

Pages from the Old Records

The Tamarias of the Singhbhum Region: Past and Present

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The former Singhbhum district, now divided into West Singhbhum, East Singhbhum and Seraikela-Kharsawan districts, has been home to diverse ethnic communities, including the Munda, Oraon, Ho, Santals, Gond, Bhuiya, Bhumij, and Tamaria, among others. We have rich ethnographic accounts of these groups written by renowned authors and ethnographers. However, the ethnography of the Tamaria or Tamaria-Munda is quite limited. They lack a clear tradition regarding their origins or migration, which makes it difficult to trace their historical background.

Apart from one reliable short article (Tamaria 1922: 176-182), which we present here, and occasional references in other works, there has not been a comprehensive study on the Tamarias. It is clear that we cannot expect to find much information in the existing sources. Nevertheless, a careful investigation may still uncover a few materials which could provide a basic outline of their history.

The true identity of the Tamarias of Singhbhum region has long been a historical mystery. Tickell, in his *memoir*, noted that they are a sub-group of the Munda tribe. As Hindu population spread across the Chotanagpur plateau, the Mundas resisted their oppression. A large proportion of the Munda population left Chotanagpur plateau and migrated south-eastward. A group of Mundas entered the lowlands of Rahe, Bundu and Tamar which are part of the present Ranchi district. There, they intermingled with the Bhumij and Bhuiyans and eventually merged into a 'mongrel race' known as 'Tamarias' (Tickell 1840: 696). Another group of Mundas followed a somewhat different route and entered the open tract of Kolhan (Ibid). In more recent times, the Tamarias also moved into Kolhan and settled in Kolhan Pirs of Gumra, Thai, Bharbharia, Lallgarh and Goikera (Sahu 1985: 163).

Robert Parkin, in his important study on the Mundas of Central India, traces the origin of the Tamarias as Mundari speaking community, belonging to the North Munda sub-family (also designated as Kol, or more properly Kolarian group, which includes more than a dozen tribes). It is helpful to quote Parkin here: 'Mundari has four dialects: Hasada, spoken in the Khunti-Tamar-Chaibasa triangle in southern Ranchi. Naguri, spoken in northern and western Chotanagpur, Latar, spoken in the east, in Tamar Pargana, and much influenced by Bengali; and Keraq, spoken in Ranchi area, but much influenced by Hindi and Sadani...The Hasada-speaking area is 'the area considered, subjectively, to be the pure Munda country.' There are also two

endogamous divisions, the Kompat or ‘true’ Munda, which also includes the closely related Ho; and the Tamaria or Khangar [Munda] (also known as Mahali Munda, Marang Munda or Patar Munda). The latter are the ‘elder brothers’ of the former but inferior in status...This group are presumably to be identified with Latar dialect of Tamar Pargana’ (Parkin 1992: 24).

Both Tickell and Parkin indicate that the Tamarias are a branch of the Mundas. Parkin explored their linguistic connection to the Latar dialect, which is mostly spoken in the Tamar area of Chotanagpur. Tickell, on the other hand, traces their migration through Rahe, Bundu and Tamar regions, before they finally settled in Singhbhum as a semi-Hinduised community. Macpherson also states that Tamaria or Bhumij, while more Hinduised, are ‘as much a Mundari as the Horo-hon of the Konkpat’ (Macpherson 1908: 15).

Herbert Risley connects the Tamarias with the Bhumij community. He notes, ‘Tamarias are the territorial or local group of the Sikharbhumi (the region of Hazaribagh district) Bhumij of Manbhum’ (Risley 1915: 157). However, due to insufficient observations on this matter, no definite conclusions can be drawn.

A. D. Tuckey provides valuable insight into the occupation of the Tamarias in Kolhan in his Settlement Report. He remarks, ‘Tamarias have come into the Kolhan as petty traders and dealers. They are to be found everywhere, except in the extreme north which is the most purely Ho part of the Kolhan’ (Tuckey 1920: 9).

