CHAPTER 2
THE SANTHAL HOOL: ORIGIN, IDEOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION

The Santhals are credited to being the largest homogeneous tribe in India.\(^1\) One is inclined to believe after an examination of the census of India that the Gonds and the Bhils are the largest tribes of India. However, both of them, the Gonds and the Bhils are very heterogeneous in nature. Sir John Shore was the first to mention them as the “Saontars” in an article published in the Asiatic Researches of 1795. He described them as a rude un-lettered tribe.\(^2\) There are a number of theories about the origin of the Santhals. Originally a wandering aboriginal tribe, during the pre-colonial period it settled in Chotanagpur Plateau and the neighbouring districts of Midnapur and Singhbhum. They began to move to the north towards the close of the 18\(^{th}\) century and perhaps Santhals were not present in Birbhum when Sir John Shore prepared his paper.\(^3\) Probably they had been brought to the district by the Zamindars for the purpose of clearing their estates of jungle and wild beasts after 1795, the year in which the single Zamindari of Birbhum was progressively being split up into numerous estates and put to rack renting.\(^4\)

The Santhals seem to have settled first in Santhal Parganas between 1790 and 1810, having made their way northwards from Birbhum. There was a large scale migration of Santhals in this region towards the end of the 18\(^{th}\) century. Many of the Chotanagpur jungles had been cleared and there was a considerable influx of population from infertile upland that could not support them, secondly as a result of introduction of the permanent Zamindari Settlement by East India Company in 1793, a new set of landlords were created who began hiring Santhal labourers to clear the virgin forest in the Rajmahal hill area that had been the home land of the Malers and the Malpaharias; the notorious robbers and cattle lifters.
Various efforts were made by the British Government to win over these tribes and bring them under control. The system of Cleeveland is well known. In 1833, the Government created Damin-i-Koh meaning the skirts of the hills by demarcating the area surrounding the Rajmahal hills, including portions of Dumka, Godda, Pakur and Rajmahal subdivisons. The Santhals progressively settled in Damin-i-Koh early in 19th Century. Gradually the influx of immigrants from Cuttuck, Manbhum, Chotanagpur, Hazaribag, Palamu and Rewa increased their numbers. British Government encouraged the settlement of Santhals in Damin-i-Koh. The Superintendent of Damin-i-Koh, Mr. Pontet took upon himself to “protect the industrious race of the new settlers called Santhals and to encourage more settlers for clearing the immense forest” of Damin-i-Koh. Mr. Dunbar, the Collector of Bhagalpur lucidly expressed the objective of the Government in encouraging the Santhals to settle in Damin-i-Koh. The letter of Dunbar conjectures another interesting reason behind the encouragement given to the Santhals to pour into Damin-i-Koh was the ‘pious’ wish of converting them to Christianity. The population of the Santhals in this area gradually increased by more than 30% as they settled in great numbers here. According to Captain Walter S. Sherwill who toured through the districts of Murshidabad, Birbhum and Rajmahal hills in 1851, there were no less than 83,265 Santhals in the Damin-i-Koh area alone. However, the good days of the Santhals of Damin-i-Koh were short lived. They were initially happy, content and somewhat “prosperous in Damin-i-Koh before the Santhal Hool.” The Santhals soon fell into the clutches of the Mahajans and landgrabbers as the situation began to deteriorate. E. G. Man, traced the origin of the Santhal rebellion as early as early as 1830s, which is not totally unfounded as corroborated by the report of J. Pontet in 1839.
which establishes that the lands cultivated by the Santhals were getting transferred to the people from the plains with the active connivance of the local Amins and Naib Suzewals.\textsuperscript{12} By the Regulation-I of 1827 section III, the Superintendent of Damin-i-Koh was debarred from investigating into the cases between the Santhals and the Mahajans whereas Munsifs were empowered to do this. Consequently, the mahajans in such cases began to defraud the ignorant Santhals in the Munsif’s court. Pontet’s protest went unheard as the Santhals were being evicted from their land. In 9 out of 10 cases, Santhal lands were attached as they did not know of a suit instituted against them.\textsuperscript{13} The Bengalee traders and Zamindars thus, encroached upon the Santhal lands of Damin-i-Koh.\textsuperscript{14}

