A Tryst with the Tribes:

A Comparison of State – Tribe Relations in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India

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ABSTRACT

It is well-known that the relationship between the colonial State and the Tribes in nineteenth century India had been particularly conflict-ridden and interrupted by periodic ‘insurrections’ or rebellions. This paper studies the relationship between the pre-colonial Mughal State and its tribes and juxtaposes it against the colonial state’s management of the Khonds and the Santals, and explores what can be known about the nature of the nineteenth century ‘Indian’ state that is fundamentally different from its earlier avatars. Employing police reports and legal court files, this paper concludes, that the uniqueness of the colonial State lay in its unilateral interactions with the tribes that is a product of the transition from a state that exercised ‘narrative sovereignty’ over its territories to one that aspired to enforce ‘actual sovereignty.’ This categorical change in the nature of the state, this paper argues, employing Marshall Sahlins’ ‘possible theory of history,’ caused structural changes in the tribe-state relationship—the breakdown of which then became irreconcilable and the tribes reacted by performing rituals such as the *meriah* and the *bitlaha* which now assumed political functions. These rituals in their novel incarnation earned the label of ‘insurrection.’

Introduction

A survey of the historiography of the ‘State’ in South Asia demonstrates two marked asymmetries both temporally and in spatial terms. Temporally, the largest volume of academic literature is centered on the two transitional points—the establishment and extension of the Mughal administrative system (ca. 16th century) and the consolidation of colonial rule in the 19th century. Spatially, the focal points therefore tend to align with the temporal concerns and look at northern and coastal India respectively; leaving a vast swathe of South Asian territory in the dark. Yet it is necessary to understand mechanisms and strategies of state-formation in the Indian heartland as changes and transformations in these processes over the centuries such as in the early nineteenth century, have left considerable traces in the trajectory of Indian history and in the conception of the Indian state—as I have discussed previously elsewhere.¹

¹ Sagnik Bhattacharya, “Monsters in the Dark: The Discovery of *Thuggee* and Demographic Knowledge in Colonial India,” *Palgrave Communications* 6 no. 78 (2020): 1-9.

In my previous paper, I had discussed the delineation of the *self* and the *other* in Hindu cosmology and how the ‘Aryan’ state in ancient India defined itself in relation to the ‘other’ that is, the non-sedentary or the non-agriculturist communities that surrounded such settlements. In the course of this discussion, I had pointed out a certain degree of dependence of the state on these tribal entities for the regular functioning of the state and in realizing its economic interests. Such dependence, I argued naturally led to certain changes in the structure of their relationship and a consistent pattern of gradual ‘utilitarian inclusion’ can be noticed right from the time of the Mauryan Empire in the fourth century BCE.² However, what largely remained untouched is the transformation of tribal society itself and its perceptions of *its others* as a result of this contact—that scholars such as Aloka Parasher-Sen have been curious about. Did this relationship cause a transformation in the nature of tribe? Did it change their patterns of organizing themselves and the likes of these are questions that remain to be answered with any degree of definitive certainty and that too within the methodological parameters considered valid in historical scholarship. Although at present, I am in no position to fill this gap in historical scholarship, in this paper, I will continue that agenda set in the previous paper: to attempt a *longue durée* investigation of the relationship between the ‘state’ and the ‘tribe’ in India with a special focus on eastern India but will largely focus on the Early Modern and colonial avatars of the Indian ‘state.’

As I have explained before, in the colonial state, we find a most radical transformation of the idea of the state itself leading to a reconfiguration in the relationships with the tribes. In order to gauge that transformation, I will first discuss the nature of the relation between the state and the various non-agriculturist and/or non-sedentary populations in the Mughal Empire and general patterns of interaction between these two entities until the colonial intervention in order to set the stage for studying a transformation and then discuss the colonial state’s understanding of the Indian and how to govern it effectively briefly touching upon Nicholas Dirks and Bernard Cohn’s discussion on knowledge paradigms employed by colonial state. I will then proceed to outline the transformation of the relationship between the state and its other as evident through the Santal rebellion (or *Hūl*) of 1855 in the Damin-i-Koh region of modern West Bengal and Jharkhand and the Khond uprising of 1882 in Kalahandi, Odisha.

The transformation that I intend to demonstrate will manifest itself at a number of levels primarily to do with the nature of the state and the powers and capacities that the institution claimed for itself. While the state in ancient and medieval India made no claims to actual sovereignty over the forestland, the colonial and post-colonial state in India has extensive claims to the same replacing narrative sovereignty. This transition transforms ‘allies’ into ‘subjects’ and derives from a certain confidence in its ability to

² The previous paper would ideally be cited here. These references have been included to denote continuity of the project.

‘know’ the forest and its people that I have demonstrated was lacking in the ancient avatar of the state. Therefore, just as this transformation is a matter of a certain shift in the knowledge-systems employed by the institutions of power as Dirks masterfully argues, it is also a question of forest governmentality developing in the nineteenth century that caused a major shift in the state’s dealings with the inhabitants of these forests—a controversial and contested relationship that continues to this day.³

The key points of investigation in this paper are therefore, firstly, what are the broader interests and patterns of tribe-state relations visible in pre-colonial India? Secondly, what are the key (visible) elements of change in this relationship perceptible in colonial India and how were they perceived by the tribes themselves? And finally, what changes do both the tribes and the state demonstrate as a response to this colonial intervention (or failure thereof)?

Although this paper deals with the interactions of the ‘state’ with the ‘tribes’ most of the sources used in the course of its argumentation will be documents produced by the State and its agents. These sources primarily include state documents regarding the treatment and the management of the Khond tribes and the Santal rebellion in the Bengal Presidency. I will also be using a few ethnographic reports produced during the colonial period which (although not completely accurate) help researchers locate the relative position of the tribes in the colonial ecumene. This method of utilizing state documents (mainly, police and court files) to gauge the social reality of a subalternized population was, to a large extent, pioneered by the Subaltern Studies Collective and Ranajit Guha in particular⁴; I believe this method will yield positive results similar to what has been achieved in the studies of the Collective – this is the only way known and accepted by historians whereby we can overcome the silence on the part of the tribes in terms of the production of historical knowledge in the form of written documents.

1. The ‘Lost Tribes’ of Mughal India?

While references to non-agriculturist populations are rampant in the texts of ancient India as I have outlined in my previous work, Chetan Singh makes a curious observation that these peoples suddenly seem to disappear in the later records from the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire.⁵ While it is absolutely cogent to assume that the internal instability and alien-ness of the Delhi Sultanate along with its Delhi-

3 Note: This notion of ‘forest governmentality’ has not been extensively studied in the course of this present paper but has been discussed in great detail by Nicholas Dirks. Both the cause and consequence of these developments are to with with the re-imagining of “India” in terms of the State’s land-revenue policies—every nook and corner was now a ‘resource’ by virtue of its mere existence and thus had to be taxed. See: Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 108-116.

