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Finding the Historical Footprints Underlying the Santal Narrative of Migration

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Abstract

The Santal narrative of migration is full of fascinating tales, events and changes in the social and cultural fabric of the tribe. The present paper relooks into the places, events, and the changes in the light of the narrative and attempts to search for the historical imprints underlying the narrative. One of the main objectives of the paper is to locate the land of *Chae-Champa*[1] which occupies a central position in the narrative of migration. The paper follows the subsequent migration of the Santals migrating out of Chae-Champa into the erstwhile land of Sikhar, Telkupi and Silda. On matching the narrative with the historical records collected from various sources, it is found that the *Santal* narrative is not purely mythical, it has a formidable historical base upon which it has been constructed. In other words, the narrative of migration is an expression of their historical legacy as being a displaced people, overrun by powerful new settlers who appeared into the scene as per changes in the socio-political scenario.

Introduction

The *Santal* have been a wandering tribe, moving perpetually in search of new land for cultivation and transforming densely afforested unpenetrated lands into agricultural farms. However, as waves of human migration of various races, ethnicities, made their way into the country in the form of conquest or habilitation, these first cultivators were pushed back into the corner. Without the knowledge of the written word, the Santal could only preserve the history of their tribe in oral from, passed on through generational transmission. History of many tribes, communities were also passed on orally. But, while in the case of others, the oral form was generally put into the written medium, this never happened with the Santal until the arrival of the European missionaries.

One of the first attempts to document the Santal narrative of their story of origin, traditions and institution was made by Rev. Lars Olsen Skrefsrud. In 1863 about eight years after the Santal Rebellion a young and enterprising Norwegian missionary Lars Olsen Skrefsrud had come to India to work with the Gossner Mission. Four years later in 1867 he along with his Danish colleague Hans Peter Borresen founded the Ebenezer Mission Station at Benagaria[2] in the erstwhile Santal Pargana. While his

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[1] For the sake of uniformity the spelling of Chae-Champa has been used throughout the paper.

[2] Benagaria village is located in Shikaripara Tehsil of Dumka district in Jharkhand, it is about 52 kilometres south-east of Dumka.

association with the Santals, Skrefsrud became immensely interested in the Santali language and traditions. In 1873 he published a Santali grammar and ventured to document the traditions and the institutions of the Santals. For many years he looked in search of someone who had profound knowledge about the traditions and customs of the Santal and finally he found a *guru* by the name of Kolean. Skrefsrud assisted by a Santal colleague named Jugia became involved in the process of documenting all that Kolean *guru* had to say about his people. The dictation was completed on 15th February 1871 and subsequently it was published in the form of a book, *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak' Katha*, in Santali (Bodding 2013: 187). Rev. Skrefsrud's successor Rev. Paul Olav Bodding published re-edited version of the book in 1942, *Tradition and the Institution of the Santals*. The book comprehensively narrates all the aspects of Santal life, from birth till death. It elaborates the rituals and customs followed in the time of birth, marriage, death and other social obligations. This comprehensive work opens with the Santal story of origin and migration as narrated by Kolean *guru* and other gurus. Skrefsrud had clarified that the narratives have been put down, verbatim, without any addition from him (Ibid: 1). A summarised version of the Santal story of origin and migration as narrated by Kolean guru to Skrefsrud is discussed in the next section. It is important to note that in Santal tradition there is no distinction as 'story of origin' and 'story of migration'; it is basically one story, but for the sake of present study it has been classified into two parts. The first part of the story, 'the story of origin' basically comprises mythical narratives; it talks about the origin of human beings on Earth, their classification into various septs and the second part, 'the story of migration' talks about the journey of the tribe into various lands.

The Santal story of origin and migration

The Santal trace their primeval history from *Pilchu Haram* and *PilchuBudhi*, the first man and woman, created by *Thakur*, their highest god. The couple lived in a place called *Hihiri Pipiri,* it was there they gave birth to seven pairs of boy and girl children. When these children grew up they were married and divided into seven septs, the eldest boy became *Hansdak*, younger to him became *Murmu*, next *Kisku*, following him *Hembrom* and *Marandi*, then *Soren* and the youngest *Tudu*.

From *Hihiri Pipiri* the tribe migrated to the land of *Khoj Kaman*, wherein their behaviour became ignoble. This moral degradation so infuriated the Thakur that he resolved to destroy them all, barring *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Budhi*. Thakur ordered the ancient couple to hide themselves in the caves of the *Harata* Mountain while he rained havoc for seven days and seven nights until all living things were washed away and dead.[3] After the nemesis was over the Thakur instructed the pair to come out of the cave, and offered them clothes. Subsequently these two made a new home for themselves, lived and multiplied.

Thereupon they migrated to another country called *Sasanbeda*, where five more septs, *Baskey, Besra, Chore, Pauria,* and *Bedia* were added to the original seven, thus making twelve septs in all. The migration continued to *Jarpi country,* where they came across a formidable mountain, standing astoundingly obstructing their path. However hard the Santal tried they could not find any passage to cross the mighty mountain. The exhausted, terrified tribesmen pleaded to the mountain, 'O *Marang*

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[3]Bodding expresses doubt about the identity of the couple whether they were Pilchu Haram and PilchuBudhi or some other ancestors.

buru[4] if thou let us pass through, we shall worship thee when we shall find a new country'. The next morning as the Sun rose up, the tribesmen could find a new passage leading beyond the mountain; they named the path '*Sin duar*' and the other end of it '*Baih duar*'. Upon crossing the mountain they came to the *Aere* country. After a brief stay there, they moved on to *Khande,* and from their pursuing a north-easterly direction[5] came to the land of *Chae*. They then took a south-west turn, crossing the *Chae* and *Champa* passes came to the land of Champa.

Up to the arrival of the ancestors to Champa the *Birhors, Mundas, Kurumbis* were collectively called *Kherwars*.[6] However gradually with time, the Birhors and the Mundas started to drift away socially. The Birhors were out casted since they ate monkeys, and the Mundas developed a '*deko*' character through their marriage to dekos. *Kherwals* marrying deko were called '*Sins*' and so were their descendants. It happened somehow that a Sin once had an illicit relationship with a daughter of a *Kisku* king and she bore a child. Fearful about the social consequences the woman left the child in the forest. A wealthy Kisku family picked up the boy, named him Mando Sin, and started to raise him as their own. The child went on to become a valiant young man, and found employment as a *diwan* to a Kisku king. Mando Sin eventually developed tremendous influence with the king, he one day sought the king's help to look for a bride for him. In spite of all his efforts, no one would offer their daughter to him because of his birth identity. The unwillingness of the Santal in offering a bride to him made Mando Sin furious, he ordered- until anyone offers him a woman to be his bride, he will forcibly defile every Santal women. Sensing an unprecedented danger, the Santal fled the land in fear, not all though, a few choose to stay on.

In the book,*The Tradition and the Institution of the Santals*, Bodding presents another version of the same story from an uncited source. The basic outline of the story remains the same and the only difference is in the concluding part. On being threatened by Mando Sin the Santals conspired to trick him. They convinced Mando Sin into believing that they needed to time to come up with a solution. Mando Sin agreed, the Santal used the time in building carts to flee from *Chae-Champa*. When the carts were ready, they fled from Chae-Champa leaving everything behind. *Mando Sin* learnt about the flight but could not do anything about it. However, few Santal were persuaded to stay back because of their rich possessions and they were the Bedea (present *Bedia* tribe) sept.

It is important here to discuss briefly about the concept of Kherwal. As a matter of fact, the Santal representation of the other and the self was based on notions of mutual assimilation and dichotomy. The division of mankind into two broad ethnic categories called kherwals and the non-ethnic groups or dekos is a direct outcome of that perception (Sen 2017: 71-72). While narrating the story of ancestors, Kolean guru interestingly mentions that at one point the dekos and the Kherwals had very good relationship. The relationship was so strong that the Kherwal army had accompanied Rama to Lanka in order to vanquish Ravana(Bodding 2013: 10). Since then, they had a long period of peace until their arrival to Chae-Champa. At Chae-Champa, the relationship between the dekos and the Kherwals strained beyond repair. According to the narrative, the Santals had flourished immensely at Chae-Champa; there they had forts after each septs, and

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[4]Great Mountain

[5]Directions specified in Rev Skrefsrud's*A grammar of the Santali Language*, page VIFull reference in Bibliography. The book Traditions and Institutions of the *Santals* re-edited by P O Bodding do not cite any directions.

[6]Present usage is 'Kherwals'. In early documents, 'Kharwar','Kherwars' are alternatively used.

they had become powerful enough to develop inter-sept rivalries. The kiskus were fighting with the marandis and the dekos 'used this as an opportunity for entering and robbing the people' (Ibid: 20). It is not difficult to assume that the dekos did not consider the Kherwals a target until they formed a self-sufficient economy, or in other words they became 'prosperous'. Possibly, it is this 'prosperity' which lured the dekos into meddling in the affairs of the Kherwals which led to the subjugation of the latter and effecting a fresh wave of Santal migration and dekoisation of the remainder (Sen 2017: 71-72). Another important point to note is that the lower caste Hindus are not considered by the Santals as a proper deko. The Santals felt great aversion towards the flag bearers of the Hindu cultural hegemony who defile the racial purity of Kherwal through illicit relationship or marriage (Ibid). They are the proper dekos as far as the Santal perspective is concerned.

Coming back to the story, the forefathers moved onto a new place called *Tore Pokhori Baha Bandela*, where they stayed for a long time. They were forced to migrate from here as well because of renewed threats of incoming *dekos*. They travelled until they came to a place where there was a big plain, and in the middle of the plain there were three trees- the *tope sarjom* (*Sal* tree, Shorea robusta), the *labar atnak* (*Asan* tree, Terminalia tomentose), *ladea matkom* (*Mahua* tree,Mahua longifolia), they sat beneath the trees and started a long deliberation. Kolean guru is not quite sure about the duration of the deliberation, twelve days or twelve years. All this time the ancestors drank from the *Kere* spring and legislated over the social customs and traditions of the tribe. They discussed the ceremonies of birth, social rights over marriage, death and cremation, all included until they formed a unified set of rules that is still followed to this day. Kolean explained that the conference of the 'three trees' turned upside down everything that was followed in the past, and a new constitution was formed. It had many elements borrowed from the dekos. For example, the Santal they never cremated their dead, neither had they carried the dead into the river for funeral rites, they traditionally buried the dead. The ancient Santal never put vermillion on the forehead of the bride in wedlock, but all that was changed, and made like the dekos (Bodding 2013: 13).

The first thing, which is a very interesting feature about the deliberation, is its magnificent setting; the narrative dramatically places the conference in the backdrop of three most iconic tree symbols of the Santal tradition. As a matter of fact, when the *Thakur* was sowing the first trees upon the Earth, he started with *sirom* plant (Andropogon muricatus), then *dhubi* grass (Cynodon dactylon), after this *Karam* tree (Adina cordifolia), followed by *tope sarjom* (Sal tree, Shorea robusta), the *labar atnak* (*Asan* tree, Terminalia tomentose), *ladea matkom* (Mahua tree, Mahua longifolia) and then all kinds vegetations. The placing of the conference right beneath these trees not only increases its aesthetic value but offers a glorious opportunity to look into the indigenous people's style of expressing cherished heritage. In stark contrast to the hallowed gothic buildings, beneath the spectacularly crafted vaulted ceilings where learned sophisticated people legislate over laws, deliberate over complex matters, the indigenous people place of choice is a serene natural setting beneath the three most iconic symbols of their tradition. The second appealing feature in the story of deliberation is its outcome, the radical reformation of Santal tradition and customs which allowed the entry of non-Santal elements into the Santal fold. Until that time, the Santals were living a close insulated life with their share of unique customs and tradition; later after the national defeat in *Chae-Champa* the tribe is reflective about its social beliefs and practices. It would not be improper to guess that they had felt the urgent need to

revamp the traditions and custom to better suit the new social order, which unlike the past, now included the *deko'*.

After their long sojourn in *Tore Pokhori Baha Bandela* they moved out in search of a new place, for the fear of invading Muslims. As they were moving, they came onto the *Bare-badwak* forest (long grass eaten in the time of famine, Panicum colonum L), it was so thick and dense that no one wished to go ahead; they crossed this place moving in a wide column formation. Eventually they came out of the forest and reached the *Jona Jospur* plain, after a brief stay here they relocated to *Khaspal Belaonja*. While living there many of them scattered in different directions in places like Sir, Nagpur, and Sikhar.

For the members of the tribe who went to Sikhar, they cleared up the jungles and became owners of many villages. In Sikhar they learnt to celebrate the Chata festival[7]. Eventually, they were driven from Sikhar by the dekos who took away their land, a section of the tribe went to Tundi. Eventually, they lost the title of Kherwal; according to Kolean this was due to the fact that they lived in the Sant country for long time. Kolean ends the story of migration by metaphorically presenting the insecure future of the Santal tribe in general:

> 'don't cross the Ajoy River...but because of the difficulty in getting food we have come, we have not obeyed the words of the ancestors. Then we have gradually come to Santal Parganas. We have come feeding and we exist like silkworms. And someday we shall go again somewhere, who knows where. Some people have gone past Rajmahal to the other side of the Ganga. Who knows why Thakur is punishing us this way' (Bodding 2013: 13).

Discussion on the story of origin and migration

Before delving into the scrutiny of the Santal narrative of origin and migration, it is necessary to look into two broad points related to the narrative, the first, the prevalence of different versions of the narrative, and second, the composition of the narrative. The first point to note is that there are multiple versions of the narrative. However, the fundamental structure upon which the story is constructed basically is the same, the difference lies in the detailing of the events and chronological order of places migrated to. In this context, apart from the extensive list of places mentioned by Skrefsrud and Bodding, there are few other sources like the accounts of Rev. Phillips, Dr. A Campbell, and *Bagh Rai Parganait*[8] where we find names of additional places.

Secondly, it is important to consider the basic composition of the narrative. A careful analysis will reveal that the first part of the narrative, the origin of human being, the segregation into septs, the great deluge, the wrath of the god, the early migrations display the essential traits of a myth. It symbolically presents the Santal perception of various phases of societal changes or developments using cause and effect methodology. The gradually moving narrative suddenly bursts out with information and detail with the arrival of the tribesmen in Chae-Champa. This place finds mention irrespective of all versions and sources. Here all the sources are in perfect synchronisation. All sources identify Chae-Champa as the land where the Santals reigned supreme; with forts after

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[7]Chata festival, the Santal equivalent of Hindu Charak Puja observed sometime in the month of Baisakh (April-May).

[8]Bagh Rai Parganait's narrative can be found in E.T. Dalton. 1872. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal.* Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal.

each sept, an established local self-governance and above all independence. For the first time, we get to see inter-sept rivalries and skirmishes, battles between intruding dekos and defending Kherwals. In essence, the Santal narratives of Chae-Champa point to a unique moment in Santal history where they engage in direct friction with the intruding people and ultimately the latter emerge victorious and former eventually migrate. With all these information and details, the place, Chae-Champa demands an investigation about its present day location.

The concluding part of narrative deals with the post-emigration out of *Chae-Champa*, the conference of adopting a new social constitution (tradition), the eventual dispersion of the tribe in the land of *Sir, Sikhar*, and *Silda*. The very essence of which is captured very beautifully by Kolean in his concluding remarks which metaphorically compare the Santal like the silkworms. In many ways, it sounds like the lamentations of an old guru helplessly seeking answers for the tribe's vagrant destiny, without any abiding home. It appears that Kolean being an old conservative guru is somewhat discontented by the rejection of former traditions and institutions, and thereby reflective about what might have gone wrong? In doing so, Kolean guru becomes the conscience of the entire Santal community, contemplative over weaknesses, desperately trying to figure the right course.

Opinions of various scholars on the location of places mentioned in the narrative

Many places in Jharkhand especially the villages around the banks of the River Koel bear distinctive Mundari endings (Roy S C 1912: 128). Such as, *hatu,bera, piri, sereng, gutu, hutup, hutu, jang, gara,ba, baru, kel, kera, ora, da, dag, deg, daga* etc. It is also important to bear in mind that the *Mundas* and Santal were collectively called as Kherwals(as per Kolean gurus narrative), and they until some point in history stayed together. Although none of places mentioned in the list have the Mundari suffix, yet some 19th century records do mention about the possible existence of few places.

On the narrative of Santal story of migration, Colonel Dalton remarks, 'I am unable to identify the AhiriPipiri; but Khairagarh and Chae-Champa are in Hazaribagh or Ramgarh District, and to Chae-Champa remote Santal, as well as those in this District, frequently allude' (Risley 1892: 211). Skrefsrud, however believed that the Santal arrived India from north-west; he supposed the places of *Aere, Khande*, Chae, Champa to be Iran, Afghanistan, and Chinese Tatary. Hunter was of the opinion that the name of HihiriPipiri may suggest, the land of flowering trees, this would have been in the higher valleys of Brahmaputra. However he asserts confidently, 'with Sikhar, fourth in the list, we touch solid ground' (Hunter 1868: 155). According to Hunter the land of Sikhar, lies upon the *Damooda* (Damodar River), almost within the ancient district of Beerbhoom (Birbhum), and now forms one of the chief places of pilgrimage of the race. P C Roychoudhury in his Hazaribagh District Gazetteer mentions, 'this theory of the movement of the Santhals cannot be said to be authoritative but there may be some truth in this migration' (Roychoudhury 1957: 102). Bodding inclined to believe, 'that the Chai and Champa mentioned are to be found in Hazaribagh and on the Chota Nagpur plateau, and from this point on it is not difficult to find verify the wanderings of the people as told by traditions' (O'Malley 1999: 92).

Question therefore arises was there a land in the Hazaribagh district named Chae-Champa? What are the other sources that offers clue about its existence? If the land existed, how far the Santal narratives are supported by historical evidence? Also, what are the historical footprints underlying the other places commonly mentioned in the

narrative such as Sikhar, and Silda? In what ways the socio-political atmosphere in these places enriched the narrative of migration and the tradition of the Santal? The paper attempts to answer these questions.

Locating Chae-Champa

The general opinion that can be formed from the 19th century records is that Champa and Chae was located somewhere in the Northern fringes of Hazaribagh District. One way to check the authenticity of this information is to refer the maps of 18th and 19th century India. By that time period fairly reliable maps had been drawn by actual scientific surveys across the Indian subcontinent. In this respect the early maps of India made by Major Rennell, the 18th century Surveyor General of Bengal is indispensible.

Two maps derived from the survey of Major Rennell are very relevant for the study, the maps are entitled:

    1. An Actual survey of the Provinces of Bengal, Baharetc, by Major James Rennell, Engineer, Surveyor General to the Honourable East India Company, published in 1776 with the permission of the Court of Directors by Andrew Dury (Dury 1776).

    2. The Conquered Provinces on the South of Bahar containing Ramgaur, Palamow, & Chota-Nagpour with their dependencies inscribed to Major Jacob Camac by James Rennell, published in June 24th 1779 (Rennell 1780: 22).

The first map (map 1) as the title suggests was based on the works of Major Rennell and was published by Andrew Dury, a London based surveyor, engraver, and map publisher, in the year 1776. It appears to be a one-off publication by Andrew Dury, not part of any book, specifically published for the use of East India Company officials. The second map (map 2) is a part of the book by James Rennell, published in 1780, *Bengal Atlas containing maps of the theatre of war and commerce on that side of Hindoostan.* In map 1, the land of Champa is plotted quite vividly in the northern fringes of Hazaribagh District beyond the hill ranges in the north upon the Gaya plain. In the second map however Champa (plotted as Chumpah in the map 2) is shown running diagonally from north-west to south-east direction, roughly emanating from Bigha (24°.39′N, 85°22′E) to the Lugo Hills. Two very important passes are shown in both maps, one Champa Pass and the other Donah Pass. In both the maps the Champa pass is the road to north, crossing the hills and entering Gaya plain. Presently it is the Delhi-Kolkata Highway (old NH2[9], present NH19), a Grand Trunk Road. In present Jharkhand, Bigha is no more the gateway to Gaya, it has been replaced by Chouparan (24°37′N, 85°25′ E); it is through this place the Delhi-Kolkata Highway passes. The road Chouparan-ChatraMarg connects Chouparan, Itkori, and Chatra. The past road centre of Bigha (24°.39′N, 85°22′E) is just over 3 kilometres, up north of Chouparan. The 'Donoh Pass' mentioned in both the maps is another road to Gaya plain apart from Champa Pass, from Itkori (24°29′N, 85°16′ E) taking the 'Donoh Pass' ('Itcowry' in Rennell's map) to meet the other road down the Champa Pass (Lister 1917: 52).

    The Chae Pargana shown as 'Cheye' in the second map, extends from Itkori ('Etcowry', in Rennell's map) in the West to the Jainagar ('Jaynagur' in Rennell's map) in the East, roughly stretching about 50 kilometres in east-west direction. However there is a big difference in the position of Champa in map 1 and map 2, as already pointed out in the previous paragraph. The question is which map correctly positions 'Champa'?

