

**IN SEARCH OF A MORAL WORLD: THE SAPHA HOR MOVEMENT
IN THE SANTAL PARAGANAS (1871-1947)**

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Certified that the Thesis entitled, 'In Search of a Moral World: The Sapha Hor Movement in the Santal Parganas (1871-1947)' submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Sudeshna Banerjee and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BRK-	Babujiu Ka Reak Katha
BSA-	Bihar State Archives
CMS-	Church Missionary Society
FB-	Forward Block
HMHRK-	Horkoren Mare Hamramko Reak Katha
HRK-	Hul Reak Katha
ICHR-	The Indian Council of Historical Research
IOL-	India Office Library
INC-	Indian National Congress
WBSA-	West Bengal State Archives
KBDPK-	Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha
MLA-	Member of Legislative Assembly
OUP-	Oxford University Press
PS-	Police Station
RSS-	Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Introduction

1. The Argument

This thesis is about the Sapha Hors, a sect that emerged in the Santal Parganas in the perceptible trail of the Santal defeat in the Santal *Hul* (rebellion) of 1855. The Sapha Hors are a small sect who have been either glossed over in the existing scholarship because of the relative smallness of their demography or stereotyped as Hinduized by scholars who study the Santals, - their history, culture and language.¹ Some scholars from within the Santal community even categorically refused to discuss the Sapha Hors, implying thereby that the Sapha Hors are so irretrievably Hinduized that it is pointless to discuss them as Santals.²

The emergence of the sect was first documented in British records in the year 1874 in the context of an agitation by one Bhagirath Manhji of the Godda Subdivision of the Santal Parganas, who was 'trying to disturb people's mind by threatening an outbreak.'³ Originally a rebel in the Santal *Hul*, Bhagirath Manjhi had become a guru in 1871 courting official displeasure for his

¹ See George E. Somers, *The Dynamics of Santal Tradition in a Peasant Society* (Abhinav publications, New Delhi, 1977) See Appendix A: Sapha Hor has been translated as 'Santals converted to Hinduism,' p. 221; For a general overview of the assumed Hinduization among the Santals see, N. Dutta Mazumdar, *The Santals: A Study in Culture Change* (Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1956)p. 54; Also see, Sumita Saha and Nilanjan Goswami, 'Religious Life and Belief system of the Santals: A Case study in Solageria village' in *Man In India*, 93 (2-3) (New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2013), ps. 313 -332. In this study the sect is categorically stated as Hinduized. The writers observe, 'In decades after the Kharwar movement, Hinduised sects did come up like Sapha Hor, Samra, Babajiu. Among them it was the Sapha Hor who propagated a more exclusive and sanskritized lifestyle based on strict commensal norms that prevented eating in the house of those who did not belong to the sect and abstained from drinking *handia* and eating fowls and pigs, eating their morning meal only after a purificatory bath and worshipping Mahadev.' p. 316

² The concept 'Hinduization of tribes,' has been a much discussed and debated issue among scholars and politicians. For an elaborate discussion on the theme, see B.B. Chaudhuri. 'Society and Culture of the Tribal World in Colonial Eastern India: Reconsidering the Notion of Hinduization of Tribes' in Hetukar Jha ed., *Perspectives on Indian Society and History: A Critique* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), ps. 32-81. Also see Virginius Xaxa, 'Transformation of Tribes in India,' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 12,1999, p.1521.

³ Letter from GN Barlow, the Commissioner of Bhagalpur to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceedings, (henceforth BJP) November 1874, File No: 755, West Bengal State Archives (henceforth WBSA).

‘seditious speeches’. In one of his meetings and attended by twelve hundred followers, Bhagirath claimed his divine anointment as King and proclaimed that the Santals needn’t pay taxes as it was they who did the ploughing and God who enabled the crops grow. ⁴ His followers called themselves Sapha Hors or ‘clean mean’ and began a ‘cleansing’ or self-purification drive, aimed at creating a moral order, marked by vegetarianism, abstention from alcohol and animal sacrifice - markers that were probably intended to distinguish the Sapha Hors from the others in the Santal community. They are variously referred to in the colonial records as Sapha Hors, Safas, Bhagraits and Kherwars. ⁵ The Sapha Hors have consistently still inculcated these codes that they imposed upon themselves since the time of Bhagirath Manjhi.

This thesis critically thinks through and beyond the prism of Hinduisation through which the Sapha Hors have been predominantly viewed. Nor does it subscribe to a view that whatever the apparent difference of the Sapha Hor, the Santal community is fundamentally unvaried because it is a changeless primordial entity. This thesis is, indeed, predicated upon the basic argument that both the above contentions are ahistorical and essentialist. Invoking historicity, this thesis argues in favour of situating the Sapha Hors in their appropriate spatio-temporal location(s) and studying their genesis and transformation within the wider cross-currents of economic, social, political and institutional developments in the relevant region during the colonial period. Only such study can demonstrate that irrespective of the size of the sect, the Sapha Hors crucially informed the histories of popular protest, of anticolonial resistance, of popular religion and even of the nationalist movement in the Santal Parganas during the colonial period.

⁴ S.P. Sinha, ‘The Kherwar Movement 1874-1942’ in *Conflict and Tensions in Tribal society*, (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Co, 1993) p. 207

⁵ Diary of Moorat, the daughter of Reverend Stark. See M.A.C. Moorat ‘Alfred and Elizabeth Stark’ (1925, Calcutta) quoted in Marine Carrin and Harald Lyche- Tambs, *An Encounter of the Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries, and their Changing Worlds, 1860-1900* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008) p. 207. The British records, the missionaries and the existing scholarship refer to the sect predominantly as Kherwars.

Such a historical perspective enables the thesis to broach the following arguments:

One, categories like ‘Hinduised tribe’ put conceptual blinkers on any attempt to appreciate how the Saphas actually emerged in a contingent situation and historically and travelled (and transformed) through a series of contingent situations to which they reacted/ responded as a group with its own agency. Once the Sapha Hors had committed themselves at the inception of the movement to an agenda of self-purification, their tryst with a diverse cultural environment in their environs – a weave of evangelical missionary theology, numerous deities that the sizeable number of Hindus in the region sought to propitiate, a long tradition of Vaishnavism in the area followed by the subaltern people, who nourished a subalternised *bhakti* tradition preached by numerous local *gossains* – framed an interesting range of cultural symbols, deities, moral precepts and modes of worship from which the Saphas could borrow, exercising their own discretionary agency. Thus the Sapha Hor notion of the moral world was never a closed concept driven by a Hinduization fetish; rather it accommodated ideas and symbols that Sapha Hors in their historical journey since the 1870s eclectically picked up from Christian evangelicalism, from ever-expansive subaltern Hindu pantheon in the region, from the symbols, ideas and practices of the local subaltern *gossains* and from other folk cults abounding in the region.

Two, the historical take of the thesis helps the present author to bring out a very significant dimension hitherto missed in all accounts of the Sapha Hor world. An in-depth search and reading of historical sources enable this author to present the Sapha Hors in the light of an abiding spirit resistance to colonial rule that consistently ran through the otherwise transforming career of the sect during the colonial period. Viewing the Saphas through the prism of the ‘tribe/Hindu’ debate has blinded scholarship to repeated assertion of the Saphas in the domain of

active political resistance to the colonial order in the Santal Parganas. If a latent anti-colonial spirit was inchoate in Bhagirath's instruction to his followers not to pay taxes to the British, an overt resistance surfaced among them during the 1880s in the form of the anti-Census agitation. The Sapha Hors again asserted their spirit of resistance by participating in the Civil Disobedience movement, this time acting in tandem with the nationalist movement under the leadership of the Congress. They again asserted their presence in the nationalist movement in a big way in 1942.

Three, the thesis strongly suggests an integral connect between the Sapha Hor's pacific cultivation of strict moral codes, on the one hand, and their bouts of overt resistance to the colonial order, on the other. Indeed, one major point that the thesis makes is that the Santal resistance to the colonial order, on encountering defeat in the Hul, morphed into a millenarian dream among a group of Santals to create the sect of Sapha Hors. The thesis uses the paradigm of millenarianism in the study of the Sapha Hors especially when many tendencies in the Sapha Hor movement corresponded to the salient features of millenarian and messianic movements so common in late medieval and early modern Europe. In fact we argue, to label millenarianism as euro centric is essentialism in another form.⁶ Inspired by the writings of Christopher Hill, the thesis also proposes that the novelty of the Sapha Hor way of life was indeed the response of a section of the Santals to the experience of defeat; in this case the Santals' experience of defeat in the *Hul*.⁷ In all pre industrial societies there were commonalities in the way in which people reckoned with their experiences of defeat, the way they expressed their anxiety to escape from their suffocating experience towards a new dawn or light, riding on the crest of a millenarian

⁶ Prathama Banerjee, 'Re-Presenting Pasts: Santals in the Nineteenth -century Bengal' in Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Ghosh eds., *History and the Present* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002) p. 257.

⁷ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin, 1975); C. Hill, *The Experience of Defeat* (London: Penguin, 1985).

experience.⁸ The Hal Illakkam (literally frenzy- raising) in Ernad proclaimed in the year 1843, ‘a ship would arrive with the necessary arms, provisions and money for 40,000’ to liberate the country----an exact echo of the Pacific cargo cults analyzed by Peter Worsley.⁹ The Sapha Hors’ world was also one of an ongoing expectation of millennium which had come thanks to the munificence of Thakur during the Santal Hul but had ultimately eluded them because the leaders had failed god.¹⁰ We thus suggest that without taking into consideration the question of millenarianism it would be ahistorical to characterize the Sapha Hors and their movement (s). The thesis raises and answers a number of related questions in this regard: was millenarianism a product of their encounter with armed insurrection that was numbed by the impressions of massive repression in the armed insurrection called the *Hul*? Were millenarian dreams reawakened when the census enumeration began in 1881? Why did the Sapha Hors respond favourably to the nationalist movement from the second decades of the twentieth century? Is it because the Sapha Hor millenarianism identified itself with Gandhian nationalism? How would we explain the long bouts of the Sapha’s silence from active participation into politics that was so characteristic of the Sapha Movement? The thesis argues that the alternation in the career of the movement between pacific phases of exclusive emphasis on the cultivation of moral codes of ‘purity’, on the one hand, and activist phases of resistance to the colonial order, on the other, are typical of the millenarian strain that can be clearly discerned in the sect’s worldview.

One major thrust in the thesis will be a recuperation of the subaltern as a conscious human

⁸ Kennel Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971) p. 16.

⁹ Sumit Sarkar, ‘Popular’ Movements and ‘Middle Class’ leadership in Late Colonial India: Perspectives and Problems of a ‘History from Below.’ (Delhi: Aakar, 2015) p. 30.

¹⁰ For a reading of the Santal rebellion see Kali Kinkar Dutta, *The Santal Insurrection*. (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1940), p.7-8; Dhirendranath Baske, ‘Saotal Ganasangramer itihasa’ (Calcutta: Bijayon Prakashani, 2002, First published in 1975). W.J. Culshaw and W.G. Archer, ‘The Santal Rebellion,’ *Man in India*, volume 25,1945, ps. 218-239.

subject-agent overshadowed by colonial representation of the colonial subjects in the archival documentation. While archives – repositories of cartographic, linguistic, ethnological, ethnographic, religious, economic and historical knowledge in various forms is a power in itself that gives the colonial state world mastery through documentation,¹¹ the voice of the people gets lost in the volumes of such statist knowledge. For this reason, we are therefore compelled to look for alternatives sources outside the domain of the archives and it is here that field study assumes importance for it can draw attention to aspects of the life of the sect that lies hidden from archival knowledge. Knowing full well that the Sapha Hor movement belonged to the late 19th and early 20th century and therefore the participants cannot be interviewed and their voice directly accessed, the question is, what is the point in visiting the field i.e. the Santal Parganas? We have proceeded with the assumption that the movement and its ideologies had left certain traces in the everyday practices of the Sapha Hor sect that still exist albeit in small numbers in different parts of the Santal Parganas. The study thus suggests, opening up an interdisciplinary bridge between anthropology and history.¹² Our objective is collecting and reading such specimens of the Sapha Hors’ cultural articulation such as songs but reading all this in tandem with secondary and primary (mainly archival and missionary) sources from the colonial past. In other words, we intend to study the different facets of the life of the Saphas not so much with the tools of anthropology as with the intentions of finding historical traces of the ‘recalcitrant event’¹³ in the present day habitation, life style, practices and cultural orientation of the people

¹¹ See Tony Ballantyne, ‘Archive, Discipline, State: Power and Knowledge in South Asian Historiography’ in *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3, 1, June, 2001, p. 87-105.

¹² For a discussion on the interchanges between history and anthropology in present studies, see Saurabh Dube, ‘Introduction: Anthropology, History, Historical Anthropology’ in Saurabh Dube ed., *Historical Anthropology* (New Delhi: Oxford India Paper Back, 2007).ps.1-48.

¹³ The phrase is borrowed from Shahid Amin who uses ‘recalcitrant lives/events’ to refer to ‘submerged stories that can be spun into tellable tales only by arrogating to themselves the criteria of the historic, in ways which alter materially the terms on which the big story (e.g. Gandhian Nationalism) is told.’ See “After the Archive: Reflections of an Indian Historian” a paper presented at the Conference, *Creating an Archive today: Decisions, Uses,*

who inhabit the present times in the Santal Parganas and call themselves Sapha Hors and Santals simultaneously.¹⁴

It is also important for our study to recognize that the power of colonial knowledge also mires nomenclatures. Readers are therefore confounded about whether such terms as Kherwars are interchangeable with or exclusive of nomenclatures such as Sapha Hors, Bhagraites or even Safas.¹⁵ Moreover, the fact that the sect disintegrated into sub-sects, as Bodding suggested, would mean that the movement might appear inconsequential for historical research on the ground that demographically the sect was of no significance. It is here that we have to interrogate British records and their created nomenclatures and its interrelationships. The most important question that we have to deal with in this context is whether we can at all use the word ‘Kherwar’ for the followers of the new movement.

‘Kherwar’ is a problematic conception. P.O. Bodding noted that the word ‘Kherwar’ is a ‘common pronunciation’ used by the Santals but he does not mention the right Santal word for the clan.¹⁶ The original word for the Santals is ‘Kherwal’, or ‘the ancestors of the birds,’ which has a long lineage going back to the mythical past.¹⁷ Why we are compelled to raise the question is because etymologically there is a difference in the manner in which the word ‘Kherwar or

Documentation, (Centre for Documentation and Area Transcultural Studies, International Conference), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 18th-19th December, 2003.

¹⁴ The research on the Sapha Hors was funded by UGC sponsored Minor Research Grant (April 2008 and January 2010).

¹⁵ The question was first raised by Krishnapada Kisku, teacher Albadh high School, Bolpur.

¹⁶ P.O Bodding, L.O. Skrefsrud. Sten Konow, Traditions and Institutions of the Santals, (*Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, henceforth HMHRK), (New Delhi: Bahumukhi Prakashan, 1942) p. 12. It was first published from the Santal text by Skrefsrud in 1887.

¹⁷ According to Suhrid Bhowmick, Kher’ or bird and ‘wal’ or ancestor depicts the true origin of the Kol family. See Suhrid Kumar Bhowmick, *Ronor Malar Bhumika: Bengali Santhali Dictionary*, (Medinipur: Marang Buru Press, 1985) p. 3;

Kherwal' is used in two of the important texts we have in our possession, one published and interpreted by the missionaries and the other written by a Santal writer; both narrations appearing within a gap of seven years. Both are narrations on old Santal traditions with one significant difference i.e. in the reading of the words 'Kherwar or Kherwal.' In missionary reading of Kolean guru's narration, *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, (henceforth HKMHRK) the word 'Kherwar' was lost in course of the Santal migration and was revived only during the movement of 1871.¹⁸ From a reading of the second text, *Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha*, (henceforth KBDPK) however, it would appear that the Santals never lost their ancestral name nor did the name have anything to do with the movement by the Sapha Hors who emerged in 1871.¹⁹

This difference in the interpretation is related to the manner in which the ancestor story of the Santals has been narrated in the two accounts. According to HMHRK, the prosperous days of Cai Campa was immediately followed by wars, defeat, dispossession, further migration and finally the loss of the name 'Kherwars.'²⁰ The ancestor story narrated by KBDPK on the other hand doesn't talk about wars. Rather it was in Cai Campa that the Kherwals learnt the art of cultivation from Marang Buru and it was here that the Santals learnt to live a settled life.²¹ The KBDPK thus talks about a peaceful and domesticated life of the Santal ancestors which explains why the name Kherwal survived.

¹⁸ See the footnotes, Bodding added to the HMHRK, p. 12.

¹⁹ Ramdas Tudu Reska, *Kherwal Bangsha Dharam Puthi Katha* tr. ed. Sukumar Sikdar and Sarda Prasad Kisku (Kolkata: Nirmal Book Agency, 2004). The book was published by the author in 1894. See p. 13.

²⁰ HMHRK, op cit, p. 12.

²¹ KBDPK, op cit, p. 126.

This difference was not documented in missionary accounts. Infact the word ‘Kherwar’ was adopted in the colonial discourse and the movement came to be recorded as the ‘Kherwar movement.’ The usage continued in the colonial discourse so that in the context of the anti-census agitation of the Sapha Hors in 1881, G.N. Barlow, the Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas clearly saw, ‘a system’ (that) ‘formulated under the term ‘Kherwar’, which by mixing up national ideas along with matters connected with social and religious reforms presented a view thoroughly attractive to the Santal mind and has created an organization necessarily opposed to the Government’.²² What is not clear from the official narrative is who revived the word Kherwar? The answers get even more enigmatic because we find that a large number of Santal rebels had actually enlisted themselves in official records as Kherwars during the anti-census agitation of 1881.²³ Is it possible that the use of the word was a colonial/missionary coinage that gained currency during the agitation and later entered the colonial discourse? After all the ‘thousands of letters’ that were instrumental in the spread of the anti-census agitation of 1881 had no mention of the name ‘Kherwar.’ They only talked about codes of a pure life.

In dealing with nomenclatures, the difficulty we face is that the voice of the Santals themselves is rarely represented in printed form and KBDPK remains the sole instance of a Santal literati’s endeavor to uphold his traditions through writing which he even published himself ; in all other instances the subalternized voices of the Santals, reaches us primarily through external agencies notably through the missionaries or the colonial officers and in the process forms the basis of

²² G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department (henceforth BJP) 8th June 1881, File 9C, August 1881, West Bengal State Archives (henceforth WBSA).

²³ Ibid.

archival knowledge on which we are dependent. To study the sect, this major difference in the narration and interpretation is relevant for our study and we have chosen to refer to the movement, by their specific name Sapha Hor rather than the name of the clan Kherwar. Secondly, if we follow Bodding's division of the sect, the Sapha Hors, the Samras and the Babajis, only the names of the Sapha Hors re-appear in archival material on the nationalist movement.²⁴ Finally we prefer to use Sapha Hors because the sect continues to be identified by this name even today.

The different chapters in this thesis in their own manner demonstrate the way in which various experiences had impacted the lives of the Saphas; we trace the millenarian dreams pursued by Bhagirath Manjhi in the post *Hul* period, the assertion of the Sapha Hors during the census operation of 1881 against an invasion into the sanctified inner domain of their lives, the message of purity preached by a significant number by gurus who didn't claim direct association with Bhagirath, we look at the efforts of the sect aspiring for the fulfillment of their dreams of freedom in Gandhi's *swaraj*. In this historical journey we will also see how the sect reconstituted their worldview accommodating a large number of deities as part of their never ending endeavor to purify their life in the eyes of god. In the course, it would be interesting to observe certain peculiarities that characterize the movement of the Sapha Hors. The Sapha Hor movement remained strictly anti-colonial and did not enter into any confrontation with the Hindu zamindars or the moneylenders who were identified as collaborators of the oppressive rulers during the *Hul* thus constituting what would appear to constitute a major break from the *Hul* traditions. There was infact no attempt on their part at defining their allegiance or opposition to this superior cultural order. Such a behavior of the Sapha Hors might suggest economic dependence on a class

²⁴ P.O. Bodding, 'The Kherwar Movement among the Santals' in *Man in India*, volume 1, March 1921. ps.223

on whom the Santals relied for credit especially in a situation where the colonial state failed to provide them economic security.²⁵ However, looking at the issue enjoins us to interrogate whether the millenarian dream of the Sapha Hors did not already embrace the vision of an egalitarian society where lands would belong to the Santals alone? Is it not possible that without opposing the powerful moneyed classes, the Sapha Hors millenarianism imagined a free society liberated from the bondage resulting from indebtedness?

Another component of the movement, worth looking into even more deeply is the relation between the Sapha Hors and the Santal society, which is germane to the reading of the sect and their movement(s). The colonizers had an interest in highlighting the emerging tensions in the Santal Society as a result of the rise of the sect; a theme which emerges from the colonial archives itself. The Sapha Hors were said to be distinguishing themselves from the *jutha* Santals (spelt *jithia* in the colonial records) considered lower in rank thus suggesting a rising social hierarchy in the Santal community. While not completely disowning the claims made by the colonial observers, it is important to probe whether the emergence of the sect had indeed given rise to initial suspicion within the Santal community resulting in internal tensions as noted by archives.

²⁵ B.B. Chaudhuri, 'Decline of the Old Order in the Adivasi (Tribal) World' in *Peasant History of Pre-Late Colonial and Colonial India, Volume VIII*; General editor: D.P. Chattopadhyay, History of Science Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008) ps. 711-764

2. History

In 1874, the Sapha Hors forced their way into historical visibility when Bhagirath Manjhi addressed a crowd of around twelve hundred men in Bausi in the Godda district.²⁶ Colonial officials identified Bhagirath Manjhi as a Santal rebel who had revolted during the Santal Hul of 1855.²⁷ The officials now found him reiterating the demands of the *Hul* that the people ploughing with cows should pay a rent of two *annas*, those with bullocks a rent of four *annas* and with buffaloes a rent of eight *annas*.²⁸ Missionary eye witnesses registered that Bhagirath had been anointed as the king at Bausi and was reclaiming the kingdom that Thakur had once promised the leaders of the *Hul*.²⁹

In this connection, we should pause to take a historical look back at the Santal *Hul* to which Bhagirath, being a rebel himself frequently talked about. The Santal *Hul* began on 30th June 1855 in Bhagnadihi a little village in the heart of Barhait, located in the Sahebgunj sub-division. With its epicenter in Sahibgunj, the movement then spread out in different directions, south to Borio and Colong and from to Bhagalpur via Pirpointi in the west and Rajmahal in the east,³⁰ so that the entire country between Colong on the west, Rajmahal in the east and nearly as far as

²⁶G.N. Barlow, The Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 7th October, BJP, November 1874 WBSA.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸John Boxwell, Officiating Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas, dt.1/10/1874, BJP, November 1874, WBSA.

²⁹ A detailed account of Bhagirath Manjhi and later gurus is found in 'Babujioka Reak Katha', narrated (possibly) by Sagram Murmu of Mohulpahari (1892-1927). See Peter B Anderson, Marine Carrin and Santosh Sore, tr. and eds., *From Fire Rain to Rebellion: Reasserting Ethnic Identity Through Narrative*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2011), p.177. An eyewitness working under C.M.S. also corroborated this incident and reported that Bhagirath had been anointed the 'king' at Bausi where he received money as rent. See Reverend A. Stark, C.M.S, to G.N. Barlow, the Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas, Pathra, dt. 2/9/1874, BJP, November 1874, WBSA.

³⁰ K.K. Dutta, op cit, p. 19.

Raniganj and Sainthia on the south came under the control of the Santal rebels.³¹ As the movement increased in strength, an increasing number of rebels, moved further south, sacked Pakur reached as far as Suiri in Birbhum. By July end, the whole country between Deoghar and South western border was under the control of the Santals.³² It not before early January 1856 that the rebellion was finally brought under the control of the colonial administration.³³ Predictably the government's repressive machinery came down heavily on the revolting Santals. It was 'not war' but 'execution' W.W. Hunter quoted another officer, describing the nature of the persecution leading to defeat, death and dispossession of thousands of Santal men, women and children.³⁴ Significantly the Santal *Hul* together with a considerable number of uprisings round about the same time against British rule had a lasting impact on British policies and impressed upon colonial consciousness the necessity to know the subject population more closely.³⁵ In fact in the post 1857 era, the government began to insist on the creation of a body of ethnological knowledge for a better grasp of societal realities on the territory over which they ruled. They were anxious to be able to explain why rebellions were taking place and how they would be able to avoid disaffection in future or new ways to claim loyalty of the subjects by representing authority in a feudal mode in Victorian India.³⁶ With such knowledge, the British claimed that they could not only avoid interference but in time become the primary protectors of India's

³¹ L.S.S. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Santal Parganas* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1910), p. 60.

³² *Ibid*, p.61.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 62.

³⁴ Quoted from Vasudha Dhagamwar, *Role of Image of Law in India: The Tribal Experience* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006) p. 160; Also See W.W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal: The Ethnical Frontier of Lower Bengal with the Ancient Principalities of Beerbhoom and Bishenpore*, volume 1, p. 247. <https://archive.org/details/annalsofruralben01hunt>

According to one estimate 10,000 to 12,000 Santals died. See John M Macphail, *The story of the Santals: with an account of the Santal Rebellion*, United Free Church Santal Mission, Badmah, 88th July 1921 (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker and Spink & co, 1922) p. 61, India Office Library, London. (henceforth IOL).

³⁵ The Kol uprising in Singhbhum (1831-32); The Bhil uprising in Khandesh (1818-31), Farazi (1838-48) Wahabi (1830-60) and Sepoy Mutiny (1857).

³⁶ See Bernard Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian Indian' in *A Anthropologist Among Historian and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, henceforth OUP, 1987) p. 633.

tradition.³⁷ This was indeed the time when colonialism was meticulously trying to evolve into ‘a cultural project of control.’³⁸

Equipped with new knowledge, the colonial ethnography, began to reflect the changing perceptions of the tribal world. The incessant incidents of tribal revolt initially provided a background to the colonial state’s interest in the tribal societies and the world of the tribes appeared only as adjunct to the state’s counter insurgency measures.³⁹ In the Santal Parganas, the *Hul* however confirmed British fears that Santals were a people who could destabilize British supremacy. This the colonial officers traced to the ethnic solidarity of the tribe despite their widely dispersed geographical location inhabiting the whole western frontier of lower Bengal. The situation was described by Hunter: (the Santals) numbering, ‘a million and a half.. claiming a common origin, speaking one language, following similar customs, worshipping the same gods and forming in all essentials a distinct ethnic identity among the aboriginal races.’⁴⁰ With increased ethnographic acquaintance with the Santal world, dedicated colonial ethnographers were now less obsessed with the notion of the mechanically and readily rebellious Santals, showed interest in other traits that could best describe the community. W.W. Hunter noted the Santals’ great skill at reclaiming lands, their industrious and honest nature with ‘a natural aptitude to blend with the country in which they lived.’⁴¹ E.G. Man (1867) romanticized Santal

³⁷ Nicholas Dirks, ‘The Ethnographic State’, Saurabh Dube ed., *Post Colonial Passages: Contemporary History writing in India.* (New Delhi: OUP, 2004), p.78

³⁸ Nicholas Dirks, ‘Introduction’ in Dirks ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor:University of Michigan Press 1992) p.3

³⁹ See B.B. Chaudhuri, ‘Towards an Understanding of the Tribal World in Colonial Eastern India,’ S. Taniguchi, H. Yanagisawa, and F. Oshikawa, eds., *Economic Changes and Social Transformations in Modern and Contemporary South Asia*, (Tokyo, Hitotsubashi University 1994) p. 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 28.

⁴¹ W.W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal: The Ethnical Frontier of Lower Bengal with the Ancient Principalities of Beerbhoom and Bishenpore*, volume 1, (London: Smith Elder and Co, 1868) ps. 210-11.

life style, its life of freedom, 'untrammelled by social or traditional prejudices.'⁴² In fact, almost every visitor to the Santal country left notes, romanticizing the community and thereby rationalizing the cause of the *Hul* in the Santal Parganas. Thus Mary Maddock, the wife of Commissioner Hoernle wrote in March 1927,

(Santals were) 'like the flopsy bunnies, were very cheerful and improvident'...Being completely honest themselves they had no conception of the kind of ruthless dishonesty by which these men{moneylenders} thrived and were horrified to find themselves being sold up and almost into slavery to pay debts they didn't know they had incurred.'⁴³

Once the act of rebellion was rationalized the government now justified the need for a benevolent government for the protection of the 'simple' people like the Santals. Hence the Regulation III of 1872 was introduced which revived the non-regulation system of administration in the Santal Parganas. The Santals would now be under the direct supervision of the Deputy Commissioner who would work through a team of Santal officers familiar with the language and the customs of the land and work preferably through the mediation of the leaders of the Santal community. Mary Maddock found the new administrative policy to be almost efficacious and foolproof. She wrote,

'The Santals faced guns and cannons with such heroic and undaunted courage that when it was all over the Raj decided that these people were worth helping. Hence the special

⁴² B.B. Chaudhuri, 'Decline of the Old Order in the Adivasi (Tribal) World,' op cit, ps. 26-27.

⁴³ Diary of Mary Maddock, wife of Late Edward Hoernle, (I.C.S, First Revenue Commissioner of the Province of Orissa 1938; The diary was written after Hoernle became the Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas, 1925-27), MSS EUR D918 Mary Maddock Papers, (1925-1930), India Office Library, (henceforth IOL).

regulations. They came under the special care of the Deputy Commissioner. Henceforth no Santal land could change hands without his permission. A specially appointed Santhali speaking settlement officer toured the district to make sure that the right people owned the lands and that no one was dispossessed because of debt.⁴⁴

Although evangelization remained the foremost concern of the missionaries' working among the Santals, Reverend L.O. Skrefsrud, Reverend P.O. Bodding and Reverend W.J. Culshaw were also motivated by scholarly interest in tribal societies. In 1887, Bodding published an English translation of *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha* translated originally published in Santali by Skrefsrud. In the forty years (1890-1934) he spent in the Santal Parganas, he published a five volume Santali dictionary and collected fifteen hundred short Santal folk stories.⁴⁵ Importantly he also took the initiative to publish articles on the emerging sect of the Sapha Hors, that the present thesis is focusing on. on the new sect of the Sapha Hors.⁴⁶ The rich observation of the missionaries and the administrators of the Santal country provided a rich corpus of knowledge which H.H. Risley, O'Malley and other colonial administrators of the Santal Parganas drew upon during the years to follow.

The rise of the Sapha Hors was first reported in 1871 by the missionaries of the C.M.S to the government out of concern that another Santal agitation seemed to be brewing. Moorat noted in her diary that as soon as the the news of Bhagirath Manjhi reached them, her father Reverend Stark wrote to the Secretary of C.M.S out of panick 'If you don't hear from me again, you will

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Peter B Anderson, Marine Carrin and Santosh Soren, *From Fire Rain to Rebellion: Reasserting Ethnic Identity Through Narrative.* (New Delhi: Manohor, 2011) p. 17

⁴⁶ P.O. Bodding, 'The Kherwar Movement Among the Santals' in *Man in India*, volume 1, March 1921, (Ranchi, 1921) ps. 221-232; 'A Santal Sect' in Ramananda Chattopadhyay ed., *Modern Review*, March 1922, Calcutta, p. 358.

know by my silence that I have been killed; the Sonthals are rising,' According to Moorat, Sir Richard Temple, the Lieutenant-Governor saw the letter 'and was greatly concerned, as it was the first information he had received of any trouble in that district.'⁴⁷ The rise of Bhagirath was unsettling for the missionary community not only because it was a reminder of the *Hul* but because it was the beginning of what they thought was a blow to their effort at evangelization. In a letter to his brother-in-law dated 28th June 1875 Skrefsrud expressed fear, 'There has been a half rebellion among the Santals and we are having rigid persecution against the Christians.'⁴⁸ In 1881, he saw ominous signs in the assertion of the Sapha Hors during the anti-census agitation. In a letter addressed to Lord Macaulay, he categorically pointed that far from being 'a harmless socio religious movement it was a rabid socialistic agitation which will be satisfied with nothing less than absolute exemption from paying rent.'⁴⁹ In 1882 Reverend Stark of the C.M.S, in charge of Pathra and Bhagya expressed concern that there was a changing attitude of the Santals who showed, 'a solid indifference to Christianity.'⁵⁰ In 1887, Reverend Skrefsrud despaired, 'What we miss now, is the first, hotly burning love of the first Christians,' and mourned the passing of the 'golden age' of the mission.'⁵¹

Varied explanations were considered for the changing fate of the missionaries and one of them was that the rise of guru Bhagirath was influenced by the Brahmin faction amongst the Hindus to stop the Christianization of the Santals.⁵² Reverend Skrefsrud was however certain that the process of acculturation between the Santals and the Hindus was almost inevitable beginning

⁴⁷ Marine Carrin and Tambs Lyche, 'A Encounter of the Peripheries,' op cit, p. 208.

⁴⁸ Olav Hodne, Hodne, *The Seed Bore Fruit: A Short History of the Santal Mission of the Northern Churches 1867-1967*, (Calcutta: CD Media, 1967), p.22.

⁴⁹ Letter addressed to Macaulay from Reverend Skrefsrud, dt, 3/2/81, Manuscripts Collection. Report by the Norwegian missionary Skrefsrud. Part of the Ripon papers, Vol. CII(FF335), ADD MS 43592: 1880-1884, IOL.

⁵⁰ The Church Missionary Society, 63rd Report of the Calcutta Corresponding Committee of 1882, p. 42.

⁵¹ Marine Carrin and Harold Tambs Lyche, 'An Encounter of the Peripheries,' op cit, p. 291.

⁵² S.P. Sinha, 'The Kherwar Movement (1874-1942)' op cit, p. 214.

with the very first contact between the two people in Champa and growing over the years.⁵³ Hence when Matadin, another Hindu guru, anointed Bhagirath with red mark on his forehead it was for Skrefsrud just a tradition continued.⁵⁴ Like wise the pilgrimage to holy shrines, killing of animals and adoption of Hindu purification ceremonies such beltika and poita/sacred thread established full adherence to Hindu principles and practices.⁵⁵ The effect of such 'Hinduization' according to the missionaries was however disturbing, 'the Santals were losing their good name for truthfulness and good faith, they were setting up shrines to Hindu gods, paying homage to the Brahman and congratulating themselves on the honour of being as one of the Hindoo caste.'⁵⁶

In the nineteenth century, the theme of the Sapha Hors disappeared from colonial records between 1891 -1938. The only exception being the two articles published by Reverend Bodding on the sect both indicating the continuing interest in the Sapha Hors inspite of the apparent silence of the colonial archives. In the third decade of the twentieth century, the Sapha Hors resurfaced again but this time they were being mentioned not just as Kherwars or Sapha Hors but as Gandhian activist too. By then the country was already in the throws of consecutive mass movements and an increasingly complex electoral politics. The Sapha Hors might have been drawn into mass politics by elite groups but only when their millenarian vision was once again rekindled by a new hope of freedom in the twentieth century.

⁵³ Letter from L.O. Skrefsrud to Sir W Muir 6th January 1876 quoted in S.P. Sinha op cit, p.215.

⁵⁴ His mentor, one ex-mutineer named Matadin whom he had met in the jail was believed to have, 'given color of Hinduism to Bhagirath's movement.' see J. Boxwell, Deputy Commissioner to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas, dt. 1/10/1874, BJP, November 1874 WBSA.

⁵⁵ S.P. Sinha op cit, p. 215

⁵⁶ Fifty sixth report of the Calcutta Corresponding Committee of the Church Missionary Society. (1891-92) page 55

3. Pre existing Literature

The study requires us to engage with certain conceptual and historical issues that is essentially related to the study of the sect and its movement(s). A primary concern in this study is to deal with the issue of nomenclatures, whether it is at all relevant to use the word 'tribe' for the study of the Sapha Hors. Susana Devalle was one of the first among scholars to argue in the Indian context that the tribe was a colonial category, a part of its legitimizing ideology and a device to catalogue conquered population.⁵⁷ Several writings since then have tried to deconstruct the notion of tribe in the Indian context. Ajay Skaria identified wildness, the attributes of the *Jangal*, (the forest) and the wilderness through lively stories or *goths* of the Bhils. The wildness, he argued, was affirmed by the practices of the Bhils- their seasonal migrations, shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing activities, occasional raids on the plains, often celebrated through songs. For the British however, wildness had a different connotation; it meant taming the Bhils by stopping the raids and enforcing strict forest regulations, acts through which wildness was marginalized, leading to a new identity; the Adivasi.⁵⁸ Nandini Sundar argued that contrary to popular perceptions, the Bastar area was not isolated from the rest of the larger economy in the pre-colonial period. Colonialism changed the terms of the integration of the Bastar region with the wider economy inserting its own administrative style, replete with laws and regulations, with its demands for timber and other forest products.⁵⁹ The colonial modernity reordered diverse groups

⁵⁷ Susana B.C. Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity and Protest in Jharkhand* (New Delhi: Sage, 1992) page 50, 73.

⁵⁸ Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forest Frontiers and Wildness in Western India* (New Delhi: OUP, 1991); Also see Ajay Skaria, 'Being Jungli: The Politics of Wildness' in *Studies in History*, 14, 2, 1998, ps.193-215.

⁵⁹ Nandini Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar* (New Delhi, OUP, 2008).

in India in terms of three differing categories –religion caste and tribes,⁶⁰ where the caste became the conceptual twin was the idea of tribe.⁶¹

The concept that the tribe as a figment of European imagination, was however questioned by other scholars. Professor B.B. Chaudhuri, viewed tribe as a ‘brahmanical construct’ because the colonial discourse on caste and tribes was largely based on information provided by the dominant caste groups.⁶² Vinita Damodaran argued that while colonial epistemology was built on Brahminical notions of caste, it also drew on eighteenth and nineteenth century ideas of race.⁶³ The development of the sub-discipline of ethnology from the 1850s in Britain, provided the general scientific framework for the study of linguistic, physical and cultural characteristics of the dark skinned, non-European, ‘uncivilized’ people who were then given a proper place in the evolutionary scale; a concept that was reflected in the writings of W.W. Hunter, Herbert Risley, J. Forsyth on castes and tribes.⁶⁴ In the colonial ethnography although the tribe had emerged as a definable object with clearly demarcated characteristics, regional variations could not be necessarily resolved and hence the category tribe was continually improvised as scholar/administrators responded to changing situations.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Prathama Banerjee, ‘Writing the Adivasi: Some Historiographical Notes’ in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, January-March 2016, vol LIII, No. 1, ps. 131-153. (p.113)

⁶¹ Sumit Guha, ‘States, Tribes, Castes: A Historical Re-Exploration’ in *Comparative Perspective*’ in *Economic and Political History Review*, Volume L, Nos. 46-47, November 2015, ps. 50-57.

⁶² Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Adivasis and the Raj: Socio Economic Transition of the Hos, 1820-1932* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2011) p. 6. Also see Vinita Damodaran ‘Colonial Construction of the tribe in India: The Case of Chotanagpur,’ in Biswamoy Pati ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiations* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2010) ps. 55-88.

⁶³ Vinita Damodaran, ‘Colonial Construction of the tribe in India,’ ps. 57-58.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Daniel J Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta, ‘Indigenous pasts and the politics of belonging,’ in Daniel J Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta ed., *The Politics of Belonging in India; Becoming Adivasi*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011) p. 5.

In the third decade of the nineteen thirties, the word tribe with its implicit racial content was replaced by the word 'adivasi,' a development generally traced to the time of the formation of the Adivasi Mahasabha in 1938. Although the term 'adivasi' was contentious and stood in rivalry to the terms like the 'tribe' or 'the indigenous people' or 'vanavasi', it came to be accepted as 'a middle of the road term' that later found recognition in the Indian Constitution of 1950.⁶⁶ The word 'adivasi' also found a greater acceptability in historical research not as a label but as a recognition of their collective identity that grew from being oppressed. Rycroft argued that the term is increasingly translated as 'Indigenous and Tribal People' by activists and scholars, 'in resonance with the new phase of indigenous movements to allow Adivasis to engage with the discourse of indigenism on their own terms, i.e. their specific historical, cultural and political experiences of being tribal and/or indigenous.'⁶⁷ The concept of 'Indigenous Peoples' acquired more coverage once it was recognized in international law, and due to the fact that the global collective of 'Indigenous Peoples' now have a foothold in the inter- governmental development process.⁶⁸ In the present day political scenario, the term adivasi/indigenous has increasingly come to represent an expanding identity cutting across tribes, bearing different names, speaking different languages and dialects.⁶⁹

The other significant question that has been raised is can the tribe at all be seen as a structural type distinct from the peasant? Andre Beteille did not suggest that a tribe was a construction of the colonial government, but rather he questioned the tribe-peasant bipolarity in the sense that

⁶⁶ Uday Chandra, 'Towards an Adivasi Studies: New Perspectives on the Tribal Margins of Modern India,' in *Studies in History*, 33 (1) 2015, p122.

⁶⁷ Daniel J. Rycroft, 'Looking Beyond the Present: The Historical Dimensions of Adivasi (Indigenous and Tribal) Assertions in India,' *Journal of Adivasi and Indigenous studies*, Vol. I, No.1, August 2014, p. 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 5

⁶⁹ Virginius Xaxa, 'Tribes as Indigenous people of India,' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 18, 1999, ps. 3585-3595. (p. 3595.)

the characteristics usually attributed to peasants were noticeable in many 'tribes' as well; for instance, the predominance of settled agriculture, its subsistence oriented house hold economy, in the sense that the tribal family provided the required labour service for agriculture.⁷⁰ In the 1980s, the question was re-appraised by scholars working under the banner of environmental history. Their study focused on tribals as forest people and related issues such as deforestation, forest acts or resistance against forest encroachment. Recent studies have moved towards a rapprochement of two extremes; forest and field, shifting cultivators and peasants. Introducing the term, 'agrarian environments', Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan discussed the artificiality of both categories emphasizing on a strong interdependence between such categories and between various modes of livelihood.⁷¹

The study of the sect requires us to look critically into the nature of the movement whether we should argue in favour of the relevance of millenarianism for an understanding of the Sapha Hor movement as we have indicated in the previous section. Rooted etymologically in the Christian belief in the millennium, scholars have avoided the use of the word to explain peasant/ tribal rebellion. To me it appears that this term may be applied to the Sapha Hor movement in a more fundamental way and hence the concept and its relevance requires closer and in depth engagement than that we find in the existing literature on Adivasi rebellion in India.⁷² It is true

⁷⁰ Sanjukta Das Gupta, 'Peasant and Tribal movements in Colonial Bengal: A Historical Overview' in Shekhar Bandopadhyay ed., *Bengal Rethinking History: Essays in Historiography* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001) p. 66.

⁷¹ See Sangeeta Dasgupta, 'Locating Adivasi Identity in Colonial India: The Oraons and the Tana Bhagats in Chhotanagpur, 1914-1919' in Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah ed., *Savage Attack: Tribal Insurgency in India* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2014) p.118.

⁷² On Millenarianism see Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester University Press 1971); C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin, 1975); C. Hill, *The Experience of Defeat* (London: Penguin, 1985); N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarian and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); P. Worsley, *The Trumpets Shall Sound* (London: Paladin, 1970); Bryan Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among the Tribes and Third World People*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books ltd, 1973); Kennel Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971); Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion, Millenarian Protest Movements Against the European Colonial Order* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1979). For the

that in comparison to the mass politics developing in the later phase of nationalist movement characterized by intensified class conflict or wide spread anti-imperialist struggle, the peasants in the first three quarters of the British rule represented inchoate and a naïve state of consciousness. It is in the nature of his consciousness, in his visions of his own collapsing world order and his will to rebuild or change it in the near future, lies his millenarian dreams. In this connection we refer to the existing literature on millenarianism so insightfully studied by Peter Worsley, Christopher Hill, A.L. Morton, Bryan Wilson which explored the crumbling of a social order and the assertion of the millenarian voices over time, period and across countries, from communities in Africa to the Pacific Islanders to the rebels who were routed in the English civil war of 1642.

Studies have also shown, how the messiah was born from a collapsing social order especially when the religious fervor was rekindled among the rebels.⁷³ In Russia, thousands of serfs left their homes and headed for the Caucasus where it was believed, the Tsar also the messiah, was sitting on a mountain distributing freedom to all who came to his feet.⁷⁴ Michael Adas studied showed how the colonial government in Burma and Java opposed the prophets, monks, holy men, who they thought were the main catalysts in popular resistance against the colonial government since their teachings implicitly, if not openly, posed challenges to the legitimacy of the rule of the European colonizers.⁷⁵ In India, we find Gandhi in the role of a messiah to people from varied corners of the country; Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, Medinipur in Bengal, the Hos of Singbhum or the Oraons of Ranchi during the national movement from the second decades of the

Indian perspective see Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (Bombay: Asha Publishing House, 1965).

⁷³ Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971) p. 3

⁷⁴ Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, December 1976)

⁷⁵ Michael Adas, 'From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Pre Colonial and Colonial Southeast Asia' in Nicholas B. Dirks ed., *Colonialism and Culture*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) p. 116

twentieth century.⁷⁶ The present thesis examines the role of the messiah and new prophets who were not looked upon in favourable light by the colonial rulers but had a significant political and cultural influence on the sect under review. The thesis argues and agrees with Bates and Shah the relevant question whether there was anything particularly adivasi about the forms of resistance that have been labelled as adivasi.? Whether adivasi resistance can at all be differentiated from the peasant resistance?⁷⁷

The study also engages with the concept of revivalism, which has commonly been used to describe the Sapha Hor movement. By revivalism, the colonial administrators understood, ‘the revival of the mythical days of Champa, a land of plenty and freedom, a lost but a retrievable golden age.’⁷⁸ The idea found resonance in the writings of Stephen Fuchs and Edward Jay who talked about cultural revitalization to explain social movements among the tribals.⁷⁹ Revivalism remained a predominant characterization along side ‘reformative’ and ‘transformative’ to describe the structural changes brought about by social movements on the tribals.⁸⁰ Coming to the study of the Sapha Hor movement, J. Trosi however preferred to use ‘nativistic’ instead of ‘revivalistic’ to explain the sociological significance of the movement.⁸¹ John MacDougall who made the first significant study of the sect emphasized on an incomplete tribe- peasant continua and held increasing ‘cultural peasantization’ that was taking place among the Santals as the cause

⁷⁶Shahid Amin, ‘Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern U.P,1921-1922’ *Subaltern Studies III: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: OUP, 1989) ps.1-62; For a study of the impact of Gandhi on the Hos see Sanjukta Dasgupta, *Adivasis and the Raj*, op cit, ps. 299-302.

⁷⁷ Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah, Introduction: Savage Attack: Adivasis and Insurgency in India in Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah, ed., *Savage Attack: Tribal Insurgency in India*, (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2014) ps. 2-34.

⁷⁸ W.J. Culshaw and W.G. Archer, op cit, p. 229

⁷⁹ Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in India*. (Bombay: Asha Publishing House, 1965) Edward Jay, ‘Revitalization Movement in Tribal India’ in L.P. Vidyarthi ed., *Aspects of Religion in Indian Society* (Meerat: Kedar Nath Ram Nath, 1962) ps. 282-302.

⁸⁰ L.K. Mahapatra, ‘Social Movements among Tribals of India’ in K.S. Singh ed., *Tribal Situation in India* (Simla: Institute of Advanced Studies, 1972) p. 400; Also see P.K. Shukla, ‘Tribal Resistance in Chotanagpur: A Case Study of the Dubia Gossain Movement (1870-1880)’ in B.B. Chaudhuri and Arun Bandopadhyay ed., *Tribes, Forest and Social Formation in Indian History* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004) ps.162-171

⁸¹ J. Trosi, ‘Social Movements Among the Santals’ in *Social Action*, Volume 26. July-September, 1976, ps. 253-266

behind their assertion against colonial power. The Santals being a minority in the district was aware of the Hindu culture and hence ‘the use of Hindu symbols in the Kherwar movement indicated a kind of unconscious peasantization of Santal culture’.⁸² Another significant work on the Sapha Hors by S.P. Sinha also emphasized on the revivalist character of the movement.⁸³ In two of his scholarly articles however, B.B. Chaudhuri argued that revivalism as a concept cannot in itself explain the changing trajectories of a movement occurring continuously in brush with colonialism. Interpreting the radical ideology of the peasantry, he pointed out that cultural revitalization or ‘purificatory programme’ was a vital part of the radical political agenda of the adivasis in a situation where there was a growing awareness of the short coming of the institutions and rise of powerful critique of aspects of tradition. However, drawing a contrast between the Santal *Hul* and the Kherwar movement, Professor Chaudhuri pointed out that millenarian strains had considerably weakened during the Kherwar movement. Millenarianism involved not only dependence on the supernatural but a direct confrontation with vastly resourceful enemies. These traits, according to him, declined during the Kherwar movement when the rebels showed considerable planning and coordination among themselves.⁸⁴ It is true that there was great organization behind the Sapha Hor assertion of 1881, but the thesis will show that the millenarian visions of the rebels, irrespective of stronger organization, continued to be a major inspiration behind the movement.

In this thesis, we draw upon Hinduization of the sect as an important thematic since it is relevant

⁸² John Mac Dougall, *Land or Religion? The Sardar and Kherwar Movements in Bihar 1858-95* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985) ps. 236-240.

⁸³ S.P. Sinha, *The Kherwar Movement*, op cit. ps. 200-219.

⁸⁴ B.B. Chaudhuri, ‘Revaluation of Tradition in the Ideology of the Radical Adivasi Resistance in Colonial Eastern India, 1855–1932’— *Indian Historical Review*, Part I 36(2), 2009, ps. 273-305; B.B. Chaudhuri, ‘Revaluation of Tradition in the Ideology of the Radical Adivasi Resistance in Colonial Eastern India, 1855–1932’— *Indian Historical Review*, Part II, Vol. 37.1 36(2) 2010, ps.39-62

to our subject of discussion.⁸⁵ The thesis does not touch on the theme of sankritization of tribes, on the logic that ‘the process of climbing up the social ladder has not been the overriding concern of the tribes.’⁸⁶ Related to this primary theme we will reckon with two kinds of literature. Firstly, there were the writings on the Santals in general where the Sapha Hors found no mention although the writers were contemporaries of the sect. The second kind engages with the theme in relation to the Santals and more particularly the Sapha Hor community. Within the first genre of literature on the Santals, we find the writings of scholar- administrators like R. Carstairs who even while referring to the census agitation of 1881 did not mention the Sapha Hors or the Kherwars.⁸⁷ Similarly W.G. Archer through several of his publications studied different aspects of Santal life and even advocated codification of customary laws of the Santals. Although he dealt with the subject of Hinduization of the adivasis, he remained significantly indifferent to the subject of the Sapha Hors.⁸⁸ Such silence could be political; it could suggest avoidance of the existence of the sect perhaps because they were considered unworthy of discussion.⁸⁹

Within the second genre of literature, the ‘anthropologically inclined administrators’ like E.T. Dalton was among the first to note the Hinduizing influence on some castes and tribals of Chota Nagpur which formed the content of his book, *The Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872). The issue was discussed with much sense of urgency in the missionary records and the letters

⁸⁵ According to Virginius Xaxa, it is appropriate to describe the processes involved in the context of the tribes as Hinduization and not as Sankritization. This is because climbing up the social ladder has not been the overriding concern of the tribes. See Virginius Xaxa, ‘Transformation of Tribes in India,’ in *The Economic and Political Weekly*, June 12, 1999, p. 1521.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ R. Carstairs, *The Little World of an Indian District Officer*, (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd 1912); Also see *Harma’a Village : A novel of Santal Life* (Pokharia: Santal Mission Press, 1935).

⁸⁸ W.G. Archer, *The Hills of Flute: Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India: A Portrait of the Santals* (Delhi: Isha Books, 2007); *Tribal Law and Justice: A Report on the Santals* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Co, 2014).

⁸⁹ P.O. Bodding, ‘The Kharwar Movement among the Santals’ in *Man in India*, volume 1, March 1921.

published in *The Englishman*, *The Friends of India* and *The Hindu Patriot* between 1874-1881.⁹⁰ In 1891 H.H. Risley published his four volumes, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, which recognised the distinction between the ‘Safa Hors’ and the ‘Deswali Santals,’ after considerable experimentation with the theme of Hinduization of the tribes in the census enumeration.⁹¹ The fact that the sect had indeed made an impression on colonial mind was evident from O’Malley’s District Gazetteer published in 1910 which reserved a section on the Kherwar movement, chronicling its spread through several gurus, its split into several sub-sects, observing that the sect reappeared in times of economic distress. He was also noted that the movement had a tendency to Hinduism.⁹² The gazetteer was followed by two consecutive writings by Reverend Bodding in 1921 and 1922 in the ‘Man in India’ (first issue) and ‘The Modern Review’ respectively, articles already referred to in the previous section. None of the writings however considered the sect to be Hinduized and Bodding infact clarified his position on the Hinduization of the sect. He stated categorically that the sect aspired neither to become a Hindu or a Christian. They were simply trying ‘to strike a new line between the two.’⁹³

While colonial (missionary) writings was constantly changing its position on the subject of Hinduization of tribes, the nationalist ethnography that emerged from the 1930s, chose to highlight that the tribes were an integral part of the Hindu society. Writing in the mid nineteen thirties, Charulal Mukherjee expressed considerable optimism in his book *Santals*, that the ‘Adivasis’ were finally seeking to revitalize pre-Dravidian culture and tradition as the idea of civilization was filtering into the tribe both consciously and unconsciously. To amalgamate with

⁹⁰ S.P. Sinha, *The Kherwar Movement*, op cit, p.212

⁹¹ L.S.S. O’ Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Santal Parganas*, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta 1910) p. 364

⁹² Ibid, p.179

⁹³ P.O. Bodding, *The Kharwar Movement among the Santals*, op cit, p. 231

the Hindus, he wrote, had always been the deepest desire of the Santals and on traversing through the Santal myths and traditions would at once realize this deep urge to become a part of the Hindu society. The rise of the Sapha Hors was for him a clear indication of this urge to become a part of the civilization.⁹⁴ The view had a general acceptance in the writings of Indian sociologists and G.S. Ghurye critiqued not only the caste/ tribe distinction but regarded tribals as ‘imperfectly integrated class of Hindu society’ or ‘Backward Hindus.’⁹⁵ He pointed out that Hinduism was at the center of India’s civilizational unity and at the core of Hinduism were Brahminical ideas and values that were essential for the integration of the society.⁹⁶ Most anthropologists did not go so far but rather considered Hinduization as a gradual, steady and incomplete process. Nirmal Kumar Bose argued that Hindu method of tribal absorption was unique in the sense that it did not necessitate a complete obliteration of tribal culture. Rather its numerous traits did survive the Hinduization process.⁹⁷

The Sapha Hors however did not appear in all existing literature on the sect as Hinduized. Peter Anderson preferred syncretism to Hinduization to describe the movement by the Kherwars. According to him, syncretism entailed a process where religious elements were continuously reworked into wholes when integrated into different cultural and religious systems. The Kherwars, he pointed out was an interesting study in syncretism because they incorporated both Hindu and Christian element in their belief system.⁹⁸ Another work by Buddheshwar Tudu,

⁹⁴ Charulal Mukherjee, *The Santals*, (Calcutta: A. Mukherjee, 1962) p. 377-380

⁹⁵ Carol Upadhyay, ‘The Idea of an Indian Society: G.S. Ghurye and the Making of Indian Sociology’ in Patricia Uberoi, Nandini Sundar, Satish Deshpande ed., *Anthropology in the East* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007) p. 216

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ See Nirmal Kumar Bose, ‘Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption’, in *The Structure of Hindu Society*, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1975) ps. 168-181

⁹⁸ Peter Anderson, ‘Revival, Syncretism and the Anti-Colonial Discourse of the Kherwar Movement (1871-1910)’, in Richard Fox Young ed. *India and Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding –Historical, Theological*

preferred to evaluate the Kherwar movement not so much as ‘Hinduization’ but rather as a reaction to the activities of the Christian missions and their evangelization efforts among the Santals.⁹⁹

The present thesis however resonates the views of B.B. Chaudhuri, Ranajit Guha, David Hardiman, Tanika Sarkar, who have tried to evaluate the interaction between the caste/ tribe or low caste/ high castes through its specific historical trajectories. Citing the *Hul* of 1855, Guha showed how the rebels adopted certain forms of ritual worship only because they were considered to be conducive to spiritual merit by the Hindus.¹⁰⁰ According to B.B. Chaudhuri, the so called ‘Hinduization’ of the tribes in general, affected only a tiny segment of the tribal society, i.e. the relatively well off groups. The process was far more complex when it was linked to the radical agrarian movements, in which case, the adoption of Hindu cultural traits was a collective effort, a move that eventually facilitated the process of reassertion of the tribes.¹⁰¹ Questioning such universalist notions such as Hinduization and Sanskritization,¹⁰² David Hardiman pointed out that such theories lacked any convincing historical dimension. Govind’s followers among the Bhils of Western India gave up alcohol or abandoned their spirit mediums. In such forms of self-assertion, Hardiman argued, ‘There was no straightforward imitation of high caste values; rather a synthesis was created from an eclectic appropriation of various elements of culture and beliefs

and *Bibliographical-Essays in Honour of Robert Frykenberg*. (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdsman Publishing, 2009) ps. 127-143

⁹⁹ Buddheshwar Tudu, *Adibasi Bidroher Itihash*, (Kolkata: Puspo Publishers, 2008) pages 117-124

¹⁰⁰ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, (New Delhi, OUP, 1983) p.72.

¹⁰¹ B.B. Chaudhuri, ‘Society and Culture of the Tribal World in Colonial Eastern India: Reconsidering the Notion of Hinduization of Tribes’ in Hetukar Jha ed., *Perspectives on Indian Society and History: A Critique* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001) p. 34.

¹⁰² ‘Sanskritization’ is described by M.N. Srinivas as a process by which the tribes or caste aspires for improving their position in the local caste hierarchy by taking over the customs, rituals beliefs ideology, style of life of a high caste. See M.N. Srinivas, *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and other Essays* (New Delhi: OUP, 1989) p. 56

of the politically dominant classes.¹⁰³ The followers of Devi chose to endorse high caste values precisely because values such as claims to purity were symbols of power that had so long enabled the dominant classes to subjugate subordinate classes with a minimum use of physical force.¹⁰⁴ Similar forms of self-assertion is also noticeable in Jitu Santal's movement in Malda. Tanika Sarkar explained this form of assertion as 'a striking case of modern self-reform among the Santals, improvised through an interaction with the ideas and images external to the community but according to terms dictated by the Adivasi leader himself, who decided what element to carry along with the old Santal life and what not to practice'.¹⁰⁵ Based on his study of the Namasudras living in six districts of Eastern Bengal, (Bakargun, Faridpur, Dacca, Mymensingh, Jessore and Khulna) Sekhar Bandopadhyay argued that the demand for higher castes position or adoption of the so called purer ritual symbols need not be taken as expression of narrow social ambitions or emulation of the upper castes. In fact, any such act can also be seen as a protest against inferior social position and associated disabilities as well the appropriation of certain symbols that had so long been the exclusive privilege of a few at the top. After all the rise of the Namasudras from their former Chandals/untouchable status constituted one long struggle for social recognition which drew them into institutionalized politics that helped them to legitimize their position within the caste system¹⁰⁶ In either situations- whether the socially segregated lower orders aspired for an access to a more powerful cultural order through eclectic

¹⁰³ David Hardiman, 'Assertion, Conversion and Indian Nationalism: Govind's Movement among the Bhils' in Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke ed., *Religious conversions in India: Modes, Motivations and Meanings.* (New Delhi, OUP, 2003) p. 256

¹⁰⁴ David Hardiman, 'Adivasi Assertion in South Gujrat: The Devi Movement of 1922-23', in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies III: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: OUP, 1989) p. 217.

