CHAPTER 1
THE ADVENT OF THE COLONIAL RULE AND SANTHALS

In this chapter, I have tried to delineate the history of the region that came to be known as Santhal Parganas after the Santhal Hool of 1855. This region which was part of Anga, Radha and Sumha in ancient period, and during the Turko–Afghan period has been referred to as ‘Jharkhand’ (region of forests).

Due to its dense forests, inaccessible terrain and wild animals the Jharkhand region, appears to have never been completely subdued until the advent of the British. Hsuan Tsang who visited India around 645 A.D. gives authentic account of this region. He talks of the kingdom of Kie–chu-u-khi-lo that seems to refer to the harkhand region. His travel records mention that this kingdom had its capital about 117 miles northwest of Tamralipti; perhaps Santhal Parganas. Although the Mauryan empire seems to have established its sway over this region too, but it had never been able to subdue the region completely. Similarly, it is doubtful whether Chotanagpur acknowledged the sovereignty of the Kushanas or the Guptas or it remained independent throughout history. However, it may be inferred that the region might have come under the pale of the Kushanas evidenced by the finds of Kushanas’ gold coins in this region though it may not establish their lordship over it. From the inscriptions of the Gupta age, it can also be deduced that the Chotanagpar region might have submitted to the might of the Guptas.

There are very few records of the region during the post Gupta period until the medieval period. During the medieval period, the great Kingdoms of North India had not been able to establish their sway over the Jharkhand region. This inaccessible tract remained independent throughout the Turko-Afghan rule (1206 – 1526 A.D.). The fortress of
Rohtas seems to be the farthest limit of actual penetration. In 1585, the Raja of kokrah (as Chotanagpur was known to the Mughals) was reduced to nominal suzerainty of Akbar by an expedition under Sahbaz khan, and Ain-i-Akbari lists kokrah as a part of the subah (revenue district) of Bihar. However, Kokrah seems to have regained independence during the disturbance that followed the death of Akbar in 1605. Repeated attempts were made by the Mughal empire to re-establish its token of suzerainty but effective penetration was extremely limited. The Mughal power was strictly limited in the hilly tracts of Chotanagpur, where their orders could not always be enforced.

Mughal supremacy could be established in Eastern India only after the battle of Rajmahal in 1576 between the Karranis and the Mughals. The Mughal rule brought peace in the region for a long period from 1576 till the beginning of war of succession among Aurangzeb, Dara, Murad and Shuja. Sher Shah once passed through this region while returning from Bengal found this region a centre of the Afghan chiefs during the rule of of Nahani and Karrani Afghans, who challenged the suzerainty of Akbar. It must be pointed out here that during the period of Great Mughals, from Akbar to Aurangzeb, this region was included in the Sarkars of Monghyr. Audambar and Tanda. Mughal rule brought peace in this region.

Shah Shuja was the governor of Bengal with his capital at Rajmahal. It was he who gave the first permission to the British traders in Bengal to trade at the request of Dr. Boughton who had cured her daughter. The region played a very decisive role in the war of succession. Having defeated Dara in the battle of Dharmat and having murdered Murad; Aurangzeb had the only challenge from Shuja. Thus, it seems that the decisive phase in the war of succession took place in this very region.
from Monghyr to Rajmahal and it was only after the loss of Rajmahal that Shuja had to flee in 1660 clearing the way for Aurangzeb to become the undisputed master of India.

During the later Mughal period too, this area played a very significant role. After the Battle of Plassey (1757), the seeds of the British power were sown. Mir Qasim became the Nawab after the displacement of Mir JAFar (1760), and he had to wage war with the English in order to save his sovereignty. In the series of battles that led to the downfall of Mir Qasim, the battle of Udhwa Nala in this region has assumed a very important place.

We know that immediately after battles of Plassey and Buxar, there developed a grave situation of rebellion, lawlessness and dacoities in Bengal in general and in this region in particular. The aboriginals, Hill-men (Paharias) and Ghatwals raised a banner of revolt against the British rule. This has been characterized by the British writers as ‘Savagery’ and the Paharias have been branded as habitual robbers. This view is prejudiced as the Hill-men had lived for centuries in this region peacefully. They had developed their own political system and they were under the control of Zamindars. They rendered the most useful service of guarding the passes in the hilly areas. However, with the weakening of the administration of Nawabs, anarchy set in from above. Dual Government worsened the situation, Zamindars became refractory and the guards of the passes (i.e. the Hill-men and Ghatwals) became unemployed. To top it all the famine of 1770 brought them on the brink of disaster leading to violent rebellions.

