II

Land and People

For centuries together, the Saraks are inhabiting certain pockets of the erstwhile Manbhum district in the state of Bihar with their counter-parts in Medinipur, Bardhaman and Bankura districts of West Bengal. They are settled agriculturist and live like peasant communities in the region. Before introducing this community in greater details we would present certain aspects of the area of their habitat especially the currently named Purulia District where from our subjects come.

Purulia district owes its name to an ordinary village of the same name. The village had gradually grown in importance and became the headquarters of erstwhile Manbhum district in 1838. According to the decision of the Government of India contained in clause b sub-section 1 of section 1 of the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Act 1956, Purulia a Subdivision of Manbhum district, excluding Chas and Chandi Police station and the Police Outpost area of Palamda within Barabhum Police station was transferred to West Bengal. The new district of Purulia in West Bengal came into being on November 1, 1956.

Setting

Purulia therefore became the western most bordering district of West Bengal. There are two sub-divisions in the district, namely Purulia and Raghunathpur. Purulia became a municipal town under the old law in 1876. Purulia district has an area of 6,259.0 sq. km. The latitudinal and longitudinal extents are from 22° 42' 35" to 23° 42' 0" North and from 85° 49' 25" and 86°
Map - 1

A map of the District of Purulia in the State of West Bengal
(inset: West Bengal within the boundaries of India)
Map - 2
The locations of study-villages in Purulia
Map - 3
A bird's eye-view of the study villages
54° 37' East. The district is 220 Kilometres away from the Bay of Bengal and the Hooghly estuary (Census of India, 1981). The physiographic location of the district may be characterised as between the alluvial plains of West Bengal and the ancient plateau of South-east Bihar. Purulia has hardly any natural boundary. Only about a hundred kilometres of the district boundary follows the Damodar river in the North and the Subarnarekha in the West. Purulia has its boundary on the north with the Bardhaman district of West Bengal and Dhanbad district of Bihar, on the south with the districts of Hazaribagh, Ranchi and Singbhum of Bihar on the east with Medinipur and Bankura districts of West Bengal, and Ranchi District on the west. Tropic of cancer runs through the district.

**Communication**

The existing roads in the district provide very important transport services. The National Highway (NH-32) passes through the police stations of Purulia, Jaypur and Balarampur covering a distance of 64 Kms between Balarampur - Singbhum border and Chas - Dhanbad border. Two state Highways, viz. Purulia - Barakar road and Chasmore - Tulin road also run through the district covering a total length of about 121 Kms.

The railway was introduced in the area on 14th December 1889 by the erstwhile Bengal - Nagpur Railway company. Asansole, on the erstwhile East Indian Railway was connected with Purulia in the first phase. The line further extends to Sini and Chakradharpur on the main line of the old Bengal Nagpur Railway. The Kharagpur - Gomoh section of the erstwhile Bengal - Nagpur line was opened for goods traffic and the The complete length upto Gomoh was opened for passengers traffic on 1st January 1907. The next
addition to the railway system was the Purulia - Ranchi line which was opened on 15th November 1907. The district is at present served by the South-Eastern Railway. The district is directly connected with Calcutta by two trains. The district possesses 198 Kms of broad gauge and 35 Kms of narrow gauge tracks.

**Topography and climate**

The district has a gently undulating topography with occasional hillocks of hard rocks. These are residual hills, locally known as dungri, bearing testimony to the high plateau of ancient times which has been eroded down and came to the present landform. Because of erosion, the texture of the present landform is of two kinds, viz. higher peneplains which include the police stations of Jhalda, Arsa, Baghmundi, Balarampur, Barabazar, Bardhaman and the rest are in the zone of lower undulating surface. The highlands rise very steeply from 300 metres (above sea-level) but the slope becomes moderate above 500 metres, there appears an uplifted peneplained surface. The highlands of Purulia are actually the remnants of the spurs projecting from the Ranchi plateau to the west and functioning as watersheds of the Subarnarekha - Kasai - Damodar group of rivers. Ajodhya Pahar forms the main highland region of Purulia. To the west and south of Ajodhya Pahar, occur a number of residual hills, isolated and detached from the parent body. There are many such outliers in Jhalda which rise steeply. Here the Chamtu is the highest point with 688 metres of the other residual hills, the most spectacular is Jajuhati dam at 542.5 metres encircled by numerous streams. At the southern periphery of the Baghmundi hills the prominent outline are Kadali Pahar and Khaira Pahar with 377 meters and 348 meters height, respectively. The important peaks on the
main highland mass of Bagmundi are Ajodhya, Ganja Pahar and Gugni Pahar. The average height of each of these peaks is 580.5 meters. The Gorgaburu and Karma hill with heights of 677 meters and 663 meters respectively are the highest peaks. There are nine peaks at the extreme north-west of the district of which Bijali Pokhar which rises 621 meters and Jabarban peak with 641 meters are worth mentioning. To the north-east of the district, Panchet hill with 643.5 meters height is located.