¹⁰⁵ Tanika Sarkar, 'Rebellion as modern self fashioning: A Santal Movement in Colonial Bengal' in Daniel J Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta ed., *The Politics of Belonging*, op cit, p. 66

¹⁰⁶ Shekhar Bandopadhyay, 'A Peasant Caste in Protest: The Namasudras of Eastern Bengal (1872-1945)' in Shekhar Bandopadhyay and Suranjan Das eds., *Caste and Communal Politics in South Asia* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Co, 1993) ps.145-180.

borrowings or sought an inversion of the very order represented by high culture-- what the subordinate masses hoped to achieve was to destroy his own marks of subalternity.¹⁰⁷

The assertion of the rebels however had deep rooted economic grievances—the continuing alienation from land or diminishing forest rights, remained a perennial problem in all tribal areas. B.B. Chaudhuri identified the economic basis of rebel peasants' consciousness¹⁰⁸ and Prabhu Mahapatra emphasized on the continuous conflict between landlords and tenants in the tribal Chotanagpur.¹⁰⁹ Samar Kumar Mallick traced the prelude to Jharkhand in the major economic dislocations taking place in the Santal Parganas.¹¹⁰ Every where in the colonized world, there was a breach in the 'moral economy' of the peasant as a result of unusual exactions and other forms of state encroachment transgressing the traditional relationship between the ruler and the ruled. By clashing with his notions of economic and social justice, and increased state intervention, studies have shown, the peasants were left with no option but to react in their own terms.¹¹¹

Finally, the study will engage with the question of agency and leadership involved in the movement. The predominant trend in historiography transferred the agency of building the nation and the development of consciousness-nationalism- to elite achievement. Kali Kinkar

¹⁰⁷Saurabh Dube, 'Entangled Endeavours' in Saurabh Dube ed., *Post Colonial Passages: Contemporary History-writing on India*, (New Delhi: OUP, 2004) p. 199.

Partha Chatterjee, 'Caste and Subaltern Consciousness' in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: OUP, 1992) ps. 169-210.

¹⁰⁸ B.B. Chaudhuri, 'Decline of the Old Order in the Adivasi (Tribal) World,' op cit. ps.711-764.

¹⁰⁹ Prabhu Prasad Mohapatra, 'Class Conflict and Agrarian Regimes in Chota Nagpur, 1860-1950' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Volume 28, 1. 1991, p. 2.

¹¹⁰Samar Mallick, *Transformation of the Santal Society: Prelude to Jharkhand* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1993).

¹¹¹ See Ramchandra Guha, *Saboteurs in the Forest: Colonialism and Peasant Resistance in the Indian Himalayas* in F.D. Colburn ed., *Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (Armonk NY: ME Sharp INC, 1989) ps.65-87. Also See James C. Scott, *Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South East Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976).

Dutta and Dhirendranath Baske's writings on the Santal *Hul*, provide a rich source of information on the rebellion even though the rebel as a subject of study is absent in this narrative form of history. The nationalist elite historiography differed in its subject matter but the principal modality common to all was to represent Indian nationalism as primarily an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom.¹¹² This was how K.K. Dutta and J.C. Jha conceived the history of nationalist movement in Bihar where the representation of the role of the National Congress overshadowed the presence of small sects such as the Sapha Hors.¹¹³ K.S. Singh studied the peasant movements through periodizations; 1795-1860 as a period of primary resistance, 1860-1920 as a period characterized by a mix of religious, agrarian and political issues, 1920-47 as a period characterized by movements of political and secular nature. The decade of the 1920s therefore constituted for him a great watershed between rebellion of 'sporadic, isolated and spontaneous nature' and tribal movements sustained by external stimuli –like the message and personality of Mahatma Gandhi.¹¹⁴

A major critique to this form of historical writing came in 1980s when the role of the subaltern as a conscious human subject agent was recuperated, independent of the elite, in the making and the development of Indian nationalism.¹¹⁵ In the subaltern project, the two domains, elite and subaltern, was segregated and although it had its overlaps, it was categorically pointed out, even if the masses fought alongside the elite, they managed to break away from control and put the

¹¹² Ranajit Guha, 'Some Aspects of of the Historiography of Colonial India' in Ranajit Guha ed. *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Volume I (New Delhi: OUP, 1982) p. 2

¹¹³ K.K. Dutta, *Freedom Struggle in Bihar Vol. - 1,2,3*, (Patna: Govt. of Bihar,1957); J.C. Jha, *The Tribals of Bihar and the Indian Freedom Movement 1920-24* in *Indian Historical Review*, July1985-January 1986, Vol.XII, Nos.1-2. Ps. 281-299; P.N. Ojha ed., *History of Indian National Congress in Bihar 1885-1985*, Historical Research Series no. 21,1985.

¹¹⁴ Sanjukta Das Gupta and Rajshekhar Basu, *Narratives from the Margin: Aspects of Adivasi History in India*, (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2011) page 6.

¹¹⁵ Ranajit Guha, 'Some Aspects of the Historiography,' in Ranajit Guha, ed. *Subaltern Studies Volume I: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: OUP,1982) p. 3

characteristic imprint of popular politics on the movement initiated by the upper classes.¹¹⁶ The subaltern project thus emphasized on rebel's own consciousness which formed the subject of several important studies; Tanika Sarkar's study of Jitu Santal of Malda, Swapan Dasgupta's study of the adivasi rebellion in Jangal Mahal or the Gudem Rampa revolt studied by David Arnold to name a few.¹¹⁷ The project underwent a shift in 1985 from subaltern politics (studied in the vein of E.P. Thompson and Antonio Gramsci) towards cultural history, cultural theory representation of subaltern subjectivity influenced by Foucault and Derrida.¹¹⁸ A fundamental question was raised by Gayatri Spivak in this context, 'Can the Subalterns Speak?' Although sympathetic but critical of the subaltern project she claimed, here and in other essays, that the subaltern is not privileged and does not speak in a vocabulary that will get a hearing in institutional locations of power. The subalterns entered official and intellectual discourse only rarely and usually through the mediating commentary of someone more at home in those discourses. If the problematic is understood this way, it is hard to see how the subaltern can be capable of speaking.¹¹⁹ Guha on the other hand continued to emphasize that the voice of the subaltern can be heard through a more nuanced reading of the colonial texts and listening to

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 6

¹¹⁷ David Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem Rampa rising (1832-1924)' in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies I: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: OUP, 1982) ps. 88-142 ; Swapan Dasgupta, 'Adivasi Politics in Midnapur (1760-1924)' Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: OUP, 1985) ps.101-135; Tanika Sarkar, 'Jitu Santal's Movement in Malda (1924-32): A study in Tribal Protest' in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: OUP, 1985) ps. 136-64; David Hardiman, 'The Power in the Forest: The Dangs (1820-40)' in David Arnold and David Hardiman eds. *Subaltern Studies VIII: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: OUP, 1994) ps. 89-147; David Hardiman, 'The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India' in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies VIII: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: OUP, 1984) ps.196-230.

¹¹⁸ See David Ludden, Introduction in David Ludden ed. *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical history contested meaning and the Globalization of South Asia* (London: Anthem Press, 2002) p. 17

¹¹⁹ Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* London, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988). Also see Gayatri Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in Ranajit Guha ed. *Subaltern Studies IV: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: OUP, 1985) ps. 330-363.

many stories narrated by small voices drowned in the noise of statist command.¹²⁰ One important contribution to the study of the Sapha Hors was made by Peter Anderson et al, through their publication and translation of texts orally narrated by Santals themselves that had been collected by P.O. Bodding on the *Hul* and the Kherwar rebellion, that was later archived in the Oslo library. The idea behind the project according to its editors was to bring out the voice of the Santals and acknowledge them as the subject of his own history from the *Hul* of 1855 to the advent of the twentieth century.¹²¹

Critiquing the subaltern project especially its essentializing tendency which assigned to categories like ‘subaltern’ and ‘autonomy’ ‘fixed decontextualized meanings,’ Sangeeta Dasgupta questioned the homogenous character of the subalterns, pointing out to the internal hierarchies within the Oraons and their responses to the changing historical contexts.¹²² Prathama Banerjee explored the possibility whether a study of tribal histories can open a new critical perspective from which to view the modern world at large.¹²³ In her earlier work, she studied the encounters between the ‘primitive’ tribes and the colonized *Bhadralok* of colonial Bengal; an interface between the ‘historical’ and the making of the ‘primitive’, two autonomous processes which actually worked together to bring about a condition she called colonial modernity.¹²⁴ Studies

¹²⁰ Ranajit Guha, ‘The Small of History’ in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakraborty ed., *Subaltern Studies Volume IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. (New Delhi: OUP, 1996) ps.1-12 (p.3).

¹²¹ Peter Anderson, Marine Carrin, Santosh Soren eds. *From Fire Rain* op cit, p. 24.

¹²² Sangeeta Dasgupta, ‘Locating Adivasi Identity in Colonial India: The Oraons and the Tana Bhagats in Chhotanagpur, 1914-1919’ in Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah ed., *Savage Attack: Tribal Insurgency in India* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2014) p. 116

¹²³ Prathama Banerjee, ‘Writing the Adivasi: Some Historiographical Notes’ in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, January-March 2016, vol. LIII, No. 1, ps. 131-153. P.134

¹²⁴ ‘Introduction,’ in Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: ‘Primitives’ and History –writing in a Colonial Society* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006)

have focused on shift from rebellion to politics of everyday life bringing social history in conversation with anthropological studies of rural communities.¹²⁵

4. Methodology

The study combines the methods of history and anthropology to provide an analysis of the different trajectories that constitute the world of the Sapha Hors. The relevance of the methodology is further enhanced by the fact that the sect lacks written tradition. Our study suggests that the interrelationship between historical research and orality has been underplayed and the printed word has always been considered to be authentic. We place the study within the broad terrain of what Dube calls ‘Historical anthropology,’ that ‘is a form of knowledge, that entails archival research and fieldwork, themselves framed as pre-figured and already known procedures that subsequently find productive combination in this inter disciplinary terrain.’¹²⁶

Having said that it is important to emphasize that the methods used in our study is primarily historical. The study is a historical study of movement and our purpose is to understand the articulations of the movement contoured by the specifics of the historical moments. We have consulted – Judicial proceeding, Political Special, Fortnightly reports, Reports DIG CID File, Freedom Movement File, Bihar Governor’s Report from different archives notably the West Bengal archives, Bihar Archives, Oriental and India Office Collections, a few private papers from the Oriental and India Office Collections, missionary records and periodicals, personal diaries and government publications for reconstruction of the story of the Sapha Hors.

¹²⁵ Uday Chandra, Chandra, Uday, ‘Towards an Adivasi Studies: New Perspectives on the Tribal Margins of Modern India’ in *Studies in History*, 33 (1) 2015, p.125.

¹²⁶ Saurabh Dube, ‘Introduction: Anthropology, History, Historical Anthropology’ in Saurabh Dube ed., *Historical Anthropology*, op cit, p. 2; Also see Bernard Cohn, ‘History and Anthropology: The State of Play’, in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and other Essays*. (New Delhi: OUP, 1990). Cohn explains Anthropological history as a study of political culture, a culture of power relations, constructed by the interaction of colonizer and colonized in the specific form of self representation to each to the other. p. 44

Overview of the Chapters

The different historical concerns of this study has been organized through five chapters along with an Introduction and a Conclusion. Following this Introduction, Chapter 1 traces the beginning of the sect against the background of the Santals' experience of defeat in the *Hul*. This chapter is based on a few Santal texts we have in our possession, which was translated and published by the missionaries of the C.M.S and the Scandinavian Mission. All the texts agree that the *Hul* was fought with a hope of a kingdom but was lost because the Santals rebels had disobeyed the commands of Thakur. Against the background of the experience of defeat in the *Hul*, small number of Santals under their guru Bhagirath Manjhi began a search for the moral world that could win back their legitimacy in the eyes of god. This chapter profiles the guru and his ideas that was to serve as the moral foundation on which the sect built its ideology. This chapter also studies how the Sapha Hor's millenarian beliefs were kept alive and was disseminated through numerous gurus who did not always claim association with Bhagirath. Chapter 2, traces the re-emergence of the sect, in the context of the anti-census agitation of 1881 and studies why and how the census was opposed. It was indeed an eye opener for the colonial officers who for the first time came to term with the fact that contrary to their expectations, the new sect had refused to die down even after the death of Bhagirath Manjhi in 1879. We look at the nature of the opposition as 'thousands of letters' came into circulation, some of them issued in the name of Dubia Gossain, asking the Santals to pursue a life of purity. None of the letters directly opposed the census and yet the British observed with alarm how the anti-census agitation spread across the Santal country following the trail of the letters. The chapter studies the large number of 'rumours' which accompanied the circulation of letters which were in effect a Santals'

way of interrogating the census. We look at the incisive critique of government's policies through the 'rumours'- its land and forest policy, the migrations to tea plantations, a threat to security of women and in fact a violation of sacredness of the inner domain of the community. The chapter also explores why the agitation came as a rude shock to the government who failed to comprehend the logic behind the agitation especially because the census they thought was meant for the greater good of the people. Neither could they comprehend why the Santals were making 'false pretexts' to avoid arrests; a feature they thought was unique to the new rebels and a contrast to the idealized image of the 'honest' Santal. Chapter three will study how the Sapha Hors - although a minority among the Santals - became the main protagonists around whom the debate on Hinduization of the tribes was first initiated in the Santal Parganas. It will study the responses of the missionaries, the colonial officers to the emergence of the sect, their understanding of the assumed Hinduization of the sect, which they then applied to situate them in the 'scientific' scheme of classifying population when the census operations began in an all India level. We will see how in the twentieth century, the colonial theories drew the nationalists, Hindu organisations and later even the Adivasi Mahasabha into contesting dialogues into a complex 'politics of numbers' for validation of their claims to new nation hoods; the major debate centering around the question whether the tribes were Hindus at all? Against the background of the debate, the study explores how the colonial officers and missionaries took a keen interest to protect 'the Santal system,' in a professed effort to stem the tide of assumed 'Hinduization' among the Santals. In the 1940s, in another turn of events, the study shows how, a small group of anthropologically inclined scholar/administrators, particularly under the influence of the emerging functionalist school of thought led by B. Malinowski in England began re-evaluating the notion of 'Hinduization' and its impact on the tribes. The sect, in this chapter, was more a

passive onlooker to the efforts and debates that surrounded them notably on the question of Hinduization. In Chapter 4 we study how the Sapha Hors came back into colonial gaze in the third decade of the twentieth century but this time as active Congress supporters. It studies the revival of the millenarian dreams of the sect around Gandhi as the new messiah. Along with the adivasi masses all over Bihar, the Sapha Hors now began constructing their own vision(s) of an imminent Gandhi *raj* in their own terms and in their own way and were thus co-constituents in the making of the myths around Gandhi. The Sapha Hors who were active during the Salt Satyagraha of the 1930s came to the forefront of politics during the Quit India movement of 1942. In Chapter 5 we engage with the question whether it is at all possible for the unmediated subaltern voice to be audible to the historian? This study recognizes the serious limitations of depending on archival sources alone and endeavors to access the world of the Sapha Hors through fields studies, opening up a bridge through conversations with the sect, listening to their songs and prayers and myths thus interpreting the voice of the Sapha Hors, in so far as we can claim to access them by disentangling them from mediations by the Saphas' 'others' to the best of our abilities.

Chapter 1

The Disenchanted Voices of the Hul: The Beginning of the Sapha Hor Movement.

Introduction:

The *Hul* or the Santal rebellion of 1855 had left a deep imprint on the lives of people who rose in revolt over a large area of Bengal Presidency, covering the Damin-i-koh, Bhagalpur, Birbhum, Eastern Hazaribagh, northern Manbhum.¹²⁷ Songs were composed and myths emerged around, Sidhu and Kanhu, the illustrious leaders of the movement, who had generated a millenarian dream. However, the legacy of the *Hul* might have died with the defeat of the rebellion at the hands of the British. In 1871, Bhagirath Manjhi of Tardiha, revived the millenarian dream, through a new message of salvation that revived the Santal aspirations for freedom. Significantly Bhagirath had taken part in the *Hul* and shared the experience of defeat along with his fellow rebels. But defeat taught him a different lesson and he realized that the Santal cause could not succeed without a thorough going cultural revitalization through the adoption of new beliefs and ethical norms, which could restore the community to a state of pristine purity. What evolved was a belief in a moral code or unwritten rules, interpreted in his own idiom, that was intended to be a break with the age old traditions of the Santals. This meant that a Santal would now have to redefine his position in regard to his traditional culture in order to give shape to the

¹²⁷ P.C. Roychaudhury, *Gazetteer of India: Bihar, Santal Parganas*, (Patna: Superintendent Secretariat Press, 1965) p. 130.

understanding of the new world he sought to establish.¹²⁸ His followers came to be variously known as the Kherwars, Sapha Hors, the Safas or the clean men.¹²⁹

In this chapter we seek to contextualize the emergence of Bhagirath and other like minded adivasi rebels in the post Hul ambiance of disillusionment, uncertainty and fear. Indeed, the significance of *Hul* far outlived its immediate consequence and although the revolt was crushed, the legitimacy of the movement was never called into question. As the *Hul* remained eternally justified, long after the revolt was crushed, in the first section of this chapter we study the world - view of the rebels of 1855 for whom the *Hul* was a legitimate war against oppression. In the next section, we look at the disenchanted voices of a section of the people who traced the failure of the *Hul* to the sins committed by the leaders, from their newly imbibed sense of Christian morality. Although it was represented by the voice of a minority, strongly influenced by the missionaries, the critique provides a rare insight of the past as retold by the men who had taken part in the great *Hul*. It is against this backdrop of the demoralizing effect of the experience of defeat that the third section situates the emergence of Bhagirath as the initiator of the Sapha Hor movement and the moral world he sought to create through unwritten moral codes. In the final section, the study seeks to demonstrate the legacy of Bhagirath, in the cult of guru worship that subsequently emerged throughout the Santal Parganas. There is no evidence to associate the later gurus directly with Bhagirath's own agency, but the preaching of the gurus, showed a remarkable similarity with the messages left by Bhagirath Manjhi. For this reason, we incorporate the cult of

¹²⁸ For case studies from across the continent of the responses of the colonized to their defeat, See Bryan Wilson, *Magic and Millenarianism: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among the Tribes and Third World People*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1973) p. 278.

¹²⁹ M.A.C. Moorat in her autobiography of her parents Reverend Alfred and Eliza Stark of the Church Missionary Society (henceforth C.M.S.) referred to the followers of Bhagirath Manjhi as 'Safa Hors' or 'Bhagrathias. M.A.C. Moorat, 'Alfred and Elizabeth Stark,' 1925, Calcutta, quoted in Marine Carrin and Harald Lyche- Tambs, *An Encounter of the Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries, and their Changing Worlds, 1860-1900* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008) p. 207.

the gurus within our attempt to understand the new sect begun by Bhagirath. Times were changing and the new time demanded new modes of adjustment as well as new idioms of protest. Writing about the experiences of the defeated rebels in the English civil war of 1642, Christopher Hill highlighted the significance of the changing times, '*the experience of defeat meant recognizing the collapse of the system of ideas which had previously sustained action, and attempting to discover new explanations, new perspectives.*'¹³⁰

Bhagirath was an enigma to his contemporaries, be it the missionaries, the Government or the common Santal who watched this man grow in importance in the post *Hul* period. Ironically Bhagirath's name was lost in time but his teachings helped in initiating a sect that survives till this day. In the process of studying Bhagirath's thoughts, we inevitably confront the breaks and continuities in his ideology with that of the rebels of the *Hul* of 1855.

The Santal Hul, Its legitimation and legacy

The ground for Santal discontent had been growing over the years. The *zamindars* and his retainers –*gomasthas, surbarakar, the peons*; the *mahajans* and their *mustajir*- the police and the court, exercised combined extortion on the Santals, subjecting them to abuse, maltreatment, forcibly evicting them from their own lands.¹³¹ If the Santal took a loan, they were made to sign a bond, the terms of which was so stringent that, it could never be repaid and the responsibility for re-payment automatically fell on the family, resulting in a practical enslavement of the entire family.¹³² The Santals were aware that even in situations where the debts were paid off, they

¹³⁰ Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries*, (London: Penguin Books, 1984) p. 17.

¹³¹ Kali Kinkar Dutta, *The Santal Insurrection*. (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1940), p. 7-8.

¹³² *Ibid.*

were helpless, as one Santal said, ‘we being the jungly animals, ignorant of accounts, and of the language, do as they please.’¹³³ The mahajans charged the Santals false bonds of 40 or 50 rupees and brought suits against the Santals in the civil court. If the Santals went to the house of the mahajan, for the money, they were charged with decoity or theft and made to appear before the court.¹³⁴ The *Hul* was a Santal response to an unbearable situation, the timing legitimized and endorsed by the appearance of Thakur. In this section we primarily concentrate on the voices of the rebels, expressed through the trials, oral narration on *Hul*, translated and published by missionaries, the travelogues/ diaries and excerpts from the story of *Hul* written by British officers. These narrations would help to understand the justification to revolt in the Santal’s own ontology.

In their reminiscences, the Santals consciously chose to isolate all memories of happy days from the shadow of mahajan or zamindari oppression. Chotrae Deshmanjhi narrated, he was a boy when his ancestors entered Nankar long before the *Hul* began.¹³⁵

‘During those times the lands in Nankar yielded a variety of crop; rice, corn, pulses, til, mustard.... grew in good quantity. Fruits and green vegetables grew in abundance in the forests. And because there was extensive pasture, people had many cows, goats and buffaloes... This was the time when the Santals lived in peace and happiness. Where ever the Chata Parab, Pata Parab, the Kali Puja was held, the village boys and girls would run with their madal (drums), tamak,

¹³³ Samar Kumar Mallick, *Transformation of the Santal Society: Prelude to Jharkhand* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1993) p. 8.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.8.

¹³⁵ Dhirendranath Baske, ‘Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha’ in *Saotal Ganasangramer itihasa*’ (Calcutta: Bijayon Prakashani, 2002, 1975) p.160.

bansi(flute) to dance and in the village they would dance the whole day. This was the time when the Santals were most happy and they did not know anything beyond that'.¹³⁶

Chotrae's memories of the happy past was not defined by time and it is also not clear from the narration, to what extent he was aware of the deteriorating conditions of the Santals on the eve of the rebellion. But popular ballads were in circulation and some of earliest ballads were written against Kenaram Bhakat of Amrapara, a moneylender and trader, loathed by the Santals for his notoriety.¹³⁷

'Oh Hor, come and listen while I tell you all about Kenara-a-a-am!

We cry to our Parganas, in vain cry against Kenara-a-am!

If they do not help us, there will be Hool against Kenara-am!

A Hool for our wives and little children

A Hool for cattle and for homesteads-

A Hool for our old life of freedom that we want back again!

If they donot help us, there will be a Hool against Kenaram'¹³⁸

The indispensability behind the urge to rebellion was best explained by the rebels themselves. In his trial before the magistrate, Sidhu one of the leaders of the *Hul*, testified that the Mahajans took 500% as interest but Mr. Pontet, the superintendent of the Damin -i – Koh (1937-55) did not

¹³⁶ Ibid. p 160

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 56

¹³⁸ The song is quoted from the story of *Hul* fictionalized through a novel by Robert Carstairs, *Harma's Village: A Novel of Santal Life* (Pokhuria: Santal Mission Press, 1935) p. 102.

pay heed to any of the complaints made to him by the Santals.¹³⁹ So the Manjhis and Pergunnaites assembled in his verandah and consulted for ‘two months’ that Mr. Pontet and Mohesh Dutt, (the police officer in charge of the Dighee thana), did not listen to their complaints and ‘no one acted as their father and mother’(protectors). It was then that God descended from heaven in the form of a ‘cart-wheel’ and said, ‘kill Pontet and the darogah and the mahajans and then you will have justice and a father and mother.’¹⁴⁰

Thus *Hul* was a legitimate fight for justice against the oppression of the sahuakar, zamindar and the government. The legitimacy of the *Hul* grew stronger as myths of the appearance of Thakur began to circulate through the countryside. Chotrae Desmanjhi narrated the rumors that circulated in the village on the eve of the *Hul*:

In every village, streets began to be cleaned and metal balls, broken old winnowing fans and old worn out brooms with flags should be hung up at the end and it was said someone was coming and something dreadful would happen to the village if the streets were not found clean.¹⁴¹

Stories of the two leaders, Sidhu and Kanhu and their divinely ordained powers began to assume different forms in popular imagination as people began to predict and await the coming changes.

According to one version, Maku and Manka had gone to visit the four sons at Bhagnadihi. It was

¹³⁹ Testimony of Sidoo Santal late Thacoor, letter from A.C. Bidwell, Special Commissioner for the suppression of the Santal Insurrection to Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dt. 15th October, Bengal Judicial Proceedings (henceforth BJP), 8 November 1855. West Bengal State Archives (WBSA)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ *Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha* [The Story of Chotrae Desmanjhi], translated by Stephen Hari Tudu in collaboration with Mildred Archer in W.G. Archer, ‘The Santal Rebellion’, *Man in India*, Volume, 25 (Ranchi: Man in India Office, 1945) p. 232

there that they learnt that Marang Buru, the Great Spirit, had appeared before them seven times on successive days in different forms. He was seen first as a cloud descending from heaven, then as a tongue of fire with a knife glowing in the midst, as a mysterious veiled figure, as a shadow in the bright sun where no shadow should fall, as a Sal(timber) tree suddenly springing from barren grounds and finally as a white man clothed in loin cloth. The brothers claimed that Marang Buru gave them a sacred book containing the Great Spirit's command to prepare the people for what was to come.¹⁴²

While Macphail's account talked about the mystical signs that signified the coming change, the 'Hul Reak Katha'(henceforth HRK)¹⁴³ was an all encompassing account of the rebellion, beginning with magical signs to a direct call for action against the oppressors. According to this version of the story, on two separate occasions Sidhu and Kanhu were visited by an 'out of the world figure' waiting for them under the *Baru* tree and 'none who were passing by witnessed the happening.'¹⁴⁴ It was on the third day, that Thakur revealed himself before them and told them

¹⁴² John M. Macphail, *The Story of the Santals: with an account of the Santal Rebellion* United Free Church Santal Mission, Badmah, 88th July 1921, (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker and Spink & co, 1922) India Office Library, (henceforth IOL) p. 54

¹⁴³ Peter B. Anderson, Marine Carrin and Santosh Soren, tr., ed., *From Fire Rain to Rebellion: Reasserting Ethnic Identity Through Narrative.* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2011) p. 147.

According to a note by the authors of Fire Rain, *The Hul Reak Katha* (The Story of the Santal *Hul*) was narrated by an unknown Durga Tudu living in a village called Mundha Am, which was probably located in the vicinity of Mohulpahari. He was interviewed by Sagram Murmu, who included his summary of the exchange, the promised payment to Durga Tudu and the terms of the narration; p. 141

¹⁴⁴ Quoted from HRK in 'From Fire Rain' op cit, p. 177; The brothers Sidhu and Kanoo saw a man near the Baru tree trunk lying down on the ground; he had no arms, no legs but heads on both side. The next day on their way to the village school, they saw the man again. He had legs on both sides but no head and no arms. On the third day they saw him sitting like a man.

Kanhu's deposition before the magistrate, during his trial, was different from the HRK. When he was asked, 'What was the Thakur like?' Kanoo replied that he was a white man, dressed in *dhoti and chudder*, who sat on the ground and like a sahib (British officer) wrote on pieces of paper. He had six fingers on each hand and appeared before him only at night. See Letter from G.F. Brown to the Honourable Chairman, Deputy Chairman and the Court of Directors of the East India Company, London, dt. 12th December, Examination of Kanoo Sonthal in BJP, 20 December, 1855. WBSA

For the first time we have the description of the divine figure of Thakur who possibly reflected the Santal imagery of a dominant class; A white man, with a knowledge to write, wore the attire of a gentleman and yet was placed above

that he had come to give them ‘a blessing’. They should send a letter to the raj(government) asking for the removal of the heavy rent upon them and so saying he laid down the rules. The people ploughing with cows should pay a rent of two annas, those with bullocks a rent of 4 annas and with buffaloes a rent of 8annas. If the raj did not listen, then Thakur commanded ‘make yourselves kings’ and He promised, ‘I will extend my assistance to you.’¹⁴⁵ Thakur also gifted them with the magical powers of reading and writing. The writer of HRK admitted his ignorance as to how the brothers had mastered the art of writing but ‘somehow’ they managed to send a *perwannah* (letter) to the raj.¹⁴⁶ The news of the appearance of Thakur, more particularly the bizarreness of the imagery of Thakur and the appearance of the mystical seven symbols, all validated the belief that something extraordinary was about to happen. This was further reinforced by the written word which established the legitimacy of the *Hul* beyond doubt.¹⁴⁷

As the news spread, rumours and speculation stirred up excitement and large groups of Santals began to assemble to listen to the brothers. Sheikh Sumro testified before the Assistant magistrate of Aurangabad in Mursidabad that having heard that the Thakur had come ‘out of the earth’, went to Bhagnadihi. The brothers showed him the ‘written paper’ that the Thakur had given them and told them that he had come down personally because there had been much ‘sin’

the ordinary because Thakur possessed ‘six fingers’. In either instance, magical imageries were associated with grotesqueness to establish the supernaturalism of the situation

¹⁴⁵ HRK, op cit, p. 177.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 177-79.

¹⁴⁷ Peter Anderson, ‘Literacy and the Legimation of the Santal Hul, 1855:A Retrospective Perspective from the 1890s’ in Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs-Lyche, *People of the Jungle: Reformulating Identities and Adaptations in Crisis* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008) ps.143-172; Also see Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, henceforth OUP,1983)p. 54; Ajay Skaria observed, ‘notion of writing as a weapon of the dominant’ often appeared as a crucial element in the experience of subaltern groups. He showed how in 1868, when the adivasis of Panchmahals, in Western India, in their revolt against the British were asked to surrender, Joria Bhagat sent the officers a reply in a sheet of paper covered with squiggles and stick drawings of human beings. It was his written affirmation of his refusal to accept defeat. See Ajay Skaria, ‘Writing, Orality and the Power in the Dangs, Western India, 1800-1920s’ in *Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakraborty ed. Subaltern Studies, Volume IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: OUP, 1996) p. 14.

in the country. He gave the brothers, ‘the kingdom and the right to kill anyone who did not obey them’.¹⁴⁸ On 30th June 1855 about 10,000 Santals met at Bhagnadihi in the Sahebgunj district to listen to the divine command interpreted by Sidhu and Kanhu and end the oppressive rule of the mahajans and zamindars and an indifferent sarkar.¹⁴⁹ The myth that was created became synonymous with the truth.¹⁵⁰ With this responsibility, Sidhu and Kanhu assumed the role of Subah Thakur. As the flames of the revolt spread, the leaders gave the call for a war for ‘the Santal country’ whose contours remained undefined. Sidhu proclaimed’, ‘we will drive them (sarkar) beyond the Ganga’. He told his followers:

‘Mother Ganga will come to Thacoors (assistance). Fire will rain from Heaven.. It will rain fire and all Sahibs will be killed by God in person... this is the order of Thacoor.’¹⁵¹

The belligerent mood during the *Hul* however did not always seek divine intervention. There was also the pragmatic voice amongst the rebels, defiant and confident, clearly expressing themselves in the songs of the *Hul*,

‘We will survive by our selves, no one will be by our side,
We will surely revolt,
We will surely revolt,

¹⁴⁸ The Deposition of Sheikh Sumro taken on an oath on 9th July 1855 before the Assistant Magistrate Aurangabad, BJP July 19-26 1855, WBSA.

¹⁴⁹ Kali Kinkar Dutta, *The Santal Insurrection*, op cit, p. 15

¹⁵⁰ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005) “Myth is make-believe; it is a game that transfigures our fragmented, tragic world and helps us to glimpse new possibilities by asking, “What if?” p. 7.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency In Colonial India* (New Delhi: OUP, 1983) p. 111.

The village Manjis and Pargannaits,
The village heads,
Will give us all kinds of help, no one will be by our side,
But we will surely revolt.’¹⁵²

Emulating the brothers, several subah (provincial) Thakurs began to take charge of the movement. ‘The situation became as ferocious as the tiger. Many Subah Thakurs, messengers, soldiers and officers appeared under their authority.’¹⁵³ *Perwannahs* or *hukumnamahs*(orders) were issued in the name of Shree Kanhu Thakur and Shree Sidhu Thakur in order to communicate between Thakurs of different regions. Some of these *perwannahs* (order from one Thakur to another) carried assurance and instructions for the rebels, ‘Send two men. The power is now ours for the what of it, for the future there is no fear.’¹⁵⁴ (emphasis added) Others threatened dire consequences, ‘if you do not attend, your head will be cut off.’¹⁵⁵ Satirical songs were composed to rebuke the men, who tried to avoid the *Hul* by ridiculing their masculinity.

‘The people of Dhanjuri listen,
They have become ma...n,
Man they have become,
He, he, he,... he.’ (laugh)¹⁵⁶

¹⁵²Dhirendranath Baske, *Saotal Bidroher Potobhumikaye Samaj Chetonar Rup Nirnaya*, in Tarun Bhattacharjee and Debyojyoti Mazumdar ed., *Saotal Bidroho Sankhya* Number 2-6 (Calcutta: Information and Cultural Department, 1995) p. 93.

¹⁵³ HRK, op cit, p. 181.

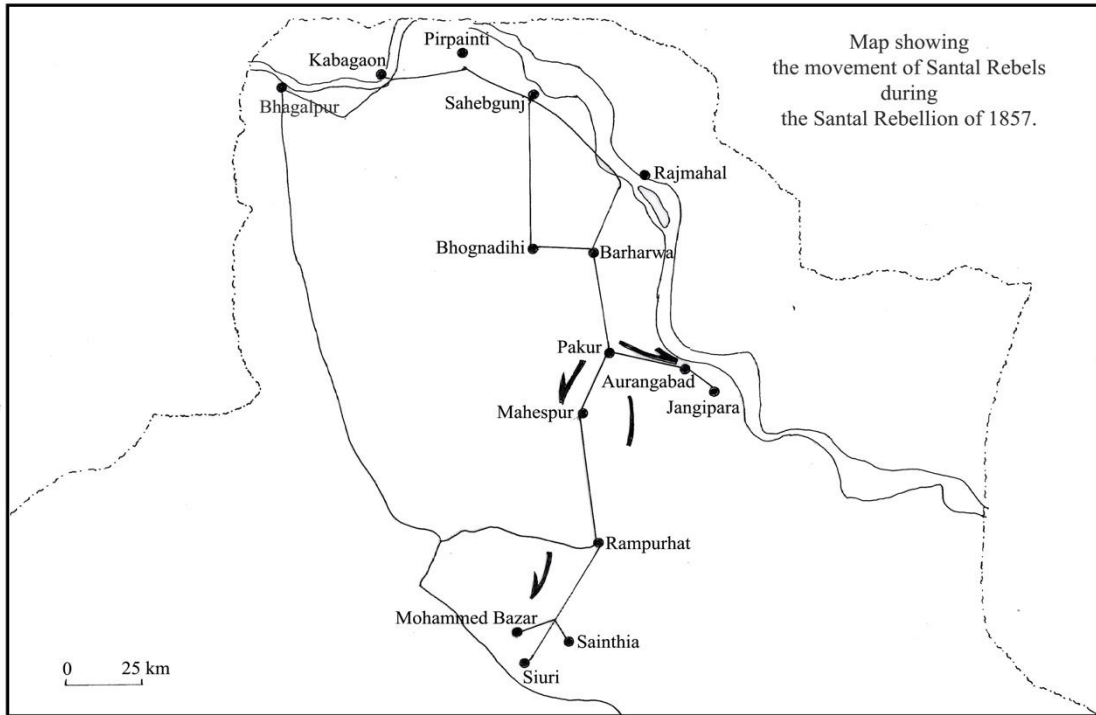
¹⁵⁴ Letter from the Magistrate of Moorshidabad, dt. 11/8/1855 to Mr. Grey, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, BJP, 6 September, 1855, WBSA.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Dhanjuri hey,
Jani hoylo morod,
Morod hoylo jani
He he he.. he.’

There was considerable organization in the rebellion as Santals rebels spread out in all directions from Bhoganadihi; to Bhagalpur via Pirpointee in the north, Rajmahal in the east and south as far as Siuri. The Map showing the movement of the rebels has been taken from Google only after studying the movement from the noted works on *Hul.*¹⁵⁷

MAP - 1



Source: Google Maps

The rebels fought for six months with varied intensity but finally succumbed to superior British troops from around January 1856. Looking at the *parwannahs* it is possible to trace how the rebels' morale began to gradually crumble for want of men and medicine as the British troops began to tighten their control over the movement.

See Dhirendranath Baske, 'Saotal Bidroher Potobhumikaye Samaj Chetonar Rup Nirnaya' in *Special Issue on Santal Rebellion*, op cit p. 94

¹⁵⁷ See Map-1, p.12. The route in the map corroborates with K.K. Dutta's *The Santal Insurrection of 1855-57*.

‘Oh Thakur and Subah our men are struck with balls and is not to live. Mercy and Justice of the Thakur! Send a letter and a dagger. Quick Thakur quick. Oh! Subah come soon. None of your Sepoys appear to live and is dead with balls. Bring medicine and bring the same soon and with care.’¹⁵⁸

Forty-eight such letters were recovered from Sidhu and Kanhu’s box at Bhagnadihi.¹⁵⁹ The brothers seemed to be conscious that something had gone terribly wrong during the course of the movement. Kanhu told the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, “The Thakur had said, ‘water will come out of the muskets’ but my troops committed some crime, therefore Thakur’s protection was not fulfilled.”¹⁶⁰

Kanhu himself in a despondent and introspective mood reflected that the troops must have committed some crime to have incurred divine displeasure. Thus Kanhu’s testimony was instilling into the memory of the defeat of the *Hul*, a critique of some of the acts of the rebels themselves. The critique however took a more structured form in the various narratives of the Santal converts to Christianity as recorded by the missionaries who began to reevaluate the *Hul* from notions of morality or ethics. What is important for our subsequent discussion is to study the voices of dissent expressed in a handful of texts, in the midst of complete silence of a large section of the people who were previously active composing songs of the *Hul*. These voices of dissent raised no question about the legitimacy of the *Hul*, but their reappraisal, was largely

¹⁵⁸ Letter from the Magistrate of Moorshidabad, dt. 11/8/1855 to Mr. Grey, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, BJP, 6th September, 1855, WBSA

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ G.F. Brown to the Honourable Chairman, Deputy Chairman and the Court of Directors of the English East India Company, dt. 12/12/55; Examination of Kanoo Sonthal, BJP, 20 December 1855, WBSA.

influenced by Christian conceptions of morality, which they had learnt from their association with the missionaries.

The ‘Sin’ and the ‘Sinners’ of Hul

The *Hul* led to a panic in the country and contemporary newspapers were flooded with incidents of Santal atrocities.

‘After plundering Sangrampur, the Santal insurgents reached Pakur and they kept the place under siege for three days and three nights. On the fourth day, Sidhu, Kanhu, Chand and Bhairab entered the house of a local zamindar, but could not get wealth to their expectation.... Then they plundered the houses of many villagers and robbed them of their wealth. One Brahmin named Radhanath Pande, a bed ridden paralytic patient, and one Lakshman Mandal who being a lame man could not run away, were brutally murdered. Two old women were however not only spared, but also respectfully provided with some food and money.’¹⁶¹

The Santals however, were understandably not self-critical of their acts, because they were following the orders of god. During his trial, Bullye Santal was asked by the magistrate of Murshidabad, why he had gone to the *kutchery*(office)of the rajah of Mohespur. Bullye replied without hesitation, ‘I came to plunder’; as this was for him, an ‘honourable’ act. He told the magistrate, it was their plan to loot ‘the whole country and take possession of it,’ for the brothers

¹⁶¹ Kali Kinkar Dutta, *The Santal Insurrection*, op cit, p.33.

had told him, 'no one can stop us, for it is the order of the Thakur.' (What Bullye Santal had in his possessions after plundering for three days were three rupees and a few chudders (shawls)).¹⁶²

By February 1856, the *Hul* was crushed ruthlessly with a heavy hand leaving ten thousand dead or in a desolate, desperate condition without food or shelter.¹⁶³ Disillusionment seeped into the *Hul* songs even while justifying the cause for which the people had sacrificed their lives:

'Sido why are you bathed in blood
Kanhu why do you cry hul hul?
For our people we have bathed in blood
For the trader thieves,
Have robbed us of our land.'¹⁶⁴

The *Hul*, according to the rebels, had its own ethical codes, which lay in the logic of the revolt itself. In his deposition before the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, Kanhu said:

'I was to pay revenue to the government and I was to oppress no one and the zamindars and mahajans were committing great oppression.. and that I was to

¹⁶² Deposition of Bullye Santal, Manjee, son of Bhushye, aged 35. Occupation –cultivator, caste –Santal, inhabitant of Basan, Tilligram, BJP, File number 291, II, July 19-26, 1855 WBSA

¹⁶³ John M. Macphail, *The Story of the Santals: with an account of the Santal Rebellion*, op cit, p. 61.

¹⁶⁴ *Hul* song translated by W.G. Archer in L.S.S. O' Malley, Bengal District Gazetter, Santal Parganas, Appendix-D (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1910) p. 396. There might be some disagreement on its interpretation. I have however quoted Suhrid Bhowmick's interpretation of expressions of disenchantment in this *Hul* song, referred to in 'Saotal Bidroher Gaan O Kabita,' in Tarun Bhattacharjee and Debyojyoti Mazumdar ed. *Saotal Bidroho Sankhya*, op cit, p. 98.

place them at a distance from the Santals and if they do not go away to fight them.¹⁶⁵ (emphasis added).

Yet the *Hul* failed because in the eyes of the rebels the moral code had been violated. The writer of HRK, more explicit in his explanations of the failure of the *Hul*, pointed out to certain rules of morality upon which the legitimacy of the rebellion rested. According to HRK, the Thakur told the brothers that their victory was dependent on their ability to pursue an ethical life.¹⁶⁶ Thus unwritten rules were formed; while the oppressor should be punished the rebel's acts' have to be righteous. He could not succumb to any form of personal greed, debauchery or break the 'laws' of the community. In other words, underlying the whole concept of the legitimate war, lay the fundamental premise that god's assistance was promised to those who were able to distinguish between acts of justice and injustice. Significantly these moral precepts were often reflections of Christian notions of sin, redemption or Christian understanding of marriage and conjugality, with which the *Hul* was now reappraised. But all the texts placed the burden of the sins committed during the *Hul*, not on the community but on the individual acts of depravity. Chotrae Desmanjhi was one of the converts who vividly related the experiences of the *Hul*:

'Sido and Kanhu had raised an army and had gone to loot Mohespur. They went in palkis (palanquins) and as they went they cleaned the country up. Wherever they camped they made the boys and girls dance and if a girl caught their fancy, their orderlies/servants would place a cloth on the girl's head and they said she had become the Thakurs'. The girl was then taken in a palki and taken to them...

¹⁶⁵ Examination of Kanoo Santhal, BJP 20th December, 1855, WBSA

¹⁶⁶ HRK, op cit, p. 177.

In this way Sido and Kanu got a number of girls. Anyone's daughter or daughter-in-law became theirs if their eyes fell on them. If a man said anything he was shown the 'pod of a pea' (shown the sword). So for fear not a word was said.'¹⁶⁷

Chotrae was thus questioning the behavior of the leaders, who had been disrespectful of the Santal women and by doing so, had diverted from the rightful path of *Hul*. The portrayal of such depravity among the rebels, however might have been a missionary inspired critique of the free sexual liberties prevalent among the unmarried boy and girls of the Santal community. Among the Santals, the community did sanction a degree of licentiousness within the boundaries of the rules of sex. Even in instances of forced sex within members of the community, if the elders so decided, the offender might be punished with just a fine ranging from five rupees to fifteen.¹⁶⁸ To the Christian missionaries however, such acts were unethical, uncivilized and hence unjustified.

The other practice that was held as immoral was polygamy. The practice of having co-wives was not unknown among the Santals although it was not a common practice. Even Kolean guru, who was aware of the practice did not approve of it.¹⁶⁹ The Santal riddles ridiculed of the concept of having co-wives. Yet the practice was not uncommon and there were situations when the man took another wife with the permission of the first wife.¹⁷⁰ The Christian concept of morality, which made its presence felt through the critique of the *Hul*, thus questioned the very basis of

¹⁶⁷ Chotrae Desmanjhi *Reak Katha*, op cit, 232–39.

¹⁶⁸ W.G. Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice: A Report on the Santals*. (New Delhi: Concept Publishing House, 1984) p. 149.

¹⁶⁹ *Horkoren Mare Haramko Reak Katha* (Traditions and Institutions of the Santals), Translated from Santali by L.O. Skrefsrud in 1887. It was translated into English with notes by P.O. Bodding. (henceforth HMHRK), (New Delhi: Bahumukhi Publication, 1942) p.81.

¹⁷⁰ W.G. Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice*, op cit, p. 158-160.

Santal belief and culture, by trying to subvert all flexibility in the rules of sex, marriage, that governed the lives of the Santals,

‘The real sin,’ explained Durga Tudu in HRK, ‘is fornication- to take the wife of another... Although the man does not know, yet the Sun God can see you from the above. He can see through all your deeds. Because of this you are sure to fall into sin.’¹⁷¹ (emphasis added).

The writer of HRK was evidently trying to establish the importance of monogamy as a principle of good marriage and defining morality at the same time. But was the act of immorality seen as the only cause of failure then? The reminiscences of the *Hul* are full of memories of witch hunts, en masse desertion from villages, continuous search for hide outs in the forests, scarcity, panic – all of which invariably ended in questioning the leaders and their immoral acts that was believed to have altered the course of war during the *Hul*. Chotrae narrated:

‘My two elder brothers said, “We have many girls. They may call them witches and kill them. We must flee from here at once.” The family walked for day and night until they reached Kodma.’¹⁷² His family made sure that all the girls were married. Oil was used to do iputut (marriage) to girls ¹⁷³and ‘no matter whether they lived together or not after marriage, no one

¹⁷¹ HRK, op cit, p. 185.

¹⁷² Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha, op cit, p. 235

¹⁷³ It is a form of marriage in the Santal community arranged between two young people who settle matters for themselves without intermediaries. Itut means paint smearing and is so called because the young man, when he gets an opportunity smears some red paint or mud on the forehead of the girl with whom he is in love. This is not the most common form of marriage and is rare. The common form is kiring bahu. See O’ Malley, op cit, ps.159-162.

asked questions nor did they inquire about each other'.¹⁷⁴ From Kodma, the family fled to Ramkhura in the Saptola hills and took refuge in the forest with several others and it was here that they surrendered to the British forces.

The HRK, unlike Chotrae's reminiscence, made no reference to the witch hunting but ended the story on a similar note, holding the leaders responsible for defeat of the *Hul*. One Santal song questioned the ignorance of the 'kings' due to which the kingdom was lost:

The Santal brothers were kings earlier,
Somehow they were lost,
How their reign was lost?
As they were illiterate
As they were dull
Santal kings were lost
Their region was lost also.¹⁷⁵

It appears from the composition that the bard was complaining of the illiteracy of the leaders, their incapability to lead the nation. But what is important in this context is that, these thoughts were indeed lamentations of a defeated community at a loss to understand the failure of the *Hul*, which after all had the sanction of god.

¹⁷⁴ Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha, op cit, p. 235.

¹⁷⁵ Sedae sari Santa! boeha

Rapajko tah"ekan
Cekatebon helaoena
Cekatebon pucucena
Santa! rapajko?
Oloktebon licarena
Buddhi tebo khatoyena
Enatebon pucucena
Santa! rapajko.

The reminiscence of the *Hul* by Baijnath, which was translated by Reverend Cole of the Church Missionary Society (henceforth C.M.S.) however, reflected a different mood altogether. Baijnath possibly like all other Santals of his times did not question the legitimacy of the *Hul* because he was aware of ‘*Thakur*’s command’ and that the brothers were chosen by *Thakur* to lead the revolt. His story was more about the ordeal the Santals faced during the course of the rebellion; of dispossessed families hiding in the thickest part of the jungle, coming out only during the night, afraid of being discovered and killed by the soldiers. He talked about continuous migration to avoid getting arrested, ‘the suffering, people and animals dying in scores.’ –an experience that was ultimately futile because the *Hul* was lost.¹⁷⁶

A similar experience was narrated by Jugia Haran, who unlike Baijnath, directly questioned the deceitful promises of the leaders as the real cause of suffering of men during and after the *Hul*. Jugia Haran reminisced,

‘During the insurrection we suffered severely. From Asar (mid of June to mid of July) for full three months we lived in the hills at the foot of trees: rain was continuously pouring on us, and we were nearly dying from hunger, because of the guiles of the Suba Thakurs.’¹⁷⁷

In all the texts thus, the collapse of the moral order was explained solely in terms of the ‘sins’ committed by the rebels, Chotrae narrated:

¹⁷⁶ Baijnath’s Story (Translated by Reverend Cole from the original account written by Baijnath himself) in *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, October 1881, p.117.

¹⁷⁷ HMHRK op cit, p.192.

‘In this way, we Santals were reduced to great sorrow, misery and suffering and scarcity as a result of the wicked acts as well and the deceitful promises of Sidu and Kanu. We lost our houses, cattle, cow, bullocks and buffaloes, our food and everything, only our hands were left.’¹⁷⁸ (emphasis added).

The Santals felt disgraced and humiliated not only because they had been left economically crippled but reproached by the very class of people against whom they had revolted, ‘there was no plough cattle, there was nothing to eat, and the *dekos* mocked us irritatingly. We had again to fall into the hands of the same money lenders.’¹⁷⁹

All annoyance and disappointments converged into one pertinent question the writer of HRK, placed before his listeners:

‘Where and in which matters were they successful? Not even for one day they were kings, or, not even for one year they collected rents. They only caused the lives of other people to be lost.’¹⁸⁰

Chotrae and the other converts were thankful that the Government had re-established order that had been undermined by the *Hul*. They were happy that an order was issued so that the Santals could reclaim their cattle lost during the rebellion and they could begin their cultivation once again. In the second year after the rebellion, when the Government began to build railways, Chotrea said, ‘(it)was of great help to the Santals’. The traditional village administration was

¹⁷⁸ Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha, op cit, p. 237.

¹⁷⁹ HMHRK, op cit, p. 192.

¹⁸⁰ HRK, p. 187.

restored, the posts of the *panda*, *cakladar*, *kudam naeke* (official posts) was revived and given back to the former holders of position and all service lands were returned to them. Thankful of the colonial presence, he added, ‘Through cultivation we at least shed our poverty and as days passed we built up our savings as we had done before.’¹⁸¹ In this manner, wrote the writer of HRK, ‘The British brought peace to the country.’¹⁸²

These were the people who not only accepted British rule but saw through the advantages of collaborating with the ruling power. There were however songs composed in the post *Hul* period, whose antiquity is difficult to ascertain, yet the voice of the rebel can be heard, especially of claims over the lands they had taken pains to cultivate,

‘Santal Parganas a country that belong to us
Unlike other countries it was covered with forests.
We have cleared the jungles,
driven out the animals,
We have carried land to prepare the ground.’¹⁸³

Bhagirath began preaching in these uncertain times amidst hopes and frustrations surrounding the memories of the *Hul* still fresh in the minds of the people. The converts, had initiated the process of rethinking of the causes of the defeat especially after the *Hul* lost its moral sanctity in the eyes of god. But unlike the converts who placed their faith in the British rule, Bhagirath

¹⁸¹ Chotrae Desmanjhi *Reak Katha*, op cit, p. 238.

¹⁸² HRK, op cit, p. 184.

¹⁸³ Suhrid Bhowmick, ‘*Saotal Bidroher Gaan O Kabita*’ in Tarun Bhattacharjee and Debyojyoti Mazumdar ed., *Saotal Bidroho Sankhya* op cit, p. 98.

chose to continue the legacy of *Hul*, while extending his own explanation of how to reckon with the post *Hul* situation. His ideas typically reflected the morale of the defeated; he no longer talked about a direct confrontation with a far superior military power with the same mood of confidence as the rebels of 1855 but rather placed his faith in a magical change.¹⁸⁴ Bhagirath came to believe that the Santals could once again dream of ‘a country,’ only if their society was rejuvenated or revitalized through the adoption of new ethical beliefs and practices. His ideas evidently crystallized over the time and revealed a peculiar blend of moral and political thought under the influence of the *Hul*.

Bhagirath Manjhi and the Act of Repentance

By 1871, Bhagirath Manjhi, had already established himself as a guru in the village named Tardiha, in tuppeh Barkope of the Godda district.¹⁸⁵ There is nothing much that we know about Bhagirath other than the fact that he had participated in the *Hul* of 1855 and was imprisoned in Bhagalpur jail in 1868 for seditious conduct ‘for trying to disturb people’s mind by threatening an outbreak’ and since his discharge had been known to the authorities as a ‘turbulent character’.

¹⁸⁶ G.N. Barlow, the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, characterized Bhagirath in the following

¹⁸⁴ Interesting parallels can be drawn from across the world on how men dealt with defeat in the hands of the white powers. The Hau Hau movement was started by Ta Ua (1862) of the Maori tribe, who in his youth had fought the white settlers. Later he became a Christian convert. One day, Ta Ua proclaimed that angel Gabriel had appeared to him in a vision. As redemption for his people who had become forgetful, desolate and in doubt, he announced that Gabriel had revealed a new religion to him: Paire Marire (good and peaceful). He preached the the religion of England was false. The priests of the new religion will have supernatural powers. Uttering the word ‘Hau’ would bring victory against the white and recruit legions of angels who were waiting to help the Maoris to drive the Europeans into the sea. See Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven and New Earth: A study of Millenarian Activities* (Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1971) p. 16.

¹⁸⁵ See Peter Anderson, Marine Carrin and Harald Lych Tambs ed., *From Fire Rain To Rebellion: Reasserting Ethnic Identity Through Narrative*, op cit, p. 213.

The narrator Sagram Murmur talked about the first leader Bhagirath who appeared as a Babaji in 1871.

¹⁸⁶ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dt. 7/10/1874, BJP, November 1874, WBSA.

terms, '(he) belonged to a small class of Santals some of whom were known as head centers (possibly leading religious gurus). They were keen to establish and maintain influence for themselves by fomenting agitation, which had become more or less recurrent in the pergunnah and particularly each year after 1871.'¹⁸⁷

The emergence of the gurus, was possibly related to events in the post *Hul* period that impacted Santal life deeply, fomenting a simmering discontent among them. The problem was partly rooted in the government policy which began experimenting with new administrative ideas in the newly created district of the Santal Parganas. In 1856, the new district was kept outside the Regulation system with the avowed objective of improving the economic- political condition of a country already ravaged by en masse desertion of Santals and destruction of agriculture. The idea was to utilize the village organization at work in administering the area and establishing a direct communication between the administrators and the people.¹⁸⁸ The district was declared a no-police tract and by the police rule of 1856, the Manjhi (headman) of every village and the Parganas (headmen of several villages) were given police powers. But the new administrative innovation introduced in the district had no role in revitalizing the economy because the non-regulation experiment, suddenly revoked in 1863 was too short-lived to have any enduring effect on the lives of the distressed people. By the time, the government tried to make amends to the situation through the re-introduction of non-regulation in 1872, alien control over the economy had been firmly established in the Santal Parganas.¹⁸⁹ This was evident in the overall socio-economic changes rapidly taking place in the district since 1856. One notable feature was the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Extract from Santal Administration Report for the year 1862, BJP, December 1871, WBSA.

¹⁸⁹ See B.B. Chaudhuri, *Decline in the Old Order in the Adivasi Tribal World in Peasant History in late Pre-Colonial and Colonial India*, Volume 8, Chapter X, (New Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2008) p. 742.

changing composition of the landowners outside Damin-i-Koh. The new purchasers were mainly Bengalis like Ramprasad Das a wealthy banker of Monghyr and his son Kamaleshwar, Gridhari Lal a pleader in the Bhagalpur court, Ramranjan Chakraborty of Hetampur or Raja Leelanand Singh of Khorakpur (Monghyr).¹⁹⁰ Big zamindaris like Hendwa, Sultanabad, Ambar, Pabia, Barkope, Patasanda remained in the hands of old families but their estates was subdivided among numerous *patnidaries*, *sepatnis*, *ijaradars* etc. Most of the absentee landlords managed their estates through European agents like Barnes and Grant. Enquires by Brown Wood revealed that the assessment of Barnes and Grant was as a rule higher than those of the native zamindars.¹⁹¹ To add to the misery of the Santals, the native zamindars of Dumka, Godda and Rajmahal subdivision collected various illegal cesses and abwabs from the subjects.¹⁹²

A brimming discontent among the Santals, was registered by the government in 1871, who initiated a reappraisal of what was summarized as the 'manjhi question'.¹⁹³ The Santal system, according to the government, acknowledged the role of the *manjhi* in the community under whom they settled in new lands and paid their rents to the zamindars. The zamindars on the other hand was completely oblivious of the importance of the manjhis in the Santal community, treated them as mere farmers, ousting them at their convenience. Under the prevailing system, the Santal *manjhis* not only received short leases from the zamindars but had to pay heavy salami in order to get the land and at each renewal they faced an enhancement of rent. The zamindars in

¹⁹⁰ Samar Kumar Mallick, *Transformation of Santal Society: Prelude to Jharkhand*, (Calcutta: Minerva Associates Publication Pvt Ltd, 1993) p. 49.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid. p 53. The Santals were required to pay such cesses to the gomosthas, diwan, jamadar, peada, for zamindar's dak expenses, when death or marriage took place in the zamindar's house.

¹⁹³ S.C. Bayly, officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Home department, Judicial, 29th July, 1871, 20-23 (A). National Archives of India, (henceforth NAI).

fact took every opportunity to enhance the rent in one installment, by one, two or even three hundred percent.¹⁹⁴ To make matters worse, the leases were often not renewed with the old majhee- mustajir, but with strangers; mostly the Bhojpuries or Bengali moneylenders. The new land grabbers tried every means at their command to obtain possession of the best lands in the village thereby breaking up the whole village community. In 1871 A.W. Cosserat, the Santal officer, in charge of Rajmahal Damin, reported to the Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas that every where in the district, there was a large-scale dispossession of Santal manjhis from their lands. The dispossessed manjhis had all the sympathies of the people and these were the men 'goading' the Santals to rebellion.¹⁹⁵ In 1871, the Santal discontent sparked off a panic resulting in a fall in the prices of articles by 50%.¹⁹⁶ In the month of May 1871, there was a threatened rising by the Santals, so much so that, the Santal labourers of two indigo factories in the plains, returned their advances saying that they could not work that season because they were bound to join the *Hul* or rebellion.¹⁹⁷ It was also rumoured that a large force of Santals was marching on Dumka, from where they intended to go to all the headquarters and even to Bhagalpur. Their avowed objective was to obtain redress against the mahajans and zamindars.¹⁹⁸ A complaint was lodged by some 124 ryots/peasants in Dumka and 64 in the Godda district, belonging to 29 talooks owed by twenty zamindars and landlords to the Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas.¹⁹⁹ With the memory of the *Hul* of 1855 still alive in the minds of the administrators, the Deputy Commissioner was directed to make a thorough enquiry into the

¹⁹⁴ Samar Kumar Mallick, op cit, p. 48.