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[9]National Highway

To resolve the conflict it is necessary to shed light on the issue from additional sources. In October 21st, 1930 a case was decided upon by the Privy Council comprising of Judges, Lords Atkin, McMillan, and Sir John Wallis. The case was- Charu Chandra Ghose Vs. Kumar Kamakhya NaraIn Singh and Others, hearing an appeal following a decree of the High Court of Patna (Indian Law Reports: Containing Cases Determined by the High Court of Patna and by the Supreme Court on Appeal from that Court. Patna series, Volume 10, 1931: 284-296). The appeal was basically from a decree of the High Court at Patna reversing the decree of the Additional Subordinate Judge of Hazaribagh and decreeing the suit brought by the Court of Wards on behalf of the minor zamindar of Ramgarh for a declaration that the suit Village forming the Jagodih estate are an ordinary jagir of the Raj resumable on failure of the direct male line of the grantee, and are not a shamilat or shikmi taluk of the Ramgarh estate as was recorded in the khewat or Record of Rights of the zamindari made by the Settlement Officer under the provisions of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908. While giving verdict on the said appeal, Sir John Wallis makes the following opening statement:

> The adjoining parganas of Chai and Champa, one to the north and the other to the south of the Barrakur River, form part of the Ramgarh zamindari in the Hazaribagh District of Chota Nagpur. The Jagodih (presently in 24°44′N, 85°32′ E) estate is situated in Chai, and is one of several estates in these parganas which were recorded in the settlement as shamilattaluks, that is to say, taluks in which the talukdars or proprietors now pay the Government revenue to the zamindar instead of paying it direct to Government." (Ibid: 286).

Two very important points emerge from this statement firstly, the location of Chae and Champa with respect to the Barakar river, and secondly, the Jagodih estate is situated in Chae. So if we consider the first point then map 2 correctly positions Chae and Champa, since according to the map the former lies to the north and the latter is to the south of the Barakar River. The second point serves as supplemental evidence, it states that Jagodih estate is situated in Chae Pargana, in the present map of Jharkhand district, Jagodih indeed falls between Itkori and Jainagar as mentioned above.

With all the information on Chae-Champa from above discussion, an attempt can be made to establish it in the present map of Jharkhand. The land of Chae would be the region bounded by the hill ranges in the northern fringes of Chatra, Hazaribagh and Koderma district, Tilaiya Dam Reservoir in the south, Itkori (in Chatra district) in the west and Jainagar in the east (in Koderma district). The land of Champa would be the region running diagonally from Itkori in the north-west to Lugo hills in the south-east.

Additional information on Chae-Champa comes from Ain-i-Akbari which states that in the time of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, the land was under the province (Subah) of Bihar, with an annual revenue assessment of 6,20,000 dams[10], and liable to furnish to the Imperial army 20 cavalry soldiers, and 600 infantry soldiers (Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak; Jarrett, H.S 1891: 154). So from the records it is apparent that by 1590 (when Ain-I-Akbari was written) the land of Chae-Champa was already under the Mughal dominion.

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[10]According to *Ain-i-Akbari* forty dams were equal to one rupee of 172.5 grains.

Map 1

Map entitled-Actual survey of the Provinces of Bengal, Bahar etc, by Major James Rennell, Engineer, Surveyor General to the Honourable East India Company, published in 1776 with the permission of the Court of Directors by Andrew Dury. The boxed part shows the Ramgarh Pargana (Dury 1776).[11]
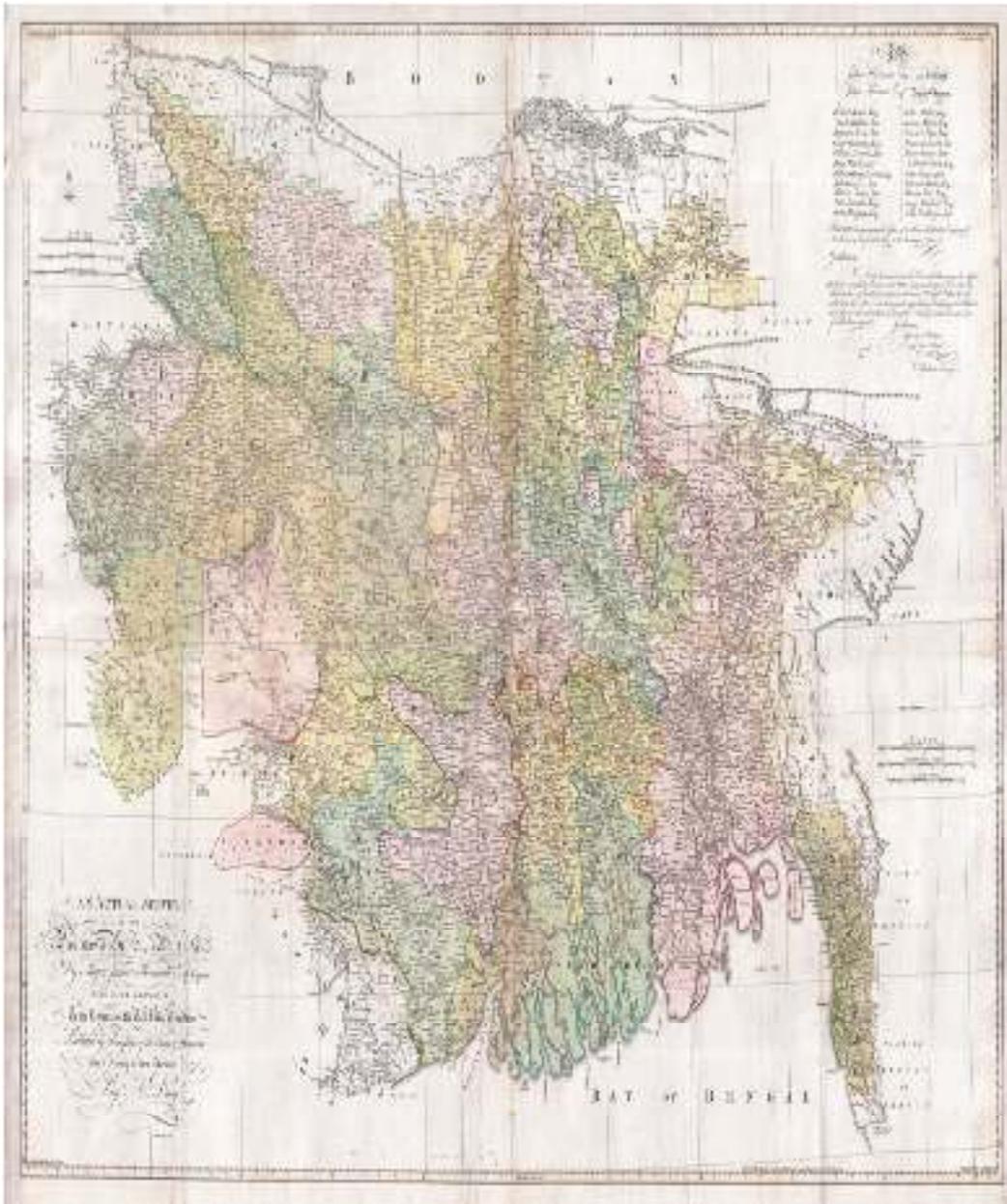
Figure 1

An enlarged section of map 1 showing the location of Champa province highlighted in red oval mark. The Champa pass is marked in red dotted line and the Marang Buru hills is highlighted in red rectangle (Ibid).
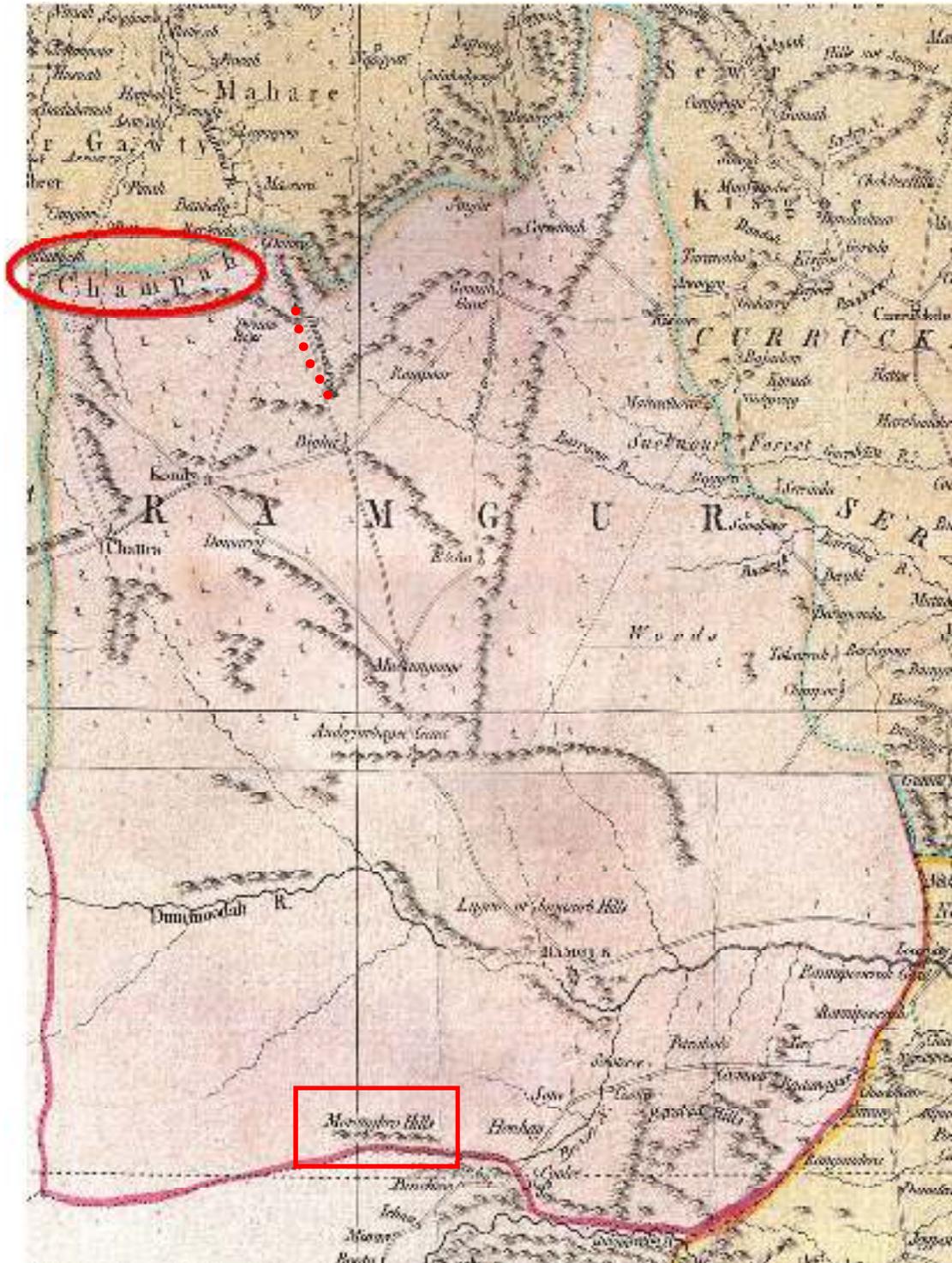
Map 2

Map entitled *The Conquered Provinces on the South of Bahar containing Ramgaur, Palamow, & Chota-Nagpour with their dependencies inscribed to Major Jacob Camac* by James Rennell, published in June 24th 1779 (Rennell 1780: 22).[12]

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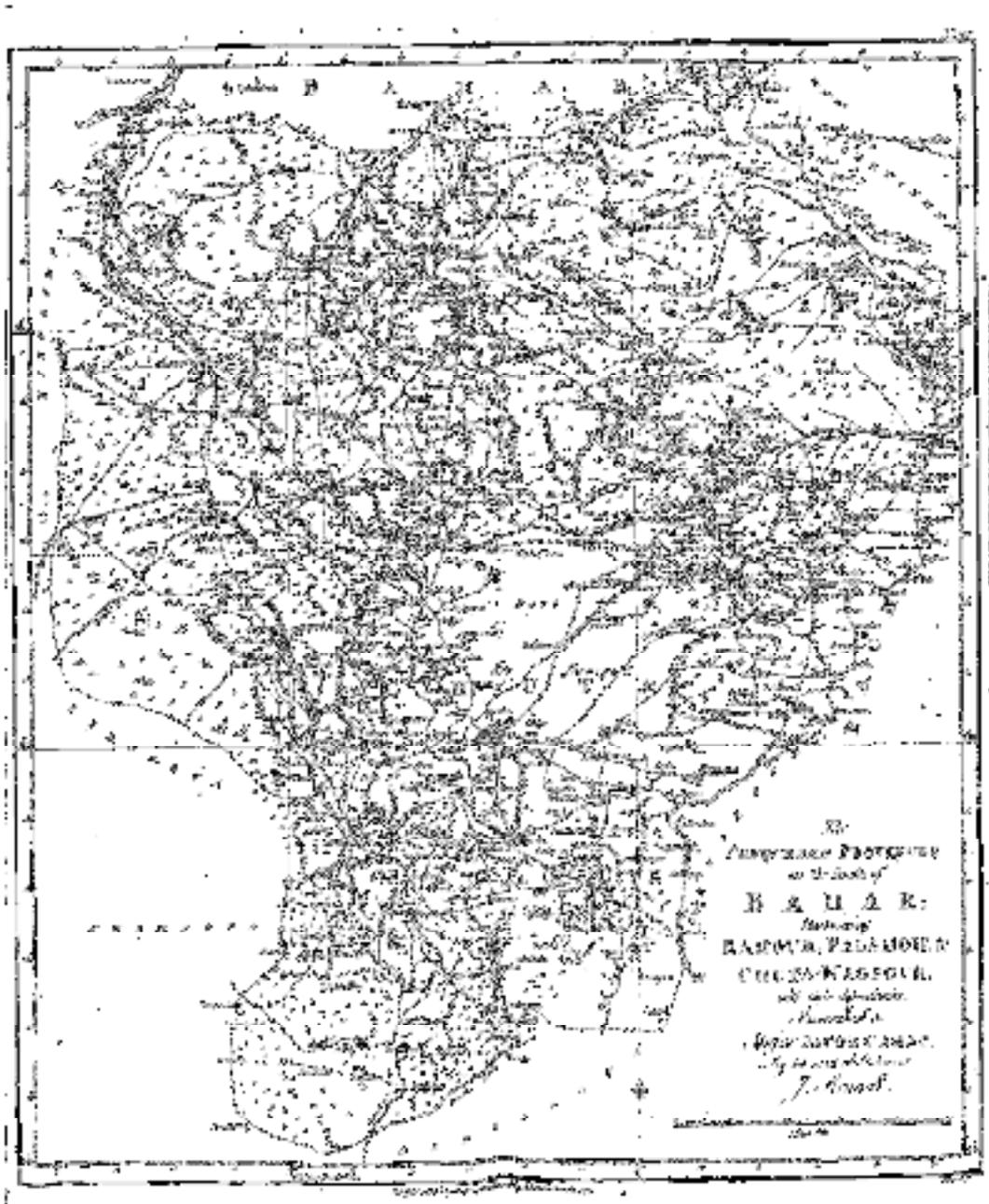
[12] For digitized version visit- https://archive.org/details/A077240129/page/n21

Figure 2

Enlarged view of the map 2, the dotted line running west to east shows the Cheye (*Chae*) and the dotted line running North West shows the Chumpah (*Champa*). To see the map in the current perspective the present names of the places mentioned in the map are given below.
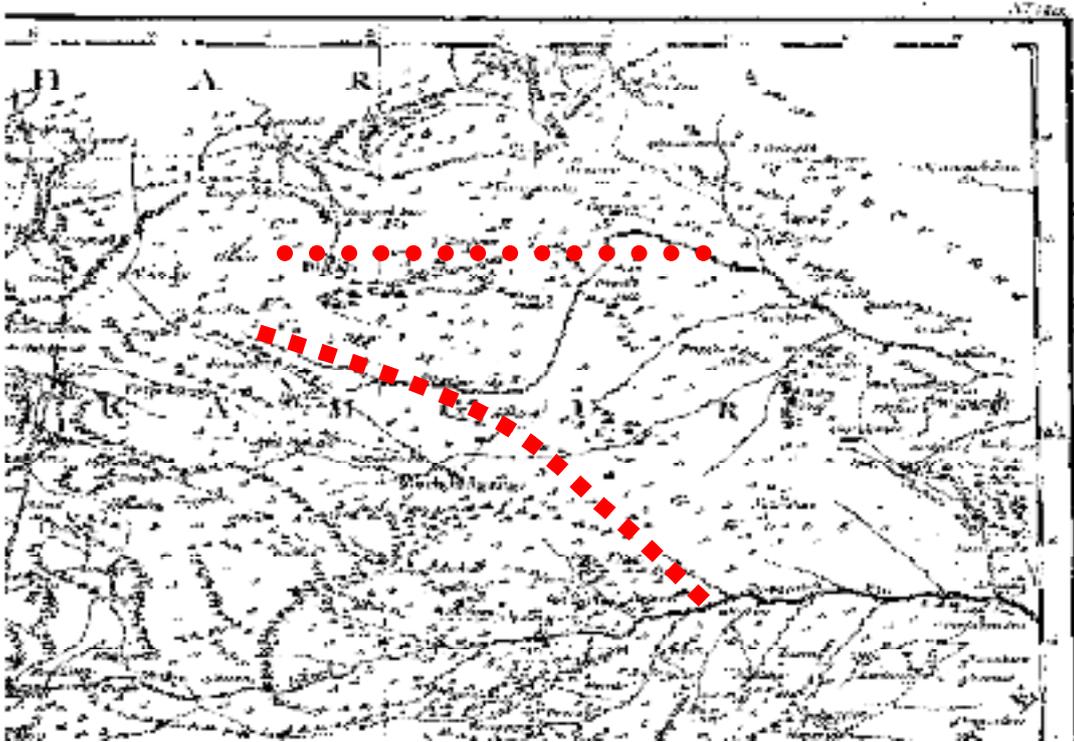
Sl	Name in Rennell's Map	Present Name	Latitude	Longitude
1	Etororee	Itkori	24.29	85.16
2	Kendy	Kendi	24.34	85.06
3	Chittra	Chatra	24.22	84.87
4	Koondah	Around Naudiha	24.20	84.38
5	Bigah	Bigha	24.39	85.22
6	Corumma	Koderma	24.46	85.59
7	Doomchauns	Domchanch	24.47	85.68
8	Palgunge	Palganj	24.06	86.22
9	Ocunhazary	Hazaribagh	23.99	85.36
10	Luggoo Hills	Lugo Hills	23.78	85.71
11	Curruckdea	Kharagdiha	24.42	86.16

History of *Ramgarh* Raj and its connection with the narrative

From the second half of the 14th century C.E, Ramgarh, Kunda, Kendi, Chae-Champa became chief estates in terms of revenue and jurisdiction of the Delhi Sultanate. Therefore it is important to discuss briefly about the history of erstwhile Ramgarh Pargana to understand the political atmosphere in the time of the narrative. The Ramgarh Raj claims descent from one Singdeo (Rajputs from Bundelkhand), who was employed along with his brother, Bagdeo Singh, under the Maharaja of Chota Nagpur (Lister 1917:

55). Over time Bagdeo the young brother, proved to be more astute, he quickly realised that the estates under the Maharaja of Chota Nagpur (later Ramgarh) were loosely held and constantly in quarrel with each other. Baghdeo grasped the weakness, quarrelled with the Maharaja and set out for conquest, not stopping until he had brought 22 parganas under his fold. He made his elder brother fauzdar with the title of Thakur. Bagdeo continued from 1368-1402 and was succeeded by his son Kerat Singh. The fourth Raja to ascend the throne of Ramgarh was Madho Singh who became the ruler of the pargana from 1537-1554. Initially the Ramgarh Maharajas ruled with Sisia as capital, then it was transferred to Urda (23°95′N, 85°04′ E), then to Badam (23°83′N, 85°29′ E) and finally to Ramgarh (23°65′N, 85°56′ E), gradually shifting the capital south-eastwards.

In the year 1763 Makund Singh succeeded to become the new chief of Ramgarh while his relative Tej Singh was put as head of the army. A new player appeared in the scene with the grant of Diwani to East India Company in 1765. The East India Company did not engage with the Ramgarh Raj until 1769. By then the relationship between the Company and raja Makund Singh had strained beyond repair, until the former finally decided to depose him. Eventually Captains Goddard and Camac were sent to collect the revenue and Makund Singh was reduced to submission. A few months later he was again in rebellion, and was put to flight by a military force under Captain Camac. Tej Singh, who had joined forces with the Company, was installed in his place in 1772 (Roychoudhury 1957: 66). It is this Captain Camac to whom the map 2 is addressed.

In 1780, Chapman became the first civilian administrator of Chota Nagpur. The conquered provinces, as these were called, were formed into a British District, it included, Ramgarh, Kendi, Kunda, Kharagdiha, the whole of Palamu, Chakai, Panchet on the east of Ramgarh, and the area around Sherghati. In the initial phase the Company administration had to face several difficulties. As a matter of fact the rapid change in power, policy and administration had left the land lawless, difficult to control. In May 1809, Captain Roughsedge commanding the Ramgarh Battalion wrote to the Magistrate of Ramgarh, 'scarcely an individual in the whole country has remained unchargeable with some act of arbitrary violence' (Roychoudhury 1957: 8). This unrest was huge and what followed next was a sequence of uprisings one after the other. In 1799 there was an insurrection in Tamar, followed by the Oraon uprising in Chota Nagpur in 1811. A second insurrection occurred in Tamar in 1820, and in 1831 there was a formidable uprising known as the Kol insurrection (RoyChoudhury 1957: 9).

