

**EN(FRAMED) REBELS:**  
**Documenting Santal Hul Commemoration**

Thesis submitted to  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Philosophy**

by

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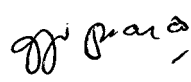
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This dissertation titled “En(Framed) Rebels: Documenting Santal Hul Commemoration” submitted by Sudipto Mukhopadhyay, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree, diploma of any university or institution .

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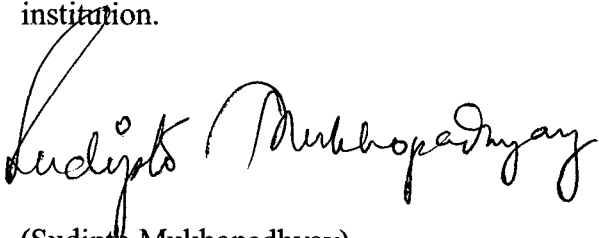
  
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**Declaration by the Candidate**

This thesis titled “En(Framed) Rebels: Documenting Santal Hul Commemoration” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree, diploma of any university or institution.



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*To my Sister*

*and*

*to all my Commemorations...*

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It has always been an exercise with memory that has kept the trio, Baba-I-Ma, moving under one emotional knot. The silence is kept knotted enclosed within the folds of our commemorations. It deepens.

## Introduction: Episode One - The Stage

There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.

(Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1969: 254)

It was a history of obsessive fascination with memory that eventually led me to take it up seriously in terms of an academic venture. This journey into commemoration might have now taken a disciplinary turn, however, I have often been accused of girdling time in my wallets. My words often clung to fragmentary moments in the past and these timid tours down the cobblestones of my memory lane finally pushed me to recognize this natural tendency in me as potential methodology into my research area. My project is a collage of fragmented histories, forgotten memories and forsaken truths. For very few of us have the opportunity to channel our manic visions onto pages of reality, this academic venture becomes a lot more than a mere project since it roots from my series of voyages within, which have now been realized without and bound together in the body of this dissertation.

My research began with certain presuppositions. One such presupposition led me to the very *site* of Santal Hul: *Kranti Sthal*, Panchkathia. The *Kranti Sthal* marked under a sal tree, cordoned off by a tall brick wall just before the Panchkathia bazaar exactly 4 km from Barhait in Sahibganj district of Jharkhand, made me feel relieved for being able to situate the beginning of Hul so effortlessly at that particular site. But this relief was rather short lived once I started interacting with the local people: the Santals, the *dikus* and the government representatives. My presupposition that there can exist an umbrella narrative did not take me further than my interviews of two government officials. Once I began my research I tried to gather the historical narratives not through books or other references but through the narratives of the migrated Santals who are established in their respective fields and who were available to me in close quarters. At that juncture my expectation of a singular meta narrative splintered. I was faced with a multitude of narratives claiming multiple *truths* which in turn added up to a history of myriad memories.

Recollection forms the very basis of commemoration. The practice of recollection is what brings memory, which may not exist otherwise, alive. The memory is brought alive through its commemorative association in the present with a promise of the future. The

commemorative symbols – holiday and ceremonial observances, printed and oratorical commentary, cartoons, statues, paintings – make the memory/memories available as continuous presence. The structuring power of commemorative symbols reflects the utilitarian capacity of the present power machineries through which the past acquires its *value*. At this juncture an introduction to the project on the collections of the recollection necessarily demands certain temporal and spatial contextualization of the community in focus.

It was during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Santals migrated massively into the *Damin-i-koh* area of Northern India which was formed in 1832-33 (Datta 2). Talking about its genesis O'Malley notes:

The name is Persian, meaning the *skirt of the hills*, it was a Government estate in the north-east of the district of Santal Parganas, extending over 1356 square miles and including portion of Rajmahal, Pakur, Godda and Dumka sub-division (emphasis mine: 245).

First the Mal Pahariyas and then the Santals were employed to clear the forest of this region and gradually they settled in this territory with their own lust for life. The very simple innocent life that these people led readily brought others into their confidence and in course of time the outsiders, the *dikus*, as they call them, took advantage of their gullibility. Captain Sherwill, the Revenue Surveyor on Special Duty, recollects their honesty as he has seen from close quarters, “[f]or honesty of purpose and purity of word, they [the Santals] have hitherto been unmatched- a Santal’s word is always believed.”<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the Government appointed James Pontet as the superintendent of the *Damin* in 1836 (Datta 3) and soon the facilities available in this area attracted traders and money-lenders (Datta 4). The Bengali families of *moira*, *benia* and other castes from Burdwan and Birbhum and Bhojpuris and Bhatiyas settled through their professional acumen (Datta 4). Kalikinkar Datta (1940) notes that by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century there were about fifty Bengalis at Barhait, “the capital town of the hills”, 13 miles North West of Barharwa Railway Station (4). Arun Chowdhury (2000) in his book on the history of Hul gives the etymology of the term *diku* which comes originally from the Hindi term *dik* which means ‘oppression’ or ‘disgust’. While *diku* in Santali originally meant ‘oppressor’, later it became an umbrella term for both ‘outsiders’ and ‘oppressors’(16). The recurrent repercussions against the oppression at the hands of the outsiders have been felt in this part of the tribal constituency since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Historians claim that in June/July 1855, the Santals under the leadership of Sidhu Murmu and his brothers Kanho, Chand and Bhairav, declared ‘Hul’ or ‘rebellion’ against the oppressions and exploitations of

the mahajans/zamindars and the negligence of the British administration. Dhirendranath Baske ([1976] 2003) and Narahari Kaviraj (2001) even draw a trajectory of such repercussions since the revolt of Tilka Manji in 1784 so as to put the Santal Hul of 1855-56 in the tradition of resistances by the often so categorized 'primitive' men. It is often argued that the Santal insurrection was initially not directed against the British but later was channelized against them for reasons pertaining to their lack of concern for the Santals (Datta 10). As can be expected, the 'primitive' bows and arrows of the Santals were no match to the guns and cannons of the British army but their guerilla tactics in the interiors of the forest kept the war raging for a year (Kaviraj 31). The rebels and the rebellion were tamed by the power machineries in the course of time and history but the issues remain often untamed and unresolved. Thereafter, the Santal Hul has given rise to more rebels and rebellions and has stayed amidst the muddled memories of doubts and desires but the historical referents have stayed back, pristine, in the folds of narratives. Herein, I will intervene with my disciplinary desire to unfold those narratives to place them in the web of power relations.

With all the debates between memory and history, in recent academics, memory has become a category of cultural history. It has found distinct expression in the commemoration of Hul where the memory of the historical event is referred to through certain performatives. The main performatives of the commemoration of the rebels and the rebellion include:

- Rituals & processions
- Tribal cultural performances & games
- State narratives
- Donations and contributions
- *Vikas Mela*, State sponsored exhibitions of important modern technologies etc.

The performatives highlight why certain specific remembrances become the subject of the collective memory. My work is not just *on* commemoration of a historical event but can be read *as* a commemoration itself. The urge to record and to recall the past (where the past and present overlap during recollection) is an academic imperative for me.

In this study in politics of commemoration with reference to Santal Hul and its linkage with problems of representation and legitimization, the primary inquiries which are at stake are: first, does being *there* in person provide an access to the *truth* about the commemoration/history and other performatives? Second, can recollection be *truly* ethnographized and what is ethnographic research if not a recollection? What are the sites and

modalities of the meaning of history in an act of commemoration? And more importantly what kind of *knowledge* is gained through the documentary recordings/readings of such performatives? The ethnographic text which would be constituted through the visual and oral narratives of the documentation would be read under the light of collaborative and participatory approaches to visual ethnography and historiography. My investigation will establish a tripartite hypothesis. First, it will show how visuals become the site of interrogations of history/acts of recollection. Second, it will prove how narratives – visual or otherwise – when contextualised, create a dynamic and reflexive ethnographic text. And finally it will demonstrate that the process of ethnographic visual research is in itself a commemoration of certain historical events. My research, thus, would provide an academic link between experience and the ethnographic text.

A precursor to my ethnographic text is a documentary film, *Hul Sengel: The Spirit of the Santal Revolution*, produced by the University of Sussex in association with the Indian Confederation of Indigenous & Tribal Peoples (ICITP), New Delhi on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Santal Hul. The film was directed and produced by Daniel J. Rycroft in 2005. The main concern of the documentary is to provide a link between subalternity and visual representation. It addresses certain key themes regarding Santal social memory in relation to the practice of visual ethnography, documenting the intangible heritage of a tribal culture, the space of orality in indigenous culture, and the interface between academic research and indigenous studies. The memories of Santal Hul narrated through interviews, discussions, music, poetry, songs, drama, paintings, sculptures, landscapes and the like are intertwined with a deep concern of the problems of representation and legitimization. In another very recent research work by Daniel J. Rycroft, a link has been established between minority histories, subaltern identity and visual representation. It got published as a book in 2006 titled *Representing Rebellion: Visual aspects of Counter-insurgency in Colonial India*. It deals with the visual narrativization of subalternity and subaltern resistance. Rycroft examines the visual representation of Santal Hul by the East India Company official, Walter Stanhope Sherwill, as published in *Illustrated London News*, which silences the subaltern voice, reinstates the subordination of the indigenous culture and provides an interesting side light on colonial surveillance.

Since my project deals with the problems of Santal representation and Santal historiography, one must also refer to Prathama Banerjee's *Politics of Time: 'Primitives' and History-writing in a Colonial Society*. The book analyses the constitution of the 'historical' in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal and the strategies involved in primitivizing the Santals by the then Bengal intelligentsia. Ranabir Samaddar in his *Memory, Identity, Power: Politics in the Jungle Mahals (West Bengal) 1890-1950* also raises certain key issues in the formation of subaltern memory. The politics of Subaltern History has also been analyzed by Ranajit Guha in his celebrated text *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*.

For the history of the Santal Hul one must refer to the works of J.A. MacPhail, and the renowned historians, Kalikinkar Dutta and Dhirendranath Baske. MacPhail's *The Story of the Santals, with an account of the Santal Rebellion* is a very important colonial narrative of tribal history. Kalikinkar Dutta's *The Santal Insurrection of 1855-7*, first published in 1940, is the first major historical narrative of the Santal Hul and has been a guide for researchers of Santal history and culture thereafter. The personal account of the history in Digambar Chakrabortti's *History of the Santal Hool* written during 1895-96 remains one of the most important existing old narratives of Hul. The only extant Santal voice of the old narratives remains in Chotrae Desmanjhi's *Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha*. The eminent Santal historian Dhirenranath Baske represents the subaltern voice in his celebrated history of Santal Hul in Bangla titled *Saontal Ganasangramer Itihas*. To understand the rich Santal cultural heritage, one must also refer to W.C. Archer's *The Hill of Flutes: Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India – A Portrait of the Santals*. Although it is a very idealized and romantic representation of Santal culture, yet it is the first major collection of their literary heritage.

My research also demands an understanding of collective memory for which one must refer to the seminal texts *On Collective Memory* written by Maurice Halbwach, *Social Memory* by Wickham and Fentress, and *Les Lieux de Memoire* by Pierre Nora. Issues regarding commemoration and national identity have been dealt with by Sarah Tarlow in the book titled *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archeology of Mortality*. It addresses certain key factors on recollection, bereavement and individual choice through the commemorative practices in Orkney. On visual ethnography it is imperative to note the works of Sarah Pink in her *Working Images* and *Doing Visual Ethnography* both of which contextualize the visual research method in present ethnographic investigations.

I intend to read into the visual narratives that I have documented during my field work on the Hul *Divas* on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 and 2010 and the celebration of Sidhu's birth anniversary, all happening at Panchkathia and Bhognadih, and Hul *Divas* on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009 and 2010 at Siuri in West Bengal. The performatives/ practices of recollection of history that got

framed demand engagements with certain historiographic inquiries and the theoretical and methodological implications of documenting such performatives. Hence, the ethnographic text which would be constituted through the visual narratives of the documentation would be read under the light of collaborative and participatory approaches to visual ethnography and historiography. My investigation would primarily emphasize on the process of research and representation of the visual ethnographic text.

The ethnographic text which would be constituted through the visual narratives of my own documentation would also include the counter narratives of the Santal Hul as narrated by the *dikus* of the region. Moreover a total research on the politics of commemoration with reference to Santal Hul and its linkage with problems of representation and legitimization, in itself, I hope will prove to be a novel attempt.

### **Notes and References**

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<sup>1</sup> J.P. 14 Feb. 56, no. 159- Letter from Captain Sherwill, enclosed in Bidwell's Report.

## **Chapter I: Pleasure, performativity and pedagogy in the commemoration of Santal Hul**

... it is the age of *lieux de memoire*. We no longer celebrate the nation, but we study the nation's celebration. (Nora 1996: 7)

The memory-content of Santal insurrection is imprinted with narratives of sufferance and violence. These narratives have their own representational qualities which render them believable and affable. What is left as residue in/through the practice is what renders them significant. The residue is the quality of pleasure that affects the participant associated with the commemorative practices. In this particular chapter I will take the question of pleasure vis-à-vis sufferance and violence that are ubiquitous in the narratives of the insurrection and how they feature in the practice of recollection that makes them so significant. We will see how forms of pleasure *are cultivated* through the performatives of commemoration and *are subverted* (being compensated) with an enforced sense/responsibility of pain by the machineries of power governing the concerned commemorative practice. This dialectics between celebration and sufferance which is symptomatic of all the institutions of martyrdom allow a fertile ground of the appropriation of the celebration into pedagogic purposes.

In the present context it seems Michel Foucault's notion of "emergence" partially captures the complexity around the concept of commemoration. Foucault argues that new discourses and practices emerge out of certain resistances of forces that pave the way for new political, cultural and emotional spaces. An "emergence" thus contains itself in the conflict and reconstitution of the conflict in a new structure. Moreover, the way he uses the terms to describe *emergence* capture the essential representational role played by commemoration: "substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals" (1977: 151). In course of the practice of commemoration of Hul we will see how systematized versions of history/histories are displaced and substituted by the machineries of power in order to reverse the possession of history.

### **Past(s) and time(s) in commemoration**

Before embarking on my case study of the commemoration of Hul it seems imperative to understand the concepts of time and the past vis-à-vis the space and practice of commemoration. We are told that to interpret the riddle of culture one has to go back in time, to the past which precedes the present and without which we do not have any future. The



nature of the past and the demand it has over the present are the key factors one needs to address here. In this section we will see the process in which a commemorative practice unveils different time frames and periodizes time according to the interest of the present.

The concept of *time* remains the primary problem in the practice of commemoration. For Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory “requires the support of groups delimited in time and space” while history remains relatively autonomous (84). Bergson addresses the very fundamental philosophical problems of time and memory and argues that it is memory that draws the past into the present and hence the past “might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality” (44). He introduces two different concepts of time. The first is temporal duration, *durée*, or “inner time” which is ‘defined less by succession than by coexistence’ (44). The instinctive perception of this time is the basis of knowledge about the self. Since pure duration is a kind of a fluid, without a distinct boundary to compartmentalize its span, the subjective insight into inner time is constituted in continuous emergence (Bergson [1896] 1996). This inner subjective time resides in the realms of human creativity and spontaneity and is the key to the spiritual and philosophical knowledge production. The second type of time, i.e. *temps*, draws one to the material, practical world. It is objective, manageable, determined, quantitative and divisible into spatial units. It can be measured with the mechanical clock and calendar time and regulates the needs of human life where the temporal time flows into a spatial concept of time. This ensures that the flow of experience is turned into a manageable and spatial unit of time (Bergson [1896] 1996; Warnock 1987: 18-29; Adam 1990; Coser 1992: 7-9). The insistence on the importance of commemorative dates that has universally been a part of the political agenda has been termed by scholars as “the invention of tradition” (Winter 62). Walter Benjamin in his “Theses” writes: “Calendars do not measure time as clocks do; they are monuments of ... historical consciousness”. This consciousness is historically contingent to the institutions of power that govern the calendar. Durkheim shows how a holiday functions to concentrate a community’s stake on their common beliefs, traditions, and ancestors ([1915] 1965: 420). But the latent power play that goes into the process of governing such a commemorative date often goes unnoticed. At present it is impossible to overlook the ongoing tussle between the West Bengal government and the Sidhu-Kanho Memorial Association, as will be discussed in details in the final chapter, over the *exact* date of Hul and the importance to commemorate on that *exact* date. The temporal past is put at stake so that their tribal identity does not get subsumed into a homogeneous identity of the State.

The past, too, remains a problem in this particular context because in memory “the time line becomes tangled and folds back on itself. The complex of practices and means by which the past invests the present is memory: memory is the present past” (Terdiman 8). History’s focus resides on the historicity of past episodes while memory is taken as something which does not have a temporal sense of time, something that denies the ‘pastness’ of its objects and that gives a sense of continuous presence (Novick 1999: 3-4). In this paradigm of continuous presence we do not relate to one single time but a variety of times which is rather an arbitrary enterprise (Adam 1990; Hutton 1993). The indeterminacy of the past, which is exemplified by continuous changes in understanding the ‘pastness’ of its objects, constantly shifts the temporality of the past and hence past does not remain fixed (Hacking 1995). On the other hand Kartiel suggests a kind of atemporal sense of past with relation to the practice of recollection. He says that recollection “involves the invocation of the past through ritualized actions designed to create an atemporal sense of the past in the present” (Kartiel 1999: 99-100). Finkelkraut (1994) cautions us regarding the value attached to concepts of the past and the present in the process of recollection. He writes:

Memory does not consist in subordinating the past to the needs of the present. ... If the future is for all things the measure of value, memory has no ground: for he who looks to gather the materials of memory places himself at the service of the dead, and not the other way around (54)

Memory, thus, is seen as something that is plural, which gets mediated in a different temporality of the past and remains fluid in the presence. However in certain approaches to cultural tradition and the understanding of the representation of events, memory is reduced to a history of the past’s images (Hutton 1993: 22). Bergson, on the other hand, categorizes mnemonics into two distinctive forms of memory: ‘habit’ memory (used daily to tell us what things are) and ‘representational’ memory, which is a ‘pure’, involuntary and spontaneous form in which we become aware of ‘pure duration’ and which helps us to understand ourselves ([1896] 1996: 213). He argues that the entire past episodes are present at the level of unconscious, where all the experiences are preserved timelessly. The preserved past experience ensures that nothing is forgotten or destroyed. Historian Jan Assmann introduces “mnemohistory” in the process of remembering which “[u]nlike history proper [...] is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered” (Assmann 1998: 8-9). Mnemohistory calls for a theory of cultural transmission as an active process of meaning-making through time, “the ongoing work of reconstructive imagination” (Assmann

1998: 14). He remarks: “It is only through mnemohistorical reflection that history [...] becomes aware of its own function as a form of remembering” (21). Memory is also considered as something that generates signs where lots of visual associations, allusions and symbols are produced. Pierre Nora distinguishes four types of realms or sites of memory: symbolic (commemorations, pilgrimages, anniversaries, emblems); functional (manuals, autobiographies, associations); monumental (cemeteries, buildings); and topographic (archives, libraries, museums). He argues that “memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image, and object” (1996: 3). These sites connect different time frames and, in the words of Pierre Nora, “the residual sense of continuity remains” in them (1996: 1). This semiotic conception of culture (Schwartz 1996) is based on a simple but strong premise: that “every conscious perception is ... an act of recognition, a pairing in which an object (or an event, an act, an emotion) is identified by placing it against the background of an appropriate symbol” (Geertz 1973: 215). Commemorative objects can be seen as “appropriate symbols” because they allow transformation of collective consciousness into a referent through which one make sense of the experience. These sites of memory are spatial associations where a group of people engages in a shared activity through which they express “a collective shared knowledge [...] of the past, on which a group’s sense of unity and individuality is based” (Assmann 1995: 15). “Collective memory”, Schwartz argues, “is a representation of the past embodied in both commemorative symbolism and historical evidence” (471). The dominant scholarly debates about sites of memory show how these spaces become signposts of dominant political power in society. One school of thought following Pierre Nora would argue that these sites visually mark the legitimacy of the ruling political power. The phenomenological experience of walking past a heritage site or remains of the past subverts the dominant power equation that is marked on the site and yet the official boundaries govern the free movement of such an experience. The official walled territories of the important sites of the Hul, at Panchkathia and Bhognadih ground not only mark the legitimacy of the political power in their claims to history but also highlight how they limit history as per their own choice. The choice of history that suits their interests is marked in order to keep it manageable in the course of time. The practice of commemoration, thus, becomes the space in which these power relations are evaluated and imposed upon the consenting subjects.