Scholars like K. K. Datta have dwelt upon the origins of the Santhal rebellion brilliantly.\textsuperscript{15} The grasping and rapacious spirit that influenced the mahajans in their transactions with the Santhals was the first and foremost cause of the rebellion. As a matter of fact the baniyas and mahajans were the chief culprits. The thriftless and improvident Santhals were easily indebted, for which exorbitant interest was charged once he contracted a debt and had little chance of escape thereafter. The mahajans not only took all the agricultural produce but also swept off his debtor’s cattle and forced the Santhals and their family members to work as bonded labourers.\textsuperscript{16} The non-proximity to the courts, far off at Deoghar and Bhagalpur made their fight with the mahajans in the courts almost impossible. The proceedings of courts were conducted by corrupt Amlas and peons. The executive was represented by Naib Suzawals and Darogas, who were also corrupt and oppressive. The police was also hand in glove with the mahajans, who not only exploited the Santhals but also manhandled and terrorised them. Rev. C. N. Koomar refers to two
notorious mahajans of Damin-i-Koh near Amrapara namely Kenaram Bhagat and Becharam Bhagat, who committed all kinds of atrocities on the Santhals.\textsuperscript{17}

The Santhals were further troubled by the corrupt administration. The administration in the area of Damin-i-Koh abounded in abuses and malpractices.\textsuperscript{18} For revenue administration the Damin-i-Koh was under the superintendent who had enormous influence and authority. However, actual revenue work was done by four Naibs – Suzawals, who were notoriously oppressive. In making illicit personal gains, the Calcutta review of 1856 states – “where authorised to receive some six rupees on behalf of the Sircar (Government), they will lay some six other rupees for their private benefit: or where a rent of 4 annas for a plot was fixed in the settlement, they take a rupee more for a sapling bamboo clump, or a solitary fruit tree growing thereon.”\textsuperscript{19} There was only one magistrate at Deoghar and the only European officer to visit Damin-i-Koh was the superintendent Mr. Pontet. Mr. Pontet was kind towards the Santhals and Santhals had great respect for Mr. Pontet,\textsuperscript{20} but he had no criminal and civil jurisdiction. Santhals had to go to the courts at Deoghar and Bhagalpur for the trial of civil and criminal cases which was a herculean task not merely because of the inconveniences of the distant journey but also because of the various corrupt practices of the amlas, mukhtars and peons attached to the courts. Thus, while a Santhal found justice so far off and so terribly difficult to access in the shape of magistrate, he found justice nearer home only to his bane in the shape of the Darogas and Thana police; the authorized agents of the district Magistrate.\textsuperscript{21}

The economic condition of the Santhals was thriftless, improvident and not very good. They borrowed indiscriminately form the neighbouring traders and mahajans and thus plunged themselves into a vicious circle of
extortions and sufferings from which they could never escape during their lifetime. These mahajans were mostly the non-santhal population of the plains who had been there since long, as is clear from the Bhagalpur report of Buchanan. There was a contemporary new influx from the districts of Birbhum and Burdwan. The up-country merchants coming from Sahabad, Chapra, Arrah and other places had also settled here. Usually, they lent money, paddy, rice or other goods to the Santhals and became arbiters of their fate and held in hand their destiny throughout their life. During the harvest season, the debtors were required to pay major part of the crops gathered by them to their creditors. As Babu Digambar Chakravarty of Pakur writes- “In this way the produce of the lands was always drained off, the poor always remaining steeped in hopelessly heavy debts and no better than the slaves of their creditors throughout their life.”

The Calcutta review of 1860 mentions that the Santhals “saw his crops, his cattles even himself and family appropriated for a debt which ten times paid remained an incubus upon him still.” They were forced by the mahajans to work on their fields and in their houses without compensatory wages. Even their women along with the children were coerced to work as servants and as maids. The debtor had to promise to work out his debt by personal service and payment of exorbitant rate of interest through the execution of Bonds that was detrimental to the Santhals. The Santhal was thus converted into a ‘Kamiya’; the bonded servant of his creditor. William Le Fleming Robinson (I.C.S.) in 1858, secured its abolition in Santhal Parganas. He has graphically described the evil effects of this exploitative system that may easily be understood when he cites that a Santhal who had borrowed Rs. 25 had to work his lifetime for its repayment and his son too had to work his lifetime for the
same purpose. However, his grandson was released by Mr. Robinson.

The discontent among the Santhals under ‘Kamiotee’ (some sort of Jajmani system) system got accentuated due to the higher wages received by free labourers who worked on the railways that was under construction then, and returned with their savings to deck out their women in simple finery and feast their fellow villagers.