4 Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” in *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1-42.

5 Chetan Singh, “Conformity and conflict: tribes and the ‘agrarian system’ of Mughal India”, *Indian Economic Social History Review* Vol. 23 no. 3(1988): 321-322.

centered attitude is responsible for such omissions in the records, it does not explain the lack of acknowledgment of tribal (or non-sedentary/pastoral) existence in the Mughal empire which ruled from Afghanistan to Bengal at the height of its power. It is also absurd to argue that by the seventeenth century, such populations had integrated into the Mughal agricultural system as they seem to re-appear in British documents in the nineteenth century after a period of apparent in-existence.

The essential question therefore, is to ask how *agrarian* was 'The Agrarian System in Mughal India' that is, how extensive was this system? Due to the scanty research work on the interactions with tribals in the eastern part of India which is the region on which I will base most of this paper, I am driven to consider some instances from the ethno-history of northern and western India in search of the tribes that evaded mention in the Mughal documents and for a consistent pattern that might speak volumes about the nature of state—tribe interactions in pre-colonial South Asia. Both Christopher Bayly and Chetan Singh in a number of instances have suggested with some evidence that the Mughal system (economic as much as political) was an amalgamation of various different socioeconomic systems and that there was a consistent dialectical relationship between each of these that influenced and to a large extent changed each other.⁶

While established scholars such as Irfan Habib and Muzaffar Alam have stressed the predominantly agrarian nature of the Mughal socioeconomic system as well as the Mughal ecumenical repertoire, Shireen Moosvi's pioneering research into this field concluded that the gross cultivated region during the reign of Emperor Akbar (1556 – 1605) was only about 55% of that in 1909-10. Her study looked particularly at the calculations of the province of Punjab which was one of the *zabti* [measured] areas of the empire and found the cultivated area to be only 39.19% of the area under cultivation in 1910.⁷ Singh draws his conclusions regarding the co-existence of a number of different socioeconomic systems, primarily pastoralism on the basis of these calculations and through the multiple references to the Jats, Gujjars, Ghakkars etc. in the Mughal archives which demonstrate behaviors consistent with pastoralists in a primarily agrarian neighborhood i.e., periodic raiding.⁸

So, given the prominent existence of non-agriculturist communities in the empire, why do they almost never feature in the documents produced by the Mughal 'State' unlike the ones produced by their Hindu predecessors? Singh's one-step response is that historians have consistently misnamed them as

6 For a detailed survey of this matter, See: C. A. Bayly, "The Indian Ecumene: A Indigenous Public Sphere," in *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 180-212 ; Chetan Singh, "Conformity and conflict: tribes and the 'agrarian system' of Mughal India", *Indian Economic Social History Review* Vol. 23 no. 3(1988): 319-340.

7 Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire, c 1595: A Statistical Study* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 65.

8 Singh, "Conformity and Conflict", 321-322.

‘peasants’ without any attention being paid to distinguish between the different types of agricultural activities (i.e., sedentary and shifting agriculture). However, this argument is weak at best given that the Mughal state depended heavily on the extraction of agricultural surplus and its redistribution among the ruling classes.⁹ Since pastoral communities as well as shifting-agriculturists do not produce any sizable surplus, it is odd that they would have evaded any special mention in the state accounts. I believe the answer to this mystery can be found at multiple levels by exploring how the Mughal state dealt with these communities, how it saw itself and how it carried out the effective (real) act of governance.

The Grand Sedentarization

This entire conception of the relationship of the state and the tribes is based on the notion that through such a contact, both the state and the tribe transformed itself and was changed in terms of their natures in a truly ‘dialectical’ sense—they engaged with each other and interacted according to the terms set by the ‘other’ as well as themselves based on their social and geographical circumstances. However, as Singh points out, there is substantial evidence to suggest that Mughal rule eventually settled or ‘sedentarized’ a significant proportion of these peoples through their policies discussed below. As to why they do not appear to exist in the Mughal records, Moosvi offers a rather interesting perspective that has much to do with how the State saw itself and the myth they wanted to promote.

It is important to note that most of the ‘tribal’ populations studied by historians with regard to the Mughal empire show a high degree social stratification as well as differences in terms of the habitats. Singh found the Jats and Ghakkars for example, to be both agriculturists as well as as nomadic pastoralists engaged with the Mughal state in supplying pastoral products. Singh’s approach in explaining this phenomenon is distinctly evolutionary as he considers such formations to be the result of adaptation to local circumstances engendered by the pressures exerted by the state in dealing with these tribes. With regard to the Jats, Singh writes:

“The natural environment prevailing in the varying geographical areas which were inhabited by different sections of the Jats did, therefore, in all likelihood prompt structural changes in their society that made many of these sections fundamentally and characteristically different from each other. While the Jats had become settled peasants in the agricultural areas of Punjab, they continued to remain partially or wholly pastoral in the more inhospitable parts of the region.”¹⁰

The primary reasons for such pressures are generally two-fold. Firstly, pastoral societies are internally unstable and hence often fail to meet the requirements of their community as a whole. This forces such populations into regular contacts with the neighboring agrarian settlements which might either take the

9 Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707)* 3rd Edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

10 Singh, “Conformity and Conflict”, 328.

form of raiding or trading. While there are ample references in the *Babur Nama* for example of the Ghakkars, Gujjars and Jats are raiders¹¹ later records demonstrate a gradual shift towards sustained patterns of exchange with agrarian neighbors and with the Mughal State¹². Frederik Barth summed up this process by stating that “the nomads became tied in relationships of dependence and reciprocity to sedentary communities [...] their culture is as to presuppose the presence of such communities and access to their products.”¹³ This process, argues Rowton, begins the integration of the nomad and the villager into one single economic system; hereon, they behave “merely as specialized occupational groups.”¹⁴

Secondly, to account for this gradual shift in the behavior of the western tribes of India we must look some of the more consistent policies of the Mughal State with regard to the economic life of the empire and its relation to nomads. As I have stated earlier, the Mughal state depended strongly on sedentary agriculture producing a sizable surplus for its day-to-day functioning thus, the expanding empire became increasingly protective of its agricultural land and of agrarian communities. In such a situation, raiding became ever more costly and the pastoralists would have been pushed towards trading and cooperating with the sedentary population causing significant changes in their lifestyle which includes working as seasonal labourers in the increasingly commercialized agricultural sector of the Mughal State that was always in need of more and more labour. It is cogent to assume that such strong inter-dependence naturally led to a gradual sedentarization of the population or at least shortening their itinerant-routes and limiting it to areas adjacent to settled villages. This process was also actively supported and sponsored by the Mughal state by the foundation of towns such as ‘Gujarat’ for the Gujjar people¹⁵ Besides agriculture, such tribes as a Gujjars and Jats were also employed by the Mughals as mercenaries as Niccolao Manucci mentions in his travelogue.¹⁶

Thus, the picture that emerges from study of this narrative is one of simultaneous and co-existence of nomadic, semi-nomadic pastoral tribal groups within the Mughal ecumene that were gradually driven closer to the Mughal state-system by the state’s consistent focus on agriculture, military protection of agrarian communities and commercialization of the agricultural sector of the economy leading to its position of domination over the other forms of economic life that existed within the Empire. But what about

11 Emperor Babur, A. S. Beveridge (trans.), *Baburnama: A Memoir* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India, 2017), 454, 379, 387.

