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Tribal Village Organisation and Mobilisation in the Tribal Protest Movements in Eastern India, 1820-1922

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I

This paper examines the complex interaction of the tribal village organisation and the tribal protest movements in Bengal and Bihar during the period 1820-1922. Some distinctive features of the village organisation had much to do with the origins and organisation of the movements. Requirements of the movements, as tribal leaders perceived them, also necessitated measures towards a reconstruction of their society and culture. These vitally effected the progress of mobilisation in the movements. An attempt is made here to analyse how all this happened. The roots of the ideology which contributed to the gradual transformation of the tribal movements over the years were mostly religious beliefs.

The non-stratified tribal village society greatly helped the formation of sentiments of solidarity. However, large-scale tribal movements involving numerous villages could not properly be built upon their basis, because the tribal social organisation was characteristically a village-based one and the institutional basis of supra-village solidarity was generally lacking. Notions of an wider ethnic identity transcending a village did exist. They, however, only marginally influenced the day-to-day village life, because they were primarily embedded in the tribal religion, folklore and myths, and tribals came to know of their existence, only occasionally, from the rituals performed during various communal festivals and ceremonious.

The growing awareness of this wider identity had much to do with the tribal encounters with the assorted alien intruders, including the elaborate apparatus of power of the colonial state, whose activities tended to impinge on man and village at the same time. This awareness deepened with the increasing insistence by the leaders of tribal movements on the need to reconstruct their society and culture as a prerequisite for the success of the movements. While reconstruction

involved jettisoning of certain aspects of the tribal culture, its ideology came to be built on the revival, redefinition and reinterpretation of certain elements of the tribal belief system, derived from religion or linked with it. The success of their movements was generally limited. Partial too was the realization of the vision of a reconstituted society. However, the force of the ideology inspiring the vision is evident from its reappearance, in its essential features, in most later movements.

This study is restricted to three major tribal groups: the Munda, the Oraon and the Santal. An important consideration behind this choice is that their social organisation and protest movements both had striking similarities. Inclusion in our analysis of some aspects of the social organisation of the Ho tribe of Singbhum is intended as an illustration of the argument that significant changes in the tribal village organisation in the three areas of our choice had much to do with the gradual consolidation of alien domination there, with the colonial state playing a crucial role in the process. In Singbhum aliens other than the State had only a marginal control.

The period covered here is 1820-1922. 1820 was the year of a notable Munda movement in the Temar *pargana,* in the organisation of which certain religious beliefs and practices had an important role. The year 1922 saw the collapse of the large-scale Oraon movement which had in it pronounced millenarian elements.

II

We need to analyse some characteristic features of the social organisation of the chosen tribal groups and then their implications for the organisation of the recurring tribal movements. The phrase 'social organisation' may be defined as the totality of the arrangements toward the achievement of some common ends. Naturally, the 'common ends' widely varied from case to case. So did the devices and institutions designed to attain them. The aspects of the organisation emphasised here are as follows:[1]

a) 'settled agriculture' as a crucial determinant of it;

b) The village (*hatu* in Mundari) as the basic unit of this organisation;

c) composition of the group controlling access to 'village resources' and the nature of its status in the organisation;

d) composition of the 'later settlers', quite of few of whom, despite their vital role in the village economy, had a much inferior claim to village resources and often only tenuous links with the formal village organisation;

e) developments over the years adversely affecting the status and position of the group controlling access to village resources;

f) magico-religious beliefs of the tribals as one of the major influences on the social organisation.

The tribal social organisation was largely predicated on the primacy of settled agriculture, based on plough-cultivation and a certain amount of artificial irrigation, in the tribal economy. However, considerable dependence on forest resources continued till access to them came to be severely restricted. A Munda saying quoted by Hoffmann is revealing : 'We Mundas do not like a country where there are no forests.'[2] The sentiment had much to do with the importance of forests for the tribal subsistence, though it also had cultural roots.[3]

Settled agriculture did not necessarily mean stable agriculture. Ecological constraints, occasionally compounded by the social relationship of production, particularly during the colonial period,[4] made organisation of cultivation often insecure, necessitating a sort of shifting cultivation. However, from the point of view of generation of surplus, settled agriculture was superior to swidden cultivation and pastoralism as modes of tribal subsistence. It is notable that the tribal economy had a far weaker base where the latter modes of subsistence persisted largely because of the failure of tribals there to adopt superior techniques of agriculture, such as artificial irrigation and plough.[5]

To the extent that settled agriculture was located in a more or less fixed geographical space (known as village) over a considerable length of time and was capable of producing a bigger surplus than swidden cultivation or pastoral economy, it significantly determined the nature of the social organisation which its practitioners gradually built up. As we have said later, this social organisation was partly designed to secure the control of the original settlers over the resources of their village. Their long stay in a particular village created strong feelings of attachment to it, sentiments deeply influencing their social organisation. Where tribals practiced the other two modes of subsistence mentioned above, the social organisation, in the absence of a well defined area of stable agricultural settlements, lacked stability. However, as Sarat Chandra Roy observes in his study of the Oraon, the festivals and ceremonies prevalent in the areas of settled agriculture show the persistence of the memories associated with the earlier modes of subsistence.[6]

The tribal social organisation was essentially a village-based organisation. A Munda village (*hatu*), observed Hoffmann, 'stands for what we would call civilization, although the range of what the Munda

understands by civilization is ... a very small circle indeed as compared to the vastness and complexity of our modern material civilization'.[7] Culshaw, a Christian missionary located in the Bankura district of Bengal, had an identical experience to record: 'The community life of the Santal centres in his village, and is so organised as to make common action inevitable in social, economic and religious affairs'.[8]

Difficult as we may find to define the concept 'village', the tribals had a clear idea of its meaning. The constitution of a village had much to do with the original tribal agricultural settlements, with the various settling groups dividing among themselves a tract of wasteland. A village here meant a certain area, capable of immediate cultivation and also a considerable forest area, which these groups claimed as their respective area of control. New villages could also come into existence with the multiplying number of the members of the founder's family necessitating search for new cultivation in the neighbourhood. Whatever the origins, tribals well understood the boundaries of different villages. In fact villages had their own flags, clearly distinguishable one from the others. Defending the 'honour' of the flags caused quite a few inter-village clashes. In general village boundaries were scrupulously respected. Indeed, tribals believed some *bongas* (gods, spirits, called *simana bongas*) constantly looked after the maintenance of the boundaries. Incantations on occasions of communal festivals and ceremonies invoked their intervention for the preservation of the boundaries. Moral sanctions against their violations reinforced the injunctions of religious rituals.

Clan ties had once evidently an important role to play in the village organisation. However, clan sentiments, i.e., beliefs deeply rooted in tribal myths that tribals had descended from different totemistic clans (called *kikis* in Mundari),[9] gradually ceased to be a decisive influence on the regulation of inter-village relations centering around exercise of control over the material resources of villages and other related issues. Clan ties remained effective primarily in the regulation of marriage.[10] For instance, clans continued to be exogamous i.e., marrying within a clan was strictly prohibited.