¹⁹⁵ S.C. Bayly, officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department to Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Home department, Judicial, 29th July, 1871, 20-23 (A), NAI.

¹⁹⁶ Demi Official from H. Rattray to H.R. Maddock, Dumka 27/5/1871, Home Department, Judicial, 29th July 1871 NAI.

¹⁹⁷ S.C. Bayly, officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Home department, Judicial, 11th July, 1871, NAI

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Charles Wood, Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, Home Department, Judicial, January 1872, Nos. 36-42, NAI.

grievances of the Santals.²⁰⁰ An enquiry conducted in Dumka and Godda, where the Santals were found to be most restive, revealed that most of the complaints of the Santals were well founded.²⁰¹ The Government decided to revive Act XXXVII of 1857 by which the Santal Parganas was once again declared a non-regulated province. The decision was followed by the new land settlement of 1872 to be undertaken by Browne Wood. However, before the economic situation stabilized, a famine struck the countryside in 1874, caused by the failure of winter rice crops, which was the main staple of the district. The worst affected area was the rice producing lands of Rajmahal, where rainfall was deficient and only one fourth of average crop was harvested. The other affected areas were Dumka and Godda.²⁰²

In these unsettling times, Bhagirath Manjhi began to draw a large crowd at his gatherings. The best-known account of Bhagirath is available in, 'Babujioka Reak Katha', (henceforth BRK) narrated (possibly) by Sagram Murmu of Mohulpahari (1892-1927) and collected by Reverend Boddington on the life of Bhagirath and several gurus after him.²⁰³ As an eye witness to the rise of Bhagirath Manjhi, the narrator said: 'I am going to tell you the story of Babajis whom I have seen with my own eyes and about whom I heard with my ears'.²⁰⁴ According to the BRK, Bhagirath claimed his revelations from Chando Bonga(god) himself and as an intermediary between Chando Bonga and man, he believed that he was endowed with special powers to represent the wishes of god. The Guru told his followers,

²⁰⁰ S.C. Bayly, officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Home Department, Judicial, 29th July 1871 NAI.

²⁰¹ Samar Kumar Mallick op cit, p. 58.

²⁰² O' Malley, op cit, p. 205.

²⁰³ BRK, ps. 213-276 .

²⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 217.

‘Those of you whose requests the Cando Baba appreciates will recover from your illness, and those whose petitions he does not appreciate will not recover by coming here once. Come twice, thrice, present your requests to me, and I will also earnestly present your requests to him.’²⁰⁵

The people who came to him arrived in the evening, washed his feet and paid him respect. Everyone carried with them ingredients to be sacrificed and placed before the Baba -a leaf cup of sun dried rice, one betel-nut, a *pice* (one paisa coin) and one *lota* (bucket for storing milk). Bhagirath told the men who gathered around him that he communicated with Chando baba at night and those men who were having serious trouble would have to keep themselves awake the whole night. According to the writer of BRK, the men dozed off at night much to the annoyance of the guru. In the morning, Bhagirath would begin preaching the ‘Ten Commandments, which we all hear daily in church.’²⁰⁶ (emphasis added).

In the light of his engagements with his followers, Bhagirath’s instructions were possibly guidelines on the conduct of their daily lives. However, his reference to the Ten Commandments would mean, he had some exposure to the Christian teachings and possibly aware of its importance he considered his instructions to be as sacred and binding as the Commandments. But Bhagirath’s preaching’s were never simple words of wisdom or solutions for healing to his listeners. His orientation of life, his vision of the coming days was randomly infused with allusions to the *Hul* and the ‘sins’ committed by the people, during the great rebellion. He told his followers, ‘Come with your one mind and let it be understood by all of you that we have

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 219.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p.219.

sinned exceedingly. The kingdom will be ours on the day on which we will fully remove our sins.’²⁰⁷ (emphasis added).

Significantly, the concept of sin, was explained by the Santal original text more in terms of the imagined degeneration of the whole community rather than individual acts of depravity. We may refer here to the *Jom Sim Binti* (the song of birth) as the earliest oral text produced by the Santal community. The narrator of the text, Kolean Guru talked about a time when ‘mankind became bad’, and ‘they did not respect each other’ resulting in ‘a fire-rain that raged for seven days and seven nights that destroyed mankind. Only two, who were hidden by divine grace in the Harata Mountain were saved’.²⁰⁸ Another text, *Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha*, composed by Ramdas Tudu Reska from Mohulpahari also talked about a moral degeneration as a result of which, Thakur created an elephant, who stomped the earth that created a great flood and destroyed mankind.²⁰⁹ Here individual acts of depravity did not matter. Under Santal community rules however, all immoral acts were defined by the community and was adjudged in the council composed of the elders. The dreaded *Bitlaha* was a communal act of out casting performed with the sanction of the council of elders for breaches of either exogamous or endogamous law of the people.²¹⁰ For the rebel however, there was another kind of ‘sin’ embodied in the repressive structure of the colonial state. Birsa Munda had called himself a prophet sent by god to announce the imminent end of the sinful world following a great deluge. The sin, which the great deluge

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 221.

²⁰⁸ HMHRK, op cit, p. 8

²⁰⁹ Ramdas Tudu Reska, *Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha*, tr. and ed., Sukumar Sikdar and Sarda Prasad Kisku (Kolkata, Nirmal Book Agency, 2004) p. 97.

²¹⁰ O’Malley, op cit, p. 133.

would wash away, was for Birsa, a composite world of the government, the money based exchange economy and curiously agriculture.²¹¹

Bhagirath's conceptualization of sin was less universal and was defined by himself-the guru-although it was derived from the traditions of the community.²¹² Referring back to the days of the Hul when the sin was committed, Bhagirath proceeded to remind his followers the need to respect the rules of the family.

‘Let us take only those who are allowed by law, whether they are our fathers, our mothers, our daughters, our daughters-in-law, and sons, brothers and sisters. Our children shall not act thoughtlessly. Otherwise this time also our father in heaven will not approve of our acts.’²¹³ (emphasis added).

He was possibly talking about the customs that governed the traditional Santal understanding of marriage, sex, conjugality and any deviation was unacceptable, as it was likely to incur the disapproval of god. Unlike the converts, he was not criticizing the traditional Santal world-view, but like them, his memories of the defeat of *Hul*, was replete with ideas that the community was falling apart because of individual acts of disobedience. Therefore, as a guru, it was important for Bhagirath, to show the path which would amend for the sins and lead the community to a state of purity. It was here that his ideas deviated from the practices of the Santal community. To free

²¹¹ B.B.Chaudhuri, ‘Revaluation of Tradition in the Ideology of the Radical *Adivasi* Resistance in Colonial Eastern India, 1855–1932’—Part I, 36(2) 2009, p. 299.

²¹² Fraternal polyandry was a recognized custom among the Santals. There was sexual intercourse between a husband's younger brothers and his wife. When the elder brother died, his wife frequently made her home with one of the younger brothers. But it must not be assumed that such relations were universal. O' Malley, op cit, p. 164.

²¹³ BRK, op cit, p. 223.

themselves of sin, Bhagirath insisted on simple rules of living which he learnt from his own Santal tradition or that of his neighbouring Hindu community. He told his followers ‘let us not take forbidden food, then only, the Sin Bonga of the above will hear our petition and bestow his blessings upon us; only then we will benefit.’²¹⁴ His notion of purity was not based on any written codes but instructions of humble living: abstain from forbidden food and abide by the rules of the community. The final crystallization of his thoughts took place during the famine of 1874.

The Famine and the evolution of Bhagirath’s kingdom

In 1874, there was a growing discontent among the Santals, on the issue of distribution of rice among the famine- stricken people when Hindu traders bought rice at Government rates and sold it at their own rates. Reverend Stark of the Taljhari mission of the Church Missionary Society managed to prevent an attack on the magistrate’s *kacheri*(office) and the issue was resolved only after the magistrate, back from his tour, saw to it that the rice was evenly distributed.²¹⁵ It was during the distribution of rice, that Bhagirath called a meeting of his fellowmen at Bowsee, at the site of a Hindu temple in South Bhagalpur, which was attended by 1200 followers.²¹⁶ He told his followers,

‘The rice which the Europeans have brought now is the same which we gave in the olden days, it is the same which they bring back to us; it is meant for maintaining our life.’²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 219.

²¹⁵ Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs-Lyche, op cit, p. 206.

²¹⁶ Ibid. Bausi is also spelt as Bowsee.

²¹⁷ BRK, op cit, p. 223.

Bhagirath insisted that, since the food that was brought in saved lives, it was as ‘sacred’ as an offering and should be accompanied by proper rites. The BRK narrated Bhagirath’s instructions before the food was touched.

‘Take this rice when you have done proper rituals, fowls and pigs shall not tread on it. And prepare your food every day after taking bath in order that you do not do adultery, hold on to the rituals and religious duties. Now I have said everything to you, go and act accordingly’.²¹⁸

The consecrated act of taking bath daily, refusal to touch pigs and fowls, staying away from adultery and performing the rituals were the core precepts on purity, around which his followers were asked to reorganize their lives.

In Rajmahal and Godda, Bhagirath’s ideas stirred activities among the people and there were reports of pilgrims flocking to Tardiha from the whole countryside especially from the Rajmahal Damin. In nearly every village in Rajmahal and Godda, some of the families began to slaughter their pigs and fowls. On their return from Bowsee (Bausi), where Bhagirath held his great meeting, the Santals began to talk about the good times that were coming and that times were changing, the sahibs would either be killed or driven out of the country.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 223.

²¹⁹ Reverend A. Stark, C.M.S to G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas, Pathra, dt. 2/9/1874, BJP, November 1874, WBSA. The distinction between Santals and Sapha Hors is not clear here. We assume it was a general mood of exuberance among the Santals at the news of the coming of a new Babaji.

This gathering of people, possibly enthused Bhagirath to work towards a more formalized relationship between himself and his followers. Along with his position as a guru, he envisioned himself has a king and began to invoke the idea of a kingship, to which he often alluded to in his preaching's before his disciples. He set up a shrine of three stones on the summit of the Tardiha hill, which gave his followers a site to assemble. He appointed a *wazir* and a *munshi* to help in collecting rents from people. An administrative ritual was inaugurated possibly from his knowledge of *kacheries* (offices). The *munshi* wrote down the names of all who made offerings to Bhagirath. To the followers, the guru gave his dictates that they were now free from all demands for rents with effect from the current year. In future there would be no land rent and every man would pay him four *annas* for every ox, eight *annas* for every buffalo, irrespective of the lands they cultivated.²²⁰ Crowds went up with their offerings of milk, ghee and money which was poured on the stones, while money was placed in front of Bhagirath. Thus a notion of an imagined independent polity was evolving, supported by a basic administrative system- a *wazir*, a *munshi* and a revenue system.

As an intermediary between people and god, Bhagirath seemed to have assumed an overlapping role of both a king and a religious guru. As the religious guru, he continued to preside over the rituals, preach the words of morality and as the *wazir* of god, he was entrusted with the responsibility of collection of rent. Reverend Bodding described one of these meetings where Bhagirath would pass a bowl of rice around asking, 'Who has created this grain?' The disciples would answer 'God has created it.' Then Bhagirath put his second question, 'and who has ploughed the ground and sowed the seed?' 'We did the ploughing and sowing,' was the angry

²²⁰ BRK, op cit, p. 227.

answer of his disciples. Bhagirath then summed up, 'if we did the ploughing and sowing and God let the crops grow, why should we pay taxes to the government?'²²¹

Bhagirath's conception of an independent polity, curiously was based on an assumption that the British power was already falling apart. What occasioned this realization cannot be ascertained with certainty, but there is a possibility that government policies, such as distribution of rice, building of railways, new land settlement, did not fit in with his image of the repressive state structure, that had been instrumental in crushing the *Hul*. Therefore, these efforts by the government, perhaps appeared to him, as weaknesses and as symptoms of a collapsing state structure. He was also confident that once the government left the country, the lands would come back to its original cultivators. Thus Bhagirath preached,

'The Europeans are trembling in fear, they bring the rice and deliver it to us and they will shortly run away, it is because of this reason they have made roads and railways for themselves like the tracks and passages of field cats. They know it very well that one day the 'black sons of the land will get the country and they know it definitely.'²²²(emphasis added).

As the guru and the king, Bhagirath pointed out to his natural rights to claim the desired kingdom, once promised by god to the Santals: 'An order has been given to us to get a country; they are willing to give the country only to me, but you must also be bold enough to claim it;

²²¹ SP Sinha, *The Kherwar movt 1874-1942* in 'Conflict and Tensions in Tribal society' (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Co 1993) p.207.

²²² BRK, op cit, p. 227.

then we will certainly get the country.’²²³ (emphasis added) According to the writer of BRK, Bhagirath thus began to claim the position of magistrate in his ‘pride’,²²⁴ Reverend Stark, an eye witness to the events of 1874, also reported that in his ‘arrogance,’ Bhagirath told his listeners ‘sahibs would fail because they had no power over him as he was divinely helped’.²²⁵ In August, a panic spread in Sahebgunj that the Santals were coming down to massacre every one and were on their march to Rajmahal. When this news was confirmed by a pergunnait of a Rajmahal village, the government decided to take action. A party of 40 police of the Bhagalpore district force was stationed at Burhait, (the central and the most important bazaar of the Rajmahal Damini), another 40 men of the Santal Parganas Reserve Force was ordered from Dumka and sent to Godda and a third party of 40 men was sent from Bhagalpore to Bowsee(10 miles from Godda) where the movement had originated.²²⁶

But Bhagirath’s popularity continued to grow, and people from great distance, over sixty miles, visited Tardiha and made their offerings to him. ‘So many coins began to fall everyday that a water-pot could be filled up to the brim even if each one gave only a pice.’²²⁷ Bhagirath’s preaching seemed to have inspired believers and non-believers alike for there were some who sacrificed and ate a black goat before they took the rice into the village street. But amongst the believers, people began to kill their pigs and fowls, bathe daily and cook their own rice.²²⁸ His followers Doma Manjhi and Bheem Manjhi carried his message to Sultanabad area appealing to

²²³ Ibid p.227.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Reverend A. Stark, C.M.S. to G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas, Pathra, dt. 2/9/1874, BJP, November 1874, WBSA.

²²⁶ From G.N. Barlow Commissioner of Bhagalpur to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department, dt. 7/10/74, BJP, November 1874. WBSA.

²²⁷ BRK, op cit, p. 221.

²²⁸ O’ Malley, op cit, p. 147.

the people to follow a pure life. In the Pakur division, a manjhi named Bhagrai and his scribe Lakhan, began petitions containing long unconnected complaints on local matters such as their rates of rent or the system of collecting chowkidari payment.²²⁹ In another incident, Dhunu, the chief of the village of Sidpur under Sultanabad area, announced that there would be no more taxes as soon as the raja of Mohespur fell.²³⁰ He was arrested and jailed in the autumn of 1874. In 1876 there was a revival of the movement in Sultanabad and Reverend Skrefsrud wrote to John Boxwell about *parwanas* circulating through Sultanabad with a fresh spate of new conversions accompanied by the slaughter of pigs and fowl. The chief of the village of Haripur, even declared that the insurrection would begin as soon as Dhunu got out of jail.²³¹ In December 1874, the movement was given a new lease of life by Gyan parganait, who instigated the Santals not to pay rent to the zamindar or repay loans to the money lenders. He warned that those who were unwilling to slaughter their pig and fowls would be converted to Christianity. In February 1874, Chand Ray, appeared from Burtola in Murshidabad, with a distinguishing mark on his forehead. He became influential in the Rajmahal Damin, where the Santals began to delay payment of rent.²³²

The rise of Bhagirath and his followers, became a cause of concern for the native Christians and the missionaries, who became apprehensive of different kinds of rumours. Moorat, Reverend Stark's daughter noted, 'The Santals were told the day on which they were to assemble on the hill for his anointing: the date was fixed for the general rising and massacre of ourselves, the

²²⁹ Appendix A, Note by the Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881. WBSA.

²³⁰ Samar Kumar Mallick, op cit, p. 150.

²³¹ Ibid, p. 210.

²³² Samar Kumar Mallick, op cit, p. 150.

magistrate, Indian Christians and Babus.’²³³ They communicated to Reverend Stark stationed at Taljhari Mission, about what they thought were Bhagirath’s future plans, ‘The magistrate’s house at Godda was to be Bhagrath’s and our home at Pathra would be given to the vizir.’²³⁴ They advised Reverend Stark to leave and send his wife and their children to Calcutta, which of course the missionary and his family did not comply with. Moorat, observed in her diary, that unlike the rebels of 1855 Bhagirath’s followers did not plunder but what was striking was the peculiar behavior of these people: ‘Daily a large number of people would pass our house armed, as we have never seen them in the past years, carrying bows and arrows, spears and dreadful looking tomahawks.’²³⁵ Although they never assaulted the missionaries and their families, Moorat observed a grim prospect in their utterance, ‘Wait a little, you have sown your corn, see who will reap it.we will send you by the beat of the drums to that happy land of which you are always speaking and singing.’²³⁶

The ‘general rising and massacre’ did not materialize, Bhagirath was arrested and put behind the bars to be released after two years. Bhagirath resumed preaching in a vein as if he was picking up the thread from where he had left it. He began to tell his followers that while in prison he had been receiving orders from Chando, which he had now come to carry out. Though detailed information about this phase of his leadership is difficult to find, Moorat referred to a rumor that caused panic among the members of her family; Bhagirath was supposedly planning to kill them all. Moorat wrote, ‘we spent the night praying and were saved by a miracle’.²³⁷ The other

²³³ M.A.C Moorat ‘Alfred and Elizabeth Stark’ (1925, Calcutta) quoted in M. Carrin and Lyche Tambs, ‘An Encounter of Peripheries’ op cit, p. 208.

²³⁴ Ibid, p 208.

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 207.

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 207.

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 209.

information that can be gathered from missionary sources was that Bhagirath was again arrested for violence against an old man and was jailed. He died in prison in 1879.²³⁸

The Legacy Continued

Bhagirath Manjhi died but what remained elusive was the nature of the legacy he had left behind him. There were two reasons behind this apparent lack of knowledge of the newly formed sect after his death. Firstly, our knowledge of Bhagirath is limited by the absence of government reports in the period after Bhagirath's death. As long as Bhagirath was alive, the government with their econo-centric view point were worried about the rent questions, which they thought had been the main issue behind Bhagirath's assertion.²³⁹ But once the land settlement was implemented peacefully, the government interest in Bhagirath and his followers declined. They dismissed the importance of the new sect, discarded all allegations that Bhagirath had collected money as rent during his meetings; thus trying to undermine any possibility that Bhagirath might have been claiming an independent political status. Interpreting Bhagirath's understanding of sovereignty, John Boxwell pointed out, that Bhagirath's only promise to the people of Barkope was that, if he got enough money, he would buy a piece of stamp and present a petition about their arrears of rent to the Godda hakim(officer).²⁴⁰ In fact, according to another officer named Mr. Grant, the guru admitted that he had seen the railway and the telegraph wires and was also perfectly aware of the powers of the British rulers, 'if you held up two fingers, a pultan (a group) of soldiers would come. I am not a fool.'²⁴¹ Boxwell went on to explain that, while the guru might have hoped to gain personal influence from his preaching, many of his followers believed

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 209.

²³⁹ John Boxwell, Officiating Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas to Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas, dt. 1 October, BJP, November 1874 WBSA

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

it to be the rightful moment to pressurize the government for rent remission.²⁴² The Government was happy to report a rift within the Santal community caused by the emergence of the sect and their newly introduced customs, which contradicted the age old Santal practice and caused resentment among the members of the community. Thus the sub-divisional officer of Godda, who had opened an inquiry into Bhagirath's proceedings was able to convict him upon a charge of intimidation, pressed by another Santal.²⁴³

The second factor was the emergence of a significant number of gurus in the post-Bhagirath period who apparently had no unifying links with Bhagirath Manjhi nor was there any known attempt on their part to initiate a formal organization of the followers of Bhagirath Manjhi. O'Malley called them 'imitators of Bhagirath,'²⁴⁴ as indeed there were remarkable similarities in the codes of conduct that was preached by the later gurus and Bhagirath Manjhi. Bhagirath's own followers did not believe in his death. They said that he had been translated to heaven and would return from God to be their King and give them back their country. His immediate followers continued to await his return and claimed that he would return with their 'country.'²⁴⁵ After his death, the gurus who appeared throughout the district claimed that they had been 'commissioned by god' through whom god cured men.²⁴⁶ There were however no large meetings and no religious frenzy about killing of animals and the gurus no longer talked about 'the country'. Dreams and promise of the land or country was possibly nurtured and survived through his followers although the gurus remained remarkably silent on it. But no matter whether

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur Division to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department, BJP November 1974 WBSA.

²⁴⁴ O'Malley, op cit, p. 175.

²⁴⁵ Marrin Carrin and H. Tambs Lyche, An Encounter of Peripheries, op cit, p. 209.

²⁴⁶ O'Malley, op cit, p. 175.

the government undermined the importance of the sect or whether the gurus openly claimed themselves to be Sapha Hors or not, the fact that the sect survived was evident when they made their presence felt through the anti-census agitation of 1881. In fact, in pacifist movements, the fear of the superior political power either drove radical assertions underground or was silenced although expressed in an unrecognizable disguised idiom often unknown to the superior British power.

The writer of BRK mentioned several gurus all of whom claimed that the effects of their work would vanish after three or five years.²⁴⁷ Pero guru of the Kasturi village, Jasai guru of the Kedo village, Bariar baba in the Samra village, Ramjit Baba of the Ambadiha village, Kathia Guru of the Bhaisa village, Siru Guru in Maethani, Caitan Guru in Mania Mohr, Balea guru in Bhatonda, Arjun Guru in Gorhot. Thus, the writer observes ‘many gurus are being born continually in the country. People of this region also say that one guru appeared in the Duaria village, one in Kasikhund, one in Dhoduma, one in Bhelagor, one in Dhaka, one in Rajband and one in Dumka.’²⁴⁸ (emphasis added).

The new gurus did not talk about any ‘destined land’. They only said that they had come to heal. Bariar Baba had ‘written permission’ from Chando to cure sickness. He is said to have cured the blind and the lame by the power of his words. Like Bhagirath, he said that the only way to avoid sickness was to give up forbidden food because as soon as forbidden things were eaten, the diseases would reappear. Bariar Baba claimed, ‘the Ten Commandments, which we hear, are the

²⁴⁷ BRK, op cit, p. 227.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 243.

sum and substance of forbidden things.’²⁴⁹ His commandments were sacred instructions to be followed and they included ideas he learnt from some form of contact with the missionaries assimilated with the knowledge of his own customs. Thus the guru preached that it was improper to join hands during *Lagre* and *Don* with maidens who were married, adultery was allowed only with those permissible under Santal customs; relations between brothers and sisters, a woman and her brother’s son, a woman and her husband’s elder brother’s son, a man and his sister’s daughter were to be preserved.²⁵⁰ It was because the rules were always breaking that, ‘Cando is throwing all the sorrows at us because he is angry with us. But from today admonish your children and abide by the laws.’²⁵¹ Bariar baba never took money from all who came to visit him and his meetings would end with the cry, ‘Mercy Ram Cando.’²⁵²

Pero Guru according to BRK had the power to heal and to single out witches but like Bhagirath insisted that the powers were not his own but only belonged to God. ‘I do not heal, it is Chando who heals, have faith in him and he will heal you. He has given me a blessing in order to tell you these words.’²⁵³ Pero Guru preached the Ten Commandments and ‘he added one or two more to them.’ Only those who had faith, i.e. ‘those who believed were healed, and those who did not, they were not healed.’²⁵⁴ Ramjit Babaji insisted on the maintenance of a pure clean life and prohibited the use of ‘filthy language’.²⁵⁵ If bad language was used, then Cando would not accept the prayer. He insisted on addressing all, even children, as father and mother.²⁵⁶ Like all other

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 233.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p.233.

²⁵¹ Ibid, p. 235.

²⁵² Ibid, p. 235.

²⁵³ Ibid. p. 227.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 227.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 241.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 241.

babajis, he was also the mediator between god and man, chosen to bring relief to the people in distress. He claimed Chando baba was instructing him thus:

‘Give them a ball of earth, dog grass and ashes of cow dung in my name and I will bless them for you. Teach them laws and customs. If they keep my commands, then I will bring forward many Babujis to help you.’²⁵⁷

O’Malley also wrote about gurus and their disciples who appeared around 1907 and were seen running but never walking from place to place. Some Babajis held meetings on Sundays and prohibited Sunday labor for them and their cattle. They further directed the people to be kind to their animals, not to strike them on the head or on the bones and to leave pasture grounds for them. At the end of the Sunday meeting one of them would call out aloud, ‘Ram Chando Duhai’ and all those present would do the same.²⁵⁸

Although there was nothing to connect the gurus and Bhagirath Manjhi, yet a close reading of the messages makes it evident that all teachings were resonances of Bhagirath Manjhi’s teachings. All the gurus were talking of a life of purity on lines inculcated by Bhagirath himself. All of them claimed that they had the power to heal. None of them referred to the country but the promise of the country was implicit in the inculcation of the life of purity; as Thakur had once told Bhagirath that only the pure could achieve the kingdom. There was thus reason to believe that from the late 1870s it was the gurus who carried forward the Sapha Hor tradition. Possibly the lessons of Bhagirath were splintered and carried on by the gurus although from such scattered legacy it is difficult to categorically identify the Sapha Hors. Significantly the legacy of

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 243.

²⁵⁸ O’Malley, op cit, p. 175-177.

Bhagirath Manjhi was accepted long afterwards by the missionaries of C.M.S. struggling with their proselytizing efforts among the Santals. They were completely at a loss to explain the source of power that Bhagirath continued to have over the 'simple minded' Santal,

'We don't know how very close it may be-- when we see what influence a single man has had within the last few years in creating so great a mental revolution in a great portion of the Santal nation.'²⁵⁹ The only solution they could think of was a miracle in the Christian world, 'May god grant that a Christian apostle may soon be raised among them'.²⁶⁰

In the 1880s, Skrefsrud wrote that the Kherwar movement had split into three sub-sects. The Sapha Hors were worshipping the Singabahini (goddess who rode the lion) and the Sun and were abstaining from drinking and dancing. Second group were the fakirs or the Babajis whose profession was to traverse the country and beg. The third were the half-hearted 'bhelwaragars' who while joining in all observances of the Kherwars retained their old custom and substituted sweet meat for animal sacrifices.²⁶¹ In 1921, Reverend P.O. Bodding reported of another division into -the Saphai, the Babaji and the Samras.²⁶² The different accounts of a later period however, seem to converge on identifying the Sapha Hors (Saphai) as 'the early followers' of Bhagirath Manjhi among the Santals.²⁶³ In 1871 however, the British rulers thought that the sect had died but they were proved wrong when in 1881, the Sapha Hors made their presence felt through a well organized anti-census agitation.

²⁵⁹ Fifty sixth report of the Calcutta Corresponding Committee of the Church Missionary Society. (1891-92) p. 55.

²⁶⁰ Ibid

²⁶¹ S.P Sinha, op cit, p. 216.

²⁶² P.O. Bodding, 'The Kherwar Movement among the Santals, in *Man in India*, Volume 1, March 1921, p. 222-232.

²⁶³ O'Malley, op cit, p.179.

Chapter 2

Non-Cooperation with the Census: Pursuing the moral project.

Introduction:

In the previous chapter, we studied the inception of the Sapha Hor movement in the form of the rise of Bhagirath Manjhi. We situated his teachings and millenarian dreams in the shadow of the defeat of the *Hul*. We noted how he assigned the failure of the *Hul* to the ‘sins’ committed by the leaders. Consequently, he articulated a moral vision and it was around this moral vision that a new sect started crystallizing. We also showed how the career of the sect far from dying with the death of Bhagirath, survived in the preaching of a number of gurus, who were apparently isolated from one another in terms of the area of operation. However, as we showed, it was the moral precepts preached by them that mapped them in the same universe and indicated that they were carrying forward Bhagirath’s legacy even though they did not explicitly reiterate Bhagirath’s millenarian vision of an impending divine kingdom.

However, by way of introduction to the present chapter, we like to reiterate what we had noted in the first chapter. The colonial and missionary archives from which we have derived the bulk of our source material had not recognized the message of the disparate gurus after Bhagirath’s death. With their typical sensibilities and world views the administrators and the missionaries, were not insightful enough to string together the message of the disparate gurus and discern the veritable path that led from Bhagirath’s teaching to the crystallization of the sect. This failure to register was probably a consequence of the official tendency to closely study the tribal world only when it revolted or did anything the British authorities construed as subversion of the

political and economic order that they presided over. The significance of the more pacific moments, when a sect silently congeals in non-violent ways, simply through the reiteration of moral preaching, were lost in official British sensibilities, as the authorities were on the lookout for a *Hul* like insurrection. So this chapter shows how the authorities keenly and anxiously registered the role of the Sapha Hors in 1881, when the latter asserted themselves as a group in relation to the census enumeration that had begun in the end of 1880.

This chapter not only highlights the Sapha Hors agitation against the census in the 1880s but also draws our attention to the role of this agitation in making the British realize that Bhagirath's movement, contrary to their expectations, had refused to die down with his death in 1879. A detailed survey of the movement was undertaken on the census agitation, with the help of missionaries, government officials, *zamindars* and affluent peasants from the areas affected by the census agitation. It brought to the realization of the British, that the Kherwars had 'a distinct organization, which had been silently spreading and strengthening' in the Santal country.²⁶⁴ It was found, Bhagirath's message had not only survived, but the new sect had acquired a substantial following between 1871 and 1881, even though no single guru had guided or consolidated the sect after Bhagirath's death. It led the British to trace from among the Kherwars, 'a system with a name and recognized principles.'²⁶⁵ G.N. Barlow, the Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and Santal Parganas concluded that it was the census operations of 1881 that provided the Sapha Hors, the opportunity to strengthen their organization, both in terms of the number of adherents and their principles. In this chapter, we seek to trace the trails of the non

²⁶⁴ 'Report as to the recent excitement among the Sonthals,' G.N. Barlow, the Commissioner of the Bhagalpur Division and Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dt. 8/6/1881, Judicial Proceedings (henceforth BJP), File 9C, August 1881, West Bengal State Archives (henceforth WBSA). In this chapter, we use the word Kherwar to avoid confusion.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

cooperation movement, which brought the Sapha Hors to the limelight of political agitation once again, we try to identify the unique nature of the assertion which we will try to narrate through the experiences of the defeated and finally we seek to understand Sapha Hors' objections to the census based on a different rationale that offset the government's conception of good governance.

The 'mysterious orders' and the agitation against the census

With the death of Bhagirath Manjhi in 1879, the British believed that the Sapha Hor movement was almost dying down and the case of Bhagrai Manjhi and his scribe Lakhan in the Pakur subdivision were the last sporadic sparks.²⁶⁶ In 1879, the re-settlement of the Damin had ended under Mr. Brown Wood with an increase of 80% on its revenue based on an assessment of the newly cultivated lands.²⁶⁷ Following the land settlement, the government began preparing for the first elaborate census enumeration and by October 1880, the operation had become visible to the Santal population everywhere in the Santal Parganas.²⁶⁸

The opposition to the census in the Santal Parganas was first registered in early November 1880, when two missionaries, Mr. Patterson and Mr. Cornelius reported of an opposition against the census, at Khairbani and Jamtara, both under the Jamtara sub-division. They cautioned the government that in these two areas, the Santals had threatened to kill any enumerator who dared to enter their village. These men, they reported, had begun killing their pigs and fowl and were

²⁶⁶ Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

²⁶⁷ H.H.Macpherson, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Santal Parganas 1898-1907*(Calcutta: Secretariat Book Depot, 1909) ps. 160-161.

²⁶⁸ Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

bitterly hostile to the government. To the missionaries they appeared as being ‘rebels both in speech and act’,²⁶⁹ who were supposedly following, ‘mysterious orders’ disseminated in the form of letters that asked the Santals to kill their pigs and fowls.²⁷⁰

Significantly, British authorities in Hazaribagh and the Santal Parganas, had reported of the circulation of ‘thousands’ of such letters, in their respective areas around the middle of 1880; this was before the direct opposition was registered in these places. The letters declared that if the Santals were to avoid a calamity, they should follow the moral precepts outlined in the letters.²⁷¹ The letters particularly insisted that the people should kill their fowls and pigs and abstain from ploughing on Sundays. The British had no clue from where the letters were originating but they noted that the ‘rumour’ among people was that, they were coming from Benaras.²⁷² Some of the intercepted letters were issued in the name of Dubia Gossain, a guru who resided near the Ramgur *thana* (police station) of the Hazaribagh district. The authorities at first wondered who were the target audience to whom these letter bound moral precepts were addressed.²⁷³ After surveilling the situation in the Hazaribagh and the Santal Parganas, they were quite sure that those who actively responded to these moral instructions were the old or the new Kherwars. (as referred to by the missionaries and colonial authorities).²⁷⁴

It is not a coincidence that the wild circulation of such mysterious orders followed in the perceptible trail of census operation in the Hazaribagh district. These orders both verbal and

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ H.H.Risley, Deputy Commissioner of Hazaribagh to H.K. Hewit, Commissioner of Chotanagpur, 15th November 1880, BJP file 1041A-41, February 1881, WBSA.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

written, stirred considerable activities amongst the Santals ; at Domri, 46 miles from Hazaribagh, common fowls began to be sold 128 per rupee, following the order to kill them. At Bogodun, 32 miles from Hazaribagh, the head constable of the thana (police station) reported that ploughing on Sundays had stopped. Numerous such reports were reported to be received from all police stations in the district and they show that ‘orders’ both verbal and written were in wide circulation in Hazaribagh and in south eastern parts of Gaya district.²⁷⁵ The iteration of these moral precepts and their eager cultivation by the Sapha Hors in the Hazaribagh area were themselves reaction of a kind, to the census operation. But the moral precepts that the letters carried with them did not always snowball into opposition to the census. There was no news of opposition to the census from the Santal Parganas, as late as the end of November.²⁷⁶

In no time however, the letters crossed the borders of the Hazaribagh district to reach the Santal Parganas. On the first day of Dussera vacation, Mr. Foley, the permanent inspector at Karmatar, pressed the alarm bell when he wrote to Mr. Wilmot, Sub-divisional officer at Deoghar, inquiring if there was any possibility of a general rising among the Santals.²⁷⁷ Thus sensitized, Mr. Wilmot, surveyed, to actually find a movement among the Santals in both his own sub-division and in the adjoining Jamtara subdivision. His administration indeed found ‘thousands of anonymous letters’ in circulation in the local villages and some of them were issued in the name of Dubia Gossain of Ramgarh in Hazaribagh. What followed was a frenzy and many people began to slaughter their pigs and poultry.²⁷⁸ The letters in circulation, were varied in their linguistic articulation but they conveyed the sense ‘a calamity’ that was to be ‘avoided.’. They

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

asked the Santals to take the name of god daily, to visit the Gossain at Palgunge with an offering of a rupee and a kid, to kill their pigs and fowl and to desist from working on Sundays. The sites of the circulation of these letters were marked by signs of ‘uneasy quiet prevailing among the people who appeared disturbed and refrained from celebrating the *Durga Puja*’.²⁷⁹

The circulating letters, the killing of pigs and fowls, the stoppage of work on Sundays, were the first rumblings of the beginning of the agitation but soon news of emissaries travelling from one place to another and holding secret meetings on the issue of the approaching census began to be reported by British officers.²⁸⁰ Although the earliest news of opposition to the census came from the missionaries at Jamtara subdivision, the first concerted movement began from Karmatar and Narayanpur, in the Jamtara subdivision.²⁸¹ Narayanpur was a ghatwali taluk in the northwestern part of Jamtara. Here Mr. Wilmot, was informed that Santals were cautiously discussing the issue of census in the Narayanpur *hat* (market). The Deputy Commissioner received a telegram from the adjoining Muddapore (Madhupur) station that, parties of Santals were going in the direction of Narayanpur. They were probably ‘delegates’ and the whole countryside was waiting to see how the Narayanpore party acted. Some 500 Santals at Kakraha, 12 miles from Karmatar were also known to be following the Narayanpore faction.²⁸²

The Deputy Commissioner first met the rebels of Karmatar on 10th December. They promised compliance and even agreed to bring in the neighbouring rebellious headmen of Narayanpur to listen to his instructions. On 11th December, the rebels met the Deputy Commissioner at

²⁷⁹ Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner W.B. Oldham, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² W.B. Oldham, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to Commissioner of Bhagalpur division, Camp Jamtara, dated 14th December 1880, BJP, File 1041A-41, February 1881, WBSA.

Narayanpur, armed with staves, raising rebellious cries and reminding each other how they had killed the Ghatwal in 1855.²⁸³ The Deputy Commissioner met the leaders of the opposition, Kharia Manjhi and his two companions from Narayanpur, who told him that Dubia Manjhi had forbidden enumeration, because if they registered themselves, the men would be sent to Cabul and women to the tea plantations of Assam. They stated boldly that ‘they would have no census and would not permit their houses to be numbered or their names to be written’.²⁸⁴ The Santals of Narayanpur told the Deputy Commissioner that they had dismissed the manjhis for giving consent to the authorities to carry on their operation. The Deputy Commissioner confronted another Kherwar Santal, named Gulia, who told him curtly that he would not allow his name to be written. The Deputy Commissioner tried to explain to a crowd of two hundred to three hundred men who had assembled outside his office, the objective behind holding the census, after which the men dispersed quietly. That very night, the house of Rattrey, the Deputy Magistrate was set ablaze.²⁸⁵ The incident which took place surreptitiously at night was so unlike the character of ‘the honest Santal’ that the Deputy Commissioner would not believe that it was their work.²⁸⁶ However, it came to their knowledge that the men who were behind the agitation were the new converts who had visited Dubia Gossain and had ‘announced their decision to become Hindus.’²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Ghatwali tenures were granted from the time of the Mughal rulers for the protection of the ghats or passes through the hills, and the ghatwals were small hill chieftains, who raised small levies for their defence and were responsible for the peace and order in the tracts held by them. See O’ L.S.S. O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Santal Parganas*.(Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot,1910) p. 259.

²⁸⁴W.B. Oldham, Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas to Commissioner of Bhagalpur division, Camp Jantara,14th December 1880, BJP, File 1041A-41, February 1881, WBSA.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur to Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department, BJP, File 1041A-41, February 1881, WBSA.

²⁸⁷ Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

In eastern part of the district, Mr. Campbell, the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the Pakur subdivision, observing the general recalcitrant mood of the Santals, anticipated a possible opposition to the census in his own sub division. He organized a meeting with the Sapha Hor leaders, Lakhan and Bhagrai, who were already known for their occasional remonstrance and explained the purpose of the census, even before the enumeration began. But soon after this meeting, he learnt that Bhagrai and Lakhan Kherwa had held a meeting of their own, where they issued an order forbidding the Kherwars to allow their houses to be numbered. The meeting was attended by several Santals and, the order was legitimized through writing by Lakhan Kherwa to non-cooperation and obstruction in the work of the enumeration.²⁸⁸

Apprehensive of the deteriorating situation, the Deputy Commissioner then began a tour of the district on 27th December 1880. While travelling from Jamtara to Dumka, he found that in the Gamaru ghatwali talook on the SW border, there was complete disruption of work in the Santal villages. Here the houses were not marked as the enumerators refused to enter the villages lest they would be assaulted by the villagers. The Deputy Commissioner remained in Dumka till 10th January and resumed his tour, travelling through tuppeh Hendwah westwards to Deoghur.²⁸⁹ In tappeh Hendwah or Hendwai, the villagers, he noted were in the grips of a disquieting restlessness. Here ‘Hindi perwannahs’ (orders) were said to be in circulation and secret meetings were reported to be organized by Santals, which was allegedly joined in by the neighbouring Bhuyinas. On 15th January, just before the *Badhna* festival (Sohrai), he halted at Taljhari, the western most talook of Hendwah and found strong opposition here. In Taljhari, the Kherwar leader, Raghai Manjhi arrived with a following of four hundred men, to meet him and each came

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Tappeh Hendwah or Hendwai was a tract of 450 square miles, lying NE and NW of Dumka bounded north by Godda sub-division, east by Damin and west by Deoghar subdivision.

with sharp freshly cut staves to express their unwillingness to allow census enumeration. The Deputy Commissioner constituted them into ‘a panchayat’, but Raghai refused to cooperate, which led to his arrest. The crowd reassembled for the next four days demanding his release until Raghai consented to assist in the work of enumeration for the whole of Taljhari talook and was finally released. There after, the state of affairs was reported to be under control; in Jamtara and Deoghar enumeration was complete, good progress in work was reported from Pakur, while the enumeration in Rajmahal was expected to be over by 31st January 1881.²⁹⁰

The overall progress in work however was again offset by the sudden news of the Katikund ‘riot’ which occurred at the Nargunge Bungalow within the Dumka Damin-i-Koh on 27th January 1881.²⁹¹ Here, the British officer in charge of the area, Deputy Magistrate A.W. Cosserat was taken by complete surprise at a large gathering of the mustagirs and ryots, comprising of Santals, ghatwals, Coles, Domes, who joined in the opposition to the census. Incidentally he had been warned by the missionary at Khairbani about the growing reluctance of the Santals to enumerate themselves from the ‘attitude of the Santals’ on the borders of Dumka while as late as 24th December, Cosserat insisted that there would be no opposition in his region.²⁹² His predictions proved to be completely erroneous and he witnessed the largest and most organised opposition to the census centering around Katikhund. Men from adjoining villages of Silingi and Kendua came forward to express their solidarity with the people of Katikund. Those who had already been enumerated united with those who were waiting to be enumerated in support of each other. A young Santal, informed Mr. Cosserat, that the Babajee had given orders that the census was not to be taken and as a result the census of the village of Kurranpura had come to a standstill.

²⁹⁰ Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

Around 2'o clock in the afternoon, no less then 15000 men assembled at camp Katikund to meet the Deputy magistrate Mr. Cosserat, amidst 'great yells and shouting.'²⁹³ Cosserat with his twenty years of experience as a Santal officer in the region, decided to settle the matter, without 'shedding of blood,' while dispatching a letter for immediate police or military assistance. He released two of his prisoners arrested for opposing the census and agreed to give in writing that the enumeration would be aborted in Katikund. This raised further enthusiasm of the crowd who now demanded that each bungalow in the Dumka Damin should be allowed exemption from enumeration through a statement issued by the officer himself. The pergannaits of Bungalow Silingi and Kendwah placed similar parwanas before the officer. With the evening setting in and 'the matters looking serious,' the officer later admitted that he was left with no choice but comply with the demands and the crowd finally dispersed, 'shouting as they went.'²⁹⁴

This 'second outbreak' as the Officers chose to call it, drew their attention to the situation in and around the Nargunge bungalow, from where most of the agitators were arrested. On enquiry, the Deputy magistrate Cosserat, learnt that the Santals had organized a large gathering in the Sultanabad Damin shortly before the Katikund incident, where decision to oppose census was taken jointly and this agitation was planned by emissaries from Hendwah, one of whom was also present during the Katikhund agitation.²⁹⁵ On 29th January, Cosserat visited the Nargunge bungalow and found letters issued in the name of Dubia Gossain with its familiar message to follow the path of purity. Significantly, during his visit, Deputy Magistrate also learnt that every

²⁹³ Diary of A.W. Cosserat, Deputy Magistrate, Dumka Damin, 27th January 1881, BJP Volume no. 291, March1881, WBSA.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

where in the Nargunge bungalow, people had turned Kherwars after killing their pigs and fowls.²⁹⁶

Simultaneous to the Katikund agitation, opposition began in Nunihat the capital of Hendwah, situated around 27 kilometers north of Dumka, where W.M. Smith was confronted by men resolute on preventing enumeration. The Santal agitation spread from Katikhund and Nunihat to the villages in the south of Godda and then to one part of Rajmahal Damin and within another week to the northern Godda Damin.²⁹⁷ The name of Jadu Manjhi, the son of the late Bhagirath Manjhi, already stigmatized the ‘notorious agitator of 1875,’ came up for the first time on 30th January 1881 from South of Godda.²⁹⁸ He arrived with some thousand Santals and declared that they would not allow any enumeration to take place. The initial reasons he stated for opposing the census was fear, but when assured that his fears were groundless, he put forward a different logic altogether. He argued with the officers that if the *jamabandi* records had facilitated the sale of lands the census record might facilitate the sale of Santal women.²⁹⁹ Similar opposition was also recorded in Belpatta, a tuppeh of the same size as Hendwah, on 20th January 1881, which however settled down only after Mr. WM Smith met the leaders and satisfied their queries.³⁰⁰

By the first half of February, the opposition had almost died down except for pockets, where the Santals were still found to be resisting census, waiting for Jadu Manjhi’s instructions. While some said they were waiting for instructions from their ‘gurus’ at Godda, others declared that

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

²⁹⁸ W.B. Oldham, Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas to Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division, camp Deoghur, 1st February, Volume 291, BJP, March 1881, WBSA.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

their guru Jadu Manjhi had forbidden them to be enumerated because their names had already been written in the register of their father Bhagirath and hence they could not have their names written twice.³⁰¹ Another report of 8th February revealed that sixteen villages in Taljhari (Mission station) in the Rajmahal sub-division were still opposing on the ground that '*land was Bhagrits and their own; and they would have no more of the pergunnaitis nor of the sub-divisional officers.*' Twenty-five villages of Passai in the Godda sub-division and six Kherwar villages in the Murarow bungalow were also objecting to census leading to the arrest of their leaders.³⁰² Mr. Oldham pointed out that at high computation only one twenty-fifth part of the district was engaged in opposition.³⁰³ In the whole of Damin, opposition was 'led by scattered Kherwar individuals, later on by the inhabitants of the areas of Nargunge and Silingi bungalows bordering on Hendwah, and by a few villages in the Katikhund bungalow and then by scattered Kherwar communities in the North'.³⁰⁴

If the general spirit throughout the district remained aggressively anti-census, the only exception was the Rajmahal portion of Damin where Mr. Jones was in charge of the operation. Incidentally, this region paid by far the largest portion of the revenue assessed upon the estate and yet Mr. Jones, the sub-divisional officer of Rajmahal, was said to have single handedly carried through the enumeration without facing any opposition.³⁰⁵ Significantly, the Santals in South Rajmahal, the colonial officer reported, were more concerned with registering their names as 'Kherwars,' through discussion rather than any confrontation with the colonial authorities.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² G.N. Barlow to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Camp Dumka, dt 8th February, Volume 291, BJP March 1881, WBSA.

³⁰³ Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ G.N. Barlow to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Financial department, Bhagalpur, 1st January, BJP, File 1041A-41, February 1881, WBSA

They were infact joined by Santals from Godda, and from the Pakur subdivision, who met at Bithona to claim their separate status as 'Kherwars' thereby distinguishing themselves from the mass of the Santals.³⁰⁶

The agitation which began in the Nargunge- Jamtara region thus spread west to Katikund-Nunihat-South Godda. On 26th January 1881, the census opposition crossed the borders of the district of Santal Parganas and reached Jamui situated in the adjoining Mongyr district, west of Deoghar. The subdivisional officer of Jamui, W.B. Martin found that all Santals in the region from Chakye to Jamui thana refused to be enumerated. They gave no sufficient reason for refusing but said that they would not on any account allow the census to be taken. The officer believed that there was more to it than the mere dislike to be enumerated, which he ascribed to different kinds of 'rumours and threats' that was in circulation through *parwanans* in the area. Unlike in the Santal Parganas, the letters with their moral precepts were not noticeable here but the mood seemed to be more optimistic as if triggered by a hope that, 'better times are coming', 'a day of retribution is near,' that 'everything white was to be put aside' even 'a subah was said to have been chosen' and such messages disseminated from place to place. Two headmen it was rumoured went to Jamtara for orders. Grog drinking in Chakye came to a halt. In Darura talook, North East of tuppeh Hendwah, 20 miles from NNE from Dumka, the people said they were waiting for instructions from the Santals of Damin.³⁰⁷

The colonial mind however failed to rationalize the cause of opposition to the census. They were unable to understand the Santal motive behind the obstruction to their mission of providing

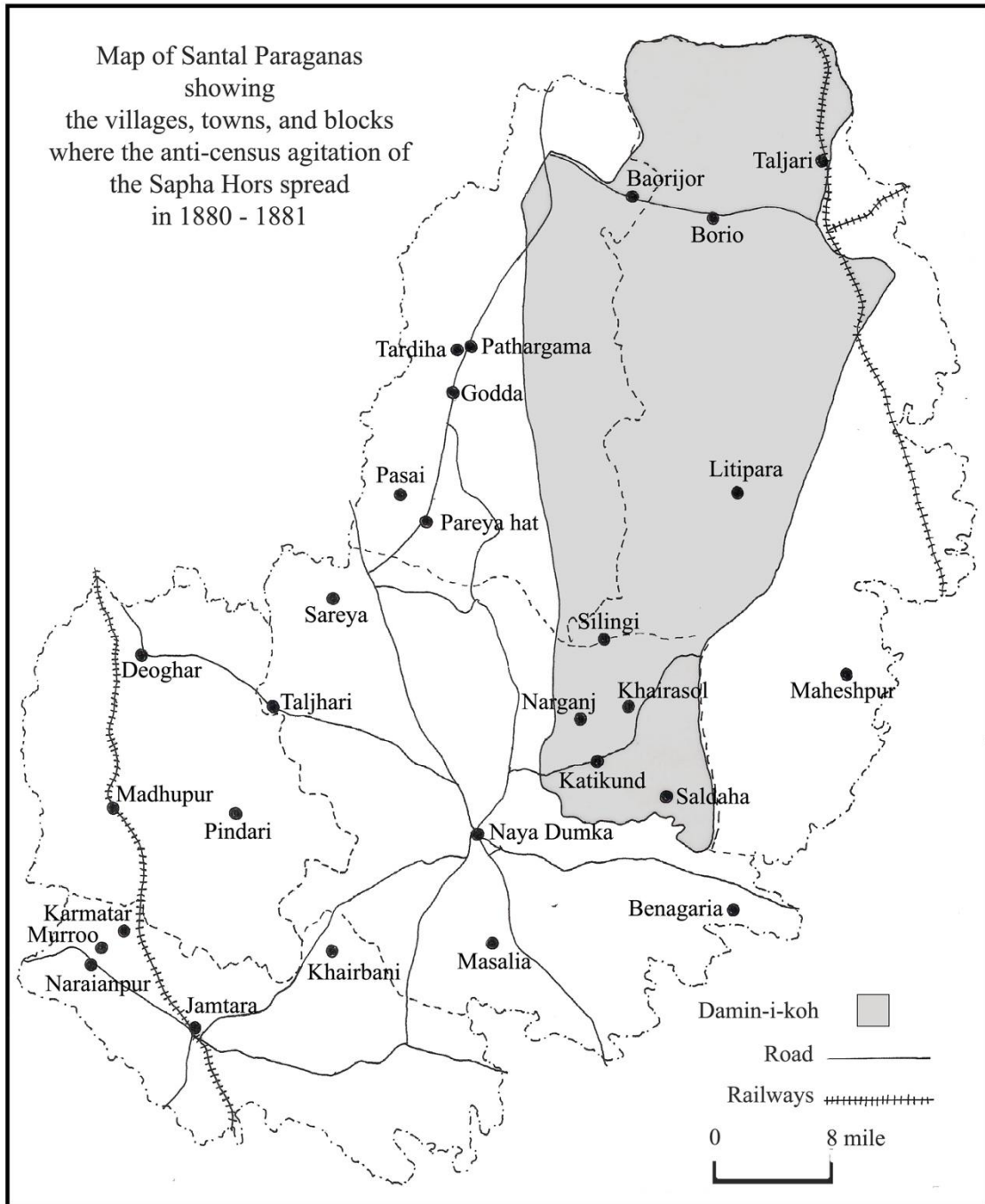
³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ W.B. Martin, sub-divisional officer of Jamui to Collector of Monghyr, Camp Nagari, dt. 26th January, Volume 291, BJP March 1881, WBSA.

‘good governance’ and bringing back order especially in the post *Hul* period. They responded to the opposition by initially trying to reason with the leaders through meetings, trying to make them understand the purpose of the census but when they failed, they resorted to arrests. More than hundred arrests were made although the maximum period of punishment awarded was two years. The largest number of arrests were made from the Nurgunge bungalow, where fifty to sixty ‘ringleaders’ were identified, of whom thirty- two were mustajirs and the rest were ryots.³⁰⁸ Under the strict surveillance of the police and the military, the work of enumeration was finally completed on 15th February 1881 and the Census books were submitted on the 20th of the month.

³⁰⁸The mustajir was often a lessee, who was often an outside speculator, to whom the zamindar leased a village for a term of 10 years. See L.S.S. O’ Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Santal Parganas. op cit, p. 263.

MAP - 2



Source: 'Report as to the recent excitement among the Santals,' prepared by G.N. Barlow, the Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santa! Parganas. Judicial Department, Judicial Branch, Proceedings 3 9-40, File- 9C, August 1881, West Bengal State Archives.

The following map has been prepared from the list of the prisoners arrested from different villages, blocks and towns and the general report submitted by the Commissioner's office. The areas affected by the agitation come under the dotted portions demarcated in the map. After cartographically charting out the movement what becomes evident is the dispersed nature of the movement. which revealed a completely different pattern of agitation when compared to the map of the Santal rebellion of 1855 as shown in Map-1 of this study.³⁰⁹

The Clean Men and 'the purity of self'

Towards the middle of February 1881, the agitation against the census operation ended and all agitators were put behind the bars. However, the census of 1881, revived colonial interest in the sect especially when 40,960 Santals registered themselves as Kherwars.³¹⁰ The colonial officers had reasons to believe that another thousand adopted the new religious creed and opposed the census, but did not enlist themselves as Kherwars. Based on census figures and other government estimates, some 50,000 Santals was believed to have become Kherwars in 1881.³¹¹ This would mean that in the meantime, (i.e. between 1871-1881) the sect had gradually organized itself, winning over a large number of Santals, around the moral precepts initiated by their guru Bhagirath in 1871. In fact, the sect remained significantly hidden from British records, until the middle of September 1880s, until 'thousands of letters' were found along the trail of the census

³⁰⁹ The map has been prepared by Anjushri Bhattacharya with utmost care. Map-1 p. 49

³¹⁰ A Table was prepared by the Commissioner's office on the number of those calling themselves Kherwars as recorded in the Census of 1881 in the several divisions of the District; see Table-1 p. 136.

³¹¹ John MacDougall, *Land or Religion? Sardar and the Kherwar Movements in Bihar 1858-95* (Delhi: Manohar, 1985) p.88.

enumeration in the villages of Hazaribagh and Santal Parganas, most of them expressing the fear of a 'calamity'.³¹²

The letters in circulation were like an announcement of an impending crisis in the offing. Looking at the manner of its circulation, it would appear that, the Santals silenced their agency in the writing of the letters, as if to sustain an impression that there was a messianic agency behind its authorship. This reminds us of the significance of the papers falling from heaven in the form of letters on the eve of the *Hul*. As in the case of those letters, in case of the present ones too, the letters seem to be a pre-ordained declaration of something profound coming from above. One letter seized during the Katikhund riot of 27th January 1881, and was archived, provides an insight into the nature of the letters in circulation, written in the name of Dubia Gossain,

'Receive the blessings of Dubianath Babajee. Do not milk your cow or plough your field on Sunday, neither keep or rear pigs or fowl. Walk on the right path. Whoever comes to pay his respect to me, all his desires shall be accomplished, but if my commands are not obeyed the above stated punishment will follow within two or four months. My letters have already been sent to all parts of the country. Make every person acquainted that his welfare depends upon my blessings and he would obtain thereby the benefit of making the gift of cow; in other words, Bhagwan/god will give whatever may be good for him. Whoever may think these words false will certainly get into trouble. Whoever receives

³¹² Appendix A, Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

this letter will make a fresh copy and circulate it, failing this he will be held guilty as of the sin of killing a cow.’³¹³ (emphasis added)

The letter was clearly a motivated kind of writing, instructing the Santals to pursue the ‘right path’ by cleansing the mind and body, to abstain from killing animals and to stop working on Sundays and thus pursue the right path. Recalling the original agenda as set by Bhagirath Manjhi, it appears that abstention from work on Sundays was a new addition. This new element was evidently derived from the notion and praxis of the Sabbath day among Christians. This practice of deriving elements of righteousness and justification from sources outside of the Santal tradition was not an unusual trend as case studies have shown; a rebel often ‘stitched his cloth of rebellion with threads from many sources.’³¹⁴ In a quest to bind the sect and hold it together, disciplinary safeguards were instituted in the form of punishment against anybody who dared violate or question the orders of the guru. Some letters threatened that failure to conform would meet with tragedies like a huge deluge of fire or rain.³¹⁵ Others pronounced that, defiance against the guru’s orders was tantamount to the crime of ‘killing a cow,’ traditionally considered as a heinous act in the Santal society. Conformity to the spirit of the letter on the other hand, would be blessed by god in the form of a gift of a cow.³¹⁶

³¹³ Diary of A.W. Cosserat, Deputy Magistrate, Dumka Damin, 29th January 1881, BJP Volume 291, March 1881, WBSA.

³¹⁴ For a discussion on this new historical trend in the light of recent research see, Tanika Sarkar, ‘Rebellion as Modern Self fashioning: A Santal movement in Colonial Bengal’ in Daniel Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta eds., *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011) p. 66. Also see David Hardiman, ‘Assertion, Conversion, and Indian Nationalism: Govind’s Movement among the Bhils’ in Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke eds., *Religious Conversions in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford India Paperback, 2003), p. 256

³¹⁵ S.P. Sinha, ‘The Kherwar Movement 1874-1942’ in *Conflict and Tensions in Tribal Society* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1993) p. 206

³¹⁶ Diary of A.W. Cosserat, Deputy Magistrate, Dumka Damin, 29th January 1881, BJP Volume 291, March 1881, WBSA.

As the letters passed in circulation from one village to another, what was noted by the officials was a frenzy among the Santals as they began numerous acts of purification, many of which were indeed new to the community. We know little of the actual mechanism of autonomous mobilization; whether it was the pull of the primordial ties of kinship, community, the power of rumours or the compulsion of custom and religion.³¹⁷ One theory was, ‘all rebel messages, whatever the means of transmission, had the dual function of informing and mobilizing at the same time’.³¹⁸ As in the time of the *Hul*, orders in a written form had such an aura of sanctity and authority about it in the eyes of the Santals that they later responded to the need for purification with great enthusiasm, as if they were responding to gods’ calling. According to the *zamindar* of Pakur, the agitators gave up the ancestral practice of eating beef, ham, and pork, started wearing the *poita* (a sacred thread), the sacred beads around their neck (in the manner of the Vaishnavites) and preferred the use of ‘*Hindu dhoti*’ instead of the ‘scanty *langoutis*’ (*loin cloth*).³¹⁹ Drinking of *handia* (rice beer) was given up. Many began to worship the Sun, Durga, Kali and other Hindu gods. Mr. Cornelius stationed at the Jamtara outpost noticed that the Sapha Hors broke their older earthen vessels and used ghee, milk as mediums of ablution in their worship. In Dumka, the Sapha Hors refused to use the cow in the ploughing operation. Reverend Stark of the Church Missionary Society in the report noted that one –sixteenth of the Santals residing in South Jamoyee and one fourth in North Jamoyee had become Sapha Hors. They kept themselves away from the other Santals; they would not touch their food, water and utensils and did not draw water from the same well. They even began to distinguish themselves from the

³¹⁷The entire question of mobilisation with all its pertinence has been inspired by my reading of Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 118.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 227.

