

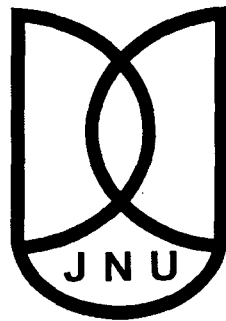
# ADMINISTERING SINGHBHUM:

STATE, COMMUNITY AND CONTINGENCIES OF RULE, 1800-1910

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the requirements for the award of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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### DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "Administering Singhbhum: State, Community and Contingencies of Rule, 1800-1910" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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### CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Needless to say, the responsibility for all the inconsistencies and mistakes remains mine.

## Abbreviations

Admin.	-	Administration
Agri.	-	Agriculture
App.	-	Appendix
Assist.	-	Assistant
CDCR	-	Chaibasa, District Collectorate Room
Col.	-	Colonel
Commnr.	-	Commissioner
Dep.	-	Deputy
Dept.	-	Department
Desp.	-	Despatch
For.	-	Forests
Front.	-	Frontier
Gen.	-	General
Gov.	-	Governor
Govt.	-	Government
Jt.	-	Joint
Jud.	-	Judicial
L.P.	-	Lower Provinces
Let.	-	Letter
Lt.	-	Lieutenant
No.	-	Number
Offic.	-	Official
Officiat.	-	Officiating
Para.	-	Paragraph
Polit.	-	Political
Proc.	-	Proceeding(s)

Rep.	-	Report
Resol.	-	Resolution
Rev.	-	Revenue
S.W.	-	South-West
Secy.	-	Secretary
Settl.	-	Settlement
Transl.	-	Translation
Vol.	-	Volume
WBSA	-	West Bengal State Archives
Yr.	-	Year

## Introduction

The region of Singhbhum is located on the southern-most region of the Chotanagpur plateau and was part of the lower provinces of the Bengal presidency when the colonial state first entered the region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It remained so till 1913, when it became a part of the newly carved out state of Bihar and Orissa. After the transfer of power in 1947, and the re-organisation of the different states, it became a part of the state of Bihar. Today, it has been divided into two districts - West and the East Singhbhum - and is part of the state of Jharkhand which was created with much fanfare in the year 2000. The region is inhabited primarily by the Ho community. Apart from the Hos, the other tribal communities of sizeable proportion which inhabit the region are the Santhals, the Bhumijis and the Paharias.

Right from the early nineteenth century, the region has been administered through a series of special laws and mechanisms which have aimed at ensuring the 'protection' of these 'peripheral' communities against, what are portrayed to be, their more avaricious 'outsiders'. The Wilkinson Rules, the Scheduled District Act, the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act during the colonial period, and the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution and Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) after the transfer of power are examples of some of these legal provisions that have accorded a centrality to the local village bodies and tribal communitarian structures of



authority in decision making processes. In Singhbhum, this has meant foregrounding *manki-munda* system of village organization and authority of the Hos. The mankis are the heads of a *conglomerate* of the villages, while the *mundas* are the head of individual villages. These structures of authority have, in turn, formed the rallying point of several activists, tribal organizations and individuals who have seen them as an effective check against the modernist developmental paradigm of the state. In 1979, for example, during a study commissioned by the Government of Bihar on the proprietary status of the Wilkinson's Rules, several respondents pointed out that "under these rules (as opposed to the laws in other parts of the country) the sufferers can open their mind before them in their own language and decisions by and large were made according to custom."<sup>1</sup> It was also argued by several respondents that such mechanisms, that recognize customary law and traditions has prevented them from much 'harassment', 'costly litigation' as well as 'crafty touts of the lawyers.'<sup>2</sup> Some recent academic works have also emphasized the potential benefits a proper working out of these provisions hold for the local tribal population. Nandini Sundar, for example, in one of her recent articles brings out that *adivasis* in several parts of Jharkhand are actively using legislations such as the PESA to reconstruct their "traditional village structures" for implementing government schemes connected with the question of poverty alleviation.<sup>3</sup> In another recent study, Alpa Shah sees the village organization of the Oraons and the Mundas in Jharkhand - the *parha* - as reflective of, what she terms as an alternative sacral polity. The institution of the *parha*, as per Shah, constitutes an effective check for the local population to successively evade the intruding might of the modern state apparatus.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Samanta, Nripendranath. (1997). 'Wilkinson's Rule: A Boon for the Tribesmen of Kolhan' in Sen, A.K. (ed.) *Wilkinson's Rule: Context, Content and Ramifications*. Chaibasa: Tata College

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Sundar, Nandini. (2005). 'Custom' and 'Democracy' in Jharkhand. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 41 (Oct. 8-14, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Shah writes, "While Mundas clearly feared the state, they were also unclear about what the state really was...Most, however, agreed that sarkar was a recent invasion, an increasingly visible and powerful threat to the Mundas, and that in former times, in the absence of the sarkar, tribal society had been united and therefore stronger...The *parha* derived its legitimacy not from the idea that it represented a solely sacred realm, but from the idea that it represented a sacral polity." See Shah,

The debate around the violation of these special laws has also been at the center of much controversy of late with several activists pointing to the several discrepancies and sidelining of local village bodies by the government of India while leasing out mining contracts to transnational companies.<sup>5</sup> However, we have also found instances where these institutions have been very cavalierly used by the government to effectively implement various schemes and policies. Very recently, certain locals in Singhbhum pointed out that the tribal heads had played a crucial role in facilitating clearances to mining corporations in Singhbhum through the gram sabhas.<sup>6</sup> The consent of the local population was extracted by 'buying over' the *mankis* and the *mundas*, whose houses could be seen flanked with the only street lights in the otherwise power-stricken villages. These were 'gifts' from the Rungta Mines Limited, Usha Martin Industries, and Tata Steel for their co-operation in the gram sabhas. 'Some mankis and mundas now roams in Scorpio SUVs,' the elected panchayat representative from Digha, Bilarman Kandulna, told the media, but 'a few boycotted the electrosteel public hearing for Kudalibad mines last year.'<sup>7</sup> An easy explanation for the above, which is what the journalistic report sought to do, was to see this as simply an instance where certain sections within the local community were bribed into acting against their communitarian interests. There is, however, more to such instances than just a simple buying over and one need to explore the social processes that may lie behind these instances.

One of the questions the present study, by looking at change in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, seeks to pose is whether these two - the tribal structures of authority and the modernist paradigm of the state - can always be posited in opposition to each other. By looking at the territorial, agrarian and ecological re-organization of the region, one can notice that, far from being in opposition to the state, the policies of administrative exceptionalism and special laws were central in

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Alpa. (2010). *In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism, and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India*. Delhi: OUP, pp. 55-56

<sup>5</sup> Ramakrishnan, Venkitesh and Ajoy Ashirward Mahaprashasta. (2013). 'Illusory Rights' in *Frontline*, Volume 30, Issue 8, April 20-May 03, 2013

<sup>6</sup> Anumeha Yadav, 'More Mines, Fewer Schools in former Maoist stronghold', *The Hindu*, Manoharpur, Jharkhand, June 17, 2013

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

fortifying a class within the local communities through whom policies were worked out on ground. This is not to say that there was no tension involved within this indirect mechanism of rule imposed in the region. But as we shall see, over the course of this study, for various reasons it was both politically and economically expedient. Within a stratified society, it was invariably with the help of certain groups, as against some others, that the colonial polices were implemented. The attempt over the course of the work, by looking at different aspects and themes, would be to show how rather than being an external actor that intervened in the society from outside, the colonial state penetrated, expanded and consolidated in the region by skilfully exploiting the many cleavages within these communities. The process in turn led to the exacerbation of the older hierarchies, as well as the creation of the new ones within the local communities. An un-intuitiveness to the internal differentiation within those called tribal can, otherwise, lead us to reducing the complex process of colonial re-organisation of the region into a flat and a linear narrative from the commons to the private. I contend that the approach I have adopted can also help us understand the complex conflicts and struggles within the tribal society, which have only proliferated in the last few years.<sup>8</sup> The time frame chosen for the period of study is the 110 years between 1800 and 1910 when the colonial state extended, expanded and consolidated its control over the region.

### *Colonial Representations: The Undisturbed District*

In the period under study, certain colonial accounts that were written about the region of Singhbhum worked with a certain kind of elision. Singhbhum was

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<sup>8</sup> To take a contemporary example, the case of Salwa Judum (and also many similar militias in other parts of the country), literally meaning purification campaign and also peace march, a vigilante groups raised by the Chattisgarh government with support from transnational companies and local propertied groups is pertinent. Followed on the lines US counterinsurgency policies, it was aimed to facilitate the takeover of mineral rich land in the region. A number of social movements which derive their theoretical understanding by posing the above mentioned binary have failed to come to terms with the phenomena, where they have seen 'tribals' pitted against their 'fellow tribals'. See for a critique of the above kind of conceptualization. Giri, Saroj. (2010). "Ethical Mining" and Adivasi Community as "Stakeholder" in [www.sanhati.com/excerpted/2756](http://www.sanhati.com/excerpted/2756) (last accessed on 13th June 2013)

portrayed as a region lying 'secluded' for ages in 'utter silence and seclusion'.<sup>9</sup> The Hos (or the Larka Kols, as the British referred to them) who had migrated into it centuries ago, had jealously all along guarded their 'exclusivity' within this 'walled in' territory.<sup>10</sup> Even the colonial intervention had not changed this undisturbed state of things within the region. If Bradley Birt had referred to Chotanagpur as the 'little known province of the empire', he went on to term Singhbhum as the 'Tibet of Chotanagpur' - the forbidden land which no stranger could pass through.<sup>11</sup> Loaded with the dominant perception of looking at forested regions and tribal communities as insulated and frozen across time, these representations very squarely obscured the historical processes that might have shaped the region, or its inhabitants, over the ages. Singhbhum, within this narrative, seemed more like a pre-ordained region. Consider for example the following words of Birt:

Singhbhum itself seems like a land especially designed by nature for Hos...it is a wild rugged country, *walled in* by range of hills and covered with dense patches of tree jungle. But what appealed to the fighting Kols most of all was the natural strength of the country to hold against foes from *without*. It is admirably planned for defence. *Shut in* by a barrier of hills, massed together in a series of bold irregular peaks, the country is almost inaccessible to an invading army.<sup>12</sup>

It may be argued that laying bare the nuances of the various factors that shaped Singhbhum was hardly the intention of the texts such as the above. These texts were, after all, merely supposed to serve as guide books to the administrators and travellers about the region and its people. However, when one looks at the perfunctory historical anecdotes they invoke not just about the pre-colonial but also the more immediate past, we can notice the obfuscation of the various social and spatial transformations. Bradley-Birt's narrative perfectly underscores this point. Apart from the few 'disturbances' that occurred during the colonial attempts to take over the country, there was no change of any significance to have been included

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<sup>9</sup> Tickell, S.R. (1840). 'Memoir on the Hodesum (Improperly called Kolhan)' in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XI, part II, p. 709

<sup>10</sup> Bradley-Birt, F.B. (1910). *Chotanagpur: A Little Known Province of the Empire*, London: Smith, Elder and Co., p. 86

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86-87

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87-88 (emphasis mine)

within the narrative. The reader is led through descriptions of the customs and traditions of the Hos and their daily lives at the *bazars* and the fairs, but the overall impression one gets is that region, and its people, had existed as frozen across time. Describing Chaibasa, the administrative headquarters of Singhbhum, Birt remarked in 1910:

Miles away from a railway until recent years, and even now sixteen miles from the nearest station, there is nothing progressive about Chaibasa. *As it was in the beginning, so it is now*, and the spirit of rest broods over it.<sup>13</sup>

And if the administrative headquarters had remained so unchanged, one can only imagine the case about the more arboreal tracts. With regard to the Saranda forests in the south-western part of Singhbhum, Birt wrote the following:

Change has touched this part of the Kolhan not at all. *Today the Hos still lead the same simple life that their ancestors lived for generations* – save only that the days of forays are over and the arm of the British law reaches even into the remoter corner of the jungle.<sup>14</sup>

Drawing upon official records and settlement reports, the present study seeks to counter representations such as the above, by attempting to look at the various changes wrought upon by colonial rule within the region of Singhbhum. The region presented several difficulties to the colonial officials as a region to be administered. The strategies of rule that were finally adopted had to take into consideration several factors. If the possibility of unrest was one aspect that had to be factored in, there was also largely the unknown country and its difficult terrain, knowledge about which had to be first gleaned so that policies could be effectively operationalized. The region, however, abounded in several resources to have ever been ignored by the British. The colonial state, over the course of the nineteenth century, exacted revenue from the region through various means and from various sources – rent from land, sale of timber and various forest products as well as mining of iron ore, copper, limestone, chrome, manganese and various other mineral products. A vast network

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 97 (emphasis mine)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 89 (emphasis mine)

of roads and railways was also laid down over large parts of the region.<sup>15</sup> As a result of the various commercial ventures of the colonial state, there was also an ever increasing influx of outsiders, or *dikus* as they were referred to in local parlance, into the region.<sup>16</sup> These various colonial interventions, far from leaving Singhbhum in its supposedly 'pristine' and 'insulated' pre-colonial state, induced several far reaching changes. In fact, even for the pre-colonial period the notion of insulation is open to question. The transactions at the weekly *hats*, or the ceremonies at the annual hunts, are just a couple of examples that bring out the economic, social and cultural linkages that the Hos shared with the other communities of Chotanagpur.<sup>17</sup>

The current research had begun by attempting to analyse this change by solely focussing on the question of the control over forests. However, over the course of reading through the archives, and as has also been highlighted in recent historiographical interventions<sup>18</sup>, I came to realize how an attempt to insulate forests from a number of interconnected themes and issues would have obfuscated a key aspect of the change brought about by the British. My attempt, therefore, has been to situate the transformations brought about by colonialism in the territorial, agrarian and ecological landscape of Singhbhum within its interconnectedness.

While trying to explain the socio-economic changes in this period, I have consciously avoided either a top-down or a bottom-up perspective. It is certainly inadequate, as K. Sivaramakrishnan's<sup>19</sup> pioneering work has demonstrated, to explain change only by referring to colonial intent as laid out in policy documents, or through exploring their ideological origins. There is a need to probe into the several constraints imposed on the operationalization of these policies by several ground level

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<sup>15</sup> (General Administration Report 1878-79) File no. 734, 1879, CDCR

<sup>16</sup> See for example the Diku reports prepared by the Government in the first few decades of the twentieth century. 'Ejectment of Dikus', File No. 1, collection no. XVI of 1910-11, Rev. Dept., CDCR; 'Extract from Diku report of Mauza Kuriposi - Pir Aula Thana No. 357' File No. 5, 1911, Rev. Dept., CDCR; 'Extract from Diku report of Mauza Kuriposi - Pir Aula Thana No. 357', File no. 324, 1917, Rev. Dept., CDCR

<sup>17</sup> Tickell, *Memoir*, p. 785, 805

<sup>18</sup> See Agarwal, Arun and K.Sivaramakrishnan (ed.). (2001). *Social Nature: Resources, Representations and Rules in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press; Bhattacharya, Neeladari. (1998). 'Introduction', *Studies in History*, 14 (2)

<sup>19</sup> Sivaramakrishnan, K. (1999). *Modern Forests: State Making and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India*. Delhi: OUP

contingencies. The colonial rule over this period did not simply signify a linear progression towards consolidation of colonial control. Even till much late, we find cautions being voiced within the colonial officialdom for the possible disturbances they might lead to.<sup>20</sup> The present work focuses extensively on the elasticity that colonial policies had to show in their operationalization. At the same time, the present work also does not look at this process as simply a complete subordination of the colonial policies to the local constraints and contingencies. The changes introduced by the British were quite palpable, either in terms of the territorialisation of the region, the rent schemes, the steps against shifting cultivation, the changes in the patterns of land holdings. My attempt would, thus, be to contextualize the various changes within the dialectics of the colonial revenue needs on the one hand and the contingencies of administration on the other.

Over the course of the work, I have used the terms tribal and *adivasi* interchangeably to denote the inhabitants of Singhbhum. Though, I am aware of the recent debates around the origins and problems of using one or the other term,<sup>21</sup> issues of semantic fine tunes are not very important for my work. The focus, here, rather is to trace the historical development within the social and economic landscape of Singhbhum, and the Hos, and not the processes of identity formation

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<sup>20</sup> For example, as late as 1897 when the colonial state had consolidated itself in the region, the settlement officer J.A. Craven's proposal to curb a local festival which he described as promoting much 'licentiousness' and 'drunkenness' in the district was rejected by both the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum as well as the Commissioner of Chotanagpur. The Commissioner of Chota Nagpur A. Forbes, for example, stated that the Singhbhum Hos were of 'very excitable nature' to render such intrusive measures safe, and 'it will probably be better to rely upon the effects of the civilizing influences now at work than to do anything which would tend to exasperate this naturally turbulent race of aborigines'. See Craven, J.A. (1898). *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate in District Singhbhum of the Year 1897*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press. pp. 22-23; (Let. No. 868L.R., from A. Forbes, Esq., C.S. I., Commnr. of the Chota Nagpur Division to the Secy. to the Board of Rev., L.P., dated Ranchi, the 29<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1897), appended to the Craven Report

<sup>21</sup> See for example David Hardiman's discussion of the nomenclatures - 'tribal' and 'adivasis' and his reasons for preferring the latter. Hardiman, David. (1987). *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*. New Delhi: OUP

## *Histories of the Tribes*

After the transfer of power, the first histories of the tribal communities were written in the 1960s when historians attempted to situate the various the 'tribal revolts' of the colonial period within the overall history of the coming into being of the new nation-state.<sup>22</sup> If K.S. Singh represents the progenitor of this approach, S.K. Sen and Murali Sahu exemplify the same for the region and period under study.<sup>23</sup> The idyllic adivasi population living in harmony with nature and themselves were seen, in this framework, as threatened by the incursions of the British and other outsiders, which they protested against through these rebellions. In most of these writings, these rebellions and protests were represented within a linear schema - they began as a 'millenarian' call of one of the leaders against the alien raj; became 'agrarian' because of the colonial intervention in the local land structures of these region; and finally became 'political' after coming into contact with the national movement for freedom from the British Raj.<sup>24</sup>

The sub-altern collective in the 1980s attempted to counter this schema - what it termed as the 'elitist biases' of the existing historiography - by attempting to bring out the contribution made by the people on their own independent of the elite.<sup>25</sup> Many of the early works of the sub-altern collective broadened the way 'political' was understood and also engaged very fascinatingly with the question of religiosity within these protests. The study of tribal resistance was central to many of the early

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<sup>22</sup> Singh, K.S. (1966). *The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist*. Calcutta: 1966; Jha, J.C. (1964). *The Kol Insurrection in Chotanagpur*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., Sen, S.K. (2008). *Tribal Struggle for Freedom Singhbhum 1800-1858*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company. Sahu, Murali. (1985). *The Kolhan under The British Rule*. Jamshedpur: Utkal Book Agency

<sup>23</sup> Consider for example, the following words of S.K. Sen in the introduction of his book, "The Ho Land is an integral parts of the Sovereign Democratic Republic of India and the glorious history of this part will, I am sure, be a source of inspiration to everyone, not to speak of the children of the soil alone....If the qualities of their ancestors were brought home to their minds as traits of character worth developing, the qualities of sincerity of purpose and proper zeal and fervor for the maintenance of integrity, they may prove themselves worthy citizens of India." Sen, S.K. *Tribal Struggle for Freedom*. p. 10

<sup>24</sup> See for one example of this kind of conceptualization, Singh, K.S. (1988). 'Tribal Peasantry, Millenarianism, Anarchism and Nationalism: A Case Study of the Tana Bhagats in Chotanagpur, 1914-25', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 16, 1988

<sup>25</sup> See Guha, Ranajit. (1982.). 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian and Society*. Delhi: OUP



works of the sub-altern historians.<sup>26</sup> However even within most of the subaltern historiography, tribal resistance is seen only in opposition to the non-tribal population. Ranajit Guha, for example, in his study of the peasant and tribal revolts in colonial India through the prism of rebel consciousness, for example, contends that it was the rebel's view of the enemy – both the British as well as the non-tribal *dikus* – which provided the subjective determinants of various tribal revolts. “The domain of the rebellion defined itself negatively by exclusion of the *diku* just as the tribe defined itself in terms of the otherness of the alien”, Guha goes on to write, “...the tribe, in other words, was not merely the initiator of the rebellion but was its site as well. Its consciousness of itself as a body of insurgents was thus indistinguishable from its recognition of its ethnic self.”<sup>27</sup> The parallels with the earliest nationalist historiography, which it attempted to counter are quite glaring. Within economic history also, the change is described largely in terms of the same insider and outsider framework.<sup>28</sup> Some recent works have tried to understand tribal protest outside of the insider/outsider binary.<sup>29</sup>

The rise of the environmentalist history in the 1980s, as a distinct field of enquiry in the 1970s and 1980s, with growing concerns over forest and other forms of ecological degradations, gave a fillip to the study of sites that were seen as separated from the agrarian world. Colonialism was identified as an ‘ecological watershed’ that broke the various harmonious ties of the forest dwellers with the forests.<sup>30</sup> While several initial conceptualizations of environmental history have increasingly been questioned, and even nuanced, the study of forests has effectively foregrounded the

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<sup>26</sup> Guha, Ranajit. (1983). *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*. Delhi: OUP; Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi*; Arnold. David. (1982). ‘Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem-Rampa Risings, 1839-1994’ in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian and Society*. Delhi: OUP

<sup>27</sup> Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects*, pp. 285-291

<sup>28</sup> Prabhu Mahapatra, for example, sees within the agrarian landscape of Chotanagpur a continuous ‘class struggle’ between the non-*adivasi* landlords and the *adivasi* tenants. See Mahapatra, Prabhu Prasad. (1991). ‘Class Conflicts and Agrarian Regimes in Chotanagpur, 1860-1950’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 28:1

<sup>29</sup> See for example, Dasgupta, Sangeeta. (1999). ‘Reordering a World: The Tana-Bhagat Movement, 1914-1919’, *Studies in History*, new series, vol. 15, no. 1

<sup>30</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. (1989). *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. Delhi: OUP

studies of several tribal communities.<sup>31</sup> In the recent past, there have also been studies regarding the colonial constructs, categories and concepts with regard to the tribal population.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to Singhbhum, Sanjukta Dasgupta's work on the Hos is an extremely important work to have emerged in the recent past.<sup>33</sup> Looking at various aspects of the *adivasi* village society, it attempts at a comprehensive examination of the transition of the Hos over the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, be it in its examination of British intrusion, agrarian change or the changes with regard to the control over forests, Dasgupta, too, works with an insider/outsider binary. "It was the growing encounter with non-tribal outsiders, including the apparatus of power of the colonial state, and the gradual consolidation of alien domination", she writes, "which brought about significant changes in the village organisation of the Hos." The same framework, albeit in a reverse way, is also discernible in Asoka Kumar Sen's work on the colonial state's engagement with the customary laws of the Hos and other communities of Singhbhum. He, for example, remarks that the colonial state in framing laws for the region recognized the 'specificity of the *adivasis* as a custom governed community.'<sup>34</sup> In analysis such as these, there is a certain homogeneity given to the 'tribe' and an externality given to the colonial state. The present work, by looking at the co-option of a certain section of the tribal population for purposes of imperial governance seeks to challenge both these assumptions.

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<sup>31</sup> See for example, Prasad, Archana. (2003). *Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the Making of an Anti-Modern Tribal Identity*. Delhi: Three Essays Collective. Skaria, Ajay. (1999). *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press

<sup>32</sup> Damodaran, Vinita. (2006). 'Colonial Constructions of the "Tribe in India: The Case of Chotanagpur', *Indian Historical Review*. Vol. 33, no. 1; Skaria, Ajay. (1997). 'Shades of Wildness Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Aug., 1997)

<sup>33</sup> Dasgupta, Sanjukta. (2011). *Adivasis and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos, 1820-1932*. Delhi: Orient Blackswan

<sup>34</sup> Sen, A.K. (2012). *From Village Elder to British Judge: Custom, Customary Law and Tribal Society*. Delhi: Orient Blackswan, p. 184

## *Overview of the Chapters*

Chapter 1 looks at the constitution of the region that was a part of the lower provinces of Bengal into the administrative unit of Singhbhum in the early decades of the nineteenth century. After laying down some details regarding the geographical landscape, and the internal dynamics of the Hos, the attempt in this chapter is to look at how these factors determined the earliest colonial interventions in the region. It was in the midst of intense squabbling amongst the various local chiefs and *rajahs*, along with large scale unrest amongst the Hos, that the British first entered the region in the early nineteenth century. This chapter will thus be dealing with the various ways and means through which the British sought to quell the unrest, displace the various local chiefs and take over the region. Their military plans and strategies, however, had to be constantly reformulated over the course of time, and this was, in a way, an indicator of the limits to which the colonial state could actually carry out its intended plans in practice. However, even the re-formulated plans and strategies for their eventual success drew greatly upon the internal cleavages within the Ho community. The help of a privileged section of headmen within the Hos, namely the *mankis* and the *mundas*, be it through providing the colonial military with supplies, information or other assistance was crucial in the taking over of the region by the British.

Chapter 2 explores the colonial intervention in the agrarian landscape of Singhbhum. These interventions are contextualized as one of the means through which the British administratively re-organized the region and reinforced the fragile order that they had established initially through military means. These policies exacerbated the hierarchies within the Hos so as to fortify a class of privileged sections through whom colonial policies were worked out on the ground. Even while constrained by local structures of authority of the Hos, colonial authority found its way to transform and work it ways through these local communitarian structures, which was both economically and politically expedient. An important point that I wish to make in this chapter is that local structures of authority, that were co-opted in this period for purposes of imperial governance, did not constitute some autonomous domain

which colonial intent had to *completely* subordinate itself to. Rather, these local structures were dialectically related to the larger imperial political and economic structures - demands of which produced several transformations within them as well.

Chapter 3 look at the colonial attempts at establishing greater control over the forests of Singhbhum. The chapter begins by examining the new concerns over the depletion of the forests towards the late nineteenth century. Certain scientific ideas about the forest degradation, and its effects were selectively invoked by the colonial state in order to legitimize its intentions to usurp vast swathes of forest land. However, its attempts to work out these concerns were limited as a result of the various difficulties imposed by the complex, bewildering as well as contested arrangement of local rights to the forests. The attempts at instituting an extensive regime of restrictions over the forests were further complicated because of the earlier policy of the colonial state that had promoted forest clearances. One of the ways for overcoming these problems was to, once again, hand over key functions of forest management to the *mankis* and the *mundas*. Though the forest department constantly highlighted the ineffectiveness of these village officials to carry out the various complicated tasks, they could never be displaced. Forest usurpation affected the most marginal sections within the Hos and the colonial state hoped to palliate some of its effects by carrying out its intended aims through a section which had a social and cultural legitimacy amongst the Hos. However, the concessions to the headmen could not completely check the resentment of the Hos against the new restrictions. The chapter ends with looking at the use of fire by the Hos within the demarcated forests as a means of resisting the new forest regulations and the colonial attempts in vain at countering it.

