

## **The Colonial Origins of Jharkhand Movement: Land and *Adivasi* Solidarity**

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**Abstract:** The colonial attempt to convert lands and properties into revenue zones alienated a large number of tribal people in India dependent mainly on agriculture and forest resources. Consequently they were forced to leave their original *Khuntkatti* land and migrate to other places. The simmering discontent among the tribes found expression in a series of uprisings throughout the subcontinent and also got articulated in mainstream political movements. Jharkhand Movement was one of the oldest among them. This paper specifically focuses on how the colonial perception of land and tribal use of common property conflicted and became a major issue in the making of the Jharkhand Movement.

**Keywords:** Lands, Forest, *Adivasis*, Colonialism, Jharkhand

### ***Introduction***

In the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when Jharkhand Movement was in full swing Jaipal Singh<sup>1</sup>, the *Marang Gomke* or great leader of Adivasi Mahasabha stated in a public address that the first ever *adivasi* movement in Jharkhand originated as early as in the 1820s against the Sikhs who were planted in every Munda village; it

was the first instance of an *adivasi* movement envisaging land as an inalienable property, which Birsa Munda fought to recapture.<sup>2</sup> Later activism and the question of land rights among *adivasis* followed the same path. It came from a fear to get evicted from hereditary homestead because, in *adivasi* cosmovision, land is an aesthetic component of tribal life; its economic value is also immensely important and inscribed in their age-old traditional agricultural practices. Hence, forced alienation from land acts as an important factor in tribal aggression, something that was reflected throughout the entire period of Jharkhand autonomy movement.

### ***Early colonial subjugation***

The colonial expansion in Jharkhand began when the East India Company got the right to extract revenue of this vast natural zone of India. The expansion not only ruptured tribal traditional economy but also created a scope for other alien elements (zamindars, money lenders) to come and occupy this resource-rich land for their economic pursuits. It was documented that as the power of East India Company extended over many parts of Chotanagpur, tribal chiefs were compelled to pay revenues to the crown on the fixed basis.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, to ensure revenue, thousands of acres of forest lands were converted into agricultural lands. And this was rampant after the introduction of Permanent Zamindari Settlement in 1793. In the following years, the East India Company, by means of exercising its power to fixed revenues, helped zamindars to hire cheap labour for clearing up

forest lands into the agricultural lands.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, with time traditional *Bhuihari* *Khuntkatti* lands were also taken away. This furtive control over natural resources for the benefit of the Crown rapidly altered a primitive economic structure that existed since time immemorial. Scholars have argued that the ‘economic expansion’<sup>5</sup> of the English East India Company in this region was achieved through resource utilisation and appropriation of revenues.

The above colonial expansion was taken into account throughout 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in colonial discourses.<sup>6</sup> In the early colonial context, the British decided to extend their grip over vast natural resources through conversion of wetlands and forests into the agricultural lands on the basis of a new system of land management. Because, they firmly believed that the ‘country yields more than is paid by the raja consequently his villages must be much underrated within the sum now he pays.’<sup>7</sup> Now, in regard to the question of converting wetlands into agricultural lands, scholars have argued that ‘the distinctive feature of early colonial land registration was the meaning of property, the agricultural land that could yield revenue was property, the rivers, water bodies, woodlands and grazing grounds which could not yield revenue were not properties, these were regarded as wasteland.’<sup>8</sup> O’Malley agreed that in this way they first brought changes into the customs of semi-savage tribes, put them down by armed forces, and then they were managed by policies of reconciliation.<sup>9</sup> This relentless change in the nature of

lands and forests gave a serious blow to *adivasi* customs which were rooted in land and inherited by generations from their ancestors.

This dominating attempt to a large extent '[led] to the ruin of tribal peasantry'<sup>10</sup> and it opened 'the history of this "out of the way" tract of India as in the rest of it'.<sup>11</sup> After Emperor Shah Alam II granted the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the English East India Company, Chotanagpur, and Santal Pargana fell into the premises of new revenue collecting zone. Similarly, Ramgarh and Kharakdiha became a part of revenue tract for the British, but revenue collection was very difficult because the region was fully covered with dense forests and a hilly terrain made it inaccessible for any kind of measure. Keeping in mind this inaccessibility, the British made great effort to penetrate the jungle; accordingly in 1769, a letter was issued to Harry Verelst, President and Governor of Fort William, by the Chief of Patna Mr. Rumbold, seeking the permission to penetrate the vast jungle tract. In the same year Captain Camac was charged with the duty to penetrate into the forest tract for two reasons; one, it was necessary to be vigilant against the Marathas because it bordered the British Indian Dominion, and secondly, it could open up a vast revenue-yielding tract essential for British Economy.<sup>12</sup> However what the British sought to achieve was absolute administrative supremacy over this vast tract. Accordingly, within 1771, the entire region was brought within the

jurisdiction of British Dominion and many changes in the administrative setup were brought into existence.

A few years later, after the Kol insurrection of 1831-32, the entire Chotanagpur region was placed under a newly formed non-regulation province, the South Western Frontier Agency, directly under a judicial officer, Thomas Wilkinson, who was became an agent to the Governor General. Wilkinson became empowered to exercise all revenue and judiciary powers and also in-charge of subjugating the Kols thoroughly. The most significant of all activities was that the old village administration that prevailed in almost all the villages was maintained.<sup>13</sup> The sustenance of the traditional village system gave birth to Manki-Munda system of administration and also formed the basis of civil, revenue and criminal justice and police administration. Wilkinson's rule prohibited the transfer of land or mortgage without his prior sanction. He also banned all sorts of taxes that prevalent in the region.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in 1837, the Kolhan Estate was also placed under a similar administration to protect Ho culture and traditional administrative practices from the evil eyes of the foreigners, because in most cases 'they came as traders, moneylenders and subordinate government officers and fleeced the tribesmen in all conceivable way' and that led to unrest among the Ho's of Sarikella, Kela and Badgaon in 1840.<sup>15</sup>

