CHAPTER III

FROM 'HEATHEN ABORIGINALS' TO 'TRIBALS': THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN CHHOTANAGPUR

Our hearts yearn within us as we stand in the harvest field plucking the few ripe ears immediately around us, and seeing the golden grain standing waiting for the sickle - surely one thinks there cannot be another country on the face of the Gospel as in (sic) Chota Nagpur. They are simply waiting to be gathered into the fold of the master, but they cannot reach the fold without a preacher, and they cannot reach the fold without a leader... We want men in scores to lead these poor blind pilgrims to the strait (sic) gate, and to guide their faltering footsteps as they first essay to tread the narrow way, for they often fall, and as yet they are not strong enough, nor indeed for generations will they be, to struggle upward by themselves. They require the watchfulness, the guidance, the care of the European Missionary... 1

For the missionaries, the relatively unknown province of Chhotanagpur was a land of the scorching sun: 'the ground is baked hard and brown by the sun, the fields are bare and dry, the rivers empty.' 2 In this very land, however, the 'sun of righteousness' was just beginning to rise, though 'The full clear day' was 'yet very far off'. 3 The notions of time - day and night, darkness and light - and space, as interpreted in biblical discourse, were very specific and different from the rationality of the post-Enlightenment period. The missionaries posited 'concentric circles of proximity to a

center in real space and mythical Time, symbolized by the cities of Jerusalem and Rome. To the missionaries, the beliefs and customs of the people of Chhotanagpur, the Kols, were not only curious but evil as well. These invoked disgust, horror, indignation and contempt, but more importantly, an intense belief in the superiority of the Christian faith. The 'animal' and 'savage' life of these communities, with its accompanying tyrannies of lust and superstition and compact with the Devil or Satan, pointed to the depth of their misery - moral, mental and physical - as they lived out their dark lives. These 'savage aboriginals' equated Christianity with the stomach and were therefore ranked at the bottom end of the scale of civilization.

For the 'heathens' who knew no God and religion and were therefore in need of salvation, the missionaries were to be the deliverers of their souls and those who would lead these people to the Kingdom of Christ. To the 'simple minded folks' who knew only the mirth of dance and drink, they would bring a sobriety that matched the doctrines of Christianity. To this easily exploitable 'race' would be brought justice and deliverance from the hands of avaricious landlords and moneylenders, often equated with Hindus and the followers of the Congress. The outcome of this process would be the creation of a 'Christian aboriginal' people, culturally distinct from their surrounding neighbours.

Across periods of time, and between personalities and institutions, there were differences in missionary perception and in the stereotypes posited. Yet, one may discern an overarching vision, a corpus of recurrent idioms, metaphors and images. This was the missionary discourse, itself embedded in a network of relations of power.

and knowledge. This chapter attempts to trace the lines of formation of the missionary concept of a 'tribal'. How did this ideological construct, along with a description of the customs and practices of these communities, emerge in missionary perception? Rather than merely identifying images and stereotypes, my purpose is to, construct in Homi K. Bhabha's expression, the 'processes of subjectification' - the 'mode of representation of otherness'. Accordingly, Section I deals with the linkages between evangelicalism, and administrative and commercial interests; it traces the overlaps and differences in the narratives of the administrator and the missionary. Section II focuses on the image of the 'tribal' as the other, his religion was the anti-thesis of Christendom and was in contradistinction to the macro-religions of India - Hinduism and Islam. To these 'tribals' would be given the elements of a unique and distinct identity: racial characteristics, customs and practices, a language, folklore and a history. Thus, the tribe came to be born in missionary perception. Section III discusses the missionary search for tribal languages and folklore; Section IV analyses the attempts of the missionaries at history writing. Section V seeks to show how, due to Christianizing efforts, there came to be created two irreconcilable identities: the 'heathen aboriginal' and the 'Christian aboriginal'.

This chapter focuses on the three missions that came to Chhotanagpur in the period between 1845 and 1900: the German Evangelical Lutheran Mission, later renamed, the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Mission (hereafter the GEL Mission), the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (hereafter the SPG) and the Roman Catholic


6. Ibid., p. 68.
Mission. These organizations cannot of course be indiscriminately grouped together; they differed with regard to their intellectual, social and political moorings. While the Roman Catholic Mission was a strongly centralized institution with its headquarters at Rome, the SPG, which came under the Church of England, was closely connected with the administrative machinery of the colonial state. The GEL Mission, on the other hand, although of Lutheran affiliation and therefore closer to the SPG, was under the German Fathers till 1914, and continued to maintain its links with Germany even after it had formally declared its independence from German control. Moreover the concerns of these missions often varied. While the SPG was involved primarily with education and Bible Schools, the Roman Catholics focused on issues of land and rent, and became therefore often the harshest critics of the administration. Individual Fathers of the same institution could differ as much in their orientation and approach. Nottrott of the GEL Mission was an interventionist who sought to transform what he saw as tribal culture; Hahn, on the other hand, was a protectionist who believed in nurturing traditions and customs that were believed to be characteristic of these tribal communities. This chapter seeks to analyze the overlaps in missionary discourse and practice rather than the differences between missions and missionaries. Moreover, it studies the organizing principles that structured missionary ideas, and not the extent to which such ideas were assimilated, appropriated or contested by the Christian converts and their tribal brethren.

