chief ministers who had made this remark when asked about the food crisis in Kalahandi in the 1990s.

[12]In fact, H. H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vols. I and II*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891, can be perhaps cited as an example where this aspect is visible.

[13]Meena Bhargava's chapter in this book refers to the Company 'inventing' the Malangis—who were salt labourers in Bengal—that classified a set of amorphous tribal people of diverse regions into one category.

[14]G. N. Dash, *Hindus and Tribals: Quest for Co-Existence*, New Delhi: Decent Books, 1998, refers to the absorption of tribals. He over-emphasises the 'openness' of the caste system and the dimensions of terror accompanying this process.

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predominantly to brahminical Hinduism—a phenomenon that we would return to later.

The terms 'tribal' as well as 'adivasi' (ancient people) need to be substantially clarified to situate large sections of people like the Nagas, Chakmas, Bhils, Dangs, Koyas, Todas, Paniyas, Kondareddis, Mundas, Kandhas or Santals. The term 'adivasi', or 'tribal' used in this book is used to describe people who have distinct identities in terms of language, cultural bonds and religion, including a certain commonness in terms of their economic life, which represents a significant degree of marginalisation. As can be seen, this effort to define tribes does not preclude features such as internal social differentiation and conflicts. One needs to also bear in mind that colonial India did have large sections of the population that were forest-dependent, but they were simultaneously involved with other activities, which included agriculture. This particular aspect needs to be located in terms of its transitory logic that was premised on contradictory pressures. Thus, over the nineteenth century the tribals were increasingly exposed to the twin pressures of growing encroachments on forests and the loss of land, brought about by the zamindar-sahukar-sarkar nexus that was based on exploitation and cradled and defended by the legal and administrative systems introduced by colonialism. This implied a context that destabilised the agricultural systems of different tribal communities. In fact, a phenomenon that needs serious enquiry is the nature of the agricultural practices that remained transitory, caught as they were between shifting cultivation and forms of settled agriculture.

COLONIAL INTERVENTIONS AND TRIBAL SOCIETY: LAND SETTLEMENTS AND THE EXPANSION OF CULTIVATION

Although marked by diversities, the impact generated by colonialism on the world of the tribals was increasingly felt by the second half of the nineteenth century in a significant manner. The colonial regime started the process of recording land rights in tribal areas, often giving an individual farmer the right of cultivation. In most cases the effort was to make a direct relationship between the farmer and the state. This impacted tribal societies in three ways. First, in many tribal societies, especially those practicing *jhum*, there was no

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individual ownership of land. Land was owned by clans as in the case of the *khuntkatti* system of Chotanagpur or village councils in the Garo and Khasi hills of the North East. Since jhum was banned under the forest laws, the right to land for jhum cultivators was not recognised. Secondly, though the rights of the tribal peasants were recognised, the increasing burden of taxes led to their increasing indebtedness. Finally, the British policy also tried to expand plough cultivation in areas where jhum was being done earlier. But the promotion of the plough was not very successful as it did not suit the environment in which it was being introduced. This again led to the impoverishment of the ordinary jhum cultivator as they could not successfully take up the plough.

There was also large-scale interference in the forests by the administrative system established by the British. The fact that they sought to regulate, control and tap the forest resources, undermined the administrative and economic position of the tribal chiefs in their own territories, with village level institutions losing their powers when it came to controlling land and forests. In some parts of the Bengal Presidency, especially in areas that had the Permanent Settlement—like Orissa and south Bihar—some of the relatively privileged tribal chiefs were incorporated through the land settlements and brahminical Hinduism's caste system as 'tributary chiefs' (princes) and zamindars, along with sections who were 'outsiders' and who were settled as zamindars. These princes and zamindars emerged as the support base of British colonialism. Besides ensuring a steady inflow of resources in the form of tribute they paid to the colonial government out of the rents they extracted from the tribals (and the settled agriculturalists), it also served to draw on the resources and administer the inaccessible forest tracts.

Alongside, one has to also focus on crucial features associated with certain problems within adivasi society and the household. These ranged from the imposition of restrictions through forest laws (for instance the undermining of the medicinal system and the manufacture of liquor), to the resistance to women getting land rights which in turn led to patriarchy attempting to re-assert itself and the increase in witch-hunting/witchcraft.[15] Another dimension that needs to be articulated at this point is the emergence of affluent sections of tribals being settled through land settlements, as a result

[15]In fact, Shashank S. Sinha's chapter in this book focuses on this aspect.

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of colonisation.[16] This impacted agricultural practices and production. Besides, the Hinduisation of tribes (discussed earlier), with many among these sections getting incorporated into the brahminical order, it also meant the emergence of internal exploiters in the form of landlords and moneylenders from among erstwhile tribal communities. This particular aspect needs to be borne in mind while negotiating terms like *dikus* (or outsiders) in tribal areas, which some historians do not take into account seriously. After all, we should not miss the insider dikus.[17]

Consequently, one has to go way beyond the colonial/anti-colonial theme to explore the fascinating areas of social history. This would not only enable us to see a holistic picture without romanticising anything, but also direct scholarly attention towards analysing the scope and the basis of the apparent anti-colonial 'outbursts' more effectively. At the same time, a social historian cannot but observe a pattern of distinct continuities between the colonial and post-colonial. For the magnitude and the level of barbarism inflicted on the world of the adivasis—given its polarised class content—is in many ways more ruthless in this post-modern twenty-first century.

Forms of tribal existence

Jhum and Shifting Cultivators

By the middle of the nineteenth century, tribal societies had a diverse social and economic organisation. Nevertheless, one can identify certain commonalities. One can mention here the method of shifting cultivation—variously called jhum, *bewar*, *dunger* and *podu*—which marked them out as different from those who used the plough. Most shifting cultivators confined their activities—based on the use of the pickaxe and the hoe—to small patches of land, that they had cleared inside the forests. After harvesting the produce they shifted their activity to another patch that they cleared, to

[16]See for instance, P. P. Mahapatra, 'Class Conflict and Agrarian Regimes in Chotanagpur, 1860–1950', *Indian Economic Social History Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1991. It acknowledges how the British transformed many tribal chiefs into zamindars, p. 22.

[17]Sitakanta Mahapatra, 'The Insider Diku: Boundary Rules and Marginal Man in Santhal Society', in *Tribal Problems of Today and Tomorrow*, ed. P. C. Mahapatra and D. Panda, Bhubaneshwar: Sabari Cultural Society, 1980, pp. 2–3. He points to this problem as a result of, among other things, the growth of a market economy and differentiation in terms of wealth.

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return only when the forest cover reappeared in the original patch, thereby maintaining a cycle of some years. These shifting cultivators were mainly found in the hilly and forested tracts of north, east and central India. The basic prerequisites involved free access and mobility within the forests.

An attempt to focus on the agricultural cycle of shifting cultivation, *bewar* has been outlined by Archana Prasad. As she puts it:

TABLE II[18]

THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE UNDER *BEWAR*

INDIAN CALENDAR	ENGLISH CALENDAR	NATURE OF WORK
Chait	March–April	Clearing of undergrowth and large trees
Baisakh	April–May	Firing of bewar field
Jeth	May–June	Broadcasting of seeds
Asadh	June–July	Men work in the fields
Sawan	July–August	Men work in the fields
Bhadon	August–September	Men work in fields
Kuar	September–October	Beans ripen and are harvested
Kartik	October–November	Kodon and kutki ripen
Aghan	November–December	All crops are harvested
Pus	December–January	Winnowing takes place
Magh	January–February	Shift to new bewar fields
Phagun	February–March	Mostly festival time

In fact Prasad correctly asserts that scholarship on the Baigas tend to take hunting and gathering as auxiliary or supplementary activities. While emphasising that shifting cultivation would be unsustainable without hunting and gathering, she delineates that these need to be located as essential aspects of 'seasonal survival'.[19]

Hunters and Gatherers

There were also the hunters and the gatherers of forest produce in several parts of the country. The forests were seen by many tribal

[18]Archana Prasad, *Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the Making of an Anti-Modern Tribal Identity*, New Delhi: Three Essays, 2003, pp. 39–40.

[19]Prasad, *Against Ecological Romanticism*, p. 40.

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groups as essential for fulfilling their basic needs. For example the Khonds and Santals of Orissa did their ritual hunt in the forests and divided the meat between the hunters. They also depended on forest produce like fruits and roots (e.g., *kandha-mula*; mula means root which is a type of sweet potato, the name of which seems to have been derived from the Kandhas) for their medicines.[20] These tribal communities also sold forest produce including lacquer and ingredients to produce dyes in the local market, and in turn bought essential commodities like rice and other grains, salt and oil. Given the absence of land and money in their hands they normally depended on a system of exchange (barter) that pushed them closer to the exploitative traders. This particular problem assumed alarming proportions in a context that was marked by increasing monetisation. Thus, tribals worked in exchange of money to meet their needs, leading to the rise of the bonded labour system. This could mean that three generations of a family would be required to pay back a paltry amount of money that had been borrowed by the grandfather of the generation that was still repaying it. Besides the stabilisation of the new system threatened to change the lives of many tribal communities like the Baigas (of Central India) who considered agricultural labour as a job that was below one's dignity, since they looked at the forest as an important source of survival.

Pastoralists and Herders

Another kind of tribal society was that of the pastoralists and the herders like the Van Gujjars of the Punjab hill states or Gujarat, or the Lambadis of Andhra Pradesh who visited the forests and the pasturelands seasonally. They not only concentrated on animal husbandry, but also traded in grains and other products with those who lived in the forests. The stability of their survival system depended on their movement between forests, pastures and land resources.

Tribal Society and Settled Cultivation

As mentioned earlier, colonialism and its administrative agencies saw the logic of civilisation among the tribes in terms of their

[20]See David Hardiman's chapter 'Knowledge of the Bhils and their Systems of Healing', in this collection.

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proximity to settled agriculture. In fact, the work culture of colonial capitalism favoured some tribes like the Binjhals, Gonds or Santals who owned land and cultivated it with the plough. They were considered as being more advanced in their way of life and therefore 'semi-Hinduised'. In fact, a conscious policy seems to have been followed in some princely states like Kalahandi during the mid-nineteenth century to encourage and settle the Kultas to increase agricultural production, since they were found to be more enterprising than the Kandhas. What was never taken into account was that the Kandhas were not used to settled agricultural practices and this comparison with the more 'dynamic' Kultas was rather unfair. In many cases, however, what is never mentioned is that tribals were pushed into the hilly interiors after clearing the lands on which they had already practiced settled agriculture. Consequently, although one can see diverse forms of survival practices among the tribals, most of them were also forest-dependent. One needs to be cautious about not seeing these as three different or autonomous worlds outlined by us. In fact, it would be perhaps best to locate them holistically in a transitory context that was marked by the footprints of fluidity.

Besides, one can see the emergence of a system of exploitation that comprised two inter-linked structures imposed by colonialism and the internal exploiters, that included the zamindars and moneylenders. The following Baiga song perhaps depicts the manner in which the process of colonialism impacted the tribals:[21]

In this land of the English, how hard it is to live
how hard it is to live.
In the village sits the landlord
In the gate sits the Kotwar
In the garden sits the Patwari
In the field sits the government
In this land of the English how hard it is to live.
To pay cattle tax we have to sell cows
To pay forest tax we have to sell buffaloes
To pay land tax we have to sell bullocks
How are we to get our food?
In this land of the English....

[21]Cited in Verrier Elwin and Shamrao Hivale, *Songs of the Maikal Hills*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1944, p. 316.

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Similarly, the following Kol song tells us the problems they faced from the zamindars:[22]

Alas! under [the grind of] forced labour
Blood trickles from my shoulders
Day and night the emissary from the zamindars,
Annoys and irritates me, day and night I groan
Alas! This is my condition
I do not have a home, where shall I get happiness?
Alas!

Forest Laws and their Impact

Another major factor that impacted tribal societies was the changing nature of forest management in the colonial period. The British declared total ownership of all forest lands and established a system of reserved forests where people were not allowed to freely move around in the forests, practice shifting cultivation or gather forest produce. This had a negative impact on the lives of the pastoralists, jhum cultivators and hunters and gatherers who depended on free movement inside the forests for their livelihood. They were forced to move from such areas and go into other areas in search of work and livelihood—a process that is called migration. But the nature of forest management was such that the British were forced to depend on tribal labour for doing work in the forests—since disallowing the tribal people from living inside the forest meant losing out on those who could work for them inside the forest. This also meant losing the people who had far better knowledge about the forests having lived there for decades as compared to the colonists who had just arrived. Thus, the British were forced to create a system where they gave the jhum cultivators a few patches to cultivate land on in their forests, but only on the condition that they would provide labour to the forest department and nurture the forests so that they could grow their crops to the fullest extent. The villages which were established by the forest department inside the reserved forests for the purpose of providing cheap labour to the British rulers were known as forest villages. The tribal people responded by protesting against the forest laws in instances such as Songram Sangma's revolt (1906) in Assam and the forest Satyagraha (1930) in Chotanagpur and the Central Provinces.

[22]K. S. Singh, *Birsa Munda and His Movement: A Study of Millenarian Movement in Chota Nagpur, 1874–1901*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002, p. 4.

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Traders and Markets

One of the most important impacts of the British rule was the increasing control of the daily life of the tribal people by factors that were external to their existence—colonialism, landlords/moneylenders and middlemen. With the negative effect of the measures described above the tribal people became more and more dependent on casual labour and gathering forest produce for the market. Besides, the fluctuations in prices that were manipulated meant that food grain prices were lowest immediately after the harvest, and dearest immediately before the harvest. For instance, in the princely state of Kalahandi, the price of rice fluctuated between 12.130 kg and 16.800 kg per rupee and that of *mandia* (millet) between 20.527 kg and 29.857 kg per rupee in 1912. Similarly, the price of rice rose from 18.660 kg per rupee in September 1918 to 8.864 kg per rupee in March 1919, and that of mandia rose from 23.325 kg per rupee in April 1918 to 11.662 kg per rupee in March 1919. Local factors like rumours often spread by middlemen about impending scarcity as well as general features affecting the colonial economy (viz. the First World War and the 'Great Depression') also reinforced the problem, forcing the tribals to take loans.[23] Elsewhere in the Central Provinces, one also comes across the issue the market networks that created problems for the Baigas. For example, this meant walking long distances and hence the Baigas were compelled to sell lac at prices that were agreed upon by the Lakheras or artisans, who moulded lac and who were superior to the Baigas in terms of the existing social hierarchy.[24]

SHIFTING IDENTITIES AND CONVERSIONS

While studying the tribals in colonial India one has to take into account the world of shifting identities[25] and negotiations, where both contests and incorporations assume importance. In fact, the

[23]Nilamani Senapati and D. C. Kumar, *Orissa District Gazetteers: Kalahandi*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1980, pp. 229–31; J. Das, *Final Report of the Land Revenue Settlement in Kalahandi District Ex-State Khalsa Area 1945–56*, Berhampur: India Law Publication Press, 1962, p. 3; *Report on the Administration of Kalahandi for 1933–34*, Kalahandi: Kalahandi State Press, p. 16.

[24]Prasad, *Against Ecological Romanticism*, p. 50.

[25]Sanjukta Das Gupta's chapter in this book examines problems related to tribal identity, focusing on the Hos of Chotanagpur.

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question of the 'integration' of tribals is again a debatable area, if one takes into account the violence and terror that often accompanied such drives. Amidst the debates and many controversies what is normally missed is their conversion into the brahminical order since they were/are not Hindus. This had its specificities in the context of both colonial India as well as the world of the tribes. Besides, unlike what seems to be the received wisdom, brahminical Hinduism did convert and incorporate tribes. One has to of course emphasise here that many tribals also chose to convert.

This complex process of conversion seems to be missed out even by leading anthropologists like F. G. Bailey. For instance, while referring to Oriya migrants to the Kandha hills (in Orissa), he puts forth that in the 1950s, Oriyas were about 3 in every 8 of the population. He feels that they were probably fewer at the beginning of the century.[26] Although the question of Oriya migrants cannot be disputed, Bailey fails to even conceptualise their emergence from among the Kandhas itself. In fact, the problem of binarising the hillman/plainsman is a feature that also haunts historians.[27] What needs to be also borne in mind are the fluidities associated with a complexity where 'Oriyas' (viz. castes), besides being migrants into this area, also emerged from among the adivasis in the (pre-colonial and) colonial period. Thus, castes like the Warrior caste that Bailey refers to (viz. Paikas or Khandayats) also emerged from among the Kandhas and other adivasi groups. This in fact illustrates the process of conversions of adivasis. His reference to the increasing population of the 'Oriyas' in the Kandha hills should also be seen as an extension of this process that was perhaps 'happening' even while Bailey was doing his fieldwork in the area.[28] One could illustrate this point by

[26]F. G. Bailey, *The Civility of Indifference: On Domesticating Ethnicity*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 3.

[27]One can cite here David Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: the Gudem-Rampa Risings, 1839–1924', in *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History & Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha, New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1982, p. 88–142.

[28]For details related to the pre-colonial roots of this phenomenon see Hermann Kulke, 'Kshatriyaisation and Social Change: A Study in Orissa Setting', in *Aspects of Change in India: Studies in Honour of Prof. G. S. Ghurye*, ed. S. D. Pillai, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976. This focuses on the issue of Kshatriyaisation in the context of medieval Orissa and extends its relevance upto the seventeenth-eighteenth century AD. He emphasises this as more useful/relevant than Brahminisation and the functional reality. Also see, Surajit Sinha, 'State Formation and the Rajput Myth in

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citing the census data we have for some parts of Orissa, which shows a decline of the tribal population.

TABLE III[29]

DECLINE OF TRIBAL POPULATION IN NILGIRI, DHENKANAL AND RANPUR, 1881–1891

PRINCELY	VARIATION OF TRIBAL POPULATION	VARIATION OF STATE TOTAL POPULATION	
	1881–91	1881	1891
Nilgiri	–4,356	50,972	56,198
Dhenkanal	–70,305	208,316	238,285
Ranpur	–2,093	36,539	40,115

TABLE IV[30]

DECLINE OF TRIBAL POPULATION IN SAMBALPUR, 1881–1891
SAMBALPUR

YEAR	POPULATION OF THOSE RETURNED AS 'ANIMISTS'	VARIATION IN TOTAL POPULATION
1881	46,652	554,165
1891	29,353	618,825

Central India', in *The State in India, 1000–1700*, ed. Hermann Kulke, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 335. He feels that the diffusion of the Rajput model of the state and the indigenous developmental processes could gain ground only among those tribal groups who had attained the technological level of settled agriculture. Thus, as he puts it, we do not find shifting cultivating groups like the Juangs or the Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa developing a kingship supported mainly by their primitive technique of cultivation. However, he makes it clear that it was not essential for the use of the plough to determine the rise of kingship. Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1991*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 110–16, also refers to certain aspects of 'Rajputisation' affecting some of the adivasi communities.

[29]This table is based on C. J. O'Donnel, *Census of the Lower Provinces of Bengal 1891: The Provincial Tables*, Bengal Secretariat Press: Calcutta, 1893, pp. 101–3; W. G. Lacey, *Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa, Vol. VII. Part II*, Tables, Patna: Superintendent Government Printing, 1933, p. 4.

[30]This table is based on L. S. S. O'Malley, *District Gazetteers: Sambalpur*, Patna: Superintendent of Government Press, 1932, p. 218; Lacey, *Census 1931, Part II*, p. 4.

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TABLE V[31]

IN TRIBAL POPULATION IN KORAPUT, 1931–1941

VARIATIONS IN THE POPULATION OF SOME TRIBES IN THE KORAPUT DISTRICT		VARIATIONS IN THE TOTAL POPULATION OF THE KORAPUT DISTRICT	
	1931–41	1931	1941
Savara	–4,807	9,49,652	11,27,862
Jatapu	–37,961		

Consequently, along with other features (viz. migrations), the decline of the tribal population needs to be also taken as an index to explain the magnitude of this process of Hinduisation.[32] One needs to also mention here the manner in which some tribals like the Kandhas of Ranpur articulated this phenomenon when they preferred to be recognised as 'Oriya Kandhas.'[33]

This process was accompanied by simultaneously hierarchising the tribes (and outcastes). Thus, references to two types of Kandhas—the 'open country' Kandhas and the *pahariah* (hilly) Kandhas of Kalahandi (in 1856) can be cited as typical examples to illustrate this point.[34] Consequently, the shifts and changes introduced by colonialism, especially the agrarian interventions both reinforced and polarised this process that had pre-colonial roots and saw sections of the affluent adivasis opting to get incorporated as well. This process saw the incorporation of caste hierarchies in tribal cultures and the 'othering' of low outcastes like Dhobis and Barbers. At the same time, it was not restricted to only those tribals who had been converted to and incorporated by brahminical Hinduism. Apart from this, one also witnesses the 'othering' of women. Closely connected to the changes in the political economy of the region was the introduction of property relations through land settlements,

[31]R. C. S. Bell, *Census of India, 1941, Vol. XI, Orissa Tables*, Simla: Manager of Publication, 1942, p. 7 and 27.

[32]One must also mention here that we have chosen to highlight typical examples to focus on the decline of the tribal population, and that this process was marked by a degree of unevenness. Thus, in many areas the tribal population had increased.

[33]G. N. Singh, *Final Report on the Original Survey and Settlement Operations of the Ranpur Ex-State Area in the District of Puri*, Berhampur: Sarada Press, 1963, p. 10.

[34]Elliot's Report on Kalahandi State, 28 July 1856, cited as a 'Supplement' in Senapati and Kuanr, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, pp. 457–82.

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which simultaneously reinforced patriarchy. This was reflected in an increase in the incidents of witchcraft/witch-hunting, especially since the 1850s among the Santals and Mundas.[35]

At the same time, tribal conversions to Christianity need to be taken very seriously. The Oraons, for example, felt that Christianity protected them from the witches and *bhoots*, who were powerless against this system (viz. Christianity).[36] This needs to be seen as metaphors for deeper processes that expressed the agony of displacements, which saw tribals loosing land to Hindu settlers. It was perhaps this phenomenon that led to the conversions of the Mundas to Christianity in Chotanagpur. The missionaries helped them petition to the colonial government against the exploitative practices of the zamindars, and the latter retaliated by attacking churches. However, far from being an unchanging site of conflict, shifts are observable here. Thus, by the time Birsa Munda got involved with the movement in 1895, the Mundas identified the zamindars, moneylenders, dikus, as well as the missionaries and colonialism as their exploiters.[37]

MIGRATIONS AND REBELLIONS

Simultaneously, one needs to also grapple with issues like dispossession and migration, and the process of politicisation and resistance. Colonialism reinforced the problem of dispossession in an unprecedented manner, precipitating large scale migrations. Whereas it would be wrong to argue that tribes did not migrate in pre-colonial India, the nature and form of these migrations changed with the 'development' of colonial capitalism as well as the global

[35]See Shashank S. Sinha, *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating Tribes in Gender Studies*, Kolkata: Stree, 2005; in fact, his doctoral research on 'Adivasis and Witchcraft in Chotanagpur, 1850s–1950s', Department of History, Delhi University, 2010, brings to light fascinating aspects related to this dimension.

[36]Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 247.

[37]Mahapatra sees '[t]he movement towards Christianity ... [as] a part of the larger class struggle that raged during the period [1885–90]' among the Mundas and the Oraons; see Mahapatra, 'Class Conflict and Agrarian Regimes in Chotanagpur, p. 34. Besides, the problem of social differentiation among tribal communities that makes it difficult to see these in terms of 'class struggle', what needs emphasis is the shifting nature of this conflict as one proceeds towards the closing years of the nineteenth century.

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needs of labour. The following folk poem articulates the miseries involved in this process. Of course, the elements of protest can hardly be missed:[38]

This little finger said,
'Mother, I'm hungry.'
The next finger asked,
'How can we get food?'
The middle finger said,
'We'll borrow'
The index finger said,
'How can we pay it back?'
The big thumb said,
'We'll eat, drink and leave the country.'

What needs emphasis is that migrations, or even rebellions, apart from being strategies for survival for the tribals, were the last resort for them, when driven to the wall. In this context we see tribal migrations to mines, tea plantations and the factories that developed under the aegis of colonial capitalism, including the sector owned by the Indian capitalist class (like the one at Jamshedpur established over 1908–11). One needs to keep in mind here the racialised notions of the 'hard working' tribal which meant the preference for and the intensive exploitation of the migrant tribal labourers.[39] This also meant external migrations to places like Fiji, Mauritius and Natal. Needless to say, the situation in these places was even more traumatic since the tribal migrants were exposed to ruthless exploitation. As an ongoing research project related to Indian migrant labourers to Natal shows, external migrations were deeply impacted by the racialised notions mentioned earlier. This implied a preference for the 'hard working' tribes, who constituted as much as forty per cent of those who were recruited as migrant labourers. The development of plantation labour developed in a context that saw the 'formal' abolition of slavery, but simultaneously saw the invention of a new system of bondage driven by ruthless exploitation. In addition to this, the non-payment/payment of low

[38]Prafulla Mohanty, *Indian Village Tales*, London: Davis-Poynter, 1975, p. 21.

[39]Nitin Varma's chapter in this book focuses on the ruthless exploitation of the tribal migrants from the Madras Presidency, Central Provinces and Chotanagpur in the tea plantations of Assam.

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wages created a situation which meant that the migrants could not afford to return back even after the 'contract' period ended. It was a situation of helplessness that disallowed a sense of freedom they were entitled to.[40] Consequently, migrations—internal or external—were hardly a soluton to the problems faced by the tribal migrants.

Of course, we also witness the efforts of the adivasis to confront a reality that was increasingly threatening to obliterate them. This meant devising various methods to survive, day-to-day forms of resistance, as well as large-scale rebellions.[41] Talking about major tribal rebellions, these included the 'Kol rebellion' (Chotanagpur, 1855), the 1857 Rebellion and uprisings among the Mundas, leading upto the one that is labelled as the 'Birsa Munda rebellion' we have already mentioned earlier. These were precipitated by a combination of diverse factors (discussed earlier) that caused resentment and anger among the tribals. Moreover, the nature of these rebellions need to be seen holistically, along with the shifts and changes over the 1850s and 1940s.[42] The tribals envisaged a just and fair order and drew upon notions of a 'moral economy' and the erosion of customary rights, increasing pressures and exploitation by a host of adversaries that included the zamindars, sahukars, colonialism and also the dikus. Nevertheless, what can be observed is that these were marked by a significant degree of inconsistency over the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, some of these, while challenging imperialism, were clearly associated with the landed sections and the zamindars, as in the case of the adivasi rebellions during the 1857 Rebellion in Chotanagpur or western Orissa.[43] A few others too, drew upon the support of the missionaries

[40]Madhavi Jha's research on 'Re-contextualising Women, Sexuality and Marriage Laws in Natal, 1860–1911, M.Phil. Department of History, Delhi University, 2010 highlights significant dimensions to this relatively unknown area.

[41]While B. Pati's chapter in this book unravels aspects of survival as a strategy of resistance, Uwe Skoda's focuses on a tribal rebellion in the princely state of Bonai in Orissa. To get a general picture of the tribal rebellions over the 1850s and 1940s, see B. Pati, 'Popular Struggles and the Movements: 1857–1947', in *Perspectives on Indian History, Vol. III*, ed. K. N. Panikkar, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan (forthcoming).

[42]See Kathleen Gough, 'Indian Peasant Uprisings', in *Peasant Struggles in India*, ed. A. R. Desai, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 94 (85–126).

[43]For details see Shashank S. Sinha, '1857 and the Adivasis of Chotanagpur', Sanjukta Das Gupta, 'Remembering Gonoo: The Profile of an Adivasi Rebel of 1857 and B. Pati, 'Beyond Colonial Mapping: Common People, Fuzzy Boundaries and the Rebellion of 1857', in *The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India: Exploring Transgressions, Contests and Diversities*, ed. Biswamoy Pati, Oxford: Routledge, 2010.

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and colonialism, like in the early phase of the 'Munda Rebellion', as we have seen. On the basis of their experiences with their struggles, the adivasis learnt to distinguish between their 'friends' and their 'adversaries'. Therefore, by the time Birsa got involved with the movement, the adivasis directed their anger against the imperialists and the missionaries, along with their immediate/internal exploiters (including the dikus), even as they sought to widen their support base by uniting with the Kols. Of course here, what also needs mention is that some of the tribal movements (including those that had a considerable outcaste following) 'otherised' low/outcastes and even Muslims.[44]

As is evident, the adivasi movements were not bound by what some historians like Ranajit Guha call 'territoriality'. Nothing illustrates it better than the 1857 Rebellion itself. In fact, instances of such transgressions are visible in Chotanagpur and western Orissa. One also needs to appreciate their inclusive character. Thus, in the case of the Birsa Movement, one witnesses a distinct level of solidarity among different tribal communities as well as the support of the economically marginal non-tribals. One needs to also clarify the concept of the diku, or outsider. It included internal exploiters like the moneylenders as well as the zamindars, some of whom had tribal social origins and who exploited the tribals. A closely related position is that of David Arnold, who refers to the 'hillmen/plainsmen' dichotomy related to the Gudem-Rampa *fituris* (viz. rebellion).[45] Nevertheless, if one keeps in mind the tribal social

[44]A classic nineteenth century example would be the Mahima movement that developed around mid-nineteenth century Orissa. It saw the involvement of tribals and had a major outcaste following. Nevertheless, after the initial phase it 'otherised' both Barbers and the Washerfolk. This trend of the adivasi movements 'otherising' other marginal social groups has a long history—a history that has often been misunderstood. For instance, see Tanika Sarkar, 'Jitu Santal's Movement in Malda, 1924–1932: A Study in Tribal Protest', in *Subaltern Studies IV*, ed. Ranajit Guha, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 163. She attributes this phenomenon to 'his [viz. the Santal's] indigenous code of belief'. Such a position fails to comprehend the power of brahminical Hinduism and its interactions with adivasi society (that was transformed by social differentiation *within* tribal society), and the distinct footprints of the Congress and the 'Mahatma' on the world of the adivasis. In fact, if seen critically, the sources cited by Sarkar would unravel a different picture of the marginal Santal share-croppers who dreamt of an exclusive order during their rebellion, which had no place for Muslims, Doms and Chamars who were outcastes, along with their exploiters.

[45]David Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem and Rampa Risings 1839–

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origins of some of the dikus this method of dichotomising the people from the hills and the plains cannot be sustained. Moreover, the fact that the 1857 Rebellion in the hills of Orissa saw tribals and outcastes uniting with sepoys, can be cited as an example to refute Arnold's formulation.

The interaction with colonial modernity should be also taken into account while discussing adivasis in colonial India. We have already mentioned the manner in which Christianity perhaps acquired a new meaning in a colonial context. Here one has to also bear in mind the onslaughts launched by the missionaries on the caste system. This seems to have made many tribals see colonialism as a system that offered possibilities of equality. Of course, what is indeed striking is the manner in which the tribals seem to have virtually transformed it to invent equality that was neither there in their society nor accorded by Christianity or the missionaries, or colonialism. Interestingly this served to fight the oppressive feudal and colonial order that included the missionaries after a point of time. It also saw tribals like Dharanidhara, a Bhuyan rebel leader of Keonjhar (a princely state of Orissa) leading a meli (1891–92) which drew upon ideas that were impacted by the dialectics of colonial modernity, and which contested feudal exploitation and also confronted colonialism.[46]

The mass movements led by the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi did attempt to make breaks. Thus, inclusive politics did to a certain extent see the involvement of tribals in the three mass movements over the 1920–43 period—viz. the Non Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement. These were precipitated by the non-resolution of the problems faced by the tribals and can be traced back in many ways to the nineteenth century. Interestingly, the Gandhian strategy of leaving *swaraj* largely undefined meant that the tribals could relate to it on the basis of many of their unresolved problems. At the same time, the bourgeois leadership of the Congress which had strong links with land was not interested in a resolution of the problems affecting the tribals. Consequently, one observes the continuation of struggles by the tribals

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1924', in *Subaltern Studies, Vol. I*, ed. R. Guha, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 88–142.

[46]For details related to Dharanidhara see B. Pati, 'The High: Low Dialectic in Fakirmohana's *Chamana Athagutha*, Popular Culture, Literature and Society in Nineteenth Century Orissa', in *Situating Social History, Orissa, 1800–1998*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001, pp. 45–46.

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related to the reassertion of customary rights and the problem posed by displacements and moneylenders, which developed in the course of the three mass movements. It hardly needs to be emphasised that these were based on the popular perceptions and interpretations of the struggle for swaraj. These perhaps formed the basis of what led to the large-scale involvement and participation of tribals in the three mass movements.

The birth of the Kisan Sabha (1936) and the rise of the militant Prajamandal movements (especially from 1938) in some of the princely states provided alternative possibilities.[47] This saw renewed efforts to take up many of the issues affecting the tribals that had not been resolved by the Congress-led mass movements. What resulted were powerful movements that often united the tribals with sections of the non-tribal rural poor. Thus, the Nilgiri (a princely state in Orissa) Prajamandal took up the problems affecting the tribals specifically in 1939. This included the question of minimum wages as well as the standardisation of the measurements (since the sahukars gave loans in small—Laxman—*gaunis* and expected these to be returned in big—Ram—gaunis). These demands surfaced once the *durbar*'s strength had been thoroughly undermined and specifically involved the exploitation of the tribals by the relatively affluent sections of peasants who employed wage labourers and the moneylenders, since Nilgiri did not have any big landlords.[48] Similarly, the struggle of the Varli tribals in Maharashtra (1945–47) saw the imaginative incorporation of class and gender issues, even as they contested colonialism.[49]

Here one can also mention some of the large-scale peasant movements that saw a serious involvement of the tribals, like the Tebhaga movement, the Telengana movement and the Tripura Prajamandal movement.[50] The Tebhaga movement of undivided

[47]See M. A. Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1974, for details.

[48]In fact, the sahukars manipulated the *gaunis* to exploit the tribals. Thus, while they gave loans (of grain) in Laxman gaunis, they took these back in the 'big' Ram gaunis—Lord Ram being the elder brother of Laxman; for details see B. Pati, *Resisting Domination: Peasants, Tribals and the National Movement in Orissa, 1920–1950*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1993, p. 115.

[49]For details see S. V. Parulekar, *Revolt of the Varlis*, Bombay: Peoples Publishing House, 1947.

[50]Archana Prasad's chapter in this book explores the transition of tribal resistance from the early years of the twentieth century, through the mass

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Bengal (1946–47) included landless tribals, who were sharecroppers and nearly five million poor peasants (including tribals), who belonged to parts of fifteen out of the twenty districts. It was perhaps the most militant and broad-based class struggle witnessed in the Bengal countryside upto this point of time. The Tebhaga movement demanded that the *bargadar* (sharecropper) retained two-thirds of the produce (and surrendered one-third of it to the *jotedar*, or the landowner). The effort by the Muslim League Ministry to smoothen things through legislation in January 1947 led to the calling off of the movement, although it failed to act on it.

The Telengana movement began in September 1946 and developed as a struggle against the feudal autocracy of the Nizam of Hyderabad.[51] In his famous announcement of 3 June 1947, Lord Mountbatten declared the British intention of quitting India on 15 August that year. Soon after this, the Nizam of Hyderabad issued a *firman* (order) staking a claim to 'independence' once British paramountcy had lapsed. He made clear Hyderabad's intention of acceding neither to India nor to Pakistan. The Telengana movement went through two stages—the first stage when it challenged the might of the feudal state, and, subsequently after independence, when it had to face the combined might of the Union government and the state government of Hyderabad (viz. 1947 to 1951, when it was called off).

The Telengana movement saw the participation of tribals and peasants of about 3,000 villages, covering around 3 million people in an area of about 16,000 sq. km. which included three districts. The hated landlords—the pillars of autocracy at the village level—were driven away and *gram raj* was set up. Some of the aspirations of the tribals and poor peasants were actualised. This included the distribution of about a million acres of land among the landless tribals and peasants, stopping all evictions, forced labour, usury (stopping or drastically cutting it), increasing the daily wages of agricultural labourers, enforcing a minimum wage and opening the forest belt for the use of the tribal folk.

Tripura provides a rather striking example of a state that remained isolated from the mainstream anti-imperialist struggle. Along with other factors, this can be traced to the policy of 'no-interference' in

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movements and leading up to those associated with the Kisan Sabha and the Prajamandal movement.

[51]For details see P. Sundarayya, *Telengana People's Struggle and its Lessons*, Calcutta: CPI (M), 1972.

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the affairs of the princely states that had been advocated by Gandhi.[52] In fact, there was no Congress organisation in Tripura till about 1945, and the Prajamandal worked as a human rights organisation against the *titan* system, according to which local girls were sent to the palaces to satiate the desires of the bureaucracy. Some efforts were also directed to educate people in the rural areas through the Jan Siksha Andolan, though it stopped its activities by the time the Second World War started.

By the mid 1940s a big revolt under the aegis of the Ganamukti Parishad developed which led to the first armed resistance against the raja. The Ganamukti Parishad began by taking up the issue of tribal deprivation. It fought against moneylenders and food grain hoarders and sought to get food grains at a reasonale price and cheap loans to the tribal people. The Parishad raised funds to serve the ill and was involved in other forms of social work which made it increasingly popular. Interestingly, by 1949 it had launched a cooperative moneylending system in order to provide loans to adivasis at reasonable rates of interest.[53]

What can be clearly seen are the transitions through which the grievances of the tribals were negotiated over the 1850s and 1940s. A remarkable level of continuity of the 'past' is observable over the 1920s and the 1940s, which also saw the rise of the mass movements led by the Congress and Gandhi, even as one sees certain shifts in the nature and forms of the struggles of the tribals. In many ways, the growth and development of the All India Kisan Sabha and Prajamandal movements marked this shift from the 1930s when it comes to the exploitation of the tribals, that were taken up along with the struggle against British colonialism. At the same time, the compromises of the Indian ruling classes with feudalism at the time of independence ensured, among other things, a continuity of some

[52]Here one needs to mention Gandhi's declaration in 1934 that he favoured 'non-interference' in the princely states; for details Gandhi to Kelkar (President of the All India State Peoples' Conference), July 1934, in All India Congress Committee Papers (hereafter AICC), file no. G-27/1934, Private Papers Section, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. This was the broadly accepted position of the Congress till 1938, when some of the princely states saw explosive movements, after which the Congress entered the political arena. Nevertheless, this position remained largely unchanged till 1942, when the Quit India Movement altered the situation, at least in some princely states.

[53]I gratefully acknowledge Archana Prasad for allowing me to dip into some of the oral testimonies collected by her from Tripura.

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of the basic problems affecting the tribals. These problems have been reinforced by many other factors that continue to haunt the world of the adivasis today.[54]

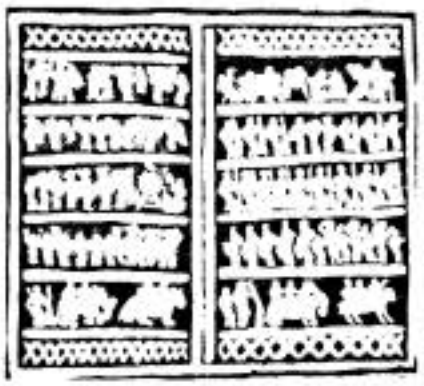
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This book brings together the diversities associated with adivasis in colonial India in an effort to make their world visible. It draws upon contributions from established scholars, historians, sociologists, anthropologists as well as younger scholars engaged in research in this area. The range of sources explored by the contributors include conventional archival materials, official reports and oral evidence. The value of oral traditions assumes vital importance while studying marginal societies for they contributed seminally to the birth of most of the Indian languages even though many of them did not have a script nor depended on it in a serious manner. The essays in this volume are insightful micro-studies, through which this book brings out a face of India that in all its multifacetedness, has its own specificities and richness.

[54]Felix Padel's chapter in this book, focuses on the way the contemporary, post-colonial situation affects the tribals.

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'Modern Science', Classification Strategies, Questions of Identity and Patriarchy

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Of Apes and Ancestors
Evolutionary Science and Colonial Ethnography

Meena Radhakrishna*

INTRODUCTION

In the closing years of the nineteenth century, as an offshoot of the influential ideas of Charles Darwin, there was a preoccupation amongst a section of British writers towards the identification of the precise hierarchy of the 'higher and lower races' on an evolutionary scale. This was not an idle exercise in itself—it had serious political implications. The imperial mind was seen to be a superior one, capable of applying itself to improving the world at large, to the general benefit of all.

Thus, Benjamin Kidd, who according to his publisher, sold 17,000 copies of his *Social Evolution* in the first edition, explicitly advocated to his reading public the logic of his theory of 'social efficiency'. The gist of this theory was that tropical regions with their rich resources could not possibly be left unexploited by those more capable of doing so.

> It is in the tropics that we have the greatest food producing and material producing regions of the earth.... The last thing our civilization is likely to permanently tolerate is the wasting of the resources of the richest regions

*Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Nasir Tyabji for his comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

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of the earth through the lack of the elementary qualities of social efficiency in the races possessing them.[1]

Another author announced that it is 'a false view of human solidarity ... which regrets that capable and [a] stalwart race of white man should replace a dark-skinned tribe which can neither utilize its land for the full benefit of mankind, nor contribute its quota to the common stock of human knowledge'. And so, 'there is cause for human satisfaction in the replacement of the aborigines throughout America and Australia by [a] white race of far higher civilisation'.[2]

The theory of both the supremacy of the white man and the rationalisation of the survival of the fittest race was constituted from different quarters. Darwin postulated that: 'At the present day civilised nations are everywhere supplanting barbarous nations ... through ... (superior) intellect.'[3] E. B. Tylor asserted that

it was reasonable to imagine as latest formed the white race of the temperate region, least able to bear extreme heat or live without the appliances of culture, but gifted with the powers of knowing and ruling which gave them sway over the world.[4]

Simultaneously, an empirically created knowledge both facilitated imperial expansion, and justified it amongst contemporary European audiences. This chapter examines the genealogy of the concept of higher and lower races. It analyses how the process of economic and political expansion of empires led to the appropriation of the emerging science of evolutionism. Evolutionary science intersected with the nascent discipline of anthropology to produce particular ways of seeing and interpreting the world so that decades after Darwin's writings came out, they were reflected in the work of Edgar Thurston, the official ethnographer of the Madras Presidency. The chapter illustrates how in the accretion of knowledge about 'races', science, official reports, travelogues, fiction, anthropometry and even scriptures played a role.

[1]Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution*, New York: Macmillan and Co. Ltd.,1896, p. 341.

[2]Karl Pearson, *The Grammar of Science*, London: Walter Scott, 1892, p. 438.

[3]Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species and the Descent of Man* (henceforth Text of *The Descent of Man*), London: The Modern Library, Reprinted 1936, p. 497.

[4]E. B. Tylor, *Anthropology*, I, 91—quoted in Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban and Antenor Firmin, *The Equality of Human Races (Positivist Anthropology)*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2002, p. xxix.

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BARBARIANS OR MONKEYS? THE 'COMPARATIVE METHOD' AND 'RACIAL TYPES'

Nicholas Dirks has elaborated on the new role that ethnography was to play officially in the twentieth century. In 1901, the government of India resolved its support for a scheme to carry out an ethnography for India. Risley was appointed Director of Ethnography for India; Edgar Thurston, Superintendent of the Madras Museum between 1885 and 1908, was appointed as the Superintendent of Ethnography for the Madras Presidency. Ethnography by now had been elevated to a grander scale and scientific status. Moreover, Thurston seemed eminently suited to this job. He was by training a medical man, and lectured in anatomy at the medical college in Madras in addition to directing the activities of the Madras Museum.[5] The significance of an Indian ethnographer in the pay of the colonial government is important as a particular official view permeated all his conclusions, and indeed all his observations. Edgar Thurston's accounts remain valuable today in tracing a tradition of methodological practices which exist to this day.

As successful completion of Thurston's eight volumes on *Tribes and Castes* testify, the British government found his work worth funding and supporting. His work was preceded by a number of important ethnographers—notable among them were Alfred Lyall, Henry Maine and W. W. Hunter.[6] The work of the last of these was more directly and self consciously political and ethnographical. Thurston's intellectual debt to Hunter can only be guessed and it certainly appears that the two had government patronage and trust in common.

A study of views prevailing in the late nineteenth century on 'dark-skinned tribes' in general is relevant for an understanding of colonial perceptions of the Indian indigenous people. It was the world's races which were being considered, and there was already some consensus on different 'types' or 'branches' of races. Edgar Thurston, conducting his researches on the so-called south Indian jungle

[5]Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of India*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 183.

[6]For an account of how a colonial official like Brian Houghton Hodgson became an ethnologist, see Peter Pels, 'The Rise and Fall of the Indian Aborigines: Orientalism, Anglicism, and the Emergence of an Ethnography of India, 1833–1869', in *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology*, ed. Peter Pels and Oscar Selemink, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press,1999.

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tribes, did not have to ponder over the place of his subjects on the evolutionary ladder. He simply took into account the fact that 'many ethnologists of great eminence have regarded the aborigines of Australia as closely associated with the Dravidians of India'. To support this view, Thurston quoted Thomas Henry Huxley's identical views on this matter. Thurston also emphasised the 'important ethnographic fact' that the Dyaks of Borneo, ('as described by Wallace') seemed racially close to the Kadirs of Annamalai Hills. Similarly, there were evident racial affinities between the Veddas of Ceylon, the Tamil Kurumbas and the Australian races.[7] The concept was an important input into the understanding of a community; this could be achieved by examining other individuals of the same racial type, across geographic regions.

Some racial types of the world—the Feugians, the Australians, the native Americans, and the Indian 'jungle tribes' in general—were presented by the evolutionary theorists as curiosities and specimens of a bygone era. Spectacles of these supposedly near extinct specimens were popular in England and in the colonies. These took the form of great colonial exhibitions in the second half of the nineteenth century.[8] In 1866, there was a proposal for a great Ethnological Congress in Calcutta 'which was to bring together, in one exhibition, typical examples of the races of the Old world, to be made the subject of scientific study when so collected.'[9]

Darwin was probably one of the first originators of the view that *the early man was like the contemporary savage.*[10] The relegation of some racial types to ancestorhood of humankind was authorised by him when he described 'a party of Feugians'.

[7]Edgar Thurston, Introduction, in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Madras: Government Press, 1908, pp. xxi–xxii; xxviii, xxxi, xxxiv.

[8]For an account of these exhibitions, see John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880–1960*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, pp. 97–120.

[9]*Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, April 1866, as cited in E. T. Dalton, Preface, in *Tribal History of Eastern India*, first published 1872, Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1973. The Government of India, who warmly approved of the project, thought such an exhibition could form an appropriate adjunct to the general industrial exhibition planned for 1870. This proposal had to be dropped as the Commissioner of Assam pointed out a possibility of 'health difficulties the specimens might face during transportation and if specimens of the more independent tribes fell sick and die in Calcutta or on the journey, it might lead to inconvenient political complications'.

[10]Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behaviour*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 199.

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Such were our ancestors. These men were absolutely naked and bedaubed with paint, their long hair was tangled, their mouths frothed with excitement, and their expression was wild, startled and distrustful. They possessed hardly any arts, and like wild animals lived on what they could catch.... For my part, *I would as soon be descended from a monkey* ... as from a savage who delights in torture of his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practices infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency and is haunted by the grossest superstitions.[11]

By comparing an 'ancestor'—a monkey—with that of a Feugian, Darwin implied that just like the monkey, a Feugian would take time to evolve into a human being. This idea was picked up by another author: '(The Feugians) will develop in the course of a few hundred thousand years'.[12]

Darwin also compared the moral disposition of a 'barbarian' who dashed his infant on the rocks in a fit of anger, with a Newton or a Shakespeare.[13] The juxtaposing of a particularly mindless aborigine with an exceptionally gifted European suggested that these individuals were *typical* representatives of two different races. Another author echoed that 'in mathematical capacity an Australian is nearer to a lion or a wolf than to a Rowan Hamilton. In moral development, (he) is less remote from dogs and baboons than from a Howard or a Garrison.[14] By relegating the Australian to a category closer to animals, the Europeans could be made to identify with an idealised, unusual specimen of their own race as the collective norm. It has, in fact, been pointed out that 'by making so much of the gulf between the higher and lower races, the popularizers (of Darwin's theory) were perhaps unconsciously taking some of the sting out of the ape theory. The lower races were made to bear the greater part of the burden of animal descent, thus sparing cultured whites some of the humiliation of being no more than higher apes.'[15]

Darwin speculated on the mental proximity of aboriginal people to animals more than once. He agreed with another authority that

[11]Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, London: John Murray,1890, pp. 618–19,emphasis added.

[12]A. H. Keane, *Ethnology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896, p. 48.

[13]Darwin,*The Descent of Man*, pp. 65–66.

[14]John Fiske,*The Destiny of Man*, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin and Co.,The Riverside Press, 1890, p. 71.

[15]Alfred Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860–1914*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1981.

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the tendency of primitives to imagine that natural objects were animated by spirits seemed no different to that exhibited by his own dog (a full-grown and very sensible animal) which barked and growled at a parasol blown by the wind, apparently believing that its flight indicated the presence of some invisible agent.[16]

SIZE OF THE SKULL AND SHAPE OF THE NOSE: THE RISE OF PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

In the initial phases of social evolutionary ideas, it was attempted to relate the mental capacity of the race in question (the direct determinant of social achievement) to some physical attribute. For the scientific community interested in this question, the physical attributes of the subjects under study were not to be evaluated in accordance with some ethnocentric concept of physical beauty: that was for the anthropologist-turned-photographer.[17] The scientist was interested in providing objective evaluation of the skull, the brain, the jaw, the nasal bone, and so on. The concept of 'cranial capacity' was an early and enduring one. Darwin had this to say on the subject:

The belief that there exists in man some close relation between the size of the brain and the development of the intellectual faculties is supported by the comparison of the skulls of savages and civilized races, of ancient and modern people.... The increased size, as ascertained by measurements, was exclusively in the frontal part of the skull—the seat of the intellectual faculties.[18]

He stated that 'the mean internal capacity of the skull in Europeans is 92.3 cubic inches, in (Native) Americans 87.5, and in Australians

[16]Darwin, Text of *The Descent of Man*, p. 469. See also Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories*, p. 199.

[17]In books on ethnology, to emphasise the difference, those who were chosen for photographs were 'the most degraded specimens ... the ugliest and the weirdest looking of an otherwise handsome race'. H. N. Hutchinson, et al., *The Living Races of Mankind*, London: Hutchingson and Co, 1890, p. 70. Also see Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology & Photography: 1860–1920*, London: Yale University Press, 1994.

[18]Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, chapter II (On the Manner of Development of Man from some Lower Form), p. 21.

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only 81.9 cubic inches.'[19] He, in fact, quoted Herbert Spencer to show that the brain of a civilised man was nearly 70 per cent larger than that of the savage. He himself, thus, put the stamp of authority on the alleged connection between cranial capacity and mental development of a whole people.[20] Among those who expanded on this view was A. H. Keane, one of the Vice Presidents of the Anthropological Institute at Cambridge.[21]

The size and shape of the skull were important, and bigger cranial capacity showed a bigger capacity to think. An author noted how the differences between the brains of a Shakespeare and an Australian would be fifty times greater than the differences between the Australian's brain and that of an orangutan.[22] However, the size and shape of the brain was considered significant in another way. A guide to the index of civilisation was the cephalic index.[23] Thurston 'proved' through elaborate tables the so called 'dolichocephalic' type of cranium which the Chenchus possess in common with other Indian jungle tribes,[24] indicative of an earlier evolutionary phase. Brahmins, akin to other Aryans, were said to possess brachy-cephalic craniums.

Among other anthropometric researches were the noteworthy ones of the nose. The European standard of a high-bridged nose with nostrils which were not dilated, and the root not depressed, indicated the highest possible development *of the mind*. Further rising of the nose from the surface of the face indicated an aspect of later evolution. Those in possession of a narrow nostriled nose were put on a higher scale of civilisation within the same society.[25] Some authors explained the differences in shape of the nose and its size on the basis of Darwin's theory of natural selection, based on the function of the nostrils and hence their differing degree of dilation

[19]Darwin, Second Edition, *The Descent of Man*, 1874. In 1881, E. B. Tylor asserted that the average estimate of the contents of skulls in the case of an Australian was 75 cubic inches; African 85; European 92; E. B. Tylor, *Anthropology*, vol. I & II, first published 1881, London: Watts and Co., 1930, pp.1, 46.

[20]Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 190.

[21]Keane, *Ethnology*, 1896, p. 190.

[22]Fiske, *The Destiny of Man*, p. 71.

[23]This was calculated in the following manner: the maximum width of the head divided by the maximum length, multiplied by 100.

[24]Thurston, Introduction, in *Castes and Tribes* p. xlviii.

[25]Herbert Risley, *Imperial Gazetteer of India 1907–1909*, third edition, Government Press: Calcutta, 1910.

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in a cold or warm climate. They concluded that a flat nose was indicative of a lower evolutionary stage.[26]

A Guide to the Specimens illustrating the Races of Mankind of the British Museum elaborated on the criteria for judging mental development. It concluded: '... in its highest development, the Caucasian branch, which includes all the inhabitants of Western Europe, displays a refined cast of features, with thin lips and nose narrow and high at the bridge.'[27]

A large part of the Introduction to Thurston's *Castes and Tribes* engages with the varied nasal proportions of his subjects. He noted that in the Dravidian type, the nasal index, (worked out on the same principles as the cephalic index) is higher than in any known race, except the Negro. He also quoted an authority to prove that the nose in the Aryan group could be compared with the noses of Parisians, who had an average nasal index of 69.4. The nasal indices of various south Indian jungle tribes were found by Thurston to vary from an average of 81.9 in the Chenchu to 95.1 in the Paniyan. Essentially, the higher the nasal index, the lower the cultural level of the community concerned. The contrast between a Brahman of high culture, a fair complexion and a long, narrow nose, and jungle tribes of very dark colour, short of stature and with a nasal index exceeding 90, Thurston declared, called for no explanation.

DASYUS AND *DASAS*: A HISTORY DERIVED FROM MYTH

The doctrine of evolution of the human race over a long period was a useful one for the scientist who could now locate the world's societies (and races) on an evolutionary scale. For the British administrator, the evolutionary scale provided a useful way of understanding communities *within* a colony like India.

In fact, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, especially after the 1857 events, there was a great desire on the administrator's part to 'understand India': this was the era of classifications and categories like warrior or martial races, criminal tribes, cultivating or professional castes and so on. Thus, while

[26]Julian Huxley and A. C. Haddon, *We Europeans: A Survey of Racial Problems*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939, p. 102.

[27]*A Guide to the Specimens illustrating the Races of Mankind*, London: British Museum, 1908.

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India found its due place in the scale of evolution in societal terms on a world basis, within India the evolutionary theory was applied to sort out the loyal from the disloyal, the respectable from the criminal, the malleable from the obstinate—the *dasyu* from the potential *dasa*.

W. W. Hunter contributed to the hierarchisation of the Indian people by proposing an evolutionary scale within India itself, which was a 'great museum of races in which one can study man from his lowest to highest stages of culture....'[28] He postulated that the Aryans in India with whom the British felt political affinity by now were not only fair-skinned, but of noble lineage, speaking a stately language and worshipping friendly and powerful gods. The others were the original inhabitants whom the lordly newcomers—the Aryans—had driven back into the mountains or reduced to servitude to the plains. 'The victors called the non-Aryans, an obscure people, *Dasyu* (enemies) or *Dasa* (Slaves)'.[29] These 'obscure people' were the subject matter of Thurston's studies twenty years later, with a similar evolutionary hierarchy in mind.

In the ethnographical writings of the period, there is a curious mix of the Hindu religious texts passing as history, and Darwin's scientific terminology. The reinforcing of the arguments from the Vedas with evidence from Darwin was an ingenious way of reading Indian history by one influential administrator and author.

> Speaking generally of the aborigines of India, we have sacred traditional accounts which represent them to have been *savages allied to the apes*.... In the existing aborigines we find here and there marked peculiarities which point to a possible descent from some lower type of animal existence: the frequently recurring ear point of Darwin, peculiar to certain apes, the opposable toe characteristic of the same animal; the long stiff hair of biped or quadrupeds in unusual parts of the body; the keen sight, hearing and smell of some of the lower animals, coupled with mental qualities and habits ... which can hardly be called human.[30]

Further, he said,

[28]W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Empire: Its History, People and Products*, London: Trubner and Co., 1882, p. 58.

[29]Hunter, *The Indian Empire*, p. 58.

[30]James Samuelson, *India: Past and Present*, London: Trubner and Co., 1890, p. 95, emphasis added.

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A comparison of the accounts that are given of (*dasyus*) in the Vedas with the Indian aborigines of today shows conclusively that some of them must have possessed a very low bodily and mental organization—indeed, that they were a more debased type of beings than what is now called mankind.... The Aryans called them Dasyas, or enemies.... in fact, their description is almost identical with that of some of the Andaman Islanders of the present day. They called them eaters of raw flesh, without gods, without faith, lawless, cowardly, perfidious and dishonest.... The Brahmins described the Dasyus or aborigines as *Bushmen or monkeys*.... in Ramayana, the monkey general Hanuman ... plays a prominent part.[31]

There is a shuttling between the past and the present by these writers, and the two merge imperceptibly, soon inseparable. What is being claimed is that the aborigines of today have some of the characteristics of apes that Darwin described; the only difference is that while the brahmin described them as monkeys, Darwin would call them apes. Thus, the collapsing of the existing Andaman Islander into monkey/ape/Bushman happens at one level. Views of Aryans of yesterday (brahmins), Aryans of today (British) and Darwin converge on the other. It appeared that there had been identical reading of a section of the population all along, from the time of the Vedas up to Darwin. In other words, the theory of evolutionism was put to a unique use by the British ethnographer/ administrator in that he completely brahminised a Darwinian concept.

In this framework for analysis of the aborigines of the late nineteenth century, the scientific component was an important link of the past to the present. The Vedas help to justify conquest of the aborigines, 'way back then', and Darwin, their conquest today, through the concept of the survival of the fittest. This mode of analysis was given a coherent form by Hunter. He identified the convergence of the world views of the brahmin of the Vedic period and those of the British coloniser: both found the aborigines akin to either the dasyu or dasa. The invocation of Darwin in the description of an evolving section of mankind invited the contemporary audience to consider the natural trajectory of the aborigines in general: they ought to be conquered again like the Aryans did earlier, except that this time they can then be civilised through the missionaries. The British felt an affinity with the brahmins, in that they both worshipped 'superior Gods'.

[31]Ibid., pp. 2, 13, 14 and 95, emphasis added.

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Hunter could be writing of British imperialism when he wrote with some awe, commenting on the Vedic period that,

> The stout Aryans spread.... (They) had a great trust in themselves and their gods. Like other conquering races, they believed that both themselves and their deities were altogether superior to the people of the land and their poor, rude objects of worship. Indeed, this noble confidence is a great aid to the success of a nation.[32]

The history, so called, of the apish aborigines was, then, gleaned from the Vedas and merged into the future that Darwin promised: they shall be conquered, and will evolve into mankind at some point, albeit with help from the evolved.

The official ethnologists like Hunter and Russel/Hira Lal's classification of the 'non-Aryans' into potential criminals was also partially derived from the Vedas. The aboriginal races of the plains, according to Hunter, had 'supplied the hereditary criminal classes, alike under the Hindus, Muhammadans and the British. The non-Aryan hill races also appeared from *vedic times downwards as marauders*.'[33] When the last ethnographic survey of Central Provinces and Berar, published in 1916, was being conducted, the authors Russell and Hira Lal sought explanations for different 'races' in vedic texts. Their principal authority was M. Emile Senart's *Les Castes dans l'Inde*, from which the authors reasoned that the tribals could probably be identified as the Rakshasas (devils) described in the Mahabharata.[34]

During this period, the British administrator was anyway inclined to think of indigenous people as criminals or dasyus. Through the nineteenth century, British expansionist desires extended from the plains to the hills, as need for land for plantations pressed on the administration. The 'hill tribes' increasingly came to be seen as a political and administrative problem as they resisted the encroachment on their land by the planters, or recruitment as plantation workers, or interference by missionaries with their social institutions. There was 'trouble' with the Santals in 1855 for several years and with the

[32]Hunter, *The Indian Empire*, p. 61.

[33] Ibid., p. 60, emphasis added.

[34]Crispin Bates, 'Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India: The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry', in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 247.

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Nagas in 1878. An earlier experience of 1835, of tribals as formidable dasyus, was still in the administrative memory: on moral grounds of suppressing the custom of human sacrifice practiced by the Kondhs, even after it burned down whole Kondh villages, the British army had to remain deployed for long periods to check further resistance. A regular pacification programme to deal with tribal people had been launched by the British, and this made them see a parallel between their own beleaguered situation and that which was faced by the Aryans centuries ago. However, it was hoped that the dasyus could successfully be turned into the dasa mould, either as workers or soldiers in British armies.[35]

A NEW LAW OF EVOLUTION: THE COLONIAL PRESENCE AND MORAL PROGRESS

While working on the issue of 'ancestorhood' represented by the indigenous people and their derived criminality, another possible link was explored: that between scale of civilisation and moral/ethical progress. It was implied here that European morality was more perfect, as with advancement of civilisation, man becomes ethically more perfect. Those low on the scale today, 'the ancestors', were immoral in their disposition. Thus, not only earlier societies, no longer existent, were deemed to be less ethical, but also those which were supposedly the relics of earlier ones, existing in the form of African, Australian or Indian indigenous communities. The 'ancestorhood' of uncivilised societies was represented by their barbaric practices: cannibalism, infanticide, human sacrifice and so on.

Anthropology, then, became the study of the barbaric and the bizarre. The ethnographic material of the period shows a marked tendency to represent the aborigines belonging to the lowest rung of the Indian evolutionary scale. There is a tendency to over-emphasise their barbaric practices. This seems to have arisen for two political reasons: to show that continuing British presence was required to

[35]The Akas of Assam were divided by Hunter into two clans: 'the eaters of a thousand hearths and the thieves who lurk in the cotton fields'. 'It was only under the British that these exterminators ceased to be disturbing elements in India by recruitment into the army': Hunter, *The Indian Empire*, p. 59.

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suppress them and to explain the low rate of success of the programmes of the British to civilise them.[36]

W. W. Hunter was asked by the government to conduct 'a great stock taking after a century of British rule' in 1881. The burden of his work in general was to convince the British public how beneficial the British rule had been for the Indians. 'British rule in India is again upon its trial.... Doubters [sic] have arisen who dispute whether our supremacy in the East is a gain to ourselves or to the peoples over whom we rule....' He wrote of suppression of infanticide, widow burning, hook swinging, self-mutilation and human sacrifice as some of the achievements of the British rule.

> Great as has been the material progress of India during the past century, its emancipation from ignorance ... to my mind, (is) a far more splendid memorial to British rule. Truly, the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. [37]

Richard Temple, a senior administrator, wrote at the end of the century that the government had put an end to all barbarous rites and 'scrupulously respected all the customs of the people so far as might be consistent with Christian civilisation.'[38] This progress had to be zealously guarded. As John Strachey pointed out, 'there is hardly a province in India in which horrid and cruel practices would not instantly spring into vigorous life if our watchfulness were relaxed.'[39] There was a spate of such writing in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. 'Among the wild hill tribes and primitive race of India, the chief ideas of religion has been the necessity of appeasing the malice of malignant beings by oblations of blood, and on occasion of great emergency by the outpouring of human blood.... that of children was an irresistible delicacy certain to put (the bloodthirsty Gods) in the best of humours....' The author, a professor of Sanskrit

[36]Meena Radhakrishna, *Colonialism, Evolutionism and Anthropology—A Critique of the History of Ideas 1850–1930*, vol. XIX, Centre for Contemporary Studies, New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, June 1997, pp. 35–38.

[37]W.W. Hunter, *England's Work in India*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1881, pp. 1–2.

[38]Richard Temple, *A Bird's Eyeview of Picturesque India*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1898, p. 145.

[39]John Strachey, 'Conclusion', in *India: Its Administration and Progress*, fourth edition, London: Macmillan, 1911.

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at Oxford, soon mentions that 'through our instrumentality these and other horrible rites have been long suppressed.'[40]

The official ethnographer provided ample data from this time onwards well into the twentieth century showing how the imperial presence was needed to stem the barbarism of the subject races.[41] More and more, with the ostensible purpose of understanding the origins of such barbaric practices, the researcher tended to dig out these in societies where they no longer existed, or perhaps had never existed. In fact, the professed object of the Ethnographic Survey of India was to 'rescue from oblivion much that must have perished before it was brought to record' i.e., 'customs of immense antiquity' which were indicative of the society's 'national and racial temperament.'[42] Much if not all of such research conducted in the colonies was sponsored by the British government.

Thurston's *Ethnographic Notes on Southern India* had 18 topics, some of them of the following nature: omens; evil eye; charms; animal superstitions; sorcery; torture in bygone days and a few stray survivals; slavery; making fire by friction; fire walking; hook swinging; infanticide; meriah human sacrifice; deformity and mutilation; earth eating and so on.[43] Incidentally, this sort of research and choice of topics was a part of an earlier anthropological tradition. John Lubbock, an eminent anthropologist of his time, and one of the early Presidents of the Anthropological Institute published his popular *Prehistoric Times* in 1865. Here he studied 'modern savages' like the Andaman Islanders, Australians and Maoris with the message that they needed to be colonised. Some of his more alluring titles included horrible rites; parricide; cannibalism; cruelty; infanticide; absence of cleanliness; curious customs; low ideas of deity; witchcraft; ideas of decency and virtue; character and so on.[44]

[40]Monier Williams, Preface, in *Modern India and the Indians*, London: Trubner and Co.,1879.

[41]In fact, it was explicitly said of the black republic of Hyati that the freemen of Hyati had reversed back to pagan rites, snake worship and cannibalism after independence from the British. 'A century of misrule' among the inhabitants of Hyati was there for all to see. Keane, *Ethnology*, p. 266.

[42]H. A. Rose, Preface, in *A Glossary of the Tribes and Caste of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, first printed 1919, vol. 1, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, reprint 1990, p. viii.

[43]Edgar Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes on Southern India*, Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1907.

[44]John Lubbock, *Preshistoric Times*, first published 1865, London: Williams and Norgate, 1872.

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Thus poised, Anthropology, by definition, had to look into what the civilised society was not. The standard was set by the white European, the other populations provided the data for deviations. Anthropology investigated the unchanging nature of these societies (except under British rule) and *here lay the contradiction between the doctrine of evolution, which most anthropologists of the day were inspired by, and the doctrine of the civilising mission of imperialism*. The official ethnographer provided evidence of the necessarily static nature of indigenous societies ('it will take the Feugians a few hundred thousand years to develop'), while the administrator was constrained to show how under the colonial rule, rapid progress could be achieved through fast delivering reforms.

One ingenious way found to reconcile this contradiction was to suggest that the laws of evolution were in fact supportive of the British programme of reform of the 'rude races of India':

> The task of civilizing India is a heavy and often a disheartening one.... The history of our rule in India is one of progress from the lower to the higher type.... If our countrymen are but steadfast in their duty, the eternal laws of evolution and human development will be strong siding champions in the work.[45]

COLONIAL ETHNOGRAPHY: A 'SCIENCE' OF MUTUAL QUOTATION

A point worth considering is the source material for the anthropological accounts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lubbock's sources, for instance, were among others, accounts by travellers and missionaries, taken uncritically at their face value. The missionaries, like the travellers, had an interest in highlighting the bizarre elements in the daily routine of the people they worked with, so as to justify their presence and to emphasise the difficulty of working with backward people. Their accounts were used as data sources not only by the government for policy making, but also for scientific analysis by senior ethnographers like Lubbock and Thurston.[46]

[45]W. W. Hunter, speaking on the 'Rude Races of India' before the Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1878, as cited in Francis Henry Skrine, *Life of Sir William Wilson Hunter*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911, p. 287.

[46]Radhakrishna, *Colonialism, Evolutionism and Anthropology*, p. 42. Also see, Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, pp. 173–76.

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Missionaries, in fact, were a universal and a very important source of ethnographic material because of the subjects they chose to work with. Abbe Dubois embodied the concept of the prototypical ethnographer of his time, and is still considered a valuable source of material on India. Dubois considered part of his mission to present a written account of his findings to the Court of Directors of the East India Company, and these proved to be of the greatest benefit in aiding the government.[47] It was noted that 'the Abbe seldom indicate(d) how he established a certain piece of information, whether by observation, informants, or text.... he obviously turned to (the sacred texts) often.'[48]

In the Victorian period, travellers to the 'orient' were considered heroes like the explorers—the difficulties in getting to distant, unknown places put many hazards in the way of the travellers and voyages were genuinely unsafe. These travellers were celebrated in the European society of the day as upholders of the traditions of adventure and daring—the very qualities identified with the early explorers and settlers in the colonies. The accounts written by these travellers were often exaggerated in terms of the risks they encountered and the extent of danger posed by the people inhabiting these unknown regions. Stories of poisoned bows and arrows of the Andaman Islanders or the Maori head-hunters thrilled an audience not likely to ever travel to these distant places, and it seemed quite safe on the part of the these early travellers to spin yarns.

However, the opening up of the Suez Canal led to unprecedented opportunities for travel to places hitherto inaccessible to the common traveller, and more guarded accounts were written even by unsympathetic travellers. Of the Andamanese, it had to be admitted, 'we now know that they do not burrow in the ground like rabbits, and there are no oven trees for roasting ... men, no cannibalism, no boomerangs....' Of the Yaghanas, it was now confirmed that 'they eat neither their aged nor their enemies, as has often been asserted.'[49] Clearly, these sort of stories had been circulated earlier either by the missionaries or by the travellers.

[47]Paul Hockings, 'The Abbe Dubois: An Early French Ethnographer', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, NS, vol. II, no. 2, 1977, p. 335.

[48]Ibid., pp. 335–36.

[49]A. H. Keane, *The World's Peoples: A Popular Account of Their Bodily and Mental Characters, Beliefs, Traditions, Political and Social Institutions*,London:_Hutchingson and Co., n.d., p. 61.

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A genre of 'research' of the time was embodied in the popular ethnography books. Through the travel writings, the popular image of an Australian or an Indian in the mind of a reader was already imprinted by the time these books appeared. The popular ethnology accounts merely sought to give it a semblance of scientific truth by providing data and figures, and references to other anthropologists' more detailed work. *The Living Races of Mankind*, for instance, acknowledged debt to what it called the eminent anthropologist, A. H. Keane, while Keane himself in his preface to another popular account, *The World's Peoples*, called his work a sequel to *The Living Races*.[50] *The Living Races* quoted among its sources the 'many books of travel by which our knowledge has been vastly increased of late years.'

Authors like Rudyard Kipling projected an image of India which found echoes in the popular ethnographic works depicting colonial subjects. *The Living Races* spoke of Papuans of New Guinea as 'reminding us of the Fuzzy-Wuzzy of Mr. Rudyard Kipling's ballad.'[51] Similarly a section on Burmese women in the above ethnographical account simply refers the reader to Kipling's account of them in one of his stories.[52] Kipling's fantasy tale of a wolf-reared child inspired an ethnographer to find evidence of a real case supposedly of the same kind. He even published an article in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* with a generalised title 'Jungle life in India'. This contribution was quoted by the author of *The Living Races*, complete with references and page numbers of the concerned journal, giving the impression of scientific analysis. Moreover, the author of the article was mentioned to be an official of the Indian Geographical Survey, adding to the authenticity of the report.[53]

The line between fact and fiction grew further blurred by the circular nature of the data sources, of which a scientist as serious as Darwin was also a part of. Lubbock used the popular ethnology books unquestioningly and Darwin used Lubbock's data uncritically as a fellow scientist's. 'Details on the immorality of savages' were provided by Darwin in one of his writings by simply referring to the 'copious evidence' in a chapter of Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilisation*.[54] Darwin

[50]Hutchinson, et al., *The Living Races of Mankind*; Keane, Preface, in *The World's Peoples*. Not surprisingly, one of the authors was also the publisher for both.

[51]Hutchinson et al., *The Living Races*, p. 26.

[52]Ibid., p. 111.

[53]Ibid., p. 123.

[54]Darwin, Text of *The Descent of Man*, p. 489.

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also drew his conclusions about the 'moral sense' of Indians on the basis of accounts by British police official Sleeman.[55] He used writings of Francis Galton, who had done researches to prove that the mental capacity of an African was no more than a dog's.[56] The 1890 edition of Darwin's *Descent of Man* incorporated W. W. Hunter's information on Santals in an unquestioning manner. To support his studies on the so-called savages, he quoted in his writings E. B. Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind,* 1869; Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times,* 1865; and W. W. Hunter's *The Annals of Rural Bengal,* 1868.[57]

The use of administrative material by the ethnographer of the time was also rampant.[58] Among Thurston's sources were Gazetteers, Madras Census Reports of 1891 and 1901, District Manuals and Madras Police Records. This led to not only a bias in the statements regarding the communities in question, but the *areas of research* themselves were then defined according to the administrative needs. These communities, who were seen to be potential material for raising army corps or for working in British owned plantations and factories, had to be brave and loyal. Enquiries into the 'character' of the community thus became as important a part of the research, as their barbaric customs.

The circularity of information is also a noteworthy aspect of the relationship between administrative material and ethnography. While the census reports would quote a manual or a gazetteer, these would be quoted by Thurston. The police would quote Thurston, and Thurston would refer to police officers' testimonies in his later publications. Such recycling of essentially the same information in different government publications gave the impression of authenticity by sheer force of repetition. When an ethnographer made use of such information, it not only got the seal of authority for a contemporary audience, but also became baseline data for later ethnographers.

The author of *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* mentioned that much use was made of 'standard ethnographical accounts of other parts of India'. Among those cited were the Punjab Census Report; Bengal and India Census Reports; the Bombay Gazetteer and police accounts like Gunthorpe's. This last account,

[55]Keane, *Ethnology,* p. 117.

[56]Cited in Kidd, *Social Evolution,* p. 289.

[57]Darwin, Text of *The Descent of Man,* p. 551. Also see Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behaviour.*

[58]Radhakrishna, *Colonialism, Evolutionism and Anthropology,* p. 48.

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published in 1916, used the Central Provinces Gazetteer of 1871 as an important source, showing the datedness of the material used for new writings. It was probably assumed that these communities were 'relics of the past' in any case, and so no change could have happened.

Apart from being used as the 'starting point' of later research in the field, this data became virtually indestructible in another way. Thurston's publications were used as texts by students of Ethnography for the advanced courses at the University.[59] Thurston, on his part, while giving an account of the Yenadis in one of the Madras Museum Bulletins, reproduced extracts from the thesis of one of the students who had submitted it for the M. A. degree examination of the Madras University. While Thurston quotes this student, the thesis quotes Thurston's data to support one of his own points. It is interesting to note the style, and attitude of the thesis writer to the community under study.[60]

STRUCTURES OF POWER AND THE ETHNOGRAPHER'S DOMESTIC TOOLS OF TRADE

Also important for our purposes here is the *modus operandi* of data collection by the official ethnographer from the field. Thurston did observe many of the communities himself, and it is worth considering the methods ethnographers like Thurston evolved in order to get information from the concerned people.

There was reluctance on the part of the subjects to not just part with any information but to appear before the examiner at all. The unwarranted interest in their daily lives was resented as much as interest in the different parts of their anatomy for collection of anthropometric data. Thurston recorded that respondents, when they agreed to be researched, lent their bodies to him in exchange for money. 'Permission to make use of their bodies for the purposes of research depended essentially on a pecuniary transaction on a

[59]Thurston speculated that 'the same fate is presumably destined ... for the M. A. degrees of the Madras University in history, which includes ethnography with special reference to the Indian Peninsula.' Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. II, no. 1, 1897, p. 34.

[60]'The dental wear was rather great, and intelligence consequently in the inverse ratio.... They should be cured of their lazy habits. They evoke pity, but while they grow the lazier for false pitying, they become the brisker for a kindly whipping.' Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. IV, no. 1, 1901, pp. 91, 105.

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scale varying from two to eight annas.'[61] There are also references to a 'substantial remuneration' paid to the Paliyans (plus a banquet given), who then allowed Thurston to measure their bodies, but only with the intervention of the forest contractor with whom the people in question exchanged forest produce.[62]

It thus appears that to collect information from reluctant respondents, who did not always respond to money incentives, various authority structures were invoked by Thurston.

Thus while it was the headman and the revenue officer whose help was needed in the case of the Kotas, and the police in the case of Koramas, it could be the assistance of employers like estate owners 'without which (Thurston's) researches would have been barren.'[63] In the case of Nayadis, Thurston approached some of his 'Namboodri friends' for information on their customs first. Often such informants were not able to furnish any information at all precisely because of the isolation of the lower castes. Thurston records that only when he found he could not get any information at all, did he go to the 'fountain source', i.e., the community in question itself.[64]

An important gap in our understanding of colonial ethnography is the responses of the subjects to the colonial ethnographer.[65] They reflected the new fears and apprehensions generated by an alien rule, and anxiety over the possible repercussions unleashed by the ethnographer's researches. These fears were compounded by the fact that the government ethnographer had the government's punitive machinery at his command if there was resistance to the investigations. There are some details of responses made available by Thurston himself, of people whom he investigated, and of others in the proximity. He complained of the difficulties he faced in his researches 'owing to the wickedness of the people, and their timidity and fear of increased taxation, plague inoculation and transportation'.

For ethnographers like Thurston, the police was useful not just to provide information on the communities in question, but also to coerce them into cooperating with him. Thurston recorded that 'only under marked protest, and with the assistance of the police did the

[61]Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*,vol. II, no. 1,1897, p. 31.
[62]Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. V, no. 1, 1903, p. 48.
[63]Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. II, no. 1,1897, p. 10.
[64]Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. IV, no. 1, 1901, p. 66.
[65]This has been partially addressed by Bates, 'Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India', p. 246, and Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, p. 185.

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Koramas permit me to use them for the purposes of anthropometry, and my recollection of my sojourn among them is far from a happy one.' This unhappy event became a proof of Thurston's claim that Koramas were *criminally inclined.*[66] Active resistance on the subjects' part to give information to an official ethnographer would bring the community's name on police records: any community needing to be investigated with the help of the police had to be by definition a criminal one. Thurston's respondents understood this, but still defied him.

The anthropometric data collection was resisted for another reason.

> The Kotas did not ... enter good-humouredly into the spirit of an anthropological enquiry. A sudden strike set in, and an order was circulated among the village community that the measurement of women was not to be continued. Only with the intervention of the headman (who receives a small salary from government to collect rent and make return of vital statistics) and intervention of the local revenue officer did they allow investigations but even then not of women.'[67]

The ethnographer was viewed with suspicion and considered an agent of the government, unlikely to have the subjects' interests at heart. Thurston wrote that,

[66]Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. II, no. 1, 1897, p. 51. The fact of their criminality was quoted by a student of Thurston's as an input into information about their *character* in his work. This young ethnographer supplemented Thurston's information with that provided by the District Superintendent of Police. Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. IV, no. 1, p.107.

[67]Edgar Thurston, *Anthropology of the Todas and Kotas of the Nilgiri Hills*, Madras: Superintendent of Government Press, 1896, p. 186. Essentially, the communities investigated understood the view the European ethnographers had of their women, and resented it. Thurston's *The Ethnographic Notes on Southern India* has a chapter on 'Dress' which begins with photographs of women with bare breasts. The article itself, belying its title, is about lack of dress among women in the forest and there are few details about the dress worn by the men folk. It talks about the Indian women's beauty, charms and modesty. It gives an account of how Indian women surprised in their baths behave, or how indigenous women in forests respond to the request to part with their only item of clothing i.e., bead necklaces. In Thurston's account of 'long ears' artificially achieved by women of a community, the illustrating photograph is of a woman whose bare breasts completely distract the reader's attention from the hardly visible dilated lobes. Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. II, no. 2, p. 126. Women thus studied perceived the male ethnographers' sexual interest in them. A photograph of the black women in a popular ethnology book showed the younger women crossing their arms to cover their breasts, which were normally left uncovered. See Keane, *The World's Peoples*, p. 303.