This region was strategically important for the company as it commanded the high way from Kolkata to Patna. Hence, the British rulers were anxious to control the area effectively. They broke the
isolation of the area as the frequent marches of the army created varied problems for the people. The entire area remained a challenge for the British from 1770 to 1780 as the aboriginals refused to recognize the rule of the company. Paharia Ghatwal revolt thus qualifies to be nominated as the first anti-British revolt in India on a large scale that had a pronounced anti-British bias too.

This revolt was suppressed by the British with the help of the army and the whole region was declared a military collectorship under Robert Brooke. Robert Brooke advocated both of his policies simultaneously; rigorous suppression and appeasement of the Paharias simultaneously. This basic policy was followed by Captain Browne as well. This dual policy found its fullest expression in the system of Augustus Cleveland. He was the shrewdest colonialist. He circulated money among the Paharias who had a non-money economy till then. He also created a division among them by raising Hill Archers’ corps and making the Paharia Sardars the pensioners of the Company. He advocated a complete change of way of life of the Paharias and wished to see them as settled cultivators and not as shifting cultivators. Thus, the system of Cleveland was a tactics of colonial control and not an act of philanthropy or humanism for which he has been much eulogized.

The British rulers had just one intention; to appropriate the surplus product or revenue from this region. In this sense, the modern British conquest was totally different from all previous pre-colonial conquests, whereas the pre-colonial conquest meant the control over territory and less powerful groups of human beings, the colonial conquest sought mastery over the resources.

Therefore, it became imperative for the company rulers to convert Santhal Parganas and the adjoining region into an area of settled
cultivation so that it could yield revenue for the company. Hence, the shifting cultivation known as Jhoom and Kurawo in this region was deliberately discouraged. The British tried to induce the Paharias to the ways of settled cultivation or wet rice cultivation. However, like the Baigas or Agarias of Madhya Pradesh, the Paharias were resilient enough and did not change their natural way of life. As a result, the Santhals migrating from Chotanagpur and south West Bengal were patronized and encouraged by the English to settle in Santhal Parganas and Damin-i-koh.

Thus, the area known as Damin-i-Koh; the habitat of the Hill-Men (Paharias) was gradually filled up by the new comers namely the Santhals. The Santhals, with encouragement from the British, expanded at the cost of forests that they cleared for cultivation and also at the cost of the Paharias whom they pushed back to the hills.

The Santhals became peasants with settled cultivation and fixed habitat in the course of the first half on the 19th century. This was a momentous change that brought in its train, several miseries and tensions, and within a very short span of time they revolted in 1855.

Santhal Parganas is a beautiful region. In the alluvial tract to the south–east, the scenery resembles that of the Ganga valley but is relieved from tameness by the background of the hills. The scenery is far more picturesque in the hilly and undulating tracts that make rest of the district. The Trikut hills is full of beautiful plants and flowers and one can have the glimpse of distant Parasnath; the sacred mountain of the Jains from the hill top. The hill road between Katikund and Amrapara present a refreshing beautiful picture. The lofty hills and deep valleys accord views that approach in beauty to those of lower Himalayas. The north eastern circle hills between Sahebganj and Rajmahal with steep hill
sides upon the stream of Ganges and fertile plains beyond presents captivating scenery.

Before the advent of the British, the tribal groups of Jharkhand had been leading a life of relative seclusion with limited contact with the rest of world. They had developed a certain level of competence in crafts such as weaving and pottery-making and metallurgy, and attained a certain level of competence in agriculture. They were organized on the lines of tribes; each tribe maintained its own socio-religious and cultural life, economic activity and identity, although a close parallel existed between the tribal and non-tribal communities.

In the pre-colonial period, powerful tribal kingdoms existed in which a majority of the tribals lived comfortable lives, at least until the colonial period, having control over large areas of land, having armies, an aristocracy, tax collection, and judicial system of one sort or another, and often enjoyed lucrative trading relations with merchants (such as Banjaras) and hindu cultivators in the plains.¹

These tribal communities depended on an oral tradition and did not leave behind written records. The colonial administration and its historians, with their dependence on written records and material remains as testaments to the bygone era of glory, often had a tendency to regard such communities as ‘backward’ and at a lower level of historical evolution. The colonial sense of racial and cultural superiority and hierarchy added to the stereotyping of the tribal communities and regions as primitive.²

As early as 1795, Sir John Shore spoke of the Santhals of Ramgarh in Birbhum district.³ Towards the close of the eighteenth century, the Santhals who were very expert in clearing forests and bringing them into cultivation began to migrate to the Rajmahal hills situated on the North-
Eastern side of Chotanagpur plateau. Two reasons can be given for this migration. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, many of the Chotanagpur forests had been cleared and there was a considerable influx of population from the infertile uplands which could not support them. Second, the introduction of the Permanent Settlement by the East India Company in 1793 resulted in a general extension of tillage and in creation of a new set of landlords based on the British feudal pattern. These landlords began hiring Santhal labourers to clear the virgin forests in the Rajmahal Hills’ area so as to bring more land under cultivation. They enticed them by promising high wages and rent-free farms.