The undulating plains from north to south of the district may be classified as the following categories: (a) The Damodar valley (b) The Damodar-Kasai valley (c) The Damodar-Dwarakeswar interfluve (d) The upper Silabati catchment (e) The Kasai-Kumari interfluve; and (f) The Subarnarekha valley to the west and south-west. The general slope of the river valleys, except the Subarnarekha is towards east and south-east. The height of the interfluves, sloping north and south, ranges between 150 and 300 meters above Sea-level.

Annual rainfall of the district measures on an average 1325 mm during the peak rainy season which starts from the month of June and ends in the month of September each year. Other months of the year are usually dry with little or no rain.

**Rivers**

The main river of the district is Subarnarekha which is in the western most part of Purulia. The Damodar, forms the northern boundary. Gobai is the most important right bank tributary of the Damodar. The Dwarekeswar, the Silai, the Kasai and the Kumari are the other rivers flowing through the district.
Flora and Fauna:

The green vegetation includes Sal (Shorea robusta), Asan (Terminalia tomentosa), Kend (Melanoxylon), Pial (Buchanania latifolia), Bans (Bambosa indica), Golmohor (Delonix regia), Kanthal (Artocarpus heterophyllus), Pabas (Butea frondosa) and various grasses and dwarfed bushes, Numerous Mahua (Bassia latifolia), Palas (Butea monosperma), Dumur (Ficus hispida), Am (Mangifera indica) and Neem (Azadirachta indica) which are found in different slopes and also near the cultivable tracks.

The rapid pace of deforestation has not only shrunken the natural flora but also caused depletion of fauna. However, there are still some tigers, leopards, bears (black and sloth), wolves, hyenas, jackals, Indian fox, spotted and barking deer, wild pigs and the langoor's in the forests of Purulia. The Dalma hills adjacent to this district nurture a small herd of elephants. The game birds are also not very numerous today. Jungle spur and pea fowl and grey partridge can occasionally be seen. Pigeons both rock and green are common. Snakes are fairly numerous, and there are elaborate rituals and lores to protect men from snake-bites. The main poisonous varieties are the cobra (Naja naja) and the karait (Peripatopsis capensis). In the hilly areas, an occasional python is met with. Many of the tanks and irrigation bundhs (pond) are regularly stocked with ruhi (Labeo rohita), mrigel (Cirrhina mrigala) and katla, (Catla catla). Various small species of fish, toads, beeches etc. are also found in almost every piece of water reservoirs and also in the low paddy lands.

Purulia being a predominantly agricultural district. 75.19 percent (1991 census) of the total inhabitants of the district depend on agriculture (i.e., cultivators and agricultural labour) which is much higher than that of the state average. But the irrigation facilities for agriculture in the district is far from
satisfactory. The district is characterised by rain-fed mono-crop farming system with presence of a largely distributed waste land. The classification of land use are as in the district Purulia is given below:

i) Net cropped area - 294.90 thousand hectares
ii) Land put to non-agricultural uses- 70.72 thousand hectares
iii) Barren and un- cultivable waste- 18.06 thousand hectares
iv) Misc. tree crops and groves- 11.39 thousand hectares
v) Cultivable waste- 86.98 thousand hectares
vi) Other fallow land- 20.10 thousand hectares
vii) Current fallow- 32.95 thousand hectares

The district has deposits of a fairly wide range of minerals which are commercially important. A few such minerals may be worth mentioning like China-clay, Coal, Copper, Felspar, Flourite, Lime-stone and quartz, which are found in the district. There are asbestos, calcite, fireclay, granite, graphite, illuminate, mica, iron-ore, rock-phosphate and a few other radio active minerals.