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Having learnt that I was a government official, they (the people) consented to allow me to record their measurements only on the distinct understanding that I would not get their land assessment increased.[68]

He said,

The Paniyan women believed that I was going to have the finest specimens among them stuffed for the Madras Museum, and the Muppas of Wynad were afraid that I was a recruiting sergeant, bent on enlisting the strongest men of their community for a native Malabar army.... (A man) was afraid that the height of measuring standards was the gallows.[69]

The most eloquent reaction was of the Sholagas examined by Rivers and Thurston, who 'came to the conclusion that the object of our enquiry was to settle them in a certain place near London, that the wools of different colours (used for testing vision) given to them ... were for tying them captive with.... Others said that they could not understand why the measurements of the different organs of their bodies were taken, perhaps to reduce or increase the size of their body to suit the different works which they were expected to do near London.' (These Uralis and Sholagas) 'came to us in a state of abject fear ... and in some cases continued to be so terrified throughout that their observations were of little value.... (they) became much alarmed when they thought over the meaning and probable consequences of the examination.'[70] An elderly man wept bitterly when undergoing the process of measurement, and a woman bade farewell to her husband, she thought for ever, as he entered the threshold of Thurston's 'impromptu laboratory.'[71]

The fears of those subjected to these indignities were not too absurdly far from reality. The suspicion of the people in question that they were mere specimens for the British investigators had some grounds: as noted earlier, they were routinely treated as 'exhibits' during the great industrial and ethnographic exhibitions held throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A terror of being stuffed and kept in a museum was not far-fetched either:

[68]Ibid., p. 186.
[69]Ibid., p. 229.
[70]W. H. Rivers, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*, vol. V, no. 1, p. 3.
[71]Edgar Thurston, Introduction, in *Castes and Tribes*, p. xvii.

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there was an already existing brisk trade elsewhere regarding Maori heads (because of the fine tattooing on the face).[72]

The apprehensions that body measurements had some connection with recruitment in the army or suitability for factory work near London were not unfounded either. A section of the administrators strongly felt that tribals made excellent soldiers in service of the British. It is also of interest here that Thurston quotes a Mr C. Roberts' *Manual of Anthropometry,* 'dealing with the objects and advantages of ascertaining the physical proportions of the body.' This is what the author of this Manual felt: 'it is desirable that we know the rate of growth of children from year to year ... to enable us to regulate the employment of children in factories and workshops and to guide us in the selection of recruits for the military and naval services....' Thurston added that these observations, though made regarding England, applied with equal force to India.[73] What needs to be added to the above accounts is the explicit nature of the anger arising from Thurston's presence among his subjects. While Thurston spoke of their 'wickedness', on more than one occasion, he acknowledged what his respondents considered on their part to be *his* 'evil eye' and 'polluting touch'.[74] Most telling of all, those on whom he conducted his researches, Thurston was seen to be the harbinger of death itself.[75]

CONCLUSION

India was, as noted earlier, posed as a great *museum* of races. This particular view denied the people concerned a legitimate place in the present, robbed them of any recognition of being societies in a

[72]'Years ago, a large number of preserved Maori heads were brought into Europe. A collection was recently exhibited at a meeting in the Anthropological Institute in Hanover Square. In response to the demands of European collectors, the supply increased to an alarming extent. No man with a well tattooed face was safe,' Hutchinson et al., *The Living Races,* p. 46.

[73]Edgar Thurston, *Madras Government Museum Bulletin,* vol. IV, no. 1, p. 22.

[74]'I have even known a man get rid of the coin presented to him, by offering it, with flowers and a coconut, to the village goddess at her shrine, and present her with another coin as a peace offering, to get rid of the pollution created by my money.' Thurston, *Castes and Tribes,* p. xviii.

[75]'The untimely death of a native outside town, at which I was halting, was attributed to my evil eye.... Villages were denuded of all save senile men, women and infants....' Ibid., p. xvii.

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state of flux like any other, and fixed them in a dead mould. Since they were remnants of earlier generations, long dead, they could be studied, analysed, classified and exhibited. What has been attempted in this chapter is locating a convergence of interests between scientists, ethnographers, colonial officials, travelogue-writers, fiction writers and local structures of power. While tracing the trajectory of what we today call colonial anthropology, we find skillful fusing of politics with academics, history with myth and science with fiction by its practitioners. What makes this knowledge 'colonial' is the reason why it was produced: emphasis on indigenous people as being relics of the past served to detract from their importance as politically active people who were constantly challenging the British.

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Colonial Constructions of the 'tribe' in India
The case of Chotanagpur

Vinita Damodaran

This chapter looks at the multiple strands in British policy towards tribes in Eastern India. It is concerned with revisionism in the context of tribal histories. Here, I will consider colonial narratives of representation that have come in for criticism by revisionists, in particular, the idea of the ecological noble savage, pristine forests and isolated tribal people. The argument that earlier ethnographers and colonial administrators had mistakenly thought that 'tribes' were static entities, leads many of the revisionist critics to conclude that distinct tribes never existed, and that the claims of indigenous people for autonomy must have no theoretical legitimacy or historical validity.

A closer look at the record reveals that we may be too hasty in dismissing colonial narratives in this summary fashion. Indeed, I argue that, earlier generations of ethnographers did actually very often understand the complexities of ethnic identity and cultural dynamics. In similar ways, colonial discourse did not just conjure up an imaginary landscape, but analysed real landscape differences. In fact, it can be said that the material and the imaginary landscape constituted one another in complex ways. Colonial administrators did participate and engage with the land and the people and were forced to contend with indigenous knowledge and ideas of place. The narratives of these travellers, surveyors and officials of the company *raj* were not merely a 'representation of place' that could

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be used to root colonial claims to possession, but a far more ambiguous relationship with the place and its native inhabitants.[1] The ambiguities, contradictions and often acute observations of colonial officials go unrecognised in such post-modern reading. It is against this background that colonial representations of customary rights and constructions of indigeneity need to be seen. In a recent article, Nancy Lee Peluso has criticised colonial constructions of customary rights as having little basis in reality and leading in the Indonesian context to the 'racialisation' of the landscape with 'ethnic access' to resource use.[2] This is a problematic position, for the history of debates on customary rights in the Indian context reveals quite clear colonial preoccupations with the detail of local rights and their practice, especially in the context of forest lands. Given the nature of the state and the dominance of the property interest, these rights proved difficult to recover and to legislate in favour of, because they belonged only to practise and to oral tradition. Despite this, genuine attempts were frequently made in the latter half of the nineteenth century to document local rights and land-use customs and to protect some customary practises. In the context of the discourse of indigeneity, these attempts are of enormous importance, although they are rarely given adequate attention. The recent extraordinary attempts of the Jharkhand government to award indigenous land claims not on the basis of oral evidence but specifically on the basis of colonial documentation dating back to the 1920s demonstrates the vital importance of understanding the colonial interpretation of customary rights.

James Bodley has recently observed that 'the revisionists' assault on the 'noble savage' and the wilderness idea come at the historical moment when the global culture's unsustainable cultural imperative

[1]To see all colonial images as constitutive of the colonial identity of India and as part of the regime of colonial control does not allow for individual agency to emerge and tends as Dane Kennedy notes to 'essentialise the west as an undifferentiated, omnipotent entity... imposing its totalising discourse on the rest of the world without check or interruption... a discursive practice no less distorting than the west's tendency to essentialise the orient.' See Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post Colonial History', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 24, 1996, p.3.

[2]Nancy Lee Peluso, 'Fruit Trees and Family Trees in an Anthropogenic Forest: Ethics of Access, Property Zones and Environmental Change in Indonesia, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1996, pp. 510–49 and 'Genealogies of the Political Forest and Customary Rights in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2001, pp. 761–812.

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of perpetual capital accumulation is reducing the earth's stocks of water, soil, forests, and fisheries to dangerously low levels and disrupting ecosystems and natural cycles on an unprecedented scale.' Similarly as notions of indigeneity and customary rights come in for revisionist attack, the marginalisation and proletarianisation of many forest-based communities and the demise of their traditional livelihoods gains pace all over the world.[3]

COLONIAL POLICY IN CHOTANAGPUR

Links with the past

To be linked to the wilderness or the jungle, was by definition pejorative from ancient times down to the eighteenth century. It was not a recent phenomenon. It must be noted, and I fear that in their haste to dismiss the notion of the unchanging primitive tribe, revisionists do not sufficiently emphasise this, that colonial epistemology aligned itself with brahmanical knowledge resulting specifically in the depoliticisation and emasculation of many communities which came to be later termed as 'adivasi'. Sumit Guha, for example, in his book, *Environment and Ethnicity in India*[4] seems to follow the line, criticised by Bayly[5] and O'Hanlon, that the British invented nineteenth century caste and tribe. In order to challenge the notion of an ageless caste-based social order, Guha's argument may have been carried too far. Colonial regimes did not simply invent caste and tribe out of pre-colonial systems that were uniformly mobile and uncodified. The agency of Indians and long-term structural continuities need to be taken more into account in these studies. Nineteenth century preoccupations with caste needs to be understood in terms of continuity with pre-colonial brahmanic and kshatriya precepts and traditions. While one cannot deny the existence of powerful local ideologies and alternative forms of social organisation, the growing

[3]James Bodley, 'Comment' in T. N. Headland, 'Revisionism in Ecological Anthropology', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 18, no. 4, August–October, 1997.

[4]Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

[5]Christopher Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988—quoted in R. O'Hanlon, 'Culture of Rule, Communities of Resistance: Gender, Discourse and Tradition in recent South Asian Historiographies', *Social Analysis*, no. 25, September 1989, p. 98.

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dominance of brahmanical rituals and scribal specialists in the immediate pre-colonial period needs to sufficiently studied.[6]

In Chotanagpur then, it is possible to argue that the categorising of the indigenous inhabitants as barbarous and in need of civilisation has a longer history than the colonial period. The idea of the Aryan invasion of India was an important premise in colonial writings which recorded the negative images of non-Aryan people that could be seen to date back to the first contacts of the non-Aryan peoples with the Sanskrit speaking Aryan peoples in the first century.[7] Evidence for this was recorded by eighteenth century British orientalists and later by nineteenth century colonial and Indian ethnographers. Clearly the idea of the Aryan invasion of India is much disputed. The literature relies, as Trautmann notes, on an over reading of the Vedic texts. However, it is less easy to dispute the fact that, an analysis of these texts make it possible to say that religion and language were clear markers of difference between the Aryans and the non-Aryans.[8]

Colonial epistemology thus built both on brahminical notions of caste and drew on eighteenth and nineteenth century ideas of race. How does this relate to colonial understandings of tribes? Some ethnologists, viewed tribes in the north-eastern parts of India such as the Nagas and the Mizos as the 'true wild tribes of India' and 'unlike the broken tribes found in Chotanagpur.' For these colonial administrators, the 'tribal' model with its essential unity, clear body of customary law and unambiguous legitimacies was better suited to the task of maintaining public tranquility.[9] Victorian anthropology

[6] Brahmanical theories of society that had long been propounded in the ancient centres of Hindu scholarship became, more widely influential, with the growing power of Brahmin ritual in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As the surrounding Hindu caste society became less mobile and more codified under colonial institutions, these older images of the tribes received a new impetus. See R. O'Hanlon, 'Cultures of Rule, Communities of Resistance', pp. 98–99.

[7] Notions of cultural primitivism in Europe can be traced back to classical Greece and Rome. Similarly it can be seen that brahminical attitudes towards the other were constructed over time. However, this is not to say that the images were unchanging. See G. Boas and A. Lovejoy, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935, p. 287.

[8] T. Trautmann, *The Aryans in British India*, California: University of California, 1997, p. 214. See also Romila Thapar, 'The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics', in *Cultural Pasts*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1134–35.

[9] I. Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 5.

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in this period was dominated by ideas of socio-cultural evolution. Indeed, as Stocking notes, by the time of the great Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851 a considerable body of British writing including utilitarianism had been concerned with the progress of civilisation.[10] As he writes,

> within the British tradition and Continental tradition civilisation was conceived: ideas about non-European "savages" who defined "civilisation" by contrast; ideas about the physical nature and differentiation of man, which raised the problem of its universality; ideas about the nature of social order, which defined the specific context of civilisation; and ideas about the methods appropriate to the study of human life and history, which defined the extent to which it might be subsumed within the rubric of natural science.

These constructions of difference and the rigid drawing of boundaries had important implications for the discourse on tribes. In the context of the increasing migration of Hindus into remote adivasi areas and as brahminical values acquired a legitimacy as a strategy for the exclusion and surbordination of tribals, British racial ideas acquired a new meaning. The colonial state aided and abetted the process of subordination, as Chotanagpur was brought under administrative control in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, accompanied by projects for the classification of castes and tribes, the production of new regional histories and the *de facto* enshrining of brahminical law within the Anglo-Indian judicial system. The early ethnographic surveys of the 'tribes' were thus concerned with assigning them a social position in a Hindu social hierarchy. By the nineteenth century, developments in thinking in Europe gave further impetus to these ideas. Human diversity was beginning to be conceptualised in rigidly hierarchical and physical terms due to new ideas in comparative physical anatomy and physical anthropology. The implications of all this for scientific conceptions of the mental characteristics of non-European peoples was profound. In the eighteenth century, 'savages' had been generally assumed to share essentially the same psychic nature as Europeans. In the first half of the nineteenth, this essential unity was eroded by a hereditary racialism.[11] European ideas on race were to change with

[10]George W. Stocking Jr., *Victorian Anthropology*, New York: Free Press, 1987, p. 9.
[11]Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 142.

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the impact of Darwin's ideas which, while challenging polygenetic ideas, actually strengthened racial attitudes.[12]

Indeed, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a comprehensive Anglo-Saxon racialism. Though the biological elements in the race idea developed in a more gradual way a number of events sharpened the sense of separation of Europeans from the dark-skinned colonial peoples. By the 1850s, the sub-discipline of ethnology had developed in Britain as the most general scientific framework for the study of the linguistic, physical and cultural characteristics of dark-skinned, non-European, 'uncivilised' peoples. By the time of the Sepoy Mutiny the same can be said about many colonial administrators, missionaries, gentleman explorers and scientific travellers in India. After Darwinian theories came into prominence, dark-skinned peoples were assigned their proper place in the evolutionary timescale. They were the missing links in the evolutionary chain and could cast light on the processes by which the 'ape had developed into the British Gentleman.'[13] The late nineteenth century movement to conceptualise human diversity in rigidly hierarchical terms resulted in India in a spurt of ethnological conferences and published papers on the comparative physical characteristics of castes and tribes in India. It is important to note that in the same period the new teachings of evolutionary racial ideologists made India an important source of data for the supposed transition from the primitive to the advanced. For men such as W. W. Hunter, Herbert Risley and J. Forsyth, evolutionary racial ideas dominated their work on caste and tribe.

As Herbert Risley recorded, the ethnographic conference at Lahore in March 1885 hoped to built up the modern science of anthropology in India and it was believed 'that it might be possible by careful observation and record of social practises, to arrive at fresh data throwing light on ethnological problems which scientific men John Lubbock, Henry Maine and E. B. Tylor have discussed in Europe.'[14] Elsewhere he wrote that 'the physical characteristics which distinguished the tribe tend on the whole to be preserved; it is this persistence of type which accounts for the differences of feature, which though only definable by scientific method, are marked enough to

[12]Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, London: John Murray, 1890.

[13]Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 185.

[14]H. H. Risley and E. A. Gait, *The Census of India*, Calcutta: Government Press, 1903, p. 552.

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render it possible within certain limits to make a fair guess of a man's caste from his personal appearance.'

The association of racial ideas with colonial constructions of caste and tribe received its scientific backing in the corpus of volumes on anthropometric studies in India. Amid the confusion caused by the staggering variety of communities in India, it was hoped that the disorderly nature of Indian society could be organised hierarchically and in racial terms. The search for 'true origins' and separateness among the castes thus became the central task of the ethnographic surveys. As Risley noted,

> the difficulty of throwing much light on the true origin of the lower and intermediate castes by collating customs and ceremonies which they have borrowed in the most liberal fashion from the higher castes suggested to me the possibility of applying to the leading tribes and castes of Bengal the methods of recording and comparing typical physical characteristics which have yielded valuable results in other parts of the world.

He hoped through these anthropometric methods to detach 'the considerable body of non-Aryans from the general body of Hindus and to refer them to specific stocks as Dravidian, Lohitic, Tibetan and the like and through these methods to determine the divergence of each of these aggregates from known Aryan and non-Aryan types.' Such an exercise, he had little doubt, would not only have the support of the scientific community in Europe but would also appeal to leaders of the Hindu community amongst whom the orthodox and advanced laid so much stress on the 'purity of their Aryan descent.'

As early as 1866, Dr J. Fayrer submitted to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, a proposal for the great Ethnological Congress in Calcutta which was to bring together in one exhibition 'typical examples' of the races of the old world, to be made the subject of scientific study when so collected. The council of the society were unanimous in regarding the position as one highly calculated to advance the science of ethnology and in submitting it to the government of India warmly advocated its adoption, as an appropriate adjunct to the general industrial exhibition which it was then intended to hold in 1869–70. However, the scheme ran into difficulties. It was important that the wild tribes of India should be represented. Yet it was no easy matter to induce these 'strange shy creatures to visit even the stations nearest to them and to induce them to proceed to a remote and unknown country for a purpose they could not be made to

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comprehend.'[15] The commissioner of Assam was more specific: 'if specimens of the more independent tribes fell sick and died in Calcutta or on the journey, it might lead to inconvenient political complications.'

By 1865 in India, ethnology was the most popular and rising science of the day—so much so that one commentator noted that:

> I soon expect to find that, instead of collecting postage stamps, young ladies of an intellectual turn will collect nice little cabinets of Crania for the inspection of their friends.

Views of comparative types, with a measuring pole diligently but uselessly placed in the background, demonstrate the approach of many of the soldiers and residents who utilised their photographic skills in the cause of ethnology.[16]

It is in this context that stereotyped images of the tribe predominated in colonial discourse in the mid and late nineteenth century. Among the many stereotypes of the tribes, images of the tribes as addicted to drinking and merrymaking continued to proliferate. Most of the colonial officials reported the tribes were all addicted to drinking. Reporting on the condition of the Gonds and Korkus of the Central Provinces Forsyth remarked,

> ... until lately habits of unrestrained drunkenness have aggravated the natural obstacles to their improvement.... it is this unfortunate want of steadiness that has led to most of the misfortunes of the race, to the loss of their heritage in the land, and in a great many cases practically even of their personal liberty. Inferior races gave way before superior whenever they meet; and whether, as here and in America, the instrument selected be 'fire-water', or as in New Zealand, it be our own favourite recipe of powder and lead, the result is the same.[17]

W. W. Hunter writing in the *Annals of Rural Bengal* in 1897 recorded that:

[15]E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta: Government Press, 1872, pp. 1–2.

[16]J. Falconer, Ethnographical Photography in India 1850–1900, *Photographic Collector*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 16–46.

[17]J. Forsyth, *The Highlands of Central India: Notes on their Forests and Wild Tribes, Natural History and Sports*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1871, p. 96.

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It was not difficult to understand the contempt with which the Sanskrit speaking conquerors regarded a speech squeezed into such narrow and so ignobly objective moulds as that of the ancient *dasyus* or their descendants the present hill tribes of the northern frontier.... of this language the most striking features are its multitude of words for whatever can be seen or handled, and its absolute inability to express reflex conceptions of the intellect, the absence of terms representing relationships in general and conspicuously the relationship of cause and effect.[18]

The Hinduisation of tribes was seen as improving these wild people and in the case of the Bhumij of Chotanagpur it was reported approvingly that 'he was no longer the wild marauder of the seventeenth and eighteenth century.'[19]

Similarly one can see ideas of environmental determinism and notions that a jungly landscape producing a jungly mind surfacing in some of ethnographic writing on tribes.[20] The term jungle was not an unchanging one in the Indian context[21] though ideas of savagery were associated with an inhospitable forest environment and tropes of wilderness. Images of tribes in colonial discourse are replete with references to the forest environment resulting in the production of 'primitive places'.[22] However, the argument that colonial discourse tended to overemphasise the relationship of local communities with forests and tended to misread the landscape has to be examined more carefully. For example, S. C. Roy, the noted Indian anthropologist of

[18]W. W. Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*,Calcutta: Smith Elder, 1897, pp. 29, 114.

[19]*District Gazetteer of Manbhum*, Ranchi: Government Press, p. 79.

[20]The association of savagery with the landscape is not new. In the eighteenth century, Alexander Von Humboldt similarly talked of the native Americans by proclaiming that a savage landscape produces a savage mind. See Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland, Personal Narrative ... trans. and ed. Thomasina Ross, 3 vols., London: Heury G. Bohn, 1853.

[21]As Zimmerman notes, the use of the term *jangala* in Sanskrit is interesting. The Sanskrit jangala (as a mental image) corresponds in many respects to the frontier. Subtly he notes the value of the jangala to Indians themselves changed over time. Jangala lands were created, in reality, by a process of progressive deforestation, partial cultivation and abandonment of deforested territory. The non-Aryans practising slash and burn were driven back into the less inhabitable mountains and marshes. F. Zimmermann, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats: The Ecological Theme in Hindu Medicine*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1999.

[22]K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: State Making and Environmental Cange in Colonial Eastern India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 87.

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the early decades of the twentieth century, has recorded in some detail the migrations of the Mundas and Oraons. He records that at some stage they finally secluded themselves away from the attacks of the Aryans in the valleys and jungles of Chotanagpur.[23] He notes that it was in the 'primeval forests' of Jharkhand that the first Munda immigrants made clearances in the jungles and established their villages in the north western parts of what is now Ranchi district and records that the Jharkhand Mundas 'appear to have remained unmolested in their isolated mountain fastness. Walled off from the outside world by chains of wooded hills they had a long immunity from hostile disturbances which enabled them to build up their social and administrative organisation.'[24] These representations of a remote wooded landscape are in keeping with what Sivaramakrishnan has called 'enduring tropes of wilderness' and one can argue that, this idea of a pristine landscape is not borne out by the evidence. Indeed it is clear, that the landscape in Chotanagpur, even in the thickest jungles, was an anthropogenic one. This is in keeping with the numerous studies elsewhere that have argued that 'there is no such thing as virgin forest'.[25] The forests that ecologists have assumed to be unchanged for centuries are being found to reveal, pot sherds, charcoal and the remains of ancient crop fields.[26] One can however, safely conclude that the forests of Chotanagpur constituted an anthropogenic landscape. However, to my mind, what is important is not whether ecosystems are untouched or unchanged by humans but whether there exist serious 'quantitative and qualitative differences in human impact over time in relation to cultural, species and ecosystem diversity'.[27] The more serious threshold of human activity is the point when the natural regenerative capacity of the

[23]S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, first published 1912, Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, reprint 1970, pp. 60–61.

[24]Ibid., p. 63.

[25]There are of course important qualifications to be made, which many revisionists ignore. As Leslie Sponsel argues, the speculation that humans have had an impact on the ecosystem for millenia must be tempered by other considerations. For example, 1/3 of the land of the planet may be termed 'wilderness', and while 12 per cent of the interior forest of the Brazilian Amazon is anthropogenic, 88 per cent is certainly not by any definition. Quoted in Headland, 'Revisionism', p. 621.

[26]Yoon, 'Rainforests seen as shaped by Human Hand', in Headland, 'Revisionism', p. 608.

[27]Leslie Sponsel, 'Comment', in Headland, 'Revisionism', p. 621.

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ecosystem is exceeded and ecological succession is halted as was beginning to happen by the late nineteenth century in Chotanagpur.[28]

Similarly, while the argument for isolation is also not borne out by much of the nineteenth century literature there is little doubt that distinctive cultures and ontologies were practised on the plateau. Many of these showed evidence of complex cultural exchanges from an early historical period distinguished by reciprocity not easily categorisable as Hinduisation or tribalisation. In 1868, Valentine Ball recorded ancient excavations, indicating human activity at the top of the hills, in valleys, in the middle of cultivation and even in the thickest jungles of Chotanagpur. In Singhbhum, Colonel Tickell in 1840 noted the complex political economy of the region in the earlier periods and the fact that Singhbhum was in the hands of the Surawaks or Jains whose oppressions ended in their expulsion from the Kolhan.[29] O'Malley noted that in the ancient period the Sravakas or lay Jains penetrated the jungles, where they were rewarded with the discovery of copper.[30] Dalton recorded in the thirteenth century that the north of the district came under the rule of the Singh family of Porahat, who claimed to be Rathor rajputs, whose ancestors were three brothers in the body guard of Akbar's general Man Singh who took the side of the Bhuiyas against the Hos and ended up conquering the country for themselves. At one time, the Singh *rajas* also ruled over the country now included in the states of Seraikela and Kharsawan and claimed suzerainty over the Kolhan, a claim which the Hos denied. According to Dalton, old Hos told him that they honoured and respected the Singh chiefs, but regarded them, until they quarrelled rather as friends and allies than as rulers. Even if they ever were subjects they had achieved their liberty in various hard fought fields.[31]

What is clear from these histories, many of them conjectural, is that the communities in Singhbhum and elsewhere were not in any sense 'isolated' but were constantly interacting with other groups from the north. However, one cannot simply reject the notion of a

[28]Ibid.

[29]S. R. Tickell, 'Memoir on the Hodesum', *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 9, 1840, p. 690.

[30]L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Singbhum, Seraikella and Kharsawan*, vol. xx, Calcutta: Secretariat Book Depot, 1910, p. 25.

[31]Ibid., p. 26.

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cultural autonomy of, for example, the Hos in Singhbhum as some recent revisionist historians who record the complex process of migration and cultural transformation in Singhbhum and elsewhere have done.[32] As Stuart Hall has argued,

> ... cultural identities come from somewhere, they have histories. But far from being externally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power.

Hall's argument, that identities are always about becoming, also offers, as it has been argued, a way out of the 'impasse in which those who historicise the identities or traditions of others are accused of undermining political projects founded upon originary, perhaps essential truths'.[33]

Indigenous agency and colonial discourse

Notwithstanding the rich and complex histories of acculturation and settlement of communities in Chotanagpur, colonial discourse tended to perpetuate stereotyped images of the tribe which had important implications. It is not surprising that racial and evolutionary ideas dominated given the global historical context and the dominance of racial ideas. It is important to note that, despite the often racial, evolutionary ideas of tribes British attitudes towards indigenous peoples in India in the nineteenth century were not unchanging or homogeneous. It is difficult in this chapter to completely unravel the multifarious skeins that made up British policy in the period. However, some of the main strands in the thinking of officials, administrators and anthropologists need to be identified in order to assess the overall impact of colonial interventions in the lifestyles of the 'tribes'.

The nineteenth century had seen the emergence of humanitarian sentiments about the future of aboriginal peoples. This trend in

[32]T. N. N. Singh Deo, *Singhbhum, Seraikella and Kharsawan, through the Ages*, Calcutta: Alliance Press, 1954, p. 41. More recently see the work of A. K. Sen, *Text and beyond Text: Essays on the History of the Ho of Singhbhum during Colonial Rule* (unpublished manuscript).

[33]Stuart Hall quoted in Tania Murray Li, 'Environment, indigeniety and transnationalism', in *Liberation Ecologies, Environment, Development, Social Movements*, ed. M. Watts and R. Peet, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 342–43.

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Victorian thinking developed in the 1830s with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aborigines which was set up to inquire into 'the measures ... to be adopted with respect to the native inhabitants of countries where British settlements are made, and to the neighbouring tribes, in order to secure them the due observation of justice and the protection of their rights, to promote the spread of civilisation among them, and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian religion.'[34]

Even among writers such as W. W. Hunter, the ethnological vision of partnership between the colonial state and non-Aryan groups is evident. Throughout East Bengal, he noted 'Santhals and other hill men may be found living apart from the Hindus and preserving their national customs ... patient of labour, at home with nature, as pioneer cultivators seasonal indigo workers such people furnish the sinews by which English enterprise is carried on in Bengal'.[35] The Santal in much of colonial ethnology, functions as a sort of 'noble savage' with all its associated stereotypes. The idealised concept of the noble savage was a counter to the most pejorative characterisations of foreign peoples as barbaric and fundamentally inferior. It has been argued, that the celebration of so called primitives may well have partially weakened Europe's arrogant ethnocentrism and created at least a momentary imbalance about the human cost of civilisation. Yet as Muthu notes, as much as this may have helped to elicit the intellectual groundwork for the humanitarianism of anti-slavery thinking, a rejection of noble savagery was necessary before a more meaningful and substantive moral commiseration with non-Europeans could develop. The peculiar understanding of the relationship between human nature and culture in noble savage writings yielded a virtually dehumanising exoticism despite the best intention of thinkers who chose to celebrate what they saw as the 'purely natural' specimens of humanity in the new world.[36]

Despite this criticism, it was these ideas that allowed a nascent humanitarian discourse to develop in India about the position of tribes in the mid-nineteenth century which we will discuss in a later section of the paper. In order to understand this complex colonial

[34]Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 241.

[35]W. W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, London: Smith Elder, 1872, p. 226.

[36]Shankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2003, pp. 11–12.

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discourse on tribes we will have to take into account indigenous agency and ideas of place. I have noted the complex history of migration into Chotanagpur from a very early period rendering the whole idea of 'isolated' tribes questionable. What cannot be disputed however is the fact that while many of these developments did lead to a complex acculturation process, it gradually resulted in the spread of hierarchy and differentiation and the increasing loss of status of these communities. Increasing inroads by a moneylending, landlord class gradually intensified the decline of these groups. The increasing marginalisation started in the pre-colonial period and was aided and abetted by the British in the eighteenth century. In the Ranchi region, by 1585, the Mughal empire succeeded in making inroads into the region and imposing revenue demands for the first time on Munda and Oraon village communities. On their failure to oblige, the king, Durjan Sal was imprisoned by Jahangir in 1616 for twelve years. On his return to Chotanagpur, Durjan Sal became progressively Hinduised and acquired a retinue of brahmin priests and Rajput courtiers. These outsiders gradually attacked the Munda and Oraon communities imposing *rakumats* and cesses as they acquired *jagirdari* rights. The introduction of hordes of strangers into the country and the creation by the raja of a class of middlemen brought changes in the communal system of the majority of Mundari villages.[37] The system of service grants was an exotic idea introducing a class of jagirdars into the villages under various denominations such as *Bhaiyes, Baraik, Pandey, Jamadars, Ohdars* and so on. Gradually some Munda and Oraon settlements came under the onslaught of these new class of exploiters.[38] In Ranchi, the *khuntkatti* nature of a number of villages hitherto held by the descendants of the original settlers in common ownership was beginning to be impaired and in some villages the tribesmen were reduced to the ranks of an agricultural labourer. In the *rajhas* lands the jagirdars and later the *thikadar* laid hold of some of the finest plots in the village and began to cultivate it through farm servants. Some of the Mundas appear to have retreated to the jungles further south rather than submit to such ruthless exploitation. Thus we hear of Gaasi Munda of the

[37]See J. Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in Ranchi*, 1902–1910, Calcutta: Government Press, 1912, p.129.

[38]It needs to be pointed out that the incursions by an outsider class was made possible in a context where older images of the Mundas, Oraons and Hos as inferior received a new lease of life. See Roy, *The Mundas*, pp. 107–8.

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Purthu Kili then living in Hasa village not far from Khunti emigrating to the mountainous and jungly tract further to the south east and his descendants founded villages all around them, where the khuntkatti system was still in full vigour at the time of the East India Company. It is clear that the social downgrading of these communities quickly followed military marginalisation by the Mughals in the seventeenth century. In the region of Singhbhum, the advent of outsiders had resulted in a growing unrest among the surrounding Ho population. Here, the interventions of East India Company in the eighteenth century unleashed other forces of change.[39] As the company got a foothold in Dhalbhum and started interfering in the affairs of the local zamindars with an eye to subduing them, local government in the region was severely weakened, though overall control of areas such as Kuchang was given up as it was seen as encroaching on the rights of the independent raja of Mayurbanj.[40] However, in the following seventy years increasing inroads by an 'outsider class' resulted in growing unrest. The Kol rebellion of 1830 was the culmination of the period of change.

The period of the eighteenth century and certainly the nineteenth century had seen an invasive colonial policy in Chotanagpur in the interests of 'good rule and government.' The early incursions into the region had resulted in the formation of a district in about 1780 known as the Ramgarh Hill Tract, and magisterial courts were held first at Shergati to the north west of Hazaribagh. At Hazaribagh the local force of infantry was stationed under a European commander and one officer who performed the duties of judge, magistrate and collector. Gradually the area was brought under British control. The British had tried to enforce control through the local chief but by 1800 this policy was abandoned in favour of more direct control which was implemented militarily and the whole region was placed under the magistrate of Ramgarh in 1816 and the district was governed in accordance with ordinary regulations in force in Bengal. The effects were immediate and most visible in Tamar where the exploitation of Hindu moneylenders, whose activities were bolstered by colonial courts, resulted in widespread protests which continued unabated until the 1830s.[41] As the tribes were introduced to the idea of 'good government', they had to wend their way long distances

[39]Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, pp. 171–206.
[40]O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, p. 29.
[41]See file on Tamar disturbances, *Hazaribagh District Collectorate Records*, 1819.

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to Shergati, in land disputes which resulted from the seizure of Munda lands by Pathan moneylenders.[42]

When the courts failed to redress their grievances protest seemed the only answer. British administrative reports in the early nineteenth century show bewilderment at the hostility of the tribes to 'good government'. The commissioner of Circuit in 1830 reported colourfully on the Munda rebellions of 1830. They were he noted:

> Restless, wild and furious.... they rushed into an insurrection scarcely paralleled for ferocity. Eager for plunder and universally prone to inebriation and infuriated by real or imaginary wrongs, the whole population yielded to the unobstructed tide of rebellion—fire, rapine and murder marked their paths; nor was their vindictive spirit confined to those to whom their injuries were ascribed.[43]

This was the language of savagery and rebellion that, it has been argued, helped in the 'production of primitive places through their influence on images, ethnology and administrative policy.'[44] Elsewhere the language was subtly different as in this oft quoted statement of Bindrai Manki that figures in several reports on the 1830 rebellion:

> We complained to the raja of the *munshi* having sided with his father-in-law and deprived my wife of her chastity and of the Singh having forcibly taken and kept my sister. When we told the Raja our grievances we returned home. We four were subsequently sent four by Krishna Dewan who told us that as we were *kols* we might do as we pleased, but be careful not to involve Raja Achet Singh in any difficulties in our conduct. We returned home, invited all the *kols* our brethren and caste to assemble at the village inn where we had a consultation. The Pathans had taken our honour and the Singh our sisters and the Kuar Harnath Sahi had forcibly deprived us of our estate of twelve villages which he had given to the Singh. Our lives we considered of no value and being of one caste and brethren it was agreed that we should commence to cut, plunder, murder and eat. We said if any were hanged it would be us four. If any put in irons it would be we should be the four. We four should be answerable and if the gentleman sent for any it would be us, who were ready to submit to whatever might be the sentence. It is with

[42]Report of the Munda rebellions in the 1830s in Dalton's, *Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 171.

[43]F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Chota Nagpur: A Little Known Province of the Empire*, London: Smith Elder, 1903, p. 21.

[44]Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests*, pp. 3–4.

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this resolution that we have been murdering and plundering those who have deprived us of both honour and homes that committing such outrages our grievances would come to light and that if we had any master notice would be taken of them and justice rendered.[45]

That these rebellions forced colonial policy to contend with 'indigenous' ideas of place and being is not in doubt. Native resistance to European land claims forced a recognition of Munda rights and highlighted the limits of colonial power. The process revealed the ambivalence of the colonial state and the interaction of indigenous narratives of resistance with narratives of power. Some representations of rebellions also make the case for indigenous agency quite strongly. Here, we see a doctrine of human nature where the savages are bestowed with moral judgement, and a sharp sense of injustice which stands in contrast to ideas of the 'noble' or 'ignoble' savage. Through the conscious use of their will to transform their unhappy circumstances into a better social condition the tribes are seen as active agents of their own future. In these accounts which see 'tribes' as cultural beings, they are afforded more genuine respect as human beings, resulting in a critique of British imperial policy from within the system which is brutalising fellow human beings and destroying their culture.

In the context of the Munda and Santal rebellions in Chotanagpur in the 1830s and 1850s these humanitarian sentiments found expression in the writing of administrators, missionaries and ethnologists of the time. One report in the aftermath of the Santal rebellion of 1851 noted that 'the Santhals were excessively simple and quite unacquainted with or unable to comprehend the most simple accounts and the mahajans and zamindars take advantage of their defects of character in this respect by cheating them both in money transactions and arrangements for holding their land.'[46] While the repression of the rebellion was extreme, a growing perception of the plight of the 'indigenous' inhabitants who were threatened by the ruthless interventions of moneylenders from the plains and colonial institutions begins to become more evident in the writings of administrators from about the 1850s. It was reported that the 'keen-eyed Hindu merchants from the north were quick to gauge the simple character of the primitive peoples.'[47] H. Ricketts, a

[45]Cited in Roy, *The Mundas*, pp. 114–17.
[46]Letter 184 of 1857, *Hazaribagh District Collectorate Records*, 1856–57.
[47]Bradley Birt, *Chota Nagpur*, p. 5.

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member of the board of Revenue noted in 1854 that 'there seems reason to apprehend that the people of the district, the coles suffer much injustice at the hands of the foreign middleman introduced by the *raja*, their *zamindar*', while Davidson who studied the condition of the province in 1839 put forth—

> in point of fact there is no regular police or administration of justice in Nagpur till the present agency was established in 1834.... that the *coles* are frequently imposed on by their landholders is not for want of comprehension, but they have been so long completely left to their mercies and so entirely deprived of any protection from them that it is difficult to resist.

He further stated that,

> efficient administration in this part of the country will be impracticable until the rights of the people have been authoritatively recorded and steps been taken to secure them in the enjoyment of their rights by comprehensive legislative enhancement.[48]

In 1854 another fair-minded official Major Hannyngton, Agent to the Governor General in 1849 and the first district commissioner of Chotanagpur in 1850 noted the ways in which dikus had tried to rob tribals of land. As he put it, 'in Chotanagpur, the *bhooi* has lands which exist in every village have been exposed to the rapacity of the middlemen, aliens who are hated by the people and who to obtain these lands, spare no species of force or fraud'.[49]

This perspective of fair minded officers and commentators was to continue until the late nineteenth century when Birt noted that 'the new-comers had under-rated the risk. The Kols and Oraons they so much despised were dangerous foes when pushed too far. Fire and sword struck terror into the hearts of *zamindars* and interlopers and taught the British government that special cases needed special laws and that a backward people at the mercy of unscrupulous adventurers called for timely assistance and protection.'[50]

The sentiments expressed in this writing by Bradley-Birt in 1907 illustrates the different levels of thinking among British administrators in the latter half of the nineteenth century. That the tribes were

[48]Ibid.

[49]Report cited by Ricketts in *Selections from the records of the Bengal government*, vol. xx, (Chota Nagpur), Calcutta, 1854, pp. 14–15.

[50]Ibid., p. 6.

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'backward' and 'primitive' was clearly felt. However, it was realised as early as the 1830s that the way of life of the indigenous inhabitants of Chotanagpur was being gravely threatened by the incursions of Hindu landlords and the moneylending community, aided by colonial institutions and bolstered by colonial law. The production of what has been called the colonial stereotype of the 'simple innocent tribal people who needed protection from non tribal merchants and moneylenders' had a basis in the existing reality of tribal oppression and found voice in indigenous narratives of resistance to such oppression. In the context of widespread rebellion and protest by the tribes these ideas were taken seriously by the administrators and significant attempts were made to make Chotanagpur a non-regulation province of Bengal and one where colonial institutions would function keeping in mind the different character and problems of the region.

Such a perspective allows us to move away from the revisionist view that colonial rulers were merely conjuring up tribes as 'isolated', 'difficult' and essentially 'different' to an understanding of the ways in which colonial rulers were forced to participate and engage with the land and its people and to contend with indigenous ideas of place and being. Many of those cited—Davidson, J. C. Hannyngton and Ricketts—between 1830 and 1850 had tried to carefully document the history and land rights of local communities and were strongly critical of colonial courts and administration. As Ricketts noted:

> It appears to me that the system existing is the most mischievous that could be followed, that any change would be for the better.[51]

The importance of resistance and the idea of Munda and Ho exclusiveness

After the Munda rebellion of 1830, the government put the entire province of Chotanagpur under the charge of an officer, designated 'Agent to the Governor-General'. The first legislation implemented for Chotanagpur was the introduction of the 'Wilkinson rules' under regulation 13 of 1833 which made Chotanagpur a non-regulation province of the South-West Frontier Agency after abolishing the military collectorship of Ramgarh Hill Tract.[52]

[51]Ibid., p. 10.

[52]Regulation xiii of 1833 exempted certain areas, among them Chota Nagpur from the regulations and placed them under special new rules for the administration of civil and criminal justice and for the superintendence of police, land revenue etc.

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In Singhbhum, the Munda rebellions helped the company in their 'expansionist goals' and a major portion of the territories of Porahat, Seraikela, Mayurbanj and Kharsawan were put together under the charge of a British officer and given the name Kolhan, 1955 sq. miles in all.[53] Major Wilkinson, the Governor General's Agent of the South West Frontier Agency recorded the reason for taking over these areas, owing 'to the inability of the chiefs of the estates to keep control of the Lurkas ... the strength and resources of the Kuar of Seraikella (being) exhausted by the constant necessity ... to repel the attacks of the *coles*, that our Dak runners on the Bombay road throughout Baumghatty and from thence to Kutkurinjhea, will always be liable to interruption; and that many murders will be annually committed on suspicion of witchcraft.'[54] In Kolhan, therefore the Kol rebellion had made it possible to render Ho exclusiveness a fact with the 'amputation of the Ho tracts of the Kolhan' from Seraikella, Kharsawan and other Oriya states.[55] For the administration of justice, the district of Lohardugga was constituted as a centre for dispensing justice over 12,500 sq. miles. Wilkinson tried to pacify the tribes by granting the village headmen or Mundas and *mankis* of certain areas official documents confirming their title to the land and fixing the rent in perpetuity. But his reforms were based on a fundamental misunderstanding. As a result of this misunderstanding and the granting of land titles to village headmen, several villages fell into the hands of diku landlords for arrears of rent. British courts participated in this dispossession as Mundas of villages had no title deeds to their land and could not prove ownership in British courts.[56] As there was no proper record of rights, land grabbing by dikus in cahoots with the courts continued to an unparalleled degree.

[53]Deo, *Singhbhum, Seraikella and Kharsawan*, p. 47.

[54]Major T. S. Wilkinson, to R. D. Mangles, ESQ Secretary to Government, Fort William, 22 August 1836 cited in Deo, *Singbhum, Seraikela and Kharsawan*, p. 47.

[55]See criticism of this position in Deo, *Singhbhum, Seraikela and Kharsawan*. According to historian M. Sahu, the British introduced a system of administration that consolidated its grip over the Kolhan. In this way, the Kolhan became politically and administratively part of the Indian empire. He notes that the attempt of the British to prevent land alienation was caused by the growing problem of dikku penetration. 'The policy was praise worthy inasmuch as without this the entire tribal community would have been swept away by the Diku influx'. See M. Sahu, *The Kolhan under British rule*, Calcutta: New Diamond Press, 1985.

[56]J. B. Hoffmann, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, vol. VIII, Patna: Government Press, 1933, p. 2400.

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E. Dalton was to note in 1890 that 'it was during the administration of the south western agency that the greatest disturbance of peasant proprietary tenure occurred.'[57]

The agency administration was abolished under Act 20 of 1854 and the powers of the agency were vested in an officer appointed by the local government known as the 'Commissioner' who was placed under the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. In 1869 the Chota Nagpur Tenures Act was passed to redress some of the grievances of the peasantry.[58] One could say that the act was a case of, too little too late. It recognised *bhuinhari* tenures and as these lands were subject to such dispute the act was passed providing for the demarcation of such tenures and lands and the preparation of registers to record them with rights, privileges, immunities and liabilities affecting the holders thereof.[59] As a result of the bhuinhari act the Lieutenant-Governor was empowered to appoint one or more persons as special commissioners to carry out the provisions of the act.[60] Each special commissioner was to investigate claims to the tenures and demarcate the lands, and then make for each village an accurate register of all the tenures. He was also authorised to restore to possession all persons or their heirs who had been wrongly dispossessed within two years of the passing of the act, and to enter their names as occupants of lands in the village register.[61] It is important to point out that while this act seemed specifically designed to end disputes at the village level, in practice it succeeded in restoring only very limited areas of land to the dispossessed tribals and did not demarcate all the traditional tenures. In fact it completely left out other tenures, in

[57] *Papers Relating to the Chota Nagpur Agrarian Disputes*, Calcutta: Government of Bengal, 1890, Part II, p. 21.

[58] The operations under the Act though successful to some extent in the areas in which they were carried out were a mere palliative of the disorders. There was a failure to even define *bhuinhari* or *Khuntkatti* which was perpetuated when the rent act of 1879 was enacted.

[59] *Bhuinhari* tenures were those which were reclaimed and held by persons claiming to be descendants of the original founders of the village in which such lands were situated.

[60] Only one special commissioner was appointed, Rakhal Das Haldar, a Calcutta barrister. Roy notes that the investigations began on 1 April 1869 and went on until 31 March 1880; Roy, *The Mundas*, pp. 272–73.

[61] J. Reid, *The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 with Notes, Judicial Rulings and the Rules framed under the Act*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1910, pp. 22–23.

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particular Mundari khuntkhatti tenures. Thus, in examining the nature of the special laws on Chotanagpur we need to keep in mind the fact that they had a limited impact and did not dramatically change the predicament that the local people found themselves in.

It is interesting to note that, these partial legislative attempts to check obvious exploitation by outsiders developed alongside the notion of 'civilising' the tribes. This was made most clear in the debate on shifting cultivation. Richard Temple, for example, argued strongly in favour of ending the practice of shifting cultivation. *Jhum*-ing was said to be wasteful and to threaten the jungles in the remoter parts. It was reported that the Kharia tribe of Dhalbhum who lived on fruits available from trees and jungle produce, raised a few precarious crops on patches of jungle which they cleared for the purpose by burning the trees. After reaping their harvest, they shifted to another area of the jungle and returned to the same patch after 8–9 years. The language of settling and improving these groups was always in evidence.[62]

It is also important to note that, the legislative exercise of the latter half of the nineteenth century which was aimed to redress the most pressing grievances of the tribes in Chotanagpur did not fail to rouse debate on the merits of a policy that provided for an 'excluded' or 'partially excluded area'. J. Forsyth, the administrator of the Central Provinces, was vociferous in his criticism of colonial policy regarding these tracts. He proposed that the Mandla plateau, or *savannah*s as he called it, should be opened up for permanent cultivation.

> We have here a tract eminently fitted to yield results from the application of European energy, intelligence, and capital to the supervision and direction of native labour.... none but a capitalist can now practically occupy the waste lands so as to secure a legal proprietary title; and the aborigine never has such capital as would enable him to do so.[63]

Edward Dalton, the former commissioner of Chotanagpur, was of the opinion that the complicated machinery of civilised laws

[62]In the Central Provinces the activities of the shifting cultivators was criticised with vigour by Forsyth. The fact that much of the destruction of the forest resulted from the activities of merchant capital and the opening up of the region by railways was mentioned by many of the settlement officers only in passing. See Forsyth, *The Highlands*, pp. 96, 364, 367.

[63]Forsyth, *The Highlands*, p. 163.

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was unsuited to the backward tribes and that the government was 'inclined to treat them with favour bordering on partiality.'[64] But the debate was won by those who believed in some form of protection for the tribes.

In the early part of the twentieth century the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 attempted further to define and record tenures and to 'register ... rights, privileges, immunities and liabilities affecting holders.' This legislation, the reasons for which were given in a Bengal government resolution in 1880, aimed to put an end to disputes which had assumed 'so chronic a character in connection with these special tenures.' It is important to note that while the act recognised *khuntkattidar* rights it gave no privilege to khuntkattidars to entitle them to retain possession against the wishes of the landlord. The limitations of the act could be clearly seen.[65]

All this does not detract from the fact that some effort was made to record and protect customary rights by the colonial state. Often misjudged, but sometimes appropriate, the protection of these customary rights helped to institutionalise the fact of tribal autonomy. The move to protect these rights was fuelled by resistance movements of the nineteenth century, and by the fact that colonial administrators were forced to contend with indigenous knowledge and ideas of place. As I have noted, we thus need a more sophisticated understanding of colonial ethnography that takes into account various strands of thinking and the great variety of imperial agents involved in the process of colonisation. A whole generation of ethnologists and administrators in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had systematically studied 'tribal culture'. Starting with the work of Colonel Tickell and Ricketts in the 1840s and 50s to W. W. Hunter and E. Dalton in the late nineteenth century to S. C. Roy in 1910, the idea of a distinct tribal Munda, Ho or Oraon culture had been given textual force and meaning, which was to be translated to legislative protection of sorts. S. C. Roy, the Indian anthropologist whose early work followed in the footsteps of Victorian evolutionary anthropologists such as Tylor and Morgan, while continuing to describe Oraons in racial terms, systematically mapped Oraon culture through meticulous field work becoming a champion of tribal protection and precursor

[64]Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 3.
[65]Reid, *The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act*, pp. 22–23.

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to Verrier Elwin.[66] In his study, *The Mundas and their Country*, published in 1912 he is greatly interested in the land system of the Mundas and in recording their customary social and religious practices. In recording the folklore and songs of the Birsa Munda movement Roy gave legitimacy to the loss of dignity and economic injustice suffered by the Mundas. He noted how the Mundas had reacted against the interventions into their daily life and portrayed their dispossessors as 'men of mean blood'. In their songs they pilloried them:

Owls pose as lords, the owls of low birth, struts the vain peacock in glory of plumage. Look how the crow rules as digaur over each village. Peacocks are grown great beings on earth. Rules the vile crow as kotwal all over. Now hath each village for digaur a crow. Mundas of hamlets now tremble and shiver. Terror supreme does reign the land over. Mundas of hamlets have lost their old cheer.[67]

By recording these songs, Roy revealed the strong sense of fear and hatred that the Mundas felt towards outsiders. They were perceived as destroying the happy lifestyle of the indigenous peoples and as a proud, vain and parasitical class imposing their administrative structures on hitherto autonomous Munda villages. In songs composed later in the nineteenth century the extent of the destruction is made more apparent and they talk of death and famine stalking the land, as in,

... horrible death from hunger prevails, oh! for the days when man knew no cares ... woe to this age when men on earth below do daily die of famine.

This was a reference to the results of dramatic changes brought by the British land revenue policy and increasing emigration into the region of outsiders in the wake of colonial rule.

We also need to locate the work of administrators like Davidson, Hannyngton and Ricketts in the 1850s to ethnologists like S. C. Roy in 1900 and others within a broader framework of nineteenth-century humanitarianism. In an important article, Alan Lester has argued that humanitarian ideology can be traced to the late eighteenth, early

[66]Sangeeta Dasgupta, 'The Journey of an Anthropologist in Chotanagpur', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2004, pp. 165–98. Dasgupta could usefully develop this aspect of Roy's work more elaborately.

[67]Roy, *The Mundas*, pp. 22–23.

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nineteenth century when a sense of responsibility for distant human suffering was created in western Europe, when these societies became entwined within global networks of exchange and exploitation. He challenges the notion of a singular metropolitan centered colonial discourse and suggests instead a complex network of discursive exchanges in a globalised field.[68] In fact, the young science of ethnology owed its institutional origins to the humanitarian impulses embodied in the Aborigines Protection Society, founded in 1833 'to promote the spread of civilization and the protection of their rights.' The nineteenth century, had seen the emergence of humanitarian sentiments about the future of aboriginal peoples. Stocking argues that in the period 1830–70, the organisation and the ideology of empire were in a state of irresolution as humanitarians, colonists, colonial reformers and free traders pushed their respective concerns in the metropolitan political arena. This trend in Victorian thinking manifested itself in the 1830s with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aborigines which was set up to inquire into 'the measures ... to be adopted with respect to the native inhabitants of countries where British settlements are made, and to the neighbouring tribes, in order to secure them the due observation of justice and the protection of their rights, to promote the spread of civilisation among them, and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian religion.'[69] The story of missionaries such as Hoffman and Lievens is important in this context.

Important new work on missionaries is allowing us to reassess the work of missionaries. While it has been argued that from the start, missionaries provided a more authoritarian instrument for the attempted control of indigenous communities in India and Africa, it has recently been argued that missionaries played an ambivalent role both in Britain's imperial expansion and in local power struggles. In a recent important work E. Elborne has shown that the religious 'conversation' between the missionary and his parishioners resembled more the ministrations of the Good Samaritan than a dichotomous clash of cultures in south Africa. Similarly in India, missionaries were sometimes, important critics of colonial policy and attacked an indifferent or even greedy

[68]Alan Lester, 'Observing the Due Observance of Justice: The Geographies of Colonial Humanitarianism', *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, vol. 20, 2002, p. 277.

[69]Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 241.

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administration.[70] Along with the reverend J. Parry, A. F. Lacroix and J. Wenger and other colleagues with experience of work in other areas, James Long of the Church Missionary Society in Bengal was for example fiercely critical of the effects of the landlord or zamindari system. In the 1850s, referring to the case of Spain under Arab rule during the middle ages, he remarked that 'there are certain stages in society when the government of enlightened foreigners is better for a nation than that of her own rude chieftains.... The doctrine avowed in various quarters that 'India is to be ruled not for the benefit of the 200 millions, but in the interests of a few foreigners.'[71]

In Chotanagpur, four missionaries of the Gossner Mission came to Ranchi in 1845. They were Germans who had been invited to preach in Chotanagpur by the first commissioner of Chotanagpur, J. C. Hannyngton. They had become acquainted with the 'kols' while in Calcutta where they came across 'black children engaged in mean works like sweeping the roads and carrying the goods ... the young missionaries were at once struck by these dark skinned, bright merry faced people, who presented in every way a marked contrast to the decidedly handsome, fair skinned indolent Bengalees and the rather martial looking up country men.'[72] They settled in Ranchi in 1845 where progress was slow and 'at the close of day of weary, fruitless toil they might have been seen again digging on their own little garden plots, to raise up a few vegetables for the supply of their common table or working with hatchet and plane squaring timber for their dwelling houses and schools with their own hands raising the walls, or laying on the roof of their godly church'.[73] As a result of their work, four Oraons were baptised in 1850 and the first church was founded; and two Mundas were baptised in 1851. The Anglican Mission established its work in Ranchi in 1869 and the Roman Catholic mission started work in Chotanagpur soon after. I will concentrate here on the work of the Jesuit mission which has a long

[70]See Peter Anderson and Sussane Ross, *Christian Missionaries and Orientalist Discourse*, in *Christians and Missionaries in India*, Frykenberg, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2003, p. 313.

[71]G. Oddie, *Missionaries, Rebellion and Proto Nationalism, James Long of Bengal, 1814–87*, London: Curzon Press, 1999, p. 183.

[72]See Nottrott, *The Gossner Mission under the Kols* and Chatterton, *The Story of Fifty Years Mission in Chotanagpur*—cited in S. Mahato, *A Hundred Years of Christian Missions in Chotanagpur, since 1845*, Ranchi: Chotanagpur Christian Publishing House, 1971, p. 21.

[73]Ibid., p. 29.

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and rich tradition of involving themselves in tribal land struggles. It would be interesting to compare the work of the Protestant with the Catholic missions though this is outside the scope of this chapter. Work on protestant missionaries elsewhere has argued for the close association of Protestantism with empire and the fact that Protestantism was an important element of the constitution of 'British' identity in the nineteenth century and as such helped to unify diverse communities. Jesuit radicalism on the other hand developed in Chotanagpur as an important critique of colonial state policy, a tradition that continues to this day.

The first Jesuit missionary in Chotanagpur, Stockman settled in Chaibasa in 1869. The early Jesuits did not believe that they had to help the local people against oppression by landlords.[74] Until the 1880s they had few tribal converts. Between the years 1880–85, more converts were made as a result of the efforts of Mullender who helped a few people in court cases in Bandgaon and Burudi.[75] In March 1885 with the arrival of Father Lievens, a young Jesuit missionary, things moved at a dramatic pace. He was given the charge of the whole area between Sarwada and Badagaon in the south and south-west part of Munda territory. Lievens believed that ordinary preaching would not work given the growing crisis in the agrarian scene. He came to study and understand the traditional rights of the Mundas and began to develop a strategy to help them.[76] He believed that only a policy that would not unduly antagonise the government but invoke the power of its laws would work. He refused for this reason to have anything to do with the *sardari* agitation which he regarded as socialistic. He loaned money for poor tribals to hire lawyers and pointed out their rights to them.[77] It can be argued that by helping mainly Christians and getting entire villages to convert, Lievens' motives were primarily that of conversion. He may have been focussed on turning indigenous people into civilised Christians. However, equally important was the role of missions in the eyes of local communities as 'vectors of contact' with the British imperial centre. In the southern African case, Elbourne argues, that 'missionaries were

[74]Fidelis De Sa, *Crisis in Chotanagpur*, Bangalore: Redemptorist Publication, 1975, p. 117.

[75]Peter Tete, *The Kharias and the History of the Catholic Church in Biru*, Ranchi: St Alberts, Faculty of Theology, 1990, p. 61.

[76]Ibid.,pp.66–67.

[77]Fidelis De Sa, *Crisis in Chotanagpur*, pp. 124–25.

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sources of useful information about European technology, culture and religion. Such information could be used to protect societies against imperialist incursions, as much as, to internalise the dictates of cultural colonialism.'[78]

Frequently Lievens travelled to the Ranchi court. At the Ranchi court he got his clients to meet lawyers and court employees, who according to a special arrangement took up the causes of the people for a moderate fee. Lievens himself supplied the magistrates with information regarding the many ways in which the villagers were being harassed. Exaggerated statements of false witnesses of the landlord party were detected in court. By December 1887, many of the lawsuits undertaken or contested on the missionaries' advice were successful.[79]

The number of converts seem to have increased rapidly. In September 1886, there were 200 followers. By October 1888 these had increased to 56,000. It has been argued that Mundas began to look at Catholicism as a society wherein they could be protected. It was believed and this is in line with Elbourne's argument that as the Jesuit missions were in the good books of the government, the people hoped that the missionaries would help win over the government to their side. The landlords reacted by complaining to the government that the people were preparing for rebellion as a result of mission activities; they were 'illegally combining against the landlords by gathering in large numbers, carrying battle axes, cutting the rice of these gentlemen, refusing to work for them, preventing others from working, forcing people to become Christian, even rescuing people imprisoned by police and beating constables.'

The commissioner of Chotanagpur sent two officials—Renny, the acting D.C. of Lohardugga and Patch, the S. P. of police, to investigate in 1889. Both blamed the missionaries for fomenting rebellion.[80] As a result of 'the disgraceful and deceptive conduct of these missionaries a large number of tenants have become Christians and in consequence they have been doing lawless acts.' Despite the fact that the missionaries had only a limited effect on the overall agrarian crisis, they were important critics of colonial policy towards

[78]E. Elborne, *Blood Ground, Colonialism, Missions and the Context for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853*, Montreal: Mcgill Queens University Press, p. 13.

[79]Tete, *The Kharias*, pp. 78–79.

[80]Fidelis De Sa, *Crisis in Chotanagpur*, p. 207.

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tribes and perceived as such by administrators such as Renny and Patch.

By the 1890s the anger and resentment of the Mundas had erupted once again into the Munda rebellion. The rising was put down by the government, but it was renewed in 1899. Birsa was an ex-Lutheran who put himself at the head of a new religion in which elements of Christianity were to be found. The risings were against the government, but there were also attacks against the missionaries. Thus the people, after trying various forms of adaptation resorted once again to open rebellion. They seem to have felt that the government and the Christian missions had let them down. Limited agrarian legislation in the form of the Chota Nagpur Tenures Act of 1869 extended only to the survey of bhuinhari (ancestral) lands and the *manjihas* tenures. No attempt was made to deal with the disputes about rajhas (ordinary raiyati) lands which comprised the great bulk of the cultivated area.

This was the context for the arrival of the next important missionary to involve himself with agrarian affairs in Chotanagpur—John Baptist Hoffmann, a German Jesuit who became a strident critic of colonial policy towards tribes. On his arrival, he viewed the local district commissioner, Gordon in 1893 as a 'man of little intelligence, incapable and lazy' who was extremely hostile to the missionaries and so ignorant of the state of the region that he said it was the 'tribals who were persecuting the *zamindar*s rather than the other way around.'[81]

Hoffmann was perturbed by the anger and the hostility of the Mundas who were preparing under Birsa to launch their attack on the government and the missionaries by secretly plotting their rebellion in the hills and the forests. His writing clearly ascribe more agency to the communities whose unhappiness was fuelled by the neglect of grievances by the state. Birsa persuaded his followers that god had given him the task of liberating the tribals and instituting a new religion. Hoffman noted that the religious gatherings, 'gave a harmless appearance' to the numerous *sardar* meetings in which the intended rising was settled without arousing any serious suspicions in either government or missions. But it was aimed at resolving more deep-seated grievances. It facilitated the gathering of about 6,000 armed men around Birsa in Chalkad in August 1895, after

[81]Peter Tete, *A Missionary Social Worker in India*, Rome: University Gregoriana Editrice, 1983, p. 29.

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which it was announced that he would call fire from heaven to destroy the alien. Hoffmann himself was threatened. The Birsa movement forced missionaries such as Hoffmann to recognise the strength of local grievances and the inability of the colonial state to deal with the grievances of the communities. For tribal converts like Birsa then the reimagination of community through the use of invented and traditional symbols became more potent weapons than loyalist Christian discourse. It was in this context that the missionaries also came under attack because they were no longer 'vectors of contact' with the British imperial centre. In this past these connections with the missionaries had helped to challenge in a limited manner the overwhelming incursions of the colonial state and the zamindars. Hoffmann was deeply aware of the social and economic problems in Chotanagpur and gradually evolved a strategy to legally rectify through the laws the injustice done to the Mundas by zamindars, thikadars and moneylenders. His tenure in the Serwada mission were to make him a great missionary, a philologist, anthropologist and social reformer.[82] Hoffmann seized the opportunity to propose to the government, through the commissioner, a scheme for amending the laws, because as he had said so often concerning the rebellion, many of the complaints of the tribals were just. His detailed research into the Munda land system was consulted by Lister during the survey and settlement operations in 1902.

In August 1899 when Sir John Woodburn, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal visited Ranchi, the question of the settlement operations came up again. As J. Reid noted, 'the discussions regarding the bill to consolidate the law of landlord and tenant in 1899 showed clearly that there was a considerable divergence of opinion regarding local customary agrarian rights and customs and a record of these rights and customs was evidently necessary to supply the data for agrarian legislation. The Lieutenant-Governor, in the first place, considered it inadvisable to proceed with the bill, because after the Birsa movement, the Mundas were seen as still being very disturbed; secondly he thought that until the record of rights for the whole district was prepared, it was difficult to say what provisions of law were suitable for Chotanagpur.'

The Lieutenant-Governor had sought advice of the local officials, zamindars and missionaries. He was afraid that the proposed law

[82]Ibid., p. 46.

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would give rise to quarrels between the zamindars and the tribals and rebellion. Hoffmann tried to argue that codification and land measurement were the only way of preventing a rebellion. Streatfield, the judicial commissioner and Taylor were of the opinion that until a survey and a record of rights were undertaken, at least in Munda country, disaffection and discontent will continue. On 2 February 1902, the government of India sanctioned the inception of the survey and settlement operations, beginning with the Munda country and eventually extending to the whole of the district. The correspondence and control with regard to the survey and settlement operations were referred to Lister, the settlement officer and John Reid, director of land record.

The survey operations began on 8 March 1902 in the police stations of Khunti and Tamar under Lister. When it was carried out, Hoffmann was at Sarwada mission and was closely associated with Lister, so that many provisions in the Act that relate to the tribes were drafts of Hoffmann himself. It is recorded, that Lister and Hoffmann talked far into the night with Hoffmann rendering valuable assistance to Lister with regard to the Munda land system and local customs. Tete notes that it was Hoffmann who drafted the special laws in connection with Mundari khuntkatti which appeared in Appendix 1 of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908. As Hoffmann noted,

> It is no exaggeration to say that the state of insecurity of nearly all kinds of tenures and titles to possession was so universal as to seriously depreciate the value of lands and cripple agriculture. This insecurity was not limited to the raiyats holdings, but extended to the *zamindar*'s as well. So much so that it was common belief that any man with a little audacity and a little money might take possession of what lands he pleased. The courts, having little or nothing to go upon but oral evidence were in practice not merely powerless, but were in a way bound to assist rather than to check spoliation. This I know is a startling statement.... consider how legal records of tribal rights and customs in the absence of all legally fixed and demarcated boundaries of villages as well as fields, among an ignorant people, who could neither understand the court language, nor make themselves understood except through interpreters, how easy it was I say in these circumstances for them to prove in court any claim they might choose to make. In their bewilderment and despair, the aborigines were driven to attempts at risings and in fact always lived in a state of disaffection. In such a state of affairs, a general settlement was a necessity. Now that it has

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been completed, it has, in the course of years furnished the plainest proof of its importance and utility.[83]

In 1908, the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act was passed with the aim to 'supersede and consolidate the Act in force in Chotanagpur ... to improve the procedure ... to complete and improve substantive law, by embodying in it certain necessary provisions borrowed from the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1897 in connection with praedial dues and services'. The government had been forced to make a survey of khuntkatti in order to bring about peace and tranquillity among the Mundas in particular and in Chotanagpur in general. But it was felt that the survey was not enough to secure this finality; it was also necessary to protect the Mundas in their possession of the land. Hence the restrictions that were embodied in the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act. Legal provisions were made within the act to protect Mundari khuntkatti. It could not be transferred by sale except in special circumstances. In other words, where the record of rights had been prepared, a suit for the recovery of rent was not maintainable in any court unless it was sanctioned by the zamindar. If he refused the sale he had the right to liquidate the arrears of rents. A mortgage of any Mundari khuntkatti was prohibited. *Bhugut bhanda* was allowed but was not supposed to exceed seven years.[84] No transfer of a Mundari khuntkatti was valid unless in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act aimed to amend the laws and codify them according to custom and usage. However, when the act came into force there were only 156 villages registered as having full Mundari khuntkatti rights and 203 sq. miles as bhuinhari fields. It was found that out of 3614 sq. miles of cultivated land only 405 sq. miles were registered as ancestral property. From this we can say that the Act came too late. However, it had great significance for the Mundas as it recognised the Munda land system itself, for which they had been struggling for more than a hundred years. Hoffmann himself was optimistic about the impact of the Act;

[83]Hoffmann cited by Reid, *Final Report on the Survey*, p. 142.

[84]This was the transfer of interest of tenancy for the purpose of securing payment of money advanced or to be advanced by way of loan, upon the condition that the loan with all interest thereon shall be deemed to be extinguished by the profits arising from the tenancy during the period of the mortgage. Reid, *The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act*, p. 2.

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For more than a hundred years the Mundas were calumniated as savages or semi-savages, whose claims were too exorbitant and absurd to be listened to as stubborn rebels whom nobody could satisfy and therefore justly subjected to severe military reprisals as the Kols who were fit for nothing, but carrying burdens and being serfs. And now after a cruel martyrdom that has lasted all too long, their claims have been recognised officially as having been perfectly right and their land system appears as one of the wisest creations of pre-historic times. So after all they are neither savages nor semi-savages, but a race of martyrs most deserving of the sympathy and respect of all right minded men. Therefore the Act is a justification and a rehabilitation of the highest moral value.[85]

Hoffmann clearly followed the tradition of Lievens who preceded him. But he also promoted a method of dialogue with the government officials and persuaded them to protect the rights of the tribals. For him personally this was a rewarding exercise as he noted,

Thus the settlement literally resembled a calm sunny morning after a long destructive hurricane, which had reduced all the Mundas to extreme poverty and had thrown hundreds of thousands far away from their own dear country. For those remaining it brought peace and security. To me, who had been forced to witness and feel horrid sufferings of the Mundas for many years, it afforded one of the greatest joys of my life.[86]

The discourse of tribal protection was to come to full term in the debates around the statutory commission in the 1920s. By the 1930s these debates had culminated in the Excluded Areas Order which went some way to protecting the tribal communities. By the 1950s, the debates in the Constituent Assembly and the Report of the Thakkar commission further ensured that this legislation was to remain in force in the constitution of the newly created Indian State.[87]

[85]Hoffmann, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, 1933, vol. viii, p. 2402.
[86]Ibid., pp. 2403–4.
[87]*Constituent Assembly Debates Official Report*, Delhi: Government Publication, 1946–50, pp. 1, 139.

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Rethinking Adivasi Identity
The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act (1908) and its aftermath among the Hos of Singhbhum

Sanjukta Das Gupta

Overturning the decision of the attestation court to grant *khuntkatti* status (a privileged tenancy status given to the descendants of original clearers of jungle)[1] to Udai Ho of Loharda village, the Settlement Officer T. W. Bridges stated:

> The law does not allow them [*the Hos*] the privilege of khuntkatti unless they can show they qualify under Section 83 [of the *Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act*]. They [*should*] not do this simply by declaiming themselves of the same family as the original founder of each village ... [*But this is all they do, although*] ... there is not enough ground for supposing that the Ho memory is by national defect entirely blank concerning the history of collateral branches.[2]

The Settlement Officer clearly imputed wilful acts of deception to the Hos with regard to the manner in which they claimed their status. He alleged that neither the custom nor the character of collective memory could be evoked to justify their actions.

[1] *Khuntkatti* tenure referred to the tenure that belonged to a member of the lineage (*khunt*) who had reclaimed lands (*katti*) from the forests.

[2] Tuckey Settlement Papers (henceforth TSP), K 41 Sl 44 of 1916–17, Basta No. 1, Loharda Thana No. 5, Chaibasa Collectorate Record Room (henceforth CCRR).

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Udai Ho was one among the 62 objectors belonging to Jamuda *killi*[3] who claimed in 1915 that their ancestors had originally reclaimed lands in the area and were therefore the founders of Loharda village.[4] They thus asked for the inclusion of their names in the village khuntkattidar list that was being prepared at the time. As Udai Ho stated,

> We have never worried our heads about boundaries, being one family. In all the villages most of us hold lands, showing thereby we are descendants of the original clearers.[5]

Kelly, the Case Officer, was inclined to consider Udai's to be a genuine plea. He believed that the village of Loharda had probably been a *tola* of Uligutu, and since the essential factor that made one a khuntkattidar—the reclaiming of lands from virgin forest—had taken place long before regular boundaries were assigned to villages, khuntkatti status should be granted to the claimants. He further argued that Udai's exclusion from the khuntkatti list had arisen out of a misrepresentation of what was understood to be a village. Kelly pointed out that, 'the word *hatu* to the Ho means the village site; he has a separate word for lands.'[6] The word 'village', as defined in the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act, had a different meaning and included both the site and the lands within the boundaries of the village; it could not therefore be translated into the single word *hatu*. However, disallowing these objections, the Settlement Officer ruled that while Kelly may be right in his theory, he could well be the victim of a 'clumsy conspiracy'.

This is only one instance of the innumerable claims to khuntkatti status made by the Hos in the Kolhan Government Estate in the West Singhbhum district of Chotanagpur in the course of the settlement operations of 1914–18.[7] The latter was to be carried out according to the provisions of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) which had been enacted a few years ago in 1908. The CNTA had behind it a history of more than fifty years of agrarian strife and conflict

[3]The word *killi* denotes a clan group or an extended family.
[4]A village in the Chainpur *pir* of Kolhan Government Estate.
[5]TSP, K 41 Sl 44 of 1916–17.
[6]Ibid.
[7]A part of the Chotanagpur Division of the Bengal Presidency till 1911, Singhbhum today falls in the newly created state of Jharkhand.

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between landlord and tenant in Chotanagpur.[8] It was the culmination of the legal and administrative measures taken to remove agrarian discontent, and aimed at safeguarding local customary rights and usages by giving recognition to the time-honoured right of the *adivasis* to reclaim land.[9] Enacted nine years after Birsa Munda's *ulgulan*, it intended to provide a degree of protection to the Chotanagpur adivasis by making khuntkatti tenures secure against encroachments of landlords by fixing their rents in perpetuity and making illegal the sale of these lands for any purpose other than arrears of rent.[10] It also gave statutory recognition to existing customs regarding use of forest, occupancy rights, rights to reclaim land, etc. Despite its limitations, historians have generally conceded that the CNTA did benefit the adivasi tenants and marked a watershed in the history of colonial state intervention in land relations in Chotanagpur.[11]

[8]For a discussion on the evolution of tenancy legislation in Chotanagpur see D. Rothermund, 'Tenancy Legislation for Chota Nagpur: The Emphasis on Executive Protection', in *Zamindars, Mines and Peasants: Studies in the History of an Indian Coalfield*, ed. D. Rothermund and D.C. Wadhwa, Delhi: Manohar, 1978, pp. 69–83.

[9]'Adivasi' as David Hardiman explains, is the political term that has gained currency since mid twentieth century to denote groups which evolved a collective identity having shared a common fate under colonial rule. He rejects the use of the term 'tribe' because of its evolutionist connotations although the idea of tribe has been shorn of its racist content in the twentieth century. See David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 13. The terms 'indigenous peoples' and 'indigenes' are increasingly used by anthropologists who wish to avoid the cultural baggage of the term 'tribal'. However, these carry their own late twentieth century cultural baggage and raises questions regarding the criteria which would determine who is indigenous and who is not. The terms 'indigenous' and 'adivasi' and 'tribe' indeed signify the transnational, national and colonial trajectories through which such people have confronted modernity. For more details on this issue, see, Andre Beteille, 'The Idea of Indigenous People', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1998, pp. 187–91; Virginius Xaxa, 'Tribes as Indigenous People of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 51, 1999, pp. 3589–95; Bengt G. Karlsson, 'Anthropology and the 'Indigenous Slot': Claims to and Debates about Indigenous Peoples' Status in India', *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2003, pp. 403–23. Although in this paper the terms *adivasi* and tribe have been used interchangeably, these indicate indigenous ethnic communities socially organised on lines distinct from 'caste' and sharing some kind of group-sentiment during the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

[10]One of the best-known of the tribal movements of the period, Birsa Munda's *ulgulan* (Great Tumult) took place in the region south of Ranchi in 1899–1900. See K. S. Singh, *Birsa Munda and his Movement 1874–1901: A Study of a Millenarian Movement in Chota Nagpur*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.

[11]Ibid., p. 187. K. S. Singh points out that the Act came too late, for more than

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K. S. Singh thus argues that the passage of the CNTA in 1908 led to the establishment of agrarian peace in Chotanagpur.[12] P. P. Mohapatra considers the legislation to be a recognition of the political importance of the tenantry since it struck at the ability of the landlords to exact and enhance rent in its various forms, the major source of their power.[13]

What is overlooked in such interpretations is that by uniformly codifying and legalising existing rights, the Act failed to take into account the historical evolution of these rights. The CNTA had very different implications for the Ho people of Kolhan Government estate whose social divisions and system of governance differed considerably from that of other adivasi groups of Chotanagpur. The unique features of Kolhan were not considered when the CNTA was discussed, and no special provisions or exceptions were made for this region. The provisions of the Act were largely ignored in Kolhan when it came into force for the first time in Chotanagpur. However, the resettlement of Kolhan during 1914–18 brought the problem of contradictory rights and claims into focus. The local administration drew attention to the communal character of the Ho village organisation and attempted to reinterpret and define custom, as it existed in Kolhan. The Hos, on their part, frequently disputed interpretations and definitions. They actively negotiated with the colonial government on these issues with varying degrees of success. The CNTA therefore provides one moment in the assertion of a distinct identity of the Hos in the course of colonial rule.

This essay thus studies one of the many local histories of Chotanagpur Division of the erstwhile Bengal Presidency and examines the ways in which both the state and colonial subjects used their agency in the context of the specific colonial political and socio-economic situations in order to reshape tradition and social practices and to redefine the parameters of community identity. In this context, it addresses the debate on the colonial construction of 'tribe' and argues that no single discourse on 'tribe' dominated colonial policies. Finally it attempts to understand resistance in terms of

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nine-tenths of the Mundaris as only 156 villages could be secured as intact Mundari villages.

[12]K. S. Singh, 'Agrarian Issues in Chota Nagpur', in *The Tribal Situation in India*, ed. K. S. Singh, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1972, p. 375.

[13]P. P. Mohapatra, 'Class Conflicts and Agrarian Regimes in Chota Nagpur, 1860–1950', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1991, p. 38.

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compromise and negotiation rather than as open rebellion. In this analysis, comparisons with the social organisation of the Mundaris,[14] a people with whom the Hos shared a close affinity, have been included to illustrate the distinctive attributes of the Hos.[15]

LAND RIGHTS IN KOLHAN: THE BACKGROUND

In the early nineteenth century, Singhbhum was a thickly forested, rugged country, protected by hill ranges and watered by numerous rivers; it was fertile and productive in places, and stony and barren in others. Many diverse ethnic communities inhabited this space—the Oraon, the Munda, the Gond, the Bhuiya, the Bhumij, the Tamaria and the Ho, the last being the most populous. The open, undulating tract in the south-western part of Singhbhum district, locally known as Kolhan, was almost exclusively peopled by the Hos. A study of the early colonial documents, military dispatches and travelogues reveal that by the nineteenth century, the Ho social organisation had come to centre around settled villages or hatus, indicating the primacy of settled agriculture in the lives of the Hos. In many areas however, particularly in forested regions, a form of slash-and-burn cultivation, locally known as *purunga*, continued to persist.[16]

The typical form of land control in Kolhan was not communal ownership. Instead, land ownership was vested in individual families who held separate plots, although there was continual cooperation among a number of family groups in the interests of sustaining agricultural management and production. Cultivation followed the clearing of forests through the collective effort of a killi or an extended community of kinsmen. The usual practice among the different ethnic groups of Chotanagpur, particularly among the Mundaris, was that

[14]I use the term 'Mundari' to indicate the Munda adivasi group of Chotanagpur. The intention is to avoid confusing the Munda people with the village headmen, also known as *munda*.

[15]Hos are believed to be closely related to the Mundaris. See, E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, reprint, Delhi: Indian Studies, Past and Present, 1974, p. 184; J. Hoffman, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, vol. 9, reprint, New Delhi, 1990, p. 1764.

[16]There are several references to the presence of well-organised villages in the accounts of British officers serving in Singhbhum in the early nineteenth century. Roughsedge, for instance, in 1820 described his wonder at the amount of cultivated land. The Hos were found by him to be living rather luxuriously, their villages abounding in sheep, goats, fowl and pigs (Roughsedge to Metcalf, 9 May 1820, Chota Nagpur Commissioner Political Despatch Register, vol. 27, Bengal State Archives).

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members of a specific clan group would get together and clear the forest to found villages. In the case of the Hos, however, it was not uncommon for two or three killis to jointly establish a village,[17] a practice that was probably connected with their history of migration from Chotanagpur. Like the Mundaris, the Hos also recognised the founding killi of the village as the khuntkattidar. The village organisation developed partly from a need of the reclaiming group to ensure control over the village resources, a control rendered essential in view of the scarcity of natural resources in real terms. Because of ecological constraints, settled agriculture did not necessarily imply stable agriculture. Land was plentiful, yet reclamation required hard labour. A significant portion of the land area was rendered infertile as the topography of the upland regions severely limited water supply for cultivation. Ho custom therefore decreed that the khuntkattidar, who reclaimed cultivable land from jungle and waste, had a special right in the fields that he reclaimed. Generally speaking, throughout the tribal region in Chotanagpur, the khuntkattidar enjoyed certain special privileges and rights, which were interwoven into the religious observances and customs of the people.

One such privilege of the Ho khuntkattidars was the reserving for themselves the posts of the village headman, locally known as the *munda*, and that of the village priest or *deuri*. These usually belonged to the founding killi. The *manki*, the head of a *pir* (a cluster of villages), who represented the adivasis in their dealing with the local ruling authorities, also belonged to the dominant khuntkattidar family of the group. Customary laws regarding land and inheritance secured the right of all patrilineal male descendants of khuntkattidars to the lands cleared by his ancestor, thereby preserving the control of the founding killis over village property. It has been observed that Hos believed that a person had everlasting right to land prepared by himself or his ancestors unless he completely divested himself of it voluntarily. The special privileges of the khuntkattidars had a ritual status as well. One such observance related to the use of village *sasan* (burial ground). Descendants of the founding families retained the exclusive use of their own *killi sasan*. Families of outsiders related to the khuntkattidars by marriage had to establish a separate sasan of their own in their adoptive village, or bury their dead in their original khuntkatti village.

[17]Declaration of Garbett Manki, GB&O, Revenue Progs. A, No. 6, Enclosure 4, March 1915, P 9797, London: Oriental and India Office Collection (henceforth OIOC).

