

**Contesting Claims and Contingencies of Rule:
Singhbhum, 1800-2000**

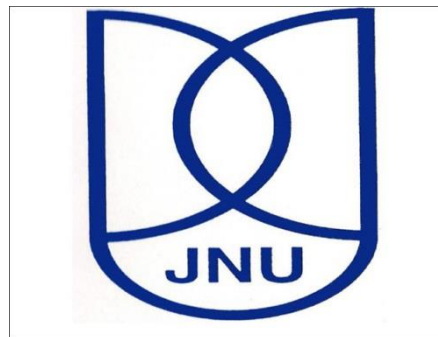
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I, SYED UMAR KHALID, hereby declare that the thesis titled "Contesting Claims and Contingencies of Rule: Singhbhum, 1800-2000" submitted by me in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my original work. The Thesis has not been previously submitted in part or full for the award of any other degree of this university or any other university.

(Syed Umar Khalid)

CERTIFICATE

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

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Dedicated to

Rohith Vemula and Gauri Lankesh

who fought resolutely in their lives, and continue
to inspire millions even today

*The most beautiful thing for those who
have fought a whole life
is to come to the end and say;
we believed people and life,
and life and the people
never let us down
- Otto Rene Castillo*

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*In the slaughter house of love,
they kill only the best ,
none of the weak or the deformed.
Don't run away from this dying,
whoever is not killed for love is already dead meat.*

Needless to say, the responsibilities for all the errors in the work remain mine.

July, 2018

Syed Umar Khalid

Abbreviations

Admin.	-	Administration
Agri.	-	Agriculture
App.	-	Appendix
Assist.	-	Assistant
BSA	-	Bihar State Archives
DCRR	-	District Collectorate Record Room
Col.	-	Colonel
Commnr.	-	Commissioner
Dep.	-	Deputy
Dept.	-	Department
Desp.	-	Despatch
For.	-	Forests
Front.	-	Frontier
Gen.	-	General
Gov.	-	Governor
Govt.	-	Government
GOI	-	Government of India
Jt.	-	Joint
Jud.	-	Judicial
L.P.	-	Lower Provinces
Let.	-	Letter
Lt.	-	Lieutenant
No.	-	Number
Offic.	-	Official
Officiat.	-	Officiating

Para.	-	Paragraph
Pol.	-	Political
Proc.	-	Proceeding(s)
Rep.	-	Report
Resol.	-	Resolution
Rev.	-	Revenue
S.W.	-	South-West
Secy.	-	Secretary
Settl.	-	Settlement
Spl	-	Special
Transl.	-	Translation
Vol.	-	Volume
WBSA	-	West Bengal State Archives
Yr.	-	Year

A late nineteenth century map of Singhbhum



Source: Survey of India, 1890 (included within the Famine Charitable Relief Fund, File no. 1, Revenue Department, Chaibasa District Collectorate Room, 1901-02

Introduction

Towards the close of 2014, I was in Ranchi, for my field work for the present work, when the results to the Jharkhand state assembly elections were declared. For a state beleaguered with factional alliances, a mid-term collapse of all previous governments and the imposition of Presidential rule thrice, the elections results were unusual. It was the first time that a pre-poll alliance, between the BJP and AJSU, managed to secure a majority in the state assembly. And then the BJP went ahead to do something further unusual – they appointed Raghubhar Das, a person who did not belong to any of the communities categorized as Scheduled Tribe as the Chief Minister of the state. For the supporters of the new government, the victory of the BJP-AJSU represented the ‘final dawn of stability’ in the state¹, and Raghubhar Das’s appointment a challenge to the ‘traditional entitlements of power’.² However, the mood amongst certain activists that I interacted with in Ranchi, from an organization called *Visthaphan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andalon*³ (VVJVA), was quite sombre in the face of these developments. For them, the choice of a ‘non-tribal/outsider’ for the post of the CM was a declaration of the ‘anti-*adivasi*’ (*adivasi virodhi*) intent on the part of the new government. Another prominent

¹ Tewary, Amarnath. (2014) ‘A vote for stability in Jharkhand’, *The Hindu*, Ranchi, December 23, 2014

² Anuja. (2014). ‘BJP goes off script, chooses non-tribal Raghubar Das as Jharkhand chief minister’ (accessed via <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/vUTQss8CLP7Cysb0kPb0TN/Raghubar-Das-elected-new-Jharkhand-chief-minister.html>)

³ Literally meaning the Anti-Displacement, People’s Development Movement

activist in Jharkhand, Dayamani Barla was cited in the press calling this choice as an affront to the legacy of Jharkhand, and the decades long movement that had led to its creation.⁴ The stability of the government was also not something necessarily positive, and the VVJVA activists pointed out that the ruling party was no longer dependent on allies now to carry out far reaching changes. As I sat down in one of their meetings, I heard their members, who had come from different parts of Jharkhand, forewarn of an escalation of the ‘attack’ on the adivasis. Invariably, the discussion would come down to the corporate scramble for land in Jharkhand. Just a few weeks before my arrival in Ranchi, massive farmers’ protests across the country had forced the central government to retreat on its amendments, via an ordinance, in the Land Acquisition Act. Citing that, the VVJVA activists feared that the new government would now zero in on the land laws of Jharkhand, most specifically the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (SPTA). These two acts were introduced by the British in the backdrop of the Munda *ulgulan* (in 1908) and the Santhal *hool* (in 1855) as an attempt to safeguard tribal rights to land and forests vis-a-vis the ‘non-tribals/outsideers’. It sought to give statutory recognition to the adivasi claims to lands and forests, which were seen as being knotted with their customs and traditions and safeguarded them against alienation and transfer. The convenor of the VVJVA, Damodar Turi, in his speech, pointed out that big businesses were now eyeing these lands in Jharkhand, rich in minerals, and this was the reason they ensured the person closest to them was appointed as the CM. “This is the return of Company Raj to Jharkhand”, Turi concluded his speech with this forewarning, and the meeting ended with charting out a plan of agitations across different districts of Jharkhand to save the most revered legacies of the *ulgulan* and the *hool*. A leaflet distributed prior to the meeting, inviting people to attend it, had described the challenges of the present in the following words:

Under the leadership of Birsa Munda, Sidu-Kanu, Tilka Manjhi, Nilambar-Pitambar, adivasi movements forced certain legislations (on the British), and using their rights put up a struggle to claim ownership of land that had been appropriated by the zamindars, traders, money-lenders, contractors, land mafia, mining mafia, etc and resisted land acquisition by government for various companies. Today, the

⁴ ‘Raghubar Das set to be Jharkhand’s 1st non-tribal CM’, *The Times of India (Mumbai edition)*. 27 Dec 2014.

government is trying to amend Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act in order to facilitate land acquisition for various multinational corporations...The right over land produced through the CNTA was the result of the struggle by the masses, whereas the bureaucrats and politicians today are flouting this law to loot the land of the struggling adivasis by hook and crook. Adivasis today with nothing in their hands except for the bows and arrows will have to rage a storm of mass movements against the loot of their land and resources.⁵

The fears of my hosts in Ranchi were not unfounded. After giving many indications, the BJP-AJSU government moved in towards amending the CNTA and SPTA two years later. It first brought in an ordinance to amend the acts in May 2016. The ordinance did not get the Presidential nod, following which the ruling party, commanding an absolute majority introduced and passed it in the state assembly. The amendments sought to ease the several restrictions imposed by the two acts regarding the acquisition and transfer of lands in the state. The changes led to massive protests across Jharkhand, precipitating a far reaching crisis for the government. Opposition parties and their leaders, ironically including previous CMs who had themselves tried to amend the CNTA during their reign, now seized upon this moment to attack the government. Responding to the amendment, Babu Lal Marandi, for example, commented:

You can't apply age-old mentality of land acquisition in tribal area which has always been hesitant to embrace non-tribal world.⁶

Beyond Jharkhand, platforms had sprung up even in the national capital to 'Save the CNTA/SPTA'. In popular perception, these changes were portrayed as a body blow to the *adivasi* communities inhabiting Jharkhand and the breach of the "last firewall" that protected them and their lands.⁷ As people mobilized to save these legislations, memories and invocations of the past were conspicuous by their presence all around. A journalist reached the village of Birsa Munda, to witness the following scene:

⁵ Pamphlet (undated) titled *Ulgulan Jaari Hai* by VVJVA (Translation mine)

⁶ Jitendra. (2016). 'Amendments to century-old laws on tribal rights spark protests in Jharkhand', *DownToEarth*, 24th November 2016, (accessed via <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/amendments-to-century-old-tribal-rights-laws-spark-protests-in-jharkhand-56411>) (*emphasis mine*)

⁷ Singh, Sneha. (2017). 'A tale of land loss, from Birsa's village', (accessed via <http://www.governancenow.com/news/regular-story/a-tale-land-loss-birsa-munda-village-ulihatu-tribal-land>)

Past the tamarind and jackfruit trees, and the hens and chickens flitting from hut to hut and across the road, men are gathering in the common hall of the village, marked by an arch that says 'The birthplace of Bhagwan Birsa Munda'. Children sit watching on the boundary wall, and gun-toting CRPF commandos in fatigues strut about. From within the hall is heard the voice of men solemnly pledging to fight against the amendments to the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (SPTA)...The pledge is being read out in front of a statue of Dharti Aaba, or "father of the earth", as the tribals have deified Birsa Munda.⁸

The outpouring of protestors on the streets was followed by outpouring of several quasi-historical writings that sought to explain the historical 'origins' and 'legacy' of the CNTA. To take one example, a journalist sought to answer the question as to "why are the tribals angry over proposed changes" with the following *historically informed* explanation:

Land is at the core of tribal societies' survival. As per the customs of Munda and Santhal tribals, the ownership of land belongs to all the families of the same *killi* (clan), who cleared the forest and made land cultivable. This age old custom provides an identity of being a Munda or Santhal and their country. The British fought many wars against tribals of Chotanagpur and Santhal Pargana for almost 100 years. They were unable to deal with continuous grievances of tribal against usurpation of their land rights. With the passage of time, the violence started getting lethal and spread like wildfire. It led to killing of thousands of tribals. The violence in Santhal Pargana came to halt after British came up with a different district administrative set up in 1855 to appease Santhals and redress their grievances. It had helped strengthening the sense of security among the tribals about their homeland. This different administrative set up culminated into separate act in 1949 as the SPT Act. Whereas, with the enactment of the CNT Act, the British tried to end the simmering discontent among the general population of Chota Nagpur Plateau. Given the fact that people of Chota Nagpur were greatly attached to their land assets, the CNT Act 1908 went a long way in establishing peace in the region.⁹

It was not for the first time that these tropes of difference and the mutual antagonism of tribals versus non-tribals were been invoked. Right from the early decades of the 20th century, the movement for the separate statehood of Jharkhand had repeatedly articulated that Jharkhand was an abode of the tribals to whom it should be restored to, and in whose interests it should be governed in line with. Sanjay Basu Mallick, articulated this view very clearly in his 'historical analysis' of the Jharkhand movement when he stated the centuries long conflict in Jharkhand is basically a conflict between two

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Jitendra, 'Amendments to century-old laws on tribal rights spark protests in Jharkhand'

different social systems (tribal and non-tribal).¹⁰ The adivasis are represented as an ‘other’ to the people of caste societies, a homogenous people, who share a symbiotic relationship and whose claim over resources are based on custom and traditions. Over the last decade and a half, as vast parts of the adivasi hinterland have been embroiled in a civil war between the Maoists and the security forces of the state, these tropes of difference have neatly coalesced with another related theme. In several writings that emerged in response to the initiation of military operations against the Maoists in 2009, the adivasi rebel (constituting the basic cadre of the Maoist guerrilla army) was represented as a modern incarnation of a primitive rebel, who by standing up armed in defence of his commons epitomises the critique of modern capitalism and its individualistic values. In her celebrated essay *Walking with the Comrades* based on her visit into the heart of the rebellion, noted writer Arundhati Roy sought to place the present Maoist movement within a trajectory of several tribal rebellions since the colonial period. In her words, the history of the ‘resistance’ of the tribal people in this part of the country predated the Naxalites, and their ideological inspiration the Chinese communist leader, Mao Tse-Tung by several centuries. And in a very evocative passage, she sought to mark off the distinctiveness of these (as a police officer told her) ‘greedless’¹¹ people, in contrast to those who are waging a war on them. Describing the annual celebrations of the *Bhumkal* revolt of 1908, Roy writes:

The sound of drums becomes deafening. Gradually, the crowd begins to sway. And then it begins to dance. They dance in little lines of six or seven, men and women separate, with their arms around each other’s waists. Thousands of people. This is what they’ve come for. For this. Happiness is taken very seriously here, in the Dandakaranya forest. People will walk for miles, for days together to feast and sing, to put feathers in their turbans and flowers in their hair, to put their arms around each other and drink mahua and dance through the night. *No one sings or dances alone.*

¹⁰ Mullick, S. Basu (2003). ‘The Jharkhand Movement: A Historical Analysis’ in R.D. Munda and S. Bosu Mullick (ed.) *The Jharkhand Movement: Indigenous Peoples’ Struggle for Autonomy in India*. Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

¹¹ A police officer described to her the difficulties of the police in fighting a people whom it was difficult to buy over. To quote the words of the police officer as cited by Roy, “...this problem can’t be solved by us police or military. The problem with these tribals is they don’t understand greed. Unless they become greedy, there’s no hope for us. I have told my boss, remove the force and instead put a TV in every home. Everything will be automatically sorted out.” Roy, Arundhati. (2010). ‘Walking With the Comrades’ in Outlook, (accessed via <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/walking-with-the-comrades/264738>).

*This, more than anything else, signals their defiance towards a civilisation that seeks to annihilate them.*¹²

In all these writings and invocations, by people and organizations who otherwise profess different politics and viewpoints, there are certain common presumptions which underpin their understanding of the adivasis and their relationship with the state. In all these representations, apart from essentialising adivasis as homogeneous communities operation through customs and traditions, there is also an externality given to the state in its relationship with the adivasi communities. All these different movements - be it the different rebellions in the colonial period or the protests against the CNTA or even the armed struggle waged by the Maoists – are then seen clubbed within a same linear frame, as having been prompted by the modern state's disturbance of the previously idyllic custom based world of the adivasis. These are seen as attempts of the adivasis to save their *jal-jangal-zameen* (water, forests and lands) against avaricious outsiders – embodied by the *sarkar-sahukar-zamindar* nexus in the past and the government-corporate nexus presently. The internal worlds of the adivasis are seen as conflict-less, the only conflicts are with the outsiders.

Such imageries of the adivasis, thereby, also have implications on the prescriptions that are offered to redress their problems. In the light of the marginalization and dispossession of the adivasis from their lands and forests, several debates around democracy, governance and decentralization in tribal tracts has also come centre-stage. The interests of the 'idyllic' adivasi communities are seen as best encapsulated in their customary village bodies. Decentralization and localized governance through customary village bodies, as opposed to top down schemes prepared by those who have no connect or concern with the tribal population, has been a key demand of many movements fighting for adivasi rights. In the words of B.D. Sharma, one of the staunchest advocates of such a framework, the right to manage their own affairs according to their customs, traditions and village bodies, that have sustained these 'peripheral' communities since 'time immemorial' constitute 'the most basic and inalienable right' of the adivasi

¹² Ibid (emphasis mine)

communities.¹³ The recent success of the movement in the Niyamgiri hills of Odhisha, where an organization named *Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti* (NSS) organized several *gram sabhas* and successfully halted Vedanta Aluminium Limited's plans of acquiring lands for mining bauxite, has been showcased as example of the efficacy of local decision for the interests of the adivasis.¹⁴ The success of this movement, termed as 'inspirational' by its leaders, has in turn led to many other organizations attempting to replicate the same strategy of wielding local and customary bodies of the adivasis as a weapon against the external state power.¹⁵

But is opposition to the state and the many 'outsiders' the only response of the adivasis? Has the adivasi 'insider' always stood in a state of antagonism with the non-adivasi 'outsiders'? Have the customary claims of the adivasis remained static over the years? Can the customary claims and village bodies of the adivasis and the modernist paradigm of the state be always posited in opposition to each other? Has state intervention, right from colonial times, never been constitutive of the local village bodies and customary claims of the adivasis? For every example cited by the supporters of the above mentioned framework, there are several counter examples which question its validity. If the NSS organised gram sabhas to halt Vedanta's attempts to acquire land of the adivasis in Odhisa; in another adivasi area of Singhbhum (Jharkhand), it was the mining company, Rungta Mines that took the initiative of organizing the gram sabhas to acquire land for the same purposes. A new report on the latter pointed out the manner in which the gram sabhas representatives were given a share in the spoils by Rungta Mines for facilitating the acquisition of the lands of the adivasis in the villages.¹⁶ The Chattisgarh government raised an entire vigilante force, in connivance with the local

¹³ Sharma, B.D. (2001). *Tribal Affairs in India: The Crucial Transition*. New Delhi: Sahyog Pustak Kuteer, p. 4

¹⁴ 'Interview with Lingaraj Azad, leader of the Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti' (accessed via <http://www.foilvedanta.org/articles/lingaraj-azad-niyamgiri-movement-leader-and-political-activist/>)

¹⁵ 'We Will Not Allow Mining in Mahan: Press Release by Mahan Sangharsh Samiti – Buoyed by the recent victory in Niyamgiri, members of MSS pledge to save Mahan forests from land grab at a historic public meeting' (accessed via <http://www.greenpeace.org/archive-india/en/Press/We-will-not-allow-Mining-in-Mahan-Mahan-Sangharsh-Samiti/>)

¹⁶ Yadav, Anumeha. (2013). 'More mines, fewer schools in former Maoist stronghold', *The Hindu*, Manoharpur (Jharkhand), June 17, 2013

adivasi elite, called the Salwa Judum to counter the Maoists. As per Nandini Sundar, such state's actions find a receptive ground in the class differentiation within local communities, which they, in turn, promote by giving some a share in the spoils, and further marginalizing others. In the words of Sundar:

The formal structure of government, participatory politics and the political reality in which they operate means that for every adivasi movement protesting against displacement or destructive mining or demanding shares in industries, there is now often a counter adivasi movement, propped up by an opposing party.¹⁷

The reality of the complex world of the adivasis, we need to realize, does not confirm to the much romanticized picture of idyllic communities *unitedly* resisting the encroachment of the 'outsiders'. As we have been highlighted in recent scholarship (dealt with below), the internal worlds of the adivasis who are differentiated from within are as much conflict ridden, and therefore include different kinds of responses to the state. Adivasis, thus, resist the incursions of the state and the companies; sections of them also collaborate with it; some also negotiate to enhance their standing vis-à-vis others in their communities. The rallying call of preserving custom, as seen in the current protests against the amendments to CNTA and SPTA, also means different things to different sections within the adivasis. For if the CNTA safeguards the lands recorded under the act from alienation and transfer, what about those who own no lands or have no title deeds for their lands? Is there even a way of classifying their displacement, dispossession or loss over the years? Moreover, what have been the markers and considerations used by the state, and the strategies used by the people, to codify and record their lands in the state's documentary universe? Who has gained and who has lost out? As the colonial past continues to maintain a conspicuous presence in most contemporary articulations of adivasi protests, we seek answers to the above questions by going back to this past. But before coming to the central argument we shall be making in this work, below is a brief summarizing of the manner in which 'adivasis' and 'tribes' have been dealt with in scholarly inquests.

¹⁷ Sundar, Nandini. (2012). 'Adivasi Politics and State Responses: Historical Processes and Contemporary Concerns' in Dasgupta, Sanjukta and Raj Sekhar Basu (ed.). *Narratives from the Margins: Aspects of Adivasi History in India*. New Delhi: Primus Books, p. 251

Writing Adivasis

These imageries of exception and difference themselves have their roots in 19th century colonial writings, when the first accounts and histories of the adivasis started being written by several colonial administrators as well as missionaries. In these writings, the ‘tribe/aboriginals’ were cast in racial terms as distinct from the ‘castes’ of India. There were a number of factors that propelled this interest, at this specific moment in the ‘aborigines’ of India. The new teachings of evolutionary racial ethnology, as Susan Bayly points out, had made India and other colonies an important source of historical data on the supposed transition from ‘primitive’ to ‘advanced’ political institutions. In the evolutionist frame, Europe was seen to have already reached the pinnacle of civilization – a progress that was measured along a temporal axis. It was in the colonies that the *savage*, the *semi-savage*, the *primitive*, the *archaic*, the *out of date* people and institutions still survived. Even within the colonies, ethnological gaze was seduced most to the study of ‘tribes’ – perceived to be at the lowest rungs of civilization.¹⁸ However, unlike what Bayly alludes to, these were not simply abstract intellectual enquiries and were significant for purposes of control, subjugation and governmentality.¹⁹ Several recent studies have emphasized that the knowledge produced in this period on the adivasis and moves towards classification and enumeration of different communities was enmeshed, apart from racial theories, with several political and economic imperatives.²⁰ In fact, the

¹⁸ Bayly, Susan. (1995). “Caste and ‘Race’ in Colonial Ethnography of India” in Peter Robb (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

¹⁹ In this regard, Adam Kuper says, “The idea of primitive society was never the exclusive preserve of social anthropology. It infused the political and historical consciousness of several generations.” Kuper, Adam. (1998). *The Invention of Primitive Society*, New York: Routledge, p. 14; see also Pels, Peter. (1997). ‘The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History, and the Emergence of Western Governmentality’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 26

²⁰ Mark Brown, in his study on the relationship of ethnology in classifying certain communities as criminals, points out how by the early twentieth century the tasks of the ethnologist and the district officer had become enmeshed, see his ‘Ethnology and Colonial Administration in Nineteenth-Century British India: The Question of Native Crime and Criminality’, *The British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jun., 2003); see also Pathy, Jagannath. (1995). ‘Colonial Ethnography of the Kandha: “White Man’s Burden” or Political Expediency?’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Jan. 28, 1995); Kaushik Ghosh’s work on the relationship between the fetishization of aboriginality with search for cheaper supplies of labour in a period post 1840 when slavery was banned in the points to the commercial interests behind the institutionalization of Orientalist discourse about aboriginality. See his ‘A Market for Aboriginality : Primitivism and Race Classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India’ in

most authoritative accounts were written by officials tasked with colonial administration in these areas.²¹ However, following from Damodaran's cautionary advice, we need to avoid the haste to summarily dismiss the representations in these writings as exemplifying 'colonial constructs'. Colonial discourse, as Damodran points out, did not just conjure up an imaginary landscape, but analysed real landscape difference by engaging with indigenous knowledge and ideas of place.²² As the adivasis petitioned the state, rose up in rebellion and made several attendant claims and counter-claims, the colonial administrators were forced to engage, via sections of the native population, with questions of customary laws, local tenurial systems, etc.²³ However, despite these shifts and engagements, there was an overall assumption in all these works of the essential difference of the tribe with the castes of India. If the initial works had relied more on race theories and anthropometry, later works, such as that of the German Jesuit missionary John Baptist Hoffman, while not totally discarding the earlier models, would explained the differences in patterns of land ownership and tenurial systems.

These ideas of difference fed into the institutionalization of a policy of exception for tribal tracts at all-India level in the last few decades of colonial rule. In these years, the tribal tracts were excepted from the purview of Indian legislatures, to whom power started being gradually devolved from 1919 onwards. This became a contentious issue as representatives of the Indian nationalist movement opposed these measures, that they considered as an example of the colonial policy of divide and rule. Invoking

Bhadra, Gautam, Gyan Prakash and Susie Tharu (ed.). *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vol. X, Delhi: OUP

²¹ See for example, Tickell, S.R. (1840). 'Memoir on the Hodesum (Improperly called Kolhan)' in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XI; Dalton, Edward Tuite. (1872). *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing; Dalton, E.T. (1868). 'The "Kols" of Chota-Nagpore', *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, Vol. 6 (1868); Hunter, W.W. (1868). *The Annals of Rural Bengal*. Calcutta: West Bengal District Gazetters, Government of India (reprint, 1996)

²² Damodaran, Vinita. (2006). Colonial constructions of the 'tribe' in India: The case of Chotanagpur, *Indian Historical Review*, 33, 44-76.

²³ See for example the writings of German Jesuit missionary John Baptist Hoffman, who in the aftermath of the Munda rebellion was commissioned by the colonial state to draw up a memorandum on the land system of the Mundas. Hoffman, John Baptist and E. Lister. (1905). 'Special Memorandum on the Land System of the Munda Country' accessed via <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.141364/203412/003>. See also his *Encyclopaedia Mundarica (16 volumes)*. Reprinted as (2005) *The World of the Mundas I and II*, New Delhi: Critical Quest. (Henceforth, Hoffman I or Hoffman II)

anthropological and ethnological ideas about ‘primitiveness’ and differences of the tribes vis-a-vis the castes, produced over the 19th century, the supporters of this policy christened this policy as a ‘protective’ one. The ‘aborigines’ needed to be protected from the purview of these legislatures which, being comprised of non-tribals, were portrayed as inept to represent them or understand and deal with their specific problems. However, this period which saw the emergence of anthropology as a nascent discipline within the Indian universities, the initial anthropological ideas about tribes were also reworked and reformulated in response to multiple factors.

Since the colonial policy of ‘exclusion’ was predicated upon the identification of certain peoples as ‘tribes’ and how they were different from the ‘castes’ of India, the main contentions between the anthropologists also arose around the same. There were the likes of first generation of self-trained anthropologists such as Sarat Chandra Roy, who despite working within the frame of essentialized difference between tribals and non-tribals in his several kinds of writings (including monographs on the Oraons and the Mundas that continue to be cited as authoritative works on these tribes²⁴) sought to trace the progress made by the tribes of Chota Nagpur over the years. Based on this story of progress, Roy could not come to totally support the policy of exclusion from legislatures.²⁵ As Sangeeta Dasgupta informs us, this was a result of various multiple influences on Roy, as well as the different kinds of audiences he wrote for.²⁶ Then, there were the likes of G.S. Ghurye, who were very critical of the colonial policies of exclusion and through their work tried to dismiss to any binary opposition between the castes and the tribes. In Ghurye’s opinion, the tribes were simply ‘backward Hindus’ who required

²⁴ Roy, Sarat Chandra. (1912, Reprint 1995). *The Mundas And their Country*. Ranchi: Man in India Office; see also his (1915, reprint 1984) *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur*: Ranchi: Man in India Office

²⁵ For example, see his Roy, (1936). ‘The Aborigines of Chota Nagpur: Their Proper Status in the Reformed Constituion’, *Indian Nation*

²⁶ To quote Dasgupta, “While Roy had initially found anthropology to have a more generalized administrative and academic intent, it was not found to have a specific practical utility in the context of India. As an Indian who symphatized with the Congress (though he never formally joined i), Roy believed that the discipline would ‘help in knitting the bonds of unity between different castes and creeds, races and communities’ at a time when ‘India’ was getting ‘swaraj minded’.” Dasgupta, Sangeeta. (2010). ‘Recasting the Oraons and the ‘Tribe’: Sarat Chandra Roy’s Anthropology’ in Uberoi, Patricia, Nandini Sundar and Satish Deshpande. (ed.). (2010). *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology*. Delhi: Permanent Black.

to be assimilated into the 'mainstream' through certain economic ameliorative measures.²⁷ On the other hand, Verrier Elwin, through his ethnographic works attempted to show the essential difference between the two and initially supported the colonial schemes of 'exclusion' for 'protecting' the 'aborigines' of India.²⁸ However, as the curtains were being drawn on the empire, and his initial conceptualizations and support to the colonial policy of exclusion had come under attack from Indian nationalists, he slightly reformulated his initial views. Occupying considerable sway in shaping tribal policy post-independence in Nehru's administration, particularly in the North-East, Elwin's later works sought to strike a balance between the two extreme positions.²⁹ There were also others like D.N. Majumdar, who wrote extensively on the Hos and whom we shall deal with at some length in this work, who emphasized the long history of cultural contacts between the tribes and castes in India, leading to a movement towards Hinduism amongst the former.³⁰ However, his own position on the policies of exclusion reflected much ambivalence and contradictions. Critical of the isolationist policy of exclusion during the colonial period³¹, he was also not completely convinced of the efforts by the post-colonial state towards slow weakening of tribal institutions, leading to what he perceived as detribalization. As the Indian practitioners of Indian anthropology were also pulled into the vortex of this debate around policy for tribal rule, their writings and conceptualizations, thus, reflected different pushes and pulls, determined both by the developments within the discipline as well as the political environment of the time.

After the transfer of power, the first histories of the adivasis started being written from the 1960s. The focus in this period was to write the histories of the adivasis within the larger history of the coming into being of the Indian nation, and situate the various the

²⁷ Ghurye, G.S. (1943). *The Aborigines, so called and their future*. Bombay: Popular Book Prakashan

²⁸ Elwin, Verrier. (1939). *The Baiga*. London: John Murray; see also his (1941). *Loss of Nerve*. Bombay: Wagle Press and (1942). *The Agaria*. Bombay: OUP

²⁹ Elwin. (1957). *The Philosophy of NEFA*. For the shifts over time in Elwin's conceptualizations see his biography by Ramachandra Guha, Guha. (1999, reprint 2014). *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals, and India*. Delhi: Penguin

³⁰ Majumdar, D. N. (1937). *A Tribe in Transition: A Study in Culture Pattern*. London: London, Longman, Green & Co; (1950). *The Affairs of A Tribe: A Study in Tribal Dynamics*. Lucknow: Universal Publishers.

³¹ Majumdar, D. N. (1936), 'A Plea for the Better Treatment of the Aboriginal Population in India' in *Calcutta Review*, October 1936

‘tribal revolts’ of the colonial period within the overall history of the struggle of the Indian people for national independence.³² 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.³³ The idyllic adivasi population living in harmony with nature and themselves were seen, in these works, as threatened by the incursions of the British and other outsiders, which led to periodic revolts. As Sangeeta Dasgupta points out, in most of these writings, the various 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.³⁴

This schema was challenged with the emergence subaltern studies in the 1980s, who borrowing from the theoretical postulations of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, were centrally preoccupied with demarcating the distance between subaltern and elite politics.³⁵ The early subalternists were especially attracted to the many 19th century tribal revolts, to show the inherent political consciousness of the participants of these movements, despite the absence of a vanguard party.³⁶ Even other works that focussed on the later tribal movements initiated at the call of Gandhi, or in his name, demonstrated

³² Singh, K.S. (1966). *The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist*. Calcutta: 1966; see also his (1988). ‘Tribal Peasantry, Millenarianism, Anarchism and Nationalism: A Case Study of the Tana Bhagats in Chotanagpur, 1914-25’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 16, 1988. 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

³³ 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. *Tribal Struggle for Freedom*. p. 10

³⁴ Dasgupta, Sangeeta. (2014). ‘Reading Adivasi Histories: Tana Bhagats in Colonial and Post-Colonial Times’

³⁵ 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

³⁶ Guha, Ranajit. (1983). *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*. Delhi: OUP. 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

that the popular actions of the peasant masses went far beyond the limits set on it by the nationalist leadership.³⁷ Many of these works broadened the understanding of the category ‘political’, and also engaged very fascinatingly with the question of religiosity within these protests. However, in their examination of tribal movement, resistance was seen only in opposition to the non-tribal population. Ranajit Guha, for example, contends that it was the tribal 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.”³⁸ The early subaltern collective, despite questioning many of the arguments of the existing historiography on popular uprisings and insurgency, thus, did not break away from the tribal/non-tribal, insider/outsider binary. In fact, in Guha’s conceptualization the ‘tribal insurgent’ (within a generalized category of the peasant) was divested of any internal differentiation or spatial and social contexts. In the words of David Ludden, there was a certain sociological shoddiness to these works as groups as disparate as hill tribes practising slash and burn agriculture as well as commercial farmers were clubbed together in the unitary category of peasant, obfuscating any class or technological differentiation and claims to social mobility.³⁹ However, even the histories, beyond the Subaltern fold, focussing specifically on economic change in the tribal tracts did not delve into the processes of differentiation and class formation within those called tribal, and continued to describe change largely in terms of the same insider and outsider framework.⁴⁰ As for the subaltern collective, in later years it moved away from an

³⁷ Hardiman, David. (1987). *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*. New Delhi: OUP

³⁸ Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects*, pp. 285-291

³⁹ Ludden, David. (2001). ‘Subalterns and Others in the Agrarian History of South Asia’, in Scott, James C. and Nina Bhatt. (2001). *Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge*. New Haven: Yale University Press pp. 208-211

⁴⁰ Prabhu Mahapatra, for example, sees within the agrarian landscape of Chotanagpur a continuous ‘class struggle’ between the non-advasi landlords and the advasi 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

examination of popular protests to questions of discourse analysis and questions of colonial constructions of culture and power.

Around the same time as the emergence of subaltern studies, the rise of 'environmental history' as a distinct field of enquiry also prompted another kind of interest in studying the tribal communities. Environmental history emerged in response to the broader tensions of the 1970s and 1980s about the ecological consequences of high industrialization, as well as several popular movements resisting the same. As excessively anthropometric understandings of the world came to be critiqued, the new approach sought to contextualize human interventions, historical events and processes within the ecological infrastructure of the period. As these studies moved to sites seen as resolutely separated from the agrarian worlds, many of these works concerned themselves with the relationship of the forest dwelling tribes with their habitats. As ecological degradation and social dislocation caused by capitalism and colonialism came to dominate the research agenda, several historians attempted to delineate the manner in which British rule in India reconfigured the relationship of the tribes with their forests.⁴¹ But beyond accounts about the colonial past, there have also been studies on contemporary movements protesting environmental degradation as well as displacement, such as the work by Amita Baviskar on the movement of Bilala adivasis led by Narmada Bachao Andolon against the Sardar Sarovar Dam in West India.⁴² Many of these works, which studied these movements, also emerged in the backdrop of global concerns about safeguarding the survival of the indigenous communities, seen as facing a stark future owing to the destruction unleashed by global capitalist forces.

⁴¹ For a few examples, see Guha, Ramchandra. (1989). *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. Delhi: OUP. Gadgil, Madhav and Ramchandra Guha. (1993). *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*. New Delhi: OUP. Arnold, David and Ramchandra Guha (ed.). (1995). *Nature, Culture and Imperialism*. Delhi: OUP. Rangarajan Mahesh. (1996). *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces, 1860-1914*. Delhi: OUP. Grove, Richard, Vinita Damodaran and Satpal Sangwan (ed.). (1998). *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: OUP. Rajan, Ravi S. (2006). *Modernizing Nature: Forestry and Imperial Eco-Development 1800-1950*. Delhi: Orient Longman

⁴² Baviskar, Amita. (1997). *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts Over Development in the Narmada Valley*. Delhi: OUP

However, over the years, several initial conceptualizations of environmentalists have been increasingly questioned, and even jettisoned. In an important essay, Neeladri Bhattacharya questioned the mutual exclusivity that had developed between environmental history and older agrarian history, and urged for the need to explore the interconnected worlds of the forests, pastures and the fields.⁴³ Archana Prasad, critical of Guha and Gadgil's positioning of advent of colonialism as the moment that constitutes the 'ecological water-shed' which introduced conflicts in the relationship of the tribes with their natural habitat, pointed to the longer history of such conflict in the pre-colonial India. Her work on the Gonds dispels the notion of the idyllic adivasis living in a harmonious state in nature by pointing to their conflicts with the natural world, as the internal stratification and conflict amongst the Gond tribes.⁴⁴

Over the past few years now, the internally fractured nature of the adivasis has been repeatedly highlighted in several works. In her analysis of the Tana Bhagat movement, Sangeeta Dasgupta has highlighted the inadequacy of either the *sarkar-sahukar-zamindar* or the indigeneity framework to explain all the aspects of the movement. As hierarchies had developed amongst the Oraons inhabiting the differentiated terrain of Chota Nagpur, implicit in the Tana Bhagat movement was as much a challenge to the native elite as to the 'outsiders'.⁴⁵ Alpa Shah, exploring the rise of the contemporary movements around the notion of indigeneity in the context of Jharkhand speaks about the 'dark side of indigeneity'. The stereotypes around indigeneity, and the attendant claims based on them, according to her, sustain and reinforce several class inequalities. 'The political project of this identity politics, this "culture-making"', writes Shah, 'flattens a vast diversity of agendas and interests that are in effect affected by the complex inter-relations of...gender, class, and caste, which undercut people's

⁴³ Bhattacharya, Neeladri. (1998). 'Introduction', *Studies in History, Special Issue: Forests, Fields and Pastures*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, July-December 1998

⁴⁴ Prasad, Archana. (2003). *Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the Making of an Anti-Modern Tribal Identity*. Delhi: Three Essays Collective. See also Agarwal, Arun and K. Sivaramakrishnan (ed.). (2001). *Social Nature: Resources, Representations, and Rule in India*. Delhi: OUP

⁴⁵ See for example, Dasgupta, Sangeeta. (1999). 'Reordering a World: The Tana-Bhagat Movement, 1914-1919', *Studies in History*, new series, vol. 15, no. 1

identity.’⁴⁶ In an introduction to a volume on adivasi movements and insurgency, Alpa Shah and Crispin Bates call for a ‘historically, socially and politically situated approach to the ways in which forms of resistance get labelled as ‘adivasi’ or ‘tribal’, or ‘not’’.⁴⁷ Uday Chandra’s work on Jharkhand looks at claim making and negotiation with the state as the underlying reasons for the differentiated adivasi communities taking resort to armed revolts, in both the colonial or post-period. This is a drastic departure from the existing understanding of revolts and resistance. For example, as opposed to the likes of Ranajit Guha, who writing two decades back had emphasised the distinct domain of the subaltern politics with the elite domain, Chandra contends that ‘Subaltern politics...is driven by a deep awareness of dominant state structures, particularly the crevices afforded for making claims on political authorities from below.’ And ‘resistance as negotiation...is driven by the logic of negotiation between the state and the subalterns in its embrace in the margins.’⁴⁸

This work joins the concerns raised by the above mentioned last set of scholars to bring out the manner in which the fractured nature of adivasi communities determined the multiple responses of these communities to the state. Our attempt here by looking at different aspects of change in Singhbhum over the last two centuries would be to show that rather than being an external actor that intervened in the society from outside, the colonial state consolidated itself in the region by skilfully exploiting the many cleavages within these communities, and co-opting their customary village bodies for purposes of governance. Far from being in opposition to the state, the colonial recognition to claims based on custom through a series of special laws were central in 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. But as we shall see, over the course of this study, for various reasons it was both politically and

⁴⁶ Shah, Alpa. (2011). *In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism, and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 25

⁴⁷ Bates, Crispin and Alpa Shah (ed.). *Savage Attack: tribal Insurgency in India*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan

⁴⁸ Chandra, Uday. (2013). *Negotiating Leviathan: State Making and Resistance in the Margins of Modern India*. Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Yale University for the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

economically expedient. Within a stratified society, it was invariably with the help of certain groups, as against some others, that the colonial policies were implemented. In other words, the colonial state's intervention in the region can be seen as constitutive of, just as it was simultaneously constituted by the internal hierarchies within local communities. This complicated process instead led to the exacerbation of the older hierarchies within already fractured adivasi communities, as well as the creation of the new ones. And in turn, this allowed sections within the local community to enhance their social and economic standing, at the cost of others, by taking advantage of the opportunities opened by the colonial state. It is my assertion that un-intuitiveness to this internal differentiation within the adivasis and their complex relationships with the state structures leads us to reducing the complex story of adivasi-state relationship in these areas into a flat and linear narrative of a fall from the commons to the private.

An Overview of Chapters

The region of Singhbhum, that includes the industrial town of Jamshedpur, the densest Sal forests of Saranda in the country and is home to the Ho community lies on the southern-most precinct of Jharkhand. It shares borders with West Bengal and Odisha and is divided into two administrative districts, West Singhbhum and East Singhbhum. However, back in the early decades of the 19th century, when the East India Company established first contacts with the region, the region did not exist as either a single administrative or a territorial unit. It was part of the lower provinces of the Bengal Presidency and carved out amongst numerous rulers, chieftans who were regularly at war with each other. After subduing the adivasi revolts and uprisings, the British displaced these warring chiefs and successively took over different tracts and over time constituted the district of Singhbhum. Singhbhum remained a part of the Bengal Presidency till 1913, after which it became part of the newly created province 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 constitutes the southern-most precinct of the state of Jharkhand, which was created with much fanfare at the turn of the millennium. Apart from the Hos, the district is also home to Mundas, Santhals, Bhumijis, Paharias and there is also vast inflow of people from the adjoining region who flock the industrial towns of

Singhbhum for work. For this study, most of the primary material that we have dealt with deals with the central part of Singhbhum known as Kolhan, and amongst the communities we have dealt mainly with the Hos. The Hos have their own customary system of village organization and assemblies, with the *munda* as the village head and *manki* as the head of pirs (or conglomerate of villages).

Back in the colonial period, there was a tendency to obscure the historical processes that have shaped the region and its inhabitants over the ages. In an account written in 1910, Bradley Birt, for example commented that Singhbhum had rested ‘secluded’ for ages in ‘utter silence and seclusion’. The colonial intervention had done little, for writers like Bradley Birt, to change this undisturbed state of things. If he referred to Chotanagpur as the ‘little known province of the empire’, Singhbhum was seen as the ‘Tibet of Chotanagpur’ – the forbidden land which no stranger could pass through. 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. Singhbhum, within this narrative, seemed more like a pre-ordained region meant to be inhabited by the Hos. Loaded with the dominant perception of looking at forested regions and tribal communities as insulated and frozen across time, Birt writes:

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.⁴⁹

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

⁴⁹ Bradley-Birt, F.B. (1910). *Chotanagpur: A Little Known Province of the Empire*, London: Smith, Elder and Co., p. 86

in the years preceding the colonial takeover of the region, there was no change of any significance to merit consideration for inclusion within Birt's 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 unchanged 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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹

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 and the implications for its people.

Chapter 1 attempts to reconstruct and uncover the manner in which this outlying and extremely undulating and heavily forested part of Chota Nagpur within the Lower Provinces of Bengal was perceived, experienced and transformed into the district of Singhbhum in the initial decades of the nineteenth century. In effect, we deal with the making of, what we know today as Singhbhum for the region cannot be treated as given when the British first landed here. A historian can easily slide into applying later administrative categories in reconstructing this phase of history. But there is a need to remain cautious of such an anachronism and as we noted above, the region did not exist as a single or a unitary administrative unit in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 97 (emphasis mine)

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 89 (emphasis mine)

This chapter also deals with the manner in which the representations of the region and its people underwent a shift between the years when the British first came into contact with the region and after they had taken control over it.

Chapter 2 explores the distinct modality of rule – that we term as administrative exceptionalism – for the governance of frontier tracts such as Singhbhum, which involved co-opting the customary structures of the Hos for the purposes of imperial governance. The *mankis* and *mundas*, who were reservoirs of localized information about the people and the terrain, and had also provided help to the British during the military operations that led to the accession of the region, now became local officials of the British Raj in Singhbhum. With the locus of power shifting to the local structures of authority, several key functions such as rent collection, local administration and policing was given over to the customary headmen of the Hos. This chapter departs from the conventional ways of reading this policy as a colonial attempt to preserve custom by attempting to show various contingencies of rule in the region behind the adoption of this policy. We also show the manner in which the official recognition to this policy significantly transformed the meaning of custom, and the social character of customary structures of authority of the Hos. We also deal with the various tensions and the different opinions within the colonial officialdom with regard to the adoption of this indirect mode of rule. Lastly, we look at the different responses to the institutionalization of this policy of administrative exceptionalism at an all-India scale during the last few decades of colonial rule.

The next two chapters explore the manner in which this policy of administrative exceptionalism was intertwined with the colonial intervention in the agrarian and forest landscape of the region. Chapter 3 shows that policies such as the colonial drives, in the initial decades of colonial rule towards expansion of the arable and institutionalization of rents over agrarian lands was dependent on enlisting the support of the customary headmen of the Hos. This in turn allowed these headmen to enhance their economic and social standing by staking claims over large parts of land during settlement operations, as well as take advantages of the policies of ‘protection’ such as CNTA. The initial drive to clear the forests was reversed during the closing decades of the 19th century as the commercial value of the forests dawned upon the British. Chapter 4 explores the manner

through which the British, as the prism with which forests were viewed underwent a shift, attempted to institute an intensive regime of restrictions over the forests. The British, however, faced immense difficulties towards this end because of the difficult nature of the terrain, as well as the complex, bewildering and contested arrangement of local rights to the forests. This led to the devolution, notwithstanding the discomfort of the Forest Department, of the key functions of forest management to the customary headmen.

The policies of administrative exceptionalism and the specific nature of colonial intervention in the agrarian and forest landscape of Singhbhum, thus, not only exacerbated the older hierarchies within the Hos, but also created new ones. The customary headmen not only staked claims from the colonial state to enhance their social and economic position, but also trumped the claims of others. Within this context, Chapter 5 looks at the different social and political movements in Singhbhum in the last three decades of colonial rule. As the customary headmen had gained in status over the years, the ones who had lost out sought to challenge the former's authority through these movements. These movements, we contend, were not only directed against the state, but were also expressions of contests within the internally fractured communities inhabiting Singhbhum. This point was not lost upon the colonial officials who sought to preserve the authority of their eyes and ears in Singhbhum, as they strengthened the powers of the headmen to repress these movements. We close this chapter by looking at the rise of another kind of movement, i.e. the movement for separate statehood for Chota Nagpur. Here, we shall explore the manner in which an educated urban elite sought to forge out a new adivasi identity in their quest to articulate their political stakes, and negotiate the outcome of the formulation of policy of rule for tribal areas on the eve of transfer of power in 1947.

We conclude the present study by examining the contentious legacy of administrative exceptionalism in the post-colonial period, which saw a gradual weakening of the traditional structures of authority and their replacement with a new one. We notice the several tensions within the adivasi society, as the older sections attempted to resuscitate their declining authority and thereafter sought to appropriate the new structures of authority that emerged.

Section I

At The Exteriors of the Empire

Chapter I

Confronting Singhbhum: From a Geographical Region to an Administrative Unit

In the year 1835 Jadunath Bhanj, the Raja of Mayurbhanj, which was then subordinate to the Commissioner of Cuttack, applied to the British for assistance for a journey that he, along with his relatives, desired to take westwards. The adjoining region he wished to enter was the southern-most part of Chota Nagpur, then part of the Ramgarh District in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency; and the context of his proposed journey was the marriage of two of his brothers with the daughters of two rulers in this tract. The marriage had been fixed for some time, but reaching the brides' homes remained a problem for Bhanj, as it required crossing the territory under the control of another chief who was not too well disposed towards either the bride or the groom's family. Bhanj feared that, unless assisted by the colonial authorities, the wedding party might make itself prone to attacks by this chief's hirelings during the journey. The authorities in Cuttack, on receiving his application, forwarded it to their higher ups in Calcutta soliciting their instructions on the matter. The Calcutta authorities, in turn, wrote back instructing Stockwell, the Commissioner of Cuttack to maintain a policy of absolute non-interference in the internal matters of the different chiefs, and communicate their inability to the Mayurbhanj Rajah to help him in any which way in the matter. They

further stated that Bhanj should be informed to himself take the consent of this chief, and till that is affected the authorities should forbid all his plans. Bhanj' fulminations, when informed of the above, that the British were conspiring to stop these royal marriages failed to have any impact on the authorities. In reply, Stockwell simply stated that the official policy in the matter 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."⁵²

When the above representation was made by the Mayurbhanj Raja to the British, this southern most precinct of Chota Nagpur, which we know today as Singhbhum, was carved out amongst numerous rulers, chiefs and *zamindars* – each of whom claimed local prominence. A family styling themselves as the Singhbhum Rajah resided in the region called Porahat, and claimed to be the rulers of this tract for over six generations. However, by the middle of the previous century, their control had been gradually weakened and the other parts of the region had been sub-divided amongst different chiefs and *zamindars*. One of his brethren or *hissedar*, who referred to himself as the *Kunwar*, had broken away from him and resided in Seraikela. Another family styling itself as the *Thakurs* controlled the region called Kharsawan. There were several other small chieftains in the region too. This territorial division amongst the chiefs had led to constant internecine battles between them, especially between the royal families in Porahat and Seraikela. In 1835, the Mayurbhanj Rajah's brothers' marriage had been fixed with the daughters of the Porahat Raja and the Thakur at Kharsawan, and the adversarial chief in question was the Seraikela Raja. For the longest time, the British did not want to get entangled in the dispute ridden local politics of these different chiefs. They did not want to disturb the chain of political command, via all these different chiefs, that they had themselves established in 1821. The different chiefs used to settle their territorial disputes by enlisting the services of their tribal subjects in their military forays against each. The main community inhabiting the region were the Hos, who were governed by their own village councils headed by *mundas* (village headmen) and *mankis* (headmen of a

⁵² Despatch. No. 27 of 1836, Judicial Department, Lower Provinces, the 15th November. 1836, General Letters to the Court of Directors (Judicial Department), Volume. No. 17, West Bengal State Archives (WBSA).

conglomerate of villages or *pirs*). At this time, the officials referred to the Hos as ‘Larka Kols’ who were seen as a war-like tribe of ‘free-booters’ and ‘plunderers’. The different chiefs were perceived to be only in ‘nominal control’ of the various chiefs, and once driven into military forays were difficult to control for any authority. The authority of the East India Company, the government in Calcutta knew from the periodic reports of the local British officials, had continued to rest, since their arrival in the region, on an extremely precarious ground. Far from reflecting a state of confidence, these reports presented a picture of utter confusion in terms of the internecine battles between various chiefs for territory, and considerable anarchy caused by the incessant plunder carried out by the Larka Kols. The British were greatly troubled by the prospect of their support to one of the chiefs during the marriage procession might once again trigger into action the Larka Kols, which would have serious implications for British authority. For the longest time, the British had continued to stay away from the internal disputes of the chiefs. But they could not, as the following pages would show, afford to pursue this policy of non-interference for long.

What exactly was this region and how had the British over the late 18th and early 19th century come into contact with it? What were its different specificities - its landscape, its internal administrative arrangements – and how did the British grapple with them? Who were these different chiefs involved in squabbles against each other? Who were these turbulent Larkas that inhabited the region? How had things come to such a perilous situation in the 1830s, and how did the British respond to it? This chapter, over four sections, attempts to uncover the manner in which this outlying and extremely undulating and heavily forested geographical zone of south Chota Nagpur within the Lower Provinces of Bengal was perceived, experienced and transformed into the new administrative district of Singhbhum. In the first section, we sketch a broad outline of the entire tract of Chota Nagpur plateau and its inhabitants, before moving into the specificity of its southern most part. Based on accounts written by travellers, officials and military men, it also deals with colonial representations of wilderness, savagery and difference of this extremely undulating and heavily forested region and its turbulent people. The subsequent sections are a reconstruction of the different phases of military operations, between 1818 and 1837, that were taken to subdue the unrest in Singhbhum and which

culminated in its accession to the British. It is an extremely detailed delineation of the various internal strifes between different chiefs, their control over and relationship with their British, and the changing British strategies over time. The final section, dealing with an account written by the first administrator of the newly acceded region of Singhbhum, looks at the manner in which some of the representations about the region, and its people, changed after the accession of the region. The region, which was felt to be a difficult and a wild frontier territory was now perceived as a beautiful recluse, that reminded the author of Europe. And the Ho adivasis of Singhbhum, from being a refractory tribe of plunderers and freebooters in the military despatches just a few years back were turned into Arcadian ‘noble savages’ – living in harmony with themselves and their natural surroundings.

Section 1

The Arrival in Chota Nagpur: Unfamiliarities Galore

Over the eighteenth century, the East India Company had slowly increased their control over large tracts of the sub-continent. Yet, several areas, lying between their newly acquired territories and dominions, continued to remain a veritable dark spot for the company officials. On the eastern side of the sub-continent, it was the Indo-Gangetic and Bengal plains that they had firmly established their control over and acquainted themselves with. As opposed to these regions, the lower provinces of the Bengal presidency – the region of the Chota Nagpur plateau - appeared as a vast and a largely unknown labyrinth of undulating and forested terrain interspersed with various streams and waterfalls. These tracts may well have abounded in natural beauty, as opposed to the dull and sullen landscape of the plains, but they could at the same time also be fierce and unforgiving to those who ventured inside. The region was infested with wild animals, insects and dangerously malarial mosquitoes; it was home to the refractory tribes and was seen as extremely difficult to traverse, demarcate and territorialize.

Chota Nagpur, had come under the control of the East India Company after it acquired the diwani rights of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II in 1765. But, the British control had remained very loose and nominal in the region. In the subsequent decades, realizing the strategic importance of the region vis-à-

vis the other major power in the subcontinent - the Marathas - as well as for any future expansion of the Company's writ into Deccan, the forces of the East India Company started making regular incursions into the region. They first reduced the Rajahs of Chota Nagpur into their vassals, fixed an annual rent payable to the Company and reconstituted the territory as the Ramgarh district. The Ramgarh Zilla was placed under a British officer who combined the offices of judge, a magistrate and collector of revenue, who in turn was under the Governor at Fort William, Calcutta.⁵³ The initial decades of the 19th century would see a gradual consolidation of the company's writ in the region through a subduing of the local chiefs, the introduction of the *zamindari* police and establishment of police posts into the region and constant military campaigns against the 'savage' and 'barbaric' tribes of the region.

Walter Hamilton's East India Gazetteer, published in 1828, contained a brief description of the early perceptions and experiences of the East India Company with the region. This thinly populated inland region distant from the seas and covered with 'unhealthy jungles' and hills, wrote Hamilton, had been fostered with great care in a state of semi-independence by its chiefs. Between the jungles and the hills, lay extensive tracts of cultivable plains where locals grew different kinds of pulses, wheat barley, cotton, a little sugarcane, and some esculents. The nature of this country made it difficult for 'troops not born on the spot' to penetrate and subdue it. In Hamilton's opinion the Mughals, despite forcing the local Rajahs to pay an annual tribute, could never totally subjugate them. In the subsequent period, the British would face the same problem. Hamilton remarks that the decrees of the Ramgarh court would simply not be followed in the region, especially if they were disagreeable to the Rajah. These chiefs, in the words of Hamilton, had resolved to hold 'no personal intercourse of communication with the British functionaries', and this specially frustrated the successes that the British had hoped to achieve with the introduction of the zamindari police force in 1807. This set the stage for the entry of colonial troops under Edward Roughsedge into the region in 1808 for the 'proper subordination' of Chota Nagpur. Roughsedge would subsequently play an important role a decade later in the accession of Singhbhum, but that is a story we come

⁵³ The Ramgarh district would later in 1833, after an extensive suppression of the Kol rebellion, be reconstituted as the South Western Frontier Agency.

to later. At this juncture, his arrival at the head of military operations led to both the Raja and his Dewan fleeing from the region – the latter to Calcutta where the authorities rounded him up, and the former into the jungle fastnesses of Singbhum, located to the south of Ramgarh. The British, successful in its operation, curtailed the powers of the Raja, abolished the position of the Dewan and divided the region into six *thanas*.⁵⁴

A year before the above lines had made it to the press, another official S.T. Cuthbert had sent a detailed report to the authorities describing this region, its rulers and its people. He too alluded to the ‘wild nature’ of the country, where qualified officers could not be easily convinced to serve, and the ones who did at times failed to survive their term owing to the ‘unhealthiness of climate’.⁵⁵ ‘To the inhabitant of other parts of the country’, Cuthbert commented, ‘who may be compelled by business to journey into and sojourn in the Pergunnah at that season (from the onset of monsoon till mid-December), it may accounted to be deadly.’⁵⁶ He was also particularly not too well disposed towards the local chiefs of the region whom he called ‘ignorant’ and a strain on the colonial authorities. He just stopped short of calling for their complete removal, but not before making a case for stripping them of further powers. But beyond such general descriptions, Cuthbert’s report was very different from accounts such as that of Hamilton. Cuthbert was a magistrate at Ramgarh, and apart from a general acquaintance of the area in which he served, he had also taken special enquiries for the purposes of this report. He thus had a relatively more intimate knowledge of the region, the internal arrangements instituted by the chiefs within the region, the system of land tenures and village administration. The various chiefs and Rajahs, Cuthbert stated, were always engaged in ‘predatory’ and ‘petty’ warfare against each other, making raids to expand their territories

⁵⁴ Hamilton, Walter. (1828). *The East India Gazetteer: Containing Particular Descriptions of the Empires, Kingdoms, Principalities, Provinces, Cities, Towns, Districts, Fortresses, Harbours, Rivers, Lakes & c. of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries, India Beyond the Ganges, and the Eastern Archipelago; Together With the Sketches of the Manners, Customs, Institutions, Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures, Revenues, Population, Castes, Religion, History & C of their Various Inhabitants. Second Edition, Vol. 1.* London: H. Allen And Co. pp. 415-416.

⁵⁵ Letter No. 50, from S.T. Cuthbert, Magistrate to Henry Shakespear, Esqr., Secretary to Government in the Judicial Department, Fort William, dated Zilla Ramghur, the 21st April 1827, reproduced in entirety in Roy, S.C. (1921), ‘Ethnographical Investigation In Official Records’, *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol. VII, Part IV, 1921. p. 9, 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

and defending their own from the others. These squabbles, however, required each chief to raise a sufficient number of armed retainers, for the purposes of which they started bestowing lands in *jageer* to certain people. By the time the British arrived in the region, this ‘custom’ was not only a long-standing one but had gone beyond its original – military – purpose. Jagirs were now also granted for religious and civil services ‘at the pleasure of the superior’ and were hereditarily held. Cuthbert described the *jagirdars* as a particularly oppressive class of people, who had come to control several villages as sub-tenures of the Rajah. During his travels across the region, he came across several half-deserted villages because of the conduct of these land holders against the *raiyyats*, and when he sojourned in their estates, he would receive several complaints against the oppressive conduct of the *jagirdars*.⁵⁷

While there was a general tendency at this time to define the region in terms of its difference vis-à-vis the other regions, one can at the same time discern an attempt in Cuthbert report to fit what he observed in the region within categories, concepts and systems that he was familiar with – both back in Europe as well as the plains of India.⁵⁸ He, thus described the *jagirdars* as a counter-part of the feudal system that prevailed in Europe during the middle ages, and following from this framework went on to describe an elaborate taxonomic structure of further under-tenures. After the Jagirdars, the local chiefs granted lands for a quit rent to the Mankis and the Mundas through a ritual that involved conferring them with *pugrees*. Below the jagirdars and the mankis and mundas were placed the Mahto (the civil head) and the Pujari (the religious head) who headed the village community and conducted its affairs. These village heads would lease out lands to the raiyyats by orally pointing out before witnesses the extent of the land that was to be cultivated, and in turn collect rents from them in four instalments and pass it on to their superiors.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁸ As an example of the former, one can see a report published in one of the Calcutta newspaper in 1832, which described Chota Nagpur as a hilly and jungly country that had always lacked behind in terms of civilization when compared to the eastern parts of Bengal. ‘Postscript To Asiatic Intelligence’ in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register For British and Foreign India, China and Australasia* (AJMR), Vol. VIII – New Series. May-August 1832. London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 120.

For the British officials who moved into these regions, it was not just a different terrain that they were encountering; they perceived the people of this region as also different and, as they would experience, one of the most difficult ones to subdue, control and administer. The early colonial accounts and reports about the region commented extensively about its people, who just like the landscape, were defined in opposition to the people of the plains. “The impervious fastnesses here”, wrote Hamilton, “conceal many strange tribes, who even at this late era of Hindoo predominance, have not yet become converts to the Brahmanical doctrines, and are consequently classed by the priests among the abominable.”⁵⁹ In the early records, the tribal inhabitants of the region of Chota Nagpur, as well as its adjoining regions, are referred to as the ‘Koles’/Kholes’/’Coles’ and described as ‘a hardy and athletic race (of people), black and ill-favoured in their countenance, ignorant and savage to the last degree’. According to one of the earliest accounts, the Kols, spread over the territory of Chota Nagpur as well as adjoining Orissa, were described as a people who were ‘passionately fond of fermented liquors’, and unlike the Hindus, ate all kinds of flesh as well as various kind of jungle roots. They owned none of the Hindu divinities, and seemed ‘scarcely to have any system of religious belief’, barring some primitive form of nature worship.⁶⁰ Others like Cuthbert and Hamilton, however, referred to them as ‘lowest kind of Hindoos’⁶¹ or part of the ‘degraded castes of Hindus’.⁶² For officials, the Kols evoked both fantasy as well as dread; they were both a ‘barbarous people...prodigal of blood’ who would murder when excited by passion; as well as a simple and truthful race of people who, as Cuthbert would recollect his experiences as the magistrate, would readily confess to their crimes.⁶³ Cuthbert also stated that they were always migrating in search of work, and were specially preferred by indigo planters ‘on account of... performing more work...at a

⁵⁹ Hamilton. *The East India Gazetteer*. p. 415.

⁶⁰ Stirling, Andrew. (1825). *Orissa: Its Geography, Statistics, History, Religion, and Antiquities*. London: John Snow. pp. 50-51.

⁶¹ Cuthbert to Shakespear, dated Zilla Ramghur, the 21st Apr 1827, in Roy, ‘Ethnographical Investigation in Official Records’, p. 14.

⁶² Hamilton. *The East India Gazetteer*. p. 415.