The Santhals did not have security even in the possession of those lands that they had made fit for habitation and cultivation by clearing and cutting the forest. The non-Santhal diku settlers gradually acquired more and more land from the Santhals by executing mortgages from them in return for loans. This has been corroborated by Mr. W. G. Taylor, Assistant Commissioner at Sreekund (near Tinpahar) when he wrote to Mr. A. R. Thompson, Deputy Commissioner at Dumka on 16th February 1856 that the Zamindars of Sultanabad (Maheshpur) and Amber (Pakur) were disliked by the Santhals because they had granted leases of Santhal villages to the non-santhals. A contemporary writer graphically described the situation as follows:

“Zamindars or more properly speaking Zamindari retainers, as gomasta, Surbarkar, peons and other Mahajans and their Mustagirs or agents, the police, the revenue and court amlas have exercised a combined system of extortions, oppressive exactions, forcible dispossession of property, abuse and personal violence had a variety of petty tyrannies upon the timid and yielding Santhals, usurious interest on loans of money ranging from 50 to 500 percent, false measures at the haat and market, willful and uncharitable trespass by the rich by means of their unto the red cattle, tattoos,
ponies and even elephants on the growing crops of the poorer race; and such like illegalities have been prevalent. Even a demand by individuals from the Santhals of security for good conduct is a thing not unknown embarrassing pledges for debt also formed another mode of oppression.”

As a recent scholar has opined that the first revolt of the Santhals started against the money lenders. In his first manifesto, a notice issued to the resident of Rajmahal, the Santhal leader Sidho thus denounced the money lenders- “the Mahajans have committed heramis (treachery), Pap (sinful crimes) and all have acted unjustly.”

The Santhals hatred and detestation of the Mahajans and been stated to be at the root of the trouble. This was proved by the murder of all of them who fell in their hands during the rebellion.

The revolt was also against the Zamindars, the local administration and a section of European community, particularly those connected with the construction of the railways. The main cause of Santhal animosity and hatred towards the Zamindars and the Government was the demand and subsequent payment of rent. In fact, such was their abhorrence of rent that they did not mind deserting settled cultivation for search of new lands where they were not required to pay any rent. The Santhals particularly disliked the idea of paying rent assessed on the basis of a defined area which resulted in the question of rent increase with each phase of reclamation.

Rightly put by the Santhal leader Sidho, the proper basis of assessment of rent should have been the number of bullock plough or buffalo plough instead of on the basis of a defined area. According to Chotrae Deshmanjhi another participant in the Hool, Sidho propagated the theory that Santhals will pay rent at the rate 8
annas per buffalo plough and 4 annas per bullock plough and if the
government did not accept this demand, the Santhals should rebel. Sidho’s idea was perfectly consistent with the conditions of the Santhal mode of cultivation, a characteristic feature of which was the fallowing of a large area for a certain length of time and consequent reclamation of new lands till the fallow land recovered its fertility. An assessment of rent on the basis of a defined area ignored this vital condition of Santhal agriculture and necessarily caused much hardship to the Santhals. The Santhals had grievances against the Indigo planters too, who had established some kothis in Damin-i-Koh and coerced the Santhals into cultivating indigo. In 1855, on the eve of the rebellion, Santhals even issued pamphlets in Santhali language and devnagari script against the planters on July 25, 1855 and also looted the kothis of some planters during the rebellion.

As a result of the facts mentioned above, Santhals had realized that the establishment of a Santhal Raj was the only panacea for all its ills. According to Oldham, the fundamental idea guiding the rebellion was the establishment of a Santhal realm and kingdom. Their can be traced some link to this idea and the price rise then as the idea seems to have gained ground at a time when there was an abnormal rise in prices that added tremendously to the resentment of the Santhals then.

Mr. Pontet vividly described two other factors in his letter that added fuel to the fire on the eve of the rebellion of 1855. First was the practice of cattle lifting by mahajan’s men and the second was misbehaviour with the Santhal women. When the mahajan obtained decree for his loan against a santhal, he practically got hold of everything he possessed. Pontet has cited an example: A mahajan got a decree of getting Rs. 21, 11 annas and 10 paise from a Santhal who had borrowed Rs. 24 and 4
annas from him. The Santhal paid in paddy on account of Rs. 11/- and then removed himself to another part of Damin. The mahajan instituted a case in the nearest court for the balance of Rs. 13 and 4 annas and obtained a decree ex-parte. After obtaining the fresh decree he sent two men to point out the defendant’s property. Instead of doing so, they attached 12 cows and 5 pairs of bullocks worth at least Rs. 100/-. The cattle lifting was indiscriminate and this was as great a loss to the Santhalas as that of land. Without the bullocks or buffaloes he could do nothing on his land. Mr. Ashley Eden, the first Deputy Commissioner of Santhal Parganas categorically pointed out in his letter to the Commissioner Stainforth that this system of illegal cattle lifting was the cause of the Insurrection. These were all plough cattle and no notice was even served before the attachment of the cattle. The cattle were at once driven back and sold most frequently by people who had nothing to do with the land.

