

Tribal Movements in India

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Edited by

K.S. SINGH



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INTRODUCTION

K.S. Singh

THE tribal societies in middle India, unlike those in the North-East, were closely integrated with the prevailing colonial system, its economy and administration. The interaction of the peasants and tribes had led to the development of settled agriculture as the primary mode of subsistence in the pre-colonial period. This process was accentuated in the colonial phase as waves of peasants moved into tribal areas. They carried with them their cultural systems which inspired the rise of religious movements called the Bhagat movements among tribes. In the colonial phase the tribals not only faced threat to the control of their environment and resources such as land but, also, actually lost control of them. This was at the root of the long chain of tribal uprisings centering on the crucial question of the possession of land. Alongside the agrarian struggles, Sanskritisation processes were also at work. In the post-colonial phase these trends continued, except in one respect, namely, that the Sanskritisation process slowed down even if it was not actually reversed as in the North-East, because of the demand for the implementation of welfare measures which followed the recognition of the tribes as a privileged category under the Indian constitution.

The survey conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) identified a number of movements in eastern India; the most important of them being the movement for the establishment of a Jharkhand state. There were also social

mobility movements among the Kurmi in Chotanagpur re-seeking the tribal status. Central India reported the continuation of the Bhagat movements and a political movement of sorts among the Gonds. Northern parts of Andhra, which are a part of the Central Indian system, witnessed a militant tribal uprising. There were also movements in western India such as the Bhagat movements among the Bhills, agrarian movements among tribals and the Halpatis and a political movement for autonomy. In the south, where there were small and isolated primitive tribes, only incipient political processes could be observed among them.

Studies of these movements suggest that tribal unrest assumes an organised character only among the large homogeneous, land-owning tribal communities who have a relatively strong economic base such as the Munda, Santal, Bhil, Gond, etc. Very few of the primitive tribes, who have a pre-agricultural technology, participate in such movements. The major tribal communities, however, have a high degree of literacy and a high rate of participation in democratic processes. It is these groups who react strongly to the issues concerning land and forest on which they subsist. Also, a new middle class is emerging from among them in urban areas which agitates about reservation of jobs; it is also sensitive to the exploitation of its people as labourers in agriculture, mining, industries, etc. The demands of this new class are couched in secular idioms.

We may categorise the movements in Middle India identified by the ASI survey as follows:

- i. Movements for political autonomy;
- ii. Agrarian and forest-based movements;
- iii. Sanskritisation processes; and
- iv. Cultural movements based on script and language.

Movements for Political Autonomy

The Gonds and Bhils voiced their demand for the formation of a separate state at the beginning of the Second World War; however this was neither spelt out nor sustained by an organised movement. Initially, Kurma Bhimu in Adilabad demanded a Gond raj in 1941. Then, in a memorandum

submitted before the States Reorganization Commission in the 1950s, the Gond leaders demanded the formation of a separate state for the Adibasis to be carved out of the tribal areas of Chattisgarh and contiguous districts of Rewa region and Vidarbha. A movement consisting of the Gonds of the lower strata led by Hira Singh developed in the late 1950s and reached its peak in 1962-63 before dying down. The local authorities did not take this movement seriously as for most of them the Manjhi was an eccentric person and his movement was quixotic (See Singh).

Desai describes a tribal autonomy (*Adivasi Swayat Raj*) movement in South Gujarat in the 1960s. However, the movement does not seem to have gathered strength since, which could be due to the remarkable progress achieved by Gujarat in the area of tribal education and development. Singh also provides the historical perspective on the best organised and most articulate movement for tribal autonomy in Middle India which belongs to Chotanagpur, the most advanced and exposed of the tribal regions—and the various phases through which the movement passed until it emerged as the Jharkhand party in the 1940s. Even though the party has been losing ground, the slogan of tribal or regional autonomy is still alive. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) with its radical ideology, has emerged today as a major political force in the industrial and mining belt of Chotanagpur, and in Bihar politics after the 1980 general elections. Generally speaking, it seeks to broaden the separatist movement by including within its ambit the peasant and working classes. However, the tribal ethnic movement reveals strands of interdenominational and inter-tribe competition and rivalry.

The Jharkhand movement failed to develop into a full-fledged regional movement. Tribal ethnicity in a multi-ethnic society, characterised by economic interdependence among different communities, thus followed a different course of development in Chotanagpur unlike such movements in the North-East; separatism in this tribal region did not develop into secessionism. Panchbhai deals with the ramifications of the movement among the Santals while P.K. Bhowmick presents a case study of the Jharkhand politics of West Bengal and L.K. Mahapatra of Orissa.

Agrarian and Forest-based Movements

Agrarian movements in tribal areas are restricted to only some regions within which tribal movements occurred. Few agrarian struggles were reported from the northern and southern parts of India. In Middle India, though tribal discontent over various forms of exploitation is widespread, it has been organised into movements only at some places involving a few tribes. Agrarian struggles and forest-based movements are closely linked and will be dealt with here together. The leaders of the freedom struggle in the tribal regions had mobilized the tribals by focusing on the means of livelihood: their rights in the forest and to forest produce being eroded through commercial exploitation. This, next only to land, was the most important resource on which the tribals subsisted. A series of forest satyagrahas were launched in the 1930s by the Indian National Congress to demand restoration of tribal's customary rights to extract timber and collect forest produce for consumption. In Madhya Pradesh, in the 1950s, a forest Satyagraha was led by the Kharwar of Palamau, the dominant tribal peasant community in Palamau, and another by the Gond across the border (See Singh). The two forest satyagrahas had their roots in the disturbance of the customary rights of the tribals in the forest which they had enjoyed without let or hindrance until the forest department imposed its regulations for efficient management of forest resources. Their struggle failed to achieve its objective, which eludes them to this day.

The Gond in Madhya Pradesh did not have traditions of militant struggle waged in defence of their rights in land and forest (See Singh) The Gond zamindars, however, spear-headed the 1857 rebellion in their region like the zamindars elsewhere, but the Gond peasants as a whole were not involved in any movement. However, from the 1940s, instances of the Gond's resistance to encroachment on their right in forests came to light. Since independence, their territorial and political systems have broken down, and their rights in forest and land have been eroded. New settlements have been founded in their land. Peasant castes have immigrated in large numbers in the Adilabad and Chanda districts and outsiders have

flocked to the industrial centres and townships which have sprung up in the Gond land. The fact that Gond movements have centred around forest rather than land is understandable in the context of Dandakaranya ecology. In the early 1940s, when the Gonds of Adilabad led by Kurma Bhimu started a short-lived insurrection over the forest question, restriction of their rights in forest was the burning issue; today it is their right to land. As the pressure of population on land grows, there is greater need for land. In February 1981 there was an unusual spurt of forced harvesting on lands taken away from them by non-tribals, raiding of houses of money-lenders and decamping with mortgaged valuables. On 20 April 1981 a conference was planned by CPI(ML) at Interville. The meeting was banned and the tribals were persuaded not to assemble there. However, they took out a procession which came into conflict with a police force. About 15 tribals lost their lives. *The Raos deal with the struggles of the other tribes in Andhra.*

Kulkarni tells us about the agrarian struggle of the tribals of Dhulia. There has been large-scale transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals who include money-lenders, rich landlords and traders. As landlessness and poverty grew the tribals sought employment on low wages. A Sarvodaya worker, Ambarsingh Suratwanti, a Bhil himself, started to organize the Adibasis in 1967. The Government of Maharashtra issued an Ordinance in July 1975 to prohibit alienation of tribal lands and to provide for the restoration of lands alienated in contravention of the law. Danda and Ekka give an account of the emancipation of the bonded Dublas of South Gujarat.

The agrarian movement among tribals in Chotanagpur in recent years has taken the form of forcible harvesting of crops on the land formerly owned by them but currently in illegal possession of and cultivated by non-tribal money-lenders and rich peasants, the demand for restoration of land under the provision of tribal tenancy laws and compelling payment of remunerative prices for tribals' produce in markets where they have traditionally been exploited.

However, it is not land but forest which has become the focal point of widespread disturbances recently. More than land, forest is intimately connected with tribal life. It is the abode of the spirits and the place of worship (*śarna*), the seat

of life-cycle ceremonies including burial (*sadsandiri*): it is the source of food, and of employment. Under the law all such customary rights are extinguished in the reserved forests. In practice tribals have been reclaiming land with the connivance of petty officials; and it is a common sight to see patches of cultivation in reserved forests. Of late, as pressure on land has increased, there is demand for more land and, therefore, trees are felled in forest reserves causing loss not only to the national economy but also to the tribal economy in the long run. The "tree war" has now spread into Orissa, where the splendid *sal* forest is being cut down. In sharp contrast to this is the new mass movement to protect forest, the Chipko movement, in which however there is only a marginal participation of the Bhotiyas, a tribe, as described by Das and Negi.

Adhikary and Bhattacharya tell us about the tribal involvement with the CPI(ML)-led movements known as the Naxalite movements, which mobilised tribal and non-tribal peasants against oppression by rich peasants, money-lenders and local officials. The first phase of the movement was from 1967 to 1972 and the second from 1978 onwards. The movement established bases in north Bengal, the Srikakulam-Adilabad region of Andhra Pradesh, Chotanagpur-Santal Pargana belt and the Bhil regions of western India. However, the study reveals that the tribal participation in the leadership structure of the Naxalite movement, as also in its operation, was marginal.

Sanskritisation Process

In spite of the attraction of the secular advantages of the tribal status, the process of Sanskritisation has not come to a stop in Middle India, though it has slowed down. Bhagat movements have been reported from Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Danda tells about Gahira Guru who leads a Sant Samaj movement among the Kavar to promote social reform. Rajmohini, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, still carries on with her reform among the Gonds. The light has not failed, as Ekka tells us about her and her continuing movement. Mann's study shows that the old Bhagat sects continue to

flourish in Rajasthan. In Gujarat, an area so far little known for the Bhagat movements, a number of movements have been reported by Lal, apart from the intensive propagation among the tribals by the Swami Narayan sect. A Baba has stirred up the tribals in Bastar. Bhatt gives us an account of his doings, which mercifully have stopped now. The Bhagat movements by prohibiting consumption of liquor and promoting savings contributed towards the peasantisation of the tribes.

Cultural Movements

While the Bhagat movements are flourishing in the more backward conditions of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, sections of non-Christian tribals are seeking a return to the pre-Hindu and pre Bhagat forms of tribal religion; centring around the *Sarna* or the sacred grove, it is a religion called *Sarna Dharam* or *Sari Dharam*. The followers of both forms numbered 4.28 lakhs and 35,000 respectively in 1961. Their number has gone up to 9.51 lakhs and 1.61 lakhs in 1971. Evidently the movement is gaining ground; compared to this such movements as *Adi Dharma* (1,309), Birsa cult (280), the Bonga cult (4,391), Jairea (185), Kharwar (7,418), have paled into insignificance. A part of this process can be seen as a reaction against Hinduism and Christianity.

Christianity has been the single most important factor of culture change in the tribal region. Of the tribal Christian population, which was 16 lakhs in 1961 in Middle India, Orissa has reported the biggest rise (88%) followed by Madhya Pradesh (82%). These trends have persisted since. An insider, Hembram, presents a study of the *Sarna Dharam*. The former Gond Raja of Chanda claims to have established yet another form of tribal religion, the *Gondi Dharma*, which seeks to differentiate itself from Hinduism, as Thusu tells us.

Another variant of this form of identity movement is the effort being made by some communities to regain the tribal status they lost under the spell of Sanskritization movements. Singh and Mahato present a case study of the Kurmi-Mahato in this regard. The efforts to evolve a script and build up an indigenous literature in tribal language may be seen as

part of an overall movement to define and assert tribal identity. This process in Chotanagpur can be traced to the 1920s when the upcoming tribal middle class started a movement to gain political autonomy, and gave a fillip to revivalism in tribal literature which sought to preserve and recreate many of the cultural symbols of the past. Probably the most dynamic of the identity movements in middle India is the one based on the Santali script, the *Ol Chiki*, fashioned by Pandit Raghunath Murmu. The story of this movement is told by Sitakant Mahapatra, who also throws light on the Santal revivalism. Across the border in Bihar, Lakho Bodra claimed that the lost script, *Varana Kshiti*, the shining letters of the Ho people, was revealed to him at the end of a forty-day ordeal in a cave. The script movement also goes with social reform, the concept of which is rooted in the traditions of the ancient society of the Ho tribe. This came to be known as the Adi Samaj movement which is described by Dasgupta. Discovery of a script is thus part of a whole programme of reform, revivalism and revitalisation of culture; the objective usually being the preservation of the pure and pristine elements of culture (Ho, Santal). The demand for recognition of the script is part of the demand for a new social order in the tribals' search for identity.

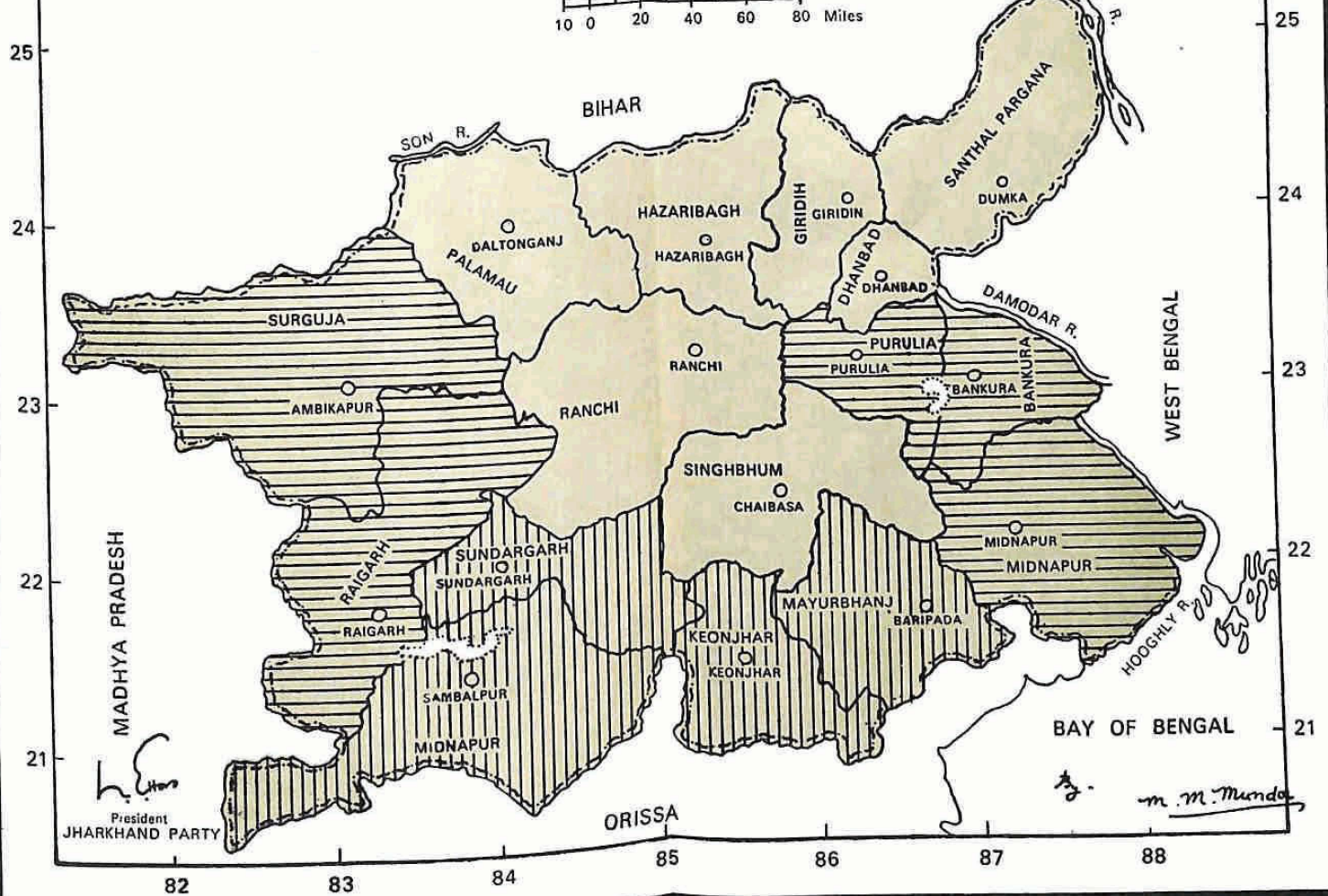
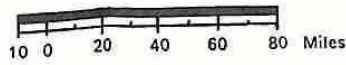
Most of these movements are concentrated in middle India of which northern parts of Andhra are a part. The tribes down south are too primitive, too small in numbers, and too isolated in their habitat to organise movements, in spite of their exploitation and the resultant discontent. However, Mishra tells us about the incipient processes of political mobilization among the tribes of south India. Mathur takes up a smaller part of this process in the context of highly politicised Kerala. Pandit reports a similar trend among the Islandic community of the Car Nicobarese.

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PROPOSED JHARKHAND STATE

82 83 84 85 86 87 88



H. G. Jha
President
JHARKHAND PARTY

M. M. Munda

TRIBAL AUTONOMY MOVEMENTS IN CHOTANAGPUR

K.S. Singh

THIS PAPER explores the historical development of tribal autonomy movements in Chotanagpur, sets in depth the goal, strategy and mobilization of the Jharkhand movement as seen at the micro level in 1977-79, and analyses the ideology and structure of the various autonomy movements in their different phases.¹

I

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Chotanagpur, where the tribal system had survived relatively intact, became the centre of a dynamic separatist movement due to a combination of many reasons. Firstly, Chotanagpur was the most advanced of the tribal regions in point of literacy, political consciousness, and industrial progress. Secondly, the major tribal communities were concentrated in a geographically distinct region; they were not scattered like the Bhils and Gonds over different political and territorial systems. Thirdly, Christianity was a strong force in Chotanagpur; the major tribes of Chotanagpur became very effectively evangelised. There was no other region of tribal middle India which witnessed such a spread of Christianity. As Christianity spread it performed many roles: it gave the tribes a sense of identity; it gave them a history and a myth; it accentuated the

notion of private rights in land; it promoted education and medical care; it also emphasised among the converts a sense of separateness from the rest. Fourthly, the Chotanagpur tribes had a tradition of militant and organised struggles going back over a hundred years; struggles organised around land and not forests as elsewhere. The incidence of proletarianisation was small when compared with that among the Bhils. Fifthly, there was a rich corpus of anthropological literature to draw upon in order to create a new sense of history to legitimise the tribals' search for identity. Sarat Chandra Roy gave eloquent expression to the tribals' demand for separation; his ideas and draftsmanship left their imprint on the memoranda submitted by tribal organisations before different government bodies. He was not a closet anthropologist but rather the first ideologue and active protagonist of the demand for tribal autonomy. Lastly, Chotanagpur was exposed to the operation of many interests: the Bengalis formed a sizeable professional and landowning community, and the Muslims were a significant trading and professional interest. The Bengali-Bihari controversy over employment in the late 1930s and the Muslim League politics also affected the development of the tribal separatist movement.

We shall briefly describe the different phases through which the separatist movement passed and how it was transformed into a regional movement.

The first phase, starting at the turn of the present century, saw the rise of the institutions designed to introduce reforms and stimulate development among the tribes mainly along denominational and partly inter-denominational lines. The leadership came from the missionaries and Christian students. The missionaries pioneered temperance movements to check the evil of drinking among tribals and formed cooperative societies to free them from the clutches of money-lenders. Of the latter movement, the most notable was the Roman Catholic Cooperative Society, founded in 1906, which had a considerable effect in 'civilising' the aboriginals and raising their standard of life generally. Societies were also formed for the promotion of education. Led by Christian teachers and students they constituted the matrix of the political movement which was spearheaded by educated Christians later. As early

as in 1898, the Christian Association had been formed by the Lutheran graduates for the promotion of education. In 1918, the Catholics joined it to form the Christian College Union. In 1912, J. Bartholomew of the Anglican Mission, on his return from the Students' Conference at Dacca in 1911-12, founded a branch of the Dacca Students Union to raise funds for the education of poor Christian students. The Munda-Oraon Education Conference (Siksha Sabha), founded by a non-Christian leader, and the Ranchi Union also worked towards promoting education, but chiefly among urban tribals.

Inter-denominational and also, occasionally, pan-tribal solidarity for the socio-economic uplift of the region as a whole found expression in the formation of some societies. In 1912, the Chotanagpur Charitable Association was organised by all aboriginals, Christians and non-Christians, to raise funds for students. Voices were raised for forging unity among the people of Chotanagpur; for abolition of differences between Christian and non-Christian tribals, as also among all tribals such as the Munda, Oraon, Tamarua, Mahali, Lohar and Panre. A new sentiment was in the air, "All Adivasis are one", "Adivasis of lower category such as Lohar, Panre, Bhuniya and Tamarua should not be looked down upon", etc. This pan-tribal sentiment was, however, weak.

When the era of constitutional reforms dawned, and demands for the promotion and protection of regional and sectarian interests grew, the educated Christian tribals—mostly students belonging to the Lutheran and Anglican Missions—took a hand in organising the Chotanagpur Improvement Society at the instance of the Anglican Bishop of Ranchi. A Munda led this interdenominational (Anglican-Lutheran) body, which voiced its concern in 1916 over the absence of security for tribals and stressed the need for the preservation of tribal identity in the changing political context. "Whatever may be done in the way of reform elsewhere", it urged, "the aborigines of Chotanagpur may be left to the administration of European officers".² The Society also offered various suggestions for economic advancement of the tribal community. The Society, however, became more or less moribund by 1920.

The second phase, which lasted from 1920 to 1938, was

dominated by the revived activities of the Chotanagpur Improvement Society (Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj). A tribal urban middle class was forming. The Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj embodied inter-denominational unity of the missions for political purposes and, unlike in the first phase, it set up a sustained operation. It was led by tribal teachers and catechists, and sought to secure employment for educated tribals, reservation in the services and legislative bodies, and formation of a sub-state joined to Bengal or Orissa. While it tried to spread its activities to villages, it remained essentially an urban movement. This period also witnessed the development of mini-revivalism among tribes, very much on the lines of the Indian renaissance which stressed return to the golden age of the community, and formulated an individualistic approach to reform and service to the community. It is to this phase that we can trace the revival of *Parha* (ancient tribal assemblies) and the discovery of lost 'scripts' said to have been used by the tribes in their heyday. The Samaj was able to focus the attention of the authorities on the problems of the tribes. The Simon Commission and the Government responded to the tribal problems, and sought their solution within the framework of the existing political structure.

The third phase, from 1938 to 1947, saw the rise of a militant movement under the Adivasi Mahasabha. The immediate cause of the formation of the Mahasabha was the experience of the first elections held in 1937 under the Government of India Act of 1935. The Congress swept the polls. This persuaded Christian as also non-Christian tribals to join forces; the Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj and other organisations thus merged to form the Adivasi Mahasabha. This was a wider movement, commanded a larger political base, and possessed pan-tribal composition and objective. Two other factors which influenced the formation of the Mahasabha were the Bengali-Bihari controversy and Muslim League politics. The Bengalis felt that their interests in Bihar were not safe and, therefore, they should combine with the tribals to form a separate state. The Muslim League, in the mid-1940s, played with the idea of forming a corridor passing through the tribal areas to link the proposed areas which would constitute East and West Pakistan. They sympathised with, and gave financial

support to the Adivasi Mahasabha. The Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj and the Adivasi Mahasabha both were 'loyalist'. Jaipal Singh, President of Adivasi Mahasabha, gave support to the British war effort to which the Congress was opposed and played a considerable role in recruiting tribals for the British army. The Adivasi Mahasabha was led by professional political workers, some of them highly educated and articulate. It became a Chotanagpur movement extending over both urban and rural areas. Also, it did not confine its scope to only the Ranchi tribals. It did not demand merely the formation of a sub-state but complete separation from Bihar. A series of violent incidents occurred during this period which underlined the militant nature of the movement. It remained outside the mainstream of nationalist politics and the freedom movement and by 1947 the militancy had not paid off; the Adivasi Mahasabha was routed by the Congress in the elections held in 1946. The link with the Muslim League was broken, and the Bengali-Bihari controversy tapered off.

The fourth phase, from 1949 to 1963, saw the rise of the Jharkhand party. The Adivasi Mahasabha was wound up and this new regional party created. The two factors which contributed to the formation of the party were the experiences of the failure of the militant movement and more important, the framing of the Constitution for India. The Fifth and the Sixth Schedule recognised the tribals as a minority and gave them more than the anthropologists and the British administrators had prepared them for. The framers of the Constitution also gave the country a secular system, which the missionaries and the minorities found reassuring. Further, it was discovered that the Census of 1941 had given an exaggerated figure of the tribal population in Chotanagpur which had sustained the Adivasi Mahasabha movement. The Census of 1951, like the Census of 1931, showed that the tribals were not a very large community; in fact, they had never been a majority in the Chotanagpur region. Therefore, the Jharkhand party was thrown open, at least in principle as embodied in its constitution, to all Chotanagpuris. There was thus a transition from ethnicity to regionalism as the formative factor in the movement. This was partly in keeping with the larger political and secular stance current in those days that

language and not ethnicity should determine the formation of a province.

Some elements of the Congress Socialist party and quite a few members of the non-Bihari money-lending community, who could be identified as the *dikus* (the alien), joined the party. The concept of the Jharkhand was enlarged to include all the regions that once formed part of the Chotanagpur administrative division. Thus the tracts inhabited by the Chotanagpur tribals which formed parts of Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh were included in the Jharkhand. The means adopted by the party to achieve its goal were constitutional. Though Christians dominated the movement and provided the leadership there was an unmistakable tribal core to it. This will be evident from the fact that the Jharkhand party polled nearly 750,000 votes in the 1952 and 1957 elections (see Appendix).

The years from 1952 to 1957, which cut across the two elections, were in many ways the peak period for the Jharkhand movement. The Jharkhand Party emerged as the major party in the Chotanagpur-Santal Parganas region. The second general election saw it extend its influence in Orissa, where it captured five seats and held the balance of power in the state politics which were plagued by instability. It displayed remarkable unity, laid down the law in the tribal region, could mobilise thousands of people and take out mammoth processions at short notice. However, the States Reorganisation Commission with mid-1950s turned down the plea for a separate Jharkhand State.

The late 1950s, saw the decline of the party, which can be attributed to many factors. Firstly, there was the growing impact of development programmes on Chotanagpur and the increasing involvement of the tribals in the developmental process. Secondly, because of the competition for better educational facilities, employment opportunities and control over development inputs and resources, the split deepened between the advanced Christian and relatively backward non-Christian tribals. The non-Christian tribals started looking mainly to the Congress or the Jana Sangh for support among the many All-India parties that appeared on the scene and strengthened their presence (Congress, Jana Sangh, Swatantra, CPI). Thirdly, the experience of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa,

which had both given representation to tribal interests in the the government and the council of ministers, had made it clear that all that the tribals needed was a share in power in order to protect their interests -which could as well be secured by joining the Congress or by coming to some kind of understanding with it, as in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. Fourthly, the Jharkhand party did not have any agrarian programme, its leaders were town-based professionals who had little feel for rural problems. The leaders, as a matter of fact, were drawn mainly from the higher strata of tribal society; the Munda (village headman) and Mankis (head of Munda) in the Ho region; the Manjhi and Parganaites in the Santal region; and educated Christians from the Munda and Oraon areas. Its ally was the Janata Party which represented the zamindars of Chotanagpur; in 1962 the Jharkhand Party accepted as member an ex-zamindar of Chotanagpur and appointed a secretary from the money-lending community. The agrarian situation continued to deteriorate; radical measures were needed to remedy the lot of the tribal masses; measures which the Jharkhand Party could not provide. In fact part of the Congress success later can be explained by its 'garibi hatao' programme. Lastly, there was dissidence within the party arising out of the style and performance of the leadership, particularly at the time of the reorganisation of states (1955-56). At that time the Jharkhand Party not only failed to press its demand but also saw a sizeable chunk of the 'Jharkhand' being given away to West Bengal. The party machinery was weak; it had always been handicapped by lack of funds. In fact, only a liberal supply of money could sustain an organisation which never functioned efficiently at the higher level. The search for money led to strange alignments with elements such as the *dikus*, the traditional enemies of the Adivasis. The non-Bihari *dikus*, as mentioned earlier, had a vested interest in the movement to keep the Bihar *dikus* away. Party support was also given to many 'outsiders'. All this created tensions within the party. This became evident when the party was wiped out in the mid-term election in Orissa. But that was not all, a still greater shock was in store for the Jharkhand Party.

In the 1962 elections the number of votes polled by the

Jharkhand Party was slashed to almost half of that registered in 1957. This reduced its seats to twenty in the Bihar Assembly and was a sharp reminder to the leaders that its stance of isolation, either ethnic or regional, could no longer be maintained. The merger of the Jharkhand Party with the Congress, effected in June 1963, was thus a natural corollary of the operation of the above-mentioned forces.

The fifth phase, lasted from 1963 to 1975, after the fourth general elections when the objective conditions for an autonomy movement were present but there was no unified political party. The Jharkhand Party was fragmented: the parent body had broken up into smaller parties of tribal sub-ethnic groups none of which packed any punch. The Jharkhand was like a splintered glass; there was a movement, but no composite party.

This phase had many interesting features. There was a distinct radicalisation of politics which came about largely as a result of the articulation of the agrarian factor in the tribal situation. The Jharkhand in its constitutional role as a regional party had played down agrarian issue. Meanwhile the agrarian situation became worse. The incidence of alienation of land belonging to tribals increased; more and more educated tribal youths were seeking employment; construction of industrial complexes resulted in the displacement of tribals from their land, and their absorption into industrial culture was slow. Though there was some development in tribal regions, it was on a smaller scale than elsewhere; it was not enough to meet the rising aspirations of the new generation of the tribal community. No doubt, the participation of a section of tribal leadership in the government resulted in distinct improvement in some matters: more tribals were employed in the government than before; the quotas reserved for them were, by and large, filled; more attention was paid to their region, and there was also a larger flow of funds. But evidently this was not enough. The 1971 Census disclosed an alarming state of affairs. The percentage of the scheduled tribes in the population of the districts of tribal Bihar had fallen sharply in the decade 1961-71: in Ranchi from 61.61 to 58.08, in Singhbhum from 47.31 to 46.12, and in the Santal Parganas from 38.24 to 36.22. This was not only because of

the slow growth rate of the tribal population, which was in fact among the lowest, but largely due to the heavy influx of people from other parts of Bihar. This trend persists.

The radicalisation was also due to the influence of the Naxalite movement: the infiltration of extremist elements in tribal organisations and the entry of the leftist parties in the region. The last had generally kept out of tribal politics so far their interest had been limited to the workers engaged in the mining and industries. The leftist orientation to tribal politics meant putting a greater stress on the political education of workers and agrarian issues, linking local and all-India politics, militancy of means, and better organisation. All-India leftist parties became increasingly committed to the concept of tribal autonomy as distinct from that of the formation of a tribal state.

However, as the political character of the Jharkhand movement became diluted the agrarian aspects came into prominence. The formal political slogan of a separate state was not given up, but the emphasis shifted to the conditions of the tribals, the nature and consequences of exploitation, isolation and neglect. There is a better articulated demand for a dominant role for the tribals in regional administration, for better educational facilities, and more employment opportunities. There is also a demand for restoration of alienated land provision for legal and institutional safeguards to protect tribal interests and to end all forms of exploitation. All parties working in Chotanagpur united in stressing the regional factor.

We may conceptualise the developments during this phase in terms of (i) fragmentation of the tribal party and factionalisation of tribal politics, (ii) rise of urban pressure groups, and (iii) political extremism, agrarian radicalism and cultural revivalism.

Fragmentation and Factionalisation

The merger of the Jharkhand Party with the Congress in 1963 shocked the hard core of the Jharkhandis, who were keen to maintain a separate political identity, and sections of the dominant Christian elite and missionaries who feared loss of

the leverage they exercised. It was also stated that the merger had not been ratified by the general body of the party and was, therefore, technically, defective. In fact, no sooner was the merger effected than it began to be criticised. The behaviour of the leadership, which had sought the merger and benefited from it, did nothing to allay the criticism. Mutual bickering and personal rivalries delayed the implementation of the terms of the merger and its consolidation. The attitude of those leaders who lost or relinquished office became ambivalent. The Jharkhand factions were in disarray. As many as nine groups sprang up to fill the vacuum created by the merger, and the main body of the Jharkhand split up into four factions in the late 1960s.

The processes of the split within the split are outlined here. During the years from 1963 to 1968 as many as three groups claimed to represent the Jharkhand Party. After the Party was decimated at the polls in the Fourth General Election in 1967 attempts were made to unify the factions but a further split could not be averted. A faction of the party refused to recognise the seventy-one-man Executive Committee of the Central Party. On 28 December 1967 the All-India Jharkhand Party was formed. Its first act was to declare the merger with the Congress effected in 1963 unconstitutional and void as it was not approved by the general body. This party split again in 1969-70 owing to the temperamental incompatibility of and conflicts between its leaders. In 1968 the Santals separated from the Chotanagpur tribals and formed their own party, the Bihar Prant Hul Jharkhand on 28 December, which was named after the Santal Insurrection (locally called *Hul*). This was the culmination of the long-standing grievance nursed by the Santals that though they were more numerous than the Mundas and Oraons, they did not command adequate influence in the Jharkhand movement.

Rise of Urban Pressure Groups

The rise of the urban pressure groups led by the educated tribals, mostly Christian, at industrial complexes to demand jobs for tribal youths in administration and industrial undertakings, also occurred during the years from 1963 to 1968.

The process of the formation and the development of the pressure groups was epitomised in the Birsa Seva Dal (BSD) which emerged as the most important of the urban groups. It was essentially a socio-political organisation and not a political party as it did not contest any election. There were two influences at work which led to its formation. Firstly the missionaries of different denominations had been shaken by the fragmentation of the political structure of the Jharkhand Party and were dismayed at the erosion of Christian leadership as revealed by the results of the general election of 1967. Therefore, they felt a new organisation had to be established to safeguard the interests of the educated tribals in urban areas. Secondly, the extremist elements were fairly active in seeking to establish a base of influence in the tribal region; managed to influence the BSD ideology, programmes and methods considerably. The co-existence between the missionary and CPM-L elements was not always happy. The two worked together for some time but subsequently there was a split. The name of the tribal Birsa Munda, who led the uprising of 1899-1900 against the missionaries and the British Government, used in Birsa Seva Dal was, therefore, a little ironical but it served as a draw nevertheless.

The effective life-span of the BSD movement was very short. There were two phases in its development. The first from 1967 to 1969 was a militant phase. Violent methods of struggle to secure tribal rights were advocated. Meetings, processions of the youth armed with bows and arrows, and celebrations of the Birsa Day, were the modes of mobilisation. The BSD demanded creation of a separate state, expulsion of the non-Chotanagpuris, agrarian reforms and measures against money-lenders.

After 1967 the second phase of the BSD movement began. The influence of CPM-L and the missionaries waned. BSD pledged itself to play a constitutional role and adopt peaceful methods of struggle. Violent incidents ceased. But the organisation was soon undermined by internal conflicts, and some of the BSD leaders sought refuge in the Jharkhand splinter groups. The BSD almost ceased to exist. Recently, however, it has converted itself into a political party.

Political Extremism, Agrarian Radicalism and Cultural Revivalism

Political extremism is reflected in the formation, in 1973, of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM). The objective of the JMM was to form a separate Jharkhand state, end exploitation of tribals by non-tribals, and secure preferential treatment for the sons of the soil in the matter of employment.³ In contrast, the BSD, despite its attempt to establish a rapport with the tribal peasants, remained essentially an urban movement.

Agrarian radicalism was best seen among the Santals who were more sensitive to the agrarian question and militant about it. The agrarian movement among the Santals organised by the JMM—came to a head at harvest time in those areas of Bihar (particularly in Purnea and Santal Parganas) where Santals are engaged as labourers and crop-sharers. The most important series of incidents occurred in 1968 in the Santal Parganas, when the Santals forcibly harvested crops standing on their land illegally occupied by money-lenders. Yet it is striking that there was little bloodshed. Such incidents became part of the agrarian landscape of Bihar.

The JMM launched an operation to recover alienated land from money-lenders and big peasants in North Chotanagpur, an area which was not the stronghold of the Jharkhand Party. There were 120 violent incidents including looting of crops or forcible harvesting of crops standing on lands in illegal possession of money-lenders, attacks on 'exploiters', arson, and murder. The largest number of incidents (69) occurred in 1974. Since then the number of incidents has declined sharply.

The Mahtos' alliance with Santals gives the JMM an extra-ethnic dimension; there are the possibilities of the Santal movement developing into a pan-Santal awakening cutting across the Santal areas of Bihar and West Bengal. The Hul Jharkhand has supported it. The Santals of Hazaribagh, Giridish and Dhanbad have formed a common front with those of the Santal Parganas.

Cultural revivalism is also to be seen in over-all working of the JMM. Elements of the ancient tribal self-government

have been revived. The *Baisi* (assembly) in the Santal Pargana functions as a court without fees or pleaders and deals out simple justice. A volunteer force has been raised. Subscriptions are being locally collected. Tribal traditions of collective farming and preserving of jungles, pastures and common land have also been revived; a common grain pool has been created.

11

GOAL, STRATEGY AND MOBILISATION

The Jharkhand Party began steadily losing ground in the general elections ever since 1961. The Jharkhand Party did not contest the Lok Sabha poll as a party in March 1977. In the elections to the Bihar Assembly in May 1977, all four splinter groups of the Jharkhand Party polled only 81,227 votes as against 3,61,187 votes in 1972. The Janata wave swept the tribal regions. In spite of this, a militant phase of the Jharkhand movement started in October 1977. It originated in the statements made by late Jayaprakash Narayan, about the advisability of the formation of small states, and by the Home Minister, Shri Charan Singh, about the reorganisation of the states. These triggered off developments at two levels in Chotanagpur. First, all parties, including the Janata but excluding the Jharkhand Party, came together to demand a separate state for the Chotanagpur-Santal Pargana region. Second, the Jharkhand Party demanded the formation of the Jharkhand State consisting not only of the Chotanagpur-Santal Pargana region of Bihar, but also of the adjoining areas of Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

In the course of this phase of the movement for a separate state from October 1977 to June 1978, 46 events/incidents were reported from all over South Chotanagpur, out of which there were 25 from Ranchi, 18 from Singhbhum, and 3 from Palamau. Incidents, including demonstrations, gheraos, etc., took place in April (12), May (10) and June (14). While no event of any significance occurred in Palamau and Ranchi districts in the month of June 1978, except the celebration of the Birsa Day on 9 June 1978, 11 incidents were reported from

Singhbhum (excluding Jamshedpur). Next only to Ranchi town, Jamshedpur was an active centre of movement; slogans appeared on the walls, the Birsa Seva Dal was active behind the so-called encroachments, and funds were raised. In Ranchi district the incidents were concentrated in the Munda region, particularly Khunti (11) followed by Simdega (6), Gumla (3) and the Sadar (5) subdivisions. About 19 police stations (thanas) were affected in the Khunti and Simdega subdivisions and of them 6 were severely affected. Among the Mundas, the Lutheran Christians formed the backbone of the movement.

The issues against which the leaders of the movement agitated were (a) acquisition of land for large irrigation projects and firing ranges, (b) survey and settlement operations, which were held up, camps closed down, etc., (c) collection of loans, rent and cooperative dues, which were resisted, (d) nationalisation of forest produce and collection of *kendu* leaves, and (e) panchayat elections which they boycotted (in two blocks Torpa and Rania). Forest godowns were looted and stacks of *kendu* leaves burnt; a rest house was forcibly occupied; demonstrations were held and processions taken out at district and subdivisional headquarters. Forcible collection of subscription from contractors was reported from the Chakradharpur region. The local Government officers were *gheraoed*, intimidated and demoralised. The authorities instituted 13 cases against 58 persons who were active in the movement.

This phase of the movement for a separate state reached its culmination in the Ranchi *band* of 12 May 1978. The All India Jharkhand Party Conference held on 21 May 1978, declared that if the demand for Jharkhand State was not conceded by 15 August 1978, it would begin a non-cooperation movement. No tax would be paid to Government; no loan would be repaid; no mineral or forest produce would be allowed to be exported from Chotanagpur; the panchayat elections would not be permitted to be held, and if Mukhias and Sarpanches were elected, they would be *gheraoed* and forced to resign; the settlement operation would be stopped and, finally, no project or dam would be permitted to be constructed. It was also proposed to make the party more

broad-based and mobilise youth, including students, farmers and women. However, in a fever of excitement, some agitated processionists indulged in acts of looting and brickbatting which alienated the people in Ranchi town; while the brutal murder of a money-lender in Simdega alarmed a section of money-lenders, some of whom were financing the movement.

Although there was sympathy for the movement among the tribals all over Chotanagpur, and in all parties, and also among some sections of the non-tribals living in Chotanagpur, their support was not well articulated and their participation in the movement varied in range. For instance, the Chotanagpur Santhal Parganas Alag Prant Sangharsh Samiti was formed in October 1977 as a platform for all parties, but it was shortlived and soon virtually collapsed. The two militant groups active in the agitation and involved in almost all incidents were the All India Jharkhand Party and the Chotanagpur Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti. The first had the backing of all Christian tribals, in particular the Lutherans who provided support, shelter, etc.—the Roman Catholics and Anglicans were not as active. The second, the youth organisation, which was exclusively an urban group consisting of the youth belonging to all Christian and non-Christian communities, staged an ugly demonstration at Netarhat on 21 May 1978 where the Bihar Ministers were staying. Some Jharkhand leaders disassociated themselves from such militant activities and called upon their people to act in a constitutional manner. The non-Christian tribal leaders of Congress(I) were also active—some addressed meetings from a common political platform and demanded a separate party unit for the region but other members of the Congress (I) were against this movement. The tribal members of the Janata Party withdrew their support from the movement and ceased to be vocal. After the meeting at Netarhat, they kept out of the movement and did not join hands with the militant groups. A couple of Yuva Janata Units, however, voiced their support for a separate state. This movement was also being supported by a section of the Muslims. Among the regional parties supporting it, was the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. At the all India level, the Congress(O) did not support it and the CPI was in favour of tribal autonomy and adopted a resolution to that effect;

Under the impact of the movement collection of rent, co-operative dues, etc., declined in Khunti. However, despite the attempt to boycott and disturb the panchayat elections, these passed off peacefully though the polling was low at some places and in one panchayat, Karra (Thetaitanagar), there was no voter. No MLA was forced to resign on or after 9 June 1978, i.e., Birsa Day, as announced by the two militant groups. The day was celebrated officially for the first time with the Chief Minister and Finance Minister attending the celebrations.

As the movement progressed the forest question assumed increasing importance. The issues agitating the tribals in this connection were:

- (a) payment of remunerative prices for lac and minor forest produce;
- (b) payment of compensation for the damage done to the crops by elephants;
- (c) payment of appropriate wages for labour in the forest, and;
- (d) recognition of their traditional rights to reclaim lands by clearing jungles in the areas outside the reserved forests.

To add fuel to the fire the tribals were also instigated by the forest contractors to agitate against the Forest Development Corporation; this appears to have destroyed the traditional nexus between the money-lenders and the tribals. Paradoxically, the tribal leaders' demand for Jharkhand and the traders' agitation against nationalisation of minor forest produce coalesced in a joint front in August 1978. There were violent protests against the nationalisation of minor forest produce and the operation of the Forest Development Corporation even though the latter paid good wages and generated a record number of man days of employment. In the wake of the agitation, the Government decided to de-schedule a few items of minor forest produce from the list of items reserved for purchase by the Forest Development Corporation.

Bands of Munda Christians obstructed felling of trees and

plantations by the Forest Department in the Porahat region of Singhbhum district. They *gheraoed* and assaulted the forest officials; they burnt down godowns of *kendu* leaves in Thetaitanagar and Jaldega Blocks of the Simdega subdivision, which caused a loss of Rs. 5 lakhs to the State exchequer. This trend culminated in a violent demonstration at Simdega on 3 August 1978. The mob attacked and burnt down two Forest Rangers' quarters-cum-office, and attempted to break open the jail. In an attempt to control the mob the police resorted to firing which resulted in the loss of two lives and injuries to two other persons.

Since the demand for the establishment of a separate state had not been met till 15 August 1978 preparations to move into the next phase were intensified.

The Jharkhand Party launched the direct action programme by observing a day of mourning to make the point that independence was not complete without tribal autonomy. Meetings were held, subscriptions were raised—sometimes forcibly, pamphlets issued, slogans written on walls and buses, etc. Though no further incidence of attack on Government offices occurred some employees of the forest department left the villages for fear of their lives and took shelter at block offices.

The second phase of its direct action consisted of *dharna* and observance of a two-day fast on August 25 and 26. The number of those offering *dharna* gradually increased from 359 to 1,839. About 68 offices were affected by the *dharnas*, the majority of them being the block offices (27). The other offices involved were Central Government offices (4), State Government offices (5), Commissioner's office, Deputy Commissioners' offices (3), SDOs' offices (7), thanas (9), railway stations (7) and post offices (5). The party was able to mobilise a large number of young men and women, particularly in the Munda belts of Ranchi and Singhbhum districts, and in the industrial areas of Jamshedpur to offer *dharna*. From the Murhu and Bandgaon regions *dharnas* by 200-300 people were reported. This tactic was followed by *gheraos* designed to paralyse the working of the offices at all levels. However, there was no attempt to physically obstruct the functioning of the offices, with the exception of Kalebira in

Ranchi district, Chaibassa, Jamshedpur and a couple of other places in Singhbhum district.

A total of 103 persons were arrested, 68 in Singhbhum and 35 in Ranchi. Among the persons arrested in Singhbhum district, were the top leaders of the Jharkhand Party. At Daltanganj there was also an attempt at *gherao* in a couple of offices but there was no arrest. The *gherao* programme in Ranchi was a flop: even the resistance offered by the people assembled to *gherao* was merely a token gesture.

Another phase of the direct action programme was started at mid-night of 31 August 1978. This was intended to obstruct the movement of traffic—on the G.T. road and on the rail line from Chakulia to Rourkela and from Bano to Rourkela. There were also two minor attempts to obstruct traffic at Ghatsila on the rail track on 1 September 1978, and at Bandgaon on 3 September 1978. The crowds dispersed as the police approached them and so this phase also completely failed.

The last phase was concerned with the organisation of *bandhs* in all towns of the Chotanagpur division. The Jharkhand launched the 'bandh phase' of 'direct action' in all cities and towns of the South Chotanagpur division after 2 September 1978. However, the call for a *bandh* in Chaibassa for 3 September 1978 did not produce any result. On 12 September 1978, some members of the party took out a procession at Chandil and compelled the shop-keepers to close their shops. When the call for *bandh* failed to make any impact, the party decided to concentrate on Ranchi, and obstruct the flow of traffic along Ranchi-Chaibassa road, passing through the Murhu section on 15 September 1978. They took out a procession in violation of section 144 Cr.P.C. on the afternoon of 14 September and called upon the people to observe *bandh* on 15 September. Supporters of the Jharkhand Party, in groups of 20 to 50 people, came out at various points on the Main Road and the Purulia Road in Ranchi town early in the morning and tried to obstruct the flow of traffic. As a result, mini buses went off the road. The missionary schools were closed, but the Government schools functioned. Reports of the agitators trying to stop trains at Karra (Khunti) and Simdega were also received. A very serious

incident took place at Binda in the Murhu sector on the Ranchi-Chaibassa road, when about 500 tribal boys felled 150 sal trees and laid them across the road to obstruct the traffic. As a result of this, the traffic was suspended and could be restored only next day. *Jharkhand Times* of 17 September 1978, admitted that direct action programme except at a few places, like Chaibassa, Jamshedpur, Bandgaon, Murhu and Torpa had not succeeded according to their expectations, and called upon the party members to learn from their failures and weaknesses. However, it derived some satisfaction from the partial success of the Ranchi *bandh*.

It was a combination of the policy of non-interference with peaceful demonstrations and the firm handling of any situation arising out of the violation of the law which isolated the Jharkhand Party. Not only did the other elements of the Jharkhand movement keep away from it, even the newly formed Yuva Sangh of the students, which held a conference at Chaibassa on 27 August and a secret meeting at Jamshedpur on 28 August, disclaimed association with it. The All India Jharkhand Party too reportedly planned its movement of non-cooperation separately.

The threat of direct action having failed, the Jharkhand Party switched over to political action, and called a conference of regional parties at Jamshedpur on September 20 to evolve a strategy for the achievement of the Jharkhand state. Only the Lutherans belonging to the German Mission were active in this movement, the Roman Catholics and Anglicans kept away. The local church and the Mundas and Mankis belonging to the German Mission reportedly sent out instructions to their followers to offer *dharna* and *gherao* in local offices.

Many groups came together to demand a separate Jharkhand state and formed a common platform with its own flag in September 1978. They held a big meeting at Ranchi on 15 October which was attended by the representatives of the Jharkhand Party, the Hul Jharkhand, the Indian Muslim League, the Congress (Reddy group), Birsa Seva Dal and the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

An important trend that emerged towards the end of 1978 centred round the activities of the extremists in the Munda-

Ho areas of the Singhbhum district bordering Ranchi. There was an extensive infiltration in the area by extremist elements. Resistance to the plantation of teak became the symbol of movement. Teak plantation in this region is about a hundred years old, and in 1977-78 the Forest Development Corporation undertook to plant teak in 2000 hectares of the *sal* forests. Rumours were spread that teak was replacing *sal*, considered to be a sacred tree, and that nothing grew under teak, not even grass, roots and tubers, on which wild life and the tribal people subsisted. It was alleged that as elephants did not eat the teak leaves they were forced to seek food in areas under crops where their depredations increased. The agitationists also contended that fruit bearing trees were being cut down to establish teak nurseries thus depriving the tribal of a source of food.

It was mainly in the areas where the Forest Development Corporation operated that the agitation centred. The agitationists cut off all communications to this region by blocking roads and damaging bridges. They began to destroy nurseries, 11 of which were damaged in the two divisions of the Forest Development Corporation, causing a loss of about Rs. 6 lakhs. Felling of *sal* trees was justified by the agitationists on the ground that they enjoyed the traditional right to reclaim land for cultivation. They contended that this traditional right to reclaim land as a Mundari *Khuntkattidar* (the privileged tenant) had been given by the former zamindar of Porahat but was not recorded as such during the last survey and settlement operations. They also claimed that all forest areas constituted the Jharkhand, and so they had the right to fell trees to reclaim land. Felling of trees of the protected forests occurred over an area of about 300 acres entailing a loss of Rs. 4.10 lakhs. As the agitators collected in large numbers to fell trees and cut off communications, there was a confrontation with the police. This was the reason for the first firing on 6 November 1978 in Goelkira. Another problem was to round up agitators who were wanted in various cases. It was difficult to locate them and when they were arrested, they offered resistance which often turned violent. This led to the second firing on 25 November 1978.

The political movement almost died down in 1979, though

meetings and demonstrations continue to be held. The Jharkhand Prant Sanyukt Morcha claimed the support of the CPI which, in deference to the sentiments of its local cadre, supported the case for tribal autonomy. Among other parties which pledged their support were the Muslim League, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, CP(ML) and the Birsa Seva Dal which became a political party during this period. However, this morcha broke up after the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha disassociated itself from it in April 1979. The JMM became particularly active in the Santhal Parganas as mentioned earlier, where it organised a movement against money-lenders and traders and resorted to forcible cultivation and harvesting of crops in the lands taken away from the tribals. The activities of the Jharkhand Prant Sanyukt Morcha dwindled.

The Jharkhand Party remained fragmented. The All India Jharkhand Party, which moved closer to the Janata, won one parliamentary seat, while the Jharkhand Party won another in Ranchi and the Marxist Coordination Committee Dhanbad the third. The Jharkhand Party boycotted the State Assembly elections in 1980 in protest against the denial of the cook symbol, but its candidates remained in the field. The Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress Party continued to dominate the strongholds of the old Jharkhand Party. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha emerged as a major political force in the industrial mining belt of Chotanagpur, and in state politics, particularly since the 1980 general elections. It captured 13 seats and polled 3.38 lakh votes, while the old Jharkhand Party or parties could win only one seat and poll 33,469 votes. The JMM had reached an electoral understanding with the Congress(I)

III

IDEOLOGY, STRUCTURE AND GEOGRAPHY

While the Jharkhand Party or parties remained committed to the concept of a Jharkhand State, the JMM projected a radical ideology, the Jharkhandi is a producer irrespective of caste, tribe or nation residing in the Jharkhand. The Jharkhand

is described as an internal colony which is being exploited by outsiders. Even though the region accounts for 18 per cent of minerals, it avails itself of only 15 per cent of the state's budget for development. The development process itself is exploitative of the local inhabitants and outsiders have moved in to seize all opportunities of employment. There is a Jharkhand nationality and as in all nationality questions, self-determination is the key element in the social formation. It is only with a separate state of Jharkhand that the nationality question can be satisfactorily resolved for the benefit of the exploited and depressed working classes. The Jharkhand must therefore turn into a *Lalkhand*, that is, the movement of political separatism and struggle of the working classes should go together.⁴

The ethnic movement was not monolithic. A semblance of unity was forged and maintained for about two decades but it barely concealed the currents and cross-currents of differences arising out of the consideration of tribal and denominational interests. In the first phase of the tribal movement the denominational inspiration behind the political demands was only too evident. In the second phase, the Anglicans and Lutherans dominated the Chotanagpur Ummati Samaj movement and provided its leadership; the Roman Catholics kept away from it and formed their own Catholic Sabha to present their case before the government. The Catholic Sabha continued to maintain its identity even after all other bodies had merged to form the Adivasi Mahasabha which maintained a delicate balance between the three denominations by providing suitable representation to their interests in the organisation and leadership. If the president was an Anglican, the secretary was either a Lutheran or a Catholic. This equation was continued into the Jharkhand party, even though the party was dominated by the Protestant Christians. In 1962, following the reconstitution of the party, its Catholic secretary was dropped, which caused resentment among the Catholic supporters of the Jharkhand. The Catholics were always suspected of maintaining an ambivalent attitude towards the tribal movement. It was believed that the Catholics were guided by global considerations in their crusade against communism; they preferred order to chaos in India

and so they lent indirect support to the Congress candidates in elections. In the Orissa election (1974), the Roman Catholic Church was reported to have issued secretly a 'fervent' appeal to the electorate to give 'mass support' to the Congress; the local branches of this Church issued a 'pastoral letter' quoting the secret circular to the Christian Adivasis who constituted an overwhelming majority in Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar. This was a windfall for the Congress, which swept the polls.

The protestant missions, Lutheran and Anglican, have been largely Indianised, and they encourage and practise grass-root democracy in electing their church bodies (*mandlis*). This explains their consistent support to the tribal movement. They still form the core of the Jharkhand groups but the Anglicans are beginning to lose interest.

The militant movements in Chotanagpur were led by the Kolarian tribes, the Mundas, Hos and Santals, who were the dominant communities. The Oraons, having been exposed to outside influences longer were less militant and more resilient. Both the Mundas and Oraons joined the Sardar Movement (1859-1895) which sought to establish the peasant rights of the tribal people, but the Oraons broke away in the mid-1880s. The Mundas provided the leadership for the students' movement in 1915-1920. The Oraons constituted the leadership of the Unnati Samaj Movement; the Mundas kept out of it and formed their own Munda Sabha. Except in the early phase of the Adivasi Mahasabha, the Munda remained the dominant element in it. The Jharkhand Party had its strongholds in the Ho, Munda and Santal regions. Some sections of the Oraons had become a little lukewarm in their support later, and with pro-Congress Tana Bhagats in their ranks, they switched their support to the Congress and the Jana Sangh—the votes cast in favour of the latter went up from 17.2 in 1967 to 33.2 per cent in 1969—and have continued to support either the Congress or the Jana Sangh (Bharatiya Janata Party) since. The Jharkhand parties had their bases among distinct sub-ethnic groups: the Hul-Jharkhand is entirely formed by Santals now; the All-India Jharkhand Party (Bagun group) draws its support mainly from the Hos of Singhbhum; and the Jharkhand Party relies on the Mundas.

An interesting sidelight is provided by the fact that the major tribes have generally dominated the elections while minor tribes have played a smaller role. For example, out of thirty-two seats captured by the Jharkhand Party in the 1952 elections the Santals accounted for seven, Mundas three, Hos five, and Oraons seven, while the smaller tribes such as the Kharias got two seats and the Kherwars only one. In 1967, again, while the Santals captured ten, Oraons seven, Hos six, and Mundas five, the Cheroes could get only one seat out of the twenty-nine reserved seats. The parliamentary seats have always been captured by major tribes. One reason for the dominant role of the major tribes could be their relatively strong economic base and cohesive social organisation. They are settled peasants while minor tribes are primarily artisans and craftsmen or are engaged in shifting cultivation.

In the first three general elections mostly Christian candidates were elected from Ranchi and Santal Pargana, and non-Christian candidates from Singhbhum and Palamau. The number of Christian candidates has since been gradually declining. In 1967 non-Christians captured 75.08 per cent and the Christians only 24.20 per cent of the reserved seats in the Bihar Assembly. A similar pattern also emerged in the parliamentary elections. This trend has persisted since. Christians dominated the early phase of the Jharkhand Party but have in recent years been further replaced by non-Christians who now dominated the Congress and other national and regional parties. The erosion of Christian leadership has had its repercussions elsewhere.

While the major tribes first supported the Jharkhand Party and later the Congress, some of the minor tribes have always been pro-Congress. For example, the Santals' neighbours, the Paharias, who benefited from the welfare schemes spearheaded by Congress-supported voluntary agencies, the Asurs of Ranchi and the Kherwars of Palamau have generally voted for the Congress. The Paharias even organised a Yugavasi Sabha to counter the Adivasi Mahasabha. Even among the major tribes, the Hinduised Bhagats, Sapha Hos among Santals, thread-wearing Santals in Hazaribagh and Tana Bhagats among Oraons have always been pro-Congress.

The traditional Jharkhand Party has now been eclipsed by

the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM). The first remains confined to the Munda belt dependent upon the support of the Protestants of the German Mission. The JMM has its base among the Santals and Hos; it has also the support of the Mahto-Kurnis who seek reversion to their pre-1931 Census status as a tribe. While the Jharkhand Party was dominant in the Munda-Oraon-Ho-Santal belt of the Ranchi, Singhbhum and Santal Parganas districts, the JMM is growing in strength in the industrial belt of Hazaribagh and Dhanbad and is spreading its network in the adjoining districts of West Bengal and Orissa.

At the outset of the movement the Jharkhand state was to include the old feudatory states of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, two districts of West Bengal, parts of Bihar Arrah district (Bhabhua), Bhagalpur (Banka) and Monghyr (Jamui) adjoining Chotanagpur and inhabited by its tribes, and of course, Chotanagpur. In recent years, adjoining parts of Bihar districts have been left out. The Jharkhand map now shows 3 districts of West Bengal, 4 of Orissa, 2 of Madhya Pradesh, and 7 districts of Chotanagpur of (Bihar) (see map). The Chotanagpur-Santal Pargana belt of Bihar was the epicentre of the movement; the parent organisations are located in Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and the adjoining areas of Orissa, peopled by Chotanagpur tribes, were deeply influenced by the movement.

For instance, in the Lok Sabha elections in 1980, the party could poll only 50,192 votes in West Bengal and 61,881 in Orissa. The assembly election figures for Orissa were 25,002 in 1977 and 34,782 in 1980. It was only in Bihar that it was able to recapture its 1971 performance of polling about 4 lakh votes.

As regards the response of other elements in the situation, the Central Government has repeatedly turned down the proposal for the formation of a Jharkhand state and instead stressed tribal development. So has the Congress Party (I). However, almost all the major all-India parties have set up their regional units in Chotanagpur. The Lok Dal remains committed to the concept of small states. The CPI has changed its earlier stand against a separate state in favour of one in deference to the wishes of its local cadre. The CPM is opposed

to the division of West Bengal. The CPM-L parties are in favour of the tribal state.

IV

EVALUATION

It is paradoxical that what the old Jharkhand Party with its impressive electoral achievements could not gain in its heyday from 1949 to 1963, the fragmented Jharkhand parties and urban pressure groups achieved after 1967. There was no participation of tribal elements in the Bihar government from 1950 to 1959. A tribal minister was inducted in 1960. Since 1963 and particularly since 1967 the tribal leaders have played their cards skilfully, there have been adequate representation in the government not only of the two major tribal regions, Chotanagpur and the Santal Parganas, but also enthusiastic participation by both Christian and non-Christian elements in them. At one time, in the 1970s, tribal leaders headed as many as eleven corporations set up by the government. A major demand of the tribals has also been met by setting up the Chotanagpur-Santal Pargana development authority, which embodies the concept of regional development and creation of a separate pool of resources of which tribals will be the main if not exclusive beneficiaries. The widespread unrest in tribal regions also influenced the passage of a number of agrarian measures including many pieces of legislation, which place stringent curbs on alienation of tribal land and provide for debt redemption, credit support, allotment of homestead sites. Restoration of land alienated during the period of thirty years, which was a major demand of the tribal movements has been made possible through an enactment. There has also been impressive progress in providing employment to tribals in administration and industrial undertakings. Almost all tribal groups including the radical elements welcomed the Prime Minister's 20-point programme as an instrument for accelerated development and radical transformation in the tribal area.

The failure of the Jharkhand movement to develop into a full-fledged regional movement may be explained by many

factors. Firstly, its appeal to the non-tribal sections of the Chotanagpuris was small, because it was essentially a tribal party, and the tribals and non-tribals were not on the best of terms. Secondly, its past record of alliances with the forces which had worked against the national movement and remained 'loyalist' cost it the sympathy and support of a large section of the ruling elite. Thirdly, its structure contained many contradictions which sharpened and multiplied as the cleavage between the Christian and non-Christian tribals deepened. Lastly, the region had always been exposed to the operation of pan-Indian forces. The ethnic movement therefore could not remain in a state of political isolation. The impact of development and macro-political system and the merger with the Congress considerably weakened the demand for a separate state. The slogan of Jharkhand state has, however, not been given up. But the possibilities of the Jharkhand party capturing its pre-1962 position of strength appear to be remote. Moreover, as the election results show, there has been a gradual erosion of ethnicity as a factor in regional politics (see Appendix).

Thus, tribal ethnicity is a multi-ethnic society characterised by economic interdependence among different communities struck out a different course of development in Chotanagpur unlike the North-East. Separatism in this tribal region did not develop into secessionism. Recently a section of extremists demanded the formation of a sovereign nation for a part of Singhbhum known as the Kolhan conquered by the British in 1837 on the ground that this part of the country had never merged with the Indian Union during or after the transfer of power in 1947. Two representatives of their organisation went abroad to seek support for this claim, and there was a violent confrontation between its members and the police on 26 October 1981.⁶ However, this move is not supported by the people and parties. Secessionism is neither feasible in the present circumstances nor is it warranted by socio-economic developments.

All tribal parties speak of a set of regional objectives and programmes of action. This has been due to the realisation that tribals do not form the majority in Chotanagpur as a whole and that there are backward communities in this backward

region which could also be brought together on a common political platform to demand their share in the control of economic resources and exercise of political power. Now, almost all political parties have their regional units for Chotanagpur, which has acquired the attributes of a sub-state, a mini-secretariat to formulate and supervise the implementation of Sub-Plans of Five Year Plans and a bench of the High Court. This has no doubt been due to the articulation of the tribal factor by the Jharkhand and other parties over the years.

APPENDIX

Performance of the Jharkhand Party/Parties in Bihar

	Votes polled	Seats won in the State Assembly	Seats won in the Parliament
1952	766,366	33	
1957	726,939	32	
1962	432,644	20	
1967	172,123	8	
1969	229,327	17	
1972	361,187	8	1
			1,95,880 (1971)
1977	81,227	1	
1980	3,71,734	14	1
			1,40,778

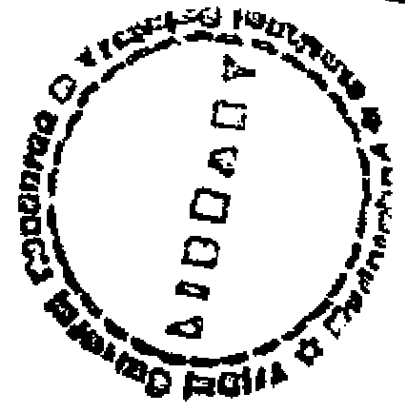
Notes and References

1. I started my study of tribal autonomy movements in Chotanagpur as part of the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship project on tribal society. On 29 March 1973, I presented a paper entitled "From Movement to Party: A Study of the Tribal Politics in Middle India 1920-63" at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. (K.S. Singh, "The Freedom Movement and Tribal Sub-Movements 1920-47" in B.R. Nanda (e.d.), *Essays in Modern Indian History*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980). In 1976 I presented a paper on "Tribal Ethnicity in a Multi-Ethnic Society: A Study in the Process of Conflict and

Integration in Colonial and Post-Colonial Chotanagpur" at a UNESCO Seminar in Manila; it was later published in *Trends in Ethnic Group Relations in Asia and Oceania, Race and Society*. UNESCO, Paris, 1979. Earlier in September 1975 I had presented another paper "From Ethnicity to Regionalism: A Study in Tribal Politics and Movements in Chotanagpur from 1900 to 1975" at a seminar held by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study which has been published in S.C. Malik (ed.), *Dissent, Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1977. In December 1980, I presented yet another paper on Tribal Unrest partly updating the earlier studies at a seminar on tribal development organised at Bhubaneswar in October 1980 by the National Commission on Backward Areas. In my Devraj Chanana Memorial Lecture, delivered at the Delhi University, on Tribal Transformation on 8-10 December 1981, I referred to some recent aspects of the Jharkhand movements. All this material have been put together in this paper. Also see, *Jharkhand Andolan me Videshi Missionarion aur Videshi Paison ki Bhumika* (year not given). Further see for a brief review K.L. Sharma, "Jharkhand Movement—Bihar", *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, 10 January 1972.

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4. A.K. Roy, *Jharkhand aur Lalkhand*, Marxwadi Coordination, Dhanbad, July 1981.
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THE JHARKHAND MOVEMENT AMONG THE SANTALS*

S.C. Panchbhai

Historical Perspective

THE SANTAL—the largest tribal language speaking group and the third largest Scheduled tribe in India—from the majority of the Adivasi population of Bihar. Numbering over 1.5 million, they constitute nearly 36 per cent of the total tribal population of that State. The District of Santal Parganas has almost one-third of the total Santal population of India. With less than 2 per cent of the Santals being Christian convert and about 8 per cent being literate, approximately 98 per cent of this community still speak their traditional language and follow traditional pattern of life.

If one traces the history of administration of the Santal Parganas (referred to as SP henceforth), one finds that the region of Damin-i-Koh, now part of the present SP with was under the Subha of Bihar since the early Mughal period, came under the Estate India Company in 1965. This erstwhile inaccessible area was slowly exposed to the outside world following the construction of roads and railways which also led to the influx of outsiders. The introduction of the zamindari system and other new laws dealt a blow to the traditional economy of the Santals. Within a few years the merchants, the mahajans

*Partly adapted from the author's earlier report: 'Intergroup Stereotypes and Social Tensions in the Context of the Jharkhand Movement in Santal Parganas'.

and the zamindars amassed large fortunes and reduced the Santals to the status of serfs (Culshaw & Archer, 1945; Datta, 1940; Datta Majumdar, 1956). Their sufferings made them desperate, and when all their efforts to have their grievances redressed were ignored by the authorities. The simmering discontent and tension that had been mounting for quite some years, suddenly burst into open violence in the form of the Santal *hul* (rebellion) in 1855.

Sido and Kanhu, the two Santal brothers who provided the leadership for this mass uprising, proclaimed that they had received supernatural sanction to guide the destiny of their people. They preached: 'We should only pay eight annas for a buffalo plough and four annas for a bullock plough and if the rulers did not agree we should start fighting. We should slay all the unspeakable Dekos (aliens) and become the rulers ourselves' (Culshaw & Archer, 1945: 232). In many places, people were organized on the pattern of private armies equipped with bows, arrows and battle-axes and there were many incidents of looting, arson and killing of mahajans. When the local administration were unable to control the situation, a large body of Government troops was deployed to put down the revolt. Subsequently, the District was placed beyond the scope of general laws with the passing of Act 37 of 1885.

In the opinion of some observers, the oppression of the mahajans, the police and the zamindars was not perhaps a sufficient cause for such a large-scale uprising of the 'unyielding Santals'. A deeper cause, as McPherson suggests, 'was the Santal yearning for independence, a dream of the ancient days when they had no overlords, perhaps a memory of prehistoric times when according to some speculators they were themselves masters of the Gangetic valley and had not yet been driven back by the Aryan invaders' (McPherson, 1909).

It is also significant to note that the movement was not of or by the Santals alone, and though having apparently an ethnic bias it manifested almost a class character in its development and objectives. Though the Santals provided the leadership, the indigenous artisan castes—such as, the Kumhars (potters), the Telis (oilmen), the Kamars (blacksmiths) as well as the Momins (Mohammedan weavers) and the Gwalas (milkmen)—who had developed socio-economic interdependence

with the Santals through many generations, were also intimately involved in this struggle against the tyranny of outsiders (Datta 1940).

The various measures introduced by the Government through the new Act did not help the Santals substantially. Their economic dependence on the mahajans remained as before. With the quashing of their uprising they probably realized that their position and status vis-a-vis the Dekos could not be improved by such revolts alone. As a result, a Hinduized social reform movement began to spread among the Santals towards the early seventies known as the Kherwar movement which, unlike the rebellion, was more socio-religious than political in content.

As one of the major functions of such movements is rank improvement, one may agree with Orans (Orans, 1965) that as the political rank path through military means appeared to be closed with the failure of the rebellion, a section of the Santals chose to follow the ritual rank path through the Kherwar movement by adopting many Hindu symbols of rank. By applying the term Kherwar, they were again reinforcing in their memory the image of their golden past when they were free and their people were known by this name.

Thus, whereas the rebellion contained contra-acculturative tendencies, turning the Santals away from the Hindu, the Kherwar movement paved the way for increased acculturation. This cultural borrowing, however, did not bridge the psychological gulf between the two communities. The Santals remained ambivalent towards the Dekos as before, admiring their wealth and intelligence and hating their attitude of superiority and exploitation. And, as we shall see later, this ambivalence still exists as a backdrop to all efforts at adjustment on the part of the present day Santal society, encysted as it is in the dominant Hindu milieu.

The Modern Political Phase

It has been pointed out by Orans that, except for the period of rebellion, throughout the history of Santal-Hindu contact and till the advent of political democracy in the thirties of the present century, 'the Santal pursued rank almost exclusively via

economic mobility and emulation' (Orans, 1965: 133) resulting in 'increased cultural load' and decreased solidarity. Because, 'unlike success in political rank path, which promises rewards to all, economic success is essentially individual' (*ibid.*: 129; Orans, 1959).

The 1930s, particularly after the Home Rule was introduced, opened up new political opportunities for the Indian masses including the tribals. The elites in the hitherto backward communities realized that they can utilize these opportunities to manoeuvre the state machinery in their favour by working as political brokers or pressure groups. The leaders, who were previously engaged mainly in social reform movements, gradually took to political activities and became the spokesmen of their communities.

With the introduction of provincial autonomy in 1935 under which Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas were made 'partially excluded areas', the tribal elites 'felt the need to organize themselves into a united political party' (Lakra & Minz, 1968). The Unnati Samaj, the Kisan Sabha and the Catholic Sabha of Chotanagpur and the Hor Malto Marang Sabha of Santal Parganas merged into one in 1937 to form the Adivasi Mahasabha which subsequently transformed itself into the All-India Jharkhand Party in 1949, thus becoming the main political platform of the majority of the Adivasis in the Jharkhand area, including the Santal Parganas. In addition to many other factors responsible for its success, the parochial appeal of the Jharkhand Party made the Adivasis regard it as their own party (Sen & Panchbhai, 1967). At the high water mark of its history, the Party polled the maximum votes in the tribal areas of Bihar during the first general elections, and returned the maximum number of its candidates to the State legislature.

Though having the largest following in the region, the hold of the Jharkhand Party in different districts and among different Adivasi communities was not, however, uniform. As the rank and file of the Party cadre were dominated by the Christian Mundas and Oraons, and as the main centre of its activities was the District of Ranchi, the Santal elite, aware of their numerical strength, could not identify with it whole-heartedly. Moreover, in the absence of proper leadership among the

Santals no effective party organization emerged in the Santal Parganas. These were two important reasons behind the waning influence of the Party in the District in subsequent years. During the third general elections in 1962, though eight Jharkhand candidates won (as against eleven previously) and the Congress Party returned only six candidates, the latter polled the highest number of votes showing a definite decline in voter turn-out in the Jharkhand strongholds. Such setbacks to the popularity of the party in other areas also led it to merge with the Congress in 1963—surrendering its most popular party symbol, the cock, and its legal identity. These leaders who were unhappy over the merger formed many dissident groups, 'all essentially personalistic cliques' and though they fought the elections in 1967 as independents, with different election symbols but using the name of Jharkhand, they were able to win only in four constituencies in the district.

After the merger of the Party with the Congress, the Santal leadership found itself in a dilemma. Observing the situation, many political parties hitherto unknown in the region used this opportunity to penetrate into the Jharkhand reserve. Just before the mid-term elections of 1969 some dissident Jharkhand leaders, who had not aligned with any other party, formed a new organization called the Hul Jharkhand with a view to getting formal recognition and separate election symbol. This new party was successful in securing six out of the eighteen Assembly seats in the District as against seven by the Congress and one each by the SSP, PSP, JS, CPI and CPI (M).

As many apparently non-political movements preceded the formation of the Hul Jharkhand Party and provided it with new content, direction and base, one has to acquaint oneself with these movements to understand this political party in its true perspective. The emergence of various non-political socio-cultural organizations in large numbers after the merger of the Jharkhand Party also had a near parallel in the Santal Hul and Kherwar movements. When political activities reached a low ebb after the merger, activities at the socio-cultural level were intensified by the tribal elite.

Recent Socio-cultural Movements

With the waning of the influence of the Jharkhand Party towards the late fifties, the Santal elite began to realize that their political struggle would not sustain for a long time until the people were 'educated' and a sense of unity and purpose was inculcated in them. That section of educated Santal who did not directly involve themselves in politics for various reasons, organized themselves through different non-political associations. Some of the main associations which were quite active during the sixties in the Santal Parganas were:

1. Santal Samaj Sudhar Baisi: This Baisi (association), though initially organized in 1957, made its presence felt around 1963. It is dominated by a section of Sapha Hors and patronized by the Jana Sangh and the Arya Samaj. Its main objectives were: (a) to combat the Christian missionary influence and (b) to propagate the Sapha Hor religion.

2. Santali Lohanti (progressive) Baisi: This was founded around 1967 and is run mainly by some Christian Santals. Literary pursuits and unity among the Christians are its two primary aims.

3. Santal Samaj Rakap (reform) Baisi: With its advent in 1969 it tried but failed to create a common platform where representatives of all the other Baisis could come together to evolve a common programme.

4. Sido-Kanhu (S.K.) Baisi: This association was formed in 1966 and is the most popular and effective organization in the Santal Parganas. As it is intimately related to the present movement of the Santals it needs to be described in greater detail so as to get an insight into the Jharkhand situation.

According to its founder-secretary, S.G. Hembrom, who calls himself 'Buang Guru' of the Baisi, this organization was established to perpetuate the memory of the Santal heroes 'who laid their lives for the cause of their people'. Fr. Murmu, a very influential Santal leader, and Mr. Hembrom were largely responsible for convening a meeting of the Parganaits of the Rajmahal division, which was held on 26 November 1966 in the Borio Bungalow. It was at this meeting that the idea of forming a Baisi was given concrete shape and unanimous approval. The Baisi initially had the following major objectives:

1. To open adult literacy centres, clubs, libraries and primary schools for speeding up the tempo of education among the Santals, the Pahariyas and other down-trodden people;
2. To reconstruct the deteriorating Manjhithans and Jaherthans sacred grove for social and cultural revivalism; and
3. To organize co-operative 'grain-golas', and cottage industries for the economic improvement of the people.

The Baisi also used to advise the people that they should take to business and trade, and settle their disputes through the traditional village panchayats. It also addressed an appeal to non-tribals: 'The contractors should pay proper wages to their labourers, the Mahajans should charge less interest from their debtors, the traders should make minimum profit, and the government servants should do justice and service to the people.'