⁶³ Cuthbert to Shakespear, dated Zilla Ramghur, the 21st Apr 1827, in Roy, ‘Ethnographical Investigation..’, p. 20.

lower rate.’⁶⁴ The use of the term ‘Kol’, in an undifferentiated manner, to describe all the inhabitants of Chota Nagpur, as well as the adjoining regions, however tended to lump together several different communities. The British, despite using this term, could not remain completely unaware of this. A work published in 1825 on the adjoining region of Orissa, for example, stated the Coles could be divided into thirteen *different* tribes, i.e., Kols, Lurka-Kol, Chowang, Sarvanti, Dhurowa, Bahuri, Bhuiyan, Khandwal, Santals, Sour, Bhumij, Batholi and Amavat.⁶⁵

The above descriptions were still largely restricted to northern parts of Chota Nagpur, covering roughly the areas presently known as Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Palamau. In these descriptions of Chota Nagpur, Singhbhum would find only a perfunctory mention as an outlying expanse, where defeated chiefs, in the face of advancing colonial troops, would take recuse. Singhbhum remained outside the fold of Ramgarh tract, and in initial records we see it being described not just in opposition to the Bengal plains, but also in opposition to northern parts of Chota Nagpur. Singhbhum is described as the exterior most of an overall exterior region. It had remained shut out from all outside influences, having never been under the sway of the Mughals and the Marathas, and the only information about the region came in bits and pieces from the pilgrims who crossed it en route from the Gangetic plains to the Jagannath temple.⁶⁶ It was seen as home to the densest forests and the fiercest tribes, the latter zealously guarding their exclusivity in the ‘safe’ preserve of the former. In the 1760s, when certain military officials attempted to enter into Singhbhum in consequence of a local chief’s armed retainers launching predatory raids on the ceded tracts of Midnapore to the east, they would return with bitter experiences. The ‘jungle fellows’ armed with their arrows would ‘sting’ the colonial troops ‘like a parcel of wasps’, commented Captain Morgan heading the operations in a tone of frustration, and then ‘fly off’ into the forests.⁶⁷ The harshness of the climate, along with the difficulties of the landscape, made the situation more onerous for the

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁶⁵ Stirling. *Orissa*. p. 50.

⁶⁶ Tickell, S.R. (1840). ‘Memoir on the Hodesum (Improperly called Kolhan)’ in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XI, part II, pp. 695-698.

⁶⁷ Quoted in O’Malley, L.S.S. (1910). *Bengal District Gazetteers: Singhbhum, Saraikella and Kharsawan*, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, p. 28.

British military, and they would keep away for several decades after this early experience. But this experience left an indelible perception on the British about the region and its people.

The 'Kols' of this part of the lower provinces of Bengal were called the Larka Kols, literally meaning the fighting Kols. An early colonial account described them as a wandering tribe that had migrated into this region about a century back, after which they launched depredations on their neighbouring regions to extend their territories.⁶⁸ But the military officials who first landed here, found them quite different from the rest of the Kols. In these early accounts, the Larka Kols, just like the region, are described through a number of markers which distinguishes them from their other Kol brethren to north. The Kols were now divided into two broad camps – the 'Dhangar Kols' (comprising Mundas, Oraons and other communities) and 'Larka Kols' (exclusively referring to the Ho residents of Singhbhum). According to one report, the former were a quiet, hard-working and simple race of people, while the latter a bold, sturdy and a brave race.⁶⁹ According to another report, the two lived in a state of mutual antipathy and the Larkas considered the Dhangars as demons.⁷⁰ In Cuthbert's report, the Lurka Kols found a tangential mention only to describe their ruinous impact on the other Kols. He commented that the 'intimacy' and 'connection' between the two, if allowed to continue, would have had 'demoralizing' and 'detrimental' effects on the welfare of the Ramgarh district, and realising it the government took special measures to restrict such contacts 'by every possible means'.⁷¹ The Lurka Kols were, after all, the more 'savage', more 'jungly', more insubordinate and the fiercest in their opposition to outside contacts.⁷² For certain

⁶⁸ 'Short Account of the Lurka Coles', *AJMR*, Vol. XIII, January-June, 1822, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. pp. 136-137.

⁶⁹ 'Postscript to Asiatic Intelligence', *AJMR*, Vol. VIII, May-August 1832, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 120.

⁷⁰ 'Account of the Kholes or Coles', *AJMR*, Vol. VIII, May-August 1832, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 265.

⁷¹ Cuthbert to Shakespear, dated Zilla Ramghur, the 21st Apr 1827, in Roy, 'Ethnographical Investigation In Official Records'. p. 14.

⁷² It needs to be however mentioned that in the colonial representations the difference between the Kols and Larka Kols was not casted in completely absolute terms on all occasions. At other juncture, we see them representing all the Kols within the same broad brush stroke. Even the terms Kols/Coles/Larka Kols was used interchangeably when discussing the Hos.

officials, the ‘disgusting state of nudity’, in which their women lived, confirmed the greater savagery of the Larka Kols.⁷³ Their independence was a regular description of the Larka Kols.⁷⁴ In 1820, when the British had embarked upon a plan to decisively intervene in the region, a military official described their defiance of all authority in the following terms:

It is rather remarkable, that at no great distance from Calcutta, there should exist a war like tribe, almost unknown beyond their own mountains...They are called Lurkas, and inhabit a part of Singhbhum, named after them, Lurkacole. About sixty years ago, a Raja attempted to subdue the Lurkas, but he was repulsed with great slaughter. This inspired their neighbours with such dread of them, that no Native has ever since ventured near them with any authoritative claims; and they are now quite independent of the rajahs and zamidars, to whom they pay no tribute, or mark of submission of any kind.⁷⁵

As we have seen above, different officials and writers who wrote on the Kols were undecided whether they were Hindus. But when it came to the Larka Kols, the overwhelming opinion was that they were not Hindus. An article in the London based journal *John Bull in the East* claimed to quote the Larkas’ assertion that they were neither

⁷³ A newspaper article published sometime in the 1820s by a official had the following to say about the matter, ‘The Indian women are generally better clothed than the men; but as a proof of the savage state of the Coles, it may be observed of their women, that they appear in the most disgusting state of nudity. I recollect one day passing a village, where I saw several of them, who were not better clad than jogies; and many of them are said to use an apron of level, in lieu of the scanty lunghoot’. Though the generic term Cole is used here, this article was written specifically on the Lurka Kols of Singhbhum. Cited in ‘Account of the Kholes or Coles’, *AJMR*, Vol. VIII, May-August 1832, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 265. Hamilton too commented on this, comparing specifically the different levels of nudity amongst Dhangar Kol and Lurka Kol women, stating that the former possessed some wearing apparel but the latter were completely naked except for a small piece of cloth around their waist. Hamilton. *The East India Gazetteer*. p. 415

⁷⁴ As already stated in the introduction, the authority of the Rajah of Singhbhum, residing in Porahat had been considerably reduced over the eighteenth century. This was not only vis-à-vis the other chiefs, but also vis-à-vis these ‘Lurka Kols’, and they were seen to be directly controlling several villages independent of him; from whence they launched plunderous raids upon neighbouring territories to extend their control.

⁷⁵ A correspondence of 1820 (exact date not known), reproduced in the obituary of Major Roughsedge.

‘Mohammadan’ nor ‘Hindu’, but are of the same cast with the *sahib log*.⁷⁶ Another article, written a few years later by an official in a local newspaper *East Indian* catering to mainly local British readership, drew a vivid picture to describe the antipathy of the Larkas to the temples. One day, while passing through a village, this official came across several shattered idols, of neat sculptures, strewed about on the ground. He gathered the villagers to inquire the cause of such carelessness, and was informed that this was the work of the Larkas who would regularly rob a nearby temple. The official was curious to see this ‘unfortunate temple’, and found it located in a small dark grove. It had an idol of a ‘horrible black figure’, which was decked in muslins and jewels. Considering that these raids on temples were regular, he commented that, by the time his lines would make it to the press, these muslins and jewels would most probably already be in the possession of the Larkas. In his opinion, even temples were nothing more than sites of prospective plunder for the plunderous Larkas:

Having no system of religion, the Coles, during their incursions never hesitated to enter the temples, from whence, with sacrilegious hand, they took everything valuable – such as the clothes, jewels, &c. of the idols; and, to show their utter contempt for the god, they sometimes, with an awkward thump, relieve them of a limb or some other member.⁷⁷

Savagery in early colonial perceptions was also often associated with notions of migration and forested habitats. As such wandering tribes, such as the Lurka Kols, inhabiting the *jungle* lands of Singhbhum were readily slotted into savage frames. But Singhbhum was not all forest, and its people were not wandering and migrating all the time. They had, as colonial military officials who arrived in the region in late 1810s and early 1820s discovered, cleared forests to make villages and fields, and firmly rooted in these hamlets they practised settled cultivation. The article in the *John Bull in the East* commented, for example, that the territory abounded with villages, ‘some of them large’; and the fields of the Larkas displayed the ‘fruits of considerable skill and industry in

⁷⁶ ‘Short Account of the Lurka Coles’, *AJMR*, Vol. XIII, January-June, 1822, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 136.

⁷⁷ Cited in ‘Account of the Kholes or Coles’, *AJMR*, Vol. VIII, May-August 1832, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 265. Though here he is using the term Coles, he is in effect referring to the Lurka Kols. These different nomenclatures were also interchangeably used in the descriptions.

agriculture.’ They complemented their agrarian practices with animal husbandry, and possessed cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry in great abundance.⁷⁸ The article in *East Indian*, noting the ‘remarkably well cultivated’ state of the region, went on to describe a sexual division of labour in their agrarian practices. ‘Like most barbarians’, the author commented, ‘the women perform all the domestic and agricultural labours, while the men are either engaged in the chase or idling their time at home in sloth or excess.’⁷⁹

The early accounts of Singhbhum, which we have cited above, drew largely upon the accounts, correspondences and recollections of military officials from the ‘scene of disorder’ that the region presented in these years. These accounts, attempting to lay before the British readership both in the metropolis as well as in India the *wild* frontiers of the empire, where colonial authority barely existed or was in the process of being implanted, were however in the form of broad brushstrokes. As such, they obfuscated more than they revealed, and were especially silent on the details of internal differentiation within the region and its people as well as their customs and traditions. At this juncture, the contingencies of the military, apart from shaping official attitudes about the region and its people, also determined what caught the attention of the official gaze.⁸⁰ An intricate and fine sketching out of details would become a central concern for the ethnographic explorations of the latter half of the 19th century. But at this juncture, the main concern remained conquering this geographical space, rather than making it legible for the outside world.

⁷⁸ ‘Short Account of the Lurka Coles’, *AJMR*, Vol. XIII, January-June, 1822, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 136.

⁷⁹ Cited in ‘Account of the Kholes or Coles’, *AJMR*, Vol. VIII, May-August 1832, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 265.

⁸⁰ For example, these accounts described in some detail the weapons of the Lurka Kols that they employed for purposes of defending themselves or attacking their adversaries. These were mainly bows, arrows, and battles axes, locally called *tangees*. The *tangees* and their heads were of various sizes, shapes and had different kind of edges. The Lurka Kols, the John Bull in the East article commented, had been so accustomed to using these *tangees* that they cut off heads of the horses with one single blow. The bows and bowstrings were made out of bamboos, and the arrows which used to be fired from such distances were specially distant executions having nail shaped pointed and angular iron heads. It is not surprising that a detail of these weapons were elaborated in fine detail as from the 1760s onwards, the British troops whenever they entered the territory would face a volley of these arrows fired at them from the fastnesses of the hills where the insurgent Lurka Kols would position themselves. ‘Short Account of the Lurka Coles’, *AJMR*, Vol. XIII, January-June, 1822, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 137.

Section II

Subduing Singhbhum: Into The Tiger's Den

The British first got acquainted with this southern-most precinct of Chota Nagpur in the 1760s when, the region of Midnapore, which they had taken over, was faced with intermittent raids of the people from this region. The military campaign that they subsequently took to secure Midnapore from these raids brought them into contact with the family of the Singhbhum Raja residing in Porahat. The Singhbhum Raja, Jagannath Singh, whose power in the region had been weakened over time, sensed this as an opportunity to make overtures to the superior armed power, which the East India Company represented at that time, to help him recover his lost possessions and power in the region – vis-à-vis other contending chiefs as well as his refractory subjects. The uncle of Jagannath Singh, a person by the name of Pitambar Singh, met George Vansittart in 1767 on his behalf and urged that they be taken under the pale of company's protection for an annual tribute in return. Faced with this offer, Vansittart wrote to the authorities in Calcutta:

Since my arrival here Pitumber Singh, uncle to Jugunnaut Singh, the present Raja of Singbhoom (who is now kept under confinement by his cousin Sownaut Singh), has waited on me on the part of his nephew, who supplicates the Company's assistance and is desirous of putting his territories under their protection, and paying them an annual revenue....Singhbhoom formerly contained nearly 14,000 villages, but only about 500 are at present in the Raja's possession; of the others some gone to ruin, and the rest are in the hands of the Coles, a tribe of plundering banditti. The face of the country is in general plain and open it contains only a few straggly hills, has very little jungle in it, and no fortress of any importance. The Raja is by marriage a distant relation of the Sambhalpur Raja; there is a constant correspondence between the two districts and an uninterrupted intercourse of merchants. They are situated from each other about 90 kos, and there is a tolerable good road the whole way between them. Singhbhum was never reduced under the dominions of the Mughals, but has for 52 generations been an independent district in the possession of the present family. This is the account which Pitumber Singh, &c. have given me I have thought it my duty to lay before you all particular of it. If you approve of taking the country under the Company protection, four companies of sepoy, I believe, will be quite a sufficient force and it will probably open an easy intercourse with Sumbulpore. The first

overtures on this subject were made by the Raja to Lieut Fergusson near some months ago, who by my direction has since made all the inquiries he could concerning Singhbhum and I find his information in general agreement with Pitumber Singh's account.⁸¹

The authorities in Calcutta, after a scurried enquiry into the region, decided against the course proposed by Vansittart. The Governor insisted, instead, to focus on capturing Cuttack for now, asking any measures regarding Singhbhum to be deferred till then.⁸² And for the next five decades since this initial contact, the British would largely keep away from Singhbhum. Their few interventions remained limited to securing cooperation from the local chiefs against certain practices that affected the peace of the adjoining ceded tracts, or caused a loss to the colonial revenue. For example, six years after their first meeting with the family of the Singhbhum Raja, the British would once again summon the Raja; but this time to warn him against encouraging the smuggling of contraband salt through his region which was believed to be causing loss of revenue to the British. The salt merchants, it was discovered, transported salt through Singhbhum that they got from Orissa (then in possession of Maratha) instead of Midnapore (that was under British control). The Raja was forced to sign an obligation that he would not encourage such practices or harbour any raiyats and merchants in future and also guarantee the peace of neighbouring territories. Once again, two decades later the British forced the chiefs of Seraikela and Kharsawan to sign covenants against giving refuge to any fugitives and rebels from the territories directly controlled by the British. In 1803, the British sought the cooperation of the Seraikela chief in the Anglo-Maratha war assuring him that the British would allow him to remain in control of his territory.⁸³ Beyond this, the British seemed to have not meddled much into the area or its internal affairs of the different chiefs.

⁸¹ Let. dated Bulrampore, the 13th Dec 1767 from George Vansittart, the Resident officer of Midnapore to Hon'ble H. Verelst, Esq., Governor of Bengal, in Firminger, Walter (ed). (1914). *Bengal District Records, Midnapur, 1763-1767*. Calcutta: Catholic Orphan Press.

⁸² Price, James Cattaral. (1876). *Notes on the history of Midnapore, as contained in records extant in the Collector's office*, Vol. 1. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press. p. 54.

⁸³ O'Malley. (1910). *Singhbhum, Saraikella and Kharsawan*, p. 32.

The company's interest was renewed in the region in the second and the third decades of the nineteenth century. The British victory in the third Anglo-Maratha war in 1818 meant that it finally acquired possession of Cuttack and Sambhalpur, and was now the major, uncontested, power in the sub-continent. In his account of this period Murali Sahu points out that, after the victory over the Marathas, the company establishment 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.⁸⁴ Different chiefs of the region were again making repeated overtures to the British to help them in restoring their respective powers both vis-à-vis each other, as well as against their restive subjects. Major Edward Roughsedge, who had already been involved in military operations in the northern parts of Chota Nagpur since 1808, wrote to the authorities, after their victory against the Marathas, the advantages of extending British control over this area. The authorities were not yet ready to plunge on to the region and desired more information about it. They specially wanted to inquire into the reasons behind Singhbhum Raja's continued pleas to be taken under the pale of British over-lordship. In the meantime, Roughsedge was asked to maintain friendly relations with the Raja and receive his proposals for a 'more intimate connection'; however, he was not to commit anything from the side of the government.⁸⁵ A couple of months later, however, the government agreed to extend British authority over the chiefs. But, in a specific instruction sent to Roughsedge, it emphasized that this authority was to be extremely nominal and there was no desire on the part of the government to interfere with the internal affairs of the different kingdoms. After they agreed to the supremacy of the British government, the three chiefs – Raja Ghanshyam Singh of Porahat, Babu (Kunwar) Bikram Singh of Seraikela and Babu (Thakur) Chetan Singh of Kharsawan – were to be left in the 'secure enjoyment' of their actual possessions. They were only to pay a nominal tribute to the Company, and, carrying on from the previous century's

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸⁵ Let. dated Gorakhhpur, the 18th June 1818 from J. Adam (Secy to the Govt) to Major Roughsedge, in Sinha, H. N. (1945). *Selections From the Nagpur Residency Records*. Vol. IV (1818-1840). Nagpur: Government Printing

covenants, they were again asked to ensure that their estates do not become safe asylums to fugitive offenders.⁸⁶

To put into effect the instructions of the government, Major Roughsedge, who was by now made the Political Agent of the South-Western Frontier to the Government General, sent his assistant Lieutenant Ruddel to Singhbhum in early 1819 to enter into agreements with Singhbhum Raja at Porahat as well as collect all possible information regarding the country and ‘especially of the extra-ordinary race called the Larkas.’⁸⁷ But Ruddel’s trip to Singhbhum was a failure. Neither could he succeed in penetrating deep into the region to actually come into contact with the Larka Kols, nor did the Raja agree to the conditions laid down by the government. On the latter point, it is important to state here that the Porahat Raja, in indicating his desire to be taken under the British overlordship, wanted more in return from the British than the latter was willing to accede at this juncture. More specifically, the Raja wanted British help to restore his pre-eminence in the region vis-à-vis *Kunwar* Bikram Singh of Seraikela; he wanted the British to help him restore the idol of Pauri Devi – the family goddess of the Singh rulers and the ritual marker of local power – which he accused the father of Bikram Singh, Abhiram Singh of having stolen from his family’s palace in Porahat in 1790. Ruddel and Roughsedge, on their part were bound by the government’s instructions of leaving the different chiefs independent of each other and absolute non-interference in their internal affairs. The negotiations between the two broke precisely on this ground sometime in May 1819. However, in February 1820 the Porahat Raja would come around to agree on precisely the terms he had rejected a few months back. The change in his attitude could be attributed to the fact that after the failed negotiations of the previous year with him, the British had turned their attention to the chiefs of Seraikela and Kharsawan, and successfully effected agreements with them in January 1820. The Porahat Raja realized his failure to be flexible with his demands in this changed scenario would isolate him and

⁸⁶(Let. No. 36, from Captain Wilkinson, Agent to the Gov. Gen. to R.D. Mangles, Secy to Govt., Fort William, Jud. Dept., dated 22nd August 1836) File No. 1046, DCRR, para 7

⁸⁷ Cited in Roychoudhury, P.C. (1959). *1857 in Bihar (Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas)*. Second Edition. Patna: Government Revision Branch, p. 75.

his claims vis-à-vis the other chiefs. The agreement taken from Raja, on 1st February 1820, stated:

....I hereby engage and bind myself and my posterity to a loyal devotion to the interest of my new sovereign, and the most implicit obedience to such orders as I or they may, from time to time, receive from competent authority. I further engage for the purpose of marking my feudal dependence on the British government to pay an annual tribute of 101 Sicca Rupees to be given with the year 1226 (1st Bhadon) 1818, and to be paid...to the person who may be appointed to receive it by His Lordship in Council. Should I or my posterity wilfully fail in the observance of these stipulations, I hereby declare myself and them liable to such notice of, or punishment for, the infringement, as it may appear, to the British government for the time being to deserve.⁸⁸

In return, the title deed or *pattah* given to him by Roughsedge stated:

In return for the Engagement which you have executed and delivered to Captain Ruddel, I am authorized and directed by the British government to assure you of the protection of the Honourable Company, the efficient benefit of which, in your maintenance in all your existing rights, privileges, and possessions, you and your posterity will continue to enjoy, so long as you and they shall faithfully abide by the stipulations to which you have pledged yourself and them.⁸⁹

Even as the Raja unconditionally agreed to the terms placed by the British, he expressed a hope that the British would help him regain his lost pre-eminence in the region.⁹⁰ He hoped for help in recovering the idol of Pauri Devi; he hoped for re-establishing his authority over certain of his territories which he claimed had been forcibly encroached upon by the Seraikela and Kharsawan chiefs; he also hoped that accepting the British suzerainty would afford to him assistance of the colonial military in reducing to subjection the Larka Kols who, for all practical purposes controlled the

⁸⁸ 'Translation of a Kuboolyat taken from Raja Ghunsham Sing Deo of Porahat, in Singbhoom, dated 1st February 1820' in Aitchison, C.U. (1892). *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*. Vol. 1. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, p. 144.

⁸⁹ 'Translation of the Pottah given to Rajah Ghunsham Sing Deo of Porahat, in Singbhoom, dated 1st February, 1820' in Aitchison. *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*. p. 144.

⁹⁰ Wilkinson to Mangles, 22nd August 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para 9.

greatest part of his territory, independent of him. In return, Roughsedge was also willing to be more flexible than earlier, pushing the limits of what Calcutta allowed him. He promised to assist the Raja in subduing his refractory subjects, as well for the recovery of the idol of Pauri Devi from the Seraikela chief. But he could not go further than this, and assist him in recovering his territories that he claimed had been taken over by the other chiefs, stating that he was 'bound by certain principles' communicated to him by Calcutta.⁹¹

Twenty days later, Roughsedge proceeded with the Porahat Raja to Seraikela to settle the dispute over the possession of the Pauri Devi idol. The journey to Seraikela brought Roughsedge into contact with the *dreaded* Larka Kols, whose territory he decided to enter after 'settling the business in the civilized part of Singhbhum'.⁹² However, the different chiefs were quite alarmed about the dangers of Roughsedge's proposed march and as he stated, to the authorities in Calcutta, 'having a (very) formidable opinion of the power and ferocity of these savages', they even made a formal protest against it.⁹³ Roughsedge's initial policy was however, to avoid any direct military operation or confrontation with the Hos. He called upon *mankis* and *mundas* - the customary headmen of the Hos - and felicitated them with ritual gifts, turbans and clothes in return for an agreement whereby they were asked to relinquish their 'predatory habits' and acquiesce to the authority of the Porahat Raja.⁹⁴ The village headmen that came to Roughsedge at this time were largely from the northern parts of Singhbhum, who told him that it was the southern Kols who were responsible for the disturbances in the region that had diminished the authority of the Raja.⁹⁵ The scene, however, changed very quickly when Roughsedge tried to move southwards. When Roughsedge's troops were camping at Chaibasa, the tribal villagers of a nearby hamlet attacked the camp in which one person was killed and several injured. This set the stage for the first sanguine battles

⁹¹ Wilkinson to Mangles, 22nd August 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para 10.

⁹² 'Extract from a Private letter, Lurkas', 1820 (exact date not known), *AJMR*, Vol. X, July-December, 1820, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 609.

⁹³ (Roughsedge to Metcalfe, 21st March 1820) cited in O'Malley. (1910). *Singhbhum, Saraikella and Kharsawan*. p. 33.

⁹⁴ Sen, S.K. (2008). *Tribal Struggle for Freedom Singhbhum 1800-1858*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company., p. 27.

⁹⁵ Sahu, Murali. (1985). *The Kolhan under The British Rule*. Jamshedpur: Utkal Book Agency, p. 21.

between the company's troops and the Hos, scenes which would reoccur repeatedly for the next decade and a half. A letter from the site of occurrence described the manner in which the troops, under one Lieutenant Maillard, attacked, pursued and 'sabred' the insurgent party of around 300 of these 'ignorant and savage, but brave mountaineers' armed with bows, arrows and battle axes. The Hos, on seeing the advance of the troops, would retreat to the hills from where they would fire their volley of arrows. They would cut down the dak lines and sever communications. At times, they would also emerge from their strategic hideouts in the hills and rush down on the cavalrymen with their battle axes 'with utmost impetuosity and blind courage' seemingly 'to kill the horses than the riders...from an idea that by dismounting the latter, they should find them an easy prey.' But, in front of the superior firepower of the colonial troops they could not stand up for long. On some occasions, the British sent the captured Hos to the insurgent strongholds with messages for surrender and warnings against holding out. Even then, if the Hos remained persistent the colonial troops simply burned down entire villages to force them out. Matters came to a close after a few days with the insurgents releasing the intercepted daks, following which a fragile peace was concluded in the region.⁹⁶

On his return to his cantonment at Sambhalpur, Roughsedge might have had an air of triumph about him; for he had put down the turbulence of the Larkas – a 'war-like' people, who were perceived to have inspired terror and dread in the minds of all authority as well as travellers into their territory. But, in terms of the objectives with which he had set out, Roughsedge's first visit to Singhbhum had not been completely successful. The chief of Seraikela, contesting Ghyanshayam Singh's claims, could not be persuaded to return the Pauri Devi idol. The 'Southern Coles' also had not completely submitted to the Singhbhum Raja's authority. His major success, however, lay in his being able to make arrangements for the setting up of the first police posts in the region, a proposal he had made to the Raja after the disturbances broke out.⁹⁷ After his return, Roughsedge penned down a letter to the authorities in Calcutta describing vividly his travails into this heart of

⁹⁶ 'Extract from a Private letter, Lurkas', 1820 (exact date not known), *AJMR*, Vol. X, July-Dec., 1820, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., p. 609.

⁹⁷ Wilkinson to Mangles, 22nd Aug 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para 11.

darkness. Painting a picture of savagery of the Hos and obscurity of the territory, Roughsedge commented:

Not having any feelings of veneration for Brahmins...they make no scruple of putting to death any man of respectable caste who presumed to enter their territory, nor is there I can venture to affirm a single Brahmin, Rajpoot or Mussalman in any one of the numerous and well inhabited villages they possess. A traveller would as soon think of visiting into a Tiger's Den, as of traversing any part of Lurka Cole.⁹⁸

Calcutta, far from being impressed by Roughsedge's audacity, chastised him. In their opinion, Roughsedge had gone way too far than what the government had commissioned him for. In a communication sent to him, the government stated their dissatisfaction with his proceedings against the 'Lurka Kols', as it did not have the 'the previous sanction of the government.' Furthermore, they specially asked Roughsedge to specially discontinue all mediation between Porahat and Seraikela regarding the disputes over the idol Pauri Devi.⁹⁹ The control over this territory, as the previous despatches had laid out, was only to be a nominal one, and meddling into the internal affairs of the chiefs was strictly forbidden for the local officials.

Despite this initial admonishment, Roughsedge continued to pursue the sanction of the government for his proposals of 'subjugating the whole of Singhbhum'. The change in government's attitude came early next year, when the fragile peace established by Roughsedge showed the first signs of crumbling. In early 1821, the police posts came under attacks by the Hos, and a *subedar* was killed in one such attack. Though the chief of Seraikela averted greater disaster by affording shelter to the survivors of this attack and reinforcing the garrisons with his own armed retainers, the government realized the need now to upgrade their own military intervention in the region. An elaborate military plan was made to encircle the territory from four sides – Sambhalpur, Cuttack, Midnapur, and Bankura – by about 2000 soldiers belonging detachments of the Body Guard, the 13th

⁹⁸ Roughsedge to Metcalf, 9th May 1820, quoted in Sen, S.K. (2008). *Tribal Struggle for Freedom Singhbhum 1800-1858*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company. p. 25

⁹⁹ Metcalfe to Roughsedge, dated 3rd June 1820, cited in Wilkinson to Mangles, 22nd Aug 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para 11.

N.I., the Hill Rangers, Ramgurh battalion and Cuttack legion.¹⁰⁰ The local chiefs, through whose territories the colonial military were to pass were asked to afford every facility for the progress of the troops. The command of these operations was placed in the hands of another officer – Lieutenant Colonel Richards.¹⁰¹ Roughsedge, as we have seen above, was the person who had been pursuing the government, for the previous two years, to establish authority over Singhbhum and subdue its refractory residents. But at this juncture, when the company establishment finally decided to pursue the course that he had been proposing, his role was reduced to a mere advisory one to Richards. The authorities in Calcutta, after their experiences of the previous year, could not repose their trust in Roughsedge to once again not overstep the official mandate.

At the command of Richards, colonial troops again marched into Singhbhum in March 1821 - the second time in less than a year. These military operations, which lasted for a couple of months, were extremely tedious and considerably tested the skills and endurance of the colonial troops. The landscape of this ‘mountainous tract of country’ was not known to the troops, and they had to considerably climb uphill to reach the points from where attacks were to be made. An officer who took part in these operations described the many hardships that they faced. They had been sent upon the mission to subdue Singhbhum in the worst season of the year, ‘the thermometer stood every day in our tent at 110 and 112, and on some days as high as 122; and when exposed to the sun at noon, it generally stood between 150 and 160.’ Alongside the heat of the weather, ‘the extremely bad mountain roads, bad water, and for days together none at all’ added to their ‘many privations’. Their adversary - ‘a tribe of outrageous mountaineers called Kooles’ – was no less challenging, and just like earlier these records mention the manner in which the insurgent Hos would recluse, in the face of advancing troops, into the mountain fastnesses from where they would then launch their counter attacks. The manner in which

¹⁰⁰ ‘Short Account of the Lurka Coles’, *AJMR*, Vol. XIII, January-June, 1822, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 137. Another officer who took part in the campaign put the number of soldiers who participated in this campaign at 5000. ‘Extract of a Letter from an Officer, dated Camp Sumbhulpoor, July 24th, 1821 in *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 92, part 1 (Jan-June 1822), p. 76.

¹⁰¹ Wilkinson to Mangles, 22nd Aug 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para 17.

this officer described the ‘very harassing nature of the expedition’ was also to justify the extreme measures that they adopted:¹⁰²

The mode of fighting we were obliged to adopt, to subdue the enemy, was also very harassing to our men. For three or four days after our arrival in their country, they gave us battle on the plains, but finding themselves so dreadfully cut up, and being able to make no impression upon us, they betook themselves to the recesses of the highest mountains, where we were obliged to follow them, hunt them down, and kill them like so many tigers; as they never allowed themselves to be taken prisoners while they could keep hold of their bow and arrow and battle axe.¹⁰³

An article in the journal *John Bull in the East* a year later would call these extreme measures as having been called upon themselves by the Hos themselves. Their ‘practice to murder strangers found within their territories’ and other ‘frequent outrages’ had necessitated these measures from the side of the government, which had, as its ultimate motive, ‘producing an alteration in their behaviour’. Echoing the imperial military’s stand point, the author of this article justified the loss of life as an inevitable consequence of dealing with a savage and obstinate people:

On the advance of the troops the villages were deserted, and the inhabitants took refuge, with their principle effects, in the fastnesses of the hills, and in the sides of difficult millahs, where they could throw up stockades in front of their places of retreat. When pursued to those places and attacked, they made a very desperate resistance, exhibited individually the *utmost contempt of life and savage thirst for revenge*. In many cases, therefore, it was found impossible to spare the poor fellows, who scorned to yield, even when severe wounds left them but little power of annoyance.¹⁰⁴

The colonial troops, apart from attacking the Hos, also specifically targeted their granaries, to deprive the insurgents of the means of subsistence. The Ho resistance was further perforated from within, when several *mankis* and *mundas* starting acquiescing to

¹⁰² As per this letter, thousands of Hos (Larka Kols) were killed in these operations.

¹⁰³ ‘Extract of a Letter from an Officer, dated Camp Sumbhulpoor, July 24th, 1821 in *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 92, part 1 (Jan-June 1822), pp. 76-77.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Short Account of the Lurka Coles’, *AJMR*, Vol. XIII, Jan-June, 1822, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 137. (emphasis mine)

proclamations issued by the British to personally appear in the camp and surrender.¹⁰⁵ Against a professionally trained military, the Hos, despite the advantages of local terrain and knowledge, were fighting a desperate battle. More surrenders followed, and by May 1821 their resistance to British intrusion was effectively over. The colonial state had forced most of the headmen to swear, on the tiger's skin as per the local custom, to come to an agreement.¹⁰⁶ As per this agreement, they were to acknowledge themselves as loyal and obedient subjects of British authority. The agreement stated specifically that in case of any oppression, they would, rather than resorting to arms, complain to British officers commanding the troops on the frontiers. The agreement also specified an amount of rent annually payable to their their 'lawful chiefs or zamindars', whose authority was restored over their erstwhile rebellious subjects. Moreover, they were to keep the roads through their country open and safe for all travellers, and in the event of any robbery, to seize the thieves and account for the property. Lastly, they were to allow persons of all castes to settle in their villages and afford them protection; and also encourage their children to learn the Oriya and Hindi languages.¹⁰⁷ With the signing of this agreement, the first siege of Singhbhum was effectively drawn to a close. The siege, however, had come at some loss to the colonial military as well. And apart from the exactions on the lives and limbs of the soliders, there were the sufferings of the non-combatants, which had to be compensated and rewarded. A doctor, who accompanied a regiment to combat sites, was killed in an 'accidental shot' by the colonial troops. Two other doctors out of the four who had commenced were killed because of the harshness of the climate and the fatigue of these operations. The son of the killed doctor was appointed as a subordinate medical officer in the body guard¹⁰⁸, and the lone doctor who survived these operations received the public thanks of the Commander in Chief for his additional exertions.¹⁰⁹ Leaving behind certain detachments of troops at strategic places in the country, most of the troops

¹⁰⁵ Sahu., *The Kolhan Under British Rule.*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁶ 'Short Account of the Lurka Coles', *AJMR*, Vol. XIII, January-June, 1822, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 137.

¹⁰⁷ Wilkinson to Mangles, dated 11th Oct. 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR. p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Hodson, V.C.P. (1910). *Historical Records of the Governor-General's Bodyguard*. London: W. Thacker & Co., p. 89.

¹⁰⁹ 'Extract of a Letter from an Officer, dated Camp Sumbhulpoor, July 24th, 1821 in *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 92, part 1 (January-June 1822), p. 77.

returned back to their cantonment at Sambhalpur. The harshness of the climate had taken its toll on the health of Major Roughsedge too, and six months later, suffering from fever that last over three months, he died on 13th January at Soanpur, sixty miles south of Sambhalpur.¹¹⁰

The successive operations in less than a year, however, had failed to subdue the southern territory of Singhbhum. All the *mankis* and the *mundas* who acquiesced to the 1821 agreement came from the northern parts of Singhbhum. This was despite the fact that there had been special emphasis during the military operation at encircling the southern territories of Singhbhum. But at the end of the operations all that the company establishment could achieve was stationing a police post within 10 miles from one of the villages in the south. In rest of the territory, a rudimentary administrative mechanism and an indirect mode of rule was established. The authority of the local chiefs and *rajahs* was given the sanction of the company establishment, and the region was fortified with police posts and detachments from the colonial military. The chiefs were to oversee the rent collection in the area and pass on a share to the authorities in Calcutta. In 1823, Roughsedge's successor Colonel Gilbert, having received due authorization from the government, undertook a very brief military expedition to Seraikela with an object of bringing away the idol of Pauri Devi from the Seraikela chief's house and restoring it to the Porahat Raja. The mission was a success and the idol was restored eventually without any resistance this time around.¹¹¹ Beyond this one concession, Calcutta instructed the British officers in the region to keep away from 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 misgivings, the events of the subsequent decade would have served to dispel it. The series of insurrections, that broke out within a short span of five years in the next decade,

¹¹⁰ 'Major Edward Roughsedge' in Royal Military Calender. (1826) *The East India Military Calender Containing the Services of General and Field Officers of the Indian Army*. London: Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen. p. 229.

¹¹¹ Wilkinson to Mangles, dated 22nd Aug., 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR. para 21.

contributed in making the situation extremely perilous for the British, and called for a drastic realignment in their approach to the territory and its local rulers.

Section III

Conquering Singhbhum: A Scrambled Land

In the years after 1821, the disputes between various chiefs of the region showed absolutely no sign of abating. And the British intervention in the early 1820s had only exacerbated their contradictions by the slight administrative re-territorialization of this geographical space. As per the 1821 agreement, four 'Kol' pirs - Aula, Lallgarh, Thai and Bharbharia – that had been earlier under the control of the Mayurbhanj Raja who was subordinate to the authorities in Cuttack since the victory of the British in the third Anglo-Maratha war, were included in the South-Western Frontier Province and placed under the Political Agent of the Governor-General stationed at Hazaribagh. The matters were further complicated, as these four villages fell within a larger tenure – called Bamanghatty - of a person called Niranjan Das Mahapatra, who had been in a dispute with the royal family at Mayurbhanj since 1818. As per his claim, the Mahapatra family had been holding Bamanghatty rent free for five hundred years in return for their military services; but in 1818 the ruler at Mayurbhanj, Bikram Bhanj` had forced him to agree to an annual rent of 700 rupees. After the British took away four villages from Mayurbhanj's control in 1821, the Mahapatra, who had been evading Mayurbhanj's demand for rent, now started making overtures to them asking the colonial authorities to free the rest of Bamanghatty as well from Mayurbhanj and place it under the authorities at Hazaribagh. The British maintaining a policy of non-interference into territorial claims of different chiefs and zamindars refused to acquiesce to his demand. Instead, their attempt was to conciliate both the parties. In 1825, Roughsedge's successor Colonel Gilbert effected an agreement between that two which stated that Madhab Das Mahapatra (Niranjan Das Mahapatra's son) would pay a slightly reduced annual rent of 500 rupees to the Mayurbhanj chief. The settlement would, however, fail in its intention to pacify the dispute and two years later, Jadunath Bhanj, Bikram Bhanj's son and successor, made an attempt to deprive Madhab Das from all power and authority within Bamangathy. Madhab Das's authority could only be saved because of the intervention of the Cuttack

commissioner Stockwell at the behest of Colonel Gilbert, who prevented Jadunath from executing his wishes.¹¹² Thomas Wilkinson, the newly appointed agent of the South-Western Frontier Province, felt that reversing the 1821 territorialisation might put an end to the ‘misunderstanding’ between the Rajah and the Mahaptra, and suggested to the authorities in both Cuttack and Calcutta to proceed in this direction. Both Cuttack and Calcutta agreed to his plan. But while trying to operationalize it, which required primarily ‘amicably settling’ the difference between the two, Stockwell was attacked by *larkas* who were seen to be ‘Mahaptra’s followers’. A small military action followed, at the end of which the Madhab Das once again agreed to pay 500 rupees annual rent to the Mayurbhanj Raja, as well as well as to abide by the decisions of the government.¹¹³ The two, however, could simply not be conciliated. And over the next four years, enlisting the ‘plunderous Larka Kols’ on their side, both of them would organize repeated attacks on each other’s territories, in the process ‘destroying several villages’, ‘carrying off cattle’ and causing loss of ‘hundreds of lives’. From 1834, Henry Ricketts, Stockwell’s successor, would go further than the official policy that had been adopted till then and throw in official weight behind Mayurbhanj Raja’s claims. By next year, after fresh round of attacks, Mayurbhanj had gained possession almost over whole of Bamanghatty, except ‘two Kols pirs’ of Lalgarrh and Aula. The region of Bamanghatty, however, was still not completely secure with the Mayurbhanj Rajah, and the ‘Coles’ from these two other villages would continue to launch attacks on his claims to authority.¹¹⁴

This entire dispute between the Mayurbhanj Rajah and the Mahaptra family of Bamanghatty pulled the various chiefs of Singhbhum, who were already in a scramble for territory and supremacy vis-à-vis each other, into its vortex. Jadunath Bhanj complained to the authorities against the chief of Seraikela, Ajumber Singh accusing him of sheltering and helping Madhab Das Mahaptra. Ajumber Singh refuted his claim and portrayed it as simply a ploy by Jadunath Bhanj to resume hold over a territory called Koochung, that had been granted to him by earlier Mayurbhanj Rajahs, but which he

¹¹² Let. from W. Dent to C. Macsween, Secy. to the Govt., Fort William dated 4th Sep. 1833, File no. 3305, DCRR.

¹¹³ Wilkinson to Mangles, dated 22nd August. 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR. para 6.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

wanted to reclaim after settling his claims against Madhab Das. The royal family at Porahat supported Jadunath Bhanj, sensing that the triumph of his claims would contribute to weakening the authority of their long adversary, Seraikela and help them regain complete supremacy over Singhbhum. Wilkinson feared that the chiefs of Mayurbhanj and Porahat would attack Koochung, and on one occasion, he even rushed 100 *sipahis* of the Ramgarh Battalion to the region to prevent it.¹¹⁵ Such was the dispute ridden scene amongst the various chiefs in the region when the colonial authorities refused to give protection to Mayurbhanj Rajah's brother's marriage procession to the royal palace at Porahat – the incident that referred to in the introduction of this chapter.

The main anxiety for the colonial officials became the large scale involvement of the 'plunderous Lurka Coles' in the excursions of one chief against the other. Over the last few years, the intractable tribes of these lower provinces of Bengal Presidency had continued to harass the colonial military, even when not directly involved in the various royal disputes. The *remote* frontier on the south had seen a short lived insurrection in 1831 in a village called Jayantgarh, triggered by the custodial death of a former rebel. As the British tried to quell this unrest, two of the villages of the Bamanghatty region - Aula and Lallgarh – refused the payment of rent institutionalized by the 1821 agreement and joined in the rebellion. These disturbances had just been pacified that a widespread rebellion – the Kol revolt immortalized as one of the earliest tribal revolts against the British - broke out in the region just north of Singhbhum.¹¹⁶ Wilkinson, who at that time was involved in attempting to settle the Bamanghatty dispute, was rushed out to command the military in quelling it. The Kol rebellion, engulfed many different regions of Chotanagpur, including certain northern parts of Singhbhum. In the areas of Singhbhum, the 'Larka Kols' joined the other 'Kols', despite all the previous attempts, as had been outlined in the report by Cuthbert, of the Ramgarh authorities to stop contacts between the two. And, during such insurrectionary unions, all the distinctions that some had created between the 'Larka Kols' and the 'Kols', as we had seen in Section 1, were

¹¹⁵ Desp. No. 14 of 1836, dated Fort William, the 6th Sep 1836 from Auckland to the Hon. Court of Directors of the East India Company, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 17, WBSA, para 10, 12.

¹¹⁶ For an extensive description of the Kol rebellion, see Jha, J.C. (1964). *The Kol Insurrection in Chotanagpur*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co.

discarded. A newspaper report describing the military operations to suppress the revolt commented that both these ‘wretchedly poor tribes’ are remarkably ‘alike...for a total disregard of the rights of property, and a readiness to have recourse to arms upon the most trivial occasions.’¹¹⁷ In the operations to suppress this revolt, Wilkinson attempt to enlist the support of different sections of the local population in densely forested territory, large parts of which were virtually unknown to the colonial military. As earlier, the chiefs at Seraikela and Kharsawan were asked to assist the military campaigns by supplying their contingents made up locals. Apart from that, a special emphasis was placed on securing the acquiescence of the tribal headmen - ‘the local leaders whom the Coles have a strong attachment to’ and who could in turn ensure faster surrenders of the rebels.¹¹⁸ Soon after the suppression of the Kol rebellion, another short lived insurrection broke out in Junglehahals, the region to the east of Singhbhum. This was headed by a person called Ganga Narain, and within a few months it spread into parts of Singhbhum. During this campaign against Ganga Narain, Wilkinson once again noted the ‘valuable aid’ rendered by a local detachment – ‘a body of irregulars’ made up of the local population that he had raised – in assisting the colonial military detachments in this hostile terrain.¹¹⁹ A report submitted just a few months after this uprising was put down commented that the ‘the precise time of (this) rising’ was determined by ‘the success of insurrection in Chotanagpore and Tamar (Kol Revolt)’ and the ‘disturbances prevailing in Bamanghatty’ along with the ‘unsettled state of Singhbhum’.¹²⁰ Even other contemporaneous reports which did not completely agree with this theory of ‘simultaneous insurrections’ being connected did not rule out the possibility of such a union being effected sometime in the

¹¹⁷ ‘The Kholes’ *AJMR*, Vol. VIII, May-August 1832, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 186.

¹¹⁸ Desp. No. 19 of 1832, Jud. Dept., Lower Provinces, the 25th Sep 1832., Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 14, para 3 (WBSA).

¹¹⁹ Desp. No. 3 of 1834, Jud. Dept., Lower Provinces (undated), Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept., Vol. No. 16, para 5 (WBSA).

¹²⁰ Let. from W. Dent to C. Macsween, Secy. to the Govt, Fort William dated 4th Sep. 1833, File no. 3305, DCRR. Ganga Narain was captured and executed in Singhbhum in February 1833..

future. And if such were to be forged, these voices warned, the military force deployed in the region would be inadequate to subdue the ‘rioters’ and ‘protect’ the country.¹²¹

If ordering the region into a peaceable tract of land, which would secure easy movement of *dak* and travellers, had been Major Roughsedge’s intention during the 1821 agreement, it could be said that both peace and order had remained completely elusive. The borders between different administrative tracts carved out by the British in Chota Nagpur had remained porous, and the boundaries of territories claimed by different royal families within Singhbhum remained disputed and thereby fluid. Because of this state of affairs, an insurrection in one area would quickly spread to adjoining areas, seriously threatening British authority over a large region within this scrambled territory of South Chota Nagpur. The chiefs, despite affording help to the British in their military campaigns only fuelled these ‘frontier disturbances’ further through their feuds.¹²² In fact, these intractable subjects, it was now argued, were absolutely beyond their control and once instigated their violent recalcitrance would extend to the few semblances of British authority – *dak* lines and stationed troops - in the region.¹²³ In such a precarious situation, could the British, despite their avowed policy of indirect form of rule through the different chiefs, in whose internal affairs they would not interfere, afford anymore to look the other way?

In a letter dated 4th June 1835, Wilkinson urged the authorities in Calcutta to abandon the earlier policy of non-interference, and instead allow him to strengthen the

¹²¹ Extract of a letter, dated camp Puthowreah, Chota Nagpore, 11th February 1832, in ‘Miscellaneous: Supplement to Asiatic Intelligence’, *AJMR*, Vol. VIII, May-August 1832, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co. p. 145.

¹²² Despatch No. 14 of 1836, dated Fort William, the 6th September 1836 from Auckland to the Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 17, WBSA, para 15.

¹²³ Just to give one example in May 1835, the Deputy Post Master at Sambhalpur reported to the Cuttack Commissioner the avowed that the “Coles” had warned that they would murder the *dak* runners should they continue to run the mail. After an incident, in which 20 sepoys of the Ramgarh battalion who were returning from an outpost, were attacked by the “Coles”, the postal authorities had cancelled their plan to set up two *Dak* chaukis in the region. The Cuttack Commissioner, after this incident, directed the deputy post master to station a guard of 10 muskeeters at all the “exposed *dak* chaukis”. The Cuttack commissioner in his reported stated that the Mayurbhanj Raja after this incident confessed his own inability to control these “Coles”. *Ibid*, para 14.

Seraikela, Kharsawan chiefs as well as Mahapatra in Bamanghatty.¹²⁴ These forces, he felt, powerful in their own respective estates, had been the most reliable of local allies of British, promptly assisting them during moments of unrest. In proposing this course of action, Wilkinson was, in a way, also questioning the decisions taken by his predecessors as well as some of his contemporaries. For example, as we had seen earlier, both Roughsedge and Gilbert had supported the royal family at Singhbhum vis-à-vis the Seraikela chief in the dispute over the Pauri Devi idol. And in 1834, the Cuttack Commissioner, Henry Ricketts had allowed Mayurbhanj Raja to take back Bamanghatty from Madhab Das Mahapatra. The estates of these chiefs and zamindars, Wilkinson felt, were strategically located to safeguard other parts of lower provinces of Bengal which the British directly controlled - such as Ramgarh, Midnapore and Dhalbhum. Moreover, Wilkinson pointed that the Mahapatra commanded a 'numerous body' of his own caste, which the colonial state could rope in as a reserve force against the *Larkas*. Wilkinson's opinion, unlike Ricketts, was not favourably disposed towards the Mayurbhanj Rajah, who he considered powerless to hold on to Bamanghatty for long.¹²⁵ However, just a year later, Wilkinson would propose an even more radical break from the past. It was too late, he now felt, to attempt to resuscitate any of the older chiefs or zamindars. The Mahapatra, weakened considerably and reduced to utter destitution, had been living at government expense at the agency headquarters. And the Seraikela chief and Mayurbhanj Raja had simply refused to end their mutual hostilities, despite repeated warnings communicated to both of them. If the 'reduction of Coles to order' and 'preservation of tranquillity (for future)', was the aim of the British, the time had come, Wilkinson urged the authorities in Calcutta, to stake a direct claim over these 'wild frontier districts'. Or else, the *Larkas* - the 'merciless plunderers' and 'the freebooters' - would simply continue to ravage the territory:

¹²⁴ Despatch No. 14 of 1836, dated Fort William, the 6th September 1836 from Auckland to the Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 17, WBSA, para 25.

¹²⁵ He stated the 'Coles' would defect away from the Rajah if he did not allow them complete license to plunder, and would rise up in open revolt if they were called on to pay rents as subjects of the Raja. Ibid, para 9.

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 Toepeer, 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.¹²⁶

In this letter by Wilkinson, we can also discern a clear shift in the way he wanted the British to frame their authority vis-à-vis local rulers and chiefs. These ‘petty chiefs’ were not just inept in control these ‘outrages’, but, according to Wilkinson, they were also oppressive on the local tribal population. To quote him:

Neither the Raja of Mohurbhunje or Singhbhoom, nor any of the Baboos can control the Coles, nor could we make them sufficiently powerful to do so, without affording the 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 would be obliged to suppress. Again if after punishing the Coles, we were to leave them to the management of the several Chiefs to whom they have hitherto owned allegiance, those Chiefs could never control them, although the whole of them could exercise an influence over them for Evil, whenever they might find it convenient to do so, for the injury or destruction of an obnoxious neighbour.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Wilkinson to Mangles, dated 22nd Aug. 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR. para 44.

¹²⁷ Ibid., para 54.

According to Wilkinson, the older order, represented by these local Rajahs, chiefs and zamindars, now had to be supplanted directly by the new and superior authority represented by the East India Company. In this letter, he also attached an elaborate military plan that he said was the only way of subduing and conquering Singhbhum. From the north, where the '*jageerdars* of Nagpur' along with the *mankis* and *mundas* would be asked to assemble, fifty irregular horses and a brigade of guns along with 250 men of the Ramgarh battalion would enter the region. The force of the *jagirdars* would be protected in the rear by another reserve force of 100 men and 25 horses. A third detachment consisting of 400 men of the battalion, 100 horses and a brigade of guns would proceed, assisted by the troops furnished by Seraikela and Kharsawan rulers, from another direction.¹²⁸ Despite abundance of grain in this territory, the troops, Wilkinson stated, were not to depend on the country for any supplies, and he recommended the detachments to be laden with ample supplies for two months to be on the 'safe side'.¹²⁹ The troops, would be specially concentrated in certain villages where the 'plunderers' had completely disregarded the authority of their headmen, and would take the attacks to the fastnesses of the hills where the Coles would retreat, after deserting their villages, seeing the advancing troops.¹³⁰ Calcutta approved Wilkinson's proposals, with the words that they were confident that Wilkinson's 'anxious attention (would)...prevent any cruelties being committed by the irregular troops and (he)..would save from any outrage the helpless and the infirm men, women or children if any such were left in the deserted villages'.¹³¹ Wilkinson's increasing significance in the corridors of power in Calcutta greatly alarmed the Mayurbhanj Raja who feared that the success of this expedition might deprive him of the territories to his west – such as Koochung – that he staked a claim over. Making a last ditch effort to safeguard his interests, he sent a representation to Calcutta, via the Cuttack Commissioner. Calcutta not only summarily discarded his plea,

¹²⁸ Desp. No. 14 of 1836, dated Fort William, the 6th Sep. 1836 from Auckland to the Hon Court of Directors of East India Company, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 17, WBSA, para 27-29.

¹²⁹ Wilkinson to Mangles, dated 22nd Aug. 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para 53.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, para 48, 50.

¹³¹ Desp. No. 14 of 1836, dated Fort William, the 6th Sep. 1836 from Auckland to the Hon Court of Directors of East India Company, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 17, WBSA, para 30.

but instead ordered him, in an absolutely disinterested manner, to provide all assistance to Wilkinson when the forces pass through his territories. By rendering this assistance, the government in Bengal stated, he will give the best proof of his loyalty to the British and in Captain Wilkinson's camp he would get the best opportunity to safeguard his own interests and opposing the intrigues of his alleged enemies.¹³²

Backed by Calcutta's support, aided by local chiefs and village headmen and armed with a professionally trained military, Wilkinson marched into the region with the setting in of winter in November 1836. The final capture of the region was an extremely short lived affair. During these operations, under Wilkinson and another officer Colonel Richards, the British, apart from attacking certain villages, made the usual proclamations for cooperation to the tribal headmen, who in turn facilitated several more surrenders. A month in to the operations, Wilkinson commented that this assistance provided by the village headmen Hos was of great help in subduing the *Larkas*:

The Lurkas are evidently much alarmed, and much I attribute to the impression made by the successful affair on the morning of 4th December and *subsequent hearty co-operation with us*, of the *Mankis* of Cherrai, Goomla and Bhunje which disheartened their brethren of Toepeer.¹³³

After a few months, in the early months of 1837, military operations were taken to the southern frontiers. Once it was felt that the surrenders of the 'ring leaders' of the unrest had been secured, the troops marched back to their cantonments victorious by February 1837. A total of 622 villages over 26 pirs were taken over from the different chiefs and designated as the Kolhan Government Estate, which was incorporated into the South West Frontier Agency. Samuel Richard Tickell was appointed as the first local administrator of Kolhan, his post designated as the Assistant Agent to the Political Department of the South-Western Frontier Province, and he joined this new office on the on 12th 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

¹³² Cited in Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1st March 1838, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Volume No. 19, WBSA, para 13.

¹³³ Wilkinson to Secy., The Govt. of Bengal, 9th Dec. 1836, quoted in S.K. Sen, *Tribal Struggle for Freedom*, p. 68. (emphasis mine)

Chaibasa. Through these operations, Wilkinson also included the four Kol villages of Bamanghatty – that had been at the centre of dispute between Mayurbhanj Rajah and Mahaptra - within the newly carved out Kolhan Government Estate. The Rajah, protested against the deprivation of what he claimed to be his territories. In another representation addressed to the Government, where he called this decision a result of ‘ill-feeling’ harboured towards him by Wilkinson, he urged the government to restore it under the jurisdiction of Cuttack. The government, clearly impressed with Wilkinson’s recent successes in the military operations, sided with him and once again rejected the Mayurbhanj Rajah’s petition.¹³⁴ But, a victorious Wilkinson also had some additional scores to settle with this chief. He suggested to the government that this Rajah should be made to pay a monthly allowance of 250 rupees for the maintenance of the Mahaptra. But to save matters slightly for the Mayurbhanj Rajah, the Cuttack Commissioner could prevail upon the government to negotiate a slightly better deal for Mayurbhanj Raja. As per the final settlement, the Mayurbhanj Raja would pay Mahaptra a monthly allowance of 100 rupees, while the rest of his requirements would be granted by public funds. The other chiefs, who were about to be stripped from their authority in the region, but who had assisted Wilkinson, were given monetary donations for their services and future maintenance.¹³⁵

Wilkinson however realized that, even in supplanting the older indirect form of rule, there were limits to the direct authority of the Raj in the region. Back in 1831, the Cuttack Commissioner Stockwell had once, frustrated by their vain attempts to conciliate the internal disputes between various chiefs, suggested to Wilkinson to replace them with tribal headmen as the nodal points of British authority in the region. Wilkinson now, once again, seized upon this proposal. In his plan presented to the government in August 1836, he suggested that the authority to collect rents should be vested with the *mankis* and *mundas* and the local officers should make extensive use of village panchayats composed of *mankis* and *mundas* in settling all civil and criminal cases. This indirect form of rule,

¹³⁴ Cited in Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1st March 1838, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 19, WBSA, para 15-16.

¹³⁵ The Seraikela chief was given a donation of Rs. 800, while certain chiefs and zamindars such as those of regions of Keraikela, Kera and Chainpur, were given Rs. 300, 200 and 250 respectively. Ibid, para 19.

and its future forms, will be explored in the subsequent chapter. But here, one can say that the reasons for this shift to local structures of village authority, was determined by the colonial anxieties to prevent the recurrence of unrest in the region, which had considerably exhausted their energies. In the preceding period, the assistance of these headmen had been crucial in suppressing the widespread unrest over an extremely unfamiliar region. Now, as the East India Company was set to establish their rule in this ‘wild frontier district’¹³⁶, co-opting the *mankis* and *mundas* - ‘held in highest estimation amongst the *larkas*’¹³⁷ – for the purposes of imperial administration became the new form of indirect form of rule. Wilkinson, especially, wanted the British to go extremely slow and at his recommendation, that older rates of rent fixed last by Majour Roughsedge, i.e. 8 annas per plough, were maintained. This was in direct contrast to the kind of rates of rent that were at that time being levied on the permanently settled Bengal plains to the east. Wilkinson, for one, did not share any pessimism about the low rent and remarked that it would be enhanced in a few years once “the Coles have been brought into good order, and become more civilized...in a few years under judicious management.” In some years, the British would realize, Wilkinson went on to say, that the returns from the country have been more than just financial. To quote Wilkinson, the government would be benefited 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.¹³⁸

Section IV

Representing Singhbhum: From ‘Savage’ to ‘Noble Savage’

The British had been finally able to secure peace in the region. But, they still faced the enormous task of administering this region, about which their knowledge was scanty and till now only based on their military expeditions. Such broad brushstrokes

¹³⁶ Cited in Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1st March 1838, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 19, WBSA, para 4.

¹³⁷ Wilkinson to Mangles, dated 22nd Aug. 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para 56.

¹³⁸ Cited in Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1st March 1838, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Vol. No. 19, WBSA.

would no longer work, for now they had to take up governmental tasks such as laying down boundary lines, assigning title deeds over agrarian lands, settling old disputes – in short setting up the nascent administrative and fiscal structures of the Raj. This task fell upon Tickell, who being the local officer in charge, had to immerse himself intimately with questions of customs, traditions, internal regional differentiation, etc. Tickell's memoir on the region, published in the *Journal of Asiatic Society* over two parts in 1840, not only acquaints us with several of these intricate details, and is probably the first ethnographic account on the region; but we now also notice a reversal of the tropes in which the region and its people are now described.

Tickell shared with other colonial officials before him the perceived dissimilarity of the Hos from other communities. But for him, it did not simply reflect a state of 'savagery' 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*. "Their love of truth, honesty, their obliging willingness, and their happy ingenuous indisposition", Tickell commented, formed a "very striking contrast to the mass of people of the people in Hindustan", specially the "duplicitous Hindoos". Tickell lamented that the introduction of colonial courts of justice in the name of checking their "lawless tendencies", might just end up destroying the very virtues which distinguished these 'primitives'. Quite interestingly, the same set of people who were being lamented as having an "utmost contempt of life and savage thirst for revenge"¹³⁹ just a few years back were now depicted as largely a non-violent race of people. The previous depredations committed by the Hos on their neighbours were, according to Tickell, because of their instigation by the "Hindoo Zemindars...who employed them to wreak their own malice on their neighbours." And in another complete reversal of earlier representations, Tickell now commented that these forays of the Hos were "*never* marked by cruelty or unnecessary violence" and "unless openly resisted, never was a life ever taken". From being presented as a people, who inspired great dread amongst the neighbours, and whose practice it was to murder strangers found in their

¹³⁹ 'Short Account of the Lurka Coles'. *AJMR*, Vol. XIII, January-June, 1822, p. 137. (emphasis mine)

midst,¹⁴⁰ Tickell now called the Hos “hospitable to the strangers in the same degree as the Arabs of the desert”, and from whose door no stranger would leave without a stirrup cup of rice beer.¹⁴¹ Wilkinson, while urging the government to conquer Singhbhum in August 1836, had presented a picture of the murderous Larkas frequently taking the lives of women, and their entire relatives, after branding them as witches - owing to the “universal belief” amongst the Larkas in witch-craft and evil spirit.¹⁴² Tickell, now, not only downplayed the practice of witch-hunting stating that the worst horrors resulting from this superstition have come to an end; but he also stated it would be unfair to make an exception out of the Hos. Any impartial observer would understand, Tickells wrote, that such crimes are common to barbarous ages of all nations, and were frequent some time ago even in Britain. If previous commentators had commented upon the “disgusting nudity” of their women to describe the greater savagery of the Larka Kols vis-à-vis Hindus as well as other Kols, Tickell stated that while nudity continued amongst the women of lowest order, but the young women and girls of the better classes – who were “were well and handsomely dressed... decorous in their manners, most pleasing in their looks, and doubly engaging from the frank and confiding simplicity which true innocence alone gives”, pleasingly reminded him of “Swiss peasant girls”. In terms of the little restraints that they placed on their women, the Hos, in his opinion, had more in common with the British than with the Hindus, with the latter’s “stupid ideas of false modesty”.¹⁴³

The ‘savage’ Larka Kols who had marked their presence as an extremely savage and refractory tribe of plunders and freebooters in the military despatches just a few years ago were now, we can notice, turned into Arcadian ‘noble savages’. They were not a threat to civilization, their existence was in fact a living critique of “reputed evils of civilization”.¹⁴⁴ In Tickell’s representations, they were living in complete peace and harmony with nature and themselves in these ‘insulated, semi-barbarous and wildest parts

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 137. (emphasis mine)

¹⁴¹ Tickell. ‘Memoir on the Hodesum’. pp. 807-808.

