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CONTENTS

Studying Contrasting Environmental Realities of the Adivasis of pre-Colonial and Colonial Eras

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the changing environmental realities of the Adivasis across the ages. 'Environment' here refers to both 'ecological' and 'social'and may be viewed as mutually inter-dependent. The methodology is one of looking at the changing environmental realities of the Adivasis from evolutionary perspective following Braudel's model of 'dialectic of time spans'. The objective is to map the broader shades of changes taking place in the material as well as the ecological world of the Adivasis. The time-frame of investigation roughly begins from the pre-colonial period and ends with the closure of the nineteenth century a period that signaled major transformations in the life of the Adivasis.

Introduction

The search for alternative approach to environment has of late drawn worldwide attention of scholars across the disciplines. The recent surge in academic interest over the Adivasis of both colonial and post-colonial India may partly be seen as a result of the urge to study the distinctive cultural patterns of the 'Other'[1]. The curiosity for knowing the past environmental perception of the Adivasis is but natural as it was this sense of physical environment that had helped them to survive the test of time and had also dictated their world view including the whole gamut of their socio-religious beliefs and practices. Whether it contains an alternative perception about preservation and maintenance of physical environment relevant even today is an argument subject to controversy. But doubts have never been cast regarding its existence, and the interaction between nature and culture has been viewed as a heritage of Indian tradition relayed down to us through generations. The theoretical frameworks to address it are however multiple. For some, it is 'environmental idealism' (Rycroft 2017: 29) or 'ecological romanticism',(Prasad 2014) while others view it more in terms of inter-relationship between natural ecology and 'social or human ecology' (Mukherjee 1923: 1-28). Whatever it may be, rethinking the past environmental perception of the Adivasis will

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[1] The term 'other' generally refers to the colonized subjects. It is used by many theorists like Sarte, Derrida and Lacan including others in their writings. Nowadays the term has a wide connotation encompassing caste, class, identity and gender of the so called marginalized sections of the society. However, tribals are also considered to belong to the category of other when compared with the mainstream. See Foreword by Gail Omvedt in Vulli Dhanaraju (ed.), *Caste Tribe and Gender, Politics of Self and the Other,* Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 2017.

not be totally unwarranted if we try to trace the roots of the environmental concerns and developmental ethics of modern times. The Adivasi perception of environment, enshrined in need-based use of natural resources, nourishing special sentiments for and reverential attitude towards different manifestations of nature and fostering awareness about the inter-dependent nature of the different elements of the eco-system, has indeed earned global recognition nowadays. Though not always accompanied by a display of gratitude to the Adivasis, efforts are on to popularise this ethos at the popular level, to develop environmental consciousness among common people along lines already adhered to by the Adivasis in the past.

While the materialistic nature of modern society is not hard to seek, controversy exists in determining the exact nature of the Adivasi society. A good deal of attempt has been made by scholars to define it in the past as 'savage', 'uncivilized', 'backward', 'egalitarian' or that the Adivasis living at different stages of evolution etc.[2] But none of these characterisations seems appropriate in exposing the full length of the dimensions of the Adivasi society, particularly their relationship with the natural surroundings or the ethos and vibes with which they engaged in a myriad of socio-economic and religious practices. Indeed researches are still on to determine their exact nature and recent revisionist scholars have made an advance in this direction by claiming that the Adivasis are an inseparable part of the ecological settings of the areas they lived in (Guha 1999).[3] What is usually left out while defining the Adivasis is the morale and philosophy of their life which in essence is a combination of history, mythology, religion, migration, and affinity with nature, a philosophy which roughly comes close to what, in modern times we call 'unity in diversity' and 'live and let-live' philosophy of life.

This paper does not seek to expose the nature-culture interface over the centuries drawing references from the world of the Adivasis. The primary focus of this essay is to study how a given ecological setting gives birth to a set of ideas and sentiments that govern socio-economic and religious engagements of people. An imagined world then comes into being unknowingly based on those beliefs and practices of people which keep them busy day and night to meet their earthly necessities and aesthetic aspirations. This world then develops enough resilience to withstand vicissitudes and stresses of time and evolution, unless of course changes start to creep into its ecological setting to accommodate increasing pressures of urbanization, industrialization and commercialization and meeting the rising demands of a growing population. In the milieu, the familiar world gradually disintegrates giving way to an entirely new set of ideas, attitudes and responses that are remarkably different from the earlier ones.

This paper has two sections. In the first section, the past perception of the Adivasis regarding environment prevalent during the ancient and medieval times has been explored and examined. The wide time-frame of reference is deliberately chosen because it is during this phase when one may find indigenous environmental ethos and ideas

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[2]Formulations on Adivasi society are multiple. Earlier attempts to define the Adivasis particularly during the colonial times were primarily based on looking at them in comparison to the civilized people of the mainstream and hence emerged such characterizations like 'savage', 'forest-dweller', 'animist' and so on. But these formulations have become obsolete today in view of the change in popular perception about them.

[3]Many scholars have criticized the colonial attempts at overdrawing of the separation between the Adivasis and their ecological settings.

were at its operative best both in terms of theory and practice. The equilibrium in nature was broadly maintained without major interventions initiated in the landscape, particularly forest-cover, rivers and mountains. Therefore, the issues that disturb mankind in present times like environmental crisis or imbalance did not arise. The second section deals with the modern period starting with the colonial rule till the end of the 19th century, when major interventions were brought in by the colonial masters in Indian ecological setting inspired by their own imperialist/colonialist agenda. The import of new ideas of mercantilism, market economy and commercialization of agriculture that laid the foundations of the colonial rule in India had three ramifications. While it changed the face of the natural world and left adverse impact on the socio-economic and cultural lives of the tribals, it also paved the way for the much-dreaded environment crisis to surface in the long run. The roots of this crisis lay undeniably embedded in the colonial policy of initiating ruthless intervention into the natural environment, notwithstanding its merit in sustaining huge population and developing the cradles of modern civilization that have been carried out and perpetuated in the subsequent centuries down to the post-colonial period. While the discussion in the first section will be more of a general type owing to the absence of region-specific sources it will, I hope, not mark any abrupt departure when discussion of the second section follow with reference to the Santhals of southwest Bengal.

Perception about nature

The broader shades of the environmental thoughts of the Adivasis which were manifest in their unique ideas relating to land, water, forest and mountains including disease and death bear a close resemblance with what the ancient people thought about environment in general. Though not much works have been done so far to identify the points of convergence between the two traditions (of the Sanskritic tradition and Indigenous tradition of the non-Aryan people) regarding environment, it has been found that in many respects the views of one tradition overlap the other with threads of commonality being shared by both the traditions. For example, in ancient Indian texts namely the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and the Epics it has been stated that one of the pre-requisites for survival was to interact successfully with the surrounding world in order to procure food, shelter and other logistics of living like hunting and fighting diseases (Vannucci 1993: 67). The ancient Indian texts view the natural world as a single unit, together with all living and non-living beings. Man had to identify natural powers and to submit to the dictates of winds, flood, drought earthquake and other vagaries of nature in their life. To remain free from their adverse effects, men were forced to resort to magic and odd religious practices.[4] In the Vedas, we find hymns that offer worship to different natural forces with fear and reverence. A regular rainfall needed intervention of gods. Even many rites were practiced by the early Indians to minimise the impacts of vicious natural events. The *Rg Vedic* outlook of 'one' which 'manifests in all' can be comprehended in contemporary ecological term as 'everything is associated to everything else.'[5] In the

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[4]Chandrani Banerjee Mukherjee, 'Thoughts on Climate on Early Indian Texts', *The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies,* Vol. LIV, Nos. 3 & 4, October, 2014-March 2015, p. 10.

[5] Ibid, Also see Shukla Das, 'Concern for Environment: An Early Indian Perspective,' in *Journal of the Ancient Indian History,* Vol. XXI, 200-2002, University of Calcutta, p. 130.

socio-religious tradition of the Adivasis, similar references are available in plenty. Santhal creation narratives,[6] for example, indicate that all creations in this earth followed the divine wish and were united in a chain system sharing essential link with each other. These narratives also contain references to different elements of nature and their role in creating this earth as well as the stages that preceded the emergence of mankind. The belief of Santhal ancestors on *Thakur Jiu*'s role in creating this earth and human beings is clearly pronounced in these narratives. Successive stages of creation beginning with water to aquatic plants and animals, to birds and finally the creation of human beings is clearly spelled out. In these narratives, human beings were regarded as a part of the process of the same divine creation that also witnessed creation of water, earth, forests, aquatic animals and birds. The only difference being the acknowledgement that mankind perhaps emerged at the end of this creation process to be preceded by all other living or non-living organisms. As such, in Santhal tradition, human species was not assigned any special position of respect for their intellectual calibre, or ethical supremacy and were merely treated as one among the other creations of god. Indeed this approach of the Santhals had imparted among them both a sense of respect and fear for supernatural forces capable of causing death and devastation if hurt or displeased. This approach to nature may also be said to have laid the ideological foundations of all their socio-religious beliefs and practices.

Little wonder, aboriginal animism acquired its origin in this context. Though it is difficult to ascertain when and how did animism actually emerge there is a common consensus among scholars that actually animism preceded the birth of the so-called religions of mankind, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam for example. At the dawn of religious thinking, deities were imagined by primitive societies to reside in stones, trees, animals and woods. This animism seems to be an expression of the gratitude to and respect for nature for providing goods and services to human society (Deb 2007: 3). While this practice of worshipping stones, trees, animals and woods as deities continued unabated in tribal tradition they increasingly took human form in Sanskritic tradition and came to be worshipped as goddesses Durga, Kali, Lakshmi etc. A somewhat convergence of tribal and Sanskritic traditions took place in medieval times giving birth to cults like *Manasa*, *Sitala*, *Dharmaraj-thakur* etc., which had been worshipped as folk deities by a huge mass of peasant population including the tribals in Rarh Bengal.[7] The myths[8] in Indian tradition also contain lots of references to the practice of animism by the Adivasis in the past. Integral to it was their belief in spiritual entity including ghosts and spirits all of whom were not benevolent to mankind. The lofty mountain peaks facing towards the sky, the unique formation of rocks, huge trees

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[6] The narrative mentioned above is popularly known as Skrefsrud's version of Santal creation narrative which is said to have been taken down by Rev. L.O. Skrefsrud in 1870-1871 from an old guru named Kolean. It is contained in the Santali book '*Horkoren Mare HapramkoReak Katha*. In addition to this, another version of the same is also available published by Rev. A. Campbell entitled *Santal Tradition*. Also see T. Hembrom, *The Santals,* Calcutta, PunthiPustak, 1996, 82-87.

[7] Kosambi (1962) and Gadgil and Vartak (1976, 1981) state that most of the cults associated with the Sacred Groves in Maharashtra are Mother Goddess cults. In contrast, most of the Sacred Groves in Karnataka and Kerala are abodes of non-Sanskritic deities including snake gods. In West Bengal, the cults surrounding the Sacred Groves range from animistic tribal deities and ancestral spirits to Sanskritized deities like Shiva and Kali, and medieval subaltern deities like Sitala and Manasa.

[8] D..D. Kosambi mentions many such myths in his book *Myth and Reality*, Bombay, 1962.

and dense forests, dark caves and snowy glacier lakes were imagined by people as abodes of ghosts and spirits. The growth of mythologies in primordial societies was essentially linked with the human psychology and was transformed into beliefs and myths with the passage of time. Aboriginal mythology, ethno-medicine and animism are thus testimonies to nature-culture interaction in ancient times about which evidences are strikingly absent in Adivasi literature (Banerjee 2016: 131-153). Mythology harnessed for identity assertion built around the close linkage with the landscape.

Likewise, ancient Indian scriptures and literature contain many references to protection of forests and forest lives. The importance of forest had been outlined by Kautilya who suggested creation of a special department of forests.[9] There existed three categories of forests under the Mauryas, such as Game forest, Timber forest, and Elephant forest. Game forests were meant for the members of the ruling elites, for royal sport and hunting. The second kind of forests were rich in timber quality which were used for building forts, chariots etc., which had much economic value for the state. The third was reserved for elephants to ensure supply of elephants during war. Under the Mauryas forests were entirely owned and controlled by the state. The kings were not allowed to burn down forests. Kautilya was of opinion that there should be legislations to prevent destruction of forests including the wild life. Accordingly, checks were imposed against hunting, poaching and burning down of forests. Kautilya also suggested about the creation of a separate forests for each different type of produce. 'Thus it is clear that forests served a manifold purpose during the Mauryan times. Forestry came under the purview of economic legislation of Kautilya which displays an advanced knowledge of forest economy' (Rasik 2016: 10).[10] In the Vedas and Upanishads, similar references to protection and preservation of forests are available in abundance. Asoka's penchant for protecting forests and wild animals was proverbial.

The same sentiment for forests was also being shared by the Adivasis. In most cases, forests were cleared before establishing villages. Santhals used to clear as much forests as they needed for setting up villages or creating agricultural land. Also trees were sometimes cut down for acquiring fuel-wood or building houses. Before the advent of the British, the Santhals used to enjoy customary rights over forests. The place in the forest thick in Sal and Mahua trees was earmarked by them as a *sacred grove*. The institution of sacred groves is perhaps 'as old as the civilization itself', born at a time when pristine religion was taking shape (Deb 2007: 3; Skolimowski 1991). In Santhal culture, groves appeared as a sacred place of worship for only the male members of the villages. Such groves were also storehouse of many plant species with medicinal value absent in other parts of the forest. Taboos and stories are in wide circulation relating to groves. It is said that attempts by individuals to cut down trees or to hunt animals in the groves have often resulted in death or severe injury to the encroachers. Thus, belief upon the reigning deity of the groves who extended protection to the entire vegetation in the

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[9]Long before colonial interest towards Indian forests had come to be known forests continued to occupy a central place in the popular imagination of people both as a place of reverence and a place to be felt afraid of.Kautilya's *Arthasashtra* is believed to be one of the oldest references to the art of governance existed in early India. Aloka Parasher Sen, 'Of Tribes, Hunters and Barbarians: Forest Dwellers in the Mauryan Period', *Studies in History,* 14, 2, 1998.

[10]Anuranjini Rasik, 'Forestry: Its Economic Significance as Reflected in Arthasastra of Kautilya', *The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies,* Vol. LV, Nos. 3 & 4, October, 2015– March 2016, p.10.

grove,was substantiated Gadgil and Vartak (1994: 87).[11] We get a fine account of how in different sacred groves some of these reigning deities originally belonging to indigenous tribal tradition were being Sanskritised in course of time being replaced by some of the popular deities of the mainstream Hindu society (Deb 2007: 4). The belief in totems and taboos in tribal societies may be said to have surfaced in the backdrop of this cultural tradition of the Adivasis which nourished special sentiments for all the biotic and abiotic elements of the natural world.

This particular perception of the Adivasis about the physical environment around had given birth to certain types of socio-economic and religious engagements in the Adivasi society that define their cultural traits, ethnic identity and philosophy of life. The prevalence of slash and burn method of cultivation, egalitarian economy, the practice of collective land-ownership right, less-segregated state of society and sharing community centric work-ethos and solidarity had become the hallmark of their living in the past. Traditional healing practices that produced the heritage of ethno-medicine and associated superstitions were also in many ways related to this perception about natural environment. It may also be partly responsible for the birth of gender discrimination in the Santhal society since females were believed to be better endowed with the knowledge of medicinal value of different herbs, bulks and roots than their male counterparts. The healing capacity of Santhal women and their role as 'Shamans' was never recognized in the Santhal society though women's movement in forests as well their superior knowledge on natural vegetation of the region were quite established in the community domain of Chhotanagpur. Further, the fear of immediacy of female sex with the Bongas constantly haunted the minds of Santhal men. The belief in witchcraft and the practice of witch-hunting might have emerged in this backdrop of gender discrimination existing in the Santhal society. The religious festivals of the Santhals spanning throughout the year surrounding agricultural activities should also be viewed as parts of their interaction with nature. The most important of the festivals were *SoharaeSim, Baha, ErokSim, Iri-Gundhi, Nawai* and *Janther*. Besides, other important festivals like *Karam, JomSim,* and *MakMore* were also important. Charulal Mukherjee has commented in this context that,

> 'It seems as if the very heart of the tribe beats in unison with the advent of these tribal events, for it is here that the Santal plunges into his primitive herd-life to worship the tribal deities, to sing the advent of the agricultural season, to make merry over a bumper crops and to ward off by magic, the pests that hinder the sweet and even flow of their common life' (Mukherjee 1962: 232).

Thus, the life of the Santhals in the past was nature-oriented and the whole gamut of magico-religious beliefs and practices including festivals were in a sense aimed at celebrating their relationship with nature. The distinctive element of this philosophy was

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[11] References to reigning dieties of sacred groves are available in plenty. In many places such dietiesmight have emerged as village gods or goddesses. The cults of Chandi, Manasa or Dharmaraj Thakur as village gods or goddesses of the subaltern people might have owed their origin in this backdrop of relationship of people with nature.

the recognition that human beings held a position same as the other creatures, biotic and abiotic alike, in the natural world and that they were essentially linked with the ecological environment they lived in.Accordingly, dependence on nature and need-based use of natural resources became an integral part of their religio-cultural ethos.

Medieval period

There is little doubt that majority of these ideas of the Adivasis related to nature and culture continued unabated during the medieval times. It should however be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, the areas inhabited by the Adivasis (here the frontier districts of south-west Bengal) were rendered inaccessible by dense jungle, rugged and hostile terrain, absence of proper roadways, flood-prone rivers and almost inaccessible mountain passes that acted as a natural defense around the region. Indeed, medieval historians attributed the security of the Malla rulers to the natural defense of their territories. Secondly, the Muslim rulers never interfered in the internal administration of the Jungle zamindars.[12] The Bhum rajas of the frontier districts of Bengal or the Malla rulers of Bishnupur used to pay an annual tribute or *Peskash* to the emperors of Delhi, in return of which they were virtually left independent within their own kingdoms.

Little wonder, the world of the Adivasis of south-west Bengal, under those rajas in medieval times, was generally a closed one far removed from the din and bustle of urban life with little or no interference from the outside world. Mostly living in the lap of nature depending wholly on the thriving village system (there may be debates on its form) headed by a *Manjhi* or spokesman to settle all transactions with the zamindars and kings, the Adivasis indulged in a myriad of nature-friendly beliefs and practices consistent with their own pristine cultural ethos. It was not that their society remained stagnant and immobile at that time. Rather, the inner dimension of the Adivasi society kept on evolving during the medieval period as much as they did in the past. While their perception about nature remained more or less the same, some important changes that had crept into their life in the medieval period merits attention.