Going back to the episode of Madho Sin, Kolean guru opens the story with the narrative, 'Some Kherwars joining in marriage with the dekos called 'Sin'; and therefore their descendants became 'Sins' (Bodding 2013: 12). Incidentally rajas of Ramgarh zamindari were Singhs, and the fourth raja was Madho Singh (1537-1554). The time period of Madho Singh's raj is quite important in this perspective, since it was the time of Turko-Afghan rule (1206-1526 C.E). During that period this part of the country was practically independent from the influence of Delhi (Roychoudhury 1957: 66). Right after the accession of Akbar as the third Mughal Emperor the history of present Jharkhand took a new turn. Subsequently from early 18th century the Mohammedan influence increased significantly over Kendi, Kharagdiha (24°42′N, 86°16′ E), and Chae. Perhaps it is safe to assume that 'Singh' rulers of Ramgarh raj found place in the Kolean narrative as 'Sins'.

The establishment of Mohammedan rule is supported by the narrative of Kolean, 'some people say, it is told, that this Mando Sin, or some other Sin, was a friend of the

Muslims' (Bodding 2013: 12). Kolean narrated that the ancestors had forbidden them to cross the Ajoy river, because west of it was a Muslim country (Ibid: 14). Bodding also mentioned that majority of the Santal in his time lived east to the Ajoy River.

From Chae-Champa into the land of sikhar

Overall, the collation of information from the above narrative of migration and documented history helps us identify Mando Sin (or Madho Sin) as a historical character. Furthermore, this also connects us with the significant event of Santal flight from Chae and Champa and the reason of thereof. This flight had been a milestone of Santal history. Therefore, after fleeing from the land of Chae and Champa, the Santals had cautioned themselves from re-entering the land. They had accepted that their past stronghold had been lost forever.

After Chae-Champa, Sikhar is the second most important place in Santal narrative, and both Kolean guru and Bagh Rai Parganait are in common ground on this. The narrative asserts that the Santal post Champa settled around the land named Sikhar, an area around the ancient city of Telkupi, located in the Raghunathpur subdivision of Purulia district, West Bengal. The land of Sikhar was ruled by the Raja of Sikhar, whose capital may have been the presently submerged land of Telkupi (23°66′N, 86°6′ E). Local tradition hailed Telkupi as a place attributed to Raja Vikramaditya. Telkupi was also a special place for the Santal, who considered the TelkupiGhat as a holy place (Beglar 1878: 177). According to *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi*[13] the Raja of Sikhar was an important provincial ruler of the Manbum-Purulia area who had 36 vassals under him. *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi* states that Sultan Firoz Shah Tuglaq's army captured it in a day's fight, 70 ministers of the state of Sikhar were captured alive while the Raja made an escape.

Figure 3

Map showing the land between the two rivers, *Barakar* and *Damodar*. *Palganj* and *Tundi* lying on the west bank of *Barakar* River, while *Belanja* and *Telkupi* lying on west bank of Damodar River. Positioned in between the rivers is the *Parasnath* hill, a sacred place in the Santal tradition. *Map created using Google map.*

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[13]*Sirat-i-Firuzshahi* written by an anonymous author about the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq in the year 1370 C.E.

There is an interesting Santali folklore in this connection; it talks about a legendary raja of Sikhar, Harichand who much like Mando Sin was left in the forest right after birth (Bompas 1906: 405). The boy was saved miraculously; eventually grew up to become the king of Sikhar and built his fort upon the Panchet Hill. The Santal emigrating out of Chae-Champa cleared the adjoining forests and carved a new homeland under him. Under his rule they were very happy and it is there where they learnt to celebrate the Chata festival. An interesting clue about this Sikhar-raj is found in Barakar town, situated on the eastern bank of the river of the same name. There are four ancient temples in Barakar presently under the supervision of Archaeological Survey of India. In one of the temple there is an inscription engraved on the right jamb of the entrance or doorway of the sanctrum. The inscriptions mention that the temple was constructed by one Harishchandra for his beloved (Beglar 1878: 150). Later studies revealed Harishchandra to be the king of Gopabhum who built the temple for his wife Harpriya. A hypothesis can be drawn that the legend of 'Harichand' in the Santali folklore is inspired by the Harishchandra king of Gopabhum.

As a matter of fact, at the south-eastern foot of the Panchet hill the ruins of the fort of the Raja of Panchet still exist. There were four sets of walls, each within the other, protected by moats; the moats were connected by the streams descending from the hill. There were many gateways to the fort, now mostly in ruins. The four chief gates mentioned in the Archaeological Survey Report of 1878 are the Ankh Duar, Bazar Mahal Duar, Desbandh Duar, Khoribari Duar, and Duar Bandh (Ibid: 179). The fort was quite large, the outermost rampart measuring more than five miles; the ridge lines along the fort enclose a space of 12 square miles. The interesting thing to note is that the gateways are termed as duars. Duar or gateway is an important term in the Santal narrative of migration. While narrating the migration from the land of Jarpi, Kolean guru mentioned the massive hill which the obstructed their path, where they were unable to find a passage. They eventually had to worship the great mountain and a passage was found in the next morning. They named this passage Singh duar or Sinduar and the other end of it the Baih duar. Even during their stay in Champa there was a massive fortress with two principal gateways the Ahin and the Bahin gate. In the architectural traditions of Bengal and Odisha the principal gate is called the Singha Duar or the Lion Gate, and is generally situated in the east, while the outer gate is termed the Bagh Duar or the Tiger Gate, obviously in the west. There is a possibility that the narrative of the Sin duar and the baihduar is inspired by the architectural tradition of the predominant class.

If all the places mentioned in the migration account are considered then many places have existence in the present day. Places like Patkom (23°03′N, 85°95′ E), Kadam Beda, Belanja (23°69′N, 86°27′ E), Jhalda (23°37′N, 85°98′ E), Tundi (23°98′N, 86°45′ E), Palganj (24°60′N, 86°22′ E), Murup are still to be found in the present state of Jharkhand. The land of 'Kaende' mentioned in the Santal chronicle may possibly be 'Kendi' or present day 'Kandri' (23°44′N, 85°10′ E) about 10 kilometres North West of Itkori. The assumption is not only based on phonetic similarity but also on the fact that 'Kaende' lies in close proximity to the land of Chae.

In the Archaeological Survey of India Report of 1872-73, Belanja has been recorded as a small but important, a rising village about two miles south of the ruins of Chechgaogarh (presently Checkadham) (Ibid: 160). Two chief deities worshiped in this part were Durga and Damodar. The area the report observes, were populated mainly by Kols and Santal, the latter had great reverence for the river Damodar.

Santals of Silda

One widely cited hypothesis states that the Santals obtained their name from Samantabhumi the erstwhile name for Silda Pargana (O'Malley, L.S.S 1999: 100). Kolean guru in his narrative also mentioned the land of 'Sant' from where the Santals derive their name. Which is why it demands a discussion since the narrative of migration does not talk anything in detail about this place; however from the subject point of view it is immensely important.

The name of the tract of land comprised within the Chhatna village of Bankura was previously known as Samantabhum (O'Malley, L.S.S 1908: 173). The traditional history of the place states that it was conquered by one Sankha Rai a general of the Emperor of Delhi in 1403 C.E. The earliest account of the Santals of this region is found in Walter Hamilton's *Description of Hindustan* (1820), he wrote:

> 'some parts of these jungles are occupied by a miserable proscribed race of men called Sontals, despised on account of their low caste by the inhabitants of the plain country, who would no account allow any one of them to fix himself in their villages' (Hamilton, 1820: 148).

He further mentioned that the Collector of Medinipur was not happy with the progress of agriculture in the district, given the fact that two thirds of the district were heavily afforested. In fact the permanent settlement act of 1793 had caused a general extension of tillage and the Santals were more than welcome to rid the lowlands of the wild beasts, clear the dense afforested regions for cultivation, since no labourers from the 'open country' would be ready to undertake the venture with the exception of these' excellent clearers of forest'. By 1820 the Santals had moved in establishing their villages beside thick jungles.

Figure 4

Map showing the Santal base in the Satn country' between the two rivers of Subarnarekha in the east and Kangsabati in the west. Map created using Google map.
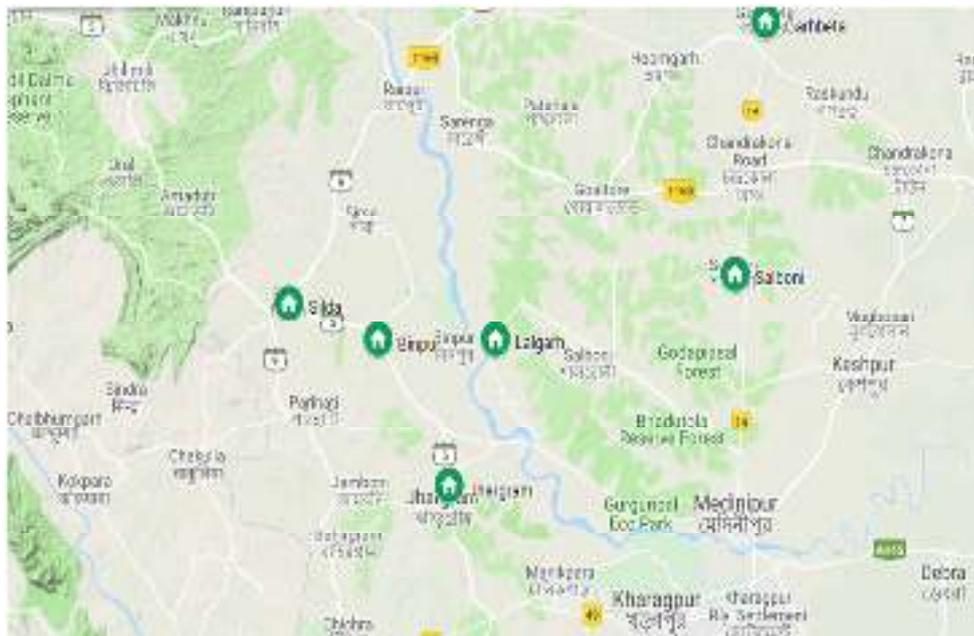
O'Malley in his *Medinipur Gazatteer* (1911) mentions that the Santals were well distributed over Binpur, Silda, Lalgarh, Jhargram and Salboni. The still existing heavy forest cover in these places is a reminiscence of their legacy as, 'excellent clearers of forest'. The migration continued further south, crossing the Subarnarekha River entering the present district of Mayurbhanj, where the land was fertile and less afforested (O'Malley, L.S.S 1911: 60). The general nature of the migration post Chae-Champa has been discussed briefly in the following section.

Conclusion

Given the few details in the narrative concerning the early migration before Chae-Champa, it is quite difficult to form a rational opinion or hypothesis about the actual locations of the places mentioned or the journey undertaken. Nevertheless, from the extraordinary detailed account of Chae-Champa it is not hard to form a general opinion on the nature of migration post Chae-Champa phase. From all the discussion above, it is quite evident that the Santal emigrating out Chae-Champa settled in the areas around the Barakar and Damodar river i.e. present day Giridih, Jamtara, Dhanbad. Migration continued along the river Damodar connecting important cities of Asansol, Durgapur, Bankura, Bardhaman, up to Hugli. Further migration along the river Kangsabati populated Purulia, especially the area around the Ayodhya Hill forest, and Paschim Medinipur. Subsequent migration and scattering of Santal colonies to the east and south of Subarnarekha River populated the districts of Saraikella-Kharsawan, Purbi Singhbhum and Mayurbhanj. In the early 19th century the opening up of Rajmahal hills for the Santal led to a massive migration past the Damodar. The districts of Birbhum, Godda, Deoghar, Sahibganj, Dumka, and Pakur now constitute a big chunk of Santal population in India. Due to subsequent socio-political changes the Santals continued migrating towards the north inhabiting the districts of Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur up to Darjeeling and beyond.

It is more than evident that no other place has occupied a permanent place in the Santal legacy as Chae-Champa. This is why it was necessary to collect a strong proof in support of its existence and location. Nothing in this regard can be more useful than a map and in this context the map of Major Rennell has offered a remarkable insight. The land of Chae-Champa bounded by hill ranges running semi-circularly from north-east to south-west formed a massive natural fortification against any invading force, suggesting why it was a place of choice, and why the Santal were able to sustain here for a long time. Historical records backs the existence of 'Singh' rulers; it also offered an idea about the shifting socio-political rifts in the form of Mughal aggression, the emergence of 'foreign zamindars', the incoming new settlers, all of these factors which all inclusively contributed to the Santal emigration out of Chae-Champa.

In such a historical backdrop Chae-Champa has entered into the traditions of the Santals as the 'Garden of Eden' in the Jewish Torah, it has ever since become an epitome of a monumental lost. However a careful introspection reveals that it also played a prime mover for future migrations. If the scattered Santal bases housing big chunks of Santal population of the present time are considered, all happen to be located in the skirts of the hills or beside densely afforested region. It is therefore not hard to understand why the natural elements like hills, rivers, passes, occupy a prominent place in the Santal narrative, folklore and tradition.

It is also important to note that beneath the strict tone of maintaining 'cultural purity' in the narrative, there are sporadic examples of cultural re-adaptation. This sort of

cultural adjustment is quite prominent in the conference which formed the new constitution wherein the traditions were made like the 'dekos'. Learning to celebrate the chata festival in the Sikhar country, the inclusion of Raja Harischandra into the Santali folklore are other examples of this re-adaptation policy. However, the narrative does not sacrifice racial identity for cultural adjustment; the racial identity is very well preserved through marriages within the tribe, the violation of which is customary ex-communication.

All these different elements infused into the Santal narrative of migration makes it profoundly interesting and immensely significant for study. It follows, what appears from the fragmented pieces of the Santal narrative somehow fits into the scaffolding of history. Leaving the mythical portions aside the remaining the account has a unidirectional historical flow. In essence, it talks about the Santal quest of a land free from political encumbrances, free from the clutches of opportunist 'neighbours' and above all a land of their own.

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Witchcraft Trials and the Great Rebellion of 1857-58

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Abstract

During the Great Rebellion of 1857-58, Kolhan-Porahat region of Singhbhum district, dominated by the Ho Adivasis, witnessed a fresh spurt of witch-killings. On the study of Trial Papers, the essay seeks to examine to what extent this incidence was impacted by the political situation and the indigenous belief system. An attempt is also made to understand whether witch-hunt was the product of temporary impulse or it was meticulously planned and socially enacted. The essay deals with the British attempt to control the crime through their legal and judicial machinery. The examination of Trial Papers reveals that by perpetrating witch-murder, the Hos were not only attempting to restore their old social practice, but at the same time this was their strategy at offering resistance to exotic system. The above aspects have been elaborated under four broad sections. First section studies the political and cultural factors motivating witch-killing. The second seeks to explore how the crime was the product of deep-seated conspiracy prior to the commitment of murder. The third examines the process of trial throwing light on when and how the crime was detected, agencies involved in the trial, testimonies and the award of punishments. The last section argues how the practice of witch-murder may be comprehended as a form of indigenous counter offensive to British rule.

Introduction

The historical studies on witchcraft often accompanies a structural-functional study on the social evil by the addition of a discussion of witch trial as done in the case of England as a necessary complement to the structural analysis (Thomas 1984) or leading to the portrayal of the function of the structure through the depiction of witch trials in Germany (Sabean 1984: 94-112) and in France (Ginzburg 1989: 1-16). In the case of Jharkhand, we notice a galore of ethnographic studies on witchcraft as a component of socio-cultural depiction of indigenous life and system as done by the like of S.R. Tickell (1840), E.T. Dalton (1973), S.C. Roy (1912, 1934) and D.N. Majumdar (1937). But depiction of the social evil through an analysis of witchcraft trials during the Rebellion has not been done so far with the exception of a very cursory attempt by an historian who has underlined witch-murder as a strategy of ethnic resistance to British rule (Sinha 2008: 135-38). This essay engages more closely with the Judicial Papers[1] to unfold how witch-trials may help form an understanding of Adivasi belief system, how this quaint practice was underlined by the Adivasis as quintessentially ethnic as against colonial law, how this invocation played out as ethnic strategy of counter offensive during the

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[1] I am greatly indebted to Prof. Gautam Bhadra for providing me an access to the Judicial papers on witchcraft trials.

Great Rebellion and finally how the British responded to the challenge posed by the Hos of Singhbhum during 1857-58. These issues are studied under four sections. First section examines the political and cultural factors behind witch-killing. The second seeks to explore how the crime was the product of deep-seated conspiracy prior to the commitment of murder. The third narrates the process of trial throwing light on when and how the crime was detected, agencies involved in the trial, testimonies and the award of punishments. The last section argues how the practice of witch-murder may be comprehended as a form of indigenous counter offensive to British rule.

Motivation behind witch-killing

Trial Papers attribute the recurrence of witch-hunt to two factors. One was extraneous in nature being caused by the complete breakdown of British law and order machinery in the Singhbhum countryside during 1857-58. But the other intrinsic in character was the impact of the Ho belief system. The author would like to argue that it was the latter that had a more significant bearing on the incidence of witch killing.

Great Rebellion as the external stimulus

As early as 1840, T. Wilkinson noted the incidence of witch murder as a virulent social practice among the Hos. Besides, the use of strong arm of law, he prescribed education and hospital as surer and more tangible means of the cure of this social menace.[2] He was equally glib about the success achieved by three-year old British rule in eradicating the social evil.[3] But that it had failed to decisively cure the evil is rebutted by a fresh spate of witch killing with the temporary recession of British control over the tribal region during 1857-58. We have evidence of the unprecedented rise in the number of witch-murder in the district of Singhbhum from a letter written by A. Money, the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur on 24 August 1860. He observed:

> 'Under the first class of offence against the person there is a remarkable increase in the number of murders. The average of the previous five years was seven cases, in which eighteen persons were implicated. The returns of 1859 exhibit fifty-nine cases of murder, in which 218 persons were implicated. It appears, however, that fifty of these occurred during the disturbances of 1857 and 1858, the people availing themselves of the temporary withdrawal of our authority to indulge their superstitious desire of exterminating witchcraft' (cited in Roy Chaudhury 1958: 134).

Before elaborating how the rebellion stimulated witch-hunt, I shall first provide an overview of the event itself. The rebellion broke out in Kolhan-Porahat on 3 September 1857 with the mutiny of the sepoys of the Ramgarh battalion of British army stationed at Chaibasa. Mutineers looted the district treasury and planned to move to Doranda (Ranchi) to join the rebels there. Out of fear, Capt. Sissmore, the Senior Assistant Commissioner, Singhbhum left the headquarters immediately after the sepoys had rebelled at Doranda. This created a state of political uncertainty. But on 16 September 1857, the British forces accompanied by the forces of the chief of Seraikella recaptured Chaibasa. This brought an end to the first phase of the rebellion. Though Lt Birch, who had replaced Sissmore, restored British command, a widespread popular movement of

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[2] Captain T. Wilkinson to Lt.S.R. Tickell, 13 May 1837, paras 10-14. Governor General's Agent, South West Frontier Political Despatch Register (SWFPDR), 13 May to 1 December 1840 , vol. 231.

[3] Ibid., paras 10, 14.

the Hos and others broke out in south Kolhan. A recent study, presenting the above story, attributes the popular uprising to pent up grievances of the Adivasis against the imposition of an alien legal and land revenue system. It continued till February 1859, when Arjun Singh, the raja of Porahat and the leader of the uprising and tribal insurgents finally laid down the arms (Sen 2011A: 82-5).

The political situation encouraged witch-murder in two different ways. First, people believed that British rule had come to an end and the indigenous traditional order had been restored. Testimonies of the accused and witnesses, besides minutes of the officials, corroborate the impact of the political situation. To quote one accused:

> 'The Sahibs we had heard had all left the country, Chybassah, Ranchi and Dorandah had all been abandoned and Konka Mankee told Randu, the prisoner that now was the time to get rid of the wizards, and witches. No, I do not mean that Konka told us. We saw ourselves that there was great confusion, fighting and killing, and we determined to kill our wizards and witches.'[4]

Likewise, Soopaee, the accused in another case, deposed 'Bur Peer was then in a disturbed state, and in all the villages it was arranged that all accused of witchcraft should be murdered.' It meant that in the disturbed state, the prisoners believed that 'the laws of the British Government' had come to 'an end'.[5]

The second impact was that when the British army regained control and resorted to pillage and plunder, villagers either took to the hills and jungles for safety or fled to the adjacent districts of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar. This state of panic and confusion found expression in the testimony of a witness:

> 'the regiments and the elephants came to Bar pir. I ran away from Amjora, so did they and the rest of the villagers. We did not run away together, we went in different directions. I returned to Amjora in about two or three months. No one has rebuilt there since. We work there and live in huts at Mahuldiha'.[6]

The villagers also took advantage of this fluid state to liquidate witches. The co-relation between 'the prevalence and impunity of crime, especially the destruction of witches' and the 'disturbed condition of the country… the state of wars between Bar pir Coles and the British rulers' has also been officially admitted.[7] An accused similarly stated:

> 'Our part of Singhbhoom was in a disturbed state. Dhan was stolen, witches were killed, and the Regiment with elephant had arrived at Jayantgarh. It was about this time two years ago, we had left our village Amjora, because it had been burned by the Regiment and take (taken) refuge in the hills'.[8]

This disturbed state was used as a ploy to allure the accused witch and his family to abandon the village for safety and murder them. Regga, an accused in a case, testified:

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[4] Cited in Minute of H.V. Bayley recorded on the case of Mata and others, Proceeding No 15, 15 December 1859, Judicial Department.