The practice of commemoration provides foundations of group allegiance and collective experience in time where multiple time frames are made to overlap with the changing interests of the governing body. More often when commemorative practices are

governed by the machineries of power so as to indoctrinate the subjects to a particular understanding of history, it is *performed* in a public space and demands certain attention from the participants. These reactions partly involve certain political impositions (Polletta, 1998a, 1998b), often an analysis of present condition (Williams 1985), a claim for a “moral accountability” (Werbner 1995: 102) and framing a blue-print for the future (Tonkin 1992: 1). Winter, however, argues that the practice of public commemoration, especially connected to the history of violence and bloodshed, is targeted to one’s need for some consolation: commemoration as an extension of mourning, the “acts and gestures through which survivors express grief and pass through stages of bereavement” (29). Commemoration is, thus, understood as a public “program” that “articulates collective values and provides cognitive, affective, and moral orientation for realizing them” (Schwartz 1997: 492). In such a public sphere, the machineries of power usually represented by the State constitute and govern the space produced in the practice of commemoration.

### **State in commemoration**

A State is supposed to do everything possible to preserve a consciousness of togetherness among its citizens, especially for those composed of multi ethnic groups which run a risk of social and cultural disintegration. It becomes imperative for the State to focus on certain common, shared elements of the inhabitants to cultivate a sense of the *personal* within collective and national identities. Major cultural ingredients like common language or a shared past becomes major foci to create a sense of an integrated culture. This is where the *personal* is unified in the *collective* to be integrated through certain common, shared and regulated practices. Evoking the past becomes an effort to create a consciousness of likeness among individuals. Attempts are made to integrate and even homogenize through certain commonalities which are believed to sustain certain public and national identities. Such identities are established by marking boundaries that distinguish “us”, who share a common past, from “them” who do not. In this process of putting boundaries, history is appropriated, revised, taught and memorized according to the interest of the present as to which personal, collective and national identities emphases are placed upon. It is needless to reiterate how modes of interest homogenize themselves on the quest for the mythical Aryan homeland in southern Russia, Ukraine, or northern India or even around the Ayodhya issue. These identities are culturally transmitted in time according to the dominant modes of power.

In issues of colonialism and nationalism, the past has been often appropriated by the dominant power so that it serves the cause of the present (Gosden 2004; Trigger 1989; Kohl and Fawcett 1995). The elites and the political leaders have legitimized their power through evidences from the past. Importantly the mode of colonial self-representation has been revived through this discourse of nationalism. Nationalism began in Western Europe as a movement for popular sovereignty which is based in the liberating rhetoric that characterized the Glorious Revolution (1688), the American Revolution (1776), and the French Revolution (1789). These observations are quite old now and have been extensively discursivized in modern anthropology and history (e.g. Chatterjee 1993; Dirks 1992). In the present context the involvement of the State in the commemoration of Hul through the discourse of nationalism not only appropriates Santal history but also transforms it according to the interests of the present. In the following sections I will elucidate the process through which the State and its machineries have achieved such an end.

### **Remembering the Rebels/Rebellion**

The celebration of Hul dates back to 1977 when Sidhu Kanho Memorial Association started commemorating the martyrs of the original Hul as Sidhu-Kanho Divas on 30<sup>th</sup> June, the day which is marked as that of the first mass congregation by the two brothers. To sustain such a project, it becomes a compulsion to bring it within the purview of the State so that it gets an official legitimacy and further support, mainly in financial terms. The West Bengal State Government took charge of the entire project and titled it as Hul Divas from 1985. It is under the financial supervision of the State that Hul is commemorated in various districts of West Bengal each year on that same date. The Esplanade East in Kolkata was rechristened as Sidhu-Kanho Dahar (Sidhu-Kanho Broadway) and the Esplanade East Post Office was named after the heroes as Sidhu-Kanho Dahar Post Office. In the repetition of names the “objects of memory” (Slyomovics 1998) is invoked constantly in conversations only to weave it into everyday practices (Slyomovics 1998: 201-3). As Daniel J. Sherman says,

Names ... become the vehicle for the transmission of meaning, a civic pedagogy in which they stand for “heroism”, receive “tribute”, and provide “examples” of imitable virtue. Through this process of displacement, names are made to embody precisely the values that undergird military service, and commemoration establishes itself as a ritual of continuity.

In this particular context the naming of the road not only implies a certain tribute paid to the martyrs but could also be perceived as a significant move in terms of counter appropriation by the backward class of the supposed elite lanes of the urban, central cityscape, where they established their own little history. Each year, in Kolkata, the SKMA, jointly with the State, commemorates the heroes at the Sidhu-Kanho Dahar with a dual intention of taking history to posterity and thereby asserting a separate self-identity of the Santals in the middle of a busy, commercial, indifferent bend of Kolkata. The official function primarily involves commemorative speeches analyzing the present Santal condition vis-à-vis the past and the significance of recollection of the Hul in the present context of the state and the nation. This is followed by State's contributions to certain section of the adivasis in order to address the developmental issues of the backward class of the society. One must acknowledge that the meagre participation in this event is brought about by the Santal performers from different states of West-Bengal who show their cultural expertise remembering Hul.

In Suri, the practice of commemoration of Hul was started with the inauguration of the District Information and Cultural Department by the ex-Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu, on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1980. It has become a two-day event at present with hundreds of Santals and local people participating in the commemoration. Interestingly, the prime interest lies not in the commemorative speeches or the State grants but in the cultural performance of the Santals and other performers from the neighbouring districts and states. On interviewing some of the artists I came to know that competitions are held in different villages over the year through which the participants of this event are chosen. Each group is paid a token amount of around two thousand five hundred rupees and the leader of the group distributes the money equally amongst the members. The space of Sidhu-Kanho Open Theatre inside the premise of the District Cultural Department of Suri is given to Santals and folk performers of Birbhum alike. The folk songs of Birbhum like baul, bhawai, bhadugaan, phakiri, Muslim folk songs, and Santal traditional dances like baha, saharai, dong etc. are staged in the form of celebration of culture in the event of the commemoration of Hul. A small scale *Vikas-Mela* is also accommodated at the same premise so that the government can showcase some of their policies aimed at the development of the backward section of the society and also offer little assistance to the small scale cottage industries.

From the year 2005, the commemoration at the supposed *site* of the insurrection at Panchkathia-Bhognadih became a major annual event organized by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha with the support of the State Government of Jharkhand. The Sidhu-Kanho Bhavan,

which became functional from 2005, is located right next to the *Kranti-Sthal* at Panchkathia. The other space concerned, i.e. the Bhognadih ground, was territorialized with a wall in 2003, to mark the sanctified space of the mass congregation called by Sidhu and Kanho very close to the land of their descendants. On the occasion of 150<sup>th</sup> year of Hul, in 2005, under the supervision of the then BDO, Jitendra Kumar Deo, a local artist from Bhognadih was commissioned to paint certain sequences from Santal history on the wall around the stage inside the ground, which will be discussed in details in a forthcoming chapter. In the same year, the official 7ft tall bronze statues of the two brothers were placed at the centre of the ground next to the 5ft statues of the duo presented by NTPC that stands in the same space since 1996. The process of commemoration starts at the *Kranti-Sthal* of Panchkathia with groups of young men and boys from neighbouring villages like Simuldhap, Boro, Panchkathia, Amrapara and Bhognadih showing their prowess in traditional skills with sticks accompanied by traditional Santali percussions like *madal*, *dhol*, *nagara*, trumpets and gongs. A ritualized *puja* is offered to their chief deity *Marang Buru* at the *Kranti-Sthal* on the morning of the event. Various Santal institutions and NGOs from all parts of Santal Parganas gather at this space after days of procession from their respective villages and finally head towards Bhognadih. This particular procession from Panchkathia and Bhognadih is organized by JMM and is officially presided over by the JMM leader Hemlal Murmu. This year the procession was led by two cycle-vans, one carrying a little girl dressed as *Bharat-Mata* and the other carrying two kids with bows and arrows as Sidhu and Kanho. Last year, in 2009, two men with bows and arrows were positioned at the head of the procession to denote the two brothers. The members of JMM usually carry *mashaals* and chant slogans during the procession as a tribute to the Santal martyrs. By the time this procession reaches the Bhognadih ground, the stage is prepared for the State officials and the chief political leaders. The official representatives and their comrades first pay tribute at the 7ft bronze statues of the Santal martyrs and then take their official chairs on the stage for the commemorative speeches. In 2009 the girls of the Eklavya School greeted the officials with their *johar* (greeting) song and the boys then danced to Santali songs which recollected the culture and history of the Santals. In 2010 the new BDO Bibhas Thakur invited students from the local school where the girls danced to a couple of songs in the memory of the martyrs of Hul. After the brief cultural programme, the officials namely the Chief Commissioner of Police, the District Magistrate, JMM leader Hemlal Murmu and other important State representatives gave brief introductions to the history, its present significance and bound their argument to the developmental cause of the backward people.

Another major congregation of the Santals and the officials at this *site* takes place on the supposed birth anniversary of one of the leaders of Hul, Sidhu Murmu, each year on 11<sup>th</sup> April. A part of the event is presided over by the *gurus* of *Vithin Samaj* from the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> April to 11<sup>th</sup> April till the officials step in for the rest of the event. This seems to be a more popular occasion where thousands of Santals, especially the followers of the *Vithin Samaj*, assemble to partake in shared rituals and cultural performances. Among the Santals ritual is still the prerequisite for any sort of initiation. On the occasion of the commemoration of the rebel or the rebellion, homage to *Marang Buru* initiates the ritualized practices. As is prescribed in most rituals across the world the homage to *Marang Buru* begins in the early morning of the day with the participants neatly dressed in green and white and assembled in silent lines inside the premise of the *Kranti-Sthal*. The two *gurus* of the *Vithin Samaj* simultaneously go on singing hymns, give lectures on the religion and cultural history of the Santals, and dance with the performers for the entire 24 hours stretch. The followers of *Vithin Samaj* abstain from drinking *hadiya* during this entire event unlike the usual Santal religious occasions where *hadiya* is taken as an integral part of the celebration. This section of the Santals has been appropriated by Hinduism and they associate *Marang Buru* with Lord Shiva of the Hindu pantheon. The entire congregation moves to the *Jaher Thaan* at a kilometer distance from the *Kranti-Sthal* late at night along with the performance troupe. As a part of the ritual the entire crowd revolves round the huge ground next to the religious *Jaher Thaan* over and over again and then settles down on the ground itself while the performers go on performing night long. It seems the entire repertoire of the Santal dances and songs are unfolded to culturally rehearse them at the pretext of a commemoration of their hero. However the cultural performance is rested with the rising of the sun the next morning and the last part of this session at this ground takes place under the supervision of the *gurus*. In this particular session hundreds of Santals who had previously pledged their devotion to the *gurus* for their aspiration of children offer food grains and garments on wish fulfillment and seek blessings from the *gurus* for their new born. The crowd is also comprised of many who come to pledge their devotion themselves. At around mid day the entire party starts off towards Bhognadih where the officials perform their ritual duty of bestowing governmental grants to certain sections of the Santals. It was a bigger event here, this year, with the Chief Minister and the founder of JMM, Shibu Soren, attending it. The *Vikas Mela* also acquaints the residents with the latest schemes and policies in terms of development of agriculture, fishery, health and other smaller scale industries.



## Performatives of commemoration

The violence and sufferance attached to the Santal Insurrection can be taken as given and over narrativized in the context of this chapter. What might be of interest is to see how, in the representation of the performatives of the violent past in deferred and differed time and space, they are rendered as *pleasurable*. There are two questions at stake here:

- Does the pleasure being experienced by the participant remain isolated from the cause and content of memory?
- Does the sobriety of the whole state of affairs associated with the performative narratives undo the affect of pleasure in the very practice of commemoration?

The commemoration becomes a pretext for certain revisions of history and culture and its inherent quality in affecting the participant makes it a celebration of the cultural coordinates of a community. The past does not remain the same. In its representation and recollection, the present merges with the past to form a new configuration of the past and the tradition which comes with it. This section will deal with the celebratory mode in recollecting the past and the intervention of the machineries of the State to undercut the pleasure with an enforced sensibility of sobriety and this becomes a ground for them to establish their notions of history and culture to their consenting subjects.

At first the very visuality of the entire participation of the commemoration needs to be engaged with. The congregation on the occasion of 30<sup>th</sup> June's Hul *Divas* is mainly supported by the JMM where the women dress themselves in their regular green blouse, lungi and green petticoat wrapped around them and silver ornaments and men in their green lungi and mainly white shirt. But the congregation of 11<sup>th</sup> April at the same place is formed by the followers of a particular *Vithin dharma* who are very much influenced and closely associated with the practices of the Hindu religion. The women followers of *Vithin dharma* wear green blouse, white saree with green border and silver ornaments, the men followers wear white dhotis and white shirts mainly and the men dancers wear the traditional green dhotis and shirts. The more recent incorporation is the performers wearing the traditional dhotis with jerseys similar to that of football players. The very visual of these men in jerseys takes us to the very sportive kind of an ambience. This is true for the young men performers who are brought from local villages to show their skills with sticks and different forms of exercises on the Hul *divas* at Panchkathia. All of them including those who play the percussion wear this modern sportswear which numbers them in categories. The same dress code was observed at Suri on

1<sup>st</sup> July where the male dance performers wore the numbered jerseys along with their traditional dhotis. This visual of the sportswear immediately takes these traditional exercises and performances to a much more complex form of modern sportive activity.

Sporting activities and competitions have become an integral part of such events. In reality such sporting activities initiate on the day previous to the *actual* commemorative practices which begin with the homage to Marang Buru. The young boys from local villages team themselves up and play football at the Bhognadih ground the day before the event while the local people enjoy along with their traditional liquor, *hadiya*, the rice beer. The very excitement that marks the space of Bhognadih in the present is reminiscent of the very excitement generated out of the congregation of the Santals during the rebellion. It takes a more celebratory form where the uncontrolled excitement in the very participation in the game along with the ritual intoxication marks the present time and space as a transgressive and Dionysian one. Talking about Norbert Elias' discussions on sports and the quest for excitement, Roger Chartier in his book, *On the Edge of the Cliff*, comments:

For Elias, the key concept that lets us account for the appearance of sports (as discontinuous from the older competitions) is the "controlled decontrolling of emotions." The pleasure derived from playing a sport or watching a match comes from an excitement produced by an unconstrained interaction among bodies that nonetheless remains respectful of life, and from the vicissitudes of a struggle that may seem severe but is only a simulacrum of the violent clashes of war (139).

The Bhognadih ground on this particular occasion justifies Elias' point of this illusory quest for origin. Pierre Bourdieu in comparison to Elias talks about the sports and social interactions of the participants associated to the very space of the field:

[which] aims ... to grasp the specificity of sporting practice, or, more precisely, to determine how certain pre-existing physical exercises, or others which may have received a radically new meaning and function ... become sports, defined with respect to their rewards, their rules, and also the social identity of their participants – players or spectators – by the specific logic of the 'sporting field' (Chartier 139).

Thus, the entire milieu of Bhognadih-Panchkathia becomes a space of celebration of various forms of cultural activities in order to socially bind a Santal identity on the occasion of the Hul *Divas*. The space of the commemoration at Suri is largely given to showcase the cultural patterns of the Santals of the state and its neighbouring locales. Other important folk

performances are also invited so as to promote the event among the Santals coming from various parts and the locals of Suri, mainly middle class Bengalis. The motive is clearly to celebrate the culture and its patterns as a form of revision of history and tradition.

While the celebratory aspect becomes prominent in the participation of the mass it becomes politically imperative for the machineries of the State to remind them of the violent struggle of their ancestors and the ongoing sufferance of certain sections among them. The sobriety of the state of affairs is incorporated in the stimulating official narratives regarding Santal identity in terms of a common national identity and issues of development. The pedagogic intention of the State and its machineries gets realized at the space of commemoration. The *Vikas Mela* acts as the main agent through which this motive is realized. The wall narratives at the Bhognadih ground narrate the Santal cultural history and practices and allow the transmission of the message of the State in disciplining its consenting subjects. As in the wall narrative, which is often vocalized in the official rhetorics, the Santals are counselled not to indulge in regular drinking habits citing medical grounds and certain mal-practices in their own society like exploitation of women. The wall narratives and the pedagogy of the State will be taken up later but what is important to note here is how they determine the sobriety of the entire state of affairs. Here one needs to engage with the intervention of the JMM in the cultural history of Jharkhand, what their rhetorics are based upon and its function in the practice of commemoration.

### **JMM and its intervention into the cultural history of Jharkhand**

The motive in the participation and organization of the commemoration at the *supposed* site of Hul by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha can be traced back to the decades of struggle of the Jharkhand Movement. Usually Jharkhand Movement is associated with the tribal people fighting for their own land primarily with an intention of establishing an autonomous state. The autonomy demanded in the Jharkhand Movement is a part of the formation of *self-identity* that has been in question ever since the intrusion of the East India Company into the hills and forests bordering Bengal, Bihar and Orissa (Sengupta 3-6). In this particular section I will show how the question of the formation of *self-identity* lies at the core of the motives in the practice and performatives of commemoration and how *modernity* is placed vis-à-vis *primitivity* in the cultural and political assertion of a national identity.

The Jharkhand movement was conceived in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the formation of Unnati Samaj (1915) which was later reorganized as a political organization and renamed Chotonagpur Adivasi Mahasabha (1938) aiming at the improvement of the economic condition of the tribals (Sengupta 5). With the formation of Adivasi Mahasabha the question of the formation of Jharkhand state was raised in 1939 (Sengupta 28). The Jharkhand Party formed in 1950 (Sengupta 29) worked along ethnic lines to change its course from agrarian struggle to class struggle. Jaipal Singh, one of the most prominent leaders of the Adivasi Mahasabha, writes on the Adivasi movement, “[t]he fulfillment of our demands is not a matter for academic discussion; it is a national necessity” (quoted in Ekka 26). The demand for the autonomous state was not in terms of any spatial interests but in terms of the cultural similarities of the people inhabiting in this area. The concept of Jharkhand, as Sengupta argues, is an “amorphous” concept (5) and he explains:

The concept of Jharkhand is not merely a geographical region. Its real implication is ‘a land of depressed people’. ‘Jharkhandi’ means a ‘mass of destitutes’ and the ‘development of Jharkhand’ is a question of ‘development of the conditions of destitute population’ (11).

Sengupta categorizes the trajectory of the Jharkhand problem as a distinct class problem (29). With the growing intrusion of modern amenities the traditional methods of the Santals started experiencing a constant crisis. Sengupta addresses this additional hue of class struggle in the Jharkhand Movement:

While anti-moneylender agrarian struggle has been an old phenomenon in Jharkhand, a new phenomenon has been added in the recent period related with industry-agriculture, more correctly the modern and traditional sectoral contradictions (34).

The modern and the traditional have been logically seen as polar opposites even in the Jharkhand Movement. The logic maintained is that the traditional as opposed to the modern lacks rational perspective of the Western world:

Birsa’s death (1900) can be taken roughly to be the end of the traditional religious type of leadership and as the beginning of a rationalistic type of leadership ... the sources of their (the new leaders’) were not the ‘dreams’ and ‘divinations’ but their education and experience and political skill gained through contacts with modern civilization (Jha 106).

Western influence has been quite significant among the tribals of this area after Christian Missionaries attempted at the conversion of the people. However, with the advent of the *dikus* and the intervention of the market economy, thereafter, the binary in terms of economy became quite prominent. Sengupta remarks:

What is distinct in Jharkhand is that a time has come when the numerous section of the peasantry do not merely grudge the better-offs among the workers, but actually point to them as reason for their own wretched existence (36).

After the amendment of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1969 some important groups like the Birsa Seva Dal or Jharkhand Mukti Morcha were born and developed through the ongoing agrarian struggles (Sengupta 34). *The Indian Nation* notes a mass movement regarding the cause of Jharkhand:

On May 12, 1969 the Birsa Seva Dal, Birsa Party and the Krantikari Morcha organized a march of about 3,000 adivasi men and women with bows and arrows. They trekked the 22 mile route from Khunti to Ranchi. Their demand included creation of a separate Jharkhand State and restoration of land to adivasis. (May 13, 1969)

Among these new groups campaigning for the cause of the Jharkhandis, JMM emerged as the most promising and the strongest political party. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha was formed on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1973 in Golf Ground, Dhanbad, under the guidance of Sibu Soren and Binod Nihari Mahto (Ekka 43). S.B.C. Davelle remarks, “[t]he trajectory of agrarian protest in Santal Parganas-Dhanbad area proved a fertile ground for emergence of the JMM” (184). The birth of JMM coincides with a significant moment of the Jharkhand Movement when on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1973, JMM and Bihari Colliery Kamgar Union – a workers’ trade union – organized and celebrated Jharkhand Divas (Sengupta 37). There have been conscious attempts, mainly from JMM, to appropriate certain historical referents so that a trajectory can be established of their present Jharkhand Movement with the tradition of insurrection and uprisings in the same region. Ekka writes:

Many Jharkhand supporters are of the opinion that various revolts, uprisings and insurrections such as several Munda uprisings (1797, 1807, 1819-20), Bhumij revolts (1798-99, 1834), Tilka Manjhi revolt (1784), Chero uprising (1800), Ho revolt (1820), Kol rebellion (1832-33), Santal Hul (1855-56), Sardari Larai (1859-65), Birsa Munda Movement (1895-1900), etc. which the people of Jharkhand launched against the British Government for protection of their right over land and forest and for

preservation of their autonomy are connected with the Jharkhand movement of the present day in one way or another. They believe that these revolts and insurrections formed parts of the struggle of the people of India against British colonialism and exploitation, and they look upon the present Jharkhand movement as an extension and continuation of these revolts, uprisings and insurrections for protection and preservation of the identity or nationality of the people of Jharkhand which, they say, is facing the threat of going out of existence due to internal colonial policy of the Central and State Governments (1-2).