However the decision of banning land transfer did not sustain for long. Colonel E. T. Dalton, in his letter to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, mentioned that 'from the first creation of the Agency the laws for the sale of land for debt or arrears of rent appear to have been regarded as inapplicable to the province, and the rules proposed by the captain Wilkinson provided that no sale or alienation or even mortgage or hereditary immovable property, was to take place without the sanction of the agent, which it was declared, would be generally withheld'.<sup>16</sup> Later, by act XX of 1854, the denomination of the agent was changed to commissioner and territorial delimitation shifted from South Western Frontier Agency to Chotanagpur. The provisions of Act VIII of 1959 was extended to three districts of this province, Hazaribagh, Manbhum, and Lohardanga, and it was decided on the 'good and sufficient ground' that the restriction on the sale of landed property in the three districts should continue without the sanction of the commissioner of province.<sup>17</sup> This system dwindled gradually after the introduction of Police Act, Bihar land Reforms Act, and Bihar Gram Panchayat Act, although in 1964, during the revisional survey period, the Manki-Munda System was safeguarded and recognized.<sup>18</sup>

Under colonial subjugation it was the forest dwelling communities that suffered most, like the Paharias of Rajmahal Hills. After subjugating the Paharias, the colonial government decided to 'Mark off an area surrounding by a ring fence of

masonry pillars in order to make the Paharia settle down in the village lands as rent paying cultivators' – the demarcated area to be known as Damin-i-koh. This is where between 1838 and 1851 a huge migration of Santals took place, where they paid nominal rent to the government. But, as the jungles were cleared and more and more land was brought under the plough, the situation worsened when the revenue of the whole Damin was raised from £668 to £6803 between 1838 and 1854.<sup>19</sup>

The Santals first settled in the district of Santal Pargana between 1790 and 1810;<sup>20</sup> probably between 1815 and 1851 they accounted for the gradual upward trend in numbers in the Damin-i-Koh. Many British officials, like Mr. Sudarland, Mr. Ward, Mr. Dunbar, Mr. Pontet, and Mr. Sherwal, documented this Santal migration into the Rajmahal Hills.<sup>21</sup> At the time of British expansion, the entire district was under the control of ghatwals and zamindars; better administration, the tract was entrusted to the Collector of Bhagalpur. As early as in 1824, Santal Pargana was modified and placed under a Superintendent.<sup>22</sup> After a series of events the British Government imposed certain restrictions which diminished the democratic character of the Santals' traditional administrative system. The government acquired the power to dismiss village headmen and appoint new ones, something which seriously affected the Santal village system by eroding a traditional structure. The report of the Scheduled Area and Scheduled Tribes

Commission (2002-2004) observed that after the enactment of Rent Act, Civil Procedure Code, and Stamp Act which 'led to enhancement of rent, eviction of headman from their offices, increased exploitation by money lenders and other ills' created the basis of the Santal Revolt in 1855.<sup>23</sup>

After subjugating the entire forest tract, the British successfully created administrative units in the whole plateau by violating existing socio-political systems. They ignored the fact that tribal property was immovable and a non-profitable subject under the principle of revenue maximization. Colonial documents show that tribes harboured a strong affinity towards their lands; for example, according to custom, the Raja was the leader of a tribe but not the owner of land, although he has the right to collect Chanda (contribution) instead of tax. But after colonisation, the Raja became a zamindar,<sup>24</sup> a virtual oppressor. The tribal perception of property rights was embedded in the old *Bhuihari* and *Khuntkatti* land tenures. Hence, under colonial onslaught, the Munda egalitarian khuntkatti system got transformed due to social stratification and alteration of the offices of the chiefs of the villages.<sup>25</sup> However, due to recurrent objection from tribal communities, some protective measures were taken to safeguard the tribes. Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (hereafter CNTA), the major act in force in the region, substantially protected customary tribal land rights.<sup>26</sup> The use of land in tribal Jharkhand has been considered as a unique system inherited from the time of the

earliest settlement in this tract. The manner of holding of lands, the measurement of quality, the capacity of yielding good quality seeds – all these were organized through long experience. The knowledge and usage of agricultural land based on a traditional system demarcated the region and separated it from adjacent areas.

Alongside economic exploitation by the British, intense involvement of new people, the *Diku*, also created problems for tribal communities. During the colonial period, the term ‘Diku’ gradually became synonymous with cheats, tyrants, looters, dacoits and so on, although originally only the nearby oppressive zaminadars was known as such. At the initial stages of tribal upsurge, it was used to denote non-tribals or upper castes and later, North Biharis generally.<sup>27</sup> In colonial times, Jharkhand became the worse victim of non-tribal migration. As it was perceived as a suitable place for profit, it became the hunting ground for non-tribals. Money lenders, zamindars, Bengali merchants, Oriyas – all came suddenly in large numbers and compelled them to sell their Bhuihari lands. Since 1793 there was continuous land alienation and this continued till the CNTA in 1908. The loss of lands to the non-tribal private owners and the destruction of traditional institutions as well as their customary rights were reflected in a series of agrarian unrest in the Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana region in the last two decades. Earlier, considering the impact of the agrarian unrest, the colonial government decided to adopt Chotanagpur Tenure Act in 1869 under a Special Commissioner to

demarcate the land of the tenants and landlords, but again in 1879, Chotanagpur Landlords & Tenants Procedure Act was passed to protect tenants from illegal enhancement of rent.<sup>28</sup> Documents related to land law of Bengal with Bihar and Orissa during the 1920s reveal that although the Bhuinhar was one of the important tenures for Munda Community in Chotanagpur and a Munda could always claim himself as an original clearer of jungle, during the 1920s no Bhuinhar family of Munda was been found in Chotanagpur District, because 'Hindu land lord put down the influence of Munda's' and the result was gradual reduction in Bhuinhar members.<sup>29</sup>