[5] Cited in Minute of H.V. Bayley. Ibid.

[6] Deposition of Kochey, Witness 2, dated 30 September 1859, Case between Government vs Regga, Latoo Mana, Kochey and Ona,Proceeding No 33, Judicial Department, 15 March 1860

[7] Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Case between Government vs Regga, Latoo Mana, Kochey and Ona,Ibid.

[8] Deposition of Regga, dated 7 February 1860, Ibid.

'I, Latoo Mana, Kochey and Mahapater arranged the murder at Amjora sitting round a fire, three days before it occurred. I arranged the murder but it was done by the order of Latoo Mana. We enticed them from their house by inviting them to fly with us to the hills as we said the Sahibs were close upon us.'[9]

The disturbed state had yet another impact as it influenced diversely the trial process. This will be elaborated below.

The indigenous belief system and witch murder

While the incidence was extraneously aided, factors motivating witch-killing largely stemmed from the indigenous belief system. The belief system governing the countryside all over the world was largely the product of the socio-economic milieu. I shall briefly portray the situation as it prevailed in England and in Kolhan-Porahat to understand the pervasiveness of the social evil. Keith Thomas identifies poverty, sickness and sudden disaster as the 'familiar features of social environment' in the 16-17th century England in which people in general suffered the 'hazards of an intensely insecure' life. Society was highly stratified manifesting huge 'variation of living, educational level and intellectual sensibility'. This was the product of an economy based primarily on the production of food in which the destiny of common man depended on the 'fate of annual harvest'. But the food supply for common man was 'precarious'. Therefore, people were 'chronically undernourished'. Coupled with this, periodic waves of influenza, typhus, dysentery and small pox imperiled the life of the rich and poor alike. The inadequacy of medical facilities blunted the possibility of immunity through medicine and vaccine. People in the countryside were therefore 'extremely liable to pain, sickness and premature death'. Despite the stoicism in the countryside before misfortune and malady in general and the absence of relief from sickness and premature death in particular, rural societies all over the world showed a certain helplessness. They, therefore, indulged either in 'careless stoicism' or alcoholism and smoking or resorted to witchcraft and sorcery as an escape from their 'helplessness in the face of disease' and suffering of all kinds (Thomas 1984: 1-27).

This was comparable in many respects to ethnic scenario in India. Though Adivasi society was not rigidly stratified either on economic grounds or in levels of educational sensibility, as related before, the division into better off and poor had been produced by inequitable distribution of lands among the earlier and later comers, between *khuntkattidars* (original settlers) and non-khuntkattidars, or due to village settlements in a hospitable terrain or forested-hilly regions. The colonial legacy from the earlier eras depicted a differential scenario, as between 'very comfortable and copious' houses of the Mundas and Mankis' and the temporary dwellings of the 'nomad tribes of Hos' inhabiting the hilly tracts, who were 'obliged to move every third year, to make fresh clearings in the forest'. Young 'women and girls of the better classes' (denoting economically better off) made 'a striking exception' to the women of the lowest classes, who 'go about in disgusting state of nudity, wearing nothing but a miserably insufficient rag round their loin', their physique rendered 'shrivelled and ugly' by 'constant exposure' and hard work (Tickell 1840: 783-4). Wilkinson noted the wide prevalence of theft and plunder of property and as punishment the raiding by the victim with his brethren and friends of the accused's house, and 'divert off thrice (the number of) cattle'

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[9] Ibid.

without regard to whom they belonged'[10]. This information confirms the economic reason behind crime, and second, tit for tat as the normal mode of justice and punishment, a factor, as detailed below, behind witch-murder also. The traditional ethnic mode of education and training hardly created any difference in sensibility and consciousness among the pre-literate group of people, which, after the onset of modern education, had prevailed between the educated and uneducated.

The life of the indigenous communities was rendered very hazardous due to such reasons as fire, drought, epidemic and attack of wild animals. Tickell seemed to romantisise Ho life when he exaggerated the inbuilt social mechanism to combat epidemic. He appreciated their 'precautionary measures' of 'nutritive food and drink and the open airy position they build in' and as safeguard from 'infection and fire' they lived in 'small and scattered villages', 'and on the first appearance of any epidemic they leave their houses, and flee into the jungles, living apart from each other'. But he could also visualise that the district of Singhbhum was 'yearly scourged by cholera, fevers and small-pox' (Ibid.: 706). We do not have much knowledge about the state of folk medicine and its practitioners to deal with this social menace. But it was sure that relief from disease was minimal. Situation was aggravated, more particularly, in areas close to or within the forests, by the menace of wild animals, particularly tiger. Flight, often leading to mass exodus, seemed to be the only way out. Therefore, in pre-literate ethnic world, disease leading to death, was in popular perception invariably inflicted from outside by evil forces, and not due to any lack of sanitation, hygiene and infection, a trait visible in England where wiseman 'assigned supernatural cause to malady' (Thomas 1984: 219).

The ethnic societies in India dreaded most the ubiquitous nature of a witch's power of causing human malady. First was that 'many people possess the powers of destroying whom they please'.[11]In his letter to his assistant Lt.S. R. Tickell, Thomas Wilkinson, the Political Agent to the Governor General, wrote:

'The Coles I believe are of opinion, that all their sickness proceeds from three causes, first, witchcraft, second the displeasure of their *deotas* or *bongas* and third, the spirit of someone who has died of witchcraft. In their opinion there is no remedy, but the removal of the witch or wizard, and therefore a number of unfortunate people have been annually murdered'.[12]

They believed that not only an individual but also the whole family and the entire village could be destroyed by a witch (Tickell 1840: 802), by introducing a cholera epidemic (Dalton 1973: 200). A witch could both be a male and female, a fact revealed by Trial Papers below. An equally formidable was that witchcraft or sorcery was a family trait. Consequently, not only the suspected witch but his/her whole family was murdered.

The faith in *animorphism* was equally prevalent that compelled them to believe that a witch was endowed with the power of shape shifting into a tiger and leopard and kill a person (Majumdar 1937: 158-59). Not only sickness and death, the witch could cause harm by destroying the crops and cattle and disturb the normal function of the weather (Tickell 1840: 802). Worst perhaps was the capability to demoralise the Desauli, the respectable guardian of the village (Dalton 1973: 200).

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[10]Wilkinson to Tickell, 13 May 1837, paras 8-9.

[11]Ibid., para 10.

[12]Ibid., para 13.

In Europe, for example, popular magicians were addressed by various such names as 'wizard', 'cunning man', 'wise men/women', 'charmers', 'blessers', 'conjurers', 'sorcerers', 'witches' and the like, who 'offered variety of services, which ranged from healing the sick and finding lost goods to fortune telling and divination of all kinds' (Thomas 1984: 210). For their services, these cunning men commanded a lot of fear and respect in their own societies (Ibid.: 300). Though 'cunning folk and maleficent witches were believed to be separate, but at times these 'overlapped' (Ibid.: 517-20). Even then, we notice the wide prevalence of magic and sorcery, as 'black' and white' magic, both in tandem 'encouraged witchcraft' (Ibid.: 653-54). This makes clear that the distinctions among these categories made by scholars, as stated above, was not socially relevant. Trial Papers showing the tendency to lump witch, sorcerer and wizard under a single category is another such instance.

It will be interesting in this context to examine how far the above belief system impacted the witch-killings during 1857-58. Significantly, villagers in Kolhan-Porahat largely emphasised on the power of the witch to bring sickness and death and incidentally on the socio-economic issues like strata difference and poverty. This will be amply illustrated by the depositions of the accused persons and witnesses. In the following quotes relating the murder of the whole family, three issues come on the anvil: the principal one being culprit having caused death, second, witchcraft being a family trait[13] and third, stealing of property as the incidental cause of murder.

The following citation would reveal the fundamentality of the witchcraft-sickness/death link:

> 'I arranged it all at Amjora, and it was by my desire and order all were killed. Joorey had killed my younger brother Bisooi by his sorcery. The day after his death we arranged for the destruction of Joorey. Bisooi himself stated, when dying, that Joorey had bewitched him.'[14]

The same fear lurked in a different murder. One witness informed that Samoo, the accused had murdered his sister Bootnee because she had killed his next brother and child with witchcraft. Additionally, he informed that 'she dug up the bones of my younger brother after we had burned them. She did so twice. I do not know why she did so. I killed her with an axe'.[15]

While instrumenting sickness and death by occult art was the most universal superstition, causing murder through anomorphism also came to be referred. Witch-tiger linkage was obviously impacted by the endemic tiger menace prevailing in forest-infested parts of Singhbhum, nay Jharkhand. The accused, whose wife had been killed, therefore testified:

> 'he had become a tiger. He had in this form sprung upon my wife when she was collecting leaves in the jungle and had killed her. I witnessed the change from man to tiger when I

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[13]For another instance of family murder, Deposition of <u>Madroee</u>, dated 5 August 1859, Case between Government and Mussamut <u>Medoee</u> (Madroee) vs Rortea (Rootea),Proceeedings No.24, 3 November 1859, Judicial Department.

[14]Deposition of Latoo Mana, Amjora, dated 7 February 1860, Ibid.

[15]Deposition of Moorgee Mato, Burunga mouzah, Anandpur, dated 26 May 1859, Remarks of Commissioner of Chotanagpur on the trial of Samoo,Proceeding No 34, 18 August 1859.

first saw it, it was half man half tiger. It commenced becoming a tiger in the legs. It first had Poosa's head, this was transformed into a tiger's head in my presence'.[16]

The motive stated was officially deemed as a 'wild-tale..not easily susceptible to explanation'.[17] But in indigenous perception the reason was genuine and widely supported as evident from the depositions of two other accused. Hoolsaee, the third accused, happened to be the brother of Poosa, the victim. He not only 'bound the deceased, made him over to the prisoner', but also testified:

'I also knew that he could transform into a tiger… I never saw him in his tiger-shape but that he some times becomes a tiger I know, as one night he devoured raw a whole goat. Whilst he was eating he roared like a tiger and through fear no one went near him'.[18]

There were other peripheral factors, like theft of paddy as corroborated by the quote below:

'We killed them because we supposed that the Sahibs were about to kill us. Joorey was also a wizard and stole dhan (paddy). We killed children because we considered that they must have been taught by their father and would all turn out wizards or witches.'[19]

In another, while one ascribed the murder of the witch to the strange reason of her being 'a passionate woman',[20] in the same case another raised his objection to the victim having trespassed into the paddy field.[21] We know of yet another case where the cousins had killed their 'old infirm' uncle. The latter was killed obviously because he had become a liability for the cousins, who earned a precarious living through labour. The cousins were apprehensive that he might burn their house as threatened. One of them admitted:

'I killed Longa at the desire of Silaee. He was to live on us. We are laborers and when we had anything to give him we gave it to him, but when we did not give him food he used to say that one day he would burn our house… Longa was very old, he could only get along by dragging himself on the ground'.[22]

Conspiracy and the crime

Cases under trial clearly show that elaborate conspiracy preceded witch-murders. Instead of being products of momentary impulse, the crime was therefore committed in cold blood and after meticulous planning. Secondly, these were not perpetrated by the person and the family directly affected alone, but were more or less a social act also, done at the covert and overt support of other villagers. There seems to be a clear pattern. We find that the family/ victim of the supposed occult practice identified its perpetrator

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[16]Deposition of Mora, dated 16 June 1859, Case between Government and Musammat Sunee vs Mora, Barundia and Hoolsaee, Procceding No. 41, 11 August 1859.

[17]Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Ibid.

[18] Deposition of Hoolsaee, dated 4 June 1859, Ibid.

[19] Deposition of Latoo Mana, dated 7 February 1860, Ibid.

[20]Deposition of Jola, dated 18 June 1859,The case of Government and Darroo vs Beerul,ProccedingNos 30,31, 3 November 1859.

[21] Deposition of Goora, dated 18 June 1859, Ibid.

[22] Deposition of Bhurta, 20 July 1859, Case between Government vs Bhurta, Selaee, Proccedings No 145, 11 August 1859.

and was the main conspirator. In some cases, where there was doubt about the perpetrator, the family took sokha's help. Therefore, sokha-witchcraft link, though not consistent, was there. The chief conspirator involved other members of his family or his agnates and cognates. One perceptible problem with the Trial Papers however is that though these reveal the community (mentioned as caste Cole) identity of both the victim and the murderer, their *killi* identity was not mentioned[23]. We have on the other hand more detailed information about the persons involved, how the killing was socially supported, often also by the head of the village and pir (cluster of villages), how prior to the crime the perpetrators camouflaged their real intention by engaging the witch and family in singing, drinking and feasting, how they were lured to an isolated place for committing the crime, the weapons used in murder and the invariable performance of the mortuary ritual. These no doubt unfold that the witch-killing was a social act in terms of participation. Furthermore, rather than being an illegal act as officially labelled, this was a religious and ethical act that derived legitimacy from the social ideal of the preservation of the ethnic order. These facts will be on board as I engage with the Trial Papers.

The persons involved in witch murder hatched the plot in a group meeting. In one such case, Jamtoor, the main culprit, convened the meeting in his own house. His wife had allegedly been bewitched by Mandun with goat's meat. This was attended by Palee, Damora, Soopai and Sunka. All decided that he and all members of his family would be killed.[24] Since the social relation of the participants had not been revealed, we are not able to tell whether they were responding to the call of their familial, agnatic or killi obligations. But the murderers were their neighbours of the same village. The reason behind their complicity was the prevailing fear about Mandun that being a wizard, the meat of the goat he had sacrificed killed all those to whom this was distributed. This created the assumption that he administered his sorcery in meat that killed many villagers.[25] Once this decision was arrived at, getting hold of the person and his family members and executing the murder was planned. Jamtoor, Damora and Tipooka went to Mardun's house and asked him to join them in drinking at Jamtoor's house. Mardun responding to this invitation, Damoora struck the first blow across his neck. But as this did not kill him, Jamtoor seized him and Pandoo cut him across the stomach and ribs that finally killed him.[26] In another case, related to the murder of four persons of the same family, the instigation of the murder came from Mana Cole, who was the father-in-law of Captain Manki. The accusation was that Captain's wife Soondoo fell sick for the alleged sorcery of Manduey, who and her husband Tota were suspected as 'dealers in sorcery'. It was believed she got well after the destruction of witch's family.[27] But there was another version to the web of conspiracy. This is revealed by the evidence of the main culprit. He stated:

'I killed Tota Cole by order of Captain Manki. Captain said he could be answerable for all consequences that he would suffer, not I, therefore I obliged…Captain called me to his

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[23]In fact, even in settlement papers a Ho was identified by *Jat* (caste) Kole and his/her killi name was not disclosed.

[24]Deposition of Pudna, 3 May 1859, Case between Government and Mussamat Jema vs Pudna, Pandoo, Paloo and Sadoo, Proceedings No 66, 11 August 1859; Remarks of Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Ibid.

[25] Ibid.; Depositions of Palee and Pandoo, dated, Ibid.

[26] Depositions of Jema and Pudna, dated 16 April 1859. Ibid.

[27]Deposition of Patur, dated 31 May 1859, the Case betweenManduey and Government vs Patur, Lonkah and Captain, Proceedings No 92, 11 August 1859

house and said one wife who had cost him 40 head of cattle had died, and another who had cost as many was just about to die through Tota's sorcery and that Tota must therefore be killed.'[28]

The accused went to the house of Tota in the evening, 'eat and drank with him and family and then launched murderous assault' with phulsa, a kind of battle axe.[29] The evidences and confessions of the culprits in yet another case bring to light the distribution of the work. Of the four prisoners involved in the murder of Magoora, Urjoon and Kolaee were involved in actual killing of the suspected witch or wizard, Libro personally aided and abetted, while Soopaee counselled and arranged the murder. Another interesting fact was how the prevailing political situation influenced the event.

The facts stated above clearly revealed that the aggrieved family/ person happened to be the main instigator behind the witch murder. Others joined him first because of the social fear of witchcraft, while sometimes the social influence of the instigator had a role in mobilising people as the above case shows. The question is who these persons were? In the above case, Rooteea, Patur and others involved in the murder were 'his servants', called pykes by one culprit, who abided by the order of Captain 'to kill Tota and his family', while another accused Karo was the younger brother of Captain.[30] Captain gave a 'tulwar' (sword) to Machooa and axes to Lonka, Damoo and Rooteea.[31] The second case instances the involvement of a distant relative. Beerul, the accused who was awarded capital punishment for the murder of Pillun, said that one of his relatives had married the daughter of the victim.[32] The third case is about the murder of one Joorey and his family by four persons. The former was the uncle of the wife of Regga, the first accused.[33] The relationship was more intimate in another case where the brother murdered his sister, for digging up the grave of his younger brother which was tabooed as an act of witchcraft.[34] Brother aiding the murder of his brother comes out from another case. This reveals that Hoolsaee handed over his brother Poosa to be killed by Mora who accused Poosa of killing his wife. But his deposition informs that an amount of coercion was involved, because Mora had allegedly threatened Hoolsaee with the words 'if you do not give him up to me I will kill you'.[35] We have learnt above about the murder of the old and infirm uncle by his nephews. The above cases bear witness to the fact that not only close relatives were involved, but in general the killers were co-villagers too.

In the commitment of crime, besides the pervasive fear of witchcraft, two other social customs were involved. First underlines the indigenous sense of justice that accorded natural right to avenge the death of the near relative. Mora murdered Poosa to avenge the

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[28] Statement of Rorteea, dated 29 Septemebr 1859, Case between Government and Mussamut <u>Medoee</u> (Madroee) vs Rortea (Rootea), Proceeedings No.24.

[29] Remarks by Commissioner of Chotanagpur, the Case between Manduey and Government vs Patur, Lonkah and Captain, Proceedings No 92, 11 August 1859

[30] Statement of Rooteea, dated 29 Septemebr 1859, Case between Government and Mussamut <u>Medooee</u> (Madroee) vs Rortea (Rootea), Proceeedings No.24, 3 November 1859; Deposition of Damoo, dated 5 August 1859, Ibid..

[31] Deposition of Rorteea, dated 13 July 1859. Ibid.

[32] Deposition of Beerul, dated 30 September 1859, Proccedings No. 30, 31, 3 November 1859.

[33] Deposition of Regga, dated 7 February 1860. The Case between Government vs Regga, Latoo Mana, Kochey and Ona,Proceeedings No.33, 15 March 1860

[34] Remarks of Commissioner of Chotanagpur on the trial of Samoo, Proceedings No. 34, 18 August 1859.

[35] Deposition of Hoolsaee, dated 4 June 1859. The Case of Government and Musammat Sunee vs Mora, Barundia and Hoolsaee, Proceedings No. 41, 11 August 1859.

killing of his wife, who was with child then and whose loss he could not bear. That this right socially devolved on him becomes clear from the fact that Hoolsaee had delivered Poosa to Mora, obviously to mitigate his loss.[36] The function of this custom is also evident from the social acquiescence to witch-killing through covert and overt acts of support. I shall substantiate this argument further when I discuss the process of judicial trial.

Second relates to how crime and complicity were culturally defined. To explain this, I shall particularly focus on the custom of defilement. The cases I have brought on board underline that there was difference in commitment of actual crime and complicity in it. Crime did not simply denote those who had actually planned and executed it. But one who had been incidentally implicated by accidentally touching the blood of the victim. However, there was a clear difference between blood mark as a proof of crime in general perception, and the same as a mark in the body for having stepped into the blood of the victim. The touch and mark of blood on the body, according to Adivasi belief, defiled the person and included him into the crime chain. In the murder of Tota and his family, the assailants deliberately made Chombey 'put his foot in the blood to make him an accomplice.[37] Defilement did not simply define involvement in crime, but it also enjoined that the person would join the actual murderers in the performance of the funeral rites either by burial or cremation. One such person not involved in the actual murder, testified:

> 'It was dark, while returning home we got our feet into the blood that had flowed from Tota's body (lying outside his door on the road to our houses) and were in consequence of the defilement obliged to assist in performing the funeral rites'.[38]

Process of trial

The above pages have studied the social aspect of witch-killing. I shall now attempt to address the other important aspect i.e. the legal and judicial aspect that added a new content and meaning to the incident. While the former deals with the course of events leading to the witch-murder, the latter will reveal what followed, why did it so happen and who were the new actors on the stage. This section will therefore mark a movement from social to administrative arena, studying change in ideology and perceptions regarding crime and how to deal with it.

Changed perception of crime

To recapitulate, in indigenous perception, witch-killing was a socially approved mode of dealing with the perpetrator of evil against individual and community and a therapeutic treatment to illness. Accordingly, witch-killing was socially deemed and approved as an act congenial for the preservation of the moral social order. The perpetuation of this order was possible if subversion of the social norm of equality and homogeneity through the distortion of the norm of 'leveled society' was thwarted by the liquidation of the person who attempts to do so. In this sense, this was a normative behaviour defending the moral economy of the indigenous societies. While the first

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[36] Statement of Mora, Ibid.

