

SETTLING THE UNRULY TRACTS: REPRESENTATION OF COUNTER SPATIAL TACTICS, IDEAS ON ENVIRONMENT AND JUSTICE AMONG SANTALS IN 18TH CENTURY FOLKTALES

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Looking at the in-between zones of daily living amidst conflict, this paper locates what may have pointed to the everyday life of the Santals and their environmental space¹ and place-making practices², through available descriptions in folktales documented between 1890 and 1929. Here, an attempt is made to shift the narrative around Santals in the 18th and 19th centuries, beyond the idea of rebellion and oppression, to the Santal imaginations on space and place-making. Thus, while acknowledging previous environmental research on the colonial impact on tribal societies and the transformation of their landscapes (Guha, Sivaramkrishnan, *et al.*), where earlier researches have established and acknowledged the important relationship that tribals had with the forests, this paper instead attempts to look at possibilities available in folktales to gauge the 'inner life of the Santals' and their own assessment of power groups during this time period.

While new researches have broken away from the earlier emphasis on insurgencies by tribal communities to exploring dimensions such as gender relations, the role of the local elite in ousting tribals from their resources, and the influence of migration on tribal societies, the focus on 'place-making' and the 'environmental imagination' of Santals available in their folktales in the 18th century tries to point towards new ways of viewing tribal research in tune with contemporary concerns. Since the areas of habitation of the Santals and other tribes in Central India continue to be conflict-ridden today, the paper hopes to take a retrospective look into the past and everyday lives in conflict among the tribals in the 18th century, which may continue to hold relevance in the way we are dealing with the tribal communities and the environment today.

In the analysis of the historical trends in tribal studies, B. B. Chaudhuri reinforces what S.C. Roy argued for: the need to look at 'the inner life of the community', and how they perceived the power groups from oral narratives and songs of the tribals, which still remains a neglected area of research (Dasgupta and Basu, 2012: 48). Given that this period in history is crucial for the society, where the Santals were being settled from shifting to sedentary cultivation, where the 'disciplining of the space'³ was entirely controlled by the British, assessing 'notions of space' and 'spatial practices' among the Santals helps to emphasise how the 'house' and the 'universe', the 'forest' and 'the landscape' provide the Santals a space for dreaming and imagining (Gaston, 1994). In recognizing this imagination, one hopes to look at the emerging 'political praxis of the Santals' and their subversive and counter spatial tactics which find expression in these folktales as well as the environmental wisdoms embedded in the same. This critical look into Santal place-making gives the Santals a 'nuanced placement in a specific geographical landscape (and time) which has historical significance in socio-cultural practices, due to spatial configurations and concomitant ideologies about the built form' (Amoo-Adare, 2013). While disciplining of these spaces today continues to be along lines determining productive activities on that space and increased state military activity, exploring the time period between a change in productive activities and rebellion and military control of the space in the past, provide an insight into the minds of the oppressed who were trying to seek out 'liberatory spaces' amidst this disciplining. Here, I focus specifically on environmental attitudes which are related to spatial practices around nature (or 'natural resources'), which was a core point of tension between the rulers and the ruled even in the 18th century.

A PICTURE OF THE TIMES

The period between 1770-1860 saw a large agrarian change or the 'settling of the unruly tracts' (Sen, 1984). Several moments of environmental loss were recorded among the Santal communities residing in this area along the eastern part of the Damodar Basin⁴. The Bengal Famine in 1770, which led to much of these lands falling into wastelands called 'jungle' later, was cleared for agriculture with major incentives from the British (Ghosh and others, 2007). This forms the initial marker of transition over the landscape while the Santal Revolt of 1855 marks the end of this period.

Having emptied the coffers after defeating Siraj ud Daula in 1765, the British had to think of new ways to increase revenue. In 1770, the famine in Bengal had created further distress and shortage. In the lesser fertile tracts or dry laterite zones of Birbhum, where there was depopulation, these farmlands fell to becoming wastelands. The British realized that this region was lying in the hands of Zamindars who had paid little or no revenue since the time of the Maratha troubles when Ali Vardi Khan was Nawab (Sen 1984). It was important for them to settle these areas and extend tillage into the wastelands to improve revenues. Some scholars speculate that earlier agricultural activity had ceased on these wastelands but the British tended to call these areas 'forest lands' (Ghosh and others, 2007). The nomadic Santals begin to play the environment-altering role of clearing forests and reclaiming these wastelands by bringing more and more land under cultivation. (Sen, Areeparampil *et al.*).⁵ This is a crucial moment in the environmental history of this region, as inaccessible land is now easily accessed by the British and thereby also transformed. The British used several oppressive laws on existing systems, which ultimately resulted in the Santal Revolt of 1855.

Forests prior to this period are represented as always having been an ambivalent category, an area where wars were fought, lying in the periphery of empires and kingdoms, comprising the social and political other, the alien and evil. Forests were also places of 'exile' or a space for 'meditation', frequented by outcastes, mavericks and the holy men in society. But the situation began to change with the entry of the East India Company. The Company began to quickly map these areas, and unlike earlier times where the ambivalence of forest tracts remained, for the Company, a better solution was to clear them. Clearing forests was a part of the civilizing mission. A few years later, however, the British realized the importance of retaining forests with the rush in demand for *Sal (shorearobusta)* trees for sleepers for the railways. Yet again began a new oppressive regime of bringing privately-held forests under state ownership, and overriding laws on commonly-held forestlands, leading to a host of conservation conflicts.

