



Historical background of Tribal Jharkhand

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The large Jharkhand spread over in the state of Bihar, Bengal, MP and Orissa consisted of 26 Districts. Status of Jharkhand is very old and even before the period of Magadh Empire. During Mughal Empire period the Jharkhand area was known as Kukhara area. In 1765 East India Company penetrated into the hilly and forested region, bordering Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, there were several popular revolts. The tribal revolts, like the Kol Rebellion, the Santhal Rebellion or the Birsa Movement, are well known. Other revolts like the Chuar Rebellion or Ganga Narain Rebellion the less discussed ones were participated mostly by the non-tribals, but were comparable in magnitude to the tribal revolts. There was one feature common to all these revolts they were all directed specifically against outsiders. Over this area the exploiters were almost, invariably outsiders. The correspondence was so vivid that the tribal word *diku* came to mean the 'exploiter' and the second one being the derivative meaning. Tribals consider the Birsa Munda revolt against the British Empire in early 1900 by as the most important movement of Chotanagpur and Santhal Paragana for the freedom of the region. Since the British times, the tribal areas of Jharkhand, which in itself was part of the Bengal Presidency in 1911, Bihar (along with Orissa) was separated from the presidency of Bengal and was made a separate province in 1936. The genesis of the demand of a separate state of Jharkhand can be traced to early 1900s when Jaipal Singh, the Oxford educated hockey Captain of the 1928 Olympics mooted the idea of a separate state consisting of the Southern districts of Bihar.

However, the first attempt of organized movement by all the tribal communities were made in the year 1915 by an organization known as " Chotanagpur Development Society ". Later, in 1940, Jaipal Singh led an important movement for the formation of separate Jharkhand state by forming an organization known as " Adibasi Mahasabha ". In 1950 this organization was named as Jharkhand party and in the election of 1952 and 1957 this party proved to be main opposition party of south Bihar. Subsequently, Shri Jaipal Singh Joined as minister in congress cabinet in the year 1963 and as a result his movement for the separate Jharkhand state fizzled out.

Second phase of Jharkhand movement started in the year 1978 led by Shri Shibu Soren. In the beginning of 1980 organizations namely Jharkhand coordination committee and Jharkhand students union were formed. The movement further deepened which resulted in the acceptance by the state govt. as Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council (JAAC) in 1990.

Jharkhand party got divided, sub divided and many splintered groups and organizations in the name of Jharkhand were formed. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) was the main party leading the movement for separate Jharkhand state. The movement for separate Jharkhand State gradually got momentum and almost all political parties including BJP, Congress, JMM, CPI, Samta and JantaDal U supported vehemently for bifurcation of Sixteen district from Bihar. Shri Lalu Pd. Yadav, Ex. CM Bihar and President of RJD, who was dead against separation of Bihar, finally succumbed to the pressure of movement and agreedly recommended from Bihar Assembly for separation and formation of separate state. BJP also ultimately, agreed for naming the separated state as Jharkhand state, not Vanachal proclaiming earlier. Jharkhand the 28th state of the Indian Union was brought into existence by the Bihar reorganization Act on November 15,2000- the birth anniversary of the legendary Bhagwan Birsa Munda. Four New districts are created in Jharkhand. They are Latehar (out of Palamu),Simdega (out of Gumla), Saraikela(out of West Singhbhum),Jamtara (out of Dumka).

According to the **Census Report-2001**, the Population of Jharkhand is 2,69,09,428 and it is at 13th place among 28 States and 7 Union Territories of India in order of population. Rate of increase in population is 23.19%.

No. of males in Jharkhand is 1,38,61,277 and that of females is 1,30,48,151. Male to female ratio in the state is 941 females per 1000 males while in 1991 it was 922 females per 1000 males.

Density of population in Jharkhand is 274 persons per Sq. Feet. Earlier (Census-1991) it was 338 persons per Sq. Feet.

Total No. of literates in the state is 1,19,70,177. At present Literacy rate is 54.13%, up from 41.39% in 1991 and it is second from the bottom among 28 states and 7 Union Territories. Literacy rate of females is 39.38% at present. In 1991 it was 25.52%.