**The People**

The newly curved out district Purulia is the habitat of not only different religious communities like Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Animists and Hindus but also of different language-groups. This is also a home for different ethnic communities, including some little-known ones. Census figures do not take into account all these different communities either by religious group or by ethnic groups. The population is usually classified into only the total scheduled tribes and scheduled caste. These communities are known to the Government.
and also to the social anthropologists only when some discontent brews up among certain communities claiming their rightful share in the socio-economic spheres or demand their ethnic identity.

The population as per 1991 census in Purulia is as follows:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Scheduled Caste Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribes Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>210006</td>
<td>110599</td>
<td>99407</td>
<td>23027</td>
<td>21856</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>2014571</td>
<td>1032172</td>
<td>982399</td>
<td>198837</td>
<td>186793</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2224577</td>
<td>1142771</td>
<td>1081806</td>
<td>221864</td>
<td>208649</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Saraks, who were neither enumerated as an ethnic group nor as a religious community, constitute only 1.51 percent of total population. So, they are not only little known, but also have been kept as non-entity (unknown) in the eyes of outsiders.

**Saraks**

Mr. Sanatan Majee, a primary school-teacher of village Durmuth of Raghunathpur police station, himself a Sarak scholar tried to collect the circle name (a settlement zone), mauza name and number of Sarak families inhabiting Purulia and Dhanbad districts in 1923. Saraks were found in 9 circles and at 106 mauzas. Altogether 1929 Sarak families inhabited in this area (vide, Appendix-I). No population figures for the Sarak community could be ascertained from the Census record.

According to a report the total population of Sarak was 20,000 in early 1970's (Mandal, 1974).

But according to a report prepared by Mr. Asit Kr. Majee (available in a book form) the total population of Sarak in the Purulia and
Dhanbad districts was 33,537 (male 17,598 and female 15,939) persons in 1993. They were distributed in 223 villages of 9 districts of West Bengal and Bihar (vide, table 2.1 and 2.2).

**Table 2.1 : Sarak population in different districts of West Bengal and Bihar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the State</th>
<th>Name of the districts</th>
<th>Number of villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>Purulia</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bardhaman</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medinipur</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>Ranchi</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bokaro</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dhanbad</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singhbhum</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Santal Paraganas</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State -2</td>
<td>Districts -9</td>
<td>Villages-223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Majee, Samakaleen Sarak Samprodaya-O-Taar Itibritta (1993)

**Table 2.2 : Sarak populations in the different districts over time.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of the district</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Manbhum - Purulia</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>4026</td>
<td>8327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Manbhum - Purulia</td>
<td>4261</td>
<td>3957</td>
<td>8218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Manbhum - Purulia</td>
<td>5722</td>
<td>4774</td>
<td>10496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Manbhum - Purulia</td>
<td>N.A</td>
<td>N.A</td>
<td>10500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Manbhum - Purulia</td>
<td>5535</td>
<td>4996</td>
<td>10531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Purulia - Dhanbad</td>
<td>9570</td>
<td>7952</td>
<td>17522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Purulia - Dhanbad</td>
<td>16773</td>
<td>15099</td>
<td>31872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Purulia - Dhanbad</td>
<td>17598</td>
<td>15939</td>
<td>33537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Majee, Samakaleen Sarak Samprodaya-O-Taar Itibritta (1993)
The statement submitted by the secretary of the Sarak community on 29th June 1994 to the O.B.C. (Other Backward Class) commission claimed that the Saraks were around 30,000 and were distributed in 91 villages in the 5 police stations of the Purulia district alone.

**Genesis of Saraks**

There is very few published literature, book or history, which can be referred to readily trace the Sarak community. The local people are not also acquainted with the history of the Sarak community residing throughout the north-west region of the district of Purulia. Only some people among the Saraks are aware about their history of origin. They claim to have once brought the light of Aryan civilisation into this area. They are the "....... people who have left many monuments of their ingenuity and piety in the adjoining district of Manbhum and who were certainly the earliest Aryan settlers in this part of India, the Sarawaks or Jains ...." (Dalton, 1872:177).