The two other important activities of the Baisi were: (a) to organize the Sido-Kanhu mela at Bhognadih (birth place of the Santal heroes) every year; and (b) to organize Sido-Kanhu dramas through a network of village-level committees.

By 1968, the Sido-Kanhu movement had begun attracting larger and larger numbers of Santals. As it provided ample opportunities for recreation for the 'pleasure-oriented' folk, a purpose and direction to the elite, and a sentimental appeal to both, it deeply touched every Santal heart. Within a very short period it became the new symbol of Santal solidarity. The movement gained fresh momentum during 1969, particularly when under the leadership of the Hul Jharkhand Party the Dhankatiya (forcible harvesting of paddy) movement was organized. In many places the Santal peasantry was incited to forcibly reoccupy their land which was under the usufructuary right of the Deko mahajans. The Dhankatiya movement proved a grand success and gave back to the Santals not only their lost land but also a renewed sense of pride and courage. The solidarity fostered through the S-K movement was, perhaps more than the political climate, responsible for this success.

As these movements, like many other solidarity movements,

were, in a sense, based on (and their processes inevitably increased) outgroup antagonism, they greatly strained Santal-Deko relations and created a sense of insecurity, suspicion and fear in the Deko mind. The additional psychological barrier thus created between the two communities provided the Santal leadership with the best opportunity to reconsolidate their own position and minimize further the Deko influence by making the Santals, as far as possible, economically less dependent. They had already organized 'grain-golas' and cooperative banks in some areas, and had threatened the people with dire consequences if they went to the mahajans for help. The leaders also tried to stop their followers from attending the Durga Puja and Dusserah melas 'organized by the Deko businessmen for their own economic interests', and, as an alternative, even organized Jaher-era melas. They were aware that as these melas would be organized by the Santals themselves they will develop a sense of unity, business and trade will be in their own hands and they will be 'free to have their own ways'.

With the growing popularity of the S-K Baisi, however, the scramble for power and money seems to have created a division in the leadership. The factional conflict sharpened and came to the fore in 1970 and this marked the beginning of the waning influence of this movement over the masses. The annual mela at Bhognadih which used to attract delegates also from the neighbouring States now draws only a few people from nearby places and the S-K drama too has become almost a rare sight.

From the foregoing discussion one may conclude that the S-K movement with its socio-cultural emphasis was primarily aimed at fostering solidarity and all-round development among the Santals. And, as we shall see later, the Jharkhand Party with its political accent is also very much concerned with the same objectives. These two movements, in a sense, may be interpreted as intrinsically related manifestations of the same socio-psychological phenomenon.

The Hul Jharkhand Party

As the names of Sido and Kanhu are closely associated with

the *hul* in the Santal mind, the success of the S-K movement seems to have prompted the political leaders to prefix this term to the already familiar name of the Jharkhand Party to form the Hul Jharkhand Party. The Party was registered in 1968 and fought the mid-term elections in 1969. To present a non-ethnic, non-parochial image, at least superficially, and to accommodate the interests of different sections of society, the party has always allotted one or two posts to non-Santal members in its executive committees at the central level. The composition of the first committee set up in 1968 clearly shows that in addition to the Christian and Bedin (non-Christian) Santals, one member each had been included from the districts of Ranchi and Singhbhum as also from the Hindu and Muslim communities of the District. An examination of the first, and also successive, elections to the executive body reveals that a great majority of the office bearers have an agricultural background and that most of them have completed their high school education though some are graduates while a few are middle-school educated or just literate. Apart from its much publicized aim of carving out a Jharkhand State, the Party also worked initially for the following two objectives: (a) to stop the use of liquor at marriage feasts and during rituals; and (b) to discourage people from taking loans from mahajans. The following answers given to a few questions put to top leaders of the Party in a very informal situation give an idea about its structure and functions:

'The only difference between the old Jharkhand Party and our Party is that we want to adopt some radical methods to get our demands fulfilled.'

'The leftist parties like any other party, are "foreign" and not suited to our regional problems. These parties have to be guided by their own interests which may even be quite contrary to our problems.'

'There are some non-tribal leaders as well as followers in our party. Generally the leaders are from the high castes and the followers from among the Harijans. . . . We know that the high castes in particular do not believe that our

cause is common; they somehow feel that our party is only for the Adivasis.'

'Our people (including the poor artisan castes settled here) are very backward, and do not know who is their friend or foe. Many of our leaders have gone over to other parties and have thus confused the common man by working against us . . .'

One gets a better insight into the working of the tribal leaders' minds if one analyses the contents of communications, the published literature of the Party and the public speeches by its leaders. The following excerpts are suggestive of the dilemma created by the tradition-modernity conflict and exhibit a basic theme of discontent:

'The Government is trying to change the Santal system of life by abolishing the posts of Parganaits and Pradhans. . . . The government is trying to abolish the land revenue so that one day people will have no right over their land. . . . The history of Chac Champa shows that the Santals were capable of being the rulers of their own destiny. . . . We are the descendants of Sido-Kanhu-Birsa, we have similar strength and courage to make our land free. . . . In bravery and sacrifice the modern leaders of India are "nothing" in comparison with Sido-Kanhu . . . their statues should be installed in prominent places. . . . Only after achieving the Jharkhand Raj our society will be able to advance socially, culturally, economically, politically and intellectually. . . . Our Hul Jharkhand party unlike the other parties does not want to rule but to ameliorate the miseries of the people. . . . This new party has compelled the Government to pass an order by which the Santals' land will have to be returned by the Mahajans. . . . The land belonged to us and the outsiders have occupied and usurped it. . . . The tribal belts are richest in India, so people of different states flock here to make money. . . . The Government is run by the north Biharis who have come to earn here, so why should they help the poor Adivasis. . . . All Government schemes are just an eye-wash to show the welfare on paper but in

actuality they are meant for the benefit of the non-tribal contractors, businessmen and job-seekers. . . .'

Certain publications show how the Santal intellectuals, both Christian and Bedin, are trying to reinterpret Santal culture and history in the context of their own frame of reference—the Christians relating Pilchu Heram and Pilchu Budni to Adam and Eve or Sasan Beda to the 'cradle of civilization', and the non-Christian Bedin showing the 'pious' effect of the Jharkhand land and culture on the Hindu gods and goddesses as well as religious leaders. Of course, both of them trace their history back to Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa, migration through Punjab, settlement in Chae Champagarh, and a few among them even try to 'prove' that the epic heroes, Ekalabya, Karna, Jatayu and Sugreev were Santals.

It hardly needs to be added that the basic message in their communication as mentioned above has remained the same ever since the earliest phase of the Jharkhand movement. Apart from certain anti-Jharkhand political factors, this harping on discontent alone without any constructive programme—particularly on the vital agrarian front (see Singh, 1972)—was not in itself enough to sustain the popularity and force of the movement. The other major reason for its decline seems to be the conflict and crisis at the level of leadership. As almost every independent (non-party) tribal candidate fights the elections in the name of the Jharkhand Party—a fact that may be interpreted both as a strength and a weakness of the movement—it will not be an exaggeration to suggest that there are practically as many 'Jharkhand parties' as candidates. Even 'officially' there are at least three factions of the party in Santal Parganas alone: (a) Bihar Prant Hul Jharkhand Party (BPHJP); (b) All-India Jharkhand Party (AIJP); and (c) Progressive Hul Jharkhand Party (PHJP).

But in spite of all this confusion, the pattern of voting in the last elections (see Table) clearly suggests that the Jharkhand consciousness still remains significant in the Santal mind:

**Jharkhand Votes (%) in the General Elections, 1972 to the Assembly
(Santal Parganas)**

Constituency	ST SC UR	BPHJP	PHJP	AIJP	Total
1. Borio	ST	52.75	×	3.92	56.67
2. Barhait	ST	16.48	×	0.96	17.44
3. Littipara	ST	60.03	0.60	1.01	61.64
4. Shikaripara	ST	×	40.40	×	40.40
5. Poraiyahat	ST	21.30	×	0.80	22.10
6. Maheshpur	ST	9.23	26.70	3.91	39.84
7. Dumka	ST	3.70	25.20	2.70	31.60
8. Jama	ST	7.02	17.01	4.37	28.40
9. Deogher	SC	×	×	×	×
10. Rajmahal	UR	×	×	×	×
11. Madhupur	UR	6.29	×	×	6.29
12. Nala	UR	×	×	×	×
13. Sarath	UR	23.87	×	2.20	26.07
14. Pakur	UR	31.47	×	×	31.47
15. Jarmundi	UR	9.64	×	×	9.64
16. Jamtara	UR	×	×	×	×
17. Godda	UR	5.70	×	×	5.70
18. Mahagama	UR	3.20	×	1.90	5.10

General Elections to Parliament (1971, 1973)

Constituency	ST SC UR	BPHJP	PHJP	AIJP	Total
1. Godda	UR	9.00	×	4.77	13.77
2. Dumka	ST	2.70	×	0.81	3.51
3. Rajmahal (1971)	ST	29.77	×	1.19	30.96
4. Rajmahal (1973)	ST	46.45	×	2.73	49.18

The Jharkhand candidates won only in four constituencies—Borio, Littipara, Shikaripara and Pakur in the 1972 Assembly elections. The first three are among the five 'core-tribal' constituencies in the District—the top five in the table. Pakur, like Sarath among the unreserved constituencies, received more Jharkhand votes probably because of the fact that in both these areas the BPHJP candidates were non-tribals. In other unreserved constituencies, the party either did not provide any candidate or received less than ten per cent votes.

The Sonot Santal Samaj

Whereas in the Santal Parganas the recent political phase,

beginning with the formation of the Hul Jharkhand Party, emerged out of the socio-cultural phase of the movement, among the Santals of the Chotanagpur division, more particularly in the District of Dhanbad, the two aspects of the recent movement developed almost simultaneously and provided the force for each other's dynamism.

The Sonot Santal Samaj (SSS), which is at the forefront of the various socio-cultural activities in Dhanbad, was organized by some educated Santals in 1971. The main aims and objects of this Samaj are: (a) To write and publish books, journals, etc., in Santali; and (b) to help and advise the traditional leaders like the Naykis, Manjhis, Parganaits, Jogmanjhis and village Bhodrons in reviving and maintaining traditional institutions and social traditions as well as in removing social evils and harmful practices. In 1973, the Samaj organized the All-India Santals Social Conference at Dhanbad in which there were some 150 delegates including a few from other parts of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. Except one resolution on *dharom* (religion) which was kept in abeyance, the resolutions on the following subjects were unanimously adopted at that conference and sent to the President, the Prime Minister and other concerned Central ministers and State ministers in Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Madhya Pradesh as well as to many Santal leaders of various socio-cultural organizations:

1. Acceptance of the Santali customary laws, except those forms of marriage, which were declared 'anti-social';
2. Abolition of the prevalent dowry and divorce systems;
3. Substituting twelve different *paris* in place of *manjhi* in Government records;
4. Proper place for Santali in the Indian Constitution, Santali as medium of instruction in schools, and acceptance of 'Ol' script;
5. Recruitment of only Adivasi teachers in tribal regions;
6. Residential and night schools for the Adivasis;
7. Increase in the number of reserved posts, seats in technical colleges, and amount of scholarships;

8. Establishment of training centres for cottage industries;
9. Abolition of wine shops from the tribal regions;
10. Restoration of land to tribals and implementation of Money-lender's Act effectively throughout the tribal regions;
11. Irrigation facilities for farmers; and
12. More radio programmes in Santali.

Responding to the Prime Minister's 20-point programme, the Samaj, at its executive committee meeting in March 1976, passed, among others, the following resolutions and approached the district authority to have them implemented:

1. Settlement of the Khas land to the Adivasis;
2. Restoration of land by deciding early the court cases launched under the CNT Act;
3. Appointment of Santali interpreters in courts;
4. Proper employment of all Adivasi candidates who have passed matriculation/high school;
5. Opening of residential and night schools;
6. Opening of recreation clubs and libraries; and
7. Protection of Adivasi women from the exploitation of non-Adivasis.

Though most of these resolutions clearly reflect the Santals' desire for accepting the modern ways and means of advancement, a significant number exhibit a serious concern for maintaining the identity and social boundaries of the community with a rather traditional content.

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha

The District of Dhanbad with a tribal population of a mere 12 per cent has never been in the forefront of the Jharkhand movement in the past. Though sporadic cases of violent incidents during the Dhankatiya movement were reported from some tribal pockets of Hazaribagh and Dhanbad, the movement did not gain momentum till around 1973.

The areas of tribal concentration in Dhanbad and adjacent regions became the centre of political activities in 1973 when the tribal discontent reached its new height due to various factors affecting both the peasants and the industrial workers. Establishment of heavy industries like in Bokaro had displaced many tribals from their land. The compensation paid to them was either at a very low rate—the amount being almost one-fourth of that paid in Bhilai, Durgapur, Rourkela (Das 1975) or not paid properly. This displacement also gave rise to large-scale unemployment which was allegedly aggravated after the coal nationalization.

At this stage three different movements coalesced to put up a common front. The Shivaji Samaj headed by B.B. Mahato was effectively working among the Mahatos (Kurmis) since 1971. This Samaj though primarily organized for eradicating "social evils" in the community—even by applying force, had much in common with the tribal interest. The industrial workers of whom a large number were Santal were organized at the trade union front mainly by one ex-CPM leader A.K. Roy. The third and probably the most forceful leadership was provided by a Bedin Santal, Shibu Soren. Though associated with the various problems of the Adivasis particularly since the mid-sixties through his association with the Adivasi Sudhar Samiti in Bokaro, and with the Dhankatiya movement during 1969-70, he became the central figure of the movement in 1973. During this period there was a "gherao" of the Bokaro Steel authorities for getting a fair deal for the Adivasis both in terms of employment as well as compensation for their land. The leaders also tried to have the land reforms enforced but found resistance from the vested interest (Das 1965). The tension was gradually mounting. The Jharkand Mukti Morcha (Liberation Front) which had been organized by these leaders as their common political platform celebrated the first "Jharkhand Day" on February 4, 1973. It was reported that thousands of tribal villagers (more than those in any of the meetings of Jaipal Singh) with bows, arrows, axes, spears and drums had assembled in that meeting. The leaders spoke of land alienation, exploitation, and various other grievances against the administration and the "outsiders", and reportedly incited the Adivasis to organize themselves

for fighting against their enemies. Subsequently "land riots" and many cases of violent clashes between the Adivasis on the one hand and the mahajans' men and the police on the other took place. In one case the daroga (head constable) who had gone to a village to arrest some tribal "rioters" was reportedly kidnapped by the tribals. All efforts of the local administration failed to trace him. There was panic and when the tension reached its climax, posing a serious threat to law and order, Mahato and Roy were detailed under MISA but Soren remained beyond the reach of law carrying an award of Rs. 10,000 on his head. Many cases of criminal nature had been registered against him. The situation at this stage could be compared with the most serious extremist movement so far reported, or perhaps as an eye-witness would like to put it, with the historic Sido-Kanhu hul. The areas worst affected were the tribal pockets of Tundi, Topchanchi, Chandankyari, Baliapur, Jamtara and the sudder sub-divisions of Dumka and Dhanbad.

The administration in the meantime seems to have revised its policy of confrontation to co-operation. The then Deputy Commissioner at long last succeeded to contact Soren on 3rd August 1975 in the presence of a large number of his followers and assured him of all cooperation and help in his programmes provided he surrendered himself to law. Accordingly in October 1975 he surrendered himself and was kept under detention for a period of two-and-a-half months. While in jail a pamphlet was issued by him on 23-10-1975 appealing to his followers to maintain peace, and informing them that he had decided to extend his full support to the Prime Minister's 20-point programme which he said was very much similar to his own 19-point programme. Thousands of copies of this pamphlet—both in Santali and Hindi and under his signature, were distributed by the local authorities in the countryside and a recorded tape of his appeal was played through loud-speakers at various meetings organized by the Publicity Department.

It will not be out of point to describe here the salient features of Soren's 19-point programme. The following major points clearly suggest that he had visualized many constructive programmes for the all-round development of

the villagers :

1. Education through 'Akil Akharas' (gymnasia for mind = schools) both for the young and the old, and opening of libraries, reading rooms and clubs.
2. Farming and animal husbandry on a co-operative basis.
3. Afforestation and horticulture through 'plant protection centres'.
4. Opening of small-scale industries and industrial training centres for women.
5. Eradication of dowry, child marriage, drinking and other social vices.
6. Organizing of 'Chetay-Baisis' (villagers' courts) to settle disputes between Adivasis and non-Adivasis.
7. Setting up of 'grain-golas' in every village in which a specified amount of paddy will have to be contributed annually by each family for meeting expenses towards running the school, paying the farm labourers, hosting visitors and for other common purposes including political activities.

It is evident from the foregoing that Soren's programmes were much more elaborate, concrete and practicable than the programmes so far proposed by any other Jharkhand leader or even by the Party throughout its span of life. He is also unique in being a teetotaler, in considering that his own people are more responsible for their backwardness, and in having a strong belief that education alone can drive away their bhut (ghost) of primitiveness.

On his release Soren was provided with all possible help as assured by the administration and also by the Chief Minister whom he had met personally. All government welfare agencies were geared into action almost on a 'war footing'. The Tundi Block in Dhanbad, which has a tribal population of nearly 50 per cent and being the centre of Soren's activities, received maximum attention from every quarter. Many new schemes—such as, facilities for drinking water, irrigation and cultivation with the help of big-diameter wells, pumping sets and even tractors and other equipment

and electrification—were undertaken and completed in record time. Many other schemes are still underway. Some one hundred night schools organized by Soren also received financial help from the District Board. In short, the amount of development work done within a period of six months far exceeded that which had been done over the previous twenty-eight years. Soren, now respectfully called 'guruji' by his followers, has also been running an Ashram in Tundi since 1975 where almost everyday one can see a crowd of villagers assembled there in the hope of having their various problems solved with guruji's help. Soren now behaves like a man with all the resources at his command and has the aura of confidence of a successful leader. Of course, some of his erstwhile close colleagues feel that after receiving the Government's patronage he is gradually losing his following and is largely alienated from the masses. Some of his critics even accuse him of having fallen prey to the illusory trap of power and prosperity laid before him by the administration.

Concluding Remarks

The movement in its totality seems to stand for two different things to the leaders and the masses and sometimes, in a maze of contradictory interests, appears to lose its cohesion. To the common people it is perhaps nothing more than just a communal partisanship, or 'an extension of their communal order' in a new garb. But to the leaders it is 'an ideological nexus' for their aspirations or an instrument for achieving the revolution of their rising expectations. The clan and kin loyalties of the people sometimes clash with the pan-tribalism of the leaders. The 'push and pull' from external sources such as the Christian missions and the various political parties also prove detrimental to their cohesive force.

All this, however, does not pose a serious threat to their solidarity because the 'shadow' of the Deko cast over every sphere of their life provides more than a rallying point. This shadow has made its presence felt all through their history.

They have also not forgotten Sido-Kanhu or their Hu!—

'perhaps the single most important event in the history of Santal-Hindu relations'—which is really part of their 'living cultural heritage and hence of continuing influence' (Orans, 1965: 30-31). This is one of the major reasons for the success of the Sido-Kanhu movement and for making it an integral part of Santal solidarity and of the Jharkhand movement.

The Jharkhand Party, in whatever garb, communicates with the masses through the local idiom; it not only appeals directly to their primordial sentiments or to their immediate economic and agrarian problems, but also promises to fulfil a Utopian dream. Its ideology, or more specifically that part of it which makes sense to the people, functions mainly at a 'vulgar' level, 'the level of slogans and catch-phrases and emotionally aroused stereotypes as well as scapegoats' (McKee, 1969: 587).

But as Santal society, like any other subordinate group, has to function within the structure of opportunities made available to it as a class, its 'relation to the inequalities of life-chances by class situations' (*ibid.*) has imposed many limitations on all its socio-political movements—whether of a primarily agrarian origin, or of a reformatory character, or of a modern revitalization type.

Let us now extend the scope of our rather 'culture-specific' enquiry to the level of generalizations about social movements among various tribal communities. Sinha (1972) has tried to show how, what he calls solidarity movements can be seen and analyzed through a series of models. After critically examining the concepts of sub-nationalism (Bose), infra-nationalism (Roy Burman), RCS (Orans), and revitalization movements (Wallace), he has emphasized the importance of both the socio-cultural and psychological factors by saying that the 'major roots of tribal solidarity movements may be traced to their ecological-cultural isolation, economical backwardness and a feeling of frustration about a lowly status *vis-a-vis* the advanced sections' (p. 421). Weiner and Field (1975) have also pointed out similar basic features of such movements by observing that 'what they share is an element of ethnic self-awareness and collective behaviour . . .' (p. 99). We also get a similar view from Spindler (1968) who feels that all the

categories of reformulative, nativistic, revitalizing or reaffirmative movements can simply be termed as 'reactive movements' which originate as a reaction to the confrontation of divergent cultures. These movements invariably have two underlying features: the search for identity and the attempt to reestablish cognitive control (p. 335). The 'reactionary', 'conservative', 'revisionary' or 'revolutionary' types suggested by Mahapatra (1972) may also be included in the above list as they too have the same basic features mentioned above. Again, though it is generally difficult to categorize them clearly, these movements may also be interpreted as primarily socio-cultural or political in nature—of course, both being manifestations of 'psychocultural adaptation'.

In the case of the Santals we find that as many objectives of the political and socio-cultural organizations are almost common there is much overlap in both their contents and processes. The concern for the socio-cultural aspects of society seems to be so dominant that even those organizations which are primarily political in nature cannot ignore them. And, in the frame of the dominant Hindu and Christian values, this concern is felt all the more vitally by the elites of Santal society, whether they are engaged in politics or in social activities.

It is important to note here that the various labels for describing these movements are relevant only when emphasizing their contents, processes, goals, or functions and that no description is complete without touching upon their psychological bearing on the participants in these movements. As this bearing had been the central concern of the RCS theory and as it has been developed in the context of Santal society (which is also the context also for the present discussion), we may examine it in the light of our foregoing observations. Social psychology of the dominant-subordinate group situations suggests that a subordinate group hardly takes or occupies a rank or position of its own choice in the social hierarchy; a rank is generally allotted to or imposed on it. With this logic, what Orans sees as RCS may probably be referred to as RIS (rank imposition syndrome). And it is this imposed rank of the dominant Dekos which the Santals have been trying to change or improve through different types

of movements. All through their history, the Santals have been feeling the load of 'borrowing' from the dominant cultures (both Hindu and Christian), and simultaneously a 'compulsion' for preserving their identity. Their socio-cultural and political movements can thus be interpreted as attempts at 'cognitive control' in the situation of an 'emulation-solidarity' conflict.

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ABBREVIATION USED :

ST = Reserved for Scheduled Tribe candidates.

SC = Reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates.

UR = Unreserved constituency.

THE JHARKHAND MOVEMENT OF WEST BENGAL

P.C. Bhowmick

WEST BENGAL, the home of a large number of tribal people, felt the impact of the Jharkhand movement which was led by the tribal people themselves. In the post-independence period, India's democratic and secular constitution provided a fillip to the backward classes for all-out development, and with the introduction of adult suffrage, the tribals became particularly keen to assert their rights revolving round their cultural distinctiveness. The Jharkhand movement is part of the psychology of identity assertion, in which ethnocentric ideas come to the fore.

The areas of tribal concentration in West Bengal, particularly the Burdwan Division, is co-terminous with the Chotanagpur region in its geophysical setting. A good number of the tribal communities of this region have their kinsmen spread over three states—Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. As a result, any movement initiated in any part of this region quickly spreads to the other parts. The Burdwan Division accounts for 14.21 lakh tribals out of the 25.32 lakh living in West Bengal.

The Santals are the dominant tribe in West Bengal. Even before independence, attempts were made to unite the tribal people, specially the people of the districts of the Burdwan Division, under the tribal banner. There are a good number of traditional fairs (*melas*) where tribals from the adjoining regions gather together. They, thus, get an opportunity to

discuss many of their socio-economic problems. They also participate in cultural activities like dancing, merry-making and drinking their exhilarating rice-beer in the traditional way. The table below provides particulars of the fairs that are held on the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa border.

PARTICULARS OF FAIRS HELD ON BENGAL-
BIHAR-ORISSA BORDER

Location	Occasion
1. Ramchandrapur Pethindha (Gopiballavpur PS) Midnapur.	Phalguni Purnima (Feb.)
2. Khakri (Nayagram P.S.) Midnapur.	Baisakh (April)
3. Phalkusma : Bankura	-do-
4. Kanaisar : Singhbhum : Bihar	Asadh (20 July)
5. Pitalkanthi Sankrail P.S., Midnapur	Aswin : Durgapuja (October)
6. Simlan (Kalna P.S.) Burdwan.	2nd Aswin (October)
7. Diksui Bhagaddi, Hooghly	Vijaya Dasami (October)
8. Khoyer Pahari, Serenga, Bankura.	Sidhu Kanu day celebration: Lakshmi Puja (October)
9. Dhachati (Salbani P.S.) Midnapur.	Kalipuja : (Kartik) (October)
10. Baramesia : Goaltore) Midnapur.	Bhratri Dwitla (October)
11. Palaibazar (P.S. Rasulpur) Burdwan.	-do-
12. Khannan (Hooghly)	-do-
13. Dhapaspara (Kalna P.S.) Burdwan.	Rasjatra : Kartik (Oct-Nov.)
14. Pandua : Hooghly	2nd Magh (January)
15. Hichapara : Balta, Midnapur.	Akhanpuja, 9th Magh (January)
16. Sonagara, Singhbhum, Bihar.	Makar (January)

Tribal people from adjoining areas as well as from distant places attend these fairs, which have a profound socio-psychological significance in the life of these people. They serve to renew ceremonial or ritual kinships, to bring them closer and to reinforce their social relations. These fairs dissolve inter-ethnic distances in general, though the presence of Dekos (non-tribals) is a discordant factor.

During the latter half of British rule in India, the tribal communities realized that many of the local zemindars were exploiting them. They did not give them any rent receipts, though they were recognized as *bargadars* (share-croppers), and even tried to oust the tribals from their small landholdings. As a matter of fact, a gathering of tribals was held (possibly in 1928) in Saharidanga (Binpur P.S.) in the District of Midnapur under the leadership of Mangol Soren, Nabin Soren of Kamarbandi, Baidyanath Halda, Dinabandhu Mandi of Saharidanga, Monasaram Mandi of Kurchibani and Doma Soren of Bansol. This gathering was of a different nature from that held in the past and made a striking departure from the traditional fairs. This occasion was more by way of a political meeting which was used to formulate the demands of the tribals in their endeavour to get relief from the burdens under which they had been groaning for a long time. In 1935, when the British Government introduced administrative reforms and elections, one Nabin Soren was an aspirant for legislature seat. He was favoured by the Congress and was requested to visit Midnapur to obtain approval of his candidature. But this was denied to him owing to political reasons. This refusal provoked Nabin Babu to contest independently with the 'axe' as his symbol.

During the Second World War, the then District Magistrate of Midnapur requested many tribal leaders to pledge their support to the war effort. Nabin Babu convened a meeting at Saharidanga along with others to help in the recruitment of tribals for the war. This reflected the extent of Nabin Babu's wrath against the Congress, which had launched the freedom movement in India, specially in Midnapur. Later on, the tribals, specially the Santals, decided to convene a meeting at Kamarbandhi (P.S. Binpur, Midnapur) in 1946, where a decision was taken to form a tribal organization along the lines of the Bihar tribal movement. Nabin Soren (Santal) of Kamarbandhi became its President. The organization was named Santal Gaonta, i.e., Santal Unnayan Samity (Society for the uplift of the Santals). Dinabandhu Mandi (Santal) also played a prominent role in this organization. The tribal leaders stressed the so-called pristine tribal culture traits.

The Santals and other tribal groups were said to be influenced by the dominant cultural traits of the locality. The slant of this movement was towards the universalization of tribal traits.

Independence made the tribals and the peasants conscious of their rights and, as such, some of members of the Santal Gaonta began to view the tribal situation in a broader political context. In 1949, Shyam Charan Murmu of Ranarani and Phagu Murmu of Kharurpal (near Belpahari) reconstituted the Santal Gaonta into the Adivasi Mahasabha, which attracted the attention of other tribals, specially the Mundas and Bhumijis. All of them began to take an interest in the activities of this organization. Abhoy Singh (Munda) of Nayagram joined hands with the leaders. It was decided that the Adivasi Mahasabha would work as a non-political organization, and serve as a platform for Adivasis in their efforts to cope with their social, economic and cultural problems by constitutional means. There were annual meetings and conventions of the Mahasabha, at which resolutions were adopted concerning socio-economic problems. They demanded stipends for tribal students and prevention of land alienation by non-tribals, among other things.

The influence of missionaries in all these activities, specially in respect of the growth of tribal ethnocentrism, was only too apparent. Their participation in tribal affairs helped the rapid growth of the Jharkhand movement. Four important missionary centres were set up in different areas—Ranchi and Benachiti (Bihar), Rairongpur (Orissa), and Bhipur (Midnapur). It was reported that the converted tribals were guided by foreign missionaries at these centres.

In the 1952 general elections, the Congress Party nominated Arjun Baske (Raipur: Nayagram) and Mangol Soren (Kamarbandhi-Binpur) as their candidates in two of the tribal constituencies in Midnapur. Other tribal candidates were backed by other political parties, e.g., Jagatpati Hansda (Santal) represented Krishak Majdur Praja (KMP) Party, Ratan Soren in Nayagram constituency and Birom Soren in Binpur constituency represented the Socialist Party, and Shyam Charan Murmu, an independent candidate, was backed by the Adivasi Mahasabha (Jharkhand) and had an

alliance with the Jan Sangh. In the 1957 elections, the Adivasi Mahasabha backed a few tribal candidates in different constituencies against the Congress. They contested with the 'cock' symbol. Shyam Charan Murmu stood as a candidate for an Assembly seat from Binpur, Ratan Soren from Gopiballavpur, Sarat Murmu from Jhargram and Babulal Soren from Raipur, Bankura. Charu Chandra Basra was tipped for a Parliamentary seat from Jhargram. All of them contested as independent candidates. It was reported that they were backed by the Jharkhand Party of Bihar as there was no State-level organization then existing in West Bengal. All of them were defeated in the elections and forfeited their security deposits. The Congress candidate was also defeated by the CPI candidate, Jamadar Hansda of Salbani.

The rout of the Adivasi Mahasabha candidates in the 1957 elections created a sense of frustration among the local leaders who tried to reorganize the Mahasabha. The anticipated trend of the 1962 general election was not in favour of independent tribal candidates. So, most of the tribals tried to form a State unit of the Jharkhand Party and tried to affiliate it to the All-India Jharkhand Party. Thus, a state level committee was set up in 1965 with 13 members, under the leadership of Dhakhin Murmu—an energetic young non-Christian Santal, who had also undergone a post-graduate course in agriculture at the University of Calcutta. His efforts and organizing ability generated enthusiasm amongst the tribals. Active members had to pay Rs. 25 and ordinary members Rs. 1.25 as membership fees. At the beginning, the party enrolled more than 7,000 members. The Jharkhand Party geared up its political machinery, and branches were opened in the districts as well as at sub-divisional and block levels in many parts of Midnapur, Bankura, Purulia, Hooghly, Burdwan and Birbhum districts in West Bengal. The party toned up its activities among the tribals to such effect that the membership swelled to 60,000 in West Bengal alone within a short time. It succeeded in bringing a large number of Santals, Mundas, Koras, Mahatos, Sadgops, and even some Muslims and Christian and non-Christian tribals in to its fold. In West Bengal, its leadership was in the hands of non-Christian

Santals. The Christian tribals held sway only at Bhimpur. Many low caste people of the locality also supported the Jharkhand Party. The neglect that these people suffered at the hands of society and their deep-rooted poverty drove them into the arms of this tribal organization. But the participation of the Mahatos in the Jharkhand Party was a different story. The local Mahatos are more prosperous and are actually local exploiters. However, they extended their cooperation to the party as a subterfuge.

The Jharkhand Party had its support base in the tribal areas. Its leaders spoke of the resurgence of tribal culture, with which economic and political issues were linked.

A weekly paper named *Deboutingun*, ('let us stand'), was launched (Jhargram, Midnapur) as an organ of the Jharkhand Party. The name was derived from a popular poem written by Ram Chand Murmu, who had exercised a profound influence on the Santals through his writings. It is in the Santali language and in the Bengali script. It focused on the problems of the tribals, and outlined the area of proposed Jharkhand State. 'Jhar' means 'bush' or 'thickets', i.e., jungles; 'khand' means 'region'—region of undulations. 'Jharkhand Ahala'—i.e., origin of the move for Jharkhand—was described in detail :

This country is ours, it was full of jungles. We the autochthones cleared the jungle and brought the land under cultivation and developed civilisation. We had our own administration, our capitals, towns and cities. The enemies have driven us here; they are trying to wipe out our name. Some of our heroes of the past like Sido, Kantu, Birsa, tried to fight against this. We have forgotten those names.

You will not get such a beloved motherland,
the land of the tribals.

Never, nowhere in this world.

It glitters like gold or silver.

It is a small world of ours.

It is inside India.

It is precious like copper, mercury or diamond.

Some of the lectures delivered by Chittaranjan Mandi, Vice-President of the State Jharkhand Party, are worth mentioning. He frets and fumes against the Dekos. According to him, Mahisasura, killed by the Durga of the Hindus, is representative of the tribals:

His physical features are like the tribals' he is our representative. The Hindus have driven away and mercilessly killed our leaders, our men. Thus the 'Dekos' not only exploited the tribals, but killed them ruthlessly. We, the tribal people, have now realised the significance of these historical events. So we have to challenge and reckon with our enemies. We must get back our land for our revitalisation, for our growth. So we require Jharkhand for the growth of the tribals, who are downtrodden, who are exploited, who are decaying and dying.

Another paper written in a similar view in the weekly (17 August 1974) said:

India is celebrating the 15th August as the day of Independence. We drove away the British rulers from this country about 27 years ago. What have we got? Nothing, not a place for home. We are not yet in a position to keep intact the lands which are in our possession. Are we in a position to save our religion? It can be said that Government has done nothing for us. The Europeans have taken away everything from the poor tribals. But our present Government has done nothing—even the *Khas* lands have not been given to us The Police are oppressing us. Though government has taken up many programmes for us, their benefits have not accrued to all The Himalaya is in the north of our motherland; our Jharkhand is like a half-moon, crescent-shaped in which the river Jahnabi is flowing, and in the south the ocean is roaring. The sacred rivers Damodar and Mayurakhi are flowing within it. The Ajay, Silai, Brahmani and Kansabati are other rivulets, watering the land. The hill Nilgiri in Orissa is another border of our land, which spreads up to Pareshnath—through Ranchi and

Dumka ridges. This is our land. This was the land of the independent Santal tribe.

A good number of Adivasi candidates fought the 1967 election with the symbol of 'Jora Sakam', i.e., two leaves'. The volunteers wore green caps as their party symbol. They conducted campaigns and held meetings where they placed their election manifesto before the public. The main items of the programme were as follows:

1. A separate State within the framework of the Indian Constitution for the tribal people to be named Jharkhand State.
2. Revival of tribal culture and introduction of teaching of tribal language in 'Ol Chiki' script.
3. Opportunities for proper education of the tribal people.
4. Establishment of hospitals and health centres in the villages.
5. Right to exploit forests.
6. Employment opportunities, including reservation of jobs, for the tribal people on population basis.
7. Economic development of the people by setting up small-scale and cottage industries in the areas inhabited by the tribal people.
8. Opportunities and facilities for agriculture and prevention of land alienation.
9. Improvement of village communication links and arrangement for supply of drinking water.
10. Facilities for technical education and providing employment opportunities for the tribal people.

The Party took up politics as a weapon for the furtherance of these aims and made use of folklore in their campaign. In this General Elections Dakhin Murmu contested from Binpur (Midnapur), Ratan Saren from Gopiballavpur (Midnapur), Dhiren Hemrom from Salbani (Midnapur), Babulal Soren from Raipur (Bankura), and another candidate from Bandowan (Purulia). All of them were defeated.

In the mid-term elections for the West Bengal Legislative

Assembly in 1969, the Party set up 10 candidates; none was returned. However, the Party had gained some importance in West Bengal by the time of the 1971 elections. It contested in the districts of Midnapur, Purulia, Bankura, Hooghly and Burdwan. The party put up 22 candidates and fought this election with the 'Bow and Arrow' symbol. Shyamacharan Murmu (Binpur) and Babular Sore (Raipur) were elected. Manoranjan Mahato contested in Jhargram constituency as a Jharkhand Party candidate.

In the 1972 election, however, the party was wiped out. Twenty-three candidates contested on the Party ticket, but none was returned. For this election, new candidates were selected. In Jhargram constituency, Mrinalini Mahato—a school teacher of Ranarani school—was selected as the Party's candidate and contested the election in place of Manoranjan Mahato, and Dakhin Babu contested in Jhargram Parliamentary constituency. Though the Party adopted several new strategies and even co-operated with other political parties without of course sacrificing its separate identity, it had to face a total rout.

The Jharkhand Party, however, continued its activities. On 30 June 1973, the Party organised mass squatting before Government offices in Jhargram and other subdivisions in the district of Midnapur over various demands including recognition of 'Ol Chiki', restoration of lands which were allegedly taken away from the tribals, employment, distribution of khas land, and protection against eviction of *bargadars*. The Party held a workers' conference at Jhargram on 7 July 1973 which was addressed by Bagun Samrui, President of the All India Jharkhand Party, and others. Bagun Samrui requested the party members and workers to work unitedly. The Purulia unit of the Jharkhand Party took up a programme of starting an agrarian movement, but this did not materialize. Recently, there were some differences of opinion amongst the party's rank and file in Bihar and as a result the party was divided into three groups—Bagun Samrui group; N.E. Horo group; and Hul Jharkhand group. In West Bengal also, the party was split into two parallel factions—one led by Dakhin Charan Murmu, President of the West Bengal unit, which owes allegiance to the Bagun Samrui group and the other led by

Chittaranjan Mandi, Vice-President of the West Bengal Unit, who linked up with the Hul Jharkhand group (i.e., group led by Justin Richard). The split became final when at a meeting of the State Committee of the party held over 18 and 19 January 1975 at Lalgeria (Midnapur) the group led by Chittaranjan Mandi staged a walkout to form a parallel organization of the party.

Apart from the Jharkhand Party, there are a number of tribal social organizations—e.g., Adibasi Santal Baishi (Congress sponsored), Adibasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association and Santali Literary and Cultural Society—which also claim to champion the Adivasi cause. However, these associations could not unite mainly due to differences of opinion as to the adoption of script. The Adibasi Santal Baishi and Adibasi Socio-educational and Cultural Society are in favour of the 'Ol' script, while the Santali Literary and Cultural Society is in favour of the Roman script. In West Bengal, the Adibasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association is the most influential amongst the Adivasis. The Society organised two rallies in 1973. On 26 February 1973, a rally was held under the leadership of Joyram Murmu. They demanded recognition of the 'Ol' script, introduction of Santali language in all the educational institutions in West Bengal, and broadcasting of Santali programme through the All India Radio. They submitted three memoranda to this effect to the Station Director, Akashvani, Calcutta, to the Chief Minister, West Bengal, and to the Secretary to the Governor of West Bengal. Joyram Murmu led another procession on 12 September 1973 to the Station Director, Akashvani, and to Writers' Building to hand over memoranda. The organization held a cultural function—styled the All-India Adibasis Cultural function—at Rabindra Sadan on 13 April 1973 which was attended by the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

Like other political parties, the Jharkhand Party holds meetings at various places on different issues, specially before elections. Sometimes the leaders and organizers of the Party pose the burning problems of the tribes before the electorate and assure them that they will try to solve them if they are elected. When it took out a procession, the members, specially the volunteers, used to wear green caps and green

shirts symbolizing 'leaves' of 'aspirations'. They used to sing tribal songs to avoid the monotony of a long march. They raised a variety of slogans, shouted first by the leaders of the procession, and then repeated by the processionists.

Some of these songs are reproduced below in a free English translation:—

Everybody is trying to divide India hurriedly,
Jaipal(is) trying to have a full Jharkhand.

O brothers, we shall not remain inert,
We shall march ahead, through sufferings and honesty to
achieve our goal.

O brothers, let us go to occupy all waste lands. We have
endless strength in our body. Let us go to occupy all waste
lands. These should be in our possession.

(Our) green flag will be victorious.

Victory will be ours. Victory will be ours.

Follow OI Chiki, Accept OI Chiki.

Follow OI Chiki, Follow OI Chiki.

Many tribal communities, through a gradual process of Hinduization, have incorporated many of the dominate Hindu traits in their culture and are in the process of slow assimilation. Prominent among them are the Bhumij, Lodha and Savara groups of people, who have formed a lower caste rung along the fringe of the Hindu caste hierarchy. The Mundas in places, have accepted Alekh Dharam, which is very akin to the Hindu Bhakti cult. A section of the Santals in many places, specially in the District of Bankura, are known as 'Deswali Majhi', from whom the other groups of Santals have severed all connections, in the course of conflicts among them on religious issues. Very recently a new feeling of retribalization has become dominant and the tribals, specially the Santals, are seeking to recover their distinct identity by adopting Sari Dharam.

The Christian Santals are not in favour of 'OI Chiki' and instead prefer the Roman script, which has been accepted by the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (1976). Many Santals, along with others, are publishing books.

journals and articles in Bengali script (e.g., in the *Pachchim Banga* published by the State Government and in the *Haritar Sakam* edited by Prof. S.K. Bhowmik). This led to confusion among the tribals who support introduction of the 'Ol Chiki' script, which is in accordance with the ideals of the Jharkhand Party. This shows that a section of the Santals is not supporting it. This can also be noticed from the election results, in which different parties got the support of the tribals.

The Jharkhand Party could not maintain its hold on the tribal population as a whole and, therefore, this movement has fizzled out. Besides, the poor tribals and the lower caste peasantry are suffering alike, and they regard political parties like the CPI and CPI (M), instead of the Jharkhand Party, as their representatives, who are pledged to fight against poverty, and also to support their cause. The leadership of the Jharkhand Party, on the other hand, was more interested in trying to raise and consolidate its position in the socio-political sphere, neglecting the lower and poorer groups. This elite leadership has not been able to bring all the tribals together under a single organization for their narrow class interest. Besides, the heterogenous tribal groups are not always inclined to coalesce with one another in a harmonious way to form a stronger party. Many tribal groups feel that most of the benefits extended to the tribals by the Government have been cornered by the Santal, and that other tribals, like the Kora, the Munda, the Lodha, the Kheria and the Mahali of West Bengal are not getting their due. Thus, the Jharkhand movement has lost its momentum in West Bengal.

Since 1976, the Jharkhand Movement in West Bengal began to be revitalised through the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) which has the active support of Mahato youngmen who have had their education at Ranchi University. The Kurmi-Mahatos also demanded to be scheduled, giving up their Kshatriya claims which they had made earlier. The Kurmi claimed that they were part of the Adivasi conglomeration in India. These ideas penetrated the Kurmi-dominated areas of West Bengal. The Kurmi, Doshwari, Tamol became part of Jharkhand movement along with the tribals. The Congress ministry, in West Bengal headed by S.S. Ray initiated the formation of the Jhargram Development Council. Sita Rama

Mahato was appointed a minister of Cabinet rank and Miss Amola Soren became Deputy Minister. These measures and various development facilities helped the local people. During the emergency the activities of the Jharkhand party practically came to a stand still. There was also a feeling that the Jharkhand would benefit the Santals only.

Dakhin Baba, a stalwart of the JMM, joined the Janata Party to contest the 1977 Election. In 1977-78 a convention was held by the supporters of the Jharkhand movement at Ranchi in which many representatives from West Bengal participated. They decided to revive the traditional festival, the tribal dialect, traditional mode of propitiation of deities through their own *Deharis*, *Nayaks*, etc., as expressions of Jharkhandism. Thus, the party was re-organised. Though it ideologically runs counter to the C.P.I. (M), the movement was not officially opposed by the existing Government.

The Government, however, initiated certain development works in rural work through 'Food for Work' schemes. They organised functions in Birbhum in memory of the heroes of Santal rebellion. The OL script devised by Raghunath Murmu was officially recognised. In the meantime the leadership passed on to one Vishnu Soren, an advocate, and Monoranjan Mahato who organised opposition to the CPI (M) programme to help the tribals, which according to the JMM was designed to dislodge the non-CPI (M) tribal leadership. The year 1980 was marked by a number of Jharkhand conventions, organisation of deputation to various authorities led by the tribal students, workers and other representatives of general tribal population all over the state under the banner of the Jharkhand movement—through which the organisers tried to convince the non-tribals about the legitimacy of their demands. Very recently (31 October 1980) a large number of tribals and their non-tribal supporters marched through the streets of Calcutta with their bows, arrows and battle axes and shouted slogans against the administration.



THE JHARKHAND PARTY IN ORISSA*

L. K. Mahapatra

Introduction

THE JHARKHAND Party, as an important all-India tribal organization, plays a vital role in leading the Jharkhand movement which demands a separate Jharkhand state within the Indian Union. Up to 1949, it was known as the All-India Adivasi Mahasabha. On 5 March 1949, the Mahasabha held a conference of three thousand delegates at Hindisala in Ranchi and passed a resolution which declared that the Adivasi Mahasabha was being changed into the Jharkhand Party so as to fight for the formation of a separate Jharkhand state. In this conference, Jaipal Singh, who is regarded as the founder of the Jharkhand Party, was elected as the President and Idsen Deba was elected as the Secretary of the Party. The objective of the Jharkhand movement was to secure a separate state for the people of Jharkhand, irrespective of caste and creed.

The desired Jharkhand state is to be multi-ethnic and multi-lingual in character. In short, this Party demands that a separate Jharkhand state be constituted comprising of the Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Nilgiri (Balasore) and Sundargarh

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districts of Orissa and the Adivasi regions of West Bengal, Bihar, U.P. and Madhya Pradesh. The old map of the proposed Jharkhand state covers the following areas within the states of Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar, UP and Madhya Pradesh. Chang Bhakar, Korea, Surguja, Robertsgunj Tahasil, Dudhi Tahasil, Rohtas P.S., Sherghati P.S., Rajauli P.S., Govindpur P.S., Jamui Sub-division, Banka Sub-division, Santal Parganas, Hazaribagh, Palamau, Singhbhum, Manbhum, Jashpur, Udaipur, Gongpur, Bonai, Bamra, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Nilgiri and northern Balasore, Midnapur Bankura and Purulia.

The leaders and ordinary members of the Jharkhand Party are known as 'Jharkhandis' and inhabitants of the proposed Jharkhand state are also referred to as Jharkhandis. Once it developed an inter-State organization, the Party was renamed the All India Jharkhand Party and fought the successive elections in four States—West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. During the lifetime of Jaipal Singh this Party was the main opposition party in Bihar till 1963 (when it merged with the Indian National Congress) and the mouthpiece of tribals both in the Assembly and in Parliament.

Sonaram Soren, a Santal graduate of Mayurbhanj, is the founder of this organization in Orissa. He organized the Adivasi Sabha in 1946 which was converted into the Jharkhand Party in Orissa. So far as its political organization in Orissa is concerned, in the first general elections (1952), six contestants, including Sonaram Soren, representing this Party were elected to the State Legislative Assembly. But soon after becoming a member of the Assembly, Sonaram Soren joined the Nikhil Utkal Adivasi Congress, an opponent front of Jharkhand, and extended his support to the Congress in forming the Government under the leadership of Mr. Nabakrishna Choudhury. Sonaram Soren joined the Cabinet as Minister for Tribal and Rural Welfare, Labour and Commerce.

In the second general elections (1957), five candidates from this Party were elected to the State Legislative Assembly. This time the Congress Party could not obtain a working majority in the State Legislature, and, being the single largest

party in the Legislature, it formed the Government with the support of these five Jharkhand members. This time Soren was defeated at the hustings. The year 1959 was an interesting one in the politics of Orissa. The Congress Party had formed the Government, but it never enjoyed a stable majority. The Congress was strong in the coastal districts but the main opposition party, (the Ganatantra Parishad) controlled the hilly areas, which consisted mostly of ex-feudatory States. 'On February 23, early in the Budget Session of 1959, when the Revenue Minister was seeking to introduce a Bill, the Congress Ministry was defeated by 8 votes. But this was reckoned a "snap" defeat, and the Ministry did not resign. The Government's strength at that time was 70 (excluding the Speaker but including 5 Jharkhand members) in a House of 138 members. During this time, Congress was kept in power by 5 Jharkhand voters in Orissa Legislative Assembly' (Bailey, 1960). In May 1959 the Congress formed a fresh coalition Government, this time with the Ganatantra Parishad as a result of which the Jharkhand Party withdrew its support and joined the opposition.

During the period 1951 to 1959, the Jharkhand Party, which was leading the Adivasi movements in the northern hill districts of Orissa, faced constant threats from two other organizations—the Ganatantra Parishad and the Nikhil Utkal Adibasi Congress. 'Towards the end of the year 1950, Mr. Ranjit Singh Bariha laid the foundation of the Nikhil Utkal Adibasi Congress, which in the succeeding year was to give the Jharkhand movement of Orissa a go-by'. (Bailey, 1960).

In the mid-term elections of 1961, the Jharkhand Party failed to capture any seat in the State Legislative Assembly. Its condition became more precarious in the 1967 elections when it again failed to capture any seats although it had set up candidates in seven constituencies in the districts of Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh. This time significantly, Sonaram Soren had joined the Jana Congress. Being elected to the Assembly, he joined coalition Government formed in Orissa by the Swatantra and Jana Congress parties.

One point worth noting here is that up to the 1961 mid-term elections, all Jharkhand contestants in Orissa fought the

elections as independent candidates. For this reason, there is no mention of the Jharkhand Party in Government reports on the first and second general and the first mid-term (1961) elections. In the fifth general elections 1971, it put up candidates in fifteen constituencies in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh and Keonjhar, but only four candidates were successful. These four Jharkhand MLAs joined the coalition Government formed by the Swatantra Party and the Utkal Congress. Siddhalal Murmu, the leading Jharkhand MLA became Minister for Labour, Employment and Housing and continued till 9 June 1972. In June 1972, this coalition Government lost its majority when most of the MLAs of the Utkal Congress-Swatantra United Front merged with Congress which formed the Ministry. But the Jharkhand High Command declared on 12 June that the Jharkhand Party would not merge with the Congress and that it would function as an independent party in the Orissa Assembly. Ignoring the Party High Command's decision, Sidhalal Murmu joined the Congress, but was not made a member of the Cabinet.

In 1973, the solidarity of this Party in Orissa was weakened as it split into two factions: (a) the All-India Jharkhand Party headed by Bagun Sumbrai; and (b) the Jharkhand Party headed by N.E. Horo. This division occurred not because of differences in ideology but because of a tug of war for leadership between these two. The Party Constitution was retained by both the factions. However, they eventually developed into two different political parties with different registration numbers and election emblems. During the elections of 1974, both the Jharkhand parties fought election to the State Legislative Assembly opposing each other in twenty-three constituencies in the districts of Keonjhar, Sundargarh and Mayurbhanj. In four constituencies—namely, Bahalda, Rairangpur, Bangiriposhi and Kuliana of Mayurbhanj District—as many as four candidates from each Party contested the elections. Out of the twenty-seven contestants belonging to both Parties only two candidates—namely, Shri Christodas Lugun of the Jharkhand Party from Birmitrapur constituency in Sundargarh District and Shri Sashi Bhusan Marandi of the All-India Jharkhand Party from Bahalda constituency in

Mayurbhanj District—were elected.

This paper will briefly examine the following:

1. Trends of the Jharkhand movement in Orissa.
2. Descriptive historical study of the development of this Party, including and after the splits in the Party.
3. Why this party failed to make a steady impact on the tribal people of the area?
4. The Organization of the Party at different levels.

Brief History of the Party

The leaders of the Jharkhand Party claim that a Jharkhand state existed from the very beginning of human civilization in India. The founders of this mythical Jharkhand state were three—namely, Risa, Karama and Chutu. It was during the leadership of these three that the Adivasis first managed to enter the area. At that time, this area was full of forests. The movement into the Jharkhand region occurred when the Aryans drove the non-Aryans (Adivasis) out of the region of the Vindhyas, the valleys of the Ganga and the Jamuna, and the Terai. Except for some parts of present-day Cuttack and Puri districts, almost all regions of Orissa were under the Jharkhand state. The first independent Maharaja of this state was Chhatia Madhara Munda and the last was Maharaja Durjan [Sah], who was eventually defeated by Sher Shah [in fact it was Jahangir] and who surrendered his kingdom, a white elephant named Samchala and twenty-four other elephants. In all, forty-five independent kings, including Madara Munda and Durjan Sthal, ruled over this kingdom. Madhara Munda handed over his throne to his adopted son, Fani Mukuta. They were regarded as the ancestors of the 'Naga Bansa' kings (kings of the cobra clan). At present, the lineage members of this clan are found in Ranchi District (Bihar).

Following the defeat of Durjan and subsequent invasions by foreign conquerors, the state was truncated to the size of present Chotanagpur. It is called Chotanagpur because it was once the estate of the 'Naga Bansa' kings. At present, Chotanagpur division includes 5 districts—namely,

Ranchi, Palamau, Hazaribagh, Singhbhum and Dhanbad— which are treated as the core of both the ancient Jharkhand state and the one that is now demanded. Thus, the Jharkhand Party aims at the unification of the areas of the ancient Jharkhand state treating Chotanagpur as the central portion. The Party also wants to incorporate in the new state the Adivasi-populated areas from the states of Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, so that the political, economic, social and other human problems of the Adivasis could be fruitfully tackled. Otherwise, they claim, the progress and prosperity of the inhabitants of this area cannot be achieved. These objectives and arguments were formulated during the course of personal interviews with Jadabananda Murmu, Vice-President, Jharkhand Party; Braja Mohan Hansda, Secretary, All-India Jharkhand Party, Bamanghati Sub-division Unit; Jaya Gobind Hembram, Secretary, All-India Jharkhand Party, Mayurbhanj District Unit; and Sashi Bhusan Marandi, MLA and Joint Secretary, All-India Jharkhand Party, Orissa State Unit.

As a political entity, the Jharkhand Party fought the first general elections from Mayurbhanj and propagated its objectives and ideologies through the election campaign. In course of time, this party gained a hold in Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Ranchi, Singhbhum and other districts. The Jharkhand leaders assured their people that the Jharkhand movement would continue until and unless a separate Jharkhand state was formed. According to the leaders, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundargarh districts and a portion of Balasore district are part of the area of Jharkhand.

The Jharkhand movement is mainly an Adivasi movement for the formation of a separate state. The term 'movement' is described by F.G. Bailey (1960: 141) in his book *Politics and Social Change* as a model for organization. Here the voters and workers do not expect any tangible rewards and assistance of any type. In a 'movement' the element of calculation is absent and the voluntary workers give their services because they are in the habit of doing so and they are morally convinced of the rightness of their party's policies. They do not anticipate any immediate or personal material gain. As an Adivasi movement, it is confined mainly to the

Adivasi-populated areas. The Jharkhand movement is primarily the result or product of growing political consciousness and an attempt on the part of the Adivasis of Chotanagpur (originally of the Christian Adivasi educated men) to revive and enrich their traditional culture by the formation of an Adivasi state. This movement spread like wildfire to Adivasi-populated, so-called ancient Jharkhand, area within the Indian Union.

There are a number of tribes in the area covered by the proposed Jharkhand state—Munda, Oraon, Santal, Ho, Saoria Paharia, Kharia, Bhumij, Bhuiyan and Birhor. The Jharkhand Party is dominated by leaders drawn from the Santal, Munda, Oraon and Ho tribes.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this Party is to unite the tribes in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, UP and Madhya Pradesh (mainly those inhabiting the hilly regions) into a separate state. The Jharkhand Party's slogan is 'Jharkhand Party stands for a separate State for all people of Jharkhand irrespective of caste and creed for achieving democratic socialism, equality, justice and fair play'. This movement is mainly confined to tribal areas. Due to differences in ecological, economic, social, cultural and other factors, the inhabitants of the plains are placed in a more advantageous position than the inhabitants of hilly regions. The people of the hills, especially the tribals, are said to be exploited by the non-tribals, particularly by the plainmen. Due to the above-mentioned factors, the tribals are not able to safeguard their interests, to enrich their culture and to enjoy all the facilities for socio-economic upliftment. The leaders of this Party claim that through the formation of a separate state and by having their own representatives in the Government, their interests will be adequately safeguarded. The government of Jharkhand state would look after the interests and well-being of the tribesmen inhabiting the State. Further, the state could look after the interests of the tribals who had migrated to other state of the Indian Union. The Jharkhandis, especially the pioneers of the Jharkhand movement, think that any

administration other than their own leads to the exploitation and deprivation of the Adivasis. After the formation of a separate Jharkhand state, both Adivasi and non-Adivasis would be treated equally.

The Hon'ble Dr. Khosla, ex-Governor of Orissa, described the Jharkhand movement as the revolution by simple means (Extracted from the Dairy of Jadabananda Murmu, Vice-President, Jharkhand Party). In Orissa, the Jharkhandis claim that they will continue to live on the mercy of the Orissa Government, unless and until they have their own state and government.

Another important objective of this party is to form an Orissa Division within the proposed Jharkhand state comprising Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Singhbhum, Sareikala and Kharasuan. The Adivasi Jharkhandis claim that the Adivasis are the original inhabitants of India and the others—such as, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc.—are their guests.

The Party's constitution says that the proposed Jharkhand state would not be separated from the Indian Union.

The Planning Commission's report on the First Five Year Plan says that in primary schools students should be taught in their mother-tongue and from the upper primary onwards, the language of instruction should be the regional one. In the Planning Commission's Report of February 1957 (p. 242), it is emphasized that there should be provisions for teaching in the medium of one's mother-tongue. The Jharkhand Party demands that they should not be deprived of these legal provisions.

There would not be only one party in the proposed Jharkhand state. Any party other than the Jharkhand, can form the government, provided it forms a majority in the state legislature.

The Adivasis have their own culture and language. Neither Oriya, for instance, nor Bengali, is their mother-tongue. So they claim that they should not be deprived of enriching their own culture and language. It is their custom to take *handia* or rice beer on festive occasions, but they have been barred from observing this custom by the Orissa Government. This is one of the points which they put forth to support their demand for a separate state.

In short, the Party aims at reviving and enriching the Adivasi language, Adivasi traditions, Adivasi customs and so on.

Party Organization

The Party's organization is mainly based around two factors—i.e., (a) means of persuading voters, and (b) recruitment of workers. According to F.G. Bailey (1960), there are two models of organization—(a) machine and (b) movement. To quote Bailey:

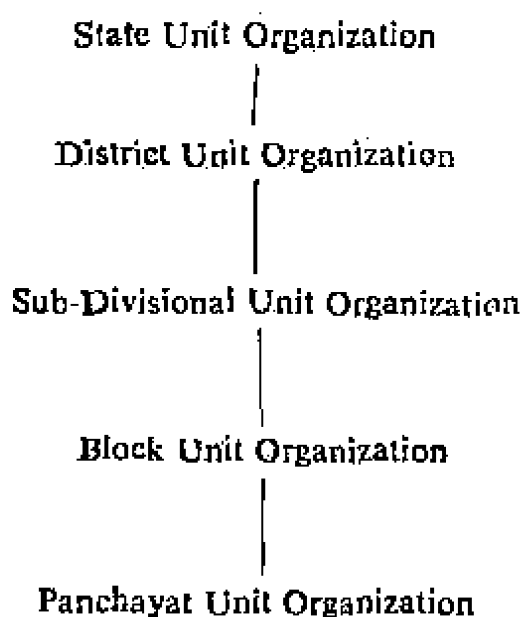
One model is that of the 'machine' in which workers and sometimes voters expect some tangible reward, not necessarily a bribe, but assistance of exactly the kind which brokers provide. In the other model, the 'movement', this element of calculation is absent and the voluntary workers give their service because they are in the habit of doing so, and in the last resort because they are morally (that is, without calculation of immediate personal material gain) convinced of the rightness of their party policies.

The organization of the Jharkhand Party in Orissa resembles Bailey's 'movement' model. It is a poor party and all workers render voluntary service without expecting any immediate personal material gain.

It was mentioned earlier that the Adivasi Mahasabha was converted into the Jharkhand Party. Subsequently, when it established a large organization, it was renamed the All-India Jharkhand Party. Eventually, due to groupism within the party, two factions emerged out of this party—one being the All-India Jharkhand Party and the other the Jharkhand Party. So far as the party organization is concerned, it is very important to focus on the organization of both these factions in Orissa. The All-India Jharkhand Party has a very strong organization in the Nilgiris of Balasore, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts, whereas the Jharkhand Party is strong in the Sundargarh District. The Jharkhand Party led by N.E. Horo has no organization in Keonjhar and Balasore districts. The organization of both these groups required to

be analyzed separately. N.E. Horo's faction is alleged to be dominated by the Christianized tribesmen and their leaders—at least, this is the opinion of members of the All-India Jharkhand Party. This is why the Jharkhand Party led by N.E. Horo is strong in Sundargarh, as the population of Christianized tribals is larger in Sundargarh than in other northern district in Orissa.

Organization of All-India Jharkhand Party



The office of the State Unit is located at Keonjhar. The All-India Jharkhand Party's organization starts at the State level and goes right down to the panchayat level in Orissa. It has three district unit offices covering four districts, with a common unit for Mayurbhanj and Balasore districts. It has offices in eight sub-divisions of four district—namely, Rairangpur, Udala, Karanjia, Baripada, Nilgiri, Champua, Bonai and Rourkela. Apart from this, it has informal units organization in a number of blocks and panchayats, on the strength of which it successfully fights Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti elections.

So far as office-bearers are concerned, from the State Unit level up to the Block Unit level, each unit has eleven office-bearers—namely, President, Vice-President, Secretary, Assistant-Secretary, Treasurer and six other general office-bearers. The office-bearers are not given any emoluments and work voluntarily.

As far as membership is concerned, any voter, irrespective of caste, creed or tribe, can be a member of the Party, provided he applies for membership to the President of the District Unit. The members are expected to propagate the Party's ideology and raise their voice against exploitation. The compulsory annual membership fee is Rs. 0.25. The members are expected to be involved in election campaigns for the Party's candidates. Each member has to take an oath before the President of the District Unit promising to obey the rules and regulations of the Party. In the State Unit, apart from the eleven office-bearers, the members vary between 25 and 35. Each District Unit office must have nineteen members whereas in the Block Units the number of members varies between 15 and 25. It was reported that the State Unit had the highest number of members in 1971-73 (35) and the lowest in 1967-70 when the strength of members was 23.

However, this Party is a poor man's party. It raises its funds mainly through collection of fees from members and donations from elected MLAs and MPs and other patrons of the Party.

Organization of Jharkhand Party

This faction has no grass-roots level organization as its opponent faction has. Its organization is confined to the district level and controlled by the State level organization. It does not have units at the sub-divisional or block levels. Nor does it have any organization in Keonjhar and Nilgiri of Balasore District. Its State Unit office is located in Rourkela with C.D. Lugun as the President and Jadabananda Murmu as the Vice-President. Apart from this, there is the Mayurbhanj District Unit office at Badampahad and the Sundargarh District Unit office at Rourkela attached to the State Unit office. Like the other faction, the office-bearers, both in the State and District units, number eleven and are voluntary workers. It is alleged that this faction is a Christianized one as it is assisted by Christian missions. It is also reported that most of the members and office-bearers of this faction are Christianized tribals.

Any voter, irrespective of caste, tribe and creed, can be a member of this faction provided he promises to accept the party's policies. No membership fee required. Each member is assigned the task of *Gramya Sangathan* under which he should create organizations for the Party at the village and block levels. They are expected to recruit new members and to propagate the party's programmes and policies.

The Party's office is located in a private residence. In 1975, it is reported that this faction fought the Panchayat Samiti election in two blocks, but was defeated in both due to its poor organization.

Party Symbols

While discussing the symbols of a party, the election emblem, party emblem, martyr days or *sahid* days, party uniform, party flag etc., of both the factions should be taken into account. The bow and arrow has been the election symbol of Jharkhand Party since its emergence.

ELECTION SYMBOL (1974)

All India Jharkhand

The bow and arrow is the election emblem of this faction. As it is primarily an organization of the tribal folks of the hilly regions, the bow and arrow represent the traditional technology of the Jharkhandis, the inhabitants of the Jharkhand area. This symbol has also been adopted as their party emblem.

Jharkhand Party

The election emblem of this wing is the nagara (a one-sided percussion instrument), which represents the traditional culture of this area. They call it Gajabaja in Mundari. They also use it as their party symbol. Another noteworthy point is that the registration numbers of both the factions are different.

Apart from it, both factions celebrate common memorial

days, use a common constitution, and a common party dress.

MARTYR DAYS

Gundurua Sahid Dibas

February 6 and 7 are observed as Gundurua memorial days. In 1949, under the leadership of Sonaram Soren, there was an Adivasi agitation at Gundurua in Mayurbhanj, where a demand was raised to separate Mayurbhanj from Orissa. At that time, Amar Singh was the SDO of Raitangpur and he ordered firing on the crowd with a view to suppressing the agitation. As a result, 'thousands' of agitators were shot dead at Gundurua, as is alleged by the leaders of the Jharkhand Party. This Martyr Day is celebrated only in Orissa by both the factions.

Tilka Memorial Day

Tilka Murmu of Bhagalpur fought against the British and was imprisoned for thirteen years (1771-84) and was eventually hanged under a banyan tree near Tilaka Square in Bihar.

Birsa Sahid Dibas

Birsa Munda fought against the British from 1895 to 1901 and died in jail.

Sido and Kanhu Sahid Dibas

These two fought against the British in the Santal Parganas during the freedom movement from 1855 to 1856 and both were hanged.

On 10 and 11 April every year, both parties observe common memorial days for all the martyrs mentioned above. They have chosen these dates because that is when they hold their annual party conference.

Party Flag and Party Uniform

Both parties have a green flag as their party flag. There is no emblem in this flag. The workers and leaders of both the factions wear green jacket and green caps. The green colour represents the verdant landscape of the proposed Jharkhand state which abounds in green forests and fields.

Activities of the Party (Non-Political)

As a tribal organization, the Party projects the problems of the tribals and place them before the Government. The leaders—like Jadabananda Murmu, Sashi Bhusan Marandi, Braja Mohan Hansda, Christodas Lugun, Kullan Baga and others—belonging to both factions claim that their Party works on different fronts such as labour, student, peasants etc. By analyzing the Party resolutions of both the factions and interviewing different leaders of the Party, the activities of the Party can be summarized as follows.

Education and Students' Front

In the resolutions passed on 3 March 1973, the All-India Jharkhand Party, Rairangpur Sub-division Unit, demanded that Rairangpur College be taken over by the Government immediately as it is situated in an area which is thickly populated by Adivasis and 80 per cent of its students belong to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes.

By another resolution accepted in the central meeting of the All-India Jharkhand Party held on 15 March 1976, it was demanded that all non-Government Colleges established in tribal areas in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh and Keonjhar should be declared as Government Colleges.

In a memorandum to the Minister, Tribal and Rural Welfare, submitted on 4 December 1975, the Jharkhand Party of N.E. Horo demanded that every year the Government of Orissa should increase the seats in Ashram Schools and provide more accommodation facilities in hostels and establish Adivasi colleges in the district of Sundargarh and Mayurbhanj. In such colleges, the Modern Indian Language

course must include an Adivasi language.

Labour Front

By the resolutions passed on 20 April 1974 at Bamanghati, Mayurbhanj, the All-India Jharkhand Party demanded that the wage rate of casual labourers be raised to Rs. 4 in the case of males and Rs. 3.50 in the case of female workers. In another resolution, the All-India Jharkhand Party demanded employment for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe workers in different Government projects and mines.

In a third resolution, this faction stated that the northern districts of Orissa (i.e., Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundargarh) are populated largely by tribes who are very poor and take *handia* rice beer, which they describe as weapon of the Garibhatao campaign. They claim that *handia* is used by the tribes as a food and not just a drink. Therefore, it demands the free sale of *handia* in tribal regions. On 25 March 1974, a demand was raised that the district of Mayurbhanj be declared as a drought area due to the continuous failure of crops of all kinds.

In another resolution passed on 3 March 1973, this faction deplored that the workers of the Sall seeds factory, bucket factories, saw mills, oil mills, and match factories were not being paid proper wages. It demanded that the wages of the labourers in these factories should be increased.

Peasant Front

In a meeting presided over by Mr. Raghunath Bisra held at Keonjhar on 6 July 1975, the All-India Jharkhand Party demanded that irrigation schemes be launched immediately in the hilly areas of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh.

Withering Away of the Jharkhand Party

Most of the important leaders of this Party and the pioneers of the Jharkhand movement have in recent years, joined the Congress Party mainly for two reasons:-(a) their desire to gain political power, and (b) their confidence that the

Congress Party would safeguard the interest of the tribal folk of this area. Jharkhand leaders like Sonaram Soren, Sidhalal Murmu, Bindheswari Prasad Gupta, and Ignace Majhi joined the Congress. They opine that the Congress is the best Party as it looks after the interests of the tribals perfectly and yet maintains national integrity. They now realize that the Jharkhand movement is a 'hoax' and will weaken national integrity.

Secondly, due to the tug of war for leadership, the Party has split into two factions as discussed earlier. As a result, the solidarity of the original Jharkhand Party was weakened and people lost confidence in the leaders of the movement.

Jaipal Singh, the founder of the Jharkhand Party, has often been branded as a leader with confused and contradictory ideologies due to following reasons. He laid the foundations of the Jharkhand movement with the prime purpose of fighting for a separate Jharkhand state within the territory of the Indian Union. However, he knew pretty well that his own State, Bihar, would be divided if the demand was accepted. When the States Reorganization Commission was set up to discuss the issue of the formation of new states, Jaipal Singh forgot about the Jharkhand issue and in a public meeting declared: 'We must live in Bihar, we must fight for Bihar and we must not allow any portion of Bihar to be shared by other States'. Thus, he contradicted his own ideology. As a frustrated tribal politician he was misleading the innocent, illiterate tribal folks through this movement with a view to wielding leadership over the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe candidates returned to the Assembly from reserved seats.

The Party does not have adequate funds to meet different problems nor to fight the elections. For this reason, those leaders who decided to take up politics as a profession switched over to other parties which had both power and funds.

For example, Sonaram Soren introduced this Party in Orissa. He organized the Adivasi Sabha in 1946. However, as the Party was not registered in Orissa, all its candidates fought as independents in the first Assembly elections. Sonaram Soren was successful in this election and joined the

Cabinet as Minister for Tribal and Rural Welfare and Commerce. The Adivasi Sabha was converted into Jharkhand Party in 1949. But, he left this Party and joined the Ganatantra Parishad, fought the 1957 elections with this party affiliation and was defeated. He fought the 1961 Assembly elections on a Congress ticket and was elected. He fought the fourth elections to the Assembly on the Jana Congress Party ticket and was elected. He returned to his original Party which he had founded and fought the 1974 elections as a candidate of the Jharkhand Party led by N.E. Horo and was defeated. At present, he is in the Congress Party. Thus, Sonaram Soren, as the founder of the Jharkhand Party in Orissa, changed his loyalty very frequently like a frustrated leader. Likewise, Sidhalal Murmu, another key leader of the All-India Jharkhand Party, who was returned to the Assembly in the 1971 elections with this Party affiliation, joined the Cabinet as Minister, Labour, Employment and Housing. To further his own vested interests, he joined the Congress and persuaded the other three MLAs of his Party to join the Congress in spite of his Party High Command's decision not to merge with the Congress Party. At present, he is in the Congress Party leaving his party and followers confused and frustrated.

In the unstable political environment that afflicted Orissa right from independence, the Jharkhand MLAs, few in number as they were, enjoyed a leverage through their support to maintain a shaky Ministry. This is evidenced by their being courted and inducted into the Cabinet time and again. But in Orissa, their share of the reserved seats was never high, their alignment with the Scheduled Castes non-existent and their thirst for personal aggrandizement was insatiable. Hence the pitiable downfall of the party from the citadel of power to a presence of relative insignificance in the last elections to the State Assembly. In Mayurbhanj District, which had been the cradle of the Party, the Santals who had been the foster-fathers of the Party in this State, had largely left the Party. It was able to survive in the Rourkela industrial region, where the Christianized educated tribal leaders hold sway, or along the borders of Bihar, adjacent to the area inhabited by the Ho militants, but only as a Jharkhand faction in Bihar.

Apart from factionalism, which was based purely on personal ambitions, the decline of the party cannot be explained without reference to its inherent contradictions. The age-old estrangement and rivalry of tribes like the Ho and the Santal in Mayurbhanj District, of the Munda and Oraon in Sundargarh District, and the incompatibilities between the Christianized and the Songsaek ('worldly' or traditional) sections of the same tribe, have always worked as constant factors to weaken the movement towards the solidarity of all Adivasis. When, as in the later phases of the movement, non-Adivasis (e.g., a Bania from Rairangpur or a Muslim in Sundargarh District), were set up as candidates of the Party disregarding the claims of tribal leaders themselves, this must have served as the proverbial last straw on the back of the camel. The credibility of a political party for the Adivasis, by the Adivasis and of the Adivasis, must have been finally laid to rest. The same opening of the doors of the Party to non-tribesmen in Bihar must have also vitally affected the Party's strength.

The opposition of the tribal non-Christians is not to be belittled. The same causes which paved the way for the popularity of the Hindu model in favour of the Jan Sangh Party in Chotanagpur, and which resulted in the Sundargarh District in large-scale reconversion to tribal (Hinduized) fold must have affected the popularity of the party (Mahapatra, 1968 and 1972; Sen, 1972; Sinha, 1972; Vidyarthi, 1972).

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RETURN TO THE SACRED GROVE

P.C. Hembram

Introduction

SARNA the sacred grove is the centre of a set of religious beliefs professed by the tribals of Chotanagpur and the regions bordering it. This religion has an organization which is designated differently in different communities. The Santal call it Sarna Dharam Semlet, the Munda Sarna Sangh and the Oraon Sarna Nava Yuvak Sangh. The Ho do not have any organization but an association known as Dupup Samaj which urges its members to follow Dupup dharam. They officially accept the tenets of Sarna dharam but not the term. According to Ho pandits, the term has been politicized.

Whatever be the present situation, at its inception Sarna dharam attracted enthusiastic followers among the tribals. It inspired them to retain their ancient customs and advance their development programmes and reformative activities. Sarna dharam brought contentment to the people and at the same time provided a force for achieving greater tribal solidarity.

Till 1931, there had been no definitive religious organization among the tribals in India. In order to discover the meaning of their religion and the practices associated with it as well as to create a common religious platform for the tribals of Chotanagpur, a conference was held at Chaibasa (Singhbhum District) in 1932. Several conferences were subsequently

held between 1932 and 1934 which were attended by delegates from Bihar, Orissa and Bengal. The conferences agreed on a common name, Sarna dharam, to denote the ancient religion of the tribes of Chotanagpur.

According to the 1961 Census, the followers of Sarna dharam numbered 4,28,687, of which 4,27,080 lived in Chotanagpur in Bihar, 109 belonged to Madhya Pradesh and the remaining 1,498 lived in Orissa.

At present the followers of this faith are concentrated in Ranchi, Singhbhum and the regions contiguous to these districts of Chotanagpur, the Sundargarh sub-division of Sundargarh district and Mayurbhanj District of Orissa. Besides, there are sizable concentrations in the border areas of Midnapore and Mayurbhanj districts.

Meaning of Sarna

The term 'sarna' means a holy spot or a sacred grove which is associated with an ancient ritual practice of the tribals. The ritual may vary from community to community but the theme is the same everywhere. All the tribals of Chotanagpur worship at the sarna called *jayer* or *jaher*. The grove is always associated with a cluster of sal trees (*Shorea robusta*) located at the outskirts of a tribal village. The ritual connected with the sacred grove imparts a new orientation to the tribals' concept of cosmology and a cognizance pattern which set the tribals apart from the non-tribals. It is not possible to go into the details of this religion but if one delves into the practices centering around the sacred grove one will find a framework on which the whole tribal culture is based. The name sarna dharam has been in vogue since 1934 but very few tribals knew the nuances of the term. As a result, a few thinkers raise objection to the term and call it sari dharam—*sari* means truth and *dharam* means religion. According to the 1961 Census, the followers of Sari dharam numbered 35,926. However, this creed is confined to the Santals of West Bengal, who are concentrated in north-west Jhargram of Midnapore District, Raipur and Ranibandh police stations of Bankura District and the areas adjacent to the Midnapore-Purulia borders. In reality, the differences

between Sari dharam and Sarna dharam lie in the emotions evoked by the terms in different communities.