Geography: The state of Jharkhand occupies 2.4% of India's geographic area. It is situated at 21°58'N to 25°30' with a total area of 79,714 sq. kms composed of 18 districts and 194 blocks.

The Tropic of Cancer cuts across 23.50 N. It is home to landmass 60-250 crore year old in the district of Palamau. The Damodar River cuts across Gondwana land almost 35-180 crore years of age. Jharkhand has an area of 74,677 sq and is bordered by Bihar, M.P. Bengal to its north, west, south and east respectively. 35% of the population of former Bihar is in the Jharkhand region. Jharkhand is one the most industrialised regions of the country today. The region accounts for 35.5% of the country's known coal reserves, 90% of its coking coal deposits, 40% of its copper, 22% of its iron ore, 90% of its mica and huge deposits of bauxite, quartz and ceramics. Forests and woodlands occupy a considerable part of Chotanagpur highlands and Santhal Parganas. The state has 29.3% of its total land area under

forest cover. These range from stunted open growth on naked, soil less slopes to fairly good sized dense forests. These add up to the stunning visual beauty of well-preserved flora & fauna of this state. Home to several national parks at Hazaribagh, Palamau, Barajamdda (Singhbhum), and Jharkhand tribal Culture has been one of harmonious coexistence with nature.

The State records an overall literacy rate of 55.8% among men and 25.52% among women. Its per capita income (NDP) was recorded at Rs 4161/-. The state has several well developed industrialized cities as Ranchi- its Capital, Jamshedpur also known as TATA after the Iron & Steel Plant, Bokaro (Steel City) etc. It also boasts several premier national Institutes such as BIT Mesra (Ranchi), Lac Research Institute (Namkum, Ranchi, Indian School of Mines, the Xavier Labour Relations Institute, and the Central Mining Research Institute.

Districts: Initially, the state of Jharkhand was carved out of 18 districts of south Bihar Nowt. The state comprises of twenty two districts of the erstwhile Bihar -- Ranchi, Gumha, Lohardanga, East Singbhum, West Singbhum, Hazaribagh, Giridih,

Kodarma, Chatra, Dhanbad, Bokaro, Palamau, Garhwa, Dumka, Deoghar, Godda, Pakure and Sahebgunj.

From the tribals perspective, Jharkhand may be divided into two regions –The plateau of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas region. Fifty years ago these two regions (then in the state of Bihar) boasted of about 28 per cent of India’s total tribal population but as of today the figure has diminished abruptly. However, tribal of Jharkhand continues to be rich in terms of heritage, history and culture. In the present study, I will concentrate on Chotanagpur regions of Jharkhand, which is considered to be one of the major tribal regions in India since the colonial period

Tribes in Jharkhand

The Constitution Order of 1950 has classified thirty different tribes in Bihar, spread over the Chotanagpur plateau that encompasses several districts that runs upto 35,000 miles shaping the southern half of Jharkhand. Jharkhand is the twelfth century name given to the tribal lands in eastern India. The British called the area Chotanagpur and it was in 1939 that they dissolved it by splitting the Bengal Presidency into Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The tribal populations in general represent the Negroid, proto- Australoid, Mongoloid, Mediterranean and Nordic races. The total tribal population of Jharkhand is 2,18,43914. The most important tribal communities found here are the Oraons, Mundas Birhors, Santhal, Gorait, Cheros, and Lohras. Amongst the Dravidian tribes like Gonds, Khonds, Korwas and Koras seem to have migrated from the neighbouring states. Among the above-mentioned tribes, we will make an attempt to study the Mundas and Oraons of Chotanagpur region in Jharkhand. However, before doing that, it will be better to give a brief introduction to the major tribal communities residing in Jharkhand.