Although they have been described as Jain by different authors (Dalton, 1872, Ball, 1869 etc.) they are not clearly distinguishable from the Hindus. Though they belonged to Jain religion, many of them tried to be identified as Hindus for reasons which we would discuss later. The cultural traits of Jainism and Hinduism have been intermingled to a great extent with the existing Sarak culture. They generally observe all the traditional religious customs of Hindus and Animists throughout the year. But till today, the names of the original Tirthankars are inextricably interwoven in their clan nomenclature.

From Valentine Ball's (1869) account we note that the people of Sarak community were engaged in copper-industry from time immemorial. A prosperous copper-age was established in the region of Singbhum - Dhalbhum by the Saraks. Conflict started between Ho community and the Saraks.
regarding the ownership of copper-mines. It is also worthwhile to mention here that the people of Sarak community at the very initial stage, discovered the copper-mines and earned their livelihood by working in those copper-mines. At a later date, though this community was driven out by the Hos, they could not completely destroy the entire traces of their earlier settlements as revealed in the following"..... the more adventurous Saraks or lay Jains, having alone penetrated the jungles where they were rewarded with the discovery of copper upon the working of which they must have spent all their time and energy, as with the exception of the talks above mentioned, the mines furnish the sole evidence of that part of the country. It is scarcely conceivable that the Hos, when they drove out the Saraks could have utterly destroyed all trace of buildings (Ball, 1869 : 170-74).

Saraks were not only the founders of copper-age in this area, but were also dealing with iron. From the Jain literature (Mazumder, 1943: 409-10) it is found that the people of Sarak community were involved with mountainous heaps of iron and furnaces scattered abundantly throughout the area whose length was 90 miles right from the Rupnarainpur to Pandaveswar, on both sides of the river Ajoy. Sudhanna, the disciple of Lord Mahabir, was the pioneer in iron works. He was an inhabitant of Rarh Bengal (presently the districts of Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia of the State of West Bengal). The council of pandits of Jaina scriptures indicated that Sudharma a vastly learned person who was pioneer in iron industry and an Acharya (Technical specialist) in Iron. The second great teacher of iron was Bhadrabahu, the principal and most ancient aphorise (Mazumdar , 1943:409-10). He was also a man from Rarh area. These teachers of Iron were the forefathers of present-day Sarak families.

The golden age of the Iron industry was witnessed in the eastern part of India. ".....This is the area where the ancient Sravakas who were clearly Jainas, lived and practised the earliest known smelting of iron ore. Hiuen Tsang
mentioned this area as the Safa province. The origin of the name of Safa is not known, but it appears to be clearly associated with Jainism. Herbert had identified Dalmi as the capital of the Safa province and the entire Dalma hills are full of Jaina antiquities. It is this province of Safa which is identified with a part of radhadesa which was visited by Lord Mahavira" (Roy Choudhury, 1984: 153-154).

From the above it appears that the Sarak community is the ancient inhabitants of Purulia district. In this district, they are still living as a very special community. Regarding the Sarak of this region, it is said "the early medieval Jain merchants of Purulia have left behind a community called 'Sravak' meaning the Jain laity. The Saraks of Purulia are Jain in their faith and practice and most of them are in trade and commerce. The majority of them unlike the immigrant Jains of modern times, live in rural areas and survive as money-lenders and small traders". (West Bengal District Gazetteer, 1985: 83-84).