7 Refer, for example, to ‘Structures by His Grace The Archbishop of Calcutta on Mr. Blakesley’s unfounded and irrelevant charges against the Catholic Mission’ in the ‘Memorandum’ from The Most Revered Dr. Brice Mueleman, S.J., Archbishop of Calcutta, to His Excellency, The Right Honourable Charles Baron Harding of Penshurst, Viceroy of India, Unpublished, Undated, St. Albert’s College, Ranchi.
CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AND THE COLONIAL STATE

Evangelicalism arose as a persuasive moral force in the last decades of the eighteenth century. 'The doctrines of the depravity of man, the conversion of the sinner and the sanctification of the regenerate soul represent', as Ian Bradley has pointed out, 'virtually the sum total of the theology of early nineteenth century Evangelicalism.'8 From the early decades of the nineteenth century, the evangelizing mission had begun to associate itself with colonial enterprise. To the evangelicals, the hand of God was visible in history, particularly in the miraculous subjection of India by a handful of Englishmen. Power accorded to the Europeans a responsibility: the heathen millions who were actual worshippers of false Gods and graven images were to be redeemed only through the preaching of the Word, through a direct assault on the mind. The Word was to be transmitted through education. Without it, the Bible could not be read and understood.

The interests of the evangelicals, the commercial classes and the colonial state were closely interlinked. Once the 'heathen' was freed from ignorance and superstition, it was anticipated that he would have both the disposition and the knowledge to improve his material conditions. The great beneficiary then would be British commerce. Charles Grant's famous statement expressed this faith, the power of language: 'Wherever our principles and our language are introduced, our commerce

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The colonial administrator, on the other hand, appreciated missionary objectives since he was already exposed to evangelical influences, 'a change [that] was being wrought in the character of the Englishman at his Center [England].' The evangelical thrust on education fitted in with the utilitarian agenda which, rather than championing the recovery of the glorious Orientalist past, strove to reform the indigenous society on rational lines. Besides, in its exercise of ideological hegemony, the colonial state appreciated the evangelical agency which could constantly supervise over and reform indigenous society. Further, missionaries and administrators had an analogous ethnographic interest in recording the unfamiliar and the exotic: 'now the past of Europe, now its unregenerate other.' The readily available missionary tropes of 'paganism' and 'heathenism' justified the White Man's Burden and his missionary zeal. The early production of western knowledge about the tribal belief structure and culture was largely the product of this combined endeavour.

The relationship between the administrator and the missionary was, however, not always one of complementarity. While the religious and secular partners shared metaphors and interests, they also spoke in different voices. Conflicts arose because both claimed to be the legitimate spokesman on the 'aboriginal' question, each claiming greater familiarity with the communities. They also differed on their notions of the civilizing mission. In missionary imagination, lack of enlightenment implied unfamiliarity with Christianity; the 'natives' were to be assimilated into the mission.


structure which bound together the converted in a quasi-familial hierarchy. In the official assimilationist viewpoint, the 'aboriginal natives' were placed at a particular stage of social development, and needed to be integrated within a broader structure of colonial rule. The following section seeks to delineate the differing images of the tribe, constructed along differing premises, in missionary narratives.

II

THE SAVAGE AND THE INNOCENT

In the summer of 1844, four missionaries of the GEL Mission arrived in Calcutta from Berlin, without any definite instruction as to where they should start their work. They noticed in Calcutta 'a race differing as much... in creed and character as they did in appearance and temperament' from the 'Ilindoo and Mussalmans'. These people, referred to as Kols or dhangars, were engaged in the most menial of occupations, but 'seemed always light hearted and happy in their work...'. An object for mission-work was finally located. These 'poor and neglected mountain-inhabitants' would be

13. Ibid.
14. Missionaire Schatz, 'Correspondenz von Calcutta, den 7 Februar, 1845' [Missionary Schatz, 'Correspondence from Calcutta, 7th February, 1845']. Die Biene auf dem Missionsfelde, für Missions-freunde und Missions-Vereine, No. 6, June, 1845, p. 46. This journal Die Biene auf dem Missionsfelde, für Missions-freunde und Missions-Vereine [translated as 'The Bee from the Mission fields, for missionary friends and missionary associations'] was started at Berlin in 1834 by Johannes Gassner, the founder of the German Evangelical Lutheran Mission, for circulation among friends and missionary associations. Gassner explained the importance of 'Die Biene' or 'The Bee', in his article: 'Was soll diese Biene' [What should these bees do?], No. 4, April, 1858, p. 26. He wrote that the bees 'should do what all laborious bees do. From the flowers in the vineyards of God, or in the fields among the Christians and heathens, they should collect the best nectar and make honey and wax out of this... they should bring light to the people who are in darkness... and for those who have not enjoyed the sweetness and mercy of truth, they should bring the honey of Christ... so that they [the
the subjects for conversion. Chhotanagpur, '40-50 German miles west from Calcutta'\textsuperscript{15} was chosen as the centre of missionary activity.