The Santhals were divided into twelve clans. According to myth, Santhal clans originated as a means of avoiding incest. They began as seven, each of which was strictly monogamous but a little later, the number rose to twelve. After that, one of them, the Bedea clan, was lost and now there are only eleven. Each clan was occupational—the Kiskus being chiefs or rajas, the Hembroms courtiers or princes, the Murmus priests, the Sorens fighters or soldiers, the Tudus blacksmiths and drummers, the Marandis merchants and the Baskes traders. The remaining four—the Besra, Core, Pauria and Hansdak’ clans—were hunters and cultivators. But now all clans bear no relation to occupation and chiefs are never despots. The Santhals were also divided into a number of patriarchal clans called Paris. Each clan was further subdivided into sub-clans known as khuts. The Santhals lived in nuclear families. Their women possessed movable properties like money, goods, cattle etc. and could dispose of such resources as they pleased. They were incharge of family purse and worked with men in different economic undertakings.

The polity of the Santhal was very patriarchal. In each village, there was, first a Jagmanjhi, whose most important duty was apparently to look
after the morals of the boys and girls and if he was at all straight laced, they must often lead him a hard life of it; second a Paramanik, whose business it was to attend to the farming arrangements and to apportion the lands. He disallowed any monopoly of particularly fertile rice lands; all must take their share of good and bad. He had to look after the interests of new settlers and to provide for guests buying contributions for the purpose on the villages. All the offices were hereditary. When a new settlement was formed, the Office bearers were elected. There was a village priest who was called Naia. He had lands assigned to him. Out of the profits of his land, he had to feast the people twice in a year; at the festival of the Sarhul, held towards the end of March, when the sal tree blossomed, and at the Moimuri festival, held in the month of October, for a blessing on the crops.

At the Sohrai feast in December, the Jag-manjhi entertained the people, and the cattle were anointed with oil and daubed with vermillion and a share of the handia (rice beer), was given to each animal. Every third year in most houses, but in some, every fourth or fifth year, the head of the family, offered a goat to the Sun God- Sing Bonga for the prosperity of the family especially of the children, “that they may not be cut off by disease, or fall into sin.” The sacrifice was offered at sun-rice on any open space cleaned and purified for the occasion. The Sing Bonga or the Thakur was the supreme deity of the Santhals. To Thakur, the sacrifice was to secure a continuance of his mercies and for preservation. The other deities were resorted to when disease or misfortune visited the family. Ancestors were also worshipped. Their memory was honoured at the time of the Sohrai festival and offerings were made at home by each head of a family. In the meantime the Naia propitiated the local devils – ‘bhuts’. In many villages, the Santhals
joined with the Hindus in celebrating the Durga Puja, the great festival in honour of Devi, and the Holi in honour of Krishna. Their own priests took no part in the ceremonial observations at those Hindu feasts.

The Mundas, Oraons and Santhals lived in the southern part of the joint Bihar, now Jharkhand. This is an upland region, broken by occasional mountain chains. However, they experienced major social, economic and political changes before the British established control over the tribal belt of Bihar in 1770. There is however, little mention of changes in adivasi society before British rule in the secondary literature which is practically the only source of data on the pre-British period. The soil here is, at best, moderately fertile and population density in much lower than in the gangetic plains to the north of the tribal belt. This region constitutes the northeastern corner of the great plateau of central India.

The Santhals speak a language similar to that of the Mundas. Before British rule the Santhal probably lived in the lower plateau to the north and northeast of Ranchi. Even today there are many Santhals in this region, but before 1770 there were no Santhals in the modern Santhal Parganas district. According to their own myths, the Santhals originally lived in the golden age in a region called Chaichampa. Since that time, however, they have continually migrated, owing to the population growth or pressure from other adivasis. The Kherwar movement was virtually confined to the Santhals of the modern Santhal Parganas district. Santhal Parganas consists mostly of undulating upland. In the northeast corner of the Santhal Parganas – extending to the banks of the river Ganges – are to be found the Rajmahal hills, none of which are over two thousand feet above sea level.8

For centuries before British rule, the Santhals practiced settled plough agriculture. They grew lowland wet rice, which was their main source of
food (but upland dry rice was also an important agricultural product for the Santhals). Land was plentiful, and when a village became too large a group of adivasis would clear the forests and establish a new village. The forests were an important economic resource and they hunted and gathered food here, and used forest products for building materials, implements and fuel. They provided for their non-food economic needs themselves, or employed village servants to meet those needs. It seems that at least the Santhals on occasion raided the plains. The Santhals practiced very little horticulture or shifting cultivation. For all practical purposes, tribal villages were economically self-sufficient.