The Santhals utterly exasperated were on the verge of revolt as not only their means of subsistence was being snatched from all corners, but chastity of their women had also become an easy prey at the hands of the Darogas and pyadas of thanas, which they were unable to bear. This was too much for them. Pontet reported such cases in his letter. Though such things had not become a general practice, the condition was pretty apaulling and the Santhals tolerance limits were tested. On the slightest opportunity and pretext, the policemen as well as the mahajan’s men misbehaved with the Santhal women and they had to bear the indignity silently.

Such an iniquitous socio-economic system as prevailed in the Damin-i-Koh for several years contained within it the seeds of the rebellion which
burst forth on an opportune moment. This was what exactly happened in 1855-57, when the Hool came as a last resort.

The grievance of the Santhals had for some time produced a spirit of unrest. The Santhals thought of getting rid of Mahajans and began to organise themselves against them. Messages with sal leaves were sent to different villages and the younger people started collecting arms, bows and arrows. In 1854, number of mahajan’s houses were attacked at night and that were officially treated as dacoities. The Santhals were caught, tried and convicted. They protested bitterly on the attitude of the government which did not even think it proper to rebuke the oppressors. The whole region of Damin-i-Koh was in a state of unrest and turmoil. Bands of Santhal youths were moving from village to village asking the people to do something in order to improve their conditions. The Santhals began to gather from the district of Manbhum, Birbhum and Hazaribagh and started thinking in terms of getting rid of mahajans, policemen, zamindars and other exploiters by killing them.

During the winters of 1855, the Santhals appeared to be in a state of flux. They had harvested an excellent crop and their influx in the capital had enhanced the local price of agricultural produce. However, the high prices for their grains did not ensure their prosperity. The ‘truth was’ as Mr. Hunter narrated that the rich Santhals were determined to be ‘no longer dupes’ of the merchants and money-lenders who intercepted these high prices, the poor agriculturists were determined to be no longer their serfs and the daily labourers were determined to be no longer their slaves.

To a people in this frame of mind leaders are seldom wanting, two brothers Sidho and Kanhu, inhabitants of village Bhagnadih (near Berhait) who were the sons of Choona Burha stood forth as deliverers
of their countrymen, claimed a divine mission and produced heaven-sent tokens as their credentials. The news spread that the God or Thakur (Marang Buru of the Santhals) had appeared before the four brothers namely Sidho, Kanhu, Chand and Bhairab for seven successive days. At first as a cloud in the sky, next as a flame of fire, then a woman with ghoonghat, fourth time as a shadow in the sun, fifth time as a mountain growing out of the earth and then as a Sal tree in a field and lastly as an ordinary Santhal of white complexion. The God delivered a sacred book to the two brothers and the sky poured down slips of paper which were secretly spread throughout the whole Santhal country. A shrine was also erected at Bhagnadih consisting of a mound of mud crowned by a cart wheel at which the villagers were instructed to present offerings of grains and milk and to sacrifice kids and buffalos. Here, the worshippers were shown the slips of paper and the book. The news of miracle spread far and wide and messengers were sent to all the manjhis of the Damin-i-Koh, bearing a branch of the Sal tree that was a signal to the people to congregate.

On the appointed day, the 30th June of 1855 at full moon, 10,000 Santhals are said to have met at Bhagnadih, where the Thakur’s (their God) order to them were announced. The Santhals had gathered from Birbhum, Bankura, Chotanagpur and Hazaribagh. Letters were said to have been written addressed to the Government and the authorities at Bhagalpur and Birbhum, to some police Darogas, zamindars and others disclaiming any intention of opposing the Government in which they declared that their new God had directed them to collect and pay revenue to the state at rate of two annas on every buffalo-plough, one anna on each bullock-plough and half an anna on each cow-plough per annum, the rate of interest was to be one pice per rupee yearly. However,
Chotrae Desmanjhi, a contemporary eye-witness to the Hool tells us that Sidho and Kanhu had propagated the theory that they would pay 8 annas per annum on each buffalo-plough and 4 annas per annum on each bullock-plough and if the Government did not accept their demand, they would rebel and slaughter all the dikus.\textsuperscript{51} It is clear that the Santhals did not like the mode of assessment of revenue based on the area of cultivation. Therefore, the statement of Mc. Pherson and Pontet is not appropriate that the Santhals of Damin-i-Koh were satisfied with revenue arrangements of the British and rebelled only against the exploitation of the mahajans.\textsuperscript{52}