12 Singh believes the overflowing quantities of pastoral products (oil, ghee, butter etc.) in the Mughal Empire sourced from the Hisar-Firoza is evidence of such a sustained exchange. See: Singh, “Conformity and Conflict”, 334.

13 Fredrik Barth, ‘Nomadism in the Mountain and Plateau Areas of South-West Asia,’ in *Arid Zone Research*, XVII, Problems of the Arid Zone (Proceedings of the Paris Symposium, UNESCO, 1962), 345,

14 M. B. Rowton, “Autonomy and Nomadism in Western Asia,” *Orientalia* Vol 42 (1973): 247-258.

15 Emperor Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* Vol. 1, 91.

16 Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, William Irvine, (trans). Vol. 2 (Calcutta, 1965), 430.

the eastern tribes that were included within the empire as a result of Akbar and Jahangir's expansion eastwards?

Narrative Sovereignty

Delineating similar mechanisms in the east is difficult at best since the amount of data on the tribes of the east is almost entirely non-existent until they suddenly reappear in the British colonial records. However, we can surmise their mode of existence from the pattern of dealings that the Mughal empire had with the chieftains of Bihar and parts of modern-day Jharkhand (particularly, Palamou) and the nature of the Mughal state. For much like the Mauryan empire, the Mughal state, in spite of its appearance as a large impersonal bureaucracy with a complex machinery to institute uniformity, at its heart, it was one that depended on a series of negotiations with local elites, chiefs, *rāja(s)* and *nawab(s)*¹⁷. Such a mode of governance permitted a high degree of flexibility in terms of the symbols and the repertoire used by the administrative system at the grassroots level to accommodate the different socioeconomic systems that existed within the empire. The empire at the macroscopic level therefore, exercised 'narrative sovereignty' and executed a 'claim' to hold sovereign status within its boundaries while real power often lay at the hands of the chiefs and governors who carried out the orders that arrived from Agra.¹⁸

Studies with regard to the chiefs of Bihar and the kingdoms of Odisha demonstrate this claim very well.¹⁹ Most of the rulers of these regions that entered into a 'pact' with the Mughal state such as the governor of Palamou or the Kings of Jeypore maintained a myth of being 'outsiders' who rule with the consent of the aboriginal population inhabiting the territory.²⁰ Burkhard Schnepel's ethnohistorical surveys found rituals and rites that enshrined the position of these rulers and governors within the cosmological framework of the tribes and also signified their approval of the appointment. These will be discussed in further detail in the next section before I discuss the point of schism in this tradition with the advent of colonial rule. But for now it would be cogent to ponder why none of these distinctions made it into the official sources produced by the Mughal state?

17 Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence 1500-1700*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

18 Sanjay Subramanyam, Muzaffar Alam, *The Mughal State 1526-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

19 T. H. Ansari, "The Nature of Relationship Between the Chieftains of Bihar and the Mughal Empire," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 2010-2011*, Vol. 71 (2011), 319-326

20 Details of the rituals and myths involved in this process can be found in: Burkhard Schnepel, "Contact Zone: Ethnohistorical Notes on the Relationship Between Kinds and Tribes in Middle India," *Asian Ethnology* 73, no. 1-2 (2014): 233-257 ; The form of narrative sovereignty practiced by the Kings of Jeypore is further discussed in Natasha Nongbri, "Resistance Reconfigured: The 1882 Khond Disturbances in Kalahandi" *Indian Anthropologist*, Vol. 46 no. 1 (2016): 1-16.

This is an interesting question, the answer to which perhaps lies in the very nature of ‘narrative sovereignty’ which attempts to establish a consistent ecumenical repertoire and establish a cosmology whereby the position of the state and the ruling class can be asserted in a situation where real power does not lie in the hands of these institutions. This must be juxtaposed against Weber’s definition of the (Weberian) State as an institution that claims and exercises a complete monopoly on all forms of physical coercion²¹—a phenomenon that I shall refer to as executing ‘actual sovereignty.’

Chetan Singh’s research on the Punjab province shows that the *arazi* figures reported in the *Ain-i-Akbari* are were not based on any actual survey but projected and generated to make them consistent with the surveyed regions of the realm. Singh believes that the need to provide these figures arose out of Abul Fazl’s desire to present the Mughal State as a homogeneous body. “Even tribal territories, which may have been only marginally agricultural were, therefore, represented as areas which were properly measured, regularly assessed and in no way different from those regions of the empire that were indeed agriculturally developed.”²² And this view is what modern historians have propagated—of a unified and uniform empire, homogeneous in its agrarian system where nomadic pastoralists, slash-and-burn agriculturists and hunters do not exist and the emperor holds sway over all the realm. The truth is, that these populations existed as much as they did in ancient India but were increasingly drawn towards growing cooperation with the state and its agrarian industry as a result of the commercialization of agriculture and the military protection of agrarian territories. And in the east, Mughal rule was even more indirect, allowing the continuation of tribal micro-states and their respective contracts and traditional rights (as well as rites) that they held vis-a-vis the *de facto* rulers of Bihar, Bengal and Odisha.

2. Ritual Diarchy: The Case of the Khonds

Gadgil and Guha posit, in the course of their discussion of the ecological history of India, the role of the intervention of the colonial rule as a major watershed moment in history of the cooperation between the tribe and the state.²³ This means the breakdown of the established custom of ‘diarchy’ where narrative sovereignty was enacted *through* the tribal cosmology and the legitimate rule of *zamindar*(s) established through the enactment of customs and principles that included the tribe and the State within the newly generated political sphere. This explanation might go far in assessing why a large number of tribal uprisings took place during the nineteenth century which saw the most aggressive degree of colonial intervention in

21 Max Weber, *Economy and Society* Volume I (New York: Bedminster, 1978), 54-66.

22 Singh, “Conformity and Conflict,” 322.

23 M. Gadgil and R. Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 99-127.

the life of the tribes of eastern India—both in Bengal and in Odisha. In the rest of the paper, I will discuss the nature and genesis of this political cosmology and discuss in brief the breakdown of this alliance with reference to the Khonds of Odisha and the Santals of the Damin-i-Koh. The general thrust of this section is to demonstrate how different forms of colonial intervention eventually changed the nature of this alliance thereby making ‘rebellion’ the only remaining option against this intervention in the case of the Santals in 1855. This present chapter will demonstrate the nature of alliance prior to the colonial intervention and the transformation of ‘narrative sovereignty’ into ‘actual sovereignty.’