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Khuntkatti among the Hos, however, did not necessarily only indicate original clearing of virgin forests. Ho socio-economic practices had certain specificities, distinguishing them from other adivasi groups in Chotanagpur and which arose from their particular mode of land settlement in Singhbhum. As the Settlement Officer discovered, while tracing the genealogy of the Kolhan villages in course of the survey and settlement operations of 1913–18, Hos were not always the original reclaimers of jungle in Kolhan. Although Hos were the dominant group in Kolhan, they were not indigenous to the region but were believed to have migrated from Chotanagpur. At the time when the Hos colonised north Kolhan, that part of the country had been almost entirely jungle and was reclaimed by them. In the south, however, the Gonds and Bhuiyas had already settled in the land, and were subsequently driven out and replaced by groups of advancing Hos.[18] These villages in South Kolhan, strictly speaking, did not have a significant number of Ho khuntkattidars or original clearers. There were also instances of non-Ho khuntkattidars of villages.[19] Because of these circumstances, the term 'khuntkattidar' was not universal throughout Kolhan. Instead the terms *marang killi* (literally the big family) and *dupup parja* (original settlers) appear to have also been in vogue in the region. That a multiplicity of customs prevailed in Singhbhum becomes evident if we examine the statements of the traditional chiefs at a conference organised by the district administration in July 1914 to determine the nature of land rights among the Hos. A section of the Ho leadership claimed that 'those who first came to the village' were the dupup parja or the original settlers, and that the later settlers came as servants.[20] The mankis of many pirs in southern Kolhan, such as Gumra pir and Chira pir were not familiar with the term khuntkatti, but claimed that the term marang killi was in vogue amongst them. However, it is

[18]A. D. Tuckey, *Final Report on the Resettlement of the Kolhan Government Estate in the district of Singhbhum: 1913–1918*, Patna: The Superintendent of Government Printing, 1920, p. 18, henceforth *TSR*.

[19]Ibid, p.19. Tuckey reports that there were non-Ho khuntkattidars in 23 villages in Kolhan in 1918. Most of these villages were located in the southern pirs of Gulkera, Bharbhariya, Lalgarh, Aola and Gumra. These khuntkattidars included adivasi communities such as Bhumij, Bhuiya, Santal, Gond and Hindu service castes such as Goala and Tanti.

[20]Statement of Ringsu Manki of Deoposhi village, Statement of Mankis and Mundas at Conference held in Chaibasa, 9 July 1914, GB&O, Revenue Progs. A, No. 6, Enclosure 4, March 1915, P 9797, OIOC.

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uncertain whether khuntkattidar and marang killi indicated the same thing. The marang killi constituted the most important killi in the village but it is possible that its importance arose from reasons other than that it had founded the village. The term, for instance, could be associated with the numerical composition of the killi, or its social position in the village.[21]

One of the myths that had been perpetuated and popularised by the colonial administration was the notion of the total isolation of the Hos, prior to the establishment of British rule, from the wider political authority in Singhbhum. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, in course of their initial forays into the region, the Company's government had recognised the petty rulers of Singhbhum as local controllers with long standing anchorage in indigenous society. But gradually the assumption that the Hos had never been fully under the control of the ruling families of the region and were virtually a 'stateless' people found acceptance among the colonial authorities as they endeavoured to legitimise their authority as protectors and guardians of the Hos. Yet, colonial records of the early nineteenth century, which was a period of general unrest and turbulence in Singhbhum, reveal that the apparatus of state power of the Singhbhum royal family was very much in existence in the countryside, even though much of its potency over the years may have been lost due to in-fighting among the scions of the royal family. Like the Nagbanshi Raj of the neighbouring Chotanagpur, the state system of the Singhbhum Raj had entrenched itself in the countryside over time and thus had a well-organised bureaucracy which was chiefly associated with collection of tributes and impositions of various kinds. However, unlike the Nagbanshi Raj, the authority of the Singhbhum royal family had weakened over the years due to a continuous struggle for supremacy among the junior members of the ruling class and their subordinate claimants for power, and also due to the challenge of the Mayurbhanj rulers in the southern part of the district. Nevertheless, several links connected the Hos with the supra village authorities. These links were primarily economic in nature, being associated with the revenue collecting mechanism. Other ties of loyalty and cultural factors also cemented the hold of the state power over the Hos.[22]

[21] *TSR*, p. 20.

[22] These included the land tax or *pancha* collected from individual villages and sundry other payments associated with religious and social practices. In Anandpur,

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The different state systems of Chotanagpur sought to buttress their hold over the adivasi population by translating the superior status of the khuntkattidars within the village in terms of preferential revenue payments. Generally speaking throughout 'tribal' Chotanagpur, the khuntkattidar as the descendant of the original founder of the village, was accorded privileges and rights related to lower rent rates compared to the parjas (later settlers) in the village. However, due to the unrest arising out of political rivalries among warring factions of ruling groups in Singhbhum since the eighteenth century, the Hos had in many places resisted the imposition of tribute whenever the chance arose. The scarcity of records makes it difficult to establish whether the practice of paying differential rates of tribute between the khuntkattidars and parjas had ever been prevalent among the Hos. However, going by the experience of the region, it seems probable that the difference had indeed existed among the Hos as well.

The British came in contact with the Hos in 1821 for the first time when they intervened in favour of the Singhbhum Raja in recognition of his claim to superior authority over the Ho; the latter were described as their 'subjects in rebellion'. This policy resulted in turbulent reaction among the Hos in the 1820s and 1830s, which raised questions within the Government about the utility of a political alliance with the discredited chiefs of the region who could barely keep their subjects in check. Declaring their intention of extending *Pax Britannica* over Singhbhum, the British decided in 1837 to separate the Ho villages of the region from the control of the local rajas and to include these within the Government Estate of Kolhan, which in turn would be incorporated within the South West Frontier Agency that was under the direct control and management of the British Government.[23]

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the villagers had to jointly purchase a Dasahara goat, which was handed over to the Babu by the headman. Another payment, common in Kharsawan, was the *shadi-gami pancha* which was exacted by the overlord in the case of marriage and death in the family and was payable in the form of rice and jungle produce such as wood. The Porahat Raja also claimed military service of the Hos partly through the ritual status they had gained, and partly through promises of booty. In return for the plunder the Hos were induced to pay further levies in the form of occasional *salami*s and different taxes or *rukumat* at periods of Hindu festivals. Certain customs, such as the ritual gifting of turbans to Ho mankis and mundas, further cemented the ties of loyalty between the rajas and their tribal subjects. T. S. Macpherson, *Final Report on the Operations for the Preparation of Record-of-Rights in Pargana Porahat in District Singhbhum, 1905–07*, Calcutta: Government Press, 1908, pp. 78–79.

[23]The South West Frontier Agency was a part of the East India Company's administrative system in the Bengal Province covering the 'Jungle Mahals' or forested

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Later, under Act XX of 1854, Singhbhum became a non-regulation district under the jurisdiction of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, i.e., it was administered according to customary rather than colonial laws (that were imposed in the regulation districts of the Bengal Province via the Permanent Settlement Act). Colonial administrators, pursuing a paternalist policy, perceived themselves as the protectors of the 'wild' yet 'innocent' tribals against 'rapacious' outsiders. In order to formalise and legitimise its power and authority, the Government professed to adapt the traditional village power hierarchy—the *manki-munda* system—and local knowledge for the purpose of administration. This led to a distortion of the role of the key village functionaries and affected social relations among the Hos, as the colonial Government negated the authority of the local power groups and utilised the traditional village leadership to act as the representatives both of the Hos and of the Government.

Once Hos came under British rule since 1837, a uniform system of land tax was imposed on them, without differentiating between original and later settlers. All Hos were expected to pay rent at the rate of 8 *annas* per plough. By the end of the nineteenth century, the uniform system of rental had obliterated any such differentiation. The Hos, in turn, did not refer to a tradition of differentiation, and argued that there had never been any distinction between the descendants of the original founders of the village and those who came later and reclaimed their lands. Custom, they argued, accorded no special privilege to the former in the context of rates of rents.

THE CNTA AND THE DEBATE ON KHUNTKATTI

The implications of the CNTA for Kolhan came up for discussion in 1912 in the context of the proposals for the resettlement of the estate. The issue developed into an intense debate between the district officers and the Government of Bihar and Orissa in which traditions were invoked and reinterpreted by officialdom to suit the needs of their present. The debate revealed the imperfect understandings that different categories of the revenue officers had of extant custom and also the difference in perceptions regarding the impact of the CNTA. The local officers opposed the introduction of the CNTA in

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settlements on its western periphery (present day Midnapore, Purulia and Birbhum districts of the state of West Bengal, and part of the state of Jharkhand).

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Kolhan, which they felt ran counter to the specificities of the region. The Government of Bihar and Orissa, on the other hand, favoured the formulation of a uniform system throughout Chotanagpur. There was no disagreement regarding the necessity of a new rent settlement. The moot point was whether the new settlement could be carried through without resorting to the CNTA or to any other Act. There was a general consensus among the local officers, as well as those with previous experience in the district, about the unsuitability of the CNTA so far as Kolhan was concerned. The Commissioner of Chotanagpur, along with the Director of Land Records and the Deputy Commissioner, proposed that Kolhan should be excluded from the operation of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act and that a short and simple regulation should be adopted for its administration. However the Government decreed that the resettlement had to be carried out under the CNTA, asserting that there was little doubt that khuntkatti rights existed in Kolhan 'although the people may have been too ignorant to assert them and Government cannot ignore these rights merely because they may lose some revenue by doing so.'[24]

Since Hos formed the overwhelming majority of the population in Kolhan, the general impression shared by colonial administrators was that they were the original inhabitants of Kolhan, and that practically all the land under cultivation had been reclaimed by them. British officers had therefore expected to find *raiyats* with khuntkatti rights in every village. However, as discussed in the previous section, in many villages, particularly in the southern part of the estate, the original reclaimers of the soil were not the Hos but the groups whom they had driven out. In a survey made of 74 villages of different pirs in the estate, it was found that only about 6 per cent of the tenants of these villages could claim khuntkatti status although they held 20 per cent of the area. In six of the 74 villages there were no khuntkattidars, in 57 villages the headmen were khuntkattidars and in 11 villages the khuntkattidars did not include headmen.[25] Moreover, raiyats possessing such rights were discovered in only 556 out of 913 villages. In 23 villages the khuntkattidars were not Hos but of other communities, chiefly Bhumij and Goala.[26] The CNTA, which

[24]From Secretary to the GB&O, Revenue Department, 28 December 1912, in *TSR*, p. 92.

[25]McPherson, 'Note on the Kolhan Resettlement', in *TSR*, p. 86.

[26]Murphy, Director of the Department of Land Records and Survey, GB&O, to the Secretary of the Board of Revenue, 31 May 1920, in *TSR*, p. 4.

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followed the customs prevalent among the Mundaris of Ranchi, restricted khuntkatti rights only to the descendants of the original founders. Thus, all claims to khuntkatti were disallowed in villages of southern Kolhan which had not been established by Ho reclaimers. Even where the family of the founders lived in the village, it was not always easy to ascertain their descendants since according to local customs, all reclaimers of the land, whether they belonged to the family of the original founders or not, had equal rights in their lands.

After the first season of the settlement operations, Sifton, the Settlement Officer in 1914, once again raised the question of whether the CNTA was suitable for Kolhan. He had the support of the Deputy Commissioner, Sen, and the Commissioner, Walsh. At first they put forward arguments that they felt would be readily acceptable to the Government and therefore highlighted the probable loss of revenue that would result from the extension of khuntkatti rights. This, they stated, would be inevitable since the khuntkattidars paid rents at privileged, i.e., at lower, rates.[27]

More significant than the loss of revenue was the distinction that a differential revenue rate would create among the Hos. The Deputy Commissioner feared that the non-khuntkattidars would nurse a grievance that they had been treated worse than the khuntkattidars within the village. The differentiation between the two classes would have the immediate effect of stirring up disaffection and making the settlement proceedings unpopular.[28] The practice of imposing a uniform rent upon all classes of Hos, ever since the annexation of Kolhan in 1837, obliterated any memories of rental differences so far as the Hos were concerned. Every resident raiyat had the right to extend his cultivation by reclaiming a portion of the wasteland within his village with the permission of his headman. The Deputy Commissioner pointed out that since Kolhan was a government estate there were no intermediate tenures between government and the actual cultivators of the soil; the mankis and mundas, so far as their holdings were concerned, were at the same footing as the other raiyats. If the CNTA was introduced in Kolhan it would lead to a situation in which the headman would have to pay a higher rent than those of the khuntkattidar raiyats if he did not belong to the family of the original founders.

[27]Walsh to Secretary to the Board of Revenue, 6/8 December 1914, in *TSR*, Appendix D (2), p. 92.

[28]McPherson, 'Note on the Kolhan Resettlement', para 11.

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Such fears regarding the granting of khuntkatti rights were reiterated by lower level officers of the district administration. Some of these officers were adivasis, and therefore were believed to have a greater knowledge of Ho customs. The Assistant Settlement Officer, D. M. Panna, argued that while a sizeable section of the Hos would undoubtedly benefit through the application of khuntkatti rights, the general effects would be ruinous. He stated that khuntkatti rights were quite unknown among the Hos and the recording of such rights would tend to create an artificial and invidious distinction among them, which could lead to the disintegration of the solidarity of the communal system of the Ho government. While Panna negated the existence of khuntkatti among the Hos, he later contradicted himself when he declared that the khuntkatti claim in a village could, if necessary, be established without much difficulty. What Panna seemed to suggest was that khuntkatti may have been an ancient practice but had fallen into disuse among the Hos. He argued that Hos 'believe that all the ancestors of different *killis* came to settle in the Kolhan at the same time. Every Ho may claim that his ancestor was among the original settlers of the community though not of a particular village and that every member of the Ho community had equal right of migration from village to village within the Kolhan and the right of reclamation of new lands.'[29] Thus, he argued that as a result of the CNTA, the khuntkatti raiyats would be looked upon as a favoured section of the community within the villages where they would form a minority.

According to local officers, yet another difficulty in the Act pertained to the position of the village leadership, the manki and the munda. They stated that although the CNTA recognised three categories of tenants: raiyats, tenure-holders and Mundari khuntkattidars, the mundas and mankis belonged to none of these categories. They were traditional leaders who represented the raiyats in their dealings with the superior political authority. However, their role in the village community had undergone a transformation since the formation of the Kolhan Government Estate and the village leadership had become dependant on the goodwill of the colonial government rather than upon the sanction of the community for their post. Under British rule, their appointment and dismissal rested

[29]D. M. Panna's 'Note on the Kolhan Settlement', 11 September 1914, GB&O, Revenue Progs. A, No. 6, Appendix K, Enclosure 13, March 1915, p. 46, P 9797, OIOC.

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with the Deputy Commissioner and in theory the mankis and mundas had no hereditary rights, although in practice the dominant khuntkattidars retained their power within the village. The CNTA, however, recognised the manki as a tenure holder and the munda as an under-tenure holder. This was because they were recognised as being entitled to the profits of new reclamation during the period of the CNTA.[30] Moreover, the CNTA did not provide for the ejection of the traditional leadership except for rent arrears, and even this exception would apply to cases where the headman's interest was not permanent or transferable. This would, however, clash with the practice which had been in vogue since the formation of the Kolhan Government Estate in 1837 according to which the headman became government functionary who could be dismissed for misconduct, oppression of fellow villagers etc., and for arrears of rent.

The local administration felt that if Kolhan was to be maintained as a reserve for the Hos, there also had to be an ultimate remedy for the recovery of arrear rent. They argued that the provision in the *patta* to raiyats, which provided for their eviction in the case of default and rent arrears, was the most salutary feature of the Kolhan land system. The alternative to eviction that was provided in the CNTA was auction sale under Section 208. The district officers feared that, 'once auction sale is permitted the door of the Kolhan is opened to all comers.'[31] Although Hos strongly resisted the intrusion of non-adivasi outsiders into their region, between 1867 and 1897 the number of non-Ho cultivators in the estate increased sharply from 1,579 in 1867 to 15,755 by 1897. Of this number 5,643 were the heirs and representatives of the 'old' 'foreign' cultivators who had settled in Kolhan during the early years of British rule, and 10,112 were the new settlers who had later got a footing in the estate, it was stated, through either the connivance or the negligence of the mankis and mundas.[32] The government therefore held the Hos responsible for outsider intrusion into their domain ignoring the fact that the influx of outsiders could hardly have occurred on such a scale except within the framework of the colonial government.

These objects to the introduction of the CNTA in Kolhan were reiterated by the Chotanagpur Commissioner. While agreeing

[30]Ibid.

[31]McPherson, 'Note on the Kolhan Resettlement'—in *TSR*, Appendix D (1), p. 85.

[32]Walsh to Secretary, Board of Revenue, GB&O, Revenue Progs. A, No. 6, Enclosure 2, p 18, P 9797, OIOC.

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that the CNTA was unsuitable for Kolhan, he proposed certain amendments to the Act, introducing a special provision for Kolhan. He argued that the concept of khuntkatti was unknown in Kolhan and that it was introduced by the survey *amins* in course of the settlement work. Nevertheless, he conceded that since khuntkatti rights had been recognised in the adjoining estates in Singhbhum district and throughout Chotanagpur, it was also necessary to recognise such rights in Kolhan. He proposed that instead of granting khuntkatti rights only to the descendants of the original clearers of the village as in the rest of Chotanagpur, they should be extended to descendants of all Hos who had cleared land without distinguishing between original clearers and later settlers. Thus the Commissioner, while recommending that fixity of rent should be introduced in Kolhan as in other parts of Chotanagpur, agreed that a special regulation was required for Kolhan.[33]

Reid, the Director of Land Records and Surveys, similarly favoured the introduction of certain amendments to the CNTA, rather than its withdrawal from Kolhan. He countered the objections against introduction of the CNTA on the grounds that the Hos had already held lands at privileged rates that compared favourably with the rent rates of khuntkattidars in almost all parts of Chotanagpur. Local authorities, he thus implied, would not treat the Hos less than generously. Rights, he argued, should be recorded if it was proposed to recognise them in practice. Moreover, he pointed out that the existing rates of rent of the Kolhan estate did not compare unfavourably with the khuntkatti rates in the greater part of Chotanagpur. The average rent paid by Mundari khuntkattidars in Ranchi, i.e., in the area in which the khuntatti privileges had been maintained, was only one anna per cultivated acre while the lands of other classes of khuntkattidars in the same district who were locally known as *bhuinhars*, were either held rent-free or at a small rent fixed in perpetuity. In Dhalbhum, the rates of rent actually paid for khuntkatti holdings were found to be five annas per *bigha* for rice and three annas three pies per bigha of the total acre, which compared favourably with the rate in the Kolhan where it was six and a half annas per bigha for all rice lands.[34]

[33]Ibid., p. 18.

[34]Reid, Director of the Department of Land Records and Surveys to the Commissioner of CND, 21 September 1914, GB&O, Revenue Progs. A, No. 6, Appendix D, Enclosure 6, March 1915, P 9797, OIOC.

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In a curious argument, Reid advocated the application of a uniform legal system in Chotanagpur while maintaining that the local customs should also be accommodated if possible. He did not oppose the principle that the communal system should be preserved, but believed that ignoring the CNTA in Kolhan would amount to ignoring the existence of khuntkatti rights and to making no record of headman's rights, 'both of which are integral parts and the most important incidents of the historic village communal system as it had developed in Chota Nagpur.'[35] Nevertheless, Reid felt that it was clearly unfair that 'the Hos of Kolhan who are entitled to these privileges by law should be deprived of them, because the law has developed in a manner that is at variance with their custom, or that they should be made the victims of an anomaly for which they are in no way responsible.'[36] He pointed out that the law had been fully effected in other parts of Chotanagpur, where the customary rights of this class of tenancy were exactly similar, without any complaint from non-khuntkatti raiyats. Nor had the implementation of the CNTA disturbed the communal spirit there. However, he conceded that it would be preferable to record khuntkatti rights in accordance with custom, and thus include a larger number of people within the definition. Thus Reid proposed certain amendments to the CNTA and suggested that all Hos and all recorded non-Hos (old tenants) who had reclaimed lands in the estate should be admitted to the rights of khuntkattidars, and that the Settlement Officer should be authorised to record as khuntkatti at fixed rates all rice lands held by khuntkattidars at the time of the settlement in 1898. All other lands held by them should be declared 'ordinary' khuntkatti, i.e., khuntkatti right that was liable to an enhanceable rent. He subsequently modified this proposal and proposed to limit the khuntkatti at fixed rates to one fourth of the holding.[37]

In the final stage, Briscoe, the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, argued on a similar line that the Bengal Council had certainly taken into consideration all counter arguments before introducing the Act of 1908 in Singhbhum. He stated that,

there are cogent arguments in favour of the extension by degrees to backward tracts of definite tenancy laws assimilating as far as possible to

[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid.
[37]*TSR*, p. 31.

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those which are in force in more advanced areas and ... the desire of the local officers to keep Kolhan the preserve of the Hos does not imply that this can only be done by putting the estate back under a form of law which must be regarded as one of survival. To abandon a course that had been adopted after due consideration especially as a change in policy would only result in delay in completing the settlement operation.[38]

Nevertheless Briscoe suggested that all Hos should be recorded as khuntkattidars in order to avoid differences between the Hos. However, CNTA would continue to be in force in Kolhan, and settlement operations would be carried out according to its provisions. The Government ultimately passed an order on 11 February 1915 rejecting the proposals for a special regulation and directing that the survey and settlement operations continue under the provisions of the CNTA.[39] This debate that developed around the differing explanations of khuntkatti revealed the misconceptions and even the contradictions regarding the notion which existed among the revenue officers. The sincerity of many of these local-level officers was never in doubt, yet a state of confusion prevailed within officialdom which in turn led to claims and counterclaims being put forth by adivasis when the issue was placed before them.

RESPONSE OF THE HOS TO THE CNTA IN KOLHAN

In course of the debate on the nature of land rights, local officers and the Board of Revenue sought validation of their position by referring the matter to assemblies of Hos. Among the Hos, there were various reactions to the matter. In the initial stages, meetings were organised with the leading mankis of several pirs or groups of villages where the significance of khuntkatti rights of the marang killi was discussed. The local administration was therefore informed by the notions and ideas prevalent within the community. What emerges from the records is a state of confusion where the administration, the village leaders and the ordinary raiyats grappled with the situation, highlighting the multiplicity of existing traditions. Nevertheless, it

[38]From H. K. Briscoe, Secretary to the Board of Revenue, GB&O to the Secretary to GB&O, Revenue Department, No. 17–215–5, 14 December 1914, *TSR*, Appendix D (5) , p. 109.

[39]Ibid., p. 31.

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became increasingly clear that the majority of the village leadership discounted the existence of differences within the community and sought to project the image of an egalitarian community. Some also put forward the practical problems associated with the granting of privileges to a few. Mahendra Manki of Chiru pir pointed out that in his village there were 12 killis of whom only one was the marang killi. If khuntkatti status was granted only to the marang killi, he argued, they would be the only ones whose rents would not be enhanced and this would not be liked by the other killis who would have to pay at higher rates.[40]

Some of the more influential mankis put forth a new claim. Discounting the previous existence of any superior political authority over the Hos, they argued that prior to the annexation of the Kolhan by the British government in 1836, the mankis had been the lords of their respective pirs and did not have to pay tribute to anyone. Under British rule, they had been transformed to servants of the Government and remunerated with fees fixed at certain rates. Thus their right to hold property from generation to generation had become dependant on the orders of the Government and their ancestral freeholds had been transformed to service tenures under British rule. They therefore presented a memorial stating that, 'the majority of the aboriginal tribes living in the pargana are Mundari khuntkatti tenure-holders or raiyats but unfortunately they are never treated as such.'[41] There were more than 5,000 signatories to the memorial.[42] The same argument was repeated at the conference of the mankis and mundas that was organised at Chaibasa on 8 and 9 July 1914. Brajmohon munda asserted that all killis who had prepared their own lands should be assessed at the same rate, since they had taken equal trouble in reclaiming their lands from the jungle. The original killi should not be given any preference.[43]

There were of course dissenters among the leadership who spoke in favour of according khuntkatti privileges. Most of them were the more affluent among the traditional leadership who would personally benefit as a result. This was voiced for instance by one Mahati Manki

[40]Statement of Mankis and Mundas at a Conference held in Chaibasa, 9 July 1914, GB&O, Revenue Progs. A, No. 6, Enclosure 4, March 1915, P 9797, OIOC.

[41]Copy of Memorial presented to the Lt Gov of Bihar and Orissa by the Hos of Chaibasa, GB&O, Revenue Progs. A, No. 6, Enclosure 5, Appendix C, March 1915, P 9797, OIOC.

[42]Walsh to Secretary, Board of Revenue, 5/8 December 1914—in *TSR*, p. 93.

[43]Statement of Mankis and Mundas.

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of Gumra pir on the second day of the conference.[44] Others argued that the Hos' initial acceptance of khuntkatti rights had been based on misconceptions. Garbett Manki, for instance, pointed out that many among the traditional leadership had been in favour of khuntkatti privileges under the impression that khuntkatti meant that no raiyat would have his present rent enhanced for any land that he had made from the jungle. He summed up the general mood of the Ho leadership on this issue:

> Now that *khuntkatti* has been explained I do not want that one *killi* who had first settled in the villages should continue at fixed rates and the rents of the other *killis* who came to the village should be advanced. No one likes their rents to be increased, but if it is increased we want all the Hos to be treated the same.[45]

Thus the overwhelming majority argued that khuntkatti meant clearing of jungles for cultivation and thus all those who reclaimed jungles, whether as descendants of original founding families or not, should be assessed at the same rate.[46] Together with this, there were isolated suggestions that those Hos who had not cleared forests but had bought lands from others, could, if necessary, be assessed at higher rates.[47]

It may be assumed that much of what the leadership had to say on the issue had behind it the sanction and the demands of majority of the community. It is interesting, however, that the ordinary Hos, despite protests against the according of khuntkatti rights to a privileged few, nevertheless sought to protect their interests by putting forward claims to khuntkatti rights, as did Udai Ho.[48] During the initial years of the settlement operations, there was a spate of claims and counter claims where almost entire villages demanded recognition as khuntkattidars. Between 1913–14, in course of the enquiry into khuntkatti rights, a total number of 4,434 objections relating to khuntkatti were lodged in the settlement courts. Of these 2,848 were heard by D. M. Panna, of which 1,284 were allowed wholly or partly and 1,564 were disallowed.[49] In the second phase of attestation

[44]Ibid.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Ibid.
[47]Ibid.
[48]TSP, K 41 Sl 44 of 1916–17.
[49]*TSR*, p. 33.

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between 1916 and 1917, there were fewer cases relating to khuntkatti, possibly due to the implementation of a more rigorous process of khuntkatti identification.

The district administration drew up genealogical trees to ascertain khuntkatti rights and case reports reveal that these were at times fabricated to buttress claims to khuntkatti at the attestation courts. In the Baiku village of Chainpur pir, for instance, eight objectors stated that they were descendants of the original founder Sado Ho and that they had not been recorded as khuntkattidar, at attestation since they were absent when the genealogical tree was being prepared. The Case Officer discovered that the genealogical tree that had been prepared by the *tehsildar* (village accountant) was in any case 'a tissue of imagination and concoction for the names of ancestors three or four generations back.'[50] On cross-examination, the claimants did not mention Sado Ho as the founder, nor did they include themselves in the history of the founding of the village. The Settlement Officer concluded that, 'The genealogical tree filed by them has evidently been fabricated to help this claim', and the claim was thereafter disallowed.[51] Yet the settlement courts supported several other claims. In Bagasereng village of Ajodhya pir, for example, members of the Honhaga and Hemrom killi claimed khuntkatti status although the attestation court had granted khuntkatti status only to the Jonko killi. The objectors argued that their ancestors had settled in the village with the members of the Jonko killi and had made their lands after clearing the forests. A member of the Honhaga killi had held the office of the deori or priest, and the munda (who belonged to the Jonko killi) asserted that the Jonkos, Hemroms and Honhagas had all come together and lived on equal terms. The Case Officer accepted their claims arguing that, 'Each of these three *killis* is as long standing in the village as the other and when the members of the *munda* and *deori killis* admit that the Hemroms are also *khuntkattidars*, I do not see how I can refuse to record them as such.'[52]

It is interesting that the Hos could negotiate with the colonial government with great ingenuity and adroitness, though such negotiations were not always successful. The response of the adivasis to colonial rule is usually interpreted either in terms of large-scale

[50]TSP, K 41, Sl 21 of 1912–17, Case No 8/89 of 1915–16, Kolhan Thana No. 1, CCRR.

[51]Ibid.

[52]TSP, K 41, Sl 163 of 1916–17, Case No 463, Thana 31, Basta No. 4, CCRR.

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rebellions that are necessarily public, organised and communal efforts,[53] or in terms of everyday forms of rebellion[54] as James Scott has suggested. However, attempts to carve out a space for themselves within colonial rule did not require the Hos to make a consciously articulated attempt to redress grievances, or to undertake silent subversion of British rule through a disregard of the new regulations and laws in everyday life. Such attempts at securing self-interest on part of a large section of the community in the context of a changing legal framework may be construed as a silent revolution and an articulation of the rights of the indigenous community. The response of the Hos on the khuntkatti issue did not take the form of an open revolt against the colonial authorities. Rather, there were various forms of resistance. Although the community leaders professed to speak for the community as a whole, ordinary Hos preferred to act on an individual basis rather than as a community acting in unison against the colonial administration. Documents in the Chaibasa Collectorate reveal a situation where resistance was located among kinship groups and village settlements and was communally organised. By the nineteenth century, however, the communal character of the Ho social organisation had largely broken down. The claims and counter claims put forth reveal the existence of difference among the Hos although the myth of equality understated the existing inequalities.

CONCLUSION

The colonial categorisation of 'tribe' is undoubtedly one of the elements through which Europe constructed and understood Indian society.[55] Recent research has also interpreted descriptions of tribes as a deliberate collaboration of European officers and their informants, and as a specific invention of tradition in order to impose colonial hegemony upon the colonised. By re-examining the sociology of colonial knowledge, such research has made a valuable contribution towards our understanding of the impact of colonialism

[53]Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.

[54]James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985.

[55]Susana B. C. Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in Jharkhand*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992, p. 73.

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on marginalised communities. Nevertheless, we have to assert that adivasi groups had well-defined boundaries that existed prior to colonial rule, and that such communities were separated and distanced from the hegemonic caste society through perceptions of difference.[56] It has also to be remembered that the colonial discourse on 'tribe' had been largely informed by prevailing concepts among the dominant caste groups, and that in many cases the colonial state appropriated such representations as part of their categorisation. As Rosalind O' Hanlon notes, these brahminical values, such as the association of Brahmins with pre-colonial dynasties, already in vogue during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were brought into wider currency during colonial times through a complex set of processes to which both British and Indians had contributed.[57]

Moreover, to argue that colonial rule invented 'tribes' out of an essentially mobile and uncodified pre-colonial system not only negates the significance of the complex socio-economic organisations and indigenous institutions of these communities, but also tends to minimise long-term structural continuities. Such an approach denies minority ethnic groups their agency in reshaping tradition and social practices and their own role in the making of their destinies; it assumes that these groups were merely puppets on a string, manipulated solely by colonial policies. Again, the impetus for change and the introduction of new attributes did not predominantly rise from colonial agency. Like other social groups, adivasi groups constantly evolve and redefine themselves in the context of specific political and socio-economic situations, leading to re-evaluation and changes in their self-perception. The Hos were not simply passive victims of colonial policy. At every juncture, they actively negotiated

[56]Non-adivasis, for instance, contemptuously refer to the Hos as Kols. It has been suggested that the term had been derived from the Sanskrit word *kola* meaning pig, and their women folk as *Kui* (female Kol). See D. N. Majumdar, *The Affairs of a Tribe: A Study in Tribal Dynamics*, Lucknow: Universal Publishers, 1950, p.18. Both of these terms are resented by the Hos as pejorative. Similarly, Hos address non-adivasis as *sadants* or *diku*, which were also terms of abuse. In other parts of India as well, the mainstream society tended to be either unflattering, or dismissive in its depiction of adivasi society. In Gujarat, the terms *'jangli jati'* (literally forest people) and *'kaliparaj'* (the black people) were commonly used to refer to adivasis of South Gujarat. Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi*, pp. 13–14.

[57]Rosalind O' Hanlon, 'Cultures of Rule, Communities of Resistance: Gender Discourse and Resistance in Recent South Asian Historiographies', *Social Analysis*, vol. 25, 1989, p. 99.

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TABLE VI

DISTRIBUTION OF KHUNTKATTI VILLAGES IN KOLHAN, 1918

	NAME OF PIR	KHUNT-KATTI VILLAGE	NON-KHUNT-KATTI VILLAGES	TOTAL	KHUNTKATTI VILLAGES OTHER THAN HOS
1	Kuldiha	13	0	13	
2	Kalnua	19	0	19	
3	Gulkera	22	1	23	1Kurmi village
4	Chainpur	5	0	5	
5	Ajodhya	32	1	33	
6	Asantalia	3	0	3	
7	Sidiu	13	1	14	
8	Lota	5	0	5	
9	Rajabasa	14	0	14	
10	Chiru	17	1	18	
11	Charai	41	2	43	1Bhumij, 1 Bhuiya villages
12	Thai	94	1	95	3 Bhumij, 1 Santal, I Gond, 1 Goala villages
13	Bharbhariya	32	0	32	1 Bhumij, 1 Sundi, 1 Goala
14	Lagra	13	0	13	Village
15	Lalgarh	29	21	50	2 Bhumij, 1 Tanti villages
16	Aola	5	79	84	1 Gond, 1 Goala villages
17	Bar	54	91	145	1 Goala village
18	Gumra	89	9	98	4 Goala villages
19	Barkela	23	0	23	1 Kumhar, 1 Kurmi villages
20	Rengra	22	0	22	
21	Bantaria	19	14	33	
22	Kotgarh	2	27	29	
23	Latua	0	6	6	
24	Jamda	0	9	9	
25	Rela	0	9	9	
26	Saranda	0	75	75	
	Total	566	347	913	

with the colonial administration from their situation of subalternity and adjusted to the changing circumstances with varying degrees of success. In this process, certain elements of distinctiveness tended to become more pronounced during British rule and the Hos could strengthen the perception of their identity based on distinctive

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historical roots and drawing on memories of agricultural settlements, language and religious beliefs. Such a perception had existed earlier, but it acquired a new shape under the changed circumstances of the colonial system.

Colonial rule certainly resulted in the introduction of new meanings and applications, though such considerations were not always part of a larger deliberate colonial project. British rule appropriated and restructured certain pre-existing social norms and thereby introduced new attributes, meanings and applications in the communities they identified as tribes. However, there was neither a uniform colonial tribal policy nor a single colonial discourse on the tribe. Rather several, and often contradictory policies towards the indigenous people emerged in course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[58] While the overarching influence of the colonial race theory cannot be denied, it was usually local needs and ground realities, rather than ideological beliefs, which significantly informed colonial policies. Thus, while identities were certainly not fixed, given or unchanging, the notion of the 'tribe' cannot be reduced to colonial policies alone.

[58]At a time when a section of colonial administrators were glorifying Hos and other groups in Chota Nagpur as noble savages, Koravas of South India and Lodhs of Western Midnapur were classified as 'criminal tribes'. In fact the idea of the criminal tribe germinated and developed over a long period of time as Stewart Gordon shows with reference to the Bhils of Western India. See Stewart Gordon, 'Bhils and the Idea of a Criminal Tribe in Nineteenth Century India', *Marathas, Marauders and State Formation in 18th century India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 151–62.

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Adivasis, Gender and the 'Evil Eye'
The Construction(s) of Witches in Colonial Chotanagpur

Shashank S. Sinha

Belief in spirits and witches has long occupied a central place in adivasi[1] cosmology and moral economy. Considerably rooted in, and, reflective of gender tensions, traditional constructions of witches and witchcraft did derive social legitimacy from religion, folklore and patriarchal customs. To this were added the impacts generated by colonial and capitalist penetration in the region. The attendant socio-economic displacement not only reinforced and sharpened the social tensions within adivasi societies but added new dimensions to prevalent notions and characteristics associated with witchcraft. This chapter seeks to explore the intricate connections between gender, patriarchy, colonialism and constructions of witches

[1]The word 'tribe' is being used interchangeably with 'adivasi' in a very neutral sense to distinguish a group of people so socially organised from caste (though some of the tribes have also become castes or are in the process) sharing some kind of a group-sentiment, and generally (though not as a rule now) a common and specific territory. The socio-economic levels associated with them have never been fixed and permanent and should not convey a sense of complete isolation from the mainstream of Indian life: for apart from some isolated and primitive food gatherers, the tribes or adivasis are, and have been, very much a part of Indian society as the lowest stratum of peasantry subsisting through plough cultivation, slash and burn agriculture, or as agricultural labourers, plantation coolies or (later as) workers in factories and mines. As far as the cultural characteristics go, though some tribes continue to practice their specific rituals, traditions, religion and taboos, most of them have become sufficiently Hinduised or Christianised over a period of time.

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in adivasi societies of Chotanagpur.[2] It is divided into three sections. The first brings out the interlinkages between patriarchy and construction of witches. The second discusses how colonialism added new dimensions to traditional constructions of witchcraft. Finally, the last section tries to revisit the connections drawn between the 'European influence' and witchcraft.

PATRIARCHY, GENDER AND CONSTRUCTION OF WITCHCRAFT

Roy had observed that for the adivasis the invisible world was as full of disembodied spirits 'as a tree is full of leaves.'[3] They believed that all diseases and mishaps were caused by 'mischievous' or 'evil spirits', witches or the 'evil-eye'. Several contemporary sources point to the enduring practice of witchcraft in the region. At Bhagalpur, Buchanan was told that 25 children died annually through the 'malevolence of witches'.[4] *Reak Katha* acknowledges:

> ... witchcraft is the great trouble with us Santals. Because of witchcraft, people in the village become enemies, doors of relatives is shut, father and sons quarrel, brothers are separated, husband and wife are divorced and in the country people kill each other.'[5]

[2]The districts that form the canvas of this essay include Ranchi, Hazaribag, Singhbhum, Dhanbad, Palamau and Santal Parganas. Though administratively speaking Santal Parganas did not form a part of the colonial Chotanagpur it is being included in this study (as has been done on many other studies) on account of geo-cultural similarity and contiguous spread of tribal population. These districts together constitute the modern state of Jharkhand. The majority of the population in this region has been rural, including considerable tribal population. The tribes of Chotanagpur are generally patrilineal (defines succession), patrinymic (defines descent) and patriarchal (defines authority). Some notable tribes include the Mundas, Santals, Oraon, Ho, Khariya, Pahariya, Birhor and Asur.

[3]S. C. Roy, 'Magic and Witchcraft in Chotanagpur', *Man in India*, vol. 33, no, 3, 1984 (reproduced from a paper originally written in 1914), p. 91.

[4]Campbell 'Notes' cited in W. Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, first published 1896, Delhi: Munshiram Mahoharlal, 1969, p. 284.

[5]*Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha: The Traditions and Institutions of the Santals* (translated with notes and additions by P. O. Bodding), Reprinted 1994, Delhi: Bahumukhi Prakashan, 1942, p. 160 (henceforth *Reak Katha*) The first version of this Santal text was prepared by L. O. Skrefsrud. Completed in 1871, this work is based on Skrefsrud's interactions with an old Santal guru Kolean and was first published in 1887.

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'There is no genuine Santal', wrote Bodding, 'who does not believe in witches. This being so, it is not strange that a suspicion is always present that witches may be at work when people fall ill and do not recover.'[6] Dalton remarked that 'all diseases in men or animals is attributed to one of the two causes—the wrath of some evil spirit who has to be appeased, or to the spell of some witch or sorcerer who should be destroyed or driven out of land.'[7] Writing towards the end of the colonial period, Houlton noted, 'the belief in witchcraft is still very strong (among the Mundas and Oraons), and murders of witches still occasionally occur.'[8] The central idea behind the adivasi religious systems therefore was to seek an alliance with the highest and the most 'helpful' spiritual entities and through them control the 'harmful' ones.[9] The evil powers had to be scared through exorcism or magic.[10] They made a distinction between 'white magic' (socially and psychologically beneficent) and 'black magic' (maleficent or evil). The minister of white magic was known as *ojha* or diviner and medicine-man, whereas, one of black magic was known as *dain*, or witch or sorcerer.[11]

The belief in the existence of witches and the efficacy of witchcraft could be almost exclusively seen among the patrilineal agricultural tribal communities (like the Mundas, Hos, and Santals) while it was remarkably absent among the nomadic foraging communities (like the Birhor or the Erenga Munda).[12] Patriarchy is more established in agricultural societies and this has led many scholars to conclude

[6]P. O. Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore*, reprinted 1986, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1925, p. 38.

[7]E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, first published 1872, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1960, p. 208.

[8]John Houlton, *Bihar: The Heart of India*, Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1949, p. 137.

[9]Roy, 'Magic and Witchcraft', p. 93.

[10]J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1979, p. 204.

[11]Ibid., p. 204.

[12]S. Bosu Mullick, 'Gender Relations and Witches among the Indigenous Communities of Jharkhand, India', in *Gender Relations in Forest Societies in Asia: Patriarchy at Odds*, ed. Govind Kelkar, Dev Nathan and Pierre Walter, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003, p. 120. For links between patriarchy and agriculture in adivasi communities of Chotanagpur, also see Shashank Shekhar Sinha, *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating Tribes in Gender Studies*, Kolkata: Stree, 2005. The construction of witches, as we shall see later, was significantly connected with the possession of agricultural land.

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that the witch-hunts were predominantly rooted in the political economy of the region. Women with land rights were thus more liable to be labelled as witches. While this may be true, total adherence to political-economy models, may obscure the other ideological and social tensions in adivasi societies, which facilitated and rationalised witch-accusations. The traditional constructions of witches were also significantly rooted in gender tensions. Thus, in spite of Dalton's observation that 'it is not only women that are accused of having dealings with the imps of darkness', witches hailed mostly from among the women. In the case of Santals, witches were exclusively women.[13] Also, while both men and women could be potential witches, more often than not, the language of the construction of witches kept the female dominant. Thus, the words colloquially used to describe witches, more often then not, were dain or *churail* (female) rather than *bishaha* (male). In fact, the Santal theory of the origin of witchcraft ascribes the 'practice' to prevalent gender tensions. Unlike Barstow, it does not completely relate witch persecutions to a deep-rooted misogyny[14] but is certainly reflective of some kind of distrust in women and a fear of their sexuality.

The ancestors of old tell, they say, that Maran buru (the Supreme Being) was teaching the men witchcraft; but by a trick the women got the magic power first. One day, it is told, the men had sat down in council to consult each other, what they should do with their scolding women. They said: we are men, how is it that our word does not count? When we say a couple of words to the women, they commence to scold shamelessly; we will not stand such behaviour. Then they said: Come along, let us go to Maran buru; from him we shall learn some kind of secret skill, that we may subdue these women.[15]

Legend has it, that the men went to Maran buru who agreed to teach them provided they, out of their own blood, made some marks on his Sal leaves. The men got afraid and told him they would come again the next day to do the needful. Meanwhile, women who were following the men secretly in the forest came to know of their exact

[13]Troisi, *Tribal Religion*, pp. 217–18.

[14]Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witchhunts*, San Francisco: Pandora, 1994. Barstow argues that witch persecutions were part of a deep-rooted misogyny, and involved the punishment of women for their sexuality.

[15]*Reak Katha*, p. 162.

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game plan. And so, the next day they prepared good food, got their men drunk, dressed up in their clothes and instead went to Maran buru.

> Do bring your leaves out quickly; we shall make our different marks; we are not able to stand the worrying of the women. Maran buru brought out his Sal-leaves, and they pricked themselves and with the blood made marks of their respective husbands. Thereupon Maran buru taught them incantations and charms and initiated them in the eating of people. Smiling and laughing they returned home.[16]

The next morning, men noticed women abusing and cowing as usual. Shocked, they decided to go to Maran buru again to learn the art. The latter was very surprised on seeing them. Having subsequently realised that women had duped him, he made men experts in the art of witch-finding 'in order that they might be able to find out the witches and punish them.'[17]

The ability of witches to 'easily subdue their bongas' however constantly haunted the men. Man notes: '[witches] are supposed to have intercourse with the bongas, which gives them the power of killing people by eating their entrails and also of causing fevers, murrain in cattle and other kinds of evil.'[18] They could therefore kill either directly or by 'setting the bongas'. The *bongas* in turn could bring destruction and death either by themselves or through agents.[19] Archer reiterates: 'she is merely its instigator and the work of destruction is done by a bonga instead.'[20] He also acknowledges women having 'strange mysterious powers' and that 'the whole process of attraction—the power of the girls to inflame passion, to subdue boys to their will—makes them from time to time, a source of danger.'[21]

[16]Ibid., p. 163.

[17]Ibid., pp. 163–64.

[18]E. G. Man, *Sonthalia and the Sonthals*, reprinted 1983, Calcutta: Mittal Publications, 1867, p. 152.

[19]Siba Prasad Raut, 'Witchcraft among the Santals of Mayurbhanj', in *The Santals: Readings in Tribal Life*, ed. J Troisi, vol. I (Religion and Magic), New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1979, p. 402.

[20]W. G. Archer, 'Santal Treatment of Witchcraft', in *The Santals: Readings in Tribal Life*, ed. J Troisi, vol. I (Religion and Magic), New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1979, p. 13. The article was originally published in *Man in India*, vol. 27, no. 2.

[21]W. G. Archer, *The Hill of Flutes, Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India; A Portrait of the Santals*, London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1974, p. 292.

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Fear and suspicion of women's sexuality not only influenced construction(s) of witches but also accounted for women's invisibility from adivasi rituals and religion. Troisi says that the belief in the dangerous potentiality of women to seduce evil spirits and wreck vengeance on their enemies was reflected in the fact that participation in all sacrifices was tabooed for women. Taboos against women's immediacy to bongas were institutionalised and a female professing intimate familiarity with them was looked upon as a witch and prosecuted.[22] Women were also not allowed to climb trees, as it was believed that the nearness of their sex would 'pollute the bongas'. Roy similarly points out that the exclusion of Kharia women from religious festivals and ritualistic observances was due to the tribals' horror of the menstrual blood, which attracted evil spirits. For similar reasons, there were restrictions against women accompanying funeral processions to burial places or cremation grounds; they were not allowed to attend *sarnas* (sacred groves) or sacrifices.[23] Women were even barred from eating the flesh of animals sacrificed to Abge bongas or to Maran buru.[24] The worship of the deities was strictly confined to menfolk. This is what a Munda *pahan* (priest) had to say:

> Women cannot go to the Ading (place reserved for dead ancestors in a house) to worship the Bonga and if they do so they would become witches. When the Bonga is propitiated by women, she is soon taken possession of by the spirit.[25]

Drawing linkages between shamanism and witchcraft were also not entirely unrelated to traditional constructions. Such a connection also comes out in studies done in the European context and some scholars maintain that witch-hunts were aimed at reducing women's role in healing. Riane Eisler argues that since witches were traditional healers, witch accusations represented a move by church-trained male physicians to oust these women from healing. Similarly it is postulated that since witch rites represented remnants of an earlier pagan religion (in which women occupied important positions), witch-accusations were an attempt by the Church to discredit and

[22]Ibid., p. 294.
[23]S. C. Roy, *The Kharias*, Ranchi: Man in India, 1937, p. 120.
[24]Troisi, *Tribal Religion*, p. 221.
[25]Sachchidananda, 'Cultural Change in Tribal Bihar: Mundas and Oraons', in *Bulletin of the Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute*, vol. 2, no.1, 1960, pp. 67–68.

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suppress such beliefs.[26] Studies from different regions in India also hint at/point to women's shamanistic roles. Verrier Elwin talks about Saora women's shamanism and that they were custodians of black magic and had unrivalled knowledge of herbs and plants.[27] Skaria says, *dakan*s (witches in the Dangs region) were often thought to be good at gathering.[28] In Chotanagpur, the relationship of women with nature and forests, and their knowledge of roots, herbs and plants (particularly the medicinal ones), were quite established in the community domain and belief system.[29]

Further, Bosu Mullick argues that there is no original Mundari word for a male healer though there is a word for witch-finder (*deora*). He says that ojha, the word for male healer, is of Indo-Aryan origin, which may have been a relatively late institution among the Mundas. Even Bodding records:

> I have no doubt that they know some vegetable poisons which they administer themselves or by proxy. It is significant that in one of their mantras they mention *kambru guru*, who is the old guru of the medicine men (ojhas).[30]

However there is not much evidence of an organised persecution of women shamans though one may qualify, that in view of established gendered construction(s) of witches in adivasi societies, women's proximity to herbs and healing made them even more vulnerable. Witch-hunts could therefore be seen as one of the many, though extreme, reflections of gender and social tensions; a sphere where struggle for power and resources were resolved in violent ways.

Exemplification of these tensions could also be seen in institutionalisation of gendered discriminations. Denial of land rights, control over women's sexuality, prevalence of comprehensive

[26]Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987, pp. 140–41.

[27]V. Elwin, 'The Saora Woman as a Shaman', in *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 171.

[28]Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 73.

[29]Bosu Mullick, 'Gender Relations and Witches', p. 344. On account of thick forests and a rich variety of flora and fauna Chotanagpur was considered a treasure house of knowledge related to herbs and medicinal plants.

[30]Quoted in P. C. Roy Chaudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteer, Santal Parganas*, Patna: Secretariat Press, 1965, pp. 901–2, (henceforth *Santal Parganas District Gazetteer*)

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taboo regimes and absence of political representation, formed some of the many 'established traditions' in Chotanagpur. In the context of customary exclusion and discrimination, witchcraft constituted one of the limited ranges of available responses for women. It represented an act of resistance against an exploitative patriarchal structure: a fault-line along which social tensions could be articulated. Bodding remarks:

> I am inclined to think that the practice of witchcraft by Santal women is, to a certain extent, really secret worship, resorted to by women because they are not permitted to take part with the men directly and personally in ordinary public worship.[31]

He elaborates:

> Santal religion is essentially a man's religion. The women are not permitted to approach any deity themselves; it has to be done through the men.... The two sexes do not trust and have confidence in each other.... Now the women want, just as much as the men, to have an equal opportunity—for good or for evil—for direct appeal to the supernatural. It cannot be done in public or with the consent of the men: hence it must be done in secret, if it is to be done at all.[32]

Low literacy rates, extreme backwardness, the prevalent moral-economy of witchcraft and a widespread belief in the supernatural powers of witches in pre-modern adivasi societies only contributed to internalisation and naturalisation of such constructions. Ball adds:

> The belief was so thorough that even those who are accused of being witches or sorcerers do not deny the impeachment but accept the position readily with all its pains and penalties.[33]

The Palamau District Gazetteer records that 'under the pressure of popular opinion, [a woman suspect] is sometimes led to form a belief that she wields supernatural forces and gradually develops the habit

[31]Cited in Dev Nathan and Govind Kelkar, *Gender and Tribe: Women, Land and Forests in Jharkhand*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991, p. 99.

[32]Quoted in *Santal Parganas District Gazetteer* , p. 902.

[33]Valentine Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life in Nineteenth Century India*, reprinted 1885, Delhi: Usha Publications, 1880, p. 115.

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of performing typical magical rites ascribed to the witches.'[34] The belief was also grounded in a sense of power and agency. Ajay Skaria points out that many women in fact claimed to be witches maybe because of the resources and respect they secured or because it was one of the few means by which they could claim authority.[35] Bodding records:

> ... they [witches] know it, believe themselves to be in collusion with evil spirits and try to exert an evil influence. They may possibly also themselves believe that they have magic powers and are able to influence supernatural beings. I have heard them assert this.[36]

Though such silent, anonymous and invisible protests have gone largely unnoticed by historians, they are crucial in understanding women's negotiation with patriarchal forces in everyday life. A shift in focus from 'extraordinary moments of collective protest' to a 'variety of non-confrontational resistances and contestatory behaviour'[37] could lead to a way of examining women's agency even while they belong to and participate in an oppressive patriarchal society.[38] The 'everyday forms of resistance' are informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains. They require little or no coordination, or planning, represent a form of individual self-help and typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms.[39] Such acts are however not devoid of consciousness. Scott cautions that 'the symbols, the norms, the ideological forms they create constitute the indispensable background to their behaviour however imperfect or partial their understanding of the situation might be.'[40]

[34]P. C. Roy Chaudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteers: Palamau*, Patna: Secretariat Press, 1961, p. 165, (henceforth *Palamau District Gazetteer*)

[35]Skaria, *Hybrid Histories*, p. 89.

[36]Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine*, p. 38.

[37]Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, *Contesting Power*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 1–2.

[38]Nita Kumar, *Women as Subjects, South Asian Histories*, Calcutta: Stree, 1994, p. 4.

[39]James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. While speaking of peasants' protest, Scott speaks about the relatively unnoticed 'everyday forms of protest' which include foot dragging, dissimulation, passive non-compliance, pilferage, feigned ignorance, slander, evasion, arson, subtle sabotage and so forth.

[40]Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. 38.

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Witchcraft could therefore be seen as an act of subversion, an attempt to create a space denied by/in society.

I have cut the plantain grove,
I have taken off my clothes,
I have learnt from my mother-in-law,
How to eat my husband,
On the hills the wind blows,
I have cut the thatching grass,
I have grown weary,
Weary of eating rice....[41]

And,

The weapons are ready,
The axe glitters,
Over the smooth verandah.
The wasps are swarming,
O Bagru! leave us,
Kill the young servants,
Kill the girls, the boys....[42]

Tribal cosmology is replete with references to women being 'trained' as witches.[43] It is held that the power of witchcraft is not inborn but is acquired through 'training in secret'. A belief however prevailed that the witches themselves took the initiative. It is said that they chose their favourite daughter or their daughter-in-law as their successors.[44] They were believed to entice and sometimes even force girls to become their disciples so that 'the seed may live on when they themselves die'. The training was imparted during dark nights in a forest or an open plain, and consisted of teaching of *mantars*

[41]Archer, *Hill of Flutes*, pp. 294–95. Archer had recorded these two songs with Santal men 'who had gone with witches in their youth'.

[42]Ibid., p. 295.

[43]Witchcraft initiations and other practices associated with the learning of witchcraft are treated extensively in W. Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore*; Bodding, *Reak Katha*; C. H. Bompas, trans., *Folklore of the Santhal Parganas*, first published 1909, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, reprint, 2001; P. C. Oraon, *Janjatiya Kshetra Mein Dain Pratha ki Samasya avom Samadhan* (Hindi), Ranchi: Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute, 2000.

[44]Oraon, *Janjatiya Kshetra Mein Dain Pratha*, p. 24.

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(incantations), charms and songs.[45] The new moon nights were traditionally associated with witches' spells and incantations in adivasi folklore. Citing the case of Oraons, Roy writes:

> Witches in general have to acquire their art by a course of training in secret.... it is said, they strip themselves of their clothes and wear only the fringes of old brooms, made of wild grass, suspended from a girdle round their waist. Thus arranged, the naked women hold the witches' dance with the help of the weird light of lamps burning on tigers' skulls.[46]

Accounts also point out that during these secret gatherings they chanted and danced starting from the prohibited shrine of the village ancestors (*manjhi-than*) and going to the prohibited sacred grove. It has been pointed out that these rites are not figments of motivated imagination and has been attested to by persons (including a respected anthropologist) who had observed them.[47]

The identification and subsequent purging of witches were also indicative of the asymmetric ordering of adivasi societies. The ojha (also known as *sokha, deonar, mati, jan*) sought to expose and counteract the anti-social activities of the witches and the 'evil' influence of the impersonal spirits. No medicines, it was believed, could prove effective in diseases caused by spirits. Only a sokha could find the working of witches and name them.[48] The fact that ojhas almost invariably were males, points to the extension of gender tensions in 'healing'. Almost all traditional constructions of witchcraft highlight the tension between the female witch and the male ojha.

The old hag dug a ditch,
The Kazaliyo filled it again.
The old hag filled two pitchers,
The kazaliyo kicked them over.
The old hag climbed on the riverbank

[45]Troisi, *Tribal Religion*, p. 218.

[46]S. C. Roy, *Oraon Religion and Customs*, first published 1928, Delhi: Gyan, 1985, p. 257.

[47]Dev Nathan, Govind Kelkar and Yu Xiaogang, 'Women as Witches and Keepers of Demon: Cross Cultural Analysis of Struggles to Change Gender Relations', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 33, 31 October–6 November 1998, p. 44.

[48]Sachchidananda,'Cultural Change in Tribal Bihar', p. 71.

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The kazaliyo dragged and threw her,
He pressed her right in the reeds.[49]

'The pronouncement of the name of a witch', notes Bodding, 'is a *jan*'s privilege. He is a man who 'knows', viz., by revelation.... Those which the *jans* pronounce to be witches, we deem witches. Whether they really find them out, or the whole is humbug—we believe that they find them out.'[50] Instead of divining the name of the person, who has cast the evil eye on the suffering patients, some sokhas however 'profess to summon their own familial spirits who impart to them the needed information.'[51]

Speaking of arbitrary identification ordeals among the Santals, Forbes had suggested how identification of witches tantamounted to identifying female victims. He discusses different types of ordeals. In the first case, the branches of Sal tree marked with the names of all females of the village over the age of twelve (married or unmarried), were planted in the morning in water for a space of four-and-a-half hours. The withering of any of these branches was a proof of witchcraft against the person whose name was attached to it. Alternatively, small portions of rice enveloped in pieces of cloth marked as before were placed in the nests of white ants; the consumption of rice in any of the bags was a proof of witchcraft by the woman whose name it bore. In a still different form of identification, lamps were lit at night and water was placed in cups made of leaves. Mustard oil was then poured drop by drop into the water while the name of each woman in the village was pronounced. The appearance of the shadow of any woman in the water during the ceremony proved her to be a witch.[52] Such arbitrary methods of 'detection' are also borne out by later accounts. In some cases, grains of rice were given to suspects to be kept in the mouth and the person in whose mouth the rice remained dry was declared the culprit. The argument is who, but

[49]W. Koppers and L. Jungblut, Bowmen of Mid-India, Vol. 1, Austria: Wien, 1976, as cited in Bosu Mullick, 'Gender Relations and Witches', p. 134. The old hag is a witch and the *kazaliyo* a witch-finder. The song describes the actions of the witch and the counteractions of the witch-finder until the latter suffocates the former to death by forcibly submerging her in the river.

[50]Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine*, p. 41.

[51]Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 208.

[52]Forbes, 'Oriental Memoirs' cited in Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore*, p. 272.

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the guilty, would show fear.[53] The subjectivity in identification needs to be noted. Bodding writes:

> If they have got, to them satisfactory, proof that a woman may be a witch (e.g., by observing any woman out at night where she has no business to be, or a woman who has shown traits of character which ought not to be found in any good woman, so on), the suspicion gets an object. Although they are very careful and reticent, this will leak out. I take it that such felt suspicion is the most common cause of *ojhas* 'seeing' witches in the divination leaf.[54]

Reak Katha laments; 'nowadays there are no such witch finders; mostly they hypocritically blacken people and take their money. For this reason, they keep secret informers, to remove hindrances.'[55] Generally old women with queer penetrating looks and ugly shapes (apparently provoking fear into the minds of the people) were taken to be witches.[56] Old women were easy to fit in the 'old hag' image of witches. But childless widows or single or unprotected women were primary victims of witch-accusations. In some cases however, the victims had been young and comely girls 'quite unlike the ancient hag of western fancy.'[57] Very rarely however, the wife or mother of an influential or rich person would be accused of being a witch as commoners had little chance of personal friction with them.[58]

Once the identification of the witch was 'established', the accused was left with no alternative but to accept the charge. Patriarchy created witches but also hunted them down. When a so-called witch-finder divined an old woman as a witch responsible for a mishap, she had practically no other alternative except to plead guilty.[59] Dalton points out:

[53]P. K. Gupta, 'Witchcraft murders in the Duars', *Man in India*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1960, p. 315. Gupta talks about witchcraft murders among the Oraons, Mundas, Santals, Kols, Kherias staying at the tea gardens as labourers, most of whom had come from Chotanagpur.

[54]Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine*, p. 38.

[55]*Reak Katha*, p. 168.

[56]*Palamau District Gazetteer*, p. 165.

[57]F. B. Bradley-Birt, *History and Ethnology of an Indian Upland*, first published 1909, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1990, p. 222.

[58]Buddhadeb Chaudhuri, 'An Analytical Study of Witchcraft among the Mundas of Midnapur', in *Tribal Transformation in India*. Vol. V, (Religion, Rituals and Festivals), ed. Buddhadeb Chaudhuri, Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1990, p. 156.

[59]*Palamau District Gazetteer*, p. 165.

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it is useless for him [sic] to plead that he [sic] has no such spirit, this only leads to his [sic] being unmercifully beaten, his [sic] best line of defence is to admit what is laid to his [sic] charge and to act as if he [sic] really were master of the situation.[60]

Roy reiterates, 'in times within living memory, people accused of witchcraft but denying the charge have sometimes been beaten to death.'[61] Dalton points to a case where eight women 'had introduced epidemic cholera into the village, and caused a terrible mortality, and among these were some very young girls. They were ill-treated until they admitted all that was imputed to them, and agreed to point tout and remove the spells they had prepared. They pretended to search for dead birds which, it was said, they had deposited as charms, but nothing was produced, and one of the poor creatures, fearing further ill-usage, destroyed herself by jumping into a well.'[62]

Valentine Ball narrates a similar incident told to him by a Deputy Commissioner:

A Ho having lost some of his cattle by disease employed the witch-finder to discover the author of the mischief. After the usual incantations, a certain old woman was pointed out. On being charged with the offence she calmly admitted that she was guilty of having 'eaten' the cattle. She was, however, forgiven, but warned against causing any further injury. After a time the man's eldest son died, and the woman was charged with having 'eaten' him. Again she admitted the charge, but this time added: 'I was not alone in doing so, but was aided by three sisters.' All the women of the village and neighbourhood having been assembled they were made to sit down in a circle, and the old woman, walking round, dropped fragments of cloth behind each of the three whom she accused. They were made to stand forth, and likewise admitted that they had shared in devouring the young man. The father, addressing the first old woman, said: 'I forgave you for eating my cattle, but this, I cannot forgive.' Arming himself with a sword, he caused the four women to carry down to the riverside the bier upon which his son was laid. He then proceeded to kill and cut off the heads of

[60]Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, pp. 208–9.

[61]S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, first published 1912, Ranchi: Catholic Press, 1995, p. 308.

[62]Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 209.

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the women, one after another, none of them seeking safety in flight, though the last took temporary refuge under the bier.[63]

The attempts at purging 'evil influences' or tackling 'deviant' behaviour were characterised by brutality and violence. Dalton points out that, 'in former times, the person denounced and all his family were put to death in the belief that witches breed witches and sorcerers.'[64] On account of a firm belief in the 'hereditary' nature of black art, Ball says that 'whole families were disposed of by being hacked to pieces like venomous reptiles', since, '... it was advisable to scotch the blood.'[65] Roy acknowledges that 'women accused of witchcraft are dragged into the forest and hacked, hanged or burned to death.'[66] Sani Oraon, who had participated in the lynching of an Oraon 'witch' in Bakraghat Tea Estate of Jalpaiguri in 1930s once described an incident of how the suspected woman's house was raided by a furious mob and how she was trussed up in a gunny bag and thrown alive in the fast flowing Leesh river nearby. A couple of days later some Paharia labourers recovered the woman still trussed up in the bag but alive.[67] The fear that haunted the 'witches' was not of death, but of a recurring nightmare. They were made to walk naked through the village, be gang-raped, have their heads tonsured or their breasts cut off, their teeth broken, or be forced to swallow urine and human faeces, to eat human flesh or the raw blood of a chicken.[68] The Santals believe that no bonga would ever go near excrement and accordingly a witch who has been so polluted is deprived of all her maleficent powers.[69]

The fact that instances like barrenness, outbreak of diseases, epidemics, deaths, often provided the social occasioning and pretext for carrying out witch-hunts, gave an otherwise inhuman act, a social legitimacy. Thus, when cholera broke out in Birhankitta village in the Santal Parganas, a little girl Pania Soren and Jeona Murmu (a

[63]P. C. Roy Chaudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteers: Singhbhum*, Patna: Secretariat Press, 1958, p. 252.

[64]Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 208.

[65]Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 115.

[66]Roy, *The Mundas*, p. 308.

[67]Gupta, 'Witchcraft murders in the Duars', p. 314.

[68]Archana Mishra, *Casting the Evil Eye: Witch Trials in Tribal India*, New Delhi: Rolli Books, 2003; Oraon, *Janjatiya Kshetra Mein Dayan Pratha Ki Samasya Avom Samadhan*.

[69]Archer, 'Santal Treatment of Witchcraft', p. 22.

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woman related to her) were taken to the manjhi-than and killed. The choice of manjhi-than as a place for the kill was to 'enlist the support of the village's founder to stop the disease.'[70] In another case, Malta Hembrom killed his stepmother Fulo and her sister when his daughter died and son fell ill.[71] Similarly, Achi Kisku was killed by her two brothers because the son of one of them had caught small pox.[72] By ritualising such acts in the name of 'unhappy' spirits, witch-killing incidents were invested with a spiritio-religious dimension.

The notion of territoriality attached with witchcraft was also quite interesting. More often than not, the 'witch' and the accuser belonged to the same village and were known to each other in some way—they were always from among the tribe and the lineage concerned. Citing the case of colonial western India, Skaria says that the agnates, women or persons from outside the community did not usually make accusations of witchcraft, possibly because these relationships were either relatively unimportant or had low levels of tension.[73] Also, witches expelled from one village could therefore be re-accommodated in another, though at a lower order in the social hierarchy. Hoffman mentions: 'it is also a very noteworthy fact that widows driven out as witches from their own villages are easily received as servants in other villages, nobody there apprehending any harm from them.'[74] 'The witchcraft idiom', wrote Sabean, 'was one way of defining the community, suggesting the manner in which envy, aggression, and fear were to be territorialised.'[75]

Witch-accusations and witch-hunts thus formed special and institutionalised instruments of social discrimination. They were also conducive to the social process of controlling women. The threat of being declared a witch certainly helped restrict non-conformism. An institutionalised belief in witchcraft served to reinforce patriarchal controls in other ways as well. Chaudhuri points out that the fear of going out at night reduced opportunities for extra-marital sex relations

[70]S. M. Naqavi, 'Santal Murders', *Man in India*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1943, p. 242.

[71]Ibid., p. 243.

[72]Ibid., p. 244.

[73]Ajay Skaria, Women, 'Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence in Colonial Western India', *Past and Present*, vol. 155, May 1997, p. 119.

[74]J. Hoffman, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, Patna: Government Printing Press, 1950, p. 1003.

[75]David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 109.

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of widows.[76] Gender discrimination associated with the adivasi notions of witchcraft and spirits were reinforced by the growth of private property and capitalism under the colonial rule.

The colonial land and forest legislations laid down 'legally' defined institutional foundations leading to the marginalisation of the adivasis. The impacts included, among other things, breakdown of the communal mode of production and emergence of private rights in land, commercial exploitation of forests, ban on shifting cultivation, penetration of market relations, intrusion of middlemen and moneylenders (the much hated dikus), social stratification and emergence of feudal relations in land.[77] Changing situations of social existence intensified the trend towards destruction of women's traditional residual land rights.[78] Though similar incidents had been reported in the past, with the advent of the private property regime and the consequent premium being attached to ownership of land, witch-hunts were acquiring new grounds. The recording of the land rights by settlement operations conducted during the late-nineteenth-early twentieth century greatly polarised tensions related to land ownership. Taking into account the fact, that under traditional adivasi systems of inheritance, land accrued to male agnates of the deceased, incidents of women being labelled as witches and hounded out, occasionally even killed, were closely connected to the political economy of land ownership. Nathan and Kelkar corroborate that the life interest of a widow restricted the property rights of the male agnates of the deceased husband, whose use of this land, for accumulation or for consumption, had to wait till after the death of the woman.[79] In most cases therefore, the killers were related to victims. Coupland observed: 'cases of murder of persons suspected of being witches are far from uncommon. The murderer is, it may be noted, almost invariably a member of the family to which the witch belongs.'[80] Greater incidence of witch killings among the Santals could

[76]Chaudhuri, 'An Analytical Study of Witchcraft', pp. 156–57.

[77]K. S. Singh, 'Colonial Transformation of Tribal Society in Middle India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 13, no. 30, 29 July 1978, pp. 1227–28.

[78]Under customary adivasi laws, the only females entitled to land rights are the widows and single women. Broadly speaking, women had traditionally enjoyed two kinds of land rights: firstly a life interest in land, a right to manage the land and its produce and secondly the right (not to manage or use the land as per one's own discretion) to a share of produce of the land; the right to maintenance (*khorposh*).

[79]Nathan and Kelkar, *Gender and Tribe*, p. 93.

[80]H. Coupland, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Manbhum*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911, p. 74.

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thus be explained by the fact that their women had traditionally enjoyed a 'higher order of rights in land'.[81]

As new land and market regimes infiltrated the tribal societies, the social safeguards against the widows and single women started crumbling, rendering them even more vulnerable.[82] The weakening of traditional institutions and collectivism only aided the process. The results included massive encroachments on women's land rights. Archer mentions a number of women recorded to be in possession of land in the 1906 Settlement in Santal Parganas. The 1922 Revision Settlement Survey on the other hand, departed from the earlier principles recorded widows under two heads; those having life interest in land and those who were *khorposhdar*s for certain plots sufficient to maintain them till their deaths.[83] Land disputes between men and women were thus becoming increasingly common. The discourses of resistance were drawn from particular claims, where women's experience of insecure rights to land challenged the dominant discourse within customary law.[84] Women were demanding property rights in the courts of law and the settlement operations launched by the government in unsurveyed tribal areas had started recognising women's rights in land. The entire process had received a major boost from the judgements upholding women's rights to land. Since Archer noticed this, tribal daughters and widows were increasingly asserting their rights to property not only among the Santals but also among the Hos and Mundas.[85]

By effecting a breakdown in the 'ecological moral economy' of adivasis, colonial rule contributed to 'ritualised violence' against women in other ways as well. There was a widely held notion among

[81]Nathan and Kelkar, *Gender and Tribe*, p. 96.

[82]Certain safeguards had traditionally existed in adivasi societies to take care of single or deserted women. In cases of families having only daughters, sons-in-law could inherit their parental property only if they agreed to settle in their wife's paternal village. Similarly, divorced women could go back to their fathers' or brothers' home, though their status became lower than that of other women in the house.

[83]W. G. Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice; A Report on the Santals*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1984, pp. 684–85.

[84]Vinita Damodaran, 'Gender Forests and Famine in 19th-Century Chotanagpur, India', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002, p. 147.

[85]K. S. Singh, Introduction to Archer, *Tribal Law*, pp. xiv–xv. Perhaps the most notable judgement upholding the right of a widow to bequeath property to her daughter, ignoring the interests and rights of male agnates of the family was delivered by the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, A. J. Mainwaring (The Santhal Parganas Civil Appeal No. 22 of 1940).

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the local communities that increasing occurrence of social disorders, diseases, deforestation and famines under the colonial rule were due to 'malevolent' forces. Such ideas had a particularly strong appeal in the context of growing pressures on the tribal economy. In the past, the remedies for such 'illnesses' had remained dependent upon forests. With the decline in forest cover (as also the restrictions on the use of forest produce), the ojhas were finding it increasingly difficult to procure medicinal plants and animal products. They were thus turning to exorcism and ascribing the causation of disease to individuals, usually women.[86] In a particular case in the Hazaribagh district, a cultivator had an attack of indigestion, which the normal medicine failed to cure. The patient therefore consulted the nearest *deokli* 'who explained that a neighbour's wife had set a *bhut* on him.'[87]

Damodaran argues that, the rise in witch-hunting in the latter half of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century was linked to the 'pressures of rapid ecological changes combined with the erosion of common property rights and deforestation.' Women were increasingly made targets of a male violence in the context of economic and ecological crisis.[88] Incidents of witch-killing would normally peak in times of socio-political disorders. Chotrae Deshmanjhi, one of the participants in the Santal rebellion (1855–56), describes how numerous girls were accused of witchcraft in the rebellion and killed.[89] Similarly Ball points out:

> During the disturbed times of the mutiny in 1857–58, when law was suspended in these regions, the Kols of Singhbhum and other parts of the Province availed themselves of their freedom to make a clean sweep of the witches and sorcerers who had accumulated in their midst, under the benign influence of British authority.[90]

The Singhbhum Old Correspondence corroborates:

> The returns (of first class of offence) of 1859 exhibit fifty-nine cases of murder, in which 218 persons were implicated. It appears, however that

[86]Damodaran, 'Gender, Forests and Famine', pp. 147–49

[87]E. Lister, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Hazaribag*, Patna: Government Printing Press, 1917, p. 92.

[88]Damodaran, 'Gender, Forests and Famine', p. 147.

[89]Archer, 'Santal Treatment of Witchcraft', p. 4.

[90]Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 116.

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fifty of these cases occurred during the disturbances of 1857 and 1858, the people availing themselves of the temporary withdrawal of our authority to indulge in their superstitious desire of exterminating witchcraft....[91]

Under the impact of ecological and social crisis, even the strains generated by regular fluctuations in the agricultural cycle became difficult to sustain. The agriculturally lean periods would thus be particularly turbulent for the adivasis. A month-wise analysis of the total number of Santal murders (of which witch killings constituted a significant part), between 1931 and 1940, shows that (excluding January and to some extent April) most murders were committed between the months of May, June and September. May and June have traditionally been 'hunger months', when the strain of living bulks largely. The high incidence of murders in January could also be explained by the fact that there is a general sense of abandon following the winter harvest. The fact that there were no murders in August (the month of transplantation, not a period of scarcity) also speaks a lot about the intricacies involved.[92] But the analysis also throws significant light on gender dimensions of witch-hunting. In a total of 78 cases of murders between 1931–40, the murderers were exclusively males but more than half the victims were women.[93] In fact, it is very difficult to procure statistical data on witch killings for the colonial period because murders as offences were put in the 'special report' category only towards the end of 1953. Further, even in the *specially reported* cases, unless the investigating officers were aware how a tribal would react to witchcraft, there were chances that they missed the motive or put in a wrong motive.[94]

By bringing about fundamental transformations in adivasi societies and complexities in the traditional gender relations, colonialism and capitalism became unconscious precipitants of witch-hunting among the tribes of Chotanagpur. In a situation of a growing

[91]Letter from Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Vol. VII, Old Correspondence, Singhbhum, 1860, No. 4455 in P. C. Roy Chaudhury (compiled) *Singhbhum Old Records*, Patna: Gazetteer's Revision Section, Revenue Department, 1958, p. 134.

[92]Naqavi, 'Santal Murders', p. 240. Naqavi writes about only those cases that were tried under section 302 or 304 of the Indian Penal Code.

[93]Ibid., p. 238.

[94]Gupta, 'Witchcraft murders in the Duars', p. 310.

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money economy, resource depletion[95] was also bringing about changes in the nature of witch-trials. Monetisation of witch-trials was thus only a logical accompaniment. In the nineteenth century, descriptions of such trials, violence and killing of the witches is more often emphasised. Towards the end of nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, monetary punishments started gaining greater ground.[96] There are numerous instances of witches being fined, both in cash and kind, to mobilise resources necessary to perform sacrifices to 'propitiate' the 'infuriated spirit'. Such fines were often estimated very liberally.[97] Failure, inability or refusal to pay fines could lead to disastrous consequences. Roy notes, 'in case of denial [to accept guilt] and the refusal to pay the fine demanded, the suspected witch is not unoften severely thrashed, dispossessed of his lands and in some cases driven out of the village.'[98] In Jasaidih, when epidemic broke out among men and cattle, the *jan guru* identified the witches, all of whom were fined twenty-five rupees and made to give a fowl, a pig and goat.[99] In many cases however, the victim was repeatedly fined. In Dumka, after being 'diagnosed a witch', the wife of Khara Hansdak was first fined 2 rupees and 8 annas, then five rupees, then ten and finally fifteen. The village decided that if she still persisted with witchcraft, she would be sent back to her parents' home.[100]

WITCHCRAFT AND EUROPEAN INFLUENCE

Some scholars have gone a little further to suggest that origins of witchcraft could in fact be traced to the 'European influence'. K. S. Singh

[95]The alienation of the adivasi lands was quite an established fact in the nineteenth century. But the advent of a restricted forest regime in the 1890s further played havoc with the survival needs of the adivasis. The adivasis had traditionally remained dependent on the forest for the food, fodder, fuel, medicinal products, etc.

[96]In the accounts of Forbes (1813), Buchanan (1830s), Man (1867), Dalton (1872), Ball (1880), Risley (1891), the violence inflicted on the witches is stressed upon, while Roy (1910–37), Bodding (1920s), Archer (1930s), and Charulal Mukherjee (see Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santals*, Calcutta: A. Mukherjea and Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1962) talk about how the fines and monetary punishments associated with witchcraft were extensively gaining ground. Dalton though refers to 'extensive propitiatory offerings' out of which the *sokha*s got a lion's share but does not specifically talk about the monetary aspects.

[97]Roy, *The Mundas*, p. 309.

[98]Ibid.

[99]Archer, 'Santal Treatment of Witchcraft', p. 21.

[100]Ibid., p. 22.

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argues, rather inconclusively though, that the advent of witchcraft in India coincided with the arrival of the colonial rulers. The local people had a larger view of Shamanism (the world of good and evil spirits), but with European influence it began to get identified with black magic, white magic and witchcraft. Women were regarded as healers and granted powers in Shamanism.[101] Though this would be an interesting area to explore, beyond the scope of this chapter, such an argument might not sound unproblematic in the light of available evidence. It is true that the adivasis did not have a word that stood for 'witch' in their own language; thus, one may believe that they borrowed the idea and the institution of witchcraft from someone. Who did they borrow it from then becomes an area of concern. Hoffman is of the opinion that witchcraft was alien to the adivasis and was introduced by the Hinduised artisan groups and aborigines. He says that the witch doctors, the sokhas neither belonged to the Mundari village nor even to the Munda race and the language they used was mostly Sadani or Hindi hardly understood by the Mundas using the mantars. Further, they derived their powers not from Singa Bonga (the adivasi deity) but from Mahadeo, a Hindu deity.[102] Bosu Mullick says that the adivasis borrowed the idea from their Hindu neighbours, the *sadan*s (the artisanal castes living in the region).[103] One also needs to revisit the 'villainous' role of the colonial state so dominant in traditional discourses on ethnicity.

The territorial reach of the colonial state in Jharkhand was always very limited and fragile. This is demonstrated by the adivasi rebellions of the nineteenth (and the twentieth century) and by the decision of the state to commute certain fines for forest offences committed in 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. It was also consistent with the physical presence of the British in Chotanagpur.[104] There is evidence of witch-trials in the region even when the British were struggling to establish their control. In 1792, John Shore had talked about the Santal ways of 'trying witches'.[105] Forbes in his Oriental Memoirs in 1813 had

[101]Quoted in T. K. Rajalakshmi, 'In the Name of a Witch', *Frontline*, vol. 17, no. 23, 11–24 November 2000.

[102]Bosu Mullick, 'Gender Relations and Witches', pp. 125–26.

[103]Ibid., p. 132.

[104]Stuart Corbridge, 'Ousting Singbonga: The Struggle for India's Jharkhand', in *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India*, ed. Peter Robb, reprinted 1999, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 138.

[105]Archer, *Tribal Law*, p. 482.