Tribal Solidarity and Sarna Dharam

Since the time Bandiram Oraon established his Adivasi Unati Samaj in the 1920s the urgency of unifying all the tribals living in Chotanagpur and adjacent areas was strongly felt. This feeling became all the more intense in 1936-37 when Jaipal Singh set up the All India Adivasi Mahasabha and followed it up with the formation of the Jharkhand Party in 1949 and started preaching the concept of a unitary Jharkhand state within the Indian Union. To this end the concept of sarna dharam became very useful.

The symbolic traits which underlie all the tribal cultures have been forcefully highlighted by various pandits like Raghunath Murmu. The concept of *bonga* or use of a various material traits like *simsandi* (particular kind of fowl sacrificed to the *bonga*), *sagunthili* (holy pitcher) and common ecology *hariar ratang* or *sakan* (green colour or foliage) are invoked to drive home the point that all tribals are alike. The Jharkhand Party—which aims to unify the various communities which are subject to centrifugal forces—uses all these symbols. For example, the Jharkhand Party's flag is green in colour and its election symbol is a *simsandi*. It is also pointed out that the tribals have various common ceremonies like *sarhul*, *ba* or *baha*, *karam* and *soloray* which suggest that all the communities living in the Jharkhand region share a common culture. Even dress and forms of beautification like tattooing are alike. Besides, a common *kill* or *paris* such as, Hembram, Hansda, Saren or Satin—are found among the Santal, Munda, Ho, Bhumij, Mahali and other tribal groups.

Sarna dharam has also served to attract the attention of the converted Christian tribals. In the pre-independence period, the missionaries took advantage of the tribals' poverty and the then prevailing political situation to draw a large number of tribals to the Christian fold. The preachers of Sarna dharam have tried to point out that the tribals' religion is not at all irrational as the missionaries would like them to believe. Sarna dharam is rooted in the tribals' ecology and has

a philosophical background which should make all the tribals proud. In this way, Sarna dharam has been effective not only in reducing the differences between various tribal groups, but it has also been able to provide respectability to the tribal religion which it has been lacking so far. That the Christian religion has a strong organizational force is well known. But even then Sarna dharam has made a dent by reconverting some of the tribal Christians to the original religion. This process may not be very significant in numerical terms but the fact is worth noting that even among tribal Christians there has been a reawakening of the tribal faith.

To my mind, the Jharkhand Party has lost some of its sting in recent times. But the various socio-cultural organizations which it fathered—e.g., Sarna Dharam Semlet (Santal), Sarna Sangh (Munda), Sarna Nava Yubak Sangh (Oraon), and Adivasi socio-educational and cultural associations (Santals of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa)—have been helping to spread its concept among the common and illiterate tribal people living in the Jharkhand region. The educated tribal youths are now quick to observe that a man from another tribal community is not very different from him in the matter of so-called culture.

Conclusion

In Chotanagpur and its adjacent region the tribals can be divided into two major linguistic groups—Mundari and Kurukh (Oraon). But the concept and practices centring round the Sal grove (*jaher* or *sarna*) have helped to unify the heterogeneous mass of tribals into a solid block. The tribal leaders in the arena of politics have been quick to seize the concept of Sarna dharam. They have pointed out the many strands of similarities interlacing the various tribal groups. What began as an effort to reinterpret the tribal religion and to refute the Dekos' notion that tribal religion defies explanation, has provided a common ground to rally the tribals to achieve better economic, social and political goals.

An All-India Sarna Organization* (Bhartiya Sarna Sangh) was established in 1978¹ to preserve and develop the ancient (*adi*) culture of the Adibasis, to foster respect for the *Sarna*

and to protect the religion based on it, to encourage tribal's dance, music and researches into all aspects of tribal culture and society, to secure tribals' rights and to promote all-round development and brotherhood among them. Tribal festivals like the Sārhul or Karma are celebrated on the same lines as the Hindus celebrate the Durga or Saraswatipuja and the Muslims their Id. Ranchi witnesses every year the tribals take out a procession through its streets, which is almost similar to the Ramnayami or Moharrum procession in demonstration of militancy.

THE ADI SAMAJ MOVEMENT AMONG THE HO*

Pranab Kumar Dasgupta

THE Ho shared with the Munda a militant tradition of struggle against the British and other aliens who entered their region after 1832. Unlike the Mundas, however, they did not pass through a process of radical social change and agrarian unrest. Christianity did not make much impact on them. Though the Hos were exposed to Hindu influence from Orissa, they remained rooted in their traditional culture. There was a great deal of similarity between their situation and that of the Santals in the adjoining regions of Orissa. A movement, known as Sarna Dharam Senlet, was launched among the Santals under the leadership of a Santal leader, Ragonath Murmu, who created a Santal script (Orans, 1965: 112-15). A similar movement developed among the Hos across the border. Called the Adi Samaj movement, it was led by Lakho Bodra, a Ho born in Paseya village near Chakradharpur in the District of Singhbhum in 1922 or 1923. His father, Lebeya Bodra, was a prosperous agriculturist. Lakho Bodra passed the matriculation examination from Chaibasa Zila school. Then he joined the railway office at Danguaposi near Noamundi as a clerk. While in service he invented a script and wanted it to be accepted by the Ho as their own script.

*The data for this paper were collected during 1969-70 from Jhinkpani, Singhbhum, Bihar, under the project on 'Impact of Industrialisation on a Tribe in South Bihar'.

Bodra believed that the Ho had their own script and pointed to the rock inscriptions from different parts of the territory in support of his view. These inscriptions are found in Pakena Pahar in Mayurbhanj, in Chriadega, Rabanchaya and at Sitabing in Keonjhar District and in Bensagar near Majhgaon in Singhbhum. They were probably written in the Brahmi script (see Appendix II). One of the close associates of Bodra stated that the alphabet used in the inscriptions was similar to their alphabet but the words were different. According to Lakho Bodra a deonra (Ho magician and witch-doctor) named Turi invented the script of the Ho long ago. Turi is equated with Dhanwantari, a mythological Hindu medicine man. Then, owing to invasions and consequent migration of the Hos, the script was lost.

It was reported that sometime in 1957, Lakho Bodra and Susil Synku, Founder and President of the Executive Committee of the Adi Samaj respectively, met Monmohan Das, the then Deputy Education Minister, at Delhi, and discussed the script invented by Bodra. Bodra contested the 1957 elections to Parliament from Singhbhum on a congress ticket but was defeated by a Jharkhand candidate. He again fought the elections in 1962 as an independent candidate but lost. This was the end of his political career.

The foundations of the Adi Smaj were laid in 1954 when a committee consisting of seven members was formed during a meeting held in the Jhinkpani factory colony. Most of the members were followers of the Jharkhand party which had emerged as a major political force by that time. The members and followers of the Jharkhand Party became interested in the script invented by Bodra as the Ho had no script of their own. All members of the committee formed by Bodra were Hos and the President and the Secretary were workers of the Chaibasa Cement Works (CCW) in Jhinkpani. At that time there was no full-fledged organization of Bodra's followers and there was no fixed place of meeting. Meetings of the committee used to be held in someone's quarters in the factory township. The committee discussed the script and then rubber stamps were made for it. About twenty people from different villages around Jhinkpani were sent to Paseya where Bodra taught them the

script. More requests began to be received from villagers that they be taught the script. As a result, trained teachers were sent out to the villages. In the year 1956, a co-educational school was opened in the industrial village of Jorapokhar near the CCW, and about 500 Ho students coming from all over Singhbhum were enrolled. There were residential arrangements for students coming from distant places. Text books written in the new script were published at the Jorapokhar press. The blocks for the script were made in Calcutta. Besides the teachings of school subjects, which were imparted in the Ho language and with the aid of the new text books, the students used to get training in carpentry, blacksmithy, weaving, gardening, tailoring, embroidery, etc. Classes preaching Bodra's theology were also held. All the sixteen teachers of the school were Hos and worked voluntarily. They were followers of Bodra and were trained by him. The Headmaster, Sidheswar Birua, was the son of an ex-MLA. Three similar schools were opened thereafter at Jagannathpur, Majhgaon and Jamshedpur. The Jorapokhar school was closed in 1965 on account of some trouble and the Majhgaon and Jagannathpur schools also became defunct. It was reported that Bodra was not on good terms with the local MLA who advised the administration to take stern action against the organization. During the Ranchi riots of 1968 which had repercussions in Singhbhum, three members of the Adi Samaj were arrested from the Ashram located at Jorapokhar.

At present, the organization known as Adi Samaj of which Lakho Bodra is the founder and director, has ten commanding centres or *sasang matul* all over the District of Singhbhum including Jorapokhar. One of the centres is located in Keonjhar district of Orissa. These centres are located in following places :

- Jorapokhar, near Jhinkpani*
- Jamshedpur*
- Doigora, near Ghatsila*
- Lota, north of Chaibasa*
- Gundasai, near Monoharpur*
- Barananda, near Jagannathpur*
- Tuntukanta, near Majhgaon*

Tonto, near Bharbharia

Sukinda in Keonjhar, Orissa

Dengopusi, near Jagannathpur

Each centre is run by a local committee composed of elected members. Above the local committee there is an executive committee called Etet Utung Choara Akhra. I was told that around the Jorapokhar centre there are about 150 families distributed over about twenty villages and the factory township, who belong to the Dupup Huda or Adi Samaj of Lakho Bodra.

A member of the Adi Samaj is supposed to be governed by the rules and regulations of the Samaj. Lakho Bodra has written books (one of them published in Hindi named *Sakar Hora* or 'Path to Heaven' and *Bonga Hora* or 'Path to the Bonga') which explicate his entire theology besides laying down the rules and regulations which are to be followed by the members of the Samaj. *Sakar Hora* deals mainly with the creation of the universe and with festivals while *Bonga Hora* covers the rituals and describes why and how they are to be observed. There are *deuris* or priests who are trained according to the rules and regulations of the Samaj and they officiate during the rituals. The Samaj has one sacred symbol known as *Rul Ing Ong*. The symbol is printed in polychrome and almost all the members of the Samaj have a copy of the symbol properly framed and placed in a sacred spot of the house. Prayers and rituals are performed in front of the symbol and *kush* (a type of grass used in Hindu rituals) is part of the religious paraphernalia. One of the principal followers of Bodra said that Bodra's theology originated from the Bhakti cult along the lines of the Munis, Rishis or saints. The Samaj members organize an annual function when religious discourses and lectures on current topics, including politics, are arranged. During this function, cultural programmes, including mythological drama, are staged. The themes and characters of the drama are borrowed mainly from Hindu mythology but often the Hindu names are equated with the names of their traditional deities.

The religious discourses of Lakho Bodra and the rules of conduct prescribed for members of the Samaj are impregnated

with Hindu beliefs and practices, but which have been reinterpreted according to traditional Ho culture. The Samaj members observe all the indigenous Ho festivals but the rituals are performed by their own *deuri* on fixed dates. The names of a number of Hindu gods and goddesses appear in prayers and incantations, but in most cases they are conceptually equated with the Bongas of the Ho pantheon. For example, Brahma is equated with Desauli, Vishnu with Goa Bonga, Shiv with Kouí, and Parvati with Jahira Buri.

The story of the creation of man as told by Bodra is very interesting and shows how the gods and goddesses of the Hindu great tradition have been syncretized with local deities. According to Bodra, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar, created the Luku Bura out of the eggs of a crab. From the blood of Luku, a jelly fish was created. The jelly fish took the shape of a prawn first and then a woman named Luku Buri. It is from the union of Luku Bura and Luku Buri that mankind was created. The Adi Samaj members observe Sukhan Parav in the spring in memory of the union of Luku Bura and Luku Buri. On this occasion the *deuri* or priest should be a bachelor and diang or rice-beer is consumed by unmarried boys and girls only (drinking is otherwise prohibited).

The Samaj members condemn *raji khusi* or love marriages and payment of bride price or *gonong*. They encourage *Andi* marriage (i.e., with the parent's consent) and their own *deuri* performs the rituals including *hom* or oblation on the sacred fire, as is done in the case of Hindu marriages. The men put on sacred threads and married women apply vermilion on the parting of the hair and wear iron bangles emulating Hindu women. Bodra's followers told me that he was well acquainted with Hindu scriptures and mythologies like the *Veda*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and that he was also conversant with the teachings of the *Koran* and the *Bible*. The *Kol-Rule* (see Appendix I) or the manifesto of the Adi Samaj begins with a verse from the *Geeta*.¹

Most of the Samaj members are Ho but there are a few Munda and Santal followers also. Membership is not limited to the members or supporters of a single political party but Bodra's followers belong to all the influential political parties of the region. There are a number of important political

leaders of the region who are followers of Lakho Bodra. It appears that Lakho Bodra's movement is essentially a syncretistic cultural movement and its impact on the traditional Ho culture is still very limited. But due to its organized and formal nature, its presence and influence in certain regions—e.g., Jorapokhar and its neighbouring areas—are readily felt. The traditional Ho regard the movement with some sort of ambivalence. They do not like the Samaj's direct attack on some of their traditional institutions and at the same time they appreciate the efforts to unite the Ho under a common symbol of the script.

An analysis of the *Kol-Rule* or manifesto of the Adi Samaj shows that the movement is universalistic in its approach, religious in its orientation and reformistic in its programme. People pursuing all types of occupations and from all walks of life are acceptable in the Dupup Huda or Adi Samaj.

The manifesto categorizes people who are acceptable as 'all Vedic children and citizens of India would be accepted under Dupup Huda'. The 'fundamental principles' highlight the ascetic orientation of the Adi Samaj. The social reform programme of the Adi Samaj—which encompasses a number of social institutions like marriage, birth, death and recreation—attacks many social rules and customs currently in vogue. The Adi Samaj condemns, as mentioned earlier, *raji khusi* or love marriage, payment of bride price, animal or bird sacrifice, prolonged pollution period after child birth, indulgence in recreation, etc., which are considered as not being part of a 'civilized norm'. The Samaj has introduced new programmes like the staging of dramas, and the creation of educational committees and welfare sections. It has been stated that 'for cultural progress, the media of drama and music should be utilized properly'. Regarding education it has been said that 'a society which has not its own language, script, and tradition, or a society which has no written religious and social codes, is like an animal without horn and tail'. The welfare section includes a religious, cultural and social research division, a health centre, a cooperative section, a housing and printing section, an agriculture section, and a craft training section.

The Adi Samaj movement started by Lakho Bodra is a

revitalization movement which is defined by Wallace (1956) as: 'a deliberate, organised, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture'. The origin of this movement may be traced to a threat to the sustenance of a cultural system by a group of people in the context of cultural contact with a dominating group. This is often associated with the creation of an idealized myth propagated by a charismatic leader who soon attracts a number of followers around him. In due course the movement gets routinised and develops an elaborate organizational base. The revitalization movement has close resemblance to the revisionary type of movement which is organised for the 'improvement' or 'purification' of the culture or social order by eliminating 'evil' or 'low' customs, beliefs, or institutions (Mahapatra, 1968).

The setting up of mines and factories on a large scale in the District of Singhbhum after independence and the consequent involvement of the Ho in the new economic order necessitated adaptive changes in the traditional Ho culture. Their indulgence in unrestricted singing, dancing and drinking and their prolonged involvement in festivals like Maghe, were not in conformity with the minimum social requirements of industrial occupation. Even before the industrialization phase, the need for social reform had been felt owing to the expansion of their interactional base in terms of Hinduization, modernization and economic pursuits.

Around 1920 a Ho school teacher insisted that both sexes participate in the negotiations leading up to a marriage. He also warned against excessive drinking and dissipation (Majumdar, 1950:215). In this connection, he composed a song, which runs as follows:

No more engage in merriment by drum, dance and song,
Toss not your heads in the dancing *akhra*,
You are drinking leaf-cup after leaf-cup,
Drink no more out of big pots, but
Seek the road to your country's good.

Besides efforts by individuals from within the community, Government officials also tried from time to time to remove

some of their social 'evils' such as high bride-price (Majumdar, 1950:141). But all these efforts failed owing to the lack of a proper organizational base to support them. The Adi Samaj movement founded Lakho Bodra, which has limited impact on the Ho society at large, operates from a fairly organized platform. It originated at a place where the traditional norms and the compulsions of a new industrial order converged into a culture contact situation.

This perhaps generated 'a deliberate, organized conscious effort' to 'construct a more satisfying culture' and a movement for the 'improvement' or 'purification' of the culture by eliminating 'evil' or 'low' customs, beliefs or institutions. Lakho Bodra created a myth that the Ho had their own script invented by Turi, the mythological Ho magician and witch doctor, and cited the rock inscriptions found in different parts of the region in support of his view. Bodra stressed that the Ho had a rich cultural tradition which degenerated in course of time. Though a number of Hindu elements were incorporated in his socio-religious movement, these elements were always identified in terms of Ho culture and tradition. The objective of the Adi Samaj is to search for the hidden, lost and degenerated *Adi sanskriti*, to reconstruct it and bring it on par with civilized society and to set it as an ideal for the Indian nation (see *Kol-Rule* Appendix I).

The Adi Samaj movement is like the Lana Bhagat movement and many other social movements of a chiliastic or messianic kind which have occurred from time to time among the Mundas, the Oraons and the Santals. These movements, under Christian and Hindu inspiration, were primarily aimed at intensifying their ethnic unity through a reformed religion. But these movements became politically-oriented in their later phases (Mahapatra, 1972:404). The Adi Samaj movement has no apparent political objective. However, the association of many of its followers with the Jharkhand Party right from its formative phase has put a political stamp on the movement.

Appendix I

The Kol-Rule, or code of conduct for the Kols (printed in Hindi in the form of a pamphlet) which is followed by the Adi Samaj members, was adopted at the Eighth Annual Conference of the Samaj held on 8 November 1961. It is stated in the pamphlet that the Conference was attended by 124 men and 20 women from Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa, and Honourable Deputy Minister of Forests and Welfare, Shyam Charan Tubid was present as the chief guest. This Conference discussed religious, social, cultural and economic aspects and tried to find ways and means for removing the evils of society and to strengthen the unity of India.

EXCERPT FROM THE 'KOL-RULE'

1. *People/Categories Acceptable in Dupup Huda*

- i. Worshippers of nature
- ii. Herdsmen
- iii. Businessmen of oil (oil-pressers)
- iv. Weavers
- v. Basket-makers
- vi. Businessmen of iron (ironsmiths)
- vii. Workers in bell metal and copper
- viii. Searchers of gold and silver
- ix. People employed in clearing and removing dead bodies and rotten things
- x. Craftsmen
- xi. Utensil-makers
- xii. Barbers
- xiii. Washermen
- xiv. Teachers
- xv. Makers of sacred thread
- xvi. A sage living in the jungle
- xvii. A 'Yogi' in search of truth
- xviii. A person dealing with memorial stones
- xix. A ruler or king of the jungle
- xx. People living on jungle roots and tubers, fruits and animals
(*tuating and food-gathering people*)
- xxi. People having an occupation in water (fisherfolk, boatmen)
- xxii. Lovers of art, music and drama
- xxiii. People who work on skins

- xxiv. People who tend elephants and horses
- xxv. People who catch tigers, bears and snakes
- xxvi. Carpenters
- xxvii. An *upasak* or worshipper of Vedic rites (Mantra, Jantra, Tantra and Yog)
- xxviii. Devoted agriculturists, etc., all *Vedic* children and citizens of India would be accepted under *Dupup Huda*

2. *Fundamental Principles*

- i. Devotion to worship, search of knowledge, truth and pious life
- ii. Preach non-violence
- iii. Give up drinking
- iv. Give up smoking
- v. Renunciation of earthly pleasures and luxuries
- vi. Inclination towards asceticism

3. *Objective*

- i. To search for the hidden, lost and degenerated *Adi sanskriti* and to reconstruct and bring it on par with civilized society and to set it as an ideal for Indian nation.

4. *Marriage*

- i. Bachelorhood/maidenhood is against the law of nature
- ii. Dowry (bride price) system is an enemy of Vedic religion
- iii. Marriage with the consent of parents and relatives is the ideal form of union
- iv. Consent of the bride and bridegroom is essential in marriage
- v. Marriages permitted by tribal custom may take place
- vi. Under circumstances, of other forms marriage may be allowed
- vii. Under circumstances, remarriage of widows and widowers may be allowed.
- viii. In remarriage, the husband's younger brother, his lineage members, village members and then others may be preferred in sequence but the choice of heir of the property of the first husband should be determined by the social committee.
- ix. In a remarriage of a widower, seeking consent from his in-laws is in conformity with the civilized norm.
 - x. Determined by necessity and income, polygyny with the consent of wife may bring family peace
- x. Child-marriage is against the law of nature
- xii. Time, date, *tithi*, etc., of marriage should be ascertained with the help of astrologers
- xiii. Asking of help from relatives by the bride before marriage is improper

- xiv. The bride and bridegroom should not come out of the house for seven days before the date of marriage
- xv. After consultation with the astrologer regarding auspicious date and time, the functions of putting vermillion, wearing iron bangles and sacred thread and holding of palm of the bride by the bridegroom should take place with the blessings of the priest

5. *Inter-community Marriages*

- i. Under present circumstances, the marriage should be preferred within the *Adi Samaj*
- ii. Inter-community marriage is not only improper but will also bring disgrace to the nation
- iii. However, to preserve the glory of religion and culture, inter-community marriages may take place in special circumstances

6. *Birth*

- i. Three days after birth, the father becomes pure to do work
- ii. After the first rite, the bow and arrow can be kept
- iii. On the ninth day after birth and after falling and drying of the navel chord, the traditional custom may be observed and the mother can put on vermillion
- iv. On the twenty-first day after birth the traditional practices should be observed
- v. In the ceremony, *alta* and vermillion should be used
- vi. The Naming ceremony should be in accordance with *Adi sanskriti*
- vii. The birth ceremony should be observed with pomp and grandeur and purity
- viii. In accordance with time and circumstances, gifts may be given away

7. *Death Rites*

- i. It is uncivilized to make difference of status (difference of blood and colour) in this respect
- ii. Cremation should be in one place and the place should be located on the outskirts of the village
- iii. As in the Archaeological Survey's findings (in excavated burials), the objects of culture should be put with the dead body as a token of respect so that afterwards his culture may be identified
- iv. The dead body should be cleaned
- v. Too much expenditure may be avoided
- vi. For the peace of the departed soul, burial is better than cremation
- vii. The placing of the body should be in north-south direction
- viii. Calling back the soul to *ading* is good and the custom originates in spiritual knowledge

- ix. The memorial stone at the burial spot should be there for historical and administrative reasons
- x. For peace of the soul and rebirth, oil should be poured on the burial spot
- xi. The burial spot should be protected and looked after for historical reasons

8. *Other Rules*

- i. Cooperation and inter-change of visit are essential for unity
- ii. Destitutes and diseased persons should be looked after
- iii. During selection of mates, seven handfuls of sun-dried rice should be offered and the presence of three persons are essential

9. *Recreation*

- i. Drama and music for recreation should be synchronized with the object and occasion, like festivals, etc.
- ii. Songs with proper perspective and meaning can only be considered as a medium of recreation
- iii. Purposeless art and drama is against the norms of civilization
- iv. Drama and music should have some relevance to traditional textual context
- v. Misuse of recreational medium is punishable
- vi. Irresponsible recreation like dancing without the permission of the committee should be stopped
- vii. The purity of a society can be measured by the inclination and attitude reflected in its drama and music
- viii. In a civilized way of dancing, men will hold hands with men and women with women
- ix. During dancing, embracing of men and women and frivolous action is against civilized norms
- x. Time for recreation (dancing) should be limited to the period between the rise of *Mangal* or Mars and the rise of *Sukra* or Venus

10. *Drama*

- i. For cultural progress, the media of drama and music should be utilized properly and these functions should be organized at various places
- ii. Financial help and donations are essential for the perpetuation of a dramatic movement

11. *Educational Committee*

A person who forgets his own culture and tradition is a lost person. If

is said that a society which does not have its own language, script and tradition, or a society which has no written religious and social codes, is like:

- (a) an animal without horn and tail
- (b) a beautiful beggar asking for alms from house to house
- (c) a short-sighted frog which visualizes the universe with the limited perspective of his own environment.

So, now in the Indian democratic framework, every individual should increase his knowledge, search for his own language, script, culture and tradition, religion, society and wealth. To achieve this, educational committees should be formed, *Etet Tutung Akhra*. The outline of the educational activities should be in conformity with the Government syllabus.

12. Welfare Section

For upliftment of the depressed and degenerated Adi Samaj the following sections have also been established:

- i. Religious, cultural and social research division
- ii. Health centre
- iii. Cooperative section
- iv. Housing and printing section
- v. Agriculture section
- vi. Women's welfare centre : (a) Spinning thread; (b) embroidery; (c) weaving; (d) knitting; (e) stitching; (f) nursing; (g) paddy husking.
- vii. Trade and commerce

Appendix II

A NOTE ON LAKHO BODRA'S SCRIPT*

The script introduced by Lakho Bodra consists of 31 letters. Each letter has a 'capital' or 'large' as well as a 'small' form. Most of the 'small' forms are really smaller varieties of the letters concerned. This practice of using capital and small forms of letters betrays the influence of Western scripts.

*Prof. Bratindra Nath Mukherjee, Carmichael Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta, was kind enough to prepare this note on the basis of the script forms collected by the author.

It is interesting to note that the forms of some of the letters may be compared with those of several letters used in the Brahmi script in different ages. Thus, the forms 'L' and 'Z' which are used in Bodra's script to convey the sound of the vowel letters 'U' and 'O' respectively, were utilized for the same purpose in the Brahmi inscriptions of the centuries immediately before and after the beginning of the Christian era. The shape of the letter 'e' (V) can be favourably compared with the forms of the same letter appearing in Brahmi records from the days of Asoka to about the period when the Proto-Bengali script became popular in Eastern India. Forms similar to the shape of the letter, pronounced as, *ra*, according to Bodra, appears in Brahmi records from about the fourth century to about the 6th-7th century AD. Again, forms similar to the shape of the letter conveying the sound *sa* can be noticed as standing for the letter *sa* (dental *sa*) in Brahmi records from about the 3rd century BC to about the 3rd century AD. Moreover, the form of the letter *pa* in Bodra's script has striking affinity to the shape of the letter *pa* in many Brahmi inscriptions ranging from the 1st century AD to about the 9th-10th century AD. On the other hand, forms pronounced (according to Bodra) as *na*, and *ta* respectively, are similar to the forms of the letters *chha*, and *tha* respectively in many early records.

It appears that some of the letters of Bodra's script have been adopted from the forms of those letters appearing in the Brahmi script of about the first millennium AD. But the forms of some of the letters taken from these records have been used for writing letters not originally meant by them. The forms of most of the other letters have no parallel in the early records of Eastern India.

We may infer that either Bodra or his informant has some knowledge of the forms of the Brahmi script. Some of them have been used and others distorted in the script in question. Many new forms have been added. Correct or distorted, various old forms of letters have probably been used to give the script an archaic appearance. But the practice of using 'capital' and 'small' varieties of letters, which is not known to have been well-known in Eastern India (where Bodra's script is in use) before the introduction of the Roman

script in that region, indicates that the alphabet in question originated in the modern period.

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THE MAHATO-KURMI MAHASABHA MOVEMENT IN CHOTANAGPUR

K.S. Singh and P.P. Mahato

THE MAHATOS' homeland consists of parts of Chotanagpur and the adjoining regions of West Bengal and Orissa; its core comprises the erstwhile Manbhum District. A well-defined territory bounded by the three rivers, Damodar, Kangswabati and Subarnarekha, it is a part of the lower Jharkhand, where the Mahatos have co-existed with tribal communities. Ethnographical accounts of the Mahatos have differed in the description of their origins and migration, but they agree on the close relationship which has existed between the Mahatos and the tribals; and they have described the processes which have led to the emergence of the Mahatos as a sturdy peasantry. Influenced by waves of Hinduism from the plains of Bengal, they spread popular Hindu beliefs and customs in many parts of Chotanagpur. The folk traditions speak of conflicts between the Kolarian tribes and the Mahatos, as the latter spread in the Panch Parganas and supplanted the Bhumij in a part of Manbhum District.

The Mahatos are divided into fourteen exogamous totemic clans, unlike the Kurmis in other parts of Bihar who have divisions named after territories. Parts of village settlements (*bakhol*) are organized around lineages. Every *bakhol* has a common platform known as *tong* or *akkara* (*akhardi*). The lineage settlements combined to form a *kuli* (hamlet). A cluster of villages formed the *pargana*.

As the Mahatos emerged as a 'tribal' peasant caste, they

formed the link with the endogenous state formation, and were recognized as intermediaries (*pattadar*). Gradually, they gained an advantage over local tribal communities such as the Bhumij by making use of their superior agricultural technology.

The hard working, crafty and thrifty Mahato and the relatively easy-going, poorly-skilled, spendthrift and pleasure oriented Bhumij. The contrast, however, should not be overdrawn. The Bhumij goes through the same cycle of arduous technological operations in rice cultivation as the Mahato, and negligence in agricultural work is looked down upon among them also. They differ from the Mahato mainly in their general disinclination to curtail the consumption of the year's agricultural produce for the sake of further investment in landed property. The Mahato although does rise to be the paddy lender, he does not rise to such an eminence in the trade as the Beney, Utakal Steni Brahman or the Sunri. The Mahato does not feel comfortable about entrusting others to till his land. His economic ambition tends to limit itself to the level of substantial cultivator. (Sinha, 1974).

The Mahato social system showed a two-fold stratification. The first consisted of the *buntadis*, namely, those who were the founders of the village and who enjoyed a measure of prosperity and possessed the seven symbols of higher status. Those were (a) *bundh* (irrigation sources), (b) *bagan* (garden), (c) *berh* (enclosure), (d) *bahal* (cultivable land), (e) *banduk* (gun), (f) *bandar* (pair of bullocks), and (g) *ban* (granary). The second strata consisted of the ordinary Mahatos.

As the Mahatos controlled and exploited a major part of the natural resources with their enterprise and skill, there existed an economic base for the acceptance of the norms of the sanskritic culture. The features of the sanskritic influence were: role of the Brahmins in performing ceremonies; regulation of agricultural activities by the Hindu calendar; worship of Hindu Gods and observance of Hindu ceremonies; and, finally, putting forward claims to Kshatriya status.

This provides a background to the processes of social

mobility which were set afoot as long back as 1894, resulting in the de-scheduling of the Mahatos as a tribe in the 1931 Census.

There were a number of exogenous and endogenous forces making the social situation dynamic. Among the first category of forces we can mention the partition of Bengal and the rise of the Muslim League which made the labelling of many communities as Hindus necessary. This does not imply that they were not Hindus. What this meant was that the label of enforced identity was asserted more vigorously. The separation of Bihar from Bengal in 1912 and the Bengal-Bihar controversy over disputed regions politicized the situation. The Kurmis, being a dominant community in the region, emerged as an important factor in politics. The freedom movement was another factor. In 1930, a number of Kurmis were killed and many arrested during the Non-cooperation Movement. All these developments sharpened the political consciousness of this community.

Among the endogenous factors, we have already mentioned the sanskritic influence on the upper strata of Mahato society. The claim to the status of Kshatriya was vigorously pressed from many platforms ranging from the *baisi* to the regional and provincial Mahasabhas.

A study of the politics of the Mahasabha reveals the various stages in the evolution of the identity of the Mahatos. During the first stage, the Mahatos were essentially a Chotanagpur community. At the second stage, the Mahatos of Chotanagpur and the Kurmis of Bihar discovered that they were kinsmen. The Bihar Kurmis were also a prosperous cultivating caste. Buchanan Hamilton reports that the Kurmis appear to be an aboriginal Hindu nation who were not of sufficient consequence to be admitted into the order of Kshatriyas, but, at the same time, they were too powerful to be treated merely as the dregs of impurity. They were considered to be the autochthones of the Magadh region. Some of them performed the functions of priests on social occasions in the houses of later immigrants. *Kurmi bhat* was a traditional offering made by the latter in honour of the Kurmis' role as priests. However, it appears that the Bihar Kurmis ascended the social ladder more quickly. The All

India Kurmis Kshatriya Mahasabha (AIKK), set up in 1894, held 18 Conferences till 1930, and sought to promote all India brotherhood among the Kurmis with different surnames living in various parts of the country. A Hindi Magazine, *Kurmi-Kshatriya Diwakar* was published from Banaras. The Kurmis were encouraged to wear the sacred thread and claim the status of the Kshatriya. The Muzzaffarpur Session of the AIKK (1924), attended by the Mahato delegates from Chotanagpur noted in a resolution that Chotanagpuria and other Kurmis were alike. The delegates were offered sacred threads. By 1930, the Kurmis of Bihar and the Mahatos of Chotanagpur found a common ground, and the term Kurmi-Kshatriya was applied to the latter. It should be noted that a spate of literature appeared during this period which established their claim to the status of Kshatriyas. This literature was inspired by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj and were also written by local Mahato leaders.

At the third stage, the Mahato-Kurmis sought a pan-Indian identity by discovering and establishing kinship with the Kunbis of Maharashtra, the Patels of Gujarat and the Kurmis of U.P. among others. The Maratha leader Sivaji and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel became new culture heroes. The annual Mahasabhas and the regional Sabhas strengthened the Kurmi-Mahato solidarity. The main trends of Mahasabha politics were brilliantly described in the 1931 Census Report.

Whatever the motives may be, there has certainly been a great deal of agitation in this behalf during the last decade. In the year 1923 caste sabhas were held in more than one centre of Manbhum district and various resolutions were passed. It was decreed that Kurmis should no longer eat chickens or drink wine; Kurmi women should not work as casual labourers for persons belonging to other castes; they (the women) should wear a second garment and should not go to the bazar by themselves but should always be accompanied by menfolk of their own caste; when a Kurmi died, his sradh ceremony should take place on the twelfth day after death,

as with the Kshatriyas of Bengal, instead of on the tenth day as heretofore. The 17th session of the 'all India' Kurmi-Kshatriya conference was held at Muzaffarpur in the year 1929, and three delegates from Manbhum were present as representatives of the Chotanagpur Kurmis.

There it was settled that there is no difference between the Kurmis of Chotanagpur and the Kurmis of Bihar proper. The three delegates returned home from the conference after taking the sacred thread. This was followed in the same year by another large sabha at Ghagarjuri in Manbhum, which was attended by a representative of the Kurmis of the United Provinces, and on this occasion it was settled that the Kurmis of Chotanagpur and Kurmis of U.P. and Bihar are akin to each other and there will be inter-dining and inter-marriages among the said Kurmis; also that the Kurmis of Chotanagpur would join closely with the all-India Kurmi Kshatriya Association and will be guided by the directions of it. At this gathering it was explained that the Kurmis are Kshatriyas and they have right to wear sacred thread, and some fifty Kurmis wore the sacred thread in the conference with the help of genuine Brahman priests. (Lacey, 1931)

As a result of the demand made by the Mahasabhas, the Mahatos were de-scheduled as a tribe and became a caste in 1931. They gave up the benefit of special and major protection from the Revenue Laws of Chotanagpur, as bewailed by British officers, in favour of the 'honour and glory' which accrued to them in their new status (Census of India, 1931, Vol. VII). However, the Mahatos continued to claim where it suited certain individuals that they were governed by tribal laws in matters of property and inheritance. "It was held that the aboriginals in Chotanagpur denote a race and not a religion." In all such cases the high courts however concluded that though the Mahatos claimed originally to be aboriginals, they had become Hinduised and were thus governed by the Hindu laws (P.C. Raychoudhary, 1963).

It should be noted that the Mahatos' claim to be Kshatriya was not accepted by the regional castes. For

example, the Sarikella chief went by the verdict of the committee set up by him to inquire into the claims of the Kurmis in 1930. The committee held that Kurmis were *Jatehal*, that is, the community whose water was accepted, but they were not Kshatriyas.

Two trends can be observed during the period 1931-1969. First, the Mahato-Kurmi got divided into three major groups over the Bengal-Bihar controversy. The first group was in favour of remaining in Bihar and described *Karmali* as a Bihari dialect. The second group favoured Bengal. Meetings or *Paisi* attended by Bengal leaders adopted resolutions describing the Kurmi-Mahatos as Bengali-speaking Hindus.

An interesting twist to the Bihari-Bengali controversy over language was given by the manipulation of the *Tusu* festival and its folklores. Celebrated over the Panchpargana region, *Tusu* is essentially a Mahato festival, observed by unmarried girls to honour the memory of a legendary girl who epitomised the virtue of devotion to her parents and attachment to her husband on whose death she sacrificed her life and became a *Sati*. In 1954, many songs were composed in *Karmali*, the language of the Mahatos with a political bias, condemning the Bihar government and Hindi language. A *Tusu* Satyagraha was launched by the Lok Sevak Sangh, a local party which was agitating for the merger of Manbhum with West Bengal. Processions were taken out and there was much singing of the new *Tusu* songs with beating of drums.

The third group supported the Jharkhand movement. Two MLAs from this community were sponsored by the Jharkhand Party.

Following the reorganization of the Indian States, the Kurmi homeland was divided between Bihar and West Bengal. In spite of the fragmentation of the political base, the social solidarity movement continued to grow, and the Kurmis played a notable role in the backward classes movement which emerged as a powerful force in Bihar after 1949.

The last phase of the movement (1969 to 1975) shows the convergence of the forces of political extremism, cultural revivalism and agrarian radicalism (Singh, 1970). As mentioned in other reports on the Jharkhand Party, the decline

and fragmentation of the Party created a vacuum in Chotanagpur politics. This was sought to be filled by forces representing the extreme left which set up new organizations and influenced many others. Secondly, the backward classes made common cause with the tribals to demand a Jharkhand state. It is interesting to observe that this combination promoted the demand for Jharkhand states in those areas which had not been among the strongholds of the Jharkhand Party. Agrarian factors also came to the forefront as the incidence of land alienation and indebtedness among tribal communities went up.

These processes were reflected in the formation of the Sivaji Samaj by the Mahato-Kurmis of Chotanagpur in 1969. The objectives of this organization were to promote social reform among the community, upgrade its status, establish mutual contacts with the sub-castes within the community and employ constitutional means for achieving their objectives. Through its activities, the Samaj highlighted the backwardness of the Mahatos and sought to alleviate their conditions by forging a political alliance with the Santals.

The Mahatos and Santals have been traditional enemies; the former as a relatively well-to-do peasantry have exploited the latter. Their political alliance was not effected without opposition, doubt and fear as voiced by various sections of the two communities. Nevertheless, the leaders were able to bring the two together. The Mahatos thought that by placing the Santals in the forefront, they would be able to protect their interests. A result of this alliance was the formation of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (1973) with the objective of forming a separate Jharkhand state, ending the exploitation of tribals by non-tribals, and securing preferential treatment for the sons of the soil in the matter of employment. The Sivaji Samaj merged with the new organization.

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (1973) combined in its operations elements of agrarian radicalism and cultural revivalism. The Morcha launched an operation to recover alienated land from the money-lenders and big peasants in North Chotanagpur. There have been 120 violent incidents including looting and forcible harvesting of crops standing on lands in the illegal possession of money-lenders, attacks on exploiters, arson,

and murder. The largest number of incidents (69) occurred in 1974. Since then the number of incidents has declined sharply. The Morcha came out in support of the Prime Minister's 20-point programme.

The honeymoon between the Santals and Mahatos came to an end in 1976. The inherent contradictions in the alliance and the traditional animosity between the two communities came to the surface. The Santals joined hand with the Congress Party during the mid-1970s and the Mahatos have been left to fend for themselves. But the social organization is still active. The Mahatos are re-discovering their identity as the autochthones of Chotanagpur and have begun to emphasize their separateness from the Bihar Kurmis. Accounts are being written of their close relationship with tribal communities and they are now claiming the status of a tribe.

The Kurmis, with their base at Manbhum, lived along with other tribes with social equality. The fact is amply proved by some local Kathas, e.g.: (i) Kol Kurmi Masiat bhai; (ii) sharing of cooked food with Santals; (iii) common worship with the Adivasi 'Sama' Puja. . . .

Another remarkable thing is that the Kurmis of Chotanagpur have no sub-division, no sub-caste or even no sub-groups. This singleness of the unity of the community totally differentiates it from the Kurmis of Bihar who are divided into sub-castes, e.g., the Awadhia, Ghamaila, Kochaisa, Dhanuk, Joshwar, Sindriya, etc. This lack of division singularly confirms that the Kurmis of Chotanagpur have migrated somewhere from central part of India, where they have their original kinsmen, Kurbis. It is to be noted that for a Chotanagpuri Santal, the 'Kurmi' is not a 'Kurmi' but he is a 'Kurbi'

The totemistic organization of the Kurmis further indicate that Kurmis of Chotanagpur are distinct and different from the Kurmis of North Bihar who have titular gotras.

Like other tribes a Brahmin, the head of the Hindu society, is an untouchable for a Kurmi. A Kurmi, traditionally, cannot touch the food touched by a Brahmin. Such is the case traditionally with the Santals and other tribes. [*Souvenir*]

The meeting of the Chotanagpur Kurmi-Mahasabha at Ramgarh (May 1975) demanded inclusion of all backward classes in the tribal list.

This appraisal of the dynamics of the Mahato-Kurmi Mahasabha movement shows the political processes involved in the transformation of a tribe into a caste, the evolution of the identity of a local community to an all-India status, and the present-day considerations which seek a reversion to the pre-sanskritic status.

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THE EXTREMIST MOVEMENT

AN APPRAISAL OF THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ITS REPERCUSSION AMONG TRIBES

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Introduction

BY EXTREMIST movement we broadly mean a deliberate endeavour on the part of the participants who hold extreme views in relation to the existing or accepted ones and resort to extreme measures to secure a desired goal. Of all such recent movements, the Naxalite movement would appear to be the most important. This movement was termed Naxalite as a derivative of 'Naxalbari'—an area comprising about sixty villages in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal. It was in this area towards the first week of March 1967 that an agitation occurred, and subsequently took the shape of an extreme political movement which, strangely enough, shook the administrative machinery of India to the foundations.

Geography of the Movement

The Naxalite movement had a life span of roughly five years (1967 to 1972). It was spatially sporadic and limited to small areas. Starting in the rural areas of Naxalbari, the movement spread out to only a few other areas of East and South India; though it also had an impact in some metropolitan, urban and sub-urban areas. Almost all the areas, interestingly enough, exhibit certain salient features which are of importance for any political movement. They were mostly hilly and

forest-clad areas inhabited by a large number of tribals and were situated either on the state borders or on the international boundaries of India. For instance the Naxalbari sub-division of Darjeeling District, West Bengal, where the movement began, is bordered on the west by Nepal, on the east by Pakistan, and, to the north, about 30 to 50 miles from Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan. This area is located at precisely that point where the narrowest of corridors, 13 to 14 miles wide, connects the main portions of India with the Northeastern states and territories (Assam, NEFA, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura). The total population of the area is 42,000, the majority of whom are tribals like Santals, Oraons and Mundas.

Srikakulam, another important centre of the Naxalite movement, is situated in the northern-western part of Andhra Pradesh. It is bounded on the north and west by the Koraput and Ganjam districts of Orissa, on the east by the Bay of Bengal and on the south by Visakhapatnam District. The District may be divided into two natural zones—the hilly region called the Agency area in the north-west and the plains which are mosly sandy on account of their proximity to the sea. The areas where the uprising broke primarily within the Agency area, and inhabited by hill tribes like Jatapu (62,686), Savara (67,637), Konda Dhoras (32,221) and so on.

Although Naxalbari in West Bengal and Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh were the two major strongholds of Naxalite operations, they never operated as controlling centres for Naxalite activities in different parts of India—such as the Debra-Gopiballavpore areas of Midnapore, West Bengal; Mushahari in Bihar; and Lakhimpur-Kheri in Uttar Pradesh.

Approach

At the very outset we point out that ours is a post-mortem analysis of the Naxalite movement based on secondary source materials. In other words, it is a review paper. One feature that we should mention is that the movement does not belong to the remote past.

The Naxalite movement was very active for a period of about five years. It started as a mere spark and then flared

up into a big flame in no time making the whole country suddenly conscious of its presence. While during the first half of this brief period the movement had a great momentum in terms of its activities and in terms of opening up new areas of operations, the latter half seems to be a period of its slow sinking into relative obscurity.

There has been a voluminous outpouring of books, pamphlets and articles, numbering approximately three hundred, on the Naxalite movement mainly written by non-participants, such as, news-reporters, journalists and political commentators. Most of these writings are merely in the form of reports. Among the few analytical studies, two distinct trends can be discerned: (a) those which emphasize the differences between a larger section and a smaller section of the CPI (M) cadres on some methodological or tactical issues; and (b) those that attempt to draw ideological parallels between Naxalism in India and Maoism in China. Besides these there are reports by participants, followers and sympathizers of Naxalism. These reports—like those which appeared in *Liberation*, *Deshabroti* and *Peoples' Daily*—are very vocal about the genuine participation of the Indian tribals and peasants (by 'peasant' they often mean tribals as well) in this movement. The Naxalites, we learn, claim to have been successful in influencing and mobilizing a great mass of marginal farmers and agricultural labourers belonging to tribal communities against the big landlords and, later on, against the local administration in their respective areas of operations. From our long association with tribal and peasant studies in India, we are tempted to react to these observations. The claims to have mobilized the bulk of the tribals and peasants against the landlords does not conform at all to our findings from various studies, especially of the tribal worldview and their notions of identity and solidarity. As the title of this paper suggests, our primary purpose is to probe into the nature of tribal participation in the movement. In this regard the following questions may be raised for discussion:

1. Who were the Naxalite leaders? What were their strategy and ideology? What communication did they

have with tribals and what was the tribal reaction to such attempts at establishing communication?

2. What was the nature of the tribal response to these leaders, their strategy and their ideology?
3. What is the actual meaning of 'tribal mass participation' in the movement?

Apart from dealing with these specific issues, we would like to include a few general queries such as why and how the movement subsided and whether this subsidence is only an appearance. For our convenience, however, we shall not discuss these points, in the order they have been presented above.

Emergence of the Movement

Based on what we have heard and know of, we can identify three mental phases among the bulk of the middle class intelligentsia, especially in North and South-East India:

1. Before the onset of the movement, a phase of 'despair', i.e., a phase of unfulfilment of the results expected from the then socialistic democracy prevailing in the national polity;
2. Impetuous beginning of the movement and an air of relief in anticipation of a 'world of hope'; and
3. 'A phase of disillusion' because of shifting of strategy by the Naxalites, followed by its subsidence.

The first phase made it possible for the movement to emerge without much prior preparation and enabled it to gain rapid momentum thereafter.

The tribals and peasants whom the Naxalite movement stirred up, had not been passing through the above mental phases. In the case of the Indian tribals who participated in the movement, there was a mere state of discontent in relation to their immediate material world, and they had no or very little consciousness of the conditions prevalent in the national polity. To be precise, the tribals in all areas of Naxalite operations had been exposed to the social, economic and

political forces generated by the larger society, but they had no clear awareness of the exact causes of those forces. They had numerous diurnal and mundane points of contact with the wider world which led them to form a very poor opinion of it. However, this dissatisfaction operated at a merely personal level and confined itself within a limited frame of cognizance. In order to give vent to their dissent against the aliens, these tribals (as a case of illustration and reference the Girijans of Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, may be considered) initially, felt few apprehensions about being drawn into the movement; but it is our firm conviction that they could never be made to, or, more appropriately, it has never been possible to make them, comprehend the Marxist-Leninist ideology of class struggle mainly in terms of the national, or rather international interests of the oppressed class ignoring their immediate economic and limited demands.

Tribals and Leadership

Tribal participation in the leadership structure of the Naxalite movement was very marginal and segmental. Jangal Santal from the Naxalbari area of Darjeeling District, North Bengal, and Gunadhar Murmu from the Gopiballavpur area, Midnapore district, West Bengal, both Santals, are the only two tribal leaders known to us. Although, apart from the Santals, the other tribal communities like the Munda, the Oraon, the Lodha, the Savara, the Girijan and the Jatapu were living in areas of Naxalite operations, none of them produced any Naxalite leader worth the name.

The two leaders mentioned above had been, as we know, associated for a long time with the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Jangal even contested the general election of 1967 from the Naxalbari constituency as a CPI(M) candidate, though he was not successful. The association of these two tribal leaders, first with the CPI (M) and later with the Naxalites, could never be conceived by the tribal Santals. In general, these tribals treat their non-tribal neighbours with suspicion, and consider them to be surreptitious and subversive Dekos. Although we know neither the nature of the influence of these two leaders on their community, nor of

their communication with their fellow folk, we have reservations on the score that they wielded any great influence or fostered free flow of communication between the leaders and the participant members from their community in the movement. The reason that these two persons were recognised as leaders in the movement, was mainly because they were already, workers of the extreme leftist parties, not because of any work that they did within their community. As the movement was not a tribal one, the fact that any of its leaders belonged to a tribal community did not, in any way, indicate that he had the mass support of his community.

There has been no report of tribals employing their system of intra-tribal communication; for example, the Santal practice of sending branches of the Sal (*Sorea robusta*) trees with leaves on them to indicate the exact date of their gathering together. Further, the use of these means would have made the Santals who had settled in widely scattered areas of East India, aware of the movement which had stirred their brethren in North Bengal. There is no evidence for this either.

Non-Tribal Leadership and Tribals

The non-tribals who dominated the Naxalite Movement and directed its activities, had, like the the earlier mentioned tribal leaders, close associations with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) since its inception in 1964. Some of them (Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal to mention a few) even had associations with the undivided Communist Party of India. Before launching the movement some of them had been working among different sections of the Indian population in various parts of the country as ordinary workers of the party. With their political experience of Indian field situations, they showed occasional disagreement with the political ideology—especially the planning and direction of the Party and its campaigns—and had been cherishing a kind of discontent against the central leaders of the CPI (M). No sooner had the Naxalite movement started than these ex-CPI (M) working cadres were found to hold pivotal positions in the leadership. A few of the expelled members of the CPI(M)—

namely, Kunikal Narayanam in Kerala and Nanjal Selvin of Tamil Nadu—immediately joined the movement. Some high level CPI(M) leaders—such as K.P.R. Gopalan of Kerala, then a member of the State legislature, and Shiv Kumar Misra, a state level secretary of the CPI(M) in Uttar Pradesh—resigned from the Party and took over the leadership of the Naxalite movement in their respective areas. Some of the leaders developed 'intimate relations' with the tribals of those areas where they had worked as CPI(M) members—Kanu Sanyal, a Bengali Brahmin immigrant from the plains, is worth naming. He was famous, along with Jangal Santal, a local tribal of the Naxalbari areas of North Bengal, for giving a lead to the movement in that area among the labour-class who comprised seventy-five per cent of the tribal population. Unlike most others he had an advantage by being conversant with the local tribal dialect. Vempatan Satyanarayana, another important Naxalite, was a teacher who had knowledge of the tribal dialect of the plains and was very popular among the Jatapu and Savara in the hills of Srikakulam, A.P. Subhara Panigrahi, an established writer of Andhra, was also active in the area. He originally hailed from Orissa and was responsible for spreading the movement among the hill tribes of Koraput District of Orissa.

The Naxalite leadership developed partially as a result of dissatisfaction and discontent with some of the policies of the CPI(M) and partially because they wanted to establish an alliance with the International Communist Party of China. The movement lacked any coherent organisation or centralised authority. Though Kanu Sanyal was the Chairman of the Party and Charu Mazumdar the political ideologue, they could not create an image for themselves as a central authority. Soon after the formation of the party differences arose among the leaders in various parts of India, which subsequently developed into 'group politics'.

The tribals in the Naxalbari and the Srikakulam areas were primarily swidden-cultivators. A section of them worked in the tea gardens. All these tribals faced precarious economic conditions when the administration prohibited them from carrying out cultivation on hill slopes and in forest areas. The Naxalite leaders lumped up all these tribals

together with the non-tribal cultivators and labelled them as 'peasantry'. Existing anthropological literature as well as our own study of the tribal and non-tribal cultivators of rural India reveal that tribals and non-tribals may form a local community, cooperating in day-to-day essential matters within the broad framework of an agrarian economic structure. However, the tribals perpetuate their cultural autonomy and ethnic identity and respond differentially to any innovation or exogenous call. It is true, though, the tribals initially reacted fairly positively when the Naxalite leaders held demonstrations and sent deputations, given their discontent against the local administration.

The traditional socio-political system of the tribals in India may be characterized as having a non-centralized, clan-lineage based segmentary system and a strong sense of 'moral community'. In most of the cases, the secular and religious leadership is combined and remains in the hands of one man. The rise of 'charismatic personalities' among the tribals who lead various solidarity movement in the past, might have been possible due to the continuity of the traditional theme although it is often explained as an influence of Christianity.

Some of the tribals were aware of the constitutional privileges provided for them, and others of the Government officials in their proximity. By virtue of their encounters with these Government officials, they also formed a 'bad view of life'. A deep probe into the worldview of these people would reveal that the tribals—though they usually lump all non-tribals as under the term *Deko* or alien—can specifically identify many 'stereotypes'. The Naxalite leaders and workers were initially treated by the tribals as 'agents' for obtaining their due privileges from the Government, and were not considered as part of their 'moral community'. The leaders also approached these people with this explicit offer. However, this was mere strategy as the Naxalites had a political ideology where there was no scope for special privileges for the tribals, and subsequently waged an armed political struggle. The tribals would very soon found themselves nowhere in the picture while the Naxalites found it convenient to seek tribal support as they could provide suitable ideout.

Conclusion

The extremist movement which took place during the period 1967-72 cannot be called a tribal movement. It was, in the main, a politically motivated movement initiated and led by a few politically motivated non-tribal individuals swayed by ideological considerations. As a start they stirred up the discontent of the tribals, took out occasional processions with them and held demonstrations. The tribal participation was, however, marginal. The two tribal leaders, by virtue of their having had a long association with the external Party organisation, were already lost to their respective ethnic groups, as 'new elites'. That is why, when with the initiation of the movement, Kanu Sanyal and other non-tribal leaders tried to utilize the tribal (Santal) identity of Jangal Santal, it made no real impact on the community as such, and subsequently there was no genuine mass participation by the tribals with a sense of solidarity.

RAGHUNATH MURMU'S MOVEMENT FOR SANTAL SOLIDARITY

Sitakant Mahapatra

Guru Gombke and Culture-Hero

THIS PAPER examines the contributions that Raghunath Murmu made to the strengthening of Santali and Mundari solidarity by re-defining and reinterpreting what constitutes the basis of Santali heritage and culture. His precise contribution to the cause of Santali solidarity is yet to be discussed in detail with reference to his literary and cultural works and other organizational activities. There are various reasons for this. Murmu is not a very articulate person, let alone being a charismatic person. He certainly does not fit the description of a rebellious prophet, nor that of an inspired activist leader. He is not like Birsa Munda nor has, he inspired the Santal community to launch any large-scale direct political movement to assert their individuality in political or ideological terms. Yet his activities and writings are possibly the greatest single unifying force for the Santal community and have helped it to develop a sense of identity. From the beginning of the forties, when he discovered the Ol Script (1941) and wrote some of his earliest plays, till today (he laid the foundation-stone of a Santali University at Betakundridahi, 3 kilometres from Jhargram in West Bengal on 21 February 1977) he has been the most potent spiritual leader and symbol of the socio-cultural unity of the Santals. The Mayurbhan Adivasi Mahasabha honoured him with the title

of Guru Gomkey (the greatest preceptor) for his great service to the community. The Dhumkuria in Ranchi conferred the degree of D. Litt. on him in appreciation of his great contribution to Adivasi literature. Julius Tigga called him a 'great inventor and dramatist' and the tribal leader Jaipal Singh called him 'an anthropologist and a Pandit'. Charulal Mukherjee described him as 'the priest' of the tribes (the Santals). Prof. Martin Oraons in his work *The Santals—A Tribe in Search of the Great Tradition* admired his OI Script and called him the spiritual guru of the Santals.

Yet Raghunath Murmu is a very shy and withdrawn person, quiet and unassuming in his approach. He speaks slowly and haltingly, almost meditatively, perhaps thinking as he speaks. He is the very opposite of a demagogue. I have had the opportunity of meeting him personally several times since 1970 and also listening to his public speeches. He speaks with feeling, with conviction and a sense of deep commitment to what he considers the great heritage of Santali culture and traditions. Sometimes, in personal interviews, one can notice a tinge of frustration and growing pessimism that the Santals, more particularly its educated intelligentsia (the elite), are not doing enough for their culture and 'seem to be more concerned with the privileges of position, status and authority.'

In short, he is a very remarkable leader and is easily the most important spiritual and culture leader that the Santal community has thrown up. He has fashioned a script, and has written a number of plays to give concrete shape to his idea of Santali social ethics and worldview. He has written textbooks for educating teachers and students in the OI script up to primary level and has sought to give a new sense of identity and solidarity to the tribe by reinterpreting its religion.

For well over three decades he has been a major force in Santali society, culture and politics. Ideologically and organizationally, he has always remained in the background; influencing, guiding, directing rather than actively pursuing the objectives of identity and solidarity. After the Santal 'rebellion' of 1917 in Mayurbhanj when they revolted against the British attempt to recruit a labour corps from among

them to serve in Mesopotamia and France during the first World War, there was hardly any stirring—either ideological, political or social—for nearly three decades. The merger of the erstwhile State Mayurbhanj with Orissa in 1949 was the first occasion after 1917 when there were some rumblings. However, the Jharkhand movement for separate political territorial identity has been the only other major development since then. It may be mentioned here that the rulers of Mayurbhanj were, by and large, enlightened people who realized that the strength of the kingdom lay in the harmonious relationship between the non-tribals and the tribals. They were integrationists and in their own way encouraged mutual participation in social activities, festivals and rituals. In the *Rath jatra* of Lord Jagannath of Baripada, during Sivaratri, Dussera, Makar Sankranti and other festivals there was a fair amount of give and take encouraged by the authorities. A basis for mutual understanding had been created by the rulers through years of adopting a liberal approach and this perhaps explains why in 1917 and again in 1949 when militancy rose to the surface, it remained somewhat limited, never developed into a conflagration and was also fairly short-lived. Even the appeal for a separate political state did not generate much mass support. The failure of the Jharkhand movement, its rapid degeneration into splinter groups and factions and the inability to enthuse the masses are both the cause and effect of the greater impact of socio-cultural forces and influences and the comparative irrelevance of politics and ideology. Raghunath Murmu's work needs to be viewed in this general perspective. While it is true that militant activists and political ideologues and workers make use of his name and ideas, his impact has been basically on the socio-cultural and religious fronts. He has sought to provide the Santals with a systematized approach to social ethics as also a world-view.

The Historic Backdrop in Mayurbhanj: Politics and Culture

It is perhaps necessary to briefly recount the events relating to the Santal movement for solidarity, unity and identity starting from 1949 and up to today to provide evidence of the

influence of Murmu's teachings in crystallizing, moderating and providing a focus to the movement. The sequence of events will also show how he not only gave it an intellectual, emotional and religious context and relevance, but also helped to lift it from a negative and sometimes ineffective, wasteful and irrelevant political dogmatism to an awareness of the deeper underlying socio-cultural roots.

At the time of the merger of Mayurbhanj State with the State of Orissa in the year 1949, a large section of Adivasis, particularly the Santals, under the leadership of Sonaram Soren, declared themselves in favour of merger with Bihar and remained generally dissatisfied and resentful. In their meetings they stated that Mayurbhanj was formerly a part of Singhbhum and since Singhbhum was being made part of Bihar, Mayurbhanj also should merge with that State. They added that if the Government of Orissa merged Singhbhum with Orissa, then the Adivasis of Mayurbhanj would have no objections to Mayurbhanj being conjoined with Orissa; but until this was done, they would continue their agitation for Mayurbhanj's merger with Bihar. It is not necessary to go into the details of their campaign and I am only providing a broad outline of the developments so as to better explain the importance of Murmu's role after the frustration generated by the failure of the 1949 upheaval. There was widespread agitation by the Adivasis throughout Mayurbhanj and the law and order position was seriously disturbed. Their agitation took a variety of forms like:

1. Disobeying the laws of the Government of Orissa;
2. Non-payment of rent to the Orissa Government but payment may be made to the Central Government or the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj if the latter demanded it;
3. Non-payment of forest royalty or other Government dues;
4. Forcible cultivation of waste lands;
5. Organization of strikes in the mining areas;
6. Non-cooperation with non-Adivasis;
7. Smuggling controlled commodities to Bihar;
8. Large-scale violation of all forest laws;
9. Disregarding all law Courts.

These acts of protest culminated in a series of disturbances. A large number of Adivasis assembled deep in the Bangriposi hills (between Baripada-Rairangpur Road) where plans were hatched for a *melee* and attacks on non-Adivasis and Government servants along with burning and looting of their houses. As the agitation continued on a wide front, the Adivasi agitators took the law into their own hands and committed various acts of violence—smuggling of rice to Bihar commenced in full swing; telephone and telegraph wires were cut at several places; several bridges and culverts were damaged; the Baripada-Rairangpur Road was blocked at the Bangriposi Ghat portion; trees from reserve and protected forests were cut indiscriminately; and there were two murders. The Adivasis tried to create complete chaos and paralyze the administration. The Government resorted to police firing. The law-breakers were taken into custody under the penal provisions of the law, the ringleaders were detained under the Orissa Maintenance of Public Order Act and a punitive tax and collective fine of Rupees one lakh was imposed on the Adivasis of Bamanghaty Sub-division. This agitation was the most important of its kind in the history of Mayurbhanj since the revolt of 1917.

The formation of a separate Jharkhand state was the basic intention behind this widespread agitation. Two years after the 1949 rebellion, there was a move to seek a refund of the collective fine imposed on them. The Adivasi leaders wished to use this demand to rehabilitate the prestige of the Party and regain the confidence of their followers. The Government, however, decided that the fines should be refunded. Instead, in order to gain the confidence of the Adivasi, it was decided that various development works would be undertaken. There was apparently also a suspicion that the funds so obtained may be frittered away for organizational or agitational purposes and would not really be used to help the people of the area. Government had shown an extraordinary amount of clemency by releasing all Adivasi prisoners in June 1950, by withdrawing all unimportant cases and by remitting the fines not yet levied. The Adivasis were given concessions all round and their leaders were generally given recognition in the body-politic of Orissa. Raghunath Murmu

had by this time invented his script and written his more important plays. His sympathies were with this cause but he easily sensed its purposelessness and in private talks and communications argued for a re-direction of efforts into social organization and cultural activities.

The formation of an Adivasi Cultural Association, proposed by the 'Ol' Samiti of Mayurbhanj in the year 1953 and inaugurated at a meeting at Nakibagan in Bamanghaty Sub-division on 14 March 1954 (under the presidentship of Prudhal Lakhan Marandi of Kaduani and the vice-presidentship of Ghasiram Sandil and Shri Ghasiram Hansda of Deoradihi), was the direct result of his inspiration. It was resolved in this meeting that the Association would work:

1. (a) to make the Adivasis (Mundari group) literate with the help of the Ol script.
- (b) to enrich Mundari literature;
- (c) to collect old songs and traditions, to write books for class-reading and to publish them;
- (d) to encourage their songs and dances;
- (e) to publish a 'social paper'.
2. Adivasi students would be imparted instruction in their own language with the help of their own script from the primary stage.
3. Every Adivasi village would engage a teacher and start a village school to give instructions to the boys and girls.
4. Members of the Adivasi Cultural Association would visit such schools and guide the teachers.
5. The Government should appoint a supervisor to supervise such schools.
6. The Government should give education to the Adivasi students in their own language in the ashram schools and sevashrams and primary schools.

The Association was renamed the Adivasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association. Under its auspices, a number of meetings have been held at different places in the District since 1962, though the Association was formally registered only in 1964. Details of some of the important meetings and the

decisions taken as well as the follow-up action are outlined below and they will reflect the great importance attached to social and cultural matters as also indicate the attempts to forge some kind of a cultural unity. Raghunath Murmu's inspiration, advice, guidance and help was always solicited by the Association and its leaders.

In a meeting held at Rairangpur on 23 and 24 June 1962, an ad hoc Committee of this Association was formed and resolutions were adopted declaring Sarana and Mundari to be the common religion and language respectively of the Mundari group of tribals. The organization used to hold training classes in their language and script at Rairangpur. The object of this move has been to popularize the language and to enrich it so as to make it acceptable as the medium of instruction in schools.

An Adivasi Socio-educational and Cultural half-yearly Conference was held at Rairangpur on 21 and 22 October 1966 under the Presidentship of Dr. Mangal Hembram, a TISCO employee of Nuamundi (Bihar). Shri Chandra Mohan Singh, ex-minister, Orissa, attended it as chief guest. The following resolutions were passed at the meeting:

1. Extension of the scope of agitation to the All-India level.
2. Collection of funds for the construction of the Association's building.
3. Recognition of the community head-man as the authority to settle social disputes.
4. Withdrawal of the encroachment cases filed against Adivasis by the Government.
5. Concession on postal rates by the postal authorities to the monthly paper *Sagen Sakam*.

Another Conference of the Adivasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association was held at Rairangpur on 31 March and 2 April 1970. Besides the members of the district branches, about 50 delegates from West Bengal and Bihar attended the Conference. Matters relating to the upliftment of the Adivasis were discussed and a new Executive Committee was formed with Shri Sundar Mohan Hembram as President. A few

months later a Semlet M.E. School was started by the Association at Rairangpur with Class VI in July 1967. In order to attract students to this institution they were exempted from admission charges and tuition fees. Besides the regular teachers, the leaders of the Association used to take classes in different subjects. This school is now, however, virtually defunct.

The half-yearly Conference (1967-68) of the Adivasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association, Mayurbhanj, was again held at Bangriposi on 12 and 13 October 1967. The delegates' conference was held on the 12th. About eighty delegates, including two from Bengal and three from Bihar, participated in the meeting. The meeting decided to popularize the 'Ol' script among the Adivasis by introducing night classes in rural areas, and to put pressure on the respective State Governments to recognize their language and script and to introduce them the medium of education in the primary classes in Adivasi areas. It was also decided to start UP and ME classes under the management of the Association; to move the State Government for a grant of Rs. 40,000 to enhance the sale of their books, leaflets and the monthly journal; and to move the Government for withdrawal of the encroachment cases instituted against the Association for the construction of their offices on Government lands. A Branch Association for Baripada Sub-division was formed. The Parganas' Conference was held on the same day, i.e., the 12th, where they discussed their religious and social customs and formed committees to look into these aspects.

In the open Conference held on 13 October 1967 under the Presidentship of Dr. Kali Charan Soren of Chakulia (Bihar), the speakers eulogized the aims and objectives of the Association, urged the Government to render all help, and appealed to the Adivasi community to unite under the banner of the Association and to cooperate in the effort to improve their culture, language, etc. They demanded that there should not be any restrictions on the manufacture and drinking of *handia*. Sonaram Soren, ex-MLA urged the Santals to maintain their solidarity for their own benefit. Citing the unity of the people of Nagaland and the success of their efforts, Soren exhorted the Santals of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to be

united to achieve their demands. Monmohan Tudu, ex-Minister in Orissa, explained the aims and objects of the Association and advised the Santals to fight for their cause in a peaceful and constitutional manner. He explained the various steps taken by the State Government for the betterment of the Adivasis and warned them not to be misguided by reactionary political parties. In his speech, he condemned the speakers who had cited approvingly the agitation of the people of Nagaland. Ten resolutions were passed at this Conference: (a) Condemning the present marriage system prevalent in the Adivasi community; (b) condemning *pata* dance, (c) deciding to open a branch office of their Association at Baripada; (d) urging upon the members to contribute more funds, (e) deciding to protect *jahera* lands (places of worship); (f) deciding to settle their social disputes through the office of *manjhis* in villages or Parganas and of the Pirs or Desh Parganas; (g) urging the Government to impart education to Adivasi children at the primary level using the Adivasi Ol script; (h) requesting the withdrawal of encroachment cases instituted against their Association; (i) seeking postal concessions for the transmission of their journal and other literatures; and (j) granting more funds to the Association.

The Annual Conference of the Adivasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association of Mayurbhanj District was held at Rairangpur from 5 to 7 August 1968 under the presidentship of Shri Sundar Mohan Hembram. Shri Monmohan Tudu, ex-minister, attended the conference as chief guest. Delegates from Bihar and West Bengal also attended the meeting. Matters relating to the problems of the Adivasis were discussed and the office-bearers of the Association were elected with Shri Sundar Mohan Hembram as President. Much stress was laid on the successful running of the ME school started at Rairangpur.

The activities of the Association were at a rather low ebb between 1969 and 1975. The aims and objects of this Association as set out in the revised programme for 1976-77 are :

1. the promotion of literature in Santali and its other

- sister languages in the medium of Adivasi *Ol chiki*;
2. the promotion of cultural and social reforms among the Adivasis through discussion, demonstration and practice of arts and music; and
 3. the establishment of such educational institutions which will advance the development of Adivasi languages and script.

The journal *Sagen Sakam* has had a very erratic existence. It used to be published as a monthly journal with gaps in publication ranging sometimes up to three to four months. After that, it virtually stopped publication in 1969 until September 1976 when it has started coming out again. The attempt to establish a broad base for the activities of the Association and to give it adequate socio-cultural coverage has not, however, borne much results. The membership is still very limited; not many work sincerely for the Association in honorary capacities; and the organization is virtually at a standstill. Raghunath Murmu is deeply aware of this and in more than one interview he has expressed his disappointment, unhappiness and sometimes resentment at this. "They are more interested in promoting self-interest and personal prospects these days; who will work selflessly, without payment for a common cause, for the sake of society and culture?" he asks ruefully. *Sagen Sakam* costs only Re. 0.50 (fifty paise) per copy and the annual subscription is only Rs. 6. Yet there are not many regular subscribers. In January 1977, the number of regular subscribers stood at a paltry forty-nine. There are, of course, some extra sales now and then. Similarly, as of January 1977, the total number of life members of the Association was only twenty-one and annual members seventy-four. This is considered very unsatisfactory even by the organizers themselves. There does not seem to be any determined bid or effort to enlist more members. The Association has a press of its own called Semlet Press and it has, over the years, published several books on *Ol chiki*.

It has now formed a judicial branch, called the Pargana Committee, to deal with questions of social reform and to decide social disputes amicably. The Association has delegated the necessary powers to this Committee. It functions

through the agency of the Parganas and Desh Parganas. When this author visited the Association's offices in January 1977, they had twelve disputes on hand. Most of them related to inter-family disputes within villages and only one to a dispute between two villages.

There was a three-day All-India Adivasi (Santal) Conference at Jhargram between 18 and 20 February 1977. According to *The Statesman* (23 February):

'more than 10,000 Santals including 500 women, from Assam, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh attended. . . . The Conference adopted a unanimous resolution demanding the introduction of Ol *chiki*, the Santali script, as the medium of education among Santals. It said that phonetically it was more suitable for the Santali language than the Roman script. It also urged upon the Government to recognise six holidays in honour of the major festivals of the Santali culture. Pandit Raghunath Murmu laid the foundation of the Santali University at Betkundridahi, three kilometres from Khargram.

From the sequence of events and the activities of the Association it would be clear that Raghunath Murmu's impact has been felt in the socio-cultural and literary fields and he has come to symbolize the cause of reviving the tradition and heritage of Santali culture and education through the medium of its own language and script.

The genesis of the Ol script: Language as gesture and communication

Born in 1905 (5 May) at Dandbose, a small village four kilometres from Rairangpur, Raghunath Murmu was educated up to matriculation by his father, Nandalal. As an apprentice in Baripada Powerhouse, he showed a talent for innovation and surprised the State Chief Engineer, Mr. Wellwood, by pointing out certain defects in the blueprints of an installation. He took to weaving carpets and his novel method of furnishing threads and producing carpets of quality attracted attention and Dr. P.K. Sen, Dewan of the State, sent him for

industrial training to Calcutta. On return he became an Instructor in the Purna Chandra Industrial Institute, Baripada. Due to his father's death he sought a transfer nearer home and was posted as Headmaster of Badamtaliya Model School. It was here that he seriously took up the idea of an independent script for Santali and through trial and error and with the help and cooperation of many friends and advisers, notable among whom was Sauna Murmu, he fashioned the script and made a hand-press for typing out the set of alphabets. The Superintendent of Education of the State once visited the school and was impressed by Raghunath's zeal, his script and the hand-press. He wanted it exhibited in the Annual State Exhibition of 1939. A little later, Sir P.C. Bhanj Deo, the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj was impressed by his achievements and allowed the propagation of this script in the State. After three years he was transferred to Rairangpur High School on promotion. He, however, resigned from service in 1946 for personal reasons.

By this time he had published his first play, *Biduchandan* and written the second one *Kherwal Bir* which were printed both in Oriya and Bengali. The Kherwal Jarpa Samiti of Jamshedpur patronized him and encouraged to refashion *Oi chiki* along the lines of modern types suitable for use in printing presses. He went to Calcutta and got the types cast in the Swadeshi Type Foundry. *Kherwal Bir* was printed at Bistupur and *Biduchandan* in Bengali at Calcutta. Both the plays were extremely popular among the Santal masses and were performed in remote villages. The Kherwal Jarpa Samiti acquired the Chandan Press and started printing *Sagen Sakam* and *Oi Gemet* in *Oi chiki*.

In more than one interview, Raghunath Murmu explained how he decided to develop separate script for Santali. He maintains that in old legends and traditional songs, particularly the *bintl* songs, he found mention of the script 'OI'. 'How could there be a name unless there was a corresponding thing?' he asks, like a seasoned logician. He took upon himself the task of finding out, or, rather, discovering the script. In this task, Muniram Baskey, a Bevin boy trainee returned from England, helped him a lot. Jaipal Singh wrote in the Journal *Adibasi Sakam* published from

Tatanagar: 'An important question which must be considered seriously is the work of making the Adivasis race-conscious. This can be done by the acceptance of a new script altogether which will give them an individual identity'. Raghunath Murmu was himself concerned with this question of the identity of the Santals. He mentions how he had come to realize that the Santals were held in low esteem by the non-tribals and he attributed this largely to the absence of education among the Santals. He became aware that without a deep awareness of their own language and literature, tradition and culture, the Santals will always be despised and looked down upon. As a community it must grow, prosper and deserve the respect of others by a 'fierce sense of identity'. To him, a separate script was an indispensable step in the realization of this aim as, in its absence, the Santali-speaking people in Orissa, Bihar, Bengal and Assam would remain divided into different zonal groups. The need was to find an alphabet which could encompass all the peculiar sounds of the Mundari language.

Raghunath Murmu explains that he got his ideas on what the alphabet should be from the following four things :

1. There was a popular custom among Mundari women-folk to get tattoo marks in blue on their body and limbs. These marks, called *khoda*, are often very artistic. They convey specific meanings and vary from tribe to tribe and sometimes even among the different septs of the Santali community.

2. The Santals have the practice of branding their domestic animals as a symbol of possession. These also vary from sept to sept. Having burnt marks on the left hand, which is referred to as *sikha*, is also a tribal symbol for the Santals.

3. In the past, the Santals lived in dense forests and they used different symbols on stones or on trees to convey some special meaning or secret information like danger, safety, 'run away', 'let us meet there', etc., etc.

4. Bugles and horns were blown with various sound-patterns or rhythmic variations to rally people or to convey particular meanings when there was some likely danger ahead.

He also explains how he posed a few questions to himself:

1. What would be the natural design of alphabets so that there is minimum variation between printed types and handwriting?
2. What should be the minimum number of letters in such an alphabet?
3. How does the Mundari language differ phonetically from those of the neighbouring non-tribal languages like Bengali, Oriya, and Hindi; and why are those scripts, including the Roman script which was used by the missionaries, not phonetically suitable for tribal languages like Santali, Ho, Munda, Mahali and Birhor?

He says that he was convinced that finding answers to these important questions was essential for the success of the new script.

Ultimately, he designed an alphabet with thirty letters with six vowels and four consonants linked to each vowel. All the letters were based on either some objects, activities of the body or particular sound-patterns which they resembled. Examples are: mushroom, a bee on wings, blowing air by mouth, the earth, mouth opened to vomit, harvesting operations, etc.

Besides, the alphabet has five significations used after the letters to give different sound effects—i.e., nasalization; low pitch; prolongation of vowels; separation between checked consonants and other consonants or vowels; and force (check valve) to open the checked consonants and make them simple consonants. It is thus a fairly sophisticated script and meets most of the phonetic requirements of the Santali language.