The tribes of Jharkhand not only differ considerably from non-tribal population but even from one another. Cheros (found in Palamu and Chaibasa region) for instance, migrated from the sub-Himalayan tract and they bear the Dravidian physiognomy with light brown complexion while most of the other tribes are dark skinned, short statured, curly-haired and broad nosed people. Most of the tribes live in mud-thatched houses with baked tiles on the roof. Often they have kitchen gardens attached for supply of vegetables and there is space set aside for the cattle. Unlike the haphazard dwellings of the Oraons or the leaf houses of the Birhors, the Santhal (most

predominant and prosperous among the tribes of Jharkhand, accounting for 37% of the tribal population concentrated in the Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand) houses are most well planned with separate apartments for the elderly. Consequently, this region bears testimony to the minimum impact of the religious institutions. That's why, in this study, I have deliberately excluded the Santhals as a tribal community and Santhal Pargana as the region for examination.

The Santhals are noted for their highly organized social life as evident from *bitlaha* – a form of punishment. It is a disciplined expression of revolted disgust against sexual offenders. With the accompaniment of drumbeats, the huge Santhal gathering advances to the culprit's house. They gather their crowds by means of *dharwak* signal) conveyed from village to village which consists of a twig with its leaves stripped to indicate the number of days after which the *bitlaha* will be held. In fact the enormity of the crowd infuses awe and terror and simultaneously expresses collective resentment to the culprit's misdeeds. *Bitlaha* commences with the village headman calling for a joint meeting of the five *Manjhis* (village headmen) who revive the crime. Once ratified, the drums are beaten and amidst obscene folk songs, the Tribals gather around the offender's house, urinating along the walls and defecating in his courtyard.

The villages of the various tribes are usually situated near the forest, except for the Paharias who prefer the hills and the nomadic Birhors whose semi permanent dwellings are made out of twigs and leaves. Mundas and Oraons prefer the highest- level ground and the layout is not confined to any pattern, while the Santhals construct their houses on both sides of well-planned streets. The Hos villages are often situated on riverbanks.

The Mundas (in the Mundari language it refers to a man of prestige and wealth) are the most ancient among the tribes of Jharkhand, who love to live in association with other tribes. They date back to the times of Buddha, whose doctrines they are believed to have rejected. However, the Cheros accepted the Buddhist dharma and much later they became the rulers of Palamu. They are quite industrious and proud of their descent, still indulging in extravagant shows. The rich among them intermarry with the local Rajputs. The Cheros together with the Bhumijis were active participants in the rebellions of 1832 and 1857.

Bhumij (children of the soil) are believed to be the earliest settlers of Manbhum region in Jharkhand They are ethnically related to the Mundas, whom they closely resemble. This tribe is a perfect example of people accepting the Hindu gods, besides their tribal deities. Though some of the tribes have accepted the Hindu pantheon and prefer to cremate their dead while others have retained their practice of burying the bodies in the burial ground called *Sasan* or *Harshali*. Except for the Paharias (the hill men dwelling in the Rajmahal area) who are free from totemic influence, almost all tribes have their individual village priest, *Naika* or *Pahans*. These *Pahans* take care of the *Sarna* or the sacred grove where the village deities reside amidst some old trees. The deities vary in number and strength. While the Hos have to appease only two village deities, *Desauli* and *Jahira Buru*, the Oraons have as many as ten deities and spirits. However, most of the tribes acknowledge the sing *Bonga* or the Supreme

An important institution with the Oraons is the *dhumkuria*, which has put them on the ethnographic map of the world. This dormitory segregates the boys and girls, while simultaneously training them to share the responsibilities of the community. It is in this *dhumkuria* that traditions are passed from the older age group of youths to the younger ones.

Most of the tribes have a huge village expanse set for festive dances and the same ground is used for village meetings of *kulidrup* (an assembly of tribal adults). This is superseded by the council of headmen known as *Manjhis* while *Parcha* is the collective chief of various villages representing the people of the entire region. The *Manjhis* together with his subordinates or *Paramanikas* and the village priests keep an eye on the public morals of the village.