The neo-colonial State machinery is believed to be a hindrance to the Jharkhand cause. However the political parties take recourse to the machineries of the State to exercise their power on their take on history. Power, as Foucault says in *Discipline and Punish*, has no separate existing quality or potential. It exists in the performance of acts, in acting to influence the actions of another. In this case we see how the political powers supported by the State machineries appropriate history and tradition to influence the adivasis. The preoccupation of history is primarily targeted at the process of modernity that the future promises to procure. In this context Nirmal Sengupta writes:

History manifests itself only at the level of consciousness of its actors; the significance of the current, however, lies in the preoccupation of the future. In the characteristic pattern of intersectoral articulation in Jharkhand, the peasant nationalism indeed, is a struggle for the development of the working class. Where there is a definite interest of the industrial capital to maintain the depressed conditions of the rural economies, the efforts of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha to develop the agriculture or to assert adivasis' rights over the forest produce are effectively struggles against the exploitation including that of the industrial capital (251).

The adivasis fighting for their own rights, in the context of Jharkhand, was primarily supported by JMM. In the current situation the class struggle has taken multiple forms with the provision of modernity that are showcased to them in the State organized *Vikas-Mela*. JMM's formation in the course of the Jharkhand movement and its intervention into the cultural history of Jharkhand influenced the adivasis to put certain questions at stake. How do modernity and primitivity function in their appropriation of history? In what ways do the State machineries address and govern primitivity vis-à-vis modernity?



## Addressing the 'primitive within'

The social imperative among the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengali intelligentsia to address the 'primitive within' and demarcate the *modern* from the *pre-modern* or *primitive* as Prathama Banerjee argues seems quite a political imperative in the case in focus. Here the cross-temporal *primitivity* is demarcated from the profitable *modernity* and the 'primitive within' is projected as primitivity in order to internalize them into the apparatus that constitutes modernity. The determination of the primitivity which has to be addressed through modernity has become the central focus of the day. The primitive here is placed as a direct antonym for modern where primitivity is imagined as a temporal marker which might detain the developmental process that is invested on the supposed backward class, the Santals in this case. Modernity appears as an advantage to primitivity. In the case in focus the 'primitive within' has dual possibility. The obvious one is pointed at the class difference of the people in Jharkhand: the upper and middle class and the supposed backward class of the Santals and the Paharias. In other words, the backward class among the middle-upper class in terms of both cultural and economic condition marks the 'primitive within' in this particular society. The second one is more complex and resides in the psychological behaviour of the Santals. The *Vikas-Mela* is one enterprise taken by the government which showcases the modern amenities to the supposed backward group of people. The question of development is projected as the key factor here. The *Vikas-Mela* becomes the harbinger of modernity by affecting the 'primitive' within the society. The issue of development will be taken up in details later while talking of the developmental historiography in the discourse of multiple possibilities of narratives of Hul.

The second possibility of the 'primitive within' largely depends upon the evolution of their social thoughts over time. The paradox lies in the process in which this 'primitive within' is addressed by the government and its machineries so as to sanctify them into modernity. At one level a part of this 'primitive' condition is fossilized and monumentalized and at another level such fossilization becomes a condition of obligation to step into modernity. The machineries of the government apparently appropriate both history and tradition to guide them to modernity. One is told about the mal-practice of drinking the religious rice beer, *hadiya* as they call it, regularly, which, as the government claims, has made them lethargic towards education and thereby modernity which comes through it. They are reminded of the legend of *Marang Buru*, their chief deity, who has permitted the Santals to drink *hadiya* during occasions and not as an everyday practice. The primitive religious sentiment is played upon to instill a need to come out of their 'primitive' condition into the

modern world as a precondition of traditional and cultural responsibility. Another 'primitive' condition is addressed in terms of their interaction with the police. The oppressive and exploitative figure of Mahesh daroga of the Hul, as will be discussed in a later chapter, still looms in the contemporary Santal consciousness. Hence, it becomes a political imperative to cleanse the Santal consciousness of such aversion from the police. Various narratives focusing on the supportive role that the police play in the Santal society are placed around the premise of the *Vikas-Mela* so as to officially cleanse them of the fear and anxiety that have been a 'primitive' condition among the Santals. An attempt was made by the Chief Commissioner of Police during the commemoration of Hul at Bhognadih on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009, to read out a message in Santali in his speech to establish the point that the police are their immediate support system as they were even in the colonial regime. The message also elaborates the reason why the Santals should interact with the police without fear and anxiety as they are their immediate connection with the government. It is the mode of familiarity that is brought about by language politics which is played on the 'primitive' condition of the Santals to build a new constitution of behaviour with the government. It is needless to point out the politics of power in subjugating them as faithful subjects to the government.

The 'primitive' condition which instigated the Hul is valorized and monumentalized by the government. The heroes Sidhu and Kanho, monumentalized by the government, become the embodiment of this overwhelming spirit. A paradox arises when this 'primitive' condition, which has been already monumentalized by the government to sanction their rightful claims to history, becomes a necessary condition to emulate in the contemporary. And this is projected as a prerequisite to step into modernity. This year on the same occasion, the Chief Commissioner of Police in his rhetoric urged the masses to unite for another Hul that will cleanse them of their previous conditions of primitivity by their overwhelming 'primitive' spirit so as to facilitate modernity into their lifestyle. This Hul, as he perceived, would liberate them to the condition that was conceived of by the martyrs of Hul. Therefore, the official narratives foreground the paradox of primitivity *for* modernity while at the same time seeking to cleanse this primitivity because of the supposed *threat* it poses to modernity.

Here comes the second paradox of the situation in terms of the question of identity imposed upon the Santals by the government through citations of history and tradition. On one hand the identity is perceived as *other* or *backward* to acquire separate grants for the socially and economically backward people. On the other hand the identity is established as parallel to the mainstream referents so that it can be internalized in the premise of the national



identity. Hemlal Murmu, one of the leading leaders of JMM, the District Magistrate and other officials would always talk of a separate identity for the Santals and the need to procure governmental benefits for the cause of their development. The substantial amount of interest of the Jharkhand Movement was devoted to the demand for an autonomous identity in terms of an autonomous state of Jharkhand. After this demand was granted the urge continues to obtain benefits in establishing a separate identity. Nirmal Sengupta had once envisaged that “it seems that the emergence of a nationality in Jharkhand is not just a possibility but a certainty” (241). But there is a conscious contradiction in the process in which the political powers operate to legitimize their motives in the issues of development. There is a conscious attempt to internalize this indigenous culture and history into the mainstream history of traditional and colonial India so that the political powers can avail national benefits. This year in the procession, annually organized and conducted by JMM, which starts from the *kranti-sthal* of Panchkathia and ends at the ground of Bhognadih, a little girl was dressed to resemble the *Bharat Mata* and two kids as the martyr heroes, Sidhu and Kanho. The little kids who were ornamented with necklaces, armlets and bracelets made up of marigold flowers quite resembled the Hindu legendary figures Ram and Lakshman along with bows and arrows. JMM’s present political liaison with BJP completely foregrounds this conscious contradiction in their appropriation of history and myths. The heritage of the mainstream order is evoked to emphasize the need to create a heritage in the Santal history. The formation of the heritage, needless to say, would promote the Santal history into the frame of national heritage so that the national benefits become easily available to the power machineries of the ruling class. This takes us to the basic problem in the formation of heritage and the question of the ownership of that history. The problem of ownership will be taken up in a later chapter while talking of the multiple possibilities of narratives around Hul.

### **Motifs**

There are broadly three motifs in the performatives of the commemoration in focus. One shows how the process of appropriation of history is directly associated with the celebration of culture. The second is directed at the syncretic possibilities of culture and the third shows how this becomes a platform for the government to pass on developmental messages to its consenting subjects. I will deal with these three motifs one after the other in the course of this study of Santal Hul commemoration.

The commemoration of the rebels and the rebellion as documented over the past two years at the supposed *site* of Hul at Panchkathia-Bhognadih and Suri involve appropriation of history to celebrate culture. On the occasion of the supposed birth anniversary of Sidhu, the followers of *Vithin Samaj* culturally rehearse their cultural patterns and performances in order to preserve their tradition and cultural history. The *gurus* of the *Vithin Samaj*, who have been coordinating the entire event for the past twelve years, have become the custodians of their cultural heritage. In an age when Santal diaspora at the very core of Santal communitarian society has diluted much of their traditional patterns, a cultural rehearsal becomes the only way to establish continuity with the past. Interestingly, ritualized movements *preserve* while physical existence is quintessentially transient. In its very act of performing, the gestures undergo a trans-temporal documentation through their routine reiteration. Like the Ramlila of Ramnagar and the ritual in Yellemma festival at Dharwad, the Santal dance in its annual continuous reiteration, is getting documented within the scope of performance itself. But we must also remember reiteration can partially take care of documentation within a collective consciousness but certain things do die out. Therefore, the cultural rehearsal not only brings continuity with the past but also contemporizes the oral tradition.

On the other hand, the commissioned and staged performances at Suri and other districts of West Bengal displace the cultural patterns from their *original* counterparts. Such commissioned performances claim to preserve the *original* and the *ethnic* as a recreational form of entertainment for the State officials. Ironic it might sound, but truly, in an event concerning Santal cultural history, the *ethnic* Santal dances are not as preferred as the more visually appealing Snow Lion Dance from Sikkim or Chhau of Mayurbhanj District of Orissa or Gambhira from Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The objective of the cultural event at Suri clearly emerges as a ploy to draw a significant crowd by catering to the popular thirst for various regional folk forms. The second motif arises from this cultural accommodation of other folk patterns and performances.

The cultural *mélange* of various folk patterns and performances produces syncretic possibilities of culture. In 2009 folk artists from Murshidabad district performed their folk form of Gambhira and this year's major attraction was the Chhau from Mayurbhanj district and the human dolls from Malda. Popular consensus demanded a repeat show of the Snow Lion Dance from Sikkim in 2010. The folk artists of Birbhum showed their expertise in folk forms like the *bhadu gaan*, *baul*, *bhawai* etc. In the performance of the human dolls from Malda we see how the cultural form has adapted and appropriated popular lyrics of

contemporary bands to serve their narratives. Such cultural performance sustains the ephemerality by its reiterability but through modification/ hybridization they might get a new lease of life. That in Ramlila, mikes and lighting rather than robbing away from the ritual create a more complex relationship with the actual performance, is true for contemporary folk forms in general. Therefore, it seems, on such an occasion, the annual cultural mélange of different folk forms and practices *preserve* their cultural patterns and at the same time get adapted and appropriated into other contemporary popular demands and forms.

### **Conclusion**

The first section of the chapter provides the basic tenets and academic engagements with the notions of past and time vis-à-vis the practice of commemoration. The next section establishes the role of the State and its machineries in this practice based on my field reports of the last two years in Jharkhand and West Bengal. The following section deals with the content of *pleasure* in memorizing the martyrs of Hul and how the space of commemoration becomes a fertile ground for pedagogy to institute the power relations with the consenting subjects. Thereafter two sections are devoted to analyze the process in which the commemoration at the *site* is linked to the trajectory of Jharkhand Movement and the role of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in it. The final section deals with the motifs in the performatives of the commemoration at various *sites* of Hul. Thus, we see how commemoration emerges through appropriations of various forms of histories and cultures, displacements of power and history to establish various relations of power and reverse some claims of history.

## Chapter II: Collections of Recollection

*Sido, why are you bathed in blood?*

*Kanhu, why do you cry Hul Hul?*

*For our people we have bathed in blood*

*For the trader thieves*

*Have robbed us of our land.* (Translated by W.G. Archer, quoted in Kaviraj 55).

*We shall live alone, with no one by our side*

*We will truly rebel*

*We will truly rebel*

*Our country's Majhis and Paraganas*

*All the village heads*

*Will help us with all their might, though no one else will be by our side,*

*We will definitely rebel.* (Baske 59, Translation mine)

What exactly was the immediate cause and effect of Santal Hul will always evade us. And yet there have been constant attempts from historians to frame a history of Hul with multiple sources and references. This apparent framed homogenous history binds in it multiple narratives so that the past history or histories which evade us can be manageable when placed into the present. This manageability of history is always implied in the practice of commemoration and celebration. Hence during recollections of particular history/histories the detailed events of history do not feature. Rather certain nodes of history are narrativized as anecdotes from the event(s). In this chapter I will take such anecdotes from the pages of history as they flow in the contemporary as *provisional* narratives.

### History-memory duo

History and memory have always been of great concern among scholars either to separate the two or to formulate interdependent linkages between the two. Their relationship with the *original* past will always remain a fertile critical dialogic space among historians of various ages. On one front memory and history are believed to be two different 'routes to the past' (Lowenthal 1985). This approach associates memory with certain kinds of mythification of the past, with emotional barricades rendering it arbitrary, lacking in legitimacy of history and

finally being very subjective, while history evokes critical distance from the past, refutes memory's non-linear temporality and its proximity towards human creative faculties. Hence, memory studies, with their central focus on lived experience and subjectivity, promotes multiple forms of inquiry and various modes of representation of the past than history which have currently broadened the perspectives on history, memory and the past (Misztal 99-100).

The very basis on which Memory Studies stands today finds its roots to Maurice Halbwachs' contested conceptualization of collective memory. He separates written history from memory and argues that written history inspects groups from outside, while collective memory which grows within a group "allows the group to recognize itself through the total succession of images" (Halbwachs [1926] 1950: 84). Therefore, the group feels "strongly that it has remained the same and becomes conscious of its identity through time" ([1926] 1950: 84). Such a reading of memory rests not on the pedagogic intentions of history but on lived history, which is quite individual and depicts more or less a clear image of specific periods and their distinctiveness ([1926] 1950: 57). He talks about the social arrangements that are important for memory to exist, develop and generate, "[i]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (38). Halbwachs' conceptualization of the core difference between memory and history, which allows memory of a social group to be the function of awareness of the individual and collective identities through time while history's impetus is on discontinuities and locales outside and above groups, has instigated a long range of debates regarding the quality of this relationship. Halbwachs' old fashioned positivist concept of history is discarded by later critics as 'naïve' and with the idea that history cannot 'literally' construct the past (Schwartz 1982: 3876), while a historical narrative may itself become an essential part of the collective memory (Hutton 1993: 129). However, the claims of historians that there are fundamental differences between history and memory are still quite influential in academic discourses. One such influential argument is put forward by Lowenthal (1985) who segregates history and memory because he argues that historical knowledge is symptomatic of collective production and sharing, while memory, he claims, does not involve group activity. Another influential claim is set by Pierre Nora who maintains that history and memory are two separate orientations towards the *original* past. Nora's focus on *lieux des memoire*, roughly translated as *sites* or *realms of memory*, which are marked as a cultural support for a particular collective memory, clearly refers to the art of memory and its techniques where places and images become markers to facilitate remembering. Nora insists

that “memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events” (1989: 22). Both Nora and Halbwachs put memory as a coordinate of commemoration which is rather a distorted form of history. Like Halbwachs, Nora sees memory and history as “in many respects opposed” and implicates spontaneity in natural memory which is singular, coupled with gestures and emotions, while history is necessarily reflective and quite universal (1996a: 4). Living memory, which is “subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting” and filled with censorship of sorts has the quality of unpredictability since it is “capable of lying dormant for long periods only to be suddenly reawakened” (Nora 1996a: 3). History, on the other hand, remains incomplete, critically distanced from the *origin* and “suspicious of memory”. Nora’s conceptualization of history differs from Halbwachs’ view in this particular context. While Halbwachs’ intention was to put a clear boundary between memory and history, Nora deals with their changing relationships to each other. History, for over the past century, has always distrusted memory for its dubious *claims* to truth and desired to “surpass and destroy it”, has equipped itself with the “critical method whose purpose is to establish true memory” (1996a: 4). Recent critics have strongly criticized Nora’s concept of history as highly nostalgic and have discarded his notion that memory and history can be set apart to establish the latter’s superiority over the former (Tonkin 1992; Sturken 1997). He has been perceived as “a cultural conservative” for his looking back at the past and reducing the act to the level of commitment towards it (Schwartz 2000: 313). His idea of memory is also rejected because he deals with the “official” places of memory which rather brings in the power dynamics into question and the tendency of coercing the nationally cultivated memory as the significant past (Samuel 1994: 11). His argument, critics have argued, is contingent to the French perspective and that too has been seen as a cultural, pessimistic position on history and memory (Winter and Sivan 1999b: 2).

In the last 50 years, philosophers of history have started intervening into the narrative structures of history and examined what features are characteristic of narratives (Gallie, Danto, Morton White). They have emphasized on the inevitability of the cultural narrative that functions as the interdependent linkage between memory and history which is enhanced by the cultural turn in history. This cultural turn renders history’s claims to *truth* as a fluid category. This new trend of interpreting the past in lights of memory as a coordinate of historical inquiry promotes and legitimizes methodological pluralism. Hence “memories continue to be memories, and it is their relation to lived historical experience that constitutes their specificity” (Radstone 2000: 11), while historians are “consumed by epistemological

doubt and are not sure if they can find out what actually happened in the past” (Reynolds 2000: 5). As writing history becomes a category of narratives and memory has more authentic roles to play in narrating the past, the boundaries between the categories of memory and history become blurred (Anzette and Lambek 1996b). In other words, any inquiry into the *origin* would rely on the interrelations of history and memory rather than having closed boundaries between history and memory. The role of subjectivity in the practice of remembering has also been a central concern for later historians which constitutes a sense of identity to the individual. Fentress and Wickham argue:

The essential subjectivity of memory is the key issue to begin with. Of course, memories about the past can themselves change across time, but, even when they do not, they will certainly be selected, out of the potentially infinite set of possible memories, for their relevance to the individuals who remember them, for their contribution to constructing personal identity and relationships (88).

Memory becomes an intriguing knowledge of the past that provides continuity with the individual and the unmediated (Warnock 1987: 37). More of a causal connection is preferred between the practice of recollection and the past events. Memory “is not an itemized past but a continuity of conscience in which I recognize myself as a continuity of identity and my present experiences and engagements as my own” (Oakeshott 1983: 15). Such an understanding of memory will not confuse the remembering of past events with the way they are historically understood. Memory, thus, functions as the subjective quality of the present in a historical understanding of the past. Hence any interpretation of the possibilities of memory or history depends on the representational quality of its narrativization.

### **Narratives in network**

An inherent descriptive quality of writing history that the historians now acknowledge analyzes the required chronological events in a deferred and differed time and space. Mink, in his essay, “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument”, calls narrativization as “a form of human comprehension” that construe meaning to the apparent chaos of “events” which, more like “stories”, do not possess any form. He argues that the events do not stand as *events per se* but rather as *events under description*. The representational quality of narrativization determines the viability of the claims to *truth* of historical evidences. Mink writes:

Inseparable from the question of how narratives aggregate is a second problem about the sense in which a narrative may be true or false. This question arises only if a narrative as such does have holistic properties, that is, if the *form* of the narrative, as well as its individual statements of fact, is taken as representing something that may be true or false. ... It is an unsolved task of literary theory to classify the ordering relations of narrative form; but whatever the classification, it should be clear that a historical narrative claims truth not merely for each of its individual statements taken distributively, but for the complex form of the narrative itself (144).

The complexity that gets associated with narratives in scholarly analyses gives way for multidisciplinary inquiries. It is this advent of narratives into the criticism of history that has actually brought in other disciplines into the understanding and representation of the past. Narratives seem to be always present around a past but the way they are constructed and assimilated has brought in the question of ethics in the treatment of the past. The 'roots to the past' have become more mythic, fluid and contested than a picture perfect *moment*. The *truth* of a *moment* in history is argued to be in causal relationship with the present. Hayden White reminds us the need to understand the form of representation of a sequence in history to grasp the *truth* of that sequence. White writes:

In fact, the "truthfulness" of the sequence is to be found not at the level of concreteness but rather at another level of representation, that of typification. The sequence should be taken to represent a *type* of event. The referent of the sequence is the *type* of event depicted, not the two discrete events imaged, first, the firing of a shell and, then, its explosion. The spectator is not being "fooled" by such a representation nor is there anything duplicitous in such a rendering of a cause-and-effect sequence (1198).

