CONCLUSION

The first time the Santhals are mentioned in the history dates from British reports from the 1790s. At that time the Santhals lived in the jungles covering the lower part of the Chotanagpur plateau. According to Skreisrud, Santhal is a distortion of ‘Saontar’ which was adopted by these tribals when they lived in ‘Saont’ near Midnapore in Bengal for generations, from where they were continuously migrating towards Chai Champa which according to Bodding was located near Hazaribag district in Chotanagpur plateau. According to E. T. Dalton, In Chai Champa, there was an old fort whose lord was a Santhal king. He killed his entire family and himself when he learnt of an impending attack of Ibrahim Ali, the army chief of Mohammad bin Tughluq.

In the course of the first half on the 19th century, the Santhals became peasants with settled cultivation and fixed habitat. This was an overwhelming change that brought, in its train, several miseries and tensions, and within a very short span of time they revolted in 1855. The rise of the radical Santhal movement and its collapse (during the period between 7 July and end 9 December 1855) draws upon two things that are particularly notable. First, bitterness with aliens, especially money lenders and local police, had been growing over the years. Aggrieved Santhals complained to the local administration. No decisive action was taken until May-June 1854 when they raided the houses of some particularly notorious moneylenders. The state severely punished the raiders but spared the moneylenders. The punishments created widespread consternation throughout the Santhal world. Secondly, it was only then that the ideas of an organised resistance began to circulate. Santhal pondered over the means in secret meetings in the night, about how to
get rid of tyrannical aliens? The incarnation episode (middle of April 1855) provided the ideology to the resistance movement. The movement though rapidly spread throughout the Santhal land, collapsed abruptly. It could not survive the army repression. The crippled moral foundation of the rebel organisation hastened the collapse.

Analyzing the causes of the Santhal Hool, Dr. K. K. Datta dwelt mainly on to the foul deeds of the Mahajans and exploitation of the zamindars. However, this does not represent the whole truth. The colonial system was the real culprit. First of all, it is to be noted that the Santhals were treated as outsiders in law till 1855 because the local law – Regulation-I of 1796 and Regulation-I of 1827 – did not give any protection to the Santhals which was available only to the Paharias. Thus, the Santhals were tied with the European system of judicature whose idioms were little known to them.

Secondly, the concept of individual ownership of land and the concept of private property broke the age old protection of the community to the individual members. This individual freedom was really bondage as the individual was brought under the direct subjugation of the state, without community serving as the cushion. The Santhal also lost the security provided by the mutual aid system of the community in crisis situations – like illness, death or during special rites of birth and marriage. To crown it all, the colonial rule established its primacy over resources and therefore, the reserves at the disposal of the community in the form of forest resources were also depleted. Thus, no resource was left to them to meet situations like crop-failure or famine.

Thus, the Santhal individuals who could turn to the community for help in times of crisis earlier could no longer depend on the community for help due to the penetration of colonial domination. Mahajans (Money-
lenders) and Banias (Merchants) now came to plug this gap. Their need became more imperative because the Santhals were required to pay land revenue in cash and not in kind as was done during the Mughal period. The colonial system thus brought the santhals to the doorsteps of the Mahajans and Banias. Many of them were undoubtedly greedy and foul players, but it would be wrong to consider this as being only the outcome of perfidious human nature. It was indeed the vagaries of the colonial market economy to which the economy of the tribals was now being linked up and subjugated that made the unscrupulous operations of the Mahajans and the Banias almost inevitable.

Thus, the Santhals were plunged into the world economy suddenly. As a matter of fact this change from a nomadic tribe to a peasant society linked with the colonial economy was too swift to be endured. The Santhals had to jump to a historical stage in less than 50 years for which European tribes had taken centuries. However, its impetus did come from outside, from sources external to the Santhal society. It was not the Santhals who moved through stages into the complexities of modern economic relationships, rather it was the market economy that “engulfed” them. The Santhals failed to understand market fluctuations and the intricacies of price mechanism, or even the difference between the real and the market value of his produce. It was so due to the colonial system.