The fact, however, remains that it could not be accepted by the non-Santal Mundari speakers. It would seem that from the beginning Murmu conceived the script as not being useful to all the Mundari group of languages but only as the script of the Santals. Perhaps the numerical superiority of the Santals made him feel that a script for the Santal language would be automatically accepted by the Mahali, Birhor, Ho and Munda. Murmu's critics argue that a great opportunity

was missed from the beginning. Even though not all the phonetic requirements of these other groups of languages were met by Murmu's script, it would have been possible to do so by minor adjustments, modifications or additions. As this was not done, the other groups went their own way and even sought to develop their own scripts.

The Kerwal Jarpa Samiti of Jamshedpur published *Nei Jong Lagit OI* (a pamphlet) by Murmu in 1946 and when the Thakkar Bapa Sub-committee visited Chaibasa in Singhbhum District, this was presented to them.

The Rairangpur Adibasi Socio-educational and Cultural Association (henceforward referred to as ASECA) took up the promotion of Santali language and literature and the OI script. *Sagen Sakam* was set entirely in the OI script and was printed at first at the OI Press and, later, when the Association purchased a new printing machine in 1966, in the Semlet Press. Similarly, the Bihar ASECA, registered in 1967, started a journal called *Semlet Sakwa* set entirely in OI script. The West Bengal Association also started its own journal called *Jug Jarna*.

It will not be out of place to mention here that the Santal leadership is also somewhat divided on the question of the OI script. There is a sizeable and vocal group, particularly in Bihar and to an extent in West Bengal, that wants the Roman script to be retained for the Santali language. This has been a matter of considerable emotion and various motives are attributed to each group by the other. The case for the OI script is put very vigorously by Dr. B.B. Hembram:

The Santali language has its own original existence, its own entity. Bengali language cannot be written in English script and vice-versa. If anybody ventures to write the Santali language in English or Bengali script or Hindi or Oriya script, he is just going to put a garland on the neck of a red-hot statue, and if it happens so accidentally and unfortunately, within a short period the Santali language will be phonetically deformed. Consequently it will lose its glamour, its original beauty, and in the long run this resourceful language will be compelled to live a crippled life among the healthy languages of the other peoples of

India (Hembram *et al* : *Adibasi Ol Script*, 1972, Calcutta, p. 12).

The supporters of the script and its propagation (see next section) do not, however, seem to take into account two other important points. Firstly, a script for a language needs a communication milieu, an atmosphere in which it is commonly used in social, inter-personal and other situations. To serve as a medium it must have certain internal and external stimuli. All these are conspicuous by their absence so far as the Ol script is concerned. Its use is still basically restricted to the activities of the Association and their printed books and journals. It has not yet shown the characteristic of being used by the literate masses. This is perhaps as it had to be. Most literate Santals know, in addition to Ol, either the Oriya, Bengali or Devanagari scripts and when it comes to writing letters, petitions, etc., the balance of convenience is often with the latter scripts and not with Ol. The jobs available in the area require a working knowledge of these scripts and languages and, in addition, sometimes a knowledge of English. Social communication also forces them to know the other languages and scripts which the regular schools teach in. As a result of these factors, many even forget how to write the script through sheer disuse. Others know it but rarely use it except while writing to their parents, spouses, or children when the latter happen to be literate in the Ol script. The problems of a low-literacy society aggravates this situation. This author has interviewed students who have formally passed the test in Ol script and at one time could write fluently in it but now they barely remember it. Talking to such people in the villages one senses a mood of resignation, despair and quiet acquiescence. 'After all what do I do with the knowledge of this script?' someone asked me, 'How am I going to use it and with whom? There is hardly a book, a journal, no reading material, no newspaper.' The second point that does not seem to have been taken into account is that the popularity of a script is integrally linked to the popularity and strength of the language and the corpus of available literature in it. The fact remains there is not much of lay, religious, secular or popular literature in the language.

Raghunath Murmu is painfully aware of this and feels that much needs to be done in this regard by the Santal leaders and their Association in the three states.

Propagation of the Script: The Wasteland of Indifference

Raghunath Murmu realized early on that it was not enough merely to devise a script as a symbol of identity or tribal solidarity. The Santals must learn this script and use it in their social communications within and beyond the State. For this had been its greatest *raison d'être*: the fact that Santals with the same cultural heritage, social traditions and language and living in the states of Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal, were faced with a problem of communication among themselves. Those who went to school and obtained a formal education learnt Oriya, Bengali or Hindi in the Oriya, Bengali and Devnagari scripts respectively. Hence, educated Santals in these three states are at least bilingual—they know and read the local language and its script, and they also know and speak their language Santali at home. The Santals in Bihar, primarily because of the influence of missionary activities which date back to the nineteenth century (the G.E.L. Church came to Ranchi in 1843 A.D.), learn Santali in the Roman script. Thus, the literate Santals in these three states express themselves in four different scripts—Oriya, Bengali, Devnagari and Roman. This is certainly a serious problem.

Raghunath Murmu felt that the best solution to this problem would be for the Santals to be taught, at least at the primary level, in their own language and script. But this has not yet been possible for a variety of reasons. Prominent among these are (a) the absence of proper text books in the Santali language and Ol script; (b) the absence of properly trained teachers who can impart education in the script; (c) the absence of a sizeable body of literature in the language in printed form that could provide a degree of respectability to the language; and, above all, (d) the absence of a general desire or determination among the literate Santal masses not only to learn the script but to use it, in preference to the local script of the local language, in inter-personal and social communications both inside and outside the State where they

reside. He realized, along with many educated and sensible leaders, that the language must equip itself properly before their demand that it be made a medium of instruction could be acceded to or given a serious hearing.

This realization explains Raghunath Murmu's efforts to write a number of textbooks in the Ol script. In this effort, a very important group of Santal leaders and the ASECA's of Rairangpur in Orissa, Chakulia in Bihar and Bhawanipore (Calcutta) in West Bengal have given him the necessary financial and organizational support by publishing the books, by endeavouring to publicize them and by organizing informal schooling to impart education in and through the script. Murmu's publications in the Ol script include:

1. *Ol Cemet* (A Santali Primer)
2. *Parsipoha* (A Santali Reader, Parts I & II)
3. *Elkha Parab* (Arithmetic for primary students)
4. *Parsi Itun* (Summary of the lessons imparted to teachers).

The first book is a neat primer with illustrations. Published by the Adivasi Social-educational and Cultural Association, Rairangpur, it has run into ten editions. Each edition is generally of 3,000 copies and different editions have been finance by different ASECA's. For example, its eighth edition published in 1970 was financed by the Calcutta ASECA. *Parsipoha*, which literally means the new leaves of a seedling emerging out of the soil, was first published by the Chakulia ASECA in 1968, in a printing of 3,000 copies. *Elkha Parab* has also run into several editions.

The main objectives have been to first train a number of teachers in the script and the use of the script in elementary grammar, composition and arithmetic. The texts prepared are intelligent in the sense that they make use of the immediate environment of the Santals—the village, the household, the relationships in Santal society, and its way of life; in other words, things, objects and events which have a fairly direct connection with the child's life. From this point of view, it must be said that the textbooks prepared by Murmu are scientific and are based upon modern concepts that are now in vogue

for the preparation of primers for the education of children and uneducated adults. It has to be remembered that the text books in Ol script are meant also for adult education. In an interview with this author, Murmu explained that his years as a teacher in Badampaliya School helped him to gain an insight into the learning needs and thought processes of children and the practical methods through which their curiosity could be aroused, sustained and intensified. The lessons have been designed in a graded manner with the aid of a carefully chosen limited vocabulary and not by overburdening the learner's mind with too large a vocabulary.

In addition to the preparation of textbooks in the Ol script, Raghunath Murmu was deeply aware of the need to train a large number of teachers to take up the teaching of the script to the rural areas. A Semlet M.E. School had been started in July 1967 at Rairangpur primarily for this purpose. Prominent Santali leaders and men of culture used to conduct classes in the School in an honorary capacity. In more than one meeting, resolutions had been passed requesting the governments of Orissa, Bihar and Bengal to impart education to the Mundari group of Adivasis in the Ol script, to encourage the songs and dances of the Adivasis and to make Santali the medium of education at the primary stage. The M.E. School at Rairangpur did not make very good progress and had a halting career. But the ASECA's of Calcutta, Rairangpur and Chakulia have organized what are known as Santali 'literacy camps' at different times and in different places. Normally these last for seven to ten days and a large number of educated Santals, particularly Santal teachers, attend these camps where the methodology of 'quick' teaching in the Ol script and Santali language is imparted by stalwarts of Santali culture. This author had the opportunity of observing one such camp at Kalikapur, Baripada, held between 17 and 23 February 1975 in which all the three Associations collaborated. A book entitled *Parsi Itun* written by Raghunath Murmu was published on the occasion. It is a summary of the lessons imparted to the 'teachers, propagators and members of the ASECA's of Calcutta, Rairangpur and Chakulia on Santali literacy by Guru Gomkey Pandit Raghunath Murmu' as per the publisher's blurb.

Besides these camps which are held occasionally, regular educational institutions, even if of an informal kind, are also run in different places. These are called *itun asras* and students are given primary education through the medium of the Ol script. The number of such institutions has varied from year to year and the Association of Rairangpur does not have a year-wise list of such schools or institutions. Some institutions, which had been started earlier, have continued, while others have been closed down. A discussion with the office-bearers of the Association revealed that there are many reasons why some institutions have thrived and others have not, most important among which is the availability of dedicated teachers prepared to teach in the Ol script up to the primary level. There is also the question of the response of the local Santals to the informal schools. There are many instances where the local people have shown a very luke-warm attitude to such institutions and the whole business of learning the script.

These institutions generally function outside the normal primary school or ashram/sevashram hours as the teachers are often the same and the same school house is used. The organisers explain that until the Government decides to introduce primary education in the local tribal language, this is perhaps the best they can do in their limited way.

As mentioned earlier, the number of such institutions has varied from year to year. For example, during the year 1976-77, according to the first half-yearly report of the Association, '24 *itun asras* have been established in the District of Mayurbhanj, each with one teacher. The institutions are functioning properly. During the period under report 35 students have passed the examination through the medium of Ol script.'

To supervise the functioning of these institutions, the Association has created an Education Board called the Sochet Board with a President and Secretary and several members. The Board has published course-books up to the primary stage. It is also said to be actively preparing grammar and vernacular textbooks even up to the graduate level.

The Association issues printed certificates to teachers who pass out of the *itun asras*. The certificate, which bears the seal of the ASECA of Rairangpur, runs as follows:

Certified that _____ son/daughter of _____ of _____ P.O. _____ District completed the course of teacher's training for reading and writing with Ol script in the institute of Ol Itun. He/She passed the examination held at _____ on _____ and was placed in _____ division.

Similar certificates are also sometimes given to the students.

The Mythology of Culture and Script : A Return to Roots

The concept of a revealed script is peculiar to many primitive tribes. Such scripts are generally invented by people who, however, disclaim any specialized, individual skill or technique. Instead, they emphasize that they came to formulate the script through some kind of divine inspiration. The script is supposed to be divinely inspired and is linked to the eschatological. It is, as it were, a sort of reincarnation of the word. It can even be compared to the Hindu belief in *avatars*. Just as God is supposed to reincarnate himself in different generations, it is similarly contended that the script existed in some glorious past, and that it disappeared with the decline of the tribe, its misuse and disappearance coinciding with a period of decadence. The reappearance of the script is associated with the resurgence of the vitality of the tribe. In other words, the rise and disappearance of scripts are linked to the rise and fall of tribes and both are linked to the growth, the flowering and the gradual disappearance of a well-developed system of *sittlichkeit* or social ethics. Thus, the script forms a part of the primitive tribe's *weltanschauung* or world view.

The Santals, for example, claim three such revealed scripts for their language. One is attributed to Ramdas Tudu of Ghatsila, the second one to Ramchandra Murmu of Silda, and the third, the one that is in circulation now, to Raghunath Murmu of Mayurbhanj. The script devised by Raghunath Murmu is the one that was ultimately accepted as being the superior one even by Ramdas Tudu and Ramchandra Murmu. Santal society and the Santal leaders in general also accepted this script. Strictly speaking, it is not a revealed

script. Murmu does not claim any dream-inspiration but he does insist that he made no original contribution to the script. 'All that I did was only to use certain mechanisms to give phonetic equivalence to the sound of the language and I learnt it from our culture, our social tradition'. It may be noted here that revealed scripts have also been reported from among the Hos of Singhbhum and the Sabaras of Ganjam and Koraput districts. Raghunath Murmu believes that the glorious past of the Santal tribe was associated with the purity of the group, its exclusiveness and its faith in certain ethical principles. No doubt he has been harping back to a mythical past, but it is a past whose reality is widely accepted and acted upon.

To Raghunath Murmu this mythical past had characteristics of a Spartan culture—strong body, adequate physical exercises and gymnastics, no drinks except on ceremonial religious occasions, and, above all, a sense of sacrifice and dedication to the community. The individual almost existed for the community and the pinnacle of achievement in life was when he did something for the community. The decline and disappearance of such a glorious past was partly due to the evil influence of neighbouring non-tribal societies which set in motion internal degeneration by their corrupting influence. The Santals forgot the principle of commitment to the community and the feeling of their exclusiveness and solidarity. They began to look admiringly and enviously at the glamour and dazzling aspects of the social life of the non-Santals. Sometimes, it was no more than dazzling dresses, good food and a pat on the back; sometimes it was the lure of the towns and jobs in Government offices. The Santal boys and girls started dancing with non-Santals and often it was for small favours like good food or a little drink. This, according to him, led to a vulgarization of art-forms and also the Santal life-style. This also led to the development of a spirit of softness which is responsible for the commonly held belief that the Santal's life is characterized by an indulgence of the baser senses and the widely held notion that, for the Santal, the pleasure-principle is the most important one in life. The disappearance of the script was linked to this outward movement of the spirit and the growth of flabbiness.

It is, therefore, essential to treat Murmu's invention of *Olchiki* not as an isolated phenomenon but as integral to his ideas about social ethics, the glorious past of the Santal tribe and what needs to be done to revive and regenerate its ancient culture.

The Literature of Message and Myth: Aspects of the Re-interpretation of Tradition

In a number of creative works, Raghunath Murmu has outlined his image of the glorious heritage of the Santals as also his approach to certain predominant socio-cultural questions like drinking of *handia* (rice-beer), intra-sept marriages, individual morality and social ethics, propitiation of gods and even physical culture. These works are semifictional. Three of them—*Biduchandan* (Oriya edition, 1942; Bengali edition, 1948), *Kherwal Bir* (Oriya edition, 1944; Bengali edition, 1952) and *Darege Dhan* (1966 in Ol script) are plays. *Hital* (unpublished), which is in two parts, contains songs in praise of the Creator (this is perhaps his most important creative work) and *Bakhen* (1967) is again a collection of invocatory songs meant for different occasions. The first two plays are extremely popular as they are very stage-worthy and have absorbing story-lines. Both hark back to a mythical past and through their protagonists—Bidu in *Biduchandan* and Kherwal in *Kherwal Bir*—Murmu has sought to project certain human qualities and values which, according to him, are essential features of the true Santali character. There might have been a degeneration and corruption in historical times due to the evil influences of the non-tribal world which the Santals have fallen to, but they constitute a superficial trauma which would be rectified by a proper understanding of and return to the roots of the culture. This is why myth, history and current social concerns are all present in these two plays.

Kherwal Bir depicts a mythical past in which an intensely humane king called Manmi used to rule over his subjects. During the course of his rule, the population began to expand leading to poverty and want. Some people become greedy, and rapacious and take to evil means and irreligious paths. They

form a faction, worship dark witches and evil gods or *bongas* and begin to make human sacrifices so as to gain power and authority from these gods. This group is called *danmi*. Gradually, their numbers and power grow, they defeat the *manmi* group and capture the kingdom. The latter run away to the jungles but even there, there is no respite for them from the attacks of the *danmis*. They capture the heroes and warriors of the *danmis* and sacrifice them to the evil gods and enslave the rest of the group. The king hides in the forest with his queen. He loses the battle, is captured and killed. His wife in the meantime gives birth to a beautiful son who is protected by Dharam Baba (another name for Maranburu) in the shape of a lion and lioness. When the boy is fifteen the queen has a dream that he would be called Kherwal and would defeat the *danmis*. The *danmis* are ultimately defeated in the battle by this young and divine-inspired. Kaerwal is enthroned king, given the title of *bir* and married to a girl called Kajal who is also a devotee of Dharam Baba who had helped him in many ways to fight the *danmis*.

The concept of *danmi* and *manmi* are clearly borrowed from the Hindu mythology of the fight between *dunavas* and gods. Instead of gods, Murmu uses *manavs* or men or good-men. This is the classic struggle between virtue and justice against injustice and vice. Many groups and communities use it as part of their myth of their inherent moral superiority. Kherwal is the original name of the Santals and, therefore, the play invests the tribe with this quality of moral superiority. 'Every tribe and nationality, in some part of the world, every valley or cluster of hamlets, refers to itself in favourable terms and to others unfavourably' (Robert Redfield: 'How Human Society Operates', in *Society Today and Tomorrow*, New York, 1961, 70). This is the universal practice of distinguishing the in-group, or what Cooley calls the *primary group*, from the out-group and is a part of the sentiment of ethnocentrism. In the present context, *danmi* could mean either the Dekos (non-tribals) or all those who are not Santals.

His play *Darege Dhan* extols the virtues of a spartan approach to life. It emphasizes the role of the socialization processes like community singing and dancing annual hunts

and festivals. It upholds the need for a healthy and vigorous community and advocates that the use of *handia* (rice-beer) be restricted to ceremonial and ritual occasions. It reminds the Santals that they will never be held in esteem by the non-tribals unless they shun their bad habits which enervate them and make them objects of ridicule.

Murmu has also put together the invocatory songs or prayers prevalent in the Santal community in a small book called *Bakhen* (1967). Elsewhere he has extolled the role of these prayers and songs in maintaining the strength, the individuality and the separate character of Santali culture. He has also said that the people should not forget these prayer-songs and that every Santal should know them. These invocatory songs are used at following specific occasions:

1. *Maghe*.
2. *Baha* (flower festival)
3. *Eroh* or *Erok* (sowing ceremony)
4. *Sura sagan mah mane* (post-sowing prayer)
5. *Asalia* (De-weeding ceremony)
6. *Jam nowa* or *Nowa hulu rakab* (new harvest)
7. *Janthar* (harvesting)
8. *Got puja* in *Sohrae* festival (worship of domestic animals)
9. *Guhul puja* in *Sohrae* (worship in the cattle-shed)
10. *Rashi puja* (worship of *handia*)
11. *Rashi puja* (when relations come).
12. *Chaxiar nmda* (worship after child-birth)
13. *Bapla* or *Itut sindur* (worship during a marriage festival)
14. *Kuli bida* (Farewell to the bride after marriage)
15. *Nahan ar baandan* (Bathing during the bone drowning-ceremony)
16. *Giditara* (prayer before eating the *bhog* during *Sohrae*)

In *Biduchandan*, he tries to highlight the theme of self-sacrifice and commitment to the community. Bidu and Chandan are renowned celestial dancers and they have been directed by the Almighty (*Maranburu*) to descend to earth and remind men of the essential spiritual qualities of dances and songs and

the living heritage of the tribe. In his preface to the play, Raghunath Murnu has insisted that the play relates to the divine play of a god and goddess and that he has tried to collect only a fraction of their universal and comprehensive divine lessons. In the play, Bindu is portrayed as a self-sacrificing young man who is divinely inspired and who the corrupted men in society regard as being mad. He, however, dedicated himself to do good to the entire community. Chaigad and Mangad are two small kingdoms established by two renowned Santal headmen (*manjhis*) in ancient times. The two kingdoms are perpetually fighting each other. Chandan is born as the daughter of the *manjhi* of Chaigad whose first daughter had drowned. Bidu is born as a nomadic boy in a country called Bahagad whose location seems unknown to everybody and even Bidu admits that 'it is somewhere there, far far away, perhaps a mystic land'. He seeks shelter in Chaigad as also in Mangad but is considered by both kingdoms to be an agent of the other side and is turned away by both. Chandan falls in love with Bidu and it is through sacrificing love that they are able to communicate with each other through the newly-found (or newly revealed) script, *Olchiki*. Chandan passes message to Bidu about when and where they can meet, where he can hide and other such information through this script inscribed on stones and trees. Bidu wants to do good for both sides and put an end to their enmity. The birds and beasts are his friends. His aim in life is to find an identity for himself as an escape from his loneliness and to discover the meaning of life through sacrifice, love and good deeds. Bidu and Chandan have understood the spirit of the forgotten script and in critical times Bidu is able to communicate using that script with his beloved Chandan. The script is thus, at one level, the language of life, and at another the revealed language of the gods known only to those who have the mystic power to discern it by love and sacrifice. Thirdly, the script also partakes of all the exclusiveness of the tribe and is supposed to cut out the others. It has thus elements of secretiveness, mystery, divine dispensation and solidarity.

At the end of the play, Bidu and Chandan vanish from the scene. Divine dancers, they have to return to their fold of

divinity. But enough has happened for the people of Chaigad and Mangad to realize their ignorance and folly in not recognizing these divine agents. They atone for their short-sightedness by coming together and resolving in prayer to abide by the lasting human qualities of life. The age of guilt ends and a genuinely humane and communal culture is born.

Hital (unpublished manuscript) is in two parts and seeks to chart the origin and migrations of the Santal tribe, or rather the Kherwals, up to the present times. It is a narration of supposedly historical incidents when the tribe moved from distant Gandhar near Afghanistan to the East along the Indogangetic plain. The historical accuracy of these migrations is not at all free from doubt as there is hardly any evidence, except for the mention of some place names in the traditional *binti* songs which are undoubtedly an important part of the folklore of the tribe. There is, however, no other corroborative material, archaeological or documentary, and at best, it can be treated as yet another effort to reconstruct a golden age in the mythical past. But Murmu believes in it religiously and so do many Santal leaders.¹ Indeed, this author has come across this belief among uneducated illiterate Santals in remote villages. Thus this 'myth' has penetrated deep into consciousness of the community and has become a part of the lore and legends of the tribe. This golden age is considered to be one of prosperity and plenty: there was material well-being as also a cultural flowering. The golden age serves as a backdrop against which the degeneration and corruption of life and society in the present times are presented. In the book *Jatra Pata Enez Gira* (1955)—which Sonaram Soren, an ex-Minister of Orissa edited (it is a collection of songs composed by several Santal poets calling on the people not to dounce with non-tribals during *jafras* and non-Santal festivals)—there is a description of the age of the migrations and the establishment of Santal kingdoms in Chai and Champa:

When we were in Chaigal the country was full of happiness and rejoicings: there was power and plenty. Women never kept away their iron bracelets nor did they ever accept the gift of snacks or *handia* from non-tribals or dance with them. They never took *pan* or tobacco but they were

experts in house-hold chores. The walls were kept so polished and shining by repeated washing in cowdung and mud that if a fly attempted to sit on it, it would slip There, in Champagal, we have left behind all those sculptures of singers and musicians and how wistful we feel now for those glorious days!

The book contains several songs calling upon Santals not to dance with non-tribals on any occasion. It warns the community against the guile and superior cunning of the non-tribals. It says that Mahadev worship, *ratha yatra* and the *Dola* festival, which are strictly non-tribal festivals, have been projected by the latter as being Santal festivals as well. This is another way of corrupting Santali culture. In short, both *Hital* and *Jatra Pata* (the latter was obviously inspired by Murmu's book) hark back to a glorious mythical/historical past and call upon the tribe to be worthy of it in the present by maintaining its identity and solidarity.

In *Hital*, Murmu has also sought to supply answer to some of the vexed questions presently troubling Santal society and culture. Let us take two of these, namely, drinking of *handia* and intra-sept marriage. In the second part of *Hital*, Murmu describes how, when the seven sons and seven daughters of Pilchu Halam and Pilchu Budhi (the first man and woman, comparable to Adam & Eve) came of age, they thought of preparing *handia* and offering it to the children after observing the necessary ritual functions. Since all of them were brothers and sisters, they suffered from a guilt complex over the subject of sex among themselves. The old man and woman prayed to Maranburu and as per his blessings prepared *handia* in a prescribed way and offered it to the children with the counsel that this was *dharam* or virtue. The relevant lines run like this :

- (1) *Dharam reya kan na add handib menah*
Ili daka reya kan adi sibila.

(It is a thing of *dharam* called *handib* or *handia*. It has been made out of soaked rice and is very fragrant and pleasant.)

- (2) *Ranahan rankan nas add bishon biskan*
Sahananyun lagaid danaa yui reya lek-kan
 (It is a medicine, it is also poison. It enlivens and freshens.)
- (3) *Menma atha olid banga lagti ahijge*
Dharam bong aya karege handi yun lek-kan
 (It is wrong to use it out of time but it is necessary to drink it at the time of *dharam karam* or religious worship.)
- (4) *Pilchu tikin andekhan hapan ka takta*
Juri Jana lagid harkin alah jul adak.
 (After this, Pilchu Halam and Pilchu Budhi opened up the path to the children to fall in the snare of love.)

In the song, the sons are sent to the forest for *shikar* but the old man and woman don't follow them. Similarly, the daughters are also sent to the forest to collect edible roots and leaves. *Handia* makes them happy, courageous and also forgetful. It takes away the guilt-complex and enables the brothers and sisters to have sex and thereby ensure the continuity of the tribe. While collecting the forest produce, the girls sit in the shade of some trees and sing and dance. The boys hear the songs from afar and come and join the dance. As the dance-rhythm mounts to a crescendo, they pair off and go into the forest and have sex. But after the spell of *handia* wears off, they are full of guilt and remorse and, corresponding to this sense of human guilt, nature responds by thunder and lightning and torrential rain. When the rains stop they return to the village but remain hiding in the *jahera* the sacred grove. Their parents seek them out only the next morning. At night, the old couple are visited by Maranburu in their sleep who tells them that this is a part of the law of nature and there should not be any feeling of guilt.

- (1) *Dharamge aped nankay jata akadpe*
Ape bidal domangkad bugi akange.
 (Dharam had made you so, to fall in love and it is good for your generation.)

(2) *Menma niva tayam ante hapan hidalad
nonkad bang bugia kaya, Huyuah.*

(But after this, your progenies and subsequent generations can't and should not do this as it will be a sin for them.)

Then with the blessings of Maranburu they name the septs.

Through this mythology, Murmu projects the following ideas concerning the consumption of *handia* and marriage within a particular sept:

1. That the drinking of *handia* is part of a religious ritual;
2. that it leads to health, vigour and youthfulness;
3. that it induces love and is an essential ingredient of love;
4. that it dispels fear; and
5. that it is really a sacrament.

Its use, therefore, should be restricted to proper ritual, festival occasions as a part of the offerings first made to the gods or *bongas*. It, thus, has sacramental properties and its indiscriminate use is to be condemned. Similarly, in the beginning of creation, intra-sept marriage was necessary for the continuity of the tribe and, moreover, it was divinely ordained but thereafter it has lost its *raison d'etre* and validity and should never be allowed.

Conclusion

Thus, through his creative writings, plays, the compilation of *Bakhens*, the invention of a script and his attempts to propagate and popularize it, his reinterpretation of tradition and social ethics, Murmu has sought to socialize and culturalize the entire concept of identity and solidarity. He has used myths, history, and his own ideas (which get inevitably mixed up) to project a glorious past or a Great Tradition and calls on his tribe to try to live up to it. He thus projects a world-view to which is linked his numerous ideas on social ethics, personal morality, the relevance of song and dance, marriage,

drinking of *handia*, physical culture, etc., etc. He is not a charismatic leader in the normal sense of the word; nor is he a rebellious prophet. But possibly this unassuming school teacher has done more than anybody else to forge a sense of identity and create an awareness of belongingness and to foster a tradition of solidarity and strong individual character among the Santals.

A MOVEMENT AMONG THE GONDS OF CHANDA

Kidar Nath Thusu

THE AIM of the present paper is to show that the contemporary political movement among Gonds of Chanda Chandrapur District (Maharashtra State) can only be properly studied in the context of their (former) Southern Gond Kingdom of Chanda. The Gond Rajas of Chanda, belonging to the Atram clan (of six-Dev phratry), had emerged from humble beginnings in and around Sirpur, with the fort of Manikgarh serving as their stronghold, and had gradually extended their sway, during the 400 years or so of their rule, over nearly the whole of the present Chanda District and its adjoining areas in Rajnandgaon, Wardha, Yeotmal, and Adilabad districts. As observed by Dr. Singh (1971), this process of the emergence of the local autochthons as kingdom-builders, was climaxed by the formation of states not only among the Gonds of Chanda but elsewhere in Central India, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Although throughout its existence, the Southern Gond kingdom had remained surrounded on almost all sides by the Muslim kingdoms known by various names, the brief records concerning the successive reigns of its nineteen rulers show that they had adopted (what Dr. Sinha describes as) the Rajput model of state, both on the sacred and secular levels, probably due to the influence exercised by the Brahmin priests and others. The concrete Rajput model of emulation was also followed by their feudal chiefs in varying degrees.

Although the later Gond rulers of Chanda had remained, nominally, the tributaries of the Mughal emperors of Delhi for about a century or so, it was only when they were conquered in the middle of eighteenth century by the Maratha (Bhonsle) rulers of Nagpur that their political entity finally came to an end. However, the various zamindaris set up by the Gond rulers continued to exist almost intact, without being disturbed (except in certain special cases) by the Bhonsle rulers and their successors—the British rulers of India.

Despite the fact that the Gond Rajas had been divested of power for two centuries or so, it is clear that they continued to receive not only 'political pensions' from the governments of the day, but also enjoyed prestige as well as commanded respect from their erstwhile subjects, particularly from the Gonds dwelling in the areas once constituting the directly-administered (khalsa) territories of their Kingdom. In fact, they are traditionally entitled to receive 'Gondi dues' as well as *man* and similar tributes in cash and kind, whenever they (or their authorized agents) visit any place (including the zamindari areas of Chanda and/or the Muglai parts adjoining the District of Chanda). In a similar manner, the respective Gond zamindars are entitled to claim and demand within their respective territorial units, all these gifts and honours, though in an attenuated form.

The celebration of the royal festival of Dusserah, as observed by me at Aheri and as reported from the different zamindari—areas and as celebrated by the Gond Raja of Chanda within his precincts, continues to be performed by Brahmin priests, while the worship of their tribal/clan deities, like Phersa Fen (alternatively referred to as Boda or Mota Dev), with or without their own priests (katoda), is also performed regularly. Thus, although the Raja of Chanda, and the respective (Raj-Gond) zamindars in varying degrees, have been patrons of Brahminism (in the Shakta and Vaishnavite varieties), the fact remains that the direct patronage extended by them to, and their actual participation in, their own tribal cults and myths has not been lessened or denigrated. For that matter, the annual celebrations of the Shivratri and Deepavali festivals (as observed by me at Aheri and at Kamalapur village) exhibit a curious mixture, amounting to a synthesis, of the

tribal cults with the Sanskritic rites and mode of propitiation.

In the initial stages, it was quite possibly their descent groups—that is, the phratries and clans—which had demarcated the lower levels of their territorial organization. However, it has not been possible to get confirmation about the mono-clanic homogeneous tracts (excepting perhaps among the Marias living around Bhamragad, etc.), though the distribution of the privileged tenure-holders (namely zamindars/mokkasadars) indicates that originally some sort of territorial jurisdiction might have been exercised by the dominant clans/phratries.

As regards the stratification prevalent among the various categories of Gonds inhabiting different parts of Chanda District (major portions of which formed the Gond kingdom of Chanda), one finds that a major line of demarcation divides those who call themselves, and are regarded by others, as the rest of the Gonds known by such terms as Naik-Gonds, Dadwe-Gonds Gaita-Gonds, Maria (Gonds), and Ware-Koitor. While on the hand the Raj-Gonds do not accept cooked food and (sometimes) water from the hands of the 'other' categories of Gonds, on the other hand all the Gonds, whether Raj-Gonds or not, propitiate the same tribal/clan deities. What is more, all them (including the pardhans) have basically similar types of clan (and phratry) affiliations. Yet another distinguishing mark which separates them from one another is that each of them constitutes a distinct endogamous group—the Raj-Gonds, however, vehemently assert that they are most careful in this respect, though it was reported that in certain areas where the so-called Dorul-Sattum are found, inter-marriage with them is resorted to without involving any serious consequences. Similarly, the Naik-Gonds, Dadwe-Gonds, Ware-Koitor and Gaita-Gonds (wherever contacted by me during the course of my field work) state that the normal practice among them is to marry within their own ethnic group (*jati*). Of course, it is the Raj-Gonds who occupy the highest position among the Gonds; and this claim of superiority is acknowledged by all others. As such, though a Raj-Gond is free to marry a girl belonging to any Gond-group other than his own (e.g., a Ware-Koitor or a Naik-Gond), yet the children ensuing from such a union would not be ordinarily counted as Raj-Gond, but would be regarded as belonging to the mother's ethnic group.

Among the Raj-Gond themselves, and perhaps to a lesser extent among the Gaita-Gonds too, a major cleavage runs between the so-called aristocratic section, locally referred to as the Srimants; and the rest (including the village headmen and the priests). To be sure, the Srimants (as a social class) include all those who are reputed to enjoy political power in the respective territorial segments comprising varying number of villages, either in the distant past or at present, coupled with their corresponding interests in land. Consequently, this 'class' encompasses not only the Raja of Chanda but also the ex-zamindars and mokkasadars and even those who are commonly referred to as Malguzars and/or Pâtels. However, village headmen and their own priests, whether they be substantial cultivators or not, are not regarded as belonging to the Srimant class, though a few Sendia (that is, the respective headmen of their areal *jati*-councils) are occasionally referred to as Srimants, perhaps through courtesy. It is interesting to observe that the former feudatory (Gond) chiefs and the (Gond) jagirdars, even those whose ancestors had been reported to have been converted to Islam, in different parts of Madhya Pradesh and Nagpur, are held in esteem and included in the general category of Srimant. It is, however, difficult to say whether there exists any hierarchy among the class of Srimants for the simple reason that the Raj-Gond included in this class are not regarded as being hierarchically-constituted; neither is the bipolar division in their society, (i.e., aristocrats and commoners) accompanied by any definite ritual status—in terms of food taboos or specific religious beliefs and practices. But the Srimants as a whole are found to contact matrimonial alliances among themselves, forming thereby, as it were, stable marriage alliances without, of course, leading to the emergence of any stratified hierarchy of marriage classes among them. The Gaita-Gonds, perhaps, may also have such a broad-based two-tier stratification among them, namely the Srimants and the commoners.

Regarding the position of the Raj-Gonds in the regional set-up of the caste hierarchy, it is generally agreed that while the Brahmans occupy the highest position, the inter alia position of the other (Hindu) castes 'higher' than the Raj-Gonds could not be easily determined by our Raj-Gond

informants. The same is the case with those who are placed by them as 'lower' than themselves. The main criterion is the generally accepted practice of acceptance/rejection of cooked food (and sometimes water) from the hands of those belonging to the higher/lower groups. Thus, the final picture that emerges can be expressed as follows :

'Higher' than the Raj-Gonds :

Brahmins, Jangams; Komati (Bania); Badai, Lohar, Sonar; Kapewar, Kunbi; Kalar, Teli, Golkar, Marar; Salewar, and Shimpi.

'Lower' than the Raj-Gonds :

All Gonds other than the Raj-Gonds (namely, the Gaita-Gonds, Naik-Gonds, Dadwe-Gonds, and Marias); Pardhans; Odewar, Nhavi, Dhobi; Manewar, Mahar, and Madigas.

It is interesting to observe that while the Muslims and the Christians are regarded as being outside the regional set-up of the caste hierarchy, there are some Raj-Gonds (of Potegaon) who asserted that they have stopped taking cooked food from the hands of the Brahmins, though they admitted that they used to accept the same previously (this was corroborated from the Raj-Gonds of other areas too). They further wanted me to believe that they do not require the services of Brahmin priests on such occasions as Satya Narayan Puja and post-funeral ceremonies, as they perform the necessary recitation concerning such ceremonies themselves, with the aid of printed booklets or from memory. For that matter, the Gond Raja of Chanda stated that whenever he visits places outside Chanda, he takes with him some members of his family who cook and prepare meals for him, for he does not accept cooked food from the hands of even Brahmins, not to mention those belonging to any of the so-called 'higher' caste groups of the Hindus.

At the initiative taken by, among others, the late Zamindar of Potegaon, Srimant Berek Rao Surpam affiliated to five-Dev phratry, a few Raj-Gonds of Potegaon proper (including the then Zamindar of Potegaon) had taken, nearly four decades

back, initiation (*deeksha*) from the Dasari Guru of Shri Vaishnav Panth, belonging to the Muglai parts of the country (that is, Adilabad District), and known by the name of Guru Vainkatachari. His disciples (including the Raj-Gonds) worship Tulsi (which is alternatively referred to as the Brindavan) particularly on Kartik Ekadeshi. In the areas adjacent to the Potegaon Zamindari, the Raj-Gonds of Gilgaon and Pai-Muranda zamindaries, in particular are reported to have taken initiation in the Vitthal Panth—that is, they worship Krishna—thanks to the teachings of a Guru from Sidhi-Pet of Muglai territory with the consequence that some of them are said to apply the tilak-marks (of Kumkum and Chandan) vertically on their foreheads, instead of horizontally as the Shiva-Panthis do. What adds interest to this fact is that no Raj-Gond living in this particular area, whether he has taken initiation in the Panth or not, has given up the propitiation of Phersa Pen or Devi Mata, as enjoined by their Gondi *dharma*. Reference may also be made in this context to the fact that the Raj-Gond Raja of Chanda, on his own admission, stated that he is a disciple of Chikhalikar Maharaj of Nagpur—a Brahmin devotee of Durga (i.e., probably a Shaktaite). It appears that it is largely on the instructions of his Guru that the Raja performs, particularly on every Tuesday, the necessary rituals by reciting Dev-pothi either by himself or along with the Rani, or occasionally through his Maratha Brahmin priest. But that does not mean that the Raja of Chanda no longer propitiates Mota Dev (Phersa Pen), or neglects to perform the rituals concerning the ceremonial eating of new crops (Nava Dhan) through his own tribal priest (*katoda*).

In fact, a movement was started in the recent past—directly under the aegis of the Gond Raja of Chanda—called Veedikar Gond Samaj Seva Samithi, which is said to be registered body having its central office at Chandrapur. This movement reached its zenith in 1946, when an important meeting was held under the Raja's chairmanship in the Kelapur Taluka of Yeotmal District of Maharashtra State. The professed aim of this movement (locally referred to as Shudi Sanghtan) is to unite as many as forty-one categories of tribal groups comprising the Gond, Bhil, Kolam, Baiga, and Khond as well as the Pardhans; in short, all those aboriginals (referred to as

mul-niwasi) who follow the *dharma* commonly practised and the Dev worshipped by the Gonds. According to the Gond Raja, Gondi or Koitor Dharma is different from Hindu Dharma, in as much as the sacrifice of the cows/bufaloes is a must for the proper propitiation of their tribal/clan deities. It is further claimed by Raje Yadav Shah, the former Gond Raja of Chanda, that it is he and none else who is in a position to give a lead to his erstwhile subjects. As such, he is the Dharma-Guru in so far as the Gondi Dharma is concerned, and, no wonder, he is engaged in preparing a Dharma-Grantha for the followers of the Gondi Dharma. It is also asserted by the Raja that it was directly as a result of the movement started under his aegis that the Pardhans have neither separated from them nor made common cause with the neo-Buddhist Mahars, if only because it has been impressed upon them that the Pardhans form an integral part of the Gond Samaj as a whole.

To this recent development may be added the fact that the Raj-Gond Zamindar of Palasgad, Raje Fateh Lal Shah affiliated to the Sayam clan (of seven-Dev phratry), does not seem to attach much importance to such religious matters, except, perhaps, for performing his role during the celebration of Dusserah in his zamindari. He is an educated man of considerable influence, and was elected on an earlier occasion as an M.L.A. At present he is the Chairman of the Social Welfare Committee of Chanda Zilla Parishad. He is quite conscious of his Gond (albeit Raj-Gond) identity, being rather keen to establish his direct descent from the ancient but now extinct (Gond) ruling family of Tipagarh fame, who are believed to have held sway over the whole of the Wairagad territory. The same is the case with the Zamindar of Aberi, Raje Vishveshwar Rao, who is affiliated to the Atram clan of six-Dev phratry. He has been elected to the Legislative Assembly on more than one occasion. He is a prominent leader of the Maha Vidarbha Rajya Sangharsha Samathi (MVRSS), whose demand is the establishment of a separate Vidarbha state comprising the eight districts of Maharashtra (including Chanda). He enjoys considerable influence and prestige, particularly in his own zamindari. Like the Raja of Chanda and other zamindars/mokkasadars, he is quite aware

of his Raj-Gond identity, without aspiring to be recognized as a Rajput of any order, although he certainly patronizes the Brahmin priest, whose services are utilized for the performance of Dusserah and other Hindu festivals and ceremonies. However, this patronage has not resulted in his giving up the propitiation of his tribal/clan deities, the related ceremonies being performed by his own tribal priests and mediums. The same may be said about the present Raj-Gond Zamindar of Potegaon, Srimant Dev Rao, who though forced by circumstances to lead a life of comparative simplicity and penury, is at present the Sarpanch of the Panchayat Samithi of Potegaon. He too is quite conscious of his Gond identity, though it was his late father who held pronounced views about his identity as a Raj-Gond. Not only had his father persuaded his Raj-Gond subjects to desist from employing Brahmins as priests on such occasions as the Satya Narayan Puja but he was also anxious to introduce the Gondi script; however, he was forced, much against his wishes, to write in Marathi all about the Gondi (Koitor) Dharma, wherein he highlighted the rules and regulations of behaviour and norms of conduct to be followed by the Raj-Gonds. (See *Raj-Gond Lokanche-Rivajache Niya-mavali Vyavasthapak*, Raj-Gondi Sabha, Nagpur).

If the elite among the Raj-Gonds possess rather strong feelings about their tribal identity without aspiring to be counted as Rajputs (Kshatriya), then it is quite obvious that the commoners among them have an even more developed awareness of belonging to a distinct tribal fold, which is conceived by them to be different from the Hindus in general, though (surprisingly enough) in actual practice, they observe, in common with the Hindus of the respective areas, the corresponding festivals and ceremonies (e.g., Shivratri, Holi, Deepavali, and Dusserah). It is worth adding that in recent years a number of booklets (all of them in Marathi) have been published which deal in one form or the other with the Gondi Dharma. Though it is projected as being different, this Dharma is clearly modelled on the traditional Hindu beliefs as is evidenced by the incorporation of such concepts as Treta Yuga, Avatar, and Satya Purusha in it. Shri Marutrao Jagannathrao Todase (of six-Dev phratry), aged about 55 years, residing at Kurkheda has written a booklet entitled *Dharmik Katha*;

Bade Dev Darshan : Phersa Pen, published in 1956, which deals with their myth of origin, classification of the Gonds into various clans according to the number of Devs or Gotras, festivals observed in connection with their deities, and the pilgrimage-centres of the Gonds.

When we take into consideration the above facts, it becomes clear that the Raj-Gonds of Chanda District, who have long lost their political power by their own admission, are found at the contemporary level of observation to retain and take pride in their tribal identity. What is more, in their anxiety to retain their identity as a distinct ethnic group (*jati*), they try to differentiate themselves from the non-Gonds, without, however, claiming or aspiring to the status of the Rajputs (Kshatriyas). This is in contrast to the Bhumij of Manbhun District or the Cheros of South Bihar, and so needs some explanation, which may perhaps be found when the historical perspective is taken in view. Accordingly, it may be stated that the Rajput model (as visualized by Dr. Sinha), with all its connotations, was present all along to be emulated, at least by the extant feudal (Gond) chiefs, and they succeeded to a large extent in imbibing it, more or less exclusively at the ideological level. Thus, one finds that they possess the qualities traditionally associated with Rajput valour and honour (including their craze for hunting); as also that they observe such practices as seclusion of their womenfolk, prohibition of widow re-marriage amongst the aristocratic, and extension of patronage to, and actual participation in, the celebration of Dusserah-cum-Navratra festivals (without disregarding their own tribal festivals and ceremonies). Apparently, then, their conscious efforts at emulating the Rajput model, both at the secular and sacred levels, might have eventually, if allowed to continue undisturbed, resulted in their gaining some sort of Rajput recognition, particularly for the aristocratic section. But this on-going process was apparently arrested and halted when they were politically conquered and subjugated by the Maratha (Bhonsle) rulers of Nagpur. This setback has been further reinforced in the post-independence period when ameliorative measures were adopted and welfare schemes introduced by the Central/State Governments, by way of abolition of zamindaries and *malguzaries*. Coupled with the

concern shown for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes and Castes, these developments have resulted, on the one hand, in enforcing all sorts of safeguards and privileges for them, and, on the other hand, in 'forcing' them to remain within their tribal fold, rather than to make the expected and normal attempts (at a conscious level) to gain entrance to the Hindu fold with an equivalent status of Kshatriyas (Rajputs) in the regional caste hierarchy, as Dr. Sinha's and Dr. Singh's studies in this direction would lead one to conclude.

Reference may be made in this connection to the observations made by Prof. Fürer-Haimendorf, who conducted field work intermittently among the Raj-Gonds of the Adilabad District of Andhra, from 1941 to 1953. He has specifically noted (1956 : 510-511) that the Raj-Gonds in the area of his study "do not aspire to included in the Hindu fold"; on the contrary, they retain their separate tribal identity, primarily because, as a result of their stable system of clans and phratries which operate effectively at the ritual level, the position of every individual in the framework of descent groups is well-defined and immutable. Thus, even though he finds that the composition of their residential group is fluid yet, according to his assessment, it is the rigidity and the strength of the descent system that has not only given the necessary stability to their social relations, but has furnished them with the required psychological and social security.

In the light of the above discussion, we can make the following conclusions:

The kingdom of Chanda, when studied with reference to the Gond tribe (s), emerged, essentially, as a result of internal growth, filling the vacuum created by the Muslim invasions from across the northern Indian plains. Arising thus from a small beginning in and around Sirpur, under the leadership of six-Dev-and Atram-affiliated Raj-Gonds, the Southern Gond Kingdom of Chanda gradually expanded during the 400 years or so of its existence till it covered almost the whole of the present day District of Chanda and its immediate surrounding areas as well. The political structure of the Gond chieftaincy of Chanda, which took the monarchical form of government, was initially organized on a tribal base, which we know (thanks to the studies made by Dr. Sinha and Dr. Singh) had

its roots in a settled form of agriculture and in the organized village community. It also probably had clan-demarcated territorial units which later became the military administrative units without, however, having much to do with phratries/ clans of the Gonds of various categories. Furthermore, during the hey-day of its existence, the central plain-areas of the Gond kingdom of Chanda remained directly under the control of its rulers, while the hilly, frontier-tracts, lying both on its west and east, were granted by them to the various feudal chiefs who mostly belonged (or were accepted into) to their own fold of the Raj-Gonds. Evidently, then, the Southern Gond Kingdom of Chanda fulfilled in all essential respects the four pre-conditions (as laid down by Dr. Singh) which resulted in the formation of states among the tribal communities in central and eastern India.

Regarding the socio-cultural aspects, it may be stated that my study does not support all the important consequences of state-formation which have been expressly stated in the respective studies made by Dr. Sinha, and Dr. Singh. Although as a direct result of the imposition of a feudal superstructure on the tribal Gond society, a two-tier social stratification came into existence, this bipolar division of their society into two distinct social classes (namely Srimants and commoners) was not accompanied by any ritual status in the form of food taboos or any such mark of distinction, excepting, of course, in the exercise of political authority and in the possession of economic wealth on the part of the Srimants. Neither is there any evidence to show that genealogies were improvised with a view to gaining the status of Kshatriyas either by the Gond rulers and/or the aristocratic section among them. There is, however, no doubt that the Gond state of Chanda definitely "accelerated the process of reclamation and cultivation of waste-lands through a network of irrigation works, such as embankments and reservoirs" as also encouraged commercial activities, particularly in the fort-cities. They developed the administrative system 'with the tribal chief at the top and a line of communication extending through a chain of forts under the control of various zamindars/mokkasdars/killedars.

There are clear references which show that the Gond ruler not only constructed temples but also conferred generous

grants in the form of land and 'pensions' on Brahmins and others, where they presumably settled for good. Yet, this did not result in the manufacture of 'high sounding genealogies linking the newly converted rulers with Puranic mythological heroes'. According to Dr. Singh, another cultural aspect of tribal states was to 'underline tribal identity', for, with the development of their own culture comes the renaissance and regeneration of the tribe. The manner in which Dusserah was celebrated at Aheri by the ex-Zamindar of Aheri as well as the Shivratri and Deepavali festivals performed at Aheri proper and Kamalapur village by the common Raj-Gonds and others and as witnessed by me demonstrates that though 'the spread of the Puranic and epic lores' was actively encouraged by the tribal state, yet the fact remains that 'the little tradition did not disappear altogether; but it flourished under borrowed great traditions. Both got mixed up: The Brahmanical rituals stopped short at a point beyond which local rituals and ceremonies held sway'. (Singh, 1971 : 178).

In the light of what has been mentioned above, it may be stated there are definite indications to show that this particular tribal (albeit Gond) state of Chanda had, during the course of its development, met with and remained largely unaffected by the then prevailing notion of (what Dr. Sinha has termed) the Rajput model of state (or one of its particular version). Similarly the various influences emanating from the Shakta and Vaishnav forms of Hinduism had an effect on the Gond Society, while the ritual services performed by the Brahmin priests were utilized progressively, even by the 'common, Gond' at large. But, this process of gradual integration with Hindu civilization appears to have halted due to some historical reasons with the result that we now find that while, on the one hand, patronage continues to be extended by the state (as represented by the now defunct Gond ruler and his one-time feudal chieftalncies) towards the celebration of the key symbolic festivals (like Dusserah, Shivratri, Deepavali and Holi), on the other hand, the tribal/clan festivals and ceremonies have not been totally abandoned. Nor is there any conscious effort or aspiration to be recognized and accepted as Rajputs of different orders, at least among the

aristocratic sections (Srimants) of the Raj-Gonds; instead, they prefer to be referred to as pure and simple Raj-Gonds, without claiming to be Hindus, much less Rajputs/thakurs, thereby retaining and accentuating exclusive feelings of separateness and tribal identity.

The reason for this sort of ambivalence on the part of the Gonds of Chanda is partly explained by Prof. Furer-Haimendorf, who attributes it to their strong and stable descent system, as reflected in their (non-localized) clan/phratry organization. This is true at the level of their social structure, but the picture is totally different when it comes to the cultural dimension, for they are found to actively observe and participate in almost all the religious festivals and ceremonies commonly associated with the higher caste Hindus, though not at the cost of dissociating themselves from their own tribal cults and myths.

It may, therefore, be suggested that the other part of the explanation for their retaining their tribal identity may lie in their political aspirations for the establishment of (what Dr. Roy-Burman has termed in a different context) an ethnic nationalism, which has, in their particular case, taken the form of what is described by him as proto-nationalism (Roy-Burman, 1973: 129), if only because a conscious elite among them promotes a search for an expanded identity, without however contradicting the larger nationalism. To be sure, this movement among them has not posed a serious threat to the authorities, because there is a fairly keen competition for capturing the centralized political power among the aspiring and ambitious Raj-Gond elites, as represented by (among others) the Raja of Chanda and the Zamindar of Panabaras on the one hand, and by the respective zamindars of Aheri and Palasgad, on the other. All of them are actively engaged individually (and rarely in combination) in the pursuit of political power, depending exclusively on their own influence and prestige among their followers, without however, evolving a common programme or forming an alliance, even of a temporary nature. However, the goal is the same—to capture the leadership of the Gonds of Chanda and its neighbouring areas. In short, they strongly feel that by maintaining a distinct entity and, for that matter, a distinct tribal identity, they

would continue to command the loyalties of their people; obviously, they have failed to work under a centralized leadership. The Gond Raja of Chanda provides a symbolic unity in this connection, but his leadership is seriously challenged and is, in fact, over-shadowed, by the aspirants, and hence not acceptable to all of them. As a consequence, they are a divided people politically though they remain united in their common identity as a tribal ethnic group, commonly referred to as the Gonds, but known to one another in their own language as the Koitor.

Finally, a few words may be added to explain the contemporary role of the present Gond Raja of Chanda in the light of the significant observation made by Dr. Roy Burman (in his comments on the paper by Maurice Freeman on Social and Cultural Anthropology). According to Roy Burman, 'when there is a disruption of secular power-base, the old trappings of power continue, but with a new sanction which falls within the conventional domain of the sacred.' As already pointed out, the Gond rulers of Chanda had lost their political power some two centuries ago; yet the present Gond Raja of Chanda, Raje Yadav Shah, though deprived of 'the secular power-base,' continued to hold, till recently, a pre-eminent position of authority among a large section of his own people, solely due to the customary usages prevalent since long (*purabe*) among the people living within the territorial framework once constituting the Gond kingdom of Chanda. The authority and prestige enjoyed by the Gond Raja of Chanda included his right (*adhikar*) to collect the various forms of taxes in kind or cash (collectively referred to as 'the Gondi dues'), mainly from the Gond householders, as also to exercise social control over his people, e.g., settling internal disputes referred to him for final adjudication and settlement, and arranging suitable marriages for the Gond girls taking shelter with him, popularly referred to as the daughters of the Raja'.

Nonetheless, his position and prestige—as the highest chief (Mukhya Raja) of his people—have of late been seriously challenged by a number of the (Gond) zamindars, whose ancestors were originally granted their respective estates by the rulers of the time to be administered by them as subordi-

nate chiefs, owing allegiance to the centralized authority of the Gond Rajas of Chanda. Thus one finds that in the recent past a gradual erosion of the authority of the Gond Raja of Chanda has set in as a result of the challenges thrown by the zamindari and also due to the general awareness of the people at large of their rights as free citizens, particularly since India gained independence in 1947.

No wonder, then, the Gond Raja of Chanda has started realizing, however reluctantly, that he can no longer afford to rely upon the old loyalties of his erstwhile subjects. The result of this realization has probably been responsible for his claiming to be the Dharma-Guru of not only the Gond of various determinations, but also of other ethnic groups (specifically, the Scheduled Tribes) dwelling in the area of the former kingdom of Chanda. Accordingly, he has declared that it is none other than himself who is in a position to show the way towards the establishment of the Gondi Dharma. With this end in view, Raje Yadav Shah of Chanda had started (as already stated) an Association called Veedikar Gond Samaj Seva Samithi, with branches at various centres. The main purpose behind this movement is to make the Gonds and others like the Pardhans, aware that they constitute the Mul-Niwasi (that is, the original inhabitants) of this tract; what is more, they should be conscious that their (Gondi) Dharma is fundamentally different from the Hindu Dharma, if only because, unlike the Hindus, they are required to sacrifice buffaloes/cows to propitiate their Bada Dev (called Phersa Pen). Needless to say, the aims and objects of this movement (Shudi Sangtan) are explained to the people at large by means of printed literature (Dharma-Grantha) as well as during formal and informal meetings and gatherings, directly addressed by him or through his chosen circle in the capacity of the Dharma.

This sort of reliance on a new sanction which is purely of a sacred nature, is reinforced by the recent claim made by the Gond Raja of Chanda (in the office of the Collector of Chanda) that it was his ancestors who had been responsible for the construction and maintenance of the Mahan-Kali temple—which stands just outside the walled-city of Chandrapur—which was built by his ancestors when the capital was

shifted to Chandrapur somewhere in the sixteenth century. This claim is, however, contested by the present priest of the temple on the ground that they are real owners of the temple precinct where a market-cum-festival is held annually on a relatively large scale in honour of the goddess Mahakali the tutelary deity of the Gond Rajas of Chanda.

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THE GOND MOVEMENTS

K.S. Singh

PROBABLY THE largest tribe in India, the Gonds have emerged as the dominant community in the vast territory extending from the Satpuras to the Godavari, to which they lent their name (hence Gondwana). They founded a number of states, graphically described in the mediaeval chronicles, and their political authority survived in a number of the Gond zamindaries until recently, which gave them a measure of social dominance over other communities. The autochthones of the region formed a constellation with the Gonds as the most important star, and most of the former traced their origin to and maintained relationships of various kinds with the latter. The Gond social system is the most complex and stratified—the communities range from the most primitive to fairly advanced ones. The Raj-Gonds formed the aristocratic stratum and the Dhur Gonds were at the bottom of the social ladder. From the territorial angle, the southern region (Chanda, Adilabad, Bastar) is less exposed to external influences and the Gond political and social systems survive there in a relatively pure form. The northern region (Durg, Rajnandgaon, Belarpur) is more exposed and the Gond system is more acculturated as a consequence.

On the face of it, the Gonds did not have a tradition of militant struggle waged in defence of their rights over land and forests. The Gond zamindars spearheaded the 1857 rebellion in their region like the zamindars elsewhere, but the

Gond peasants as a whole were not involved in any movement. However, from the 1940s, instances of the Gonds' resistance to encroachment on their rights in forests have come to light. Since independence, their territorial and political system have broken down, and their rights in forest and land have been eroded. New settlements have been established in their lands. Peasant castes have migrated in large numbers to the Adilabad and Chanda districts and outsiders have flocked to the industrial centres and townships which have sprung up in the Gond land.

The fact that Gond movements have centred round forests rather than land is understandable in the context of Dandakaranya ecology. Another distinguishing feature of such movements, particularly those occurring in Bastar where the Marias and Murias predominate, is the special relationship of the tribes with the Bastar chief, who also serves as the chief priest to the presiding deity, Danteshwari, of the tribal pantheon. Any change in the status of the Raja—who combines the political and religious authority as dramatically exemplified in the Dusserah festival—stirs fears in the tribal's heart; his denigration invites the displeasure of the Gods and epidemics and droughts. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Bastar rebellions from 1876 to 1966—there were as many as seven—involving the primitive tribes revolved around the chief, his projected visit outside his state (1876), the uncertainty about succession (1911), and his denigration and manipulation in the 1960s. But this was only an ostensible cause. At the root lay the forest question, semi-feudal exactions (*begar*), maladministration and exploitation. The reservation of large areas as state forest was an important issue in the Bastar rebellion of 1911, the *bhumakal*:

The inclusion in reserves of forest and village lands, high-handed treatment and unjust exactions on the part of Forest Officials, maltreatment of pupils and parents by school masters in order to extort money, forcible collection by school masters of money to purchase supplies for Tahsildar and Inspector, purchase by school masters of supplies at one-fourth of the market price, similar acts by the State Police, with the addition that they exact *begar*

and beat village servants to compel the cheap supply of grain, the demand of excessive *begar* by the Tahsildar and non-payment for supplies in connection with the camps of officials, the exaction of excessive *begar* by Malgujars, interference with the rights of manufacturing intoxicating liquor, a practice of officials of getting houses built by *begar*, even compelling the labourers to feed themselves, exactions by the lessees of villages. . . and general oppression on the part of officials. The petitioners add that this oppression began with the advent of Raj Bahadur Panda Baijnath, that they had petitioned him without result, and that their present object was merely to ensure that some one should come and hear them.¹

It was a total revolt:

The outburst was accompanied by murder, arson, looting and general savagery, it was a regular revolt against civilization, against schools,¹ against forest conservancy, against the opening up of the country by Hindu settlers, in short it was a movement of Bastar state for Bastar forest dwellers.²

The Maria, Bhatra and Parja, and some of the Bison-horn Maria in the Dantawara region participated in the rebellion; only the zamindars and the most primitive Maria of the Abujhmar Hills kept out.

In the early 1940s, the Gonds of Adilabad led by Kurma Bhimu started an insurrection which was short-lived over the forest question:

This spark was provided by the forcible disabandment of a group of Gond and Kolam settlements in the Dhanora state forest, and for the first time in their unequal struggle against the ruthlessness of non-aboriginal landlords and the indifference of officials to their needs, did the Gonds find a leader capable of rallying hundreds of tribesmen to concerted action.

Their belief in his leadership was strengthened by his claim to supernatural powers. Like many Gond Bhaktas or seers, men capable of trance-experiences and liable to possession by gods, Bhimu was credited with the faculty of hearing the voices of deities and to act under their guidance. But this alone would not have enabled him to rouse hundreds of peaceful cultivators against the authority of the State if the aboriginals' temper had not already been near boiling-point, Rumours current among the non-aboriginals of the District had it that he intended to found a 'Gond Raj' but this is not born out either by the accounts of his Gond followers nor by the letters which he continued to address to the authorities. In these he demanded only permission to live and cultivate at Jhareghat and freedom from the exactions of forest subordinates and from plough-tax and grazing-fees, whose collection had been used as a pretext for all sorts of illegal extorting of cash and provisions.³

In the Gond region proper, a tribal organization was set up as early as in 1950 with its headquarters at Chanda, which promoted activities for the welfare of the tribals (mainly Gonds) in the adjoining regions (Rajnandgaon, Durg, and Narainpur Tehsil in Bastar; Amrabati region in Vidarbha; and Chanda, Yeotmal, Akola, Buldama and Nagpur in Maharashtra). It was in non-political body which was active in the rural area. After Dharma Das, Lal Shyam Shah—a Raj Gond, who was influenced by the freedom movement and had participated in the rural reconstruction programme launched by Mahatma Gandhi—took over and remained at its head till he joined politics, as he considered politics to be the most potent weapon for social change. He fought in successive elections with the support of the opposition parties.

The sporadic disturbances in the Gond region which culminated in the organized movement in the late fifties and early sixties, the Bastar disturbances apart, could be seen as a manifestation of the Gonds' sense of insecurity and grievances over a number of developments in their region. Of them, the most important was the launching of the Dandakaranya project which made serious inroads into their forests :

3,310,06 acres of reserved forests and 78,127,17 acres of protected forests were made available to the Dandakaranya Development Authority for settling refugees from East Pakistan. A good part of the forests was cleared. The settlement of such large numbers of 'aliens' created a number of problems for the tribals, one of which was their apprehension about the scarcity of land for their own settlement. Secondly, the tribals, who were dependent on the forests, suffered more as forest reservations were extended, their administration made more stringent, and felling of trees prohibited. Thirdly, the exploitation of the tribals by forest contractors (who cheated them of their valuable timber wealth by buying it at a nominal price), by distillers, money-lenders and traders, and by land-grabbers grew apace. Restrictions on the traditional use of minor forest produce and its exploitation by contractors also created dissatisfaction. Fourthly, the rising incidence of unemployment among the educated tribals led to a demand for employment of the tribes in the Bilai and other industrial undertakings.

Memories of state formation inspired the demand for a separate Gond state after independence which has, however, never been spelt out and sustained by an organized movement. Kurma Bhimu demanded a Gond raj for his own region in 1941. In a memorandum submitted before the States Reorganization Commission, on 9 May 1963, the Gond leaders—such as, the tribal minister, Raja Naresh Singh—demanded the formation of a separate state for the Adivasis to be carved out of the tribal areas of Chhatisgarh and the contiguous districts of the Rewa region and Vidarbh. Narain Sing Uikey, President of the Gondwana Adibasi Seva Mandal, reiterated his demand for the formation of a Gondwana State, consisting of Gond and tribal regions of Chhattisgarh and the contiguous districts of Vidarbh in Maharashtra, to protect them against exploitation. The partition of the Central Provinces had fragmented the composite Gond region and created problems for tribals who could not market their produce in their traditional markets which now lay in two different states. A conference of the opposition parties and the Chhattisgarh Mahasabha Sangh met to seek a solution to this problem, but nothing came of it.

In 1960, on the occasion of the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Rajpur, 40,000 Adivasis held their first demonstration and demanded relief. The Dhebar Commission was set up soon afterwards and one of their leaders was associated with it. Tribal leaders, drawn mainly from the affluent Raj Gond families, participated in the Government; a few others also joined the opposition parties.

A movement of the Gonds of the lower strata led by Hira Singh⁴ developed in the late 1950s and reached its peak in 1962-63 before dying down. Hira Singh, son of Penu Gond Manjhi belongs to Amapara (Durg) and came from the respectable ranks of the Deo Manjhis. His own position is eighth among the Deo Manjhis and his family belongs to the Marai clan. Not much is known about his childhood, except that he was born at Raoghat near Jagdalpur, was brought up at Telawat, 15 miles from Kanker; he worshipped like his people at the shrine of Anga Deo; left his home at the age of 14 to go round the Gond area; and went to the Kargurh mountain near Bailadila to visit the Shrine of Burha Deo. He chose Durg as the centre of his activities in 1948. He founded an organization called Adibasi Kalyan Samiti to promote the welfare of the Gond people in their homeland now split between Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. He gave himself the name Kangla Manjhi in token of his identification with the poor (*ka:ngal*), by which name he is better known now. The objectives of the Samiti were to uplift the tribal people by promoting the implementation of development programmes launched by the Government, to encourage cultivation among the tribals who could no longer depend on forests by securing facilities for them, and, last, to construct shrines to the Gond deities, Gaura Deo and Burha Deo. The Samiti, which raised money and claimed a membership of 3,000, soon ran into trouble caused by litigation, factional fights, misappropriation of funds, and finally became moribund. But it provided a base for Kangla Manjhi to enable him to move into the political arena.

On the face of it, the Manjhi supported the National Congress and its candidates during the elections, affirmed his faith in democracy, employed national symbols (Bharat Mata), and called upon the people to participate enthusiastically in

national celebrations (such as, independence day and republic day) at all levels from Durg to Delhi. The handbills and pamphlets issued by the Samiti are couched in an unintelligible language and are characterized by narvete.

At the local level, the Manjhi set up the Majhi Sarkar, which did not function in direct opposition to the state or district administration. It was a parallel but invisible government. He appointed himself Rashtra Manjhi, gave a high position to his wife who was called Rajamata, called his children Rajkumar, and surrounded himself with bodyguards, designated as colonels. He prescribed dresses, emblems, seals (Bhata-Gondwana) and badges (Taj Hind). He himself carried a naked sword and his followers paraded with weapons. He imposed a system of collection of revenue and imposition of fines.

As Rashtra Manjhi, he appointed majhis at the Pargana level. Each pargana consists of five to forty villages. For every ten Parganas he appointed a *bade* manjhi. The post of the manjhi could go by the clan but gradually the Manjhi sarkar became a family affair, the manjhiship of Durg being retained in his own lineage. Gonds were also appointed to such offices as pratinidhi, president, secretary and chaprasi in the manjhi sarkar.

The Manjhi toured the Gond territory extensively in 1959-62. He demanded formation of a Gondwana State and employment for the tribals, founded the Bharatiya Gondwana Sangh in August 1959, called upon the tribals to avail themselves of the facilities of education and employment offered by the Government, promoted social reforms (respect for women and abstinence from killing animals), constructed religious shrines, and built up their unity. He submitted memoranda ventilating grievances of a local nature. He claimed that he had stayed with Mahatma Gandhi and confabulated with Jawaharlal Nehru "who had given him the Gond Raj". He himself was an incarnation of Burha Deo, the Gond God. In 1961, he held as many as thirty meetings. There were instances of conflict with local government functionaries. He advocated non-payment of tax which could be collected only by his Sarkar. Later, he also declared formation of Gondwana Raj, which would solve all

the problems of the forty lakh tribals in India. He acquired a considerable following and at one point could temporarily mobilize as many as 100,000 tribals in the region extending up to Bhandara District. The slogans were revivalistic—the tribal women should not discard their traditional gear, and the tribals should assert their rights in forests, land and lakes. His messengers visited villages, ‘terrorized’ people, created confusion and called upon people not to pay taxes or to cast their votes.

The Manjhi and some of his followers were taken into custody and arraigned on the charge of impersonating as public servants, forming public assemblies, wrongful confinement of persons and cheating. The Manjhi’s defence was that he was a social reformer. They were acquitted in 1962 but the movement came to an end soon afterwards.

The movement does not show much sign of life now and Kangla Manjhi confines his activities to holding meetings. There are occasional reports about the activities of his Sarkar and of clashes of a minor nature; his leaflets appear and funds are raised. But the Manjhi now stays in Delhi.

Some people have described the movement as concealed insurgency. The local authorities did not agree with their view as they did not find any substance in the allegations made against the Manjhi. Neither he nor his movement was taken seriously by them. He and his followers were allowed to participate in independence day celebrations lest they created a nuisance. They came dressed in their khaki uniforms, wearing bands and headgears and brandishing weapons.

A few conclusions could be drawn from this narration. First, the Gonds did not succeed in organizing any large-scale and sustained movement for the creation of Gondwana state. The Gond system was too stratified to make for unified action. Secondly, unlike the Chotanagpur tribals, the Gonds did not go through a phase of militant agrarian struggles which served to sharpen the consciousness of ethnic identity. Christianity, with its tools of modernization, did not make any impact. The Gonds were far too dependent on forests. Their economic system had not broken down to a point where they had to depend mainly on land. The man-land

ratio was not adverse and is still not so. Availability of land and forests in some regions offered scope for migration. Then, again, unlike the Bihar situation, the higher ranks of Gond society were offered seats in the Government and representation on many public bodies. There is no sense of deprivation in the sharing of political power that gave an edge to the tribal movement in Bihar. It should be noted also that there were no revitalization movements, except in two cases recently, which could promote social mobility and set their vision high.

References

1. Confidential letter No. 60 dated 29 March 1969, from B.P. Standant, Chief Secretary and the Commissioner, Central Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Forest Department, Simla.
2. Ibid.
3. Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf: 'Aboriginal Rebellions in the Deccan'. *Man in India*, Rebellion Number, Vol. XXV, December 1945.
4. This part of the study is based on the field work done in 1973-75. I am grateful to K.N. Thusu and L.N. Soni of the Nagpur Office, for collecting information on the present status of the movement and the family history of Kangla Manjhi; and to Vikash Bhatt for providing information on the movement in the Dastar region.

A FOREST SATYAGRAHA

K.S. Singh

THE LEADERS of the freedom movement in the tribal regions mobilised the tribals by focusing on their rights in forests being eroded through commercial exploitation of forest and forest produce, which next only to land were the most important resource on which the tribals subsisted. A series of forest satyagraha were launched in the 1930s by the Indian National Congress to demand restoration of tribals' customary rights to extract timber and collect forest produce for consumption. The Kharwar of Palamau, the dominant tribal peasant community¹ inhabiting the forest region south of the Koel river were drawn into such a struggle led by the Congressmen from across the river.² A number of freedom fighters sprang up in their midst.³ The involvement of Kharwars in the freedom movement was remarkable considering the fact that other tribal communities such as the Chero had joined the regional movement for tribal autonomy led by the Adibasi Mahasabha and later by the Jharkhand party.

The freedom movement aroused expectations among the Kharwars that days of their oppression were numbered and that the era of the *swaraj*, which they interpreted to mean restoration of their rights in land and forest would dawn. Part of their expectation had been engendered by the propaganda of the Congressmen among the tribals in the 1930s and 1940s. The Zamindari system was abolished, which brought relief to the oppressed peasantry in the 1950s. For

the Kharwars it meant the end of the Ranka *raj* which vested in the government of Bihar. The forests also vested in the state. They were notified as protected forests in which the customary rights to free fuel, to free timber for domestic use, free grazing, and to free collection of minor forest produce were regulated, even restricted in practice under the watchful forest guards who harassed the tribals. Independence thus brought little relief from the day-to-day worry of the tribals about making both ends meet; in fact their problems multiplied as their forest, which they were accustomed to look upon as their own, which they could exploit for their benefit, was no longer their own, and their movements in it were subject to check and control. Land which was another important resource was subjected to the payment of land revenue. Independence did not mean abolition of rent as had been promised by the Congress leaders during the freedom struggle. Restrictions were also placed on the cultivation of barren lands, which according to the tribals fell within the ambit of their traditional rights. The vision of primeval independence, which meant freedom from all fetters, all obligations to pay taxes etc., did not materialise. The Kharwar felt cheated. A reaction against the Congress rule set in the mid-1950s.

The stage was thus set for the commencement of a Satyagraha concerned mainly with the free utilisation of forest produce and extraction of timber without making any payment and marginally with non-payment of rent. It was led by Fetal Singh (died in 1976) of Kharwar. Born in the *Surya bansi* moiety of the Kharwars, he was a small illiterate tribal peasant who had inherited a little land to which he added a lot more through reclamation of waste land. Thus a person of means he was not slow to see how the Congress Government had not kept the promises made to the tribals during the second general elections that they would be permitted to take forest produce and the produce from government owned land (*gairmazarua*) without any restriction and that their land would be made rent-free. In December 1957 he began organising the Kharwars to join his movement which cut across the state borders and swept into the Kharwar region of Madhya Pradesh. Fetal's men threatened contractors and coolies working in the Baliagarh forest with punishment

if they did not go back home. They collected brick-bats and prepared slings (dhelwas, a device made of strings). To make matters worse, 1957 was a year of scarcity, which made tribals subsist more on forest produce such as roots and tubers.¹

A Bhagat party was thus born in the mid-fifties among the Kharwars. It called upon the people to stop payment of rent to revenue collecting agent, utilise timber and forest produce without making any payment, defy magistrates and forest guards, and to flout the forest laws which violated tribals' customary rights. It claimed that tribals had complete rights in forests and gairmazarua land. An independent Bharat Sarkar was reportedly established which issued warrants of arrest against government servants, imposed fines, etc. Fetal's men brought the forest operations to a standstill. They also told their people that the police men's bullets would turn to water and they had nothing to fear about. These were matters which the Kharwars alone could decide. They were the owners of forest and of land which were to be cultivated rent-free. Within a few weeks the movement gathered momentum. It articulated new-fangled ideas:

"Mahatma Gandhi had told us, . . . cultivate barren lands produce, cotton, spin the *charkha*, manufacture clothes, wear them and beat drums. But where is the Kisan *raj*? How can we eat unless we cultivate and grow food. You should shout slogans so that they may reach Delhi. We feel that the Britishers have not gone as yet. We think the *Zamindari* is as it was before. . . .

"We had voted for the Government. A *raja* looks after the welfare of the people. The *raja* who does not look after the welfare of his people is not actually a *raja* and we do not want this sort of *raja*. We won't allow the contractors to cut forest wood. We won't pay any rent or tax. We will establish our own Government. We do not accept this Government. We can sacrifice our lives for this. . . .

"Gandhiji had told us, . . . tillers will be owners of land. But we are labouring hard and dying and others are merry making. Big persons have snatched away our claims. Why should they snatch our lands? . . . Now we are

not allowed to enter into the jungle even. Neither the Zamindars nor the Government had irrigated the jungles and planted trees. This is ours. Why the contractor should take it away? We will stop cutting of forest wood by the contractors nor should any one go to work for the contractor in the jungle. We do not accept this Government. We will establish our own Bharat Raj. We won't pay any sort of rent or tax. We should unite and establish our own Bharat Raj, we do not accept the Police or the Magistrate. If they would enforce their law and rules upon us we would not abide by that whatever may happen. . . .

"When the Police or the Magistrate will attack us we will also attack them from behind and there is no offence in so doing. We will attack them with this pistol and bullet."⁴

Many of these ideas were reflected in the folk songs improvised for the movement and sung at meetings:

"The system of the zamindars broke down,
 With it went away the *begari* performed by the Kisan
 The big baboo is now handling the *Kudal*
 We won't have either police or village chowkidar
 "Do not sleep brother Kisan
 A Bihari wolf enters Chotanagpur
 Awake the Kisan!
 Collect stones, to drive it away.
 "O children of Bharat, listen to the word of Gandhi
 Let us confront the *Sarkar*
 "The forest bush was taken away,
 The bush, the hills were also taken away
 We were cheated."⁵

The Kharwars of Madhya Pradesh were the first to strike. In 1957 a forest movement developed with the Khobi village (Ambikapur-Sarguja) as the base, involving the Kharwar tribe, who were led by their leader, Chuni. Chuni was influenced by the Gond preacher, Rajmohini. Later, he broke away from her, advised people not to pay land revenue and forest dues, held meetings to propagate his view that

Jungle Zamin Azad Hai (forest and land are free) etc. A *sarkar* was reportedly established. Chuni was also influenced by Fetal who was expected to pay him a visit. Chuni's men felled trees illegally in forests, demanded free use of land and forest, etc. With the aid of a typewriter Chuni started sending messages to the effect that the authority of the government servants was at an end. His followers evaded arrests. Local officers were assaulted. Like Fetal Chuni thought in terms of setting up an independent authority. Chuni's men strengthened their position by replenishing their stores of food and fuel.