The *type* of event that White analyzes is quite like the formation of the third kind of knowledge in a cinematic montage where two often unrelated shots produce a third level of understanding. The representational quality of history depends on that third kind of knowledge that is generated through two apparently unrelated sequences of the past. Here comes the question of the function of that narrativization. Mink writes:

Only by virtue of such [narrative] form can there be a story of failure or of success, of plans miscarried or policies overtaken by events, of survivals and transformations which interweave with each other in the circumstances of individual lives and the development of institutions (144).



These narratives of the past provide an emotional bond around the people who find themselves directly or indirectly implied with the past. The narratives function in the present as a kind of healing agent where the community bonds itself in association with the practice of recollection and commemoration. This idea of a formation of a *community* in terms of the practice of commemoration is what will be taken up later in the study. The question that emerges through this discussion on history, memory and the representation of the past in the theoretical paradigms is about how much of this understanding coincides with the understanding of the past in the representation of Santal Hul.

Foucault (1977) and White (1978) have added the notions of the hidden ideological biases of representation of the past in recent criticisms of history. The language of power and control has problematized the viability of printed words of the official documentation as the only referents to circumstantial evidence of an event. The question of dominance naturally comes with such official documentations being considered as primary sources to the *original* past. Do the usual trusted sources like that of the official records act as the only index to a historical phenomenon? Dealing with the relevance of these apparently unimportant historical conjunctions, Ginzburg's claims of conducting historical research intrigued my thoughts. He points out that "the occurrence of a phenomenon cannot be taken as an index of its historical relevance" (1992: 164). Do the insignificant presences, or significant absences, of any given set of thoughts or practices in the official records or other sources, necessarily mean that they are of less importance or absent in the given parameters of a society? A discovery of "small numbers of texts", Ginzburg argues, can be "more rewarding than a massive accumulation of repetitive evidence." (1992: 164; *Cheese and the Worms*, xiii) The quantity here becomes subordinate to the quality of the evidence (1992: 159, 164). This quality of the evidence keeps the *actual* history intangible which otherwise seems quite tangible with sources and documents galore. However, Ginzburg cautions us that sources are not "open windows" to the past, rather they function more like "distorting mirrors" (1999: 25; 1992: 158; *Cheese and the Worms*: xiv, xv, xvii). Yet if a historian acknowledges the existing distortions within the sources or the historical records that do not render the record "useless" (*Cheese and the Worms*: xvii) rather, Ginzburg points out, that the paucity of historical evidences provides an opportunity to "reconstruct a fragment" (*Cheese and the Worms*: xiv). The recuperation of certain fragmentary sources would lead to the constitution of fragmentary narratives<sup>1</sup> or as I will call them *provisional* narratives in this particular context.

## Official narratives of Hul

*Objective* records of the Santal Hul as often claimed and taken into consideration by the historians, colonial and indigenous, do not necessarily qualify as the *truth* in understanding the narratives of the event. In an attempt at browsing through the myriad available narratives on Santal Hul, in the present, one arrives first at the colonial accounts. The important ethnographic and administered accounts are given by W.W. Hunter in *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868) and J.A. MacPhail's *The Story of the Santal, with an Account of the Santal Rebellion* (1922). The Judicial Proceedings (1855-56) and the District Records of Bhagalpur, Suri and Dumka are the bearers of more administered accounts of often uncontested *objective* records of the rebellion.

The question of translatability is what contests the very claims to *truth* of these official narratives. The supposed testimonies given during the judicial proceedings of the victims and witnesses are all translated from their mother tongue (Santali/Bengali/Hindi) into English. Therefore, how much of the *actual* linguistic patterns and forms are compromised and censored by the officials will always remain a matter of conjecture. There have been general complaints against the court proceedings which were conducted in a foreign language and remained unintelligible to the Santals. In *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, Rev. L.O. Skrefsrud collates the narratives on the traditions and institutions of the Santals by an old Santal, Guru Kolean, who says:

As the magistrates do not know our language, they cannot distinguish falsehood from truth; they are only led astray by the words of the deceitful Indians; therefore we do not get just judgements (Bodding 129).

A lack of common language had always affected court proceedings in the colonial period especially in non-metropolitan parts of the country. Narahari Kaviraj quotes W. G. Archer who writes:

It is a remarkable fact that in the district bar of more than 100 pleaders whose self-interest, one would have thought, would have induced them to learn the language, barely three can speak and understand Santali. In such conditions, understanding collapses through the mere lack of a common language (Kaviraj 184).

The testimonies or the sources have been “rewritten” by the colonial authority in a transferred linguistic pattern to be “able to project the image of an author and/or a series of work(s) in another culture” (Lefevere 14). Lefevere (1992) deals with the ideological role of translation

where the ideology is understood as “the dominant concept of what society should (be allowed to) be” (14). Hence the all powerful benevolent image of the colonial authority is transmitted in “rewriting” the source/testimonies which in time are considered as *primary sources* by the historians. The very fact, as will be discussed shortly, that the insurrection was interpreted and channelized not in anti-British frame by the administrative and administered accounts themselves highlight the problem of considering these records as *objective*. The personal oral narratives of the victims and witnesses are at least twice filtered and censored as they are transcribed in a different language and in a rather hostile locale. In constituting an *objective* knowledge through the testimonial accounts, the emotive quality of the process of articulation has been consciously erased while the local narratives remain content with hollow words. The conscious erasure of emotions from the disciplined documentation of the colonial *objective* narratives make the later historians refrain from reading the quality of *truth* in the expressions of the victims. This filtering of the first person narratives of these witnesses not only problematizes the *truth* attached to their claims but also highlights how writing becomes the medium of dominance against the culture of people without writing. Talking of the mentalities of orality and literacy, Walter J. Ong writes:

Without writing, words as such have no visual presence, even when the objects they represent are visual. They are sounds. You might ‘call’ them back—‘recall’ them. But there is nowhere to ‘look’ for them. They have no focus and no trace (a visual metaphor, showing dependency on writing), not even a trajectory. They are occurrences, events (31).

The written word assures a representation of that event without which the trace can not be objectified. One who has the apparatus to give a trajectory to events would obviously have the agency to censor and modify oral narratives. The colonial masters knew that the only way to conquer the colony is through translation so as to “[establish] correspondences [that] could make the unknown and the strange knowable” (Cohn 53). It is the writing of oral narratives by the colonial subject that renders them *passive* not just during the course of action but in the course of writing history and remembrance. Thus, these colonial records become the visual metaphor of dominance and embody how the narratives of the people without writing are made into passive victims in the very process of writing of their history. The apparent *objective* nodes of history that are historically subjugated through the medium of writing and language politics render the narratives *provisional* in the very practice of writing history.

## Personal accounts of Hul

Among the immediate unofficial personal accounts of the Santal Hul we have two categories of *provisional* narratives. A significant account of Hul comes from the personal narrative of Babu Digambar Chakverty of Pakur who was there six years during the time of rebellion (Datta: x). His personal narrative in *History of the Santal Hool of 1855* (1895-96) gives him a critical distance of the history from *outside*; in terms of not totally implied in the cause but definitely involved by the effect of the Hul. He tries to limit his claims to truth on account of his personal experience which renders it believable. He writes in the Preface to his text:

Apart from the fact that, I have a personal experience of the hool, I remember vividly all the circumstances from hearing the story numberless of times told by my father and his old friend Anup Parganait of Jaba (elsewhere mentioned as Jaga Sardar, cf. p. 9) in the Damin. *I can, therefore, assure the reader that what are related in these pages are quite true.* But I can only relate so much of the facts as happened in Parganas, and Sultanabad, and in some villages situated within Damin. These were the places chiefly affected by the so-called insurrection, but the wave extended on all sides to a certain extent, *whereof I have no personal experience* (13, emphasis mine).

Digambar Babu's overt submission to the readers that he has a first hand knowledge of a particular part of the event and that other parts are unknown to him takes the readers into his confidence. Historians like Kalikinkar Datta and P.C. Roy Chowdhury have compared Digambar Chakverty's account with other official records to frame a history of Hul. Narahari Kaviraj, who also has considered Digambar Babu's text to write an extant history of Hul and the role of the Santal community in it, is however critical of the text's narrative framework:

Digambar Chakraborty (*History of the Santal Hool*) weaves a fanciful story when he writes that the Santal rebels looked upon the Company's Government as their *ma-bap* and that they had no intension to rebel against the Government. Hence Sidhu and Kanho not only strongly disapproved of the conduct of Tirbohan and his followers but exposed them to censure and severe punishment. This account does not accord with facts. On the contrary, the proceedings of the Trial of Tirbohan which were conducted by Rivers Thompsom, the Deputy Commissioner, gives altogether a different picture. Tirbohan's action was acclaimed by the leaders and Tirbohan and his comrades were given recognition for their bravery in the form of rewards which, however, consisted of a few pieces of cloth and a few rupees (167).

On the other hand, is the personal narrative of an *insider*, Chotrae Desmanjhi, influence of the missionaries upon whom is clearly imprinted with his biased distance from history. *Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha: Anti-British Plots and Movements before 1857* (1970) was translated and printed in the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of Dhirendranath Baske's *Saontal Ganasangramer Itihaas* ([1976] 2003). His portrayal of Sidhu and Kanho is tainted with his Christian morality and he highlights them as sexually immoral individuals and ruthless leaders. Two notes are particularly significant which show his aversion to these leaders in terms of their morality:

Then the Sidhu-Kanho duo gathered some soldiers and went to plunder Maheshpur. On the way during a sojourn they ordered the local boys and girls to dance and if any girl attracted their attention, the soldiers would cover their head with a cloth and say that she has become theirs (Baske [1976] 2003: 162, translation mine).

Such a point of view is further highlighted in their religiously influenced words:

That girl is taken to their palanquin. Again if some other girl catches their attention she is also covered with a cloth and told that she has become the Thakurs' and also brought into the palanquin and they would become the Thakurs'. Likewise if any girl or woman would draw their attention her head was covered with a cloth and she would become theirs' and nobody would have a say in it. If anybody had protested, he would be killed, that is, the soldiers would kill that person, hence nobody would dare say a thing (Baske [1976] 2003: 162, translation mine).

The notion of free sex which is quite a significant part in the Santal social structure (c.f. Bodding; Archer) could be part of a moral tension in the Christian minded Chotrae Desmanjhi which has compelled him to understand this social practice otherwise. Therefore, the *subjective* approach in the personal records of the particular history I am talking about is fraught with issues contingent to their contemporary social thoughts which make them *provisional* from their inception.

### **The *provisional* past**

A bit of luck and conviction brought me close to the *provisional* narratives of Hul. Given my presuppositions about a certain historical understanding of Hul, I went to the *supposed* site of Hul at Panchkathia. My primary intentions of digging out the past from the present narratives defeated the very cause of this scholarly venture. The narratives of the past as recollected by common people – the Santals and the *dikus* – contested my presuppositions and then my

focus shifted to the processes of formation, implications, and the multiplicity of these *provisional* narratives. Before I get into the narratives, I must explain why I call them *provisional*. Commonsensically speaking, these are matter-of-fact narratives which are often conjectured and construed into the known nodes of historical referents. In that sense they are always quite fluid and are free to change course vis-à-vis doubts and interests. Theoretically speaking they are narratives construed with different modes of representation: verbal and visual. They are simultaneously tangible and intangible. At one level, the oral narratives that flow during recollections make the mode intangible and some of them, when they get filtered down as visual imprints, make the referents tangible which in reality stay intangible. The *provisional* narratives are formulated in such a duality; they are more constitutive than constituted. Arguably, of course, I too am framing such *provisional* narratives of Santal Hul in the way I am constructing them by collating certain anecdotes and historical referents and dealing with their implications.

### **30<sup>th</sup> June or 7<sup>th</sup> July: When did Hul begin?**

It is quite easy to mark the temporal coordinates to an event. But the markers keep certain queries at bay. One such contested preoccupation is found among the historians of Santal Hul regarding the exact date of the beginning of Hul. When did Hul actually begin: 30<sup>th</sup> June or 7<sup>th</sup> July 1855? In *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, Hunter records that on 30<sup>th</sup> June the Santal congregation had begun their legendary journey towards Calcutta:

The brothers found that they had raised a storm which they could not control. A general order went through the encampment to move down upon the plains towards Calcutta, and on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1855 the vast expedition set out ... their purpose was to march down to Calcutta, in order to lay the petition which the local authorities had rejected at the feet of the Governor-General; and *the truth of this statement is rendered probably by the fact that their wives and children accompanied them* (238, 240, emphasis mine).

A sense of chaos is insinuated in Hunter's narrative with an intention of undermining the spirit of these brothers. There is a deliberate sense of estimation and probability in his narrative which undercuts his claims to truth. Yet he is taken as the authority in any research on rural Bengal of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. His authoritative claim is quite explicable when he notes in his book, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*:

After a hurried trial, the chief leader Sidu slew the corrupt inspector with his own hands, and the police left nine of the party dead in the Santal camp.

From this day – the 7<sup>th</sup> of July – the rebellion dates (240).

Browsing through other official records one would immediately question that Hunter's narrative of the murder of nine Santals by the police seems a bit incongruent with the other official records. The official and other records note the murder of Mahesh daroga and nine other *dikus* at the hands of Sidhu, Kanho and their men on 7<sup>th</sup> July. A section of the Santal historians believe that this marks the beginning of Hul. But deliberate attempts of the colonial narratives to undermine the strength and spirit of the insurrection actually undercut the objectivity of the history that they have claimed to register. The noted Santal historian, Kalikinkar Datta, writes about the Santal congregation of 30<sup>th</sup> June:

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, 1855, about 10,000 Santals met Bhagnadihi, when the divine order that the Santals should get out of their oppressors' control was announced to them by Sidhu and Kanhu (15).

In a colonial account, Ashley Eden, the Assistant Magistrate of Aurangabad, gives a detailed narrative of the congregation:

On the day of the full moon, an enormous body assembled from various quarters, within a radius of thirty or forty miles, and whilst there, a paper was dropped in the middle of them appointing a Rajah, the incarnation of God and ordering them to slaughter all Europeans and respectable natives but especially the servants of the Company.<sup>2</sup>

For once in the colonial narratives this assemblage is considered a serious treat to the colonizers. Datta, like Eden, refers to the "day of the full moon" as a mass mobilization of the Santals that poses a threat to the colonial system.

This contest regarding the fixed date of Hul brings in certain fundamental queries in focus. Is Hul a single event in history incongruent to the colonial history of India or does it have a connection with other forms of upheavals of these indigenous people? When did Hul actually begin? Is it borne out of a growing consciousness of identity formation? How does the state function to temporalize Hul in the recollection of the colonial history? Santal historian Dhirendranath Baske refers back to Tilka Manjhi who was hanged for fatally wounding Augustus Cleveland on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1784 as the beginning of Hul (Baske 14). There has been a teleological motive in Baske's argument where he traces the *telos* from Tilka Manjhi and argues that there have been repercussions throughout the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries and Santal Hul led by the four brothers has been the most significant of the repercussions against the colonial regime. The reference of Tilka Manjhi has been erased from the historical memory as Dhiren Baske quotes Dhanai Kisku who writes in *Baba Tilka Manji tatha Bhagapur* (Baske 13), that even Vidyasagar wrote in his *History of Bengal* that Cleveland died due to unhealthy conditions in Rajmahal Hills. Prathama Banerjee argues that the very image of Cleveland as a “peacemaking civilizer of the ‘violent primitives’ of Rajmahals” (162) built through the colonial and the nationalist narratives disown Tilka Manjhi’s space in the histories of rebellion in the colonial regimes. In Prabir Guha’s visual narrativization of Hul in *Sakaler Sandhane* one finds a conscious effort to connect Tilka Manjhi with Sidhu Murmu. A traditional practice of hunting connects the two with the intended metaphor of rebellious zeal. Tilka Manjhi’s reference is brought into the docu-feature as a historical consciousness of young Sidhu who would rather hear of the heroic tales of the former than of the fictive kings and knights from his grandmother. This historical consciousness in young Sidhu seems to be an anachronistic feature but the implication of this visual narrative is to develop such a historical consciousness among the youth through the lost and nostalgic culture of story-telling in the contemporary nucleated family equation. *Paschimbanga Krishak Sabha*, who commissioned the film, insisted that Guha bring in the pedagogic aspect in the narrativization of history. Interestingly, the docu-feature begins with the teacher-student nexus and the teacher analyzing and rationalizing the sequences of the past to connect its significance to the present. It is quite symbolic of the nexus between the *Paschimbanga Krishak Sabha* and the target audience where the pedagogic intent to make the public historically conscious visually proves the state’s hidden ideological biases and effort to ideologically subjugate the public. Yet, a certain amount of conflicting ideas is visible in the narrative frame of the docu-feature. Prabir Guha, the theatre activist and director of Alternative Living Theatre, brings in real life workers, theatrically unpolished though they are, on stage to bring out the social and historical consciousness of these so called subaltern people. On one hand Guha keeps the state’s ideological bias in the narrative framework and yet subverts it by providing a continuity of Hul to the other repercussions of these indigenous people which has been consciously silenced by the colonial and the present state narratives. Dhiren Baske critiques the colonial narratives which have confined Santal struggle against exploitation to one single event with a fixed date of beginning and end, a single site and a single hero. He takes this struggle as more of a practice against exploitations where his community has participated actively and which is not confined to a single event in history. Prathama Banerjee argues and warns:



The rebellion could not be completely exhausted by this momentous date, this single numerical instant. ... To make it appear as a single event, colonial officials tried to document the hul as a centralized occurrence, where four brothers, Sidhu, Kanu, Chaind and Bhairav, were accused of mobilizing all Santals. Yet the authorities had to admit that there were many beginnings to the hul, and the simultaneous but disparate risings were not all explicable by a central leadership or unified organization (160).

The colonial apparatus which has marked the singularity and homogeneity to this event arguably becomes visual in the practice of commemoration sponsored by the state. The visual narratives at the Bhognadih ground, the monumentalizing presence of Sidhu and Kanho at the same ground, the narratives of Hul in the daily newspapers and other representations during the event show how the Hul has been legitimized ideologically as one singular and homogeneous event in history.

As a matter of fact, the Sidho Kanho Memorial Association started commemorating the two heroes of Santal Hul, Sidho and Kanho, on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1977, the day when these two heroes gathered the masses at Bhognadih. Amalendu De, the ex-chairperson of Rabindra Bharati University, writes in a petition to Prasanta Sur dated 6<sup>th</sup> May 1983:

On the auspicious day of 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1855, under the leadership of Sidhu and Kanho, a huge congregation took an oath to initiate a rebellion against harassments, oppressions and exploitations. Hence in the history of Indian mass struggle and mass revolution this day is quite important and significant. In memory of this historical event we rename and inaugurate this roadway in respect towards the two leaders and we have undertaken the task to construct a memorial slab (translation mine).

The intention of the Association was clearly to promote the martyrs of Hul so that the spirit of these messiahs can be emulated within the consciousness of the contemporary adivasis. In the introduction to the booklet circulated on the Sidhu-Kanhu Day Observance, 1977 June 30, Dilip Saren elucidates their motives:

To-day we have assembled here on that very auspicious day to pay humble respect to the leaders of the first mass uprising against the British tyranny and we have termed this day as 'Sido-Kanhu Day' in the name of those two great leaders.

But when the West Bengal State Government took charge of the entire event and titled it as Hul *Divas*, Santal historian Dhirendranath Baske pointed out what he thought as a mistake regarding the exact date of Hul. It took twenty five years to take a drastic step for the

Association led by Baske himself claiming that the State has misinterpreted their history and thereby taken their heritage for granted. As a form of protest, the Association boycotted the official programme this year on 30<sup>th</sup> June and had their separate function before the official function started at Sidhu-Kanho Dahar and also organized for a *proper Hul Divas* on 7<sup>th</sup> July at South Dinajpur, Jhargram and Kolkata. A noted member of the Association, Sarada Prasad Kisku, informs that due to lack of publicity, however, very few attended the commemorative event organized by them.

This particular debate over the exact date probes into a basic question in terms of the possession and claims of history. The State and its machineries quite naturally take public histories as an obligation and claim that they need to guard and preserve the same. Once the historical site is officially sanctioned as a heritage it is appropriated officially into the machineries of power. After Sidhu's martyrdom has been appropriated by the State, as a token of gratitude, the descendants of Sidhu get occasional honorarium. The agency of history and the way it has to be commemorated is taken away from them. Quite recently the State has approved to make a museum inside the courtyard of their house and has given grants to build two buildings next to their ancestral place. It is needless to point out how their basic agency to live in their own heritage space is appropriated by the State.