THE SANTAL REVOLT IN 1855

The Santal Rebellion of 1855 was the final marker of the disturbances and discontent that the East India Company's rule caused to the peace and tranquility of the Jungle Mahals, comprising a part of

the middle valley tract of the Damodar. In 1855, thus, we find considerable alarm among the British and evident in the following letter addressed to the Secretary of Bengal by the Commissioner of Chhotanagpuris a description of this revolt of 'an outbreak of the Santal population' with an appearance of 'a very general and serious rising' (Old Singbhum Records, 1958).

The movement meant a lot of direct loss to the Santals themselves. Sidhu, Kanhu and other leaders of the movement who were arrested, were sentenced to death and hanged in 1856. The others were not only dispossessed but falling to penury chose to become daily-wage labourers or went back to settled cultivation. Members from the Santali community became a stable pool of labour for British enterprises through most of the 19th century after this (Areeparampil, 2002).

The Santals had a very complete form of a village community known as the Mandali system. In this system, the Majhi or village headman would handle all the business of the community, which included negotiation of rent as well. Unlike the *Paharias*⁶ who refused to settle, the Santals took to settling in these undulating plains, which had to be leveled for cultivation (particularly what the British constituted as Jungle Mahals). The landlords would initially fix verbal tenures with the Santals who kept their commitments on the same. Furthermore, for the initial years of clearing, they were not charged any rent.

The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, instituted by the British as a more strategic system of gathering revenue, at once empowered local landlords to collect revenue on behalf of the British along with ignoring the numerous rights that were available to different kinds of cultivators and tenurial rights held prior to this, which were both written and verbal. Now, landholdings were allotted to Zamindars under a fixed tenure with a fixed rate of revenue. The Santals, who earlier were of great use to clear jungle and forestland and hence not charged any rent, were slowly charged taxes against the plough and as they settled, they were later taxed against the total crop produced. These assessments while flouting earlier agreements were exorbitant, since it only matched the land productivity levels of the fertile plains of Bengal rather than the dry laterite zones of the Jungle Mahals (Ghosh, Areeparampil, Sen *et al.*). Extortion by landlords meant high debts, crop produce was slowly bonded to *Mahajans* (moneylenders) and exorbitant rents meant quick land alienation among the Santals who fled towards Damin-i-koh (Dumka), the only *khas* lands that were left directly

under the Company. Here is where the Santals received some protection as the Company was quick to realize that the Santals were lesser aware of government systems and courts and the written word, in comparison to their counterparts from Bengal, Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, who were the Zamindars and revenue collectors in the area.

As soon as the lands became cultivable lands, the Santals would flee to newer wastelands while the cultivable lands would pass on to permanent settlers. Thus, it is no wonder that as the Santals began to retreat from Bengal and the Jungle Mahals, their numbers grew in Damin-i-Koh, the only place where their rights were protected. With time, lesser and lesser wastelands were available, providing all the appropriate conditions for a revolt.

The repeated problem faced by the Santals and other tribals in Jharkhand was that while they offered and arranged governance regimes which were community-based collectives of organizing resources, the colonial government found this inconvenient, especially in terms of determining and ensuring that revenues increased (Ghosh and others, 2007).

British law and policy created the dominant spatial practice in these parts. The British administration first transformed the space, and then experienced losses in the space. It instituted formal definitions of this loss as 'deforestation' and developed new ideas on 'forests', 'wild tracts', 'productivity', and 'settled agriculture'. It was the apocalyptic events which the British woke up to—namely famine, shrinking cultivation, the wrath of marauders and finally deforestation (Damodaran, 2002). Revenue extractions during the colonial period played a crucial role in 'ecological degradation' and 'deforestation'.

BODDING'S FOLKTALES

Reverend Paul Olaf Bodding (1865-1938) was a Norwegian missionary, linguist and ethnographer who worked with the Santals for 44 years. He arrived in India in 1890, a young Norwegian priest who came to help Skrefsrud and Borresen in their missionary work and resided in Mahulpahari in Dumka (Damin-i-koh). His main work was around Santali literature and much of his interests lay around the mythologies, legends, folktales, songs, witchcraft, medicines and daily life of the Santals. Among the several works credited to him are a collection of folktales. After Bodding died, his wife Mrs Christine Bodding handed these manuscripts over to the Oslo

University Library in Norway, which were put into press by another folklorist, Steven Konow.