In another observation, Tuckey states, ‘The Bhumij, Santals and Oraons are not considered Dikkus by the Hos, nor are the Tamarias, but the Tamarias who are Hinduised Mundaris from Tamar are mainly petty traders and money-lenders in the Kolhan...’ (Tuckey 1920: 20). Tickell also suggested that the Tamarias were involved in cattle trading, and the local Gwalas used to sell cattle to them, often without the knowledge of their Ho masters (Tickell 1840: 805).

In 1880, W.W. Hunter reported a population of 3,016 Tamarias in Singhbhum. This figure is modest compared to the total tribal population of 256,065 in Singhbhum, which consists of 14 different tribes. Besides this population data, Hunter provides no other significant information regarding the Tamarias in his multi-volume work (Hunter 1877: 37).

Thus, the information about the Tamarias is limited. In light of this scarcity, the present article, written by a Tamaria scholar, Devendra Nath Samanta Tamaria of Kolhan, entitled ‘A Few Traditions Regarding the Origin of Tamaria Clans’ published in the esteemed journal, *Man in India*, Vol. II, 1922, is a valuable ethnographic contribution. The article gives an intimate account of how a Munda group, separated from the main stock, eventually migrated to the Singhbhum district, and divided their homogenous community into various *gustis* or clans. The author claims that ‘These Tamaria Mundas, now generally known simply as Tamaria, retain certain traditions and customs partly or wholly forgotten by the Mundas of Ranchi district or Chotanagpur proper’. In view of the dearth of written materials—published or unpublished—the author has relied on ancient traditions and folktales, which is both necessary and commendable. The article is not only reliable, but also very engaging, particularly its final section which discusses certain changes in the name of the original *gustis* and the

adoption of new gustis by the members of the community, leading to resultant negative social consequences.

In contemporary times, the chronic lack of ethnographic data on the Tamarias has impacted their status. The Jharkhand government denied them Scheduled Tribe (ST) status due to utter ignorance of their history and ethnography, and classified them instead in the Other Backward Caste (OBC) State List. The Tamarias had to fight a lengthy legal battle to rectify this situation and gain official ST status.¹ They pleaded in the Jharkhand High Court, supported by relevant materials, that they historically and ethnographically belong to the Munda ethnic group, and should therefore be included in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list of the Jharkhand government. After a prolonged legal battle, the truth ultimately prevailed.

On 30 March 2022, the Lok Sabha passed the Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2022, to include the Tamarias along with several other communities—Deshawari, Ganjhu, Dautalbandi (Dwalbandi), Patbandi, Raut, Maajhia, Khairi (Kheri), and Puran — in the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Jharkhand.²

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¹ Shyam Sundar Nag & Ors. Vs. State of Bihar & Ors., Patna High Court, 6 January, 1987; 'Ramnath Samant vs The State of Jharkhand and Ors', Jharkhand High Court, 26 April, 2017.

² 'Lok Sabha passes Bill to include some communities in Jharkhand ST list', *The Indian Express*, 6 April, 2022.

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II. A FEW TRADITIONS REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF TAMARIA CLANS.

By DEVENDRA NATH SAMANTA TAMARIA, B. A.