"...the police patrols were twice attacked by Chuni's men, first on 16th December 1957, and then on 18th December 1957. On both these occasions stones were hurled at the police party and on 18th December 1957, the persons who attacked the police were armed with spears, 'gofans' and swords . . . on 12th January 1958, some of Chuni's men attacked a police picket. A crowd consisting of about 150 men and women, armed with lathis, spears, axes and gofans approached the police picket posted close to one Ghasi's house and asked the policemen to go away. When the policemen refused, the crowd started pelting stones at them. The mob, however, gave chase and pelted stones at the police

...Apprehending danger to their life they opened fire in self-defence. Three shots were fired which resulted in the death of two persons and injuries to a third.⁶

Fetal, too, decided to strike a few weeks later. The reports received by the Government stated that he was going to organise a raid on contractors' labourers engaged in wood cutting. The local authorities' decided to arrest Fetal to prevent the movement from taking a violent turn. A graphic description of the incidents which followed in quick succession resulting in a firing on 1 February 1958 occurs in confidential report sent by the local authorities to the government:

"We left the camp at 9 A.M. and reached the village Bahahara at about 10.30 A.M. Before we could reach the

house of Fetal Singh, he and his men spotted us and began collecting persons by shouting to their associates. When we arrived in front of the house of Fetal Singh, about 200 persons had collected there and had taken position, and were all armed with lathis, bhalas, swords, catapults, tangis, and dhelwans. Many of them were carrying stones in bags hanging round their necks, with dhelwans (a device to hurl stones to a great distance with considerable force). They challenged us not to proceed further than the board carrying the notice in Hindi "52 deg ke bhitar police nahin barh sakti hai". Large number of persons were rushing towards the house of Fetal Singh, and we therefore posted police parties in proper position to prevent them from congregating at Fetal Singh's house.

"The Magistrate warned the mob to disperse immediately, or it would be dispersed by force. He explained to the mob that there were warrants of arrest against Fetal Singh and 4 others which had to be executed. He asked them to surrender. He also warned the other members of the mob that their participation with Fetal Singh in his resistance was an unlawful act for which they could also be arrested. He clarified that it was our intention only to enforce the law and not to harm anybody.

"When this warning had little effect on the mob, the Superintendent of Police (S.P.) went ahead and again explained to them saying that he was the S.P. of the district and they were all his brothers, and directed them not to violate law. He referred to the rioting case u/s 147 I.P.C. and read out the names of Fetal Singh and 4 others against whom warrants of arrest were issued and who were evading arrest. These persons were specifically named out by the S.P. and they were asked to surrender themselves immediately, and the remaining persons were asked to disperse the mob if they resisted arrest.

"On this Fetal Singh and his men shouted out that they were prepared for all eventualities. They were warned and asked to think about the serious consequences which might result due to their unlawful determination of not to disperse and not to surrender. When this had no effect, the Subdivisional Officer (S.D.O.) declared the assembly

unlawful, and ordered them to disperse failing which they would be compelled to use the force. On this a man told us at the top of his voice that they had their own Government, and that they would not accept the police and the Magistrate, not the present Government. They had no respect for the warrant of arrest. The police and the Magistrate had committed dacoity in the house of Radhika Bhuiyan when they went to attach the property on 14.2.1958 in connection with the criminal case instituted against him. One of them started reading out their *Kanuns* (laws) that they had passed themselves. . . . Finding that they were determined to resist the arrest, the S.D.O. ordered lathi charge. A section of lathi party moved ahead on which the mob started throwing volleys of stones by means of dhelwans which resulted in injuries to 19 men and officers including the Magistrate and the Inspector of Police. The situation was found to be very grave and the lathi party proved ineffective. There was great danger to the life of the force, and S.D.O. therefore ordered the force to open fire. While the lathi party was withdrawing, a person from the other flank of the mob made a desperate rush towards the lathi party with a sword. The first round was fired on him, and he fell dead on the ground. Even this had no effect, and the mob continued throwing stones. Again the Officer Incharge of Ranka P.S. warned the mob to disperse immediately, otherwise they would resort to more firing which might cause heavy casualty. But the mob was not prepared to listen, and advanced towards the force, whereupon another round was fired causing injury to one person. After this, Fetal Singh who was directing the operation from behind a cover, left and concealed himself in his house. After this the mob started retreating. The force was then rushed for the arrest of the warrantees.

Most of the persons fled away, and only a few of them concealed themselves in the house of Fetal Singh. The police force surrounded the house, and started searching the rooms of the house to effect arrest. Mahadeo Singh, a resident of Ramchandarpur, P.S. District Surguja (M.P.) who was the chief advisor of Fetal Singh was

found brandishing his lathi. Before he could assault the Magistrate, he was arrested by the force. Thereafter one Thakur Prasad Singh dealt two lathi blows on Havildar Jamna Singh, but was overpowered and arrested. Fetal Singh had concealed himself in a very dark room within a false roof. He was detected by the R.S.M., and when he wanted to arrest him, he whipped out his Balwa (a big axe). The R.S.M. saved himself. He again went with a bhala (spear), disarmed him and arrested him. Later on three other persons were also arrested.⁷

Fetal was later arrested, convicted and jailed. He broke down in jail owing to ill-health and pressure from family to retract. He was released later on furnishing a bond for good behaviour. The Government decided to suspend the terms of sentence against him and eight of his colleagues. Later Fetal was acquitted.

The two forest Satyagrahas had their roots in the disturbance of the customary rights of the tribals in forest which they had enjoyed without let and hindrance until the forest department imposed its regulations for efficient management of forest resources. This was an anti-climax for the tribals who fed on hopes in the mid-1950s looked forward to reduction, even abolition of land revenue and to ready facilities for *nishtar* (extraction) in forests. When neither materialised, they rose inspired by their dreams of primeval freedom against the local authorities. Their struggle failed to achieve its objective, which eludes them to this day.

Notes

1. Narmadeshwar Prasad and others, *Land and People of Tribal Bihar*, Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 1961, pp. 123-30.
2. Ghanshyam Ojha, a Congress worker from Daltonganj, while mobilising the Kharwars in the course of the 1942 movement advocated forcible cutting away of lac by tenants, abolition of zamindari, etc. It appears from the records that Kharwars' involvement in the 1942 movement was next only to the Tana Bhagats' in its intensity (File No. 1 of 1942. Confidential Section of the Deputy Commissioner's Office, Palamau).

3. One of the distinguished Congress leaders who organised the Kharwars and Parahias to participate in the freedom movement was Jadubans Sahay. The freedom fighters among the Kharwas are enumerated in the memorial slabs put up at the block offices of Bhandaria (14), Ranka (13) and Mahuadant. Even a Parahia, a member of the very primitive tribe, and a Kisan figure in the roll of honour at Ranka, Bhagirith Singh, a Kharwar, rose to be the Secretary of District Congress Committee, and was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for reviving the Kharwar agitation in the 1940s. He also organised *melas* in honour of the Kharwar freedom fighters of 1857, Nilambar and Pitambar.
4. The English translation of the speeches delivered by the Kharwar speakers at Chunga, Daitonganj Sadar on 8.2.1958. Deputy Commissioner's Confidential Section papers.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Resolution on the Report of Shri C.B. Kekre, District and Sessions Judge on the Incidents at village Khobi, district Surguja leading to the Police Firing on the 12th January 1958, Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1958.
7. Confidential Report from S.C. Ghatak, S.D.O. Garhwa to Deputy Commissioner, Palamau dated 19 February 1958, Confidential Section, Deputy Commissioner's Office, Palamau.

GAHIRA GURU AND HIS SANT SAMAJ MOVEMENT

Ajit K. Danda

GAHIRA GURU, or the Master from Gahira, is a Kawar tribal by birth. His actual name is Rameshwar Ram. He was born in 1913 at Gahira,¹ a village in Lailunga Police Station of Gharghora Tehsil in Raigarh District. As he himself claims, he belongs to the Atri *gotra* (clan), and is the fourth and only surviving child of Burgi Kawar, the *gaotia* (headman) of Gahira.

During his childhood, Rameshwar Ram was like any average child of Gahira, with little interest in studying and intermittently involved in agricultural activities and the looking after of domestic cattle. He is said to have attended school only for "fifteen hours". But this proved adequate for him as it gave him proficiency in reading Hindi. He has thoroughly studied the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in Hindi and is capable of reciting Sanskrit *slokas* (rhymes). He is fluent in Oriya as well.

His early youth was spent in agricultural pursuits. When he was about fifteen years old, Rameshwar Ram came in close contact with Niranjana Das, a Vaishnava mendicant who was their family *lanjha* (preceptor) and used to receive *dana* (charity) as part of any post-funeral ceremony. Niranjana Das belonged to the village of Chhail in Dharamjaigarh Tehsil in Raigarh District. Whenever he visited Gahira he used to spend some time in meditation in Gunu Gufa (a cave located in the nearby village Gunu). Rameshwar Ram used to visit him

there and also started practising meditation. As reported by Ekka, Rameshwar Ram received some sort of *diksha* (initiation) from the mendicant and, thereby, was inspired to practise Tratak Yoga (1972:176). In Rameshwar Ram's own words, once when he went to visit Niranjan Das in Gufa he found the latter in a state of *pranayama* (levitation). Rameshwar Ram was already familiar with the practice of levitation but his approach to it was through Bhakti Yoga (path of devotion). He found Niranjan Das practising levitation through Jnan Yoga (path of knowledge), a superior way. He became a disciple of Niranjan Das and from him learnt the art of levitation through the path of knowledge. They stayed in Gunu Gufa for some time and practised meditation and levitation, subsisting on whatever fruits, leaves and tubers they could collect from the forest. Even after his return to the village, Rameshwar Ram often slipped into the forest without anybody's knowledge and practised meditation there until he left home for good. After a short stay in Gunu Gufa, he discovered that the cave was not very suitable for deep meditation. Hence he trekked to Sirkot, an uninhabited jungle near Kasmi in Samri Tehsil of Surguja District. He resumed meditating there and at the age of about thirty-five years was blessed with *siddhi* (enlightenment) by Lord Shiva.²

After attaining enlightenment, Rameshwar Ram married Purni, a Kawar girl, daughter of the headman of the village Lureng in Raigarh District and started family life.³ He has three daughters and two sons from Purni. He married another Kawar girl, the daughter of the headman of village Sardega, who died soon after their marriage leaving no children. Almost immediately after her death, he married Ganga, the daughter of the headman of village Kudur in Surguja District, and has had a son and two daughters by her. It is said that at the time of the consecration of the Kailashnath temple at Gufa (which later came to be known as Kailash Gufa), the assembled priests advised him to marry again as none of his living wives were present. He chose a Kawar girl in her teens.⁴

In 1953,⁵ he founded the Sanatan Dharam Sant Samaj which later came to be known as Sant Samaj,⁶ and started preaching. He urged the people to practise *satya* (truth), *shanti* (peace), *daya*

(compassion) and *chhama* (absolution); and to abjure *chori* (theft), *pardari* (adultery), *hatya* (killing), and *mithya* (falsehood).

As an examination of the pamphlet provided in the Appendix indicates, his initial interest was to establish the Kaurav ancestry of the Kavar and to restore their position of past glory which they had lost due to their indulgence and because of the adoption of certain bad practices. As a means for restoring the past glory he prescribed the observance of certain food taboos, marriage rules, and funeral practices. In fact, nowhere in the said pamphlet is there any reference to the Sanatan Dharam Sant Samaj, which seems to be a later conceptualization.

How the Kaurav Jati Sudhar movement transformed itself into the Sant Samaj movement cannot be fully established, but the Hindu Mahasabha and the Jan Sangh obviously played a part in the initiation of the movement and the widening of its scope. Rameshwar Ram was, in fact, a close associate of the Raja of Sarangarh who had espoused the cause of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Jan Sangh in that area. Rameshwar Ram urged his followers to bathe and pray every day, recite the Ramayana, and offer collective prayers to God every Thursday. He declared that he did not believe in the caste hierarchy but held the Brahman and the cow in great esteem. He built a temple consecrated to Shiva and Parvati in the natural cave of Kailash Gufa in 1956 and arranged for daily worship there by engaging a Brahman priest. Copies of the *Ramayana* have been kept in a separate enclosure within the temple and are worshipped there daily. He also established a Sanskrit Pathshala at Kailash Gufa in 1967 which provides Sanskrit teaching up to the Acharaya standard. The Pathshala is recognized by the Board of Sanskrit Studies, Banaras. At present, there are 140 students there who receive free education, board and lodging. Attached to the Sanskrit Pathshala is a Hindi Primary School (up to fifth standard). The expenses of the Pathshala as well as the Primary School are met from *mutthidan*, or voluntary public donation,⁷ of one handful of rice per family per day.

In order to popularize his movement among the masses, he established three other temple complexes—one each at

Gahira Sirkot, and Samarbhar in 1966, 1970, and 1976 respectively. Everywhere, there is a special structure for performing *yagna* (sacrificial fire) and all the centres organize an annual fair which attract Hindu mendicants and priests from distant places. At Kailash Gufa, the sacrificial fire worship is performed during Shivaratri in the month of Fagun. At Gahira, it is performed from Shravan Ekadashi to Amabashya and again during Ekadashi to Purnima in the month of Magh. The sacrificial fire is performed at Sirkot during Ramnavami and at Samarbhar during Dushera. Gahira Guru moves from one centre to the other throughout the year and thus renews his contacts with the devotees. Ordinarily, he visits Gahira during Maghi Purnima, Kailash Gufa during Shivaratri, Sirkot during Ramnavami and Samarbhar during Dushera.

During the annual fairs, his devotees are expected to donate twelve paise per head and two kilos of rice per household. The grain collected through *nutthulan* and the donations received during the annual fair are used towards the maintenance of the centres. The excess grains are deposited in grain banks, locally known as *bhandars*, organized by him. Any devotee can borrow grain from the grain bank at any time, and has to return the same with 25 per cent excess. From the income of these grain banks, he maintains an Ayurvedic Hospital at Samarbhar. In this way, the income derived from the devotees eventually goes back to them. This particular programme has become so popular among his devotees, that he had to buy a tractor and a trailer for carrying grain to the *bhandar*. As already indicated, most of Gahira Guru's devotees⁸ during the initial phase were Kawars. Three of his four centres (i.e., except Kailash Gufa), are located in areas predominantly inhabited by the Kawars. All the four centres are located in extremely remote areas having almost no communication facilities. As he himself said, the 'people there had no knowledge of plough cultivation. They used to remain naked, worship evil spirits, and indulge in the habit of eating defiling food and drinking liquor. I had to teach them how to plough land and worship god.'

In course of time, members from other communities living in adjacent areas started joining his movement.⁹ He

soon acquired a large number of followers from among the Nagesia, Oraon, Gond, Rajwar, Pando, Cherwa, Ghasia, Bargah and some other local tribes and castes. The Korwa, who had stayed away from his movement for quite some time, have also recently started becoming his followers. Many of the local Marwaris and Baniyas have also joined his movement. Though the main concentration of his followers is in Surguja and Raigarh districts, Gahira Guru has followers from the District of Bilaspur and other adjoining areas as well.

A Sant can generally be identified by his clean white dress, long hair, and sacred thread. The house of a Sant ordinarily is very tidy. It has a white flag, and *bhajans* (devotional songs) and recitation from the *Ramayana* are performed every evening.

In most of the villages surrounding the centres, there is a public relation man known as Bhagat Pracharak. For the purpose of collection of *mutthidan*, they are sometimes referred to as Gram Member. Between twenty and thirty such villages form a circle and the activities of the Sant Samaj in a circle is supervised by a circle member or *mantri*. At these centres, the Bhandari is the overall in charge. A Bhagat Pracharak or Gram Member is responsible to the Circle Member, who in turn is responsible to the Bhandari.¹⁰

All the positions—like Bhagat Pracharak, Gram Member, Circle Member, and Bhandari—are voluntary.¹¹ Usually, one of the Sant Bhagats from a village, circle or centre are assigned to the job. Incidentally, most of the Bhagat Pracharaks, Mantris, and Bhandaris are Kawars by tribe.

The Sant Samaj movement has so far no avowed political goal, though its influence in political matters is considerable. Many political aspirants seek the Guru's blessings. Gahira Guru is, however, largely involved in socio-cultural reform and strongly believes that through these means he can serve the society better. He lays emphasis on the people and preaches that people form the nation and not the mass of land, and action is more important than *dhong* (show). According to him, one should try to reform society through hard labour.

It is somewhat contradictory, though a fact, that he lays

great emphasis on reform and change and at the same time upholds tradition. His views on the caste hierarchy are also ambiguous as he believes in the equality of castes yet assigns a superior position to the Brahmans.

The immediate impact of the Sant Samaj movement on the tribes and castes that came under its influence was one of disintegration as all of them were classified as either Sant or Besant. They do not inter-marry or inter-dine. However, across the caste or community level, the movement has an apparently integrative influence as it brings people of unequal socio-ritual status within its common fold. This could, to a certain extent, forge unity though even the Sant Bhagats do not marry across communities or caste nor do they inter-dine.

The Sant Bhagats refuse to inter-marry or dine with the Besants as the latter are considered unclean. The Besants accept the higher socio-ritual status of the Sant Bhagats but refuse to inter-dine or inter-marry with them as the latter have a heterogeneous composition. Still, the movement could even out the inter-caste and inter-community differences to a considerable extent through their participation in the annual fair, religious congregations and attendance in the Sanskrit Pathshala.

On the economic front, the impact of the movement is even more perceptible. As per the directions of the Guru, most of the Sant Bhagats have become devoted agriculturists and the consequent economic gain has become apparent among them. The organization of grain banks contributed substantially in this respect, as they could keep the money-lending exploiters at bay.

As already indicated, the Sant Samaj movement has no political aim but its political impact and potential is considerable. Gahira Guru estimates the number of his followers to be about four lakhs and they could form an important pressure group under the common umbrella of the Sant Samaj movement. During the 1967 elections, Bhanu Pratap Singh of Jashpurnagar, a Gond, sought Gahira Guru's support and blessings. Even though Gahira Guru lent him no political support, his blessings were enough for Bhanu Pratap Singh to win the elections. During the next elections, Lareng Sai,

a Kavar, got his blessings and became a Deputy Minister. Surendra Kumar Singh, MLA and Lachman Ram, ex-MLA, are among his regular visitors now. The local unit of the ruling Congress realizing his political potential, arranged a meeting between Gahira Guru and the then State Chief Minister, Shyama Charan Shukla. The local unit of the Sarvodaya Centre is also eager to use his platform for the propagation of their programme.

To sum up, the goal of the Sant Samaj movement was initially to elevate the socio-ritual status of the Kawars and the initial programmes of the movement were designed accordingly. However, both the goal and programmes of the movement, underwent several changes through time. The movement that had started as a mobility movement in the early fifties, transformed itself into a social reform movement by the sixties and by the seventies it had become an important platform for political activities.

As a close examination of the appended pamphlet reveals, the initial thrust of the movement was to legitimise the Kaurava ancestry of the Kawars. An apparently sequential order of descent has been drawn up in the pamphlet and certain practices are proscribed or prescribed and propagated for the purpose of attaining this goal. The emphasis on Sanskritic practices indicates its inclination towards the Hindu model.

The establishment of the Sanskrit Pathshala for tribals initially had the same objective. But when the school was made open to non-tribal children, it became a turning point of the movement and it transformed itself into a social reform movement. The presence of students from non-tribal communities and the engagement of Brahman pandits as teachers were interpreted as an implicit approval of Gahira Guru's programme by the public at large. However, several devices were evolved to ensure a continuous influx into the movement. The most important among these is the organization of annual fairs at all the four centres developed by the Guru. The movement experienced a moral boost when non-tribals started participating in it and became followers in large numbers. For Rameshwar Ram this was an important and necessary development as their association

with the movement elevated his status in the eyes of his fellow men. However, the non-tribals did not join the movement simply out of devotion to the cause. Most of them were traders and occupied lands (not always legally) in tribal tracts and needed an umbrella to protect their interests. They found the protection provided by Gahira Guru convenient and very suitable for their purposes.

There is scant information on the growth and development of the movement. Gahira Guru's background of being the only surviving child of a village headman gave him some initial advantage. Through marriage he established relationships with several other village headmen and thus reinforced his command over his fellow Kawars. Being a close associate of the Raja of Sanargarh and through him having some control over the Jan Sangh workers in the area, it became relatively easy for him to propagate his idea. The prevailing background of Hindu-Muslim tension in the country during the forties and fifties and his inclination towards the Hindu model were also to his advantage. His successful avoidance of embroilment in political matters and the widening of the goal of the movement from mobility to social reform added to its popularity. With the implementation of economic programmes, the movement almost experienced the second transformation, and, in spite of its ritual overtones, the Sant Samaj has established its credibility as a composite secular movement having well specified socio-economic programmes.

Appendix

Hari Om Tatsat

Kaurav Caste Reformation

(Kaurao Jati Sudhar)

GENERATIONS AND NUMBERS OF KAURAO BANSH
BEFORE THE MAHABHARAT PERIOD

Names according to first chapter (ADI PARVA) :

KAURAV Bansh was ruling till 22 generations, i.e., Krishna, Marich, Sursabha, Surya Swayambha, Nakhatpati, Briddha,

Anupam, Nahansa, Sanajati, Prahjam, Bhoj, Sant, Bharat, Ajamidh Bramha, Vishnu, Satya, Shantanu, Bichitrabrya, Pandu, Arjun; this was during the *dwapar epoch*....Being the followers of *Vedas* and well-wishers of cows and Brahmans and because of their honesty and high morals they had ruled without any obstacle up to Pandu's turn, a protector of the religion. But due to the curse of a *rishi* Pandu died at the time of intercourse with his wife. After him Duryodhan, a son of (Dhritarashtra) the blind king, became the king of this kingdom as Yudishtira was a minor (*nabalig*) at that time. But because of his alcoholic habits, lack of conscience and avariciousness, suppression of the cows and people (*praja*), and offence to religion, the whole family of Kauravas including all the 100 brothers, were ruined in the battle of Mahabharata. When the five brothers were cremating them, their wives became *sati* with the heads and hands of their respective husbands. The wife of Abhimanyu (Uttara) also got ready to perform *sati* but at that moment Krishna said to her, 'you are carrying (two months). Let the child come into this world so that the *bansh* of Kurus and Pandavas will be perpetuated. So don't become *sati* and protect the lineage of Kaurava' (according to *Stri Parva*, 13). According to Krishna's advice, Uttara gave birth to Parikshita and then Janmejaya was born of Parikshita and like this *sembansh* of Kauravas ruled over till their 30 generations of *Kaliyug* (according to *Itihas Puran Satyarth Prakashan* 252, *Ekadash Prishtha* (page 11) *Sammulash*). From this evidence it is proved that not all the Kauravas were destroyed in the battle of... Mahabharata. For evidence from Yudhishtira through Parikshita, Janmejaya, Ashwamedha, Dwitiram, Chhatramal, Chittrarath, Dushtashailya, Ugrasen, Sursen, Bhuvanpati, Ranjit Ruksak, Sukhadeo, Narharideo, Suchirath, Sursen (2), Parvatsen, Medhavi, Sonchir, Bhimdeo, Nruharideo, Purnamat, Kardavi, Alamik, Udaipal, Duwanmal, Damat, Bhimpal and up to Kshemak were the rulers of Indraprastha (i.e., Delhi). After that, Vishrava killed Kshemak and ruled over Indraprastha. But from that very day the kingdom was weakened as *chhatra dharma* (*Kshatriya dharm*) and *vedmarg* were neglected and the customs and manners like *shudras* have been adopted, which are against the '*karmakand*'. But

from today we will try to follow our now rules and customs gradually:

1. Taboo of fowls (*murgi nishedh*)

Forbidding meat and wine in social ceremonies.

So far, we the six groups—i.e., Dudhkawar, Paikara-Kawar, Rathia, Rakhaud, Chanti and Cherwa—will observe cultivation. The above six groups belong to *sombunsh*, and we should also reform our caste-brothers accordingly.

Five types of marriages are mentioned in the *Manusmriti*:

Dev Vivah : Out of these 5 types of marriages, this marriage ceremony is performed in a decorated courtyard with the pious (*yagnya hawan*) rituals. A girl also was decorated and was given over by her father to a suitable bridegroom.

Aarna Vivah : In this form, a daughter (*kanya*) is given in exchange for cows and bullocks from the bridegroom.

Prājapatya Vivah : The husband and wife observe *griha-thashram* and offer their daughter *kanyadan* to the bridegroom.

Asur Vivah : It is a sort of contract where money was paid as bride-price.

Gandarbha Vivah : This marriage takes place out of mutual consent of bride and bridegroom, may be untimely, even breaking the rules of their society.

ABOUT THE DISPOSAL OF DEAD BODIES

According to *Striparva* 13, the Kauravas had not buried but cremated the dead bodies. So we shall also continue the cremation (*agni sanshar*) of the dead bodies.

Accordingly

Tijrahan i.e., purificatory bath on the third day should be observed.

Daskarma -We should perform the traditional rituals with

the help of Bramhins according to *karmkand*, after 10 days of the death.

Yours

SHREE RAMESHWAR GURU
GAHIRA GRAM
POLICE STATION : Lailunga
DISTRICT : Raigarh

DATED: 18-4-1954

Caste Reformers :

Dhaniramji Kanwar, Gahira.
Mananlalji Kanwar, Keravahar.
Chandansinghji Kanwar, Amatoli.
Kantiramji Kanwar, Zoradih.
Ajit Sahayaji Kanwar, Kudur.

Natwar Printing Press, Raigarh.

(Translated from *Kaurao Jati Sudhar* (original)).

Notes

1. Gahira means deep. In keeping with the meaning of the term, the village is located in a deep valley surrounded by hills on all sides.
2. According to his own statement in 1971, he was blessed by Goddess Durga. At the time of interview in 1976, he changed his position and claimed to have been blessed by Lord Shiva.
3. Santram Patel, one of his co-villagers from Gahira, reported that Rameshwar Ram married at the age of 25 for the first time. He had no children and they were separated after about five years of marriage. Purani is actually his second wife.
4. As Rameshwar Ram felt somewhat uncomfortable with questions regarding his personal life, no further information about this wife was insisted upon. Some say that he again married another girl in 1968.
5. Some informants mentioned 1943 as the year in which the Sant Samaj was founded. This does not appear to be correct.
6. This piece of information appears incongruous as one of the earliest pamphlets circulated by Rameshwar Ram in April 1954, highlights his interest in an organisation called *Kaurao Jati Sudhar* (see Appendix).
7. Particularly from his followers, locally known as Sant; non-followers are called *Beiant*.

8. They are referred to as Sant or Sant Bhagat.
9. This was perhaps the turning point that transformed the Kaurao Jati Sudhar movement into the Sant Samaj movement.
10. The Sant Samaj and its establishments are now maintained by a registered Trust. Since registration, the Sanskrit Pathshala maintained by the Sant Samaj receives a grant of Rs. 4,000 per year from the Madhya Pradesh Government. The centres are built on land purchased from the Government.
11. It is said that when Gahira Guru moves from centre to centre, he always carries his own ration.

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REFORM MOVEMENT OF RAJMOHINI DEVI

William Ekka

Origin of the Movement

THE ORIGIN of Rajmohini Devi's movement has been ascribed to a crisis which had assumed the form of a famine in the Surguja District of Madhya Pradesh in 1951. This view is held by L.K. Mahapatra and Chandrabhal Tripathi (1956), D.N. Majumdar (1959), S.L. Kalia (1962), Stephan Fuchs (1965) and me (1972). According to a pamphlet brought out to publicize Rajmohini Devi's movement and her teachings, the famine had created such a great scarcity of food-grains that even ready money failed to buy them. Mahapatra and Tripathi (1956) state that the region had experienced a long spell of drought which started in 1948 and ultimately brought about famine conditions in 1952. Needless to say, under these conditions there had been consecutive crop failures especially in view of the paucity of irrigation facilities. Food-grains being scarce and dear, the people, especially of the interior areas, were driven to subsist on the edible leaves, fruits, tubers and roots collected from the forest. This economic distress was an obvious factor which contributed to the origin of Rajmohini Devi's movement. However, there were various socio-religious factors which also paved the way for its emergence. As Fuchs says, 'Because of the failure of monsoon many people and cattle died of starvation or of epidemic. The tribal religious leaders—village priests, sooth-sayers and witch

doctors—performed many sacrifices and killed many animals and poured away much liquor to appease the angry gods and spirits; but nothing helped to bring the much desired rain. In consequence of this failure people lost their faith in their traditional religion and were on the lookout for new and more powerful gods and a more effective ritual of worship' (1965, 88). Giving the same information, Kalia says: 'The situation had reached to a point when people were desperately searching for new means and powers which would rescue them from the calamity' (1962). Time was thus ripe for the emergence of a messianic movement and the appearance of Rajmohini Devi—holding out hope to the people for deliverance from their woes—was very opportune.

Rajmohini Devi and Her Personality

Rajmohini Devi is an old Gond woman of about 60 years of age. According to Majumdar (1959) she belongs to the 'Manjhi tribe, a section of the great Gond group of tribes'. When she started her movement, she was a resident of Govindpur village under Ramkola Police Station, where she had migrated along with her husband from Gargori village, about thirty miles away, to live with her husband's sister. She established an ashram in Govindpur and she now lives there away from all members of her family. However, she is said to have seven children and is described as simple in her habits, a devoted wife and an affectionate mother. She is unassuming and fond of cleanliness. She has had no formal education and, according to Kalia (1962), she learnt to read and write from her non-tribal followers much later in life. The economic background of her family is reported to be distressing.

Stories about Rajmohini Devi's Inspiration

Before the commencement of her movement, there was nothing extraordinary in her character or personality which could be indicative of her present greatness or point at the leader and reformer in her. The event which put her into limelight has more than one version. According to Bapu Dharma Sabha Adivasi Seva Mandal Ka Vidhan, the official constitution

of the Mandal, there was a great famine in 1951. Food was not available at all. Rajmohini was very poor and on 10 July 1951 she had nothing to eat. She was also unable to get fruits and roots in the jungle that day. Disappointed and despairing, she sat down on a rock at noon and began to weep thinking of the dark and dismal future ahead of her and her children. At that point she received enlightenment about the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. It gave her peace and contentment. From there she returned home and went on a fast for twenty-one days. On completion of her fast, the clouds poured down and brought peace and prosperity to the people.

According to another version, she was able to collect only a very meagre amount of mushrooms and *putu* in the jungle one day. She went down to a river and began to wash them thinking of the insufficient quantity of food she had gathered and of her poverty. When she raised her head, she saw a sage coming towards her. On reaching her, he told her that she was another Rajmohini personifying truth and asked her to reform the world, to spread the message and show the path of truth to the humanity. He told her that the age of Gandhi had begun and without truth it would not survive. The day that mankind practised truth, the path of prosperity would appear and there would be peace to all mankind. Otherwise, the world would go on being crushed by the weight of sin. After saying this the sage disappeared and Rajmohini Devi began to preach his message to the people.

According to a third version, two or three sages appeared to her and gave her some mysterious material which they asked her to keep in an inner chamber of her house. They asked her also to reform mankind. According to an informant, one day her luck did not favour her while she was hunting in the jungle for food to feed her children with. She returned home feeling unhappy but on top of it she was scolded and beaten by her husband who was under the influence of liquor. So she went and sat on the banks of the Rajmelan river and began to weep. It is said that she then had a vision of Mahatma Gandhi and his teachings. From there she walked to Dhodhavati, a village near Govindpur, where she told the people for the first time about her vision

and exhorted them not to kill any creature, to give up drinking liquor and eating meat, to bathe and worship God daily, not to tell lies and to practise truth. She told them that if they did all those things they would get rid of their tribulations. The people showed their willingness to act in accordance with her teachings if she brought down rain that very day. She said to them that it would rain and, as if she had performed a miracle, there was a torrential downpour that very day. The people were wonderstruck to find the words of an ordinary woman coming true. They came to the conclusion that she was blessed with divine or supernatural powers and rushed to pay homage to her and to listen to what she said. The news travelled fast over a very vast area and people poured into Govindpur from far and near to have her *Darshan*, to receive her blessings and to listen to her preachings. She held prayer meetings and taught the people to lead a pious and simple life so as to improve their lot. Soon after this a fair was held in Govindpur and thousands of people became her followers. In order to spread her teachings she travelled on foot to a large number of villages. Everywhere she was given a warm welcome and the people thronged to her prayer meetings and to listen to her teachings. She soon had a large number of followers. According to Kalia, (1962), at one stage she had about eighty thousand followers while according to an informant they numbered as much as one-and-a-half lakhs in 1956.

The Followers and Area of Influence of Rajmohini Devi

According to some Nagesia informants, Rajmohini Devi's movement is known as Bapu Dharma or Suraj Dharma. Her followers are called Bhagats. They belong to several tribal groups such as Gond, Kavar, Nagesia, Kherwar and Panika. According to Mahapatra and Tripathi (1956) some caste Hindus also became her followers, but after some time she asked them to dissociate themselves from her because of their ulterior motives and dishonesty. Her followers are mostly from Surguja District. They are also found in the bordering areas of the neighbouring districts of Mirzapur (UP), Sidhi (MP) and Palamau (Bihar). Her followers have given up

drinking liquor and eating non-vegetarian food. In the courtyard of every Bhāgat house a white flag stands beside a small mud platform. A small earthen pot containing water is kept on the platform and the Bhagats worship Hindu deities offering flowers and burning incense everyday after taking a bath. In those villages where the number of her followers is large, huts have been constructed for collective worship which takes place every Thursday. The huts are called *mandir*, meaning temple. On the occasions of festivals, *kirtan* (religious song sung in group to the accompaniment of musical instruments) and *Rama Bhaja* (a dance having a few set steps and songs which carry religious and Gandhian messages) are performed.

Bapu Dharma Sabha Adivasi Seva Mandal and its Objectives

For spreading the teachings of Rajmohini Devi, the Bapu Dharma Sabha Adivasi Seva Mandal was established in 1951 soon after she started her movement. It was registered on 20 March 1959 in the office of the Sub-Registrar, Ambikapur, the District Headquarters of Surguja District. Besides spreading teachings of Rajmohini Devi the Mandal has certain other objectives which have been translated by Kalia from its constitution as:

1. To create the feeling of universal brotherhood.
2. To preach the principles of Mahatma Gandbi and to do national service.
3. To wean the tribals away from eating meat and drinking wine; spread the idea of cleanliness; to raise the economic standard; and to lay emphasis on living a life of simplicity and truthfulness.
4. To propagate Hindi religion, *havans* and *kirtans*.
5. To eradicate social and communal evils.

The Teachings of Rajmohini Devi

The principal teachings of Rajmohini Devi as contained in the official constitution of the Mandal are as follows:

1. Follow true religion and love God.
2. Wear *khaddar*, spun and woven by *charkha* and *kargha*.
3. Do not sell *mahua* (*Eassia latifolia*) in the market, nor ferment it in the *bhathi* (liquor distillery).
4. Liquor is the dirt of the world, abandon it.
5. Do not chew tobacco but save money (for domestic purposes)
6. Keep away from *dewar* (magico-medicine men) and cheats, get rid of the fear of ghosts and witches.
7. Take bath everyday and keep your body, mind and house clean.
8. Venerate the cow, do not afflict her.
9. Love your neighbours, becoming the children of one mother.
10. Do not kill any animal, give up eating meat and fish.
11. Follow the path of Gandhi Baba and become real *Swaraji* (independent citizens, it may mean 'her followers' also).
12. Birth and religion are one, keep away from cheating.
13. Do the work of the nation, society and home, maintain the honour of the group (of Bhagats).
14. Plough the land, cultivate it and worship the cow and the goddess of wealth (Lakshmi).

Rajmohini Devi's Association with the Sarvodaya Movement and Her Political Leanings

Rajmohini Devi appears to have been influenced greatly by Gandhian ideology. Her teachings lay emphasis on wearing clothes made of *khadi*, speaking the truth, not drinking liquor, not killing any creature and worshipping God. Perhaps her first meeting with a follower of Mahatma Gandhi of any repute—the late Raghodashjee of Balia (UP)—took place in November 1955 when he had come to Ambikapur on a *pad-yatra* from Palamau District (Bihar). She extended her co-operation to him whole-heartedly in his Bhudan movement. This led to her association with the Raghopuri Sarvodaya Ashram, Ambikapur, and her active participation in its activities. Later, she had several meetings with Vinoba Bhave

also, the last being in December 1975. On the occasion of the Bhoodan Silver Jubilee, she took part in the *padyatra* along with a large number of her followers. The *padyatra* was led by the then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shri Shyamacharan Shukla, from the Circuit House, Ambikapur to Raghopuri Sarvodaya Ashram, on 18 April 1976 after coming from Indore. Her efforts at popularizing *khadi* are reflected in her practices of wearing *khadi* clothes and spinning thread daily. But *khadi* has not gained popularity among her followers in proportion to her campaign for it. The reasons for this may be the higher cost of *khadi* as also the fact that cotton is not grown in Surguja District. However, her older followers are often seen sporting *khadi kurtas*, *dhotis* and a Gandhi cap, especially while going to her Govindpur Ashram or going to attend Bhagat meetings. Her great respect for Mahatma Gandhi has percolated down even to her followers in the interior areas. On 24 December 1969, an annual fair was held in Samri Pat of Surguja District. The Bhagats organized a procession and a large number participated in it. The procession started and ended with the slogan 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai'. Slogans were also shouted in honour of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In the procession, white flags as well as a few flags of the Congress party were carried. This speaks of their support of the Congress Party about which they are sometimes vocal as well. According to Majumdar (1959) she herself is a supporter of the Congress party which is reflected in her speeches emphasizing the importance of bullocks, ploughs and cows in the rural economy.

The Effect of the Movement

One of the conditions for becoming a Bhagat is abstinence from drinking liquor, and in this regard her achievement is significant. Her relentless drive against liquor perhaps stems from her understanding of its ruinous effects on the slender income of the tribal people. From the very beginning of her movement, she tried to convince the people that the primary cause of their poverty was addiction to liquor and she perceived abstinence from liquor as a way to prop up their

failing economy. Many of her followers admit that before joining her movement they drank liquor heavily, often on credit which they paid for after the harvest along with exorbitant interest charges. Sometimes they did not keep account of the credit they had taken and had to pay whatever the liquor sellers demanded. This drove them to the money-lenders who lent them money at a high rate of interest. Thus they gradually got embroiled in the vicious circle of debt. Further, they used to waste substantial quantities of rice and millet in making their own beer. They now say that after becoming Bhagats they are able to live in a much better way on what they produce than before. They do not drink liquor or rice beer any more on any ritual or social occasion and have substituted tea or boiled jaggery water.

Wherever she went she preached against liquor. It is reported by Majumdar (1959) and Mahapatra and Tripathi (1956) that she once happened to be in Dudhi Pargana of Mirzapur District (UP) while the then Chief Minister of the State, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, was on a visit to the place. He came to meet her on 10 December 1953 when she requested him to close down the distilleries. In reply he told her to keep teaching the people to give up liquor and automatically the distilleries would close down. Majumdar says that as a result of her crusade against liquor, many distilleries closed down in many parts of Mirzapur District. Similarly, Kalia (1962) states that in Surguja many liquor sellers suffered heavy losses in 1957. A liquor contractor of Barti, a village near Govindpur, had a loss of two thousand rupees, and one day the total sale of liquor in a local distillery was the grand sum of two pice only.

In order to become her follower one has to be a vegetarian also. Her followers have thus given up eating meat and fish. Besides being vegetarian, they are not supposed to kill any creature. She maintains that the killing of any creature amounts to the commission of sin. For ritual purposes her followers use fruit and coconuts in lieu of goats, fowls and pigs. They do not even domesticate them for economic reasons also. Before they became Bhagats they either sold them or ate them.

Her exhortations against drinking liquor and killing any

creature find further expression in her novel method of converting the people to her faith by implementing two new programmes of *nasabandi* (prohibition) and *prandaya* (compassion for life). She has now taken up the task of weaning the people away from meat and drinking liquor not merely through teaching but by taking coercive measures against these habits. Near Gobardhanpur, a village in the Pal Tehsil of Surguja District, there is a shrine of Bacharaj Kunwar, a local deity. The deity is believed to fulfil the desires of his devotees if they vow to offer him things such as pigs, goats, fowls or liquor. Everyday some creatures are sacrificed and liquor is offered to the deity in fulfilment of the vows made to him. One day in the month of May 1976, she went to the shrine with her followers. People from neighbouring villages assembled there to see what she wanted to do. She and her followers cleaned the place and stopped the people from sacrificing any animal and offering liquor to him. So told the *baiga* (priest) of the deity that she would make Bachraj Kunwar a Bhagat by bathing him, applying a *tikka* of vermilion on his forehead and putting a *janeo* (sacred thread) on him. After doing this she asked the *baiga* to become a Bhagat. He replied that since she had made his god a Bhagat he would also follow suit. Following his lead a large number of people became Bhagats on the spot. The success of this incident opened up new way of converting people to her cause and she intends to visit different villages while the village deities are being worshipped to make them Bhagats before winning over the villagers.

Her followers are not supposed to enlist the help of *dewars* or *ojhas* (magico-medicine man) for the treatment of diseases. Nor are they expected to believe in the existence of evil powers or ghosts or evil spirits. However, she has not been very successful in this respect. Her followers have not yet been able to shake off their superstitions because of their relative isolation and illiteracy coupled with the non-availability of modern medicine, and they still look for the mediation of *dewars* or *ojhas* between the spirit world and mortal beings when they are afflicted with ailments. However, it is interesting to note that most magico-medicine men now only take *rotis* (bread made of rice or wheat), fruit or coconuts and

boiled jaggery water to appease the ghosts or evil spirits from their Bhagat clients. This is because they mostly employ *ojhas* or *dewars* from among themselves.

One of the aims of her movement is the propagation of Hinduism among the tribals and according to Bapu Dharma Sabha Adivasi Seva Mandal Ka Vidhan it also aims at stopping the conversion of tribals to Christianity. It is difficult to say how far the missionaries were active in proselytizing at that time. In order to become Hindus her followers have adopted some Hindu customs which they appear to have over-simplified. The people of the area are mostly tribals, and do not belong to the twice-born castes, but they wear the sacred thread without undergoing the *npanayana* ceremony. It is difficult to say at what stage one becomes a Hindu but Rajmohini Devi's followers' awareness about Hindu gods and goddesses, the festivals and their associated rituals and their significance, and the scriptures and their contents is very poor. The reason for this may be their tribal background, their relative isolation, lack of regular institutionalized teaching of Hinduism, and their illiteracy or low educational level which hampers them in their reading, understanding and interpretation of religious scriptures. In the places where the Bhagats and non-Bhagats live side by side the former have not been able to break away from their traditional religion. They still believe in their village deities and contribute in cash and kind for the worship and appeasement of them. They abide by the custom which forbids them to start certain agricultural operations until the village deities are worshipped. According to Majumdar (1959) she does not have much knowledge of Vedic practices but is imbued with orthodox Puranic ideas and has been influenced by many saints of medieval times such as Kabir and Mirabai; though it is not clear as to how she came under their influence. There is a temple dedicated to Ram in Govindpur Ashram where her followers worship during Dusserah, Magh Purnima, Ramnavami and Janmasthanmi. But according to an informant who is a close associate of Rajmohini Devi, there is no statue of any god within the temple. Instead, pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and Sardar Vallabh Patel are hung on the walls. She is reported to hold that

Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave are Pursotam Ram and Lord Krishna. This may be the reason why her followers invoke the name of 'Gandhi Baba' while they worship individually or collectively. Vinoba Bhave has also influenced her. Apart from her association with the Sarvodaya movement, she and her followers are against cow slaughter.

She has started paying attention to the education of her followers only very recently. When the then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh paid a visit to Ambikapur in April 1976, a proposal was put forward that she be given a grant for running a school in Govindpur. He promised to accede to this request but Rajmohini Devi changed her mind as she thought that she could not run a school for long with a Government grant. So, she started a school on her own at Govindpur in July of that year with eight children who are maintained on *ansh dan* (one handful of grain left aside in every Bhagat household everyday).

Ashram

Rajmohini Devi has about twenty-four ashrams located at different places in Palamau, Surguja and Mirzapur districts. In every ashram there is a *gram kosh* (village bank) in which the *ansh dan* from neighbouring villages is deposited and ultimately sent to Govindpur Ashram. The Bhagats also contribute money from time to time to further the movement. For the construction of Govindpur Ashram and its temple each Bhagat household contributed Rs. 1.50. Rajmohini Devi's institutions and other information about the movement and its activities are communicated to the Bhagats living in different villages through the Ashram. After their return from Govindpur the individual Bhagats narrate to the other followers the experiences they had, the work they did and the talks they had with Rajmohini Devi during their stay there, usually after collective worship in the village temple.

Reasons for the Decline of the Movement

Rajmohini Devi's movement, as I have already said in another article, was essentially the product of a crisis (1972).

Initially, her success was phenomenal and the number of her followers grew incredibly fast. But as the conditions of life returned to normalcy their numbers began to decrease. After a short period of abstinence, many of them began to return to their old habit of drinking liquor and eating meat. Death and disease among her follower began to be abscribed to their new religion which they said had displeased their traditional deities. Some people ceased to be her followers because they could not gain anything by following her teachings (Mahapatra and Tripathi, 1956). According to the same writers, a meeting of the regional panchayat of the Majhis (Gonds) of Dudhi area was held at Bhagadu village on 4 January 1955 to decide whether and to what extent they should follow Rajmohini Devi. Some of her followers deserted her because the stories told to them about her supernatural powers proved to be false (Kalia, 1962).

Some dishonest and unscrupulous elements also associated themselves with her mainly to profit from her movement. They sold prayerbooks, Gandhi caps, tricolour flags and sacred threads to her tribal followers. In Samri Pat, sacred threads were sold at a cost of fifty paise per piece. Another reason for her waning influence is the dishonesty of her lieutenants who embezzled money which had been collected in the name of the movement. She turned them out, but they took their revenge by speaking ill of her. Moneylenders, landlords and liquor dealers are also opposed to her movement as it had come in the way of their exploitation of the tribals (Fuchs, 1965). The number of her present followers is estimated at only four or five thousand.

Concluding Remarks

Some scholars such as Mazumdar believe that Rajmohini Devi's movement has by and large failed. In fact this is not so. Even though about twenty-five years have passed since she began her movement, she has quite a large number of followers. With her new method of making the village deities Bhagats and thereby winning over the people, her movement has had a fresh lease of life. She has made the people aware of the vices of liquor and if her followers and workers keep adhering to her warnings against liquor and if

they whole-heartedly help her to spread this idea among the tribal non-Bhagats, they would cooperate with the Madhya Pradesh Government in a large measure in its efforts to remove liquor from tribal areas. It may be mentioned here that the Government imposed prohibition in the predominantly tribal populated districts of Surguja, Mandla, Jhabua and Baster in April 1976. She and her followers were against the adoption of the method of family planning. Now she has been told by a Sarvodaya worker that for the prosperity of her followers they should not have more than two or three children. He cited the example of Rama who had only two children. This example appealed to her very much and she now urges her followers to practise family planning.

Majumdar (1959) opined that her movement has galvanized the acculturative processes of Hinduization among the tribals which will lead to the happy and harmonious blending of the Hindu and tribal cultures. This has, however, created social disorganization of the ethnic groups of her followers to some extent. People from the same ethnic group are divided into Bhagats and non-Bhagats, the latter often being called Sagats. This division of their society has given rise to connubial and commensal problems and sometimes they have developed antagonistic attitudes towards each other. Following her teachings, her followers do not eat meat and thus they have been deprived of their only nutritious and proteinous food. Besides, they do not raise goats, pigs and fowls which could fetch them money for raising their standard of living. Thus the movement has some negative consequences also.

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A BABA IN BASTAR

Vikas Bhatt

DURING the last few decades, a number of religious and reformative movements have sprung up among some of the tribes of Central India, which were once ruled by a number of small feudatory Rajas of tribal origin. Various studies of these movements suggest that the social situation in which they developed was characterized by the convergence of a number of factors such as continuous contacts with the larger community; oppression by money-lenders, landlords and autocratic rulers; crises like famine and outbreaks of epidemics and the failure of tribal gods to give protection; and the ineffectiveness of the traditional politico-religious leadership. A closer look at the Bhagat movements suggests that they had their starting point in the historical culture contact situations which made tribal cultures susceptible to the preachings of Bhagat leaders. And when a movement originated, it grew very rapidly, drawing on the large-scale participation of the tribals desirous of moving upwards to gain a respectable social position by following simple Bhagat prescriptions. Such Bhagat communities developed an interest in puritanic ways of life and drew closer to Hindu society.

This paper is devoted to the study of a recent Bhagat movement which was started in 190 in Chapka village of Bastar by one Baba Bihari Das who asked his followers to wear a *kanthi* (a bead made of Tulsi wood) for the purification of their sins. It will be as well to begin with the

background of the tribal situation that prevailed before the movement began.

II

About sixty-eight per cent of the population of Bastar consists of Scheduled tribes which are comprised of such major ethnic groups as the Bison-horn Maria, Muria, Dhurwa, Bhatra, Halba, and Dorla.

The ethnic groups of Bastar are hierarchically rated by the tribals themselves. The Bhatras and Halbas enjoy a higher social status followed by the Murias. Today, the Bhatras have reached a semi-Hinduized state. They wear the sacred thread, 'the right to do so having been purchased in years past by their ancestors from the Raja of Bastar' (Grigson, 1938). The Murias are rapidly becoming like the Bhatras. This process was observed by Elwin (1947) who called it the 'Bhatra movement'. Its main features were the wearing of the sacred thread and abolition of the *ghotul*. The two tribes lived in close contact with the Hindus from very early times. Now the other tribes are trying to follow the example of the Murias. The term Muria has been adopted by those tribes who want to be elevated in the local hierarchy.

The tribes of Bastar worship a number of deities and believe in the existence of spirits which they propitiate by performing sacrifices and making offerings. A number of Hindu deities have also been assimilated in the tribal religion. The rulers of Bastar functioned as the chief priests of the deities. The tribals believe that the form of worship developed by the Maharajas keeps away disease from both people and cattle and results in good crops and happiness. According to Elwin, so strongly do the aboriginals believe this that they resent the Maharaja leaving the state even for a short time. His absence means a withdrawal of divine protection from cattle, crop, and people (1947:183). The last Maharaja, Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo, was believed to be immortal possessing supernatural powers, whom bullets could not hurt. However, he was accidentally killed in a police firing on 25 March 1960 when he was leading a tribal uprising from his

palce; but the tribals do not believe that their Maharaja is dead.

In the pre-Independence period, the tribes of Bastar were organized into a number of multi-village administrative units called parganas. Each pargana was headed by a Pargana Manjhi, who acted as the representative of the Maharaja. The Maharaja delegated some of his powers to the Manjhis. The pargana system was abolished when Bastar state was merged with the Indian Union. Pravir resented this and demanded re-establishment of his rulership. When he failed to get it, he formed a political party called Adivasi Seva Dal to fight against the Government. Most of the active members of this group were Manjhis. The Manjhis used this organization to re-establish their influence over the tribals. They used to collect money and arouse sympathy for the Maharaja in his campaign to regain his lost rulership.

After the death of Pravir, the members of the family could not provide leadership; they fought among themselves to occupy the important office of chief priest and the pargana manjhis were similarly divided. Every member of the royal family celebrated his own Dassera at Jagdalpur. The tribals were confused as to who was the chief priest and where his chariot was placed in the Dassera procession, which was symbolically important for them. Pravir's death had created a vacuum which his family could not fill.

III

Origin of the Bhagat Movement

The recent movement of Bhagatism among the tribes of Bastar was started by one Baba Bihari Das, appeared in Chapka village towards the end of 1970. He claimed to be an incarnation of Pravir. His claim was immediately supported by two ex-members of the Adivasi Seva Dal, Khosru and Bali, who belonged to the Bhatra tribe inhabiting the Chapka region. Khosru and Bali were supposed to have known Pravir very well owing to their long association with him. So when they identified the Baba as Pravir, most of the

tribals believed it implicitly.

Chapka was already famous as the site of the old temple of Mahadeo and the holy river of Markandeya. Every year, thousands of semi-Hinduized Bhatras and Halbas gathered there on the occasions of Makar Sankranti and Shivratri. The rumour about Pravir's reappearance spread through the villages like wild fire. A huge crowd of tribals started gathering at Chapka to see Pravir. Baba appeared before the tribals only in the darkness of night and it was not long before he was widely accepted as Pravir.

The Baba started touring the villages where he recited the *Ramayana* and performed *homa* for the welfare of the tribals. Khosru and Bali, who had joined Baba by that time, told the tribals how Pravir did not die even after being hit by bullets and how he lived in the forest for few long years and how he emerged again in the form of Baba. They used to tell them that Pravir in the form of Baba wants to purify the life of his beloved tribals by reciting the *Ramayana* and performing *homa* for them. After *homa*, Baba used to receive valuable presents from the villagers. Later, Baba started preaching a life of devotion to Ram and enjoining methods for purifying the polluted lives of the tribals. He started distributing *kanthis*, the acceptance of which was made obligatory on the observation of a code of conduct.

Goal of the Movement

Baba Bihari Das expressed his dislike of the way the tribals lived, ate cows, pigs and other animals, worshipped ghosts and indulged in magical practices to harm one another. Baba Bihari Das, a Hindu from Ayodhya, set the following goals for his reformative movement among the tribals:

1. To propagate the name of Ram and the popular ideology connected with the devotion to Ram as a cultural hero;
2. To introduce the ideal behaviour pattern based on puritanism in the life of the tribals and eliminate 'impure' elements from it.

One who accepted a *kanthi* from Baba for a nominal charge of 25 paise, became his follower. The followers were asked to devote their life to the worship of Ram and to observe the following:

1. To plant *Tulsi* (Basil) and *Bat* (Banyan tree) in the courtyard of their house and worship the plants every morning after taking a bath.
2. To sing a *Bhajan* in praise of Ram every morning and evening.
3. To give up eating any kind of flesh and drinking wine. At a later stage, this rule was slightly modified and the followers were asked not to drink the wine sold in shops; however, they could distil it themselves and drink it. Intoxicants like rice-beer and sagoplam sap were not prohibited.
4. To give up the worship of any other deity except Ram.
5. To abjure all magical practices.
6. To abstain from thieving, violence and telling lies.
7. To avoid both pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships.
8. To avoid adultery and rape.
9. To worship the husband. Married women were asked to honour their marital status by putting vermilion in the parting in their hair and to touch the feet of their husbands every morning and before sleeping.
10. To avoid eating or drinking water touched by any person who did not wear a *kanthi*.
11. To hold a *bhajan mandali* in the village at least once in a week, preferably on market day.
12. To maintain cleanliness throughout the day.
13. To discard any living being of black colour and to avoid the use of black objects as evil was black.

A breach of the rules polluted the sacred *kanthi* and harmed the person.

Development of the Movement

As mentioned earlier, the movement started towards the end of 1970 when Baba Bihari Das was joined by two Bhatras, Khosru and Bali. A fairly large number of tribals came every day to Baba and accepted *kanthis*. The tribals often accepted one *kanthi* for themselves and took a few more for their family members. One who accepted the *kanthi* had to act as if he had touched the feet of Baba Bihari Das from a distance and then sit down on one side with a group of other tribals who had accepted *kanthis* and wait for Baba's preachings till *kanthis* were distributed to everybody present. After the distribution of *kanthis*, Baba used to recite a *bhajan*:

*Raghupati Raghaw Raja Ram, Patit Pawan Sita Ram,
Jai Jai Bolo Eaba Ki, Jai Jai Bolo Baba Ki,
Mukh Mein Tulsi, Ghat Mein Ram, Hare Ram Hare
Ram.*

Everyday hundreds of tribals, both male and female, made conscious efforts to hear and understand the hymn and repeated it several times after Baba. They were asked to sing the *bhajan* everyday.

In the beginning, the majority of the converts were Bhatras and Halbas. The Murias, who live in the immediate neighbourhood of the Bhatras, also joined the movement by accepting *kanthis* in large numbers. In early 1971, Baba was joined by two more Bhatras who were also ex-members of the Adivasi Seva Dal. Baba's Bhatra associates were acquainted with the Pargana Manjhis and they organised a meeting of the Pargana Manjhis early in 1971. The Pargana Manjhis joined Baba and worked for him in their respective areas. As a result, more tribals were attracted towards Baba. The Pargana Manjhis also involved the Patels (village headmen) in the activities of the movement. It was widely propagated that the Baba has a *rakshasa* (demon) in his power which he will release in the villages to eat up those who disregarded *kanthis* either by not accepting it or by not following the observances connected with it. The Patels were also warned to get their respective villages converted as not doing so would invite

disaster and misfortune to the village. It was generally believed that one who ate flesh and drank wine would die immediately. Such beliefs were implanted in the psyche of the tribals in a planned manner by the active members of the movement. These fears had a tremendous effect on the tribals. All roads leading to Chapka were crowded by caravans of tribals. The tribals were also warned not to disclose the identity of Pravir otherwise the police would again arrest him.

By mid-1971 the Bison-horn Marias, Dhurwas and Dorlas had also joined the movement in large numbers. The tribals came in groups of 100 to 150 persons of the same village to get converted to the new faith. But the Hill Marias remained out of the picture till the end.

Traditionally, the Goncha festival was celebrated in summer at Jagdalpur by Pravir in honour of Lord Jagannath, and a large number of tribals used to attend it. In 1971, Baba Bihari Das celebrated Goncha at Chapka village in more or less the same way as Pravir did at Jagdalpur. The Goncha festival was also celebrated at Jagdalpur by Smt. Vedvati Devi, wife of the Late Pravir Chandra Bhanja Deo but most of the tribals went to Chapka. Only a few tribals attended the festival at Jagdalpur and it became difficult for the royal family to find enough tribals to pull the chariot of Lord Jagannath. The Goncha festival contributed to the popularity of Baba Bihari Das.

The Baba frequently toured villages, distributed *kanthis* and performed *homa*. He also went to those villages where a fund of 100 to 500 rupees could be raised for presentation to him. Baba had asked the tribals to discard animals of black colour as they symbolized evil, and would turn into tigers, cheetahs and crocodiles and eat up the inmates of the house if they retained them. As a result all markets of the district were flooded with black animals as the tribals were in a hurry to dispose them of at any price. The unsold animals were drowned in water reservoirs. The District Administration had to promulgate Section 144 in July 1971 to prevent gathering of more than five animals at a place and their transportation from Bastar. On 21 August 1971, the police arrested ten tribals who were forcing their co-villagers

to accept the new faith. A similar incident took place in September 1971 when the village headman and other Bhagats of village Chandangiri beat up a villager who did not accept a *kanthi*.

At last the District Administration asked the Baba to leave Bastar by 13 September 1971, but the Baba managed to return. Baba's involvement in politics created new problems but the support of a political party gave further momentum to the movement. In 1971, one of the four Bhatra associates of the Baba, named Peeluram, fought the bye-election for a seat in Parliament from Bastar. Although Peeluram was defeated by a narrow margin, Baba's political influence was established and the movement began to interest a number of district-level political leaders. The Baba utilized 1972 largely for political activities. The General Elections were held during the year and Baba supported the candidates of the All-India Congress Party. He celebrated Goncha and Dassera festivals at Chapka which were attended by a very large number of tribals.

By 1973, the Baba again turned his attention to the socio-religious activities of the movement. He resumed performing *homa* in Chapka village at the request of the villagers who offered him big fees. A serious incident took place on 19 July 1973. The Baba interfered with a tribal ritual at Kumbhali village, 25 miles from Jagdalpur. He reached the site and snatched the incense burner from hands of a priest and showed disregard for the tribal deity worshipped by the tribals. He took over the place with the help of his guards and performed the worship of his own deity. The Baba and his associates were arrested by the police but Baba was released. Baba's frequent arrests gained him more popularity as the resurrected Pravir because the tribals were reminded that their Maharaja was again and again being tortured by the police.

In 1974, the Baba organized a *mahayajna* at Chapka on the occasion of the famous Kumbha fair at Haridwar. According to an estimate, about 25-30,000 tribals attended the *mahayajna* and were initiated into his cult of *kanthi*. Baba received a large number of cows, ornaments and huge sums of money in the form of *dakshina*. It must be mentioned that 1974

was a bad year as most of the crops in Bastar had failed.

Gradually, the Baba started losing his influence. The Bison-horn Marias and other tribals who had taken wine were not dead. It became a common practice in the villages for tribals to take off the *kanthi*, drink wine and put it on again. The element of fear which induced conversion was losing its force. On 5 April 1975 the Baba left his domesticated monkeys with a few young women who had come to visit him. The monkeys attacked the women while the Baba's workers stood by and enjoyed the spectacle. This matter was reported to the police who arrested the Baba and his associates. Later the Baba was released but this incident affected his popularity.

On 4 May 1975, construction material was seized by the Government at Tirtha situated 72 kilometres from Chapka. The material was collected by Baba for the construction of a temple dedicated to Ram and a branch of his Ashram. In August 1975, Baba Bihari Das was again arrested under MISA and his Ashram was converted into a school. Baba Bihari Das and a few of his close associates were put in jail.

Structure of the Movement

The sequence of events reveals that the average Bhagats' participation in the movement was limited to the acceptance of *kanthi* and attendance at the festivals celebrated by Baba. There was no tribal unrest of the kind witnessed in Pravir's time. The main centre of the movement was Chapka village. When Baba had collected a sufficient amount of money, he constructed a residential building for himself which served as his Ashram also. The Bhatras—Khosru, Bali, Peeluram and Gangaram Kachlam—who were active members of Pravir's Adivasi Seva Dal, ranked next to Baba Bihari Das. They acted as his advisors and administrators.

The Pargana Manjhis occupied a position just below the four Bhatras. The Pargana Manjhis came from different tribal areas and when they joined the movement, their activities were limited to their spheres of influence. The Pargana Manjhis acted upon the advice of the four Bhatras. The relationship between the four Bhatras and the Manjhis was based on old friendship and recognition of mutual interests. The Pargana Manjhis

were assigned the work of dealing with the Patels. In traditional relationship of Manjhi and Patel, the former enjoyed a superior position as he controlled a number of villages. After the conference at Chapka, the Pargana Manjhis had contacted the Patels and then conducted meetings of the Patels in their respective villages. The Patels in turn held meetings of the elders of each village to decide the date for mass conversion. Thus the structure of the traditional political system was utilized by Baba for furthering his own movement.

Apart from the Pargana Manjhis, there were a number of village-level workers in Pravir's Adivasi Seva Dal. These were known as Members. There were about 2000 village level workers in the Baba's organization also known as Members. These workers were given yellow turbans as a symbol by Baba Bihari Das. In some villages, the member and the Patel are the same persons. But in very large villages, there was more than one Member, each in charge of a cluster of households. Thus, the former workers of the Adivasi Seva Dal had proved to be very effective in mobilizing the tribal masses during the agitations of 1961, 1963, 1965 and 1966, all of which had been led by Pravir. The effectiveness of this organization was once again proved when Baba utilized it for his movement.

Baba Bihari Das' movement received support from the non-tribals also which was visible at the time of elections. A group of businessmen was influential in the political field. When Baba proved effective in collecting votes for Peeluram in the elections of 1971 for a parliamentary seat, this group of businessmen tried to cash in on Baba's influence and supported him.

The Bhatra tribe took an active part in the movement. As has been mentioned earlier, the Bhatras are a semi-Hinduized tribe which has lived in continuous contact with the Hindus as the Maharajas of Bastar allotted land to the immigrant Hindus in the Bhatras tract. This tribe normally joined any movement which promised them a higher social status.

Communication

The Baba adopted the traditional method of communication

which had also been effectively used by Pravir to promote the activities of the Adivasi Seva Dal. Secret messages were relayed from one village to another by a messenger carrying a flag. The message was passed verbally to a man of next village. The man who received the flag then ran to the next village where the process is repeated. In this way, a message could be transmitted from one corner of the District to another without recourse to modern communications technology but with almost the same efficiency. Another method of communication was to take round a chilli which signified danger, another was taking around a branch of a mango tree which invited people to gather at a fixed place.

Baba's teachings were communicated through the Members. He also toured extensively. Pamphlets were distributed at festivals in an effort to influence literate people.

Geography of the Movement

As mentioned earlier, the movement affected the Bhatra tribe around Chapka. The Bhatra tract extends from Jagdalpur tehsil to Kondagaon tehsil. But in a short time the Muria tribe was also involved. The first to join were the Kondagaon Muria in 1970. In 1971, the movement spread very rapidly and covered almost all tribes, except the Hill Maria and some sections of the Dorla tribe. Because they live in the southernmost part of Bastar, the latter were not influenced by Pravir. The Hill Maria tribe remained in isolation. When the movement had declined in other parts of Bastar by 1975, it was still alive in the Bhatra tract and in the adjoining Muria villages.

Participation in the Election

As mentioned earlier, Peeluram, who was one of the close associates of Baba, contested the 1971 bye-election for a seat in Parliament from Bastar, as an independent candidate, actively supported by him. Though he was defeated by a narrow margin, the Baba's potential as a vote catcher became known.

In the election of 1972 for eleven seats to the Legislative

Assembly of Madhya Pradesh Baba Bihari Das proposed to support the candidates of the Congress Party. The State-level leaders of the Party were not in favour of taking his support. However, the District-level leaders knew very well that the Baba would support another party if his offer was not accepted by the Congress. The Jan Sangh Party was being supported by Smt. Vedvati Devi who exercised considerable influence over the tribals. The Congress Party which had lost many seats during the 1967 general elections, was again not supported by any influential tribal leader. Finally, the Congress Party accepted the support of Baba Bihari Das. Baba, who had been waiting for this acceptance, immediately involved himself in the election campaign in support of the Congress candidates. He toured extensively in at least six constituencies. Pamphlets with pictures of Baba Bihari Das were distributed.

Meanwhile, Peeluram had defected from the Baba's camp and was contesting as an independent with the banyan tree as his election symbol. Since he was contesting against the Congress Party, Baba told his followers that the banyan tree contained evil spirits, and therefore the tribals should not worship the tree any more. The banyan tree planted by them should be thrown beyond the village boundary. Now Peeluram was in difficulty as he could not change his symbol and he was defeated in the election.

The Congress Party won nine out of the eleven seats. The election figures show that the party got more votes in the 1972 general election in comparison to the general election of 1967 (see Table).

Impact on Social Life

The Bhagat movement of Baba Bihari Das brought about a temporary change in all spheres of social life. It also disrupted tribal life. The tribal society got divided into two distinct groups of Bhagats and non-Bhagats. But this separation did not take place at the initial stage of the movement. When Baba started preaching a life of devotion to Ram and abstinence from any kind of flesh and wine, the tribals were converted individually. But when the Pargana Manjhis got involved

Votes polled in 1967 & 1972

Name of the constituencies toured by Baba Bihari Das	Number of Votes obtained by Congress candidate in 1967	Result 1967	No. of votes obtained by Congress candidate in 1972	Result 1972	Difference
1. Chitrakote	2827	Defeated	14,283	Won	11,456 +
2. Bakavand	6647	Defeated	16,194	Won	9,547 +
3. Kondagaon	3337	Defeated	16,526	Won	26,189 +
4. Dantewada	2894	Defeated	13,649	Won	10,755 +
5. Keshkal	2874	Defeated	13,051	Won	10,177 +
6. Narayanpur	1991	Defeated	13,287	Won	11,296 +
7. Jagdalpur	4282	Defeated	9,732	Defeated	5,450 +

in the movement and persuaded a considerable number of tribals from their villages to go in for mass conversion, the ordinary tribals became a minority group. Still, there was no hard line to separate the two groups. Later the Bhagats were asked to observe non-commensality norms in dealing with the ordinary tribals, which posed family and social problems for the tribals.

The villagers who did not wear the *kanthi* were now forced to accept it. If any family member refused to wear the *kanthi*, he could not eat with the Bhagat members of his own family. In Lanjora village, three brothers asked their younger brother to accept the *kanthi* which they had brought for him; when the latter did not accept it, he had to cook his food separately. Later, when the other Bhagat villagers began pressurizing them, the three brothers turned the younger brother out of the house as his presence in the house polluted their sacred *kanthi*. They then went to Chapka again to obtain new *kanthis*.

The Bhagats only eat food cooked in earthen vessels. The Bhagats do not drink water from the hands of any person not wearing a *kanthi*, even if he is a Brahmin by caste. The Bhagats of Lanjora are strictly endogamous. But there is no change in bride offering price or in any other give-and-take business in marriages, except that the use of wine is totally prohibited. Indeed, wine cannot be imbibed on any occasion. There are cases when relatives did not attend the funeral of their non-Bhagat relatives. Inter-marriage between the Bhagat and non-Bhagat Murias of Lanjora village is impossible at the

moment. Recently, a case was reported to the police when two groups of Bhagat and non-Bhagat Murias openly fought on an issue connected with marriage. The marriage had been settled about five years earlier between a boy of Lanjora village and a girl of Bhandarseoni village. At the time of settlement of this marriage, both families were followers of the Baba's cult. Later the boy's parents discarded *kanthi*. When they came to know that the girl's parents were not willing to accept the boy as he was now an 'impure' mate, they forced them to marry early. But the girl's parents broke up the settlement and resettled the girl with a boy who was 'pure' on account of his *kanthi*. When the marriage was taking place, the parents of the boy reached Bhandarseoni, snatched the girl away and brought her to Lanjora after a brief fight. Now the Bhagats of Lanjora are pressing the boy to return the girl to her parents at Bhandarseoni. They also want the case settled by Panchayat, but the boy's parents have lost faith in the Panchayat which is dominated by the Bhagats. So they want to take the case to court and are ready to spend any amount of money upon it, as it has become a matter of prestige for the non-Bhagats. This case is only an example—similar cases occurred in almost every village during the movement. Now that the Bison-horn Murias have thrown away the *kanthi*, they do not face such problems, but they did face it at an earlier stage. However, the Bhatras continue to follow the Baba very strictly.

The Muria institution of *ghotul* also suffered. In Lanjora village, the Bhagats built their own *ghotul*. The Bhagat's *ghotul* is called 'Ram Mandli' and the code of conduct is different from that of the traditional *ghotul*. The musical instruments of the Murias are totally prohibited in the Bhagat's *ghotul*. They do not sing the traditional songs. Instead of *ghotul* songs, they sing 'Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram. . . .' They have brought a new set of musical instruments, which belong to the modern world. They cannot practice intercourse before marriage, and the girls do not sleep in the *ghotul*. However, a frank *chelik* of this *ghotul* told us that sometimes girls do sleep with the boys but that is wrong because it pollutes the *kanthi*. Some of the Bhagats, especially the young, cannot help it!

The non-Bhagats are looked down upon by the Bhagats. The non-Bhagat also consider themselves inferior to the Bhagats. The Bhagat Muria of Lanjora village consider themselves as equal to and even better than any other Hindu. They like to be compared with the Jain settlers of the village instead of the Brahmins, whom they have seen eating flesh and drinking country liquor. However, this is not the case with the Bisor-horn Maria or any other tribe of Bastar, except the Bhatras and Halbas who have upliftment as their social aim.

The movement appears to have induced a change in folk religion from polytheism to monotheism. The Baba asked the tribals to worship only Ram and give up their traditional gods and goddesses. He propagated the belief that all the tribal gods and goddesses were now in his captivity at Chapka and he had made them Bhagats. When the tribals asked Baba what they should do to their own gods and goddesses, Baba simply asked them to put a *kanthi* around the neck of the tribal deities. He assured the tribals that he had collected the souls of all the tribal gods at his place, so none of their gods could punish them for neglecting their worship. As a result of the spread of this belief among the tribals, the tribal rituals ceased to be performed. But most of the tribals and, especially, their priests, continued to worship their own gods and goddesses as before. They only added Ram as one more god to their pantheon. When something wrong happened in the villages, they remembered their age-old gods and went to them.

In Lanjora village, only the priest performed the rituals and very few tribals attended the ceremonies. This situation continued till 1974 when an epidemic spread among the cattle which resulted in a great loss to the people, both Bhagats and non-Bhagats. The priest told the villagers that the Jamidarini Mata (a form of Mother Earth) was not pleased with the villagers as they did not pay attention to her. Immediately, the villagers decided to verify in their own way whether her soul (*jiv*) was there or not. The *jiv* was found in the body of the deity and later the whole village worshipped it with the help of the priest. After this incident, many tribals gave up their *kanthis*.

The tribals of Bastar use coconut, betel-nut and various

other items in their rituals. They have been using them from an early time, but these items were considered for the first time substitutes for sacrifices when Baba preached abstinence from flesh and liquor. When the tribals restarted worshipping their own deities, they even then stopped offering these sacrifices. In Lanjora, the tribals sometimes offer milk to the deity instead of liquor. They do not offer sacrifices to the Jamidarin Mata but offer her a number of coconuts. This is a Hindu element in the tribal religion which has been introduced by the movement.

Abstinence from flesh not only deprived the tribals of a food rich in protein but also of cattle wealth. The domesticated goats, pigs and poultry birds became useless for the Bhagat tribals who could not eat them. Baba's orders to give up all black animals had a bad effect on the tribal economy which is partly based on the rearing of animals. They hurried to sell off their animals. Before the movement, a cow brought 150 to 200 rupees, goats 50 to 70 rupees, fowls 5 to 8 rupees and fowls used for cock-fights 10 to 60 rupees. After the Baba's order they sold their cattle at any price that the opportunist buyers offered. Cows were sold for 40 to 80 rupees; goats for 10 to 20 rupees and fowls for no price. The traders came with trucks from distant places like Raipur, Bilai, and Waltair to purchase cattle and birds which the tribals sold at a low price. Those who did not find a buyer in the market, either left the cattle in the market or tied a stone-weight to the animal's neck and drowned it in any river or water reservoir on the way back home. Nobody brought unsold cattle home. As no market existed for pigs and dogs, they were mercilessly killed or sunk in water. The tribals thus lost an enormous amount of their wealth. According to an estimate, the tribals of Bastar lost cattle-wealth worth 80 to 90 lac rupees. This impoverished the tribals who possessed little land. Cultivation was also affected as pairs of oxen were broken up.

The tribals also lost some of their valuable ornaments and old coins of gold and silver, as they were given away as presents to Baba Bihari Das. Many man-days were lost in travelling for Chapka.

The State Government suffered loss of revenue. Some

124 wine shops out of 201 shops suffered a fall in income during 1971-72. Many wine shops were closed down for an indefinite period. The wine shops of the entire Bastar District were affected, which indicates that most of the tribals of almost every part of Bastar had left drinking wine; it can also be taken as an indicator of the effectiveness of Baba Bihari Das' preachings.

Whether Dead or On-Going Movement

With the arrest of Baba Bihari Das under MISA in August 1975, the movement has tapered off. Most of his followers have discarded the *kantli* and returned to their traditional way of life. But there are still some who observe the religion taught by Baba. Most of them are in the Bhatra and Muria tracts. Strangely, a rumour was spread in the month of July 1976 from Lohandiguda situated in the Bison-horn Maria tract that some tribals were trying to raise a fund to facilitate the release of Baba Bihari Das. On the other hand, most of the Bison-horn Marias have discarded *kantli*, and they have resumed eating meat and drinking home-brewn wine. It is thus difficult to say whether the movement is dead or alive or is in hibernation.

After the Emergency,* the Baba came back to Bastar but was externed again on the ground that his activities fomented ill-feelings among tribals and that he exploited them. The externment order was later quashed by the High Court, and the Baba came back and planned to hold early in 1981 a Vanaspati Yagna on an ambitious scale. If held, the Yagna would have enabled the Baba to make a clean profit of lakhs of rupees at the cost of the tribals who would contribute, and would have re-established him as a political force in Bastar. Both prospects were daunting. Evidence was not lacking that the Baba had encroached on the Government land to construct an Ashram at Chapka, that he had collected funds and forest produce, that he exploited tribals who were made to pay for the *Kanthis*, the yellow cloth they had to wear, and the *Ganpa Jala* (the holy water) etc. The Baba was also alleged to have relations with women and was charged with bigamy. Action followed and the Yagna could not be held.

The Baba fled to Orissa. The latest about him is that he is demanding the return of the articles seized from him and that he is instigating the tribals against administration. His followers demand his return.

To conclude,** this ten-year old movement in Bastar could be evaluated in its political and social aspects. First, the Baba with the help of the former Bastar ruler's confidants sought to fill the political vacuum created after their master's death in police firing in March 1966. The Baba was represented as the incarnation of the late Bastar ruler who exercised tremendous influence on his people—so did many Bastar rulers as evident from the uprisings in which the disturbance of the people's relationship with their rulers was a factor—and which was attested by the fact that the candidates fielded by him routed the Congress in 1952, 1957, and 1962, and that even his widow continued the winning spree in 1967. The Baba who appeared in 1960 established himself soon thereafter and favoured the Congress in 1972 elections. However, his political ambitions aroused the fear and wrath of his adversaries.