[37] Deposition of Rootea.

[38] Deposition of Machooa, date not available, Case between Government and Mussamut <u>Medooee</u> (Madroee) vs Rortea (Rootea), Proceeedings No. 24, 3 November 1859

perception was very much active during the above witch-murders, the second was not so much in operation.

On the other hand, in official perception, despite social justification, murder or an attempt to murder was a homicidal act. As such, it was a crime committed against an individual and was therefore criminal and punitive. Prevention and punishment of crime and illegal acts constituted the prime responsibility of the government necessary for the maintenance of peace, order and justice. The domain of crime was also differentially defined. Adivasis did not strictly distinguish between a murderer and an abettor in crime, while in official perception these were two distinct functions with varying punishments to deal with them. There was yet another difference. Adivasis believed that executor, planners of murder and persons not directly associated with the murder but defiled by blood-stain were socially enjoined to perform the funeral of the dead. Therefore, while societally the last act was a moral obligation, it was an illegal and deliberate act to destroy the proofs of murder before the court of law.

Dispensation of justice

The process of trial was a part of the administration of criminal justice. The British mode of governance was based on the ideal of separation of powers into executive, legislative and judicial domains to be managed by three distinct but inter-linked agencies. But dispensation of criminal justice was the function of two agencies, the executive who delivered the criminals before the court where trial was conducted and judgment awarded. Another feature of the colonial court system was the separation between civil and criminal justice. However, the mode of administration in Adivasi dominated Chotanagpur division in erstwhile Bihar functioned in aberration of the standard norm. District administration governing Ho land, for instance, functioned under the supervision and control of the assistant political agent, known during 1857-58 as assistant political commissioner, as the head of Kolhan system. This was based on unitariness rather than separation of powers. Therefore, the district head was both the executive and judicial head where civil and criminal distinction was not rigidly maintained. District administration was uplinked with the divisional administration that constituted the unit of administration christened South West Frontier Political Agency under the direct charge of the Governor General.[39] As part of criminal administration of justice, the trial process began with the apprehension of the criminal, proper local investigation of the crime by agencies officially assigned to do so, actual trial at the district court, where evidences of the prisoners and witnesses were collected and examined and on their basis the judgement was delivered by the district court. The process ended with the judgement being referred and endorsed by the divisional court headed by the Commissioner. The entire process operated under the system of criminal justice as enforced by the criminal rules framed by Thomas Wilkinson in 1837.

Apprehension of criminals

Kolhan criminal administration was under the direct control and supervision of the Assistant Commissioner. He operated with the help the Mankis and Mundas. The direct responsibility of the village and pir heads was to apprehend the offenders and deliver them to the district administration. But witchcraft trials inform about the crucial role of an intermediary called *chaprasi* (peon, orderly) who was apparently deputed by the

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[39] For an elaborate study of the ideology and mechanism of governance, see (Sen 2012: Chapter 3)

district authority to make local enquiries for collecting information about specific acts of crime. While this identified him as an important chain of the trial process, this implied that the village and pir heads did not attend often to the call of responsibility assigned to them. During the troubled times of 1857-58, the laxity of the indigenous officials was very much evident. In one case, the murder of Joorey and his family came to official notice in connection with the local investigation in a different case conducted by Soma, the chaprasi of the court of Senior Assistant Commissioner R.C. Birch. On the basis of his report Rajo chaprasi was deputed to investigate into the matter.[40] Rajo assembled Dikool Manki, Nursingh Manki, Maneek Munda, Reino Munda and Hos of that area. In the process, he could learn the names of persons involved. After making enquiries he learnt about the cause and place of the murder.[41]

Understandably, on the basis of chaprais's local enquiry and report, the accused were apprehended with the help of the Manki and handed over to the district administration.[42] The next stage of trial was conducted at the district court headed by the Assistant Commissioner. The accused and witnesses were examined and their statements were recorded as per the British court procedure enforced by Wilkinson's rules. On the basis of the above court trial, sentences were awarded. However, the trial papers do not mention the quantum of punishment announced by the district court. But it appears, that in the present case the sentence awarded must have been more than two years. So, as per rules, the case was referred to the higher court of the Commissioner for approval and confirmation (Sahu 1985: 126-28).

Dealing with the case, the Commissioner of Chotanagpur in his remark examined the entire incidence of crime, the process of apprehension of the culprits and the process of investigation as contained in the proceedings of the case referred to him by the assistant commissioner. The statements and confessions of the culprit were made before him and recorded. He then delivered the judgement that Regga, Latoo Mana and Kochey were to be transported beyond sea for life. The history of the case thus shows that the actual murder had been committed in February 1858; the culprits were delivered on 30 September 1859, after which the matter was taken up by assistant commissioner. On his judgement being referred to the court of Commissioner, trial seemed to begin on 26 November 1859, the confessions of culprits were recorded on 7 February 1860 and the judgement delivered on 15 March 1860.[43]

I would like to highlight one important consideration that influenced what should be the just quantum and nature of punishment. In fact, colonial bureaucracy was in doubt about the exact nature of punishment to be awarded when the Adivasi villagers were of the impression that British rule had ended and their indigenous order had returned. Stating why instead of awarding capital punishment the culprits were awarded transportation beyond sea for life, it was stated, 'the Coles of the Bur peer then regarded themselves as released from their responsibility to their rulers, and at liberty to carry out their own tradition that a witch should not be suffered to live'.[44] But in another case, the difference in bureaucracy becomes clear. The Officiating Commissioner recommended that all four prisoners be hanged and their property be forfeited as a deterrent for others.

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[40] Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Case of Government vs Regga, Latoo Mana, Kochey and Ona.

[41] Deposition of Rajo, dated 15 October 1859. Ibid.

[42] Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

But H.V. Bayly (position not mentioned) had reservations because the 'prisoners were of the notion that British rule had ended and their laws had ceased to exist'. He therefore recommended imprisonment for life in transportation for three. But for the fourth he awarded 14 years' imprisonment in banishment for counselling and advising the murder but 'was not aiding or abetting in it by any'.[45]

Witch-hunt as an indigenous counter-offensive

The sudden spurt of witch-hunt during 1857-58 has been interpreted in a recent study as a mode of resistance against colonial rule (Sinha 2007: 135-38). On a perusal of witch trial papers, this section will broadly examine to what extent the argument was true and will seek to unfold the ways this resistance was offered. This will explain, in the light of James C. Scott's famous study *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985), the distinctive way the social marginals or the 'weak' organise their resistance and in doing so what weapons they rely on. But before doing so, we are perhaps required to understand what this indigenous counter-offensive was against. A recent study on indigenous role and attitude to the Great Rebellion regards it as a resistance against the new system that the British introduced among them (Sen 2011A: 84). It will however be interesting to appropriate the entire gamut of the counter-offensive and in this backdrop to evaluate the invocation of witchcraft as a strategy.

It is well known that the Adivasis of Jharkhand organised widespread armed civil rebellion during 1857-58. Therefore, militancy may be taken as the arch-pillar of indigenous counter-offensive against the British. But during the entire course of popular uprising, they also widely resorted to flight as a mode of protest against British reprisal (Ibid.: 88-90). Migration, temporary and permanent, has widely been identified as a peaceful way of registering protest. What did this change signify? Ajay Skaria locates this shift in protest modality as the weaks' typical way of reading the time and reinventing their strategy of resistance (1999: 109-10). This understanding will help appreciate the difference between the normal everyday form of resistance and abnormal tumultuous form of resistance. Likewise, this will enable us to evaluate the role of witch-killing as a mode of counter-offensive among the Adivasis.

There is no doubt that witch-killing and rebellion were coeval and part of the tumultuous form of militant resistance. But this is equally true that the symbolism of witch-murder was invoked as a peace-day challenge, rather as everyday form of resistance, to colonial rule. As such, the practice became the representative cultural symbol of the Hos and the law putting an embargo on this practice as a violation of the norm. My argument is that this was how they asserted the supremacy of custom over law. Viewed from a different angle, it was also a way of reinforcing the significance of witch-murder as an indigenous therapy against malady as against the practice of western medicine through the inauguration of hospital as a cure of illness. The Trial Papers provide the following details of how the Adivasis contested exotic rule through many covert and overt acts of disobedience.

The first was the unwillingness to report the incidence of the witch-murder by villagers and village-pir officials to the district authority as per colonial rules. This is instanced by one such murder committed in 'the very remote and wild part of Singhbhum, called Sarandah' in September 1857. Significantly, the exact date of murder was neither remembered nor recorded. This may be an example of amnesia characteristic of oral society. The disturbance was obviously another deterrent. But what may be noted

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[45]The Case of Government vs Mata, Sarda, Rando and Topey, Minute of H.V. Bayley.

that though the tumult had come to an end by the month of February 1859, neither the matter was reported nor were the murderers apprehended. The Manki did so only on 20 July 1859 'under the orders from the Singhbhum court'.[46] In another case, the charge of deliberate suppression was against the village head. The murder of one Poosa was perpetrated in September 1858. But the Munda did not send any report as per official procedure to Thakurani Kunja Kumari, the proprietor of Anandpur, in whose area the crime had been committed. She could learn of it when her servant inspected the village.[47] One may ascribe this misdemeanour to the indigenous misconception that they were absolved of the responsibility to follow the exogenous procedure as British rule had come to an end.

Second was the social reluctance to co-operate with the investigation of the crime. Jema of Koodamasada in Rengra pir informed Senior Assistant Commissioner at Chaibasa of the murder of her brothers, mother and sister by their neighbours. A chaprasi named Haradhan was deputed by the district administration to make field investigation with the help of the Manki and Munda. But he had difficulty in collecting evidence either from the Manki or from villagers. This becomes clear from the quote, 'I went to Bameea Manki of Rengra peer. The Manki said that at present he can get no one to obey his order and could not help me as the business occurred during the recent disturbances.'

Haradhan next called all the people to attend a 'Panchayat' at Jhinkpani in Gumla pir regarding a robbery where Manki was brought. But 'even Bamia Manki would not assist' him. Haradhan then seized Jamtoor, one of the accused, who confessed and named other culprits. At Jhinkpani, Pandoo (another accused) tried to run away but Haradhan

> 'siezed him and told him I would cut him down if he attempted to get off. Bamia Manki's nephew was asked to bind Pandoo but he would not do till I threatened to slice him. Pandoo and others confessed…I believed all the villagers consented to the murder'.[48]

On the basis of their depositions and confessions of the accused, the judgement could be delivered.[49] The reluctance to abide by law and silent compliance to traditional form by maintaining secrecy,[50] eloquently spoke of social bias for custom and opposition to law.

The matter of greater concern perhaps was that not only from ordinary villagers, resistance came from the village power centre also, the lowest rung of Raj bureaucracy, as represented by the pir and village heads. First, the resistance took the form of direct complicity in the crime as the above case of Captain Manki had shown. Another case informs about the involvement of the village head. It emerges from the deposition of one of the accused. He informed that as Madun was suspected to be a wizard for instrumenting the death of many people, Soopai, the Munda and Jamtoor, his Juridar (assistant) settled that 'he should be killed'.[51] Second, resistance was mild and indirect

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[46] Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, 3 November 1859.

[47] Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, The Case of Government and Musammat Suneee vs Mora, Balundia and Hoolsaee, 11 August 1859, Proceeding No. 41.

[48] Deposition of Haradhan, Witness 6, 3 May 1859, Case of Government and Mussammat Jema vs Pudua, Pandoo and Sadoo, 11 August 1859, Proceedings No.66.

[49] Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, 11 August 1859, Ibid.

[50] One witness testified 'every one knows they (the accuseds) did it (the act of murder)' Deposition of Soopai, Witness 1, 3 May 1859, Ibid.

[51] Deposition of Pandoo, 23 July 1859, see also Depositions of Palee and Sadoo,23 July 1859, Ibid.

when the Manki by avoiding the chaprasi in his investigation was found to be a reluctant collaborator in the case mentioned above.[52]

Another way of showing disobedience was by resorting to occult practice conforming to the indigenous mode of treating illness. In one such case, for allegedly causing illness by sorcery to a person named Lagra some persons were murdered. The British had introduced medical treatment in the local hospital as the alternative mode of dealing with sickness. But villagers demonstrated an obvious allergy to the exotic therapy by resorting to the indigenous mode of identifying the cause of illness and effecting the cure with the help of the sokha, who played the role of 'an exorcisor or witchfinder'. Sacrifice of goats and bullocks, prescribed by the sokha, however, did not provide any relief. But after the suspected witch named Pilllun was killed, not only Lagra 'recovered', but also 'there has been no sickness in the village'.[53] This seemed to have reinforced their faith in traditional form of treatment. The attachment to the indigenous mode, as also the unconfirmed complicity of the exorciser in witch-murder, is evinced in another case. When in Golkera village in the Saranda forest region, a person fell ill, a sokha was employed by the family. On the allegation that the sokha had 'denounced' Pillun as witch, Beerul killed him on 'the order of the sick man's relatives'. Interestingly, the sokha 'claimed that he only offered sacrifice and prescribed medicine'. More so, as the allegation was not proved, sokha was acquitted.[54] But in another case, the witch-finder was the first accused and the court ordered that he and the other culprit should 'be hanged by neck till they are dead'. The charge was that on being called by a family member of a sick person 'to make pujah', Patur 'did so and found that an offering of a goat and buffalo was required by the spirit'. Though not admitted, one can presume that he had accused Tota and his wife as 'dealers in sorcery'. He went a step ahead by perpetrating the murder of the accused with other members of the family with the help of Lonkah, the other culprit.[55]

The Ho community was in perceptible dilemma while resorting to the indigenous custom and therapy in place of law and medicine as forms of resistance. The more pragmatic of them seemed to be conscious of the return of the exotic order. So they were apprehensive that the supposed restoration of their traditional system would not been more than a temporary relief. This emerges from the testimony of an accused. Beerul testified 'Jolla and Singrai said she (Pillun) was a witch and ordered me to kill her. I refused saying the Sahibs would punish me'.[56] Lurking fear operated in a different way. This was the fear of complaint to the authority and punishment by the court of law. This made the culprits to either involve the witnesses in the process of crime or murder them. Mahapater was witness to Regga and Latoo Mana's involvement in such a witch murder, as he found them standing beside the corpse. Fearing that former might give evidence against them, they implicated Mahapater in the crime by forcing him to bury the bodies. He was therefore 'unclean from touching the bodies' and socially implicated in the

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[52]Deposition of Haradhan, Witness 6, 3 May 1859, Ibid.

[53]Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, The Case of Government and Musammat Suneee vs Mora, Balundia and Hoolsaee, 11 August 1859, Proceeding No. 41.

[54]Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, The Case of Government and Darroo vs Beerul, 3 November 1859, Proceedings 30 -1

[55]Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, 11 August 1859; Deposition of Patur, 31 May 1859, The Case of Manduey and Government, vs, Patur, Lonkah and Captain,11 August 1859, Proceedings No.92

[56]Remarks by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, 3 November 1859.

murder.[57] In another case, the culprits apprehended that as two members of the victim's family had seen them commit the crime and might 'complain the Sahib', they were murdered.[58]

Conclusion

The above facts may be summarised under some broad points. First, the sudden spurt of witch-killing during 1857-58 was influenced by the tumultuous political situation. As such, this nullified the British assumption that strict imposition of British law, the hospital and modern education had curbed the virulence of witch murder, if not put an end to it. Second, the pre-British practice, so endemic and universal, as Wilkinson had reported, was rooted in indigenous belief system that assigned malady of different varieties, more so illness and death, to the practice of witchcraft. So witch-murder was socially approved relief mechanism to ward off malady, and its perpetration deemed as a moral act for the perpetuation of the social order. The examination of Trial Papers brings on board that witch-murders was a socially planned and executed act. Third, the study does not confine itself merely to an understanding of the function of Adivasi belief system and mentality, as also colonial legal machinery. No less significantly, this also underlines the salience of the performance of witch hunt and murder as a militant and everyday form of peaceful resistance through non co-operation and disobedience. As such, this may be identified as an attempt by the Adivasis to assert the supremacy of custom over law and witch murder as an alternate therapy to modern medicine offered by colonial masters.

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[57]Deposition of Mahapater, 15 October 1859, The Case of Government vs Regga, Latoo Mana, Kochey and Ona, 15 March 1860, Proceedings No. 33.

[58] Deposition of Jema, 16 April 1859, Proceedings No. 66

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Linguistic Politics and Kurukh Language Movement of the Oraons in Jharkhand

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Abstract

In the immediate aftermath of independence, India has been witness to language assertion as a distinct marker of identity, regionalism and political clout. In this debate, Adivasi languages of Jharkhand tried to assert their distinctiveness, through recognition of their language and culture to bolster up their claim of a separate state. However, the movement leading to the creation of Jharkhand on 15 November 2000 largely rested on the strength built by the pan- Adivasi ethnicity and solidarity in the state rather than languages.

The post-independence language assertion among the Santhals of eastern India, and inclusion of Santhali in the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution spurred Oraons, the speakers of the Kurukh language and the second largest Adivasi community in Jharkhand, to raise the demands for similar linguistic recognition. While this in a way reinforces the linguistic ethnicity and regionalism, it no doubt undermines the historic recognition of pan-Indian Adivasihood. This contradiction makes this study more topical. The other aspect that makes the literary movement interesting is the political overtones attached to it. The paper seeks to examine these aspects.

Divided into four sections, the first section seeks to locate the demand of Kurukh language amongst the Adivasi languages of the state. The second section narrates the cultural movement centred around it that claimed benefits for the Oraons to reinforce their distinct ethnicity. The third section looks at the attempts of government and linguistic organisations in popularising the movement and claiming support for it and the last section makes an assessment of the position of the Kurukh language in Jharkhand today and the messages that are emerging out of it.

Introduction

Independent India has seen language as a site of contestation. What was 'mis'construed as a harmless entity in post-independence India in comparison to no less harmful trends as communalism, casteism, regionalism has promoted dangerous and violent partisanships in India. It was a point of contestation in 'Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani' debate in the 1950s, which threatened to pull apart the meticulously built fabric of nationalism in India. With the creation of State's Reorganisation Commission (SRC) in 1953, with Justice Fazl Ali, K.M. Pannikkar and Hridaynath Kunzru to look into the question of 'Linguistic Reorganisation' of states, the question of linguistic politics came to fore (Chandra et al 1999: 100).

The nation witnessed one of the worst politics and partisanship over the issue of languages. Meticulously woven threads of unity that upheld the logic of 'unity in

diversity', a legacy of the national movement, and gave an impression of a unified nation just a couple of years ago, seemed to be broken into fragmentary pieces with each language claiming a distinct identity (Guha 2007: 198-200). A nation with 1652 languages as per 1961 census[1] was subjected to internal strife, discomfort and clash of interest. The issue generated a sense of competition among the linguistic groups in India who claimed superiority over other languages, which led to a very strong sense of linguistic regionalism.

Several groups across the nation demanded separate state for themselves on what apparently seemed as linguistic demand but had strong political undertones. In this backdrop, Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda, demanded a separate Adivasi state comprising major parts of South Bihar, besides Adivasi dominated districts of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. He presented his case on linguistic basis in front of SRC in 1955 in Ranchi. This memorandum was signed by 34 Jharkhand Party MLAs of Bihar (Ghosh 1993: 1788-90). His absence from the scene and multiplicity of languages spoken by the Adivasis weakened the case in front of SRC. Furthermore, it was clear that demand lacked mass support and the public opinion was divided and therefore rejected (Dutt 2005: 68). In rejecting these demands, SRC suggested (Narayan 2003) that the distinction between Adivasis and other citizens, insofar as they act as impediment to the political and economic advancement of the tribal areas, should be progressively removed. In fact, the prevailing mindset of the ruling clan that persisted even after independence made a stark difference in the treatment of Adivasi and non-Adivasis. On this issue, Amit Prakash (1999: 462) argues that the rationalist-integrationist paradigm of the colonial discourse was carried into the administrative arrangements of postcolonial India. This limited the capacity of the national governments to intervene in socio-political movements and they wanted to carry forward a melting pot approach. Adivasi leaders could not reconcile with this approach and demanded political recognition, by creation of a separate state on distinct ethnic and cultural identity. This demand had serious economic undertone also and the Adivasis of Jharkhand felt that their resources are not used for their benefits (Sharma 1976: 37-43).

Assertion of proto-Jharkhandi identity had in fact, surfaced as early as the 1930s when in a memorandum to the Simon Commission, where it was agreed by the colonialists that the 'tribal areas would be excluded from the Aryan races'. The Western-educated leaders in the Adivasi areas of Bihar, were quick to learn from the nationalist leaders. They employed a version of local history, glorified the tribal revolts, and utilized the uniqueness of the tribal heritage to engender autonomous forms of imagination of the community that soon started to desire political recognition. In pre-independence period, greater sense of sincerity towards the Adivasi demand was shown by Rai Bahadur Satish Chandra, a member of Bihar Assembly in 1939. In the State Assembly he presented the demand of separation of Chotanagpur plateau and Santhal Pargana from Bihar. This demand was rejected by the then premier of the province Shri Krishna Singh, who claimed that on the basis of available census records the population of Adivasis in both the district was only 25 per cent and he gave statistical account that the majority of the people in these areas spoke Hindustani.[2] So, in his opinion the demand was not appropriate.