The *Tamarias* are a section of the Mundas of Chota Nagpur whose ancestors, a few generations ago separated from the main body of the Mundas now occupying the Ranchi District and migrated to the neighbouring district of Singhbhum. These Tamaria Mundas, now generally known simply as Tamarias, retain certain traditions and customs partly or wholly forgotten by the Mundas of the Ranchi district or Chota Nagpur *proper*. Among the principal Munda clans or septs met with among the Tamarias of the Singhbhum district the following may be mentioned; the *Samad* or *Samanta*, the *Charad*, the *Sili*, the *Rantai*, the *Bukru*, the *Nagari*, the *Diuri*, the *Telenga*, the *Pandu* *bing* or *Nag*, the *Kamal*, the *Sandi*, and the *Tufi*. Almost every clan or *gusti* (as the Tamarias call it in imitation of the Hindus) is subdivided into more than one *gusti*. Thus the *Samad* or *Samanta* *gusti* is sub-divided into *Singi-Samad* and *Nida Samad* *gustis*, the *Charad* into *Charad* and *Butkud*; the *Sili* or *Sulanki* into *Sili*, *Tufuki* and *Kanchan*; the *Rantai* into *Tamaria*, *Rantai* and *Bota*; the *Bukru* into *Mailda*, *Budae-jāng cho*, *Bukru*, *Dutu Hurud* and *Tawa Keronj*; and the *Naguri* into *Takra*, *Naguri*, *Satrangi*, *Dunguri* and *Kana Baruhatu*, and the *Diuri* into *Diuri*, *Sadom Lopa Diuri* and *Koronjo-Kofe*.

The origin of the *Samad gusti* is given as follows:—The ancestor of the clan with those of other *gustis* went a-hunting. The meat of the game killed was equally distributed among the different *gustis* that took part in the hunt. The ancestors of the *Samad* clan were considerable in number, and so the meat that fell to their share had again to be cut into smaller pieces with an axe. The act of cutting in this manner is called *Sama* by the Tamarics and thus these cutters of the meat came to be called *Samads*.

The traditional origin of the different subdivisions of the *Samad* clan is as follows.

A child of a man of the *Samad gusti* died, and its *umbul ader* (calling back the shade to the house) ceremony was performed on the
The Nida Samad. tenth day after death, on a dark
Clan. night. The performers of the

ceremony called the spirit of the deceased to accompany them to the house of the latter when a man concealed in a bush responded to the call with the intention of frightening the performers. At this response the party were greatly frightened. As the ceremony was performed at night (*nida*) the father of the dead man and his descendants came to be called the *Nida Samad* clan.

A few days later the second brother also lost his child. But he performed the *umbul ader* ceremony of his child by day (*singi*), for
The Singi he was afraid to do that at night.
Samad Henceforth he and his descendants
Clan. were known as the *Singi Samad*
clan.

The traditional origin of the *Charad gusti* and the *Butkud gusti* is related as follows:—Once on a rainy day in the course of their migrations the ancestors of the clan had to encamp for a night on both the banks of a river. The people on one of the banks were warming themselves round a fire, while their brethren on the other bank were shivering with piercing cold. The river was in flood and could not be crossed. The party shivering with cold asked the party enjoying the warmth of the fire on the opposite bank of the river to supply them with fire. The request was complied with and a brand of fire was supplied, but this brand of fire would burn with great difficulty. As such a brand is called *Butkud* in the Tamaría dialect of Mundari, the people who supplied this *Butkud* brand thenceforth came to be known as the *Butkud gusti* and their descendants are so known to this day. The shivering party made fire with the help of the *Butkud* brand. The fire began to burn brightly and the people warming themselves by the fire began to experience a kind of sensation known as *charad* in the Tamaría dialect. As they experienced the *charad* sensation they began to be called the *Charad gusti*. The *Charad* regarded the *Butkud* as their *bhāyads* for they received such help from them. Thus intermarriage between the *Charad* and the *Butkud* came to be regarded as wrong.

The legend of the origin of the *Bukru gusti* is as follows:—

Once upon a time, people belonging to several

gustis went a-hunting. When meat of the game was being distributed equally among all the *gustis*, the men of a particular *gusti* expressed their desire to have something more than their proper share. The habit of doing so is called *bukru* in the Tamaria dialect. Thus the people who asked for more meat than had fallen to their shares began to be known as the *Bukru gusti*.