Here, I shall be comparing the cases of two tribal tracts—the Khonds of Odisha and the Santals of Bengal who lived under different forms of colonial rule in the nineteenth century. While the majority of the Khonds lived in the tributary zamindari estate of Jeypore, the Santals were direct subjects of the East India Company. The Kingdom of Jeypore, established in the mid-15th century, came under the suzerainty of the Company (and later the British Government of India) by becoming a zamindari estate in 1776 and remained so until India’s independence in 1947. The habitat of the Santals, known as the ‘Damin-i-Koh,’ on the other hand, skirted the Rajmahal Hills which was the military centre of Mughal power in Bengal. In spite of its proximity, evidence seems to suggest that the Santal territories were never formally penetrated by the Mughal forces and the Pahariyas and Santals largely continued their regular mode of existence through negotiations with the chieftains of Bihar that ruled in lieu of Mughal direct-rule.²⁴

The political organization of the Khonds have been studied extensively by Schnepel and Natasha Nongbri (in the specific context of the Khond disturbances in 1882) who have both asserted their fundamentally diarchic nature of existence with reference to their modes of interaction with the state as well as its agents (the kings of Jeypore).²⁵ Schnepel concludes on the basis of a series of police and court reports concerning the Khonds that—firstly, they had an organized political structure with a recognized notion of kingship. Secondly, that its legitimacy hinged on the receipt of consent and approval from the Khonds. Third, that they preferred a local male ruler (though he is external to the region or the tribe) in stead of a distant king; and finally, that they engaged in alliance and aid with the king of Jeypore when the latter demanded their support through traditionally prescribed rituals and methods.²⁶

Since the relationship of the tribes with the larger political unit (the colonial state, the Qutb Shahis or the Mughal Empire) was essentially indirect, it is cogent to assume that this pattern remained constant in spite of regime changes since at least the 15th century. Therefore, by studying these patterns of interaction,

24 Ajay Pratap, “The Savariya Paharia: Shifting Cultivation in the Rajmahal Hills,” in Ian Hodder (ed.), *Archaeology as Long-Term History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 75.

25 Schnepel, “Contact Zone” ; Nongbri, “Resistance Reconfigured”

26 Schnepel, “Contact Zone”, 244.

we can get a glimpse of the ‘normal’ mode of dialectic between the Khond tribes and the wider state. I will highlight two such cases and their resolution. The following tale is known from the *Koratpur District Gazetteers* in relation to brewing conflicts of the Khonds with the State in the little little kingdom of Bissamcuttack located within Jeypore:

Upon the death of the king of Kalyansinghpore, Krishna Deo, in 1884, the queen Neela Devi had been authorized to adopt an illegitimate son named Gopinath Deo for issues of succession. However, when the queen forwarded her own nomination with the help of the *Dewan* Sripati Dalapati, a conflict ensued and authorized by the Doctrine of Lapse, the King of Jeypore took charge of the territory as Krishna Deo had no legitimate son. This move was in violation of the traditional contract established between the Khonds and their immediate kings and a conflict ensued where the Khonds congregated on the day of *Dussehra* at Singhpur and declared Gopinath Deo as their *raja*. When the queen refused to recognize this coronation, the Khonds carried the minor child under an escort of 300 men to Jeypore where a temporary settlement was reached and Gopinath Deo was given an allowance. However, since the tripartite conflict continued, the King of Jeypore took charge of the estate until two sons of Gopinath Deo returned from the coastal districts and assumed suzerainty over Kalyansinghpur with the express support of the Khonds.²⁷

“The faithful Khonds, once again, supported them and the elder brother, resuming the title of zamindar began to collect rents and issue receipts. The Deo brothers gained the ready support of the people everywhere which caused great apprehension in the Royal court of Jeypore.”²⁸

This contract with the tribes—that their consent mattered in determining the selection of the next king appears all over Odisha as a similar story emerges from Carmichael’s report from the southern Oriya kingdom of Golgondah. When the ruling monarch Anata Bhupati was deposed by the British on account of repeated failures to pay revenues and the widow of his predecessor installed to the title:

“this election was highly distasteful to the hill *sirdars*: firstly, **because they had not been consulted** [...] troubles of all kinds thickened around the unfortunate Ranee, and it was not long that she was carried off to the jungles by a party of the hill peons and there barbarously murdered.”²⁹

While this rather disturbing report is revealing in itself, what follows is even more interesting. After this incident, the region became subject to direct rule by the Company and its collector’s native Amin. “But they were not long in discovering that the extinction of their ancient chiefs had seriously lowered their own status.” And they raised an insurrection against the government in favour of a restoration of the Bhupati

27 N. Senapati, *Koratpur: Orissa District Gazetteer* (Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1966), 416.

28 Ibid.

29 D. F. Carmichael, *Manual of the District of Vizagapatnam in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, Asylum Press, 1869), 236.

family and managed to install Chinna Bhupati as their *rāja* as well as hold out against the Company's militia for three whole years (1845-48).³⁰

The pattern that emerges from these cases, as pointed out by Schnepel is that sovereignty over the 'little kingdoms' held by the Khonds was only achievable in narrative terms as long as the political terms imposed were in line with the traditional lifestyle and contracts known to the Khonds. Neither the colonial state, nor the native state centred in Jeypore had the effective means of ruling these territories without tribal support which asserted its autonomy when the political contract between the tribe and the state was broken. In our final case for the Khonds, I will focus on the specific case of the 1882 Khond uprising in Kalahandi before moving on to the Santal Uprising of 1855. The point of investigation in both these cases is, although there existed a precedence and a pattern of settling such disputes relating to inheritance and traditional rights, why did the Santal uprising of 1855 and the Khond uprising of 1884 take the form that they did and bypassed the tradition mode of reconciliation? In order to answer this question, I will be briefly employing Marshall Sahlins' '(possible) theory of history'—the explanation through which would be, in my opinion coherent with the conclusions reached by Natasha Nongbri and Elizabeth Rotter-Hogan.