Firstly, the village system of the Adivasis, which was the bedrock of their ethnic life seems to have assumed a more complete form during the medieval times than it ever before with an elaborate hierarchy of officials fast coming up under the leadership of a headman known as *Manjhi* in the Santhal society. With it, a faint beginning of the process of social stratification and hierarchical division in the Santhal society came to the fore. The social and cultural life of the Santhals then appeared to be satisfactory as they enjoyed almost perfect freedom from all bondages and were subjected neither to any form of oppressive taxation nor exploitation by outsiders or superior landlords. This happened because in the 17th century in the wake of the decline of the imperial control of the Mughals some big feudatory chiefs, namely the 'bhum' rajas (regions named after those bhum rajas like Dhalbhum, Sikharbhum, Manbhum, Barabhum, etc.) emerged in the frontier districts of Bengal. They had leased out their vast estates to several landlords who on their turn came in agreements with the Adivasi Sardars or village headmen either to guard or protect the

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[12]*West Bengal District Hand Book*, Bankura, Calcutta, 1951, p. xi.

far-flung areas of the estate or to collect whatever revenue possible from the region. But in no circumstances, these arrangements proved binding or oppressive on the Adivasis. Moreover, at the individual level, the concern for the rent to be paid or tension about the security of tenure or about the modality of village administration to be followed was non-existent since these were all managed by their Sardars. Such care free and prosperous state of life of the Adivasis during medieval times have well been conjectured and recorded by a host of medieval chroniclers and writers (like Abul Fazl) including early colonial administrators and missionaries. T. Allen, (Magistrate of Birbhum) for example admitted that, 'it is almost entirely owing to the vitality of this system of village rule that the Sonthals have not been absorbed long ago amongst low-caste Hindoos'.[13] Campbell, a missionary of Pakhoria mission in Manbhum also wrote, 'When a Sonthal hive settles in the jungle to clear a location and establish a village the manjee is to the Sonthal hive what the Queen Bee is to the hive of bees; they cannot get on without him.'[14] The missionaries, who were the early witnesses to the state of affairs of the Santhals have made many such remarks that contain glimpses of the Santhal society in the medieval period.

Secondly, increase in Adivasi population in the medieval period undoubtedly took place but it did not pose any problem owing to the abundance of land and the natural talent of the Adivasis, Santhals in particular, for clearing jungles and creating cultivable lands. Moreland, for example, has given a population estimate of India of nearly 100 million in the 17th century, while Kingsley Davis to 125 million and Shireen Moosvi to 145 million during the same period.[15] It is important to notice that though population was increasing, its pressure on environment was not heavy. The general physical atmosphere was so pleasant that a traveller passing through the Mughal empire was surprised to see the absence of physicians. Even in the works of saint poet Tulsidas and Abul Fazl references to good health and spiritual disposition of people are frequent.[16]

Thirdly, one cannot ignore the possibility of interaction between the Adivasis and the non-Adivasis that came close on the heels of the process of Sanskritisation spanning across the centuries of the medieval age. Signs of such interaction in cultural and linguistic spheres between the two traditions are pretty evident. While in religio-cultural field, one may notice several Hindu deities getting incorporated in the pantheon of tribal gods and goddesses and Adivasi women coming under the influence of the marriage rituals of the Hindus, in linguistic sphere such borrowing and lending process appears to be more glaring. Hunter wrote,

> 'While treating of the alphabet, we found reasonable ground to conjecture that the Aryan invaders of India had come in contact with the Santhals, or a cognate race, in primitive times and that Prakrit a very early form of Sanskrit, had adopted some pure Santali terms'. (Hunter 1975: 97).

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[13] Bengal Judicial Progs, May 1872, WBSA (Allen's report dt. 23 Jan 1872).

[14] Bengal Judicial Progs, December, 1871, vol. no. 161, Govt. of Bengal to Govt. of India, 6 December 1871, WBSA.

[15] Taken from NeeraShukla, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

[16] Ibid, 95.

According to Grierson,

'…the purest Santali is spoken in the north especially in the Santal Parganas and in Manbhum. The dialect spoken in Midnapore, Balasore, Singhbhum and Orissa tributary states is more mixed. It shows signs of gradually yielding to Aryan influence…' (Grierson 1967: 30-35).

Fourthly, the socio-political institutions of the Adivasis might have also undergone changes in the medieval period depending on the broader linguistic or cultural identity of the regions they lived in. The Paharias, for example, came to be politically constituted into northern and southern group of tribes, corresponding with the two sub-groups of the Paharia; the northern belonging to the Savaria Paharia, and the southern to the Mal Paharia. The former had an appropriate language and had not the least vestige of the doctrine of caste. Contrary to northern part, the southern tribe had adopted the Hindi or Bengali language as spoken in low lands adjacent to their hills (Martin 1976: 82–83). Similar north-south division is also noticeable among the Santhals. Campbell for example has stated that northern Santali or that spoken in Bhagalpur, Monghyr, Santal Parganas, Birbhum, Bankura and Hazaribag was the language of the overwhelming majority of the tribe and was more polished than southern Santali (cited from Baske 1999: 7). Besides, there might have been other changes that had adored the life of the Adivasis in the medieval period.

II

This section traces the consequences of the importation of colonial ideas and ethos on the physical environment and socio-cultural lives of the Santhals of Southwest Bengal. The nature-centric ideas and activities of the Santhals for the first time came under a serious threat when colonial rule unleashed the forces of commercialisation of agriculture and market economy including the idea of private landownership right in the frontier districts of Bengal. Added to it were administrative changes, enactment of forest regulations and introduction of colonial knowledge production mechanism, the cumulative effects of which brought the Santhals under the subjection of a new kind of distressing reality hitherto unprecedented in their life. These new changes should be viewed as integral parts of the larger project of colonising India that affected both the physical and social ecologies of the country. The journey began with the introduction of land revenue regulations to be followed by other interventions as and when necessary in the ecological and socio-economic world of the Santhals to fulfill imperial interest.

Impact of land revenue regulations on the areas of Jungle Mahals

The British control over Jungle Mahals was established in the last quarter of the 18th century. The attempt to bring the lands of this area under assessment for revenue dated back to 1767, when Ensign Fergusson led a military expedition in the western part of the Jungle Mahals, an area, which later formed the district of Midnapore. But to collect revenue from the areas of Jungle Mahals was not an easy task. Though the amount of revenue fixed in these areas was not heavy the government officials till found it difficult to collect them from the tribals of the regions. As a consequence of default in the payment of revenue by the jungle zamindars, most of their estates were put up for sale in the last decade of the 18th century.

The destruction of the old ruling families and the emergence of a new class of zamindars, talukdars (in zamindari hierarchy talukdars come next to the zamindars with landed property little less than the zamindars) and other groups of revenue farmers had caused considerable tension in rural Bengal. This can be said to be the beginning of the forces of disruption in the agrarian society of Bengal. The new, relatively small zamindars and talukdars who stepped into their shoes with the obligation of meeting revenue demands on a regular basis along with proprietary rights over land, totally destroyed the ardour of zamindari paternalism in the Jungle Mahals.[17] The mutual trust and bonds between the tenants and the zamindars, based on feudal relationships, became a thing of the past. The resultant effect brought as much tension and discontent to the new owners of the land as to the tribal residents of the respective estates.

The Santhals, including other groups of tribals, could not rest in peace in this situation. The most aggressive among them were the Bhumijs, who had earlier enjoyed land without any payment of revenue, either under some invalid title or in lieu of certain police duties as ghatwals or *sardar-ghatwals* (protectors of strategically important passes or hostile terrains). The resumption and assessment of the ghatwali lands by the British had caused the Bhumij sardar ghatwals to flare up, thus putting the areas of the Jungle Mahals in a state of turmoil. They became further hostile when the duty of superintendence of police as well as the power to appoint and dismiss individual ghatwals was invested in the hands of the magistrate collector.[18] The Chuar rebellion of 1799 and the *Ganga Narayan Hangama* or the Bhumij revolt of 1832 were reflections of social unrest and turbulence of the time that followed the introduction of the Permanent Settlement. The last decades of the 18th century, thus, witnessed a turmoil in the agrarian society of the Jungle Mahals, resulting from an attempt to introduce revenue laws by the British government, on the one hand, and the tribals flaring up in violent protests against the curtailment of their rights, on the other. However, the Santhals being peace-loving by nature did not join hands in the mass outcry of the late 1790s. They preferred the backwoods of the jungles to participating in the general disaffection of the region (Jha 1967).

Administrative changes

Close on the heels of revenue regulations appeared administrative changes introduced by the British. As disorder and mismanagement reigned supreme during this time, the Company's administration took the decision to bring changes in the administrative set up of the region. In 1805, a new regulation, known as Regulation XVIII was enacted. Under this regulation, a separate magistrate was appointed for the Jungle Mahals for the immediate superintendence of the district. The zamindars and the managers were entrusted with the local charge of police, jointly with the police-darogas. It was decided that the districts called 'Jungle Mahals', composing of the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan and Midnapore should be separated from the jurisdiction of the magistrates of those districts and would be placed under the jurisdiction of a district officer, known as the 'Magistrate of the Jungle Mahals'.

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[17]*West Bengal District Gazetteers,* Bankura, 376.

[18]Ibid., p. 376.

Suchibrata Sen, however, has also attributed the creation of the new district of the Jungle Mahals to the Chuar Rebellion of 1799 (Sen 1984: 8). Thus, the areas of the Jungle Mahals witnessed profound changes in terms of administrative management of the East India Company. K. Sivaramakrishnan has analysed the same from the standpoint of state formation efforts of the Company in the frontier districts of Bengal that led to the re-territorialization of the region to suit imperial interests (Sivaramakrishnan 1999: 14). Taking note of the natural vegetation and distinct cultural traits of the inhabitants of the region he characterizes it as 'zones of anomaly' which had offered considerable challenges to the British to pacify.

Santhal migration to *Damin-i-Koh*

It was in this context that the Santhals of Jungle Mahals, were forced to leave outdoor in search of a better homeland. With this began the process of great historical importance, namely, Santhal migration to Damin-i-Koh (Birt 1905: 10-11). 'It was this migration to the Damin that first involved the Santhals in the apparatus of the colonial state' (Chowdhury 2004: 13). There are multiple interpretations by scholars as to what led the Santhals of the erstwhile Jungle Mahals (Bankura, Birbhum and Midnapore, including the other parts of the Jungle Mahals) to migrate to Damin.

In the changing situation, ever since land revenue regulations came into force land now became a marketable commodity and a lucrative field of investment. A spirit of professionalism ensued in the sale and management of land, as landed property now became accessible to any person with capital and a capacity for land management. The revenue regulations of the East India Company attracted many foreigners, traders, businessmen, mahajans (moneylenders) and others to the rural society of Bengal. They all tried to make good fortunes at the cost of land and labour of Santhals. Among them the exploitation by mahajans was worst. Several factors such as frequent famines, sharp rise in prices of commodities, demand for money during the sowing and harvesting seasons and to meet family and social obligations hurled the Santhals into the debt net of the mahajans.

After the Santhal *Hool* (1855-56) both in the Santhal Parganas district and the erstwhile Jungle Mahals things did not improve much for the Santhals. Zamindary and mahajani exploitation continued unabated and the arbitrary enhancement of rent continued to impoverish the Santhals. Robertson's Settlement Report testifies to the fact that the arbitrary enhancement of rent was what the Santhal *manjhi*s (village headmen) had to face quite often after settling on the land of the zamindars.

Santhal emigration for labour

The disruption of the agrarian economy forced the Santhals to look at other avenues of employment apart from land. This led to the beginning of the process of Santhal migration for labour to various parts of the country. The coal mines of the neighbouring districts and the tea gardens of Assam and Duars provided them opportunities. The agents of tea planters in Assam recruited a huge number of Santhals to work in the tea gardens. The Bengal–Nagpur railways that used to pass through Adra–Kharagpur division and the huge coal belt stretching across vast areas of Raniganj, Asansol,

Dhanbad regions provided enormous employment opportunities to Santhal labourers. McAlpin shows that among other places, the Santhals of Bankura district preferred to go to *Namal* (Burdwan) for labour. During the transplanting and harvesting seasons, they used to get as much as 5 to 6 *annas* a day (McAlpin1981: 61-62). Usually they brought back substantial money with which they paid off the debts incurred by their families in their absence. The rest of the money was spent on drink.

Impact of emigration

Indeed, the result of this emigration for labour proved disastrous for the cultural ethos of the Santhals including their sense of identity. Away from home and a familiar environment, they felt helpless and their ethnic solidarity also started to wane. Though they were temporarily relieved from the acute scarcity of food or earnings, the effect of emigration had an adverse impact. It led to the

'change of the population gradually from cultivating to a labouring population…Socially it has had a debasing effect, because in his search for labour he is freed from the influence of the village community and is thrown into contact with all sorts and conditions of persons, many of these of a criminal type from whom he derives looser ideas of truth, morality and caste. These evil social effects are in their turn weaning the Sonthal from his hereditary occupation of clearing the jungle' (McAlpin 1981: 63).

With this spurt in immigration other vices including liquor addiction became rampant.

Disintegration of the Manjhi/*Mandali* system

Meanwhile, the position of the manjhis in the village society of the Santhals became precarious. In the erstwhile Jungle Mahals his position was no better than an ijaradar or tahsildar (a form of revenue farmer in charge of collecting rent). 'In Balasore he is little more than a tahsildar, in Bankura and North Midnapore he is a tenure holder, and in Birbhum he is a quasi tenure holder' (McAlpin 1981:72). However, the post of manjhiwas not abandoned altogether and assumed different names in different places. The introduction of the British revenue system had altered the role of the manjhis in their society, as they now became government nominees, who could enjoy office only if they met the obligations of the government. These new developments regarding the post of *manjhi*, marked a radical departure from the traditional power and status of the *manjhi*s in the villages. As a result of all these maladies, the social organization of the Santhals received a severe set-back. The majhi/mandali system, the essence of the Santhal social structure, was broken. This process of disintegration of the Santhal village system seems to have started with the change in the status of the manjhis. McAlpin, in his report, has discussed at length the process of disintegration of the village system of the Santhals.

Thus by the end of the nineteenth century the Santhals of southwest Bengal appeared at the doorsteps of change in all respects, material, psychological and ecological. They were forced to accept the peasant economy of the plains and their status became same as the impoverished peasant masses of rural Bengal. The process de-tribalisation had also set in to a certain degree. The colonial forest legislations of 1878 and of subsequent decades had hammered the last nail in the coffin of their

nature oriented life-style as in a single stroke of a pen they became outsiders in their own forests. While tribal response against these intrusions into their ecology and socio-economic life took the form of violent demonstrations in the first half of the 19th century the second half witnessed relative calmness and was more marked by the display of socio-cultural awareness which converted into political and territorial awareness at the turn of the 20th century. However, the only ray of hope that kept flickering amidst all these disturbing experiences of the tribals was the knowledge producing mechanism of the colonial rule that for the first time built a common awareness about tribal ethnography in India and recognised the distinctive traits of tribal culture the reflection of which is pretty evident in the shifting strands of colonial approach to Indian Adivasis.

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Community Resource Mapping in Support of Local Land Tenure?: Results from an Exploratory Study at Gandhamardhan Hill in Eastern India

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Abstract

This article draws on results from an exploratory project at Gandhamardhan Hill in Odisha state to understand the possibilities for community resource mapping in support of community control over common lands in eastern India. Based on improved national legislation and technical development in GIS, community resource mapping can support formal community control of forests, help secure individual titles to agricultural land, and give a voice for communities in planning bodies when mining is proposed. The project mapped part of Gandhamardhan Hill and five adjacent villages, drawing on official land records and ethnographic research. It is found that while there are promising possibilities to use the maps in national environmental advocacy, contextual social and resource use complexities make tenure claims challenging at the moment. Institutional arrangements, lacking community cohesion and wide variations in resource uses need to be better understood in order to realise the potential of maps in support of community resource rights.

Introduction

Community participation in the mapping of local lands and resources has been seen as a way towards new understandings of the landscape and as a possible starting point for dialogue over its governance and uses (Bauer 2009). Consequently, significant work has been carried out designing manuals and other accessible, yet comprehensive, documents on how to carry out land use mapping in particular contexts, for example in relation to the lands of indigenous peoples in Canada (Tobias 2000, 2009). Common features for such mapping approaches are firstly that they should include, and preferably be carried out, by the affected communities themselves in order to truly represent their interests. This is since traditionally mapping has tended to be carried out on behalf of the state or some other outside authority thereby inducing outcomes towards goals set by these entities rather than those living on and making use of the land (Peluso 1995; Walker & Peters 2001). Secondly, tools and techniques should be feasible. This means any methodology should not be overly complicated and require specialist knowledge or expensive equipment potentially implying a trade-off between precision, affordability and ease-of-use which needs to correspond to relevant legal requirements but also actively engaging with challenging ethics involved in capturing different resource perspectives (Fox, Krisnawati & Hershock 2005).

Despite the struggle for pro-poor land rights and demands for recognition of community forest uses in central India, so far limited research exists to document spatially the many existing uses of land proposed for, and possibly at a later stage converted to, a mine (Oskarsson 2013). Mapping of natural resource uses can serve many purposes beneficial to local livelihoods. It can provide detailed evidence of peoples' use of forests opening up for legal claims according. They can be used to settle agricultural land in favour of local cultivators. And they can be used to convince expert committees and other planning bodies that mining plans has to be reconsidered given the risk of disrupting livelihoods, as well as be used in litigation. For these promises to be realised it is however crucial to have an active involvement of communities. If local participation is not part of mapping exercises there is a likeliness that various elites will continue to define and use a disproportionate share of the natural resource base.

Mapping resource uses are particularly interesting not only due to the ongoing private sector-led expansion of mining, but also given the Forest Rights Act[1] which allows previously excluded forest-dwellers to claim titles to land and forests officially classified as forest but used by the communities for generations. New possibilities afforded by GIS have the potential to produce maps of better quality than what was previously possible. These technologies can be used not only by expert geographers, but also by civil society actors in cooperation with affected communities themselves. Maps can support livelihoods directly by visualising the existing uses of natural resources by local people thereby helping to prevent their displacement by for example mining or forest plantations without their consent or compensation. This is currently taking place far too often across the country when forest-dwellers are seen as 'encroachers' on forest land.[2] The maps can also help communities claim recognition of their forest rights as well as counter the official mining plans which tend to hide local resource uses. Securing property rights via the formal recognition of land titles (and forest rights) is seen as one of the best ways to improve the livelihoods of poor people.

This article draws on material from an exploratory project at Gandhamardhan Hill in Odisha state to detail the possibilities for community resource mapping under conditions of overlapping resource uses in highly diverse social conditions. The first section discusses the role of maps in resource governance. Following this is a discussion about the methods and the historical and legal context in which the case study is situated. The subsequent empirical section provides material on how resource uses and social groups interrelate to one another. Finally, conclusions are drawn on the possibilities for community resource mapping to be useful in support of community claims to land.

Maps and resource control in India

Maps are vital in industrial project plans for a wide variety of purposes. The number of maps required and the detailed specification of these in Indian legislation have improved in recent years as GIS technologies have become mainstreamed for planning

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[1]The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 was passed in 2008 but remains unevenly implemented across India.