The most important crop of tribal Jharkhand is paddy and all economic relationship is based on this. Usually members of a tribal family work together in their plots, at times, accompanied by villagers. Hunting is now rare as forests are fast disappearing, however the Birhors can still be seen hunting for monkeys through their nets. They consume the meat while its skin, used in drum heads, are bartered. Other products available with the tribals for sale or barter include ropes, baskets, honey, cocoons, etc. Another interesting and no less popular product for sale by the tribals is the *hanaria*

or the home brewed rice beer, which is also associated with tribal worship. Usually the tribal women come to the weekly *haats* or markets with the *hanaria* in big pots. They can easily be identified by their dark complexion, heavy tattoo marks, and flower decorations together with brass and silver ornaments. A good number of tribal men in Chotanagpur can be seen working in the coalmines and other industries while others take care of cultivation.

History of Tribal Communities in Jharkhand

Jharkhand has preserved its relics of all different ages. Even in a period a lakh years earlier, human beings used to live in this area. None of the communities who reside in Jharkhand at present can claim that they are the true descendants of those primitive people. A study of the Brahmanical literature including Vedas indicate that in the eyes of the Brahmanas there was no distinction among the Aryans⁵, *Asurs*, Dravidians and *Nagas*. This is probably the reason why there is no historical proof of mutual conflicts or wars between Aryans, Dravidians, *Asurs* and *Nagas*. There is every chance that these names indicate the same set of people, because the Brahmanas have called themselves 'Sur' (*Bhudev*) and the rest as 'Asur'. In all, there occurred thirteen wars between the *Devas* and *Asurs*.

It appears from the historical context that the early inhabitants of Jharkhand belonged to any of the three communities-*Nishad* (*Austric*), Dravidian and *Asur*. The Mundas, Kharias, Korwas, Korkus,..Birhors, Bhumijas, Kherwars, Santhals, Hos, Mal Paharias etc. belong basically to the '*Nishad*' group. of people. Studies of the Munda-speaking families reveal¹⁶ that they had immigrated in two different. streams from the Central Asia, once before the Christian Era and then again around the 12th century A.D.) The Oraon, Nagesia and Sadan communities belong basically to the Dravidian group of people. The Oraons entered Jharkhand from Rohtasgarh, at the time of Sher Shah (10th Century A.D.). The Sadans came to reside over Jharkhand in the first century B.C., when the Satvahanas of Andhra, had

occupied Bihar and made "their horses drink the water of the Ganges". The Sadanis are the descendents of.

5 e.g. "Oh Indra, you cut into pieces both of those unfriendly ones and the *Dasas*-the Aryans and the Asurs, in the manner the forests are cut".---RigYeda,6/33/3 or the Aryans mentioned separately and after Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Shudras in Yajur Veda, 26/2.

6 J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India :Its Nature, Functions and Origins*. Oxford, 1961, No. 4.

Satvahanas. However, owing to the disintegration of their social order, the Cheros, Baraiks, Chik-Baraiks, Rautia etc. have become known as different tribes. "Chik" is originally a Dravidian word, meaning 'small'. In the same way the word 'Sad' means 'horse'.

According to the Munda tradition, when the Munda came, the Asurs had been the inhabitants of this area. Following Shri Ananta Prasad Shastri, the Ranchi District Gazetter writes that the *Nagas* were a tribe included in the *Asur* race from which have originated the names like Nagpur, Chotanagpur etc.⁷ Since they found that the country was occupied by the *Naga* people, the Munda too have named this land as 'Nagadesh'.⁸ In the mythology, Jimutavahana had sacrificed his life to save *Naga* named Shankhachuda from its enemy Garuda and had put an end to the terror created by the latter among the *Nagas*. The descendants of the *Naga* people even at present observe *Jitia*⁹ festival to celebrate this success of Jimutvahana.

A number of communities who now reside in Jharkhand celebrate *Jitia*, and are almost certainly the descendants of the ancient *Nagas*. Further, among the many meanings of the word '*Kurma*' one is snake (*naga*); and that may well be the origin of the name '*Kurmi*'. In the same way the meaning of the word *Ahir* is also snake and the name *Ahir* has probably been derived from that. The *Nagbanshis*, *Kurmis*, *Ahirs*, *Saraks*, etc., those who observe *Jitia*, are the communities who have originated from *Naga* people.