## Chapter I

### Confronting Singhbhum: From a Geographical Region to an Administrative Unit

The vast arena of undulating and heavily forested countryside categorized by the British as the district of Singhbhum, did not exist as either a single or a unitary administrative unit when the British had first entered the region. The region was carved out amongst numerous rulers, chiefs and *zamindars* and was relatively fluid with regard to its boundaries. A family styling themselves as the Rajahs resided in the region called Porahat. However, by the middle of the eighteenth century, their control had been weakened over the territory over which they claimed control. Because of several internecine conflicts, the other parts of the region had to be subdivided amongst different chiefs and *zamindars*. A chief, who referred to himself in local parlance as the *Kunwar*, controlled the territory called Seraikela. A family calling itself the *Thakurs* of Kharsawan controlled the region called Kharsawan. In such a situation, it would be anachronistic to treat the region as given when the British first entered it. Rather it was through the colonial engagement with the place over time, that the region was constituted as Singhbhum.

This chapter attempts to uncover some of the processes, which led to the transformation of what was an area within the Lower Provinces of Bengal, into the district of Singhbhum. We will attempt, over the course of four sections, to explore the many ways in which the region was experienced and then subsequently re-territorialized into a single administrative unit by the British. The first two sections, through a critical engagement with two colonial texts, attempts to delineate the basic features of the landscape and the communities inhabiting the region. This will help us in contextualizing the ways and means adopted by the British when they, through a series of counter-insurgency operations, tried to extend their control over the region. The last two sections look at these various colonial measures which were adopted to quell the many insurrections and take over the region. Since my intention is not to analyse the various insurrections for the insights they may offer to the study of social protest and tribal resistance, I will not be going into too many details regarding the many facets of these rebellions. The attempt, in the last two sections, would be to simply look at how these various insurrections, and the measures taken for their suppression, contributed to the making of the region. However, I have also not consciously confined myself to only looking at the unrest within the region categorized as Singhbhum proper. Since the pre-colonial territorial arrangement was still relatively porous, some of these insurrections, which might have originated in the adjoining regions, had direct effects on the making of Singhbhum - both in terms of the immediate, as well as the long terms measures, adopted by the colonial state.

## I. Un-familiarities Galore: From Bengal To Chotanagpur and Locating Singhbhum within Chotanagpur

It was the Indo-Gangetic and the Bengal plains on the east that the East India Company had long acquainted itself since the transfer of *diwani* rights. As opposed to that, the lower provinces of the Bengal presidency appeared as a vast labyrinth when the British first entered the region. This vast arena of undulating forested hills interspersed with various streams, waterfalls, and infested with wild animals,

insects and dangerously malarial mosquitoes, was seen as extremely difficult to traverse, demarcate and territorialize. W.W. Hunter, alluding to the vast thickets of forests that lay on the western frontier of Lower Bengal, remarked:

On the west rise the mountains, covered to the summit with masses of vegetation. Gorgeous creepers first wreath with flowers, then strangle their parent stems, and finally bind together the living and the dead in one impenetrable thicket...Over the uplands the jungle still holds its primitive reign, affording covert to wild beasts and cool glades for herds of cattle.<sup>1</sup>

This was depiction of the Chotanagpur plateau. As the above quotation implies it was, usually, described in opposition to the other more familiar plains to its east. The region of Singhbhum was situated on the southern-most precinct of this area, and was variously perceived as the exterior most of an overall exterior region. Clothed with the densest forests within Chotanagpur and hardly having been under the sway of Mughals or Marathas, it was also seen by the British, as shut out from all outside influences. Virtually no information about this 'dreadful' region could come out save for bits and pieces from the pilgrims who crossed it en route from the Gangetic plains to the Jagannath temple.<sup>2</sup> The colonial military officials, when they first landed here in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, saw themselves amongst other things, as the first explorers from outside into this southern frontier of Chotanagpur. In the subsequent period several more accounts<sup>3</sup> were published about the region, in which the colonial officials and travellers saw themselves as laying out the region thread bare to the outside world for the first time.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter, W.W. (1868). *The Annals of Rural Bengal*. Calcutta: West Bengal District Gazetters, Government of India (reprint, 1996)

<sup>2</sup> Tickell, *Memoir*, p. 695-698

<sup>3</sup> Tickell, *Memoir*. Dunbar, William. (1861). 'Some Observations on the Manners, Customs, and Religious Opinions of the Lurka Coles', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 18 (1861). Dalton, Edward Tuite. (1872). *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing; see also his 'The "Kols" of Chota-Nagpore', *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, Vol. 6 (1868). Hunter, W.W. (1877). *A Statistical Account of Bengal: Volume XVIII, Singhbhum Districts, Tributary States of Chutia Nagpur and Manbhum*, London: Trubner and Co. Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*. O'Malley; *Singhbhum GAZETTER*. Bradley-Birt, *Chotanagpur: A Little Known Province*

<sup>4</sup> This self-perception of the British as being the first explorers into the region was also related to the superior cultural status they ascribed to themselves vis-à-vis the rest of the population in India. The first administrator of the region after its accession to the British Tickell, for example, remarked that

In the absence of written records from the pre-colonial period, this section attempts to lay out the main geographical features of this south-eastern region of Chotanagpur through a critical reading of two accounts published later: S.R. Tickell's *Memoir* on the central upland region of Singhbhum published in 1840 and Valentine Ball's account of his field trips to the jungle tracts of the sub-continent in the 1860s. They may not probably be explicative of the earliest encounters of the British with the region but reflect an intimate - though in different ways - understanding of the different specificities of Singhbhum. There is, however, a need to remain intuitive to the various representational strategies employed therein for the purposes of this section. Further, both these accounts, despite being different in their own ways, cannot be categorised either as purely administrative, scholarly or exploratory in their scope. All of these perspectives impinge on each other and, as we shall see over the course of this section, get reflected in these works. As for the conceptual framework behind these accounts, one can clearly discern a certain romanticism about the unexplored countryside and the 'tribes' inhabiting them. However, at the same time, one can also find other structuring influences as well.<sup>5</sup> This was related to both the larger changes within Europe as well as the contingencies of rule within Singhbhum.

Born in a family with a keen interest in natural history and trained as a geologist in Trinity College in Dublin, Valentine Ball landed in Calcutta in 1864. The objective

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the region would have forever remained unknown to the people unless the 'enterprising' British showed to the world what the 'timid Hindoo' was incapable of. Further, they saw themselves laying out for the first time the histories of these regions to the outside world - a task once again which the natives were incapable of. The historian, explorer and the administrator all came together during the forays of these officials and travellers. See Tickell, *Memoir.*, p. 695, 706-708

<sup>5</sup> Ramchandra Guha has discussed this new romanticism about the countryside in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the rise of the opposition to industrialization. Guha refers to the romantic tradition, as reflected in the works of William Wordsworth, John Clare, John Ruskin, William Morris and Edward Carpenter, to bring out how the opposition to the destructive impact of industrial revolution largely reflected in the affirmation of the life of the countryside as an ideal opposition to it. See Guha, Ramchandra. (2000). *Environmentalism: A Global History*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp. 11-17. These influences are discernible not just in the works of Tickell and Ball, but also someone like Hunter. His *Annals of Rural Bengal*, where he set out to recover the history, not of British ascendancy in India, but of the 'silent millions' within rural Bengal who bore the 'yoke' of English supremacy, exemplifies very clearly this new yearning of the countryside. For a discussion of the new interest amongst 'indigenous' population with the rise of bourgeois revolutions in Europe, see Liebersohn, Harry. (1994). 'Discovering Indigenous Nobility: Tocqueville, Chamisso, and Romantic Travel Writing', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3 (Jun., 1994)



was to lay out before the largely European world of letters and the academia, a picture of the *hitherto unexplored tracts* of the empire. His upcoming sojourns had a dual purpose. Being on the pay rolls of the Geological Survey of India, as well as a regular contributor to the various geological journals, he was on a scholarly and scientific expedition. That, however, did not restrict his explorer self. 'A lover' of nature, as he described himself, he was out, just as much to explore the *unexplored* in these *secluded* tracts of the empire. In the very first lines of the account, Ball wrote:

Imperial India, India of the Great Cities, Great Rajahs and Princes, is not described in these pages. It has been my object to lead my readers away from those scenes of display and splendour to which so much prominence has been given in various works published of late years, and to attempt to present before them pictures of the lives of men, wild beasts and plants, in regions many of which have been seldom visited or described before.<sup>6</sup>

Within less than a month of his arrival, Ball had begun his journey westwards through rugged and unmade country roads. It was here, which was then the lower provinces of Bengal, his first field trips and explorations were undertaken. The alteration in vegetation patterns was visible quite early in his journey, as the rice cultivation in the plains was gradually replaced with terraced cultivation of the same.<sup>7</sup> Further west he encountered a drastic elevation in the terrain of the region. Entering Chotanagpur, he described the difference that set it apart from the region he had started from:

Even in the flattest portions it is impossible to find any point from whence hills are not in view: this feature at once strikes the eye of visitors from the dead level plains of lower and Eastern Bengal.<sup>8</sup>

The densely forested hills and plateaus also broke the country into fertile valleys and river basins that had been cleared from the forests over the past few centuries. The location of villages here was hardly permanent and it would be difficult to trace a village at a place where it had existed just a few years back. This was largely to do

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<sup>6</sup> Ball, Valentine. (1880). *Tribal and Peasant Life in Nineteenth Century India*. Delhi: Usha Publications (reprint 1985). p. vii-viii

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56

with the fact that the local inhabitants here practised shifting cultivation and after a harvest of few crops they would move to new areas.<sup>9</sup> The landscape also did not remain the same round the year. The trees shed their leaves and the country turned dry in the summer months from March to May, only to come back to life with the rains in the subsequent months. The terrain and the forest foliage glistened, in these months, amidst showers and sunshine. The country, being extremely unhealthy during the monsoons, was however the most difficult to traverse during these months. The winters were luxuriant, and the time of the year best suited for colonial explorations as well as military operations. In fact, it was during these winter months that Ball conducted his field trips in Chotanagpur.

Setting westwards every year from Calcutta in November and continuing till March, Ball explored and studied the northern regions of Chotanagpur - Hazaribagh, Lohardugga, Palamau, Manbhum and Ranchi - for the first three years, before finally 'descending' south into Singhbhum in 1868. His narrative thus provides us with a lucid description of the changing landscape through this region - from Bengal to Chotanagpur to Singhbhum - something that will help us trace the points of references that Singhbhum was constantly defined in opposition to. The forest became denser and the terrain more unfamiliar. Commenting on how one feels at the very 'outskirts of civilization' even within the administrative headquarters of Chaibasa, Ball went to remark:

To the west and south-west one might travel through the wildest jungle for several hundreds of miles, without coming upon a single sign of any kind to indicate that the people have, in any way, been brought into contact with the British power - save, perhaps, that, afforded by their quiet and undisturbed condition.<sup>10</sup>

Unfamiliarity also characterized Ball's descriptions of the inhabitants of Singhbhum. It was believed that the Lurka Kols, as the inhabitants of Singhbhum were called by the British, or the Hos, as they referred to by themselves, broke away from the Mundas after their migration into these 'secluded' spaces. The Hos, Ball went on to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 104

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., P. 128

write, were, 'rigidly conservative with regard to their language and customs' and liked to remain 'shut out from all outside influences.'<sup>11</sup> The axis of difference along which the Hos were described in Ball's account was related to the similar representation of Singhbhum vis-à-vis the other regions. It was variously believed that the densely forested region of Singhbhum provided the exclusivity to the Hos which they jealously guarded.<sup>12</sup> Even within Singhbhum, they remained constantly mobile, and these movements, over the years, could be traced from the density of gravestones erected across the region in the memory of the deceased.<sup>13</sup> The central upland region within Singhbhum, known as the Kolhan, where these tabular gravestones could be spotted in the greatest number, was the place where the British mostly encountered the Hos and their 'untidy' villages.<sup>14</sup> Even these villages were perceived as markedly different from villages in other parts of the empire. In fact, for Ball, these villages were not just in drastic contrast to those of the 'respectable Hindus',<sup>15</sup> but also with those of other tribal communities inhabiting the region in areas north of Singhbhum. In a very evocative representation of the *wilderness* he encountered on entering Singhbhum, Ball remarked:

Some of the small villages in the hills in this neighbourhood were inhabited by...a tribe allied to the Hos and Sontals, and therefore quite distinct from the Dravidian Uraons, who occupy the plateau further north. These people often knew only two or three words of Hindustani. Very wild they appeared to be, and much given to drink. In one village I passed through, every soul - man, woman, and child - appeared to be drunk. With their faces whitened with wood ash, they danced about in a half frantic state, and the scene presented to my eyes was more of the nature of an African orgie than my previous experience led me to expect in India.<sup>16</sup>

However, the colonial discourse about the region, and its people, was not completely internally coherent. For some others, the notion of Singhbhum as a *wild* and a *secluded* space had a completely different meaning.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 162

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 162

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 162-163

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 163, 137

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 137

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 134

Tickell's memoir on the region was written almost a couple of decades before Ball even entered Singhbhum. He had been appointed as the first administrator of the region in 1837, and quite intensely explored the region for the eventual returns it may provide to the British.<sup>17</sup> The region to him, as he explored its 'thickets and briars' and 'its labyrinth of untenanted forests', seemed more like a home to the *unspoiled* aboriginals who were living in close harmony with nature and themselves. Though Tickell shared with other colonial officials and travellers after him the perceived dissimilarity of the Hos from other communities, for him this did not simply reflect a state of primitiveness from which the Hos had to be weaned away. Rather, this perceived distance of the Hos from civilization, measured by the British along a temporal axis, was a virtue that had to be consciously *preserved* by the British.<sup>18</sup> Describing the Hos as a 'light-hearted and a 'good natured' race, Tickell wrote:

In summing up this account of the Ho race by a description of their general character, their virtues and vices, I may perhaps fall into...a little partiality in their favour; three years constant intercourse with them, in which *their love of truth, their honesty, their obliging willingness, and their happy indisposition, formed so striking a contrast to the mass of the people in Hindustan*, may have perhaps induced me to pass lightly over faults to which they are but too liable; but this error (a pleasing one) is I imagine shared with me by, all the European residents who were at Chyebassa. Whether the duplicity and bad propensities of Hindoos in general, be owing to their intercourse with us, or whether it be inherent among them, is a point at present mooted, and not be decided by myself. But among this simple race, the reputed evils of civilization have not yet commenced to be felt; and fervently is it to be trusted, though, alas, the hope may be Utopian, that the introduction of our Courts of Justice, in checking the lawless tendency of the Kols may not destroy those virtues which are inherent to a primitive state of society.

This romanticized notion of the 'truthful' Hos was also extended in Tickell's account to portray them as astonishingly largely *non-violent*. This was in complete contrast to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 695

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the differentiated response of the British towards populations categorized as 'tribes' and 'castes' see Skaria, Ajay. (1997). 'Shades of Wildness: Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Aug., 1997)

what the military officials were saying just a few years back. For Tickell, however, these earlier moments, which saw the colonial military engaged in a series of sanguinary battles with the Hos for territorial control, were merely the result of the influence of the 'Hindoo zamindars' who had instigated these otherwise 'simple race' of people.<sup>19</sup> Tickell further remarked that these Arcadian qualities of the Hos within this serene surroundings, provided the colonial officials posted here several pleasures.<sup>20</sup> The annual great hunt in the month of May, when apart from the Hos various tribal communities from the surrounding regions gathered in Singhbhum was one such moment. Its description in Tickell's account can be quoted at some length. As the 'vast sheets of pathless jungle' were slowly overtaken by the numerous hunters and beaters, and the jungle resounded with clicks of arrows, the roars, screams, groans of the animals, piping of flutes, beating of drums and the baying of trumpets, what followed was a scene, Tickell wrote, 'only the wildest imagination could picture':

Here are the ever dancing and singing *Sontals*, dressed out in flowers and feathers, with flutes ornamented with streamers made of pith, the wild *Kurrias*, or hill men, from the Luckisinnee hills in Borahbhum; the *Koormies*, *Taunties*, *Soondees*, *Gwallas*, *Bhoomijes* &c, with sonorous 'dammas' or kettle drums, and other uncouth music, armed with swords, bulwas, and bows and arrows of every description; the *Hos*, simple and unpretending, but with the heaviest game bags; the little ill-featured *Tamarias*, with spears, shields, and matchlocks; the Nagpoor *Moondas* with huge ornaments stuck through their ears, indifferently armed with bows and arrows, clubs or bulwas; the Southern *Kols*, and the far comer from Saranda with their chain earrings and monstrous *pagris*; the *Bhooians* with their long bows ornamented with horse tails, or the feathers of the blue jay, and their immense barbed arrows; the *paiks* of the *Rajahs*, *Kunwars*, *Thakurs* and other zamindars with their shields, talwars, powder horns, and immense matchlocks with rests, dressed out in all colours; lastly, the *Rajahs*, *Thakoors*, &c. themselves with guns of Delhi manufacture, prodigious scimetars, or an occasional 'Angreeze bundook...'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tickell, *Memoir*. p. 807

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 806

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 787

Relishing the sight of countless groups enjoying the spoils of the hunts and cooking, eating, drinking, sleeping, laughing or dancing around a bonfire, Tickell went on to comment:

..the sports of these simple people in their sylvan retreats must afford the highest excitement and pleasure to all in whom to a passion for field sports is joined a love for the beauties of nature, here seen in her wildest and most striking attire.<sup>22</sup>

These various representations portrayed the region as nothing more than a huge mass of forest cover and the Hos as a homogenous community living in complete seclusion as well as in harmony with their natural surroundings. This portrayal however, elided certain subtle yet extremely important specificities about the region and its inhabitants.

## **II. The Differentiation Within: The Place and the People**

The entire region of Singhbhum was not completely the same everywhere and accounts that emerged from local administrators could not remain completely unintuitive to these differences within Singhbhum. For example, the tasks assigned to Tickell as the first administrator of the region, such as laying down boundary lines in the region, closely acquainted him with the differentiation within Singhbhum. If there were vast desolated parts in its southern and south-western regions, the northern part consisted of an extremely fertile and populous region. In these latter regions the Hos had converted a sizeable section of the forest land into arable where they in some cases also practised settled cultivation.<sup>23</sup> However, owing to constraints of irrigation and manure, it was mostly slash and burn that was the dominant form of cultivation.

Apart from the differentiation in the landscape and the terrain of the region, the Hos were also internally differentiated - something that the British in the subsequent decades only exacerbated. This was most manifest in the conflicts that characterized

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 787

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 695

the region when the British first entered Singhbhum. The region at that time was carved out amongst different warring chiefs who regularly mobilized sections of the Hos to commit 'depredations' against each other for greater territorial control. We will deal with this period of history in greater detail in the next section. For the purposes of this section, it is important to mention that this territorial arrangement within the region needs to be contextualized within a larger process of differential access to resources, where to borrow from Peter Sahlins, 'territorialization of the community had preceded territorialisation of the state.'<sup>24</sup> In the absence of sources from the pre-colonial period, I draw from the existing work of Sanjukta Dasgupta on the Hos to establish this point.

Drawing upon the history of patterns of migrations, socio-economic changes as well as the process of state formation in the region, Sanjukta Dasgupta delineates the stratification within the Hos in the pre-colonial period. Upon first settlement of the Hos into the region, forests and wastelands were cleared collectively by the first settlers to make way for agricultural settlements.<sup>25</sup> In a harsh and difficult country, the villages settled came to organise themselves in a manner so as to secure the access of the original village founders, the *khuntkattidars*, over the scarce village resources. This differentiation was further institutionalised in the pre-colonial tribal polity by reserving for these first settlers the posts of the tribal heads - *mankis* and the *mundas* - the head of the clan, and the chiefs of the village council respectively. The privileges to these groups were further manifest in economic terms, as well as with the differential rates of rent for tribal headmen. The families claiming a *khuntkattidar* status were in cases, able to reserve the post of the *mankis* and the *mundas* over many generations as succession to these posts was by primogeniture.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Sahlins, Peter. (1988). 'The Nation in the Village: State-Building and Communal Struggles in the Catalan Borderland during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Jun., 1988), p. 246-247. Sahlins, makes this argument in his study of the conflicts in the mountainous Cerdanya valley situated on the border of Spain and France. These conflicts were largely seen as outbursts of national enmity. Sahlins, however, locates these conflicts within the history of differential access to resources which led to this process of territorialisation of village communities.

<sup>25</sup> Dasgupta, Sanjukta. *Adivasis and the Raj*, p. 35

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42

However by the late pre-colonial period, the village organisation of the Hos was in a state of constant flux. The process of state formation in the region, with the rise of the royal families in the eighteenth century, induced several changes within the tribal communities. The role of the *mankis* was transformed into one of intermediaries between the state and the people. A section of them were now entitled to a commission for the total amount of rent they collected from the people in the villages and the *pirs*. In many places, service tenures of a military nature were also granted to a section of them. These social processes invariably introduced far reaching changes, as far as the production, appropriation and distribution of the agrarian surplus was concerned. This also laid the basis for a certain kind of a sub-infeudation within the region.<sup>27</sup> The territorial arrangement as it emerged, was one in which the ruling family's directly controlled territory was surrounded and guarded on all side by frontier tenure holders.<sup>28</sup> On the basis of the above, Dasgupta remarks that the idea of tribal egalitarianism would only be valid if applied to this core group of original settlers. However, one cannot ascribe a complete homogeneity even to this core group within the Ho community. Though we don't have much evidence to substantiate this claim, the later period exemplifies that the *mankis* and the *mundas* were also differentiated as a group.<sup>29</sup>

The landscape, terrain and the ecology also determined the differentiation within the Hos. As A.K. Sen points out, the villages in the plains enjoyed an environment more favourable for cultivation than those in the hilly and forest areas of Kolhan. "The state of having a more developed agriculture gave the people of the plains", Sen goes on to write, "an economic edge over the people on the margins who practised shifting cultivation."<sup>30</sup> As a result of this, the densely forested areas did not reflect the same hierarchies within the community as the northern and the central upland

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<sup>27</sup> This, however, cannot be compared with the sub-infeudation in the Indo-Gangetic and the Bengal plains. The specificities of sub-infeudation in different parts of Chotanagpur, were largely to do with the terrain of the region, which determined the agrarian productivity and thus the class formation in the region.

<sup>28</sup> Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*. p.72

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 2 of this dissertation, pp. 62-65, 69

<sup>30</sup> Sen, Asoka Kumar. (2011). 'The Process of Social Stratification in the Lineage Society of Kolhan' in his *Representing Tribe: The Ho of Singhbhum under Colonial Rule*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, p. 107



regions where most of the cultivation was carried out. The differentiation within the Hos was thus directly related to the larger changes within the production and appropriation of agrarian surplus. This internal stratification and the prevalence of a privileged section within the local communities provided the British a modicum of relief during the tedious military operations, through which they converted this geographical space into an administrative unit.

### **III. Turbulent Times: Early Encounters of the British (1765-1835)**

The region of Singbhum may very well have abounded in natural beauty as the above accounts laid out, but these 'insulated, semi-barbarous and wild tracts'<sup>31</sup> could also be fierce and unforgiving to those who ventured inside. When the British first established control over the region, there was large scale unrest. The suppression of one rebellion or surrender of one rebel chief would only be followed with the break out of another one. The Hos at this time, in the representations of the colonial officials, were far from being the kind of noble savages as described by Tickell. In 1767, the Resident Officer of Midnapore referred to them as a 'tribe of plundering banditti' who controlled large parts of Singbhum.<sup>32</sup> More than half a century later, Roughsedge, who was at the head of military operations in the region in the 1820s, portrayed them as a 'violent' and 'war-like' race who 'made no scruple of putting to death any man of respectable caste'.<sup>33</sup> Another official, Captain Morgan commented the following regarding the *belligerence* of the population in these areas:

It is all a joke to talk of licking these jungle fellows. They have not the least idea of fighting; they are like a parcel of wasps: they endeavour to sting you with their arrows and then fly off. It is impossible almost to kill any of them, as they always keep at a great distance and fling their arrows at you, which you may suppose, seldom or ever do any execution.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Tickell, *Memoir*, p. 695

<sup>32</sup> quoted in O'Malley, *Singbhum Gazetteer*. p. 31

<sup>33</sup> Roughsedge to Metcalf, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1820, quoted in Sen, S.K. (2008). *Tribal Struggle for Freedom Singbhum 1800-1858*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company. p. 25

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in O'Malley, *Singbhum Gazetteer*, p. 28

The terrain of Singhbhum was unfamiliar to the British to conduct their military operations in. The first police posts that were established in the region came under intense attacks from the Hos. The *dak* lines were also repeatedly attacked, because of which communications between different officials were also broken. Even *perwannahs*, or proclamation for surrenders, could also not achieve the desired results immediately. On top of all of this, the vagaries and difficulties of the harsh climate within Singhbhum only made the situation more onerous for the British. The high incidence of malaria and other jungle fevers in these forested tracts amongst colonial troops, regularly debilitated their counter-insurgency operations.<sup>35</sup> Morgan, for example, lamented about the sickness amongst his troops in what he called “the *shockingest* weather” he ever saw in his life.<sup>36</sup> He further went on to write:

To tell you my real sentiment of the affairs of this country at present, I think it will be a more difficult job to settle it than it was at first to conquer it...I wish to God this business was over, for I am really tired of doing nothing, and my poor sepoy fall sick continually. I have now above sixty men ill of fever...I will lose no time in pursuing Jugarnath Dhal. The consequence of it will be that all the people of the country will run to the devil, and the country cannot possibly be settled for many months; but what can I do with the rascals when they neither come in nor answer my *perwannahs*.<sup>37</sup>

The region, thus to the British was, to borrow K. Sivaramakrishnan’s phrase, a perfect ‘zone of anamoly’ - ‘those intractable geographical spaces where fields and farmers were not readily visible, where commerce was most common to predation, and where unrest did not yield swiftly to standard pacification strategies’.<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, military plans that the British undertook in the region were constantly reformulated during the course of these operations. At the same time, the unfamiliarity and the different specificities of the region also brought to the fore, that

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<sup>35</sup> In this regard see the formulations of David Arnold, who, in an interesting article has expanded the concept of resistance in forested areas to include the question of the role of ecological frontier in sustaining or undermining tribal resistance. See Arnold, David. (2001), ‘Disease, Resistance and India’s Ecological Frontier, 1770-1947’ in Scott, James C. and Nina Bhatt (ed.) *Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge*. Delhi: OUP

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in O’Malley, *Singhbhum Gazetteer*. p 29.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>38</sup> Sivaramakrishnan, K. (1999). *Modern Forests: State Making and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India*. Delhi: OUP

standard strategies adopted by the colonial state to suppress unrest in other parts of the subcontinent could not be mechanically adopted here. The military strategies that were finally adopted to extend colonial control in the region, as we shall see, combined a mix of repression as well as an exploitation of the differentiation within the Hos.

For the first five decades since their first contact with the region, the British intervention in the region was limited to supporting one chief against the other. Though the British forced, through successive agreements, the various rulers to accept British suzerainty<sup>39</sup>, their interference into the internal matters as well as disputes of these chiefs and *rajahs* was minimal. However, this admission of the different chiefs within, to use Murali Sahu's words, 'the pale of British protection'<sup>40</sup> did not bring with a simultaneous compliance on the part of the Hos. This constant unrest which, at one level threatened British control over a strategic region<sup>41</sup>, also threatened the authority of the local chiefs in the region. In the second and the third decades of the nineteenth century, one can notice the otherwise dispute ridden chiefs making repeated overtures to the British to intervene military against 'the insurgent Hos'.<sup>42</sup> Though they referred to the Hos as their "subjects in rebellion"<sup>43</sup>, their control over them was hardly anything but complete.<sup>44</sup> Consider for example, the following remarks of Roughsedge, who headed military operations in Singhbhum in the period from 1818-1821:

The Raja and Zamindar of Singhbhum who are in attendance on me have so formidable an opinion of the power and ferocity of these savages that, notwithstanding the

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<sup>39</sup> The Raja of Porahat signed a covenant with the British in 1773. The chiefs of Seraikella and Kharsawan signed the same in 1793.