Moreover, the sources of tension and conflict between the Santhal and outside world lay not only in economic hardships but also in the fear or danger of being culturally submerged by the rulers. The Santhals’ capacity to retain their identity was reduced by their loss of autonomy, economic exploitation and growing dependence on the middlemen.
The Santhals thus outlived their patience because of differential reasons and rebelled in July 1855. The revolt was violent and full of cruel and inhuman acts. The martial law had to be promulgated and army called to suppress the revolt. By December 1855, the Revolt gradually withered out but not before leaving many scars. The revolt was suppressed mercilessly by the British.

As a result of the Hool, the cautious colonial masters erected a new district namely; Santhal Parganas, by Act-XXXVII of 1855. They adopted the policy of segregating the tribals and therefore, the district was put on non-Regulation administration with special protective laws.

As to the nature of the Hool, we find it as a complex phenomenon. It cannot be brushed aside as a ‘Primitive Revolt’ manifesting inhuman acts, killings, loot and all violent acts. The revolt had some of the elements mentioned by Dr. Ranjit Guha. The element of adopting the ways of the dominant class was there in the Santhal Hool but the nature of Santhal violence was not indiscriminate as Dr. Guha has tried to explain, it was discriminate and manifested ethnic hatred towards ‘the other’. In this sense, the Hool displayed ethnic solidarity in the negative sense i.e. by excluding all non-Santhals. The argument that some lower caste people were spared and treated as friends such as oilmen, potters, black smiths etc. does not hold good as all of them were attached with them in Jajmani relationship. We must remember that the Santhals had become peasants before the outbreak of the Hool and had Jajmani relations with some castes who “served” them and that’s why they spared them.

The element of territoriality also does not hold good as enunciated by Dr. Guha. Damin-i-Koh was not the homeland of the Santhals; they were migrants who displaced the Paharias and settled there.
Thus, the paradigm evolved by Dr. Guha is not sufficient in explaining such a complex phenomenon. The Hool had the characteristics of what Kumar Suresh Singh calls as primary resistance movement as well as characteristics of revivalistic and millenarian movements. It was a war of economic grievances, no doubt, but it was also a war waged for preserving their culture. The movement also displayed emotional unrest, hysterical symptoms as well as religious overtones. Hence we may with our humble submission conclude that a re-appraisal of the Santhal Hool is quite in the fitness of things. Other researchers may later emit fresh light on the topic.

The nature of post-Hool movements has been generally misrepresented. There are two typical views. According to one, the Santhal resistance nearly disappeared. The explanation suggested is that the new administrative system devised for the new Santhal Parganas formed in 1856 solved forever the Santhal question. The second argues that even where the Santhal agitation disappeared, its nature basically differed; Santhals renounced forever their old political path and opted instead for a purely socio-religious movement.

The reasons for the absence of any organised movement during the years 1856-1860 were not that the administrative reforms solved the Santhal question for ever. In fact, the material condition of the Santhals worsened. The argument that the so-called socio-religious movement replaced the Hool type movement is questionable too. What looked like a socio-religious movement was actually a form of organisation of the political movement. The political movement did revive in 1861, and recurred from time to time until 1882.