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[1]Jharkhand data highlights: The Scheduled Tribes, Census of India 2001, www.censusindia.gov.in, downloaded on 20 Nov. 2018.

[2]Ibid., The other reasons given by Shri Krishna Singh was that the demand was raised by Satish Chandra to include these parts in Bengal when the fact was that many Adivasis of Dhalbhumgarh had given petitions to stay in Bihar. Diwani records of the area were also cited to prove that the area had been under the control

In the aftermath of partition, integrationist approach was considered desirable for building of a nationalist spirit and all sub-national and sub-ethnic identities were absorbed to it. The debate that followed in the constituent Assembly post 1947, centered on the logic that the problems and discontent in the Adivasi areas existed due to their exclusion from the mainstream development patterns and that the Adivasi customs need 'protection' of the majority community (Prakash 1999: 465, 487). On the contrary, Adivasi leaders as Jaipal Singh contended that the dominant viewpoint of working towards a pan-national identity that would subsume all sub-identities might not be a desirable option. He pointed out that these identities are not necessarily at cross-purposes with the national identity. Albeit, this opinion was not considered in the Constituent Assembly, but this position survives today.

By the mid-1970s, the Jharkhand movement could project quite a number of Adivasi and non-Adivasi leaders vociferously raising the demand for a separate state. Even the definition of the term 'Jharkhandi' was widened to include all those residing in the region who observed local festivals, worshipped tribal deities, shared tribal culture and took pride in the martyrdom of local heroes (Mahato 1989: 18). It is interesting to know that the movement for the creation of Jharkhand as a separate state brought the Adivasis of the state together on the basis of Adivasiyat (ethnic and cultural identity of the Adivasis), which cut the barriers of distinct linguistic identity of different Adivasi groups of the state. In the process of creation of a Jharkhandi political identity, it incorporated those non-Adivasis or *sadans* also, who were settled in the region a long time ago and were assimilated into the agrarian economy.[3] The demand continued to gain momentum in the 1980s-90s.

Munda and Mullick (2003: xvi) believe that the demand of Jharkhand and Chattisgarh were based on ethnicity and *Adivasiyat*. Since Jharkhand came into existence, the issues of domicile, benefits of the government sponsored social schemes for the Adivasis, implementation of Panchayati Raj Extension in Scheduled Areas (PESA) in fifth schedule areas of the state, Panchayati Raj in non-scheduled areas, land security and other issues have connected Adivasis together in state politics. Yet, we cannot deny this could not obfuscate, the propensity of dissensions and strains simmering within due to the linguistic and regional demands among the Adivasi communities in Jharkhand. The four dominant Adivasi groups namely Santhals, Oraons, Mundas and Hos have been voicing their demands for the constitutional recognition of their languages though these languages were devoid of written literature, and were classified at times as dialect. It becomes topical therefore to understand how language as a basis of ethnicity came to be publicly discoursed in the context of the Oraons.

Locating the Kurukh language of the Oraons

Oraons are indigenous Adivasis of India of Dravidian stock. They are one of the most populous Adivasis of India with an estimated demographic number of 3.5 to 4.5 million out of which 1,716,618[4] resides in Jharkhand alone, making them the second largest

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of Bihar since medieval period. He further claimed that Christian missionaries of the area aimed at conversion of the Adivasis and Jaipal Singh Munda, being one amongst them aimed to do so through government funds. He gave statistical accounts and provided copies of petition to support his contention.

[3] 'Emerging Jharkhandi Identity: Report on a Conference', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 18, No. 25 (Jun. 18, 1983), 1091-1092

[4] Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Lok Sabha Unstarred question No. 221, Answered on 17.07. 2017, www.indiaenvironmentaportal.org.in.downloaded on 20 Nov. 2018.

Adivasi community of the state (Oraon 2003: 310-23). British ethnographer Colonel Dalton (1872) is of the opinion that they might have been original inhabitants of Konkan region and in the process of migration have settled in Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Orissa. As Adivasis were looked upon as cheap labour by the colonial rulers, many Oraons were taken to work in the tea gardens of Assam, so there is substantial Oraon population there as well. A large population of Oraons also known as *Dhangars* reside in Chattisgarh. Oraons claim to have introduced the use of regular plough into Chota Nagpur plateau (Roy 1915: 9) that enabled the Adivasis of the region to lead a settled agrarian life.

Historians largely believed that the Oraons settled in Chotanagpur plateau around 100 B.C. They also call themselves Kurukh as their language is Kurukh.[5] Like most of the Adivasis of India, they are also devoid of written ancestral literature. Adivasi languages in Jharkhand belong to two language families – Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian. Kurukh and Malto belong to the Dravidian family and the rest to the Austro-Asiatic family. Kurukh is spoken in the districts of Gumla, Simdega, Lohardaga, and Ranchi by the Oraons, whereas Malto, a Dravidian language, is spoken by the Sauria Paharias and Mal Paharias. The Sauria Paharias are found in the Rajmahal Hills of Santhal Parganas. The areas in which the Oraons live in Jharkhand are close to the capital and urban settlement. So they normally speak Hindi or use Sadari as a language to communicate with non Oraons. In addition to it, in other states of India where Oraons are found as Chattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal and Assam, they are well versed with the language of the mainstream be it Hindi, Assamese, Bengali or Odia (Abbi 1995: 175-86).

Kurukh language Movement

The Adivasi languages of India are passing through a very critical stage in which a significant section of the Adivasi population show progressive trend of abandoning their traditional languages and declaring languages spoken by the mainstream as their mother tongue. The argument of excessive dominance of Hindi in north and central India and its growing influence in the lives of the people of the state is a resemblance of the tendency of the mainstreamisation of regional tendencies. Ongoing urbanization and industrialization have also left adverse impact on the usage of Adivasi languages as their mother tongue. Studies conducted in the area (Abbi 1995: 174-79) underlines that Adivasi languages as Kurukh and Kharia are fast disappearing from urbanised areas. Despite a strong effort by linguists, litterateurs, language activists and academicians, urban Adivasis don't take pride in speaking their mother tongue. On the contrary, ignorance of the Adivasi languages is regarded as an enhancement of status and prestige. In speaking Hindi they feel superior in comparison to other fellow-Adivasis who find it difficult to speak it. A study on Adivasi languages (Ishtiaq 1998: 197-98) has ascertained that amongst the Adivasi groups of Jharkhand, Santhals are not only conscious of their cultural heritage but are more serious in developing their language and use as their lingua franca communicate in their own tongue (Ishtiaq 1998: 189-200). Therefore, Santhali is the leading Adivasi language, recognised in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution and the language with its own popular script. To stem the rot and revive the language, Kurukh language movement began. The protagonists, like Adivasi

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[5] Many learned Oraon Adivasis as Karma Oraon, former Dean of Social Sciences, Ranchi University ,Diwakar Minj, Associate Professor, PG Department of History, Ranchi University, strongly object to refer these Adivasis as Oraons and assert that the correct name for them would be 'Kurukh'.

identarian movement, seemed to be inspired by the writings of ethnographer-administrators and missionaries.

The genre of literature written in this period was an attempt to understand their subjects for administrative convenience and Christian missionary activities. Missionaries visited villages by foot or on horseback, asked about everyday grievances, listened carefully to complaints and problems, advised on legal matters and offered lawyers to fight land alienation cases, used native preachers to spread the word regarding foreign assistance, and eventually, instructed and baptized whole villages (Chandra 2013 :146-47). Translations in English were done mainly by missionaries to know Kurukh vocabulary and their equivalent English meaning. In this attempt, British missionary, Rev. Batsch prepared the grammar of Oraon language in 1852 (Sen 2018: 32). A. Gringard compiled Oraon folktales in 1931 and published the book titled *Oraon Folklore*, which was followed by *Oraon-English Dictionary* in 1942. F. Hahn published *Kurukh Grammar* in 1898, *Oraon Vocabulary* in 1900 and *Kurukh Lokavarta* in 1905 (Devi 2015: 74). The interest of the colonialist further increased and with the help of a native Oraon, Dharmadas Lakra, the then Sub Divisional Officer of Gumla district, W.G Archer and Jesuit missionary F. Hahn published *The Blue Land.* This book published in 1940 is collection of 2660 songs and 440 riddles. It was also published in the Kurukh version titled *Leelkhora khekhel* (Tirkey 2013: 52-53). These writings were basically on Kurukh but in Roman script. All these identified them as a literary community.

The other genre of work on the Oraons by E.T. Dalton (1872), S.C. Roy (1915), W.G. Archer (1940) and the likes, was ethnographic. These scholars were fascinated by the Adivasi way of life. But they had a preconceived notion of their Arcadian simplicity that largely motivated them to document their oral sources with a sense of plainness. They heard riddles, folk songs, folk tales, festival songs, agricultural songs and wrote about them. They classified songs and dances into various categories and wrote them with their translations. Furthermore, they wrote on marriages, divorce, amusement, youth dormitories, searches for suitable bride, clinching ceremony, pre-marital status and condition of Oraon women were depicted. They believed that these oral traditions had a sexual, magical or symbolic significance (Archer: 2006). The above ethnographies served the important purpose of identifying the Oraons as a historic community, which provided the rationale for building later identity movements.

In Chotanagpur, the process of creating movement around language could be traced to the 1920s, when the upcoming Adivasi middle class started a movement to gain political autonomy, and gave a fillip to revivalism in art and literature, which sought to preserve and recreate many of the cultural symbols of the past. Probably the most dynamic of the identity movements in Middle India is the one based on the Santhali script, the *Ol Chiki*, fashioned by Raghunath Murmu in 1905. By writing text books in it, training teachers and opening schools the new script was popularised. A cultural movement was created by organising seminars, opening Cultural Samiti (1953), and publishing journal in Ol Chiki script. It also aimed at building up an all-embracing movement aimed at reforming the Santhal society and reviving its pristine element (Singh 1982: 1382).

Oraons, the Adivasi group demographically second only to the Santhals in Jharkhand, was quick to follow their precedent. A major change in the attitude of the educated Adivasi Oraons occurred when they started making more conscious and concerted efforts by setting definite goals. First is to make an attempt to create awareness among the Oraons to be closely associated with their language. Development of Kurukh

linguistically has been the other important objective. This the protagonists of the movement attempt to do through the creation of written literature by documenting oral and ancestral tradition and creating new literature. This was necessary because linguists classified Kurukh as a dialect due to absence of script. Surely, it is one of the 33 languages of India with more than one million speakers. But like any other Adivasi language of Jharkhand, it was devoid of a literary tradition and the entire spread of the language rested on its orality and oral traditions. The oral literature popularly known as the ancestral literature or *Purkha Sahitya,* especially by the Adivasi litterateurs of the contemporary period (Tete 2013) is the storehouse of information about their knowledge, custom and tradition. Due to the absence of script and literature, protagonists of the movement in its initial phases started collecting and preserving their oral traditions as the source of their ancestral knowledge and information.

Furthermore, Kurukh language activists felt that the development of an independent script was necessary to express their thoughts and documenting their cultural and oral traditions, besides legitimising their claim of a linguistic status. Among the Oraons, Narayan Oraon, an Oraon Adivasi, tried to develop *Tolong Siki* script for this language quiet late in 1999. This script was promoted by 'Kurukh Literary Society', a society created for the promotion of Kurukh language and culture on 14 October 2006.[6] It conducts conferences and seminars in different parts of India and neighbouring countries as Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan to popularise and promote this language.[7] The script is popularised by many organisations as Bhartiya Tolong Siki Pracharini Sabha, Aadi Kurukh Chala Dhumkuria Parha Akhara, Adivasi Chhatra Sangh, Kurukh (Oraon) Vikas Chatra Sangh and others. The script has not received the same kind of acceptance as was received by Ol Chiki (script of Santhali). So, the modern methods to popularise it are also being used. A mobile application for Kurukh language and script was brought by the Kurukh language activist to widen the outreach of the language to those educated people who are getting away from their language and culture.[8] Together with this, an attempt was made by Adivasi intellectuals to create contemporary literature in their languages. Their demand derived strength from the distinctiveness of their culture, religion, customs and traditions. This tendency led to the beginning of linguistic politics in the state of Jharkhand.

With the growth of nationalist fervour the objective of creating literature in Kurukh changed completely. It also changed the persons involved, motivated by the idea of kind of a self-search. Their attempts aimed at creating literature in Kurukh to strengthen Oraon identity in democratic politics. *Bij Binko* was the first journal that was published in Kurukh in 1940. Later, *Bolta* in 1949, *Dhumkuria* in 1950, *Kurukhan* in 1962 and such other journals were launched to popularise Kurukh and also to build the volume of literary writings in Kurukh (Tirkey 2013: 54). But all of them were short lived as they were individual attempts, largely of middle class educated Oraons, and lacked popular mass base. Lack of popular support was due to the fact that while majority of the Oraons were illiterate, a few of those who were in government services and other professions

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[6] The society got registered on 10 October 2007 in New Delhi. Since then the society has been organising annual conferences to promote creation of literature in Kurukh language. In 2009 the annual conference of the society was organised in Raipur in Chattisgarh, in 2012 in Ranchi and in 2018 it was organised in Chennai. After inclusion of Santhali and Bodo, the Adivasi language of Santhalis of Jharkhand and Bodos of Assam in the list of languages recognised by the constitution in 2010, Kurukh is raising similar demands. For details see www.kurukhworld.com, downloaded on 2 October 2018.

[7]*Hindustan*, Ranchi, 22 October 2018, 22.

[8]*Prabhat Khabar*, Ranchi, 29 December2018, 19.

remained largely aloof from it. However, the apathy of the latter seemed to wane when a Kurukh journal titled '*Sinagi Dai*' in Devanagari script was brought out in 1986 by Mahli Livins Tirkey, an erstwhile administrator, that is still in publication.

The purpose of writing the works was not simply to develop Kurukh as a language, rather it urged for recreating Oraon history and documentation of that aspect of the past that has been untold by the mainstream histories. In doing so they followed the same line as was done by the freedom fighters, during nationalist struggle. Glorification of past and reviving memories of heroes had strengthened the national movement, Oraons tried to do the same to make people realise their glorious cultural and political heritage. This resulted in the publication of *Oraon Sanskriti* by Brother Mikhail Kujur, S.J., *Oraon Sarna: Dharma aur Sanskriti,* by a retired civil servant Bhikhu Tirkey, *Tribal Origins and Culture* by Mahli Livins Tirkey, *Tribal Movements: A Study in Social Change* by Dr. Philip Ekka, S.J., an academic and Bishop of Jesuit society, *Innelanta* (Of nowadays) by legislator Ignace Tirkey, *Kurukh Purkha Xiree* (a collection of old and new stories) by Ahlad Tirkey, *Namhai Erpa* (Our home) a novel by Justine Ekka and such related works.

Linguistic Politics

Politicisation of the issue of language was the next important aspect of the linguistic movement. Language in India has a deep class and caste connotation, therefore a divergent relation with languages becomes a question of conflict of identities. India, which has 22 scheduled languages (the number increased from 18, when Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali were added to the list in 2003), has also seen some shift in the language profile of populations. In the 1961 Census of India, 1,652 mother tongues were recorded. However, the 2001 census listed only 234 identifiable mother tongues with 10,000 or more speakers each. In the context of Jharkhand, the people at the grass- root level have bothered less about religion and more about their tradition and culture. Choosing a literary language in this sense is a metaphor for choosing a distinctive identity that is not only cultural but social as well. Brass (1994: 175) opines that in contrast to the pluralist policies pursued by the government of India, many states have pursued discriminatory policies towards their linguistic minorities within their boundaries. With proportionately decreasing demographic trend in subsequent census, Adivasis in the region were invariably posited against the dominant regional community, which also happened to be a distinct linguistic and cultural community. There has been profound influence of the Hindus and especially Vaishnavism on the Mundas and the Oraons (Roy: 1917, Srivastava: 2002). They have also faced large scale conversion from Christian missionaries working in the area, yet the vibes in the social and literary sphere, resonates the feeling of overcoming religious differences by the assertion of *Adivasiyat*.

The major demands raised by the diverse linguistic groups in Jharkhand in front of government was recognition of their language as the second language of the state; teaching of these languages be done in schools and colleges, inclusion of the language in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution, conducting state level examination in the Adivasi languages and protection of the language and culture of the Adivasis through government aids. The demand for listing of language in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution has a symbolic and material advantage. It opens up the avenue of the protection of the language by the President of India on the advice of the commission for linguistic minorities against discrimination in use of the language and

representation on language development committees appointed by the central government.

The politics of language of Adivasi communities in India is closely associated with their demand for assertion of selfhood. Initially, the demand was politically taken up by the 'Jharkhand Party' that represented the aspirations of the Adivasis in Jharkhand. It included the programme of preservation and development of 'Adivasi culture' in its agenda in the general election of 1962. It also carried the demand for teaching Adivasi children in Adivasi languages in school and colleges (Tirkey 2002: 89-92). Since the 1990s political mobilisation of Adivasi groups had turned bitter and violent. Adivasi leaders organised a strong movement for assertion of their identity, recognition of their distinct ethnicity and economic right over the resources of the region together with the political demand of creation of a separate Jharkhand state. It was believed that North and central Bihar are prospering at the cost of South Bihar (now Jharkhand) and its mineral rich areas. It was believed that the rights of the Adivasis would be more secure in Adivasi dominated state. It became imperative for leaders of the movement to stroll the path of Pan-Adivasi regionalism cautiously. The diversity, including linguistic, that existed among different Adivasi communities was therefore kept at bay during the Jharkhand movement and the bond of Adivasiyat was highlighted as its main plank.

In Jharkhand, the phenomenon of linguistic politics had its origins in the colonial period but politics over demands for recognition of the Adivasi languages gained vigour after 2000, when the new state came into existence. The presence of large number of Adivasi groups brought them under a broad umbrella of 'Jharkhandi identity' but failed to create a distinct linguistic and cultural identity. Historically, the Mundas, Oraons, Santhals, Hos and others had their cultural distinctiveness that was more important for them, than their Pan-Adivasi identity. They wanted recognition of this identity that had been denied to them. In the course of constructing a political movement for creation of separate Jharkhand, the issue of linguistic identity got complicated further. Political leadership was hesitant in recognition of this separate linguistic and cultural identity. As accepting demands of one distinct linguistic group as Santhals, Mundas or Oraons would make speakers of one language group happy. But they would constitute only a small number of the Adivasi community staying in Jharkhand. At the same time, it would make a majority of other Adivasi groups whose demands and distinctiveness were not accepted displeased.

In this light, demand made by many Adivasi groups for the inclusion of the Adivasi languages in the list of second language of the state may be visualised. This demand has obviously symbolic, political and economic advantages. It signifies the importance and the position of its speakers in state politics, as also the creation of job opportunities in the language and protection of the language and culture. The demand for inclusion of Kurukh language in school and colleges has derived support from the provision of the Article 350A of the constitution that obliges every state and local authority to provide for adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children, belonging to linguistic minority groups (Basu 1997: 393-94). The use of mother tongue or local language in teaching school students has been a topic of debate across the country with some academicians claiming that the process may make the child uncomfortable in using mainstream languages such as Hindi and English and lower his self-confidence due to lack of ability to communicate. Despite these aspersions, in 2016 the education department of Jharkhand, planned that the students in state-run schools in Jharkhand will be given education in Hindi and Mathematics in Adivasi languages. The textbooks on the two

subjects were translated in Ho, Santhali, Mundari, Kurukh and Kharia languages for students of classes 1 to 3. The books were used from the academic session of 2016-17 in the schools run under 'Sarva Siksha Abhiyan'. The declared objective of the state government was to check the number of drop outs at the primary level.[9] However, the real motive of these efforts was to combat the steep decline in the quality of school education in the state, especially in rural areas.[10]

The efforts at inclusion of the Adivasi language in university education were raised when the state was part of Bihar. In 1980, Ranchi University became the first state university to have a department of 'Tribal and Regional Languages' to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Adivasis of the region.[11] Since then, nine Adivasi languages are taught here, namely Nagpuri, Mundari, Kurukh, Kharia, Kurmali, Santhali, Khortha, Panchpargania and Ho. Besides this Nilamber Pitamber University with its headquarter at Medininagar and the newly created Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee University, Ranchi teaches Kurukh in Jharkhand.[12] Different universities of the state teach dominant Adivasi language of their region in the university. Interestingly, Kolhan University with its headquarters at Chaibasa and Sido Kanhu Murmu University with its headquarter at Dumka have departments in Maithili, which is the regional language of Bihar. The existence of these language departments together with Bengali and Odia in other universities of Jharkhand has pushed the Adivasi languages to raise their demand with more vigour.