A man by the name of Sagram Murmu from Godda sub-division of Santal Parganas helped Bodding with his work on Santali language. Sagram Murmu had great knowledge of his people and Bodding encouraged him to write his stories down as well as collect stories from distant villages against a nominal remuneration. Soren's research of the original manuscripts corroborates Konow's claim that most of these folktales were in fact written down by Murmu himself and not Bodding. Konow, of course, went one step further to state that it may thus be considered an authentic source or cultural wealth of the tribals (Soren, 1999), though this may be debatable. There has been a continued debate in tribal studies on the role of missionaries during this time. Traditional researches show that the missionaries worked in tandem with the colonial state with the sole aim of bringing in a civilizing mission among the 'natives'. However, recent researches show that the role of missionaries continues to be debatable while Tripti Chaudhuri stresses on their evangelical rather than imperial roles, whereby their main goal was to educate the Santals and improve the life situations, hence emphasizing that their records were not always encapsulated with interests of the state (Dasgupta and Basu, 2012: 102-120). Alpa Shah (2014) highlights the missionaries as a force which acted against the State (e. g. , the Jesuits) and thereby actually eased the entry of the state into the area in the long run. Bodding belonged to the European missions, but considerable criticism has been made by tribal scholars on Bodding's misrepresentation of Santali religion (Archer, Cecil Henry Bompas, and Soren), though all acknowledge the contribution his body of work has made to the cultural resources located in that time. Thus, in this interpretation, one has had to keep in mind the biases in the text and the reformist agendas of the missionaries.

It is evident from the explanations in the Preface by Steven Konow that the documentation of stories on behalf of Santals was being conducted with the fear that almost all of this community was getting 'Aryanised' and little history of ancient India will be left. Santals were from the ancient Kolarian race and hence documentation of their folktales would help throw light 'on the mentality preserved in their ancient speech', mentions Konow. One gets a hint of the reason for this fear where Tripti Chaudhuri highlights that after the Sidhu Kanhu movement, in 1874, many Santals joined the Kherwar movement initiated by Bhagirathi Manjhi

of Godda, which had a lot of Hindu influence which appealed to the Santals and threatened the Christian Missionaries (Dasgupta and Basu, 2012: 110)

Konow concludes these Aryan influences in the stories because of the inflection of some Aryan words related to domestication of animals, trade, craftsmanship, money and time but also mentions the likeness that the tales have with Pancatantra and that it is difficult to gauge whether the Aryans adapted their stories from the stories of the Kolarians, the root community of the Santals, or whether Murmu had documented stories which had adapted themselves to Aryan influences over time. Furthermore, in the first story in Volume 1, the writer, Sagram Murmu, tells us about how the Santals are learning to read and write after the *Sahebs (The Missionaries)* have come in and taught them. He considers these folktales to be the unwritten laws of the Santals which help carry down the traditions and customs of the Santals.

ABOUT THE NARRATORS AND STRUCTURE OF THE FOLKTALES

Others who helped Murmu with writing the manuscript included Durga Tudu, Mohon Hembrom, Bhuju Murmu, Kanhu Marndi, Somae Murmu, Kandna Soren, Hari Besra, S Hasdak, Sugri Haram, Dhunu Murmu and Sona (Soren, 1999). Soren highlights the presence of women who also submitted these stories, though in the 1929 printed version of Bodding's folktales by Gian Publishing House referred to in this paper, many of the names are not mentioned. In these volumes, just a few find mention. Sagram Murmu from Godda, Kanhu Marndi from Chondorpura, a better-educated Santal who died in Mesopotamia during the period of war, Bijhu Murmu and Phagu, among others. There is a possibility that some of the tales were told by women as some characteristics and motifs clearly represent this (Ramanujan, 1997). The confusion over motifs suggests that having adapted itself from the original tellers, characteristics and motifs of both women and male-authored tales are found. Most of these stories have a free-flowing structure and the stories are left open-ended with a scope for multiple interpretations based on the life experiences of the listener. In most cases, Murmu has documented different versions of the similar tale, where the basic plot and storyline remains the same, but the characters take on new colours and voices in each tale. These multiple versions provide an imaginative reading of how the Santals were trying to argue with the numerous dilemmas of survival at that time.

I do not select all the stories in the three volumes for this paper. Instead, I highlight some relevant plots and incidents that give insights into the spatial imagination of the Santals, where definite renegotiations are taking place when the physical space is changing around them and provide a focused discussion on the tales around the cultural heroes of the Santals, which may point to some key ideas of justice and environmental attitudes.

THE SANTAL COUNTRY/SPACE IN THE FOLKTALES

To use Descola's term 'nature of beings', these folktales are documentary evidences of how Santals viewed nature and their landscapes within their folk traditions at that time. The tales give a rich diversity of observation among the Santals, and their construction of the natural space around them. For the Santals, the inner and the outer world, the house and the world they inhabited were equally important. The typical Santal country comprises the presence of flat rocks, many Arjuna (*Terminalia Arjuna*, Kahua) and palm (*Borassus Flabelliformus*) trees and 'tanks' or water bodies.

It is interesting that Santals gave so much recognition to these small creatures, termites.⁷ 'Termite hills were to be found everywhere,' writes Bodding. (Bodding, 1990a: 172) The Santal folktales show the keen observations that the Santals had made of the intricate nature of the termite nests, as the characters (chickens) get lost in the narrow passages of the termite hill and save themselves from the hungry Jackal. This Bachelard would interpret as the labyrinthine journeys down a *cellar*, while here the Santali subconscious comprises a journey into the intricate underground passages of a termite hill where chickens find *refuge*, experiencing adventure and protection from the enemy who could not access these parts. It is in fact the subterranean and irrational forces pointed out by Bachelard, probably 'fear', that finds various *underground manoeuvres* in the underground tunnels where takes place the resolution of the plot in a story where a friend turns foe.

