Chapter II

Socio-Economic Changes of the Santais Under British Colonial Rule

The British rule had unleashed major socio-economic changes in India. The introduction of the Permanent Settlement (1793), with its claim for revenue on perpetual regularity, marked the beginning of a new experience for Indian people. Land revenue being the only major source of income of the East India Company, the main focus of the Company’s administration was on its quantitative increase and regularity in collection. Experiments on land revenue policy for obtaining maximum possible revenue and to decide on the parties, the proposed revenue settlement would be agreed upon, constituted the main business of the Company at the outset. However, the changes brought into the revenue structure of the country by Company’s officials, triggered off corresponding changes in other sectors of the agrarian society as well. As residents of the Jungle Mahals, the Santais could hardly escape these changes that came in consequence of the revenue-regulatory policy of the British government.

Land Revenue Regulation and its Impact on the Santais of Jungle Mahals

The British control into the areas of the Jungle Mahals was established since the last quarter of the 18th century. By then, the traditional set up of the Jungle Mahals had started to deteriorate. The past histories of these areas, as mentioned earlier in details, indicate that when the Malla rulers held an undisputed sway over these territories, they had been left undisturbed by the Muslim rulers.¹ Though the Rajas of Bishnupur used to pay an annual tribute (Peskash) to the emperor of Delhi, they were independent within their own kingdom and the Muslim rulers did not interfere in their internal administration. This claim is also confirmed by medieval historians, who attributed the security of the Malla rulers to the natural defense of their territories.² Further, the residents of these areas being mostly tribals, had a different socio-economic and cultural life from the rest. They were

¹ Census 1951, West Bengal District Hand Book, Bankura, Calcutta, 1951, p. xi. (Hereafter West Bengal District Hand Book, Bankura)
not in the habit of paying revenue to any authority and were also unaware of the complexities and obligations of revenue regulations.\(^3\)

However, with the beginning of British rule in Bengal and consequent imposition of revenue regulations over the zamindars, the law and order situation in the Jungle Mahals deteriorated much. The zamindars, now, became less interested in maintaining tight vigilance over their areas. Also, the British attempt to bring the area under effective control was slow and the incidence of lawlessness was on the rise. Though the district collectors were invested with magisterial powers to take care of law and order problems, they were very few in numbers. The thanadary system was yet to evolve to its fullest and the inaccessibility of the Jungle terrains made the task of wielding control over the areas even more difficult. In this situation violence, gang robbery, and other forms of depredations occurred almost on perpetual regularity in the Jungle Mahals and the problem was unlikely to be controlled by occasional dispatch of army by the East India Company. However, during the initial years of revenue experiments carried out in the Jungle Mahals, the Jungle chiefs had not much grievances, as the assessment made during the Decennial Settlement was quite less. Consequently, the ryots too were not very much disturbed.\(^4\) But of course, the changes that accompanied the new revenue regulations shattered the traditional rights and duties of the zamindars.

When the Britishers introduced land revenue regulations in the Jungle Mahals, they hardly bothered about the relatively inaccessible terrains or any other physical barriers of the region. They also refused to take note of the sentiments and customs of the tribal residents of the area. As soon as Jungle Mahals came under the operation of the ordinary revenue laws in 1793, the zamindars and the chiefs found it very difficult to collect the estimated revenue. The rate of assessment fixed for the district of the Jungle Mahals however, was far less from the usual government demand of 9/10 rate as assessed in other districts of Bengal.\(^5\) In some districts like Burdwan and Bishnupur, the rate of assessment fixed at the time of the Decennial Settlement was allowed to continue even in the years after 1793. The total collection of the Bishnupur estate, including the balance of the year

1789 was Rs-4,19,539/-, while Burdwan kept paying annual jamma of more than Rs-3700,000/- for the last twenty years. The high rate of assessment at which the settlements were agreed upon, was even admitted by the British officials. The Collector of Burdwan wrote, “The amount of assessment fixed on the lands ...was as high as had ever been realized by the exertions of any govt. Mohammedan or British.”

The fact, that there was no provision for remission of revenue even in cases of natural calamities, added to the woes of the zamindars. In case of default in payment they had no way but to face virtual liquidation of their estates. The position of the zamindars was made further constricted by taking away from them the right to levy extra imposts from ryots. The period following Permanent Settlement, thus, subjected the zamindars to so much of a demand that they, in turn, passed the onus on to the ryots to get rid of the pressure. The result was increasing exploitation of the ryots by the zamindary amlahs, deterioration in law and order and spread of robbery and depredations in the region. Recorded instances show that the turbulent Paik Sardars and tahasildars, in the habit of misappropriating public revenue, were sometimes discharged from their offices. Thereafter, they wrecked vengeance over the poor inhabitants of the soil creating terror in the countryside. However, it needs to be mentioned in this context that the rate of assessment in the district of the Jungle Mahals was quite low in comparison with Bishnupur and other areas of Bengal but still it was difficult for the tribals to meet the demand, owing to their poverty in general and indifference to revenue-payment in particular.

However, as a consequence of default in the payment of revenue by the Jungle zamindars, most of their estates were put up for sale. Thus, Bishnupur Raj ceased to exist in 1805 and was purchased by the Maharaja of Burdwan for Rs-2,15,000/- in 1806. Other estates like Raipur, Phulkusma, Chatna, Ambikanagar, Shyamsundarpur, and Bhelaidiha too had to face liquidation, subsequently, for similar reason. Thus, the Permanent Settlement inevitably resulted in the sale of various zamindary estates and the ruin of the old princely families. A complete list of estates on which revenue was assessed at the

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6 Quoted from Ibid., p. 153.
7 B.S. Das., Civil Rebellion in the Frontier Bengal, Calcutta, 1973, p. 89.
8 Suchibrata Sen, op. cit., p. 45.
time of the Permanent Settlement showing their respective areas and revenue demands is mentioned in the Settlement Report of Robertson.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Estates Formed Out Of The Vishnupur Zamindari}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tauzi No.</th>
<th>Name of Estate</th>
<th>Area in acre</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bishnupur (purchased by the Maharaja of Burdwan in 1806)</td>
<td>2,06,471.5</td>
<td>1,35,989 – 6 – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Barahazari (purchased by the Maharaja of Burdwan in 1791)</td>
<td>1,31,943.5</td>
<td>1,92,633 – 6 – 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Karisunda (purchased by the Maharaja of Burdwan in 1791)</td>
<td>13,129</td>
<td>23,395 – 5 – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Jungle Mahal (purchased by the Maharaja of Burdwan in 1788)</td>
<td>1,22,354.5</td>
<td>3,499 – 4 – 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Kuchiakole (purchased by Nemai Singh, son of Chaitnya Singh in 1798)</td>
<td>8,542.5</td>
<td>8,237 – 10 – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Panchal (purchased in 1798)</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>408 – 9 – 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Jamtora (purchased in 1798)</td>
<td>9,575.5</td>
<td>6310 – 9 – 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Maliara (separated from the main estate created an independent taluk)</td>
<td>32,043.55,</td>
<td>202 – 8 – 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Saharjora (created an independent taluk by order of the Board of Revenue)</td>
<td>16,623</td>
<td>3,110 – 0 – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Kismat Saharjora</td>
<td>4,665</td>
<td>1,156 – 10 – 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Jungle Mahals}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tauzi No.</th>
<th>Name of Estate</th>
<th>Area in acre</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>938.</td>
<td>Chhatna or Samantabhum</td>
<td>1,40,194</td>
<td>731 – 7 – 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>990.</td>
<td>Bhelaidiha</td>
<td>25,781.5</td>
<td>524 – 2 – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>991.</td>
<td>Phulkusma</td>
<td>35,763.5</td>
<td>212 – 9 – 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>992.</td>
<td>Shyamsundarpur</td>
<td>88,100</td>
<td>247 – 10 – 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>993.</td>
<td>Simlapal</td>
<td>48,712.5</td>
<td>759 – 13 – 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>994.</td>
<td>Ambikanagar</td>
<td>85,261</td>
<td>372 – 14 – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>995.</td>
<td>Raipur</td>
<td>79,362.5</td>
<td>2,657 – 13 – 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{10} F.W. Robertson, Settlement Report, op. cit., p. 37.
The destruction of the old ruling families and the emergence of a new class of zamindars, talukdars and other groups of revenue farmers had caused considerable tension in rural Bengal. The loss of power and status of the old ruling families had totally dismantled them as a class. 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 right over land, totally destroyed the ardour of zamindary paternalism in the Jungle Mahals.\textsuperscript{11} The mutual trust and bond between the tenants and the zamindars, based on feudal mode of relationship, now, became a thing of the past. The resultant effect brought as much tension and discontent to the new owners of land as to the tribal residents of the respective estates. Particularly, the tribals could not rest in peace as they found their position threatened in this new situation. The most aggressive among them i.e. the Bhumijs, who 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, now became volatile. The resumption and assessment of the ghatwali lands had put 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 power to appoint and dismiss individual ghatwals was invested in the hands of the magistrate collector.\textsuperscript{12}