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also referred to some established witch-trials.[106] In fact in the early nineteenth century, an official speculated that around a thousand women had been killed as witches in the plains of central India alone in the past thirty years.[107] Besides, what certainly cannot be denied is the fact that attempts were made by the 'Europeans', whether colonial authorities or Christian missionaries, to dispel notions of witchcraft and control all related acts of 'mischief', 'crime' or 'murder'. Wilkinson directed:

> There should be an encouragement to bring the diseased to the hospitals and the doctors for a proper cure. The Medical officer should be liberally encouraged to explain that medicine only can cure the disease and if this message of cure through proper medicine be spread, belief in witch-craft will decrease.[108]

Punitive measures were also suggested to control such 'crimes'. Dalton, the Commissioner of Singhbhum in 1860, took firm measures to put down the practice of 'soka.' He declared it a crime for any person to practice a 'soka' or any person to employ a 'soka.' Cases of murder, which originated in witchcraft and in the power to be possessed by a 'soka', were to be treated as crime as well.[109]

Man writes about a former Assistant Commissioner who employed a curious device to prevent murders related to witchcraft. Whenever he heard that any woman had been denounced, he used to bring out a galvanic battery; 'lightening case' or 'devil's box' as it was called. The girl was told to hold the handles but the electric current was disconnected. She showed no reaction and was therefore considered incorrect; but when the questioners were put through the same ordeal (this time with the current on), they used to dance for half-an hour—a practical proof which would stay any further belief in the girl's guilt and procure the witch-finder condign punishment.[110] In fact, when questioned about witchcraft, one of the frequent Santal complaints

[106]Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore*, p. 272.

[107]Skaria, 'Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence', p. 110.

[108]*Witch-craft leads to Murder*, Notes from the Singhbhum Old Correspondence in Commissioner's Record room, Ranchi, in Roy Choudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 271.

[109]*Notes on 'Soka' or Witch finder* (1860), Digest of some letters in Commissioner's Record Room, Ranchi, in Roy Choudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 279.

[110]Man, *Sonthalia and the Sonthals*, pp. 152–53.

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would be: 'magistrates undoubtedly try cases, but the idea of witchcraft does not enter their heads. If we punish witches, they complain against us and we get the sentence ourselves. The problem is difficult. And when we explain to the *Hakim* (magistrate), he argues thus, 'if the woman over there is really a witch, let her eat my fingers.'[111] Writing in the early decades of the twentieth century Roy also acknowledged, 'since the establishment of the British Government, however, matters have improved immensely, and instances of such extreme violence [witch-hunts] have become less frequent.'[112]

Like the colonial authorities, even the Christian missionaries did try to mitigate the evils associated with witchcraft. They offered the adivasis complete emancipation and exemption from fears and superstitions associated with witchcraft. The converts, says Dalton, believed that 'the Supreme Being who does not protect them from the spite of malevolent spirits, has ... Christians under His special care.'[113] In fact, the 'freedom from witches' was one of the major incentives for the tribals joining Christianity.[114] The missions set norms to control the behaviour of their members both within and outside the religious sphere. The converts were cut off from any activity that savoured bonga worship and were forbidden to partake of any ritual sacrifice and ceremony in the honour of the village and ancestral bongas and other spirits.[115] When eight to ten Oraon families near Silphari village (near Ranchi) invited a mati (witch diviner) to ward off some evil spirits, they were first fined by the Parish Father and, upon refusal to give up the practice, were expelled from Christianity. The missionaries used mediums like talks, dramas, preaching, or plays to ridicule witchcraft.[116]

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion highlights how witch-hunts not only played a significant role in the ordering of social and gender relations

[111]Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santals*, p. 293.

[112]Roy, *The Mundas*, p. 308.

[113]Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 263.

[114]K. N. Sahay, *Under the Shadow of the Cross*, Calcutta: Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, 1976, p. 64.

[115]Troisi, *Tribal Religion*, p. 267.

[116]Sachchidananda, 'Cultural Change in Tribal Bihar', pp. 72–73.

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but were closely connected to changes in the political economy. Under the impact of tensions and inequities generated during the colonial period, such hunts acquired new meanings and legitimacy. It also indicates how the involvement of different parties—the colonial state, adivasi patriarchs, 'witches', dikus, Christian missionaries (and also anthropologists and ethnographers)—with different socio-political locations and interests—made the world of sprits and witches an innately contested political terrain and a site for multiple agencies. In fact, the power politics underlining the witch hunts in Chotanagpur contributed significantly to the gradual institutionalisation of such killings.

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Assertion and Resistance

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Visibility through Resistance
The Malangis and Salt Making in Eighteenth Century Bengal

Meena Bhargava

The Malangis, popularly known as salt labourers, were identified by the East India Company as an indispensable body of workers for the flourishing salt industry of Bengal in the eighteenth century because of their proficiency in salt making. This chapter, however, focuses on their ethnic—tribal or racial—origins, and hazards a suggestion that the 'Malangi' was an amorphous category, invented by the Company, a result of the colonial classification strategy, whereby a whole set of adivasis from diverse regions were put under this category. Malangis were not just salt labourers; they were tribals, forest-dwellers and woodcutters. Whatever be their job profile, they adopted different forms of resistance—for that appeared to be their only tool for survival—against the oppression and exploitation they suffered at the hands of the zamindars—often the Maratha zamindars—the *beoparis* (salt merchants) and the officials of the Company. As forest-dwellers and woodcutters, they also employed several tactics to protect themselves from the depredations of the wild beasts they encountered in the forests, where they lived for almost eight months to procure wood for fuel that was needed to make salt.

ETHNICITY, ROLE AND CHANGING STATUS

The Malangis formed a bulk of the immigrant population in certain areas of Bengal i.e., western parts of the 24 Pargana Sunderbans,

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the eastern part of Bakarganj Sunderbans and the low lying marshy tract of Jessore Sunderbans. The main immigrants to the 24 Pargana Sunderbans were Uriyas and Bunas. Uriyas came largely from Cuttack but also from other parts of Orissa. Bunas or the hill and forest tribes of western Bengal came from Bankura, Birbhum, Hazaribagh, Bhagalpur and Chotanagpur. The 1872 census report classified them ethnically as semi-Hinduised aboriginals in the category of Asiatics-Natives of India and Burma.[1] Both Uriyas and Bunas had originally come to these regions as Malangis or salt manufacturers and as woodcutters. It is believed that subsequent to the abolition of the government monopoly in salt in 1861, they settled as cultivators in different parts of the 24 Pargana Sunderbans.[2] The Malangis also resided and plied their trade in the several regions between the Hugli and the Matla rivers, which had low, thick brushwood jungles. The region also had isolated forest trees, which sporadically towered above stunted timber and indicated that the original forests here were no different from the forests in Sunderbans. They had cleared these forests for wood to acquire fuel for salt boiling.[3] Some Malangis also belonged to the Khadal caste, one of the lowest castes of Hindus. They were engaged in salt making in Bengal at least till the abolition of government salt monopoly, after which they took to fishing and boating as their caste occupation.[4] Yet another group of people, who worked as Malangis, were Shendus, a hill tribe. They inhabited the area to the northeast and east of the Blue Mountains and were accused several times of raiding the Chittagong hill tracts.[5]

The Malangis had emerged as an important body of salt labourers in the profitable salt industry of Bengal in the eighteenth century, notwithstanding their oppression and exploitation—a situation remarkably different from that in the sixteenth century. In the sixteenth century, salt was scarce in Bengal and was carried down the river from Agra, which obtained its salt from the Salt Range beyond Lahore and

[1]W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. II (Districts of Cuttack and Balasore), first published 1875, New Delhi: D. K. Publishing House, 1973, pp. 42–43.

[2]W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. I (Districts of 24 Parganas and Sunderbans), p. 318.

[3]Ibid., p. 289.

[4]W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. III (Districts of Midnapur and Hugli, including Howrah), p. 57.

[5]W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. VI (Districts of Chittagong, Hill Tracts Chittagong, Noakhali, Tipperah, Hill Tipperah), p. 65.

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the Sambhar Lake. The Nunias, who were a caste generally into salt making, then extracted salt from nitrous soil. The amount of salt produced by them was rarely more than what was required for local market consumption.[6] In fact, salt was not as valuable in the sixteenth century as in the eighteenth century. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, salt was cheaper in relation to wheat as compared to the period 1869–70.[7] Thus, in the pre-colonial period or prior to 1757, salt making was guided by local needs. More importantly, it was considered a subsidiary source of revenue by the zamindars. However, though the zamindars controlled salt production, there were no stringent policies regarding it. The Malangis were considerably free to choose their masters and they did not experience the kind of pressure that one would get to observe during the Company period i.e., to supply a certain amount of salt at a fixed price within a determined time. But, of course, the zamindars collected a rent from the *khalaris*, which was paid by the Malangis. The zamindars, subsequently, tried to obtain a good price from the merchants, who usually bought salt from them.[8]

Nevertheless, by 1781, change was evident in the status of the Malangis and the zamindars, when the East India Company established a salt department and deprived the zamindars the right of manufacturing salt in their zamindaris. As compensation, the zamindars were given *malikana*[9] and a *mushahara*[10] upon the condition of helping the Company in the manufacturing of salt. James Grant, in his report of the revenue of Bengal has observed that in 1582 the duties paid to the State by the salt works in the Sunderbans amounted to Rs 25,382. There were 45,000 Malangis in the Sunderbans and Hijili and the outturn of salt was 20 lakh maunds. But in 1781, when the Company assumed salt monopoly and the rights to the entire profit from salt manufacture, the estimates had changed i.e., the number of Malangis had gone up to 60,000, the outturn of salt was 28 lakh maunds, the gross sales Rs 5,45,000 and

[6]Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707*, second edition, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 105.

[7]Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire c. 1595, A Statistical Study*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 329–30.

[8]Balai Barui, *The Salt Industry of Bengal, 1757–1800, A Study in the Interaction of British Monopoly Control and Indigenous Enterprise*, Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Co., 1985, pp. 37, 52.

[9]*Malikana* was a *haqq* (right) of a zamindar in recognition of him being the *malik* (owner) of the land.

[10]*Mushahara* was a monthly or other periodical pay or allowance.

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there was a profit of Rs 3,500,000.[11] It is evident thus that during the eighteenth century, large quantities of salt was manufactured. It was produced by boiling seawater in pans along the coast of Bay of Bengal from Chittagong to Orissa. The Malangis who needed merely seawater, firewood and earthenware pots to facilitate their craft, were given advances several months before the salt was manufactured.[12]

It is in this context of the rising value of salt and the profits that the Company acquired by its salt monopoly, that we can gauge the Company's perception of the Malangis. The Company saw them as 'laborious and useful body of men ... who only live from hand to mouth'[13] and since these labourers 'have no possessions or effects, they can only discharge their debts by their work.'[14] Thus 'destitute of private resources', the Malangis engaged 'with a view to profit ... ever attentive to his own interest rather than to that of his employers to whom he was in direct opposition.'[15] The Malangis, therefore, were identified as a 'lower class of people' who were driven to relocate because of their affinity towards change or the fear of being indebted to the government and the inability to pay back their debts.[16] These mixed reactions notwithstanding, the Company recognised the invaluable role of the Malangis in the manufacturing of salt but it could hardly prevent the harassment they faced at the hands of the

[11]Appendix No. 4, An Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Finances of Bengal by James Grant in W. K. Firminger, *Affairs of the East India Company (being the Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons, 28 July, 1812)*, vol. II, New Delhi: Neeraj Publishing House, 1984, pp. 262–63.

[12]P. J. Marshall, *East India Fortunes, The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, London: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 34.

[13]To, John Shore, President, Board of Revenue, from Thomas Calvert, Comptroller of Salt Manufacture, 19 August 1788, Consultation, Fort William, 7 October 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September–December, 1788, New Delhi: National Archives of India (henceforth NAI).

[14]Letter to Court of Directors, letter no. 46, 19 December 1763, in R. R. Sethi (ed.), Fort William—India House Correspondence, vol. III, 1760–1763, NAI, 1968, p. 548.

[15]To, Charles Stuart, President, Board of Revenue, from H. P. Forster, Agent to the late Agent of Roymangal Division, Jessore, 11 July 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 19 July 1790, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, June–September, 1790, Vol. II, NAI.

[16]To, John Shore, from Thomas Calvert, 19 August 1788, Consultation, Fort William, 7 October 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September-December, 1788, NAI.

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zamindars or the *sazawals*. The Company often found itself in a state of dilemma and apprehension over the attitude of the Malangis i.e., if they refused to engage for salt production, it would result in loss of money advanced to them or even heavier losses from the deficiency of salt that could otherwise be produced for sale and 'bring considerable emoluments to government'.[17]

INSUBORDINATION, REPRESSION AND OPPRESSION

The exploitation of the Malangis can be traced to the formation of the Society of Trade, which Clive had established in 1765 to regulate the Company's monopoly over trade throughout Bengal in the 'most controversial inland articles' like salt, betel nut and tobacco. The Society of Trade succeeded in raising the price of salt throughout Bengal but an inquiry into the conditions of saltpans in the 24 Parganas revealed that the benefits rarely reached the producer i.e., the payments made to the Malangis remained static throughout the 1760s.[18] As the Company moved towards consolidating its salt monopoly and demanded the sale of khalaris from the zamindars, disputes began over the Malangis between the zamindars and the purchasers of the khalaris. The zamindars resisted the sale of khalaris and claimed that according to their *sanad*s (a royal order from a Mughal Emperor) the khalaris formed a part of their zamindaris and since the Malangis, apart from being their salt makers were also their raiyat, engaged in cultivation, they had the first right on them.

Obstructing salt business in defiance of the Company's authority, the zamindars took every opportunity to manufacture salt on their own.[19] There are instances of the manufacture of salt being impeded in the khalaris of Chittagong when the zamindars held the Malangis captive and extorted money from them on the pretext of *barrak* rent (tax for collecting fuel in the jungles belonging to the zamindars) and *chula selami* (payment made to the zamindars at the time of setting up the *chula* or salt work). The distressed Malangis thus produced only 1100 maunds of salt instead of 4000 maunds, the

[17]Ibid.

[18]See, Marshall, *East India Fortunes*, pp. 138, 157.

[19]To, John Shore, from Thomas Calvert, 27 August 1788, Consultation, Fort William, 26 September 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September–December, 1788, NAI.

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actual yield of the khalaris.[20] The harassment and detention of the Malangis by the zamindars decreased and delayed salt production in the other salt districts as well. In Mandalghat, for instance, there were 2277 khalaris and customarily the rent was paid on the spot by the Malangis to the different zamindars for the ground that they occupied at the rate of Rs 4 to Rs 10 for each khalari.[21] The norm followed was that the rent would be collected only once, even if the Malangis moved their khalaris from grounds that were not productive to other places that were. But the Malangis, particularly from the interior parts of Mandalghat, complained of the violation of this practice by the zamindars, for they collected the rent twice if the Malangis made any such change.[22] Like in Mandalghat, in the Roymangal division too, the zamindars continued their arbitrary demands on the Malangis and compelled them to pay more than was specified in their *patta*.[23] In the Roymangal division of this district too, the same violation followed. In fact, the zamindars often created hurdles in the payment of land rents by the Malangis to the salt agents by either asserting their claims or complaining against the Malangis for balances.[24] The attitude of the zamindars had induced such fear and anxiety amongst the Malangis that those working in the *barboony* khalaris (khalaris in forests) insisted on settling their revenue accounts before proceeding to the woods, so that their families were not molested by the zamindars.[25]

[20]To Thomas Calvert, from Robert Tomlinson, Salt Agent, Chittagong, 27 July 1788, Consultation, Fort William, 26 September 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September–December, 1788, NAI.

[21]To, Charles Stuart, from Benjamin Grindall, Comptroller, Salt Office, 8 July 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 2 August 1790, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, June–September, 1790, Vol. II, NAI.

[22]To Benjamin Grindall, from William Dent, Salt Agent, Tumlook Division, 25 June 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 2 August 1790, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, June-September, 1790, Vol. II, NAI.

[23]To Benjamin Grindall, from M. C. Horsby, Salt Agent, Roymangal Division, Culna, 19 July 1791, Consultation Fort William, 12 August 1791, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, August–December, 1791, NAI.

[24]To Benjamin Grindall, from John Mackenzie, Salt Agent, Joynagar, 6 April 1792, Consultation, Fort William, 14 May 1792, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue, January–June, 1792, NAI.

[25]To, Benjamin Grindall, from Richard Goodlad, Salt Agent, Barripore Cutchery, 22 December 1791, Consultation, Fort William, 28 December 1791, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, August–December, 1791, NAI.

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That the behaviour of the zamindars could become excessively violent is evident from the petitions filed by the Malangis of Nausray *aurung* in Hijili. They complained that the men of a Maratha zamindar committed all kinds of outrages in the aurung and 'bound and carried off' few Malangis. Fearing similar treatment, the other Malangis fled to the jungles and refused to return to the aurung to manufacture salt. Although a *daroga* was sent for their protection, they stipulated that they were a 'defenceless *Malangi raiyat* ... daily exposed to such incursions.' So, they asked, 'how are we to manufacture salt in personal safety?'[26] On yet another occasion, the same Maratha zamindar seized and forcibly carried away some more Malangis from Nausray. To secure themselves, the other Malangis fled from their homes, sought shelter with another family and locked themselves inside the house. But the Marathas allegedly climbed the roof, broke open the *chappar* and wounded the Malangis and their family. Traumatised by such violence, the Malangis again resisted their return to the aurung. Consequently the salt manufacture at Nausray came to a complete standstill.[27] To escape the oppression of the zamindars, the Malangis often deserted the khalaris like in Hijili, heading for the adjacent districts or the adjoining states.

Apprehensive of the zamindars' actions that might prove fatal to the business of salt, the Company, on several occasions had considered prosecuting the zamindars in the *diwani adalat* of their districts.[28] However, such stringent decisions by the Company could hardly deter the agitated zamindars, deprived of their proprietary right of salt production and the ownership of the khalaris. Despite the insistence of the Company that salt could only be produced under the Company's monopoly, the zamindars and the *ta'alluqdar*s showed no signs of succumbing. To the contrary, in audacious defiance and to facilitate their clandestine manufacture of salt, they compulsively

[26]Petition of Beeshnoo Purdaun, Bunnoo Purdaun, Juggoo Jennah, Nittoo Sunnahputtee, Mahesh Purdaun, Dammoo Dass, Molunghies, inhabitants of Nausrey Aurung, Chait, 23, 1198, Consultation, Fort William, 15 April 1791, Salt Proceedings, Revenue Board, 18 February–27 May 1791, NAI.

[27]Petition from Davee Persaud, Chowdree, Shikdar of Bercool, Enclosure in, to, W. N. W. Hewett, Salt Agent, Hidgelee, from N. B. Edmonstone, Acting President, Fort William, Calcutta, 9 June 1792, Salt Proceedings, Revenue Department, 13 June–21 September 1792, NAI.

[28]To, John Shore, from Thomas Calvert, 19 August 1788, Consultation, Fort William, 7 October 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September–December, 1788, NAI.

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withheld the Malangis, many a times those who had already received advances from the Company. Moreover, to prevent the Malangis from taking advances from the Company in future, the zamindars even seized their cattle, plough and other effects. On the complaints of the Malangis against the violence and extortion by the zamindars, the revenue collectors issued *parwanas* to secure their freedom. But, be it the collector or his *chaprasi* (who was sent to implement the collector's order), the zamindars treated them with equal contempt and disrespect.[29]

The resistance of the zamindars against the Company's salt monopoly continued unabated and so did their oppression of the Malangis. In the 24 Parganas, for instance, the zamindars, ta'alluqdars and their *muffassal* agents, prevented the Malangis from assembling for work and accepting advances from the Company's salt agents, took them away from the khalaris and confined them during the boiling season on the pretense of balances of rent due from them on account of the new *jamabandi* settled in 1783. From those Malangis who had attended the *jarib* (rope used for measuring land), signed the jamabandi papers and paid the rent accordingly, the zamindars demanded a greater increase in rent. They did not even spare those who had not attended the jarib or signed jamabandi papers but were in the woods to help manufacture salt for the Company. If the Malangis refused to comply, they were beaten, confined and suffered violent treatment at the hands of the zamindars. Several Malangis, therefore, who had taken advances from the Company, deserted the khalaris and took refuge in the Anwarpur pargana, the *ta'alluq* of Ram Lochan Munshi. When the salt agent demanded the release of the Malangis, Ram Lochan not only refused to do so but also declared that the Malangis were free to work or quit the employment of the Company.[30] Concerned at the loss of these labourers, the salt agent was even more worried by the spirit of independence amongst the Malangis infused by zamindars like Ram Lochan. This illustrates how invaluable the Malangis were, be it for the zamindars or for the

[29]To, Thomas Calvert, from Robert Tomlinson, 18 September 1788, Consultation, Fort William, 28 November 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September–December, 1788, NAI.

[30]To, Thomas Calvert, from Benjamin Grindall, Salt Agent, Barripore Cutchery, 15 September 1788, Consultation, Fort William, 7 October 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September–December, 1788, NAI.

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Company. If it suited their interest, the zamindars had no compunction in supporting the Malangis to challenge the monopoly of the Company across the salt districts.

Encouraged by the zamindars, many of the Malangis, who had taken advances from the Company, quit the khalaris at the height of the boiling season and joined the services of the zamindars and the ta'alluqdars causing heavy financial imbalances for the Company. The Company found it almost impossible to secure the debts from them, for those who possessed no property of their own could make no repayments unless they had work. Therefore, even if it was for the sake of recovering balances, the Company often felt obliged to provide the Malangis jobs in the khalaris.[31]

However, despite the fact that the Malangis' service added infinite value to the production of salt, they continued to face repression and insubordination from almost all quarters or from all those engaged in the salt business and its beneficiaries—be it at the hands of the zamindars, the beoparis or the officials of the Company. So lucrative was salt trade that there seemed to be a competitive rush to engage the Malangis and pay them advances, sometimes much before the actual boiling season. To consolidate their profits from salt at the cost of the others, the beoparis forcibly took the Malangis away from the khalaris at the peak of the boiling season upon the excuse that they were in arrears to them for the previous years. Such was the case in parganas Moragacha, Sheopur, Azimabad and Hathiagar of the 24 Parganas where John Reed and David Killican captured each other's Malangis, ill-treated them and forced advances on them. Reed's pretext was that they had received advances from him while Killican insisted that the same Malangis who had received advances from Reed were in arrears to him for the previous years.[32]

Balances of revenue appeared to be the major reason—real or pretended—for the abduction of the Malangis not only for the zamindars or the beoparis but also the revenue collectors of the Company. The complaint filed by Richard Goodlad, a salt agent, against the revenue collectors and rentiers for seizing his Malangis,

[31]To, John Shore, from Thomas Calvert, 18 November 1788, Consultation, Fort William, 28 November 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September–December, 1788, NAI.

[32]To, John Cartier, President & Governor & the Council of Fort William, from David Killican, Calcutta, 7 July 1772; see also, To, John Cartier, from John Reed, 4 December 1771, Consultation, Fort William, 17 February 1772, Home Department, Public Proceedings, January–February, 1772, NAI.

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will illustrate our point. Goodlad, concerned at the loss of his men, which led to declining business and fall in the manufacturing of salt, alleged that the sazawals and the *harkaras* of the revenue collectors of Nadia and Jessore in the 24 Parganas took away his Malangis during the boiling season, claiming rent against them. Expressing his desperation, he complained, 'every man who is taken away stops awhile *khalaris* till he returns.'[33] The complaint of the salt agent was endorsed by the petitions of the Malangis to the *shiqdar* of pargana Moragacha, which indicated how the Malangis were beaten and carried away by the sazawals and the harkaras.[34]

RESISTANCE, REBELLION, TURMOIL

Finding no relief from circumstances that subjected them to violent oppression and exploitation, the Malangis became increasingly resistant, refused the *ta'ahud*s (contracts) of salt manufacture and devised ways and means of escaping from the khalaris. Dissatisfied by their allowances, the *Ajoora* Malangis[35] in Hijili, assembled in large numbers, defied the authority of the salt agent, left their work and sometimes even crossed over to the Maratha territory to evade the payment of rent. One may observe that if the Ajoora Malangis of Hijili (who were better paid than the other Malangis) protested over their payments, it needs no conjecture to establish the fate of the other Malangis who were even worst hit by the prices that they received. The Ajoora Malangis were paid a greater amount than in Tamluk. They were given the *thika*[36] price for the salt that they delivered over and above their original assessment in the *thankhanja* or the muster roll of the Malangis, which varied but never exceeded 50 maunds upon any one Malangi. Dismissing the complaints of

[33]To, Benjamin Grindall, from Richard Goodlad, 31 December 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 17 January 1791, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, January–March, 1791, NAI.

[34]Petitions from Molunghies to Shikdar of pergunnah Mooragatcha, 20 December 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 17 January 1791, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, January–March, 1791, NAI.

[35]*Ajoora* Malangis followed salt manufacture as a hereditary occupation. For more details, see, Balai Barui, *The Salt Industry of Bengal*, p. 35.

[36]Under the *thika* system, the Malangis came from outside the village and were paid at a much higher rate than the *Ajoora* Malangis. See, Balai Barui, *The Salt Industry of Bengal*, p. 36.

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the Malangis of Hijili as 'frivolous and unreasonable', the salt agent alleged that the Ajoora Malangis, since time immemorial had held lands in Hijili and Tamluk; that they were bound to it since generations from father to son and were expected to deliver a certain quantity of salt at a fixed price as specified in the thankhanja.[37]

Concerned about the augmentation of the production of salt and fearing that if the rebellion of the Malangis (without the support of whom no increase was possible) continued, it might affect the production adversely, the salt agent conceded that the assessment rates at which the Malangis were originally assessed were 'inapplicable in present times, inconsistent with the regulations of the salt department and too unfavorable in their operations to this class of manufacturers', although they had received a considerable increase of price in 1790 and possessed some advantages in fuel and land rents. The salt agent realised that the abolition of *ajoora* tenure and putting the Ajoora Malangis on an equal footing with the Thika Malangis was the only alternative and perhaps the sole way of controlling the rebellious Malangis. But then they also knew that the abolition of the ajoora tenure would cause heavy losses in both salt production and revenue.[38]

The Company officials were obviously at tenterhooks as the salt profits were put at stake by the resistance of the Malangis. They became increasingly suspicious of the Malangis and accused them of 'numberless tricks' like smuggling salt or mixing salt with mud. These 'tricks' by the Malangis were however not devoid of truth. To prevent such activities, overseers were appointed to superintend the manufacturing of salt. As early as 1788, they were instructed that immediately on their arrival in the woods, they should take into account the number of khalaris or *taffal*s in each creek, assess the provisions and pots that the Malangis possessed in the woods, the quantities that they expend daily and their time span i.e., for how long these quantities would last. The overseers were also ordered to examine the quantity of salt, which each taffal would produce and get a written affirmation from the Malangis and the *gomashta*s that they would boil the same quantity of salt each day. The overseers were obliged to make these investigations

[37]To, Charles Stuart, from Benjamin Grindall, 24 March 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 29 March 1790, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue, Fort William, January–March, 1790, Vol. I, NAI.

[38]Ibid.

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every five days to ascertain that the business was carried on smoothly in every taffal or khalari.[39]

Seeking to maintain and protect its profits from salt, the Company devised different strategies to control the Malangis. Undaunted however, the latter continued their rebellious activities like petty thefts and pilfering of salt in the course of its manufacture. They piled up contraband salt in their house or buried it in the ground and unearthed it at an opportune time to carry it to distant places on boats or bullocks or through the coolies to sell without a *rawana* or a note from the salt agent or his assistant.[40] The smuggling of salt was facilitated by the *paikars*, who gave them annual advances to receive salt in the same manner as the Company. As the Malangis manufactured salt, they hoarded it daily, delivered a part of it to the Company and then by aligning with the *mohrirs*, *aduldars*, *jamadars* and the chaprasis carried the rest of the salt to their respective houses. From the portion that they carried home, the Malangis gave some amount of salt to the paikars from whom they had received advances, and some they sold to other paikars for ready money. The remainder, they would keep with themselves.[41]

Allegedly the Malangis also associated themselves with the bandits who infested the communication between Lakhipur, Dacca and Calcutta. While the bandits plundered the chulas or the salt works, the Malangis by pre-conceived measures supported them in carrying away considerable quantities of salt.[42] In Tamluk, the Malangis stole salt from time to time causing shortages in the bazaars around Tamluk. Many of them were arrested while smuggling salt by the bazaar *chauki* peons, stationed specifically to prevent the

[39]Instructions to the Overseers appointed to superintend the manufacture of salt, from C. Burrowess & T. Brooke, Revenue Department, Consultation, Fort William, 7 October 1788, Home Department, Separate Revenue Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue (Fort William), September–December, 1788, NAI.

[40]To, Richard Marquis Wellesley, from I. L. Pereira and Ramchunder Hazrah, Calcutta, 25 June 1800, Consultation No. 2, Fort William, 26 June 1800, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, 19 June–December 1800, NAI.

[41]To, Richard Marquis Wellesley, from I. L. Pereira, Ramchunder Hazrah, Ramlochan Sircar, Calcutta, 31 July 1800, Consultation No. 11, Fort William, 21 August 1800, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, 19 June–December 1800, NAI.

[42]To, Benjamin Grindall, from Robert Tomlinson, 19 July 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 6 August 1790, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, June–September, 1790, Vol. II, NAI.

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Company's manufactured salt from being embezzled.[43] In yet another attempt at stealing salt, the Malangis bribed the *koyals* (weighmen) to take less salt from them in the weighing machine than what the Company was entitled to.[44]

A report from the salt office in May 1795 confirmed the participation of the Malangis in the illicit trade of salt. It indicated collusion between the Malangis, the dealers, the officers employed to superintend the manufacture at the aurungs and those stationed at the chaukis.[45] From the volume of salt that the Malangis manufactured, only a part of it was delivered to the government. The rest was sold clandestinely by the Malangis to dealers, engaged in contraband trade. The dealers disposed this salt the same night through other petty dealers to the inhabitants at exorbitantly reduced rates. For instance, in villages Gopalnagar and Shrinagar in pargana Nadia, the people at their houses purchased 20 seers of salt for a rupee. This caused a massive fall in the prices of salt in the muffassal markets. Buying contraband salt at very low prices was a great temptation to the raiyats. They not only refused to purchase the salt from the merchants (who bought it at the Company's sale to sell it in the muffassal markets) but also concealed the illicit practices of the Malangis, the dealers and the officials at the salt chaukis. This league between the three—the Malangis, the dealers and the officials of the salt chaukis—led to hoarding of salt by the merchants, resulting in the decline of market prices.[46]

To confiscate contraband salt, the Company established chauki ghats and appointed *darogas* at each one of them. As an incentive to catch smuggled salt, the darogas, apart from their salaries were sanctioned a reward of 50 per cent on the value of the quantity of salt seized. However, this scheme of appointing darogas to catch smuggled

[43]To, Benjamin Grindall, from William Dent, 27 March 1792, Consultation, Fort William, 2 April 1792, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue, April–July, 1791, NAI.

[44]To, Benjamin Grindall, from William Dent, 13 July 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 2 May 1791, Salt Proceedings, Board of Revenue, April–July, 1791, NAI.

[45]To, Richard Marquis Wellesley, from John Bristow, W. A. Edmonstone, G. Udny, Calcutta Salt Office, 5 June 1800, Consultation No. 4, Fort William, 19 June 1800, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, 19 June–December 1800, NAI.

[46]Petition of Loknath Poddar and other salt merchants to the Board of Trade, 13 May 1800 in Proceedings of the Board of Trade in the Salt Department, 19 May 1800, Consultation No. 5, Fort William, 19 June 1800, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, 19 June–December 1800, NAI.

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salt proved to be completely futile and inadequate in restraining the Malangis. In fact, the darogas facilitated it. Ostensibly the darogas realised that if they performed their assigned task efficiently, there would be no contraband salt left. This would mean a heavy fall in their earnings i.e., they would have to revert to their monthly pay without the 50 per cent reward and which perhaps the darogas found insufficient to meet their growing demands and the standards of living. Evading all norms of duty they entered into a secret *bandobast* with the Malangis, mahajans, paikars and others and on securing a 'compensation reward' allowed them to carry the contraband salt through the chauki ghat.[47] Apart from a certain sum of money, the Malangis also bribed the darogas with a small quantity of salt every month. The salt that they received as bribe from the Malangis was deposited to the Company as seized contraband salt and on it being sold at the Company's public sale, the darogas received their reward of 50 per cent.[48]

Identifying the reason for a lesser number of khalaris as compared to the earlier times, the Company officials observed that the Malangis had never served willingly unless coerced.[49] Previously the principle in salt manufacturing was that a man who entered into the business, he and his descendants were compelled to serve year after year i.e., once a Malangi engaged himself, he could not escape until he decided to desert the territory. The Company had abolished this system as it was considered to be highly oppressive and sought voluntary labour from the Malangis.[50] But the Company itself could hardly relieve the Malangis of the harrowing, oppressive experiences they had because of the zamindars, beoparis, the revenue and salt officials. Their condition was further worsened by the low allowances that they received. Sometimes their *khoraki* (diet) allowance was not even

[47]To, Richard Marquis Wellesley, from I. L. Pereira and Ramchunder Hazrah, 25 June 1800, Consultation No. 2, Fort William, 26 June 1800, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, 19 June–December 1800, NAI.

[48]To, Richard Marquis Wellesley, from I. L. Pereira, Ramchunder Hazrah, Ramlochan Sircar, 31 July 1800, Consultation No. 11, Fort William, 21 August 1800, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, 19 June–December 1800, NAI.

[49]Petition of salt merchants requesting continuance of salt contract as before, To, Harry Verelst, President & Governor & the Council at Fort William, Consultation No. 5, 7 October 1768, Home Department, Public (Branch), Vol. II, 1768, NAI.

[50]To, Benjamin Grindall, from Richard Goodlad, 12 July 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 19 July 1790, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, June–September, 1790, Vol. II, NAI.

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sufficient to meet their subsistence levels. This was particularly the case if their parganas or villages faced scarcities. The Malangis of Tamluk, for instance, were affected by such acute shortages of khoraki that they either had to borrow from the merchants or sell whatever they possessed to make ends meet.[51] Although Rani Janki, the zamindar of pargana Mahisadal had supported the Malangis and provided them the necessities, the Malangis from the other parganas of Tamluk petitioned the government for indulgences to rid them of their distress. In return, they promised to pay back the loan from their first advance of the next season of salt making.[52] Thus, despite the severities the Malangis encountered, salt making remained a major source of their living. Subsequent to their return from the woods, most of the Malangis found it difficult to meet their basic needs, or at least till their crops were ready for harvest. From amongst these, the indigent ones who had no lands to cultivate were forced by circumstances to either enlist as *dandies* (those who row the boat; boatmen) or engage as woodcutters for the Calcutta market. Both these alternatives entailed a heavy risk to the lives of the Malangis by exposing them to attacks by tigers, particularly when they were undertaken in the Sunderbans. When the boat was anchored on the riverside, the tigers swam across the river and carried away the dandi. Same was the fate of the woodcutters in the forests. It was estimated that while on these jobs, more Malangis lost their lives in a year than when engaged in salt manufacturing.[53]

Not able to withstand these atrocities, the Malangis on several occasions refused to go to the woods in the Sunderbans even if they had received advances or were indebted to the beoparis for previous seasons. On being questioned for their objections, the Malangis from the Roymangal zamindari alleged that the advances were forced upon them, that they and their ancestors for generations had resided as cultivators near Gournadi and since they had never been Malangis,

[51]To, William Dent, Petition of Mokund Beare, Hatty Ram Manjee, Rassoo Jennah, Jagoo Mundul & Salt Ryots, pergunnah Tumlook, Enclosure in, To, Benjamin Grindall, From William Dent, 9 August 1792, Consultation, Fort William, 17 August 1792, Salt Proceedings, Revenue Board, 13 June–21 September 1792, NAI.

[52]To, Benjamin Grindall, from William Dent, 9 August 1792, Consultation, Fort William, 17 August 1792, Salt Proceedings, Revenue Board, 13 June–21 September 1792, NAI.

[53]To, Benjamin Grindall, from Richard Goodlad, 12 July 1790, Consultation, Fort William, 19 July 1790, Salt Proceedings, Finance Department, Board of Revenue, June–September, 1790, Vol. II, NAI.

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no claims could be found against them. And yet they were seized, put in shackles, disgraced and beaten. To free themselves from attending the salt works, the Malangis paid a certain amount of money to the salt officers for which they invariably had to sell their effects. But they preferred to purchase their release rather than undergo hardships or be ill-treated or as they told the investigators that 'they would prefer death to being Malangis.'[54]

FORESTS, WILD BEASTS AND THE MALANGIS

Struggling and enduring their desperate conditions, the Malangis never seemed to be free from distress. The manufacture of salt in some parts of the wild and dreary woods of the Sunderbans was manifestly a service of great hardship and danger. The insalubrious climate of the woods and the wild animals which infested the region, rendered salt making a risky affair for the Malangis. The noxious vapours from the woods caused acute sickness. Apart from this, many of them were carried away or eaten by tigers and alligators.[55] They found it difficult to deal with the perils of climate, the ravages of tigers and the remote distance from any possible relief or assistance. Consequently, the southern portion of the Sunderbans which comprised the jungle tract along the seashore was entirely uninhabited with the exception of a 'few wandering gangs of woodcutters and fishermen.'[56] On each side of the jungle, alligators of enormous size were seen asleep or 'basking in the sun completely motionless and resembling a log wood'. The woodcutters were often deceived by their appearance until the alligator was woken by a shot and scrambled into the waters or attacked the woodcutters.[57] Alligators apart, tigers too abounded

[54]To, Charles Stuart, from William Douglas, Collector, Dacca, 17 March 1791, Consultation, Fort William, 22 April 1791, Salt Proceedings, Revenue Board, 18 February–27 May 1791, NAI.

[55]To, Benjamin Grindall, from R. Rocke, Salt Agent, Roymangal, Jessore, 18 December 1789, Consultation, Fort William, 4 January 1790, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings (Board of Revenue-Fort William), January–March, 1790, vol. I, NAI.

[56]Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, vol. I, p. 317.

[57]Walter Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries*, vol. I, New Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1971, p. 124.

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the Sunderbans and their ferocity was a major obstacle not only for salt making but also extension of cultivation. Causing terrible havoc amongst the Malangis, many of them were carried away or eaten by the tigers while cutting wood and making salt in the wilderness.[58] The depredations of a single fierce tiger had frequently forced 'an advanced colony of clearers to abandon their land and allow it to relapse into jungles'.[59] Thus, though the region was favourable for the manufacturing of salt, it was deserted by the Malangis.

The Malangis and the others who worked in the forests were also prejudiced by superstitions. Believing in forest spirits, they were confident that their safety depended entirely upon supernatural agency. None would venture into the woods without a *puja* (worship) performed by a brahmin (priest) or a *fakir* or *pir* (saint). To conduct the puja, the Malangis sought payments for the brahmins or fakirs from the Company. Even though the Company was not convinced, it agreed to grant pensions to the priests for that seemed to be the only way of encouraging the Malangis to manufacture salt in tiger-infested zones of the Sunderbans.[60]

The fakir was said to have apparently acquired supernatural powers from the presiding deity—whom he propitiated with offerings over the tigers and other wild animals.[61] These fakirs were generally Muslim devotees, who claimed to possess charms against the malice of wild animals. They lived by the riverside and were greatly revered by the forest-dwellers and woodcutters, who offered them food and *cowries* to win their goodwill. Invariably, these fakirs were also killed by the animals but the longer they lived, the more they were respected. It is believed that the Muslim woodcutters raised a small mound of earth in the huts of the fakirs and prayed before it prior to going inside the forests. The Hindu woodcutters too, like the Muslims, raised elevations three or four inches in height from the ground about three feet in width and placed mounds of earth, shaped like balls on them. They painted these red and then performed puja with offerings of rice, flowers, fruits and Ganga *jal* (water from the

[58]Ibid., p. 124; see also, Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, vol. I, p. 315.

[59]Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, vol. I, p. 315.

[60]To, Barber Palmer & Co., Agents for Robert Tomlinson, from Richard Goodlad, 29 July 1799, Consultation No. 5, Fort William, 6 August 1799, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, July–December, 1799, NAI.

[61]Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, vol. I, p. 312.

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Ganges). Like the Muslims, who assigned particular portions of the Sunderbans to their pirs, the Hindus also allocated parts in the Sunderbans to their gods and goddesses.[62] Before the woodcutters embarked on their journey into the forests, each fakir assembled his group of woodcutters, cleared a space at the edge of the forests and erected a number of small tent-like huts, in which forest deities were kept for worship and offerings.[63] The boatman (the one who carried the woodcutters to the forests) then observed a fast and went off to sleep. The latter was most significant in the entire exercise of propitiation. It was in his dreams that the boatman was informed by gods and goddesses about which forests may be cut without the dread of the tigers.[64]

The Malangis and the other woodcutters believed that the invocation and worship of the forest deities rendered the allotted forest free of tigers. Each one of them, therefore, before commencing their work, made an offering to the forest spirits to gain a right to be protected by the deities. However, despite this elaborate performance, the Malangis and the woodcutters continued to be devoured by the tigers. If this happened, the fakirs decamped, but the Malangis were more responsible. They placed flags at prominent corners of the allotted forest area to warn the others.[65]

Indulgences, invocations, prayers notwithstanding, the Malangis had no respite from the ravages of these deadly animals. Many continued to die and several were destroyed annually. An estimate of the deaths and casualties caused by the tigers amongst the Malangis gave startling figures in Jessore. Comparing the figures of 1788 and 1789, it was revealed that in 1788, of the 8,168 Malangis employed, 461 had died either because of natural causes or the attacks of the tigers. In 1789, the projected number of Malangis to be employed was 10,873 and it was conjectured that 628 of them would die, afflicted by either natural death or the tigers. The deaths caused by tigers were however determined to be much greater than the natural deaths, which were reportedly about one-fourth of the total loss. Comparatively the deaths due to accidents like drowning

[62]Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description*, vol. I, p. 125.

[63]Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, vol. I, p. 312.

[64]Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description*, vol. I, p. 125.

[65]Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, vol. I, p. 312.

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or attacks by alligators were inconsiderable and therefore difficult to be calculated.[66]

The Malangis, employed for over 30 years in different parts of the Roymangal division, claimed that there was not a single area in that division in which salt could be manufactured without any threat to the lives of the Malangis because of tigers or climatic diseases. Nevertheless, when the Malangis engaged in the Roymangal division reported deaths or destruction by tigers, the Company dismissed them as fabricated excuses for defending the non-performance in accordance with the terms of their contracts. Suspecting the Malangis of deceit and failing to understand the intensity of their distress, the Company directed the salt agents to be even more rigorous towards them. The agents were instructed not to accept any reports of death without the deposition or oath of the persons who had attended the cremation. Neither could the agents entertain any reports of deaths of the Malangis due to tigers, alligators or by drowning unless one or two witnesses deposed before them. Also, the agent was to maintain a register of deaths and casualties that may happen between the dispatch and return of the Malangis, specifying the name of every person deceased or destroyed and the date, place and manner of his death. It is ironical, that though the Company was aware that it was impossible to protect the lives of those who manufactured salt in the Roymangal division, it had no scheme of compensation for the severities caused by the wild beasts. On the contrary, the Malangis were asked to refund the allowances of every man missing or those who had left the forests until they could on behalf of those missing provide the stipulated quantity of salt. The nonchalance of the Company was further apparent by its declaration that the Malangis who came back with all their men would be bestowed with a premium although not exceeding one thousand *sicca* rupees.[67]

The directives of the Company notwithstanding, it was recognised that since no part of the Roymangal division was secure except its cultivated area, the raiyats often manufactured salt to a limit of about

[66]To, Benjamin Grindall, from R. Rocke, 18 December 1789, Consultation, Fort William, 4 January 1790, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings (Board of Revenue-Fort William), January–March, 1790, Vol. I, NAI.

[67]To, Charles Stuart, from Benjamin Grindall, 28 December 1789, Consultation, Fort William, 4 January 1790, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings (Board of Revenue-Fort William), January–March, 1790, Vol. I, NAI.

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8000 maunds in the proximity of their homes.[68] Even the Board of Revenue acknowledged that it was impossible to provide effective security to the Malangis in Roymangal. Though it favoured the abolition of salt manufacture in this region, it also recommended that if the Governor General decided to continue the manufacture, he ought to sanction the expense of Rs 21,366 calculated by the salt agents as necessary partial relief and protection to the Malangis.[69] There were however no moves made in either direction. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Board of Revenue sounding almost fatalistic declared,

> ... disease and death particularly are incidental to employment in that particular division of the country and the circumstances beyond the reach of control.

Nonetheless, the Board suggested that if salt manufacture was relinquished in the Roymangal division, the Malangis could opt for alternative employment which would be of 'great advantage to them in point of comfort whilst many useful lives now annually cut off would be preserved to the State.'[70] Feeling persuaded perhaps, the Governor General approved a partial and gradual relinquishment of salt manufacture but only if expedient and only if the salt officials could guarantee against illicit trade and smuggling of salt in those territories.[71]

Whatever the laws or the enactments, the occupational disasters of the Malangis, their stress and complaints found no relief. The scanty allowances, the unwholesome climate i.e., famines and droughts which inflicted high mortalities on them, the inundations in which they lost their lands, the hard labour, the danger of falling prey to the wild beasts with which the Sunderbans was infested

[68]Ibid.

[69]To, Earl Cornwallis, from Board of Revenue, Consultation, Fort William, 4 January 1790, Home Department, Separate Revenue, Salt Proceedings (Board of Revenue-Fort William), January–March, 1790, vol. I, NAI.

[70]To, Richard Marquis Wellesley, from John Haldane, W. A. Edmonstone, G. Udny, Calcutta Salt Office, 22 September 1800, Consultation No. 2, Fort William, 11 December 1800, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, 19 June–December 1800, NAI.

[71]To, Peter Speke, From, C. R. Crommelin, 8 December 1800, Consultation No. 4, Fort William, 11 December 1800, Home Department, Separate Revenue Proceedings, 19 June–December 1800, NAI.

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and the absence of eight months in a year from their homes and families, remained insurmountable. But the Malangis—be they salt labourers, tribals, forest-dwellers or woodcutters—never succumbed. They fought valiantly, their struggle was starkly visible and they resisted to the utmost in the hope that they could possibly improve their conditions of work and subsistence. To achieve their end, to make a living or simply to survive, the Malangis had no alternative to resistance. For them, resistance was survival or, should we say, that their survival was resistance.

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From Dispute to 'Disturbance'
The 'Gond Disturbances' in Late Nineteenth Century Bonai (Orissa)

Uwe Skoda

INTRODUCTION

On 10 October 1897, the Raja of Bonai[1] sends an alarming telegram to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur stating:

Gond people fighted and plundered raj bhander [royal storehouse—Au]; send one dozen police soon to arrest them reply.

In a rather lukewarm reply Commissioner Forbes tells the Raja:

You should proceed to Chaibasa and make full statement to Deputy Commissioner regarding conduct of Gonds.

[1]At present a Sub-Division of Sundargarh District in north-western Orissa, Bonai used to be under the apparently rather loose overlordship of the Marathas and—in closer proximity—to some extent under the Sambalpur Raja in early nineteenth century until the area was finally under British control in 1818 and officially ceded to them in 1826. However, Bonai remained fairly remote—an hardly accessible kingdom surrounded by hills—and relations with the British appear to have intensified only towards the middle of the nineteenth century, when it became part of the South-Western Frontier Agency (formed in 1833) which was subsequently transformed into the Chotanagpur Division administered by a Commissioner in Ranchi (from 1854 onwards). It remained a Tributary State of this Division until 1905–6, when Bonai was transferred to the Orissa Tributary States under the Political Agent based in Sambalpur.

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The file is then, apparently considered to be of minor importance, forwarded to the Deputy Commissioner with the order,

> The Deputy Commissioner should record the statement of the Raja without going to Bonai himself and should report his opinion to the Commissioner afterwards.

While looking at the transformation of a former princely state during the last century I came across a bundle of files in the record room of the Commissioner in Ranchi (formerly Commissioner of Chotanagpur) titled 'Gond Disturbances'—not catalogued, but covered in thick layers of dust.[2] This collection of papers without any inherent order contained separately dated files, letters, memos and reports in English as well as in Kaithi[3] (not Oriya); for e.g., letters from the Raja of Bonai as well as the 'tribal'[4] Gond jagirdars. However, I rely predominantly on the English files[5] stored in 'archives of repression'—to use an expression of Ginzburg[6]—but as Wagner had argued in relation to *thuggee* as another 'disturbance' to the colonial project,

> [t]he British may have misinterpreted the phenomenon they encountered, but they in turn left us with sufficient material to reassess *thuggee*—both as a colonial construction and as a social reality.

[2]In relation to this I would like to thank the Commissioners and Staff of the record rooms, Commissioner's office, Ranchi, for granting access to the sources and for helping to locate files. So far Jharkhand has not established a separate State Archive. I am also grateful to the Deputy Commissioner and Staff of the Record Room, Chaibasa as well as to the Staff of the State Archives of Orissa, Bhubaneshwar for allowing me access to additional files. The archive of the former Diwan of Bonai did not offer any files on those events and the oldest files there date back to early twentieth century.

[3]A script used by e.g., in Bihar—specifically by Kayastha, as scribes, in the princely courts. It lost importance to the Devanagari script later on.

[4]In the files, the Gonds are referred to as 'tribe' and also as 'semi-military class'. Today they are listed as Scheduled Tribes and considered to be Adivasis—a category of twentieth century provenance.

[5]Even though in many cases English documents are marked as translations I could not go through the content of those Kaithi-files so far and the question remains how reliable the English translations are or how far they may have distorted or passed over intentions of the authors. Further translation work and research is certainly required and intended here.

[6]Quoted in K. A. Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 16.

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Similarly, the files presented here offer evidence not only for acts of resistance, but for a complex process of establishing a princely state.

Going through these files and supplementing them, for e.g., with an Oriya family chronicle of one of the Gond jagirdar families referring perhaps more explicitly to a distinctive Gond perspective, it seems the plundering was not a sudden reaction; rather the incidents around October 1897 were only the tip of the iceberg in a continuously conflict-ridden relation between Gond chiefs and the Raja. In this long-standing conflict, revenue payments were frequently withheld; villages of the Gond chiefs attached to the Raja's *khas*[7] cultivation in order to make up for the debts and more generally obligations were disputed. At times both sides would also resort to open violence. As such the situation in late nineteenth century Bonai appears to resemble to a large extent pre-colonial political structures being multi-layered and evolving around conflicts.[8]

The 'unrest' described in the telegram and the much longer dispute between Gond chiefs and the Raja demonstrate on the one hand an enduring relevance of pre-colonial political patterns determining the actions of the Gonds, but also to some extent of the Raja. On the other hand this structure itself was slowly altered by a colonial power entering and penetrating the area. The looting of the royal granaries was also linked to increased demands for revenue following the first land settlement—payments certainly were resisted. The introduction of settlements, limited in scope as they may have been initially, and the concurring codification of property rights was a major step towards a transformation of the kingdom of Bonai under British paramountcy intended to turn a 'little kingdom' into a 'princely state'. As a result, so my argument an on-going dispute—rather the rule than the exception under the old order—was increasingly framed as 'disturbance' to a Pax Britannica being an emblematic expression of a new order, in which pacification formed an essential part of a civilising mission[9] and courts were regarded as

[7]Revenue term meaning here 'under the direct management'.

[8]B. S. Cohn, 'Political Systems in Eighteenth-Century India: The Banares Region', in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays*, first published 1962, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001; A. Wink, 'Sovereignty and Universal Dominion in South Asia', in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1984.

[9]M. Mann, 'Torchbearers upon the Path of Progress': Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India, An Introductory Essay', in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission*, ed. H. Fischer-Tiné, and M. Mann, London: Anthem, 2004.

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legitimate arenas to settle conflicts. Plundering stood diametrically to this conception.

Thus, in the this chapter I will not only introduce those events in Bonai in the late nineteenth century, but also look at the changing relations within a layered power structure, in which Gond chiefs and the Raja tried to outmanoeuvre each other in relation to the new imperial overlord, who in turn measured and 'reformed' land holdings and tried to broker 'agreements' between the parties, while at the same time attempting to penetrate the whole political structure down to the village level. The case of the 'Gond disturbances' also shows that attempts to establish a more centralised state police force by levying a police cess was even more resisted than the revenue payments since it also threatened the Gond self-image. Here a compromise was reached—perhaps not unlike conflicts in pre-colonial times though engineered by an imperial overlord, who was not only engaged in the incidents in Bonai, but also in other more threatening contemporary resistance movements such as the one of Birsa Munda, 'disturbing' the Pax Britannica.[10]

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE 'DISTURBANCES'

As already mentioned the 'outburst' of the Gonds was not as surprising as the telegram may suggest. In fact, prior to the events in 1897, Bonai witnessed a long history of low level disputes between the Raja and the Gond jagirdars, having the titles Dandpat and Mahapatra. In an order passed on 9 December 1896[11]—roughly a

[10]On the Birsa Munda movement, see for instance P. Ekka, *Tribal Movement: A Study in Social Change*, Ranchi: Madhya Pradesh Jesuit Society, 2003. For other uprisings in the late nineteenth century, see for instance D. M. Praharaj, *Tribal Movements and Political History in India. A Case Study from Orissa, 1803–1949*, New Delhi, Inter-India Publications, 1988, p. 54. The events in Bonai might be seen as a relatively smaller skirmish among many other uprisings in Orissan princely states in the late nineteenth century, which casts some doubts on British statements that: *'the existence of the [native] States was necessary to maintain tranquillity and security of the colonial possessions'* (Praharaj, *Tribal Movements and Political History in India*, p. 55—referring to John Malcolm), even though the more threatening contemporary resistance movements such as the one of Birsa Munda may indeed have occurred in areas under direct rule.

[11]File dated 23 October 1896, titled 'From the Rajah of Bonai', the order of the Offg. Commissioner Marindin / Marinton (not clearly readable) dated 9 December 1896 is mentioned below a letter of the Bonai Raja. Possibly a copy.

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year before the telegram—the events are traced back to a settlement by Commissioner Hewitt around 1880, after which rates were enhanced. According to this report, the Gonds resisted these changes refusing to pay rent.

The Rajah made every attempt to realize the rents due to him from the Gonds but failed. At last he attached their cattle and sold them for recovery of his rent with the sanction of the Commissioner, but only a small portion of the arrear was recovered by the sale of cattle and subsequently the Rajah attached their villages and settled them with others leaving the Gonds in utter destitute of means for their livelihood. The latter then began to plunder the bhandars (granaries) of the Rajah and the ryots of the state and the Rajah asked Commissioner's help.

British police forces were finally sent to Bonai arresting the two jagirdars and bringing them to Chaibasa. An agreement was brokered by Commissioner Grimley in 1889 according to which they were supposed to pay, but not directly to the Raja. However, as the abovementioned order goes on to state, the Gonds appear to have withheld payments afterwards too.

Repeated reports were made by the Rajah to the Commissioner requesting him to issue orders to the Gonds to pay him what was due to him. Orders were issued every time to the Gonds who were also personally warned by the Commissioner when on tour to pay the Rajah's dues but they persistently neglected to comply with the orders.

After the death of Subhan Dandpat in 1893 the Raja managed to attach some villages of his estate—leaving one to the maintenance of the minor Dandpat. Thus, one hears, that in 1897 it was not the first incident of looting the royal granaries. The previous attacks on the storehouses are explained with the non-payment of rent on the side of the Gonds and the subsequent attachment of the Gonds' land which deprived them of their livelihood. It hints at a reaction expected after the attachment of villages. Moreover, the Raja was warned beforehand about the 'side-effects' of such actions. While the settlement of Commissioner Hewitt around 1880 was followed by violent protests and plundering by the Gonds the 'agreement' reached by Commissioner Grimley in 1889 was not very successful

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either as a 'Report regarding Gond Disturbance in Bonai'[12] dated 29 January 1897—few months before the telegram—indicates, stating that,

> The agreement of 1889 has been treated a dead letter [by the jagirdars—Au].... It is a pity that the agreement was not rigidly enforced from the beginning.... The only effect for the order of attachment has been that the Gonds have stopped all payment for the last two years.

It also mentions that given the relatively small profits for the jagirdars from their estate the attachment may not lead to a recovery of arrears soon. Moreover, the jagirdars should not be blamed alone, since the subordinated headmen (Naiks), enjoying the 'profits' of the village, are also in a strong position and they too refuse to pay. Instead, the Naiks should also pay police cess, even though strictly speaking only the jagirdars are liable, and if they would refuse, they should be evicted. In future, the jagirdars should also be given a share in the profits of each village. And since the Mahapatra *'denies the agreement of 1889, though he signed it', 'being unfit to rule'* he should be removed and replaced by his son. Thus, as a possible solution, the Deputy Commissioner suggests a reinforcement of the agreement, but also *'to forego some of the arrears'* on the side of the Raja. And the Deputy Commissioner closes his report by stating:

> ... if the Gonds understand that the Raja is acting with the support of the Commissioner I do not think that there will be any resistance. If necessary the Raja could be lent some police: and the temporary confinement or deportation of Judhisthir Mahapatar and Barsabho Naek, together with Brajo Dandpat and Dasrathi Naek, would I think keep things quite quiet.[13]

Apparently things do not run as smoothly as the British had hoped for. Instead there is a land dispute going on between the Raja and Dandpat, which the British feel they had to mediate. However, the Deputy Commissioner expresses relief that the crop cutting mentioned in the letters in late 1896 are actually not related to the

[12]File titled Judl. [word not readable. I think it is possibly an abbreviation for 'Judicial'] Department, Letter to Commissioner, No. 62, 29 January 1897, kept at the former Record Room of the Deputy Commissioner Singhbhum, Chaibasa.

[13]Ibid. Signature of the file not readable.

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earlier 'disorder', but a land dispute. Yet, even after a visit of the Deputy Commissioner problems between the Raja and Gonds surface again. However, there is also good news for the British when the Raja informs the Commissioner on 31 March 1897 that after the visit of the Deputy Commissioner, a tiger was caught near the Deputy Commissioner's camp—a tiger that had killed several people before. Attached to the letter the Raja sent the skin of the tiger. And the Deputy Commissioner notes:

> I think we may inform the Rajah that the Commissioner is very much pleased that he has got the man eating tiger killed promptly. The skins may be kept by the Commissioner.[14]

Simultaneously the conflict over payments of rent is far from over. On 13 July 1897, the Raja writes that he had explained Grimley's order to Dandpat and Mahapatra *'but they did not pay any heed to what he said'*. However, on 27 September 1897, Brajo Dandpat (manager of the estate on behalf of the minor Dandpat) writes to the Commissioner mentioning his payments. He brought the money to the Raja in order to *'release the [his] villages ... from the management (khamhar) of the Raja'*, which he refused. On the contrary the Raja still referred to the Dandpat as 'debtors'—besides other examples of misconduct of the Raja listed in the letter. The Commissioner, politely addressed as 'your honor' and described as 'the Mae/ Bap (literally meaning mother-father) of the Minor' should allow the Dandpat to deposit the money directly with the Commissioner. On the very same day a quite similar letter is also sent by Dukhu Mahapatar, jagirdar to the Commissioner, informing him about payments already executed. And he summarises *'we became angry owing to the oppressions of the Raja'*.

In late September, with the starting of the harvest season the Raja again complains about cases of crop cutting by the Gonds in villages under his influence. And a few days later events take a turn to the worse. On 20 October 1897, the Deputy Commissioner writes a report 'Regarding Gond Disturbance' listing what the son of the Raja, Babu Lambodar Deb has testified to him in Chaibasa. Accordingly on the day of Dossehra, a crowd of 150 Gonds had gathered in one of the attached villages. They marched to the royal

[14]A few months later on 22 June 1897, the Raja also informs the colonial administration about an alleged theft of lac by Dukhu Mahapatra (son of Judhistir).

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store house and took the person in charge hostage demanding to be given rice and goats. Pretending to attend a nature's call, the keeper of the storehouse escaped and ran about five miles to the fort. Alarmed by this the Raja sent his own police force consisting of five men and a relative. The Gonds told them 'to clear off' or risk to be punished. Until the Shaheb [presumably Commissioner/ Deputy Commissioner—Au] arrives they would rather cut and eat the paddy. Thus, the police force had no choice, but to return and *'it is not known what more mischief they are making.'* The same happened in other villages too, where Gonds, allegedly being instigated by the mother of the minor Dandpat, threatened to beat the Raja's people. The situation in the Mahapatra estate was similar, where Gonds resisted the attachment of their villages by the Raja. Against this unrest, the report concludes, the Raja was helpless.

> The Rajah has not arrested the Gonds as directed by Deputy Commissioner. This was because he is unable to arrest them without the help of Constables from the District Police. He might have made attempts to arrest them but that he feared that there might be bloodshed....[15]

Interestingly, the 'looting' started on the day of Dossehra. In the Orissan context Dossehra is a major ritual of incorporation[16]—a day when the Gond chiefs were expected to attend the royal court's rituals and accept a well-defined role in the rituals vis-à-vis their overlord. Non-attendance was usually considered as dissent or open defiance and an attack on the royal storehouses on this day certainly augmented the clear challenge to the Raja. Significantly also a number of Gonds are listed in the text as informers, but none of them appear to have testified personally, while those present during the testimony at the British court, going by their names such as Chasa, belong to peasant communities nowadays widely accepted as relative late migrants, probably invited by the Raja to settle in Bonai and therefore presumably rather loyal to the Raja.

Two days later, on 22 October 1897, the Commissioner issues an order that in relation to the information furnished by Babu Lambodar

[15]From, The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, No. J/424, dated 20/22.10.97, 'Regarding Gond Disturbances', Regr. No. 748, 1897–98, Commissioner's Office, Chotanagpur Division, Political Department, Collection I, File No. 8.

[16]B. Schnepel, *The Jungle Kings: Ethnohistorical Aspects of Politics and Ritual in Orissa*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2002, p. 271.

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Deb, it appears that seven leading Gonds (among them Brojo Dandpat, mother of minor Kheria Dandpat and Dukhu Mahapatra) have committed crimes and should be served notice to appear in Chaibasa. However, not fully aware of the distances the Commissioner has to inquire in a side note, 'How many days march is Bonai from Chaibasa?' and is subsequently informed, 'about 10 days march.'

From the files one also learns that, though the seven Gonds were served with summons to appear before the Deputy Commissioner on 23 November 1897, they disobeyed. The Deputy Commissioner states:

> I have now sent warrant to the Raja with strict orders to arrest the men. He was anxious to have police sent from here, but I refused this as I understand that you [the Commissioner—Au] do not want the Rajas to come crying for help in every little emergency.

He thus hints, like the sequence of events, at a rather fragile position of the Raja vis-a-vis the jagirdars. Similarly, another note is found in the files dated 27 April 1898 with the question: *'Why warrants not executed?'* and an answer is given as: *'No, Sir, but I heard that the Rajah's Police did not dare to do so—being very weak'.*

A copy of a warrant for the jail in Ranchi dated 28 April 1898 documents that this case was still dragging on then. However, a letter of the Raja of Gangpur dated 2 May 1898[17] indicates that the Gonds were finally arrested, presumably with his help, and brought to Chaibasa.[18] But it seems they did not stay there very long. Apparently, additional demands from the Raja and his officials arguing for instance that the Gonds have also 'misappropriated' 68 cattle while looting the storehouses, increasingly angered Commissioner Forbes. He was convinced that there was no proof that the Gonds stole those cattle. Rather in his court proceedings he decided that the Gonds should pay the new rent from 1305 (1898) onwards and the Raja is anyway *'better off than he really deserved considering the incapacity he has displayed in carrying out his own orders.'*

Still then, conflicts continued. Though the British tried to hand over detailed orders (parwanas) with their individual revenue demands

[17]From, Raja Raghu Nath Shekhor Deo, Political Chief, Gangpur, to, The Commissioner Chota Nagpur, dated 2 May 1898, No. 5, Commissioner's Office, Chotanagpur Division, Vernacular Department, Index No. 295, Collection No. Pol, File No. misc. of 1898–99.

[18]Ibid. Since he, the Gangpur Raja, arranged the transport for them he sends a list of costs incurred, which the Raja of Bonai had to reimburse.

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to all Gond-Naiks under the two chiefs, the revenue collection remained complicated. And on 20 February 1899, the Deputy Commissioner informs his superior that the Mahapatra has paid his revenue, while the Dandpat has not. Rather Brojo Dandpat and the Naiks 'of that tribe' have not acknowledged the order of the Commissioner. Thus, on 18 April 1899, the Commissioners, informs his Deputy that he should issue warrants for the five remaining Naiks, who have not collected their parwanas, because of disobedience. Though the conflicts persist, the files end in 1899 and one can only guess that the 'game' of refusal, withdrawal and compromise continued.

'WHITE SAHIB'S OCCUPATION': COMMISSIONER HEWITT'S LAND SETTLEMENT IN BONAI

The files quite often refer to two major events preceding the 'Gond disturbances' of 1897: on the one hand to the apparently first British attempt for a land settlement under Commissioner Hewitt dated variously between 1879 and 1881 and on the other hand to an agreement brokered by Commissioner Grimley in 1889, who tried to introduce corrective measures after the settlement. In his *Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Bonai Feudatory State,* Orissa, W. G. Kelly, the Revenue Officer, remarks in 1913 on the previous settlements:

> The only known land revenue settlement in Bonai, previous to this [Kelly's settlement 1910–13—Au], was a summary one ordered to be made by Mr. Hewitt in 1879, and carried out, in certain areas, by the then Chief. Mr. Hewitt found that the unit of measure best known to the people was a Khandiparan or area, the seed spread capacity of which was a Khandi or 30 seers of paddy. By experiment he ascertained that this area was 50 yards square, and directed measurements to be made with a pole of 5 cubits or $7^1/_2$ feet, the length and breadth of a Khandiparan or Bonai bigha thus being 20 × 20 of these poles.Only wet rice lands were dealt with, and in consultation with the chief, leading headmen, and raiyats, Mr. Hewitt fixed the rates of rent for assessment.[19]

The document shows a keen interest on measuring land rather than relying on earlier indigenous ways of fixing rents according to the

[19]W. G. Kelly, *Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Bonai Feudatory State, Orissa, Bonaigarh,* 1913, p. 19. (Place of publication not mentioned).

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seeds used[20] and thus privileges land as a means to determine revenue. It also indicates how limited in scope this first attempt must have been, i.e., only 'certain areas' were affected, which are not further specified.[21] An additional problem that Kelly acknowledged in his proceedings was 'the non-existence of reliable records of Mr. Hewitt's settlement'[22] and one can perhaps presume that the rates of rent for the Gond jagirdars were still fixed largely according to *'the ordinary measurement by sight'* as Cobden-Ramsay[23] had remarked. Though we do not know anything about the rates before and after Hewitt's settlement it is clear that the rates were increased and this enhanced rate contributed ultimately to the 'disturbances'. Thus, an order by the Offg. Commissioner dated 9 December 1896 states with regard to the disputes between the Raja and the Gonds' Chiefs after Hewitt's settlement, but prior to Grimley's agreement,

> The lands held by the Gonds were ... assessed at enhanced rates. The Gonds were a semi-military class of men liable to render military services to the state. They objected to the settlement made under Mr. Commissioner Hewitt's order, but Mr. Hewitt disallowed their objections. They not being satisfied with the settlement withheld payment of rent to the Rajah for several years.[24]

The importance of this first settlement—as limited as it may have been—is well-illustrated in a family chronicle written by the Dandpat family in the early 1930s and subsequently submitted to the Raja's court in Bonaigarh in yet another conflict with the Raja over forest rights. In this document, resembling to a large extent a

[20]In other areas ploughs, hoes or bullocks were counted.

[21]'Bonai State Administrative Report for 1942–43' also openly acknowledges the rather limited extent of the settlement and mentions that the zamindaris were left out. In Chapter II on Land Administration one can read that: There had never been a regular Land Revenue Settlement in the State in the past. Mr. Hewitt did one in 1879 and did not survey the Zamindaries. It was followed by a settlement of Mr. Kelly in 1910 and he left a printed final report. The first settlement assessed rents amounting to Rs 11.860 including the payments in kind. This was enhanced by 102 per cent and Mr Kelly fixed a net rental of Rs 24.000. His was a plane table survey of wetlands only. (Administrative Report, p. 2).

[22]Kelly, *Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Bonai Feudatory State*, p. 19.

[23]L. E. B. Cobden-Ramsay, *Feudatory States of Orissa*, first published 1910, Calcutta: K. L. M. Private Limited, 1982.

[24]See footnote 11.

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'royal chronicle' (*vamshavali*), the major events of their own history are presented—usually of the heroic kind, for instance how the family contributed to the defence of the state. Given that there is no contemporary document of the Gonds—apart from those filed in the British archives—the text can illuminate a distinctive non-British perspective on the 'disturbances', even though a slightly later one. Thus, one reads:

> At that time [of settlement—Au] Sri Dayanidhi Indra Deo was the king of Bonai and ruling. Till then the Britishers had not occupied Bonai but during his reign British people occupied Bonai and at that time they kept it under the control of Nagpur Zone. At that time Mr. White Saheb first came to do the settlement work of Bonai.... After this quarrel by the impact of Mr. White's settlement since long long ago many people enjoyed landed properties having their own right. Over it there started a quarrel and that quarrel [was] started by Subarna Singh Dandapat, Judhistir Mohapatra and their assistants. Though this quarrel started for a very small reason it was enlarged due to fault of the Tahsildar of that time named Khetra Mohan Bohidar and it could not be decided among them; hence it was placed before the court of the commissioner Ranchi. The splendid Commissioner of that time Mr. Grimle [sic] heard everything and saw that the Dandapat, Mohapatra and his assistants became very much annoyed (raganvita) on the king and the settlement of Mr. White increased the quarrel (golmal) to a great extent. Also if this rebellion (bidroha) will last long then the state will be destroyed (chharkhar), because the revolters (bidrohi) are the main body of the security of the state.... So he thought, at first the rebellion (bidroha) is to be ended peacefully. At first both the parties may be requested to make a compromise among them and by that their anger is to be diminished.[25]

In a notable mimicry of the colonial administration, though perhaps not really intended as such, Commissioner Hewitt is turned into 'White Sahib', whose settlement is seen as instrumental to have intensified existing quarrels. Significantly also the events following are styled as a 'customary rebellion',[26] i.e., not directed against the

[25]Oriya text presented by the Dandpat family to the author. English-translation by M. Pradhan, B. Purohit and U. Skoda. Also submitted to the Bonai Court as P. R. NO.19 DT. 4.6.1936, Bonai State.

[26]M. Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Afrika*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955, p. 27ff.

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king as such or the royal order, but rather against the unfair treatment imposed upon the zamindars, which is further aggravated by 'wicked officials'[27] of the ruler. Thus, it is stated:

> Before this in the year 1889 there was a difference of opinion between the king and zamindar of that period. In those days people were of simple nature and they were sincerely obeying the king. They were considering the king as their elder brother ... So they were expecting equal share from the elder brother and for that reason there was difference of opinions and the Zamindars revolted. But in this rebellion the Zamindar have not given any physical wound to the king. On the other hand it is clear from the activities of Zamindars that they do not have any evil intention towards the king. They had revolted only for their maintenance.[28]

This description also sheds light on the Gonds' or at least Gond jagirdars' perception of the events and the rationalisation of their actions following Hewitt's 'reforms'. The settlement with its explicit focus on land, not just on revenue collection for which other methods could have been employed, is considered in the text as 'occupation'—notwithstanding that the British never ruled Bonai directly. However, one has to keep in mind that the text was probably written in the 1930s only and as such is a later retrospect projection.

*PAIK*S AND POLICE CESS

While the payment of revenue was contested, delayed and withheld, the question of paying police cess was even more disputed. Even after the Gond jagirdars finally cleared their debts in terms of rent they remained stubborn in their refusal to pay this cess. Thus, in a letter dated 15 August 1893,[29] Mohapatra and Dandpat both stated that they had been ill—in order to explain the delay in payments—but they had paid everything until 1889. They also claimed to have paid revenue for the years 1890–92, but objected to an additional police cess. They offered to explain their objections to the

[27]R. Guha, *The Unquiet Woods. Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 62ff.

[28]See footnote 25.

[29]Undated file, Commissioner's Office, Chotanagpur, Record Room, Ranchi—presumably English-translation of a Kaithi-file.

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Commissioner during his next visit to Bonai. In a return letter they were informed that the question of police cess had already been settled and they should pay the cess 'at once'. Their stern refusal goes back a number of years, which is indicated in the already mentioned order dated 9 December 1896, that states that,

> ... since the agreement [procured by Commissioner Grimley in 1889—Au] the Gonds were paying through ... a cousin of the Bonai Rajah the rent due from them on account of their lands but not the Police contribution as mentioned in ... the said agreement.

Besides, in statements sent as late as on 14 April 1898,[30] Dukhu Mahapatra, Brojo Dandpat and Ghamaria Dandpatain argue that they have actually paid rent according to the agreement and will pay the remaining money if it is found that there is still money due to the Raja—a statement indicating that they were still refusing other cesses, notably not only police cess, but also school cess, which they apparently considered not to be 'due to the Raja' and hoped for a decision of the Commissioner in their favour.

How can this refusal to pay police cess be explained? After all, it was a relatively minor amount compared to the rent, which they paid finally more willingly—though never without pressure. It seems that the matter of the police cess was not only a question of money, but it involved the larger issue of identity. The resistance against police cess becomes more comprehensible if one takes into account for instance the settlement report by the concerned officer Kelly in 1913 who states on the Gond jagirs:

> These people are Gonds and with their followers ... first entered the State as wrestlers and sword players and were given the Jagirs when installed in it as a police force. In addition to rendering police service half the net land revenue of their villages was to be paid to the Chief. Owing to their refusing to supply the necessary police force a tax at three annas in each rupee of the land revenue was imposed upon them and their rayits [sic]. (*Settlement report 1913, Chapter III: Land Tenures, pp. 9–10*)[31]

[30]Letter, Commissioner's Office, Chotanagpur, Record Room, Ranchi.

[31]Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Bonai Feudatory State (Orissa), dated 4 February 1913, by W. G. Kelly, Settlement Officer, Bonai Feudatory State, [Kelly Report], State Archives, Orissa.

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Moreover, the report also states that the Gonds, '... are poor cultivators. They are keen huntsmen and those of the Jagirs from [sic] a body of militia, which at times, has been of much use to the State'. (*Settlement report 1913, Chapter II: The People, p. 6.*)[32]

The Gonds are here described as 'militia' or 'police force', which refers to the indigenous term *paik* designating 'peasant-warriors'.[33] In the already mentioned text on the Dandpat family a land rent reduced by half is demanded for the paiks '... who are attending to the work of 'state security', 'fort guarding' and controlling the internal and external enemies of the state.'

As such one can conclude that the self-image of the Gonds was clearly linked to defence and to the police function, i.e., *controlling the internal and external enemies (satru) of the state*—apparently without any significant differentiation between army and police—and the police cess not only not sanctioned by 'custom', but quite the opposite of it.

Moreover, they objected not only to the police cess, but also to the establishment of police stations in their areas. In a letter dated 27 September 1897 already quoted, Brajo Dandpat complains to the Commissioner that the police station (*thana*) set up by the Raja in his village causes problems rather than solving any. The police officers coming into the area would commit adultery, so the accusation and the Raja would not punish these crimes of the outsiders. Not only the Gonds, but also the Bhuyan Zamindar protested against the setting up of a thana in his area, but without success in the long run. The reason for collecting police cess as well as the set up of thanas, the creation of a police force in general, was certainly an attempt to establish a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force as the central pillar of a state in a British sense and thus to guarantee law and order from a central authority—here, the State officials of Bonai and indirectly the British. This new police not only threatened the power base of those who were customarily obliged to provide troops to the Raja, they were also asked to pay for it.

The files on the 'Gond disturbance' also show how limited the police force of the Bonai state was at that time and how little he and his police could do to arrest those Gonds. In a file titled *Annual Return of the Military Forces 1915* (Sub-Collector's Record Room, former

[32]Ibid.

[33]Perhaps resembling the yeoman, who was responsible for protecting the feudal lord or king as a guard or warrior in times of war.

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Record Room of the Dewan) it is stated that in 1915 the strength of the 'Armed Police' was 43, with 12 guns at its disposal—indicating probably a rather slow process of establishing a Police Department, but also the power of the Gonds in this bargaining process. Given their resistance, it may not come as a surprise that the police cess was indeed abolished soon after as there is no mention of it in the Kelly report of 1913. Instead the role of the Gond 'militia' is highlighted again.

On the one hand it is not clear from the files if they had ever paid the cess. Perhaps not. But on the other hand, the thanas remained in their areas too and the grip of the state further increased with the introduction of the chowkidar system in early twentieth century, i.e., the appointment of village guards in every village with the obligation to report crimes etc. to the nearest thana and thus to the state apparatus and not the jagirdar—a procedure to which the jagirdars again objected.

A MULTILAYERED POLITICAL STRUCTURE: OUTMANOEUVRING, WITHDRAWAL AND THE PENETRATION OF THE COLONIAL STATE

In his analysis of eighteenth century Benares region, Bernhard Cohn[34] stressed that the political system was multilayered. He distinguished several levels ranging from the 'local level' on the one hand, as the lowest or most basic administrative stratum consisting of local revenue collectors, indigenous chiefs and lineages, up to the imperial level on the other hand. Between these ends of the spectrum one finds a variety of kings—greater or smaller relatively, claiming superiority or having to accept an inferior rank at least temporarily and using very different titles. The distinction between 'Raja' and 'Maharaja' paradigmatically expresses their relationship as a 'little king' as opposed to a 'greater king'. As Berkemer[35] pointed out, the 'little kingdom' has to be understood as a relational construct in which the position of the 'little king' is determined by his relationship to the overlord(s), in which he is subordinate, as well as to his subjects, in which he in turn is the overlord himself. Quite in line with the general picture drawn by Cohn, Wink[36] argued that:

[34]Cohn, 'Political Systems in Eighteenth-Century India: The Banares Region'.

[35]G. Berkemer, *Little Kingdoms in Kalinga: Ideologie, Legitimation und Politik Regionaler Eliten*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993, p. 319.

[36]See A. Wink, 'Sovereignty and Universal Dominion in South Asia', in *The Economic and social History Review*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1984, p. 288.

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The state organised itself around the conflict which was endemic in the hereditary zamindari and vatan rights. The disputes about these hereditary rights were in principle interminable; they remained contained as long as the sovereign power could tip the scales, but erupted afresh as soon as sovereignty was disputed.

Zamindar, as Wink points out, is used as a generic term here and may denote any 'holder of land'—be it a village headman or even a raja.

Coming back to western Orissa, the political structure was equally layered and revolved around conflicts.[37] The agents involved here included the Raja of Bonai (with lesser textually visible officials of the Raja such as the tahsildar Kethro Mohan, who might have been more influential behind the scenes); the Gond jagirdars; and also the Naiks as village headmen as well as the British. The colonial power in turn was itself graded and not always fully consistent in its evaluations and recommendations, i.e., the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, based in Chaibasa being in charge of the Bonai affairs, might have differed in his judgements at times from the more distant Commissioner in Ranchi, who in turn could overrule or pass orders to his Deputy if required.[38]

An important recurrent theme in the files on the 'Gond Disturbances' is the question of who among these agents had direct relations with whom and in which matters for instance, revenue payment, the judicial sphere, etc. This implies the issue of who may (be allowed to) bypass another title-holder and thus may ultimately negate any inferiority or may claim equal or even superior status. This central theme and bone of contention—certainly not limited to Bonai[39]—appears to be related to British attempts to codify a

[37]For southern Orissa, see also B. Schnepel, *The Jungle Kings: Ethnohistorical Aspects of Politics and Ritual in Orissa*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2002, p. 271.

[38]Unfortunately the hand-written communication between Commissioner and Deputy are hardly readable in terms of signatures, but apparently a change took place around 1898, when an 'Officiating Deputy Commissioner' signed the letters. Since in terms of address always the office is given and not the individual name I will stick to this custom too, being aware however, of the possible changes in person.

[39]See for instance J. McLeod, *Sovereignty, Power, Control: Politics in the States of Western India, 1916–1947*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 66ff, for attempts of the princes across India to get into direct relations with the Indian Government and British crown in early twentieth century instead of being subordinated to the provincial administration.

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relatively fluid pre-colonial structure, in which allegiances used to be more important than territory, and, at the same time, to penetrate the evolving political system as far as possible.

Thus, for instance, on 27 September 1897, Brajo Dandpat writes to the Commissioner and mentions the Dandpat's payments to the Raja via his cousin for the years 1296–97 (1889–90), directly to the Raja for 1300–3 (1893–96) and to the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum for the year 1897.[40] However, he complains that the Raja issued receipts directly to the Naiks (village headmen) which he argues is considered to be against 'custom'—in fact complaining that he was by-passed. The Commissioner, politely addressed as 'your honor' and described as 'the Mae-Bap [literally meaning 'mother-father'] of the Minor' is asked for permission that the Dandpat should be allowed to deposit the money directly with the Commissioner. On the very same day a quite similar letter is sent by the Mahapatra informing the Commissioner about payments already executed and about the Raja issuing receipts to the Naiks, who, however, refused to accept them.