Santhals have always believed that anyone who renders land cultivable is entitled to cultivate it. His descendants are considered to have a permanent right to such land, and deceased members of the lineage are seen as participating in ownership of that land. Control over lands in a village lay with the village as a whole, and the lineages living in a village tended to enjoy equal access to land, in several ways. First, according to Dhan, landed families could trace their entire lineage respected others’ ancestral lands, and had their security of tenure guaranteed by religious sanctions. Second, waste lands were periodically redistributed by village officials to the needy. Third, donations of land to outsiders, or transfers of land between villagers, required the consent of the village as a whole. Fourth, in various ways a poor villager could receive hospitality from another villager, or borrow his labour or implements free of interest. Finally, a poor young man could gain additional lands by being adopted by another family. He worked and lived with this family and after some years could marry the house holder’s daughter. By his labour the young man was deemed to have paid the necessary bride-price, and his son earned a share of his father-in-law’s property equal to
those of his brothers-in-law.\textsuperscript{15} The egalitarian pattern of land-holding was equally prevalent among other tribes as Santhals for almost the entire period preceding British rule.

The investigation and punishment of serious crimes like witchcraft, and the resolution of disputes over land-use, marriage and so on, were handled initially by village officials. If they did not bring about a satisfactory resolution, the matter was referred to the village general body meeting at which anyone could speak. If the issue concerned more than one village, or if agreement could not be reached within it, an appeal could be made to village – circle officials and circle meetings. When a decision was reached the guilty party often had to perform certain ceremonies, and to host a feast for the entire village.\textsuperscript{16}

Every summer a large number of Santhals, from an area covering several village circles, gathered for a big hunt which was followed by an assembly for resolving all outstanding disputes. Anyone could take part in the assembly. It was presided over by a special priest appointed only for the assembly. The only other institution which traditionally brought together Santhals from a wide area was the ceremonial out casting (bitlaha) of someone convicted of breaking a rule of clan exogamy.\textsuperscript{17} The Santhal tribe was endogamous and divided into exogamous clans and sub–clans, each clan having its own myth of origin. Generally these clans and sub-clans had equal status, although within a village the founding lineage was somewhat superior to the others in prestige and perhaps wealth. But there did not seem to be any tendency for a particular lineage to be the founding one in most villages and there were virtually no other forms of inequality between lineages, clans or sub–clans.\textsuperscript{18} It was rare for the same clam to have founded all or most of the villages in a large area.
Certain essential services were performed for tribal villagers by non-adivasi (village servants). Many of these people settled in adivasi villages long before the eighteenth century and worked for whole villages, as well as for individuals, being paid by the village, in ways regulated by tribal customs. They knew the adivasi languages, and often joined in village ceremonies, frequently worshipping tribal deities in private, while at the same time employing Hindu religious specialists. They, however, did not intermarry or dine with the Santhals, Mundas or Oraons. Thus, the main form of inequality in adivasi society before British rule was that between lineages in a village. The founding family had most prestige in a tribal village, followed by other adivasi families that had settled later and finally by the village-servant groups. However, there was not much disparity between these groups since land tended to be distributed equally among adivasi lineages.

Thus, we can term all Santhal society before 1770, a segmental-egalitarian type of society using S.C. Sinha’s terminology. The Santhal society may be located very near the “tribal” end of S.C. Sinha’s tribal-hindu continuum. Some contact clearly existed between adivasis and hindus. For Santhals because of migration into predominantly Hindu region, Adivasis adopted some hindu religious beliefs and practices. However, Santhals were not Hindus before British rule because culturally speaking their religion consisted primarily of their worship of deities not borrowed from the Hindus and because their beliefs and rituals were not consciously derived from the Hindu tradition. Even less were the adivasis Hindu from the point of view of social structure, since they had no social intercourse with Hindus that involved ritual inferiority. Santhals did not have a compact tribal territory like Mundas and Oraons when British arrived. Some Santhals no doubt became
tenants during their centuries of migration, but their landlords had no legitimacy in Santhal eyes, and the Santhals often migrated precisely in order to avoid tenancy.