[2] The general risks of displacement have been documented in for example Fernandes (2009). For displacement risks and livelihood impact directly related to bauxite mining see Reddy and Mishra(2010) and Oskarsson(2010).

purposes. Best known is the use of maps for environmental and forest approvals at the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) of the central government. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports part of the national environmental approval legislation are supposed to provide a detailed view of the surroundings of a proposed project site but in reality only provide an overview of 10 km. These maps do not show the detailed picture of the immediate natural surroundings and features, for example streams of water, which can help identify important characteristics at a site (Oskarsson 2017a). In the conflict between mining promoters and local communities across central India, a clear understanding of local resource uses takes on crucial importance for the ability to counter mining plans and advocate in favour of local resource rights. Current planning documents tend to hide even the existence of habitations and villages on and close to the sites proposed for mining (Bedi 2013). If local people are to be seen, they or organisations working close to the grassroots, must be able to use available tools to visualise existing dwellings and forms of resource uses to explain why certain resources belong to communities and not to the government or private companies. In sum, maps might offer protection of local livelihoods directly by preventing displacement from mining by supporting local mobilisation as well as allowing complaints to be launched in various courts and in environmental expert committees. Maps appear to be particularly important in support of local claims for the recognition of Forest Rights titles.

New technologies, including low cost GPS devices and the free, online availability of detailed satellite images and geographical databases, are increasingly putting the ability to map resources and resource uses in the hands of communities around the world (Chapin, Lamb & Threlkeld 2005; Harris 2016; Herlihy & Knapp 2003; Orlove 1991). This has given rise to a wave of mapping exercises where previously excluded peoples have been creating counter-maps to the ones which show the officially allowed and sanctioned resource uses (Hodgson & Schroeder 2002). Of importance for the impact of these counter-maps has been the ability to live up to existing legislative demands when for example bringing resource claims to court, as well as the possibility to match in technical detail the maps produced by dominant groups including especially governments and companies (Chapin et al. 2005). Internationally the possibilities for resource mapping has created a significant body of literature including the production of guidebooks to enable communities themselves to do mapmaking, and atlases of indigenous lands (Chapin et al. 2005; Fox et al. 2005; Tobias 2000, 2009). Depending on the scale of the mapping effort and the choice of technology, efforts have had varying degrees of local participation at times relying more on remote sensing for data collection (Chapin et al. 2005). These examples of manuals on community mapping are mainly based in the West however and are likely to involve educational and technical requirements beyond the capacity of the average mining-affected community in for example rural Odisha state. Mapping work in Odisha will thus not only have to take into account the often limited resources which are with local people, but also those of potential resource persons at NGOs and with social movements.

Maps continue to be closely related to the exercise of official power since 'in order to establish what is actually controlled, mapping becomes both a requirement and a tool of power' (Elden 2013: 324). The use of maps and surveys to establish land rights has a long history in India going back to Mughal and Maratha periods. The British greatly expanded the scope and use of these methods however particularly in forest areas

(Kumar & Kerr 2013). Community resource mapping comes with the possibility to increase political skills and legislative requirements (Mitchell and Elwood 2016) to ensure a better fit between community demands for resource claims and existing legal protection. Since demands are likely to vary across India's institutional landscape from local bodies to those at state and national levels, legal knowledge not only determines where the most promising opportunities exist to use mapping techniques, but also the quality and type of maps that need to be produced in order to be seen as legitimate. As far as is known community resource mapping has not been attempted on a larger scale in India as of yet.

Since Independence a similar set of modernist aspirations to those of the British have guided Indian bureaucrats and policy makers particularly in their attempts to keep social and natural uses of land separate. While this has been much discussed in relation to forests, it also appears to apply to other land uses. Robbins (2001) discusses the semi-arid regions of Rajasthan where a modernist discourse attempted to hide the actual hybrid land uses which had existed for generations. In relation to forests mixed agro-forestry landscapes tended to be converted into either legal forests or agricultural land thus removing the in-between category which had supported a wide range of peoples (Kumar & Kerr 2013). The history of maps in India to date has thus been more widely related its use to support official exercises of power rather than the resource rights of marginalised groups.

The official view of resource rights and what land uses should exist is thus often dramatically different from the local perspective, building on a colonial, historical legacy of land and forest settlements only to a limited extent reformed in recent decades. Private landholdings and forest use rights are still frequently denied to *adivasi* and other groups of farmers greatly affecting livelihood outcomes:

> Because tribals have no security of tenure and live under the constant threat of eviction, they cannot invest in improving their land. Their poverty prevents them from planting tree crops that have long gestation periods, and the illegality of their position precludes their receiving loans from the government to make their agriculture more productive (Baviskar 1994: 2500).

The official view of tenure rights is recorded in land records, maps and other documents handled by administrators in various government departments. Farmers and forest dwellers are often not aware of the exact details of such records, or struggle to interpret and contest them (Oskarsson 2013). The world of official records is, however, closely guarded from outside view particularly by officers in the Revenue and Forest Departments of state governments. The reduced possibilities for local people to understand and influence how their resources are framed in official records opens up for misuse for the benefit of various vested interests ranging from locally influential landowners to commercial and political groups (Kumar & Kerr 2013, Oskarsson 2013). The official view of resources is additionally dressed up in a complicated, techno-bureaucratic language difficult to comprehend for non-specialists. One example of this is how vital agricultural land maps rely on boundary markers with special codes which can only be understood with certain training. For these reasons local people, and particularly the poorest who tend to be less educated, have tended to become dependent on the goodwill of administrators for implementation of rights (Oskarsson 2010). Transparency

is however increasing particularly due to the Right to Information Act 2005 but also via the use of websites and other means of information dissemination (Baviskar 2007). Even though direct interactions with the bureaucracy continue to be difficult it is possible to access much of the data used for official decision-making nowadays.

Even in agricultural areas where land has been mapped, land records remain frequently of poor quality and are out of date. Land records are supposed to be updated every 20-25 years but frequently this has been delayed, and in certain cases land details have not been updated for as much as 50 years. This has given rise to vast inaccuracies between the records and actual land uses (Mearns & Sinha 1999). Reasons for delays include the low priority given to land records management with inadequate budgets, but also a reliance upon outdated and complicated, time-consuming survey methodologies which do not take into account technological improvements in recent decades (Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development 2009). Maps are produced for agricultural and other lands under the control of state government revenue departments. These maps have less visibility in environmental protection since they are not part of public documents like EIA reports. They are also difficult to interpret or combine with larger area maps since they tend to lack scale information.

Revenue maps tend to be available in local department offices and there are websites which can be utilised to provide further details. There is thus some basic data available which can form the basis for mapping agricultural and village forest land even if often in poor condition. This is even acknowledged in Government of India reports:

> Over the years, [the maps] have been subjected to the vagaries of the weather, continuous and improper handling, and unscientific methods of storage, rendering them fragile and tattered. The maps have also undergone shrinkage affecting their accuracy and their credibility (Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development 2009:164).

The sensitivity of maps has come to mean that high quality, though often somewhat outdated, governments maps from the National Survey and Mapping Organisation of the Government of India are very difficult to acquire within India and not at all for sale internationally. The challenge to carry out community mapping in India becomes significant when official maps are difficult to at all get hold of, and, once acquired, are often of poor quality and out of date. This in combination with the severe resource constraints among civil society groups and movements, particularly in rural areas, create clear difficulties in realising the possibilities mapping has to offer. A number of possibilities are, however, afforded by legislation and long-running campaigns which can help bridge the gap between local livelihoods, rights afforded in existing legislation, and the official view of natural resources. The need for support for local communities in their land and forest claims against a rapidly expanding mineral industry, and the new opportunities afforded by legislation (especially the Forest Rights Act), as well as the widespread availability of information technology (GIS), indicate good potential for social action research aimed at strengthening community rights to vital natural resources. Detailed investigations at particular locations are, however, necessary to understand the particular ways in which communities and resources may benefit from mapping.

Methods

Bauxite mining can be a particularly useful form of mining to study in relation to community resource mapping since the ore bodies are all located in what is officially labelled forests but in reality inhabited by *adivasi* and other lower-caste groups. In order to understand not only community land use but also which groups specifically use different resources, extensive ethnographic fieldwork was carried out over 5 months in 2011 and 2012 in combination with GIS analysis completed in 2013. The ethnographic work was partially seen as helping to identify important resources and resource users in the studied villages, and partially improving the interpretation of the completed maps in their variations across time and space. In the research team some of the members had previous experience of mapmaking while others had knowledge of livelihood analysis. The attempt was to make these different skill-sets work together to achieve an integrated approach where maps were made which could be interpreted as valid representations of how different groups use the Hill for resources and spiritual needs.

Available statistics and local interviews led the project team to consider a study close to Paikmal town in Bargarh District. In the final selection of villages a mixed setting with ST, SC[3] and general caste communities were obtained in five villages. The ethnographic methods included a stratified random sample livelihoods questionnaire carried out in the study villages. Apart from understanding general livelihood concerns and conditions the questionnaire aimed to capture uses of common property resources related to the forest. Personal interviews were carried out with local informants to get an overview of the area, its history and peoples. Focus group discussions with different resource use groups complemented the questionnaire. The project was able to access, digitise and improve existing Odisha government cadastral maps of agricultural land using ArcGIS software. Although the cadastral maps are usually both outdated and worn out, they provide a very good base map which can greatly improve the quality of final maps. It was not possible to obtain forest maps from the Forest department resulting in less detailed maps by the project on this land.

Contested resources on and around Gandhamardhan Hill

A large deposit of bauxite ore, approximately 200 million tons in total, exists on top of the Gandhamardhan hill in Odisha state, but also highly biodiverse forests, crucial rivulets and a number of important spiritual shrines and temples. Gandhamardhan came to national prominence when public sector Balco (Bharat Aluminium Corporation) proposed a bauxite mine there in 1983 (Mishra 1987). Balco promised a project of national importance with some local benefits including the employment of about 500 people (Mishra & Panda n.d.). One of the first movements in India against mining was formed at Gandhamardhan Hill and was able to force the company to cancel its plans (Concerned Scholars n.d.; Mishra 1987). Since mining plans continue to threaten the Hill

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[3]The Scheduled Tribes (ST) is a group of people officially recognised by the Government of India as marginalised and in need of support in the form of e.g. land and forest rights for livelihood support. The Scheduled Castes (SC) are people in the lowest Hindu caste hierarchy and therefore similarly marginalised to Scheduled Tribes.

from time to time ever since the movement remains active.[4] This movement made use of the spiritual connection people have with the hill and its rich biodiversity in Hindu and local tribal heritage myths (Padhi & Panigrahi 2011). This provided for strong support since

> [t]he villagers equate [Gandhamardhan] with their mother, who provides then with food, firewood and fodder. According to the villagers, She further provides water through 22 streams and 150 perennial springs. The stream water is referred to by the villagers as mothers' milk, and the plants as an integral part of her body(Concerned Scholars n.d., 9).

The spiritual dependence on the hill has been complemented by the fact that agriculture around the hill rely completely on the streams which originate on the Hill. Gandhamardhan Hill and its immediate surroundings thus provide a dramatic contrast to much of the Western Odisha which has come to be associated with droughts, agricultural distress and mass migration in recent years.

The way land was settled historically continues to influence actual land use to date (Mearns & Sinha 1999). By paying a fee to the colonial government, princely states and other intermediaries got full control over its respective areas where the tenants had very limited rights. With very varying capacity to govern, as well as to administer justice, it was only natural that a large number of protests occurred (Pati 2007). According to interviews during fieldwork at Gandhamardhan Hill the villages had been settled three generations earlier based on land grants given by the local princely ruler. This is not an unlikely explanation since it was according to Panda (2005) common to provide such grants to people. While many laws have been enacted since Independence to improve the access of poor people to land, an unequal pattern of land use continues to this day with village heads controlling inherited land with good water availability and the possibility to influence village affairs to this day. When the best land is not available many continue to cultivate land settled as government-owned on commons on village or forest lands.

Forests in Odisha state have been formalised under either revenue or forest department administration. The two forests exist side by side with little internal coordination to date. This divide was initially created for historical reasons when flatter 'revenue land' in valleys was settled first with the revenue department even if containing forests (Kumar & Kerr 2013). At a later stage of the 19th century, sloping land tended to be settled as unsuitable for cultivation and owned by the government as forest. This excluded large parts of land traditionally cultivated by *adivasi*[5] groups across the state leading to significant protests and some amount of legislative support. It is for example illegal to transfer *adivasi* land to other groups according to the OSATIP legislation.[6] The state itself frequently acquires land for industries, mines and dams, however, and has remained able to take also *adivasi* land and pass it on to private industries even despite

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[4] Similar movements have objected strongly to bauxite projects in recent years including for example those in Kashipur and Niyamgiri in Odisha, and Jerrela and Araku in Andhra Pradesh (Amnesty International 2010; Oskarsson 2017b; Reddy 2006; Supreme Court of India 2008).

[5]The Scheduled Tribes is the official name for a group of peoples with special Constitutional benefits who mainly live in central-eastern India's forested regions. Other common names include *adivasis* or tribals.

[6]Orissa Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property (Scheduled Tribes) Regulation, 1956 as amended up to 2002.

the expressed ban in the OSATIP legislation of making *adivasis* landless (Kumar et al. 2005).

At Independence, many forested areas in Odisha remained without detailed settlement of rights. The state government attempted to clarify actual land uses but continued the earlier view of shifting cultivation on slopes as an evil which should be stopped. 37% of the area of Odisha state is officially recorded as forest in spite of many known villages, fields etc. within these areas (Sarap 2007). Forests play a particularly important role for landless people. They can also support livelihoods in the dry season when agricultural activities are not possible. 80% of forest income is generated during the summer accounting for as much as 25% of the total household income. Forests are crucial in lean summer months but also provide significant resources compared to other opportunities. In many parts of Odisha communities had taken own responsibility for the management of forests long before the Forest Department and, even later, its Joint Forest Management (JFM) initiatives of community participation came along. About 8,000 such groups continue to operate today (Ibid.).

The injustice of *adivasi* forest land has only begun to be addressed in recent years with the passing of the national Forest Rights Act 2006. Since the Act remains under implementation it has unfortunately not been as effective as it could have been. The history of movement protest and community land rights legislation thus show significant possibilities to protest against large-scale projects but moving beyond the ability to block unpopular projects to claim tenure continues to represent a significant challenge even with supportive legislation like the Forest Rights Act. It is in this context that community resource mapping appears as an opportunity to put some of the tools required to formalise claims in the hands of communities and community-based organisations backed up by technically skilled activists.

Map making and community resources

This section provides empirical material to highlight social diversity at Gandhamardhan Hill and how this relates to the highly varied use of multiple natural resources including cultural artefacts. The richness present in the diversity of cultural and material life even in the small sample of 5 hill-side villages poses significant challenges in the creation of meaningful community maps. Additionally, it is important to account for politics and power since the representation of resource uses on maps are not neutral processes but about political choice of whose voice matters, and what forms of resource uses should be preferred, and legally sanctioned, in the future.

This study engaged with five hillside villages next to Gandhamardhan Hill. Each village had a certain delineated area in which agriculture, grazing and other activities took place with fixed control of land use and access even if smaller, subordinate hamlets were present in a few of the villages. Overlapping areal access with fuzzy boundaries became mainly marked in the forest area. Villages further away from the Hill also used the forest for at least some part of the year, or for accessing specific resources like, for example, firewood. And then there are the medicinal men who come for specific plants known to grow at certain times of the year. Similarly, many consider the Hill as spiritually important both among Hindu pilgrims who visit its temples from near and far, and for *adivasis* who rely on informal shrines and sacred groves deep in the forest.

Deciding on all these and many more important uses of the Hill and its resources relies on informal structures not easily confined to the uniform structure of official property rights legislation. While the Forest Rights Act promises to incorporate a multiplicity of livelihood and spiritual uses within one larger area, and putting this area under the direct control of the village council, determining the appropriate institutional structure and appropriate forms of decision-making is a real challenge given the sheer number of different uses and overlapping claims in time and space between people not belonging to the same village council.
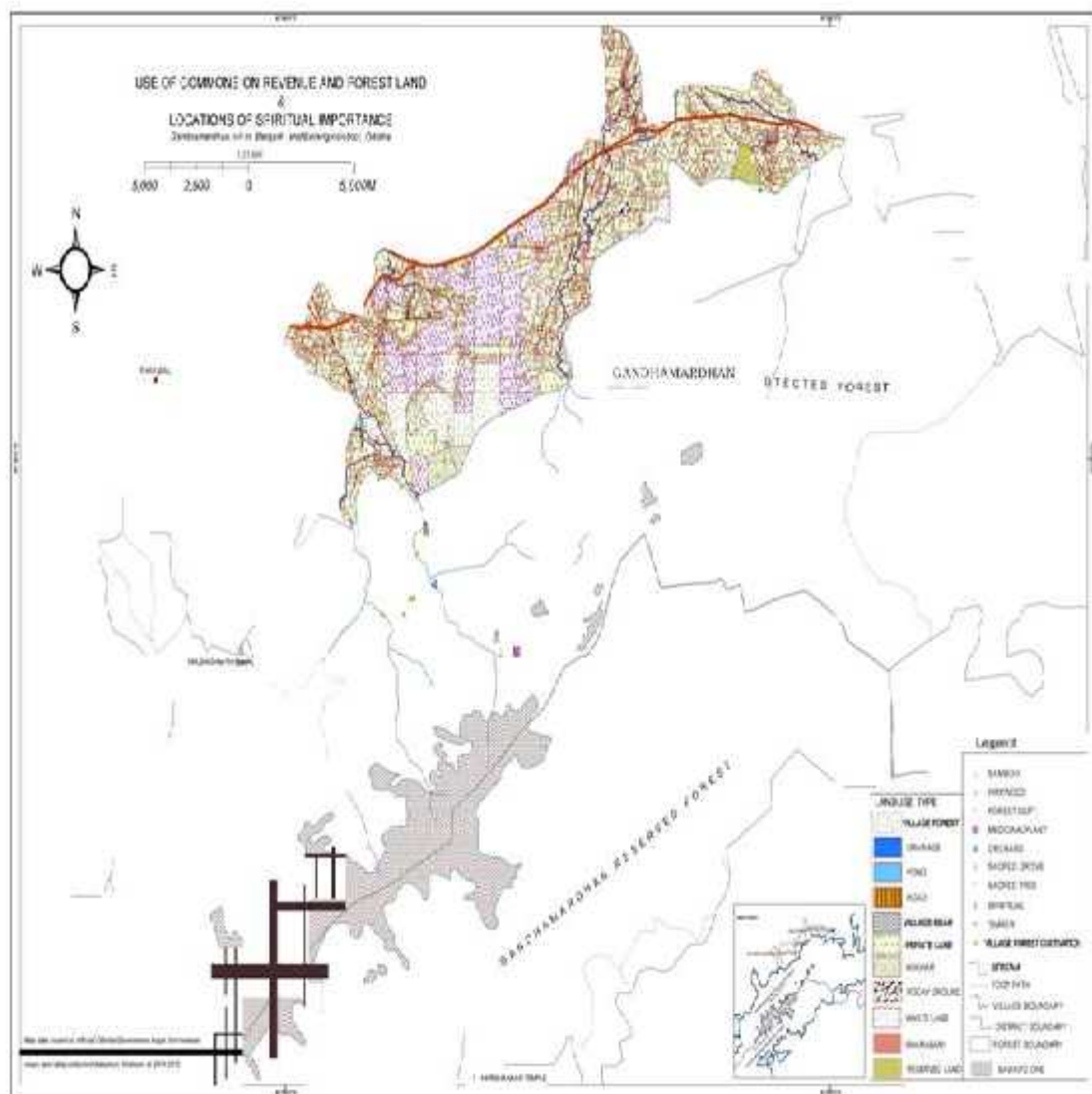