3. The Point of Schism: A Tale of Two Rebellions

The Khond Disturbance of 1882

Colonial discourses on the roots of the Kalahandi uprising tend to either favour a political or a religious explanation to the large-scale violence for a period of around six months in 1882. Politically, it stemmed from the schism that the British colonial intervention had introduced in the structures of legitimacy that existed between the Hindu *rāja* and the tribal chiefs. As K. S. Singh points out, the authority of the king was not formally recognized or deemed valid until the Khonds had made a claim to have installed him on his *gadi* [throne] and he was made to marry a Khond girl.³¹ These relationships at the same time, therefore were expressed entirely in ritual terms and the king recognized the authority of the tribes and the tribal chiefs by patronizing the local sacrificial rites. However, with the advent of British paramountcy, such relationships broke down and tribes that were recognized as 'allies' turned into 'subjects.'³²

This transition took the form of the emergence of a new class of Hindu rulers that derived their legitimacy from their position within the British colonial repertoire—one guided by Western law and aspiring the establishment of 'actual' sovereignty in the form of the Weberian state and replacing the

30 Carmichael, *Manual of the District of Vizagapatnam*, 237.

31 K. S. Singh, *Tribal Society in India: An Anthro-Historical Perspective* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985), 92-93.

32 Nongbri, "Resistance Reconfigured", 5.

narrative repertoire that had sustained the relationship between the tribes and the state. One of the most direct consequences of this shift was the abolition of the position of *Umrao*. These *umrao(s)* had been tribal headmen who assisted the chief in the act of governance and negotiated the autonomy of the tribes. In its place, the new ruling class, in the words of Padel, “internalized the British scale of values, with its concepts of ‘progress’ and ‘justice’ becoming ‘enlightened reformers’ and ‘efficient’ collectors of revenue.”³³

At the same time, this class of ‘enlightened reformers’ with its British overlords, provided the religious ground for the uprising—the banning of the *meriah* or ritual human-sacrifice: something that the former Hindu chiefs had not disturbed and even patronized in order to keep the political consent of the Khonds.

The immediate causes of the uprising follow from the political justifications. Raja Udit Partab Deo (r. 1853 – 1881) had imposed heavy taxes on the Khonds and had introduced a certain commercialization of agricultural produce causing market considerations to penetrate into the forest that was the domain of the Khonds for centuries. He had abolished the *umrao* intermediaries and had allowed an agrarian caste, the *Kulita(s)* to settle on Khond lands to increase his revenues from rent.³⁴

The disturbances started with the death of Udit Parth Deo and the ensuing rival claims of Ram Bhadra Sai and Ragho Keshore Deo as the next chief. The conflict was aggravated by the long absence of the *dewan* who now formed the link between the Khonds and the state and resolution of the conflict became impossible due to the absence of the traditional structures of alliance that existed between the two institutions and due to the lack of the *umrao*. When after repeated pleas, the matter could not be resolved, the Khonds realized their tribal autonomy was shrinking fast and what became infamous and the Khond rebellion in Kalahandi followed, starting with a massive murdering of the *kulita(s)*.

It may be generally argued therefore, that the intrusion of colonial forces and colonial ideologies into the Khond heartland and the erosion of the previously sustained contract between the ‘state’ and the ‘tribe’ was responsible for this uprising. While in previous cases of similar crisis such as those succession crises outlined in the previous section, the threat to this consensus could be resolved peacefully, in the case of the 1882 incidents, reconciliation through known methods became impossible due to the alien nature of the political ideology functional in the Khond heartland. The *Kulita(s)* here play a major role because it is effectively their supremacy gained through agricultural efficiency prized by the new state that had allowed the state to subordinate and marginalize the Khonds which no previous ruler had dared to do. We can safely

33 Felix Padel, *The Sacrifice of Human Being : British Rule and the Konds of Orissa* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 172.

34 Note: He was largely successful in this. His annual revenue went from Rs. 22,000 in 1853 to Rs. 127,500 in 1881. See: Nongbri, “Resistance Reconfigured”, 3.

conclude this subordination as root cause and point of schism in the tribal ecumene which pushed them towards open rebellion.

The peculiar form this rebellion took—human sacrifice of the Kulita(s) is reminiscent of the Khond tradition of human sacrifice or *meriah* which the ‘enlightened’ British government had banned (since 1842) causing profound disturbances in the regular religious, economic and political lives of the Khonds. As I shall discuss at the end of this section this ‘form’ in fact has significance and in certain ways, connects the Khond disturbances to the Santals.

The Hūl of 1855

The *Hūl* [‘liberation’] that is the indigenous name for the Santal rebellion of 1855 has been one of the most studied tribal rebellions in British India. While the background to this uprising is scarcely as complicated as the Khond disturbance discussed above, it has generally been described as a reaction of certain immediate economic stimuli as briefly outlined below. However, I will argue in line with Rotter-Hogan, that the Santal rebellion in fact highlights certain long-term mechanisms that were far more political in the tribal context and in fact shared similarities with the later political Khond rebellion.

The *Calcutta Review* of 1856 explained the uprising in most trivial terms reducing the complexity of the causes and their grievances to “the forcible abduction of two Sonthal women [...] and some minor acts of oppression, as taking kids, fowls, etc. without payment.”³⁵ It must be remembered that tribal revolts at the scale of the Hūl had almost never been witnessed in the previous history of the region. A major reason for that might be that for the most part of their history, the Santals were not subjects in any sense to any organized state power. It is true that their habitation were included in the territories of the Mughal Empire but ethnographic as well as historical research suggests they that states had never formally managed to penetrate these forests and establish their rule.³⁶ A most important reason for which was the migratory nature of the tribes and the minimal capacity to produce agrarian surplus coupled with the inaccessibility of the terrain. These reasons have in fact been well established for quite some time now, in the history of stateless societies by researchers such as James C. Scott.³⁷

The colonial state’s intervention in this matter started with the commercialization of agriculture that had evaded the Mughal Empire in the east and the general impoverishment of the Bengal countryside which put an immense pressure on land forcing policies for extrinsic agricultural growth. These policies led to a widespread project of ‘sedentarizing’ the Santals that is perceptible in the colonial records. In 1810,

35 “The Sonthal Rebellion” *Calcutta Review* 26 (1856): 241.