'The land of the Kols opened itself\textsuperscript{16} for the missionaries, wrote Schatz of the GEL Mission in February 1845. He described the land and its climate, the vegetation, the richness of minerals and natural products, but most importantly, its inhabitants. Two-thirds of the inhabitants of the land were Hindus, but the rest, the people to be redeemed, were the 'original inhabitants', different 'in language and appearance'.\textsuperscript{17} In one of the earliest evangelical representations in the British period, the 'Kols' appear as

an apparently isolated mountain people different from the Hindus. Probably inhabitants of the plains, they were sent back by the penetrating Hindus; they are smaller and more strongly built than the Hindus, of a darker complexion and have somewhat thick lips. They have almost no religion, only ghosts of the dead to whom they sacrifice once a year. The best is that they have no caste. What we see here everyday is indescribable, how the Satan has tied himself to the weak hearts of the heathens...\textsuperscript{18}

In 1848, Schatz continued,

The poor Koles know not about God, the largest group among them, the Munda Koles, have no word for the name of God... The Ura Koles have a better expression... They call him Dhurme, the good and right. Yet, despite the name they do not know this God, and never pray to him, rather they pray only to the Bongas, or Nads, and Singbonga... the Sun or Light Devil... The Bongas are a host of devils in every village... They [the Koles] overlook the blessing that God gives to them and their misery which is very large, is in their own

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\textit{people] can see and understand the mercy of God.}
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\textsuperscript{15.} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{16.} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{17.} 'Ein Freundlicher Correspondent aus Calcutta schreibt vom 2 Juni, 1845' [A friendly correspondent writes from Calcutta on 2 June, 1845], \textit{Die Biene auf dem Missionsfelde} No. 6, June, 1845, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{18.} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 46.
eyes, the result of inadequate sacrifices to the Bongas...They fear the Devil the most and prefer to serve him... 19

The Kols were a different people: they were different from their immediate neighbours, the Hindus and the Muslims, and of course also from their deliverers, the Christians. The difference became the basis of missionary cognition. Belonging to a different racial stock and having a social structure, belief system and customs different from the surrounding people, these communities were seen to be historically anterior to the rest of the population in 'India'; yet, they had been ousted from their homeland by the Hindus. Such was the missionary construct of the Kols; they gradually came to be incorporated under a generic ethnographic term, the 'tribe'.

The missionary construction of the tribe was a part of a larger process of production of colonial knowledge about the 'natives'. As the Orientalist endeavour was supplanted by an Anglican and evangelical urge, knowledge which came to be constructed through a meticulous translation and understanding of ancient Hindu texts in metropolitan centres was replaced by new subjects of analysis. The focus now shifted to popular practices and customs. As ethnography arose as a discipline, actual contact with the natives, a personal observation of their rites and rituals, became part of the ethnographer's creed. Observers moved from centres to outstations - small towns, villages and hitherto untrodden regions. The image of the lonely missionary working in distant frontiers armed with copies of the Gospel and aided by converted Readers and Catechists, inspired the colonizing mission. A new object had entered the field of colonial observation - the 'tribe', always defined as the other.

The savage and the heathen, in Christian imagination, was defined in opposition to Christianity. India, a world without Christ, was heathen. Though it had an ancient civilization, it had no worldly religion. Missionary descriptions were saturated with images of depravity, of 'brutishness, the brutality of lust, the tyranny of lust; the tyranny too of superstition and the cruel craftiness of the practised manipulators'.

Even 'the most corrupt form of Christianity' was seen as a blessing in contrast to the 'worthless' religions of the subcontinent with their 'abominations of idolatry'.

Within the indigenous society, tribes - who had no religion - were segregated from people with spurious religions. Tribals were seen as the other of the 'civilized unbelievers like the followers of the False Prophet, and civilized heathens like the Hindoos.' In defining the tribe, the missionaries drew upon the Orientalist image of the Hindu, but at the same time, militantly denounced the Hindu and his practices: his pride and dishonesty, the caste system, infanticide, the pantheon of gods and goddesses. In contrast to 'the caste-proud Hindoo, hedging himself round with his time-honoured traditions, and the restless Mosometaen burning with intense antipathy to his Christian masters', the 'simple earnest faces' of the 'tribals' indicated 'minds of a more attractive and promising order than either; energy, in the place of the listless apathy so characteristic of the worshippers of Brahma; simplicity of character, so different from the bold, licentious look which too often marks the followers of the

20. 'Promotion of religion at home by foreign mission, A paper read at the Bishop of Ely's visitation by the Rev. Francis Pott, Rector of Northill', The Mission Field, March 1, 1890, p. 83. This journal was published by the SPG Mission.
21. Ibid., p. 82.
22. Ibid., p. 82.
23. Interestingly, the first article published in Die Biene auf dem Missionsfelde on India is a discussion of the 'holy texts' of the four Vedas. Refer to 'Aus den Reden beim Jahresfest in London' [Out of the discussions at the annual festival in London], Die Biene auf dem Missionsfelde, No. 1, January, 1845, pp. 3-4.
Prophet. They were a 'race' that differed from the macro-communities 'as much in

creed and character as they did in appearance and temperament. Horny, a Roman

Catholic Father displayed a similar sense of sympathy as he wrote about the Sarwada Christians:

Those who do not know them will find them wild and uncouth, and

will scarcely believe it when they are told, that among these

seemingly savages, genuine pearls and golden hearts and peasant

brains with the soundest common sense, can be found, ready to

defend not only their religion but even the elementary rules of

honesty, modesty and straightforwardness.