The result of all these changes had generated a strong reaction on the part of the tribal residents in the Jungle Mahals, particularly among the Bhumijs who burst forth into a spate of violent revolts since 1790’s. 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 18\textsuperscript{th} century thus, witnessed a tremendous change in the agrarian atmosphere 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 curtailment of their rights on the other. As disorder and mismanagement reigned supreme during this time, the Company’s government took the decision to suspend the operation of the ordinary revenue regulations in these areas for the time being.\textsuperscript{13} Also resumption of paikan lands was annulled. Henry Stratchey, who was in charge of restoring peace and

\textsuperscript{11} West Bengal District Gazetteers, Bankura, p. 376.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 376.
\textsuperscript{13} J.C. Jha., The Bhumij Revolt, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967, Chapter- iii & iv.
tranquility in the region, adopted a conciliatory policy towards the zamindars. The police
darogas were recalled from Manbhum and Ghatsilla and were entrusted with the job of
maintaining law and order along with the Paiks and sardar Ghatwals. The Ghatwals were
also restored with their rights over land and service.14 The rate of assessment of the
estates of the Jungle Mahals, agreed upon at the time of the decennial settlement, was
again reduced, which helped restoration of tranquility in the area. 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.15 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 ‘Magistrate of the Jungle Mahals’. Suchibrata
Sen however, has also attributed the creation of the new district of the Jungle Mahals to
the Chuar Rebellion of 1799.16 Thus, the areas of the Jungle Mahals, witnessed profound
changes both in terms of administrative management and in connection with the revenue
regulations of the East India Company.

The impact of all these changes on the Santals was disastrous since they were the most
timid and peace loving of all the tribal groups in India. In fact Santals had not paid any
revenue or allegiance to any form of government so far in their long history. Nor did they
know much about revenue obligations and its various paraphernalia. But the British govt.
did not take into cognizance these specificities of the region. Therefore, when the district
of the Jungle Mahals came under the purview of revenue regulation, the tribal response
against these regulations led to an atmosphere of violence, massacre and mayhem in the
Jungle Mahals. However, the Santals being peace loving by nature, did not join hands in
the mass outcry of the late 1790’s. They rather preferred the backwoods of the jungles to

14 Ibid, Chapter- iii & iv.
16 Ibid., p. 8.
participating in the general disaffection of the region. But they were very disturbed as a result of all these changes.

However, the first direct change in the life of the Santals had appeared when different types of land tenure practices prevailing at that time in colonial Bengal were brought under the network of revenue assessment. Hunter, in his book had classified these different types of land tenures under five headings. For example: a) tenures held directly from the government b) intermediate tenures c) cultivating tenures d) service tenures and e) rent free tenures. Attempt to bring these tenures under the ambit of revenue regulation had caused widespread discontent among the people of Bengal. One such step that affected directly to the Santals was known as Jungle Bari Jama. “When virgin lands were leased out for the purpose of being cleared of Jungle and brought under cultivation, the tenure was known by this name.” In fact, after the famine of 1770, with the large-scale reduction in peasant population in Bengal, the Santals were called upon everywhere to clear forestland and make it cultivable. Everywhere, in the district of Jungle Mahals Santals were encouraged to settle for the purpose of clearing jungle lands and making them cultivable. In some reports this type of land is called Baze or Baze-Zamin land. The Settlement Report testifies to this type of land to have been largely under the possession of the Santals for clearance and extension of cultivation. Robertson has commented that the Santals must be given the credit for having brought under cultivation the major portions of land in the Jungle Mahals with tremendous labour. The fact that many of the villages in southwest Bengal still bear Santali names is a testimony to these areas to have once remained under the possession of the Santals. However, the terms of settlement agreed upon at the time of negotiation forbade the Santals from paying any revenue during the initial years of clearing forests and initiating cultivation. But after three or five years, it was stipulated that the land would be brought under assessment at progressive rate of rent. Thus, much to the dismay of the Santals they were obliged to pay rent for the land they cleared and made fit for cultivation. They were further subjected to

17 J.C. Jha, op. cit., Chapter- iii & iv.
18 West Bengal District Gazetteers, Bankura, p. 380.
19 Ibid, p. 383.
20 Introduction to West Bengal District Records, (New Series), Midnapore, Calcutta, 1956, p. XXXI.
21 Quoted in Suchibrata Sen, op. cit. p. 32.
pay rent at a progressive rate with the passage of time and were denied knowledge of patta rights where the terms and conditions of the land agreement were inscribed. The report of J. Rawlins, addressed to the collector of Midnapore, dated 05-08-1794, contained information about various types of exactions made by the zamindar of Kasijora on the ryots.\textsuperscript{22}

But the most pertinent land problem, which caused progressive impoverishment of the Santals was the prevalence of Sanja or produce rent.\textsuperscript{23} Particularly, the areas that later came under the jurisdiction of Bankura district, a high percentage of land in possession of the settled ryots was held on produce rent or on a mixed cash and produce rent basis. Sanja or produce rent was ordinarily calculated on the basis of one third of the produce of the holding in a normal year. Bhag rent consisted of one half and sometime even 9/16 of the gross produce of the holding, while mixed cash and produce rents often represented an even higher proportion. According to F.W. Robertson, in this system, even when there was a bad harvest the rent remained the same. The landlords were, therefore, more keen to settle lands on Sanja rent, as they received regular income from land in spite of the failure of corps. “In the district where famines are frequent, Sanja are more advantageous than bhag rentals to the landlords...”\textsuperscript{24} In Bankura, the ryots were not only ignorant and helpless but they were thoroughly subservient to the landlords. The result was the increase in the Sanja rent and consequent impoverishment of the Santal ryots. Robertson believed that this kind of rent paying system often compelled the ryots to fall into the debt net of the mahajans and landlords as the ryots of the Jungle Mahals were “poor and thriftyless.”\textsuperscript{25} In case of a visit of a famine or any other natural calamity for which the natural harvest of the season was affected, the ryots had nothing to fall back upon. The only recourse left before them, was to borrow grain from the landlords or mahajans for survival. Their lands, here, acted as a security for the money or the grain, they borrowed. The rate of interest, agreed upon often-scaled 50% to 100% on the amount borrowed. The poor ryots, naturally, were unable to pay such a huge burden of debt and the cumulating interest on it often reduced their rights over the harvest of even subsequent years. “When