The primary cause of the lull during the years 1856-60 was that the Santhals were then struggling for survival. It was not the right time for
any combined resistance. They did not have the resources or suitable village social organisation for it. The collapse of the Hool and the severe counter-insurgency measures of the state was a huge setback for them. The army suppression of the Hool, especially after the declaration of the Martial Law on 19 July 1856, about two weeks after the Hool started, had deadly effects on the economy. The published paper of Professor B. B. Choudhary, “Reinterpreting the Santhal Insurgency, the Hool of 1855” provides gruesome details of the state violence against the rebels that did not show any mercy while using its entire repressive machinery for stamping it out. Rebels caught while committing the crime against ‘person or property’ and suspicious designs were immediately killed. The characteristic official disdain for Santhal culture had to do much with the ferocity than finality. Officials readily inferred that only ‘wild savages’ like Santhals were capable of the violence that marked the Hool. The Bhagalpur Magistrate argued with a clear conscience. ‘The entire extirpation of the Santhal tribe will be the only way to ensure peace.’ The Army movement until the revocation of the Martial Law on 3 January 1856 left a trail of destruction. Rebel villages and their traditional food stores were indiscriminately burnt. Many Santhals fled from their villages to escape army violence. Local zamindars and mahajans who greatly suffered from the rebel activities were in a vengeful mood and opposed the return of the fugitive Santhals even after the end of the Hool. The sudden influx of Damin Santhals into their estates made them less eager to show any kindness to their Santhal praja, as scarcity of labour was not acute there as in Damin. All this immediately told on the local agriculture. A British official estimated that 10000 Santhals perished. Many more, an army Colonel found, were abandoning their villages. With their villages and food stores burnt,
Santhals were resourceless. Cultivation could not be resumed because of the scarcity of labour or of the disorganised state of labour. Rebuilding a nearly ruined economy required a large capital input for enabling Santhals to buy seeds, implements and cattle, and to subsist till the next harvest in November-December 1856 (The insurrection ended in January of that year). Only a massive state help could have nursed the agriculture back to health. Government was woefully niggardly. Its financial help was also conditional. It was all in form of a repayable loan.

Santhals also had to cope with the successive strains on their economy. Sudden spurts in all sort of commodity prices during the Mutiny hit most the destitute vagabonds who had not yet settled down to stable agriculture. The famine of 1865-66 had far more disastrous effects.

On the other hand, the Non Regulation system introduced after the Hool had no role at all in toning up the economy. New economic groups, who kept intruding into the Santhal villages, had no role either. Their activities added to the misery of Santhals. Government assumed that the system would keep them out forever which it did not, because the assumption was wrong. It believed that the source of the evils that plagued the Santhal society was the liability of Santhals to the same set of laws as applied to all the other regions; the solution was to set these laws aside and place them under the control of an official who would devise the best system possible for them. What eventually mattered was not changing one set of laws for another. No matter what the laws were, hostile outsiders kept coming. The vaunted non regulation system was itself abandoned (1863). Vested interest groups did not want the huge new districts of Santhal Parganas closed to them forever. The legal validity of the system was questioned and ultimately it was scrapped.
With their economy in ruins and village social organisation severely disrupted, the destitute Santhals could not therefore plan any organised political movement. It, however, revived, though on a smaller scale, especially in the 1860’s, when violence was generally avoided. However, the exciting change was the assertiveness of the rebel mood. It was not a sort of stray protest, appearing and fizzling out in no time. It was the ideology that really mattered. The inspiration behind it was the old vision of an independent Santhal Raj. The leaders who carried the message had a distinctive social composition. Vaisnava gurus called *babajis* or Santhals influenced by their teachings, led the movements until 1882. Its scale during the period 1871-82 was much larger, though the use of violence was limited here too.

With the suppression of the Santhal uprising in 1855, the Santhals probably realized that their position and status vis-à-vis the dikus could not be improved by such revolts alone. As a result, a hinduized social reform movement began to spread among the Santhals towards the early sixties and seventies in the nineteenth century known as the Kherwar movement which unlike the rebellion was more socio-religious with camouflaged political overtones.

As noted earlier, one of the major functions of such movement is rank improvement, it appears that as the political rank path through military means appeared to be closed with the failure of the rebellion in 1855, a section of the Santhals chose to follow the ritual rank path through the Kherwar movement by adopting many hindu symbols of rank. By applying the term Kherwar, they were again reinforcing in their memory, the image of their golden past when they were free and their people were known by this name.
Thus, whereas the rebellion contained contra-acculturative tendencies, turning the Santhals away from the hindus, the Kherwar movement paved the way for increased acculturation. This cultural borrowing, however, did not bridge the psychological gulf between the two communities. The Santhals remained ambivalent towards the dikus as before, admiring their wealth and intelligence and hating their attitude of superiority and exploitation. And, as we still notice, this ambivalence does exist as a backdrop to all efforts at adjustment on the part of present day Santhal society, encysted as it is in the dominant hindu milieu.