There was no sign of restoration of the original state of things, however. Rampant alienation caused rumblings of localized unrests on the basis of ideas, images, emotions and emptiness.<sup>30</sup> In the situation, CNTA declared that Bhuinhari land cannot be transferable or saleable, except *Bhugutbandha* for seven years or *Zuripeshgee* for five years, or by means of building educational or religious institutions.<sup>31</sup> Apparently CNTA proved to be beneficial for the tribes of Jharkhand, but land passed on to non-tribals steadily, forcing tribals to leave. Industries and mining in the Jharkhand region aggravated the situation. By 1891, more than 330,000 people had migrated out of Chhotanagpur alone; by 1911 this increased into 707,000, and in 1921 it was almost 947,000.<sup>32</sup> Due to a Hinduisation process, the tribes did make some compromise by accommodating alien practices like food

habits,<sup>33</sup> though some sort of a notion of tradition allowed them to maintain their own system of administration<sup>34</sup> in various pockets of Jharkhand.

### *The nature of land and agriculture*

Undoubtedly, as land was an integral component of life, it became a central point of confrontation. Chotanagpur division of the Jharkhand State consisted of five districts, namely, Palamou, Manbhum, Singbhum, Ranchi, and Hazaribagh, which constituted the major part of the plateau and highly resource-rich, and hence a target of intrusion by outsiders. However, agriculture was not easy because the entire area was an undulating terrain and marked by ‘alternating interfluvial ridges and water channels’.<sup>35</sup> Due to this, it was necessary to adopt for good arable farming the space between ridges of hills and valleys. In the local dialect the two were known as *don* and *tanr*, respectively. Steep slopes led to over-drainage and soil erosion, and don lands were used mainly for paddy cultivation and tanr lands were used mainly for other crops such as millets, oilseeds etc. There was a variety of paddy called *Gora Dhan*, cultivated on the top of the ridges, found in Chhotanagpur alone.<sup>36</sup> In Singbhum district, there were three categories of land available according to their quality. These were *Bera*, best in quality because of the supply of water throughout a year, *Bad*, known to be of inferior quality, and *Gora* that was located in the ridges and depended entirely on natural rainfall.<sup>37</sup> Cultivation depended entirely on the availability of arable land. Many other forms

of land were also used for cultivation, precisely by subdividing the *don* and *tanr* lands.<sup>38</sup> The expansion of arable land depended on the process of clearings of jungles, absolutely maintained by customs. Reclaiming jungle lands was one of the principle ways on which more and more land could be transformed into arable lands. Founding a new village and reclaiming an older one on a rotational basis was the traditional practice regarding expansion of arable lands. The oldest practice of founding new villages near forests was the *Khuntkatti* system among the Mundas.<sup>39</sup> Another form of reclamation was the *Pradhani* system, very common in the entire Chotanagpur region, particularly in the Dhalbhum area. Under the *Pradhani* system, whenever necessary a large tract of forest would be cleared and settlement entailed paying tributes to Pradhans. They were sometimes remunerated through rent-free lands or a part of village rent as commission.<sup>40</sup> They were the recognised village official and in-charge of collecting rents in their own villages. The entire Kolhan came under the direct fiscal administration of the government in 1837, after the Kol insurrection.

### ***Cultural change through colonial expansion***

Changes in an existing structure led to diminishing agriculture and consequent exodus to other regions, and this was accentuated by the transfer of land-ownership and a Hinduisation process in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup> Scholars like L.P.Vidyarthi have argued that the pattern of transformation of tribal society in India is

characterized by two distinct processes, traditional and modern. Hinduisation, Sanskritisation, and tribe-caste continuum were the important traditional processes and the modern processes are those that came after the intrusion of Christianity, urbanization, industrialization, development, and democratic experiments.<sup>42</sup>

Jharkhand too witnessed both these patterns which transformed tribal society. As early as in the 1830s, the entire Chhotanagpur region witnessed the process of Hinduisation which brought a so-called hybrid structure into tribal society. Degradation and deculturation of ethnicity and ancient land tenures through rupturing ownership pattern brought catastrophic changes. It was recorded that the Hinduised Maharaja of Chhotanagpur donated huge amount of lands to 'respectable man (non-tribals), mahajans and men of subsistence', a large number of villages were granted to Brahmins as *Kush-Brahman* tenures, and many other like *Brittadar* and *Khairat* were given to those with whom the maharaja was pleased.<sup>43</sup> Along with the loss of de-facto rights of land the gradual deterioration in practicing tribal traditional religion was a major setback too. With time the effect of acculturation could be seen at multiple levels and to a great extent the animistic religions based on tradition were replaced. For example, the Ho, a Munda-speaking tribe completely changed their material life after close contact with the Hindus. It was found that instead of 'leafy booths and wicker walls' they began to build substantial houses and instead of wooden ladles and leaf plates, they now used

metal plates.<sup>44</sup> Today, the sandals of Jharkhand abstain from beef-eating and are hardly interested in performing *Itesh Bapla, Nirbolok Bapla, Sanga Bapla, and Baha dor Bapla* because of close proximity to Hindu Society.<sup>45</sup> Rapid Hinduisation brought about an identity crisis and accelerated changes in the landholding traditional system in an unprecedented scale. In the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jharkhand tribal populations suffered due to the ‘landlord system’ brought about by the British in a ruthless completeness.<sup>46</sup> The Marxist historian, R.P. Dutta, while describing the painful situation of the peasantry noted that:

The introduction of the English land lord system, of individual landholding, of mortgage or sale of land, and of a whole apparatus of a English bourgeois legal conception alien to Indian economy and administered of an alien bourgeois which combine in itself. Legislative, judicial and administrative function completed the process. By this transformation the British conqueror’s state assumed in practice the ultimate possession of the land, making the peasantry the equivalent of tenants. Who could be ejected for failure of payment, or alienating the lands to its own nominees as landlord?<sup>47</sup>

The British, in order to encourage appropriation of revenue altered customs, as noted by Hunter. He noted that the introduction of Permanent Settlement tried to ‘substitute contract from custom’,<sup>48</sup> which led a complete process of economic transformation and created the reason for tribal insurrection. In other words, colonial rule reinforced tribal movements in all parts of Jharkhand. Protests in

order to retain ancestral lands, for nearly for two hundred years, show an inter-relation between land and the 'sons of the soil.'<sup>49</sup> The situation was aggravated more when tribal economic life cycles changed due to loss of 'cultural' distance from land.