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 48.
\item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{West Bengal District Gazettes}, Bankura, p. 380.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Quoted from \textit{West Bengal District Gazettes}, Bankura, p. 389.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 388.
\end{itemize}
once a ryot had been compelled to borrow to tide over difficulties, he was seldom or never able to clear himself of his obligation as a result of which the mahajan took hold of his land.\textsuperscript{26} In such cases their lands were put up for sale and were purchased by the same landlord mahajan, who used to lend money or grain to the ryots in time of their crisis. It has been seen that the hereditary zamindars of the Jungle Mahals had little surplus capital. Hence they could not always be the purchasers of land offered for sale. It happened, therefore, that there were no bidders at the time of sale and the holding was knocked down to the mahajan for a fraction of its value. After securing the possession of the holding, the new owners resettled it with the original occupant on a produce rent. The tenant had hardly any option to choose. Either he had to submit to the terms and conditions of the landlord mahajans or had to give up his holding and become a wage labourer. The result was economically disastrous. Neither could the ryot ever free himself from this debt net nor could he hope of bringing any improvement to his material condition. "For a price far bellow its true value, the produce of the Santals were taken in return for which they were given primarily salt, tobacco and cloth.\textsuperscript{27}

Thus, the Permanent Settlement let loose a wave of change in the agrarian society of Bengal. Old zamindary families were ruined and the new, relatively small zamindars, talukdars, ijaradars and other groups of revenue farmers emerged. 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 capacity for land management. The revenue regulations of the East India Company encouraged many foreigners, traders, businessmen, mahajans and others to throng in the rural society of Bengal. But agricultural production did not improve and so was the condition of the ryots remained as destitute as ever. The old feudal mode of social relationship was lost and the entire agrarian society was in doldrums. The Santals must be very worried over this state of affairs as these changes posed a threat to their life and culture. Being peace loving and simple by nature, they did not flare up immediately to register their protest like their more aggressive brethren, the Bhumij. To make matter worse, there was the outbreak of the Bhumij in 1832, which

\textsuperscript{26} L.S.S. O'Malley., \textit{Bengal District Gazetteer, Bankura}, Calcutta, 1908, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{27} K.K. Dutta., \textit{The Santal Insurrection of 1855-1857} Calcutta, Calcutta University, 1940, p. 5.
again disturbed the peace of the region. The operation of the British army to suppress the Bhumij revolt also did considerable damage to the villages of the Santals.\footnote{Suchibrata Sen., op. cit., p. 84.}

As a result of all these maladies in the Jungle Mahals, the Santals, once again, were forced to leave outdoor in search of a better homeland. With it, began a process of great historical importance, namely, Santal migration to Damin-i-Koh.\footnote{Bradley Birt, F.B. The Story of an Indian Upland, London, Smith Elder, 1905, pp. 10-11.} It should be remembered, here, that no conscious effort was ever undertaken by the Santals to reach and settle in Damin-i-Koh, which later formed the nucleus of the Santal Parganas. Francis Buchan on stated that in the year 1809-1810 he had visited the district of Bhagalpur, which later formed the main parts of Santal Parganas district. During that time he had noticed that around 500 Santals settled in that region. He had come to know on a personal enquiry that they had come there around 1800 and they came from Birbhum, Palamou and Ramgarh.\footnote{C.E.A.W., Introduction to the Journal of Francis Buchanon (1810-1811), p. 28. (Title Page lost)} The report of Sutherland in 1819 throws a good deal of light on how in reality, Santal migration had taken place in Damin-i-Koh. These areas, thus, made habitable and cultivable by the Santals, actually received official attention in 1832 when John Petty Ward demarcated the entire area and named it as Damin-i-Koh.. Earlier, Augustus Cleveland had created Damin-i-Koh as a reserve for the Paharias, the original inhabitants of the area.\footnote{S.J. Areeparampil Mathew., Struggle for Swaraj, Chaibasa (Lupungutu), TRTC 2002, p. 132.} But since aversion of the Paharias to cultivation was well known, the British government encouraged the Santals to clear the forests in the areas of Damin. During the time of Sutherland and James Pontet the Santals received official support and encouragement to develop settlement in Damin. The zamindars, on their part, also liked it, as they knew that the spread of Santal settlement would fetch them better economic returns. The Santals, on the other hand, found the areas of the Damin relatively peaceful and ideal for developing their habitat. All these combined together to facilitate hordes of Santals from Orissa, Dhalbhum, Manbhum, Barabhum, Hazaribagh, Midnapore and Birbhum, to migrate in large numbers to the areas of the Damin-i-Koh. However, we don’t have any concrete data about the amount of land and the area that had been reclaimed and brought under cultivation by the Santals in Damin-i-Koh. From Captain Sherwill’s report of 1854, we come to know that about one-third of the pargana Handwe
had been brought under cultivation by the Ghatwals Sonthals and Bhuiyahs, that the inhabitants of the pargana Godda consisted in a great measure of Ghatwals and Sonthals who cultivated the soil with diligence. The Santals were also found in great numbers in Tappah Belpatta. During Captain Sherwill’s visit in 1851, there were 1,437 Santal villages and a total of 83,265 Santals were living in the Damin. The total land under cultivation was about 1,62,560 acres or 254 sq. miles.

Now the question is, what led the Santals of the erstwhile Jungle Mahals i.e. Bankura, Birbhum and Midnapore including the other parts of the Jungle Mahals to migrate to the Damin-i-Koh. Suchibrata Sen has summarised the causes of Santal migration to that region in the following words: "The settlement of the Santals in this area lay in the logic of history. The renewed migratory mood of the Santals, the frequent disturbances in the Jungle Mahals area, the zamindary oppression over the simple and innocent Santals, the close connecting boundary of the Jungle Mahals and the Damin-i-Koh area made the settlement of the Santals in that area independent of the will of any individual." Ward, one of the early British administrators, involved in the creation of Damin-i-Koh also mentioned the same. According to him, the Santal emigrants had come from other areas in order to avoid exploitations and disturbances. However, it should be remembered that the Santal migration to Damin-i-Koh began long before the idea to create a separate land for the Santals gained ground. It actually started since the last decade of the 18th century and became further intense in the succeeding decades owing to the disturbances in the Jungle Mahals. Sutherland report shows that large tracts of land, presently known as Dumka, Bakrop, Patsunda, including Sultanabad and Ambar were once thickly populated by the Santals.

It can be said that the Santal influx into Damin-i-Koh increased much after the rebellion of 1855 when the Santal Parganas district came into being which promised to provide a special protection to the rights and interests of the Santals. The Census of 1872 shows clearly the increase of Santal population in the Santal Parganas district in comparison

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33 O’ Malley, op.cit., Bankura, 1910, p. 44.
34 Suchibrata Sen., op. cit., p. 98.
36 Ibid., pp. 35-36.
with the Santal population in other districts of Southwest Bengal, which previously formed the major portions of the Jungle Mahals.\textsuperscript{37}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>1872 Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santal Parganas</td>
<td>191,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jungle Mahals:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>25,378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>6,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnapore</td>
<td>96,921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This proves large-scale displacement of the Santals from the erstwhile Jungle Mahals to the Santal Parganas district in the decades before 1872.

However, the happy days of the Santals in Damin-i-Koh did not last long. We know that the Santals were again subjected to the exploitations of the zamindars and mahajans. Frustrated and dismayed, when they came at the receiving end of their existence, they burst into a revolt. The causes of the Santal insurrection as stated in \textit{The Calcutta Review} are as follows:

"...a combined system of extortion, oppressive exactions, forcible dispossessions of property, abuse and personal violence and a variety of petty tyrannies upon the timid and yielding Sonthal. Usurious interest on loans of money ranging from 50 to 500 per cent; false measures at the haul and market; willful and uncharitable trespass by the rich… and such like illegalities have been prevalent."

\textsuperscript{38}

The simmering discontent of the Santals first found expression on June 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1855 in a massive meeting at Bhagnidih. Their leaders, (Sidhu, Kanhu, and their brothers Chand and Bhairab), while referring to the message allegedly sent to them by their Bongas made a call to a gathering of about 10000 santals to throw off the yoke of foreign oppression.\textsuperscript{39}

Under the messianic leadership of Sidhu and Kanhu, soon thousands of Santals joined hands in the revolt and took revenge against the Bengali usurers and zamindars, who had earlier exploited them. The insurgents swayed everybody who came in their way and killed many foreigners in their villages. Disturbances soon spilled out of Santal heartland (Damin-i-Koh) into the adjoining territories of Birbhum and Murshidabad.