Meanwhile Commissioner Forbes decided to come to Chaibasa to see the papers *'regarding the wrongful action of certain Gond leaders against the Raja of Bonai'*. On 6 December 1897, following the incapability of the Raja, notices were already sent by the Commissioner through the Deputy Commissioner to Judhistir Mahapatra and Brajo Dandpat directing them to appear with their subordinate Naiks, thus also questioning the capability of Dandpat and Mahapatra to execute orders to the Naiks. Thus, the Commissioner tried to establish a direct rapport with the Naiks, without relying either on the Raja or any jagirdar.

A few months later one finds another letter of the Raja complaining that the jagirdars did not allow their Naiks to accept orders of the Commissioner sent through the Raja—apparently in an attempt to shield their own interests as intermediaries. On 5 August 1898, the Raja writes once again to the Commissioner saying that he wanted to distribute the parwanas of the Commissioner dated 9 June 1898 to Dandpat, Mahapatra and the Naiks, but only Dandpat and Mahapatra accepted the documents. The two jagirdars did not allow

[40]Letter from Braja Dandapat, Manager of Jhirdapali in Bonai dated 27 September 1897, to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Commissioner's Office, Record Room, Ranchi.

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the Naiks to issue receipts for receiving the orders. Those documents had also been sent by post before, but were returned 'unclaimed'.

Orders of the Commissioner passed in his court on 16 September 1898 illuminate again the problem of layers within the structure.[41] Here the Commissioner states that '[t]he Rajah will have nothing whatever to do with any cultivation within the Gond fiefs' and thus guarding the interests of the Gond jagirdars against a Raja trying to extend his influence. Moreover, on a question of the Raja where the Gond chiefs should deposit the revenue he ordered: 'The Gonds leaders will be ordered to pay their annual rents ... at Chaibasa to the Deputy Commissioner', in effect giving in to an earlier demand of the Gonds and excluding the Raja as an intermediary here. However, the order also states that the Raja remains in this position in judiciary process and says that the eldest son (*tikait*) of the Raja would exercise judicial control over the Gond estates. Thus, while a demand of the Gond chiefs was fulfilled, the Raja was kept in charge in another important domain, i.e., the relatively newly introduced but increasingly decisive legal framework.

However, the disputes in relation to who is supposed to interact with whom continued into the next year. On 21 January 1899, the Deputy Commissioner informs the Commissioner that four Naiks have come to collect their parwana. The Deputy was supposed to hand over parwanas to the two Chiefs and 18 Naiks. Three other Naiks collect their parwanas by 10 February 1899. But the Commissioner points out on 20 February 1899 three other villages have not collected parwanas.[42] Also on 20 February 1899, the Deputy Commissioner informs the Commissioner that while the Mahapatra has paid revenue (full rent till 1306 [1899]), the Dandpat has not. Moreover, Brajo Dandpat and the Naiks 'of that tribe' have not acknowledged the order of the Commissioner.

> It thus appears that neither the acting Chief (Brajo Dandpat) nor any of the Naiks of that tribe have, so far, taken any notice of my orders.

They, the Deputy Commissioner suggests, should be warned about 'severe measures' in case they do not pay. Also the remaining Mahapatra-Naiks should be informed, but without any warning.

[41] Proceedings of the Court of the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Present A. Forbes, Esq., dated 16 September 1898, Commissioner's Office, Record Room, Ranchi.

[42] An added note states that Jhirdapali is a *khas* village of the Dandpat, but it remains unclear to the British who are the actual Naiks of the other two villages.

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These parwanas should be handed over by their own Officers, not those of the Raja. By 15 April 1899, the Deputy Commissioner informs his superior that both chiefs have cleared all outstanding payments up to 1899 and the Dandpat excused himself for the late payment due to small pox in his village. Still then, five Naiks are known to not have collected their own parwanas and on 18 April 1899, the Commissioner informs his Deputy that he should issue warrants to them because of disobedience. As punishment for disobeying summons, an amount of Rs 3 must be acquired from them or an imprisonment for a period of 15 days be inflicted upon them. Though one does not know from the files, whether all Naiks under the two jagirdars finally appeared to accept the parwanas of the Commissioner, it clearly shows the determination on the side of the colonial administration to reach down to the local level and codify their obligations in parwanas, which also legitimated them in their position. As Cohn[43] mentions, local chiefs at the base of political structure were subordinated to the next higher level, the regional ruler, but at times derived their legitimacy from a still higher authority—the secondary level in Cohn's model. An interaction and bonding from an imperial level, the colonial administration, down to the village-level, however, appears to be a novelty—bypassing two middle layers. Still then, these attempts were successful only to a certain extent, since the other side tended to prefer non-interaction.

As Cohn described it for eighteenth century Benares, withdrawal was a common strategy in disputes between those wielding powers at various levels. Thus, he noted:

> The raja's obligations to the nawabs were the regular payment of revenue and provision of troops when requested. The Raja of Banaras at every opportunity tried to avoid fulfilment of these obligations; and on several occasions the nawab sent troops to try to bring his subordinate to terms, if not to capture and kill him. On these occasions Balwant Singh [Raja of Banaras—Au] would retreat with his treasure and army to the jungles.... After a time the nawab distracted by similar behaviour in other parts of the state or by his intervention in imperial politics, would compromise with Balwant Singh and withdraw, at which time Balwant Singh would resume his control of the zamindari.[44]

[43]Cohn, 'Political Systems in Eighteenth-Century India: The Banares Region', p. 486.

[44]Ibid., pp. 488–89.

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The various cases of Dandpat and Mahapatra and also the Naiks not following the summons of the Raja or the British can be read as a strategy of resistance similar to the one followed by Balwant Singh. Going through the files, the sequence of events appears like a perpetual low level conflict with non-compliance of orders on the side of the Gonds until warrants are issued and occasionally executed, before the circle of non-compliance starts again. While such actions as foot dragging or feigned ignorance are common 'weapons of the weak',[45] at times the Raja too might have resorted to such tactics, for e.g., excusing himself not to appear before the Deputy Commissioner, claiming to be ill and sending his son instead.

While the jagirdars, the Naiks or perhaps even the Raja used low level defiance and withdrawal as tactics, the British are accused to have recurred to deception as the Dandpat vamshavali documents:

During the reign of the Maharaj Dayanidhi Deo at first Krushna Saounta started revolting (bidroha[46]) against him. So the Commissioner of Ranchi took him and his family members by a false trick (*kausala*). From there only ... [one—Au] returned back.

It exemplifies that a transfer to and detention in the centres of colonial administration such as Chaibasa was feared and may have actually enforced tactics of retreat. However, given the introduction of a legalism under colonial rule withdrawal might have slowly turned into a stand only partly viable. As the court document of the Dandpat family from the 1930s suggests other options for opposing the Raja, i.e., courts and their advantages in particular, may have been increasingly explored.

BROKERING LAW AND ORDER

The British administrators, though apparently not always evaluating the situation consistently, tried to broker agreements to maintain 'law and order'. Moreover, they expected both parties involved to honour the agreement mediated by Commissioner Grimley in 1889. Thus, at times they not only blamed the Gonds' Chiefs, but also the

[45]J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 29.

[46]Related to drohi/ rajdrohi—enemy.

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Raja for being responsible for situations of disorder and disturbances. Here are a few such instances.

While the Gonds were blamed for withholding *'payment of rent to the Rajah for several years'* (Order 09/12/96[47]) after the Hewitt Settlement, even after the Grimley agreement '[r]*epeated reports were made by the Rajah to the Commissioner requesting him to issue orders to the Gonds to pay him what was due to him. Orders were issued every time to the Gonds who were also personally warned by the Commissioner when on tour to pay the Rajah's dues but they persistently neglected to comply with the orders issued by the Commissioner'.*

However, in a simultaneously smouldering conflict over three plots of land on the border between Dandpat jagir and Raja's khas land the Deputy Commissioner came to the conclusion that at least in case of one plot *'the Raja is clearly the aggressor in this case I passed an order that the dandpats were to remain in possession for the ... present.'*[48]

In case of the third plot (the first went also to the Dandpat) the Deputy Commissioner decided in favour of the Raja, even though it was claimed by Dasrathi, a local Gond headman. This claim, however, the Deputy Commissioner notes, was more or less in return for claims by the Raja to the other plots. However, he also states in terms of the outstanding dues for the Raja,

> I have submitted recommendations for dealing with the Gonds and enforcing the agreement of 1889 and I imagine that there will be no more difficulty if we authorize the Raja to take rigorous action.[49]

Shortly after the 'plundering' of the granaries the Deputy Commissioner writes again to his superior:

> 4. As to what should be done I am quite sure that unless the Agreement of 1889 and all our past action is come to nothing, the Gond leaders must be sharply dealt with and get a term of imprisonment. If you were thinking of visiting Bonai as early as November I think matters might wait till then, a notice being served meanwhile on the Gonds to abstain from further

[47]Quoted above.

[48]Letter No. 58 J, From the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, dated 29 January 1897, Commissioner's Office, Record Room, Ranchi.

[49]'Returned to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur', dated 29 January 1897, Commissioner's Office, Record Room, Ranchi.

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violence and to appear before you when you reach Bonai: if however your visit will be later than that I think that the leaders should be arrested at once. They would probably make no difficulty about accompanying my Police to Ranchi to appear before you: if you were to send ten constables in charge of a reliable Officer I think that there would be no disturbance.[50]

Thus, the agreement—a contract having almost the status of law here—must be honoured and cannot be altered or broken. It is in this context that Commissioner Forbes decided to come to Chaibasa to see the papers 'regarding the wrongful action of certain Gond leaders against the Raja of Bonai'[51] and on 31 July 1897 and on 2 January 1898 notices were sent to Mahapatra and Dandpat respectively to meet the Commissioner on tour, on 31 January 1898. If they would refuse they would be declared 'outlaws' and their property would be confiscated. Moreover, they would be permanently exiled from Bonai, they are told.

A similarly sharp reaction of the Commissioner is also expressed in another letter dated 29 April 1898, in which the Raja's revenue officers for e.g., Khetro Mohan Tahsildar claim that Dandpat and Mahapatra have made *golmal* (rebellion) in the country and have looted property of the storehouse. They also provide a list of those stored goods. The comment added on 19 May 1898 by the Commissioner to this letter states very plainly:

This is at once disposed of by the fact that the arrears allowed to the Rajah include full rents for the years in question ... if the Tehsildar says anything more about it I shall make the Rajah pay for them.

And another comment (added probably on 7 May) states:

The Tehsildar was verbally told that his claim was untenable in as much as the Rajah's procedure to attach the villages was improper.[52]

These latter statements not only mention again apparently 'wicked officials', but also turn the tables towards the Raja, who is held

[50]'Regarding Gond Disturbances', Regr. No. 748, 1897–98, Commissioner's Office, Chotanagpur Division, Political Department, from the Deputy Commissiner of Singhbhum, No.J /424, dated 20/22.10.97, Collection I, File No. 8.

[51]Letter No. 259 J/P, From A. Forbes, Esq., Commissioner of Chotanagpur, to the Deputy Commissioner Singhbhum, dated 7 December 1897.

[52]Comment to a letter from Khetro Mohan Tahsildar and Jai Deo Satpati Munshi, Bonai, dated 29 April 1898, Commissioner's Office, Record Room, Ranchi.

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TABLE VII

EXCERPT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURT OF THE COMMISSIONER [FORBES], 16/09/1898[53]

RAJAH'S REPRESENTATION	COMMISSIONER'S ORDER
1. [asking about the recovery of arrears]	The Rajah has been allowed full rent [of attached villages] for the whole time + is not entitled to anything more. It was entirely his own fault that the attachment of the Deoposh lands was not made effectively
2. ... whether he would get back the 13 or 14 ploughing bullocks + buffalos.	There is no proof of the Gond having taken away any cattle of the Rajah.
6. ... whether he would get the land of Kurumdihi and Mandkoodhodha which belong to Nayadihi	The disputed land in Kurumdihi is decreed to the Dandpat ..., while the disputed plot, Murkudhodha land, is decreed to Nayadihi.
7. ...who would try the cases in connection with the Parganas of Gonds?	The Tikait will of course continue to exercise judicial administrative authority.
8. [inquiring about his share in the cultivation of Jagirdar's estates]	No. Certainly not. The Rajah will have nothing whatever to do with any cultivation within the Gond fiefs. ... He is better off than he really deserved considering the incapacity he has displayed in carrying out his own orders.
9. That the Gonds should be directed to pay their rents annually either to him or to the Commissioner at Ranchi	I agree to this. The Gonds leaders will be ordered to pay their annual rents ... at Chaibasa to the Deputy Commissioner.

[53]Excerpt of the Proceedings of the Court of the Commissioner [Forbes], dated 16 September 1898, Commissioner's Office, Record Room, Ranchi.

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responsible for his avaricious Tehsildar. A court order passed by Forbes in this matter has apparently been written in the same spirit. The order itself is a remarkable document of mediation:

CONCLUSION

To summarise the argument here, the 'disturbances' were intrinsically linked to the land settlements being conducted in Bonai under colonial influence since 1880. However, to read these 'disturbances' in Bonai simply as an immediate and straightforward reaction by the Gonds to a specific settlement and increased rents, would be missing the complex interaction between Gond 'tribal' chiefs, the Bonai Raja and the British. The events were on the one hand rather embedded into a much larger civilising mission of the colonial power, which tried to implement not only newly codified property rights, but what it perceived to be the rule of law and good government.[54] Part and parcel of the colonial project was, apart from a new legalism, the pacification of the subjects and the colony, the Pax Britannica, here also seen as 'taming of the savages'.[55]

On the other hand the supposed looting by the Gonds should be understood, so my point here, in reference to the old, pre-colonial regime. In relation to the colonial power the Gonds chiefs acted according to an earlier pattern of political interaction revolving around conflicts, withdrawal and compromise rather than 'honouring' contractual relations, the kind of 'permanent' settlements British administrators tried to endorse. The 'disturbances' are not just a conflict over money, but a fundamental disagreement on the notion of 'agreements'. The agreement brokered by Commissioner Grimley in 1889 following earlier conflicts between the Gonds and Raja might stand here symptomatically. While Grimley's successors were of the opinion that the agreement 'must be enforced', they also had to acknowledge that Gonds chiefs treated the document as a 'dead letter'—thus rather continuing to operate within a framework of a 'little kingdom' rather than a 'princely state', preferring withdrawal and ignorance of warrants to appearances in courts. Disputes, relatively common in the pre-colonial era and at times violent, were now framed as 'disturbances' threatening the valued public tranquillity, the Pax

[54]Mann, 'Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress', p. 8.
[55]Ibid., p. 18.

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Britannica, and a smooth functioning of courts to which the British persistently referred in order to solve conflicts.

Leaving aside the problem of revenue collection or rather non-payment by the Gonds even bigger resistance arose from the demand of police cess. This cess linked to the pacification and the establishment of a centralised police force seemed to have threatened the Gond identity as 'paiks' or 'peasant-warriors' guaranteeing themselves the state security. The abolition of the police cess soon after the 'disturbances', but also the continuation of the contested newly established police stations is apparently a result of the conflict and hints at a certain compromise between the Gond chiefs, the Raja and the British as well as at the fact that *the colonial regime changed things far less than its discursive self-representations would lead one to believe.*[56]

[56]N. Dirks, 'From Little King to Landlord: Colonial Discourse and Colonial Rule', in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. N. Dirks, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992, pp. 176.

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Coolie Strikes Back
Collective Protest and Action in the Colonial Tea Plantations of Assam, 1880–1920

Nitin Varma

Tea in the classic colonial representations symbolised the transformation of a jungle-ridden 'backward' province of 'waste', through the colonisation of British enterprise and capital. The order and precision of the 'gardens' of tea stood in utter contrast to the wildness of the 'jungles' of Assam—a most illustrative contrast of the chaos and violence of nature, and the tranquillity, prosperity and control that the pioneering endeavours of the white man had engineered.[1]

The introduction of tea in the early part of the nineteenth century in Assam was actualised by the active support and backing of the colonial state. Political troubles with the Chinese government over the 'opium issue', and the abrogation of the trade monopoly of the East India Company, made it imperative to seek new areas where

[1]The British annexed the north eastern frontier of its Indian colony, Assam, in 1825 after the conclusion of the Anglo-Burmese War. It was part of the presidency of Bengal till the year 1874, and was under the local jurisdiction of the Agent to the Governor-General on the North-East Frontier. For the early history of British presence see Edward Gait, *A History of Assam* (first published Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1926), Guwahati: Bina Library, 2001; Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1977; and H. K. Barpujari, *Assam In The Days Of The Company*, Shillong: North Eastern Hill University, 1996.

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tea could be profitably produced.[2] Inspite of the initial scepticism of the success of such an enterprise in India, the government of William Bentinck appointed a committee in January 1834, to explore the possibilities of tea cultivation using Chinese seeds and methods. Opinions were sought from people in different parts of the country showing interest in the issue. In their initial 'Mapping of the Empire', using strong reason and analogy from the Chinese experience, the committee considered the Himalayan region most suited to fulfil that role. Assam, which had recently come under the control of the company, was curiously shown neglect from the botanical authorities in Calcutta, where reports from local officers, of the plant being 'indigenous' and cultivated by the Singhpo tribe was coming from the early parts of the century. It was only in the late 1834 did the Tea Committee finally acknowledge this 'fact'. In a letter to the Government of India, the Committee in a very optimistic note described this as 'to be by far the most important discovery that has been made in matters connected with the agricultural and commercial resources of this Empire.'[3]

The feasibility of cultivation of the indigenous variety, in respect to both quality and outturn achieved in experimental stations set up by the government and the favourable response to early 'specimens' of Assam tea in the markets of Calcutta and London interested investors and capitalists. A more positive step in this direction was taken with the almost simultaneous formation of the Bengal Tea Company in Calcutta and the Assam Company in London in 1839, both looking to take over the plantations of the East India Company and exclusively produce and market the tea produced. Competition at this nascent stage was not something that would have excited the investors and shareholders of the companies, and they eventually merged under the Assam Company.[4]

[2]Tea was a very important 'economic' and 'social' commodity in British life from the eighteenth century. While the production of this commodity was monopolised by the Chinese, its lucrative trade was East India Company's preserve, being a major source of its annual revenue. The 1833 Charter Act took away the monopoly of the East India Company in the trade of Chinese tea.

[3]*Letter from the Tea Committee to the Government of India dated 24 December, 1834*—cited in Harold H. Mann, 'Tea Industry in North-East India', in *The Social Framework of Agriculture*, ed. Daniel Thorner, Delhi: Vora & Co., 1967.

[4]Kalyan K. Sircar, 'A Tale of Two Boards: Some Early Management Problems of Assam Company Limited, 1839–64', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 21, nos. 10–11, March 1986, pp. 453–59.

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Governmental help did not come only in the form of the transfer of almost two-third of the experimental tea gardens to the new company but also made available, land. Jungles and even areas under cultivation were designated as 'wastelands' and given out at very favourable terms. Under the benevolent disposition of the 'Planter-Raj' and riding over the initial hiccups, the industry made rapid strides mostly clearly revealed in the displacement of China as the principal exporter of tea to Britain, by the turn of the century.[5] Commercial cultivation of tea in the province was undertaken in the valley of Brahmaputra or the Assam valley and Surma Valley.[6]

THE IGNORANT *COOLIE* AND THE FRAMING OF THE COOLIE ACTS

The 'civilising mission of tea' in the province was not up against just the vagaries of nature and the diseased climate, but the 'native' Assamese was said to be a strong impediment. Being depicted as conservative, lazy and given to smoking opium they were condemned as being innately inefficient to cope with the requirements and rhythms of a 'modern' industry. At the same time *coolie*[7] with all its

[5]In 1866, 96 per cent of tea imported into Britain came from China and only 4 per cent from India. But by 1903, the share of Indian exports increased to 59 per cent while the Chinese contributed only 10 per cent of the total imports. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 409.

[6]The cultivation of tea in the valley of Brahmaputra or Assam valley was carried out in the districts of Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Darrang and Kamrup while in the Surma valley the districts of Cachar and Sylhet in Surma valley was involved in the production of tea. For a general history of tea industry in Assam see Percival Griffiths, *History of the Indian Tea Industry*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1967 and H. A. Antrobus, *A History of the Assam Company*, Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable Ltd., 1957.

[7]I understand the pejorative sense of the use of the word *coolie* for plantation workers. However this usage will be retained not just to emphasise the difference between 'coolie' and 'labourer'. The Coolie identity was neither fixed nor stable but historically constituted. Its discursive and material strategies have been subject to a variety of studies in different contexts. Especially see John D. Kelly, *'Coolie'* as a Labour Commodity: Race, Sex, and European Dignity in Colonial Fiji' and Jan Breman, 'Conclusion: The Making of a *Coolie*'; both articles in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 19, 1992, pp. 3–4. Also see Kaushik Ghosh, 'A Market for Aboriginality: Primitivism and Race Classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial

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attendant stereotypes, which was being fashioned in the overseas colonial plantations in the post-slavery period of the 1830s and 1840s, was being increasingly mobilised by the tea planters of Assam. The appropriateness of the immigrant coolie as ideal labour for tea gardens, was most explicitly expressed in the racialised sociology of labour, where the coolie, especially the tribal *junglee* stood for docility and capability for hard manual labour against the intractability and laziness of the native.[8]

The coolies for the tea gardens of Assam primarily from the tribal districts of Chotanagpur, Central Provinces and Madras presidency was said to have his/her own set of peculiarities. S/he was depicted to be perpetually entrapped in his self-sufficient village economy; resisted by social taboos; and remote Assam was said to fall beyond his mental and physical domain. Immobility and ignorance emanated from his/her very basic nature and condition of existence.

India', in *Subaltern Studies, Vol. X*, ed. Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash and Susie Tharu, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999 and Piya Chatterjee, 'Secure This Excellent Class of Labour: Gender and Race in Labor Recruitment for British Indian Tea Plantations', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol. 27, no. 3, July–September 1995.

[8]There was a strong collusion of material interests in the discursive strategies of the stereotype of the 'native' and the 'immigrant' coolie. Here the ascriptions which were inscribed in the very race of the coolie on closer scrutiny hints at this unease with the local labour and the preference for the immigrants in the colonial enterprises. The logic of colonial plantation of low wages coupled with a strict working regime could not lure the local labour, which had sufficient bargaining powers to be settled in such circumstances. This becomes even more interesting if one looks at earlier experiences of the tea planters operating in Assam. The whole rhetoric of the insufficiency and innate laziness of local labour is contradicted by the early history of the plantation. Cachari labour from Lakhimpur, Nowgong provided much of the labour for the company's gardens. However, the fact that it often resorted to 'strikes' and 'mass movement' out of plantation, was an evidence of the capabilities of the local labour vis-à-vis their employers. This was most detrimental to an industry, which was labour-intensive, and where profits were primarily determined by the existence of the continued supply of cheap and compliant labour-force. See C. A. Bruce, 'Report on the Manufacture of Tea, and on the Extent and Produce of the Tea Plantations in Assam', in *A History of the Assam Company*, H. A. Antrobus, first published in *Transactions of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India*, vol. 7, 1839, pp. 466–76; George Williamson, 'Report of the Superintendent of Assam Company, 16th February 1854', in *A History of the Assam Company*, pp. 479–85; Kalyan K. Sircar, 'Labour and Management: First Twenty Years of Assam Company Limited (1839–59)', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 21, no. 22, May 1986 and M. A. B. Siddique, 'The Labour Market and the Growth of the Tea Industry in India: 1840–1900', *South Asia*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1995, p. 86.

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To mobilise this immobile class of labourers, planters had to operate through the agency of 'labour contractors' who depended upon a class of *'coolie* catchers'—the infamous *arkattis*, to induce this reluctant class of people to go to Assam. These coolies were initially brought from their native districts to Calcutta; from where they were despatched to Assam by steamer and Cachar by boat.[9] The 'ignorant' coolie was however found susceptible to the guiles of the arkattis, and the uncertainties of a long and tortuous journey under conditions of extreme insanitation.[10]

The Special Committee appointed by Government of Bengal in 1862 to enquire into the state of affairs, evoked similar sentiments, where the early operations of the arkattis to the tea gardens in Assam were described as a harrowing saga of deception, desertion and death. There was no doubt that coolies needed protection and governmental intervention was deemed necessary. This becomes all the more interesting when the predominant common-sense of the time was the non-interference of state in matters of capital.

On the recommendations of the committee, Transport of Native Labourers Act III was passed in 1863. Recruiting and transit was licensed. Emigrants had to be registered before the Magistrate of the district, and placed on contract not exceeding five years to be executed in presence of the Superintendent of Emigration. By this legislation, described sometimes as the first labour legislation in

[9]At first the recruiting operations were confined to the lower districts of Bengal, and those chiefly on the river route to Assam. But gradually the *Junglee* or *Dhangars* from the Chotanagpur region, who had worked in the sugar plantations of Mauritius in the post-slavery period, were becoming the most sought after 'class of *coolie*'. The 'upcountry' men from north-western Provinces and Bihar though labelled to be unsuited to the wet climate and jungle tracts of Assam, constituted a substantial number by the late nineteenth century especially in the Surma Valley. The Central Provinces and the Ganjam tracts of Madras Presidency were the other principal areas from where coolie travelled to work in the tea gardens of Assam. S. Chatterjee and Ratan Das Gupta, 'Tea-Labour in Assam: Recruitment and Governmental Policy, 1840–80', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xvi, nos. 44–46, November 1981, pp. 1862–67 and J. F. Gruning, 'Note on Recruitment of Labour for Tea Gardens in Assam', in *The Detailed Report of the General Committee on the Indian Tea Association for the year 1909*, pp. 68–79.

[10]Between December 1859 and November 1861, out of 2272 labourers transported for the Assam Company from Calcutta, 250 or 11 per cent died en-route; and between April 1861 and February 1862, out of 2569 labourers as many as 135 died or drowned and 133 absconded; Siddique, 'The Labour Market and the Growth of the Tea Industry in India: 1840–1900', pp. 93–94.

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an organised Indian industry, the recruitment and transit of coolies was brought under governmental vision and control.[11]

But what about the life of coolies within the gardens? Was he to be left completely at the disposal of the Planters Act VI of 1865 which was premised on such anxieties where wages were fixed, contract reduced to three years and 'protectors' of labourers appointed and empowered to cancel contracts under circumstances which they deemed oppressive?[12] These Acts with periodic revisions, formed the broad comprehensive grid regulating the recruitment, transit and settlement of the coolie under the 'benevolent' protection of the government.

At the same time, it was argued that as the coolie was not immigrating voluntarily and the planter was spending a 'fortune' to recruit him, it is only natural for him to expect value for his money. Contract was seen as a way out. Coolies were obliged to work for a specific period of time for a particular employer in return for the wages and other provisions provided.[13] But this was to be no ordinary civil contract, having strict penal provisions. It was argued that the 'modern' notion of contract was incomprehensible to the 'primitive'/'tribal' coolie and s/he had to be deterred by strong penal provisions with small doses of coercion and violence—a language that they best understood.[14] This stereotype of the ignorant coolie at a total loss in controlling his life and labour and requiring protection had strong material interests at work. The plantation regime where profits were alienated from a skewed labour market and intensified labour process was rationalised on such otherised/primitive notions of the

[11]For a history of legislation in the tea plantations of Assam, see R. Das, *Plantation Labour in India*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1931, pp. 29–40.

[12]Wages were fixed as Rs 5 a month for a man, Rs 4 a month for woman and Rs 3 a month for child. But Act II of 1870 omitted all mention of minimum wage, which was again introduced by the 1882 legislation. For details, see the *Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee*, 1906, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1906.

[13]M. R. Anderson, 'Work Construed: Ideological Origins of Labour Law in British India to 1918', in *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India*, ed. Peter Robb, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

[14]That the coolie worked on a primitive, natural notion of time was most clearly revealed in the shift of governmental policy of determination of wages from time to task. The 1865 Act fixed a minimum wage for the coolie subject to the completion of 9 hour daily and 6 days work in a week. But the Act I of 1882 made the payment of wage subject to the completion of a daily task.

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native labour. 'Civilisation' ironically had to draw upon primitiveness as the justification of the exceptional. The 'legal' rights power to private arrest bestowed to the planters by the Act VI of 1865 for the 'absconding' coolie justified in the words of a Chief Commissioner as 'something more for the cost he [the planter] incurs, the inferior article he has to put up with, and the consequent risks he runs in losing by death or desertion the *coolie* he has paid for.'[15]

The rights to private arrest has been argued to have inaugurated the system of indenture or the penal-contract system in Assam, conditioning the operations of the labour market and nature of the labour process. Depression and stagnancy of wages, coercion and physical torture at the workplace and extremely authoritarian systems of control were said to be inherent to the system.[16]

The plantation regime and this system of penal contracts have at times been not just seen as curbing the labour market but said to have deterred the capacity of the coolie to involve in confrontational or collective modes of protest. Arguments have been made in other plantation context of labourers choosing accommodation and individual acts of passive resistance as a 'strategy' appreciating the 'realities' of the plantation system and structures of power in the larger colonial society.[17] The exodus in Chargola in the 1920s in the tea gardens of Assam, is seen at times as symptomatic of that change from individual to collective modes of protest—as a maturity

[15]Revenue and Agriculture Department, Emigration Branch, A Proceedings, Nos. 3–11, April 1893, New Delhi: National Archives of India (henceforth NAI).

[16]For more details on the indenture system in the tea plantations of Assam, see R. P. Behal, *Some aspects of the Growth of the Tea Plantation Labour Force and Labour Movements in Assam Valley Districts*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1983; Rana P. Behal and Prabhu P. Mohapatra, 'Tea and Money versus Human Life': The Rise and Fall of the Indenture System in the Assam Tea Plantations 1840–1908', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 19, pp. 3–4, 1992; Sanat Kumar Bose, *Capital and Labour in the Indian Tea Industry*, Bombay: AITUC, 1954. I have looked more closely into these positions and arguments at another place; see Nitin Varma, 'Coolie Acts and the Acting Coolies: Coolie, Planter and State in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century Colonial Tea Plantations of Assam', *Social Scientist*, vol. 33, May–June 2005, pp. 5–6.

[17]See Brij V. Lal, '"Non-resistance" on Fiji Plantations: The Fiji Indian Experience, 1879–1920', in *Plantation Workers, Resistance and Accommodation*, ed. Brij V. Lal and Dough Munro, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996, p. 188. Also see Martin J. Murray, 'White Gold' or 'White Blood'?: The Rubber Plantations of Colonial Indochina, 1910–40', pp. 56–59 and P. Ramasamy, 'Labour Control and Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya', 97–104; both articles in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 19, 1992, pp. 3–4.

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in its form.[18] Sukomal Sen, in his study of the working class of India illustrates such a progressive hierarchy of struggles of the plantation workers in Assam:

> Development of trade union consciousness and organisation among the tea plantation workers was a comparatively delayed phenomenon. Horrid isolation far from their homes, their ignorance, want of education, and difficulty of contact with the outside political and trade union workers, added with sharp vigil and revengeful attitude of the employers against any attempt for combination were factors responsible for the delayed process. Yet their elementary passion for resistance against exploitation, humiliation, physical torture, and many other sorts of sadism committed by the British planters matured in gradual course into a higher consciousness to safeguard their interests collectively. Their collective absentation from work and their determined decision to abandon the tea gardens as happened in May 1921 actually climaxed the manifestation of this consciousness.[19]

The transition from 'elementary' passions in the early days in the plantations to higher forms of collective bargaining as witnessed in Chargola, is analysed as 'maturity' of the forms of protest. The delay in these analyses is ascribed to the late development of trade union consciousness and associations among the tea workers of Assam.

[18]The Chargola exodus of 1921 is one of the most celebrated episodes of 'mass resistance' to the plantation systems in Assam. Early in May 1921, coolies struck work primarily in the Chargola valley in Surma Valley, apparently demanding a higher wage, which was refused by the authorities. It was followed by an en-masse desertion of coolies in batches, resolved to go back to their home districts, chanting victory cries to Mahatma Gandhi leading the Non-Cooperation movement against the colonial state, and claiming to serve under his orders. Beginning from one or two gardens, the entire valley by the middle of June was beginning to have a 'deserted' look, with two gardens reported to have 'lost' almost the entire labour force, and most of the gardens suffering 'losses' of around thirty to sixty per cent. In all, around 8,799 coolies left the gardens of Assam in this period. See Nitin Varma, *Coolie Exodus in Chargola: Mobilisation, Control and Collective Action in the Colonial Tea Plantations of Assam*, M.Phil. Dissertaton, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2003.

[19]Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India: History of Emergence and Movement, 1830–1990*, Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1997, p. 60. Also see Rana Behal, 'Forms of Labour Protest in Assam Valley Tea Plantations, 1900–1930', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 20, no. 4, January 1985, PE–20; Bose, *Capital and Labour in the Indian Tea Industry*, p. 96; Amalendu Guha, 'Formation of a Working Class in Assam Plantations: A Study in Retrospect', in *Problems of Tea Industry in North East India*, ed. North East India Council for Social Science Research, Calcutta: Research India Publications, 1981, p. 94.

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Protest and its modes are situated in an ahistorical teleological hierarchy where it only matures with the advent/contact of 'higher' forms of ideology like socialism and nationalism.

Do such conclusions conform to the evidence we have? Do we have instances of collective protest in the period of our enquiry? And what were the modes of association and forms of articulation of such actions?[20]

Before engaging with these lines of enquiry in this chapter, two points of qualification are in order. First, this exercise in no way attempts to create a false hierarchy between the confrontational collective/non-confrontational individualised modes of protest, valorising in effect the 'flashes of outbursts' in neglect to the 'everyday forms of protest'.[21] The primary concerns that motivates such an engagement, is to question the glaring absence and then a dramatic entry that such collective modes of protest are subject to, in most of the literary corpus.

Secondly, in emphasising the decontexualised 'moments', the oppression and torture that the coolies bound by penal-contracts had to go through can neither be denied nor said to be always suitably

[20]Some recent studies have brought to light the collective modes of bargaining for the early history of tea plantations in Assam. *Cacharis* who came from the districts of Darrang and Nowgong populated much of the gardens of the Assam Company. Because of the proximity of the plantations to their home districts and the absence of the penal-contracts curbing their freedom/movement they showed signs of collective bargaining and action. In 1846, around 250 cacharis absconded the garden of Assam Company at Satsoeah for being discriminated on the grounds of payment, being paid lower wages than the *Bengalees*. A more organised 'strike' took place in the year 1848, when the cacharis refused to receive one month's pay, which was nearly three months in arrears. Interestingly, they did not abscond and trek back to the native districts, but struck work for the recovery of wages. They finally returned to work not only after a promise of payment within 14 days but obtained a written agreement from the authorities of payment in future within 15 days of the due date. The switch to a migrant labour force and the introduction of Workman Breach Contract Act [Act XIII of 1859] and the more elaborate system of penal-contracts [Assam Emigrant Act] have often been argued to be fallouts of such bargaining instincts shown by the local labour; see Sircar, 'Labour and Management: First Twenty Years of Assam Company Limited (1839–59)'.

[21]Desertion for example has been argued to be a very prevalent avenue of escaping the harsh life in the plantations. The right to private arrest as empowered by the Act VI of 1865 and the elaborate system of policing and tracking down of the 'absconders' could not deter the rates of desertion. There were 2584 desertions in 1877, 9855 in 1884, 6432 in 1897 and 10,244 in 1900. Behal, 'Forms of Labour Protest', p. 20.

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'resisted'. Flash points in that case though a crucial commentary on the relationship, masks the deeper processes and anxieties at work.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE *SAHIB*

The system of penal-contracts to a large extent had a bearing in the formation and articulation of the authority structure within the plantations in Assam. Authority within the tea gardens headed by the manager constituted an elaborate hierarchy of European employees and native staff. This authority structure has been at times seen to be exclusively premised on a strong element of physical violence and coercion backed by legal 'rights' like that of private arrest. Such views fail to appreciate the normalising strategies that went into the making of these relationships of authority, and give a selective view of them, operating in an exclusively conflictual domain. The perpetuation of the relationships of authority was not premised just on coercive technologies of control but also by invoking the cultural/social idioms of authority. However in emphasising the relational aspect the point one wants to make is that the project was far from complete.

Authority within the plantation showing strong paternalistic inclinations was seen to be invested in the person of the manager (the *burra sahib)*. It was therefore of no surprise that a particular garden was often identified with its manager and the discharge of wage and non-wage benefits on it was seen to be his prerogative and obligation. A book meant to better acquaint the managers with his coolie population describes the 'ideal *sahib*', as fulfilling such roles:

> ...[the] attractiveness of the Estate [for the *coolies*] lies, not so much in the offer of material amenities but in a *feeling of confidence and faith in the management, in brief, the personality of the manager* ... the sahib who can speak to the labourer in his own language ... who understands that leave is essential at certain festivals ... who is aware that three or four days off each year are necessary to perform 'sradh' ceremonies for deceased parents and relatives, and does not jeer and laugh when an application is made year after year beginning with the formula 'my father is dead'; who does not insist on a Dom and Kurmi living cheek by jowl in perfectly appointed barracks, but will grant a location to a group of caste fellows and let them construct their own bastis.... such a sahib is an epitome of the attractiveness

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of an estate where it is possible to live and work in comfort and without peril to soul.[22]

The fulfilment of such responsibilities and obligations was not just a part of the job of the manager but crucially the basis of his legitimacy.[23]

DUSTOOR: NEGOTIATING THE CUSTOMARY

The year 1896 was marked by a change in the management in the gardens of Jellupur (Cachar), Bhagaicherra (Sylhet) and Barjan (Sibsagar).[24] Within a few days, not only were there cases of assaults and organised attacks on the new set of authority but in one instance, the bungalow of the new manager—the most visible manifestation of his authority—was burnt down. In a very interesting case reported from Madhabpur garden (Sylhet, 1902),[25] coolies made an organised attack on the manager who had come to the lines to collect the hoes from the coolies. The coolies, who had been in the habit of retaining the hoes, resented this new move. A more violent and glaring case of the 'reaction' to a new practice introduced by the management was seen in the Rowmari tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1903), which formed the immediate context for the enquiry into the 'deteriorating' relationship between the coolies and managers. Coolies in the garden traditionally used umbrellas while working in the rain but were now compelled to use *jhampis* (a kind of wide brimmed hat). The coolies protested and made assaults on the manager, the assistant manager, and the head clerk of the garden. About two

[22]*Handbook of Caste and Tribes employed on Tea-Estates in North-East India*, Calcutta: Indian Tea Association, 1924, p. 5.

[23]For details on the authority structure within plantations see Sharit Bhowmick, *Class Formation in the Plantation System*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1981 and Ranajit Dasgupta, 'Plantation Labour in Colonial India', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 19, nos. 3–4, 1992, pp. 175–198. Memoirs of planters give a first hand account of the operations of such authority structures; see George M. Barker, *Tea Planter's Life in Assam*, Calcutta: Thacker, Sphinx & Co., 1884 and A. R. Ramsden, *Assam Planter: Tea Planting and Hunting in the Assam Jungle*, London: John Glifford Ltd., 1945.

[24]My main source is the *'List of serious cases of Assault on tea gardens of Assam'*, Rev A, 77–117, August 1904, Assam State Archives, Dispur (henceforth ASA). All cases/ incidents are cited from this source unless otherwise mentioned.

[25]The identification used is (district in which the garden in discussion is located, year of the incident). This mode of identification would be retained during the course of this discussion.

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hundred of them then went in to Dibrugarh, where they assembled in front of the *kutcherry* ventilating their grievance.

P. G. Meltius, the Commissioner of Assam valley districts, reflecting on the incidence of collisions between employers and coolies made in the wake of the Rowmari incident, though highly unrealistic about its nature and degree, made a very interesting observation:

> ... *Coolies* know little of the rules, but round the rules certain local practices or *dustoors,* varying from garden to garden and on particular points possibly even conflicting with rules, have grown up, with the details of which they are intimately acquainted, and *it is the departure from dustoors in a direction unfavourable to them which they really resent.*[26]

The evidence that has been cited fits perfectly with the statements. The coolies used to a particular manager, a particular practice (using umbrellas, retaining the hoes) or broadly to a particular custom (*dustoor*) were resenting changes to it. However, while retaining the usage of the dustoor, I will refrain from using it in this narrow sense, arguing instead that it did not necessarily mean the expectation of a continuation of practice, task or wage, but a sort of collective belief that an expected standard of 'material' and 'cultural' well-being was respected and ensured. What was considered as expected, just and legitimate was the subject of bargaining and struggle between managers and coolies.[27] The idea does not make a claim where each and every act of outrage/oppression was necessarily resisted collectively, but simply argues that it was not as if everything went unchallenged. To cite a letter from the Subdivisional Officer of South Sylhet to Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet explaining the reasons behind 'serious disturbances' (read collective action) in the tea gardens:

[26]Letter from P. G. Meltius, Commissioner of the Assam Valley Districts to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 6 May 1904, Rev A, 77–117, August 1904, ASA. Emphasis mine.

[27]I am using customary in the sense the Genoveses have pointed out, which they argue represented 'a compromise hammered out in real class struggle. To speak of custom means to identify the range of activity, called privileges by the masters, assumed as rights by the slaves ... which flowed from the master's knowledge that the violation of norms would carry an unacceptable level of risk; Elizabeth Fox Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism,* New York, 1983, cited in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 180.

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Provocation (for unrest) may be supplied by the idea (well founded or otherwise) that wages are too low, the introduction of some new *dustoor* or some indiscretion on the part of the manager. Some act of the manager may in itself be sufficient cause for the disturbance, but it is generally not sufficient in itself to account for the serious disturbance that sometimes occur, in which the majority of a labour force take part.[28]

This clearly indicates that a simple cause-effect, ringleader/malcontent explanation is not sufficient enough for collective action within the plantations. An elucidation of the term 'collective' in that case would be in order. Here, 'collective' is not used as a shorthand for an 'undifferentiated *coolie* community' residing in the garden and also not necessarily for the 'pre-existing' solidarities of tribe/ ethnicity and the notions associated with it. Collective at these times of mobilisation was defined by and drew upon various anxieties and legitimising strategies.[29]

The coolies apart from the work in the gardens indulged in small-scale agriculture in lands which the management rented out or as small tenants or sub-tenants in the nearby government lands. This was encouraged by the management as a part of the cost of reproduction of the workforce borne in the agricultural sector and thereby make a below subsistence wage and a flexible workforce possible. But in the peak season of the tea crop, when the demand for working hands was greatest, the coolie's involvement in her/his own agrarian practices was resented and the management indulged in various coercive and non-coercive means to make them work on the gardens. The seizure of hoeing tools provided by the gardens, which the coolies would have also been using for their own agriculture, is made intelligible in this light. However the coolies used to this practice for long, could not come to terms with its legitimacy and reasonableness, protesting the move.

In the case of the Rowmari incident, investigations showed that the garden, of late, was showing signs of strict discipline and

[28]Letter from H. L. Thomas, Subdivisional officer, South Sylhet to the Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet. dated 23 January 1904, Rev A, 77–117, August 1904, ASA.

[29]Anxiety could be the outrage of the cultural/religious/caste norm, harsh treatment on an individual, payment of short wages or the stoppage of non-wage benefits like the rice advances and land for cultivation. At times it was considered illegitimate to outrage the modesty of a woman as to pay short wages or arbitrarily increase the tasks. I am not using strategy as a strictly conscious plan of action.

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production speedups. Unlike the broad rimmed hat, which allowed both the hands of the coolie to be used for plucking leaves, the umbrella had to be held with one hand which affected the efficiency of plucking and the reluctance to this change could have been a 'form of resistance to the speed-up of production demanded by the garden.'[30] A riot reported from Joyhing tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1896) where the managerial authorities were forcing the coolies to work on Sundays can also be appreciated in this light.

Changes in the management were often resented because it brought in its wake new patterns of work and management of labour. A very illustrative riot reported from Tehapara garden (Sylhet, 1916) clearly points to this. Coolies of this particular garden, were for some time, gravely dissatisfied with certain rules and the harsh practices of labour control introduced by the new manager. Provoked by an incident of assault by the person in question, the whole coolie population of the garden consisting of hundreds of men, women and children collected near the dispensary and confined him and his assistant alongwith the head *babu*, native doctor and a *sardar* in a stable. Bricks and bamboo sticks were relentlessly pelted on the detained party.[31]

Apart from the wages given by the gardens, non-wage benefits like land for cultivation and grazing, rice and cloth advances and at times loans of need formed a substantial part of the entire package. There was no standardised pattern of such 'benefits' and it varied from district to district and even from one garden to the other. Changes and withdrawals at times drew deep resentment, expressed at times collectively. When the rice advances were stopped by the management of the Bardeobam tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1900), coolies made a collective demonstration and refused to work. A more violent reaction was observed in Kharbon garden (Lakhimpur, 1904) where the usual custom of giving women under Act agreement 6 seers of rice a week at Rs 3 a maund was reduced to 5 seers:

> On 19th June 1901, Mr. Macindoe [the manager] paid rice to the *coolies*, but the *coolies* raised hue and cry at the reduced rate ...[he] took refuge in his

[30]Rana Behal Rana and Prabhu P. Mohapatra, 'Tea and Money versus Human Life', pp. 165–66.

[31]Letter from B. C. Allen, Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to Secretary to Government of India. Home Department, Police Branch, March 1916, no. 103, Part B, NAI.

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office with some of his men, but the *coolies* burst open the door and threw bricks and bamboos at them.

Such discrimination was often felt by the newer coolies who were generally placed at the bottom of the priority list in such allocations. Some new recruits of the Bordubi garden (Lakhimpur, 1902) alleged that they were not given enough rice and refused to work. When the manager forcibly attempted to turn them to work, he was attacked by the aggrieved party, and had to protect himself by using a revolver.

That these 'benefits' were not just seen as 'customary' in the sense that it was not open to change, for at times the coolies did not merely resent to the stoppage or discrimination on the concessions but expected the garden management to respond to the situations of want and scarcity. In a very representative case, coolies of Towkok garden (Sibsagar, 1894) came in a body and demanded rice from the garden *godown* on a day which was the not the usual day of issue. However, the refusal on this account could not calm the agitated coolies who made a collective attack on the godown and the men protecting it. The coolies of Dhoedhan garden (Lakhimpur, 1920) assaulted the manager and destroyed bungalow and property of the garden when their demand for the increase in 'concession rice' and payments were not met.[32]

Religious festivals and social occasions were often the sites where such negotiations and 'what was legitimate' was tested and contested. The coolies of Barjuli garden (Darrang, 1891), showed great reluctance in getting back to work on a day immediately after an important religious festival—*Karampuja*.[33] The assistant manager, who was on

[32]The average wage paid in these gardens in September 1920 was substantially lower than the average wage paid in September 1919 and a downward tendency in wages failed to respond to the abnormal increase in prices. The decrease in benefits and wages meant all the more 'unreasonable' when the tea companies owing these gardens were paying dividends as high as 35 per cent in the same years. 'Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report, 1921–22', p. 7 and Guha, 'Formation of a working class in Assam Plantations', pp. 89–90.

[33]Festivals like *Karampuja* seem to have had strains of communitarian solidarity. In our fieldwork in the Duars plantation region (May–June 2000) we found that this is a festival practised by most of the labour population of the tea gardens. In this yearly ritual the branch of the tree *karam* is buried. This is further circulated throughout the labour line stopping at each quarter in which vermillion (this act of application of *sindur* is symbolic of the transfer of the evil spirits in the vicinity into the branch) was applied to the branch. Subsequently it is taken to a nearby river or stream where it was immersed. Samrat Chaudhury and Nitin Varma, 'Between Gods/

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his usual rounds of the lines to turn the coolies out for work did not pay any heed to such calls forcing some coolies and assaulting a resisting sardar. The incensed coolies made a collective offensive on the assistant manager chasing him out of the coolie lines. In a similar case reported from the Holonguri garden (Sibsagar, 1900), the Santal coolies demanded a holiday on the occasion of *Kalipuja*. When the manager refused such calls and went down the lines on a horseback to induce them to work, an army of coolies surrounded him with sticks. Again when the manager of Kellyden garden (Nowgong, 1898) and his assistant, attempted to turn the coolies out to work, after three days' holiday given for the Holi, they encountered opposition; and on the attempt of the assistant to hold a woman by the hand to induce her to go to work, a number of coolies attacked him and the manager with sticks.

KI KATRI MAIKE MARILE:[34] *COOLIE* WOMEN AND COMMUNAL *IZZAT*

In a case reported from Alinagar garden (Sylhet, 1900), the coolies had struck work. When the assistant manager came to make enquiries, he was attacked and severely beaten by some of the coolies. The official report on the incident read:

> The case appears to have originated in some violence on the part of the assistant manager of the estate, who as the accused said took their *izzat* from them.

What was this *izzat* that the coolies complained that was taken from them? Often it signified the coolie women; seen as the repository of izzat (honour) that became the sites on which such contestations of legitimacy/honour were undertaken. The manager of Nadua tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1899) was severely assaulted by the coolies for

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Goddesses/Demons and 'Science': Perceptions of Health and Medicine among Plantation Labourers in Jalpaiguri District, Bengal', *Social Scientist*, vol. 30, no. 5–6, May–June 2002, p. 32.

[34] Literally translated as 'Why did you beat up the girl' (Sadani language)—it was the question posed by one Gambhir to the manager of Koliapani garden after he manhandled a girl Durgi. Home Department, Police Branch, July 1914, no. 67, Part B, NAI.

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an attempt to 'outrage' a coolie girl. In another case reported from Hatikuri Tea Estate (Cachar, 1913), a collective assault was made on the assistant engineer who continued despite objections of inspecting the leaves plucked by the women coolies collected in clothes worn round their waists. Six coolies were charged and arrested for rioting and assault. The legitimacy of the act of assault on the official, and the communal approval to it was more clearly revealed when an attack was made on the arresting party by the other coolies of the garden and the arrested men forcibly released. On further enquiries of the incident it was found that the coolies were for sometime gravely dissatisfied with this mode of examination of leaves and had made several complaints to the head writer of the garden.[35]

However it was not just the cases of sexual exploitation/outrage of women, but their oppression at the workplace that often led to a collective sense of illegitimacy of such acts, provoking communal action. On the assault of a coolie woman for disobedience of orders by the manager, forty coolies of Silghat tea garden (Nowgong, 1890) severely handled him. In a similar case reported from Suramcherra garden (Sylhet, 1899), five coolies came with *daos* into the manager's bungalow on his assistant striking a coolie woman for doing bad work. Again when the coolie women of Sapakati garden (Sibsagar, 1892) engaged in plucking tasks were put on hoeing work as a punishment by the manager, who felt that they had turned out late for their usual task, a number of coolies set upon him and beat him severely.

In a case reported from Koliapani garden (Sibsagar, 1905), one can more clearly understand the dynamics of how a 'small' act of assault on a coolie girl could provoke communal anxieties of their honour being threatened and snowball into a major act of collective action. The manager of the garden in question, a Mr Mangin, on his daily inspection of the pruning tasks took a coolie girl Durgi by her ear to a place where he felt that she should have been working. Four or five men working nearby immediately came rushing up to him and one among them, Gambhir, in a very agitated mood questioned the manager, *'Ki katri maike marile?'* [Why did you beat up the girl?] Soon around thirty men joined them, from where they had been working, and an assault on the manager by clods and *lathis* ensued. The fleeing manager was subjected to a siege by about

[35]Letter from W. J. Reid to Secretary to Government of India, Home Department, Home Department, Police Branch, July 1914, no. 67, Part B, NAI.

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a hundred and fifty coolies in his bungalow and like missiles pieces of wood were thrown. Later in the day, all the Koliapani coolies, men and women numbering around two hundred reached Jorhat—the subdivisional headquarters, and made complaints to the Deputy Commissioner that the sahib threatened their izzat.[36]

THE VIOLENCE OF PROTEST, THE PROTEST OF VIOLENCE

A very crucial feature of the resistance/protest of the coolies was the strong element of physical violence. Apart from physical attack, assault by appliances used in the plantation work like hoes, *kodalis*, sticks and daos became weapons at these moments of confrontational protests. It needs to be emphasised that physical abuse and torture was an integral part of the disciplining process of the authority structure of the plantations and so the challenge to it led to an inversion and recasting of the violence and abusive behaviour manifested often on the managers, on whom such an authority was invested.[37]

Such a process is most clearly revealed in the cases of assaults on individuals, which at times was deemed 'excessive' and met with organised opposition. On the caning of a coolie in one the gardens of Lakhimpur district in 1884, by the new manager the other coolies retaliated and beat him severely. In another case from the same district in 1889, some Cacharis were convicted for 'uniting and threatening a manager who had, while pointing out to them the way in which some work should be done, 'tapped' one of them with a cane.' On the public caning of a coolie from Bokel tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1893), the coolies attacked the manager on whose orders such an act was perpetrated. An aggravated assault with hoes was committed by a number of coolies of Laskarpur (Sylhet, 1897) on the manager who had given three strokes with a stick to one of the coolies in punishment for assaulting a sardar. The coolies of the Bowalia tea garden (Cachar,1884) assaulted and besieged the manager's bungalow

[36]*Case 22 G. R. of 1905, P. C. Mangin versus Tulsi Kairi, Kamal Kairi, Ramcharan Ganju, Arjun Goala, Bhandari Ganju, Jagua Bhumiz, Lachman Muchi, Sibchoran; Sections 147, 148 IPC*, Home Department, Police Branch, July 1905, nos. 105–107, Part B, NAI.

[37]Dipesh Chakrabarty in the context of Calcutta jute mill worker argues that the rebel worker inverted the terms of his relationship, and overturned the two major everyday signs of his subordination: abusive language and physical violence. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, pp. 181–82.

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for some hours for caning a boy in the presence of the assembled coolies.[38] Again when a boy in Namgaon tea garden (Darrang, 1918) was slapped for causing disturbance while certain coolie women were being paid, the coolies attacked the Manager and the Assistant Manager and wrecked the office building.[39] A coolie in the Apin tea garden (Cachar, 1895) was ordered by the manager to bring back certain coolies who had absconded. While returning back to the garden, two of the apprehended coolies escaped. He was severely disciplined by the manager who beat him up with a stick. Later in the day, when the manager was making the rounds of the garden, the coolies attacked him. One caught hold of the bridle of his pony and others threatened him with kodalis.

The case of Aghna, a *chaukidar* at the bungalow of Dr Patherson (Moran tea garden, Lakhimpur, 1902) who beat him up with a riding whip is an illustrative case of the communal disenchantment. The official report of the incident read:

> Dr Patherson of Moran tea estate found fault with a *coolie* named Aghna and slapped him; this enraged him and his relations. Aghna and three other *coolies* brought a number of *coolies* and formed an unlawful assembly, with the common object of insulting and intimidating Dr Patherson and Mr Harroks (the manager).

The 'enragement' of Aghna and his relations, which the Deputy Commissioner's report suggests grossly, underestimates the resentment the incident provoked. The 'unlawful assembly' consisted of around sixty coolies of the garden who followed the carriage of the manager and doctor, as they were driving home through the lines, using abusive and threatening language.

There was yet another case of multiple assault on Matadin, a coolie of Monai garden (1914) by the manager, assistant manager and their orderlies leading to him being hospitalised in a very critical condition. The incensed coolies of the garden formed a body of about two hundred, took the ailing Matadin from the hospital and proceeded to leave the garden. The manager in his endeavours

[38]*Report on Labour Immigration into Assam during the year 1884*, Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1885 and Dwarkanath Ganguli, *Slavery in British Dominion*, Calcutta: Jijnasa, 1972, pp. 36–37, (reprint of articles from *Bengalee*, September 1886 to April 1887).

[39]Resolution on Immigrant Labour in Assam for the year 1918–19.

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to induce them to return, rode on a horseback after them. One of them Ramadin, (possibly a relative of Matadin), seized the Manager's horse by the bridle, ordering him to dismount and struck him with a lathi. The cornered manager drew out his revolver and fired a shot at Ramadin. Enraged at this, the other coolies attacked the manager with lathis till he fell unconscious. The coolies then broke into two parties, one of which administered a severe beating to a Sikh *havildar* and the other party went searching for a particular *jamadar*.[40]

It is interesting to note that sometimes these moments of defiance were not restricted to the particular individual on whom the authority was invested (the manager); but the symbolic manifestations of his authority (bungalow, tea-house, the figure of him riding the horse etc.) and the other individuals perpetuating this authority structure (sardar, jamadar, European and native staff, and even the local police administration who made frequent visits to the gardens to arrest the 'defaulting' coolies and were actively involved in the arrest of absconding coolies on the complaints made by the manager) became potential targets.

Generally, such actions took on a deeper connotation when the person in question was 'respected' in the community. An incident from Talap tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1898) clearly reflected such sentiments:

> A *sardar* of long standing who had been abused by one of the assistant managers for sitting down and talking to some *sardars* when they ought to work incited the *coolies* to make an attack upon the manager and his three assistants.

Two years later, in the same garden, a riot occurred under similar circumstances:

> ... Mr Jameson, a newly joined assistant, was trying to explain to the *coolies* how ticca plucking should be done. The *coolies* either could not or would not understand his orders, so he took hold of the *sardar* and ran him up to the place where the plucking was to begin. He was attacked with sticks.

[40]Letter from B. C. Allen, Offg Chief Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Assam to Secretary to Government of India, Home Department, dated 20 June 1914, Home Department, Police Branch, August 1914, nos. 120–22, NAI.

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In Singrimari tea garden (Darrang, 1900), the manager finding fault with some bad hoeing, reprimanded the two *daffadar*s in charge and struck them with a cane, whereupon about thirty Cachari coolies threatened to assault the manager with their hoes.

'YOU MUST FINISH YOUR TASK ELSE YOU WILL BE SHORT PAID':[41] WORK RELATED GRIEVANCES

It was not always assaults, abuse and outrage of social norms, that formed the object of collective anxiety and action; there were also specific wage related grievances. In a case reported from Barhalla tea garden (Sibsagar, 1892), the manager refused to pay a coolie and ordered him to be taken away for supposedly making a disturbance during the distribution of wages. The coolie in question called out to the other assembled coolies to seize the manager, and then broken bricks and clay were thrown at him and his assistant. Again, a coolie of Hukanpukri garden (Lakhimpur, 1900) objected to the sum being paid to him as *ticca* (overtime work) demanding an immediate enquiry. The assistant manager Hennessy went down and struck the dissenting man with his fist. This led to a deep sense of agitation among the three hundred assembled coolies who surrounded the bungalow of the assistant and threw bricks into it. They finally made a charge inside the building, but the assistant alongwith two other European staff made an escape through the bathroom. On this the party of coolies proceeded to assault the native establishment of the garden as they fancied that they had helped the sahibs to escape. Some 50 or 60 Oriya coolies of Sephanjuri (Sylhet, 1902) made a collective protest on the refusal of the manager to give one of them leave. A large quantity of plucked leaves was thrown away, and many of the coolies left the garden.

An interesting case representing the solidarities formed at the workplace was reported from Khawang garden (Lakhimpur, 1914). The manager of the garden on his usual rounds of inspection found faults with the way a female coolie, Durapati, was plucking. Later in the day when the female coolies were being paid for their daily tasks, the manager told her to wait till he finished paying the other women. Durapati apprehending that the manager would not pay

[41] *Santhali Language Handbook*, p. 40.

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her on account of her defiance asked the other women present not to leave until she was paid. The other women on finding such apprehensions coming true made a rush towards the manager, who had to take refuge inside the office in company of his head clerk. This move proved futile as the women made a siege of the office and kept Mr Saunders [the manager] a prisoner for three hours. Windows were broken, abuses were hurled and broken bricks were thrown.[42]

A similar incident was reported from Adabari garden (Sylhet, 1897), where certain coolies in order to earn ticca money went voluntarily to work on a Sunday. The assistant manager, overlooking that it was Sunday and that the coolies could stop working when they liked, ordered them back again. This created a general feeling of discontent and anger, and shortly after, at the tea-house several women attacked another European assistant (who had really not been responsible), beat him on the head with their umbrellas, and threw him over into a ditch. Several male coolies, who were present, stood looking on—encouraging the women.[43]

Again, a collective complaint was made by around 150 to 200 coolies of Khorikotia garden (Sibsagar, 1899), that they did not get enough leave in the middle of the day. This led to a heated discussion with the manager who caught a coolie by his hair and threw him down. On this the whole crowd turned on him and the manager received several blows from the lathis.

As said before, wages and tasks at times formed the reason, behind collective grievance and action. In this case, it is important to bear in mind the mode of assessment and payment of wages in the gardens. The coolie in order to earn his daily wage (*hazira)* had to complete a standard daily task (*nirikh)*; the payment for work over and above the standard task, amounted to what was called as ticca (or the overtime work). The nirikh was not determined by a fixed amount of hours put in daily by the coolie, but by the work assigned by the supervising authorities as constituting a reasonable

[42]*King Emperor versus Durapati and Nine Others*, Home Department, Police Branch, September 1914, no. 139, NAI.

[43]John Kelly, in his study of the Fiji plantation cites a similar report by an overseer of Fiji plantation of work-gangs of women coolies disciplining their European overseers by capturing them, beating them, immobilising them and urinating on them. Such an act, argues Kelly, had a sexual dimension to it, for the 'dignity of the overseer, his masculine, sexual, controlling persona could not survive it.' John D. Kelly, '*Coolie*' as a Labour Commodity', pp. 259–63.

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day's labour. The assignment of tasks to the individuals was also contingent on the tea plant cycle and the state and demands of the industry. In the cold weather the coolies were especially hard pressed with a sharp drop in the works within the garden and the tasks being far from remunerative.[44]

The two primary tasks worked out on the gardens were hoeing and plucking.[45] Measurements of hoeing tasks primarily done by the men, were made by the *nal*, a measuring device, or counting the rows of tea bushes or *galis*. As planting was not uniform everywhere the two measurements did not necessarily coincide. Plucking done almost exclusively by women and young children was one of the most labour-intensive jobs within the gardens. This was also contingent on local geographical conditions and was carried out by taking various other factors into account.[46]

There was no necessary consistency among the tasks in the different gardens and the remuneration for them. However, each garden at a particular point in time evolved the rates (its dustoor) which could not always show arbitrary changes and revisions. At times such revisions were deemed as excessive, unreasonable, and more than anything else illegitimate, provoking collective rejection. It further emphasises the bargaining instincts of the coolie with the management in evolving what was the dustoor and hence the legitimate rate. Such was the case in Kharjan tea estate (1901) when the pruning task was increased from 25 nals to 30 nals, which the coolies refused to accept. The manager summoned the coolies to his bungalow and asked one man, Gulali whether he had finished his task. Gulali answered in an affirmative going by the old rates, which was immediately contradicted by the *muharrir* (clerk). Mr Powell [the manager] then slapped Gulali, on which the coolies present attacked him with their

[44]Special Report on the working of Act I for the years 1886–89, p. 218–19; *Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report 1921–22*, (henceforth *ALECR*), Shillong, 1922, p. 204.

[45]Hoeing was essentially done by men at different rates—for the light surface hoe was carried out 5 to 7 times a year and a deep hoe done once a year; *ALECR*, p. 65.

[46]The three important considerations were the season, the method of plucking and the species of tea bush. Again on the same garden, there were variable conditions—the flush might have been full or weak, plucking might have to be carried on from behind the flush or by getting in front of it; bushes could have been fine, as in the flat or the less producing bushes on the *tilas*. Distance was also a factor, where in some gardens the planted areas were close by to the coolie lines and tea houses while in some others it could be as far as a mile.

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sticks. Powell took refuge inside his bungalow where he was confined with his assistant and the muharrirs for nearly two hours. Again when the hoeing task was increased in Pathiacherra tea garden (Sylhet, 1902) the discontented coolies made an attack on the sardar and assaulted the manager. On the increase of the hoeing task of Bangaon garden (Darrang, 1903), the coolies worked under the new rates for few days but eventually struck work. When the chaukidar and jamadar tried to get them back to work, the coolies threatened to assault them. They finally assembled outside the garden office with hoes in hand and left only after ventilating their complaints. The collective expression against such acts deemed as illegitimate was most visibly expressed, when about sixty coolies from Sessa tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1901) left their gardens and made an appearance before the Assistant Commissioner, Dibrugarh, complaining that tasks within their garden was excessive.

The tasks within the gardens were not only subject to arbitrary changes but their assessment and payment of wages based on that was also open to the 'interpretations' and 'readings' of the various supervising authorities. Cases can be cited of underassessment, disparity and corrupt practices in the determining of the day's labour. The language handbook meant to facilitate the managers to conduct their supervisory tasks in the native language contains phrases, which makes for a very interesting and suggestive reading in this context:

Work and Thikka and earning[47]

You must come to *'hazri'* at 7 O'clock, I see you coming late to work everyday. If you come late in future you will be turned back to your home.

This is your task. You must finish it; else you will be short paid. Others can finish it, why can't you?

What is the brick doing in your basket?

You are trying to get extra weight.

You must pick out the coarse leaves before I can weigh it.

However, it was not as if every such deviation from the 'norms' were justified and met with no resistance. There were complaints made by the Bengali coolies of Balipara tea garden (Sylhet, 1890), of being paid less than what they had actually earned during the month; when the manager went to look into the matter he was assaulted. Again when the management of Mirtinga tea garden (Sylhet, 1903),

[47]*Santhali Language Handbook*, pp. 40–41.

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stopped the pay of the coolies on account of bad work, they collected in a threatening manner and used abusive language in protest. The issue of short wages in Tiphuk garden (Lakhimpur, 1899) created a great amount of discontent among Garo and cachari coolies. The manager called a leading man of the dissenting group and struck him a blow for his defiance. This led to all Garo and cachari coolies attacking the manager.

The assessment and verification of the fieldwork was the duty and responsibility of the native staff and their excessiveness at times met with collective resistance. When the coolies of Khobang tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1892), were paid short wages they assaulted the head and hazira muharrir whom they thought to be responsible for the faulty assessment of their tasks leading to them being paid less than what they deserved. Often the manager became the target of such discrepancies as he was seen to be in the position of authority and therefore accountable for the actions of his subordinates. In Titadimoru garden, (Lakhimpur, 1900) there was grave dissatisfaction among the coolies on the way in which the new muharrir was conducting the weighing of leaf. The dissatisfied coolies threatened the manager, Mr Macdonald. In another instance, when the manager of Amrailcherra tea garden (Sylhet, 1902) sided with the garden muharrir against whom the coolies had grievances, there was a general strike and the coolies outrightly refused to work. On the use of coercion by the manager to get back the coolies to work, he was assaulted by two men with hoes and was severely injured.

Grievances were articulated when the payments of wages did not show consistency and regularity or there was deviation from the 'agreed' practice. On the non-payment of wages on the regular pay-day, the coolies of Scottpur garden (Cachar, 1896), declined to work. Again when the tasks of the previous day was not assessed and haziras not paid, coolies of the Rema tea estate (Sylhet, 1898) refused to work. On the use of physical intimidation by the manager to get them back to work, the coolies made a collective assault on him. They were ordered to the muster ground where they attacked the manager, and struck him several blows with sticks and stones.

In an interesting case reported from Powai tea garden (Lakhimpur, 1917), Grant, the assistant manager, on a Monday afternoon, came to his office to pay the coolies what they had earned in the previous week by hoeing at contract rates. The assembled coolies seemed to be in an agitated and infuriated mood and Grant sensing danger

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made a rush for his bungalow but was struck several times on the way. The office premise was ransacked, and the furniture and papers destroyed. Next morning, despite the presence of police in the garden, about 500 coolies with sticks and knives came out beating drums and marched round the lines in procession. Later in the day, the local *kaya*'s (trader) shop was wrecked.

On the investigations into the incident, it was revealed that there was general discontentment on account of the garden authorities delaying the normal practice of weekly payments from Saturdays to Mondays. This meant that the coolies did not get money in time for the weekly Sunday bazaar. They were forced into taking loans from the local kaya, whose prices they considered extortionate. The simultaneous attacks, on the symbols representing the garden authorities and the local trader, were out of this apprehension that there was a collusion between the two parties and the change in the timing of payment of weekly wages was made to benefit the kayas.[48]

THE COLLECTIVE WILL TO LEAVE

Confrontational/ violent modes of collective articulation of dissent, as we have seen, were not entirely absent in the period of our study. The expression of anxieties and at times purposeful action showed an appreciation of their social/material context and the process of negotiation which it was subject to. However the modes of expression at times were not limited to violent confrontational attacks on the authority and its contiguous symbols but instances of collective desire to leave the gardens can also be cited. At times, this reflected the bankruptcy of legitimacy of the authority within the garden arising out of an extreme outrage of social/material interests.

In a very well publicised 'Mesaijan affair' (Lakhimpur, 1888) a large body of coolies left the garden extremely distressed with the brutal treatment meted out to three coolie women of the garden.

[48]Letter from J. C. Webster, Chief Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Assam to Secretary to Government of India, dated 23 April 1917, Home Department, Police Branch, June 1917, no. 115, NAI. When the prices demanded by the traders were found to be unjustifiably high, there were cases of *hat* looting in Bindukhuri and Balipara gardens (Darrang, 1901). Again, cases were reported of attack on *kaya*'s shops and raiding of weekly hat in the Samdang and Hukanjuri gardens (Lakhimpur, 1920). Behal, 'Forms of Labour Protest', PE 6.

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The Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur gives the following account of the case:

A large body of coolies left the garden and came to the station, complaining of ill-treatment. They stated that both men and women had been flogged; in the case of women that they had been tied to a post in the porch of the manager's house, their clothes lifted up to their waists, and that they had been beaten on the bare buttocks with a stirrup leather by the orders of the Assistant manager, Mr Anding. The DSP went out and enquired, and found that two women, Panoo and Khumti, had been assaulted in the way described. I myself went out, and, on further enquiring ascertained that a woman named Sukni had also been beaten some three or four times. The women Panoo and Khumti had been flogged for desertion, and Sukni for short work.

The act of disciplining could not have been but considered extremely unreasonable, for it was not only made into a spectacle (tied in front of the manager's house where the other coolies could see it) and was brutal (flogged with leather stirrups on their buttocks) but also persistent (one individual beaten three or four times) and repeated (the treatment was meted out to three different women). That it was inflicted on the women coolies of the garden, could also have provoked the patriarchal anxieties of honour and the threat to it.

The case cited, of coolies leaving the Monai garden (1914), after an assault was made on one of the coolies, Matadin, can be better appreciated in this light. The unreasonableness of the act provoking this response was not only because of the disciplining that Matadin was subject to, but the fact that he was punished for the same mistake on three different occasions, by the manager, the assistant manager and by the orderlies of these authorities, could not have but made it extremely illegitimate and highly excessive.[49]

In the year 1891, the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur talks of groups of coolies leaving the gardens. In one case certain Rewa coolies left the garden in large numbers articulating various grievances relating to work and life within the plantation:

The case of the Khabang garden has been specially reported. A large number of Rewa coolies struck work, declaring that they had come up for four

[49]Home Department, Police Branch, August 1914, nos. 120–22, NAI.

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months only.... they came to the station enmasse in spite of the protests of the manager and made various complaints ... sent back [to the garden], and shortly after there was a riot on the garden, in course of which the manager was seriously assaulted. The allegations of fraudulent recruitment and ill-treatment were disproved. The *coolies* were from a new labour district, and did not like to work...

Continuing with reports of such collective desertions, the Deputy Commissioner writes:

In two other cases, batches of coolies came to complain of overwork, insufficient food etc.... [The] Superintendent sent a large number of Ganjamese *coolies* who insisted on coming into *cutcherry*.... Their complaint against *sardar* was at once remedied by the Superintendent.

Often such cases of collective withdrawal of work and the decision to leave the garden, were not only due to the presence of specific grievances, but the lack of faith on the garden authorities to resolve such concerns and therefore the futility to indulge in a negotiatory process within them and in turn appeal to a different set of authority. Such tendencies were evident, be it in case of the sixty coolies in Sessa garden (Lakhimpur, 1901) appearing before the Assistant Commissioner, Dibrugarh alleging excessive tasks within the garden, or the two hundred coolies of Rowmari (Lakhimpur, 1904) making their way to the sub-divisional headquarters at Dibrugarh complaining against the introduction of a new practice (of using jhampis instead of umbrellas) or the entire population of Koliapani garden (Sibsagar, 1905), numbering around two hundred, men and women included going upto Jorhat, the subdivisional headquarters, and making complaints to the Deputy Commissioner that the sahib threatened their izzat, on account of the assault made on a coolie girl by the manager.[50]

At least three cases in the second decade of the twentieth century can be cited of coolies leaving the garden to appeal to the 'higher' authorities of their grievances. In 1910, the coolies of Denan tea garden (Cachar) left the garden in a large body. The manager's persuasion and his forcible attempts met with retaliatory attacks. These coolies when intercepted by the Sub-Inspector of Police related

[50]Home Department, Police Branch, July 1905, nos. 105–107, Part B, NAI.

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to him that they were on their way to Silchar to complain to the Magistrate that they had been given short pay.[51] In 1911, the coolies of Namrup tea garden (Lakhimpur) left the garden in a body, intending to proceed to Dibrugarh and complain against the manager because he refused to give them bonus at the rate of ten rupees per head, which they argued was the accepted rate. The coolies refused to listen to the pleas of the manager and showed signs of travelling on foot. When the manager tried to catch hold of one of them, he was attacked and assaulted. The coolies finally proceeded on the journey on foot.[52] Again in the year 1917, about 600 coolies of Pathini tea garden of Karimganj Subdivision struck work and made their way to Karimganj demanding higher wages.[53]

CONCLUSION

The migrant coolies in the tea gardens of Assam (recruited mainly from the tribal districts of Eastern and Central India from the middle decades of the nineteenth century) showed over a period of time a process of change in their perceptions and experiences of life and work. The idea of the purity of various 'tribal' identities and their worldviews within the tea gardens could not be sustained and it was continuously responding to the changed circumstances of existence and processes of assimilation and interaction.

Looking especially into their protest behaviour and the articulation of power and authority it was argued that the authority structure within the gardens backed by legal and extra-legal features invested in the person of the manager was not just premised on the brute force and oppression, but were also brought into play through traditional and cultural idioms of legitimacy. Such an appreciation helps us understand the non-coercive dimensions of authority, and the basis of its longevity and perpetuation.

[51]Letter from L. J. Kershaw, Financial Secretary to the Government of India to Secretary to Government of India, Home Deparment, dated 2 March 1910, Home Department, Police Branch, March 1910, nos. 20, Part B, NAI.

[52]Letter from W. J. Reid, Financial Secretary to Government of India to Secretary to Government of India, Home Department, 17 July, 1911, Home Department, Police Branch, July 1911, No. 172, Part B and Home Department, Police Branch, April 1911, No. 55, Part B, NAI.

[53]Home Department, Police Branch, April 1917, no. 26, Part B, NAI.

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Dustoor, as was argued, represented a collective sense of material and cultural well-being and any dramatic deviation from that provoked anxieties inducing at times collective action. This notion of dustoor was not informed by any static or non-dynamic elements of the tribal past but was achieved through a negotiatory process with the management.

The issues around which such collective urges led to protest revealed the anxieties ranging from gender, social and cultural oppression and violence to grievances at the workplace. At times it meant illegitimate methods, like torturing and abusing women (perceived as the repository of izzat), so as to make the coolies work for longer hours with lower wages.

The nature of collective protest revealed a strong element of physical violence. This was, as has been argued, informed by the dimension of the modes of control with a strong element of physicality and abusive behaviour. At these moments of inversion the violence was recast on the authority structure and its symbolic manifestations. However it was not just violent and confrontational expressions which characterised the collective modes of protest, but at times there was a mass withdrawal of work that demonstrated a sense of futility to engage in a negotiatory process.

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Unravelling the Forms of 'Adivasi' Organisation and Resistance in Colonial India

Archana Prasad

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about the variegated nature of 'adivasi'[1] struggles in north-eastern and central India. In doing a comparative analysis between different forms of resistance against the feudal and imperial rulers this article delineates how different ideologies guided the 'adivasi' politics of colonial India. Broadly speaking, the struggles followed three patterns in the British period. The first were the protests against the feudal rulers of the zamindaris where the adivasis used traditional symbols of protest and images of the past to mobilise for access to resources in the future. The second were the struggles in the British ruled areas where the adivasi people protested against the dominant stream of nationalist movement. And finally there were the struggles led by the socialists and communists in the late colonial period. These struggles were not only 'adivasi' struggles, but also the movements of other marginalised people.

The interesting point to note about these is that the writings of the historians in the late twentieth century characterised many of the first two local struggles as part of the 'Indian Environmental Movement', whereas the communist led movements were not put under the same

[1]The term 'adivasi' has been placed within quotes throughout this chapter as I use it as a political identity and not generically.

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rubric. It is therefore important to examine how these struggles were different in their intent and organisation. These differences were based on the varied perceptions about the future of 'adivasi' people and their relationship with the larger political economy. This essay considers some of these themes in the context of the study of some of the significant 'adivasi' movements in twentieth century colonial India. The first section focuses on the Maria protest of Bastar, while the second section outlines the relationship between Congress politics and 'adivasi' movements through an analysis of the forest satyagraha in the Central Provinces. These will be compared with the broad philosophies of the communist led 'adivasi' struggles in central and western India, with some passing references to the 'adivasi' struggles in the north-eastern areas. This comparison will be necessary because it shows how the roots of the contemporary debate on the future of 'adivasi' India are embedded in these broad differences.

'TRADITIONAL' MARIA PROTEST AND FOREST LAWS: BASTAR, 1910

The Marias of Bastar were among the first 'adivasi' groups to protest against the application of forest laws in feudatory zamindaris. Bastar was a feudatory state under British protection. From 1886–92 it was virtually ruled by a Diwan appointed by the British. From then on the customary relationship between the 'adivasi's and the Raja received a setback. Certain measures that the Resident and Diwan took in the name of the Raja were responsible for the spread of severe discontent amongst the Marias of the *marh*.[2] As a consequence of the failure of the state apparatus to redress and ameliorate grievances, the Marias organised a collective protest against the state. Chief amongst the causes of the protest were the following:[3]

- The first set of forest rules in Bastar was introduced in 1892 when large tracts of forests were 'reserved' and *marhan*, a bewar type of

[2]For a greater, fuller analysis of this revolt see Nandini Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar 1854–1996*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

[3]Bastar State Records (henceforth BSR) Forest Department, File No. of 1892 Bastar District Record Room, Jagdalpur. Also see Clementi Smith, 'The Bastar Rebellion', in Ranchi: *Man in India*, 1944, p. 62.

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cultivation, was prohibited in forested areas. Along with restrictions on marhan, the access to fuel wood and other forest produce was also limited. The discontent was further fuelled by the unwarranted exploitation by the forest guards. The Raja's administration had failed to protect the customary rights of the Marias in the forests.

- The misuse of customary rights by both state and forest officials. The most common form of this was the exploitation of 'adivasi' labour. During the independent rule of the Raja, no system of *bhet begar* was prevalent in the villages of Bastar. By 1910, Smith recorded that forest officials, mostly British, were extracting bhet begar. This involved the carrying of luggage and building of houses without payment of any kind. Further the officials also forced the villagers to sell food grains at low prices and sometimes even free of cost under the *bisaha* system.[4] The labour and produce, which was earlier considered to be a payment to the rulers for discharging their duties, was now seen as an 'oppressive' practice by the British.
- There was a feeling of dissatisfaction against the introduction of western education by the missionaries. The Marias were forced to make buildings and maintain masters for schools where, they believed, their traditions were being violated. Both the teachers and missionaries were seen as disseminators of Christianity.
- The Marias also resented forms of exploitation by the lessees of the forests, the Hindu thikadars and the police. They were all considered 'foreigners' in the region. The main slogan of the Maria protest was 'Bastar for Bastaris'.[5] It must be noted that this demand was akin to the demand of many 'adivasi' struggles in Jharkhand in the nineteenth century which were against the dikus or outsiders.[6] Such demands in fact helped to create a distinct 'tribal identity' in the region: an identity that influenced the politics of the region in the period after independence also.

[4]BSR Forced Labour, File No. XXIII of 1929, pp. 29–53. Also see Smith, 'The Bastar Rebellion', pp. 61–62. Here it should be noted that *bhet begar* was abolished in Central Provinces.