Secondly, the Baba did promote among the Bhatras and Murias—the more advanced Halbas kept aloof—a crude form of the Bhagat movement, which is common in many parts of tribal middle India. A similar movement had occurred in Chotanagpur in early 1930s (Singh). The pattern is familiar: the wearing of the accepted marks of Vaishnavism, the *Kanthis* made of *tulsi*, yellow *dhoti*, use of the holy water (*Ganga Jal*), abstention from eating meat and drinking liquor—and from traditional dances and music, selling of goats and fowls at throwaway prices because they are unclean, etc. The *kanthi* would protect the followers "when a long dark night shall ensue, when demons shall eat up all non-*kanthi* wearing people, when a great havoc shall be caused by an earthquake or a deluge in which all except those wearing *kanthi* shall perish". However, unlike other Bhagat movements, it was a short-lived affair and it has not so far resulted in the formation of a cult. Like other Bhagat movements, it created a division between the *Kanthis* and non-*Kanthis*, thus disrupting families. Besides, like other Bhagat movements, it did cause a loss of revenue when the people stopped drinking and distillers almost closed down their business. Prices

of fowls, goats, fish came down in tribal markets. But this was a passing phase. The Baba's prophecy about a doomsday proved to be false. The roots of primitive religion in Bastar were deep and strong. The people went back to their old ways of life. What upset most of them was the disclosure that the Baba belonged to the Dom community, to which the tribals in Bastar considered themselves superior. The Baba was not the reincarnation of Pravir; he was a money spinner. This largely ended the movement.

*Added by the editor.

**Based on the editor's field study of the movement conducted during 1974-75.

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THE TRIBAL AUTONOMY MOVEMENT IN SOUTH GUJARAT*

I.P. Desai

THIS STUDY was conducted in the four districts of South Gujarat; namely, Broach, Surat, Bulsar and Dang. The purpose of the investigation was to assess the strength of the demand for an autonomous Adivasi state and to identify the social forces behind it. The study is in the nature of a bird's-eye survey of this demand and the agitation for it in the four districts of South Gujarat with a view to formulating specific areas for further research.

The principal objective of the study was to seek answers to the following questions:

1. How did the demand for an autonomous state for the Adivasis arise?
2. Has the demand come from the villages in the interior?
3. How widespread is the demand?
4. What is its future?
5. Who are the people who propagate and support the demand?
6. What are the problems of the landholding population among the Adivasis?

*The essay is based on the research project entitled "A Study of the Slogan of Separate State by Tribals of South Gujarat", sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (1971). A summary appeared in the *Research Abstracts* (4), ICSSR.

7. What is the role of the educated section of the Adivasis and what are their problems?
8. What is the nature and extent of the influence that landholders exercise in Adivasi society?
9. What were the relations between Adivasis and non-Adivasis in the past and what are they at present?

In addition to direct observation through attending conferences and meetings, more than 100 respondents from different fields—such as political workers, social workers, missionaries, heads of panchayats, Members of Parliament and Members of the State Legislature—were interviewed. The interviews were open-ended but covered the views of the respondents on the origin of the demand for a separate state, the present position and future of the agitation, the social classes behind the demand, and the influence of landholders and the educated among the Adivasis. The analysis aims at identifying the social forces behind the demand and the role of different political and social groups.

The whole of South Gujarat, i.e., all the four districts, can be divided geographically into three belts—the western or the coastal belt, the central or the plains belt, and the eastern or the forest belt.

The people in the forest belt are referred to as Adivasis, Adimjatis or the tribal people. One thing common to them is that they all live in forest areas. But there are different endogamous groups among them. There are also differences in the methods by which they earn their livelihood. Some of them are owners and owner-tillers of land, some are tenants or sharecroppers, and so on. But illiteracy, ill-health and poverty, and, to a very large extent, isolation, are common to them all. Thus, in terms of their geographical environment, their social structure, dialects, styles of living, customs, manners, beliefs and values, they are different from the rest of the people in the region.

These four districts are contiguous on the east with the Adivasi areas of the neighbouring State of Maharashtra; namely, the districts of Thana, Nasik and Khandesh. The eastern Adivasi region of South Gujarat is contiguous with the Adivasi area of the eastern part of Baroda District which

in turn is contiguous with Madhya Pradesh. The Adivasi area of Baroda District is contiguous with the Panchmahal area to its north. The Panchmahal District is contiguous with Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Further north and north-west of Panchmahal is Banaskantha District which, on its northern side, touches Rajasthan and on its west, the District of Sabarkantha. Banaskantha does not have a large population of Adivasis, but Sabarkantha has a large population of Bhils and the northern part of that District is contiguous with the Bhil area of Rajasthan. Thus, there is literally one large contiguous tract of Gujarat populated mainly by Adivasis which runs from the eastern part of South Gujarat, through Baroda District, Panchmahal District and up to the northern part of Sabarkantha District. Further, this area touches those parts of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan where the bulk of the inhabitants are Adivasis. In short, Gujarat has a contiguous area comprising about 30 lakhs of Adivasis. If contiguity alone is the criterion for the formation of a separate state, then this area could certainly form an Adivasi state. If they unite with the Adivasis in the neighbouring states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, they could have an even larger state within the Indian Union.

Though there is a geographical contiguity, there is no homogeneity of ethnic stock, dialect, or economic and cultural development. The Bhils are the single largest group constituting about forty per cent of the total Adivasi population of Gujarat. They have their own dialect and they are the majority group in Sabarkantha, Panchmahal, Baroda and Broach. The Vasava Bhils of Broach District have their own dialect. The Bhils of Panchmahal are probably the most economically, educationally and socially advanced group among them. There are other groups of Adivasis in the Bhil area, but they do not have much numerical strength. Thus, the northern and western parts of the Adivasi belt consist largely of the Bhils. In Broach District, the Vasava Bhils are largest group. There are Tadvīs in Nandod Taluka. Then there are Chaudharis in Valia Taluka along with the Vasavas. The Halpatis are mostly in the non-forest Talukas except in Zagadia.

In Surat District, the Chaudharis are the single largest group. The other groups are the Dhodias, Gamits, and Bhils. There are other small groups, such as the Kotwalias, each with its own dialect. In Bulsar district, the Dhodias are the single largest group. The other groups are Naiks, Koknas, Warlis and Kathodis. In Dang, the Koknas or Kunbis are in the majority while the Bhils and the Gamits are fewer in numbers than the Koknas.

Each of these groups is endogamous. They have their own dialects and occupy a contiguous area. For all practical purposes, each group is like a caste residing in a particular area. Thus, the Adivasis in South Gujarat are a heterogeneous people in terms of their dialect, social structure and culture. Each group has had a different history and a different rate of development during the last twenty years. In some cases, the direction of development is also different. Each of these groups has a separate consciousness. The so-called Adivasi consciousness is a political development created and supported by administrative measures. The Adivasis' social consciousness, their feelings of Adivasi 'we-ness', as also their religious consciousness, arose out of their contact with non-Adivasis.

II

The demand for a separate state for the Adivasis was first voiced by an Adivasi Praja Socialist Party (PSP) MLA Ratan Sinh Gamit. In the 1969 budget session of the Gujarat State Legislative Assembly this MLA, who hails from the tribal area of Dang, said that he would raise a 'Dangi Sena' and ask for a separate state because the present state could not solve the problems of the Dangis. Subsequently, a conference was held at Ahwa in Dang in May 1969 which demanded the creation of an autonomous state. The ball was thus set rolling. The reaction of the Adivasis at that time is not known, but subsequent enquiries show that the sympathy for the slogan of Adivasi Swayat (autonomous) Raj is more widespread than is generally believed. Adivasi 'we-ness' arose out of their contact with non-Adivasis. The ethnic consciousness of each group is also growing due to unequal development and because of scarcity.

The slogan of *Swayat Raj* (autonomous Adivasi state) is understood differently by different proponents. There are three main proponents of this demand. One is the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The second is the Adimjati Rashtriya Mahasabha or the Vyara group. The last are the Swatantra Party MLAs. All the three are basically local groups in terms of the area of their influence. The basis of their understanding is explained by their political persuasion as in the case of the CPI (M) and the Swatantra Party. Politically, the Vyara group is nearer the Swatantra and the undivided Congress.

The Communists View

The reasoning of the CPI(M) or, for that matter, also of the CPI is deductive. It is based on considerations that are expressed in terms of the whole social order and which are of a universalistic nature. One of the principles in their theory is the right of self-determination of minorities. The application of that theory in the Soviet Union and in China with regard to the backward ethnic groups is said to have been successful. According to their theory, the basic problem is that of exploitation arising from the private ownership of the means of production and in this case the ownership of land.

Unless the ownership of land becomes communal or social exploitation will not end. Now so far as exploitation is concerned, it is not peculiar to the Adivasis—it is a general problem. Therefore, if the Adivasis are exploited it is not because they are a particular ethnic group but because they are members of a particular social system or social order. That order is an all-India one and in the final analysis part of the existing world order. Unless that is changed, exploitation and the problems of the Adivasis cannot be solved.

Yet, the development of the different parts or the different nations of the world and of different groups within a nation is not equal and, therefore, the strategy and tactics to be employed in the case of such less developed parts or areas or groups should be suitable to each individual case such as ethnic or religious groups. They must be left to determine their own development.

Thus, the theory of self-determination leads the Marxists to ask for an autonomous region or a separate state. This strategy is based on the fact of the Adivasis being rural communities belonging to an ethnic stock (Adivasi). That is where and how the Adivasis are placed in their formulation. But in spite of their recognizing the Adivasi consciousness, they support the slogan because they believe that ultimately the Adivasi consciousness will merge into the class consciousness. As it is, the landless labourer, the small and middle peasant and the Adivasi are all rolled into one. This is precisely the difficulty of the situation. If class consciousness becomes strong, Adivasi consciousness would be weakened. But, if Adivasi consciousness becomes strong, class consciousness would be weakened. The two cannot go together. A small error or a slip would result in the growth of a reactionary consciousness rather than the revolutionary consciousness which a good Communist aims at.

That error is not just a theoretical possibility. Actually in India, the Communist tactics did not succeed with regard to both the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes. In one case it resulted in the creation of a separate country (Pakistan) without solving the problem of the Muslim minority. In the other case involving Scheduled Castes there was a change of religion (Buddhism) but their problems remained unsolved. This policy did not make the Scheduled Castes or Muslims into adherents of Communism. Nor did they become class conscious and continue to be Muslims and Scheduled Castes. That this danger in the tactics is real when applied to the Adivasis has been shown while discussing the situation in Broach District.

The Swatantra Party View

Four Adivasis belonging to the Swatantra Party issued a statement on 15 June 1970 that they were going to submit a memorandum to the President of India. A translation of what appeared in a newspaper is given below (*Gujaratmitra*, 16 June 1970), though it is probably a summary of what they said in the statement and not the exact words:

Khed Brahma, Zalod, Naswadi, Chhotta Udepur, Umbergaon, Vansda, Vyara, Dang, Dharampur, Zagadia, Dediapada, Bankan and Nosal parts of Mangrol Taluka are declared as Scheduled Areas by the Rashtrapati by his order of Scheduled Areas Order (A class States) of 1950.

Rashtrapati has the power and authority to administer these areas through the Rajpal by a council consisting of 20 members including two-third Adivasi and one-third non-Adivasi members of legislatures. Not only that but also the Rajpal has the power to make laws without the state or central legislature and to change the laws made by the State or Central legislature with the advice of the council.

Gujarat Government has begun to exploit the mineral, forest and other natural wealth of the above-mentioned areas to help their supporters and the government has tried to take away the freedom of speech of those who oppose it. Instances have occurred of attempts to crush our political freedom by instituting false cases and by giving threats. Consequently, the feeling of unity of the people of different areas is broken.

We have decided to present a memorandum to the Rashtrapati to take steps according to Schedule Five of the Constitution in the interests of our freedom, social justice and economic development.

The important point to note here is that the proponents of this line of action are members of the Swatantra Party which accepts the principle of nineteenth century liberalism. It is irrelevant whether or not the four members understand these principles. They have taken a constitutional course as much as the CPI (M). Yet it is a different course under a different clause which ensures the participation of the non-Adivasis also. Also, they have not threatened an agitation. The talukas mentioned are only some of the Adivasi talukas. The statement was issued when the no-confidence motion against the Gujarat government was being discussed in the Assembly. It is also not known whether the memorandum was eventually submitted or not, but it represents another understanding of the concept of an Adivasi state. In

fact, it abjures the notion of a separate state or even an autonomous region. Also the accusation is against the government and not against the non-Adivasis directly. It is as much a political move as that of the CPI (M) but is based on a different socio-political theory.

The Vyara Group

The third approach is that of the Vyara group. Vyara is a taluka in Surat district. So far as the official resolutions or even the constitution of the Adivasi Rashtriya Mahasabha organization is concerned, there is no mention of an Adivasi state. One of the important leaders of the group said in the course of an interview, that he was not in favour of increasing the number of states in India. They would ask for a separate state as a last resort, if their demands were not satisfied. But that state will be a full-fledged state of the Indian union, separate from Gujarat State. They also think in terms of uniting with the Adivasis of the neighbouring states.

As discussed with regard to Surat district, this group thinks in terms of the Adivasis as an ethnic entity and that is the basis of their action. The exploitation of the Adivasis in the past and their backwardness in the present is attributed to the Hindu social structure and social philosophy. They say that the ultimate solution of the Adivasi-non-Adivasi relationship is the reform of that social structure and philosophy.

Some of them draw inspiration from Vivekanand and Gandhi. What they envisage is the absorption of the Adivasis in Hindu society and therefore much will depend on the attitudes and actions of Hindu society.' Politically, they are what they describe as 'a balancing force': They are against the political exploitation of the Adivasis and stand for their political identity. In effect, that might mean some kind of an Adivasi pressure group.

P.S.P. or Gamit's Attitude

The most unsteady and unpredictable factor is the P.S.P. (now Congress) Legislator Ratan Sinh Gamit, who set the ball

rolling. He was used by the CPI (M) and the CPI as their instrument. Occasionally the Communists hold meetings and talk of an autonomous state. But some months after the above-mentioned conference in 1969 Gamit said that Dang should be a centrally administered area. Some observers say that this is a prelude to the demand for merger with Maharashtra. But it should be noted that his main concern is with the Dangs. He considers even the Adivasi Dhodias from neighbouring talukas as outsiders. Why should he wish to join non-Adivasi Maharashtra?

These are the various meanings attached to the slogan of an Adivasi Swayat Raj. Obviously, it is being used as a weapon in the political struggle, and is not really the major aim. But one of the major consequences of this demand is that it has heightened the Adivasi consciousness. This could lead to a stage where all the difficulties and problems of the Adivasis are explained in terms of the Adivasi-non-Adivasi relationship. Our inquiry enables us to say that, that is what is happening irrespective of what the different proponents of a separate state for the Adivasis might say.

Our observation is that even in those districts and areas where there is not much support for the idea of an Adivasi state, among the more conscious sections of the Adivasis the feeling of injustice and unfairness perpetrated by the non-Adivasis in the past and during the present is very widespread and in some cases intense too. This is felt in different fields of life and among different sections of the Adivasis. We have identified two sections—the Adivasi agriculturist and the educated Adivasi—among whom the idea of an Adivasi state is being nurtured.

III

The Adivasi Consciousness among the Educated Adivasis

The extremist position is that Adivasi-non-Adivasi relations cannot improve—i.e., cannot be established in terms of equality—unless there is a change in the attitudes and behaviour of

the surrounding society which is mostly Hindu. The extremists also do not see any possibility of such a change in the near future and take the position that Adivasi-non-Adivasi relations can improve only when the Adivasis have an independent identity. The extremist section, which is not very large, consists mostly of the educated Adivasis and only a very few agriculturists. The number of Adivasis going in for higher education is increasing and if they do not find employment, their grievances will increase and the simplest explanation for their difficulties will be the non-Adivasi competitors, selectors, policy-makers and implementers.

A very senior member of the legislature, who cannot be accused of Adivasi chauvinism, described the difficulties of the Adivasis in the following words:

After finishing education he (the Adivasi) has the problem of employment. He is poor and helpless—who will help him? Names are registered in the employment Exchange. But if a candidate does not get a job within three months he has to register his name again. But the Adivasi does not know about it. He believes that the name is registered so the order will come. But it does not come and he feels frustrated.

Further, when there are good vacancies the employment exchange people do not send the names of Adivasis and give the advantage to non-Adivasis. Consequently, the Adivasis get ordinary jobs. An MA gets 100 or 150 rupees. How will he be satisfied? On the other hand he sees that the man who was studying with him becomes a Collector or a Mamlatdar. Why this inequality?

You might say that 5 per cent seats are reserved for Adivasis. But is the Adivasi taken? Suitability is made a big qualification. Under this pretext anybody is disqualified. Because a suitable scheduled caste or tribe person is not available that reserved seat is made unreserved.

Today the Adivasis are taken in the education or co-operative departments. Will you show me a single example of an Adivasi in an executive position? Ujaliats do not want the Adivasis to come up.

After thus describing the feelings of illiterate Adivasis he said: 'I wish you were a Adivasi to experience this'.

Another young graduate expressed himself in a similar manner. He said: 'With all your sympathies for the Adivasi, you can't understand us'.

This is how the feeling of 'us' and 'them' is nourished. It is very difficult to eradicate this feeling, though it is possible not to feed it.

A fairly large number of our Adivasi respondents said that the distance between the Adivasi and the non-Adivasi has not disappeared, but it has become less and will disappear in future. The basis of this hope lay in exactly the same phenomenon which increases the distance. They said that the distance between educated Adivasis and educated non-Adivasis is less. They easily mix with one another without the Adivasi-non-Adivasi feeling. Also, they said that the upper class Adivasi is not discriminated against by the non-Adivasi in day-to-day social intercourse. According to them, education changes the appearance and behaviour of an Adivasi and he can no longer be recognized as an Adivasi.

The conflict between the feeling of 'we-ness and of 'they-ness' surfaces when there are competing or conflicting interests. One area in which this conflict is ever-present is in the employment of the educated. Actually this is a question of the shortage of opportunities. It is not that the upper castes or the Ujaliats have not experienced this frustration. During the British days when the Government made a distinction between the advanced, intermediate and backward castes and the Muslim minorities, the Brahmins and the allied advanced castes had a similar experience. In some states they suffer similarly even today.

Thus, education by itself softens Adivasi-non-Adivasi relations. But people obtain education primarily with a view to earning a livelihood and it is here that the tribal consciousness operates when the opportunities are not proportionate to the number of claimants. Job opportunities are a by-product of general economic development and it is the failure of that development that converts the unifying role of education into a conflicting one. Education as such need not be blamed.

Tribal Consciousness and the Peasants

The other identifiable section where the feeling of Adivasi 'oneness' gathers strength is the class of tribal middle peasants and big landholders. The tenancy legislation with all its imperfections and given the manner of its implementation was unfavourable to the Adivasis and made many people owners of land and increased the size of the holdings of many others. This landowning class is a fairly big class in absolute terms. In fact, as the Census data show, in some Adivasi communities the number of agricultural labourers is smaller than the number of cultivators. The size of the holdings is not supposed to be more than 10 acres. But that class which has a sense of property acquires a new confidence and new aspirations, particularly when an entire new world is opened up to them through transport, communications, and by schools coming to their villages. They want their sons to be educated both for financial and for status purposes. Psychologically, therefore, the programme of re-distribution of land is very attractive even for the agricultural labourers. Actually, there is not enough cultivable land for every one and in all probability the agricultural labourers will remain labourers even if all the available land is distributed. Yet, the programme has an agricultural value. Apart from the political following that a party might gain from its propagation, the programme creates new ambitions and shakes the people out of their complacency and mental lethargy. Some of them at least begin to look beyond their villages and districts. It is here that the new occupations and the small number engaged in them play a big role. They provide a direction to those who began to think that something other than agriculture is also possible. This has happened in all the districts in South Gujarat.

The educated, at least the first generation of them, comes from this class of small landholders or middle peasants among tribals as we have called them. For some time the educated and the landowning peasants have a common platform. But as soon as the influence of education begins to be expressed among the educated in terms of the style of living, ways and views of life, the peasants become critical of them. This happens within twenty-five years of education and that is how we find

that the peasants have an ambivalent attitude towards the educated and vice-versa both among the Adivasis and the non-Adivasis.

The ambitions and aspirations of the landholding peasants and of the educated class also have their effect on Adivasi-non-Adivasi relations. There is the desire to be absorbed into the wider society; but there are no means to achieve this, or at least they are scarce. The non-Adivasis due to historical reasons, had an earlier start and have an advantage over the Adivasis. Those among the Adivasis who have the means and have attained a position of equality in material terms now want equality of status and power. That is how we find that in all the districts the Adivasis say that the non-Adivasis do not want them to come up.

The Political Activities and the Slogan of Adivasi State

In spite of the similarity in socio-economic development and a shared view of the Adivasi relationship, the slogan of an Adivasi State and the attendant agitation is differently received and understood in different districts. How can this divergence be explained? The one difference that we have noted is the difference in political activity. As we have seen, the agitation exists in Broach District only and that is solely due to the initiative of the CPI(M). They have found allies among those they call the sectarians. Barring two Adivasi talukas in Surat District, the Communists do not have a foothold in the area. In Bulsar, they do not have a foothold in even one taluka and the idea of Adivasi State is not approved of in that District. In Surat district, the Vyara group's position at the moment is not to agitate for an Adivasi state. But, if at all, they would prefer a full-fledged state and not the entity allowable under the fifth Schedule of the Constitution. But the theoretical grounds of the Communists and the Vyara group are different. In the case of the latter, the question arises out of the Adivasi-non-Adivasi relationship and the nature of Hindu society and philosophy. To use the Communist terminology, they are completely sectarian. Even if the Adivasi's problems do not become part of a political programme in view of the fact that the socio-economic developments are common in all the

districts and that the feeling regarding the Adivasi-non-Adivasi relations is also the same, the possibility of a purely Adivasi movement in all the three districts cannot be ruled out.

The social, psychological and economic situation created by the developments during the last twenty years, has generated the forces which make Adivasi society ripe for change. This process cannot be stopped or reversed. Thus, it is not correct to say that nothing has happened in Adivasi society during the last twenty years. It is necessary, in the first place, to recognize that much has happened there just as in non-Adivasi areas. The problem is how to go forward or develop further, or how to harness these forces for further reconstruction.

As we have seen, there are several fields in which the forces of change operate and the problems have to be tackled in each of these fields in a coordinated manner. It is true that this is a generalization and it is always easier to say than to do a thing. It is our contention that the problem is not correctly cognized.

It is very common to encounter a social situation created, as in the case of the slogan of an Adivasi autonomous state, at the political and administrative levels. What happens when the situation is tackled purely at political level is described by Ghanshyam Shah in his report on the Dangs. He has also discussed what happens when a new type of administration is introduced. It is an error to treat the situation purely as a law and order problem without taking into consideration the socio-economic, social and philosophical realities.

These realities have to be studied with specific problems in view. The Government is probably conducting such studies in its own way. It may be possible to add a wider perspective to such studies. But that requires a dialogue between the administration and researchers. The point that is made here is that the feeling about the Adivasi-non-Adivasi relationship is going to play an important role in future developments, even if no political party cognizes it.

It is necessary to clarify here that it is not only what the Adivasis feel and do but also what the non-Adivasis feel and do that is equally important and relevant. What we mean

is that all the problems are likely to be viewed by both the Adivasis and the non-Adivasis from their respective angles. It is generally presumed that the non-Adivasis always have a wider perspective. That is not correct. Probably all that the public knows is that there are 28 Adivasi members in the State Legislature. But it is hardly realized that the reality is different in different regions. For example, in South Gujarat, according to the 1961 Census, Surat and Bhulsar have 50 per cent, Broach has 42 per cent and Dang has 97 per cent Adivasi population. If a demand or a point of view put forth by 50 per cent of the population is to be considered narrow or sectarian, why is the point of view of the other 50 per cent considered to be wider? Some of the answers could be that they are more advanced, they know more, they understand things better than the Adivasis. That is precisely what the Adivasi elite questions. They call it the ruse to keep the Adivasis backward. It is necessary to spread more knowledge about the Adivasis among the non-Adivasis in all regions. The other thing that needs to be changed among the non-Adivasis is the attitude that what they are doing is in the interests of the Adivasis and that the latter should appreciate it. What the Adivasis want is to be involved in deciding what is in their interest and in implementing whatever decisions are taken. It is necessary to recognize the Adivasi identity.

What the Adivasis need to be informed of is that the changes that are taking place in their society are creating occupational differentiations which in turn create the problem of status differentiations based on them and on education. These and the problems of employment will have to be faced even by the separate state. They are not going to be solved overnight by the creation of an Adivasi State, just as the problems of India have not been solved by political independence. The differential development in different areas and of different communities will create problems similar to those between the Adivasis and the non-Adivasis. That the Dangī Adivasi considered the Dhodia Adivasi as an outsider is a case in point. Also, the existence of associations for the advancement of different communities and the formation of new ones is a pointer to the direction of future developments. Another factor is the existence of Adivasi Students Associations, Primary

School Teachers' Associations and youth organizations. These will create problems for the Adivasi state too. It would be a sorry mistake on the part of non-Adivasis to dismiss them as sectarian. They can play a constructive role if they are not dismissed as sectarian but are properly understood. While they are confined to the Adivasis, they have interests which are common to both the Adivasis and the non-Adivasis.

The Adivasi's desire for a share in the distribution of power and authority is not a new phenomenon. It is similar to the lower status groups in non-Adivasi areas desiring a better status and a share in power in relation to the higher income groups. Some castes in the plains and coastal areas of South Gujarat have achieved that to the extent that it is not posed as an inter-caste problem. These so-called lower castes are being involved in politics and are being politicized.

But there are two differences between the lower status groups in non-Adivasi areas and the Adivasis: (a) The former groups were living and involved in the wider world, particularly in the political set-up and the opportunity structure. The Adivasis entered into these structures only after independence, i.e., in 1947. They have a late start. (b) They have a sense of being discriminated against. The basis of this sense is the feeling that they are a distinct group—the Adivasis. The conflict is between this feeling and the participation in the political and opportunity structure. The course of this participation, unlike that in the case of lower status and income groups of the plains area, has been consciously directed with regard to the political and opportunity structures. While this conscious direction increased the participation, it also added to the feeling of distinction. This feeling has grown to such an extent during the last twenty years that they would not like these crutches to be removed. Indeed it would be unwise to remove them immediately. One thing that the constitutional crutches have done is to enhance the aspirations and ambitions of the Adivasis. This is necessary for change and therefore desirable. The only way to make them independent of these crutches is to increase their participation in the non-directed areas of the opportunity structure. But that implies that our wider opportunity structure is wide enough today and is growing wider so as to absorb them.

Within the given opportunity structure there are several other ways to decrease the feeling of discrimination. These could be followed by the non-governmental voluntary agencies both among the Adivasis and among the non-Adivasis. These ways will have to be at the elite and non-elite levels both among the Adivasis and the non-Adivasis. There could be several fields varying from literacy and fine arts to community welfare in which joint discussions and actions are possible. These fields have to be thought out locally. It should be mentioned that such programmes will have very limited effects.

After our investigation was over and this report was completed and ready for despatch to the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the newspapers of 31 July 1970 published the news that the Gujarat Government has appointed a Board for Adivasi and Harijan Welfare consisting largely of Adivasis and Harijans. It is a high powered board which will formulate and sanction schemes for the welfare of the scheduled tribes and castes. It will have two panels, one each for the Adivasis and the Harijans. The functions of the Board through these panels would be to prepare the monetary allocations for schemes to achieve the educational, economic and social advancement of the Harijans and Adivasis. The duties of the Board will be to look after the educational and welfare activities, housing, employment and health schemes and will provide protection from injustice and all forms of exploitation as far as the Adivasis and Harijans are concerned.

If the Board members keep their heads on their shoulders they should be able to do a lot towards increasing the participation of the Adivasis and the Harijans in the changing wider society. If they take hasty steps and short cuts to get immediate results, the Board will create more problems than it will solve.

THE BHIL MOVEMENT IN THE DHULIA DISTRICT (1972-74)

D.S. Kulkarni

Introduction

THE Adivasis constitute about six per cent of the population of Maharashtra. They are concentrated in the hilly parts of the State and are amongst the poorest section of the populace. Starvation is common and the majority of them live below the poverty line. About forty Adivasi tribes were enumerated in the 1971 Census of the State. Out of these, eight tribes—Bhil, Mahadev Koli, Gond, Warali, Kokna, Thakur, Kathodi and Gamit—constitute about eighty per cent of the total Adivasi population in the State. The Adivasi population is concentrated in certain parts of the State. About sixty per cent of them live in the three districts of Dhulia, Thana and Nasik. In spite of the special constitutional provisions for the protection of these tribes, their condition seems to have remained stagnant. This can be seen from a brief look at their conditions and circumstances as discussed below.

The Adivasis live mainly in the rural areas. About ninety-six per cent of them live in rural areas as against the State average of sixty-nine per cent. Poverty appears to have reduced the average span of life among the Adivasis. About sixteen per cent of the total population of the State consists of persons aged 45 and above. In the case of the Adivasis this age group constitutes thirteen per cent of the population. Because of poverty, a large majority of the Adivasi women

have to work more. About forty-seven per cent of the total women in the rural areas of Maharashtra were recorded in the 1961 Census as being gainfully employed, as against fifty-eight per cent of Adivasi women. The majority of the Adivasis are small cultivators and agricultural labourers. About sixty-five per cent of the Adivasis land-holders have less than three hectares of land while only twenty per cent hold more than six hectares. Most of the land is situated in hilly tracts and does not have irrigation facilities. A number of Adivasis work as agricultural labourers at very low wages. The work is also seasonal. In lean months a number of them are forced to live on leaves and roots. The Adivasis are less migratory than others. They feel insecure in the alien surroundings of towns and cities and are reluctant to move to urban areas. The Adivasis are far behind the general population in terms of education, and economic prosperity. The tribal sub-plan of Maharashtra State points out that 'in the view of some experts the Adivasis are yet to cover a 50-year period to reach the existing levels of their counterparts in other areas. Some experts also hold the view that quite a few Adivasis are yet in the stone age. It is a matter of pride that the Adivasis in Maharashtra are much advanced being agriculturists in the full sense of the word excepting a handful like Maria Gond in Chandrapur and Katkaris in Western Maharashtra who are yet at the food gathering stage' (emphasis added).

Adivasi tribes have their own hierarchical social system of petty chiefs and priests-cum-medicants (bhagats). Different Adivasi tribes follow their own customs and avoid contact with other tribes living in the same area.

Problems

Poverty, exploitation, illiteracy (lack of education), addition to liquor and superstitions are the five important problems faced by the Adivasis.

It is indeed difficult to imagine the poverty among the Adivasis. As a group they belong to the lowest twenty per cent of the population classified according to per capita income. Most of the Adivasis are small cultivators with inferior

quality holdings which do not have irrigation facilities. As labourers on farms, in forests and in charcoal manufacturing they get work on low wages only for some days in the year. A number of Adivasi women collect firewood and sell it for a living. A study of the economic conditions of the agricultural labour in Shahada tehsil of Dhulia District shows that in most of the villages the per capita annual income of sample families (most of whom were Bhis) was less than Rs. 300. The condition of the Adivasis in other districts is not different.

The exploitation of the Adivasis by the non-Adivasis takes various forms. Money-lenders-cum-traders charge incredibly high rates of interest. During lean months they are lent about Rs. 50 which have to be repaid after the harvests (within a period of three to four months) in kind. The money-lender recovers as much as possible. If calculated the rate of interest would work out to be between 600 to 1200 per cent. Harsh means are also used to recover loans. These include beating the debtor or confining him in the lender's house. Other traders in the Adivasi areas also take advantage of the ignorance of the Adivasis. High prices are charged for necessaries like salt. In the Adivasi areas of Dhulia and Chandrapur salt is sold or exchanged for more than a rupee per kilogram of paddy. False weights are also commonly used. Lack of proper transport facilities and ignorance about the prevailing prices compel the Adivasis to sell their products to local traders and to purchase their goods from them only. The local traders normally have some sort of understanding among themselves to perpetuate this exploitation.

Exploitation also takes the form of bonded labour for repayment of debts. Bonded labour is not very uncommon among Adivasis. Its form differs from place to place. Exploitation has resulted in the appropriation by the non-Adivasis of lands belonging to the Adivasis. The process of alienation started before Independence and gained momentum after 1950. This land alienation has led to a loss of the only productive asset of the Adivasis and has reduced them to the level of serfs.

Petty government officials also exploit the Adivasis in many ways. Policemen extort money under threats of arrest.

Revenue servants like *talathis* and *patawaris* charge heavy fees for any service which is supposed to be rendered free of charge. Instances are known when revenue stamps worth ten paise were sold for a rupee or more. The extreme poverty, ignorance, geographical and cultural isolation of the Adivasis make the exploiters bold and their injustice goes unnoticed and unpunished.

Most of the Adivasis are illiterate. The literacy rate in Maharashtra in 1961 was twelve per cent for males and two per cent for females in the Adivasis areas as against forty-two and seventeen per cent respectively for the total State population. The difference becomes even wider in the case of higher education. A few Adivasis who are educated up to Matriculation or above are able to get jobs in towns and cities because of Government reservation of jobs for Adivasis. This leads to a migration of educated persons from Adivasi areas. Some educated persons, belonging mainly to the families of Adivasi chiefs or those who are relatively well-off, get elected to the Legislature, or Zilla Parishads and Taluka Panchayats. Only a very few of them care to serve their people and some of them even begin to exploit their brethren by entering the money-lending business. Due to poverty young boys are forced to start working at the age of nine or ten and are employed to look after cattle, etc. The girls look after the household work and the younger children, while their mothers are out collecting firewood. Hence most of the boys and girls do not go to school. In any case, they are unable to benefit from going to school where they have to study in a language they do not use at home. Their own dialect finds no place in the education system. The teachers are also very irregular as most of them live in nearby town or big places. Most of them do not have their families in the villages where they teach even if they live there. The non-Adivasi teachers look upon the Adivasi students with indifference bordering on contempt. No wonder that the spread of literacy is very slow among the Adivasis.

Liquor is part of Adivasi life. A child is given a few drops of liquor after birth. A dead body is buried only after some liquor is poured into its mouth. Till recently, Adivasis used liquors prepared locally from Mahuwa flowers or

other substances. However, after prohibition was introduced they started consuming strong country liquors made illicitly from jaggery. After prohibition was partially abolished, they started consuming liquors made by sugar factories and breweries. Due to poverty and ignorance, most of the Adivasis live a day to day life and never think of the future. This attitude to life make them an easy prey to drinks. Drinking increases their poverty, indebtedness and exploitation. Money-lenders, landlords and traders can easily induce them to execute false documents or put their thumb impression on false receipts or accounts when they are under the influence of liquor.

Most of the Adivasis believe in supernatural powers and ghosts. A sick man is first taken to a medicant (Bhagat) who normally asks him to offer hens or goats to the gods. He exploits them in this and various other ways.

Movements among the Adivasis

The Adivasi movements before Independence had a peculiar nature. When indebtedness and oppression reached unbearable portions in an area, a more daring Adivasi would collect a group of persons and raid the houses of money-lenders, destroy the papers, and cut off their noses in some cases. This group would carry on such activities for some time but it would soon be arrested by the police and the whole thing would come to an end. The Adivasis cherish the memory of a number of such heroes.

The first major movement against the exploitation of Adivasis was organized under the leadership of Mrs. Godavari Parulekar, a leader of the Communist Party. The movement met with extreme opposition from the money-lenders, traders and contractors on the one hand and the Government on the other. However, it received wide publicity and also support from political parties and social workers. In spite of severe opposition the movement succeeded in emancipating bonded labour, raising wage rates and stopping the atrocities perpetrated by the money-lenders and traders. Above all it created a sense of self-respect among the Adivasis. No longer did they remain meek and humble to be oppressed by police constables, *talathis* (the village revenue officials), and forest guards.

The Movement in Dhulia

Many years later, another tribal movement took place in Dhulia District. About 37 per cent of the population of the District consist of Bhils, the most prominent Adivasi tribe in the State. This movement is of recent origin and is just a decade old. However, it has achieved significant results and is held as an example of Adivasi movements in the State. The rest of this paper is devoted to a description of this movement.

The present District of Dhulia was a part of the region called Khandesh. The Gujaratis had migrated to this area before the establishment of British rule. However, they settled down in the area in large numbers only after the British extended their rule. The East India Company encouraged cultivation of cotton in the area. The development of roads and the construction of railways in the area in the 1860s helped the development of capitalist farming. Farmers who had migrated from Gujarat known as Gujars occupied the lands and began employing Bhils as *saldars* who were treated more or less as slaves.¹ All land formerly cultivated by the Adivasis was gradually occupied by non-Adivasis by legal and illegal means. This process started in the 1830s and went on till 1970. After 1950 there were large-scale transfers of land from Adivasis to non-Adivasis.² This alienation took place in various ways : (a) Money-lenders took possession of the lands of those Adivasis who owed them money. In many cases, this took place under oral agreements. The lands so taken over were never returned. (b) Rich landlords took possession of Adivasi land on promise of exchange which never took place. (c) A number of money-lenders took Adivasi lands on long-term lease with or without the Collector's consent. They got themselves registered as tenants and became owners under the Tenancy Act. (d) Non-transferable Adivasi *inam* land were made transferable on payment of a certain amount after Independence. Non-Adivasis purchased these lands after they became transferable. (e) Adivasi lands were auctioned by cooperative credit societies because of non-payment of dues. These were purchased by non-Adivasis. A number of these transactions took place through force and fraud.

With increased ownership of land in the area, the non-Adivasis began to oppress the Adivasis in various ways. Landlessness and poverty forced the Adivasis to work as *saldars* or casual labourers on non-Adivasi owned farms for low wages and long hours. Money-lenders also employed them on low wages. Instances of the flogging of Bhil labourers, rape of Bhil women, burning of huts and other atrocities began to increase in number. Since the non-Adivasis practically controlled all the seats in the State Legislature and had good contacts with Government officials at all levels in the District, their crimes against the Bhils went unnoticed and unpunished. Political parties in the area paid lip service to the welfare of the Adivasis but did little to redress their grievances. Sarvodaya workers in the area were the first to take any action. Shri Vinoba Bhave had in his Bhoodan Yagna toured this area and a Sarvodaya Ashram was established at Dhadgaon in the interior of the Satpuda mountains. One of the Sarvodaya Ashram workers was a Bhil and he provided the leadership to the movement.

Leadership

Ambarsing Suratwanti was born in a village in the area. He was educated up to Matriculation. He was employed in the Sarvodaya Ashram on their ambulance. After 1967 he started touring the villages and asked the Adivasis to unite to fight the atrocities committed against them. He used to sing *bhajans* and became known in the area as Ambarsing Maharaj, as persons who sing *bhajans* are called Maharaj among the Bhils. Some Sarvodaya workers backed him in this work. They formed a Gram Swaraj Samiti and started touring the area to unite the Bhils against oppression. Some educated youths from different places joined Ambarsing and helped him to organize youth *mandals* at different places. Eventually they set up the Shramik Sanghata which, along with the Gram Swaraj Samiti, guided the movement.

Growth and Development

On 7 November 1971, a meeting was organized at Budhigavan

village.³ Representatives from different villages attended the meeting. It was decided to conduct a survey of different villages to study the problem of land alienation. By January 1972, 72 villages had been surveyed. On 30 January 1972, a big rally of Adivasis was organized at Shahada which was attended by about 6000 Adivasis. A charter of demands was prepared. This included stopping Adivasi land transfers to non-Adivasis, restoration of lands illegally transferred, implementation of the employment guarantee scheme of the State Government and fixation of minimum wages for agricultural labourers. Thereafter, Adivasi youth groups started taking out *morchas* at different places. The landlords tried to counter this growing awareness in different ways like beating Adivasi leaders and lodging false complaints against them with the police. However, at certain places the Adivasis succeeded in getting back the lands illegally occupied by the money-lenders and others.

From February to May 1972, various Adivasi groups succeeded in getting about 1872 acres of land in thirty-one villages restored to them. This created a wave of enthusiasm among the Adivasis and a corresponding bitterness among the non-Adivasi landlords who organized crop protection societies to resist them. Adivasi workers were arrested by the police at different places. Adivasi groups offered land satyagraha at different places, such as the one that Ambarsing Suratwanti offered on 2 October 1972. This received wide publicity in Maharashtra. The then Minister of Forest, Shri M.D. Choudhari held discussions with the workers. The Government of Maharashtra appointed three special tehsildars to inquire into the legality of land transfers from Adivasi to non-Adivasi persons. The reports of these tehsildars have not been published; but it is reliably learnt that they have reported that these transfers with very few exceptions, were more or less in accordance with the provisions of the law.

The Adivasis were not satisfied with these investigations and efforts and in February 1974 they again launched land satyagrahas at different places to regain the lands illegally acquired by non-Adivasis. On 25 February 1974, Ambarsing died of a kidney disease at Poona. The Adivasis thus lost the man who had given them a new sense of self-respect. However, the struggle was carried on. On 17 April 1974 a big rally

was organized at Prakashe in Shahada tehsil. It was attended by over 15,000 Adivasis from different villages in the District. Many of them had walked miles to attend the rally. The Government of Maharashtra issued an ordinance on 6 July 1975 (13 of 1974), to prohibit the transfer of Adivasi lands to non-Adivasis and to restore lands alienated in contravention of the law.⁴ The Ordinance was later changed into an Act (35 of 1974). The Act mainly dealt with the restoration of lands alienated in contravention of the law and the prohibition of future alienation. However, a number of further transfers were effected by taking advantage of the legal loopholes. The Maharashtra Legislature subsequently passed a Bill to restore lands legally alienated during a certain period (Bill No. 81 of 1975). After a very long period it received the assent of the President and became an Act (14 of 1975).⁵

Both these Acts were challenged in the High Court. However, they have now been declared valid and are being implemented. The Adivasi workers in Dhulia are doing their best to get these Acts implemented. Thus it can be seen that the Adivasi movement in Dhulia has scored a victory so far as the land problem of the Adivasis is concerned.

There was also the problem of agricultural labour. There are two kinds of agricultural labourers in the area—(a) *saldars*, labourers on annual contract; and (b) *Halmajur* or casual labourers. It has already been mentioned that the *saldars* were treated very badly. They had to work from early morning to midnight and to do all types of jobs on the farm and in the house. They did not get a single holiday in the year and the wages were also very low. The Shramik Sangh-tana and the Gram Swaraj Samiti organized the *saldars*. It was decided that the annual contracts between *saldars* and the landlords should be finalized at a meeting between them and that individual contracts should be avoided. The *saldars* in a number of villages were able to effect such contracts. In some villages the landlords refused to deal with the *saldar* unions. The village committees of *saldars* under the leadership of the Shramik Sangh-tana printed forms of accounts and supervised the payments to *saldars*. The hours of work and the nature of work were also fixed. This system of contract began in 1972 and after much resistance the landlords accepted

it and it became an accepted practice by 1975.

The casual labourers were also organized. The rates of wages were supposed to be fixed in consultation with the landlords. This also met with stiff resistance from the landlords. In 1974 the Government of Maharashtra fixed minimum wages for agricultural labourers. The Adivasis demanded the implementation of these wages and at a number of places they refused to work on lower wages. The struggle still goes on.

There was also a problem of forest land. A number of Adivasis had been cultivating lands which were shown in Government records as forests. The Adivasis had cleared parts of the forests and were cultivating them with the connivance of the forest officers. However, notices were now issued to the cultivators to vacate them. A number of persons were also forced to supply labour for forest work. Both these issues were taken up by the workers. People were asked to refuse to do forced labour. Satyagrahas were offered when attempts were made to vacate cultivated lands in the forest areas. The Government has now agreed to redistribute the land not actually under forest to Adivasi cultivators. The Sharmik Sanghтана workers supervised the work of distributing the land. In one case they attacked and severely injured by those who wanted a favoured distribution of land to a few individuals only.

The movement is not limited to agitations and Satyagrahas. It also includes the education of Adivasis, and anti-liquor and anti-betting (*matka*) campaigns. Educational camps are organized for three to four days at different villages. Information on various problems is given at these camps. Separate camps for women are also organized. Night schools (called *dangaris* by the Adivasis) are also conducted at different villages where the Adivasis are taught to read and write. Adivasi women have formed groups to prevent men from drinking liquor and have succeeded in quite a few cases. In some villages country liquor shops as well as illicit breweries have been closed.

Conclusion

Thus the Bhil movement in Dhulia started in real earnest only from 1970 achieved considerable success in only a few years.

The Adivasis in the area have gained a sense of self-respect. They can no longer be harassed as dumb animals by landlords, money-lenders or lower level Government officials. The movement has received wide publicity in the newspaper and a number of younger people from cities like Poona and Bombay have taken part in organizing the Adivasis. Some young Adivasis are also working as full-time workers of the Sanghtana.

After the proclamation of the Emergency in June 1975, some of the workers of the Sanghtana were arrested probably at the instigation of local vested interests. They were released after a few months. Some of them have been arrested again recently. The Sanghtana is now concentrating its attention on the education of men and women, implementation of land restoration acts and similar activities.

Notes

1. For further details see S.D. Kulkarni, 'Over a Century of Tyranny', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 9, No. 10, 9 March 1974, pp. 389-92.
2. For details see S.D. Kulkarni, 'Alienation of Adivasi Land', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 9, No. 35, 31 August 1974, pp. 1969-70.
3. See 'The Bhil Movement in Dhulia', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, February 1972, pp. 205-9, for a description of the movement in its earlier stage. See also 'Organising the Adivasis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, February 1974, pp. 173-76.
4. For further details about the provisions of the Ordinance see Kulkarni, 'Alienation of Adivasi Land', *op. cit.*
5. For details about the provisions of the Bill see S.D. Kulkarni, 'Justice Delayed—Or Denied', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 25 January 1975, pp. 97-98.

THE HALPATI MOVEMENT AMONG THE DUBLASS OF SOUTH GUJARAT

William Ekka and A.K. Danda

SEVERAL TYPOLOGIES of tribal movements have been attempted so far by scholars from India and abroad. Linton (1943), Wallace (1956), and Mahapatra (1972) are a few of them. Though most of them are fairly comprehensive accounts, none of them are fully exhaustive. In certain cases—for example, Linton (1943) and Mahapatra (1972)—the categories of specific typologies are, for obvious reasons, not exclusive either. The character of the movements is sometimes so varied that even after taking all typologies together one wonders whether all the tribal movements can be properly fitted to any or even several of them. The Halpati movement among the Dublas of South Gujarat is one such movement which can, on the whole, be accommodated to Linton's scheme (1943) through, following Wallace.¹ One would ponder whether it can really be called a movement. The problem can be overcome if we accept a twofold clustering of movements—exogenous and endogenous—taking the ethnic affiliation of the leaders of the movement into account. In this respect the Halpati movement falls in the former category as it was originally initiated by Gandhi and his followers who were mostly from outside community.

The Dublas constitute the largest tribal group of South Gujarat, particularly in Bulsar, Surat, and Broach districts. They were landless, extremely poor, and lived like serfs of the Kanbi or Patidar landlords. Their original name is not

known. It is said that due to their impoverished conditions they were referred to as 'dubla' which means 'weak'. This was considered to be a pejorative term by the people (Bremen, 1974). So, Gandhi named them the Halpati. Vallabhaji Patel formally used the name Halpati on 26 January 1939, perhaps for the first time, in the course of a joint meeting of the bonded Dubla labourers and their masters. Etymologically, the term is derived from the word *hal* or plough and means one who ploughs or holds the plough.

The system of bonded labour was locally known as *half-pratha*. Under this system an indebted labourer or *Hali*² was bound by contract to serve his *Dhaniama*³ or creditor until he had repaid his debt. The creditors were invariably the landowners and in sharp contrast the indebted labourers were by and large landless.⁴ Except through their employment as agricultural labourers they had no other source of income. Their wages were mostly given in kind, locally known as *bhata* or *bhatu* plus a small amount of cash on a daily basis. But the cash given to them was so little that they would never be able to get rid of their bonded condition by repaying their debts. As reported by Shah in this connection, 'the scale of wages was not determined by the cost of living but by the wishes of the landowners who naturally formed a strong and self-sufficient group; against rapacity and selfishness, there was no remedy, no appeal, no redress' (1951:176). In ordinary circumstances, the dependence of the *hali* on his *dhaniama* went on increasing, lowering him to a state of semi-serfdom. To refer to Shah again, a creditor could sell his bonded labourer or transfer him to some other creditor along with the balance of the debt. Often, the debt incurred by a father devolved on the son, necessitating him to occupy what was almost his pre-destined position. When the son in turn needed money, particularly for meeting wedding expenses, he also resorted to the same source as it was almost impossible to repay the debt or serve two creditors simultaneously. Even if they did not inherit debts many Dublas became bonded labourers by borrowing money for meeting marriage or other expenses. In course of time, other members of the family also got attached to the household of the creditor, the women becoming maid-servants and the children graziers. They used

to be called *vasidi* and *gawalia* respectively.

A *hali* had to work hard and for long hours. If he did not work to the satisfaction of his creditor or absented himself, he was scolded and sometimes beaten in the very presence of his wife and children, who had no courage to protest against such treatment. If a *hali* tried to intervene or protect a fellow bonded labourer, he was driven away along with members of his family to face starvation. His master invariably sacked him and no other farmer engaged him because of his unobsequious and unservile nature.

As this was a single crop area, there was not much demand for daily wage labourers till about two decades ago. So the *hali* had to render unconditional service to his master. According to Shah, in the early days the tribals of South Gujarat were shifting cultivators. During the period of transition from shifting to settled agriculture they lost whatever control they had over their land.

At that time the land revenue used to be collected by the Desai who belonged to the Anavil, Patidar, Bania, and Parsi communities. They acted as money-lenders to small farmers for payment of cash levies and in course of time managed to take away their land and employ them as agricultural labourers who later on became bonded labourers. Among all tribes, as reported by Shah, 'The Dublas by their soft nature, easy going and subordinate temperament reached the stage of serfdom the earliest and in largest numbers' (1958: 172). Some Dubla informants, however, reported that they had no land from the very beginning. When they came into contact with the landowners, they got involved in debts and their failure to pay back the loan made them what they are.

Whatever reasons there may have been for the problems and predicaments of the Dubla, they made very little concerted effort to achieve freedom from their bonded condition. They were so cowed down that in spite of their numerical dominance they put up with the inhuman-treatment meted out to them. Their economic vulnerability, absence of alternative occupation, lack of unity and leadership, illiteracy, and lower social status together placed them at a disadvantage and compelled them to remain in semi-serfdom.

Before Independence, the then Government did very little either to abolish *halipratha* or to alleviate the sufferings of the *hali*. Some moves were initiated by Congress volunteers. But due to their preoccupation with the struggle for freedom, those moves had no lasting impact. According to Jugatram Dave, an associate of Gandhi, the cause of the liberation of the Halpati from *halipratha* was at first taken up by the inmates of Sabarnati Ashram,⁶ Ahmedabad. In the early twenties of the present century many of the Ashram workers lived in villages with a view to spreading the demand for independence in rural areas. Some of them settled down in the Bardoli taluka of Surat District for this purpose and established several action centres at different places. As they lived with the people in the villages they soon discovered that in a place where half of the people lived in a state of virtual serfdom, political independence would mean very little to them unless they were emancipated. So, instead of propagating the cause of freedom, they initiated social work programmes among the Halpati, taught them to live in cleanliness, to spin, and to sing *bhajans* (devotional songs) while they took steps to promote literacy.

Narhari Pareek, a social worker, came in this manner to Sarbhon village and started a night school for adults in a Halpati hamlet in 1923. The Dublas' response to it was encouraging. Once Thakkar Bapa paid a visit to the school and being impressed by the zeal of the Dublas he composed a song for them, the words of which broadly meant that they would read and be free, that they would not tolerate anyone scolding or beating them and that they would send their children to school. Observing the enthusiasm of the Dublas for education and hearing the song, the Patidars grew alert and alarmed. They did not like the Dublas going to school and accordingly chastized and threatened their respective *halis*. As a consequence, one night no Dubla turned up for the class. Narhari Pareek could guess at the reason and in order to press his mission he undertook a fast until the school reopened. At this, through the intervention of Vallabhaji Patel, the school was reopened and Narhari Pareek broke his fast. However, after this incident the school did not run very smoothly and it was eventually decided to close it down.

As reported by Jugatram Dave, no significant development took place during the period between 1924 and 1938. This period witnessed a tremendous awareness of nationalism among the farmers of Bardoli taluka. In 1928 they, under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbai Patel, had successfully opposed the imposition of higher land tax by the Government. But no further action was initiated to do away with the *halipratha* until it was decided to hold the session of the Indian National Congress in Haripura village of Bardoli taluka in 1938. Preparations were started about six months before the commencement of the session and several committees were formed. The publicity committee, in addition to its normal functions, was assigned the task of explaining the meaning of independence to the people, especially the Dublas of the villages adjoining Haripura. To the Dublas, independence meant liberation from *halipratha* and with that hope in mind they came forward in large numbers to help in constructing roads and doing other manual jobs at the site of the session. It was a novel experience for them to be away from their houses for so long and to work for someone other than their *dhaninama*. The *dhaninamas* did not like this but taking the prevailing situation into account they allowed their *halis* to work for the Congress session. They themselves were supporters of the Congress and were the ultimate beneficiaries of the roads being built around their villages. So they supplied food-grains to the Congress workers for feeding the *halis* engaged in various works. As observed by Jugatram Dave, perhaps the only gain of the Haripura Congress for the Dublas was that they gave up their habit of drinking liquor. This was the result of the fact that during the session Vallabhbai Patel promised to liberate the Dublas from *halipratha* on condition that the latter would give up the habit of drinking liquor.

After the conclusion of the Haripura Congress, Vallabhbai Patel initiated moves to honour his promise to the Dublas. He convened a meeting of the leaders of landowning farmers of Bardoli taluka and explained to them the evils of *halipratha* and requested them to set the Dublas free. A joint meeting of the representatives of the landowning farmers and the *halis* was held on 21 August 1938 where it

was decided that *halipratha* would be abolished within one month and several resolutions were passed which determined the future course of action. In brief the resolutions were as follows:

1. *Halipratha* is economically and morally harmful to both the farmers and the labourers. It should be abolished and payment of wages in cash should be introduced. A *hali* should have the freedom to work anywhere as he wishes.
2. The rate of wages is fixed at four-and-a-half annas.
3. The debt of a *hali* who has served for twelve years should be treated as paid. The remaining debt of those who have served for less than twelve years should be realized from their daily wages for each year proportionately. A *hali* who was still in debt should be paid three-and-a-half annas and the remaining one anna should be paid to the *dhaniamas* until the debt was fully repaid.
4. For the settlement of disputes between farmers and labourers a panchayat of both the parties should be formed. If the panchayat failed to settle the dispute a sarpanch should mediate and settle it.

In this meeting, resolutions were also passed fixing the wages of women and children engaged in household and other tasks. They were shown to Gandhi who was camping at Bardoli at that time. Though not very satisfied with the terms of the resolutions, he approved them as both parties had drafted them jointly. Under the presidentship of Vallabhaji Patel, a joint meeting of the farmers and the labourers of Bardoli taluka was held on 26 January 1939 and these resolutions were finally adopted. It was in this meeting that the Dublas and *dhaniamas* came to be known as Halpatis and Patels respectively.

The Halpatis put the resolutions into practice from the very next day. They stopped the practice of having one meal in the house of the Patel but continued to work for them. But the Patels kept waiting for another Patel to take the first step before paying wages in cash to the labourers.

Some days passed this way without producing any positive results. In some villages meetings were held to implement the resolutions. Certain plans were evolved by the farmers of Khoj village in this regard which were as follows:

1. The Patels will stop the practice of supplying meals to the Halpatis and instead pay them in cash.
2. Social workers will stay in the villages until the implementation of the new system of payment of wages.
3. Social workers will ring a bell at appointed hours announcing the beginning and closure of the working hours.
4. The farmers should inform the labourers the previous evening about the work required from them.
5. Those labourers who did not have a job should assemble at a fixed place so that the farmers could get the required number of labourers from there.
6. In every village there should be a joint panchayat of both the parties.

In spite of all these exercises, no Patel wanted to be the first to pay wages in cash. Soon the Halpatis stopped going to work. As this happened in an agriculturally slack season the Patels were not worried about the development. But the Halpatis stopped their women also from serving in the houses of the Patels. This created many problems for the latter as their cattle sheds were not cleaned, their clothes and utensils were not washed, their courtyards were not swept and their women had to attend to all the household chores which they were not used to doing. This compelled the Patels to agree to the demands of the Halpati.

However, within a few years of this change, the Halpati were reduced to *hali* again. By 1942, the Congress social workers had left the area to participate in the struggle for independence. No one could be left behind to provide encouragement and guidance to the Halpatis. Meanwhile, the Second World War had broken out bringing dearth in its wake. As a result, the agreed wages were no longer sufficient even for a single meal. Naturally the Halpatis again became dependent on the Patel, who fixed wages according to his will.

This gave rise to a situation which brought back into existence the old practice of giving one meal and two seers of food-grains to the labourers. Thus, *halipratha* reestablished itself.

Even after the independence of the country, it took some time to wipe out *halipratha*. According to a press note cited by Shah, the Dublas of Gujarat, the farmers, and the *halis* reached a formal agreement through the good offices of Morarji Desai and Gulzarilal Nanda on 11 June 1948 at Bardoli, for the abolition of *halipratha* which was enforced on 17 June 1948. However, the agreement was not reinforced by law. As a result, the concerned parties were not bound to observe the terms and conditions laid down in the agreement. As a result, *halipratha* continued to linger on.

The process of the disintegration of *halipratha* was initiated by the commercialization of agriculture and the consequent depatronization of associated relationships. Now-a-days farmers grow more cash crop than food-grains which has made agriculture more capital intensive than labour intensive. Agriculture in South Gujarat has become somewhat mechanized too. As a result, the relationship between the landowning farmers and agricultural labourers gradually got transformed from an impersonal one to an uncordial one. There were occasions when small friction between them led to violence.

In the late fifties of the present century, the practice of *halipratha* almost disappeared. But their long slave-like existence presented a host of serious problems to the Halpatis. In order to find solutions, Halpati leaders Javerbhai Sankarbhai Patel and Chhotubhai Gopalji Desai asked their elders to assemble near Bageshwar temple of Vaghecha village and a plan was drawn up for the creation of an organization for the advancement of the Halpatis in every respect. A year later on 30 September 1961, the Halpati Seva Sangh was established at Bardoli.

Right from its inception, the President of the Sangh has been Jugatram Dave and its Secretary Arvindbhai Chhotubhai Desai, both non-Dublas. It is run by money obtained from subsidies, donations, sale of agricultural produce, and profit from its Khandi Gramodyog schemes. The tasks undertaken by the Halpati Seva Sangh for the development of the Halpatis include—as outlined in the Halpati Seva Sangh's *Bardolini*

pravritini Thanki (1973)—maintenance of schools, imparting vocational training, giving legal and medical aid, constructing huts, digging wells, pressing for the implementation of Minimum Wages Act, conducting excursions, bringing about social reform, encouraging cultural activities, making arrangement for street lights in the hamlets of the Halpatis, organizing *bhajan* sessions, and effecting prohibition of liquor among the Halpatis.

Thus, the Halpati Seva Sangh, at least theoretically, has committed itself to various developmental works for the people. So far, the Sangh has concentrated its attention more on running schools and Khadi Gramodyog schemes than anything else. It runs twenty hostels, one higher secondary school, ten post-basic schools, and eight Ashram shalas or primary schools. It has not yet been able to create enough desire for education among the Halpatis.

The precarious existence and the semi-serfdom of the Dublas of South Gujarat had attracted the attention of top national leaders like Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Morarji Desai, and Guljarilal Nanda. Gandhi wanted to convert this community of bonded labourers to the status of owner-cultivators and all the above-mentioned national leaders and many others worked to achieve this goal. What have been the achievements of this transformation process that was initiated in the early twenties of the present century? The Dublas call themselves Halpatis, but to members of other neighbouring communities they are still the Dublas. If the appropriateness of the meaning of a name is taken into account, the tilt is definitely in favour of the other communities. This does not, however, make it a case of non-achievement. The period of serfdom had come to end for the *halis* even long before the initiation of the Prime Minister's 20-point economic programme during the Emergency. Inhuman torture and humiliation are no longer meted out and their overall dependence upon the Patels has been relatively reduced. They are no longer forced to work extra hours and no additional work is taken without payment. A time-keeper announces the beginning of the day's work and its closure. They also receive wages in cash. But they have neither become Halpatis or owner-cultivators in the strict sense of the term, nor have they acquired enough

strength to maintain their existing status. The organizational set-up of the Halpati Seva Sangh is an insurance against any further mishap but this as such can do very little besides looking after their sundry needs. Control over economic resources, which is the main level for a break through, has remained beyond their reach. Thus, Gandhi's dream of transforming the *halis* into Halpatis has only been notionally fulfilled. However a sign of the strength of the movement is the increasing involvement of indigenous leaders. As already mentioned earlier, the initial thrust of the movement was exogenous in character and there was very little initiative from within the community for sustaining the movement. Naturally it had to pass through periods of relative inactivity. Once sufficient endogenous initiative is generated and given sustained organizational support, transformation of economic status may not remain illusory for a very long period. Amalgamation of endogenous initiative with exogenous leadership will necessitate a fresh review of the typology of movements.

Notes

1. Wallace defines a revitalization movement as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture.
2. A *hali* is a ploughman who ordinarily works in the fields of a landowner by annual contract. But if he ever needs to borrow money, which most of the ploughmen usually do, he does it from the landowner whose fields he cultivates and thus becomes attached to him until repayment of the debt, the interest of which goes on accumulating, turning him in the long run into a bonded labourer.
3. A *dhanlama* is a landowner who ordinarily gets his fields cultivated by engaging ploughmen, locally known as *hali*, on annual contract. During exigencies a *hali* borrows money from his *dhanlama*. This sets the beginning of a new relationship which assigns the *dhanlama* the role of a creditor and the *hali* becomes his debtor, a status that ultimately makes him a bonded labourer.
4. Whatever little land a few Dublas own at present had been given to them by the then British Government for their services as Bethla, Kosia, and Kotwar. The land was too small to support them throughout the year. As a result, most of them had to mortgage their land to the Patidar.
5. One of the several centres from where Gandhi used to initiate and operate his programmes.

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SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AMONG THE TRIBALS OF SOUTH GUJARAT

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NO SERIOUS discussion of social change among the tribal communities in India is possible without a reference to tribal movements. As observed by the historian C.E. Black, 'Tribal societies may be said to meet the problem of change by concentrating their efforts alternatively on defending the existing conceptions and adapting them to an altered conception. This fundamental choice between inflexibility and adaptation reflects the accumulation of an infinite number of smaller choices'.¹ Tribal movements represent a particular course of action for tribal societies in the process of adaptation. King presents an appropriate definition of social movements: 'A group venture extending beyond a local community or a single event and involving a systematic effort to inaugurate changes in the thought, behaviour and social relationships.'² All movements in the tribal areas of India have been, by and large, an exercise in fostering social change by adapting the moral and spiritual values of the Great Tradition. In this connection de Bruyn says that a movement is 'a communal expression of the struggle for life. It symbolizes the efforts of a people to re-order and reorganize its way of life as a result of changed conditions. . . . Such movements, although they sometimes show strongly religious, syncretic features, are merely psychological reactions to existing situations. They are the people's attempt to gain relief or release from their distress, through the intervention of

supernatural powers in the efficacy of which they firmly believe, which powers either belong to an indigenous religion or are an element in an alien religion with which the people have become familiar.³ The movements which occurred in the tribal regions of India sought to bring about directed change and were modelled on the Great Traditions of Hindu culture.

The tribal movements reported⁴ from several parts of India are often regarded as phenomena quite different from social development, and are considered variously to be retrogressive, fantastic, hysterical, led by insane or rebellious prophets, or a confederation of the deviants in tribal societies. Only a few of these movements have been studied in any detail by scholars who have remained in the communities long enough to gain the confidence of the leaders and participants and who have compiled a description, history and analysis of their beliefs and actions. For example, the Birsa movement in Chotanagpur has been excellently reported by Suresh Singh.⁵ His work is, perhaps, the only complete documentation to date of a movement in a tribal region led by a tribal.

Very little attention has been paid to such movements in the tribal regions of Gujarat. Desai,⁶ in his work on the Gandhian movement in the tribal areas of Surat district, has made reference to some of the socio-religious movements in that region. Amongst the Hindu population of Gujarat, the most important religious tradition has been that of the Bhakti sect. The tribal communities, too, could not escape the influence of this tradition. Thus, several of the Bhakti sects which has been entrenched in the religious order of Hindu society, gradually extended their influence to the tribal regions and were accepted by the tribals in South Gujarat. This paper describes various socio-religious movements among the tribal communities of that region. Altogether, six religious sects have been discussed about which reliable material could be gathered. The movements were on a fairly large scale in South Gujarat, bringing together several tribal communities such as Dhodia, Choudhary, Dubla, Gamit, Warli, Konkan, Naika, Bhil, and Vasava. However, some social groups—such as, Dhodias, Choudharys, Gamits and Dublas—have participated in these movements in greater

numbers owing to the patterns of their organization.

All the four tribes mentioned above are settled in the plains of the Valsad and Surat districts. The distinct strip of land comprising the valleys between the Arabian Sea and the Sahayadri range in southern Gujarat is the homeland of these tribes. They are settled agriculturists except the Dublas whose traditional occupation was that of farm servants to the Hindu landowning class. Compared to other tribal groups in Gujarat, the latter were advanced agriculturists living in settled villages.

The plains of the Surat and Valsad districts were penetrated by both Hindus and Muslims as long back as sixteenth century. When the Peshwas entered Gujarat, they first established their seat of rule at Songadh in Surat District in 1719. After the eighteenth century, when the forest tracts of the plain were cleared and cultivable land was made available, the non-tribal population gradually increased in these regions. However, until the late eighteenth century, the non-tribal population was small in numbers. But within a hundred years, several pockets of non-tribal concentration had emerged in this area. With this, the process of the grabbing by the non-tribals of the cultivable land belonging to the tribals started in full swing, so much so that in a very short time these migrants, who were in a minority in this region, came to own most of the cultivable land. By the turn of this century, the non-tribal landowning communities—such as Anavil Brahimans, Kanbi Patidars and Parsis—became the landlords and the tribals were reduced to a subservient status. Many of them lost their land. An interesting account has been provided by Desai regarding the change in the excise policy and its effects on the Adivasis:

The Adivasis tapped their own trees for toddy and distilled liquor for themselves. But first in the beginning of the twentieth century, the British administration and following it other native states such as Baroda, Rajpipla, Vansda, Sachin and Dharampur introduced a new excise policy known as the 'Madras system'. According to this system, the government sold by auction the right to sell

liquor and today in particular places. The system was in vogue before prohibition was introduced in Gujarat area. Everyone else except the government was prohibited from producing liquor and toddy. He who did was punished. The Adivasis lost their right to prepare their own liquor and toddy but not their habits of drinking.

They had no money and they were not accustomed to handle money. The exchange and money economy was not known to them. They were given some money and drinks in lieu of their labour. They even did not know how to count. The result was growing indebtedness. And slowly they began to lose their land. They became either tenants or labourers. The new economy and the polity exploited their habit of drinking.⁷

A fragmented tribal society was no match for the well-organized landowning class. As a result, the economic differentiation between the tribals and the landowning non-tribals become marked and over time the latter forced the tribals to become farm servants. The worst plight was that of the Dublas who, having lost their land, were compelled to accept the servitude of the landowners as bonded labourers. The tribals had sunk in to dire poverty by the turn of the century. Illiteracy was rampant among them. However, a few of the Dhodias, Choudharys and Gamits took the education towards the beginning of this century. A school with boarding facilities for tribal boys was started by the Gaikwad administration at Songadh in 1885. The tribal youngmen who came out of this school became conscious of the miserable plight of the members of the society; and in order to improve their living conditions, they launched a reform movement.

These men believed that the root cause of the misery of their people was their traditional social life and drinking habits. Before they turned activists, a few tribals in that area had already started to consciously adopt the Hindu way of life. One such person was Dharia Bhai, a Gamit inhabitant of Ghata village in Vyara taluka of Surat District. Dharia Bhai was a farm servant of a Parsi landlord. His farther, Kanji Bhai, too, had been a farm servant with the same landlord. Kanji Bhai was an expert at reading

footprints. For his son's marriage he used his knowledge to find a daughter-in-law and succeeded in seeking locating a girl who was full of virtues and endowed with wisdom. After her marriage, she persuaded her husband to leave the employment of the Parsi landlord and to start cultivating unreclaimed land. After some time, Dharia Bhai, at the instance of his wife, erected a temple in the village in which images of Hindu gods and goddesses were installed. Dharia Bhai's reputation as a bhagat (priest) gradually increased. Dharia's younger brother, Mochda, was entrusted with the task of preaching the Hindu gospels to the tribals to persuade them to give up their habit of drinking toddy and eating flesh. Emphasis was placed on bathing regularly and singing devotional prayers everyday in the morning and evening. This made an impact on several tribal men and women of the area. It also became instrumental in uniting different tribal groups.

Like Dharia Bhai and Mochada Bhai, another person from the same village, Devji Bhai, became popular among his people as a saintly man, and more and more people listened to his preachings. Devji Bhai had been referred to by the famous poet, Ghaverchand Meghani, in his work 'Lamp of Humanity' as a saint of the ancient iron age. At a 'durbar' meeting convened at Vyara, the Gamit gentry invited to attend it, when offered perfumed scents, mistook them for wine, and put them into their mouths. This incident made Devji unhappy and he resolved to educate his people. He sent his son for further education and started spreading moral and ethical education among his people. Devji also exhorted the womenfolk to get rid of limestone necklaces. These necklaces were so heavy that at times they used to be the cause of their death. He also called upon them to wear blouses to cover the upper part of the body. Devji Bhai sent his son, Amar Singh, to the Songhdh boarding school. On completing his education, Amar Singh was recommended by the school authorities for further education, and the Gaikwad administration sent him to Behrampore in Orissa for training in the rearing of silk worms and the art of making silk sarees. When Amar Singh came back after completing his education, he joined the Gaikwad administration but

remained in service for only a short time. He believed in his father's tenets of non-violence and his moral and ethical ideas. As his job required him to kill worms in order to get silk-threads, he decided to give it up. He joined his father in his mission to reform the tribal way of life, not only among the Gamits but among all tribal communities of 'Rani-Paraj'.⁸ He, his father and his teacher, Fateh Khan, who was a muslim, convened a meeting of the Adivasis under the banner of 'Rani-Pradesh Hitwardhak Sabha'. This conference, held some time in 1905, lasted three days and a number of resolutions were passed with the objective of reforming the Adivasi society of that region. Those who became followers of his reformative movement were asked to form an 'ekda' (or a group) by bringing in more and more people. But only a small minority of the tribals were influenced by Amar Singh's teachings.

During the same period, another reformer, Raman Bhai of village Khadiya in neighbouring Mahuva taluka, persuaded women members of his family to abandon the wearing of heavy limestone ornaments as he believed that they were the cause of uncleanness. However, his attempts at reform were resented by other members of his village and he was excommunicated.

Such sporadic attempts did not make such impact and, by and large, the tribal societies continued to practise their age-old traditions. But soon afterwards another wave of reform swept the area, and this time it was different. Popularly known as the Devi-movement, it appealed to a large number of tribals, both in Surat and Valsad districts. This movement gave a new dimension to the earlier attempts. It was believed that a supernatural power was roaming in the area and was exhorting the people to stop drinking wine and toddy. This episode took place some time in 1921. Two persons, a woman and a man, visited the area from Khandesh. The woman was found to be seated at the end of a twelve feet long pit. Men and women went to see her. Those who wanted to reach her, had to walk through the pit, with something on their head. If that thing did not fall while the person walked through the pit, with the hands swinging at the sides, he or she was considered to be a person endowed with

purity of mind and a pious attitude. If that object fell, the person was not considered worthy of following the path of Devi. Those who reached her after walking through the pit, were required to offer her a piece of red coloured cloth in which the man would gaze intently and then pronounce on the purity and sacredness of the person concerned. The Devi then blessed such individuals as were found to be pure and asked them to stop drinking wine and toddy and eating flesh. In this way the two visited village after village. From each village one or two men were chosen by the Devi to move along with her. These chosen men were known as 'gorali' or 'govalas'. After her departure, the village where she had been camping would hold a feast, which was termed as 'bhandara'. This movement spread fairly rapidly and it was believed that a kind of hot wind was blowing in all directions, carrying the messages of 'Devi business' was a brainwave of Amar Singh who wanted to reform the members of his society.

While these attempts were being made, the tyranny and oppression of the landowners, supported by the administration of both the British and Gaikwad regimes, intensified to counteract the spread of reform. The non-tribals did not want the tribals to become aware of their conditions as they wanted to perpetuate their exploitation. The government, too, was interested in the continuation of the drinking habits of the tribals as it earned revenue. When the effect of the religious movement began to be felt, both the landowners and the government got alarmed, particularly the former. Among the Choudharys of the Mandvi and Valod talukas, the Devi movement made a considerable impact which drew the attention of the British government. Their reaction was favourable but the Gaikwad administration reacted aggressively and continued to enforce drinking on the Adivasis. It was reported that two or three persons used to hold an Adivasi and pour liquor or toddy into his mouth, much as they poured castor oil into the mouth of a buffalo or a bullock.⁶ The landowners, too, did all that was possible to prevent the Adivasis from becoming teetotallers. The inhuman treatment meted out to the Adivasis prompted some social workers to take up the cause of the Adivasis. But the Gaikwad government issued

orders prohibiting the entry of these social workers into the Adivasi area as it felt that these persons would create conflict between the Adivasis and the landowning class and ruin the Parsis.¹⁰ Owing to the fear of torture and harassment at the hands of the landowners, the Parsis and the administration, the tribals ignored the message of Devi and relapsed into their old drinking habits and the Devi movement was gradually crushed. 'After the failure of this movement there was a boycott of these people who had given up drinking liquor so much so that on occasions such as marriage and death they were isolated. In this anti-prohibition movement, the government, the wine shop-owners and the Adivasis who kept contract for selling toddy were all united.'¹¹

At about this time, the effect of the Gandhian movement began to be felt in the region, and many Adivasis got involved in it in an effort to reform their society. The Gandhian movement gave the much needed fillip to the reform movements initiated by the tribals themselves. Through the Gandhian movement the credibility of their earlier efforts was reaffirmed. But the path of reform was not a smooth one. Resistance from members of their own society was strong enough apart from the unfavourable attitude of the government. An idea can be obtained from the following account;

Amongst the Chodhras there is a large section of the tribe which is under advanced Hindu influence, and therefore opposed to any kind of blood sacrifice. The differences between the two sections have become very pronounced since the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in the tribal area, and his followers seek to put a final end to the custom of blood-sacrifice. Fights take place between two sections, and these are followed by impressive ceremonies.

In December 1929, a party of a hundred Chodhras proceeded with six goats to Ahin de dev hill to perform the usual sacrifices. The reformers came to know of this plan and they mustered in large numbers to prevent the sacrifice. Before the party could reach the hill with the goats, the *utaru* (place of sacrifice) was surrounded

by the volunteers of the reformers' party and thus the sacrifice was not held. When both the parties were returning in the evening, one triumphant and the other full of resentment, things came to a head and a free fight took place in which several persons were injured.

A few days later the reformers intended to hold a meeting at Serkui village to preach temperance and the abandonment of blood sacrifices. The aggrieved party found in this an opportunity for wrecking its vengeance, and therefore after a feast of fowl and toddy, awaited the arrival of the reformers. They hid themselves in a river hollow near the place of meeting, and as soon as the reformers arrived, they fell upon them and beat them mercilessly. The reformers being in a small number had to make good their escape.