The village organisation was partly designed to ensure control of the tribal group founding the village over the village resources. The control was a vital concern for this organisation, particularly because the resources were only apparently abundant. In a real sense they were scarce. In the context of the prevailing agricultural technology, the ecological framework of the tribal agriculture, and the limited availability of inputs other than land, the mere availability of land, the

only apparently abundant factor of production, did not necessarily mean an effective access to it. Who actually controlled the village resources? The general impression about it seems erroneous. For instance, in his study of the Santal, Archer has characterised the control as 'communal ownership'.[11] It has also been described as being essentially egalitarian.

The typical control did not mean the same thing as 'communal ownership'. The unit of agricultural organisation was an individual family. The family also 'owned', within certain well-recognised limits, the holding it operated. The control was not egalitarian either. Not all the villagers were owners. Contrary to the general impression about the so-called egalitarianism of the tribal society—which is generally contrasted with the inequality characterising a stratified peasant society—control over village resources (the reclaimed area, the wasteland the forest products) was for long restricted to the group associated with the foundation of the village and to the patrilineally descended members. This core group had also an exclusive claim to the use of the village graveyard (*sasan*). Having a right to this use was a vital matter for villagers. In general tribals were too deeply attached to their ancestral village to brook the idea that after their death they would be buried elsewhere. In the event of their death elsewhere their bones would invariably be brought back to the village and buried there following a communal ceremony.

This core group zealously guarded their claim of first access to village resources. The idea of the sacrosanctity of the claim was so deeply embedded in the tribal consciousness that descendants of the village founders (called *Khutkathidare* in the Munda country and *Bhuinhars* in the Oraon) considered any contrary practices as violation of almost a natural law. This was the reason why they deeply resented the appropriation by the Munda state[12] of their product beyond the limit to which they had agreed at the time of institution of kingship among them.

However, tribal egalitarianism is a valid concept if it is applied solely to this core group, despite the inequality among its members in respect of landholding or of possession of other resources. Since the unit of the organisation of cultivation was the individual family, the size of the landholding of individual families could widely vary because of the possible differences in their industry and enterprise and in other relevant factors. The tribal social order was egalitarian in the sense that this inequality did not derive from any institutional devices and was not enforced through them. This inequality alone in respect of

the size of landholding did not necessarily create an inegalitarian, stratified society. Stratification essentially means a relationship of domination and subordination, where the domination was associated with certain circumstances enabling a few persons to exercise control on others, because of the dependence of the latter on the dominant group for supply of some essential inputs of agriculture. As we see later, certain village functionaries (such as the village headman and the village priest) enjoyed a special position in respect of landholding. This, however, had no implication whatsoever in terms of control over the rest of the tribal community. Hoffmann, Culshaw, Sarat Chandra Roy and others have also concluded, on the basis of their analysis of the words used by tribals in addressing each other, that theirs was a non-hierarchical culture.[13]

Apart from the priority of the claim of the restricted 'descent' group (the patrilineally descended members of the village founder's family) to village resources, its superior status was institutionalized in the fact that the two most important village functionaries, the headman and the priest, invariably belonged to it. In fact they represented, respectively, the two branches of the Munda family: the *Munda Khunt* and the *Pahan Khunt.* (The term 'Munda' in this specific sense may easily be confused with the generic name Munda which Hindus gave to the entire Munda tribe, though the Mundas called themselves *horoko.* Hindus called them Munda after the village functionary, *munda*, probably because it was he who represented to the neighbouring Hindu community the Munda world.)

In general the *munda* looked after the 'civil' business of the village and the *pahan* its 'spiritual' matters. A Munda would rarely make such a clean distinction between the two. In his perceptions the one easily shaded off into the other. In a Santal village the line of demarcation between the two was indistinct even in a formal sense. The headman (*manjhi*) here performed functions which in a Munda village were normally assigned to the priest (called *Naika* in Santali).

The august status of the headman and the priest in the village was primarily due to the cruciality of their roles in the preservation of the tribal 'social order' as the community understood it. For instance, the Munda *pahan* was generally called ' the maker of the village', because of his indispensable role in the rituals connected with the foundation of a new village and with the numerous communally-organised festivals and ceremonies, which villagers considered vital for its secure existence. Hoffmann suggests that as the key figure in the Munda village organisation the *pahan* was initially in charge also of the village's civil

concerns losing the control gradually to the *munda.*

A notable change in this respect was the delegation of part of the responsibilities of the headman and the priest to 'assistants' of their choice, where they found their job much too burdensome to cope with. The assistants, similarly choosing others to share their work, were generally tribals, though not invariably connected with the village founder's family.

Population in the tribal village included settlers other than the 'descent' group we have described above. The position of such 'later settlers' in regard to landholding and in the village organisation would illustrate the elements of inegalitarianism in the tribal society. We may take the Munda village as an instance. Except the official representatives of the Munda raj and its dependents, most outsiders settled in the village had an important role to play in the tribal economy. The latter group, including non-tribals, was composed of settlers who came to be partly involved in the local agriculture and of assorted 'service groups'. While the tribal village's dependence on outsiders in connection with agriculture was partial, it could scarcely survive without the service groups.

Tribals, who formed part of the agricultural work force included descendants on the mother's side. Where they chose to stay on in the village their livelihood largely depended on the cultivation of the holdings they were permitted to operate. Others, too, settled in the village, sometimes on their own, and sometimes because the tribal village wanted them to come. The usual occasions for this were the depletion of the local labour for some reasons, or the need for additional labour in connection with same urgent agricultural operations.

The role of outsiders in the local agriculture as hired labourers was peripheral. Agriculture was essentially a 'family farm' in the sense that tribal households relied almost exclusively on the labour of family members. Moreover, unlike in the Hindu caste society, there was no cultural constraint on the employment of female labour in agriculture. Hiring of labour was, therefore, exceptional. Sarat Chandra Roy came to know of the practice in a few cases. However, the labour hired here was only partially used in cultivation. Generally, labour was hired on an annual basis. Roy found that 'contracts' for labour (called *Dhangar* labour in the Oraon country) were usually renewed, with elaborate rituals, at some annual festivals, each as *Magi.*

Various service groups, mostly outsiders, provided services which were vital for the maintenance of the village economy. For instance,

the village depended on blacksmiths for agricultural implements, on weavers for cloths, on potters for the supply of earthen pots and on cowherds in connection with the grazing of the village cattle.

Since the tribal agriculture was mostly based on settled cultivation, the implements needed for this were far more varied and sophisticated than those which practitioners of swidden cultivation generally used. They were usually made of iron. Though familiar with the art of iron-smelting where iron ores were abundantly available, they had yet to learn well the skill of making iron implements. Where iron ores were not available at all, dependence on non-tribal craftsman was still greater. Dependence on non-tribal weavers was often unavoidable too. The tribal village produced mostly a course variety of cloths, and even this production was generally unequal to the demand.