In 1770, a catastrophic famine struck Bengal and Bihar which also affected the present day Santhal Parganas district. As a consequence, much agricultural land was abandoned. British revenues dwindled and therefore the State encouraged various groups to bring land under cultivation. One of the groups was the Santhals, of whom none had entered the Santhal Parganas, though some were living in adjacent districts, especially Birbhum to the southeast where Santhals often worked as agricultural labourers, or paid nominal rents for the lands they reclaimed. As land once again came under plough it became scarcer, which led to rents being raised in accordance with the Permanent Settlement of 1793. This development led the Santhals to move again, and begin to clear the forests of what is new Santhal Praganas. By 1830, the Santhals had settled all over the district.20

Another tribe, the Paharias or hill people, are the indigenous inhabitants of the Rajmahal Hills which form the northeastern corner of Santhal Parganas. Unlike the Santhals, they speak a Dravidian language, and before British rule they were hunters and gatherers rather than settled agriculturists. However, the Paharias were similar to Santhals in having a highly egalitarian and isolated society. For centuries before 1770, the Paharias plundered the Hindus of the neighbouring plains, however some of them could be bribed by a Hindu to avoid his fields and raid his neighbour’s. A rough modus Vivendi usually prevailed between the Paharias and Hindus, but broke down in the mid – eighteenth century, especially after the famine of 1770 although the famine harmed the Paharias less than the plain’s people.
The Rajmahal Hills were of strategic importance to the British, since their main supply route between Calcutta and northern India lay between the narrow plain between the river Ganges and the hills. The British maintained control over the Paharias by exempting their headmen from the land revenue, and in return requiring Paharia headmen to restrain their own people from raiding the plains. Between 1826 and 1832, the pacified area was marked out by a line of pillars and named the Damin–i-koh (“Skirts of the hills”, this area corresponds closely to the Rajmahal Hills).  

When the Damin was formally established in 1833, the British permitted the Santhals to settle there, recognizing that while the Santhals were not Paharias they were not Hindus either. Although they settled in the Damin, the Santhals still had to pay the land revenue. But the Damin-i-koh was a government estate, and rents were less than half of those in the Ranchi district. During the next fifteen years the Santhals moved to this region in such great numbers that the population of the area increased by more than twentysix times. By 1851, there were about 83000 Santhals and about 33000 Paharias in the Damin–i-Koh.  

Captian Walter Sherwill who was employed in the government revenue survey of Bihar Province, noted that while in 1838, there were about forty Santhal villages in the area with a population of about 3000, by 1861 the Santhali population in the area had increased to 82,795 inhabiting 1,473 villages. The Damin – i – Koh soon became the centre of Santhal life. The Santhal Parganas had been the homeland of the Malers and the Mal – Paharias too. They raised quite substantial dry crops. They depended very much on the forest produce, each member of the family engaged himself somewhere in its economic activities. The Malers had no class-organization. They came from the major tribal group of Paharias. A
Maler village was a cluster of families which were ultimately related to a few byares (lineages). The lineage among the Malers was a corporate group and one of the important functional limits of their social life especially at the time of birth, marriage or death and any celebration. The lineage got its due importance and the family was the primary unit of society. Thus in the broader context, their design might be drawn like a member tribe of Paharias-tribe-territorial group-lineage-family-individual.

The Santhals and Malers were not having cordial relations among themselves. They were not on best of terms. The Malers were gradually pushed out of the villages which were all theirs until the Santhals came in and colonized the land. As Sherwill observed in 1851, “the hillmen have with a few exceptions, retired to the hills being either unwilling to be near the Santhals, whom the hillmen despise”.

Various attempts were made by the British Government to win over the Malers and to bring them under control. The authorities realised that their laws, however wise, were not applicable to all their subjects. The non-regulation system was thus started in 1796. In consideration of their uncivilized state, and entire ignorance of the language, laws and customs of the Hindus and Mohammadans, it was determined on the 14th of June 1782, that the inhabitants of the hills should not be subject to the ordinary tribunals; but that all crimes and misdemeanours should be tried by an assembly of their chiefs, under the superintendence of the Magistrate, who was ordered, in particular cases, to report the sentence passed by the assembly.