\textsuperscript{38} Quoted from Edward Duyker., \textit{Tribal Guerrillas}, Bombay, OUP, 1987 p. 32.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 34.
Though discussions on Santal revolt is not the primary object of this study, given the impact it created in the district of Birbhum, it would not be irrelevant, to mention it in bare outline.

“In the beginning of July 1855 the Santals moved across the border and sacked Palsa in the north of the district, but fell back on the advance of a force of 400 men of the 7th Native Infantry, which advanced from Berhampore, and next day defeated them at Maheshpur. By the 20th July Mrityunjaypur and Narayanpur to the north-west of Rampur Hat had been sacked and by the 23rd Ganpur and other villages had been destroyed. Further South the rebels overran the country from the Grand Trunk Road in Burdwan, a few miles across the south-western boundary, to Sainthia in the heart of the district. The country was panic-stricken, and Suri at one time was threatened with an attack…Towards the end of July General Lloyd was placed in command of the force employed against the Santals; and shortly afterwards colonel Bird was appointed, with the rank of a Brigadier, to the special command of the troops in Birhnum and Bankura. All the troops available were hurried up, and by the 17th August quiet was for a time restored to this part of the country. “The villagers” wrote the Magistrate of Birbhum on the 24th of August “have returned to their homes, and the husbandmen are engaged in the cultivation of their land as usual the Santals are nowhere to be found, having retreated to a place some thirty miles off in another district”. In this month a proclamation was issued promising that all rebels who laid down their arms would be pardoned, except the leaders and those proved to have committed murder; but this offer was regarded as a confession of weakness and the flame of rebellion again blazed up. By the end of September the Magistrate of Birbhum reported that the whole country from four miles west of Nagar up to Deoghar was in their hands’ the daks were stopped, the villagers had fled from their homes. One large body of Santals was encamped to the number of 5000 to 7000 at Tilabulni, six miles west of Suri, where they had dug tanks, strengthened their position by earthworks, and made preparations for celebrating the Durga Puja. They were, it was reported, only waiting for another body of about 3000 Santals to join them before advancing to attack Suri, and had given notice of their intention in a characteristic way.”

However, we all know that by the end of the winter of 1855-56 the revolt collapsed. After the Santal rebellion, the upland tracts in the western part of the district of Birbhum were transferred to the newly created districts of the Santal Parganas. This was an important outcome of the movement and reflected government’s resolve to recognize the territorial integrity of the Santals. The parganas that were affected by this transfer were Sarath, Karaye, Mohammadabad and part of Darin Mualeswar. In 1879 another change took place in the district, when Barwan, with an area of 108 square miles was transferred to Murshidabad, and Rampurhat and Nalhati were transferred to the district of Birbhum. The physical limits of the district have remained unchanged since then.

The Santal revolt, however, had its impact both on the psychology of the Santals as well as on the British policy towards this extremely industrious race. Practically, the Santal Parganas district came into being after the Santal insurrection of 1855. This district, which has an area of 5,470 square miles, is bounded on the north by the districts of Bhagalpur and Purnea, on the east by Malda, Murshidabad and Birbhum, on the south by Burdwan and Manbhum, and on the west by Hazaribagh, Monghyr and Bhagalpur. There came, along with these changes, a series of legislations to protect the land and other customary rights of the Santals over forest. As a result of all these legislations, a totally different kind of land tenure practice came to develop in the Santal Parganas district.

But nothing, as such, appeared to protect the rights and privileges of the Santals living in the Jungle Mahals. In fact George Yule’s Report on the Santal Parganas shows that the Santals of the adjoining territories also demanded similar legislations to be extended in their regions. But the British government refused to oblige them. George Yule, thus reported, “We explained to the deputation with much repetition that we in the Santal Parganas district could not help them; that they lived under another system, and must be guided by the rules of that system.” But these legislations notwithstanding, the condition of the Santals in the Santals Parganas district did not improve remarkably. The Santals experienced great economic hardships even after the rebellion, with zamindars

41 Durgadas Banerjee., West Bengal District Gazetteers, Birbhum, (Calcutta), 1975, p.139.
42 N. Datta-Mazumdar., The Santals. A Study in Culture Change, Delhi, Govt. of India Press, 1956, p. 31.
43 Quoted in an appendix to E.G. Man., Sonthalia and the Sonthals, Calcutta, Geo Wyman & Co. 1867.
and mahajans once again tightening their hold in and around Santal Parganas. Poverty, hunger and subjection to the exploitation of the zamindars and mahajans continued unabated crippling the life of the Santals as it had been in the previous. This destitute state of affairs, well recounted by Chotrae Desmajhi, a contemporary Santal, goes as follows:

"After the rebellion we Santals were scattered through poverty. Because of hunger, the Santals who had meant to be rulers had to go back to the Dekos and beg them to feed us. Some people returned towards Sikhar, earning their livelihood by day labour as they went. Most people went on the land in order to earn their living and worked under Dekos. Others went to the towns to earn their living. In this way, owing to hunger, we Santals crossed the Ganges to earn our living and were scattered as far as the Pandua forests, Sikharpur, Catai, and the country of Barind."44

Thus, it can be said that a large-scale migration of the Santals again took place towards northern Bengal after the revolt of 1855. Around the same time, there began the process of transporting Santals for labour in the tea gardens of Assam. The agents of tea planters in Assam recruited a huge number of Santals to work in the tea gardens.

The demographic concentration of the Santals in the Santal Parganas district received a setback after the Santal insurrection of 1855. It seems that the Santals fast dispersed into adjoining territories particularly in the districts of Southwest Bengal including Dinajpur and other areas after the catastrophic end of their movement.

The Census surveys conducted by the British government indicate an upward trend of Santal population in the districts of Bankura, Birbhum and Midnapore in the succeeding decades after 1871.45

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44 Quoted from N. Datta Majumdar, op.cit., p. 31.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Santal Population in West Bengal</th>
<th>Santal Population in Bankura</th>
<th>Santal Population in Birbhum</th>
<th>Santal Population in Midnapore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>1,38,862</td>
<td>25,378</td>
<td>6,954</td>
<td>96,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>36,622</td>
<td>20,034</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>565</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>3,04,122</td>
<td>1,01,537</td>
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<td>119,159</td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>5,12,047</td>
<td>1,05,682</td>
<td>47,221</td>
<td>148,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>6,36,900</td>
<td>1,15,017</td>
<td>56,087</td>
<td>1,61,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>6,72,615</td>
<td>1,04,912</td>
<td>57,180</td>
<td>1,52,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>7,53,663</td>
<td>1,14,577</td>
<td>64,079</td>
<td>1,69,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>6,62,651</td>
<td>1,18,476</td>
<td>60,920</td>
<td>1,51,132</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>8,45,395</td>
<td>1,37,659</td>
<td>78,440</td>
<td>2,02,882</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: A. Mitra., Census 1951, p.118.