Figure 1: Overview of Gandhamardhan Hill and the study villages

While on the one hand present biodiversity on the Hill, in lack of in-depth surveys, was detailed in interviews as good, and the present approach in which villagers manage resources informally appear to allow for multiple uses, there are many potential threats. Settling formal decision-making and claiming rights appear important before any large-scale projects like mining, religious tourism or commercial forestry moves in to claim

large areas of the Hill ahead of communities. To date protest meetings have been able to keep mining plans at bay. JFM dominated by the Forest Department has however become active resulting in village areas previously used for grazing and logging to move out of the formal control of villagers. This might also happen with the reserve forest.
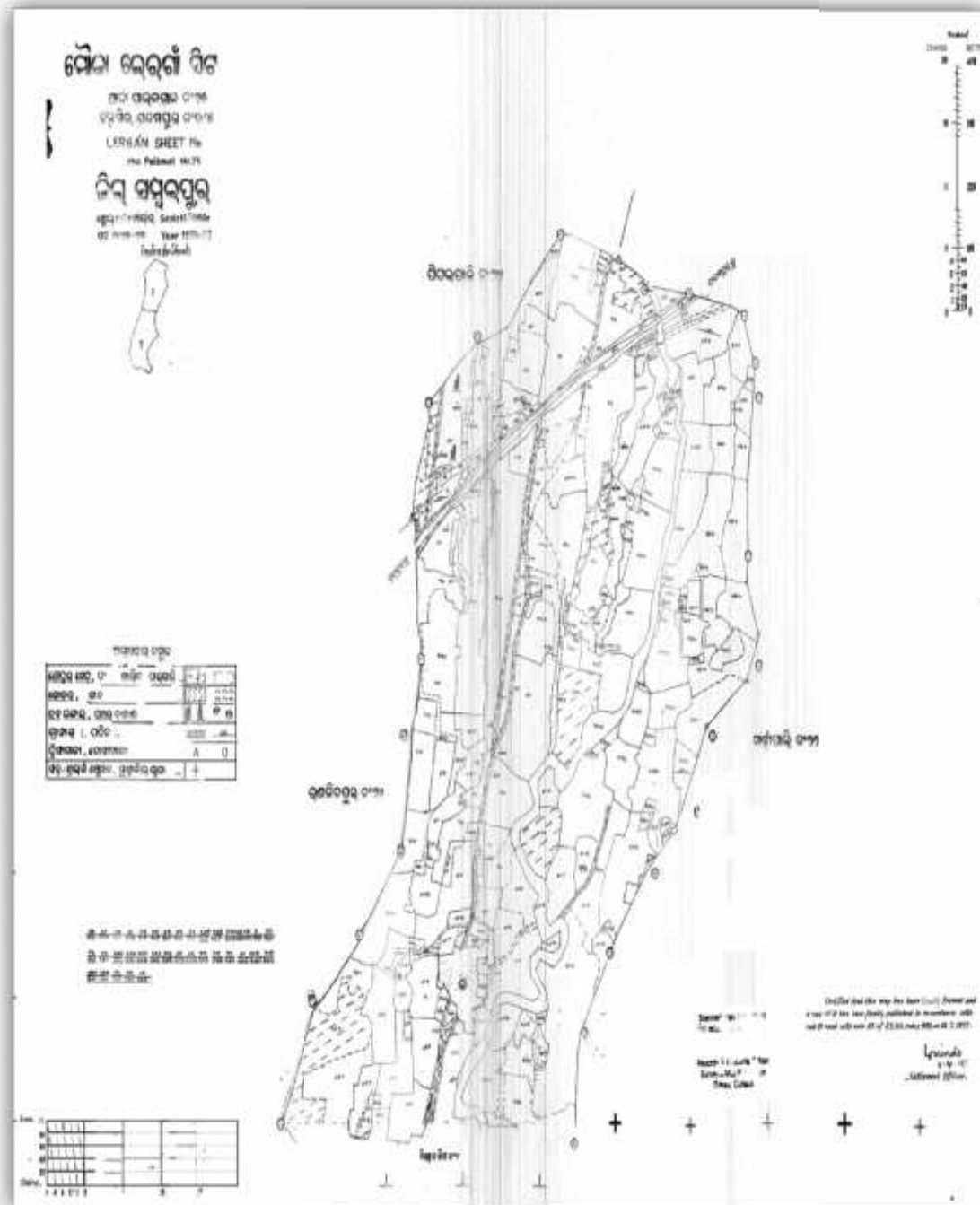
Figure 2: Partial view of the original revenue map for Lergaon village
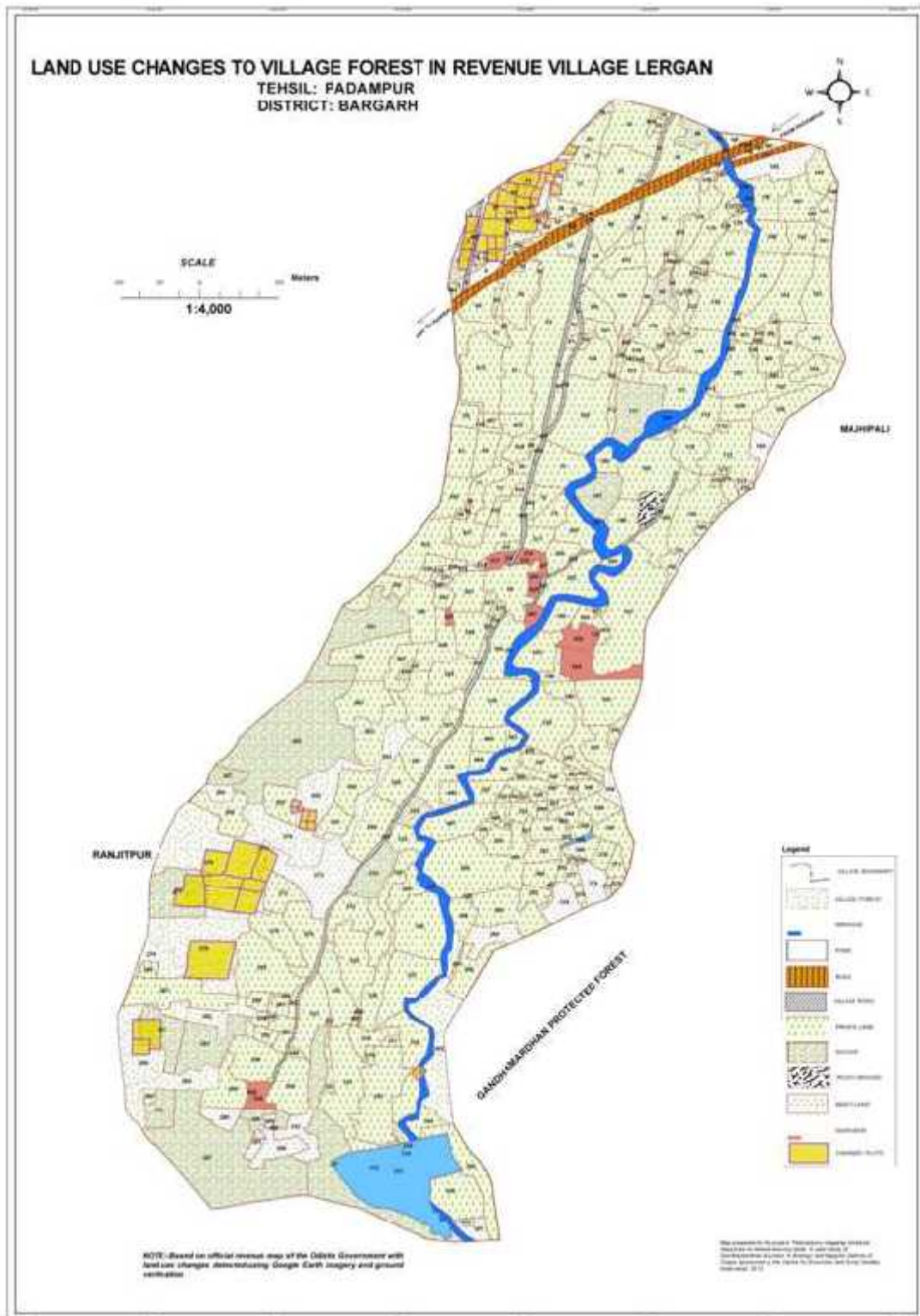
Figure 3: Improved revenue map for Lergaon village

Each village map contained quite dramatic errors (see Figure 2 and 3 for original state government map and processed project map for one village area). This involved for example recently built irrigation dams in some of the study villages and a Forest Department demonstration site. Other discrepancies involved the move of an entire

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village which according to interviews several decades ago had shifted a few hundred metres to the south. Remaining in the map village location was now only the Brahmin village *Gauntia's* estate, a massive property with agricultural fields where houses used to exist. Intriguingly, one village had a 'white spot' on the official map with no mapped land use at all. This was a space which did not officially belong to the government or anyone else and yet was in part cultivated by villagers since long.

Land use naturally varies significantly over the year. Agriculture despite being the primary source of income for many households only dominates for a small part of the year after the monsoon rains and up until the December harvest. After the harvest grazing takes over the fields when animals can feed off the remaining stubble. In the summer different trees continue to be vital for livelihoods. Many forms of grasses grow on the open spaces of the revenue village. The *Mahua* tree is particularly important and each family tends to have its own tree somewhere within the revenue village. For the project to be able to record these shifting land uses with greater detail improved methodologies would be needed. Especially important would be the possibility to access better satellite imagery than the freely available Google Earth images.

There have been frequent accusations that JFM tends to follow forest department and overall state government goals rather than community interests in its planning, management and benefit-sharing of forests (Sarap 2007). The presence of JFM in the livelihoods of villagers was found to be negligible, however, despite significant areas where mainly medicinal plants were grown. Households did not sell its produce to the JFM groups but to in the market or to traders apart from certain varieties of leaves which have special state government collection points. They also had no particular reasons for protecting the cultivations which were all on village forest land, frequently immediately next to the reserve forest. The committees appeared dominated by a few village elites and the local area President in the nearby town. JFM in the study villages appeared to function in ways similar to the common critique of such groups elsewhere, for the benefit of village elites rather than as a source of livelihood for villagers. This is of course very unfortunate since the investment in medicinal plant processing and the ability to sell medicines in markets across the state are likely to generate at least some income beyond that which villagers themselves can make when selling unprocessed plants only in the local market. Villagers reported going to the reserve forest only for special purposes. This is especially for bamboo used for basket-making, medicinal plants, spiritual purposes and for commercial firewood collection. These uses exist throughout the year but are largely carried out only by a specialist in the villages rather than being something that every household does on a daily basis. As can be seen in the map a number of forest uses go deep into the reserve forest. Bamboo collectors walk almost to the top of the hill once per week to gather the bamboo they need. And along the same path exists a number of locations where firewood is collected.

To understand social relations a total of 122 household questionnaires were completed during fieldwork across the five study villages.[7]94 of the 122 household respondents were born in the present location which appeared surprising in a region with

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[7]The households were purposefully selected to comprise all the main communities of each village, that is from General category, OBC, SC and ST groups, to reflect intra-village power and resource relations. Within each community participants were randomly selected to create an overall stratified random sample.

very mixed communities and, at least in recent decades, a strong tradition of outwards migration. There was also no noticeable difference between ST and SC groups in terms of their roots in the area. In one predominantly ST village all households responded that they were born in the present village while OBC/General category households to a larger extent had moved to the present location. Villagers were found to stay in all the villages to a large extent contradicting the literature on widespread migration. The proximity to the Hill supported alternative livelihoods when agriculture was difficult during the hot summer and the following rainy monsoon.

Table 1: Study villages of Paikmal Block

Village	Gram Panchayat	Number of Household	Population			
			SC	ST	Others	Total
Khandijharan	Jhitiki	96	344	30	32	406
Ranjitpur	Jhitiki	240	102	538	364	1,004
Lergaon	Bhengrajpur	124	172	154	184	510
Rasmunda	Bhengrajpur	74	108	40	146	294
Majhipalli	Bhengrajpur	122	286	118	140	544
Total		656	1012	880	866	2,758

Source: Government of Orissa, Odisha Sampad (http://www.orsac.org/odishasampad/) based on Census 2001 data.

Land availability varied, not surprisingly, both between villages and between caste groups. More than 70% of the households in the questionnaire were found to have own agricultural land across the villages. Almost all the households with land had at least some with land title. Often this land title was in the name of an older relative. To complement the land with title deed many also cultivated village forest or *gochar* (grazing) land within the village boundary. ST respondents more often than other groups lacked title deeds instead cultivating forest land with scarce productivity and no irrigation facilities. Some Dalits were completely without land but a few were found to be among the relatively well off. Village headmen across the study villages uniformly controlled more land than anyone else indicating historical inequality based on this inherited position.

Forest use was as expected common for agriculture, forest produce collection, timber (particularly for firewood) as well as for grazing. Surprisingly most of these activities took place in the village area forest and not in the reserve forest despite the high quality reserve forest and a reduced amount of forest guards present in the area. Focus groups and personal interviews did not mention other institutional mechanisms protecting the forest making the preference for village forest unclear. Grazing would take place in the reserve forest only during the dry summer season and only partially since many would stay in village forests also then. No cultivation was recorded in the reserve forest either in questionnaires or on walking tours. It is however in the reserve forest where people go for medicinal plants. One SC village of basket-makers entirely relied on bamboo supplies from the reserve forest for livelihoods. The reserve forest is also the main area for sacred groves and other spiritually important locations though groves could also be found across the village area.

Due to security concerns with Maoist and security police presence in the forest during fieldwork it was only possible to record a partial view of actual reserve forest uses. Even these recordings combined with interviews and focus group discussions made it clear that villagers regularly move across large areas of the Hill, though with varied purposes and variable needs over seasons. It is clear that people depend on virtually the entire Hill for a number of different purposes which include spiritual needs, medicinal plant collection, bamboo and firewood. There can be no doubt that Gandhamardhan Hill plays a very important part in the spiritual lives of villagers. Every household (except one) provided detail of different festivals they celebrate at the Hill. This was irrespective of which community they belonged to or whether or not they considered themselves Hindu. Best known are the festivals of local *adivasi* deities and the Hindu celebrations next to the Nrusingnath temple but many other local occasions are celebrated. It is well known that pilgrims come to the Hindu temples from far away to number tens of thousands of people every year in May or June. But at least locally *adivasi* festivals are also known with large attendance, or at the very least come to make offerings at the forest shrines and groves whether or not they consider themselves to follow the particular beliefs of the *adivasi*. Deities were found in special locations such as at forest shrines which could be close to the villages on the forest fringe but many shrines are deep inside the forest requiring treks of several hours of the hillside. The important *adivasi* Buddharaja shrine is close to the top of the hill next to the bauxite deposits. Similarly a very popular pilgrimage route between two Hindu temples cuts straight across the Hill. Spiritual uses are thus, like the livelihood-based ones, varied with local, regional and inter-religious support. They are recognised as vital community resources in the Forest Rights Act giving additional support in higher-level advocacy in case mining is proposed. At the same time the sheer richness in cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs, again like for livelihoods, appear to complicate community claims to control the land with multiple, cross-cutting uses and no existing solution for what institutional mechanisms should be authoritative.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the possibilities for community resource mapping of natural resources based on a case study at Gandhamardhan Hill in Western Odisha. In this exploratory study an attempt was made to capture the different livelihood and cultural uses of land which at present go undetected, either due to outdated land records on revenue land, or based on a denial of rights to forests. The increasing availability of low(er) cost GIS technologies were put to use to create improved maps based on existing government base maps for a part of Gandhamardhan Hill. The particular aim was to find the gaps between official and actual uses of land. A key understanding emerging from the research is the highly varied social setting also of this relatively confined study area. Even across a few villages it is clear that there is a great variety of groups which engage with land for livelihood and spiritual purposes in ways which are not only challenging to capture on maps, but additionally difficult to formalise since they are overlapping and cut across administrative boundaries like villages and blocks.

The high biodiversity and excellent forest cover on large parts of Gandhamardhan Hill has given rise to a wide number of uses of the forest. This was evident in this study

both in the village forests and in the larger reserve forest on top of the Hill. Not surprisingly the forest was particularly important in the hot summer months when water scarcity prevents cultivation or grazing in the villages. While the project was unable to access forest maps of similar detail to those of the revenue land it was nevertheless possible to show a wide number of uses of the forest including spiritual uses, and the collection of NTFP, bamboo, medicinal plants and firewood all the way to the top of the Hill. It is thus clear that people depend on large areas of the hill including those where the bauxite ore exists on the very top. It is, however, also clear that different social groups, and men and women within these groups, engage with highly varying uses of the land, conforming to an extent to the social groups they belong to but also according to other factors like level of education and seasonal availability of certain resources.

The maps created by this project give scope for the recognition of cultivation on village land and community forest rights based on a wide number of uses. To actually make use of existing rights is a challenge, however, given the widespread marginalisation of the population. Improved tenure rights will certainly be good for farmers but are at present not expected to be able to on their own radically improve the agricultural opportunities in the area given, for example, irrigation and market access problems for farmers. As indicated in this study, significant work is needed beyond mapping to determine the kind of institutional framework which could adequately govern the wide range of resources and resource-users. Thinking about whether, and if so how, institutions can be designed which can properly decide on sustainable resource use have not been a part of this project. Such challenges are clearly much beyond technical mapping and livelihoods analysis given the variability and overlapping uses between groups of people, and across space and time. This is true even if one was to look at only a smaller part of the Hill such as the fieldwork area in this project. And since using the forest goes much beyond individual villages to also include villages further away from the Hill, and various other entities including those who come as pilgrims or to collect medicinal plants, significant work would be required to understand how arrangements might be best designed.

At present there is no standard set for how accurate a map should be, or what technical qualifications are needed from a map maker in order for the map to be seen as valid. The technologies are widely available for mapping cultural and natural resources of relatively good precision, that is significantly better than what exists in government offices at the moment. Lacking legal recognition of maps produced by others than government offices and their authorised consultants will continue to hamper community mapping initiatives. There will be a need to develop forms of mapping which are suitable for rural India in terms of cultural diversity, the building of trust, and finding appropriate forms of decision-making to ensure that the resource uses represented on maps become community-centred.