36 Pratap, “The Savariya Paharia”, 75.

37 For a detailed account of such dynamics, See: James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Hamilton had noted that “they were expert in clearing forests and bringing them into cultivation, but seldom endure to pay any considerable rent” sowing the seeds of the notion that these lands and these populations could effectively be used for colonial enrichment after all. In 1827, Ward surveying the area wrote: “they emigrate from their own country to those districts which are known to abound in forests [...] so great is their predilection for the wildest places, that they are seldom known to remain at one station longer than it takes to clear and bring it into cultivation.”³⁸ But within 25 years, in 1851, Captain Sherwill found the Santals to be living in “a fine cultivated valley [...] studded in every direction with hill villages, the sides and tops of the hills cleared and occupied by large sheets of cultivation.”³⁹

Putting these three reports together, the message is clear. The Santals had been ‘sedentarized’ over two decades and had started a new lifestyle of settled cultivation and engaging with wider society in more sustained patterns of interaction. Rotter-Hogan notes that mustard-seeds were one of the main ‘export’ items of the Santals which were purchased (at ridiculously low rates) by middle-men and sold to the Company whereupon they were exported out to England.⁴⁰ Sherwill’s account in fact allows us to imagine a complete transformation of Santal life as he also mentions rudimentary machinery and a complex village structure that would make a return to a nomadic lifestyle impossible.⁴¹ What followed these developments was a consistent intervention of the colonial State, an exaction of rents from agricultural produce by the Company and the introduction of a commercial and monetarized economy in the Damin-i-Koh that had so long evaded state subjugation.

Unlike the Khonds however, the Santals did not have intermediary agents that managed their interactions with the pre-colonial ‘State’; in all possible senses, they never engaged with it before. Their attitudes to the ‘outside’ and to wider non-Santal caste Hindu society was one of antagonism and xenophobia. Although they occasionally bartered services with lower castes of Hindus, their interaction with the Brahmins had never progressed to the stage like the Khonds where the former were involved in legitimizing their alliance with wider society⁴². They considered co-habitation or sexual relations with non-

38 For a detailed account of these reports, See: S. C. Mukharji, *Bihar District Gazetteer: Santal Parganas* (Patna: Secretariat Press, 1938), 116-117.

39 Walter S. Sherwill, “Notes Upon a Tour Through the Rajmahal Hills,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 20 no. 7 (1851): 544-606.

40 Rotter-Hogan, “Insurrection...or Ostracism”, 81.

41 He found that Santal houses contain “a Santal and his wife; several married children and their families; a pig sty, buffalo shed and dovecote; a wooden stand holds the water pots ... [and] also a rude wooden press for expressing oil from mustard seed.” See: Sherwill, “Notes”, 570.

42 Schnepel noted in his survey of the Bhuiya(s) of Odisha that the coronation ritual of their King assumed the form of a Vedic *abhishek* ritual with the tika-ceremony being performed by the Brahmins. Both Brahmins and state officials (paiks and colonial police) were present at these ceremonies which effectively integrated the tribe in the local and colonial state’s cosmos just as in integrated the wider Hindu society and the colonial state within the tribe’s political universe. See: Schnepel, “Contact Zone”, 248-249.

Santals polluting and worthy of bringing about ritual ostracism or *bitlaha*.⁴³ The point of schism here is not only in terms of the intrusion of the state and its categories of ‘efficiency,’ enlightened reform’ and ‘commercial exploitation of land’ it is also realized through the intervention of the State that privileged ‘sedentarism’ over nomadic forms of life and intervened actively in ‘sedentarizing’ the Santal population.

Again, similar to the Khonds, the form of protest that the Santals engaged in during the 1855 unrest needs to be seen with caution as Rotter-Hogan has pointed out. She claims that the acts of aggression, closely mimic the *bitlaha* acts of ritual ostracism whereby the tribe and the land was deemed to be purified after any particular act of transgression of tribal laws (mainly, tribal incest and sexually engaging with a non-Santal.) During the ritual, hordes of tribesmen descend on the dwelling of the transgressor and the hut is desecrated through public defecation and acts of destruction and vandalism.⁴⁴ *Bitlaha* would usually take place after the annual ‘national hunt’ which is precisely the time, as the records show, the *Hūl* started to gain momentum and the Santals started mobilizing.

A Structural Transformation

Now that the groundwork has been set and the two ‘insurrections’ located within their respective contexts, a comparative analysis, I believe would do us some good in understanding the long-run ‘historical’ processes at play here—that caused major disruptions in the life of both the Santals and the Khonds and kept them from resolving the ‘crisis’ through the existing modalities known by these tribes in their interaction with the State. I shall begin with the case of Khonds as it is easier to discuss it and simultaneously elaborate Marshall Sahlins’ theory of the historical event in the process of understanding the structural change.

Sahlins expounded the idea that a ‘historical event’ is one that underpins fundamental structural changes in the basic fabric of society. Any point of rapture or schism in this, causes societies to make a note of it and engage with the ‘event’ with a degree of seriousness that is perceptible to historians (or indeed anthropologists) writing centuries later. Changes at the level of categories for example, may therefore be deemed structural changes and hence ‘eventful’ mechanisms in the Sahlins-ian sense. Sahlins’ ‘possible theory of history’ accounts for such changes which may be deemed cataclysmic by communities at the local stage. This theory has been employed in the study of the reaction of the local Hawaiian population to the arrival of Cook which fundamentally altered their worldview and threatened their local cosmology. I argue,

43 Rotter-Hogan, “Insurrection...or Ostracism”, 88.

44 Ibid.

that it is also possible to understand the Santal and Khond insurrections through an appeal to this theory which might explain wider structural changes at the level of the 'State.'

The Khonds, unlike the Santals were used to the state. The transformation for them came in the form of the state's unilateral intervention through steps like the removal of the position of the *umrao* and the banning of time-tested Khond rituals such as the *meriah* (ritual human-sacrifice) which had acted both as a ritual praying for fertility as well as a political glue between the tribe and the material world ruled by the king.⁴⁵ The Khonds had been 'allies' of the state, now they were its 'subjects.' The Santals on the other hand were widely distrustful of the State and viewed all external forms of organization as threats. For them, the fundamental structural change was brought in by the very penetration of the state and its agents—the moneylenders, the commercial agriculturists and police into the forest cosmos held by the Santals as sacred.

In the case of Kalahandi, when the position of the *raja* became disputed, the Khonds expected their voices to be heeded in the appointment of the next *raja* (as it had always been in the previous cases outlined above) and in subduing the *dewan* who had imposed undue miseries of the Khonds. However, this reconciliation became impossible since the bilateral alliance was meaningless for the colonial state as well as the new ruling Hindu elite who derived their legitimacy from the British state. The underlying categories behind the state had also changed and it was now intent on exacting Weberian sovereignty by monopolizing 'all forms of physical coercion.'⁴⁶ Mark Brown in fact cites this as the unconscious objective behind the banning of acts of ritual killing such as 'thuggee' or perhaps even Sati and by an extension—*meriah* or the Khond ritual of human-sacrifice.⁴⁷ The deprivation of their agency in the appointment of the new king, made the changed nature of the state apparent to the Khond and the absence of any structure to mediate the crisis made reconciliation impossible. Neither did the new Hindu elite need the Khonds in establishing their rule, nor did any 'traditional' structure such as the *umrao* exist to bring them to the discussion table. The structural transformation of the State and Tribe relationship was indeed, complete.