All these communities are found today almost strictly within the confines of the greater Jharkhand¹⁰, which itself is an indication of their local origins. There exist a few other communities, e.g. *Jhora*, *Bhuinya*, *Bhogta*, *Ghasi*, *Pan (Swasi)* etc. who are found only in the Jharkhand area, and are more probably related with one of the three

⁷ . Anant Prasad Banerjee Shastri, *Asur India* (1926) Cited in *District Gazetter, Ranchi* (1970), pp, 41.

⁸ S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, Bombay, 1970, pp. 334.

⁹ Although Jitiya is observed outside Jharkhand as '*Jiwit Putrika*' *Vrata*, it was a *Naga* festival, which

has been duly spiritualised by the Brahmins later on; which spread over North India. *Satya Narayan Vrata* is a *Vrata* which has been introduced in the Hindu Society in or after Mohamedan period. The spiritualisation of tribal festivals is still on its way. "*Karma*" has been spiritualised by the Brahmin as Parshwa Ekadashi. On their way of spiritualisation, the Brahmins wrote "Allahopnisad and "Ishopnisad" to bring them into Hindu fold. But neither the Muslim nor the Christian are regarded as Hindu. It is Jitiya - which proclaims, that the descendants of *Naga* people are still in existence; though they might have been intellectually and culturally Brahmanized.

¹⁰ e.g. the area of inclusive of the parts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa which is included in Jharkhand cultural region.¹⁰

racess discussed above. A number of these communities are known as Scheduled Tribes at present, and are accepted as the original inhabitants-of this area. Others e.g. the *Sadanis*, *Nagbansis*, *Kurmis* or *Bauris* are included as castes within the Hindu communities and are often confused as to be the immigrants since there is a tendency to consider that all Hindus were immigrants. Under the influence of Brahmanism, the feudal families of Jharkhand have tried for long to depict themselves as distinct from the local people. They had invented various stories regarding their origins e.g. (1) *Ratu*-child reared by a snake, accepted as the king of Mundas and established the Nagbanshi dynasty, (2) *Panchkot*-child reared by cow, accepted as the king among the Kurmis, (3) *Barahabhum* -child reared by pig (*Baraha*), (4) *Bonai*-child reared by peacock near a Kadamba tree and founder of *Kadambanshi* dynasty, (5) *Patkam* -claiming ancestry to Vikramaditya, (6) Jashpur- outsider Kharwar Rajput accepted as King by the Kharwars, similarly (7) Gangapur-Keshri Raiput, (8) Surguja-Rakhshel Rajput, (9) Kariya- Chauhan Rajput, and the chiefs of Dhalbhum, Porahat, Saraikela, Kharswan, Bandhgaon, Karaikela, Chainpur etc. all claiming their ancestors were outsiders (*Rajdom Kshatriya*, *Suryabanshi Kshatriya* or *Chandrabanshi Kshatriya*) accepted by the local people as their kings. But the very fact that none of these families were able to provide any testimony in favour of their outsider origin is the best proof of those being concocted. Yet their attempts have gone a long way to confuse the self-identity of Jharkhand.

Some other communities- e.g. *Domra*, *Mahli*, *Turi*, *Chamar* etc. are not confined to Jharkhand. But they are found all over Jharkhand, and are residing here for long. The fact that all these communities, including the last named ones, are residing in a particular geographic region for a long time, and most of them are found only in this region, is enough to help the development of a culture, specific to Jharkhand area and distinct from other areas. This culture, the 'Jharkhandi culture', is a community culture and is not much influenced by Brahmanism.