Thus, the missionaries portrayed the Kols as savage as well as innocent and open,
simple in comparison to their crafty neighbours. Indeed had the tribes been

intrinsically and immutably 'savage', then the project of conversion and civilization

would inevitably have collapsed. Such efforts at differentiation was part of the

colonial project. 'In each case what is being dramatized is a separation - between

races, cultures, histories, within histories...'. These tribals evoked sympathy, not
disgust; the temporal distance between them and the 'civilized' had to be necessarily

bridged through conversion.

This story of conversion was narrated in missionary literature: in lectures given
by the missionaries on furlough, at symposia and conferences, in missionary memoirs
and ethnographic accounts, in reports, petitions and censuses submitted to the colonial


25. Ibid.

26. E. Horny, 'The Field', Chota Nagpur Mission Letter, 2nd Year, No. 6, June, 1932, p. 100. This journal was published by the Roman Catholic Mission.


28. Bhabha, 'The other question', p. 82.
administration. A variety of metaphors, images and stereotypes were produced in the
telling of this story of conversion: the horrifying accounts of 'heathenism', the
difficulties faced by the missionaries and the sacrifices made by them, their untiring
zeal and devotion to the cause, and the ultimate conversion of the people. Eulogies of
individual missionaries were part of the same narrative exercise. While writing the
history of Christianity in India, Sherring, Smith and Badley referred to the difficulties
faced by the founding fathers of the Gossner Mission and to their eventual success:

In 1844 six missionaries were sent to India to labour among the
tribes of Chota Nagpore They visited the people in their villages,
they laboured in their own gardens to support themselves, they
erected their own buildings; they were heedless of the changes of
the climate, and of the intense heat of an Indian sun. One after
another, four fell to sacrifice to exposure and over-exertion. The zeal
of the remaining two did not flag. In 1850 the first fruits were
gathered. That year they baptised 11 adults, the next 27, and each
year the number increased.29

The triumph of the missionaries was emphasized by describing the problems of
conversion. While some converts clung on to their benevolent Fathers even in the
most hazardous of moments, others found it difficult to distance themselves from
dances and liquor drinking. Converts left the faith and reconverted, only to abandon
the church once again in moments of crisis. They switched faiths as the Jesuits,
Anglicans and German Lutherans competed to attract converts. Yet, the doubts of the
missionaries, their frustrations and their failures are only fleetingly mentioned since
Christianity must eventually triumph; the 'natives' had to inexorably move towards the
only true religion. As Cave-Browne of the SPG reported: 'A feeling had begun to
prevail among the Kols that it was their destiny to become Christian. Inquirers did not

29. *History of Christianity in India; With its Prospects. A Sketch. Compiled From
Sherring, Smith, Badley, and Reports (Madras: 1895), p. 53.*
come in by ones or twos, from distant and isolated points; but they began to come in families, in some cases it might also be said in villages, eagerly applying for baptism.\textsuperscript{30} Whitley of the SPG wrote: 'Christianity now spreads spontaneously, as it were, among the Kols...and there is every reason to hope that the whole people will become Christian.'\textsuperscript{31} Statistics were cited charting the progress of the mission, and predictions were made as to when the whole of Chhotanagpur would turn Christian.

At a time when the missionaries constituted the only effective European presence, the mission stations existed as focal points of authority, as centres of 'civilization' and reform. The mission with its schools, boarding houses, churches, hospitals and Bible schools, sought to reorganize the religious, social and economic life of the tribal. The missionary saw himself as an adult, a parent who supervised his native children by ordering their work, leisure, worship and festivities within a rigorous behavioural code. Hahn of the GEL Mission compares the Kols to children in the Kindergarten who not only sing and play but also quarrel, and are sometimes naughty.\textsuperscript{32} Elsewhere Logsdail of the SPG notes:

\begin{quote}
It cannot be too often repeated that our people in Chota Nagpur need a great deal of looking after. They are quite uneducated and need building up in everything...Some become school teachers, Scripture Readers and native Pastors, some become carpenters, others policemen, others work in the government courts or take up other services under the government, and many go off to work on the tea-garden of Assam, Cachar, or the Dooars; but the majority of our people are agriculturists and farm their own holdings.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Cave-Browne, \textit{The Chota Nagpore Mission}, p. 19.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Anonymous, 'Chota Nagpore', \textit{The Mission Field}, May 1, 1890, p. 176.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Paul Wagner, \textit{Character Sketch of Rev. Ferdinand Hahn of the G.E.L. Mission, Chota Nagpur} (Guntur: 1913), p. 12.
\end{itemize}
In this quasi-familial structure, the traditional hierarchy was replaced by a new Christian order where converts were absorbed into the missionary structure, and differences between a 'Christian aboriginal' and a 'heathen aboriginal' became more and more marked.