The service groups were, typically, non-tribal outsiders. Sarat Chandra Roy calls them 'low-caste Hindus or rather Hinduised castes'.[14] Evidently, tribals themselves had once provided part of the services. However, their role become increasingly marginal, and the supply of the services came to be nominated by the outsiders. Hoffmann found that the craft of the tribal blacksmiths (*bareas*), based on an inferior technique, and use of a different sort of implements,[15] did survive in isolated pockets, the competition it faced from the wares of non-tribal blacksmiths (*lohars*). However, by the time he was writing (the 1920s), the number of the tribal blacksmith families had dwindled to insignificance. As for the tribal weaver families, Hoffmann found them to be the least numerous of the surviving tribal service groups.

It is striking that Hoffmann, who was particularly convinced of the flourishing state of the tribal blacksmith's craft once upon a time, had not explained its decline. Both Sarat Chandra Roy and Hoffmann noted a strong feeling among the Munda and Oraon cultivators against any active association with the craft; indeed, the tribals regarded this association as being 'degrading'. It is suggestive that the tribal families, which continued to be engaged in the craft, gradually and completely separated from the main tribal stock and come to form a distinct cultural group.[16] In fact this 'exterior' group was not allowed to participate in the communally organised festivals and ceremonies of the Mundas and the Oraons. Whether this exclusion had anything to do with the influence of the Hindu caste system, particularly its norms regarding purity and pollution, is not known.

The decline of the tribal craft was perhaps partly due to economic reasons. It is probable that the local business thrived as long as the relative economic isolation of the tribal village continued. The gradual opening of the tribal world and the increases in cultivation necessitating

a larger supply of agricultural tools land implements exposed the local craftsmen to the competition of their better-equipped counterparts elsewhere. The local products were thus probably priced out of the market. The cultural factor mentioned above did matter to the extent that association with the craft resulted in the lowering of the social position of the craftsmen. However, why should they not continue their production, assuming a constant demand for their products?

The composition of the other outsiders in the Munda country was distinctive. They mostly belonged to the civil and military personnel of the Munda raj, apart from the host of dependents living off the income from the villages granted in parts by the royal family.

The attitude of the tribal village to the outsiders—descendants on the mother's side and other tribals involved in the agricultural process, the assorted service groups and the representatives of the Munda raj and other beneficiaries of its favours in other ways—was reflected in its characterization of them as *eta haturanko* (men of other villages), while the tribals perceived themselves a *hatu horoko* (men of the village). This was partly institutionalized in the inferior economic and social status of some of the former.

For instance, descendants from the mother's side could not claim all the rights enjoyed by *hatu horoko*. Tribals settling in the village on their own (*donam horo*) had lesser rights than those who were asked by the Munda village to come (*aunam horo*).[17] The usual term for both, *parja horoko* (subject population; *parja* meaning subject), suggests that the *hatu horoko* regarded them ('almost invariably Mundaris', according to Hoffmann) as a subordinate community. When with the increasing consolidation of the political authority of the Munda royal family the obligation on the part of the tribal village to provide unpaid labour service (*bet begari*) to the raj representatives came to be systematically enforced, the *parja horoko*, initially, bore the greatest burdens.

The tribal village was generally tolerant of the service groups. The obvious reasons was the indispensability of their role in the village economy. '*Diku*', the general terms of denunciation for a section of the outsiders they distrusted, was not meant for them. Tribals ceased to be friendly with precisely those service groups whose activities they came to regard as being prejudicial to their welfare—for instance, the *Ghasis*, traditionally music-players at tribal festivals, whom during British rule outsiders such as coolie recruiters for the plantations in Bengal and Assam used as an instrument of coercion.

The fact that some of the service groups were culturally different did not matter much. In fact the cultural gap narrowed where their long stay in the tribal village resulted in considerable cultural

exchanges. It has been argued that the 'Hindu traits' which tribals slowly emulated were, till the arrival of Vaishnava gurus, mainly derived from the material and non-material culture of such service groups. Where tribals themselves, though separated from their old tribal stock, continued to provide some services (the blacksmith's services, for instance), the cultural distance was negligible. Hoffmann observed striking similarities between the traditional Mundas and the *Baraes* (tribal blacksmiths) in respect of clan names, methods of worship and the rituals performed at festivals. However, he has also written of a slow change in this regard over the years: 'Some of these socially separated branches of the race', living mainly by their handicrafts, were more exposed to Hindu influences.[18]

The cordiality between the tribal villages and their service groups led some observers (H. Risley, for instance[19]) to conclude that they formally belonged to the tribal social organisation. They did not. They were not the usual functionaries of the village community, though it could not do without their services. They were excluded from the ceremonial sacrifices. Marriage relations with them were not permissible. They were required to take prior consent of the village community for them to have their own graveyards in the village.

In contrast, attitude to the outsiders whom tribals called *dikus* was throughout marked by bitterness. The strongest of the diatribes of tribals were applied to them. A Mundari proverb says: 'The eye of a *Sadan* (alien) in like the eye of a dog'.[20] Bitterness with rent-farmers (*ijaradars*), mostly Muslims, is reflected in the Mundari saying: 'If a Mussulman gets a footing in a village, it spells ruin to the Mundas as surely as an axe used by a woman will soon get spoiled'.[21] A Mundari prayer to their supreme God *Sing Bonga*, on occasions of any deadly epidemic, thus invoked his intervention against the 'spirit causing the diseases' (*baram bonga*): 'Drive him away to the country of the *dikus*'.[22]

This feeling of alienation was as pronounced at the level of culture. Hoffmann came to know that Mundas rarely allowed singing of *Sadani* songs in their festivals, particularly in those where dances had an important place: 'Up till now no *Sadani* songs were made for these dances'.[23]

III

Significant changes gradually occurred in the arrangement designed to secure the tribal village's control over its resources, which, as we have noted above, determined to a considerable extent the nature of the village organisation. They had partly to do with the consolidation

of the process of state formation, i.e. the rise and growth of a central political authority within the tribal world itself. The more important factor was the increasing penetration of British political control and the associated economic change.

This may be illustrated with reference to the Munda history. The maintenance of the Munda royal authority negotiated diversion of part of the rural surplus. There was not much of an effective intervention in any other way in the village organisation. The Munda raj recognised the status and role of the village functionaries, and seldom interfered in the sphere of arbitration of internal disputes and conflict. The royal family, despite its increasing inclination towards Hinduism, did not take any initiative at all to make it popular with the Munda.

However, two broad developments occurring then had crucial implications later for the Munda village organisation. The consolidation of the apparatus of the royal power meant growing strength of certain groups, including members of the royal family. Their activities had a decisive role in undermining this organisation during British rule. Secondly, the growth of the royal authority also obliged tribal villages to work within the framework of a larger supra-village administrative network. The village headman had now to accept the authority of persons called *mankis*. Tribals themselves, they were placed in charge of a group of villages in connection with the collection of tribute from them. However, they gradually developed interests which conflicted with the collective well-being of villages even in pre-British times.

Some developments during British rule affected the tribal village organisation far more adversely.

(a) In the Munda world, control of the 'core' group, *Khutkathidars* and *Bhuinhars*, over village resources increasingly weakened. By about the beginning of the 20th century they survived only in small, isolated pockets.