There are also some indications on the customs related to the use of space. Water bodies and tanks were segregated for drinking and eating and for cleaning or washing. These norms are considered important, since failure to adhere to the norm is mocked at by the Jackal, when a small King fails to establish this practice in his kingdom (Bodding, 1990a: 2). Tanks are usually surrounded by palm trees since the leaves of palm trees don't fall and rot, thus ensuring that the water remains clean. Bamboo trees are planted a little away

from the water since the leaves could fall and pollute the water, observes Bodding in his footnotes (Bodding, 1990a). Since folktales were also a method of educating the young, it could be that in their documentation, the Santalis recording these stories for the missionaries included messages and agendas for the society as well.

The natural landscape bears symbols of familial connections and ancestry and this is evident when one culls out the role of trees and grasslands in different plots. In the story 'How the Sabai Grass Came into Existence' (*Backom Cet Leka Janamen*) (Bodding, 1990b: 296), the slain sister of seven brothers takes the form of a bamboo shoot which is cut and converted into a flute and the sister comes alive through the music in the flute and calls her brothers for a meal. While serving the meal, as she relates the story of their act of slaying her, the ground opens up to swallow them, which includes the youngest brother who tried to rescue her but failed. The sister tries to save her youngest brother from being swallowed into the ground by holding on to his hair. While he too faces the same fate as his brothers, his hair remains above the ground and becomes *sabai grass*⁸ (Backom, *Pollinia Eripoda*) and covers the landscape.⁹ While for the environmental researcher the importance given to *sabai* is important, Bachelard points to the *natural surroundings* bringing to the fore the idea of *elsewhere* which have detailed memories of the past and while the past here holds harsh memories of loss of ancestors and family and lessons for the Santals, the *sabai grass* provides *avast* space, of immensity and dreams.

In fact, so important is the trope of the natural surroundings in the daily life of the Santals that this enters their daily rituals and customs. In a sub-plot, which includes rituals and customs involving the river Damodar, the story on the Jackal and the Prince (*Toyo Ar Raj Hopon Rean*) (Bodding, 1990a: 58) is about the pauperised prince boy. Bodding explains in a footnote 'that for Santals, among the numerous death rituals or ceremonies performed, the last ceremony is called *bandhan*, performed after some of the bones of the cremated body are thrown into the Damuda river'. This connection is better explained in the tale on *Kara and Guja* (Bodding, 1990c :162), where the story unfolds on the sub-sept of the Hasdak sept of the Santals, or *Cil Bandhis*. In the story, two kites have been plaguing the community; it is Kara and Guja who manage to kill them. The two kites fall into the *Gangi Jamin* spring or fountainhead of the river Damodar, symbolizing the ancestral history of the *Cil Bandhis*.

These stories are also used to orient children to the forest and the animals and plants, besides the *ancestral* symbolism that forests

hold in literature. We are oriented to the kind of activities women undertook in the forest and the range and the nature of animals as well. In 'The Story of a Princess' (*Raj Kumari Reak Katha*) (Bodding, 1990b: 162), when the sister is plagued by her seven sisters-in-law, she finds friends in the forest. So, when her sisters-in-law trick her by giving her a potfull of holes while sending her to fetch water, the frogs offer to lie flat over them, so the pot does not leak, or when she is asked to bring leaves from the forest without tying them, the tree snake (*Dipsadomorphustrigonatus*—non-poisonous) stretches itself and wraps itself around the leaves, hence tying the bundle and unbundling it when the sisters-in-law come to see how she has managed the feat. In the same way, the rat-snake (*Zamenismucosus*—non-poisonous) fastens itself around the firewood which she must carry back for her sisters-in-law.

In the story (*Toyo Ar Tarup Rean*) (Bodding, 1990a: 8), a ravenous leopard who has been attacking the Santal village is saved by a group of traders travelling along the road in the forest, and after this generous act of the traders, decides to turn around and eat them instead. The 'mahua tree' and the 'waterpool' sit in judgment giving environmental lessons when the traders call upon the *mahua* tree and the waterpool to save them from the leopard. The tree and waterpool believe that the leopard should surely eat the traders given the ingratitude of 'human kind' to them and nature. Trees are that *poetic space* where the inner and outer worlds blend. In many of the stories, trees bring respite and a twist in the protagonists' otherwise difficult life. Trees are important marking points which change events or turn around fate. For instance, the Banyan Tree (*Ficus bengalensis*) is a camping ground in between a long journey and also brings a twist to the story when the Mongoose Boy (*Cemen Kora*) who (Bodding, 1990b: 144-175) loses his house and belongings because his brothers burn it down, and strikes a fortune under the 'dream space' of the tree.

The tree acts as a space for solace, forgiveness and redemption as well. Thus, in the story 'Seven Brothers and One Sister' (Bodding, 1990a), where the sister is constantly plagued by her seven sisters-in-law, the narration goes like this,

"Hurt by all this, the girl went away to a sandal-wood tree [Santalum album] and sat down at the foot of this tree. Having thought over all, she mounted the tree to hang herself, but she was not hanged, she was transformed into a fruit and stayed there. A long time passed.

Then one day her brothers were coming back from their trading tour, and camped at the foot of this tree; while there, people tell, a tear-drop fell down on them. ”

While trees come in as a symbol of ‘immensity’, the blending of the inner and outer worlds, it is important to note that many of the plots around the trees have a sense of tragedy associated with them. Bachelard associates *grandeur* and immensity with trees. On more occasions than one in Santal folktales, trees are found to *weep*.