One such important insurrection was the Tana Bhagat Movement (1914-1919) of the Oraons that opposed taxes imposed on them by the zamindars. Their grievances were mainly against taxation and the zamindars' attitude. It broke out with the aim to reconstruct tribal identity and for economic improvement of the tribes. As early as in the 1920s, the Tana Bhagat refused to pay 'Harai' (a plough and ploughman for a day to cultivate land of zamindar) to Sambhu Bharati, an owner of Rud Jungle<sup>50</sup> of Nowatoli, in the Ranchi District. The Tana Bhagat were accustomed to grazing cattle in this jungle and collect fuel by paying 'Harai and Boukatti'. The basic tenets of the Tana Bhagat's religion enjoined that they be free from all sorts of subordination. In a later phase, the movement collaborated with the Kols who considered themselves as descendents of Rawan, the legendary king of Ceylon. Their main aim of the agitation was to re-create the ancient past because they believed that god created soil and so they have the equal right to enjoy its produce.<sup>51</sup>

In the course of the movement they assembled in the Satpahari area near Hazaribagh which was surrounded by seven densely forested hills, a site that they

regarded as a place of pilgrimage. The Oraons believed that Shibu (Guru or Bhagwan) would redress their grievances. They were in a great trouble and wanted that the government should arrange 'Adhbatai', an equal division of grains with the owner of the land.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, for the zamindars of Ranchi and Palamou, their eviction was hardly a serious matter for they believed 'the land is theirs (zamindars') and the Bhagats can go and practice their religion in the jungle'.<sup>53</sup> Dickinson, the then Superintendent of Police of Hazaribagh, characterised this movement as a mixture of 'Bolshevism, Gandhism and idiocy'.<sup>54</sup> However, some of the officers believed that there might be some support of the German Church which operated in the area<sup>55</sup>. Later, this emphasis on land became an ideological symbol of Jharkhand Movement; it has been consistently challenged by the colonial and post-colonial state by a suppression of movement on the one hand and on the other, formulation of legislation was supposed to meet the grievances of the tribals in a larger democratic sphere.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Tribal system of traditional land management and governance:***

The cumulative effects of all these menace reduced the tradition and interaction based on lands, however historical memories, ideas of homeland, and their retention through armed struggle in the past were reoriented and recorded through different phases of Jharkhand Movement. B.H. Baden-Powell observed:

Every tribesman knew that he had joined in conquering or seizing a territory, and that he would fight to keep his hold on it. He acknowledged that his chief's word was his law, and that the share allotted to him and his fellows must be observed. His sense of right to his own allotment would make him equally ready to fight for it, and it asked why? He would in all probability reply, because his clan had conquered it. His chief's had allowed him 'his inheritance' and he had cleared and ploughed up the land.<sup>57</sup>

E. T. Dalton had also propagated similar views in his *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*; he argued that the land belongs to the tribes have strongly defended by themselves in any occasion. He says 'Munda's and Ho's, who tenaciously cling to their holding and have always showed themselves ready to fight for them if necessary'.<sup>58</sup> Baden-Powell added that "the idea of right was that they were 'Bhuhar' the original soil clearer and settlers. The latter originated with 'inheritors' who acquired the lordship of existing villages, or founded new ones in the same sense of superiority".<sup>59</sup> Thus when the imperial policies taken over all the available land under various forms irrespective of exogamous clan system, it does not generate only political animosity and violence but it produced an apocalyptic vision of the world that turn upside down.

Now, the legal and traditional bases of rights were somehow prevailed in a few pockets of Jharkhand even after long historical period. It was interesting to note that, the existence of the traditional system was on the ground that the ideology of

tribal economy is based on communal land management and kingship through generations. Lineages and clans are the backbone of tribal society which existed through land ownerships. It was “Communal land tenures epitomized by the *Munda Khuntkattidar* system’.<sup>60</sup> ‘In this system the lands reside with the clan-elders.’<sup>61</sup> The word *Khuntkatti* signifies cleaning the jungle. According to the Act of 1908 a *Mundari Khuntkattidar* is ‘a Mundari who has acquired a right to hold jungle land for the purpose of bringing suitable portion thereof under cultivation by himself or by male members of his family and includes (a) the heirs male in the male line of any such Mundari when they are in possession of such lands or have any subsisting title thereto and (b) as regards any portions of such land which have remained continuously in the possession of any such Mundari and his descendants in the male line, such descendants’.<sup>62</sup>

However, in the long term, adverse impact on the economic structure by rupturing land tenure some steady change also occurred in the traditional village system. It was natural for a community to determine the functioning of their economic pursuits through the articulation of traditional village structure. According to B.H. Baden- Powell:

[All] the races of India, whose history we are to any extent acquainted with, have, when they passed the nomadic or pastoral stage, and took to settled agriculture, formed certain groups of land-holdings, more or less connected together, and

which we call ' VILLAGES.' At least that is true for all the districts in the plain country where there are no exceptional features.