³¹⁹ Taresh Nath Pandey, zamindar of Pakur, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

Santals they called *Jhitia* (possibly *Jhutha*) and prohibited inter dining or marriage with the non-Kherwars.³²⁰

In this connection we would like to suggest that through such acts, the Santals were seeking to avert the invasion of their lives from the hegemonic colonial gaze by pursuing moral precepts which would probably make their community appear so perfect that the British would not dare cast a searching gaze on it. In order to protect the purity of the body, all physical contacts of the body with any act considered defiled was removed through prescribed procedures of physical cleansing. Indeed, the body was considered so sacrosanct that the Sapha Hors began to distance themselves from all Santals they considered lowly and unclean. Such enthusiastic responses, through varying measures of eclectic assimilation from a dominant religion, was in fact a form of self-assertion to redefine their identity; an attempt enforced through the use of either the *poita* or the string of sacred beads around their neck or using Hindu methods of worship or even bringing in Hindu gods within their own pantheon of gods. The earlier Sapha Hor project of asserting their claim to their 'own country' remained inchoate. In fact, we can argue, the active cultivation of the vision of 'pure' that the agitation embodied, appears to have been a justification of the assertion of their right to their 'kingdom'-a right that their original guru Bhagirath voiced.

Reinterpreting the Census: The Santals and their world of fears and apprehensions

In the last section we saw how the Santals desperately tried to avert the colonial gaze but the question is, why were the Santals so anxious to oppose the census? Does this entail that they

³²⁰ This was reported by many of those who were assigned the task of providing information on the anti-census agitation. Reverend A. Stark, Missionary of Taljhari, Rajmahal, Reverend Tombridge of Bhagaria, Godda, Tareh Nath Pandey from Pakur, C.F.Manson Deputy Magistrate, Dumka, W.H.Rattray, Deputy Magistrate, Jamtara, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

were trying to elude the multiple factors that seemed to besiege their existence in various ways in the last quarter of the 19th century? Indeed, soon after the *Hul*, the Santals saw their world open up, once railways track, which was part of the Calcutta-Delhi line, now passed through the south eastern part of the Santal Parganas and along the narrow plain between the Ganges and the Rajmahal hills. Between 1853 and 1855, this project had given employment around 100,000 people in the Santal Parganas and in the adjoining areas.³²¹ The railways thus opened up forests, cleared interiors and permitted recruiting of adivasis from the area especially when the tea gardens in Assam became operative from the 1860s. Between 1870 and 1900 the Chota Nagpur plateau (constituting an administrative division, comprising of the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribag, Palamau, Singhbhum and Manbhum in Southern Bihar) and the adjoining Santhal Parganas provided almost half the 750,000 workers who went into the Assam tea gardens.³²² The Santals were thus brought closer to the market forces as migrations began en masse to the plantations or to the plains especially in times of high prices provoked by poor harvests, when wages for non agricultural labour was low.³²³ The Santals economic position in the 19th century was precarious because of the arbitrary government policies on the one hand and on the other the vicious gaze of the moneylenders awaiting every opportunity to dispossess the Santals from their land. The first detailed land settlement of 1874 appear to have raised some expectations of the Santals that it would inaugurate reduction in rents.³²⁴ When instead the census enumerators appeared on the scene with their elaborate questionnaire in mid-1880, all hopes of reduction was shattered. The Santals asked Captain Carnac, the Assistant Commissioner of the Santal Parganas several times,

³²¹ John MacDougall, *Land or Religion: The Sardar and Kherwar movement 1858- 95* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985) p. 30

³²² Samita Sen, 'Questions of Consent: Women's Recruitment for Assam Tea Gardens, 1859-1900' in *Studies in History*, 18, 2, n.s, 2002, ps. 238-239. She pointed out that the large scale migration was due to a failure in agriculture. The region experienced five major famine and an influenza epidemic between 1880 and 1920.

³²³ John MacDougall op cit, p. 161.

³²⁴ John Boxwell, officiating Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to Commissioner of Bhagalpur division, dt. Dumka, 1 October 1879, BJP, November 1874. WBSA.

under what 'raj' they were being numbered and whether it was the 'maharani' or 'the company' who was causing the census to be taken.³²⁵ Being under the Bengal presidency and perhaps with the educated middle class opinion trickling into the Damin, vague notions about the change over from the Company rule to that of the rule of the maharani had possibly reached the Santals. In Santal memory, the rule of the Company was associated with the days of the *Hul* and with the brutal suppression of the rebellion. Now with the news filtering in of the administration taken over by the *Maharani* (queen), who knows whether hopes were raised that the distant authority of the *Maharani* would generate the impression of benignity.

In this connection it is relevant to pose the question as to whether there was a similar opposition to the census of 1871 in the Santal country. Indeed, faced by the opposition by the Sapha Hors during 1880, the officials sought to remind them that there had already been a census opposition in 1871 and the Santals were acquainted with what the census was all about. Significantly in reply, the Santals of Narayanpur refused to acknowledge that there had been a previous census.³²⁶ So the question arises, why was the previous census operation not registered as such by the Santals? The answer probably lies in the fact that the census operation of 1871 was less organised and thorough, than the one conducted in 1881. Therefore, the Santals absolutely new to the census experience of 1871 had hardly registered their first encounter with the census. The situation in 1881 however was very different. By then the census operators had acquired the capability of streamlining the procedures of enumeration. This meant that the enumeration was so complete, the questionnaire so elaborate and the coverage so pervasive, that the enumerated

³²⁵ Captain Carnac, Assistant Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

³²⁶ Appendix A; Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Pargana, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

population could not but register the existence of the census on the horizon of their existence.³²⁷

It was precisely in this context when the Santals began to feel the invasive edge of the census, that they began to apprehend the coming 'calamity'. To make matters worse, the array of paper works, the large number of people involved in the enumeration, all contributed to suspicion behind the survey and records as a further imposition of colonial arrangements.

The census thus began to besiege the Santal mind with all kinds of apprehensions as they were at the receiving end of the rapid developments over which they had no control. These fears were vented through the letters, we referred to, and was also reflected in the Santal responses to the persuasive efforts of the census officials to make them relent to their work of enumeration. Let us reflect the way in which the Santal mind was forced to come to grips with the fundamental change ushered into their existence by colonial presence and its attended circumstances in their part of the country. In January 1881, Raghai Manjhi along with some 50 followers met the Deputy inspector of schools at Taljhari, and distinctly stated that 'the (Wood) settlement had been the last Government measure. It had enhanced their rents and facilitated the sale of their land and they would have no further Government interference.'³²⁸ Thus the Raghai was trying to assert that the census was a fresh government interference and was completely uncalled for. In the tappah Hendwah, the Wood's settlement had actually doubled the rents in the Taljhari taluk compared to those of the adjoining Badgo taluk.³²⁹ Not surprisingly, Hendwah turned into a hotbed of sedition in 1881, and emissaries from the region was reported to be visiting adjoining

³²⁷For a discussion on the way in which the census operations of 1881 had become streamlined and comprehensive see Richard S Smith, 'Between local tax and Global statistics: The Census as local record' in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, ns 34 1, 2000) p. 2.

³²⁸ Appendix A; Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Pargana, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

³²⁹ Ibid.

villages fomenting agitation against the census.³³⁰ Almost at the same time the Sapha Hors of Barharwa indeed said something more drastic, 'Land is ours. We cleared the jungles. We ought not to pay rents. We will combine and drive out the English.'³³¹

This Santal assertion has to be situated in the context of continuous land alienation, especially from the time of the Wood settlement. The declared aim of the Wood Settlement had been to grant the Santals occupancy rights with their rents fixed for a period of seven years. The other aim was to fix the maximum interest at 24% per annum on loans contracted by local moneylenders and ban compound interest. It was also stipulated that the total interest decreed on any loan could not exceed one fourth of the principle sum, if that period was not more than one year. The lived experience of the Santals, however had a different story to tell. Only the collection of cesses and abwabs by the zamindars was completely prohibited.³³² In effect, between 1872-1881, in the zamindari estates, the Wood's settlement actually raised the rents by 10% much to their delight.³³³ In the Damin, which was directly under the government control, the Wood's settlement provided that the total revenue had increased from Rs. 1,00,165-4 in 1868 to Rs. 1,77,495-3-9 in 1879. The rise in agricultural assessment was from Rs. 93956 in 1868 to Rs. 1,69,455, which meant an increase of more than 80% in the *Jama* (revenue), and the largest increase was registered in the Rajmahal Damin.³³⁴ Mr. Barlow, the Commissioner of Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas admitted, 'although owing to the rapidity of successive enhancement the burden may have been felt heavily by the ryots,' but he attributed the rise to an extension of

³³⁰ Memo by W.B. Oldham Deputy Commissioner, No D-1 Deoghar, dated 24th January, 1881, Volume: 291, BJP March 1881, WBSA.

³³¹ F.F. Cole, Missionary, Barharwa, Rajmahal, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

³³² Samar Kumar Mallick, *Transformation of Santal Society; Prelude to Jharkhand*, (Calcutta: Minerva, 1993) p. 59.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

cultivation.³³⁵ In reality, the benefit of the rents which were fixed for a period of seven years, was greatly nullified by a ten percent rise in prices. The Woods settlement thus proved to be utterly disappointing for the Santals who had expected that the settlement would lead to considerable reduction in rents and some even stopped the payment of rent. Numerous court cases followed especially as considerable number of Santals refused to pay rents. Mr. Boxwell, the officiating Deputy Commissioner, stated the number of cases instituted by the zamindars between 1873-75.³³⁶

Total Cases instituted....	1873...12,177
	1874...10,331
	1875...17,865

The greatest irony of the situation however was that, by giving the Santals occupancy rights, the Wood Settlement made the Santal's *jote* (land) a property of real and increasing value. H.H. Macpherson, the Settlement officer for the period (1890-1905) noted,

‘Raiyat lands had no price before the Settlement because rents were enhanced at the will of the landlord... with the fixity of the rent and the security of tenure the occupancy rights at once became articles of value and the village usurer was not slow to see that here lay the ready means to circumvent the new usury laws.’³³⁷

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid, p. 60.

³³⁷ H.H.Macpherson, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of the Santal Parganas 1898-1907* (Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1909) p. 45

Thus under the new circumstances, the Settlement officer pointed out, land offered the moneylenders a greater and more stable security than crops because it had now acquired a greater market value. Moreover, conditions of borrowing were made easier and the failure to repay their loans in time, led to loss of their land to the moneylenders. Mr. Oldham, the Deputy Commissioner of Bhagalpur wrote, 'When the borrowers were all Santals or members of the other primitive races and the lenders were all keen witted Bengalis and Beharis and land was the security, that security was fast passing from the hands of its original clearers and cultivators into those of the creditors.'³³⁸

An official found in 1882, that considerable proportion of lands of the cultivators of the great tappah Hendwah had passed into the hands of the creditors.³³⁹ Within ten years of the Settlement (1875-85) there were as many as 10,000 court or public sales and 40,000 private sales of ryot holding³⁴⁰ An enquiry conducted by Mr. Carstairs, the Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas (1886-1900), revealed that the amount of land that had been alienated by sale all over the district by the time he took over responsibility as the Deputy Commissioner was about 1,20,000 acres.³⁴¹

Did the question of loss of forest and village commons feature in the spectrum of fears that prompted the Sapha Hors to oppose the census operations? Significantly Katikhund featured among the important sites where the census was opposed by the Sapha Hors. The region formed a part of the Damin which had just been declared a reserved forest in the year 1881 with the Deputy Commissioner as the Conservator of forests. With this declaration, the government

³³⁸ Samar Kumar Mallick, op cit, p. 72

³³⁹ B. B. Chaudhuri, 'Decline of the Old order in the Tribal World' in *Peasant History in late Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* Volume 8, Chapter X, (New Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2008) p. 744.

³⁴⁰ Public or court sales were for recovery of rent arrears and private sales were for the recovery of debts.

³⁴¹ Samar Kumar Mallick, op cit, page 78.

established their rights over sal, asan, sisoo, sat sal and fruit trees and wood cutting was severely restricted. In the zamindari tracts, the Wood's settlement left the forest rights undefined to the advantage of the zamindars who seized every opportunity to exclude the *ryots* from even the basic *bankar* privileges to which the Santals had customary rights.³⁴²

The government was thus contradicting the Santals' age old customary rights over the forests which from time immemorial had been looked upon as free gifts from nature. The jungle supplied the Santals with timber, dye, gums, bee wax, and vegetables. The women gathered plants, fruits, roots, flowers, leaves of trees for various uses. Wild plants like *Kenasag*, *Lata sag*, *Sunsmi sag*, *Kitha sag* (spinach) were widely consumed particularly in times of scarcity of food. The Mahua tree and its flowers were a source of a coarse spirit and oil and was also used as cattle fodder. The Sabai grass was used for making baskets and was a major source of livelihood for the Santal women.³⁴³ Such was the dependence that the Santals found any restriction on grazing and access to the forest unacceptable especially when the British officers stepped up efforts to bring forests under government control.

On 27th January 1881 a large group of Santals gathered in the office of A.W. Cosserat refusing to be enumerated. The agitators came chiefly from the bungalows, where the Government conservancy had been going on for some time and the Santals raised their cries against conservancy which was being supervised by Cosserat. The Sapha Hors who met W.M. Smith at Nunihat on 27th December also brought up all their old grievances against restrictions imposed upon them regarding wood cutting. The Santals of tuppah Hendwah expressed their grievances to

³⁴² The *banker* privileges included collection of fuel, grass for thatching, leaves to make the platters, brushwood for fences and small *sal rollas* (posts and beams) for repairing the houses. Samar Kumar Mallick, op cit, ps. 114-116.

³⁴³ Ibid, p.37.

Mcl. Smith against Udit Narain Singh, the titular raja of Lagwa or Noonni, who had farmed his estate to a Bengali but reserved the forest to himself. Wood's settlement had allowed the ryots to use the firewood and rollas(saplings), but reserved all 'the trees of growth' to the zamindar. What antagonized the Santals was the arbitrariness of zamindar Udit Narayan's declaration that any tree could be considered 'trees of growth', thus compromising the Santals access to these trees and their produce.³⁴⁴

The gradual disappearance of rights over the forests and grazing lands had actually been registered by the Santals at the time of the Woods Settlement itself. In June 1870, five men allegedly under 'the influence of ganja (raw tobacco) appeared before the Sub-Divisional officer of Dumka with some fragments of letters scrolled over with unintelligible characters which they said had fallen from the Heaven.'³⁴⁵ One of them even claimed that they had been directed by a deity to meet the magistrate. These men came from the tract lying between Deoghur and Dumka on the border of both sub divisions and were aggrieved by the disappearance of the village grazing lands under the operation of the new settlement. They had come with the 'letters' in order to bring the matter to the notice of the magistrate. The divisional magistrate of Dumka and Deoghur however dismissed their claims and discharged them only after a warning against the consumption of ganja.³⁴⁶ The subsidiary options of earning through the selling of forest products gave the adivasi society a certain elasticity- a capacity to absorb, even if for a short time, crop

³⁴⁴ W. Oldham, the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur division, Note, dt. 30 January 1881, Deoghar, Volume: 291, BJP, March 1881, WBSA.

³⁴⁵ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C, August 1881 WBSA.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

failures and the claims of the outsiders. But once the rights over the forests was taken away, the rents and taxes imposed by the state, made the life of the adivasis much less tolerable.³⁴⁷

Last but not the least, the fears prompting opposition to the census focused on the Santals' perception of his/her bodies as s/h saw it materially and symbolically. In the Santal world-view, his community was conceptualized in the trope of a body, of which individual members were but integral parts collectively working to make the body cohere and function. While the entire community was visualized by the Santals as originating from body of the bird, the collective body of the community was regularly invoked in their practices pertaining to new settlements.³⁴⁸ Settlements were founded only when the body of a member of the collective looking for a new place would be possessed by Marang Buru and then would select the site of the settlement for the entire community. In Santal imagination, thus the body of the community was a sacrosanct unit, consecrated by god whose spiritual presence in the body community was felt during the ceremonies through the medium of the possessed. It is not surprising therefore that the notion of the body was also crucial to the way in which the Sapha Hors felt and responded to the colonial impact. With his own body ideally located in the body of the community within the geographical imagination of the Santal country, the Sapha Hors reacted to the colonial reality as forcibly disintegrating the community's body and wrenching its parts from this original, congenial whole and scattering them in far away places that the Santal would not have the misfortune of reaching had it not been for the colonial presence. By the beginning of 1880s, the Santals had come to realize that the English were an over bearing power to reckon, who moreover straddled ends of

³⁴⁷This suggestion is derived from James C. Scott, *Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South East Asia*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) ps. 62-64.

³⁴⁸ See P.O. Bodding, L.O.Skrefsrud, Sten Konow, *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha, Traditions and the Institutions of the Santals*, (New Delhi: Bahumukhi Prakashan, 1942) p. 101-102.

the world, unknown and therefore fearsome and alienating for the Santal; and using this connectedness of its far flung concerns, the British authorities could wreck the Santal body and break the community. However, the Sapha Hors bodily fears as expressed in the conversations with the officials and in the letters, were gendered too. Even though the patriarchal orientation of the Santal society was less hierarchizing and restrictive than the ones in Brahminical society, it was nonetheless a factor to reckon with in the Sapha Hor discourse. Gendered imaginings therefore were particularly sited as we shall see later in the chapter, in the patriarchal fears centering around women's migration to the Assam tea plantation on the one hand and the imagined branding of women's bodies by census officers.

A significant aspect was the anxiety over female bodies being transported to the tea gardens. In tea plantations 'twin needs for cheap female and child labour and the need to create a special labour force through generational reproduction created a high demand for women in the Assam tea industry'.³⁴⁹ It was no coincidence that the letters claimed that if the census was held, the women would be transported to the tea plantations in Assam.³⁵⁰ For long, the Santals had been a witness to the colonial rulers ability to forcefully transport them to the tea gardens ever since they opened up in the 1860s. They watched with apprehension as families broke up, community became numerically dented, as large number of Santals travelled to the Assam plantations never to return. They found their girls vanishing into the thin air as the dreaded *arkattis* laid the trap to allure women to the distant land. Songs were sung lamenting the loss of girls who disappeared in the dead of the night.

³⁴⁹ Samita Sen, op cit, p. 232.

³⁵⁰ W.B.Oldham, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, 29th January 1881, BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

*Small buds have been
 Stolen this night,
 What are their names, Sukhi, Lukhi,
 Simti, Malti, Aladi and Payo.
 These six girls have been transported today.*³⁵¹

The Assam plantations had never been a preferred destination among the Santals unlike the Duars in North Bengal where the Santals travelled on their own initiative, and after earning a few weeks wages, returned to their homes in the Santal Parganas.³⁵² That it was force that sustained the flow of Santal immigration to the Assam plantations is evident in the records of the superintendent of emigration at Calcutta.³⁵³ The *arkattis* abducted men and women from their own houses and forcibly took them to the labour depots where they were assigned false identities and new names, so that they could be no longer be traced back to their villages. They were then taken to the middlemen who touched and examined their bodies for signs of illness. Then the bodies were sold to the highest bidder ‘exactly as cattle were’; amounting to a ‘sale of human flesh’ as the colonial officers themselves admitted.³⁵⁴ In 1889 there were more than five thousand *arkattis* in Ranchi district alone.³⁵⁵ The targets of the colonizers or the agents were primarily the women and children with their nimble and tender fingers, considered best suitable

³⁵¹ Cited from Dwarakanath Ganguli, ‘Slavery in British Dominion’ in Suhrud Bhowmick, *Saotal gaan o kobita*, An Anthology of Santali Songs and Poems (Calcutta: Sahiya Academy, 1996) p. 68.

Kocha bari dimbo phul
 Aaj rate churi lo gelo,
 Ki ki nam, Sukhi, lukhi,
 Simti Malti, Aladi, Paye lo,
 Choy jon churi je go chalane gelo.’

³⁵² Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: ‘Primitives’ and History Writing in a Colonial Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 96.

³⁵³ Ibid, p. 97.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 97-98.

³⁵⁵ Kaushik Ghosh, ‘Market for Aboriginality’ in G. Bhadra, S. Tharu, and G Prakash eds., *Subaltern Studies Volume X: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi, OUP, 1991) p. 46

to the delicate task of picking leaves.³⁵⁶ In order to create a settled labour force in the tea plantations, the planters preferred employing entire families rather than individual Santal with a backward pull from their native villages. Consequently, the infamous culture of ‘depot marriages’ came to be frequently organized by the recruiters transporting labour to the plantation. Such forced marriages made a travesty of the age long customs that was solemnized through elaborate rituals accompanied by songs and dances during the marriage ceremonies in which the entire community reveled. The colonial state thus had the power to turn completely meaningless, such sacrosanct domains like marriage solemnized by their age old rituals, and thereby inscribe their lives a fresh. The letters and conversations were thus trying to warn against the disintegration of the community through transportation, which was a violation of that very order and space, created and sanctified by god through the medium of the possessed.

The letters circulated among the Sapha Hor almost like a fore warning, reiterating the same fear over and over again, of being bodily dislocated and thrust into an unknown world lying outside of their Santal country. Not unnaturally it evoked the anxious curiosity of the Santals who posed innumerable questions regarding their future once they agreed to enumeration. Some asked the officers whether men would be forcibly sent to Afganistan.³⁵⁷ Others wanted to know, what if the British left and took the Santals with them? After all, if the British left the country at all, it could only be after striking a blow at the community.³⁵⁸ The Santals of Belputta, met W.M. Smith at Dumka and enquired about such a possibility, whether they might be deported to some

³⁵⁶ Samita Sen, op cit, p. 232. The Chota Nagpur plateau (an administrative division, comprising of the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribag, Palamau, Singhbhum and Manbhum in Southern Bihar) and the adjoining Santhal Parganas, provided almost half the 750,000 workers who went into the Assam tea gardens between 1870 and 1900.

³⁵⁷ W.B. Oldham, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, dt. 29th January 1881, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA. It is curious that the Santals were familiar with the war in Afganistan. The rumour possibly refers to the Second Anglo–Afghan War which was fought between the United Kingdom and the Emirate of Afghanistan from 1878 to 1880 and ended in the Treaty of Gandamak in 1880.

³⁵⁸ Appendix A; note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C, August 1881, WBSA.

other country.³⁵⁹ Four headmen in Karmatar, infact refused to take chances and demanded from the Deputy Commissioner a ‘written order’ giving assurance that they would not be exiled as a result of the enumeration.³⁶⁰ An old mustajir told the officer in charge of census in Kandrasole, Karmatar on December 1880, ‘I will write, but if anything happens to me, my son will put an arrow through your eyes.’³⁶¹ In the Santal mind, the British symbolised the agency of destroying the community, destabilizing their quiet lives and scattering them into distant lands, from which, who knows whether they could ever find their way back home.

The sense of alienation of the self was aggravated when the missionaries began their work of evangelization in the Santal country from the 1860s. The Church Missionary Society had five stations in Taljhari, Barharwa, Hiranpur, Pathra and Bhagya. The Indian Home Mission built twenty stations, the main being at Benegaria and a colony in Assam where it had its tea plantation. The other missions were the Christian Women’s Board of Missions, a Wesleyan Mission in Deoghur, the American Methodist Episcopal Mission in Pakur, the Plymouth Brethren in Jamtara, Karmatar, Mihijam and the Christian Disciples in Deoghar.³⁶² The church brought about a whole new own concept of time, space, new sense of ethics and morality; ideas completely alien to the Santal world. It regulated the life of the converted Santals through daily prayers, Sunday sermons, a rhythm of life determined in terms of western chronometric time. It frowned upon the traditional ceremonies that involved animal sacrifices, heavy drinking, eating rice cakes, songs with sexual innuendoes and accompanying dances and polygamy. The converts could not attend such community or ritual sacrifices of animals although they were afraid that

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² L.S.S. O’ Malley, op cit, p. 82.

crops would be destroyed as the *bongas* had not been appeased. When the rainy season came they could not visit the *ojhas*. They could not get help to sow and transplant during the hot season as they could not invite helpers to drink rice-beer with them.³⁶³ It was a whole new concept of living where the body was sought to be ‘tamed’ to fit into the structure of a new concept of Christian morality. The Sapha Hors watched the converts and their new ways of life with a suspicion, often entering into quarrels with Christian preachers; their hostility making way through the letters and their conversations with the colonial officers once the census enumeration began.

In fact, when the actual operation of the census began in the 1880s, the Sapha Hors showed extreme sensitivity to fears that they would have no control over their bodies. They wanted to know from the colonial officers whether the men would be branded on their breasts and the women were to be branded ‘elsewhere with the number of their houses’.³⁶⁴ In the first meeting held at Dumka Damin by AW Cosserat, the Saphas enquired whether the women were to be dishonored at night.³⁶⁵ When the night of 17th February was fixed for verifying the accounts written in the books in Barharwa, rumors began to spread that women were to be branded in a very delicate part and they would be defenseless as the men were to be gathered in one area and the women in another.³⁶⁶ In other words, the Sapha Hors had begun to visualize the census as a total take over of their bodies. It appeared that the central concern for the Sapha Hors now was to protect their socio- cultural identity as some kind of an inner domain, essentially rooted in their own country and in the cultural space of their own community. This anxious interiorizing of their

³⁶³ Marine Carrin and H Tambs-Lyche, *Encounter of the Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries and their changing Worlds, 1867-1900*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008) ps. 187-88.

³⁶⁴ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C, August 1881, WBSA.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ F.F. Cole, missionary at Barwarha, Rajmahal, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

selfhood vis a vis the over bearing colonial presence predictably culminated in the woman's body as the most intimate inviolate space; the Santal community as we have already seen was patriarchal albeit its less hierarchical than its Brahmanical counter part. It is undeniable that colonization of the Damini and the Santal Pargana exposed Santal women to *dikus* and British officials who particularly lusted tribal bodies; thus colonialism symbolized for the Santals as an age of sexual exploitation of their women. Therefore, the apparently naïve questions, the Sapha Hor men asked the officials, were the product of a new anxiety about Santal women's wellbeing. For the Santal patriarchy, the most protected aspect of the community's honour was the protecting the 'chastity' of the women; any violation of it was considered an affront to the male whose masculine duty was to protect that honour of the community.³⁶⁷

The foregoing examination of the range of anxieties and fears that the Sapha Hors articulated through their letters and queries suggests that the central trope around which they were organised was the theme of impending loss of control over their own bodies. This pervasive underlying fear was succinctly summed up by the Sapha Hors from the Tappah Hendwah, who declared to the enumerators that 'by registering the name, the profession, and other particulars, the Government was actually purchasing the body of the person who registered'.³⁶⁸ Perhaps this was what the Sapha Hors of Barharwa reminded the Santals when they claimed, 'become Kherwars and you will escape these indignities'.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Pradip Kumar Dutta, *Carving blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (New Delhi: OUP, 1999) p. 188.

³⁶⁸ Ram Kanai Karforma, farmer of the farmed portion of the Tappah Hendwa, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

³⁶⁹ F.F. Cole, the missionary at Barwarha, Rajmahal, BJP 9C August 1881, WBSA.

For people concerned over the gradual loss of land, forests and even their bodies, there was perhaps a millenarian appeal hidden in the belief that only the purest shall receive the blessings of god and thus escape the sufferings of loss! The colonial presence had polluted their body and therefore the need to become 'pure' had filtered in deeply into the practices of the believers. In this connection we may site a conversation with an aged Kherwar that R. Carstairs, the Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas (1886-1900), quoted in the following words,

'So you wanted to take the raj(rule) from us,' I said

'Oh no,' said the old man, 'we have no idea of doing that.'

Who told you to leave off eating fowls and drinking liquor? I asked.

'No man,' he replied.

'What made you do it, then?' I asked. 'Something within told me, and I had to obey,' he said.³⁷⁰

Facing the challenge: Colonial response to anti-census agitation

A report regarding this anti- agitation submitted by J. Monro, the Inspector General of Police to the Secretary of Government of India, (Judicial department) on 1st February 1881, charted out the areas disturbed by the 1881 census agitation. He identified 'a block' bounded on the south by Dumka, east by a line drawn from Rampurhat to Pakur to Passai, (under Sultanabad in Godda), West from Passai to Taljhari (in Dumka sub-division)³⁷¹

³⁷⁰ Robert Carstairs *The Little World of an Indian District Officer*, (London: Macmillan 1912) p. 331.

³⁷¹ J. Monroe, Inspector general of police to the secretary to the government of Bengal, Judicial department, Camp Deoghar, dt. 1st February 1881, Volume: 291, BJP March 1881 WBSA. A hand drawn sketch was sent by W.B. Oldham to Horace Cockerall, dt. Deoghar, 29th January, 1881. Refer to Table -2 on p.137.

On the basis of the report and after studying the reaction of the Santals, ‘in the whole country’ from Monghyr to Birbhum, Horace Cockerell, Secretary to the Government of Bengal in a letter dated 2nd February 1881, wrote to the Secretary to the Government of India, on the necessity of bringing in a squadron of irregular cavalry into the Santal Parganas. He was troubled by the possibility ‘of the spirit of dissatisfaction spreading into the Chota Nagpur division’.³⁷² According to Cockerell, ‘Santal Parganas was the political center for the Sonthal population; and the Sonthals of the adjoining districts followed the lead of those of the Pergunnahs.’³⁷³ The only possible way, they could think of, to remove the smoldering disaffection among the Santals, was ‘by bringing in the troops because ‘the Santals had a remarkable dread of cavalry and horses.’³⁷⁴ Accordingly, the government sent troops in two parts-one for action and the other as reserve. The former would operate with the civil officers in the disturbed tracts where the census was still to be undertaken and the latter would encircle the disturbed parts at a considerable distance, to be used when required.³⁷⁵ Cockerell issued a statement, whereby the Deputy Commissioner was instructed to make a full enquiry of the disturbance making sure that all ringleaders should be prosecuted and punished, while measures should be taken ‘to deprive all village *manjhis* and *pergunnaitis* who had failed to stand loyally by the government’.³⁷⁶

The instructions of the Government were followed by elaborate surveys and reports prepared on the anti-census agitation. The colonial administrators then claimed that they had been able to trace a ‘distinct order’ in the organization of the movement. Within this order, those who

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Horace Cockerell to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Calcutta, 29th February BJP March 1881 Volume 291; WBSA. See Table- 3 at the end of the chapter, for the distribution of the troops in different parts of the Santal Parganas. p. 141

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

immediately came under the surveillant gaze of the colonial officers were the several gurus, popular among the Sapha Hors. Significantly all over South Asia, the holy men were always considered to be a source of disaffection and suspicion for the colonial masters, not only because the ways of these men was an enigma to the administrators but because their teachings often implicitly contradicted the justification for colonial rule. In fact 'these men before the emergence of nationalism were the main catalysts of popular resistance to colonial rule.'³⁷⁷ In colonial rationality, the role of the gurus was thus always essentialised as outsiders to the supposedly innocent and peaceful life of the Santal society. Not surprisingly, the gurus, who came to the limelight during the investigation in the Santal Parganas were objectified, criminalized and documented as 'low caste adventurers who impose on and make a living out of the Kherwars by playing their religious and semi political hopes.'³⁷⁸ These men were said to visit Santal villages from (Choto) Nagpur and Rajmahal areas, spreading disaffection among them and 'instigating them against the Government'.³⁷⁹

In the colonial ethnology of the 1830s, the Santals gained recognition as the 'noble savage'; the British essentialized them as simple and honest, uncorrupted by civilization. The idealized concept of the 'noble savage' had indeed developed in contra distinction to the more pejorative characterizations of tribes as barbaric, fundamentally inferior and had much to do with the emergence of humanitarian sentiments from the 1830s that had entered into Victorian thinking

³⁷⁷ Michael Adas, 'From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant protest in pre Colonial and Colonial South Asia.' in Nicholas Dirks ed., *Colonialism and Culture* The Comparative Studies in Society and History Book Series. (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992) p. 116.

³⁷⁸ Ram Kani Karforma, the farmer of the farmed portion of tuppeh Hendwa. Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C, August 1881, WBSA. Such essentialization was very common in colonial discourse on tribes. For a discussion on the role of the colonial in the making of the criminal tribes see Sanjay Nigam, 'Disciplining and Policing the 'criminals by birth'. Part I: Making of 'Colonial stereotype-The criminal castes and tribes of North India, in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 27.2, 1990, p. 132.

³⁷⁹ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas BJP File 9CAugust 1881 WBSA; and also Bengal/IOR/P/1648 file 9B-39 June 1881. India Office Library, (henceforth IOL).

about the future of the aboriginal people living under British settlements.³⁸⁰ With the ‘noble savage’ coming to dominate British ethnographic thinking, a new archetype emerged that of the ‘intruders’ who took advantage of the ‘innocence’ of the tribe, making money out of the latter’s foolishness and misguiding them in the process. It is in this ideological context that the British administrators’ stigmatization of the gurus may be appropriately situated.

With this new hyper sensitivity about the potentially corrupting intruders masquerading as gurus, the British administrators in the Damin-Santal Parganas were quick to hunt out such gurus where ever they could be found in the region. Thus the records tell us about Dubia Gossain, Mohan Das of Passai, Tagore (Thakur) Gossain, Chandra Gossain, Salkhon Sadhu, Gossain of Bausi, Jhemakpur babaji, Jadu Manjhi most of them referred to in the official documents as ‘miserable low castes.’³⁸¹ Of all gurus it was Dubia Gossain who drew considerable attention as the letters which were thought to have fomented the agitation were found to have been circulated in his name. He was a guru residing under the Ramgarh thana in the Hazaribagh district who turned into an enigma for the officers unsure of his actual role in the anti-census agitation. While the two Deputy Commissioners of Hazaribagh and the Santal Parganas debated over his role in the circulation of the letters, the guru himself denied all association with the agitating Santals.³⁸² He was arrested but in the absence of substantial evidence against him, he was later released and sent to Lucknow, a place distant enough to prevent him from creating further trouble.³⁸³ Thus

³⁸⁰ Vinita Damodaran, ‘Colonial Construction of the ‘tribe’ in India: the case of Chotanagpur’ in Biswamoy Pati ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival Resistance and Negotiations* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2010) p. 67; For changing colonial perceptions on the tribal world see B.B. Chaudhury, ‘Towards an Understanding of the Tribal World of Colonial Eastern India’ in Tanaguchi, Yanagisawa and Oshikawa ed *Economic Changes and Social Transformation in Modern and Contemporary South Asia* (Tokyo: Hitotsubashi University, 1994).

³⁸¹ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C, August 1881, WBSA.

³⁸² H.H. Risley, Deputy Commissioner, Hazaribagh to the Commissioner of the Chotanagpur division, Hazaribagh dt. 31 December 1880, BJP February File 1041A-41. WBSA.

³⁸³ Ibid.

from their colonial vantage point the authorities failed to understand the significance of the gurus in the lives of the Sapha Hors and the part they played was simply reduced to the role of spreading disaffection against the government.

Among the the colonial officials however, there was consensus that it was the Kherwars who were entirely responsible for the resistance made to the census of 1881. While people outside the sect, they argued, might have been involved in the agitation, it was the sect who had seized the opportunity and had ‘quickly headed the movement, which advanced Kherwarism with the strength of a revival.’³⁸⁴ It was indeed a shocking revelation for the colonial administration that the sect which was thought to be dying after 1878, had in reality spread silently, strengthening itself with a ‘distinct organization’ and ‘recognized principles’.³⁸⁵ According to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, G.N. Barlow, the Santals like the Irish peasants had always dreamt of ‘days which were to come to their race, when no rents will have to be paid.’³⁸⁶ That vision was now pursued through what the British coined ‘Kherwarism’ which was a Sapha Hor utopia nurturing the dreams that one day ‘they will have their own chosen leader, lands in plenty, with no rent and no hakim(lawyer) to bully them and rob them.’³⁸⁷

It is significant that this representation of the Kherwar was not in congruence with the notion of the noble savage. In fact, under the threat of the agitation, officers now began to question the romanticized popular understanding of the Santal tribe, ‘their reckless gaiety, their bluntness and apparent simple honesty and undoubted zest for the outdoor amusements and particularly for

³⁸⁴ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, BJP, dt. 8th June 1881, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP, File 9C, August 1881, WBSA

³⁸⁷ Ibid

hunting.’³⁸⁸ The theoretical position on the noble savage underwent an inevitable change and ‘Kherwarism’ was qualified with a new understanding of the character of the Santals. It was now pointed out that, the outwardly nature of the Santals, ‘no matter how attractive it might appear’, was in reality, ‘treacherous,’ for a Santal was ‘by constitution politically discontented and aiming at a change.’³⁸⁹ In colonial perception, the culture and nature of the colonized thus became one; a frozen category, freed from history.³⁹⁰

This ‘inherent anti-colonial’ character of the sect further infuriated the authority especially as the government officials in the Santal Parganas believed that they were ruling in the best interest of the Santals.³⁹¹ After all- that is the way they looked at things- that from the time the Damin- i- Koh was demarcated in 1833 and Pontet was placed in charge of it as the Superintendent in 1837, the Santals who poured into the region in large numbers, was believed to have enjoyed the privileges of ‘low rents’ and the ‘exclusive protection’ of the government which had been originally planned for the hill tribes or the Paharias by Augustus Cleveland.³⁹² In a characteristic mood of benevolent righteousness, the British administrators in the Santal country felt that notwithstanding the experience of the *Hul*, the colonial government under George Yule, had been sympathetic to the Santal sentiment, created the non regulated district with ‘a personalized touch to administration’; the whole idea was to establish a government where there would be a direct communication between the administrators and the people. Under the new system the Commissioner was to remain at the apex of the system in which, ‘his personal touch was of great

³⁸⁸ Ibid

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Nicholar Dirks, ‘Introduction: Colonialism and Culture’ in Nicholas Dirks ed., *Colonialism and Culture* op cit, p. 3.

³⁹¹ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, BJP, dt. 8th June 1881, BJP File 9 C August 1881. WBSA.

³⁹² W.B. Oldham, Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, 25th April, 1881, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

importance'.³⁹³ He was to function as the head of the revenue, civil and criminal courts. The government felt that they had been sensitive enough to keep the civil and revenue law in the area flexible, not rigidly codifying them. They had also given enough space to community sentiment by fostering a system in which the headman would represent the village in its relations with the outsiders and would be responsible for revenue to the government in the Damin-i-koh.³⁹⁴ Most importantly, they had also declared the Damin a no-police tract.³⁹⁵ There was an air of self congratulation on the extent to which the post *Hul* administration had been sensitive to the cultural requirements of Santal way of living, as one official pointed out, 'The entire system would rely on a secure system of land tenure and a simple system of criminal justice, which should be just, speedy and efficacious and were the best safeguards against outsiders'.³⁹⁶

So when the administration had to confront the agitation, the mood was one of dismay. They were at a loss to understand why such people who had no specific objection, wanted neither any explanation nor anything to ask about it, but stubbornly resisted the census.³⁹⁷ It was further distressing for them to learn that when one concession was granted to the villagers, another was demanded until nothing less than the stoppage of the entire operation was insisted upon.³⁹⁸ The officers felt that their benevolent gestures had not been appreciated by the Santals. In their dejection they thought the administration of the region was an 'oversight.' No wonder the

³⁹³ 'Extract from the Santal Administration Report for the year 1862,' BJP, December 1862, WBSA.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department, dtd. 8th June 1881, BJP File 9C August 1881. WBSA. Also see Memorandum by the Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, letter No. 1239 dt.10th March 1870, BJP, P1-13 December 1870, WBSA.

³⁹⁶ Appendix to Notes prepared by Joint Secretary, Santal Parganas. File no. 92/29 Judicial, National Archives of India, Delhi. NAI.

³⁹⁷ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department, dated 8th June 1881, BJP File 9 C August 1881, WBSA.

³⁹⁸ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, Judicial Proceedings File 9C, August 1881, WBSA.

officers began to look upon Santal Parganas as 'the most criminal district in the Bhagalpur division.'³⁹⁹

The Christian missions who entered the Santal Parganas in the 1860s, had also been attracted to the Santals for their childlike nature and very primitive ways and hence an undeniable target, in dire need to be civilized.⁴⁰⁰ In fact the Missions began to report considerable progress in their efforts at evangelization until the sudden rise of Bhagirath Manjhi, which was believed to offset much of the Missions' work in the district.⁴⁰¹ To enforce their enlightenment project, Reverend Skrefsrud of the Home Mission, thought it essential to remove the major obstacles to evangelization and hence suggested to the government as early as 1878, to send an imprisoned Bhagirath to Benegaria, where he would try his best to convince Bhagirath to leave his 'evil ways and join the Mission'. He reminded the government that this effort had indeed been successful once and Dhunu, a prominent Kherwar rebel of Sultanabad, had been converted and thus pacified in 1876.⁴⁰² Similarly, if Bhagirath could be converted, Skrefsrud pointed out, 'I think I would be able effectually check the Sapha Hor movement...the government would be freed from a great source of nuisance by Bhagirath becoming a Christian.'⁴⁰³ When the Kherwar assertion occurred for the second time with a greater force of numbers than before, Skrefsrud no longer talked of conversions. He suggested several harsh punitive measure to be taken against the rebels to Smith, the Assistant Deputy Commissioner, who had sought his advice on how to deal with the Kherwars. He categorically stated that the leaders should be flogged publicly for

³⁹⁹ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department, dt. 8th June 1881, BJP File 9 C August 1881, WBSA.

⁴⁰⁰ Diary of Miss Droese, 'The Santals', in *The Church Missionary Gleaner*: North India, November 1911.

⁴⁰¹ S.P. Sinha, 'The Kherwar Movement 1874-1942' op cit, p. 214

⁴⁰² Marine Carrin, Harald Tambs- Lyche, *An Encounter of the Peripheries: Santals. Missionaries and their Changing World*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008) p. 210.

⁴⁰³ SP Sinha, *The Kherwar Movement 1874-1942*, op cit, p. 214.

libeling the government, and made a public example for setting afloat absurd and indecent rumours. After the ringleaders were flogged they should be sent to the state prisons. He warned the government, 'do not treat them any longer as a harmless, if not praise worthy, social religious movement, because religion is only a means towards an end.'⁴⁰⁴The official mood of rejection was thus re-enforced by missionary mood of utter disillusionment. The administration on their part had no problems complying with the missionary narrative that some fiercely belligerent Santal agitators were indeed trying to remind them of their strength, 'the sahebs (Europeans) and the Christians were few, we are numerous.'⁴⁰⁵

The government under Oldham now found it imperative to question the whole notion of governance based on 'exclusive privileges' and even added that if 'the system' some how continued every effort should be made, 'to stop its further advance in that direction'.⁴⁰⁶ Oldham was possibly aware of the opinion of some of the officers and their sympathy towards the new system. Among the officers of the Santal Parganas however, the greatest concern was to explain why and how the Kherwars had mobilized themselves 'as a body' and the answer to it, the officer believed, lay in their ethnic identity which explained their solidarity as a community. Therefore, the only way to prevent any future dangerous assertion was to destroy the 'clannish feelings of the Santals.'⁴⁰⁷This the Deputy Commissioner sought to achieve in two ways; to revive the police throughout the district and to throw open the exclusive system whereby the non Santals would gain the right to settle in the Damin. They defended their rationale on the ground

⁴⁰⁴ Reverend Skrefsrud to Smith the Assistant Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas dt. 8/2/1881 cited in S.P. Sinha, *The Kherwar Movement 1874-1942*, op cit, p. 213.

⁴⁰⁵ Cited in John Mac Dougall, op cit, p. 79.

⁴⁰⁶ W.B.Oldham, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to the Commssioner of Bhagalpur, 25/4/1881, BJP, File 9C, August 1881. WBSA.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

that under the existing system, the village police had not only been unsuccessful to deal effectively with crime but had failed to provide necessary information on the brewing discontent, which explained the failure of the government to predict the agitation of 1881. Moreover, with the notion of ‘the noble savage’ losing its former importance, it was no longer necessary to protect the Santal country any more, but rather he thought, it was more practical to place their trust on the non-Santals.⁴⁰⁸ The source of all the problem, G.N. Barlow summed was, ‘the unstableness of the national character’ of the Santals who were responsible, ‘for obstructing good administration run in the sole interest of the Santal population’.⁴⁰⁹ The ‘unstableness’ of the Santal character, the government surmised, provided sufficient grounds to repress the agitating Santals. In the midst of the general dismay among the officers, some optimism was expressed by the administrators who pointed out to the numerical limitations of the number of agitators, since only one-twenty-fifth part of the district was engaged in the opposition and was led by Kherwar individuals in isolated pockets of the district.⁴¹⁰ The Kherwars had thus made their place as the ‘politically discontented’, in the scale of evaluation, that was applied within India to distinguish between ‘the loyal from disloyal, the respectable from the criminal, the malleable from the obstinate-the *dasyu* from the potential *dasa*.’⁴¹¹

The experience of working among the Santals for a long time had created some dedicated Santal officers, one of them being A.W. Cosserat, who had been an administrator in the Santal Parganas for twenty years. His confidence as an administrator and his romanticized notion of the noble

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dt. 8th June 1881, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

⁴¹⁰ Appendix A; Note by Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

⁴¹¹ Meena Radhakrishna, ‘Of Apes and Ancestors: Evolutionary Science and Colonial Ethnography’ in Biswamoy Pati ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival Resistance and Negotiation* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2010) ps. 38-39.

savage inspired him to take measures during the agitation that did not go well with the higher authorities. Cosserat, it was pointed out, had not been able to rise to the occasion to subdue the rebels in the ‘riot’ that took place in Katikhund and had in fact given in to their demands, who forced him to sign that there would be no census in the region. Following such an incident, which blemished the powerful imagery of the Government, it decided to teach the officer a lesson and discipline the Santals at the same time. While Cosserat was transferred from the Santal Parganas on the ground that he would never again command his former influence with the Santals, his removal was meant to make the subjects realize that, ‘the Government will not allow even the favourite officers of the Santals to remain amongst them, if they have been forced into a position inducing them to commit serious mistakes.’⁴¹² The appeal by Barlow and his officers, however to end the exclusive system in the Santal Parganas did not receive a homogenous response and the need for such a system continued to dominate official thinking throughout the period under review.

Countering the census: the two world of fears, the Government and the Saphas.

In this section, we seek to demonstrate the way in which the census of 1881 became a site at which two worlds of fear stood facing one another- one that of the colonial officers of the Santal Parganas and the other of the Sapha Hors. Our objective is to understand how the two construed the significance of the census through the sieve of their respective apprehensions. Ever since the census operations began, the British tended to see the Santal especially the Sapha Hors as nurturing an active opposition to the entire operation; they keenly noted how the Sapha Hors ‘as

⁴¹²Conduct of Deputy Magistrate, A.W.Cosserat during the disturbances which took place at Katikhund in the Santal Parganas. G.N. Barlow to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, letter No. 441J, dt.18th March 1881. Bhagalpur, BJP, File 9, April 1881. Cosserat was in charge of ten bungalows(areas) under Dumka Damin and was serving as an officer in the Santal Parganas from 1860s with occasional breaks.

a body' were resisting the enumerators.⁴¹³ With their minds steeped in governmental need for demographic statistics, so characteristic of a post enlightened rationality, the British failed to understand why the census should trigger such adverse reaction from the Santals, when the census would serve to benefit the subject population. The state therefore organized meetings with the agitated Santals explaining to them the government's intention behind the enumeration. When this effort failed, the disgruntled government deduced that the Santals were either too ignorant or falling prey to machination of groups like the Kherwars, who were using the agitation to strengthen their own position in the community.⁴¹⁴ However, underlying this characterization of the Kherwar led agitation to the census was the more fundamental fear on the part of the British in the Santal Parganas- a fear deriving from their experience of the *Hul*. The fear was what, one of the British officer's characterized as, 'the ethnic solidarity' among the Santals which could instigate a repetition of the *Hul*. In fact all British officers, whether it was E.G. Man, W.W. Hunter, or E.T. Dalton, had keenly observed 'the ethnic identity and solidarity' within the community; indeed they explained the large participation of the Santal during *Hul* in terms of this solidarity.⁴¹⁵ As if to echo this line of thinking, the British officers in 1881, were apprehensively registering 'clannish feelings' at the root of what they observed as the Sapha Hor's ability to persuade a large number of Santals to oppose the census. So when a considerable number of Santals gathered in Katikhund with staves, shouting for the complete stoppage of enumeration, and demanded that the officer-in- charge sign the order with red ink,⁴¹⁶ the incident was entered in official reports as a veritable 'riot'-⁴¹⁷ even though the assembled Santals had not

⁴¹³ W.H.Rattray, Deputy Magistrate, Jamtara to the Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas, Camp Karmatur, dt. 27-29 November, 1880, File 1041 A-41. February 1881, WBSA.

⁴¹⁴ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

⁴¹⁵ See B.B. Chaudhury, 'Towards an understanding of the Tribal World of Colonial Eastern India.' op cit, p. 28.

⁴¹⁶ R. Carstairs, *The Little World of an Indian District Officer*, op cit, p. 259.

⁴¹⁷ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

resorted to violence. In fact, the Santal agitators at Katikhund talked with the British officers in all humility, put their hands together and addressed Cosserat, the Deputy Magistrate as ‘hujoor’ (lord) even while trying to terminate the enumeration. So great was the fear of Cosserat and his men, and so overwhelming of the memory of the *Hul*, that the officer was skeptical of the civility on the part of the Santals. Even though a man from Bakna pleaded with him not to bring down a troops of elephants on them, all that the British registered from the behaviour was a rebellious, non compliant attitude of the rebels and felt justified to bring down the forces to quell the agitation.⁴¹⁸

Once the army brought in and was instructed to march through the disturbed areas, the sense that the colonial administrators were trying to make of the movement had to be re-appraised. The British had for long remained committed to their reading of the Santals as simple, brave and honest. Consequently, based on this colonial ethnographic essentialization, the British administrators expected that once the agitation was subdued, the Sapha Hors would own up to their recalcitrant role. However, this reading was predicated upon a simultaneous tendency to read the Santal agency along modernist lines of the autonomous, secular agency of a person in a movement that they had initiated. So when the Sapha Hors were arrested and the trials ensued, the British administrators were taken aback to find that a majority of the agitating Sapha Hors completely denied any involvement in the disturbance.⁴¹⁹ With their understanding thus dented, the British sought to salvage their perspective by arguing to themselves that this blatant denial was confined to the Sapha Hors of Jamtara and Hendwah, who were new converts; the ‘old Kherwars’ of the north and the east had not adopted this denial mode but only wanted their

⁴¹⁸ Diary of A.W. Cosserat, Camp Katikhund Dt. 27th January 1881, BJP Volume 291, March 1881, WBSA.

⁴¹⁹ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

names to be entered in census as Kherwars.⁴²⁰ To keep the Santal world picture intact, the old Kherwars were posited closer to the traditional Santals, known in colonial ethnography for their simplicity and candid nature. The new Kherwars who did not fit into the essentialized image of the honest Santal, were objectified and categorized as the, ‘politically discontented’ and it was they who were held responsible for acts of denial which were nothing but ‘pretexts’ in order to avoid punishment.⁴²¹ It was because of their inability to understand the sect that the Deputy Commissioner claimed, ‘the Kherwars never openly disclosed the real reason for their opposition to the census’.⁴²²

The problematic that presents itself before us is, were the colonial administrators reading the Santal world in the light of their own reason? We cannot say for certain that they were not. So we do not know for certain how to historiographically react to such colonial reports when the British were reading the Santal attitude as ‘denial’ of involvement in the movement. May be the imagining of ‘denial’ was based on observations too steeped in the colonial reason, directly a derivative of western rationality. Perhaps the Santal response could have been interpreted in other ways rather than in the trope of denial. We in our terms as researchers are not in a position to pronounce the final word especially as all the materials available to us regarding Santal responses are necessarily mediated by the spirit of the colonial archives (including missionary). However, we have reasons to doubt whether any colonial official or missionary interpreting the resistance to the census could be self-reflexive enough to critique their own reason and then interpret the reactions and responses of the Santals in the latter’s own terms.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dtd. 8th June 1881, BJP File 9 C August 1881, WBSA.

⁴²² Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

Factoring in the question of the Santals own agency and raising the relevance of reading the Santal world view in this connection, the present thesis therefore raises the question whether the Sapha Hor attitude in the resistance to the census should not be interpreted in terms of millenarian thinking shaped in the mould of the *Hul* of 1855. Even while we emphasize on the millenarian dimension of the movement, we would like to suggest a number of possibilities any one of which might have been appropriately applicable to the Sapha Hors response to the census. However, this thesis does not insist on prioritizing any one of the possibilities. During the *Hul*, the ‘*Thakur’s perwanna*’ or the heavenly ultimatum had been aired among the Santal community through the two leaders, Sidhu and Kanu, who appeared in the messianic role heralding the coming of a new age. The Santal community responded to their call when the heavenly *perwannah* was communicated through letters that fell from the sky. Similarly, in the case of the anti census agitation of 1881, the Sapha Hors responded to the message which they felt was being divinely ordained through the letters in circulation, enjoining the Santals to oppose the census. Moreover, like in the days of the *Hul*, myths did emerge around the name of Dubia Gossain, who was said to have lived on grass, which he ate like a cow and he wore nothing but wood and iron. It was said he was an incarnation of a deity who had come to earth for the express purpose of persuading the Santals to destroy all unclean animals like pigs and fowl.⁴²³ His popularity spread from Hazaribagh to the Rajmahal Damin and Santals seemed to be aware of the magical powers of the guru. Some of his followers in fact claimed that the bullets would not kill them, on the contrary, the local government officers and the zamindars would be exterminated and the millennium would soon begin.⁴²⁴

⁴²³ John M Macphail *The story of the Santals: with an account of the Santal Rebellion*, United Free Church Santal Mission, Badmah, 88th July 1921, (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker and Spink & co, 1922 India Office Library, London) p. 65, IOL.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 79.

However true to the messianic strain of a millenarian movement, it was really the numerous Santals at the local level who were embodying the agitation. However, these ordinary Santals, as in the case of messianic movements, were not looking upon their own mortal selves as the originators of the agitation. In millenarian movements, participants may very well take initiative which they perceive as divinely ordained, and not arrogate any leadership role on that count. This is because the leadership role can only be that of either god or the god sent messiah. There was the possibility that the participants in a millenarian movement looked upon himself as nothing but a carrier of gods' order, bereft of any responsibility. In 1881, when the local leaders acted as emissaries, held nocturnal meetings, where decisions to oppose the census was decided and even threatened refractory elements with the fear of punishment primarily through 'the letters' circulating in the name of the guru, they might be simply following the orders of the gurus or the god sent messiah.⁴²⁵

It is also desirable to raise the question whether in every interaction with the British officials, the spirit of agitation was the dominant template. Could it be possible that the Sapha Hors with their own world of anxieties and fears had come with pressing questions which they felt needed urgent hearing. Thus the Sapha Hors in a place towards the east of Dumka, categorically told C.F. Manson an official, that they would oppose the census till they obtained an explanation as to what the exercise was all about.⁴²⁶ Similarly, at Pakur, Bhagrai and Lakhan, the well known Sapha Horsl leaders, admitted during their trial, that they had stopped the census but their only objective was to have the measure explained to them.⁴²⁷ While the government believed that the

⁴²⁵ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

measures had already been explained to them by the officers and claimed that Bhagrai and Lakhan were giving 'false pretexts' there could be other possibilities for the opposition that the colonial reasons simply foreclosed. The colonial officials may well have explained the measures but the question is whether the Sapha Hors, in their own terms, were satisfied with the official explanation; after all the fear of losing their world and the distrust of the colonial officials was so deeply rooted that they might be repeatedly seeking clarification if only in an anxious quest to be reassured. During the trial of the prisoners of Katikhund, where large number of people from different villages gathered, the reasons for the participation in the agitation and the responses that followed the arrests naturally varied. Some of the rebels told the officers during the trial that the opposition to the census was decided in two meetings, where the sole question that was discussed by the Santals was whether the census was to be opposed and what should be done if A.W. Cosserrat attempted coercion. The prisoners also told the officer that the decision that was reached was that the census was not to be allowed and that no arrests were to be permitted. But soon after arrests were made, two of the leaders told the officer that they had taken part in the gathering to know whether during the census they were to be branded or not. From colonial perspective, any such queries were labelled 'pretexts,' and there was no reason to try to understand, why like many other Santals, these men were also seeking assurance for their security, at a time when there was a general apprehension centering around the census. The older men, like the headman of Ambajora, Dumka Damin, with greater experience and possibly lesser faith in government policies, did not deny his involvement in the agitation but expressed his willingness to go to *hajut* (prison) rather than allow the census.⁴²⁸ There were in fact repeated queries about the census and in several instances the officers had to confront varied concerns. To recall, the Santals of Belputta, south of Hendwah had met W.M. Smith on 20th of January 1881

⁴²⁸Diary of A.W. Cosserrat, Camp Katikhund, dt. 27th January 1881, BJP Volume 291, March 1881, WBSA.

and expressed a grave apprehension that when the English left the country ‘they would deport the Santals or deal some blow at them before they left’.⁴²⁹ In South Godda, Jadu Manjhi was eager to know, just as the *jamabandi* records (record of rights of a village) had facilitated the sale of land, would the census facilitate the sale of Santal women?⁴³⁰

Contrary to how the British tried to portray the ‘new converts’, as men who were noted for their ‘denials,’ the Sapha Hors of Narayanpur did not refute the fact that they had taken part in the agitation. Narayanpur had been one of the major storm center of the anti-census agitation and the agitators here told the officer that they had been instigated to oppose the census by their non-Santal neighbors.⁴³¹ There is no reason to believe that that the Sapha Hors of Narayanpur ‘made pretexts’, for British records does speak of men from lower castes like the Bhuniyas or even higher castes who were suspicious of the census.⁴³² But there could also be situations when the fear of harassment of the officers compelled the rebels to withhold truth by keeping their association with their guru or even their identity discreet. The Sapha Hors in the region around Jamtara and Hendwa refused to admit that they were Kherwars or that they had ever visited the Guru Dubia Gossain.⁴³³ Even before the agitation subsided, government informers reported that the Santals particularly from tappeh Hendwah did visit the Gossain but if intercepted on the way, invariably gave some ‘fictitious reasons’ for their journey, such as, they were going to Palgunje to bring back their cattle.⁴³⁴

⁴²⁹ Appendix A; Note by the Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas, BJP File 9C August 1881, WBSA.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

There is no doubt that the knowledge of the superior military power of the state drawn from the memories of defeat in the *Hul* did loom large in the mind of the Santals which then percolated down to the men resisting the census enumeration. The only difference was, if the repression unleashed by the government after the *Hul* had silenced many, in the post *Hul* period, many had turned into pacifists, who in general were more keen on avoiding confrontation with the state. Such acts which was labelled as ‘denials’ could perhaps be considered as a type of ‘avoidance confrontation,’ especially in a situation where there was an inherent dilemma resulting from a fear of repression and the simultaneous urge to oppose the colonial government.⁴³⁵ Sometimes the act of denial became a necessary form of survival. After the Munda revolt was suppressed in 1900 and Birsa Munda was imprisoned, he deliberated over how to save his four hundred followers all of whom were likely to face harsh punishment from the colonial state. He told Bharmi Munda that they should deny any knowledge of him before the magistrate as this was the only way they could save themselves.⁴³⁶

Aftermath of the agitation: The census of 1891

In 1891, another census was held in the Santal Parganas. Given the pacific nature of the sect, as we know, the question is how did the Sapha Hors react to the census, which in 1881 was seen as an exercise on the part of the colonial state in asserting full control over the Santals body, denying the latter the ability to control themselves? Official reports noted that unlike in 1881, the agitation against the census was confined to the sub division of Rajmahal alone. The general ambience, was one of fear and hope, which might appear to us as an exercise in passivity but this

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ K.S. Singh, *Birsa Munda and His Movement 1872-1901* (Seagull, Calcutta, 2002) p.150.

was how millenarian movements worked. The colonial official reported that the census of 1891 suddenly seemed to have aroused a lot of expectations among the Sapha Hors who talked about the independent land, freedom from rents and freedom from conversions to Christianity. They pointed out to their natural rights over the lands further legitimised by the colour of the soil, 'the soil of the country being dark belonged to the dark skinned people and not to the white men who would go back to their own country where soil was white'.⁴³⁷ There was thus a general mood of exuberance in 1891 among the Sapha Hors of Rajmahal as if they were awakened by god's command. When nothing extraordinary happened, the excitement over the census died down and the Sapha Hors possibly out of a sense of dejection retreated into their own villages practicing their religion in seclusion.