Some of the spatial demarcations highlighted in these stories are the carved niches in the walls and near the fireplace for fowls within the dwelling, the walls offer protection and a place of refuge. The *bhitar* (inner world) is where the *Bongas* (spirits) and ancestors reside. The house-field at the end of the dwelling is where Santals grow corn and vegetables in the cold weather. There are demarcations of the forest from places of habitation. The forest is a place of proximity that suits all domestic purposes of fetching water, firewood and leaves and fruit-gathering and planting. The limits to this constructed imagination of space is that space beyond where strange adventures take place. These are: the road frequented by traders, the ambivalent market place to make a fortune or get robbed, the place beyond the river Ganga where lives ‘the other’, the source of the Damodar in which lie the ancestors and to which the last funeral rites are offered, and the deep forest where sometimes the cattle are taken in to graze. The Santals also visit distant lands or the lands of the other in these tales, but here it is usually for the purpose of exchange, to exchange cloth, cattle, and charcoal. This gives the drastically different conception of territory and space in the minds of the Santals as well as conceptions of time.

The Santali folktales trace gradual changes in the landscape, ‘one that was ever changing with past forests giving way to settlement, shifting agricultural practices and altering boundaries between villages and forests’. In the tale ‘Jhades Judi’ (The Ascetic Jhades) (Bodding, 1990b: 46)¹⁰, a description of changes in the forest landscape is linked with the notion of time.

After the bride of the youngest brother of seven brothers is kidnapped by the Judi,

“As time passed, who knows how long a time, people tell, they took care of the child whom she had borne and gone away from, until he grew up. And people also cleared the primeval forest and settled all over and filled the place.”

NEGOTIATING LIFESTYLE CHANGES AMONG THE SANTALS

Some of the stories lock in the numerous conflicting decisions and new norms that needed to be established in the community as the political and economic and environmental events were turning around them. This is reflected in some of the stories, particularly around the shifts in agricultural practices from shifting to sedentary agriculture, dilemmas on conservation, or the flux that the community was facing due to migration, or how the Santals chose coping mechanisms around the atrocities of *Zamindars* (landlords) and moneylenders, or the simple changes in technology, some that the Santals willingly took on for their own betterment at that time.

In Volume I of Bodding's folktales, a separate section is devoted to stories on women. While Bodding notes that the Santali women are not projected in equal light as the men, it is interesting that plots and stories around women also depict several conflicts faced by the society in the outside world, and most of these conflicts are a negotiation on lifestyle.

The importance that the Santals gave to the combined form of living agrarian and forest-based livelihoods is highlighted several times in different tales. In the 'Kara and Guja' story, the situation is described clearly, where rent-free land earlier provided to Santals was being converted into rent. Here Santals have continued some of their older practices of support from the jungle to supplement their food. There is a mention of jungle tubers such as *Zehneria Umbellata* used for consumption.

In one of the stories of animals borne by women titled the 'Hanuman Boy' (*Haru Kora Rean*) (Bodding, 1990b: 110-143), the plot revolves around the shifts in agrarian practice. The Hanuman boy, born of a widow, is used to highlight this difference.¹¹ The story unfolds with several incidents of how the Hanuman boy outwits his seven human brothers in spite of his limited resources. The competitive conflict between them starts when the Hanuman boy and his brothers decide to clear the forest to begin cultivation. Each of the brothers chooses a patch of the forest to clear, but here the Hanuman boy strikes his axe at a tree and comes back home. The Hanuman boy does not light fire in his part of the clearing while his brothers have cleared their patch and begun to use ploughs and bullocks too. The Hanuman boy asks his mother for ploughs, bullocks and seeds, only to hear that she has none of these assets. His mother gives him pumpkin seeds (*kodukutki*) instead. Thus, while his brothers sow highland paddy¹², the Hanuman boy plants pumpkin seeds

(*Cucurbitia lagane ria*) which grow as climbing creepers around the tree stumps in the forest. At this point, the conversation between the Hanuman boy and his brothers flows like this:

“Look here you, when are you going to plough? You do nothing to clear the ground. ”

“O brothers,” he (Hanuman Boy) replies, “I have sown without clearing the ground. ”

“What have you sown, you fellow?” they asked.

“Look here brothers,” he on his part asked them, “what have you sown?”

“We,” they replied, “we have sown highland-paddy. ”

“I also,” he said, “have sown highland-paddy; or rather I have not sown, I have planted. ”

The brothers soon realise that the Hanuman boy has planted pumpkins instead of rice, and at this point he tries to convince them that he can barter these pumpkins for rice. During the harvesting season, a ritual is followed of offering the first rice harvest to the *bongas* on a sacred spot or *khond* after which a feast is prepared. The Hanuman boy must also follow this ritual even though he has planted no rice. To his mother’s surprise, when they cut open the biggest pumpkin picked from the forest, out falls a whole lot of rice, symbolically seeds here. The story points to the fact that there is some prosperity in planting as well.