The Bhuiyas also inhabited the Santhal Parganas, Buchanan Hamilton found that some of them had made themselves thoroughly hinduized living according to hindu tenets and having Brahmans for priests while
some others were still practicing impurity, eating beef, pork, camels, horses. etc. that Hindus offered. Probably they were connected with the ‘Buis’ of Madras and Central Provinces. But there is no tradition regarding the order of creation, their own migrations or any defined ideas of future state. The British government did not consider them a peace loving people and their co-existence with the Santhals and Mal-Paharias had not been always quite so peaceful in the past. They were apprehended by the Bhagalpur police in large numbers for taking up arms and forming unlawful assemblies with intent of committing riot and plunder.

Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas region came under British rule in 1765 as a part of the grant of diwani rights over Bihar, Bengal and Orissa after the Battle of Buxar in 1764. After a series of military expeditions and with immense difficulty, tribal chiefs were compelled to pay fixed revenue to the East India Company. These tribal chiefs were by and large, treated as Zamindars made tributary by conquest. In 1789, it was pointed out that the Permanent Settlement should not be extended to the Chotanagpur area because revenue collection from this area were “more in the nature of a tribute than a revenue proportioned to the produce of the soil”. Nevertheless, in the late eighteenth century, the Permanent Settlement was gradually introduced in the region. This was the single most important factor that integrated the region into the British Indian Empire and the colonial mode of production. This integration was however, incomplete and was the main contributory factor that led to the pauperization of the population.

The first consequence of the introduction of a revenue settlement in this region was an increase in indebtedness and usury. The tribal peasants, who had been declared full proprietors of land, had the option of letting
their lands be auctioned off to recover overdue revenue or borrowing to pay the increasing revenue demand. The indebtedness of the tribal land owners worsened as their land was auctioned off to recover revenue arrears or outstanding debts. Thus, the Permanent Settlement tried to suddenly substitute contract for custom. The sum result of this policy was that indebtedness and the operation of usurious capital became one of the pivots around which the land market revolved, with the result that land started passing into the hands of moneylenders. With regard to adivasi peasantry, there was no room in the new provisions for the customary land rights of the original settlers and the village office-holders. These omissions in the new system gave the Zamindars increased power to evict peasants from their lands. Customary law was abruptly replaced by contract law.\(^{31}\)

The East India Company came to administer the region directly and the resultant increase in revenue demands started affecting all rungs in the revenue collection ladder. With the establishment of judicial, military and administrative structures, the alienation of peasants’ land and their exploitation continued unabated, albeit under the garb of legality. The “introduction of an alien legal and tax system and administrative measures that aimed at attaining an effective system of economic exploitation” accelerated the process of land alienation and exploitation of the peasantry.\(^{32}\)

The pressures that was generated by a modern and little understood administrative machinery and new land relations did not go unchallenged. The stirrings in tribal society look the form of revolts and disturbances in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the Great Kol insurrection (1831-32), the Santhal rebellion (1855) and the Birsa Munda revolt (1895-1900) are some of the most prominent examples. These
uprisings and revolts, led by the traditional elite, were always agrarian in origin but often acquired social and religious overtones. They often began with attacks on government property, such as police stations and public offices, and involved attacks on the European population. However, the brunt of the tribal revolts against the introduction of the colonial system in the region was borne by the exploiter classes of landlords and moneylenders who were seen as local representatives of the exploitative system. “No matter which one of their three main oppressors - Sarkar, Sahukar or Zamindar (government, moneylender or landlord) was the first to bear the initial brunt of a jacquerie in any particular instance, the peasants often showed a remark in any particular instance, the peasants often showed a remarkable propensity to extend their operations widely enough to include among their targets the local representatives of one or both of the other groups too”. The British administrative machinery always came down heavily on these revolts and insurrections and crushed them through sheer military superiority. The new system of revenue, judicial, and police administration went on to transform these tribal areas. “The pervasive effect of a money economy, the creation of a market in land, the emergence of a money lending landed sector and the development of chronic peasant indebtedness, were instrumental in producing fundamental transformations in agrarian economic relationships” in the region. A new class of revenue intermediaries was established who, along with the Christian missionaries, went further to integrate the tribal areas into a modern system of administration. These social, economic and political structures, that emerged according to the logic of British policy in the tribal areas, went to the create conditions that suited the colonial state as
well as the intermediaries but were against the interests of the tribal people of south Bihar (Jharkhand). The integration of the tribal region into the colonial mode of production resulted in a restructuring that simultaneously undermined as well as preserved the pre-colonial system, though in a distorted way. The tribal region became a subordinate part of the colonial state and the economy. Part of the dynamics was geared towards ensuring availability of a labour force at a subsistence level. The region emerged as the best places for recruitment of labour for various economic enterprises in colonial India and abroad. The outmigration of the tribals to the tea gardens of Assam, the fast developing coalfields of Bengal and Bihar, and iron-ore mines elsewhere in the Chotanagpur region was one of the fundamental effects of the alienation of land rights of the adivasi peasants and their pauperization. Apart from the economic impact, the new legal and economic system also had socio-cultural repercussions. The social profile too changed due to large number of outmigration from the region. It was reflected in fall in birth rates, which in turn changed the proportion of population that was of tribal origin. Besides, the military operations launched to contain tribal protest movements generated a culture of repression. Coercion; physical and institutional, was utilized, which resulted in “reproduction of indebtedness and extensive forced labour and the state also used native institutions and forms of social organization, putting them at the service of the colonial system.”