<sup>40</sup> Sahu, Murali. (1985). *The Kolhan under The British Rule*. Jamshedpur: Utkal Book Agency. p. 34

<sup>41</sup> Murali Sahu points out that the company establishment at this time was anxious to open direct communication between Sambalpur and Bengal, and connect the Province of Cuttack through a short cut route with Banaras. And for this control over Singhbhum was essential. Sahu. *The Kolhan under The British Rule*. p. 19

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 34

<sup>43</sup> Dalton. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 180

<sup>44</sup> This control of the feudatory rulers over the Hos was also varied across the region - in the northern and the southern parts

considerable force under my command, they are evidently much alarmed, and have made a formal protest against the danger of the march.<sup>45</sup>

The initial policy of the colonial state had been to avoid a direct military confrontation and Roughsedge went about felicitating the privileged sections within the Hos, largely the tribal headmen, with ritual gifts in order to placate the unrest.<sup>46</sup> When that failed, and the British had to embark upon a series of tedious and extremely difficult military operations in the country, these sections within the Hos provided the colonial military with the supplies, local intelligence as well as other kinds of support, including military help. The local chiefs, through whose territories the colonial military traversed, were also asked to afford every facility for the progress of the troops. Several skirmishes between the colonial military, cavalry and infantry on one side and the Hos with bows and arrows continued during these years. The resistance on the part of the Hos, however, could not sustain itself because of the superior military strength of the British as well as the fractures within the Hos, with many headmen surrendering to the British.

After extensive operations in the country, several groups of headmen in many areas made their appearance before the British and surrendered. In the subsequent agreement signed in May 1821, they were made to accept the sovereignty of the British, albeit via indirect rule, and the monopoly of the state over use of force. The agreement specified that in a case of any oppression by the chiefs or the zamindar, the people inhabiting the region were to report it to the officers commanding the troops in the region, rather than taking to arms themselves. Apart from that, they were also to allow 'persons of all castes' to settle in their villages, learn Oriya or Hindi and keep the roads through their country safe. The chiefs were assigned the

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. p. 180. ven as early as 1767, when the Porahat raja was making overtures to the British for protection, the resident of Midnapore, George Vansittart had remarked that out of the 14,000 villages that Singhbhum formerly contained, the Raja's writ ran at that moment only over 500, 'of the others some are gone to ruin, and the rest are in the hands of the Kols', quoted in O'Malley, *Singhbhum Gazetteer*. p. 31 (emphasis mine)

<sup>46</sup> S.K. Sen, *Tribal Struggle for Freedom.*, p. 27

role of the *zamindars*, and the agreement specified an amount of rent annually payable to them.<sup>47</sup>

Interestingly, all the *mankis* and the *mundas* who acquiesced to the above agreement came from the northern parts of Singhbhum. The company establishment could not bring the southern regions of Singhbhum under control at this time. This was despite the fact that there had been special emphasis during the military operation at encircling the southern territories of Singhbhum. All that the company establishment achieved was stationing a police post within 10 miles from one of the villages in the south. Various accounts, both colonial and post-colonial, that have reconstructed this phase of history have represented this densely forested region as 'the most intensive centre of Ho belligerence', along with referring to the Hos here as 'fiercer'.<sup>48</sup> These accounts, however, throw little light on the possible reasons for this greater militancy amongst the Hos in the southern and south-western part of Singhbhum. One probable reason for this can be the fact that this was the area where, for reasons analysed in the previous section, a relatively privileged class of tribal headmen, which could assist the colonial state, with supplies and more importantly crucial intelligence, in its military operations was not present. What this brings out is the fact that the British counter-insurgency operations, apart from relying on their superior military strength, were contingent on the help of a section of locals. Where they could not garner the support of a section within the local communities who were familiarized with the local terrain, the best of colonial aims could not be realized in practice.

After the agreement signed with the *mankis* and *mundas* in 1821, a rudimentary administrative mechanism and an indirect modality of rule was established in the region. The local chiefs and *rajahs* were to oversee the rent collection and pass it on the company establishment. The law and order was entirely in the hands of the British and several police posts were established in the region. The British also

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<sup>47</sup> (Let. No. 36, from Captain Wilkinson, Agent to the Gov. Gen. to R.D. Mangles, Secy to Govt., Fort William, Jud. Dept., dated 11th Oct. 1836), File No. 1046, 1930, CDCR. p. 6

<sup>48</sup> Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*. pp. 181-182. O' Malley, *Singhbhum Gazetteer*. pp. 34. Sen, S.K., *Tribal Struggle for Freedom*, p. 30, 38. Sahu, *The Kolhan under British rule*. p. 24-25

specified that apart for the above purposes, they would not intervene in the internal affairs of the various chiefs. No major insurrection broke out for almost a decade after the 1821 agreement which might have reflected to the British the fruition of their diplomatic, military as well as administrative machinations in the region. However, if there were indeed any such misgiving, the events of the subsequent decades would have however served to dispel it. The series of insurrections, that broke out within a short span of five years in the next decade, contributed in making the situation extremely perilous for the British.

The *remote* frontier on the south saw in 1831 a short lived insurrection in a village called Jayantgarh. The trigger was the custodial death of a former rebel. But as Murali Sahu points out, the outbreak was a result of larger discontent against regularized rent exactions institutionalized by the 1821 agreement.<sup>49</sup> While the British tried to quell unrest in Jayantgarh, another two villages Aula and Lallgarh refused the payment of rent and joined in the rebellion. This short lived unrest had just been pacified that another insurrection broke out in the region just north of Singbhum. The Kol rebellion, as it has immortalized as one of the earliest tribal revolts against the British, engulfed many different regions of Chotanagpur, including Singbhum.<sup>50</sup> The 'infection', as colonial despatches referred to it, spread 'over a very wide extent of country' and while it lasted raged with 'lamentable violence'.<sup>51</sup> During the course of the military campaigns to suppress the Kol rebellion, the British once again faced many difficulties because of the unfamiliar terrain. Narrow pathways through the jungles and the hills would be regularly blocked in many parts by felling trees and any soldier who ventured too far alone came under intense attacks.<sup>52</sup> The British were however anxious to suppress the rebellion in as less time as possible, lest the rains set in, when the country became 'extremely unhealthy'.<sup>53</sup> Once again during the course of these operations, special emphasis was laid on ensuring the surrenders of the *mankis*, 'the local leaders whom

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<sup>49</sup> Sahu, *Kolhan under British rule*. p. 42

<sup>50</sup> For an extensive description of the Kol rebellion, see Jha, *The Kol Rebellion in Chotanagpur*

<sup>51</sup> (Desp. No. 19 of 1832, Jud. Dept., Lower Provinces, the 25<sup>th</sup> Sep 1832) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 14, para 3 (WBSA)

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, para. 33-34

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, para. 32,35

the Coles have a strong attachment to' and who could in turn ensure faster surrenders of the rebels.<sup>54</sup> After a few major attacks, the following proclamations for surrender were issued to the *mankis* and the *mundas*:

It is the object of the Sirkar to benefit its subjects. It is therefore proclaimed to all the *Mankies*, *Moondas* of Nagpore that they should abstain from rebellion, and come to the *Huzoor*, and those who come in at once will be excused their crimes, and those who do not come into the *Huzoor*, will receive the punishment they deserve.<sup>55</sup>

All the *Moondas*, *Mankies* and *Coles*, who are now in the jungles; know ye, you are required to come to us, in three days, if you come within the three days, all will be well. A battalion has arrived at Koondapoortie. We shall wait 3 days for your arrival, if you come not in three days you will be attacked from every direction, and must abide by the consequences.<sup>56</sup>

Wilkinson, who was heading the military operations in this period, also recalled the special help rendered by the *Seraikela* and *Kharsawan* chiefs of the *Singhbhum* region in the suppression of the *Kol* rebellion in the parts of *Singhbhum* it had spread to.<sup>57</sup>

Soon after the suppression of the *Kol* rebellion, while there was still unrest in the southern parts of *Singhbhum*, another rebellion broke out in the region to the west of *Singhbhum*. This rebellion was headed by a person called *Ganga Narain* and within a few months it had spread into parts of *Singhbhum*. A report submitted just a few months after this uprising was crushed commented, the following with regard to the specific timing *chosen* for the uprising:

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> (Transl. of a *perwannah* dated the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mar 1832 from the Jt. Commnr.) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 14, (WBSA)

<sup>56</sup> (Transl. of a *perwannah* dated the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1832 from the Jt. Commnr.) Gen Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Volume No. 14, (WBSA)

<sup>57</sup> (Let. No. 36, from Captain Wilkinson, Agent to the Gov. Gen. to R.D. Mangles, Secy. to Govt., Fort William, Jud. Dept., dated 11th Oct 1836), File No. 1046, 1930, CDCR

...the success of the insurrection in Chotanagpore and Tamar, the disturbances at that time prevailing in Bamanghatty and the unsettled state of Singhbhum from which aid was expected no doubt determined the precise time of rising.<sup>58</sup>

During the course of the military campaigns against Ganga Narain and his followers, the colonial state created a body of irregular troops made up of a section of the local population. These forces were stationed to oversee the region during periods when the colonial military withdrew during the rains.<sup>59</sup> During the winter months when full scale military operations were launched, these troops made up of the local population, as one despatch commented, rendered invaluable help.<sup>60</sup> Though this particular uprising also remained an extremely short lived affair with the capture and execution of Ganga Narain in Singhbhum in February 1833, it once again brought to the fore the large scale discontent in the region. If the borders remained porous and the situation volatile for the easy movement of rebels from one region to another, there was also the same several old territorial disputes which resurfaced in the 1830s.

#### **IV. Territorial Conflicts and The British Take Over Of The Region (1835-1840)**

In the year 1835, the Raja of Mayurbhanj, Jadunath Bhanj wrote an application to the British requesting help for passage through the territory under the Seraikela chief. The context was the proposed marriage of his two brothers with the daughters of the Porahat and Kharsawan chiefs. The British, maintaining the policy of non-interference in the affairs of the different chiefs, rejected his application. Despite Jadunath Bhanj's admonition that the British were trying to prevent the marriage, the Commissioner of the region of Cuttack (adjoining Singhbhum) Stockwell replied

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<sup>58</sup> (Let. from W. Dent to C. Macsween, Secy. to the Govt, Fort William dated 4<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1833), File no. 3305, CDCR

<sup>59</sup> Apart from the unrest in Mayurbhanj, which as noted above we will turn to subsequently, there was also attacks on the villages under the Thakur of Kharsawan. These the colonial authorities saw as being instigated by the Porahat Raja. See Wilkinson to Mangles, p. 11. CDCR

<sup>60</sup> (Desp. No. 3 of 1834, Jud. Dept., L.P.) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 16, WBSA. pt. 5



that this was *merely* to prevent hostilities, which “would most probably occur from one chief attempting to force his way through the territory of another with whom he is not in terms of amity.”<sup>61</sup>

The territorial arrangement within the various chiefs of Singhbhum had from the eighteenth century rested on an extremely precarious ground. However, by this time things had come to such a situation that even passing through each other's territory could lead to clashes. The colonial intervention in the preceding decade had a role to play, in contributing to making the contradictions between these chiefs further sharp. For example, the four villages of Aula, Lallgarh, Thai and Bharbharia in the southernmost part of Singhbhum, had been under the control of the Mayurbhanj Raja who was subordinate to the Cuttack Commissioner. The 1821 agreement however, placed these regions under the Political Agent of the Governor-General (South-western Frontier) stationed at Hazaribagh. The situation became further complicated as a result of the fact that these four *pirs* fell within the tenure of Mahapatra of Bamanghatty. The Mahapatra, in this period was claiming that Jadunath Bhanj forced him wrongly in 1818 to pay an annual rent for the region, whereas his ancestors had been holding these *pirs* rent free for several years as a *lakhiraj* tenure was bestowed upon his ancestors by the earlier Mayurbhanj rajahs. After the new administrative re-division in 1821 and the taking out of these areas from Cuttack, the Mahapatra was now claiming independence from Mayurbhanj. Jadunath Bhanj, in turn, accused Seraikela chief Ajumber Singh of assisting the Mahapatra in the latter's military forays in the Mayurbhanj territory. The Seraikela chief, on his part, saw this as nothing more than a ploy by Jadunath Bhanj to take back a region called Koochung, which he claimed had been bestowed upon him by earlier Mayurbhanj rulers. Jadunath Bhanj denied this claim of the Seraikela chief too. Amidst all of these conflicts, the Porahat Raja was also keen on restoring his lost supremacy over the other chiefs and thus he supported Jadunath Bhanj against the Seraikela chief.

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<sup>61</sup> (Desp. No. 27 of 1836, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 15<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1836) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 17, WBSA

The situation was, certainly, extremely complicated and what made it further threatening for the British was the participation of a large section of the Hos in the attacks and counter-attacks launched by one or the other chief against each other. Wilkinson was to recall later, how the government *dak*, the officials carrying them and even the armed guards of the colonial state were regularly attacked by the Coles, "sometimes by those of the pirs under the influence of the Mahapater, and sometimes by those under the influence of the Rajah."<sup>62</sup> 'Merciless plunderers' would emerge from their hide outs in the mountains of Koochang and launch raids 'setting the government authorities at defiance.'<sup>63</sup>

All through the 1820s and the early 1830s, several officials of the company establishment, from the Cuttack Commissioner Stockwell to Joint Commissioner of the Ramgarh battalion Wilkinson, made several efforts to resolve these conflicts.<sup>64</sup> Most of these were, however, largely in vain and the attacks continued unabated. It was in the midst of one of these failed efforts to conciliate the various parties that Stockell for the first time in 1831, made the argument that the British should dislodge the different contending chiefs and establish direct control over the region with tribal headmen as intermediaries.<sup>65</sup> This suggestion, which was what eventually happened a few years later, was however not accepted at this point of time. Wilkinson also came to question the policy of non-interference that the British had maintained all along this period. Wilkinson felt that as a result of this policy, the authority of several chiefs who could have been of help to the British, were weakened during the course of these internecine battles. He wrote, for example:

...it should always have been our policy, to have kept as strong as possible, Seraikela, Khursawa and Bamunghatty because the chiefs of those estates had always the

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<sup>62</sup> (Let. No. 36, from Captain Wilkinson, Agent to the Gov. Gen. to R.D. Mangles, Secy. to Govt., Fort William, Jud. Dept., dated 11th Oct 1836), File No. 1046, 1930, CDCR, para 40

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., para 38. See also Desp: 14 of 1826, WBSA, para 26

<sup>64</sup> In 1825, the Cuttack Commissioner made the Mayurbhanj ruler and the Mahapatra sign an agreement which instructed the latter to pay an annual rent of 500 rupees to the former. The agreement failed to resolve the dispute and clashes between the two resumed in the years following it. Towards the end of 1831, Wilkinson proposed that the four villages in dispute should be restored to the authority of the Cuttack Commissioner, which was subsequently accepted the following year. The Cuttack Commissioner made several efforts to resolve the dispute after that. <sup>64</sup> (Let. from W. Dent to C. Macsween, Secy. to the Govt., Fort William dated 4<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1833), File no. 3305, CDCR

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

power to assist us, and have since we formed relations with Singhbhum, promptly repaired to our aid when we called them. It is probably now too late to consider how far it was expedient, to allow the Mohurbhanj Raja to expel the Mahaapter and his relations from Bamunghatty, on the principle that every independent chief has a right to do that, which seems fit to him in the internal management of his own country. This policy is no doubt good when the interests alone of the independent chiefs are likely to be effected, but not, I respectfully submit, when it injuriously operates on our own interests, or the interests of those petty states, whom we are in a manner bound to protect.<sup>66</sup>

Further, these potential local allies for the British were weakened by the repeated attacks of the Hos. It was clear that this state of affairs could seriously threaten the authority of the British, in fact, not just in Singhbhum but also in the nearby regions:

If the Seraikela Kooar ceases to be powerful, it be from the attacks of the Coles. The increase of their power will be in proportion to his loss of strength...I...apprehend, if affairs continue on their present footing in Singhbhoom and Bamunghatty is, that Gangpore and Bonnie Gurzate of Sumbhelpore, and Keonjhur, which have always been liable to the attacks of the southern Coles, *will continue to be liable to them*, that parts of Mohurbhunje *will be overrun* by the Coles of Lallgurh and Oulapeer, that villages of Dhulbhoom *will be constantly plundered* by Coles of Toeeppeer, Burburreapeer and Berndea, aided by Coles of other Peers of Singbhoom for Bamunghatty no longer continues any protection to Dhulbhoom; The Mohurbhunje Raja have gained possession of it, by expelling the Dhoorwas (the Mahapaters caste) through the aid of the Coles, he cannot I conceive longer retain possession of it through his own resources, then he has their good will, which in my opinion, he only continue to posses, so long as he can point out plunder to them, or allow them an interrupted passage into Dhulbhoom which I fear, *if he had the will, he has not the power to prevent...*our Dak runners on the Bombay road, throughout Bamunghatty and from thence, to Kutkurinjeah, *will always be, liable to interruption*; and that *many murders will be annually committed* on suspicion of witchcraft.<sup>67</sup>

With the unrest, and attacks and counter-attacks continuing unabated despite several proclamations, appeals, as well as other attempts on part of the colonial state

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<sup>66</sup> (Let. No. 36, from Captain Wilkinson, Agent to the Gov. Gen. to R.D. Mangles, Secy. to Govt., Fort William, Jud. Dept., dated 11th Oct 1836), File No. 1046, 1930, CDCR, para 45,

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., para 44. CDCR

to resolve the territorial conflicts, the earlier policy of non-interference slowly gave way to one of direct military intervention. A few months before large scale operations were undertaken in the region, the Government communicated the following to both Wilkinson and Ricketts:

All parties should be informed that the British Government is anxious to avoid all interference even in their internal broils, but it will resent every disturbance of the public peace, and unless the tranquillity of the district shall be restored and the security of the communications be established, Captain Wilkinson may be prepared as soon as the colder season shall set in, to undertake active operations for the purpose.<sup>68</sup>

Towards the end of 1835, Wilkinson requested from the Ramgarh battalion- fifty irregular horses and a brigade of guns along with 250 men. A second detachment consisting of 400 men of the battalion, 100 horses and a brigade of guns was to proceed from another direction. Along with that *jagirdars*, *mankis* and the *mundas* of the regions in the north were to, just like earlier, render help to the operations. As a reserve, another party of 100 men and 25 horses were to be directed to these northern parts to act as a reserve to the force of the *jagirdars*.<sup>69</sup> These were directed mainly towards the northern regions under the Porahat Raja and the Seraikela chief. After the initial attacks, proclamations for surrender were issued. At the end of the following year, military operations were undertaken on the southern frontiers. The troops were laden with ample supplies for the operations and were given a green signal for unrestrained belligerence within the more familiar territories.<sup>70</sup> Villages were to be attacked and destroyed; cattle and property plundered, and the *sirdars* apprehended and kept in confinement.<sup>71</sup> The operations, it was directed, should specially set an example to the Hos of the four villages of Aula, Lallgarh, Thai and Bharbharia, so as to restrain them from any further 'outrages' they might have planned. It was also thought necessary to attack a few other villages where the Hos

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<sup>68</sup> (Desp. No. 14 of 1836, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 25<sup>th</sup> Sep 1832) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 17, WBSA, para 18

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, paras 27-29

<sup>70</sup> (Desp. No. 8 of 1837, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 1837) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 18, WBSA, para 1

<sup>71</sup> (Let. No. 36, from Captain Wilkinson, Agent to the Gov. Gen. to R.D. Mangles, Secy. to Govt., Fort William, Jud. Dept., dated 11th Oct 1836), File No. 1046, 1930, CDCR, para 48

had 'disregarded their *Mankies* or chiefs and joined the plundering parties.'<sup>72</sup> Over the course of these operations, under Wilkinson and another officer Colonel Richards, the British made the usual overtures to the tribal headmen, who in turn facilitated several surrenders. During the early part of this operation, Wilkinson commented how this assistance provided by the local elite was providing great help in subduing the Hos :

The Lurkas are evidently much alarmed, and much I attribute to the impression made by the successful affair on the morning of 4<sup>th</sup> December and *subsequent hearty co-operation with us*, of the *Mankis* of Cherrai, Goomla and Bhunje which disheartened their brethren of Toepeer.<sup>73</sup>

The different chiefs and other sections of the local elite were also rewarded for their services to the British after the operations.<sup>74</sup> The British troops only marched back to their cantonments once it was felt that surrenders of the 'ring leaders' of the unrest had been secured. Interestingly, Wilkinson 'excepted' the densely forested Saranda from his plans of the *pirs* to be 'punished' and these regions could, once again, not be covered over the course of these operations. After the operations, Wilkinson, for example, remarked:

...none of the Singhbhoom Rajahs people know anything about it, and the Coles in the plains have little intercourse with those in the Surnda hills.'<sup>75</sup>

The suppression of unrest this time, unlike in 1821 was not followed with the restoration of the authority of the various local chiefs but by their displacement. As the British staked a direct claim over the region, we can now discern a clear shift in the way they framed their authority vis-à-vis these chiefs. These 'petty chiefs' were not just seen as incapable of checking the unrest, but were also portrayed as

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<sup>72</sup> (Desp. No. 8 of 1837, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 1837) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 18, WBSA, para 1

<sup>73</sup> Wilkinson to Secy., The Govt. of Bengal, 9<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1836, quoted in S.K. Sen, *Tribal Struggle for Freedom*, p. 68 (emphasis mine)

<sup>74</sup> (Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1838) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Volume No. 19, WBSA, para 19

<sup>75</sup> (Let. No. 36, from Captain Wilkinson, Agent to the Gov. Gen. to R.D. Mangles, Secy. to Govt., Fort William, Jud. Dept., dated 11th Oct 1836), File No. 1046, 1930, CDCR, para. 51

oppressive on the local tribal population. Wilkinson explained it in the following words:

Neither the Raja of Mohurbhunje or Singbhoom, nor any of the Baboos can control the Coles, nor could we make them sufficiently powerful to do so, without affording them direct military aid whenever an outbreak occurred. With a knowledge that military aid was to be afforded by us, whenever required, there is not one of the Rajahs or Baboos, who would not have recourse to such measures of oppression, as would lead to constant insurrections, which we should be obliged to oppress.<sup>76</sup>

The suppression of constant insurrections entailed considerable expenditure repeatedly. Extending authority of the company establishment to these areas, was portrayed, as the only effective mechanism of ensuring 'peace in these wild frontier districts' and thus 'unavoidable.'<sup>77</sup> The plan the Cuttack Commissioner Stockwell had suggested a few years back of taking over the country and placing them under the direct control of the British

Belonging to the Singhbhoom Raja	38
Belonging to the Kooar of Seraikela	51
Belonging to the Thakur Cheytun Sing	03
Belonging to the Mohurbhuje Rajah	181
Total	622

**Table 1**

with tribal headmen acting as the intermediary was taken up now. The British overtook a total of 622 villages from the different chiefs. Table 1 gives the details regarding how many villages were taken up from the different chiefs.<sup>78</sup> The older rent rates of 8 annas per plough were maintained. This was in direct contrast to the kind of rates of rent that was levied on the Bengal plains to the east. This was largely to do with the fact that after the sanguinary conditions in which the country passed over to the company establishment, the British could have hardly afforded further

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., para 54, CDCR

<sup>77</sup> (Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1<sup>st</sup> Mar 1838) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 19, WBSA, para 4

<sup>78</sup> Source: Ibid, para 6

unrest. Wilkinson, however, did not share any pessimism about the rates of rent imposed and remarked how they could be enhanced '*with the eventual civilization of the rude tribes*'. Moreover, Wilkinson went to remark, the returns from this country would not just be financial, and the government would be benefited by, to quote him:

...by having at its command a powerful people, when compared with their neighbours, ....whom it could overawe, or punish if necessary, neighbouring zamindars, who might venture to set government at defiance.<sup>79</sup>

The country taken over from the different chiefs was designated as the Kolhan Government Estate, and was included in the South West Frontier Agency. The first administrator in this region was Lieutenant S.R. Tickell who was given the post of the Assistant Agent to the Political Department of the South-Western Frontier Province. He joined this new office on the on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1837. With a battalion from Ramgarh, a brigade of guns and local horses stationed in this newly ceded tract, the company establishment set up its headquarters in Chaibasa. The strenuous process through which the administrative unit of Singhbhum came into being was however far from over and several more regions were added over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> The British might have taken over the region, but their attempts to refashion the territory, just like the military operations through which the region was taken over, remained contingent on a multitude of agencies and actors, from the terrain to the climate, as well as the local communities inhabiting the region.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, para 7

<sup>80</sup> The number of villages under British control increased from 622 in the year 1837 to 901 around the first decades of the twentieth century, with many territories and native state added subsequently.

## Chapter II

# Control & Co-option: Administrative and Agrarian Reorganisation

A couple of decades ago, Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa attempted to describe and capture the violence in post-World War II Peru in his famous novel, *Death in the Andes*. The central character of the novel is a military official by the name of Lituma, who is posted in the extremely inhospitable Andes mountain ranges. The story begins with his initial investigation into three murders, but as several more people around his vicinity are also done to death, he only wonders and with each assumption is driven to greater fear, as to who could be the possible assailants. Is it the guerrilla brigands or *the terrucoss* roaming the mountain fastness of the Andes, or could it be the human sacrifice practising natives? From the first to the last page of the novel if there is one word that best captures his state of mind, or even that of his subordinates, it is fear. It is an extreme fear of the unknown, *the people and the territory*, that plagues Lituma. He fears a guerrilla attack on his ramshackle military post any time; or in another places as he experienced in a miraculous escape from a landslide, even “the weather betrayed you in the goddamn Andes.”<sup>1</sup>

If one replaces the mountain fastness of Andes with the undulating labyrinth that Singhbhum represented in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the

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<sup>1</sup> Llosa, Mario Vargas. (1997). *Death in the Andes*. Kent: Faber and Faber, p. 176



predicament of the colonial officials would not be too different from Lituma's. Valentine Ball, for example, remarked that a service in this part of the empire, as opposed to the executive services of Bengal, was regarded by the colonial officers much in the light of a penal settlement.<sup>2</sup> The series of insurrections had already showed to the British the effective resistance that the locals could pose with locally made bows and arrows to the colonial artillery, cavalry and military within this region. The inadvertences and omissions in the military tactics also revealed to the British the unfamiliarity of this extremely 'harsh' region, where colonial officials were frequently down with protracted attacks of fever.<sup>3</sup> At the time when the British took over the region, hardly any despatches or correspondences of colonial officials revealed any sense of confidence despite the large scale suppression of unrest. The inability of the native chiefs to check the 'periodic recurrences' of the rebellions had served as a major pretext to establish direct control over the region. But now the company establishment was faced with this arduous task, for which they came to realize that military power could not be solely relied upon. This chapter attempts to analyse how the fragile 'order' ensured by the military campaigns was subsequently reinforced by administratively re-organizing the region.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section looks at the adoption of a different framework for rule in the region, in which the customary village and *pir* level structures of authority were co-opted for purposes of imperial governance. This is contextualized as determined by the disruptions caused to the extension of colonial control in the region. This section also looks at instances of direct intervention by the colonial state in what were perceived to be customary matters of the Hos and the subsequent transformations within the Hos. The last two sections lay out the changing terms of engagement of the colonial state with the Hos in the changing revenue demands and the changes within the agrarian organisation in the region. The third section looks at the early rent settlements in the region, and the fillip given to the extension of the arable in the region as well as recording of lands in the name of individual tenants. The fourth section, deals with the last decade of the

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<sup>2</sup> Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 137

<sup>3</sup> (General Administration Report, 1878-79), File no. 734, CDCR

nineteenth century when a new settlement initiated several far reaching changes and transformations in the patterns of land ownership in the region.