The demand of Adivasi language activists included the demand of inclusion in state service commission (JPSC). Existence of large number of Adivasi languages had made the issue problematic and instead of giving recognition to any one language, nine languages namely Nagpuri, Mundari, Kurukh, Kharia, Kurmali, Santhali, Khortha, Panchpargania and Ho were recognised by JPSC in 2016. It is observed that these kinds of demands are raised in various states where linguistic communities are trying to carve a niche for itself. With the issue of *Adivasi-Moolvasi* (tribes and original inhabitants) gaining strong position in the state politics, the demand for inclusion of Adivasi language in Staff Selection Commission (SSC) meant for selection of class 3 and 4 staff was also made. Nine Adivasi languages were included in the scheme of languages to promote entry of more Jharkhandis into the government jobs and restrict the entry of outsiders in the government offices.[13]

This step acted as a boost to the drooping morale of the Adivasis in the state and many non Adivasi students also took interest in learning the language in an attempt to qualify for the limited government jobs. Satya Bharti, a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) in Ranchi started organising classes in Kurukh and Mundari. First batch found few takers and four students enrolled in Kurukh class and six in

[9]*Hindustan Times*, Ranchi, 24 November 2015, https://www.hindustantimes.com/ranchi/tribal-students-in-jharkhand-can-now-learn-hindi-maths-in-mother-tongue/story, downloaded on 18 November 2018.

[10] The latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2014, had highlighted that 55.7% class 1 students in rural Jharkhand cannot recognise letters of the English alphabet, while 53.7% students of the same class cannot recognise single-digit numbers. The report further revealed that due to an extremely bad situation in the lower classes, where most of the class 8 students could not even recognise the letters of English alphabet.

[11]www.ranchuniversity.ac.in, downloaded on 19 November 2018.

[12]*Hindustan*, Ranchi, 7 October 2018, p.24.

[13]*The Indian Express*, Ranchi, 21 November 2018, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/from-now-more-questions-on-state-tribal-languages-option-in-jharkhand-civil-service-exams-280781.

Mundari. These included two non Adivasi students as well. The prospect of keeping the language as a subject in JPSC exam widened the array of the languages and gave them much needed popularity and acceptability among all students.[14] Kurukh was recognised as the official language of the state in 2003 with 'Tolong Siki' as its script but the students were allowed to appear in final exam with this language only in February 2016.[15] The script developed by Dr. Narayan Oraon, a paediatrician by training. Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore which has also developed new scripts for languages such as Lambadi and Santhali, also assisted in the process of developing this script.

Assertion of Oraon Identity

The efforts to evolve a script and build up indigenous literature in Adivasi languages could be seen as part of an overall movement in Jharkhand to define and assert Adivasi identity. The objective vacillated from the preservation of the pure and pristine elements of culture to the movement for political autonomy. In a multi-lingual state like Jharkhand, where each Adivasi group has its own language and the non-Adivasi groups speak various languages as Nagpuri, Bengali, Hindi, Odia and English, recognition of a common language remains a tricky issue. In Jharkhand, it is observed that more than one Adivasi groups reside in an area and they are generally found to speak languages other than their mother tongue (the chances that they know one dominant lingua franca and their ancestral language together with one or more Adivasi language is also observed).

Democratic politics of India has given vigour to Adivasis of Jharkhand and they are trying to assert their unique status through their language, culture and customs. While it has the chances to fulfil the aspirations of the protagonists of pan Adivasi identity at the same time it has the potential to disenchant many other groups. Linguistic factor can therefore act as a force of cohesion as well as disintegration. In this regard, Virginius Xaxa (2005: 1369), an Adivasi Scholar, is of the opinion that the movement connected with language and tradition is primarily concerned with enriching the content of the identity created in the process of interaction between Adivasis and non-Adivasis. Articulation of identity is most pronounced among Adivasis where an educated middle class has emerged. Recent wave of Adivasi assertion has witnessed linguistic assertion of the Oraons, who have taken up the task of creation of literature in Kurukh which is not mere documentation of Oral traditions.[16] The demand for recognition of Kurukh must be understood in this backdrop. Educated Oraons have taken up writing stories, novels and poetry which have brought a new genre of literature to the fore.

Kurukh is spoken by the Oraons and in some regions also by the Kharias. In their attempt not to be submerged by the mainstream, particularly that of Hindi, the Oraons appear keen to develop their own script to promote the growth of their language and literature. These efforts seem to challenge the use of Devanagari as the script of Kurukh

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[14]Arti S Sahuliyar, 'Smart way to learn tribal language', *The Telegraph*, 18 November 2016, shttps://www.telegraphindia.com/states/jharkhand/smart-way-to-learn-tribal-tongues/cid/1316632, Downloaded on 18 November 2018.

[15]www.jharkhandstatenews.com, 22 February 2016. Downloaded on 20 November 2018.

[16] Initial studies on Oraons done largely by Colonel Dalton, S.C Roy, W. G Archer and even new works done by Bhiku Tirkey and the likes have tried to document the oral tradition of the Oraons. See, E.T Dalton, *The Oraons: Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872, Section 1. S.C Roy, *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur: Their History, Economic life and Social Organisation*, author, Bar Library, 1915. W.G Archer, *The Blue Grove: The Poetry of the Uraons,* New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 2006. Bhikhu Tirkey, *Oraon Sarna: Dharm Aur Sanskriti*, Ranchi Jharkhand Jharokha, 2011.

language across universities in Jharkhand.[17] This departs from the trend of Adivasi languages of Jharkhand (with the exception of Santhali and Ho) using Devanagari i.e.., the script of Hindi language, as their script. The promotion and revitalisation of Adivasi languages and the creation of primers, literature and even introducing the Adivasi language in primary schools has been voiced. Connected to it is the search or development of a script, as has been the case with the Santhals or the Tripuri speaking Adivasis in Tripura (Singh 1982: 1382). The choosing of the script from among scripts Adivasis are familiar with, has also formed a part of identity articulation, as has been the case of the Bodos of Assam. The Kurukh activists have also raised the demand for inclusion of Kurukh in the Eighth Schedule. The demand for listing of language in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution has a symbolic and material advantage. It opens up the avenue of the protection of the language by the President of India on the advice of the commission for linguistic minorities against discrimination in use of the language and representation on language development committees appointed by the central government. However, these attempts are rooted in the urban set up and are not widely popular. The Kurukh activists have also raised the demand for inclusion of Kurukh in the Eighth Schedule. However, the attempts are rooted in the urban set up and are not widely popular. These efforts received partial victory when the Kurukh activists succeeded in getting their script Tolong Siki, recognised as the script of Kurukh from Jharkhand and West Bengal government.[18]

The articulation of identity amongst the Oraons has, however, not been confined to the cultural-linguistic movements alone. It is visible in another direction as well. It is most pronounced in regions where an educated middle class has emerged and is trying to accrue benefits for the Oraons on the basis of language. One such is seeking employment through education by urban Oraon educated middle class. They believe that securing of government jobs in schools and colleges on the basis of language is a mark of the recognition of their as a distinct ethnic identity, besides helping them gain benefits from the existing schemes of government. Furthermore, many Adivasi intellectuals strongly believe that the consciousness evident in such articulation is not the consciousness of Adivasi as a category but that of being a people different from the others and especially the dominant regional community. This in a way bolsters up Adivasi sub-nationalism that is gaining strength in the north eastern Adivasi states of India and such Adivasi-dominated states of central India as Jharkhand and Chattisgarh. It aims at economic and political empowerment of the Adivasi communities, even if it is very limited.

Understanding the language debate and estimation of Kurukh

It becomes clear, therefore, that language debate in India in contemporary period largely centres on the attempts of many people efforts to keep their language and culture alive in the increasing identity politics of a democratic nation. These efforts are closely associated with the economic aspirations of its speakers who are trying to get more space in government departments, government aided schools and colleges,

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[17] Ajay Kumar Tirkey, 'Kurukh Samaj Aur Sanskriti', in Ranendra eds., *Jharkhand Encyclopaedia: Mandar Ki Dhamak, Gulaichi Ki Khusboo*, New Delhi, Vani Prakashan. *Jharkhand Encyclopaedia: Mandar Ki Dhamak, Gulaichi Ki Khusboo*, New Delhi, Vani Prakashan, 2008, 105-120. Devnagari is the script of Hindi and many Adivasi communities of Jharkhand are writing in the Adivasi languages in this script. Interestingly this script is also followed in the universities of Jharkhand where Adivasi languages are taught. In the process of creation of spaces languages are asserting themselves but when it comes to written script Devnagari script rules the roost.

[18] *Dainik Bhaskar,* Ranchi, 26 December 2018, 8.

etc. It is also widely believed that this will administratively and politically make them the dominant community in the state.

Political parties and language activists are also using language as a tool to strengthen their support base especially among the people of their region. It gives opportunities to aspiring linguistic politicians to extend the lure of government jobs and creating opportunities in the spaces where they are familiar and clearly ahead than the mainstream. Educationists argue that the use of the mother tongue can boost the self-esteem of marginalised people. In this light, Dr Karma Oraon, an academician of Ranchi University, observed 'The tribal society is realising that if we don't teach the native language to our children, they may later develop an identity crisis'.[19]

There is yet another side to this story. In a state which has 16 languages recognised as second state language namely Urdu, Santhali, Mundari, Ho, Kharia, Kurukh, Kurmali, Khortha, Nagpuri, Odia, Panch Pargania, Bangla, Magahi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Angika, language has become a favourite tool of successive governments to please all. The last four languages were included in the list of second language in 2018.[20] It may be argued that by acting in this manner, the Jharkhandi political class have taken steps to take away precious government funds from deserving Jharkhandi languages. It is presumed that the languages spoken by a large number of people as Santhali and Kurukh are treated at par with Panch Pargania which has very few speakers. Instead of benefitting languages by including them in the list of second languages it has increased the chances of governments being unmoved by the demands of its speakers. As speakers of demographically small group are kept at par with those of the large groups, giving government room for not considering their demands sincerely.

The rise in literacy rate in India has seen the overall literacy rate among the Adivasis also steadily increasing. It has increased from 27.5% in 1991 census to 40.7% in 2001 census. The literacy rate among the Oraons has been highest i.e. 52.5% and 40.8% among the females. In fact, Oraons have the highest number of graduates among the Adivasis.[21] Proximity of the Kurukh speakers with urban areas and awareness created among them can be attributed for this growth. This growth in literacy has not transformed into love for Kurukh rather it has increased the popularity of Hindi which has become the *lingua franca* of the state. Contact-induced changes in languages have a tendency to homogenize an area of once-distinct speech communities. In Jharkhand, Kurukh has moved towards a linguistic restructuring that brings them close to Hindi which is spoken by the majority of the population of the state, despite efforts of language activists.

Conclusion

This overview of Oraon language movement reveals that Oraon society is in a double bind. At one level, Oraon linguists are deeply concerned about preserving their language, which is the carrier of their history, identity, culture, information and their association with their land. Original literature is being created in Kurukh to make it

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[19]*Times of India*, Ranchi, 28 December 2008.

[20] 'Jharkhand gives second language status to Magahi, Angika, Bhojpuri and Maithali', www.uniindia.com, Posted on 21 March 2018, downloaded on 20 November 2018

[21]Jharkhand data highlights: The Scheduled Tribes, Census of India 2001, www.censusindia.gov.in, downloaded on 20 Nov. 2018.

more socially acceptable, especially for the younger generation. On the other level, constitutional provisions or recognition of the language as the second language of the state has not created a level playing field for Kurukh. In the democratic politics, political parties have worked more towards evolving a regional identity based on ethnicity for Adivasis that unites them, instead of highlighting the distinctiveness of language and culture that divides them into small groups. With the emergence of a middle class, the issue of language, culture, tradition, livelihood, even control over land and resources as well as a demand for a share in the benefits of the projects of modernity has become an integral part of identity articulation among the Adivasis (Xaxa 2005: 1363-70). Beyond this political paradigm of the movement is the cultural assertion of the Adivasis, where they refuse to be assimilated or incorporated in the 'Great Traditions'. They are demanding this greatness for their traditional systems. With the recognition of Kurukh as the second language of West Bengal, it is clear that language politics has not lost its sheen in the Indian political arena.

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Tribes at the Borderland: Locating 'Pakistani Hindu Bhils' in Jodhpur, Rajasthan

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Abstract

This research paper identifies the Pakistani-Hindu-Bhils as a borderland community to enable an understanding of borders as a social space. I advance this discussion by consolidating the cultural and material realities of borderland communities especially in the South Asian context. To question the precarity of their identity vis-à-vis the borderland location, I further the argument of tribes facing dual exclusion on account of being Hindu minorities in Pakistan and a Scheduled Tribe in India. Although this is not to simplistically emphasize binaries rather understand the irreconcilable identities that the cross border community undergoes upon forced migration. The paper challenges the mainstream understanding of cross-border displacement and treatment towards borderland communities. The border experienced by people who cross them, live there, is vastly different from how states imagine the borderlands. This is contextualised and an attempt to evaluate epistemic thinking on borderlands through tribes located there is made.

Introduction

While on my ethnographic fieldwork in Jodhpur, Rajasthan I met an American PhD Scholar in Anthropology also conducting field research. Upon conversation and chance meetings in the field, it was understood that not only did our research interests significantly overlap but also the community that we were interested in carrying out exploratory study with was the Pakistani-Hindu-Bhils located in Jodhpur, India. I used the above term of address; she used the term of address more attached to the refugee status of the community. Almost instantly and intuitively, I started asking questions of methodology in our now established common field of enquiry, the tribes of the Borderlands. One key question that remained relevant was that what was going to be a starting point of enquiry for my American colleague to carry out her responsibilities as an anthropologist to study tribes in the western borderlands of India. The terms of address used for this community with an unstable status, transitory location and multiple identities owing to their cross-border displacement and their history was something I was grappling with personally.

I immersed in studying the community at Jodhpur, majority of them Bhils, and the subsequent pattern of mobility they undertook and challenges of their conflicting citizenship aspirations. To study the history of tribes of Rajasthan became important as a methodological site to understand identity that remains influx. To understand changes in identity formation and politics became a reason for me to explore the circulation of tribal

identity categories in anthropological and political discourses that exemplify the continuing and politicised process of group identification (Weisgrau 2013).

The Bhils have been engaged in a struggle of staking a claim to Indian citizenship since the 1965 Indo-Pak war. This political uncertainty has affected their sense of self, community and identity. Presented below are vignettes that depict the anxiety and precarity of their existence. The Indian state categorises them as 'Pakistani-Hindus' which in many ways represents the paradox of their situation. In being considered as Pakistanis, they at the Indian side of the border experience alienation and discrimination from the local community, customs officials, state officials etc. And in being perceived as Hindus on the Pakistani side, there is constant pressure from Pakistan and the local community to relocate to India. Cohorts comprising of local goons, Taliban and maulvis subject Hindu minorities to intimidation and violence forcing them to leave their villages.

For the current paper, I start with vignettes of Bhils which expresses their anxiety and concern about the precarity of identity in relation to the location at the borderlands. I explore the idea of the 'Hindu Bhils' with respect to who they are and how the status categories become a part of their political identity. They aspire to gain Indian citizenship and hence the Bhils become practising Hindus in terms of rituals and everyday religious practices. The Bhils referred to here now address themselves as Hindu Bhils to distinguish themselves but more importantly to represent themselves to the Indian state as 'natural citizens'[1] of India. This further enhances their struggles and vulnerabilities in seeking Indian citizenship after crossing the international border. Further, engagement with the ethnographic illustration of the Bhils located at the borderland is carried out to understand how they seek to negotiate with the state to gain citizenship.

Kamala voiced her understanding of the border and what relevance the border has personally for her family while at *Dali Bai ka Mandir* informal community settlement in Jodhpur. The angst of separation of family members is depicted and the challenges of the everyday while Kamalaji consistently tries to apply for citizenship in India.

> We came here on the train to Bhagat ki Kothi station. So many people come this side of the border and think whether to go to Delhi or stay in Jodhpur. Some come on tourist visa and others come with the Jatha, you know religious groups. We came as part of the jatha and first went to Haridwar then Delhi and Mathura. We submitted our papers in Jaisalmer. Crossing border was little easy because of the jatha (pilgrimage visa) arrangement. We are Hindus this is the right place for us, this side of the border is our old village. The border makes it very difficult for us, my parents still live that side of the border in Sanghar district of Sindh. My four brothers are also there in Sindh, my husband's mother and his six sisters are also there. This border has divided our big family. They can only come to visit sometimes with Jatha and then they stay with us for one month (the duration of the pilgrimage visa). Sometimes if it is easy they try for tourist visa and visit us, basically anything to cross the border and be with us and our children. My husband and my children are now this side of the border after selling a lot of things and spending money, we will wait for things to improve on this side I think (Kamala ji, October 2015, Dali Bai ka Mandir, Jodhpur).

H.S. Sodha is a social activist with Pak-Visthapit Sangh (PVS) and was himself part of cross border migration post 1971 war phase.

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[1] What is being asserted through the Hindu Bhil identity of the rightful claims of gaining citizenship in India

It is true the Bhils gain it and lose it (their identity). Previously, they had an identity based on their migratory pattern from desert area to the other borderland area but then partition took place and they became Pakistani nationals. Yet they were not entirely Pakistani nationals since Bhils associate themselves to the Hindu identity. Now they came here, Indian side of the borderland and had to renegotiate their identities. If you ask me there is always official and unofficial identities and attributes that they have changed throughout their lives. The Bhils have gone there (Pakistan) from Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Thar or other such places. We still associate them and they themselves associate with identity of this (Indian) side of the border, actually of the time when there was no border, no differences at all. This identity runs parallel with their culture and practices. We are also worried how to preserve this culture. They have full right over their culture maybe now you can call it borderland culture. We need to move forward and explore this region and its people with an open mind but that does not mean we separate them from others in the Indian society which is happening at the moment. These people come from Pakistan, so their integration into our society is very important. This is actually their original village. If we drew maps of Dhat region all the villages will fall under it (HS Sodha, Jodhpur, September 2015).

Through the above narrative, it can be inferred that identity assigned and one that a community assumes along with social role, perception and use of space are inherently political and constantly in flux. The Hindu Bhils are dynamically engaged with one another and contribute to its creation through language, location, culture, and regional politics. This constant engagement is where the contestation arises for the Hindu Bhils and hence they seek permanent citizenship and consider it as a stabiliser of their future. Although, through the investigation of borders we realise that there can be no hegemonic dominance of any specific social theory. Whether critical or not, the understanding of space such as the borderlands and its social significance can be arrived at by understanding the individuals who occupy it and their 'lifeworlds'.

Kishenji, a Bhil volunteer with PVS, was himself a cross border migrant who got citizenship in 2002. He started working for PVS in order to help and bring the voice of his community forward. He explained the blurred nature of borders as lived spaces of Bhils as I interviewed him in Jodhpur.

See, these cross border migrants are being displaced and relocating as a minority of Pakistan. The reason they decided to do this is religious discrimination faced. So in a way crossing the border becomes like seeking refuge for them. If you consider the definition of refugees, they fulfil all the requirements yet they have not been granted refugee status because India has not signed on to the refugee conventions. This is not their problem but problem in state policy…so these are Pakistani minority migrants who have now decided to resettle in the Indian borderlands for various reasons as you know. Particularly the Bhil community and Meghwals were initially travelling to the fertile land of Punjab and Sindh (which is now in Pakistan) to escape the drought prone region in Rajasthan to find stable livelihood options. Now it's the same families that are trying to transcend the borders and come back to their ancestral villages that they had once left in search of work and livelihood (Kishenji, Banar road, Jodhpur, September 2015).

Kishenji highlights the reason that Hindu Bhils provide for leaving villages in Pakistan. The community was transcending these borders in the past in search of work and livelihood and found themselves caught in the state policies once the border was drawn. Borderland can be seen as 'transitory zones' or as spaces where dynamics between state and its nationals (as well as non-citizens who have recently arrived) are most apparent. The geographic region around the national boundary or the borderland area witnesses this socio-political effect. These interactions become complex with the

presence of state, local people and the newly arrived migrants seeking to assimilate in these borderlands. The local social relations help make meaning of the political scenario of the city.

Further explaining from his experience from the 1971 phase, H.S. Sodha states how the border migration has taken place in different phases. He had finished his high school in Pakistan after which his family relocated to Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

One can easily understand the Hindu Bhils (Mr Sodha insists on calling them Pak-Minority migrants) migrating to India in three phases. First group that migrated post 1965, then those who migrated in 1971 (approximately 90,000). The recent group was post 1992 phase and they are still migrating every other week, via the rail route reaching Bhagat ki Kothi, Jodhpur from Karachi, Pakistan. Roughly we can estimate how many people from the Bhil and Meghwal community are there in the 1971 group, which is the major group. The percentage would not be less than 90%. The rest 10% is comprised of other communities Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Suthars, Darzis, Malis, Charans, etc. The people from 1965 phase are originally from Thar Desert area and had gone to the fertile lands of Punjab and Sind. It is human nature to always have something constructive in your mind. In fact I want to say that these men of Thar Desert have a total range of how they get skilled and what they do with those skills. They even took up singing, folk songs especially. They used to voice their problems and lacunae through these innovative processes. I want to mention again the majority are scheduled caste and scheduled tribes which are 90% as I mentioned who cross over the border periodically and even now in contemporary times. They prefer settling close to the border and villages around it.

The above narrative unravels the aspect of understanding border through time and how it has been transcended by individuals for livelihood purposes and dignity as well as in search of stable living conditions. Majority community members crossing the border are scheduled caste and tribes as mentioned and carry out livelihood opportunities as and when they arise and changes with the location. The changes through time occurred from being a pastoral community, to agricultural labourers and currently are working in the stone quarries on the outskirts of Jodhpur city as daily wage labourers/manual labourers. They prefer to settle at the borderlands since their ancestral villages were located here before they migrated to Pakistan.