However, many a people belonging to the Sarak community held the view that their ancestors belonged to a place called Manbazar. They were forced to leave their abode and migrate to the present region some four hundred years ago. The migration seemed to have taken place during the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

".......in 1589 or 1590 , during the reign of Akbar , Raja Mansingh marched his troops from Bhagalpur through the Western-Hills to Bardhaman enroute to reconquer Orissa and again a couple of years later he sent his troops through Jharkand to Midnapore; on both these occasions he must have passed through portions of this district .......Mansingh again sent out his troops, in 1593 from Bihar to Midnapore by what has been described as a Western route through Jharkand" (West Bengal District Gazetteer, Purulia, 1985:90, 236).
Mansingh with an intention of taking rest for a few days, encamped at Manbazar (dominated by the Sarak at that time) before returning to his own country through this road. During the period of taking rest, he was attracted by a beautiful Sarak lady. Due to the forcible outrage of chastity of a lady belonging to Sarak community, they became frightened and left their habitat for a new settlement. At that time the destination was unknown and they were fleeing for self-protection. They began to settle-down at Panchakot or Panchet region, reigned by Panchakot Raj. From then on, a new chapter of their struggle for existence began.

*Other historical evidences*

The evidences cited regarding the Saraks being Jain are as follows:

The names of gotras (clans) are derived from the successors of Adideva, the first Tirthankar of Jainism. Those belonging to the gotras Anantadeva, are the successors of fourteenth Tirthankar Sri Anantadeva. Those who are under the canopy of the gotra Dharmadeva are the successor of fifteenth Tirthankar Sri Dharmadeva. Similarly, those whose gotra is Sandilya are the successors of sixteenth Tirthankar Santideva, Kashyaps are the successor of twenty-third Tirthankar Sri Parshwanath. The birth places of Adideva, Dharmadeva, Santideva are lying at bank of the river Saraju at Ayodha and Ratnapur. The birth place of Lord Parshwanath is situated at Varanashi, on the bank of the river Ganges. Thus it can be claimed that the original dwelling place of the Sarak are mainly in the north-western regions of India. Subsequently, due to the various reasons such as spreading out of Jainism and expansion of trade and commerce, they became scattered through to the remote areas of Chottonagpur plateau centering the Pareshnath hill. It is to be mentioned here that Pareshnath hill was named after Tirthankar Parshwanath. This hill is closely associated with the life and culture of the
Saraks. It can be recollected that out of twenty four Tirthankars, twenty attained Nirvana in this Pareshnath Hill. According to Risley (1891: 237), ".............Parswanath, the twenty third Tirthankar who is believed to have attained Nirvana on Parswanath hill in Hazaribagh is still recognised by the Sarak as their chief deity..........

At present the Saraks are concentrated at the north-west of Purulia district. It is reported that before setting up of their present habitats they inhabited the fringes on the banks of the river Kangsabati or Kasai. In the olden days they lived in places such as, Boram, Budhpur, Pakbirra and so on. Though it cannot be ascertained with accuracy about their duration of habitat in Manbazar area, archaeological evidence about the relics of Jain temples during the period between 10th and 16th century indicates that Saraks probably lived in this area. The small images of stones of Jain Tirthankars found on the banks of river Kangsabati, were constructed during the period of 10th to 13th centuries. "This is borne out by the fact that from all along the banks of the Kansai (Kansabati) river, numerous stone images of Jain Tirthankars have been found, which are dateable to the 10th, 11th or 12th centuries........besides these, there are remnants in the 10th and 13th centuries in variation of the North Indian and Orissan and Nagarasikara style. These can be seen at Boram, Budhpur, Charrati, Palma, Pakbirrah .......

Most of the ancient Jain relics found in Kangsabati basin indicate that present Saraks would inhabit this area. "..............the Saraks appear to have colonized along the banks of the rivers and we find their temple-ruins on the banks of the Damadar, the Kansai........".

It is mentionable that in ancient times, there was existence of a commercial road from Varanashi to Tamralipta port (presently Tamluk in Midnapur District of West-Bengal) passing through Budhpur and Pakbirrah.
Possibly this renowned oldest port was engaged in the export of copper and as such it was named as Tamralipta. It is to be recollected that the people of Sarak community were employed with the copper-industry while they were residing at Manbazar and its adjoining areas. It is available in the history that in the past, maximum copper was available in this region particularly from the puncha- copper mines. The foreign trade (export) of copper was carried-out though this Tamralipta port and the culture and civilization of Sarak people were developed covering this road. It is on record that "Another route from Tamluk direct to Benaras (varanasi) probably passed through Pakbirra and Budhpur on the bank of the Kasai near Manbazar , ....the fact that in those ancient times, the marchants who are credited with having built these old temple.........". (West Bengal district Gazetteers, 1985 : 235).