It appears that Sidho and Kanhu proclaimed themselves as lord of the country and declared them as Subah-Thakur and appointed Naibs, Darogas and other sub-ordinate officers.\textsuperscript{53} Mr. Hunter states that the bodyguards of the leader alone amounted to thirty thousand men and the expedition started on 7\textsuperscript{th} July, 1855. Sidho and Kanhu were camping at the bank of Morel river.\textsuperscript{54} The Hool broke out due to an immediate cause that has not been narrated by the writers of the Gazetteers or Mr. W. W. Hunter. The immediate cause has been narrated in some detail by Rev. C. H. Koomar, who has prepared his story on the basis of Santhal legends and folktales as well as other documentary evidence. The story goes as follows:

There were two wealthy and wicked mahajans at Amrapara namely kenaram Bhagat and Becharam Bhagat who were brothers. They advanced loans to the Santhals and in the name of recovering the loans they used to seize the property and cattle of the Santhals with the connivance of Daroga Maheshlal Datta. Maheshlal Dutta had been posted at thana
Dighee since 1835. He always helped the mahajans. Kenaram Bhagat and the Daroga were fast friends and Kenaram Bhagat got Garbhu Manjhi of Amgachi village arrested by the police. Again Kenaram Bhagat had some grievances with Harma Deshmanjhi of village Pipra. One day, early in the morning, Kenaram Bhagat lifted all the buffaloes of Harma Deshmanjhi with the help of his musclemen. When Harma Deshmanjhi got the news, he went to the jungle where his buffaloes were grazing. The Pahalwans and musclemen of Kenaram Bhagat also caught hold of Harma Deshmanjhi and produced him before the Daroga at Amgachi. Harma was kept in chains by the Daroga. When the father of Harma, Champai went with Lakhan Paranik to release Deshmanjhi, they were also arrested. Thus, these four prisoners namely Garbhu Manjhi, Harma Deshmanjhi, Champai and Lakhan Paranik were dispatched to Bhaglpur for trial.

The Daroga Maheshlal Dutta and the four prisoners were scheduled to stay at night in the house of the nephew of Keneram Bhagat namely; Mahendra Bhagat at Berhait. The wife of Harma informed the villagers of the incident. The villagers informed Sam Pargana of Padarkola and thus the Santhals were uneasy and were thinking of the release of these innocent prisoners. Sam Pargana knew that Subah Thakur Sidho and Kanhu were camping near Berthit.
Therefore, he informed Sidho and Kanhu camping at Panchkathia on the bank of Morel river in the night of 6\textsuperscript{th} July, 1855. The route to Bhagalpur passed through Panchkathia and Daroga was to cross the place early in the morning. When Sidho and Kanhu got this news, they collected thousands of Santhals with bows and arrows, lathis, axes and other weapons.\footnote{55}

When Daroga was informed of the gathering of Santhals, he took it lightly and proceeded towards Panchkathia with a following of Barkandazes and when he met the Santhals of Panchkathia, they refused to disperse.\footnote{56} Sidho and Kanhu demanded the release of four prisoners.\footnote{57} They also demanded that a tax of Rs. 5/- be levied on each Bengali family in the neighbourhood. The Daroga did not accept their demands and ordered the arrest of four brothers. At this, the Santhals fell him with their battle-axes and freed all four prisoners. Garbhu manjhi slaughtered Kenaram Bhagat\footnote{58} with a sword and began to cry ‘Hool-Hool’. He also slit the head of Daroga,\footnote{59} Maheshlal Datta and with this murder the Santhals set out on the war trail.