In the post 1891 period, the activities of the sect seemed to have suddenly disappeared from British records except for sporadic reports of Santal unrest, although we do not know for certain how far the Sapha Hors were involved in these agitations. One such disturbance took place during Craven's revision settlement of Pakur (1892-93), when the Santals demanded that their lands be assessed at rental fixed by Mr. Wood and also complained against the inaccuracy of the new records. The agitation took place in 1896-97 under an ex-Pargannait, Futteh Santal, who had been dismissed from the services of a headman for alleged corruption. He led the agitation from Ambar for which purpose he began to collect subscription from the Santals to restore the rents fixed during the Wood's settlement. Futteh was arrested but the discontent spread across Damin into Godda. The protesting Santals looted markets, withheld their rents but the unrest did not make much headway and was finally brought under control by the British forces.⁴³⁸ Thereafter

⁴³⁷ O' Malley op cit, p. 148.

⁴³⁸ Samar Kumar Mallick, op cit, ps. 152-153.

British records is silent on the Santal/Sapha agitation until the third decade of the 20th century, at a time when the national movement under Gandhi's leadership had begun to sweep the country and had also touched the Santal Parganas.

TABLE-1

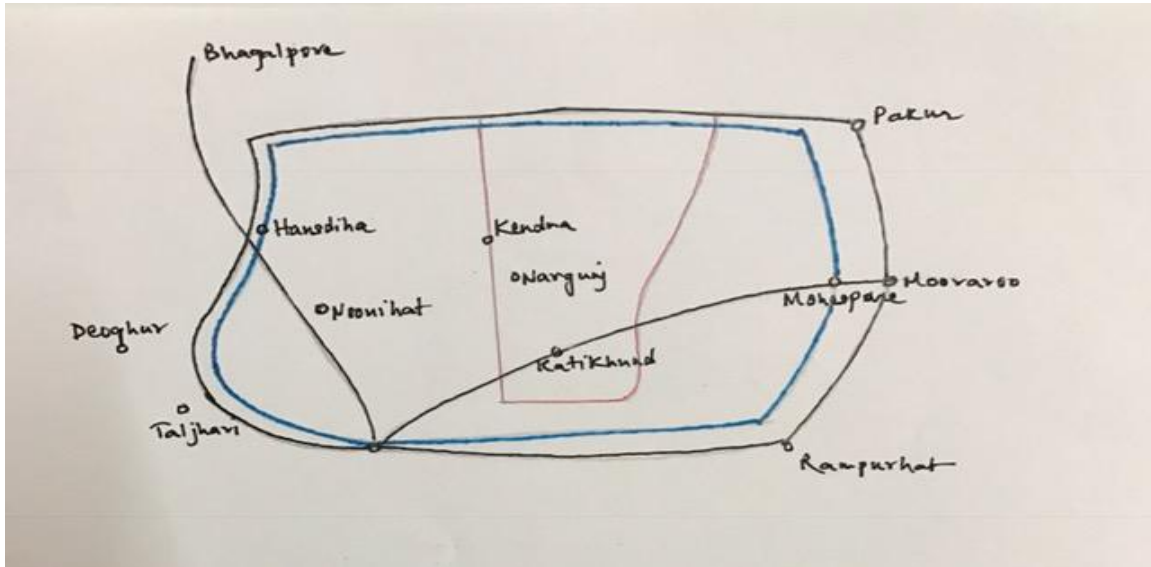
The number of those registering themselves to be Kherwars in the Census of 1881 in the several divisions of the District:

	Districts	Male	Female	Total
75% are new Kherwars	Dumka	3122	2987	6109
All old Kherwars	Pakaur	3353	3243	6596
All new	Jamtara	2	5	7
Ditto	Deoghur	123	135	258
All old followers of Bhagirath	Rajmahal	2702	2626	5328
Ditto	Godda	11287	11375	22662
Total		20589	20371	40960

Source: Report of GN Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division, Judicial Proceedings, Appendix D, File 9C, August 1881.

TABLE -2

A hand drawing showing the area disturbed by the anti-census agitation of 1881 and the movement of troops across the district. The sketch prepared in January 1881 however leaves out the areas around Jamtara where the opposition to the census had ended by December 1880.



The Red line shows the Damin-i-Koh.

The Blue line shows the area affected by the anti-census agitation.

Source: W.B. Oldham to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur division, Camp Deogar, dt. 29th January 1881, BJP March 1881 Volume: 291.

TABLE-3

The Deposition of the Infantry and the Police in the district showing the area wise distribution of troops in the district in 1881:

	Districts	Infantry	Police
1	Dumka	2 companies	
2	Taljhari		50
3	Nuni		50
4	Katikhund	1 company	50
5	Mohespore	Ditto	25
6	Amrapara		25
7	Kendwa	1 company	25
8	Pussai		50
9	Godda	1 company	50
10	Pakour		25
11	Muddapore	3 company	
12	Saruth		50
13	Karmataur and Jamtara		50

Source: Letter from Horace Cockerell to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Calcutta, 3rd February 1881. Judicial Proceedings, March 1881 Volume: 291

CHAPTER 3

The ‘Hinduization Theory’ and the Official Promotion of the ‘Santal System,’ in the 1920s-1940s: The Sapha Hors hangs in the Balance.

Introduction:

In the last chapter we have seen how the anti-census agitation of the Sapha Hors of 1880-81, forced the British government to reckon with the fact that the sect had indeed established a strong footing in the district of the Santal Parganas. We have also seen how the Sapha Hors rebuked the government’s logic of good governance and opposed the census for an invasion into the sacredness of their space. How they refused to cooperate with the colonial authorities until they were forced to surrender by sheer threat of military strength. The government predictably failed to understand the rationale behind the Sapha Hor agitation and identified a ‘system’ formulated under the term ‘Kherwarism,’ i.e. always ‘aiming at a change.’⁴³⁹

In this chapter, it is our objective to see how the emergence of the sect in the Santal Parganas influenced missionary and colonial discourse from the late nineteenth century which had its reflections on the colonial project of classification of the subject population when the census enumeration began in the late nineteenth century. ‘Hinduization of the tribes’ became one of the major categories of interest which drew in a number of agencies - the missionaries, the nationalists, Hindu organisations and later even the Adivasi Mahasabha into complex, diverse

⁴³⁹ G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur Division and the Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial department (BJP), File 9C, August 1881, West Bengal State Archives, (henceforth WBSA).

and contesting debates on the subject. This happened in the crucial conjuncture of politics between 1920s- 1940s which witnessed several rapid political developments: the waning of the Civil Disobedience movement, the Communal Award of 1932, the Two Nation Theory being steadily broached by the Muslim League and finally the rise of the Adivasi Mahasabha in the 1938.

One primary concern of this chapter is to understand the imagining of the Sapha Hors as Hindus in the nationalist discourse and the successive discussions that centred around this pivotal theme. It is however important to remember that in the period under review, the envisaging of a Hindu nationhood was only one of the many discourses which nationalism produced for this was the period in which both the Muslim league and the Adivasi Mahasabha were also envisioning their own imagined nationhoods.⁴⁴⁰ Our other objective will be to break down the abstraction of national movement itself, and of large formations like the Congress, in order to have a closer look at politics at the local level where local leaders had a significant role in the emerging constructs of nationhood. It is however important to note in this context that, at this juncture in history, the distinction made between the Sapha Hors and the Santals in the colonial/nationalist discourses is not always clear. Often the Santals were taken to be a monolithic group by both the nationalist leaders and the colonial administrators. So when a section of the anthropologically inclined British administrators and the elite nationalists made their own contribution to the debate on 'Hinduization' or when the colonial officers tried to re-enforce the 'Santal system' in a professed effort to stem the tide of assumed 'Hinduization' among the Santals, they had both the Sapha Hors and the Santals in mind. Situated in this whole complex spatio -temporal

⁴⁴⁰ For a study of the emerging Muslim nationhood in Bengal, refer to Rafiuddin Ahmed's brilliantly analysed book, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: a Quest for Identity*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, henceforth OUP, 1981).

conjuncture, this study revolves around the Sapha Hors- although a minority among the Santals - who became the main protagonists around whom the debate on Hinduization of the tribes was first initiated in the Santal Parganas.⁴⁴¹

Missionary representation of the so called Hinduization of the sect

It was the Church Missionary Society (henceforth C.M.S) who as early as 1874 read ‘Hinduizing’ implications in the Sapha Hor life style.⁴⁴² The C.M.S founded in London in 1799 and initially known as the Society for Missions in Africa and the East, had its mission stations established across continents in East Africa, India, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Sri Lanka. In the Santal country, the C.M.S had stations at Taljhari and Barharwa (in the Rajmahal sub-division) Hiranpur (in the Pakur sub-division) Pathra and Bhagya (in the Godda sub-division). Along with other missions, the C.M.S. pursued an ardent proselytizing mission with high hopes of rapid conversion of the Santals to Christianity. With such eager stake in bringing the Santals into the Christian fold, they were understandably shaken when Bhagirath came to acquire a significant following – a development we have already noted in chapter one. Reverend Stark was in charge of the mission, close to Tardiha, where Bhagirath’s persuasion came to sway Santal minds. Stark and his daughter Moorat began to carefully observe the new movement especially on seeing ‘crowds of Santals’ travelling to the Mandar Hills to visit the new guru. He noticed that the followers had stopped killing their pigs and fowls, they were making their offerings of

⁴⁴¹ For an elaborate discussion on this subject see B.B. Chaudhuri, ‘Society and Culture in the Tribal World in Colonial Eastern India: Reconsidering the notion of Hinduisation of the Tribes’ in Hetukar Jha ed., *Perspectives on Indian Society and History: A Critique* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), ps. 23-79.

⁴⁴² Sir Richard Temple, Lieutenant –Governor of Bengal and in the C.M.S committee received a letter from Reverence Stark stationed at Godda, on the Santal agitation around Bhagirath Manjhi. His daughter Moorat Stark claimed that it was the first information he received of any trouble in the district. Quoted in Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs- Lyche, *An Encounter of Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries and their Changing worlds (1867-1900)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008), p. 208.

milk and ghee on three stones established by Bhagirath on top of the Mandar hills. They were calling themselves ‘Safa Hor or the Bhagiraities.’⁴⁴³ One of his informants, a schoolmaster at Lowbanda, reported to the Reverend that the Santal followers of Bhagirath performed a sacrifice in Lowbanda and offered prayers for the success of the ‘Santal Raj.’⁴⁴⁴ He also gathered that the greatest influence on Bhagirath, was that of a Hindu named Matadin who had anointed him as the ‘king of the Santals’.⁴⁴⁵ In Stark’s interpretation, the new rituals that Bhagirath’s followers were observing were completely different from the traditional Santal customs. Bhagirath’s message and precepts struck the C.M.S personnel as Hinduizing in intent. However, in 1874 the other missions, for example, the Home Mission based in Benegaria was still not perturbed by the rise of the new sect as they were quite elated about the high rate of baptism among the Santals. The Home Mission infact boasted of baptism of 2000 adults and about 4000 children by the end of 1874.⁴⁴⁶ Moreover, they were happy that their attempts to indigenize Christian practice and to create a synthesis between Santal customs and Christian sense of morality had proved to be a wise strategy that would strengthen mission’s position among the Santals.⁴⁴⁷

In 1881, the situation took a dramatic turn with the anti census agitation breaking out among the Santals; we have studied this agitation in the chapter two. All missions noted with apprehension that their proselytization efforts had been challenged by what they saw as ‘Hinduization of the Santals’ leading to a ‘great disintegration in the minds of the people.’⁴⁴⁸ Simultaneously they

⁴⁴³ Ibid, p. 206.

⁴⁴⁴ Reverend Stark, CMS, to G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of Bhagalpur division and the Santal Parganas, dt. 2nd September 1874, BJP, November 1874 WBSA.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Olav Hodne, *The Seed Bore Fruit: A short History of the Santal Mission of the Northern Churches 1867-1967* (Calcutta: CD Media, 1967), p 22. The Baptist Mission had first started work among the Santals in 1824.

⁴⁴⁷ The Church Missionary Gleaner, volume XXVII, July2, 1900, (A journal of Church Missionary Society, (henceforth C.M.S), p. 107.

⁴⁴⁸ Fifty Sixth Report of the Calcutta Corresponding Committee of the C.M.S, (1891-92) page 55.

observed with complete disbelief that the entire anti-census agitation had been spearheaded by the Sapha Hors who had asserted themselves once again in different parts of the Santals Parganas. During the Decennial Missionary Conference of the C.M.S held in Calcutta 1882-83, the blame for initiating the process of 'Hinduization' was placed on Matadin who had anointed Bhagirath in 1874. The missionaries were prompt in seeing the hand of Satan in all this; 'The Satan tried his utmost six years ago to overthrow our work, were a Hindu, who was an ex-convict, converted a Santal to Hinduism and instigated him to do his utmost to influence his people....' ⁴⁴⁹ The other missions who had previously not taken seriously the C.M.S's alarm now felt persuaded by the changed situation to concur with the C.M.S's reading. ⁴⁵⁰

The anti-census agitation, the resurgence of the Sapha Hors and their gurus and the perceived threat to their efforts at proselytization of the Santals, were in missionary imagination, indications of growing 'Hinduization' of the Santals. In 1891, Reverend Stark who felt vindicated on his earlier premonition, went on a fresh visit to Tardiha, the centre of Bhagirath's movement in Godda. Keenly observing the numerous gurus who followed Bhagirath, he declared that these gurus under the influence of Hinduism were frustrating all missionary efforts at evangelization. ⁴⁵¹ The Reverend reported in the Committee meeting that in Sahere, one such religious teacher of the sect was visited by a large number of Santals 'with painful results'. ⁴⁵² Another guru Chandrai was 'unblushingly declaring' at a meeting at over 200 Santals, 'that god had been to him the previous night and told him not to believe the *padre sahib*(missionary), that

⁴⁴⁹ S.P. Sinha, 'The Kherwar Movement 1874-1942' in *Conflict and Tensions in Tribal Society* (New Delhi : Concept Publishing Company,1993), p. 212.

⁴⁵⁰ Fifty sixth report of the Calcutta Corresponding Committee of the C.M.S. (1891-92) op cit, p. 63.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

Mahadeo was their God and not to accept Jesus Christ.’⁴⁵³ The missionary further informed that he had tried in vain to ‘*expose his wicked lie*’, by begging the Santals ‘to think and judge for themselves and not to submit to the leadership of such a man who only sought to make gain of them to the ruin of their soul’.⁴⁵⁴ Dejectedly he told the meeting, how all his efforts were in vain and how the Santals had left exclaiming ‘with one voice, they would not have Christ after what god (Mahadeo) had declared to their guru’.⁴⁵⁵ The missionaries were certain about a general degeneration in the character of the Santals as the veritable outcome of the process of Hinduization. The Santals they said were ‘losing their good name for truthfulness and good faith, they were setting up shrines to Hindu gods, paying homage to the Brahman and congratulating themselves on the honour of being as one of the Hindoo caste.’⁴⁵⁶

As the missionaries observed the new movement among the Santals, they looked for external influences on the Santals for the assumed Hinduization of the tribes. Stark talked about ‘false teachers’ who were responsible for a changing attitude of the Santals in around his area of mission work. In his report placed in the 63rd meeting of the Corresponding Committee of the C.M.S held in 1882, he wrote, ‘the Santals nowadays show a stolid indifference to Christianity.’⁴⁵⁷ If the imagined threat of Hinduisation of the Santals and the decline in proselytizing efforts had become a major concern for the missionaries of the Santal Parganas, the matter acquired greater significance when it emerged as an important subject of ethnographic and administrative interest for the colonial government trying to understand the tribal population of the country. So when the imperial census enumeration began, the colonial administrators

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 55

⁴⁵⁷ 63rd Report of the Calcutta Corresponding Committee of the C.M.S 1882, p. 42

began drawing up on the notion of ‘Hinduization’ already coined by missionaries. What complicated matters for the colonial administrators was that their classificatory logic resulted in contradictory often remarkably inventive stereotypes.

Categorizing religion in the census and the conceptualization of the Hinduization of tribes.

In the colonial discourse, the Sapha Hors came to be situated in the emerging discussions on ‘Hinduization’ in the last decades of the 19th century at a time when the phenomenon was seen as a general occurrence in the tribal world. This was indeed the time when the colonialisms’ knowledge about the colonized was becoming more crystallized and sophisticated and this development was reflected in the Imperial census which constituted a part of this effort to ‘know’, ‘classify’ and to ‘count’, creating a situation, which David Ludden called, ‘orientalist empiricism.’⁴⁵⁸ In England, the trend to collect large amount of information on various aspects of economy and society had already been identified as central to good governance by the end of the eighteenth century.⁴⁵⁹ But contrary to the British census, the classificatory logic adopted in the Indian census emphasized on religion as one of the fundamental categories not only for organizing data but also for attempting to understand the Indians.⁴⁶⁰ Whether describing literacy, wealth or number of people, the census data was inevitably divided and subdivided to feed

⁴⁵⁸ Arjun Appadurai ‘Number in Colonial Imagination.’ in Carol a. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer ed., *Orientalism and Post Colonial Predicament, Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 318.

⁴⁵⁹ For an account of how the British census was critiqued and later accepted as a progressive measure by the British population, see Kathrin Levitan, *The Cultural History of British Census: Envisioning the Multitude in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁴⁶⁰ Kenneth W Jones, ‘Religious Identity and the Indian Census,’ NG Barrier ed., *The Census in British India: New Perspectives*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), p.75

information on religious categories.⁴⁶¹ The census thus tried ‘to create a concept of religious community more detailed and more exact than any existing prior to the creation of the census.’⁴⁶² But it is interesting that beneath the veneer of certitude parading in the form of numbers and classifications, the British administration in India never arrived at a stable, definitive and precise understanding of who was a Hindu.

‘What is a Hindu?’ was the query H. Beverley, the Census Commissioner of Bengal posed while preparing his report on the census of 1872. He was unable to answer the question with certainty and this same confusion persisted some ten years later in the reports of J.A. Bourdillon, the Census Commissioner for Bengal for the year 1881, ‘No answer in fact exists,’ he wrote, ‘for the term in its modern acceptance denotes neither a creed nor a race, neither a church nor a people, but is a general expression devoid of precision, and embracing alike the most punctilious disciple of pure Vedanta, the Agnostic youth who is the product of Western education, and the semi barbarious hillmen... and is ignorant of the Hindu theology as the stone which he worships in times of danger or sickness.’⁴⁶³

With this kind of confused understanding of a Hindu, continuing to permeate colonial thinking, the colonial officials further complicated their representation of their situation in India by trying to factor into their classificatory-enumerative edifice of knowledge the question of the relation between the tribe on the one hand and the Hindu caste society on the other hand.⁴⁶⁴ Among the

⁴⁶¹ Kenneth Jones, ‘The Negative Component of Hindu Consciousness in Geoffrey Oddie ed., *Religious Traditions in South Asia: Interaction and Change* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998) ps. 70, 75.

⁴⁶² *Ibid*, p. 84.

⁴⁶³ J.A. Bourdillon, *Report on the Census of Bengal, Statistics*, volume 1, 1881 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1883) paragraph 178.

⁴⁶⁴ The present thesis doesn’t seek to claim that the assimilation of tribes into the lower echelon of the caste society was entirely a figment of colonial imagination. Admittedly the present author claims to have done no primary

colonial officers, Colonel Dalton was the first to have used ‘a methodology’ in the study of the tribes of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa which revealed an increasing official awareness of the so called growing Hindu influences on the adivasi world.⁴⁶⁵ Surveying what he thought was an acculturation between the tribes and Hindus in some parts of Bengal, he attempted a classification of the tribes on the the basis of two principles; the language in which they spoke and the extent of the Hindu influence on the tribe (Hinduized aboriginals) called Bhumij. He described them as the ‘Hinduized aborigines’ or the ‘broken tribes’ who had ‘lost their own language, mystified their early history and adopted much that is Hindu in their customs and religion’.⁴⁶⁶ It was H.H. Risley as the Director of the Ethnography for India 1901- 1909, who began the study of caste and religion as a primary site for social classification, a key to understanding Indian social variability as well as Indian mentality.⁴⁶⁷ In 1891, Risley elaborated on the complexities and regional variations of the phenomenon of ‘Hinduization’ and identified atleast four distinct processes through which conversions were happening in Bengal.⁴⁶⁸ He upheld several instances where ‘Hinduization’ had caused a complete effacement of the old tribal identity so that not before long, ‘the tribe will soon have become a caste in full sense of the word and will go on stripping itself of all customs likely to betray its true descent.’⁴⁶⁹ None of the

research in this regard and therefore not in a position to say anything for or against the notion of the tribe caste continuum.

⁴⁶⁵ B.B. Chaudhuri, ‘Towards an Understanding of the Tribal world of Colonial Eastern India’ In Tanaguchi, Yanasagisawa et al, ed., *Economic Changes and Social Transformation in Modern and Contemporary South Asia*, (Tokyo, 1994) p.31

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ For an account of Indological discourses which viewed India through essences, particularly castes and religion-as embodiment of the irrational Indian mind in opposition to the ‘logical’ and ‘rational’ mind of the west, see Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁴⁶⁸ H.H. Risley *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Volume 1 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891) page xv-xviii.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

enumerators however either doubted their own fundamental methods of assessment or their ultimate capacity to know.⁴⁷⁰

In the Santal Parganas, the question of ‘Hinduization’ of the Santals became a serious colonial concern in the context of the anti-census agitation of 1881. The matter was already brought to the attention of the officers as early as 1874 when John Boxwell, the officiating Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas and an eye witness to the rise of Bhagirath Manjhi, observed what he considered to be a strong tendency among the non-Aryan Santals to amalgamate with the Hindus who surrounded them. He was particularly astonished at the extraordinary rapidity of the spread of the movement and the intense moral fervor with which the Santals unhesitatingly killed all birds and beasts, despite the fact that it ‘formed considerable item of property in every household.’ All this the Commissioner suspected amounted to ‘a change of religion.’⁴⁷¹ However, it was only during the agitation of 1881 that the government felt great urgency to document the movement in all its details. The survey that followed was conducted by government appointed officers that included influential Hindu zamindars, rich peasants, the missionaries and British officials, all of whom shared a common consensus that the sect was definitely ‘Hinduising’. Taresh Nath Pandey, the zamindar of Pakur and Captain Carnac, the Assistant Commissioner of the Santal Parganas drew the attention of the government to the disparity of economic and social status between the Santals and the Hindus. In their understanding, it was this differentiation that enticed the Santals to ‘set up’ a purer religion and a

⁴⁷⁰ See Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) p 44.

⁴⁷¹ Bengal General (Misc) Proceedings, September 1875, BJP, File no 133-1/4Bhagalpur Commissioner’s Annual General report 1874-5, WBSA.

higher social code, something that could bring them at par with their affluent neighbours.⁴⁷²

W.H. Rattray, the Deputy Magistrate and Collector of Dumka, shared a similar view that the Sapha Hors were aspiring to become Hindus. All reports agreed upon the fact that the Kherwars had abandoned their old religion and were assimilating into the Hindu religion, sometimes under the influence of Hindu Vaishnava gurus.⁴⁷³

Once the ascription of 'Hinduization' on the Sapha Hors had congealed, the question was how to situate them within the broader framework of the 'Hinduization' of the Santals. From 1872 statistics on the assumed 'Hinduization' among the tribals began to pour in so that the colonial authorities found themselves in a pool of complex data with which they not only had to reckon but fit into their classificatory scheme. Ironically they were not certain about the categories, whether these categories were amply supported by 'evidences' precisely because 'the evidences' that they were collecting and negotiating were still mind bogglingly complex and diverse for them to become decipherable as distinct patterns. Thus 'Hinduization' remained on dubious and debatable grounds despite all the statistics and classifications that was attempted by the officers.

The Bengal Census of 1881, in its report on the Santal Parganas pointed out to the increase in the number of person entered as Hindus who at the previous census (1872) was classed as aboriginals.

⁴⁷² 'Report as to the Cause of the Recent excitement among the Sonthals'. G.N. Barlow, Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division, Santal Parganas to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal; BJP, File 9C August 1881, WBSA

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

Statement showing the (%)increase in each religion in the Santal Parganas since 1872:

TABLE-4

Religion	Increase + or Decrease -	
	Number	Percentage
Hindus	+5,456,231	+13.64
Mahommedans	+2145,472	+10.96
Christians	+37,012	+40.71
Buddhists	+75,202	+93.29
All Others	-2,339,541	-10.43

Source: J.A. Bourdillon, Report on the Census of Bengal 1881, Volume 1 (Bengal Secretariat Press, 1883) p. 86

According to the census of 1881, the ratio of Hindus to the general population was 2.42% higher and the proportion of the aboriginals 3.20% lower than in 1872. The Census of 1881 further introduced a new column called the 'Hindu Sonthals' without a proper explanation of the new category.

TABLE -5

<u>Districts</u>	<u>Santals by Religion</u>			<u>Hindu Sonthals</u>			<u>Grand Total</u>		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Both Sexes</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Both Sexes</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Both Sexes</u>
<u>Bhagalpur Division</u>									
<u>Monghyr</u>	3460	3478	6938				3460	3478	6938
<u>Bhagalpur</u>	6795	6598	13384	20	22	42	6815	6611	13426
<u>Purneah</u>									
<u>Maldah</u>	902	832	1734	421	412	833	1323	1244	2567
<u>SantalParganas</u>	270801	206745	537546	4628	4520	9148	275429	271265	546694
<u>Total</u>	281958	277644	559602	5069	4954	10023	287027	282598	569625

J.A. Bourdillon, Report on the Census of Bengal 1881, Volume 1 (Bengal Secretariat Press, 1883) p. 86.

When the census of 1891 took place, the whole enumeration procedure for the year 1881 was found to be seriously flawed because the actual enumerated figures revealed an overall drastic decline in the number of the Santals for the year 1881 due to the anti-census agitation of the year.

TABLE-6

Extract from a statement showing the the chief caste in the district of the Santal Parganas (figures ascertained in 1872, 1881 and 1891).

	1872	1881	1891
Santals	455,513	9148	617,158

Source: District Census Report, Santal Parganas, 1891(Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press 1892) p. 7

This would mean that all figures for the previous census of 1881 was ill conceived and that the colonial apprehension of increasing Hinduization among the Santals was actually an over - estimation. The invented category ‘Hindu Sonthals’ was removed from the census of 1891 as arbitrarily as it was introduced without stating a specified reason. Instead ‘the aboriginals’ like Santals were entered as one of the ‘chief castes’ in the District of Santal Parganas in the census of 1891.⁴⁷⁴ The confusion of concepts was thus not over and boundaries between all categorizations of caste, sub castes, aboriginals still remained completely fuzzy in colonial imagination. ⁴⁷⁵ Interestingly in the same year, Risley in his notes on the Santals written in ‘Tribes and Castes of Bengal’(1891), entered the Sapha Hors as ‘sub-tribes’ along with ‘Deswali

⁴⁷⁴ District Census Report, Santal Parganas, 1891 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press 1892)

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

Santal' thus recognizing the Sapha Hors as a part of the Santal community along with their traditional division of septs and sub- septs.⁴⁷⁶

In Bengal, at the turn of the century, the officers were beginning to get a better grip of situation and while continuing with their ethnographic classifications, they recognized the difficulties entailed in reaching conclusive decisions on the 'Hinduization' of tribes because of flaws in census enumeration. This was what Gait reminded in his notes on 1901 census, when he pointed out that too much reliance must not be placed on the figures, as the problem of distinguishing between Hindus and Animists depended much on the idiosyncrasies of the census staff.⁴⁷⁷ In one of his instructions on census enumeration, he strongly urged that the census staff should not be allowed to decide if a man was Hindu or not. 'A Ho or a Santal can never become a Hindu just as a Hindu can never become a Ho or Santal.'⁴⁷⁸

In the whole exercise, the agency of Santals/Sapha Hors was naturally ignored. No attempt was made by the officers to observe whether the group or the community under study called themselves Hindus. On the contrary the assumed 'Hinduization' theory of the colonial administrators acquired a new dimension when in the 20th century, Hindu nationalists was quite eager to draw upon colonial characterization of the Sapha Hors as Hinduized and use it to

⁴⁷⁶ Appendix-B, 'Santals' in Risley, *Castes and Tribes of Bengal*, volume II, quoted in L.S.S. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Santal Parganas*. (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1910) p. 364.

⁴⁷⁷ Edward Gait, Report on the Census of Bengal, 1901, volume VI (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1903) p, 156

⁴⁷⁸ *ibid* p. 156; The census reports noted, the enumerators were chosen mostly from among the patwaries, village headmen, tehsildars, moktars and where literate men were not found, writers of the Deputy Commissioners office worked as enumerators. See H. Beverley, Report on the Census of Bengal, Volume II, 1872, pp18-43. In another case study on the Rajbangsis, it has been pointed out, the British authors writing caste histories, with no proper idea about the local language and society, depended for information on the non-Rajbangsis immigrant caste Hindus working in government offices. The latter however were not favourably disposed to the local Rajbangsis and consequently their history it was claimed was distorted in the official accounts.

See Swaraj Basu, 'The Colonial State and the Indigenous society: The Creation of the Rajbangshi identity in Bengal', in Sekhar Bandopadhyay, Abhijit Dasgupta, William van Schendel eds., *Bengal: Communities, Development and States*, (New Delhi: Manohar,1994) p. 53.

strengthen their emerging notion of Hindu nationhood. In a sudden awakening of what has been called a ‘census mentality,’ the colonial subjects now began to use the census as a decennial tally sheet to ascertain the demographic strength of the enumerated communities.⁴⁷⁹ In the twentieth century thus newer factors were beginning to impact census reading, as Appadurai pointed out, identities constructed by such a process, ‘transformed not just into imagined communities but “enumerated communities.”’⁴⁸⁰ Even as nationalism turned into mass movement, the underlying current of thinking of the nationalists continued to derive from the basic thematic of colonialist thought, so that the notion of majority and minority communities defined in terms of criteria such as religion, language or tribe applied over a variety of territorial units, remained vital factors in the emerging politics of the twentieth century.⁴⁸¹

In the 20th century, it was from within Bengal that census reading triggered ‘demographic commonsense which functioned as a trope of extinction.’⁴⁸² The publication of statistics by O’Donnell in the census of 1891 showed a decline in the Hindu population of Bengal with the result that it triggered a sudden revelation of a notion of ‘dying Hindu’ that stunned Hindu middle class sensibility and awakened them to the need for a better understanding of the situation.⁴⁸³ The Hindu middle classes had to reckon with two important questions; the complex

⁴⁷⁹ Kenneth Jones, ‘The Negative Component of Hindu Consciousness’ in Geoffrey A. Oddie ed *Religious Traditions in South Asia; Interaction and Change* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998) p. 70

⁴⁸⁰ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Number in Colonial Imagination,’ op cit, p. 332.

⁴⁸¹ Partha Chatterjee, ‘Community and the Nation in Saurabh Dube ed *Post Colonial Passages: Contemporary History-Writing on India* (New Delhi: OUP, 2004) p. 118

⁴⁸² Pradip Kumar Dutta, *Carving Blocs: Communal ideology in Early Twentieth Bengal*, (New Delhi: OUP, 1999) p. 23

⁴⁸³ This popular tract called ‘A Dying Race,’ was written by U.N. Mukherjee which first serially published in Bengalee in June 1909. The publication of the book entitled ‘Hindus-A Dying Race’ was followed by similar concerns of decreasing population in a second book by U.N. Mukherjee ‘Coming Census’ a Bengali translation of which sold 25000 copies free of cost. As early as 1905(1311) the Bengali journal *Provasi* was discussing the need for educating, uplifting and integrating the disabled castes in the Hindu society. The prospects of re conversion of the Christians and the Muslims was also discussed. The *Provasi* also referred to the frequent conversion of the non Aryans in Ancient India by *Vratyastoma* rites mentioned in the Samaveda. See Papiya Chakraborty, *Hindu Response*

divisiveness of the nature of Hinduism, the census so long upheld, which undermined any claim to a unified nationhood and secondly, their newly discovered realization of the decreasing numerical strength of the Hindus vis-a vis the Muslim and the Christian population of the Bengal Presidency. Interestingly because of the permeable nature of the communal common sense, the Hindu communal thought spread through multiple discourses across region, notable among them being the adivasi dominated district of the Santal Parganas. The link between the two regions was served by Deoghar situated in the western borders of the district which had a considerable Bengali Hindu population and had for long served as a hideout for Bengali and Bihari extremist nationalist leaders.⁴⁸⁴ It is in the context of the emerging agenda on the collective Hindu selfhood that we will try to situate the Sapha Hors, whose identity was attempted to be integrated within the broad spectrum of an imaginary Hindu nationhood.

The Santal in the imagining of Hindu nationalism versus the official mind in the conjuncture of 1920s -1940s

There is no denying the fact that ideologically a large part of the nationalist effort under Gandhi consisted in seeking to promote education and economic development among the different communities of India- such as promotion of *khadi* and upliftment of *Harijans*. To that effect, Congress workers of the Santal Parganas, were found to be working passionately to establish links with the Santal population through meetings, pamphlets, songs and lantern shows; their objective being to expose the exploitation of the colonial administrators. At the same time, they

to *Nationalist Ferment: Bengal 1909-1935*; (Calcutta: Subarnalekha, 1992), p. 33. For more detailed discussion on the subject see Pradip Kumar Dutta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Identity in Early Twentieth Century Bengal*, (New Delhi: OUP, 1999). Sumit Sarkar, 'Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva' in David Ludden ed., *Contesting The Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) ps. 270-293

⁴⁸⁴ See Prithwindra Mukherjee, *Sadhak Biplabi Jatindranath* (The Devoted Revolutionary Jatindranath) (Kolkata: West Bengal State Book Board, 1990)

agitated for a series of economic reforms to preserve the rights of the Santal community. The demands varied- they talked about knocking off of arrears, excavation of bandhs for irrigation purpose, starting of grain *golas* (stores), ensuring proper forest rights in Damin forests, formulation of a scheme for education for the Santals and the Paharias among others.⁴⁸⁵ But when the question of reviving the self-respect and pride of the nation arose, a predominantly influential section among the Hindu middle classes of Bengal, conceived nation primarily as Hindu; a predominant trend that was in turn reflected in the history writing of the period.⁴⁸⁶ In fact, as Sumit Sarkar observed, ‘the crucial ideological and organizational initiatives in the formation of both Hinduism and later Hindutva came primarily from (this) new middle class produced by colonial education.’⁴⁸⁷

The concept of Hindutva crystallized during the mid nineteen twenties, first through the writing of Nalini Gupta in Bengal and later by V.D. Savarkar in his book *Hindutva-Who is a Hindu?* published in 1923.⁴⁸⁸ Savarkar talked about the original unity that underlies and orders the cultural diversity of the Hindus; by ‘Hindus’ he emphasized on a community divided into many castes and sects bound together by one invisible bond-blood. All Santals, Kols, Bhils, Panchamas, Namasudras and all other such tribes and castes according to him were Hindus.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ ‘The Sapha Hor Movement in the Santal Parganas,’ Political Special File 210/1938, Bihar State Archives (henceforth BSA).

⁴⁸⁶ Gyanendra Pandey, ‘The Appeal of Hindu History’ in Vasudha Dalmia and H von Stietencron ed., *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1995) p. 369

⁴⁸⁷ See Sumit Sarkar, ‘Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva’ op cit, p. 280

⁴⁸⁸ Pradip Kumar Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, op cit, p. 57

⁴⁸⁹ Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘The Idea of Hindu Race in the Writings of the Hindu Ideologues in the 1920s and 1930s: A Concept Between Two Cultures’ in Peter Robb ed. *Concept of Race in South Asia* (OUP, New Delhi, 1995) ps. 327-354, (p.341).

This imagining of nationhood influenced an important segment of the local Congress in Bihar and more particularly the Santal Parganas. Infact one study shows that the Congress in Bihar converged with the Hindu organizations on atleast two major issues- Hindi Urdu controversy and cow protection.⁴⁹⁰ However because of lack of official documents we have no means of knowing the responses of the Sapha Hors to the efforts to amalgamate them into the mainstream Hindu nationalist politics in the period 1920s-1930s. What we do know is that there were efforts to use the agency of the Sapha Hors in the project of conversion by the local leaders with allegiance to both the Congress and the Hindu Mission.

In the Santals Parganas, it was individual Hindu elites with strong ties with the Congress who began to work among the Santals with the avowed objective to 'Hinduize' them. One such politician was Kashishwar Chakraborty, popularly known as *Sannyasi baba* (hermit) and already a known name in elite circles, because of his association with Jitu Santal of Malda.⁴⁹¹ He was a prominent lawyer and a non-cooperator of Dinajpur who formed an organization called the *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, which preached a popular form of Hinduism, using the names of Hindu gods and goddesses along with occasional reference to Gandhi, who however had no association with him. One such song invoked the name of Gandhi who appears to have given a

⁴⁹⁰ Hitendra Patel, *Communalism and the Intelligentsia in Bihar 1870-1930: Shaping Caste, Community and Nationhood* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2011) p. 228

⁴⁹¹ Tanika Sarkar pointed out, Chakraborty came out of a wider movement around this time when Hindu ascetics came close to the Congress movement and functioned as preachers, combining Hinduisation as well as populism among labourers, peasants and tribals. Officials suspected that this was an organized move planned at a conference of sadhus at Nagpur in 1920. Coinciding with the onset of the Khilafat movement and Non-cooperation, a number of them from the Arya Samaj and the Ramkrishna Mission or from the Dasnami sect, fanned out in the Bihar-Bengal region. In Dacca they were hosted by Anukul Chandra Basu. Chakraborty was suspected to be a Swarajist. Although it is also not clear why he was called the Sannyasi baba. The Satyam Sivam sect was founded in 1925 whose object seems to have been to convert the Santal for the Hindu community on the lines of the Arya Samaj.' He was the inspiration behind the revolt of Jitu Santal in Malda between 1924-32. See Tanika Sarkar, 'Rebellion as modern self fashioning: A Santal movement in Colonial Bengal,' in Daniel Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta ed., *The Politics of Belonging: Becoming Adivasi* (London and New York: Routledge Contemporary South Asian Series, 2011) ps.75-76.

call for war through the 'Holy book'; an appeal through which he intended to blend Gandhian populism with his own brand of preaching:

Baba Gandhi has sent a holy book from the West

Read read oh! Ye people

Bombs, canons, folding swords flash like lightening

Oh! Let us chant 'Satyam Sibam Sundaram.'⁴⁹²

The expression in the song is enigmatic. A reading of the song could suggest that he was talking about a sacred text (possibly a reference to the Bible) which inspired the people to take up arms in the west (perhaps an allusion to the crusades). His ideas were however more elaborately explained in his pamphlet entitled, '*Kasisor Bhattacharyajoak newa Hindu dharam reak biboron.*' The Santals, he said were the descendants of Ram and Lakhan and hence were justified in carrying bows and arrows, spears and swords. He told the Santals to pay Rs 3-4 to gain access to the Hindu community and in return promised them *Swaraj*, which would free them from rents. Such privileges however were not meant for the 'outsiders' as the Christians, Muslims and the Europeans would either be driven out, massacred or they would have to pay rents.⁴⁹³ The colonial reports claimed that the pamphlets were primarily found to be in circulation in Dinajpur and was seized before it entered the Santal Parganas.⁴⁹⁴ Nevertheless colonial officers identified his followers in the Santal Parganas; Babu Bhagawan Das a zamindar of Rajmahal town, Kadu

⁴⁹² Kashishwar Chakraborty had visited Malda in July 1926 and held one or two meetings in Habibpur and here he started a campaign amongst the Santals with Jitu as his local agent and preacher. Political special File 242/29. The movement by Jitu Santal has been studied by Tanika Sarkar, *Jitu Santals' Movement in Malda, 1924-32: A Study in Tribal Protest* in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies volume IV*, (New Delhi: OUP, 1985) ps.136-164

⁴⁹³ Proscriptions of a leaflet in Santhali, Kashishwar Bhattacharjoak newa Hindu dharam rean bibron: activities of one Kashishwar Chakraborty, *Santal Agitation*. Political special File 242/29. Bihar State Archives (henceforth BSA).

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

of village Dumaria, Sundar of village Kumharia, Thakur Hembrom, all of them reported to be associated with the Congress as well.⁴⁹⁵ For the colonial officers however any attempts at Hinduization meant political trouble, a disguised effort at establishing links with the Santals, so that they could be encouraged into acts of sedition against the government.⁴⁹⁶ When Kashishwar lost his standing with the local Congress, the Hindu Mission from Calcutta, which already had links with the Swarajists, was invited by the Congress to work among the Santals.⁴⁹⁷ It is thus evident that from the 1920s, the initiative to integrate the adivasis within the imaginary Hindu nationhood was coming from the middle classes with their overlapping Congress/ Hindu Mission allegiance; a trend noticeable in the politics of Bengal and Bihar from the early twentieth century.⁴⁹⁸ The Hindu Mission had in fact emerged as the principal organizer of *Suddhi* movements in Bengal and Bihar⁴⁹⁹ with the proclaimed goal to help revive Hinduism among the aboriginal tribes and the backward races, and bring back the adivasis to their 'original religion.'⁵⁰⁰ Its declared objectives contained 'eight commandments' issued from its main office,

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Kashishwar left Congress in April 1923 after being suspected of defalcation of Congress funds. As a member of the Hindu Mission he claimed to have converted 350 Christian Santals back to Hinduism. In June 1927 Kashishwar was elected member of the executive committee of the Hindu Sabha, Sarsuna Barisal. Note on Kashishwar Chakraborty of Dinajpur by the Deputy Inspector General Intelligence Branch. Political special File 242/29.

⁴⁹⁸ In the 1920s it was a common sight to see a Congress leader participating in the activities of the Hindu Organization. At a time when the cow slaughter issue was very sensitive and government records suggested a rise in communal tensions in different parts of Bihar, the amity *between the Hindu organisation and the Congress became a noted feature*. See Hitendra Patel, op cit, p. 183; Similar accounts can be found in Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935-46* (New Delhi: OUP, 1992) p.161

⁴⁹⁹ The *suddhi* movement was spearheaded by Arya Samaj particularly in North India to 'purify' or 'reconvert' marginal groups. It began with the Rahtia Sikhs around 1899-1900, the Malkhana Rajputs of the Mathura Farrukabad region in 1922. For many within the Arya Samaj *shuddhi* was often a pre requisite for swaraj. The Arya Samaj justification for rekindling issues of Hindu re conversion and sangathan was based on the spectre of Muslim strength and cohesion and that of Christian conversions. See Sumit Sarkar, 'Christianity, Hindutva and the Question of Conversions' in *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Post Modernism, Hindutva, History* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002) ps. 47-50.

⁵⁰⁰ Hindu Mission was established by Swami Satyananda Saraswati in 1925 in Bengal. It was registered in 1927. Any person born in India and calling himself a Hindu and professing a religion based on Hindu scriptures was considered Hindu by the Mission. Although different types of educational works, practical vocational training, medical activities were mentioned among the objects of the Mission, more important was the preaching and

7 Bechu Chatterjee street in Calcutta. They consisted; worship of Krishna and the Gita in every household; to protect temples, pilgrims and the chastity of women; to adopt rudraksha from the guru, meditate everyday, protect the cow, to congregate for kirtan every full moon and finally preach Hinduism with full dedication- evidently the ‘commandments’ were attempts to structuralize an otherwise amorphous religion to help in the proselytization mission like the other established religion.⁵⁰¹

In the Santal Parganas, the British associated the Santal agitation to the activities of one Lambodhar Mukherjee who was making extensive tours into the interior of the district with his magic lantern demonstration against the colonial government.⁵⁰² Mukherjee as a member of the Congress and Hindu Mission began his work among the Santals initially from Deoghar.⁵⁰³ In 1939, he moved from Deoghar to Dumka where he turned out to be a successful organizer which earned him popularity as Marang Baba among his Santal followers.⁵⁰⁴ There is however reasons to believe that his followers were mainly Sapha Hors who wore red khadi shirts, following their leader’s ardent admiration for Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and his Khudai Khitmatgar (also known

propagation of the Hindu religion and culture and the revival of ancient glory on the basis of the Hindu Scriptures, mainly Bhagavad-Gita. Papiya Chakraborty, op cit, p. 186; Charulal Mukherjee claimed that in 1936 the Hindu Mission had converted over one hundred Santals to the Hindu fold. See Charulal Mukherjee, *The Santals* (Calcutta: A Mukherjee and Co, 1940) p. 380

⁵⁰¹ Letter to Hallet, Deputy Commissioner’s office, Dumka, dated 24th October 1929. Political special, File 242/29.BSA.

⁵⁰² Extract from the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, letter no 167 dated 10th April 1930; Political Special File 155/1930 BSA.

⁵⁰³ From the diary of D.K. Roychaudhury, a nephew of Bagha Jatin and related to Usharani Mukherjee wife of Lambodhar Mukherjee. According to police reports, Lambodhar Mukherjee of Guskara, district Birbhum, was a staunch non-cooperator. He used to work as a tailor in the shop of Jogendranath Sarkar, Deoghar. He was convicted in connection with the Tarakeshwar Satyagraha. A friend and an associate of Ramraj Jajwara, a salesman in Congress khadi department, they were leading suspects and agitators in Deoghar and Patna. Political Special File 266/19

For Tarakeshwar Satyagraha of 1924 see Buddhadeva Bhattacharaya, Tarun Kumar Banerjee, Dipak Kumar Das, ed., *Satyagrahas in Bengal 1921-39* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates Publication Pvt Ltd, 1977).

⁵⁰⁴ ‘Usharani Mukherjee’ (editorial in honour of Usharani Mukherjee) appearing in a vernacular journal ‘Gharani ed., Karuna Mukhopadhyay, 1(28) 15th November 1965. Personal interview with the Debapriyo Mukherjee, son of Lambodhar Mukherjee has enriched knowledge on many unknown facts about the revolutionaries. Interview 31/8/2015.

as the Red Shirts).⁵⁰⁵ The period between 1930s and the 1940s saw a number of initiatives to formally ‘convert’ the Santals into Hindus by the local Congress/ Hindu Mission leaders. On 3rd and 4th October 1935, Mukherjee was reported to have ‘converted’ 500 Santals to Hinduism and led them in a procession through the Dumka *bajar* (market). The whole initiative being sponsored by the Congress District Board chairman Mr. Ramjivan Himatsingha MLC, Patna.⁵⁰⁶ The Hindu babus(elite) expressed a sense of complacency because they thought that the Santals were equally reciprocating to the call for conversions because it was their long time aspiration to be ‘a part of the Hindu society.’⁵⁰⁷ By the 1930s, the Hindu Mission / Congress vision of the Hindu nationhood and the apprehensions of the dying race became stereotypical popular concepts which was shared by all Hindu organizations no matter what their ideological differences were on the political plane. Thus B.S. Moonjie’s speeches at the Hindu Sabha District Conference held in Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Deoghar between 16-21 June 1928, echoed the grave concern among the Hindu elites on the extinction of the race and the urgency of a unified Hindu nation,

‘In the glorious past,’ he said, ‘the Hindus had been a nation of sixty- two crores ruling India Afganistan and Kashmir. Now they had dwindled to twenty- two crores and were checkmated by seven crores of Muhammedans. They must reorganize themselves so that they can do without the Muhammedans, and the message of the Hindu Sabha was to achieve that end through Suddhi, Sangathan

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid; Also see Political Special File 36/1935, BSA

⁵⁰⁶ Reports DIG CID File no KW 20 1935 Jan-December 1935. BSA.

⁵⁰⁷ Charulal Mukherjee, *The Santals* op cit, p. 379. He was a practicing lawyer in Dumka in 1933. The book was dedicated to Maharaja Pratap Chandra Banja Deo of Mayurbhanj.

and the removal of ban on untouchability’.⁵⁰⁸ In Deoghar he said, ‘the Santals, the Bhils, the Kols, who should be their strength were embracing Christianity and Muhamedanism owing to the apathetic treatment meted out to them by their Hindu brethren.’⁵⁰⁹

The dreams of a monolithic Hindu community however received a major challenge when the Communal award was announced on 4th August 1932. With its provision for separate electorate and reservation of seats for various ‘communities’ and interest, the Communal Award was looked upon as an outrageous attack on the entire Hindu community by the Hindu elite of Bengal.⁵¹⁰ By late 1930s, Bihar began to witness widening communal rift and increasing communal tensions in rural and urban areas of Bihar. The splinter Muslim communal parties in Bihar joined the Muslim League by 1938 and was gradually building up its provincial base in the district. The Congress ministry formed their main focus of attack as the new ‘Hindu raj.’⁵¹¹

In the context of a deteriorating political relationships between the major political parties, all major parties/ caste organizations became entangled in propaganda and counter propaganda to control the census; the central question being whether to include the tribes and the lower castes as Hindus. While the Hindu organizations agitated against the long standing erroneous basis of colonial ethnography particularly the colonial desire to separate religious and ethnic identities of tribal and lower castes groups, the Muslim league/ caste organizations particularly in Bengal

⁵⁰⁸ Reports from the second half of June 1928; DIG CID File 16/28.BSA.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-47*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 25

⁵¹¹ Vinita Damodaran, *Broken promises: Popular Protests, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935-1946* (New Delhi: OUP, 1992), p. 160

made counter accusations about the corruptions involved in the census operation with Hindu officials trying to force all Scheduled castes and tribes to return themselves as Hindus against their interests.⁵¹² In the meanwhile from the late 1930s an independent adivasi organization began to make its presence felt through its contribution to the debate on the census. This was the time when the adivasis had begun to assert themselves all over the Chotanagpur division particularly Ranchi, Singhbhum, Palamau, Hazaribagh although Santal Parganas and Manbhum was yet to respond to the agitation. A society named Chotanagpur Zinnat Samaj had from the 1930s been putting up aboriginal candidates in municipality, district board or Legislatures against Congress candidates and were also agitating for Chotanagpur as a separate province.⁵¹³ From the late 1930s, the Adivasi Mahasabha was reportedly drawing large crowds. In March 1941 thirty thousand people was said to have gathered to listen to Jaipal Singh (elected President for the third time), who made a vehement attack on the census operation on the ground that the Hindu enumerators were recording non-Christians and non-Muslim adivasis as Hindus.⁵¹⁴ The contest over the census operation in the Chotanagpur plateau became intense as the adivasis themselves became divided in the 1940s; the Adivasi Mahasabha being led by Jaipal Singh and the Sanatan Adivasis led by Theble Oraon backed by both the Congress and the Hindu Mission.⁵¹⁵ To resolve the controversy over categorizations, W.G. Archer as the Census Superintendent of Bihar, left instructions that aboriginals should be asked by the enumerators whether they observed the Sarhul ceremony and if they did, they should be entered as Oroans or Mundas in the column meant for religion. His instructions raised alarm of the Hindu groups and

⁵¹² William Gould, *Religion and Conflict in Modern South Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.160. (The term scheduled caste tribes was introduced by the Government of India Act 1935).

⁵¹³ Letter from Jimut Bahan Sen to Dr. Rajendra Prasad dt Patna 9th May 1939 in Valmiki Choudhury ed. *Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Correspondence and Select documents, Volume 3*. (January-July 1939) (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984).

⁵¹⁴ Freedom movement 1940, Confidential Fortnightly Reports on Political Events in Bihar; Political Department (Special section) Patna; Reports on the events in Bihar during 20 March, 1941. BSA

⁵¹⁵ Governor's Report, Bihar July-December 1940; L/PJ/175, India Office Library, (henceforth IOL).

the Hindu Dharma Rakshak Sangh sent a deputation to the Commissioner's office on 24th October 1940 stating that the colonial officers were trying 'to drive a wedge between Hindus and the aboriginals and thus playing the game of the Muslims and the missionaries.'⁵¹⁶

In the 1920- 1940s the colonial officers (and missionaries) many of them anthropologically inclined, were indeed in favour of entering tribes as aboriginals. This was infact a clear change from the earlier official position that the Sapha Hors were Hinduized. Writing in 1921 about the Kherwars in 'Man in India', P.O. Bodding portrayed the Sapha Hors as Santals and not Hinduized caste or tribe. He expressly pointed out that the 'Kherwars were Santals by birth and lived in the midst of Santals, their ideas of a spiritual world and of man's relations with it had their root in the religion of the people.' What triggered the change in the Sapha Hors, according to him, 'was a loss of faith in their old *bongas* (spirits) which explained why they increasingly turned towards Hinduism and Christianity.' But this did not mean a complete assimilation with Hinduism but rather the creation of a new belief system, 'taking something from one and something else from the other of the religions mentioned....'⁵¹⁷ Bodding was thus arguing that the Sapha hors inspite of their eclectic religious beliefs were still aboriginals who had not lost their identity.

Infact in the 1930s and 40s the debate on identity of the aboriginals now involved the academic circles; British anthropologist-officers like Verrier Elwin, W.G. Archer, J.P. Mills, J.F. Hutton had begun to endorse a more protectionist policy that singled out the Indian tribes as culturally

⁵¹⁶ Agitation about the recording of the aboriginals as Hindus and non-Hindus in the Census; Extract from SS File No 33 of 1940; Political Special File 461/40, BSA.

⁵¹⁷ P.O. Bodding, 'The Kherwar Movement Among the Santals', in *Man in India*, volume 1 March 1921, ps. 230-231.

distinct from the caste Hindus and in need of protection from the Hindu society through an enforced isolation. This theory was opposed by an emerging group of Indian sociologists like G.S. Ghurye who critiqued the caste/tribe distinction itself and regarded tribals as imperfectly integrated classes of the Hindu society or the 'Backward Hindus.'⁵¹⁸ A mid-way approach was attempted by W.G. Archer in his elaborate treatise on the Santal community although he was silent about the existence of the Sapha Hors- we don't know for sure why.⁵¹⁹ Archer observed:

'Aboriginals as a whole have no terms of their own to describe their religion... When a tribesman says his religion is Hindu, he often merely means that he is not Christian or Mohammedan. He certainly never implies that he has shed all his tribal ways, that he has adopted Brahmanic practices... even if he adopts certain Hindu festivals, it is often because they offer him fresh excuses for jollity... Moreover Hinduism ... has always been tolerant of variety and there is nothing in Hindu theory or practice to prevent a tribesman from retaining all his tribal practices and yet being accepted as a Hindu.'⁵²⁰

In this chapter it has been highly interesting to observe how different kinds of agencies- missionaries, colonial officers, census authorities, different players in nationalist high politics actually inscribed their perceptions and desires originating from their own respective positions of power on imagining the Santals/Sapha Hors as Hindu –Hinduised without ever caring to bring into the public domain in an unmediated manner, the voice of the Sapha Hors /ofcourse that is

⁵¹⁸ Carol Upadhyay, *The Idea of Indian Society: G.S. Ghurye and the Making of Indian Sociology* in Patricia Uberoi, Nandini Sundar and Satish Deshpande ed., *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010) p. 216

⁵¹⁹ The Census superintendent of Bihar (1939-41) and the Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas (1945- 46).

⁵²⁰ B.B. Chaudhuri, 'Society and Culture of the Tribal World', op cit, p. 49

understandable. Neither did the elite Hindus, involved in defining identities ever consider the fact that the tribals could be simultaneously keen on emulation as well as preserving their identity, without any actual assimilation into the Hindu society.⁵²¹ It is pertinent to remind the readership of the observation that Martin Orans made in his thesis to demonstrate the extent of mediation in the representation of the Santal identity/ties. Many Santals reported to Martin Orans, during the course of his research that they were pressured by Hindu authorities to register themselves as Hindus; ““when the enumerators were asked, ‘what is your religion? Most Santals, did not understand this word and when it was explained would reply, ‘Santal religion’; the census takers would then say, ‘that is your caste (jati) not your religion. Are you Hindu, Muslim, Christian or what?’ By this they might obtain their desired result.””⁵²²

While the political parties fought over the identity of the Santals, categorizing them as Hindus, what was missed out was that the concept of a ‘Hinduized’ Santal was simplistic and flawed. This chapter emphatically shows this conclusion. It is not surprising that from the 1930s, in the context of the raging contest over the census, the colonial officials and missionaries found it even more imperative to protect the ‘Santal system’, as a means to counteract the growing propaganda for the Hinduization of the tribals. No where in the process was the voice of the Sapha Hors heard even when the government set out to lay an elaborate plan to protect ‘the Santal system.’

⁵²¹ Ibid, ps. 34-35.

⁵²² Martin Orans, ‘A Tribe in Search of a Great Tradition: The Rank Concession Syndrome among the Santals of Chotanagpur. PhD dissertation; Chicago, Illinois, March 1962; p.85. Martin Oran was studying the Southern Santals ((Orissa, C.N. Feudatory state, Singhbhum).

Colonial position: In defence of the ‘Santal System (1930s-40s).