[5]W. V. Grigson, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*, London: Oxford University Press, 1936, p. 17.

[6]K. S. Singh, *Birsa Munda and his Movement*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.

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The protest revealed the change in the Maria disposition towards their rulers. The sequence of events was further evidence of this. The immediate cause of the Maria uprising was the establishment of a police station at village Kutul (today considered as the centre of Abhujmarh). W. T. Ward, a missionary in that area, described the events that followed:

In the second week of January we first heard of the unrest among the aborigines south of Jagdalpur. Vague rumours were afloat, but none of a very serious nature. On the 18th a Christian living amongst the Prajas—the aborigines—came to me with a story, that they all armed were on their way to Keslur where the Political Agent was camping to make known their grievances. For some reason the deputation did not see De Brett and returned home bent on rectifying their grievances their own way.

A branch of mango tree, red pepper and an arrow were tied together and sent around to all the villages. The mango leaves stand for general meetings; the red pepper a matter of great importance is to be judged and the matter is very urgent; the arrow is a sign of war. Every village was compelled to contribute towards general expenses. Things soon began to warm up considerably. Policemen were driven from posts and dared not to appear in bazars outside of Jagdalpur; those working in forest department were also driven away; school masters and immigrants were also put to flight.... The insurgents walked into town and looted a forest depot and later set fire to it.[7]

All symbols of exploitation were targeted by the Marias. The focus was on the police and forest officials. The police and the forest guards were the most apparent forms of exploitation and symbols of the Raja's misuse of his customary power.[8] The protest was sparked of by the establishment of a police station at the centre of the marh. The arrival of the police in one village symbolised the arrival of an 'alien' government. All efforts at negotiations were directed at the Political Agent who had the powers of governance. A failure to meet him and solve their problem meant the breakdown of a 'traditional' bond between the rulers and his *prajas*. The police station signified

[7]Accession No. 211, Reel 15, Foreign Secret–I, Proceedings No. 12–41 of August 1910, Crown Representative Records (Eastern States) (henceforth CRRES), New Delhi: National Archives of India (henceforth NAI), p. 24.

[8]For a detailed analysis of the role of the King see Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns*.

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the crumbling trust between the Marias and their Raja. For instance one *dokra* (an elderly Maria statesmen) in Abhujmarh stated that the Marias had defeated the *goras* during the 1910 rebellion.[9] The Marias identified the police with the British and protest against the police was symbolic protest against outsiders. In this sense, though the Maria revolt was anti-colonial in character, this tacit sentiment was couched in a decidedly traditional approach as will be seen in the foregoing description.

Though the police were the first target of the Marias, the scope of the movement and the target of hostility broadened towards the immigrants. The Marias targeted exploitative elements, notably the Hindu thikadars in their society. They also registered protest against the presence of non-Bastaris, like missionaries such as Ward, immigrant cultivators, and forest dwellers in their territory. Ward wrote of his own position during the uprising:

> A day or so later the rebels cut off my water and wood supply. Into their camp I rode to inquire who had given this order. When the question was put they all said 'we did'. Then they told me not to return until they called me, which would be when all parganas would meet together. What provoked them was that I had seen their bows and arrows in large quantities. No amount of persuasion would induce them to give me water and wood; they said we were to endure hardship with the rest.[10]

Despite his work amongst the Marias for over a decade, Ward had failed to win a place in that society. His position in the society was the same as that of the *pardeshis* or low caste people from Chhattisgarh who had settled in the area.[11] The conflict between the Marias and pardeshis came under sharp focus when the Marias demanded 'Bastar for Bastaris' and the restoration of legitimate community rights.

The forest restrictions of 1892–1910 played an important role in fuelling discontent against the 'outsiders'. In Bastar, immigrant 'adivasis' came mostly from the neighbouring Chanda-Garchiroli tract where bewar or shifting cultivation had been stopped. Possibly

[9]This statement was made to me in Irakbhatti village in 1990. It shows that the Maria protest became a part of the Maria 'oral tradition' as a victory for the community over an alien and exploitative government.

[10]Accession No. 211, Reel 15, Foreign Secret–I, Proceedings No. 24–41 of August 1910, CRRES, p. 25.

[11]Smith, 'The Bastar Rebellion', p. 63.

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this put pressure on the land available for *penda* (another name for shifting cultivation). The forest restrictions created an artificial shortage of land by controlling the movements of the Marias and other 'adivasis', thus intensifying the conflict between Bastaris and non-Bastaris. The Maria action in Bastar shows the link between the enactment of forest laws in *khalsa* (government owned) areas and their effects on zamindari regions.

The Maria people articulated their identity in multiple ways. The demand of Bastar for Bastaris reflected the regional identity of the Marias and was articulated against those Marias who lived outside Bastar. The Maria identity was articulated against outsiders as a 'traditional' communitarian identity. This was reflected in the organisational planning and strategy of the protest. Meetings were held amongst all panchayats of the Maria parganas and all decisions were taken collectively. Thus, all Marias were brought together through a system of communication which made the use of symbolic traditional forms. Thus the arrow was a sign of war; the red pepper implied urgency and the mango leaves meant meetings. In this way the Marias defined their community identity. Thus, the assertion of identity took an aggressive form during the course of the movement when they cut off the supply of water, electricity and communications to the 'outsiders' who were treated as enemies of the community.

The British saw the Maria protest as a 'rebellion' against the British government. The use of this term implied that the Marias had betrayed their rulers. Little did they realise that the Maria protest was not against the rulers but against the 'outsiders' of whom the British formed a significant portion. Instead the British resident preferred to look at the events of 1910 as a part of a 'palace conspiracy'. The report of the Political Agent of Bastar suggested that Lal Kalendra Singh, the uncle of the Raja was the main 'instigator of the rebellion'. His Arya Samaji links were presumed to be sufficient proof of his 'rebellious' intentions against British sovereignty. This debate over the nature of the uprising was important from a political point of view. If the revolt was inspired by Kalendra Singh he needed to be taught a lesson in order to secure British future domination over Bastar. And if the movement was spontaneous, then certain grievances had to be rectified to secure colonial domination. Whatever the origins of the protest, both a section of the rulers and the Marias expressed their opposition to the British administration of Bastar. Lal Kalendra Singh was unhappy that the Political Agent and British law had diminished his political

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power; whereas the 'adivasis' realised that the Raja would not be able to fulfil his customary role if he remained under British influence.[12]

The attitudes of British officials were conditioned by pre-conceived images of the 'adivasis' and the ruling elite. At the provincial level officials believed that aggressive behaviour was not a part of Maria disposition and that some members of the Royal family had instigated the revolt. This theory fitted in well with official stereotypes of intrigue and conspiracies amongst Mughal and Rajput princely clans. In fact, one section of the officials always felt that the Marias were instigated by Lal Kalendra Singh and should not be punished. For instance the Political Agent at Bastar said that he could not 'understand the whole scale flogging (of the Maria protesters). The people seem to have grievances and have been worked up to rebel. It seems unwise and not humane to punish ordinary people, who are proverbially timid and backward in this way.... Surely it is the ringleaders on whom punishment should fall'.[13]

Though the British blamed Maria aggressiveness on the leadership of Lal Kalendra Singh, their perception of Maria behaviour changed considerably. Henceforth, the Marias were no longer seen as 'timid' and 'helpless' people.

In order to teach the Marias a lesson for their aggressive behaviour Maria leaders were awarded stringent 'punishment' like flogging and troops were called in to repress them. Two battalions of the army travelled from Bombay to assist the Central Province police and could only restore 'order' after one month.[14] As a consequence of the protest the British control over the State increased to a great extent. An administrator was sent to Bastar as the permanent administering authority and in 1922 when the Raja died, Bastar was put under the direct control of the British.[15] The Raja's independence was curtailed and his attitude towards the British changed considerably. Though in the early years of British rule the Bastar Raja was perceived as 'uncooperative', in the post-protest years he complied with British authority in an unquestionable way. For instance, in 1921, the Raja of Bastar took an anti-nationalist position on the non-cooperation

[12]Accession No. 211, Reel 15, Foreign Secret–I, Proceedings No. 24–41 of August 1910, CRRES, p. 5.

[13]Accession No. 211, Reel 15, Foreign Secret–I, Proceedings No. 24–41 of August 1910, CRRES, p. 8.

[14]Accession No. 211, Reel 15, Foreign Secret–I, Proceedings No. 24–41 of August 1910, CRRES, p. 14. Also see Smith, 'The Bastar Rebellion', p. 43.

[15]Grigson, *Maria Gonds of Bastar*, p. 17.

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movement. In an article which he published in the *Eastern Mail* he wrote that the movement aimed at great mischief and that it had some following because its discourse was couched in a religious garb.[16] Thus, one of the main impacts of the protest was that it made the Raja of Bastar more dependent on the British for his survival. This was mainly because the Maria protest, despite its tacit anti-colonial content, was targeted more at the Raja and less at the British.

But despite this, the Maria protest of 1910 could not be termed as a total failure in its short term goals. In comparison with the protest of 1876, the Maria action in 1910 attracted more people. Its immediate effect was the removal of the police station at Kutul. But in terms of its long term implications, the expression of discontent by the Marias also had a wider impact on the implementation of zamindari laws in the khalsa areas. After the Bastar protest, the forest agreements with the zamindars were only partially implemented. The rulers felt that it was not politically feasible to implement these laws as it would lead to protest amongst the people of both khalsa and zamindari areas. This was mainly because Gonds and other groups like the Baigas regularly migrated to the zamindari tracts in order to escape the oppression of the colonial forest department.

In one sense, the Maria protest postponed the inevitable application of the zamindari laws till the 1920s. By the 1930s the difference between khalsa and zamindari forests had become considerably narrow. The Court of Wards were free to close forests and make working plans for their reproduction. The possibility of revolt lessened because of the extent of the zamindari forests and the difficulty of control of all forests. For example, in Saletikri forests it was noted that bewar continued despite its prohibition by law. But the survival of these cultivation forms was becoming more and more difficult in zamindaris which were experiencing increasing government intervention.

CONGRESS VERSUS 'ADIVASI' NATIONALISM IN THE FOREST SATYAGRAHA

Till the second quarter of the twentieth century, issues concerning forestry did not enter the dominant nationalist discourse in the

[16]Accession No. 211, Reel 15, Proceedings No. 28–34 of March 1921, CRRES, p. 3.

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Central Provinces. The provincial Congress felt that their social base was limited to the middle classes and therefore the forest satyagraha of 1930 was organised by Congress to expand its mass base for the civil disobedience movement. Reflecting upon the condition of the Congress party in the Provinces, the Mahakaushal Pradesh Congress Committee president wrote in 1936:

> Only four districts, Jabalpur, Rewa, Raipur and Saugor have been able to maintain district offices. In the remaining eleven districts the Congress offices remain in the pockets, drawers and almiras of some one gentleman of the district.[17]

The statement above gives us a hint about the Congress base in the Province. In Congress terminology Mahakaushal comprised of the Hindi speaking regions of the Central Provinces and most of the 'adivasi' areas came under the purview of the Mahakaushal Congress Committees. The lack of organisation and leadership was described as the main cause of the Congress failure to expand its base in these Provinces. Further the nature of the Congress contact was 'infrequent' and was expressed in the lack of constructive work in the Provinces.[18]

The 1930 satyagraha was one of the first attempts by the Congress to make contact with the 'adivasis'. But this effort was marred by the divisions within the Congress about the nature of the movement. In the Central Provinces, the Congress was divided on a linguistic basis: Hindi Congress and the Marathi Congress.[19] The Marathi Congress formed a 'war council' to decide the strategy for civil disobedience. The forest satyagraha was initiated by the Hindi Congress and found half-hearted support with the Marathi Congressmen who were called the 'responsivists' during this period. The main leaders of the Hindi Congress were D. P. Misra, Seth Govind Das and Ravi Shankar Shukla. The leaders of the Marathi Congress were N. B. Khare and M. S. Aney. While the leaders of the Hindi Congress initiated the move for a satyagraha against forest laws, the Marathi Congress expressed

[17]Rajendra Prasad Papers, (hereafter R.P. Papers), File No: IX/1936 Collection I, NAI, p. 67.

[18]Ibid., p. 68.

[19]For further details see D. E. U. Baker, *Changing Political Leadership in an Indian Province: The Central Provinces 1919–1939*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979. Also see Home Political Fortnightly Reports, Central Provinces and Berar (henceforth FRCPB), 18/V, 1 April 1930, NAI, p. 72.

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its reservations about initiating such a movement. R. D. Tripathi, a responsivist, wrote:

> We (the responsivists) have given our consideration to the proposed breach of forest laws and have come to the conclusion that it is not a step calculated to advance the cause of the sponsors of the movement. In the first instance the grievance is not common to a sufficiently large section of our population. People living on the fringes of the reserved forests only have this grievance. The support of this cause shall thus not be countrywide.... Another feature of the satyagraha against forest laws is that it requires cattle to graze, the volunteers themselves being unable to do so. The Mahatma has not given his seal of approval to the other form in which materials may be removed from forests.[20]

The main issues picked up by the Hindi faction were temperance and grazing. The 'responsivist' concern over the limited impact of the grazing rules was born out of their desire for a mass-based movement that incorporated the whole population of this region. By asserting that the issues focused upon (by the Congress of Hindi-speaking areas) were of limited concern, Tripathi showed that the aim of expanding the mass-base of the Congress could not be fulfilled by the 'breach of grazing laws'. He implied that if the forest satyagraha was to have a wide appeal, the 'breach of laws' should also include taking other kinds of the produce from the forest.[21]

The Hindi Congress, which initiated the forest satyagraha resolution, ruled out protest against gathering laws in forests. This reluctance was born out of the leadership's acceptance of the aims of conservation. Just before the start of the movement, Motilal Nehru, the then president of the Congress sent a warning to the satyagrahis in which he said:

> Their (the forest law's) application maybe no doubt inconsiderate and harsh but nevertheless it gives considerable economic and agricultural protection to thousands of people and controls the conservation of the natural wealth of the Province. The penalties for its breach will be so drastic and so

[20] *Hitavada*, Nagpur 24 April 1930.

[21] Baker has shown the influence of Tilakite politics on the Marathi section of the Congress party. He has also shown the successful attempts by the Tilakites to marginalise the Gandhians within this politics. See Baker, *Changing Political Leadership in an Indian Province*, pp. 75–79.

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summary that majority of the people will get demoralized and bring disgrace to the organizers.[22]

This assumption that the ideals the forest department stood for, justified its policies showed that the Congress's ideas of conservation were not so different from that of the colonial government. In keeping with this the leaders of the Hindi Congress appealed to the people to confine themselves to the cutting of grass. A leader of the Hindi Congress, D. K. Mehta, is reported to have said that the forest was natural wealth and destroying it would be like 'cutting your nose to spite your faces'.[23]

Both Mehta and Nehru recognised the opposition of interests between the peasant, the grazier and the 'adivasi' in the forests. They contended that excessive exploitation of forest resources would be harmful to the agriculturists' interests. According to them the main aim of the movement was to protest against arbitrary grazing rules without hampering the protection of forest resources in any way. Thus Motilal Nehru stated that:

The Congress protest was against the law is not its administrative and economic harshness, but the ethical and material inequity inherent in affecting the liberties of the subject of the state, that has no public sanction behind it.[24]

In this context, the choice of the grazing satisfied the Congress nationalists because the number of protesters would be small and therefore the damage to the forest could be controlled. As the editorial in the daily newspaper *Hitavada* stated:

Nowhere has the Congress ever made a statement that it will send hundreds of people in protest against the forest act. This shows that the aim of the Congress movement was limited to a symbolic protest against the colonial government's administration. They did not want to lead a protest of general discontent against the forest laws.[25]

[22]*Hitavada*, 1 May 1930.

[23]*Hitavada*, 24 August 1930. The Congress Chief Minister of Bihar echoed the same views on the necessity of conservation of forests nine years later. For this see R. P. Papers, 1-M/1939, p. 17.

[24]*Hitavada*, 1 May 1930.

[25]*Hitavada*, 28 August 1930.

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Further, the nationalists would be able to protest against the colonial government without harming the forests. Thus the main aim of the satyagraha would be fulfilled. The feud within the Congress and this background to the forest satyagraha shows that the intent to organise a tribal protest was borne more out of the organisational need of the Party, rather than the imperatives of tribal survival. This was evident in method of organisation and progress of the movement.

In 1930, the varied and widespread protests in forested areas showed the intensity of the discontent against the forest laws. Some were protests that were confined to the cutting of grass in the forests as a token of resistance against the forest laws. Initially, these protests were a result of sustained Congress propaganda as a part of the civil disobedience. The first signs of success came in the second half of June when the 'responsivists' were persuaded to give wholehearted support to the movement initiated by the Hindi Congress. Thereafter the Congress started achieving some success in the Berar regions. The leader of the protest, Aney was to flag off the movement on 10 July by going to a reserved forest and cutting some grass. The Berar movements were launched in Yavatmal, Pusad, Arvi and Talegaon. However in each case the plans moved according to the Congress' instructions and the satyagrahis courted arrest after cutting grass. But clearly the British government was not shaken by these protests. This was evident from the fact that the officer in charge remarked that as 'the intended breach is cutting of grass, of which there can be little or none at that date, it is doubtful if the move, at the start at any rate can be more than a demonstration.'[26]

Thus the forest satyagraha would have faded in oblivion if the traditional 'adivasi' leadership had not defied the moderate Congress method and taken matters into its own hands. The first signs were seen in Sagar when a number of palm trees were cut down, the Congress called off the movement.[27] By August 1930 the Congress had lost the leadership to the local 'adivasi' elites in the northern parts of the Province where the protest against forest laws did not require Congress leadership. The first incident occurred in Mandla where forest officials were assaulted and the Gonds at Mukas Chapra

[26]FRCPB 18/VII, 15 June 1930, p. 78.

[27]FRCPB 18/VIII, 1 July 1930, pp. 25–26. Also see *Hitavada*, 17 July 1930; 20 July 1930; 3 August 1930; 10 August 1930 and 27 August 1930.

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took from the forest what they considered was 'rightfully theirs'. Thereafter a chain of incidents occurred, the most famous and serious one being in Betul on 28 August 1930. At Banjridhal, Betul district, about a hundred Gonds marched to the police station to protest against the arrest of their leaders. The demonstration resulted in a confrontation between the Gonds and the police. One constable was killed and two forest guards injured. Other incidents reported between the period of July and October 1930 were at Raipur, Seoni, Betul and Jabalpur.[28]

There were many such incidents against the forest laws where the nature of these protests was markedly different from the Congress sponsored protest. The difference was described by the *Hitavada*, in August 1930:

> The forest movement seems to be taking root in the rural areas of our Provinces. In these areas it is acquiring a somewhat serious aspect. The incidents at Betul should make the Congress reflect on its decision. If things go on as in the present, the movement will become a serious menace to the people. The Gonds and other people may not understand satyagraha principles and if encouraged to break laws may continue to break them once negotiations succeed.[29]

The Congress and the 'adivasis' differed in their conception of protest. One of the main aims of the Congress was to register its protest and demonstrate the power of non-violence in overthrowing foreign rule. The notion that violence would lead to repression and endanger the survival of the movement led the Congress to condemn the Gond struggles. The Congress disowned any responsibility for the movements to restore the 'adivasi' rights in forests. The Hindi Congress President, D. K. Mehta, reminded the 'adivasis' that they were not fighting for 'mastery over the forest, but for Swaraj'.[30]

What did swaraj mean for the Gond, Baiga, or the Korku? The forest communities aimed for 'mastery over the forest'. Their's was a fight not for swaraj but for *bewar swaraj*. Perhaps from this point of view, the politics of swaraj and the politics of bewar were the same

[28]FRCPB, 18/IX Second half of August 1930. Also see Home Political, File No. 253 of 1930, NAI and *Hitavada*, 28 August 1930.

[29]*Hitavada*, 28 August 1930.

[30]*Hitavada*, 7 September 1930.

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thing. For them freedom was associated, not with the freedom of the nation, but with free access and movements inside the forest. Keeping that context in mind it is not difficult to explain why the Gonds acted the way they did. The method of protest was simple. The villagers moved about together with their axes taking forest produce and attacking forest officials whenever they were stopped. However, it is quite difficult to say whether the Gonds acted spontaneously or whether they were galvanised into acting in this way. The sequence of protests suggests that the Gond struggles were neither unorganised nor sporadic as projected by the nationalists, the press and the government. Though all protests were organised village-wise, there is no evidence of any attempt by the Gonds to forge one unified movement as in the case of the Bastar movement of 1910. This shows that the Gonds were protesting against specific grievances of their villages with respect to forest laws. In cases like those of the Banjridhal Gonds, it is quite evident that the leaders of the struggle were chosen by the villagers. By 1936, it was evident that this aim was achieved in a limited way. The president of the Mahakaushal Congress Committee held that even though the party had come into 'contact with the masses', it had failed to build a sustained mass base.[31]

The response of the Congress was predictable. It attempted to explain to the government that the Gonds were giving the Congress a bad name. This itself was proof of the political mileage that the Congress had extracted from the protests. By September 1930, both, the nationalist press and the government had begun to see the Congress as a political force which was more moderate than the 'adivasis'. The government spokesman issued a statement saying that there were clear signs 'of the pernicious misrepresentation of the Congress Party' by the Gonds which had led to the clash in Betul district. Similarly the *Hitavada* opined that if the movement was to continue, it should be under the direct control of the Congress leadership.[32] This clearly meant that bourgeois parties and public opinion were on the same side: if the 'adivasis' were to protest their demands and methods of protest should fit within the parameters of bourgeois and populist politics.

[31]R. P. Papers, IX/1936 Collection I, p. 68.

[32]FRCPB,18/X, first half of September 1930, p. 18. Also see *Hitavada*, 7 September 1930.

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THE COMMUNIST STRUGGLES IN THE ADIVASI AREAS DURING THE LATE COLONIAL PERIOD

The spread of 'adivasi' people's struggles in numerous parts of Bengal and Bihar, the hill state of Tippera (presently Tripura), Thane district of Maharashtra and the Telengana region of Andhra from the late 1930s onwards signified a new trend in the organisation of vulnerable landless and 'adivasi' people. The mass front which formed the basis of the organisation of the 'adivasis' was the Kisan Sabha which was formed in 1936. The first congress of the All India Kisan Sabha set up the broad framework within which several struggles had been waged in the past and would be fought in the future. It broadly stated that,

> The All India Kisan Conference emphatically condemns and totally rejects the new constitution [under the Government of India Act, 1935] devised by British imperialism to maintain and strengthen its political domination by allying itself with the most reactionary forces of feudalism and decaying capitalism with a view of deepening its economic grip and oppressive power over the toiling masses of India.[33]

This characterisation of the Indian colonial state and its ruling classes was different from the protests described in the preceding sections. While the Maria protest looked at the Bastar Ruler as the Raja who failed to perform his 'traditional duty' the Congress characterised the state as one that was colonial, without analysing its relationship with the traditional elites. In fact the communists of the 1930s and 1940s had often argued that the Congress had failed to develop an organisation in the Princely states because it did not characterise these states as anti-nationalist. Leaders like P. Sundarayya stated the leadership of the Indian National Congress did not encourage the 'state people's struggles against the princes'. Rather they concentrated on extracting a few promises and concessions and did not want to disturb the power equations in the states.[34] In fact the Tripura Rajya

[33]M. A. Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1974, p. 11.

[34]Several articles in *Peoples War* in that period make this argument. Also see P. Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle and its Lessons*, Calcutta: CPI (M), 1972, p. 19.

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Gana Parishad was also considered one such organisation that was led by the Congress. Here the Congress asked for the establishment of a 'full and responsible government under the aegis of the Maharaja of the State'.[35] This means that unlike the communists, the Congress refused to characterise the ruling classes of the Princely states as either feudal or collaborators with British Imperialism. This context created both the framework, and the space for the communists to carry out their struggles and build their base in these areas.

It is pertinent to ask how these initiatives were different from other nationalist and 'adivasi' protests. The first characteristic of these movements was that they started as creative movements for social transformation. In one of its earliest resolutions the Kisan Sabha had already stated that social, economic and political emancipation was one of the most important tasks of the peasant and agricultural programme.[36] In this sense the agrarian agenda could not be separated from the social and political programme. For this reason, the organisation of local kisan sabhas and 'adivasi' people's committees in these areas was preceded by the establishment of broad forums advocating the social and cultural agenda. The formation of the Andhra Mahasabha in 1930 with the active support of the communists became the forum of the 'militant democratic elements' who had joined the national movement and supported the salt-satyagraha of 1930–32, but were unable to find a vent for their anger in the Princely States. The main aim of the Mahasabha was 'educating people against forced labour, untouchability, and other social evils and to impress on the government the need for the abolition of such undesirable practices.'[37] Cultural action was an important part of this movement and provided the militant youth activists with a method of spreading their message of nationalism and anti-imperialism. Thus, in 1938 when the Nizam of Hyderabad banned the singing of *Vande Mataram*, all 'democratic forces started their struggle to vindicate their right to sing their patriotic song'. In this

[35]All India State Peoples Conference Records, (henceforth AISPC), File No. 170, Praja Mandals in Manipur and Tripura 1939–42, New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. See, letter written by Umeshlal Singha of the Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad regarding the formation of the Tripura State Peoples Conference dated 23 December 1938.

[36]Rasul, *History of Kisan Sabha*, pp. 5–6.

[37]R. Ranga Rao, 'Peasant Movement in Telengana', in *Social Movements in India*, ed. M. S. A. Rao, Delhi: Manohar, 2004, pp. 149–68; see p. 154.

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way the Andhra Mahasabha acted as an important 'fighting all-in-united front' to strengthen the efforts of the communist party to get militant and progressive cadres for the state as a whole and for the tribal area of Telengana in particular.[38] That this aspect of struggle was not unique to the Andhra communists was proved by the formation of the Jan Shiksha Samiti in Tripura in 1936. The agenda for education was guided by the fact that the King had started some education in the state. This effort was appreciated and supported by the Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad and the elite Congress leadership of the state as a good step towards 'responsible government'.[39] In this context the Jan Shiksha Samiti was formed in 1936 by a group of intellectuals who aimed to provide education to the tribals in the hill areas which were ignored by the state administration. The main aim of this Samiti was to make people literate and also spread awareness about the nature of exploitation faced by them.[40] This helped to create a broad consensus and understanding that led to the formation of the Gana Mukti Parishad in later years.

The second important characteristic of the communist struggles was their agrarian programme. Communist led movements raised the slogan of the 'land to the tiller' and of 'equal wages' as the pillars of their protest and attempted to locate its origins in the social and economic oppression of the local areas. In the process these struggles united 'adivasis' with non-'adivasi' people on the basis of their common socio-economic and political experience. In this sense the movements of their times were not only a critique of the prevailing conditions but also of the customary practices in the villages. Thus the early conferences of the Kisan Sabha made clear their conceptions of the class alliances between the peasants (*kisans*), landless peasants and agricultural workers (*khet mazdoors*), and other workers in the agrarian sector. Though the 'adivasis' or the tribal people were not mentioned by name in these documents, the provincial reports showed that many of the agricultural workers and marginal farmers indeed belonged to the 'adivasi' and *harijan* groups. In the Comilla Session of the All India Kisan Congress, its president

[38]Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle*, pp. 20–21.

[39]AISPC, File no. 170, *Report of Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad*, 1939.

[40]Dasaratha Debbarma, *Gana Mukti Parishad in Building the Peasant Movement in Tripura*, All India Kisan Sabha, Golden Jubilee Series Number 7, 1986.

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Swami Sahajanand sought to make some theoretical points regarding the relationship between small peasants and landless agricultural workers:

> The small peasants are the backbone of the Kisan Sabha. The khet mazdoors are after all landless kisans. Those who had yesterday have none today, and those who have them today will lose tomorrow and thus, while possessed of their lands, they are kisans, and deprived of then we call them khet mazdoors. But this process is progressively going on and there can be no line of demarcation between these two sections of kisans. They who seek to draw one are common enemies of both.[41]

The early struggles in tribal areas like Tripura, Dahanu and Telengana implemented this understanding. They concentrated on fighting against state oppression and demanding rights that would strike at the root causes of the inequities and exploitation within these areas. Primary amongst these were demands for ownership rights over land in areas where tribal lands had been alienated, providing just wages for landless labourers and fair price for produce and demand for ending the system of forced labour. Apart from these, another important category of the demands was the fight for access and rights to common property resources. The agrarian charter of the Faizpur Congress said that 'common pasture lands should be provided and rights of the people to tanks, wells, ponds, forests and the like should be recognized and no encroachment on these rights should be permitted.'[42] Amongst other demands the 'equal wages' demand was also significant in the context of the forced labour that used to take place on forest works.

This was particularly evident in the Varli struggle in Thane district (1946). Here the Kisan Sabha, under the leadership of Godavari Parulekar and S. V. Parulekar ensured that all 'adivasi' agricultural workers would get a rate of Rs 2 to Rs 3 per 500 lbs of grass collection, and a daily rate of 0.25 paise for forest work. It was argued that this wage would be essential since forest work was heavy and the cost of living impossible to meet even in these wages. Further, the wages stipulated in Thane were lower than the wages in other areas for similar kinds of work. At another level, the Kisan Sabha also

[41]Rasul, *History of Kisan Sabha*, p. 29.
[42]Ibid., pp. 12–13.

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stated that the timber merchants and landlords could afford to at least pay these rates since timber trade had yielded fabulous profits.[43]

The idea of the equitable redistribution of wealth in terms of land, harvest and wages formed an integral part of the struggles against the state. Amongst the most prominent examples of these were the efforts at land reform or the voluntary imposition of land ceilings towards large landlords. Both surplus land and the yields were taken over by the Kisan Sabha in all the 'adivasi' areas where they were working. While Sundarayya and Parulekar described these as some of the main achievements of their movement, the Gana Mukti Parishad followed the same pattern in Tripura. It fought against moneylenders and food grain hoarders in order to get cheap food grains and loans to tribal people. In 1949 they also started a cooperative lending system in order to provide loans to 'adivasis' at reasonable rates of interest.[44] These strategies and instances showed that the communist led movements had a forward looking vision of the establishment of an egalitarian and democratic society. In this they were decidedly different from the protests of the Gonds or the Marias who projected their past and their traditional methods of resource management as the only alternatives to the state-managed systems of resource use.

Finally, the third distinguishing feature of the communist led movements was the organisational framework within which they structured their struggles. We have seen in the previous sections that 'adivasi' revolts led by their elites used the traditional community structures and symbols in their revolt. The communist leaders critiqued these institutions as being embedded in feudal relations of production. In contrast, they made local level peasant committees and guerilla squads representing the most disadvantaged sections of the 'adivasis'. Thus, Sundarayya wrote of the organisation of the Telengana movement:

> During the course of the struggle, the peasantry in about 3000 villages covering roughly a population of 3 million in an area of about 16000 square miles, mostly in three districts of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khamam, had succeeded in setting up gram raj.... For a period of 12–18 months the

[43]S. V. Parulekar, *Revolt of the Varlis*, Bombay: Peoples Publishing House, 1947, chapter 5.

[44]For this point and instances that support this proposition see Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle*, chapter IV; Parulekar, *Revolt of the Varlis*, chapter IV; and Debbarma, *Gana Mukti Parishad*.

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entire administration of these areas was conducted by village peasant committees. During the course of this struggle, the people could organize and build a powerful militia comprising 1000 village squad members and about 2000 regular guerilla squads.... this heroic peasant rebellion shook the medieval autocratic regime of the Asafjahi dynasty to its roots, delivering death blows against it.[45]

Similar instances of formation of local peasant committees representing the most oppressed people were also seen in other areas where the Kisan Sabha was active. This showed that the communist led 'adivasi' struggles were unique in that they attempted to democratise the local polity, society and economy of these areas. To this extent these struggles also waged a battle against the traditional village elites and built a leadership amongst the peasants and 'adivasis' themselves. In attempting to build a democratic village society, they sought to create the conditions for widespread social and agrarian change that would ultimately lead to a 'socialist society'—one that was both modern and egalitarian.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to analyse the nature of different types of 'adivasi' struggles and their logical impact on the political economy of their region. It has also attempted to delineate the ways in which protests led by the traditional elites, the Congress and the communists were different from each other. In the process, it has provided a background to the analysis of the demands of the contemporary 'environmental and tribal rights movements' which centre around the legitimate access to forests and settlement of land rights. The discussions show that the antecedents of the struggles for land and forest rights may be grounded more in the communist led, rather than the traditional movements for 'adivasi' rights. In this sense there is a clear case for the classification of some of the communist led struggles as 'environmental movements'. But if this is to be done, then the parameters and theoretical limits of the historiography of Indian environmental history will have to be redefined. The analysis

[45]Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle*, pp. 2–3. Also see pp. 65–67 for a detailed analysis of organisation.

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of scholars will have to move beyond the 'tradition versus the modern' debate that plagues both the study of 'adivasi' struggles as well as the historiography of the Indian environmental movements.[46] Until that is done, the communist led struggles will be denied their legitimate space in the history of Indian environmentalism.

[46]For a critique of this historiography see Archana Prasad, *Environmentalism and the Left: Contemporary Debates and Future Agendas*, Delhi: Leftword Books, 2004.

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9

Survival as Resistance
Tribals in Colonial Orissa*

Biswamoy Pati

This chapter examines features related to what can perhaps be termed as resistance through the very act of surviving, focusing on the world of the tribals in colonial Orissa.[1] While examining the resistance of the oppressed, scholars speak of the rather well-known protest forms. Thus, these have been seen to be associated with the 'day-to-day', the 'long term', and the rebellions or revolts involving the common people.[2] In the context of colonial societies like India, colonialism imposed new realities that threatened to decimate the *adivasi* population. Perhaps what needs to be emphasised is that the combined might of the 'old' and the 'new' barely left the tribals in a position to survive. This was contested through the anti-colonial/feudal mass movements over the 1920–47 period.

Nevertheless, historians do not seem to see the very act of surviving as resistance. Perhaps in this sense at least, survival needs to be seen differently, especially in a context when voices from the

*I am thankful to Dr Saurabh Mishra, Welcome Unit for the History of Medicine, University of Oxford, for his suggestions and comments.

[1]The British took over Orissa in 1803 from the Marathas.

[2]This would be a very long list and would be impossible to complete; one can refer to E. J. Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, E. P. Thompson, Georges Lefebvre, Rodney Hilton, Emanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Carlo Ginzburg and James C. Scott. As far as Indian history is concerned, one can mention the contributions of A. R. Desai, Kathleen Gough, Ranajit Guha, B. B. Chaudhuri, Sumit Sarkar, David Hardiman and a host of other historians, including some associated with the Subaltern Studies 'collective'.

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margins in today's globalised world do not seem to be heard any more—in many ways echoing the nineteenth century. The difference of course is that today India is no more a colonial country. In fact, by their systematic assaults the post-colonial ruling classes seem to remind the tribal folk of their past.

At the outset, a few points need to be delineated. Thus, it needs to be clearly mentioned that the theme of this chapter is intimately involved with the colonial agrarian interventions and the way it impacted upon the production process. Nevertheless, some of the complexities related to the agrarian interventions, the production process and the social stratification that emerged are not discussed for constraints of space.[3] Further, the colonial classification strategy needs to be questioned and critiqued. A classic example is the area of grey between the tribes and the outcastes, which can be cited to illustrate this point. Moreover, many of these methods of resistance interacted with the National Movement, the Prajamandal Movement and the Kisan Sabha in Orissa.[4] And finally, while this chapter seeks to problematise the way in which scholarship has negotiated the issue of resistance of the tribals vis-à-vis the internal and external order of exploitation in Orissa, most of the features highlighted can be applicable to any part of colonial India.

SHIFTS AND CHANGES

From the plains to the hills

Talking specifically about pre-colonial, especially early medieval Orissa, scholars like Bhairabi Prasad Sahu highlight the dynamics

[3]Most of the studies focus on the coastal tract. For details see Binoy Bhusan Chaudhuri, 'Land Market in Eastern India 1793–1940', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, January–March, 1975 and 'Eastern India', in *The Cambridge Economic History of India Vol. II c.1757–c.*1970, ed. Dharma Kumar, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1984, pp. 86–177; Sanjeev Raut, 'Rural Stratification in Coastal Orissa 1866–1900', *Social Science Probings*, vol. 3, no. 1, March 1986, pp. 136–50; Pradipta Chaudhury, 'Peasants and British rule in Orissa', *Social Scientist*, vol. 19, no. 7, August–September 1991, pp. 28–56; Biswamoy Pati, *Resisting Domination: Peasants, Tribals and the National Movement in Orissa, 1920–1950*, Delhi: Manohar, 1993, especially chapter 1; and Shakti Padhi, *Land Relations and Agrarian Development in India: A Comparative Historical Study of Regional Variations*, Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Developing Studies, 1999.

[4]Biswamoy Pati, *Resisting Domination*, chapters 3–5.

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of the feudalisation of this region. The manifestations of this process included at one extreme the emergence of intermediaries and superior landlords and at the other end the reduction of peasants and artisans to the position of semi-serfs. As suggested, the caste system developed late in Orissa and when it did (viz. the 10–11th century AD), certain specificities and differences in comparison to the Indo-Ganjetic plain model marked it. This was primarily because of the preponderant tribal population and the geographical variations in the region (viz. the coastal tract and the hilly/forested interior). As a result, the land grants to Brahmins and the extension of agriculture implied the conversion of most of the tribes into Sudras, which converged with the process of their peasantisation. Along side this, their chiefs were absorbed as kshatriyas into the *varna* system. This implied the absence of any rigid polarisation. The classic four-fold varna system continued to remain largely notional, as in practice the two tier-structure with the numerous intermediary occupational castes constituted the functional reality. Consequently, one witnesses the evolution of two clearly identifiable varnas—the Brahmins and the Sudras. The Vaishyas were not really visible in society, though men of substance appropriated this status for themselves. This implied that the Vaishyas surfaced in the epigraphical sources only occasionally in times of trade. Similarly, the Kshatriyas never had local roots, and were created in this period of state formation (viz. clan to caste society) that saw shifts in the identity of adivasi chieftains, who invented this category for themselves. The rise of the Kshatriyas/Karanas was a feature associated with the emergence of feudalism.[5]

These formulations can help us understand the dynamics of caste formation in pre-colonial Orissa. At the same time, the displacement of tribals in pre-colonial Orissa—a process that saw them shift from the plains to the hills—becomes clear from early colonial accounts. These records draw upon the oral traditions of the tribals and 'family histories' of some of the princely rulers. Thus, one can cite here how adivasis were displaced through the examples of the Bhuyans

[5]Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, 'Orissan Society: Past and Present Manifestations', paper presented at the Training for Development of Scholarship Society, Pune, 1987, and 'The Brahminical Model Viewed as an Instrument of Socio-cultural Change: An Autopsy', in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 1985*, New Delhi: Indian History Congress, 1986, pp. 180–92.

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and Kandhas of Ranpur, the Kandhas of Baramba, Daspalla and Narsingpur and the Sabaras of Dhenkanal.[6]

If anything, colonialism reinforced these changes as far as the caste polarisation was concerned. These were occasioned not only by the agrarian interventions, but other factors as well.[7] One can witness this shift from the early nineteenth century. This implied a process that not only saw the displacement of tribals, but also the emergence of new settlers. Thus, in states like Mayurbhanj it saw the tribals like Santals, Bhumijs, Kols and Hos (Deslogs) being dispossessed from their villages by the non-tribal Hindus (Hatuas) like Goalas, Chasas and Mahantis.[8] This phenomenon of the tribals loosing out to Kultas and Telis is also visible in the case of the Binjhals of the Borasambar zamindari in the Sambalpur district.[9] In areas like Khondmal, the Kandhas were rapidly loosing their lands in the early 1920s,[10] and in the Jeypur zamindari the Sabaras were being ousted by Kumuti and Brahmin moneylenders.[11]

This problem co-existed with efforts to settle non-tribals in tribal areas. Thus, in some states like Kalahandi, a conscious policy seems to have been adopted to encourage the Kultas to settle with land as they were considered 'industrious' in comparison to the tribal population.[12] In a similar way, the Mayurbhanj *durbar* welcomed settlers from the so-called British Orissa in the early years of the

[6]Samuel Charters MacPherson, *Report upon the Khonds of the Districts of Ganjam and Cuttack*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1842, pp. 19–20; 'Confidential History of Ranpur State', Crown Representative Papers, R/2–306/131, London: India Office Library, (henceforth IOL), pp. 2, 4. In fact the Ranpur princely family seems to have descended from the Kandhas; 'Brief Histories of each of the 24 Feudatory States (1909)', Crown Representative Papers, Narsingpur, Ranpur, Baramba, Daspalla, and Dhenkanal, R/2–285/1, IOL.

[7]I would be discussing some of these later on.

[8]Nilamani Senapati and N. K. Sahu, eds. *Orissa District Gazetteers: Mayurbhanj*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1967, p. 75. Refer to the correspondence of T. E. Ravenshaw, the Officiating Superintendent, who toured Mayurbhanj in 1866.

[9]K. B. M. Hamid, *Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Sambalpur District, 1926*, Patna: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1927, p. 31.

[10]J. W. Woodhouse, *Final Survey and Settlement Operations in the Khondmals Subdivision* (District Angul), *1921 to 1925*, Patna: Bihar and Orissa Government Press, p. 5.

[11]N. C. Behuria, *Final Report on the Major Settlement Operation in Koraput District 1938–64*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, n.d., p. 52.

[12]Foreign Department/Political 'A' Branch July 1882, Nos. 396–429, New Delhi: National Archives of India, (henceforth NAI).

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twentieth century. These people were encouraged with incentives in the form of low interest loans to build houses and offered free supply of wood.[13] This phenomenon was distinctly associated with the colonisation of the region and the efforts to tap its resources by the colonialist and his feudal collaborators. The obvious aim was to clear forests and to increase agricultural production. As can be expected, this added to the woes and insecurities of the tribals.

The tribals resisted these drives. In Kalahandi, their survival strategy made them determined to oust the Kultas and they appealed to the Chief Commissioner to solve their problems. When nothing was done to redress their grievances, the Kandhas and Gonds (along with the Gowdas and Dombs) 'attacked' the property of their rivals in broad daylight, unaccompanied by any 'personal violence', in an 'orderly way'. This anger was also directed against other internal exploiters.[14] This action was perceived as just and fair. What is remarkable is that on the appeals of the colonial administrators most of the 'stolen' property (viz. cash, brass utensils, ornaments, cows, buffaloes, etc.) excepting the grain—which they saw as something that originally belonged 'to them'—was returned. However, even some of the grain was also returned. Interestingly, although the Kultas alleged that vast amounts of grain were not returned, the tribals accused the former of exaggerating the amount taken by them, and, simultaneously confessed that they had consumed a portion of it.[15] Efforts by colonial mediators like Berry to win over the Kandhas by issuing land leases, did not produce any impact. The latter wanted the Kultas to go since even if settled as ryots under the Kandha Majhis they would 'eventually come forward and oust them from their villages'.[16]

[13]*Report on the General Administration of the Tributary Mahals of Orissa for the Year 1903–1904*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1904, p. 4, (henceforth *Report on the Tributary Mahals*).

[14]Foreign Department/A Political I Branch, March 1883, Nos. 59–83, NAI, (henceforth Berry's Report). What needs to be noted, however, is that out of the 142 villages 'plundered', 69 villages belonged to the Kultas, 27 to the Telis, 17 to the Malis, 12 to the Gonds, 9 to Kombhars, 6 to Gowdas, and one each to the Joshis and the Mohantis. In fact, problems with Mohantis can be traced back to the 1830s–40s. One also finds mention of a localised conflict when a Hindu of the 'Mahanti' caste tried to settle in Beelscoopa, a Kandha village; see MacPherson, *Report upon the Khonds*, p. 43.

[15]Berry's Report.

[16]Ibid.

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The Meriah encounters

Besides, certain other factors also contributed to the loss of lands held by tribals, struck a deathblow to their livelihood and pushed a large section of them into the hills and forested tracts. Thus, the early years of Orissa's colonisation was marked by major upheavals in the hills of the western interior. The 'burden of civilising' the tribals fell on the shoulders of the colonialist who justified these brutal campaigns on the basis of two major points—the Meriah (human) sacrifice among the Kandhas and the practice of female infanticide which was located as a universal practice in the hill tracts.[17] While nobody can justify these features, the ignorance of the colonial officials and the way they located them is indeed striking. Thus, human sacrifice was associated with all Kandhas, a feature that is unfortunately echoed by even contemporary scholars.[18] Moreover, the fact that female infanticide was not a uniform phenomenon was not grasped by the colonial officialdom. What needs to be also stressed is that both were complexities with which the colonisation of the region was associated. Here, one can refer to the rise and the polarisation of private property in land and the efforts to have land settlements. Similarly, it did have a direct association with the insecurities and uncertainties posed by a context that was marked by rapid shifts and changes.[19] We are told about the buffalo sacrifice that took place after the Meriah sacrifice, and how the buffalo subsequently substituted the human sacrifice.[20] In fact, it is worth speculating if the Meriah sacrifice itself was a recent phenomenon

[17]For details see, MacPherson, *Report upon the Khonds* and A. C. McNeill, *Report of the Agent for Suppression of Human Sacrifice and Female Infanticide in the Hill Tracts of Orissa for the Year 1860–61*, Calcutta: n.d., 1861, p. 3, refers to the agrarian crisis over three seasons in the Kandha tracts of Kalahandi and Jeypur that saw attempts by the Kandhas to revert to the Meriah sacrifice.

[18]Edith S. Brandstadter, 'Human Sacrifice and British-Kond Relations, 1759–1862', in *Crime and Criminality in British India*, ed. Anand A.Yang, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985, pp. 89–107. This also contains factual inaccuracies; thus she refers to Baudh, an Orissan princely state, as a place in Bengal.

[19]In fact, MacPherson, refers to Hindus encroaching upon the lands of the Kandhas and expelling them from the 'open country' to the 'wild tracts'; see MacPherson, *Report upon the Khonds*, p. 20. McNeill, refers to the agrarian crisis over three seasons in the Kandha tracts of Kalahandi and Jeypur that saw attempts by the Kandhas to revert back to the Meriah sacrifice. See McNeill, *Report of the Agent for Suppression of Human*, p. 3.

[20]Brandstadter, 'Human Sacrifice', p. 107.

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adopted by some Kandhas in a context that has been outlined and not an old practice as has been constructed by the colonialist in his enthusiasm to 'civilise the barbarian'.

The Meriah wars were accompanied by the burning, destruction and plunder of grain and drove large sections of the settled tribal population to the hills and forests, as is reported from the Kalahandi state in 1856.[21] This implied that the agricultural land and the water sources created by the tribals were lost. Consequently, the terror raids on the tribals in most parts of western Orissa (comprising especially of Ganjam, Jeypur, Kalahandi and Patana) disrupted their very existence.

Loss of land and water resources

At the same time, efforts to have agrarian settlements had far-reaching consequences. For instance, in Kalahandi these were executed with *goantias* who were landed elements. The built-in logic of parasitism can be grasped if one keeps in mind that *goanti* rights were frequently auctioned off to the highest bidder. The power of these goantias pivoted around their tax collecting role, with which came vital privileges. They owned the best land (*bhogra*). They could reclaim wasteland and take over land surrendered by ejected peasants. They were supposed to construct water sources, and, were originally rewarded by the durbar for these. However, although the water systems were built through the recruitment of forced labour, these were subsequently stolen from the people.[22]

[21]H. K. Mahtab, *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa I*, Cuttack: State Committee for the Compilation of the History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, 1957, p. 178. Lieutenant Elliot's (Deputy Commissioner of Raipur), 'Report on Kalahandi State, 28 July, 1856', refers to seeing abandoned land that 'had been once cultivated'—Nilamani Senapati and D. C. Kuanr, *Orissa District Gazetteers: Kalahandi*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1890, p. 467, (henceforth *Elliot's Report*). John Campbell refers to the population driven out from the 'vast plains' of Kalahandi and lower Patna due to 'famine' and 'disease' and, in fact, glosses over the connection between the Meriah wars and the desertions; see John Campbell, *Human Sacrifices in India*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1986, p. 246.

[22]J. Das, *Final Report of the Land Revenue Settlement in Kalahandi District Ex-State Khalsa area, 1947–56*, Berhampur: Indian Law Publication Press, 1962, pp. 7, 9, 13, 16, 22–23; R. K. Ramadhyani, *Report on the Land Tenures and the Land Revenue System of Orissa and Chattisgarh*, vol. III, Berhampur: Indian Law Publication Press, 1942, pp. 109, 111, 113, 115; see also *Elliot's Report*.

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The resistance to these large-scale takeovers is visible when we are told about Koyas refusing to settle close to the main roads in the Jeypur zamindari.[23] One also witnesses attempts to engage in collective forms of agriculture like the *mustajari* system in the zamindari.[24] Needless to say, they can be clearly seen as acts of resistance. Thus, whereas isolation reflected a desire of self preservation, working collectively in the mustajari system instilled some form of protection from adversaries. Simultaneously, folk tales were invented to express anger against their oppressors. A Koya subversive folktale, in fact, locates oppression to be based in incestuous relationships.[25]

The colonial establishment and the durbars made efforts to settle 'criminal' castes—a rather fluid category that emerged over the nineteenth century—with land grants. The idea behind this move was to incorporate these people into a system that would look into the 'law and order' management in what was defined as 'set up a thief to catch a thief'.[26] It is highly probable that this was a way through which sections of the poor, landless tribals could also get themselves identified as 'criminal castes' like the Panas in order to get land.

There were other components through which the tribals resisted these changes. Colonial accounts refer to the Kandhas as 'expert

[23]Thus, the *Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee: Orissa 1940* cited the case of some tribals like the Koyas of the Jeypur zamindari, who refused to settle near the main roads. The idea of settling down in the isolated tracts (viz. hills and forests) was not option-based, especially if one takes into account the first half of the nineteenth century. The situation did get somewhat altered after this phase, but even then some tribals preferred to stay isolated. See Godavarish Mishra and Prananath Patnaik: *Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee: Orissa 1940*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press: Cuttack, 1940, p. 50.

[24]For details, see Biswamoy Pati, 'Storm over Malkangiri: Laxman Niaiko's Revolt (1942)', in *The Indian Nation in 1942*, ed. Gyanendra Pandey, Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Co., 1988, pp. 185–205.

[25]Thus, a Koya folktale cited in Verrier Elwin's *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, refers to Deur buying a horse for Dadaburka Koya and his wife, with whom mankind began. They were old, but soon Dadaburka and Dewi met and had two sons and two daughters. Deur said whoever among the two brothers could ride the horse would be *raja*, and the others would be *prajas*. Only Bhima and Laxmi could ride the horse and became raja and rani. Bhima made amins, guards and the policemen other prajas. Very soon they began troubling people and everyone was afraid of them. See Verrier Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. 563–64.

[26]Having *chowkidar*s (rural police) from among Panas seems to have been a normal feature in colonial Orissa. R. Clarke talked of a plan to start a Pana settlement at Angul, giving the Panas 'good' lands and loans, which would be written off; see

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bargainers'.[27] As reported, they had 'a passionate desire for land' and in fact, it was through gifts, including land that initial contacts were established with them.[28] These need to be seen as strategies through which sections of the poor, landless tribals sought to re-locate (or even locate) themselves. The loss of land was also negotiated by looking back into the past to draw solace.[29] In fact, some tribals, like the Oraons, had nostalgic notions of the past when there were 'no landlords' and they did not have to pay rents or taxes.[30] We are told about the perception of the Sabaras that their god Kittung (Jagannatha) had been stolen by the brahmins of Puri. This perhaps needs to be seen as a metaphor that sought to turn upside down the way the colonial officialdom and the upper caste order situated Jagannatha as 'Orissa God', in order to express their anger and resentment against the loss of their lands and habitats.

Shifting cultivation

Shifting cultivation was one of the major components that emerged as a response to this context. While talking about tribals one of the standard assumption seems to trace them as 'ancient people'—the 'original inhabitants'—residing in the forests and mountains, who loved this method of cultivation. Besides marking the triumph of colonial anthropology, such positions tend to stereotype a large section of the people who not only lost their lands but were at different points of time pushed into the forested/mountainous interior. Given the complexity of the context that has been outlined, it is in fact quite usual to come across references to a fractured tribal

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R. Clarke, 'Panas of Orissa', in M. Kennedy, *The Criminal Classes in India*, first published 1907, reprinted, Delhi: Mittal Publication, 1985, appendix pp. 324–29. The *Talcher Settlement 1911–1912* refers to rent-free lands that were given to Panas, who worked as chowkidars; see *Talcher Settlement 1911–1912*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1963, p. 13; *Report on the Tributary Mahals, 1901–1902*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902, p. 8 and, Ramadhyani, *Report on Land Tenures Vol. III*, p. 284, refer to Pana chowkidars in Mayurbhanj.

[27]Campbell quoted by Brandstadter, 'Human Sacrifice', p. 106.

[28]MacPherson, *Report upon the Khonds*, p. 87.

[29]Ibid., p. 27. Here, the pre-colonial system of the Kandhas is mentioned. Thus, it is highly possible that they looked back to the days of the *umrao* system (the pre-existing land system) with the *abbayas* (patriarchal heads) and romanticised it as a better system based on equality and the absence of coercive methods.

[30]S. C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, Ranchi: S. C. Roy, 1915, p. 109.

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reality. Thus, in the case of Kalahandi we come across references to two chief categories of tribals—those living in the open country who were called Kotchriah Kandhas and the Pahariah or Dongariah (viz. pahar = hill; dongar = shifting cultivation) Kandhas.[31] Similarly, in Mayurbhanj we are told about two classes of people—the Deslog comprising Santals, Bhumijs, Kols and Hos and the Hatuas, which included Hindu Goalas, Chasas and Mahantis.[32]

Severe problems and pressures saw a large section of the tribals taking up shifting cultivation. This was adopted not because it was 'dear to their heart'[33] but because they had lost control over the tracts they had cleared due to their large-scale desertions and displacements. It was also because there was no other alternative. New ideas and concepts were invented to negotiate the changed situation. Thus, one comes across the Kandhas of the Jeypur zamindari who started using either hoes or wooden ploughs to loosen the soil and sow the seeds, and invented oral traditions to justify this. As expressed, the use of the iron plough was discouraged since it would hurt 'mother earth'.[34] Moreover, on being told time and again to stop Meriah sacrifice by Campbell, the Kandha leaders had responded by saying that they 'were not beasts'.[35] Given this context, it is highly possible that some of them adopted shifting cultivation as a protest for being labelled in this manner.[36]

Shifting cultivation witnessed the beginnings of a shift away from rice production.[37] After all, clearing the forests for cultivation, the problem of cultivating on hill tops and water constraints led to a

[31]*Elliot's Report*, p. 473. In fact, the colonial establishment clearly admired the Kotchriah Kandhas.

[32]Senapati and Sahu, eds., *Mayurbhanj Gazetteer*, p. 75, refer to the correspondence of T. E. Ravenshaw, the Officiating Superintendent, who toured Mayurbhanj in 1866.

[33]Ramadhyani, *Report on Land Tenures Vol. III*, p. 109.

[34]This was discovered in course of the author's fieldwork among the Kandhas of the Koraput district while conducting my fieldwork. I have discussed this in a paper 'Perceptions in a Changing Society: A Note on Koraput (Orissa)', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xxv, nos. 18–19, 1990, pp. 986–88.

[35]Cadenhead to Smollet, 17 March 1845, Board's Collection, 99, 436, pp. 25–26, cited in Brandstadter, 'Human Sacrifice', p. 179.

[36]Interestingly, historians like David Ludden are strikingly silent about this method of cultivation; see David Ludden, *Agricultural Production and Indian History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

[37]Campbell and MacPherson, both, refer to different varieties of rice that were grown by the Kandhas; see Campbell, *Human Sacrifices in India*, p. 244 and MacPherson, *Report upon the Khonds*, p. 49.

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greater dependence on dry crops like *mandia* (millet), *ragi*, *kotkee*, etc. Alongside. What is also essential to grasp here is that the shifting cultivator's diet also began to change—from one that was based on rice, to dry crops. This also implied drinking *mohwa* instead of *handia*.[38] What therefore needs to be emphasised is that these changes were in response to forces which were largely external to their existence—forces over which they had very little control. And, in this sense, their re-orientation to these changes needs to be perhaps seen as a part of their survival strategy that epitomised resistance.

Resistance is also discernible in the very act of practising *podu*, *dongar*, *kumri* and *jhum* right upto the 1940s. Interestingly, the tribals encountered two contradictory features—one that sought to enforce a tax on shifting cultivators in areas that were not surveyed and as a result was not clearly defined (and had to be calculated on the number of hoes or ploughs owned) and the other that saw the Agency officers in areas like the Jeypur zamindari working overtime to prevent and discourage podu.[39] This created the suspicion that taxes would be enforced anytime. It was this component that perhaps determined the way tribals wanted to remain in isolation and felt insecure vis-à-vis the construction of roads. Thus, in 1865 some Kandhas of Parliakhemedi feared that 'this was the first step towards introducing an assessment on their lands'[40] and in 1872 some of them 'carelessly allowed two Government wooden bridges to be burnt' when 'firing the jungles'.[41] In areas like Khurda, dissatisfaction with the forest laws 'always found expression', although this was 'never given vent to'.[42]

[38]Going by Campbell, *handia* (made from rice) was their common drink; this changed over the nineteenth century to *mohwa* which is distilled from the mohwa tree; see Campbell, *Human Sacrifices*, p. 19.

[39]R. C. Bell, *Orissa District Gazetteers: Koraput*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1945, p. 105.

[40]Proceedings of the Madras Government, Judicial Department 23 December 1865, File no. 1344 G/2, Bhubaneshwar: Orissa State Archives, (henceforth OSA).

[41]Proceedings of the Madras Government, Judicial Department, 6 January 1876, File no. 1845 G/7, OSA. This 'carelessness' is difficult to accept; incidentally the bridge was re-built by them.

[42]*Report of the Khurda Forest Enquiry Committee*, p. 19. Sociologists and natural biologists like Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, completely miss out the nuances and complexities of shifting cultivation from the point of view of the tribals; see Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, 'State Forestry and Social Conflict in British India', in *Past and Present*, vol. 123, 1989, pp. 141–77. While talking of

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On occasions the response of the tribal folk provides fascinating forms of subversion, wherein components drawn from the colonial administrative system were almost turned upside down. Thus, in areas like Malkangiri (in the Jeypur zamindari) taxes were not clearly defined and it was difficult to identify the exact land owned by shifting cultivator.[43] This created a space to evade taxation. Another argument justified such action especially since some tribals located themselves as 'independent'. In fact, as late as 1877, colonial administrative reports mentioned how the Kandhas did not owe allegiance to any rajahs.[44] Some others preferred to occasionally offer vegetables to the chiefs or touring officials,[45] perhaps as bribes to avoid assessments. Similarly, the method of responding to questions about the amount of land held in terms of the number of ploughs owned[46] needs to be perhaps located as a desire to 'hide' the amount of land actually held to prevent any assessment for tax payment. One also sees the Karuwa tribals of Gangpur being defined (in the 1930s) as mobile people, since they were food-gatherers and hunters, who bartered off forest products for food.[47] Consequently, what needs to be grasped here is the effort to resist the drives to assess and tax shifting cultivators, and some tribals like the Karuwas perhaps defining themselves in a way through which they could avoid taxation.

We are told about the Bondas, Parajas and the tribals of the north-eastern region of the Malkangiri taluk of the Jeypur zamindari insisting on and in fact being allowed to continue with shifting cultivation

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'conflicts' they base their arguments on a map—drawn virtually along colonial lines about the 'major forest conflicts in British India', that abstracts many regions where these conflicts assumed serious forms as well as areas where they remained 'camouflaged', as this paper argues. To put it in another way, in *colonial* India conflicts over access to forests took place wherever there were forests, tribals and the internal ruling classes (emphasis deliberate).

[43]Bell, *Koraput District Gazetteer*, p. 114. Thus, it was calculated on the basis of hoes and ploughs owned and the accessibility of the village.

[44]*The Orissa Tributary States: Their Present Conditions and how to Improve it*, (Report from the *Bengalee* with some additions and alterations), Cuttack: Orissa Patriot Press: Cuttack, 1877, p. 29, IOL.

[45]Campbell, *Human Sacrifices*, p. 254; perhaps on occasions these offerings were made as bribes.

[46]P. K. Mahapatra, 'Handbook on Koya', in *Adivasi*, vol. XI, no. 4, 1969–70, p. 20.

[47]Indrabilas Mukherjee, *Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Gangpur State 1929–1936*, Berhampur: Indian Law Publications Press, 1938, p. 13, refers to the Karuwas being seen twenty-five years ago.

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for fear of 'greatest discontent' in case any changes were introduced.[48] Similarly, the Sauras in the Parliakhemedi hill tracts were allowed to continue with the kumri and cut timber for domestic and agricultural purposes.[49] On occasions the idea of taxing shifting cultivators was dropped. Thus, the proposal to tax the Khaira tribals of Mayurbhanj (in 1899), who carried out shifting cultivation 'extensively', was dropped.[50] Resistance is also visible when forest officials wanted to extract work from them in order to gain access to the forests. Needless to say, their success was intimately involved with the survival of the poor tribals.

Conversions and shifting identities

The violent colonial encounters were followed by land settlements with some of the affluent tribals, who continued living in the plains as settled agriculturists. Simultaneously, a large section of the poor tribals worked as agricultural labourers and many of them got marginalised as outcastes. Consequently, as discussed, these agrarian settlements polarised the class/caste system, with the poorer sections of the tribals emerging as agricultural labourers. These features created the space for shifts and changes leading to religious conversion to brahminical Hinduism, with the affluent sections getting themselves incorporated within the brahminical order and the poorer sections emerging as tribal agricultural labourers or as outcastes.[51] One has to bear in mind here, that for the tribals, this process of 'Hinduisation' or 'integration' into the 'varna' order involved complex shifts in their identities.

[48]Bell, *Koraput District Gazetteer*, p. 106.

[49]Proceedings of the Madras Government 24 November 1881, Judicial Department, Accession No. 1434 G/9, OSA.

[50]*Report on the Tributary Mahals of Orissa, 1899–1900*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1900, p. 14. Thus, the *Report on the Tributary Mahals, 1900–1901*, refers to the idea being dropped by the chief as it would 'cause dissatisfaction among' the Kharias; also see Ibid., p. 12.

[51]Sociologists like Nandini Sundar, 'Adivasi vs. Vanvasi: The Politics of Conversion in Central India', http://sites.is.cornell.edu/releco/pdf/nsundar.pdf, 2005, refer to the process of conversion to Hinduism in the context of Central India. Although she does not mention it, many of her arguments match with what one witnesses in the case of Orissa; for details see, Biswamoy Pati, *Identity, Hegemony, Resistance: Towards a Social History of Conversions in Orissa, 1800–2000*, Delhi: Three Essays, 2003.

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One should refer to the importance—the relevance as well as the limitations—of the concepts of sanskritisation and Hinduisation while dealing with conversions. Sanskritisation was a route through which low castes were able to rise—over one or two generations—to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by sanskritising their ritual and pantheon. One can agree with this as long as it accepts that such shifts were linked to some degree of upward economic movement and is not seen as a mono-dimensional, non-interactive process.[52] Another problem inherent in this formulation is that it does not see the level of violence inflicted on the tribals and their ideas. In fact, even sensitive socio-anthropological studies sometimes categorically assert that Hindu civilisation did not on the whole seek to convert or displace tribals, although they agree that conflicts were frequent, and tribes were forced to retreat to the 'remotest areas'—viz. the forests and mountains.[53] Taken together, these contradict the 'civilisational' claims of Hinduism.[54] In fact, if anything, the opposite seems to be the case.

Operationally this had typical characteristics. In fact, a very superficial survey of some of the available land settlement reports of the Temporarily Settled areas of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore, the princely states and some of the major zamindaris illustrates the rather serious fallout of the agrarian interventions and the expansion of cultivation, especially the way they polarised social relations, especially caste.[55] These had a bearing on the conversions since the land settlements entailed a set of complex negotiations with the tribals.

[52]M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952, pp. 30–31. As he puts it, this was possible, especially for those in the middle regions of the hierarchy; see Ibid., p. 30. This perhaps implies some degree of affluence that needs to be stressed. I would like to refer here to Max Weber, *The Religion of India* and his 'diffusion model'. The basic problem with this is that it locates this as a one-way process, involving the Hinduisation of tribal beliefs. See Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, trans. H. H. Gereth and D. Martindale, first published 1958, New York: The Free Press and London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967.

[53]Felix Padel, *The Sacrifice of Human Being: British Rule and the Khonds of Orissa*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 17.

[54]A major exponent of this 'civilisational' character of Hinduism is Ravinder Kumar. I am not aware of any serious work by him on the subject, though he has published short newspaper pieces. This right-wing position veils the basic components of terror and violence directed against the adivasis and outcastes by brahminical Hinduism.

[55]For details see Pati, *Resisting Domination*, chapter 1.

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The specificities of the context are perhaps reflected in the way the Ranas of Jeypur wore the 'sacred thread' and believed that they had bought the right to do so from the maharaja of Jeypur.[56] What deserves emphasis is the significance of this language of exchange that was applied to the sacred realm. We also witness the Gonds of Sambalpur inventing new legends to re-locate themselves within the framework of brahminical Hinduism, and the Gond zamindars wearing the 'sacred thread'.[57] Here one can also mention the Kandhas of Ranpur state who preferred to be identified as 'Oriya Kandhas', that indicates an allied component of the process—Oriyaisation.[58] These practices not only implied a degree of Hinduisation, but also a strategy to cope with the shifts and changes by getting incorporated into the brahminical order.

The relatively affluent adivasis claimed Khandayat—the Oriya variant of Kshatriya—status. 'Khanda' means a sword and Khandayat means sword-wielding. In fact, this caste accommodated a wide variety of the prosperous section of the tribals as well. Thus, one witnesses, a level of Rajputisation/Kshatriyaisation/Oriyaisation that converged with Hinduisation, and affected the affluent sections of the tribals.[59] Some of the references in the *Census Reports* offer clues to understand this process. For example, the first *Census* mentions

[56]Nilamani Senapati and N. K. Sahu, eds., *Orissa District Gazetteers: Koraput*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1966, p. 110.

[57]L. S. S. O'Malley, *District Gazetteers: Sambalpur*, Patna: Superintendent of Government Press, 1932, p. 70. Nilamani Senapati and B. Mohanty refer to Gond zamindars wearing the 'sacred thread'; see Nilamani Senapati and B. Mohanty, eds., *Orissa District Gazetteers: Sambalpur*, Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1971, p. 117.

[58]G. N. Singh, *Final Report on the Original Survey and Settlement Operations of the Ranpur Ex-State Area in the District of Puri*, Behampur: Sarada Press, 1963, p. 10.

[59]Leading anthropologists like F. G. Bailey also see the Oriyas as migrants to the Kandha hills; see, F. G. Bailey, *The Civility of Indifference: On Domesticating Ethnicity*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996. As he puts it, in the 1950s, Oriyas were about 3 in every 8 of the population, and he feels that they were probably fewer at the beginning of the century; ibid., p. 3. Although the question of Oriya migrants cannot be disputed, he cannot conceptualise their emergence from among the Kandhas itself. Thus, the hillman/plainsman dichotomy is a feature haunting even sensitive scholars like him. What needs to be also borne in mind is a complexity where 'Oriyas'—besides being migrants—emerged from among the tribal population in the pre-colonial and colonial period, as we have sought to demonstrate. Thus, castes like the Warrior caste that he refers to (Paikas or Khandayats) also emerged from among the Kandhas and other adivasi groups. This in fact illustrates the process of conversions of adivasis via Hinduisation/ Kshatriyaisation/ Oriyaisation, and his reference to the Oriyas should also be seen as an extension of this process that was perhaps 'happening' even while Bailey was doing his field work in the area.

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the presence of 'numerous' Sabaras in the Cuttack and Puri tract,[60] though this was not the case in the 1930s and 1940s. One also sees a very large increase of the Khandayat population—45.4 per cent (the largest for any caste)—between 1901 and 1931 in the Orissa Division and the Orissa States.[61] At the same time, a decline of the population of the Saoras (-4,807) and the Jatapu (-37,961) in the Jeypur zamindari between 1931 and 1941 is noticeable, although there is no serious reason to explain this.[62] One needs to grasp here that a large number of tribals identified themselves as Khandayats. Consequently, the connection between a decline of the tribal population and the phenomenal increase of the Khandayat caste should be borne in mind while discussing the process of conversions.

Given this scenario, the conversions of the tribals was the result of a very complex, dialectical process, with tribal society itself negotiating the new context. For the affluent tribals it implied getting incorporated as Khandayats/Kshatriyas. This illustrates a level of continuity from the pre-colonial period, as mentioned by Sahu, which we have mentioned earlier. However, from the point of view of the poorer sections it meant getting linked to the agricultural process as agricultural labourers or being classified as 'criminal' tribes or castes. What is of course very significant and applicable to tribals in general is that they converted to Hinduism as a strategy to cope with changes and the shifts over the nineteenth century. The magnitude of this process is difficult to fathom unless one also keeps in mind the decimation of large sections of the tribal folk—owing to the conflicts with the colonialist and his feudal collaborators—over the nineteenth century. Consequently, the process of Hinduisation was far from being a mono-dimensional, non-interactive process and the tribals adopted Hinduism as a survival strategy vis-à-vis their adversaries: the brahminical order, the internal exploiting classes and colonialism.

A somewhat related feature was the shift to Christianity, although it attracted very few tribals. After all, Christianity was closely associated

[60]Beverly, *Census of Bengal, 1872*, p. 191.

[61]Based on W. G. Lacey, *Census of India, 1931, Vol. VII, Bihar and Orissa Part I: Report*, Patna: Superintendent Government Printing, 1933, p. 267.

[62]R. C. S. Bell, *Census of India, 1941, Vol. XI Orissa Tables*, Delhi: Office of the Commissioner of the Census, 1942, pp. 26–27; thus, over the 1931–41 decade the Saora population went down from 57,325 to 52,518 and that of the Jatapu from 53,134 to 15,173.

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with colonialism that had spelt doom for the tribals. Interestingly, we get references to the Sarrea (viz. Sauras/Sabaras) tribals of Ganjam asking Amos Sutton in 1826 if adopting Christianity would make any difference vis-à-vis Brahminism.[63] In a context of uncertainties and insecurities, some Oraons who converted to Christianity felt that it protected them from the witches and *bhoots*, who were powerless against this system.[64]

LIFE AND STRUGGLE

Markets and Livelihood

By the late 1930s we get some details of the tribals living on the margins and their lives. One can illustrate this by citing some examples. Raghomoni Sabara of Mochagam (a Sabara village in the Nowrangpur taluk) in the Jeypur zamindari seems to be a 'poor' peasant. He had 2.5 *putties of land*.[65] A rent of Rs 3 was calculated on the 'seed capacity' of 2.5 putties (30 putties of paddy is equal to about 38 maunds of paddy) of land that yielded 20 putties of paddy. The total family income (annual) was Rs 125, out of which he earned Rs 5 and Rs 10 through carpentry and practising in indigenous medicine, respectively. His wife earned Rs 16 as a wage-earner. The total household expenditure (annual) was Rs 128. Surviving scarcity made him sell the paddy, ragi, black-gram, castor seeds and horse-gram that were produced by him and his family. This enabled him to buy some basic commodities for the family like kerosene, salt and cloth. The next example is Jammi Jogi Paraja of Seesaguda village (Pottangi taluk) in the Jeypur zamindari. His family comprised two females and two males. The total agricultural income (annual) was Rs 102, which included 3 putties of paddy (10 rupees), one putti of ragi (2 rupees) and labour performed by two 'elderly' members of the household (90 rupees). The expenditure (annual) included food (80 rupees), salt and kerosene (15 rupees), clothing (10 rupees),

[63]Amos Sutton, *A Narrative of the Mission to Orissa*, Boston: David Marks, 1833, p. 130; this question had been posed to Sutton on 9 January 1826.

[64]E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta: Government Press, 1872, p. 247.

[65]By *putties*, what is being referred to here is based on the 'seed capacity' of the land.

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ornaments and toiletries for women (1 rupee and 8 *annas*), liquor (2 rupees), charity (8 annas) and rent (2 rupees). Since we are not told anything about his land holdings, he was most probably a shifting cultivator, whose family worked as agricultural labourers.[66]

These two families are representative of the people who just about managed to survive. As can be clearly seen, what was produced by Raghumoni and Jammi and their families or their earnings could hardly sustain them for a year. In fact, they spent more than what they actually earned. This meant that loans were a regular feature of their lives—a debt trap, which they were pushed into. The viciousness of this process was distinctly associated with forces of the market that assumed a monstrous form.

Talking of the markets, the tribals lost out since their planning was scarcity-oriented and because the markets were manipulated. This forced them to sell paddy and food-grain after the harvest when prices were at their lowest and buy these (after exhausting whatever little they had produced) before the harvests, when prices were at their peak. One can illustrate this point by referring to the prices in the princely state of Kalahandi where the price of rice fluctuated between 12.130 kg and 16.800 kg per rupee and that of mandia between 20.527 kg and 29.857 kg per rupee in 1912. Similarly, the price of rice rose from 18.660 kg per rupee in September 1918 to 8.864 kg per rupee in March 1919, and that of mandia rose from 23.325 kg per rupee in April 1918 to 11.662 kg per rupee in March 1919. In 1933–34, the price of rice was 31 seers per rupee in December, whereas it was 20 seers per rupee between July and September. In the same period, the price of mandia was 40 seers per rupee in April, May, January and February and 32 seers per rupee between July to November and March. The hoarding of grain by the traders created this problem.[67]

Keeping in mind the people we are talking about and the crisis faced by them one can now highlight how they survived. A folktale of the Gadbas refers to how they learnt cooking from among the leftovers (in the pots) of the Jeypur zamindar's deserted camp (when he had been on a hunting expedition).[68] On close scrutiny, one can easily observe how such encounters were a means of coping with

[66]*Report of the Partially Excluded Areas*, Appendix 263.

[67]*Elliot's Report*, pp. 229–31; J. Das, p. 3; *Report on the Administration of Kalahandi for 1933–34*, Kalahandi: Kalahandi State Press, p. 16.

[68]Elwin, *Tribal Myths*, p. 571.

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hunger. One of the earliest references to survive the problem of 'crop failure' that affected the tribals can be traced back to the 1840s. Thus, a large number of 'hill' women and children of Mayurbhanj and Nilgiri gathered at feeding centres that had been opened by 'leading natives'.[69] We are also told how the poor in the princely states survived famines like the Naanka Durbikhya (1866) by depending on the forest for 'roots and fruits'.[70] Moreover, scarcities during drought converged with an increase in the number of 'petty thefts' in British-held Orissa as well as the princely states.[71] This led to an increase in the number of people in the jails. Although colonial officials connected drought with 'petty thefts', what they missed is how the poor subverted the legal process by committing these 'acts' to get into jail which resolved the problem of hunger, at least for some time. However, these strategies were not necessarily related to droughts or 'crop failure', since for some who spent their lives living with scarcity, these were a part of their everyday living. Thus, there are references to tribal 'gangs' of Kols and Lodhas operating in Gangpur and Mayurbhanj, respectively, in the early 1922–23.[72]

One has to keep in mind here references to the Sabakheas (corpse eaters) who were 'robbers from the banks of the Subarnarekha river', the 'gypsies' who tried to forcibly take paddy, the 'gangs of Panas' who 'plundered' grain 'driven by sheer want to crime' and 'gangs' of Lodha dacoits in Mayurbhanj. There were also those who kept human skulls or rubbish in front of shops and houses to extract money and/or food, and the Kandaras and Panas who indulged in 'very petty crime'. There were other 'crimes' that included looting, highway robbery, cattle lifting, and dacoities, which were routinely carried out.[73] One needs to locate those involved, irrespective of their

[69]*Reports on the State of the Police in the Divisions of Chittagong and Cuttack 1840*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1842, p. 46.

[70]*The Orissa Tributary States: Their Present Conditions*, p. 52.

[71]W. W. Hunter refers to plundering of grain stores and 'organised dacoities' undertaken during the 1866 Famine 'with the express object of being sent to jail'; see W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal Vol. XVIII, District of Cuttack and Balasor*, London: Trubner & Company, 1877, p. 211. Also see *Report on the Tributary Mahals, 1900–1901*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1901, p. 9.

[72]*Review of the Administration of the Feudatory States of Orissa and Chotanagpur for the Year 1922–23*, Patna: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1923, p. 4.

[73]*Police Reports in the Division of Cuttack, and the Assam, Arracan, and Tenasserin Provinces, and Chota Nagpur, with the Orders of the Government Thereon for the First and Second Six Months of 1841*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1843, pp. 7, 17, 21, 58, (henceforth *Police Reports*); *Police Reports in the Division of Cuttack, and the Assam,*

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labels, as amorphous groups of people, who could very well include the tribal folk, who adopted these methods to survive. In fact, some of the popular plebeian movements adopted by large sections of tribals like the Mahima movement perhaps sought to accommodate and resolve the problem of hunger by directing its followers not to take their meals after sunset.[74]

What was defined as 'serious crime' committed by 'gangsters' also needs to be examined seriously. This can be visualised from an incident reported from the Jeypur zamindari (1942) where a gang that included two 'ex-convicts' stole a knife and a blanket. These two men were too drunk to run away and were easily apprehended by the police immediately afterwards.[75] Examining the Cuttack lunatic asylum records, one gets references to people from the 'jungles', who committed individual acts of violence, like murder.[76] In the light of this the representations of the 'aggressive' tribals, who committed murder needs some qualifications. Thus, such acts were virtually the last resort for the tribals. Moreover, these acts were a rarity considering all that they underwent over the period we have discussed.

'Developmental' projects, land transfers and migrations

The durbars and the zamindaris negotiated forests on a set of contradictory policies. Thus, even while imposing severe restrictions on the use of forests to discourage shifting cultivation (which 'destroyed' forests), the Kalahandi durbar, for instance, planned to

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Arracan, and Tenasserin Provinces, and Chota Nagpur, with the Orders of the Government Thereon for the First and Second Six Months of 1842, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1844, p. 37; *Police Reports in the Division of Cuttack, and the Assam, Arracan, and Tenasserin Provinces, and Chota Nagpur, with the Orders of the Government Thereon for the First and Second Six Months of 1843*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1845, p. 8; *Elliot's Report*, p. 303; Senapati and Mohanty eds. *Sambalpur District Gazetteer*, 218; Senapati and Sahu, eds. *Koraput District Gazetteer*, pp. 314–15; and *Review of the Administration of the Feudatory States 1922–23*, p. 4. The people involved included outcastes such as Panas, Kandaras, Lodhas, Dombs, Gandas and Sabakheas who belonged to fluid, amorphous categories as has been already mentioned.

[74]This is a practice that is virtually codified; personal interview with Biswanath Baba, the high priest of the cult, Cuttack, October 1989. Mohammad Laeequddin, Census Officer Mayurbhanj State, *Census of Mayurbhanj State 1931, Report, Vol. I*, Calcutta: Calendonian Printing Company, 1937, p. 120.

[75]Elwin, *Bondo Highlander*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1950, p. 246.

[76]W. A. Green, *Annual Report of the Insane Asylums in Bengal for the year 1865*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1866, p. 89.

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clear forests to build the railway line to connect Kalahandi to Rajnandgaon.[77] Similar were the efforts of the Mayurbhanj durbar to contemplate taxing shifting cultivators and clearing forests to build the railway line that connected Baripada with Rupsa (which was inaugurated in 1905), and the mining of iron ore for Tata and Sons and The Bengal Iron and Steel Manufacturing Company, who had leases to extract it.[78] Consequently, this process co-existed with intensive drives to tap forests. This also led to the sufferings of those who worked at the sites with meagre or no wages, or those whose lands were taken over, without any compensation.[79]

The 'modern' sector impacted on tribal society by undermining their existence. The subversive component in the following Oraon magic spell, meant to exorcise evil spirits, perhaps demonstrates how the 'modern' sector that developed was located by the tribals.[80]

Pull father, pull, pull,
Pull the bhuts to whom,
Vows were by our fathers made.
Pull father, pull, pull,
Pull the bhuts to whom,
Vows were by our grand fathers,
and great grand fathers made.
Pull father, pull, pull, pull the steam boat.
Pull father pull, pull,

[77]This was made operational in 1883.