Although Kurmis belong to the *Asur (Naga)* group of people, some amount of intermixing has occurred with the Mundas and Santhals which is evident in such *gotra* names as *Birhor*, *Hansda*, *Tete* etc. found among the Kurmis too. Some other *gotra* names like *Tiru*, *Chil* etc. indicate the influence of Dravidas on Kurmis. The Bhumijas found in Manbhum are from the same stock as the Mundas as is evident

from the fact that intermarriage between these two communities occur freely. However, unlike the Mundas, the Bhumij community resides in the midst of Kurmi settlements. It is notable that although the Kurmis and the Bhumijas differ widely in their social customs and languages, the two groups are socially accepted to each other. Following the Naga custom, which exists even to this date, the Bhumijas are accepted as *Sahia* or *Mitta* (befriended) by the Kurmis. Similar relations are found between Kurmis and Santhal. All these social phenomena of inter-community relations need hundreds of years for being effective and bears testimony to the fact that the Kurmis are residing in this region for several centuries along with the Munda and Santhal tribes.

In fact, it may be of little surprise should the Kurmis happen to inhabit in this area even earlier than the Munda tribes, who are often accepted as the earliest and original inhabitants of this region. Indirect evidences like the travel accounts of Sumaschic, Fahien or Huen

Tsang had never referred to any point, which might indicate the existence of Munda in this area. According to Sri Sarat Chandra Roy, the first Munda dynasty was established here in 64 century A.D.¹¹. But the discovery of two silver coins of Vima Kadphesis I (200 B.C.) in the richest Munda settlement in Koel basin, of two gold coins of Vima Kadphesis II at Kumharia of Lohardaga and three gold coins of Huvishka at Belwadag near Khunti¹² indicate that this area was well-settled before the time of the Mundas. None of the important rivers in this area e.g. Sankh, Koel, Damodar (Pushpakaran, Pokarna), Swarnrekha etc. is named in Mundari language. Then who were the settlers here earlier than the Mundas? There are many evidences in favour that these settlers were the Kurmis. According to Dr. G. S. Ghurye, the Kurmis had to migrate from Central Asia to the forests of Jharkhand because of the pressure from the Gonds and the Kamars, in a remote past when the Kurmis were still doing *daha* (shifting) cultivation¹³. Kamars are found settled in all Kurmi villages in Jharkhand. It appears that the Munda immigrants had compelled the Kurmis to move eastwards leaving their original settlement at Kurmgarh on the borders of Ranchi and Surguja districts. At present Kurmis inhabit areas in the east, which is the richest Munda settlements, but are extinct in Kurmgarh area. Most probably the pressure from Sadans too had forced the Kurmis to move further east. Sadans were settled in

¹¹ S. C. Roy. op. cit., pp. 77.

¹² District Gazetteer Ranchi, 1970, pp. 39.

¹³ G. S. Ghurye, *Aborigines So Called and Their Future*, 1941, pp. 12.

western Jharkhand even in first century B. C. and the Satavahanas had fought the Kushanas, which may explain the discovery of Kushana coins in this region. Among the Sadans, there is a clan called Baraik whose martial origin is established. On the whole, by the pressure of these people the Kurmis had to move eastwards and are found at present in Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Santhal Parganas, Singhbhum, Purulia, Midnapur, Bankura, Sundergarh, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts only. It is notable that their settlements are completely encircled on the west by the Munda settlements. In the historic time, the Kurmis had built up a highly developed civilization and a powerful state in this region. It appears from the available facts that the famous king Shashanka (seventh century A.D.), who had defeated Harshavardhana, was a Naga king and his capital Karnasubarna was located in the Kurmi land of Jharkhand¹⁴.

History of Tribal Administration in Jharkhand (with special reference to their land revenue administration)

The tribals inhabited the Gangetic plains during the pre-Vedic period and were an agrarian society. When the pastoral Aryans invaded the Gangetic plains they succeeded in conquering the fertile area since they had horses, which enabled them to be more mobile. One of the main characteristics of the tribals in the course of their history of struggle with alien cultures was the fact that they were always away from the centre of power, they were frequently on the fringes. In the era of small kingdoms developing into empires such as the Magadha Empire and the Ashoka Maurya during the 800 BC, and the Guptas and Cholas around 10th and 12th AD, evidence of the marginal existence of the Tribals community is to be found. In all the records we find references to Tribals people as *dasyu*, *danavs*, *rakshasha* and savage, etc. The Aryan people were more dominant and aggressive. They had a monarchical system of governance based on the varna system and a standing army with fighting skills. Egalitarian Tribals communities did not have a kingship system, since it was based on hierarchy - a

concept alien to the tribal ethos. Instead of Kingship the tribals had clan groups among the *Kily* system -- the clan system. This later developed into the *Khuntkatti* system. Nor did they have a standing army, since the self-sufficient tribals communities did not have a division of labour based on workers and non-workers.