¹⁴² Captain Wilkinson to Mangles, dated 22nd August 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para. 41.

¹⁴³ Tickell. ‘Memoir on the Hodesum’. p. 784.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 807.

of the country'.¹⁴⁵ But even the wilderness of the landscape, for Tickell, had very different connotations than many of his predecessors as well as contemporaries. In very evocative lines over the memoir, he attempted to lay bare the variegated and undulating landscape of Singhbhum, and all the scenic beauties and treasures that it contained. The streams and hills were surrounded by dense forests which in certain places opened into cleared patches, where cultivation was carried. At one place, Tickell described the beautiful undulating meadows of a village a mile to the south-east of Chaibasa, which he stated should have been preferred over Chaibasa as the administrative headquarters, saying that it reminded him of English parks.¹⁴⁶ There were also scenic water-falls in the region, the natives had informed Tickell, and in this memoir, he lamented his forlorn wish to visit them.¹⁴⁷ Diverse flowers, fruits, roots, plants, shrubs, fungi, ferns and creepers clothed the cool banks of foliage canopied streams. Describing the alterations in landscape of the region with the change of seasons, Tickell presented a very vivid imagery of the onset of monsoon – the time when vegetation was restored after several dry months and the “tender foliage of the forests” glistened with “golden breaks of sunshine, and mellowed shades of green.”¹⁴⁸ At another place, describing the attractions of the region, Tickell commented:

The beautiful byturnee, every wind of whose stream would be a subject for the artist's pencil, or the poet's pen, runs its crystal waters through regions of deserted forests, where the vastness of the canopied trees, and the luxuriance of wild vegetation, show the richness of the soil...

The Arcadian qualities of the Hos within this serene surroundings, Tickell remarked, provided the colonial officials posted here several pleasures. 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. 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

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 694.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 705.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 700.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 706.

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 Borahbhoom; 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 scimeters, or an occasional ‘Angreeze bundook...’¹⁴⁹

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.¹⁵⁰

The first administrator of the region cautioned against treating Singhbhum as “mere waste of jungle”, saying that it would more than repay all the troubles of the exploring it.¹⁵¹ Apart from its wild scenic beauties for the itinerants, the abundance of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 787.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 787.

¹⁵¹ Tickell was however clear that this exploration of the region, and laying it out to the outside world, could only be carried out by Europeans. The ‘inhabitants’ of the region, retaining their primitive habits, were simply incapable of it; and the ‘Hindoos’ were too ‘timid’ for the task. This self-perception was related to the superior cultural status the likes of Tickell ascribed to the Europeans vis-à-vis the natives. Further, he saw only the British capable of laying out the

game for the hunters, the region abounded in different kind of treasures. For the geologist, there were numerous minerals – including gold.¹⁵² Abounding in different kinds of insects, the region presented an ‘exhaustive filed of research and discovery’ for the entomologist.¹⁵³ For the archaeologist, a historian and a student of Indian antiquities, there were traces all-around of a former presence of a once opulent and industrious civilization. On the last point, Tickell, while laying down boundary marks amidst the vast labyrinths of untenanted forests, himself stumbled upon several ruins of old forts, temples, tanks, broken idols in various states of decay, unattended to for centuries and unmarked by any record or history. At such moments, Tickell felt as having stepped on space that had stood frozen over time in utter ‘seclusion’ and ‘desolation’. His local informants, such as once a Mayurbhanj Raja’s official, could not give him any information about most of these; and most of the local tribes stayed away from them as a result of their several fears and superstitions. But to Tickell, they were all evidences of that “these untrodden jungles having once been the seat of opulence, industry and power, so utterly decayed, so long departed, as not to have left a record behind.” But despite ruing his lack of knowledge of Indian antiquities which prevented him from throwing any light on the history of these relics, Tickell described in detail these accidental discoveries, which are quite interesting, to be quoted at some length:

....In Lalgurpeer, the remains of a square brick fort well ditched round are still visible; it is said by the Brahmins to have been the seat of the Raj Dom tribe, who with all his people, houses, and riches, were destroyed by fire from heaven, for having slain a cow and wrapped a Bramin in the hide, which tightening as it dried, squeezed him to death...In Anlahpeer, to the far south, and on the borders of Rorwan, a few Koles of the poorest have built a wretched stragglng hamlet of what once was a truly magnificent tank...judging by the trees which now luxuriate amidst the buildings, the place must have been deserted and in ruins full 200 years ago...On the east bank are the remains of a handsome stone ghaut; the west side may be similar,

histories of these regions to the outside world – a task once again which both ‘timid Hindoo’ as well as ‘primitive tribes’ were incapable of. In the forays of Tickell and many others after him, this self-confidence in their superiority, made the historian, explorer and the administrator all came together. See *Ibid.*, p. 695.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 701.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 704-705.

but was inaccessible, by reason of thickets; on the summit of the ample bund surrounding the water, lie stones richly carved; it is probable they once constituted small temples ranged around...In the centre (of this *ghat*) are two sunken platforms, with stone steps descending into them, in which lie idols in all stages of decay; some of these were buried many feet under a loose reddish soil, having the appearance of a decayed bark. Among several Gunneshes, Parbuttees, Mahadeos, and other gods of modern Hindoo mythology, were others which my (Brahmin) informants...could give me no history of. Three of the best preserved of these I took away with the help of some Nagpoor Dhangars, not one of the people of the country daring to touch them...To the west of this, and all along the bank of the Talab, the plain now covered with jungle grass, and here and there cultivated with a gora dhan by the Koles, is scattered with bricks, showing that a substantial town or bazaar must have existed there....Thickets and briars matting over richly carved ghauts and temples; old avenues and plantations whose symmetry can now scarcely be detected amidst overwhelming jungle, offer a vivid picture of what these deserted tracts once were; and the mind instinctively pictures to itself a once opulent and prosperous people, whose forgotten dust rests perhaps within the funereal shades of these ancient forests, as their fates and fortunes, alike unknown, lie buried in the clasped vastness of time.In the vast saul forest which spread over the boundary of the Kolehan and Baumunghatee, and about twelve miles from the nearest village, are two extraordinary pools of water, evidently artificial, called the “Soorme and Doormee”...Absurd stories are told of the fatal effects of the water on the man and the beast, by the Bhoomijes, who are the exercisers of unclean spirits in jungles, and the spot is carefully avoided by the superstitious Koles. I visited the “Soormee Doormee” while laying down the boundary in 1838-1839; we had great difficulty in forcing our way through the dense jungle, not the trace of a path existing, and I verily believe we were the first party, for many generations, who had intruded on this abode of utter silence and seclusion.¹⁵⁴

How does one understand this shift in representations within such a short period of time? At one level, this shift was a result of the changed times. The British, were no longer, engaged in military campaigns over territory against the Hos. On the contrary, they claimed to be in control of the territory. Therefore, earlier representations, which portrayed the Hos as a refractory tribe of people who were defiant of all authority, were

¹⁵⁴ Tickell. ‘Memoir on the Hodesum’. p. 707-709.

increasingly excised from later accounts. The Hos, they now claimed, were their peaceful subjects who had been way laid in the past by the intrigues of ‘Hindu zamindars’ - the latter having been displaced from their authority being of no consequence anymore in the imperial scheme of things. Secondly, this coalesced perfectly with the ideology of rule in these tracts, which emphasised paternal control over these ‘primitive’ subjects. This paternalism had to be imbibed in their daily practice and the local administrator, as Wilkinson had written to Tickell the day after he joined office, had to be in close contact with the people, remaining accessible to them at all junctures.¹⁵⁵ Lastly, Tickell’s romanticism about the region as well as the framing of the Hos as the archetypal noble savage, can in fact be situated within a certain strand of contemporaneous literary and poetry writings back in Europe, that yearned for the countryside in opposition to the destructive impacts of industrial revolution.¹⁵⁶ For example, in describing the Hos and Singhbhum, we notice, at many junctures, that Tickell apart from using the markers of their perceived dissimilarities vis-à-vis the people of the plains – ‘the Hindus’ – on the

¹⁵⁵ Wilkinson to Tickell, 13th May 1837, cited in Sen, Asoka Kumar. (1997). ‘Introduction’ in Sen, Asoka Kumar. (ed). *Wilkinson’s Rules: Context, Content and Ramifications*. Chaibasa: Tata College., p. xvi.

¹⁵⁶ 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. For a work which discusses 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) In accounts written in colonial India at that time, the yearning of the countryside was clearly manifest in Tickell’s memoir on Singhbhum, as well as later accounts of travellers and administrators such as Valentine Ball and W.W. Hunter. Valentine Ball, who landed in Calcutta in 1864, travelled through several parts of rural India, including different parts of Chota Nagpur, for his scientific expeditions wrote the following in the very first lines of his 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.” Ball, Valentine. (1880). *Tribal and Peasant Life in Nineteenth Century India*. Delhi: Usha Publications (reprint 1985)., p. vii-viii. Similarly, Hunter in his *Annals of Rural Bengal*, wrote that he had 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. Hunter, W.W. (1868). *The Annals of Rural Bengal*. Calcutta: West Bengal District Gazetters, Government of India (reprint, 1996).

east also measured them in terms of their similarities with Europe. All of this placed Tickell's representations in a stark contrast with those of the likes of Roughsedge and Wilkinson before him, whose portrayals of savagery and intractability of the Larka Kols, were determined by their more immediate concerns as well as the sanguinary battles that they were engaged in.

Conclusion

Over the previous few sections, we have tried to show the strenuous process through which the administrative unit of Singhbhum came into being, and the shifts in which representations about the region and its people over the course of this transition. There were, however, still regions within Singhbhum, around the area designated as Kolhan Government Estate, which remained beyond their control. Over the course of nineteenth century, several of more territories as well as other native states would be brought under British control.¹⁵⁷ And the making of this administrative unit of Singhbhum would remain all through the colonial as well as post-colonial period a continuous process, with expanding frontiers, shifting boundaries and changing administrative divisions. However, at this juncture, the British could not establish their control over large parts of the southern part of the region. In fact, in his military plan presented to the government in August 1836, Wilkinson had 'excepted' the densely forested and hilly Saranda region located on the south-eastern precinct of the region. "I have never been able to get much information regarding it", Wilkinson explained the reasons for this omission, "for 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."¹⁵⁸

What could have been the reason for the British inability, despite their superior military power, to extend and establish their control in these parts at this period? Various accounts, both colonial and post-colonial, that have reconstructed this phase of history,

¹⁵⁷ 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.

¹⁵⁸ Captain Wilkinson to Mangles, dated 22nd Aug. 1836, File No. 1046, 1930, DCRR, para. 51.

have largely reproduced the words and frameworks of colonial military officials such as Roughsedge and Wilkinson, in portraying this part of the region as ‘the most intensive centre of Ho belligerence’, along with referring to the Hos here as ‘fiercer’, but without throwing much light on the reasons for it.¹⁵⁹ A recent work by Paul Streumer, which elaborately looks at the different military battles and debates within colonial officialdom in the period leading up to the colonial take-over of Singhbhum, explains the north-south divide as a result of divided political society amongst the Hos, and traditional enmity between various clans.¹⁶⁰ But, what was the basis of these enmities or divides? Even Streumer’s account, despite its richness of archival material, does not give us much clue about it. This north-south division, and the greater belligerence of south Singhbhum, needs to be seen as determined by the variegated agrarian landscape of the region, and its impact on internal village organisation of the Hos. As we saw in the first section, when the colonial military first entered the northern and central part of the region, under Roughsedge, they had come across extremely big villages where the Hos, displaying considerable skill in agriculture, practised settled cultivation. Similarly, when Wilkinson was preparing to enter the region, he had commented that there was an abundance of grain in all the ‘Cole’ Pirs. This shows that the production of agrarian produce was beyond mere subsistence level, and the appropriation of this surplus would have privileged certain sections within the local communities. Tickell’s account, despite its attempts to represent the Hos as largely a homogenous idyllic people, could not remain totally unintuitive to the internal differentiation amongst them, and noted the substantial and capacious houses of the Mankis and Mundas.¹⁶¹ In the early decades of the twentieth century, when the settlement officer A.D. Tuckey was trying to determine *khunkatti* claims, or in other words, determining who was the first family to have cleared the forests and converted them into fields, by closely examining various genealogical family trees, to give them certain special tenurial rights, he had found most of the *khunkattidars* to be

¹⁵⁹ See for example Dalton, Edward Tuite. (1872). *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing. pp. 181-182. O’ Malley, *Singhbhum, Saraikella and Kharsawan*. pp. 34. Sen, S.K., *Tribal Struggle for Freedom*, p. 30, 38. Sahu, *The Kolhan under British rule*. pp. 24-25.

¹⁶⁰ Streumer, Paul. (2016). *A Land of Their Own: Samuel Richard Tickell and the Formation of the Autonomous Ho Country in Jharkhand, 1818-1842*. Houten: Wakkaman, pp. 67-71.

¹⁶¹ Tickell. ‘Memoir on the Hodesum’ p. 783

belonging to the ancestors of the *manki* and *mundas*.¹⁶² Since the post of *manki* and *mundas* was hereditary in nature, one can presume that these heads of clans and villages in the early 19th century, being the first settlers into the territory, would have attempted to secure their access over village resources, including agrarian produce, vis-à-vis others. The economic privileges of the *mankis* and *mundas* in the agrarian economy of Singhbhum also determined their social and political position in the village society, and tied them up into various relations with the various Rajahs and chiefs in the pre-colonial period. Tickell commented that in the pre-colonial period, the entire region had been divided into 24 *pirs*, and in these *pirs*, the Hos were already tied up in various rent agreements with the Rajahs.¹⁶³ In these relationships, the headmen in the pre-colonial period, were already playing the role of intermediaries between the village community and the different royal families in the late pre-colonial period. In fact, Sanjukta Dasgupta in her history of the Hos states that some of the *mankis* and *mundas* were even granted service tenures of a military nature. The territorial arrangement as it emerged, Dasgupta goes on to say, was one in which the ruling family's directly controlled territory was surrounded and guarded on all sides by frontier tenure holders.¹⁶⁴

The British skilfully tapped into these social relations between the fractured local communities, the authority at the village level and royal families to extend their control in the region. As we have seen in the preceding sections, the British made extensive use of the services of *mankis* and *mundas*, not to forget the *jageerdars* of the region to the north of Singhbhum, as providers of intelligence, local knowledge as well as supplies during the military operations. However, in the differentiated agrarian landscape of Singhbhum, where large areas of cultivated plain land would be followed by miles of dense forests and undulating terrain, the internal stratification within the Hos, and their relations with

¹⁶² Tuckey, A.D. (1920). *Final Report on the Resettlement of the Kolhan Government Estate in the District of Singhbhum, 1913-1918*. Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa. p. 21 (Henceforth, Tuckey Settlement Report)

¹⁶³ Tickell. 'Memoir on the Hodesum'. p. 698. Wilkinson had calculated this rent in the pre-colonial period to be the tune of Rs. 2000 per annum, which he said the British through the 1821 agreement had reduced to roughly 800 per annum. (Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1st March 1838) Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud. Dept.), Volume No. 19, WBSA, para 7.

¹⁶⁴ Dasgupta, Sanjukta (2011). *Adivasis and the Raj: Socio-economic transition of the Hos, 1820-1932*. Delhi: Orient Blackswan. p.72.

pre-colonial state structures, was not the same everywhere. Seen in this light, it is not surprising that the British found it extremely difficult to extend their control to southern precincts of Singhbhum, where agrarian settlements were extremely sparse and scattered. This also exemplifies that British military success in these frontier tracts was not simply a result of their superior fire-power. In those regions, where they could not garner the support of a section within the local communities, even their most advanced and professionally trained military detachments seemed inept to the task. Same would be the fate of their subsequent attempts to refashion the territory, which would continue to remain contingent on a multitude of local agencies and actors. There were after all, as Wilkinson had realized, several limits to the direct authority of the Raj.

Chapter II

Administration through Exception: Exploring the Indirect Form of Rule in Singhbhum

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 Kolhan region of Singhbhum before he left back for Britain. The purpose was to share his experiences about one of the most ‘peculiar’ regions under his charge with officials who were about to take over from him. In the note subsequently prepared by Dalton, the British takeover of the region in the 1830s was represented as an attempt by them to save the tribal population from their oppressive chiefs and avaricious neighbours. 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.*¹⁶⁵

Such representations reflected more than anything else the changed situation and the colonial state's relative stability compared to the turbulent early decades of the 19th century. The details of the various tedious and sanguinary battles between the *Larkas* and the colonial military were now increasingly excised from official reconstructions of the past. These representations were also coterminous with the shift in the representations of the Hos – from savage *Larkas* to a 'race' of arcadian noble savages - that we had analysed in the last section of the previous chapter. 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 Asiatics of higher civilization.'¹⁶⁶ 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. In his note in 1875, Dalton, for example, wrote that the 'willing assent' of the locals to the company establishment was reciprocated by the British who never attempted to displace their 'indigenous' and 'naturally grown' systems of authority.¹⁶⁷ A few years later W.W. Hunter complemented the policy in Singhbhum of recognizing the 'indigenous' village institutions, which meant that, unlike in other areas, they 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.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Colonel Dalton's Note on the Kol Tribe in the Singhbhum District, May 1875, Jud. Dept., Proc. No. 16 to 18, WBSA (emphasis mine).

¹⁶⁶ Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 205.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁸ Hunter. (1877). *A Statistical Account of Bengal: Volume XVIII, Singhbhum Districts, Tributary States of Chutia Nagpur and Manbhum*, London: Trubner and Co., p. 74.

In the official narrative of the time, the resultant consequence of this form of administration, where colonial policy was intuitive to local customs, traditions and practices, was the tranquillity that prevailed in Singhbhum - the property of the local *raiya*s was secure 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.¹⁶⁹ More than half a century later, the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum drew attention to this ‘paternalistic’ 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.*¹⁷⁰

What exactly were the features of this system of administration? How was it different from, and relate to policy in other areas? What prompted this course of action on the part of the British in Singhbhum, and how was it justified within official circles? What were the various tensions involved in this indirect form of rule? What was its impact on the tribal communities inhabiting Singhbhum? This chapter seeks to answer some of these questions by exploring the different aspects of this distinct modality of rule – which we term as administrative exceptionalism - which the British adopted for the governance of frontier tracts such as Singhbhum. We analyse this policy, over three sections, by picking up some aspects of this policy across different phases of colonial rule. We begin by looking at the origins of this policy in the early years of colonial rule in Singhbhum, and the several factors that determined it. The second section follows it with up an examination of a very specific problem that beset colonial administration towards the turn of the twentieth century. This was related to the increasing influx of outsiders (called in local parlance as *dikus*) in the region, which, it was argued, would undo the

¹⁶⁹ The Kol Tribe in the Singhbhum District, Minute by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, dated the 29th April 1875, Jud. Dept., Proc. No. 16 to 18, WBSA.

¹⁷⁰ Let. No. 194T., from J.R. Dain, Esq., I.C.S., Dep. Commr., Singhbhum to J.A.Hubback, Esq., I.C.S., Special Officer, P.O. Hinoo, Ranchi, attached as Appendix C in Sen, A.K. *Wilkinson's Rules*, p. 96.

exceptional form of administration if it remained unchecked. The last section of the chapter looks at the debate around this policy between different British officials, missionaries, Indian legislatures as well as anthropologists in the late colonial period, when it was institutionalized at an all-India scale. We close this chapter by focussing on the work of Dharendra Nath Majumdar to look at the postulations of an Indian anthropologist to a policy, at a time of growing nationalist opposition to it, whose origins were rooted in several ethnological ideas about the difference of the ‘aborigines’.

Section I

The Origins of Administrative Exceptionalism in Singhbhum

The same law for all is a very high sounding and popular cry, and it is one that has been much favoured in the legislature of recent years; but I think in this craving for homogeneity the heterogenous character of the component parts of the population of India should always be borne in mind
– Edward Tuite Dalton¹⁷¹

After the extension of British control over Singhbhum, colonial authority was articulated in different ways. Unlike the past, when power was shared with different chiefs of the region, the East India Company was now to be the paramount power in the region.¹⁷² 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.’¹⁷³ Practices such as witchcraft had to be curbed, by the introduction of modern medicine and setting up of hospitals.¹⁷⁴ Even the possibilities of abhorrent practices, such as *sati*, amongst the erstwhile ruling families had to be

¹⁷¹ Dalton, Edward Tuite. *Descriptive Ethnology.*, p. 3.

¹⁷² 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 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 25th June 1838, in Roychoudhury, (1958). *Singhbhum Old Records*. Patna: Superintendent Secretariat Press, p. 8.

¹⁷³ Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1st March 1838, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud Dept), Vol. No. 19, WBSA, para 12.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, para 12.

prevented by the vigilance of the local officers.¹⁷⁵ Education was to wean away ‘rising generations of Lurka Coles’ from their ‘gross ignorance’ and ‘foolish and vicious habits’ which accounted for their ‘misery’.¹⁷⁶ There was an effort to open out, and transform, the country by laying down roads across its length and breadth. It was hoped that this would contribute much to the ‘moral’ and ‘material’ improvement of the ‘wild tribes’, since ‘experience had shown that *Larka Coles* who are brought in contact with strangers for commercial purposes became much more tractable and less barbarous than the inhabitants of the more distant Coles villages which are seldom visited by traders or travellers.’¹⁷⁷

However despite such a posturing, the British had to remain accommodative of several existing practices and structures. As several officials had realized in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, there were very real limits to supplanting all that was previously existing – customary practices, political structures, village bodies- with the direct authority of the Raj. Even officials such as Cuthbert, magistrate at the Ramgarh district in the 1820s, who had been a vocal proponent of superseding the powers exercised by local chiefs, *zamindars* and *jageerdars* by the direct establishment of colonial authority in the Ramgarh district had realized that the need to make certain concessions in view of the nature of the country. For example, in his report, he cautioned against interfering too much in to the customary systems of village *chaukidars* in the hilly parts of Ramgarh district. These *chaukidars* provided protection to the travellers, traders and merchants through the steep and inaccessible *ghats* and passes; and if the British tried to substitute them with police officers or men from the military, there was a very real fear that these ‘natural and the only effectual guardians of public peace’ might turn into its

¹⁷⁵ Let. No. 36, from I.K. Aulseley, Gov. Gen.’s Agent to H.J. Prinsep, Esq., Secy. to the Govt. of India, Fort William, Polt. Dept., dated the 28th Aug 1839, in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. pp. 22-24.

¹⁷⁶ Desp. No. 8 of 1838, Jud. Dept., L.P., the 1st March 1838, Gen. Letters to the Court of Directors (Jud Dept), Vol. No. 19, WBSA, para 12. In another letter, the Government in Bengal asked to the Agent at the South-Western Frontier to impress upon his Assistant Agent in Kolhan to specially encourage the ‘inhabitants of the hill country (of Kolhan) to send their children’ to the schools that were established by the British in the region in this period. This was, the Government stated, ‘a most essential part of an officer’s duty’ in this region. Let. No. 331, dated Fort William, the 16th April, 1845 from S.C. Beadon, the Under-Secy. to the Govt of Bengal to the Coll. I.P. Ousley, Agent to the Gov-General and Commnr., South-West Frontier, in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 65.

¹⁷⁷ Extract from a let. no.45, dated the 19th Mar 1855, from the Commnr. of CN to the Secy to the Govt of Bengal, in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 79.

assailers, and pose a threat to the lives of the merchants and the commerce of the country.¹⁷⁸ In his report, Cuthbert also commented on the absolute necessity of combining the offices of judge, magistrate and collector into one post. This combination of powers would be inconvenient in other parts of the empire, Cuthbert stated, but the ‘rude and uncivilized’ people of Ramgarh require the ‘inspection, care and consideration of officers vested with consolidated powers.’¹⁷⁹

Unlike Cuthbert, Thomas Wilkinson, who was at the helm of affairs at the time of the accession of the region, was a very strong proponent of working with and through the local structures of authority. As we had observed in the previous chapter, he had tried to enlist the help of the *mankis* and *mundas* during the military campaigns of the 1830s in Singhbhum. In the years prior to the accession of Singhbhum, Wilkinson had already started giving shape to the policy of administrative exceptionalism in the region. After the suppression of Kol Rebellion in 1833, he had been involved in the administrative reorganization of the South Western Frontier Agency (SWFA). At his behest as the Agent to the Governor-General in the SWFA, the region was divided into Manbhum, Lohurdugga and Hazareebagh and placed under officers designated as his Assistant Agents.¹⁸⁰ The Regulation XIII of 1833, which was promulgated on 2nd December 1833, excluded the SWFA from the Courts of Diwani Adalat and called for the framing of special rules for the administration and civil and criminal justice in the region. As per section IV of the Regulation, the administration of civil and criminal justice along with functions such as the collection of revenue and the superintendence of the police in this area was to be vested in an officer appointed by the Governor General in Council, to be denominated as Agent to the Governor-General.¹⁸¹ As the first Agent to the Governor-General in the SWFA, Wilkinson framed the rules for civil and criminal justice in the

¹⁷⁸ Cuthbert to Shakespear, dated Zilla Ramghur, the 21st Apr 1827, reproduced in Roy, ‘Ethnographical Investigation..’, p. 27.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁸⁰ These posts – Agent and Assistant Agent – were later converted into the posts of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in the court judgement of the Patna High Court. (2000). *Mora Ho vs State of Bihar*, on 5th January 2000. <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1026283/>

SWFA, which were approved by the government.¹⁸² The most salient feature of these rules, which came to be known as Wilkinson's Rules (WR), was the centrality they accorded to the village bodies and the existing structures of authority in the arbitration of justice. 'Intriguing *vakeels*', who were seen as agents promoting vexatious litigation were debarred from pleading in any of the courts in the provinces under the WR. The parties in the disputes were to be allowed to conduct their business either in persons or by authorized agents.¹⁸³ 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.

After its accession to the British in 1837, Kolhan Government Estate of Singhbhum was incorporated as a new division into the SWFA, with Tickell as the Assistant Agent. The extension of the WR to Singhbhum brought the attention of the colonial authorities in this region to the customary structures of the Hos. The correspondence between Wilkinson and his Assistant Agent Tickell in the years after the accession reveals the manner in which the British devised the modality of rule for this region. Wilkinson cautioned against interfering too much within the local village structures as well as inter-village divisions, and insisted that they instead be co-opted for the purposes of imperial governance.¹⁸⁴ 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

¹⁸² (Letter No. 363, Council Chamber, the 17th February 1834 from S.Macsween, Secy to Govt to Captain T. Wilkinson, Agent to the Governor-General in Hazareebagh) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. p. 1.

¹⁸³ '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.

¹⁸⁴ (Let. No. 150, Camp Chaibasa, the 10th December 1838 from T. Wilkinson, Governor-General's Agent to Lt. Tickell, Assistant Pol. Agent, Colehan, Singhbhum) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. p. 12.

mankis.¹⁸⁵ In order to incentivize their work for the imperial administration, these local level village officers were in turn entitled to a certain commission on the total rents that they collected.¹⁸⁶ This policy, Wilkinson informed Tickell, would also 'induce' the Mankis to prevent the concealment of cultivation, as their income would be based on the total rent that they collected from the villages under them.¹⁸⁷

In the subsequent decades, the local British officials in Singhbhum went about officially recognizing several *mankis* and *mundas* as village level officers of the Raj by giving them *pattahs* or title deeds. There was a special emphasis on recognising those *mankis* and *mundas*, who had assisted the preceding colonial military campaigns.¹⁸⁸ And in many places, where they could not find appropriate tribal heads, they even created new intermediaries of their rule by awarding the *manki-ship* or *munda-ship* to certain persons who had assisted them against the 'insurgent' Larkas in the past. Wilkinson in a letter to Tickell, written towards the end of 1838, brought out one such case of a person named Raghunath Biswai. In the decades prior to the British intervention, Biswai's father enjoyed control over several villages, which had been granted to him free of all rent by the Singhbhum Rajah. But owing to Raghunath's active assistance to Major Roughsedge in 1820-21, the *Larkas* had driven him out of his possessions during the turbulent years of 1830s. Now that the British had taken over the region, Raghunath wrote a *durkhast* to them expressing his desire to be restored with his erstwhile possessions. Both Wilkinson and Tickell were keen to accept his plea, but sensed trouble from the Larkas if he returned to the very same villages. As an alternative, Tickell proposed that his erstwhile possessions should be substituted with equal amount of land in another part of the country. Wilkinson not only considered the plan a desirable one, but went ahead to state

¹⁸⁵ Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, p. 117.

¹⁸⁶ As a title deed given to a manki by Tickell on 19th July 1839 stated, the village Munda was entitled to 1/6th of the total collection of revenue from a village, and from the remainder the Manki got 1/10th. 'Transl. of a Pottah given by Captain Tickell to Raoria, Mankee of Kowsillapossi in Bur Peer, dated 19th March 1839' in Aitchison, C.U. (compiled). *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*. p. 363.

¹⁸⁷ (Let. No. 150, Camp Chaibasa, the 10th December 1838 from T. Wilkinson, Governor-General's Agent to Lt. Tickell, Assistant Pol. Agent, Colehan, Singhbhum) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. p. 12.

¹⁸⁸ (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 30th July 1860) Ibid, p. 114.

that Biswai should be appointed as a *sirdar* of the villages with the same power and authority as the *mankis* in the other divisions.

The recognition to the traditional structures of authority for administrative, fiscal and judicial purposes as well as the indulgent assessments regarding rents was portrayed as the bulwark of the ‘paternal’ form of administration in Singhbhum. 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, a day after he took charge of the district:

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.¹⁸⁹

The Irish geologist Valentine Ball, who visited the area as part of his tours across the different rural areas of colonial India, a couple of decades later, 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, which equipped them to act as adjudicators in disputes which ‘among the Hindus and under a less patriarchal system would have blossomed into...a great amount of vexatious litigation.’¹⁹⁰ 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.

Several local officials, right from Wilkinson to Tickell in the 1830s and 1840s to Dalton in the 1860s and 1870s described this system of exception in extremely favourable terms. In fact, in this part of the empire, where several densely forested tracts remained

¹⁸⁹ Wilkinson to Tickell, 13th May 1837, cited in Sen, A.K. ‘Introduction’ in A.K. Sen (ed). *Wilkinson’s Rules: Context, Content and Ramifications*, p. xvi.

¹⁹⁰ Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, pp.137-138.

un-surveyed and thus unfamiliar even several decades after the extension of their rule, these officials were indeed benefited by having at their reserve a substantial number of village officials from within the local communities. Colonial officials would regularly acknowledge the role of the *mankis*, as local police officers, in arresting many criminals, rebels and fugitives.¹⁹¹ W.W. Hunter, in fact, commented that the ‘detective ability’ of these tribal heads, was ‘particularly well suited to the wild nature of the country’.¹⁹² Similar to the kind of help they provided during the tumultuous years of the 1830s, several *mankis* and *mundas*, as Dalton stated, were pivotal in the arrest of all ‘heinous offenders’ during the unrest at the time of 1857 mutiny.¹⁹³ The help of the village headmen, who besides their official functions were also important reservoirs of local information, was also extremely crucial in the enumeration of village level statistics¹⁹⁴ as well as codification of customs and traditions in the region.¹⁹⁵ Dalton, even stated, that this system of exception saved the British considerable monetary expenditure, since by recognizing the village headmen as local police officers, they were saved from the charges that they would have incurred in setting up and maintaining a large police apparatus in the region. In his note on the region, before he left for Britain, he was full of tributes for such a policy, which he hoped would never be subverted:

We have not a single policeman in the Kolhan, except at the Sadr Station, Chaibasa...The system of police has worked admirably, and I earnestly trust that no theoretical aversion to exceptionable treatment, or love of uniformity, may ever succeed in subverting it. The Mankis may ask for assistance if in difficulties, and are rather too fond of doing so, and the District Superintendent of Magistrate may send out a police officer to assist the Manki, but I have always discouraged such interference. The Manki would soon lose his sense of responsibility if it were too

¹⁹¹ (Let. No. 44, from the Gov.-Gen.’s Agent to Captain W.H. Oakes, 1st Class Assist. Agent, Gov.-Gen., Singhbhum, dated 14th Oct, 1846) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 71.

¹⁹² Hunter, *Statistical Account*. p. 118.

¹⁹³ Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*. p. 184.

¹⁹⁴ Hunter acknowledged the help of the various tribal headmen during the census operations in Singhbhum, *Statistical Account*. p. 33. They also helped the British in the accounting of weekly births and deaths in the region. (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 26th Oct 1869) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. p. 198.

¹⁹⁵ (Rights and Customs of the Hos), File no. 30, Collection No. XVI, 1910-11, CDCR.

frequently resorted to. The local officers should never allow him to forget that he is paid for doing the work himself, and should insist on his doing it.¹⁹⁶

A certain strand of scholarship which has studied the colonial state's statutory recognition to the customary village bodies during this period uncritically reproduces such assertions of the local officials to reach the same conclusions as them. Murali Sahu, writing on the structure of local administration in Kolhan initiated by Captain Wilkinson's Rules, states that in the administration of justice, the British 'preserved' the 'original system (of Manki-Munda) almost intact' till the very last days of the Raj.¹⁹⁷ Similarly, Asoka Kumar Sen in a recent work on the colonial state's engagement with the customary law of the Hos and other tribal communities suggests that the colonial administration virtually replicated 'custom' by bringing the office of the *manki* centre stage.¹⁹⁸ Such readings of history, despite their utility to various adivasi movements and organizations to make certain claims of 'autonomy' and 'self-rule' vis-à-vis the state, however, obfuscate the various complexities and tensions involved in the indirect form of rule.¹⁹⁹

Firstly, it is important to distinguish between intentions and compulsions. The British adopted the policy of giving statutory recognition to the village headmen not because they were particularly interested in 'preserving' custom. The adoption of such a course, as described above and in the previous chapter, was necessitated by a recognition on the part of the British that they could not operate in this region without enlisting the support of a section of the locals. In an unfamiliar tract, where a threat of rebellion was ubiquitous by its presence, these sections possessed both possessed knowledge of the terrain, as well as some legitimacy amongst the tribal communities. Secondly, it is also important to stress that the colonial engagement with customary law and customary institutions transformed, what they perceived as, 'custom' in significant ways. The

¹⁹⁶ (Dalton's Note on the Kol Tribe, May 1875) Jud. Dept., Proc. No. 16 to 18, WBSA (emphasis mine).

¹⁹⁷ See for example, Sahu, Murali. (1997). "Thomas Wilkinson in Kolhan and the Origin of the British Administration" in Sen, A.K. (ed.) *Wilkinson's Rules.*, pp. 13-23.

¹⁹⁸ Sen, Asoka Kumar. (2012). *From Village Elder to British Judge: Custom, Customary Law and Tribal Society.* Delhi: Orient Blackswan, p. 65.

¹⁹⁹ These invocations of the past, which mirror colonial claims of paternalism and preservation of customary laws, to make certain claims vis-à-vis the state in both colonial as well as post-colonial period are explored in some detail in Chapter 5 and the Conclusion of this work.

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 SWFA 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.’²⁰⁰ 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.²⁰¹ There was simultaneously also the introduction of new norms of administration such as ‘efficiency’ and the ability of the *mankis* and the *mundas* to read and write.²⁰² Even the WR, seen as the bulwark of protection, clearly specified that the British were to select the ‘influential’ and the ‘respected’ village elders, in our case the *mankis* and the *mundas*, to arbitrate justice in the village *panchayats*.²⁰³ Simultaneously, the co-option of the *mankis* and *mundas* as the lowest rung of colonial officers in the villages induced far reaching changes in their social and economic character. 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 lands to them and a greater access to colonial officialdom. The changes in their authority in the villages also needs to be contextualized in the large scale socio-economic changes that the British introduced in the region from the latter half of the nineteenth century till they left. The formation of a large scale bureaucratic set up, the increase in the rents and other changes in the agrarian landscape, the setting up of mines and other industries, the introduction of forest conservancy significantly altered the region, which not only not only exacerbated the existing hierarchies within the Hos but also created new ones.²⁰⁴ The point we are trying to make is that the local village structures of authority, operated within a larger

²⁰⁰ (Let. No. 7, From the Agent to the Gov.-Gen., S.W. Front. to Lt. Haughton, 1st Class Assist. Agent, Gov.-Gen., Singhbhum Division, dated Chotanagpur, 17th Mar 1851) in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, pp. 33-34.

²⁰¹ 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.

²⁰² Ibid, p. 34.

²⁰³ Wilkinson’s Rules, point 21, in Roy, Pandey R.N. *Handbook on Chotanagpur Tenancy Laws alongwith Customary Laws in Chota Nagpur.*, pp. 288-289.

²⁰⁴ Some of these socio-changes are taken up in detail in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

administrative, social and economic set up, and changes in the latter had far reaching effects on the former. The works, cited above, not only take our attention away from these several changes, but also give a singularity to the voice of colonial authority in the region by quoting the voice of the local officials who were favourably disposed towards 'paternal' form of administration as the authoritative voice of British rule. This also occludes the various tensions and fissures within the colonial officialdom.

The exclusion of the large tracts from the general laws prevailing in most of British India did not always confirm to the vision of homogeneity of the officials in the higher echelons of power. In the early 1860s, for example, the government reduced the powers of the district officers and the scope of the WR only for the civil matters by introducing the Code of Criminal Procedure to Singhbhum. The Commissioner of Chota Nagpur, Dalton and Judicial Commissioner of Chota Nagpur, J.S. Davies made last ditched attempts to get the orders reversed, but in vain. Dalton tried explaining to the government the inconvenience that would 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, in his viewpoint, would eventually make this new system of justice arbitration very unpopular amongst the people.²⁰⁵ The Judicial Commissioner commented on the futility of displacing a system that had been working 'so well for a period of thirty years'.²⁰⁶ 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 Singhbhum, not excepting the Colehan, *must henceforth be homogenous*.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ (Let. no. 458, from Lt.-Col. E.T. Dalton to F.R. Cockerell, Esq., Officiating Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, dated 17th Mar 1864) Proc. No. 99, May 1864, Jud. Dept., WBSA.

²⁰⁶ (Let. no. 38, from Major J.S. Davies, Jud. Commnr. of Chota-Nagpore to Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commnr of Chota Nagpore, dated 12th March 1864) Proc. No. 100, May 1864, Jud. Dept., WBSA.

²⁰⁷ (Let no. 288T., from the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, to Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commnr. of Chota Nagpore, dated 23rd May 1864) Proc. No. 101, May 1864, Jud. Dept., WBSA. (emphasis mine)

Therefore, rather than giving a singularity to the voice of colonial authority, 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. Several officials in Calcutta, even when they could not completely do away with these ‘exceptional’ laws, found ways to subvert them in their attempts towards greater integration of the district with the rest of the empire. This will become further clear in the subsequent section.

Section II

Exception for Exclusivity: Kolhan as ‘A Reserve for the Hos’ (1860-1920)

In several colonial accounts written in the first few decades of colonial rule in Singhbhum, the Hos were represented as a community that, since their migration into the region, lived in complete isolation who, if required, even violently guarded their exclusivity.²⁰⁸ This was, however, far from the truth. There were several other communities – Bhuiyas, Tamarias, Santhals, Mundas, Gonds – inhabiting the villages of Singhbhum, apart from the Hos. There were also groups such as *goalas* (cow herds), *tantis* (weavers) and *kamars* (carpenters) who were tied up economically with the Hos, performing several important functions in the villages. In the second decade of the 20th century, the settlement officer Tuckey found several villages in Singhbhum to have been founded and settled by communities apart from Hos.²⁰⁹ The presence of these groups did not, however, change the colonial imagination of the Hos as an exclusive people. In his *Descriptive Ethnology*, Dalton commented that the first few decades of British rule, despite making the Hos ‘less suspicious’ and ‘revengeful’ had not been able to completely changed their attitudes towards outsiders:

²⁰⁸ See for example, several accounts written in the first decades of the nineteenth century that we dealt with in Chapter 1.

²⁰⁹ See Chapter 3.

Even at the present day, the exclusiveness of the old Hos is indeed remarkable. They will not allow aliens to hold lands near their village, and indeed, if it were left to them, no strangers would be permitted to settle in the Kolhan.²¹⁰

In the early decades of their rule, the British were keen to end this perceived seclusion of the Hos. The agreement that Roughsedge had effected with the various headmen in 1821, if we recall from the previous chapter, had stipulated the Hos to allow all persons of all castes to settle in their villages. Though in 1839, Wilkinson had instructed Tickell to take ethnic considerations into account while resolving boundary disputes between Mayurbhanj Rajah and the newly carved out Kolhan Government Estate; but this, rather than being a matter of policy, was determined more by instabilities of the time.²¹¹ The British attempt, over the next few decades, remained to ensure that the territorial boundaries of the region are not strictly limited with the ethnic boundaries of its people. For example, in 1868, just after the British had finished the first major survey and settlement operation in the region, Dalton applauded the efforts of the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, W.H. Hayes towards establishing numerous village markets, vernacular schools and laying down bridged roads, all of which he hoped would go a long way in attracting new settlers in the region.²¹²

In these initial decades, the local officers who had been active supporters of ‘exceptional’ administration in Singhbhum did not see the opening out of the country to new settlers as contradictory to their ‘paternal’ rule. In fact, for officers like Dalton, the two were complementary. The British rule, in his words, was attempting to ‘civilize’ the Hos while simultaneously ensuring that they retain the traits which ‘favourably distinguish’ them ‘from Asiatics of higher civilization’.²¹³ The recognition to customary structures of authority took care of the latter aspect; while the opening out of the country through roads and markets went in the direction of simultaneously ‘civilizing’ them. In

²¹⁰ Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 185.

²¹¹ Let. No. 4, dated Camp Bashoorgram, the 12th Jan 1839, from Wilkinson to Tickell, in Roychoudhury (ed.), *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 17.

²¹² Let. No. 400, dated Camp Bandgaon, the 29th Feb, 1868, from Col. E.T. Dalton to W.H.Hayes, Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhoom, in Roychoudhury (ed.), *Singhbhum Old Records*, pp. 187-188.

²¹³ Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 205.

the words of Dalton, the opening out of the region would bring innovation, extravagance and prosperity for the rising generations of the Hos.²¹⁴

In a few decades, however, this idea was completely reversed. If the British were serious in preventing the good effects of their paternalistic form of rule from being undone, it started being argued by the close of the century, measures were urgently required to safeguard the region as the protected abode of the Hos. The increasing settlements of traders, miners, recruiters for planters, hide dealers as well as new cultivators from outside who thronged to the district in the second half of the nineteenth century started being seen in an unfavourable light by several officials. J.A. Craven, who conducted survey and settlement operations in the region from 1893 onwards commented that the Hos were losing much of their original 'simplicity' and 'truthfulness' because of the 'intermingling with foreigners.'²¹⁵ A.D. Tuckey, who conducted the next survey and settlement operation two decades later said that these outsiders 'encouraged litigation in the region as a means to acquire land from the less intelligent Hos.' Since many of these outsiders, known in the local parlance as *dikus* had acquired landholdings in the region through dealings with *mankis* and *mundas*, the latter were seen as having become corrupted. Tuckey stated that the Hos, in the light of the 'corruption' of their headmen had even started approaching courts for the resolution of their disputes. All of this, it was argued, posed a serious threat to the 'preservation of the ancient village system', the bulwark of British paternal rule in the region.²¹⁶

From the last decade of nineteenth century onwards, one notices that several steps were taken to protect the 'simple' and 'truthful' Hos from the 'aggrandizing outsiders' as well as to preserve their special form of village administration. The Craven settlement stipulated that the 'foreign cultivators' would have to pay double the rents on their agrarian lands compared to the Hos. The only concession was made for the 'old *dikus*' who could prove that they had settled in the region before 1867. A few years later, a

²¹⁴ Let. No. 400, dated 29th Feb, 1868, from Dalton to Hayes, in Roychoudhury (ed.), *Singhbhum Old Records*, pp. 187-188.

²¹⁵ 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., p.22. (Henceforth, Craven Settlement Report).

²¹⁶ Tuckey Settlement Report, p. 23.

special post of the Kolhan Inspector was created over the *mankis* and *mundas* to look into the *diku* settlements, and supervise the transfers of land. The village headmen, were asked to send periodic reports about the *dikus* settled in their village, with the failure to do so being liable to fine. In the year 1902, the then Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, W.B. Thomson created an elaborate set of rules to deal with the *diku* problem. These rules sought to regulate land transfers between the *dikus* and the *Hos* and also empowered the Deputy Commissioner, if required, to eject the *dikus* and auction of their properties. The rule also stipulated that the *dikus* cannot settle in the region, without the written permission of the DC.²¹⁷ Over the next few years, with these new rules at their command, local officials drew up lists of ‘undesirable dikus’, reports of their activities, the extent of their landholdings, etc and also initiated measures for ejecting them.²¹⁸ The complete enforcement of these rules, however, remained contentious. Several *dikus* defied the authority of the local officials, refused to accept their orders and even questioned the applicability of these new rules.²¹⁹ This was compounded, by the fact that, once again, the colonial officialdom did not reflect a unitary voice regarding this new concern. This will become clear from the following discussion of one such case.

Sometime, in the first few years of the twentieth century, the colonial officials evicted a person named Prayag Singh, from the town of Manoharpur. He was found to be a ‘*diku*’ who as an *arkatti* was illegally recruiting the *Hos* for a ‘notorious’ coolie depot owner named Cook. The Deputy Commissioner H.D. Carey saw Prayag’s activities as a clear contravention of the conditions – which had stated that his residence in the region was subject to his good conduct - under which he had been allowed to stay in the region as a *diku*.²²⁰ For this ‘misconduct’, Prayag Singh was evicted from the region and given five months’ time to take away his properties. Though, Prayag absconded from the region following these orders, a few years later, it was discovered, that his ‘mistress’ Hira Tanti

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

²¹⁸ Tuckey, p. 24.

²¹⁹ For the details of few such cases, see Diku Reports prepared by the Settlement Department, Settlement Department, Col. No. III, File No. 324, 1917.

²²⁰ The condition for his stay in the region also stated that he was not to make any fresh acquisition of land in the region – either for homestead agriculture or any other purpose. Copy of General Note at the head of Manoharpur Diku list of 1904 signed by Mr. A.W. Watson showing conditions on which permission to reside in Manoharpur was granted, Col. No. XVI, File no. 1, 1910-1911, Rev. Dept., CDCR.

along with two of her relatives Konsoro Tanti and Lakshmi Tanti were still living in the region and had kept the *arkatti* traffic alive for the depot owners. These women, it was now alleged, were ‘bad characters’ who were resorting to all sorts of unfair means, including prostitution, to recruit the ‘ignorant aboriginal people’ as coolies. In two separate orders, passed on 13th March 1908, the Deputy Commissioner, evicted both of them, giving them two month time to remove their properties from the region.²²¹ By another order, the Deputy Commissioner instructed the police to proceed and auction of Prayag Singh and Hira Tanti’s houses. Konsoro and Lakshmi refused to leave the region, and did not even remove their properties. The result, local officials lamented, was that Hira Tanti – the ‘expert coolie recruiter’ – would still visit the region, carrying on their illegal activities. The Sub Inspector, in his report, stated that unless Konsoro’s houses are auctioned off ‘the frequent visits of the *arkattis* in the region will not be stopped.’²²²

The Deputy Commissioner Carey, however, felt that the proposed punishment was too lenient. ‘Hundreds if not thousands’ of *dikus* had settled in the region, he explained the seriousness of the *diku* problem to the Commissioner, and several of those turned out in the preceding decades had returned.²²³ In the light of this serious situation, Konsoro and Lakshmi needed to be punished under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code for refusing to follow the Deputy Commissioner’s order for eviction.²²⁴ After getting a nod of approval from the Superintendent and Remembrances of Legal Affairs at Calcutta about the legal technicalities of the matter²²⁵, the Deputy Commissioner instructed the local magistrate to initiate proceedings against the two.²²⁶ In a very short lived case, the magistrate, basing himself without any cross-examination, on the statement of the Sub-

²²¹ Copies of Deputy Commnr’s order dated 13/03/1908 regarding Konsoro Tanti and Lakshmi Tanti, in *Ibid.*

²²² Translation of the report of the S.I. of Police, Manoharpur, dated 1/06/08, in *Ibid.*

²²³ Memo No. 863 R. of 09/08/08 from Deputy Commnr, Singhbhum to the Commnr, Chota Nagpur, in *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Section 188 of the IPC refers to disobedience to order promulgated by public servant empowered by the law.

²²⁵ Let. No. 1159 R., dated Calcutta, the 21st August 1908, from The Hon’ble E.P. Chapman, I.C.S., Offg Superintendent and Remembrancer of Legal Affairs to the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, in *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Order by H.D. Carey, Deputy Commissioner dated 31/8/1908, in *Ibid.*

Inspector and two other witnesses, found the two guilty and sentenced them to 15 days of imprisonment on 13th November 1908.²²⁷

The matter, however, refused to end there, and from Chaibasa jail, Lakshmi and Konsoro challenged the magistrate's orders in the High Court. Apart from other grounds, their appeal questioned the very applicability of Section 188 of the IPC against them. In other words, the argument was that an order by the Deputy Commissioner regarding the ejection of *diku*, or for someone to be prosecuted for not complying with it, was not a lawful one as the rules regarding the ejection of *dikus* were not backed by the Indian Penal Code.²²⁸ The Deputy Commissioner, was summounded, to give a justification of his proceedings. In a detailed defence of his actions, Carey laid out the 'exceptional' form of administration prevalent in the Kolhan region of Singhbhum and several steps that were taken, since the last settlement, to prevent the 'encroachment of the property of the aboriginal village communities' by these 'mischievous' *dikus*. It was his contention, that in so far as the region was excluded from the Indian Penal Code except for criminal matters, these special rules were the 'only law' for these purposes, and a legitimate addition to the forms of civil justice and administration laid out by the WR. And since the Civil Procedure Code was not in operation in the region, the Deputy Commissioner's orders were perfectly within the ambit of Section 188 of the IPC. In his opinion, a letter by the authorities in Calcutta in 1903 had also effectively closed the doors on the "foreigners" by clearly stating that, even if they acquired no land, the *dikus* should not be allowed to remain in the trading centres of Singhbhum "unless they bear a good character and were engaged in legitimate trade." As for the character of these two women, the Deputy Commissioner harboured no doubts about their bad influence and went on to state that being *tantis*, the two women belonged to the "most obnoxious class of foreigners". To quote him:

To this caste, belong most of the arkattis who are responsible for so many abuses in cooly recruiting. It has since been the practice to presume that Tantis are undesirable

²²⁷ Order by A.C. Das, dated 13/11/1908, in Ibid.

²²⁸ Konsoro Tanti and Lakshmi Tanti, Petitioners through the Jyoti Prasad Sarvadhikhri, In the High Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal; Criminal Revisional Jurisdiction in the matter of Konsoro Tanti, Lakshmi Tanti vs King Emperor, in Ibid.

and to eject summarily all who have no settled rights unless there is some exceptional reason for allowing them to remain. In this particular case, no such presumption is necessary because illicit cooly recruiting is certainly not legitimate trade. The man, Prayag Singh, with whom these women are admittedly connected, was known to be engaged, and has been expelled from the Kolhan for so engaging, in the arkatti traffic on behalf of a notorious individual by the name of Cook, who has cooly depots at Kharagpur, Midnapur and other places. In these circumstances, there cannot be any doubt that the order evicting these women were passed for public purposes in defence of an ignorant aboriginal people who are easily gulled by fair promises. That the continued residence of these two women at Manoharpur would be likely to cause injury to individual lawfully employed therein is established by the fact that nothing is more common in this district than complaints made by women that their husbands and other male relatives have been decoyed away by men who are not licensed recruiters.²²⁹

Despite the long and detailed explanation by the Deputy Commissioner, a two bench of the High Court overturned the magistrate's judgement and acquitted both the women. In their opinion, there was no order or statute of the government, having the force of law, which prevented any "foreigner" from entering upon and dwelling in a government *khas mehal* region like the Kolhan. The Deputy Commissioner had based his orders, according to the judges, on an *ipse dixit*²³⁰ order of the Remembrancer of Legal Affairs, which they now found flawed and set aside. Moreover, the judges found the Deputy Commissioner's actions "more extraordinary", as these women were living in the region on the basis of permission granted to them by the Collector himself in 1904. The Legal Remembrancer, who had earlier supported the Deputy Commissioner Carey's proposal for punishing the two women, also changed his position. In a fresh letter to the Deputy Commissioner, he regretted rushing to a wrong conclusion earlier about the legal basis of the Kolhan rules. He stated that he was now informed by the Revenue Board that the Record of Rights in the Kolhan was prepared without any legal authority, and there was therefore no foundation in law authorising the exclusion of foreigners from Kolhan,

²²⁹ Brief of Case in which Konsoro Tanti and Lakshmi Tanti have applied to the High Court to revise a sentence of imprisonment passed on them under section 188 IPC for disobedience of an order ejecting them from Kolhan, in *Ibid*.

²³⁰ Meaning a "dogmatic and unproven statement".

or prosecuting them for disobedience to such an order. Even in the future, any attempt to frame a legislation on the matter of dikus, he commented, was bound to be a controversial move. Rather than evicting the *dikus*, a move that ran into legal troubles, the Deputy Commissioner, according to him, should simply refuse settlements to ‘foreigners’ while also placing strict conditions on the Hos regarding the alienation of their lands to the ‘foreigners’.²³¹

If one looks at certain other cases, one notices the absolute lack of consistency in the court and the government’s rulings to such orders by the local officials. There were occasions when the orders passed by the Deputy Commissioner ejecting the dikus were upheld by the higher authorities as ‘lawful orders’.²³² But then there were also several other occasions where the higher authorities modified or even repealed the Deputy Commissioner’s orders. This lack of consistency needs to be seen in the light of the different economic interests that were at play. As we have seen above, the Legal Remembrancer changed his position, after consulting the Revenue Board, which in a case that concerned recruitment for planters and coolie depots, could not have remained uninfluenced by them or by prospects of revenue. This point is further established when we look at another case which concerned the granting of licenses to a *diku* over certain areas for the prospect of mining manganese. After receiving a memorandum from the *diku* in question, the government issued an order directing the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner to not interfere with him, on the pretext of the *diku* rules. This government order is quite explicative of the manner in which big economic players like planters and miners could easily get a section of the colonial officials on their side in subverting these rules:

It should be explained to the Deputy Commissioner that the object of the rule preventing the settlement of dikus in the Kolhan estate is designed to protect the aborigines from the machinations of the low class Hindus, mostly Tantis and Goalas, who when they settle amongst them, by formenting quarrels and lending them

²³¹ Let. No. 25/2, dated Calcutta, the 13th February 1909 from the Hon’ble E.P. Chapman, I.C.S., Offg Superintendent and Remembrancer of Legal Affairs to the Commissioner of the Chota Nagpur Division, in *Ibid*.

²³² Let no. R988, dated 29/10/06, from the Dep Commnr, Singhbhum to the Suptent & Remembrancer of Legal Affairs, in *Ibid*.

money, oust them from their agricultural lands. The rule which discourages the settlement of these people is undoubtedly a very salutary one; and it must be carefully observed. It must, however, be recognized that this rule does not apply to special cases, such as railway bazaars like Manoharpur and areas where there are minerals. The presence of outsiders in places like these does no harm to the aboriginal Ho. It is quite a different thing allowing settlements for commercial and industrial purposes and permitting outsiders to settle down amongst cultivating Hos and gradually take their lands from them. The rule referred to cannot be allowed to interfere with the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the country which would, moreover, be beneficial to the Hos by providing the needy ones with employment and furnishing all with good local markets for their produce.²³³

All of this was just, a reflection of the tension, and the different interpretations it generated, between officials who emphasized exceptional forms of administration and those who insisted on a uniform administrative structure; between officials who were tasked with the administration of the region, and those who were concerned with revenue. The over-all integration of the region with the economic and administrative structures of the Raj, meant that notwithstanding the special forms of administration and claims of paternalism, the larger economic interests could always make their way around. This however did not mean that the policy of 'exception' was ever abandoned. The last phase of colonial rule would see it getting further fortified.

Section III: Institutionalizing Exception as an All-India Policy (1919-1935 : Rationale and Responses

“The granting of responsible self-government may or may not be a distinct advantage to the many of the peoples of India. To the aboriginal races...it would be a distinct disadvantage.....the aboriginals will in vain look for...sympathy from the legislative bodies.”

²³³ (Copy of Memo No. 2349 T.R., dated 10/10/07 from the Govt. of Bengal to the Commnr of Chota Nagpur forwarding Bengal Govt. order on the memorial of Babu Modhu Lal Doogar and another dated 17th September 1907 regarding certain licenses to prospect for manganese in the Kolhan) Ibid.

- From the memorandum of Louis Van Hoeck, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Mission to the Simon Commission²³⁴

It took some time for the government to realize what unrestricted contact meant for the backward peoples and before restrictions were applied they had lost much, which they can never recover. The trend of administration, as well as positive enactments, have so far saved for them the rest, and, though in education and adaptability to modern conditions they are still much below the general level of the province as a whole, they have made great advance in recent years. The period, has however, been too short to put them in the position of being able to save themselves from whatever is harmful in contact with other civilizations, while absorbing whatever is good.²³⁵

- From the Memorandum presented by the Government of Bihar and Orissa to the Simon Commission

In the last few decades of colonial rule, the debate about the need for an ‘exceptional’ form of administration in tribal areas, rather than remaining localized, assumed an all-India character. It debate began in the backdrop of the constitutional reforms, from 1919 onwards and drew several provincial officials, the missionaries, certain adivasi organizations, representatives of the Indian National Congress as well as several anthropologists into the picture. Several British officials were concerned about the ramifications of devolution of powers to the legislatures on the ‘depressed classes’ and the ‘minorities’, and stressed that their interests needed to be safeguarded by special provisions. At this juncture, previous concerns about protecting the ‘ignorant’ and ‘childlike’ aboriginal from the complicated working of colonial courts coalesced with concerns about simultaneously defending them from the ‘diku’ legislatures. Several legislatures of the Congress opposed the moves towards greater ‘exclusion’ of tribal tracts from purview of the assemblies, seeing the British posturing as another colonial attempt of dividing the ‘nationalist’ opposition to their rule. In this debate, one notices that

²³⁴Indian Statutory Commission. (1930). *Selections from memoranda and oral evidence by non-officials*. Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, pp. 432-433. (Henceforth, Non-Official memoranda)

²³⁵ “Memorandum for the Indian Statutory Commission on the Backward Tracts of Bihar and Orissa” (accessed via <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.100213/224411/015>), p. 358.

occasionally each side also cited the enquiries of their preferred anthropologists – the ‘men of science’- to validate their positions. But anthropologists on their part, by this time, were quite a heterogeneous group of people who held ambivalent and contradictory views. The last section of this chapter seeks to capture this debate in the late colonial period, the rationale for standardising and expanding the policies of exception and the various responses to it. The initial part of the section is not strictly limited to Singhbhum alone, as I deal with material from some other districts and provinces as well to examine the various arguments.

The Government of India Act, 1919 while devolving powers to Indian legislatures partially kept several tribal areas out of their purview, by classifying them as ‘backward tracts’. Before this act, most of these areas were categorized as Non-Regulation Provinces, and as Scheduled Districts after the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874. In these areas, acts and laws that were passed by the central and provincial legislatures were not to be applied, unless they were approved by the Governor-General and the Governor in Council, both of whom were given several discretionary powers. A decade and a half later in 1935, as per the GOI Act, 1935, the ‘backward districts’ were reworked with certain modifications as ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded areas’. The GOI Act, 1935 was based on the recommendations of the Indian Statutory Commission, commonly referred to as the Simon Commission, which had been set up to give recommendations for future forms of administration, by reviewing the working and progress of the constitutional reforms since 1919. It further empowered the Governor to disallow, at his discretion, any resolution or question in Council, regarding the administration of an ‘excluded’ or a ‘partially excluded’ area. The distinct feature of the debates in this period was a greater emphasis on standardising the rationale, categories and markers for excluding an area from the general laws of administration. This becomes clear, for example, when one looks at the different ‘official’ and ‘non-official’ memorandums placed before the Simon Commission.²³⁶

²³⁶ The use of the words ‘official’ and ‘non-official’ is taken from how these memorandum were subsequently recorded and classified. While the official volumes include the memorandums placed by the various provincial governments; the ‘unofficial volumes’ mainly contain the volumes memorandums placed by the various missions active in the region.