Again, by endorsing the complexities in the initial formation period of a village, Baden-Powell concluded that “the term 'village,' as we use it, means a group of landholdings, with (usually) a central aggregate of residences, the inhabitants of which have certain relations, and some kind of union or bond of common government”. Now the argument goes back to the tribal formation of a village which is essentially a form of bondage achieved through “nomadic and shifting cultivation in the forest” which can last for more than 100 years through hereditary headship or certain customary powers. Baden-Powell argues that the primitive sense of village has changed its essence due to acceptance of ‘Hinduism and Aryan ideas of Government’.<sup>63</sup>

In order to find some common features of tribal village system in the whole of Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana Division, it is necessary to look at the colonial ethnographer’s documents of the Kolarian and Dravidians races. Dalton’s *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* was one such available resource contains extensive details of the tribal system of governance. This great work emphasized on the analysis of the tribal administrative system based on *village or Parha*.<sup>64</sup> B.H. Baden-Powell wrote in 1896 ‘Each *Parha* contained and form twenty to twenty five villages and had a chief called *Manki*’. Dalton observed when

Mundari's first came into the Jharkhand Region they had No Raja, they formed a congeries of small confederate states, the head of each village is called a *Munda*. In various occasion self assertion was facilitated by the Munda community through their rights of inheritance. According to custom the *Munda* was the head of *Parha* which was traditionally presided over by the *Manki* and his area is called *Pati*. He was the person whose duty was to settle down all the disputes related with land and this was known to all Munda villages as *Mankipatti* system.<sup>65</sup> Baden-Powel agreed that the Kolarian tribe in the entire forest tract accepted the rule of the tribes based on Dravidian Stock (Gond & Oraon) because of their superior organization.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand Kol have also no centralized govt.

The common traditional leaderships are based on village headman. It consists of a secular leadership and sacerdotal leadership known by various names in various parts of Jharkhand. The post of headmanship is entirely hereditary while the sacerdotal headman was chosen from dominant clan of the village. These headmans have a stronghold among the tribe of Jharkhand. They also guide the deliberations of the village Panchayat. Each family had its own headman, known as *Munda* among the Ho and Munda tribes, *Manjhi* among the Santal and *Sirdar* among the Bhumij.<sup>67</sup> W.W.Hunter in his Great work "Annals of Rural Bengal" described that in a Santal society "The headman for the time being (*Manjhi*) bears the undisputed sway which belongs to a hereditary governor".<sup>68</sup> He also mentioned

about the deputies of headman like *Jog manjhi and Jog pramanik*. In Munda or Oraon system of village Panchayats there are numerous numbers of ‘*Parha*’ or *Pir* which was a collective form of village unions.<sup>69</sup> The groups are small and separated by the cultivated and wastelands held by each. Each group has a chief called *Tarvi*. It has found that each tribal clan has its own chief, like others Bhils also has its own chief called *Rawat*. Unless these chief became united in subordination to some *Raja* they remained independent and hardly in a sufficient degree of relation to form a confederacy, though it seems that they met in assemblies to confer on any matter that concerned several of the *parha* in common. The *parha* or union grouping is still traceable, and on festival occasions each one exhibits its own flag with the distinguishing device or *totem*’.<sup>70</sup>

With time such tribal agencies have lost their command because of the steady migration into the Chotanagpur and it caused marginalization and “lead to a complex acculturation process it gradually resulted in the spread of hierarchy and differentiation and the increasing loss of status of these communities”.<sup>71</sup> During Mughal period they successfully penetrated the whole of Jungle Mahal and for the first time imposing *rukumats* to the Munda and Oraon communities and forcefully snatching away their land and subsequently brought some changes towards their communal indigenous system of land use.<sup>72</sup>

The supremacy over land was inscribed in the perceptions of tenures. In several settlement reports it was recorded that numerous numbers of tenures were active in the region since colonial time which was morally less associated with law of primogeniture. Some of them are *Tangor, Chibabrit* etc. In Palamou District some of the rent free tenures were *Khuskhairat, Bishnubri, Kushbrit* etc. These are religious grants, in Manbhum district there are *Putni tenures, Tamipatta tenure*, generally given as lease of an entire village, *Jungleburi tenures* were given for clearing the jungles<sup>73</sup> and these tenures were guided by the idea of rationality and not even changed in the whole life of a tribe. Father J.Hoffman. S.J observed that Munda of Chotanagpur have a ritual of their own that their land is inalienable because they believed that their lands remained with the last man even after his death. He wrote that ‘the man or owner continues live in his family or offspring in a manner which however crude or even ridiculous it may seem to us, is to the aborigines a very serious matter indeed. For in their belief the owner depends even after death to a great extent on the material well being of his descendents’<sup>74</sup>. To further concentrate on the relationship based on landed property the management of ‘common pool’<sup>75</sup> resources by the local indigenous institution is very important.

<sup>76</sup> The role of traditional communal property institution in the management of common pool resources has been seen intact to the whole heterogeneous tribal communities. Since the early human settlement in the entire Chotanagpur and

Santal Pargana Plateau the management of resources was based on this primitive institution. It suddenly allows sustainable resource use in a scientific way. Traditionally almost all the tribal communities practiced the Kili and Clan system which was distinguished from the mainstream Jati society and which allows the tribes to direct access to the land<sup>77</sup>. It has been argued in Dhebar Commission Report in 1962 that ‘Life in the hills in spite of the attendant disabilities, has made the tribal’s hardy, self reliant and vigilant’<sup>78</sup> thus the agricultural parameters were shaped in collaboration with existing knowledge of their surrounding environment as well as traditional institution. So to say, the tribal community is more prone to consume once they taken of the grains from the field, and instead of making any profit making efforts to make instant money they consume most of the productions at a village level. Market oriented demand have never been seen in the tribal community. Thus any irrational change compels them to rebel.