The uprising following this structural transformation can be understood terms of Sahlins' theory. Sahlins suggested that following such a structural transformation—the culture of that society will also transform for "the transformation of a culture is the mode of its reproduction"⁴⁸ and that such transformations will utilize elements of the cosmology under threat for "in acts of reference, categories

45 Bhagabana Sahu, "Buffalo Sacrifice: The Peculiar Belief System of the Kandhs of Odisha." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 76 (2015): 931-34.

46 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 54-66.

47 Mark Brown, "Crime, Governance and the Company Raj: The Discovery of Thuggee" *British Journal of Criminology* 42 no. 1 (2002): 77-95.

48 Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 138.

acquire new functional values.”⁴⁹ The structural transformation that had reduced them to passive subjects also reduced their economic prosperity by means of the massive demands placed on the Santal by the *raja* and their displacement by the Kulita(s). Sahlins posits that the ‘crisis’ manifested in the cosmology will be subsumed under the categories known to the Khonds and be interpreted in terms of their existing worldview. That the Khonds interpreted this change in status in ritual terms can be gauged from their response to the crisis. Two reports by Mr. Ismay to the Commissioner of Chhattisgarh might be particularly illuminating in this context.

Firstly, Ismay reported that on January 20, 1882, the Khonds had engaged in plundering several Kulita village but “in an orderly way.”⁵⁰ And Secondly, the Superintendent, Mr Berry reported that the Kulita(s) had been killed, their heads scalped and their limbs taken away to be consecrated at a Khond temple.⁵¹ These reports demonstrate the specificity as well as the ritual nature of the insurrection that was only later directed at the British. The Khonds initially interpreted the crisis in religious terms and desired to cleanse their territories of the evil influence that they associated with the Kulita. When the traditional mode of asserting this change and praying for its redressal was no longer available, they resorted to the illegal commission of *meriah* that earned the event the label of an “insurrection.” The cultural practice of *meriah* had thus survived by transforming and re-inventing itself as an act of defiance against the colonial state that had imposed these structural changes upon the Khond⁵² as well as acted as the traditional response to the occurrence of such ‘cataclysmic’ changes.

The nature of the ‘cataclysm’ that the tribe experienced at the event of such massive structural changes is perhaps best understood in the context of the Hūl. For the Santals, the state itself was new as was the sedentary lifestyle that the state sponsored and brought about through sustained policies conducive to its physiocratic interests.⁵³ As a result, the default mode of evading state-subjugation and exploitation for the Santals—packing up and migrating, was no longer a viable option (which is how they arrived at Damin-i-Koh from Birbhum etc. in the first place⁵⁴). A settled lifestyle had brought with it unprecedented population growth^{55,56} reducing the agility of the tribe while at the same time, under colonial conditions pushing them

49 Ibid.

50 National Archives of India, Foreign Policy, A, July 1882, Pros. Nos. 396-429. From Chief Commissioner., Central Provinces, No. 2027-118, dated June 10, 1882.

51 National Archives of India, Foreign Policy, No. 67, (No. 189). From F. C. Berry, Superintendent of Affairs, Kalahandi to Col. H. C. E. Ward, Additional Commissioner, Kalahandi, Bowani Patna, dated July 27, 1882.

52 As Nongbri seems to believe. See: Nongbri, “Resistance Reconfigured”, 13.

53 Note: In the words of the *Friend of India*, the Damin-i-Koh was to be transformed into a ‘smiling garden’ (Calcutta Review 1856: 231). Note the use of the word ‘garden’ in the phrase.

54 Mohan K. Gautam, *In Search of Identity: A Case of the Santal in Northern India*. (Leiden: M.K. Gautam, 1977), 11.

55 This relation is also agreed upon by Rotter-Hogan, “Insurrection...or Ostracism”, 88.

56 Note: Hunter cites the percentage of children under the age of 12 in Damin-i-Koh to be 47.5% indicating a rapid population growth with initiation of sedentarization. See: W. H. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal. Districts of*

further towards impoverishment; and consistently subjecting them to ill treatment and betrayal by the Hindu middle-men and moneylenders that exploited them. Their response to this structural change in terms of the introduction of the Weberian state and its commercial interests along with the loss of their traditional modes of coping with the state, has been outlined by Rotter-Hogan and interpreted in ritual terms. Sahlins' theory of the event is also operative here.

We can trace the psychological reaction of these major structural changes in the language of the tribe from the legends of the period and the notion of the defilement of their land (by the commercial interests and the state) contained in the folk-songs and traditions. The following song was recorded by Archer that describes this dilemma brilliantly:

*Saheb rule is full of trouble,
shall we go or shall we stay?
Eating, drinking, clothing,
For everything we're troubled;
Shall we go or shall we stay?*⁵⁷

Other legends talk of apocalyptic images such as great snakes ('*lag lagin*') slithering all over the terrain, snakes eating men and the emergence of a buffalo-cow who would halt and graze before someone's door till all the members of the household were dead.⁵⁸ Just before the Hūl, Rotter-Hogan notes, witch-hunts and *hadun* trace-dances had become a regular affair.⁵⁹ These are the Santals' attempts at exorcising the evil spirits that they thought had possessed the land which also proves that the machinations of the new state had been interpreted in terms dictated by the Santal cosmology as Sahlins had predicted.

After all such attempts at exorcising the evil spirits (i.e., the commercial State) failed, the Santals began gathering at Bhagnadihi around June, 1855 at a time when, as Rotter-Hogan notes, they were supposed to gather for their annual hunt and (if necessary) their *bitlaha* rituals. It is from these hints that she suggests that the Santal 'insurrection' was effectively an attempt to ostracize (or exorcise) the State and its agents from the Santal realms given the peculiar degree of focus, accuracy of targets, timing, and cult nature of the whole affair.⁶⁰

Sahlins' theory predicts the interpretation of major structural changes within the categories and cosmologies known by a given population. This has already been elaborated for the Santal case. The latter part of his theory posits that the change, in an essential sense, would also be reinterpreted as a continuation

Bhagalpur and the Santal Parganas. 14 (London: Trubner & Co., 1877), 279.

57 W. G. Archer, "Santal Rebellion Songs". *Man in India* Vol. 25 no. 4 (1945): 207.

58 W. G. Archer, and W. J. Culshaw, "The Santal Rebellion" *Man in India* Vol. 25 no, 4 (1945): 218-39.

59 Rotter-Hogan, "Insurrection...or Ostracism", 90.

60 Rotter-Hogan, "Insurrection...or Ostracism", 90-95.

of their cosmology whereby cultural practices may continue through the adoption of new functional categories or values. Interpreting the insurrection as *bitlaha* against the State enables the ritual of *bitlaha* to assume a new functional (political) value and offers a method of engaging with the State hitherto unknown to the Santals (apart from fleeing i.e., disengaging.) Moreover, as *bitlaha* is ritual purification after the ritual defilement of Santal society or lands, the intrusion of the market forces (arguable symbolized by the *lag lagin*) and the ensuing degradation of the Santals effectively allow for the rebellion to be read as a ritual exorcism; both of which involved a targeted destruction and defilement of the ‘property’ and body of the transgressor.