However, this community does no more live at Manbhum and its adjoining areas in Purulia district. The glorious deeds of their ancestral Jain Sarak- the ruins of architecture of temples and sculptures are instances of the extinct civilization. It would be worthwhile to put on record the relics found in the areas:

**Pakbirra:**

There are several relics of Jain temples of wonderful architect, use nicely decorated and standing as monuments. Idols on style of an ascetic, seated in yogi meditation in the village Pakbirrah (situated about 25 miles away of the south-west of Purulia town ) can even now be noticed. In the year 1873, Beglar (British in Indian administration) travelled throughout the region. Though Beglar mentioned in his Report (Report on a tour through the Bengal Provinces in 1872-73, 1878) about the existence of many temples, only three temples are found still now and the remaining others are under ruins. There are
many instances of architectural remains lying scattered in the courtyard of temples such as, idols of small and large size of Digambar Tirthankars and others in various poses. To-day, the seven and half feet high stature of Digambar Jain Tirthankar, a wonderful creation of Jain architect use is found in neglected and careless condition. It is mentionable that nearest to these temples, were a number of ponds out of which one was very big having landing steps, cemented with stones were completely destroyed. It is clearly understood from the description by Mr. Beglar that there was a well-planned centre of Jainee-culture at Pakbirrah. "........there were altogether twenty shrines, large and small including the biggest one made of bricks and stones and in each and every shrines, one or more statue of Jain Tirthankars are found. It seems that the status of all the Tirthankars like Rishavnath, Santinath, Parswanath, Mahavira etc. were established in those shrines, Ofcourse, to-day all those shrines and temples are under ruins, but the statues of Jain Tirthankars are available which are kept at a side collectively. The existence of broken parts of the shrines and temples alongwith embolic myrobalang, pitches and funeral pyres are found. The gigantic statue of Jain Tirthankar (probably of Padmaprava) is now venerated as Lord Bhairava" (Ghosh, 1957 : 444). May be that all these were once built by the Saraks.

**Pairachalli**

Pairachalli is situated on the eastern bank of river Kangsabati at a distance of approximately five miles from Manbazar. Some of the ponds and wells which were founded by the Sarak people belonging to Jain religion are still existing here. A statue of terribly destructive form (Rudra) of Lord Shiva, mounting on an ox in a strange fashion is found close to presently pitched entry road to the village. At present it has become a deity Goram to the local people. The word Goram means a village. This deity Goram is worshipped as a
village deity. Besides these, there are thousands of stone images, beautifully engraved, lying disorderly at every nook and corner of the village. In all these architectural remains style of Jaina architecture is distinctly present. The evidences of different architecture reminiscences mysterious long past and are instances of Jain architect. Older peoples of this region gave an account that even to-day, the floors of room, veranda, furniture and fittings, are occasionally found while digging the banks of the river.

**Budhpur**

Nearest to the village Budhpur, there are various relics and ruins existing in disorderly manner. At present some distinguishable remains are noticed, which indicate fine workmanship in the then architectural forms. All those seemed to be built by the Jains once. These might have been captured by the Buddhists later. Most probably at later date the religion of Lord Shiva became so popular that the influence of Buddhism was discontinued and as a result of destruction of temples and transformation of the statues of stones into phallic symbol of Shiva came into being. Here it can be mentioned that presently at Budhpur nothing except the Buddhist sculpture engraved in the body of the monumentry can be traced.

**Boram (Deulghata)**

The village Boram is situated at the right bank of the river Kangsabati at a distance of five miles to south from Jaipur. Both Mr. Dalton and Beglar visited this village and recorded the various archaeological examples in their books. They declared that the temples and images which were built here by the Sarak community once belonged to Jain religion. "These three temples are all of the same type and are no doubt correctly ascribed by the people to the Srawaks or Jains. I found indeed no Jain images, but about a
miles to the south, the remains of a Hindu temple in a grove were pointed out to me, and all the images from all the temples were dedicated to Siva, but amongst the images were several nude figures ...... that were in probability of the Jains of the brick temple " (Dalton, 1872: 186).