III

DIFFERENCE AND SAMENESS

The explicit object of the Evangelical project had been to displace the practices of Chhotanagpur 'tribals'. Yet, within a short while, the dismal failure of the missionaries was evident. Initial dismay and bewilderment were soon replaced by indignation. It was not the Kols who were degraded; their natural innocence had been tainted by external agencies. The Hindus were nailed as the culprits. In 1848, Schatz of the GEL Mission wrote from Ranchi: 'Had the Kols been an isolated people and not disturbed by the Hindus... it could have been possible to hope for an... overall and quicker influence of the Evangelium on them. They had borrowed from Hinduism for the past fifty years... They have the caste system like the Hindus and idols...'.

Two identities of the 'aboriginals' thus came to be created. On the one hand were those 'aboriginal races' who had merged into the 'great Aryan body'. Others, however, had been able to maintain a certain national independence, they... preserved their hereditary laws, and customs, and character... And in maintaining their independence from the great invading body, they have also to a great extent preserved

34. Missionaire Schatz, 'Correspondenz (Verspätet)', Bethesda, den 26 Mai 1848'[Missionary Schatz, Correspondence (delayed), Bethesda, 26 May 1848], Die Biene auf dem Missionsfelde, No. 2, February, 1849, p. 16.

their tribal individuality among themselves.\textsuperscript{36} It was the latter group that had retained its innocence and not fallen prey to the designs of false gods. The missionaries chose to work amongst this group. These people had to be kept isolated as subjects for missionary conversion. Their uniqueness had to be preserved and resurrected. Bleses of the Roman Catholic Mission wrote: 'If the aboriginal social structure were to crumble and the Aborigines' rights were to be trampled on, not only would our apostolate suffer a set back and our opportunities vanish, but even our existing Christianity would be endangered in the wreck.'\textsuperscript{37}

The missionaries ardently set about in their task. The people who were awaiting deliverance had to be identified, classified and structured in ways that would be comprehensible to the Whites. In their attempt to rediscover the tribe and recreate its historical image, certain cultural determinants and symbols were identified: racial characteristics, language, a corpus of myths and folktale, a well researched history. Drawing from the primacy of language in the nineteenth century concept of nationalism, linguistic categories were regarded as scientific and objective and determinants of tribalism; dialect zones were created and mapped; folklore was collected for the study of tribal customs and tradition; migrations were referred to and a historical past that was in stark contrast to the present was described. Once these elements were codified, they served as the cultural basis for a distinct tribal identity.

This strategy of representation was not accidental. It endorsed, repeated and elaborated upon a specific structure of knowledge that was created through an enmeshing of biblical and evangelical traditions, evolutionary doctrines, often a romantic urge and

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} Fr. C. Bleses, 'The aboriginals of Bihar and Orissa', \textit{Our Field}, 12th Year, No. 1, January and February, 1936.
a positivist obsession to classify even the minutest of details. The tribe was thus discovered and defined in missionary perspective, its boundaries as a primeval and cohesive body were continuously drawn.

IV

SEARCH FOR A LANGUAGE AND FOLKLORE

The waves of immigration that took place in Chhotanagpur as different people came to settle in the region were reflected in the various linguistic configurations that greeted the missionaries when they reached there. Kols, Oraons, Mundaris, Hos and Cheros spoke in different tongues. 'It is extremely difficult with the language', complained Batsch of the GEL Mission in November 1846. '...There are four tribes where each does not understand the other. All four are among themselves more or less foreign and with each must a person use a different word, and this makes it very difficult for us newcomers.'

The more bewildering the situation was, the greater was the urgency to create order by arriving at a language for communication. The importance of acquiring a knowledge of the local language had already found mention in the regulations set out for the Fathers. One of the clauses in the Constitution drawn up by Gossner on August 8th, 1848, for the Chhotanagpur Mission was as follows: 'In order to be able to convert the heathen, the first priority is to learn the language and one should not be content for long with interpreters who often say something different from what they

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38. Friedrich Batsch, 'Ranchi (Bethesda genannt), den November 11, 1846'[Ranchi (named Bethesda), 11th November, 1846], Die Biene auf dem Missionsfelde, No. 3, March, 1847, p. 23.
ought. Here no diligence may be spared.\textsuperscript{39} Missionaries had to decide what the recognized language of the mission was to be. Yet, as Cave-Browne wrote: 'To frame a language, and to frame that into a common language which at present had not a sign or a character, and varied in its very sounds, valley from valley, was a work which seemed to them to involve an amount of labour of which there was no hope of corresponding results.'\textsuperscript{40} Under the circumstances, Hindi was adopted in 1869 as the language of instruction for the following reasons. It was the medium of daily communication, it was the language of the court and the market, it was a language with a large body of religious literature. However, the language proved incomprehensible and unpopular and had to be abandoned.