In the story on the ‘Jackal and the Leopard’ (*Toyo Ar Arup Rean*), we are introduced to the typical dilemmas related to conservation. While stories of hunting as a sport are replete in several accounts by the British and local elite during this time, in this story a clear rationale of survival is given for killing the leopard that has been eating the villagers’ cows and bullocks. The leopard is given a voice in the story, and chooses to escape to another forest when he hears the din of the Santal drums in the villages. However, here he meets a group of traders along the road which bifurcates the forest, who try to save him from the people in the village. We are thus introduced to competing interests vis a vis the leopard, the people in the village and the traders on the road. In the story, when the Leopard is saved by the traders, he threatens to kill the traders, who ask a ‘mahua tree’ and ‘a waterpool’ to sit in judgment. Both give their verdict against the traders given the ‘ingratitude’ of human kind. It is at

this point that the Jackal is introduced in the story. He ignores previous judgments and instead outwits the leopard. The leopard is induced to enter a sack and then beaten up with stones to death.

There could be numerous interpretations to this story. The story could be of competing interests. What the Jackal does is take us back to the original intention of the village people, who were being harassed by the leopard in the forest and who decide to work in the larger interest of saving the forest and the traders rather than just serving the vested interest of the traders of saving themselves, or the self-interest of the leopard. On the other hand, the leopard being given a voice could well be 'nature's being' that has lost a sense of home and place, and must meet its end given the numerous forces against him, the lack of food, the traders, the villagers and the Jackal, who can outwit anyone.

In the stories on women, 'The Silly Women' (*Dundhi Maejiu Rean*) and The Story of 'Some Women' (*Maejiuko Reak Katha*) indirectly establish that women are not to engage in the sacrificial rituals associated with paying homage to the ancestors (*Kutam Dungra*). The plots in the stories revolve around a time when all the men leave the village, leaving the women behind to perform these rituals, an exclusive domain of men. In the first story, the narrator mentions that the story is located in a time 'when the Santals were all foolish', and a *Zamindar* forcibly takes the men away. The women pray to the Bongas that their men return safely. In the second story, the story is located at a time when the village was an endogamous village and hence when the men all went off to trade (which Bodding captures in his notes as moving far into the Assam districts to trade in cloth, cattle and charcoal), women are left behind to perform the sacrifice. In both the stories, it is established that this knowledge rests with men indicating that the men are needed in village rituals as well. In smaller plots, in 'The Moneylender and his Debtor' (*Mohajonar Khatok*) (Bodding, 1990a: 263) a Santal outwits the moneylender and settles his case. A considerable portion in the story is devoted to the interaction between the moneylender and the Santal's wife, who does not understand the language of the moneylender and this comes forth in a dramatic scene when the moneylender finding the Santali man unavailable in the house, must accept the postponement of the payment of dues, but instead eyes the beans grown in the house-field by the Santali woman. The moneylender begins to argue. Not understanding the alien language, the argument flares into a physical act of the woman chasing him out of the house with a pestle. A clear message is given

to Santali women on how to cope with the threats of changing and powerful forces around them.

THE SANTAL CULTURAL HERO AND ATTITUDE TO JUSTICE

The Jackal¹³ is an important cultural image in most of these tales. Though the Jackal is a trickster, he is established as greater than the King. The Jackal may also represent an ambivalent character who could well be the missionary for the Santals narrating these stories, or the pure cultural hero of the Santals.

In most of the stories, the Jackal enters a plot when all other systems of justice seem to be failing in the narrative. Since folktales are being handed down to the next generation, one can assume that the Jackal is trying to tell the next generation not to make the same mistakes as the previous generation and keep their wits about them. Thus, this section explores in the voice of the Jackal the larger messages that are being given on justice, and the voice of wisdom in these trickster narratives.

The Jackal in Judgment

In the story 'Jackal Judgment' (*Toyo Bicar*) (Bodding, 1990a: 39), the she-jackal plays a crucial role where the overall morality of the society seems to have failed. Here a young boy is cheated by an influential man, who manages to bring in a group of arbitrators whom he pays beforehand to be on his side. The jackal manages to convince the arbitrators that passing 'unrighteous judgments which impact the seventh generation' would result in a mockery of the arbitrators themselves. Here indirectly, the jackal is suggesting that there is a need for honest arbitration in order to keep the moral fabric of society intact for future generations. The following table locates the possible messages from the Jackal in Judgment in some of selected folktales.

Analysis of the voice and action of the
Jackal in Judgment (Bodding 1990,a.)

Santali Name of the Folktale	Core concern in the Folktale	Resolution offered by the Jackal	Environmental Plots/Wisdom/ other concerns offered through the story
<p><i>Toyo Ar Harem Budhi Rean</i></p> <p>The Jackal and Husband and Wife</p>	<p>Explores a husband and wife relationship, and the entry of the <i>bhut</i>(ghost) who claims that the woman is his wife</p>	<p>The Jackal stops the fight and instead asks to investigate the case. Cleverly throws a challenge and makes the <i>bhut</i> enter a kupi (earthenware pot) and thus banishes him. He also instructs the woman to leave the earthen pot behind</p>	<p>The story talks of a lot of changes in the Santal community such as the entry of bottles instead of earthenware and bamboo receptacles, reading and writing brought in by the 'Sahebs', and the customary importance of folktales and riddles in passing down tradition and customs in the community. The wisdom offered is the need to judge the case instead of quarrelling and an introduction to the importance of folktales put together by ancestors for the community</p>