The legend of the origin of some of the sub-divisions of the *Bukru gusti* is interesting. The story goes that a *Bukru* man had two wives—one of whom was a Tamaria Munda woman while the other was a Barāi (weaver) woman. Unfortunately he lost two children, one by each wife in the course of one week. The bones of the deceased were carried to the clan ossuary (*sasan*) for burial. The bones of the child born of the Barāi woman were gorgeously decorated while those of the child by the Tamaria woman were without decoration. People at the *Sasan* or burial-ground mistook the decorated bones for those of the child born of the Tamaria woman and so they kissed (*cho*) them first. People who committed this mistake were called the *Barāi-jang cho Bukru*, i. e. *Bukru* who kissed the bones of a child born of a Barāi woman. Their descendants are still known as men of the *Barāi-jang cho Bukru* clan.

The legend relating to the sub-divisions of the *Diuri gusti* is as follows :—

The Tamarias consider it beneath their dignity to bury a dead horse with their own hands.

Unfortunately a pony belonging to

The Diuri a certain family of the Diuri *gusfi*
 Clan. died. As no low-class Ghasi was
 available in the neighbourhood,

the family was compelled to bury the carcass of the horse themselves though it was considered beneath the dignity of a Tamaría to do so. Thenceforth the people who performed this detestable office and their descendants came to be known as the *Sadôm-tôpâ Diuri* clan. The *Sadôm-tôpâ Diuri* men are looked down upon as of low birth by other Tamarias. The traditional origin of the *Kamal* or (lotus) *gusfi* is related as follows :—

Once on a time some Tamarias went into a forest for the purpose of hunting. There they killed some deer and other eatable animals. When the meat of the animals was distributed amongst the hunting party, a man kept the meat that had fallen to his share on a *kamal* or lotus leaf. As he kept the meat on a *kamal* leaf he came to be known as belonging to *Kamal* clan. No Tamaría of the *Kamal gotra* will pluck a lotus leaf or lotus flower.

The story of the origin of the well-known *Nag*
gusfi or, to give it its real Mundari

The Pandu Bing name, the *Pandû bing* clan is as
 or Nag Clan. follows :—

Once on a summer day, a Tamaría woman went to a river to fetch water. There was none at home to look after the babe which the mother had left behind at home. The mother having bathed in the river filled her earthen pitcher with water. She then placed it over her head and hastened home. On returning home she found, to her astonishment, a cobra or Nâg serpent or *Pandû bing* (white

serpent) protecting the babe, which was sitting on the courtyard, from the heat of the Sun. by expanding its hood over the head of the babe. At the sight of the mother the Nāg serpent is said to have disappeared. As the babe was protected by a Nāg serpent, the descendants of the babe came to be called the men of the Nāg *gusṭi*. No member of the *Nag gusṭi* will injure a Nāg serpent.

Transformation of gusṭi names.—In many cases, the Hinduised Tamārias of the district of Singhbhum have altered their *gusṭi* names almost beyond recognition. Thus the name of the *Samad gusṭi* has been changed into *Samanta gusṭi* in order to give it a respectable Hindu appearance. In the same way the *Sili gusṭi* has changed its name into *Solanki gusṭi*, the name of a Hindu Rajput clan. The name of the *Sandil gusṭi*—a *gusṭi* or clan name common to many genuine Hindu families and said to be derived from Sandilya Rishi,—is in so much favour with the semi-Hinduised Tamārias of the district of Singhbhum that instances have been known in which a Tamāria of the *Sandil gusṭi* has married in the same *gusṭi*. And no wonder, as, in fact, this new *gusṭi* name has been adopted by families belonging to several originally distinct *gusṭis* such as the Diuri, the Charad, the Butkud, and a few others. A curious instance of the transformation of a *gusṭi* name is that of the Naguri and the Rantai into the Nāg *gusṭi*. This clan name is also in so much favour with the semi-Hinduised Tamārias of the Singhbhum district that instances have been known in which a Tamāria of the Nag

gusti has married in the same *gusti*. This evidently shows that this new *gusti* name has been adopted by families belonging to several originally distinct clans.