So to say, the epitome of Jharkhand Movement by and large was to free from agrarian discontent and disparities emerged through colonial discourses. Since the emergence of the Colonial State as a proprietor of the whole plateau area and the vision of the modern independent state, to say followed a parallel legacy and histories of land alienation. The trajectories almost same and unchanged till the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence, The British policies towards tribal economic structures was somehow affected the lineage and clan system and violates cultural

identity however due to strong affinity they kept an obscure image of it. Baden-Powell observed that “The British Government went on an entirely different principle; it started with the avowed policy of defining and confirming on an equitable basis, the right of private persons in the soil”.<sup>79</sup> The inbuilt notion of clan system was important as a part of tribal regionalism and a major concern in a communitarian ethnic based society. It also worked as a symbolic weapon during ‘the wartime or in a defense condition against the strangers, local feuds, even worked as a unit against the extortionate revenue officers’.<sup>80</sup>

The eminent anthropologist K.S.Singh stated, that in many cases transfer of land owned by tribals has been transferred to those of non-tribals under the exclusive consent of the owner of that particular land. It was happened because of the high rents imposed by the colonial powers as well as rack renting by the zamindars and other money lenders. Thus the tribes reside in the countryside that was highly indebted was almost accepted money lending profession due to the restriction imposed by the CNTA. In many cases the number of non professional moneylenders overlapping professional money lenders in great numbers. The cases of land transfer are becoming very high in some parts of Chotanagpur region through illegal selling, mortgage of rayati lands.<sup>81</sup> The report of the Committee of Jharkhand Matters has figured out that in spite of various tenancy laws namely, CNTA of 1908, The Santal Pargana Tenancy Act 1949, The Scheduled Area

Regulation 1969, huge land alienation occurred because of the ineffectiveness regarding enforcement of the law. No proper land settlements have been taken into account. Singh observed that the first ever 'agrarian myth' of what is known in the tribal belt of eastern India as "all lands to the tribal" was first manifested in the Sardar Jarai, not in the Kol & Tamar insurrection in the early decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century. However there are so many instances of such insurrection that can be compiled to understand the core principles of these movements. K.S.Singh noted that the whole tribal problem of agrarian distress remained vital in the concept of golden age; he warned us that it does not reflect that the tribal agrarian movements always tended to procuring "state of things" that prevailed before the influx of the aliens.<sup>82</sup> It may not be correct to say that the tribal revolts were shaped by facing serious blow brought by the colonial oppressors, but in many cases it was engineered by the indigenous oppressors, like, zamindars, peasants, intelligentsia, the native royal dynasties and many others. Apprehension in taking part in those revolts subsumed through memory and earlier tribal uprisings.

### ***Conclusion***

Undoubtedly the periodic change in economic structure converted into Jharkhand political Movement, however it can't be ignored that the impact of colonial land management unsparing those tribal communities who depends on mostly forest product. International labor organization observed that "Indigenous peoples are not

homogenous groups. They differ from one another not just in terms of their ecology, cultural identity, economic organization, and social and religious practices but also in terms of the nature of their relationship to national political and economic systems”.<sup>83</sup>

The eminent agrarian historian Dr. B.B.Chaudhuri argued that any regional economic formation with agricultural development, settled cultivation essentially a village based economic formation. The property, level of cultivable land, technology, village organization etc are the major characteristics of a village based agricultural structure. There were no disagreements that colonial rule had a decisive role in social transformation. To get rid of the situation the pre-colonial tribal societies have adopted certain devices to prevent changes certainly going to take place in their economic system. But in a broader way this theory was not acceptable, he argued that the cultivation essentially means a collectively recognized set of restraints on use of village resources. In a community, culturally derived producers did have a role in a particular area. In the tribal areas, the role appears in this form. Even in the social structure of major tribal communities like Santals and Mundas are different from the hilly Paharias.<sup>84</sup> Similarly Santals are good agriculturists than the Hos.

In this way dislocation from home and hearth forced them to adopt different profit enabling food habit. It also seriously undermined their environmental

knowledge. O'Malley recorded that "there has not been a famine here since 1866, chiefly because the majority of the population are aboriginals and a considerable part of their food supply consists of edible forest product".<sup>85</sup> Similarly in a census report of 1961 it was claimed that the inhabitants of eastern Chotanagpur plateau are mainly dependent on non-agricultural occupations and 'unable to pursue their traditional work as a main source of livelihood'.<sup>86</sup>

It could be a viable instrumental approach that the violations of century old customary rights by the colonial administration as well as by the Non-tribal created resilience against the oppressing arms. Because in reality despite of existence of CNTA, Khuntkatti land was sold by the moneylenders; some lands were alienated from the tribes through collusive title suits, Chapar Bandi, Sada Hukumnama, Sada patta, marrying tribal women etc. these alienation methods was determine through the cash trapped method.<sup>87</sup> The alienation from the land was continued in the post colonial era through industrialization and in other possible way and this lead agrarian unrest in Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana District. And in the later the issue related to land was dovetailed with mainstream political movement epitomized for the separation of Jharkhand.

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***Endnotes:***

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<sup>1</sup> Jaipal Singh was a great leader of Jharkhand Movement. He was an educated Munda tribal man and captained Indian hockey team in Olympics in 1928, He founded Adivasi Mahasabha in 1938, he represented as the leader of tribals in the Constituent Assembly of India

<sup>2</sup> This statement has been made by Jaipal Singh In the annual Adivasi Mahasabha Meeting held at Ranchi, G.E.L Mission compound on 13.04.1947. More than 25 thousand tribes have attended the meeting. For detail pls see Political Special Section ,File no 270, 1947, BSA

<sup>3</sup> J.C.Jha, 'History of the land revenue of Chotanagpur in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century', The Journal of the Bihar Research society, Vol-1, January-December, 1964, Parts1-4, pp-106-107, In this essay J.C.Jha clearly pointed out that after the introduction of land revenue in Chotanagpur, Most of the surviving tribal chiefs, rajas were recognized and grantees as Zamindars. He pointed out that how each and every tribal community has faced common problems and alienated from their existing rights over land. the extension of lands under revenue maximization took serious effects over the existing land rights of the Sardar Ghatwals belongs to Bhumij community, Mankis of Chotanagpur and Manjhis of santal Pargana also lost their customary rights of holding lands.