By 1896, E.H. Whitley of the SPG had published his \textit{Notes on the Ganwari Dialect of Lohardaga, Chhota Nagpur}. While introducing his work, he wrote:

These notes treat only of (sic) the dialect or patois chiefly spoken by zamindars and raiyats, and has been very largely adopted by those M undas and Oraons who formerly spoke only their aboriginal languages. Its use is constantly increasing. Hence the importance of understanding and speaking this Ganwari to the Magistrate and Missionary alike. Any one speaking this variety of Ganwari will be understood by villagers over a large area of country to the north, south, and west of Ranchi, though not far to the east, in which direction Bengali prevails, and some other peculiar dialects.\textsuperscript{41}

At the same time, it was recognized that these inhabitants of Chhotanagpur - the Mundas and the Oraons - needed their own 'tribal' language, their 'original language'.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} 'A Constitution drawn up by Gossner for the Kols Mission, August 8th, 1848', Appendix 2 in W. Holsten, Johannes Evangelista Gossner, p. 389.
\textsuperscript{40} Cave-Browne, \textit{The Chota Nagpore Mission}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{41} E.H. Whitley, \textit{Notes on the Ganwari Dialect of Lohardaga, Chhota Nagpur} (Calcutta: 1896), Introduction.
\textsuperscript{42} Cave-Brown, \textit{The Chota Nagpore Mission}, p. 89.
As Hahn of the GEL Mission pointed out: 'In spite of their intimate connection, the Mundas and Oraons have kept their own separate languages, so absolutely different from each other that it was out of the question to choose either of them as a medium of reaching both tribes.'

The original intention of the missionaries was not to create a tribal language, but only to reduce it to a written form. Collecting words and phrases, learning the language of the 'heathens', and understanding its structure were a part of the missionary endeavour. Gradually however, there was a shift from 'descriptive appropriation to prescriptive imposition and control'. Out of the varying dialects, it was the Fathers who chose, categorized and codified the correct form of a particular language, its vocabulary and grammar. A hitherto unwritten language was reduced to a written form; it was given a script, a formal orthography, a regular grammar. As pamphlets from the Gossner Mission indicate, the initial script chosen was Latin even if the language was Oraon or Mundari; this was later replaced by Kaithi, and ultimately by the Devanagri script. I cite the example of the Oraon Kumuyo Puthee, a seventy four page tract printed in English in 1891 by Fr. Lievens of the Roman Catholic faith; its aim was 'to transform the popular partiality for profane and dancing songs - rather an obstacle to the spread of religions - into a love for religious canticles and a fresh aid to the diffusion of religious knowledge.' The codification of language thus became a process of moral disciplining. In 1899, Fr. A. Grignard's translation of the text into the Oraon language was printed in the Latin script; it was reprinted in

43. Wagner, A Character Sketch of Rev. Ferdinand Hahn, pp. 6-7.
45. A. Grignard, 'Komunyo Puthi', Chota Nagpur Mission Letter, 1st Year, No. 4, April, 1930, p. 62.
1907, due to the efforts of Fr. C. Bouckhout of the Roman Catholic faith, in Nagpuria Sadani or Sadri which was of the Kaithi script. The mission press played a major role in this production of knowledge. Inexpensive literature was published for mass consumption. Dictionaries and books of grammar were followed by translations of liturgical, doctrinal and biblical texts. As early as in 1850, tracts were published in the Oraon language. Hahn, a champion of the Oraon language, translated biblical stories of the Old and New Testaments, hymn books and other canonical literature into Oraon, and edited a book on Oraon grammar and vocabulary. Nottrott of the GEL Mission composed his literary works in Mundari. Some of the tracts printed for the purpose of propaganda by the Gossner Mission were as follows: Shaitan Ke Bandhanon Me [In the Shackles of the Devil] by A. Diller, Govindpur (undated); Paulus Pahana Topano - Yeeshu Khrista Ke Ek Achiye Yoddhe Ka Jeevan Charitra [Paulus Pahana Topano - A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ] by A. Nottrott, Ranchi, 1914; Jahan Se Wah Jeeviton Aur Mritakan Ka Vichar Karane Ko Phir Aawega [From Where He Will Return to Judge the Living and the Dead] by A. Diller and H. Schmidt, Govindpur (undated); Pabitra Baptisma ka Bhedh [The Meaning of Holy Baptism] (anonymous and undated); and Ham Yeeshu Se Bhont Karana Chahhate Hain [I Would Like to Meet Christ] by A. Diller and H. Schmidt, Govindpur (undated).47

46. The Oraon Kumunyo Puthee in its various editions were printed and published at the Catholic Orphan Press, Calcutta. These were immensely popular tract used by the Roman Catholic Mission. Refer to A. Grignard, 'Early memories of the Chota Nagpur Mission, the origins of the Komunyo Puthi', Chota Nagpur Mission Letter, 1st Year, No. 3, March, 1930, pp. 46-47 and 'Komunyo Puthi', Chota Nagpur Mission Letter, 1st Year, No. 4, April, 1930, pp. 60-63.

47. These tracts are available at the Archiv der Gossner Missions [Archive of the Gossner Mission], Berlin. Shaitan Ke Bandhanon Me by A. Diller was published at Govindpur (press and date of publication not mentioned); Paulus Pahana Topano - Yeeshu Khrista Ke Ek Achiye Yoddhe Ka Jeevan Chantra by A. Nottrott was published by the GEL Mission Press at Ranchi in 1914; Jahan Se Wah Jeeviton Aur Mntakon Ka Vichar Karane Ko Phir Aawega by A. Diller and
Tracts and pamphlets written in the vernacular by the members of the tribal communities were also published by the mission press. The local language was popularised by using it in mission schools.