## I. The Origins of Administrative Exceptionalism: Contending the Disruptions to Colonial Authority

In 1875, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal Richard Temple asked the outgoing Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Edward Tuite Dalton, to draw up a memorandum on the Kōlhan region of Singhbhum before he left back for Britain. The purpose would be to share his experiences about one of the most 'peculiar' regions under his charge with other officials about to take over from him. In the note subsequently prepared by Dalton, British intervention in the region was constructed as colonial attempts to save the tribal population from the oppressive chiefs and their avaricious neighbours. Already within a few decades of taking over the region, the note reflects the colonial re-writing of the turn of events that lead to the accession of the region:

I hold to the opinion that the inhabitants of the Kolhan were never subjugated till they yielded to the strong grasp which now holds them firmly, *yet lovingly*. The Chiefs of the Political Estates, girding their secluded and rather inaccessible territory, claimed their allegiance, and the British officer who first came in contact with them, Major Roughsedge, recognizing the claim, forced the Kols for a time to submit to it; but it was soon found that the Chiefs referred to had no influence over them, or power to control them. After several years of bitter anarchy, it became necessary to release them from the yoke thus imposed, and take them under our own wing, *and to this they willingly assented*.<sup>4</sup>

The representations, such as the one cited above, reflected more than anything else the changed times and the colonial state's relative stability compared to the turbulent times in which they had entered the region. The details of the various sanguinary battles with large sections of the tribal population, which had the potential of puncturing colonial claims at paramountcy were now increasingly

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<sup>4</sup> (Colonel Dalton's Note on the Kol Tribe in the Singhbhum District, May 1875) Jud. Dept., Proc. No. 16 to 18, WBSA (emphasis mine)

excised from official reconstructions of history. The *willing* consent of the locals to the company establishment, Dalton went on to write, was in turn reciprocated by the British who never attempted to displace their 'indigenous' and 'naturally grown' systems of authority.<sup>5</sup> In another account, Dalton commented that British rule, even while it 'civilized' the Hos from their earlier 'unsophisticated savage' state, ensured that they remain *uncontaminated* and 'retain those traits which favourably distinguish the aborigines of India from Asiatic of higher civilization.'<sup>6</sup> The above accounts written by Dalton reconstructed history to serve the purpose of signifying colonial rule as unhindered progress. This notion of progress, however, did not destroy the original state of the 'aborigines' but rather filtered and incorporated, whatever was good in it, within the imperial structures of authority. As per certain officials, this was only made possible by the intuitiveness of the British to local customs, traditions and practices in the specific situation of Singhbhum. Hunter, for example commented a few years later that the 'indigenous' village institutions and organisation, unlike other areas where they remained only a residue of the past, were thriving in Singhbhum:

There can be no doubt that the complete preservation of the indigenous village system in Singhbhum is due not only to the isolated position of the District and its freedom from the intrusion of Hindus, but to the fact that Government has from the first recognised and made use of existing officials.<sup>7</sup>

The resultant consequence of the *paternalistic* form of administration followed by the British since 1837 was that the property of the local *raiyats* was secure, the police system through the tribal headmen functioned admirably well, and the Hos had kept themselves free from the meshes of the moneylenders. The task for future that lay for the colonial authorities was now to, as the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in the 1870s Richard Temple put it, 'stereotype this happy state of things' forever.<sup>8</sup> The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, more than half a century later, was to draw

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 205

<sup>7</sup> Hunter, *Statistical Account*, p. 74

<sup>8</sup> (The Kol Tribe in the Singhbhum District, Minute by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, dated the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1875) Jud. Dept., Proc. No. 16 to 18, WBSA

attention to this mode of administration and related it to the British attempts at administering the region in the interests of the aborigines:

The Kolhan has been administered for ninety years on a system suitable to a primitive people, under which they have prospered exceedingly. If the system ceases, this prosperity will disappear *and the Hos will cease to exist as a separate community.*<sup>9</sup>

This section seeks to turn on its head this colonial narrative regarding the distinct mode of governance in the region and locate it within the disruptions caused to the extension of a uniform administrative structure. Rather than being intended outcomes of colonial intervention, I intend to show that the policies of administrative exceptionalism were a result of the specific matrix of constraints imposed on the colonial state by the people and the terrain. These contingencies were unsurprisingly concealed in the above cited descriptions by different colonial officials. The concealment was to serve the purpose of occluding from view, any or the many fissures in the imposition of colonial authority in the region. In fact, even the word imposition (for its top down connotations) does not encapsulate completely the operationalization of colonial authority in Singhbhum.

Following the accession of the region categorised as the Kolhan Government Estate to the British, and its incorporation into the South Western Frontier Province, colonial authority was articulated in different ways. There was, on the one hand, a strong tenor of utilitarianism and nineteenth century liberalism. It was remarked that the 'wild people' inhabiting these regions were 'now about to be subjected for the first time to an administration of justice upon principles constant with European notions.'<sup>10</sup> The colonial state's paramountcy had to reflect in its monopoly of power over life and death of the people inhabiting the territory under its control.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> (Let. No. 194T., from J.R. Dain, Esq., I.C.S., Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to J.A. Hubback, Esq., I.C.S., Special Officer, P.O. Hinoo, Ranchi) attached as Appendix C in Sen, Asoka Kumar. (1997). *Wilkinson's Rules: Context, Content and Ramifications*. Chaibasa: Tata College, p. 96

<sup>10</sup> (Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1838) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Judicial Department), Vol. No. 19, WBSA, para 12

<sup>11</sup> Wilkinson, for example, drew attention to the dangers of allowing the power of life and death to the *zamindars*. The consequence of such a policy, he went to say, would be that they would not hesitate to get rid of whomsoever they might consider obnoxious to themselves. There might have been

Education was to wean away 'rising generations of Lurka Coles' from their 'gross ignorance' and 'foolish and vicious habits' which accounted for their 'misery'.<sup>12</sup> Witchcraft, described by Dalton as one of the activities that most engrossed the minds of the *adivasis*<sup>13</sup>, had to be curbed, by the introduction of modern medicine and setting up of hospitals.<sup>14</sup> Even the possibilities of abhorrent practices, such as *sati*, amongst the erstwhile ruling families had to be prevented by the vigilance of the local officers.<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding such posturing, the company establishment's attempts at formulating a policy of rule had to remain accommodative of several existing practices and more importantly, existing hierarchies within the local tribal communities. The locus of power also saw a shift towards the village and *pir* level structures of authority.

The various tribal heads, namely the *mankis* and the *mundas*, assistance of some of whom was crucial during the various counter-insurgency operations, now acquired a certain centrality for purposes of administration. In an extremely unfamiliar region where the British were keen to prevent the recurrence of unrest, co-opting these sections for the purposes of imperial administration was considered a viable modality of rule. The locus of power shifted to local structures of authority and each *pir* in Kolhan was recognised as an administrative unit for police and fiscal purposes. The *mankis*, or the head of the *pirs*, who had under them a conglomeration of villages were recognized as head police officers and rent collectors. The *munda* on the other hand, came to exercise authority in his village subordinate to the *mankis*.<sup>16</sup> Both the *mankis* and the *mundas* were to be in turn entitled to a certain commission on the

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difficulties in the past, but considering the British had now established a post at Chaibasa, Wilkinson suggested that the power of apprehending criminals accused of murder should rest with the Political Agent and the Assistant Agent. (Let. No. 30, from T. Wilkinson, Gov.-Gen.'s Agent to T.J. Halliday, Secy. to the Bengal Govt., Fort William, dated the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1838) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 8

<sup>12</sup> (Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1838) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Judicial Department), Vol. No. 19, WBSA, para 12

<sup>13</sup> Dalton, E.T. (1868). 'The "Kols" of Chota-Nagpore', *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, Vol. 6 (1868), p. 30

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, para 12

<sup>15</sup> (Let. No. 36, from I.K. Auseley, Gov. Gen.'s Agent to H.J. Prinsep, Esq., Secy. to the Govt. of India, Fort William, Polt. Dept., dated the 28<sup>th</sup> Aug 1839) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. pp. 22-24

<sup>16</sup> Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, p. 117

total collections that they made. As the *pattah* given to one of the *mankis* by Tickell dated 19<sup>th</sup> March 1839 specified:

Be it known to Raoria, Mankee of Kowsillapossi in "Sath Bunturia": the undermentioned villages are entrusted to you. You are nominated Mankee of these villages. You must keep the ryots in those villages satisfied, and settle them. You must be attentive to the Government orders, and collect the revenue of your Illakah according to the settlement, and bring it yourself. Whatever revenue will come from any village, one-sixth of will be given to the Moondah, and from the remainder you will be given one-tenth.<sup>17</sup>

The British officials, in this period also set about identifying such tribal headmen, who had assisted the British in the previous period and bestowed upon them a series of rewards and grants:

After making enquiries from the Kooar of Seraikela, and his Umla, I find that the village of Gotannu yielding rent about 8 rupees was formerly given by the Kooar of Seraikela to Hurry Mankie...His family since I have been in the agency, have always been the best behaved of all the Coles, and were particularly useful with their followers in Koochang...In 1836 when that place was reduced to order and again in 1837 and 1838 in Singhbhum, when the Colehan was brought directly under the management of Government on this account, I consider the family deserving of every consideration and have therefore confirmed to them the village of Gotannu rent free, and given a *Patta* to the eldest of the family Sangee mankie. To that effect copy of the *Patta* is herewith forwarded for record in your office. I have thus long delayed granting the *Patta*, that I might satisfy myself of the truth of the statement made by the members of the family which I have now done.<sup>18</sup>

The British also created new intermediaries for their rule in places where they could not find the appropriate tribal heads. Wilkinson, in a letter to Tickell, brought out one such case. Raghunath Biswai had 'actively' assisted Roughsedge in the early 1820s, for which he had been ousted from Singhbhum by the insurgent Hos a decade

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<sup>17</sup> 'Transl. of a Pottah given by Captain Tickell to Raoria, Mankee of Kowsillapossi in Bur Peer, dated 19<sup>th</sup> March 1839' in Aitchison, C.U. (compiled). (1930). *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*. Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, p. 363

<sup>18</sup> (Let. No. 155, from Captain Wilkinson, Gov.-Gen.'s Agent to Lt. S.R. Tickell, Assist. Polt. Agent, Colehan, Singhbhum, dated the 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 1838) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 16

later in the renewed period of unrest. The British were keen to restore his possessions to Biswai, but the difficulty remained the large population of the 'Coles' within the villages that once belonged to him rent free. Biswai's presence in these villages posed the danger of renewing the disturbances, if not now than at least in 'some future period'. As an alternative, he was substituted with amount of land equal to what he formerly held in other villages and was granted with the authority to manage it. Wilkinson instructed the following to Tickell:

...you may appoint him serdar in the same power and authority over them as is exercised by the several *Mankees* over their Divisions, and you may remunerate him for his services in the same manner as an engagement to people to settle in and bring into cultivation lands now waste, of the village placed under Biswai, you may give the deserted lands to such persons, as undertake to reclaim them rent free from three or even four years.<sup>19</sup>

The bestowal of such villages to these tribal heads and their co-option as the lowest rungs of officials in the colonial administration continued over the next few decades as well, in what remained a largely un-surveyed country.<sup>20</sup> The region was in fact, not just excluded from any kind of a general survey in this period, but local officials continued to warn against any inquisitive incursions even about possible evasion of taxation. The Hos were perceived as ever too excitable to render it advisable, as the Governor-General's Agent communicated to the Revenue Board on one occasion, to 'be subjected to needless disquietude on a surmise that the contrary may be the case (with regard to evasion of tax).'<sup>21</sup> Proposals to fine *mankis* and *mundas* found complicit with the *raiyats* in concealing cultivation and evading taxation were rejected. The Revenue Board was also willing, on its part, to be considerate regarding the 'indulgent' demands of the local officials,<sup>22</sup> and proposals to

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<sup>19</sup> (Let. No. 153, from Captain Wilkinson, Gov.-Gen.'s Agent to Lt. S.R. Tickell, Assist. Pol. Agent, Colehan, Singhbhum, dated the 12<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1838) Ibid, p. 14-15

<sup>20</sup> (Let. No. 1402, from Lord H.U. Browne, Under-Secy. to the Govt. of India, Home Dept. to Rivers Thompson, Esq., Junior Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, dated the 30<sup>th</sup> July 1860) Ibid, p. 114

<sup>21</sup> (Extract from a let., from the Gov.-Gen.'s Agent, S.W. Frontier, to the Secy. to the Board of Revenue, no. 24, dated the 28<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1852) Ibid, pp. 37-38

<sup>22</sup> (Extract from a letter, from the Secy. to the Board of Rev., to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, no. 382, dated the 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 1852) Ibid., p. 38

standardize the system of rent assessment were also overruled.<sup>23</sup> Sentences passed against locals were time and again revised for the fear of alarm they may cause amongst the 'wild' inhabitants of the region.<sup>24</sup> Even the Santhal Rebellion in the nearby region, despite the Commissioner's insistence that it did not spread to any part of Singhbhum, led to military fortifications in the region as a precautionary measure.<sup>25</sup> All of this exemplifies that the social basis of the unrest in the preceding period despite the best attempts of some colonial officials to portray otherwise, could not be completely lost upon the colonial authorities.<sup>26</sup> The memories of the unrest were all too fresh and the fear of it recurring all over again was ubiquitous by its presence amongst colonial officials. The following words of the Governor-General, written in the period just after the British took over the country, very succinctly captures the limits to colonial intervention:

....lands in Singhbhum have never been measured and assessing on the plough was considered a plan which the Coles would easily comprehend than any other mode...  
*It is more an object at present, to civilize the people and preserve tranquillity than collect high rents.*<sup>27</sup>

The acceded region of Singhbhum was also excluded from the civil and criminal laws prevailing in the rest of the country. The rules drawn up by Wilkinson for the administration of civil and criminal justice in the South Western Frontier Province were extended to Kolhan. The most salient feature of these rules was the centrality it accorded to the village bodies and the existing structures of authority in the arbitration of justice. 'Intriguing *vakeels*', who were seen as agents promoting

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<sup>23</sup> (Extract from Mr. Henry Rickett's Report on the district of Chyebassa, dated 31<sup>st</sup> Jan 1854) in Roychoudhury, *Ibid.*, p. 42

<sup>24</sup> (Let. No. 45, from the Agent to the Gov.-Gen., S.W. Front. to Lt. I.C. Haughton, 1<sup>st</sup> Class Assist. Agent, Gov.-Gen., Singhbhum, dated Chota Nagpur, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sep 1851) *Ibid.*, p. 35

<sup>25</sup> (Let. No. 1600, from the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, to W.J. Allen, Esq., Commr. of Chota-Nagpore, dated Fort William, the 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1855) *Ibid.*, p. 92

<sup>26</sup> Dent, for example wrote the following about the causes of the rebellion led by Ganga Narain that began in Junglemahals, and then spread to parts of Singhbhum, "The attachment and sale of a debtor's property is everywhere considered a harsh measure, but amongst these rude and ignorant people particularly attached to their lands it was doubly unfeeling and cruel. They would have readily continued to pay to the extent of their means, but they could not comprehend the justice which turned them out of house and land" (Let. from W. Dent to C. Macsween, Secy. to the Govt., Fort William dated 4<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1833), File no. 3305, CDCR

<sup>27</sup> (Let. No. 107 from the Gov.-Gen. to Lt. Simpson, Offic. Assist. to Pol. Agents, Colehan, Singhbhum, dated the 25<sup>th</sup> Sep 1838) Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 10-11 (emphasis mine)



vexatious litigation in the regulation provinces were debarred from pleading in any of the courts in the areas under the Wilkinson's rules. The parties in the disputes were to be allowed to conduct their business either in persons or by authorized agents.<sup>28</sup> Amongst powers devolved to the colonial officials, the Political Agent to the Governor General and his Assistant Political Agent were the most important figures empowered by these rules. They in turn had to however, encourage the settlement of the disputes as much as possible through local village bodies.

The low assessment of rents, along with the recognition to what were perceived as traditional structures of authority for administrative, fiscal and judicial purposes were variously portrayed as the bulwark of the paternalism that guided colonial rule in the region. Paternalism, in fact, certain officials stressed, was not to be limited to the rules guiding the management of these tracts but had to be imbibed in the daily conduct of the colonial administrators. Consider for example, the following instructions from Wilkinson to Tickell:

You should at all times be accessible to the people under your charge, except at your hours for meals and recreation, and take particular care not to transact business with them, through the agency of any of your establishment which will be the surest means of checking anything in the shape of refraction or oppression. Your patience and temper will be often tried, but I have every faith in your exercising both the work for which you have been selected.<sup>29</sup>

Valentine Ball, during his forays into this region, also commented on the benefits of this *paternalism* imbibed in daily practice by colonial officials. The colonial residents he came in touch with had 'mastered' the Ho language and many local customs. The result of this was that, Ball went on write, they could act often as adjudicators in disputes which 'among the Hindus and under a less patriarchal system would have blossomed into...a great amount of vexatious litigation...was put a stop to at an

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<sup>28</sup> 'Wilkinson's Rules: Rules for the administration of Civil Justice within the jurisdiction of the Agent to the Governor General under Regulation XIII of 1833', point 26 in Roy, Pandey R.N. (2011). *Handbook on Chotanagpur Tenancy Laws alongwith Customary Laws in Chota Nagpur*. Allahabad: Rajpal & Company, Appendix VI, p. 289

<sup>29</sup> Wilkinson to Tickell, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1837, cited in Sen, A.K. 'Introduction' in A.K. Sen (ed). *Wilkinson's Rules: Context, Content and Ramifications*, p. xvi

early stage.<sup>30</sup> This *protective* conduct on the part of the officials, along with the centrality given to the village bodies, was seen in direct opposition to the impersonal mode of justice arbitration which the colonial legal machinery in other parts was seen to embody.

There remained quite a few advantages of having at their reserve a substantial number of village officials.<sup>31</sup> The role of the *mankis*, as local police officers, in arresting many criminals, rebels and fugitives continued to be acknowledged by colonial officials.<sup>32</sup> Hunter, in fact, commented that the 'detective ability' of these tribal heads, was 'particularly well suited to the wild nature of the country'.<sup>33</sup> They were also important for a number of other functions, which in other regions were performed by the village level *chowkidars*.<sup>34</sup> As important reservoirs of local information, their help was also crucial at a later period during the census operations as well as for ascertaining the local customs and traditions in the region.<sup>35</sup>

The distinct mechanisms governing the region had to however, contend with fissures within colonial authority at another level. The exclusion of the large tracts from the general laws pertaining in most of British India did not always confirm to the vision of homogeneity of the provincial officials. In the early 1860s, for example, the Code of Criminal Procedure to Kolhan which abrogated the special powers invested to the Deputy Commissioner by the Wilkinson's rules was extended to the region despite the objections of both the Judicial Commissioner as well as the Commissioner of Chotanagpur. The Commissioner represented to the Government the new 'dilemma' that this new change had brought about. He wrote about the

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<sup>30</sup> Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p.137-138

<sup>31</sup> Hunter in his Statistical Account quoted a report on Village Watch prepared by D.J. M'Neille in 1866 which pointed out the number of *mankis* in Kolhan as 68, and the *mundas* as 710. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, p. 76

<sup>32</sup> (Let. No. 44, from the Gov.-Gen.'s Agent to Captain W.H. Oakes, 1<sup>st</sup> Class Assist. Agent, Gov.-Gen., Singhbhum, dated 14<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1846) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 71. Dalton also acknowledged their role in the arrest of all 'heinous offenders' during the rebellion of the Porahat Raja against the British in 1857, see his *Descriptive Ethnology*. p. 184

<sup>33</sup> Hunter, *Statistical Account*. p. 118

<sup>34</sup> (Let. No. 3023, from Col. E.T. Dalton, Commnr. of Chota Nagpore to Lt. E.G. Lillingston, Officiating Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chotanagpur, the 26<sup>th</sup> Oct 1869) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. p. 198

<sup>35</sup> Hunter, *Statistical Account*. p. 33; (Rights and Customs of the Hos), File no. 30, Collection No. XVI, 1910-11, CDCR

inconvenience to be caused to the 'wild people' of the district, who would now need to travel great distances to prosecute someone, defend themselves or even to merely appear as witnesses. The new measure, he wrote, would eventually contribute to making the system of justice arbitration very unpopular amongst the people.<sup>36</sup> The Judicial Commissioner had already communicated to the Commissioner the futility of extending the new rules, and displacing a system that had been working, in his opinion 'so well for a period of thirty years'.<sup>37</sup> Their appeals, notwithstanding, the Lieutenant Governor, communicated the following in return to the Commissioner:

The Colehan being an integral portion of the 'Province of Chota Nagpore', must be considered included in the Notification extending Act XXV., of 1861, to that Province, and the Criminal Procedure throughout the whole district of Singhbhoom, not excepting the Colehan, *must henceforth be homogenous*.<sup>38</sup>

The legal rules governing the region, even as they evolved in different ways, continued to remain in constant tension with the laws governing the rest of the country throughout the nineteenth century, especially after the introduction of legal mechanisms such as the Indian Penal Code. The section of the colonial officialdom entrusted with the task of framing general pan-India policies reflected the larger imperial interests and thus insisted on a homogenous administrative mechanism. The insistence of the local officials to laws intuitive to the specificities of the region, on the other hand, can only be understood within the ground level constraints imposed on them in the working out of these policies. It is important to locate the operationalization of the new modes of governance within this tension of the larger imperial interests and the several ground level contingencies. The dialectics of the two will also help us to contextualize the changes that the local communities underwent over the nineteenth century. The local structures of authority, which were officially recognised by the British, operated within a larger administrative,

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<sup>36</sup> (Let. no. 458, from Lt.-Col. E.T. Dalton to F.R. Cockerell, Esq., Officiating Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, dated 17<sup>th</sup> Mar 1864) Proc. No. 99, May 1864, Jud. Dept., WBSA

<sup>37</sup> (Let. no. 38, from Major J.S. Davies, Jud. Commnr. of Chota-Nagpore to Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commnr of Chota Nagpore, dated 12<sup>th</sup> March 1864) Proc. No. 100, May 1864, Jud. Dept., WBSA

<sup>38</sup> (Let no. 288T., from the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, to Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commnr. of Chota Nagpore, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1864) Proc. No. 101, May 1864, Jud. Dept., WBSA (emphasis mine)

social and economic set up, and changes in the latter had far reaching effects on the former.

The formation of a large scale bureaucratic set up, the new modes of surplus extraction, as well as the concomitant changes in the political economy of the region were extremely drastic changes wrought within the region by colonial rule. These were bound to exacerbate the existing hierarchies within the Hos while at the same time creating new ones. The colonial intervention, contrary to what some scholars have argued, was anything but a *preservation* of the indigenous system of village administration and communitarian structures.<sup>39</sup> Most of the *mankis* and the *mundas*, who already enjoyed certain privileges, were further set apart from the rest of the society, as a result of the grant of rent free lands, a greater access to colonial officialdom, as well as most importantly the commission on the collection of rents, which only increased with each settlement.

On the other hand, even the colonial appropriation of custom re-casted it in important ways. The British came to exercise a direct control in the succession claims of the *mankis* and the *mundas*. In 1851, for example, the Political Agent of the South-Western Frontier Province communicated to his Assistant from Kolhan, that the post of the *manki* could neither be completely elective nor hereditary, as had been the case till now. Rather, the British were to exercise the final authority and, 'the Coles should continue to feel that the authorities have unrestricted control in such matters.'<sup>40</sup> With the entrenchment of the colonial revenue machinery, the colonial state even reserved for itself the authority to remove the *mankis* and *mundas* for non-payment of the revenue.<sup>41</sup> There was simultaneously also the introduction of new norms of administration such as 'efficiency' and the ability of the *mankis* and the *mundas* to

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<sup>39</sup> See for example, Sahu, Murali. (1997). "Thomas Wilkinson in Kolhan and the Origin of the British Administration" in Sen, A.K. (ed.) *Wilkinson's Rule: Context, Content and Ramifications*. Chaibasa: Tata College, pp. 13-23

<sup>40</sup> (Let. No. 7, From the Agent to the Gov.-Gen., S.W. Front. to Lt. Haughton, 1<sup>st</sup> Class Assist. Agent, Gov.-Gen., Singhbhum Division, dated Chotanagpur, 17<sup>th</sup> Mar 1851) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, pp.33-34

<sup>41</sup> See the texts of the *pattas* given to the *mankis* and the *mundas* after the 1867 Hayes settlement. (Let. no. 122 from W.H. Hayes, Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum, to Comm. Chota Nagpore, June 1867, p. 134-135) appended in Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*, Appendix 2, 3, pp.317-320

read and write.<sup>42</sup> Even the Wilkinson's rules, seen as the bulwark of protection, clearly specified that the British were to select the 'influential' and the 'respected' village elders, in this case the *mankis* and the *mundas*, to arbitrate justice in the village *panchayats*.<sup>43</sup> It would thus, be simplistic to argue, as has been done in a recent work by Asoka Kumar Sen, on the making of customary law in Singhbhum, that by bringing the office of the *manki* centre stage, the colonial administration virtually replicated 'custom'.<sup>44</sup> The point I am trying to make by citing such examples is that, even while being limited by several exigencies, colonial authority found its way to transform and work through these local communitarian structures. Contrary to what continues to inform much conceptualization regarding 'tribal polity' and its relationship with 'modern' state structures, a simple binary between the two cannot be posed. With regard to the customary *parha* system of the Mundas and the Oraons Alpa Shah, for example, argues that in the face of the weakening *adivasi* solidarity, the resurrection of these indigenous systems of village organisation and authority can be seen as a Munda alternative to the state.<sup>45</sup> However, the evidence at our disposal clearly reflects that state power penetrated and expanded in the region through, not extraneous, but internal agents and systems of authority. It was these social groups, the *mankis* and the *mundas*, in the case of Singhbhum who constituted these local agents of colonial administration. The terms of engagement of the colonial state with them, however, was not always easy, uniform or static in the period under study. As these officials were inextricably tied to the colonial revenue apparatus, the changing terms of this engagement needs to be located in the changing revenue demands of the colonial state.