(b) A more direct assault on the tribal village organisation was the removal, nearly everywhere, of village headmen by aliens as a device to ensure success of their plans of maximizing their rental income.

(c) Where the headmen stayed on, presumably agreeing to do what the alien land-controllers had asked them, their role in regard to the tribal village became substantially altered. They ceased to be vital functionaries of the village community and turned into a component of the coercive authority of the aliens.

(d) Distortion of the *manki's* traditional role was far greater. The fact that he had only a tenuous link with the village organisation, had much to do with this. A *manki* did not have any vital ritual functions of

the kind which a headman (*munda*) usually carried out. Numerous reports of British officials have described the role of *mankis* in assisting the aliens (including moneylenders) in expropriating the original Munda settlers from their villages.

(e) Contemporaries have also pointed out how, with the increasing integration of the village headman into the apparatus of the colonial state and the consequent elevation of his status, the relative positions of the priest (*pahan*) and the headman (*munda*) gradually changed. The *pahan*, once even performing part of the role of the *munda*, did not quite accept the change with good grace. A result was the appearance of tension and conflict in the village society of a kind rarely found earlier.

Such change in the village organisation, however, only marginally affected the non-material Munda culture, rooted in magico-religious beliefs and practices. The study of such beliefs is worthwhile because the structures and function of the tribal village organisation is not intelligible solely in terms of secular concerns—such as the nature of the control of a particular descent group over village resources and the organisation of the village economy within this framework. The role of magico-religious beliefs and practices was crucial. This is evident in different ways:

(a) The magico-religious beliefs and practices were essentially rooted in the purely material concerns of the tribal village.

(b) They were communally organised and were not just left to the choice of isolated individuals.

(c) They affected the utilization of at least part of the village resources.

Both religion and magic were here predicated on the belief in the supernatural. A basic assumption here was that natural phenomena occurred in the way they did primarily because some outside forces beyond nature i.e. some supernatural forces willed it that way. However, religion here was not quite the same thing as magic.[24]

This belief in the active role of the supernatural in causing developments directly affecting tribal material existence and the origin of the tribal religion and magic needs to be stressed. A school of anthropological thought argues differently and rules out any such role of the supernatural as the basis of religious belief. Durkheim, for instance, interpreted religion as something originating in the collective crowd behaviour on some special occasions. Collective performance of some rituals, he argues, creates in the participants a sense of awe and mystery, transcending social limits. This awe and mystery of a sacred

nature he calls religion. Religion, according to him, is thus man-God equation.

However, the tribal conception of religion lacked proper systematization. Organisation and systematization mark what is called the 'Great Tradition' in religion, and this was the work of a group of specialists having ample leisure for the purpose. Tribals better understood the elaborate rituals to be obligatorily performed, so that the collective well-being could be ensured, and also the similarly elaborate code of prescription against their violations. Incantations and prayers of tribals at religious ceremonies revealed their overriding concerns: good harvests, absence of epidemics and the security and happiness of their progeny.

The material roots of the magico-religious beliefs of tribals are also evident from the way the different gods and spirits were worshipped. There was no specific form of worship for the Supreme God (*Sing Bonga* in Mundari). He was invoked in times of particularly severe calamities. His blessings were sought too on nearly all important religious ceremonies. On the other hand, worship of village gods and house gods was more organised and well-defined. Appropriate rituals were minutely prescribed. They had to be as scrupulously performed, since these gods mercifully ensured the success of their agricultural operations and hunting expeditions (failure in which was regarded by tribals as a bad omen for their crops). They were worshipped at fixed times at the village sacred grove, with the village priest invariably presiding over the function. Worship of house gods was partly a replication of worship of village gods and was often a preparation for the latter. The house-based religious ceremony had a distinctive feature: worship of the 'spirits' of dead ancestors in the sacred tabernacle of the house.[25]

Worship of the Supreme God and the village gods was not left to individual options but communally organised. The communal organisation of religious beliefs and practices, symbolised by collective participation in them and the central role here of the village priest, rested on a consistent reasoning. This is as follows. Prosperity and welfare (generally identified with abundant harvests and freedom from deadly diseases) would mean preservation of the village order. Continuity of the prosperity was regarded as a natural order and a break in it, therefore, as a symptom of a grave disturbance of this order. The break was blamed on supernatural agencies, intervention of ill-natured *bongas*, and artifices of malevolent witches. All this could, however, be countered by collective rituals properly performed by the village community as a whole.[26]

The communal organisation of the religious practices of tribals was naturally based on their perception of a basic difference between their practices and those not communally organised. Tribals did emulate over the years certain non-tribal religious beliefs and festivals. However, this emulation remained outside the framework of the distinctive tribal village organisation. This is evident from the non-participation in any form whatsoever of the village priest in such rituals and festivals, since they were not based on the distinctive tribal belief system.[27] To this category also belonged witchcraft. Hoffmann argues that the ideological basis of the craft, as he found it, and the language in which witches and the 'witch doctor' said their incantations and cryptic formulas, suggest their derivation from the neighbouring Hindu culture.[28] Whatever the origins, the craft, though widely practiced, was never integrated into the communally binding code of religious practices. Indeed, tribals viewed it as being utterly disruptive of their village order, so that measures toward eradicating the evil were mostly communally devised.

Religious beliefs are of relevance to our study of the tribal village organisation also because they affected the utilization of at least a portion of village resources. The village sacred grove, the central place of public worship in the village, was regarded as being sacrosanct and inviolable. Even during the worst of famines it was kept out of the village society's enterprise in adding to cultivation through reclamation. Use of old *sal* trees (*jacar*) also a site of public worship, was prohibited till the village priest sacrificed a fowl by way of his approval of felling the trees. *Bhutkheta*—lands allotted to persons looking after the propitiation of malevolent *bhutas* (spirits)—and constituting a sizable portion of the village cultivation, were wholly non-alienable. Tribals believed *bhuts*, in the event of transfer of control over such lands to non-tribals or aliens, would not be properly worshipped and the *bhut's* wrath would cause calamities to the village. Grants of land to the village headman and the village priest were by way of remuneration of certain services of a religious nature. The Santal headman (*manjhi*) had a particularly important role in the communal religious ceremonies. The village sacred grove, called *manjhistan*, was in fact located near the headman's abode.

We have emphasised above two major determinants of tribal village organisation: arrangements towards securing the control of a particular descent group over the village resources, and the magico-religious beliefs and practices of tribals. The tribal village had also to adopt devices to counter what it perceived as threats to the village social 'order'. Threats from *diku* activities formed a class apart. To the question

of the tribal response to them in the form of collective resistance we would turn later. One specific kind of threat, tribals believed, was lapses from the norms of 'right' behaviour, and preservation of the social order considerably depended on adoption of devices to prevalent or correct such behavioural deviancies.

Witchcraft, as we have mentioned above, constituted one of the severest forms of threat to the tribal social order. The universal impression in Munda society about its dreadfulness was reinforced by the conviction of its alienness to the traditional belief system of the Mundas.