*Toyo Ar Tarup
Rean*

The Jackal and
the Leopard

A ravenous leopard is eating up the cows and bullocks of the Santals. What do the villages do with the leopard? Should they save the leopard or cut the forest down? They decide to save the forest and kill the leopard instead

The Jackal enters at a moment of ingratitude when the leopard threatens to eat the traders who have saved him from the villagers as he crosses a road in the middle of the forest. He outwits the judgment of the *mahua* tree and *waterpool*, who believe the leopard is right due to the ingratitude of humankind to nature and manages to trap the leopard and save the traders and villagers

The story looks at several layers of interests; the Santals who needed to save their cattle and believe that it is indeed better to save the forest than one leopard, pointing to larger interests, the traders who work in vested interest as they save the leopard without thinking of the Santals. The self-interest and the ingratitude of the leopard that is rescued who then wants to eat the traders. This justifies the action of the Jackal, who outwits the leopard and finally stones him to death. The Jackal saves the traders and also works in interest of the Santals. Smaller messages are given by the *mahua* tree and *waterpool* to the traders who cut and axe even the roots of the tree, while basking under its shadow, and drink water from the waterpool though they constantly pollute it.

*Toyo Reak
Khisa*

The
Astuteness of
the Jackal

A father-son
quarrel which
is not
submitted to
the Panch in
fear of fine.
How do we
support our
children? How
do we use our
wit to support
ourselves?

The Panch members
talk of a jackal story
where a she-jackal
outwits a leopard.
Here, the Panch is
held synonymous to a
leopard which may
devour the younger
jackals as the he and
she jackals quarrel.
Both the jackals enter
their cave, the she
jackal offers a solution
to the leopard and
exits his trap and
manages to enter the
cave inaccessible to
the leopard.

The father and
son decide to
settle their
quarrel without
the Panch
members. A
basketful of wit
is needed to do
this. Women
like the she
jackal are
considered to
have wisdom
and are an
example to the
Santals to avoid
punishments
and fines from
the Panch
(Council), by
sorting out
their own
matters.

Toyo Bicar

The Jackal's
Judgment

A father tells
his son to seek
protection
under a big
man after his
death.

The Jackal is
established as a
cultural hero in the
story where the Jackal
is greater than the
King. The Jackal offers
a magical gift of a
cow to the poor boy.
The cow gives him
many goods and
rewards for his well-
being. The cow is
stolen unfairly by
elders in the village
and the Jackal enters
when an unfair
judgment is about to
take place over the
ownership of the cow.

The Jackal
reminds the
arbitrators that
unrighteous
judgments
should not be
passed on the
younger
generations

<i>Toyo Horokora Rean</i>	The Jackal again is established as a cultural hero. How did you know that I am the big one?	The story points out that though the Jackal is a big one, it is not necessary that he has material wealth, but wit and wisdom	The plot is similar to the previous story. Several other strategies are made available in this story for the boy to protect his cow. The cow is an important asset for Santals at this point in time, a part of the changing lifestyles which was being accepted by the community
The Jackal and the Santal			
<i>Toyo Ar Raja Hopon Rean</i>	A father tells his son to seek protection under a big man after his death.	The Jackal and the Prince Jackal again gifts the boy a prized cow	The cow is an important asset for Santals at this point in time, a part of the changing lifestyles which was being accepted by the community

The Jackal as a Trickster

Where the Jackal is a trickster, the Jackal is constantly cheating the Santalis, and hard lessons need to be learnt along the way, so the Jackal does not get the better of them. In the story, 'The Jackal's Craftiness' (*Toyo Reak Porphundi*) (Bodding, 1990a: 92), we find the plot unfurl between the Jackal and the Leopards, where the Jackal is actually a moneylender who comes to the leopards asking for grain. The elder leopards find that their young ones are left starving even though they bring enough food home at the end of the day. They realize the Jackal's antics. A tragedy unfurls as the Jackal kills the father when the parents try to take revenge and the young ones and the mother must now accompany the Jackal. Throughout the story, we are exposed to the craftiness of the Jackal, how he uses the leopards to hunt, how he manages to eat the bigger share, how he manages to trick the crocodile while crossing the river and destroys him.

In a large collection of stories on the Jackal, one finds the mention of the age-old ritual of friendship among Santali women of exchanging two leaves and branches of the Karam tree (*Adina Cordifolia*) and thereby declaring their friendship in the community for life. In the stories, the Jackal makes friends with Hen and her chicks, paddy birds (*Ardeolagrayii*, *Kok*) or a hare, showing that these friendships happen between the strong and the weak as well. The Jackal manages to gobble his weak friends in the stories and if one were to explore at what point the weak are killed, in most cases it is in a moment of over-intoxication¹⁴, for most of these incidents are around sharing rice beer together. In most of the plots, the story unfurls around the idea of 'greed'. The Jackal displays sheer greed where he must devour all that is in front of him, paddy bird, goat, sheep, cow, bullock and finally meets his own destruction in the end. In other cases the society gets together and punishes him.