## II. Early Rent Settlements (1840-1880)

The low rates of rent and older systems of assessment prevailing in the region, continued to vex a number of colonial officials. Already, within a couple of decades

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 34

<sup>43</sup> Wilkinson's Rules, point 21, in Roy, Pandey R.N. *Handbook on Chotanagpur Tenancy Laws alongwith Customary Laws in Chota Nagpur*. p.288-289

<sup>44</sup> Sen, A.K. (2012). *From Village Elder to British Judge*, p. 65

<sup>45</sup> Shah, Alpa. (2010). *In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism, and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India*. Delhi: OUP, pp. 58-59

of the takeover of the region, colonial officials were remarking on the 'notoriously under-taxed' inhabitants of the region, who:

make no reasonable use of any money that they may have hoarded.....their houses, clothes, food are with very exceptions, the same as they were 20 years ago. There is not, as those who know them say, the remotest token of improvement in their way of living and the police reports show that they are as superstitious and savage as ever.<sup>46</sup>

Many officials regarded the older system of assessment, based on the information supplied by the *mankis* and the *mundas*, as contributing to the loss to the colonial exchequer.<sup>47</sup> The untrustworthiness of the *mankis* and the *mundas* was repeatedly remarked upon by various officials, who also saw them conniving with the *raiyats* in the concealment of cultivation.<sup>48</sup> However, despite representations to the government by various officials about the above, the government continued to exercise caution regarding introducing any new measures for the next couple of decades. The government's main concern, as already remarked in the previous chapter, was to maintain political stability which any drastic change could have threatened. Despite such a cautionary approach, the land revenue continued to show, as Table 1 brings out, a slow yet steady increase in the period. There was, however, at the same time, a simultaneous increase in the expenditure<sup>49</sup> and several colonial officials were remarking about the need to make the inhabitants of the region at least 'pay the expenses attendant on their own government'.<sup>50</sup> There

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<sup>46</sup> (Extract from Rickett's Report, 1854) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 44

<sup>47</sup> Under the plough system of rent assessment, a pair of bullocks or cows, or the amount of land that could be cultivated by five maunds of seed was regarded as equal to a plough. The *mankis* and *mundas* was to supply information to the authorities at the beginning of every year regarding the cows, bullocks and seeds owned by *raiyats*, which was then entered into a register.

<sup>48</sup> (Extract from Rickett's Report, 1854), in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 41, 42

<sup>49</sup> Hunter, *Statistical Account*. p. 115-117

<sup>50</sup> (Extract from Rickett's Report, 1854) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p.40

were various steps taken in this direction over the next half a century as the colonial revenue machinery

systematically entrenched itself in the region. This, in turn, led to a series of transformations in the landholdings and the way agriculture was organised.

With rent from land being the main source of revenue, the main concern of the colonial state, for the first few decades after establishing direct control in the region, was the expansion of the

arable land. Colonial policy, in

this regard had to, however, remain intuitive to the way agriculture was organised in the region, which was peculiar to the specificities of the region. Though, there were certain patches of open land on which settled cultivation was practised, the dense forests posed a formidable barrier to the extension of cultivation. An article published in 1861, for example, rued the *wretched* state of cultivation in the region in the following words:

Cultivation and agriculture appear to be at the lowest ebb in the Colekan (Kolhan). Scarcely anything but *dhan* is raised, and the fields in which it is sown are so small, ill-formed, and to all appearance badly attended to, that abundant crops are, I suspect, of rare occurrence. Immense tracts of fine land have been for ages covered with the old forest trees or with dense and shrubby jungle, and no attempts seems to have been made at any time to clear the soil, the Coles contending themselves with the few open patches which are found near the villages.<sup>51</sup>

A decade and half later, Hunter, drawing upon the Revenue Board's statistics similarly observed that the colonial state, despite its best attempts, could bring only

Year	Amount
	Rs - a - p
1837-38	5, 108 - 1 - 8
1840-41	6, 252 - 14 - 2
1845-46	6, 724 - 15 - 9
1850-51	8, 088 - 10 - 4
1852-53	8, 523 - 6 - 2

**Table 1 - Source: Rickett's Report**

<sup>51</sup> Dunbar, William. (1861). 'Some Observations on the Manners, Customs, and Religious Opinions of the Lurka Coles', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britian and Ireland*, Vol. 18: p. 372

less than one-third of the area under cultivation. He further went on to remark that over half of the region that was covered with forests could never be cultivated at all.<sup>52</sup> Apart from the forests, the undulating topography determined in another way the limits to agrarian expansion, as the following comment of Hunter brings out:

Nothing resembling the great level rice plains of Bengal proper is to be met with throughout the district. Everywhere the face of the country is undulating, and broken up by alternate ridges and depressions, which for the most part radiate from small central plateaux and form the channels of small streams. The ordinary kinds of rice can only be grown in the bottom of these depressions and on the lower levels of the slopes.<sup>53</sup>

The elevations and depressions of the hill ridges and plateaus divided the arable land in the region into different classes, with different levels of productivity. The *bera* lands, or the low lands, lying between the depressions of the hills were more fertile, largely because of their location, which allowed for a higher moisture retention capacity. The *bad* land, on the other hand, were located on the hill sides, and were thus comparatively less fertile. The least fertile, were the *gora* lands or the uplands, located on the uplands of the hills and the plateau. The vast differences in fertility, and thus agrarian productivity could have been overcome, with the development of irrigation facilities. These however, continued to remain poorly developed in the region.<sup>54</sup> The various crop reports, prepared by the revenue department also exemplify how agriculture in the region continued to remain dependent on the vagaries of nature.<sup>55</sup> Some contemporaneous commentators were all too eager to blame the poor state of irrigation in the region on what they perceived as the 'lazy and indolent' nature of the Hos.<sup>56</sup> This poor state of irrigation, however, needs to be contextualized within the overall revenue concerns of the colonial state, where the main source of returns was rent from land, rather than produce from land. In such a

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<sup>52</sup> Hunter, *Statistical Account*, p. 82

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79

<sup>55</sup> See for example (Let. no. 497, from Lt. E.G. Lillingston, Offic. Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhoom, to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal in the Rev. Dept., dated Chyebase, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sep 1869) Proc. No. 96, Sep 1869, Rev Dept. - Branch Agri., WBSA

<sup>56</sup> Dunbar, *Some Observations*, p. 371



scenario, the colonial state's lack of interest in increasing the productivity of the agrarian lands through reinvesting the surplus to processes such as the development of irrigation facilities is hardly to be wondered at. The embankment of lands, followed by construction of *bandhs* and reservoirs, in a hilly and forested country would have required huge outlays of capital with very few returns. As such, the colonial government remained disinterested in improving the facilities for irrigation. Consider for example, the following comments of the Deputy Commissioner of Chotanagpur made in 1874:

Unless people themselves take up the matter it is difficult to suggest what can be done, since the unaided efforts of the government officers must necessarily result in limited good.<sup>57</sup>

Even towards the end of the century, the government constructed *bandhs* and reservoirs continued to remain abysmally low and accounted for only 8.2 per cent of the total 943 *bandhs* in the region.<sup>58</sup> The rest were built by the *raiyyats* themselves. In fact, the Revenue Board noted as late as 1898 that it was difficult for the government to engage in 'such petty and scattered works', and just like in other regions, the funds should be diverted for the improvement of communications in the region.<sup>59</sup> It was only during periods of famine and scarcity that one can notice a prioritization of constructions of *bandhs* and reservoirs, which were sanctioned as relief works.<sup>60</sup> The *mankis* served as key agents for the operationalization of these works and were advanced sums of money for the same.<sup>61</sup>

The lack of a standardised system of measurement was, also, variously lamented upon in official accounts and correspondences. However, despite proposals in the

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<sup>57</sup> (Let. No. 36, from Captain G.H. Garbett, Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to Col. E.T. Dalton, Commnr. of Chota-Nagpur, dated camp Mojgaon, the 21<sup>st</sup> Jan 1874) File No. 28, CDCR

<sup>58</sup> Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate 1897*, p. 25

<sup>59</sup> (Let. No. 516A, from E.W. Collin, Esq., Offg. Secy. to the Board of Rev., L.P., to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., dated Calcutta, the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1898) File No. 1061, 1897-98, CDCR

<sup>60</sup> (Let. No. 4219B, from I.B. Lane, Officiat. Secy. to the Board of Revenue, L.P. to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal in the Rev. Dept., dated Fort William, the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1869) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. p. 194-195; (Let. No. 969R., from H.L. Khastgir, Esq., Dep. Coll. in charge of the Dep. Commnr. Office, Singhbhum to the Commnr. of Chota Nagpur Division, dated Chaibasa, 10<sup>th</sup> Mar 1900) Proc. No. 63-64, April 1900, Rev. Dept. - Branch - Agri., WBSA

<sup>61</sup> O' Malley, *Singhbhum Gazetteer*, p. 122

past couple of decades from certain officials, it was not until 1867 that the first systematic steps were taken in this direction.<sup>62</sup> Though a settlement had been conducted in 1855, which doubled the rates of rent, the older system of assessing through the plough system had been maintained. By 1867 however, the 'improvements' made in the cultivation of the region was perceived as reason enough to not only enhance the rents, but also to change the system of assessment. This metaphor of 'improvement', which not just in this case but repeatedly occurs in the revenue records to describe the cultivation, can in fact be seen as commensurate with the level of sedentarization in the region. The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum Hayes, who carried out a new settlement in 1867 for example, wrote the following about cultivation in the region in his final report:

The people of Kolhan...have much to learn; still looking back a few years we cannot but be stuck with the improvements they have made. From being nomadic in their habits, moving from place to place with the hal of cattle on which they were assessed and cultivating patches here and there for one or two crops only, they have gradually become stationary and established themselves in picturesque villages.<sup>63</sup>

A mobile population practising slash and burn agriculture, as Jacques Pouchepadass also informs us fitted rather badly with colonial conceptions as well as concerns regarding the ownership of the land and the taxation of its produce.<sup>64</sup> The settlement conducted by Hayes in 1867 was intended to make the Hos further 'stationary in their cultivation, to get rid of the dense jungle the district is noted for and to make

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<sup>62</sup> In 1848, for example, Haughton proposed a scheme of rent enhancements by converting the assessment of land per plough, into assessment per *bigha* by making inquiries into the quantity of land held by a person who paid for one plough. The scheme was shelved by the government and no orders were passed. Once again in 1853, the Assistant Agent proposed some kind of measurement of lands, remarking that any assessment regarding cultivation in the region could not be made with any approach to truth under the then prevailing system. (Extract from Rickett's Report, 1854) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p.43

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in (Let. No. 272R, from Renny, Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum to the Commnr. of Chotanagpur, dated 27<sup>th</sup> July 1892), File No. 2490, 1894, CDCR

<sup>64</sup> Pouchepadass, Jacques. (2011). 'British Attitudes Towards Shifting Cultivation in Colonial South India: A Case Study of South Canara District 1800-1920' in Ramchandra Guha and David Arnold (ed.). *Nature, Culture, Imperialism*. Delhi: OUP, pp. 123-151. Another work on the extension of colonial control in the Nilgiri hills comments that shifting cultivation, or badaga cultivation as it was called there, created a landscape of the unknown for the colonial state, which as we will see subsequently in our discussion the colonial state was attempting to overcome. See Sutton, Deborah. (2011). *Other Landscapes: Colonialism and the Predicament of Authority in Nineteenth Century South India*. Delhi: Orient Blackswan. p. 98

the Coles good agriculturalists.<sup>65</sup> It was also felt incumbent, as the then Commissioner of Chotanagpur Dalton, was to recall later, 'to remove the reproach that a district so prosperous did not defray the expenses of its Government.'<sup>66</sup>

Under the new settlement, which was to remain in force for the next thirty years, the earlier unit for rent assessment seen as arbitrary and dependent on the information supplied by the tribal heads, was changed in favour of a specific unit of land. The lands, using rough *chittas* and maps, were measured by Hayes and an estimate was made of the quantity that was previously assessed per plough. The rates of rent were once again doubled, with the result that the gross rental nearly trebled.<sup>67</sup> Certain areas, comprising mainly of the densest forested tracts of Saranda, Rengra, Nalwa and Rera were however excluded from the settlement, for what was construed as the 'backward state of cultivators.' The *gora* lands or the uplands were also excluded from the rent schemes prepared under this settlement. The settlement gave special incentives to the *mankis* and the *mundas* as well as the *rai'yats* for the expansion of the arable, as the following text of the one of the *pattahs* given to a *munda* brings out:

If through your care and management any reclaimed land not previously assessed is brought under cultivation, you will be at liberty to make arrangements with the cultivators, and after allowing them to hold such land rent free for a period as is likely to encourage the extension of cultivation and is agreed to you by your *Mankee*, you may proceed to assess and realise the rent of such lands at a rate not exceeding the village rate by this settlement established, and during the period of your lease, one-half of the rent so realised will for your own use and the other half shall belong to the *Mankee*.<sup>68</sup>

The Hayes settlement also formalised the earlier norm of official rewards to certain tribal heads through a new tenure that it created. *Lakhiraj* tenures or revenue free grant of villages, were granted to 19 people, comprising of *mankis* as well as some

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<sup>65</sup> (Let. No. 212, W.H. Hayes, Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum to Col. E.T. Dalton, Commnr. of Chotanagpur, dated 20 June 1864) Proc. No. 13, Nov 1864, Rev. Dept. - Agri., WBSA

<sup>66</sup> Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*. p. 184

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184

<sup>68</sup> Patta to a *munda* at the rev. resettlement of 1867 (Letter No. 122, from W.H. Hayes, Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum, to Comm. CND, June 1867, p. 134-135) appended in Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*, App. 2, p. 317

others, for their services, to the British. In these villages, the cultivators were to pay the same rent, but unlike other villages they paid it not to the government, but to the tenure holders.<sup>69</sup>

Through these, as well as various other measures, the colonial intervention in the agrarian scenario within Singhbhum, set the ball rolling for considerably increasing the value of land, as reflected in the large scale expansion of the arable over the next few decades. Even before the expiry of the settlement, the areas categorized as 'backward'<sup>70</sup> and excluded from the schemes prepared by Hayes were settled in 1880 by the then Deputy Commissioner Captain Garbett and brought under regular assessment.<sup>71</sup> Over all the fillip given to the extension of cultivation, in the thirty years of the period of the settlement, led to more than a double increase in the area under cultivation from 82, 427 acres in 1867 to 1,94,738.9 acres in 1897.<sup>72</sup> This was despite the fact that considerable portion of forested land in the region was in the same period usurped by the colonial state and converted into reserved forests. By the 1890s, almost half the area of the region was under cultivation.<sup>73</sup> This was in stark contrast to the figures cited by Hunter in his statistical published 17 years ago. Table 2 shows the figures of culturable and unculturable waste lands in the Kolhan region of Singhbhum as it stood in the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>69</sup> Hunter, *Statistical Account*. p. 89

<sup>70</sup> Just like the metaphor of 'improvement' was used in revenue records to signify the level of sedentarization of the population, the term 'backwardness' was used to describe those areas where the forest cover was very dense, making the process of agrarian expansion and sedentarization much more difficult.

<sup>71</sup> Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate 1897*, p. 63

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> (Let. No. 299R., from W.H. Grimley, Esq., C.S., Commnr of Chota Nagpur to the Secy. to the Board of Rev., L.P., Land Rev. Dept., dated Ranchi, the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1894) File No. 2490, 1894, CDCR, p. 2

Table 2- Proportion of Culturable and Unculturable Waste Land in Kolhan, 1892<sup>74</sup>

Total Area of Kolhan	1, 946 square miles
Reserved Forests	523 square miles
Area under the management of the Revenue authorities	1, 423 square miles
Culturable Area	700 square miles
Area of culturable land actually under cultivation	600 square miles

The expansion of the arable, in a period when the colonial state attempted also to check the practise of shifting cultivation and bind the population more intimately with land, in turn led to the development of different sets of interests in land. This was all too apparent, in the divergent opinions of different classes of the population regarding the extension of assessment on the *gora* lands that the next settlement introduced.

### **III. The Gora Lands and the 1897 Craven settlement: From Right of Cultivation to Right of Occupancy**

The early years of the last decade of the century saw preparations for a new settlement of the region as the period of the Hayes settlement drew to a close. Apart from a minute recording of boundary lines, homesteads, wastelands, trees on cultivated lands, hills, rivers, tanks, bandhs and the use of more intensive methods of surveying, the most far-reaching change in the new settlement was the imposition of rents on the previously un-assessed *gora* lands. The *gora* lands were important areas for the locals for pasturage and also cultivation of certain crops. Coarser varieties of rice, cereals and pulses, that required less moisture and supervision were

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid

grown in this land. These areas had mostly been subjected to shifting cultivation with the *raiya*ts constantly shifting to new patches of land. Though rents of the lowlands, *bad* and *bera*, had been successively enhanced in the previous two settlements, a measure such as this were being introduced for the first time in the region. Unsurprisingly, there were various doubts within the colonial officialdom about the pushing through such a measure. The Commissioner of Chotanagpur, for example, observed that:

...the introduction of a mode of assessment which is against the custom of the country, and opposed to the interests of the people could not but create dissatisfaction and discontent, and I, therefore, do not consider it desirable that the proposal to separately assess uplands should be adopted without first taking the opinion of the people themselves.<sup>75</sup>

As a means of allaying these fears and taking the 'consent' of the 'people themselves' and to ensure that the innovations intended would be confirmable to 'local traditions', a conference was convened on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1893 involving the 37 *mankis*, 296 *mundas* and 138 representative *raiya*ts before the settlement proceedings were initiated. When the proposal to assess *gora* lands was finally placed in the conference, there were long deliberations amongst the various *pir* and village heads and no consensus could be reached either amongst tribal headmen, or between them and the colonial authorities. The Deputy Commissioner, who convened the conference, described its proceedings in the following words:

The assemblage took a very long time to talk over the matter amongst themselves, and eventually enquired of me where they were to graze their cattle if their '*gora*' lands were made rent paying? To this my reply was that it was only intended to assess the culturable waste (*laikabadi*) and not unculturable waste (*nabakabadi*) and I pointed out that there were large areas of the latter description of land in each village far in excess of their requirements. I was next told that no one would consent to part with any '*gora*' land in his possession. My reply to this was that I did not wish to forcibly dispossess anyone, but simply to make each person pay one *anna* per *bigha*. A fair number of the *Mankis*, *Mundas* and *raiya*ts admitted the necessity of placing

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<sup>75</sup> (Let. No. 56R., from W.H. Grimley, Esq., C.S., Commnr. of Chota Nagpur to the Secy. to the Dep. Commnr., Singbhum, dated Ranchi, the 13<sup>th</sup> Apr 1893) File No. 2490, 1894, CDCR

some restrictions on "gora" holdings, but only one or two were in favour of any proposals as stated (by me)...Eventually I was asked to allow a week's time to enable the people to think out the matter.<sup>76</sup>

A few days later, a petition signed by 23 *mankis* and 14 *mundas* was submitted to the colonial authorities expressing their willingness to include the *gora* lands under a light assessment. Though a higher number of *mankis* and *mundas* objected to the scheme through another petition, this was not accepted by the government.<sup>77</sup> The former petition was signed, amongst others by a local Christian convert by the name of Captain Manki, who held 14 villages on *lakhiriaj* tenure in the Thai *pir*. He was brandished variously as the 'mouthpiece' and 'leader of the Singhbhum Kols' and it was said that a statement from him could without the least hesitation be accepted as representing the acquiescence of the locals to the assessment of *gora* lands.<sup>78</sup> By this time however, no final decision was taken and the government ordered that the assessment of these lands would be subject to a separate report prepared by the settlement officer during the settlement proceedings.

The proceedings of the conference, and what transpired thereafter, signify not only the fractures within the local community of the Hos

but also unsettle any assumption that the indigenous communal structures of the *adivasis* were as a rule opposed to the interests of the colonial state. The 'lack of unanimity' in the conference was also not, as Sanjukta Dasgupta seems to suggest, simply a reflection of the continuation from the pre-colonial period of the 'conflicting political loyalties' of the Hos.<sup>79</sup> We need to locate the convergence of the interests of a section of the tribal headmen with that of the colonial state in the interstices of the colonial revenue machinery, which was made possible through the various *processes* of the agrarian re-organisation in the region.

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<sup>76</sup> (Let. no. 307., from R.H. Renny, Esqr. Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to the Commnr. of the Chotanagpur Division, dated Chaibasa, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1893) File No. 2490, 1894, CDCR

<sup>77</sup> The number of *mankis* and *mundas* who signed the petition opposing the new proposals was 44 *mankis* and 85 *mundas*.

<sup>78</sup> (Let. No. 299R., from W.H. Grimley, Esq., C.S., Commnr. of Chota Nagpur to the Secy. to the Board of Revenue, L.P., Land Rev. Dept., dated Ranchi, the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1894) File No. 2490, 1894, CDCR

<sup>79</sup> Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*. p. 142

Over time a section of the *mankis* and the *mundas* had come to stake a direct claim over land. There had been of course, as already noted above, land rewards to the tribal heads which the 1867 settlement had formalised into a separate tenure. Apart from this, the incentives given to the extension to cultivation, colonial overtures against shifting cultivation and the special emphasis on recording lands in the name of individual tenants in the last decades of the nineteenth century were important factors that contributed to exacerbating the stratification within the Ho society. The change was all too apparent when one considers the social process through which the right to cultivate *gora* land, as the 1867 settlement defined it, was transformed into a right of occupancy by the next settlement.

In the interlude period between the Hayes settlement in 1867 and the Craven settlement in 1897, there had been considerable changes in the region. An almost double increase in the population and the usurpation of around 531 square miles of the forested lands contributed to increasing greatly the pressure on the lands in the region. Simultaneously, the opening out of new frontiers for cultivation had also contributed to an immense increase in the arable lands in the region. To the colonial officials this only exemplified the advancements effected within the Hos by the colonial intervention, which had 'bound' even them more closely to their lands.<sup>80</sup> As a cumulative result of the above processes, the practice of subjecting *gora* lands to shifting cultivation had also more or less disappeared from the region. Over these thirty years, the best of these lands, as Craven noted, were occupied by the tribal headmen and their relatives to the exclusion of the poorer *raiyyats*.<sup>81</sup> Some in authority located the expansion of cultivation in the uplands within an evolutionary schema of the successive phases which the organisation of agriculture must go through everywhere. This 'new stage of development' in Kolhan as per this view, was only a part of the larger change that other regions of Bengal had already gone

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<sup>80</sup> (Let. No. 299R., from W.H. Grimley, Esq., C.S., Commissioner of Chota Nagpur to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, L.P., Land Revenue Department, dated Ranchi, the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1894) File No. 2490, 1894, CDCR

<sup>81</sup> Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate 1897*, p. 53



through in the recent past.<sup>82</sup> For others, what was the 'universal custom' in the eyes of some had now ceased to exist:

In the previous settlement 'gora' lands were not assessed, and no raiyat had any right to exclusive possession of any particular 'gora' lands, but with the increase in the demand for lands, the custom by which every settled raiyat had the right of cultivating a certain portion of the 'gora' lands of a village seems to have died out, and now the same raiyats are in exclusive possession of the same lands, and this has been the case for some years past.<sup>83</sup>

During the settlement proceedings, Craven went about informing the people the reasons behind the colonial state's intentions to bring these uplands under assessment. These uplands, he opined, had continued to remain in an 'unsatisfactory' condition because of being excluded from the assessments. The best of these *uplands*, as a result of the exclusion from the rent schemes had continued to remain in the possession of a few influential people of the villages, which hampered any incentive at increasing the productivity. This essentially meant that these lands were not converted into *bad* and *bera* by the construction of embankments which along with increasing the productivity of these lands, would have also brought them under the rent assessments. In such a situation, Craven informed the villagers, the government felt it necessary, apart from bringing the *gora* lands under rent assessment, 'to (also) make a just redistribution among the *raiayats*.'<sup>84</sup> This however, was strongly objected to by those holding these lands:

The proposal to make a redistribution was strongly objected to (by) the raiyats claiming occupancy rights in their *gora* land; and I was told that sooner than give up a portion of this land, they would be willing to pay a light assessment on all the lands of this class. They were aware that a proposal had been made by the Deputy Commissioner in 1894 at a Conference to which the Mankis, Mundas and Raiyats of all the important villages had been summoned to increase the rent on rice lands.

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<sup>82</sup> (Resol. No. 3020, Rev. Dept. - Land Revenue dated 5<sup>th</sup> Sep 1896), File No. 1061, 1897-98, CDCR

<sup>83</sup> (Let. No. 868L.R. from A. Forbes, Esq., C.S. I., Commnr. of the Chota Nagpur Division to the Secy. to the Board of Rev., L.P.) File no. 511, 1897-98, CDCR

<sup>84</sup> Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate 1897*. p. 53

They all expressed themselves as being more in favour of a light assessment on the *gora* lands than of an increase in the rate on the rice lands.<sup>85</sup>

The redistribution of lands, which Craven initially proposed to the villagers, would have in fact, meant reversing the process that the colonial state had itself initiated. It would have been in any case, very unlikely to have emanated from the colonial state considering its social basis and also the 'serious trouble' as Craven noted, it might have led to.<sup>86</sup> It would also not have contributed anything in terms of returns to the colonial state. Conversely, for those holding these lands for some years in the past, the settlement and the recording in the name of individuals provided these people a legal basis for their claims of an occupancy status over these lands. In the context of an increasing value of land and a further usurpation of vast swathes of lands by the

Forest Department over the next few years, these uplands recorded in their names would certainly have been an invaluable asset. The colonial state in this and other ways not only refashioned the hierarchies within the Ho society but also contributed to manufacturing certain legitimacy for their rule and policies. Had not, after all, the decision to impose rents on the *gora* lands been 'consented to' at every stage of its imposition by the 'Hos' themselves? By the end of the settlement, the gross rental from the region, as table 3 shows, had almost tripled. This was despite the fact that the

	Settlements	No. of villages	Gross Rental
1	1837	622	5, 108
2	1855	622	8,523
3	1867	847	64, 828
4	1897	911	1,77,300

**Table 3 - Gross rentals over different settlements**

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 53

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 30

prevailing rents for the other classes of lands, as fixed by the Hayes settlement thirty years back, were retained. The increase, mainly as shown in table 4<sup>87</sup>, was a result of the expansion of cultivation and the assessment of *gora* lands.