### **The Immediate cause of Hul**

A broader pretext of Hul has been historicized as a retort against oppression and exploitation in the Santal Parganas. What was the occasion that prompted Sidhu and his brothers to start this rebellion flows in contemporary accounts through doubts and interests. The immediate cause connects some interesting anecdotes which have their own context and implications in the contemporary situation. The multiple sources and texts will be considered here to trace certain historical referents and connect them with the way they are contextualized in the practice of recollection.

One of the first extant narratives of Hul was collected from Sekhar Kisku. He narrates that the young Santals led by Sidhu and his brothers assembled twelve Santal men from each village at their ancestral place, Bhognadih, on the full moon night of 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> June 1855. Initially they wanted to file a petition against the exploitations and oppressions of the money lenders to the British Commissioners at Bhagalpur and then Jangipur. When the petitions met the deaf ears of the British authority at the Santal Parganas, the Santals assembled to go to the

higher authorities in Calcutta. Their grudge against the British increased with the latter's efforts to deforest the sacrosanct Sal trees, increase in tax and further when a Santal woman was raped by British railway workers. During that time Mahesh Daroga and his nexus with the money lenders Kenaram and Becharam Bhagat, sons of Panch Kauri Bhagat of Amrapara, near Dumka, became a matter of great fear and anxiety for the poor Santals. While they were taking an innocent *manjhi* from Pipra Gaon (Pakur), Garbha Murmu, to Bhagalpur on false charges of dacoity, Shyam Tudu, pargana of Paderkola, intercepted them on their way but could not rescue Garbha from the hands of Mahesh Daroga and his company. Two Santals of Paderkola informed Sidhu about this false allegation against Garbha and on 7<sup>th</sup> July, Sidhu, his four brothers and his Santal comrades intercepted them near Barhait at Panchkathia. Garbha was released and he killed both Kenaram and Becharam while Sidhu killed Mahesh Daroga on the spot. Kanho realized that this could be the indication by their Thakoor to start the Hul, as the latter has promised them in the recent past. This initiated the Hul.

There are multiple narratives regarding the immediate context of initiation of the insurrection. Some argue for an economic, social and political cause while others claim religious fanaticism and cultural beliefs as the cause of Hul. Talking about exploitation and oppression, Dhirendranath Baske recollects an old saying that a poor Santal would plead to the *diku* mahajan: *bish bol babu* ("Babu, say twenty!": a count of twenty would release them of their debts). Kanho's testimony talks of exploitations and oppressions as the cause of Hul:

Mahajans gave us one pice and received twenty. When we borrow one rupee, the mahajans take eight maunds of rice in return. They exact outrageous interests, set four or five peadahs upon a poor man making him pay their expenses, and in addition to all, I have to mention that they disgrace our wives and daughters.<sup>3</sup>

Kalikinkar Datta finds its origin in the economic discrepancies of the age and believes that the economic, social and political infiltration of the *dikus* and the British have put the Santal world system in transition. This transition is symptomatic of the intervention of the market in the pre-capitalist system. Datta writes:

The insurrection of 1855 was not a mere spasmodic outburst of the crude instincts of the semi-savage Santals. ... The causes of the insurrection were deeply rooted in the changing conditions of the time. It had its origin in the economic grievance of the Santals, due to the oppressions and frauds committed on those simple-minded people by the above mentioned Bengali and up-country merchants and money-lenders (Datta 5).

Unable to bear the transition in terms of the different arrangements in their economic terms and conditions caused by the changing times, the Santals, led by Sidhu and Kanho, solidarized against the governing system. Hunter acknowledges the discrepancy brought in the Santal life by the *dikus* and notes the “ultimatum” that they wanted to place at the “feet of the Governor-General” (240):

The ultimatum is said to have insisted chiefly on the regulation of usury, on a new arrangement of the revenues, and on the expulsion, or, as some say, the massacre, of all Hindu extortioners in the Santal country (238).

The colonial narratives have framed their records in such a way that the cause of the insurrection would seem totally detached from any colonial connection. Certain official narratives and testimonial accounts illuminate why the Santals went against the colonizers. One reason is of course related to the lack of interest of the colonizers in safeguarding the cause of the Santals. Another reason is related to certain rape of Santali women by English railway workers. Sidhu explains the reason of their anger against the colonizers:

... one of the railway sahibs carried off two Santal women near Rajmahal and wounded a Santal man, killed another. On this account the Santals were angry with the *saheblogues*.<sup>4</sup>

Elliot, the Commissioner of Burdwan Division, refers to this particular breach in conduct of the agent of the colonizer:

... the Santal women had been disgraced and this injury called amongst them for vengeance to the utmost and added ferocity to their fanaticism.<sup>5</sup>

The Rani of Pakur too talks about the alleged rape as an immediate cause of the insurrection:

The insult offered to their innocent women by the railway people naturally irritated the Santals to take up arms for revenge and is itself shocking to relate.<sup>6</sup>

As another immediate cause, the historians also refer to the episode where Mahesh Daroga forcefully tied a Santal and was taking him to Bhagalpur to be tried in court on false charges of dacoity which led to his much revisited altercation with Sidhu. This episode finds its due space in the practice of recollection but the character who was taken in custody on false charges does not remain the same in all the accounts. In his personal account of this episode, Digambar Chakrabortti records:

The Daroga then collected a number of Chowkidars, and with them and some Constables he proceeded in great state to the village Thatkathia to arrest the robbers. With the object of frighten the Santals he indiscriminately arrested a few of them, and in order to extort, confession exercised the most unheard of cruelties. Gocho Santal also was arrested, and the savage treatment he met with exasperated the Santals (25).

Kalikinkar Datta and Dhiren Baske follows Digambar Babu's narrative while the later historian Narahari Kaviraj writes:

The daroga had come to Panchkhetia accompanied by several barkandazes and mahajans. From there he sent for the Santals. Two or three hundred of them came to him with Sidhu as their leader. Sidhu asked the daroga why he had bound Motto Pareshnath. The daroga said- a dacoity had been committed last year and an illegal assemblage had taken place this year, I have, therefore, bound Motto (97).

In this particular recollection of history the character has been transferred to another while the episode remains constant.

These little histories of exploitation are often silenced and merged with other referents so that their discursive amplitude can be controlled and regulated. Narahari Kaviraj refers to the colonial narratives and the neo-colonial narratives of the early Santal historians like Kalikinkar Datta and shows how the anti-British sentiment latent in them was discursively neutralized in the recording and narrating of history (40- 43). Bradley Birt writes, "Against the British Government, of which they knew so little, they bore no ill-will" (quoted in Kaviraj 41). The colonial rule has been projected in the garb of benevolence so as to neutralize any anti-British sentiment among the Santals. The Revenue Supervisor, W.I. Sherwill, records on his special duty:

Sonthals in the Daminikoh are far better clothed, better fed, have more cattle, and better houses than those outside the Government boundary and that whenever he has not fallen into the of the Bengally traders, he is a happy and contented man. He has always heard Mr. Pontet's name mentioned by them with respect and reverence, and he is satisfied that a high assessment has had no share in producing the present outbreak.<sup>7</sup>

However in Datta's analysis of the cause of the social instability during that time, the influence of the colonial narrative is quite visible when he writes:

The movement was not anti-British in the beginning, but it was directed chiefly against the mahajans and traders ... Gradually, however, the nature of the movement changed as the insurgents directed their attacks against the oppressive naib suzawals, the police and the courts then working under the Company Raj (10).

While another colonial analyst E.G. Man in his *Sonthalia and the Sonthals* (1861) gives a point of view very much contradicting the usual colonial argument of supposed benevolence that they have for these people, he says:

They [the Santals] had no faith in a Government which sees only through police and in their quarrels with the mahajans, they had every reason to consider tyrannical, unjust and extortionate (116).

He firmly believes that the outbreak had no direct connection with the Europeans in general but was against the mahajans and the local Government officials in particular. One is reminded of Gramsci here, who says, “[t]he peasant, and even the small farmer, hates the civil servant, he does not hate the State for he does not understand it” (272-3). It is partially true in the context of the cause that initiated the insurrection because their direct contact with the State were the figures they hated and feared the most, the police. The figure of Mahesh Daroga, as will be discussed in the next chapter, becomes the direct link between the Santals and the State in narratives of Hul. Does Mahesh Daroga *actually* represent the entire colonial authoritative power to these indigenous people? It is true that the menacing figure of Mahesh Daroga has continued to find its presence over time but considering him as the sole colonial apparatus targeted by the Santals would be too far fetched an assumption. He definitely represented the colonial authoritative power to many, but that does not discount the fact that the manjhis and parganas had no connection with other machineries of the colonial authority.

The colonial narratives have often diverted the cause of the insurrection to the religious fanaticism of the indigenous modes of living, as Sherwill writes:

religion has been mixed up with the rebellion, in order to strengthen the hands of the rebel chiefs by acting upon the minds of the Sonthals, for the Sonthal in his own way a peculiarly religious man, and when his ideas are assisted by the powerful Muhoon spirits and smoking Ganja, which two excitants are resorted to in all their religious dances and exercises, and freely used upon the present occasion, the Sonthal may be driven to acts of violence and desperation.<sup>8</sup>

It has often been recorded in official and unofficial records how the supernatural powers have shaped the course of action of the insurrection. Marxist historiography has argued how mysticism and supernatural powers have played significant roles in mobilizing and solidarizing the Santals (Kaviraj 84-94). While the official narratives negate these beliefs as 'primitive' superstitions, in the nationalist and Marxist historiography they "reappear as the bravery of a 'tribal' people, yet to learn the calculativeness which rationality endangers in the educated classes" (Banerjee 168). In both cases they are discursively nullified as 'primitive' in respect to a temporal sense of time.

### Notes and References

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<sup>1</sup> Partha Chatterjee makes a similar claim in *Nation and Its Fragments*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> J.P. 19 July, 55, no. 47.- Letter from Eden, d. 13 July, 55

<sup>3</sup> J.P. 14 Feb. 56, no. 205- Kanho: confession before court.

<sup>4</sup> J.P. 8 Nov. 55, no. 26- Sidhu: disposition before Ashley Eden.

<sup>5</sup> J.P. 19 July, 55, no. 64.

<sup>6</sup> J.P. 14 Feb. 56, no. 164- Letter from the Rani of Pakur, enclosed in Bidwell's Report.

<sup>7</sup> Sherwill's letter dated 24 July 1855 attached in the appendices to J.P. 14 Feb'56; no. 157

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

### **Chapter III: Taming the *Truth* of Narratives**

Nothing should be lost for history. ... To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past. (Benjamin 254-55)

The 'fullness' of past that Walter Benjamin talks about is more of a transcendental category which practically will always elude those who participate in history and its other categories. So much of the past will be lost and found and lost again constantly with the flow of time and interest. So much of it will remain unknown or half known. No matter what, the plight continues, as an account of the survivors of the rebellion would show.

#### **The Survivors of the Rebellion**

This section will deal with the survivors of the rebellion. In other words, how certain characters of this history have survived multiple narratives by series of transformations and adaptations with the passage of time. Each is meshed with doubts and interests as recorded and recollected over time. On one side we have the leaders of the Hul, Sidhu and Kanho, and on the other side we have the villains, Mahesh Daroga and the notorious moneylenders Kenaram and Becharam Bhagat. As the brothers Sidhu and Kanho are eulogized and valorized as no less than Messiahs, the villains have been blackened into becoming the prototypes of perpetrators of exploitations.

#### **Mahesh Daroga**

Dhiren Baske recalls that in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the figure of the daroga stood for the absolute power of the colonizers to the Santals since they were the visible machinery of power, so much so as to make it a practice for the elderly poor to bless even the District Magistrate by wishing for his fast promotion to the post of a daroga. The legend of Mahesh Daroga, Baske promptly remarks, is quite accountable for such a practice.

The official and the personal narratives do not deny the menacing figure of Mahesh Daroga of Dighee Thana associated with the Santals in ways of oppression and exploitation. But Digambar Chakrabortti perhaps mistakenly refers to Mahesh Datta as the Daroga of Badlagunje Thana (24). In a petition, the widow of Mahesh Datta, Mossammat Seetal Daye alias Rajcoomari writes to the Lieutenant-Governor:



... Mohesh Dutt held the office of the Naib Suzawal of Thana Dighee in the Damin-i-koh from the year 1835 to 7<sup>th</sup> July 1855 a period of 21 years, that sometime before the above date when he was on leave at home the Santhal insurrection broke out and he received a perwanah from Mr. Pontet then Superintendent of the Damin-i-koh to go and join his Thana and take steps for the suppression of the insurrection.<sup>1</sup>

The counter narrative of Mahesh Daroga's wife projects him as an obedient and faithful servant to the colonial masters who gets involved with the Santals only after the insurrection broke out and that too while trying to put off the aggressive Santals from ill-treating the innocent Mahajans. As is quite expected, the counter narrative continues valorizing his deeds and in the process criminalizes the Santals:

... in obedience to Mr. Ponet's order he immediately proceeded to his Thana and learning that a great number of Santhals had assembled at a place near Putchkoteah (Panchkethia) he went to that village. In the next morning three of the Santhals came to him from adjoining neighbourhood where the Santhals had assembled and desired him to go and visit their Thakur there. He lost no time to repair to the spot accompanied by a few Burkundazes but to his surprise found that the Santhals had bound down some of the Bengalee Mahajans and had already commenced practising great violence over them. That her husband the Suzawal tried his utmost to dissuade the insurgents from their oppressive conduct but in vain; they declared that the British Government is no more, their (the Santhal) reign having already commenced. Subsequently they ordered him to collect 5 rupees from each of the Mahajans to be given to them. On this the Suzawal told them he will be prepared to send from his Thana whatever sums they required but the Santhals declined and told him that they have understood that he would under this pretence quit the spot and report the matter to the Magistrate, and so Sidhu their chief killed the Suzawal and two other Burkundazes on the spot.<sup>2</sup>

The misdeeds of Mahesh Daroga of binding an *innocent* Santal on false charges is silenced and the narrative transfers the misdeed to the Santals and he is publicized to have tried to settle the issues between them as the representative of the colonial authority. The personal narratives of Digambar Chakrabortti and other historians, as already have been cited in the previous chapter, have clearly shown the oppressive and exploitative quality of Mahesh Daroga. The colonial narratives too acknowledge such a quality in him as the Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division. Brown, notes:

Sidhu who killed Mahesh Datta could not have had any personal cause of complaint against him, because his house was not within his jurisdiction. But Mahesh Datta might be and probably was obnoxious to the whole tribe of Santals, on account of his extortion, and Sidhu, it might be said, acted not in his individual capacity but as the constituted leader of the insurgent Santals in avenging their wrongs.<sup>3</sup>

A first hand report of a Santal leader, Tirbohan, says: “our cause of complaint was that whenever we had any cases anywhere the daroga Mahesh Datta used to spoil them by his interference”.<sup>4</sup>

First the figure of Mahesh Daroga and then the brutality of the colonizers in curbing the insurrection left the totality of Santals and the other backward classes shaken in every possible way. According to the tradition of the Murmu family the first grandson is named after his grand father, but Sidhu’s grandson was named Bhado instead of Sidhu because of the fear of the colonial apparatus which is perpetrated deep into their hearts (Chowdhury 65-66). The police being the chief perpetrator of colonial aggression became a matter of deep anxiety over the years. This figure of Mahesh Daroga survives in the very angst that the Santal masses share with the police. Therefore, it becomes imperative to cleanse such a deep anxiety by dispelling it with visual reassurance articulated on banners:

The police are not a burden to bear,  
They exist for social welfare.

Or,

Seek help from the police,  
We are always at your service.

The visual reassurance is amplified in the commemorative speech of the Chief Commissioner of Police, Sahibganj, in order to bridge the chasm of fear that has developed and remained since the colonial times.

### **Kenaram and Becharam**

The characters of Kenaram and Becharam Bhagat, the brothers of Amrapara, as narrated by Sekhar Kisku, seem to have a very symbolic presence in the narratives of Hul. Dhiren Baske recalls that these two brothers were extremely notorious money lenders during their times and were supported actively in their oppression by Mahesh Daroga. Arun Chowdhury places

them in Littipara and also talks about their illicit nexus with the state representative, Mahesh Daroga. Prabir Guha in his docu-feature keeps these figures and the context but does not individualize them with a name. He did not want to get into the conflict of history in the claims of truth by individualizing certain characters who he thought may not be true. So he keeps certain contexts which seemed to him appealing and effective in visual portrayal of the sequences of Hul. But the conscious erasure of the Bengali mahajans during the scuffle with Sidhu at Panchkathia perhaps was his misinterpretation of history. In the wall narratives at the Suri District Information and Culture Centre one would not miss the reference of Kenaram Bhagat (see Plate). But one does not trace either of them in the Judicial Proceedings where the witnesses name the mahajans and the barkandaz killed by Sidhu-Kanho. In the first witness account of the event, Ram Portab Singh, who was accompanying Mahesh Daroga et al and who fortunately escaped the spot when Sidhu-Kanho attacked them, names the victims as Manik Moodee, Gora Chand Moodee, Meghoo Barkundauz, Iswar Singh Peada, Damree Bhowkudar and other others.<sup>5</sup> In the Judicial Proceedings, F.I. Halliday notes the names of the victims killed during the scuffle on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1855 at Panchkathia as Muhesh Dutt Darogha, Meghoo Burkundauz, Murmoo Burkundauz, Ishur Sing Peada, Dhumree Chowkeedar, Manick Moodee, Gora Chand Moodee, Haroo Moodee, Sartuk Moodee and Neemae Moodee.<sup>6</sup> Baske refers to Kenaram of Amrapara who accompanied Mahesh Daroga on the fateful day and both were killed by Garbhu who was taken a prisoner to be tried at Bhagalpur on the false charge of dacoity. If we consider the official and other records that note that Sidhu was convicted for having killed Mahesh Daroga then is Baske trying to de-criminalize Sidhu so that he gets the sacrosanct stature of a hero? However, Baske collects an old song which refers to the exploitations of the Daroga and Kenaram in terms of the insurrection:

Come brother, come and listen  
 Alas, alas! Bhagat Kenaram  
 Kenaram alight on the saddle of a horse  
 Is galloping down the lanes.

I beg to the Paragana,  
 Alas, alas! At the fair of Michhapur!  
 For Kenaram, daroga  
 Alas, alas! At the fair of Michhapur!

Heartless daroga vengeful peada,  
Has rid life and the heart of any joy  
The daroga rides tap tap on his horse  
A sparkling belt on his waist, a well dressed peada  
Has rid life and the heart of any joy.

Come brother pay heed  
Alas, alas! Bhagat Kenaram!  
I devote my prayers on the altar of the God Paragana  
Alas, alas! Bhagat Kenaram!

If no one hears me or no one pays heed  
Alas, alas! Bhagat Kenaram!  
We shall live on our own  
Since nobody wants to shelter us  
But we shall rise in rebellion.

For our wife and children  
For our land, property and home  
Alas, alas! Such violence, such blood!  
For our cows, oxen, ploughs and wealth  
To reclaim them all once again,  
We shall rise in rebellion. (Baske 56-8, Translation mine)

The song narrates how Kenaram, with the help of the daroga, had made the life of the Santals economically miserable and offers prayer to their almighty and decides that if no body comes to their rescue they will rebel.

A recent article of the National Co-ordinate Committee Forum, celebrating 150 years of Hul in 2005, refers to Kenaram Bhagat and Maheshlal Daroga being killed on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1855 as the beginning of the Hul. On the occasion of the 154<sup>th</sup> year of Hul, in 2009, JMM leader Hemlal Murmu too talks of Kenaram and Becharam in his commemorative speech at Bhognadih. Incidentally in a conversation with certain chief leaders of the state over the official lunch, Hemlal Murmu privately converses in Bangla and confides that these characters are mythical figures denoting the exploitation of the mahajans in terms of

Kenaram, who extorts more and Becharam, who in return gives a meager amount. Hence, the very economic implications of the names of Kenaram and Becharam become an easy way to elucidate the oppressions of the mahajans. Digambar Chakrabortti narrates:

On the way they would take up from the hills a shapely stone and having painted it vermilion to vouch for its genuineness arrive at the farm-house of some fated debtors who had to undergo the boarding expenses of the creditors and his servants. ... These Bhakats and Moiras always possessed two sets of weighing baskets. The baskets with which they measure crops of their debtors and whereof the capacities were a little more than the correct measure were called *Kenaram* or *Bare Bao*, and the other sets which were of less capacities were called *Becharam* or *Chhoto Bao*. *This is no exaggeration or product of overheated brain. The truth has been ascertained from the report, of sober and honest men, who were themselves eye witness of the aforesaid method of plunder* (20-21).