As a part of the linguistic enterprise, the missionaries collected and recorded tales and stories, myths and traditions, songs and proverbs - all seen as cultural expressions of the collective consciousness of the community, untainted by a later importation of ideas. Hahn's works in this context were particularly noteworthy. He wanted his collections of folklore to be 'in style and working, manifestly aboriginal.'\textsuperscript{48} In his attempt to record these 'as it was', Hahn's writings, and in particular his descriptions of customs and festivals, were 'so interwoven with after thoughts and belated additions or restricts' that these were 'rambling in style'.\textsuperscript{49} Yet the very process of writing attributed a fixity to oral tradition and to a cultural system. It sought to reform moral attitudes by sanitizing the language, repressing 'immoral', erotic and sensuous expressions.

IV

WRITING A HISTORY

Once the tribal languages were determined and folklore collected, the next task was to trace the 'early history of this remarkable race.'\textsuperscript{50} History would corroborate

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\textsuperscript{48} A. Grignard (ed.), \textit{Hahn's Oraon Folk-Lore in the Original} (Patna:1931), Foreword, p. i.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{50} Cave-Browne, \textit{The Chota Nagpore Mission}, p. 3.
the image of the tribals that the missionaries had constructed and emphasize the distinctiveness of a tribal identity. Only through history could the missionaries explain the backwardness and the degradation of these communities, identify the causes of their decline, attribute these to external agencies, and thereby, describe a process through which the rightful occupants of Chhotanagpur, these original inhabitants of the land, were deprived of their country and exploited by the avaricious Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, history would substantiate the claims made by the missionaries who projected themselves as the champions of the downtrodden, the only ones truly interested in the tribal cause. Their intervention in Chhotanagpur would be thereby legitimized. Hurad, an Oraon convert, appropriating the logic of his mentors, referred to the 'dim days of yore', to the 'very old days when the people of this land were utterly neglected by its...rulers'.51 The exceedingly 'imperfect past' was rectified only after the advent of Christianity in Chhotanagpur.

These Hindu rulers never cared to give any civilization in any form to the inhabitants of this land...Mohammedan governors...left their subjects at the mercy of the Hindu chiefs...Christian rulers were the Good Samaritan to the Mundas and Uraons of this Province...they felt compassion on these people and brought them to the inn and gave them to the host, i.e. entrusted them to the care of the Church and its ministers. The year 1845 [the year the GEI. Mission was established in Chhotanagpur] saw the beginning of a new era in the history of this small province...It is Christianity and Christianity alone that has given a new impetus to the intellectual, social and moral uplift of this land. There is no denying of the fact that before 1845 the history of Chota Nagpur was exceedingly imperfect.52


52. Ibid.
Wagner of the GEL Church refers in this context to 'the golden olden times' of the pre-Aryan conquests when Oraons and Mundas 'lived the life of peaceful colonists'. It was 'their common sufferings and hardships' against 'the common enemy, the Aryan Hindus', that had united these ethnographically and linguistically 'different peoples'. The reasons for the downfall of the tribes were located therefore not within these communities. Their nemesis occurred because these 'trusting' and 'guileless' people had protested against the incursions of the outsiders - the Hindus and the Muslims. Cave-Browne wrote:

they dared to struggle, and to struggle boldly, for their ancestral plains and almost deified river banks - were driven further and further, higher and higher, before the advance of each successive wave of invaders, and forced to accept the alternative of being absorbed into the invading masses, or of seeking refuge, and a bare existence, on the rugged and sterile heights...

They were thus deprived of their land, the land that they had cultivated with 'incessant toil' after clearing the 'almost impenetrable forests'.

Missionaries, while writing their stories, referred extensively to the works of colonial administrators like Hodgson, Hunter and others, which were themselves ordered by specific intellectual traditions and colonial prejudices. To these they added their own preconceptions, rudimentary knowledge and imagination. Their understanding of European history and their conceptions of the anthropological doctrines of evolutionism structured their understanding of the 'Dravidian tribes'.

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54. Ibid., p. 4.
55. Ibid., p. 3.
57. Ibid., p. 4.
58. Ibid.
Parallels were drawn by Cave-Browne between 'the poor uncultured Britons' of North Wales and the tribes of the Vindhyas, between the 'Angles of England' and the 'Hindus of Hindustan'.

The remote, wild, high grounds of North Wales and Cornwall to this day possess, in the dialect and character of their people, traces of the old Briton occupation; so does the great Vindhyan range...retain evidences of a long extinct supremacy, in the remnants of aboriginal races who erst in primitive barbarism and savagery, in ages gone by, lorded it over the plains of India. 59

Yet, how was one to establish the credibility of the missionary enquiry and the veracity of the conclusions it yielded? The tribes of Chhotanagpur were the 'pre-Aryan races' 60 whose history could be traced only by 'going back thirty centuries or more', to the times when the 'Aryan invaders were pouring into the Indian continent'. 61

Written sources of these times were not available. Under the circumstances, 'Records, unwritten, aye, and many of them written in stones [emph. original], of a period before Buddhism or Brahminism overran the country, or even a Hindu had set foot in India' 62 testified to the antiquity of these people.