The word Kherwar is a term usually assumed to be derived from the designation of the Santhals in their own language Santhali, as it was reported to Rev. Skrefsrud by the Santhal Kolean Guru in 1869. This may however, be a result of the Kherwar movement as this term is not recorded anywhere before this movement which can be dated to the Bhagirath Manjhi’s agitation up to the first census that was conducted in 1871. He was at that time already a known political leader as he had been imprisoned in 1868, for his participation in agrarian unrest, but it was seemingly not before 1871 that he appeared as a baba or proper babaji, which was the honorific title of the religious leaders in the Kherwar movement. He forwarded demands for Santhal raj (self-rule) and demanded that the Santhals should return to worship the Sun God Chando or Rama and clean themselves from their sins instead of worshipping their traditional godheads; the Bongas, whom he considered as evil. After a famine in 1874, he expanded his teachings as well as the level of his political actions. A shrine built according to hindu principles was constructed under his supervision and a Santhal appointed as panda (priest). Theologically, Bhagirath explained that the Hool had failed due to the fact that Santhals had intercourse with non-Santhal women, and
politically he had himself anointed as raja and started to levy land rent. He was then arrested together with his brothers and the panda. Bhagirath was sentenced to imprisonment for two years. In the district Sultanabad, another leader Gyan, ordered the Santhals to cleanse themselves and stop paying rent to the government for which he was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment. Nevertheless the Kherwar agitation continued in 1875 and from 1874 to 1877 there were extra troops stationed at Dumka, the main town of Santhal Parganas. Bhagirath Manjhi died in 1880.

The Kherwar movement continued and the preparations by the state for undertaking the census operations of 1881 led to new outbreaks. There was by then Kherwars in many places in Santhal Parganas, and a new leader, the hindu Dubia Gosain toured Santhal Parganas before he settled in Hazaribag district. He smoked ganja, smeared his body with ashes and let his hair grow, all in accordance with hindu babaji's. In the Santhal Parganas, the house of the magistrate in the Jamtara was burned down and prisoners were freed from Khatikund and the magistrate was forced to cancel the census operations.⁴

In retrospect, it is difficult to know exactly which Kherwar group stood for what activities and what the relations between Santhals and low castes were, but there is no doubt that 40960 people registered themselves as Kherwars during the 1881 census.⁵ Even more telling is the fact that there were recorded 825889 Santhals at the census in 1871, but only 202752 in 1881. In some districts there was what could be considered a natural increase of the Santhal population but in many other districts lots of Santhal evidently recorded themselves as something else, or refused to be recorded at all. In Santhal Parganas alone the change was from 455513 in 1871 to 9148 in 1881.⁶ The figures are serious
indicators of social unrest and extra troops stationed in Dumka in 1881-
82.

As stated, the Kherwar movement continued in different forms and there
are great differences in the estimation of it as a political or a religious
movement. There is little doubt that many administrators and
missionaries estimated the early phase of the Kherwar movement in the
1870s and the early 1880s as a dangerous political movement. This is
stated in administrative reports, and letters from the missionaries to the
authorities and the newspapers.

In 1874, the Kherwars were strongly opposing the Christian missions and
the CMS (Chotanagpur Mission Society) missionary Rev. A. Stark
stressed that the government should found Christian schools to fight the
opposition and in the autumn of 1880, Rev. Skresrud observed that the
Kherwars propagated “a rabid, socialistic, political agitation, the religion
being only a means towards an end”. When one considers the situation
of the census operations at that time, it is understandable that he
considered the movement as political. Other observers had, however,
already pointed to the fact that parts of the movement had turned its
focus towards more mild aspects of religious life. In the Administration
Report of Bhagalpur division for 1877-78, it is stated that, Bhagirath and
his new sect, have been orderly and quiet; they have formed themselves
into a separate community, they won’t eat, drink or intermarry with the
other Santhals, they call themselves Kherwars, and their religious and
domestic practices are more and more approximating to the Hindus and
may almost be regarded as belonging to that religion.