One must note the last part of the quote in italics where he tries to testify his report. Datta refers to the weighing scales in his text from the Pakur Records:

Those money-lenders kept two sets of weighing scales – (1) *Kenaram* or *Eara Bau*, the capacity of which was a little more than that of the ordinary measure and which was used by them for weighing the crops that they took from their debtors, and (2) *Becharam* or *Chota Bau*, the value of which was below that of the standard measure and which was used for weighing articles lent to the Santals by them. (6)

The Pakur record clearly notes the economic implication of Kenaram and Becharam in terms of *Bara Bou* or elder wife and *Chota Bou* or younger wife. The economic referents of Kenaram and Becharam, in course of history, have become historical referents that embody a history of exploitation. In literary representations too these two characters have been established as metaphors of exploitations.

Manoj Mitra's Bengali comedy *Kenaram Becharam* critiques contemporary familial urban relationships based on economic determinates through the characters of Kenaram and Becharam. In the absence of Becharam Chatterjee one Kenaram poses as Becharam and takes possession of Becharam's family. The family members understand the practical absurdity of the situation of internalizing Kenaram as Becharam and yet take the fake person as real in order to take advantage of the economic possession of Becharam. In a conversation between Becharam and a real estate agent Nagen the motive of the play is clearly established:

Becharam: O Mister, do you the know position of the old parents like us in a family?

Nagen: Tell me.

Becharam: Like an *apostrophe*.

Nagen: *Apostrophe?*

Becharam: Yes, *apostrophe* in English language. Ornamented on the head ... with no syllable! We, the old parents are similar. *Head of the family* ...

Nagen: *Only position ... no pronunciation.*

...

Becharam: O Mister, nobody is one's own in this family. Money! Money is one's own! If you have money, you have the world. No money, no world. O Mister, if you have money you can buy or sell even relationships (63, translation mine; original in italics).

The deep pessimism in the words of Becharam is directed at the middle class urban lifestyle which is at a constant economic crisis in view of contemporary economic disparity. This crisis finds an embodiment in the economic determinates of Kenaram and Becharam. In the present context we see how economic determinates are internalized and personified in the representation of a social crisis.

### **The Fate of Sidhu and Kanho**

The ultimate fate of the brothers, Sidhu and Kanho, too remains in the mire of multiple narratives each of which flows on its own accord. Kaviraj notes what Major Shuckburgh (30 August, 1855) records regarding the circumstances leading to the capture of Sidhu:

... shortly after our arrival in camp, a man came in to say, that he got the head chief, Sidhu Manjhi bound in cords in a neighbouring village and if ordered to bring him in, he would do so. It was done, and the *celebrated robber thief* and rebel is now a prisoner in my camp and will be sent immediately to Bhagalpur (98).

The capture of the rebel leader, Sidhu, came as a huge relief for the colonizers as they realized that this would give them a control on the insurrection. Major Shuckburgh criminalizes Sidhu as *the celebrated robber thief* to valorize the supremacy of the colonial governance. Another colonial narrator, Bradley Birt, notes:

... after a summary trial Sidhu was hanged at Barhait by Mr. Pontet in the presence of a vast concourse of Santals, who watched the proceedings with the apathy born of defeat (Kaviraj 98).

Sidhu's execution in the presence of a vast concourse of Santals is understood by the colonial narratives as a grand spectacle that marked the end of the insurrection. Officially 31<sup>st</sup> December 1855 marks the end of the insurrection after Sidhu was hanged and Kanho and other important Santal leaders were captured. The later historian, Arun Chowdhury, notes from his sources that Sidhu was hanged publicly at his own village, Bhognadih, under the supervision of District Magistrate of Murshidabad, Toogood (40). He also talks about the multiple narratives on the death of Kanho. From his sources he concludes that Kanho was hanged somewhere near Dumka. He also notes a narrative which believes that Kanho was hanged on a *Mahua* tree near Jhilmili (59). *Calcutta Review* notes that he was captured near Operbandah, north-east of Jamtara, by the Sardar *gatwal* of Kunjra (Datta 67). Judicial Proceedings record that the Lieutenant Governor approved the death sentence of Kanho to be carried into execution at Bhognadih next to their *Thakurbari*<sup>7</sup>. Brigadier Bird writes to the Secretary, the Government of Bengal, dated 16 February 1856:

I have the honour to report for the information of the Lieutenant Governor, the departure from Suri, this morning, of a detachment in progress to Bhagnadihee with the Santal prisoner, Subha Kanhu.<sup>8</sup>

In a letter to Mr. A.R. Thompson dated 20<sup>th</sup> February, Mr. W.C. Taylor, Assistant Commissioner, reports that Kanho was hanged on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1856 after his trial and much after the insurrection was curbed by the colonizer:

All necessary arrangements have been made by erecting a gallow and the sentence of death passed on Kanhu Manjhi was duly carried into effect at Bhagnadihee at 2 P.M. on Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>9</sup>

T.E. Webster notes that "there were no large concourse of people and those who came few were Santals".<sup>10</sup> Kanho's public execution came as a matter of fear among the Santals and a relief for the *dikus*. Interestingly in a recent recollection of the history by Prabir Guha in his film, *Sakaler Sandhane*, these historical narratives are placed according to the need of the project. Kanho succumbed to his injury at Maheshpur and was hanged before Sidhu after a false trial. The compromise with the historical *truth* becomes a conscious effort to valorize Sidhu Murmu as the sole leader to the event. In the final moment Sidhu gives a public lecture

on how he has been politically correct in exterminating the exploiters. Much of the historical anachronism is imposed to heroize Sidhu who is also seen sloganeering to mobilize the Santals during the insurrection. One must be reminded here that Guha's film was commissioned by the *Paschimbanga Krishak Sabha* and has been circulated across the tribal areas of Bengal. Hence the post-colonial Marxist narrative clearly has appropriated history to serve their cause. In the following section I will engage with the process through which Sidhu and Kanho are heroized in the practice of history and commemoration.

### **Heroization of Sidhu and Kanho: One is not born a hero in this world, he is made one:**

This section would deal with the construction of heroism and how heroes are made from everyday characters from everyman to not just everyman. I would investigate the process in which the sons of Narayn Manjee especially Sidhu and Kanho were heroized in the *provisional* narratives of Hul. The very process of heroization dates back to the event when they themselves became leaders to challenge the oppressors. Yet there were colonial apparatuses which tried to unheroize them connecting them with everyday life and everyday practices. Toogood who writes:

Like their fellow people, Sidhu and his brothers are "common sort of men; they are poor, much in debt" but they were made of sterner stuff, they refused to oblige the mahajans by submitting to their exorbitant demands. The brothers had started a just war, a war of liberation against the exploiters. This gave them the stature of heroes. All the Santals were duty bound to obey their orders – their oath was to do or die (quoted in Kaviraj 96).

In the confession of "Kanoo Manjee son of Narayn Manjee taken by the Honourable Ashley Eden" on the 8<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1855:

Kanho: At first we were not wounded, but many of my followers were killed. We returned to the attack and the Govt. troops retired and made a Poojah. Then we fled and again returned and Seedoo fired arrows. The troops continued their fire and Seedoo was shot in the arm and I on the right side of my stomach.

The Deity had said that water would fire from the muskets, but some of my troop must have done wrong, and therefore the Deity's promise proved incorrect. About 80 Santhals were killed and the rest returned home.<sup>11</sup>



But Digambar Chakrabortti refers to some other leader of the Hul namely Chando Manjhi prophesizing that the bullets would have no effect on the Santals. He writes:

Chando Manjhi one morning declared that Chando Bonga had been to him overnight and said that rifle balls would have no effect against them, and in case they were fired at the harmly rifles would give forth water, instead of destructive leaden balls (28).

If we take both as real and not misinterpretations, then we have two distinct conclusions: one obviously leads to the process of heroization of Sidhu where other leaders were silenced in history and the other that Digambar Chakrabortti may have resisted the divine quality in Sidhu.

The present attribution of divine quality to Sidhu dates back to the event when a certain proximity towards the supernatural and the divine is *appropriated* by them in order to affect the Santals into a common perception. Sidhu's testimony tells us what led their divine spirit or *thakoor* appear before him:

The Manjhis and Parganaits assembled in my verandah, and we consulted for two months, concluding that Pontet and Mahesh Daroga don't listen to our complaints and no one acts as our father and mother; then a God descended from heaven in the form of a cart-wheel and said to me: 'Kill Pontet and daroga and the mahajans and then you will have justice and a father and mother.'<sup>12</sup>

Kaviraj argues that such interactions immediately raised Sidhu and Kanho to the stature of heroes (86-87). He writes:

The mystic element served a double purpose. Not only did it invest the leaders with an unassailable authority because of their association with gods, it was done through a media which was easily intelligible to the Santals (88).

He also narrates how after Sidhu was wounded, Kanho became the *Subah* and controlled his followers as the new leader:

Kanho was also active in the encounter at Maheshpur. As Sidhu was disabled, the mantle fell on Kanho who met the troops in another encounter at Raghunathpur. Facing inevitable defeat at the hands of the troops, he took refuge in the hills (Kaviraj 98).

At the Mofussil Confession taken by M. Surkar Darogha of Thannah Cooperboondah in the District of Beerbhoom on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1855, Kanho articulated the urgency for him to lead his community and how imperative it was to exterminate exploiters from their land. He also confessed that his followers went beyond his control during the course of the insurrection:

The Deity granted me an interview and told me that through the country wherever there are Santhals you will be their Raja, and will take a tax of two annas on every plough, and will not oppress the Ryots, you will not allow any Bengallees to live in your Territory. Having received a Purwannahs to this effect I and my brothers Chand, Bhyrub, and Seedoo became Soobahs, and Seedoo and I killed Mohesh Dutt Darogah and very many others and took great plunder. All the Santhals of the country formed my army and they also plundered and killed. I did not order many people to be killed. I directed that whoever would obey orders should be considered obedient/ gureeb and not killed. But that all the rich and disobedient should be killed and their property plundered. But my army did not attend to that order and plundered much.<sup>13</sup>

The brothers have not just been heroized by their followers and themselves but a significant contribution has been made by the local print media in valorizing these characters by privileging them over other leaders. Their messianic quality is circulated through certain hyperboles as *Hindoo Patriot* narrates Kanho's prophesy:

When on the scaffold, he [Kanho] maintained his firmness to the last and declared, with noose round his neck, that he will come again, that he will reappear in six years to head another *hool*.<sup>14</sup>

The print media has always projected these leaders as virile men of messianic quality who naturally command the deference of an ample mass of people. In the visual narratives of Hul at the Suri District Information and Cultural Centre, Sidhu is depicted as the more aggressive and masculine figure with a lighter shade of brown which is clearly done to establish him as the leader of his community. The 7ft bronze statue of the brothers, Sidhu and Kanho, visibly project them as powerful masculine figures quite contradicting the colonial narrative:

Seedhoo Manghee, Chief of the Santal Rebels, Sketched from Life [portrays the] ... miserable origin[ator] of the insurrection, [and] was taken whilst he was in prison at Bhaugalpoor, immediately after his capture. He is a short, thin, active little fellow, very unlike a Santhal in appearance.<sup>15</sup>

As opposed to Sherwill's account, the 7ft long Sidhu, at Bhognadih ground, is made to look far older to Kanho in order to assert two attributes required in men caught up with the cause of leading a rebellion. While the classical contours of their musculature stand for physical strength, Sidhu's visage bears the evidence of possessing ancient wisdom and worldly perception in contrast to a much younger Kanho who embodies the militant passion of an

able-bodied revolutionary. The positioning of the forelimbs of the two men is deeply thought provoking, while Kanho seems to be in a posture of vigilant adherence with his arms joined just above the abdomen, Sidhu's left arm has been left like that of a flag bearer only this time denied of his flag.

### **Motifs of the motives**

Motives are prerequisites for narratives which render them significant at the present. Similarly they determine how the web of power relations would acquire a future for certain narratives by connecting them with issues of development. From the reading of the *provisional* narratives of Hul we observe that six distinct motifs, classifiable broadly in three categories, feature in the motives of the practice of recollection in the particular context. The three broad categories are the motifs in the official historiography, in alternative historiography, and in developmental historiography.

The dual motifs in the official historiography are the colonial official and the post-colonial Marxist state official narratives of the event. Both the colonial and the post-colonial state narratives have tried to contain it as one event with a fixed beginning and an end and periodized it as one particular indigenous repercussion of the colonial India. The colonial narratives have mostly criminalized the heroes, as Rycroft argues citing Sherwill's visual imprints some of which have been referred to in the previous chapter, so as to assert the benign assumption that colonization was in the best interest of the natives. The post-colonial State narratives like the colonial narratives provide an event-mentality to the insurrection but unlike the later assert the subversive form in it and heroize the leaders so as to play with the politics of Santal identity and the question of nationalism as already discussed in the first chapter. The prime motive in the official historiography is targeted at reinstating the power relations that generate consenting subjects.

The motives in alternative historiography similar to the motives in the official historiography are centered round the politics of Santal identity and the question of nationalism. However, unlike the later, the motifs of the motives are quite resistant to the intension of the power dynamics instated by the State in colonial and post colonial times. One motif in alternative Santal historiography resists the singularity of the event and tries to locate an origin to the event in the tradition of resistance to the colonial apparatus. Dhirendranath Baske first addressed the plurality of the practice of resistance and traced the Hul back to the

revolt of Tilka Manjhi of 1784. The Sidhu-Kanho Memorial Association with the initiative of Baske has challenged the State's appropriation of history in terms of its *misinterpretation* regarding the latter's *wrong* assumption of the beginning of Hul. Nevertheless, the State representatives with their authoritative arguments have tried to make this debate seem redundant. Therefore, the Sidhu-Kanho Memorial Association has organized separate commemorative practices around West Bengal on 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2010, the day they argue marks the beginning of Hul of 1855-56. It seems quite paradoxical that on one hand they try to locate the origin in some other time frame and yet try to fix this event in a definitive time frame. The present debate over the *exact* beginning of Hul of 1855-56, that has breached the liaison between the State and the Santal cultural front that commemorates the event, raises certain key questions into the very motives of their practice. Who determines how the history is to be constructed and preserved? The other motif in alternative historiography, that Narahari Kaviraj and Prathama Banerjee promote, narrativizes Hul as a sub-cultural practice which has been part of the Santal collective consciousness. Similarly, the Santal diaspora considers this event a part of the tradition of resistance and a practice against any form of exploitations and oppressions. However, JMM has tried to appropriate this history for their cause to build a nationalistic consciousness among the *adivasis* of Jharkhand and equates this event in the tradition of resistance contingent to Jharkhand.

The motives behind such appropriations of history have been largely to evoke certain futuristic purposes. This takes us to the third category of developmental historiography which is not a trans-historiography but contingent to the cause of development. One of the motifs is guarded by the Santal position in this entire tradition of resistance. The motive behind the Santal consciousness of the tradition of resistance that is instilled in the practice of recollection and commemoration is to challenge the nodes of exploitation so that there is a growth in terms of Santal development. This motif in developmental historiography is addressed both by the State and the Santals but the motives remain separate and attached to the web of power relations. The *Vikas Mela* that is organized by the State seems to be its benevolent project as a visual metaphor of mass development. The overt pedagogic intention regarding the usage of modern techniques in the agrarian life of the Santal peasants, in their daily activities, multiple scale business provisions and their desired relation with the State machineries produce them as subjects of power. Here history and its modalities of construction and preservation become the pretext to legitimize the State and urban machineries into their daily practices which would give them the State's version of

development, a feel good factor with certain upwardly mobile motives that get cultivated in the Santal consciousness. The language of command is sugar-coated with benevolent rhetorics of the State so that the web of power relations is established into their consciousness as something natural. The characteristics and positions of the present peasant society in focus are quite congruent with Partha Chatterjee's concept of political society. He rightly claims:

Those in political society make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations (2004: 57).

The motive of the government that I am dealing with remains unstable, temporary and is subject to change with certain constitutional rearrangements. One might cite how the Bhognadih tribal interests on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008 and 2010 were divided according to the political interventions. Multiple stages contingent to different political interests were staged on the very ground where Sidhu and Kanho once united thousands of Santals to fight against oppressions and exploitations. On 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009, however, the State government with the support from JMM political leaders arranged for the *Vikas Mela* and could not accommodate certain BJP State representatives on the stage during the commemoration of Hul. It seems a certainty in this context when Partha Chatterjee notes that the "... state agencies, or governmental agencies generally, including NGOs that carry out governmental functions, are no longer an external entity in relation to peasant society" (2004: 59). Talking about the implications of this complexity in the current peasant society, Chatterjee admits how these welfare and developmental functions staged publicly have become "a matter of legitimate claims by peasants" (2004: 59). This utilitarian claim in gaining access to the benefits has created small coteries of competitive benefit-seekers who would gorge on the capital that the government invests on the peasant society largely considering its electoral mobilization of these people. Chatterjee writes:

The response of governmental agencies to such demands is usually flexible, based on calculations of costs and returns. In most cases, the strategy is to break up the benefit-seekers into smaller groups, defined by specific demographic or social characteristics, so that there can be flexible policy that does not regard the entire rural population as a single homogeneous mass but rather breaks it up into smaller target populations (2004: 60).

In the Hul commemoration the governmental grants reach out to certain sections of tribal people who are directly involved with the interests of the government or the political parties. Apart from the descendents of Sidhu Murmu, the *parganas* of the neighbouring Santal villages and some academically good students avail these governmental grants. During my field work I realized that certain coteries of benefit-seekers would form around this *smaller target population* and would try to appropriate history to suit their own self-seeking interests and garb them as rightful claims to governmental benefits. The narrative of the Rooj family of Panchkathia is a case in point. Of late, the governmental benefits that Sidhu Murmu's descendants avail have made them believe that highlighting their participation in the same history would facilitate their availing of those benefits. They claim that their ancestor, Gopal Rooj, was killed by Sidhu and hanged at the Panchkathia *Kranti Sthal* which marks the beginning of the Santal Hul of 1855-56. No written documents, official and otherwise, verify such a narrative. Arun Chowdhury in his book *Hul* refers to the Rooj family and notes that Gopal Rooj was murdered by Sakram Manjhi in 1887 (Bengali 1294). He also quotes Gopal Rooj's son Dhanakrishna Rooj who captures this murder through poetry:

*Rich amidst the settlement*

*The Qualified Gopal Rooj*

*Oh what was the use*

*You were cut down to pieces (62, translation mine).*

Therefore, it seems quite clear that a pie of history becomes easy bait to extort governmental benefits. Nevertheless, in the present context one would not debate that the showcasing of the governmental policies become the criterion for such a cultural and political milieu. With the changing interest of the policies, the entitlements do not become the rights of these subjects but remain contingent to the web of power relations that is administered and instilled in such commemorative practices. As Chatterjee writes:

... [the] claims of people in political society a matter of constant political negotiation and the results are never secure or permanent. Their entitlements, even when recognized, never quite become rights (2004: 58).

Since these entitlements always remain the interest of the government and its policies, they are perceived as producing inequalities among the people living in the margins. Chatterjee too addresses these obvious inequalities and writes that "the charge against state agencies is not of exploitation but discrimination" (2004: 60). The official benevolent rhetoric has been

quite effective in this context. Through pamphlets, wall narratives, staged rhetorics for integrating a nationalistic outlook and its so-called benevolent services to the peasant society, the State tries to veil such allegations of discrimination. The police which is apparently the most vital of State machineries is trying its level best to encounter any such allegation with rhetorics and wall hangings so that it can undo the legacy of Mahesh Daroga which it is still categorized with. In the commemorative speech, the Chief Commissioner of Police even takes recourse to language politics to win over the tribal masses by expressing part of his compassion in Santali.

I do not quite agree with Chatterjee though when he excludes the tribal people from his notion of political society and says “these marginal groups represent an outside beyond the boundaries of political society” (2004: 61). The Santal participants in the commemoration are not marginal although through the power equation they are put at the limits of the system as if having no agency in the process of development. There is a constant overlap between the peasant society and the ‘primitivized’ tribal society which problematizes the often drawn practical boundaries. However the government with its own strategies and policies tries to bring them under one purview of the national. Chatterjee argues that through an *internal transformation*, the subaltern classes participate in a dialectical relationship with the government. He writes:

It is clear that in pushing the project of turning subaltern subjects into national citizens, the modernizers have encountered resistances that are facilitated by the activities of political society. ... in resisting the modernizing project that is imposed on them, the subaltern classes also embark on a path of *internal transformation* (2008: 51, emphasis mine).

It is through such resistances and contradictions that there is an *internal transformation* within these people which inserts them into the present power dynamics.