Until complex and time-consuming governance processes have been possible to take shape, participatory maps thus appear mainly useful as evidence in higher-level advocacy when mining and other large-scale projects are proposed without local consultations. For example the national environmental approval process in India can be engaged with by at least some well-educated members of civil society. Such advocacy can result in the cancellation of mining plans (see for example Kumar 2014) thereby offering some protection against displacement and other consequences of mining with

poor resettlement and environmental management records. Moving beyond the defensive blocking of industrial projects towards wide-ranging protection of community rights represents a larger challenge where map-making needs to become part of long-term community organising and policy development.

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Augustus Cleveland and the Making of British Tribal Policy in Santal Parganas

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Abstract

This essay studies the works of Augustus Cleveland among the Paharia tribe of Rajmahal hills in order to evaluate his role in the development of the British tribal policy in Santal Parganas. The wide stretch of fertile land below the hills was often the subject of skirmishes between them and the lowland zamindars which created administrative problems, besides threatening the safety of their land route from Bengal to Bihar. The role of Cleveland was basically to give a final shape to a policy of confrontation and conciliation which his administrative predecessors, Robert Brooke and James Browne had introduced. But the reason why he is remembered is because of the humane touch marked by kindness and a broader understanding of the Paharias' needs which emerged from his personal interaction with them. Ultimately, he was able to secure the Paharias' trust who saw him as their guardian and accepted all his schemes. For all his administrative measures, he may therefore be regarded as precursor to 'British Paternalism' in India. The present essay evaluates him in the light of the sources and in the broader context of British-Paharia relationship.

Introduction

This essay historically recalls the memory of a colonial bureaucrat who may rightly claim to be one of the pioneers of tribal policy of an inchoate British empire. The rise and establishment of their rule in the second half of the 18th century saw the beginning of the British contacts with the tribals of India. These, in course of time, often resulted in the weakening of tribal autonomy and their control over community resources like water, forest and land (*jal, jungle, jameen*). It also witnessed dilution of their pre-colonial socio-political organisations built up through the ages. This form of British-tribal relationship, based on conquest and subjugation, has been a dominant and oft-studied theme in Indian history. However, there are instances where alternative forms of relationship, based on mutual trust and cooperation, developed between the British and the tribal society. This led to the formulation of British paternalism, the early exponent of which was a later 18th century bureaucrat named Augustus Cleveland (or Clevland; 1754–1784). He gradually climbed to the high office of Collector and Magistrate of Bhagalpur that enabled him to inaugurate an entirely new approach towards the Paharia tribe of the Rajmahal hills coming within his jurisdiction. His approach was characterised by an unusual kindness, emanating as if from the father towards his children. It was based on an intimate and personal contact with the lives and conditions of the Paharias. He showed a respect to their customs and practices, while introducing changes in their

socio-economic condition through his various measures. The Paharias reciprocated him by becoming his ready collaborators and showering on him their unstinted faith and love. The memory of *Chilmili Saheb*[1] was therefore preserved in their legends that expressed profound gratitude to their benefactor.

Biographical sketch

Not much is known about the early life of Augustus Cleveland. He was the son of John Cleveland (1707–1763) of North Devon, England, Secretary to the Admiralty and Sarah Shuckburgh (d. 1764) and was born on 19 September 1754. Appointed as a Writer in the services of the English East Company on 16 November 1770, he arrived in India on 22 July 1771 when he was barely 17 years old. He made a steady but quick rise in his career partially because of his lineage that connected him to Sir John Shore, who rose to become the Governor General of India (1793–1798).[2] His next promotions came in quick succession: Assistant in Select Committee Office in 1772, Assistant to the Collector at Rajmahal in 1773, Assistant to the Council of Revenue at Murshidabad in 1774, Assistant Magistrate at Bhagalpur in 1776, Judge Magistrate and Collector of Bhagalpur in 1779 and also Judge of the Adawlat (Journal of Francis Buchanan 1810-11: 231, Appendix I; Birt 1905: 40-42, Appendix I). Thus, he got the best possible training for his future works remaining for five years as Assistant Magistrate of Bhagalpur district. At the young age of 25, Augustus Cleveland became the Magistrate and Collector of Bhagalpur and Rajmahal in 1779. Death came very early to Augustus Cleveland. He died on 13 January, 1784 at the age of 29. He died on board a ship, 'Atlas Indiaman', in which he had embarked for the Cape of Good Hope. Mrs. Warren Hastings who was returning to London due to ill-health was also sailing in the same vessel. But Cleveland died near the mouth of Hugli. His body was brought back in the pilot sloop that had attended the ship. He was buried in Park Street Cemetery, Calcutta (Buchanan 1930: 232).

What were the circumstances of his death? Our common understanding is that he was shot and wounded by an arrow by Tilka Manjhi, a Santal leader, and he died after sometime as a result of its impact. Tilka Manhji was also hanged publicly by the British administration for killing Cleveland. But surprisingly, our contemporary and later English sources maintain a mysterious silence on the probable cause of Cleveland's death. They discuss his death, but rarely its cause. However, we find a passing reference of the causes of his death in the account of William Hodges.[3] He wrote in 1783:

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[1] Sir John Houlton observes:

'Even now more than 160 years after his death, the Paharias remember with affection 'Jhilmili Saheb' as they call him, and quote his sayings whenever a question arises about their rights. I had personal experience of this when in charge of Settlement in the Santhal Parganas' (Houlton 1949: 67).

[2] Cleveland was cousin of Sir John Shore (later John Lord Teignmouth), the Governor-General of India. He was Shore's only relative in India and was also his dear friend. His death in 1784 saddened John Shore deeply. He composed a monody (See Appendix II D of the present essay) in Cleveland's memory which was later published in his biography written by his son Lord Teignmouth.

[3] William Hodges (1744–1797) was a British traveller and artist who accompanied Captain Cook on his second voyage to the pacific (1772–75) and then came to India. In 1781 he met Augustus Cleveland at Bhagalpur and became his friend. Hodges stayed at Bhagalpur for about four months during which period he accompanied Cleveland to various places within the district and into the hills. He did many of his paintings here. Like many British painters of his time, Hodges searched for the picturesque and unknown

'On my return to Buxar, I proceeded to Bauglepoor, where I found my friend Mr. Cleveland on the bed of ficknefs (sickness), which in lefs (less) than three months deprived the Indian world of his valuable life, a lofs (loss) irretrievable to his friends, and moft (most) feverly (severely) felt by the public.

A CONSTANT, and indeed an inceffant (incessant) application to public bufinefs (business), without fufficient (sufficient) care of a very delicate frame, and poftponig (postponing) until it became too late, the expedient of trying a more favourable climate, terminated the mortal exiftent (existent) of this ineftimable (inestimable) man, who died on board a fhip (ship) at the mouth of the Ganges, in which he had embarked for the Cape of Good Hope. His remains were brought back in the pilot veffel (vessel) that had attended the fhip (ship), and were afterwards depofited (deposited) at Bauglepoor, where a handfome (handsome) monument was erected to his memory' (Hodges 151).

Whatever the circumstances of his death, it seems to have been lamented by one and all (see Appendix I & II).

Political scenario

The hill tracts of Rajmahal, Bhagalpur and Kharagpur, which was then known as the *Jungle Terry*[4] or *Jangal Tarai*, were inhabited by the Paharia tribe. According to Colonel E.T. Dalton:

'…Malers[5] [or Sauriya Paharias] were the first of the aboriginal tribes of Bengal that were prominently noticed by the officers of the East India Company…Malers have no traditions

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landscapes. He found flat landscapes monotonous and found beauty in roughness, irregularity and variety. It is in search of unknown and irregular that Hodges went to the Rajmahal hills with his patron and friend. During one of their excursions, they received invitation from some Paharia Sardars to grace the occasion of an annual buffalo sacrifice in a nearby village. Cleveland and Hodges attended the sacrifice ceremony which was graphically described by Hodges in his account (Hodges 92–93).

[4] Jungle Tarai district between 1772 and 1779 covered almost every portion of the present district of Santhal Parganas and a large area to the west and south-west now included in the Bhagalpur, Monghyr and Hazaribagh district. Most of the areas of the Jungle Terry was surrounded by a tangled mass of hill and inhabited by the Paharia tribe. (Datta 1968: V).

Major James Browne has also defined the boundaries of Jungle Tarai in some detail:

'The Jungle Terry districts are bounded by the plains of Bauglepoor and Colgong, and the Ganges on the north. On the north west by the Currukpoor Hills. On the west by Guidore, and the plains of Bahar. On the south and south west by the provinces of Ramgur and Pachete. On the south east by Birboom. On the east, by the Rajahmahl Hills. On the north east, by the Ganges, and part of the Rajahmahl Hills' (Browne 1788: 1).

He says further:

'These Hills are not a chain communicating with any other, but a cluster of small Hills surrounded by the flat countries, the districts skirting them are as follows beginning with Sacra [Sikri] Gully: 1. Gongapersaud 2. Tilliagurry 3. Colgong 4. Bauglepoor 5. Curruckpoor 6. Bierboom 7. Sultanabad 8. Ammar 9. Rajhmahl 10. Jumnee, which ends at Sacra Gully, and completes their contour.' (Browne 1788: 73).

[5] There are two branches of the Paharias. One is *Mal* Paharias who lived in the southern and eastern parts of the Rajmahal hiils in the second half of the 18th century and were said to be the Hinduised section of the tribe. The other branch of the Paharias is *Maler* or *Sauriya* Paharias who had largely occupied the northern parts of Rajmahal hills during the same period and who had stuck to its ancient ways of living and traditions. R.B. Brainbridge gives a very interesting description of customs and practices of the Sauriya Paharias. He recognised five divisions of Sauriya Paharias which were territorial in nature–Patre, Mandro, Pubbi, Chetteh and Dakrni. Patre occupied the centre of the hill tract; Mandro was found on the north; Pubbi on the east; Chetteh was found on the east from Tin Pahar; Dakrni was found on the South and the in

throwing any real light on their history. They do not endorse the story of their common origin with the Oraons and migration with them from the west, preserved by the latter people; on the contrary, they aver that the human race was first produced on the hills to which they cling' (Dalton 1872: 264–65).

We find rich ethnographic details about the Paharias in Lieutenant Thomas Shaw's[6] monograph of 1792 entitled 'On the Inhabitants of the Hills near Rajamahall', which was published in the *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. IV, 1795 (reprinted in 1799). The monograph was the product of information collected from local informants.[7] Significantly, ethnographic writings on the Paharia religion, festivals and customary laws by Francis Buchanan, Captain Walter Sherwill, Colonel E.T. Dalton, W.W. Hunter and many others drew heavily on Lieutenant Shaw's work.

Till the advent of the British in Jangal Tarai in the second half of the 18th century, the Paharias were pre-peasant communities who lived through hunting and foraging. We learn that they never at any time acknowledged imperial supremacy either of the Mughals or the Bengal Nawabs (Choudhary 2016: 3–5). In fact, they never had direct relationship with any government before the British. They desired only the seclusion of their rocky home. However, their desired seclusion was threatened by the neighbouring zamindars who lived beneath the Rajmahal hills. They particularly coveted a wide strip of fertile land that existed between the hills and the plains. The zamindars wanted to cultivate the fertile lands and the Paharias wanted to prevent their cultivation in order to keep back the 'hated foreigners' as far as possible from their hills. Their attitude was: we would not cultivate, neither would allow anyone to cultivate.

In their quarrels, however, it was the Paharias who always had the upper hand. Taking full advantage of their geographical position, their armed bands descended from the hills fully equipped with 'powerful bamboo bows and poisonous arrows', murdering all those who opposed their progress into the lowland and looting all the way. They carried with them grain, salt, tobacco, money, cattle and goats and anything they could lay their hands on; and retreated to their hills where no one ever dared to follow them

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Pakur subdivision. Although the inhabitants of these divisions intermarried, great dissimilarity in language existed among them (Brainbridge 1907: 46). In the present essay, the term Paharia is synonymous with Sauriya Pahariya.

[6] Lieutenant Thomas Shaw was appointed the first Commander of the famous Bhagalpur Hill Rangers, raised by Augustus Cleveland in 1780. According to Bhagalpur District Collectorate Records, Shaw held 12 *bighas* and 1 *katha* of land at Bhagalpur near the Rangers Cantonment. The land covered a house with offices, garden, and two bighas, which contained an old tank which became dry in 1795. (Bhagalpur District Collectorate Records, Vol. 14, 1795, 346). Rev. Reginald Heber, when he visited Bhagalpur on August 10-11, 1824 was all praise to the memory of Lt. Shaw. He says, 'The only man who during this interval [after the death of Cleveland] appears to have done his duty towards these people, was Lieutenant (afterwards colonel) Shaw…' (Heber 1828: 193).

[7] Thomas Shaw writes:

'[His] description [of the Paharia] does not contain much more than a bare translation of what was written by the best informed mountaineer whom I have met. I have spared no pains to render it faithful; for there alone it can have any merit. My information has been derived through a *Soubadar* of the Rangers (whom the late Mr. Cleveland had instructed in writing *Nagree*) as far as relates to the inhabitants of the hills in three *Tuppahs* of *Mudjeway, Ghurry*, and *Munnuary*…Whatever was material in these latter Tuppahs, was related by a *Soubadar* from that quarter to the one who can write; and both attended me in translating them' (Shaw 1799: 45).

(Sherwill 1852: 545–46; Birt 1905: 33–5). These raids made the life of the lowlanders miserable.

Realising the impossibility of resistance, the lowland zamindars initially resorted to negotiations and compromise. They offered certain portions of their fertile and cultivated lands to the Paharia *Sardars*[8] on *jagir* or service tenure. The condition of their holding them was to prevent any further invasion of the Paharias on their lands. The Sardars were to maintain guards at the passes that led down into the plains, while the zamindars were to place their own police outposts to prevent the raids on their cultivated lands. The agreement was annually renewed at the time of *Dassahara* festival when Sardars of all tuppahs with the village *Manjhis* (headmen) descended from the hills to meet the zamindars. The Sardars got turbans from the zamindars as token of renewal of agreement which was followed by a feasting and drinking session (Birt 1905: 61–63).

The agreement between the two parties had little sanction and it was quickly forgotten by the Paharias. Each year the agreement was renewed and broken. The Paharia raids into their villages and the fields continued. Annoyed by the repeated breaking of the agreements by the Paharias, the exasperated zamindars and harassed lowlanders decided to teach the Paharias a harsh lesson. At one Dassahra festival, the agreements were renewed and turbans given to the Sardars as usual. There was also feasting and drinking session. However, when the Paharias and their Sardars all got drunk, the zamindars and the lowland farmers swooped down upon them and cut them into pieces. Only a few survived to tell the tale (Birt 1905: 63–64). The news of the treachery spread to all the remaining Paharias. Burned with mad passion of revenge, the groups of Paharia martial youths swept down upon the plains. They conducted a series of raids and indulged in plunder and pillage to apprise the zamindars and their lowland ryots the futility of their treacherous act (Ibid. 71). This vigorous spree of looting and murdering by the Paharias resulted in much confusion and disorder in the whole area.

The general disorder created in the lowlands adjoining the Rajmahal hills by Paharia raids attracted the attention of the British. To the British, extension of settled agriculture was necessary to enlarge its sources of land revenue, and they feared its loss from the Paharia depredations. Further, they valued greatly the safety of their communication lines. Paharias' activities put in danger safety of the vital land route from Bengal to Bihar. Colonel James Browne, in his report of 1779 to government, observed that it was about fifteen years since the hill people had any government among themselves of a general nature; during which period they had become dangerous and troublesome to the low country; that their ravages had been the more violent, as they were stimulated by hatred against the zamindars for having cut off several of their chiefs by treachery (Browne 1788: 75). Lieutenant T. Shaw also observed that the low country bordering on the hills was almost depopulated, and travellers could not pass with safety between Bhagalpur and Furruckabad, nor could boats pass without danger of being plundered (Shaw 1799: 102–3). More irksome was, however, the frequent looting and murder of the Government *dak* runnners who were the only means of communication between Bengal and west Bihar. These runners, who followed the land route along the Ganges through the narrow Telliagarhi pass, fell easy prey to the Paharias. The dak runners were

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[8] The *Sardar* was the head of the group of villages. As such he is also referred to as Sardar Manhji. In each village subordinate to him and acting as his deputy was the Manjhi.

robbed and murdered and the Government despatches were invariably destroyed. This was an intolerable situation for the East India Company's authorities at Fort William who took communication as their life-line and wanted to keep it safe and secure at any cost (Birt 1905: 72).

Early British officials and framing of British tribal policy

This was the state of affairs when, on the advice of his military adviser General Barker, Warren Hastings in 1772 raised a special 'Corps of Light Infantry' with about 800 well armed and dressed persons. The Corps was placed under the command of Captain Robert Brooke 'who had already distinguished himself in partisan or guerilla warfare'. His authority extended over the areas of Rajmahal, Kharagpur and Bhagalpur, which were formed into a military collectorship in November 1773. He was entrusted with the double task of 'taming' the rebellious zamindars and the Paharias and restoring and protecting the means of communication and 'turn their thoughts from war to cultivation' (Browne 1788: Introduction iv; Birt 1905: 72–73; McPherson 1909: 26).

Captain Robert Brooke followed the policy of repression and conducted military raids against the refractory zamindars and the Paharias. He had remarkable successes against the lowland zamindars many of whom were forced into submission. However, he found that his Corps was no match against the Paharias. The jungle on the hills being very dense, there being no roads, no supplies and no chance of the hill people coming to an open fight, chances of success against them was very slim. Having an intimate knowledge of the rugged terrain, the Paharias appeared and disappeared at will, shooting down British troops with their poisoned arrows. These poisoned arrows were dreaded by the Corps as every wound these inflicted was fatal. Added to these difficulties was the unhealthy climate of Rajmahal hills which resulted in frequent sickness and several deaths of Light Infantry soldiers. It was proving to be a hopeless contest, compelling the authorities to think about making a change in methods (Birt 1905: 73–74). In the meantime, the Paharias also began to realise the futility of old way of plundering. Whenever they were seen in the plains, they were chased and shot at by the Light Infantry (Sherwill 1852: 546; Shaw 1799: 103). So this was equally a daunting encounter for them also.

Realising the futility of the ongoing contest, Captain Robert Brooke took the first historic step of conciliation. He initiated the practice of inviting the Sardars and their villagers, both males and females, to descend from their hills and see him personally. Whosoever came to him was treated with kindness, feasted and presented with a turban, money, beads or some trifling gifts (Ibid.)[9]. He also submitted a conciliatory plan to the Fort William that included showing leniency to the Paharia prisoners, their wards and women and encouraging habitation in the cultivable tracts below the hills (Browne 1788: Introduction iii-iv; Datta 1968: vi). He also induced some of the Paharias to come down and settle in cultivable lands below the hills and claimed himself to have founded no less

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[9] Captain T. Shaw observes:

'…it became unquestionably necessary to impress them with a dreadful awe of our prowess: and in this harassing and unpleasant warfare, I have been well informed by officers who were with Captain Brooke, that his gallant conduct could not be too much commended. He made them sensible of the inefficacy of opposing him in the field, and invited the chiefs to wait upon him and negotiate, when he gave a feast to those who came, and made them presents of turbans…' (Shaw 1799: 103).

than 283 villages between Udwa and Barkop (McPherson 1909: 27). Writes McPherson, 'When the later achievements of Mr. Cleveland are considered, it should not be forgotten that Captain Brooke was the pioneer of civilization in the jungleterry' (Ibid.).