Tribals were particularly careful about right marriage relations, since marriages, creating more or less stable social relationship, had relatively enduring effects on the social organisation. The tribal society, therefore, strictly enforced its injunctions to prevent transgressions of the norms of tribal endogamy, clan exogamy and sanctity of marriages.

It is notable that the nature of the punishments prescribed by the village community for offences was wholly determined by the tribal perception of the degree of the disruption that such offences caused to village 'order' and solidarity. The contrast in this respect with British law is striking. The criteria for judging whether an activity constituted an offence and the assumption about the appropriateness of the punishment provided in the legal code for the offence applied to all regions. Whether a region was tribal or not hardly mattered.

Punishments prescribed by tribal village *panchayats*[29] ranged from simple fines to 'outcasting'—one of the severest forms of punishments, involving termination of membership of the offender in the village brotherhood. A particularly strong form of disapproval in the Santal society of certain forms of deviancies from standards of right behaviour was known as *bitlaha*[30], a kind of collective defilement of the offender's house. Outcastes could, however, be readmitted into the tribal society under certain conditions.

Our analysis of the tribal village organisation and of the village's collective devices to counter threats to this organisation enables us to explain a phenomenon which struck contemporary observers: the strong sentiments of village solidarity. The principal roots of the sentiments could be thus summed up.

(a) The 'core' group of village settlers was bound by 'descent' and 'kinship' ties. The group was closely related to the village founder's family. This association is also evident from the social composition of the two most important functionaries of the village community: the headman and the priest.

(b) Certain aspects of the tribal egalitarianism—the non-stratified

nature of the tribal society and its non-hierarchical culture—reinforced the sentiments and cohesion.

(c) The 'later settlers', though not part of the inner core of the village organisation, were closely integrated into the village economic organisation. Their constant cultural exchanges with the tribals cemented such ties.

(d) Communally organised festivals, religious ceremonies, including the magico-religious practices, contributed to the perception of a communal identity.

(e) The communal activity included occasional hunting expeditions too. Such expeditions were communal not just because they involved the participation of the entire village (often of a cluster of villages). They constituted a communal activity also because success in them was universally regarded as a good omen for their primary economic activity of the village: agriculture.

(f) Ancestor worship, a vital component of the religious belief system of the tribals, constantly revived and reinforced emotional ties of villagers with the village where the ancestors lived. Bones of villagers dying and buried elsewhere were invariably brought to the village of their ancestor, and buried there again. The 'bone burial ceremony' was far from a family affair. It was a communal event, a collective ritual, symbolising the union of a separated villager with the wider moral entity to which he had belonged—his ancestral village.

It was in the village that such sentiments of cohesion were generally centered. Institutional expression of sentiments of supra-village solidarity was usually lacking.[31] This, however, did not preclude the existence of a set of shared beliefs and values among tribals of different villages. Contemporary observes[32] (such as E.G. Man, Hoffmann, Culshaw and Archer) noticed remarkable similarity in the attitudes and the belief system of tribals scattered over a large area. There was a clear idea about the larger identity of a tribe. This was partly evident from the strictest possible enforcement of the principle of tribal endogamy. Marrying outsides the tribe constituted a serious offence, rendering the guilty liable to outcasting by the tribal society. This sense of belonging to a larger self, 'tribe', was strengthened by the growing consciousness of an exclusiveness produced by the increasingly hostile encounters with aliens. Moreover, despite the multiplicity of local gods and related practices, a close similarity in religious beliefs and organisation existed in the villages by a common tribal group. Festivals and ceremonies, though village-based, also contributed to the awareness of a wider tribal identity. On nearly all cases the Supreme

God (*Sing Bonga* in the Munda country) was invoked, and the tribal cosmogonic legends and myths were recited. Hunting, which had the form of an annual festival, had a role too in the creation of this awareness. It normally involved a cluster of villages and the 'Hunt Council' meeting then discussed matters of common interest.

Reports of Christian missionaries particularly noted the role of 'learned gurus' in the preservation of the tribal tradition, invariably[33] an oral tradition, and in their transmission from generation to generation. The point of view that exposure of tribal society to alien cultural influence, particularly Hinduism, tended to weaken the consciousness of a separate identity is only partially valid. Tribals did emulate some Hindu beliefs and practice. However, this seldom meant assimilation of their culture into the wider hierarchical Hindu culture.

Indeed, emulation of Hindu cultural traits, where it followed the insistence by tribal leaders on a reconstruction of their society and culture as a precondition of success in their struggle against aliens, reinforced the assertion of their tribal identity. This insistence did lead to the formation of sects in tribal society which did not closely follow all the cultural mores of their ancestors and thus produced tensions and even rifts in it. However, the influence of the sects remained peripheral to the village organisation, particularly during times of a temporary cessation of large-scale protest movement.

IV

We now turn to the second part of this study: the implications of the tribal village organisation for the process of mobilisation in the protest movements of tribals. The broad question examined here is the extent to which some specific features of the movements are explicable in terms of this organisation. The features are: their recurrence, involvement in them of the village society as whole; the rapidity of their spread and the largeness of their scale; appearance of radicalism at a certain phase of their developments and the rise of millenarianism as an aspect of this radicalism.

A notable thing about the village organisation, to the extent that it affected the process of mobilisation in the protest movement, was its changing nature over the years. While the village organisation did impinge on the shape of the movement, the movement itself gradually led to a rethinking on the part of tribal leaders about the ideal social organisation they should have in order to be better equipped in their encounters with adversaries. The reconstructed social organisation they came to have in the process was not just a temporary arrangement,

disappearing with the end of a phase of a movement. Based on new ethical notions, and religious beliefs, awareness of a wider ethnic identity and a clearer understanding of the goals of the movement, it inevitably reacted on the mobilisation of rebel tribals.

We should particularly note the following aspects of the relationship of the tribal village organisation and the process of mobilisation in the tribal movements.

(a) The particular manner in which alien intrusion affected the communally organised tribal society partly explains why the tribal reaction to this intrusion tended to be a communal one.

(b) Radicalism was a specific form of this reaction under particular historical circumstances. The rebels then aimed at the rejection altogether of alien domination.

(c) Radicalism was at times articulated in the form of millenarianism.

(d) The rise of a movement and the manner of mobilisation in it are closely related. However, the determinants in each case are different. The shape of the mobilisation in the tribal movements had much to with certain features of the tribal village organisation we have analysed above, such as: village solidarity in its various institutional forms; sentiments of supra-village identity and tribal religious beliefs, practices and cultural values in general.

Tribal movements tended to involve the entire village society, because it was so structured that alien intrusion immediately and directly hit the community as a whole, and not just a few isolated individuals. As we have said above, practices of alien land-controllers included assaults on village communal institutions and thus made the village react collectively. The growing tribal consciousness of the alienness of the antagonists reinforced the sense of this collectivity.

Movements initially having only limited aims, such as removal of specific local grievances, developed radical tendencies, generally with a growing conviction among tribals of the utter futility of relying on the existing political authority for riddance from alien domination.

Millenarianism is, typically, a product of such a growing mood. However, the mood by itself did not lead to millenarianism. The transition usually occurred with the appearance of prophetic and charismatic leaders enunciating ideas and plans for an ideal society and polity. The rebels were particularly receptive to this message at the time when they had become suddenly exposed to severe pressures and thus feared disruption of their economy and culture.