Not only at Manbazar and its adjoining regions, even at the places of Balarampur, Dulmi, Charrah, Parah, Senera, Sankha, Chakoltore of the district of Purulia, many ruins of Jaina temples and marks of almost extinct Jaina archaeological skills, once built by them, were washed out by current of times, lying scattered as an witness of remembrance of the past. These are dated in between 10th and 13th centuries.

However, some agreed that the Saraks were immigrants from Gujarat and they came to settle in the Chotonagpur area near Pareshnath Hill sometime during 11th to 13th century AD. Some claimed that they were immigrants from Uttar Pradesh. A few scholars again subscribed to the view of tracing the Saraks' date of origin in copper age. The regional migration from Dhalbhum to the Panchakot area took place during the reign of the Mughal emperor, Akbar-the Great. The local ancient architectural remains, ruined temples, shrines etc. on the banks of river Damodar and Kangshabati especially those at the present village-sites of Payrachali (8 kms. away from Manbazar), Budhpur in Manbazar, Bodma (deulghata, 7 Kms. away from Jaypur) bear the testimony of the community's rich heritage.

**Oral History**

It would be noteworthy to refer to the oral history about conditions of Saraks during the invasion by Bargies (sometime between 1735 and 1745).*

It would still be better to refer to history of Saraks as remembered by a non-sarak (Brahmin) village older. We would summarise his (A.G's) version.

Among Brahmins there are mainly two sects: Shaivas and Saktas. The Brahmins of Purulia were mainly Shaivas. Therefore they do worship Shiva and set up the idols in temples. In early 18th century Mahabir Jain did visit this area for preaching Jainism. The Brahmins felt threatened at this and tried to abuse and harass Mahabir as naked hermits by instigating the paria dogs to drive out the Jain preacher. Bargi invasion changed the situation altogether. Bargis would plunder all communities and religious sects except the Hindus and for that matter Brahmins. So Saraks pretended themselves to be non-jaina for the sake of self protection. During this period Brahmins took advantage of this situations and buried the idols of Jaina Tirthankars in Jaina temples and put the idols of Shiva in their places. In many temples they also destroyed the Jaina idols. So many Jaina temples were converted to Shiva temples during that period.

Mahabir had been camping at Beirya and the place of the camp was called Beiryar Bari. Mahabir was, therefore, Beiryr Sadhu, hermit of Beirya. Beiryar Bari still exists in the north-western corner of the Bero Railway station which is one kilometre away from Senera, one of our study villages. One can find the remains of a Jaina temple where there is a broken idol of Santidev Jain. A.G. claimed that if excavation could be undertaken there would be several such idols of Jaina Tirthankar under Hari mandir and Nabaratna Shiva Mandir situated at Senera village. According to A.G the Sarak did not oppose Brahmins in destroying or buring Jaina idols out of fear from Bargi invasion and ostracization by the Brahmins.

A Sarak village older (B.M) also corroborated this same popular saying heard in his childhood from his grand father.
The present worker enquired about the authenticity of such saying and gathered that scientists from the Archaeological Survey of India excavated one stone idol of a Jaina Tirthankar from the village Senera twenty years ago. That idol is presently being exhibited in the Indian Museum in Calcutta. Again all the Sarak women of Senera and other neighbouring villages offer Jury (milk, rice and sugar) and worship at Beiryar Bari at night on Mahabir Jayanti. No Hindu or Animist women do this puja (worship). So there must be some truth to this public saying. But only serious research by archaeologist and large scale excavation can unveil the truth.

From the citation above, it is clear that there should not be any two opinions about the existence of Saraks' settlement in this area in the earlier centuries. It is also clear that the Saraks or the Sravak were followers of Jainism in those days and the present Sarak community under study are descendants of the Jaina Sarak community who migrated from Dhalbhumgarh to Panchakot of the-then times. This community remained unknown to the historians and also to the anthropologists because of their proximity to Hindu caste group and the process of silent Hinduization in the latter centuries. This transition may be due either to opportunity or compulsion. We would not go into this question for the moment before we make a thorough documentation of the community from the point of ethnography which follows in the following chapters.