At the time when this incident took place, a party of one hundred Chodhras from the Bardoli Taluka were touring the villages preaching temperance, Mahatma Gandhi's message of the spinning wheel, and vegetarianism. The local reformers joined their comrades from the neighbouring taluka and one morning marched in an impressive procession to the village of Serkui, bearing the national colours and singing reform songs to the tune of music. They gathered in a circle round the spot where their comrades had spilt their blood. The leaders made impressive and forceful speeches in the Chodhri dialect exhorting the tribesmen to carry on with the reforms in spite of all obstacles. The speeches were followed by songs and prayers by a Brahmin who accompanied the processionists. When the prayer was over one of the leaders proceeded to a mound of earth, and prostrating himself, picked up some soil and passed it three times over his head. He got up, and pointing to the sun, swore that he would even give up his life in the service of the tribe. Each Chodhra who was then in the circle follow the example of his leader and took the oath in a similar manner. The ceremony was witnessed by the frightened villagers of Serkui from the tops of trees, hedges, and from behind the fencings of their fields.¹²

The tribals of South Gujarat thus went through a difficult

transitional period during the first quarter of this century. Their own traditional beliefs were being eroded and their cultural transformation was gaining momentum. This situation produced strains and disposed the people towards the Bhakti sects which had already started attracting followers from amongst the tribals. On account of the failure of the earlier reform movement initiated by the educated tribals and also that of the Devi movement, the different Bhakti sects had ample opportunity and a conducive environment to grow into socio-religious movements.

A sect or *sampradaya* as it is known in Gujarat, represents a set of moral values to which a tribal chooses to conform. Thus to say that a person adheres to the 'Moksha marg *sampradaya*' means that he or she follows the code of conduct laid down by the founder of the *sampradaya*, as well as the subsequent preachings of the monastic order. The strictness with which the code is followed depends on the individual as well as on the enthusiasm of the monks.

Sat Kaiwal

The first Bhakti sect to arrive on the scene, as is evident from the available information, was 'Kayam Panth' which was popularly known as 'Sat Kaiwal'. This sect had been founded in Kaira District by a saint whose name was Kuberswami. His real identity is shrouded in mystery. It is believed that he was not born as a mortal being of the woman. Legends about him say that he was sent to the earth by the supreme god, Sat Kaiwal to preach His gospel. It is said that this world has been created by Sat Kaiwal. He is supposed to be a formless entity but is pervasive in this universe. Out of nothingness He created the existence of living beings. The creation was effected as a part of His own self. He alone, as the creator of this universe, occupies the supreme position. When He discovered that human beings were going astray and were ignoring His very existence, he decided to send a special envoy. From His own self, He created Kuberswamiji and sent him on the earth.

Kuberswami appeared as a young boy on the bank of a pond in the village Kasar Kaira District in the year 1829.

There he met a woman who belonged to Saras village of the same District. Kuberswami told the woman the purpose of his appearance and asked to adopt him as his son. That woman took him to her village which became the place where this sect was established. Kuberswami died in 1934 at the ripe old age of 105 years. Many persons became his disciples and the *sampradaya* gained ground first in Kaira District. A temple was erected in the Sarsa and the number of disciples rose rapidly. From amongst the followers, a band of dedicated and trusted disciples were selected to be sent to other areas to preach the gospel of Sat Kaiwal. The disciples were given the status of monks. Temples were erected at other places also. One such temple was erected at Umra village¹³ in Surat District. From here the monks visited the tribal areas.

One such monk, Tapasvi Raghu Ram, became very popular in this region and many stories regarding his miraculous power spread in the villages. While camping at Vyara he was approached by a tribal teacher, Ruwa Bhai of Kataswan village, who used to come to Vyara daily to worship Rameshwar Mahadeo.¹⁴ Ruwa Bhai requested Tapasvi Raghu Ram to accept him as his disciple and to enlist him as a member of the Kayam Panth. Initially, he was refused as the Maharajshri doubted his capacity to become a strict follower of the sect, but on the recommendation of a Bania disciple he accepted Ruwa Bhai as his disciple. Ruwa Bhai discussed this matter with Tentia Bhai who was the headman of village Kataswan. Tentia Bhai too, was educated and as such expressed his desire to join the sect. Tentia Bhai invited Tapasvi Raghu Ram to camp in his village, to which the latter agreed. He was given a warm welcome and a special *mandap* had been erected to greet him. Here, Tentia Bhai along with his other kins men took *guru mantra* from the saint. As long as the saint remained at Kataswan, he used to sit in *samadhi* during the day at the peak of a hillock and during the night, he used to conduct sessions of spiritual discourse, devotional prayers, and discussions.

In a very short time the reputation of the saint reached far-flung villages. Tentia Bhai himself was well-known in the area as he was a big cultivator. Soon, a large number of

tribals belonging to several villages of Vyara taluka as well as from the neighbouring talukas of Mahuva, Valod, Mandavi and Bardoli accepted *guru mantra* from Tapasvi Raghu Ram and from other monks. In this manner, the Sat Kaiwal *sampradaya* struck its roots in the tribal region. It is difficult to estimate the number of followers, but the faith is quite popular. There are three temples in Vyara taluka itself which were erected some time in 1950.

To be a follower of this sect, one has to take *guru mantra* from a monk which is spoken into the ear of the person. The *mantra* runs as follows:

*Sahej swabhaw chachaw Guru charna,
Kaiwal Kaiwal gap uchharna,
Kari snan dhyam ur Guru ka,
Sahej dasa sadhan haru bharee ka*

(With a pure mind concentrate on the feet of the guru and chant the word 'Kaiwal, Kaiwal' several times. And after taking bath, let the Guru enter young thoughts with the purpose of worshipping the supreme god.)

The disciples are required to lead a simple life, to be truthful, to completely abstain from drinking wine and toddy and from eating meat. They are also required to bathe regularly and to chant the *guru mantra* before the image of 'Karuna Sagar'. Normally, everybody keeps one or two framed photographs of Karuna Sagar Maharaj in their house. In case there is a temple in the locality, the disciples are expected to visit it either in the morning or evening for *arati*. Those who become monks, have to reside in the temple of Karuna Sagar and abstain from sex. The present priest of the temple at Vyara¹⁵ is a tribal from Broach District. His predecessor also belonged to a tribal community. However, not more than ten tribals have become monks.

This *sampradaya* cuts across caste and ethnic boundaries. The founder of the sect Kuberswami Maharaj, has said in one of his treatises that his religion would be known as 'Kayam Panth' and those who will follow it flourish. In this manner, according to him, the name, the form and the path of his

religion are static. But those who want to attain salvation once and for all, ought to follow the doctrine of Sat Kaiwal. He also called his sect 'Gyan Sampradaya' (deliverer of knowledge).

Altogether eighteen treatises had been written by Kuberswami Maharaj. But the important ones are *Viswa Bharan Vidhivansh Nidhi Granth* and *Pancham Swans Ved Granth*. Most of these were written between 1920 and 1930 but were not published at that time. After his death, one of his favourite disciple, Sukhanandji Paramhans, undertook the work of publishing these treatises. Many of the treatises were untraceable as Kuberswami had given them away to various disciples. It is mentioned that a copy each of the manuscript of both the important treatises had been lying with Tentia Patel. Raghu Ram Maharaj had lot of confidence in him. But after the death of Tentia Patel, his son Keshri Singh, who became the leader of the Sat Pati movement, refused to part with them when approached by Sukhanandji. All these treatises were published with the help of financial offerings from the followers; but there was no donor from the tribal communities. But a recent publication, *Bhagwan Karuna Sagar ni Prathna Vidhi*, was entirely financed by donations from tribals of the Choudhary and Dhodia communities.

Moksha Margis or Vallabha Swami Sect

This sect had been established by one Vallabh Ram Surya Vyas of Ahmedabad at the beginning of this century. Vallabh's father was a very religious and learned Brahmin of his time. Vallabh inherited the religious temperament of his father, but he was an ambitious man. Several Bhakti sects were becoming popular in Gujarat—such as, the Vallabhchari, Swamnarayan, and Ramanuj sects. Vallabh, too, established a new sect as he believed that the other Bhakti sects were taking the people away from a strict observance of the Hindu great tradition. As a firm believer in the omnipresent Brahma he explained the significance of chanting 'Om! Om!'. However he was able to attract followers mainly from Ahmedabad District. After his death, his son Ramuji, who inherited the mantle in 1925, intensified the propagation of the sect amongst the Adivasis

of the Surat and Valsod districts. As we have stated earlier, this was the period when the Adivasis in South Gujarat were passing through a crisis. When Ramuji started holding *satsang* (discourses on religious ideas) in Adivasi villages he got an encouraging response. He started attracting followers, first from the Dhodia community and later from the Choudharys and Gamits too. By the fifties this sect had become very popular. Its area of influence comprised the villages of the Chikhli, Dharampur,¹⁶ Pardi, Bansda and Navsari talukas of Valsod District and the Mahuva Valod, and Vyara talukas of Surat District. Communitywise, it attracted the largest number of followers from the Dhodia community. It was common in those days to see several Dhodia men wearing the 'U' shaped tilak on their foreheads as prescribed by Guru Ramuji.

After the death of Ramuji in 1962, the influence of the sect slumped. Ramuji's successor is his eldest son but he is more a businessman than a priest. He runs a big factory which manufactures dyes and does not have much time to hold religious discourses. The *satsangs* are conducted by various followers who are mostly tribals but they are not very effective. However, a temple is being erected at Anaval village in Bansda taluka, which is a centre of pilgrimage for both hinduised tribals and the Hindus as it is believed that Lord Ram once visited this place. As Anaval has a underground hot spring, it also attracts pilgrims from distant places.

This sect has a big temple at Ahmedabad. At the moment the disciple who conducts the *arati* is a tribal from Paradi taluka, who is employed in the factory of Ramuji's son. Ramuji's wife looks after the temple and the organization of *satsang*, etc., in the tribal villages. She has published a treatise¹⁷ in the memory of her husband which contain the philosophy of this sect. According to the claim made in this treatise, Ramuji was the fourth in a line of incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Ramuji is considered the chief architect of this 'Moksha Margi' sect and as such is referred to as 'Moksha Margacharya', while his father, the funder of the sect, is referred to as 'Param Brahmanishtha'.

A majority of tribal followers have taken *Guru mantra* from Ramuji. At the time of taking *Guru mantra*, the

disciple has to make twenty-two promises to the Guru. The three important promises are : (a) Non-indulgence in sexual relations with any woman other than one's wife. Similarly, in the case of a woman disciple, she should never cohabit with any man other than her husband; (b) Total abstention from meat eating; and (c) Abstention from intoxicating drinks and substances such as wine, toddy, tobacco, cigarettes or 'biris' and betel nut. Besides, the disciple has to make other promises such as taking bath everyday, maintaining body cleanliness, offering *Puja* to the Guru everyday before taking food in the morning, wearing tilak on forehead, and living an honest, pure and simple life. A disciple is also forbidden to inter-dine with those who are not followers of the sect. On account of this rule, a 'Mokshamargi' is often placed in an embarrassing situation when he has to visit his kins men who are not 'Moksha margis'; he has to cook his own meal on a separate oven.

These promises are required to be made in order to purify oneself. According to the Guru this is the only way of achieving salvation. The Guru at the time of giving *mantras* says, 'if you cannot do any *punya* (good deeds), it does not matter but at least never commit any sin. Further, just by chanting *mantras* given by the Guru, you cannot secure the blessings of the Guru and even if you get the blessing it will not be fruitful. It can be fruitful only when you fashion your life according to the teaching of the Gurus which ultimately will bring salvation.' The Guru also teaches several kinds of *mantras* such as *Gayatri mantra*, *Mahakal mantra*, *Surya mantra*, *Rahu mantra*, and *Mrituyunjya mantra*. The main worship is offered to the Guru, not to any other God. If one wishes to be a serious and dedicated disciple, he has to adhere to the forty-three articles of the faith.

Sati Pati or Arati Samaj or Aap-ki-Jai Wala

Popularly known as 'Sati Pati *pratha*', this is one tribal movement in South Gujarat which started as a religious movement and later turned into a quasi-political movement. In Dhulia District of Maharashtra, a *Ehil guru*, Gulia Maharaj, propagated his religion amongst the *Adivasis* *livi*

there. He used to move from village to village calling upon the Adivasis to abandon their habit of drinking wine and toddy and meat-eating. He also used to hold religious discourses to impress upon the Adivasis the need for cleanliness. But he did not form any sect. His main concern was with reforming the Adivasis through religious preachings. Gulia Maharaj did not enter any villages of Gujarat.

After the death of Gulia Maharaj in 1939 or 1940, Ram Das, who was the younger brother of Gulia Maharaj, undertook the responsibility of continuing the movement. Ram Das soon gained popularity which encouraged him to form a new sect. Ram Das used to visit the villages of Sougadh and Vyara talukas in Gujarat. There he came into contact with Keshri Singh of village Kataswan in Vyara taluka. As has been mentioned above, Keshri Singh's father, Tentia Bhai, was a trusted *bhakta* of the Sat Kaiwal sect. It is reported that Tentia Bhai used to publish a monthly journal known as *Samaj Sudhark* and through this he used to propagate the messages of Karuna Sagar Bhagwan. As such, Keshri Singh came into a magnificent heritage. Besides, Keshri Singh is supposed to be the first matriculate from amongst the tribals of Surat District. He had been sent to Baroda for higher education. For seven years he was employed in a ginning mill at Miyagam in Baroda District. In 1942, he returned to his village and joined Ram Das when approached by him. Eventually, Ram Das concentrated in his own region, while Keshri Singh became the supreme leader of this sect in Gujarat.

It is not clear whether the name of Sati Pati for this sect was coined by Ram Das or by Keshri Singh or by the people of that area. Ram Das died around 1957. The basic philosophy of this sect runs like this: 'There is sky, there is earth. Both meet and when there is rain from sky, plants grow from the womb of earth. In a similar manner when a man (who is like the sky) pours his semen inside the womb of a woman (who is like the earth), a living being is born'. 'Sati' is the equivalent of a woman or mother and 'Pati' is the man or father; hence the followers of this sect are known as 'Sati Pati Pratha Wala'. Later, this movement got another name—Arati Samaj. Ram Das introduced the performance of *arati*

for Gulia Maharaj by the womenfolk. Later Keshri Singh who began to assert his leadership gave a new dimension to the performance of *arati*. Instead of Gulia Maharaj, the womenfolk were performing his (Keshri Singh's) *arati*. At the time of *arati*, hymns taught by the late Gulia Maharaj used to be sung. Keshri Singh composed a set of about fifteen prayers to replace them. It was because of this emphasis on *arati* that this sect also used to be referred to as Arati Samaj. Many people, who are not followers of Keshri Singh, also refer to his organization as 'Aap-ki-Jai Wala'. When two members of this sect meet they greet each other by clenching their hands, raising them up to the head and uttering 'Aap-ki-Jai'. The hands are clenched to remind each other that everybody has come out of his mother's womb with their hands clenched.

When Keshri Singh took up the leadership of the sect, he attracted a large number of followers. His movement unleashed a new wave of enthusiasm in the area. He is shrewd, well-versed in treatises, a good organizer and has a remarkable gift of eloquence. On every *amavas* and *purnima* a large number of his followers congregate at his place to pay respect to him and to listen to his religious discourse. He also speaks about economic problems and the degeneration of tribal societies. His followers attend the *arati* and offer money. They bring their own rations and cooking facilities are made available by Keshri Singh. It is alleged that his followers also render labour in his fields. Keshri Singh, who is called 'dada', is 72 years old but is very agile for his age and is considered a 'Bhagwan' by his followers. There are many stories about him as a healer. His cocky manners and flamboyant behaviour make him a colourful personality.

People from several tribal communities became his followers. His followers come not only from Vyara, Sougadh and Mandvi talukas, but also from far-flung villages of Dang and Broach districts. Keshri Singh condemns drinking liquor and meat-eating and instructs his followers to lead an ordinary life. He also prohibits wearing costly and heavy ornaments. In his exhortations, he emphasizes the need for tribal unit and regeneration of the tribal society.

It was Keshri Singh who turned this religious movement

into a quasi-political one. He believed that the sorry plight of the tribals was not responsible for the social turmoil of the day. The fault lay with the non-tribals who were undermining the tribals. Before, therefore, a new golden age could dawn, the non-tribals would have to be expelled from the area. He organized his followers and asked them to refuse to pay land revenue. This led to clashes between the government and the tribals. At that very time, tenancy legislation was due to be enacted. At several places the tribals claimed to be the owners of the land. This gave rise to a conflict situation between tribal and non-tribal landowners. In one clash at Valod in 1953, the police had to open fire. It so happened that in a nearby village a tribal claimed some land which a non-tribal family had managed to get recorded in its name. This incited the tribals. The non-tribal family demolished the house of the tribal which, according to the former, stood in the fields. The members of the tribal family were forcibly carried away in a truck and each member one was put down at different places, far away from their home. On getting back, the head of the tribal family consulted his kin members and other tribals of the village and they decided to approach Keshri Singh to seek redress. Keshri Singh asked them to retaliate and demolish the house of the non-tribal family which was situated in Valod township. When the tribals expressed their fear of being shot down by the police, Keshri Singh assured them that no harm would come to them as the bullets shot at his followers would turn into flowers.

A large number of tribals reached the house of the non-tribal family with the intention of demolishing it. On hearing about it, the non-tribal family sought the help of the police. When the tribals reached the house, the police first fired in the air. The tribals thought that bullets were turning into flowers. Encouraged they shouted, '*phool*' and '*Dada ki Jai*', and climbed upon the roof of the house. When the police opened fire and the bullets hit them, there was commotion and everybody fled. Nine persons were killed on the spot and several injured. An enquiry was instituted by the State Government but nobody is aware of its findings. Ultimately, the land went to the non-tribal family by a decree of the court and the

tribals worked as farm servants in the same field.

In the no-rent campaign, clashes took place and at some place the Mamlatdar, who went to collect the revenue, was assaulted. At one or two places, the police were called in and several tribals were sent to jail. In one village, a Parsi landowner was killed by his followers. Keshri Singh sent petitions to the Central Government and issued pamphlets challenging the authority of the Government to collect land revenue. He argued that the tribals were owners of the land. The Central Government has been given only the power to rule the country by the British and the Government was just a servant of the tribals. He was convicted four or five times and was sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, for inciting agitations and violating the law. He even approached the President of India and sent a memorandum to the Commonwealth Conference held at London in 1961. The contents of the memorandum are unintelligible. He condemned the activities of the educated tribals who were responsible for the sad plight of their communities. He posed the question—'Is it better to be a cowherd of buffaloes or a cowherd of asses?' However, the movement could not succeed. He now describes his organization as 'Adhyatmic Jyot Jyoti Pradipt Samaj'. He constituted an advisory board called the Race Relations Board Conciliation Committee. He says that this organization is meant for the spread of his teachings and has no agitational programme. However, he asserts that without 'relating the spiritual needs to the day-to-day material matters, there is no salvation for the human beings from misery'. With the rapid expansion of education in the region, more and more tribals are losing faith in him and in his preachings. At any rate he is now a spent force amongst the illiterate tribals.

Sanatan Dharm Seva Sangh

This organization has emerged recently and recruits its followers from amongst the tribals. Its activities are confined to the villages of a few talukas, such as Pardi and Valsad, amongst the Dhodia community. The saints of this organization, such as Vidyanand Maharaj and Akhanand Maharaj

(they reside at Panchvati, Nasik) and Swami Dayanand Vedpathi Maharaj (he has established a Vedashram at Chandod on the banks of the river Narinada) frequently hold *satsangs* in tribal villages and through it attract disciples. The disciples are required to abstain from drinking wine and eating meat and to lead a pious life. It started its activities in 1950. At the recent Kumbh mela at Prayag the organization held its first conference. It arranged a special train from Bombay for the tribals to enable them to attend the conference and about one thousand persons, mostly tribals from Pardi and Valsad talukas, attended it.

Kalwadia Panth

Kalwadia Panth's Guru was Fakir Bhai, a man from a potter's community, belonging to village Kalwada, near Khergam in Valsad taluka. After his death his sons, Vallabh Bhai and Magan Bhai, became gurus. This sect also has a sizable following amongst tribals, numbering nearly five thousand. The Panth's followers are confined to the villages of Valsad taluka only. This sect originated in the teachings of Khwaja Garib Nawaj Chisti of Ajmer and was introduced in this region by Nadarsa Baba of Vansda. His successor was Mirza Baba of Surat who was succeeded by Malek Baba of Olpad. Fakir Bhai was the disciple of Malek Baba and popularized the Panth amongst the tribals. The followers of this Panth assemble at night and hold *bhajan* sessions.

Swami Narayan Sect

Although an old sect in Gujarat, it started its activities amongst the tribals only recently. The sect stresses salvation through work, which is to be carried out carefully and methodically each day. The rules are contained in a book of precepts called *Sikshak Patra*. Two hundred and six commandments have been laid down prohibiting taking of animal life, eating flesh, drinking alcohol, gambling, swearing, bribery and adultery. A huge temple has been erected at Vyara and another is under construction at Karchelia in Mahuva taluka. The monks of this sect are intensifying the

campaign of recruiting tribals. The fourth in the line of chief monks, Pramukh Swamiji as he is called (his real name is Narayan Swaroop Dasji), visits the tribal areas frequently and holds *sarangs*. At the inauguration of the temple at Vyara recently a large crowd of Adivasis came. Many Adivasi leaders had been invited, and a dancing troupe from the Dang area was also called. This sect has been able to recruit tribal followers from the villages of Vyara, Valod and Mahuva talukas. Educated tribals from the Dhodia community constitute its main followers. As the resources at this disposal of this sect are large, it is expected that it will make a bigger impact in the coming years in the tribal areas than other sects.

Conclusion

Most of these sects were formed by men of charisma who attracted a large following of devotees as they promised to change their old way of life to a better one. Through these sects, the tribals were able to acquire a feeling of social equality and self-respect which went hand in hand with their economic development. They raised their ritual status in the wider society. The Sati Pati movement demonstrated how a religious movement inevitably gained political overtones. Religion and politics were not separate in the minds of the tribals. Keshri Singh prophesied the advent of a golden age and asserted that it was right to oppose the existing power, as the tribal way of life was being threatened and undermined. So he organized agitations against the non-tribals and the authorities, and stirred up enough militancy to alarm the non-tribals as well as the Government.

None of the sects have become an endogamous group. However, it is observed that while looking for a daughter-in-law, a family belonging to the same sect gets preference. But among the younger generation, such considerations are not given any significance. Among the Gamits, families belonging to the Mokhsa Margi sect have been found to take spouses from the families converted to Christianity and vice-versa.

Although some leaders have gained the support of the sect to which they belonged, these sects, on the whole, are

not relevant to the political behaviour of their members. The Sati Pati or Arati Samaj may be called semi-political movements. The strict adherents of this sect have not been participating in the elections to the Assembly or to Parliament. The sects, as such, do not appear to work for mass politicization. In the village Panchayat elections, persons belonging to a sect in the village decide to vote together for a particular individual in case he belongs to their sect, but otherwise there does not seem to be much evidence that sects have taken any active part in politics or in elections.

Most of the sects today take no interest in programmes of social reform or in the political solution of social problems. The leaders of their sects mobilize the populace and use techniques of persuasion merely in order to gain converts. In south Gujarat, conversions are mainly effected through *satsangs*. Owing to this nature of the sects, their members do not have strained or contemptuous relations with those who have not joined them. But they do feel morally superior to those who still adhere to the traditional way of life. However, by and large, this does not in any way affect social relationships. The strict adherents of a sect may not accept food in the house of a non-sect individual of his own society but no offence is taken by the latter and alternative arrangements are made for the formers' meal. In a few cases, relationships between members of different sects have been found to be antagonistic. For instance, it was observed that the members of the Kalwadia Panth do frequently quarrel with members of the Sanatan Dharam Panth. Similarly, the members of the Sati Pati sect despise the followers of Sat Kaiwal. The former treat the latter as traitors to the traditional society.

There does not appear to be any visible evidence of respectful treatment given by Hindus to a tribal member of a sect, nor do the Hindus treat the tribals as equals. Indeed, most of the sects' members do try not to mingle with the Hindus. Only successful political leaders are given respectful treatment by the Hindus. Otherwise, the stereotyped attitude towards the tribals has not changed irrespective of whether one belongs to a sect or not. On the contrary, hostility towards the tribals is growing.

Most of these sects had an institutional set-up even before

they were introduced in tribal areas. Two or three sects even have their own place of worship at the village level. For instance the Sat Kaiwal sect has three temples in Vyara taluka. Swami Narayan has recently constructed a big temple at Vyara and at the inauguration of the temple, the chief guest was a powerful tribal leader of that region. Another temple is under construction at Karchelia in Mahuva taluka (in the neighbourhood of Vyara). The Moksh Margis have their own temple at Anaval in Bansda taluka.

Nearly all sects use the Gujarati script, as do the tribal followers. However, the Sati Pati sect uses the Hindi script but the language is a mixture of Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi. The use of the Hindi script is for the benefit of its followers in Maharashtra.

Each sect has its own rules for religious ceremonies. But for the life-cycle ceremonies, only the Sati Pati sect and the Moksh Margi sect have distinct rules. For instance, the followers of the Sati Pati sect are not required to wail at the time of the death of any member in the family.

Notes

1. Black, C.E., *The Dynamics of Modernization*, New York, 1966.
2. King, C.W., *Social Movements in the United States*, New York, 1956, p. 27.
3. Bruyn, J.V.de, 'The Mansren Cult of Biak', *South Pacific*, V, 1-11, pp. 3-5.
4. For instance, the Santhal rebellion, the Sardar movement, Kherwara Bhil's rebellion, the Birsa movement, and the Jharkhand movement.
5. Singh, Suresh, *Dust Storm and Hanging Mist*, Calcutta, 1966.
6. Desai, I.P., 'The Vedchhi Movement', Surat (mimeograph), 1969.
7. Ibid.
8. 'Rani' in the Gujarati language means forest. Thus, 'Rani Paraj' means a forest region.
9. Desai, I.P., op. cit.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Mehta, B.H. 'Religions, Thoughts and Worship among the Chodhras of Gujarat', *The Journal of the Anthropological Society*, Bombay, Vol. XV, No. 34, 1934.
13. Umra village is now within the boundary of Surat City Municipal Corporation.

14. There is an ancient temple of Rameshwar Mahadeo at Vyara.
15. The land, measuring about 2 *gunth*, for the construction of the temple, had been donated by a tribal woman who is a widow.
16. The influence of the sect was restricted to the plains of Dharampur taluka, which is inhabited by the people of Dhodia community.
17. The title of the treatise is *Ramujt Smritt Granth*, which was published in the year 1967 from Ahmedabad. Her son publishes a weekly news-letter known as *Chetavani*

STRUCTURE AND ROLE DYNAMICS AMONG THE BHILS OF RAJASTHAN: A CASE OF THE BHAGATS

R.S. Mann

THE BHIL, the largest tribe of western India, are concentrated in south and southwest Rajasthan, western Madhya Pradesh, northeast to southern Gujarat and the adjoining districts of Maharashtra. This study is essentially of the Bhils of Rajasthan with particular reference to the Bhagats and their movements, as they operate in Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara and Chittorgarh districts.

All available accounts and sources of the structure of Bhil society in the pre-culture contact period are virtually unanimous in underlining the fact that it was marked by 'homogeneity'. Almost all sections and individuals exercised near equality in terms of social position or placement, a mild exception being certain individual professionals—e.g., Bhopa (witch doctor) or Gameti (village headman). Every member of the tribe recognized the principle of loyalty to it. Any member of any lineage or clan was as good as any other. Whatever the forms of impositions, constraints or other conditions then prevailing, they were uniformly applicable to all members of the tribe. Segmentation or divisions in the tribe were only on the basis of kinship, say, clan or lineage. Such segments or groups were, by and large, free of all feelings of superiority or inferiority and there was no stratification among the groups. The members of the tribe provided a solid and united front to all kinds of eventualities. In various walks of life, covering the widest span from the individual to the tribe, the element

of social differentiation was more or less absent.

Contact and the Post-contact Situations

This homogeneity began to be impaired consequent to the Bhils' contact with the non-Bhils. The Bhil kingdoms and their subjects were challenged leading to confrontations of various forms with the Rajputs, the Marathas and the British. The Bhils were uprooted from their original habitations. Following defeats in battle the Bhils fled to the interior hilly areas and dense forests and resettled there. They were forced to stick together to face the hostile environment and this resulted in a new and even more intense kind of cultural homogeneity. They organized 'pal' divisions on the basis of territory, kinship and cultural homogeneity. The people of such divisions started referring to themselves as 'Palia' Bhils or dwellers of a *pal*. With the creation of *pals*, people became more conscious of their responsibility of protecting themselves against outside elements. A *pal*, at times, is a single village, with a number of *phalas*, or sections, under it. Some times it includes more than one village and their *phalas*. The *pal*-dwellers of a particular region are usually identifiable by culture-trait affinities and some distinctiveness in their mode of living. They usually live in scattered settlements in interior forest. A *pal* is normally a contiguous geographical unit, irrespective of whether it is located in a valley or a hilly region. Their *tapras* (houses) are largely of a uniform nature. The *palias*—referred to by some as primitive, uncivilized, hill-dwellers, who are semi-nomadic—are characterized by a strong in-group or 'we' feeling and recognize the *pal* council as the 'supreme body for socio-political control. The inter-village organization, known in some areas as *sokara* consists of the heads of the villages in each *phalas* and is forceful enough to govern and regulate life in a *pal*. Many of these uprooted Bhils took to criminal ways. They became furiously hostile to all non-Bhils and indulged in murder, looting, robbery, and dacoity.

While there were those amongst the Bhils who decided to run away from the aggressive non-tribal people, there were others who submitted to the will of the outsiders and decided

to stay on and co-exist with the newcomers. Given the inevitable development of increasing interaction and social intimacy, three trends gradually emerged in their physical, social and cultural life. Physically, the non-tribal men mixed with the local Bhil women, either voluntarily or under the pressure of circumstances. Some Rajputs, as also a few others who accompanied them, took Bhil women as their wives. Because of the outsiders' dominance, the Bhils' resentment against such acts was almost nil. The children born of such unions and their descendants formed new ethnic groups which differentiated themselves from the Bhils. Members of such groups, including the Garasia and Bhilala, assumed a socially superior status. At the social level the members of the new group completely dissociated themselves from other Bhils and became endogamous groups. Differences appeared in their relationship of commensality, nature of food intake, use of Bhopa, etc.

Those Bhils who did not inter-marry, maintained their identity while living alongside non-Bhils in mixed communities. Such settlements are comparatively accessible and are found mainly in the plains. In course of time, and because of their long contact with the outsiders, the Bhils started borrowing the social practices and cultural traits of the superior people. Certain rites practised by the Rajputs (e.g., during a marriage), were adopted by the Bhils. The use of *purdah* is another custom which the Bhils borrowed. Also, they learnt about settled and improved farming methods and gradually gave up their slash-and-burn cultivation. Many of the men and women started working in the houses and on the land of the immigrants who took possession of a large part of the fertile territory. With the status of social inferiority or subordination that the outsiders assigned to the local inhabitants, the latter were also reduced to the position of serfs and bonded labourers. If at all better treatment was given at some places, it was in return for personal and political favours which the Bhils rendered to the non-tribals. Otherwise, the Bhils were treated mercilessly. At the level of ideas, concepts like pollution, untouchability, subordination-superordination, caste and its major rules, came within the knowledge of the Bhils. A few of the gods and goddesses of the upper castes

were also accepted, in a superior form, in the Bhil religious pantheon.

At the initial stages, members of the two divisions that had emerged—the Palvi and the plain Bhils—were not conscious of their separate identities. They met almost on an equal social plane. However, in the course of time and as the ways of life of the members of the two groups began to diverge, a rigid stratification and segmentation ensued between the two. The Palvi Bhils were referred to as Mele Bhils, whereas the plain Bhils were termed Ujale Bhils. Maintaining their traditional way of life, the Mele Bhils denounced the Ujale Bhils who, according to them, had accepted a position of subordination to the Rajputs and other non-Bhils. They condemned any Bhil man or woman who worked for any of the caste groups. On the other hand, the Ujale Bhils spoke of their Mele counterparts in a contemptuous manner and assigned an inferior status to them. According to them, the Mele Bhils are primitive people and are dacoits, robbers and thieves. They are violent and not at all law-abiding. Thus, the social gap between the two groups of Bhils widened. In many areas, their social intercourse gradually came to an end. In some places they even went to the extent of declaring each group endogamous. An Ujale would marry an Ujale and a Mele a Mele. Another trend which emerged amongst the Bhils of many parts of Mewar is worth mentioning. The Ujale Bhils, for many decades, have started calling themselves Mina, though they are actually Bhils. Such Minas do marry among Bhils who have not yet decided to adopt the nomenclature of Mina. The creation of Bhil-Mina tribes has even been accepted.

The Bhagats

The Bhils realized the value of the higher social and religious ideals connected with the Hindu way of life. In the midst of such social processes came another weighty movement. This grew in the light of increased culture contact and proximity of the Bhils and the various Hindu castes. This effort led to the growth of new social formations which were non-existent prior to the seventeenth century. This trend led to further divisive tendencies among the people of the tribe. The more

affected were the Ujale Bhil, while the Palvi remained largely unaffected.

A class of Bhagats came into being, though they also had intra-class variations. This was the direct outcome of the Bhagat movements of various kinds and with differing backgrounds. A Bhagat is basically one who has consciously renounced faith in the primitive cult, labelled animistic, and developed faith in Hindu gods and the associated religious principles. Further, he is one who has given up many old practices and taken to new ones which are considered essential requirements of the new faith. The Bhagats also utilise sacred musical instruments such as brass-bell and *tambura*. New impositions form part of their way of life, which are broadly akin to Hinduized forms of behaviour. The Bhagats among the Bhils belong to various sects, and their respective philosophies, principles and associated norms and sanctions have assumed forms of a movement with a large number of followers. The Bhagat movement is generally described as a socio-religious renaissance. At times, it appears to be a socio-politico-religious movement. Others treat it as an effort for religious upliftment designed to bring the Bhils within the orbit of Hinduism. In certain cases, it has led to social reform.

Among the original deities of the Bhils may be included Bheru (considered to be the chief deity). Bheru has many forms and associated gods and goddesses. Among them are Kala or Gora (represented by the figure of a warrior mounted on horseback); Mata (considered by some as Bheru's consort and by others as Bheru's sister); Magra Baba (deity of the hills); Dharam Raja (virtuous king); Rebari Baba (Bheru's assistant represented by a man riding on a camel); Khetlo or Khetarpal (field deities); and Sikotra (a malevolent deity). The Bhils depend on their deities and venerate them through the observance of festivals. The Bhils have also worshipped goddesses like Shitla and Vejwa. The former checks diseases and the latter removes bodily deformities. Kulaji, a cattle god, is also worshipped. Some even worship the tree. The village deity brings rain, drives away evil spirits and provides protection. Another element in the traditional Bhil religion is the appeasement of spirits, ancestral and otherwise. Among the important guarding spirits are Bhomia and Matlok (stone images

of men and women, sometimes with bows, arrows, swords, etc., kept on a slightly raised platform) which ensure safety and the perpetuation of the line. These images are housed in a religious place called Deora. There are many attendants of each Deora; who may include Pat Bhopa (the overall manager of the Deora), Kotwal (who looks after all details of religious ceremonies and the performances of the Pat Bhopa), Punjara (assistant to the Kotwal) and other Bhopas who are believed to have supernatural powers and can go into a trance and chant mystic formulae. The Bhils also believe in witches and Weers. The latter are said to be able to control evil spirits.

With the onset of the Bhagat movements, the traditional faith declined. New gods and beliefs were introduced. While the acculturated Ujale Bhils were more influenced by the movements, the Meles continued to adhere to their faith in the traditional deities and religious practices. They give secondary place to Hindu gods and goddesses and keep their images, if at all they recognize them, outside the Deora. They keep images of their old deities inside the home. However, the Ujale Bhils take the opposite approach. Various sects operating among the Bhils seem to have borrowed a large part of their philosophy from Hinduism—e.g., acceptance of the beliefs in Karma, in reincarnation, in an omnipresent and omnipotent single god, vegetarianism, notions of pollution and purity, and puritanism. Mahadeo, Parvati, Ram Deo, Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma and Krishna are worshipped.

In the course of the growth of the Bhagat movements, two distinctive trends have appeared. Under one, there was no disturbance of the original order. Instead, the propagators of the movements added additional items to the traditional beliefs and practises and did not spend their energy in undoing the old order. Under the second, which appeared almost simultaneously, the supporters of the movements hit at the roots of certain features of the old system. It was emphasized that they must be destroyed as they were very inferior in comparison to the new beliefs. In this case it was a substitution of the old by the new order.

Bhagat Movements

The oldest Bhagat movement among the Bhils is that of Mavji. It is over three centuries old but suffered a setback which lasted a long time and was revived, as a Vaishnavite movement, only in the last century. It not only involved the Bhils but also some non-tribals like the Bhoi, Kumhar Kurmi and even Brahmins. The Bhagats of this sect are also described as Baneshwar Dhamis or Baneshwar Dham Panthis. Their temple is known as the Dham, an abode of a Maharaj. The region of its impact is Banswara and Dungarpur. In fact, Mavji was considered to be the tenth incarnation of Vishnu, and was born in a Gaur Brahmin family of Sabla village in Dungarpur District. Along with the worship of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, the Mavjis also instructed the Bhils about their social, spiritual and economic upliftment.

At the same time, the Bhils liberally donate to the Krishna temple which is looked after by the present *guru*. Mavji compiled and wrote his teachings in many volumes, popularly known as the *Agal Vani*, the speech of the future. It is the privilege of the *guru* alone to officiate in '*kan phunkna*' ceremony (whispering in ears) for converting a person to the Bhagat fold. The conditions for becoming a *dham panthi* or Mavji Bhagat are many. These are connected, directly or indirectly, with various aspects of the life to follow which may briefly be outlined as follows:

- (i) The Bhagat Bhils of this sect will refrain from eating meat. It may be mentioned that the Bhils have essentially been, otherwise, non-vegetarians.
- (ii) The Bhagats will neither accept *dapa* (brid-price) nor go in for *devar vetta*, the marriage with elder brother's wife. Any kind of *natra* (remarriage) is avoided. As a matter of fact the bride-price among the Bhils is rampant and its amount has lately increased many-fold. Levirate has also been a custom among the Bhils.
- (iii) The Bhagats would greet one another by saying '*jai maharaj*', a symbol of this sect.
- (iv) As part of other symbols of the Bhils of this sect, a Bhagat will put on the vaishnavite sectarian mark on

his forehead. He should also wear a *tulsi mala* (*Ocimum sanctum*) around his neck.

- (v) To symbolise the *guru's* tenth incarnation, and to remain conscious of their being bhagats, they wear *bana* (cotton thread) in the neck. This thread is made up of ten knots to indicate the tenth incarnation of Vishnu.
- (vi) In case of the Mayji Bhagats, it is only the *guru's* privilege to hoist the flag of the sect at his residence. An ordinary Bhagat is not allowed to do so.
- (vii) The Bhagats make use of the white robes, which, according to them, denote simplicity and truthfulness.
- (viii) The will of the community is supreme, and a Bhagat is expected to submit totally to it. He cannot overlook directives of the community of Bhagats.
- (ix) Simultaneously, a Bhagat has to regularise his life in accordance with the spiritual and moral sanctions provided in the movement.

Another sect, started by Govindgiri, a religious leader and social reformer, is known as Lasodia. This is comparatively popular in the Dungarpur and adjoining Bhil areas of Udaipur, Banswara and Gujarat. Govindgiri, a Banjara by caste, received enlightenment through meditation. He had also been blessed by a saint who visited his house one day. The origin of this sect could be traced to the first quarter of this century, around 1910. When Govindgiri excelled in the practice of meditation, he left his house in the Sant Rampur state of Gujarat and started preaching among the Bhils. In no time, he became popular. This scared the ruler who asked him to leave the state. Govindgiri came to Dungarpur and launched his reform movement among the Bhils. In a short span of time he became very influential; his teachings shook up the traditional superstitions, beliefs and ideas. He encouraged the Bhils to create a new society. It was reported that at one stage, around 1913-14, Govindgiri thought of establishing his own kingdom. He was charged with a conspiring the overthrow of the Rajput rule and establish a Bhil state while addressing a huge rally of the Bhils in Banswara. The then ruler of Banswara managed to arrest Govindgiri after he had

addressed a huge gathering at Mangadi hill. He was exiled. Later he died. This caused a temporary setback to this movement. Today it is one of the leading sects of Bhagats. The Bhagats worship Mahadeo and Krishna. It is like the Mavji sect. The method of conversion is almost the same. However, it is more austere and ascetic in its observances which may be described as follows:

- (i) The Bhagats have to give up committing thefts and being lawless. In fact, such activities had increased particularly among the Palia Bhils because of confrontations and resentment.
- (ii) They have to embrace the philosophy of non-violence and virtuousness.
- (iii) The Bhagats have to abstain from meat-eating.
- (iv) Liquor, considered a root cause of evils, was condemned by the preachers. All Bhagats abhor liquor.
- (v) Those who embrace Bhagatism have to lead a life of truthfulness and honesty, which the preachers regard as a noble way of living.
- (vi) As part of their philosophy, they encourage a life of celibacy.
- (vii) The Bhagats have to impose prohibitions with regard to the institution of marriage. They prohibit polygyny, a practice which the Bhils would resort to as soon as there is an opportunity. They have, according to their traditional social system, preferred to be polygynous. Keeping more wives is a symbol of superior status among them.
- (viii) As a symbol of Govindgiri Bhagat identification, the right arm of the person is branded with a hot iron. In addition, a Bhagat wears a special kind of necklace and saffron or red coloured clothes.
- (ix) Unlike a Mavji, a Govindgiri Bhagat installs a white flag outside his residence. Inside the house, *dhuni*, or the sacred fire, is kept burning.

- (x) The Bhagats have evolved a new mode of greeting. It involves saying 'Jai Guru Maharaj' or 'Jai Malik' when two people meet.
- (xi) As the creator of the sect himself got his power through *samadhi* (a form of meditation) and as *samadhi* forms the chief medium of worship of Govindgiri, this philosophy is reflected in one of the earlier death rites of the Bhils. The Bhils who became Bhagats have to give up cremating their dead. Instead, they bury them. The non-Bhagat Bhils continue to cremate their dead.
- (xii) As a part of their observances, the Bhagat women have to remain in seclusion during the menstrual period.
- (xiii) On certain prescribed days, the men and women of the Govindgiri sect have to observe a fast.
- (xiv) As part of economic reform, the Bhagats fence their fields and dig wells for irrigation. It was felt that economic betterment is necessary to cope with other observances of the sect under reference.
- (xv) The Bhagats take a bath everyday. They are forbidden to start the major activities of the day unless they have taken a bath. The non-Bhagat Bhils continue to neglect such hygienic practices.
- (xvi) The form and content of the songs sung by the Bhagats are different. They mainly sing sacred songs in mild tones.
- (xvii) As part of new ideas and beliefs, they have to abjure superstitions.

In addition to the above-mentioned major sects of Bhagats which are active among the Bhils of Rajasthan, there are a few others, but they have not gained in popularity. The history of these sects, too, is not very old and they are of recent origin. The followers of these sects are scattered and as such have no specific areas of concentration. These sects include : (a) Kamdia/Ram Dev Panth; (b) Nathji Panth; and (c) Kabir Panth.

The Bhil followers of the Kamdia Panth are called Kamdia Panthis. The movement, originated by the Kamdia sect, does not appear to have influenced the Bhagat Bhils to the extent

that they have given up their original faith. The Kamdia sect, which is say about forty years old, is also known as Dasnami. The Bhagats of the Dasnami sect are not far removed from their brethren who come under the category of Panchami. The missionaries of the Kamdia sect have, all along, been more liberal in their approach to converting people to their fold. Even after conversion, the restrictions that are imposed are less severe. There are more or less no restrictions on social intercourse between a Dasnami and a non-Dasnami Bhil. The same person may act as a priest for the Panchami and Dasnami faiths. Among the observances prescribed for Dasnami Bhagats, the notable ones are:

1. The Bhagats should engross themselves in the pursuit of higher knowledge.
2. They should refrain from drinking liquor.
3. The Bhagats should, as far as possible, avoid killing animals.

The Dasnami Bhagats worship Ram Deoji who is symbolized by a metal horse. Among the Bhils, Ram Deoji is also called Jargaji. They are assigned a lower status by the Bhils than Bheru and Megra Baba, indeed Jargaji is considered to be an assistant to Bheru. The members of the Sadhu caste, who are the chief worshippers of Ram Deoji, do not agree with this view as they consider Ram Deoji to be the supreme being and the rest of the deities—like Bheru, Mata, and Magra Baba—as being inferior to him. The Dasnami Bhils make various offerings to Ram Deoji to get their desires fulfilled. The Ram Deoji sect is yet far short of achieving much popularity. This sect is believed to have originated in Jodhpur and was brought to the Bhils by Hindu missionaries.

The sect of Shambhu Nathji has even smaller following. Many of the Bhagats from this sect express their devotion to Shambhu Dal or Nathji or Dhuniwala. The movement is new among the Bhils and is believed to have originated in Ujjain. The Bhagats of this sect greet each other by pronouncing 'Jai Sita Ram'. The main prescriptions for the followers of this sect are :

- (i) The Bhagats should keep a sacred fireplace in the house.
- (ii) They should try and practise abstinence from liquor.
- (iii) They should cultivate vegetarianism and discard non-vegetarian food.
- (iv) They should wear the sacred thread and saffron-coloured clothes.
- (v) They should have regular baths and offer prayers.
- (vi) They should give up all kinds of criminal activities.

One feature of the Bhagats of this sect in the Mewar region is that they are not very rigid about these observances. And even if a follower is, at times, neglectful he or she is not strictly dealt with and continues to be a Bhagat. Such Bhagats are befitting of the popular appellation of 'Chalu Bhagats', i.e., those who loosely observe the restraints enjoined by the Bhagats. They float between the old ways of life and the new conditions. At the same time, the situation suggests the possibility that the Bhils may even, if they so desire, revert to their original way of life. The reaction of the Bhagats of the stronger sects, such as the Lasodia or Mavji, or even of the other smaller sects who are devoted to their faith, is one of indifference to the Chalu Bhagats. Within their own sects, they normally excommunicate any person if he or she is found to be negligent.

Another Bhagat movement among the Bhils of Rajasthan is the one introduced by Kabir. As a matter of fact, some of the Bhils, as a result of alien efforts and initiatives, began to sing the prayers and hymns composed by Kabir. The movement has caught the imagination of only a small section of Bhil society. Those who became Kabir panthis are very strict about the observances enjoined on them. First, the Kabir Bhagats believe in monotheism and denounce the rest of the deities. Second, they have an attitude of sympathy and mercy for all living beings. Non-violence is an essential part of their life. The Kabir Panthi Bhils totally abstain from the use of liquor. The Bhagats within this fold, are more sincere in their devotion to the faith. Though a small group, they seem to be more respectful of the path they have chosen to improve their way of life.

Conclusion

From what has so far been discussed, a few conclusions may be derived even though some of them may appear to be controversial in settings other than tribal.

First, in addition to the traditional divisions in Bhil society like Palvi and plain or Ujale and Mele, the Bhagat movements have created yet another area for division. The old lines of social divisions have given way to a new kind of segmentation and stratification. The Bhagats, the non-Bhagats and to some extent the Chalu Bhagats are segregated. At the same time, in the case of intra-Bhagat segments, there have developed considerations of superiority and inferiority. For instance, the Bhagats of Lasodia, Mavji and Kabir Panth do not rate the Ram Deoji and Shambhu Bhagats as socially and ritually equal. The social position of the Bhagats is superior to that of the Chalu Bhagats and non-Bhagats or ordinary Bhils, who are placed in the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. This has led to the growth of new levels of stratification and differentiation. Elements of subordination and supraordination have crept in. In terms of social interaction, the feeling of distance grew and the Bhagats became an endogamous group. The Bhagat Bhils do not marry non-Bhagats, the Chalu Bhagats being the exception. Relationships of commensality are affected; the Bhagats do not eat, drink and smoke with the non-Bhagats. Anybody doing so is ostracized. This attitude provided a new determinant of social boycott.

Certain marriage and death customs of the Bhagat and non-Bhagat Bhils also differ: *Dewar Vatta*, *Natra*, *Dapa*, polygyny, etc., and the associated rights, duties and privileges do not find acceptance among the Bhagats. Sharing a drink with kinsmen while deciding on *Dapa* is not a convention which the Bhagats accept. Non-payment of *Dapa* also affects the Bhil-money-lender relationship. The Bhagats rarely participate in the traditional functions of the non-Bhagats. In certain cases, new role complications have cropped up. If a Bhagat Bhil boy, of his own, marries a non-Bhagat Bhil girl, they often fail to pull together because of the divergent natures of the respective behaviour patterns prescribed for them. She cannot cook for the husband and his family and would need

a separate kitchen for herself. She can join them in such activities only if she accepts Bhagatism. Sometimes they go to absurd lengths. In a village in the Kherwara Tribal Development Block, the Bhagat Bhils withdrew their children from a school because they had to take water along with non-Bhagat Bhil boys from a common pot.

With the decline of the Bhagats' faith in their traditional religion, their dependence on the Pat Bhopas, Bhopas, Punjaras and other religious functionaries also declined. The kind of relationship which had existed for centuries between the religious leader and the community could no longer be sustained by the Bhil converts to Bhagatism. A similar setback took place in the case of the authority of the Da Mota (tribal council or elder's council) and Gameti, the village headman, and their ways of resolving conflicts. The Bhagats, having assumed social and spiritual superiority, did not find it appropriate to submit to the guidance of the traditional leaders. They would not accept traditional punishments and fines which normally involved the offering of a few bottles of liquor and poultry. Their philosophy went against the consumption of such things.

The Bhagats incorporated certain new cultural traits in their material styles of living. One of the added dimensions, identified among the Bhagat Bhils, is the new system of symbols. Marks on the forearm and the forehead, use of rosary, sacred threads and knots, are symbols of the faith. Even the forms of greeting underwent a change. There were sartorial changes. The clothes of the Bhagats, which were white, saffron or light red in colour, were supposed to reflect virtue and simplicity. The habit of cleanliness was encouraged. Regular baths and wearing of clean clothes are among the essential requisites of a Bhagat.

An important feature of almost all the movements, is that they were not initiated from within the community. Probably the tribals themselves could not attain such awareness on their own. The movements were carried forward by the non-Bhils, who belonged to various caste groups, from Brahmin to Banjara. In subsequent stages, however, some Bhil-Bhagats began to act as the mediators of the philosophy and principles of the Bhagat movements.

There are also some other features. The Lasodia movement had a political motive. In no time, it spread like wild fire. The political objective of creating an independent kingdom, emerged out of a Bhagat movement based on religious beliefs. The Mavji movement, on the other hand, remained religious. The Bhils accepted the new faiths because they were passing through a stage of degeneration caused by the influence of the dominant and powerful groups who were outsiders. The Bhils were psychologically prepared to accept anything that could promise an improvement in their existing conditions. However, the opposite phenomenon—of reversion to the old faith—is also in evidence. Many of those who hurriedly got converted to Bhagatism, often in an effort to seek temporary relief from adverse conditions prevalent at that time, started reverting to the old faith when they realized the uselessness of conversion and when the restraints of Bhagatism became unbearable.

Lastly, the Bhagat movements can also be considered in terms of their relevance to the two historical approaches to the tribal people. The Mavji or Lasodia sect are for 'assimilation' into, whereas the Dasnami Bhagats are for 'integration'. The former have denounced the traditional society, the songs, dances, mythology, eating and drinking habits, and marriage practices of the Bhils. But the latter being reformists continue to accept many features of the traditional life. The Bhagat and non-Bhagat Bhils have a divergent reaction to the programmes of planned change and development. For instance, the development of poultry and fishery activities, as part of nutrition programme among the Bhils, are resisted by the Bhagats, while the non-Bhagat Bhils put up no such barrier to change, as it is supported by their value system.

TRIBAL MOBILISATION IN SOUTHERN INDIA

P.K. Misra

THE TRIBAL population of the four states of South India namely, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu, referred to in this report as the Southern Zone—is rather thin in comparison with the tribal population of other zones. The total tribal population of this zone is 8,12,200 which is 0.9 per cent of the population of the zone and 0.15 per cent of the total tribal population of the country. The population of the tribes in each State of this zone and their percentage in terms of the total population as per the 1971 Census is given in Table I.

TABLE I

<i>State</i>	<i>Scheduled tribe population</i>	<i>% to total population</i>
1. Andhra Pradesh	1,657,657	3.8
2. Karnataka	231,268	0.8
3. Kerala	269,356	1.3
4. Tamilnadu	311,515	8.8

There are 83 tribal groups in this zone but only a few of them have a population of more than one lakh. Some of the big tribal groups are the Koyas of Andhra Pradesh (they are the largest in this zone) with a population of 2,85,226; the Malayali in Tamilnadu (1,59,426); the Irula in Tamilnadu (89,025); and the Paniyan in Kerala (49,562). It is observed that

the larger tribes are found in Andhra Pradesh whereas the tribal groups in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka are relatively smaller in size. Another distinct feature of this zone is that several of the tribal groups have been living on food-gathering and hunting till very recently. In fact there are some groups which still continue to subsist on food-gathering. The Chola Naickens, who by now have become quite well known, are one example. They number only around 281 (Ananda, 1976). They live in caves and have no implements for hunting. Similarly, some Jenu Kuruba groups live by food-gathering, and till recently several of them were observed living in bushes. But in this zone, the Chola Naickens are perhaps the only people who have managed to keep themselves away from the expanding economy and culture of the 'civilized world'. It has been possible for them to do so because they withdrew to the most inaccessible and inhospitable areas. Others, like the Jenu Kurubas, did try to withdraw but the area they lived in itself came into the orbit of expanding economy followed by the culture brought along with it. Wherever the tribals have become part of this expansion process, with only a few exceptions, they do so by losing control over the resources and thus becoming dependent on the alien culture. It is observed that in this zone, as elsewhere, the tribals lost their land and other resources, and live by selling their labour. Though their labour is of critical importance to the expanding economy, they as a people become marginalized. This process is perhaps more acutely felt in this zone than elsewhere.

In spite of the fact that some of the most primitive groups live in this area, anthropological literature about the tribals in this zone is conspicuously poor. There are only a few full length monographs available on the tribes of this zone though some of the tribal groups, like the Todas and Kotas, have attracted the attention of social scientists the world over.

On the basis of their population, the tribes of this zone can be divided into several geographical pockets. One such pocket is the tri-junction of Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala in the Western Ghats. The other major pocket is in the northern most parts of Andhra Pradesh bordering three states—namely, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

There are some minor pockets too. The geographical location of these pockets, whether big or small, shows that they all lie near State boundaries, in the forests or in the hills. The larger pockets show a more intensive combination of all these factors. The location of these tribal pockets is not a mere historical accident. People possessing poorer technology have been pushed into outlying inhospitable areas the world over. Whenever there is a confrontation between the people of higher technology and the people of lower technology, one of the alternatives for the latter is to squeeze themselves into the interiors of the forests or to go up into the hills. But the march of civilisation keeps on clearing the forests and climbing the hills and in that sense the tribal populations in such places eventually get exposed, so to say. But in spite of physical exposure, the tribes remain socially farthest from the centres of civilization and also from cut-off points of network of relationship which are the main integrative principles of civilizations. Thus, in this sense, the tribal populations stand at the periphery of civilization. But this process becomes incompatible when it comes to the realization of material benefits—both raw material and cheap labour are required for the expansion and prosperity of a civilization. As indicated earlier, the economy of the tribals living in this zone is fast changing but if we take into account how they lived even a decade earlier, we find each tribe has made interesting and varied adaptations to the environment and the people around it. In this zone, a good number of the tribals—like the Chola Naicken and the Jenu Kuruba—depended upon food-gathering. Some combined food-gathering with hunting like the Koyas and Chenchus. Others combined it with some handicraft like the Betta Kurubas and Urali Kurubas who, besides food-gathering, were engaged in basket making and pottery and blacksmithy. Then there were groups like the Mullu Kurumba who engaged in cultivation but derived a fairly large amount of their food through hunting and fishing. Then there were groups like the Kuruchia who had always been settled cultivators but supplemented their diet with hunting.

At the level of social organization also, we find interesting variations. The polyandrous Todas are too well known to

need any elaboration. All the tribes found in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu, are patrilineal and patrilocal but some of the tribes in Kerala are matrilineal. Some of the tribes which are now patrilineal appear to have been matrilineal at one time; for example the Mullu Kurumba are patrilineal and patrilocal but their clan inheritance is through the mother. However, the clan system in their case is becoming functionless. Similar evidence is available for the Mala Ulladan.

There is another interesting feature of the tribes in this region and that is the notion of pollution. Through the concept of pollution and various other symbols, particularly dress and language, each tribal group maintains its separate identity and also a relative distance in respect of the neighbouring population. The system of maintaining distance as found in some of the regions, has been compared with the hierarchical arrangement of the caste system (see Gould, 1967; Reddy, 1973 and Misra, 1972). Maintenance of relative distance does not necessarily determine hierarchy. It is indicative of mutual relationship. However, it can lead to the development of hierarchical characteristics if there is an input of power.

In this resume, I will concentrate mainly on the tribal pocket situated in the western ghats at the tri-junction of Tamilnadu, Kerala and Karnataka. The tribes of this pocket can be considered as belonging to three regions. One is the region of the Nilgiris; within this region itself there are distinctions between the tribes which live on higher levels and the tribes which live at lower levels. It is reported that the lower levels at one time were effected by a high incidence of Plasmodium malaria. The second is the Western slope of the Nilgiris, close to the borders of Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala, which is referred to as the Sultanbateri region, named after the important towns of this region. The third adjoins the second region but is close to the border of Karnataka and Kerala and is known as the Manantody region after the important town of the region.

The Nilgiri Region

In the Nilgiri region live the Todas, the Badagas, the Kotas,

the Kurumbas and the Irulas. The Todas occupy the higher and westerly plateau area, the elevation of which ranges between 6,500 feet to 7,500 feet. The Badagas occupy the eastern half of the Nilgiri plateau which is heavily cultivated by them. The elevation of their settlement ranges from 4,900 feet to 7,300 feet. The Kotas live at almost the same elevation as the Badagas and have only six settlements. The Kurumbas and the Irulas are found on the lower slopes of the Nilgiris at elevations varying from 1,500 to 5,000 feet (Hockings, 1974: 207). The Badagas are reported to have migrated from the Mysore plains to the Nilgiris in the latter half of the sixteenth century. In 1602, there were only about 500 Badagas in the Nilgiris living in three villages but they now number 1,04,000 and are spread over 370 villages. Most of these villages are located in a zone between 5,000 and 6,500 feet, the upper reaches of which touch the Toda settlements and the lower, the Kurumba settlements (Hockings, 1974). In other words they pushed the Todas to the upper regions which was too cold for their millet cultivation and they forced the Kurumbas down to an inhospitable malarial climate.

A review of the growth of the population of the tribal groups shows some interesting results (Tables 2 & 3).

TABLE 2

Tribes	1901	1961	Increase	
				% Annual
Todas	807	714	- 11.62	-0.19
Badagas	33,152	84,823	+148.36	+2.45
Kotas	1,267	833	- 34.25	-0.57

TABLE 3

Tribes	1901	1971	Increase	
				% Annual
Todas	807	930	+ 15.24	+0.22
Badagas	34,150	104,000	+204.52	-2.92
Kotas	1,267	1,188	- 6.23	-0.09

The Badagas have grown rapidly while the Toda and Kota populations have gone down if the Census data from 1901 up to 1961 is taken into account. The Census figures for the Kurumbas and Irulas are consistently available. However, if we take the data up to 1971, the Todas also show a positive growth rate suggesting that in the ten-year period (1961 to 1971) the welfare measures undertaken among them have had positive results. But the Kotas still show a minus growth rate. If proper records were available the Irulas and Kurumbas perhaps would show a downward trend in numbers, at least up to 1961. Their decline in numbers could be expected because of the material climate of the area they lived in as also the large-scale persecution suffered by the Kurumbas in particular. The decline of the Todas was mainly because of the venereal diseases that affected them, a gift of the European settlers. But the decline of the Kotas is inexplicable. However, the important point is that the Badagas, who were a refugee population, have not only significantly risen in numbers but have also expanded and occupied most of the hospitable land in the Nilgiris. The growth of their population can be explained by the fact that not only were they producing their own food but they also generated a surplus which enabled them to buy up more and more land and expand. Their expansion led to the impoverishment of all groups, particularly the Irulas and Kurumbas as they were the weakest.

These groups lived in economic and social symbiosis: the Todas as pastoralists, the Badagas as agriculturists, the Kotas as artisans and the Kurumbas as food-gatherers and sorcerers. The Irulas were somewhat aloof from this symbiosis. However, though they provided their specialist services and goods to each other the exchange was not equitable. The Todas considered themselves to be the purest. They ate vegetarian food. They did not allow any of the other groups to come near their settlements. The Kotas, the Kurumbas and the Irulas were considered to be the most unclean. They ate carrion. The Kurumbas were particularly despised because they practised sorcery. The Kotas were employed to play music during the death ceremony of the Todas and the Badagas. Each group tenaciously maintained its cultural

identity despite interaction at the economic and social levels. The complex Toda rituals and social organization had no parallel in Kota life. The similarity between the Kotas and the Badagas did not go beyond dress and housing.

But all this has undergone a sea-change now. The exchange of services and goods between these communities based on the traditional relationship has given way to the impersonal market mechanism. There is no social interaction between them at the group level. In fact there is open antagonism between the Todas and Badagas, and the Kotas and Badagas. The Kurumbas and Irulas have never been a constituent in the power structure of the Nilgiris and they are not so even now. The Kurumbas were a persecuted people though they have some respite now as the people's attitude towards superstitions is changing.

The Todas have lost not only their pre-eminent position as also their grazing land, but their numbers are too small for any meaningful mobilization. The Kotas are similarly restricted in numbers. They lost their craft with the opening up of the area and also the land. The Kurumbas and the Irulas have been absorbed as wage-labourers in plantations and private farms or have been left to fend for themselves. It is the Badagas who have been rising from strength to strength. Their mainstay has been agriculture which received a further impetus with the introduction of potato, and now the latest capital intensive techniques of growing this crop has been made available to them. They participate in modern industry and a large number of them have become successful entrepreneurs. They have also taken to modern education and in this respect they took advantage of their backward class label. They are active politically and because of their large numbers and being concentrated in one place their viability as a political group is recognized in political circles.

There are some Christians among them but after independence their number has been falling; there have been very few conversions since then. The majority of them are Hindus but unlike the peasant castes in the plains they have not bothered to establish their identity in the caste hierarchy. They have by-passed the phenomenon of 'Sanskritisation' and instead they strive to 'modernize' themselves. In the

process the phenomenon of class dynamics has emerged among them. There are successful entrepreneurs among them as also owners of middle range industries. The large and medium size farm owners among them use capital intensive techniques to increase productivity with an eye on the market. A middle class is emerging among them and a substantial number of literate Badagas having obtained jobs in governmental and non-governmental establishments. But the base of Badaga society is still formed by a large chunk of people who are small or marginal farmers or landless labourers who have become progressively pauperized by the very nature of development. Thus, the Badagas have come a long way from their original refugee status, thence to a tribal status with a place in the regional inter-tribal relationship, and finally to a modern group with emerging tendencies of class dynamics.

The Sultanbateri Region

In this region live the Chettys, the Mullu Kurumbas, the Urali Kurumbas, the Kattu Naickens and the Paniyans. We find almost the same position here as in the Nilgiris—each tribe is endogamous, each observes specific commensal relations with the others, each has a specialized occupation and a notion of purity and pollution. It is also noticed that the Chettys, who are now mostly landowners, have started claiming to be a Hindu caste. The Mullu Kurumbas, who used to be hunters, now mostly depend on wage-earning. The Urali Kurumbas, the craftsmen of the area, gradually gave up their trade because of the penetration of the market into their region. The Kattu Naickens, who were food-gatherers, now find that the forests do not provide them with enough food and have taken to wage earning. The Paniyans used to work as serfs and continue to live by their labour. Our guess is that a similar demographic pattern would pertain to this area as to the Nilgiris if systematic data for each tribe was available. Analyzing the present situation it is clear that only the Chettys and the new settlers have an upper hand in the region as they produce surplus food and have other resources which allow them to invest and expand, advance money on credit and have control over men

and materials. All this, as discussed earlier causes pressure particularly on those who do not have the means to produce their own food. They are natural prey for those who are anxious to multiply their surpluses. Their pauperization and eventual decay is a logical corollary. But in this region also, the ten-year population record of the Paniyans and Kattu Naickens (1961-71) show an upward trend, suggesting that the welfare measures undertaken for the Scheduled Tribes have produced some positive results. The rise of the Chettys has not been as dramatic as that of the Badagas because the Chettys had to face stiff competition from new and more enterprising Muslim and Christian settlers in the region and they did not have the advantage of cash crop like potato which the Badagas had.

Both the Chettys and Mullu Kurumbas claim to be Hindus but without claiming particular status in the caste hierarchy. The twice-born group of Kshatriyas is missing in the South Indian caste situation, and hence the new groups entering the fold of the caste system can best join as clean Shudras. The term Shudra is not an enviable one and it is increasingly becoming impertinent to refer to any one as a Shudra. Therefore, the tendency is to gloss over the *varna* status and instead to seek status via 'modernization' and wealth, and through adopting prestigious rituals. This is what the Chettys and Mullu Kurumbas are striving for.

The Manantody Region

In this region live tribes like the Jenu Kurubas and the Betta Kurubas on the Karnataka side and the Kattu Naickens, the Urali Kurumbas, the Adiyans, the Paniyans and the Kuruchias on the Kerala side. Of all these groups, the Kuruchias are traditionally the only settled agriculturists. The records show that for their heroic participation in local wars, the Kuruchias were given gifts of land and money by the local kings (Varier, 1976). The records show that they fought against the British in 1812 and thereafter they were mercilessly punished (Ravindran, 1976). They are exclusive group and live away from all tribal and non-tribal groups. Except for the Namboodris, they consider all other people

differentially polluting. They do not allow any one to enter their houses or work in their fields. They are settled agriculturists and have a joint family system. Their property is held by the family. The Mullu Kurumbas consider the Kuruchias as being superior but the Kuruchias have not sought any particular identity in the Hindu caste hierarchy except that they have a minimal interaction with all those whom they consider polluting. Unlike the Badagas and the Chettys they have not given up their tribal identity and traditional practices and remain a close-knit group. There are differences of wealth in the community but it has not led to the emergence of classes among them because the property is not individually owned. All labour and capital investment is on land which, on account of several constraints, cannot be expanded beyond a certain point, while their social norms, particularly these concerning pollution, prevent economic diversification. Though they do seek to improve the productivity of their land by using modern agricultural techniques, hardly any efforts at modernization are noticed in other spheres of activity. Only a few among them have gone in for higher education. On account of their social norms, they have been able to prevent alienation of their land.

The two regions Sultanbateri and Manantody just described are contiguous and at one time must have been substantially rich in forest and natural resources. But now this wealth is divided among three states and the people living in these areas have been accordingly separated. Not only this, but the states concerned represent three different culture zones. The three main languages spoken in these States are Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. In olden times, the tribals living in this zone must have been in close interaction with each other. This was possible because each culture area reached a cut-off point near about this zone and one can guess that demarcation of boundaries must have been vague in olden times. However, all this has changed now. Large chunks of forest have now been cleared and three dominant cultures have physically expanded up to be the State boundaries from their respective sides, however it is minimal from Karnataka side—plains people with higher technology came and settled into the region. Plantation, an entirely new

economy with new values made deep penetrations into this zone. The forest dwellers were uprooted, restrictions on their movement were imposed, their foraging economy was interfered and they were also lured to part away with the forest resources and the land they owned. The State policies on forest also interfered with their way of life. They became refugees on their own land.

The pace of penetration has quickened more particularly in those areas where big reservoir dams in the forest regions have been planned. The consequences of 'Statewise' penetration has been, (i) even though a tribe is, culturally, economically and politically homogenous, owing to demarcation of State boundaries the homogeneity is broken and a section of the tribe is made to integrate with the culture of State where it resides. Its political activities are relevant to that State. (ii) except for the Kuruchia all other tribals lost land to the settlers and plantations in their respective regions. Most of the tribals now work as daily wage earners. (iii) The artisans like the Urali Kurumba and the Kōta lost their trade but the Betta Kuruba received impetus to enlarge their craft as demand for baskets has increased but they are now facing acute shortage of raw material. (iv) The traditional economy has broken down and with that the traditional form of interaction between the groups has become extinct. The traditional pattern of social relationship thus has become meaningless yet the traditional values persist. This has made the groups more exclusive than before. The small tribal groups thus remain divided, restricting horizontal mobilisation. (v) The groups like the Jenu Kuruba and to some extent the Paniyan had taken entirely a different path and that is to withdraw themselves from outside interaction including development agencies, as far as possible.

Politically, it is the Badagas in the Nilgiris and the Kuruchias and Mullu Kurumbas in the other two regions who are active. It is not mere coincidence that the three land-owning groups should also be politically active. The Badagas tread on thin ice —while they have 'prospered' in Tamilnadu and have greatly benefited by the absence of the higher caste in the region, they are very much against the Tamil settlers in the Nilgiris, the latter being a potential threat to their interests. Their culture

and language is distinct from that of the Tamils and hence they fight against the Tamilization of the Nilgiris. Here lies the basic contradiction. The average Badaga is conscious of as to what objectively determines an individual's status and hence makes serious efforts to accumulate property and 'modernize' but at the same time he is forced to realize the contextual and culture-based situation which gives rise to 'communal' politics. The interplay of these opposing forces is in the best interests of those who have been able to amass some wealth for themselves. When participating in the wider arena such people tend to take radical postures and do not seem to give any weightage to traditional practices but back in their home regions they become champions of the traditional inter- and intra-group relationship.

The young leadership of the Kuruchias and the Mullu Kurumbas realize that they cannot become politically important because of their small numbers. Some efforts have been made by different political parties to mobilize them across tribal boundaries. However, these efforts have not been sustained. A number of young people belonging to these communities are full of enthusiasm but lack proper leadership. The young men are fully conscious of the exploitation they and their communities have suffered but feel frustrated as they cannot do anything about it for want of money and the lack of education among them. But it appears that they have not been able to cast away their traditional values and objectively analyze their situation. While they realize the necessity of tribal unity, one of them said during a discussion on this issue: 'It is not possible to bring them (tribe X) into our fold because they are so ignorant and dirty. We do not allow them to come near our water sources.' Their leaders have a clear assessment of their strength and have learnt the modern art of 'politics'. Those who have come up socially, 'float' by aligning themselves to one or other factional group while those still at lower level keep their importance alive by solving individual problems.

This review of the tribal situation in most of the southern part of the country apart from some pockets in Andhra Pradesh, shows that political mobilization has not proceeded beyond the take-off stage. This is intriguing particularly in a

region like Kerala where political consciousness can be said to be the highest in the country. Further, regionwise investigation and in-depth analysis is required to fully understand this phenomenon, particularly when the objective conditions for mobilization exist. A social worker who has worked among the tribals for last thirty years said 'Even the most backward, submissive tribe like Paniyan do show their utter annoyance on outsiders interfering with their life when they are sure of some support. Otherwise in spite of being subjected to greatest humiliation the adaptation to which they have taken recourse is to lead a life of their own and not to allow the outsiders to penetrate to their social, cultural, and ritual life'.

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POLITICAL AWAKENING AMONG THE TRIBES OF WYNAD

P.R.G. Mathur

Introduction

THE PURPOSE of this paper is two-fold: (a) to describe and analyze some aspects of the political movements among the tribes of Wynad, Kerala, and (b) to discuss some of the difficulties that are being faced by the tribes in organizing their movements in this area. Before we take up the subject matter, it is necessary to describe broadly the location of the field and its general features.

The field-work for this study was conducted in a small town—Sultan's Battery—which is situated 102 kilometres north-east of Kozhikode, the headquarters of the district of the same name. According to the Census of India, 1961, the population of Scheduled Tribes in the State of Kerala was 212,762, but it was 269,358 in 1971, this registering an increase of 1.26 per cent. The settlements of the tribes are located on the Western Ghats which separate Kerala from the adjoining districts of Karnataka and Tamilnadu. The District of Cannanore has the largest population of Scheduled Tribes (50,464 or 3.82 per cent of the population of the District). Kozhikode has a tribal strength of 84,982 persons or 4.03 per cent of the total population of the District. This District is followed by Palghat and Idukki which have a tribal population of 25,954 (1.52 per cent) and 34,820 (1.60 per cent) respectively. It is evident from the above figures that well

over three-fourths of the tribal population of Kerala is concentrated in the northern districts of the State.

Wynad

Wynad formed part of the territory of the Pazhassi Raja during the British regime. This hill tract consists of two taluks : North Wynad (Connarore District) and South Wynad (Kozhikode District). Wynad is an exceedingly mountainous plateau. The average height above mean sea level is 3000 feet. The important tribes who inhabit the region are: Paniyans (45,562), Kurichians (18,700), Mullakurumbans (15,116), Uralikurumbans or Vettukurumbans (2,251), Kattu-naickans or Ten Kurumbans (5,565), Pulayans (43,683) and Adiyans (6,905).¹

Most of the tribes in Wynad used to practise shifting cultivation, gathered food and were hunters. During the British rule, there was great improvement in transport and communications, as a consequence of which there was an influx of people from the plains. The immigration continues unabated. As a result of the large-scale influx of non-tribals, particularly Syrian Christians from the former Travancore State, sizable chunks of arable land which the tribals used for shifting cultivation, have been encroached upon and the tribes have been deprived of their only means of subsistence.

The Paniyans are a numerically dominant tribal community in Kerala. They are still bonded labourers. Bonded labour exists among the Adiyans also. The Paniyans claim that they were the autochthones of Wynad and that the Gowdan and Nair landlords, who migrated to their area, overpowered and enslaved them. It is interesting to point out here that there are as many twenty *Devaswoms* (trusts) in Wynad and the majority of them are owned by Nairs and Warriors. However, the Gowdans are also the owners of a few *Devaswoms*. The Mullakurumbans, who hitherto made a living through shifting cultivation and hunting, have now adopted plough cultivation. The Uralikurumbans were potters and artisans. Many of them abandoned the irtraditional occupation and have today become farm labourers. The Kattunaickans are said to have migrated from the neighbouring forests

of Karnataka and led an isolated life in former times. They were hunters and collectors of honey and food. A number of them today work as *mahouts*.

The Kurichians are one of the oldest inhabitants of Wynad. There is a place called 'Kurichiat' where they claim to have fought along with the army of Kerala Varma Raja of Kottayam (Pazhassi Raja) against the British. According to some historians, the Kurichians protected the Pazhassi Raja for nine years until 1805 A.D. in which year he committed suicide. It was left to their commander, Talakkal Chandu, to command the Kurichian army against the mighty forces of the East India Company. The Kurichians are the aristocrats among the hillmen of Kerala, occupying the highest social status in the tribal hierarchy. They still observe touch pollution against all castes and communities except the Nambudiri Brahmans. They are skilled in archery. They also used to practise shifting cultivation in the extensive tracts of virgin land but have now become settled agriculturists. As many as 116 members of a lineage have been found sharing a kitchen in Kaniambatta, a village in South Wynad.

Wynad has the largest concentration of tribes in Kerala. In this area they form, more or less, a compact group. The majority of the tribes of Wynad are primitive cultivators and bonded labourers as we have stated earlier. In former times, they also practised hunting, but this has now been stopped by the Government. Paucity of land has forced the Mulla-kurumbans and Kurichians to abandon their traditional shifting cultivation and to adopt the plough. They are unskilled and backward in this technique of cultivation, but their time-tested method of cultivation require extensive lands. The influx of non-tribals into Wynad during the past five decades has made land dear. Extensive tracts of tribal land have been surreptitiously acquired or usurped by Christian and Muslim cultivators, who are immigrants from the plains. The tribals have been dispossessed of their lands in most cases, and have been reduced to landless serfs of the Christian, Muslim and Hindu exploiters. The greatest sufferers are naturally the bonded labourers—the Paniyans and Adiyans. Ruthless exploitation by the plainmen and money-lenders and lax administration in the area has added to the economic

distress and social degradation of the tribal people of Kerala in general and those of Wynad in particular. Attempts at alleviation of their sufferings came not only from Government agencies but also from voluntary organizations and associations. Hindu and Christian missionaries are active among the tribes of Wynad, but they have been unable to win them over to their respective folds. However, a few tribal unions or associations have been formed in Wynad in recent years with the support of well-established political parties in order to find ways and means to further their socio-economic upliftment. We shall examine the functioning of these associations below and try to assess their impact on the political awakening among the tribes of Wynad.