CONCLUSION

We may broadly conclude that though Bodding's documentations of folktales from the 18th century may have included within them reformist or evangelical missionary agendas, they provide a wealth of information in understanding the inner life of the Santals during the 18th century. The stories highlight the actual situation and the aspiration of the Santals. They also provide us with interesting insights into the environmental attitudes and spatial constructions by the Santals. In terms of the dramatic changes around the Santals,

the Santals stake their claim to space by establishing identities through rituals, and customs and ancestral linkages that they have, or the simple poetic space of the different trees in the landscape, the dream space where Santals change their fortune overnight. Through the exploration of 'spatial concepts' and 'environmental imaginations' in the folktales, one thus finds a broad idea of the kind of symbols or manifestations available in a select set of stories of these ideas on space. The folktales subtly suggest some of the counter spatial tactics chosen by Santals. These include the importance the community continues to give to the forest to supplement their food, which comprised a range of 'nature's beings', distinguishable into friend and foe or the space of reserves such as the 'house field', an important reserve of food which is outside the scope of access to the moneylender, or the warm fireplace at home, the protective spaces for Santals. In the critical negotiation over the imaginations of space is the crucial link of identity, and given the time in history when the folktales are documented, the dismantling of the physical and local spaces around the Santals meant a constant need for negotiation of the self and identity (Amoo-Adare, 2013: 126) which finds expression in these folktales.

NOTES

1. Lefebvre specifies that in order to theorise about the production of space, we need to examine space in terms of spatial practices, representational spaces and representations of space. (Lefebvre, 1991). The 'way space is identified draws critical boundaries between identities, self and other.' (Gregory and Pred, 2007)
2. Sense of place is what roots a person to a specific geographical location or place. A person's attachment to a place may be based on people, culture, history, emotion, land, time, and so on. Sense of place or place-attachment is an 'environmental attitude' that contributes to the formation, maintenance or preservation of identity. (Low and Altman, 1992, Amoo-Adare, 2013).
3. The disciplining of space imposes abstract space on everyday life, and in doing so predisposes the users of those spaces towards certain social or spatial practices. (Amoo-Adare, 2013).
4. The term 'Jungle Mahals' was used during Akbar's rule and formed part of Circa Gopalpara. Later, the area was transferred to Chakla Midnapur in 1722. In 1805, the East India Company constituted the Jungle Mahals whereby it added some parganas and mahals from Midnapur which included Chatna, Barabhumi, Manbhumi, Supur, Ambikanagar, Simlapal and Bhalaidih, the district of Burdwan which surrendered Senpahari,

Shergarh, and Bishnupur and Pachet, Bagmundry, Bogan, Kaodan, Taraf Bahapur, Katlas, Habila, Jhalda, Jayapur, Mukundy, Nwagarh, KismatChaontly, Torang, Tung, Nagar, Kiasi and Patkum which formed parts of the then district of Birbhum. Out of this Manbhum, Bhalaidih, Pachet are part of the Damodar valley (Sen, 1984).

5. R.C. Mukherjea's accounts on who the Santals were and their stories of migration written in 1960 give some instances and evidences of the compulsions on the Santal's side to migrate and convert from a nomadic life to that of a settled one. From the genesis story of the Santals, it is obvious that the Santals too were facing shortage of land and were having inter-tribal feuds which thus encouraged them to keep moving in search of new lands and settling in new areas from 'Campa gar' (R. C. Mukherjea, *The Santals*, A Mukherjee & Co. Pvt. Ltd. , 1962)
6. *Paharias* are tribals living mostly in the hilly forested tracts of the Santal Parganas
7. Termites play a crucial role in dry environments, particularly in the area of nutrient recycling and the creation of soil. Termites also trap moisture and help it travel, crucial to the decomposition process of plant and animal material in dry environments.
8. *Sabai* continues to be used for the use of different products such as ropes and baskets by Santals.
9. Note by Bodding: 'Backom is used for making twine and also making paper, naturally not by Santals'. The plant is found wild and cultivated.
10. The ascetic is another character that appears in the Santal stories, and the relationship the Santals had with ascetics would come from the northern parts of the country, north of the Ganges to live in these forests, were both to be revered and feared. In the stories about *Jugis*, most often these ascetics are shown to have magical powers that may impact the everyday family life of the Santals.
11. It is important to note here that like the use of illegitimate children in literature in 18th century cultural narratives in Britain, here 'animals borne by women' are used to bring a critical topic into public eye. We don't know if similar cultural concerns were prevalent in the Santal community as among Europeans, though S. C. Roy denies the existence of the illegitimate child among tribal communities. However, in cases where the father dies before the birth of child, we find in these tales similar predicaments of the child as that of orphans and illegitimate children. It could well be an adaptation of the trope from Victorian traditions by Bodding or the missionary influence in these tales. Nevertheless, it is important to notice how the plot is arranged around the child and how the voice of the child is used to highlight practices otherwise 'criminalised' in the colonial context.
12. Bodding notes that this type of paddy is rarely seen among the Santals except for those migrating to Assam.
13. Konow tries to make distinctions between Aryan and Santal tales, especially

through the depiction of Jackals in these tales. In Santal tales, Jackals are shown to be treacherous and malevolent while in stories with Aryan influence they are represented with great wit and intelligence and a minister and adviser to the King in the organized animal kingdom, he concludes.

14. The essence is association with greed and excess rather than the consumption of alcohol here. Many other tales in the volumes talk of the practice of brewing beer as part of the ritual activities of paying respect to the ancestors of the Santals, for instance.

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