Along with several other provincial governments, the Government of Bihar and Orissa placed a memorandum before the Simon Commission on the “backward tracts” in their province. This memorandum began by drawing upon the long history of economic exploitation of the ‘aboriginal’ tenants by the ‘Hindu’ landlords in Chota Nagpur which, according to them, made provision for protection an absolute necessity. To make the case for need for exclusion from the legislatures, the memorandum then stressed upon the demographic profiles of the region. According to them, the demographic specificities of the electorate in the different constituencies would imply that the aborigines, being always in a minority, could never ensure that a candidate who *represents* their interests is returned to the assemblies.²³⁷ It also stated that the main opposition to the ‘paternalistic’ form of rule came from the Bengali settlers who were opposed to it, owing to their interest in the adivasi lands.²³⁸ In the light of this, the memorandum called for upgrading the prior forms of protection for a people who were still deemed as ‘childlike’, ‘improvident’ and who could be ‘readily stirred to violence’. The memorandum made special note of the forms of ‘protection’ in operation in Singhbhum, and the need to augment them further. According to the government, the system (under the WR) had ‘protected the Hos from encroachment by the Dikus’ and functioned ‘with very little challenge by the outsiders and full acceptance by the inhabitants of the tract’. But the granting of powers to legislatures, which from the ‘aboriginal point of view’ was going to be composed of ‘dikus’ would now pose a direct threat to this system. It called for giving a legal sanction to the WR in the reformed constitution, if the ‘region was to be at all preserved as a ‘reserve for the Hos’.²³⁹

Five years later, just prior to the coming into force of the GOI Act, 1935, the Government of Bihar and Orissa placed another report wherein it called for a further

²³⁷ For example, the memorandum placed by the Government of Bihar and Orissa to the Simon Commission stated that barring a few districts, the number of ‘aboriginal electors’ was less than one third of the total electorate. “Memorandum for the Indian Statutory Commission on the Backward Tracts of Bihar and Orissa” (accessed via <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.100213/224411/015>), p. 347.

²³⁸ “Memorandum for the Indian Statutory Commission on the Backward Tracts of Bihar and Orissa” (accessed via <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.100213/224411/015>), p. 353.

²³⁹ Ibid, p. 355.

expansion for the criteria for exclusion.²⁴⁰ The government argued that the proposed provincial autonomy in the 1935 act weakens the position of the central government over these areas, and demanded incorporation of additional safeguards in the reformed constitution. In fact at this juncture, the government demanded that the governor's discretionary powers should be extended not only for 'the predominantly aboriginal tracts' but also for those 'fringe areas' where the aborigines were in the minority.²⁴¹ 'The fate of the aboriginal', the report stated, would be that of a mere labourer usurped of his land and absorbed into the depressed classes if left 'unprotected'.²⁴² According to the official line of reasoning, as articulated by different administrators of different other 'backward tracts', the devolution of powers to the legislatures since 1919 had hardly created conditions where the interests of the 'aborigines' could be represented in the assemblies. According to the Deputy Commissioner of Manbhum, the 'adivasis' suffered from certain 'natural disabilities' and were born with a 'lower intelligence' to be able to represent themselves in the legislatures.²⁴³ Another official from Sambhalpur presented a view, which while seeming to be having the opposite opinion reached the same conclusion. In his opinion, the 'aborigines' were more advanced in matters of intelligence and village affairs but, being out of touch with modern political thought, would take some years before understanding the parliamentary system.²⁴⁴ Others used other markers to make a case for greater 'protection' through exclusion. According to the Bishop of Ranchi, the low levels of education placed the 'aborigines' in a distinctively disadvantaged position, making the control of governors absolutely essential to work out

²⁴⁰ In 1935, there were doubts expressed in the House of Commons in Britain about the comprehensiveness of the previous enquires regarding the areas which ought not to be subject to the normal consequences of popular government. As a result, just prior to the passing of the Bill regarding the reformed constitution into an Act, fresh enquiries were ordered to be undertaken by provincial governments. This report that the Government of Bihar and Orissa now presented was part of these fresh enquiries.

²⁴¹ 'Letter No. 7342-A. R., dated the 18th October 1935, from the Government of Bihar and Orissa to the Government of India' included in *The Government of India Act, 1935 Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas (Section 91): Recommendations of the Provincial Governments and the Government of India*, New Delhi (Indian Reprint), 1936 (Hereafter *GOI Act, 1935, Recommendations*), p. 107.

²⁴² *Ibid*, p. 107.

²⁴³ 'Letter no. 166 – P.C., dated Purulia, the 18th September 1935, from S.N. Mazumdar, I.C.S. Deputy Commissioner, Manbhum, to the Chief Secretary To Government, Bihar and Orissa, Ranchi' in *GOI Act, 1935, Recommendations*, p. 117.

²⁴⁴ 'Report on the Question whether Sambalpur District should be "partially excluded" under the new constitution' in *Ibid*, p. 120.

the various schemes for education and literacy.²⁴⁵ An official from Angul in Orissa drew reference to the distinct ‘individuality’ of the district, with its system of ‘unwritten community laws’ which was functioning admirably well but which will not be appreciated by the Legislative Assembly.²⁴⁶ Elsewhere, J.H. Hutton representing the Assam government resorted to culturally essentialist arguments to stress on the differences between people inhabiting the plains and hills. The plains folk, according to him, could never understand the customs, the practices and the administrative necessities of the ‘Mongolian peoples’ of the hills and the ‘fringes of India’, and if given powers over them, were sure to destroy them.²⁴⁷

These moves towards expanding the scope of exclusion and the framing of the Indian legislatures, to quote the Bishop of Chotanagpur, as ‘the hereditary enemies of the aborigines’²⁴⁸ was bound to affront the claims of the Indian nationalists, more so at a time of growing anti-colonial nationalism.²⁴⁹ In its annual session in 1936, the Congress in its annual session in 1936 decried the exclusionary provisions of the GOI Act, 1935 with regard to the tribal areas as another “attempt to divide the people of India into different groups, with unjustifiable and discriminatory groups, to obstruct the growth of uniform democratic institutions in the country.”²⁵⁰ At different junctures in the 1920s and the 1930s, Indian legislatures challenged these policies of exclusion. For some, the exclusion of these tracts was a ploy by colonialists to keep these areas as the dark holes of the empire. For example, in a debate in the Bihar and Orissa assembly, one legislature stated

²⁴⁵ *Non-Official Oral Memoranda*, p. 454.

²⁴⁶ ‘Report on the Retention of Angul in the List of Partially Excluded Areas’ in *GOI Act, 1935, Recommendations*, pp. 123-127.

²⁴⁷ Home Dept., File no. 2/1/ 36 – Public (NAI), p. 31.

²⁴⁸ *Non-Official Oral Memoranda*, p. 443.

²⁴⁹ For example, a representative from Bombay, N.V.Gadgil quoting Winston Churchill’s words in the British parliament for making a larger list of ‘Excluded’ and ‘Partially Excluded Areas’ even it included the ‘entire scope of Great Indian peninsula’, remarked, “It has been said that if these areas are not given protection, the result will be that they will fall victims to Poona Brahmans(referring to the tracts excluded under the Bombay Presidency)...I know Poona Brahmans being one of them, but what I am afraid of, Sir, is that the real protection that they need is not from Poona Brahmans but from London Brahmans and Banyans who come to sit opposite me”, Home Dept., File no. 2/1/ 36 – Public (NAI), pp. 8-9.

²⁵⁰ cited in Guha, Ramchandra. (1996). ‘Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal Question in Late Colonial India,’ *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 35/37 (1996): 2375.

that no one knows the exact details about the exploitation of the mineral and forest wealth of Chotanagpur because of these policies of exclusion. To quote him:

“Chotanagpur specially the district of Singhbhum, is particularly an area where there is wealth which can be exploited...we know how companies after companies are cropping up there to loot the mineral wealth in the dark...nobody knows whom they pay, what they pay, what amount they raise, etc. for it is an excluded, and scheduled area”.²⁵¹

In the resolutions they moved in the assembly, calling out for stamping this ‘despotic’ forms of rule, they referred to the ‘progress’ made by these areas which had ‘brought them into line with the rest of the province’.²⁵² Their resolutions, needless to say were dismissed by the government without much discussion. Its advocates were termed, not just as ‘profoundly ignorant’, but rather as belonging to those ‘alien’ groups which had exploited the ‘aborigines’ and whom they looked at with resentment.²⁵³ The reference to Indian legislatures as ‘aliens’ at a time when the government was collecting memorandums and reports from different provincial officials and missionaries – all of whom were Europeans – is quite interesting. Vis-a-vis the tribes, the “caste Hindus” – settlers from North Bihar and Bengal in the case of Chotanagpur – were represented as more foreign compared to the British. They belonged to classes ‘most hostile’ to the aboriginal interests, who were only interested in removing the policies of protection.²⁵⁴ Commenting in 1935 on the repeated resolutions moved by the Indian legislatures against the policies of ‘exclusion’, the Government of Bihar and Orissa stated:

The Provincial Legislature as a whole has taken little interest in the backward tribes other than to press for the removal of existing forms of protection, the Congress has taken no interest in them expect to exploit them for political purposes, and the local self-governing bodies have usually been more anxious to

²⁵¹ Home Dept., File no. 2/1/ 36 – Public (NAI), p. 19.

²⁵² File no 389 of 1929, Home Dept. –Judicial, (National Archives of India).

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 346-348.

provide for non-aboriginals than for aboriginal needs except in the few districts where the aboriginals themselves have effective representation on these bodies.²⁵⁵

In the debate around the exceptional form of rule, anthropological and ethnological ideas about ‘primitiveness’ and differences of the tribes vis-a-vis the castes, of ‘animists’ vis-a-vis ‘Hindus’ had always been writ quite large. On one occasion, an official from Assam, M.C. Witherington, responding to a resolution moved by some members of the Congress in Bihar referred to the inherent scientificity of the scheme of exclusion by drawing upon the work of anthropologists, calling them ‘the men of science of India’.²⁵⁶ The other side in the debate too wasn’t averse to damning the anthropological roots of the policy, with an India legislature calling the policy of exclusion the brainchild of these ‘learned’, yet ‘selfish class of people.’²⁵⁷ Born out of ‘an unequal power encounter’ between Europe and the East, to borrow the oft quoted phrase of Talal Asad phrase, it is indeed true that the long and dark shadow of colonialism was always cast large on the discipline of anthropology.²⁵⁸ But, it is equally true that within an overarching frame set by colonial rule, ethnographic enquiries had undergone several shifts by the last decades of British rule in India. As opposed to the early 19th century evolutionary racial ethnology that was seduced most to the tribal tracts of the sub-continent as encapsulating evidences of the ‘primitive man’, the later 19th century works increasingly reflected a complex engagement with the native notions of time, space as well as customary rights, tenurial systems, etc. Ethnographic enquiries of this later period

²⁵⁵ ‘Letter No. 7342-A. R., dated the 18th October 1935, from the Government of Bihar and Orissa to the Government of India’ included in *GOI Act, 1935, Recommendations*, p. 107.

²⁵⁶ Home Dept., File no. 2/1/ 36 – Public (NAI), p. 27.

²⁵⁷ To quote him completely, “I admire the learning of these gentlemen, but I condemn their selfishness. *These anthropologists want all the primitive classes of people in India to remain uncivilized...The object of these anthropologists is to preserve these sections in their primitive conditions so that they could indulge in their intellectual pursuits, not only they, but their heirs and successors...I cannot support a scheme of this kind. If the British parliament and the anthropologists and the others who support total or partial exclusion had cared for the interests of these people in the first place they would have insisted upon proper representation of these classes in the Legislatures.*” Ibid.

²⁵⁸ See Asad, Talal. (1975). ‘Introduction’ in Talal Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, London: Ithaca Press

were forced, as a result of several protests, rebellions and their attendant claims and counter-claims, to engage with these complex questions.²⁵⁹

The emergence in the early decades of the 20th century of several Indian practitioners of anthropology also complicated the situation. These practitioners drew from existing frameworks of knowledge developed by the British, but in attempting to reach conclusions that were not always the same, they also sought to carve out their own new frameworks. The pioneer of anthropological research in India Sarat Chandra Roy, as Sangeeta Dasgupta informs us in a forthcoming work, was not someone who was professionally trained in the discipline; yet through his work on the Oraons of Chota Nagpur, he sought to engage in a ‘vast imperial network of scientific and cultural exchange...taking place across the British empire and its various colonies.’ Even as he sought official support to institutionalize a discipline he thought to be of practical importance, and even as he engaged with the nineteenth century ethnographic inquests of British administrators and missionaries, Roy’s work and postulations, as Dasgupta argues, was not wedded to the state and shows shifts over time in response to several theoretical and political developments.²⁶⁰ This is quite evident, for example, in Roy’s positioning vis-à-vis the categorization of Chota Nagpur as a ‘partially excluded area’ as per the GOI Act, 1935. Citing the progress made by the region in terms of its culture, literacy, the greater tractability of its inhabitants, etc., Roy, in an article he wrote in the *Indian Nation*, critiqued the moves by the government to place ‘this most advanced among the so-called ‘Backward Tracts’ of the older act’ as a partially excluded area in the reformed constitution of 1935.²⁶¹ The second batch of Indian anthropologists –N. K. Bose, D.N. Majumdar, Irawati Karwe, G.S. Ghurye – were all professionally trained as

²⁵⁹ The most striking example of this later shift are the late 19th century and early 20th century ethnographic inquests of the German Jesuit missionary John Baptist Hoffman. After the suppression of the *ulgulan* led by Birsa Munda, the government, which was eager to prevent its recurrence, asked him to draw up a memorandum on the Munda land system. This was part of the government drive to codify local customary rights of the Munda and remedy the agrarian causes of the rebellion. Hoffman was specially chosen for this task because of his knowledge of *Mundari* as well as acquaintance with customs and traditions of the Munda. The latter was perceived to be interwoven with the land system of the Mundas. Hoffman’s writings are explored in greater detail in the next chapter on agrarian change.

²⁶⁰ Dasgupta, Sangeeta. (forthcoming). *Reordering Adivasi Worlds*. Delhi: OUP.

²⁶¹ Roy, S.C. (1936). ‘The Aborigines of Chota Nagpur: Their Proper Status in the Reformed Constitution’, *Indian Nation*. p.22

department offerings anthropology started being set up in universities across India.²⁶² But, as these practitioners of a nascent ‘scientific discipline’ with ‘practical value’ were pulled into the vortex of the debate around policy about appropriate form of rule for tribal areas, their positions also reflected different pushes and pulls determined by developments both within and outside the discipline. In the concluding part of this section, we focus on the work of an important, yet understudied, anthropologist of this time, D.N. Majumdar to understand these dilemmas of the Indian ‘experts’, whose postulations on the subject were shaped by multiple influences.²⁶³ Before we come to his prescriptions for rule, it is important to briefly examine his conceptualization of the Hos as a tribe, on which the former was based.

Majumdar stepped into Chotanagpur for the first time in 1923 as a young post-graduate student of anthropology along with a batch of other students and his teacher at the Calcutta University Rai Bahadur L.K.A. Ananta Krishna Iyer. This visit acquainted him with S.C. Roy, who was considered at that time the towering figure of anthropological research in Chota Nagpur at that time. As Roy introduced the group to the ‘primitive life’ of different tribes of Chota Nagpur, Majumdar seems to have been taken in by Roy’s brand of ‘salvage ethnography’. In this first trip, he travelled through the hillocks and small forests of different regions in Chota Nagpur. Undertaking his journey through the Bengal-Nagpur railway line, he found vast cleared fields, amidst the

²⁶² The first department of sociology and anthropology was set up in Bombay in 1919, followed by Calcutta in 1921 and in Lucknow in 1928. In 1921, Sarat Chandra Roy had also founded the journal *Man In India*, which published the results of many anthropological enquiries taken up by the likes of him and his other Indian contemporaries, besides re-publishing old works and reports that he considered of ethnological interest. For a brief history of the rise of anthropology in India, see Vidyarthi, L.P. (1978). *Rise of Anthropology in India, Vol. I (The Tribal Dimension)*, Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

²⁶³ Unlike other Indian anthropologists of the time, like Verrier Elwin, S.C. Roy or G.S. Ghurye, the life and works of D.N. Majumdar remains most understudied. He is not included even in a recent collection of articles on the different anthropologists, who initiated the discipline in India. Uberoi, Patricia, Nandini Sundar and Satish Deshpande. (ed.). (2010). *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology*. Delhi: Permanent Black. While looking up the existing works on Majumdar, I could only find a couple of article on the ‘Lucknow School of Anthropology’, of which he was a part, and only one monograph which explored his life and works. Hegde, Sasheej. (2014). ‘Invoking Sociology at University of Lucknow (1921-75): Framing Considerations’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology 2014*, 48: 409; Thakur, Manish. (2014). ‘Sociological Traditions: Context, Claims and Practices’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology 2014*, 48: 419; Saksena, H.S. (2017). *Tribal Studies and Beyond: Contributions of D.N. Majumdar to Indian Anthropology*. Delhi: Rawat Publications.

rocky terrain, surrounded by densely populated Munda and Oraon hamlets. ‘Beharees’ and ‘Bengalees’ were scarcely to be found in these areas, Mazumdar commented, but the missionaries were conspicuous by their presence everywhere. This trip made him realize the significance of Chota Nagpur for those interested in the study of primitive people. Chota Nagpur was a ‘vast treasure’, where the ‘aboriginal people’ had till now ‘preserved much of their habits and customs’ despite being surrounded by ‘cultured people’ on all sides. But this could change very soon, and in an article he subsequently wrote, he commented upon the urgency for the anthropologists to lay their eyes and ears on this area. Even a decades’ delay could mean that, ‘all that was primitive in them would perish adding only a blank page to the diary of the chorus.’ Travelling from Ranchi to Lohardugga, he finally reached Kolhan in Singhbhum where he found the Hos – ‘the most interesting of all the aboriginal tribes of the Chota-nagpur plateau’ – whose educated members, at that time, were involved in ‘social reform’, trying to get rid of all the ‘scandalous vices’ that had slowly crept within them.²⁶⁴

From the mid-1920s, he had started publishing the preliminary results of his enquiries – anthropometric details of their physiognomy²⁶⁵, collection of Ho love songs²⁶⁶, detail of the games they played²⁶⁷, customs, traditions, ceremonies regarding birth and death²⁶⁸ - in different journals such as *Modern Review*, *Calcutta Review*, *Man In India*, *Indian Review*, etc. In 1926, the Calcutta University awarded him a prestigious scholarship – Premchand Roychand scholarship - to carry out these studies about the Hos. In 1928, he had taken up the job of a lecturer in anthropology at the Economics and Sociology Department of Lucknow University and by the end of the decade, the recognition for his initial work came in the form of Mouat gold medal awarded to him in 1928 by the Calcutta university. These different recognitions prompted him to take the

²⁶⁴ Majumdar, D. N. (1925). ‘The Cry of Social Reforms Amongst the Aborigines’ in *The Modern Review*, March 1925, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, Whole No. 219. p. 286.

²⁶⁵ Majumdar. (1925). ‘Physical Characteristics of the Hos of Kolhan’ in *Man In India*, March-June 1925, Vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 56-68.

²⁶⁶ Majumdar. (1926). ‘Some Love Songs of the Hos’ in *The Indian Review*, May 1926, pp. 315-316.

²⁶⁷ Majumdar. (1925). ‘Some Outdoor and Sedentary Games of the Hos of Kolhan’ in *Man In India*, March-June 1925, Vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 193-202.

²⁶⁸ Majumdar. (1925). ‘The Birth Ceremonies of the Hos of Kolhan’ in *Man In India*, March-June 1925, Vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 176-184.

work further, and in 1933 he joined the Cambridge University for a doctorate, and two years later in 1935 he submitted his doctoral dissertation on ‘culture change’ amongst the Hos under the supervision of T.C. Hodson. In 1937, this doctoral dissertation was published as a monograph titled *A Tribe in Transition: A Study in Culture Pattern*. Thirteen years later, this monograph was expanded and republished once again as “*The Affairs of a Tribe: A Study in Transition*” in 1950. However, over these decades, spent in Singhbhum, Lucknow and at Cambridge, his initial views and perspectives underwent several shifts and modifications.

One of the most marked features of this shift was Majumdar’s attitude about the ‘exclusivity’ and ‘isolation’ of the Hos as well as their relationship with the ‘castes’. In one of his early articles, Majumdar described the mutually antagonistic nature of the relationship between the Hos and the *dikus*. The latter looked down upon the former, condescendingly referring to them as Kols or dirty people who reared pigs. The former, on their part, regarded themselves as equal and even superior to the *dikus*, and would not take anything from them. If someone did so, he would be immediately excommunicated from the community, only to be taken back after an elaborate purificatory ceremony presided over the tribal headmen and village elders.²⁶⁹ However, over the next decades, he reworked this view of the mutual antagonism between the Hos and the *dikus*. In the 1937 edition of his work on the Hos, he wrote:

Kolhan is still the land of the Hos, in spite of the presence of the *dikus*. They have occupied it, and maintained their occupation. The Hos are often encouraged to treat the *Dikus* as aliens...(but) the formation of classes in Kolhan has done much to soften the distinction between the aborigines and the higher caste people. The higher classes of the Hos form a sort of middle class, and thus bridge the gulf between two extreme sections of the people in Kolhan. This is contributing to a peaceful social progress.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Majumdar, D. N. (1925). ‘Some Ethnographic Notes on the Hos of Kolhan’ in *Man In India*, March-June 1925, Vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 186-192.

²⁷⁰ Majumdar, D. N. (1937). *A Tribe in Transition: A Study in Culture Pattern*. London: London, Longman, Green & Co., pp. 195-196.

Majumdar also began to question the standard notions about the ‘isolation’ of the Hos. The Hos, according to Majumdar of 1950, had never been an ‘isolated people’ and had always lived in contact with other castes and tribes from the very early times.²⁷¹ And this ‘clash of cultures’²⁷², according to Majumdar, had induced far reaching changes within the Hos, most notably the growing differentiation within the tribe. The Hos had split into separate classes who were increasingly living a separate existence from each other.²⁷³ The *mankis* and the *mundas* and a few substantial cultivators lived in separate *tolas* within the villages, with better facilities and better houses.²⁷⁴ They ate better quality food, and hardly inter-dined with their raiyats. The growth of this ‘class consciousness’ amongst these wealthy families of the headmen was such that their children refused to eat together with the children of the raiyats in government boarding schools and hostels.²⁷⁵ In Majumdar’s opinion, this had ramifications for the tribal forms of solidarity. The colonial recognition to the *manki-munda* system, according to him, had significantly altered this tribal institution. The colonial state had started to directly appoint new *mankis* from dominant families within the village. And these headmen, increasingly becoming aware of their new found social and economic status, did not refrain from ‘using their increased judicial and executive responsibility...for private and political ends’, and even resorted to bribes, corruption, embezzlement of funds towards it.²⁷⁶ Majumdar notes that this had created an ‘unhappy situation’ in the region, and there were several instances of the Hos being left unsatisfied with the arbitration of their problems and disputes by their own headmen.

As we have seen, several colonial officials harped upon the difference between ‘aborigines’ practising ‘animism’ and Hindus to argue for excluding the tribal tracts from the scope of the legislatures. However, according to Majumdar, the Hos, specially the higher classes amongst them, who had come into closer contact with the dikus, were showing a decisive movement towards Hinduism. ‘The tribal religions everywhere have

²⁷¹ Majumdar, D.N. (1950). *The Affairs of A Tribe: A Study in Tribal Dynamics*. Lucknow: Universal Publishers, p. 281.

²⁷² Ibid, p. 277.

²⁷³ Ibid, p. 232.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 45-48.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 287-288.

been permeated with Hindu ideas, rites and rituals’, he explained, ‘and it is indeed difficult to draw a line between them and popular Hinduism.’²⁷⁷ These hierarchies developing within the Hos, as a result of these contacts, were connected not just to their material world but also their customary, ceremonial as well as supernatural world. There was an on-going movement for ‘social reform’ amongst Hos, and they were purging the ‘offensive’ practices within their social and cultural life and adopting the cultural traits of their ‘more advanced communities’. In urban centres and villages on their fringes, the Hos had started to confine their women in their homes and adopt practices such as *purdah*.²⁷⁸ There were also conscious changes being introduced in their dietary habits, with the families of *mankis* and *mundas* giving up the eating of pork and beef.²⁷⁹ The earlier ‘sublimely vague beliefs’ of the Hos in spirits or *bongas* and their offerings to them as well propitiation ceremonies were undergoing substantive changes. There were instances of *diku* priests propitiating the spirits; the Hos were adopting the new spirits, new Gods, new cults; and these were relegating into background the older tribal pantheon.

One such interesting cult, that Majumdar described was the Manasha Cult - that had emerged in this period, ostensibly to cure snake bites. The description of this cult reveals the implications of this religious change for the internal dynamics of the Hos. With earlier ‘indigenous’ prescriptions being considered insufficient, a number of centres had sprung up in certain villages of Singhbhum – where *diku ojhas* (largely priests from adjoining parts of Orissa) taught their disciples methods to invoke the Goddess Manasha, believed to preside over snakes. The ceremony in this cult, to drive away the poison, was the following. The *ojha* or the priest would sit, two nights before the full moon every fortnight, under a tamarind tree and recant ‘weird’ and ‘unintelligible’ *mantras* in Bengali, spoken in Oriya style. After reciting the mantras for some time, the priest would be possessed and fall down prostrate before a small mound of earth which was supposed to represent the goddess Manasha. At this juncture, his posse of disciples, who sat around him, would also be possessed and would begin to shake and knock their heads against the

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 269-270.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 21, 282.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

wicker fence and strike each other with canes. Two days later, when the new moon emerged, the disciples who had gone through the above procedure would tie a black string around their arms, which was believed to make them immune from snake bite. One *ojha* who had become extremely popular, and gathered around him disciples from several villages was a person by the name of Gono.

One of the days, Majumdar while passing through the villages, witnessed the ‘Manki Saheb’s son’, who was a young disciple of Gono, being beaten mercilessly by his co-disciples. It was a ‘piteous sight’ Majumdar wrote, ‘for he was not yet possessed as the others were.’ The reference to the ‘Manki Saheb’s son’ was to the son of Babu Dulu Manki, the *manki* of Dumbisai in Kolhan who was extremely influential. Dulu Manki had been elected as the aboriginal member of the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council several times and also conferred with the title of the Rai Sahib by the British in 1931. At the time of the incident described above, with Dulu Manki having grown very old, his son was the de-facto *manki* of the area. The fact such a powerful person was not only a disciple of Gono, but could be publicly beaten reflected, for Majumdar, the ‘attitude of the people, the masses and the classes, towards the adoption and assimilation of alien Gods.’²⁸⁰ In fact, it was not simply that the headmen were showing a move towards Hinduism. The priests, which included a section of the *dikus*, were making an attempt to gain in influence vis-à-vis the *mankis* and *mundas* of Singbhum in the customary, ceremonial, supernatural world of the Hos, which in turn was connected to their material world.

There is almost an approving tone in the words of Majumdar to explain this perceived movement towards Hinduism, which in another place he says creates no distinction between animism and popular Hinduism. But, his contemporaries who studied the tribes of Chotanagpur were not so convinced. In Sarat Chandra Roy’s opinion, the original spirit world of the Hos was not so vague and in explaining their ‘concretization’, Majumdar was merely reading his own Vedantist or pantheistic Hindu idea into the Ho’s

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 261.

mind.²⁸¹ Despite having been influenced by S.C. Roy quite early in his anthropological career, one can see that, in observing religious change, Majumdar did not always reach the same conclusions. These divergences become more marked when one compares their opinions on the role of Christianity in Chota Nagpur. Roy considered the missionary intervention as largely positive, which by liberating the people from old tribal taboos and immoral practices, had imparted a sense of a sense of moral confidence amongst them to claim their rights. For Roy who saw a bright future for Christianity in Chota Nagpur, the missions had integrated several indigenous customs and traditions into their fold.²⁸² Majumdar held completely opposite views, and in his, opinion, Christianity had no future especially amongst the Hos, 'neither today nor in the near or distant future'.²⁸³ The absence of landlordism, the better economic conditions of the Hos vis-à-vis the other cognate tribes, their *tribal forms of solidarity* and the *protective forms of administration* had effectively, according to him, checked the spread of Christianity in Singhbhum.²⁸⁴ According to him, the movement of the Hos, specially the higher classes amongst them, towards Hinduism was also at the same time a movement away from Christianity.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Roy, Sarat Chandra. (1938). 'Review: A Tribe in Transition: A Study in Culture Pattern by D.N. Majumdar' in *Folklore*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Sep., 1938), pp. 324-326.

²⁸² Roy, S.C. (1931). 'The Effects on the Aborigines of Chota-Nagpur of their Contact with Western Civilization' in *The Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. XVII, 1931., pp. 378-388.

²⁸³ Majumdar, (1950). *The Affairs of A Tribe*, p. 307. Majumdar, in fact was not particularly well disposed towards the missions, and what he felt to be their modus operandi for the purposes of conversion. In his opinion, the conversions to Christianity were prompted more by secular than Elsewhere in this book, he commented that missions.

²⁸⁴ For example in the 1950 edition of his work, at one place he writes, "Where they (the tribal communities) live in compact groups, and are superior in number, their tribal organization has remained strong, and conversion to Christianity is not appreciable. The typical case is afforded by the Hos. They still maintain their tribal organization, the traditional beliefs are still regarded as sacred, though there is less rigid adherence to tribal customs and rites due to cultural contact, and Christianity has not asserted itself in Kolhan."Ibid., p. 253.

²⁸⁵ Majumdar, in fact was not particularly well disposed towards the missions, and what he felt to be their modus operandi for the purposes of conversion. In his opinion, the conversions to Christianity were prompted more by secular than divine reasons, and Singhbhum's better economic condition saved it from becoming a major catchment area for conversions for the missionaries. The missionaries, he stated, need to change this approach and should, instead, focus more on spiritual questions rather than a materialistic one. Ibid., p. 308. Elsewhere, in an article written in 1938, he made a plea for 'organized mission work' by the Hindus to 'reclaim the aboriginal', and proposed an elaborate scheme on which this mission work should follow. Majumdar. (1938). 'Tribal Population and Christianity: A Plea for Organized Mission Work

A contradiction is clearly discernible here in the Majumdar's postulations. While delineating the *long* history of cultural contact of the Hos with other castes and tribes, Majumdar had emphasised the gradual weakening of tribal institutions and 'detrabilization', the growing differentiation amongst the Hos and their movement towards Hinduism. However, the same tribal solidarity that he described earlier as getting weak was now invoked as an effective check against Christianity to describe its failure in spreading amongst the Hos. These contradictory analyses were, in a way, a result of the contradictory influences within Majumdar.

As he explained in the introduction to the 1950 edition of his work on the Hos, Majumdar preferred the functionalist school, moving away from earlier methods of evolutionism and diffusionism. According to him, the functionalist method, with its emphasis on quantitative field work and learning the language of the subjects of study, established anthropology on a sound 'scientific' and 'objective' basis, while also making it a discipline of practical importance. However, he could not be convinced with the postulations, of the Euro-American functionalist anthropologists of the time, from Malinowski to Radcliffe Browne and many others, which tended to view the native cultures of the colonized as largely passive before the advent of colonialism, and the West as the sole moving force of cultural change.²⁸⁶ India far from representing a history of passivity, for Majumdar, reflected a dynamic and longer history of 'traffic of cultural contact' between various castes and tribes of India. Elsewhere, in a tract written in 1944 on the 'primitive groups' of the United Provinces, based on his experiences of census operations in the region in 1941 with which he was officially associated, Majumdar had stated that the distinction between tribes and castes had become '*more academic than real*'.²⁸⁷ He explained this by referring to the histories of migrations of different communities over the pre-colonial past, which led them to constantly migrate to new habitats and taken new occupations, names and languages, and consequently make new claims for vertical mobility. The colonial classification of the various communities into

Among the Tribal People by the Hindus' in *The Modern Review*, May 1938, Vol. LXIII, No. 5, Whole No. 377 .

²⁸⁶ Majumdar, (1950). *The Affairs of A Tribe*, pp. V-VIII.

²⁸⁷ Majumdar, D.N. (1944). *The Fortunes of Primitive Tribes*. Lucknow: Universal Publishers, p. xiv.

castes and tribes, according to him, could not be taken at face value, as it was based on the knowledge (*or rather the lack of it*) of the census enumerators vis-a-vis the strength of various caste organizations and their claims for a higher status.²⁸⁸

However, even as he emphasised the histories of integration and assimilation of the ‘tribes’ with the ‘castes’, he could not stretch it, especially in the case of the Hos, absolutely. Unlike the tribal communities of United Provinces, introducing whom Majumdar made the claim of vertical mobility of tribes into castes during census operations, Chota Nagpur was witnessing the rise of an assertive adivasi movement with its demands of autonomy, self-rule and separate statehood. Far from claiming a caste status, these movements, in Majumdar’s opinion, tended to view the ‘social distance between castes and tribes with sinister misgivings.’²⁸⁹ For Majumdar, this ‘political consciousness’ was as a result of conscious and deliberate attempts by an advanced section of tribal communities to revive their traditional beliefs and practices in the face of loss of economic and social deterioration. Majumdar explained that the contacts of the Hos with ‘civilization’ had been not been an unmixed blessing, and they were not always treated at par by those whom they had sought to imitate. A section of the ‘advanced tribals’ were now resuscitating older tribal values, customs, traditions as well as forms of tribal solidarity to advance their economic, social and political rights as well as to counter a sense of inferiority complex. The rise of this ‘tribal sub-nationalism’ – despite the changed circumstances where mutuality on class lines had replaced older communal considerations – ensured their village organization and the headmen system was not totally lost within this overall wind of change. This tribal revivalism, however did not mean that the movement towards Hinduism was completely abandoned, and Majumdar hoped that the conflict could have been reduced only if economic antagonism was taken care of. Majumdar described a local enquiry, where the Hos asked him to mediate to underscore this point. The Hos were protesting against the attempts of an aboriginal welfare officer to prove that the *dikus* residing in a village were autochthonous to it, having similar rights as the Hos. After ruling in the favour of the Hos, Majumdar commented:

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. ix.

²⁸⁹ We will deal with the self-representational strategy of these movements in detail in a subsequent section.

Social prestige is associated with the adoption of Hindu practices yet those who claim this privilege are conscious of their economic exploitation by the higher Hindu castes...Had it not been for the rights to hold land and the expropriation of tribal lands by the *dikus*, the relation of the Hos with the *dikus* would have been much healthier.²⁹⁰

How did these contradictory analyses determine Majumdar's attitude to the 'exceptional' form of administration for tribal areas? Was he in favour of bringing the 'Hinduised' Hos under a uniform administrative structure, as was being argued by the representatives of the Congress in the legislatures? Or was he in favour of the assertions made by the nascent adivasi movement, which was resuscitating their own institutions and keeping tribal forms of solidarity alive? Majumdar commented on this policy for the first time in an article written for the *Calcutta Review* a year after the coming into force of the Government of India Act, 1935. In this article, despite accepting the disastrous effects of 'the contacts with civilization' for the tribes, the overall disorganization of tribal life as well as certain protective benefits of the indirect form of rule, Majumdar expressed his disquiet towards any attempt to 'isolate' the tribes. In his opinion, there were two kinds of situations that the British were faced with. There were places where the tribes had lived in association with the lower castes for long, and did not suffer from much exploitation at the hands of the 'alien groups'. In these places, Majumdar stresses, as he does in his later works on Singhbhum, it was 'difficult to know when a tribe crosses the line to Hinduism.' However, there were large areas where there had been a history of 'clash of interests' between the 'tribal people' and 'Hindu landlords', leading to the former's dispossession from lands by landlords and moneylenders. In Majumdar scheme of things, protection was required to safeguard the latter - the encroachment of the economic rights of the tribal rights. But at the cultural realm, contacts were only bound to increase and 'it was absurd to think of isolating them'. Furthermore, even Majumdar's ideas of economic safeguards were always accommodative of the developmentalist concerns of the native elite, for whom these areas were seen as offering *vast riches* and *great possibilities*. The programme he offered – a forward policy of economic uplift along with protective legislation against exploitation by alien people – was, therefore, a

²⁹⁰ Majumdar, *The Affairs of a Tribe*. p. 300.

compromise between colonial ideas of primitivism, his own thesis of acculturation as well as the newly emergent developmentalist motifs:

Under the complicated conditions of modern life, the primitive tribes are not in a position to take their future in their own hands. The possibilities of primitive tracts, the great riches of raw material, both vegetable and mineral as well as capacity of the tribes for consuming manufactured goods by participating in the economic development and exploitation of resources of their habitat, make it necessary that the primitive tracts should be opened up by a network of communications. Under favourable conditions, or under a system of protective legislation, the Sonthals, the Hos, the Cheros and the Majhwars have adjusted themselves to the changed conditions. But wherever tribal rights to land have not been protected, the tribes have suffered and have been degraded into serfs or slaves mostly of the Sahukars. It is therefore imperative that a forward policy of economic uplift among the primitive tribes should be introduced with protective legislation against exploitation by alien people.²⁹¹

Majumdar's critical attitude to this policy comes out clearly, once again, in a lecture delivered at Nagpur University a decade later, just on the eve of independence. Critically examining the legacy of the indirect form of rule initiated by the British, Majumdar stated that the 'recognition of the indigenous tribal organization by the government' in Chota Nagpur had failed in achieving the purported advantages of indirect rule. His long field works over the previous two decades in Singhbhum had made him extremely aware of the very visible differentiation that had emerged within the Hos, specially the privileged position, as we have seen above, of the headmen. And here in this lecture, he stated that this differentiation, along with the colonial interference in the indigenous institutions of the tribes, such as in the appointment of the tribal headmen, had brought the 'system of indirect rule' into a conflict with the tribal patterns of life.²⁹²

Does this mean that Majumdar, wanted the post-colonial state to abandon this policy of exception, that was not only based on essentialized racial differences between the tribes and the castes but had also left behind a conflicted legacy? Far from it, he was,

²⁹¹ Majumdar, D. N. (1936), 'A Plea for the Better Treatment of the Aboriginal Population in India' in *Calcutta Review*, October 1936, p. 75.

²⁹² Majumdar, D. N. (1947). *The Matrix of Indian Culture*. Lucknow: Universal Publishers, pp. 142-143.

in fact, critical of efforts after independence to restrict the powers of the *mankis* and the *mundas*, and instead wanted the government to make use of the growing stratification within the Hos for the purposes of formulating policy in Singhbhum. The privileged sections – the *mankis* and *mundas*, those claiming *khuntkatti* rights and the educated Hos – commanded great social influence within the community, and Majumdar wanted the government to interlope them for the purposes of administration. These ‘ambitious families’ will not only help local communities ‘adjust’ to the new schemes of the government but it will also prevent the government, from governing the region through ‘aliens’, whose motives the Hos, especially since the emergence of the adivasi movement, had become highly suspicious of. Following from this framework, Majumdar was critical of the subtle ways through which the state, in the early years after independence, was transferring the social influence of the tribal headmen to the ‘detrribalized’ men and women from the local communities, and even by non-tribals who were appointed as tribal officers in Singhbhum. For example, he critiqued the moves by the administration to ban the sale of *adivasi* land even to other *adivasis*, without the direct permission of the Deputy Commissioner. This move had been apparently brought in response to certain cases coming to light where *dikus* obtained adivasi land, by registering their claims in the names of their servants who were adivasis. Even as this move could check certain malpractices, it privileged the Deputy Commissioner’s powers over that of the *mankis* and the *mundas* and could lead to a reversal of ‘the tradition of centuries of indirect rule.’ He went on to ask

One is tempted here to ask if this was at all necessary and is not the remedy for malpractices of the tribal officers is more drastic than the disease itself? ...if indirect rule has succeeded in other parts of the world among savage and preliterate people, why should it not succeed in Kolhan and the Hos are such a compact people.... Political expediency today has necessitated concessions in the form of tribal welfare activities, but a change of heart is called for, and the anomalies of the *laissez faire* policy with regard to tribal life and culture must be

removed, whatever be the consequences. This, I am afraid, cannot be done by viewing the problems from above, the perspective must change.²⁹³

At another place, he warned against stripping the *mankis* and *mundas* of their local police duties by establishing direct police posts. Quoting a conversation with a local *manki* where he cited government's lack of trust in the tribal officers as the main reason behind the setting up of direct police posts in the region, Majumdar called for appointing these very people as the *thana* officers:

It is necessary to put the new duties now devolving on the *thana* officers to educated young men of the community or the intelligent persons among them, whose official role and usefulness will slowly act as *corrective* to the general *laxity* of tribal control and the *lapses* of the tribal officers.²⁹⁴

Such prescriptions for the future policy of rule, in a way, allowed Majumdar to resolve his own contradictions as well. This method to check the growing 'detrribalization', by roping in elements who elsewhere he described as moving toward Hinduism, seemed most plausible for Majumdar. It also allowed him to remain a proponent of continuing with the indirect form of rule in Singhbhum, without completely borrowing the colonial rationale behind it. It did not fundamentally disturb Majumdar's central thesis of the Hos showing a movement towards Hinduism without, at the same time, conceding too much to the claims of the emerging political movement amongst the adivasis. The one connecting point, between the colonialists and people like Majumdar, however, remained a paternalistic attitude towards the adivasis who were seen as incapable of taking the future in their own hands. If the previous proponents of exceptionalism had described the adivasis as 'childlike' who had to be saved from their avaricious neighbours, for Majumdar the leadership of the adivasi movement, of the 1940s and 1950s, despite having stamped tribal welfare as an important agenda was 'not sufficiently alive to the goal of tribal life'. The dawn of independence had led to 'a new hope and a new ambition surging in the mind' of these 'voiceless millions' to benefit by 'pretending injured innocence'. In Majumdar's patronizing scheme of things, the

²⁹³ Majumdar. *The Affairs of A Tribe.*, p. 16.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 318. (emphasis mine)

initiative for alleviating the tribals from their ‘cup of miseries’ had to come from beyond the adivasis.²⁹⁵ The nationalist leadership had to take a lead in engaging with the claims of the tribals, even if they seemed doubtful and bizzare. And in this endeavour, they could always rely upon the help of experts, like him and other anthropologists, who could help them in formulating the best policy.²⁹⁶ However, contrary to such views, the adivasi organizations and mobilization in these last decades of colonial rule played an important role in negotiating the outcome of the policy of rule for post-colonial India. And towards this, several actors were not averse to borrowing from a plethora of resources – be it essentialized claims of nineteenth century ethnographic accounts of colonial administrators as well as the legacy of exceptional forms of administration – to make claims vis-à-vis the state, and carve out their own distinct political space. This story is explored in the last chapter of this work.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, while examining the policy of administrative exceptionalism, we have tried to remain alert to the various tensions, fissures, contradictions and oppositions that were involved in it. Just to recapitulate briefly, firstly, this policy was adopted because of the disruptions caused to the extension of a uniform administrative structure in all parts of the empire. Thereafter, several officials situated in Calcutta and Patna continued to remain uncomfortable with the devolution of powers to the tribal headmen, and viewed the policy as an unnecessary hurdle for several of their policies. These contingencies were unsurprisingly concealed in the descriptions of this policy by the 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. Lastly, the policy also found opposition in the last decades of colonial rule from the representatives of the Congress and its legislatures, who pressed for the extension of a uniform administrative structure. If the British tried to enlist the enquiries of the anthropologists to validate their policy, Indian anthropologists such as Roy and Majumdar, not to mention the outright opposition of others such as G.S. Ghurye and A.V.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. xi.

²⁹⁶ Saksena. *Tribal Studies and Beyond*, p. 85.

Thakkar, in the last decades of colonial rule, had an ambivalent and changing attitude towards it.

To close this chapter, it needs to be said that there developed another tension as a result of this policy, one that the colonial officials hardly ever acknowledged. This was the tension that developed between *mankis* and *mundas* and the rest of the villages as a result of this policy. As we noticed in the first section, the greater access to colonial officialdom along with their increased incomes owing to their duties of rent collection, had already enhanced the social and economic standing of the headmen in their communities. This growing differentiation amongst the Hos, and the colonial policy of punishments as well as rewards to these local officials of the Raj, allowed the British to enlist the support of a section of local communities when they introduced several drastic socio-economic changes. We now move on to this story, which shows a close intertwining of the policy of exception with the colonial revenue machinery.

Section II
Fields and Forests

Chapter III

Fractured Communities, Fractured Responses: Mapping Agrarian Change in Singhbhum under Colonial Rule

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, more than half a century after they had extended their control over Singhbhum, the British officials, on the eve of an upcoming survey and settlement operation, were vexed with a dilemma. The settlement operation was being initiated at a time when there was widespread unrest in several adjoining regions of Chotanagpur.²⁹⁷ As experience of the previous decades had demonstrated to them, rebellion and unrest in one part of the region could easily spill over to nearby regions. Accordingly, colonial officials, both in the region as well as at the imperial capital in Calcutta, were anxious about the ‘political effects of so searching a procedure’²⁹⁸ and the possibility of resistance from this ‘naturally turbulent race of

²⁹⁷ There was widespread unrest specially in and around the Ranchi district from the 1860s. It began in the form of adivasis petitioning to the authorities over what they felt was infringement of their customary rights on land by ‘Hindu’ landlords. When these were largely left unheeded, this finally culminated in the Ulgulan or the revolt led by Birsa Munda in the 1890s. For a description of this phase of this phase of tribal unrest, see Hoffman I and II. Roy. *The Mundas And their Country*. Singh, K.S. *The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist*. 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

²⁹⁸ Res. No. 2559, Calcutta, the 8th May 1894, Rev. Dept, Land Rev, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR

aborigines' to the intrusive methods of surveys that accompanied these operations.²⁹⁹ Amidst several general anxieties that accompanied each settlement operations, there was one very specific fear this time around. The British were planning, through this settlement, to bring the uplands of the undulating terrain of Singhbhum, locally known as *gora* lands under a rent scheme for the first time. These lands, were the relatively less fertile (compared to the low lands) regions, owing to their geographical position on the upper ridges of the plateau, which made their moisture retention capacity pretty low. These lands were used by the most marginal sections within the locals to cultivate certain coarser varieties of crops through shifting cultivation. They were also used as grazing grounds for their herds of cows and goats. This proposal to assess the *gora* lands was not coming for the first time. It had been contemplated during earlier settlement operations during 1855 and most of all in 1867; but each time it was rejected with the colonial state remaining content with assessing the lowlands, locally known as *bad* and *bera*, and gradually increasing the rates of rent over them.

The change was going to significantly affect the lives of a large section of the population and, as such, there were fears that this change may lead to 'dissatisfaction and discontent'. To address these concerns, the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, on the advice of the Commissioner, convened a conference of selected delegates from within the local communities on 10th June 1893, to ensure that the changes are acceptable to 'local traditions'. This set the stage for the entry of a person by the name of Captain David Manki, *manki* of a *pir* called Thoi, who played an important role in facilitating the operationalization of this policy. His statements and representations during and after the conference in favour of the new policy, despite being opposed by the majority of the delegates to this conference was portrayed by the British officials as the authoritative voice of the community. And giving credence to his voice as exemplifying the 'consent' of the local communities to the new rent scheme, the British implemented it through this settlement, and this led to a significant increase of returns from the region. Who was this

²⁹⁹ 'Letter No. 868 L.R., dated Ranchi, the 29th-30th November 1897 from A. Forbes, Esq., C.S.I., Commissioner of the Chota Nagpur Division to The Secretary to the Board of Revenue, L.P.' in 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.

Captain David Manki? What were his interests in agreeing to such a scheme, which curtailed, what was seen even by colonial officials as, the ‘universal custom’ of the local communities? Why would the headmen, even if a section of them, give their acquiescence to a rent scheme over an area where villagers earlier cultivated crops without any rents and grazed their animals without any restrictions? Furthermore, what were the considerations for the colonial state in privileging one voice from within the local community as *the* voice of the community? How did it re-orient the internal dynamics of the village communities?

In the previous chapter, we had observed the institutionalization of a regime of ‘exception’ in the region, where, excluded from the general laws and regulations, tribal headmen had become the nodal point for the operationalization of colonial power in the region. As rent collection was one of their primary functions, the power of these headmen was located in the interstices of colonial revenue machinery – which in turn was dependent mainly on returns from land. This chapter explores the manner in which this interwoven nature of the regime of exception with the colonial revenue machinery led to the convergence of the interests of a section of the section with the colonial state. We shall return to the story of the 1894 conference later in this chapter, and attempt to answer the questions posed above. This chapter is divided into three sections. Section I explores colonial drive towards expansion of the agrarian frontiers and institutionalization of rents in the initial decades of their rule, and the manner in which it was contingent on enlisting the support of the headmen. Section II explores the manner in which the incentives and rewards given to the headmen for agrarian expansion allowed them to enhance their position within their communities, which they sought to formalize during settlement proceedings. Section III traces the rise of concerns in Chota Nagpur, in the backdrop of the Birsaite *ulgulan*, at the turn of the 20th century of protecting customary claims to land which led to the enactment of the CNTA. In this section, we also deal with the extension of CNTA to Singhbhum, where its operationalization led to several contesting claims made by the local communities to the British in order to take advantage of its ‘protective’ measures.

Section I

Initial Rent Settlements & the Widening Agrarian Frontiers under Colonial Rule

Since rent from land was the main source of revenue for the colonial state for most of the nineteenth century, the main concern of the British, in the initial years of their rule was the expansion of the arable and the imposition of an extensive rent scheme on this area. A medical surgeon by the name of Dr. William Dunbar, who had accompanied the colonial troops during the military campaigns of the 1830s, had connected the ‘savagery’ of the Larka Kols with the wretched state of cultivation in Kolhan. To quote him:

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.³⁰⁰

Dunbar had hoped that the establishment of the Company’s authority in the region would wean away the ‘Coles’ from their ‘predatory pursuits’ and put them firmly on the road of civilization.³⁰¹ This optimism for the deliverance of ‘blessings of civilization’ to the people of the region, with the establishment of the Raj, contained a hope for clearing the forested Singhbhum into a legible agrarian landscape and integrating it with the settled agrarian communities.³⁰² There was also an official desire to take measures towards binding the practitioners of shifting cultivation, locally known as *jhum*, more closely with land, which in turn would be measured, recorded and assessed under rent schemes. Over the next few years, there were also repeated overtures towards increasing the rents from the region, which were considered to be too indulgent.

But, change in this direction would come very slowly over the next three decades. As we had seen in Chapter 1, Wilkinson, as a result of the political turmoil that had

³⁰⁰ 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

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 375

³⁰² *Ibid*, p. 376

preceded the accession of the region in 1837, had considered it wise not to introduce any major change on the agrarian front. The older rates of rent, i.e. 8 *annas* per plough in 1837, as well as the older method of assessment through the indigenous method of ploughs had been retained by him. 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 the *rai-yats*, which was then entered into a register, and used as a marker to calculate the rents payable. The land revenue from the region, as Table 1 shows, steadily increased over the initial years of colonial rule, but a simultaneous increase in the expenditure on the district balanced the returns absolutely squarely.

In the next few years, the low rates of rent and the lack of a standardised system of assessment and land measurement would vex a number of officials. In 1848, the Assistant to the Governor-General's Agent, Captain Haughton, made a representation to the government commenting that the 'notoriously under-taxed' Coles should at least be made to pay the expenses that are 'attendant on their own government.' Haughton, despite noting the 'jealousy of the *ryots*' that prevented any measurement of lands also made a proposal of measuring the lands through a rough survey with the assistance of a 'jury of Coles'. Furthermore, he was in favour of imposing a differentiated rather than a uniform rent on the lands by dividing them into three different classes –*bera*, *bad* and *gora*. In his opinion, such a plan, which involved increasing the rents on the *bera* and the *bad* lands and decreasing them over the *bad* lands would not only increase the

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: Increase in Revenue from Singhbhum in Initial Years

Source: Rickett's Report

revenue, but would also not be met with any opposition from the 'Coles'. His recommendations were, however, not acted upon.³⁰³

In this period, there were also representations made to the government about the untrustworthiness of the *mankis* and *mundas*, who were seen to be concealing cultivation and, thereby, causing a loss to the colonial exchequer. In December 1850, Haughton's successor Lieutenant Davies, for example, complained that the headmen had been concealing cultivation to a great extent by misrepresenting the number of ploughs liable to assessment. Davies was of the opinion that the losses caused be recovered by levying rents on these concealed lands retrospectively for the previous two years. Alongside, he opined that the *mankis* and the *mundas* found to be involved in concealing cultivation be fined the commission which they would have been entitled to for these lands. The Agent to the Governor General, however, disapproved of his Assistant's measures, which he considered as too harsh. Instead, he was of the opinion that notices should be issued proclaiming 'forgiveness' to the headmen, if they filed revised and correct statements of the number of ploughs liable to assessment in their villages within a month.³⁰⁴ In proceeding with such a cautionary approach in this period, the officials, still concerned about the intractability of the country and its residents, were only following the dictum of Wilkinson, who had had told a local official in 1838 that their object was more 'to *civilize* the people and *preserve* tranquillity than collect high rents.'³⁰⁵

Despite the Agent's assertions in 1851 that any further concealment of cultivation would lead to punishment and rigorous enforcement of government's claims, the tribal headmen over the next few years, as per government reports, continued to conceal the lands under cultivation, specially the newly reclaimed lands. In 1853, on the basis of an assertion by the Assistant that 'no assessment...could be made with any approach to truth' under the prevailing system, the plough system was replaced by another system of assessment called the "Coot system". This was a very rudimentary method of measuring

³⁰³ Extract from Mr. Henry Rickett's Report on the district of Chyebassa under date the 31st of January 1854, in Roychoudhury. *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 41

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 42-43

³⁰⁵ Let. No. 107 from the Gov.-Gen. to Lt. Simpson, Offic. Assist. to Pol. Agents, Colehan, Singhbhum, dated the 25th Sep 1838, in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, pp. 10-11 (emphasis mine)

lands, where in the presence of the villagers through the village *panchayats*, a rough estimate of those lands where cultivation was of a “sufficient extent” was made.³⁰⁶ This was the only change made in the region, before the first survey and settlement, was undertaken under Henry Ricketts in 1854.

Ricketts was given charge of the first survey and settlement operations that were initiated in the region after its takeover. In the 1830s, as we observed in Chapter 1, he, as the Cuttack Commissioner, had been fervently making representations to the government on behalf of the Mayurbhanj Raja against certain proposals by Wilkinson. As the settlement officer in Kolhan, he now seized upon the moment to once again argue against the policy of low rents initiated by his old time adversary within the officialdom. In his opinion, the ‘Coles’ had hardly made any improvements over the previous twenty years and still lived in dilapidated houses and wore scanty clothing. But this, to Ricketts, was not a result of their poverty but of their ‘savage’ and ‘superstitious’ ways of life and it was time that the government made them pay what they were capable of paying. It is desirable, he wrote to the government, that the increase of rents should not be postponed any longer, especially considering that some *raiyyats* had started thinking that the present low rates would never be enhanced. He was also in favour, like Haughton, of dividing the different classes of land and imposing differentiated rents over them. Citing his conversations with the headmen as well as the opinion of other officials on the eve of the settlement, he stated:

The Coles themselves were desirous that the present system under which a man who ploughs bad soil with one plough has to pay at the same rate as the man who ploughs the best soil with one plough should be superseded and it is reasonable it should be. One uniform rate may have been suitable when cultivation was rare and confined to the best spots but is no longer suitable and that the wants of the people compel them to cultivate very inferior soils.³⁰⁷

Based on Rickett’s recommendations, the differentiated rates of rent for different classes of land, with a moderate increase in proportion to the productivity of the land were introduced in the region in 1854. In the best quality lands, the rents were increased from 8 annas to 1 rupee per unit of land and *pattahs*, or title deeds, were granted to

³⁰⁶ Extract from Mr. Henry Rickett’s Report, in Roychoudhury, *Singbhum Old Records*, p. 43

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 44

mankis and *mundas* for a period of twelve years. The *gora* lands were however excluded from any assessment and the government did not go any further in terms of any further changes, especially in the method of assessment and measurement. The older fears of unrest resurfacing again had not completely gone away. In fact, during the settlement proceedings, the Agent, fearing some reprisals from the locals had proposed deployment of additional military contingents.³⁰⁸

Apart from low rents, the lack of a standardised system of assessment and concealment of cultivation, a major reason for the low returns from Singhbhum in these initial decades of colonial rule was its terrain and landscape. On the one hand, vast parts of the country, continued to be under extensive forest cover and thus beyond any rent scheme.³⁰⁹ In the later part of the nineteenth century, most of these forest lands were taken over by the Forest Department and converted into reserved and protected forests, precluding any scope of any arable expansion here.³¹⁰ On the other hand, the vast undulating terrain and the ‘extremely broken up’ nature of the country meant that extensive cultivation could only be carried out only in the lower levels of the slopes. The British could, have overcome this limitation, and expanded extensive forms of cultivation into the uplands, by building embankments, which would have regularly irrigated terraced form of cultivation in these uplands. There was, however, never any interest on the part of the British for such a measure, which, in a country as heavily forested and hilly as Singhbhum required huge outlays of capital.

³⁰⁸ Let. No. 47, from the Gov-Gen’s Agent and the Commnr, South-West Frontier to Lt. J.S. Davies, 1st Class Assistant Gov-Gen’s Agent, Singhbhum Division dated, Chota Nagpore, the 8th July 1854, in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 48

³⁰⁹ Ricketts, in his report in 1854, had noted the gradual expansion of cultivation into the forested tracts of the region. He stated that while areas to the east and north of Chaibasa had been almost completely cleared of its forests, even the best lands of the densely forested southern and western regions had been brought under cultivation. ‘Extract from Mr. Henry Rickett’s Report’, in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*, p. 43. However, any initial optimism about the expansion of cultivation soon died down, and W.W. Hunter in 1877 noted that despite their best attempts, the British could only bring only less than one-third of the area under cultivation. He further remarked that over half of the region that was covered with forests could never be cultivated at all. Hunter, *Statistical Account*, p. 82

³¹⁰ Chapter 4 deals with the question of Forests, the colonial engagement with it and its impact on the local communities.

The next settlement carried out in 1867 sought to take care of some of these concerns, as the British slowly started moving away from a policy of extreme caution. From the late 1860s, it was argued that the ‘improvements’ made in cultivation was reason enough to not just enhance the rents but also introduce other changes. The metaphor of ‘improvement’, which repeatedly occurs in the revenue records of this period, can in fact be seen as commensurate with the increasing levels of sedentarization in the region.³¹¹ W.H. Hayes, who was the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum in this period and carried out this settlement, for example, wrote:

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.³¹²

The settlement was intended, in the words of Hayes, to make the Hos further ‘stationary in their cultivation, to get rid of the dense jungle the district is noted for and to make the Coles good agriculturalists.’³¹³ The Commissioner of Chota Nagpur, Dalton stated that it was finally time ‘to remove the reproach that a district so prosperous did not defray the expenses of its Government.’³¹⁴ As per this 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 mapped and 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

³¹¹ Several works inform us that for the colonial state in the 19th century trying to entrench its revenue machinery in the hinterlands of the empire, a mobile population practising slash and burn agriculture fitted rather badly with colonial conceptions as well as concerns regarding the ownership of the land and the taxation of its produce. See for example, 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*; See Sutton, Deborah. (2011). *Other Landscapes: Colonialism and the Predicament of Authority in Nineteenth Century South India*. Delhi: Orient Blackswan

³¹² Quoted in Let. No. 272R., from Renny, Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum to the Commnr. of Chotanagpur, dated 27th July 1892, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR

³¹³ 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

³¹⁴ Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*. p. 184

gross rental nearly trebled.³¹⁵ There were however certain areas, mainly the densely forested tracts of Saranda, Rengra, Nalwa and Rera, that were excluded from the settlement. The consideration for excluding them from the new policies was the perceived continued ‘backward state of cultivators’ in these tracts.³¹⁶ The *gora* lands were also completely excluded from any rent schemes once again.

Apart from the rent increments and the new systems of measurements, an extremely important change brought about by the settlement was the special incentives it gave to the village headmen for the expansion of cultivation. It had been a practice, as we had seen above, that the *mankis* and *mundas* would conceal the expansion of cultivation by the villagers by not reporting it to the authorities, thus causing a loss to the colonial exchequer. The 1867 settlement now gave the *mankis* and *mundas* a special incentive if they supervised fresh reclamations on lands that had not been previously assessed. The *manki* and *munda* could keep half of the collections each of the total rents that they collected from the inhabitants settled on these freshly reclaimed lands. Read, for example, the following text of a *pattah* given to a *mundain* 1867:

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*.³¹⁷

Besides this incentive of higher commission to the headmen, the Hayes settlement also formalised the earlier norm of official rewards to certain tribal heads by creating a new tenure called the *lakhiraj* tenures. Under this tenure, villages were granted to selected headmen in lieu of their military assistance and loyalty to the British during

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184

³¹⁶ 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.