The creation of stereotypes of the tribes was an important feature of the process of integration of Jharkhand as a subordinate partner in the colonial enterprise. The tribal people were seen as a socially undifferentiated class that could provide labour and revenue. The process of integration was supposed to civilize them. The dikus versus adivasi
(outsiders versus tribal) contradiction was also reinforced. The series of legal measures had this inherent contradiction in it. This official reinforcement of the perceived conflictual relationship between the adivasi peasants and the diku landlords and moneylenders contributed to the identity (Santhali) formation here. The role of the Christian missionaries was another important factor influencing the socio-cultural dynamics of the region. The German Evangelicals, Lutherans, Anglicans and Roman Catholics had established missions in this region, which are important even in the present times. As a part of the larger colonial discourse, the Christian missions have been carrying the civilizing influence of the word of God and Western rationalist thought to these areas till today. These missions had an important impact as they introduced Western education and values to the population of this region. The result was what has been termed, the ‘deculturation’ of the tribes.\(^{38}\)

Ironically, some of these missionaries also subscribed to the adivasi versus diku dichotomy.

Moreover, the Christian missions had considerable prestige amongst the people due to their social work. As a result, they were able to persuade the population of the region to take legal recourse for the redressal of their grievances. This contributed to the legitimacy of the colonial rule by containing violent revolt in the region. The influence of Christian missionaries had yet another impact. Those who had come in contact with the missionaries gained some level of Western education and began to understand the dynamics of the colonial state better. Consequently, there were efforts to generate greater social consciousness and organize the peasantry against exploitative economic relations. This also contributed to the emergence of the Jharkhand movement later. Nationalist thought in India had emerged due to the exposure of the
Indian intelligentsia to Western education, and a comparable pattern can be discerned in this region as well.

The colonial state was still expansionist and the efforts at legitimization of the regime were not of primary importance. The earliest available instance of significant British activity in South Bihar was a militia force under Captain Camac in 1769 sent to subjugate the local chiefs and landlords and this step was taken to ensure regular payments of revenue by local tribal chiefs. From then until almost the middle of the next century, British activity in this area was limited to occasional military operations. These operations were aimed at subjugating recalcitrant local chiefs, tribal heads, landlords and revenue intermediaries, and to aid the collection on overdue and war booty. This policy was geared towards maximization of revenue without incurring the cost of local administration. The introduction of rent collection on contract by local chiefs, thkedars, ilakedars and landlords on behalf of the British brought about a fundamental change in the agrarian relations of Santhal Parganas.

It was only after the Kol insurrection of 1831-32 and the Santhal rebellion of 1855 that the contradictions in such a policy of maximization of rent from land through the intermediaries were noticed. Although the erstwhile officers would like us to believe that the local rent collectors were responsible for the numerous tribal revolts and insurrections in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries as reported for instance by the Report of Joint Commissioners Dent and Captain Wilkinson, dated 4 September 1833, regarding the disturbances is Barabhum and neighbouring Parganas during the Kol rebellion blamed the local ilakedars, zamindars and thkedars as primarily responsible for the disturbances. These intermediaries had increased the rent by 35 percent in just a few years. But the British administration cannot escape
responsibility since it was their efforts at maximization of revenue that passed down the line until if became unbearable for the tribal peasants of Jharkhand.

The tribal revolts of the mid-nineteenth century signified that the policy of minimum administration with maximum rent collection had outlived its utility. If, the colonial rule was to benefit from this mineral rich region, the use of force was not sufficient. The colonial discourse had to now legitimize British interventions. The hegemonic discourse of British rule was already emerging in rest of India, in shape of projects of legislation and education. The Santhal Paraganas was also to become a part of the larger colonial discourse after the rebellion by the tribes had been crushed by sheer military superiority. It was at this point of time that the colonial discourse on tribal areas was articulated in a nascent form.