However, Robert Brooke did not get enough time to implement his plan. In July 1773, he had to resign from his duties, paving the way for Major James Browne to take over his responsibilities (Browne 1788: Introduction iv). Soon after taking charge of Jungle Tarai district, Browne took definite measures to restore tranquility and win over the Paharias. He continued with Brooke's plan of individual meetings with the Sardars and villagers and treating them with respect and kindness (Sherwill 1852: 546). He followed this up, by submitting an elaborate plan in1778 for the administration of the hill areas. This received the formal approval of Warren Hastings, the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta. Interestingly, as he mentioned himself, Browne prepared the plan in consultation with many Paharia Sardars, who particularly insisted on the preservation of their ancient form of government (Browne 1788: 78). Thereby, he proposed a plan of internal government which contained the following main features:

> That the successors of the several Sardars of different tuppahs be restored to authority and possessions held formerly by their predecessors. But instead of holding them from the zamindars, they would hold them by *Sanad* granted in the name of the government. They would give *machulkahs* (pledges) to government specifying their duties and services.
>
> That the Manjhis would give similar pledges specifying their services and obligations.
>
> That all the transactions of the hill people would be carried through their Sardars.
>
> That the annual oath of allegiance, with the ancient forms and ceremonies attending it, be renewed.
>
> That *Hats* be established at proper places, to forward the intercourse of the hill people with the low country. (Ibid: 78–79).

Yet another significant measure of Major Browne was to create 'Invalid Jagirs'. Lands at the foot of the hills were allotted rent free to the retired and disabled soldiers formerly employed in the army of the East India Company. These lands were known as Invalid Jagirs and were given to the soldiers rent free for life. Thus, an attempt was made to create a buffer zone between the hills and the low lands as a measure of safety. The plan of Major Browne was much appreciated by the Court of Directors who sanctioned it in toto (Birt 1905: 76–77; Datta 1968: vi). Evaluating Brooke and Browne's works among the Paharias, Lieutenant T. Shaw observes, 'Captain Brooke and he [James Browne]…laid the foundation for the most permanent and happy settlement concluded with the hill chiefs by the late MR. AUGUSTUS CLEVELAND, that could possibly be attained' (Shaw 1799: 103).

Augustus Cleveland and his Paharia policy

Reforms of Cleveland should be classified under two heads, those actually prepared and implemented, and those which he could not implement because of his premature death. Though young in age, he had enough administrative experience to tackle the problems that emanated from the confusion and disorder that prevailed after Major Browne's exit from the scene. The Paharias had once again became restive and started plundering and looting at will. Not only that, they were helping the zamindar of

Chandawa, Rup Narayan Deo in his constant quarrels with his neighbours and ravaging an extensive area in the south of the district. In the western direction, Rajput rajas of Kharagpur Raj were getting suspicious of the growing English power at Bhagalpur and they encouraged the activities of Rup Narayan and the Paharias. Rani Sarbeshwari of Sultanganj in the south was also a source of worry to the Company. Thus, the whole stretch of land lying south-west of Bhagalpur district was in a state of disorder. River *dacoity* was also on the rise between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal (Birt 1905: 83–85). It was therefore left to Cleveland to either carry forward the works of Brooke and Browne or to bring suitable changes.

In this difficult situation, Cleveland's first efforts were directed at conciliation rather than conquest. He knew very well that it was imperative to win over the Paharias in order to pacify the whole area. This would also serve his another purpose of breaking the nexus between the zamindars and the Paharias. Following the lines laid down by Brooke and Browne, he therefore endeavoured to secure the goodwill of the Sardars and Manjhis because their 'influence with the rank and file was paramount'. He also thought that gaining their confidence would help the British in gaining a control over the whole tribe (Ibid. 86–87).

For fulfilling his aim of inducing the Paharias to throw in their lot with the British Government, Cleveland devised a novel plan. This was to give pension to the Sardars, Naibs and Manjhis that would make them economically dependent on the government. The rate of pension differed from ten rupees a month to Sardar, three rupees to his Naibs and to two rupees to the Manjhis. In lieu of the pension, the holder was to assist the authorities when required, report all crimes within the villages under his control, and maintain peace and order in their respective areas. In 1780, Cleveland reported to the authorities that forty seven chiefs had agreed to become government pensioners on the above terms (Birt 1905: 87–88).

Making forty seven chiefs agree to his proposal within a short span of one year was undoubtedly a remarkable achievement of Cleveland. However, he must have had to do a lot of ground work to achieve it. The Paharias did not like interaction with the 'hated foreigners', nor did they like any intrusion into their hill territory. But Cleveland crossed all these barriers; he frequently visited their villages, most of the time 'alone and unarmed', and freely intermixed with the Paharia Sardars and villagers and discussed his plans with them till they were convinced of their usefulness to them. He invited them to his residence at Bhagalpur. He also gave them and their wives and children little presents and above all much affection and respect. It was only after seeking their verbal consent that he sought government approvals for his plans. Thus, he had the backing of his people behind his plans. His contemporary and friend William Hodges has given a rich testimony to his style of functioning among the Paharias.[10] Captain Sherwill also informs us that,

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[10] William Hodges describes Cleveland's methodology in the following words:

'It was the humanity of that gentleman, added to the defire (desire) of improving the revenue of this part of his diftrict (district) for the Company's benefit, that induced him to venture into the hills, alone and unarmed, where he convened fome (some) of the principal Chiefs; and after the fulleft (fullest) affurance (assurance) of his moft (most) peaceable intentions and good-will towards them, he invited them to vifit (visit) him at his residence at Bauglepoor. The confidence which he manifefted (manifested) in their honour, by trufting (trusting) to it for his personal fafety (safety), effectualy gained

'[Amongst the Paharias], Mr. Cleveland went unarmed, and almost unattended, and after much patience and by distributing presents and giving feasts to hundreds of the hill-men at a time, and by settling small yearly pensions on all the principal chiefs, they relented…' (Sherwill 1852: 546).

Converting Paharia Sardars and village heads to government pensioners seems to have been a calculated preliminary step to gain their collaboration and confidence and also create a congenial atmosphere to launch his next schemes. His next scheme was to use the Paharias' military instinct and fighting capacity for the benefit of the empire. According to this plan, the Paharias were to be moulded into a disciplined corps at the disposal of the government, ever ready to be employed. He submitted his scheme to the Governor-General-in-Council. The scheme provided for a corps of hill archers, some four hundred strong, to be enrolled by the district administration among the followers of those forty seven chiefs who pledged to coordinate with the British government. Eight of the most trusted Sardars were to be placed in command of detachments. A special uniform of purple jacket and turban was recommended to all who joined the corps. The eight Sardars were to get three rupees per month, village headmen who furnished recruits two rupees and the rank and file three rupees per month. The total expenditure on raising this corps was estimated at Rs. 3,200/-. With the approval of the government, the Corps of Hill Archers was enrolled (Birt 1905: 90–91, 94). William Hodges says that in less than two years Cleveland had a fine corps employed for the express purpose of preserving peace and order in the same area which witnessed devastations for centuries. A camp was formed for a corps of a thousand men, three miles from Bhagalpur, where their families resided with them, and where strict military discipline was observed (Hodges 1793: 90).

Cleveland soon got the opportunity to test the effectiveness of this corps. It was employed against a raiding party of the southern Paharias who were on their old ways of plundering villages. Cleveland himself marched at the head of the Hill Archers to assess the performance of the new recruiters. To his satisfaction, they fought well, drove back the marauding party and even pursued them far into their own territory. Cleveland then urged Government to recognise the corps as a permanent and properly constituted fighting force as it was capable of dealing with local disturbances. The government sanctioned his proposal. The corps was to be recruited entirely from the Paharias, and its chief object was to maintain peace on the Rajmahal Hills. The new corps thus formed was placed under the charge of Lieutenant Thomas Shaw. Stationed at Bhagalpur, the

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their efteem (esteem), and fome (some) time after a deputation of their Chiefs waited on him. By a variety of attentions, by little prefents (presents), and acts of perfonal (personal) kindnefs (kindness), he so fubdued (subdued) their ferocious fspirits (spirits), that they promised to defifit (desist) entirely from their ufual (usual) depredations; and returning to their families and their people, the whole body became earneft (earnest) to be personally introduced to this humane and benevolent ftranger (stranger). Mr. Cleveland had by this time digefted (digested) his plan, which he brought forwards by degrees, and whatever he propofed (proposed) they inftantly (instantly) agreed to. He fent (sent) prefents (presents) to their wives, and wherever he faw (saw) he careffed (caressed) their children, decorating them with beads; and to their Chiefs he prefented (presented) medals, as a mark of his (friendfhip) friendship, and as a reward for their improving civilization… Thus the ingenuity, addrefs (address), and humanity of one man effected, in the fpace (space) of little more than two years, more than could even have been hoped for from the utmost exertions of military feverity (severity).' (Hodges 1793: 89–90).

corps was later known as 'Bhagalpur Hill Rangers' (Birt 1905: 96–98; Datta 1968: viii). It continued to exist for over seventy years and was disbanded on the reorganisation of the Native Army after the Revolt of 1857 (Dalton 1872: 266; Datta 1968: viii).

Another notable scheme of Cleveland was the establishment of Hill Assembly for the administration of Civil and Criminal Justice in the hills. This was basically the blueprint for a dual government in which justice was to bring to the door step of the Paharias and deliver through their indigenous agencies. Cleveland's plan appears to have been to preserve, as far as possible, their system of self government. He knew that ordinary courts of the Company government were ineffective for them, while the Bhagalpur courts were inaccessible. So he was in favour of making a special arrangement that would be more effective and useful. In April 1782, Cleveland obtained sanction from the Government to withdraw the whole of the Rajmahal Hill tract from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts. Here we can trace the origin of the Non-Regulation System implemented in the tribal regions of India. Under the new scheme, all disputes were to be referred to the Hill Assembly. The Assembly which was started with the Hill Rangers, further elaborated and extended throughout the Rajmahal hills. A Council of Sardars was to meet twice a year forming a session court to try all offences that had occurred in the previous six months within its jurisdiction. The Collector reserved for himself the right to veto or amend all sentences passed, except in the case of a capital punishment. None had the right to rescind the sentence of death save the Assembly itself. The Hill Assembly first met in 1782. Years later, its procedures were defined by Regulation I of 1796 which provided that the Magistrate should commit all important cases to be tried before an Assembly of hill chiefs. He was to attend the trial as Superintending Officer and confirm or modify the sentence if not exceeding fourteen years' imprisonment. Higher sentences were referred to the *Nizamat Adalat*, the Supreme Criminal Court. However, the powers of the Hill Assembly were curtailed by Regulation I of 1827 according to which the hill-men were declared amenable to the ordinary courts. The Sardars got advisory powers in place of judicial powers. Some of the Sardars were to sit with Magistrate when he tried cases in which the hill-men were involved. He was also authorised to adjudicate summarily in disputes about land, succession and claims to money when the value of the suit did not exceed one hundred rupees. (Dalton 1872: 266–267; Hunter 1877: 306–7; Birt 1905: 100–102; Datta 1968: viii). However, Regulation I of 1827 was subsequently repealed by Act XXIX of 1871 which rendered the Paharias amenable to the ordinary law (McPherson 1909: 28).

Clevelend's another remarkable step towards the welfare of the Paharias was the creation of *Damin-i-Koh*, an exclusive territory of the Paharias to save them from the outside encroachments. This priviledged Paharia zone was formed into a Government Estate. The Paharias residing within the boundary of Damin-i-Koh were to hold absolutely rent free lands. The Estates of Ambar and Sultanabad were also withdrawn from the old district of Rajshahi and included in Damin. In the south lay the *Pargana* of Belpatta in Birbhum, ruled by Tribhuban Singh. It was also included in Damin. Thus a vast stretch of land was consolidated into a Paharia zone or Damin-i-Koh (Birt 1905:109-10; Basu 1942: 83).

However, the government soon realised a problem. Within the limits of Damin-i-Koh, large tracts of fertile land lying at the foot of the hills was uncultivated and paid no revenue to the government. The fact remained that the Paharias would neither cultivate

the valleys themselves, nor allow others to do so. This prompted the administration to induce the Paharias to settle in the low country and intermix more generally with the inhabitants on the plains. The government came out with a very favourable plan. Every Sardar inclined to settle in the low country was to be granted a jagir, from one to three hundred bighas of land, free of all rents or taxes, according to the ranks or influence he had in the hills. His jagirs would be transferrable to his heirs. Any of the Paharias not of Sardar rank, who was inclined to cultivate lands in the low country, received lands free of rents or taxes initially for ten years, after which period the land so cultivated had to pay revenue accordingly. The pension scheme was costing government over Rs. 13,000 annually and therefore the government wanted this scheme to be financed by the revenue generated by the Paharias themselves. It appears that Cleveland himself regarded pension scheme as a provisional arrangement. His object was to help them financially and to ensure good conduct from them till the art of cultivation had taken root among them. He was convinced that at no distant date they would descend to the plains and finally take to cultivation and manufactures. Cleveland proposed to the government that all the Sardars and Manhjis holding pension from the government should forfeit their pensions unless they settled on the plains within twelve months. He hoped that they would become 'civilized' and learn productive methods of agriculture by intercourse with the lowlanders and would thereby be able to contribute to the cost of administration (Basu 1942: 86–87; Hunter 1877: 308; Mcpherson 1909: 27–28).

Cleveland also supplied the Paharias seeds and implements and also established bazaars for them below the hills where they could bring their products for sale and barter (Birt 1905: 109–10; Basu 1942: 86–87; Hunter 1877: 307–8). These reforms intended to change a pre-peasant community into a peasant community by incorporating them into a part of mainstream market economy. However, these schemes could not be entirely implemented mainly because of his untimely death.

Augustus Cleveland's concern for the Paharias' welfare was so comprehensive that he cared not only for the present generation, but also for the next generation of the Paharias. He introduced formal schooling and opened a school in Bhagalpur for the children of the Bhagalpur Hill Rangers' personnel, although any Paharia boy could get into it. We know about this school mainly from the travel account of Rev. Reginald Heber (Bishop Heber), who passed through Bhagalpur town in 1824. It is particularly rich in the description of this school and its pupils. Heber reached Bhagalpur by river on 10 August 1824 and was soon on a trip to the town and its adjoining areas with his host Chalmers, the Judge and Magistrate of Bhagalpur. During his trip, one of the places of interest he visited was a school which he informed as 'being originally opened by Cleveland' and later revived by Governor General Lord Hastings (1813–23) (Heber 1828: 190–91).[11] It seems that the Paharia school had a long life as it was found

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[11] Bishop Heber during his trip to Bhagalpur made interesting observations about the Paharia school:

'The school is adjoining to the lines, and occupies a large and neat bunglow, one room in which is the lodging of the schoolmaster, a very handsome and intelligent half-caste youth; the other, with a large verandah all around, was, when I saw it, filled with Puharee sepoys and their sons, who are all taught to read, write, and cypher in the Kythee character, which is that used by the lower classes in the district for their common intercourse, accounts & c. and differs from the Devanagree about as much as the written character of western Europe does from its printed. The reason alleged for giving this character the preference is its utility in common life, but this does not seem a good reason teaching it only, or even beginning with it. No increase of knowledge, or enlargement of mind, beyond the power of keeping

mentioned in *The Bengal Directory and Annual Register, 1841* as 'Bhaugulpore Hill School'. The Directory also gives the names of the persons who formed its management committee in that year (The Bengal Directory and Calcutta Annual Register, 1841: 514).

The tribal policy of Cleveland: An evaluation

As related before, when Augustus Cleveland was appointed Collector and Magistrate of Bhagalpur and Rajmahal in 1779, he was barely 24. However, he had enough administrative experience and maturity of a veteran. His pension policy, although costly and not without its critics[12], rendered the Paharias peaceful allies of the British government. Raising the Hill Corps and formation of Hill Assembly were brilliant plans that got the much needed support of the higher authorities and were actually implemented. They remained in practice without much alterations even after his death. To elaborate, the pension policy was in vogue till 1879, the Hill Corps till 1857 and the Hill Assembly till 1827. In fact, Cleveland's fame largely rests on these three reforms. However, credits also go to Lord Hastings for saving many of his schemes from the looming threat of early exit. He saved his pension scheme from the embezzlement of the middlemen and pensions were restored to the Sardars and village chiefs. Lord Hastings also revived the organisation of the battalion which had 'become a mere rabble, addicted to all sorts of vice and disorder' and the rights of the Paharia to their land upheld as against the lowland zamindars (Heber 191–93).

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their accounts and writing a shop-bill, can be expected from it, in as much as there is no book whatever printed in it, except Mr. Rowe's spelling-book, and no single Hindoo work of any value or antiquity written in it. I urged this to the school-master, who said that by and by, when they had made some progress in the Kythee, he might teach them the Nagree, but they might, I am convinced easily learn both together, or if one at a time, then the printed character, as simpler, is to be preferred. In the Kythee I heard several, both men and boys, read fluently and I could understand their Hindoostanee very well. They are described as quick and intelligent, fond of learning, and valuing themselves on their acquirements. This school was originally set on foot by Mr. Cleveland, but till Lord Hastings' visit had been shamefully neglected by his successors in office. It was revived by Lord Hastings, and is now very carefully and judiciously attended to by the adjutant, Captain Graham, an intelligent Scots officer, on whom the whole management for the corps has for the last five years devolved, the commanding officer, Captain Montgomerie, being in the last stage of a decline… At the school I met the present native commandant, one of Mr. Cleveland's surviving pupils, an old man, much reverenced by his country, and who passes a great deal of his time there, being extremely proud of his people, and interested in their improvement. He has also the character of a smart and intelligent soldier. His influence has been very valuable in getting the school together again…' (Heber 1828: 190-91).

[12] Francis Buchanan was an overall critic of Augustus Cleveland's policies. He remarks:

'In fact this [rendering the Paharias peaceable allies of the government] was chiefly effected by the terror which the military operations of Captain Brooke inspired, and a plan of temperate conciliation adopted by captain Browne; and it seems exceedingly doubtful whether or not the kindness shown to them by Mr. Cleveland and the lavish use of public money have had any advantageous result. Were I to believe the Suzawul's [Sazawal or the Deputy of Cleveland, Abdul Rasul Khan] account, I should rather think that the pensions have done harm. He says that whatever the chiefs receive is totally expended on liquor at Bhagalpur, and that the pensioners return from thence just as bare as when they left their hills. If such is the case, the idleness which usually accompanies such dissipations must have tended to reduce them to greater than would otherwise have been the case. The payment should, therefore, if possible, be made to them near home; and perhaps might be effected at Majhuya, through a native officer fixed there, as I have already proposed. It would of course be necessary that he should be liable to severe punishment if detected in fraud; and the best source of information, and means of control, would probably be found in the officer commanding the corps of hill rangers' (Buchanan 1939: 254).