³¹⁷ 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

period of unrest and rebellion. In these villages, the cultivators paid the same amount of rent as elsewhere, but unlike other villages the headmen could keep to themselves the entire collection, rather than passing it to the government for a small commission. During the 1867 settlement, the British identified 19 such ‘loyal’ families and granted them with rent free villages under the *Lakhiraj* tenure.³¹⁸

A year after the completion of this settlement, Dalton made an extensive tour through Singhbhum, and had great words of appreciation for the work carried out by Hayes. It was very ‘gratifying to observe’, Dalton wrote to Hayes, the improvements of a people that had been ‘long regarded as irreclaimably savage’. For Dalton, the result of the settlement was another evidence of Hayes’ efficient administration of the district that had kept the people contented. To quote:

I was anxious to see as much as possible of this part of your district of which an important new settlement has just been completed. The impression left on my mind is that the people are simply quite content with this new settlement but they are on the whole rather proud of it. They fully appreciate the security of tenure that has been given to them; and though having to pay nearly three times the amount of rent that they paid before they appear perfectly able and willing to meet the demand and not one word of complaint on the subject did I hear though everywhere conversing with the people freely on the subject.³¹⁹

Thirteen years after the settlement in 1880s, the densely forested areas that had been excluded by Hayes from settlement owing to their ‘backwardness’ were settled and brought under assessment by his successor Captain Garbett. 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 1897.³²⁰ 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.³²¹ This was in stark contrast to the figures cited by Hunter in his statistical account

³¹⁸ Hunter, *Statistical Account*. p. 89

³¹⁹ Let. No. 400, dated Camp Bandgaon, the 29th Feb, 1868, from Col. E.T. Dalton to W.H.Hayes, Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, in Roychoudhury (ed.), *Singhbhum Old Records*, pp. 187

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ 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 16th May 1894, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR, p. 2

published 17 years ago. Table 1 shows the figures of cultivable and uncultivable waste lands in the Kolhan region of Singhbhum as it stood in the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Along with these changes on the agrarian front, there was also an effort by the colonial administration during these years, we would do well to remember from the previous chapter, towards integrating the region with different economic, administrative and infrastructural networks of the empire. Dalton, as noted in the previous chapter, had also applauded Hayes in the 1868, for establishing numerous village markets, vernacular schools and laying down bridged

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
Cultivable Area	700 square miles
Area of cultivable land actually under cultivation	600 square miles

Table 2- Proportion of Cultivable and Uncultivable Waste Land in Kolhan, 1892³²²

roads, all of which he hoped would go a long way in attracting new settlers in the region. In the subsequent decades, these new settlements increased with the laying down of railway lines, establishment of the mines and other industrial centres within Chota Nagpur. The region also thereby became a major catchment area for the plantations. All of this led to a considerable increase in the value of land, and those who had been

³²² Ibid

incentivised by the previous settlement played an increasing role in the sale, mortgage and transfer of tenancies. As the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur, put it on the eve of the next settlement:

The railway has opened out the country, and the cultivators have now found that the demand for the products of their lands from other parts of the country is large, and this has led them not only to cultivate their lands with greater care but to extend the areas of their cultivation. In my crime report for 1893, I have remarked how the facilities for export afforded by the railway had taught the people the value of their surplus stores, and led them to prosecute even petty pilferers, who formerly would not have interfered with....Figures indicate that during the 24 years between 1867 and 1891 not only has there been a large increase in the population of the Kolhan, but that a large proportion of this increase is due to the influx of non-aboriginals from the Tributary States and Orissa...The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum says that as the Kolhan is a purely agricultural tract, it is not difficult to conceive how very large must be the cultivation over that of 1867, when there has been so enormous an increase in the population, and it is not surprising that the Kols have improved their cultivation with the examples set them by the careful Uriya Gowala cultivators, who are now so largely scattered among them.³²³

Through all these measures, the British set the ball rolling for the development of conflicting interests in land amongst local communities. This was all too apparent, in the divergent opinions regarding the introduction of a rent scheme on the *gora* lands that the next settlement introduced.

Section II

Rent Registers, Regime of Exception and Regulating Adivasi Consent

The Survey Operations led to the introduction of a khatian, i.e., a record of rights, and the zamindars and their agents gained possession over the jungle by bribing the settlement officers...What idea they (the adivasi peasants) have about the khatian? They have little education and are simple people. At the time of the survey they had no idea what was happening – Swami Shahjanand, *Jharkhand Ke Kisan*³²⁴

In colonial self-representations, settlement proceedings were taken up for the benefit of the villagers and to create an elaborate record of their various rights to the village resources. However, in practice, these operations afforded an opportunity for

³²³ 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 16th May 1894, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR, p. 2

³²⁴ Shahjanand, Swami. (1995). *Jharkhand Ke Kisan* (ed. translation as Swami Shahjanand and the Peasants of Jharkhand: A View from 1941 by Walter Hauser). New Delhi: Manohar

privileged sections within differentiated local communities to enhance their own social and economic status. As has been elaborately discussed in the previous chapters, it is not our case that the Hos and other communities inhabiting Singhbhum were undifferentiated communities before the advent of colonial rule. But the British attempts to enumerate and classify claims to village resources in the name of individual tenants, through these operations only ended up exacerbating the already existing hierarchies within the adivasi communities, while also creating new ones. The native chiefs, *zamindars* and tribal headmen – the cooperation of whom was essential during these operations – could effectively use these moments to legalize their own claims over land and forests, over that of others. Furthermore, the new practice of formalizing of their claims by the grant of a written title deed placed large sections of the village community, who were uneducated, in a considerably disadvantaged position. The manner in which this grant of a written title deed enabled the privileged sections to deprive the adivasis of their access to lands, hills and forests was amply visible in Singhbhum at the close of the nineteenth century. Let us come back to the story that we started this chapter with, to elaborate this point.

The Hayes settlement was going to expire in 1897, and with the turn of the last decade of the century, the British had started preparations for the new survey and settlement operation. On the eve of these operations, there were narratives of both the gradual civilization of the Hos as well as their continued recalcitrance within the official circles. For example, arguing that the upcoming survey needed to be extremely extensive, the British would outline the story of ‘great strides in civilization’ made since the previous settlement owing to ‘the spread of education and the freer intercourse of its people with the outer world’. Back in 1867, the fear of unrest and the colonial state’s reliance on local *amins*, who were only acquainted with native methods of measurement had led to the preparation of rough *chittas*, which were of no practical use anymore. But there was no need for such fears anymore, and the British, it was argued, should employ the cadastral method of survey and minutely map every detail regarding village boundaries, homestead lands, wastelands, trees on cultivated lands, hills, rivers, tanks, *bandhs*, etc. At the same time, the new proposal of extending the assessment over the *gora* lands alarmed several officials. The Commissioner of Chota Nagpur, W.H. Grimley, in fact, even placed an alternative proposal of increasing the returns from the area, where

rather than assessing the *gora* lands, the British could increase the rates of rent over the *bad* and *bera* lands. According to Grimley, the people were used to regular increments in the rates of rent over the lowlands during every settlement. But, the proposal to assess the *gora* lands he tried to impress upon others, went against the ‘universal custom of the country’ and, was opposed to the ‘instincts of the people’ which would only lead to discontent and dissatisfaction.³²⁵ The dominant opinion amongst the revenue officials, however, was towards reversing the earlier policy of excluding the *gora* lands, which they said excluded a large area from the pale of revenue. However, because of the Commissioner’s intervention, the officials adopted his other advice, which was that no change should be adopted ‘without first taking the opinion of the people themselves’.³²⁶ And the special conference of tribal representatives was organized.³²⁷ It was attended by 37 *mankis*, 296 *mundas* and 138 representative *rai-yats* and was presided over by the Deputy Commissioner. The Deputy Commissioner vividly described the proceedings of this conference, specially the deliberations around the proposals of assessing the *gora* lands:

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 (cultivable) waste and not unculturable (uncultivable) waste 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 *rai-yats* admitted the necessity of placing 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.³²⁸

The conference ended without any decision. A few days later, however, a petition signed by 23 *mankis* and 14 *mundas* was submitted to the colonial authorities expressing

³²⁵ Let. No. 56R., from W.H. Grimley, Esq., C.S., Commnr of Chota Nagpur to the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, dated Ranchi, the 16th April 1893, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR

³²⁶ Ibid

³²⁷ Ibid

³²⁸ Let. no. 307., from R.H. Renny, Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to the Commnr. of the Chotanagpur Division, dated Chaibasa, 29th July 1893, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR

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.³²⁹ The former petition was signed, amongst others by Captain David Manki. He was brandished variously as the ‘mouthpiece’ and ‘leader of the Singhbhum Kols’. The Commissioner stated that, “Captain Manki may be said to be the leader of the Singhbhum Kols, and any statement deliberately made by him may without the least hesitation be accepted.”³³⁰

The proceedings of this conference, and the developments around it, lay bare the fractures within the local community – not only in terms of the differences between the village community and their headmen, but also significantly within the headmen. Sanjukta Dasgupta in her work on the Hos, which also specifically looks at this 1893 conference, suggests that that this lack of unanimity in the conference was merely a reflection of the continuation of the ‘conflicting political loyalties’ of the Hos from the pre-colonial period.³³¹ Such a reading of this event, however, is far from convincing. By freezing the ‘political loyalties’ of the Hos over such a large period of time, Dasgupta actually fails to locate the determinants of these loyalties and essentializes it as some sort of an unchanging characteristic of the Hos. In our opinion, there is, rather, a need to contextualize these shifting ‘political loyalties’ (to reluctantly use Sanjukta Dasgupta’s expression) of differentiated village communities inhabiting the changing agrarian landscape of Singhbhum.

Let us recapitulate, and expand upon the arguments presented in the previous section to explain this point. In the three decades of the Hayes settlement, there had been more than a double increase in the arable. But this expansion, took place at a time when there was a simultaneous usurpation of vast swathes of forested land - about 531 square miles, to be precise. These were taken over by the Forest Department, where all access of the villagers was restricted. In addition, the fact that there had been an almost double

³²⁹ The number of *mankis* and *mundas* who signed the petition opposing the new proposals was 44 *mankis* and 85 *mundas*.

³³⁰ Let. No. 299R., from Grimley, to the Secy. to the Board of Revenue, L.P., Land Rev. Dept., dated Ranchi, the 16th May 1894, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR

³³¹ Dasgupta. *Adivasis and the Raj*. p. 142

increase in population, aggravated undoubtedly by the steady influx of *dikus* in this period, contributed greatly on the pressures on the existing portions of land. In such a situation the incentives to reclaim new areas, at a time of increasing value of land, meant that the villagers had to search for newer frontiers for agrarian expansion. The invariable result of this was a steady and gradual reclamation of the *gora* lands, where over the next few decades, the practice of shifting cultivation more or less disappeared. The best of these lands, as the settlement officer Craven noted, came to be occupied by the tribal headmen and their relatives, to the exclusion of the poorer *raiyats*.³³² The new proposal of extending assessment over the *gora* lands meant that these lands would be officially recorded in the revenue registers called the *khatians* in the name of individual tenants, just like the *bad* and the *bera* land. Therefore, by acquiescing to this new proposal, this settlement allowed a section of the headmen, who had already occupied these lands to formalise their occupancy. In the rural landscape of Singhbhum where ownership of land was a major determinant of social power, especially in the context of an increasing value of land, these uplands recorded in their names would certainly have been an invaluable asset. It was these large scale transformations in the agrarian worlds of the Hos, rather than a continuation of ‘political loyalties’ from the pre-colonial period that explains the convergence of the interests of a section of the tribal headmen with that of the colonial state.

Furthermore, the intertwined relationship of the colonial revenue machinery and the regime of exception helped the British to cultivate a section of loyalists from amongst the local population. The case of Captain David Manki, whose representations in favour of the assessment on the *gora* lands during the settlement proceedings were favoured by the government over other representations, is in fact quite instructive here. In 1891, just prior to the initiation of the settlement proceedings, the government, on the recommendation of local officers, granted him a hereditary grant of several rent villages for his services to the colonial government. Writing to the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur in 1890, the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum described the life of Captain Manki, as he was popularly called, as one lived in complete allegiance and ‘enthusiastic

³³² Let. No. 868L.R. from A. Forbes, Commnr. of the Chota Nagpur Division to the Secy. to the Board of Rev., L.P., File no. 511, 1897-98, DCRR

loyalty' to the crown. He was born sometime in the 1830s to a father who had provided valuable help to Wilkinson during the accession of the region and was originally named Captain Ho after a particular British officer 'Captain Saheb'.³³³ In 1861, following his support to the British during the 1857 mutiny, he was appointed as *manki* of the Thoi Pir. Shortly after, he converted to Christianity, and was rechristened as Captain David. The Deputy Commissioner, specially lauded his 'individual character', which he stated accounted for his continued 'good influence' amongst the villagers at a time when the influence of the other *mankis* had taken a beating with the gradual introduction of the courts, pleaders and *mukhtars* in certain matters over the village bodies.³³⁴ This influence had come in handy for successive district officers who enlisted Captain Manki's as 'faithful and trustworthy counsellor and helper in local matters', especially on occasions when they apprehended any opposition from the local. The Deputy Commissioner made out a strong case for making his *pir* into a rent free one, by giving the following examples of the services by which Captain Manki had 'brought himself into special notice' of the Raj:

- i. During the mutiny of 1857 he rendered assistance in guarding the Government building and the Government treasure which had escaped plunder at the hands of the mutineers, and his services at that time were well known to Captain Birch and Dr. Hayes, who were both Deputy Commissioners of Singhbhum.
- ii. During the Keonjhar disturbances of 1868 he gave valuable assistance with the help of his ryots in carting commissariat stores for the expedition.
- iii. During the disturbances in the Bamanghati he rendered assistance to Dr. Hayes in arresting some of the offenders and sending them to Chybassa for trial.
- iv. When Colonel Garbett was DC he assisted him in introducing vaccination for the first time, and by his influence overcame the great reluctance of the people to accept

³³³ An official involved in the next settlement operation pointed out that there was a tendency to name children after people of influence in the region – be it a doctor, *amin*, settlement officer, famous military officials and administrators. Apart from names such as Captain Manki, this particular officer came across people named 'Saheb Ho', 'Amin H' and quite a few Kaptan Ho and Dalton Ho (named after E.T. Dalton). 'Note on the Hos by Mr. Dahn Mashi Panna, Ass. Settlement Officer' appended in Tuckey Settlement Report. p. 121. In the 1920s, there was an influential Manki in the region named Garbett Manki, named after Colonel Garbett who had been a Deputy Commissioner in the 1880s in the region.

³³⁴ As we had seen in the previous chapter, the Criminal Procedure Code had been implemented in 1861, which gave the colonial courts an entry in the region, despite Singhbhum continuing as a non-regulation tract and later as a Scheduled District

vaccination. His services in this matter were recognised by the Commnr, Mr. J.F.K. Hewitt

v. When in 1886 the current land settlement of the Kolhan was about to be made, he was instrumental in explaining to the ryots the proposed changes regarding the increase in tax and method of settlement, and was successful in getting them to agree to those proposals and measures.

VI. During the pendency of a boundary dispute between the states of Mohurbhunj and Saraikela he was placed in charge of the disputed area.

Vii. During the Bonai disturbances in 1888 he sent his Mundas and some bowmen with the expedition that went to Banaigurh under Mr.Renny, DC.

VIII. During the absence of the District Superintendent of Police from Chybassa he has occasionally been placed in the charge of the Kolhan Police Office to carry on the current duties.

IX. As an Honorary Magistrate and member of the Road Cess and School Committee he has given most regular attention to his duties at all seasons of the year, although his residence is about 20 miles distant from Chybassa.³³⁵

Stating that Captain Manki was old, and could not be expected to continue much longer, the Deputy Commissioner wanted the government to reward this old time loyalist with the rent free villages, which, he stated, would go a long way in supporting him and his family of four sons and a wife. Recalling that it has been a 'custom to reward loyal and faithful services of the village headmen by a grant of rent free grant of villages', the Deputy Commissioner stated that this reward to an extremely deserving manki such as Captain David Manki, will, in fact, be gratifying not only to him but would also serve as 'a great incentive to others in his position to serve the government as loyally and faithfully as he has done.'³³⁶ Several other testimonials written by different local officials as well as missionaries, described him as 'an earnest Christian'³³⁷, 'the most intelligent Kol'³³⁸, 'a constant upholder of order'³³⁹ and 'a devoted servant of the government'³⁴⁰.

³³⁵ Let. No. 973 R., dated Chybassa, 19-21st March 1890 from Colonel W.H. Samuells, DC of Singhbhum to the Commnr of Chota Nagpur, File no. 179, Serial Nos. 1 and 2, Procs No. 4 and 5, Rev & Agri. Dept., July 1891, National Archives of India (NAI)

³³⁶ Ibid

³³⁷ Testimonial by Hayes, Deputy Commnr, Singhbhum, dated 30th March 1890, File no. 179, Rev & Agri. Dept., July 1891, NAI

³³⁸ Testimonial by S.J. Manook, Assistant Commnr, dated 15th March 1890, File no. 179, Rev. & Agri. Dept., July 1891, NAI

The Revenue Board was initially slightly perturbed by the proposal and stated that by sanctioning a hereditary grant, the government was completely surrendering all future returns from the area for the British.³⁴¹ However, they were ready to make

a ‘deviation’ in this case. Even by their own admission, Captain Manki ‘was more deserving than the majority of the headmen to whom similar grants have already been made’.³⁴² This new grant increased Captain Manki’s annual income from Rs. 57-11 to Rs. 247-9-10. But beyond the monetary increase, the real source of his enhanced power lay in his now absolute control over the villages in his *pir* where he became, to paraphrase the words of the Revenue Board, a full blown proprietor having considerable power over the entire village and the tenantry.³⁴³

Settlements	Gross Rental
1837	5, 108
1855	8,523
1867	64, 828
1897	1,77,300

Table 3 – Increase in Rents over different settlements

With the support of the likes of Captain Manki and other headmen, who seized upon the settled operations to increase their social standing within their communities, the colonial state extended the assessment over the *gora* lands. By the end of the settlement in 1897, the gross rental from the region, as table 3 shows, had almost tripled. As the

³³⁹ Testimonial by J.C. Whetby, Anglican Mission, Ranchi dated 13th March 1890, File no. 179, Rev & Agri. Dept., July 1891, NAI

³⁴⁰ Testimonial by H. Boileau, dated 13th March 1890, File no. 179, Serial Nos. 1 & 2, Rev & Agri. Dept., July 1891, NAI

³⁴¹ Rev. and Agri. Dept. Unofficial, R. No. 829 R., dated 23rd May 1891, File no. 179, , Rev & Agri. Dept., July 1891, NAI

³⁴² Ibid

³⁴³ Rev. and Agri. Dept. Unofficial, R. No. 829 R., dated 23rd May 1891, File no. 179, Rev & Agri Dept, July 1891, NAI

prevailing rents for the *bad* and *bera* lands, as fixed by the Hayes settlement thirty years back, were retained, the increase, as table 4 shows, was a result of the assessment of *gora* lands as well as extension of cultivation and doubling the rates of rents for the *dikus* who were settled in the area.

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

Table 4³⁴⁴

However, it was not that there were only moments of convergences between the headmen and the colonial state. When it came to certain other proposals, which were seen to be limiting the powers of the headmen, there were also considerably sharp divergences between the two. For example, the Deputy Commissioner, echoing the sentiment of a section of the colonial bureaucracy who had considerable misgivings about the tribal headmen³⁴⁵ wanted to strip the *mankis* and *mundas* of their police functions through this

³⁴⁴ Source: Craven Settlement Report

³⁴⁵ For example, back in 1871, the Commissioner Dalton had once communicated to Hayes, that their 'ability' in apprehending dacoits and criminals at times left much to be desired. Let. No. 2723, from Col.

settlement and thereby also reduce their commission.³⁴⁶ 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 absolutely necessary, and in this changed situation, the tribal headmen could not be expected to efficiently discharge the police functions. The Commissioner, alarmed by this ‘sudden’ and drastic proposal, wanted it also to go through the special conference, lest it later leads to discontent.³⁴⁷ And in the special conference, unlike the issue of levying rent on the *gora* lands, this proposal found a unanimous opposition from the *mankis* and *mundas*. Despite the ‘very harassing’ nature of the police duties, the headmen 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.’³⁴⁸ The headmen reacted in a similar manner to a proposal of redistributing *gora* lands made by the settlement officer, a couple of years into the settlement. In 1895, during one of his field visits, Craven explained to the villagers that the best of the *gora* lands had been occupied by only a few influential families of the village, who had not shown much interest in improving its quality. A ‘just redistribution’ of the *gora* lands among the raiyats, in his opinion, could reverse this state of affairs. This proposal was, however, strongly opposed:

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. They

E.T. Dalton to W.H. Hayes, Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chota Nagpore, the 31st Oct, 1871, in Roychoudhury, *Singhbhum Old Records*. pp. 239-240. Similarly, a report on the administration of the district in 1878-1879 found them complicit many times, in concealing cases of crime and thereby deemed them untrustworthy. Gen. Admin. Rep. of Singhbhum, 1878-79, File No. 734, DCRR

³⁴⁶ The Deputy Commissioner was of the opinion that the upcoming settlement should reduce the commission of the *mankis* and *mundas* from 10% and 16.75% of the total collection of rent as fixed in 1837 to 5% and 8% respectively now.

³⁴⁷ Let. No. 56R., from W.H. Grimley, Esq., C.S., Commnr of Chota Nagpur to the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, dated Ranchi, the 16th April 1893, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR

³⁴⁸ Let. no. 307., from R.H. Renny, Esqr. Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to the Commnr. of the Chotanagpur Division, dated Chaibasa, 29th July 1893, File No. 2490, 1894, DCRR

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.³⁴⁹

The proposal was eventually dropped. In his report, Craven explained that this redistribution would have led to ‘serious trouble’ in the region, as it entailed depriving the ‘Mundas and their relatives and friends’ of their possessions. In any case, it is very unlikely that this proposal would have been implemented for the additional reason that, in effect, it entailed reversing the process that the colonial state had initiated through its policies in the previous decades. The point we are trying to make is that these intermediaries of colonial rule not only facilitated the operationalization of certain policies, but also zealously guarded their own possessions, power and interests against any encroachment by the state. As Deborah Sutton points out, while observing a similar process in another part of the empire, 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.’³⁵⁰

By the end of this settlement in 1897, the economic advancement in the position of the headmen can be gauged from Craven’s statement that the amount of commission that was allowed to these ‘village officials’ by this settlement exceeded the total revenue fixed during the Hayes settlement by around 3,400 rupees. However, beyond these economic advancement, several tribal headmen also increased their privileged position through various ‘abuses of power’. We conclude this section with the story of one such headman, whose claims and possessions led to much dispute at the turn of the century.

The controversy was regarding a headman by the name Abhiram Toong, who styled himself as the zamindar of Manoharpur. As per Toong’s claim, his father, Dassu Babu, was the Rajah of Saranda Pir, as one of the subordinate zamindars and relatives of the Rajah of Singhbhum. After the annexation of the region, similar to the rewards given to the other Rajahs and chiefs, his father had been specially recognized by Tickell in 1841 and granted five ‘sanad’ villages – in the valley of fairly level land enclosed by the

³⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 53

³⁵⁰ Sutton, *Other Landscapes*. p. 94

Saranda hills and the Porahat boundary - for a small quit rent. After Dassu Babu's death, these had hereditarily passed on to him. In the 1857 mutiny, Toong had faithfully served the British at a great personal cost – his wife, children and other relatives were 'slaughtered' by the rebels – and in lieu of these services, these villages were made rent free under a *lakhiraj* tenure in 1862.³⁵¹ However, as per Toong's claim, he was not simply an ordinary *lakhirajdar*. Coming from the royal family of the Saranda chiefs, he claimed that his control over these villages was hereditary and at par with the power of the chiefs and Rajahs of the adjoining native states. Over the years, he converted a sparsely populated and densely forested region into a well cultivated estate by settling a large number of Gonds as well as Oraons and clearing away the forests. At the close of the century, the entire tract, especially the Manoharpur town, had burgeoned into a prosperous region. The laying down of the Bengal Nagpur Railway line made it an important centre of timber trade. And as several markets sprang up around the town and the value of the lands in the adjoining villages shot up, large number of new settlers had started flocking into the area.

Around the same time when a very opulent grant had been made to Captain David Manki, several colonial officials were not very comfortable with this rise in power of Abhiram Toong. They accused him of violating the terms of his *pattah* by selling the timber, and ignoring the state of cultivation in the region. However, a more serious charge levied by the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum in 1890 was that he had resorted to forgery to stake claims, far greater, than what had been granted to him in 1862. As per these officials, Toong before 1862 was a mere *munda*, who was remitted, as a result of his services, of his rent for only one, and not five villages, and that too only for his own lifetime. Furthermore, they contested his claim that his father had been officially recognized by Lt. Tickell in 1841. In their opinion, be it this claim of official recognition, or his control over five villages, these were all fraudulent entries made by Toong in the records at a much later period. Quite interestingly, when Toong was asked to substantiate his claims with evidence, he commented that all the original documents had been destroyed by fire during the mutiny. In the opinion of these local officials, apart from

³⁵¹ Letter from Abhiram Toong, Zamindar, Manoharpore, Singhbhum to the Commissioner of Chota Nagpore, dated 27/1/1891, Abhiram Toong's case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

there being a breach of his contract, these were all serious offences, and they urged the government to cancel his *pattah*. The matter was referred to the Commissioner.

In one of his representations, asserting that ‘all the rajahs, *thakoors* and *zamindars* of Singhbhum’ will testify that these areas were his ancestral property, Toong implored the Commissioner to intervene and restore the ‘just rights’ of a ‘poor man encumbered with a large number of family from starvation and misery.’³⁵² The Commissioner W.H. Grimley, adjudicating the case, took a somewhat favourable view towards him. In the opinion of the Commissioner, as Toong had been holding these five villages for over 30 years and had also shown ‘continued fidelity to the government’, the government should confirm his possession over the five villages, and also allow him the right to sell timber from these villages. Grimley, however, clearly specified that the grant would cease on his death.³⁵³ But Toong, as one official looking back at his life commented in 1908, knew how to make his way around power and influence local officials.³⁵⁴ In 1896, the official who succeeded Grimley as the Commissioner commented that limiting the grant of five villages to his lifetime would be ‘improper’ and ‘unjust’.³⁵⁵ The next Commissioner, Slacke, made out a better case for him in 1902, when agreeing with Abhiram’s claims about the official recognition to his father in 1841, he commented that ‘if the rent free grant was limited to his life only he really got no reward; on the other hand it meant a confiscation of his already existing rights as *khorphosh* holders of the village.’³⁵⁶

There were also other ways in which Toong attempted to enrich himself to the detriment of others in the area. On one occasion, he sought to dispossess a person by the name of Tilu Sahu, whom he had himself appointed in 1891 on a lease to collect bazar

³⁵² Letter from Abhiram Toong, Zamindar, Manoharpore, Singhbhum to the Commissioner of ChotaNagpore, dated 27/1/1891, Abhiram Toong’s case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

³⁵³ Letter No. 291 E. from W.H. Grimley, Commnr of Chota Nagpore to The Chief Secy. to the Govt of Bengal, dated Ranchi, the 23rd May 1891, Abhiram Toong’s case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

³⁵⁴ Note by Deputy Commissioner on Abhiram Toong’s life grant in Saranda Pir, Kolhan, dated 12.03.1908, Abhiram Toong’s case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

³⁵⁵ Let. No. 1228 L.R., from the Commnr of Chota Nagpore to the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Ranchi, the 30th January 1896, Abhiram Toong’s case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

³⁵⁶ Note by Commnr’s P.A. – Case of Abhiram Toong, dated 16/12/1902, Abhiram Toong’s case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

rents at Manoharpur, when he realized the profits he could himself make in this increasingly thriving domain. He was only restrained from doing so, by the intervention of the Deputy Commissioner, when Sahu filed a petition against him.³⁵⁷ There were several complaints that Toong sold away all the timber, including very small trees, depriving the raiyats of their bare minimum necessities.³⁵⁸ He was also accused of exacting illegal rents and services, and once of even way laying the *raiya*ts to unknowingly put their thumb impressions on an agreement, which bound them to rents far beyond the government rates. During the enquiries that were ordered against him, the local officials would side with Toong and, on one occasion claimed that he was not forcing but merely trying ‘to persuade his *raiya*ts to pay such rents’.³⁵⁹ Furthermore, by the first decade of the twentieth century, Toong had extended his claim over five more villages. An enquiry was initiated to ascertain any encroachments over government lands. But in return, it was merely stated that these five new villages do not find a mention in the original *pattah* of 1862, as these simply did not exist back then. These were, as the following extract from the report (about one such new village Patorbasa) would show, simply a result of opening out of new frontiers of cultivation:

Dukurdih was a small jungle village at the time when the patta in question was granted to Abhiram Tung. This village was surrounded on all sides by jungles. It had a few hamlets and its southern portion was a jungle and this southern jungle tract was called after the name of Pator Ho, who alone lived in this jungle tract and in consequence of that this jungle tract was called Patorbasa. He deserted this place owing to the fear of tigers and other wild animals. Some 15 years after the grant of the patta, i.e. some 30 years ago Hari Naik Gondh (by caste) and his relatives came to the jungle tract deserted by the former inhabitant Pator Ho and settled here. A few years after this Hari Naik became Munda of the village and in consequence it was separated from Dukurdih. All these facts have been ascertained from KairaManki and from other sources. As this hamlet (Patorbasa) was not in existence at the time of grant owing to desertion by Pator Ho and consequently it is not mentioned in the patta...³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ In the Court of the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, Civil Suit No. 78 of 1901, Tilu Sahu vs AbhiramToong, dated 22/6/1901, Abhiram Toong’s case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

³⁵⁸ Let. No. 560 R., from the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum to Babu Abhiram Tung, dated the 27th June 1907,

³⁵⁹ Note by Sheristadar dated 25/5/1907, Abhiram Toong’s case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

³⁶⁰ Report, undated, Abhiram Toong’s case papers, 1890-1907, DCRR

In fact, the incentives to agrarian expansion had led to the creation of several new villages. At the beginning of the colonial rule in Singhbhum in 1837, there were only 622 villages. This increased to 847 villages by 1867 and to 911 by 1897. Apart from their other functions, the village headmen were important players in this drive towards agrarian reclamation, and founded several villages. This would help them in enhancing their status further in the subsequent period when a new concern dawned upon the British.

Section III

Reclaiming the ‘Original Reclaimer’: The Extension of Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act to Singhbhum

In the various petitions addressed to the local and imperial governments, the (Mundas during the Sardari Larai in 1870s) claimed what the whole race had never ceased to claim and what had actually been granted to their brethren, the Hos of the Kolhan Estate, namely to have their villages and village groups placed under direct British administration. ...They did not see the radical difference between the Kolhan country, still free from the rajah and zemindars, and their own, overrun, as it was by foreign landlords, some of long standing.

– John Baptist Hoffman while discussing the phase of Sardari Larai in Ranchi³⁶¹

As the term of Craven settlement was nearing completion, the British were faced with an additional dilemma in the second decade of the twentieth century. This was regarding the extension of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA), which had been framed in 1908 in the upcoming settlement in Kolhan. The CNTA had been framed ostensibly to protect the ancestral tenurial rights of the adivasis, the infringement of which was felt to have led to large scale agrarian unrest in different parts of Chota Nagpur (specially Ranchi) over the nineteenth century, finally culminating in the bloody *ulgulan* led by Birsa Munda. It sought to do so by recognizing and privileging the category of *khuntkattidar* as a new tenurial category. The *khuntkattidar* was perceived to be the original settler in the region, who through his sweat and toil had founded the villages and made agrarian fields by clearing the dense forests, and who now required special protection against the landlords and dikus. In the backdrop of the *ulgulan*, the previous forms of protective legislations, in different parts of Chota Nagpur, were

³⁶¹ Hoffman II, p. 16-17

considered inadequate. And as per the special protection under CNTA, the lands delineated as *khuntkatti* lands were assessed at half the rents than the rest of the village, and apart from other things they were protected against rent enhancements and transfer. The CNTA was initially extended, via settlement operations under John Reid between 1902 and 1910 to Ranchi, the epicentre of the *ulgulan*; but in the subsequent period it was extended to all other parts of Chota Nagpur, including Singhbhum and it was hoped that this would prevent any outbreak of further violent revolts.

The major fix for the British, during the settlement operations, however, remained the identification of the progeny of the original settlers and founders of the villages to codify them as *khuntkattidars*. Now the matter of “original settlers” was bound to be a matter of contested claims. Given the privileges - low rents and protection against further enhancements - that the CNTA offered, several sections started with claims and counter claims. However, before we come to that story, a brief discussion of the CNTA is in order.

Since concerns around the need to protect the ancestral rights of adivasis originated in response to the Birsaites *ulgulan* or the Munda rebellion, , we ought to take a brief detour to discuss the specific manner in which the British attempted to understand the land system and the social organization of the Mundas in Ranchi. We follow it up with a description of the manner in which the CNTA was extended to Singhbhum, which was different from Ranchi.

At the turn of the twentieth century, several British officials could not remain oblivious to the agrarian causes behind the Munda rebellion, and the preceding phase of *sardari larai* (which saw several petitions and representations made to the British urging intervention on the agrarian front). In the words of the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur at the time, Forbes, the ‘Kol troubles’ would not end till ‘a complete survey and record of rights have been made throughout the Munda country...and the *bethbegari* (forced labour) is abolished.’³⁶²This was echoed by other officials such the Deputy

³⁶² Forbes cited in Reid, John. (1912). *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1902-1910*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, para 101.. Ibid, Para 109

Commissioner of Lohardaga, and the Judicial Commissioner of Ranchi.³⁶³ However, a major problem facing the British remained their lack of knowledge about the customs, traditions and land systems of the Mundas, which were seen to be interwoven. This led to the enlistment of a German Jesuit missionary John Baptist Hoffman, considered at that time the ‘greatest authority on everything concerning the Mundas’³⁶⁴, in the entire enterprise. Before proceeding further, we give a brief background of Hoffman, whose advocacy of adivasi rights, and ethnographic inquests, shaped the specific form of this new tenurial legislation.

John Baptist Hoffman arrived in India in 1880, and joined the Chota Nagpur Mission in 1885 at a time when the missionaries were facing considerable challenges here. On the one hand, the relationship between the missions and the British had become slightly strained because of the active intervention of the former in the local agrarian disputes; on the other hand, several old converts had reverted back to their ‘pagan’ faiths seeing the inability of the missionaries to effectively resolve their problems. Fresh conversions, Hoffman like his predecessors in the past, realized were dependent on an intervention in the material problems of the adivasis.³⁶⁵ But, at the same time, official

³⁶³ Ibid, para 109

³⁶⁴ Tete, Peter. (1986). *A Missionary Social Worker in India: J.B. Hoffman, The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act and the Catholic Co-operatives, 1893-1928*. Ranchi: SatyaBharathi Press, p. 60

³⁶⁵ In the 19th century rural landscape of Chota Nagpur, missionaries were deeply embroiled in agrarian law suits and disputes. This strategy, first practiced and perfected by Lutheran missions and then, amongst the Jesuits, by Hoffman’s predecessor Constant Lievens was also a realization on the part of the missions of its efficacy in furthering the heavenly mission. Peter Tete, in his biography of Hoffman, describes the manner in which the Jesuits went about their task of conversions. Lievens, for example, would assemble the entire village and then lay down his conditions for help in the agrarian disputes of the people against the zamindars regarding rent disputes and illegal exactions. “If the whole village was ready to come over to Catholicism, he was willing to help them and so sometimes the whole village became Catholic.” Tete, *A Missionary Social Worker in India*. For a biography of Constant Lievens, see Clarysse, S.J. (1985). *Father Constant Lievens, S.J.* Ranchi: Satya Bharathi Press. In fact, the relatively greater popularity of the missionary enterprise in Ranchi, compared to say a region like Singhbhum, can also be traced in the different agrarian conditions in the two regions. Interestingly, the Jesuits had started their missionary enterprise in Chota Nagpur from Singhbhum. In the year 1868, Father Augustus Stockman set his foot in Chaibasa with the hopes of transferring the ‘first fruits of our holy religion in the midst of Hos.’ However, over the next half-a-decade, he tried in vain to get any converts from the Hos – whom he described as a simple and straightforward people, who told no lies, cultivated their small plots of agrarian lands which were their ‘little kingdoms’ and most prized possession. However, the Hos held the Christians in contempt, and Stockman failed in convincing them to give them some part of their land for the missionary infrastructure and getting any converts for around 6 years. It was only after this failure in

support was also critical in resuscitating the missionary enterprise. Within a few years of his arrival in Chota Nagpur, the violent *Ulgulan*, led by Birsa Munda, burst forth and engulfed several parts of Ranchi. Hoffman was keen to dispel the mistrust the authorities had developed towards the missions, and during the *ulgulan*, Hoffman supplied the colonial state with important information on the movement of Birsa's followers.³⁶⁶ At the same time, as part of his missionary ambitions, he learnt *Mundari*, translated the bible into *Mundari* and went about collating details of Munda customs, language and traditions. This minute collection would all later go into his magnum opus – the 16 volume *Encyclopedia Mundarica* published in 1915 after he had been repatriated to Germany. The gargantuan exercise was taken by him, in his words, to salvage and record the words, customs, traditions and practices of a 'race' on the verge of extinction.³⁶⁷ But much before that, this exercise at collating information of all matters 'tribal' made him impress upon the government, after the suppression of the *ulgulan* the need to codify their customary rights, whose infringement by outsiders had led to the *ulgulan*. It was his knowledge of the *Mundari*, his perceived acquaintance with the Mundas and attempts to

Singhbhum, that the Jesuits moved northwards towards Ranchi, where they were able to establish their project on a much secure basis. For a brief account of this initial period of the Jesuits in Chota Nagpur, see Ponette, S.J. (1992). *The Dawn of the Ranchi Mission*. Ranchi: Catholic Press. Stating that the missionary assistance in the struggle for economic assistance constituted to the growth of Christianity, D.N. Majumdar explained the extreme rare conversions to Christianity amongst the Hos, compared to the Mundas of Ranchi, as a reflection of their better agrarian conditions. As he says, "While the Mundas had to suffer from a hundred and one ills at the hands of irresponsible landlords, the Hos and the Santhals migrated to areas where they could live in comparative peace, and extend their settlements on to virgin land free from exacting landlords and land-grabbing middle-men."Majumdar. (1950). *The Affairs of a Tribe*. p.252-253. Based on such a realization, we should not, as Joseph Bara points out in his study of the relationship of the missionary enterprise and the colonial state in 19th century Chota Nagpur, look at the missionaries as simply outposts of the colonial project. The intervention of the missions, in fact, emboldened a section of the locals to stake greater claims and improve their conditions – something that the authorities were not completely comfortable with. See Bara, Joseph. (2007). Colonialism, Christianity and the Tribes of Chotanagpur in East India, 1845–1890, *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 30:2, p. 195-222

³⁶⁶ Hoffman, for example, states that in the 1870s the government looked at the missions as 'nest of political unrest' as the people who had flocked the Lutheran as well as Catholic missions in thousands came with an intention to improve their social and economic positions. Stating the way in which the conversions emboldened them to make such claims, Hoffman states, 'The masses, relying on their numbers, believed that now the time of deliverance was at hand, and they threatened to get out of hand in the remoter parts of the country....All this caused an estrangement between the local government and the Missions, which came to be looked upon to some extent as nest of political unrest.' Hoffman, Part 2, p.22

³⁶⁷ Tete, *A Missionary Social Worker in India*, p. 145

bridge the strained relations between the missions and authorities that led to him being enlisted in the codification of the adivasi customary rights to land. To start with, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal asked him to write a note on the ‘original land system’ of the Mundas. Along with one of the settlement officers E. Lister, he co-authored this note - titled ‘*A Special Memorandum on the Land System of the Munda Country*’ – which was appended with the very first official publication of the CNTA.

In his salvage ethnography of the adivasi communities of Chota Nagpur (largely Mundas, but also Oraons and in some places also the Hos), Hoffman attempted to locate their ancestral rights in their patterns of migration into Chota Nagpur. In Hoffman’s narrative about the past, successive Aryan invasions had forced the Mundas to migrate into Chota Nagpur, where they finally found their ‘long rest’; and in these ‘difficult’, ‘dangerous’ and ‘forbidding’ territories, where they were secure, from any further incursions, the Mundas cleared forests, founded villages and created their agrarian fields. As other tribes such as Oraons were also making settlements into the area, he said, the Mundas in many places were ‘crowded out’ and a section of the Mundas migrated further south and settled in and around Ranchi. Another section of the Mundas – which branched out later as the Hos - migrated even further south-east into the more ‘secluded’ and ‘jungly’ territory of the region later carved out as Singhbhum. But these further migrations were a ‘slow’ and ‘peaceful’ process, and unlike their previous migration into Chota Nagpur, without any conflicts between the Mundas and the Oraons. The pioneers of the village – the *bhuinhars* and the *khuntkattidars* – formed themselves into homogenous village communities, divided into exogamous clans (*killis*), and headed by a priest (*pahan*) and headmen (*munda*). The village munda collected their rent from the villages and passed it to the *manki* (who was the head of a conglomerate of villages – called the *pati*³⁶⁸), who in turn passed it over to the Chota Nagpur Raja. These idyllic village communities, living in complete harmony with themselves and their surroundings, he said, had imposed several voluntary restrictions on themselves to guard themselves against any outside influence. The headmen were divested of any special powers, lest they get corrupted and transfer of village property to anyone not belonging to the

³⁶⁸ This is the equivalent of the Pir of the Hos, that we discussed in the previous chapter

founding *killi* was strictly forbidden. Furthermore, the rents given over to the Rajas were in the name of the entire village having no mention of individual tenants or lands. This served to screen any information about lands or individual tenants to any ‘outside power’.³⁶⁹ The descendants of the founding family of a village could be ascertained from the stone slabs on the grave, locally known as *sasandaris*, which one found studded throughout the region, as the pioneers of the village stressed on the need to bury the dead in the very same villages that they had founded. The common burial grounds and stone slabs, were in fact, the title deeds and claims to the *khuntkatti* status in the pre-colonial period.³⁷⁰

According to Hoffman, the Mundas were ‘the freest cultivators not just of India but the whole world’³⁷¹ for the longest time in history till calamity struck in the seventeenth century. In 1616, the Chota Nagpur Raja was defeated and captured by the troops of the Mughal emperor Jahangir, who released him only after twelve years. Having ‘consorted’ with the ‘Hindu royalties’ and ‘the splendors of the Mohammaden empire’, the Rajah came back a corrupted man and started building huge palaces and temples. Moreover, he was released on the condition that he would pay a yearly tribute of 6000 rupees to the Mughals. As a result, the Chota Nagpur Rajah, on his return, started interfering in the internal village life of the Mundas. He imposed greater rents, and most calamitously started granting written title deeds or *jagirs* to the many outsiders who flocked to the Rajah’s palace in this period. These new *jagirdars* over time went far beyond the grant and became a power unto themselves, replacing the village headmen

³⁶⁹ Hoffman, Part 1, p. 14

³⁷⁰ Such was their importance, that Lister and Hoffman inform us: “Even if a man dies away from his ancestral village in a place where his *kili* has no burial place, his relatives ought to, and will, if possible, take his bones, or at least part of them, to the ancestral village, and there place them under the *sasandari* of the *kili*; and since the *sasandari* are sacred to the *kili*; the members of one *kili* will on no account share their *sasandiris* with those of another. The placing of the first, as well as of every subsequent, stone in a newly established village is a public function, having both a religious and civil character. Not only the village people, but also the prominent men of neighboring villages of different *kilis*, are called to help, and to witness that the stone in questions covers the remains of so and so, and that his direct descendants have placed the stone and have thereby created a permanent proof of their membership in the village family and their right to share in the common village property.” Hoffman and Lister, *Memorandum*, p. 228-229

³⁷¹ Hoffman I, p. 16

and striking at ‘the most vulnerable’ points of the system.³⁷² By the dawn of the twentieth century, these new *zamindars* had more or less over run the country and ousted the original settlers of these villages.³⁷³ For a people who had never dreamed of yielding even to their headmen ‘the least particle of proprietary rights in their villages’³⁷⁴, the effects of this coerced transition from the commons to the private was catastrophic. These outsiders introduced the unknown concept of rent and progressively increased it over the years. The Mundas, unlike the Hos of Singhbhum, did not even have any more forests to clear. Over time, they ended up toiling as serfs in the very fields their ancestors had pioneered or, in the later part of the nineteenth century were recruited by *arkattis* and found themselves in extremely exacting conditions in the tea-plantations of Assam and the Duars. Or in extreme conditions, pushed to the wall, they were waylaid by their leaders on the ‘wrong track’ of agitation and rebellion against the government.³⁷⁵

As per Hoffman, the British intervention, far from reversing, had worsened the state of affairs in the region over the nineteenth century. Deriving their ideas about tenurial systems prevalent in Britain and other parts of India, the British were unintentionally waylaid, owing to their ‘ignorance’, into recognizing the claims of the *jagirdars* and *zamindars*. At a time when the law privileged the written word over custom, usage and tradition, the title deeds granted to the *jagirdars* and *zamindars* by the ‘Hinduised’ Chota Nagpur Raja only made them more legitimate in the eyes of the colonial officials. The introduction of the *zamindari* police, in the first half of the nineteenth century, by the British was an almost ‘fatal’ (though, again ‘unintentional’) move of the British which made them de-facto local administrators. In Hoffman’s

³⁷² Hoffman I, p. 11-12

³⁷³ Hoffman gives the following figures to underscore his point. Before 1676 ‘no alien owned an inch of ground’ in the region (Quoting a settlement officer in the 19th century Rakhil Das Haldar, Hoffman says that the oldest pattah to an outsider could be traced to this year. Hoffman, Part 1, p. 12) but by 1903 these ‘outsiders’ had occupied more than 77 per cent of the original *khuntkatti* land “The result of the general settlement of 1903 show that this formerly entirely Mundari district now contains 3,614 square miles of cultivated fields. Out of these, 2,804 square miles have passed into the possession of the maharajah and of the zemindars as *rajhas*. 405 square miles have become personal property of the maharajah and zemindars as *majhihas*. 405 square miles only remain the property of aboriginal cultivators, namely, 203 square miles as *bhuinhari* lands and 202 square miles as *khuntkatti* lands.” Hoffman, Part 2, p. 7

³⁷⁴ Hoffman I, p. 16

³⁷⁵ Hoffman I, p. 17

opinion, the years between 1805 and 1895 were the most ‘fatal ones’ for the ‘Mundas in particular and the aborigines in general.’³⁷⁶ The British, however, according to Hoffman, were simply prisoners of their own prejudices and ended up superimposing their ideas about tenurial systems derived from their experience in Britain or other part of India on these *different* people.

The British, Hoffman urged, were now faced with the historical task of correcting the historical wrongs of the past, and finally give official recognition to the ‘Munda land system’. The aborigines of India, who operated not through law but custom; whose claims to property were based not on written word and title-deeds but on oral tradition; whose social and political structure was intimately interwoven with totemic religious beliefs; who were the ‘child-like’ people pillaged by their caste neighbours, now required the paternal hand of the authorities. Hoffman received a note of appreciation from the government for his services in this entire project. We reproduce an extract from his response to the government for the official acknowledgement of his work:

For more than a hundred years, the Mundas were calumniated as savages or semi-savages, whose claims were too exorbitant and absurd to be listened to, as stubborn rebels, whom nobody can satisfy, and therefore justly subjected to severe military reprisals, as *sarKols*, who were fit for nothing, but for carrying burdens and be serfs. And now after a cruel martyrdom that has last all too long, their claims have been recognized officially as having been perfectly right, and their land system appears as one of the wisest creations of prehistoric times. So after all they are neither savages nor semi-savages, but a race of martyrs most deserving of the sympathy and respect of all right-minded men. Therefore the Act is a justification and a rehabilitation of the highest moral virtue.³⁷⁷

There were, however, several obfuscations in Hoffman reconstruction of the past, which gave a certain homogeneity to the tribals, and reified their antagonism with the outsiders as the only one that existed. In a way, this was also a result of his informants of Munda past. As Uday Chandra points out, Hoffman tended to treat the statements of the village headmen, who were his main informants, as authoritative versions of Munda

³⁷⁶ Hoffma I, p.

³⁷⁷ Hoffman II, 2, p. 38-39

history and traditions.³⁷⁸ In Hoffman's narrative of the gradual deterioration of the agrarian conditions in Chota Nagpur, the *zamindars* and *jagirdars* from outside who were 'brought into Chota Nagpur by Hinduised rajas or came in the wake of effective British occupation'³⁷⁹ get casted as the archetypal villains. Such an approach ends up obfuscating the several changes, differentiations and internal conflicts within the adivasi society itself. However, the process of the codification of *khuntkatti* rights, which revealed that the social structure of different tribal communities had been evolving with as well as responding to the several social and economic changes made this stereotype difficult to sustain even for Hoffman. For example, in their *Memorandum on the Land System of the Mundas*, Hoffman and Lister pointed out that in certain villages, the *zamindar* from outside had allotted lands to the headmen to assist them in compelling the adivasis to forced labour, enhance their rents and impose other levies. Similar to what we have observed with regard to the Hos, several of these headmen of the Mundas were asserting superior rights over land and forests to the detriment of other members of the village community with the entrenchment of the colonial revenue apparatus, the agrarian expansion, and the increased value of timber. In some villages the landlords had even 'imposed' new headmen who did not belong to the founding *killi*.³⁸⁰ Hoffman and Lister also pointed the manner in which the colonial intervention had created a bitter conflict between the *pahan* (village priest) and the *munda* (headman), by privileging the office of the latter over the former. The *pahan* was keen to restore his superior status within the community by displacing the *munda*, and this led to a strife between the two in almost every village, which at times assumed, to quote Hoffman and Lister, even the character of a 'war to death'.³⁸¹ Furthermore, there was also a class of under-tenant raiyats who were further marginalized with the rise in status of the village headmen. As a mode of resistance against their headmen, the *raiya*t would, at times, en masse refuse the payment of rents to the headmen – "posing as a landlord" – which led the latter to be sued

³⁷⁸ Chandra, Uday. (2013). *Negotiating Leviathan: State Making and Resistance in the Margins of Modern India*. Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Yale University for the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

³⁷⁹ Hoffman, Part 1, p.32

³⁸⁰ Hoffman and Lister, Memorandum, p. 233-235

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 232

for arrears of rent.³⁸² In the wake of the enactment of the CNTA, these internal conflicts became more pronounced during settlement operations to codify the *khuntkatti* rights. This will become apparent, as we now turn to discuss the extension of the CNTA to Singhbhum, and the manner in which the local communities responded to the new lucrative benefits offered by the CNTA.

The decision to extend the CNTA to Singhbhum, a legislation that had originated largely in response to the agrarian crisis in Ranchi, was initially met with considerable opposition from the local officials. One of the reasons behind this opposition was the loss of revenue that the recognition of *khuntkatti* rights would incur. The local officials, who contended that Singhbhum had considerably low rates of rents compared to other parts of Chota Nagpur, which had remained static since the Hayes settlement of 1867, were looking at the upcoming settlement as an opportunity to increase rents. On the basis of a preliminary enquiry taken in 1910, the Deputy Commissioner contended that the privileges accruing from the recognition of the *khuntkatti* rights would cover almost 20 per cent of all the existing land, and lead to a considerable loss of revenue.³⁸³ However, at a time when the concerns about protecting ‘custom’ had been slight prioritized over concerns about revenue, the government rejected this opposition stating that they had decided ‘on the enforcement of *khuntkatti* rights against zamindars in all parts of Chota Nagpur.’³⁸⁴ The project of delineating these *khuntkatti* rights of the Hos began in 1913 with the commencement of the settlement operations under an officer by the name of A.D. Tuckey. However, a year into the settlement operations, several local officials once again sought the government’s intervention to exclude Singhbhum from the purview of CNTA. Having had the earlier arguments based on revenue concerns rejected, they now invoked the trope of difference of Singhbhum, to make a case for excluding the region from the CNTA. The Hos were different from Mundas, these officials argued, and Singhbhum was different from Ranchi. According to them, the former had not been taken

³⁸² Ibid, p. 237

³⁸³ ‘Note on the Kolhan Resettlement, by H. McPherson, dated the 6th August 1911’, appended as Appendix D(1) in Tuckey Settlement Report, p. 86-87

³⁸⁴ Cited in ‘Note on the Kolhan Resettlement recorded by Mr. J.D. Sifton, Settlement Officer of Chota Nagpur on the 30th May 1914’, appended as Appendix D (3) in Ibid, p. 101

into account during the framing of the Act, and its extension would, in fact, harm the exceptional forms of administration of Singhbhum.

J.D. Sifton, one of the settlement officers wrote a detailed note to persuade the government that the extension of the CNTA would ‘undo the results of the precautions taken in the past to reserve this country for the Kols.’ The Kolhan region of Singhbhum, he explained, was already governed by protective forms of administration. According to Sifton, the British, had recognized in Singhbhum, unlike in Ranchi, the village communities of Hos and their ‘communal system of self-government of a purely natural growth’. The British had, even, taken special efforts to ‘protect’ the Hos, ‘from their own weakness’ by rigid rules forbidding transfer or mortgage of lands to aliens and by stopping ‘the headmen to settle aliens in the village.’ Furthermore, by the exclusion from the workings of the court, the Hos had been saved from any litigation, and the Hos, barring the few recent complaints about *diku* intrusion, had largely remained a people without any complaints. The introduction of the CNTA, by introducing the system of rent suits for the rent defaulters would bring the Hos into contacts with the law courts, and reduce the prestige of their customary headmen. Clause 46 of the CNTA, which gave the raiyats limited powers to mortgage and sublet their lands for a period of 5 years will, Sifton tried to argue, prove to be specially disastrous for the Hos. ‘The Ho’, explained Sifton, ‘is a spendthrift on the occasions of weddings and festivals; he suddenly finds himself endowed with a valuable security on which he can obtain credit; he will soon be mortgaging field after field and probably make a very bad bargain over the terms.’ However, the main argument of Sifton, as well as many other local officials, was that the Hos, unlike the Mundas, did not recognize any distinction amongst first and later settlers to the village – anyone who cleared forests was treated in the same manner. The only distinction that the Hos recognized was with the outsiders and compared to the *dikus*, the Hos were already assessed at preferential rates. Stating that ‘not a single officer with experience of administration of Kolhan’ was in favour of this extension’, Sifton, finally, deployed the voice of the locals to buttress his point:

The objection to the introduction of the *khuntkatti* status in the Kolhan is not any loss of Government revenue but it is the division of the Hos into two classes, the introduction of a distinction which was entirely at variance with their own idea. Mr.

Kelly who was for a short time Superintendent of the Kolhan before he joined this Settlement, has put the case to the *khuntkatti* families in a number of villages, explaining that the law entitles them as *khuntkattidars* to hold land at lower rates than rest of the Kolhan. They have replied, I believe in all cases, that all Hos have made their own lands and they do not wish to hold lands at lower rents than their relatives in other villages who are not *khuntkatti* raiyats. The *khuntkati* family generally enjoys the social distinction of being the predominant killi in the village but this is a matter quite apart from the idea of a special status as raiyats. They regard the general rent enhancement as the proper way of increasing the revenue not an enhancement of the rents of a portion of the community only....There is no trace in the Kolhan of the *Mundari khuntkatti* system where a *khuntkattidar* payed a fixed contribution to the village tribute irrespective of the area held by him, and the *parjas* of the same race paid rent....I consider it most impolitic to introduce among the Hos a distinction, which is unknown and will cause a grave disturbance of the communal spirit and solidarity which is at present so pleasing a feature of the Ho tribal organization.³⁸⁵

In response to this renewed opposition to the CNTA in Singhbhum, John Reid, who had taken up settlement operations under CNTA in Ranchi in the previous decade, and was now the Director of the Land Record and Surveys, wrote a long letter to the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur emphasizing that CNTA alone could protect the rights of the ‘aborigines’ in all of Chota Nagpur. Citing old settlement reports and accounts, Reid, stated that, despite the distinction between original and later settlers being less pronounced in Singhbhum as in Ranchi, the Hos recognized the primacy of the original founders in the village. The solution to the slight difference between the two regions, lay not in the abandonment of the CNTA, but merely a small amendment in the original Act. As per Reid, all the Hos can be recorded as *khunkattidars* to be assessed at low rates; while the only special benefit to the founding family and their descendants should be the protection against any future enhancements in rents. He also took this opportunity to counter the rationale given in the previous opposition to CNTA, which had emphasized the low rents in Kolhan. Since the settlement operations had begun in different parts of Chota Nagpur, Reid explained, the rents assessed on lands held under a *khuntkatti* title were far less than ordinary rates existing in Kolhan. According to Reid, the opposition of these officials came from elsewhere, which they did not state openly. It rested on their uneasy relationship with the village headmen, who were employed as the ‘public servants’ and ‘rent collectors’. Many of these officials were keen to displace them, which

³⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 100-102

CNTA, by making a record of their rights would obviate. The headmen, in the words of Reid, needed protection not only ‘against the interloping Hindu and the Muhammadan but on occasion against the Deputy Commissioner’ too.³⁸⁶ Arguing that the exclusion of Kolhan from CNTA would set a disastrous precedent, Reid stated that landlords and chiefs in other parts of Chota Nagpur, who were opposed to the customary rights of the adivasis would start demanding similar exemption. If the government exempted Kolhan from the CNTA, he commented that the government would be accused ‘with some show of reason’ of having been influenced by their own interests as landlords of the estate:

The protection of the Hos should be treated solely as an agrarian question: they reclaimed the lands which they till from the jungle; they are not capable of holding these lands, if they are not protected against themselves, and it is therefore necessary on equitable and political grounds that the Deputy Commissioner of the district should have complete power to save their lands from the clutches of the money lender and the intrusion of alien cultivators...*To destroy these (customary rights of headmen and khuntkatti rights)...would I believe be a blot on the Revenue Administration, and the policy is incompatible with the spirit of fair play, which has characterized British Revenue Administration since the Government of India devolved on the Crown.*³⁸⁷

The Commissioner of Chota Nagpur was, however, not convinced with Reid’s defence of the CNTA, and in a letter written to the Revenue Board a few months later echoed and seconded the concerns articulated earlier by Sifton. Recounting his own meeting with the headmen of Kolhan in July 1914, Walsh, tried to put across the point that the introduction of CNTA into Kolhan, by creating a distinction amongst the Hos, would create ‘much heart-burning’ amongst those recorded as non-*khuntkattidars*:

I visited Chaibasa in July and held a conference with the Deputy Commissioner, the Settlement Officer of Chota Nagpur and the Settlement Officer of the Kolhan. A large number of Manki and Mundas came into Chaibasa to meet me and I questioned them on (these)...points, and recorded their statements...They had come in, owing to

³⁸⁶ ‘Let. no. 5854, dated Ranchi, the 21st September 1914 from J. Reid, Esq, I.C.S., Director of the Department of the Land Records and Surveys to the Commissioner of the Chota Nagpur Division’ appended in Ibid, p. 105

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 108 (emphasis mine)

a notice from the Settlement Department that the Settlement Officer would come to discuss certain questions with regard to the record of forest rights. They did not therefore come with notice that the question of *khuntkatti* rights would be discussed. The fact is important, as their statements that there has never been any distinction between one class of Hos and another were thus perfectly spontaneous and unprepared, and in view of the fact that on the second day of the conference a very largely signed memorial containing over 5,000 signatures addressed to His Honor the Lieutenant Governor was put in... (in) which they claimed *khuntkatti* rights as follows : - 'That majority of the aboriginal tribes in the pargana are Mundari *khuntkatti* tenure holders or raiyats, but they are never treated as such.'... They said that by *khuntkatti* they thought that every Ho would not have his present rent enhanced for any land which he had made from the jungle. It will be seen that when asked whether they wanted a preferential rate for the "*marang killi*", namely the *killi* which first cleared and settled the village... they all replied: 'We want the same rate for all the Hos... From the above it will be seen that the principle of the *khuntkatti* rights as defined in section 7 of the CNTA and as understood in other parts of Chota Nagpur, that the original settlers of the village are entitled to preferential rights over subsequent settlers of the same race, has never been the custom in the Kolhan and is not wanted by the Hos.'³⁸⁸

The Revenue Board, however, rejected the arguments put forward by Sifton and Walsh, stating that the Act had been made applicable to Singhbhum, by the Bengal Council, after due consideration. The Board approved Reid's recommendations for the amendments in the CNTA, according to which all the Hos were to be recorded as *khuntkattidars*, with the only special benefit of protection from enhancements being granted to the founding family. In the opinion of the Board, this will take care of the concerns articulated by local officials about the need to prevent any distinction between Hos; after these amendments, the only distinction that would be recognized would be between the lands. The lands proved to be held 20 years prior to the coming in to force of the Act in 1908, were to be settled at fixed rents and declared free from any future enhancements. With the main point of objection taken care of, the Board stated that the opponents to CNTA had not made a 'sufficient case' for any 'reversal at this late

³⁸⁸ Let. no. 509 – T.R., dated Ranchi, the 5th/8th Dec 1914 from E.H.C. Walsh, Commnr of Chota Nagpur Division to the Secy to the Board of Rev, Bihar and Orissa, appended as Appendix D (2) in Ibid, p. 93

stage.’³⁸⁹The arguments of local officials of Singhbhum which emphasized the ‘uniqueness’ and ‘exceptionalism’ of Singhbhum were eventually defeated, with the Lieutenant-Governor in Council accepting the opinions of the Board, and with the publication of a fresh notification, the settlement was continued under CNTA.³⁹⁰ An Act which based itself on the differences of Chota Nagpur with the plains ended up seeking to impose a certain uniformity over very different tenurial systems and terrain within Chota Nagpur. In this urge for uniformity, the opinions of an official like John Reid were privileged by the government over those of the local officials of Singhbhum.