It is more fruitful to see the Kherwars’ as amongst one of the many
modernizing movements in the colonial period, and in this regard, they
are drawing much on the same lines as the missionaries. The preaching
of morals is one of them, and the glorification of God as the one who allows healing when people do repentance is another. The Santhal Christian missions and the Kherwars were two different ways into modernity, both ways intended to reform the Santhal community, and both had to come to grips with traditional elements in the Santhal culture and religion as well as with each other and the introduction of new traits in contemporary Hindu culture, which was by then gradually being turned into separate identities of Christians, Kherwars and Santhals themselves.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Santhal society underwent social changes accompanied by inclusion of new gods and ideas in the new forms of suitable beliefs, new forms of rent and agrarian exploitation of farmers, copyholders and workers and the response was mass movements which combined demands for social reconstruction with stress on individual repentance. That the Kherwars had been on decline at least since 1930s is evidence that new forms of religious and political organizations have taken over. The Jharkhand movement is one of them, and the political and religious excitement in present Santhal society is evidence that a new social situation has appeared and that the Santhals are in search for fitting answers within the modern Indian society.

Before British rule, Santhals were primarily settled rice cultivators possessing sufficient land. Economic resources were equally distributed between adivasis themselves and between them and their village servants. Tribal villages were virtually isolated both economically and politically. It was a segmental-egalitarian type of society. Cultural contacts, however, existed between the Santhals and the Hindus because of Santhal’s migration into predominantly Hindu regions. Adivasis
adopted some Hindu religious beliefs and practices. However, Santhals were not Hindu culturally before the advent of British rule, because their beliefs and rituals were not consciously derived from Hindu traditions. Since they had no social intercourse with Hindus that involved ritual inferiority, their social structure was not akin to Hindus. By the time the British arrived, Santhals did not have a compact territory and a central ruler, that’s why they were not affected much in the beginning. Some Santhals became tenants during the centuries of migration and a new form of land tenure was introduced (private ownership of land/permanent settlement). However, their landlords had no legitimacy in Santhal eyes, and Santhals often migrated precisely to avoid tenancy. During the period between 1770 and 1857, the dikus entered in Santhal Parganas in large numbers and gained de-facto control over much tribal land and raised the cost of access to that land. Few adivasis did leave their traditional economic pursuits as the traditional landlords did little to protect their interests against the dikus. The British introduced a legal and administrative system that was incomprehensible to the adivasis, but was easily manipulated by the dikus who reinforced their power over the tribal economy. The dikus held political sway over the tribals. British rule witnessed major rebellions during the period epitomizing in the Santhal Hool in 1855, which was suppressed by the British because the Santhals tried to solve their political and economic problems by force. However, it turned futile and the rebels were treated differentially. The reforms ensued these rebellions, empowering British officers with some judicial authority also to restore adivasi lands alienated by dikus and to remain and maintain close inter-personal contacts with them in order to prevent further revolts.
Between 1830 and 1855, the Santhals acquired what they felt was a homeland; the Damin-i-Koh and a protector of that homeland: Pontet. However, Pontet did not prove very effective at stemming land alienation by the dikus. Santhals also acquired new economic resources and a new level of political awareness, when they worked on the railways between 1853 and 1859; a factor precipitating tribal revolt involving acts of religious revitalization and political defiance although involving only a minority of Santhals. The reforms after 1855 in the Santhal Parganas were of far-reaching consequences.