One major concern of the colonial administrators almost dating back to the time, the exclusive system of government was introduced in the Santal Parganas, was the protection of ‘the Santal System,’ and the keystone of ‘that system’ was thought to be the village ‘mundal’ or ‘the manjhee.’⁵²³ Now in the second decades of the twentieth century, the protection of the system appeared essential especially under the assumed threat of ‘Hinduizing’ tendencies developing among the Santals since the anti-census agitation of 1881. Faced with the Sapha Hor agitation in the Damin in 1881, as we have seen in chapter two, the authorities had debated over the exclusive status of the Damin granted by the Act 35 of 1855 and reinforced by the Regulation III of 1872. The Commissioner G.N. Barlow was in favour of taking away the exclusive right of the Santals and allowing the foreigners the right to settle in the Damin. The proposal however did not receive support from the influential circles of the British government on the ground that it would lead to the disintegration of ‘Santal nationality’ with serious consequences for the future of the community. John Boxwell, the officiating Deputy Commissioner opposed Barlow’s view arguing,

‘If we let the dikus into the Damin we break the Santal nationality. Their language will go then, in particular religion change. The tribe becomes a low caste of Hindus. They can never rise. In other districts the same process will go on faster because there will be no Santal head quarters. In two generations we shall have added one and half million to the dregs of Hinduism.. if we keep out the dikus, we

⁵²³ Extract from Santal Administration Report for the year 1862 BJP, December 1871, WBSA.

declare that we are going to preserve the Santals from absorption. Therefore, we should adhere to the old policy of the Damin for the Santals.⁵²⁴

A similar observation was made by Allen, the District magistrate of Birbhum in his report of 1911,

‘It is almost entirely due to the vitality of this system of village rules, that Sonthals have not been absorbed long ago among the low caste Hindoos... as soon as he (Santal) is cut adrift from a village, and he has to stand or fall merely as an individual, he sinks down and becomes indistinguishable in the crowd of low caste Hindoos.’⁵²⁵

The British administrators were convinced that only a strong village system could protect the Santals from losing their status. Evidently one of the objectives of the Regulation III of 1872 was to promote and protect ‘the Santal system’; a system described as ‘simple direct and designed to meet the special requirements of the backward and unsophisticated people of this region.’⁵²⁶ The whole idea behind the system, the colonial administration claimed, was to provide a secure system of land tenure and a simple system of criminal justice, which would save the aboriginals from the evils of the litigation and from exploitation.⁵²⁷ Its success it was believed depended on a perfect coordination between the Deputy Commissioner, the manjhis(head man), the officers, all of whom worked in unison to preserve ‘the spirit of the laws’

⁵²⁴ Boxwell to Under Secretary, Revenue department, dt. 14th November 1881, Government of Bengal quoted in S.P. Sinha, *Kherwar Movement 1874-1942*, op cit, p. 201.

⁵²⁵ See B.B. Chaudhuri, ‘Decline in the Old Order,’ op cit, p.750.

⁵²⁶ A defense of the Santal system is found in the ‘Appendix to Kumar Ganga Prasad Bill to provide the best administration of criminal justice in the Santal Parganas’ (Lapsed) Home Department, Judicial File No 92/29, Serial numbers 1-8, National Archives of India, (henceforth NAI)

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

since much of the civil and revenue rules peculiar to the district was not codified. Laws were to 'be found in the rules, executive orders and in the decision of the Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner according to the customary laws of the people.'⁵²⁸ The Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas, R. Carstairs pointed out to the uniqueness of the system which had been applied in only one among the forty eight districts under the province of Bengal that perfectly blended 'the will of the government with the will of the people.'⁵²⁹ The system he claimed had no support from 'the departmental mind' who thought that 'the very existence of Santal Parganas was an offence, being a breach in the symmetry of the province.'⁵³⁰ However, the system survived, in his opinion, because of the relentless efforts of some officers like him and their faith on the architects of the system, 'A man (George Yule) who had once been in actual contact with it could not but feel its life, its charm and its spirit. We had faith, the missionary hope that the prejudice of the departments was to their not knowing it, and that we might yet convert it.'⁵³¹ Carstairs became a self-proclaimed guardian of the policy begun by George Yule and Ashley Eden under which the 'savages' could be 'tamed' through good governance.⁵³² Thus when Carstairs was writing in 1895, the officers were still talking about a civilizing mission to enlighten an otherwise savage race. His writing in particular didn't show any concern about the so called 'Hinduization' of the tribe although the issue remained an important agenda in the writings of the contemporary Census Commissioners. By the third decades of the 20th century times, as we have seen in the last section, the 'politics of numbers' had changed the dynamics of politics and began to impact official decisions. Reverend P.O. Boddington in his notes attached to

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ R. Carstairs, *The Little World of an Indian District Officer*, (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd 1912), p. 310

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Ibid, p.311

⁵³² Ibid.

the census of 1931 pointed out that the real concern behind the 'Hinduization' process was not just the disintegration of the indigenous Santal community but was more political in nature,

'It has always been our wish that the Santals should be kept as Santals, all work has had this as background. Personally I am of opinion that if the Santals continued to be exposed to the influence of Hindus, they will some day be found again as a new low caste that has attached itself to the Hindu society, of little use to themselves and a danger to the country where they live, incidentally a political problem.⁵³³ (emphasis mine).

In colonial rationale thus, Hinduisation of the tribes would mean greater number of Hindu lower castes and with the Hindu/nationalists naturally aligned against the government, it could only mean greater opposition to the government. The only way, the colonial officials could hope to stop the growing political opposition was by stemming the tide of 'Hinduization.' The whole notion was dependent on how far the government was successful in protecting the cohesion and solidarity of the village community. Like Carstairs, Reverend Bodding talked about a village council under the close supervision of the government officials,

'So far as I can see, they may be saved and become useful, even very much so if they are helped in a proper way and treated as deserving to stay as Santals. The present day Santals are a virtuous race. There is so far as I know or have observed, no reason to think that they are indifferent to the

⁵³³ Note on Santals by P.O. Bodding in J.H. Hutton, *Report on the Census of India 1931*, 3 volumes, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, Reprint, 1966), p.98-109.

propagation of their race, rather quite the opposite. It is not this side that the Santals problem shows itself. I believe it would be advantageous for all if the village councils could be given some more power and work and naturally with certain safe guards so that their work could be controlled.

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He was thus in favour of a protectionist policy towards the tribes as a safe guard against the perceived threat of increasing Hinduization of tribes; an idea that received support from other missionaries all of them voicing their opinion in favour of protecting the Santal system in the 1930s. Thus Dr. Demster and Dr. Kitchen added in their notes to the census of 1931,

‘The tribal organization is democratic. In the Santal system, the village community is a unit, managed by a headman known as the *pradhan*, who is so to speak, the interim between the Santal community and the outside world. Disputes are settled by the *panchayats* and the public opinion of the community suffices to discourage dishonesty and untruthfulness. The system works very well in the Santal Parganas, but where the Santals have come into contact with other more advanced civilization their system has tended to crumble and their strength to decay.’⁵³⁵

Interestingly in the 1940s, among the colonial officials itself, a small group of anthropologically inclined scholar/administrators particularly under the influence of the emerging functionalist

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid, p. 109

school of thought led by B. Malinowski in England began re-evaluating the notion of ‘Hinduization’ and its impact on the tribes. The avowed objective was of course protecting ‘the Santal system’ from disintegration. Inspired by Malinowski’s writings, W.G. Archer argued that Christianization was a greater threat to the process of disintegration of the tribes.⁵³⁶ It was missionary efforts at evangelization that radically altered the Santals world view, denying them of a life with which they had so long been accustomed.⁵³⁷ No converted Santal could participate in tribal festivals or perform sacrifices to the *bongas*, they could not take part in the dancing, drumming and drinking on grounds of immorality and indecency. While Christianization denied the Santals an access to his moral and religious world, ‘Hinduization’ in contrast did not lead to a complete loss of identity.⁵³⁸ Interestingly Archer however chose to remain silent on the existence of the Sapha Hors inspite of their clearly discernible life style. His silence perhaps indicating his emotional attachment to what he described as the ‘pride of Santal life and culture.’⁵³⁹

Archer then clarified that he used the term Hindu in ‘a strictly tribal sense’. He wrote,

‘Aboriginals should in fact be recognized as Hindus but in the sense, which does no injury to their customs, involves no revolution in their values, imposes no alien formula on their laws. The term Hindu should describe a fact, not inaugurate a revolution.’⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁶ WG Archer, *Civil Law in Santal Society*, Part 2; MSS EUR F 236/ 58

⁵³⁷ WG Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice: A report on the Santal*, (New Delhi: Concept publishing Co pvt ltd, 2014) p. 656

⁵³⁸ WG Archer, *Civil Law in Santal Society*, Part 2; MSS EUR F 236/ 58

⁵³⁹ W.G. Archer, ‘Preface’ in *The Hills of Flutes: Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India, A Portrait of the Santals* (Isha Books, New Delhi, 2007) p.12.

⁵⁴⁰ W.G. Archer, *Tribal laws and Justice*, op cit, p. 658

Therefore, to decide whether a tribe was Hindu or not, Archer suggested that it was important to ask pertinent questions but most often ‘none of these questions which might have revealed important differences with caste Hindus were asked at all.’⁵⁴¹

In the late 1940s official thinking had moved away from the stereotypical classifications which had influenced official evaluations when the census first began. The concept of ‘Hinduization’ of tribes was re-evaluated, there was talk about codification of Santal customary laws which however was rejected on grounds of its inflexibility of character.⁵⁴² But from the 1930s attempts had already begun among some of the tribal leaders of the Chotanagpur plateau to organize different tribes through a common religious practice and beliefs; the *sarna dharma*.⁵⁴³ This change had presumably much to do with the kind of organized politics that was developing among the adivasis since the 1930s and was distinguishable from the earlier organization of Santal resistance. In 1942 however the distinction between all political parties was temporarily shadowed when Gandhi gave his call for Quit India. We find the Sapha Hors once again in the forefront of political agitation but this time they were found to be fighting against the colonial government in unity with the *dikus* and the (traditional) Santals. The Sapha Hor dream of freedom had sometime along the way merged with that of the nationalist dream of a free India.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, p. 659

⁵⁴² K.S. Sinha, ‘Introduction’ in W.G. Archer, *Tribal laws and Justice*, p. xix -xx

⁵⁴³ Martin Oran noted during his study of the Santals of Orissa, Chota Nagpur Feudatory state and Singhbhum in 1962 that when the Jharkhand movement began, the adivasis of Chota Nagpur tried to organize themselves in the name of their ‘adi’ religion, as ‘Sarna Dharma’ and enter themselves as such in the census but without much success. As late as 2009, the late Ram Dayal Munda, Ranchi, the noted scholar and activist expressed similar hopes that the adivasis might one day unite themselves under the Sarna dharma. Interview, 15 March 2009.

Chapter 4

Towards the Gandhi Raj: The Final Encounter (1930-47)

Introduction:

In the last chapter we have seen how the colonial authorities and missionaries in their bid to facilitate good governance began the imperial project of the census enumeration through classifications and enumerations of the subject population which led to a number of constructs – one of them being the ‘Hinduized’ tribes. We have also seen how this construct became so pervasive that segments of the nationalist leadership seized upon this ascription and played an important part in further advancing the project of ‘Hinduization’ of the tribes through writings and even the project of *suddhi*. While the debate ensued, the agency of the Sapha Hors continued to remain hidden from colonial gaze for a considerable span of time and the last we hear of them was during the anti-census agitation of 1881 followed by sporadic events of Sapha agitation in the Santal country which died down quickly. When the Sapha Hors did reappear in the records in the third decades of the 20th century, the country was already in the throes of consecutive mass movements stirred by Gandhi and the millenarian dreams that his messages inspired among varied sections of the people.

It was to a politically surcharged environment resulting from the arrival of Gandhi and the spreading ‘rumours’ that contributed to the making of the new messiah of god-that we turn to in this chapter. Gandhi’s message of *Swaraj*, was a concept so polysemic that it made the people dream again; ‘it represented a regime where the hierarchies would be altered and norms reversed,

it indicated a time where food would be in plenty and prices would be controlled.’⁵⁴⁴ In the ensuing frenzy caused by the vision of Gandhi *raj*, the Sapha Hors too joined the national movement but expressing their dreams in an idiom that was clearly their own. There were flash points in the assertion of the sect between 1930-47. After the anti-census agitation of 1891 we hear about the sect’s involvement in the movement of 1930-31, the elections of 1937 and finally during the Quit India movement of 1942. In the intermittent period of spurts of political activism by the Sapha Hors, we know nothing much about them and we can only hypothesize that the outburst of their resistance having been repressed, they receded into a quiet and pacific cultivation of an impeccably ‘pure’ way of life, searching for an answer to their own failure through a spiritual self assessment; typical of millenarian moods. It is in a complex political setting that marked the last stages of India’s struggle for freedom against British rule that we will study the Sapha Hors and their continued quest for ‘freedom.’

The Santal Parganas in political ferment; the 1920s -30s

The political ferment in the Santal Parganas was dynamic and complex. There were many protest agitations and mobilizations emerging all over the district in a typically surcharged environment of nationalist ferment. This thesis is vitally interested in understanding both this dynamic and the complexity because the Sapha Hors were one of the communities who became active participants in the complex political development of the time. It is necessary for this thesis to briefly survey the political developments in the crucial years of gradual crystallization of the national movement in the Santal Parganas and that of Bihar.

⁵⁴⁴ Sangeeta Dasgupta, ‘Mapping Histories: Many narratives of the Tana pasts’ in Sangeeta Dasgupta (Guest) ed., Reading the archive, reframing Adivasi Histories, in *Economic and Social History Review*, Volume 1. 3, No. 1, Special Issue, January-March 2016, p.117.

In the early 20th century, Congress activities in the Santal Parganas remained relatively quiet and confined to small pockets, inhabited by the Biharis and Bengalis, living notably in the Deoghar, Dumka and Pakur subdivision. This was the general political scenario until the advent of Gandhi began to change the face of politics from its elitist character to a national mass movement. The Champaran Satyagraha for all the limitations, for the first time established the quasi messianic image of Gandhi amongst the peasantry who were victims of rack-renting, *beggar* and *abwabs*, *bakhast* lands and heavy indebtedness for a long time.⁵⁴⁵ Like every district in Bihar, the district of Santal Parganas also had its unique problems. The government, as we have seen in chapter three, even with their keen interest in preserving the ‘Santal system’ failed to prevent the disruption of the Santal agrarian system. The effects of Wood’s administration of 1872 had been disastrous on the economy and only came to be revealed over time. The Regulation II of 1872 by conferring occupancy rights on the Santals had destroyed the communal ownership of land. The new occupancy rights had stopped the age old custom of periodic redistribution of lands among tenants by which all members of the village could once enjoy both good and bad lands. Moreover as a result of the new settlement, the *ryot* (peasant) now gained the right to part with his lands in payment of his debts.⁵⁴⁶ This provided the moneylenders ample opportunity to consolidate their rights over the local economy. Both the settlement officers, McPherson(1898-1907) and J.F. Gantzer (1922-35) admitted that the administration had failed to check land transfers and as a result of which the very basis of the social life of the tribes had gradually weakened. Gantzer noted that throughout the district (excluding the Damin) the *pradhans* (headmen) in the zamindari were actually relinquishing their position and villages were being

⁵⁴⁵ Arvind Das, ‘Peasant and Peasant Organisations: The Kisan Sabha in Bihar in Arvind Das ed., *Agrarian Movements in India: Studies in 20th century Bihar*. (London: Frank Cass ,1982) p.46.

⁵⁴⁶ Samar Kumar Mallick, *Transformation of Santal Society: Prelude to Jharkhand*, (Calcutta: Minerva Associates Publication Pvt Ltd, 1993) p. 108.

returned to the *khas* management of the *zamindars*.⁵⁴⁷ To add to the miseries of the Santals, repeated famines occurred in the Santal Parganas in the period between 1866- 1919 accelerating the process of land transfers from the Santals into the hands of the moneylenders.⁵⁴⁸ One result was an intensified flow of emigration of the Santals from the Santal Parganas to the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Assam. Reports from Jalpaiguri show that while the number of Santal immigrant had been 3071 in 1891, in 1901 it rose to 10,582, in 1911 a further rise to 19,639, after which there was a slight decrease in 1921, when the Santal immigrants numbered 14,866.⁵⁴⁹ The other destination was Barind (the districts of Malda, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Bogra districts of Rajshahi division) where a large number of Santals migrated to work in the fields.⁵⁵⁰ According to one figure from the census of 1911, the number of immigrant Santals in Malda alone was 48,402.⁵⁵¹

It was in the period following the famine of 1919 that the colonial officers began to register an intensifying Congress propaganda against the government in the Santal Parganas and became apprehensive that it would encourage recalcitrance on the part of the ryots.⁵⁵² However, in the 1920s, Congress was still a middle class organization confined to the main cities of the Santal Parganas; Deoghar, Jamtara, Sahebgunj, Madhupur and Dumka. So when the Non-Cooperation-

⁵⁴⁷ J.F. Gantzer, *Final Report on the Revision Survey and Settlement Operation in the District of Santal Parganas, 1922-35*, (Patna: Superintendent Government Printing, 1936) p. 24.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*, Famine conditions prevailed in 1873-74, 1878, 1884-85, 1888-89, 1891-92, 1897, 1919, p.121.

TABLE 7: Population Figures for Santal Parganas based on the census reports between 1881-1911:

	Immigrants	Emigrants	Remarks
1881	1,48,733	27,515	Emigrants outnumbered by 1,21,218
1891	1,53,087	98,848	-do- by 54,639
1901	1,11,525	2,26,008	Immigrants outnumbered by 1,14,483
1911	1,06,679	3,21,283	-do- 2,14, 604

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.138.-Table 7

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 129.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 134.

⁵⁵² J.F. Gantzer, *op cit*, p. 24.

Khilafat movement broke out in the (1919-20) the Santal participation hardly significant in terms of participation or organization was easily repressed by the heavy hand of the colonial administration. In the Rajmahal subdivision, about a score of men, village officials were either dismissed, suspended or fined for collecting *muthis* (subscription), distributing food or providing lodging to the non cooperators, or simply for sympathizing with them. The Congress offices were pulled down and less than hundred convictions were made under 70A of the Criminal Amendment Act.⁵⁵³ The only active participation of the adivasis was seen in the Maheshpur *zamindari* where the adivasi volunteers were found picketing before *ganja* and *toddy* shops in 1922. Some of the Congress workers according to a report tried convincing the Santals to adopt the sacred thread and eschew the flesh of goats and fowl although the colonial officers had no doubt that these efforts should be seen not as a political propaganda but rather as an attempt to influence the Santals to enter their names as Hindus in the coming Census.⁵⁵⁴ In March 1929, when the Congress Committee conference held its meeting in the Santal Parganas, attended by Rajendra Prasad among others, 400-500 people were said to have appeared at its sessions on each of the two days, of whom only 32 were Santals.⁵⁵⁵ As late as 1929, the world of the adivasis and the middle classes still seemed to stand wide apart as is evident from a secret meeting held in Deoghar, at the house of Bijoy Krishna Chaudhury, (the nephew of the noted Homoeopath Dr. P Banerjee). Here the Bengali *babus* were reported to be discussing the risks involved in enlisting the support of the Santals to the nationalist cause under Congress leadership.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵³ K.K. Dutta, Appendix xvii, 'Freedom Struggle in Bihar, Volume I (Patna: Government of Bihar, 1957) ps. 364-369.

⁵⁵⁴ Fortnightly reports for the First half of October 1929; India Office Library (henceforth IOL) IOR/L/PJ/687.

⁵⁵⁵ Fortnightly reports for the First half of June 1929; IOR/L/PJ/687.

⁵⁵⁶ Report dt.29/9/27 to B.N. Singh sub-divisional officer Jamtara, Political Special 242/29, Bihar State Archives (henceforth BSA).

By the 1930s however, the government reports began to register serious attempts at building Congress organizations into the interiors of Santal Parganas through meetings, pamphlets, songs and lantern shows. The most prominent activists trying to enlist Congress support in the region were Lambodhar Mukherjee, Motilal Kejriwal, Babu Sashi Bhushan Rai and Binodananda Jha, most of them residents of Deoghar. Colonial vigilance was particularly noticeable in case of Lambodhar Mukherjee identified in the police records as the ‘most dangerous person’ whose main activities was concentrated in Jamtara and Deoghar.⁵⁵⁷ He was accused of delivering speeches illustrated by magic lantern slides at Mihijam, Jamtara, Bewa and Geria, in the Jamtara segment of the Deoghar sub division. The report also noted that he had already made his visits to the interiors of Rajmahal, Pakaur, Jamtara and Deoghar sub division in the previous months. The government was apprehensive that his speeches were likely to eventually excite the ‘ignorant inflammable aboriginals.’⁵⁵⁸ On the grounds of trying to incite the Santals, Lambodhar Mukherjee was interned for a year on 29th April 1930 under Section 108 Cr. P.C.⁵⁵⁹

The Civil Disobedience movement broke out in colonial India on 6th April 1929, after Gandhi gave his call for Satyagraha through ‘the war against salt tax.’ It rocked north Bihar with its epicenter in Saran, Champaran and Muzaffarpur. In the Santal Parganas, the civil disobedience movement began on a low ebb. Deoghar continued to be the site of anti government activities led by the middle classes. A procession/ *prabhat pheri*, now a new symbol of cultural support to the cause of nationalism, was taken out on 6th April which paraded the streets of Deoghar singing nationalistic songs in the morning while the Congress activist Binodananda Jha held meetings in

⁵⁵⁷ Extract from Deputy Commissioner’s letter No. 167-dt. 10/4/39; Political Special File 155/1930, BSA.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. Similar speeches were delivered at Saraiya by Motilal Khejriwal within the Sardari circle Saraiya(Dumka) in the morning of 10th July 1931, leading to his arrest. See ‘Civil Disobedience in the Santal Parganas,’ Political Special File,126/31, BSA.

the afternoon.⁵⁶⁰ Dumka was placed under the Prevention of Intimation Ordinance disrupting all efforts at organizing any agitation against the salt laws. The salt agitation in the Santal Parganas didn't make much headway and only twenty-eight arrests were registered.⁵⁶¹ However, confidential report of the police noted significant Congress activities in Dumka from where volunteers were moving into the interiors of the district distributing *charkhas* and cotton thread. They were reported to be moving surreptitiously from village to village spreading boycott and 'khaddar propaganda.'⁵⁶² The Deputy Commissioner also noted that Congress volunteers were trying to stir the locals over the boycott of foreign goods, picketing of excise shops but also remarked, 'so far the attempt has not met with any marked success and 'the Damin is unaffected.'⁵⁶³ In June 1931, the District Officer J.R. Dain however expressed his concern over the increasing influence of the local Congress leaders among the rural masses of the district. He noted that unlike the tours of Rajendra Prasad and Abdul Bari, which only had a transitory effect on the Santals, as neither their 'language or their subject matter' left any lasting impression, the local men like Lambodhar Mukherjee had a far greater influence over the masses as 'they were more dangerous and less responsible in nature.'⁵⁶⁴ Significantly by the early 1930s, Congress meetings such as the one held in the Saraiya bazar in the Sardari circle, Dumka, had begun to draw larger number of Santals.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁰ Extract from Deputy Commissioner's letter No. 167-dated 10/4/39; Political Special File 155/1930, BSA.

⁵⁶¹ 'Salt Campaigns in Santal Parganas, picketing and boycott campaign in the district,' Political Special File ,181/30, BSA.

⁵⁶² Confidential report, Camp Deoghar, dt. 23 /6/1930, Santal Parganas, Political Special 181/30, BSA.

⁵⁶³ H.K. Brisco, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Camp Purnea, dt. 27/5/30; Political Special File 181/30, BSA.

⁵⁶⁴ J.R. Dain's dairy dt. 12/6/31. On 27th January 1935 Mr. Dain reported on the proposed meeting of the Santals at Katoria district in Bhagalpur. Political Special File 65/1931. BSA.

⁵⁶⁵ Political Special File KW 20/1931 DIG CID Weekly reports, July-December 1931, BSA.

The decade of 1930s also witnessed another significant development. Congress nationalism at the local level was increasingly becoming associated with the temperance movement and a project of conversion of the Santals to Hinduism. The importance of conversion of adivasis into Hindus was an agenda shared by the local Congress and the Hindu organizations, both concerned over the declining demography of the Hindus; a fear that was triggered by the notion of the 'dying Hindus,' popularized by a tract appearing in the early 20th century.⁵⁶⁶ On 15th January 1934, under the initiative of the Arya Samajists, the All India Santal Mahasabha held two meetings, one at Mandar hills, Dumka, followed by meetings held on 3rd and 4th February 1935 at Dulisara bandh, in Katoria P.S, Bhagalpur.⁵⁶⁷ The avowed purpose of these meetings was to teach the adivasis to give up drinking, embrace Hinduism and not become Christians. The adivasis were reminded that they were suffering because 'they were disobeying the principles of their fore fathers and giving up their own religion,'⁵⁶⁸; (emphasis added) by which of course the Santal religion was considered to be a part of Hinduism. The Arya Samaj preached that if the principles of their forefathers was to be preserved, they should abstain from liquor, discontinue the practice of illicit distilling, not divorce wives or allow females to dance in the *melas*. The adivasis should collect *muthis* (subscription) from every household and encourage their children to receive education. The meeting at Dulisara then extended a half-hearted support to Congress while cautiously avoiding any hostile encounter with the colonial government. The meeting ended stating that 'the Santals should live peacefully under the 'benign' government and approach the officers for their grievances.'⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ See Chapter 3, p.153 of this thesis.

⁵⁶⁷ Political Special File 36/1935, BSA.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ J.R. Dain to RE Russell, Commissioner's Office Bhagalpur, 27/1/35; Political Special File 36/1935, BSA.

The British were however alarmed not only because of the converging interest of the local Congress and Hindu Mission on the issue of conversion but by the news that the meetings held in Dumka and Dulisara bandh was an endeavor to mobilize the Santals to join them and especially 'to organize the Sapha Hors' under them.⁵⁷⁰ This incident once again turned government attention to the Sapha Hors especially because they were concerned that if a 'Hinduising and an anti-missionary movement' began under the Congress/ Arya Samaj initiative, the Sapha Hors were likely to join them because of their 'troublesome nature.'⁵⁷¹ To counter the increasing influence of the Hindu groups over the Santals, the government now organized their own meetings. The Hor Malto Marang Sabha, an organization of the Santals and the Paharias held their meetings at Kuschira bungalow on 28th and 29th December 1935 under the leadership of Sagram Hembrom, the president of the Taljhari Mission.⁵⁷² In a gathering of two hundred men, Sagram Hembrom, talked on subjects similar to that of the Arya Samajists ; the Santals were advised to improve their general conditions by educating their children, cultivating their lands and avoid drinking.⁵⁷³ In none of the sabhas, political agendas were discussed and yet their efforts at the so called social reform were clear attempts at drawing Santals' attention towards their respective causes. However, it was not before 1938 that two separate incidents involving the Sapha Hors, brought the sect under serious government surveillance after more than three decades. It was not a pleasant revelation for the colonial administrators when they learnt that, during this intermittent period, the sect had not only grown in numbers but had strong links with

⁵⁷⁰ R.E. Russell to H.M. government, dt. 30/1/35; Political Special File 36/1935, BSA.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² In 1932 the Hor Malto Marang Sabha, an organization of the Paharias and the Santals was formed under the initiative of E.S. Hoernle I.C.S Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas. See Charulal Mukherjee, *The Santals* (Calcutta: A Mukherjee and Co, 1933) p. 380.

⁵⁷³ S.C. Mukherjee to J.R. Dain, Camp Shikarpara, dt. 23/1/35; Political Special File 36/1935, BSA.

the National Congress- confirming their fears of an unholy nexus between the sect's Hinduizing tendency, their anti-government attitude and closeness to the Congress.

Reappearance of the Sapha Hor movement in the colonial records of the 1930s

In 1938, the two incidents involving the name of the Sapha Hors was reported from the Pakur Damin. One was related to the ill treatment of a Mangal Chaukidar by the Sapha Hors of the Dumarchi bungalow of the Pakur subdivision and the other was related to a raid on the Semultala *jhil* (lake) near Sahebgunj by two- three thousand Santals. It was later established that even if the first accusation could have something to do with the Sapha Hors' attempt to stop illegal exactions made by the *chaukidar*, no connections however could be established between the Sapha Hors of the Pakur subdivision and the Sahebgunj incident.⁵⁷⁴ A highly anxious police administration in the district of the Santal Parganas felt it immediately necessary to commission a close study of the developments especially within this community and submit a detailed report to the administration. Accordingly, a Sub Inspector of Police, B.H. Koomar was commissioned with the work of collecting information on the sect primarily from the Pakur Damin from where the trouble was registered. His report going into thirty- seven pages not only documented the existence of the sect over a significant number of villages in the Pakur Damin but also confirmed the Sapha Hors' active participation in the national movement. It was indeed an eye opener for the police administration who had unexpectedly stumbled upon the important fact that the Sapha Hors were Congress men and readily came to the conclusion that the movement was 'a Congress initiative to convert Santals to Hinduism.'⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁴ Binodananda Jha to HPM, dt.10/6/38, 'The Sapha Hor Movement,' Political special, File 210/38, BSA.

⁵⁷⁵ Personal Diary of B.H. Koomar, CSI, dt. 1/3/38, 'Sapha Hor Movement,' Political special File 210/38, BSA.

Koomar divided the Santals into five groups; Kherwar Santals, Sadhu Santals, Sapha Hor Santals, Christian Santals, original Santals. The last two classes, he stated were not involved in the Congress activities unlike the rest who were politically active through their association with the Congress. Only the Kherwars, he thought had a long lineage going back to the times of the *Hul* while the Sadhu Santals and the Sapha Hors had recent origin, coming into existence sometime during the Civil Disobedience movement. The Sadhu movement, he claimed was begun by one Ramjit Sadhu of Ambadiha situated in Gaibathan in the Godda sub-division. His followers wore long beard, hair and moustache like Indian sadhus, they abstained from pork and fowl and had regular interaction with their guru. Most of these men however, according to Koomar, had become original Santals or had joined the Sapha Hors. The Sapha Hor movement however, Koomar observed was a purely political movement to enroll Congress members. Its origins, he wrote, went back to the Civil Disobedience movement in Hazaribagh. At present, they were followers of Lambodhar Mukherjee, the Congressman whom they occasionally visited with white flags.⁵⁷⁶

Although Koomar's tours concentrated primarily in the Pakur Damin, he learnt from his informers that there were Sapha Hor villages in Godda and Dumka as well but lying outside his survey zone, he therefore had to satisfy himself with the observation that, 'this movement has been throughout the district in some form or other.'⁵⁷⁷ Within the Pakur Damin, where he conducted his tour, he noted that the villages of Paharpur, Udalbani, Taldih, Bhati, Dumarchi, Telopara in the Pakur subdivision had all turned Sapha Hor villages from the time of the civil disobedience movement of 1930s. They were believed to be active during the Assembly

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

elections of 1937, carrying white flags, collecting votes for the Congress, and spreading the news that if the Sapha Hors voted for the Congress, they would be free from payment of rents. In Dumarchir, Tialiapara in the Pakur Damin and Taljhari under the Godda subdivision, white flags were pitched.⁵⁷⁸ In Amrapara block, under the Pakur subdivision, half of the villagers of Bhatti, Udalbani and Paharpur had posted white flags and destroyed their swines and fowls. On his way to Alubera, Koomar documented that many Santals in the villages Chilgo, Sakalma and Bishunpur, under the Amrapara block in Pakur subdivision had converted to Sapha Hors during or after the Civil Disobedience movement. Their leaders Somail Santal of Kataldih bungalow of Godda sub-division, Budhrai Santal of Sakalma of Pakur subdivision, were active during the elections of 1937 spreading the ‘false rumour’ that by voting for the Congress they would be free from the payment of all arrears and in the future would pay rents at a reduced rate. Budhrai Santal was reported to attend all Congress meetings along with his Sapha Hor friends of Alubera and Amrapara of the Pakur subdivision.⁵⁷⁹ The *pradhans* of Baramasia and Udalbani under the Pakur subdivision had become Sapha Hors although the village possibly remained traditional Santal. On the way to Dharampur under Litipara tehsil, Koomar found some villages of Dhangara, Jordiha, Kaldam, Mahuatai and Litipara in Pakur subdivision had become Sapha Hor strongholds. The Sapha Hors *pradhans* of village Bhima Molha actively preached their creed convincing the Santals that they would have to pay less rent from the ‘month of *phagun*’ (March).⁵⁸⁰ This Koomar discerned was the primary reason for the popularity of Sapha Hors as many Santals joined the movement in the hope of paying reduced rents. When such reduction did not occur, the Sapha Hor leaders according to Koomar, shifted the responsibility onto the non-converted Santals saying that the matter was being delayed because of their indifference to the

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

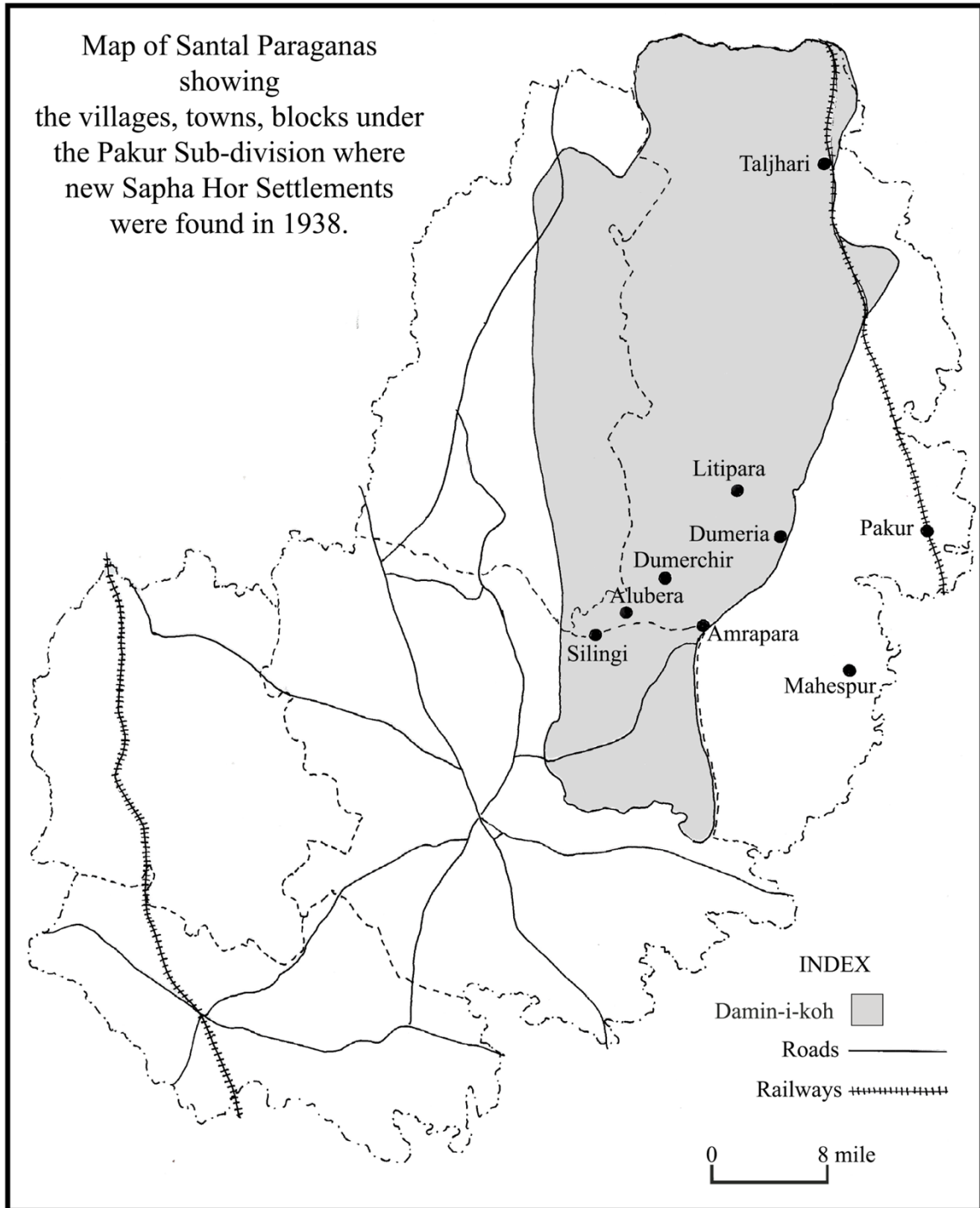
⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

Sapha Hor movement.⁵⁸¹ The Superintendent of Police, Santal Parganas, confidently reported to the various police headquarters in Patna, Muzzafarpur, Bhagalpur and Dumka that, ‘the movement was a religious and a political movement led by the Arya Samaj.’ The reason he stated was that, the sect follows the ‘doctrines’ of ‘orthodox Hinduism’ -such as becoming vegetarians, abstaining from meat or drinking and worshipping Hindu gods.’⁵⁸² What was relevant for our study is that the Sapha Hors in the area demarcated in the Map-3 along with the Saphas of the other parts of Damin played a significant role in the Quit India movement of 1942.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² R.C. Mc. Laren to DIG. CID. Patna, DIG. Muzzaffarpore, Commissioner Bhagalpur, Deputy Commissioner Dumka, dt. 16/4/1938, Political Special File 210/38, BSA. For the new Sapha Hors settlements, see Map-3 p188

MAP - 3



Source: 'The Sapha Hor Movement.' The personal diary of the sub-Inspector of Police, B.H. Koomar, Political Special, File 210/38. Bihar State Archives.

The report might have its confusion in the understanding of the categories in the Santal community.⁵⁸³ For that matter Koomar's way of historicizing the Sapha Hor movement was questioned by the District Commissioner i.e. the authorities who commissioned Koomar to collect information on the sect.⁵⁸⁴ At the same time, the District Commissioner acknowledged the importance of the report, its detailed field study based on close vigil over the sect. The report led to further queries and soon other reports followed confirming Koomar's findings. The subdivisional officer of Pakur found that fifty-sixty Santals had formed a Sapha Hor Association and were active in *elakas* (areas) under bungalows Amrapara, Alubera and Dumarchi in the Pakur subdivision inviting Santals to adopt the Congress creed assuring, them that rents would be remitted.⁵⁸⁵ What alarmed the colonial administration was this general clamour for reduction of rents among the Sapha Hors and the fact that Congress too had been talking about arrear of rents being written off in the Damin.⁵⁸⁶ Binodanand Jha, a Congressman who at the time was the acting Parliamentary Secretary, government of Bihar (1937-39) had a different pick on the matter. He referred to the already existing popular expectation around the Santal Pargana Enquiry Committee report due to be submitted in the district. Speaking on behalf of the Santals, he pointed out that, since every district was expecting remission of rents it was not an illegitimate desire on the part of the Santals to expect that their rents should be reduced. No matter what the difference of opinion was between Russell and Jha, what is important for the present study is that, Koomar's voluminous and painstaking report convinced the colonial

⁵⁸³ Koomar gave no reason as to why he thought the original Santals were not anti- government. Neither did he know that the lineage of the Sapha Hor sect went back to 1871. It was perhaps the Sapha Hors association with Congress leaders like Lambodhar Mukherjee that confirmed his suspicion that it was a political movement to enroll members to the Congress.

⁵⁸⁴ The Deputy Commissioner was aware that the Sapha Hor movement long preceded the civil disobedience movement that began in Hazaribagh in the Nineteen- thirties.

⁵⁸⁵ S.N. Sen, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to R.E. Russell, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, Patna, dt. 17/5/1938, 'The Sapha Hor Movement,' Political Special File 210/38, BSA.

⁵⁸⁶ Binodananda Jha to HPM, dt. 10/6/38, 'The Sapha Hor Movement,' Political special File 210/38, BSA.

officials that by the end of the 1930s that the Sapha Hors were a sizeable group in the Pakur subdivision and more importantly, ‘another name for the Congress.’⁵⁸⁷ Russell sent a special note to the Deputy Commissioner on the Congress leaders involved with the Sapha Hors and in the project of Hinduizing adivasis. Notable names among them were the Sapha Hor Santals- Charan Murmu, Debu Murmu. Lambodhar Mukherjee and Brijlal Dokania.⁵⁸⁸ What is important for our study however is to study whether the Sapha Hors were at all influenced by the propaganda of the different politically motivated groups or whether they were able to pursue their own brand of nationalism.

The Sapha Hor vision of Gandhi raj

The remarkable phenomenon that is worth looking into is that Sapha Hors were indeed constructing their own vision(s) of an imminent Gandhi *raj* in their own terms and in their own way at a time when the adivasi masses all over Bihar were awakened by the millenarian appeal of Gandhi. While we discuss the Sapha Hors envisioning of the Gandhi *raj*, this thesis also seeks to demonstrate the role of the Sapha Hors millenarian vision in the making of their ‘Gandhi’ and his ‘*raj*.’ It is difficult to identify the extent to which the Sapha Hor vision of Gandhi was derived from the imagining of Gandhi *raj* by other adivasi groups in the surrounding areas. Keeping in mind, the significance of rumour in the popular nationalist enthusiasm about Gandhi, it is important therefore to take a stock of the way in which a wave of messianic expectations

⁵⁸⁷ S.N. Singh, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to R.E. Russell, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar letter, dt. 17/5/38, Dumka, ‘The Sapha Hor movement,’ Political Special File 210/38, BSA.

⁵⁸⁸ R.E. Russell, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar to S.N. Sen, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, dt. 11/5/1938, ‘The Sapha Hor Movement,’ Political Special File 210/38, BSA.

about Gandhi spread all over the province and country.⁵⁸⁹ Indeed, it could be in the order of things to postulate that the Sapha Hors were co-constitutive in the making of this adivasi vision about Gandhi rather than being passive followers of what the other adivasi communities around them initiated.

Gandhi's successful intervention in the Champaran Satyagraha in 1917, as studies have shown, had turned him into a quasi- messianic figure in the eyes of the indigo cultivating peasants- an image that soon spread across the district.⁵⁹⁰ One *ryot* told the British officials that Gandhi was Ramchandra and another said he was sent by Viceroy or even the King and that his mandate overruled all local officials and the courts.⁵⁹¹ Varied sections of the Indian masses thus began to fashion their own images of Gandhi, especially in the initial days when he was still a distanced figure, vaguely glimpsed or heard-of-tale of a holy man with miracle –working powers.⁵⁹² Indeed the Birsait Bhagats imagined that Mahatma was an incarnation of Birsa Munda.⁵⁹³ The fact that Gandhi had made a mark on national politics became evident when the Non-Cooperation movement began on 12th February 1921. Eight thousand Tana Bhagats held a meeting at Kuru (Orissa) in support of the non cooperation movement.⁵⁹⁴ Even after the non-cooperation

⁵⁸⁹ For a detailed account of the appeal of Gandhi among the masses in Eastern U.P. see Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern U.P, 1921-22' in Ranajit Guha ed. *Subaltern Studies Volume III: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi:Oxford University Press, henceforth OUP, 1989) ps. 1-55.

⁵⁹⁰ Jacques Pouchepadass, 'Local Leaders and the Intelligentsia in the Champaran Satyagraha (1917): A Study in Peasant Mobilization' in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No.8 1974, Sage Publications, p.83. More than 8000 peasants came to Champaran to lay their grievances before Gandhi or his assistants in two months of his arrival to Champaran. ps. 67-87.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹² Sumit Sarkar, '*Popular*' Movements and '*Middle Class*' leadership in Late Colonial India: *Perspectives and Problems of a 'History from Below.'* (Delhi: Aakar, 2015) p.75.

⁵⁹³ K.S. Singh, *Birsa Munda and his Movement (1872-1901)* (Calcutta: Seagull, 2002), p.173.

⁵⁹⁴ K.K. Dutta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, volume 1, (Patna: Government of Bihar, 1957) p. 336.

movement was called off, it did not break the Tanas' morale to fight for independence. Eight hundred adivasis of Chotanagpur attended the Gaya session of Congress in December 1922.⁵⁹⁵

The high water mark in Congress activism in Bihar was the Civil disobedience movement (1929-30) which registered great activity particularly in the districts of Saran, Champaran and Muzaffarpur.⁵⁹⁶ The peasants and adivasis in different districts of Bihar as in many parts of India also played a significant role in authoring images of Gandhi that left a deep imprint on subaltern consciousness and expectations. New cultural symbols such as the *charkha*, *khadi*, or teetotalism, became increasingly acceptable to the adivasis as conditions for attaining *Swaraj*. In 1928-1929, Bonga Manjhi, of Hazaribagh seated himself in front of a Congress flag in his village in Borobera, invested his followers with the sacred thread (*jeneo*) and asked them to eschew meat. His disciple, Hopna Manjhi preached, '*jeneo* was a sign of being Gandhi's man' and it possessed charms that will make the *sarkar*'s (government's) bullets ineffective like water.⁵⁹⁷ On 19th July 1931, Duka Hari or Haribaba, a leader from among the Hos of Singhbhum, visited the Congress headquarters, at a time when the Congress had little contact with the adivasis of Singhbhum. It was after this visit that Haribaba began to preach non-payment of rents and the wearing of *khaddar*.⁵⁹⁸ In the Santal Parganas, Padru Paharia, Chandu Paharia and Surya Paharia who came from Sakrogarh in the Rajmahal Damin moved around the Paharia villages declaring that the British Raj had been abolished, that Gandhi *raj* had been established and within a month there would be a remission of rents. They would have to pay a tax of 4 *annas* per plough yoked

⁵⁹⁵ Mathew Areeparampil, *Struggle for Swaraj: A History of Adivasi Movement in Jharkhand*, (Chaibasa: TRTC, 2002) p.224.

⁵⁹⁶ Papiya Ghosh, 'The Civil Disobedience Movement in Bihar (1930-34) (New Delhi: Manak Publication, 2008) ps. 61-62.

⁵⁹⁷ Note by Deputy Inspector General of Police, Bihar and Orissa, dt. 8/6/30 in Political Special File 25/1930, BSA.

⁵⁹⁸ Sanjukta Dasgupta, 'Encountering Colonial Modernity: British Rule and the Hos of Singhbhum', in Kaushik Bandyopadhyay ed., *Interrogating Modernities: Perspectives on Asian History* (Kolkata: Setu, 2009) p.110.

with bullocks and 8 *annas* per plough yoked with buffalo. When arrested Pandru explained that he was only preaching, '*dharma ki baat*(word of religion).'⁵⁹⁹ Donda Paharia of Choto Basko posted white flags similar to those used by the Sapha Hor villages in Dumarchir. But his visions of Gandhi *raj* was directed against their age old rivals, the Santals. Donda Paharia told the Paharia folk that the Santals had driven them from the top of the hill and from all their good lands. As a result, they possessed no fertile lands now except a few *kuraons* which were quite insufficient for their livelihood. But if they adopted Gandhi *dharam*, destroyed the swine and the fowls and pitched white flags they would get back the good jungles that rightfully belonged to them.⁶⁰⁰

In order to control the groundswell, the Congress leaders did not contradict the local level narratives that were being weaved around Gandhi. Mathura Prasad, a close associate of Rajendra Prasad was ready to indulge the adivasis in their own narrative about Gandhi only because he thought that the belief in the supernatural was so integral to the adivasi world view that without indulging it the adivasis could not be mobilized. So in a speech delivered in Borobera, on 15th February 1930, Mathura Prasad himself said, 'God will come to earth and render the swords or guns of enemies useless.' He quickly reconstituted the Hos' imagination of Gandhi as messiah by almost silently introducing the notion of *khaddar*, 'if a Santal is killed, he will be brought back to life when Bonga Manjhi wraps the body in *khaddar* and pours milk on it.'⁶⁰¹ He did not have to be too ingenious in doing so because already among the subalterns of the region, a narrative of the *khaddar* possessing sacred powers was in circulation as was the the *charkha*

⁵⁹⁹M.N, Sen, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to Toplis, Deputy Commissioner's office, Dumka, dt. 4/6/30; Political Special 181/30, BSA.

⁶⁰⁰ Personal Diary of C.H. Koomar, CSI, dt. 1/3/38; Political special File 210/38, BSA.

⁶⁰¹ 'Congress Propaganda among Santals,' Memo, dt. 11/3/30; Political Special File 25/1930 BSA.

being seen as the symbol of *Swaraj* or sometimes even the ‘*sudarshan chakra* of lord Krishna’; the weapon of destruction with which Krishna destroyed the forces of evil.⁶⁰² All throughout the Chotanagpur plateau this frenzied expectation of Gandhi *raj* initiated illuminating signs of an immanent changing world order. As a part of this milieu the Sapha Hors also came to interpret their own vision of freedom through their own discursive symbols.

The participation of the Sapha Hor in the Civil Disobedience however is not immediately apparent from the existing archival records. This is intriguing though. The present scholars’ sense of bewilderment at not finding any noticeable trace of Sapha Hor participation in the Civil disobedience movement in the colonial archives was ultimately dispelled by two significant kind of sources. One not from colonial archives but from a collection of Sapha Hor songs that directly indicated how Gandhi *baba* and Gandhi *raj* figured prominently and seemed to refer to the period of the Civil disobedience movement when wild expectation of Gandhi *raj* was anyway pervasive all over Bihar. The other source is interestingly an archival one; the detailed report prepared expressly on the Sapha Hors by the specially commissioned police officer C.H. Koomar and his categorical reference to the movement which he traced to the Civil disobedience movement.

As it appears from the report, there were several local leaders among the Sapha Hors who were Congress flag bearers preparing for Gandhi *raj* in their own terms. Somai Santal of Kotaldih, in

⁶⁰² See Sadan Jha, ‘Charkha, ‘Dear Forgotten Friend’ of Widows; Reading the Erasures of a Symbol,’ in *Economic and Political Weekly, (Special Article)*, July 10, 2004, p. 3116. There were other instances where the dignity of the women was emphasized to justify the necessity of promoting charkha. The ‘*sudarshan chakra*’ or the charkha was supposed to break the chain of slavery. So it was argued that it was the duty of the nationalist to cut off the fetters of bondage and save Mother India from being stripped naked like Draupadi. For further discussion on the new symbols of nationalism see Lata Singh, *Popular Translation of Nationalism (1920-22)* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2002) p. 108.

Godda subdivision, Larga Santal, Khaira Santal of Telai Para bungalow and Budhrai Santal of Jethke of bungalow Alubera claimed that Gandhi *raj* had arrived and so they must adopt themselves to the laws of the new *raj*. The norms of the new *raj* reiterated the commands of Bhagirath Manjhi explained some sixty years before- such as abstaining from pork and fowl along with new instructions and injunctions. All Sapha Hors were asked to pitch the white flag given to them by the leaders as a mark of their allegiance to Gandhi. They were to be specifically white in colour, rectangular in shape and was to fly high above their houses. The Sapha Hors were required to surround themselves in auspicious symbols. Every house should have *tulsi* plant built on a small podium.⁶⁰³ The Sapha Hors even narrativized Congress membership of 4 *annas* in their own terms. All Sapha Hors would receive a chit of paper on payment of 4 *annas*, which would protect them from all fears and evils of this world. They could pay rent in cash or kind according to their will. But if the Sapha Hors chose to disobey the commands of the new *raj*, the Congress along with ‘their police’ would take disciplinary actions. They would destroy the swine and fowls and bury them in the courtyard of the disobedient men. The carcasses would decompose on that very ground and the disobedient would have to pay for all the men who gathered as witness to their punishment.⁶⁰⁴ Thus in the new narrative, the police was the agency of power now controlled by the Congress. It was their responsibility to ensure that the disciplinary measures arrogated in the name of Gandhi was enforced perhaps for the unity of the movement and for an unquestionable reliance on the central Congress leadership. Thus even as Congress activists, the Sapha Hors support for the Gandhian movement was deeply inscribed by their own agency. The present research proposes to read Koomar’s report in tandem with Sapha

⁶⁰³ Personal Diary of C.H. Koomar, CSI, dt. 1/3/38; Political special File 210/38, BSA.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

Hor songs which in unequivocal terms expressed its support for the Congress political agendas including the war against salt tax, begun by Gandhi on 6th April 1929.

Ram, Ram

Brother, give up liquor and meat

Give up hen and pig.

Take bath everyday.

Boycott the court.

Boycott foreign clothes

Wear khaddar and put on holy thread

Do not eat foreign salt.

Then Gandhi Raj will come

Our Swaraj will come. Ram Ram ⁶⁰⁵

The song recalled Bhagirath's moral codes preached some thirty years back, to give up pigs and hens, to bathe daily, to give up liquor. At the same time keeping with the changing times it also talked about contemporary Congress agendas such as boycott of courts, the foreign clothes and salt tax- all symbols of colonial oppression. The song mentioned *khaddar*; although one can not

⁶⁰⁵ Ram, Ram, Boehako,
Paura, jel bagipe,
Sim, sukri bagikope,
Din hitok dabrakpe,
Sarkari adalot chibanpe,
Bideshi kicric chibanpe,
Khaddar harogepe, poita harogepe,
Bideshi bulun alope joma,
Tobege Gandhiraj hijujka,
Aboak swaraj hijuka, Ram, Ram.

Source: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/66007/13/13_appendix.pdf .

We have no means of knowing the author who has collected the Sapha Hor songs. Since these have been used in the present thesis the present author acknowledges the great effort that went behind collecting them.

say with certainty whether and if so how far the Sapha Hors adopted *khaddar*. We can assume that the Sapha Hors were perhaps trying to reconstitute their pre-existing world view in sync with the Congress movement of 1930s. We also know that some followers of Lambodhar Mukherjee wore red dyed *khaddar*, as noted in the third chapter. But wearing *khaddar* was perhaps a personal cult that Lambodhar Mukherjee had initiated among his followers. However in the larger political canvas, with *khaddar* appearing in the Gandhian discourse as the sole remedy for the dwindling handloom industry and traditional sector in general, its appeal among the countrymen was unquestionably on the rise.⁶⁰⁶ In November 1930, a large gathering of 3000-4000 Santals at Bisaha bill, three miles from Godda met to discuss *khadi* among other agendas. A few days later they again clashed with the police during another meeting in which fifty-seven Santals were arrested. An armed police was marched through the disturbed area to dismiss any notion that the Gandhi *raj* had been established.⁶⁰⁷

While we cannot say for certain how far the Sapha Hors had adopted *Khaddar*, the Congress temperance movement we know had a ready acceptability among the Sapha Hors. The act of abstention from liquor was an old practice of the Sapha Hors and explains their ready response to the Congress call for temperance as reflected in this Sapha Hor song,

Brother, destroy the tavern

Liquor is the cause of our ruin,

Believe in serving humanity, repose your faith in Ram,

Repose your faith in Gandhi Baba, Ram, Ram.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ Sadan Jha, 'Charkha, 'Dear Forgotten Friend' op cit, ps. 3113-3120.

⁶⁰⁷ Papiya Ghosh, *The Civil Disobedience Movement in Bihar*, op cit, p.118.

⁶⁰⁸ Ram, Ram, Boehako Paura bhati rapudpe
Paura aboak sorbonas reak karon kana

The Sapha Hors had so long talked about cleansing the mind and body by abstaining from killing animals, giving up alcohol. As a part of the new cultural agenda however, the Sapha Hors equated liquor as a cause of social ill thereby resonating Congress propaganda behind the temperance movement popularized from the 1930s. All songs however ended in the hope of the coming *Swaraj*, a millennial dream which the Sapha Hors conceived through their own dreams.

Ram, Ram,

Gandhi Baba,

Gandhi Baba, Gandhi Raj will come,

Swaraj will come.

We will get back our independent kingdom, Ram, Ram. ⁶⁰⁹

While Gandhi himself in *Hind Swaraj*, did talk about a code of conduct to regulate one's own life- chastity, adopting poverty, cultivating fearlessness.⁶¹⁰ For the common man however *Swaraj* embodied not codes of conduct but rather wild millenarian expectations. For the Tana Bhagats, *Swaraj* signified a rule where Tanas were the lords and decision would be taken in the Panchayats; it symbolized the *raj* of the Oraons where land would be theirs alone.'⁶¹¹ For the Sapha Hors Gandhi *raj* merged with *Swaraj* where they would be ruled by the laws of the new *raj*. They posted the white flag and carried the 'chit of paper' that would protect them from all fears and

Manwitet orjoupe, Ramre tehadokpe, Ram, Ram.

shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/66007/13/13_appendix.pdf

⁶⁰⁹ Ram, Ram Gandhibaba, Gandhibaba

Gandhiraj hijuka, nij raj hijuka

Sadhin rajbo Jiam ruara. Ram, Ram.

⁶¹⁰ Rudrangshu Mukherjee, 'Gandhi's Swaraj' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 44, No. 50, December 12-15, 2009.

⁶¹¹ Sangeeta Dasgupta, 'Mapping Histories,' op cit, p. 118.

evils of this world.⁶¹² They were in fact talking about an independent country again. In popular imagination Gandhi himself was no longer a mere leader in flesh and blood. One newspaper reported of a drifting cloud that was seen to be changing shape in the sky; first it appeared as the four-armed Vishnu and then assumed the shape of Gandhi before it disappeared.⁶¹³ People were found to be reading the Gandhi chalisa.⁶¹⁴ Gandhi had become a Mahatma to the people.⁶¹⁵

From the end of Civil Disobedience to the initiation of Quit India movement: an interlude.

The Civil disobedience movement was repressed through out the country and the Santal country blended into this wider picture of the waning of the movement. What is important for our study however is to emphasize that the millenarian expectations of deliverance from colonial rule into a dream of the Santals regaining their own country also subsided once the movement petered out. In order to situate the Sapha Hors' world during the period 1932-42 within the wider currents of nationalist politics we have to understand how the dominant template of Congress activities also changed from the Civil disobedience template in the meantime. We therefore pause here to take stock of how the pattern of the movement was changing and what was its significance for the Sapha Hors.

In the post Civil disobedience period, a significant development was the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935 which proposed that India would become a federation comprising of British Indian provinces and Princely States. The Act provided for the introduction of the ruling system based on provincial autonomy under which an elected ministry was expected

⁶¹² Personal Diary of C.H. Koomar, CSI, dt. 1/3/38; Political special File 210/38, BSA.

⁶¹³ Lata Singh, op cit, p. 33-34.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Shahid Amin, Gandhi as Mahatma, op cit, ps. 1-55.

to perform all of the provincial administration. For the first time in colonial India, Indian governments would be responsible to the elected legislatures. At the center however Indian would have no control over the subjects reserved for the British, namely diplomacy and defence.⁶¹⁶ The passing of the Act ushered in a shift in the nature of political activism as all major political parties began to prepare for the ensuing elections to the provincial assembly. The All India Congress office instructed all districts to remodel their committees, to arrange for the opening of ashrams in every *thana*(police station) manned by a permanent Congress agent and for the enrollment of the full quota of the members in the new constitution in six months. Even the British administrators admitted that there was really no party in the province except the Congress and its prestige was unimpaired.⁶¹⁷ It did not come as a surprise therefore when in the 1937 Provincial Assembly elections, Congress won a majority of seats and formed their ministry in Bihar in April 1937.⁶¹⁸ Its political and ideological programme in Bihar, especially the Congress and the Kishan Sabha coalition, enabled the Congress to successfully build the largest possible alliance between different classes under which the lower and subordinate classes were mobilized.⁶¹⁹ However, this integrative character of the Congress according to Vinita Damodaran eroded with its acceptance of office in 1937 as political situations and pressures on the Congress shifted dramatically. As a party in power the Congress was forced to fall back on the institutions of imperial predecessors and often forced to reproduce the structures of imperial authority.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁶ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983) p. 336

⁶¹⁷ Local Government Reports for 1934, L/PJ/12/474, IOL

⁶¹⁸ Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and Congress Party in Bihar 1935-47* (New Delhi: OUP, 1992) p. 63.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 8

⁶²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 8-9. The biggest fall out occurred over the Kishan Sabha movement which had swept north and central Bihar in the late 1930s. Once in power all resolutions on the abolition of zamindari was forgotten. The Bihar ministry faced with the civil disobedience of the zamindars watered down the tenancy bill in September 1936 and Maulana Azad and Rajendra Prasad negotiated a secret agreement with the landlords in Patna. This was happening at a time when the Kishan sabha membership shot to half a million in 1938 with Bihar alone claiming 2,50,000 members. The Congress ministry took an increasingly hostile attitude towards the kishan sabha militancy and

One significant change came in the distribution of power at the provincial level of administration. Adivasis from the Santal Parganas was now represented in the assembly by Sapha Hor Santals who had earned for themselves the honour 'babu' in the official records; Charan Murmu (MLA) Debu Murmu (MLA), Chandu Paharia of Chtotobasho (began a movement among the Kuarbhaga Pahariya). The other member from the Santal Parganas was Brij Lal Dokania (MLA).⁶²¹

In the 1940s, another significant development in Bengal which had its bearing on the politics of the Santal Parganas was the formation of the Forward Bloc (henceforth FB). The new party was launched by Subhas Bose on 3rd May 1940 initially with the intentions of working from within the Congress but after being ousted from the position of the President of Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee(PCC) on 11th August 1940, Forward Bloc became a party in its own right. Apparently it might appear far fetched that Subhas Bose had any track in the Santal Parganas. But what is often missed is the role of Bengalis many of them with former revolutionary links had their base in Deoghar and Dumka. Hence political spin offs initiated in Bengal often spilled over into the Santal Parganas. Moreover, Subhas Bose by his charisma was independently emerging as the most popular regional hero in Bengal with pockets of personal influence in Bihar, Punjab, Bombay and Tamilnadu.⁶²² In Santal Parganas his popularity among the Bengali /Bihari middle classes based in Deoghar and Dumka accounted for the growing importance of Forward Bloc as a political party.