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- 14 for details. see author's note in Shalpatra, (Dhanbad, in Hindi), no- 4, February 1978, pp. 37-39.

Marginalisation of the tribals continued during the medieval period. During this period, the Muslims came to India, as early as 711 AD, as a part of an expedition led by the Arab General Muhammad bin Qasim. Shortly thereafter, Sindh, part of lower Punjab, was incorporated into the Arab Umayyad Caliphate. In the course of time, the Muslims conquered a number of Hindu kings. However, the Muslim Emperors were not interested in invading the Tribals areas, except for collecting *malgujari* tax. Since early times, *Sarna* tribals developed system of socio-cultural and political governance

- the *Parha* and the *Manki Mundua* system. This was the basis of the social union among the tribals in Jharkhand. Kingship developed amongst the tribals as a result of the necessity to protect their natural and livelihood resources from alien predations and to pay taxes to more powerful emperors. The kings would appoint someone from amongst their kin to be an agent to collect tax. The revenue thus collected was then used for paying the taxes to the emperor. The *Nagbanshi* Rajas, the *Jariagarh* Raja, the *Ratu Raja*, etc., were amongst some of these small kings. They would collect *malgujari* from the people to pay to the Emperors. This system of kings can be seen in the Oraon areas, in the western region of Jharkhand. The Tribals resisted this kingship system. The Hos resisted the *malgujari*, and so too did the Santhals and the Mundas. This resistance became more prominent during the British rule in India, which resulted in the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act, and the Wilkinson Rule. These rules and Acts recognised the distinctiveness of the social-cultural and political institutions of the tribal people. They also provided the British government with a better way of collecting tax from a people who refused to part with the lands that had been cleared and cultivated for several generations. It is clear that the customary system of self-governance of the tribals has existed and evolved in the course of the history as far back as we can trace it. Their customary practices have been one of the main strengths of the tribal people. This is how they have been able, in the past, to resist outside forces encroaching into their freedom.

Disempowerment

The economic effects of forcible incorporation of tribals into a stratified market economy have been well recorded. However, as well as the economic exploitation and land alienation, the incorporation and subordination of the tribal society in to the market economy, has led to the destruction of the community as a whole. This disempowerment was done through a very conscious destruction of the tribal institutions of governance. In the case of Jharkhand, with the establishment of British

rule we find a conscious effort to destroy the traditional tribal institution of self- governance, self-regulation, such as *Munda Manki* system and the *Parha* system. These representative institutions were supplanted by a new set of institutions to enable the British not only to appropriate the economic and labour resources of the tribal communities in the form of land

revenue and indentured labour, but also to make these new institutions independent of the control of the tribal community. It is no accident that unlike the *Munda Manki* system, which was communitarian and not necessarily hereditary, the new system was always based in an individual authority and in several cases hereditary. These offices of revenue extraction were vested with authorities of a feudatory chief or raja. Apart from the system of revenue and labour extractions a new and bureaucratic civil and criminal administration was also set up. The tribal communities encountered bureaucracy, police and courts for the first time. These institutions not only destroyed the tribal communities, since they were completely out of the control of the society, they also eroded the communitarian principles that permeated the self-regulatory mechanism of the tribal society. The impact of this ethos was evident in the mechanism of dispute settlement in the traditional tribal institutions. In the case of disputes, such as inter-clan clashes, murders or debts, the emphasis of the community *panchayat* was on justice, rather than judgement or punishment. All this changed with the advent of the modern bureaucracy that was based on individualism and impersonality. The tribal notion of justice was replaced by the modern binary of crime and punishment. The inability of the tribal people to grasp this subtle but deadly shift often led to tragic consequences. In the initial year of the establishment of police stations there are several recorded instances of the tribal warriors reporting to the police station with the body of their victims. What ““ the police officials as the “innocence and simplicity of the savage tribals” have patronizingly recorded was in fact the result of the failure of the tribal communities to understand the full import of the modern judicial principle of crime and punishment. Rather than endeavouring to resolve the cause of acrimony between the tribal individuals or groups so that harmony could once again be restored, as was the traditional custom of the tribal *panchayat*, the modern institutions resorted to punitive action, since for them an individual was solely responsible for its acts of omission and commission. The tribal mechanism of grievance redress was therefore trespassed and violated. Furthermore, in its dealings with modern bureaucracy, judiciary and police the tribal notion of self-respect was violated. The elitist attitude