These effects notwithstanding, the life of the Santals in the Santal Parganas district was still better than their counterparts living in other areas. Edward Duyker has upheld the situation in following words, “They still suffer under the mahajans, and in many cases are merely sharecroppers on their own land, but at least it is their own land. The same cannot be said for the Santals of West Bengal, despite a whole series of ‘protective’ legislation.”46

However, after the insurrection, the Santals came to realize the futility of carrying out armed struggle against the British government. Hereafter, the focus of their movement changed completely. From a violent fight against colonial misrule and exploitations, they now concentrated more on bringing cultural upliftment of the members of their community much in line with the cultural standards of the caste communities. This led to give birth to an entire spate of non-violent social reform movements among them culminating in the genesis of the Kherwar movement of the 1870’s. (See next chapter)

**Land Tenure Practices of the Santals in Bengal after 1855**

The attempt to bring the lands of the Jungle Mahals under assessment for land revenue dated back to 1767, when Ensign Fergusson led a military expedition in western Jungle Mahals – an area, which later formed the district of Midnapore. The rebellious and disgruntled jungle chieftains, who never paid any regular rents for their lands earlier and were in no mood to surrender before the British demand this time either, virtually resisted

46 Edward Duykers., op. cit., p. 35.
every move of the Company’s government to collect revenue during the last decades of
the 18th century. Nevertheless, the process of colonial consolidation in the Jungle Mahals,
seemed to have made some progress in the succeeding decades as is evident from the fact
that by 1793, proposals came pouring in from all corners to introduce Permanent revenue
Settlement in the area. However, the rules of the Permanent Settlement being more
favourable to the zamindars, the Santals continued to reel under zamindary exactions and
exploitations much the same way as their non-tribal brethren in these areas. In the
absence of any documentary details of the dues to be paid by them to the zamindars, they
remained vulnerable to the greed of the zamindary amlahs and with the legal means of
redress out of their reach and understanding, their position in effect, became very
precarious. In reference to the Santals of Midnapore, Hamilton thus said, ‘...the
zamindars gave them ‘no leases’ and that they held their land on verbal tenures’. The
seething discontent of the tribals in the Jungle Mahals that came in consequences of these
dislocations in the rural economy, therefore, culminated in two violent protest
movements, namely the Chuar Rebellion of 1799-1800 and the Bhumij revolt of 1832-33.
For the relatively peace loving Santals the response, as stated earlier, was different.

Since land was in abundance and the Santals were gifted with the capacity of clearing
jungle lands into arable plots, they practically faced no difficulties in making settlements
in the areas of the Jungle Mahals. Often hordes of Santals under the leadership of majhis
or headmen would settle in jungle tracts on condition of paying to the owner or zamindar
a small sum of money. The zamindars, on their part, also looked forward to making such
rent-agreements with the Santals in the hope of getting better return from that land in
future. Once the clearance of the jungle land took place and some two or three initial
years of cultivation had passed, the zamindars used to evict them from the best lands and
allowed them merely to ‘retain possession of the comparatively high or danga lands of
the village.’ Settlement Reports of Birbhum and Midnapore districts inform us about the
possession of land by the Santals without any documentary details in support of it.
B.M. Raha, Deputy Collector of Birbhum (1881), wrote to the Collector of the district

48 B.M. Raha, ‘Condition of the Sonthal Ryots of Beerbhoom’ (Letter from the Deputy Collector of
Birbhum to the Collector of Birbhum), Proceedings of the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Revenue Dept. Land
and Land Revenue, Misc., File No. 8, Nos. 68-80. (August 1881)
that most of these Santal settlers had ‘no doubt acquired right of occupancy’, but did not know what ‘right of occupancy’ was all about. In his letter, Raha recommended that the Santal lands ‘be measured and the rates fixed by the Government officials as it has been in the adjoining Sonthal Pergunahs’. By 1883, Raha reported that this measurement and rental fixation (mostly as existed in the Santal Parganas district) had been achieved. Santal farmers in Birbhum were parcelled out land on lease for seven years, while wasteland that had reclaimed was to be ‘assessed at half rates’. 49 It is believed that this measure had rendered the Santals of the Birbhum district at least some landed status. P.M. Robertson, reporting on the survey and settlement of Santal villages in Rampurhat and Suri sub-divisions of Birbhum in 1915, also provided testimony to it. He said: ‘The average Sonthal jot is fairly big. Many Sonthals hold jots of 20 to 50 bighas, while a few have holdings of 100 bighas or more’. 50 In 1910, O’Malley noted the continued existence of majhi jots, ‘(a) class of lease in vogue in Santal villages, where the majhi or headman takes a settlement of the whole village from the zamindar for the specified term at a lump rental and makes his own arrangements for rent with other cultivators, to whom he lets out land.’ 51 With reference to such tenures in Midnapore district he further stated:

“In the more jungly tracts there is a special class of tenure holders termed as Mandals. They were originally substantial ryots called abadkars who undertook to bring large tracts of wasteland under cultivation by paying the zamindars a stipulated sum as rent. These mandals reclaimed land either themselves or with the help of other ryots whom they induced to settle with them; established a village to which they usually gave their name; and being heads of the settlements were known as headmen or mandals. The zamindars and the mandal from time to time readjust the terms of their bargain and the former does not interfere between the mandal and his under-tenureholders. In the settlement proceedings of 1839 they were declared to have rights of sthani or Khudkhast ryots and not to be entitled to any profit or munafa and as they were left to make terms with the ryots settled by them they have had a considerable profit besides what they obtained from

49 Ibid, Misc., File No. 8, Nos. 56-60. (July 1883)
50 P.M. Robertson, Final Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Sonthali Villages of Rampurhat and several other Villages in the Rampurhat and Suri Sub-Divisions of the District of Birbhum, 1909 – 1914, Calcutta, 1915, p.35.
any land cultivated by themselves. Though not exactly recognized as regular talukdars, but they gradually acquired rights superior to those of Khudkhast ryots. Their mandali rights became transferable by custom, and when at the subsequent settlements they came into contact with the government though not as talukdars they were held entitled to its consideration. The government deducted 15 percent from the gross jama in their favour and after some demur they accepted this as a sufficient recognition of their status.

Robertson’s Settlement Report also testifies to the fact that arbitrary enhancement of rent was what the Santal majhis had to face quite often after settling on the land of the zamindars. Indeed as the Santal migrations to Birbhum went up, so did the majhi jots in the land of the zamindars multiply, leaving the latter with an opportunity to effect arbitrary enhancement of rent. In reference to such majhi jots Robertson wrote ‘...such is the sentimental tenacity with which the Sonthals cling to the headman that rather than lose him they will submit to almost any exaction’. However, in the subsequent settlement operations, attempts had been made to prevent zamindars from illegally enhancing rents on majhi jots. There were also instances of zamindars attempting massive extortions on the majhi jots before the beginning of settlement operations. For example, the Santals who migrated to Vidyadharpur, Sehalai and Khanjaipur Mauzas of Bolpur Police Station in southern Birbhum, around 1890, suddenly had their rents more than doubled just before the settlement operation was about to commence. The standard argument of the zamindars when asked about the cause of the enhancement of rent was that quantitative increase in landholding of the Santals had led to a corresponding increase in rent due from them. But according to B.B. Mukherji, the Settlement Officer of Birbhum, “The Sonthal’s old rent receipts showed no area nor the zemindars could prove any previous measurement of Jamabandi. The Sonthals assert that they are holding the same lands all along which they reclaimed from waste.”

How much the zamindars were eager to grab the land of the Santals in a slightest pretext is evident from Mukherji’s another report, where he has lamented the way the Santal peasants were subjected to the process of dispossession of land and enhancement of rent

53 P.M. Robertson, Settlement Report of Birbhum, op. cit., p. 35.
in the district. He wrote: “In course of attestation we could discover 56 cases of illegal transfer in police station Rajnagar, four in police station Muhammedbbazar and two in Khayrasole … There were cases where we could do nothing – cases where the Sonthals lost their lands before the legitimate restriction of the alienation of their land was made…” The areas of Bolpur, Rajnagar, Rampurhat, Muhamadbazar etc., which were once full of jungles and were reclaimed and converted into cultivable land by the Santals had been largely expropriated by the zamindars.

The Santal land tenure system in Midnapore was no better either. In 1856 Midnapore cultivators also lodged similar protests against arbitrary increase of land rents by the zamindars. By the time of Jameson’s survey, the resultant impact of arbitrary increase of rent and other exploitations of the zamindars over the Santals had largely robbed them of their lands. In 1930, K.B. Saha commented that this was ‘specially noticeable in Silda, Bagri and Bhanjabhum and other parganas under the Midnapore Zamindari Company.’

**Break up of the Mandali System**

The changes in the Santal land tenure system, as mentioned above, also brought disruptions in their traditional social set up. The stable community-oriented social structure of the Santals received a blow when the village *majhis* were brought down to the level of ordinary Santals and were stripped of their powers as sole spokesmen of the villages. In places where they were allowed to function, their office assumed different character, as they had to act mostly as revenue farmers in the villages on behalf of the British government. In some other places, they began to act as landlords in making settlements with the new settlers in the capacity of leaseholders or mustagirs.