	Rs - a - p
Extended Cultivation	88,338 - 11 - 0
The assessment of Gora lands	17,080 - 12 - 7½
The enhancement of rates on the lands held by new foreigners	6,536 - 6 - 4½
The assessment of homesteads of non-cultivating foreigners	465 - 5 - 3
Total increase	1,12,471 - 3 - 3

Table 4

Apart from their commission on the gross rental collected (which only increased with each enhancement<sup>88</sup>) as well as their increasing hold over land, the tribal headmen had also increased their privileged position through various 'abuses of power'. With the development of a land market in the region and the increasing value of lands, they played a pivotal role in sales, mortgages and transfers of tenancies. In many cases, they connived in settling the lands of tenants unable to pay the rents with the increasing numbers of *dikus* or the non-tribal settlers in the region.<sup>89</sup> The change in the character of these social groups was not lost completely upon the colonial officialdom. One official for example, commented with reference to the increasing sales, mortgages and transfers of lands to the *dikus*, which the

<sup>87</sup> Source: Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate 1897*

<sup>88</sup> Craven giving the details of the amount of commission payable to the *mankis* and the *mundas*, and *tahsildars*, commented that 'it is worthy of notice that the amount of cultivation allowed to the village officials at the present settlement exceeds the net revenue fixed at the past settlement by Rs. 3,397, *Ibid.*, p. 54

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44

*mankis* and *mundas* had effected, that the indigenous chiefs and heads, had become 'corrupted' and 'begun to forget their tribal allegiance.'<sup>90</sup>

While concluding the chapter, it is important however, to add that the *mankis* and the *mundas* were not completely homogenous as a group and their relationship with the colonial state was also fraught with various tensions. As local police officers, their 'ability' in apprehending dacoits and criminals, as Dalton once communicated to Hayes, at times left much to be desired.<sup>91</sup> Further, they were deemed 'untrustworthy' and complicit many times, in concealing cases of crime.<sup>92</sup> Their complicity in concealing cultivated lands, destroying valuable forests and valuable timber to expand agriculture even in reserved forests, finds an increasing mention in colonial records, especially towards the latter decades of the nineteenth century. This had a direct co-relation to the increasing value of lands. It was for example, argued after the Craven settlement which specified a double rate of rent for the *dikus*, 'that the *mankis* and the *mundas* would be tempted, for the sake of increased gain to conceal such settlements (in connivance with the *dikus*).'<sup>93</sup> Added to that were notions within the colonial officialdom about their 'lack of efficiency'. One official, for example noted with reference to the many administrative duties they were expected to perform, that 'they are too uneducated to perform undertake such duties.'<sup>94</sup>

Considering these various factors, it had been even proposed before the Craven settlement to take away their police functions and consequently reducing the percentage of commission payable to them. It was felt that the 'rapid development' of the district, since the last settlement had made the introduction of a regular police force in the region necessary. These proposals however, unlike the issue of levying

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<sup>90</sup> (Let. No. 516A, from E.W. Collin, Esq., Offg. Secy. to the Board of Rev. L.P., to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., dated Calcutta, the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1898) File No. 1061, 1897-98, CDCR

<sup>91</sup> (Let. No. 2723, from Col. E.T. Dalton, C.S.I., Commnr. of Chota Nagpore, to W.H. Hayes, Esq., Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chota Nagpore, the 31<sup>st</sup> Oct, 1871) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. pp. 239-240

<sup>92</sup> (Gen. Admin. Rep. of Singhbhum, 1878-79), File No. 734, CDCR

<sup>93</sup> (Let. No. 389A., from H.J. McIntosh, Offg. Secy. to the Board of Rev., L.P. to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., dated Calcutta, the 29<sup>th</sup> Apr), File no. 3, 1899, CDCR

<sup>94</sup> (Let. No. 85, from E.W. Collin, Offg. Secy. to the Board of Rev., L.P. to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., dated Calcutta, the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1898), File No. 3, 1899, CDCR

rent on the *gora* lands, found a unanimous opposition from the *mankis* and *mundas* in the above mentioned conference. Despite the 'very harassing' nature of the police duties, they replied in the conference, it 'was simply as a result of these powers that they were able to collect the rent punctually and pay them in due time.'<sup>95</sup> The point that is important here is, to quote Deborah Sutton who observes about a similar process in another part of colonial India, that 'in creating a species of officer who could exercise a proxy authority in the villages the colonial authorities had also created a set of interests which the village officers fought to protect from any challenge.'<sup>96</sup> Despite the introduction of the post of the Kolhan inspector a few years later to oversee various works (previously the sole preserve of the *mankis* and the *mundas*) they could never be displaced completely. For all their perceived problems, the *mankis* and the *mundas* remained key intermediaries of the colonial administration and continued to be rewarded for the various services performed.<sup>97</sup> These sections, amongst the local population, after all had far too many uses for the colonial state to be dispensed with. This will become further clear in the next chapter which looks at the colonial state's attempts at instituting intensive methods of control over the forests of the region.

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<sup>95</sup> (Let. no. 307., from R.H. Renny, Esqr. Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to the Commnr. of the Chotanagpur Division, dated Chaibasa, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1893) File No. 2490, 1894, CDCR

<sup>96</sup> Sutton, *Other Landscapes*. p. 94

<sup>97</sup> Towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, ten 'most deserving' *mankis* were rewarded with cash prizes for services performed to the colonial state in a meeting of all the *mankis*. Such public bestowal of rewards, it was felt would let the assembled tribal headmen know, whose services have been 'good' and whose 'not so good'. See (Rewards to Mankis) File no. 156, 1909-10, CDCR

## Chapter Three

### Forests, Fields & Fires: Re-constitution and Resistance

The forests of Singhbhum were too defining a feature of the region to have ever escaped official notice. During the early decades of the nineteenth century the 'impenetrable' forests were viewed as having been specially 'preserved' to provide a means of 'defence and retreat' to the insurgents.<sup>1</sup> After the extension of the British control in the region there were the usual imageries of wilderness within which the forests of Singhbhum were described. Tickell, for example, commented that life here was more of a 'struggle for mastery with the tiger(s)'.<sup>2</sup> Valentine Ball, on the other hand, evocatively described how the incursions of wild elephants from the forests into the villages led to the abandonment at times of entire villages, for the damage these herds wrecked upon them.<sup>3</sup> However, the forests of the region, for all their perceived destructive potentials, were also a site of great social, economic as well as

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<sup>1</sup> (Let. from W. Dent to C. Macsween, Secy. to the Govt., Fort William dated 4<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1833), File no. 3305, CDCR

<sup>2</sup> Tickell, *Memoir*, p. 699

<sup>3</sup> Ball, 121, 124. Statistics of cattle as well as local villagers killed by tigers, leopards, bears, wolves, snakes were compiled in official reports and measures were taken for their destruction. See for example (General Administration Report, 1878-79) File No. 734, CDCR

ritual significance for the Hos - a fact which colonial officials, despite their evocations of wilderness, could not remain completely oblivious to.<sup>4</sup>

The forests had an important role to play in the subsistence economy of the Hos. During the lean months of the agrarian cycle, the dependence on the forest products was the greatest. This was the time of the year when gleaners would come from far-flung areas and set up temporary houses within the forests to collect the *mahua* flowers.<sup>5</sup> Several other trees provided the locals not only with poles and timber they required for setting up their houses, but also several other articles which they sold in the local markets. The Commissioner of Chotanagpur in the 1860s, E.T. Dalton noted that returns from the sale of these articles went a long way in helping the Hos pay their land revenue.<sup>6</sup> There were also the large hunting and grazing grounds, the fishes in the streams traversing the forests and several other products that the forests offered. In fact, these many uses of the forests made the region more resistant to periods of famine and scarcity. When the food prices increased and the land revenue became difficult to pay, the villagers would retreat to the forests and depend on the various jungle products.<sup>7</sup> The forests moreover were home to several myths, beliefs and were seen as home to several gods and spirits. Dalton commenting on the religious beliefs of the Hos made the following remarks:

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<sup>4</sup> Despite the perceived destruction that the dense forests wrought upon the people which he described, Ball appended to his account an exhaustive list, what he called the, 'principal' forest products in Chotanagpur, which included trees, seeds, fruits, leaves and stems. These constituted, to quote him, the 'food of the lower races of the population inhabiting the jungle tracts'. Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 695-696. See Appendix I at the end of this dissertation for the entire list.

<sup>5</sup> Ball described the flowers collected from the *mahua* tree as the 'staple and sometimes the only article of diet available to the poorer classes during several months of the years.', Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 65

<sup>6</sup> Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 201

<sup>7</sup> Several correspondences during the 1866 famine noted for example how Kolhan, being the most forested area within Singhbhum, was considerably less affected by famine as opposed to Dhalbhum which depended chiefly on rice cultivation. (See Let. No. 1123, from Lt. Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commnr. of Chota Nagpore to the Board of Rev., L.P., dated 29<sup>th</sup> May 1866) Rev. Dept. - Agri., Proc. No. 147-149, WBSA. Vinita Damodaran has in an interesting study compared the effects of the famine at the close of the nineteenth century with the 1866 famine, and points out that the greater mortality figures in the former are explained by the usurpation of the forests by the colonial state which took away from the local population their most effective resource of confronting a famine. See Damodrana, Vinita. (1998). 'Famine in a Forest Tract: Ecological Change and the Causes of the 1897 Famine in Chota Nagpur, Northern India' in Grove, Richard H., Vinita Damodaran and Satpal Sangwan (ed.) *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: OUP.

They (the Hos) make no images of their gods, nor do they worship symbols, but they believe that though invisible to mortal eyes, the gods may, when propitiated by sacrifice, take up for a time their abode in places especially dedicated to them. Thus they have their "high places" and "their groves" - the former some mighty mass of rock to which man has added nothing and from which he takes nothing, the latter a fragment of the original forest, the trees in which have been for ages carefully protected, left when the clearance was first made, lest the sylvan gods of the places disquieted at the whole sale felling of the trees that sheltered them should abandon the locality. Even now if a tree is destroyed in the sacred grove..., the gods evince their displeasure by withholding seasonal rain.<sup>8</sup>

The deities within the groves were regarded as responsible for rainfall and the outturn of crops and were specially honoured during agricultural festivals.<sup>9</sup> Dalton described one of the local festivals of the Hos, called the *Bah Bonga* festival, which took place when the *sal* tree was in full bloom. During this festival young boys and girls garlanded their hair with the *sal* flowers, houses were decorated with the same and offerings of *sal* flowers were made to families seen as the village founders. The great reverence several trees were held was in fact, a marker of their centrality in the lives of the Hos. Dalton, for example, commented:

The selection of the *sal* flowers as the offering to the founders of the village is appropriate, as there are few villages that do not occupy the ground once covered by the *sal* forest.<sup>10</sup>

However from the last decades of the nineteenth century, several local practices through which the Hos accessed the forests for use were increasingly restricted. This was the period when the prism within which the forests were viewed by the British underwent a drastic shift. Forests from this period were no longer seen as only abodes of wilderness or a barrier to cultivation, but as increasingly fast depleting source of revenue. The shift was not specific to the district of Singhbhum alone and coincided with larger all-India concerns. Ramchandra Guha, in what was the first monograph on the expansion of scientific forestry in India, has pointed out that the

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<sup>8</sup> Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 185-186

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198



hasty establishment of the Forest Department with the help of German foresters in 1864 was mainly to identify the sources of strong and durable timber which could be used as railway sleepers.<sup>11</sup> As the colonial state attempted to exact a monopoly over the forests, several, all-India as well as provincial, legislations were framed to give it statutory backing.<sup>12</sup> With large swathes of forest land constituted as state property and several new restrictions introduced, the colonial state attempted to criminalize an entire pattern of livelihood of the gleaners, graziers and shifting cultivators, where to quote from one of Marx's early writings on 'wood theft', 'wooden idols triumph(ed) and human beings were sacrificed.'<sup>13</sup> However this process, just like any other colonial policy, was not simply imposed from above and had to work its way around several ground level difficulties.

I intend in this chapter to map out the various conservation strategies the British introduced in Singhbhum - both as to how they were conceptualized initially and how they finally worked out on the ground. The disparity between the two is an important indicator of the ground level contingencies the colonial state had to constantly negotiate with. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section while tracing the shift in the way forests were viewed by the colonial state looks at the selective invocation and application of certain scientific ideas about forest degradation and the effects it entailed. These scientific ideas constituted the basis through which the usurpation of vast stretches of jungle land and restriction of local practices was legitimized. However, the extent to which the colonial state could proceed in this direction was limited - a theme that I will explore in the subsequent section. The second section attempts to look at the departures from the rules in the working out of the various forest conservation schemes as a result of the various difficulties imposed by the people and the landscape. We will be specially dealing with the difficulties around the infringement of some of the local rights to forests,

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<sup>11</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. (1989). *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. Delhi: OUP, p. 5

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the various debates that preceded the formulation of the forest acts of 1864 and 1878 see Guha, Ramchandra. (1990). 'An Early Environmental Debate: The making of the 1878 Forest Act' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 27, 1

<sup>13</sup> Marx, Karl. (1842). 'Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood' in [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/10/25.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/10/25.htm), (last accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2012)

such as the right to clear forests and expand the arable, which the colonial state had itself privileged in the past few decades. Apart from the complex arrangement of local rights that the colonial state had to constantly negotiate with, there was also the resistance of those who were affected the most by such schemes that created additional problems. The third and final section looks at the use of fire by the Hos, as a means of resisting the new forest regulations and the colonial attempts at countering it.

## I. Apocalyptic Concerns and 'The Greater Common Good'<sup>14</sup>

In the initial decades of colonial rule in Singhbhum, forests were largely viewed as an *obstruction* to what was portrayed as the civilizing march of agrarian expansion. Dalton for example, commented in 1867, on the prosperity brought to the region through the reclamation of *wastelands* and the extension of cultivation:

Since then (the extension of British authority), the population and spread of cultivation have immensely increased, and the people are now peaceful, prosperous and happy. From the region about the station, Chybassah, one hundred and seventy miles due west from Calcutta, the wastelands have entirely disappeared.<sup>15</sup>

Such reflections however, became increasingly infrequent towards the last few decades of the nineteenth century. From the 1870s one could notice a slow but a noticeable shift with regard to colonial attitudes vis-à-vis the forests of the region. This was as already remarked, congruent with the overall change across the country. In a matter of few decades, the new narrative that emerged displaced the older narrative of the civilizing march of agrarian expansion. Several officials across many districts commented on the extensive damage done to the forests and the calamitous effects it entailed. Practices such as shifting cultivation and the use of fire were

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<sup>14</sup> The phrase 'Greater Common Good' is borrowed from the name of Arundhati Roy's essay on the controversy and the protests around the mega dam project on the Narmada River. See Roy, Arundhati. (1999). *The Greater Common Good*. Bombay: India Book Distributors

<sup>15</sup> Dalton, *The Kols of Chota-Nagpore*, p. 14

increasingly condemned.<sup>16</sup> This new narrative interestingly, also exonerated the colonial state of any complicity in the forest clearances as the destruction of the forests was portrayed in civilizational terms. The story was taken as far back as the Aryan invasion to paint a picture of a gradual destruction of forests, which the Raj now took it upon itself to stop and even reverse. As the Inspector General of Forests at the close of the century and one of the prominent German foresters in service in India, Berthold Ribbentrop remarked:

...the invaders of India did not exterminate an old civilization, previously found in the north of the Empire, by the destruction of villages and towns and the killing of people, but by the wholesale and continuous firing of the forest vegetation of the country for pastures; and it must be remembered that this was not the work of a day, for at the time when the British Empire, after the battle of Plassey, gradually extended its sway over the whole of the peninsula, invasion by nomadic tribes had gone on for hundreds of years....The withdrawal of man's active interference would, under favourable conditions, be sufficient in time to re-cloth the now denuded areas with forest vegetation.<sup>17</sup>

As most of the arguments assumed an increasingly apocalyptic tone, several officials commented about the ecological catastrophe the country was headed towards unless systematic measures for forest conservation were undertaken. Extensive deforestation reduced rainfall, eroded soil, caused floods, lowered the ground water levels, increased temperatures, and reduced the fertility of soil and so on.<sup>18</sup> With a view to prevent or at least check such eventualities, several inquiries were undertaken in the different districts of the country. Committees were set up to collate evidence; papers and documents were collected; scholarly articles were consulted and extensive correspondences amongst different districts were established during these enquiries. I pick up the results, as well as the processes

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<sup>16</sup> (Copy of a Memorandum by the Conservator of Forests, Bengal on the subject of checking the jungle fires, dated Calcutta, the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1872), Rev. Dept. - For., Proc. No. 18, January 1873, WBSA; See also (W.B. Thomson's note on Forest Conservancy in the Kolhan Government Estate) Collection No. II For., File No, 18, CDCR.

<sup>17</sup> Ribbentrop, Berthold. (1900). *Forestry in British India*. Delhi: Indus Publishing Company (reprint 1989), p. 52

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-65

through which the results were reached, of the one such enquiry within the different districts of Chotanagpur.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, following the instructions of the Government of India to enquire into the ecological effects of forest denudation in the different provinces of the country, a committee consisting of H.L. Stephenson, Deputy Commissioner of Ranchi, L. E.B. Cobden Ramsay, the Political Agent of the Feudatory States of Orissa and J. W.A. Grieve, Deputy Conservator of Forests of Singhbhum was constituted within Chotanagpur. They were to enquire in the different districts of Chotanagpur the extent of denudation, the economic effects that it entailed as well as propose measures that could be taken to check denudation and improve and preserve 'the still existing forests'.<sup>19</sup> After touring the different districts in their attempt to collate evidence and data, the committee submitted its report to the government in March 1909. A few months before the submission of the final report, Stephenson shared some of its findings with the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, H.D. Carey. In this letter, he charted out the several dangers that the denudation of the forests entailed to the region and its people:

If denudation is in progress to a dangerous extent the lesser important results would be the stoppage of the supply of timber, the loss of fuel and forest produce and the diminution of grazing; the importance of each of these effects will vary in different districts. *The more important effects* will be a possible loss of rainfall, lowering of the water level and consequently smaller rivers and possibly floods in the rains and a loss of water supply in the rest of the year; the floods may effect the district in which denudation is in progress but *more probably the neighbouring districts*. Another serious possible effect is the scouring of hill sides and the ruin of fields below by silt or sand deposits.<sup>20</sup>

The conservation of forests was thus, also presented as important, not just to save one area or district, but also its adjoining regions.<sup>21</sup> To put it another way, this meant

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<sup>19</sup> (Let. from H. L. Stephenson, Dep. Commnr. of Ranchi to H. D. Carey, Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Ranchi, the 26<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1906), File no. 50, Rev. Dept., CDCR, 1908-09

<sup>20</sup> (Let. from H. L. Stephenson to H. D. Carey, dated 26<sup>th</sup> November 1906, Ranchi) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09 (emphasis mine)

<sup>21</sup> (Offg. Director of the Department of Land Records, Bengal to the Commnr. of the Chotanagpur Division dated 7<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1906, Calcutta), Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

that the colonial state could stake claims over a region's forests on the grounds that its destruction entailed negative ecological consequences for another region. For example, within Singhbhum stopping the denudation on the hills of Dhalbhum was considered important not just for Dhalbhum but also other parts such as the Kolhan. The Subarnekha River passed through Dhalbhum and the floods that would result from deforestation on its hills would, in their opinion, have washed down cultivated lands in different adjoining regions.<sup>22</sup> Some of the references to the perceived harm that deforestation entailed for cultivation reflect an interesting shift from the earlier identification of forests as a barrier to cultivation. The depiction of forestry in this period, to quote William Beinart, 'as a more integral part of agriculture improvements'<sup>23</sup> was also visible in a note prepared by another member of the committee, Grieve. In this note, after laying out the ecological aspects of forest denudation, he went on to talk about its 'more direct effects upon the population'. Some of these 'evils', to quote him, were:

- i. Inevitable decrease of areas which are capable of growing either crops or forest and which become wholly useless.
- ii. Decrease in fertility of fields lying below denuded hills slopes owing to:
  - a) The sand washes down on to them rendering them uncultivable
  - b) The absence of decomposed humus above, which where it exists, is washed down on to the fields in the form of fertile mould or yields valuable salts in solution.
- iii. Absence of fuel; and consequent burning of manure which out to go on to the fields.
- iv. Absence of grazing areas, edible jungle products and consequent greater liability of the area to famine.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note that these references kept recurring in the different responses of the colonial officials, even though the committee referred above could not come up with any conclusive evidence to substantiate its claims. Stephenson, for example,

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<sup>22</sup> (Singhbhum) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

<sup>23</sup> Beinart, William. (1989). 'Introduction to Part 1' in David Anderson and Richard Grove (ed.). *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 18

<sup>24</sup> (Note on For. Preservation in Chota Nagpur by J.W.A. Grieve, *undated*) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

clearly remarked on the inability of the committee to back up its conclusions. For example, he stated that the one month time that the committee was given to visit the different forests of the region was too less to arrive at any comprehensive examination of the question. Even his description of the calamitous effects of forest denudation, was followed up in the next line with the remark that 'information (about)...any of these effects in late years would be very valuable.'<sup>25</sup> He also noted the committee's inability to comment on the extent of forest denudation in different areas, which as per him were more 'a matter of local knowledge' and something that the district officials were in a better position to comment on.<sup>26</sup> Grieve, similarly commented on the co-relation between deforestation and rainfall, but went on to remark that that it was not possible to prove it in the absence of 'conclusive figures'.<sup>27</sup> Establishing the correlation between deforestation and rainfall, or the effects it had in determining the underground water-table, floods, flow of rivers, denudation of catchment areas, etc. in fact required extensive statistical information collected 'month by month and day by day' across many years, which had till now not been maintained by the British government in India.<sup>28</sup>

However, these new attitudes vis-à-vis the environment, were far too strong and rigid to have been dislodged merely by the lack of such empirical resources. Richard Grove, in his study of the various early themes of the conservationist discourse in the colonial Africa, has observed that a whole gamut of scientific and other arguments were mobilized in the evolution of colonial environmental attitudes across different colonies. "Once a body of environmental attitudes became firmly established", Grove goes on to write, "*selected* scientific arguments were canvassed according to both their social expediency and their capacity to be politically convincing and to mirror, often temporarily, governmental or societal

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<sup>25</sup> (H. L. Stephenson to H. D. Carey, dated 26<sup>th</sup> November 1906, Ranchi) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09 (emphasis mine)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> (Note on For. Preservation in Chota Nagpur by J.W.A. Grieve, *undated*) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

<sup>28</sup> (Let. No. 74A, from F.W. Duke, Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal to The Secy. to the Govt. of India, Dept. of Rev. and Agri., dated Calcutta, the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1910) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

preoccupations.”<sup>29</sup> In the enquiries undertaken in the different districts of Chotanagpur, we find that the absence of evidence and statistical data was covered up with references to the results of scientific researches into these questions in different parts of Europe, as well as other colonies. An article published in the journal of *United States Geological Society* by Bailey Willis about the effects of deforestation and afforestation in different countries ranging from USA, Spain, Germany, France, Russia to Canada, Egypt, Syria and Palestine was extensively cited to argue that the committee’s conclusions were not far too away from the mark, even if they may not have specific evidence from the region they had investigated.<sup>30</sup> Consider for example the following words of F.W. Duke, the Chief Secretary to the government in the Bengal Presidency as he communicated the results of the committee to the Government of India:

There is no information...whether there has been any permanent change in the level of the underground water-table. It will be seen that (in)...their report the committee state their opinion that the effect of denudation on the level of the sub-soil cannot be questioned, *although they are unable to produce any facts or figures to support their contention*...In this connection Mr. Willis’ remarks on forests in relation to ground-level water are interesting. It will be seen that he holds as proved in the plains (that) the water-table beneath the forest lands is depressed in comparison with that beneath the adjacent fields. This is explained by the fact that forests with a plentiful humus tend to retain a large amount of water at or near the surface. The result is a more continuous percolation of water and steadier flow of springs during drought from the wooded water-shed than for the cleared water-shed. *If this is the case, there seems little doubt* that while forests may depress the water-table immediately beneath them, they tend to raise the water table beneath the surrounding lands, especially if as often happens in this province, they are on higher ground than the surrounding cultivated area.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Grove, Richard. (1989). ‘Early themes in African conservation: The Cape in the nineteenth century’ in David Anderson and Richard Grove (ed.). *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 22 (emphasis mine)

<sup>30</sup> (Water Circulation and its Control by Bailey Willis, E.M.C.E., United States Geological Survey) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

<sup>31</sup> (Let. No. 74A, from F.W. Duke, Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal to The Secy. to the Govt. of India, Dept. of Rev. and Agri., dated Calcutta, the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1910) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

Division	Timber	Fuel	Total	Minor Produce	Revenue	Expenditure	Surplus
	c. ft.	c.ft.	c.ft.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Singhbhum	348,766	502,602	851,368	29,787	1,13,415	88,715	24,7000

Table I - Average annual receipts for the years 1899 to 1907-08

My intention in bringing out the rise of these new environmentalist ideas is not to test their *scientificity*, which is outside the scope of this work. However, what is of central relevance of us is the selective application of these new ideas in establishing control over forest within the larger revenue needs of the empire. In an interesting article on the rise of scientific forestry, Ajay Skaria has cautioned us against abstracting the new environmentalist concerns and ideas from the social and political context in which they were imbricated. He goes on to explain that it was a hybrid of these environmental concerns and the different commercial interests that determined the colonial policies with regard to the forests.<sup>32</sup>

In the context of Singhbhum, we can see that as early as 1868. The Deputy Commissioner Hayes was communicating to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur the need to bring the forests of the region under 'better supervision' to help the speculators who might venture for leases to tap resin, gum, lac and other such products.<sup>33</sup> By the turn of the century, it was timber which had assumed the central importance owing primarily to its use for railway sleepers. The trade in timber from Singhbhum played an important role in reversing the negative proportion of revenues (as compared to the outlays) from the region (see table I<sup>34</sup>). Clearances of forests, for commercial purposes such as the above, never really ceased even while these enquiries were going on. This new discourse about the adverse ecological effects of the declining forest cover on its part, also never questioned the right of the

<sup>32</sup> Skaria, Ajay. (1998). 'Timber Conservancy, Dessicationism and Scientific Forestry: The Dangs 1840s-1920s' in Grove, Richard, Vinita Damodaran and Satpal Sangwan (ed.). (1998). *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: OUP, p. 626

<sup>33</sup> (Let. No. 249, from W.H. Hayes, Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum to the Commnr. of Chota Nagpore, dated Chaibasa, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1867), Rev. Dept. - For., Proc. No. 18, February 1868, WBSA

<sup>34</sup> O, Malley, *Singhbhum Gazetteer*, p. 103



timber contractors to extract timber in large quantities. Their rights over timber were always seen as apt; their practices were also not seen as wasteful or destructive. At the same time, a large section of local villagers living in the region were condemned as encroachers whose practices had to be strictly regulated. This selective application of these new ideas to different classes of population, and its consequent justification, is very succinctly exemplified in the following words of Duke:

Contractors may cut down the jungle, but they do not exterminate it or prevent its regeneration. This the villagers do by rooting up stumps of trees, by 'jhuming', by grazing their cattle on the young growth and by firing the hill sides in order that their fields below may be benefited by the ashes which are washed down the rains.<sup>35</sup>

Around the same time when enquiries were being conducted to establish the harmful ecological effects of forest degradation, the British were attempting to facilitate government monopoly over forest produce through a variety of measures. In 1905, for example, Grieve proposed several measures of surveillance for timber transit in and through Singhbhum, as well as for the management of the weekly *hats* where these were sold. The purpose of these new rules, to quote him, was to 'safeguard honest traders against men who make a practice of selling timber illegally acquired'.<sup>36</sup> In another five years, as one report laid out, local villagers were completely debarred from selling timber or even the various articles manufactured from timber in areas where rules for forest preservation were introduced. These measures were important for the 'conservation' of these areas which, as the same report went on to remark, was the primary objective behind their institution.<sup>37</sup> The ideology of conservation, as it was sought to be applied in practice, was thus directed towards the exclusion of a large section of the tribal population from accessing what constituted an extremely important means of subsistence for them. The greater common good of the region and its people, was frequently referred in

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<sup>35</sup> (Let. No. 74A, from F.W. Duke, Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal to The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, dated Calcutta, the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1910) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

<sup>36</sup> (Letter from J.W.A. Grieve, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Bengal, Singhbhum Division to the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1905), Rev. Dept., File no. 84, CDCR

<sup>37</sup> (Report by Burrows, dated 19/6/10), Forest Dept., File no. 378, 1910-11, CDCR

colonial state's attempts to legitimize these policies. The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum in 1903, W.B. Thomson for example, while writing about the urgent need to prohibit shifting cultivation argued that its continuance would reduce the entire region to nothing 'but barren rocks and boulders fit only for the wild beasts to hide in'.<sup>38</sup> Another official wrote about how the extensive regime of restrictions that the colonial state envisaged for forest preservation was entirely in the interests of the people:

...the villagers, although they resent forests being protected or reserved, could be got to see that this preservation was entirely for their own interest. Villagers who refuse to agree may be left to their own devices, and when the jungle has all but disappeared they will come to their senses.<sup>39</sup>

The rigid establishment of such ideas, which persisted despite lack of any substantive evidence however, did not mean that the colonial state was able to successfully work all of these concerns out on the ground. Even the most ardent enthusiasts of conservation did not lose sight of the limits to the schemes they proposed. Ribbentrop, for example, remarked that many of his ideas could indeed sound 'fanciful' to some for they could never be realized in practice.<sup>40</sup>

## II. Partial Accomplishments: Demarcation, Local Rights and the Different Contingencies

In light of the new environmentalist concerns, several notifications for the *protection* of - to use the new vocabulary in vogue back then - the virtually unprotected forests of Singhbhum were issued in the decade and a half between 1895 and 1910.<sup>41</sup> The laying of the Bengal-Nagpur railway line it was felt, had increased the 'wanton

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<sup>38</sup> (Note on Forest Conservancy in the Kolhan Government Estate, by W. B. Thomson, Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum), Forest Dept., File no. 18, CDCR

<sup>39</sup> (Note on Preservation of Jungles and Forests), Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09

<sup>40</sup> Ribbentrop, *Forestry in British India*, p. 59

<sup>41</sup> I will be dealing largely with the constitution of Protected Forests. The reserves had already been created in 1870s, for which not many records are available. For a brief chronology of these initial notifications of reserved forests see Roychoudhary, P.C. (1958). *Bihar District Gazetters: Singhbhum*. Patna: Superintendent Press, p. 109-110

destruction' by the villagers of 'valuable timber belonging to the state'.<sup>42</sup> For the trifle these villagers earned in the 'illegal' sale of timber, it was argued, the country was being led to a possible disaster.<sup>43</sup> A regime of restrictions which could check such *wasteful* practices was envisaged as a solution out of this crisis and as such vast swathes of non-reserved forests were notified as protected forests. An official notification was however, only the declaration of intent; the riotous growth of forests in these areas still had to be marked off into manageable zones, boundary lines had to be intricately laid, scattered patches of cultivated land had to be set aside and several practices especially the use of fire, strictly regulated. These were sought to be dealt with in the inquiries, surveys and record of rights operations which attempted to work out on the ground the ideas and intentions worked out within official minds.