Adivasi Sangham

The leaders of the Kurichians and the Jana Sangh of Kozhikode district met in a conference at Kalpetta in 1969 and formed an association called the Adivasi Sangham. The Jana Sangh-led Adivasi Sangham functioned very actively for a time in Wynad, particularly among the Kurichians. All the office-bearers of the Adivasi Sangham, with the exception of the Joint Secretary, belonged to the Kurichian community. The Joint Secretary is a Mullakurumban. The President, Secretary and Vice-President and Treasurer of the Sangham are all Kurichians. The leaders of the Adivasi Sangham got inspiration and guidance from the Jana Sangh. For instance, it is learnt that K.G. Marar and O. Rajagopal, Secretary and President respectively of the Kerala unit of the Jana Sangh, and other leaders attended a number of meetings arranged by the Adivasi Sangham. Besides, Devaki Amma, Vice-President of the State Jana Sangh, addressed one of the conferences of the Sangham in 1972.

My informant Raghavan, a Mullakurumban, was actively associated with the Adivasi Sangham. According to him, over 90 per cent of the members of the Adivasi Sangham are Kurichians and the remaining ones are Mullakurumbans, Paniyahs and Kattunaickans. Over 90 per cent of the Kurichians are believed to be sympathizers of the Adivasi Sangham. The aims of the Adivasi Sangham may be described as follows:

1. To work for the retention of the tribal culture and heritage in general, and Kurichian culture in particular, and to inspire a sense of solidarity and brotherhood among the tribal people of Wynad.
2. To promote the cause of tribal enlightenment by establishing and running schools for them.
3. To work for the all-round development and welfare of the tribal population.
4. To impart training to the members of the Adivasi Sangham.
5. To preserve and protect the cause of the traditional Kurichian sport of archery.
6. To promote unity, understanding and close relationship, on the basis of social equality, among the different tribes of Wynad.
7. To bring all the tribes of Wynad together with a view to promoting their solidarity for protecting and preserving the traditional tribal culture.
8. To enlighten the members about the constitutional provisions for tribal development.
9. To negotiate with the public as well as the Government on issues and problems like taxation and land alienation affecting the tribals in accordance with the customary laws, particularly for the protection of the Kurichians' heritage and also for the welfare of the tribes in general.
10. To oppose the spread of Christianity in Wynad.
11. To work for the restoration of alienated tribal land and to urge the Government to enact the Land Alienation Bill.
12. To oppose the imposition of levies by the Government.

In 1974 the members of the Adivasi Sangham met in a conference at Kalpetta, which was attended, among others, by the President, Secretary and Vice-President of the State Jana Sangh. The following resolutions, among others, were passed:

1. The Kerala Land Reforms Act should be implemented as early as possible.

2. There should be reservation of 75 per cent of excess land for the Adivasis when the Act is fully implemented.
3. The conference advised the Adivasis not to pay the price fixed by the Government for the purchase of *jammam* rights. The conference resolved to picket the Land Tribunal Offices for getting their demand conceded.
4. The conference urged the Government to exempt the Adivasis from the basic Land Tax.
5. The Adivasi Sangham also urged that land alienated from the tribals should be restored to them.

Action Council

The Adivasi Sangham formed a Samara Samithi (Action Council) in 1973 in order to press for their demands. One of the most important demands that the Sangham put forward was that the Kurichians should be exempted from the agricultural levy. In Kerala, a farmer owning up to two acres of paddy land is exempted from the levy. But those cultivating land more than two acres in size are required to pay a levy at the prescribed rate. For instance, a farmer who cultivates land which is more than five acres in size has to give twenty-five quintals of paddy to the Government at the rate of Rs. 63 per cent quintal. Among the Kurichians, an estate of 50 to 100 acres of land is generally held by the eldest male member of the *mittom* (lineage) as often as many as 100-150 people live under a single roof in a *mittom*. About 300 members of the Sangham conducted a *dharna* in 1973 in front of the Supply Office, Manantody, demanding exemption from the levy imposed by the Government. The demonstration was led by K.G. Marar, Secretary of the Kerala State Jana Sangh. The demonstrators threw stones and smashed the glass panes of the office. When the police interfered, their caps were reported to have been removed and thrown away. They also picketed other offices. It may be mentioned here that the Kurichians became restless on account of this levy. Although the Government ordered exemption of the levy, the local officers continued to impose it.

The Sangham filed a suit in the High Court praying that the Adivasis be exempted from paying the levy. It is also interesting to point out here that a Christian was their pleader. In fact, the same Christian advocate was invited along with Jana Sangh leaders to the conference in which the above resolutions were passed. The advocate addressed the conference and assured the members of the Sangham that he would fight for their social and economic liberation.

We have already mentioned that the Sangham demanded that the alienation of tribal land should be reversed. In one of the meetings, it was resolved to march to Muttil village and evict one Hussain from the tribal land. According to Raghavan, the then Joint Secretary of the Action Council for the restoration of Alienated Tribal Land, about 2000 Kurichians, Kattunaickans and Mullakurumbans marched on to Kolparakunnu, of Muttil village in January 1975. It was alleged that Hussain had encroached upon twenty-five acres of land belonging to the Kattunaickans. When the demonstrators reached the village, the local Revenue Divisional Officer interfered and promised them that the encroached land would be restored to them within fifteen days. Finally the *pattach* for fifteen acres of land was given to the Kattunaickans. The Sangham wanted to continue its agitation to get back the remaining portion of the land. However, the agitation could not be continued because of the declaration of Emergency. Five members of the Sangham were arrested. Raghavan claimed that it was due to their agitation that the tribes in Wynad got exemption from the payment of the levy. But he severed his connections with the Sangham in order to join the newly-formed Adivasi Samajam, which is led by the Indian National Congress.

When cloth was distributed to the tribals in S. Battery in 1974, the Sangam staged a black flag demonstration before the Minister for Harijan Welfare in order to press for the supply of superior and costly clothes to them, as a part of the removal of beads and discarding of traditional costumes. In 1974, the Sangham extended its activities to Kozhikode and picketed the Kozhikode Collectorate. The members of the Sangham wanted to picket the Tribal Research and Training Centre for shifting it from Kozhikode to Manantoddy. Some

of the slogans they shouted on the occasion were:

1. Planning and tribal development activities are only on paper. Starvation stalks the Adivasis of Wynad.
2. Wynad is the land of the Pazhassi, who fought against the mighty British. Are we today slaves in this country?
3. There is not enough land in Wynad even for burning the dead.
4. We are the owners of Wynad and are its children.
5. Laws should be made for getting back our land from the non-tribals.

Kerala Girivarga Sangham

The Kerala Girivarga Sangham was formed under the leadership of Annan, an ex-tribal MLA (CPI-Marxist), in 1972 under the auspices of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The headquarters of the Sangham are situated at Kalpetta. In fact a Thiyya social worker was the brain behind the formation of this Sangham. The said Thiyya married a Paniyan woman in order to identify himself with the cause of the tribes of Wynad. But when the Emergency was declared he deemed it politic to leave Wynad and take up service with a private firm in Kozhikode. The main motive behind the formation of the Kerala Girivargha Sangham was to terrorize the non-tribal settlers of Wynad in order to compel them restore the alienated tribal land. The Sangham had the blessings of the Karzhaka Thozhilali Union which is an organ of the CPI (Marxist). Unfortunately, owing to the infiltration of some Naxalites, the Girivargha Sangham failed to enlist popular support. Moreover, some Adiya members joined hands with the Naxalites and burned the house of a landlord. They conducted a *dharna* and staged a *satyagraha* in front of the houses of landlords in Trissileri and Tirunelli. Relations were so embittered that a landlord was murdered by a Naxalite. He was shot dead in turn by the police. The participants in the movement, including the tribals, were arrested and imprisoned. The Sangham is not very active now on account of the demoralized state of its leadership.

Kerala Adivasi Samajam

The Kerala Adivasi Samajam was formed in 1973 with the following aims and objectives:

1. To struggle for and press for their demand for the immediate creation of a separate department for tribal welfare.
2. To achieve economic and cultural independence and to save the Adivasis from the exploitation of non-Adivasi settlers.
3. To protect the Adivasis as guaranteed by the Constitution of India.
4. To forge unity and solidarity among different tribal communities of Kerala in general and those of Wynad in particular.
5. To expedite and accelerate the economic development of the Adivasis.
6. To create an awareness among the Adivasis of their rights and safeguards as provided by the Constitution.
7. To demand for the immediate classification of the denotified tribes of Kerala.
8. To integrate the activities of the Samajam and the Indian National Congress.
9. To bring all the tribal communities of Wynad under the banner of the Samajam.
10. To put an end to the step-motherly attitude of the non-tribal officials working in tribal areas and the mal-administration and corruption of Government officials.
11. To take appropriate steps to preserve the traditional tribal culture of the area.

Organisational Structure

The Samajam functions at three levels--(a) the taluk (mandalam), (b) block (Panchayat), and (c) village. The Samajam exercises an influence over the entire area of South Wynad. The office-bearers of the central Organization are President, three Secretaries and one Treasurer. Similarly, at the block and village levels, there are Presidents, Secretaries and Treasurers. Mullakurumbans, Pathiyans, Kattunaickans,

Tachanad Mooppans, Uralikurumbans and some other tribes have become members of the Samajam. However, 75 per cent of the members of the Samajam are from the Mullakurumban tribe. The denotified tribal communities, like the Pathiyans and Tachanad Mooppans, are actively associated with the Samajam. All office-bearers of the central organization belong to the Mullakurumban community.

Shri K. Raghavan Master, the local tribal MLA, a Mullakurumban himself, is actively associated with the Samajam. This is evident from the fact that most of the resolutions passed in the meetings of the Samajam have been sent to the Chief Minister, Revenue Minister, Forest Minister and Harijan Welfare Minister of the State Government through him. Shri A.K. Antony, President, KPCC, Dr. K.G. Adiyodi, Minister for Forest and other leaders have addressed several meetings of the Adivasi Samajam. The tribals claim that this has enhanced the status of the Samajam as well as the Adivasis of Wynad.

During the past three years a number of meetings have been held under the auspices of the Samajam. The following are some of the important resolutions passed in some of these meetings held in 1974 and 1975:

1. That the Prevention and Restoration of Tribal Land Act, 1975, should be implemented immediately. The Samajam resolved that the above Act should be included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution.
2. The conference resolved to submit a memorandum to the Government for establishing co-operative credit banks in the tribal areas.
3. That the Tribal Research and Training Centre should be declared as an autonomous Research organization.
4. That the Adivasis should be exempted from the payment of levy.
5. That the cattle belonging to the tribes should be allowed to graze in the forests, reserved and vested, freely.
6. That 50 per cent of the vacancies for third and fourth grade employees in the Forest Department should be reserved for tribals.

7. That 50 per cent of the cultivable land in the Vested Forest land should be reserved for the tribals.
8. That the paddy lands available in the Reserved Forests should be given to the local tribes.
9. That minor irrigation should be introduced into the Wynad area, besides extension of electrification.
10. That the price of paddy levies should be increased from Rs. 63.00 to Rs. 100.00.
11. That the law courts should have no jurisdiction over the civil and criminal cases of the Adivasis. For enquiring into such cases, legal experts may be appointed.
12. That the Government should take appropriate action to protect the Adivasis from the clutches of usurious money-lenders.
13. That the misappropriation of valuable trees from the Chingeri tribal colony and their unauthorized felling by certain officials should be stopped and the culprits apprehended.
14. That the Adivasis should be exempted from the payment of the price for the purchase of *janmam* rights of the lands that they cultivate under the Kerala Land Reforms Act. All injunctions against the Adivasis should be vacated.
15. That all appointments by the Public Services Commission should be stopped and the vacancies be filled by the respective departments giving due representation to the tribal population in various regions.
16. As part of the Prime Minister's 20-Point Programme, the Government have enacted two important measures: (a) Abolition of Bonded Labour, and (b) Prevention and Restoration of Alienation of Tribal Land. The Samajam resolved that these laws should be implemented immediately.
17. That under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation more than 200 auto-rikshaws have been issued to harijans. The conference therefore resolved that the Adivasis should be given their due share under the Development Corporation Scheme.

18. That the Adivasis who are primitive cultivators and food-gatherers should be given training in animal husbandry and farming with special emphasis on improved techniques of cultivation.

General Observations

The activities of the Adivasi Sangham under the auspices of the State Jana Sangh, were tinged with an anti-Government attitude, though it was started as a purely economic organization. The members of the Sangham not only picketed Government offices, but were trained in the use of fire-arms under eminent leaders of the Jana Sangh.

The leadership of the Adivasi Sangham vests with the Kuruchians who are eager to perpetuate their own tribal heritage, rather than the interests of the tribes of Wynad as a whole. They instigated the members of the Sangham to fight against the onslaught of Christianity in Wynad and the intrusion of money-lenders and plainsmen. The Adivasi Sangham suspended its activities on account of the declaration of Emergency. The arrest of the leaders of the Sangham demoralized the rank and file of the organization.

The Girivarga Sangham was formed mainly to vocalize the dissatisfaction of the tribes against the policies of the Government and to start a land grab movement in Wynad. It had the support of CPI (M) and the Kareshaka Thozhilali Union, but the movement fizzled out on account of the infiltration of Naxalites.

It is interesting to point out here that the Adivasi Samajam led by the Indian National Congress is functioning today though not very actively. The Samajam has the blessings of some of the leaders of the Congress in the State, but it has not been able to make impact on the tribals of Wynad. The Samajam is dominated by the Mullakurumbans under the leadership of the local tribal MLA. It is true, though, that they have succeeded in getting most of their demands conceded on the economic front with the help of this MLA, some of the leaders of the Samajam claim that it is due to their activities that the Acts relating to the alienation of tribal land, bonded labour and exemption from payment of

levy have been passed by the State Government.

The leaders were convinced that the Samajam was not functioning actively mainly because of the paucity of funds and illiteracy among the tribal people, besides lack of politicization among them.

The declaration of Emergency helped some leaders of the communist-led Union and the Jana Sangh-led Sangham to find an excuse for dissociating themselves from their parent associations and to join the Adivasi Samajam.

Some leaders of the Samajam were well aware of the tribal development activities initiated by the State Government and the aims and objectives of the declaration of Emergency. Owing to the isolation of the hamlets coupled with the poverty and squalor in which the tribals are living in Wynad, the Samajam has not been able to organize its activities at the grassroots level.

TRIBAL MOVEMENTS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

P. Kamala Manohar Rao and D.L. Prasad Rao

ANDHRA PRADESH is the traditional home of thirty-three tribal groups which are notified as the Scheduled Tribes. Their population, according to the 1971 Census report, is 16,57,657. Out of these thirty-three tribal groups, thirty inhabit the forest-clad hill ranges and glens of the districts of Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Khammam, Adilabad, Mahaboobnagar and Kurnool.

The traditional habitat of the tribals of Andhra Pradesh lies in close proximity to the tribal areas of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra on the north-eastern borders of Andhra Pradesh. Unlike the strategic tribal areas of the north-eastern region of our country, the tribal areas of the Eastern ghats, the Godavari gorges and the Nallamalai Hills are generally peaceful areas as the tribals living in this region are generally docile and gullible. However, in spite of their meekness there have been several outbreaks of violence among the tribals of Andhra Pradesh as a result of incessant and ruthless exploitation and illegal exactions.

Revolts in Visakhapatnam District

The policy of isolation and indirect rule pursued by the British rulers with regard to the administration of the tribal areas led to a series of revolts. By the close of 1832, disturbances in the Zamindaris of Kasipuram, Payakaraopet

and Palakonda of the present day Srikakulam District and in the Parlakamidi Zamindari of Ganjam became so serious that George Russell, First Member of the Board of Revenue of the Madras Government, was sent as a special commissioner to investigate the causes of the disturbances and to suggest measures for putting down lawlessness in the hilly tract. On his advice, Act XXIV of 1839 was passed which placed seven-eighths of the District beyond the operation of ordinary law and instead it was administered directly by the Collector who was vested with extraordinary powers.

Even after this Act was implemented, further troubles or outbreaks (locally called *fituries*) took place in the Golconda Hills in 1845-48, 1857-58, 1879-80, 1886, and 1891; in Jeypore Zamindari in 1849-50 and 1855-56; among the Savaras of Gunupur in 1865 and 1874; and at Korravanivalasa in Saluru in 1900.

The effects of the 'indirect rule' through the expediency of the Scheduled District Act, enacted later, were far from encouraging. The Madras Government, in the statement of objects and reasons for enactment of 'The Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act 1917', stated that 'the gradual dispossession of cultivable lands to non-tribals was a major source of outbreaks' and hence the Government was taking measures to stop the transfer of land to non-tribals.

Rampa Rebellion in Godavari District

In the early part of the nineteenth century, the British Government entered into an agreement with the local ruling chief or Mansabdar, Ram Bhupatidev, and restored to him some villages as *mokhasas*. The Mansabdar leased these villages to various subordinate hill-chiefs or *muttadars* for fixed amounts. After the death of the Mansabdar, his successors began to exploit the tribes and introduced new *abkari* regulations, through which toddy trees were leased out to renters and the local tribals were not allowed to tap toddy even for domestic consumption. The toddy renters began to demand that the *muttadars* should pay them fees for the right to tap toddy. Toddy is the choicest drink of the tribal people and irrespective of age and sex they drink toddy from January to

June. The tribals subsist on toddy alone for days together without taking food. Further, the traders from the plains, taking advantage of the simplicity of the tribals used to advance petty loans of Rs. 5 and grab produce and cattle worth more than Rs. 100 as repayment. The hillmen thought that the only remedy for their grievances was to revolt under the leadership of Thamman-Dora, a Koya leader of Bhupatipalem, in March 1879. Thamman-Dora and his group killed police constables and attacked police stations. The disturbances were finally suppressed with the help of a large number of troops. As a consequence of this disturbance, the Mansabdar of Rampa was deposed and the British Government made settlements with individual *mustadars* directly.

Prof. Haimendorf, in his book on the Hill Reddis observed that:

the history of Rampa Rebellion is important in two respects: it shows firstly that aboriginals, even if inherently not of warlike character are capable of considerable efforts when driven to extremities, and secondly, that it is both inexpedient and dangerous to allow the control and exploitation of aboriginal populations to fall into the hands of unscrupulous outsiders, who although not directly responsible to Government, are backed by the authority of the police and the law courts.

Alluri Sitarama Raju's Uprising (1922-24)

Alluri Sitarama Raju was a Kshatriya youngman from the West Godavari District. He was a student of Yoga and Astrology. He gave up his studies at the age of eighteen and retreated into the forest in order to undertake a life of meditation and prayer. He ended up living like a hermit in one of the tribal villages, and thus came into direct contact with the tribes. The British administrators were demanding free labour from the tribals for the construction of roads in the forest areas. The tribals were not accustomed to hard labour, and the non-tribals were unwilling to work in malarial tracts. The petty officers began to insist on forced labour from the Koya and Konda Reddi, and force was also employed to make

the tribals construct the roads. The exactions of the unscrupulous road-builders were responsible for outbreaks in the tribal areas. It should be remembered that those were also the days of the Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi.

Alluri Sitaram Raju is said to have been greatly influenced by Indian national movement and Gandhi, and he asked the tribes to non-cooperate with the Britishers. While putting an end to the ruthless exploitation of outsiders in tribal areas, he resolved to revolt against the British with the help of tribals to further the freedom struggle. He resorted to guerilla warfare for two years and defeated the local police in many encounters, even capturing some police stations. The British Government retaliated by completely cutting off the Agency tracts. They encircled the area with police and troops and obstructed the flow of all supplies of goods and material into the Agency. The British officers intensified their raids on tribal hamlets and molested the women and destroyed the crops.

Witnessing the unpleasant consequences for the tribals of his activities, Alluri Sitarama Raju himself surrendered to the police at Koyyuru. He was shot dead and his body was buried at Krishnadevipet. Before the end of September 1924, nearly all his followers had been captured or shot dead.²

Gond Revolt of 1940

The Gond Revolt of 1940 occurred in Babijhari village of Acifabad taluk of Adilabad District. The leader of the revolt was Kumra Bhimu who exercised great influence over the Gond. The main grievances of the tribals were the influx of outsiders and land alienation. The implementation of the new forest conservancy laws by the forest officials had further aggravated the situation.

The plainsmen of influence had succeeded in challenging the validity of Gonds' *pattas* by bringing about changes in the revenue records. Thus, a great many villages were acquired by absentee landlords and the tribals were replaced by more progressive cultivators in the most fertile areas. The expansion of the reserve forest boundaries, prohibition of shifting

cultivation and the auction of minor forest produce to private traders shattered the economy of the tribes. Further, whenever plantation works were taken up, the Gonds were forced to do free labour (*Vetti*). The police afforded little protection against the encroachment of outsiders. In fact, they were always ready to punish the tribals for alleged offences. All this precipitated a confrontation with forest and police personnel.

The forest subordinate officials and police burnt down several settlements of the tribes, and in one encounter the leader of the Gonds, Bhimu, was shot dead. After the Babijhari incident the Gonds reached the nadir in their economic conditions. They were economically discontented and politically disturbed. To pacify the disturbed Gonds, the erstwhile Hyderabad Government took several ameliorative measures and promulgated various Regulations in order to protect the interests of the tribes besides initiating programmes for land assignment and education.³

The Naxalite Movement

The Naxalite revolt was centred mainly in Srikakulam District during 1968-70. Srikakulam District is the northern most district of Andhra Pradesh and borders on Orissa. Bhadrakiri Samithi is in the western part of the District, and was the centre of the tribal unrest which turned violent and spread to the whole district. The predominant tribes living in the Samithi area are the Jatapu Dora and Savara. The Konda Dora Pydi are in a minority and are scattered in different villages of area. Among these tribals, the Konda Dora occupy the highest rank in the tribal hierarchy while the Savara occupy the lowest rank and the Jatapu the middle position. Though the Konda Dora occupy the highest social status their influence is not very extensive except in some villages like Mondemkhallu where they are in majority. The Pydi are actually an untouchable caste but claim a tribal status due to their long residence in the hills; they also call themselves Vainiki. They are lower in rank than the Savara but are more advanced than the Konda Dora and Jatapu Dora. They are also a minority group.

The non-tribal component of this Samithi consists of such castes as Vysyas (business caste), Telaga (agricultural caste), Karanam (an Oriya caste of writers) and Sundi (toddy-tappers). All these can be lumped together under the term '*sahukars*' which implies money-lenders-cum-traders-cum-non-tribal landowners.⁴

In the context of the tribal-non-tribal relationship, all these tribal groups became victims of the unscrupulous practices of the former. Every non-tribal has a business interest in the Agency and uses the tribals as pawns in their trade. The most effective way by which they trap the tribals is by lending money. It is this single activity which has brought untold miseries to the tribals and is the root cause of the tension in the tribal land. The cash needs of the tribals are varied and range from the payment of *oli* or bride price to the expenditure involved in despatching a dead man's spirit from this world. All these events can neither be postponed nor cancelled. Every ceremonial occasion at the household level needs to be properly celebrated by offering toddy to at least the kinsmen and ritual kin.

The non-tribals are always ready to give loans to the tribals because if they advance money during the off-season they can get produce in return at harvest time. When giving loans, the *sahukars* impose various conditions like that the forest produce should be exclusively given to them either towards the repayment of the principal or the interest at the time of giving a loan. The tribals agree to all the conditions because of their pressing need. While advancing money, the *sahukars* assess the credit-worthiness of the tribals in terms of their ownership of wet land, dry land, and animals. Thus the tribals who are engaged only in *podu* cultivation are comparatively safe as they tend not to get into the clutches of the *sahukars*.

The money-lending transactions of the *sahukars* are normally along the following lines. When a landowning tribal takes a loan of Rs. 50 from the *sahukar*, he has to undertake to repay after the harvest at the rate of four measures of grain per rupee. In case he fails to give the grain as agreed, he must pay more in terms of one rupee per measure. The agricultural practices of the tribesmen are so backward that they never

get the optimum output from their land and eventually they are forced to surrender their land to the *sahukar* in payment of their debt.

The *sahukars* give not only cash loans but also 'help' the tribals with loans in kind like giving rice or paddy whenever a tribal is hard-pressed for grain. Again, this type of loan is also limited to the landowning tribals. When a landowning tribal approaches a *sahukar* for a loan of grain either for his own consumption or to celebrate a function the *sahukar* advances the grain at the rate of ten measures of grain as interest for every thirty measures he takes. If the tribal cultivator fails to repay the grain as agreed, he fixes a rate and forces the tribal to execute a promissory note for the whole amount.

Transactions of this nature have helped the *sahukars* to get control of the land of the tribals. Whenever a *sahukar* assumes control of the land of a tribal, he normally engages the tribesmen for its cultivation. The tribal debtors console themselves with the thought that even though they have lost their land they can still work on it. This way, the tribal also retains the privilege of taking loans from his 'master'. However, this new relationship is more detrimental to the freedom of the tribal because it reduces him to the status of a slave and he never really gets paid for his labour. Thus, many non-tribals who migrated to the area have been able to become landowners by adopting the above-mentioned practices. As a result most of the fertile lands in the Agency have passed into the hands of the *sahukars*. Tribal honesty and truthfulness stood in the way of rejecting the terms mentioned in the promissory note and thus the tribesmen had no other way than to part with their land to fulfil their obligations.

Marxist Ideology and Tribals

According to some, tribal societies thus provide the ideal conditions for the practical demonstration of the Marxist ideology. The concentration of the means of production in the hands of the wealthy and the advanced non-tribals and the unscrupulous methods they adopt to perpetuate their status, provide the basic raw material for the development of an agitation under

the aegis of the champions of the under-dogs.

Vempatapu Satyanarayana, alias Satyam, of the Telaga caste⁵ emerged as the leader of the tribals against the oppression of the *sahukars*. He was born at Balijipeta in Parvathipuram taluk, in Srikakulam District. As he lost his parents when he was very young, his maternal uncle, Vandrasi Narayana Swamy, a petty contractor of Gumma in Bhadravari Samithi, brought him up. He studied up to the 8th Standard in the Gummalaximipuram High School and then went to Parvathipuram for teacher's training. After his training, he got a job as an Assistant teacher at Nellimukkava and worked there for four years. Then he started his own school at Kondabaridi as a teacher-manager and became popular as Kondabaridi Master. In the beginning he used to go every day to Kondabaridi from Gumma, his maternal uncle's village. Before he finally settled down at Kondabaridi he eloped with a Jatapu girl of Biddika clan. Arika Sriramulu of Kondabaridi pressurized Satyam to settle down at Kondabaridi and had a house constructed for him by the villagers. This change of residence had an important effect on Satyam.

After his migration to Kondabaridi he came into contact with Palle Ramulu, another non-tribal teacher, who was by then a communist, working at Pedakarja village. Very often both of them used to discuss methods by which to thwart the exploitation perpetrated by the non-tribals. Finally they decided that they should propagate among the tribesmen the idea of opposing the exploiters or bourgeoisie. They impressed upon the tribals that the *sahukars* were charging exorbitant interest and that they manipulated the accounts. In this task, Adibhotla Kailasam, a Brahman by caste and a school teacher in this area, helped them to address meetings in different villages.

In these meetings, they stated their policy thus:

They should unite to fight against the land alienation by the tribals; to get the banjar lands distributed to the tribals; to get the debt relief provisions implemented, to press the Government to provide credit facilities and agricultural implements and animals for cultivation to tribals.

Agency produce should be purchased from the tribals at reasonable rates and also provide provisions to the tribesmen at low rates. *Vetti* or free service should be abolished in tribal areas. The farm labourers and other agricultural workers should be given higher wages by the landlords. The forest department should give more concessions to the tribals and allow them to take firewood and timber for the construction of houses. Above all the tribal area should be declared as a self-governing unit with tribal representatives.⁶

To fight against the oppression of the *sahukars* the communists had created Yuvajana Sanghams in every village. The members of the Sanghams provided protection to the tribals who sought their help against the evil designs of the *sahukars*. After these teacher-workers had established a base, the regional and local communist leaders frequently visited the area to address meetings propagating their ideals and impressing upon the tribals how best they could help them under the existing conditions of exploitation. It is interesting to note that the communists had taken advantage of the local tensions to popularize their ideology and thus win a sizable number to their side.

Panchayat Raj and Tribals

The devoted work of the communists and the popularization of the Marxist ideology led to the sharpening of differences between the tribals and non-tribals. The introduction of Panchayat Raj perpetuated the conflict and added a new dimension to it.

The first elections to the Bhadragiri Panchayat Samithi were treated by the rival communists and *sahukars*—as a trial of strength in terms of their hold over the area. The teacher-communist leaders felt that unless they actively participated in local politics and captured political power they would not be able to thwart the designs of the *sahukars*. Among the *sahukars*, the Vysyas constitute the largest number and they sensed that Satyam would create trouble for them if he got control of the Panchayat. The *sahukars* were led by a

commerce and law graduate, G.L. Murthy.

As anticipated by the *sahukars*, Satyam filed his nomination for the Uridi Panchayat. From there he planned to get membership of the Samithi and then contest for the presidency of the Samithi. Satyam's plans were thwarted by the *sahukars* who objected to his nomination on the grounds that he had not resigned from the post of teacher-manager at the time of filing his nomination. The objection was upheld by the Returning Officer and Satyam's nomination was declared invalid. This move had brightened the chances of the *sahukar's* group to capture power.

But Satyam did not allow them to get such an easy success in the elections. No doubt the invalidation of Satyam's nomination was a rude shock to the plans of the communists, but they tried to induct one of their sympathizers into the Samithi body as a co-opted member, and then wanted to make him a Presidential candidate. One D. John, a long standing resident of Elwinpeta and a former technician of the Roads and Buildings Department, was set up to contest for the co-opted membership of the Samithi. By now the differences between Satyam and Murthy had taken an ideological colouring and the latter was made to concede that he actually backed the Congress Party. The identification of Murthy as a Congressman had helped the communists to exploit the tribals politically. They began to propagate among the tribesmen that Murthy was not only a representative of the local exploiters, but that he also represented the Party which formed the oppressive Government which had its extensions in this area in the Police, Forest, and Revenue departments.

Besides Satyam, a bus owner of Parvathipuram and a former legislator also worked against Murthy in the Samithi elections because Murthy had opposed the attempts of the bus owner to run a bus from Parvathipuram to Gummalaximipuram. Murthy opposed him because he too had interests in the transport trade and owned some buses. It was alleged that the Parvathipuram bus owner had pumped a lot of money into the elections and joined hands with Satyam to defeat Murthy. However, Mr. John did not get elected as a co-opted member and this was another setback for Satyam. He next selected a tribal from the Jatapu Dora tribe, Biddika

Sriramulu of Gujjuvai village, and a communist sympathizer to contest against Murthy. With this strategy Satyam thought that they would definitely win the Presidentship. But contrary to their expectations, Murthy got 32 votes and Sriramulu got only 8 votes.

The results of the elections had belied the hopes of the communist leaders, and made them doubt their *locus standi* among the tribesmen. However, they reconciled themselves to the situation by alleging that the *sahukars'* candidate had spent considerable money and 'corrupted the electorate' to ensure his success. This victory gave a morale boost to the non-tribals and made them feel that they need not fear Satyam and his threats.

New Strategy to Hold Tribals

Fearing that the communists would lose their hold over the tribals and non-tribals, Satyam organized labour co-operatives in the villages where the Yuvajana Sanghams were working effectively. The organization of labour co-operatives was a master strategy to bring the landlords under their control and it pitted both the tribal and non-tribal landowners together against the landless tribals. Many landowners, even among the tribals, were displeased with him because he was threatening to loot their standing crops if they did not pay the wages fixed by the co-operative. When some landowners attempted to get labour from outside, tension mounted in the village and they finally dropped the move.

There is another version of the situation during those days. Whenever a landlord and the co-operative did not come to terms over wages, Satyam used to instruct the co-operative to cut the standing crop at the middle of the night and the spoils used to be shared equally by him and the tribals who participated in the action. Such extreme step used created a fear-complex in the minds of the other landowners. In some villages the *sahukars* began to organize themselves to take counteraction against Satyam's group, i.e., Yuvajana Sangham members. This resulted in the Mondemkhallu incident of 1963. The Yuvajana Sangham members who bore a grudge against some *sahukars* had ambushed and beaten them while

they were returning from Mondemkhallu shandy. For the first time Satyam and the communists were linked with a criminal assault and they were arrested and later released on bail.

Second Election to Samithi

By these acts Satyam strengthened his position among the tribals. The second elections to the Samithi were held in June 1964 and this time Satyam was careful right from the beginning. He resigned his teacher-manager post at Kondabaridi and settled at Mondemkhallu village and made that village the centre of his activities. With the help of the Yuvajana Sanghams he undertook hectic tours in the villages to canvass against the *sahukars* and their candidates. The *sahukars* too were cautious from the beginning and wherever possible they countered his strategy. For instance, when Satyam's party announced a *burrakutha* (a type of ballad), the *sahukars'* group announced a *bhajan*. While the former centres on a secular and revolutionary theme the latter focused on a sacred theme. When such clashes in programmes led to serious tension in the villages, the organizers of both the programmes used to come to an understanding and mutually cancel their recitals. The *bhajans* organized by the *sahukars* were also a part of their strategy to bring together all their men in the neighbourhood and thus to exhibit their strength to Satyam and his followers.

In the 1964 elections, Satyam contested from Uridi Panchayat and became its Sarpanch. Immediately he announced his candidature for Samithi presidentship and started electioneering. But some rapprochement seems to have taken place between Satyam and Murthy which resulted in a secret understanding between them to the effect that Satyam would act as President and Murthy would act as Vice-president during the first half of the tenure, and they would change their positions during the second half. For some time everyone in the Samithi area was happy over this accord and felt that a new era of friendship would be established in the tribal and non-tribal relationship.

Tribal Involvement in Power Politics

A Government order prohibiting non-tribals from contesting for presidentship in the Tribal Blocks was promulgated by the State Government before the elections and consequently the accord reached by Satyam and Murthy was nullified. The Government order introduced a new dimension in the power politics of the Communists and non-tribals (Congress) in the Agency. The order made the direct involvement of the tribals indispensable in the policy-making and decision-making units of the Government.

Under the changed conditions, each leader began to think of an alternative tribal candidate. Murthy had set up Thadangi Narasimhulu Naidu, a Jatapu Dora of Amity village, as his candidate while Satyam had again set up Biddika Sreeramulu of Gujjuvai as his candidate. Unlike the last elections, this time both the candidates were tribals and both belonged to the predominant tribe Jatapu. But the result of this election was not different from the earlier one, and Thadangi Naidu won the elections with a majority of twenty-three votes.

Violent Politics and Tribals

The result of this election put Satyam and his group completely out of gear. They realized that they could not teach a lesson to the *sahukars* through elections. Slowly, Satyam developed the strategy of threat and terror. The first incident of this strategy was the looting of a paddy lorry belonging to Konda Appalaswamy, a non-tribal, at Konda Baridi Junction. A complaint was made to the police by the owner and some paddy was seized from Satyam's followers. Satyam went underground and was absent from the meetings of the Samithi for three months and thus lost his membership.

A sidelight of the lootings organized by the leftists was that this weapon was made use of by non-tribal landlords also to wreak vengeance on each other. For example, in the year 1965 a Telaga and a Sundi organized the looting of the property stored by a Vysya casteman at Tenkasingi. This incident was given a communist overtone, but it was actually

organized and executed by non-tribal landlords. The tribesmen who participated in the looting were paid in kind for their services: The paddy stock was lifted in a lorry and sold in the plains. This incident acted as a morale booster to the tribals to independently organize the plundering of the *sahukars'* wealth.

This plundering spree became intolerable even to the tribesmen. In many cases these lootings were organized by Yuvajana Sanghams. When certain tribesmen objected to this activity, they were threatened with dire consequences. For fear of these Yuvajana Sanghams, many tribesmen had left their villages and settled in the plains with some relatives. However, as a result the tribals gradually became disenchanted with Satyam's policy. Some urged Satyam's followers not to disturb the peaceful life of the village and promised to donate cash or kind to the party if left alone. In villages like Udayapuram they refused to concede the demands of Satyam's followers and wanted to meet the challenge by organizing counter moves. To keep the people in the area always in tension and to rope more tribesmen into the movement, Satyam organised many rallies in the area.

Clash Between Sahukars' and Satyam's Party

By now the movement had polarized into a confrontation between the landlords and the landless. The communists organized a rally at village Mondemkhallu on 31 October 1967 where they were going to announce their next programme of action against the landlords. The *sahukar's* group too convened a meeting at Mondemkhallu on the same day, but the police did not give them permission on the grounds that they had not given advance notice about the meeting, while Satyam's group had. The *sahukars'* group wanted to stop the tribals of their group going to Mondemkhallu, and so they camped at a village called Levidi where the road to Mondemkhallu diverges from the main road.

While a group of about forty of Satyam's followers were going to Mondemkhallu in a procession through the village of Levidi, a person in the *sahukars'* group called someone known to him, and asked him not to go to the meeting and hear the

'trash'. But the processionist replied: 'I will go there. Who are you?'. Then the *sahukar*, turning towards his men, said, 'Beat the bastard'. His farm servants, who were also tribals, set upon the processionists. Immediately some persons in the procession ran to Mondemkhallu and informed the people on the dias as to what had happened at Levidi. The meeting was called off and about a thousand people rushed towards Levidi shouting slogans. While they were approaching Levidi the person who had attacked the processionist had gone into the village and brought out a gun and fired at the surging mob. A tribal was killed and the mob became panicky and retreated towards Mondemkhallu. In the meantime, a fresh wave of people from the meeting place joined the returning group and encouraged them to go forward and 'end' the exploitation of the *sahukars* by boldly facing their bullets'. They again started moving towards the *sahukars*, but this time in a violent and determined mood. The gun was fired again and another tribal was killed. The two persons killed in the firing were Kondagorri Mangula and Arika Koranna, both belonging to the Jatapu tribe.

After this incident, the tribal's faith in the commitment of the communists increased and the movement soon spread to new areas. Satyam and his followers became more desperate. Organized guerilla activities were conducted in the Agency from 1968 and the first encounter between Satyam's followers and the police took place on 4 March 1968 at Pedakarja village. Whenever any landlord refused to pay the proper wage, Satyam used to instruct his followers to cut the standing crop at night. Such incidents took place at Dandusura, Neelakantapuram and Boddaguda. By the beginning of 1968 the interior agency was under the control of Satyam and his followers. Many illegal occupations of tribal land by non-tribals were reversed by Satyam and his followers. At Boddaguda village some Kapus had illegally taken possession of twenty-three acres of land belonging to Savara tribals and Satyam got them evicted. The story is that the Kapus got hold of the land by advancing a loan of Rs. 23. The tribals were paying interest every year and although they paid more than the principal amount towards the interest, the Kapus refused to leave the land till they paid the

principal. The tribesmen were never able to pay the whole amount at a time.

Naxalism in Andhra Pradesh Plains

The first Naxalite action in Andhra Pradesh occurred in the plains area of Sompeta in August 1969. This action is popularly known as the Garudabhadra action. It was organized by Panchadi Krishnamurty, a post-graduate, and his wife Nirmala. It started with when a political demonstration was held in Garudabhadra. But the landlord's men attacked the demonstrators and when the news spread to other villages in the neighbourhood they joined the demonstrators against the landlord's men. This finally culminated in the forcible harvesting of the standing crop of the landlord. This gave inspiration to the agitators and they linked up with the Naxalabari movement by contacting the leaders of the movement. It seems Panchadi Krishnamurty met Charu Majumdar of West Bengal and sought his guidance and help after this incident. From then onwards, a series of incidents took place in the border areas of Andhra and Orissa. All the actions were engineered and executed by such leaders as Panchadi Krishnamurty, Tejeswara Rao, and Appala Suri. Many other educated young men from the interior of Andhra Pradesh joined them later on. Besides the Sompeta area, sporadic incidents were reported from nineteen places in 10 districts of Andhra Pradesh.

When the Government deployed the Central Reserve Police in large numbers in the Sompeta area and thus provided protection to the landlords, the 'action plans' of the Naxalites could not be successfully executed. The Naxalites organized many of their activities with the connivance of local sympathizers and with the help of persons who bore a grudge against the local wealthy men. But when the police reprisals on the local suspects became severe, the people did not come forward so freely to help them as before. Thus, the 'actions' of the Naxalites remained only as 'incidents' and 'criminal acts' rather than being a part of a revolution.

Infiltration of Naxalites into the Agency

The Naxalite movement, which had started in the plains, soon forced its way into the hills and the commendable work done by Satyam was made use of by the Naxalites. This infiltration did immense harm to the tribal movement that had been organized by the communists under the aegis of Satyam, Kailasam and others. Many reasons can be attributed for the Naxalites' move from the plains region of Srikakulam to the hills. When the police reprisals became severe in the plains the local people did not come forward to help the Naxalites as freely as they had done earlier. As many members of the Naxalite group were from the interior of Andhra Pradesh they could not easily assimilate with the local people of the Orissa border. The dialect of Srikakulam District and the Oriya language in use in the border area posed another problem for them. They could not freely converse and convince the local people about the new ideology. More important than this was the security aspect. The hill ranges in which the tribal agitation was already in existence offered the best alternative for them to shift their movement. The hill ranges provided a secluded place to enable them to establish a firm base beyond the easy reach of the police.

By September 1969, the Naxalites had seized the leadership of the Agency. When five surveyors went into the interior on official work they were 'arrested' by them and later on released with instructions not to enter into the 'Red Land' again. In the month of December in the same year another notable incident was reported very widely in the local press. It was the looting of two provisions shops at Mondemkhalu. The shops of Voona Kurmanadham and Voona Venkatasam were looted in the small hours of 27 December. About 150 people came to the village and when the 'action' was going on, no one in the village dared to come out of their houses. At the time of looting, Venkatesam's wife and child were in the house. The woman stealthily went to the police station through the backyard, but by the time the police came all the valuables and promissory notes had been looted. The provisions shop was also emptied. Later on, a Konda Dora, by name Endu, was arrested by the police for conniving with the looters.

The entry of the Naxalites into the Agency was marked by the beginning of a reign of terror and indiscriminate 'actions' against anyone who opposed them, tribals or non-tribals. Even Satyam's benefactors and well-wishers like Sundi Ramamurty of Doddikallu village who had helped Satyam in many ways, were also not spared. This clearly shows that the leadership in the hills had been completely seized from Sytyam and Kailasam by the 'immigrant Naxalite leaders', among whom there were many easy-going adventurers. These 'immigrant leaders' made a distinction between the tribal followers and plains followers of the ideology and considered the tribal followers as being inferior in rank and faith. True, the tribals could not understand the new ideology completely and failed to see any similarity in the movement organized by Satyam and that conducted by the new leaders. The economic justice which Satyam had assured in the beginning was no longer found in the Naxalite programme. The tribals also found no attraction in the Naxalite actions because they were not getting any 'immediate utility' from the 'actions'. They were more attracted to Satyam's 'actions' as they involved looting grain, cutting standing crops, etc. The Naxalites, on the other hand, directed their 'actions' against the 'annihilation of the class enemy' and the tribals did not relish the idea of 'indiscriminate killing' of people.

On 10 September 1970 both Satyam and Kailasam were killed in an encounter with the police on Bori hills near Kurupam. It seems the police got advance information about their programme. With the death of these devoted tribal leaders, the tribal movement collapsed and the Naxalite movement received a serious setback. So long as the movement was in the hands of Satyam the agitation had the sympathy of the tribesmen, but when terror was let loose by the Naxalites, the 'tribal cadre' lost the sympathy of the tribesmen. When the families of the 'tribal cadre' were starving in the villages, the villagers did not come forward to help them and the local Yuvajana Sanghams became defunct for fear of police action if they showed any sympathy. The tribesmen branded those working under the new leaders as working for 'personal gain' rather than for the tribal lot. By associating with the tribals, the Naxalites had benefited more than the tribesmen because

they could make use of the tribals and tribal land for a face-lift for their ideology, as a spring-board for their actions, and as a safe hideout for their movement.

Victimisation of Tribals

In the process of suppressing the movement, a heavy police force was deployed by the Government. The tribesmen were harassed frequently by the police, for information about the whereabouts of the Naxalites and about the local sympathizers. In the course of their combing operation, the people complained that the police had taken away all their goats and cocks. A number of tribesmen were killed in encounters and hundreds of them were arrested. A number of their villages were burnt down. The tribesmen complained that whenever the police suspected that they were loyal to the Naxalites, they used to punish them and even used to burn their villages so that the supply lines were permanently cut. On the other hand whenever the Naxalites suspected that any villagers opposed their activity they used to burn down their village in the process of 'eliminating the enemy'. The tribesmen were caught in the middle and were the worst sufferers.

When the Naxalite movement was at its height many *sahukars* had fled from the area leaving their properties. It was considered a 'victory' by the Naxalites and successful demonstration of their ideology. But after the movement was suppressed all the *sahukars* came back to the villages and they are now renewing their contacts with the tribesmen, and have started their business in the old form. The tribesmen too are going to the *sahukars* for 'help'. The land that was restored to the tribals by the Naxalites slowly went back to the former *sahukars* and the tribals have again gone back to being agricultural labourers, tenant cultivators and finally dependents on the forest for their food.

Notes

1. Furer-Haimendorf, C. Von, 'The Reddis of the Bison Hills : A study in Acculturations', in collaboration with Elizabeth Von Furer-Haimendorf, Macmillan & co. (1945).
2. Raghaviah, V., *Tribal Revolts*, Adimjati Sevak Sangh (1971).
3. Furer-Haimendorf, C. Von, 'Aboriginal Rebellions in the Deccan', *Man in India*, Rebellion Number, Vol 35, No. 4 (1945).
4. Except otherwise mentioned the term *Sahukar* stands for all the non-tribal, exploiters of the tribals in the Agency Tracts.
5. A caste of cultivators also known as Kapus.
6. A pamphlet published by the Srikakulam District Communist (Marxist) Committee.

SOCIO-POLITICAL TRENDS IN THE NICOBAR ISLANDS

T.N. Pandit

THE NICOBAR Islands are situated between 6° and 10° North latitude and 92° and 94° East longitude. They lie south of the Andman Islands and, in continuation with them, make an arc around the Burmese-Malaysian peninsula reaching almost up to the Indonesian Islands. The last and the largest island in the Nicobars is Great Nicobar which is barely 144 kilometres from Sumatra. Unlike the aborigines of the Andmans who are Negritos and lead a semi-nomadic life based on hunting and food-gathering, the Nicobarese are Mongoloid and live in settled villages where they rear pigs and raise coconut plantations. From present evidence they seem to be the oldest inhabitants of the Nicobars. The total area of the Nicobar Islands is 1953 sq. kms. There are about nineteen islands in the archipelago but only twelve are inhabited. The Nicobar archipelago was under either the effective or nominal political control of the Danish East India Company between 1756 and 1869 when it was merged with the then British territory of Andaman Islands. The administrative headquarters for the Islands was then shifted from Camorta to Car Nicobar (area 125 sq. kms.) the northernmost and the most populous of the Nicobar Islands. A penal settlement was also established at Camorta subsequently but it did not flourish and was dismantled in 1888. Whereas there are reports of the population of the central and the southern areas being decimated through the spread of

highly infectious diseases like small-pox, influenza, and poliomyelitis during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the northern islands seem to have been spared such suffering. But, on the whole and for various reasons, the Nicobarese have been able to withstand their contact with outsiders during the last hundred odd years as compared to the Negritos whose present population is barely 500. In fact, the Nicobarese population has been flourishing and has risen from 6,501 in 1901 to 17,874 in 1971.

Island Communities

It will not be correct to call the Nicobarese 'a tribe'; they are, in fact, twelve island communities that have shared a common basic culture and language and social and religious norms. And this feeling of basic unity persists to this day. However, being settled as they are in different islands, (from Car Nicobar in the north to Great Nicobar in the south) which are scattered over several hundred miles of sea, it was natural that each island community should have evolved along somewhat distinct lines over the centuries. Better communication and frequent contact would have led to the growth of their culture and ideas along fairly uniform lines and feelings of unity and oneness would have been more effectively sustained. However, the Nicobarese sought to meet the challenge of geography half-way. They evolved a relationship—social, religious and economic—of mutual dependence through a network of barter trade by means of periodic visits between the northern group and the central group and between the central group and the southern group. These trade relations were strengthened and sustained through a system of social obligations and ritual practices. The basic means of transport and communication has been the sturdy single-outrigger canoe rowed by youngmen on moonlit nights over the turbulent seas.

That was the traditional pattern of their relationship which is still followed, though in a somewhat attenuated manner. Accidents take place sometimes but there are proper explanations for them and they are accepted as the price for perpetuating inter-island contact and thereby the unity of a scattered society which believes itself to be one as per their own

conception of their history. But the institutional framework notwithstanding the logic and force of the ecological factors could not be ignored altogether. Based on observation over decades, it has been determined that the Nicobar Islands have been divided into sometimes three and sometimes six cultural zones. Each island has a dialect of its own, a different man-land ratio, and varying levels of contact with non-Nicobarese and hence a different degree of involvement in the world outside the archipelago. We shall revert to this point a little later.

Spread of Christianity

When contact with Europeans, Indians and other outsiders started and showed signs of becoming a permanent and intimate factor it appears that an awareness developed among them of a threat to their belief systems and way of life. From north to south there was resistance to the new-fangled ideas regarding religion introduced by Christian missionaries from far away lands. Many missionaries were murdered. Though this was controlled by the British, the solid core of resistance continued and mutual consultations on the new threat continued through the traditional channels. Overall life, however, continued placidly enough until the Japanese occupation of the Islands during 1942-45. This was a bitter period of repression and forced labour and even torture and killings. John Richardson then a young Nicobari missionary, provided courageous leadership to his community. As a result, at the end of the war, he was able to achieve mass conversions to Christianity in Car Nicobar, the most populous of the Nicobar Islands. The 1971 Census shows that almost three-fourths (13,504) of the total Nicobarese population of this island (area 125 sq. kms. only) is Christian. All told about 85 per cent of the Nicobarese have been converted to this faith but its impact is less in the central and southern Islands. Even Chowra—an island that is close to Car Nicobar and with which the traditional ties are quite strong—is opposed to Christianity. Christianity has been superimposed on the traditional tribal religious belief system with varying degrees of success from island to island and it is now a factor for some conflict within the wider

society. A few Nicobarese have also been converted to Islam and Hinduism but their numbers are almost negligible.

John Richardson, who died recently as a retired Bishop, was Nationally honoured with the awards of Padma Shri (1975) and Padma Bhushan (1975). He was a Nominated Member of the first national Parliament to represent the Bay Island. The recognition given to him by the Government after 1947 helped him to increase his influence and prestige among his own people and indirectly helped the quicker spread of Christianity in the Nicobars. Bishop Richardson perpetuated his leadership by patronizing the village community leaders, who are known as Captains, and an islandwide chain of young educated Nicobarese missionary workers. His approach has been to involve most of the educated islanders in missionary work. Consciously or unconsciously, this move has so far protected the traditional leadership from any possible challenges from the younger educated youth. Those young islanders who preferred to take up Government jobs also served the mission and the Bishop from their position of advantage.

The percentage of literary in the Nicobars is eighteen per cent according to the 1971 census and this must have increased since then. The trend towards higher education is increasing with better facilities and opportunities being provided by the Government. This will in due course give rise to an educated elite that would in time become the political elite and supplant the traditional leadership.

However, Bishop Richardson's image as a father figure, his tremendous contribution to the growth of the Nicobari consciousness, the recognition he received both from the Government and the Church (he was made a Bishop in 1950) and the feeling of the people in general are factors that added up to strengthen both his impregnable position and the structure of leadership that he had consciously and tenaciously built up over the decades. It was he who gave the Nicobarese language the Roman script, wrote a primer of the language and translated the Bible into the Nicobarese language (Car Nicobar dialect). To-day the Port Blair station of All India Radio regularly broadcasts programmes in the Nicobarese language along with other national languages of the country. As long as the Bishop was alive, his leadership was not

seriously challenged but, now that he is no more, things are likely to take a different turn.

Contact with Mainlanders

After 1947, the Nicobarese have come into increasingly closer contact with the mainland Indians as thousands of them have been shouldering various kinds of jobs in the Nicobars as office workers, teachers, doctors, administrators, anthropologists, labourers or as permanent settlers such as in Great Nicobar and Katchall.

At the time of the 1971 Census, about 4,000 such people were residing in the Nicobars. Sometimes large tracts of land have been requisitioned for Government projects or for housing colonies. The Nicobarese are a gentle and reserved people by temperament but there has apparently been an undercurrent of resentment over all these developments. They do not like to be ordered about by anybody or forced to do anything or sell or buy anything, unless they themselves wish to do so. Resentment has also been built up over romantic affairs involving young Nicobarese girls or women, or the insensitivity of some of the outsiders to their customs, or the felt lack of consideration for the true interest of the islanders.

Apart from the Government, another agency of vital importance which has been working in the Islands since the mid-forties has been a firm of rich private traders called Jadwets (Bohra Muslims from Gujarat). Over the decades, this private firm has built, with concessions obtained officially, a lucrative monopoly trade in the local commodities of coconut and arecanut (which are exported to the mainland and elsewhere) and the marketing of a variety of consumer goods locally through a chain of stores called 'canteens' which they opened in various islands. The proprietors have been able to establish a very good rapport with the Nicobari leadership and the people at large and has been able to gain their confidence and trust. This was done mainly through the power of money and some clever techniques of image building among a people who can understand straight and simple reasoning e.g., Government ships will always demand money for passage but the trader's ships allow one to travel free; hence the

traders are a better and more friendly people.

This firm has also been generously donating money to the Church and has been paying regular allowances to some important tribal leaders, including the Bishop and Rani Lakshmi of Nancowry (Central Nicobars) under some pretext or the other. Some Nicobarese have also been employed in their shops in small jobs over the years. Having put the leadership under obligation, the Jadwets had no difficulty in passing themselves off as the best and true friends of the Nicobarese, far more reliable, useful and trustworthy than the rule-conscious and impersonal agencies of the Government. The Jadwets built up this image without having to take any obvious adverse measures to counter the influence of the Government (which would have made their work more difficult). In fact, they have always been generally courteous to even junior Government employees and have been taking good care of the more important ones. The whole game was played subtly and without much ado. Any overt hostile postures were not required as the Government, by its own manner and style of functioning, invited plenty of adverse comments. Once I posed a question to a Nicobari college student about the possible exploitation of his people by the Jadwets. He agreed with the suggestion but said that they had also been useful and helped them progress from a primitive state. Of course it must be said to the credit of the Jadwets that they have played a pioneering and important role in opening up the Nicobar Islands—providing their own boats, guest house facilities and daily necessities even to Government servants who were sent to these far-off places on official work.

Initial missionary attempts (prior to 1945) for the propagation of Christianity were actively backed by the then British administration in the Islands. So, the earliest Nicobari missionaries like John Richardson, were treated well, and were even given official posts. These earlier friendships and loyalties were not altogether given up by the Nicobarese during the years following independence. An insignificant few were reported to have even entertained some vague notions of Nicobar Islands continuing as a part of the British Empire. Of course, that was not to be and could not be. But the reports, if true, are of some academic interest. The planes of the British

Royal Air Force continued to have refuelling facilities at Car Nicobar for many years after 1947, enabling the local people to maintain some contact with the British. The bonds of Christianity and its quick spread in Car Nicobar played some part in shaping their favourable attitude towards the British. The arguments, again, were very simple and so were the notions.

However, there is not the least evidence of any such attitude existing today even among the insignificant few. But all the same there seems to be, alongside their appreciation for the good work done, a slight undercurrent of resentment against the mainland Indians generally, giving a sharper edge to a feeling of 'we' (in group) and 'them' (out group). Sometimes one hears even simple-minded Nicobarese questioning as to why their life was being disturbed in various ways: by building various installations; sending out Nicobarese (from Car Nicobar to Little Andaman) for settlement and allowing outsiders to settle in their Islands (Katchal and Great Nicobar); 'Indians' wanting to marry or being friendly with their girls; or presents being demanded by petty Government officials in return for official services. However, these are but irritations of everyday life resulting from the process of adjustment to changing conditions and not indications of any political movement or organization for any purpose whatsoever.

Differential Development

Apart from all this there are other factors operating in the present socio-political situation in the Nicobars. Car Nicobar is the most advanced and progressive of the Islands and the southern group (Great Nicobar apart) is the most backward and neglected. In Great Nicobar too, the Government has concentrated mainly on the development of the ex-service-men's settlement at Campbell Bay and has paid very little attention to the Nicobarese and the Shompen (an interior Nicobarese tribe) of the Island. Besides the distribution of the Nicobarese population is very uneven among the twelve islands. More than 75 per cent of them live in Car Nicobar (area 125 sq. kms.) and the remaining 25 per cent are distributed over the other eleven islands. Great Nicobar, the largest

Island in the group (area 1,030 sq. kms.), can boast of only a few hundred Nicobarese and Shompen.

Katchal and Great Nicobar have been used for the settlement of Ceylonese expatriates on a rubber plantation and mainland Indians (ex-servicemen) from Panjab, Maharashtra and Kerala. Communications and other welfare facilities exist to a much larger degree in Car Nicobar followed by Nancowry than in the southern islands. Some islanders are, in fact, very poorly served. There is also talk of creating a free part in Great Nicobar. If it comes through, that would change the face of their island altogether.

Thanks to the efforts of the private traders, the increased contact with the outsiders and the welfare measures of the Government, the Nicobarese economy is no longer a self-sufficient one as they have got used to numerous consumer goods that only a market economy can supply. Through the large-scale sale of their products to the trader, many Nicobarese (especially the leaders) have acquired considerable wealth in cash, creating economic imbalances among individual families; though the kind of poverty that we are familiar with in the mainland in tribal, rural or urban areas is virtually unknown here. Also, the wealthy here do not make any vulgar display of their wealth. But things are likely to change fairly soon. In his last years, the Bishop was heard criticizing the habits and thinking of the educated youngsters who do not follow in the elders' footsteps. His own son was turned out of a good Bangalore School for persistent 'unbecoming behaviour'. It appears that unknown to his father, he was being supplied with large sums of money from some source enabling him, a school boy, to live an extravagant life which the school could not tolerate. He is now living a quiet and ordinary life in Car Nicobar.

Conclusion

To sum up the situation, the Nicobar society seems to be at the threshold of remarkable changes because of both the socio-political forces at play within the society and the agents of change working from without (i.e., mainly the Government). Under the Government's pressure and persuasion, the Jadwets

are about to wind up their monopoly trading interests and their vital presence in the Nicobars. But it will take many years for their influence to be reduced to insignificance as they are going to remain at Port Blair engaged in other kinds of business. They have, for instance, been influencing the voting pattern in the Nicobars in the past and are likely to do so for some years yet. Their trading activities are being taken over completely by tribal co-operative societies but the latter's management will remain for some time in the hands of the trusted men of the Jadwets, including their family members.

However, the process of change is likely to throw up new forces which may be diverted into constructive channels through the wise and imaginative handling of the situation by the Government and political parties. Also, further development programmes must take due note of the built-in imbalances in the demographic and the socio-economic situation in the various islands and seek to correct them. Moreover, the desire for solidarity and progress within the society and the minor development schemes, both present or future need to be kept within reasonable bounds and in a healthy balance.

The Nicobarese society is indeed at the crossroads and its further direction will depend on its present and future leadership and the official handling of and approach to the planned development of this vitally significant and important region, which should be wise and imaginative.

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THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

J.C. Das and R.S. Negi

DURING the last few years or so, the Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh has attracted considerable attention because of a local movement, known as the 'Chipko Andolan' (literally meaning 'the movement to hug or embrace') which has been highlighted by the press from time to time. The Chipko movement is a unique one of its kind, and has a long historical background of the people's struggle for forest rights. There were movements in Kumaun and Garhwal which concerned the forests during the twenties which actually became a part of the freedom movement. The people of the Rawain area of Tehri rose in rebellion to protect their forest rights which culminated in military firing on 30 May 1930 at Tiladi. These movements, which took place from time to time in the Uttarakhand area, demonstrated the extent of the concern of the local people for their forests.

The latest movement, which has become famous as the 'Chipko movement', was born in March 1973 near Gopeshwar in Chamoli District. From its inception, the movement has been inspired by the Gandhian tenet of non-violence. It was initially started in certain pockets of Garhwal, led by the Sarvodaya workers of the region, and within a short time gained such momentum that it swept over the entire Uttarakhand region. The area it covers includes the Chamoli, Uttarakashi and Tehri districts of Garhwal, but our discussion will be confined to the Chamoli District only, the place of origin

of the movement, with special reference to the participation of the Bhotiya tribe in this movement, even though this is only marginal compared to the totality of the movement.

The Origin of the Chipko Movement

The origin and subsequent rapid spread of the Chipko movement in Chamoli and other districts of Utrakhand indicates the extent of the inhabitants' concern for their forests. The life pattern and subsistence economy of these Himalayan districts is intimately interwoven with its ecological setting. The intelligent exploitation of the natural resources, among which the forest is the main one, learnt through generations of experience has sustained the population of these areas. Man's relation with his physical environment is so intimate and delicately balanced that a slight disturbance is bound to disrupt that balance and the way of life itself.

The District of Chamoli has a total area of 9,12,000 hectares out of which 4,96,000 hectares are covered by forests. Apart from being a rich source of fine quality timber, the forests in these regions yield various types of medicinal herbs and shelter a variety of wild life. But the increasing control of the state over the forests, the development of a better communications network which has penetrated deep into the District, and steady growth of the timber-based industry in the country, has led to large-scale and indiscriminate deforestation in the area which ultimately had a negative impact on the life of the local people. To understand this impact better, let us trace the link between the forest and the life-pattern of people.

The subsistence economy of the area is based primarily on agriculture together with raising of animals like cattle and buffaloes by the people living in the middle and lower altitudes and sheep and goat among the Bhotiyas who inhabit the higher valleys. The society thus is predominantly agrarian and pastoral (at least in non-Bhotiya societies). The subsistence activities of the area are directly or indirectly linked with forest resources. Many of the agricultural implements are wooden (e.g. *jua* or yoke which is constructed out of ash wood, which is said to be lighter and more durable and hence easily borne

by the small-sized hill bullocks). Grass and other fodder for domesticated animals are procured from the forests. Besides, a major portion of the cultivable land in the District lacks irrigation facilities and hence for increasing the productive capacity of the soil, the people have to depend largely on compost manures instead of chemical fertilizers. Therefore, it is 'in the interest of agriculture that we domesticate cattle which give us cowdung; the cowdung mixed with the leaves and grass collected by our women from the forests provides us the compost manures for our fields, as one villager commented. This amply explains the direct relationship of the forest with agriculture. The people also rely on forest for many other daily requirements. The fuel for cooking comes from the forest; and for the construction of a new house or the repair of an old one, timber is procured from the forest and so on. Apart from these, village cottage industries like the production of articles made of bamboo or ringal, the making of rope from the bark of certain trees, wooden handles for iron implements, etc., depend heavily on the resources of the forest. The people also harvest forest produce like wild fruit, yarns and roots, medicinal herbs, and honey. Thus, the forest supports vitally both the agricultural and domestic necessities of life to such an extent that man and nature have entered into a metaphysical relationship. This relationship has been expressed during the Chipko movement by the women folk in referring to the forest as *maika* (or father's home).

The people's traditional rights over the forests were accepted during British days and that understanding still continues. But during this long period, the population has grown and several new villages have come into existence with the result that the pressure on the forests has grown. But the villagers complained that their traditional rights over the use of the forests has not increased proportionately. More so, some villages which came into existence after the settlement of forest rights on the villagers by the colonial government, have no forest of their own which causes perpetual trouble and hardship to them and their women so far as procuring of grass, leaves, fuel or timber for house construction is concerned. This created a strong feeling of grievance among the 'have nots' which gradually spread to the 'haves' who

helplessly watched the rapid depletion of the forests because of the large-scale felling of trees by forest contractors from outside and were unnerved by the prospect of the dark future ahead of them.

The other factor which contributed to the origin of the Chipko movement is equally important. Starting soon after the 1962 Indo-Chinese conflict, the Border Roads Organisation rapidly completed a vast network of roads in the border areas, including Chamoli, which to the common hill folk appeared to be the first step in the modernization and industrialization of the region which would ultimately eradicate their century-old poverty and hardship. Therefore, this development was warmly welcome and an air of enthusiasm prevailed throughout the region. Although it is a fact that all around development did take place in different spheres after these roads were built, the people soon discovered that the contractors were also taking advantage of these roads and were entering previously inaccessible areas with the sole intentions of exploiting the rich timber wealth. As a result, a vast tract of land was rapidly exposed, shorn of its lush forest.

Worst of all there were increasing instances of illicit felling that these contractors reportedly carried as per the villagers' complaint. For example, in 1967-68 one of the contractors managed to secure a contract for cutting thousands of oak, ash and walnut trees in the Mandal area of Chamoli District and the villagers reportedly saw him felling even unmarked trees. More so, the entire labour force employed by the contractor for the project was brought either from Himachal or from Nepal and the local people gained no benefit whatsoever from the whole operation. 'But why it should happen? The forest is ours, we protected it through generations, our many hopes were pinned on it, but at the end we saw how it was being ruthlessly cut down. We were silent spectators to this process which tragically contributed nothing to our economy. All our hopes seemed to be mere fantasy', bitterly remarked one villager of Mandal at Gopeshwar. Thus, the exploitation of the forest resources made no contribution to these poverty-ridden hill peoples' economy, which aggravated their grievances still further.

After the improvement in communications, some progressive employers of the Himalayan region set up small-scale industries based on forest products with an aim to provide employment to the local people and thereby to contribute to the local economy. Thus resin and turpentine village industry units were set up at Gopeshwar (Chamoli District) and Uttarkashi (Uttarkashi District). But they were reported to have been getting stepmotherly treatment from the Forest Department, as the raw resin was supplied to these small industries on a higher rate (of Rs. 50 to Rs. 83 per quintal) than to a big company based in Barielly, as a result of which these local units sustained heavy losses and could not compete with the big factory. The local people were aware of the discrimination and felt that they were being exploited. The general feeling of being deprived reached a point of no return, when the Dasouli Gram Swarajya Sangh, Gopeshwar, a small-scale local industrial corporation, was not permitted by the Forest Department to cut ash trees which they required to construct yokes for the use of village cultivators. Instead, a curious suggestion was made by the Forest Department: 'Ash wood is not available, you should make yokes from chir (pine) timber.' This angered the entire population and a general determination to act against this kind of injustice fast took shape, because the people were aware that while they were being denied their legitimate traditional right, the Forest Department had allowed a sports goods manufacturing company of Allahabad to fell ash trees. So they decided to act.

Apart from all these economic reasons, there were certain other ecological factors of crucial importance which contributed to the growth of this movement. The huge deforestation in the hilly region has brought more and more misery upon the people. The ecological balance was disturbed by the unscientific and reckless practices adopted by forest contractors, e.g., pulling out the roots of trees and dragging the cut logs which removed the loose top soil of the hill slopes. In addition, soil erosion thus suddenly became a huge problem as well. The large-scale deforestation and soil erosion resulted in serious floods. In 1970, the whole of Belakuchi village was washed away by the Alakananda flood. Several buses, loaded with pilgrims and tourists, were also washed away by

the flood waters. The damage caused by the flood was heightened by the fact that the logs, sleepers, and felled trees were carried by the flood waters with a tremendous force resulting in the destruction of five major bridges, thirteen suspension bridges, two low bridges, in addition to destruction of crops, property, and cattle worth millions.

The Alaknanda tragedy made a deep impression on the minds of the hill folk and it provided yet another illustration of the vital role that the forests played in their lives. They observed the climatic changes slowly taking place and the gradual decrease in the productivity of the soil as a result of deforestation. They also realised that the streams and rivulets, which provide them with irrigation water, were slowly drying up just after the monsoons only as a result of the large-scale felling of 'economically useless' oak trees in the region. The oak forests hold water for a long time and releases it very slowly and the destruction of these forests led to drying up of the erstwhile perennial streams. Besides, the commercially useless oaks were being replaced by pines which, though they have commercial value, do not retain water. The oak leaves which were used to feed the cattle and to manufacture compost manure were replaced by the useless pine needles. This unthoughtful and shortsighted policy was responsible for the resulting ecological imbalance. The Prime Minister has rightly said that: 'Forestry practices, designed to squeeze the last rupee out of our jungles, must be radically reoriented. . . . The narrow outlook of the accountant must give way to a wider vision of the recreational, educational and ecological value. . .'

The Movement, its Leadership and Participation of the Bhotiya

Discontent thus accumulated and spread throughout the length and breadth of the District as the people gradually realized the role of the forests, in keeping the ecological balance undisturbed. The Forest Department's decision of not permitting the Dasauli Gram Swarajya Sangh to cut ash trees for the making of yokes and simultaneously allowing the sports goods company to cut them fanned the fire.

The Sarvodaya worker, Sri Chandi Prasad Bhatt, who is a

popular figure in the District because of his untiring efforts to eradicate many social evils, decided to galvanise the inhabitants. The Gram Pradhans and other important figures of the area held a meeting to decide on a course of action to save the forests. Lengthy discussions were held regarding the strategies to be adopted.

The Sarvodaya workers and the people wanted to use peaceful means to ventilate their grievance. Some radicals wanted the trees to be burnt, while still others wanted to fight all those who tried to cut trees. But the Sarvodaya workers, who had always been inspired by the Gandhian ideal of non-violence, did not approve those suggestions. As Chandi Prasad Bhatt said 'our aim is not to destroy but to save and so we decided to cling (*chipko*) to those trees marked for felling.' Thus the radicals were outvoted and the Chipko movement took shape.

It was at village Mandal, in the last week of April 1973, that the Chipko agitators went into action for the first time. When the contractor's men reached the spot to cut the trees allotted by the State Forest Department, they found the agitators hugging the trees. The contractor's men retreated and the Chipko movement chalked up its first victory. This success worked like magic and the hill people were now determined to save their forests by following the example set by the Mandal villagers. Protest demonstrations were organized at several places in the district and they demanded a change in the forest policy of the Government.

Meanwhile, the contractor who had been unable to cut the ash trees from the Mandal forest, surfaced again with his labourers in the Rampur Phata area of Ukhimath tehsil where he managed to get an allotment from the Forest Department for cutting ash trees. The local people conveyed the news to the Sarvodaya leaders at Gopeshwar who promptly reached the area and organized a *chipko* campaign with the help of the local Pradhans and the villagers and again succeeded in foiling the contractor.

The third incident took place in Reni village, beyond Joshimath which can be regarded as the climax of the struggle. So far the incidents had take place in non-Bhotiya areas although the Chipko leaders claimed that every ethnic/

religious group of the District supported the movement. Their claim indeed proved correct with the active entry of the tribal Bhotiya.

Reni is situated approximately twenty-two kilometres from the sub-divisional headquarters of Joshimath and is inhabited by the Bhotiyas. The entire District had been aroused by the message of the Chipko movement. It was during this period that the Forest Department again auctioned a large number of trees (reported to number 2,500) in the Reni forest. As soon as the villagers learnt this, it was conveyed to the tribal Bhotiya leaders who rushed to Gopeshwar to discuss the situation with the Sarvodaya workers who were leading the movement. But the contractor was clever enough to choose an opportune time and arrived in the village with his men in March 1974 when the males of the village were away in Chamoli on some important business. The women of the village were momentarily perplexed, but Smt. Gora Devi, an elderly Bhotiya lady aged 50 and President of the village Mahila Mangal Dal, decided to resist and took the lead. 'It was not a question of planned organization of the women for the movement, rather it happened spontaneously. 'Our men were out of the village and so we had to come forward and protect our trees. We have no quarrel with anybody but only be wanted to make the people understand that our existence is tied with the forests', narrated the docile Gora Devi. It was Gora Devi and the Bhotiya women of Reni who saved the trees by blocking the only way leading to the forest and by standing firm despite all sorts of threats made by the contractor and the officials accompanying him. "The forest is like our mother's home, we will protect it at the cost of our lives' sang the women of Reni village, and the contractor was finally forced to leave empty handed. The news of the success of the Reni women spread far and wide in the Garhwal hills, and big demonstrations were held in support of the following demands:

1. The present contract system of forest exploitation which invites hardship for the local population should be replaced by forest labourers' co-operative societies as per the recommendation of the Planning Commission.

2. The raw material obtained from the forests should not be exported and small-scale industries based on them should be established for the forest dwellers who should also be provided with capital and technical assistance to run some of them.
3. New forest settlement in the district should be initiated.
4. Forest dwellers should be allowed to participate in the management and administration of the forests.

Although the movement started at a local level being motivated by local economic interests, the Chipko leaders were successful in emphasising its national significance by highlighting the ecological hazards which are bound to follow, and which would threaten not only the life of the hills but also of the plains of India. They pointed out that the Alaknanda floods of 1970 not only affected the hills but also the plains. The silt carried by the flood waters was so enormous that the ten-kilometre long Upper Ganga Canal became blocked. The desilting operations took a lot of time and cost a great deal. It also affected the farm output of western Uttar Pradesh because of the resultant lack of irrigation facilities.

An interesting billboard in Gopeshwar, set up by the Chipko leaders states '... forests are not merely for beauty; our entire food systems are dependent on them. If it is really necessary to cut one tree, be sure that you are planting three saplings to make up the damage.' This vividly conveys the UP hill dwellers sentiment concerning the forests which the Chipko movement expressed in terms of action. The sole aim of the Chipko movement was accurately summarized by its leader, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, in a recent interview with a journalist. "Saving the trees is only the first step in the Chipko movement. Saving ourselves is the real goal. Our future is tied up with them."

Conclusion

The active agitational phase of the movement is now over because the Government has accepted various demands in the shape of a renewed forest utilization policy. While in the pre-movement days the Forest Department used to lease out

large tracts of forest for cutting trees which used to be availed of only by rich contractors from outside, this practice has now been stopped. At present only small areas are leased out with the aim of protecting the interests of the local people who can avail of this opportunity even with their limited economic resources. After the movement, some modifications have been made in the management of the District Forest Department. In addition to two Divisional Forest Officers, a third post has been created. This new post is that of Divisional Forest Officer (Soil Conservation) who is entrusted with the work of soil conservation in order to check the ecological hazards that may follow after deforestation. These positive and timely steps taken up by the Government not only saved the forests but also helped in keeping the ecological balance intact.

Despite these developments, the spirit of the movement remains unchanged. It is actually very active as can be observed from a recent event when, according to Shri Bhatt, some 11,000 saplings were planted in the Niti/Mana villages at the initiative of the movement's leaders. Out of this number, only 5,000 were planted with the Government's assistance while the remaining 6,000 were planted by the people themselves. Initially the movement was directed against the leasing out of forests to contractors by the Forest Department, which led to indiscriminate felling. But now the movement has logically brought within its scope the education of the local people, the natural and traditional forest users, so that they can utilize and exploit the forest resources in a more intelligent, scientific and meaningful manner so that the delicate balance between man and nature is not lost beyond redemption.

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The Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) conducted a survey of ongoing tribal movements in different parts of the country in 1976 and organised a Seminar in September that year to evaluate its findings. Among those who presented papers were anthropologists and other scholars including historians, sociologists, political scientists and administrators. Besides there were tribal scholars who provided the insiders' views and also social workers. All these papers were divided into two volumes: The first volume contains twenty-four papers on the north-east and the second volume has twenty-five papers on movements elsewhere in the country.

The ASI survey identified movements seeking political autonomy and formation of a state, agrarian and forest-based movements, socio-religious movements and movements based on script and language. The best organised of the movements of the first type is the Jharkhand Movement which is discussed in terms of its historical development, ideology, structure and regional dimensions. While few agrarian struggles were reported from the northern and southern parts of India, as many as five agrarian and forest-based struggles, which are closely linked, were reported from central India. However, it was socio-cultural movements that held sway in this area. Five Bhagat type movements were reported, which highlighted some aspects of the Sanskritisation processes. More important was the set of four cultural movements based on script, language and religion seeking to assert and define tribal identity. Down south and in the islands, the tribes are too primitive, isolated and numerically small to organise movements on their own; however incipient processes of political mobilisation were found at work among some of them.

K.S. Singh, a senior member of the Indian Administrative Service spent many years serving among and studying backward communities in central India. He held several important assignments including the directorship of Anthropological Survey of India. Author of the well known work *Birsa Munda and His Movement in Chotanagpur* he edited a large number of books on Indian tribes.

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