of the colonial and Indian mindset was largely responsible for this. It either treated the tribal as a barbarian or as a simple

or genial savage who was incapable of taking care of himself. Such an attitude violated the tribal notion of dignity. Apart from the attitude of the officials, the mystifying processes and functions of these new institutions made it impossible for the tribal to engage with these institutions on an equal footing. Official work during the colonial period was done entirely in English and in the post independence era in Hindi. Given the preponderance of these non-tribal languages, the tribal were either compelled to learn the language of their conquerors and the attached cultural baggage or depend on the non-tribal in their efforts to seek justice from the modern institutions. Either way, the tribal lost their autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-respect. It is not an accident therefore that in every tribal protest institutions of police, judiciary and bureaucracy were made targets of attack. It is worth noting here the curious case of the shooting of an arrow by Birsa Munda on a seminary in Sarvada to mark the beginning of his protest. Certain communal minded people as an attack have interpreted this act on the religious beliefs of the inmates of the seminary. However, if the intention of Birsa was to destroy the seminary rather than shooting a single arrow from a great distance he would have organised a full fledged raid on the institution. In the absence of such a raid, the significance of shooting a single arrow lies in the fact that one of the members of the seminary in Sarvada was mediating on behalf of the tribals in the courts of Calcutta. To be

fair to the pastor, he did succeed in getting many favourable decisions for the tribals in the colonial court. Furthermore, he did not behave like the professional lawyers of Calcutta, who taking advantage of their judicial functions, cheated the tribals. However, what a western anglophile failed to recognise is that the problem of tribals is not only the inability to successfully represent their case in the modern institutions, but the very act of incorporation of the tribal society within the modern institutions. The arrow shot on the pastor by Birsa was not aimed at his religious belief, but was intended to draw a line of demarcation between the tribals desire to retain their traditional autonomy and the desire of an anglophile to facilitate an easy and civilised way of co-opting the tribal community into the modern system.

Oral tradition as a basis of customary practices

The tribals customary practices evolve from the praxis of oral traditional. In other words, the culture defines the customary practices. It is reflected in what people give

value to and what they value. The event is important rather than the time in which it took place. It is not important that it is published but that it is remembered and recounted through the generations. The past is not a catalogue of facts but an encoding of events as the marker of tribal valour, justice, dignity, etc. Oral traditions are expressions of communality and community unlike the written script, which becomes individual and personal. The manner in which the tribals oral traditions were weakened was through the imposition of the written script by the ruling class. So today any and everything has to be written down in order to have validity. Whatever is unwritten and oral has been put in the category of myths and superstition. Once the commonality of the material resources gets privatised there will be an adverse impact on social relationships among the members of the society and a very negative influence on the cultural values and attitudes of the people. This is precisely what the British did by introducing the individual *patta*-system. This is exactly what happened to the tribals in India and in Jharkhand. As a result communalism is replaced by individualism. Common property becomes private property. Co-operation becomes competition. Consensus in decision-making becomes majority decision. Equality among the members of the community becomes inequality. When India became independent the local ruling class, which was largely non-tribals and which hailed from north Bihar, and whose language was Hindi, systematically imposed Hindi on the Tribals people of Jharkhand. Thus Hindi was made a necessary language both at the level of administration as well as in the formal education system.