<sup>4</sup> Nabendu Dutta Majumdar, Memoir No-2, 1955, 'The Santal, A Study in Culture-Change', Department of Anthropology, p-23,

<sup>5</sup> Economic expansion refers to the extension of British territory after the Grant of Diwani in 1765. From 1765 onwards policies were enacted to appropriate revenues from this entire land as much as possible.

<sup>6</sup> The early colonial ethnographers and forests officials have documented that the EIC's expansion to Jharkhand belt caused immense pressure on tribal economy. For reference pls see various journals of Bihar Research Society. Foresters like Ribbentrop, Scillich also noted in their

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famous works on forestry in India. For much detail pls see O'Malley, 'History of Bengal, Bihar , Orissa under British Rule ' 1925

<sup>7</sup> Bengal District Gazetteer, Manbhum, H.coupland, 1911, pp-193, see also J.C.Jha, ' History of Land Revenue of Chotanagpur in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in The Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Vol1, Jan-Dec, 1964, Parts 1-4, pp-105-113

<sup>8</sup> N.Sengupta, 1996 'Property Rights, Incentives and Efficiency : Natural Resources in Indian Legal System' ISI, New Delhi, Jan-11-13, pp-7-16, Quoted in Brara, 1989

<sup>9</sup> O'Malley 1925, 'History of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa under British Rule' Chapter XXII, pp-668, in this chapter O'Malley noted that the alienation of land has been one of the major reason behind tribal uprisings in Bihar, and 'these have been caused chiefly by their passionate attachment to the land.

<sup>10</sup> J.C.Jha, op.cit, pp-110-111

<sup>11</sup> J.C.Jha, 1957, 'Early British Penetration into Chotanagpur, 1769-73', The Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Vol XLIII, Sept-Dec, Parts III & IV,pp-329-333, Patna

<sup>12</sup> ibid

<sup>13</sup> E.T.Dalton 1872, 'Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal' Office of the Superintendent of Govt printing, Calcutta, pp-182-183

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Committee on Jharkhand Matter, 1990, pp-6-7, (Hereafter RCJM)

<sup>15</sup> J.C.Jha, 1969, 'Singbhum under the South West Frontier Agency 1837-1854', The Journal of Bihar Research Society, Jan-Dec, Vol,LV, pp-151-57, Original Source, Political Agent on SWF to Govt, 18<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1840, Chotangpur Political Despatch Register, No, 128, Patna Archives, 1969

<sup>16</sup> From Colonel E.T.Dalton C.S.I, Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Div to A.Eden , secretary to the Govt of Bengal , in the Judicial Department (No 3115, Dated 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1869), BSA, Patna

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> RCJM, *op.cit* p-6

<sup>19</sup> 'The Santals, A Study of Cultural Change', Navendu Dutta Mazumder, Memoir No-2, 1955,1956, p-24

<sup>20</sup> O'Malley, 1910, Santal Pargana District Gazetteer, Calcutta, p-54

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> RCJM, *op.cit*, p-6

<sup>23</sup> Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, Government of India, 2002-2004, Vol-1, p-21

<sup>24</sup> Sachhidananda & BB Mandal, 1985, 'Industrialisation and Social Disorganisation, A study of tribals in Bihar', p-40

<sup>25</sup> Susana B C Devalle, 1992, 'Discourses of Ethnicity ; Culture and protest in Jharkhand', p-62

<sup>26</sup> Carol Upadhyay, 2005, 'Community Rights in Land in Jharkhand', EPW, Oct 8, p-4435

<sup>27</sup> Jyoti Sen 1986 ' The Jharkhand Movement', in K.S.Singh (ed) The Tribal Situation in India, p-434

<sup>28</sup> RCJM, *op.cit*,

<sup>29</sup> Sarada Charan Mitra 1921, 'Tagore Law Lecture, 1895, The Land Law of Bengal with Bihar and Orissa' the second edition, Sarat Kumar Mitra, Calcutta, pp-524

<sup>30</sup> As Stephen Fucks embraced that the remembrance of the golden past came into effect after a period of decline, Revivalism, Nativism, Syncretism, Eschatologism and Millenarianism came into force after catastrophies and upheavals, for details of the analysis pls see Stephen Fucks ' Messianic Movement' in "Peasant Struggle in India", Edt. By A.R.Desai, 1979, pp-28-46

<sup>31</sup> Act VI (B.C) of 1908, sec-64 and 49, Cited in Tagore Law Lectures *op.cit*, pp-526

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<sup>32</sup> P.P.Mahato, 1982 ‘ Jharkhand Bidroho O Jibon, p-49, Quoted in Sajal Bose, 1994

‘Jharkhand Movement : Ethnicity and Culture of Silence’

<sup>33</sup> The process of acculturation has been steadily grasp in many communities, discarding egalitarian systems and accepting caste system that make stratification within the tribal society.

<sup>34</sup> The concept of ‘different system’ means different vision of use of nature. Regarding landed property Jharkhand movement took its agenda regarding land problems, even the movement at one stage tried to restore traditional agriculture essentially to a great metaphysical and speculative height.

<sup>35</sup> Prabhu Prasad Mahapatra, 1991, ‘Some aspects of arable expansion in Chotanagpur, 1880-1950’, EPW, April 20, pp-1043-1054

<sup>36</sup> ibid

<sup>37</sup> W.W.Hunter, 1877, ‘Statistical Account of Bengal’ pp-79-95

<sup>38</sup> ibid

<sup>39</sup> ibid

<sup>40</sup> Mahapatra, op.cit.pp-1043-1054

<sup>41</sup> In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century migrant Hindu’s were known as Diku. Due to acculturation many Bhumij Kols have adopted Singh as their surname.