[78]*Report on the Tributary Mahals of Orissa, 1902–1903*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1903, p. 5; *Report on the Tributary Mahals of Orissa, 1903–1904*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1904, p. 5; and *Report on the Tributary Mahals of Orissa, 1904–1905*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1905, p. 9. According to Senapati and Sahu, over the 1890–1910 period the annual forest revenue of Mayurbhanj increased from Rs 30,000 to Rs 1,50,000; see Senapati and Sahu, eds. *Mayurbhanj Gazetteer*, p. 79.

[79]Foreign Department/Political A Br. July 1882, Nos. 396–429, NAI. Ramadhyani, *Report on Land Tenures Vol. III*, p. 112 and Mahtab et al. *Report of the Enquiry Committee: Orissa States*, Cuttack: Orissa Mission Press, 1939, p. 197, refer to the recruitment of forced labour; in fact, this problem affected tribals in a major way in most of the princely states. For details, see Pati, *Resisting Domination*, especially chapter 1. Ramadhayani cites a 1928 case, where land was acquired for building a railway line, without the payment of any compensation; see Ramadhayani, *Report on Land Tenures Vol. III*, p. 112.

[80]Cited in K. P. Bahadur, *Caste, Tribe and Culture of India: Vol. III, Bengal Bihar and Orissa*, Delhi: ESS Publications, 1977, p. 93; the form of this poem has been altered since the translation had been very unimaginative.

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Pull the railway train.
Pull father, pull, pull,
Pull the bicycle.
Pull father, pull.

Besides, the price of being wrenched to the world capitalist system implied that other oppressive features associated with the internal order of exploitation were systematically reinforced. These were related to coercive extractions that ranged from forced labour (*bethi* and *goti*) and the forcible supply of provisions (*gudam*, as it was called in the Jeypur zamindari) to crippling tax burdens which left them at the mercy of the princely rulers, the jamindars and the moneylenders.[81] The system of serfs (goti) existed in the Jeypur zamindari. The gotis worked endlessly (sometimes over generations) to repay paltry loans. Forcible recruitments were also made in states like Mayurbhanj to fight in the First World War.[82]

Colonial capitalism also joined in to exploit the tribals. Thus, the steel factory at Jamshedpur depended on Mayurbhanj for iron ore, for which it had a lease agreement with the durbar. What is obviously not mentioned is the forcible recruitment of bethi from among the Santals and other tribals to work in the mines at Bamanaghatty, Punchpur, Gurumahisani, Sulaipat and Badampahar. After all, by 1922–23, the Tata Company exported 393,138 tons of iron ore from the state and on an average about 3,132 persons worked in the mines.[83] Interestingly, till 1947 the Trade Union Act was not enforced in the state.[84]

Given these experiences, the tribals retaliated. Resorting to lies for survival thus, was not uncommon. According to a report, during the 1880–81 census operations, anxieties were expressed in some princely states as this was seen as an attempt to ascertain the number of able-bodied men who were needed to fight some distant war.[85]

[81]See *Report of the Partially Excluded Areas* and Ramadhyani, *Report on Land Tenures Vol. III* that contain exhaustive details related to these forms of oppression in the Jeypur zamindari and the princely states of Orissa.

[82]Senapati and Sahu, eds. *Mayurbhanj Gazetteer*, p. 82.

[83]*Review of the Administration of the Feudatory States of Orissa and Chotanagpur for the Year 1922–23*, Patna: Superintendent Government Printing, 1923, p. 21.

[84]All India State People's Conference file number 112, 'Reforms in Mayurbhanj in Their True Colour', n.d. (perhaps written in 1945–46), New Delhi: Nehru Memorial and Museum Library.

[85]*Report on the Tributary Mahals, 1890–91*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891, p. 20.

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Perhaps, this needs to be seen as an effort to hide the real reason for this concern related to fears of bethi recruitment. On occasions, the tribals refused to work even when promises were made to pay wages.[86]

One also witnesses the attempt to appeal to colonial officials with complaints against the internal exploiters. Thus, the Kandhas of Kalahandi, as mentioned earlier, had communicated their grievances against the Kultas to the Chief Commissioner. They complained against the Kultas since they had been steadily depriving them of their lands (encouraged by the durbar) and against the levies and restrictions imposed on the forests.[87] Similarly, the Kandhas of the Ganjam tracts complained 'at once' whenever they faced any 'interference'.[88] The question of selectivity while making these appeals is indeed fascinating. Thus, the tribals of Mayurbhanj appealed to the Kaiser (of Germany)—England's enemy in the First World War, to solve their problems in 1916.[89]

The tribal folk also sought to bribe high officials. Thus, the Kandhas of the Jeypur zamindari invented a folk tale that in fact listed items that could be given as bribes to high officials when they visited Kandha villages. This list included items such as eggs, flowers and plantain.[90] These reflect on the way the tribal world hoped to survive through some of the problems that they encountered.

Another typical component associated with self-preservation was to desert the village. This had roughly two dimensions. The first was precipitated during the annual visitations of oppressive officials. The Didayis of Koraput, for example, refer to the 'dark age'—*viz.* colonial times—when police constables descended onto their villages, twice or thrice a year, in order to loot and plunder. Each such visitation lasted for two to three days when the people hid in the forests.[91] The other dimension involved the process of migration. In fact, the

[86]*Report of the Partially Excluded* Areas, p. 52.

[87]Foreign Department/Political A Br. July 1882, Nos. 396–429, NAI.

[88]Proceedings of the Madras Government, Judicial Department, 6 January 1876, 1845 G/ 15, OSA.

[89]I owe this reference to Gyanendra Pandey who had presented a paper at a symposium on 'Peasant Movements in India' at the Bombay session of the Indian History Congress, 1981.

[90]Elwin, *Tribal Myths*, pp. 563–64.

[91]Uma Guha and others refer to this feature in the context of the Jeypur zamindari; see Uma Guha et al., *The Didayi: A Forgotten Tribe of Orissa*, Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India, 1968. My own fieldwork demonstrates the terror struck by them; for details see Pati, 'Storm Over Malkangiri'.

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desertions were like 'dress rehearsals' associated with migration that became visible in course of the nineteenth century itself.

The decision to migrate was a painful process that was resorted to as a survival strategy and most certainly expressed protest. Migrations seem to have become a rather prominent phenomenon by the early years of the twentieth century. On occasions, serious concern was expressed against migrations which were directly related to labour shortages. Thus, we come across the Mayurbhanj durbar banning the recruitment of tribals in Assam. Nevertheless, tribal men and women went over to British Orissa where such a ban was not in force and from there migrated to Assam.[92] Migration to Assam in the Jeypur zamindari seems to have been an organised affair by 1923.[93] One can illustrate the magnitude of the problem by referring to the way people in about 90 villages migrated out of the Jeypur zamindari in 1933. In fact, besides reporting this matter to the Royal Commission on Labour, the zamindar of Jeypur articulated his preference for people to remain as gotis in the zamindari instead of migrating to tea gardens.[94]

At times, migration was adopted as a strategy meant to escape the clutches of the moneylenders who had advanced loans. A folk poem aptly describes this aspect:

This little finger said,
'Mother, I'm hungry.'
The next finger asked,
'How can we get food?'
The middle finger said,
'We'll borrow.'
The index finger said,
'How can we pay it back?'
The big thumb said,
'We'll eat, drink and leave the country[95]

These complexities illustrate the way tribals aimed to escape the oppressive system that included innumerable taxes, bethi, goti and the moneylenders, through desertions. As discussed earlier,

[92]*Report on the Tributary Mahals, 1904–1905*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1905, p. 8.

[93]Senapati and Sahu, eds., *Koraput District Gazetteer*, p. 81.

[94]Bidyadhar Singh Deo, *The Goti System in Jeypore Agency (Orissa)*, Jeypur: Bikram Press, 1938, pp. 7–8.

[95]Prafulla Mohanty, *Indian Village Tales*, London: Davis-Poynter, 1975, p. 21.

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migrations impacted agricultural production by creating a shortage of agricultural labour which was largely composed of tribals.[96]

LIFE-PATTERNS AND RESISTANCE

Health

Health was another sector that created problems for the tribals. What is normally missed is that the world of the tribals did have a system of medicine[97] along with ways of explaining the basis of some diseases. Beyond the world of magic, the Bondas of the Jeypur zamindari, for example, had typical methods to ensure successful childbirth including skilled midwives. Similarly, there are references to the use of traditional medicines in the zamindari as is outlined in the table below:[98]

TABLE VIII

SOME AILMENTS AND THE COMMON MEDICINES USED BY THE TRIBALS OF THE JEYPUR ZAMINDARI

HERBS	SCIENTIFIC NAME	DISEASE
Kochila	—	Kalazar
Chadoigudi	Hemidesmus	Black-water fever
Kochila seed	—	Malaria
Patalagaruda root	Rauwolfia Serpentina	Snake-bite
Range Charo	Sesalania Pemicea	Inflammation due to food poisoning, eye/ ear diseases, dysentery, gonorrhoea, and erysipelas
Bela	—	Dysentery
Buin Nimba	Gentiana	Constipation

[96]*Report of the Partially Excluded Areas*, p. 43.

[97]Complexities and nuances related to indigenous, tribal medical systems and practices do not seem to attract the attention of historians; see for example, David Arnold, *The New Cambridge History of India, Volume III.5: Science Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, which is completely silent on this dimension.

[98]Senapati and Sahu, eds., *Koraput District Gazetteer*, p. 370.

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In the case of the tribals of Keonjhar, we see the use of a paste extracted from the Bhramaramari plant being used for leprosy.[99] In fact, there is a possibility that some tribals did grasp the factor of human transmissibility in the case of smallpox.[100]

Talking of smallpox, its outbreaks were often marked by severity and deaths in the tribal tracts and offer clues to grasp many hidden complexities related to the struggle for survival. The advent of non-tribal adventurers to reap huge profits through vaccination, or the colonial health establishment's efforts to introduce vaccination that was often carried with defective lymph supplies (and as a result did not work) created acute problems for the tribal folk.[101]

These features had diverse implications. Smallpox spelt doom in some areas like Subarnaghurry in 1860. The Kandhas identified it with the arrival of settlers like the Paikas, who had emerged as their major exploiters. The Kandhas wanted the Paikas to leave, since they claimed that they were 'the means of getting the *Sircar* and causing smallpox to prevail among them'.[102] We also come across some Kandhas in the Parliakhemedi tract refusing to have anything 'to do with ... [vaccination] unless smallpox breaks out',[103] and the Santals, Kols and Bhumijs objecting to vaccinate their children in the princely states.[104] Besides, inoculation was practised clandestinely in the princely states.[105]

In such contexts, smallpox was also attributed to witches and led to the killing of women suspected of being involved with witchcraft, as in the case of Kurumkel, a village in the Gangpur state

[99]This is based on M. M. Mishra, 'A Note on Leprosy: Sources based on the Palm-leaf manuscripts of the Rajasabha of the erstwhile Keonjhar State', Oriya n.d. unpublished.

[100]Biswamoy Pati, 'Negotiating with Dharma Pinnu; Towards a Social History of Smallpox in Colonial Orissa', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2002, pp. 477–92.

[101]For details see Biswamoy Pati, 'Siting the Body: Perspectives on Health and Medicine in Colonial Orissa', in *Situating Social History: Orissa, 1800–1997*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001, pp. 1–25. Also see Pati, 'Negotiating with Dharma Pinnu', p. 484.

[102]Home Department (Public Branch) nos. 60–61 (A), 24 January 1861, NAI; unfortunately it was not possible to identify the exact location of these villages.

[103]Proceedings of the Madras Government, Judicial Department, 6 January 1876, File no. 1845 G/13, OSA.

[104]*Report on the Tributary Mahals, 1890–91*, p. 6.

[105]Ibid.; *Report on the Tributary Mahals 1899–1900*, p. 9.

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in the 1870s.[106] Interestingly, the Mahima movement sought to negotiate the issue by advocating the non-use of medicines in case of illness.[107]

There was a clear subversive anti-imperialist angle as well. Thus, in some areas illness and disease got linked to symbols of colonialism. In fact, the Sauras (Sabaras) invented a new god, Sahibosum and his consort. Interestingly, Sahibosum, their sahib god was most probably an European as well as a touring official, possibly a forest guard or a policeman, carrying cholera with him. The Sauras carved wooden images in his honour and placed them at the outskirts of their villages to keep him out, or at least divert his attention. Not only was he worshipped but also offered sacrifices since it was considered essential to keep him happy.[108] Thus, smallpox brought to the surface the anger against displacements. What needs emphasis is the way the tribals connected the internal exploiters with colonialism, which becomes quite clear in the case of the Kandhas of Subarnaghurry or the emergence of Sahibosum. In fact, the emergence of Sahibosum illustrates the idea of connecting illness with the entry of colonialism and the internal system of oppression and oppressors into the tribal tracts.

As seen, the tribals tried out various alternatives for surviving such dreaded outbreaks. In such a context, the opposition to vaccination drives needs to be seen as a survival strategy owing to the defective lymph supplies. This very often meant a painful process of vaccination, followed by death due to smallpox, especially among children. Moreover, in a context of severe dislocations smallpox outbreaks brought to light the way patriarchy targeted women as the Other.[109] Thus, the search for witches and the killing

[106]C. L. Philips, 'Confidential History of Gangpur State' (upto 1927), Crown Representative Papers, R/2 306/121, n. d., IOL; Mukherji, *Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Gangpur State 1929–1936*, contains a brief reference to this incident. For details see Pati, 'Negotiating with Dharma Pinnu', pp. 481–82.

[107]Laeequdin, *Census of Mayurbhanj State 1931*, p. 120.

[108]Verrier Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, Bombay, 1955, pp. 180–81, 490, 510. Although Elwin looks upon Sahibosum as any touring official and not an European god, it is highly possible that it also included the white man. If seen this way, one cannot miss the anti-colonial component that such a perception incorporated. The reference to the policemen and forest guards is significant since they represented the structure of oppression.

[109]For details see Pati, 'Siting the Body' and 'Negotiating with Dharma Pinnu'.

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of women suspected of witchcraft perhaps illustrate the way property relations introduced by the colonial land settlements seem to have impacted sections of the tribals, reinforced patriarchy and added to the pressures on tribal women.

Liquor

The other conflicts of the tribals involved the restrictions imposed on liquor consumption which came with the introduction of the excise system. Colonial accounts often locate liquor to be responsible for the ills affecting tribal society, justify the excise system and wish away the profits that it procured. What is overlooked in these articulations is the vital importance of liquor in tribal society and that liquor had a major role in the colonial context that meant hard work and helped to transcend hunger.[110] The realisation of the power of resistance of the tribal folk perhaps forced the colonial administration to accept the needs of the tribals. Thus the Jeypur zamindari had several tracts which were 'non-excise' areas and others that were 'out-still' areas, where the shops did not obtain supplies from the government distilleries.[111] Similarly in the Parliakhemedi tracts, the Kandhas were allowed to manufacture and carry their own liquor and the police were specially instructed not to interfere with this privilege.[112]

What is indeed striking is the way anthropologists visiting the Jeypur zamindari in the 1940s could not grasp why the tribals drank in the *hats* where the excise system was in force, instead of their homes.[113] Liquor was, after all, a part of life and popular culture. Drinking liquor was of significance in a place where laws forbade its consumption and where drinking signalled a form of protest. Alongside, the tribals needed to drink to get fortified to interact effectively with a 'monster'—the market—that always 'reduced' everything they possessed. In other words one needs to perhaps see liquor consumption as a feature that enabled the marginalised tribals to survive the odds that were pitted against them.

[110]For details see Pati, *Resisting Domination*, pp. 27–28.

[111]*Report of the Partially Excluded Areas*, pp. 20, 249.

[112]Proceedings of the Madras Government, 6 January 1876, 1845 G/13, OSA.

[113]Elwin, *Bondo Highlander*, p. 252.

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CONCLUSION

As is evident from the several instances discussed above, the external and the internal mechanism of exploitation undermined the very existence of the tribals in colonial Orissa. Beyond the other modes of resistance and protest highlighted by scholars, their determination to survive, along with its allied complexities, enabled them to resist the challenges posed by their adversaries. As one concludes, the Kalinga Nagar police firing in the Jajpur district of Orissa (on 2 January 2006) that led to the death of thirteen tribals comes to one's mind. This had undoubtedly been the Orissa government's New Year's 'gift' to the tribals, in an effort to evict them from a site where the Tatas wanted to build a steel factory in Orissa.[114] This event most certainly echoes processes that have a distinct bearing with the past. The only major difference is the absence of colonialism and the feudal states. Nevertheless, occasions like this precisely remind the tribals how little things have changed for them over the last two centuries.

[114]For details see Prafulla Das, 'Resistance and Tragedy', *Frontline*, vol. 23, no. 1, January 2006, pp.14–27.

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Medical Colonialism and the Adivasi Healing Systems

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10

Medical Colonialism and the Andamanese

Satadru Sen

The penal colony established in the Andaman Islands in 1858 by the government of British India was not just an exercise in the management of criminalised Indians,[1] but also a violent, intimate engagement with an aboriginal population imagined by Britons as 'savages'. Colonial savagery is a diverse and politically contingent phenomenon: it is not a neat and self-evident category, immaculately conceived in the metropole and imported wholesale into the colony as some scholars have implied.[2] The savage in the Andamans was, to a great extent, constituted by the unfolding processes and priorities of colonial medicine. Within two years of the opening of the penal colony, the Asiatic Society was taking an interest in the bodies of Andamanese who died in colonial hospitals.[3] When the Andamanese were subsequently found to be afflicted with epidemic and endemic diseases—measles, influenza, syphilis and others—contracted from Indians and Britons, they were encapsulated in new layers of medical language and policies that sought to discipline them as patients and explain them as colonial possessions.

[1]Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, *passim*.

[2]Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790–1900*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 9–29.

[3]When a kidnapped aborigine named Jumbo died in Moulmein in 1861, his skeleton was preserved for the Asiatic Society. S. R. Tickell, 'Memoranda Relative to Three Andamanese in the Charge of Maj. Tickell', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, vol. XXXIII, 1864, pp. 162–73.

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In the early years of the settlement, modest but not inconsiderable efforts were made by the Port Blair regime to 'civilize' a segment of the aboriginal population by putting it to work.[4] This attempt drew in part upon emerging, pan-imperial notions of the fragility of savages and their need for cultural inoculation: in 1835–36, the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines had expressed the hope that civilisation would equip indigenous people to resist the vices of settlers.[5] Less generously, and in the aftermath of Darwin, John Lubbock (who was read respectfully by administrators in Port Blair)[6] argued that savages in the modern world were not just under-evolved but incapable of evolving, and that empires were therefore entitled (and obligated) to utilise them as labourers.[7] As usual, colonial realities interfered with metropolitan theorising, and attempts to transform the Andamanese into cultivators, servants and orderly craftspeople broke down by the mid-1870s. The targets of such projects were far too resistant, indifferent or sick, and produced mainly their own reputation as worthy patients with a medically ascertainable incapacity for labour.

Colonial medicine—by which I mean allopathic medicine affiliated with the British-Indian regime[8]—produced the Andamanese as creatures of human biology, exploratory wonder, race, history and romance. Alongside the dynamic that Patrick Wolfe calls 'repressive authenticity',[9] which restricts aboriginality to those determined to be biologically and genealogically pure, medicine also killed the Andamanese. This is not to claim that the aboriginal population was murdered by incompetent or malicious doctors, although that claim can certainly be made in some instances. Medicine 'killed'

[4]'Enslaved Innocence: Child Labour in South Asia', paper presented at a workshop at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, organised by The Centre for Jawaharlal Nehru Studies, New Delhi, Jamia Millia Islamia, 14–15 March 2008.

[5]Elizabeth Elbourne, 'The Sin of the Settler', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2003.

[6]E. H. Man, 'On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands', Part I, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 92, 1883.

[7]John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man: Mental and Social Condition of Savages*, London: D. Appleton and Co., 1870, pp. 1–2.

[8]See David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 11–60.

[9]Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, London: Cassell, 1999, p. 163.

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the indigenous population of the islands in the sense that by the end of the century, several medically-supported 'truths' about their status as patients and savages had come to be widely accepted by the constituencies of ethnology and imperial governance. The most central of these was the conviction that the Andamanese were a 'dying race', and that contact with civilisation—including civilised work and civilised germs—had contributed to their imminent extinction. This opened the door for a new savage in the islands: the living dead or the fossilised savage that was to be shielded from the corruptions of civilisation, including its work.

SAVAGE MEDICINE

It is important to remember that the penal settlement did not include all, or most, of the Andaman Islands. The areas where convicts and their keepers lived and worked comprised a limited geography clustered around the government enclaves. The rest of the archipelago, imagined by Britons as 'the jungle', was the world of the aborigines, largely beyond the control of the regime. Lacking the military resources to actively 'conquer' the interior, the British in Port Blair relied on a slower, but not ineffective, policy of gradual encroachment through forest clearance, the creation of new settlements of 'self-supporter' pioneers[10] and the pursuit of runaway convicts, all of which facilitated the penetration of the jungle and the appropriation of Andamanese bodies. This geographical and political expansion of the settlement had an important medical component, because in a colony widely regarded as a deadly combination of forest and swamp, health required the labour of clearing jungle and draining marshes, and labour obviously required healthy bodies. In 1877, the Secretary of State for India expressed the hope that clearing away the forest would 'conduce to the health of the Settlement.'[11] In 1877, however, it was all too obvious to Britons that penetration of the jungle had brought about a medical disaster of its own, with new diseases killing or debilitating the aboriginal population. The medicalised survival of the civilised, it appeared, was inseparable from the medicalised destruction of the savage.

[10]On self-supporter convicts, see Sen, *Disciplining Punishment*, pp. 98–109.

[11]GOI Home (Port Blair Branch), November 1877, New Delhi: National Archives of India (henceforth NAI), pp. 5–7.

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Medical interest in the Andamanese goes back to the outset of the settlement. F. J. Mouat, a highly regarded member of Calcutta's medical establishment and a man with diverse, active interests in the modern world of discipline,[12] found it necessary to kidnap and study an aborigine as part of his initial 'survey' of the islands, explicitly for the benefit of science.[13] In the next decade, E. H. Man, the Officer in Charge of the Andamanese, became intrigued by constipation, diarrhea and aboriginal responses to castor oil.[14] He and M. V. Portman, who became OC-Andamanese in 1879, both took a sympathetic interest in indigenous medicine, which found a niche in anthropology when Britons no longer took it seriously as treatment.[15] Henry Corbyn, who created the Andaman Homes,[16] was also the first Briton to voice the suspicion that the Andamanese might be physically unfit for the labour of civilisation, and that this unfitness represented a scientific wonder. Speculating within the nineteenth-century understanding of the relationship between climates and bodies,[17] Corbyn wrote in 1863:

[W]ith all their ... primitive mode of living, the damp and malarious climate of the Andamans tries even their robust constitutions very severely. It seems a matter of surprise to some persons that so much sickness should prevail amongst Europeans and Natives on the sea-girt island which we occupy, but they would no longer wonder at it if they could see the effect of the South-West Monsoon on the aborigines.... The most curious is that they appear to enjoy better health on their own selected swampy grounds, and

[12]Mouat was an avid follower of French experiments with juvenile reform, especially the work of Demetz at the Mettray Reformatory. Satadru Sen, *Colonial Childhoods*, London: Anthem, 2005, pp. 16–20.

[13]F. J. Mouat, *Adventures and Researches Among the Andaman Islanders*, London: Hurst & Blackett, 1863, pp. 269–90.

[14]Man, 'On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands', p. 82, no. 3.

[15]Ibid, pp. 83–85; M. V. Portman, *A History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1899, p. 417; Mark Harrison, *Public Health in British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 36–59.

[16]The Andaman Homes, created in 1863, were sites where the Andamanese were concentrated (often against their will) for work, language extraction, punishment, ethnological study, education and ritualised gift-giving. Satadru Sen, 'The Orphaned Colony', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2007.

[17]Mark Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 1–24.

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under their half-exposed and feebly protected dwellings, than on [Ross] island, which is cleared of all jungle, and where they have the comfort of a well-ventilated and thoroughly water-tight house.... They suffer most from coughs and colds, ague, fever, and severe headache. It is thought that their 'tattooing' is for a sanitary purpose, for they always wish to do it ... when they are suffering from any illness.[18]

Corbyn was in fact responding to three wonders: *any* sickness in an island setting, the sickness of the Andamanese in the civilisation of Ross Island, and their good health in the jungle. He read the first in terms of a universality of bodies responding to the environment, but the second and third in terms of differently racialised bodies placed in similar climatic and cultural-medical environments. Labelled 'surprising' and 'curious', this difference was simultaneously itself savage, a mark of savagery, and a producer of savage behaviour like tattooing and bleeding.

Looking back at Corbyn from his perch at the end of the century, Portman acidly remarked that medicinal bleeding had an European history as well and implied that his predecessor's wonderment was naïve,[19] but he was himself deeply invested in the medical revelation of the savage: it was 'wonderful', Portman wrote, how syphilitic Andamanese responded to treatment.[20] In the years between Corbyn and Portman, living and dead savages were virtually immersed in medicine and produced dripping with its discourse: B. Ford, superintendent of the colony in 1867, declared that the Andamanese were 'constitutionally ... weak' and peculiarly susceptible to fever and tuberculosis,[21] and when kidnapped Andamanese children died in Bengal in 1870, it immediately generated another discussion of the peculiarity of bodies and climates.[22] The decade of disease that followed was nothing less than a goldmine, producing not only a wealth of information about savage bodies subjected to various forms of political control and medical regimens, but also a substantial mass of history. Portman mused:

[18]Henry Corbyn, Narrative no. 2, 1863, Home Department Records, 1863, NAI.

[19]Portman, *A History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 417.

[20]Ibid., pp. 647–49.

[21]Report of the Superintendent of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (henceforth RSAI), 1866–67, NAI.

[22]Rev. Stern to GOI, 2.9.1870, Home Department Proceedings (henceforth HDPr), 1870, NAI.

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> The fact of children being affected with [syphilis] showed that it must have been of some years standing. It had probably been introduced at least six years previously ... and subsequent enquiries showed that it had at this time, infected members of distant tribes in the Middle Andaman.[23]

The 'discovery' of syphilis in the Andamans in 1876 located the wonder of the medicalised savage on a grid of known events and possibilities. Not only was a familiar disease, presumably brought by the colonisers, discovered anew in the normatively pristine aboriginal body, it was quickly linked by senior British officers in Port Blair—C. Barwell, E. H. Man, Portman—to moral discoveries such as poor hygiene, promiscuity, helplessness and a childish aversion to doctors.[24] References to promiscuity and 'free love' are sprinkled through contemporary discussions of syphilis in the Andamans,[25] indicating a distinctly erotic subtext within the medical discourse of savagery, with science facilitating and partially clothing the sexual fantasy of 'tropical island' colonialism.[26]

While administrators could not resist seeing syphilis in the Andamans as evidence of a 'timeless' savage nature, they simultaneously recognised it as a highly contemporary political product of a history that might or might not include Europeans. During the conquest of Little Andaman in 1885, Portman and his medical colleague Dr Gupta, examined the teeth of the newly pacified Onge, discovered syphilis, and found it necessary to explain this undeniably historical development. Portman was inclined to reject the possibility that Europeans or Indians were responsible, gesturing vaguely at Malays and Chinese and suggesting that the Onge were the products of pre-colonial episodes of miscegenation: in other words, that they were definitively contaminated.[27] The diseased body could thus reveal the racial-biological history of the savage even as it absolved the coloniser of the moment. Measles, too, had historicising and politically potent implications, allowing British observers of sick Andamanese to locate their patients and policies on a map of imperial

[23]Portman, *A History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 605.

[24]RSAI, 1875–76, NAI; see also Portman, *A History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 618.

[25]Portman, *A History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, pp. 605, 854.

[26]Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 24–25.

[27]Portman, *A History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, pp. 837–43.

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medicine and to charge each other with incompetence, negligence or mass murder. Portman wrote:

> When Mr. [E. H.] Man knew of the existence of [measles in the Andamans] he took prompt action, but he did not know of it until too late. The medical authorities on Ross Island, where the measles originated, did not inform him, ... nor did the officer in charge of the Andaman Orphanage ... take any precautions. The doctors never seem to have thought about the Andamanese, or the effect of the measles on them, though a recent similar outbreak at Fiji should have warned them, and to their neglect the partial extermination of the race is due.[28]

Like the history of a particular disease, aboriginal responses to medicine were highly constitutive of savagery, and not only because of the 'wonderful' receptiveness of their bodies to treatment. As early as the mid-1830s, an Andamanese woman picked up at sea by the ship *Lonach* had attempted to brain Dr Boswell, the Civil Surgeon of Penang, with a water pot while he was bleeding her companion.[29] That incident foreshadowed not only the patterns of Andamanese resistance, but British perceptions of that resistance. Corbyn complained:

> Flannel and other clothing, which they might be supposed to care for, they not only do not appreciate, but tear to pieces and throw away.[30]

Blankets, too, had met the same fate in the hands of people who had no appreciation for either British ideas of remaining healthy in the tropics, or the solicitousness of the coloniser.[31] In the political-military climate of the 1860s, when armed clashes between 'treacherous' aborigines and the forces of the colony were frequent, such ingratitude merged easily with insurgency, and it is not surprising that Ford, in mid-decade, associated ill-health in the aboriginal population not only with the disruption of labour but also with a generalised resistance to white authority.[32]

[28]Ibid., pp. 614–15.

[29]H. Kinsey of the *Lonach*—quoted in Portman, *A History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, pp. 445–46.

[30]Corbyn, Narrative no. 2.

[31]Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions*, pp. 1–24.

[32]RSAI, 1865–66, NAI.

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Andamanese reactions were more nuanced, cautious and contextual than the notes of Corbyn or Ford indicate. 'Sickly' aborigines were often willing to take the drugs offered by white doctors, provided the doctor ingested the drug first.[33] During the aggressive deployment of epidemic medicine in the islands, prominent Andamanese became supporters (or became prominent as supporters) of government intervention, actively pursuing and 'bringing in' people who might be infected or fleeing. These allies included Maia Biala, the British-recognised 'chief' of Rutland Island, indicating how medicine provided aborigines with a platform on which they could make overtly political choices and negotiate a new status in the colony. Biala, in fact, contracted measles and died in the process of bringing in the sick, and his death was 'severely felt' by E. H. Man.[34] He was, in that sense, a martyred medical sepoy whose help in producing patients for the regime merged politically with his calculated help in catching runaway convicts,[35] at a time when the state competed with microbes for access to undiscovered bodies.

At no time did this medical intervention go beyond the sporadic, and very large numbers of Andamanese were never 'captured' by the doctors of the state. However, the attempt that was made is itself significant, and the word *capture* can be taken literally. Foreshadowing the tactics of disease-control deployed in Maharashtra in the 1890s, the Port Blair regime pursued and detained aborigines without much interest in their consent.[36] At the height of the measles outbreaks in 1877 and 1878, E. H. Man sailed up and down the coast on the aptly named HMS Rifleman and HMS Enterprise with medicines, presents and a team of 'friendly' Andamanese, chasing the sick, taking them on board, and off-loading them at various camps.[37] In doing so, he may have contributed significantly to the spread of infection, and it is remarkable that he did not seem to recognise the risk. What is more likely is that the risk was secondary to his governing zeal. Conveying savages about the islands (and around the empire) was one of the principal ways in which the colonial regime exhibited,

[33]Report of Surgeon F. Day, 1870, Home Department 1870, NAI.

[34]RSAI, 1876–77, NAI.

[35]RSAI, 1870–71, NAI.

[36]Ian Catanach, 'Plague and the Tensions of Empire', in *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies*, ed. David Arnold, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 149–71.

[37]RSAI, 1877–78, NAI.

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performed and experienced its power, literally relocating its subjects on its administrative map.[38]

Like other pre-modern people confronted suddenly by the doctors of the modern state,[39] the Andamanese resisted, mainly by trying to avoid medical 'detection' and treatment, and running away from the Andaman Homes and makeshift hospitals where they were kept under guard. This response produced the patient as a rebel, and for the regime, medical intervention became a metaphor of political control and governance. This is not to suggest that disease merely gave the regime excuses or options for governance. Disease was governance, i.e., constitutive of governmental activity. To produce the first was also to produce the latter.

The first energetic efforts in this direction were made when E. H. Man was in charge of the Andaman Homes. Man initiated a policy of aggressively seeking out infected tribals by sending quasi-military expeditions to examine and confine newly discovered patients. In February of 1877, he sent doctors and armed guards into remote parts of the islands to find aborigines infected with syphilis, and 'had these brought to hospital.'[40] The Homes played a crucial role in these efforts, adding medical policing to their older function as sites of captivity and semi-coerced labour. From early 1877 onwards, the Andamanese who came to the Homes were regularly subjected to physical examinations, and those thought to be sick were detained. At the same time, expeditions were mounted to examine, discover and 'recall' aborigines who had recently been at the Homes and were suspected of carrying disease.[41] In his report on the Homes in October 1876, E. H. Man was able to write: 'Information having reached me that several of the aborigines living near Middle Strait were suffering from Ophthalmia, I sent a large boat and brought in twenty-one men, women and children.'[42] These patients were then kept at the Homes in a shed built specifically for them.[43] Other

[38]McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp. 42, 56–57; Sander Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies', in *'Race', Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, pp. 231–39.

[39]Catanach, 'Plague and the Tensions of Empire', pp. 149–71; Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, pp. 116–58.

[40]RSAI, 1876–77.

[41]Papers of T. S. Blakeney, European Manuscripts, London: Oriental and India Office Collections, henceforth OIOC.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

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Andamanese at the Homes were singled out for medical attention if they tried to leave. In April of 1876, E. H. Man wrote that he had 'discovered' and hospitalised an aboriginal couple who were evidently syphilitic, and added:

> They had, like some of the others, been endeavoring to cure themselves, and had for that purpose left the Home to which they had been attached. I am now hopeful that I have succeeded in discovering and placing under medical treatment all those who have, in consequence of the lamentably lax state of their morals, contracted this fell disease.[44]

Man's statement is revealing from at least two perspectives. Disease was equated with moral weakness, and thus brought into the legitimate jurisdiction of a quasi-penal regime. Moreover, medical intervention was seen as the sole prerogative of the state, and attempts by aborigines to 'cure themselves' became attacks on this monopoly on legitimate power.

This was a shift within governance in the islands; self-treatment by the Andamanese had not always been viewed with consternation by Britons, and administrators in the islands in the 1860s had been quite admiring of indigenous medical techniques.[45] Apart from a residual diffidence within colonial medicine that reflected a Romantic sensibility and an awareness on the part of Tytler, Homfray and others that they were engaged in a competitive process of magic/expertise, in which the Andamanese retained considerable power to assess them. At the time of the epidemics, that Romantic diffidence had faded, evaporated not so much by discursive shifts within allopathic medicine as by the authoritative requirements of medically articulated counterinsurgency, complete with bizarre rhetorical slippages such as 'house to house' searches in a landscape without houses.[46]

The detention and isolation of infected tribals generated a complex system of hospitals and half-way 'houses' in the Andamans. Patients at the more virulent stages of infection were kept in the 'innermost' circle of this infrastructure and denied any contact with the outside world. Convalescents inhabited an outer circle where isolation was less rigid, but where contact with non-patients was still

[44]Ibid.

[45]R. C. Tytler, 'Notes on the Andamanese Captured at Port Blair', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XXX, 1861, pp. 251–67; RSAI, 1866–67.

[46]RSAI, 1876–77.

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controlled by medical personnel: an assortment of convict orderlies, convict compounders, Dr Gupta (who was contextually included in the heroic circle of his white colleagues in the epidemic zone[47]) and IMS doctors. In February 1877, superintendent Barwell noted that a group of syphilitics had been released from the hospital on Viper Island and placed in such a convalescence hut, and that guards had been posted 'to prevent any intercourse between them and the uninfected aborigines in the Viper Home or elsewhere.'[48]

Even outside the context of epidemic medicine, detention and enforced isolation of the Andamanese were strategies of access and normalised control, allowing administrators, physicians and properly credentialed visitors to observe the 'patients' and to theorise about their bodies, their society and the connections between the two. In 1861, A. Fytche, the Commissioner of Tennasserim and Martaban in British Burma, hosted 'Mr. Blythe of the Asiatic Society' who, like Fytche himself, had 'made a special study' of the Andamanese.[49] Blythe was, in fact, interested in larger questions of savagery; he wanted to compare the islanders with African patients he had observed elsewhere, the 'Negro' being the standard against which physiological and behavioural degradation was measured.[50] After observing three Andamanese men who had been taken to Moulmein in a penal transportation *from* the islands, he remarked: 'They have hardly any trace of whiskers, beard or mustache, and have been long enough in captivity for the growth of such were it existent,' and concluded that they were not identical to Negroes.[51]

It is not surprising that such knowledge, contingent on the medicalisation of captivity in particular and colonialism in general, vindicated the aggressive deployment of state medicine. An 1876 report from the Andaman Home, where a number of aborigines suffering from 'ulcers' were being held and studied, declared: 'It is at present believed that this sickness is merely due to a want to cleanliness on the part of the patients.'[52] The observation succinctly captures the self-perpetuating relationship between state intervention,

[47]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 663.

[48]Papers of T. S. Blakeney.

[49]A. Fytche to GOI, 5.28.1861, Foreign Department, Records and Proceedings (henceforth FDPr), 1861, NAI.

[50]Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies', pp. 223–57.

[51]A. Fytche to GOI, 5.28.1861.

[52]Papers of T. S. Blakeney.

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the creation of medical knowledge, and further intervention. Colonial subjects and inferior Others are existentially unclean, and in the sanitary context of modernity, dirt is nothing short of power, generating an impulse to uncover, describe and coerce that is almost irresistible to the normatively clean.[53] Unclean aboriginal habits were again blamed, and warm baths prescribed, during a syphilis outbreak a year later.[54] In the 1890s, Portman blamed the spread of imported diseases among the Andamanese on 'their filthy habits, their custom of sleeping together in a heap ... and their immorality.'[55] The medical campaign against the Andamanese was an effort by the colonial state to extend its political authority at several connected levels. At one level, the military-style expeditions to capture and detain sick aborigines provided a self-legitimising method of taking the power of the colony into the jungle, and of bringing manageable pieces of the jungle into the colony. At another level, compulsory medical treatment forced the Andamanese to acknowledge the authority of the regime. This acknowledgment should not be confused with acceptance of the ideological claims of modern medicine; there was no hegemonic state medicine in India (including the Andamans) in the late-nineteenth century.[56] Medicine in the Andamans served to legitimise governmental action not to the Andamanese, but to the colonial authorities themselves. It was enough that the Andamanese could read medicine as a political shorthand for the regime's claims of sovereignty. At a third level, the new medical posture of aborigines as patients altered the content of their savagery and the relationship between the savage and the doctor. Patient-savages were no longer expected to cultivate crops, but they were, more than ever, protégés of the doctor and the state, who assessed their 'condition,' organised the terms of quarantine and convalescence, and stood watch at their bedside.

EXTINCTION

During E. H. Man's voyages in the Enterprise and the Rifleman, and Portman's own explorations along the coast in the late 1870s

[53]On cleanliness and Victorian attitudes, see McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp. 152–55.

[54]Papers of T. S. Blakeney.

[55]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the* Andamanese, pp. 610–11.

[56]Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, pp. 61–63.

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and early 1880s, the British officers surveyed a landscape of devastation and depopulation. Contemporary British estimates of depopulation—such as the 'half to two-thirds' figure that Portman provided—are unreliable. No systematic count predated the epidemics, villages and camps had been disrupted both by disease and by population flight, and E. H. Man and Portman both relied mainly on casual observation.[57] Man related this vagueness to the inadequacy of British power before nature in the Andamans: the jungle was impenetrable to census-takers, he told the Anthropological Society in 1883, and Andamanese informers could not be trusted because they could not count.[58] Nevertheless, they and subsequent counters like Radcliffe-Brown (who tried to divine the numbers from the 1901 census, and ended up with results that are close to Portman's[59]) fell back upon the enumerative magic of colonialism[60] to produce clarity in the jungle, confirming the 'observation' that the Andamanese were indeed missing in large numbers. This observation was a major turning point in the history of the savage encounter in the Andamans, because it consolidated the status of the Andamanese as a people on the verge of extinction, which informed the next phase of savagery and its management.

The plethora of plagues 'detected' in the Andamans after 1876 reflects deep anxieties among Britons about governance in the savage encounter.[61] Sickness could mark autonomous contact not only between aborigines and convicts, but also between the penal colony and the mainland, the island and the world. It is simultaneously a sign of vitality (heroic governance), failure (because it spreads in spite of the coloniser's best efforts to control natives and native societies), sin and guilt (because the coloniser has visited it upon

[57]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, pp. 613–16.

[58]Man, 'On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands', p. 98. On the Andamanese 'inability to count', see Portman, *The History of our Relations with the* Andamanese, p. 40.

[59]Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*, New York: Free Press, 1964, pp. 16–19.

[60]Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 8; Arjun Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination', in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, ed. Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, p. 314.

[61]Portman writes that he saw symptoms of smallpox in the late 1880s and was able to isolate the patient effectively. The account should be treated with caution; it is unlikely that smallpox in the Andamans would have been a 'one-off' phenomenon. Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, pp. 614–15.

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the innocent). Syphilis, in particular, became a metaphor not only of racial extinction but also of cultural, sexual and political perversion, in which the Andamanese had—with British complicity—taken on the habits of the wrong people, had sex with the wrong people, taken orders from the wrong people, and died out as a result. Tobacco had rendered the Andamanese sterile, believed the same Britons who had, as a matter of policy, supplied aborigines with tobacco as a technique of control.[62] Portman bemoaned the availability of alcohol,[63] although there is little evidence of the widespread use of alcohol by the aborigines in this period. The post-epidemic savage in the Andamans, accordingly, was a creature of salvage and expiation: salvaged from disaster and the clumsy zeal of civilisers, purified of moral, biological and political corruption, isolated from the corrupt, the unclean, the inexpert and the racially unfit, and restored to a permanently endangered virginity.

The discourse of Andamanese extinction predates the medical disaster of the late 1870s. E. H. Man, who was the first Officer in Charge of the Andamanese to have a self-conscious science fetish, was 'anxious to study the Andamanese from a scientific point, and record what was known of this people and their customs before they became extinct.'[64] Given the low rates of surviving infants in the Homes and the Orphanage, it made sense to assume that each generation of children might be the last. Already in the 1860s, there was considerable, albeit contested, talk about a condition of chronic decline. This medicalised discourse was also implicitly critical of the impact of colonialism upon the Andamanese. The surgeon F. Day, visiting the colony in 1869–70, had attempted to establish a mathematical relationship between extinction and aboriginal visits to the Home, writing:

> [T]hose who are living in the vicinity of our Settlement are decreasing in number, few appear to live over forty years of age, scarcely any family number above two living children, and only one has three. From April 1868 to April 1869, thirty-eight deaths were reported, and only fourteen births, whilst during the four years only six infants have lived whose parents resided at the Homes; of monthly visitors only twelve; of the half-yearly ones some

[62]RSAI, 1883–84, NAI; Report of the Andaman Homes (henceforth RAH) 1895–96, NAI; GOI to R. C. Tytler, 3.14.1863, Home Department 1863, 1653, NAI.

[63]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 464.

[64]Ibid., p. 601.

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twenty; this is somewhat remarkable, with reference to the question of the effects of fish diet on the production of offspring, and the probable result of civilization on this savage race.[65]

In 1867, Homfray—who was responsible for the dietary experiments at the Home—himself reflected (about the North Andamanese) that 'the race is gradually becoming extinct.'[66] Perceiving a decline in the population, Homfray offered the curious explanation (based on the belief, rare by 1867, that the Andamanese were the descendents of shipwrecked African slaves) that since the transoceanic slave trade had been abolished, Andamanese men could no longer find wives. He also noted, however, the frequency of deaths and the rarity of viable births at the Home, and speculated that the Andamanese might be 'in a more naturally healthy condition of body in their savage roving life in their native jungles.'[67] Coming from the generally pro-civilisation Homfray, this is a startling self-indictment. It indicates that by the mid-1860s, the discourse of Andamanese extinction was simultaneously medical, historical, Romantic, museological-anthropological and political (because of the issue of responsibility). Homfray had sought to contribute to each facet, and in the process acknowledged that colonial processes and especially the Homes had altered the living environment of the islands and damaged the aborigines. It might be argued, in fact, that this constitutes an implicit acknowledgement of the validity of the early 'ecological resistance' of the Andamanese.[68]

The Andaman Homes were not seen exclusively as a destructive force, particularly by Homfray, who was, after all, in overall charge of the institution. At this point, the Homes were seen as a correctible problem, and as a medical-anthropological experiment in progress: an investigation into what might be a healthy location for aborigines, how much tobacco was too much for Andamanese bodies, and so on.[69] Moreover, in this period, a discourse of imminent extinction could be used in support of civilising projects. H. Man (father of E. H. Man, and superintendent in the late 1860s), for instance, believed

[65]Report of Surgeon F. Day.

[66]RSAI, 1866–67.

[67]Ibid.

[68]The Andamanese had demonstrated a tendency to target convicts engaged in forest clearance. RSAI, 1860–61, NAI; RAH 1882–83, 1883–84, NAI.

[69]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 551.

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that the evident poor health of the Andamanese called for the recruitment of a 'medical missionary,' who might live in the new Andamanese Hospital in Port Mouat and persuade the aborigines to moderate their savagely excessive consumption of tobacco and unfamiliar foods, to exercise more and to wear clothes.[70] (Their nakedness, especially in the small world of Ross Island, was a source of anxiety to Man and his colleagues; not only did they believe that it predisposed the Andamanese to colds, they found it 'unsightly', unsettling and dangerous to white women who might see the naked men.[71]) Homfray and Man, both connected the islanders' culture with medical afflictions and death, Homfray referring to aboriginal dancing as a 'stupid, unmeaning madness, whereby the Andamanese catch cold, overdo themselves, and are consequently knocked up with severe inflammation of the lungs which carries them off.'[72] Here, the Dionysian aspect of Andamanese savagery—especially the apparently undisciplined body—became an internal mechanism of extinction and a plea for civilisation.

Writing at the end of the century, Portman articulated his grand theory of Andamanese extinction. Centuries of isolation and the lack of 'fresh blood,' he wrote, had generated in the Andamanese an endemic weakness. Nor was this unique to the Andamanese: 'The savage, far from being, as people often suppose, a robust man, is generally very delicate,' Portman declared.[73] Until the arrival of British and Indians, the Andamanese, with their lack of cultural, physiological and immunological defenses, had lived in an island bubble. Colonialism had burst the bubble:

> [The] Homes ... were most deleterious, in them the Andamanese learnt to smoke, contracted new diseases, and were given new foods to which they were unaccustomed. Their customs and modes of life were also altered; several well-meaning but mistaken persons were anxious that they should change their mode of life entirely, and settle down to agriculture. In their own jungles they were well sheltered from the cold winds and storms by the forests, in the depths of which little wind can penetrate; we dragged them out of these and made them live in open clearings at all times of the

[70]RSAI, 1868–69, NAI.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Ibid; see also Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 564.

[73]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 874.

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year. Further, the change of diet, etc., appears to have rendered the men sterile, and the syphilis aiding, in the few instances in which children are born, they do not survive.[74]

Portman is ambiguous about whether this devastation was the inevitable result of colonisation or the consequence of particularly obtuse policies. Above, he appears to blame Corbyn and Homfray for having failed to understand the nature of the savage. In an ironic commentary on 'experimental' colonialism,[75] however, Portman compared British intervention in the Andamans to a chemistry experiment that had not so much gone wrong, but worked perfectly to produce unfortunate results:

There is an old and well-known chemical experiment in which a warm concentrated solution of sulphate of soda is boiled in a glass tube drawn out at one end. While ebullition is proceeding freely, the tube is hermetically sealed, and ... exhausted of air. The solution when left to itself cools without the solid being precipitated, although the liquid is *supersaturated*. But if the end of the tube is broken off and air allowed to enter, crystallization immediately commences at the surface, and is quickly propagated through the whole length of the tube. The Andamanese race are like this solution. So long as they were left to themselves ... they would continue to live; but when we came amongst them and admitted the air of the outside world, with consequent changes, to suit our necessities, not theirs, they lost their vitality, which was wholly dependent on being untouched, and the end of the race came.[76]

While Portman's analysis of Andamanese extinction clearly draws upon ideas about the inevitable demise of aboriginal people that had gained currency by mid-century[77] (and were echoed by his contemporaries, like the amateur sociologist Benjamin Kidd[78]), the sickness of the 1870s had endowed him with a heavier stamp of authority—and far greater conviction—than Homfray or Day had had at their disposal. Not only had the deaths furnished evidence

[74]Ibid.

[75]Sen, *Colonial Childhoods*, p. 9.

[76]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 875.

[77]L. R. Hiatt, *Arguments About Aborigines*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 6.

[78]Benjamin Kidd, 'Social Evolution', *Mind*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1894, pp. 551–56.

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of 'what could happen', they had obliterated other possible trajectories of savage evolution on the margins of the colony. They had, moreover, added the scientific potency of germs to the mix of climate and culture. There was no longer room for doubt about the consequences of making savages do the work of civilisation, and the doubters had been discredited. In this new discursive environment, the savage—who was now 'dying' even when healthy—had to be re-encapsulated in the bubble and partially, selectively, isolated from civilisation. The new task of the coloniser in the clearing was to maintain, and to supervise, the repaired bubble while also maintaining the colony. 'Chemistry experiments' with the Andamanese could not be abandoned: to be civilised was to experiment. What was needed, under the circumstances, were different experiments.

Nor surprisingly, the deployment of the discourse of extinction was highly coercive towards the Andamanese themselves. Post-epidemic governance was not a policy of 'leaving them alone'. It was, rather, a policy of enforcing specific new roles for aborigines. The use of the Andamanese to hunt runaway convicts, which had begun on a small scale in the Homfray years, was now expanded (envisioned as extensions of savage habits of tracking and hunting), 'friendly' Andamanese were increasingly drawn into counterinsurgency operations against the Onge and the Jarawa, and new forms of savage labour (such as the ritualistic manufacture of 'artifacts') were devised.[79] Yet it is apparent that Portman struggled to persuade the Andamanese to participate in this new savagery, and that he continued E. H. Man's policies of chasing, rounding up and incarcerating people believed to have syphilis, smallpox, and even the mumps.[80] In every confrontation, Portman cited the imminent demise of 'the race' as what made his task difficult as well as necessary.[81] Regarding a series of trips within the archipelago in 1890 and 1891, he wrote:

The influenza was still raging and many deaths had occurred. At Stewart's Sound, where, in 1880, fourteen canoe loads of people came off to me when I visited it, only about fourteen people remained alive. [At Interview Island] two of them fired at me, and ... ran away into the jungle. One of them was brought back by some men of my own party ... and he, on

[79]Portman Collection, Anthropological Survey of India, vol. 4–7.
[80]RAH 1885–86.
[81]Ibid; RSAI, 1886–87.

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finding that he had to go back in the canoe, attacked me, biting one of my fingers to me bone, and ... tried to cut my throat. He was tied up and put into the boat. I took some photographs of the scene, and then burnt the village down....[82]

From fourteen canoes to fourteen individuals: along with other incantations of statistics of death and survival generated by the medical crises,[83] this is the numerical poetry of extinction. Portman was able to use it to explain his Kurtz-like behaviour. 'I am endeavouring to keep the race alive as long as possible,' he clarified,[84] and an impressed Government of India praised his efforts to 'prolong the existence of the race'.[85] Where Britons had once sought to protect convicts and shipwrecked sailors from the Andamanese,[86] the objective of control was now to save the Andamanese from themselves, i.e., from germs, their own diseased, weak or weakened bodies, and their juvenile minds. This 'preservationist' mode of governance was not devoid of an agenda of transformation, since it presumed that a measure of transformation was necessary to save the Andamanese, but the dominant assumption was that the Andamanese were to be saved *in spite of* and *with* their savagery, rather than *from* their savagery. The redefined heroism of the coloniser drew its sustenance from this reorientation of the agenda of manipulation.

At the same time, the idea of extinction could generate leniency in governance. In 1894, an Andamanese man named Chiro, who was believed to have killed another aborigine in a dispute over a dog, was sentenced by the Chief Commissioner to a relatively short spell of detention at the Home, on the grounds that a longer term would kill him.[87] (He died quickly anyway.) Such leniency towards savage offenders was not new in the Andamans, where aborigines were commonly excluded from the formal application of the law, but in the age of extinction it had acquired additional ideological moorings. This benevolence was the other face of the harshness of beatings and village-burnings; both reflected a powerful resuscitation of the Romantic in the savage encounter.

[82]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, pp. 674–75.
[83]RSAI, 1883–84.
[84]RAH 1890–91.
[85]Resolution of GOI on RSAI 1890–91, Home Department 1891, NAI.
[86]Home Department Public Consultations 8.5.1858, NAI; Tytler to GOI, 4.27.1863, Home Department 1863, NAI.
[87]RSAI, 1894–95, NAI.

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The extinction of the savage was itself a deeply Romantic idea. Correcting E. H. Man's attestation of Andamanese 'modesty,' Portman clarified that the aborigines possessed an 'Elizabethan' sense of humour, relating the savage not only to an ancestral and classical stage of normative Englishness, but also (implicitly) to English subalterns and even the unacknowledged selves of the English elite of his own time.[88] E. H. Man was himself attempting to rehabilitate the Andamanese in Victorian eyes by ascribing to them a recogniseable propriety.[89] This dynamic of seeing the savage as a familiar near-self becomes more feasible when the savage ceases to be a political-military challenge and is reduced to the status of a dying curiosity: an object of pathos and nostalgia, mourned even before it has vanished. The post-1876 forays of E. H. Man, Cadell and Portman into the deserted jungle reflect another facet of this pathos. Disease had left behind an apocalyptic landscape for the coloniser to explore and chart, and from this he collected and preserved human and anthropological debris. Romantic horror merged thrillingly with medical-scientific purpose. The 'last of his tribe' exclamations that punctuate these explorations (and that punctuate the larger narrative of European colonialism from North America to Tasmania[90]) should be seen in the light of this romance in which the coloniser finds a savage relic in a desolation that is both of his own making and accidental. In June of 1890, touring the coast during an outbreak of influenza, Portman discovered that Punga Karl, the 'last representative of the Rutland Island Sept,' had died.[91] Three years later, describing another death, he remarked that since the Andamanese knew 'how few of them were left', they were particularly sad about each new casualty.[92] He assumed that the Andamanese shared both the British sense of the boundaries of their 'race' and the Romantic attitude towards racial extinction.

* * *

[88]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 624.

[89]Man, 'On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands', p. 94.

[90]These include fiction like James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, as well as the romantic/ethnological literature surrounding Ishi, the 'last Yahi Indian,' and Truganini, the 'last full-blooded Tasmanian.' See Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi: Last of His Tribe*, New York: Random House, 1973, *passim*.

[91]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, p. 673.

[92]Ibid., p. 692.

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The intensification of the British engagement with the Jarawa and the Onge after the 1870s is an aspect of this romance, because those tribes now took on the status of relics and survivors within the larger Andamanese population. Because of the peculiar processes of counterinsurgency and pursuit through which Jarawa identity was constructed, British administrators of the 1880s and 1890s were able to imagine the 'tribe' as an entity that had receded from the main body of the Andamanese and become invisible.[93] This invisibility was rendered more exciting—and the Jarawa are nothing if not exciting[94]—by the surrounding phenomenon of extinction, because the coloniser knew that unlike the visibly dead savage, the invisible savage was still around. As known savages died out, the Jarawa moved in literally and discursively to take their plaće. (Portman was explicit about this, noting that the Jarawa were 'gradually occupying jungle which belonged to Septs ... which are now extinct.'[95]) The Jarawa are, in that sense, byproducts of the discourse of extinction: a pristine Andamanese tribe awaiting discovery, and surviving representatives of the Andamanese as they once were.[96] At the same time, extrapolating from R. H. Colebrooke's writings of the 1790s,[97] Portman speculated that the Jarawa might be infected with a mystery disease, which—like the Jarawa themselves—had been hiding in the jungle. This vision contradicts the 'pristine' vision of the Jarawa, but the two ideas—the pristine savage and the secretly infected savage—coexisted in the Romantic imagination of extinction, which was, after all, the facilitation of fantasy rather than the fixing of a single image.[98]

The British encounter with the Onge generated another duality. During the invasions of Little Andaman in the mid-1880s, it quickly became apparent that the Onge were not in fact untouched by germs or history, and this discovery complicated the question of what neo-Romantic colonialism might do with 'sole survivors.' Portman wrote:

[93]Ibid., pp. 702–4; RAH 1894–95.

[94]K. Mukhopadhyay, R. K. Bhattacharya, B. N. Sarkar, eds. *Jarawa Contact*, Kolkata: ANSI, 2002, pp. iii–xiii.

[95]RAH, 1890–91, NAI.

[96]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, pp. 701–4.

[97]Colebrooke produced several narratives of the short-lived British settlement in the Andamans between 1789–1796. See R. H. Colebrooke, 'On the Andaman Islands', *Asiatick Researches* IV, 1795, pp. 385–95.

[98]Portman, *The History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, pp. 701–4.

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The fact of syphilis being among them has to a certain extent modified our policy towards this tribe. Formerly our one object, after friendly relations had been established with them, was to prevent them from mixing with the convicts and other Andamanese, and contracting the disease, but now there is no objection to their going about the Great Andaman with the other tribes, and there will be no objection to our keeping parties of them [on Great Andaman] all the year round. The use to which I propose to put them ... is, to search for the Jarawas....[99]

The diseased survivor was, in this sense, highly useful as an experimental subject because he was already dead. The Onge could therefore be taken to Port Blair, studied, utilised, and returned to Little Andaman in accordance with Portman's desires, including his desire to show them 'that we are the strongest race, and are to be obeyed.'[100] In his notes on the Onge, Portman imagines a tranquilised savage world in Little Andaman, where politics and history have essentially ceased with the British conquest. Portman has come to the island to preside over, study, record and master a final stage that is frozen into the status of an artifact, and at the same time, almost finished. At this stage, the entire past is contained in the present, and is open to Portman's 'experience'.[101]

The only historical crack still open is the approach of extinction. In the course of his expeditions to Little Andaman in the 1880s, Portman had cultivated aboriginal intermediaries; a decade later, when his book was taking shape, several of those men were dead and the shadow of Andamanese disappearance had fallen on the Onge. Portman was silent or indifferent about his own responsibility for having infected them: a silence that reveals his assumptions about class, race, sex and cleanliness, which held upper-class white males to be both clean and sexually restrained, and thus to pose no medical threat to savages. Like surgeons behind masks or technicians in sterile suits, Portman and his colleagues could assemble, study and use the dying savage, even be horrified, thrilled or saddened, without implicating themselves in the death.

The discourse of extinction provided Britons with a new theory of savage behaviour. The Andamanese, Portman suggested as he looked magisterially at the history of civilisation and disease in the islands,

[99]Ibid., p. 844.
[100]Ibid.
[101]Ibid., p. 620.

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had become hostile and treacherous only when their political and military confidence had been broken; they had then been reduced to timidity, cowardice and dependence upon the Homes.[102] Extinction was not only the result of demoralisation, it was a cause. Here, Portman came close to a view that the Andamanese, when politically, militarily and demographically intact, were morally a different breed of savage: not necessarily noble, but innocent nevertheless.[103] This is a direct rebuttal of the idea of the naturally 'treacherous', bloodthirsty savage that pervades the pre-epidemic narratives of colonialism in the Andamans.[104] In the process of historicising treachery, Portman had established a clear trajectory with two lines of interrelated moral and political attributes: on the one hand, independence, insubordination, strength and innocence, and on the other hand, dependence, subordination, weakness and treachery. This is a counterintuitive position for a coloniser to take, but it was made possible by the transformation of the Andamanese from a governmental problem into Romantic relics.

CONCLUSION

British officers surveying the Andamanese coast during the medical crisis of the late 1870s and early 1880s relied frequently on a particular image to describe the devastation they perceived. This was the image of the deserted aboriginal village in which the people had vanished, and where the visitors themselves barely existed. In some ways, the image and the narrative mode are similar to what Mary Louise Pratt has called the 'reverie' in European travel writing: the seeing and describing of landscape in a manner that renders it vacant and inviting for would-be colonisers and properly exploited native labor.[105] In the Andamans, however, the apparent 'reveries' of E. H. Man and Portman are misleading. Here, the emptied landscape was a sign of the impossibility of civilisation and labour,

[102]Ibid., p. 699.

[103]On the further development of the idea of savage innocence, see Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885–1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 264.

[104]R. C. Tytler correspondence with GOI, 4.27.1863, 6.19.1863, Home Department 1863, 4013, 4847, NAI.

[105]Mary Louise Pratt, 'The Face of the Country, in *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, pp. 141–45.

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of sickness and death, and of a not altogether unpleasant turning-inward of the colonial imagination. The visible land and its barely visible inhabitants were both medically unfit for civilisation.

The discovery of measles, syphilis, influenza and other diseases in the aboriginal population confirmed this diagnosis, with two seemingly contradictory effects. It provided the government with powerful new rationales and tools for coercive intervention in Andamanese society. At the same time, it almost entirely silenced the rhetoric of civilising the Andamanese. Coercion and governance were henceforth aimed at preserving the Andamanese as savages defined by frailty and imminent extinction. An Utilitarian application of medicine had, ironically, produced a thoroughly Romantic savage encounter for colonisers who self-consciously abjured the civilising agenda, but not the agendas of dominance and control.

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11

Knowledge of the Bhils and their Systems of Healing

David Hardiman

In this chapter, I shall examine how the Bhils of the border region between the present states of Rajasthan and Gujarat understood and treated ill health and disease in the late nineteenth century. Before I do this, however, I would like to say a few words about the methodological problems involved in reconstructing a social and medical history of a subaltern community living in a hilly tract that even today is not easy to access. The problem lies in the sources that are the most part available to us, namely writings by colonial officials and Christian missionaries whose understanding of these people was strongly coloured by their prejudices. Is it—we may ask—possible to utilise sources that are so tainted? I shall start by examining how the British regarded such people during the nineteenth century.

According to the Italian philosopher Benetto Croce (1886–1952), European thought since the time of the Enlightenment has made a distinction between those humans who were considered to be a part of 'history' and those who belonged to the 'inferior reality' of nature. The latter were:

> ... men only zoologically, they are to be dominated. They may be tamed and trained; when this proves impossible, they may be allowed to live on at the fringes of civilization, without being the object of any of those cruelties that must be avoided against any form of life, but being allowed

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as a race to die out like those [native] American races who shrank and died ... when a civilization they could not withstand moved upon them.[1]

The British, when they conquered India, categorised in this manner a range of disparate communities scattered over the subcontinent, in the process creating for them a conceptual unity that they had never hitherto possessed. Those so singled out lived for the most part in the more inaccessible hill and forest tracts, and survived largely from hunting and gathering or rudimentary swidden agriculture. They were classed as 'aboriginals' or 'early tribes', being characterised, amongst other things, by their 'clan'-based systems of kinship and their 'animistic' religious beliefs. Sometimes, they were defined in terms of their habitat, as 'jungle tribes'.

In India, the largest concentrations of people so classed were in the northeast. Elsewhere, many were found in the central-eastern region, in what is now the state of Jharkhand and areas adjoining to it in Bengal, Orissa and Bastar, and in a belt of western India running over the four modern Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.[2] In this latter area, there were considered to be two main types of such people—the so-called 'Kaliparaj' (black people) who were found in the southern part of this belt, and the Bhils. The former were generally considered to be less warlike than the latter. In many cases, the Bhils had in the past been organised in warlike kinship groups that had prevented outside rulers from extending their control over the mountains. The British had subjugated such Bhils—with considerable difficulty—during the first half of the nineteenth century. Even afterwards, there were several revolts by them.

The British believed that they had a moral duty to 'civilise' these 'primitives'; freeing them from the state of nature in which they were mired and bringing them within the ambit of 'history'. They were encouraged to practice a more settled and intensive agriculture. In many cases, they were excluded from large tracts of forest that they had previously controlled, so that state foresters could exploit

[1]Benedetto Croce, *Filosofica e Storiografica*, Bari: Laterza, 1949, p. 246—quoted and translated by Allesandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Forms and Meanings in Oral History*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, ff6, p. 293.

[2]S. Muthiah, ed., *A Social and Economic Atlas of India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 27.

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the timber wealth of the woodlands.[3] Landlords, usurers and liquor dealers who were protected by the colonial and princely states ruthlessly exploited those who became settled.[4] A large proportion of the area inhabited by such people in western India was ruled by Indian princes rather than directly by the British colonial state. Although nominally independent, these princes relied on British troops and British-run militias to maintain their control over their 'tribal' subjects. This was the case in Mewar and the adjoining princely states of Rajasthan and Gujarat—the region that provides the focus for this article.

James Tod, who served as Political Agent in Mewar from 1818 to 1822, stated that the—'primitive inhabitants' of that state were 'content to be called' *'bhumiputra'* (sons of the earth) or *vanaputra* ('sons of the forest'). He saw them as a culturally distinct group.[5] He also described them as 'lawless' or 'wild tribes' who were being given too much freedom by the princely rulers:

> Had the wild tribes been under the sole influence of British power, nothing would have been so simple as effectually, not only to control, but to conciliate and improve them; for it is a mortifying truth, that the more remote from civilization, the more tractable and easy to manage, more especially the Bhil.[6]

Unfortunately, according to Tod, 'these children of nature' were in these parts under the rule of oppressive feudal lords whose continuing misrule caused frequent revolts.

The most influential of the earlier colonial texts relating to the Bhils was John Malcolm's *A Memoir of Central India*, published in

[3]On this, see in particular David Hardiman, 'Power in the Forest: The Dangs, 1820–1940', in *Subaltern Studies VIII*, ed. David Arnold and David Hardiman, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994; and Ajay Skaria, 'Timber Conservancy, Desiccationism and Scientific Forestry: The Dangs 1840s–1920s', in *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Richard Grove, Vinita Damodaran, Satpal Sangwan, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

[4]On usurers see David Hardiman, *Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and Usurers in Western India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996; on liquor dealers see David Hardiman, 'From Custom to Crime: The Politics of Drinking in Colonial South Gujarat', in *Subaltern Studies IV*, ed. Ranajit Guha, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985.

[5]James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, ed. William Crooke, vol. 2, London: Humphrey Milford, 1920, p. 651. The work was first published in two volumes of 1829 and 1832.

[6]Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, vol. 1, p. 586.

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1823. Malcolm, a general in the army of the East India Company, was sent in 1818 to establish British control over Malwa and southern Rajasthan. He was Tod's superior. In this book, he started by pointing out that it was hard to know the Bhils, due to 'their dispersion over rugged mountains, their extreme ignorance and prejudices, and their repugnance to confidential intercourse with all except their own tribe....'[7] Despite this, he attempted 'some conjectures regarding the origin and progress of the tribe....' They were, he said, 'a distinct race, insulated in their abodes, and separated by their habits, usages, and forms of worship, from the other tribes of India.'[8] In the remote past they had been expelled to the woods and hill after they had slaughtered the favourite bull of the god Mahadev—a dire transgression in Hindu society. They became *nishada*, or outcastes. From that time on 'they have since dwelt, subsisting partly on their industry, but more on the plunder of the rich landholders in their vicinity.'[9] Although some had settled down in the plains regions as peaceful cultivators, the 'wild, or mountain Bheel', continued to prefer 'savage freedom and indolence to submission and industry, [and] have continued to subsist by plunder.'[10]

The plundering or wild Bheels, who reside among the hills, are a diminutive and wretched-looking race, whose appearance shews [sic] the poverty of their food; but they are nevertheless active and capable of great fatigue. They are professed robbers and thieves, armed with bows and arrows: they lie in wait for the weak and unprotected, while they flee from the strong. Ignorant and superstitious to a degree, they are devoted to their Turwees [chieftains], whose command is a law which they implicitly obey. The men, and still more the women, have their intellect formed by their condition; they are quick, have a kind of instinctive sense of danger, and are full of art and evasion. To kill another when their Turwee desires, or to suffer death themselves, appears to them a matter of indifference. The whole race are illiterate, and they are, without exception, fond of tobacco and liquor to excess. Their quarrels begin and end in drunken bouts....[11]

[7]John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India, Including Malwa, and Adjoining Provinces, with the History, and Copious Illustrations, of the Past and Present Condition of that Country*, vol. 1, 1823, republished, New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1970, pp. 516–17.

[8]Ibid., pp. 517–18.

[9]Ibid., p. 519.

[10]Ibid., p. 521.

[11]Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India*, vol. 2, pp. 179–80.

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In Malcolm's account, the 'wild, or mountain' Bhils were characterised by their animal-like or feral traits, as seen in their undomesticated habitat, their rudimentary and predatory forms of subsistence, their instinctive rather than considered reactions, their proclivity towards excess rather than a civilised moderation, their unreflective obedience to the leader of the pack, their pre-religious amorality, their superstition, and their complete lack of learning. In every way, they were the mirror image of the civilised Englishman, being a people that more than any other had to be disciplined and civilised.

The missionaries who entered these territories later in the nineteenth century took such accounts as their guide. Thus, when the journal of the Church Missionary Society, the *Intelligencer*, published an article on the Bhils in 1882, it reproduced large swathes of Malcolm's text almost verbatim. The unstated assumption was that as the Bhils existed in a state of nature, their condition would have remained largely unchanged since 1820. They were classed as 'non-Aryans', that is, as an aboriginal race that was distinct from the later Aryan invaders who had driven then into the hills.[12] Even when the missionaries later provided more detailed descriptions of the Bhils that were based on their own enquiries and observations, they remained confined within these mental parameters. The Reverend C. S. Thompson thus argued in an article of 1897 that the Bhils among whom he worked were in fact of mixed race, being descended in part from a pre-Aryan 'primitive people' of Central India, as well as from Mongolian tribes that entered India before 1500 BC, and also from 'predatory Rajput chiefs' who had seized and married Bhil women after about 1000 AD. In this way he sought to explain the fact that he had observed many physical gradations among them, 'from the man who is almost a pure Rajput in complexion and physique to the black and stunted inhabitant of the forest. Moreover, here and there may be noticed features which are distinctly Mongolian. There can, therefore, hardly be any doubt that the Bheels unite in themselves a strain of these aboriginal, Mongolian, and Rajput stocks'.[13]

It is clear from this passage that Thompson was unable to transcend a discourse of racial identity that was both fanciful and insidious.

[12]'Some Account of the Bheels', *Intelligencer*, October 1882, pp. 585–91.

[13]C. S. Thompson, 'The Bheels', *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, October 1897, p. 148.

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A feature of this discourse was that it conferred a homogenised identity on peoples who might be scattered over large regions, countries or even continents. Thus, a variety of groups that lived in hills and forests were categorised as 'primitive tribes' who were supposed to share similar global characteristics. Viewed through such a lens, Bhils might be seen to possess certain 'negroid' characteristics. An anonymous British traveller in western India in the early 1820s thus described the Bhils as 'a short, thick-set people, with hideous countenances, flat noses, and thick lips, but far less handsome and finely formed men than the Africans; ... they look stupid.... Their women are even more hideous than the men.'[14] Rudyard Kipling made a similar sort of comparison over sixty years later on a visit to Mewar State, where he had observed some Bhils whose speech, he claimed, 'seems to possess some variant of the Zulu click, which gives it a weird and unearthly character.'[15] In fact, the language of the Mewari Bhils was very close to the neighbouring Gujarati, as was discovered by the missionaries when they began to translate the Gospel for their benefit. Such descriptions continued into the twentieth century. Writing in 1926, a missionary stated of the Bhils of Mewar:

> The difference in race is visible at a glance.... they are a very dark-skinned people. Instead of the clear-cut, handsome profile of the Aryan, they have blunt features. The nose is broad, the lips often thick as those of a negro, and the hair is worn long. Unlike that of the negro, it is straight or wavy but not curled.[16]

The Bhils—who were found throughout a belt of hills and mountains in western India that stretched over three hundred kilometres from north to south and in places a hundred and fifty kilometres from east to west—were all lumped together as one unique ethnic and cultural category. It was assumed that 'the Bhil' everywhere had practically identical traits, so that an observation of a Bhil in one

[14]*Sketches of India*, 4th ed., 1826, pp. 257–58—quoted in David Arnold, 'Race, Place and Bodily Difference in Early Nineteenth Century India', *Historical Research*, vol. 77, no. 196, 2004, pp. 266.

[15]Rudyard Kipling, 'Letters of Marque, Nov–Dec 1887', reprinted in Kipling, *From Sea to Sea and Other Sketches: Letters of Travel*, vol. 1, London: Macmillan, 1926, p. 57.

[16]George Carstairs, *Shepherd of Udaipur and the Land he Loved*, London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1926, p. 227.

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area could be taken to apply to all Bhils everywhere. Thus, what John Malcolm had to say about the Bhils of Malwa around 1820 were taken to apply to Bhils everywhere and at all times. In many cases, a stereotypical model of 'primitivism' appears to have been the starting point for a description; with observations being recorded only when they accorded with it. This appears to have been the case with one sweeping generalisation made about the Bhils by the author of the *Rajputana Gazetteer* of 1879: 'They are a dirty race. The men wear their hair long, and hanging in uncombed masses over their shoulders. The women are small and ugly....'[17] Many counter-observations might have been made—but they were not—as they would have opposed the pre-conceived stereotype.

Given that this was the case, we are presented with the problem with which I started. With our knowledge of these people in the past coming from such tainted sources, is it possible for us to know anything about them that is more than an objectionable caricature? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has raised the question as to what extent, if any, the outside observer can represent the subaltern.[18] Given the chasm that exists between those who inhabit a space of privilege and those who do not, any representation runs the risk of being an exercise in bad faith. Too often, the outsider inflicts her or his beliefs on the subaltern, whether these are of a racist, Christian, conservative, nationalist, socialist, feminist, environmentalist or any other bent. In such a situation, she feels, 'the subaltern cannot speak.'[19] Despite this, she goes on to argue that the intellectual with a moral commitment to the poor and oppressed may communicate across this divide, so long as she or he steers clear of all 'missionary claims'—that is avoids any assertion that the subaltern is endorsing any pre-conceived ideological position.[20] What is required above all is moral sympathy and empathy. This I would endorse entirely.

The other main principle that according to me, should be followed is to be as specific and as historical as we can in our writing. The

[17]*The Rajputana Gazetteer*, Vol.1, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1879, p. 117.

[18]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press,1999, pp. 255, 269. See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988.

[19]Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 273.

[20]Ibid., p. 310.

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detailed description that is rooted in a particular time and place is thus more likely to contain information that is of value.

Ranajit Guha has distinguished between primary, secondary and tertiary levels of documentation of this sort. The primary type was created characteristically by colonial officials who were ruling an area or suppressing a revolt, as well as by those symbiotically related to them such as traders, missionaries and the indigenous elites. As a rule, they have the great advantage of being written close to the subject and soon after an event, in the process recording many elements that were later filtered out in the secondary and then tertiary levels of documentation. Such sources provide evidence that creates the conditions for a radically different reading that runs 'against the grain.'[21] In this respect, a detailed report by an official or missionary written soon after a visit to a specific Bhil village is likely to provide a more reliable reflection of their way of life and being, than a broad generalisation by the compiler of a general ethnography or a gazetteer. Bearing this in mind, it is best to begin by locating our observations within a carefully defined and finite area, such as the Bhil tracts of Mewar and Dungapur in Rajasthan and the immediately adjoining states of Idar and Pol—that lay in Gujarat and were under the British political agency of Mahikantha—rather than a vague 'land of the Bhils' that spans whole regions and provinces. Details that conflict with the stereotypes should be considered and analysed carefully. The historically specific detail should be valued over the broad and ahistorical statement. From this base, we may then go on to make comparative observations drawn from carefully defined subaltern groups elsewhere.

Adopting this approach, I shall now examine the issue of how the Bhils of this area understood disease, and how they set about treating ill health in the latter part of the nineteenth century. To do this, I have sought out documentation that is as 'primary' as possible in Ranajit Guha's sense; that is, documentation that was created in a stated context, locality and situation and which is rich in detail. Although it will inevitably give voice to the prejudices of the writer, the detail should be sufficient to allow us to distinguish its particular bias and go on to provide a reading 'against the grain'. My starting point is an article written by Dr Thomas Hendley of the Indian

[21]Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in *Subaltern Studies II*, ed. Ranajit Guha, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 3–4.

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Medical Service, who from 1871 served as an Assistant Surgeon at the small military hospital of the Mewar Bhil Corps at Kherwara. He was in daily contact with his Bhil patients, and he took an active interest in them and their way of life. He also talked at length with a local *Thakor*, or feudal overlord, called Gambhir Sing. Major Gunning, the Commandant of the Bhil Corps, read Hendley's first draft and added more details. The resulting 42-page account was published in 1875.[22] It examined many different aspects of Bhil life, not just the medical. It is however the latter aspect that I intend to focus on here.

Hendley, with his medical training, considered himself a man of science, and during his long career in India he was to publish many scholarly articles based on his observations of the people and the country. In 1875—still a junior doctor—he was in the vanguard of a new scientific racism that held that racial characteristics could be measured physically. This would, it was held, allow a history to be constructed of the movements and migrations of different races throughout the world, so that maps could be made showing their contemporary geographical locations. His posting to Kherwara provided him with an excellent opportunity to carry out what he called an 'ethnology' of the Bhils that was based on observations of their physical characteristics and measurements. He did this in 1874, subjecting 129 soldiers of the corps to his measuring tape, recording their height, the length of various limbs and parts of limbs, body proportions and dimensions of their heads. He concluded that they were 'a small-handed race', with small chest and pelvis. The head measurements revealed that 'the Bhil skull is but slightly dolichocephalic, very different from the long thin walled crania of the pure Hindu.' He set out his observations of their physical appearance—their dark skin, straight black hair, foreheads that were 'rather more square than amongst Hindus,' 'nose slightly retroussé, broad, clubbed at the tip, and rather more varied than the dead level organ of the Hindu', 'mouths large, lips thick, inexpressive, sensual...', 'expression amiable, but timid', 'the dilated large nostrils, the moveable and prominent ear are very suggestive of distrust'. Teeth were large and horselike, adapted to chewing their staple food of coarse maize. He was not sure that his measurements provided a

[22]T. H. Hendley, 'An Account of the Maiwar Bhils', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 44, pt. 1, no. 4, 1875, pp. 347–88.

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'certain proof' that the Hindu and Bhil races were distinct, though he believed that they were, the Bhils most likely being descendents of the ancient inhabitants of India, the Dasyas, who were described in the Vedas as 'goat-nosed, the noseless, the black-skinned...'[23] For all its seeming scientific rigour, this exercise dripped with moral judgement.

Despite this, the detail in other parts of the article is sufficient to allow us to go beyond such racist stereotypes. The 'ethnology' that is so objectionable to present-day sensibilities was set out in the article only towards the end, with a range of far less value-loaded descriptions of the Bhils of this area preceding it. It is these that I shall look at, comparing them with other representations if necessary.

Hendley felt that in general, 'the Bhils are a healthy race.' For example, cholera, perhaps the most dreaded disease in nineteenth century India, was very rare among them.[24] In common with many other medical men of that era, he appears to have believed that 'primitive' people were less subject to the ravages of illness than the more 'civilised'. Michel Foucault has commented on this belief, quoting the French physician Tissot, who just before the Revolution stated that,

> Before the advent of civilisation, people had only the simplest, most necessary diseases. Peasants and workers still remain close to the basic nosological table; the simplicity of their lives allows it to show through in its reasonable order: they have none of those variable, complex, intermingled nervous ills, but down-to-earth apoplexies, or uncomplicated attacks of mania.[25]

[23]Ibid., pp. 367–68.

[24]Cholera was prevalent in the area—for example 9 cases were reported at the annual fair at Shamlaji, in the heart of the Bhil country, in 1889, of which 5 proved fatal. This outbreak does not appear to have spread beyond this town. Mahi Kantha Annual Administration Report, 1889–90, Gujarat State Archives, Vadodara Branch, Crown Representative Records, Daftar 50, F 37, Colonel H. L. Nutt, Acting Political Agent, Mahi Kantha, to Pol. Dept. Govt. of Bombay, Sadra 21 and 23 July 1890, p. 21. In 1900, however, there was an epidemic of cholera at a time of famine that killed large numbers of the Bhils of this area. See Arthur Outram to Durrant, Kherwara, 21 May 1900, Church Missionary Society Records, University of Birmingham, G2 I 6 0 1900, doc. 304.