However, disintegration of the *majhi* / mandali system was not deliberately designed by the British government. In the Santal Parganas district, even official recognition was provided to the *majhi* system to protect the rights and privileges of the Santals after the Santal insurrection. This was because “the company’s government did not look upon the Santal headman as a source of potential danger to the peace and security of the region. On the contrary, the government realized the utility of the headman as a very responsible

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[55] Ibid., p. 96.
and universally acknowledged leader of the Santals for the maintenance of order and
good government in the village. "57 But even this formal recognition by the government
also brought a qualitative change in the position of Santal majhis as undisputed leaders in
the villages. The majhis lost their independent power to wield the village society and had
fallen at the mercy of the British government.58 It all happened as part of the process of
the existing land tenure practice, where the majhis were treated as mustagirs or
leaseholders, who could be arbitrarily removed from their position after the expiry of
their leases. The zamindars began to enhance rents at their sweet will and when the
majhis failed to pay, they were mercilessly removed from their position. Thus, though the
majhis were officially recognized, they were virtually left to languish under the whims of
the zamindars. There existed, thus, a fundamental inconsistency and contradiction in the
position of the majhis as it prevailed and operated under the British rule.

However, outside the Santal Parganas district, in the areas of the present study i.e. in
Bankura, Birbhum and Midnapore, even official recognition to the position of the majhis
was not forth coming. In the Santal Parganas, a village headman was not regarded as a
tenure holder and it was an official 'heresy'59 to regard him so. But "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."60 In the erstwhile Jungle Mahals, therefore, the
decline of the mandali set up was far more rapid and flagrant than it had been in the
Santal Parganas. However, M.C. McAlpin, in his report has furnished in details the
possible causes of breakage of the majhi system in the districts of Bankura, Birbhum and
Midnapore. For example,

i) Breakage due to sale of mandali rights to the mahajans or landlords for defraying
debts.

ii) Breakage through purchase of mandali rights by rent decrees.

iii) Breakage owing to divisible and transferable nature of the system. While in some
places it was hereditary and perpetual, in other areas it was limited to a term of years
where at the end of the term unscrupulous speculators made a bid to seize mandali rights.

58 Ibid., p. 94.
59 M.C McAlpin., Report on the Condition of the Sonthals in the Districts of Birbhum, Bankura,
Midnapore and North Balasore, Calcutta, FIRMA Mukhopadhyay, 1981, p. 72. (Hereafter, McAlpin
Report).
60 Ibid., p. 72.
iv) Rapid decline in income and in other facilities of the headman.
v) Voluntary surrender by the mandals or majhis to the mahajan proprietors.  

According to McAlpin, all these causes might have operated in varying degrees but going deep into the circumstances of all the villages, it can be found that in most cases the breakage was initially due to the mahajan. In his report, McAlpin has stated that the causes for breakage were not identical in the districts he surveyed. Even they varied in different regions of the same district. For example, at Karangdih in Birbhum, according to McAlpin, the breakage was due to the fact that the Bhagats (local moneylenders) had so involved the Santals in debt as to lead to the village being sold up for arrears of rent. The Bhagats, subsequently, got a lease of the village. In some cases the proprietors were also mahajans, like the Mulhati Babus. They had obtained direct possession of a number of villages after mahajani transaction with the Santals. In Birbhum, the condition of the Santals was worst and they were the objects of oppression by the zamindars and the mahajans, which is evident from the report of the then district magistrate T.T. Allen. 

Nothing seemed to have gone in favour of the Santals in Birbhum till the introduction of the settlement known as Babu Bhuban Mohan Raha Settlement in 1881. This Settlement might have provided some respite to the Santals but it could not check the process of disintegration of the mandali system altogether. For example, the Mohant of Mollarpur, who owned nearly 32 villages, wanted to undermine the system by bringing rent suits against the Mustagirs (the village headmen) for arrears of rent and turning them out of their lands. Further, in the villages of Lal Mohan Singh, the proprietors had made settlements with the mustagirs at their own rates of rent. But side by side, there were also instances of proprietors inclined to keep the villages intact. Babu P.C. Pande of Pakur in Birbhum was the most notable example of a proprietor who had kept his villages intact. 

In Bankura district too, large number of villages had been broken by sales to mahajans but there were cases when mandali rights of certain Santals were purchased by rent decrees. For example, a hamlet of Mayurlachna was sold in execution of a decree for the value of a large number of trees the Santals had cut. Two such cases were found in Raipur, where the majhis had to sell their rights to a sunri liquor vendor on account of

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61 Ibid., Chapter- iii.
62 Ibid., p.16.
63 Ibid., p. 17.
debts incurred at the liquor shop. There are also instances of majhis employing a diku to collect rents for him and the latter had, subsequently, obtained the possession of the entire village.\footnote{Ibid., p. 18.} The most notable feature in Bankura district was that in the broken villages where the mandali system ceased to exist, the Santal cultivators used to cultivate their lands under different forms of tenure. For example, Jamai or jote right, Mokurrari right held at a rent fixed in perpetuity, Sanjha on a produce rent, and Bhagti and Korfa as under ryt. The majhi or the headman system in Midnapore, too, reflected decline and degeneration except that in the estate of the Raja of Ramgarh, the headman system continued unabated. Elsewhere, it had almost disappeared or had been entirely broken down by the mahajan-proprietors.\footnote{Ibid., p. 17.}

However, the way the villages were broken was not known. The first step in the process of disintegration of the majhi system was evident when the landlord ceased to take rent through the majhi and recognized each Santal as a separate ryt. This happened when the majhis or mandals failed to pay the rent and his rights were being taken over by the mahajan-proprietor either for defraying debts incurred by that headman or for a rent decree. Robertson has mentioned in graphic details as to how these mahajans got hold over land and became a dominant force in the agrarian society of Bengal.\footnote{F.W. Robertson., \textit{Settlement Report}, op. cit., p. 59.} According to him, before stepping into the business of money lending, these mahajans basically Bengalis from the east and Utkal Brahmins from Orissa in the west, were encouraged to settle in the land by the local Rajas. They first came as traders but preferred to close down their trading business for a more profitable employment of money-lending. The Rajas provided them with permanent mokarrari leases of the villages to act as intermediaries between them and their tenants. Thus, while they received encouragement from the Raja or the zamindar to settle, their financial capital soon made them holders of land sold by the defaulting mandals either for arrear of rent or for any other reason. Robertson said: \textquote{In both cases the result was the break up of the mandali system. In the first case the middleman gradually broke the power of the mandal, collected rents directly from individual tenants and enhanced their rents. He either dispossessed the original mandal of his khem lands altogether or assessed them to rent at the ordinary rates. In the

\begin{itemize}
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second case the mahajans who had stepped into the shoes of the mandal arrogated to himself the position of a tenure holder and enhanced the rents of the tenants, which he collected for his own benefit. The process appears to have been fairly rapid with the result that at the present day the Bengali mahajan is to be found as the middleman in possession of a complete village or group of villages holding them under a permanent mokarrari lease. Hardly a single Santal or aboriginal is to be found holding a similar position in the area."