One of the ambitious plans of Cleveland was to encourage the Paharias to practice settled agriculture and simple crafts. But this measure did not have the desired impact mainly because of his death and also because of the occupational traits of the Paharias. They were basically a hunter and forager community who practised rudimentary form of shifting cultivation. So to make them settled cultivators was a daunting task, which needed close and continuous supervision and encouragements from the authorities. With Cleveland's death, this prospect was ruined.

His far-sighted and much appreciated step was opening a modern school for the Paharia boys. However, its impact was negligible, as compared to his other schemes. The school did not lead to opening of more Paharia schools and the government did not show much interest in this scheme either. The absence of Cleveland proved to be the most vital factor for its negligence.

One of Cleveland's works, of a very durable nature, was carving out Damin-i-Koh as the exclusive Paharia zone. However, Damin-i-Koh did not serve its intended purpose of safeguarding Paharia interests. The Paharias themselves were to be blamed for this situation. Even after much official persuasions, they refused to descend from their hills and undertake the cultivation of the fertile fields that lay beneath the hills. When the government found it hopeless to induce the Paharias to settle in the plains and reclaim the forests of Damin-i-Koh, it accepted the proposal of Petty Ward, the officer deputed to demarcate the area of Damin-i-Koh, of admitting the Santals in the Damin territory to set an example to the Paharias (McPherson 34). In 1837, James Pontet was appointed Superintendent of Damin-i-Koh with clear instruction that every encouragement should be given to the Santals in the work of clearing the jungle. The government was perhaps eager expand its financial sources to compensate the burden of giving pension to the chiefs and the maintenance of the Bhagalpur Hill Rangers (Ibid. 35).[13] The Santals were already pouring into the area, clearing forests, cutting down timber, ploughing land and growing foodgrains. Now they speeded it up and virtually swarmed the whole Damin territory (Birt 158; McPherson 35).

The quick and heavy immigration of the Santals from the west into Damin soon cut off the Paharias from intercourse with the lowlanders and Damin became a Santal preserve. Restricted from moving down to the lower hills and valleys, the Paharias were confined to the dry interior and to the more barren and rocky upper hills. This severely affected their lives, impoverishing them in the long term. On the other hand, Santal myths and songs which refer to the Santal past as one of a tireless search for a place to settle, here in the Damin-i-Koh their journey seemed to have come to an end. They were to live within it, practise plough agriculture, and become settled peasants. However, this also resulted in a tragic 'deforestation' in Jungle Tarai. Writes Captain Sherwill, 'The hill-men is not to be compared with the Sonthal in the use of the axe, the former is awkward and slow compared with the active Sonthal, nearly one-half of whose existence is spent felling trees' (Sherwill 1852: 589). From the above account of an eye witness it is clear that indiscriminate cutting of trees took place under the British patronage and the

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[13]'The Government of 1823–27 had regarded the hilly tract from a political point of view. The Government of 1837 regarded it from a financial standpoint and were anxious to make good to the public purse the expenditure incurred in the work of demarcation and in Paharia administration, which latter, between the stipends to the chiefs and the maintenance of the archer corps, was costing annually about Rs. 50,000' (McPherson 1909: 35).

neo-settlers Santals acted as the agent of this deforestation. As cultivation expanded, an increased volume of revenue flowed into the Company's coffers and the Paharias' memory gradually faded out of British mind.

Conclusion

Cleveland was remembered even after more than 200 years of his death, despite the ephemerality and failure of his policies. The establishment of Hats below Rajmahal hills, the opening of a school for the Paharia boys and the creation of Damin were some of the measure which met with failures. Even his pension policy had its critics. But these failures were more to do with his early death than any fundamental flaws in conception of them. His death deprived these schemes of his personal supervision and intended direction. One cannot deny that whenever he is remembered, the fact of his early death seems to loom large in one's mind making it difficult to evaluate him in the light of his real acts. Furthermore, he was clearly in advantage because of his social connections. His father was not without means and Cleveland was cousin of influential Sir John Shore. In fact, he was the only relative of Sir John Shore in India and was close to him. From the Governor General Warren Hastings papers, we can easily draw the conclusion that he was also the favourite of Warren Hastings and his wife Marian, probably more as recognition of his talent than anything else. His lineage and his good relations with the highest authorities had no doubt played a role in his quick promotions in career and sanction of his schemes by the highest authorities in Calcutta. Was he then an overrated British official?

We must discard the glamour that surrounds his name and give due credit to his predecessors in the office for the formulation of British Paharia policy. Captain Brooke and Browne who initially sought military solutions to Paharia menace, later advocated a policy of leniency, employed several conciliatory measures and induced them to come down and settle in the cultivable plains below the hills. Thus, it becomes clear that

> 'Great as were the later achievements of Mr. Cleveland amongst the hill people, much of the credit that has fallen to him was really due to Captains Brooke and Browne, and more especially to the latter who initiated many of the reforms.' (McPherson 1909: 27).

However, though Cleveland carried forward the administrative legacies of his predecessors, his greatness lay primarily in his attitude towards the people under his charge. His personal charm and style of functioning as evinced by his extraordinary zeal for incessant and hard work and the humane and kind approach were things that ensured much of his greatness. Making regular trips to Paharia villages without any companion or arms was a daredevil approach which had few parallels in the colonial period. This head-on approach paid him rich dividends as he was able to get first-hand experience of the Paharias' customs and know their aspirations. He also won confidence and respect, rather reverence, of the Paharias. They gave their highest social regard, accepting him not as a noble administrator, but as their caring and loving guardian. He thus rose above his predecessors in converting the Paharias into loyal friends and allies.

One can wonder what could have been the possible sources of Cleveland's vision and his humane approach. Although he was well connected, he was not well educated as he came to India in his adolescence. He was living in a pre-Rousseau, pre-French Revolution age when ideas of democracy, justice, equality and fraternity were not

popular. Yet, he transcended his personal limitation of modest education and the conservatism of his age to formulate policies which were marked by broad mindedness, sympathy and ideas of justice and equality. Although, we cannot rule out genetic factors, a more plausible explanation can be his training as Assistant Magistrate of Bhagalpur for five years which provided him opportunity to understand the wider context of British–Paharia relationship. Whatever the reasons might have been for his humanness and vision, Cleveland surely foresaw a paternalistic British tribal policy in India. His emphasis on treating the tribals as equals, as brothers and sisters, was a new element in the colonial administration. His remembrance, therefore, is not misplaced and it does not merely emanate from the emotional factor of his early death. He is rightly remembered for his works and vision (See Appendix II).[14]

APPENDIX

Reminiscing Cleveland: Memory and History

Appendix I

Warren Hastings' papers say that Cleveland was ordered by Warren Hastings to take a voyage to the Cape in the hope of reestablishing his health (The Letters of Warren Hastings to his Wife 233–34). However, on hearing the news of his death midway, Hastings lamented profusely in a letter addressed to his wife Marian:

> 'Poor Clevland! Had his Death happened unconnected with Circumstances of infinitely greater Concern to me, I should have felt it as others have done, for he is greatly lamented and universally. I have other Griefs, and Fears exceeding even those Griefs, and I less regret his loss than that he died on the Atlas [Ship]. He ought not for his own Sake to have gone in his desperate Condition, nor ought I for yours have suffered it. But this is but a small part of the Follies which I have committed, deliberately and with a Violence to my own Will and Happiness and to my own Judgement.— Your Motive for sending back the Sloop was consistent with the generous and unequalled Sensibility of my dear Marian. This is her peculiar Virtue, and too often her Misery—and as often mine.' (The Letters of Warren Hastings to his Wife 233–34).

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[14] The officer who was selected in 1824 to carry out the work of demarcation of Damin was John Petty Ward who was said to be a self-willed and autocratic officer and who had no sympathy with Cleveland's system. Yet he wrote the following words about Cleveland's system in 1827:

> "'I have seen a great deal of this country and have been in the habit of frequent intercourse with the inhabitants; the form of police as established in the hills appears to me to be well calculated for the country and not as far as I am able to judge capable of admitting of improvement. Crime and affrays are, I believe, of rare occurrence there, but when they are committed, the sirdars never fail to deliver up the delinquent to take his trial before the proper authority. Under the present s stem the hill people are quiet and content. I ascribe this to that good policy which dictated making the sirdars the governors over this rude race and solely responsible for the preservation of peace and good order in their country. However rude the people may be considered, they are extremely tenacious of the rights which were conferred upon them by Mr. Cleveland; they are proud of the offices to which they were appointed by their great benefactor, especially that which appointed them judges in the trials of their countrymen; and exercise of these functions gives them, in the eyes of their countrymen, an importance which ensures on all occasions respect and obedience . . .'" (Petty Ward quoted in McPherson 1909: 33).

Nothing could be more emphatic than the above as a testimony in favour of Cleveland.

Paying tribute to the memory of his favourite officer, Warren Hastings in yet another letter to his wife written on 8 March, 1784, writes:

'Poor Cleveland! Every tongue through Bengal and Behar is loud in his praises and in Expressions of deep regret for his loss' (Letters 276).

Appendix II

A

Two monuments in memory of Augustus Cleveland were erected in Bhagalpur. First, in honour of his memory the Governor-General-in-Council, 'unanimously and heartily' decided to erect a monument on 6 February 1784 (Letters 244). The monument was erected in 1788 probably under the supervision of a Swiss Engineer Officer belonging to the Company's army, Colonel Anthony Polier (Letters 295, 309)[15] in front of the house of Cleveland known as *Tilha-Kothi*. The marble tablets were brought from Lucknow. The epitaph, written on the marble, was composed by Warren Hastings himself (Letters 248, 251).
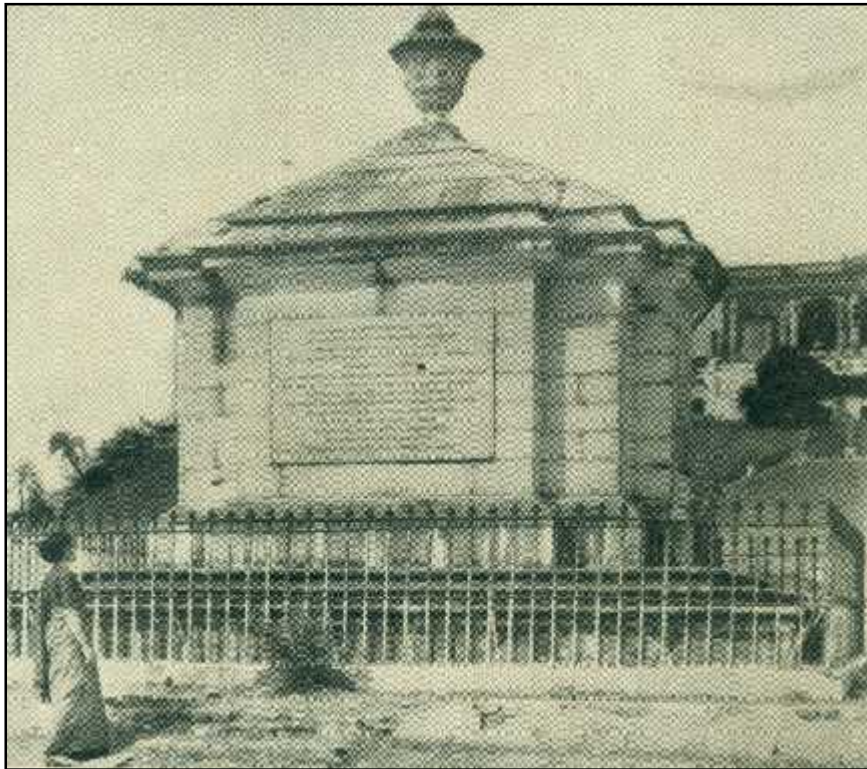
A photographic view of the Cleveland's monument and Tilha Kothi

B

George Viscount Valentia reproduced this epitaph in his *Voyages,* Vol. I and thereafter his version was used by all subsequent writers:

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[15] Warren Hastings informs her wife in August 1785 that, 'Colonial Polier, who resides at Lucknow has undertaken to construct poor Cleveland's Monument, and colonel Ahmuty to furnish the stones from Chunar. It will be well executed. I believe I have sent you a copy of the Epitaph' (Letters 309).

To the Memory of Augustus Cleveland, Esq.

Late Collector of the Districts of Bhaugulpore and Rajamahall,

Who, without bloodshed or the terror of authority,

Employing only the means of conciliation, confidence, and

benevolence,

Attempted and accomplished,

The entire subjection of the lawless and savage inhabitants of the

Jungleterry of Rajamahall,

Who had long infested the neighbouring lands by their predatory

incursions,

Inspired them with a taste for the arts of civilized life

And attached them to the British Government, by a conquest over

their minds;

The most permanent as the most rational of dominion.

The Governor-General and Council of Bengal,

In honour of his Character, and for an Example to others,

Have ordered thisMonument to be erected.

He departed this life on the 13the day of January, 1784, aged 29.

(Valentia 1809: 84).

C

The second monument in his memory was raised in 1786 by the zamindars and native government officials of the district which was described by Valentia as 'a monument resembling a pagoda' (Valentia 1809: 83). Bishop Heber had a closer scrutiny of the monument:

'Mr. Cleveland's monument is in the form of a Hindoo mut, in a pretty situation on a green hill. The land with which it was endowed, is rented by Government, and the cutcherry, magistrate's house, circuit house, & C. are built on it, the rent being duly appropriated to the repair of the building. As being raised to the memory of a Christian, this last is called by the native "Grige" (Church,) and they still meet once a year in considerable numbers, and have a handsome "Poojah" or religious spectacle in honour of his memory' (Heber 1828: 190).

Bradley-Birt says it was 'in the form of a Hindu Pyramid surrounded by a wide arched gallery wherein the sacred lamp attended by a priest still burns' (Birt 1905: 111).

The inscription attached to this monument was in Persian and was translated into English by Colonel Francklyn (Francklin))[16] which reads:

'"This monument is erected to the memory of Mr. Augustus Cleveland, Collector of Bhagulpoor and Rajmahal who died the 3rd of January 1784" (Hindoo and Mohammedan dates follow). "The zamindars of the district and the Amleh (native officers of the court), in memory of the kindness and beneficence exhibited towards them by the late Mr. Cleveland, have at their own expense, furnished this monument A.D. 1786'" (Smith 1895: 199).

Monument erected by the local zamindars and government officials of Bhagalpur
Artist : Sir Charles D'Oyly (1781-1845)[17]

D

The Paharias did not construct any monument in his memory. But as Bradley-Birt says:

'They raise no monument in stone to their respected dead, but for him they have raised a still more lasting memorial in their hearts and in the traditions of the tribe. At the time of his death, they solemnly performed for him all the funeral rites with which they honour their departed kinsmen. Lo!' they said, we have lost a father.' 'yea' was the reply, 'the father and the mother of the tribe,' and the weired wailing notes of the Paharia death-song echoed along the hills across the valleys from range to range as village after village caught the news and sadly hastened to join in the performance of one universal funeral rite of national mourning that the tribe has ever known' (Birt 112).

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[16] Colonel Francklin was a high ranked officer of Bhagalpur district when Bishop Heber visited here in 1824. He speaks of him as an 'excellent Oriental scholar and antiquarian' (Heber 195). Francklin wrote an account entitled 'A Journey from Bhaughulpoor through the Raj Muhal Hills in the months of December and January 1820-1', which was published in *Calcutta Annual Register*, 1821.

[17] This is one of 28 water colours by Sir Charles D'Oyly of a trip along the Bhagirathi and Ganges Rivers, dated August to October 1820. The trip was to take up his new appointment as Opium Agent at Patna.

The proof that the Paharias raised a greater and lasting monument of Cleveland within their hearts was given by Captain Sherwill. During his survey work, he met Kesoo Sardar on 1 February, 1851, who was an elderly stipendary Paharia chief living in Simuria village on the hills of Rajmahal. He took the captain to several places and people. Captain Sherwill comments:

> 'It is particularly pleasing to hear one of our countrymen spoken so well by so large a body of half wild people as Mr. Cleveland is spoken of by the hill-men; his name after a period of sixty-seven years is still remembered with much affection' (Sherwill 1852: 587).

The very next day, they passed through a place where a stone entrenchment was thrown across the road. They were given to understand that this stone entrenchment was one of the favourite spots of ambush of the hill archers where they lay in wait for the messengers or soldiers who passed through the hill passage. On each occasion they were murdered. Writes Sherwill:

> 'Kesso Sirdar who was with me remarked, "We were bad subjects in those days, sir, but Mr. Chibilly (Cleveland) soon put us on friendly terms with all our neighbours"' (Sherwill 1852: 587).

These examples show how deep people's affection was for their great benefactor.

Augustus Cleveland's death saddened Sir John Shore deeply. He gave vent to his sorrow in a long monody poured from his soul which is partially produced here:

> If e'er funereal trophies graced the brave,
>
> Or cypress wreaths adorn'd a Statement's grave
>
> Let Virtue consecrate the hallow'd tomb,
>
> Where CLEVLAND sleeps and weeps his early doom.
>
> For many a month consumed by feverish pain
>
> Death had mark'd out this victim to his reign;
>
> Drooping and wan, he seemed a graceful flower
>
> That yields its bloom to Winter blighting power
>
> Hope still would fondly prompt, that pious prayer
>
> Might win o'er Heaven, to pity and to spare.
>
> Such thoughts—how vain!—our anxious minds employ'd,
>
> When sudden fate th'illusive dream destroy'd,
>
> And stampe'd his doom. A chilling horror spread
>
> Through every limb; my wandering senses fled:
>
> Cold as a rock, whence drip the melting snow,
>
> I sat a silent monument of woe.
>
> No Muse attended then, to grace his urn;
>
> Whilst kindred Nature claime'd her right to mourn. —
>
> And mourn'd thou wast, these eyes yet dim will prove,
>
> The heartfelt tribute paid to friendly love.

Now Sorrow, milder grown, more calm the mind,

Enjoys the grief that Time has left behind:

Yet still the tears shall stream through many an hour;

For Time in vain opposes Nature's power.

Too keen for human bliss, Remembrance wings

The shafts of anguish, and our bosom stings;

Departed joys, like sleep-formed phantoms, rise

Press round the heart, and prompt uncall'd-for sighs.

For whilst some former scene the mind beguiles,

Where social pleasure lived in Clevland's smiles,

Grief whispers to the soul—and shews his urn—

"No more shall Clevland's social hour return." (Teignmouth 489–90, Appendix II).