One of the aims of these surveys was to achieve, what James Scott calls, a tunnel vision into the forests. A tunnel vision, Scott explains, entailed a process of simplification by the state, which brought into sharp focus certain aspects of the social reality to facilitate control.<sup>44</sup> These surveys in the forests did not just externally demarcate their boundaries but also broke them up into smaller divisions - various ranges and more narrowly blocks and sub-blocks - so as to make them more susceptible to observation, governance and management. Alongside the surveys, a professional staff of foresters trained in the particulars of forest science was also sought to be established in the region. Importantly, measures for surveillance to check transgression of the rules and regulations were also sought to be established. With 'forest science and state power on its side', the colonial state was thus all set to, to continue with Scott, 'transform the real, diverse, old-growth forest into a new, more uniform forest that closely resembled the administrative grid of its techniques.'<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Letter by Commissioner of Chota Nagpur dated 7<sup>th</sup> June 1894 (quoted in Burrows report)

<sup>43</sup> (Letter from F.A. Slacke, Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of the Chotanagpur Division dated Darjeeling, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1901). Collection No. II Forests, File No, 18, CDCR

<sup>44</sup> Scott, James. (1998). 'Nature and Space' in his *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New York: Yale University Press

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

However, the extent to which the colonial state could actually transform the forests and all the local practices intimately linked with them was severely circumscribed by the interplay of several and at times contending interests. To put it another way, a successful operationalization of these intentions had to confront the complex arrangement of rights and claims that the Hos were able to establish over the forests. These several rights and claims were neither given up voluntarily by the Hos nor could they be totally discounted during the demarcation of these areas. The initial ambition with which colonial forest policy set out with, could thus be only partially achieved in practice. Scott, despite noting the limits to the transformatory potential of top-down schemes initiated by the state, colonial or otherwise, unfortunately underplays this aspect. My attempt, in this section would thus be, through a critical assessment of the above formulations by Scott, to bring out the several departures and omissions in the working out of colonial forest policy in Singhbhum.

Even before the first demarcations were undertaken, the fact that there were limits to the extent to which the original intent could be carried out in practice was not completely lost upon the colonial officials.<sup>46</sup> The survey and settlement operation undertaken by Craven towards the close of the nineteenth century was intended to initiate the process of forming separate protected forest blocks. In this very decision of giving over demarcations to the settlement officer, we can notice the first departure from the forest rules that prescribed a record of rights to be undertaken by the forest department. The 'upcoming' settlement, it was felt at that time, was going to be a comprehensive investigation of the region to render unnecessary another operation by a different department with all its allied implications. While the commissioner expressed concerns about 'alarm' a record of rights operation may cause amongst the local population, the Conservator of Forests, in agreement with him, argued for following 'the lines' most convenient and appropriate for each district'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See for example, government letters dated 14<sup>th</sup> August 1895 and 21<sup>st</sup> September 1896 quoted in the Burrows report

<sup>47</sup> See Commissioner's letter and Conservator's letters of 1894, quoted in Burrow's report

During the demarcations, the close impingement of cultivation with the forests in the agrarian landscape of Singhbhum created enormous difficulties. Craven, for example, set out armed with several maps and diagrams to demarcate protected forests in opposition to the cultivated (as well as cultivable) lands. The cartographic devices available with the British however, could hardly encapsulate the complexities on the ground. Forests that might have appeared as dense, and fit for 'protection', from a distant perspective turned out in the field to be so broken up and scattered with cultivation that their separation, in the words of Craven, was not practicable.<sup>48</sup> The parcelling of land in the name of individual tenants, during the previous settlement operations, further rendered difficulty in any large scale usurpation of forests. Consider for example, the following observations of Craven:

In many of the blocks, there are outlying isolated patches of rice and gora cultivation. As regards the latter, the raiyats have been induced to relinquish them, but they absolutely refuse to give up the rice lands; and *as these are in most instances old fields that were measured at the last settlement, and in some cases they are the only rice lands the raiyats hold*, it would be a great hardship were they to be deprived of them, particularly as they cannot be compensated with other rice lands in the village. The raiyats have therefore been permitted to hold these lands on the distinct understanding that the cultivation is not to be extended.<sup>49</sup>

The elasticity that the original intent had to show in practice can be gauged from the fact that the first orders for demarcations, that Craven was entrusted to carry out, could be given effect to in only 202 out of the total of 911 villages. In many other villages, the idea of forming protected blocks was given up as the forest cover was found 'just sufficient for the reasonable requirements of the people'.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the boundary lines were marked off in such a rudimentary manner with piles of stones that they were difficult to recognize within a period of few months.<sup>51</sup> The successes of the first colonial attempts at enforcing some sort of legibility on the forests, by

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<sup>48</sup> Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate 1897*, p. 34

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34 (emphasis mine)

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33

<sup>51</sup> (Letter no. 788, from E.G. Chester, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Deputy Commissioner, Singhbhum, dated camp Goilker, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1897) File no. 18, Forest Dept., 1904-05

dividing them into blocks and sub-blocks can be evaluated when these are set aside the not too-optimistic contemporaneous observations of the foresters. Consider for example, the following notes made about boundary lines by the Assistant Conservator of Forests, Grieve during his inspection of the demarcated blocks, just three months after the settlement operations were concluded:

October 26 - Left Jorakhpur...striking the forest boundary at Jajobera village...The boundary is marked by stones in heaps or single, as is not very obvious. I think larger heaps of stones should be made, also posts might be inserted at a small cost.

October 27 - The forests around Dhalandia....The boundary here is most indistinct, and none of the Bhalandia men seemed to know where to find it.

October 28 - Left Gamaria....and arrived at Kharbandi...A long delay occurred in finding men who knew the boundaries, as the munda was in Chaibasa. Found the line and from a small hill and obtained a fair view of the forest N. and E....The line here is imperfectly marked, being already so much grown up that the coolies refused to go along it on account of thorns

October 29 - Left Kharbondia and proceeded on foot through the Forest to Baro Jarlo...The boundaries are most indistinct, and in several places though the coolies knew a mark had been put on the ground, none was visible...<sup>52</sup>

Seen as arbitrary as well as inadequate by various officials, the first demarcations were subjected to various revisions over the next decade. However despite the addition of new blocks, the conflicts around the boundary lines of the protected forest blocks could never be resolved. A major reason for this was also the fact that inclusion during demarcation of patches of land recently reclaimed from forests could, and did, lead to large scale desertions of the villagers. The attendant labour scarcity, which such migrations entailed for the Forest Department, forced quite a few retreats with regard to boundary lines and prohibition of cultivation. In 1907-08, for example, Kirkpatrick as the Assistant Conservator of Forests toured five sparsely populated villages around the protected forests of the Saranda region. These villages had witnessed large scale migrations to other regions ever since the creation of protected forests. Over the course of his investigations, Kirkpatrick had to restore

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<sup>52</sup> (Extracts from the Diary of Mr. J.W.A. Grieve, Assistant Conservator of Forests for the Month of October, 1897) File no. 18, Forest Dept., 1904-05, CDCR

several portions, and, at times, whole blocks to the villagers. The object, in his words, was:

...attracting new settlers, or to induce people to return who had run away when the Protected Forests were found by the Settlement Officer.<sup>53</sup>

However, the response of the colonial state towards cultivation during the demarcations also depended upon the class of land in question. In 1910, one colonial official by the name of Burrows, during his investigation into 73 villages, laid down a procedure to follow during demarcations with regard to claims for cultivation. A patch of cultivated *gora* land being of little value, he proposed, may be resumed after abating its rent, without much hassle. As for the more productive lowlands - the *bera* and the *bad* - they had to be in many cases excluded, in the face of local claims. The result was a meandering, circuitous or a 'snake like'<sup>54</sup> boundary line. In fact, the division of the protected forest blocks into even smaller sub-blocks, described by Burrows as an 'extremely torturous' process, was done mainly to take into consideration such claims. On some other occasions, where the exclusion of cultivated patch of *bera* or *bad* was not possible, the colonial state had to pay a certain compensation for its resumption.

Connected to the point of the careful exclusion of cultivation during demarcations was the significant role given to the tribal headmen, especially the *mankis*, in the working out of forest policy. The colonial reorganisation of the agrarian relations in Singhbhum over the previous half a century, had led in several cases, to plots of lands being recorded in the names of privileged *raiyats*, most of whom were *mankis* and the *mundas*. Their dispossession, by converting the areas they staked a control over into demarcated blocks, could have entailed alienating a section of the population who had served as key intermediaries of colonial rule in Singhbhum. These demarcations thus, did not intend to drastically re-organise the existing divisions of the *pirs* and villages and the structures through which the colonial rule was locally enforced in Singhbhum.

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<sup>53</sup> (Explanatory Note to this Office No. 137, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1910 to Conservator of Forests, Bengal; through the Deputy Commissioner) File No. 10, 1911-12, Forest Dept., CDCR

<sup>54</sup> Burrows Report

Moreover, with the shift in the colonial concerns over forests, we can also notice the *mankis* and the *mundas* making newer kinds of claims to the colonial state. As opposed to their earlier pre-occupation with the extension of cultivation for the incentives laid down in the *pattas*, the *mankis* and the *mundas* were now also making claims over forested areas on the pretext that they were interested in conserving them. The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum towards the close of the nineteenth century, C.H. Bompas, in fact, saw in these numerous claims an efficient means of overcoming what the colonial state could not directly accomplish. Commenting on Craven's suggestion to enforce some kind of arrangements for forest 'conservation' in the non-demarcated areas, Bompas proposed that the 'best course' in this regard would be to recognise private rights. To quote his proposal in detail:

Government has not the staff to see the preservation or rearing of little patches of jungle on isolated tungris; on the other hand, mundas or other villagers are willing to do so if they get the benefit of it. Claims are indeed made to the ownership of such patches of jungle on the ground that the claimant has preserved or retarded it. Such claims are now held to be barred by the Protected Forest rules. I think that they should be recognised; by this means there would at any rate be wood in the country, even if in private hands; and the climate of the country would be improved, a very important consideration.<sup>55</sup>

The evidence at our disposal, of which the above quote is an example, militates against the analyses of certain scholars who emphasize the centralizing thrusts of forest conservancy. Rather than decision making moving to the domain of a small group of technocratic experts as Ravi Rajan<sup>56</sup> argues, we can find numerous examples of key functions of forest conservation given over to the *mankis* and the *mundas*. Craven was specially instructed, for example, by the Deputy Commissioner, to demarcate the forest blocks in such a manner that they could be allotted to the

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<sup>55</sup> (Letter No. 515R., from C.H. Bompas, Esq., Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum to A. Forbes, Esq., C.S. I., Commnr. of the Chota Nagpur Division, Ranchi dated Chaibasa, the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1897) appended to the Craven Settl. Report

<sup>56</sup> Rajan, Ravi. (1998). 'Imperial Environmentalism or European Imperialism? European Forestry, Colonial Foresters and the Agendas of Forest Management in British India, 1800-1900' in Grove, Richard, Vinita Damodaran and Satpal Sangwan (ed.). (1998). *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: OUP, p. 342



*mankis* for maintenance.<sup>57</sup> The *mankis* were further to enforce and check infringements of forest rules as well as take steps for the prevention and extinguishing of forest fires.<sup>58</sup> The collection of the 'miscellaneous' sources of revenue mainly from the assessment on the various minor forest produce<sup>59</sup>, was the prerogative of the tribal headmen.<sup>60</sup> Their inputs were also relied upon during investigations to understand the customary rights to forests during investigations and record of rights operations. However, the most important role they carried out was the assistance rendered in the laying and upkeep of the boundary lines. The leverage that they exercised as *amins* during demarcations, allowed them in turn to determine in their own way the boundaries of the protected forest blocks. They could be bribed into excluding patches of land during demarcations; on the other hand there were contrary examples, when fertile lands were included within the demarcated blocks on the non-compliance of the local population to such demands. The conservator of forests made the following remarks in his inspection note of the protected blocks within the Saranda range:

...there is no question that no great care was exercised in the selection of the boundaries of these forests. I have seen instances in which banded rice land has been included and there would appear to be some foundation for the story of the villagers that cultivable land was included in the demarcation because they refused to gratify the cupidity of the Settlement Amins.<sup>61</sup>

Various sections within the colonial officialdom were extremely uncomfortable with the significant role assigned to the *mankis* and the *mundas* in the maintenance and upkeep of the forests. W.B. Thomson, who succeeded Bompas as the Deputy

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<sup>57</sup> (Letter No. 515R., from C.H. Bompas, Esq., Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum to A. Forbes, Esq., C.S. I., Commnr. of the Chota Nagpur Division, Ranchi dated Chaibasa, the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1897) appended to the Craven Settl. Report

<sup>58</sup> Craven, p. 39

<sup>59</sup> The terms 'major forest produce' and 'minor forest produce' were colonial categories and reflected more the commercial viability of the different forest resources and certainly not their use value for the Hos.

<sup>60</sup> (Let. No. 620A, from E.W. Collin, Esq., Secy. to the Board of Rev., L.P. to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., dated Calcutta, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1897) Proceedings No. 60-61, Sep 1897, Rev. Dept., Branch - Agri, WBSA

<sup>61</sup> (Conservator's Inspection Note dated the 9<sup>th</sup> Jan 1909 on Singhbhum For. Division) File No. 10, For. Dept., 1911-12, CDCR

Commissioner was already within less than half a decade, pointing to their inability to manage the forests. There were questions of expertise and professional training, the lack of which amongst the *mankis* and the *mundas* was seen as a major impediment in carrying out the various elaborate schemes for forest *preservation*.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, foresters were asserting the need for the forest department being given greater control. The relationship of the foresters with the *mankis* and *mundas* was characterized with various tensions. Though the demarcated blocks were to be regularly inspected by forest officers, the workings of various tasks were under the tribal headmen who were directly responsible, not to the Forest Department but to the Deputy Commissioner. The foresters quite often remarked about their inability to make the *mankis* and *mundas* comply to the various orders and demands.<sup>63</sup> In cases such as these, or even when it was regarding infringements of forest rules, the forest officials subordinate as they were to the Deputy Commissioner, had absolutely no power to punish the tribal headmen.<sup>64</sup>

The question that remains then is why were large areas, central to the commercial interests of the colonial state, and portrayed variously as key to the ecological fortunes of the country, given over to a section that could reverse or at least impede the intended aims. A major reason for this was that despite calls for additional reinforcements of experts trained in the intricacies of forest science<sup>65</sup>, a large establishment of professionally trained foresters remained a far cry in Singhbhum. Faced with such a situation, several officials were thus, remarking about the necessity of inculcating interest as well as *expertise* amongst the tribal headmen for forest conservation.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, enforcing government rules and regulations

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<sup>62</sup> (W.B. Thomson's note on Forest Conservancy in the Kolhan Govt. Estate) File No. 18, For. Dept., CDCR

<sup>63</sup> (Let. No. 21C, from the Range Officer, Chaibasa Range to the Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division) File No. 234, For. Dept., 1903, CDCR

<sup>64</sup> (Note regarding the Kolhan Protected Forests) File no. 10-11, For. Dept., 1910-11, CDCR

<sup>65</sup> (Let. No. 49, from J.L. Baker, Esqr., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa 13<sup>th</sup> April 1911) File no. 10-11, For. Dept., 1910-11, CDCR

<sup>66</sup> (Let. from the Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa, the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1897) Proc. No. 1-4, July 1900, Rev. Dept. - Branch For., WBSA

through the tribal headmen remained a cheaper and easier *modus operandi*.<sup>67</sup> Lastly, and very importantly, departures from forest rules such as these, were important for palliating the far reaching effects of forest *conservation* on the lives and livelihoods of the local population.

### III. Recovering the Subterranean Rumbings: Forest Fires and Social Protest

*Though we walked through the wars  
between the classes,  
More often changing shoes – despairing,  
as there was only injustice, but no uprising*

- Bertolt Brecht<sup>68</sup>

*Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and the oppressed, stood in constant opposition to each other, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of the society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.*

- Karl Marx and Frederick Engels<sup>69</sup>

One of the anomalies, which the existing limited scholarship on the Hos and the region of Singhbhum has tried to grapple with, is the fact that, despite large scale rebellions in other regions of Chotanagpur, Singhbhum was relatively tranquil over the greater part of the nineteenth century. Even forest reservation, which affected the most marginal section within the Hos, did not lead to any large scale uprising such as witnessed in other parts of Chotanagpur around the same time. Vinita

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<sup>67</sup> Arun Agarwal makes a similar point in his study of the van panchyats in the Kumaon region. See Agarwal, Arun. (2001). 'State Formation in Community Spaces? Decentralization of Control over Forests in the Kumaon Himalaya, India' in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Feb., 2001), pp. 9-40; see also his 'The Regulatory Community: Decentralization and the Environment in the Van Panchayats (Forest Councils) of Kumaon, India' in *Mountain Research and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Aug., 2001), pp. 208-211

<sup>68</sup> See Brecht, Bertolt. (2012). "To posterity" in the Classic Poetry Series. Accessed from Poem Hunter.com

<sup>69</sup> Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. (1995). *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (transl. Samuel Moore). Delhi: People's Publishing House

Damodaran looks at measures such as throwing open forest blocks for cultivation, during periods of scarcity to argue that various strategic retreats checked the Hos from assuming a kind of militancy that was witnessed amongst other tribal communities of Chotanagpur.<sup>70</sup> However, scarcity and famine was too chronic a feature of Singhbhum, especially towards the turn of the century, for its effects to have been palliated merely through such concessions.<sup>71</sup> Sanjukta Dasgupta, on the other hand, tries to explain this by looking at the transformations within the Ho community over the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The transformation of the Hos from the “rebellious Larkas” of the early nineteenth century to “peaceful tenants” by the early twentieth, according to her, was largely a result of the incorporation of the *manki-munda* system of authority into the structures of imperial governance. “In particular, they (the *mankis* and the *mundas*) played a significant role”, Dasgupta writes, “in successfully controlling and containing the spread of political discontent and violent mass upsurge among the Hos.”<sup>72</sup> However, there are a few points which I intend to make with regarding the above contention by Dasgupta. Firstly, the binary of the ‘rebellious Larkas’ and the ‘peaceful tenantry’, that Dasgupta uses, is not valid to explain the predicament of a sizeable section of the population. The encouragement to settled cultivation was certainly intended, amongst other things, at securing greater state control over a sedentary population. However, not everyone could be sedentarized and the process of recording land in the name of individual tenants during settlement operations greatly increased the dependence on forests for those against whom no lands were recorded. Did this section, which had been reduced to the very fringes of the Ho community, let their only means of subsistence be usurped from them without any resistance? Secondly, the absence of large scale mass rebellion, which the *mankis* and the *mundas* as a safety valve within the community prevented, does not preclude the possibilities of other kinds of resistance.

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<sup>70</sup> Damodaran, Vinita. (2011). ‘Customary rights and resistance in the forests of Singhbhum’ in Daniel Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta (ed.). *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi*. London: Routledge

<sup>71</sup> See the various famine reports of the Rev. Dept. (Branch-Agri.) in the period between 1897-1902 preserved in the West Bengal State Archives.

<sup>72</sup> Sanjukta Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*, p. 313

When one shifts attention away from trying to look for moments of outright rebellion to different other forms of clandestine, yet disruptive forms of resistance carried on every day, the picture that emerges is not so tranquil. There were, on the one hand, various instances of cultivation carried on surreptitiously, at times with the complicity of the *mankis* and the *mundas*, in the demarcated blocks.<sup>73</sup> On the other, we also find a number of petitions presented to the colonial administrators and filed as objection in the courts by the Hos after demarcations. A total of 124 petitions, for example, were filed in the couple of years after fresh demarcations in six blocks were carried out in 1910.<sup>74</sup> Considering that very few within the Hos knew how to read and write, these petitions only present the tip of the ice berg of the opposition to colonial forest management.

One of the most extreme, as well as common, forms of resistance employed by the Hos to counter the colonial attempts to *conserve* the forests was through the use of arson in the forested areas taken over from them. The use of fire as a form of protest to the usurpation of forests was not specific to Singhbhum alone, and, in a way followed a similar pattern in several other regions as well.<sup>75</sup> What was specific to Singhbhum, however, was its extremely high incidence when compared to other regions - something that made the forest department in Singhbhum especially infamous for its inability to protect the forests.<sup>76</sup> Table II<sup>77</sup>, for example, brings out

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<sup>73</sup> Burrows Report

<sup>74</sup> (Let. from Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to the Commnr. of the Chota Nagpore Province, dated 11/6/13) File No. 378, Forest Dept., CDCR, 1915. Asoka Kumar Sen also studies a number of these petitions, and points out how their text lays out the way in which the local population countered the colonial representation of their practices and customary rights. See Sen, Asoka Kumar. (2011), 'Collaboration and Conflict: Environmental Legacies and the Ho of Kolhan (1700-1918)' in Deepak Kumar, Vinita Damodaran and Rohan D'Souza (ed.). *The British Empire and the Natural World: Environmental Encounters in South Asia*. Delhi: OUP, p. 216. See also his 'Protected Forest Rules and Ho Social Protest' in Chittaranjan Kumar Paty (ed.). (2011). *Forest Government and Tribe*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company

<sup>75</sup> See Guha, Ramchandra. (1989). *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. Delhi: OUP, p.116; Bhattacharya, Neeladri. (1992). 'Colonial State and Agrarian Society' in Burton Stein (ed.) *The Making of Agrarian Policy in India*. Delhi: OUP, p. 131; Prochaska, David. (1986). 'Fire on the mountain: resisting colonialism in Algeria' in Donald Crummey (ed.). *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*. London: James Currey; see also Hobsbawm's discussion of destructive practices during protests and its selective targets. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, p. 26

<sup>76</sup> (Let. No. 532C., from E.G. Chester, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Singhbhum, the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1900) Proc. Nos. 1-4, Rev. Dept., Branch - For., July 1900, WBSA

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

the proportion of the failures in forest conservation within Singhbhum to the overall failures in the Bengal presidency in the last few years of the nineteenth century.

For. yr.	Area of protective measures (acres)	Failures areas (acres)	Failures percentage of area attempted	Area of protective measures in Singhbhum(acres)	Failures in Singhbhum
1894-95	1,199,400	5,887	0.49	468,842	3,447
1895-96	1,252,483	373,636	29.83	468,842	301,513
1896-97	1,252,483	39,592	3.16	468,842	13,619
1897-98	1,249,765	338,543	27.09	468,842	279,593

Table II

Right from the period when forest conservancy was still in its infancy, the use of fire by the Hos had been singled out as one of those 'greatest evils' which had to be curbed, restricted and expunged.<sup>78</sup> The first inquiries into the forests of Singhbhum in the 1870s also amongst other things, focussed primarily on the damage done to the trees by the use of fire.<sup>79</sup> However, all through this period what vexed the colonial officialdom greatly was the cause behind these fires. Were these naturally caused and carried over wide areas because of the strong winds that blew across the region in the warmer months? Or were these fires intentionally lighted by the Hos who ventured into the demarcated forests to glean forest produce or to carry on cultivation? There were certainly some cases, when a fire originating in surrounding region, was carried by the strong winds into the demarcated areas.<sup>80</sup> But forest fires within the heart of the reserves and in areas far away from the adjoining states could not be attributed to only natural causes. Back in the late 1860s, Valentine Ball had remarked that natural causes could hardly explain the frequent occurrence of the fires in the region:

<sup>78</sup> (Copy of a Memorandum by the Conservator of Forests, Bengal on the subject of checking the jungle fires, dated Calcutta, the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1872) Proc, No. 18, File no. 18, Rev. Dept., Branch-For., WBSA

<sup>79</sup> Roychoudhary, *Bihar District Gazetteers: Singhbhum*, p. 109

<sup>80</sup> (Let. No. 776 P., from H.L. Stephenson, Esq., I.C.S. Private Secy. to his Honor the Lt.-Governor of Bengal to the Commnr. of Chotanagpur, dated Calcutta, the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1904) Proc. Nos. - 7-8, File No.3-F/3-3, Rev. Dept., Branch - For., September 1904, WBSA

Some Europeans in India appear to have an idea that these fires are occasionally due to spontaneous combustion; this view, I need hardly state, is completely erroneous, and altogether without foundation. The lighting of the fires is the deliberate act of the people, the principle object being to obtain a fresh crop of herbage for the cattle. The removal of the undergrowth also facilitates transit through jungle.<sup>81</sup>

By the turn of the century, this opinion was firmly established within the colonial officialdom. The colonial state by this time, was trying to deliberate upon a series of penal mechanisms, which would be best able to catch the 'offenders' and thereby reduce if not completely stop, the high incidence of fires. However, these debates around greater penal mechanisms to check fires in the forests throw interesting evidence of how arson was deployed strategically to counter colonial attempts at greater restrictions within the forests.