The local officials, however, were not wrong and the extension of the CNTA fortified older dissensions and produced new ones within the Hos. Far from being the ‘undifferentiated’ and ‘honest noble savages’ who were being protected against the avaricious outsiders, sections were keenly aware of opportunities offered by the CNTA, and responded accordingly through several claims and counter-claims. The settlement officer Pasha, for example, commented:

Experience at attestation, but especially at the enquiries regarding *khuntkatti* rights show how untruthful the Hos are and what their moral ideas about truth. At the outset when the people did not know or understand about *khuntkatti* rights and privileges, they generally spoke the truth, but when they had come to understand them they began to tell untruths and in this they were helped by their little educated brethren. This was evident from the manner in which they changed their stories about the founding of a village and in their concocted long drawn genealogical trees.³⁹¹

The final report prepared by Tuckey also noted the high number of objections that were raised by people who were not accorded these privileges in the first year of the settlement operations. The number came down considerably in the following year. By this period, the authorities had acquainted themselves with the methods to identify the *khunkattidar* by sorting out the true claims from the false ones. Tuckey for example, pointed to the strategies employed by the people at attestation camps:

³⁸⁹ Let. No. 17 – 215-5, dated Bankipore, the 14th Dec 1914, from H.K. Briscoe, Secy. to the Board of Rev., Bihar and Orissa to The Secy to the Govt of Bihar and Orissa, Rev Dept, appended as Appendix D (5) in Ibid, p. 110

³⁹⁰ Let. no. 113 R.T./8-6 of 1915, dated Bankipore, the 11th Feb 1915, from the Hon’ble Mr. H. MchPherson, Secy to the Govt of Bihar and Orissa to the Secy to the Board of Rev, Bihar and Orissa, appended as Appendix D (6) in Ibid, p. 111

³⁹¹ ‘Note on the Hos by Mr. Dahn Mashi Panna’ appended in Tuckey Settlement Report. p. 121

The difficulty in deciding the question of *khuntkatti* rights was that the evidence was all one sided. The Hos naturally tried to establish their claims to *khuntkatti* in nearly every village, and suppressed any knowledge they may have had of a former occupation by others. Similarly, unless there was a clear tradition among them of a certain man or certain men of one *killi* having founded the village, they put forward claims that men of different *killis* founded the village together, so as to include as many of the villagers as possible among the *khuntkattidars*. Genealogical trees were frequently concocted beyond the point where the ascent really known, and unrelated families were introduced into them. A very careful and lengthy cross examination was necessary to test the accuracy of the claims advanced. As the intelligence of the Ho is not of a high order, cross-examination, though tedious, seldom failed to unmask deception.³⁹²

Since the beginning of the settlement operations, it was mostly the village headmen, who were quite keen to formalize the new benefits that CNTA offered, to the exclusion of others within the villages. As we have observed, sections of the village headmen had become extremely rich and powerful over the preceding years. During the present settlement operations, a note drawn up on the Hos by a settlement officer, Dahn Mashi Pasha, for example, pointed out that, despite the poverty amongst the Hos, several *mankis* and *mundas* were extremely ‘well off’ and some of them had amassed ‘wealth of the value of more than a lakh of rupees.’³⁹³ The Commissioner Walsh, who had claimed based on his meeting with headmen in July 1914 that the Hos denied any distinction between earlier and later settlers, made assertions to the contrary just a few months later. A settlement officer, for example, had told him in November 1914 that the *mankis* and *mundas* chiefly wanted the *khuntkatti* rights, to which the mass of tenants were opposed.³⁹⁴ By the end of the settlement, *khuntkatti* rights were recognized in 566 villages out of the 913 villages of the Kolhan Government Estate in the Singhbhum district. In most of the villages, it was the village headmen who were recognized as the *khuntkattidar*; though there were also 23 villages, where the *khuntkattidar* status was even accorded to non-Hos. It is also important to note that 23 per cent of all the rice lands, mainly the *bad* and *bera* lands, were recorded as *khuntkatti* lands with fixed

³⁹² Tuckey Settlement Report, p. 21

³⁹³ Note on the Hos by Mr. Dahn Mashi Panna appended in Tuckey Settlement Report, p. 120-121

³⁹⁴ Cited in Letter no. 509 from Walsh, Commnr to the Secy to the Board of Revenue, dated the 5th/8th December 1914, appended as Appendix D (2) in Tuckey Settlement Report, p. 97

rentals.³⁹⁵ The previous settlement had allowed sections of the headmen to stake a claim of occupancy over several tracts of *gora* land. The present settlement, now allowed, them to protect their most fertile lowlands from any further rent enhancements. Unlike the conceptual framework structuring the CNTA, local settlement officials could not always remain unmindful of the fact that the insider/outsider binary was not the only binary working amongst the Hos of Singhbhum. Over the years, sections of the ‘insiders’ had easily accommodated with the ‘outsiders’, and took further advantages of the opportunities offered by the agrarian surveys, to enhance their status within the community.

Conclusion

While concluding the chapter, it is important, however, to add that, one should not presume that the relationship of the colonial state with the tribal headmen of the Hos – the *mankis* and the *mundas* – was always smooth or not fraught with various tensions. There had always been a section of the colonial officialdom that had remained uncomfortable with the devolution of power to them, casting their doubts about the ‘ability’, ‘efficiency’ and trustworthiness of the tribal headmen.³⁹⁶ And the large scale agrarian transformations, which only the increased power of the headmen – both financially as well as politically – only increased these anxieties. For example, after the Craven settlement of the 1890s, which specified a double rate of rent for the *dikus*, certain officials felt ‘that the *mankis* and the *mundas* would be tempted, for the sake of increased gain to conceal such settlements (in connivance with the *dikus*).’³⁹⁷ This was not just conjured up. As we had seen in the previous chapter, the headmen played a pivotal role in settling the lands of tenants unable to pay the rents with the *dikus*.³⁹⁸ 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 *mankis* and *mundas* had effected, that the

³⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 21-22

³⁹⁶ Gen. Admin. Rep. of Singhbhum, 1878-79, File No. 734, DCRR

³⁹⁷ 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 29th Apr), File no. 3, 1899, DCRR

³⁹⁸ Craven Settlement Report, p. 144

indigenous chiefs and heads, had become ‘corrupted’ and ‘begun to forget their tribal allegiance.’³⁹⁹

Post the introduction of the CNTA to Kolhan, some officials even felt that it would become too difficult to compel the *mankis* and *mundas* to do their traditional functions, such as rent collection and police duties, for which they were ‘originally appointed’. The first demand for amending the CNTA was made just three years after its extension to Singhbhum when M.G. Hallet, the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, demanded greater powers to the Deputy Commissioner over the tribal headmen, stating that the control over the tribal headmen must be as efficient as the control exercised over subordinate police officer by the Superintendent of Police,. The official reason, cited, now interestingly was protecting the raiyats from the exploitation of their own headmen who would bring in the outsiders.⁴⁰⁰ W.B. Murphy, who succeeded Reid as the Director of Land Records and Survey, pre-empting the criticism that this proposal would meet from the other officials, stated:

It may be argued that Government is claiming in the Kolhan rights over its village headmen which it refuses to grant to private landlords elsewhere in Chota Nagpur. I see no reason why it should not do so. The private landlords of Chota Nagpur for the most part regard village headmen as undesirable buffers interposed between them and their raiyats, whose abolition is a necessary preliminary to the more effective enhancement of rents. To deny to such landlords powers which they would certainly abuse is no reason for not allowing Government to exercise these power for the purpose of protecting the raiyats of the Kolhan against a Manki or Munda who misuses a position of trust by allowing outsiders to acquire a footing in the villages which Government, in the interest of the Hos, is endeavouring to protect from exploitation.⁴⁰¹

However, for all their perceived problems, and the calls once in a while to displace them or strip them of their police functions, the *mankis* and the *mundas* remained

³⁹⁹ 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 25th May 1898, File No. 1061, 1897-98, DCRR

⁴⁰⁰ Let. No. 1269-R., dated Chaibsa, the 9th June 1917, from M.G. Hallet, Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to the Commnr. of the Chota Nagpur Division, appended as Appendix D (7) in Tuckey Settlement Report, p. 113

⁴⁰¹ Let. No. 1689 dated Patna, the 31st May 1920 from P.W. Murphy, Director of the Dept of Land Records and Surveys, Bihar & Orissa to the Secy. to the Board of Rev., appended to Tuckey Settlement Report, p. 4

key intermediaries of the colonial administration throughout the period of colonial rule. In a region such as Singhbhum, the tribal headmen, who apart from other things were also ritually tied with the village community⁴⁰², but performed official duties for the state, were a great asset for the colonial administration. D.N. Majumdar, during his ethnographic forays in the region in the 1930s, for example, noted that many new *mankis* were appointed by the British from the *khunkatti* families who were found to have substantial stakes and political weight in their villages, and a more effective control over the tenants. Their contact and close proximity with the British officials also added to their prestige as well as social and financial status. Needless to say, this had implications for the indirect form of rule and, noting the social distance between the headmen and the villager, Majumdar at one place, doubted whether these customary headmen can any more effectively discharge the arbitration of the various disputes of the villagers.⁴⁰³ But, the effective resolution of the village disputes had become a subsidiary concern, after all it had never been primary for the British. In the last few decades of colonial rule, as the various Gandhian movements made their presence felt in the region, these officials had a far more important function to discharge - of reporting on the movements of the agitators as the eyes and ears of the British regime. That story is taken up in a subsequent chapter.

⁴⁰²For example, the *mankis* and *mundas* played an important role in marriages as well as divorces in the village. Majumdar. *Affairs of a Tribe*, p. 132, 235

⁴⁰³Majumdar. *Affairs of a Tribe*, p. 290

Chapter IV

Forests, Fields, Fires & Famines: 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.⁴⁰⁴ 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

⁴⁰⁴ Let. from W. Dent to C. Macsween, Secy. to the Govt., Fort William dated 4th Sep. 1833), File no. 3305, DCRR

of a 'struggle for mastery with the tiger(s)'.⁴⁰⁵ 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.⁴⁰⁶ However, the forests of the region, for all their perceived destructive potentials, were also a site of great social, economic as well as ritual significance for the Hos.

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.⁴⁰⁷ 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.⁴⁰⁸ 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, as we will explore subsequently in the chapter, 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. During his ethnographic sojourns in the region, D.N. Majumdar for example noted that the tribes of Singhbhum, as opposed to the 'cultivating raiyats', were less affected by famines because of their proximity to the forests.⁴⁰⁹ Similarly, as the forests were gradually declared protected and reserved by the colonial state and their access were subsequently restricted, as we shall see, the region became more prone to scarcity and the suffering of the people was much greater in times of famine. The forests, thereby, were inherent part of the livelihood of the Hos. The

⁴⁰⁵ Tickell, *Memoir*, p. 699

⁴⁰⁶ 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, DCRR

⁴⁰⁷ Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 65

⁴⁰⁸ Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 201

⁴⁰⁹ To quote him, "Majumdar, *Affairs of a Tribe*, p. 50

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:

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.⁴¹⁰

The deities within the groves were regarded as responsible for rainfall and the outturn of crops and were specially honored during agricultural festivals.⁴¹¹ 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.⁴¹²

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 an 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

⁴¹⁰ Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 185-186

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 198

that the 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.⁴¹³ 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.⁴¹⁴ 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.'⁴¹⁵ 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 four 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, such as the right to clear forests and expand the arable, which the colonial state had itself

⁴¹³ Guha, Ramchandra. (1989). *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. Delhi: OUP, p. 5

⁴¹⁴ 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

⁴¹⁵ Marx, Karl. (1842). 'Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood' in www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/10/25.htm. (last accessed on 5th May, 2012)

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 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. The fourth and final section shows how the restriction to access to forests exacerbated the suffering of the people during periods of scarcity and famine. The people who earlier could depend on the forests in such dire situations were now left with no such alternate means of livelihood, which led to greater mortality and suffering, while also forcing the colonial state to institute greater relief measures.

Section I

Apocalyptic Concerns and ‘The Greater Common Good’⁴¹⁶

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. As we have observed in the previous chapter, there was a great thrust towards agrarian expansion in this period, for which special incentives were given to the *mankis* and the *mundas*. 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.⁴¹⁷

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 now

⁴¹⁶ 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

⁴¹⁷ Dalton, *The Kols of Chota-Nagpore*, p. 14

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 by the people were increasingly condemned.⁴¹⁸ 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 British now took it upon itself to stop, and also taking measures towards reversing. As the Inspector General of Forests at the close of the nineteenth 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.⁴¹⁹

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. As per these new concerns, extensive deforestation reduced rainfall, eroded soil, caused floods, lowered the ground water levels, increased temperatures, and reduced the fertility of soil and so on.⁴²⁰ With a view to prevent or at least check such eventualities, several inquiries were also 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 through which the results were reached, of the one such enquiry within the different districts of Chota Nagpur.

⁴¹⁸ Copy of a Memorandum by the Conservator of Forests, Bengal on the subject of checking the jungle fires, dated Calcutta, the 4th 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, DCRR.

⁴¹⁹ Ribbentrop, Berthold. (1900). *Forestry in British India*. Delhi: Indus Publishing Company (reprint 1989), p. 52

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-65

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 Chota Nagpur. They were to enquire in the different districts of Chota Nagpur 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’.⁴²¹ 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.⁴²²

The conservation of forests was thus presented as important not just to save one area or district, but also its adjoining regions.⁴²³ To put it another way, this meant 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 Subarnekhya 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

⁴²¹ Let. from H. L. Stephenson, Dep. Commnr. of Ranchi to H. D. Carey, Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Ranchi, the 26th Nov. 1906, File no. 50, Rev. Dept., DCRR, 1908-09

⁴²² Let. from H. L. Stephenson to H. D. Carey, dated 26th November 1906, Ranchi Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09 (emphasis mine)

⁴²³ Offg. Director of the Department of Land Records, Bengal to the Commnr. of the Chotanagpur Division dated 7th Nov. 1906, Calcutta), Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

regions.⁴²⁴ 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’⁴²⁵ 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.⁴²⁶

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, 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.’⁴²⁷ 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

⁴²⁴ Singhbhum Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

⁴²⁵ 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

⁴²⁶ Note on For. Preservation in Chota Nagpur by J.W.A. Grieve, *undated*) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

⁴²⁷ H. L. Stephenson to H. D. Carey, dated 26th November 1906, Ranchi) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09 (emphasis mine)

better position to comment on.⁴²⁸ 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’.⁴²⁹ 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.⁴³⁰

However, these new environmental concerns 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 writes, “*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 preoccupations.”⁴³¹ In the enquiries undertaken in the different districts of Chota Nagpur, 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.⁴³² Consider for example the following words of F.W. Duke, the

⁴²⁸ Ibid

⁴²⁹ Note on For. Preservation in Chota Nagpur by J.W.A. Grieve, *undated* Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

⁴³⁰ 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 7th January 1910 Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

⁴³¹ 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)

⁴³² Water Circulation and its Control by Bailey Willis, E.M.C.E., United States Geological Survey, Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

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

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

ed, 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.⁴³³

My intention in bringing out the rise of these new environmentalist ideas is not to test their *scientificity*, which lies beyond the scope of this work. However, what is of central relevance to 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

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

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

⁴³³ 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 7th January 1910) Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

of these environmental concerns and the different commercial interests that determined the colonial policies with regard to the forests.⁴³⁴

In the context of Singhbhum, we can see that as early as 1868, the Deputy Commissioner W.W. 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.⁴³⁵ 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 I⁴³⁶). 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 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.⁴³⁷

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

⁴³⁴ 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

⁴³⁵ Let. No. 249, from W.H. Hayes, Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum to the Commnr. of Chota Nagpore, dated Chaibasa, 22nd July 1867, Rev. Dept. – For., Proc. No. 18, February 1868, WBSA

⁴³⁶ O, Malley, *Singhbhum Gazetteer*, p. 103

⁴³⁷ 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 7th January 1910 Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

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’.⁴³⁸ In another five years, as one report pointed 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.⁴³⁹ 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 to in the 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’.⁴⁴⁰ 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.⁴⁴¹

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.

⁴³⁸ Letter from J.W.A. Grieve, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Bengal, Singhbhum Division to the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa the 4th February 1905, Rev. Dept., File no. 84, DCRR

⁴³⁹ Report by Burrows, dated 19/6/10, Forest Dept., File no. 378, 1910-11, DCRR

⁴⁴⁰ Note on Forest Conservancy in the Kolhan Government Estate, by W. B. Thomson, Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, Forest Dept., File no. 18, DCRR

⁴⁴¹ Note on Preservation of Jungles and Forests, Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

Ribbentrop, for example, remarked that many of his ideas could indeed sound ‘fanciful’ to some for they could never be realized in practice.⁴⁴²

Section 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 1910.⁴⁴³ The laying of the Bengal-Nagpur railway line it was felt, had increased the ‘wanton destruction’ by the villagers of ‘valuable timber belonging to the state’.⁴⁴⁴ For the trifle these villagers earned in the ‘illegal’ sale of timber, it was argued, the country was being led to a possible disaster.⁴⁴⁵ A regime of extensive restrictions to the forests which could check such *wasteful* practices was envisaged as a solution out of this crisis. Consequently, 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

⁴⁴² Ribbentrop, *Forestry in British India*, p. 59

⁴⁴³ 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 Gazetteers: Singhbhum*. Patna: Superintendant Press, p. 109-110

⁴⁴⁴ Letter by Commissioner of Chota Nagpur dated 7th June 1894 (quoted in Burrows report)

⁴⁴⁵ Letter from F.A. Slacke, Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of the Chotanagpur Division dated Darjeeling, 6th July 1901. Collection No. II Forests, File No, 18, DCRR

facilitate control.⁴⁴⁶ 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.'⁴⁴⁷ Also, all waste lands belonging to government or over which government had proprietary rights, were declared to be protected forest in 1894.

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 could thus only be 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

⁴⁴⁶ 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

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15

completely lost upon the colonial officials.⁴⁴⁸ 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’.⁴⁴⁹

During the demarcations, the close impingement of cultivation with the forests in the agrarian landscape of Singhbhum also created enormous difficulties for the first surveyors. 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 drawn from the maps 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.⁴⁵⁰ The parcelling of land in the name of individual tenants, during the previous settlement operations, further rendered any large scale usurpation of forests extremely difficult. 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

⁴⁴⁸ See for example, government letters dated 14th August 1895 and 21st September 1896 quoted in the Burrows report

⁴⁴⁹ See Commissioner’s letter and Conservator’s letters of 1894, quoted in Burrow’s report

⁴⁵⁰ Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate 1897*, p. 34

been permitted to hold these lands on the distinct understanding that the cultivation is not to be extended.⁴⁵¹

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'.⁴⁵² 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.⁴⁵³ The successes of the first colonial attempts at enforcing some sort of legibility on the forests, by 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 first round of 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...⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 34 (emphasis mine)

⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 33

⁴⁵³ Letter no. 788, from E.G. Chester, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Deputy Commissioner, Singhbhum, dated camp Goilkera, 8th November 1897 File no. 18, Forest Dept., 1904-05

⁴⁵⁴ 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, DCRR

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 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.⁴⁵⁵

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 usurped by the Forest Department without much hassle after abating its rent. As for the more productive lowlands - the *bera* and the *bad* - they had to be in many cases excluded from the demarcation, in the face of local claims. The result was a meandering, circuitous or a 'snake like'⁴⁵⁶ 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.

⁴⁵⁵ Explanatory Note to this Office No. 137, dated 22nd June 1910 to Conservator of Forests, Bengal; through the Deputy Commissioner, File No. 10, 1911-12, Forest Dept., DCRR

⁴⁵⁶ Burrows Report

The boundary between the forests and the fields always remained a liminal and an ever shifting one, which also led to frictions between different departments within the state machinery. In the early 1930s, for example, the government started *disforestation* certain areas. In other words, certain areas that were earlier declared as Protected Forests were converted back into agrarian lands. The revenue department notified certain areas as disforested, and recommended their re-inclusion back to agricultural use by clearing off the forests. However, the forest department later objected to such rampant disforestation and demanded that such notification be reversed.⁴⁵⁷

The nature of usurped forests also kept changing and many other areas that were constituted as protected forests (which allowed some rights) were converted into reserved forests (totally banishing all local rights). For example, in 1937, after inspections by the district collector four blocks of protected forests were made into reserve. On Usuria and Kolbanga forests (two of the protected forests converted into reserves) for example, he noted:

Usuria Protected Forest contains very fine quality of *Sal* and at the moment full of good poles. There is in the village a piece of jungle lying in gravel and rock, and which is unsuitable for cultivation, and which if some control is maintained will provide the villagers with all their requirements even if the protected forest is taken away....I inspected the areas of 248 acres in Kolbanga protected forest which the Working Plans Officer suggests for disforestation. The Divisional Forest officer who was with me agreed that the forest was not too bad and that the land there is more suitable for forest than for agriculture as it is dry and rather infertile.⁴⁵⁸

The people who lost their rights as a result of this change were compensated. The Deputy Commissioner was aware of the fact that this change would deeply affect the villagers, especially in Usuria where the standing crop was 'very promising'. Yet, he prioritized the preservation of forest over agricultural practices. It was, however, recommended that the Forest Department would pay the villagers a reasonable sum per

⁴⁵⁷ Let No. 4138, from J.S. Owden, Conservator of Forest, Bihar, dated 17th August, 1936 to the Secretary to the Government of Bihar, Rev. dept. File no. IIIF-58, Re-notification of certain areas disforested from protected forest block XII(b) in village Kopa, Porahat Division, as demarcated protected forest. December, 1937, (20) Rev. Dept. Regional Archives, Ranchi (RAR)

⁴⁵⁸ Let. no. 197-R, dated the 13th Jan. 1936, from the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum to the Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division, Ranchi, , File no. 111F-87 of 1937, Proc. No. 1-11, Rev. Dept., Forests, RAR

acre as a compensation for the loss of their rights. This money was meant to be spent for the benefit of the villagers, either for providing irrigation, domestic water supply or in similar other ways.⁴⁵⁹

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 re-organisation 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 forest 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 holdings of these sections, through whom the colonial rule was locally enforced. 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

⁴⁵⁹ Let. No. 1516-R., dated the 27th March 1936, from the Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to the Divisional Forest Officer, Saranda Division, File no. 111F-87 of 1937, Proc. No. 1-11, RAR

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.⁴⁶⁰

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 Rajan⁴⁶¹ 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 *mankis* for maintenance.⁴⁶² The *mankis* were further asked to enforce and check infringements of forest rules as well as take steps for the prevention and extinguishing of forest fires.⁴⁶³ The collection of the ‘miscellaneous’ sources of revenue mainly from the assessment on the various minor forest produce⁴⁶⁴, was the prerogative of the tribal headmen.⁴⁶⁵ 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

⁴⁶⁰ 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 27th July 1897, appended to the Craven Settlement Report

⁴⁶¹ 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

⁴⁶² 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 27th July 1897, appended to the Craven Settlement Report

⁴⁶³ Craven Settlement Report, p. 39

⁴⁶⁴ 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.

⁴⁶⁵ 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, 22nd May 1897, Proceedings No. 60-61, Sep 1897, Rev. Dept., Branch – Agri, WBSA

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.⁴⁶⁶

In Chapter 2, we had noted the manner in which a section of the colonial officialdom was not completely supportive of the policies of administrative exceptionalism that had been instituted in the region, which they felt devolved considerable powers to the *mankis* and the *mundas*. This discomfort was extremely apparent once again in this phase when forest conservancy had been thrust as a new agenda, and *mankis* and *mundas* given significant roles for the maintenance and upkeep of the forests. Within less than half a decade, W.B. Thomson, who succeeded Bompas as the Deputy Commissioner, was pointing to the inability of the *mankis* and the *mundas* 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*.⁴⁶⁷ 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 with their various orders and demands.⁴⁶⁸ In cases such as these, or even when it was regarding infringements of forest rules, the forest officials had absolutely no power to punish the

⁴⁶⁶ Conservator's Inspection Note dated the 9th Jan 1909 on Singhbhum For. Division) File No. 10, For. Dept., 1911-12, DCRR

⁴⁶⁷ W.B. Thomson's note on Forest Conservancy in the Kolhan Govt. Estate, File No. 18, For. Dept., DCRR

⁴⁶⁸ Let. No. 21C, from the Range Officer, Chaibasa Range to the Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division, File No. 234, For. Dept., 1903, DCRR

tribal headmen.⁴⁶⁹ This was because the forest officials remained subordinate to the Deputy Commissioner, who in turn used to work with the customary headmen of the Hos.

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, a large establishment of professionally trained foresters remained a far cry in Singhbhum.⁴⁷⁰ 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.⁴⁷¹ Moreover, enforcing government rules and regulations through the tribal headmen remained a cheaper and easier *modus operandi*.⁴⁷² Lastly, and very importantly, departures from forest rules were also important for palliating the far reaching effects of forest *conservation* on the lives and livelihoods of the local population

Section 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 Brecht⁴⁷³*

⁴⁶⁹ Note regarding the Kolhan Protected Forests, File no. 10-11, For. Dept., 1910-11, DCRR

⁴⁷⁰ 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 13th April 1911, File no. 10-11, For. Dept., 1910-11, DCRR

⁴⁷¹ Let. from the Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Conservator of Forests, Bengal through the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa, the 29th September 1897, Proc. No. 1-4, July 1900, Rev. Dept. – Branch For., WBSA

⁴⁷² 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

⁴⁷³ See Brecht, Bertolt. (2012). "To posterity" in the Classic Poetry Series. Accessed from Poem Hunter.com

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 Engels⁴⁷⁴

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 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.⁴⁷⁵ 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.⁴⁷⁶ We will deal with it in the subsequent section. 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.”⁴⁷⁷ However, there are a few points which I intend to make, regarding the

⁴⁷⁴ Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. (1995). *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (transl. Samuel Moore). Delhi: People’s Publishing House

⁴⁷⁵ 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

⁴⁷⁶ See the various famine reports of the Rev. Dept. (Branch-Agri.) in the period between 1897-1902 preserved in the West Bengal State Archives.

⁴⁷⁷ Sanjukta Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*, p. 313

above contention by Dasgupta. Firstly, the binary of the ‘rebellious Larkas’ and the ‘peaceful tenantry’, that Dasgupta uses, is not convincing 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 and forms of resistance.

When one shifts attention away from trying to look for moments of outright rebellion to different other forms of clandestine, yet disruptive forms of actions 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.⁴⁷⁸ 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 1910.⁴⁷⁹ 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 the usurpation of the forests by the Forest Department.

⁴⁷⁸ Burrows Report

⁴⁷⁹ Let. from Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum to the Commnr. of the Chota Nagpore Province, dated 11/6/13, File No. 378, Forest Dept., DCRR, 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

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, in fact, not specific to Singhbhum alone, and, in a way followed a similar pattern in several other regions as well.⁴⁸⁰ 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.⁴⁸¹ Table II⁴⁸², for example, brings out 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

⁴⁸⁰ 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

⁴⁸¹ 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 9th February 1900) Proc. Nos. 1-4, Rev. Dept., Branch – For., July 1900, WBSA

⁴⁸² Ibid

curbed, restricted and expunged.⁴⁸³ 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.⁴⁸⁴ 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.⁴⁸⁵ 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:

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.⁴⁸⁶

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.

⁴⁸³ Copy of a Memorandum by the Conservator of Forests, Bengal on the subject of checking the jungle fires, dated Calcutta, the 4th July 1872) Proc, No. 18, File no. 18, Rev. Dept., Branch-For., WBSA

⁴⁸⁴ Roychoudhary, *Bihar District Gazetteers: Singhbhum*, p. 109

⁴⁸⁵ 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 9th March 1904) Proc. Nos. – 7-8, File No.3-F/3-3, Rev. Dept., Branch – For., September 1904, WBSA

⁴⁸⁶ Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 68

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’⁴⁸⁷ with regard to protection of the forests 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.⁴⁸⁸ 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.⁴⁸⁹ At many times, they would leave lit cigarettes or burning bonfires behind leading to large swathes of forested land catching fire.⁴⁹⁰ Chester in fact, 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.⁴⁹¹

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.⁴⁹² 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.⁴⁹³ 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

⁴⁸⁷ 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 9th Feb 1900) Proc. Nos. 1-4, Rev. Dept., Branch – Forests, July 1900, WBSA, para 9

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, paras 11-13

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, para 10

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, para 4

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., para 4

⁴⁹² Ibid., para 12, 16

⁴⁹³ Ibid., para 7

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 not always trustworthy *mankis* and *mundas* to oversee the forests.⁴⁹⁴ Chester was quite hopeful that the measures proposed by him if incorporated within the existing legislation had the potential of 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.⁴⁹⁵

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

⁴⁹⁴ 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 Rakhil 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

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., para 19

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. In his opinion, this could be checked by specifying that merely producing the offender would not absolve the other villagers of the punishment.⁴⁹⁶

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 be caught except by a stroke of luck’.⁴⁹⁷ 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.⁴⁹⁸ 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

⁴⁹⁶ 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 30th June 1910, Proc. No. 3, Rev. Dept., Branch – For., July 1900, WBSA

⁴⁹⁷ 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 9th Feb 1900) Proc. Nos. 1-4, Rev. Dept., Branch – Forests, July 1900, WBSA, para 4

⁴⁹⁸ 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 9th Feb. 1900, Proc. Nos. 1-4, Rev. Dept., Branch – For., July 1900, WBSA, para 9

side were not even aware, owing to the steepness of the locality, that the other side was also burning.⁴⁹⁹

This report examined a total of 24 major fires that spread over 57, 330 acres, over the course of the year. Table III gives the final results of the report.⁵⁰⁰

Range	Forest	Date of Occurrence	Area burnt	Remarks
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⁴⁹⁹ 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 1st June 1904) Proc. no. 11, Rev. Dept., Branch – For., Sep. 1904, WBSA

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid

Chaibasa	Saitba	13 th April, 1904	Acres - 20	Maliciously caused. The fire originated inside the forest remote from any road.
Chaibasa	Saitba	14 th 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 th April, 1904	Acres - 60	Accidental, when burning fire lines.
	Saitba	19 th April, 1904	Acres - 30	Malicious. Started in a remote part of the forest away from any road or boundary line.
	Saitba	19 th April, 1904	Acres - 2	Malicious.
	Saitba	19 th April, 1904	Small	Malicious. Three fires occurred this day in the same neighbourhood.
	Saitba	8 th May, 1904	Small	Malicious in all probability.
Total Chaibasa	7 fires	.....	Acres - 1072	
Kolhan	Leda	15 th April, 1904	640	Malicious
	Leda	16 th April, 1904	640	Malicious. The accused was acquitted.
	Leda	29 th April, 1904	100	Unknown.
	Latua	28 th April, 1904	Small	Malicious. Offenders sentenced to four months rigorous imprisonment.
Total Kolhan	4 fires	.....	1, 380	

Table III (Contd on next page also)

Koina	Ambia	5 th April, 1904	.....	A few feet only burnt.
	Ambia	18 th 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 rd April, 1904	640 acres	Malicious. Two offenders sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment.
	Ghatkori	21 st April, 1904	940 acres	Malicious. One offender to three months' rigorous imprisonment.
	Ghatkori	22 nd April, 1904	213 acres	Malicious. Offender not discovered.
Total Koina	5 fires	.....	2,133	
Samta	Tirilposi	28 th April, 1904	200 acres	Careless. Occurred when burning a forest line.
	Tholokobad	16 th April to 19 th 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 th April	52, 560
Porahat		.....	1	
	Bera	11 th January 1904	12	Careless. By forest guard burning line.
	Bera	15 th April 1904	139	Accidental. Crossed from Anondpur State with a high wind.
	Songra	19 th 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.⁵⁰¹ 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 as most of these forested areas were sparsely populated. 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.⁵⁰²

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.⁵⁰³ 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 such measure.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ 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 1st June 1904, Proc. no. 11, Rev. Dept., Branch – For., Sep. 1904, WBSA

⁵⁰² Let. from the Deputy Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Deputy Commissioner, Singhbhum, undated, File No. 74, Forest Dept., 1904, DCRR

⁵⁰³ Let. No. 274G., from J.W.A. Grieve, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa, the 6th June 1904, Proc. no. 4-5, File no. 3-F/3-1, Rev. Dept., Branch – For., Sep. 1904, WBSA

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid

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.⁵⁰⁵ 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.⁵⁰⁶ 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.⁵⁰⁷

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:

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

⁵⁰⁵ 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, DCRR

⁵⁰⁶ Let. No. 274G., from J.W.A. Grieve, Esq., Dep. Conservator of Forests, Singhbhum Division to the Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, dated Chaibasa, the 6th June 1904, Proc. no. 4-5, File no. 3-F/3-1, Rev. Dept., Branch – For., Sep. 1904, WBSA

⁵⁰⁷ See appendix II for the complete text of the agreement signed by the Hos for the settlement of a Forest Village.

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.⁵⁰⁸

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 mysterious 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.⁵⁰⁹

To conclude this section, 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 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

⁵⁰⁸ Forest Admin Report, 1915-16), Forest Dept, Coll, No. II, File No. 9, DCRR, p. 19,

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid

sternly enforce the ‘*hukum*’⁵¹⁰ of the Raj, officials directed to enforce these policies had to constantly grapple with and maneuver their way around these problems.

Section IV: Forests and Famines

Forests are reserved for the benefit of the people. But if people begin to starve because the forests are officially reserved, what kind of benefit is that? Will the woods be used for the funeral pyres of the paharias who were in fact dying for lack of food or any source of livelihood? - Swami Shahjanand, *Jharkhand Ke Kisan*⁵¹¹

Even several years after the extension of colonial rule to Singhbhum, irrigation facilities in the region had continued to remain poorly developed.⁵¹² In a place, where rent from land rather than agrarian productivity determined the returns for the state, the British were never really interested in investing vast outlays for developing facilities for irrigation – such as building reservoirs and constructing embankment. As a consequence, agriculture had continued to remain dependent on rainfall and in the years when the rains failed, the region would be taken over by famine and scarcity.⁵¹³ It is in these years of famine that the worth of the forests for the local adivasis of the region became most apparent. H.H. Haines, who prepared the first working plan for forest management in Singhbhum, for example noted that the Hos knew the edible (as well as medicinal) worth of various plants, which they could depend upon during times of crisis. Apart from the Hos, another community living in Singhbhum, the Birhors sustained by hunting small animals like monkeys and gathering creepers and roots for consumption.⁵¹⁴ Much before, Haines, Valentine Ball had also observed the acute dependence of the various tribes of Singhbhum, and other parts of Chota Nagpur, on the various products from the forests for their livelihoods. He pointed out that the flowers collected from the *mahua* tree constituted the ‘staple and sometimes the only article of diet available to the poorer

⁵¹⁰ Note, Rev. Dept., File no. 50, DCRR, 1908-09

⁵¹¹ Sahajanand. *Jharkhand Ke Kisan*, p. 91

⁵¹² Hunter, *Statistical Account*, p. 79

⁵¹³ The fact that the region was completely dependent on rainfall for agrarian production is evident from the various crop reports periodically prepared by the Revenue Department. See for example Let. no. 497, from Lt. E.G. Lillingston, Offic. Dep. Commnr. of Singhbhum, to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal in the Rev. Dept., dated Chyebasa, the 2nd Sep 1869, Proc. No. 96, Sep 1869, Rev Dept. - Branch Agri., WBSA

⁵¹⁴ Haines, H.H. (1910). *The Forest Flora of Chotanagpur including Gangpur and the Santhal Parganas*. Dehradun: Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal, p.41

classes during several months of the years.⁵¹⁵ In his account, Ball, in fact, appended an exhaustive list of 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’.⁵¹⁶ In these years of crisis, the forests supplied several food supplements to the local people. Moreover, as the prices of the available food grains shot up, the people could increase their meager earnings and sustain themselves by selling several of the minor produces from the forests in the nearby markets. 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 the adjoining part of Dhalbhum which depended chiefly on rice cultivation.⁵¹⁷ This situation, however, drastically changed after the usurpation of the forests by the forest department, and the restrictions on access to the forests affected the adivasis quite hard during the years of famine. Even in years when there was no famine, Swami Sahajanand had emotively tried to capture the predicament of the adivasis of Chota Nagpur, caused by the intensive regime of restrictions, imposed in the forests in months when their water supply ran short:

These dense jungles are rich source of water with their rivers and streams, yet the kisans living nearby and their animals literally die in the summer for want of water. To dig wells in these mountain tracts is beyond their means, yet if the kisan goes into the reserved jungle with his animals, he is subject to legal actions. Neither the government nor the zamindars are concerned with meeting these needs. Yet for the kisan it is an everyday matter of life and death, and his only recourse is to shed tears of blood.⁵¹⁸

Apart from the increased restrictions on the forests, another factor which made the lives of the people of the region especially precarious during the periods of scarcity was the deforestation in many parts, and its resultant consequences. As noted earlier, one of the major reasons for the push that forest conservancy received from the 1860s was the massive need of the state for timber for the laying of railway lines. And while the access of the locals to their forests and its various produces was severely restricted, the practices

⁵¹⁵ Ball, *Tribal and Peasant Life*, p. 65

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 695-696.

⁵¹⁷ See Let. No. 1123, from Lt. Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commnr. of Chota Nagpore to the Board of Rev., L.P., dated 29th May 1866) Rev. Dept. – Agri., Proc. No. 147-149, WBSA

⁵¹⁸ Saraswati. *Jharkhand Ke Kisan*, p.72

of timber merchants which led to wholesale destruction were not considered harmful. A collateral damage of this drive was on the fauna of the region, which considerably reduced in these years. The impact of this was felt in fact not just in the forests that were taken over by the Forest Department, but also in the adjoining ones which the people could access. Bradley Birt also noted in his account that the cutting down of Sal forests over the last decades of the 19th century in the region had led to the ‘extermination of large quantities of game’.⁵¹⁹ Both these factors of restricting access to forest coupled with the reckless deforestation magnified the food scarcity to a humongous level, in those years when the rain failed. At these junctures, the biggest crunch was faced by the most marginal section within the local communities. As we had noted in the previous chapter, the colonial policy towards arable expansion had helped the traditional elite to enhance their own status by getting lands recorded in their names. The ones who lost out in this process, thus, were, thus, most dependent on forests for their survival.

In her analysis of the 1897 famine, Vinita Damodaran has noted the manner in which its scale and the suffering was far greater than the previous famines. Unlike the past, this famine affected the entire region, especially the southern districts of Ranchi and Singhbhum. As Damodaran persuasively argues, during earlier periods of scarcity 1866-67 and 1873-74 any major crisis could be averted as the people could depend on the abundant forest produce. But by 1897, when the first phase of forest reservation and protection had been initiated in the region, as per the first Forest Act of 1878, the people had no such reserve to fall back upon.⁵²⁰ The same predicament was quite evident, when the next major famine that struck in the region a couple of decades later.

The years between 1914 and 1917 were a period of acute scarcity in Singhbhum. The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, Hallet prepared a report on these three years of distress in the year 1917. The failure of the rains had led to successive bad harvests across different agrarian seasons over large parts of Singhbhum.⁵²¹ The outturn of crops from all the classes of land was affected during this famine, with those such as *gora* being most

⁵¹⁹ Bradley Birt. *Chotanagpur: Little known province of the empire*, p. 82

⁵²⁰ Damodaran, Vinita. (1995). ‘Famine in a Forest Tract: Ecological Change and the Causes of 1897 Famine in Chota Nagpur, Northern India’, *Environment and History*, Vol. I, No. 2 (June 1995)

⁵²¹ Let. dated Camp Majgaon the 27th November 1916 from M. G. Hallet, DC, Singhbhum to Commnr of Chota Nagpur, Ranchi, Coll. No. XIII, File No. 2, Rev. Dept., 1917, Regional Archives, Ranchi (RAR)

dependent on rainfall being the worst affected areas. Initially, the outturn of crops from the *bad* and *bera* areas reduced the suffering of the people. In these initial years, the authorities downplayed the impact of the famine, pointing to this outturn in the *bad* and *bera* areas, apart from the presence of the forests which they argued sustained the people. But as rains failed successively over the next seasons, even the *bad* and *bera* areas were left without any food production and the authorities were forced to start the relief operations. The relief that was granted in this period consisted of seed loans, land improvement loans, grants from the Kolhan improvement funds for small works and employing the people in construction works such as roads. Apart from that, the local establishment was also upgraded and several new officials were appointed to look into and supervise the various famine relief works. Hallet asked for the appointment of additional overseers to be employed during February and March in the preparation for the famine project, the appointment of special staff consisting of ‘aboriginal youths from Ranchi or Chaibassa fully competent to take charge of the smaller works and the appointment of Charge Superintendents and Assistant Charge Superintendents for control and supervision of operations. He maintained that these extra appointments were required for the disbursement of the ‘gratuitous relief’ and to constantly travel across the famine stricken areas to assess the scale of crisis.⁵²² Apart from the upgrading of the establishment, the local officials of the Raj - the *mankis* and the *mundas* - were also instructed to send periodic reports from the villages about estimated outturn of crops, the effect of distress in the different villages and the precise requirements for relief. The establishment of the Forest Department was also upgraded to deal with the crisis situation. The allowance of the foresters was increased, as the famine brought additional responsibilities on these officials.

However, in the initial years, the government policy was to restrict the relief to as few people as possible. Hallet, for example, at one juncture stated that the relief works should be restricted “only to persons showing emaciation and in danger of death from starvation”.⁵²³ In the beginning, the villages in, and in the vicinity of, the forests were

⁵²² Ibid

⁵²³ Let. No. 1243 R., dated Ranchi, 28.2. 1917 from A.P. Middleton, Under-Secy to the Govt of Bihar and Orissa to the Commnr of Chota Nagpur, Coll. No. XIII, File No. 2 of 1917, RAR

also excluded from any relief work. Amongst the areas that were affected by the famine, some of them abounded in forests, whereas some had been cleared of all forests in the previous decades. The jungle pirs, such as Saranda, Relu, Latua, Rengra, were at that time, portrayed in official reports as being less affected by the distress. It was argued that people of these areas could get ‘miscellaneous work in the forest’, and therefore relief in the form of employment or supplement food supply was not needed.⁵²⁴ The only relief in these areas was restricted to few villages that were seen to be at some distance from the forests.⁵²⁵ In fact, the authorities would often cite the presence of forests to abdicate their responsibility to provide famine relief. For example, Coupland, the Secretary to the Revenue Department of the Government of Bihar and Orissa, underplayed the famine relief report submitted by the Deputy Commissioner B.C. Sen, in 1915, and noted:

I should doubt that the Deputy Commissioner has studied the previous famine history of Singbhum. Had he done so, he would hardly have suggested the possibilities of 50 percent of the population of worst affected parts requiring relief for practically 12 months. *The extent to which an aboriginal population in a jungly area can be support themselves on edible forest products is entirely ignored.*⁵²⁶

But was not the access to these forest products been successively restricted by the constitution of forests into reserves and protected blocks over the past few decades? In fact, even at this juncture of scarcity, the authorities resisted any attempt to relax the restrictions in these areas. Hallet, for example, had specifically pointed out the people should not be allowed to obtain any of the forest products from the demarcated zones.⁵²⁷ As pointed above, there was also a deliberate underplaying of the ravages caused by the famine. But the official reports notwithstanding, the depredations caused by the famine was enormous on the local population. Sanjukta Dasgupta notes that in these years of scarcity and distress there was a more than a double increase in the ‘crimes’ in the region, and the emigration of the Hos to the plantations in Assam tea gardens also substantially increased.⁵²⁸ After a while, it became difficult for the authorities to be in denial mode.

⁵²⁴ Hallet, letter, *ibid*.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid*

⁵²⁶ Marginal Notes by H. Coupland, 2 September 1915, in ‘Report on Sacrcity in Singbhum’, Govt. of Bengal & Orissa, Rev. (Agri) Progs., Nos. 3-115, April 1916, BSA. (emphasis mine)

⁵²⁷ Copy of State Telegram dated 26th October 1915, from District Chaibasa to Rev. dept, Bihar, Coll. No. XIII, File No. 1 (f) of 1917, RAR

⁵²⁸ To be specific, it increased from 149 to 314 in this period. Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*, p.230

The Commissioner of Chota Nagpur who took up an extensive survey in the region in the second half of 1915, was shocked by what he saw:

The crowds collected at Jagannathpur and Barbaria were the worst specimens I saw. At each of these places I inspected about 2000 persons, of which 60 percent were more or less severely emaciated and 15 to 20 percent so reduced as to be obviously incapable of doing full day's task on a relief work.⁵²⁹

In his opinion, the situation was too serious to continue with the present forms of relief. After this report by the Commissioner, one notices that the authorities in Calcutta also accepted the gravity of the situation.⁵³⁰ The consequent upgradation of relief works had as its major component temporarily opening up of forests that had been constituted protected blocks, as well as reserves over the previous years. In the light of the ongoing distress, the people were allowed to access these areas to collect fruits, timber and other forms of minor forest produce. Other relief measures included opening up community kitchens and starting new test works. In the initial years of the famine, the local officials, specially foresters had resisted any departures in the course of forest conservancy in the region. But as the famine took on gigantic proportions, the colonial state's attempts to exclude the people completely from them had to take a momentary retreat. These moments, apart from the terrain and the overlapping nature of agrarian settlements with forests, made the British realize that there were limit to their desire of exacting a total monopoly over the forests.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, we have dealt with the manner in which the colonial state mapped, fenced, restricted forests. The colonial state's earlier perception of forests as *wastelands*, changed as they realized that they can be important sources for revenues and reservoirs alike. Couched with the concern for environmental protection, the subsequent protection of forests also grew out of the colonial state's yearning to monopolise the major forest produce like timber, as well as scores of other minor forest produces. Armed with these categorical motives, the colonial state sought to

⁵²⁹ Letter dated Sep 1915, from Commnr. Of CN to Sec, Govt. of Bihar and Orrisa, Rev. Dept., BSA

⁵³⁰ Ibid

operationalize its forest conservancy policy in Singbhum, as well as in the rest of Chota Nagpur. Mapping, fencing and classification of forests as reserved, protected, village and private forests took place extensively across Singbhum. However, the desired outcome of the colonial state to neatly demarcate the agrarian lands from the forest areas, remained largely unaccomplished. Local surveys and mapping could not distinguish the liminal boundary between forests and fields. Claims and counterclaims about ownership of arable lands marred the state's efforts to distinguish the boundary of where the fields end and forests begin. Reality often belied the arduously prepared maps, or it changed too soon. However, as the forests with its resources emerged as important source of revenues, the Mankis and Mundas who earlier vied for capturing agricultural land, now tried to capitalize their claims for becoming local level forest managers. Due to this official lack in comprehending the shifting landscape, the colonial state was forced to hand over over the authority for local management of forests to the Mankis and Mundas.

The gradual expropriation of the forest lands and resources, however affected the most marginal sections within the local communities the most. Their suffering became most acute during period of famine, whose effects in the years after the takeover of the forests were humongous on the local population. The ones who in the preceding decades had lost out during the settlement operations in the recording of lands, and whose valuable resources in the form of forests were also now taken away from them responded and resisted in several ways to these changes. This chapter has tried to show that arson and forest fires constituted one of the forms of resistance, to the specific question of usurpation of forests. However, to the overall changes, there were other forms of responses too, and it is to this that we now turn.

Section III

Empire's Twilight: Contesting Voices in the Margins

Chapter V:

Marginal Voices, Forgotten Assertions: Social Movements in Singhbhum (1920-1950)

The passing of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act(CNTA) and its application to different regions of Chota Nagpur, to its framers had seemed like the end of a hurricane and the final advent of peace and security of tenure in the region.⁵³¹ But, as we have observed over the previous chapter, the operationalization of CNTA had led to a further fracturing of already differentiated communities inhabiting the region. The granting of privileged tenures to the original reclaimers and village founders strengthened older hierarchies and created new ones, while simultaneously excluding a large section from any ‘protection’. The excluded and the marginalized were drawn to various movements that spread to Chota Nagpur over the last decades of the colonial rules with the advent of nationalist movement, as well as what seemed at many moments as its counter pole - the movement for the separation of Chota Nagpur from Bihar. This chapter seeks to look at

⁵³¹ Hoffman, Part II

some of these movements – that were centered around questions of rent, forest dues, hat tolls as well as adivasi identity.

We are not moving into an uncharted territory. Many of the movements, that we look at in the first two sections, have already been analyzed by Sanjukta Dasgupta in her work on the Hos. She argues that these were efforts on the part of Hos to safeguard their interests and create a new identity as a result of the threats posed by the ever increasing influx of alien outsiders.⁵³² We look at much of the same material that Dasgupta has used, but to arrive at a slightly different conclusion. Perceptiveness to the internal dynamics of these communities would reveal that many of these movements while challenging colonial rule were also an attempt to refashion internal hierarchies. The marginalized sections within the adivasis used these moments as much to challenge their traditional headmen and local elite, whose positions had got further regimented over time.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section looks at the spread of movements in Gandhi's name around land, forests, labour, etc in Singhbhum over the 1920s. Having begun with the call of Gandhi for non-cooperation, these movements went far beyond the limits of the Congress leadership both in their actions as well as in the time frame over which they lasted. The second section looks at the rise of the Haribaba movement, where a new religious cult which despite asserting obedience to law discomfited the authorities. This discomfort was due to the colonial intuitiveness that the movement and the new religion allowed the Hos to challenge the traditional headmen, which if went unchecked may lead to considerable trouble in the future. In both these movements, the colonial state relied extensively on these sections – the traditional headmen – to crush these movements. The last section deals with the rise of a distinct 'adivasi' politics led by urban missionary educated sections who sought to carve out a new identity, while articulating the demand for a separate province.

Section 1

An Imminent Swaraj: The Turbulent Twenties

This is not an alarmist letter, and there is not a village in the Kolhan in which an official is not given an extremely friendly reception. But the Ho has the mind of a

⁵³²Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*, pp. 279-280.

child and is quite incapable of distinguishing truth from falsehood. The Hos are not Moplahs, but once aroused they are excited, passionate and violent. There are no police in Kolhan. The people live practically under the rule of their own Mankis and Mundas, they are clothed for the most part in cloth woven by the Tantis of their village, there are no liquor shops in the Kolhan. There is nothing for the agitator to get hold of except rent. These ignorant people are accordingly told that by paying 4 annas as Congress members buy their land out-right under Swaraj, when no rent will be payable, and nothing levied except a poll tax of ½ per head. Whether or not the edict of civil disobedience issues from non-cooperation head-quarters, the intention is to stop payment of rent in this Government Estate. I would submit this propaganda as nothing short of an attempt to stir the Hos to revolt as soon as rent collection begin. The heart of the Hos is still with us, but even the most loyal Ho will lose confidence in Government unless these lies are nailed to the counter.⁵³³

The announcement of the non-cooperation movement by Gandhi led to several localised movements being launched in different parts of the country. While it served to transform Congress into a mass party, the actions of the masses did not always confirm or strictly adhere to the limits set by the leaders, including Gandhi himself. As several studies have pointed out, the people did not just understand the Gandhian message differently, but at times were even willing to reconfigure it as per the local specificities and local power dynamics.⁵³⁴ The police and CID reports of the period from Singhbhum bring to light all these contradictions as they played out in the 1920s.

It was invariably issues such as opposition to rent or the taxes paid at the markets, forest reservation, questions of labour, etc. around which people were sought to be organized. Invariably, the main organizer would be a non-*adivasi* attempting to work his way through local contradictions within the Hos in order to organize them around economic issues. The police reports would cast these ‘outsiders’ as the main ‘mischief makers’ trying to ‘excite’ and induce the ‘gullible’ and ‘childlike Hos’ against the authorities. Sporadic outbursts of the people would be followed with quick action from the colonial authorities and arrest of the main ring leaders. But just as the colonial authorities felt that they had nipped the nascent movement in the bud, reports would inform them of old ring leaders resuming their activities a few years later.

⁵³³ (Letter No. 165 T.C. dated 2nd September 1921, Chaibasa, From Lewis to F.F. Lyall, Commissioner of the Chota Nagpur Division), File no. 478, 1921, Political Special, Bihar State Archives (Hereafter, BSA).

⁵³⁴ See for example, Hardiman, David. (1987) *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*. New Delhi: OUP. Amin, Shahid.(1995). *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*. California: University of California Press.

One such character was Bishun Mahuri, whose name keeps reappearing in the confidential police reports as an ‘extreme non-cooperator’⁵³⁵ all through the 1920s. His entry into Singhbhum can be traced to July 1921 when he was appointed by the Congress leadership in the region to mobilize Hos for the non-cooperation movement and recruit them into the Congress party in Kolhan. Till then, the initial attempts of the Congress to mobilize the Hos had met with very little success. In the first half of that year, several meetings had been organized in the region which were addressed by Rajendra Prasad, Babu Gopabandhu Das, Godavari Missra, Haji Abdullah, Anant Misra. However, the reach of the non-cooperation propaganda remained limited to the towns of Chakradharpur and Chaibasa, or at the most to areas around the main railway stations. The official reports explained the turn out of the Hos in the meetings by saying that this was only a result of the distribution of rice and free rations amongst the people who turned up to swell the crowds. But the Hos of the interior regions, these reports stressed, had remained ‘uncontaminated’ from non-cooperation propaganda.⁵³⁶

The scene however began to change after the arrival of Bishun Ram Mahuri. He would go around villages asking the people to refrain from paying the taxes at the markets. Meetings were now organized in several parts of Singhbhum, which sent considerable alarm amongst the colonial authorities about the ‘lies being spread against the government’⁵³⁷ and effects it was having on the ‘sheep like’ people of Kolhan’.⁵³⁸ The attendance of the people in the public meetings, as well as the recruitment into the party, went up considerably by the time. In the interior villages of Singhbhum, villagers spoke of an imminent Gandhi Raj which was going to replace the British Raj. It was also said that the British were hurriedly leaving the country, and the Gandhi Raj that would take over from it would considerably reduce their rents.

⁵³⁵ (Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Singhbhum, dated the 22nd May 1929), File no. 146, 1929, Political Special, BSA.

⁵³⁶ (Letter No. 165 T.C. dated 2nd September 1921, Chaibasa, From Lewis to F.F. Lyall, Commissioner of the Chota Nagpur Division), File no. 478, 1921, Political Special, BSA.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Extract from the Tour Diary of W.G. Kelly, Kolhan Superintendent of Singhbhum for the month of August 1921, File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

By August 1921, Bishun Mahuri had obtained some allies in the villages, prominent amongst whom was a vendor of patent Indian medicines named Phulchand Dusadh residing in Chittimiti. An incident in the middle of the month brought Dusadh into the notice of the authorities. On 15th August 1921, some school teachers were assaulted by four Hos in the village market of a village called Serangbil. The four Hos had gone to the market where they asked the women to take off their ornaments, men to discard their coats and everyone to place their umbrellas on ground. They then asked everyone to bow before them, invoke Ram and Sita and say 'Gandhi Ki Jai'.⁵³⁹ One of Dusadh's servants drew attention of these Hos to the school teachers saying that they were not obeying Gandhi's orders, after which the Hos proceeded to hit these teachers with their umbrellas. The teachers were hit with the umbrellas till they started bleeding from their heads. The incident was informed to local manki of the region, a person by the name of Garbett Manki, who promptly entered the area and arrested all the four Hos the very next day.

Prompt proceedings were drawn up against the arrested Hos, a description of which paints a picture of the 'childish' Hos having been led astray by the 'non-cooperation propaganda curiously intermixed with Hindu missionary efforts'.⁵⁴⁰ At the end of the day, all the four were let off, as after all the main fault did not lie with them. In the words of an official, 'they had gone mad with the stories they had been told.'⁵⁴¹ The government was however perturbed by these 'distressing' developments. The Commissioner of Chota Nagpur wrote to the government:

I believe Government hold the view that agitation in the homogenous aboriginal areas is an extremely dangerous thing. We have been extraordinarily fortunate in being able so far to command the loyalty of the people without recourse to repressive measures. The moment I think there is a danger of the agitation going beyond our powers of control, I shall again come to government for permission to adopt repressive measures. Probably the most effective would be the extension of the Seditious

⁵³⁹ Extract from Mr. Lewis' demi-official letter no. 149, dated the 17th August 1921 to Lyall, File no. 465, 1921, Political Special, BSA.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

Meeting Act. With the example of what has happened in the Moplah country we cannot shut our eyes to the danger of letting the agitation go on too far.⁵⁴²

The local officials working in the region were however not in favor of repressive measures, such as the Seditious Meeting Act, which would extend to everybody. They suggested instead that the government should strike at the ‘unscrupulous mischief makers’ leading the people astray.⁵⁴³ In the case above, three names emerged who were responsible for the agitation in the region – Gardi Manki, Phulchand Dusadh and Bishun Mahuri. The first two of them were tried for their direct role in the incident of the attack on the school teachers.⁵⁴⁴

The trial of the two, however, proceeded on completely different terms. This difference is interesting to note as it reveals the manner in which colonial authorities worked their way through the internal contradictions within the Hos during these moments. The trial of Gardi Manki, rather than proceeding in the law courts (as with Dusadh), was heard by a jury of other headmen in a panchayat. This only reveals that even the headmen were not a completely undifferentiated group and the government was keen to accentuate this divide further through strategies employed in the trial of Gardi Manki, which was described as a ‘novel procedure.’⁵⁴⁵ While those who had fallen out with the government joined these movements,⁵⁴⁶ other headmen played an important role to suppress the movements. On the other hand, Garbett Manki was immensely praised by the colonial officials for his services in the arrest of these four Hos. One official described him as ‘a man in a thousand’.⁵⁴⁷ The Commissioner, personally, sent him an official letter

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Let. No. 165 T.C. dated 2nd September 1921, Chaibasa, From Lewis to F.F. Lyall, Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 478, 1921, Political Special, BSA.

⁵⁴⁴ Bishun Mahuri would always be portrayed as operating from behind, which made it difficult to prosecute him every time. He was however seen to be the main agent provocateur behind all the unrest.

⁵⁴⁵ Let. No. 165 T.C. dated 2nd Sep 1921, Chaibasa, From Lewis to F.F. Lyall, Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁴⁶ The tour diary of the Kolhan Superintendent W.G. Kelly for the month of August for example quotes a manki who stated that five of the mundas under him had become members of the Congress. One of these mundas was seen as the chief mover behind this, and he had since then avoided the manki and his order. Extract from the Tour Diary of W.G. Kelly, Kolhan Superintendent of Singhbhum for the month of Aug 1921, File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁴⁷ Let. No. 165 T.C. dated 2nd September 1921, Chaibasa, From Lewis to F.F. Lyall, Commissioner of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 478, 1921, Political Special, BSA.

of commendation.⁵⁴⁸ Other headmen were also ordered to report on all the movement of the non-cooperators.