Section 144 was freely used in Congress ruled Bihar against Kishan agitation. On 8th and 9th March 1940 the split between the CSP and the Kishan Sabha was complete at Dumrao.

Santal Parganas lying in the east of the district remained in contrast largely unaffected by the massive upsurge of the Kisan movement, Political Special 18/1933, BSA.

⁶²¹ 'The Sapha Hor Movement'; Political special File 210/38, BSA.

⁶²² Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, op cit, p. 374.

In the beginning of the 1940s, the form of agitation advocated by the two political parties in the Santal Parganas was distinctively different. The Congress under Gandhi declared that it was not yet ready for a mass agitation and leaned towards a more passive form of agitation in the form of Individual Satyagraha which was passed by the Ramgarh Congress of March 1940. The Forward Bloc on the contrary was eager for a more militant anti-war, anti-government agitation. This was also the period marked by a noticeable shift in allegiance as many of the former Congress members became FB activists in the Santal Parganas. The most important FB leaders of this period were Sarbanand Mishra, Lambodhar Mukherjee, his wife Usha Rani Mukherjee (president of Santal Pargana Forward Bloc) who worked with prominent Santal and Sapha Hor activists like Pagan Marandi, Lal Hembrom, Bhuku Murmu and Chandrai Tudu. In the events of the period, it is impossible to segregate the Sapha Hor activities from the Santals, but considering the fact some Sapha Hors were followers of Lambodhar Mukherjee we can risk the assumption that they were active participants in the anti-colonial agitations organised by the Forward Bloc in the district.

With the ongoing World War in the background, the FB in the Santal Parganas organized sabhas, agitated for no-rent to the landlords, asked people not to pay taxes to the Government or help them in the war efforts. They shouted anti war slogans and forbid payment of chaukidari taxes. Between January- June 1940, all Forward Bloc leaders along with Legu Hembrom, Dhanai Baske and Sido Hembrom were detained for such seditious activities banned by the Revolutionary Movements Ordinance passed in May 1940.⁶²³ The FB in Bihar also established links with the Kishan Sabha after the latter's formal break with Congress in April 1939 and the Santal Parganas for the first time witnessed a series of Kishan-Forward Bloc agitations in the

⁶²³ Governor's report January- June 1940, L/PG/5/175, IOL

Santal Parganas.⁶²⁴ On 12th November 1940, a procession of Kishans and Santals planned with the intention of interfering with the war week celebration was stopped under 144 IPC. But a private meeting held that evening in the house of a local Forward Bloc leader passed a resolutions seeking government exemption from payment of revenue, remission of chaukidari tax etc.⁶²⁵ On 20th November 1940, a large number of Santal Kishans attended a meeting organized by the Forward Bloc led by Sarbanand Misra, Lal Hembrom, Pagan Marandi. After the gathering, five hundred Santals tried to force a meeting with the Deputy Commissioner with their demands but were ultimately dissuaded by the local officers who advised them to send representatives from each village with proper petitions. On 20th September 1941, Sheel Bhadra Yajee (former Kishan Sabha leader) president of the FB along with Lambodhar Mukherjee and Sarbanand Misra spoke at a meeting at Dumka which was attended by 300 Santals. Their primary agenda was the formation of a National Defence Council.⁶²⁶ Such efforts on the part of the FB continued through the most part of the early 1942. By the first half of January 1942, L. Mukherjee and Sarbanand Misra claimed that they had enrolled 800 Santals in the Forward Bloc National Defense Brigade. On 16th January 1942, at the Forward Bloc Conference held in Pakur and attended by 300 Santals, L. Mukherjee and Sarbanand Misra delivered their usual attacks on the British government, criticizing the Congress while they praised Subhas Bose.⁶²⁷ Their resolutions dealt with agrarian grievances, condemned oppressive legislation and declared sympathy with the Soviets. The Commissioner of Bhagalpur was alarmed that the FB was giving

⁶²⁴ All through 1938-39 the cleavage between the Congress and the Kishan sabha widened. And finally the break was openly discussed at the AIKS conference held in Gaya in April 1939. Sahajanand and few other Kishan sabha members joined Bose's FB. See Vinita Damodaran, op cit, p.155.

⁶²⁵ Governor's report for July-December 1940; L/PJ/5/175, IOL.

⁶²⁶ The Viceroy Linlithgow's August offer (8th August 1940) was rejected by the Congress, because it offered no time limit within which the Constitution assembly would be set up. Under war pressure, the Viceroy's Executive council was expanded giving Indians the majority in August 1941. A National Defence Council was set up to give advise to the government.

⁶²⁷ Bihar Governor's Report for 1942, L/PJ/5/177. The FB was banned on 22/06/1942, IOL

the aboriginals the idea that they were at liberty to seize lands from which they were evicted for arrears of rent.⁶²⁸ With the FB activities on the rise, an alarmed Government declared most of the 'Forward Blockists' as 'the fifth columnist' and detained their leaders under the Defence of India, Rule 26 in March 1942.⁶²⁹

The Congress, on the other hand, continued to organize Individual Satyagraha at its own pace in the period between 1940-1. At its height in June 1941 about 20,000 (all India figure) had had courted arrest although the movement petered out by the autumn of 1941.⁶³⁰ The nature and the political implications of the Individual Satyagraha campaign according to Vinita Damodaran was however important because it was a Gandhian strategy to keep the anti-imperialist struggle alive in the mass mind. Obscure individuals from villages were chosen to offer Satyagraha, by which Gandhi sought to take the movement to the villages and make it a popular one.⁶³¹

What changed the situation was Germany's invasion of Russia and the dramatic Japanese drive through South East Asia, which in four months swept the British out of Malaya, Singapore and Burma.⁶³² As 1942 progressed, the withdrawal of the war-wounded men from the Burma front across northern India, the return of the migrants from Calcutta, Burma, Malaya and elsewhere, news of the British retreat under the Japanese onslaught, some even carrying live evidence of it in the form of posters dropped by Japanese airplanes –were events that inspired the coming

⁶²⁸ Freedom Movement 1940. Confidential Fortnightly report on Political Events in Bihar. Political Department (Special section); BSA. Also see Bihar Governor's Report for the second half of December 1941; Government of Bihar, Political Department, Special Section. L/PJ/5/176, IOL

⁶²⁹ Bihar Governor's Report for 1942, L/PJ/5/177, IOL .

⁶³⁰ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, op cit, p. 383.

⁶³¹ Vinita Damodaran, op cit, p. 181.

⁶³² Sumit Sarkar, op cit, p. 384.

groundswell.⁶³³ The bulk of the Congress leadership and rank were probably unenthusiastic when the Cripps Mission began an attempt at negotiations with the Indian political parties.⁶³⁴ On 8th August 1942, All India Congress Committee called for mass civil disobedience to force the British to Quit India. The British reacted with speed. The Indian National Congress was declared an illegal organization, its offices were closed and all the important leaders were put behind the bars. The arrest of the leaders however unleashed an unprecedented and country wide wave of mass fury leading to a massive revolt that swept across India. The four storm centres in 1942 were Northern and Western Bihar, eastern UP, Midnapore in Bengal, pockets in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Orissa.⁶³⁵ Bihar was one of the provinces which actively responded to Gandhi's call for Quit India. Patna was cut off from all districts except Gaya. Nearly 80% of the police stations were in the rebels' hands or had to be temporarily evacuated in the ten districts of north and central Bihar. There was considerable adivasi participation too, for a Congress source estimated the numbers killed to be the highest in Hazaribagh.⁶³⁶ Sub-divisional officers of Bihar helplessly reported several incidents of popular governments being set up, in some cases with active support of the lower levels of local administration.⁶³⁷ For weeks the British found themselves unprepared to control the situation and it took a considerable time for them to recover and restore the structure of policing and repression in the province. In the Confidential Fortnightly Report, the Governor admitted that there was a near collapse of administration, 'In this province of Bihar, the storm broke with exceptional fury and the Bihar police were called

⁶³³ Gyan Pandey, 'The Revolt of August 1942 in Eastern UP and Bihar', in Gyanendra Pandey ed. *The Indian Nation in 1942*, (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences and KP Bagchi and Co. 1988), p. 154.

⁶³⁴ Sumit Sarkar op cit, p. 388.

⁶³⁵ Ibid, p. 399.

⁶³⁶ Ibid, p. 400.

⁶³⁷ Vinita Damodaran, op cit, p. 232.

upon to bear a strain which brought them near to a breaking point.’⁶³⁸ The Viceroy informed the British government that this was ‘by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security.’⁶³⁹ Rebels fought under the banner of nationalism and reports of district officials from each of the districts had their own story to tell.

Quit India movement and the Sapha Hors in the Santal Parganas

The Quit India movement which began on the 8th August had by 15th of August spread rapidly touching all corners of the Santal Parganas. According to official reports, the Congress agitators were moving into the interiors of Damini spreading the news that the British government has come to an end and the opportunity was ripe to claim *Swaraj*.⁶⁴⁰ The government watched helplessly the way in which large scale destruction of government property ensued in complete defiance of British rule - a trend that was becoming common throughout British India. Railway lines, telegraph post, telegraph and telephone wires were damaged, official documents in several post offices burnt, large number of liquor shops destroyed or looted, many police stations attacked and Congress flags posted there in the place of the Union Jack. All sub-divisional jails and district jails had become so overcrowded that the prisoners found excuses to defy jail rules. Making matters worse for the administration, the Chaukidars refused cooperation thereby preventing government officials from securing information from the interiors of the district.

⁶³⁸ Freedom Movement 1943; Confidential Fortnightly Report on Political Events in Bihar of Political Department (Special Section), Government of Bihar, BSA

⁶³⁹ Quoted in Stephen Henningham, ‘Quit India in Bihar and United provinces: The Dual Revolt’ in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies II, Writings on South Asian History and Society*, (New Delhi: OUP, 1983), p. 136.

⁶⁴⁰ Among the local people, an important means of popular communications was through the medium of rumour. So the news of Japanese advance into India was taken as evident encouraging speculations about the ability of the colonial state to survive the calamity. See Vinita Damodaran, op cit, p. 216-7.

According to one official report, the movement was not confined to the Congress alone; people from all parts and all allegiances appeared to be enthused by the 'lawless atmosphere' and resorted to 'hooliganism'⁶⁴¹ Historians are not surprised that there were no attacks on the Europeans; as one historian insightfully observed, the masses only targeted government property as if these were open attacks on the physical presence of colonial rule and constituted a final violent assault on colonial hegemony.⁶⁴²

All important leaders in the Santal Parganas like Binodanand Jha, Ashok Kumar Bose of the Congress, Usharani Mukherjee, Baleswar Rai, Budhinath Jha, Charan Murmu, Gaurishankar Dalmia, Motilal Khejriwal of the Forward Bloc were arrested.⁶⁴³ Lambodhar Mukherjee of FB already under house arrest in Motihari in 1941 was sent to the Patna camp and then shifted to the Hazaribagh. The movement that erupted in 1942 turned out to be quite different from anything that the Congress High Command had anticipated when they raised the slogan, 'Quit India' and prescribed the mantra, 'Do or Die.'⁶⁴⁴ It was the students who were the first to come out in open rebellion in the districts immediately after the arrest of the leading leaders of the district. On 11th August the police opened fire on a procession marching to the Patna Secretariat building in which seven people were killed, all of them students. The people of Santal Parganas did not take time to join the upheaval and in the period between 12-15th August 1942, school students from Godda, primary school teachers from Dumka, women volunteers from Rampurhat visited village Maluti in the Dumka sub-division to take part in the agitation.⁶⁴⁵ The colonial officers noted with

⁶⁴¹ D.O. No. 2068, Letter from BN Singh, Deputy Commissioner's Office to Mr. Godebole, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar; Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

⁶⁴² Vinita Damodaran, op cit, p. 231.

⁶⁴³ Political Special, 27/1942, BSA.

⁶⁴⁴ See Gyanendra Pandey, op, cit, p. 155.

⁶⁴⁵ D.O. 2070/C, Letter from BN Singh Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to R.K. Gokhale, the Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division, Dumka, dt. 26/8/42; Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

much relief that these agitations were sporadic and did not receive much response from the locals.⁶⁴⁶ The movement soon began to change its character when large scale destruction of railway tracks, telegraph posts, telephone wires began. The residents of the East Indian Railway Company of Sahibgunj petitioned to the Commissioner of the Bhagalpur Division stating a complete break down of law and order when Sahibgunj was completely cut off from all communications⁶⁴⁷

If the colonial authorities in the district were found napping about the spirit of the resistance to colonialism among the Sapha Hors through most of the first three decades of the 20th century- except for Koomar who noted Sapha Hor participation in the Civil disobedience movement- the participation of the Sapha Hors in 1942 was too prominent to be overlooked. Recalling the nightmarish experiences of the anti-census agitation of the Sapha Hors in 1881, a jittery colonial government remarked that the Sapha Hors had started ‘the mischief again,’ when they registered a series of destruction of government property in the Damin in August 1942.⁶⁴⁸

On 24th August the District Commissioner’s office informed that one thousand Sapha Hors and Paharias formed themselves into ‘mobs’ in the Damin and were preparing to move from place to place. The government panicked that if this ‘mob’ initiated ‘raids,’ they would surely be joined by others thus provoking a general Santal disturbance in all parts of the district, particularly in the Damin which was always a center of Santal agitation.⁶⁴⁹ Soon after, on 26th August the sub-

⁶⁴⁶ D.O. No 2136/C, Letter from B.N. Singh, Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas to R.K. Gokhale, Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division, Dumka, dt. 30/8/42; Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

⁶⁴⁷ SCRO Bhagalpur no 92/42-43. Report on Civil Disobedience Movement submitted to Chief Secretary 1942-43, BSA.

⁶⁴⁸ D.O. No. 2068, Letter from B.N. Singh, Deputy Commissioner’s Office to Mr. Godebole, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar; Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid

divisional officer of Deoghar reported that the Sarath police station in Deoghar sub-division had been burnt, the police staff had been assaulted and their guns had been snatched away by a ‘mob’ of seven thousand Sapha Hors.

It is significant that a major part of what the British considered as ‘loot and and destruction’ was directed against the forest quarters, bungalows and the liquor shops. Of these the vendetta against the liquor shops constituted the most important aspect of the anti-colonial outrage in all parts of the district. In the official records on the destruction of government property, many a times the officials reporting the 1942 movement generically used the name Santals although that did not preclude the Sapha Hors from these anti-government acts. The question is why and how the Sapha Hors were so eager to destroy liquor shops? Was it because the opposition to liquor was integral to their self cleansing drive or was it because the Congress through the temperance movement was appealing to the anti-liquor sentiments among the Sapha Hors? Of course temperance was a strategy poised on two strategic concerns-one was to cultivate moral self image for the Congress led nation while the other was more materialistic;⁶⁵⁰ to strike at the roots of colonial economy by depriving the government of the high receipts from excise; after all mahua and pachwai/rice beer, so pervasively consumed in the Santal Parganas constituted the

⁶⁵⁰ In a study Robert Eric Colvard traces the how temperance activism came to be an important facet of the struggle for Indian independence. He explores the emergence of the “abstemious Indian” as an invented tradition constitutive of Indian national identity, how the elites used coercion to enforce this invented tradition among Indian drinkers. His study shows -what began as a concerted effort of western missionaries, Indian politicians and temperance was gradually taken over by Congress who gradually established an upper hand in the crusade against drinking. By 1930s the Congress working Committee along with the Congress prohibition committee chaired by Rajaji began an organized campaign against alcohol consumption through anti-drink sabhas, signing pledges, temperance dramas, house visits, formation of volunteer corps. See Robert Eric Colvard, ‘A World Without Drink: Temperance in Modern India, 1880-1940’, University of Iowa. Iowa Research Online. PhD thesis, University of Iowa, 2013. [hp://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/2464](http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/2464).

second largest source of revenue for the British government.⁶⁵¹ The answer probably lies in all those factors re-enforcing one another and creating formidable wave of resentment against liquor shops. What is important is that the region where the Sapha Hors lived produced a series of attacks on the liquor shops.⁶⁵²

On 15th August, there was attack on the Firozpur liquor shop followed by successive loots; liquor shop in Bhagya on 18th August and liquor shops in Mahagama, Basantrai and Lohandia bazar on 19th August, all in the Godda subdivision. On 22th August, 500-1000 Santals destroyed the liquor shop at Susni in the south Godda Damin. On 25th August, 400-500 Santals, Paharias and Mahulis picketed the liquor shop at Jaruah, ID, South under the Dumka sub-division. On the 27th August, 50-60 Santals led by Lagu Hembrom and others entered the Pachoi shop at Ranga Mashi in Dumka sub-division and destroyed the earthen pots there. On 28th August, the Sapha Hors burnt the liquor shop at Ghatchora (Pakur SD). On 29th August, 14 to 20 Congress volunteers of Rikhia and Kukraha under P.S. Sarath along with 100 Santals and Mohulis visited Karon in the Deoghar subdivision, raided the liquor shop and set fire to a refugee camp. On 2nd September, the liquor shop in Asanbani under Dumka Subdivision was burnt by the Sapha Hors who then extorted rice from the shop keepers of the place. Similarly, on 3rd September, the liquor shop at Simla in Circle Masanjore was also burnt by the Santals. The Sapha Hors under Lal Hembrom visited Gandharpur in ID South, attacked the liquor shop, damaged all the earthen pots containing liquor, closed the shop forcibly and seized one maund of rice from the villagers. The

⁶⁵¹ David Hardiman, 'From Custom to Crime: The Politics of Drinking in Colonial South Gujrat' in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. (New Delhi: OUP, 1985), p. 165.

⁶⁵² Freedom Movement 1943; Confidential Fortnightly Report on Political Events in Bihar of Political Department (Special Section), Government of Bihar, BSA.

same group of Sapha Hors led by Lal Hembrom then burnt the liquor shop at Baramasia and proceeded towards village Palasi in the Dumka sub-division.⁶⁵³

The other target of attack was the inspection bungalows and the *dak* bungalows.⁶⁵⁴ The *dak* bungalows were built originally on the *dak* route which later became the inspection bungalows for the British officers. Besides being used as residence by the colonial officers when they were on official tours, the *dak* bungalows served as post offices and therefore was an important link in the colonial mail service especially for the collection of information from the different layers of administration, whether it was the district, sub-division or the block level. These bungalows and the forest guard quarters became an obvious target for the Santals who were not only too keen to disrupt the communication networks but destroy all sites which had so long helped in the surveillance of their activities especially in the forest areas. The anger against such agencies of control lead to a series of attacks on the *dak* bungalows and the forest guard quarters. On 22th August, 500-1000 Santals gathered in the South Godda Damin and proceeded to Susni where they burnt the forest guard quarters. On the 25th August, the Alubera dak bungalow, Forest guard quarters and excise shop was burnt. Soon after that the Damin Bungalow at Silingi and the Narganj Bungalow under Dumka sub-division was burnt. A group of four hundred, mostly Sapha Hors and Paharias, burnt the quarters of forest-guard and the Damin bungalow at Alubera in the Pakur Sub-division and exorted money from a liquor vendor. The same ‘mob, the officer reported, armed with bows, arrows and *tangis*, burnt the forest bungalow and the forest guard’s

⁶⁵³ D.O. No. 2068, Letter from B.N. Singh, Deputy Commissioner’s Office to Mr. Godebole, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar; Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

⁶⁵⁴ *Dak* was a system of mail delivery.

quarter at Dumarchir in Pakur Sub-Dvision allegedly after ‘drinking 55 gallons of liquor’.⁶⁵⁵ In the Pakur sub-division a mob including some red shirt volunteers destroyed the liquor shops at Pakhuria on 30th August.⁶⁵⁶

The extent of the Sapha Hor participation in 1942 and the scale of their activism was so pervasive that government surveillance was greatly enhanced. But they continued to be greatly perplexed by the volumes of information that poured in of several attacks that were in the offing. In several instances, on receiving information on forthcoming raids, the military was immediately rushed in only to find that none of the rebels were actually present. There are several such instances of false alarms. The ID inspector of Dumka Damin was tipped off that Narganj bungalow would be burnt by the Sapha Hors. The troops were rushed in but the Sapha Hors did not appear. Similar incident was repeated in Ranewar on 30th August and in Karudih, Gopikandar, Saldaha and Katikund bungalows all in Dumka Damin on 1st September.⁶⁵⁷

The question that can be raised here is, were the Sapha Hors simply being led by the elite leadership be it the Congress or the Forward Bloc? While addressing the question we remind ourselves the specificity of 1942 movement when most of the leadership was behind the bars and this was the case of the Santal Parganas too. Lambodhar Mukherjee and the other leaders were themselves in jail at the very beginning of the Quit India movement. This absence of top leadership in the district and the sub-division level created immense possibilities for the agency

⁶⁵⁵ D.O. 2070/C, Letter from B.N. Singh Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas to R.K. Gokhale, Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division, Dumka, dt. 26/8/42; Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

⁶⁵⁶ Appendix; Political Special 27/1942 BSA.

⁶⁵⁷ D.O. 2070/C, Letter from B.N. Singh Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas to R.K. Gokhale, Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division, Dumka, dt. 26/8/42; Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

of the subalterns-in this case the Sapha Hors- to inscribe their subject hood and specific signature on the movement. In the official records there is ample evidence to enable us to flush out the Sapha Hor agency in the 1942 movement in the Santal country.

The Sapha Hor initiative did have some common connectivity with the all India political developments- especially in the large scale destruction of government property. But at the local level the Sapha Hors chalked out their own plan of actions against the colonial government that revealed much organizational skills in the encounter that followed. They were organized in groups -sometimes seven thousand in numbers- wandering through the country side destroying liquor shops and the *dak* bungalows. They followed a strategy of attacking targets and taking cover in a manner that military break-ins into their homes turned futile as the Sapha Hors had already escaped by then. There was considerable planning behind such raids. On the 30th August, a meeting held in Jabardaha, the Sapha Hors of Jabardaha and other neighboring villages of the Dumka sub-division met under their leader Lal Hembrom and planned to destroy bridges, culverts and telegraph lines along the Dumka –Suri and the Dumka –Rampurhat road. On the 1st of September another group of twenty-five Sapha Hors assembled in the Kodama village Circle Dhanbora in Dumka Subdivision and held a meeting under Paiko Manjhi to destroy bridges, culvert, telegraph lines and liquor shops.⁶⁵⁸ Local leaders like Lal Hembrom, a Sapha Hor FB activist and Legu Hembrom a Congress man, master minded the agitation in the absence of the prominent leaders of the district who were all serving jail terms. They were joined by Khadu Tudu of Nagari Tola, Logda Murmu of Khijur Danga, Champai Murmu of Pathrar, Probhu Hembrom of Khuridir, Suphol Murmu of Benachitir, Mangal Marandi and Basu Hembrom of

⁶⁵⁸ D.O. No 2282/C, Letter to the Chief Secretary Godbole from B.N. Singh, the Deputy Commissioner's office, Dumka, dt. 7/0/42; Political Special 27/1942 BSA.

Mohulpahari, Suriya Murmu of Patharaia, Bhado Murmu and Matla Murmu of Pathardah. On 23rd August, Bikram Hansda, Barsa Marandi and Barsa Murmu were arrested by the police. On 5th September, two Santals died in the encounter with the police at Baramasia. Bhado Hembrom, the father of Lal Hembrom was arrested along with Naujadik Pandey who was believed to have instigated the Sapha Hors of the locality.⁶⁵⁹

The government decided on taking drastic actions against the Sapha Hor rebels. A sum of Rs. 200 was announced for the arrest of Lal Hembrom along with other leaders like Profullah Chandra Patnaik, Srikrishna Prasad of the Congress. The Deputy Commissioner left clear instruction either to arrest them or ‘shoot them at sight.’⁶⁶⁰ The fact that the Sapha Hors were also providing leadership to Santals is evident from the manner in which the Deputy Commissioner’s office instructed the magistrates to take steps to repress the Sapha Hors. He himself organised meetings in Pakur, Hiranpur, Amrapara, where he threatened the Santals not to ‘mix themselves with the Sapha Hors’. Similar meetings were held by the magistrates of Deoghar and the Godda where the villagers were coerced, threatened and ‘ring leaders’ arrested indiscriminately.⁶⁶¹ ‘Warning notices’ threatening collective fines and penalties was widely circulated. ‘Leading’ villagers of several villages were summoned and warned of serious consequences if they interacted with the Sapha Hors or supplied recruits to them. They were instructed to detain the Sapha Hors when ever they visited the area. All who cooperated with the government in their efforts to apprehend the Sapha Hors were promised big rewards. By September end, the intensity of the opposition had begun to subside although there were pockets

⁶⁵⁹ Dhirendranath Baske, ‘August Andolan e Santal Gosthi’ in Bhakti Bhowmick ed., *Anirban* –A Collection of articles on Indian Freedom Movement (Medinipur: N.S. UNIT OF Bajkul Milani Mahavidyalay , 1997) ps.18-30.

⁶⁶⁰ D.O. No 2282/C, Letter to the Chief Secretary from the Deputy Commissioner’ Office, Santal Parganas, Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

⁶⁶¹ D.O. No 2282/C, Letter to the Chief Secretary from the Deputy Commissioner, BSA Political Special 27/1942.

of discontentment. One report stated that the agitation was mostly confined to the red shirt followers of Lambodhar Mukherjee, the local FB leader, who were primarily involved in the destruction of liquor shops till the end of November.⁶⁶²

Although the exact number of Sapha Hors arrested during the movement is not known, the government crackdown of the movement was severe.⁶⁶³ Brutal police repression on the movement forcibly brought peace in the district and the British reported with pride that one Congress supporter could not find shelter as he fled from village after village until he was finally arrested.⁶⁶⁴ By 1943, the Sapha Hor agitation in Pakur and the other subdivisions of district except for the Rajmahal Damin was reported to be under control.⁶⁶⁵ Henningham suggests that there was a duality in the character of the movement of 1942 but in the end he was forced to concede that what brought the subalterns and the elite together was their shared ideology of nationalism.⁶⁶⁶ Recent studies argue that the nationalists might have their separate political agendas from the subalterns but they shared a common anger against the colonial state as they responded to the call for Quit India. As Partha Chatterjee observed, 'it is possibly more pertinent to suggest that the ideological basis for including the *whole* population within the political nation was successfully provided by Gandhism, which consciously bridged even the most sanctified cultural barriers that divided the people in an immensely complex agrarian society.'⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶² Bihar Governor's Report for 1942, Report for the first half of September 1942; L/PJ/5/177, IOL.

⁶⁶³ In the Santal Parganas the total number of arrests registered was 890. See K.K. Dutta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, Volume 3, (Patna, Government of Bihar, 1957) p. 232.

⁶⁶⁴ Bihar Governor's Report for 1942; Report for the first half of November, L/PJ/5/177. IOL.

⁶⁶⁵ *Freedom Movement 1943; Confidential Fortnightly Report on Political Events in Bihar of Political Department (Special Section)*, Government of Bihar. BSA.

⁶⁶⁶ Stephen Henningham, 'Quit India in Bihar and United provinces,' *op cit*, p. 150; Also see Vinita Damodaran, *op cit*, p.4

⁶⁶⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (New Delhi: OUP, 1986) p. 110.

However, the repression that descended in 1942 movement once again crushed the millenarian visions of a vast number of people. What ever millenarian expectations survived appeared as flashes of optimism expressed by individuals; one Budhan of the Tatulbandh Mission excitedly reported that the Congress had conquered the rest of the country and had entered into a pact with Japan and that the airplanes that flew in the sky were those of the Japanese.⁶⁶⁸ The overall mood was however one of somber as the enthusiasm around the Quit India movement subsided while a near famine situation developed in Bihar in 1943. The moral world of the Sapha Hors crashed. There was in fact news that many of the Sapha Hors were burning their Red Shirts and were renouncing their Forwards Bloc allegiance.⁶⁶⁹

The famine situation in Bihar was indeed aggravating every passing day. Situated in the edges of the dangerous precipices of Bengal famine crisis, food grain prices in Bihar soared in 1943. It resulted in 'widespread decoity' across the province.'⁶⁷⁰ The scarcity of food in Bihar unlike in Bengal was not due to unusually bad harvest rather it resulted from a dislocation of imports into Bihar and the failure of supply and distribution system in large parts of province during 1943.⁶⁷¹ As it is, Bihar in normal times was a deficit province in both rice and wheat. During the four years between 1937-41, the average annual net imports amounted to approximately 200,000 tons of rice and 71000 tons of wheat. In addition, Bihar received supplies from Nepal and Burma. By 1942 the Burmese imports had stopped, while in May 1943, import from Nepal stopped when the Nepal government imposed a ban on exports.⁶⁷² In 1943, there was thus a decline in imports, a

⁶⁶⁸ D.O. 2070/C, Letter from B.N. Singh Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas to R.K. Gokhale, Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division, Dumka, dt. 26/8/42; Political Special 27/1942, BSA.

⁶⁶⁹ Bihar Governor's Report for 1942; Report for the first half of October 1942, L/PJ/5/177., IOL.

⁶⁷⁰ Vinita Damodaran, op cit, p. 248.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

situation aggravated by the black marketers and the heavy demand of the defense service causing an immense shortage of food grains.⁶⁷³ The result was by mid 1943 all districts began to report an increase in crime.⁶⁷⁴ On the 17th of February the Superintendent of police reported that they had to deal with a gang of 200 dacoits in the hills north of Dumka and in at least two cases the officers found that the name of Gandhi used by the ‘dacoits’.⁶⁷⁵ Looting also became rampant in Bhagalpur. In April a number of Sapha Hors of Ranga bungalow in Dumka district, P.S. Gopikandar, attacked a parganait(headman) and robbed him of some of the land revenue he had collected. On the 21st April a force of police was sent to the spot and they arrested one of the suspects near a village resulting in a scuffle when about twenty- five Sapha Hors came out with bows and arrows and attacked the police party in his support. It led to police firing causing injuries although the Sapha Hors managed to escape.⁶⁷⁶ The situation showed no improvements in July and many district officers reported that robberies were committed for obtaining food in which even the women and children participated to carry away food that was looted. The acute scarcity had clearly given rise to a form of ‘social banditry’ where peasant/ tribal rebels participated in the loot for survival.⁶⁷⁷ In August 1943, popular agitation was stirred across the province as wide spread rumour of the revival of the Civil Disobedience movement circulated through leaflets appeared in Gaya, Santal Parganas, Bhagalpur and few other places. In November, there was fresh news of activity of the Sapha Hors in the Santal Parganas although

⁶⁷³ Ibid, p.249.

⁶⁷⁴ David Arnold shows in a study how the years 1866 and 1876-8 witnessed massive outbreaks of dacoity in times of severe famine in the Madras Presidency. The Inspector General of Police identified this form of dacoity as a ‘special famine crime,’ the greater or lesser prevalence of which was an index to the state of distress. See David Arnold, ‘Dacoity and Rural Crime in Madras, 1860-1940 in Journal of Peasant Studies; 6(2):140-167, January 1979, p. 145.

⁶⁷⁵ Freedom Movement 1943; Confidential Fortnightly Report on Political Events in Bihar of Political Department (Special Section), Government of Bihar. BSA.

⁶⁷⁶ Freedom Movement 1943; Confidential Fortnightly Report on Political Events in Bihar of Political Department (Special Section), Government of Bihar. BSA.

⁶⁷⁷ A term made popular by Eric Hobsbawn, ‘*Bandits*’ (London: Abacus, 1969).

the record is silent on the nature of the activity.⁶⁷⁸ In May 1944, an attempt was made by two Sapha Hors to instigate a no-rent campaign which was promptly frustrated by timely intervention of the sub-divisional officer who succeeded in coercing one of the agitators to pay the rent and thereby put an end to the campaign.⁶⁷⁹ There were underground organizations in operation in Bihar like the Azad Dasta with its 'notional' headquarters in Patna. The Dasta developed alliances with the so called 'local dacoit' gangs and were believed to be politically significant to keep the Quit India movement alive in Bihar well into 1944.⁶⁸⁰

In the years following the Quit India movement when the frenzy over the Gandhi *raj* died down and there was no hope of *Swaraj* being delivered, the Sapha Hors's millenarian dreams also died down. From political activists to 'decoits' the Sapha Hor's historical journey has been a long one, going through many twists and rough patches. The Sapha Hors ceased to play an important part in Congress politics in the period after independence. Even their leader Lambodhar Mukherjee's political career in the post Independence India ended abruptly. Post independence, he played an important role in organizing trade union movement among the bus drivers and started the Homeo Association in Champaran from his home town Motihari. During the first general elections held in 1951-52, he formally withdrew from politics when he was denied the ticket to contest from Dumka.⁶⁸¹ Both the Sapha Hors and their leaders remained unsung heroes in the district of Santal Parganas.

⁶⁷⁸ Bihar Governor's report for 1943, L /PJ/6/178, IOL

⁶⁷⁹ Freedom Movement 1944; Bihar Political Event (Special Section), First half of March 1944, BSA.

⁶⁸⁰ Vinita Damodaran, op cit, p. 237-8.

⁶⁸¹ Diary of D.K. Roychaudhury, the nephew of Lambodhar Mukherjee. Interview Debapriya Mukherjee on 30/8/15. Lal Hembrom and Rajraj Jajware were elected from Santal Parganas and Hazaribagh constituencies in 1951-52 general elections.

Chapter 5

The Sapha Hor beliefs: a study in eclecticism

Introduction:

In the previous chapters of this study, we have studied the anti-colonial dimensions of the Sapha Hor consciousness, we have studied the instances of Sapha Hor resistance to the colonial state whether during their anti-census agitation or during the nationalist struggles of the period of the 1930s and 1940s. We have also seen how the Sapha Hors were co-constitutive along with other the subaltern classes in the making of the visions of Gandhi raj that pervaded Bihar during this period. We have also noted the tendency on the part of the colonial government to register the Sapha Hors only during the bouts of their active resistance. In this chapter, we therefore seek to read as best as we can – of course, if the possibility is at all there for the unmediated subaltern voice to be audible to the historian - the significance of that particular cultural space that the sect created and recreated for itself away from colonial and missionary gaze/s. Is it not crucial for the historian to ask why they were rigorously subjecting their lives to inculcating a life of purity? What was the nature of the world order they envisioning for themselves? Is there any way we can access the Sapha's own version of it? Is there a way to turn the archival absence into a presence by which the Sapha narratives of the world they envisioned for themselves be made audible and the Sapha agency be made visible?

Of course, the discussion has to pause here to address the fundamental question raised by Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the subalterns speak?' Can the writings of intellectuals serve as a transparent medium through which the voices of the oppressed can be represented? Can the intellectual be

cast as a reliable mediator for the voices of the oppressed, a mouthpiece through which the oppressed can clearly speak? The answer she gives is, 'No.' It is not that the subaltern cannot speak differently but speaking, according to her, is a transaction between the speaker and the listener. When the subaltern tries to speak, the voice gets distorted. It happens because others are not prepared to listen.⁶⁸² In 'Chandra's Death', Ranajit Guha shows how the stentorian voice of the state on the one hand and on the other hand the pressures of the patriarchal morality of the *Bagdi* community stifles the humble peasant voices.⁶⁸³ But the present reading of the Sapha Hors own consciousness is based on the assumption that the subalterns can after all make themselves heard. As Jean Comaraff insightfully observes, 'when expressions of dissent are prevented from attaining an open discourse, a subtle but systematic breach of authoritative cultural codes might make a statement of protest which, by virtue of being rooted in a shared structural predicament and experience of dispossession, convey an unambiguous message.'⁶⁸⁴ Our own reading is situated in a historiographical terrain that opens, recognizes and explores the possibility to listen to the voices of the subaltern. Thus Balam Hadi, an *antaja* caste of Bengal created his own *jatitattva* or the origin of mankind to counter the established Brahmanical notion of the origin of the four castes.⁶⁸⁵ The Chamars of Chattisgarh subverted their untouchable status to become Satnamis who rejected Hindu gods and *purohits* and adopted Santampanth to remove impurities of the body of its members.⁶⁸⁶ Hence we are reminded that it is possible to listen to the

⁶⁸² Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern's Speak?', Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg's ed., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), ps. 271-313.

⁶⁸³ Ranajit Guha ed., 'Chandra's Death' in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies; Writings on South Asian History and Society*, volume 5, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, henceforth OUP, 1987) ps. 133-166.

⁶⁸⁴ Jean Comaraff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) p. 196.

⁶⁸⁵ From Balam's yawn was created Haimabati, the first female and from her the first gods -Brahma, Vishnu and Siva who would direct the course of the sacred and the profane histories in the *satya, treta, dvapar and kali* ages spoken of in the Puranas. See Partha Chatterjee, 'Caste and Subaltern Consciousness' in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies; Writings on South Asian History and Society*, volume 6, (Delhi: OUP, 1992) p. 200.

⁶⁸⁶ Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950* (New Delhi: Vistaar publication, 2001) p. 9.

‘small voices of people’ through a nuanced reading of the colonial texts and listening to the ‘small voices which are drowned in the noise of the statist commands.’⁶⁸⁷

Having pursued more or less a historical methodology, albeit with critical thinking informing it, the present thesis would now venture (in this chapter) out of the more conventional historian’s trail. The previous chapters had used sources housed in the colonial and missionary archives. Even though the chapters had taken care to give the archival sources critical and deconstructive reading, the serious limitations in understanding a subaltern movement simply based on archives had lingered in the present author’s consciousness. This chapter in an effort to somehow access the Sapha Hors own voice takes recourse to a) field study and b) collecting and reading such specimens of the Sapha Hors cultural articulation as songs and c) reading all this in tandem with secondary and primary (mainly archival and missionary) sources from the colonial past. Of course this involves the present project in reading the specimens self reflexively and keeping a self-doubt alive, even while the author had tried to be responsible to the otherness that the Sapha world represents to the modern postcolonial intellectual. After all, Prathama Banerjee aptly observes, cultural articulations - symbols, myths, songs and paintings can themselves present another form of complexity.⁶⁸⁸ Such cultural articulations, resist historicists’ reading not because they can not be authentically dated, but because they are seen as ‘non-representational texts’ i.e. their referentiality is open to interpretations.⁶⁸⁹ Indeed the ‘primitives’ associated multiple images with every single abstract shape they gleaned from nature leading to an infinite

⁶⁸⁷ Ranajit Guha, ‘The Small Voices of History,’ in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty eds., *Subaltern Studies; Writings on South Asian History and Society*, volume 9 (Delhi: OUP, 1996) p. 3.

⁶⁸⁸ Prathama Banerjee, ‘Culture/Politics: The Irresoluble Double Bind of the Indian Adivasi’ in *Indian Historical Review*, ICHR, volume XXXIII, No. 1, January 2006, p. 119.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

reproduction of meanings through the unitary signs.⁶⁹⁰ Interpreting the voice of the Sapha Hors, in so far as we can claim to access them by disentangling them from mediations by the Saphas' 'others' to the best of our abilities may thus land us in as much problem as it might claim to solve. The Sapha Hors must have drawn from multiple symbols and icon from different natural and existential sources and the nature of the assimilation is very unlikely to have been uniform or structured.

Thus field studies open up a challenging but exciting avenue of somehow bringing the Santal cultural articulation to the sensitized aural experience of the researcher. Not trained to handle the tools of anthropological research, the present researcher had to depend more on historical instincts. We began our search for the sect among the Santals, from Barharwa in the Jharkhand district of the Santal Parganas, where the Sapha Hors gather every year on the occasion of Ram Navami celebration at Bindubasini temple. With the help of the locals we were able to locate a Sapha Hor family with an old lineage in the Dahujor village in Pathna block, Sahebgunj. The Sapha Hors here was led by guru Lal Hansda with a family lineage going back to the 1940s. It is also significant that several of his family members were activists in the Quit India movement of 1942. The Sapha Hors shared a village space with the Santals but what differentiated them is their strikingly distinct lifestyle. The members of the sect live in hamlets, practice vegetarianism, abstain from alcohol and do not plough on Sundays. The women wear white borderless *saris* and the men wear white *dhotis*, which however might not be strictly followed by the younger members of the sect. Any one visiting the Sapha Hor villages will be immediately drawn to the contrasting lives of two communities; one singing with their dhamsha (Santal drums) and the flute most often in an inebriated state and the other practicing a congregational worship, singing

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

their *bhajan* accompanied by the harmonium and the tribal wooden khartal in a strict disciplined form. We made several visits to Lal Hansda, to listen to his prayers and songs as well as his interpretation of the Sapha world view; discussions which have been enriching and together with the rich cachet of songs and prayers, constitute our sources through which the present scholar hopes to make the voices of the Saphas audible. Thus by combining field study with that of reading the archival records we have tried to understand how ‘cultures can be structured and constructed.’⁶⁹¹ In other words, by deconstructing the archival reading and then supplementing it with the authors findings from the field, the present author hopes to make the Sapha’s voice audible to the best of ability.

The making of the Sapha Hor cosmology

The Sapha Hor sect, as we have seen in chapter one, constituted of scattered religious formations under innumerable number of gurus and never crystallized into one institutionalized organization. Yet the sect survived with its peculiarities as little communities practicing their *Sapha Dhorom* each under their particular guru. This flexible nature of the sect was bound to have its bearing on the Sapha thought and particularly their notion of the moral world as the sect adapted and adopted ideas through oral renderings of the gurus. Reverend P.O. Boddington of the Home Mission was possibly the only missionary among his contemporaries who thought Bhagirath Manjhi was a ‘fallen Christian or had been under Christian influence of a mission

⁶⁹¹ See Bernard Cohn, ‘History and Anthropology: The State of Play’ in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays* (New Delhi: OUP, 1990) p.48 Recent trends in scholarly research have also highlighted on hybrid narratives produced by the enmeshments of theory, method and perspectives of anthropology and history. See Saurabh Dube ‘Introduction’ in *Historical Anthropology* (New Delhi: OUP, 2007) p. 2.

school.’⁶⁹² In fact he pointed out that there were only a few Santals, in his times, who were not familiar with the Christian teachings.⁶⁹³ To justify his point, he showed how Christian influences were clearly discernable in the prayers composed by the Sapha Hors,⁶⁹⁴

‘Chando the son, Chando the father and Chando the Holy Spirit.’

What Bodding didn’t specify in the article was that the songs he recorded was beginning to undergo transmutation as Christian influences were beginning to wane being replaced by Santal and Hindu gods; One song thus portrayed three Chandos possibly an incarnation of one Chando:

One is Chando,
He is Ram Chando of the Kings,
The wheel Chando of mankind.⁶⁹⁵

Bodding’s observations was however critiqued by the Church Missionary Society (henceforth C.M.S) on the ground that Bhagirath Manjhi’s preaching had nothing to do with Christian teachings.⁶⁹⁶ Rather Reverend Skrefsrud of the Home Mission and the missionaries of the C.M.S, discerned an ongoing ‘Hinduization’ among the Santals, which they traced to a change in their life style. Writing his columns in the weekly edition of *Friends of India* and the *The Englishman*

⁶⁹² P.O. Bodding, ‘The Kharwar Movement among the Santals’ in Sarat Chandra Roy ed., *Man in India*, volume 1. March 1921, p. 231.

⁶⁹³ Hodne noted during the time of Skrefsrud and Bodding the ‘Christians were regularly instructed in the Ten Commandments, which covers the whole ground of Christian duty.’ See Olav Hodne, *The Seeds Bore Fruits: A Short History of the Santal Mission of the Northern Churches 1867-1967* (Calcutta: C.D. Media, 1967) p. 14.

⁶⁹⁴ P.O. Bodding, ‘The Kharwar Movement’, op cit, p. 223-32.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ Peter Anderson, ‘Revival Syncretism and the Anti Colonial Discourse of the Kherwar Movement 1871-1910’ in Richard Fox ed., *India and Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding-Historical, Theological, Bibliographical in Honour of Robert Frykenberg*. Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Michigan / Cambridge. U.K: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2009), ps. 127-143.

during the anti-census agitation of 1880, Reverend Skrefsrud pointed out that the Sapha Hors had given up the *bonga* cult, worshipped *Singhabahini*, the money lender's god, observed Hindu practices by purifying themselves and their houses, getting rid of impure animals such as pigs and poultry.⁶⁹⁷ Even the colonial officers began to register the names of a large number of gurus like Dubia Gossain, Tribhuban Raut, Mangal Das of Bowsee, Mangal Das of Passai - gurus referred to as 'low caste', '*baishtabs*' and '*gossains*,' - who they pointed out had considerable influence among the Sapha Hors.⁶⁹⁸ The existence of such *gossains* in the eastern part Rajmahal area was noted by Francis Buchanan as early as 1810 in his account of the Bhagalpur district. Buchanan wrote about Udasin Vaishnavas who acted as gurus for the lower castes and had one forty followers under them.⁶⁹⁹ We have no definite knowledge about these men referred to as *gossains or das* although it is possible that they belonged to one of the numerous subaltern Vaishnava sub- groups that sprang into existence after the death of Chaitanya, the founder of the Vaishnava sect in 1534.⁷⁰⁰ Vaishnavism then spread across the Chotanagpur plateau especially along the path Chaitanya journeyed from *Nilachal* (Puri) to Mathura through Jharkhand.⁷⁰¹ This is evident from the Vaishnava influences on *lahusa* songs sung during the Karam festival which is attributed to Chaitanya's visit to the region.⁷⁰² The *Sapha dhorom* was also influenced by the

⁶⁹⁷ Friend of India, 8.11.1880, Quoted in Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs-Lyche, *An Encounter of Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries, and their Changing Worlds* (1867-1900), (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008) p. 209.

⁶⁹⁸ Appendix A, Note by the Deputy Commissioner, Santal Parganas, Bengal Judicial Proceedings, (henceforth BJP) File 9, August 1881, West Bengal State Archives (henceforth WBSA).

⁶⁹⁹ Francis Buchanan, *An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11* (Patna, printed from Buchanan, MSS, IOL, 1939) ps. 277-278.

⁷⁰⁰ Sudhin Chakraborty, 'Gauriyo Baishnab Dharma o Upo Samproday' in Abanti Kumar Sanyal and Ashok Bhattacharya eds., *Chaitanya Deb: Itihasa o Abodan* (Kolkata: Saraswat Library) ps. 223-226

⁷⁰¹ According to one explanation, after the death of the Guru, his six disciples usurped power in Vrindavan, in the Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh, and re-imposed the supremacy of the Brahmans consciously leaving out a vast section of the lower castes outside the fold of the movement. The movement split and a section of the followers moved to Nadia in Bengal, which was followed by further splits and during these unsettling times, numerous Vaishnava religious orders emerged around gurus. For a complete discussion on the subject see Sudhin Chakraborty, 'Gauriyo Baishnab Dharma o Upo Samproday' op cit, ps. 223-226. Also see Suhrud Bhowmick, *Jharkhand e Mahaprobhu*, (Midnapore: Marang Buru Press, 1994)

⁷⁰² S.C. Roy, *Mundas and Their Country* (Ranchi: Crown publication, 1968) p. 196

gossain cult as is discernable from the songs the Saphas sang but the roots of Sapha Hor religious thought was far more complex and vibrant formed from an eclectic mix of variegated beliefs; Vaishnavite, Shaivite not to forget the rich Santal mythology and gods through which the sect conceptualized their moral world.

The Sapha belief in the *jaher than* or the sacred grove which generally stood at the outskirts of the village was deeply rooted; they were three *sal* trees in line dedicated to Marang Buru (the great mountain), Jaher era (the lady of the grove), Moreku Turaiko(five or six) respectively, a Mahua tree preserved for the fourth *bonga*, Gosae Era.⁷⁰³ Like the Santals the Sapha Hors believed that Thakur organized the day and night and was responsible for heat and cold, rain and sunshine but he was worshipped once in a life time for promoting health and happiness. Generally in popular understanding the great gods were powerful but they were remote, unconcerned about the everyday problems of the village life.⁷⁰⁴ It was the *bongas* of the sacred grove who protected the tribe and ruled the Santal world.⁷⁰⁵ Contrary to what the missionaries claimed, the Sapha Hors never openly rejected the existence of the Santals *bongas*.⁷⁰⁶ Rather they were randomly and eclectically accommodating local deities like Sitala and Manasha, goddesses who gave protection from disease (small pox) and snakes within the Sapha Hor alongside the old *bongas* in the Sapha pantheon gods. In the guru's oral narratives however there was a guarded silence about bongas not considered as benevolent as Jaher era or Matang Buru; but then the non-Saphas were equally guarded about them.

⁷⁰³ Interview with guru Hikim Murmu of Barharwa 15/3/2009. Generally, there were two other trees assigned to Pargana Bonga and Manjhi Haram.

⁷⁰⁴ See C.M. Carstairs, *Death of a Witch: A Village in North India 1950-81* (Aldeburg, UK: Hutchinson and Company Ltd, 1983) p. 54.

⁷⁰⁵ W.G. Archer, *The Hills of Flute; Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India* (Delhi: Isha Books, 2007) p. 26.

⁷⁰⁶ See P.O. Bodding, *The Kherwar movement*, op cit, page 230.

Thus as in the case of the Santals, Marang Buru remained the principal deity of the Sapha Hors whose importance in the life of the Santal was always acknowledged through the origin myth. The origin myths did have its regional variations. According to Ram Das Tudu Reska of Dampara in Singhbhum, it was Thakur (Baba Isor Chando) who created the *has* and *hasil* (birds), the earliest ancestors of the Santals, from the midst of the clouds in the heaven with the roots of *benā* grass.⁷⁰⁷ While in Kolean guru's narration, the birds were created by 'pulling materials off' from Thakur's breast.⁷⁰⁸ What ever the differences in the narratives, it was Marang Buru who emerged as the most important *bonga* for the community. The myth goes as follows: Thakur created the *karam* tree and placed the birds *has* and *hasil*, on the tree where they laid two eggs and thus was born the earliest humans-Pilchu Buri and Pilchu Baba. But there was water everywhere. The birds cried for twelve years until finally Baba Isor Chando heard their cry and called Marang Buru to inquire into the cause of their distress.⁷⁰⁹ It was Marang Buru who took the initiative to give the Kherwals a lineage that would protect them from extinction.⁷¹⁰ He got the siblings married. He instructed the siblings to prepare the rice beer. After the rice beer was brewed Marang Buru taught them to drink and in their state of intoxication, they were sexually united. Marang Buru instructed Pilchu baba and Pilchu buri to settle in Chai Champa and Chirunagar, to reclaim and cultivate their lands. Soon they had twelve children. Pilchu Buri and

⁷⁰⁷ One variety of grass from which artifacts are manufactured.

⁷⁰⁸ See Ramdas Tudu Reska, *Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha* in Sukumar Sikdar and Sarda Prasad Kisku eds., (Calcutta: Nirmal Book Agency, 2004, first published in 1894,) p.103. The book was published ten years after HMHRK at his own initiative by the Vedanta Press. For the other version of the origin myth also see P.O. Boddington, L.O. Skrefsrud, Sten Konow eds., *Traditions and the Institutions of the Santals*, (New Delhi, Bahumukhi Prakashan, 1942) (henceforth HMHRK) p. 3.

⁷⁰⁹ *Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha*, op cit, ps. 97-98.

⁷¹⁰ According to another Santal origin myth mentioned by E.T. Dalton, Marang Buru was originally the god of the Mundas. In course of their flight from Madho Sin to the Chutia Nagpur country, the Santal reached the great mountain or Marang Buru and prayed to him for protection. Marang Buru protected them and from then on they offered sacrifices to him and assigned him a place in *Jaher than*. See E.T. Dalton *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, (Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government, 1872) p. 210.

Pilchu Haram divided their descendants into twelve septs. The Santals are thus always grateful to Marang Buru who had initiated them into a settled life; the Santals prayed:

Marang Buru we praise you, for it was you who fetched us wood for making plough from the Lughu Buru and Ghantabari jungle. You helped us to make, the plough, the joal⁷¹¹, isho and korol (wooden) implements from a single piece of wood. You created the cow, bullock and the calf under the Kadamba (Burflower) tree in Hihiri Pipiri*. You created the buffalo from the waters of Marda* lake. In the forests of Chai Champa Chiru Nagar*, within the fences of dugdha-raher saha,* you gave us the twisted Peepal tree, tiny *Mohua* tree, Arye tree, tilted Kendu tree and the true Sal tree. Under the Sal tree, in Hihiri Pipiri, at the banks of the seven rivers, you gave us every thing, you told us, cultivate your lands, plough your fields, live in peace through generations.⁷¹²

In Ramdas Tudu's narration Marang Buru represented an agrarian cult but so did Shiva in the folk religion of Bengal and Bihar. A remarkable resemblance in the stories of the two gods can be found in the composition of both Ramdas Tudu Reska's *Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha* and the *Shivayan Kavya* composed by Rameshwar Bhattacharya in the first half of the 18th century respectively.⁷¹³ The similarity of the narration not only in terms of content of but also in terms of style indicates Ram Das's familiarity with local folk stories particularly the *Mangal Kavyas* popular since medieval times in rural Bengal.⁷¹⁴ There were indeed many bucolic cults

⁷¹¹ The wooden attachment placed between the two cows for ploughing.

⁷¹² *Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha* op cit, p. 126 (* mythical names; Hihiri Pipiri and Chai Champa Chiru Nagar, Dugdha raher, Marda are names of places found in the Jom Sim Binti or the Ancestor's story).

⁷¹³ See Ashutosh Bhattacharya, *Bangla Mangal Kabyar Itihash* (Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co Ltd, eighth edition 1998) p. 204. Ramdas as Tudu, op cit, *Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha*, p. 121

⁷¹⁴ *Mangal Kavya* was a genre of narrative poetry, composed between the period of the 13th and the eighteenth centuries. Its inspiration didn't come from any particular community but composed through an assimilation of

surrounding Shiva in rural Bengal and Bihar (Orissa), which were highly popular both among the Hindu lower castes and the Santals, possibly because they symbolized a defiance of the dominance of the caste. In most of them, non-Brahmin priests performed the rituals after they adopted the Shiva gotra/clan, wore the sacred thread and became vegetarians for the specified period.⁷¹⁵ It was a parallel world of belief, which in reality had restrained support of the higher castes. In a highly hierarchized society, such rites of inversion were looked upon not only as protest against the established order but a safety valve for conflicts within a society.⁷¹⁶

Considering the ready acceptability of the rural imageries of Shiva by the Santals it is not difficult to understand why Mahadev and Shiva entered into the Santali myth or why the two gods became readily interchangeable in the Sapha Hor world view.⁷¹⁷ One lone voice, that of Kolean Guru, expressed unhappiness with what he considered as the growing Hindu influences on the pristine Santali culture as early as 1887⁷¹⁸ Acculturation was a slow and continuing process and at some point in time, in Sapha Hors' *imaginaire*, the identity of Hindu gods merged with that of the Santal gods giving rise to a syncretic religious belief in synchrony with the folk traditions of rural Bengal and Bihar (Orissa).⁷¹⁹ Listening to the Sapha Hor mantra recited during

Bengali folk and outside religious influences. Composed through a considerable period of time it was based on cultural exchanges between communities, their customs and their religious thoughts. See Ashutosh Bhattacharya, *Bangla Mangal Kabyar Itihash*, op cit, p.11.

⁷¹⁵ Nil gajan, Charak gajan, bolan gajan, boro tamasha, choto tamasha celebrated in Bengal and Bihar under different names. Priests were selected from the lowest rung of caste society- Hari, Bagdi, Dom, Tanti. See Mani Bardhan, *Banglar loko nritya o giti baichitra*, (Calcutta: West Bengal Information and Cultural Department, 1961), p. 33. Also see Sarat Chandra Roy, 'Supplementary remarks on Kali Nautch,' *Man in India*, volume 3, 1923, ps. 208-210.

⁷¹⁶ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (New Delhi: OUP, 1983) p. 30.

⁷¹⁷ See HMHRK, op cit, 'Additional Matters from other sources.' Here Mahadeo is associated with the origin myth of the Santals. p. 14.

⁷¹⁸ HKMHRK, p. 158

⁷¹⁹ Nirmal Kumar Bose emphasized on the linear pattern in culture flow, '(culture) flows from an economically dominant group to a poorer one when the two are tied together to form a larger productive organization through some historical accident.' See 'Hindu method of Tribal Absorption' in *The Structure of Hindu Society* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1975) p. 170. Romila Thapar on the other hand pointed out how assimilation can also be looked

the *Kartik Purnima* one realizes how effortlessly the Sapha Hors propitiate gods and men, accommodating them into their own inventive discourse through invocations or *bakher*s (prayers).

Dohai baba, Ser manen, Sin Chando, Nida Chando, Shiv baba,

Shiv Thakuran, Lukhi Thakuran, Ganesh baba, Shiv baba,

Parvati, Deb Durga, Maharani Mahamayei.

De gogo ape gele, Sarhao ke peya, Tihinah da Dharti puja, Netum te ge, De gogo,

Atang aa

De gogo atoren ape ho,

Jaher ayo, Lukhi ayo, Gosai ayo, More baba, Turyiko, Marang Deb, Churu Buru,

Pargana, De baba, Tala kulhi, Manjhi baba, Manjhi gogo, Dharti mayi, Ganga

Mayi, Patal Mayi...⁷²⁰

This *bakher* invokes Hindu and the Santal gods, residing in all four corners of the earth, gods of heaven and the hell, even accommodating the names of Santal officials like the Pargana and the Manjhi in their prayers possibly as men who have been endowed with great responsibilities.

Among the Santals, prayers or *bakher*s were never chanted aloud. Chanting prayers was the sole

upon as a two-way process. The fertility cults, especially devoted to the worship of mother goddess, the phallus(linga) and snake cults were absorptions from the so called mlechchas. Vidhyavasini, a consort of Shiva was worshipped by Sabaras, Barbaras and Pulindas. Elsewhere she is identified with Narayani and Durga, both associated with the mlechha tribes in the early literature. (Harivamsa, Dasakumaracharita) By medieval period, these cults of Durga and Chandi had been absorbed into classical Hinduism. See 'Image of the Barbarian' in Romila Thapar ed., *Ancient Indian Social History* (New Delhi: Orient Longman,1978) p. 178.