As nations came to be identified and marked with majoritarian identities, the marginal communities on borders struggled to find dignity and citizenship. The Hindu Bhils who decide to relocate highlight a strong association with India and their idea of the Hindu identity although Gumanaram's family has been holding Pakistani nationality thus far. They explain this intimacy across the borders by way of their movement across the borders which are highlighted below through Gumanaram Bhil's story.

In a way we are coming back home, our forefathers were labourers in Rajasthan and used to work on the fields in Punjab as well. I was born in the undivided India and there is no meaning of partition for me. The borders were always porous until the Indo-Pak war broke out in 1965. The territorial division of the subcontinent that happened during the partition of 1947 was a result of decisions taken at the centre by political leaders of both the Indian National Congress and Muslim League. Our opinions, us common people were never considered during partition. We have had to go through the process of displacement many times over because of that. We have had to take on identities and nationalities by force and it has left us as people actually belonging 'nowhere' (Gumanram, Kaliberi September 2015).

Nenuram, a cross border Bhil from the post 1992 phase who was doing a degree in primary school training at Allama Iqbal Open University, had to come to India halfway through his coursework. He explained:

> The Babri Masjid incident had a big impact on our daily lives in Pakistan. Youth, students, non-students everyone was attacked and many temples were broken. There was no support provided for the Hindus even by the Police. No one used to speak for us or support us. The goons included members of the Taliban and we would never go to any authority or official in Pakistan to voice our troubles in fear of them (Kaliberi, September 2015).

According to Vimla, who came from Sanghar district in Sindh, resided in a kutcha house near Dali Bai ka Mandir in Jodhpur with her five children voiced her predicament by explaining the difficulty of transitioning.

> The border was drawn fifty or sixty years ago, we went there (Pakistan) before that. Much before the border was made, yes. There were camels, horses and donkeys that we used to cross the border, it was simple. My mother has died and so has my husband, so life is difficult, very difficult. Now we have come to Jodhpur by train, we got down at Bhagat ki Khoti station there were so many Hindus. All my small children came with me but the elder one stayed back in Sanghar district in Sindh Pakistan. He has his family there and did not want to come here. He does want to come here to visit me sometimes using the same train Thar Express from Karachi to Jodhpur (Dali Bai ka Mandir, Jodhpur).

The above narrative makes apparent the unsettling nature of things that entails the life of the Hindu Bhil migrants. It strikingly speaks of the divided family and the symbolic bridge that the railway line between Karachi and Jodhpur has become. In a way, the physical border has also taken the shape of a border among them and describes the everyday dilemma of living in separation from family members. The Bhil woman Vimla laments of the history of the border drawing and sees it as a constant legislative struggle that they were put through after it. The idea of a porous border was strong in her imagination, and the idea of state a foreign concept. Eventually, it is understood by her that the state governs all actions and they get especially pronounced around the borderlands given the centrality of security concerns.

Who are the Pak-Hindu-Bhils

Numerous tribal and nomadic communities have historically been inhabitants of Rajasthan. The tribes in Rajasthan constitute approximately 12.6% of the total population (Census 2011). Bhils and Minas are found as the majority tribal population in the state of Rajasthan, although Bhils are the largest tribe there. The Bhils were shifting cultivators as well as pastoralists. Families in a group would move from one agricultural land to another since shifting cultivation involves a lot of displacement including across present day India and Pakistan.

The Hindu Bhils as a community have ethnolinguistic origins in the Thar Desert area and part of the historical categories within pre-partition India. The commonalities across the border once united as the Indian subcontinent witnessed shared culture, tradition and language. The identification of the communities settled at the borderlands then comes through a common past and common language (Dhatki) which is seen disappearing in contemporary times. The fact that the Pak-Hindus are in

the process of gaining stable citizenship in India, they at once adapt towards and detach from attributes mentioned above.

In the context of Pakistan, the Hindu minorities are understood to be segregated as 'upper caste' (Jati) and 'lower caste' (Scheduled Caste)[2] in the Pakistan census. This is in contrast to the tribal identity that is given to Bhils in the Indian context. This identity has several implications for them and more often than not becomes a challenge for the Bhils due to stratification both in India and Pakistan. The history of social order in the region as such dictates the everyday lives and processes leading to vulnerabilities for the tribal community. These include local nexus standing against the minority population in the rural areas leading to constant fear of and acts of persecution. Gaining access to basic state services and a citizenship status, therefore, becomes that much more difficult for the Bhils who arrive into the Indian border state of Rajasthan.

In both cases, that is, India and Pakistan, the state dictates minorities or marginalised communities to take on identities that they do not necessarily associate with. A mechanism is thus created by the State to maintain an unstable status, not provide services or rehabilitation to the Bhils who are eager to resettle in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. The Hindu Bhils form the majority of the cross-border migrants but it was understood in the field that the community also comprises of Meghwals, Suthars, Lohars, Sodha Rajputs, and other nomadic population. It is made evident that this 'Hindu' identity overwhelmingly impinges on the Bhils as part of the politics of majoritarianism. Hence, the Bhils having arrived into the Indian territory find this as an adaptive step towards aligning with the 'laws of the land' in one way and seek acceptance through identifying with the Hindu identity.

Notions of fixity of borders and mobility across the borders become essential to understand in the case of Hindu Bhils. Especially for the community, questions such as, how to reconfigure identity becomes vital. The social memory of undivided India is strong for the cross border migrants. Pakistani identity was forced on the Bhils by virtue of becoming citizens of Pakistan. Thus, it resulted in subsequent negotiations on an everyday basis for Hindus in a country following Islam as its state religion. Furthermore, the Bhils were entirely disconnected from the decision making process of the Partition owing to their socio-economic status, a majority of them being unlettered and the historical marginalisation faced by the community.

The community of Hindu Bhils are faced with the decision of leaving their villages in Pakistan. This is primarily done in fear of persecution and also in aspiration of stability in India. Crossing the border becomes an important decision to take for it involves a large shift in their everyday living socially and legally. According to Newman (2006a: 178) in Gellner (2013).

> For some the crossing of the border is an option, while for others it is an existential issue. It is often latter, those that just find a way across the border if they are to survive, who find it the hardest to cross, if only because they deemed undesirable by the border gatekeepers who maintain control over entry and exit.

Amidst varying facets of the Pakistan society and state relations, the decision of the Hindu Bhils of relocating can be understood when the foundation principles presented by

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[2]All scheduled castes are treated as Hindus and belong to the lowest caste. Historically disadvantaged, this group primarily includes communities such as Meghwal, Koli, Bhils, Jogi, Bagri etc in Pakistan. Constitutional safeguards outlaw discrimination based on caste, although in practice the Government of Pakistan has taken no steps to eliminate the practice of discrimination.

Jinnah (Qaid-e-Azam or great leader) were not upheld, including protection of minorities, political participation and socio-cultural practices. Further, CPD report (2008) confirmed physical attacks, social stigmatisation, psychological insecurity, forced conversions and continued institutional degradation characterising the position of minorities in Pakistan. Attacks on minority groups have been rampant in recent times and it also depicts the decreasing trust and peaceful coexistence at the society level. It is unfair to conclude, however, that Pakistani society, on the whole, is intolerant and intent upon eliminating pluralism.

It should be known that a small number of militants exploit the political lapses and economic crisis of the rest, and these gather momentum within a non-democratic system. This is essentially a non-state actor's scheme for their personal motives. The politics of disempowerment, minority rights, international or regional geopolitical factors further fuel this already hostile environment. It is amplified by prevailing prejudices stemming from ignorance about other religious traditions and by stereotypes of Hindus (as a strong other), Christians, Kalasha, Shias and others. The religious extremists, specifically anti minority cohorts inflame hatred through the mosques and on the streets, against non-Muslim minorities as well as against (Shia) Ismailis and Zikris.

The Pakistani-Hindu Bhils are the Hindu minorities in Pakistan located in the Sindh and Punjab provinces in specific districts such as Mirpur Khas, Bahawalpur. They belong to the lowest hierarchical frame of the Hindu caste system and are essentially tribals, dalits, and nomads who find their position further vulnerable. The participation in local, regional, and national politics is not equitable for religious minorities, while government employment positions are inaccessible. It is evident that a nation needs an internal other, whereby Hindus end up homogenising the community of Hindus in Pakistan leading to an almost invisible status to the most vulnerable Scheduled Caste section of Hindus.

Furthermore, events that occur across the border (in India) have a strong impact on social life in the villages of Pakistan where Hindu Bhils reside. Respondents had revealed incidents of violence during discussions at the fieldsite at *Kaliberi* (Bhil Basti) Jodhpur which highlighted this treatment. Hindus were being targeted in entirely unprovoked incidents in Pakistan where religious minorities resided. It was seen as a ripple effect of atrocities meted with Muslims in India and these became a common occurrence. Centre for Peace & Development (CPD) report (Balochistan, Pakistan) on minorities in certain provinces of Pakistan (2008) provided information on mob attacks taking place and blasphemy cases registered against the non-Muslim population.

Therefore, a clear instance of a nation creation that excluded its minorities comes to the fore. Minority community of Hindus in Pakistan had sufficient stratification that enabled privileged Hindus to either leave Pakistan at the time of Partition or have sustainable businesses as well as professional positions. The case of the Bhils in Pakistan is that of vulnerable within the minority and is one of complete exclusion and deprivation. My argument that the Bhils are marginalised on both sides of the borders depicts the status deprived communities hold in the Subcontinent. The post-colonial setup enhanced the vulnerabilities of this community by creating borders and question of citizenship in flux for the Hindu Bhils emerged with political implications for the entire South Asian region.

Limited Inclusion and Marginality at the Borderlands

The uneven treatment meted to religious minorities especially the Hindu Bhils was emphasised in most conversations had at the fieldsite in Jodhpur across the informal settlements of the Bhils. Especially, lack of cooperation by the state officials was mentioned, such as the police being prejudiced, cases of false accusation and/or non-registering of complaints made against the majority. The post-1992 era saw an increased number of Hindu temples being broken in Pakistan. The Hindus were forced to move out of the cities, the few of them who had shops in the marketplace were forced to shut them down.

Incidents of threats to the families, kidnapping for ransom, taking material for free were narrated by Hindu Bhil migrants repeatedly and as reasons for relocation to Jodhpur, Rajasthan. These anti-minority groups/cohorts comprise of goons, local politicians and village level religious clerics who are essentially propagating a biased perspective and initiate tensions within the local community in villages of Sindh. As aptly explained by (Gazdar 2013) the inequalities are all-pervading across class and caste and specifically in 'local configurations of power' in Pakistan. The most vulnerable lower caste Hindu such as the Bhils find themselves situated in an 'intersection of inequality which remains hidden from public and policy discussion, and yet powerful enough to perpetuate forms of social exclusion'.

The Bhils form the most marginalised section as well as the most neglected insofar as access to service and security is concerned. The changing power structure within a country highly impacts the status of the vulnerable minorities, which is the lowest caste within the Hindu minority in the current context. The state institution's disinterest and lackadaisical attitude towards this section, in particular, make the environment highly unsafe for the lower caste Hindus in Pakistan. The vulnerability owing to their caste and class identity increases the risks of violence against the Hindu Bhils in the Pakistani context.

Apart from this, an observed identity struggle for the Pak-Hindu Bhils, both in representation and practice exists. Although one may assume that local society is devoid of state and its tenets but the implications of the state's attitude and practices define the treatment and challenges minority communities' face at the local level. Social relations change dramatically when the minorities are presented with a lack of institutional support in a region with a dominant religious framework. These interactions within several districts of Sindh are not necessarily directed by the state institutions but the fact that the state authorities let the local leaders, religious clerics, and goons who propagate hate and communal binaries, create a disharmonious environment with extensive security lapses waiting to occur.

The Bhils during field discussion brought forth the intensely negative circumstances of the minorities in Sindh owing especially to the lack of police help and structural support. The situation with the Hindus, including both upper caste and lower caste families in rural areas, are at risk with their daughters being threatened to be kidnapped and forcibly married. It was mentioned after spending considerable time interacting with the same family, the matter of forced conversion is particularly serious with spurts of violence occurring as a ripple effect of events taking place in India and treatment meted with the Muslim minority in India. Forced conversions occur across the Hindu community and specifically among scheduled caste in provinces of Pakistan. It is prevalent in both urban and rural villages accompanied by violence and kidnapping as mentioned earlier. To quote:

> Tukaram's wife was abducted along with her child and was forcibly married after conversion and the news was published in the local newspaper which is how Tukaram found out about his wife and their child. This incident (as it is common practice) brought extensive shame and questions of pride amongst the community. Additionally, the female member of the family once abducted is considered dead and the struggle to get her back is strenuous, time-consuming and one that incites further backlash. This led to further threats of anti-blasphemy charges being given to the Hindu Bhil family members to prevent action being taken against the perpetrators. Eventually, this incident led for the family deciding to relocate to the Indian side of the border. (Kaliberi, Jodhpur, September 2015)

The interactions at Foreigner Registration Office (FRO) office at high court maintained the privileged status of the wealthy Hindu merchants and a few professionals that had remained in Pakistan. They were generally offered protection, however, had little recognition in society. Although affluent, they did not enjoy equal status in Pakistani society. Hence, one could observe certain professional or merchant class Hindus were treated better and faced less violence, albeit they never achieve a 'full citizen status'. It highlights the forced marginality towards Hindu Bhils in the rural areas and certain urban pockets in Sindh and Punjab provinces. The marginalised status attached to the Bhils makes domination from the majority and a systemised subjugation part of Pakistani society. The Islamic majority and Hindu minority debate in Pakistan enables us to understand the political imbalances, but the real marginalisation followed by persecution is understood through the historically disadvantaged Scheduled Castes and tribal community such as the Bhils living in Sindh and Southern Punjab provinces.

Cultural marginalisation, discrimination, economic hardships and religious persecutions have been highlighted as crucial problems faced by the Pak-Hindu Bhils. These issues were supported by narratives from the field in *bhil basti* (Kaliberi, Banar road area fieldsites) in Jodhpur. Gumanaram highlighted several such incidents and mentioned on one occasion they feared to celebrate their Hindu festivals and conducted them mostly indoors. Another major discrimination faced was on the basis of their historical practices of being pastoralists and nomads where no one would offer them a stable livelihood.

> He narrated that once a job was found on the field of a wealthy landowner the wages were neither stable nor assured. The safety and security of the female members of the family was always a matter of concern and at stake. This he had mentioned led to several Hindus converting to Islam or Christianity (Gumanaram, Kaliberi, Jodhpur).

The Hindu Bhils are thus caught between the exclusionary processes of nationalism practised on both sides of the borders. Within both nations, the turmoil within also adds to the segregation. My field interactions with Bhils arriving in different phases established that the frequent tensions in Indo-Pakistani relations add to the anti-Hindu feeling in Pakistan, making the community to feel highly insecure. The social location of the Hindu Bhils and lack of political representation owing to their status in Pakistan they are devoid of protection. I argue that majoritarianism prevalent in Pakistan continuously pushes the Hindu Bhils to the margins and forces them to risk their life's savings to relocate to India. To locate the Hindu Bhils as the most vulnerable within the Hindu minority community in Pakistan depicts a different perspective on citizenship, displacement as well as justice. (Gazdar 2013) elaborates on this by stating it as an intersection of inequality and exclusion that the minorities and specifically Hindu Bhils face in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, upon their arrival in India, the Hindu Bhils find themselves at the lowest level of hierarchy (Hindu fold) in society and an almost invisible status, living on the peripheries. This not only dampens their aspirations of seeking refuge and a better life across the border but also puts them back into the predicament of the Indian caste system (social stratification) where the tribals, dalits, and nomads have hardly any access to resources or services. This can be compared to the time of partition in 1947 when rich-landed Punjabi refugees had chosen to reside in India and although communal violence was rampant there were committees formed to address their specific needs.

The Pak Hindu Bhils do not achieve living with dignity either in Pakistan or on the Indian side of the border that they aspire for. They are left to live at the borderland rendering them invisible with no resources and livelihood options. A strong history of syncretic culture and nature of livelihood that existed owing to the porosity of border since 1947 has now come to question and become a major challenge faced by Hindu Bhil migrants in Jodhpur.

The settlements are not stable on the one hand and involve constant dislocation and relocation at times across the border as was described to me by Gumanram at *Kaliberi* referring to his family history and how they had moved to the other side of the border (present-day Pakistan). It is to be noted that the Bhils have covered a long journey from isolation to involvement in the local mainstream. They have additionally as a community moved from lawlessness to a law-abiding community to a great extent with the passage of time. The alienation felt from the mainstream further adds to the delay in assimilation and until contemporary times remains a questionable issue.

Essentially then, communities such as the Hindu Bhils who are crossing the borders and resettling in the borderlands, which they had once left behind, makes for a problematic case for the state, since the state had drawn the borders with finality in purpose. This experience of the ambivalent nature of status is not common and affects their political status immensely. It not only puts them in low visibility and recognition in the mainstream socio-political sphere but also proves disadvantageous to their well-being. The identity politics prevalent around the provinces of Punjab and Sindh in Pakistan and borderlands on the Indian side have played an important role in shaping minority identities and lack of equal status which as an issue has remained in flux since the partition of 1947.

Everyday struggles for Bhils hence include facing a theocratic state religion with the active performance of its identity both through policy and local social relations. This ranges from coding religious affiliation on national identity cards to inflammatory posters in the streets against minorities. These socio-political performances needed to be analysed and understood to attempt to understand the status of the Bhils in Pakistan which makes them cross the border to the Indian side in the first place. In this process, the question of identity and affiliation also is brought forth vis-à-vis belongingness and home.

This identity is manufactured by an emphasis on exclusions and inclusions. An important argument made by (Gorringe 2008) helps elaborate on the exclusion faced by the cross-border community of Bhils. He states that the post-colonial state imagined the Indian nation that excluded marginalised populations. When borders as in the present context of Bhils try to break up marginal castes, they become rootless and further marginalised.

A strong attempt from the tribal community is thus to seek and redefine identity to gain citizenship in India. Those who belong are officially defined, 'agreed', 'stamped'

and 'approved' and 'the others' are also specifically defined as the outsiders. Therefore, a conscious construction of the other is done by creating categories of minorities (Hindus, Christians, Qadiani in the case of Pakistan) emerging and therefore a need to eliminate such communities from the clear idea of the nationalistic discourse in the Pakistan context. On the Indian side, the social stratification and status ambivalence prevents representation and assimilation to the mainstream.

Jogdasji, a local priest at *Kaliberi,* had highlighted the belief in supernatural, several deities and spirits through the Bhil folklore. However, the traditional religious beliefs of the Bhils have been largely influenced and modified by the impact of Hindu sects. In many areas, movements have an impact which included worshipping of Hindu gods, taking vegetarian food, abhoring liquor and adopting a new pattern of life, thereby modifying the religious field of Bhils. It could be seen as a 'socio-religious renaissance' among the Bhils (Bhasin 2004). This also relates to the current context of a way Bhils have a sense of belonging to the Indian side of the border and its Hindu majority. They further ascertain the religious identity to make a strong case for Indian citizenship. In contemporary context, it is to be played out politically to reaffirm their Hindu identity in order to maintain and draw from the ancestral connect. This conscious move towards imbibing and assimilating with mainstream Hindu identity by the Pak Hindu Bhils can also be seen as a way of gaining acceptance in society and political citizenship eventually in India.

Conclusion

Borderland therefore is seen as re-imagined through political, symbolic and cultural frames to a great extent for the Bhil community that transcends it. Furthermore, the everyday religious beliefs of the community are increasingly noted to be fluid in order to achieve a stable life and status in the India context. The language, kinships ties and social relations that the Hindu Bhils leave behind as resident of Pakistan gain newer form and shape upon arrival into the Indian borderlands. This overlaps with the understanding of the history of the location of borderlands. Since the present location had its boundaries between India and Pakistan the symbolism attached with identity is reflected through historical processes to a great extent.

Arguably, then the social alienation, persecution and displacement thereof result in Bhil's irreconcilable identities. Acceptance of Indian citizenship to become 'full citizens' remains an aspiration which they struggle with on a daily basis vis-à-vis state services and recognition in the mainstream society. Borders are not just physical but a liminal zone with the Bhils remaining in an endless transition that the tribal community is never really able to exit. The borders are marked on their bodies through their political, social and cultural identity.

For Bhils, crossing the border (the international border) does not mean crossing it in actuality but more on moving to the 'right side of the border'. They will be able to cross the border only if there is social acceptance – as full empowered citizens in India. Politics around the borderland therefore remains with exploring the communities that never 'cross the border' but remains in that transitional space. The dynamics of State regulations as experienced by the Bhils came through and helped to understand the variations in State responses vis-à-vis migrants from different socio-economic strata. There exists an obvious strategy of discouragement or preference as the State deems necessary towards communities at the *Borderlands*. In the external border that is imposed on vulnerable groups the strong imagination of an Indian

nation-state is overbearing. At the political level, there is a status discourse that has come to the fore. Whether it is negotiating with *Pakistani nationality, a Hindu identity* or *tribal community* remains confounded eventually forcing the Bhils at the borderlands to oscillate between identities.

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