The other trial, that against Phulchand Dusadh was extremely extensive. Several witnesses deposed against his 'seditious activities' in the region. It was said that Gardi Manki used to visit Phulchand's house, where people armed with lathis used to dance crying "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai" and Dusadh used to lecture the people on Swaraj. People were exhorted to leave the government and mission schools, and Dusadh gave the people photographs of Gandhi and 'Bharat Mata'. It was these proclamations that brought Gardi Manki into the non-cooperation movement, and eventually led to the violent attack on the school teachers at Serangbil. The head of the school, whose teachers had been assaulted, gave detailed accounts of how these developments had made the situation extremely uncomfortable for them. The situation had been normal when the school had closed for summer vacations in May. But by the end of June, when the school re-opened, the non-cooperation movement had stuck roots in the region. One day, several people took out a procession near the school shouting '*Hari, Hari, Radha Gobind, Gandhi Ki Jai.*' Phulchand was leading the procession, and he would shout 'Gandhi Ki Jai', which others repeated after him. They continued to shout these slogans for half an hour outside the school, and would also sing '*Gardi Manki ka nit dekho, Hari Hari Hari Nath.*'⁵⁴⁹

The people would meet every Wednesday at Phulchand's house where he continued with his lectures on Swaraj and Gandhi Raj. The testimonies of four Hos were used as eye witness accounts over the course of the trial to establish the 'seditious' proceedings of these meetings. One of these eye witnesses quoted Dusadh as having stated to the people in these meetings:

Swaraj has now been attained and Gandhi is head of it. The English are leaving the country and the few Englishmen in Chaibasa would run away in three or four months time. Forty crores of hapsi sepoy were coming to drive the English out. No rents

⁵⁴⁸ Let. No. 326 T.C., dated 31st Aug 1921, Ranchi from F.F. Lyall, Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division to J.D. Sifton, Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, File no. 465 of 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁴⁹ Judgement – Emperor vs Phulchand Dusadh of Chittimitti under sec. 108 CrPC., File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

would be paid. Gandhi Mahama would establish a school and the schools of Government would be destroyed. No fees would be paid in Gandhi's school.⁵⁵⁰

Another eye witnesses stated:

He said that Gandhi was our Raja and unless we carried out his orders devils would come and eat us. That all rents had been been abolished and that each person had now only to pay -/-/6 to the Munda and the Manki, 1 pice to the Munda and 1 pice to the Manki. That the English were running away.⁵⁵¹

One more eye witness narrated an incident where Dusadh called him into his house when he was returning from the market:

Phulchand supplied me with two pamphlets (small books of Gandhi), one picture of Gandhi and one picture of Bharat Matha....Phulchand said to me "You would hang the picture of Bharat Matha on the wall of your house and worship her daily at night by burning the sarita bati." He further said to me "All the old schools would be abolished and no boys read in Sarkar school; the new schools would be constructed with the order of Gandhi Maharaj. When Gandhi would get Swaraj no rent be paid by us; the 40 crores of Habsi, the soldiers of Gandhi will come to Chaibassa and fight with the Sahibs. All the Sahibs will then run away to their own country from this place."⁵⁵²

Another witness stated the Dusadh also asked *cutcheries* to be closed down, and also interestingly that Oriya would be spoken in Kolhan.⁵⁵³ Dusadh on his part did not deny the weekly meetings in his house, but stated that these were only 'innocent religious amusements'. His plea was however rejected in court, and the statements against him were seen as an authoritative indictment of the seditious activities that he was preaching in the region. The judgement in the case stated that the weekly *Haribole* was introduced by Dusadh for the dissemination of political ideas, which misled the Hos and brought the government into contempt. The social position of Dusadh, which in fact he attempted to invoke in his favour, was cited as an additional reason to punish him:

⁵⁵⁰ Testimony of Gopal Ho, son of Nauru Ho of Jaldiha, File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁵¹ Testimony of Mola Ho, son of Barga Ho on S.A., File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁵² Testimony of Maraki Ho, aged 35 years son of Selai Ho of Chandburia, LalgahPir on S.A., File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁵³ Judgement – Emperor vs Phulchand Dusadh, File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

Phulchand Dusadh is a man of education and intelligence far above the level of persons among whom he lives. He has a good knowledge of English, and has personally conducted his defence in a manner well up to the standard of the average legal practitioner. *I can imagine nothing more unscrupulous than the falsehoods on which he has attempted to feed his ignorant and credulous audiences. The admonitions to pay no rent is in particular an attempt to throw into chaos the ordered life of the community.*⁵⁵⁴

Dusadh's conviction, however, did not completely stop such 'diku' agitators in the region. A month later, proceedings were drawn up against a 22 year old Oriya Brahmin by the name of Satyabadi Nand. He also went around the villages giving speeches proclaiming the end of British Raj and beginning of Gandhi Raj. His speeches described the government as a 'demon', 'satan' and a 'robber' who had increased the taxes, and taken away their forests. His movements in different villages were reported to the authorities by the village headmen and he was subsequently arrested. While convicting him, the judgment once again specially drew reference to the fact that he shared no racial, religious or linguistic affinity with the Hos. He was another of the outsiders who was attempting to 'throw into chaos the life of the aboriginal community of the area'.⁵⁵⁵

The discussion above about the spread of the non-cooperation movement in Singhbhum brings to light an important difference. Gandhi might have emphasized *ahimsa* as a central aspect of his strategy, but local leaders in Singhbhum in Gandhi's name were talking about an army of Gandhi's soldiers that was going to come and liberate them from the British. And as the attack on the school teachers shows, there were sporadic incidents of violence too. Moreover, Gandhi's call to withdraw the movement did not really lead to the withdrawal of the localized movements in many areas. In Singhbhum, the agitation around questions of market taxes, land rents, forests and labour continued throughout the 1920s. In 1924, Mahuri had returned to the region and resumed his activities. The authorities were mulling over what to do with him. Should he be treated as an "undesirable diku" and subsequently evicted from the region under the Kolhan Record of Rights? The fragile legal basis on which these rules rested, as we had

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Judgement in case of Emperor vs SatyabadiNand, Section 108 CrPC, File no. 478, 1921, Pol. Spl., BSA.

observed in Chapter 2, made such a move extremely tricky. Should then be legal proceedings drawn against him under the normal laws? But for that to happen, Mahuri should be directly involved in the breach of law. Mahuri, just like in the initial period, rather than being directly being involved in anything would strategically operate from behind with the help of the dismissed headmen. By this period, the people would take his name alongside that of Gandhi, and the slogan *Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai* would be followed by *Mahatma Bishun Ki Jai*. Mahuri, on his part, however kept frustrating efforts of the authorities to arrest him, though by this period he was put into the list of ‘*dagis*’.⁵⁵⁶

Police reports of 1924 noted that Mahuri was going around villages distributing sacred threads and placing tikas on the heads of the *mankis* and *mundas*, who would be told that they had been raised to the status of Chattris.⁵⁵⁷ Thereafter, these people would go around the village markets and ask people to refrain from paying the taxes.⁵⁵⁸ Several people, who had been active during the non-cooperation had become active again and similar proclamations of an imminent Gandhi Raj replacing British Raj were given. The agitation revolved once again around issues of land and forests⁵⁵⁹, though it was the issue of taxes levied at the market places that made the movement extremely popular amongst the villagers. Reports sent by *thekadars* at the markets and the loyal headmen revealed that the agitation against these taxes had spread over the whole of central and south Kolhan.⁵⁶⁰ Some people would gather at the markets and stop the collection of taxes, telling the people that the government hats stand abolished and they would soon be replaced by swadeshi hats.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁶ Confidential – D.O. No. 165 C. Chaibasa, 2nd Oct 1924 from J.E. Scott to D.E. Dixon, Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 268, 1924, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁵⁷ Extract from confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Singhbhum for the week ending the 15th March 1924, File no. 268, 1924, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁵⁸ Extract from D.O. Letter no. 262-C, dated the 13th Sept – fortnightly report of the Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 268, 1924, Pol. Spl., BSA .

⁵⁵⁹ An entry in the confidential report of the police pointed to the ‘seditious songs’ recovered from the note-books of one of the agitators in this period. The ‘seditious song’ stated that the Europeans had come to Kolhan and disposed the Kols of the lands and forests by cheating them. Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Singhbhum, dated 8.11.1924, File no. 268, 1924, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁶⁰ Confidential – D.O. No. 165 C. Chaibasa, 2nd Oct 1924 from J.E. Scott to D.E. Dixon, Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 268, 1924, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁶¹ Confidential – D.O. No. 167 C., Chaibasa, the 6th Oct 1924, from J.E. Scott to D.E. Dixon, File no. 268, 1924, Pol. Spl., BSA.

The response of the authorities, just like three years earlier, relied heavily on the assistance provided by the *mankis* and *mundas*. A circular was issued to all the *mankis*, demanding their active assistance and warning them that they will be held responsible if any ‘mischief’ occurs and goes unreported. They were also asked to launch a ‘counter-crusade’ in the region, explaining to the people the ‘folly of the present movement’ and ‘urge them to pay the tolls’.⁵⁶² The role played by the *mankis* and the *mundas*, and their efficacy to the authorities can be understood from the following story.

On 6th October, a person by the name of Landu Ho, described as ‘one of the main mischief makers’ was going to Chaibasa at night with 40 people to meet Bishun Mahuri. About 5 days back, the authorities had arrested several ‘ring leaders’ with the help of the headmen, and they were on the look-out for more such trouble makers. Landu Ho already had an arrest warrant against his name with regard to the agitation around the hat tolls. On his way, Landu Ho was apprehended by one of the *manki* named Dulu Manki⁵⁶³ and turned over to the authorities. The usual interrogation followed. While his interrogation was going on, a crowd of several people gathered around the officer’s bungalow where he was being kept. The officer and Dulu Manki stepped out to explain the government’s actions to them. As per the officer’s fortnightly report, they explained to them that the government had no intention of interfering in the religious aspect of the movement, be it adoption of Hindu religion, wearing of sacred threads or abandoning alcohol. It was only the anti-hat tolls and anti-rent campaigns that the government would not tolerate, and punish them for. The people who had gathered complained to him that the Gangaram Manki, the second most powerful *manki* in the region after Dulu, had caught, tied and beaten up innocent men in the region. The officer’s response to the people, and then the subsequent rationale for the same, exemplifies that the local authorities had more or less given the *mankis* and *mundas* a free hand to suppress the anti-tax campaign in the region. To quote from the report:

⁵⁶² Confidential – D.O. No. 165 C. Chaibasa, 2nd Oct 1924 from J.E. Scott to D.E. Dixon, Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 268, 1924, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁶³ An extremely influential *manki* in the region, whose influence D.N. Majumdar, as we observed in Chapter 2, had also noted.

I told them I did not believe the story and that the Manki had been told to arrest any person found creating a disturbance in the Hats. I have since seen Gangaram, who told me that he had found some persons creating disturbance and cleared them out of the hat. I have judged it wise not to exercise too close a supervision under the action of the loyal mankis and mundas, provided, of course, that no actual physical hurt is done. This I am satisfied has not occurred, and it seems to me that this is essentially a matter in which the Ho headmen must be supported, even if the action taken by themselves and the loyal Hos, who object to disturbances in the market, is somewhat rough and ready. It is much better that the Mankis should cuff the ears of one of these so called non-cooperators, mostly boys of 15 or 20, than that I should have to take legal proceedings against them, and possibly put them in prison for some months. Indeed I have stressed to the Mankis the necessity of taking strong action on their own initiative to stop the mischief. I trust this will have government's solid support.⁵⁶⁴

Several people who were found to be involved in the agitation in the market places were arrested. Though some of them were subsequently released, extensive trial proceedings were drawn up against Landu Ho and five others. During the trial, Mahuri came to visit them in court and at this juncture all the six prostrated themselves before him.⁵⁶⁵ Their arrest however made them into heroes in the eyes of the people. About 300 people attended their trial and a local Congress leader informed them their actions had been reported to Gandhi himself who had promised to visit Chaibasa soon. A local photographer photographed the heroes as they left court.⁵⁶⁶

The popularity of these 6 people, which owed to the popular nature of the issue they had picked up, not only led to their release from jail but also brought the attention of the Congress leadership to the issue. But the Congress, sensing the manner in which the matter had gone out of their hands, was in a bid to pacify the agitation. In a public meeting held in the region a few days after their release from jail, the Congress urged the people to “postpone the Satyagarh” and stated that they were bound to pay the taxes as

⁵⁶⁴Confidential – D.C. No. 167 C. Chaibasa, 6nd Oct 1924 from J.E. Scott to D.E. Dixon, Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 268, 1924, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁶⁵ Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Singhbhum for the week ending the 10th Oct, 1924, File no. 268, 1924, Political Special, BSA.

⁵⁶⁶ Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Singhbhum for the week ending the 22nd Oct, 1924, File no. 268, 1924, Political Special, BSA.

fixed by the government. In case the contractors proceeded to take more than what had been fixed by the government, the District Congress Committee, the speakers stated, would itself take the lead in carrying forward the agitation. In a class non-confrontationist Gandhian attitude, the speakers urged the people to remain steadfastly with the Congress constructive programmes and a resolution was passed asking Gandhi to visit the district and give 'impetus to non-violence and the use of Khadar and Charka.'⁵⁶⁷ The authorities, also, felt that the arrest of these leaders had more or less broken down the movement, and that 'peace' had returned to Kolhan. But as long as these local problems remained neither the police actions, nor even the appeals by the Congress could ensure the complete withdrawal of these several local agitations. In 1929, the local avatar of the non-cooperation movement, several years after it had been withdrawn by Gandhi, had returned to Kolhan, and one notices the same figures active again – Bishun Mahuri, Landu Ho, etc. A fortnightly report by the Commissioner informed the government that:

Bishun Ram Mahuri, a non-cooperator who gave trouble in the Kolhan some years ago has reappeared at village Kumirta. He has recently been released from jail in Keonjhar. It is reported that four or five Hos, including Nara Ho a dismissed headmen are his followers and he has been advocating opposition to Government, non-payment of hat dues and so on.⁵⁶⁸

By this period, alongside the issue of rents and market taxes the authorities were quite perturbed by the possibilities of a labour movement amongst the adivasis working in the local mines.⁵⁶⁹ Though these mining settlements were located either on the fringes or isolated amongst the reserved forests, the authorities feared that any agitation on this question would spread rapidly across the Kolhan.⁵⁷⁰ The response of the authorities to the possibilities of an anti-tax or a labour agitation was swift. The labour agitators were simply turned out of the region, while the anti-tax campaign was dealt with in the same

⁵⁶⁷ 'Kolhan Non Payment of Taxes – Trial of Ho Leaders', The Searchlight, Sunday, 9th Nov. 1924, File no. 268, 1924, Political Special, BSA.

⁵⁶⁸ Extract from Mr. J.R. Dain's fortnightly D.O. No. 102 T.C., dated the 26th May 1929, File no. 146, 1929, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁶⁹ Confidential D.O. No. 133 C., Jamshedpur, 3/4th Sep 1929 from T.A. Freston to J.R. Dain, Commnr. of the Chota Nagpur Division, File no. 146, 1929, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁷⁰ Confidential D.O. No. 273 C., Ranchi, 5/6th Sep. from J.R. Dain, Commnr of the Chota Nagpur Division to the H.K. Briscoe, Chief Secy to the Govt., File no. 146, 1929, Pol. Spl., BSA.

old manner, i.e., with the assistance of the headmen. Dulu Manki and Gangaram Manki, who we had noticed playing an extremely oppressive role five years back, were once again active to check the spread the movement.⁵⁷¹

The discussion above unsettles any attempt to situate these movements within a simple trope of the insider vis-à-vis the outsiders, or as Sanjukta Dasgupta tries to argue as an attempt on the part of Hos to strengthen the sense of tribal identity and gain in self-respect vis-à-vis non-Hos.⁵⁷² Such a reading is only a result of an uncritical acceptance of the framework in which the colonial archive casts the Hos and other adivasi communities. In the eyes of the colonial authorities, the Ho villages reflected a harmonious ordered life of the community. The ‘petty agitators’ most of whom were neither Hos, nor came from Singhbhum, were disturbing this ordered life of Ho villages by spreading falsehoods against the government.⁵⁷³ The colonial attempt was to ‘restore’ the order of the community by empowering the traditional leadership of the Hos to check the growth of the movement.⁵⁷⁴ They in turn were rewarded and commended for their services to the Raj.

In a way, the colonial attempts to suppress these sporadic movements were similar to their strategies employed about a century back during the counter-insurgency rebellions to suppress the Kol rebellion which had also relied on the traditional leadership of the Hos. But unlike a century back, the *mankis* and the *mundas* were by this period firmly entrenched as the local eyes and ears of the state. As one report pointed out, the *mankis* and *mundas* were opposed to these movements as it lead to a defiance of their authority and withholding of rents.⁵⁷⁵ The latter point is especially important. The income of the headmen, which was based on the commission on the total rent collected, was

⁵⁷¹ (Extract from Mr. J.R. Dain’s fortnightly D.O. No. 45 C., dated the 22nd February 1929) File no. 146, 1929, Political Special, BSA.

⁵⁷² Dasgupta, *Adivasis and The Raj*, p. 279.

⁵⁷³ As we have seen above, the fact that people like PhulchandDusadh or SatyabadiNand did not share any racial, regional or linguistic affinity with the Hos were seen as important reasons to prosecute them harshly. The adivasis, seen as gullible and child-like who had only been led astray could be forgiven through warnings. But these ‘petty agitators and their dupes’ were to be sternly dealt with through harsh penal measures.

⁵⁷⁴ Anonymous note dated 3rd June 1929) File no. 146, 1929, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁷⁵ (Extract from Mr. J.R. Dain’s fortnightly D.O. No. 45 C., dated the 22nd February 1929) File no. 146, 1929, Political Special, BSA.

dependent on the collection of rents. At a time when most of the movements took on the character of an anti-rent campaign, these sections had an additional economic interest in curbing these spread of these movement. Dasgupta also states that these movements cannot be interpreted solely in terms of subaltern autonomy, and that there was considerable interaction between elite and sub-altern politics.⁵⁷⁶ While that claim is indeed true, Dasgupta limits the examination of this interaction to that between local leaders active in the region and the district or national leadership of the Congress. There is no effort to locate the interaction between the traditional elite and their counterparts within the Ho, and also the convergence of a section the local elites with the colonial state. An analysis of the latter is only possible if one remains intuitive to the structural transformations colonial rule had brought about within local communities, which had led to the convergence of the interests of a section of local elite with that of the state.

These convergences were apparent during settlement operations which traditional elite, as we had seen in Chapter 3, used to improve their position within the local communities. These were just as visible when the people, whom these settlement operations had marginalized or the ones who had remained outside the pale of any protection, protested against their grievances. Protest and movements were however, not the only manner in which the excluded and the marginalized sections attempted to improve their position. There were other means too, as the subsequent section points out.

Section II

Refashioning Hierarchies through Religious Reform: The Cult of Haribaba

The adoption of Hindu religious practices in some form or the other was clearly discernible in all the agitations that took place in the region during and after the non-cooperation movement, which we dealt with in the previous section. In the subsequent decades, this impact was much more apparent with the rise of several movements which advocated a rejection of the adivasi ‘sarna’ religion and adoption of new cults borrowed from Hinduism. One of the most prominent of these was the Haribaba movement, which spread in northern Singhbhum and subsequently to Ranchi between the 1931 and 1932

⁵⁷⁶ Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*, p. 293.

and drew the Hos, Mundas and Oraons into its fold. Barring some initial efforts of the people who had been active in the previous decade to once again start an anti-rent campaign⁵⁷⁷, the Haribaba movement largely emphasized complete obedience to law. This compliance to law, however, did not stop the colonial authorities from suppressing the movement. The Christian missions active in the region were especially quite anxious with the spread of the cult, which led to many of their converts joining it. They prepared exaggerated and even false reports about seditious activities happening in the garb of the new religion, and urged the authorities to curb it. However, the reasons for colonial suppression of the new cult, as we will see in this section, went beyond just the religious anxieties of the missionaries.

A person by the name of Duka Ho, took on the name of Haribaba and gathered a few followers around him. They were asked to give up alcohol and beef and take up vegetarianism and worship of Hanuman and the tulsi plant. The adoption of these kind of religious practices was not new amongst the adivasis of Chota Nagpur, and in the initial phases of the movement the colonial authorities described it as a ‘religious revival’ copied from the ideas of Sibu Santal. A couple of years back, a witch-doctor by the name of Sibu Santal in the region of Dhalbhum in Singhbhum had started preaching vegetarianism amongst Santals asking them to lead ‘moral lives.’ He claimed to be inspired by various Gods, especially on the full moon night of the month. On one occasion, his preachings had created a ‘serious riot’ when he tried to approach the tigers in the forests ostensibly to pray to the tiger god. In official descriptions he was described as mad, but they also noted that he was held in great respect by a very large number of Santals.⁵⁷⁸

The Haribaba movement, however, went far beyond the ‘religious revivalism’ of SibuSantal. The movement was aimed at ‘purifying’ the Hos by driving out evil spirits and ghosts from their villages. An elaborate list of undesirable items that attracted the ghosts into the villages was drawn up and the people were asked to remove them from

⁵⁷⁷ Extract from the confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Singhbhum, for the period ending 8.1.32, File no. 55, 1932, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁷⁸ Extract from the confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Singhbhum, for the period ending 22.9.30, File no. 217, 1930, Pol. Spl., BSA.

their homes and bring them to the sacred groves. At these sacred groves, locally known as *jahiras*, a *puja ghar* was constructed where the worship of the new religion was carried out. On one occasion, when a colonial officer stopped the *puja*, and broke up the *puja ghar* in the *jahira*, he found ‘a miscellaneous collection of anything under the sun from paddy, old musical instruments, lizards and dead rats.’ These were items that the people had themselves brought into the *jahira* thinking that they contained evil spirits.⁵⁷⁹ Duka Ho, along with two others, was arrested quite early after the spread of the new religion on the grounds that this new cult started by him had ‘resulted with interference and molestation of non-aboriginals’.⁵⁸⁰

The arrest of the figure of the Haribaba, Duka Ho did not however lead to the decline of the movement. Instead, after his arrest his wife, Nani Kui took on the mantle of spreading the new faith and she took on the name of Hari Mai. The Hari Mai was believed to have super-natural powers which could grant the wishes of the people, and heal the sick. People travelled long distances to take ‘secret water’ from her, known as Hari Pani, and in turn she took an oath from them to follow the instruction of Haribaba and not to create any breach of peace.⁵⁸¹ The latter part is especially interesting, as at one point of time when there were appeals from certain sections to suppress the new religion on account of it being ‘seditious’, an officer said that there was little grounds to take action as the new followers had received instructions to be ‘law abiding’.⁵⁸² Hari-Ma took written agreements from the followers stating that they would not interfere in the least with other persons and they would not disobey the government in any way. A breach of these conditions would lead to the forfeiture of Rs. 40 as a penalty.⁵⁸³ The bond signed at the time of inducting new followers into the new faith also warned them against future desertion. They were told they would be fined Rs. 100 by the government, Rs. 25 by the landlord and Rs. 5 by the village panchayat in case they left the Haribaba faith. On one

⁵⁷⁹ A Short Account of the Haribaba Movement by the Deputy Commissioner, Singhbhum, dated 22nd Jan. 1932, File no. 55, 1932, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Ranchi, dated the 1st May 1932, Ibid.

⁵⁸² A Short Account of the Haribaba Movement by the Dep. Commnr., Singhbhum, Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

occasion, a local officer warned Hari-Mai against such invocation of the government's name.⁵⁸⁴

Nani Kui established an *akhara* for her followers in the forests of Manoharpur. This area fell under a *lakhiraj* tenure of a person called Babu Birkishori Singh. In this *akhara*, she employed a local man by the name of Baijnath Ganju, a local tiger trapper, as the *munshi* to maintain records of her followers and the details of their agreements, villages, etc. At one point of time, the authorities zeroed in on these two people to figure out as to whether there was any financial motive to this new cult and the people joining it? Investigations revealed that Hari Mai took very little money from the new followers, for which she had one and two anna postage stamps on all the agreements. It was said that there was no sign of Ganju having made anything 'more than free food and a few paisa' as the *munshi* for the Hari Mai. Birkishori Singh, on the other hand stated that he had allowed the Hari Mai to establish an *akhara* in his areas, hoping that she would work an oracle for him. He would send his wife to Hari Mai hoping that her supernatural powers would make his wife conceive a son. Neither did he take any money as rent for the use of his area as the *akhara*, nor did Hari-Mai ever create any difficulties in his rent collections.⁵⁸⁵

Hari Mai's popularity however continued to grow and in this period the Haribaba movement also spread beyond Singhbhum into the adjoining district of Ranchi. A complaint registered in a police station in the Ranchi district revealed the manner in which the new cult attacked the older religious practices of the adivasis. In the month of April in 1932, in two separate incidents the followers of the new religion went around in different villages, blowing conches and dug out the places of worship of the mundas. This resulted in altercations between the villagers and these followers of the new faith. The villagers filed a report with the police, following which these seven people were arrested and charged with various offences pertaining to unlawful assembly and insulting religious feelings. These seven people on the other hand, confessed to having dug out these places

⁵⁸⁴ Extract from Mr. J.A. Hubback's fortnightly D.O. no. 270 T.C., dated the 12th May 1932, Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ A Short Account of Haribaba Movement by the Dep. Commnr, Singhbhum, dated 22nd Jan 1932, Ibid.

of worship, but stated that they did it ‘not to wound the religious feelings of others but with the object of catching ghosts as directed by Harimai.’⁵⁸⁶

There were more incidents of similar attacks on the sarna faith of the adivasis. Bands of followers of the new faith would enter into villages and proceed to dig up the worship place or would simply take away the idols of the gods which the locals worshipped. Another complaint filed a month and a half after the above mentioned occurrence described one such scene:

For the last three months all the ryots of the village have taken to the worship of the Harimai and 30 to 40 men go via village Basartoli and worship Harimai. For the last fortnight all the villagers who are the followers of the Harimai, have been going about with drums, bells and conches. They go to the banyan tree, hold the idols of the Mahadeo and drive out ghosts. On the evening of 29th July, Bandhan Chik and Tuku Ghansi informed him that the Harimai worshippers of Basartoli, Suia Bhagat, Thunu Bhagat and 15 to 20 others had come to the Bar ‘tanr’ beating drums and ringing bells and were taking away the biggest idol of Mahadeo. At this time he was taking his evening meal. On hearing this, he with Bandhana Chik, Tuku Ghasi, Jharia Rautia and 8 or 10 others of the village started for the Mahadeosthan, raising an alarm, to forbid the followers of Harimai to do so. On arriving there he found the largest idol removed and the place dug up. He also saw the followers going away towards Basartoli beating drums. He overtook them at Dari ‘done’ and asked them to return the idol to him but they refused. Thuru Bhagat and Chogta Bhagat raising their left hands said that they had received orders to keep the idol at the place of their worship and to worship it. They said that, if he and his son went there, they would be assaulted. They all had lathis in their hands and were dancing as they went. After seeing their attitude, he returned to his village and held a panchayats at which it was decided that they would go again and asked them to return the idol and if they did not do so the matter should be reported at the police station. They said that they had no order to return it and that if they persisted they would go and bring the idols also.⁵⁸⁷

Many of these idols which were removed from the worship places within the villages were placed in the puja ghars built by the Hari Mai. In another instance, the

⁵⁸⁶ Ranchi S.R. Case no. 52 of 1932, Report no. II dated 11.5.1932, File no. 55, 1932, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁸⁷ Copy of station diary entry no. 282 dated 30.6.1932, Ibid.

Haribaba followers attacked the house of a person claiming that his wife was a witch.⁵⁸⁸ In some instances, the Haribaba followers would gather in front of the houses of people unsympathetic to the new faith and start beating brass kettles.⁵⁸⁹ A few months after the arrest of Duka Ho, Nani Kui was also arrested on grounds of disturbing public tranquility. But the movement did not come to an end even with her arrest. Within a few months of the arrest of the original Hari Mai, many new Hari Mais had come up in the region claiming super-natural powers. One of these new Hari Mai spoke in Hindi and Oriya. The latter is especially interesting, and as we had also noted in Chapter 2 while discussing Majumdar's work and his descriptions of adoption of similar other 'Hindu' cults by Hos, there was an increasing presence of Oriyas oghas in the region who had, at times, come to exercise powers even over the *mankis* and *mundas*.

A large section of the local authorities, despite being uncomfortable with the very eccentric Haribaba faith, hoped that this 'politically insignificant' movement would die a natural death.⁵⁹⁰ However, a few others felt that the movement had a distinct political character and was firmly 'anti-Christian' and 'anti-Muhammadan.'⁵⁹¹ Such opinions were also a result of the often exaggerated and even false reports that the Christian missionaries active in the region forwarded to the authorities about the 'seditious' nature of the movement, asking for government intervention. For example, one of the Roman Catholic missions active in the Tamar region forwarded a report to the government saying that the Haribaba followers were singing 'seditious songs' with verses such as "*Angrezi Bahadur Noy, Gandhi Mahtoji jai, Haribabaki jai.*"⁵⁹² The Superintendent of Police clandestinely sent police constables in plainclothes to the region to ascertain these claims, but their reports could not corroborate any such claim of 'political' and 'seditious' songs.

The specific slogans invoked by the missionaries are extremely interesting, as they reveal the manner in which the missionaries simply picked up the slogans of the

⁵⁸⁸ Let. no. 277 T.C. dated 16th May 1932, Ranchi, from J.A. Hubback, Commnr of Chota Nagpur Division to P.C. Tallents, Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Extract from Mr. J.A. Hubback's fortnightly D.O. no. 270 T.C., dated the 12th May 1932, Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Extract from Mr. A.R. Toplis' fortnightly D.O. no. 338 – T.C., dated the 25th June 1932, Ibid.

⁵⁹² Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Ranchi, dated the 1st May 1932, Ibid.

previous decade. Back then, the authorities had cited these slogans as evidence of the seditious nature of the activities of the non-cooperators to suppress the anti-rent and anti-tax campaigns. The missionaries hoped that citing such slogans in their reports would once again move the government into quick action to suppress the Haribaba movement. However, the government was averse to the use of any special measures to suppress the movement. Their only concern was to see to that the Congress does not get hold of the movement, which it was hardly interested in.⁵⁹³ The Superintendent of Police commented that ‘the anxiety of the missionaries that government should take preventive action is due to the fact that, in some areas, their converts have been seduced from Christianity to the worship of Haribaba.’⁵⁹⁴

The anxieties of the missionaries and the local Christians at times took the form of a direct attack on the new faith. One incident is particularly interesting, for it reveals not just the wedge between the Christians and the Haribaba followers, but also the manner in which those calling for a more direct suppression of the movement were able to prevail upon the other officials who advocated a somewhat milder approach. In the middle of the June 1932, a complaint was filed by the Haribaba followers accusing a local Christian of having attacked their places of worship. The complaint stated:

...we are worshippers of ‘Hari Mai’ and made some images of ‘Hari Mai’ in a hut built in the month of ‘Saon’ in order to worship her. We worship her every morning and evening. Yesterday, at about 5 pm, one Chote Christian came there and said that his religion was better than mine. On hearing this I replied that his religion is better for him and my religion is better for me. Upon this he entered into the hut and kicked off the two images....I caught hold of Chote and raised an alarm, and, on hearing this many villagers assembled and found Chote there. I detained him and went to report the matter at Bassia police station....Chote is still detained there till the arrival of the police (*sic*). Chote kicked off our images and thereby insulted our religion. This is my statement, and an enquiry may be made.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹³ (Letter no. 277 T.C. dated 16th May 1932, Ranchi, from J.A. Hubback, Commissioner of Chota Nagpur Division to P.C. Tallents, Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Bihar and Orissa) File no. 55, 1932, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁵⁹⁴ Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Ranchi, dated the 1st May 1932, Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ranchi S.R. Case no. 71/1932, Report no. I dated 15.6.1932, Ibid.

Chote Christian, a local convert supported by the missions, in turn filed a counter-complaint against the people who had accused him. Denying that he had kicked their places of worship, his complaint stated that he had been assaulted with lathis by the villagers, and forcibly detained in a hut for a week.⁵⁹⁶ In his version, he was merely standing by the side of the hut to see what the worshippers of Haribaba were doing when he was seized upon by Haribaba followers and beaten simply because ‘he, being a Christian, had stood by the side of the place of their worship.’⁵⁹⁷

Beginning its investigation into the case, the police visited the site of occurrence and spoke to the two parties and the list of witnesses each summoned in their support. The site of occurrence revealed broken idols, thrown about by the side of the hut and local villagers corroborated the complainant’s claim that Chote Christian had broken these idols. The investigating officer then proceeded to examine Chote’s claims. The injury marks on his body were found to be too narrow to have been caused by lathis. On the other hand, all of his witnesses contradicted each other. One of them said that she had seen Chote being detained by the villagers, but did not see any assault. Another denied any knowledge of the occurrence. A week later, he added the name of three more witnesses. The first of these was also not forthcoming in his support and stated that that he had not visited the site of the incident on that day and had merely informed Chote’s son about the incident, when he heard of it. The other two witnesses were Father Schill of Nawatoli Mission and Chote’s son Johan who sent written depositions to the investigation officer about the assault on Chote. The latter could not stand his ground when he was cross examined.⁵⁹⁸

In the light of all these discrepancies, it was an open and shut case for the investigation officer. There was no evidence regarding the assault on Chote by the villagers except his own statements. As far his detention by villagers was concerned, the villagers were ‘clearly justified under the law’ in detaining Chote considering his ‘extraordinary’ conduct on the day. Moreover, the villagers promptly reported the matter

⁵⁹⁶ Ranchi S.R. Case no. 72/1932, Report no. I dated 15.6.1932, Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Ranchi S.R. Case no. 71/1932, Report no. II dated 28.6.1932, Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

and handed him over to the police as soon as possible.⁵⁹⁹ While proceeding towards charge-sheeting Chote for trespassing and insulting the religious sentiments of Haribaba followers, the investigating officer also tried to explain the rationale behind Chote's actions. Chote's brother in law had recently converted from Christianity to the worship of Haribaba and as per the IO, 'this may have been rankling in his mind.'⁶⁰⁰

When the matter came up for hearing, the court reversed the entire investigation of the local police. The judge questioned the villagers for not bringing the broken idols with them to the thana and stated that they had themselves destroyed the idols and implicated Chote in the case. In a self-contradictory manner, while on the one hand the judge accepted the son and brother in law of Chote as credible witnesses in his support, on the other he rejected the villagers' statements stating that they were all related to each other and were also 'new and enthusiastic' followers of the Haribaba faith. In this and other ways, the judge built up a story of a lonely Christian who had been surrounded on all sides by villagers passionate with their 'new fangled reformation.'⁶⁰¹ The magistrate acquitted Chote of all the charges that the police had drawn up against him. The investigation officer was left befuddled with the entire trial and stated that instances such as not bringing the destroyed idols to the thana was a usual practice to allow the police to see such 'exhibits' at the scene of occurrence when they come there. He stated that the magistrate had simply accepted the version of Chote without 'submitting it to a critical examination'.⁶⁰² However, this judgement which was blatantly against the Haribaba followers, can only be understood by beyond merely the legal framework.

It was not merely the missionary anxieties that the judge, in this case, was trying to cater to. The colonial authorities had their own share of anxieties, which the local police's reports do not bring out. The police on its part was merely concerned with ensuring peace and tranquility, and it was therefore no surprise that they did not advocate any large scale suppression as the movement never took on anti-rent and anti-tax

⁵⁹⁹ He accepted the villagers' plea that they could not hand him over on the same night, as the S.I. was away in this period. As soon as he returned, the villagers handed over Chote to him.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Judgement – *Etwa Oraon vs Chota Paulus Oraon*, Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ranchi S.R. Case no. 71 of 1932, Report no. VII (Final) dated 10.9.1932, Ibid.

campaign. However, the changes within the internal dynamics of the adivasi communities, made the situation slightly uncomfortable for the authorities even if the movement did not take the character of an anti-rent campaign. Initial reports from Singhbhum had pointed out that a section that was particularly drawn into the movement were the headmen who had been dismissed from their positions in the previous decade for their participation in Congress activities. They were particularly keen to diminish the authority of the established *mankis* and *mundas* and rise in authorities.⁶⁰³ At one point of time, the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur while replying to a question asked by their officials in Ranchi, had stated that movement in Singhbhum could always on influential support in the region as it contributing to diminishing the authority of the village headmen. While it shows how the headmen had become unpopular in the region, it also shows the efficacy of these headmen for colonial administration. Just like in the previous decade, the authorities in Singhbhum once again relied on the help of the headmen to suppress the new cult.

The movement when it spread to Ranchi counted on the support of the village priest or the *deuri*. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the colonial intervention in the region had reversed the role and importance of the village priests vis-à-vis the headmen in significant ways within the social organization of the Mundas. While the headmen (for their importance to the colonial rule as rent collector and local police officers) had become influential and powerful, the village priests had being relegated. These ‘religious’ movements offered them another opportunity to raise their status within their communities and villages.

The Haribaba movement did not take the form of an anti-rent, anti-tax campaign or concern itself with questions of labour and forest reservation. Even then, it was suspiciously viewed as having the potential of unleashing a large disturbance in the region. This suspicion was largely due to the refashioning of the internal hierarchies within the adivasi communities that the Haribaba movement had led to. As the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum commented once,

⁶⁰³ A Short Account of the Haribaba Movement by the Dep. Commnr, Singhbhum, dated 22nd Jan 1932, Ibid.

...the first immediate danger in the movement was the fact that it would inevitably tend to draw away the allegiance of the ordinary Ho from his more enlightened and intelligent leaders to the ignorant and mischievous. Once that state of affairs was arrived at real control and stability would be gone and the ground would be ready for any sort of mischief.⁶⁰⁴

The system of governing the Hos through their traditional structures of authority had worked admirably well for the British. These sections, right from the time of the Kol rebellion to even the several movements in the 1920s and 1930s provided them the modicum of ensuring peace and order in the region. The colonial authority were particularly keen to guard the authority of the headmen in the villages, as it was through them that British empire operated itself within this adivasi hinterland.

Section III

Carving Out a New Identity: The Rise of ‘Adivasi’ Politics in Singhbhum

In the last section of this chapter, we look at the rise of a new ‘adivasi’ movement that was spearheaded by the Jaipal Singh led Adivasi Mahasabha, and its precursor Unnati Samaj (Chota Nagpur Improvement Society). The last years of colonial rule leading up to the transfer of power witnessed several contentions about the future of the adivasis in post-colonial India, and who would represent the adivasis of the region. On the one hand, the Congress had continued to claim itself as the sole representatives of all the Indian people. But, the likes of Jaipal Singh and others contended this claim by pointing to the ‘non-adivasi’ character of the Congress and instead claimed that they, as adivasis were the rightful representatives of the people of Chota Nagpur. The Congress was also opposed to the main demand articulated by these new representatives of the adivasis, which was the constitution of Chota Nagpur as a separate province, by separating it from Bihar. Moreover, the formation of Congress ministries in Bihar was shown as evidence of its ‘complicity’ in the suppression of the demands of the adivasis. Consisting of an urban section who had received modern education in the mission schools, the likes of Jaipal Singh could stake a claim in the various proceedings, while the organization that he set up could effectively bolster these claims by mass mobilizations

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

on the ground. In their efforts to carve out their space in the deliberations of these years, we also notice an effort by Jaipal Singh and his associates to articulate a distinct identity of the adivasis. And in this endeavour, they were not averse to borrowing from the knowledge on the ‘tribes’ that had been produced by the British over the past century. However, since our main argument has pointed to the internally fractured nature of the adivasis communities, we would examine the several tensions involved in this articulation of a new adivasi identity.

An anonymous note written sometime in July 1947 seemed to suggest the fear of an administration that saw itself as losing its grip over the region on the eve of the transfer of power:

The situation in Singhbhum (like Santhal Parganas) is full of anxiety. It will be wrong to think that the primitive organization of the adivasis is as vital today as it was a few years back. The Mankis of Kolhan and Parganaits of Damin in Santhal Parganas are either losing their authority or are being led to support undesirable movements.⁶⁰⁵

The immediate context of this note was two instances of police firing on protesting adivasis who were agitated around the issue of forcible seizure of grain as per the Paddy Levy Order of the government. As per the order, farmers owning more than 25 acres of land and production of above 200 maunds of rice were required to part with a portion of their harvest at a price determined by the state to add to the government’s grain reserve. This had remained extremely unpopular move and seemed to have been violently resisted on many instances.

In April 1947, when the Assistant Food Officer, responsible for enforcing the grain seizures, was returning from Gitilpi village, he was besieged by a large group of adivasis armed with bows and arrows. On the following day, when the SDO, with an armed force, went there, he too reportedly was faced with a violent group of adivasis armed with arrows and bows. It seemed to have reached a stage when he had to resort to firing to disperse them. Then again merely ten days later, the SDO visited Gamharia village to search the house of one Sarda Doraiburu. They seemed to have been violently

⁶⁰⁵ Anonymous letter, dated 12.7.1947, File no. 770 of 1947, Firing at Gamaria Kolhan in the district of Singhbhum in connection with the seizure of paddy, Political Special, BSA

resisted not just by the family members but also by a swelling crowd of armed villagers. They were finally dispersed when the armed forces threatened to fire. Again in May, when the SDO went to the same spot to seize grain, it seems, they were yet again faced with violent opposition with arrows and brickbats being hurled onto them. This time the SDO ordered firing leading to the death of one woman, and injuring two other women.⁶⁰⁶ The anticipated backlash and unrest in fact gives us the opportunity to get a more nuanced sense of the various forces and undercurrents at play in this region, and their subsequent attempts to carve out a new adivasi identity to bargain with the state, that by then had come of age. We will reach there.

Meanwhile it is important to note that while a section of the officialdom defended the firings despite its unfortunate outcome as a necessary exercise to “enforce respect for law and order” which they believed was fast ebbing⁶⁰⁷; a significant section however were of the belief that the adivasis had certain genuine grievances that ought to have been addressed so as to effectively curb the influence of “undesirable forces”.⁶⁰⁸ Above all, the apprehension was that certain adivasi organizations and the Muslim League were keen to “exploit to the full” these economic grievances of the adivasis and were “apparently determined to do mischief”.⁶⁰⁹ The Commissioner of Chota Nagpur Division, for instance, underlined his fears saying that certain elements may make “political capital” out of the instance of firings particularly considering the dead and the injured were all women. He advised that enquiries should be made to ascertain the activities of the Adivasi Mahasabha and the Muslim League. He expressed concerns regarding what he considered as “wild speeches” that were reportedly being made in Adivasi Mahasabha

⁶⁰⁶ Correspondence from Deputy Commissioner’s Office, Chaibasa to Commissioner of Chota Nagpur Division, dated 23.5.1947, Firing on a riotous mob at Gamaria in Kolhan Estate on 18.5.1947, D.O. No. 110/C, File no. 770 of 1947, Firing at Gamaria Kolhan in the district of Singhbhum in connection with the seizure of paddy, Political Special, BSA

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ This section, for example, contended that this part of Singhbhum was already a “deficit area” and hence no collection should have been made here. Moreover, they also questioned the timing of the paddy seizures which did not take into account the agrarian seasons of Singhbhum, adding to the woes of the people. And finally, there were rampant abuses in the operation of the order that included malpractices resorted to by the purchasing agents and government officials which have “contributed to intensify the adivasi hostilities towards paddy levy scheme” Correspondence from Chief Secretary to Bihar Government, Report from DIG, CID, dated 11.6.1947, File no. 770 of 1947, Firing at Gamaria Kolhan in the district of Singhbhum in connection with the seizure of paddy, Political Special, BSA

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

meetings and feared that the agitation may soon spread to Ranchi.⁶¹⁰ Commenting on the anti-paddy levy agitations, the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, Mr. K.N. Singh categorically observed that the attitude of the adivasis became particularly militant after the Ranchi Conference of the Adivasi Mahasabha. The ultimate aim of such forces, as ascertained by the state officials was: “getting Chota Nagpur separated from the rest of Bihar, and ...creating an impression on the Backward Areas Committee of the Constituent Assembly, which is expected to visit Chota Nagpur in the near future.”⁶¹¹ The Deputy Commissioner, even stated, that the entire agitation was masterminded by those who had been influenced by the Adivasi Mahasabha:

It may be mentioned that two of the ring leaders [of the anti grain seizure agitation] Ankura Doraiburu and Jugal Kishor Lagura are educated persons; Ankura has read up to the 12th standard and was for sometime as a school teacher in Jagannathpur H.E. School and J.K. Lagura is still a student of the 1st year of the Science College. It is obvious that they are at the root of the trouble. They had also attended the last Adibasi Conference at Ranchi.⁶¹²

This brings us to the agenda of the Adivasi Mahasabha, its origin, history and evolution. And simultaneously this brings us to the idea of a separate Chota Nagpur or Jharkhand and the idea of identity that they had been articulating. Though the ones who seemed to be taking lead in expressing this idea were the missionary educated Christian adivasis, but they claimed to represent the will and interest of the adivasi community at large as a distinct political category. This claim as we would analyze subsequently was based not only on a shared history of exploitation, marginalization and dispossession, but also on the invocation of an idea of a shared glorious past. They stressed, for instance, that on every phase of life and culture the adivasis were a different people and hence

⁶¹⁰ Correspondence from Commissioner of Chota Nagpur Division to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Patna, D.C. No. 29/TC, Camp Jamshedpur, dated 20.5.1947, File no. 770 of 1947, Firing at Gamaria Kolhan in the district of Singhbhum in connection with the seizure of paddy, Political Special, BSA

⁶¹¹ Correspondence from Chief Secretary to Bihar Government, Report from DIG, CID, dated 11.6.1947, File no. 770 of 1947, Firing at Gamaria Kolhan in the district of Singhbhum in connection with the seizure of paddy, Political Special, BSA

⁶¹² Correspondence from Deputy Commissioner's Office, Chaibasa to Commissioner of Chota Nagpur Division, dated 23.5.1947, Firing on a riotous mob at Gamaria in Kolhan Estate on 18.5.1947, D.O. No. 110/C, File no. 770 of 1947, Firing at Gamaria Kolhan in the district of Singhbhum in connection with the seizure of paddy, Political Special, BSA

should be left to look into their own affairs. “The land, the system of agriculture, living, fooding and everything was different.” Even in their cultural expression or dance forms there was a marked difference. Hence, “there was no reason why the adivasis should be controlled and ruled by people who are completely unconservant with these things,” said the President of Adivasi Mahasabha Mr. Herman Lakra. The target of the attack was specifically the Bihar Congress that was vehemently opposed to an idea of a tribal abode of Jharkhand separated from Bihar. He reportedly added that “However capable a foreigner be, he could not succeed in ruling another country’s people and this was the case with Congress.”⁶¹³

Drawing heavily from the narratives of colonial anthropologists and even the likes of S.C. Roy, the leaders of the Adivasi Mahasabha traced the origins of the Adivasis as the “original residents of India” in comparison to the Aryans and the Muslims who were all cast as outsiders. The adivasis, they claimed were pushed out of the Indus Valley by the infiltrating outsiders which forced them to settle in the safer and forested tracts of Chotanagpur. Being the “primitive owners of India”, the adivasis, they claimed “held the right not only for equal partnership, but the first place in the administration of the country.” Being absolutely different from North Bihar geographically, historically, culturally, linguistically and from tribal point of view, they proclaimed that unless they were given the reigns of a separate province of Jharkhand, the aboriginals in India would forever be denied the taste of true liberty. It is because of the above “natural difference”, they claimed, that Chotanagpur had been given its own and a separate tenancy act and the status of Excluded Areas. Under the rule of the non-aboriginals, they said that these special status were all under attack as amendments to the detriment of the interest of the advasis were being promulgated without any consultation with the community. It is rather remarkable that even on the eve of independence there was a section of Adivasis who found so little stake in the emergent imagination of the nation so as to proclaim that they no longer can suffer a “foreign rule exercised on Jharkhand which is prepared by our ancestors’ sweat”. The foreigner they referred to here was not the British, but

⁶¹³ Report by Sub Inspector of Police, Bihar Special Branch, CID, on Adibasi meeting held at Bazar Tand, Simdega, Ranchi, dated 24.2.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, Pol. Spl, BSA

representatives of the Bihar Congress. And, they demanded that the Governor takes over the complete reign in the adivasi tracts till the creation of Jharkhand as a separate province in due recognition of their “natural difference”.⁶¹⁴ Castigating the Congress for its opposition to the demand of separate statehood, one of their leaders exclaimed:

The Britishers amalgamated Chotanagpur with Bihar. They could be excused as they were foreigners, but the Congress Ministry of Bihar should realize it and should have, by now, separated Jharkhand from the rest of Bihar.⁶¹⁵

This very idea of “natural difference” drew heavily from the rule of “colonial difference” that the British deployed in establishing indirect rule over areas that were distinctly tribal. They advocated the colonial ideology of primitivism to distinguish tribal areas from the “mainstream” caste society. And the educated adivasis drew upon the history of exception to articulate their political stakes and borders on the eve of independence. The crucial difference was that the British used the logic of primitivism so as to suggest that the adivasis were too “backward”, too far behind in the developmental or “civilizational scale” to allow for any principle of representation to be applicable. The “modern tribal subjects-in-the-making”, as Uday Chandra points out, however, both used and pushed the limits of primitivism. Because beyond protectionism and development, what they demanded was self-rule. They wanted the adivasis to represent their own interests legislatively instead of being ill-represented, overlooked or exploited by the non-aboriginals (the Biharis, the Oriyas or the Bengalis).⁶¹⁶

What was being articulated by the Adivasi Mahasabha in terms of their demand for a separate Jharkhand in 1940s was in fact not new. In this respect, their predecessor was the *Unnati Samaj*. The *Unnati Samaj* in fact marked the beginning of what one may call “urban associational politics” in Chotanangpur, “seeking interdenominational and intra-tribal unity to articulate common aims for the region as a whole”. These were educated Christian tribals who voiced the need to have a united voice for the collective

⁶¹⁴ Representation of Adibasi Thana Sabha to the Governor of Bihar, Memo No 1193 – 4 S, dated 6.5.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, Pol. Spl., BSA.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Uday Chandra. *Negotiating Leviathan*, p 218.

interests of the adivasis who were represented as a homogenous identity. The clearest instance of the same was visible in the adivasi delegation to the Simon Commission in 1928 that was supported by the Unnati Samaj. They were the ones to have been the first to consciously lay a stake over their future on terms of a certain “lost golden past” based on the writings sympathetic colonial officials, missionaries and anthropologists of the likes of Dalton, Hoffman, and S.C. Roy.⁶¹⁷ They were also the ones who served as the precursors of the Adivasi Mahasabha in terms of formulating the demand for a Greater Chota Nagpur (which later was referred as Jharkhand). Based on the borrowed notion of a racial, cultural and linguistic affinity, they demanded that this adivasi majority area should have its own legislative council and ministers as also separate judicial and executive services. They despised the fact that the representatives in the provincial assembly for Chotanagpur districts was dominated by those from the Bihari landed gentry who were all non-tribals. However, at the end of the day, as in Montague Chelmsford reforms in 1918, again in 1928 under Simon and once in the Government of India Act 1935, the colonial state remained steadfast in their own idea of primitivism wherein they maintained that “there was no political material” for representative politics to emerge in these tribal or Scheduled Areas.⁶¹⁸ They stated every time that the stage of development amongst these primitive people does not allow for the adoption of representative politics as was applicable in the “more civilized” or caste-Hindu areas of the empire.

The most articulate voice of this demand to emerge in the last decade of British rule was that of Jaipal Singh Munda, or the Moreng Gomke (the great leader). He along with the other Adivasi Mahasabha leaders carried forward the agenda of the Unnati Samaj through the 1940s. These were years when it was evident to many that the curtain was being drawn on the days of the empire, but at the same time there were anxieties galore in the minds of the various minorities and regional identities about their fate in the future India. Like the Muslims, the Dalits, the Anglo-Indians and so on, certain representatives claiming to represent the adivasis of Chota Nagpur and other parts of Central and Eastern India were also negotiating for their safeguards and interests. And for many of them, more than the outgoing British, the immediate threat was the possibility of

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., pp 209-10.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., p 219.

a transfer of power to an upper caste dominant Hindu leadership that would continue to discriminate against and exploit them. This apprehension was best voiced by Jaipal Singh when he said that the “troubles will actually begin when the British have quitted. There will be fighting on all sides and it will be very difficult for the 30 million Adivasis to come to their own.”⁶¹⁹

In the context of Chota Nagpur, part of the province of the Bihar, the main and the most immediate adversary that the Mahasabha had to deal with was the Bihar Congress. Even the intelligence reports stated that the Adivasi Mahasabha leaders spoke of their struggle against British and Congress governments interchangeably at times.⁶²⁰ Julius Tiga for instance was reportedly heard saying that “there was only one difference between the Congress Government and the British Government and that was that the former could do more harm to them than the latter. The Congress claimed to be the popular and the people’s Government which was not a fact.”⁶²¹ Jaipal Singh echoed the same as he said that the “Congress always claims that it represents all communities and castes, but the Congress went on worse than the British.”⁶²² So he claimed that “we are fighting for self-respect. We are up against Bihari imperialism”. He said that for the Bihar Congress leadership, the adivasi tracts have meant nothing more than a “reservoir of their wealth” or a “hunting ground”. He warned that while so far the Congress has simply passed on the blame of the backwardness of the adivasis onto the Governors, it will not be able to shrug its own responsibility from the next year onwards once the British have left.⁶²³ He drew heavily from the colonial policy of protectionism premised upon the idea of primitivism. But at the same time he argued that protectionism would not last under the self-aggrandizing rule of North Bihar. He cited the dilutions already been brought in

⁶¹⁹ Report of the ASI on the Annual Adivasi Mahasabha Meeting at Ranchi on 13.4.1947 dated 15.4.47, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Spl Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶²⁰ Report by SI, SB, on adivasi meeting held at Kinkal, Ranchi on 7.5.1947, dated 10.5.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶²¹ Report of the Sub Inspector, CID, Bihar on Jharkhad Separation League’s rally held in Ranchi on 25.4.1947, dated 26.5.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶²² Report of the ASI on the Annual Adivasi Mahasabha Meeting at Ranchi on 13.4.1947 dated 15.4.47, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶²³ Ibid,

by the Bihar Congress in the CNTA and their motive to abolish the whole of it in the coming days.

From the days of Unnati Samaj to those of Jaipal Singh Munda and his Adivasi Mahasabha, what remained constant was the strong imprint of colonial anthropology in their articulation. Borrowing from Spivak this is what Uday Chandra also referred to as the use of “strategic essentialism” wherein these missionary educated adivasis were making use of certain positivist and essentialist narratives to specific political ends.⁶²⁴ In the ensuing negotiations onwards to 1947, one of these specific ends was to carve out a special status for the adivasis. Out of the plethora of such references here is one:

We adivasis were the masters of India is the saying of Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy and this right has been recognized by the Government... We are masters of this place by every respect. The [Bihar] Ministry is duping us by giving us ‘Churas and Murhis’ as if we are babies, just to wrest from us our rights of which we are entitled cent percent.⁶²⁵

The anthropological writings of S.C. Roy, in fact, seemed to be the most preferred citation for Jaipal Singh, and on another occasion he urged the ‘Bihari ministry’ to learn from Roy, ‘the greatest authority on the Indian adibasis’ as to who the ‘adibasis are’.⁶²⁶ Another memorandum written by an Adivasi Branch Sabha to the Provincial Governor claims that, the first man to set foot on the soil of India was the Munda. They occupied the thickest forests of NW India and ruled it for centuries before being displaced by the “barbarian Aryans invaders”. Scattered across India, a large chunk of these “original inhabitants” still reside in Jharkhand and offers a distinctively different civilization and an ancient culture that is preserved here. “The Bihar ministry has no sympathy to the adivasis”, it continues. The Bihar Congress, it alleges, is leading a “crusade” against the “history of adivasisthan”. It concludes:

⁶²⁴ Chandra. *Negotiating Leviathan*. p 232.

⁶²⁵ Report by ASI on the speech of Mr Yunis Sarin as delivered in the Adibasi meeting held at Ranchi on 25.3.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶²⁶ Ashwini Kr. Pankaj. (ed). (2017). *Adivasidom: Selected Writings & Speeches of Jaipal Singh Munda Munda*. Ranchi: Pyara Kerkatta Foundation, p. 21.

Bihar Ministry seems to be the destroyer of adivasidom. Moreover it loots the propertics [sic.] of the adivasis. The adivasis will no longer survive on earth if Jharkhand remains under Bihar Ministry... Therefore we should be bestowed a separate autonomous Jharkhand Province which was free from beforehand.⁶²⁷

For Jaipal Singh and his fellow Mahasabhaites, these anthropological accounts and narratives proved crucial to place themselves in a position of moral superiority and to elevate their prestige in an otherwise unequal bargain with the dominant upper caste leadership. In Behar Herald Jaipal Singh Munda wrote quoting Dr Griergson that the adivasis were the “civilizer of Hindusthan”. Hinduism, he said was nothing but “Adibasi animism more or less transformed by philosophy”. He underlined that it is only the adivasis who can save the country from “national suicide”.⁶²⁸

Another rallying point for the Adivasi Mahasabha was the purported move by the Bihar Congress government to bring all forest lands under their authority. J.O. Haywards, another leader of the Mahasabha, for instance asserted that no one has the right to say that forests, hills and drains do not belong to the adivasis. He warned that the Congress government has no authority, no rights whatsoever to take over the forests and by doing so they would effectively criminalize the traditional usage of the forests by the adivasis including the making of their own agricultural implements.⁶²⁹

Secret police records give us the picture of meetings being held across the tribal districts under the banner of the Adivasi Mahasabha through 1946-47 in what appeared to be the last push towards negotiating a separate Jharkhand. This was being projected as the “only remedy of the Adibasis’ manifold economic and social distresses and the ultimate emancipation from exploitation, repression and injustice meted out them by the non-Adibasis – (particular reference to Bihar Congress) whether in capacity of rulers, administrators, capitalists, and even as neighbours in their homeland.” The leaders

⁶²⁷ Statement of adivasidom, grievances and separation, A memorandum submitted on behalf of the Adivasi Branch Sabha, Ginikera, Ranchi, Copy forwarded to the Secretary Bihar Provincial Governor, Patna, dated 26.4.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶²⁸ Pankaj (ed.). *Adivasidom*. p. 42.

⁶²⁹ Report by ASI, SB, Ranchi on a meeting of the Jharkhand Separation League held at Ranchi on 8.5.1947., dated 14.5.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

implored everyone in these meetings to get organized, to enroll themselves as members of the Adivasi Mahasabha and to raise funds for it. The women's wing was also being pushed into fore for the task of mobilization. All "Jharkhandis" were being motivated to attend the crucial Mahasabha Conference in Ranchi in the first quarter of 1947.⁶³⁰

The gaining popularity of the Adivasis Mahasabha and that of their demand for separate Jharkhand was bound to become a cause of concern for the Bihar Congress in particular as well as the National Congress in general. In the initial years of Mahasabha's activities, the Congress had refused to accept the legitimacy of their demand by pointing to the shared demographic profile of the region, in which the adivasis were not in a majority. Jaipal Singh repudiated these claims of the Bihar Government. Taking the example of Manbhum, he said that a region which showed a proportion of 61% adivasis in 1935 returned only half the proportion merely six years later after the 1941 census. He blamed the Hindu Mahasabha for this, stating that they had vitiated the census operations by forcing the adivasis to be recorded as Hindus.⁶³¹ In another speech, he had made after an Adivasi Sabha deputation had met the Bihar Premier on 5th July 1939, he contested the figures being cited by the Congress. Faced with what he termed as 'an engineered manipulation', Jaipal Singh, in his counter, was not even averse to borrowing from racial theories to underscore the correctness of his demand:

You say this area is not mainly or predominantly a land of aborigines. A more ignorant statement could not be made. To suit your prejudice, you are making a convenience of census statistics, employing false premises. Adivasis remain aborigines regardless of the faith they profess. The census enumeration is muddle-headed... Racial classification must not be confounded with religious enumeration.⁶³²

The other matter of contention was the Christian background of the Mahasabha leaders. Attempts were made thereby to project the Adivasi Mahasabha as a Christian organization that would work to the detriment of the Non-Christians. Rumours like the

⁶³⁰ Copy of a SRD's report dated Ranchi 6.2.1947 and its enclosure for DIG, CID, Bihar, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶³¹ Report of ASI, Ranchi on Annual Adivasi Mahaabha held in Ranchi on 13.4.1947, dated 15.4.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶³² Pankaj (ed.). *Adivasidom*. pp. 29-30.