⁷²⁰ Mercy! the sky, the sun god, the moon, Shiva baba, Lukhi ma, Ganesh baba, Parvati, Deb Durga maharani. O mother! we dedicate our prayers to you, we invoke you today, we praise you Jaher mother, Gossain ma, Lukhi ma, Moreko, Turuku baba, Marang deb, Churu buru, the mountains, the Parganas(the village leader),the road through the village, Manjhi baba, Manjhi ma, goddess of earth, Ganga ma, the goddess of hell, we offer our prayers to you. Collected from Lal Hansda, Kartik Purnima, 16/11/09.

prerogative of the naeyke or the Santal priest because *bakher*, it is believed, leads to possession by spirits.⁷²¹ The *bakher* of the Sapha Hors in contrast is recited aloud but softly by the guru. Once again there is nothing ‘Hinduized’ in the *mantra*, a fact that becomes evident if we look at the similarity in the prayers recited by the followers of Birsa Munda of Ranchi.

The Munda rebel followers of Birsa recreated the concept of *Aba* or father and composed the *dharam* mantra invoking the Father, Mother, Creator of earth and heaven. Their prayers were devotional but invoked no single god. The Thursday school of Birsa’s followers thus prayed,

Salutation to the Great king in heaven, (great king was Birsa himself)

Salutations to the new king on earth,

Salutations to Brahma, Mother Goddess, Vishnu, Kali and
Durga,

Salutations to the father, Mother, north and south,

Salutations to the father and mother on earth and in heaven,

Salutations to Bhagwan lord of Sita,

Salutations to Govind and Tulsidas,

Salutations to Phirun (Pharaoh) in heaven

Salutations to the titled king on earth,

Salutations to Hari, Jogni, Mahapur Bhagan

Salutations to Birsa, the hero, the lord and the teacher.

⁷²¹ Interview, Krishnapada Kisku, 7/3/16.

or

Recite the name of Father and Mother,
Recite the name of Brahma in the east,
Recite the name of Vishnu in the west,
Recite the name of Kali in the north,
Recite the name of Durga in the south,
Attend your parents in Badho,
Watch all in the world, the happy and the fearful, the one
Without quality (nirgun) and the one with quality.⁷²²

Birsa believed in heaven and hell, the survival of spirit after death. Following him the Birsaites, abstained from sacrifices, drinking, worship of spirits and observed a day of rest- Sunday, Thursday or Wednesday (according to which the Birsaites became divided into separate schools). Inter-dining with those outside the community was forbidden. They wore the sacred thread, used sandal paste and wooden sandals. The followers of the Sunday and the Thursday school did not participate in dances. They offered prayers at the *tulshi manch*. Among them the followers of the Thursday school gravitated closer to Vaishnavism and their prayers referred to the Mahaprabhu and Mahadeo. Like the Sapha Hors they were active participants in the *Mahadeo Manda* festival and the *Dasai* worship.⁷²³

⁷²² K.S. Singh, *Birsa Munda and His Movement 1872-1901*, (Calcutta: Seagull, 2002), ps. 182-184.

⁷²³ Ibid.

The colonial officers were aware of the existence of syncretic practices among the tribes. In his notes on Tipara tribes of Chittagong, E.A. Gait noted “The religion of the Tiparas was a curious mixture of Hinduism and Animism. Vaishnava gurus had found their way to the hills and inculcated a belief in the Hindu deities and in the sacred character of the cow. But the old Tribal gods have not yet been ousted and tribal priests called Ochai worship them side by side with those of the Hindus. Their own gods and goddesses are Matai Katar (Shiva and Durga), Tuima or river goddess (Ganges), Garaia and Kalaia (Kartik and Ganesh.) See Risley and Gait, *Census of India*, Volume VI,

This was the ambiance in which the Sapha Hors envisioned their religious world; a world where we will see Mahadev, Vishnu, Marang Buru, Dasarath came to be venerated through songs and prayers. It was the oral character of popular religion that had a large part in shaping the Sapha Hor religious thoughts. Oral religion, it has been pointed out, was more ‘flexible and accommodating than written religion where words tend to fix the deities and the rituals.’⁷²⁴ Moreover, unlike the universalist concerns and moral injunctions of literate religion, popular beliefs and practices by the nature of their birth and development remained particularist and local culture specific.⁷²⁵

The Sapha Hor communities, the gurus and their pantheon of gods.

The Sapha Hor communities live largely scattered over Rajmahal, Pakur, Dumka and Godda Damin. Considering the relative smallness of their demography they are difficult to trace from among a significant number of traditional Santal villages. They however share a common village space with the non- Sapha Santals. The Santal village is surrounded by agricultural fields, pastures, ponds, graveyard and a common place of worship known as *jaher than*. Located at the village outskirts the *jaher* is the sacred grove comprising of *sal* trees within which their deities are believed to be residing. Usually, houses are arranged in a linear pattern on both the sides of the village street. The houses have several rooms and are thatched with local tiles or straw. The walls are made of wooden planks plastered with cow dung and mud. Each house has a long verandah that is generally open and faces the inner courtyard. The open square courtyard at the

1901, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1903) p.186. For an explanation of *dasai* songs refer to page number 30 in this thesis.

⁷²⁴ Sumanta Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular form: Essays on Popular Religion in Bengal*, (Calcutta: Seagull, 2002) p. 4.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

center serves as a place for gatherings on special occasions. Towards the corner of the main room, the Santals preserve a sacred place known as *bhitar* where the ancestral spirits are worshipped.⁷²⁶

In the house of the Sapha Hor however, the place of worship is open and is situated at one corner of the long running verandah. In the house of guru Lal Hansda, a low level mud platform of rectangular shape, raised in one corner of the open verandah serves as the puja *bedi*(altar). On the altar, a bunch of incense sticks is fixed to the ground along with the *Trisul* (trident) and the *linga*. Metal or earthen tumblers holding (possibly Ganga) water is placed in the alter. A bunch of empty incense boxes hang from the raft above the altar. In Hikim Murmu's house, located closer to town of Barwarha, the mode of worship is more commercialized. The *Trisul* is covered with flowers, red cloth or even with cheap glitter paper decorations. There are however atleast three *lingas* in his altar. All the Sapha Hor houses have a *Tulshi manch* in one specific corner of the courtyard. During the Ganga *puja* on the banks of Rajmahal Ganga, the symbol of worship undergoes a significant change. A *Trisul* placed at the center is supported by two cases holding arrows from either side and prayer is then offered at the base of the structure; it was an icon that could metaphorically unify Ram and Shiva or the Sapha Hor (Santal) as the worshipper of Shiva.⁷²⁷

There was another significant difference in the Sapha Hor practices. Although the originary point in the identitarian consciousness of the Sapha Hors went back to the creation myth, as the Santal community imagined it, the Sapha Hor practice as a sect did not require them to recite the *jom*

⁷²⁶ W.G. Archer, *The Hills of Flute*, op cit, ps.19-22

⁷²⁷ The icon as worshipped during the *Maghi mela*, Rajmahal, 8/2/2009.

sim binti (story of the ancestors) as a mark of their formal initiation into the community.⁷²⁸

Rather this is possibly because they believed that the rules of the sect to which the Sapha Hors were initiated by the gurus committed them so rigidly to the supposed codes of purity that reciting the *jom sim binti* appeared redundant to the community.

It was the Sapha Hor gurus who dominated the entire cultural life of the Sapha Hors. He was the leader, a position bestowed upon him by Shiva himself. Shiva it is claimed decided the true successor to the guru, and no one knew who would succeed as the next guru until god revealed the secret through dreams.⁷²⁹ As divinely blessed the guru holds magical powers and medicinal knowledge that gives him power over the rest of the community.⁷³⁰ According to the Sapha tradition, only the guru is entitled to hear the commands of Thakur, lead the community and interpret the codes of conduct. Under his guidance the sect abstained from rice beer, remained vegetarians and did not touch their plough on Sundays. They had their bath daily, maintained a distance with the non-Sapha Hor community by cooking their own food and refusing to accept cooked food from outsiders. They did not dine with non-believers- in other words the codes of conduct meant to ensure the purity of the sect. The position of the gurus in the community however never became hereditary. Unlike the Brahmins in the Hindu community, the sacred role of the guru did not evolve from the father to the son and therefore did not create a separate class of priests.⁷³¹

⁷²⁸ Interview, guru Hikim Murmu of Barhawa, 15/3/2009; Caco Chatiar, is an important ceremony among the Santals performed sometime before marriage, when the *jom sim binti* or the story of the ancestors is recited by the Santal before his formal initiation into the community. See HMHRK, p. 25.

⁷²⁹ Interview, Lal Hansda, 14th April 2008.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Among the Santals however, the position of the guru was less significant. The Santals have their own priests, Naeke and Kudum Naeke, mostly serving as assistants of the headman and holding a less important position in the official hierarchy. This was clear from the manner in which lands were allotted among the officials. When lands were settled and the rents were fixed, Manhji received four portions, the paramanik three portions, the Jog manhji

The Sapha Hor code of conduct that governed the Sapha life remained rigidly unchanged from the time of the first guru, because it was these codes that ascertained the purity of the sect. In contrast, the Sapha Hor pantheon of gods kept changing with the inclusion of new icons because such incorporations did not violate their basic code of morality. The result was, the Sapha religious world remained remarkably flexible as it significantly shifted from its original repertoire, i.e. from the worship of Thakur to a number of deities. The Sapha Hors were never worshippers of *Shakti*(power) and hence the incarnation of Kali image of Parvati is not popular among them. In Sapha interpretation, Marang Buru was Shiva, Jaher era was Parvati (the wife of Shiva) and Moreku and Turuku was Ganesh and Kartik (the sons of Parvati). Shiva replaced Marang Buru not so much in its conception but in the form of worship. Marang Buru and Shiva as the principal god and protector was now worshipped through *lingas*. The concept to the outsider might appear confusing but not so for the guru. Every time I tried to clarify my understanding of gods, the guru would smile and say that ‘there is no distinction between Hindu and Santal gods.’⁷³² This was the primary characteristic of the Sapha Hor belief where Hindu and Santal gods blended naturally into ‘One god’.

The daily chores according to guru Lal Hansda always began with morning prayers after proper ablution although Sunday morning prayers were more elaborate. While offering prayers, the guru placed sugar cubes (batasha) and vermilion in the name of each of the Hindu and the Santal Gods, the preferential order of worshipping gods following a definite pattern; Shiva, Parvati,

two portions and the others one portion as office land, which they could use without paying rent. The only exception was during the *Dasai parab* (festival), when Santals invoked the names of several gurus who can protect the Santals from demonic forces through their magical powers. According to Nayeke Mangal Chandra, a Santal scholar, there are nine gurus, the earliest (adi) guru among them was Marang Buru followed by Dhorom guru, Sido Guru, Narasingh guru, Kamru guru, Vairong guru, Bhuang guru, Rahora guru, Gando guru.⁷³¹ Kolean guru referred to Kamru as the guru of the ojhas; See HMHRK op cit, ps. 106, 164.

⁷³² Interview, Lal Hansda, 22/2/2010.

Ram, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Ganesh, Marang Buru, Jaher Era, Turuku Moreko followed by the names of lesser Gods like Manasha, Sitala. Interestingly in the long list of the names chanted, Dasarath, the father of Ram Chandra in the epic Ramayan finds mention among the lesser gods. The practice of drawing upon pre existent traditions to fashion novel modes of belief and worship was however not confined to the Sapha Hors alone. Among the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh, Mahadev and Drupda mata emerged as two main deities along with Satnam and Ghasidas. Drupda was a corrupt form of Draupadi of the Mahabharata and a Satnami innovation. The Satnamis made earthen vessels and placed the stone believed to be *linga* on top of the vessel and plant a (Tulsi) basil plant in the vessel.⁷³³ Much like the Satnamis, the Sapha Hors saw no contradiction in worshipping the *linga* with the basil plant which symbolized a union of Shaivite and Vaishnavite belief.⁷³⁴ Similarly among the Oraon pantheon of gods- Ram, Lakshman baba, Sita Ayo, Jagannath, Ganesh and Mahadeo- gods and mythical characters found place in some of the Tana hymns.⁷³⁵

The Sapha Hors worshipped Ram and Krishna as ‘baishtabs,’⁷³⁶ they planted the Tulsi (basil) in a podium similar to that in Hindu households, some wore the sacred thread (poita) or beads (kanthi) like the Vaishnavites,⁷³⁷ Some of them even grew matted hair and smoked *ganja*

⁷³³ Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube ‘Spectres of Conversion: Transformation of caste and sect in India’ in Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke eds., *Religious conversions in India: Modes, Motivations and Meanings.* (New Delhi: OUP, 2003), p 247.

⁷³⁴ According to the Puranas since Tulsi’s husband Jalandhar was killed by Shiva, the relation between Tulsi and Shiva was one of hostility. It was therefore not customary to pray for Vishnu (the consort of Tulsi) and Shiva at the same time or place their icons in the same pedestal. See Adi Ramayan in *Bharatiya- Puranic Abhidhan*, volume 1, ed., Nimai Chandra Pal, (Kolkata:1906), p. 517.

⁷³⁵ Sudeshna Banerjee, ‘The Tana Bhagat movement, 1914-1923: Sanskritization or Parochialization’ in *Journal of History*, volume xi, 1990-91, Jadavpur University Press, p. 18.

⁷³⁶ Ram Kanai Karforma, farmer of farmed part of tuppeh Hendwa, BJP, File 9, August 1881, WBSA.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

probably in imitation of the followers of Shiva.⁷³⁸ In 2009, when the Sapha Hor guru Lal Hansda said, ‘Hari and Horo was one’ i.e. belief in one would mean belief in the other;⁷³⁹ it was already a well established belief. While offering prayers to the Shiva *linga*, the guru recited a predominantly Vaisnavite mantra:

Hey lachmi, brinda tulshi

Torak brahma chhoye gossain

Nomoh nomoh tulshi debayan

Nomoh nomoh guru dayal

Tulshi, tulshi, narayan

Brindaban amge menaya

Hama bohore dale dula

Nitoreho amge menaya

Hama bohore dale dula.⁷⁴⁰

The mention of the ‘six gossains’ might be baffling because the subaltern tradition from where the Sapha Hors were deriving many of their icons and practices were not followers of Brahmin

⁷³⁸L.S.S. O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Santal Parganas*, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1910) p. 179.

⁷³⁹ Interview, Guru Lal Hansda 22/2/2010.

⁷⁴⁰ O Lukhi, Brinda Tulsi,

Torak Brahma, Cho Gossain,

Nomoh! Nomoh! Tulshi Debayan,

Tushi Tushi Narayan

You live in Brindaban,

We pour water on you,

You are there amidst us

We pour water on your head

Interview Lal Hansda 22/2/2010. Translated into Bengali by Subodh Hansda.

dominated Vaishnava tradition that was initiated after Chaitanya's death.⁷⁴¹ It may be therefore argued that the Sapha Hors were not conversant with the history of the exclusion of the non-Brahmins that this conservative strand stood for. They seemed to randomly picked up from various surrounding Hindu communities whatever sounded interesting to them. Revering *gossains* from whom they derived their inspiration along along the channels of subaltern interaction in the region, they probably found reassurance in re enforcing the interceding power of the gossains by imagining six of them together. We may therefore argue that any isolated and disjointed reference to Brahmanical practices and rituals and spiritual authorities should not be construed in the case of the Sapha Hors as an ideological submission to the upper castes. The Sapha Hor religion being an oral religion had a large part in the reconstitution of the Sapha Hor beliefs. Typical of oral religion, the character of the Sapha thought remained 'open-ended' that 'adapted and adopted new beliefs in the course of their journey through verbal renderings from one generation to another.'⁷⁴²

The inspiration behind the Sapha Songs: are they reflections of their millenarian and pacifist moods?

We are therefore looking at a sect whose world view was reconstituted through varied motifs, beliefs and ideas which because of its unstructured and flexible nature underwent constant transmutation in the course of the sect's long historical journey. But a study of the Sapha songs gives us a different perspective to the Saphas' understanding of their lives. Unlike the Santals

⁷⁴¹ See Ramakanta Chakraborty *Bange Baishnabh Samaj* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1996) p.166; Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Gauriyō Bashinabh Dharma o Samakalin Bharityo Bhaktibad in* Abanti Kumar Sanyal and Ashok Bhattacharya eds., *Chaitanyadeb Itihish o Abodan*, op cit, p. 116.

⁷⁴² For an understanding of the nature of oral religion see See Sumanta Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular form*, op cit, p.4.

songs which touched on diverse theme such as their cosmology, social, economic or religious life with variations in their lyrics and tunes, the Sapha Hor songs had a predominantly pacifist approach to life, revealing an intense feeling of religiosity, piety, pain as they communicated with all or each of the god/s. Of course we can only hypothesize where such self-critical expressions emanated from; perhaps it was caused by the pain of failure during the *Hul* the burden of which the Saphas carried on themselves, perhaps an unfulfilled feeling of being abandoned by god inspite of pursuing a life of purity with complete dedication or from an intent urge to win back gods blessing through a total submission to him. In the absence of written texts, our only access to the inner most corner of the Sapha thoughts is through these songs which constitute a significant part of the life of the Sapha Hors in keeping with the traditions of the Santals. The Sapha Hors however practiced collective singing and did not perform dancing; a prohibition they imposed upon themselves as early as 1881, as a part of their spiritual project to reform themselves and lead a pure life. For the Sapha Hors, their songs and prayers were the only means to release the load of their pent up emotions which among the colonial officials (including missionaries) only Reverend P.O. Bodding thought it necessary to record in 1921.

For our study, the *Hul* songs remain the originary point of reference because the Sapha Hors could never distance themselves from the *Hul*. Yet the significant departure from the militant mood of 1855 is no where more evident than in the Sapha Hor songs composed after 1871. Therefore, only a comparison with *Hul sereng* (song) can bring out the true significance of the pacifism that is inherent in the Sapha Hor beliefs that blended with their spiritual outlook to life. The *Hul sereng* resonated the angry voice of the Santals, tortured by years of humiliation, exploitation and dispossession, until one-day god appeared before them, told them that the time

was ripe for rebellion- as we have seen in the first chapter. The battle call was direct and confident when the Santal bards composed their songs:

For our wife –children,
For the land and the house,
Alas! This fight, this fight!
For the cow-bullock, the plough, the riches,
To get back all we had before,
We will revolt.⁷⁴³

Even after the revolt was crushed and the defeated rebels were dragged like cattle to the jail, their hands and feet chained in iron cuffs, the bards continued to compose songs. The following song justified the cause of the rebellion even under the threat of the harshest punishment awaiting the rebel under a colonial judiciary; it was sung in the form of a conversation between the rebel Santal and his mother:

Whose instructions awakened you?
At whose orders did you slay Rup Singh Tamboli?
At Sidhu's orders mother, at Kanhu's commands mother, I have
slayed Rup Singh Tamboli,
You have cuffs around your hands, iron chains on your feet, you
are going to Siuri jail,

I have flute in my hands mother, (as if) I am going to visit the Siuri fair.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴³ Suhrid Bhowmick ed., *Saotali Gaan O Kabita*, (Calcutta: Sahitya Academy 1996) p.72.
(translation is of the present scholar).

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid, p.74.

The *Hul* was defeated; the mass of the Santals, suppressed by colonial repression became bankrupt, desolate and their morale was completely crushed. Even the bards stopped composing songs of encouragement. In the changing milieu, with the shadow of defeat cast over the life of the rebels, the Sapha Hor songs composed during this period reflected the change. The songs talked about a complete submission to the grace of god for deliverance from the present state of misery. There was no longer any incitement to direct action or language of rebellion or any reference to the recovery of the lands or resources that the Santals considered their own rather Sapha Hor songs articulated predominantly a pensive, self introspective mood, talking about a life of purity as a means to win back the favours of god; after all it was their failure to comply with the moral commands of god that led to their defeat during the *Hul*. The Sapha Hors sang

Ram, Ram,

O! Man repose your faith in Bhagirath baba,

Speak the name of Ram,

Give up liquor and meat,

Drive away fowl and pig,

Accept 'Sapha Dharam'

Ram, Ram.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁵ Ram, Ram

E manewa Bhogrith babare tehadokpe

Ram Jiutum rof

Pe Paura,jel bagipe

Sim, sukriphara!!kope

Sapha dhorom atanpe

Ram, Ram.

Source: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/66007/13/13_appendix.pdf

In 1921 P.O. Bodding documented another song of the Sapha Hors (he refers to them as Kherwars) which of course he cited to indicate the predominantly Christian influence on the Sapha Hor beliefs.

In this world there is trouble, affliction;
In the other, (next world) there is anxiety,
Come let us go to the heaven world,
In Heaven is the world of content and pleasure,
-all (the goods of this) world,
Come let us go to the heaven world,⁷⁴⁶

The song reflected a similar sense of dejection whether from the failure to reclaim the Santal country or from their state of economic hardships or dispossession- we do not know for certain. The song talked about three worlds; the first world was understandably the troubled world stemming from the lived experiences of the Santals, the second world or the ‘after life,’ also portrayed an unhappy life as it was perhaps related somewhere to the Santal concept of *hana puri* (related to a place where they suffer from their past mistakes)⁷⁴⁷ and finally the heaven world where the people could find ultimate solace, the last clearly a reflection of the Christian influence as interpreted by Bodding. By Heaven, the Sapha Hors however, could also be thinking of that perfect life epitomized by the kingdom of god which the Santals had dreamt of and was within reach if god so desired.

⁷⁴⁶ P.O. Bodding, ‘The Kharwar Movement among the Santals’ op cit, p. 231.

⁷⁴⁷ The Santals do not believe in the transmigration of the soul.

Significantly, a study of the Sapha songs revealed a considerable transformation in their state of mind as the Saphas responded to the swings in their millenarian moods. Although the Sapha Hors had adopted a pacifist life, dedicated completely to spiritual practices, there were also moments when they responded to political developments such as it happened from the second decades of the 20th century with the arrival of Gandhi as the new messiah of the people. Like the mass of people, the Sapha Hors too were drawn by the appeal of Gandhi especially his message of *Swaraj* which sparked millenarian expectations around the notion of Gandhi raj. As large masses joined the anti-colonial movement to drive the *sahebs* out of the country, the songs once again reflected the militant mood of the *Hul* days:

Ram, Ram

Brother, Gandhi Baba summons us to the Quit India Movement

Brother, come everybody to join in the Quit India Movement

Victory to the Kherwar warriors!

Take the name of Sidhu, Kanhu and Bhagirath and destroy the enemies.

Ram, Ram.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁸ Ram, Ram Boehako,
Gandhibae dharwakada Bharot choro andolon,
Delabochako Bharat choro andolonrebo seladoka,
Jit hoyokma kherwati la[haikoak!
Sidu, Kanhu, Bhogrithak nutum numkatet mohndakpe
Ram, Ram.
Source: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/66007/13/13_appendix.pdf

The enthusiasm of the masses in 1942 was unprecedented as we have seen in chapter four but once the movement was crushed and the leading political parties became involved in the struggle for transfer of power, the people who had awaited for some miraculous transformation of their lives became silent and their voices became passive again. The Sapha Hor songs although collected in 2009, by the recent researcher, once again reflected the same feeling of dejection as the sect immersed themselves in their religious life, singing *bhajans* and organizing *puja*. The appeal of the songs became spiritual and submissive, placing their faith on god once again in anticipation that perhaps all was not lost and better times was in the offing. The Sapha Hors sang in groups while they offered their prayers to god/s through their *gurus*:

I will give you a pair of bananas,
I will give you a pair of fruit,
Accept our offerings,
We have come to you,
We are waiting in hope,
Lord accept us,
We will be sad
We will be sad {without you}
We look to you for fulfilling our wishes
We will offer you puja in pairs
We will offer you lights (pahar bati) in pairs,
Please accept our offerings
Sibah Namah!.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁹ Jura jura kala debo go
Jura jura phol debo go

The Sapha Hor congregational singing was in tune with the Vaishnavite *kirtans*- a practice which the sect had possibly picked up from the itinerant gurus who roamed the Santal country. Like the *kirtans*, both men and women took part in the collective singing although unlike the *kirtanias* i.e. the devotee who became immersed in dancing in a state of ecstasy, the Sapha Hors avoided dancing thus modifying Santal practices according to their understanding of the pure and impure, the right and the wrong. The Sapha Hors' practice of collective singing however signified a deviation from the Santal practice because among the Santals, only the Naeyke and Kudum Naeyke - the village priests performed religious acts. In a striking contrast to the Santals, on special occasions, such as the *Maghi Purnima*, the Sapha Hor *guru patnis* took an active part in the rituals along side the gurus.⁷⁵⁰

Significantly within the Sapha Families, as the sect was reorganizing their beliefs in the post Bhagirath period, the position of the Sapha women was perhaps undergoing a change too. In 1881, the colonial records talk of an *ayoji* or woman guru who was associated with the anti-

Atang takin meye dhorom noya
 Tehen riya kin hej akana
 Tehen riya kin durub akana
 Neh baba atang ajam aa!
 Puja da atang taraya
 Aamthen kin ushat akana
 Aamthen kin aash akana
 Jura jura sheyo debo go
 Jura jura pahar bati debo ma
 Nunkin nowa puja prasad –
 Atang takin me Sibah! Mahadev!

Interview, Lal Hansda 22/2/2010. Note: The Sapha Hor songs is henceforth written in the Roman script because of the present scholar's lack of knowledge of Santali.

⁷⁵⁰ The Santal women did not have much role in the rituals of the community. They were barred from witnessing sacrifice. They could assist in certain ceremonies but could only share certain portions of the sacrificial meat. In certain circumstances, the women could not enter the *bhitar* or private shrine. This was because the Santals believed that the sex of the woman would contaminate the bongas. See W.G. Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice: A report on the Santal*, (Concept publishing Co pvt ltd, New Delhi, 2014) p. 129.

colonial agitation in Barharwa, Rajmahal.⁷⁵¹ We do not know anything about the leader or whether there were other Santal women leaders involved in the agitation because of lack of archival records and perhaps due to the widely dispersed character of the movement of 1881. The colonial records however again fall silent on the role of the Santal women in the intermittent period 1881--1947 and we know nothing about their role even during the Quit India movement of 1942.⁷⁵² But the fact that organizational changes had indeed taken place within the Sapha household is apparent from the role of the women *pujari* accompanying their male companion during the *Maghi Purnima*. On ordinary occasions however, the guru made offerings to god while the women accompanied him, leading the choir, singing and playing the *khartal*. The Sapha Hors composed songs in celebration of special occasion like the *Kartik Purnima*, when the Santals sought blessings for good crops in the coming season. But even such compositions created to celebrate specific occasions, reflected a passive, somber mood, a total kind of pacific abandonment to god:

Baha ba baha ba atang taya ba,/ phul baba phul baba (god of flowers)

Accept our offerings,

Kuru ba kuru ba atang taya ba, / karuna baba karuna baba (god of compassion)

Accept our offerings

Niye tithi d ajam tayeme , Ram Ram/ On this holy occasion listen to our prayers,

Ram! Ram!

Niye tithi d atang tayeme/ On this holy occasion accept our offerings.⁷⁵³

⁷⁵¹ Report of F.F. Cole, the missionary at Barharwa Rajmahal to S.S. Jones, the Assistant Commissioner of Rajmahal. BJP. File 9, August 1881, WBSA.

⁷⁵² Except for Ushrani Rani Mukherjee, the President of the Forward Bloc, Santal Parganas, I have not come across the names of any other women activist in the August movement of 1942 in the district of the Santal Parganas.

⁷⁵³ Collected during Kartik Purnima, 16/11/2009.

The appeal of the Sapha Hor songs was always humble and unpretentious. Only rarely, a spirit of positiveness resonated in the songs as the Saphas prepared for their offerings to god. The following Sapha Hor *dong* song,⁷⁵⁴ in keeping with the general Santal practices commemorated on different social occasions - like some body's birth, death or marriage - it did not convey a spiritual quest, not even a direct offering but simply an outpouring of the heart:

In this earth grows the garden of flowers,
It is a proof of life and existence (of god)
Pour out your heart and see
I have offered flowers for your worship
I have arranged the lights in a circle
This garden belongs to Shalghi ma,
Her garden is a proof of life
For once look at her flower garden
The sun shining during the day you are happy
The night's moon that live in the cave, (you are happy)
The daughter of the gods' bless her
The daughters of the gods prove your existence.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁴According to Suhrud Bhowmick the *dong* songs are possibly the first compositions venerating the many facets of social life- birth death, marriage, name-giving ceremony. Suhrud Bhowmick, *Santali Gaan o Kobita Sankalan*, op cit, p. 52.

⁷⁵⁵ Naoya dhurire baha bagan
Jiu mone d praman taya go
Jiu mone d nel tay meye
Atu tolare baha arid
Biharire bati madher
Shalghi ga ga ah! baha bagan
Shalghi ga ga ah! Praman taye meye
Ghorch buto do nel taya go
Baha bagan benget ataye meye

The poet is aware that the earth was the cradle which grows flowers and made gardens grow. Indeed, the flowers were proof of the bounty of the earth and its ever alive character which in its turn is the proof of the omnipresence of god. The song talks about one Salghi as an archetype of Santal women. She has adorned her garden with flowers, pruned it and preserved it with utmost care as an offering to god and as a proof of the pulse of life that is ultimately gods'. The garden must have been created with so much of passion and sincerity or the sun would not have shined upon it to indicate god is happy and the moon would not have shined upon it to indicate that god was happy and the daughter of the gods would not have blessed Salghi enabling her to create a garden in full blossom. The daughter of the gods by doing so prove the existence of god himself. In this manner, the imperfections in human character are thus sought to be removed by aesthetically creating a pleasant flower garden. The land, the flowers, the land that yielded crops and flowers- symbolized the creation of god; it is to that god that the Sapha Hors look for compassion to bring back the world that was lost. The Sapha Hors therefore prayed that they were making amends, by making themselves and their world, worthy as possible of the imminent coming of god.

The Sapha Hors also worshipped Ram. One of the Sapha Hor gurus told the present researcher that they wear white because they are worshippers of Ram.⁷⁵⁶ In the Santal tradition, the mythical Ram was a known figure. According to the origin myth, the Kherwars(Kherwals) had helped Ram to fight against Ravana, a time when there was no conflict between the Hindus and

Sin chanda bhage menakme
Deb jyati mai sabud ataya
Deb jyati mai praman taye meye.
Song collected during Maghi Purnima 22/2/10.

⁷⁵⁶ Interview, guru Hikim Murmu of Shiva Pahar, 15/3/2009.

the Santals.⁷⁵⁷ According to another story narrated by Kolean Guru, when Sita was being carried away by *Ravana*, she prayed to Sing Bonga who then blessed her with a venereal disease which protected her from *Ravana* during her days of imprisonment in Lanka.⁷⁵⁸ Among the Sapha Hor gurus of the 19th century, it was a common practice to hail the names of Ram and Chando together during their gatherings.⁷⁵⁹ In the 20th century however, in the colonial setting, Ram was increasingly becoming the savior, an epitome of stability, the dispenser of justice in a country ruled by alien rulers who had no legitimate right over the kingdom. He was the King of Ayodha and the guru who led community; the just and moral ruler, virtuous and pure - qualities which perhaps the Sapha Hor guru referred to when he equated Ram with purity,⁷⁶⁰ The Santal *dasai* song venerated Ram looking upon him as the savior, in expressions which critiqued the colonial government and its principles of governance. The Sapha Hors, situated in this cultural milieu, became ready followers of Ram in the war against the alien rule, the Santals sang:

Dear Guru, the brave king was the guru of

Ayodhay,

Dear Guru, because there was a king and a queen

The country was saved dear Guru,

Today because they are no longer there, dear guru,

The country is devastated dear,

Dear disciple, they were true people,

⁷⁵⁷ HMHRK, op cit, p.10.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid, p.159.

⁷⁵⁹ O' Malley, op cit, p. 175.

⁷⁶⁰ The Bhagat leaders amongst the Oraons of Orissa also used white to colour their houses and set up a white flag in front of their houses, as the colour white indicated an affinity with Dharmes. Sangeeta Dasgupta 'Locating Adivasi Identity in Colonial India: The Oraons and the Tana Bhagats in Chotanagpur, 1914-1919' in Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah eds., *Savage Attack*. (New Delhi: Social Science Press. 2014) p.135-6.

Dear disciple, there was none like them,
There is not another face like them, dear
Dear disciple, they preached true religion
They were virtuous, dear
Dear disciple, they spoke words of truth
They were righteous, dear
Dear disciple, they were united dear,
Dear disciple, for this reason
Dear disciple, they were loved by Baba Iswar.⁷⁶¹

In the Santal *dasai* song, Ram is not god but rather the guru, who is loved by Baba Iswar or Chando and can lead the people to the destined future. The concept of Ram as the guru is often re-enforced in the Sapha songs and in one of them Ram is mentioned as ‘hor’ or the man. As the guru, he is revered in a typical Vaishnavite congregational singing:

In mother tongue sing,
Hare kitna hare kitna Ram Ram hare hare
Taha reta nana tar na ho (tune)
Where are you Ram hor/man
You are amidst u
Hare kitna hare kitna Ram Ram hare hare.⁷⁶² (emphasis added)

⁷⁶¹ Ramdas Tudu, ‘Kherwal Bangsha Dhorom Puthi Katha’ op cit, p. 265. The *Dasai* festival is held during the four days of the Durga puja. The Santal men dressed as women visit several neighbouring villages dancing and singing playing a special instrument called the *Bhuyang*. According to one popular interpretation, this festival was enacted as a remembrance of the defeat of a non-Aryan leader by the name of *Hudur Durga* by the evil machinations of Indra, god of the Aryans. The reason why most of the Dasai songs ended with ‘hai’, ‘hai’ (alas!, alas!) See Gorachand Murmu, ‘Hudur Durga o Dasai Nritya’ in Subhomoy Roy ed., *Madal*, Dasai o Hudur Durga Sankha (Bolpur: Sri Lakshmi Press, 2016) p.10-12.

⁷⁶² Collected during Maghi Purnima, 8/2/2009.

These Sapha Hor songs thus revealed varied moods even within the mould of pacifism. There were flashes of optimism when the Sapha songs talked about creating the garden of flowers with great enthusiasm, of adorning the paths with lights, as if in eternal preparedness for the imminent coming of god. Sometimes the songs talked about submitting themselves to god in the hope of making amends so that god will finally descend to restore the world that they lost. There were times when the songs reflected an intense sense of pathos and anguish when they begin to question their way of life and they express doubt whether they are able to uplift themselves in the eyes of god or were they failing again with grave consequences for the community. One of the songs talk about how the river Ganga was losing its purity, and so the bard reminds the people of the pressing need to bring back the purity of the river, i.e. the purity of life:

From the heights of Madar pahar(hills), baba I have seen,
The waters of Rajmahal Ganga have turned muddy,
We have to bring back to Rajmahal, baba/father,
Bring back the pure water of Rajmahal Ganga.⁷⁶³

Therefore, in the following song, the Sapha Hors remind themselves of their moral duty to continue to pursue the ‘true’ path. Composed in *lagre*, the Sapha Hors thus sing upholding the principles that govern Sapha Hor’s life:

⁷⁶³ Madar buru chot khan e koyok led baba
Rajmahal dah! Ganga dah bade ruwaren
De baba Rajmahal deben ruwara
Rajmahal Ganga dah pharia ruar pe

According to Krishnapada Kishku, *lagre* is a classical composition, composed some time in the past and retains its original form. The *Hul* songs for example was composed in *lagre*. Interview held on 16/11/2009

The white earth is a proof of *dhorom*/ right path
The white sand is proof of *dhorom*/ path of purity
In the midst of the river stands Devi Durga,
Before you and in the middle of the river stands daughter Ganga.

Without us who is going to talk about it?
Who will provide the necessary proof?
Dekho dekho Ramji/ Ramji bear witness,
Who will appreciate the white earth of the country Bihar?⁷⁶⁴

The Sapha Hors believe that their philosophy of life that they so long nurtured with all sincerity of beliefs, in their practices and their beliefs, based on norms of purity was the only path that could lead the community out of the dreary uprooted life to the desired land/country. How did they know that? They know that because they are blessed by the goddess who stands in the midst of the river. The white earth of Bihar and the white sand of the river have stood as witness to their existence. The responsibility to follow the codes of conduct therefore rested on them for without them there was no one left to talk of *dhorom*/ path of truth. No one could revive the purity of the lands.

⁷⁶⁴ Deb jati moyi okare menama
Pranam menama
Dhorom talare khari matid
Dhorom talare sabud bali
Noyi Rakhare Deb Durga moyi
Samang rakhare menayo Ganga moyi
Ale baang khan takaye leyi a
Ona akaya parmana
Dekh dekh Ramji, dekh dekh Ramji
Dishom bihare khari matire okaye sabuda
Dekh dekh Ramji dekh dekh Ramji
Dishom bihare khari matire okaye sabuda

It was as if to renew their symbolic act of purification that on the full moon day of *Magh*, considered to be an auspicious day in Hindu almanac,⁷⁶⁵ Sapha Hors travel every year to the banks of Ganga to pay obeisance to river Ganga at the location where it was believed, hermit *Jhanu*'s cottage was washed away by the flowing Ganga.⁷⁶⁶ In this chapter, it has been our objective to listen to the voice of the Sapha Hors, their eclectic mix of belief through which they invoked a large pantheon of gods without renouncing their Santal identity. Their songs were simple urging of the common man to seek the blessings of the divine power seen through their manifold manifestations. However, the inclusion of a number of Hindu deities into their pantheon of gods did not automatically ascertain the place of the Sapha Hors in the Hindu community.⁷⁶⁷ The sect continued to consider themselves as adivasis, sharing a common public space with a predominantly Santal community and the Santal Christians. The Sapha Hors are not regulated by caste rules but by their age old customs which they inherited from their ancestors. It was the census enumerators, the politicians and interested groups who have been more concerned with freezing their eclectic ideas into fixed beliefs.

⁷⁶⁵ According to the Hindu Almanac, *Kali Yug* was inaugurated on the day of Maghi Purnima and hence the dip in the river Ganga was a symbolical act of purification.

⁷⁶⁶ According to popular tradition, the cottage of the hermit Janhu was washed away by the flowing Ganga and in his rage the powerful hermit had swallowed all her water. Later at the behest of the gods, Ganga was ejected once more through the ears of the hermit. See Adi Ramayan, verse 43, in Nimai Chandra Pal ed. *Bharatiya- Puranic Abhidhan* (in vernacular) op cit, p. 484.

⁷⁶⁷ David Hardiman makes a similar argument in his study of the Adivasis in Southern Gujrat. See Hardiman, 'Adivasi Assertion in South Gujrat' in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies Volume III: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: OUP, 1989) p. 216.

Conclusion:

Situating the Sapha Hors in the changing milieu today

This dissertation has been an attempt to recreate, the story of a group of Santals, who called themselves Sapha Hors; their travels in history, their story dialectically constituted through various experiences and moments in response to colonialism and later in their interactions with the wider currents of anti-colonial nationalist politics. We have tried to situate the sect within a complex dialectical conjuncture, which cannot be explained through any unitary grid such as ‘Hinduization’ but rather through an exploration of the internal dynamism of the sect, how they reconstituted their world view at the same time retaining their identity as a Santal. We have addressed the question whether the Sapha Hors’ quest for the moral world might have been a way to reckon with their memories of defeat. We have studied how the anti colonial strains in the movement led to open confrontation with the colonial government and how the sect articulated their aspirations in a millenarian mould. One major question we have tried to engage with in the thesis was the notion of Hinduization of tribes. We have seen how the colonial officers and the missionaries construed the change in the traditional lifestyle as practiced by the Sapha Hors, such as giving up rice beer, sacrifices, abandoning dancing, as Hinduization among the Santals. We have also seen how in the decades of the 1920-1940s, the project of conversion of the tribals, began under the initiative of the Hindu Mission in convergence with the local Congress in the Santal Parganas. These efforts, we argued were a part of the nationalist project at creating an imaginary unified Hindu nation state where all tribes were seen as a part of the Hindu community. We have also seen how some of the British scholar-administrators advocated the ‘isolationist policy’ to contest the notion of the tribe as the Hindu. Ironically a significant section

of scholarly opinion today continues to echo the old ‘Hinduization’ logic that was once initiated by the colonial administrators in the 19th century. The thesis has argued against any such essentialised characterization of the sect. Rather invoking historicity, this thesis has argued in favour of situating the Sapha Hors in their appropriate spatio-temporal location(s) and studying their genesis and transformation partly through the prism of the Sapha Hor’s own agency and partly through a deconstruction of archival statist knowledge.

Turning to the present day situation in the Santal Parganas, we however find it necessary to revisit the pertinent question we have already addressed in this thesis - whether the sect was at all Hinduizing.⁷⁶⁸ Its relevance rises from the fact that the adivasis are now being increasingly drawn into ‘a politics of religion,’ which according to Amita Bavishkar, ‘coincide with an expanding Hindu nationalism in the potent mix of religious faith, cultural explanations and electoral opportunity.’⁷⁶⁹ Conversion of adivasis, which is now a much talked about issue is not just about a quantifiable change in the religious belief but also a change in the life style. Bavishkar observed a ‘bazaaria culture’ developing among the adivasis which concurred with the movement of Hinduization.⁷⁷⁰ Conversion according to Nandini Sundar could also be initiated through the process of absorption into ‘mainstream’ – as defined by Hindu organizations in terms of Hindu religion and culture.⁷⁷¹ In this concluding section of the study, we are not concerned with organized projects of conversion like *ghar vaapsi* (home returning) but rather a silent process of conversion through cultural projects of the organized Hindu political parties whose

⁷⁶⁸ The Sangh Parivar has tried to recast ‘Adivasi’s’ as ‘Vanvasi’s’ as a critical component of their ideological project. The Sangh denies Adivasis the status of the original dwellers because the idea runs counter to its own claim that the Aryans are the original inhabitants of the land.

⁷⁶⁹ Amita Bavishkar, ‘Adivasi Encounters with Hindu Nationalism in India’ in *Economic and Political Weekly Review*, November 26, 2005, p. 5111.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 5107.

⁷⁷¹ Nandini Sundar ‘Adivasi vs. Vanvasi: The Politics of Conversion in Central India’ in Satish Saberwal and Mushirul Hasan eds., *Assertive Religious Identities*, Delhi, (Delhi: Manohar, 2006).

constant interaction with the sect has significantly impacted the lives of the adivasis around them. Our hypothesis is that, the Sapha Hors are gradually being absorbed into ‘mainstream’ through state sponsored cultural projects which serve as an ideological breeding ground for concepts like Hindutva. This observation is based on the changing character of the *Maghi mela* which occurs every year on the banks of river Ganga at Rajmahal on the full moon night of *Magh*. (January-February).

The present scholar first visited the *Maghi mela*, Rajmahal in the month of January 2009.⁷⁷² Every years on *Maghi Purnima*, the Sapha Hors and the locals, gather to make their offerings to Ganga in Rajmahal. The place according to the Sapha guru was sacred for it was here that the hermit Janhu swallowed the river Ganga and ejected it through his ears.⁷⁷³ This however, does not seem to be the opinion of the people living here at the beginning of the 19th century. Writing in 1810-11, Francis Buchanan noted that no part of the river was reckoned to be uncommonly holy but vast numbers bathed at the three full moons without any great assembly forming at any particular place.’⁷⁷⁴ The process of local myth formation around the place was a later development then and has attracted large number of adivasis especially Sapha Hors for a long time.

As we waited on the shores, we saw the Sapha Hors streaming into the banks of the river and settling themselves under the numerous temporary *chaunis* (covers) that had sprung into existence on the river bed. They walked in groups possibly led by the guru; women wearing

⁷⁷² The *mela* ground can be accessed from the closest railway station Tinpahar situated on the Sahibgunj loop line at a distance of around fourteen kilometers from the station or by road via Barharwa.

⁷⁷³ The story is narrated by the Sapha Hor guru Lal Hansda.

⁷⁷⁴ Francis Buchanan, An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11 (Patna: Buchanan MSS. IOL, 1939) p. 148

white borderless saris and the men clad in white dhotis. Under the *chauni*, the guru and in some instances the guru *patnis* (wives) take equal initiative in the worship. They offered puja at the base of a symbol; a *Trisul* supported by two arrow cases from either side that was planted to a flat rectangular podium or the *bedi* (altar). While the guru offered prayers, the followers sang songs with accompaniments like the *khartal* and the harmonium. As night fell and moonlight flooded the white banks of Ganga, the Sapha Hors, silently walked towards the river. The women had little copper tumblers on their heads, balanced carefully, which sparkled as they reflected the moon light. Standing with feet immersed in the water, they chanted their mantras facing all four directions worshipping Ganga. In 2009, there was just one microphone with earsplitting noise, reciting the *Hanuman Chalisa*, drowning the silent prayers of the Sapha Hors. The Bihari Hindus who gathered here, although a minority among the adivasis, also had their priests who performed Ganga *Aarti* in imitation of the one performed in Haridwar. None of the communities however seemed to be perturbed by the presence of the other. A parallel world of beliefs had indeed unfolded here in Rajmahal where both the communities shared their myths and beliefs, albeit in their own way.⁷⁷⁵

After an interval of eight years, when I revisited the place, on Maghi Purnima, 10th February 2017, I found a change that was strikingly different from anything that I had expected. On the main road to the *mela* ground, a huge gate covered in Saffron cloth with life size posters of the present ruling party members greeted us at the entrance. The government, we learnt had taken over as the organizers of the entire event, since they came to power in December 2014. It was a massive five- day affair as against the humble one- day celebration of the Sapha Hors we observed eight years back. There were floodlights and loud speakers, stalls selling food,

⁷⁷⁵ Maghi Purnima, 29/1/2005

handicrafts and ayurvedic products of the Patanjali brand. A big auditorium stood in the middle of the ground with participants from different region, from the Bengali speaking *bauls* to adivasis from all across the district taking their turns to display their artistic skills. Large festoons specifying the worship of ‘*Prakriti puja*’ in Hindi (worship of nature) ‘Marang Buru and Jaher Era,’ indicated that the traditional Santals were now active participants in the celebration. It was no longer a primarily Sapha Hor gathering.

The Sapha Hor *puja* had also undergone a significant change. The rituals had become more elaborate and symbols of worship more complicated. There was the *Trisul* covered with red cloth and several strings of garlands piled on top of it, a case holding peacock feathers and a fire lit in emulation of the Brahminical *yajnas*; the latter purely a new addition with possible indications of trying to ‘sanskritize’ the worship. The head priest and his wife conducted the *puja*. But a hierarchy had grown within the priestly class, for I learnt that he now had other followers under him. As night fell, the Sapha Hors worshipped the river in their traditional manner walking to the river and offering mantras. One young man of around thirty years of age, a Sapha Hor, whose parents and grand parents were also Sapha Hors explained to us that the *Maghi mela* was their *disom parab* i.e. the festival of their country, while the village *parab* was the traditional festival of the Santals where they worshipped Marang Buru. His *jati* was Santal but his religion was ‘*sanatan*.’ The use of *sanatan* immediately raised several questions to the mind of the present scholar. Was this a reflection of the RSS teachings, a rhetoric they commonly used, for quite sometime now? Have the forces of Hindutva, which has always claimed that different adivasi groups, the Kol, Bhil, Mundas, Santals were part and parcel of the Hindu community finally

made inroads into the world of the Sapha Hors?⁷⁷⁶ Or was there also the possibility that the younger generation of the Sapha Hors were so baffled by the pressures of the Hindu ideological influence that they are at a loss to explain their identity. What is evident is, the *Sapha Dhorom* was possibly losing its former simplicity of belief, its flexible and accommodating character and inadvertently being drawn into the attractions of the ‘bazaaria culture.’ In this changing political milieu, the present study becomes even more relevant. It becomes more imperative to retell the story of the Sapha Hors, the legacy of their anti-colonial struggle, their vision of the moral world, their syncretic beliefs; a story which will be lost in the generalized, de-historicised understanding of the Sapha Hors as another Hinduized sect.

⁷⁷⁶ Indra Prakash, *A Review: The History and Work of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Sanghathan Movement* (New Delhi: Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, 1938) p.178

APPENDIX-1

MAGHI MELA, 2009



Picture 1: The Sapha Hor symbol of worship.



Picture 3: Offerings to Ganga



Picture 4: Sapha Hor *chaunis* on the river bank

APPENDIX-2

MAGHI MELA, 2017



Picture 4: The changing ambiance of the Mela.

Picture 5: New crowd, new festivity.



Picture 6: Changing symbols- ritualistic and elaborate display of offerings.

APPENDIX-3



Usharani Mukherjee, (President of the Santal Parganas Forward Bloc 1941-47)
Lambodhar Mukherjee in Motihari.

Glossary

Aarti-	Ceremony, Ritual
Aba -	Father
Abwabs-	Cesses imposed by the Muslim rulers
Adivasi-	Original dwellers of forests
Annas -	A unit of currency; sixteen annas equaled one rupee
Antaja-	untouchable
Arkattis -	Coolie recruiter
Asan-	Indian Laurel, Silver grey wood
Babus-	Gentlemen
Babujis-	A <i>sadhu</i> , religious teacher
Badna festival-	Sohrai , a harvest festival of the adivasis.
Bagdi	Cultivating, fishing and a menial caste of central and western Bengal
Bansi-	Flute
Banker-	A form of privilege over use of forest products
Bakher-	Prayer
Barind-	The districts of Malda, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Bogra.
Baru-	A large forest tree, <i>Dipteryx alata</i>
Batasha-	Sugar drop offered during worship of Hindu gods.
Bhagan-	Possibly <i>bhagawan</i> or god in the local dialect of Jharkhand
Bhajan-	A devotional song
Bhogta	Devotee
Bedi-	Altar
Bena-	Grass made for making artifacts by adivasi women.
Bhelwaragars-	A sadhu group; one of the subdivisions of the main sect referred to by Reverend Skrefsrud of the Home Mission of Bengaria, Santal Parganas.
Bhuia -	a semi-Hinduised caste
Bhuinphut Bhagat-	A devotionist sect among the Oraons.

Bhuinphut Mahadev-	God appearing in the dreams of Bhuinphut priest
Binti-	Recitation
Bonga-	Spirit, god
Buru-	Mountain
Caco chatiar-	Name giving ceremony of the Santals
Cai Campa-	A Mythical land mentioned in the Santal Origin myth
Cakladar-	Collectors of land revenue from their administrative units or <i>Chaklas</i> .
Chamars	Untouchable or a dalit community who are now under scheduled caste
Chando-	Sun god
Chalisa-	Devotional hymn
Charkhas-	Spinning wheel
Chata Parab -	Umbrella festival of the Hindus.
Chaitanya-	The spiritual leader of Gaudiya Vaishnavism
Chatiar -	The ceremony of purification from birth pollution
Chauni-	Shelter
Chaukidar-	Watchman or gate keeper
Chowkidari-	Tax
Chudders-	Shawls
Dak-	Mail
Damin-i-koh-	Skirt of the Hills;
Darogah-	Police Inspector
Dasa-	Servant or slave
Dasai-	Festival held on the last day of the <i>Durga puja</i>
Dasarath-	The father of Ram Chandra of <i>Ramayana</i>
Dassera-	Hindu festival celebrating the victory of Durga over Mahisasur (asurya)
Dasyu-	<i>Asurya</i> or demon
Decoity-	Armed Robbery
Dekos, dikus, -	A Hindu

Devi-	Goddess
Dhamsha-	Santal drums
Dharam-	Religion
Dong-	Song sung on different social occasions birth death, marriage, name-giving ceremony.
Durga, Parvati -	The wife of Shiva appearing under different names also known as Jaher Era among the Santal
Dhuti, dhoti-	A kind of male attire worn around the waist passing
Drupda-	A corrupt form of Draupadi of the <i>Mahabharata</i> , worshiped by the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh.
Elakas-	Region or area
Ganja-	Cannabis leaf/marijuana
Gajan-	A Hindu festival associated with Shiva, Dharma Thakur
Ganesh-	The son of Durga; god of wealth
Ghatwal-	Person in charge of the mountain pass
Gomasthas-	Originally a Persian word, ‘Gumustha’; Agents who arranged for the delivery of good to the Company
Gosae Era-	Youngest sister of Moreku and Turuku
Gossains-	Vaishnava followers
Govind-	
Goths-	Songs
Guru-	Teacher
Hadia-	Rice beer
Hajut-	Prison
Hakim-	Magistrate
Hanuman Chalisa-	Hindu devotional hymn addressed to Hanuman
Has	Goose or swan. Gander is Hasil. Has and Hasil the mythical birds.
Hat-	Local market
Hihiri Pipiri	Mythical land mentioned in the <i>jom sim binti</i>
Hinduized	To convert to or bring under the influence of Hinduism
Hor-	Man

Hukumnamahs-	Orders
Hul, Hool-	Rebellion
Ijaradars-	Revenue farmers
Isho and korol	Wooden implements from a single piece of wood
Jaher era-	The Lady of the Grove; Supreme goddess of the Santals
Jaher than-	Sacred grove of the Santals
Jagannath	The 'lord of the Universe' worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists primarily in Orissa
Jama	Total assessed rent
Jamabandi-	Revenue record
Jangal -	Forest
Jeneo, poita -	Sacred thread worn by Brahmins
Jhanu-	A Hermit in Hindu Mythology.
Jhil	Lake
Jatitattva	Origin of caste, creed
Joal-	The wooden attachment placed between the two cows for ploughing
Jogni-	Female power
Jom sim-	A festival organized in honour of Sim Bonga
Jote-	Land
Kacheri, kutchery-	Zamindars Office, court house
Kadamba	Burflower
Khaddar, khadi -	Indian home spun cotton cloth
Kali Puja-	Worship of Goddess <i>Kali</i>
Kanthi-	The wooden beads worn by the Vaishnavites
Karam tree-	A large forest tree, <i>Adina Cordifolia</i>
Kartik Agrahayan	The months of November and December
Kartik Purnima-	Hindu and Jain holy festival, celebrated on the Purnima (full moon) day or the fifteenth lunar day of Kartika (November–December)
Kendu	A tree (<i>Diospyros melanoxylon</i>)

Kenasag, Lata sag,	
Sunsmi sag, Kitha sag-	Names of different kinds of spinach.
Khair-	Man
Khartal-	Musical Instrument
Khas-	land owned by the government
Kherwal	Old name of the Santal; (Kher)bird and (wal)ancestors or ‘the ancestors Of the birds.’
Khilafat-	The chief spiritual authority of Islam as exercised by the Turkish sultans.
Kudum Naeke-	Assistant to the village priest
Kuraons-	currency
Lagre-	It is a Santal classical composition. It could also mean a form of dance
Lakshman baba-	Brother of Ram Chandra of Ayodha in <i>Ramayana</i>
Langoutis-	Loin cloth
Lingas-	The phallus as the symbol of Shiva
Lota-	Bucket for storing milk
Lughu Buru and Ghantabari-	Name of a place
Madal-	Drum
Magh-	January/ February
Mahapur-	(Possibly) heaven
Mahua-	A tree, <i>Madhuca longifolia</i>
Mantra-	Prayer
Marang Buru-	The Great Mountain; Principal <i>Bonga</i> among the Santals
Mahadev, Mahadeo-	Shiva
Mahajans-	Moneylenders
Maharani-	Queen
Manasha-	Goddess of snakes
Manda -	A festival to appease the sun and pray for the rains. Mahadev is the principal deity here. the and pray for rain during the hot anddry
Manjhi-	Village headman

Melas-	Gathering or fair
Moreku and Turuku-	Five or six; Santal <i>Bongas</i>
Munshi-	Secretary under Mughal empire
Mustajir-	Cultivating peasants who were actual owners of land.
Muthis-	Subscription
Naeke-	Village priest
Nilachal-	City of Puri, the abode of Hindu god <i>Jagannath</i>
Ojha-	A medicine man
Oraon-	An adivasi group inhabiting central and eastern India, Bangladesh
Palkis-	Palanquins
Pachwai, Pachoi -	Indian rice beer
Panchayat-	Local self-government at the level of the village or small towns
Parganas-	Group of villages
Pata-	The hook swinging festival of the Hindus in honour of Mahadev.
Patnis-	Wives
Patnidaries-	Intermediary land holders between the government and the land lords
Parampara-	Lineage
Parwanas, perwannah-	Orders
Peons-	Messengers,
Pergunnait, pergannaits -	Head of several villages
Phagun -	Month of March
Phirun	Pharaoh in heaven
Pilchu Buri and Pilchu Baba-	The first ancestors of the Santals.
Prabhat pheri-	The procession taken out in the morning.
Pradhan-	Headman of the village
Pultan-	Group
Puja-	Worship
Radha- Krishna	Hindu god and goddess
Raiyat -	someone who has acquired a right to hold land for the purpose of cultivating it.
Raj-	Government

Ram -	King of Ayodha, in the epic <i>Ramayana</i> . Seventh Incarnation of Lord Vishnu
Ram Chando duhai-	Mercy Ram Chando!
Rollas	Saplings
Ryots	Peasants
Sabai	Grass made for weaving ropes by the adivasis
Sabha-	Meeting
Sadgop-	Sadgop is a Bengali Hindu Yadav caste, found in West Bengal and Bihar
Sahibs, sahebs -	Europeans
Sal-	Timber
Sapha	Clean or Pure.
Sapha Hors, Safas, Saphas, Saphai, Bhagraits or Kherwars-	Different names by which the sect is known.
Satnami	A sect which was begun by Ghasi Das in Chattisgarh with the <i>Chamars</i> of Chhattisgarh in 1756
Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali.	The four age cycle of Hinduism.
Satyagraha-	A passive political resistance begun by Gandhi
Satyagrahi-	Participant in the Satyagraha movement
Sarkar-	Government
Sauria-	A Dravidian tribe living in the Rajmahal hills.
Sepatnis-	Under tenures under the landlords
Sepoys-	Soldiers
Siddhanta	Rules
Sindur-	Vermillion
Singhabahini-	The goddess who rides the lion
Sisoo-	North Indian Rosewood
Sita Ayo-	In Oraons myths, Sita Ayo was Parvati and the wife of Dharmesh.

Sitala-	Goddess of small pox
Six-gossains-	Six disciples of Chaitnya who came to control the Gaudiya Vaishnab religion after his death
Subah-	Leader
Surbarakar-	Court official
Sudarshan chakra-	Disk like weapon of Lord <i>Krishna</i>
Swaraj-	Self-Rule
Suddhi.	Purification
Taluk-	An administrative district for taxation purposes, typically comprising a number of villages.
Tamak-	A Santal drum
Tana Bhagats	A sect formed by Jatra Oraon of Gumla, Ranchi in 1914
Thakur-	The Supreme Being
Thana-	Police station
Talook-	A Large estate
Tilak	Mark of sandal wood on the forehead
Trisul-	The Three headed spear; the weapon of Shiva
Tulsi-	Holy Basil
Tulsidas-	Hindu poet-saint, reformer and philosopher from Ramanandi Sampradaya, best known as the author of the epic <i>Ramcharitmanas</i> ,
Tulsi Manch-	A small podium for planting the Tulsi
Tuppeh, tappeh -	Administrative division
Vaishnavas, baishtabs -	Followers of Vaishnava religion founded by Chaitanya
Vanavasi-	Dwellers of the forest
Vizir, wazir-	High ranking Minister under the Muslims rulers.
Zamindars-	Land lord

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Personal Diaries

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