The statement of Rev. C. H. Koomar is corroborated by a letter from the Commissioner of Bhagalpur to the Secretary of Government of Bengal dated 9\textsuperscript{th} July 1855. The letter states that the thanedar and a mahajan as well as the Barkandazes and some choukidars had been killed by the insurgents.\footnote{60} This intelligence input was provided by a Brahmin Daroga
who had escaped wounded and two of the Daroga’s own servants who were the eye witnesses of the incident.\textsuperscript{61}

The revolt of the Santhals took a violent turn as there were no troops at hand to deal with the insurgents except the Bhagalpur Hill Rangers. However, the hillmen corps was defeated by the Santhals near Peyalapur (Colgong) with the loss of their Sergeant Major and 25 men. The rebel then got out of hand and butchered many of the mahajans.\textsuperscript{62} The British Government reinforced the Hill Rangers by European troops and native infantry soon, and by August 1855, they were able to clear the country on the Bhagalpur side of the insurgents in a pitched battle at Sangrampur.\textsuperscript{63} Rajmahal, on the East of the hills, was saved by the exactions of Mr. Vigors; the Railway Engineer, who had fortified his residence there. On the Murshidabad side, Mr. Toogood, Magistrate of the district brought up troops from Barhampur and inflicted signal defeat upon the Santhals at Maheshpur Raj on 15\textsuperscript{th} July, 1855.\textsuperscript{64} Sidho, Kanhu and Bhairab were wounded in this encounter. Chand and Kanhu met with another defeat at Raghunathpur. On 24\textsuperscript{th} of July, the troops took Berhait, the Santhal capital while Sidho was treacherously handed over to the Bhagalpur troops by some of the followers.\textsuperscript{65}

However, the revolt of the Santhals could not be suppressed. Approximately, thirty thousand insurgents took refuge in the jungles from where it was difficult to expel them during the rains.\textsuperscript{66} The insurgence activities of the Santhals continued and ultimately martial law had to be proclaimed on 10\textsuperscript{th} of November, 1855. The whole region was then swept by 8,000 troops under the command of Major General LLyod and Brigadier General Bird.\textsuperscript{67} They ruthlessly crushed the rebellion and by the end of the year 1855, the rebellion was officially declared to have
been ended and the Martial Law was suspended on the 3rd of January, 1856.  

The Santhals did show certain chivalry while fighting desperately against the troops equipped with modern weapons of warfare. The general nature of the struggle has been vividly described by Major Jervis, “It was not war; they did not understand yielding. As long as their national drums beat, the whole party would stand and allow themselves to be shot down. Their arrows often killed our men and we had to fire on them as long as they stood. When their drums ceased, they would move for a quarter of a mile then their drums began again and they calmly stood till we came up and poured a few volleys into them. There was not a sepoy in the war who did not feel ashamed of himself.”

The rebellion was also marked by scenes of inhuman cruelty. For example; slow roasting of men, torture of children and raping the women etc. Villages were burnt, property pillaged and the country devastated. The most brutal outrages were committed on the mahajans, who were regarded as real enemies by the Santhals. When a mahajan fell into their hands, they first cut off his feet with their pharsas or battle-axes with the taunt that this was four annas in the rupee, then cut off his legs at the thigh to make up eight annas and then cut him into two at his waist to make up twelve annas and finally took off his head to complete the sixteen annas shouting ‘Pharkati’ i.e. a full quittance.

Although, the revolt of Santhals continued in the districts of Birbhum, Bankura and Midnapur in 1857, Santhal Parganas became quiet by January 1856 and martial law was lifted but. However, the recorded evidence shows that in 1857, a second rising of the Santhals took place in parts of the Jungle Mahal. The second wave of the rebellion was the result of Santhal prisoners’ flight from Dumka prison who took shelter in
adjacent areas. Moreover, the sending of Santhal prisoners who were participants in the Hool of Damin-i-Koh excited the local Santhals. In the Purulia area; the Rani of Raipur reported the rising of the Santhals. The Santhals began large scale plundering in the north-east of Bagri Pargana placed between Goaltore and south-west frontier agency. In Midnapur, Garbata and adjacent areas there was a serious Santhal rising. The Raja of Chaibasa sent an urgent message for troops. Army officers were recalled from Bishnupur to proceed towards Midnapur in order to quell the disturbances in Garbata. The second wave of rebellion in the erstwhile Jungle Mahals was suppressed with ease as there was lack of able leadership like Sidho and Kanhu in these areas. The patriotic zeal of the Santhals found expression in their folk songs but no amount of the patriotic spirit and zeal could have saved them from disaster. The Santhals of Jungle Mahals regarded the movement in the Damin as their own, which is proved beyond doubt by the fact that the Santhals of this area venerated for a long period the songs and stories of the Santhal rebellion. The Santhal insurrection was not just the revolt of the Santhals as the British historiographers and administrators have tried to portray, the revolt demonstrated the solidarity of the Santhals with other lower castes like Bairagi, Bowrie, Boya, carpenter, Dhanger, Dom, Goala, Harhi, Jolha, Kalwar, Kumhar, Lohar, Momins, Mahulis and Teli. They cooperated with the Santhals and were exempted from their wrath and vengeance. Even a goala (a caste of milk men), Bechu Rout was appointed as the Subah of Pargana Handwe by Kanhu. The Santhal Rebellion, both in the Damin and Jungle Mahal failed to attain its desired goal and objective but was successful in drawing for the first time the attention of British authority to the untold sufferings of Santhals against the worst possible feudal oppression and exploitation.
Though the revolt failed to bring about any immediate relief to them for which it was fought, it certainly served as an inspiration for the future movements of the Santhals against the zamindars and the British and a lesson as well. As a result we do witness launch of a mass resistance movement by the Santhals in 1861 against the rise of rent in Handwe Pargana of Dumka subdivision that was successful to some extent.  