In 1900, the Deputy Conservator of Forests for the Singhbhum Division, E.G. Chester in a letter addressed to the Conservator of Forests of the Bengal presidency referred to the ineffectiveness of the existing legislation to curb forest fires in Singhbhum. The underlying tone of the letter was that legislation framed at an all-India level, needed amendment at the local level, as it could not encapsulate the 'special difficulties'<sup>82</sup> with regard to protection from fire in Singhbhum. The root cause of these 'special difficulties' lay in the fact that, despite the best of the attempts, demarcated blocks, including reserves, for reasons noted in the previous section, could never be completely closed to the local population.<sup>83</sup> In a situation when a large section of graziers, gleaners, hunters and men and women employed on various works within the forests, regularly accessed the woodlands for greater part of the year, the high incidence of forests was scarcely surprising. The Hos in most instances, would fire their way through the forests while collecting fruits, twigs, branches and other minor forest produce.<sup>84</sup> At many times, they would leave lit cigarettes or burning bonfires behind leading to large swathes of forested land catching fire.<sup>85</sup> Chester in fact,

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<sup>81</sup> Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 68

<sup>82</sup> (Let. No. 532C., from E.G. Chester, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Singhbhum, the 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 1900) Proc. Nos. 1-4, Rev. Dept., Branch - Forests, July 1900, WBSA, para 9

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, paras 11-13

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, para 10

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, para 4

considered the accidental/deliberate binary irrelevant to explain the occurrence of forest fires. Even a fire, caused by accident or carelessness involved, according to him, a prior breach of forest rules and thus needed to be strictly dealt with.<sup>86</sup>

The penal measures, which Chester intended to introduce in Singhbhum and on the basis of which he proposed amendments in the existing legislation, was to make entire villages responsible (at times even neighbouring ones) for the damage done to the forests by the fires.<sup>87</sup> This was to do with the fact that more often than not, it was groups, rather than individuals, who were involved in the fires caused in the forests. For Chester, this was explained by the fact, that the inhabitants of Singhbhum - the Kols - were members of a 'community' who perambulated the forests collectively for means of subsistence.<sup>88</sup> In fact, even when not directly involved, the complicity of various sections within the Hos was at various levels. For example, tribal headmen at times were involved in allowing and not reporting breach of forest laws that led to huge fires; many other villagers were just disinterested and did not turn up even when forest officers landed up in a village to extinguish these fires.

The provision of collective responsibility, it was felt, would induce various sections within the Hos, for fear of punishment, to check, prevent and stop fires, besides also helping the colonial state in detecting offenders. Such measures, it was also felt, could effectively counter the problems posed by the scarce crew of professional staff with the forest department, and induce the otherwise untrustworthy *mankis* and *mundas* to oversee the forests.<sup>89</sup> Chester was quite hopeful that the measures proposed by him if incorporated within the existing legislation had the potential of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., para 4

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., para 12, 16

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., para 7

<sup>89</sup> Even the little professional staff that was employed in the region were seen by the high standing colonial officials as inept and incapable of checking the fires in the region. An interesting case was one of Babu Rakhal Das Chakrabarty. He was appointed as a Forest Ranger in Singhbhum in 1901 after passing out from the Dehradun Forest School. A massive forest fire spreading over 51, 400 acres in one reserved range of Singhbhum in 1903 was seen as being the result of 'slackness' displayed by Chakrabarty during the previous fire season. The official reason submitted by him, about being ill at that time, could not placate the higher officials and he was subsequently transferred to a less important charge with a warning of severe punishment 'in the event of his failure to display more energy and industry in the future'. (Let. No. 115, from the Conservator of Forests, Bengal to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. (For.) Dept.), Proc. no. 10-11, File No. 3 - F/3 - 5, WBSA



reversing the poor record of the Forest Department in Singhbhum, and wanted it to be extended to both the reserved and the protected forests:

After many years of disheartening failures in the efforts of the Forest Department in Bengal, and more especially in Singhbhum, the prospect now offered of assistance by an amendment of the Forest Act is very welcome. I feel confident that the proposed amendment with regard to joint responsibility will be regarded as without doubt justifiable in the cases of the protected forests, and, I submit, should apply also to the reserved forests which are so much more valuable, and on which the dependents of the present generation will depend for forest produce. The application to the protected forests only would encourage the people in districts like Singhbhum in their present treatment of the reserved forests which they would burn more extensively than even now, to clear the surface for purposes of easy penetration when their own more peculiar hunting grounds were less practicable by being burnt.<sup>90</sup>

These measures were subsequently approved by the Government of Bengal within a few months after they were proposed. In fact, the Lieutenant Governor while giving his approval for the proposed amendments went a step further and made the rules more stringent. Referring to the experience of Punjab, where the same measures had been introduced, the Lieutenant Governor pointed out how the villagers when faced with the prospect of a collective fine, would often produce a 'scape goat' to escape their responsibilities. This in his opinion could be checked by specifying that merely producing the offender would not absolve the other villagers of the punishment.<sup>91</sup>

However, the institution of stringent penal measures, such as the ones recounted above could not check the high incidence of forest fires. Arson was deployed by the Hos extremely surreptitiously, making it hard to detect and prevent. W.H. Haines, who prepared the first working plan for the forests of Singhbhum, remarked that more than 90 per cent of the cases in which the colonial officials were able to detect the 'offender' was by mere chance, 'as no man who planned a forest fire is likely to

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., para 19

<sup>91</sup> (Let. No. 1193T. - R., from S.A. Slacke, Esq., Offg., Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal to the Secy. to the Govt. of India, Rev. and Agri. Dept., dated Darjeeling, the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1910) Proc. No. 3, Rev. Dept., Branch - For., July 1900, WBSA

be caught except by a stroke of luck'.<sup>92</sup> Massive fires would break out simultaneously in several parts of the forests and the extinguishing of one would be immediately followed by another in a different part of the forest.<sup>93</sup> A report presented on forest fires in Singhbhum for the year 1904 remarked that these fires, in more than half of the cases, were an expression of the resentment of the villagers to the new regime of restrictions introduced by the colonial state:

...the reason of it (maliciously caused forest fires) is not far to seek. It is the villagers surrounding the Saitba forest who were formerly allowed to collect firewood from any part of that forest, under the working plan now in force, are compelled to get their wood from one or other of the four coupes. These areas are chosen with a view to supplying the wants of the villagers as conveniently as may be as regards distance from their houses; but obviously certain of the villagers have to go further for their wood than they formerly had, and they resent this. The fires which have occurred in this forests have usually originated in remote parts of the forest: in one case the fire was lit on two sides of a ridge simultaneously, and the forest guard and coolies engaged in putting out the fire on one side were not even aware, owing to the steepness of the locality, that the other side was also burning.<sup>94</sup>

This report examined a total of 24 major fires that spread over 57, 330 acres, over the course of the year. Table II gives the final results of the report.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Quoted (Let. No. 532C., from E.G. Chester, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Singhbhum, the 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 1900) Proc. Nos. 1-4, Rev. Dept., Branch - Forests, July 1900, WBSA, para 4

<sup>93</sup> (Let. No. 532C., from E.G. Chester, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Singhbhum, the 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1900) Proc. Nos. 1-4, Rev. Dept., Branch - For., July 1900, WBSA, para 9

<sup>94</sup> (Report on Forest Fires in Singhbhum, Let. No. 77C., from J.W.A. Grieve, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa 1<sup>st</sup> June 1904) Proc. no. 11, Rev. Dept., Branch - For., Sep. 1904, WBSA

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

Range	Forest	Date of Occurrence	Area burnt	Remarks
Chaibasa	Saitba	13 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	Acres - 20	Maliciously caused. The fire originated inside the forest remote from any road.
Chaibasa	Saitba	14 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	Acres - 960	Malicious. The fire commenced on a high grassy hill at midday, when a high wind was blowing. One Moika Ho was prosecuted.
Chaibasa	Santara	14 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	Acres - 60	Accidental, when burning fire lines.
	Saitba	19 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	Acres - 30	Malicious. Started in a remote part of the forest away from any road or boundary line.
	Saitba	19 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	Acres - 2	Malicious.
	Saitba	19 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	Small	Malicious. Three fires occurred this day in the same neighbourhood.
	Saitba	8 <sup>th</sup> May, 1904	Small	Malicious in all probability.
Total Chaibasa	7 fires	.....	Acres - 1072	
Kolhan	Leda	15 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	640	Malicious
	Leda	16 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	640	Malicious. The accused was acquitted.
	Leda	29 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	100	Unknown.
	Latua	28 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	Small	Malicious. Offenders sentenced to four months rigorous imprisonment.
Total Kolhan	4 fires	.....	1, 380	

Koina	Ambia	5 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	.....	A few feet only burnt.
	Ambia	18 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	320 acres	Malicious. To produce a better crop of <i>sabai</i> grass. Two offenders sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment.
	Ankua	23 <sup>rd</sup> April, 1904	640 acres	Malicious. Two offenders sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment.
	Ghatkori	21 <sup>st</sup> April, 1904	940 acres	Malicious. One offender to three months' rigorous imprisonment.
	Ghatkori	22 <sup>nd</sup> April, 1904	213 acres	Malicious. Offender not discovered.
Total Koina	5 fires	.....	2,133	
Samta	Tirilposi	28 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	200 acres	Careless. Occurred when burning a forest line.
	Tholokobad	16 <sup>th</sup> April to 19 <sup>th</sup> April, 1904	51,402 acres	This fire originated in the Bonai State, and crossed the western boundary of the Tiriposi block.
	Kodolibad			
	Karampoda			
	Samta			
	Karampoda		960 acres	Probably by carelessness of some passer by.
Total Samta	3 fires	29 <sup>th</sup> April	52,560	
		.....		
Porahat	Bera	11 <sup>th</sup> January 1904	1	Careless. By forest guard burning line.
	Bera	15 <sup>th</sup> April 1904	12	Accidental. Crossed from Anondpur State with a high wind.
			139	
	Songra	19 <sup>th</sup> April 1904	185	Cause unknown.
		.....		
Total Porahat	5 fires			
		.....		
Grand Total Of Division	24 fires		57,330	

It can be seen from the above that in majority of the forest fires seen as 'malicious' no one could be discovered or prosecuted as being responsible for the same. Further, there were several problems imposed by the climate and the terrain, which the colonial state had to deal with while trying to douse the fires. The hot weather and the inaccessibility of many of these areas regularly infested with fires rendered difficult any comprehensive measures in this regard. In certain situations, by the time a forest patrol could bring to the ranger's notice a forest fire it would be already be burning for over twelve hours.<sup>96</sup> The ranger further, on being alerted about a fire had to then go about turning out coolies to the affected areas. But this was a task saddled with many difficulties in most of the areas considering the sparse, as well as recalcitrant, population in areas where forests had been demarcated. The Deputy Conservator of Forests, for example, remarked the following about fire and labour scarcity in the Saranda region:

Difficulty in obtaining labour occurs in Singhbhum...In the case of the Saranda forests, they are one of such a large unbroken extent, that the nearest villages are a full day's journey away from parts of them. Thus, a fire may get quite out of control before the nearest Forest officer even hears of it. Also line clearing and road building is not easily done on account of the small size of the villages and their distance from work...In Singhbhum, generally, labour is not difficult to obtain, if villages are reasonably accessible, but it is yearly becoming dearer.<sup>97</sup>

It was becoming increasingly clear to the colonial officials, that the kind of punitive measures they had contemplated in this regard were hardly enough to check the occurrence of forest fires.<sup>98</sup> Just four years after Chester's calls for stringent collective measures, the colonial state was trying to work out other more restrained measures. Opening up of many parts of the region, which was densely covered with forests through roads, which could serve as the most efficient fire lines, was seen as one

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<sup>96</sup> (Report on Forest Fires in Singhbhum, Let. No. 77C., from J.W.A. Grieve, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa 1<sup>st</sup> June 1904) Proc. no. 11, Rev. Dept., Branch - For., Sep. 1904, WBSA

<sup>97</sup> (Letter from the Deputy Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Deputy Commissioner, Singhbhum, undated) File No. 74, Forest Dept., 1904, CDCR

<sup>98</sup> (Let. No. 274G., from J.W.A. Grieve, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa, the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1904) Proc. no. 4-5, File no. 3-F/3-1, Rev. Dept., Branch - For., Sep. 1904, WBSA

such measure.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, it can also be construed that a better network of roads would have also facilitated rapid movement of fire patrols and extinguishing measures in many of the otherwise secluded areas.<sup>100</sup> Apart from roads, the other measure which was envisaged to secure a section of the population which could 'willingly' assist the forest officials in putting out fires was by re-settling abandoned areas and converting them into forest villages.<sup>101</sup> These were areas located amidst demarcated blocks, where a number of concessions such as cultivation, rent free lands, grazing rights and low assessment on forest produce, were allowed through a special tenure. These concessions it was hoped, could secure a settled population and a labour force for the many tasks of the Forest Department, especially fire protection. The title deed in fact, laid down clearly that these concessions were contingent on their holders providing labour to the satisfaction of the forest officials and were liable to be withdrawn in their inability to do so.<sup>102</sup>

However, concessions such as the above, given ironically to secure a settled labour force for fire protection, in turn posed a threat of more forest fires. Gleaners would burn the undergrowth of trees to make what they intended to collect visible; graziers would use fire to improve the pasturage. There were also cases when those entrusted with fire protection were themselves involved, intentionally as well as because of carelessness, in setting up forest fires. In 1915, for example, there was a big fire in one of the ranges which spanned over 400 acres. On enquiry, it was found that this had been set alight by the coolies who had been recently recruited to clear the forest lines. The Forest Administration Report for the year 1915-16 described the turn of events on that day in the following words:

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> Road building was one of the tasks, which the Forest Department lay special emphasis to right from its first days. Apart from fire protection, a better network of roads, after all, was also important for facilitating the commercial exploitation of timber and other forest produce. The General Administration Report of Singhbhum for the year 1878-79, for example, pointed out in many places, the Forest Department itself took the task for improving and repairing existing roads. See (General Administration Report 1878-79) File no. 734, 1879, CDCR

<sup>101</sup> (Let. No. 274G., from J.W.A. Grieve, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Dep. Commr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa, the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1904) Proc. no. 4-5, File no. 3-F/3-1, Rev. Dept., Branch - For., Sep. 1904, WBSA

<sup>102</sup> See appendix II for the complete text of the agreement signed by the Hos for the settlement of a Forest Village.

They came in a body to do the work allotted to them and in order to lighten their labour they at once began to burn the swept stuff during daytime without waiting for a favourable time or for the arrival of the Forest Guard or the fire patrol, neglectful of the high wind that was blowing at the time. The fire soon got out of control and although they at first tried to put it out by beating, they at last ran away without informing anybody of the occurrence when they found out that the fire was spreading over a large area. As the whole forest in the neighbourhood was covered with smoke by a fire of the Bonai State the Forest Guard and the patrol who were nearby could not discover the fire till the next morning and they extinguished it by the evening.<sup>103</sup>

Resistance through such means, in the context of shrinking resources and other social and cultural changes, was part of the everyday struggle for subsistence of the most marginal sections within the Hos, and thus remained difficult to stop. Despite the best of the attempts, these enigmatic forest fires rendered forest conservancy an extremely difficult and challenging enterprise for the colonial state. The above cited report described the difficult predicament of the Forest Department in the following words:

*In Singhbhum...most of the fires are lighted by the people intentionally in the heart of the forests. Any effort however ingenious on the part of the Department to successfully protect the forests is rendered futile...It will be seen that out of the 29 fires reported no less than 23 have been classed under "Unknown causes" (excluding the five cases of the unprotected areas) according to the standing orders although there can be no doubt that most of these fires were alight on purpose by human agency...Incendiarism specially in cases of forest fires is very difficult to detect and all attempts on the part of the subordinate to bring the culprits to book were of no avail.*<sup>104</sup>

To conclude, we can say that despite inducing several changes and transformations in Singhbhum, measures adopted for forest conservancy could not completely bulldoze the complex arrangement of local rights to forests. In fact, the colonial state's attempts at exacting a uniformity of procedure to work out its various policies remained unrealized in practice. At times, it had to concede certain claims; on other

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<sup>103</sup> (Forest Administration Report, 1915-16), Forest Department, Collection No. II, File No. 9, CDCR, p. 19, emphasis mine.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid

occasions, when it did not, the furtive yet effective ways and means adopted by the Hos to counter these new restrictions forced the colonial state to reformulate its initial ambitions. The will of the conservationists to transform Singhbhum and its forests into some sort of *an eden of the east* had to concurrently contend and negotiate with the numerous other wills of the different local actors for whom these forests were both a dwelling place and a means of subsistence. And despite invocations about the need to sternly enforce the '*hukum*'<sup>105</sup> of the Raj, officials directed to enforce these policies had to constantly grapple with and manoeuvre their way around these problems.

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<sup>105</sup> (Note) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, CDCR, 1908-09



## Conclusion

The present work has attempted to historically trace the new techniques of organisation employed by the colonial state for expanding its rule in Singhbhum. This has necessitated an interrogation of the state/community boundary as well as well as the differentiation within the local communities inhabiting the region. Were different sections within the local community equally affected by the expansion of colonial rule? If not, then what were the different responses of these different sections to these larger processes at work? And in turn, how did the colonial state respond to the different exigencies it faced in Singhbhum? These are some of the questions I have tried to address in the present work by looking at different aspects of the colonial intervention in Singhbhum over the nineteenth century. However, this rudimentary attempt to outline a broad framework for understanding the colonial state's engagement with local communities is riddled with certain serious lacunae. This has been primarily because of the paucity of time and the archival material now at my disposal. As a way of concluding the present work, let me throw

light on some of these limitations which I hope to rectify over the course of my future research.

Any attempt to deal with the transformations within the local communities during the colonial period needs to set it against the changes within the village organisation and tribal structures of authority in the pre-colonial period. I have attempted to make up for this serious shortcoming in the work by borrowing from Sanjukta Dasgupta's work in chapter 1. However, this aspect needs to be dealt with in more detail. In fact, the whole of chapter 1 is reconstructed on the basis on very scanty sources. This has been largely because of the fact that I have not been able to consult many records that deal with the earliest encounters of the colonial state with the region. Many of these records are preserved at the Bihar State Archives in Patna which I hope to consult over the course of my future work.

Speaking of sources, the present work has largely drawn from only one kind of sources - military despatches, administration reports, settlement reports, forest reports and correspondence between various colonial officials. Though these sources deal with examining the central question of this research, i.e. the many contingencies of colonial administration, they cannot be solely relied upon to reconstruct the internal dynamics of the Hos. In this regard, the folklore of the Hos as well as missionary accounts can illuminate many aspects of social life of the Hos that are usually concealed in the above kind of records.

Another problem of the work is the over emphasis in the analysis on the central upland region categorised by the British as the Kolhan Government Estate, almost to the occlusion of other sub-regions such as Dhalbhum, Porahat, Kera, Kharsawan and the Bandgaon. Even when these have been dealt with, it has only been in connection with how the developments in these places affected developments within Kolhan. However, this seems to paint a picture of certain uniformity to the colonial policies all across the district, which was not always the case. The policy of rule adopted in these regions was the not the same as in Kolhan. These regions had been retained under some or the native ruler till much later than Kolhan, before the British finally established their direct control. Even the processes of agrarian re-organisation and

the ways and means through which the forests were usurped in Kolhan did not follow the same course in these other regions. This was related to the regional variations within the district, in terms of the tenorial patterns as well as the landscape. For example, the region of Dhalbhum on the very eastern frontier of Singhbhum was a privately owned and a permanently settled estate sharing more in common with the Bengal plains to its east than with the more forested tracts to its west.

The present work also focuses extensively on the transformations only within the Hos and the changes within other communities inhabiting the region – the Santhals, Bhumijis, Paharias, the Tantis to name a few – are not at all analysed. As remarked in the beginning of this study, the Hos did not exist in isolation from these other communities but were tied in a number of social, economic and ritual ties with them. This aspect, however, could not be covered in the present study.

Though I have extensively focussed upon the colonial refashioning of the hierarchies within the Hos, the gendered nature of these hierarchies has been largely obfuscated. Women had been excluded from any property rights even within the customary laws of the Hos (as well as several other tribal communities). They would have been further marginalized during the colonial period when the existing hierarchies were increasingly exacerbated. The different ways in which the women related to the changes under colonialism could not be examined.

Most of these above gaps and silences need to be corrected for any comprehensive examination of the questions that I have perfunctorily attempted to deal with here.

# Appendix I

## List of Jungle Products used as articles of Food in Chota Nagpur<sup>1</sup>

### SEEDS

NAMES	VERNACULAR NAMES	REMARKS
<i>Shorea robusta, Roxb.</i> .....	Sal .....	Much used by the Sontals; occasionally roasted and eaten alone, but more frequently boiled up with the dried flowers of <i>mhowa</i> .
<i>Bauhinia Vahlii, W. &amp; A.</i> .....	Chehúr .....	Sometimes stored, but more frequently roasted and eaten close to the spot where found.
<i>Mucuna imbricate, D.C.</i> .....	Kusee	
----- <i>prurita, Hook.</i> .....	Akussa or Kiwách	
----- <i>nivea, Buch.</i> .....	Khamach?.....	Sometimes cultivated.
<i>Terminalia bellerica, Roxb.</i> .....	Bhæra or Bora .....	Kernels if eaten in quantity are said to produce intoxication.
----- <i>catappa, Linn.</i> .....	Bádám .....	Seeds used as a substitute for almonds.
<i>Fuirena ciliaris, R. Br.</i> .....	Band-kobi .....	Seeds used as a sort of meal, and are sometimes ground into flour before use.
<i>Cassia fistula, Linn.</i> .....	Bunderlati or Amultás ...	Placenta between the seeds used to make sherbet.
<i>Nelumbium speciosum, Willd.</i> ..	Moolum Puddoo or Bansera .....	
<i>Ventilago calyculata, Tulasne.</i> ....	?	Seeds eaten in the same way as those of Sal.

### FRUITS

<i>Bassia latifolia, Roxb.</i> .....	Moul or Mhowa .....	The fruit is dried in the sun and eaten in times of scarcity, and the seeds yield an oil which is used as substitute for <i>ghi</i> .
<i>Buchanania latifolia, Roxb.</i> .....	Piál or Piár .....	Fruit collected and sold in bazaars.
<i>Magnifera Indica, Linn.</i> .....	Am .....	Tree occasionally found wild in the jungle;

<sup>1</sup> Source: Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 695-696

<i>Spondias magnifera, Pers.</i> .....	Amará .....	use of fruit well known; seeds softened by steam and eaten in times of famine.
<i>Ziziphus jujuba, Lam.</i> .....	Bier .....	Fruit eaten raw when ripe; pickled when unripe.
<i>Ziziphus cænopia, Mill.</i> .....	Siá-Kol or Makoi ....	Is dried and stored. A cultivated variety yields a much larger fruit.
----- <i>rugosa, Lam.</i> .....	?	A small black fruit having a slightly acid taste.
<i>Ficus Indica, Roxb.</i> .....	Bur .....	Are much eaten in time of scarcity by the very poorest Sontals and Kols.
----- <i>religiosa, Linn.</i> .....	Pipul .....	
----- <i>glomerata, Roxb.</i> .....	Doomur	
<i>Carissa carandus, Linn.</i> .....	Benchi or Karroná ..	Is capable of much improvement by cultivation.
<i>Trapa bispinosa, Roxb.</i> .....	Páni-phul or Singhára .....	Are procurable in large quantities in some of the tanks. They furnish a very wholesome food.
----- <i>quadrispinosa, Roxb.</i> .....		
<i>Eugenia Jambolana, Lam.</i> .....	Jamún .....	Fruit is collected and sold in bazaars.
<i>Diospyros melanoxylon, Roxb.</i> ..	Keond or Kaned.....	Ditto.
----- <i>exsculpta, Lam.</i> .....	?	
----- <i>embryopteris, Roxb.</i> ...	Makúr-kendi.....	
<i>Olax scandes, Roxb.</i> .....	Koko-aroo	
<i>Ægle marmeles, Corr.</i> .....	Bael.....	Chiefly used for making sherbet, but are also prepared in other ways.
<i>Feronia elephantum, Linn.</i> .....	Kuthbel .....	
<i>Tamarindus Indica, Linn.</i> .....	Tetul or Emle .....	Dried and exported in large quantities.
<i>Alangium Decapetalum, Lam.</i> ...	Bágh-ankúra .....	Fruit somewhat astringent.
<i>Flacourtia sapida, Roxb.</i> .....	Katái	
----- <i>cataphracta, Roxb.</i> ....	Páni-zali	
<i>Phyllanthus emblica, Linn.</i> .....	Ourá .....	Used for making pickles.
<i>Bauhinia variegata, Linn.</i> .....	Catchuá	
<i>Mimusops elengi, Linn.</i> .....	Bohl or Moulseré	
<i>Semicarpus anacardium, Linn.</i> ..	Bellá .....	Acrid, except when perfectly ripe.
<i>Erycibe paniculata, Roxb.</i> .....	?	
<i>Schleichera trijuga, Willd.</i> .....	Khusm	
<i>Boswellia serrata, Colebr.</i> .....	Sálgá	
<i>Karivia umbellata, Arn.</i> .....	Rakhalsusa .....	Both ripe and unripe fruits are eaten.
<i>Coccinia grandis, W. &amp; A.</i> .....	Tela-kúcha	

## Appendix II

### Form of Proposed Agreement for settlement of a Forest village on the site of the former village site of Tholkobad:<sup>1</sup>

I.....raiyat of.....agree to take up land for cultivation at Tholkobad within the Government reserved forests, and that in return for holding the same rent free I agree to assist in any labour which I may be called upon to do by the Forest Officers in charge of these said forests, such labour being paid for at the rates now in force in the Saranda Pir and neighbourhood.

This agreement shall be renewed every three years at the absolute discretion of the Divisional Forest Officer, Singhbhum, whose decision shall be final. I agree to pay an annual fees of annas four -/4/- for dry firewood and poles to be removed from the Reserved Forests in quantities sufficient for the wants of my household, but not for sale or barter.

That in the event of failure to provide labour to satisfaction of the Divisional Forest Officer, Singhbhum Division, I agree to vacate the land on being called upon to do so by him and that no claims for compensation shall lie in respect of any standing crop sown by me on such land.

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<sup>1</sup> File no. 74, For. Dept., 1904, CDCR

## Glossary

<i>Amins</i>	Locals who assisted revenue officials of the district administration during land surveys
<i>Bad</i>	Low embanked rice lands for wet cultivation
<i>Bandhs</i>	Embankment which acts as a dam in a channel of water or which holds up the catchment of a slope
<i>Bera</i>	Middle lands
<i>Bigha</i>	A unit of measuring lands
<i>Chowkidars</i>	Village watchman
<i>Dikus</i>	Non-tribal outsiders in tribal areas
<i>Gora</i>	Upland
<i>Hats</i>	Weekly markets
<i>Hukum</i>	order, command, etc
<i>Jagir</i>	Land given to someone in return of certain services
<i>Jagirdars</i>	Holder of <i>jagir</i> land
<i>Khuntkattidar</i>	Descendents of the original reclaimers of forest land
<i>Koel</i>	Cuckoo bird
<i>Laikabadi</i>	Cultivable wasteland
<i>Lakhiraj</i>	A revenue free grant of a particular village
<i>Mahua</i>	<i>Madhuca longifolia</i>
<i>Malguzari</i>	Rent
<i>Manki</i>	Tribal headman of a cluster of villages
<i>Moharrir</i>	Officials who issued stamp on documents
<i>Munda</i>	Tribal village headman
<i>Nabakabadi</i>	Unculturable wasteland

<i>Patta</i>	Title deeds of land issued by the government to tenants
<i>Perwannah</i>	Warrant or summon usually issued by the British during military operations asking the rebels to surrender
<i>Pirs</i>	Confederation of a group of villages
<i>Raiyats</i>	Tenants
<i>Sarkar</i>	Government
<i>Sipahees</i>	Soldiers
<i>Taluk</i>	Sub-division of a district
<i>Urzee</i>	Appeal
<i>Vakeel</i>	Lawyer



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