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Many Voices, One Reality: 'All India Tribal Women Writers' Meet' in Ranchi

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Introduction

Tribes are generally perceived as people allergic to development, least of all, literary development. The idea of 'development' is itself prone to questions and various explanations, yet it becomes more lamentable when it comes to women. Past century has witnessed assertion of women rights and recognition of their position in variety of fields, in a big way, including tribal societies. In history, there is a strong wave of looking at the past events from women's perspective. Subaltern stream has done much service to this kind of history writing by bringing the perspective of the marginalised to fore. In Dalit narratives, that were re-written on the behest of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, the martyrdom of Jhalkari Bai and Dalit women are being narrated as a tool to develop political consciousness at the grass root level. Myth and memoirs of Dalits in Indian Freedom struggle are employed for political mobilisation. This genre of hero worship is actively used through stories and symbols and has played a great role in Dalit assertion in North India (Narayan 2007).

In Jharkhand the history of tribal movement is being re-written and the stories of women heroes are constructed deliberately (Barla 2015) around the tribal movements in order to glorify past, especially in the context of the freedom movement, an event of great merit for dominant culture and present politics. This new wave of tribal assertion is seen in Jharkhand, the tribal state of India where the contributions of Fulo and Jhano (Chako 2017), sisters of Siddho and Kanho (leaders of Santhal rebellion of 1855), Maki Munda (Gupta and Basu 2012), wife of Gaya Munda, a close associate of Birsa Munda (leader of *Ulgulan* of 1899-1900), Devmani (participant of Tana Bhagat Movement) (Kumar 2008: 723-31)[1] and other women are being documented, and such similar attempts are visible in many parts of the country.

Literary field is less traversed by tribal women, though they have lately experienced an upward thrust in the field of education. There have been non tribal scholars who have

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[1] When Jatra Oraon, leader of the movement, was arrested in 1914 with his seven close associates, Devmani of Batkuri led the movement and kept its flames alive and popularised this movement amongst the tribes.

tried to write on them but by the turn of the century, tribal women have been trying to assert that their entry into the field of literature is not new (Baraik 2017). Organising a conference or a women tribal writer's meet in India is not a mean feat. It is close to witnessing a historical moment. It was a rare occasion when 'Sahitya Akademi', an Akademi established in 1954 by the Government of India to promote literature and languages in India, recognised the literary contribution of tribal writers and that too women writers and organised a writer's meet. Ironically, the Akademi, that has never elected a female president since its inception, thought about recapturing and giving voices to the unheard, marginalised and voices of the women that were being dismissed till date as not so strong voices, is itself an event of great merit.

The Conference: A collaboration of the nation and region

Tribals have a rich tradition of oral literature which was increasingly getting lost in the process of development. It was felt that this orality should be encoded and preserved in written mediums as well. Sahitya Akademi, in collaboration with Jharkhandi Bhasha Sahitya Sanskriti Akhara, organised 'All India Tribal Women Writer's Meet' on 7- 8 September 2017 in the state capital Ranchi, of the tribal dominated state of Jharkhand. It was organised as an attempt at mainstreamisation or laying bare the diversity and richness of Indian literature. Since independence tribal language and literature have not received their due share, in the literary world. 2017 has been a year which has been a witness to change in this ideology. Incidentally, Sahitya Akademi had also organised a tribal writers' meet on 25 February 2017 in New Delhi in which tribal writers from different parts of the country participated.

The immediate occasion was to celebrate the birth centenary of Alice Ekka, first tribal woman Hindi fiction writer from Jharkhand. Alice Ekka, was the first tribal writer who started writing on the plight of the tribal women with an insider's perspective. She was born in a well to do tribal family of Jharkhand and completed her graduation in English from Scottish Church College, Kolkata. Although her works remained unpublished till

her death in 1978 but lately, Vandana Tete, herself a reputed tribal writer and activist, published her works with the title *Alice Ekka Ki Kahaniyan*, from Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi for a wider audience (Tete 2017: 11). These stories were written in Hindi, largely in 1950s and were unpublished. Her stories carry us to the harsh realities of the post independence period where, tribal women were being exploited. Her stories were not written with a purpose, as publication was not in her mind. These literarily as also historically important stories would have been obliterated but for the commendable efforts by Vandana Tete, secretary of Akhara and her well placed son Dr. Siddharth Ekka, who is the Principal of Gossner College of Ranchi University, to publish them.

Social background of the participants

The conference attracted participants from various parts of India, from diverse backgrounds but all of whom were tribals. Most of them were activist and writers, some were associated with NGO's[2] and many belonged to the field of academics, mostly from the department of Hindi and few from the regional language department of their respective state[3]. In a well calculated step, proper care was taken to ensure that the writers were tribal women and not women working or writing about tribals. Tribal assertion was visible in their tendency of sub nationalism, created on the meticulously crafted common threads of trans-tribal association. There were many voices from North Eastern state of Tripura, Meghalaya, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Jharkhand, but the reality that embedded them

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[2] Ashwini Kumar Pankaj, 'Adivasiyon ne Likhit Sahitya Nahi Saheja, Jisse Lekhikayen Huin Gumnam', Ranchi, *Dainik Bhaskar,* 21 September 2017, 11; Alma Grace Barla, originally from Orissa now based in Bengaluru, is associated with an NGO working on anti human trafficking project from Sundargarh, Orissa. She writes on tribal issues in indigenous journals and has a degree in Journalism and Sociology.

[3] Dayamanti Beshera from Baripada, Orissa is a prominent Santhali writer and is a faculty in Maharaja Purna Chandra College, Baripada. She was honoured by Sahitya Akademi Award for her Santhali anthology (Beshera 2007). She also publishes the first Santhali women's magazine *Karam Dar.* She is one of the most prolific writers in Santhali and is well known for her Santhali writings.

S. Rathnamma and Indumati Lamani from Karnataka are less known tribal writers and have taken to writing in tribal languages after this recent wave of tribal assertion.

Mary Hansda is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Hindi at Presidency College, Kolkata, West Bengal. She is a writer and critic of Santhali Literature.

Ivy Hansda from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi is a faculty in the Department of English. She has researchers working under her whose topics range from works of famous Santhali poet and writer Nirmala Putul to tribal literature in different Jharkhandi tribal languages.

Sova Limbu is an Associate Professor in the Department of Hindi at Kalimpong University, Darjeeling. Savitri Baraik from Ranchi University is a faculty in the language department.

Heera Meena from Rajasthan is a Delhi based Ph.D. scholar.

Dr. Pramodini Hansda has been the Pro Vice Chancellor in Siddho Kanhu Murmu University, Dumka, Jharkhand and has been a strong advocate of tribal rights over *Jal, Jungle, Jameen.*

Ujjvala Jyoti Tigga, Saroj Kerketta, Damyanti Sinku, Pyari Tuti, Sushma Asur from Jharkhand, Joram Yalam Nabam from Arunachal Pradesh, Vishwasi Ekka, Kusum Madhuri Toppo and Alice Lakra from Chattisgarh are upcoming tribal writers in Hindi and tribal languages.

together was that they all were tribal women. In this sense this meet seemed to promote tribal solidarity in India that transgressed the regional and religious boundaries.

Issues raised

Many women writers from the North Eastern parts of India were concerned about the processes of acculturation and sanskritisation sweeping the tribal culture from its moorings. Their trepidation was that tribal way of life and culture is encoded in their oral mediums. As tribal communities are increasingly losing the grasp over the language, what are lost in the process are not just their language, but culture and history that are a part of their tradition.

There is yet another issue participants highlighted. One such was the evil influence of urbanisation. The keynote speaker of the conference Streamlet Dkhar, head of the department of Khasi at the North East Hill University at Shillong said, 'Tribals are currently reeling under the influence of urbanisation. Still, we are trying to preserve our culture through our writing, even when many do not speak the language.' Obviously, she is nostalgic about the rural way of Adivasi life. We are aware of the penchant for an arcadian selfhood, we find among a section of Adivasi intellectuals and activists.

Streamlet underlines yet another issue which has its echo in the presentation of other tribal participant as well. She believes that Khasis have a strong tradition of orality and their richness have not received due respect because there was no script of the Khasis till the influx of Britishers in Meghalaya. After the colonial rulers entered the area, Khasi tribe started writing about themselves in Roman script. Albeit, Streamlet's own works are not based on glorification of the past or encoding their rich tradition and heritage of her tribe, rather it deals largely with the gun culture and terrorism, of the present period.

Another participant, K. Vasamalli, a Toda tribal woman, from the Nilgiri region of Karnataka raised her apprehensions about distortion of facts and misinterpretation of oral literature by the non tribes. In her opinion the tribal feelings can only be understood in the context and the environment in which the tribes are living. Insider perception about them is that, the understanding of the outsiders is based on their own interpretations which have a bearing of their culture on them, which is quite different from the way tribes perceive themselves. She tried to highlight the fact that the Toda tribes look upon themselves as caretakers of nature and not owners, so the essence of existence of this tribe is guided by the feeling of harmony with the nature and not ownership.

A sentiment that was echoed by most of the participants was that there is specifically inherent beauty in the tribal languages. Their ethos and sentiments can best be understood in their originals and not through their translations in any dominant language i.e., Hindi, English or Bengali. The challenge posed to the tribal literature by these genres of writing was that the purity and the basic essence of the traditions is lost in the process of translation. It is clear that tribal strongly advocate for the literary creations in their language and making an urge to others to learn tribal languages for an acquaintance with their life and culture.

The tribal women writers of Jharkhand like Rose Kerketta and Vandana Tete took serious exception to the classification of oral tradition into the genre of folk songs and folk tales. Instead they made a strong case for their histories, as surviving in the form of living traditions as also their songs and stories, being specified as ancestral literature or *Purkha Sahitya*. They considered this to be vitally important for the tribals as these have been handed over to them through succeeding generations with the view of passing their secret and sacred information. Their importance cannot be undermined by labelling them as mere expressions of heartfelt emotions. For tribes, they are embodiments of their living histories that have enclosed the question of their identity rather than creations for entertainment. The sentiments of the mother-daughter duo[4] received acknowledgement of the participants, who agreed that the literature of the tribes should be called 'orature' or Oral literature which forms the essence of the tribal mode of living.

The question of ecology and environment that is so close to the worldview of tribals also came to be emphasised. All groups have a sense of past that characterises an awareness of history. They tend to use it to reinforce their own beliefs and sense of identity. Social memory continues to be an essential means of sustaining a politically active identity (Tosh 2015: 1-3). The pride that is claimed by the different sections of Indians as Dalits, women and other backward classes of India, by reclaiming their past glories in their histories (Jaffrelot 2010), was also evident amongst these tribal women writers. They all lamented about the present condition of the tribes and their inclusion into the mainstream that has brought market forces into their areas and has threatened their customary rights over *Jal, Jungle, Jameen* (water, forest and land). Litterateurs informed that the influx of industrial forces into their region causing serious problem of

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[4] Vandana Tete is the daughter of tribal writer and activist Rose Kerketta. A Kharia tribe by birth, she married Ashwini Kumar Pankaj (non tribe from Bihar) and has two sons. She has opened a printing press called Pyara Kerketta Foundation in remembrance of her maternal grandfather Pyara Kerketta, which publishes works of unknown tribal writers. Jharkhandi Bhasa, Sahitya, Sanskriti Akhara, of which she is the general secretary, formed in 2003, has been leading the struggle for giving respect to the tribal languages in Jharkhand and creating awareness about preserving tribal languages.

land alienation and displacement, the growing threat to livelihood and traditional mode of living are issues that adversely affect tribal life and these naturally come to be portrayed through their writing.

There was a sense of disenchantment with the education system as well, that has given these women the power to write and express themselves. While, all of them were by products of the modern education system, they were deeply concerned about the lack of knowledge of the present generation about their own language and culture, and the apathy created by the modern education system that separates the tribals from their traditional knowledge system and information. The purity of their culture has given way to strong wave of urbanisation and nearly all of their traditional institutions are facing strong challenge from the mainstream and have either died down under their pressure or are on the verge of being defeated.

The writers were vociferous about the matriarchal system giving way to the patriarchal ways of life of the non tribal section. These sentiments were especially strong amongst the tribal women from the North Eastern states of India and Karnataka. They complained that the wave of globalisation has blown away their communities faith in the traditional social systems and now in marriage the customary rights of the women is being done away with and they are prone to evils as wife beating, dowry and physical appearance playing a decisive role in marriages.[5]

A close look at the deliberations during the meet revealed that the women participants were beneficiaries of the modern education system and had distanced themselves from the realities and challenges faced by the tribes in their remote areas. They themselves were looking at the problems and concerns of their kind from a distance, and in doing so they seemed to miss the finer points of the tribal life themselves. The charges of apathy and misrepresentation of tribal life by the non tribal scholars working on the tribes was at times evident in their own style of writing also. Furthermore, they either glossed over or completely ignored more grave issues as livelihood, migration, individual ownership of land, naxalism, poverty and as also ill effects of patriarchy and education system on the tribes of India.

Interestingly, a strong voice amongst these tribal writers was that of Sonal Rathva from Gujarat, which was a voice of dissent. Her writings (speech/presentation) did not try to put blame on 'others' for tribal predicament, but raised a voice of self-introspection. She lamented the sad plight of tribal women; her writings underlined the failure of the prevailing education to liberate and empower marginalised tribals. But she did not fail to point fingers towards the patriarchal system severely limiting the sphere of women's activities within the four walls of the house, a tendency that was hitherto absent amongst the tribes. Krairi Mog Chaudhary (editor of Mog language magazine

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[5] For more on this see Khumutia Dbbarma, 'Tripura Rajya ki Janjatiya Samudaya ki Dharm Tatha Sanskriti: Kal Aur Aaj' and Dr. Milan Rani Jamatiya, 'Kokborok Lok Katha Ka Swaroop' in *NEHU Journal*, Voume V, Number 1, 2007, ISSN 0972-8406. Also see. Temsulao Ao, 'Gender and Power: Some women centred Narratives from Ao Naga', *NEHU Journal*, Volume II, Number 2, 2004, ISSN 0972-8406. Dr. Milan Rani Jamatia was a participant of this meet and she spoke chaste, sanskritised Hindi. Herself being a Professor of Hindi in NEHU, Tripura, she is involved in the translation works from Kokborok language to Hindi.

Sangrain) from Tripura discussed about the efforts carried by her NGO to prepare the tribal women to preserve their tradition and culture from the challenges posed by urbanisation and industrialisation.

Gender assertion

An interesting fact that was observed in the undercurrents of this meet was that it was an assembly of educated, aware, assertive and career women and nearly everyone's writing had a purpose. This purpose was to modify the way in which the tribal women are being portrayed. The stereotypes built around them are being challenged. They rued that narratives built around the body of tribal women are provocative and are trying to construct the image of tribal women in poor light. There was opposition to the depiction of women in poor light even if it was done by a tribal. The recent work of Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar *The Adivasi Will not Dance*, a work that was shortlisted for the Hindu Prize for Fiction 2016, by a writer who is the winner of Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puruskar in 2015 for his debut novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* was also criticised. Eminent tribal writer Rose Kerketta has blamed him for suffering from *diku* (the exploitative outsider) mentality, and a proposal was passed in the Meet demanding a ban on such kind of literature. The proposal carried message of serious objection of tribal women litterateurs, towards biased representation of tribals in the mainstream. Tribal women are generally viewed as more sexually liberated and free individuals with less societal restrictions (Sekhar 2017; Joshi 1971 and others). This attitude was referred as *diku* mentality and women litterateurs were in unison for its condemnation.[6]

Praising tribal attitude to women it was argued that tribal women have been economic partners of the men in their societies. They have enjoyed greater freedom in their societies since ages. They have been given choices in marriage, rights of divorce and even the right to drink liquor, an act which is considered unimaginable and absurd by dominant societies. Restrictions imposed on women in tribal societies have been less and they are not at the receiving end. They have the right to sing, dance, eat, drink, earn and enjoy life, a liberalism that is uncommon for mainstream population. This freedom is misconstrued by mainstream societies who blame tribal societies as promiscuous, at times tribal writers writing in English suffer from the same flaw.

Writers underlined that the very notion of tribalism or adivasidom, is encountering serious challenge from the ongoing process of globalisation and industrialisation. This wave has led to migration of tribals in search of livelihood to cities far and wide. Once they are dislocated, their connection with their land is severed and they tend generally to be assimilated into the mainstream culture, leading to the loss of selfhood. The norms of patriarchy and the influences of the dominant religion are so strong that it has altered the tribal culture beyond repairs. These culminated in the tribal women being subjected to victimisation by these waves.

We notice the construction of Adivasi self image does not make an attempt to offer solutions to the challenges of modern day realities. Rather it tends to be somewhat revivalistic in seeking solace in their ancestral culture and imagined purity of their

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[6] Resolution passed by the All India Tribal Women Writers Meet on Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar's writing and on the killing of Gauri Lankesh, 8 September 2017.

cultural traits in their ancient periods. On the one hand they refuse to be treated as museum specimens and on the other they resist outside influences. They used this literary platform to build an all India tribal sub nationality, but they do not fail to complain about the changes experienced in the mentality of the men of their tribes.

The attempts at creating a record of tribal literature in the respective tribal languages are an attempt to connect the young educated generation of the tribes with their language, culture and tradition. Young generation is distancing itself from their tradition and values. Community living is giving way to tribals living in mixed cultural set up where they get influenced by the dominant culture. The attempts at glorification of past and documentation of tribal culture in positive light is an attempt to overcome the inferiority complex of the young generation in relating to the language, customs and tradition of their group. Orality is giving way to written documentation and consciousness around their identity is carried beyond landscape, so that it is not lost in the process of movement or relocation.

Incidentally, Sahitya Akademi had organised a tribal writers' meet on 25 February 2017 in New Delhi. The new found concern of the Akademi raises a few questions as why after seventy years of independence Akademi is promoting tribes and is organising a tribal literary conference? Is it to promote tribal language or it has been motivated by political reasons? Choice of Jharkhandi Bhasa, Sahitya, Sanskriti Akhara and Ranchi as the venue needs to be probed.

The voices of these tribal women writers carry reflections of their societies, but have clear influence of the dominant culture. Nearly all women spoke chaste, sanskritised and polished Hindi or English and knew the art of writing in it. The fact that they have to come together and assert their rights is a substantive proof of this influence. Destruction of the ecology and environment of their landscape by industrialisation and globalisation, sanskritisation drives, ill effects of modern education systems, efforts to counter stereotypes built around the body of tribal women and misinterpretations of tribal worldview are a few issues discussed on the margins of this meet.

Many voices of tribal women when came on one platform, echoed one reality that they were against the concept of patriarchy and development built by the outsiders. They share the concern emerging out of the challenges posed by the dominant culture and feel the need to preserve their language, tradition and culture. Their anguish over the environmental degradation, migration and displacement was shared irrespective of their regional diversity. This reality and moreover its realisation is new, and the coming years have to bear witness to unfolding of these processes and the changes they have introduced to the tribal mode of living.

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