The process of mobilisation in the tribal movements, particularly in their radical and millenarian phase, had much to do with the tribal

religious belief system, from which the awareness of an ethnic identity largely derived. Such a linkage was not noticeable in all tribal movements. Even where it existed its form was not identical everywhere. Much depended on how the leadership conceived the aim of a movement. As we have observed above, the critical role of religious beliefs in the mobilisation process was particularly pronounced where the movement was inspired by radical aims. The leadership here was also, notably, provided by a single person, possessing a charismatic personality, associated with a religious status, and making optimistic prophecies about the future of a tribe as a whole and not of a small aggrieved segment of it.

Where the nature of the leadership and of the movement's aims were different, the implications of religious beliefs for the movement differed too. As instances of movements of this type we may take the Tamar revolt (1819-20), the first 'Kol' rebellion (1831-32) and the Bhumij revolt (1832). The Santal movement from 1855 onwards and the Munda/Oraon movements (1894-1922) are examples of the other type.

In the Tamar revolt[34] magico-religious rituals were essentially devices for establishing the identity of persons whom they had suspected of bearing evil designs against them. To the extent that the rituals confirmed their suspicion they strengthened the tribal resolve to strike back at the enemies.

The background to the revolt was a drought of an unprecedented severity. The desolate tribals blamed this natural phenomenon on some humans capable of causing the disaster through the 'black' art of magic. They now tried the traditional device for finding out miscreants in the village. Tribals shot arrows at a mark on a piece of wood placed at a distance, while they were uttering the names of persons they suspected of doing them harm. The person whose name had been uttered precisely at the time an arrow pierced the mark was judged responsible for causing the drought.[35] Tribals were convinced the drought would not end till the persons causing it were removed from the village. The ritual only established a foregone conclusion. The suspects were not arbitrary choices of tribals. Involved in 'rent farming' and grain trade, they, all aliens, had already antagonised the tribal village by their extortions and unfair trade practices. Tribals believed these materially resourceful aliens also possessed magical powers of stopping any rainfall whatsoever.

Magico-religious practices had little to do with the organisation of the 'Kol' rebellion of 1831-32. Sentiments of ethnic affinity did, however, have a role in its rapid spread. The core leadership, a small group

of *mankis*, set itself an extremely limited aim: their restoration to position of power and control as *mankis*, from which they were dispossessed by a member of the Munda royal family. Purely personal interest motivated their initiative in violently opposing the intruders—who had replaced them and also their patron, a section of the royal family—and in persuading the villagers to join them. They were not the spokesmen for the tribe as a whole. The villagers eagerly responded to the initiative, largely because some recent administrative and economic measure of the colonial state had hit them. The Hos (Larkha Kols) of neighbouring Singbhum could also be won over, at least partly because of their ethnic links with Chotanagpur Kols.[36] The decisive reason was the Ho antipathy towards the British caused by the way the latter's intervention in favour of the local ruling clique resulted in an abrupt increase in their obligatory payments to the group.

During the Bhumij revolt the leader Ganganarayan did occasionally tell his followers how his magical power would neutralise the British military might and thus make them invulnerable to it. It seems Ganganarayan borrowed the idea from the near contemporary movement led by Titu Mir.[37] The idea did influence his followers, but the movement as it developed came to have tendencies which prevented the idea from remaining an enduring influence on the movement. Ganganarayan was not a tribal leader at all. A member of a rival faction in the royal family he had only his personal interests to promote through the rebellion, and the cause of his anti-British offensive was his conviction of the consistent partisanship of British policy in the form of support to his inveterate enemies in the royal family.

Equally opportunistic were the motivations of a sizable segment of the rebels: owners of jungle estates (*mahals*), generally an impoverished lot, heavily indebted to alien merchant financiers, who had taken full advantage of the British laws and law courts in driving a hard bargain with them. The jungle *zamindars* enthusiastically responded to Ganganarayan's overture to them to join the revolt, regarding it as a possible means of getting rid of the wily creditors. In general, the local tribals, a mixed group unlike the Munda/Oraon and the Santal, widely participated in the revolt, without having any independent initiative of their own in the formulation of its aims and strategy.[38]

Critical, in contrast, was the role of religious beliefs in the process of mobilisation in the movements of the Santals, the Munda and the Oraon during the period 1855-1922. In the first Santal revolt (1855) this role is evident in various ways.

(a) The rumours widely circulating in the Santal country for

sometime preceding and following the outbreak of the revolt (July 1855) and contributing to the creation of a sense of solidarity among the Santals were all rooted in Santal religious beliefs and myths.[39]

(b) The decisive event in this regard was the emergence of a religiously-inspired leadership[40] perceiving the Santal as a chosen community of God and proclaiming, far and wide, the message allegedly communicated directly by God to the leader that the rebel victory in the imminent encounter with the enemies was inevitable.

(c) The rituals connected with the message of the God-ordained *Hul* (rebellion), on which the leader insisted, were all of a religious nature.[41]

(d) The legends, myths and symbols, which the leader repeatedly used for the purpose of creating in his followers a faith in their invincibility in the coming battle, were all part of the Santal religious belief system: for instance, the 'fire myth' predicting the destruction of a 'sinful world' by fire sent by the *Thakur* (God). A similar Munda myth was used by Birsa during the rebellion led by him (1899-1900).

(e) The widespread anti-witchcraft movement at the time was a conscious device of the leadership toward ensuring unity in the revolt. Witchcraft, Santal's believed, was utterly disruptive of cohesion in the village and distrusting of its peace.

(f) One means adopted by the leadership for mobilizing the Santals, spread over a vast area, was circulating branches of the *sal* tree, each having three leaves. The *sal* had an important place in the Santal religious worship, and circulation of its branches was the traditional practice when Santals of a cluster of villages had to be informed of the timing of annual hunting expeditions.

Two trends are noticeable in the Santal thinking on the general question of resistance to enemies in the period following the collapse of the *Hul* of 1855. A section of the Santals, disillusioned and demoralized by the falsification of the leader's prophecy proclaiming the invulnerability of Santals to the superior British military might, tended to lose faith in their leader and to turn away from any active resistance.[42] The more typical thinking did not at all blame the movement's failure on the leadership and related it to the moral inadequacies and lapses of the Santals themselves. The leader did insist, it was argued, on the moral purity of his followers as a pre-condition of success in carrying out the divine mission entrusted to him; the non-fulfilment of the mission was evidence that the morality of the Santals had not been of the required standard. Hence the reassertion of trust in the infallibility of the leadership and the realization of the need for moral regeneration.