However, this process seems to have started at a much earlier date, long before the survey of the districts had been undertaken by McAlpin. Because, when McAlpin surveyed the districts of Bankura, Birbhum, Midnapore and North Balasore, he found the mandali set up "practically defunct" in most of the villages of the Santals. He, therefore, classified his survey of the villages into two categories as 'broken' and 'intact'. By 'broken' he means the villages where the traditional mandali system had ceased to exist, while the villages that still adhered the traditional practice of paying rent through a headman were categorized as 'intact'. The following table shows the number of broken and intact villages in the districts surveyed by McAlpin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Santal Villages</th>
<th>Surveyed</th>
<th>intact</th>
<th>Broken</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>615</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The impact of the disintegration of the mandali system was disastrous in the social and economic life of the Santals. It "was the first step in the absorption of the Santals in the peasant society of the plains." In the post break-up period, the rights of the mandals or the village headman no longer remained the same as it had been in the previous. Though the term mandal did not perish altogether, it now became hereditary, divisible and transferable. The mandal was called either a Pradhan or Majhi or Mandal. The rights of the mandals were now prone to be taken over in a slightest pretext either on account of

67 Ibid., p. 386.
debts incurred by the family of the mandal or mandali rights sold up for arrears of rent or some natural reasons forcing the mandals to give up their rights. With the disappearance of the headman, the land earmarked for him i.e. khem land also got liquidated. The village officials, therefore, could only look for rice beer or hens or what the villagers could offer them as remuneration in exchange of their services.

Secondly, the break-up of the mandali system brought a change in the tenurial practices prevalent in the villages. Land tenure rights, now, became further segregated and complicated. Subinfeudation of land became the practise of the day. It was found to be prevalent in all the districts surveyed by McAlpin. Particularly, in Bankura subinfeudation of land meant “subinfeudation to moneylenders or grain dealers whose only object is to take money.”

In Raipur, Khatra and Chhatna the large zamindars either had sold up their estates in satisfaction of their debts or had let their villages out on lease or distributed them among their adherents. The villages under the Chhatna Raj had been leased to tenure holders. So long as the villages were under the Raj, they appeared to have been intact. But under the tenure holders, the condition of the Santal villages deteriorated fast as the tenure holders proceeded to break the system and raise rents. Subinfeudation was also found in Birbhum district with the emergence of smaller proprietors, such as, pattanidars, dar-pattanidars and se-pattanidars. In Midnapore, too, subinfeudation was common but it was more pervasive in the broken villages, which were found in the north-eastern part of Midnapore than in the intact villages as the one under Gopiballavpur thana. Thus, the rise of smaller proprietors, leaseholders, tenures and under-tenures vitiated the entire system of payment of land rent. Transfer of rights of a holder entailed transfer of rights of tenants and under tenants too, in the same ladder.

The disintegration of the mandali system was eventually followed by dispossession or loss of land by the Santals. Among the various causes responsible for loss of land, the most important was the mahajani practice, which at times led to the absorption of the mandali rights by the mahajan. In some areas zamindary sharp practice (particularly where the zamindar acted as a mahajan) was also accounted for the dispossession of land by the Santals. According to McAlpin, “From the Sonthals point of view, he loses his

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70 McAlpin Report., op.cit., p.51.
71 Ibid., p. 52.
land because he is uneducated and submissive and the mahajan takes advantage of his ignorance to cheat him out of his land by sharp practice. This is the case but it is not the whole truth. Habit of drinking and thriftlessness also played their part in making the Santals indebted and face virtual loss of land. 

McAlpin has narrated following causes for the loss of land of the Santals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Causes</th>
<th>Internal Causes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahajani Sharp Practice</td>
<td>Drinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahajan Headman</td>
<td>Thriftlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zamindary Sharp Practice</td>
<td>Want of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissolution of Mandali system</td>
<td>Submissiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commercialization of Agricultural Crops**

The impregnation of the network of commercialization of agricultural crops and monetization of rentals further compounded their problems. When the British government introduced the system of rental payment on cash, the rural communities in Bengal were hard-pressed to earn cash. Thus, when rents in kind became cash rentals and interest on loans became monetized, it alarmed the Santals. From the report of the Collector of Midnapore 1803, we get a picture of the state of agriculture in Bengal. According to that report, 75 per cent of the total arable land in Midnapore was under rice cultivation. The remaining 25 per cent of land was used for growing cotton, sugarcane oilseeds and other vegetables. Silk and cotton were important items of peasant economy. Among exportable commodities, sugar and salt were the major items of export from Midnapore. But there was a reduction in salt exports after 1842 as the saltpans went under rice cultivation as a result of competition from Liverpool. The report of Jameson indicates about the increasing rice cultivation in Midnapore. A survey conducted between 1910 and 1918 shows around 94 per cent of the cultivated area of Midnapore was under rice cultivation. Midnapore rice seemed to have met the requirements of other districts since railway communication to Calcutta established in 1901 and a line opened to north, largely facilitated the marketing of Midnapore rice to other districts of Bengal. M.M Islam has remarked that ‘despite inelastic supply of...land ...Bengal cultivators...were

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72 Ibid., p. 37.
73 Ibid, p. 38.
still maximizing their proceeds from given resources by crops that were more profitable either as a result of rise in relative price or yield.\textsuperscript{75}

The same process of specialization in agricultural production was evident in the district of Birbhum. In 1849, W.S. Sherwill has reported that apart from rice cultivation, the Santals also grew a diverse range of crops including ‘mustard Bora-bean, Ruhar-Dal, Sirgoolah corn and an edible hibiscus.’\textsuperscript{76} With the improvement in road transport from Ajay Sainthia and Sainthia Tinpahar line, they got the facility of marketing their crops in different areas of Birbhum. By 1871, the Collector of the district was of the opinion that rice accounted for some 15 – 16 percent of cropped acreages. Sugarcane, pulse, oilseeds and indigo, which had previously been grown on large scale decreased in acreage. However, with the passage of time, there was a general decline in diverse range of crop production with crops like paddy occupying the centre stage in agricultural production.\textsuperscript{77} According to Duyker, this tendency of depending on single crop cultivation system proved to be dangerous, given the vulnerability in production owing to natural calamities and fluctuation in rice-prices in the markets. The impact of price fluctuation of rice on Santal cultivators can be gleaned from the report of B.M. Raha, Deputy Collector of Birbhum, which he wrote to the District Collector. According to him, “There is no doubt that the unprecedented rise in the price of food-grains during the last few years gave a great impetus to cultivation, and the high price which their produce fetched in the market hitherto enabled the Sonthals, though not without much difficulty, and subjecting themselves to much privation and inconvenience to meet the landlord’s demand, but a reaction has set in, and the comparative cheapness of rice since last year has completely placed the Sonthals at the mercy of the landlords, and ruin is staring them in the face.”\textsuperscript{78}

The obvious result of this state of affairs was the entrapment of the Santals in the debt net of the mahajans, which further degraded their position to near servitude.

Santal emigration for labour was a direct result of the changing environment around. With the increase in population and lose of land they were virtually left with no other

\textsuperscript{77} Edward Duyker, op. cit., p. 41.
\textsuperscript{78} Quoted from Edward Duyker, op. cit., p. 42.
option but to seek alternative employment for livelihood. Fortunately, for the Santals it was at the same time since the second half of the 19th century that the British and indigenous capital started to pour in, leading to the growth of several industries like mining and metallurgy, construction of railways, imperial shipbuilding, and coal and iron industries etc., some of which had developed under indigenous initiative and enterprise. All these industries must have provided great employment opportunities to the Santals, who did not have any other saleable commodity to cash in – but labour. The Bengal – Nagpur railways that used to pass through Adra – Kharagpur division and the huge coal belt stretching vast areas of Raniganj, Asansol Dhanbad regions provided enormous employment opportunity to the Santal labourers. Apart these, the belt contained an inexhaustible supply of building stones and road metals. The stone quarries of Chhatna, Raghunathpur, Purulia and of other regions as well as rail engine manufacturing industries in Chittaranjan absorbed great amount of Santal labourers.79 Further, when Tata Iron and Steel Company was founded in 1907 there was a great exodus of Santal labourers in Jamshedpur. A large number of Santals also crowded the tea gardens of Assam and Duars.80 However, in the absence of statistical data, it is difficult to ascertain the number of Santals absorbed in these mines and factories. There is little doubt that the opening of these mines and proliferation of different industries created a steady demand for labour.