[25]Tissot, *Trait é des nerfs et leurs maladies*, vol. II, Paris: 1778–80, 432–44, quoted in Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 16.

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It was believed that as people improved their condition of life, and as the social network tightened its grip around individuals, 'health seems to diminish by degrees.' Diseases become diversified and combined with one another. As Tissot had stated in an earlier work: 'their number is already great in the superior order of the bourgeoisie; ... it is as great as possible in people of quality.'[26] Writing in such a vein a century later, Hendley said of the Bhils:

> Insanity is uncommon, perhaps unknown as we should expect in a savage race with the mind rude and uncultivated and little to excite it. I have never seen a case of mania, and only one or two of dementia in old age.[27]

One disease that was a killer for the Bhils, and which was as a result greatly feared by them, was smallpox. Hendley noted that they practised their own form of inoculation against this disease, and they preferred this to western-style vaccination.[28] In another account written later, Hendley provided more detail of their inoculation technique. They dipped a grain of dust into the pustule of a smallpox patient and then inserted this into the skin of a healthy person with the help of a needle. While doing so they invoked the smallpox goddess.[29] As was common throughout India, the Bhils believed that in cases of smallpox the body of the sufferer was possessed by a goddess and thus made feverish. Helen Lambert has described how villagers in Rajasthan in the 1980s were still holding communal ceremonies of worship that were designed to placate such goddesses and thus protect themselves from the disease.[30] The invocation of the goddess by the Bhils during inoculation would seem to have had a similar aim.

Many suffered from guinea worm and skin disorders, two problems that were 'mainly due to the filthiness of the people, whose

[26]Tissot, *Essai sur la santé des gens du monde*, Lausanne: 1770, 8–12—quoted in Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, p. 17.

[27]Hendley, 'Account of the Maiwar Bhils', p. 363.

[28]Ibid., 362.

[29]T. H. Hendley, *General Medical History of Rajputana*, Calcutta: Government Press, 1900, p. 148.

[30]Helen Lambert, 'The Cultural Logic of Indian Medicine: Prognosis and Etiology in Rajasthan Popular Therapeutics', *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 34, no. 10, 1992, p. 1071. See also David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*, Berkeley: California University Press, 1993, pp. 121–25. Arnold examines indigenous forms of inoculation on pp. 125–33.

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legs often remain coated for days with mud.' Hendley had already carried out research on guinea worm infestation among the Bhils of the MBC that had been published in *The Indian Medical Gazette* in 1872. This was a problem that affected the Bhils in particular; the non-Bhils of Kherwara town rarely suffered from it. He believed that the worms entered into the skin of the Bhils as they were bathing in or wading through dirty pools of water. People did not die of it, but it caused great debilitation.[31] Dr Mullen, Hendley's predecessor as surgeon to the MBC, had reported that venereal disease was unknown among the Bhils, and Hendley agreed with him in this, and it provided proof of their general sexual restraint. Goitre, also, was never seen.

Hendley's list of serious or widespread maladies is only partial, omitting several that appear in other sources. For example, the missionary doctor James Shepherd reported that Bhils treated at his clinic in Udaipur in the late nineteenth century commonly suffered from malaria, dysentery, rheumatism, and 'cough' or *phthisis* (e.g., tuberculosis). He was surprised by the latter, as—in his view—the air in the hills had a bracing quality that should have countered the disease.[32] Dr Jane Birkett, a medical missionary who began medical work amongst the Bhils of this area in 1900, noted that:

> Malarial fever with immense enlargement of the spleen is the commonest ailment, and it is quite pitiful to see the extent of anaemia and debility from which the whole population suffers in consequence. Tiny babies, only a few weeks old often had spleens the size of the palm of my hand, beyond their ribs; and adults often present a hard smooth tumour which passes from the L. ribs to well over the right of the middle line, and even into the R. iliac fosa.
>
> After malaria, skin and eye affections were the chief complaints. Ringworm was the most widespread skin problem, and granular lids with their sequelae the commonest eye trouble. Guinea worm was a major problem during the rainy season, and sufferers often

[31]T. H. Hendley, 'Filaria Dracunculus or Medinensis at Kherwarrah', in *The Indian Medical Gazette, A Monthly Record of Medicine, Surgery, Obstetrics, Jurisprudence and the Collateral Sciences; and of General Medical Intelligence, Indian and European*, vol. 7, 1872, pp. 59–60.

[32]Carstairs, *Shepherd of Udaipur*, p. 239.

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had four or five abscesses on one leg. There was also much phthisis and rheumatism. There were fairly frequent cases of acute pluro-pneumonia, which was known as 'the Gujarati sickness', which suggests that it was considered to have been brought from outside the Bhil region in recent times. It was particularly dreaded as it normally led to death.[33] From all this, it is clear that the Bhils suffered from many illnesses, several of which were associated with poverty and poor living conditions.

Moving on to forms of treatment, Hendley described a variety of herbal remedies used by the Bhils, such as the roots of certain plants or leaves of trees. Thus, a small shrub called *bhut bhangra* was dried and powdered and used to treat open wounds. If a purulent wound was caused by the bite of a tiger, a cure was obtained from the *kajera* tree. *Sat* or *bara mula* was used in cases of fever accompanied with dry swollen tongue and bad smell, and as a mouthwash. Hendley lists eight such herbal remedies,[34] but there must have been many more. He also stated that the 'priests are the chief physicians, although most old men are supposed to know something about medicine.'[35] By this, he presumably meant the 'medicine' that was derived locally from herbs and trees.

He mentioned another common method of treatment: 'The remedy for everything is the actual cautery; few adults, few children, and even animals are without scars.'[36] He does not elaborate on this, but later reports by medical missionaries back this observation. Dr Jane Birkett commented in 1901:

> Amongst the Bhils fire seems to be the great therapeutic agent. Most of them are marked with an arrow-head in the pit of the stomach; this was done to cure cholera. Scars from burns are also on their legs and arms.[37]

Such cauterisation was not peculiar to the Bhils, it was used throughout the region at that time, including amongst the caste Hindus of the plains. For Bhils, the rationale for this practice was

[33]Jane L. J. Birkett, 'Report of Medical Work in the Bhil Mission for 1901', Church Missionary Society Records, University of Birmingham, G 2 I 6/0 1902, doc. 75.

[34]Hendley, 'Account of the Maiwar Bhils', p. 363.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid., p. 362.

[37]Mrs A. I. Birkett, 'Bhil Mission', *Mercy and Truth*, vol. 5, no. 50, London: Church Missionary Society, 1901, p. 45.

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that it drove away the malign spirit that was causing the problem, as such spirits feared fire.[38]

Hendley also says something about childbirth practices, noting that women in labour were as a rule aided only by their women friends. They were kept in a warm hut, 'and even in cases of haemorrhage, [they] apply warm cloths, and administer hot-spiced drinks.' If there were difficulties, a wise woman of another caste might be called, or the women merely invoked the mother goddess. Cross births were rare, and were either left to the goddess, or the foetus was hooked or cut up in accordance with the advice of the most knowing person. This was however the practice amongst Hindus as well. The baby was suckled for two or three years.[39]

Hendley observed that the Bhils believed that some people—mainly women—had the ability to cause sickness, misfortune or death. It was considered that they were in touch with malevolent spirits, such as *bhoots* and *churails* (male and female departed spirits), and they could cause them to attack a person through their malign glance. They were known as *dakran* (Hindi—*dakini*), translated normally by the British, including Hendley, as 'witch'. Many Bhils wore charms or amulets on their right forearms or—with women especially—on their heads to keep such spirits at bay. The charms consisting generally of a piece of blue string with seven knots that were tied by an exorcist while he chanted incantations.[40]

What Hendley fails to mention, but which had come out in an earlier report by a Commandant of the Bhil Corps, was that women who possessed such powers were also valued for the protection that they were believed to be able to provide for their own families.

> To protect themselves from the consequences of being bewitched they will not marry into a family in which there is not a reputed witch to defend them from others of her species, and these again, as in England in former days, do everything to encourage, for the sake of the influence thereby acquired, this belief in their supernatural power.[41]

[38]This was stated by J. C. Brooke, Commandant of the Mewar Bhil Corps in 1851: Brooke to G. S. P. Lawrence, Political Agent Mewar, 7 April 1851, New Delhi: National Archives of India, Foreign Department, 16 February 1853, 121–23 FC, henceforth NAI, FD.

[39]Hendley, 'Account of the Maiwar Bhils', p. 352.

[40]Ibid., pp. 351–2.

[41]Brooke to G. S. P. Lawrence, Political Agent Mewar, 7 April 1851, NAI, FD, 16 February 1853, 121–23 FC.

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The dakran was thus a significant figure within a village politics that revolved around rivalries between families. In serious cases of alleged witchcraft, such as a sudden and unexpected death, the attribute could have tragic consequences for the woman concerned.

In such cases, an exorcist called a *bhopa*, was employed to name the witch responsible.

> Any one who is willing and has a grievance, sickness, or otherwise, has only to bribe a witch-finder sufficiently to obtain a victim, generally the wife or relative of an enemy, who is at once swung, head downwards, on a tree, where she is tortured by applications of red pepper to her eyes, nostrils, & c. Not twenty years ago, during the rains, a woman was swung in this way in the presence of British officers, who were unable to rescue her, as an impassable river lay between them. Should the unlucky woman escape death, she is turned out of the village, or, perhaps, the bhopa finds out under the influence of another *douceur*, that he was mistaken.[42]

Although Hendley's language is laced with contempt for the bhopa, they were highly regarded within Bhil society. Those who enjoyed a wide reputation for their skill and integrity would sometimes be called from a great distance to intervene in the most intractable cases. It was considered wrong to take action against a witch without a bhopa passing judgement first. In 1864, for example, a Bhil of Semlia village in Idar State suffered a wound that continued to weep blood even after being sewn up. The man's brother believed that a woman called Rupa was responsible, and he killed her with his sword. The local official stated this was seen as reprehensible as: 'If the woman was a witch the Bhopas ought to have been sent for to establish the fact.'[43]

A particularly malign case of witchcraft was considered a general social threat, and once a witch had been named, everyone was required to support the action against her, even if they were her relatives. Thus, when in 1850, a Bhil woman died in Bhimpur village of Idar State, it was believed that Rakhi, the wife of the dead woman's husband's half-brother, had cursed her. She was seized, taken to the cremation ground, and burnt alive on the funeral pyre. The Political Agent in Mahikantha commented:

[42]Hendley, 'Account of the Maiwar Bhils', p. 351.

[43]Thanedar of Poshina, 9 April 1864, London: Oriental and India Office Collection (henceforth OIOC), R/2/700/39.

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> The whole village appears to have been assembled on this occasion, a few of the nearer relatives of the victim of this burst of superstition were present but even they seem to have joined in the belief that she was a witch and did nothing to save her.[44]

He went on to note that so dangerous were such witches considered that their killing was seen 'merely as an act of self-defence not only reasonable but almost as necessary.' Nonetheless, it seems that most of such women escaped with their lives, either through a confession leading to some punishment for her and her family, or through her exile from the village. Writing in 1851, J. C. Brooke, Commandant of the Mewar Bhil Corps, estimated that there were about a hundred such cases each year in the area under his jurisdiction, of which about one in ten led to the death of the accused woman.[45]

The Bhils looked to their rulers to take a lead in preventing witchcraft, and up until the middle years of the nineteenth century they largely obliged. In 1842, the British Resident reported that witches were put to death in public in Udaipur City on the accession of Maharana Sarup Singh.[46] Local thakors acted in a similar manner. For example, the Political Agent for Mahikantha recounted how in 1850 the Thakor of Gher was asked by the people of Chapra to come urgently to their village to tackle a case of suspected witchcraft, as the victim was dying. The Thakor went, and a woman of the potter caste who was considered to have cast the spell was seized and brought to him. He told the other potters that if they tried to intervene to save her, he would seize their property. She was then put to death, after which the Thakor ordered some Bhils to take away her body and bury it.[47] The health of society was thus considered a collective concern so far as witchcraft was concerned. Witches were seen to threaten social stability from within, and it was considered a duty for those with power to counter their sorcery. There was a clear connection between local power and the prevention of supposed

[44]R. Wallace, Political Agent in Mahikantha, to Mallet, 3 September 1850, London: OIOC, R/2/700/39.

[45]Brooke to G.S.P. Lawrence, Political Agent Mewar, 7 April 1851, NAI, FD, 16 February 1853, 121–23 FC.

[46]Hari Sen, 'Popular Protest in Mewar in the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New Delhi: University of Delhi, 1996, p. 120.

[47]R. Wallace to Malet, 4 September 1850, OIOC, R/2/700/39.

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sorcery. Weaker members of the society tended to be the ones accused, such as old women, widows, or, in a few cases, subordinate males. In cases of illness in which witchcraft was not suspected, no collective response was considered necessary—individuals and families were left to treat the condition as they felt fit.

The British, after their conquest of India, had sought to outlaw the persecution of witches, a practice seen as barbaric. This ban was extended to the princely states of Rajasthan and Gujarat in the 1850s.[48] When announcing the ban in the states of Mahikantha, the Political Agent, Major Whitelock issued a proclamation:

> It is now hereby notified and declared that sorcery and enchantment have no real existence and are sheer prejudices and deceptions; and let it be clearly understood by all that the Almighty has not invested any human being with the supernatural power of causing the death of a fellow creature by the means of any such imaginary arts, and if any person shall profess to cause another bodily pain, or any injury to his person, family or property whatsoever, by pretended witchcraft, magic, or other such fraudulent practices, or if any person shall threaten to have recourse to witchcraft, or offer to remove fictitious evil-spirits for any one, and by such gross deceit shall receive, or shall obtain a promise of any gratuity, or remuneration in any shape whatsoever, that person will be punished for fraud, extortion and intimidation; and it is hereby further proclaimed that if any person or persons shall cause the death of another person under the false belief that he or she practised witchcraft or other delusive arts of any kind, then such person or persons will be tried for the crime of murder and dealt with accordingly.[49]

In Whitelock's view, belief that illness and misfortune could be caused by an evil force was not only irrational, but opposed also to true religion. In this, he gave voice to a belief that had emerged in Europe during the Enlightenment. An important thinker in this respect was Spinoza (1632–77), who had argued that many popular beliefs were delusions and superstitions—even when seemingly endorsed by the scriptures—and that those who were informed by the 'natural light of reason' had no use for them. God had created a good world, without inherent evil, and by abandoning the idea of

[48]Ajay Skaria, 'Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence in Colonial Western India', *Past and Present*, vol. 155, 1997, p. 138.

[49]Zahir Nameli or proclamation issued to the inhabitants of Mahi Kantha, 23 October 1856, OIOC, R/2/700/39.

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evil, humans could free themselves from irrational fears. By the mid-eighteenth century, mainstream Anglican theologians had, following such precepts, largely abandoned the concept of hell and its demonic forces, though some popular sects continued to believe in them.[50] What Whitelock was reflecting was, in other words, a relatively recent form of theology particular to Europe. He was, moreover, not only asserting that it was a delusion to believe in witchcraft and evil agency, but that it was a notion that was characteristically deployed in a self-serving and 'fraudulent' manner. Anyone practising such 'fraud, extortion and intimidation' would be punished harshly under the law. Hendley had also made such an assumption when he wrote, as we have seen above, that the bhopa was 'bribed' to identify a witch, and that he might be made to change his opinion 'under the influence of another *doceur*.'[51] Nowhere in this was there a recognition that the bhopas were generally considered sincere and skilled exorcists who were able to use their powers to make contact with the spiritual world to detect the source of a malign force.

In a discussion of how historians have approached the question of medieval trials by ordeal for those who were seen as transgressors, Talal Asad has noted how they have tended to focus on what people believed, rather than:

> ... the power structure by which certain truths about transgressions were determined. Thus, we don't know what were the real thoughts and feelings of individuals who could at one time resort to the ordeal and who were later obliged to submit to the inquisitorial courts. But we do know that they were processed through very different political-legal-moral structures, subject to very different powers. Their options, their behaviour, their relationship to the personnel necessary for determining guilt or innocence were all very different.[52]

In arguing as they did, colonial officers such as Whitelock and Hendley likewise focussed on belief rather than social structure, in the process failing to acknowledge the degree to which the notion of witchcraft

[50]D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964, pp. 7, 253–54, 262–63; see also Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967, p. 556.

[51]Hendley, 'Account of the Maiwar Bhils', p. 351.

[52]Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993, 5ff, p. 91.

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was socially embedded and universally believed in as a matter of common sense. For example, even the unfortunate women so accused also believed in the reality of casting curses—their main plea being that they had either not—or had at least not intentionally—cast such a spell. In approaching the matter on the level of true and false consciousness, Whitelock and Hendley failed to appreciate that such an argument would carry no weight with those to whom it was addressed. Local holders of power took action against witches because they were convinced that they had a duty to preserve their society from malign supernatural forces. They strongly resented the new law, and the practice was driven underground rather than suppressed.

In dealing with the illnesses and misfortunes brought by malign supernatural forces, Hendley discusses only witchcraft. This was no doubt the most dramatic manifestation of the phenomenon, but probably not the most common. Singling out a particular person for blame caused inevitable controversy and poisoning of relations within a village, and it was only done in desperation or because of some ulterior political motive. As a rule, malign forces were countered through ritual sacrifices and the deployment of charms that had no particular human target. A missionary who worked in this area noted in 1906 that if an illness did not respond to herbal remedies, offerings of a chicken and some *ghee* and salt might be made at the tomb of an ancestor.[53] The Bhil bhopas often prescribed and performed such rituals, being paid generally in the form of liquor, or the meat from the sacrifice. The Bhils also believed that the Hindu mendicants who came to live in solitude in their hills and forests had similar powers. For example, when a Bhil woman fell ill in 1843, her husband sought advice from one 'Gosain Nurbegur,' who said that he could provide a healing charm if liquor was procured.[54] Gosais were generally *sadhus*—mendicants who had renounced worldly life—of the Jogi or Nathapanthi sects.[55] Both the bhopas and the Hindu mendicants deployed what were known as *jantra-mantra*, or spells with miraculous powers.

[53]A. H. Bull, 'Some Bhil Customs,' *The Nagpur Diocesan Quarterly Magazine*, January 1906, Cawnpore: Christ Church Mission Press, p. 41.

[54]Deposition of Bheel Kalia Budo of Deraj of the Mondetta Putta taken before the Attachment Mehta at Mondetta, 14 April 1843, Gujarat State Archives, Vadodara Branch, Baroda Residency, English Department, Serial no. 407, Mahikantha, Daftar 83, Vol. 412, MK 13, Vol. 298 for 1843 to 1844.

[55]G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964, pp. 70–71.

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Hendley also failed to say anything about illnesses that were believed to have a divine origin, which is something spoken about in other reports. For example, writing in 1890, the missionary C. S. Thompson noted that when the rains failed or there was a great deal of sickness in their villages, the Mewar Bhils would take a vow before at the shrine of the local Devi (mother-goddess) that if she brought rain or stopped the sickness they would sacrifice a buffalo to her. When the sacrifice was eventually performed, the Devi was offered the blood, while the meat was sold. Thompson saw this bargaining before the goddess and their selling of the meat as a sign of their practicality in such affairs.[56]

It is clear from the descriptions of Hendley and others that the Bhils of this region adopted a number of approaches to healing. They provide, however, merely a catalogue of practices, rather than an analysis that reveals the relationship between them. One influential attempt to understand such healing practices has been provided by the doctor and anthropologist, John Jantzen, who worked in the Congo in the 1960s. Jantzen found that there was much mutual incomprehension between white doctors and their patients as to the nature of disease and its cure. Through his investigation, he found that the local people made a distinction between a 'natural'-cum-'divine' and a 'human' cause of illness. If a disease responded readily to therapy, or was predictable—as when very old people fall sick and die—it was normally seen as 'natural'-cum-'divine'. If a disease was intractable, it might have—so it was believed—been caused by human malevolence. Patients and their kin had to decide within which category to place an illness before consulting a specialist. Western medicine was generally considered efficacious in the treatment of 'natural'-cum-'divine' illnesses, as were some herbalists. But, if a disease took an unusual or slow course, or if there was conflict within the social group of the sufferer, human causes were suspected. Attempts were then made to resolve conflicts, cast counter spells, and perform rituals of purification.[57] Using this insight, we might conjecture on the basis of our evidence that the Bhils placed the causes of illness in three categories—the natural, the malign and the divine. If natural, herbal remedies would provide the appropriate

[56]'The Bhil Mission', Annual Letter of the Rev. C. S. Thompson, Kherwara, 31 January 1890, *Intelligencer*, 15 NS, 1890, pp. 610–11.

[57]John Janzen, *The Quest for Therapy in Lower Zaire*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, pp. 8–9.

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cure. If malign, charms, sacrifices or cauterisation provided the first line of defence, with exorcism to discover the human agency as a last resort. If divine, the god or goddess had to be propitiated. We might thus argue that the Bhils would have been willing to try the medicine of the British when the cause was seen as natural, but rejecting it when the cause was believed to be otherwise.[58]

Such explanatory devices are, in my opinion, of rather limited use. In actual practice, the cause of a disease or, indeed any other misfortune, was by no means transparent, and a range of approaches might have been taken to counter it. Herbal cures might have provided the first line of defence, with other remedies being applied if the problem continued to be intractable. Also, an attempt might be made to make a 'natural' remedy more efficacious through supernatural means. These sorts of ambiguity were seen in the case already mentioned in which help was sought from a sadhu. The evidence comes from the court testimony of a Bhil whose brother Rupa had been murdered by an official of Pol state. In 1843, Rupa's wife fell ill, and the sadhu, as we have seen, advised him to go to the liquor shop at a nearby village to purchase some liquor, after which he would provide a charm for her cure. Such healers often demanded liquor, which would be brought when the cure was being undertaken through a ritual ceremony in which the charm or spell was both created and bestowed. Some liquor might have been used for libations during the ritual, but the healer himself would consume the bulk of it afterwards. In this sense, it might be seen as a form of payment for services rendered. However, in an argument with his eventual killer, Rupa was said by his brother to have described the liquor as 'medicine.'[59] The term can hardly have been used in the modern clinical sense of the term, for liquor, with its consciousness-changing powers, was seen to have certain supernatural qualities. But also, it could at the same time be seen to provide a fortifying tonic for the sick. In all of this, categories that may be useful as heuristic devices slide into each other in an actual case-narrative.

[58]Terence Ranger has tried in this sort of way to apply Janzen's thesis to other parts of Africa. See his article 'Medical Science and Pentecost: The Dilemma of Anglicanism in Africa', in *The Church and Healing*, ed. W. J. Shields, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, p. 339.

[59]Deposition of Bheel Kalia Budo of Deraj of the Mondetta Putta taken before the Attachment Mehta at Mondetta, 14 April 1843. Gujarat State Archives, Vadodara Branch, Baroda Residency, English Department, Serial no. 407, Mahikantha, Daftar 83, Vol. 412, MK 13, Vol. 298 for 1843 to 1844.

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It was indeed this very slipperiness of categories that perplexed and annoyed doctors from a clinical background. In their eyes, the 'real' cause of a disease was 'natural'. Supernatural explanations lacked any clinical validity, and were thus bogus and, furthermore, advanced only to bamboozle and exploit the ignorant.

The arrival of the British with their small hospital at Kherwara introduced a new system of healing for the Bhils, known in the area to this day as *angreji dawa*, or 'English Medicine.' The British believed that once the superiority of this medicine was appreciated, the supposedly 'primitive' beliefs of the Bhils would in regard to health and healing soon fade away to be replaced with more 'rational' and 'civilised' medical notions. However, in this they were to be disappointed, for the Bhils continued to believe strongly that many diseases were caused supernaturally. The doctors themselves were moreover often viewed with suspicion, as they were known to carry out surgery, a practice that was frequently seen as having a malign intent. One of the doctors who was working at Kherwara in the early 1880s became so exasperated by his failure to persuade Bhils to submit themselves to the surgical knife, even in minor and easily cured cases, that he resorted to underhand means. He offered financial inducements to get people whom he felt required operations to come to his surgery, whereupon he then carried out the operation without obtaining their formal consent. He believed that the results would speak for themselves. As it was, rumours quickly spread about how the English doctors were violating the bodies, lives, and very spiritual being of their Bhil patients, causing a dramatic decline in the numbers attending the clinic.[60]

The missionary C. S. Thompson arrived in the area to work amongst the Bhils soon after this incident, and he found that, as an Englishman, he was viewed with similar suspicion. He had come believing that if he provided medical care, the Bhils would respond more eagerly to the Gospel message. For this purpose he had taken some rudimentary medical training in England before he left for India. As it was, this approach now repelled rather than attracted his would-be audience. He persevered, nonetheless, gradually managing to win confidence for his methods by going out to the Bhils in their villages and offering to treat them for minor complaints on the spot. When it became clear that people were benefiting from

[60]C. S. Thompson, 'Report on Bheel Mission, Kherwara', *Intelligencer*, 7 NS, 1882, p. 592.

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his simple remedies, many came forward, and he soon found himself carrying out a thriving practice.[61]

The scene was thus set for a new sort of 'English' doctor, the medical missionary. In the early years of the twentieth century, following the path forged by Thompson, mission dispensaries and a hospital were opened and fully qualified doctors came to practice amongst the Bhils. As converts were gradually gained, the new Christians were required by the missionaries to abandon their older beliefs in the malign supernatural causation of illness and embrace the new 'English medicine' wholeheartedly. The story of the difficulties and in some cases outright opposition that the missionaries encountered in this respect forms the subject of a separate book.[62]

[61]Ibid., p. 593.

[62]David Hardiman, *Missionaries and their Medicine: A Christian Modernity for Tribal India*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008.

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In Lieu of an Afterword
Mining Projects and Cultural Genocide: Colonial Roots of Present Conflicts

Felix Padel

Adivasis in modern India remain far from free. Tribal communities in present times face displacement and dispossession from their land on a vaster scale than they faced under colonial rule. Today's movements by tribal people resisting displacement from their land have significant parallels with movements during colonial times, and the pattern of the recent state repression of these movements is remarkably similar to repression during British times.

Because tribal people live in and around India's essential resources of forest, water, land, mountains and minerals, it is they who have most to lose from a process of globalisation geared to making the greatest and fastest profits out of these resources. This also means that adivasi struggles to protect their land, forest and mountains are the cutting edge of a grassroots movement to protect India's environment from a catastrophic *tipping point* of no return. The huge-scale pollution, overuse of water by industry, destruction of life-forms by dams, mines and factories need to be seen as an assault on the fabric of India's natural environment and fertility-base. And the people at the forefront of the fight to protect India's environment are the most despised and exploited rung of Indian society: its tribal citizens, often alongside dalits and other small-scale cultivators.

The process started during British rule, through the colonial ideology of *progress*, and has escalated since. Essentially this ideology is based on maximising profits. It was formulated by the classical economists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and reaches

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its zenith in the doctrine of neo-liberalism. It affects India's adivasis more than anyone, even though the fifth schedule of the constitution and a succession of laws are supposed to protect their inalienable land rights.

'A CONQUEST OVER THEIR MINDS'

When the British first imposed their rule over India's tribal societies, their intention was directly or indirectly to maximise revenue. The Paharia were among the first adivasis to meet East India Company troops, because they were raiding the Grand Trunk Road (according to British sources), and resisted takeovers of their territory by cultivators geared to making higher profits from the land. It is significant that the man who imposed colonial rule over them, August Cleveland, was lauded on his memorial stone as their benefactor:

> Without bloodshed or terrors of authority, employing only the means of conciliation, confidence and benevolence, [he] attempted and accomplished the entire subjection of the lawless and savage inhabitants of the jungle territory of Rajmahal who had long infested the neighbouring lands by their predatory incursions, and attached them to the British Government by a conquest over their minds, the most rational as the most permanent mode of dominion.

Cleveland subdued the Paharia using military force, and he had resisting chiefs publicly executed in 1780–82; so 'without bloodshed or terrors of authority' is a whopping distortion.[1]

A similar—but far worse—distortion is evident in the single worst situation in tribal India today: a civil war in the south of Bastar (Dantewara and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh), characterised by terrible atrocities on both sides. Ordinary tribal villagers are squeezed between police-supported paramilitaries on one side and Naxalites or Maoists on the other. The paramilitary organisation is named Salwa Judum (Gondi for 'Peace hunt'), and when the war started in June 2005, the media and government claimed this was a 'spontaneous uprising against the Naxalites', a 'Gandhian people's movement' and even 'non-violent'. While Maoist atrocities are well reported, there

[1]Felix Padel, *The Sacrifice of Human Being: British rule and the Konds of Orissa*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995 [2000], pp.23–24.

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is a virtual media blackout on Salwa Judum atrocities, which, according to several human rights reports, are much numerous. The Salwa Judum has burnt several hundred tribal villages, committing rapes and murders to force the people to leave their villages and come to refugee camps, where they are pressurised to join them. Between 100,000 and 300,000 adivasis are now refugees. Many have fled to Andhra Pradesh rather than stay in the camps, which are run like concentration camps.[2]

It is significant that the very month that Salwa Judum was formed, Tata and Essar signed a Memoranda of Understanding with the Chhattisgarh government for steel plants, based on a huge expansion of iron ore mining. The National Mineral Development Corp (NMDC) started mining on the Bailadila range in 1961, and a railway was built to facilitate export to Japan via the Vizag port. The Bailadila mines have had a terrible impact on the Maria Gond and other adivasis, and seriously polluted the Shankhini river. Adivasis in Bastar have a strong history of resisting plans for steel plants. In October 2001, police opened fire on tribal protestors against a NMDC steel plant about to displace four villages at Nagarnar near Jagdalpur. Of the 45 seriously injured, most were women and about 250 people were jailed. And yet this steel plant has never been finished. Tata's steel plant plans at Lohandiguda (Bastar) involved police intimidation, violence and jailings, especially between July 2006 and February 2007. Essar's plans at Dhurli (Dantewara) involve similar intimidation and manipulation of spurious 'consent' in Public Hearings. In both areas, tribal people have remained strongly opposed to the steel plants, despite intimidation.[3]

Many observers agree that mining companies are among the main backers of the Salwa Judum, through the Congress politician Mahendra Karma, who set it up, and the non-tribal clique around him, and it is known that Tata has paid for at least one of the refugee camps.

The reason the Naxalites made Bastar their base for so many years, is the system of endemic exploitation that has thrived there, based on the timber mafia and a deep-seated corruption involving

[2]People's Union of Democratic Rights (PUDR), April 2006, *Where the State makes War on its Own People*, www.pudr.org/pages/salwa.judum.pdf, accessed 25 June 2009.

[3]Centre for Science and Environment, *Rich Lands Poor People: Is Sustainable Mining possible? State of India's Environment 6, A Citizen's report*, New Delhi, 2008, pp.134–40.

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a number of senior officials. Tribal elders gradually learnt to see Naxalites as a lesser evil, especially since Naxalite ideology was couched in terms of combating the corruption and exploitation.

In terms of armed resistance, adivasi Naxalites or Maoists are the successors to tribal insurgents who took up arms against the iniquities of British rule. Yet the Naxal leadership, like the ideology, is non-tribal, and their acts of violence against the police etc. have now invited retaliation on a vast scale. So in a sense, Naxalites/Maoists have undermined tribal society just as much as the mainstream, and caused displacement on a large scale. They occasionally attack mining projects. However, there is a deep irony when Maoists support those opposing industrialisation, since no one imposed industrialisation with more ruthlessness and loss of life than Mao himself.[4]

So in another sense, the true successors of adivasi insurgencies are those tribal people fighting for their rights using basically non-violence, and these movements deserve a lot more support.

The Salwa Judum civil war is an extreme case, but it follows a worldwide pattern; in a sense this is where the 'War on Terror' has entered India, right in its tribal heartland. Above all, this war shows the danger for other tribal areas. If non-violent protests are not heeded, people are driven desperate. To people despairing of justice, taking up the gun often seems the only recourse. The trouble is, even non-violent protesters are being labelled as Maoists now, and any association with Maoists is used to justify extreme forms of repression.

During the years of East India Company rule, many tribal areas were 'pacified' by the burning of villages and 'exemplary force' used against any who resisted. The first senior administrator involved in the conquest of the Konds in Orissa favoured the promotion of markets:

> ... to promote their intercourse with us, and by giving them new tastes and new wants [which] will, in time, afford us the best hold we can have on their fidelity as subjects, by rendering them dependent on us for what will, in time, become necessities of life.[5]

This is the methodology of a *'conquest over their minds'*: draw adivasis into the market economy and addict them to new tastes. However, the trouble is, adivasi culture is very resilient and resistant to imposed

[4]Philip Short, *Mao: A Life*, London: Hoddon & Stoughton, 1999, pp. 480–505.
[5]Hon. G. E. Russell, quoted in Padel, *The Sacrifice of Human Being*, p. 179.

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change. While communities retain their land, they retain a strong independence of culture. It is only when they are displaced that their traditional social structure falls apart.

COAL, STEEL, DAMS AND BAUXITE

In early medieval times, India's iron manufacture was more advanced than Europe's; iron pillars made in the Gupta era show an advanced technology. The East India Company started large-scale coal mining in Bengal because of the needs of its ships, and later railways. It was the railways that accelerated iron ore mining and the development of a steel industry. When Tata fulfilled his dream of setting up a steel industry at Jamshedpur in the 1920s, he sourced his iron from the mountain of Gorumahisani (Cattle-Buffalo hill) in Mayurbhanj (north Orissa). When he first went there it was full of forest and wild animals. Now, it is an eroded wasteland, presided over by the ruins of Tata's machinery and the sterile layers of the mine.[6]

The British knew of the vast iron ore deposits in the mountains of north Orissa, and it seems that Hitler knew about this mineral wealth, and that it was a factor in the Japanese bombing of Orissa ports during the second world war.[7] Today's mining companies are well aware of this iron-wealth. Rio Tinto has been involved quietly for some years. Currently, POSCO (Pohang Steel Company of South Korea) is vying with Tata, Mittal, Bhushan and Rio Tinto for a licence to mine in a number of relatively unspoilt tribal areas in Keonjhar and neighbouring districts, including a magnificent, forested mountain called Kandadhara, which has Orissa's tallest waterfall and is considered sacred by the Bhuiya tribe. Already about 90 sponge iron factories operate in north Orissa, and over 40 new steel plants are in various stages of construction. The forest and the water sources are seriously depleted over large tracts. The elephant population is on the decline, and the quality of life for tribal communities has plummeted.

So those adivasis resisting new mines in north Orissa know the

[6]Shown in Amarendra Das and Samarendra Das' film *Matiro Poko, Company Loko* (Earth Worm, Company Man), 2005.

[7]Hitler's interest in Orissa's bauxite and iron ore is outlined in an article by Ajit Mahapatra in *Samaj* (3 May 2005), who met one of Hitler's key metal experts and the widow of another.

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hell awaiting them and are preparing to resist. The companies in question however, instead of getting the mining leases first, have started the other way around—by first trying to construct their steel plants and ports, after which they hope that access to the precious iron deposits will be guaranteed. POSCO is trying to build a steel plant and port near Paradip (Jagatsingpur), against strong resistance from non-tribal betel nut farmers. Tata is trying to build a new port at Dhamra, where conservationists (including Greenpeace) are leading resistance, and a new steel plant at Kalinganagar (Jajpur), in a complex of several major new steel plants—some already built—close to Sukinda, where 97 per cent of India's chromite deposits are located. The Sukinda mines already form one of the ten most polluted places on earth, according to the Blacksmith Institute (US) and Green Cross, Switzerland.[8]

At Kalinganagar, the farmers threatened with displacement are Ho and Munda adivasis, whose forefathers came from Saraikella (Jharkhand) over a hundred years ago. In an incident that became a symbol of tribal resistance to over-industrialisation and its repression, police opened fire on protesters, when Tata was trying to force-start construction, on 2 January 2006. A policeman was hacked to death, and police firing lasted for at least an hour, causing the death of 13 adivasis, including women and children.[9] After these killings, the *Bisthapit Birodhi Manch* (Platform Against Displacement) created a lot of publicity with its blockade on Orissa's major north-south highway, demanding the cancelling of 'false cases' and punishment of officials responsible for the firing and mutilation of some of the corpses. The blockade was finally lifted in March 2007, under intense pressure and promises from the Government, without the adivasis agreeing to accept relocation. Since then, Tata has started construction, but as at Lohandiguda, progress has been slow. Beside the road, where it was blockaded, stands a sombre memorial to the 13 dead adivasis in the idiom of Ho and Munda culture: 13 standing stones on a platform, inscribed with distinctive symbols.

The Kalinganagar and anti-POSCO movements are a signal to foreign investors in India that any project displacing farmers is likely

[8]Madhumita Dutta, *Sukinda: Top of the Dirty Thirty Heap*, Infosys Environment, http://infochangeindia.org/200712016704/Environment/Features/Sukinda-Top-of-the-Dirty-Thirty-heap.html, accessed December 2007.

[9]Ramesh C. Nayak and Joseph M. Kujur, *State Aggression and Tribal Resistance: A Case of the Police Firing at Kalinga Nagar*, Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2007.

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to meet intense opposition. The point here is that these iron-steel plans are an actualisation of plans devised during colonial times. This is also true of the aluminium industry in Orissa, which is being imposed today against strong indigenous protest movements. A precise blueprint for the modern plan was outlined by a British geologist, Fox in the 1920s–30s, who sketched the series of dams, mines, refineries, smelters and railways linking the complex to the port at Vizag.[10] So Orissa's big dams, whose primary purpose is supplying electricity and water to metal factories, have a colonial origin too. The foundation-stone for Orissa's first mega-dam, the Hirakud, was laid by Orissa's last British Governor, and then again by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1948. By 1959 it was supplying Alcan/Indal's Hirakud smelter, whose bauxite was mined and refined in present-day Jharkhand to the north. Irrigation, flood control and hydro-power were given as the dam's main purposes. This dam displaced at least 160,000 people, over 50 per cent of them adivasis, destroying a lot of forest and rich cultivated land—almost as much land as has been irrigated from the reservoir.[11] The Rourkela steel plant, along with the Mandira dam, also built during the 1950s, displaced about 23,000 (mainly tribal) people from 64 villages.[12] The Upper Indravati dams, funded by the World Bank, displaced at least 40,000 people (more than half of them adivasis) during the 1990s. As at Hirakud, there is an almost unknown history of resistance to these projects that was savagely repressed and never reported in the media. In the case of Hirakud, two tahsildars were apparently killed by protesters, and resistance was the cause of Noboghon Choudhury's resignation, independent Orissa's first Chief Minsiter.[13] The Indravati protests were peaceful and effective until police lathi-charged protesters in April 1992, injuring 180 and arresting many.[14]

[10]C. S. Fox, *Bauxite and Aluminous Laterite*, second edition, London: Technical Press, 1932, p. 136.

[11]Viegas, 'The Hirakud Dam Oustees: Thirty Years After', in *Big Dams, Displaced People: Rivers of Sorrow, Rivers of Change*, ed. Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, New Delhi: Sage, 1992.

[12]Sarini, *Adivasis of Rourkela: Looking back on 50 years of Indo-German Economic Co-operation. Documents—Interpretations—International Law*, Bhubaneswar and Heidelberg: Sarini and Adivasi-Koordination, 2006.

[13]B. Krishna Dhalo, *'Sarkar Javaab diantu'* ('Government, explain!'), *Dharitri*, 23 October 2007.

[14]Manoj Pradhan & Council of Professional Social Workers, *State of Orissa's Environment: A Citizens' Report*, Bhubaneswar, 1994.

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British geologists' surveys of the bauxite cappings on south Orissa's mountains named the base rock of these mountains Khondalite, after the Konds, who lived all around them and held them sacred.[15] In the 1970s, an East Coast Bauxite survey revealed that the summits of these mountains, and others in northern Andhra Pradesh, constituted one of the world's largest and best-quality bauxite reserves. In 1980, a new company was formed to tap this resource. NALCO (National Aluminium Company) started a mine on one of the largest mountains, Panchpat Mali, that was at first intended to supply India's aluminium needs for the next hundred years.

NALCO built a refinery nearby at Damanjodi, and a smelter near Angul, while a special railway linking these projects with the port at Vizag was constructed over the mountains (Rayagada-Koraput), to be used for future aluminium projects, funded by loans from the Saudi Fund for Development. Damanjodi displaced about 3,000 (mostly tribal) people from 19 villages, and the associated Upper Kolab dam 12,000 from 60 villages.[16]

The next bauxite project, planned by BALCO (Bharat Aluminium Company Ltd.) on Gandhamardan mountain, met with stiff and successful resistance that united tribal, dalit and nation-wide protesters, due partly to two medieval Hindu temples, but also to activists' determination in the face of extreme police intimidation.

After this, a plan was developed for Kashipur by a number of companies: Alcan, Norsk Hydro, Tata (at first) and INDAL (Indian Aluminium Company) started the Utkal project in 1992, meeting stiff resistance from tribal activists. As one of their leaders, Bhagavan Majhi said in an interview in 2004,

I put a question to the SP [Superintendent of Police]. I asked him, *Agya*, what do you mean by development? (*unnoti boile kono?*) Is it development to displace people? The people, for whom development is meant, should reap benefits. After them, the succeeding generations should reap benefits. That is development. It should not be merely to cater to the greed of a few officials. To destroy the millions of year old mountains is not development.

[15]Fox, *Bauxite and Aluminous Laterite*, p.135.

[16]Bipin K. Jojo, 'Political Economy of Large Dam Projects: A Case Study of Upper Kolab Project in Koraput District, Orissa', in *The Nowhere People: Responses to Internally Displaced Persons*, ed. Siby Thakaran, Bangalore: Books for Change, 2002.

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If the government has decided that we need alumina, and we need to mine bauxite, they should oblige us with replacement land. As Adivasis, we are cultivators. We cannot live without land. [17]

Police opened fire on an adivasi gathering at Maikanch village on 16 December 2000. Three were killed, and a dozen injured. By this time, Hindalco had taken over INDAL. Norsk Hydro withdrew under pressure from Norwegian activists soon after the firing, and Alcan in 2007, after a campaign in Canada had supported the Kashipur adivasis for some years, and just before Alcan was bought up by Rio Tinto.

While the Utkal project was stalled, another Indian company registered itself on London's Stock Exchange, and swiftly started construction of a refinery about 100 kms to the northeast, at Lanjigarh. This company, Sterlite Industries, had bought up BALCO in a privatisation scam in 2001, and now changed its name to Vedanta. Despite numerous demonstrations by the tribal population, this refinery started production in September 2007. Vedanta set the model, copied by Tata and POSCO, of constructing factories before getting clearance for mining. Above the Lanjigarh refinery towers, the 4,000, densely forested summit of Niyam Dongar, the northwest mountain of the Niyamgiri range, is home to a people still classed as a Primitive Tribe, the Dongria Konds. It took nearly 4 years at the Supreme Court in Delhi, a lot of money and gross manipulations of the truth, before this mountain was finally cleared for mining, on 8 August 2008. The Dongria have sworn not to let the mountain be mined. Its bauxite summit is covered in forest they have left uncut in honour of their supreme deity, *Niyam Raja*, Lord of the Law.

Vedanta's project at Lanjigarh is couched in terms of 'Sustainable Development' on the basis of large sums spent on building schools and hospitals (barely functioning to date), against a reality of a huge drop in the quality of life for the Majhi Kond villagers. The pollution by dust, fumes and noise is extreme. The Bansadhara river is already polluted, since the refinery was built right next to it just at the point where it forms from Niyamgiri streams. The Toxic Red Mud pond is already leaching into the river, and the State Pollution Control Board has documented illegal emissions from the factory. Also, many people have been run over and killed by company vehicles on the

[17]From an interview in *Matiro Poko*. Also quoted in F. Padel and S. Das, 'Agya, what do you mean by development?', in *Caterpillar and the Mahua Flower: Tremors in India's Mining Fields*, ed. Rakesh Kalshian, New Delhi: Panos, 2007, pp. 26–46.

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new roads, including an activist called Sukru Majhi, run down at night when there were no witnesses on 27 March 2008.

One of the judges in the case, Arjit Passayat, is from Orissa, and in the name of 'striking a balance' between environmental and social/economic interests, he got the project cleared by making the company promise huge sums in compensation, for 'tribal development', 'wildlife management' and re-afforestation. Understanding this as essentially selling the mountain to the company, a Majhi elder outside the court summed the situation up by saying, *'Taro Karma, Amoro Dharma'* (his the *karma*, ours the *dharma*). This is also a succinct summary of the kind of Indian philosophy virtually lost sight of in the Hindu mainstream, but which adivasis still adhere to: a world in which our lives are ultimately watched over and judged by Niyam Raja. As another elder, Dai Singh Majhi of Belamba village, back in 2004 said when construction was just beginning, and he had witnessed incomers' arrogant entry to the area, appropriating land, and misusing women, 'they want to flood us out with money.' The journalist, P. Sainath has observed in countless instances, that most money spent on 'tribal development' feeds corruption and never reaches the people it is meant for. A prime value in the mainstream, money is not a prime value in adivasi societies, compared with people's relationship with each other, and the deities embedded in nature. So promises of money for tribal development are empty for adivasis, but full of potential for a large range of officials, contractors and businessmen who know how to get their percentage.[18]

When Vedanta's refinery was half built, Utkal started construction of its refinery, and renewed police intimidation succeeded in overcoming what had been an extremely strong movement.[19] Yet tribal people have formed similar movements to protect Mali Parbat and Deo Mali (Orissa's highest mountain) further to the south.

[18]P. Sainath, *Everybody Likes a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts*, Delhi, London: Penguin, 1996.

[19]An extensive literature on the movement against the Utkal project includes: Deba Ranjan Sarangi, 'Surviving Against the Odds: Case of Kashipur', *Economic and Political Review*, 3 August 2002; People's Democratic Forum & People's Union for Civil Liberties—Karnataka, July 2003, *The Struggle against Bauxite Mining in Orissa: Report of a Citizens' Visit to Orissa, October-December, 2002*, Bangalore: PUCL-K; Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights, October 2006, *Kashipur: An Enquiry into Mining and Human Rights Violations in Kashipur, Orissa* (www.iptindia.org); and Robert Goodland, March 2007, *Utkal Bauxite and Alumina Project: Human Rights & Environmental Impacts* (Washington, RbtGoodland@aol.com).

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Sometimes, when Konds were asked their religion by Census officials, Konds have answered 'mountains', amusing the officials. But in its blend of materialism and spirituality, tribal religion understands that mountains are the source of fertility. This applies particularly to the Bauxite cappings on mountains in Kond areas, which act as a sponge, holding the monsoon rain on the mountain summits, and releasing water gently in streams that flow throughout the year.[20]

BLINDNESS TO THE SYSTEM OF ENDEMIC EXPLOITATION

The cause of Orissa's terrible 1866 drought lay in officials' blindness to the system of merchants' exploitation of villagers, which involved profiteering in grain prices, as soon as crops failed. This profiteering still takes place, which is why 'Everybody loves a good drought'.[21]

Marudi (drought) and *durbikhyo* (famine) have deep roots in Orissa, but droughts are not the only—or even the main—cause of starvation conditions. Famine relief is institutionalised as a *'third harvest'*—a source of profit for grain traders. A large part is 'siphoned off', and relatively little actually reaches the villagers, even when they are actually starving. Several petitions were made to the Supreme Court between 1985 and 1987, bringing evidence that rice profiteering was preying on the starving population, through 'distress sales' of paddy. The scam involved Food Corporation of India officials who were also merchants, and had been buying paddy from farmers at below the minimum price and selling it back to them at a profit, added to a rising trend of illegal transfers of tribal land to non-tribal owners through banned land mortgage arrangements, due to indebtedness from moneylending at illegal compound interest rates. Linked with this, bonded labour was still widely prevalent ('distress sale of labour').[22]

[20]Recorded by Gopinath Mohanty, *Sroto Swati*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 2000 Part III p. 324, quoting an official during the 1941 Census.

[21]Sainath, *Everybody Likes a Good Drought*, pp. 214–18.

[22]Kishen Pattnayak made a Writ Petition with Kapil Narayan Tiwary to the Chief Justice in Delhi in October 1985 accusing the Government of Orissa of causing and covering up widespread starvation deaths. Another Petition was made by the advocate Nagbhushan Pattnaik of the Indian People's Front in 1987. (Writ Petitions 12847 of 1985 and 1081 of 1987, summarised in Rabi Dash, *Judgements on the Poverty and*

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Compounding these starvation deaths is the way they have been used as propaganda for aluminium projects. On 25 September 1987, the issue drew Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Kashipur. The newspaper *Samaj* printed a special English supplement to coincide with his visit, in which the prime minister is said to have taken great interest. The whole issue concerns starvation deaths taking place in the 'Distressed Districts of Orissa', highlighting corruption by local officials, as well as the area's 'backwardness'. The Orissa Chief Minister Biju Patnaik vehemently denied that anyone had died of starvation, but a number of law suits eventually established at least some of the cases. Biju Patnaik was Congress like Rajiv Gandhi, but split and formed his own party shortly after this. Rajiv's interest during this visit was steered towards the plan of reducing the region's poverty by developing its 'infrastructure' with a view to setting up the mining and refinery plans that materialised soon after. IFAD's (International Fund for Agricultural Development of the United Nations) executive board agreed a loan for the Kashipur Project in December 1987, and the first funds started in May 1988, under the name Orissa Tribal Development Project (OTDP), which involved channelling state funds through a branch of the ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) at Rayagada. Initial work focused on irrigation, which the newspaper had suggested would alleviate the drought problem, as well as roads and bridges. The Utkal project started alongside the IFAD project, under its cover, and it soon became clear that IFAD's work was not in the interests of the adivasis at all, so it became a target for the movement, who broke its signboards, and drove its officials out of the villages.

A similar pattern was clear in the Niyamgiri case at the Supreme Court during 2007, when lawyers for Vedanta and the Government of Orissa harped on the starvation deaths in Kalahandi, and the company's offer of 'two square meals a day'. The hollowness of this promise is shown by the poverty surrounding Damanjodi—taken as a symbol of development by NALCO and other companies. Twenty-five years of aluminium development have brought an extreme impoverishment. Over 78 per cent of the population in

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Starvation Deaths in Kalahandi, Cuttack: M/6 Gramasevak Samabya Prakashan, 1998, pp.1–9. Bob Currie has studied the situation in some detail in *The Politics of Hunger: A Study of Democracy, Governance and Kalahandi's Poverty*, London: Macmillan, 2000, pp.176–82.

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Koraput district is classed as below the poverty line, making it one of India's poorest districts.[23] Vedanta and Utkal, like NALCO, have destroyed tribal people's food security, and extreme malnutrition was a major factor in the cholera deaths that engulfed Kashipur in 2007, after 15 years of IFAD and Utkal-led 'development'.[24]

In other words, the system of endemic exploitation in India's tribal areas, that many historians have shown increased hugely during British rule, has escalated even more with industrial development, even though these projects are nearly always couched in terms of raising people out of poverty. Officials such as W. W. Hunter measured the progress of British influence in the growth of 'private property'.[25] What is happening today is a culmination of this privatisation process, that repeats Europe's history of the Enclosures and the Highland Clearances: an appropriation of land and resources that had been held in common by adivasis over centuries, and are now being taken away for industry or plantations in the name of 'public interest' and making higher profits.

CULTURAL GENOCIDE AND 'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT'

When so many people's lives have been ruined, how can so many more displacements be planned—and in the name of 'sustainable development'? As Bhagavan Majhi put this in an interview for the documentary film *Matiro Poko*:

We have sought for an explanation from the Government about the people who have already been displaced in the name of development. How many have been properly rehabilitated? You have not provided them with jobs; you have not rehabilitated them at all. How can you again displace more people? Where will you relocate them and what jobs will you give them? You tell us first. The Government has failed to answer our questions. Our fundamental question is: how can we survive if our lands are taken away from us? We are tribal farmers. We are Earthworms (Matiro Poko). Like fishes that die when taken out of water, a cultivator dies when his land is

[23] *Rich Lands Poor People*, p. 322.

[24] Saroj Jan. 2008, article in Oriya, in *Bikolpo Bichar* for July-December 2007 (Boroghoro).

[25] *Orissa*, vol. II, 1872, p. 201, quoted in Padel, *The Sacrifice of Human Being*, p. 180.

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taken away from him. So we won't leave our land. We want permanent development. Provide us with irrigation to our lands. Give us hospitals. Give us medicines. Give us schools and teachers. Provide us with lands and forests. The forests we want. We don't need the company. Dislodge the company. We have been repeatedly telling this since last thirteen years. But the Government is not listening to us.

The whole issue of displacement has been routinely neglected in development projects. While Environment Impact Assessments have often been rudimentary, their shortcomings have at least been frequently attacked by campaigners and in the courts. Social Impact Assessments are given far less importance still, and administration of R & R is normally relegated to highly unsuited personnel, in a low-status government post, when this task requires the utmost sensitivity.[26] The usual response from officials to the inevitable complex difficulties that arise, since almost every displaced family faces huge trauma and emotional pain, as well as frequent injustice, is denial of the problems. Much energy apparently goes into distorting the truth to mask painful realities and abuses of power—a deliberate manipulation of the economic and cultural risks inherent in displacement.[27]

The economic risks of displacement-induced impoverishment are evident wherever people have been resettled. Even World Bank studies admit that 'income restoration' remains elusive: the hard fact is that most oustees' standard of living declines.[28] As for cultural risks, a basic anthropological analysis shows what happens to a tribal community's social system. Tribal culture exists through relationships ordered in a carefully maintained underlying social structure, the subject of traditional anthropological analysis. Every part of this social structure is torn apart by displacement:

- The *economic system*, along with the whole tradition of cultivation is completely destroyed with people's removal from their land, and the termination of their existence as farmers.

[26]H. M. Mathur, 'Resettling People Displaced by Development Projects: Some Critical Management Issues,' in *Social Change*, vol. 36, no.1, 2006, pp. 48, 69–70.

[27]Michael Cernea 'Resettlement Management: Denying or Confronting Risks,' in *Managing Resettlement in India: Approaches, Issues, Experiences*, ed. H. M. Mathur, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 26–28.

[28]WB OED Report no.17538, cited in Mathur, *Managing Resettlement in India*, pp. 61–62.

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- The *kinship system* is fractured by displacement from villages, where social relations follow the pattern of a village's traditional layout, and spatial distance from kin in neighbouring villages. In every area where a project causes displacement, there is a split in long-standing relationships, and tension between those who accept compensation and move, and those who remain opposed.
- The *religious system* is undermined by removal of sacred village sites, as well as the mining of venerated mountains. As a woman from Kinari village remarked, with tears, days after being moved to Vedantanagar colony to make way for the Lanjigarh refinery, after seeing bulldozers flatten her village and its central earth shrine, 'Even our gods are destroyed.' Losing her land means she can never grow her own food again, so the whole *system of values* attached to the customary way people have supported themselves is undermined.
- The *material culture*, through which people make most of what they need, is destroyed as soon as the houses people built from local earth and wood are knocked down and replaced with concrete houses, which are colder in winter and hotter in summer, and less suited to the culture, without rafters for storing things or sacred corners for shrines and cooking.
- Above all, the *power structure* is transformed. From being in control of their area and its resources, people find themselves at the bottom of extremely hierarchical structures of power and authority. Traditional tribal society is remarkably egalitarian, and women have a higher status than in much of mainstream society, which they lose when new, corporate forms of domination invade their area. In many ways women have even more to lose than men, which is why they are often at the forefront of campaigns against displacing projects.

The term 'genocide' was first used in 1944–45, to describe Nazi treatment of Jews. What is classed as genocide now is often a sensitive political issue: while most people class Turkey's slaughter and mass displacement of its Armenian population in 1916, and Sudan's ongoing slaughter and mass displacement of Darfur's population as cases of genocide, this is hotly disputed by the governments of these countries. However, the classic model of genocide, applied to countless tribes that were exterminated across the continents of America and Australia, is not in dispute.

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'Genocide' means killing (Latin *caedo*) a people, race or tribe (*genus*). Examining what was involved in an American tribe's genocide, it is evident that there are two levels to what was killed: the physical extermination and the killing of cultures. Contemporary accounts often demonstrate that members of those tribes often preferred to die rather than survive physically without their land and culture. The US policy from the late nineteenth century was to take over tribal territories and resettle surviving members in reservations, where they could no longer support themselves. A conscious policy of 'detribalising' them was pursued by forcibly taking children away from their families and putting them in schools where any attempt to maintain traditional customs or speak tribal languages was punished—'killing the Indian in them'—an example cited by an American anthropologist who prefers the word 'culturicide'.[29] But this term is clumsy and does not conjure the appropriate sense of death and outrage. 'Cultural Genocide' means essentially the killing of people's culture by uprooting them from their ancestral lands.

In popular usage now, 'culture' often means just 'the pretty bits', exemplified by tribal or classical dances. But its original meaning, from Latin *cultus*, links to cultivation of the soil and religious cult of nature-rooted deities, as well as the traditions of a society. In other words, tribal people's economic and political systems are fundamental to their culture, and when dispossessed of their land these systems are effectively destroyed. This is why adivasis often say they would rather die than leave their land. Losing their land brings death to all they value. The sacredness of nature, respect for elders' knowledge, ritual contact with the ancestors, growing their own food on family land and making their own houses and tools, exchanging food with neighbours with an egalitarian spirit—these aspects are swept away by corporate values, which emphasise money and financial power.

Utkal's literature even offers tribal people 'a more sustainable lifestyle,' just as Vedanta's Annual Report (2007) includes a long 'sustainable development' report, and the Supreme Court judgement of 8 August 2008 is couched in terms that 'subserve the interest of sustainable development'. This follows from a project orchestrated

[29]James V. Fenelon, *Culturicide, Resistance and Survival of the Lakota*, New York: Garland, 1998, and Felix Padel and S. Das, 'Cultural Genocide: The Real Impact of Development-Induced Displacement', in *India: Social Development Report 2008. Development and Displacement*, ed. H. M. Mathur, Delhi: Oxford University Press for Council for Social Development, 2008.

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by the world's top mining companies called Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development (MMSD), which wrote a report in 2002 titled *Breaking New Ground*, which popularised the concept of 'sustainable mining'—a contradiction in terms, rationalised by gradually laying more emphasis on 'economic' aspects of sustainability, and less on environmental aspects. In other words, a mining project is 'sustainable' if it can sustain a profit for some years, and cultivators are unsustainable if they are struggling to keep up with 'market forces'.

The MMSD process was promoted after the Extractive Industries Review (EIR), commissioned by the World Bank, took a surprisingly strong stand on the issue of Free Prior Informed Consent—the idea that people threatened with displacement should be properly consulted, and have the right to refuse consent. Warning that the World Bank would not accept this, a letter from Sharon White, Policy Director of the DFID (Department for International Development of the British Government), to the head of the EIR, ridiculed the idea that failure to get 'Prior Informed Consent' from an individual could be allowed to veto 'a national development package'.[30] Note: 'Free' had been dropped (unthinkable?), as well as the idea that veto could come from communities, not just individuals. Public Hearings have been mandatory prior to clearing major industrial projects in India since 1997, but in one case after another, these have been anything but free.

What is interesting to a historian about the DFID letter, is how an insistence on a proper process of obtaining indigenous people's consent for a project on their land (worldwide) was undermined by an official in London, just as during East India Company days. Hundreds of tribal villagers in Orissa and neighbouring states are being forced to give their 'consent' to parting with their land, when the non-alienability of tribal land is guaranteed by the Fifth Schedule of India's Constitution as the basic right of the adivasis. This brings us to the role played by the DFID in imposing the neoliberal policies in Orissa that are hastening the process of cultural genocide, of people whose lifestyle is based in the principle of real, long-term sustainability.

[30]Letter to Professor Emil Salim, 20 October 2003, cited in Padel and Das, 'Agya, what do you mean by development?' The MMSD-EIR process is summarised in Roger Moody, *Rocks and Hard Places: The Globalization of Mining*, London: Zed, 2006.

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POLICE FIRINGS

The symbol for adivasis of the genocide they face is the series of police killings, in which the Maikanch, Nagarnar and Kalinganagar firings (December 2000, October 2001, January 2006) form three high profile events in a long and gruesome pattern—a line that goes back to the most notorious of all police firings, when Colonel Dyer opened fire on an unarmed crowd, massacring several hundred people, at Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar in 1919.

In Orissa, the resonance is particularly with a series of police firings that took place during the Quit India movement in 1942, in the districts of Balasore and Koraput. The biggest police shootings in Koraput were against largely tribal crowds attacking police stations at Pappardahandi and Maithili in August 1942, where an estimated 15 and 10 to 12 people died respectively. For leading the latter attack, Laxman Naiko was executed by hanging in August 1943, although the weight of evidence suggests that the forest officer, Ramayya, for whose murder he was hanged, was among those killed in the police firing.[31]

A summary of the report into the Maikanch police firing by Justice P. K. Mishra, was finally released to the media on 10 October 2003, when *Dharitri* published an account under the title 'Maikanch firing was justified'. Basically, Mishra's report reaches the contradictory conclusions that grossly excessive force was used, but that firing was justified. It singles out the Officer In Command (OIC) of Kashipur Police Station 'for continuing with firing beyond requirement', after the Magistrate had given the order to fire, but also admonishes the Magistrate, Golak Badajena, for giving an open-ended order to fire. It mentions the 19 rounds fired as excessive, and questions the prior intent of the police visit to 'investigate' and 'maintain law and order'. The report did not highlight the height at which bullets were fired (i.e., with intention to kill), nor the live ammunition in the guns (implying a prior intention to cause harm), though it accepted the

[31]Biswamoy Pati, 'On the Tracks of Gandhism: Laxman Naiko, the National Movement and Orissa', unpublished essay, 2010; also see Biswamoy Pati, *Resisting Domination: Peasants, Tribals and the National Movement in Orissa,1920–1950*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1993; S. Sanganna, 'Revolts in Orissa: Martyr Laxman Naik: A Hero of the Freedom Movement', in *Tribal Revolts*, ed. V. Raghavaiah, Nellore: Andhra Rashtra Adimajati Sevak Sangh, 1971; H. K. Mahtab et al., eds., *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa*, vols. IV & V, Cuttack: State Committee for the Compilation of the History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, 1957.

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account given by the villagers that the incident was provoked when police laid their hands on two of the women.

Most controversially, the report went beyond its brief to justify the alumina project, stating that,

> ... the state cannot afford to remain backward for the sake of so-called environmental protection', and 'the extraction of bauxite need not have any adverse impact on the environment, particularly relating to protection of water, as is evident from the mining operations undertaken by Nalco at Damanjodi.

Reportedly, Mishra was given a quick VIP tour of Damanjodi, which made the red mud and other environmental effects appear harmless, but he refused to meet the tribal people from the Damanjodi area who wanted to tell him their real situation. A number of eminent people with experience of the Kashipur situation were also not called to give evidence, even though they submitted affidavits.[32]

So Mishra's report went out of its way to advocate the company line of economic necessity as against any adverse impact on the environment, and in this sense became a whitewash of the incident.

As for the Kalinganagar firing, the killing of a police constable has a marked resonance with the death of the forest guard for which Laxman Naiko was executed. Reconstructions of the event vary in some details. The consensus is that on 2 January 2006, several hundred adivasis from 25 villages heard that Tata was about to start construction on tribal land near Champakoili village, and collected in a stand-off with 12 platoons of police (about 420 policemen), who were escorting construction workers with 6 bulldozers. Most adivasis in that area of Jajpur district are without patta (land-deeds), so they had received no proper compensation, and IDCO (Industrial Development Corporation) had bought the land for absurdly little. Just as the bulldozers were about to start leveling the ground, and a

[32]These included: Banka Bihari Das, a noted environmentalist and former Minister in the Government of Orissa; Kishen Pattnayak, who had led a citizen's Commission to study Kashipur's deteriorating human rights before the firing; Vivekananda Dash, a journalist who had studied Kashipur events in detail; and Swami Agnivesh, who had led a fact-finding human rights enquiry with Justice Tewaria immediately after the firing incident, whose report concluded that there was solid evidence of collusion between politicians, administrators and police behind the firing, and that the firing was premeditated murder, aimed at suppressing the tribal people's protest.

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delegation of tribals had met with no response from the authorities, it seems that a stick of dynamite exploded in a group of advancing adivasis, injuring 4, and blowing the foot off, of one Birasingh Gop. When others came close, more dynamite was triggered. It appears that it had been laid around the work site with a trip wire. This is when *'a mob of armed miscreants attacked the policemen standing on duty,'* and *'Havildar C. P. Mohanty was hacked to a brutal death.'* His death triggered police firing in retaliation. Among those killed and seriously injured, many were innocent bystanders, including a woman of Champakoili standing by her house. The 13 adivasis who died (one later in hospital) were from 7 villages; 38 people were seriously injured.[33]

PARALLELS WITH THE EAST INDIA COMPANY: PROTESTERS AND INSURGENTS

The police firings are the most obvious and violent form of repression, with an easily demonstrated colonial origin. In fact, the whole power structure being used to impose industrialisation on unwilling communities of cultivators is an inheritance from colonial times. Land is acquired using the notorious Land Acquisition Act dating back to 1894, with its concept of 'eminent domain', and the hierarchies of power in the law courts, police and administration all go back to British times.

Because it involves rights to India's essential resources of forest, water, land, mountains and minerals, the issue of tribal resistance to imposed industrialisation highlights close parallels between the overall situation in India today, and the process through which the East India Company imposed its rule throughout India, to become a Government, by manipulating law and finance, as well as monopolising the use of force. The Government of India was first formed and put in place by the East India Company, with a view to making a profit out of India for its shareholders in London, through cutting primary forest, plantations of timber trees, indigo, opium, coffee and tea, and raising revenue through more 'efficient' and 'profitable' cultivation of land, which often involved inviting non-tribal cultivators to take over adivasi land. The behaviour of mining

[33]Nayak and Kujur, *State Aggression and Tribal Resistance*. Also see Satapathy Pradhan, *Police Firing at Kalinganagar: A Report by People's Union for Civil Liberties*, Delhi: People's Union for Civil Liberties, February 2006.

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companies today, and the financial bodies investing in them, which are based in London, the US and other countries, is in many ways a fundamental assault on India's independence.

Orissa is one of the poorest states in India, but also one of the richest in minerals and other natural resources. This juxtaposition is often used as a *mantra* for industrialisation, but the connection is more deep-seated and holds little promise: a wealth in resources invites the most insidious exploitation. This is the secret of the 'resource curse'—the most naturally rich areas of the world tend to be the poorest, especially when these resources are being extracted, because the system is imposed top-down by people far away, who have perfected the accumulation of profit.[34]

It is instructive that Orissa is also among the most indebted states in India. These debts are to a range of financial institutions orchestrated by the World Bank, for which unrepayable debt serves as a lever for imposing neoliberal market reforms. It is no coincidence that Orissa was the first state to privatise its electricity. A similar privatisation is continuing with water, education, and various aspects of governance, as well as a dismantling of 'restrictive legislation', that is a marked feature of the secret 'conditionalities' imposed by the World Bank on governments in financial crisis. The DFID has been instrumental in this process, and while it defines its role in Orissa as promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction, in the eyes of most observers, its policies have resulted in an increase in poverty.[35]

The resurgent East India Company operating in Orissa and neighbouring states is a multi-headed hydra—a multitude of companies, all following the model set by the East India Company and its objectives of extracting maximum profits from India's resources, heedless of the cost to human lives and the long-term health of India's environment.[36]

[34]See *Rich Lands Poor People;* Richard M. Auty, *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies: The Resource-Curse Thesis,* London: Routledge, 1993; Michael Ross, 'The Political Economy of the Resource Curse', *World Politics,* no. 51, January 1999; and *Extractive Sectors and the Poor,* Oxfam America: Washington D. C., 2001.

[35]Alternative Survey Group, *Alternative Economic Survey, India 2006–2007: Pampering Corporates, Pauperizing Masses,* Delhi: Daanish Books, September 2007. On the history of WB-imposed neoliberal programmes, see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism,* New York: Metropolitan, 2007.

[36]Nick Robins, *The Corporation that Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational,* London: Pluto, 2006..

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As for the ideology opposing this corporate takeover of the commons, the Niyamgiri Konds' conception of Niyam Raja evokes a sense of a cosmic Law very similar to the concept of dharma, or to the re-awakened sense of moral law, called for in Cormac Cullinan's book *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice* (2002), where he points out that existing systems of Law are legitimising a destruction of earth's environment that is suicidal for our species.[37] This tendency has certainly been in evidence at the Supreme Court of India recently. If humans are to survive, we may have to look to tribal people's movements against over-industrialisation and offer them a much wider support.

In an attempt to understand and analyse the colonial roots of the evergrowing conflicts that adivasis continue to grapple with even today, one evidently finds that their struggle for freedom, their fight to attain a significance amidst heedless acts of development and their incessant efforts to retain their identity, is far from over—even in independent India.

[37]Cormac Cullinan, *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice*, first published 2002, Totnes: Green Books in association with The Gaia Foundation (www.thegaiafoundation.org), 2003.

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Glossary

abbayas	patriarchal heads
abge bongas	tutelary spirits
ading	place reserved for dead ancestors in an adivasi household
aduldars	men employed in stamping salt
ajoora	a tenure system where the Malangis followed salt manufacture as a hereditary occupation
angreji dawa	'English medicine'; meaning allopathy or biomedicine
arkattis	coolie 'catchers'
aurung	a manufacturing town or village
bandobast	arrangement
barboony khalaris	salt pans in forests
bargadars	landless tribals who were also sharecroppers
barrak	rent tax for collecting fuel in the jungles belonging to the zamindars
beoparis	salt merchants
bethi	forced labour
bhet beggar	forced labour
bhogra	fertile cultivable land
bhoot	ghost
bhopa	Rajasthani term for an exorcist and ritual specialist
bhramaramari	a plant that was supposed to have properties that cured leprosy
bhugut bhanda	usufructary leases

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bhuinhari	a type of tenure or landholding where land was left in the possession of members of the original village community
bhumiputra	'sons of the earth'; a term applied to the Bhils of South Rajasthan
bhut bhangra	a small shrub of southern Rajasthan
bigha	an unit of measurement pertaining to land
bisaha	forced free supply of foodgrains, and sometimes at prices much below the market rate
bishaha	wizard/male witches
bonga	spirit
chappar	thatched roof
chaprasi	peon
chauki	police post
chaukidar	watchman
chula selami	payment made to the zamindars at the time of setting up the salt work (chula)
churail	female malign spirits
coolie	tea plantation worker
cowries	a mode of payment
daffadar	a person supervising the work of the plantation labourers
dain	witch
dakans	witches as known in the Dangs region of western India
daos	sickles
daroga	constable
dasas	servants
dasyus	enemies
deonra/deora	witch-finder
deuri	village priest
dharma	duty, religion
diguar	village watchman
dikus	literally meaning 'outsiders'; exploiters like the moneylenders as well as the zamindars, some of whom had tribal social origins and who exploited the tribals
diwani adalat	court of civil and revenue jurisdiction

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dokra	elderly men in village
Dongariah	(dongar = shifting cultivation) Kandhas—the Kandhas who practised shifting cultivation
dupup porja	original settler
durbar	state
durbikhyo	famine
fakir/pir	saint
firman	a notification or order
fituris	rebellions
galis	the space in between rows of tea bushes
gaunis	a basket to measure grain
ghee	clarified butter
goantias	holders of land
golmal	rebellion
gomashtas	agents of the English East India Company
goras	white people
goti	work done in lieu of payments made in advance
gram raj	village rule of the common people set up during the Telengana movement
gudam	forcible supply of provisions
guru dakshina	offering/remuneration to the teacher
guru	teacher
handia	an intoxicating drink made from rice
harijan	outcastes or 'untouchables'
harkara	messenger
hats	the weekly markets
hatu	village
havildar	low level police official
hazira	daily wage
izzat	respect/honour
jagir	service grant with right to collect revenue/estate/fiefdom
jamabandi	the work of determining revenue
jamadar	petty servant of the tea estate agent of the gomashta
jan	witch doctor
jantra-mantra	spells with miraculous powers
jarib	measurement (by rope)

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jhampi	a wide brimmed hat
jhum	shifting cultivation (*bewar, dunger, podu and kumri* are all different methods of shifting cultivation among the tribals)
jhuming	shifting cultivation
jotedar	landowners
kajera	a tree, common in the arid regions of Rajasthan
Kaliparaj	the 'black people'; a term used for the adivasis of South Gujarat
Kalipuja	religious festival to honour goddess Kali
Kamru Guru	old teacher of the medicine men
kandha-mula	a variety of sweet potato which was part of the forest produce that the Khonds and Santals of Orissa depended upon for their survival; mula means root and the name is derived from the Kandhas
Karampuja	generally observed in the month of August, it is a festival related to agriculture meant to appease god Karam, who would in turn shower his blessings for a bumper crop; protect the people from 'evil' and make women enjoy a better conjugal life.
karma	action, sin
khalaris	salt pans
khalsa	government-owned lands
khas	own
khet mazdoor	agricultural labourer
khoraki	diet
khorposh	right to maintenance from a piece of land
khorposhdars	those holding the right to maintenance from a piece of land
khuntkatti	a system of collective land-ownership among sections of tribal people
killi	clan
kisans	farmers
Kittung	The Sabara God, Jagannatha
kodalis	spades
koyals	weighmen
kui	female Kol

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kutcherry	court
lakheras	artisans
lathis	sticks
mahals	tribal tracts
malikana haqq	(right) of a zamindar in recognition of him being the *malik* (owner) of the land
mandia	millet
manjhi-than	shrine of village ancestors
manjihas	privileged private lands of landlords
manki	Village headman
mantars	incantations
Maran Buru	name of a hill spirit
marh	highland
marhan	plough cultivation done on highlands
marudi	drought
mati	witch-diviner
mohrir	agent of the gomashta
mohwa	an intoxicating drink
muffassal agents	local agents
muharrir	clerk
munda	village headman
munshi	all land tenures
mushahara	a monthly or other periodical pay or allowance
mustajari	a collective system of landholding
nal	a measuring device
Nilamadhaba	a tribal god of the Savaras that was 'stolen' and subsequently installed as the 'trinity'—viz. Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra
nirikh	the daily task assigned to a plantation labourer
nishada	outcaste
Niyam Raja	Lord of the Law—the main deity of the Niyamgiri mountains, Orissa
ojha	witch doctor
pahan-Munda	village priest
pahariah	(pahar = hill) Kandhas: Kandhas who lived in the hills
paik	peasant-warrior/militia in Garhjat States
paikar	an agent of the English East India Company who gave advances

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pardeshis	foreigners or outsiders
pargana	territory delimited by the Mughal government for revenue and administrative purposes
parwana	official order
patta	land-deeds
penda	a form of shifting cultivation
pir	a cluster of about 12 to 15 villages
prajas	subjects
puja	worship or to pray
purunga	a form of shifting cultivation
putties	an unit of measurement for grains
ragi and *kotkee*	dry crops
rajhas	land
rakshashas	demons
rakumats	cesses imposed upon the Munda and Oraons
rawana	a note from the salt agent or his assistant
sadans	artisanal castes living alongside the adivasis in Chotanagpur
sadant	an abusive term used to describe non-adivasis
sadhus	Hindu mendicants
sahib (*babu*)	manager
Sahibosum	sahib god of the Sauras who was most probably an European or a touring official, possibly a forest guard
sanad	a grant
sardar	head of coolies
sarna	traditional place of worship
sasan	burial ground
sat or *bara mula*	a herbal remedy in southern Rajasthan
satru	enemy
sazawal	officer appointed to enforce revenue collection
Singa bonga	supreme spirit/chief deity
sokha	witch doctor
ta'ahud	contract
ta'alluq	estate
ta'alluqdars	revenue-collecting intermediaries (zamindars)
taffals	salt works
thana	police station in Garhjat States
thankhanja	muster roll of the Malangis
thika	under the *thika* system, the Malangis came

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	from outside the village and were paid at a much higher rate than the Ajoora malangis
thikadars	contractors and revenue collectors
thuggee	(thuggery) term borrowed by the British to describe a form of robbery and murder
ticca	the period generally from June to October when tea leaves are plucked
tikait	eldest son of Raja/heir-apparent/Juvraj
titan	a practice instituted by the Tripura durbar to get local girls to the palace in order to satiate the sexual desires of the bureaucracy
tola	locality
umrao	a pre-colonial landholding system of the Kandhas
Vamshavali	family/clan chronicles
vanaputra	'sons of the forest'; a term applied to the Bhils of South Rajasthan

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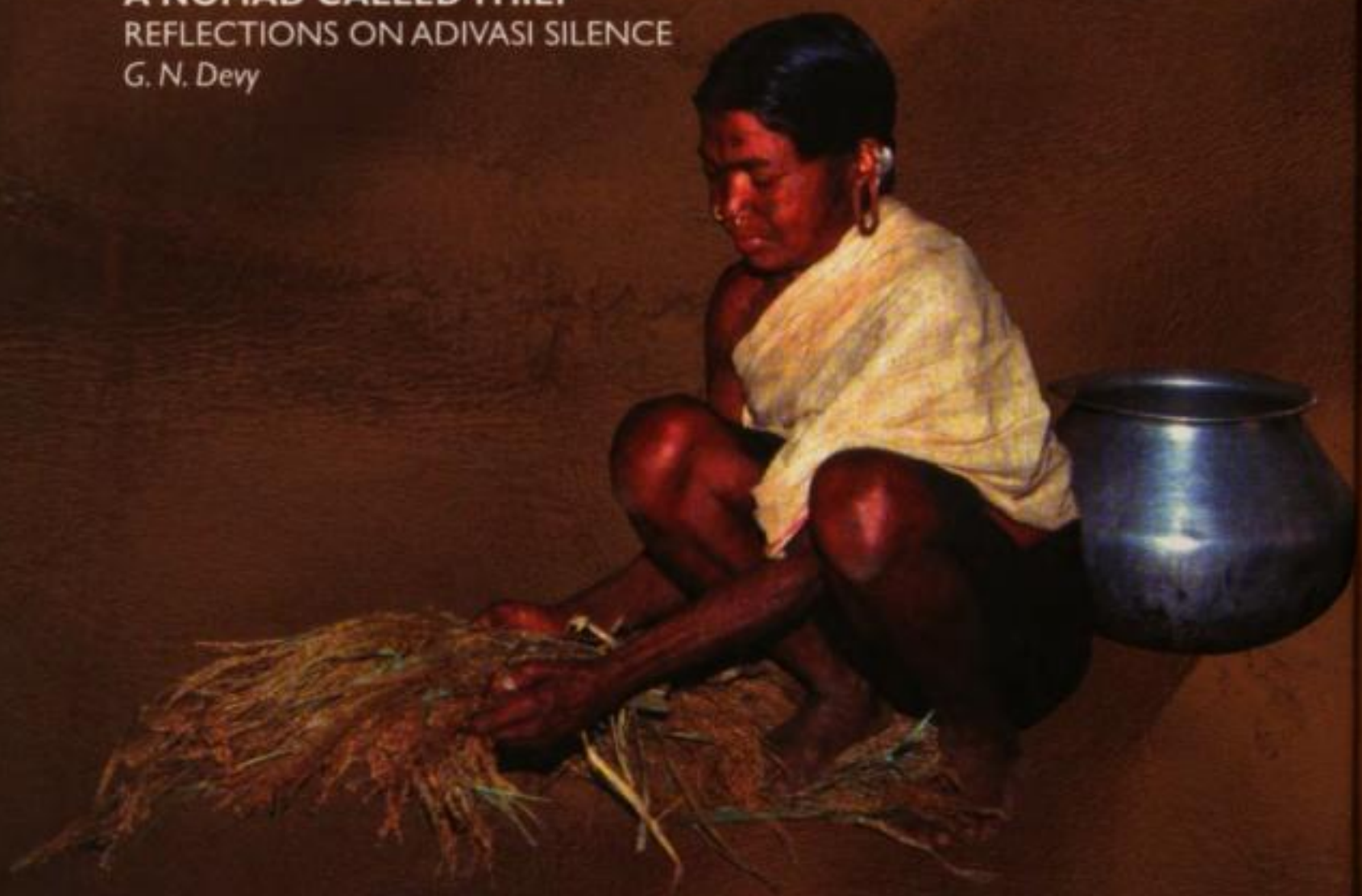
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ISBN 978-81-250-4094-1

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