Recurrence of the Santal movement strengthened the second trend. The post-1855 movements were increasingly marked by a stronger perception of the Santal identity. Kherwar, the old Santal tribal name, was now revived. This consciousness formed an integral part of the faith in the possible restoration of the old glory of the tribe. While collective action was still regarded as a prerequisite for this restoration, the Santals, with the memory of the army's relentlessness in suppressing the *Hul* still fresh, realised the folly of seeking achievement of their aims through violence. They now avoided, as far as possible, a violent encounter with the enemy. There was, therefore, an increasing emphasis on the need to revitalize the Santal society and a corresponding decline in the belief in the supernatural powers of the leader. However, this shift scarcely precluded reliance on the leader's role. The revitalization programme, all laid down by the leader, included a redefinition of the Santal religious faith, consisting in the revival of the monotheistic trend in this belief system, which normally only marginally influenced the day-to-day Santal religious practices. The revitalization process, however, remained incomplete, because it proved much too demanding for some Santals.[43] Tension between old and new faiths consequently grew. Reversions to the old faith generally occurred when the Santal protest movement itself had lost its vigour.

The Munda/Oraon movements (1894-1922), largely similar to the Santal agitation, developed some new features. By the time the movements started, the old Munda/Oraon village organisation considerably weakened. As we have noted above, the core descent group which had for long controlled access to village resources shrunk to insignificance. On the other hand, ideas of radical protests increasingly emerged; the recurring Santal movements constituting an important source of them. Hence the emphasis on the creation of a new basis for the organisation of the movements. The latent sentiments of supra-village solidarity now came out into the open and influenced this organisation. The 'religious revitalization' programme here was far more comprehensive. For instance, the idea was now being systematically developed that some of their present religious practices, such as worship of a multiplicity of gods, worship of 'spirits', including the malevolent ones and the widespread practice of witchcraft were all later accretions and foreign to the traditional religious faith. The revitalization, the leaders now insisted, was predicated on the complete eradication of such practices. Birsa, the Munda leader, also sought to create in his followers an awareness of the past history of the tribe, and consistently used the old Munda

myths for the purpose.

The Oraon movement, organisationally part of the wider movement led by Birsa (after 1894), came to be dissociated from the Munda movement and tended to be ideologically autonomous. The Oraon leaders now—after its collapse (1900)—stressed the need for reviving the distinctively Oraon tradition, now called *Kuruk Dharm* (true religion). However, there was not much of a difference in respect of organisation of the movement.[44] The striking difference was renouncement of violence as far as possible. The preaching of the ideas of *Kuruk Dharm* and of the goals of the movement had also nothing secretive about it.

The emphasis of Birsa, and later of Oraon leaders, on the need to create an awareness of the past history of the tribes, all enshrined in oral tradition, did not just mean 'invention of tradition'. The leaders were reviving a tradition, though it involved considerable redefinition and reinterpretation. Whatever the change, the growth and organisation of the tribal resistance movement at a certain point of time was unintelligible without this reconstituted belief system.

NOTES

1. While identifying the distinctive elements of the tribal village organisation we do not suggest that they were universally valid attributes applicable to 'tribes' everywhere. We merely mean to say that in a particular historical setting this sort of social organisation was associated with the leading tribes included in this study.
2. Hoffmann, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica* (hereafter *Enc. Mund.*) Vol. 2. p. 555.
3. Since a close integration of cultivation with forest and pasture characterised the tribal economy, forests had an important place in the religious practices of tribals. The cultural values that grew out of this integration even survived the sharp decline in the role of forests in the tribal economy.
4. 'The difficulties which ecology created in the way of artificial irrigation were reinforced by the negligible investment of landlords, tribals and government.' Landlords preferred to invest only where they were certain of proper rewards for their efforts. The cultivators' means were too small for costly irrigation devices. The 'land improvement loans' provided by the government were normally negligible. B.B. Chaudhuri, 'Tribal Society in Transition: Eastern India, 1757-1920', in M. Hasan & N. Gupta (eds.), *India's Colonial Encounter*, p. 76.
5. The transition to settled cultivation was partial in the cases of some Chotanagpur tribes, such as the Birhors and the Kharias.
6. S.G. Roy has argued that Sarhul, 'the principal religious festival' of the Oraons, was 'in origin a festival of the food-gathering stage of the economic history of the tribe'. The traditional rites connected with the festival were 'overlaid by other rites connected with a more advanced economic life and elaborated by gradual

accessions and additions of centuries through which the tribe progressed from mere food-gatherers and hunters to settled agriculturists'. S.G. Roy, *Oraon Religion and Customs* (1972 edn.) pp.139-140.

7. *Enc. Mund.*, Vol. VI, p. 1663.
8. Culshaw, *Tribal Heritage*, p. 7.
9. Culshaw thus writes of the Santal clan organisation: 'Many of the social activities of the Santals are based on myths, and the strength of their clan organisation is due in no small measure to its foundations in mythology'. *Tribal Heritage*, p. 64.
10. Roy observed how with the growth of population 'the solidarity of the totemic clan was gradually impaired' and how the clan eventually became a 'marriage-regulating agency'. As a result, 'Necessarily, the local group of the village came in time to be practically all in all'. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, p. 388.
11. Archer ignores the fact of clan ownership: 'The first aspect of Santal socialism is the public ownership of land'. *Tribal Law and Justice*, Vol. 1, p. 25.
12. It is generally agreed that the Nagbanshi royal family, which gradually came to exercise political control over the Munda/Oraon country, was itself a Munda family, in fact a *munki* family in charge of a cluster of villages. The royal family consistently claimed non-Munda origins, boasting of its Rajput Kshatriya lineage.
13. E.G. Man noted the absence of an 'honorific or inferior pronoun' in the Santali spoken language. Man, *Sonthalia and the Santhals* (First edn. 1867; reprint 1983), pp. 7, 74. So did Hoffmann in Mundari: 'All ages and ranks are addressed by the simple *am*, thou'. *Enc. Mund.*, Vol. 1, p. 101.
14. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, p. 68.
15. Hoffmann, *Enc. Mund.*, Vol. 2, pp. 760-762.
16. This was what Skrefsrud, a Norwegian missionary working amongst the Santals, came to know from a Santal guru, Kolean. Bodding, *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals*, p. 21. Bodding translated into English the original text in Santali. Kolean particularly emphasised the role of emigration of some Santal groups in this formation. The emigration created a physical distance between the emigrants and those who had not moved out. It was the latter who, according to Kolean, came under the influence of the neighbouring culture.
17. The distinction ceased where members of the kinship group were admitted into the village society through 'ceremonial public adoptions'.
18. Hoffmann concludes: 'These socially separated landless branches of the race, who had to live mainly by their handicrafts, were exposed more to alien influences than the conservative and exclusive cultivating Mundas'. *Enc. Mund.*, Vol. 2, p. 428.
19. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. 2, p. 105.
20. Hoffmann, *Enc. Mund.*, Vol. 13, p. 3934.
21. *ibid.*, Vol. 14, p. 4530.
22. *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 421.
23. *ibid.*, Vol. 13, p. 4129. It is striking that inter-tribal clashes, arising in various ways, did not normally have similar cultural implications. For instance, Oraon migrants, who pushed out the original Munda settlers from many a village, continued to employ Munda *pahans* in their religious ceremonies, feeling that Mundas, being the earlier settlers, were better skilled in driving out 'spirits' and the Munda *pahans* accepted the offer with good grace.
24. Anthropologist tend to distinguish magic from religion. However, they do not quite agree as to the precise nature of this distinction. Tylor (*Primitive Culture*),

for instance, did not consider magic in the context of religion. Magic to him was a pseudo-science which had become obsolete with the development of science, but had left its 'traces in superstitious practices of various kinds'. Frazer, too, thought of magic as a pseudo-science (*Golden Bough*). However, unlike Tylor, he linked magic with religion. 'He held that magical beliefs preceded religious ones...As Frazer reconstructed the inaccessible past, man looked for a way to control his environment, and thought these principles were the answer. But when they failed to give results, he concluded that there must be a personified being somewhere who had to be propitiated: thus was religion born'. Mair, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*, Ch. 13. Tribal thought tended to associate magic with 'black magic', its practices being designed to harm individuals.