<sup>42</sup> L.P.Vidyarthi, ‘Cultural change in the tribes of modern India’, ‘The Journal of the Bihar Research Society’, Special issue, 1968, pp-268-269

<sup>43</sup> Appendix Number, 3, to W.Dents separate remarks, 5 Jan. 1833, Boards Collection, London, 1502/58891, quoted in Jha, op.cit, p-382

<sup>44</sup> Memoir No-2, op,cit, p-13

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<sup>45</sup> Arunabha Ghosh, 1998 'Jharkhand Movement, A Study of Politics of Regionalism', pp-109, Original Source, Digambar Chakraborty, 'History of the Santal Hul, Chief Executive Officers, Rajnagar LAMPS, Birbhum, 1989, p-6

<sup>46</sup> R.P.Dutt, 1997 'India Today', Calcutta, pp-228-229

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p-228

<sup>48</sup> W.W.Hunter, Bengal MS Records, 1, pp-89, Quoted in J.C. Jha, 'Aspects of Social and Economic Development in Chotanagpur in Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century', The Journal of Bihar Research Society, Vol, LXX, Jan-Dec, 1983-84, p-383,

<sup>49</sup> The term 'Sons of the Soil' was taken from 'Weiner's book on 'Sons of the Soil', 1978, Princeton University Press, to denote the original settlers of the land.

<sup>50</sup> We have found in many early records that the term 'Rud Jungle' had been used; probably it denotes indiscipline forests tracts.

<sup>51</sup> Political Special Section, file no-313 of 1920, BSA

<sup>52</sup> Political Special section,, File no-313 of 1920, BSA

<sup>53</sup> ibid

<sup>54</sup> ibid

<sup>55</sup> ibid

<sup>56</sup> Nitya Rao, 2003, 'Life and Livelihood in Santal Parganas, Does the Right to a Livelihood Really Exist ?', EPW, p-4081

<sup>57</sup> Baden-Powel, 1986 'The Indian Village Community, p-399

<sup>58</sup> E.T.Dalton, 1872 'Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal', p-212

<sup>59</sup> Baden-Powell op.cit, p-403

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<sup>60</sup> Stuart Corbridge 2005, 'The Ideology of Tribal Economy and Society ; Politics in Jharkhand, C-1950-1980', in S.Corbridge et.all, 'Jharkhand Environment, Development , Ethnicity' Oxford, p-25

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*

<sup>62</sup> Tagore Law Lectures, *op.cit*, p-531

<sup>63</sup> Baden-Powell , 1896, 'The Indian Village Community' , pp-398-444

<sup>64</sup> Baden-Powell, *op.cit*, pp-152, see also Dalton, *op.cit*, p-165

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, pp-531-32

<sup>66</sup> J.F.Hewitt, Asiatic Quarterly Review, April 1887, p-396, Quoted in Baden-Powell, *op.cit*, p-153

<sup>67</sup> Baden-Powell *op.cit*, pp-151-155

<sup>68</sup> W.W.Hunter, 1868, 'Annals of Rural Bengal', pp-219-220

<sup>69</sup> Sachidananda, 'Tribal Situation in Bihar' in K.S. (ed) *op.cit*, p-174, see also Victor Das, EPW, July 28, 1990, p-1624.

<sup>70</sup> Baden-Powell, Hunter, *op.cit*.

<sup>71</sup> V.Damodaran 2006, 'Colonial Construction of Tribe in India : The case of Chotanagpur', Europe and the World in European Historiography, (ed) Csaba Levai, Thematic Work Group, p-169

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*

<sup>74</sup> J.Hoffman.S.J, 1915, 'Principal of Succession and Inheritance among the Mundas', The Journal of Bihar & Orissa Research Society, Sept 1915, Vol-1, pp-5-19

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<sup>75</sup> The term Common Pool Resources often used by scholars to identify the tribal resource used. By using common property resource it is tended to obscure maximum benefits and regulating the preservation and maintenance of common pool resources.

<sup>76</sup> Fikret Berkes 2008, 'Sacred ecology' p-49

<sup>77</sup> Stuart Corbridge, 2004, 'The ideology of Tribal Economy and Society, Politics in Jharkhand, C-1950-1980', in 'Stuart Corbridge , et.all, op.cit, p-23, Original source, F.Bailey, 1961, 'Tribe, Caste and Nation', Manchester University Press. D.J. Mandelbaum, 1970, 'Society in India', 2 Vol. University of California Press, p-578

<sup>78</sup> U.N.Dhebar (Chairman), 1962, 'Report of the Scheduled Caste Scheduled Tribes Commission, New Delhi, p-8, Quoted in Corbridge, op.cit, p-22

<sup>79</sup> Baden-powell, op.cit, p-430

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p-436

<sup>81</sup> K.S.Singh, 'Agrarian Issues in Chotanagpur', in Tribal Situation in India, op.cit, pp-379-80

<sup>82</sup> K.S.Singh, op.cit, pp-379-80

<sup>83</sup> Hari Mohan Mathur, 2009, 'Tribal land issues in India : Communal Management, Rights and Displacement' in Jayanta Parera (ed) 'Land and Cultural Survival, The Communal Land Rights of Indigenous people in Asia, p-163

<sup>84</sup> Dr. B.B.Chowdhury , Personal interview at University of Calcutta and Jadavpr University 2007

<sup>85</sup> O'Malley , 1910, op.cit, p-120

<sup>86</sup> Joseph E. SCHWARTZBERG, Census of India 1961, Monograph Series, No-4, occupational Structure and level of Economic Development in India, A Regional analysis, pp-92-93

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<sup>87</sup> Ramesh Sharan, 2005, 'Alienation and Restoration of Tribal Land in Jharkhand : Current Issues and Possible Strategies' EPW, Oct, 8, pp-4443-4446.