Mahasabha was out there to proselytize the non-Christians had also been floated and abetted by the Congress. With most of its leadership coming from Missionary educated (or even pro-Missionary) background, it was not too difficult for the Congress to cut ice. Most notably, the Congress also opened a counter-organization to the Mahasabha called the Sanatan Adivasi Sabha. The very name is a give-away, as to how its purpose was to divide the unifying rhetoric of the Adivasi Mahasabha between Christians and Non-Christians.⁶³³ While the Adivasi Mahasabha was trying to challenge the claim of the Congress to represent the interest of all Indians, the Congress too used all its means to project that the Adivasi Mahasabha led by Jaipal Singh, a Christian, did not represent the interests of all adivasis, but only the Christian converts. The Mahasabha had to work hard to counter such propaganda. Mr. SN Banerjee, “the grand father-in-law of Marang Gomke” (i.e., Mr. Jaipal Singh Munda) was the first Congress President. He was a Christian. Does that make Congress a Christian organization? They would ask.⁶³⁴ But for the Congress Government of Bihar this remained a concern as they were eager to assess whether the influence of the Adivasi Mahasabha was extending onto the non-Christians. The Joint Secretary for instance specifically instructed the DIG of the CID, Bihar to “instruct the CID reporters who attended Adibasi meetings to mention the approximate number of Christian and non-Christian Adibasis attending each meeting, and to indicate which of the speakers were Christians and which non-Christian.”⁶³⁵

This aside, there also seemed to have been an effort on the part of the Congress to project the Adivasi Mahasabha and its demand for separate Jharkhand as a communal demand in which the settled non-adivasis had no space or security. It was not unnatural to hear the Adivasi leadership calling for the ousting of the Dikus. In an Adivasi Mahasabha meeting in Chaibasa for instance a speaker was reportedly heard saying that “the Dikus should be driven out from the Singhbhum district and the Adibasis should be prepared by all means for driving them away... so long the Dikus will remain in Chotanagpur the

⁶³³ Copy of a Special Branch Officer’s report dated Ranchi 19.11.1947 for DIG, CID, Bihar, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶³⁴ Report by ASI, Ranchi on Adibasi Meeting held at Ranchi on 30.5.1947, dated 5.6.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶³⁵ Confidential Memo No 2043, C.270/47, From Joint Secretary to Govt of Bihar, Political Dept (Special Section) to the Deputy Inspector General of Police, CID, Bihar, dated 26.4.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

Adibasis won't get any facility."⁶³⁶ In response to these charges by the Congress, one notices a slight shift by Mahasabha, as it started underplaying the ethnic basis of their demand, and emphasizing more on its regional basis. A Mahasabha leader Julius Tiga in an open meeting claimed that all non-adivasis who were domiciled on Jharkhand were in favour of separation and they had been specially taken into confidence.⁶³⁷ Even in the range of speakers sharing the stage in these meetings there was an attempt to make it as representative as possible. Elias Kujur in another meeting is said to have reached out to the Hindus and others saying that the Congress has duped them and they should all too come under the flag of Jharkhand.⁶³⁸

There was another discernible shift in the strategy of Jaipal Singh. This was his relation with the Muslim League. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, there had been moments of cooperation between the Mahasabha and the League. But with the incorporation of Jaipal Singh into the Constituent Assembly, these relations were tempered with him actively distancing from the League.⁶³⁹ And from thereon, one notices Jaipal Singh devoted much of his time and strategy to negotiate for a better future for the Adivasis in cooperation with the leading stalwarts of the Congress at that time. From this time onwards one notices the Mahasabha and Jaipal Singh also making a distinction between the central leadership of the Congress, and that of the Bihar Congress. The former, it was argued, unlike the latter, were not inherently against the interests of the

⁶³⁶ Copy of a DIB Officer's report dated Chaibassa, 11.3.1947 for DIG, CID, Bihar, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶³⁷ Report by SI, SB on an Adibasi Meeting held at Kinkal, Ranchi on 7.5.1947, dated 10.5.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶³⁸ Report by ASI, Ranchi on an Adivasi meeting held at Ranchi on 28.5.1947, dated 3.6.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶³⁹ In one meeting held in April 1947, Jaipal Singh, distancing himself from the Muslim League's agenda of two nations, was reported to have said that "we want to keep India one and undivided." Despite this distancing, the Muslim League continued making efforts to reach out to the adivasi leadership and promising them their support to the demand for separate statehood. The League had other plans too, and a CID report noted that they were encouraging Adivasi-Muslim intermarriage and conversion of adivasis to Islam to make way for an eventual amalgamation with Pakistan in the future. It was also reported that the League was keen for the separation of Chotanagpur from Bihar as that would make the Muslims 43% in North Bihar instead of being a "microscopic community." Report of ASI, Ranchi on Annual Adivasi Mahaabha held in Ranchi on 13.4.1947, dated 15.4.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

adivasis.⁶⁴⁰ Jaipal Singh admitted Jawaharlal Nehru as the sole leader of India and planned to invite him and other leaders of the Congress top brass to the Adivasi Mahasabha Conference in Ranchi in January 1947. These overtures to the Congress, whom the Mahasabha had resolutely opposed earlier, by Jaipal Singh seemed to have left many suspect in the rank and file. And on one occasion, Jaipal Singh clarified:

The fate of India will be decided by the Constituent Assembly. I regret that the Muslim League boycotted the Constituent Assembly. I could have skipped the Constituent Assembly and would have been made much use of by the Muslim League but my choice is with the 30 million people whom I represent... I am not ashamed to openly work with Congressmen for the liberation of 30 million people of India.⁶⁴¹

We even hear Iqbal Kujur, another Mahasabha leader clarifying that ‘negotiating with the Congress did not mean’ that their leader Jaipal Singh, ‘was won over’ by them.⁶⁴² Nonetheless, as a CID report from Singhbhum suggests, the government continued to closely monitor the fact that the “Muslim League-wallas” were working from behind in aiding the agitation of the adivasis against the “Hindus and the Congress Government”.⁶⁴³ Yet another secret CID report confirms that the Muslim League, Chaibassa had considerable “influence” on and, notwithstanding the distancing by the likes of Jaipal Singh, had continued to maintain “close contact” with several adivasi leaders to “pull the strings from behind”.⁶⁴⁴

In the meantime, as Jaipal Singh sat in the Constituent Assembly passionately arguing out his reasons for the creation of a separate province and the need for special provisions for the protection of the rights of the adivasis, he tried to enlist the support of different local organizations as well as the local wings of the Mahasabha for his endeavors. As the delegation of the Sub Committee of the Constituent Assembly on

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Report by Sub Inspector of Police, Bihar Special Branch, CID, Patna, on Adivasi meeting held at Bazar Tend, Simdega, District Ranchi on 24.2.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶⁴³ Copy of a DIB Officer’s report dated Chaibassa, 11.3.1947 for DIG, CID, Bihar, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

⁶⁴⁴ Copy of a report dated 8.6.1947 from the Group Officer, Jamshedpur regarding Adivasi affairs for DIG, CID, Bihar, dated 20.6.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas was scheduled to visit the region, he implored his colleagues in the Adivasi Mahasabha to tour the districts and enthruse the people to meet the and depose before the committee reiteration their demands. A lot was staked by the leadership on this sub-committee as is evidenced in Elias Kujur's words:

The members of the Constituent Assembly are coming here in Nagpur. One of the members is our Jaipal Singh Munda. We should be alert to avail this opportunity. We may leave the field works which produce our daily bread for the whole year round and attend these members without fail. We should not fail forward our demand before them... the Bihar Congress, in order to put off our demands is making all sorts of false propaganda.⁶⁴⁵

In different regions, several memorandums were submitted to the Committee by different organizations, in which they tried to give out their grievances, as well as what they thought to be the best possible solution for them. We pick up one memorandum that was submitted to the Committee in Singhbhum by an organization called the Ho Samaj Mahasabha. Certain glimpses from this memorandum give us an idea of the arguments that were put forth by villagers while they made their claims. The Ho Mahasabha claimed that their areas are treated as 'step son' by the Bihar government, which had done nothing to improve the educational, financial and irrigation facilities in the region. The region, in ideal circumstances, would not be a deficit area owing to its richness of resources. They also expressed apprehension that the special laws that were enactment for the interests of the adivasis, such as the Wilkinson Rule, Civil Procedure Code, Chotanagpur Tenany Act, etc are all threatened as the officers under a 'non-adviasi' government are either unaware of or are hostile towards the "ancient customs of Panchayati and Parganait" prevalent among the adivasis. They also stated that the the census had been conducted as per the "selfish motives of the Hindus", and if done properly would show that the adivasis constitute more than 80% in Santal Parganas and Chota Nagpur. Finally, once again drawing from the dominant anthropological paradigm of the times, it stated that:

⁶⁴⁵ Report by ASI, Ranchi on an Adibasi Meeting held at Ranchi on 28.5.1947, dated 3.6.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar., BSA

The Aryans are totally foreigners for the adivasis and their ways of administration will be the cause of the downfall of our civilization and culture etc. and to protect ourselves from this we shall have to take shelter under an ancient culture and it can be done only when the Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas are made a separate province.⁶⁴⁶

It was around this time that the two instances, from the accounts of which where we had began this section, of firing occurred in Singhbhum on the adivasis agitating against forcible paddy seizures. The Adivasi Kisan Samaj, the peasant front of the Adivasi Mahasabha had already been active in this area asking the adivasis “not to surrender their paddy and rice to the Government” and to “defy the Paddy Levy Order by the Government”. They had also sent representation to both the Bihar Government and the Constituent Assembly against what they considered an exploitative and unjust order.⁶⁴⁷ A telegraphic communication from the Commissioner of Ranchi to the Deputy Commissioner of Chaibasa, Singhbhum regarding reports of forcible seizure of even paddy seeds from adivasi households by armed constables bears testimony to the fact that the issue was likely to go out of hands leading to unrest.⁶⁴⁸ The issue of forcible seizure of grains in fact became a significant rallying point for the Adivasi Mahasabha as a concrete instance of the unjust rule they were being subjected to. Matters came to a head after the firings. The weekly confidential report of the police in fact states that the “two firings in quick succession in Kolhan appears to have intensified the Adivasi propaganda against the Government” and the issue only bolstered the agitation for separate Jharkhand.⁶⁴⁹ So much so that it seems the Congressmen were “unable to go to the

⁶⁴⁶ English translation of the Memorial submitted by the “Ho Samaj Mahasabha” to the Advisory Sub Committee, Excluded and Partially Excluded areas Constituent Assembly, New Delhi, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar., BSA

⁶⁴⁷ Copy of a DIB Officer’s report dated Chaibassa, 11.3.1947, and its enclosure for DIG, CID, Bihar, dated 19.3.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar., BSA

⁶⁴⁸ Copy of a State Ordinary telegram, dated 3.4.1947 from Commissioner, Ranchi to Deputy Commissioner, Chaibassa, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar., BSA

⁶⁴⁹ Extract from weekly confidentially diary of the Superintendent of Police, Singhbhum for period ending 31.5.1947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar., BSA

interior for propaganda work as there is danger to their lives.”⁶⁵⁰ The turf war intensified on ground and so did the war of words in the Constituent Assembly as the fate of adivasis in the emergent nation state was debated and battled bitterly.

On the final count as the curtains drew over these contending forces and the myriad layers of negotiations, none emerged as clear winners. The Indian National Congress, could be said, to be taking the upper hand in the end with its centripetal urge to unify all the people of India under one single administration. The presence of people like Jaipal Singh Munda in the Constituent Assembly, and the mobilization of the Adivasi Mahasabha however ensured that this centripetal urge was not taken all the way. And the final Constitution reflected a negotiated settlement. The Congress, that had through the closing years opposed the colonial policy of exception as enshrined in the GOI Acts of 1919 and 1935, was forced to recognize certain claims regarding the exceptional nature and needs of the tribal tracts. The older ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded areas’ were renamed as ‘Scheduled Areas’ under the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It gave the Governor plenary powers for administration and called for the constitution of Tribal Advisory Councils in these areas, with three-fourth of its seats reserved for members of the Scheduled Tribes (the new administrative term for those called aboriginals in the past). But much like the arguments forwarded by the Simon Commission in 1928, the emergent ruling classes under Congress too yet again negated the argument of self-rule as forwarded by Jaipal Singh Munda. Despite his looming presence as the articulate adivasi voice within the Constituent Assembly, the balance was severely tilted against the tribal representatives in the Assembly and most of their proposals regarding what they felt to be tribal rights or practices intrinsic to the survival of tribal communities were negated and voted down one by one by the majority within the assembly. Despite all his negotiations and the mobilization on the ground, Jaipal Singh Munda did not get his Jharkhand. The adivasis had to struggle and wait for another half a century to achieve Jharkhand at the turn of the millennium. After the constitution

⁶⁵⁰ Confidential Memo No A/XXII-47 from the Office of the DIG, SR, Ranchi, to the Inspector General of Police, Bihar, Patna, dated 2.6.2947, File No 270, Confidential, Adivasi Movement: Activities of Mr Jaipal Singh Munda, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar, BSA

had come into force, a wounded and jarred Jaipal Singh Munda had retorted then in desperation:

The Constitution is yours. The borders are yours. The sovereignty is yours. The flag is yours. What is ours? What is that is both tribal and Indian in the Constitution?⁶⁵¹

⁶⁵¹ Cited by Shiv Visvanathan in his 2006 Verrier Elwin Memorial Lecture titled '*The tribal world and imagination of the future*', <http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/nov/soc-verrier.htm#continue>

Towards a Conclusion: Colonial Pasts, Post-Colonial Dilemmas

In December 2017, certain pamphlets, posters and signboards cropped up in a few villages of the Chaibasa division of Singhbhum, urging people to take part in a gathering on 18th December at a village called Bindibasa. These posters stated that this gathering would proclaim the independence of Kolhan from the Indian Union and re-conjoin it to the Commonwealth bearing direct allegiance to the Queen of England by unfurling the flag of Kolhan. The call for independence threw the local authorities into great panic, and in the frenzied crackdown that followed 43 villagers were booked under charges of sedition and criminal conspiracy. After a month, Rama Birua, an 83 years old former government employee, who signed these posters as the ‘Malik’ of a 20 member council of the ‘Kolhan Government Estate’ was arrested. Birua had come to the notice of the authorities a few months earlier, when calling himself as the Khewatdar No. 1, or the main revenue collector and a de-facto administrator of the area, he had started appointing the *mankis* and *mundas*, collecting rent from them and issuing caste, income and age certificates to the people under the letterhead of ‘Kolhan Estate Government’. To back his claims, Birua invoked the Wilkinson’s Rules, which in his opinion, not only excluded the region from the legal mechanisms and court systems in the country, but in fact gave the

region a distinct political identity. Furthermore, he had been claiming that his forefathers had been awarded the *khewatdar* status by the British, which the Queen of England, after he had written to her in 1995, had revalidated through a document dated 18th December 1998. Nobody had seen these documents and the police rubbished their authenticity; but, 19 years later, on the same date, armed with these validating claims from the Queen, Birua had set out to restore Kolhan back to the Commonwealth. The incident had not captured absolutely any imagination amongst the people, and many questioned the intensity of the police crackdown, which led to many deserted villages. But the Jharkhand Police, in their own words, did not want to take any chances since the people could easily get misguided on issues of “autonomous tribal self-rule”. For the slightly older amongst the authorities, the incident had rekindled ghosts of very similar events that had occurred in the region in the past, albeit on a much larger scale.⁶⁵²

Thirty six years ago, in March 1981, at a rally at Chaibasa attended by hundreds of tribal villagers, Narayan Jonko, President of the Kolhan Raksha Sangh, had issued a call for the independence of Kolhan, and even set out the date – 2nd Decemeber 1981 – from whence the region would be free. The previous few months had seen precipitating unrest in the region, after the Bihar Police in September 1980 cracked down on a gathering of villagers in a small mining town of Gua in the Saranda forests, who were demanding the ‘restoration of their traditional rights to forests’. The crackdown had already left three dead and many injured, but the police, in its aftermath, entered the local hospital and shot at the injured, taking the death toll to twelve.⁶⁵³ This ghastly incident only added fuel to the fire, which had smouldering in the region over the decades post 1947 owing to successive government’s non-recognition of their demand for separate statehood. The subsequent intervention by the KRS, who publicized the incident widely as another evidence of the long history of “Indian aggression against Kolhan” gave it an altogether different meaning.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵² Pandey, Prashant. (2017). *In Jharkhand village, a secession fancy and a crackdown*. Indian Express, December 27, 2017

⁶⁵³ People’s Union for Democratic Rights. (1986). *Behind the Killings in Bihar: A Report on Patna, Gaya and Singhbhum*. Delhi: PUDR, p. 5

⁶⁵⁴ ‘Kolhanistan continues to prove a thorn in the Government’s side’, April 31, 1984, India Today

The KRS had been set up in the year 1977, and besides Jonko was led by Krishna Chandra Hembrom as the Secretary and Christ Anand Topno as its legal advisor. It used to claim that the areas where the Wilkinson's Rules were in operation were technically not a part of India. Even the date that was chosen for proclaiming the independence of Kolhan is interesting, for it was on the same date that the Wilkinson's Rules had come into operation in 1833. In the days leading up to the March rally, the KRS distributed leaflets which proclaimed that only the KRS, as the de-facto government of the Kolhan estate, had the right to collect taxes from the people.⁶⁵⁵ A few days after this rally, a delegation of the KRS that included Jonko and Topno left for England, France and Germany to present the case for 'Kolhanistan' on international forums. In the meantime, Hembrom took up the work for propaganda within Singhbhum and issued notices on behalf of the 'Kolhan Government'. Consider the following notice:

“Brothers and Sisters of Kolhan

We are extremely delighted to inform you that after the decades of struggle we are making history. It is happening that our 2 representatives at Kolhan Secretariat 1. Shri Narayan Jonko and 2. C.A. Topno have left to London in Indian Airlines. Our representatives will speak in Malboro Commonwealth of Nations and request for an independent session of Commonwealth of Nations to discuss about future political, social and financial status of Kolhan. After this, they will move through France and Germany where they will raise the issue of Kolhan in the U.N.O. and give an international recognition to Kolhan struggle. The military and police firing occurring here especially Gua firing will be brought attention to. In the United Nations Office at Geneva our claims for a free Kolhan will be raised. We have our own Kolhan Government which has been in the pages of history even today. Indian Government will also be a part of this lawsuit. It will also be emphasised in the International Court that the minerals, mines and forest wealth of Kolhan is exclusively our Government's property and no other government can have any rights over it. In the General Assembly, on 30th March, 1981 as per clause 4 Kolhan Rakhsha Sangh itself is the Kolhan Government.

⁶⁵⁵ Sharma, Anuj Kumar. (2017). 'Kuirea Firing: 26 October, 1981 – The Conspiracy of Swatantara Kolhan Rashtra' in his *Unsung Heroes Jharkhand Movement: Story of Exploitation, Struggle and Martyrism*. New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, p. 114

For Kolhan

K.C. Hembram⁶⁵⁶

The memorandum presented by the KRS representatives to the Secretary of the State for Commonwealth countries at Marlborough House in London asking recognition for the Republic of Kolhan is also a very interesting document, for the past that it reconstructs. Centrality in the historical narrative in the memorandum was given to the promulgation of the Wilkinson's Rules, which to quote the memorandum were "evolved for peace, liberty, progress and good government within the jurisdiction of the South-West Frontier Agency under Regulation XIII of 1833."⁶⁵⁷ Recounting the various colonial acts that excluded Singhbhum from the general laws, the memorandum went on to state that though the domicile of British India ceased to exist with the evolution of the domicile of India and Pakistan after independence, the Kolhan Government Estate retained its original domicile because of these policies of administrative exceptionalism. And "with the emergence of the theory of Commonwealth countries, the Kolhan has acquired the domicile of Commonwealth countries in law and facts."⁶⁵⁸ In the opinion of the KRS delegates, India was not only holding on to this territory illegally but over time it had trampled upon the various 'protective' provisions for the adivasis of Kolhan. The result of it was catastrophic, with one of "the richest belts in world" becoming home to "one of the poorest people in the world", and there were "gross violation of human right situation in Kolhan by the present Government of India":

During the British rule, there had not been a single firing upon the people of Kolhan by armed forces. The firing by armed forces began since January 1948, just after the independence and such aggression in continuing till today.⁶⁵⁹

Awaiting their return, Hembrom had announced rallies to felicitate the two. But, similar to the events in December 2017, the police promptly got into action. Topno and Jonko, along with another person A.K. Sawainya, were immediately arrested on their

⁶⁵⁶ 'Notice Issued by K.C. Hembrom on behalf of the Kolhan Government', Quoted in Ibid., 115-116

⁶⁵⁷ Quoted in Tiwari, Lalan,(ed). (1995). *Issues in Indian Politics*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 152

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid, p.155

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 157

return and charged with sedition. The planned rallies and programs were also foiled by the police. K.C. Hembrom went underground to escape arrest and lived in the Singhbhum forests for close to two decades, earning the epithets of “Kolhan Tiger” and “Kolhan Rakshak”.⁶⁶⁰ Post this crackdown, the movement for ‘Kolhanistan’, which had created a momentary stir in the region in the early 1980s, was effectively over.

Taking these two ephemeral incidents as a point of departure, we attempt to conclude this work by exploring the legacy of certain aspects of exceptional administration left behind by the British. The question that emerges is what changed in the post-colonial period that made ‘colonial paternalism’ a reference point for certain actors and forces, who then invoked it to challenge the very paramountcy of the Indian state. Who were these individuals and organizations who set out to achieve aims that seemed bizarre to most outside the region? What were their calculations and vision behind making these claims? The government, as was usual during those times, summarily dismissed the movement as the work of foreign agencies and also blamed the Christian missionaries, for fomenting the secessionist trouble.⁶⁶¹ But, beyond these conspiracy theories of the state, these events, as we will see, were prompted by far more subterranean changes in the internal dynamics of the tribal communities of Singhbhum. Over two sections, we conclude this work – by relying on some official reports, certain courts judgements and newspaper articles - by a brief outline of the administrative refashioning of the hierarchies within the tribal communities of Singhbhum. This will help us contextualize the reasons for the conspicuous presence of the colonial past in the drastically changed setting of post-colonial Singhbhum.

Section I

Changing State-Society Relations: ‘Democracy’ against ‘Custom’

In the last decades of the colonial rule, as we had seen in Chapter 2, several representatives of the Indian National Congress led nationalist movement had opposed, with little success, the colonial policies of administrative exceptionalism. However, on

⁶⁶⁰ Mishra, Neelesh and Rahul Pandita. (2010). *The Absent State: Insurgency as an Excuse for Misgovernance*. Gurgaon: Hachette India, p. 40

⁶⁶¹ Tiwari, Lallan (ed.). (1995). *Issues in Indian Politics*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 150

the eve of the transfer of power, with the Congress set to take over the reins from the British, the centripetal urge to unify all the peoples of India under one single administration, in which all other identities are subsumed, assumed a renewed vigour.⁶⁶² The presence of people like Jaipal Singh in the Constituent Assembly, however, ensured that this centripetal urge was not taken all the way. And the final Constitution reflected a negotiated settlement, where along with the integrationist push of the emerging post-colonial ruling classes, the state was also forced to recognize certain claims regarding the exceptional nature and needs of the tribal tracts.⁶⁶³ The older ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded areas’ were renamed as ‘Scheduled Areas’ under the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It gave the Governor plenary powers for administration and called for the constitution of Tribal Advisory Councils in these areas, with three-fourth of its seats reserved for members of the Scheduled Tribes (the new administrative term for those called aboriginals in the past). The post-colonial Constitution, therefore, borrowed from the older colonial policies of exclusion, but simultaneously reworked its logic and rationale. Unlike the past, these areas, were no longer to be kept outside the purview of the representative institutions.

However, there remained a growing clamour in different provinces for the removal of colonial era provisions for ‘exclusion’ and in several instances the power of

⁶⁶² For example, Ram Narayan Singh, who had moved resolutions against the exclusionary schemes of the GOI Act, 1935, now stated in the Constituent Assembly, “The remedy (to the tribal problems) does not lie in separating one part or area and doing something here and there. I know that the Government will not be able to do much by separating any part of the country as a scheduled area or anything like that...What is our aspiration for the future ? Our aspiration is this. Unfortunately, the country has been divided into so many classes and communities. We should proceed in such a way that all the different communities may vanish and we may have one nation, the Indian nation.” Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX (accessed via <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/is/debates/debate.htm>)

⁶⁶³ In a sympathetic reading of the Constituent Assembly debates by Amit Prakash, the overall approach of the Constituent Assembly represented a ‘melting-point’ model wherein all the different communities retain their identity even while being part of the larger ‘nation-state’. Prakash, Amit. (1999). ‘Decolonization and Tribal Policies in Jharkand: Continuities within Colonial Discourse’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 27, No. 7/8, July-August 1999. I, however, slightly disagree with Prakash and contend that the balance was severely tilted against the tribal representatives in the Assembly and most of their proposals regarding what they felt to be tribal rights or practices intrinsic to the survival of tribal communities were negated by the majority within the assembly. The emphasis at this time was, as one representative from Bombay put it that the different ‘minorities’ must integrate with “one corporate nation, a homogenous nation.” Cons. Assembly Debates, Vol. 1

the customary village bodies of the adivasis was limited, curtailed and subverted. As we had seen in Chapter 2, D.N. Majumdar had noted, and critiqued, certain moves by the newly independent state which were reversing the tradition of centuries of indirect rule. In 1948, the state government in Bihar also set up an enquiry committee – the Kolhan Enquiry Committee, as it was called - to look into the future of the WR. The report brought out by the committee stated that while some argued the need to maintain the essential features of the existing system in the Kolhan, it was also equally important to progressively develop its administration and make it uniform with the rest of Chota Nagpur. The Wilkinson's Rules, it pointed out, was framed at a different time and could not effectively deliver the same results in the changed circumstances. For example, there were no provisions to look into cases arising out of industrial disputes, which were very common with thousands of tribals were employed in factories, mines and other industries that had come up in the area over the past half a century. To quote:

In the past this system gave cheap and speedy justice to Ho. But now, it is neither cheap nor speedy...The Rules were framed in 1833 when the people of Kolehan were illiterate, ignorant, uncivilized and were living mostly in jungle. Wilkinson's Rules gave justice to the people with lesser expenditure but there has been a drastic change in the civilization of the tribals and nowadays the Kolhan aboriginals have become literate. How can the said rule which was originally meant to administer justice to illiterate and ignorant people continue when literacy and wisdom have progressively dawned to them...The Wilkinson's Rules are out of date.⁶⁶⁴

The committee recommended giving more powers to Deputy Commissioner over the *mankis* and *mundas* by stating that the former should be allowed to make lawyers appear in cases 'which involve complicated questions'. Further, the Committee opined, that the Deputy Commissioner and the Kolhan Superintendent should also be given the powers to transfer cases to the Civil Court, 'if both contested parties make a joint prayer to that effect'. In 1952, the Bihar government extended the workings of the civil courts to the main urban centres of Singhbhum, such as Chaibasa and Chakradharpur. In these

⁶⁶⁴ Cited in Srivastava, Pradeep Kumar. (2015). 'Administration of Civil Justice in Kolhan: A Critical Approach on Justification for retention of Wilkinson's Rules' in Handbook on Landlaw. Ranchi: Judicial Academy Jharkhand, p. 74-76

initial post-colonial years, there were also legal challenges put before the courts about the validity of the WR.

In one such case, a person named Dhulichand Khirwal petitioned the Patna High Court in 1958 demanding the reversal of a decision against him by the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur on the grounds that the local officials, while acting against him, had depended on procedures outlined under the WR. Khirwal, had been accused by the state government, of withholding rents and the royalty on 42 acres of lands that he held on a lease for working a quarry of china clay between 1945 and 1950. In 1954, the court of the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum had dismissed on merit the initial petition by the state government for the recovery of the money from Khirwal. Following this, the government appealed to the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur Division. After hearing the matter, the Commissioner, in 1956, ruled in the government's favour and entitled it to recover the amount claimed. Khirwal, now, sought the intervention of the Patna High Court to quash the Commissioner's order. The whole basis of his appeal, rather than on the merits of his case and his reasons for non-payment of rent and royalty, was based on the procedure adopted by the government. According to Khirwal, the procedure adopted by the government was based on the WR, which had been overruled by subsequent judgements, which therefore made the entire proceedings against him untenable. Since the court found no merit in this argument, Khirwal then proceeded to challenge the very historicity of the Rules by stating that there had never been any proof that the Governor-General in Council had ever approved of the rules framed by Thomas Wilkinson back in 1833. According to his petition, no one had seen the original copy of the rules with the Governor-General's signature, and all that had been relied upon in all these years were subsequently typed copies, which were not reliable. However, the two judge bench of the Patna High Court, refusing to over-rule the Commissioner's judgement, stated that even if Khirwal's claims about the historicity of the Rules was correct, the long usage and acquiescence of the people as well as the Government to these rules made them a legal code.⁶⁶⁵ Despite this judgement, several legal challenges

⁶⁶⁵ Patna High Court Judgements - 'Dulichand Khirwal vs The State of Bihar and Ors 20th January, 1958'. 'Mahendra Singh vs And Ors. vs The Commissioner Of Chota Nagpur. 1958' (accessed via www.indiakanoon.org) (last accessed January 2018)

continued to be put before the courts about the authenticity of the WR, even as late as 2000, based on this same assertion – that no one had seen the original copy of the WR with the Governor-General's signature.⁶⁶⁶

In the subsequent decade, the settlement officer C. B. Prasad, who conducted the first survey and settlement operations (1958-1965) in Singhbhum after independence, made a very strong case for the removal of the *mankis* and *mundas*. Prasad considered the offices of the *mankis* and *mundas* as an anachronism of the past, which over the years had not just become useless but had also degenerated into 'centres of corruption and agents of exploitation'.⁶⁶⁷ In many cases, the headmen realized illegal exactions on the lands reclaimed by the villagers, refused to recognize their rights over these reclaimed lands and were prone to misusing their police powers to settle personal grudges. Prasad pointed out that the power of these 'indigenous institutions' had been considerably weakened with the introduction of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, the Bihar Panchayat Act, the establishment of Community Development Blocks, the setting up of police stations. Moreover, the increasing presence of lower level *karamcharis*, village level workers and *gramsevaks* associated with various government schemes had usurped the various functions hitherto performed by the *mankis* and the *mundas* and it was only a matter of time that these customary heads would also lose their say in the social matters of the village. Prasad urged for their urgent removal, which, he said was also a pre-requisite for the growth of the village panchayats.

Prasad rued the fact, that he could not dismantle these age-old institutions in these settlement proceedings, which according to him was the best occasion to do so. This was due to the lack of a green signal from the government, and also because of the fact that, he himself had to enter into a negotiation with the *mankis* and *mundas* prior to the initiation of the operation. In the days, before the operation began, several *mankis* and *mundas*, fearing the loss of their special privileges, were up in arms against it. Prasad, with the help of local MPs and MLAs, had to assure them that their special rights and

⁶⁶⁶ 'Chaturbhuj V. Ahya v. The Deputy Commissioner, Singhbhum. 1970.' 'Mora Ho vs State of Bihar and Ors, 2000' (accessed via www.indiakanoon.org) (last accessed January 2018)

⁶⁶⁷ Prasad, C.B. (1970). *Final Report on Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Singhbhum (1958-1965)*. Patna: Government of Bihar, p. 37 (Henceforth, Prasad Settlement Report)

privileges would continue to be recorded in the official registers, and it was only after this the settlement could take place. The fears of these headmen were not conjured up, and, even as the *manki-munda* system was not totally abolished, they lost their privileged position in the land tenure system. In the 1950, the passing of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950 had abolished all intermediate tenures, and transferred all the lands recorded in the names of zamindars, as well as other tenure holders to the state. The only exception made for the tribal tracts of Chota Nagpur, by an amendment in 1954, was the exemption of the *bhuinhari* and *Mundari khuntkattidari* tenancies from the ambit of the lands to be vested with the state. As the present settlement formalized these changes, most the headmen except for those recorded as *khuntkattidars*, were recorded as ‘ordinary raiyats’. This was a drastic change from the previous settlement, which as Prasad pointed out, had categorized many of these headmen as ‘other tenure holder’, and recorded their rights and duties in a ‘special headmen’s record of rights’.⁶⁶⁸ Settlement operations during the colonial period, as we have seen in Chapter 3, had provided an opportunity to the headmen to improve their positions within the community by getting land recorded against their names in the official revenue registers. By the 1960s, the tables had turned on them. As Prasad himself stated, the initial opposition of at least some of them had stemmed from their fears of losing out on their ‘illegal settlements made in the course of clandestine transactions’ over the years on *gair mazarua khas* lands (uncultivated waste and jungle land) and *gair mazarua am* lands (other community lands used as graveyards, sacred groves, village roads, etc).⁶⁶⁹

Then, there were also arguments about the loss of revenue to the state because of this system, a concern which we had observed back during the colonial rule as well by certain officials not well disposed towards the devolution of powers to the headmen. Devendra Nath Champia, an important political figure in Singhbhum, narrated to me an

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 39, 51. In an article written on the abrogation of community land rights of adivasis of Jharkhand, Carol Upadhyay also reflects on these developments, through which the headmen lost their privileged position in the land tenure system, as the settlement removed the names as intermediate tenure holders from the official revenue registers and made the Bihar government the superior tenure holder in the district. Upadhyay, Carol. (2005). ‘Community Rights in Land in Jharkhand’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 41 (Oct. 8-14, 2005). p. 4436, 4438

⁶⁶⁹ Prasad Settlement Report, p. 34

incident from 1972.⁶⁷⁰ In a meeting of MLAs from different regions of Bihar, the government proposed removing the existing system claiming that the 16 per cent commission to these sections on the total collection of rent was an unnecessary loss incurred by the state. The government also stated that the *mankis* and *mundas* used to increase their earnings by collecting rents on un-assessed barren lands which they pocketed. The government proposal was to replace the *mankis* and the *mundas* with special *karamcharis* appointed specially for the purpose. This was however opposed by Champia who narrated to me the manner in which he saved the Manki-Munda system:

I was a new MLA at that time, but went with my homework in the meeting of MLAs. On the basis of the government's proposals, I worked out a basic model. If we were to put average *malguzari* (revenue) of every village at 200 Rs, the commission of the *mankis* and *mundas* come to about Rs. 32. On the other hand, if you were employ Karamcharis for the purposes of rent collection, their annual salary would be 25,000 rupees. I asked the government, is the mode of rent collection through the tribal headmen a loss of revenue for the government? The Government representative fell silent. I also gave the argument of work efficiency. The ones you pay Rs. 32 will get you the *malguzari* in one day. But the ones you are going to pay Rs. 25,000 cannot get *malguzari* of a village in even one year. Government representative was quiet again. Others MLAs were also quiet. One MLA from Santhal Pargana, Set Hembram, supported me. We could thus save the post of Manki-Munda.⁶⁷¹

Despite several overtures against these customary bodies over all these decades, the complete scrapping of the *manki-munda* system, however, continued to remain a contentious affair. Local politicians, such as Champia, who needed to command local support, especially of the influential sections, would go against their own parties and even the government that they were a part of, in defence of these customary bodies of the local communities, and ensure that they are not totally disbanded. However, in real and substantive terms, their position was considerably weakened. As we have observed over

⁶⁷⁰ Devendra Nath Champia had been a MLA, MP from Chaibasa and had also served in the cabinet minister in the state government at different times from 1972 to 1995. He had also been a Deputy Speaker in the Bihar Assembly at different times between 1972 and 1975. He started off as an independent candidate in 1972, but subsequently joined the Congress in 1980. Twice in the then undivided Bihar, he had served as a cabinet minister and had also been a speaker of the Bihar Assembly from 1990-1995.

⁶⁷¹ Conversation with Champia on 15.1.2015

the course of this work, the position of the tribal headmen, over the period of colonial rule, depended more on recognition from the state than from the local community. With the official recognition successively declining in the post-colonial period, they slowly ended up becoming a shadow of their past. The events of the early 1980s, and the demands made by the KRS, need to be contextualized in this slow erosion of the traditional authority of the customary headmen of the Hos.⁶⁷²

Section II

Resuscitating Traditional Authority in the Face of Erosion of Power: The Emergence of Multiple Structures of Authority

It was not that the post-colonial state completely did away with the devolution of power to local village bodies, and as we saw above, it even partially agreed about the exceptional nature of the tribal tracts. But, in the new state's purported model of decentralized governance, elected village panchayats, and not customary bodies of the tribal communities were central. For example, one year after the transfer of power, *The Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1947* (Bihar Act 7 of 1948) was passed by the Bihar Provincial Legislature, with a stated purpose of establishing 'local self-government in the village communities of the Province of Bihar and to organize and improve their social and economic life.' The establishment of gram panchayats it mandated, was a departure from the hereditary model of the *manki-munda*, and involved the election of *mukhiya*, *up mukhiya* and four more members. Furthermore, a panel of nine panches, including the 'Sarpanch' was constituted through election and nomination.⁶⁷³ The extension of the

⁶⁷² An official study commissioned by the Anthropological Survey of India to look at the impact of industrialization on the Hos, looking specifically on Chaibasa Cement Works in Jhinkpani village, described the changes brought in by the establishment of the 'factory system' on the 'clan solidarity' of the Hos. This factory was established during Second World War but started only in the year of independence. In the initial years, facing recalcitrance and suspicion from the Hos, the contractors, appointed by the factory management, depended on the help provided by the village headmen to ensure the labour recruitment for the factory. The contractor used to send agents and advance money to the *Mundas* 'to secure labourers'. However, after protests by the employees' union about the 'exploitation' of the contractors, the contractor system of recruitment was replaced by a formal recruitment policy in 1955. Following this change, the role of the *mundas* for labour recruitment, and the benefits they used to pocket as a consequence, ceased to exist. Dasgupta, Pranab Kumar. (1978). *Impact of Industrialization on a Tribe in South Bihar*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, p. 47-48

⁶⁷³ Sen, Asoka Kumar. (2017). *Indigeneity, Landscape and History: Adivasi Self-Fashioning in India*. New York: Routledge

panchayati system, however, remained an extremely contentious affair in Singhbhum. The first panchayat elections were held in Singhbhum for the first time only in 1978, and after that as late as 2010. However despite the opposition to these bodies, these developments created two centres of powers in the villages within Singhbhum. And, since most of the government's policies and funds were routed in the villages through the elected *mukhiyas*, the *mankis* and *mundas* was increasingly isolated. This was noted by a report prepared by the Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute in 1979, on the various practical difficulties due to the Wilkinson's Rules, which stated that the introduction of the Bihar State Panchayati Raj Act and the appointment of the statutory Panchayat Authority had considerably curtailed the working of the WR's personnel, i.e., the *mankis* and the *mundas*.⁶⁷⁴ Moreover, by now, they had also lost their privileged positions in the land tenure system, and except for those recorded as *khuntkattidars*, the lands of the most of the *mankis* and *mundas* had been vested with the state.

The customary village elites responded in a variety of ways to this gradual erosion of their power and the movement by the KRS of the early 1980s was one such response. As for the basis of the secessionist claims, there were several conjured up claims about the past – say, about the unsettled accession of Kolhan to India. But as we have seen above, they were not the only ones laying a claim to the colonial past to suit the contingencies of the present. From the opposite end, even the various petitions filed in the Patna High Court demanding the annulment of the WR repeatedly, would repeatedly stress the Governor-General in Council had never approved of the rules drawn up by Wilkinson in 1833. As multiple structures of authority were vying for local power in Singhbhum, the past, thus, became as much a battle ground as the present. The fact that this movement was an effort by the erstwhile local elites, as they found their fortunes changed after independence, to re-consolidate their position within the village communities was not lost upon contemporaneous observers. An investigative journalistic report published in 1983, for example, came up with the following explanation for the rise of the KRS' claims in the 1980s:

⁶⁷⁴ Cited in Srivastava, Pradeep Kumar. (2015). 'Administration of Civil Justice in Kolhan' in Handbook on Landlaw. Ranchi: Judicial Academy Jharkhand, p. 77

The tribals in Singhbhum are a frustrated lot and many local politicians, mostly tribals have seized the opportunity to reap the benefits. Take for example, the case of K.C. Hembrom himself. Once he was a petty forest contractor. He joined the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and had even contested the last Bihar Assembly Election which he lost. Soon after when the leaders of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha realised that Hembrom was dabbling in secessionist politics, they disowned him. By then Hembrom had made a lot of money through felling trees and selling timber. Soon along with a few others, he formed the Kolhan Raksha Sangh.

The tribals in Singhbhum have always considered themselves special. First of all in the Kolhan area...the Indian Civil Procedure Code is not valid. Any land or simple disputes are decided by the *mankis* and *mundas*...The *mundas* consider themselves all powerful within the village. After the emergence of the *panchayati raj*, the *mankis* and the *mundas* have slowly been isolated and the *mukhiya* has taken over. According to the Deputy Commissioner of the district, Mr. G.S. Kang, "This isolation of the *mundas* is especially noticeable in the development spheres because everything has to be done in the name of the *mukhiya* and not the *munda*. The district administration has been trying its best to involve the *mundas* along with the *mukhiyas*." It is perhaps this slow erosion of the *mundas* power that prompted the Kolhan Raksha Sangh to mention in their pamphlets (that) the people of the area were citizens of an independent sovereign country.⁶⁷⁵

The short lived secessionist assertion of the early 1980s was, in fact, just a precursor to, and laid the grounds for, the more moderate demands of the later period, aimed at bargaining a better deal with state. Substantially weakened from its underground existence, the KRS, changed its demands substantively, and their focus shifted from demanding a separate republic of Kolhan to ensuring legal recognition to the village republics of Singhbhum ensconced in the *manki-munda* system. In a letter written to the President of India in February 1986, Hembrom, denying any secessionist aims of the KRS, stated that their fight had merely been to ensure "legal and constitutional recognition for the 'Manki-Munda' system for governance, which is the customary and unchanged tradition in the Kolhan Government Estate (since the early days of the British

⁶⁷⁵ Ghosh, Tirthankhar. (1983). "Midnight Massacre", Sunday Investigation, Vol. 11 (September-December), 1983 (accessed via www.archive.org)

Raj).⁶⁷⁶ This was also the period which witnessed the initiation of a movement, under the guidance of the former Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Dr. B.D. Sharma, by the name of “*Hamara Gaon, Hamara Raj*” which started demanding autonomous self-government through village councils. Hembrom, who conceptualized the *manki-munda* system as representing the ‘autonomous village councils’ of the Hos of Singhbhum, extended his support to this movement.⁶⁷⁷

Nothing that captured much notice was heard of, or from, Hembrom in the following years, till he came back over-ground in 2001, as the first government of the newly carved out state of Jharkhand withdrew the charges against him. It marked the beginning of a fresh round of activism on his part. Immediately, after resurfacing from his underground existence, Hembrom filed two petitions in the Supreme Court. One of these challenged a judgement by the Patna High Court in 2000, which held the Wilkinson’s Rules as lacking any statutory backing, and asked the government to substitute it with a fresh legislation. In his section petition, he urged the apex court to place the region directly under Delhi through the President’s rule, as the district administration, owing to the WR, had no jurisdiction. Citing the pendency of these petitions, he then wrote a letter to the President of India in 2004 demanding the stalling of the Lok Sabha elections in the district, stating that “the government has no right to conduct the Lok Sabha election in the Singhbhum reserved constituency till the apex court give its verdicts” on the administrative set-up of the region.⁶⁷⁸

This was also the time when there was a major contention between different formations regarding the holding of elections to the village panchayats, and this was to keep Hembrom busy over the next few years. In 2001, the state of Jharkhand had enacted its Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act (JPRA) in 2001, purportedly based on the model provided by the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), but in reality lacking many of its empowering features. The PESA had

⁶⁷⁶ *Manki-Munda Pranali Banam Kolhanistan*, (<http://hi.vikaspedia.in/education/>) (translation mine) (last accessed on 8th Feb, 2018)

⁶⁷⁷ Tiwari, Lalan,(ed). (1995). *Issues in Indian Politics*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 158

⁶⁷⁸ Rana, Anupam. (2004). ‘State-poll twist to Kolhan Status Row – K.C. Hembrom wants elections withheld’, *Telegraph*, March 22, 2004

been enacted in 1996 on the recommendations of a committee constituted by the union ministry of Rural Development of a committee of MPs and experts in 1994 under Dilip Singh Bhuria to make recommendations for the Panchayat system for scheduled areas. This was after the constitutional recognition to the village panchayats given by the government in 1993, through the seventy-third amendment in the Constitution, had run into legal troubles in many Scheduled Areas, with many arguing that it was going to supplant traditional structures of authority in these areas. The PESA sought to correct this anomaly by incorporating the customary law and structures of the tribes into the village panchayats, gave proportionate representation to the STs in the panchayats and completely reserved the post of the Chairperson of the Panchayats at all levels to the STs. It also gave considerably larger powers to the village panchayats over the resources in the areas.⁶⁷⁹ After the passing of the JPRA, 2001 there was however, opposition from more than one quarters, which considerably delayed the holding of elections. In one of her articles, Nandini Sundar explains this quandary where several non-*adivasi* formations were opposed to the complete reservation on the top posts in the Panchayats to the STs, recognized by the Act, stating that it was violative of their rights; and simultaneously, several *adivasi* formations opposed the holding of elections by arguing that it was violative of the vision of PESA which built upon local traditions of participatory democracy, against the divisive party politics and money associated with representative democracy.⁶⁸⁰ In Singhbhum, Antu Hembrom representing the Manki-Munda Sangh, stated their opposition was also based on the previous experience of the panchayat polls in the region in 1970, which by superimposing elected heads over the *mankis* and the *mundas*, had significantly encroached upon the rights of the latter.⁶⁸¹ A larger umbrella outfit of tribal chiefs by the name of *Parharaja, Manjhi Parganait, Manki Munda, Doklo Sohor Mahasamiti*, calling it a part of a ‘wider conspiracy’ of the Hindu nationalist RSS

⁶⁷⁹ ‘The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, No. 40 of 1996’ in Sharma, B.D. (2006, reprint) *Taming the Transition in Scheduled Areas: Report of Bhuria Committee on Self-Rule in Urban Areas*. New Delhi: Sahyog Pustak Kutir (Trust), p. 108-110

⁶⁸⁰ Sundar, Nandini. (2009). ‘Framing the Political Imagination: Custom, Democracy, and Citizenship’ in Nandini Sundar (ed.) *Legal Grounds: Natural Resources, Identity and the Law in Jharkhand*. Delhi: OUP, p. 196

⁶⁸¹ Rana, Anupam. (2005). ‘Tribe status on the decline’, *The Telegraph*, Wednesday, 17th August 2005

to usurp tribal land, stated the de-recognition of the ‘tribal administrative system’ will threaten the very identity of the people who fought for 74 years to get a separate state.⁶⁸²

There were also several legal challenges, demanding the stalling of elections. One of these petitions, filed by Devendra Nath Champia in the Jharkhand High Court, stated that the JPRA cannot be extended to Kolhan since it was contrary to the customary law and the *manki-munda* system of the area. The petition was however rejected by the court, which, in fact, went beyond the arguments presented by the lawyer appearing for the government in justifying the JPRA. According to the court, under the JPRA, the gram sabhas headed by *manjhies*, *mundas*, *pahan*, etc had not just been recognized, but in fact ‘clothed with more power.’⁶⁸³ K.C. Hembrom, made some last ditch efforts to ‘save the social fabric of the tribal society’ by the imposition of a ‘parallel structure’ of the Panchayats, and filed further petitions in the court.⁶⁸⁴ But citing previous judgements, including the 2005 judgement cited above, the Jharkhand High Court dismissed their plea stating that the issues raised by them had already been settled by different courts, including the Supreme Court.⁶⁸⁵ Back in 2003, a village munda, drawing attention to the ‘deteriorating condition’ of the tribal headmen, stated that the government officials in the villages had regularly circumvented their authority, which the constitution of the panchayats would only formalize their exclusion from administrative functions.⁶⁸⁶ The battle they were fighting was a losing one, and despite the support of local politicians like Champia, the panchayats elections were finally conducted in Jharkhand in 2010.

With their older attempts to resuscitate their declining authority having ended in vain, most *mankis* and *mundas* have been left with no other option but to engage with the

⁶⁸² Anonymous. (2003). ‘Tribal chiefs in Panchayat battle cry – Clamour for continuance of traditional governance’, *The Telegraph*, Monday, 25th August 2003

⁶⁸³ ‘Dhananjay Mahto And Ors. vs Union Of India (Uoi) And Ors. ... on 2 September, 2005’ Jharkhand High Court (accessed via www.indiakanoon.org)

⁶⁸⁴ Jenamani, Kumud. (2010). ‘Kolhan Tribals to move SC’, *The Telegraph*, Friday, 22nd October, 2010

⁶⁸⁵ ‘Kolhan Raksha Sangh vs Union Of India & Ors on 21 January, 2011’, Jharkhand High Court (accessed via www.indiakanoon.org)

⁶⁸⁶ Anonymous. (2003). ‘Tribal chiefs in Panchayat battle cry – Clamour for continuance of traditional governance’, *The Telegraph*, Monday, 25th August 2003

new structures of authority that they had earlier opposed.⁶⁸⁷ Earlier, organizations representing tribal chieftains had issued strict instructions to the *mankis* and *mundas* to boycott the elections, or else face dismissal.⁶⁸⁸ But now, Danorjee Deogam, a munda of a village named *Matkamatu*, 2 kms from Chaibasa told me, that the *mankis* and *mundas* meet, on the eve of panchayat polls (as well as other elections), to evolve a consensus about which candidate to support. They usually support candidates who take up issues of reviving their traditional structures, and protecting legislations such as CNTA. And as those contesting elections also realize the need to enlist the support of the *mankis* and *mundas*, it can be argued that the latter have not yet become totally irrelevant in the social life of the Hos, and there continues to be some overlap between the two structures of authority in the villages in Singhbhum today.⁶⁸⁹ Meanwhile, one of the protagonists of the lost cause, K.C. Hembrom breathed his last in 2016 at the age of 76. A newspaper obituary remembered this ‘Kolhan Rakshak’ of the 1980s as a militant leader of the adivasis, who had been a victim of a misunderstanding by the government. According to this writer, Hembrom and his associates of the KRS, back in the 1980s, had simply been demanding autonomous tribal self-rule (*Abua Dishum Re Abua Raj*) as per the WR. But the government made him into a ‘*deshdrohi*’ (traitor) on too literal, and a flawed, translation of their slogans.⁶⁹⁰

Summing Up

By historically situating the different techniques of organisation employed by the colonial state, and its successor, over the past 200 years, this work has sought to uncover that aspect of constitution of power in Singhbhum which lies embedded, and concealed, within the fractured communities inhabiting this hinterland. The state, to paraphrase Frederick Engels in our context, cannot be externalized as an entity standing above and

⁶⁸⁷ Interestingly, he told me that nothing came out of the petitions filed in the courts to stall Panchayat elections in the areas where *Manki-Munda* system was operation, as ‘after all there are no adivasi judges’, Conversation with Danorjee Deogam on 17th January 2015

⁶⁸⁸ Anonymous. (2005). ‘Jharkhand Diary: Boycott or be Dismissed’, *The Telegraph*, Saturday, 3rd September 2005

⁶⁸⁹ Conversation with Danorjee Deogam on 17th January 2015

⁶⁹⁰ Anonymous. (2016). *Abua Dishum Re Abua Raj ke Naare Ne Bana Diya Tha Deshdroh*, Jagran, 28th June 2016

outside these communities.⁶⁹¹ At the risk of being counter-factual, one can only try to imagine whether the military detachments of the East India Company would have been able to subdue the ubiquitous revolts of the 1830s and take over the region, if all the *mankis* and *mundas* had en masse refused them any assistance, and sided with the rebels. In this densely forested ‘little known province of the empire’, or to use K.Sivaramakrishnan’s phrase, ‘a zone of anomaly’, the British had recognized that the consolidation of their empire was contingent on tapping the clan, tribe and village level networks and hierarchies. The story of colonial military pacification campaigns, agrarian expansion and expropriation, instituting an intensive control over the forests and other resources as well as the subduing of different movements will remain incomplete, unless we simultaneously look at the role played by the tribal headmen and chieftains, enlisted by the British Raj through an elaborate regime of rewards and punishment. In turn, the official recognition to these tribal headmen and chieftains, by the institution of the regime of exception, significantly transformed their social character in their own communities. Taking advantage of the new situation, these sections within the local communities, now made new claims and trumped other contending ones from within the communities and significantly improved their standing in the village communities. They also zealously guarded and warded off the threats to their increased privileges.

The dawn of Independence, however, ushered in a gloomy and dark night for most of these erstwhile local officials of the British Raj. By a bitter twist of irony, most of them, who had enhanced their positions by taking advantages of the opportunities offered by colonial rule, are now being increasingly marginalized to the same position as those they had isolated in the past. In January 2015, Danorjee Deogam narrated to me the woes of the headmen today. Unlike the past where the headmen received a compensation on the total rents collected from the villages, Deogam told me, the headmen now receive a nominal ‘*samman rashi*’ (honorary money) from the government (Rs. 1500 for *mankis* and Rs. 1000 for *mundas*). But, he saw neither *samman* (honour) in this change, nor was the *rashi* (money) enough to sustain himself. According to him, their previous autonomy had been taken away, and the stipend from the government had converted them into

⁶⁹¹ Engels, F. (1972). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. New York: Pathfinder Press.

‘servants’ of the government and to make ends meet, the headmen had to take up other jobs. Deogam, for example, had his own shop of metal work and repairs to sustain his family. And if this was a case of a munda of a village, which in the proximity of Chaibasa, had emerged into a small urban township, one can only imagine the situation in the villages deep inside the forests.

By changing the forms of devolution of power and control, the post-colonial state, unlike its colonial predecessor, has no longer been dependent on the enlisting the support of the tribal headmen. Indeed, there has remained a continued posturing about these new village panchayats ensconcing the Gandhian vision of Gram Swaraj and creating self-sufficient, self-contained and self-reliant village republics.⁶⁹² But, that should not lead us to presume that there has been effective de-centralization, or democratization, of powers through the gram sabhas within tribal regions.⁶⁹³ The one continuity with the colonial past, however, remains that large sections of the adivasis still, continue, to have little say in important decisions affecting their lives and livelihoods. A lot of it has to do with the developmental model pursuit by the post-colonial state, with its reliance on heavy industries, which has meant that state and the industrial giants have zeroed in on states like Jharkhand, abundant in different minerals and other resources. And as decisions around land acquisition, mining, construction of dams, expropriation of minerals are being increasingly centralized in the hands of an ever fewer section – corporates, technocrats and politicians - the mandatory consent of the gram sabhas has either been ignored, bypassed, or in some cases, akin to the 1893 conference in Singbhum, simply

⁶⁹² NewsBharti. (2018). ‘252 villages of Jharkhand to carry out “Gram Swaraj Abhiyan” from April 14’, *NewsBharti*, 11th April 2018

⁶⁹³ In fact, one cannot also say that the new panchayats have completely swamped the older structures of authority, and in several places the two also overlap. Back in 1950, Majumdar had prescribed that the state should incorporate the *mankis* and the *mundas* into its new structures which still continued to command authority and recognition in the village organization of the Hos. Majumdar, *Affairs of a Tribe*, p. 318 At a time when there was much clamor for dismantling the WR, the report by Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute in 1979 also echoed the same solution and stated, rather than being scrapped, the WR and the Panchayati system should both be slightly amended to ‘strike a balance’ between the two systems. Srivastava, Pradeep Kumar. (2015). ‘Administration of Civil Justice in Kolhan’ in Handbook on Landlaw. Ranchi: Judicial Academy Jharkhand, p. 77. Having stopped to stall the elections, today several *mankis* and *mundas* also try to get themselves elected to the various posts in the panchayats.

manufactured.⁶⁹⁴ The increasing value of land, and the minerals beneath it, has also led to attempts by the state, in the recent past, to do away with legislations such as CNTA. An extremely powerful lobby of industrialists, miners and real estate dealers, that also funds most of the mainstream political parties, has framed the ‘protective’ provisions of the CNTA as an obstruction in the path to ‘development’.⁶⁹⁵ On the ground in Singhbhum, it has meant that apart from the rest, many of the tribal headmen, whose ancestors had enhanced their privileges by getting themselves recorded as *khuntkattidars* under the CNTA, have another arduous battle in front of them – another, in which they are considerably disadvantaged.

Unlike the time when British entered the region in the early 19th century, Singhbhum, today, is extremely integrated with the rest of the country. But this integration has less to do with the needs of its people, and more with the economic riches its forests and mines, offers to the corporations and real estate dealers. Let me finish this work, by describing the manner, in which despite the close integration of the region in the economic map of the nation, distances between even Chaibasa, that has served as the administrative headquarters of Singhbhum for the past 170 years and other parts of the country have not shortened much. The town of Chaibasa, as the regular sounds of the trains did not fail to remind me even in the district record room during my field trips between 2011 and 2015, has an extremely busy railway station. The assistant at the record rooms explained to me that all were good trains (*maal-gaadis*) taking away the timber, and the coal from the deep interiors of Singhbhum, to the different port towns, from whence they will be exported to other countries. The railway network in this region goes back to the latter half of the 19th century, when the Bengal-Nagpur line was laid through the region. But, even now, except for a *Jamshedpur-Calcutta Shatabadi* that stops over at Chaibasa for 2 mins, there are absolutely no trains for people to commute. Even now the

⁶⁹⁴ This can serve as a topic of another research altogether, and is beyond the scope of the present work. But for a brief summary of the manner in which adivasi rights in different Scheduled Areas have been violated by circumventing or flouting the ‘protective’ provisions of the Constitution, see Sharma, B.D. () *Unbroken History of Broken Promises*

⁶⁹⁵ Anonymous. (2012). ‘Why Chota Nagpur Tenancy (CNT) Act Fails to Protect Jharkhand Tribals’, (accessed via <https://socialissuesindia.wordpress.com/2012/09/18/why-chhota-nagpur-tenancy-cnt-act-fails-to-protect-jharkhand-tribals/>)

people of this ‘little known province’ travel in rickety buses and vans, through bumpy roads, to travel to other districts for work, or to meet their friends and family.

The people might still take the bumpy road, but the tales of their continued wretchedness fail to ruffle capture any imagination beyond their own hamlets. It is only in moments, when their protest escalates to the extent of threatening the purported ‘economic interests of the ‘nation’ that the ‘mainstream’ takes notice, but then only to castigate them. Most of the contemporary reportage about the Maoist insurgency that has struck deep roots amongst the adivasis of Central and Eastern India is a prime example of the above. During my field trips to Chaibasa, the newspapers never failed to remind me of the measures being taken to ‘cleanse’ out the ‘Maoist extremists’ who had created a ‘base’ in the dense forests of Saranda and were threatened mining interests. Though the details of the military operations – that too coloured in the narrative that New Delhi wanted to propagate - dominated most of the reports (akin to the military despatches of the 1830s), a few reports, mentioning that the writ of the state did not run in these areas, stated that the Maoists had set up their parallel structures of authority – that they called, Revolutionary People’s Committees (RPCs) – in opposition to the village panchayats as well as traditional bodies of the adivasis. As can be discerned through this work, I am deeply critical of several movements who posit the customary structures of the adivasis as an effective weapon in the fight against displacement and dispossession. Sometime in 2015, I decided to visit these ‘bases’ of the rebellion myself. By doing so, I specifically wanted to look at the manner in which those at the very margins of even the adivasi communities related to, and negotiated with, the various dominant structures of their communities, even as they were in the process of creating new ones. But as fate would have it, for reasons and events beyond my control, it became impossible for me to travel back to Jharkhand after 2016. Hopefully, at some saner in the future, I hope to return to this story to interrogate the possibilities, as well as limits, of radical social change, that this rebellion promises.

Appendix I⁶⁹⁶

(Copy of a *pattah* or Title Deed granted to a Manki by Tickell
in 1838)

To Manki son of,

You have been appointed a *Mankee* in _____ and to superintend the following villages in as below specified, you are to be answerable, according to the oath taken by you before the Agent to the Governor-General or his Assistant, for the preservation of the public peace, in the said villages and for the regular collection, and punctual payment of the land revenue which may be assessed on the said villages by the order of the Government, now, and, hereafter you are to the best of your power and ability to seize and apprehend all offenders (of whatever caste on persuasion) against the authority of Government and peace of the country, and report without delay all murders, dacoities, thefts, or other offences committed within your Division and at the same time take immediate steps for the apprehension of the perpetrators. You are also to the best of your ability settle all petty disputes which may arise in the villages under your charge and obey all lawful order which you may receive from the Assistant or other constituted authority in management of the Colehan for the time being.

For the better preservation of peace, and to aid you in the performance in the duty, there is placed in each village under your superintendence a Moonda, who has before you and the Governor General's Agent or his Assistant taken an oath to obey or afford you or your Deputy and the Assistant every aid whenever required, and who must immediately report all occurrences in his village either to you, or in your absence to your deputy (and in case of his own absence, must make over charge of his village to a Deputy Moondah, from whom the like duties will be required).

You are to assist whomsoever the Assistant or other authority in charge of the Colehan, may depute to apprehend offenders, who may have fled into your Division, and also to aid in the apprehension of all offenders for the public peace, whether on your own or any other *Mankies* Division on being called on.

There is Deputy *Mankie* under you, in case of your sickness or a necessity for your absence from your Division, the Deputy *Mankie*, whose appointment shall have been approved by the Assistant, will during your absence perform the duties of *Mankie*.

⁶⁹⁶ Roychoudhury. *Singhbhum Old Records*, p.54

It will however be necessary that you should on absenting yourself deliver your charge to your Deputy and report the same to the Assistant.

You are prohibited (and have sworn to observe that prohibition) from receiving or obeying any order verbal or written, of any Rajah or Zemindar, or any of their subordinates which may be communicated to you on any pretence whatever, you will strictly observe this, and also bring to the Assistant whoever may communicate to you any order which you have sworn not to obey.

You are to assist in person and with your followers in apprehending all offenders against the authority of Government, and the peace of the country and in the suppression of insurrections in every part of the jurisdiction of the Assistant Governor-General's Agent, or other authority managing the Colehan for the time being, in which your services may be called for.

Appendix II

Form of Proposed Agreement for settlement of a Forest village on the site of the former village site of Tholkobad:⁶⁹⁷

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.

⁶⁹⁷ File no. 74, For. Dept., 1904, DCRR

Glossary

Amins - Locals who assisted revenue officials of the district administration during land surveys

Arkatti - Plantation recruiter

Bad - Low embanked rice lands for wet cultivation

Bandhs - Embankment which acts as a dam in a channel of water or which holds up the catchment of a slope

Bera - Middle lands

Bigha - A unit of measuring lands

Chowkidars - Village watchman

Dikus - Non-tribal outsiders in tribal areas

Durkhast - Petition

Gora - Upland

Goalas - Milk traders

Gramsevaks - Village volunteers

Hats - Weekly markets

Hissedar - Shareholder

Hukum - order, command, etc

Jagir - Land given to someone in return of certain services

Jagirdars - Holder of *jagir* land

Karamcharis - Clerks

khas mehal - Leased out land

Khuntkattidar - Descendants of the original reclaimers of forest land

Koel - Cuckoo bird

Kamars - Ironsmith

Laikabadi - Cultivable wasteland

Lakhiraj- A revenue free grant of a particular village

Mahua- *Madhuca longifolia*

Mahto- Civil head in the village

Malguzari- Rent

Manki- Tribal headman of a cluster of villages

Moharrir- Officials who issued stamp on documents

Munda- Tribal village headman

Nabakabadi- Unculturable wasteland

Patta - Title deeds of land issued by the government to tenants

Perwannah- Warrant or summon usually issued by the British during military operations asking the rebels to surrender

Pirs - Confederation of a group of villages

Pugrees- Turban

Pujari- Priest

Raiyats - Tenants

Sarkar - Government

Sipahees - Soldiers

Taluk - Sub-division of a district

Urzee- Appeal

Vakeel- Lawyer

Zillah - District

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