### **Frames of truth**

My inquiry into this project began with a fundamental question whether *being* there (in the field) in person provides an access to the *truth* about the commemoration/history and other performatives. This puts the entire project I claim as *true* at stake. Nevertheless, it is my academic plight to contextualize it as *true* and make it believable through arguments and evidences through the authenticity of my documentation. My enframing of the visual *truth* is

the juncture of the interaction of my subjective experience and the constitutive *truth* that emerges from the various *provisional* narratives. Through this methodological dialogue between visual ethnography and historiography I arrive at my own claim on the regimes of *truth* for my collection of recollections.

Levinas (1981) asserts that “a saying states and thematizes the said, but signifies it to the other ... with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said” (46). For Levinas, unlike Heidegger, the *being* is always other regarding; the *truth* gains authenticity not by choice but through obligation. He remarks that “[t]rue learning consists in receiving the lesson so deeply that it becomes a necessity to give oneself to the other. The lesson of truth is not held in one ... consciousness. It explodes toward the other.” (1994: 80). It is more social than ontological. Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, writes:

a hermeneutics that regard *understanding* as the reconstruction of the original would be no more than the recovery of a dead meaning ... essential nature of the historical spirit does not consist in the restoration of the past, but in thoughtful mediation with contemporary life (149-150).

The *truth* comes alive when contextualized and mediated with the contemporary structures in the social. The *truth* of the past, as we have seen in the context of the commemoration of the Santal Hul, is verified and modified through its *mediation with contemporary life*. In the same context we have seen how the *truth* has also been determined by the regimes of power. Foucault has already equated the *truth* with power so as to determine its value in the context of its production and circulation; he says:

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and function would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is the thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying that counts as true (“Truth and Power”: 131).



What could be counted as *true* also depends on its economic dependency on the relations of power. Power can be materialized through the way the *truth* is produced and circulated:

There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of the truth (Foucault, "Two Lectures": 93).

We have also seen how the fragmented parts of the history of Hul are revisited and highlighted by the colonial and post-colonial State machineries so as to suit the motive of their power equations. Therefore, in this particular situation multiplicity of *truth* gets legitimized and represented through the *provisional* narratives hauling the past of the Hul.

*Truth* disappears once it appears and reappears in the realm of narratives – verbal, visual and otherwise. The fear of ephemerality initiates a practical, social and academic urge to *capture* and *save* the *truth* from disappearance. It is but an obligation to the academicians to fight the slippage into disappearance. Hence documentation becomes the most imperative method to find a pretext of returning to *live origin*: a cultural urge created by the world of the academia. Stones *really* talk! (cf. Derrida 95) The voice is provided by the academia to create different versions of the *real*.

Sarah Pink points out in her book *Doing Visual Ethnography* that there is no blueprint for fieldwork (4). She defines ethnography as a process of creating and representing knowledge that is based on the ethnographers' own experiences which would entail reflexive, collaborative or participatory method (18). The visuals, textual i.e. the written field notes, and other sensory ways should compliment each other which would gradually cross disciplinary boundaries (Pink 5). The purpose of analysis is not to translate the visual evidence into verbal/written knowledge but to explore the relationship between visual and other knowledge (Pink 96) and to produce "a negotiated version of reality" (20). During my documentation I often felt that my experience is constantly getting verified and interrupted with camera shots, angles, technical hazards and the frame; as if I was framing my experience. The frames that I determined in taking pictures during the commemoration and the creativity through which I often intervened into the frame, interlink the personal and the professional. The ability to create, manipulate and edit images constitutes a complex nature of the photographic image and gives new ways of defining and understanding the *real*. Pink emphasizes on the arbitrariness and subjectivity attached to photography and hence foregrounds the need to

contextualize the material (18). The meaning is produced in the context and there is no fixed meaning. Hence visual research is contingent on the research context (Pink 32). Likewise, the ethnographicness of a visual narrative is determined by the context. Ethnographic knowledge is, thus, not an assemblage of empirical data and observable facts and specificities but exists through layers of negotiation. The constructedness of this ethnographic knowledge is something inherent in our academic venture and we all are implied in this constructive representation of the multiple versions of the *real*. The field notes of the commemoration do not say much of the memories but only speak when contextualized through regimes of representations. As Reason observes:

Being *there*, like the thing itself, does not speak for itself. Instead it is the archive, along with the various representations of performance contained within the archive, which give performance form and meaning and that speak about performance (40).

Thus documentation, which has been proved to be an integral part of field work, needs to be contextualized through proper narrative and inter-subjective linkages.

Owing to the inherent ephemerality of moments, it is the frame that we bring home which talks about the narratives of *truth* and how they work. *Truth per se* does not speak but when contextualized through other senses and cultural coordinates it speaks. The *real* that is supposedly documented is constituted by multiple possibilities so as to claim it as the *truth* of the event. Since there can be only one truth and unending deferred ones, the possibility of attaining it is to contextualize it. The *truth* value that is ascribed to the claims of the frame is what lies beyond the frame in what is often unframed between these claims. Hence *truth* is the problem; it is the problem that remains at bay.

## Notes and References

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<sup>1</sup> The letter of the widow of Mahesh Dutt is attached as Appendix I in K. K. Datta, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> J.P. 14 Feb. 56, no. 157- quoted in Bidwell's Report.

<sup>4</sup> J.P. 19 June, 56, no. 151-61- Trial of Tirbohan.

<sup>5</sup> J.P. 14 Feb. 56, no. 205- Ram Portab Singh's testimony.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.- F.I.Halliday's report.

<sup>7</sup> J.P. 14 Feb. 56, no. 203 and J.P. 24 April, 56, no. 190.

<sup>8</sup> J.P. 17 April, 56, no. 259

<sup>9</sup> J.P. 17 April, 56, no. 260

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<sup>10</sup> J.P. 24 April, 56, no. 194

<sup>11</sup> J.P. 14 Feb. 1856, no. 205.

<sup>12</sup> J.P. 8 Nov. 55, no. 25-26- Sidhu: disposition before Eden

<sup>13</sup> Mofussil Confession of Kanoo Manjhee, taken by M. Surkar Darogha of Thannah Cooperboondah in the District of Beerbhoom on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1855: J.P. 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1856, no. 205.

<sup>14</sup> *Hindoo Patriot*, 6 March, 1956, quoted in Kaviraj 94.

<sup>15</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 23 February 1856, 200 (quoted in Rycroft 257).

### **Conclusion: Episode One – The Curtain Call**

Memory, on which history draws and which it nourishes in return, seeks to save the past in order to serve the present and the future. Let us act in such a way that collective memory may serve the liberation and not the enslavement of human beings

(Le Goff 1992: 99)

Each investigation into the narratives and performatives of Santal cultural history marks for me a new beginning. Hence, as of now, the question of writing a formal conclusion seems redundant. It is just an end to the first episode of my field work and intervention into a world where my journey has just begun. On the occasion of the first curtain call I would thus reiterate certain moot points raised in the arguments I have made so far and talk about further possibilities of this investigation. This dissertation is itself, in a way, a commemorative project, a commemoration of Santal Hul, and not just a *provisional* by-product of my first round of investigation.

My primary intervention into the narratives of Santal Hul, at this juncture of my documentation, has brought in the multiple possibilities of the formation and production of *truth* based on which the *provisional* past is being preserved continuously. This trans-temporal documentation of the past always already gets verified and modified during the process of recollection. The variations and adaptations remain contingent to the motives of the power machineries that practice such a commemoration.

My project, as it stands at this juncture, has incorporated different forms of narratives collected and documented from the Santals, the *dikus* and the official representatives. As is quite understandable, one can not exhaust the narratives of a history which has been such a significant part of a community for more than 150 years. During my investigation I gathered certain resources which I had no opportunity of utilizing here and had to draw the curtains this time without incorporating them in my work. Nevertheless, I will recall a few of them so that the next phase of my work will continue from those narratives which are yet to unfold.

In a conversation with Dhirendranath Baske, he recollected to me that eighteen Santal narratives dealing with the insurrection were gathered by P.O. Bodding in the second half of the nineteenth century. The original copy of these narratives was preserved in microfilms and first kept at the Oslo University in Norway and recently shared with the Calcutta Research Institute, Kolkata, where it is kept with little interest. He expressed his anguish about the fact that research is still to be conducted on these narratives. However, my project will remain

incomplete without the required study of these narratives which I intend to do in the near future. I have also come to know of *patachitras* lying untended across rural Bengal narrating the tales in the footsteps of the rebels which I intend to access during my further research in this area. More importantly one needs to research the techniques in which the Santal narratives recorded in the Judicial Proceedings are discursively and emotionally neutralized by the colonial power machineries. It would be important to see the intentional abstinence from betraying any emotion throughout the official discourse and how in the very process of translation of their testimonies, emotion has been silenced. The aloof nonchalance of the colonial documentation in order to achieve an objective distancing from the emotional mutinous ‘natives’ and their rebellion is an area which successfully provokes my interest.

All my six expeditions to the Santal Parganas over the last year not only trained me as a compassionate listener but helped me gather experiences very distanced from an urbane mentality and analogous to the often romanticized adventures of heroes. On my several journeys on the top of over-crowded buses through the Rajmahal Hills in pitch darkness, I often recalled my childhood memories of reciting Tagore’s *Birpurush* (“The Hero”) to my parents to gain strength to reduce palpitation behind my ribs. I always came back with fresh experiences which I recollected immediately to my friends and close associates with associative gestures and gesticulations to guide them to live through my experiences. Needless to say, it seems I always succeeded with the tool of the retelling, which remains the central concern of my entire project.

In taming the *truths* of narratives from my collections of recollections I have refrained myself critically from the reference of a single *truth* and placed the possibilities of multiple *truths* at the altar of the remembered rebels. The constitutive *truths* and the *provisional* past which resurface and rekindle with the turns of daily interactions and carefree assertions shimmer like the forgotten torches borne by my (en)framed rebels.

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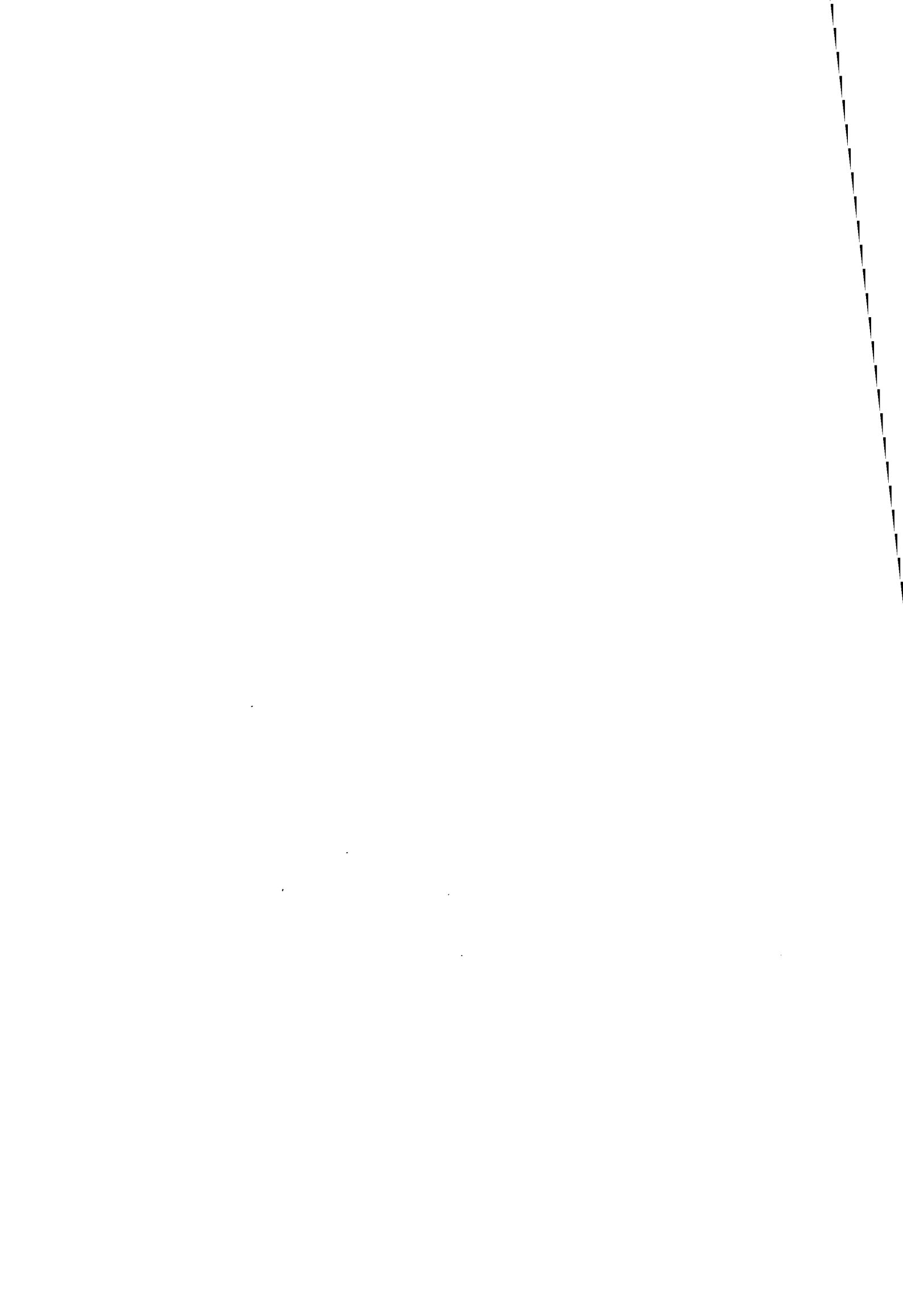
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# APPENDIX : PLATES FROM THE DOCUMENTATION



Fig. 1. Painting depicting the genesis of Hul at District Information and Culture Centre, Silli



Fig. 2. Wall narratives retelling the Santal Hul, Bhojpadli ground, near Barhait, 30th June 09





pic 3. Vikas Mela organized by Jharkhand State Govt., Bhojadin Ground, near Barhat, 11th April 10



pic 4. Vikas Mela Property Distribution Camp, Bhojadin Ground, Sahibganj district, 30th June 10



Pic 5. Mass assemblage of the followers of the Vaidin Samaj on the occasion of Sakti's day, Panchhatna, 19th April 19



Pic 6. Santals (non followers of Vaidin Samaj) making their religious nadia on the occasion of Sakti's day, Bhoprahatna



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Ph. 7. Santal performer playing the traditional flute. Organized on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Santal 100th Year.



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Ph. 8. Santal Performers from Dubrampur performing Santal dance. Organized on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Santal 100th Year.

SIDO-KANHU DAY, OBSERVANCE  
COMMITTEE 1977

*President*

Shri Dilip Saren

*Treasurer*

Shri Rup Chand Hembrom

*Secretary*

Shri Nabin Chandra Mandi

*Members*

Sarba Shri Kushal Chandra Baske, Manohar Murmu, Jyotilal Mandi, Baburam Hansdah, Purna Chandra Saren, Tara Chand Saren, Jogesh Chandra Murmu, Bijay Krishna Hembrom, Ram Krishna Hansdah, Ashutosh Murmu, Upendra Nath Murmu, Ram Kishan Majhi, Jadu Nath Tudu and Dr. Chanaku Murmu.

PROGRAMME

Thursday, the 30th June, 1977

From 6 p.m. to 7-30 p.m.

Opening Song	:	Shri Banerwar Mandi
Introduction	}	: Santali Shri Nabin Chandra Mandi
		: Beng. & Eng. Shri Dilip Saren
Inauguration	:	(By kindling lamp) : Shri S. B. Majumdar
National Anthem	:	Sm. Anita Baske & party
Inaugural Address	:	Shri S. B. Majumdar
Address by Guest-in-Chief	:	Dr. S. B. Chattopadhyay
Address by Guest of honour	:	Shri Sibum Saren
Presidential Address	:	Shri Nityananda Hembrom
Vote of thanks	:	Shri Dilip Saren & Shri Jogesh Chandra Murmu

Interval

From 8 p.m. to 9-30 p.m.

Santali dances : "Natuwa" "Paikaha" & "Danta"  
Staging of One-Act-Play 'Drama' : "SARJOM GIRA"

SINDO-KANHU DAY OBSERVANCE  
COMMITTEE

presents

"SARJOM GIRA"

( an One-Act-Play Drama )

The Announcement of a date for gathering  
by showing Sal Twig with leaves

The plot of this drama has its focus on the commencement of the Santal mass-movement which broke out in the year 1855. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Santals entered into Damin-i-Koh now known as the district of Santal Parganas in Bihar State. The place was mostly undulated and covered with jungles. The Santals with their hard and sincere labour cleared up the jungles and turned it to a fertile agricultural land and in consequence crops were grown in abundance. The Santal as a race are born agriculturists and happily lived there harvesting good crops with their hard labour. Then came the traders and mahajans from the adjoining areas being allured by the good earnings of the Santals. The local Zamindars and also the British administrators allied with these traders and mahajans in their exploitation of the Santals and other poor toiling people who lived there. The misery of the Santals mounted up heavily but no redress. At last suddenly one day a call came through the "Sarjom Gira" from Sido and Kanhu for holding an assembly at the village Bhognadihi to find out ways and means to get rid of their misery.

CASTING

Character	Male Role	Artist
Subda	A Santal villager	Paban Hembrom
Guja	„ brother	Rabilal Tudu
Bhuj	„ friend	Murali Hansdah
Bikram	Village headman	Mohan Hembrom
Ramu	Village messenger	Nabin Tundu
Dangu	Revolutionist	Ashutosh Murmu
Gangu	„	Upen Murmu
Ram Chandra	Zamindar	Baidyanath Saren
Charan	„ Companion	Biswanath Murmu
Kamal	Do	Kanai Murmu
Daman & others	Villagers	

Female		
Salgi	Subda's wife	Nandarani Murmu
Chhita	Rakhal Balika	Suniti Tudu

Board of Directors  
Sarbasri Ram Chand Baske, Ram Kishan Majhi &  
Jadu Nath Tudu (Play writer)

Director  
Shri Rabilal Tudu

Editor  
Dhirendra Nath Baske

**SIDO-KANHU MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION**22A, GARCHA 1st. LANE, BALLYGUNGE  
CALCUTTA-700019

Ref. No.....12/S.K.M.

Dated.....16.1.82.

To  
 Dr. S.N. Mandi,  
 Hon'ble Minister of State,  
 Scheduled Castes & Tribes  
 Welfare Department,  
 Govt. of West Bengal,  
 Writers' Buildings,  
 Calcutta.

Sir,

In memory of Sido and Kanhu - two freedom fighters of the nation, the name of Esplanade Row East has been renamed as Sido-Kanhu Dahar by the Corporation of Calcutta and for this renaming the personal initiative taken by Shri Prasanta Sur, Hon'ble Minister-In-Charge for Local Government and Urban Development deserves special mention. In this connection, it is proposed to inaugurate the said road as Sido-Kanhu Dahar formally by the Chief Minister of West Bengal either on 23rd or 24th February, 1982. It is also decided that Shri Prasanta Sur, Hon'ble Minister-In-Charge for Local Government and Urban Development will be present as Chief Guest and Shri Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Hon'ble Minister-In-Charge for Information and Cultural Affairs will be requested to grace the occasion as Special Guest. Hon'ble Minister ~~xxxxxx~~ of State, In-Charge of Scheduled Castes & Tribes Welfare Department, has kindly agreed to preside over the function.

To make the function successful a proposal in details is enclosed herewith for your kind consideration.

Hope to receive the sanctioned amount well in advance so as to ensure completion in befitting manner.

Yours faithfully,

Dhirendra Nath Baske  
 (Dhirendranath Baske)  
 Secretary.

o/c

Form No. O. S. 22.

No. 1.

THE CORPORATION OF CALCUTTA.  
LAW DEPARTMENT.

The 12th August, 1981.

In replying, please quote the number and date of this letter.

From

SHRI AJIT KUMAR BASU, SOLICITOR & ADVOCATE,

Chief Law Officer, Corporation of Calcutta,  
5, S. N. Banerjee Road, Calcutta-13.

To

Sri Dilip Soren,  
President,  
Sido Kanhu Doy Observance Committee  
S/O. Bharatiya Sanskrita Bhawan,  
1A, College Row,  
Calcutta - 9.

Dear Sir,

With reference to your letter No.155 dt. 5.11.80 proposing to rename Esplanade Row East as Sido Kanhu Dahar I am glad to inform you that the Administrator, Corporation of Calcutta, has been pleased to sanction the renaming of Esplanade Row East as Sido Kanhu Bahar on the recommendation of the Road Renaming Advisory Committee.

Yours faithfully,

*[Signature]*  
Chief Law Officer  
Secretary

Advisory Committee for Renaming of  
Roads, Streets etc.