The Santals of Birbhum did not emigrate in large scale for labour as the areas were on the borders of plain proper. In the northern thanas they found employment at the Pakur quarries for five annas a box of stone. In these quarries usually the whole family worked. The towns of Bolpur and Rampurhat were among other important places where the Santals were in great demand for labour. They also used to work for the dikus in the neighbouring villages. Generally, large hordes of Santal labourers set out for work almost daily to a nearby quarry or to the neighbouring diku villages or towns to serve as labourers.81 After the day’s work they used to return back to their villages by evening. Then there was another group of labourers who had to settle in some far-off places, if not for the whole year, at least for some months when there was no agricultural work at hand.

79 Samar Mallick., op. cit., p. 130.
80 Ibid., p. 131.
81 McAlpin Report., op. cit., p. 61.
Thus, in the process, some emigrated to Assam tea gardens, Murshidabad and Barind where the Santal labourers were in great demand. As daily labourers, Santals used to earn about four to five annas a day in Birbhum.82

In Bankura district migration for labour in the nearby coal-mines was also a common practice. In Chhatna, near the coal-fields “the Sonthals, who have no lands, go and work in the coal mines in the months of Chait, Bysak, Jeyt, and also in Bhado, Asin, and Kartik when there is no demand for agricultural labour at home. In these mines they worked for a fortnight or so and then returned home, going again after a few days. Their daily wages were 4 annas a day.”83 Evidences are there to show that some families had to emigrate permanently to areas of coal mines after losing all their lands. McAlpin shows that among other places, the Santals of Bankura district preferred to go to Namal (Burdwan) for labour. During the transplanting and harvesting seasons they used to get as much as Rs 5/- to 6/- annas a day.84 Usually they brought huge sums of money back to home with which, they paid off the debts incurred by their families in their absence. The rest of the sum was spent for drinking. Generally persons without any land used to go for labour. But sometimes two or three individuals from large families, who did not have sufficient cultivation, also went off for labour. According to McAlpin, the Santals appeared to have given up going to Cachar and Assam though at times they used to emigrate there.85

As in Bankura, in Midnapore also there was a very large amount of biennial emigration towards Hoogly, Burdwan and 24-Parganas for labour, particularly, during sowing and harvesting seasons. Santals of Midnapore seldom emigrated to work in the mines but a large number of them are reported to have worked in the railways at Kharagpur. Rev. A.L. Kennan has summed up the effect of this labour supply in the following words:

“Thousands of them having become landless, wander the country seeking coolie work. The mingling of the sexes on the road, the miserable provision for their sleeping where they chance to labour, being herded together here and there amongst constantly changing companions without any of the restraint of the village organization to which they have

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82 Ibid., p. 62.
83 Ibid., p. 62.
84 Ibid., pp. 61-62.
85 Ibid., pp. 61-62.
been accustomed, is rapidly lowering the morals of the community. Moreover this wandering life rapidly destroys any inclination they have towards patient industry. It is a feast or famine. It lessens their love for home. It tends to increase petty wayside thefts and crimes. The mortality amongst these wanderers is very great, and greater amongst infants and children who perish from diseases due to exposure. Those who retain their lands are still under a cloud. No one knows how soon he may be dispossessed. The encouragement to improve is absent. The better a man's land is, the sooner some Bengali will covet it, and oust him from it.”

It has been mentioned by McAlpin that with this spurt in emigration for labour, the Santals had fallen prey to demoralization and drawbacks of city life. Most of the money that they earned as wages was usually spent on drinking liquor and paying off the debts that their families incurred back at home. The fast growing liquor shops near every mine or quarry or wherever the Santals went for labour, added fuel to the drinking habits of the Santals. Along with it, they appeared to have addicted with other bad habits due to their spendthrift nature. The Santals, thus, were entrapped in a kind of city life, which was neither endorsed by their tradition nor was affordable by their meager income. The result was disastrous both economically and morally. According to Martin Orans, the concentration of these Santals in the mining and industrial towns amidst an altogether different environment and situation, living side by side with diku labourers, accelerated the process of acculturation between the Santals and the Hindus. The encysted Santal society had thus, underwent rapid transformation the impact of which was felt at a much later date.

It is necessary to mention in this context that in Bankura, Birbhum and Midnapore districts, the Santal emigration for labour was never very large in comparison with the proportion of Santal migration from the district of the Santal Parganas. Instead, statistics show that immigration of Santals in Bankura, Birbhum and Midnapore, was far greater in

86 Ibid., p. 63.
87 Ibid., p. 58.
the first few decades of the 20th century. The table appended below shows the number of Santal immigrants during 1891 and 1911.89

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigration</th>
<th>(1891)</th>
<th>(1911)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>14,276</td>
<td>28,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manbhum</td>
<td>2617</td>
<td>3725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, there was an over-all dislocation of the socio-economic lives of the Santals under the British rule. The introduction of the British land revenue system with total disregard to the traditional land system and social customs of the Santals proved disastrous to them. The influx of foreigners i.e. the Bengali landlords, and moneylenders in their lands and the introduction of the forces of monetization and commercialization on their predominantly non-monetized economy caused plenty of inconveniences to them. The establishment of British rule in Bengal had not only broken the physical isolation of the Santal society but it also paved the way for their internal disintegration. The Santals, however, tried hard to preserve their tribal tradition through their struggles but, unfortunately, they did not have the military strength to match with British colonialism. For the naive, illiterate and gullible Santals there was nothing to fall back upon and it was also difficult to adjust with the changing situation around. They were, virtually, in a dilemma as they could neither become active players in the changing cultural milieu nor could they avoid it completely.

The failure of the Santal rebellion, further, worsened the situation. While the affairs in the Santal Parganas district improved a bit for the time being after the insurrection, the condition of their counterparts living in the erstwhile Jungle Mahals remained as deplorable as ever. However, some important economic changes that crept into the lives of the Santals during the British colonial rule deserve a special mention here.

Agriculture became the primary occupation of the Santals but the traditional agrarian system based on community-oriented land ownership, underwent changes. The old slash and burn (jhum cultivation) method of cultivation was abandoned and more and more number of Santals now settled as permanent agriculturists. This happened as a result of

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89 Samar Mallick., op. cit., p. 136.
the invitation and encouragement, the Santals received from zamindars to reclaim jungle land. The concept of communal ownership of land gave way to private land ownership right, which meant land now became saleable and transferable and therefore a marketable commodity.

The Santals now had to adapt themselves with a new situation of assessment and measurement of land as well as payment of land rent to landlords or zamindars. In the traditional landholding system of the Santals, the practice of paying rent to any authority did not exist and the devise of appropriating surplus by any intermediary was also absent. But once they were brought into the mainstream agrarian economy of Bengal, they could hardly escape the greed of the zamindars and mahajans.

The disruption of the agrarian economy of the Santals forced them, for the first time, to look into the other avenues of employment apart from land. This led to the beginning of the process of Santal 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 to seek alternative employment. The Santals, thus, had to adopt a new kind of life hitherto unknown to them, the bonded life of an industrial worker in the towns or a coolie in the tea-gardens. It undoubtedly affected their ethnic solidarity and cultural ethos.

The majhi or the headman system, the essence of the Santal social structure, was also broken. However, it was not abandoned altogether and assumed different names in different places. The introduction of the British revenue system had altered the role of the majhis in their society, as they now became government nominee, who could enjoy office only on condition of meeting the obligations of the government. These new developments into the post of headman, marked a radical departure from the traditional power and position of the majhis in the villages. Not only that, where the state acted as landlord and controlled land, relative dependence developed upon these majhis / mondals for the collection of rent from the Santal villages. These majhis in their capacity as leaseholders, further made rent settlements with the existing members as well as with the new entrants in their society much the same way as their superior landlords. Thus, the office of the headman was revised and assumed a professional character. Under the changed situation
the village *majhis* now developed as a class by themselves. The emergence of this new class of officially sponsored *majhis* and paraganaitis, however, marked the beginning of the process of stratification in the Santal society.\(^90\) Thus, the establishment of British control in Bengal considerably weakened the authority of the village community of the Santals.