Important administrative changes took place in the Damin-i-Koh as a result of Hool. The most important effect of the Santhal Rebellion was the formation of the district of Santhal Parganas by the Act XXXVII of 1855. The rebellion was followed by a detailed enquiry into the grievances of Santhals and the subsequent passing of the Act XXXVII of 1855 which removed the operation of general laws and regulations in “the district called Damin-i-Koh and other districts which are inhabited principally by the uncivilized race of people called Sonthals.”

The district spanned 5470 square miles carved out from Bhagalpur and Birbhum with headquarters at Dumka was a welcome change. The district was placed under a Deputy Commissioner and four Assistant Commissioners who were given jurisdiction in civil and criminal cases. The regular police was abolished and the duty of keeping peace and arresting criminals was assigned to the villagers themselves; the headman of each village was to be held responsible. The Santhal headman and the parganaits were given due weightage and prestige. A non-regulation administration was introduced; the main feature being direct communication between the people and their rulers. The three chief principles were:

1. To have no intermediary between the Santhals and the Assistant Commissioner.
(2) To have complaint made verbally without a written petition or the presence of Amla.

(3) To have all criminal works carried on with the help of the Santhals themselves, who were to bring in the accused with the witnesses to the courts.

However, the revolt of 1855 did not give the Santhals any economic relief. The Kamiotee\textsuperscript{85} system (forced labour) and zamindari oppression continued unabated. The Deputy Commissioner of Santhal Parganas acknowledged in 1855, the existence of the Kamiotee system throughout Santhal Parganas.\textsuperscript{86} Another report reflects that the Santhal villages had been leased out to Bengalees who were committing different acts of oppression and extortions.\textsuperscript{87} It is heart rending to realize that the alienation of tribal land began as a systematic process from the 1860s. This was especially so between 1863 and 1872; the period when the district had relapsed into the regulation system. The district was then again put back on the non-regulation footing in 1872.\textsuperscript{88} During this period, the only tangible gain was the abolition of Kamiotee system in 1860 by the Deputy Commissioner Sir William Robinson.\textsuperscript{89} However, the alienation of tribal lands continued unabated. Mr. M. C. Mc Alpin in his report of 1909 observed that the alienation of tribal lands had started since mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century and he drew attention to the alarming rate at which the land was passing out of their hands. Regarding private sales he observed that “these sales are almost invariably for grain debts converted into money debts. They are seldom for cash except when the Santhal is involved in civil or criminal suit. Private sales to mahajans account form the largest number of transfers from Santhals to Dikus. ... the main dispossession appears to have begun about the great famine of
The Santhal Rebellion of 1855 was therefore all in vain from the economic point of view. On the other hand, the Santhals were impoverished and became destitute due to the Santhal Hool. The British suppressed the Hool mercilessly. They burnt the villages and destroyed the crops and food grains. In the ensuing confusion, the Santhals fled from the villages and their cattle and other properties were usurped by others. Thus, most of the Santhals became totally helpless and reached a stage of starvation. When Chotrae Deshmanjhi returned after the Hool, he and his family could find nothing to eat in the village and had to live on boiled and green Bael (a kind of fruit). The Santhals were on the course of recovery from this poverty when they began to starve again due to the great famine of 1865-66, which forced them to live on forest herbs and even on paddy-husks and Mahua fruit. The people were forced to eat the Mahua fruit while still unripe and the numbers of those who consequently died from cholera could be counted in thousands.