25. This was based on the deeply rooted belief among tribals that death, meaning merely the end of material existence, actually marked the beginning of a new existence, a disembodied one—a spirit living on in his former home as the family's protector. It was this indissoluble link with the ancestors that bound their progeny to the ancestral village.
26. Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice*, pp. 466, 473-75.
27. For instance, as Hoffmann argues, in the Munda world they were not based on the Munda *asura* legend. *Enc. Mund.*, Vol. 2, pp. 241-250.
28. Hoffmann, *Enc. Mund.*, Vol. 2, p. 372. S.C. Roy points to the usual 'long-winded incantations, mostly in the local Hindi dialect' and 'invocations to Hindu deities as well as local spirits' as evidence that the practices of the witch doctors did not form part of the communally organised religious practices of the Oraons. Roy, *Oraon Religion and Custom*, pp. 185-86.
29. *Panchayat* literally meant a council of five. However, the number varied from village to village.
30. Archer thus describes 'the ritual of the ceremony' connected with *bitlaha*: 'It is performed by an enormous crowd. It is done to the thunder and roll of drums. The crowd advances on the house in long surging lines. Finally, a ceremony of symbolic defilement is performed in the heart of the courtyard. In its disciplined expression of revolted disgust, its intense assertion of tribal values, its savage dignity, the ceremony is unique in tribal India'. Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice*. p. 549.
31. Parkin, *The Munda of Central India: An Account of them Social Organisation*, Chs. 1-5.
32. E.G. Man was particularly struck by the Santal consciousness of an identity despite their dispersion over a wide geographical area. Initially, he doubted whether his observations on the Santals of Sonthalia (a particular portion of the new district of Santal Parganas formed in 1836) applied to the Santals of other areas. He was eventually convinced that they did. Man, *Sonthalia and the Santals*, pp. 2-3. Culshaw, a Christian missionary working in the village of Saronga of Bankura district, reached a similar conclusion: 'Much of what is said is true of the Santals wherever they are found. The uniformity of Santal culture over a wide area raises questions of great interest to students...'. Culshaw, *Tribal Heritage*, 'Preface', VII.
33. The exalted position of a guru in the Santal society was wholly due to his superior knowledge of the Santal oral tradition. There is also evidence that some of them tried from time to time to create among the Santals a consciousness of the Santal race. Bodding, translator of Skrefsrud's Santali work *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals* into English thus writes about the Santal Guru: 'A Santal Guru is a man who is supposed to know certain things, e.g. what should be recited at some

ceremonial functions, and who is able to act as a reciter when called upon to do so. Any Santal can become a Guru, by attaching himself to an older Guru and gradually learning from him'. (Foreword, p. 2).

34. Judicial Criminal Proceedings, Government of Bengal, 4 Feb. 1820. Nos. 38-39.
35. Tribhuvan Manjhi, who was judged guilty, was then in charge of the royal granary and could thus manipulate the grain prices in the local market.
36. According to Dalton the Hos 'generally admit that they are of the same family as the Mundas, and that they came from Chutia Nagpur'. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Group VII, Section 4. The social and religious organisation of the Hos and the Mundas was strikingly similar. See Section 5.
37. Jha has analysed the nature of the movement led by Ganganarayan in *The Bhumij Revolt (1932-33)*, Chs. II-IV.
38. Dalton thus concludes: 'I do not know that on any occasion they rose like the Mundaris simply to redress their own wrongs. It was sometimes in support of a turbulent chief ambitious of obtaining power to which according to the courts of law he was not entitled, and it was sometimes to oppose the government in a policy that they did not approve, though they may have had very little personal interest in the matter'. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, (1960 edn. Calcutta), p. 172.
39. Rumours circulating at the time mostly stressed the paramount need of the hour: preservation of solidarity among the rebel Santals. One rumour was that *Lag Lagin* snakes were moving around and swallowing men. To remove this evil, people of five villages met together and, after fasting, went at night to another group of five villages. Another rumour had it that 'a buffalo cow is moving in the country. Whenever it finds grass at someone's outer door, it halts and grazes, and until all the members of that household died it does not move away'. The Santals started digging up all the grass in the village streets. Another rumour warned the Santals against the suspicious movements of outsiders in Santal villages, asking the Santals to take care that they could be easily identified, so that anti-*diku* measures of the time did not harm them. One rumour related to the birth of a *Subah Thakur* at a remote place called Lao fort. Bodding, *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals.*
40. According to the Santal oral tradition, God appeared before two Santal brothers, Sidhu and Kanu, with a message asking them to lead a movement aiming at destruction of the enemies of Santals and the establishment of a Santal raj. As some village headmen told the Burdwan Commissioner, 'the sole cause of the outbreak is the extraordinary spell which the idea of a *soobah* (sovereign authority) of their own has cast over them'.
41. The two brothers, Sidhu and Kanu, who claimed to have received a message direct from God, insisted on the presence of Santals at the spot where God had appeared before them and where the brothers had been worshipping God for days. The obvious purpose was to convince the Santal congregation of the veracity of their claim about the transmission of a divine message to them. Things used in the rituals in connection with offerings to the brothers by the Santals present there were traditionally all part of Santal religious rituals: *dubai* grass, sun-dried rice, *sindur* (vermilion), mustard oil and turmeric. The brothers insisted throughout that the rituals be observed with 'purity of heart'. Their messages to followers consistently cited Santal cosmogonic legends, such as destruction of a sinful world by the *Thakur* (God) through a rain of fire raging continuously for

seven days and seven nights, and escape from this pervasive calamity for only those who fled to a remote mountain.

42. Some disillusioned Santals went as for as to call the leader's prophecies and plans of resistance 'dacoits', 'guiles' and 'deceitful promises'. Bodding, *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals*, p. 192.
43. Contemporary reports on the Kherwar movement often referred to the growing social distance between the Kherwar converts and other Santals. Part of the reason for the limited appeal of the Kherwar ideology, except when a movement was on, was the economic implications of acceptance of the Kherwar lifestyle. For instance, a Kherwar Santal could not any longer rear pigs and fowls, because they were thought to be polluting objects. This sacrifice was too much for relatively poor Santals to bear.
44. For details see B.B. Chaudhuri, 'The Story of a Tribal Revolt: The Religion and Politics of the Oraons, 1900-1920.'

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