Yet, despite their efforts to ground their story in the accepted tools of the historical discipline, many of the conclusions that the missionaries had reached were left unexplained. Repeated inconsistencies crept into the missionary narrative. The Fathers were forced to accept their limitations and the speculative nature of their exercise. Their projections of tribal history were marked by uncertainties. As Wagner wrote: 'They are aborigines who have lived together since times so remote as to make

61. Ibid.
it impossible to trace any reliable information. Elsewhere, he commented: 'They immigrated most probably through the great Himalayan passes in migrations which cover a long period of time.'

THE HEATHEN AND THE CHRISTIAN

The missionaries, white and Christian, and therefore superior, had intervened in the depraved world of 'heathen aboriginals' and created a group of converts in local society. Like their critical, yet, benevolent Fathers, the converts were to regard their tribal ancestors as alien, their earlier customs and rituals as unholy and evil, their traditional tribal leadership as irrelevant. The 'purer faith of the Gospel' was to help the converts distance themselves from the 'foul superstitions of heathenism'. The elevated and purified Christian was starkly contrasted with the 'pagan Kols'. The difference was not merely religious but reflected a wider social transformation that had been 'most remarkable'. The Kol who had so long lived in a state of 'combined tawdriness and filth', now as a Christian had 'his hair...cut short, and neat and clean, his neck and arms...bare of ornaments'. The converts did not participate in dances or festivals; they appeared indeed to have lost 'all relish for their old amusements', so as to shrink with horror at the idea of resuming their discarded practices. Christian

63. Wagner, Character Sketch of Rev. Ferdinand Hahn, p. 3.
64. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
68. Ibid., pp. 26-27.
69. Ibid.
customs had replaced the original forms of worship. 'Instead of offering bribes to evil spirits, the Christians here come to Church before sowing their rice, and kneel down before the congregation, and the clergyman offers up (sic) prayer for God's blessing', wrote Whitley of the SPG. 70 Dalton, the Commissioner of Chhotanagpur reported:

As Christianity is rapidly spreading among them [the Kols], and in all probability will continue to spread more and more rapidly year after year, it is quite possible that in the course of a few generations, the most marked characteristics of the races I am describing will have been effaced for ever. It is marvellous with what firmness old prejudices are abandoned, old customs are discarded and even types changed, when they become Christians... 71

The situation was paradoxical. On the one hand, the missionaries wanted the 'aboriginals' to stand out as 'distinct, ethnical (sic) entities', 72 to have common interests which would be defended and promoted; on the other hand, the 'gradual development' of these 'untrammelled communities' through 'education and cooperation' 73 was to take place under the aegis of the missionaries. At first, diverse peoples were recognized as a cohesive whole, as the 'Kol tribals' or 'Kol aboriginals', and then, they were fragmented along new lines as 'heathen aboriginals' and as 'Christian aboriginals'. At one level, there could be no meeting point between religiosity and irreligiosity, interpreted in terms of the difference between Christianity and heathenism. At another level however, the separation was limited. Drawing from the repertoire of anthropology, the missionaries perceived both these groups as belonging to similar

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70. 'Here and There, a contrast drawn' by Rev. E.H. Whitley, Missionary in Chota Nagpur, Diocese of Chota Nagpur, 1894, Missionary Reports (1856-1951), Annual Reports from Missionaries of the Society [SPG], RHL, e Series, Vol. 49b.

71. Cave-Browne, The Chota Nagpore Mission, p. 35.


73. Ibid., p. 4.
racial stocks; they were 'aboriginals' or 'tribals', whatever their religious affiliations were. The interplay between evangelicalism and ethnography is clear.

The created differences which emerged were recognized even by the tribal communities themselves. A tribal Christian convert of the Roman Catholic faith wrote in May, 1930, after one of his visits among unconverted brethren:

It is indeed sad to see so many of my own race still groping in the darkness of ignorance...It is not astonishing that they are somewhat imbued with this false conception that Christianity is something foreign, which an Uraon could not conveniently embrace without to some extent at least ceasing to be an Uraon. It took me rather a long time to get into their head that I was one of their own race.74

The missionaries, then, had sought to reorder the life of the Kols in an image that was familiar and recognizable. Unable to assimilate or understand beyond their fixed circle of experience, and confined within the boundaries of their ideological heritage and conceptual framework that were themselves born of coexisting intellectual currents, these 'visionaries' found it difficult to make the message of Christ intelligible to the people among whom they preached. But they saw themselves as saviors: the aboriginals could not order their world without missionary help. They would be lost in the wilderness. Whitley of the SPG wrote in 1894:

One of the...pictures shown to them [the 'heathens'] is of a sheep that has strayed from the fold and has fallen on a narrow ledge of rock overhanging a precipice. The shepherd is seen in the distance coming to seek and to save the sheep that is lost...It is very difficult to explain to the people, sitting there under the dark mango grove, and looking at the first time at such a picture, that they are like lost sheep wandering about after delusions and devils, hanging in danger on the steep precipice of sin....75