The administration in the Damin was in the hands of a superintendent - Mr. Pontet between 1837 to 1855 was active in keeping the rent levels down, consulting Santhal village-circle officials, and travelling round the area. Pontet also built many roads, and tried unsuccessfully to encourage cash crops. Despite his efforts, Dikus moved in Damin-i-koh. Santhals fell into the debt trap. Many indebted Santhals could not pay debt and hence land – alienation followed. Many indebted Santhals became bonded servants, debt bondage continued in the Santhal Parganas even after the original debtor’s death. Unfortunately, we have little information of the non – Damin portion of the district before 1855.

The landlords other than the paternalistic traditional landlords treated their tenants, including the recently-arrived Santhals with increasing harshness. Administrative functions were to some extent delegated in the Damin-i-koh toPontet. However, all powers outside the Damin were
assigned to officials based outside the Santhal Parganas. The most important officials were the Magistrate of Bhagalpur, Birbhum and Murshidabad districts. Both inside and outside the Damin, lower government officials behaved harshly. They harassed the Santhals, levied illegal taxes and aided moneylenders. Many dikus gained power over Santhal villages’ internal affairs, and some even acquired formal authority; especially outside the Damin-i-Koh.41

Another possible source of inter-tribal tension was the relationship between the Santhals and the Paharias in the Santhal Parganas district. The Paharias had settled in the district many centuries before the Santhals and spoke a language unrelated to Santhali (but related to Oraon). The Paharias were distinct from the Santhals in being traditionally hunters and gatherers, but in the late nineteenth century, many of them turned to settled agriculture. Like the Santhals, the Paharias received special protection from the British, but government efforts to protect Paharias’ forest rights or guarantee their land tenures met with little success. Paharias emigrated as seasonal labourers to the Bengal and the tea plantations.42 Even in the Damin where most Paharias lived, they were outnumbered by the Santhals.

As the Paharias became dependent on settled agriculture, they increasingly competed with the Santhals for scarce economic resources. It is true that the two tribes cooperated in concealing from the authorities cases where Santhals illegally rented land from Paharias. However, they complained on occasion to local officials about the Santhals’ encroachments. They rarely took part in the Kherwar movement.

Still, there is no evidence of violent conflict between the Santhals and the Paharias. The latter’s ability to act in concert was no doubt reduced by rivalries between the Sauria and the Mal Paharias (the former lived more
towards the north were less hinduized and were more often hunters and gatherers). The Paharias were given preference over the Santhals when the government tried to restrict access to forests of the Damin. A research study performed in the 1960s (Prasad 1972) found economic, social and political conflicts between the Santhals and the Paharias occurred, but were nearly always managed in institutionalized ways within village authority structures. The cleavages were probably stronger in the twentieth century than in the nineteenth century, so these data support our claim that Paharia-Santhal conflicts were not important conditions of the Kherwar movement.

We may conjecture that from their contacts with the Paharias, the Santhals became aware that there existed in the Santhal Parganas, a group still poorer and less powerful than themselves, which they could exploit. But if this hypothesis is true, it is of limited significance. Since most of the Paharias lived in the Damin–i-Koh, the hypothesis hardly applies to the two-thirds of the district’s Santhals who lived outside the Damin. Finally, mention should be made of the tribes in Santhal Parganas other than Santhals who were small numerically, and hunters and gatherers and they played negligible part in the Santhal movements. Therefore, minor tribes do not receive much attention in this study.

The advent of the colonial rule brought the Santhals to the Mahajans and Banias. Many of them were undoubtedly greedy and foul makers, but it would be wrong to consider this as being only the outcome of perfidious human nature. It was vagaries of the colonial market economy to which the economy of the tribals was now being linked up that made the unscrupulous operations of the Mahajans and the Banias inevitable.
The Santhals had been plunged into the world economy all on a sudden. 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 a historical stage in less than 50 years for which European tribes had been given centuries of time. However, its impetus came 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 the market economy “engulfed” them. The Santhal 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 all due to the colonial rule and its 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 Santhal’s capacity to retain their identity was reduced by their loss of autonomy, economic exploitation and growing dependence on the middlemen. Due to a variety of reasons Santhals outlived their patience and rebelled in July 1855. The revolt was violent and also full of cruel and inhuman acts which we shall deal in subsequent chapters. The martial law had to be promulgated and army was called to suppress the Revolt. By December 1855, the Revolt gradually withered out but it left many scars. The British suppressed the revolt mercilessly.
REFERENCES:


15. Ibid, p. 78.
27. Ibid, p. 143.


32. Ibid, p.68.


35. Devalle, op.cit. p.70.


40. Sherwill, W., op.cit. p. 604.