Enclosure.

পর্যায়ীন ভারতের প্রথম স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রাম  
মহান সাঁওতাল হুলের ১৫৫তম বর্ষ উদযাপন উপলক্ষ্যে  
সাঁওতাল হুল পরবর্তী এবং বর্তমান অবস্থা বিষয়ক

# আদিবাসী কনভেনশন

তাং :- ৭ জুলাই, ২০১০ সময় :- বিকাল ৫টা স্থান :- ত্রিপুরা হিতসাধনী হল, কলেজ স্কোয়ার,  
কোলকাতা

আয়োজক :- ভারত জাকাত সান্তাড পাঁঠুয়া গাঁওতা (সারা ভারত সাঁওতাল ছাত্র সমিতি)

Reg.No. - S/1L/54347 of 2008-2009

সহযোগীতায় :- সারা ভারত সিধু কানহু গাঁওতা Reg.No. S-32504/80-81

১৭৫৭ সালের জুন মাসে পলাসীর যুদ্ধে জয়লাভ করে ইংরেজ ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানী ভারতে উপনিবেশ শাসনের ভিত্তি স্থাপনের ৯৮ বছর পর ১৮৫৫ সালে ভারতের আদিবাসী সাঁওতালরা পরাধীন ভারতে ইংরেজদের বিরুদ্ধে বৃহত্তম ও ভয়ঙ্করতম জনবিদ্রোহ সংগঠিত করে। এই লড়াই সাঁওতাল হুল নামে পরিচিত। আদিবাসী সাঁওতালদের নেতৃত্বে কুমোর, তেলি, কর্মকার, মোমিন, চামার, বাউরি, ডোম এবং এবং অন্যান্য নিম্নবর্গের খেটে খাওয়া মানুষেরাও লড়াই করেছিল বলে সাঁওতাল হুল ভারতের প্রথম স্বাধীনতার লড়াই হিসেবে স্বীকৃতি পায়নি। অথচ এর দুই বছর পর ১৮৫৭ সালে দেশীয় রাজা, জমিদার, মহাজনদের নিজেদের অস্তিত্ব রক্ষার লড়াইকে মহাবিদ্রোহ বা ভারতের প্রথম স্বাধীনতার সংগ্রাম হিসেবে স্বীকৃতি দেওয়া হয়েছে।

১৮৫৫ সালের ৩০শে জুন ভারতের সংগ্রামী মানুষের ইতিহাসে এক স্মরণীয় দিন। ঐ দিন বর্তমান ঝাড়খন্ড রাজ্যের বারহাইতের কাছে ভগনাডিহি গ্রামে সিধু, কানহু, চাঁদ ও ভৈরব এর ডাকে দশ হাজার সাঁওতাল জড়ো হয়ে ইংরেজ শাসনের অবসান ঘটিয়ে স্বাধীন সাঁওতাল রাজত্ব প্রতিষ্ঠার শপথ নিয়েছিলেন। তাদের হাতিয়ার আদিবাসী জনতার চিরাচরিত অস্ত্র শস্ত্র - তীর, ধনুক, টাঙ্গি, তলোয়ার। এলাকার কুমোর, তেলি, কর্মকার, মোমিন, চামার, বাউরী, ডোম, এবং অন্যান্য নিম্নবর্গের খেটে খাওয়া মানুষেরাও বিদ্রোহী সাঁওতালদের সঙ্গে যোগ দেন এবং নানা ভাবে সাহায্য করেন। বিদ্রোহীরা দিঘি থানার অত্যাচারী দারোগা মহেশ দত্তকে হত্যা করেন, পাকুড়ের রাজবাড়ী দখল করেন এবং আগস্ট মাসের মধ্যে ভাগলপুর থেকে বীরভূম পর্যন্ত বিস্তীর্ণ এলাকায় নিজেদের আধিপত্য বিস্তার করেন। বহু অত্যাচারী জমিদার ও মহাজনকে তারা হত্যা করেন। বাকীরা প্রাণ ভয়ে পালিয়ে যায়। ইংরেজ বাহিনীর সঙ্গে মুখোমুখি সংঘর্ষে অনেক লড়াই-ই তাঁরা জেতেন। কিন্তু ইংরেজ বাহিনীর উন্নত হাতিয়ার (গোলাবন্দুক) ও সংগঠনের কাছে তাঁরা হেরে যান। সিধু লড়াই-এ মারা যান। কানহু, চাঁদ, ভৈরব ধরা পড়েন। কানহুর ফাঁসি হয় এবং চাঁদ ও ভৈরবের জেল হয়। সেটা ১৮৫৬ সালের ফেব্রুয়ারী মাস নাগাদ। কিন্তু লড়াই এর আগুন নেভেনি। ১৮৫৬ সালের মাঝামাঝি পর্যন্ত নানা স্থানে সাঁওতালরা বিদ্রোহের আগুন জ্বালিয়ে রাখেন।

নিম্নবর্গের শ্রমজীবী মানুষেরা যেমন সাঁওতালদের পক্ষে যোগ দিয়েছিলেন তেমনি বিদ্রোহ দমনে ইংরেজদের পক্ষে যোগ দিয়েছিলেন নীলকর সাহেবরা ছাড়াও ভাগলপুর ও আশেপাশের জমিদাররা এবং অভ্যুত্থানের এলাকার বাঙালি জমিদার ও মহাজনরা। জমিদাররা বিদ্রোহ দমনের জন্য কোনো ভাড়া না নিয়ে ইংরেজ ফৌজকে হাতি দিয়ে সাহায্য করেছিলেন। মুর্শিদাবাদের নবাবও নিজের খরচে হাতি ও সৈন্য সামন্ত পাঠিয়েছিলেন। দামিন-ই-কো ও বীরভূমের বাঙালী মহাজনরা এবং তাঁদের আত্মীয়স্বজনরা খবর সংগ্রহ করা ও অন্যান্য ভাবে ইংরেজদের সাহায্য করেছিলেন।

বিদ্রোহ দমন করতে গিয়ে ইংরেজরা চরম দমননীতির আশ্রয় নেয়। কয়েক হাজার বিদ্রোহী যুদ্ধেই মারা যান। আরো কয়েক হাজারকে গ্রেপ্তার করা হয়। বন্দীদের উপর এমন অমানুষিক অত্যাচার চালানো হয় যে অনেক বন্দী বিচারের আগেই মারা যান। বহু গ্রাম জ্বালিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। সাঁওতালরা বনে জঙ্গলে পালিয়ে যান। অনেকে অনাহারে মারা যান। ইংরেজরা বাংলা-আসাম সীমান্তে সঙ্কোশ নদীর পাড়ে শিমুলতলা এজেন্সি বানিয়ে বেশ কয়েক হাজার সাঁওতালকে নির্বাসিত করে।



সাঁওতাল বিদ্রোহের ১৫৫ তম বার্ষিকী স্মরণে

# শ্রম দিবস উদযাপন

৩০শে জুন — ১লা জুলাই ২০১০  
স্থান - সিধো-কান্ধ মুক্তমঞ্চ, সিউড়ী

উদ্বোধনী অনুষ্ঠান  
৩০শে জুন, বুধবার বেলা ৩টা, বেলা  
২টায় শিল্পীদের নিয়ে পদযাত্রা

উদ্বোধক : ডঃ করুণাসিকু দাস

মাননীয় উপাচার্য, রবীন্দ্রভারতী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়

: সম্মাননীয় অতিথিবৃন্দ :

শ্রী তপন রায় মাননীয় রাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকার

ডঃ সৌমেন্দ্রনাথ বেরা মাননীয় রাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকার

ডাঃ রামচন্দ্র ডোম মাননীয় সাংসদ

: সভাপতি :

শ্রীমতী অন্নপূর্ণা মুখার্জী সভাপতি, বীরভূম জেলা পরিষদ

স্বাগত ভাষণ : ড. সৌমিত্র মোহন আই.এ.এস

জেলাশাসক ও জেলা সমাহর্তা, বীরভূম।

❖ উপজাতীয় প্রথায় অতিথি  
অভ্যর্থনা - নগরী আশ্রমিক  
বিদ্যালয়ের শিক্ষার্থীরা, জয়পুর  
ডন বসকো স্কুলের/সিউড়ী কেন্দ্রীয়  
ছাত্রী নিবাসের ছাত্রীবৃন্দ।

❖ প্রদর্শনী : জেলার উন্নয়নমূলক  
কাজকর্মের সঙ্গে যুক্ত বিভিন্ন দপ্তর  
প্রদর্শনীতে অংশগ্রহণ করছে।

## ॥ বিশেষ আকর্ষণ ॥

৩০ জুন ২০১০ বুধবার

বেলা ৩টা- শহীদ বেদিতে মালাদান  
❖ উদ্বোধনী সভা ❖  
বিকাল ৫টা- সাংস্কৃতিক অনুষ্ঠানের সূচনা  
ভাওয়াইয়া গান (কোচবিহার)  
আদিবাসী নৃত্য (বীরভূম)  
লোকশিল্পীদের অন্যান্য অনুষ্ঠান  
রাত্রি- ১০টা- আদিবাসী ভাষার নাটক

১ জুলাই ২০১০ বৃহস্পতিবার

সকাল ১০টা- মুক্তমঞ্চে ঘরোয়া আসরে শিল্পীদের মিলন সভা  
বিকাল ৩টা- মাধ্যমিক পরীক্ষায় কৃতী তপশিলী জাতি ও  
উপজাতিভুক্ত ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের পুরস্কার বিতরণ  
বিকেল ৫টা- মালদহ জেলার মানব পুতুল লোকনাট্য  
পূর্বাঞ্চল সংস্কৃতি কেন্দ্রের সৌজন্যে  
ওড়িয়ার ময়ূরভঞ্জের ছৌ নৃত্য  
বীরভূমের লোকশিল্পীদের নিজস্ব অনুষ্ঠান

## সবাইকে সাদর আমন্ত্রণ

সিধো-কান্ধ লোকসংস্কৃতি ও আদিবাসী সংস্কৃতি কেন্দ্রের সদস্য-সচিব তথা জেলা তথ্য ও সংস্কৃতি আধিকারিক  
দেবীপ্রসাদ চট্টোপাধ্যায় কর্তৃক প্রকাশিত ও মডার্ন আর্ট, সিউড়ী হইতে মুদ্রিত



150 वर्ष

## संताल हूल

संताल हूल ने डेढ़ सौ साल पहले स्वतंत्रता और स्वायत्तता का नगाड़ा बजाया था।

1857 की प्रथम रज्ज क्रांति की प्रथम तैयार करने में हूल की महिम भूमिका थी।

भारत के पहले स्वतंत्रता संग्राम के नायकों ने छापाकार युद्ध का हूल और तेवर इससे सीखा था तथा संदेश की देशज तकनीक की विद्या का भी इस्तेमाल किया था।

डेढ़ सौ साल बाद संताल-हूल की स्मृति वर्तमान चुनौतियों से जूझने की प्रेरणा देती है और झारखंड नवनिर्माण लक्ष्य हासिल करने का उत्साह। संताल हूल ने झारखंडी

जातीयता के निर्माण की शुरुआत की थी और झारखंड की साझी विरासत को

पहाड़ जैसी ऊंचाई और ठोस स्वरूप दिया था। संताल हूल ने आदिवासी-मूलवासी एकता की मिसाल पेश की।

यह पहली क्रांति थी जिसमें झारखंड के सभी हिस्सों के लोगों ने भाग

लिया था। हाँका मुँहा ने, जिन्होंने सरदारी आंदोलन की रहनुमा की थी।

रांची से भोजपाडीह की यात्रा कर 30 जून के

प्रतिरोध में भाग लिया था।

संताल हूल का मूल संदेश सामाजिक-

# ती

उनके शासन में चहुँओर शांति बसा दी। हजारीबाग पार करने के बाद उनके पूर्वजों ने दामिन ए फोह में प्रवेश किया और यहाँ रह कर पत्थरों को तोड़ कर, बंगलों को साफ करते हुए खेती की शुरुआत की। उन्होंने हाड़-गोड़ परिश्रम किया, लेकिन जमींदारों और सूदखोर महाजनों ने उनकी जमीनें गिरवी रख लीं। ऐसे की लाालच में जमींदारों ने संघर्षों पर

अमानवीय अत्याचार किये। उन्हें गुलाम बना दिया गया। ब्रिटिश सरकार के पुलिस अधिकारियों ने भी उन पर अत्याचार किये। ग्राम प्रमुख पाद्री बिना किसी कारण के मारे-पीटे जाते थे, यहाँ तक कि संघर्षी जातें अंगरेज अफसरों की बासना-सिपाही की शिकार हुईं।

यह वह समय था, जब दमन के खिलाफ ज़ोर धीरे-धीरे सुलग रहा था, अब लोग चुप नहीं रहनेवाले थे, उन्होंने उसे जमाना में चिल्लाना शुरू कर दिया।

अत्याचारियों के खिलाफ

आरोप दर आरोप इतने

संगे कि कोई अब

इलाज करने को

तैयार न था। उनके

लिए हर कोई बड़ा

भुक्तभोगी था।

तब सिद्धो व

कान्हू ने लोगों

से बात रखने

की अपील की

और कहा कि

इसने संघर्षों

को आदेश दिया

है कि अत्याचारियों

को अंत करते हुए वे

अपना एक स्वतंत्र राज्य

स्थापित करें। हमलोग उन सबको नष्ट कर

दालेंगे। ब्रिटिश पुलिस और बाने

जमींदारों के घुर खा कर उनके

सफादार कुबे बन चुके हैं।



सं जून - यह संघर्ष और संघर्षरत लोगों के लिए अविस्मरणीय दिन है। तीर-कमान, टांगी, तलवार, बांसुरी, मादल और धमसा के साथ शांतिप्रिय और सीधे-सादे संघर्षाली ब्रिटिश साम्राज्य, जिसका सूरज कभी अस्त नहीं होता था, के खिलाफ हूल का नाद किया था। खून के बहाव ने उन्हें उत्तेजित कर डाला था। 30 जून 1855 को गुस्वार के दिन संघर्षालपराना के भोगनाडीह गाँव में करीब दस हजार संघाल इकट्ठा हुए थे, इस पर मैकफेल लिखते हैं- 'सिद्धो-कान्हू के साथ न सिर्फ दामिन ए फोह से, बल्कि भीरभूम, भागलपुर, हजारीबाग और मानभूम से हजारों-हजार की संख्या में संघर्षालों ने हूल में शिरकत की।' उस दिन भोगनाडीह में एक विशाल सभा हुई थी। बैठक की कार्यवाही शुरू हुई, चहुँओर चुप्पी का आलम था। सिद्धो व कान्हू ने संघर्षालों के यशस्वी इतिहास के बारे में बताया कि 'उन्होंने हिक्षिर-पिपिरी, चाई चपा, सत भूई, शिकारभूई आदि जगहों पर राज किया था।

### पृथ्वी माझी

हम उन्हें नहीं छोड़ेंगे। हमने बहुत बदरास्त कर लिया, अब और बदरास्त नहीं करेंगे, इतना सब चुनने के बाद लोगों ने चिल्लाना शुरू कर दिया- 'देला बिरत पे,

कलकत्ता मार्च का एकमात्र उद्देश्य तबलेर जनरल के साथ बातचीत करना था, ताकि उन्हें इन अत्याचारों से मुक्ति व राहत मिले, जिसके लिए अब तक के प्रयास बेकार सिद्ध हुए थे, यह निश्चित है कि संघर्षाल अपने बौबी-बच्चों के साथ यहाँ पधारेंगे और पहली नजर में इस जमावड़े

एक बना बंगल था, यह बंगल उत्तरी भागलपुर और दक्षिणी बोरभूम के चरदमान, बांकुप, पक्षिनी विदलपुर, और ओडिशा के मरुबंध तक फैला था। इस क्षेत्र में पहाड़ियाँ और जंगलों की बहुलता थी, इस इलाके में पूरी आबादी के साथ संघर्षाल सदियों से रह रहे थे, वे लोत बाय, हाथी, भालू, गोर आदि बगली जानवरों

साथ रहते थे, एकदम पुराने जमाने से वे लोग अद्विष्ट तकनीक के साथ शिकार और खेती करते आ रहे थे।

हालांकि पठानों और मुगलों ने बंगाल पर कई बार धावा चोला था, लेकिन वे लोग इन जंगलों में प्रवेश नहीं कर सके थे, संघाल लोग सीधे-सादे लेकिन जॉबट और वख लड़ाके भी थे, उन्होंने किसी के आगे हार नहीं मानी थी, इन लोगों ने किसी

बाइती को जंगल के भीतर प्रवेश भी नहीं करने दिया था, जब ईस्ट इंडिया कंपनी को राजमहल के इलाकों में

दीवानों का अधिकार मिला तो उन्होंने आदिवासियों, खासकर पहाड़ी आदिवासियों, को गुलाम बनाने की कोशिशों की, जबकी कार्यवाही में संघर्षालों ने हिंसक और क्रूर (वैवा अक्षितवार किया और वे लोग कंपनी के पोस्टल बैग भी लूटने लगे।

बाइ के पहले वे आदिवासी मैदानों में आते थे, और लूटपाट के जरिये भोजन-सामग्री इकट्ठा कर वापस लौट जाते थे, अगर वे अपनी इन कोशिशों में असफल होते थे, तो बदले की कार्यवाही के तहत वे अपने चुनौतियों के साथ बगल करता हो गया

परासी को लड़ाई में बंगाल के नवाब सिपुजूदौला की हार ने भर भाय

# मूल्यांकन अभी शेष है

दिलेवटिंगु पे' (जागे, उठो, हम एक संघाल देश बनायेंगे), हटर कहते हैं- '30 जून को जमा हुए लोगों ने एक प्रदर्शन के

पेकफेल बताते हैं- 'यह मार्च शुरू हुआ, अगर इसका कोई उद्देश्य था भी तो पहली नजर में यह अस्पष्ट था, लेकिन बाद में नेताओं ने स्पष्ट किया कि उनके

का निहितार्थ एक उत्सव सरीखे माहील था, न कि किसी तरह की युद्ध करने की मेरा।

इस नजारे से एक व्यापक क्षेत्र में संघर्षालों का विद्रोह 1855-56 में ही शुरू हुआ, इस विद्रोह के बारे में कुछ और पहली नजर में यह अस्पष्ट था, लेकिन बाद में नेताओं ने स्पष्ट किया कि उनके

यह वह समय था, जब दमन के खिलाफ

जोय धीरे-धीरे सुलग रहा था, अब लोगों



समाचार, पत्र पत्रिकाएँ आदि प्रकाशित की जाँय।

**III. स्वशासन की व्यवस्था – संताल विद्रोह का मुख्य लक्ष्य था हमारा गाँव, हमारा राज स्थापित हो। परन्तु अब तक यह सपना पूरा नहीं हो पाया है। अतएव आदि काल से चली आ रही माँझी-परगाना व्यवस्था को यथाशीघ्र शसक्त रूप से चालू किया जाय। माँझी-परगानाओं को उचित व्यवस्था के तहत हक एवं अधिकार प्रदान किये जाँय।**

उपरोक्त तीनों प्रकार के उद्देश्यों को सफलीभूत करने के लिए हमें तीन रास्ते अपनाने चाहिए यथा (i) सामाजिक एवं शैक्षणिक कार्य (Social and Educational Action) (ii) राजनीतिक एवं संसदीय कार्य (Political and Parliamentary Action) तथा (iii) धरणा एवं विरोध प्रदर्शन (Mass and Agitational Action).

## संताल हुल 150 फोरम

(संताल हुल 150 मनाने हेतु विश्व में एक समन्वय मंच)

संताल हुल 150 मनाने के लिए एक विशेष समिति की आवश्यकता है जिसे संताल हुल 150 फोरम कहलाएगा। वगैर अपनी पहचान खोये कोई भी गैर सरकारी संस्थायें/सांस्थान इस फोरम के सदस्य बन सकते हैं। यह फोरम जिला, प्रदेश, राष्ट्र व अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर गठित की जायगी। प्रत्येक स्तर पर इसके संयोजक होंगे व इस फोरम को सुचारु रूप से चलाने के लिए प्रत्येक स्तर पर विभिन्न प्रबंधक यथा वित्त, प्रचार-प्रसार, कार्यक्रम समिति आदि गठित की जायगी।

अधिक जानकारी के लिए इस पते पर सम्पर्क करें:

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[www.aiswacs.org/hul](http://www.aiswacs.org/hul)

## संताल हुल-150 (1855-2005)



बिरबान्टा सिदो मुर्मू

देसताबोन दिसोमताबोन राजताबोन चालावाबोन।  
हासा भाषा सोरोसताबोन जोगाडाबोन जोतोनाबोन।।