The Santhal Parganas came under purview of a special non-regulation form of administration since 1855, but the laws and procedures used here became more akin to those of the plains. The resultant large meetings of Santhals to protest against the state of affairs in 1871, though non-violent were enough for the non-adivasis to panic. Between 1872 and 1879, rents and titles were settled throughout the district by specially appointed Settlement officers. Many Santhal tenants and village headmen were reinstated, and tenants were accorded security of tenure. In 1874-75, a major episode of religious revitalization led by Bhagirath occurred as the agrarian protests had died down after 1871. This movement gained impetus from the confusion of land settlement and from the severity of famine in 1874. The devotees who worshipped Bhagirath called themselves ‘Kherwars’ (an ancient name for the Santhals). The period between 1880 and 1895, ushered in by a new mass movement of religious revitalization in 1880, led by the Hindu ascetic Dubia Gosain refused to be counted for the census. Leaders of the census resistance movement were veteran Kherwars and Dubia’s followers. The movement was suppressed, when policemen and soldiers accompanied by the officers were rushed to the interiors of Santhal Parganas. In 1884, the Santhals
agitated to regain their lost lands sensing favourable government policy. Some Santhals regained their lands in the ensuing lawsuits, however, covert mortgaging of Santhal lands to dikus continued. The government felt betrayed after the Santhal unrest of 1880-81 and made contacts between Santhals and officials less personal. Santhal villages’ economic isolation was eroded after the mid-1880s.

The Kherwar movement consisted of sporadic and imperfectly-coordinated activities. Its participants shared certain beliefs. It consisted of religious revitalization, political challenges to the British, and agrarian struggle. The religious and political activities were linked to the idea that certain individuals had received a divine calling to reform Santhal religious practices. Religious reforms were often seen as a way to improve Santhals’ material lives, and sometimes as a precursor to a millennium. The commonest ritual innovations were Hindu in nature, for instance, the slaughter of pigs and fowls, and abstention from eating them. Large meetings were held and many Santhals went on pilgrimages to their leaders’ homes. However, the Kherwar devotees and their Hindu preceptors did not have a lasting relation of mutual dependence, so it cannot be said that this was an embryonic caste relationship. Defiance to British authorities took concrete shape only in the resistance to the census of 1881 and their agrarian protests involved the belief that they were the original tillers of the soil and as such entitled to pay at most, a low rent. They frequently refused to pay rent and complained to the local officials about the landlords.

Most of the Kherwar activities were peaceful and usually the violence was spontaneous. British officials were nearly always treated with respect during face-to-face encounters. Thus, unlike Santhal Hool, the Kherwars abjured violence to achieve their ends. Kherwar movement’s
adoption of new religious beliefs and rituals in an attempt to purify Santhal society accompanied on occasions by direct challenges to British authority was a departure from the past movements. However, the broad goals were to restore these aspects of the pre-British isolated and egalitarian tribal society which seemed most threatened by the external forces. In the Santhal Parganas, traditional Santhal land rights were more effectively and evenly preserved and that is why these rights were somewhat less of an issue in the Kherwar movement and Santhals’ poverty made it even harder for them to sustain a risky agrarian movement which was precisely the reason why religious revitalization combined with agrarian issues formed the bedrock of the Kherwar movement.

The movements’ specific activities and ideologies were affected to some extent by class structure of Santhal Parganas district. The divisions between Kherwar, Christian and other Santhals help explain why lots of Kherwar devotees doggedly adhered to their new beliefs and practices for bolstering tribal solidarity. New economic opportunities like emigration had somewhat less direct and less strong influence on the form of Kherwar movement than the influence of agrarian system and power relationships between the adivasis and the non-adivasi groups. Among the Santhals there were considerable hostility between Christians and non-Christians because of animosity between missionaries and Kherwar activists and also because the Santhals had less need of the missions as allies in the struggle against the dikus. Finally, administrative structures also had impacts on the form of adivasi movements. In the Santhal Parganas, the personal style of governance was no doubt one reason why Santhal leaders directly challenged British officers on issues of land rights and governmental authority. Yet, at the
same time the intimate relationship between officials and Santhals enabled the same officials to end Santhal resistance to the census of 1881.

The Kherwar abandoned the violence of 1855 rebellion as a way to restore Santhal solidarity not only because the State sector of European system had demonstrated its repressiveness against violent rebellion, but also because it became more responsive to the agrarian demands the Santhals had been pressing since 1855.
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