The Santhals began borrowing again from the mahajans and fell into their clutches and thereafter had to go to different places to work as labourers. Some of the Santhals returned to Chotanagpur and many of them crossed the Ganga and migrated to the district of Purnea. They also began to trade in Sal leaves, timber and coal. This took place at a time when Santhals’ attachment to land had become a permanent feature in their life-style. The Santhals had become peasant cultivators and land had become a part of their soul. “No motive is so strong in a tribal people as the preservation of the life of the Tribe, and it moves albeit the motive works for the most part, at the unconscious level, and a Santhal’s land not only provides economic security but is a powerful link with his ancestors and this applies to newly inhabited area
no less than the old, for he will not take possession till the spirits approve. The land is a part of his spiritual as well as his economic heritage. Hunger drove them to despair but their attachment to land provided also an emotional basis without which the rebellion might not have taken place”.96 This analysis of Culshaw and Archer is also corroborated by the fact that the Santhals have had a great aversion to work as coolies in rail, roads or in any other corner. They even refused to live on the side of the high road lest they might be induced to work as coolies even on higher wages for the troops.97 Even under dire necessity, they could not be induced to work as coolies in Mauritius while large number of Bowries and other lower castes from the Jungle Mahals were being regularly taken to Mauritius by the British.98 They preferred to live in the land of their birth on a much lower wage than the higher wages they could earn elsewhere.99

If this was the attitude of the Sanhtals, there is a high probability that only when the chance of getting anything from land was lost, they would look for other means of subsistence nearby. The landless and oppressed Santhals were at last compelled under the pitiable circumstances to migrate into the neighbouring coal fields of Raniganj and Jharia. From 1859-60 they began to leave their village and start a new life as miners.100 Chotrae Deshmanjhi narrates that after the Hool, the Santhals began to migrate to distant places like Purnea, Chatak, Barean to the north of the Ganga to work as coolies. They were forced to do so after the Hool because they had reached the stage of starvation.101
REFERENCES:

4. Ibid. p.65.
14. Ibid.
17. Ibid, p.65.
18. Roychoudhary, P. C., Santal Parganas Gazetteer, op. cit. p.76.
19. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Quoted in Roychoudhary, P. C., Santal Parganas Gazetteer op. cit. p.78.
31. Desmanjhi, Chotrae, Reak Katha, op. cit. p.7. Chotrae Deshanjhi was a participant in the Santal Hul, while he was a boy of 14-15.
32. Ibid.
47. Koomar, C. H., op. cit. p.61. The description of Hunter and O’Malley differ in some detail. We have adopted the version of Rev. C. H. Koomar, who himself is a Santal and has written his book on the basis of Santal Legends.
    Roychoudhary, P. C., Santal Parganas Gazetteer op. cit. p.80.
50. Ibid, However, Mr. Hunter says that he was not able to discover any
    of these letters of ultimatum, but he says that ultimatum insisted
    chiefly on the regulation in Usury and a new arrangement of
    revenues as well as the expulsion of Hindu merchants from the
    Santal country vide Hunter, W. W., The Annals of Rural Bengal,
    op. cit. p.238.
    p.37.
58. Ibid, p.70.
59. Ibid.
60. Datta, K. K., 1934. Original Records about the Santal Insurrection
61. Ibid.
    p.37.
64. O’Mallley, L.S.S., op. cit. p.50.
70. Roychoudhary, P. C., Santal Parganas Gazetteer, op. cit. p.83.
74. Letter Copy Book, Dumka, Letter from Commissioner of Santal Parganas to the Assistant Commissioner dated the 4th April, 1856.
75. Ibid, 19th April, 1856.
76. Sen, Suchibrata, op. cit. p.128.
81. Ibid, p.54.
83. Letter Copy Book, Dumka, Letter from Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, dated Dumka, 20th February, 1858.


85. Under the Kamiotee system the Santal was required to work out his debt by personal service without payment, see O’Mallley, Santal Parganas Gazetteer, op. cit. p.47; Roychoudhary, P. C., Santal Parganas Gazetteer, op. cit. p.77.

86. Letter Copy Book, Dumka, Letter from the Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas to the Assistant Commissioner, Godda, Bhagalpur, dated the 20th November, 1858.

87. Ibid. Letter from the Deputy Commissioner, Dumka to the Commissioner Bhagalpur, Dumka, dated the 13th February, 1858.


97. Letter Copy Book: Dumka Record Room, Letter from Pontet to the officiating collector, Bhagalpur, Dumka, dated the 20th May, 1852.