In sum, in both the cases, that of the Khond and the Santals, the precise nature of the rebellions they chose is interesting and revealing about the nature of the stimulus—a structural change brought about by the intrusion of the Weberian state in the Indian heartland.

Conclusion: Narrative to Reality

In the course of this paper, I have first discussed the nature of tribe-state relations practiced by the Mughal State in order to set the tone for the disruption of that order with the arrival its successor the colonial State. While the element of change has been at the forefront of this analysis, the element of continuity apparent in these cases must not be altogether discounted. Evidently, both the Mughal and the colonial state attempt to sedentarize the nomadic pastoral and primitive agriculturist tribal populations as they offered a hindrance to the exaction of the State’s ulterior motive in appropriating agricultural surplus. These attempts at sedentarization has been demonstrated in the context of the western Indian tribes for the Mughal empire and the Santals for the British.

However, the key difference lies in the terrain and the methods applied by the state in reaching the same goal. While the Mughal Empire was content in its assertion of ‘narrative sovereignty’ over the territories it claimed for itself and promoted a grand ecumenical repertoire and effectively propagated an image of uniformity, it allowed pockets of self-governance and micro-states as long as they functioned in tandem with the Mughal state and accepted their position in the Mughal ecumene through rituals and legends. This acceptance came from an acknowledgment of the epistemic and military limitations of the State and the understanding that it cannot effectively establish its rule over the forests and hills beyond the reach of the Mughal army. The Company and later the British government, however, attempted to establish a Weberian state modeled on European experience—one that successfully enforced a complete monopoly on all forms of violence and thus offered no place for internal allies and their micro-states.

Furthermore, I have attempted to discuss the nature of interactions and the ontological changes that the interventions of the colonial state brought about in the life of the tribes with regard to two tribes—the Khonds of Odisha and the Santals of the Damin-i-Koh who had till that point lived under slightly different modes of existence with respect to state and state-hood. The similarities in the reaction of both tribes in the techniques how they mobilized their age-old traditions in trying to exorcise the State suggest wider structural changes in the nature of the state-and-tribe relations which I have tried to highlight in this paper. For the Khonds, this change came in the form of an erosion of their traditional role as allies and their reduction to the status of passive subjects while for the Santals this change meant the forcible adoption of a sedentary lifestyle and the inability to evade the market forces and the subjugation that the State lived for and lived by.

Both these changes can effectively be explained in theoretical terms by understanding the transition of the State in South Asia from one ‘performed’ itself and lived by the narrative of its prowess to own that existed solely by virtue of its prowess and attempted to exert its unchallenged and unmatched authority into every nook and corner of their territory. The factor, apart from the foreignness of the colonial government that must be taken into account is of course the advanced military technology available to the nineteenth colonial administration as compared to the Mughal Empire in its heyday which allowed them the confidence as well as the power to actually cause structural changes to an otherwise hostile tribal population—an attempt at while the Mughal state had evidently failed.

However, regardless of the similarities, I must admit that a comparison of the situation of the Khonds and the Santals is far from perfect. It is important to acknowledge that they lived in different regions and lived by different myths and cosmologies. It is indeed rather old-fashioned to assume that similar actions everywhere would lead to similar reactions as this paper seems to suggest. Wherever possible, I have tried to highlight the differences between the two tribes as well as the tribes in Mughal western India while stressing the similarity of the circumstances that led to similar reactions by whatever cognitive pathway they might be. This paper, in the end is not about the tribes themselves but about how they engaged and disengaged with the State and what effect the state and the changes in the nature of the state had on the them.

At that note, I may conclude with the following observations connecting them back to the questions posed in the “Introduction.” Firstly, states, both pre-colonial and colonial, have engaged with the tribes living in their territories and have tried to make influence their nature and make them conducive to the interests of the former. Secondly, these engagements in their pre-colonial form usually allowed intermediaries to assist the process of subduing the tribes and allowed the tribes to incorporate the ‘state’

within its own cosmology as Schnepel noted in his study of the Bhuiya(s) of Odisha.⁶¹ Thus a dialectical process of (a two-way) cosmological integration was operative in these cases. Thirdly, if no such intermediaries were available, the tribes were allowed to exist as micro-states (e.g., parts of Mughal Punjab, Damin-i-Koh etc.) within the grand order of the pre-colonial state. Since the latter's existence was dependent upon the execution of 'narrative sovereignty,' as long as it managed to continue the proverbial 'keeping-up-appearances' the state did not feel threatened by these micro-states. Fourth, the colonial government on the other hand, tried to establish a Weberian state and realized a threat from the existence of micro-states and necessary allies and began a process of interfering with and where necessary curbing the influence of these states converting them from their status as allies into passive subjects. When these structural changes in the centuries-old relationship between the state and tribe became perceptible, the tribes started attaching political significance to their older purification rituals and tried to 'exorcise the state' and take it back to its older form.⁶² Thus, I have answered in my own way, the question raised by Ranajit Guha in his seminal article, why did the tribals engage in rebellion knowing full well, the political repercussions of the same? The tribes were in fact reassigning political functions to existing modalities of dealing with transgressions and trying to engage with the state via methods known to them and based on their indigenous interpretations of their crises. This final bit also answers the last question posed at the beginning of this paper regarding how the tribes perceived this change and with that, I believe this paper has served its objectives.

This paper has largely focused on the reaction and interpreting the reaction of the tribes to the intervention of the state. In the end it may also be asked how the state reacted to these failed attempts to influence the tribes and if the state underwent any transformations of its own. The answer according to Nicholas Dirks is in the affirmative. Just as the tribes gained the political capacity to interact with the State which may explain the emergence of tribal identity politics continuing to this day⁶³ (such as the Ahom and Jharkhand movement), Dirks posits that the state was also essentially transformed as it realized the need to gain more knowledge and experience of local and tribal society.⁶⁴ Dirks connects these ideas instances to the development of what he finds in the 20th century avatar of the State—the "ethnographic state" and one that claimed to 'preserve' cultures and traditions and ruled in accordance with them. While this may appear as a positive development, this also granted the Indian state, for the first time, the power and the capacity to

61 Schnepel, "Contact Zone", 248-249.

62 As in an exorcism ritual, the state was believed to be an evil spirit that had possessed the tribe and the ritual was supposed to restore the tribe back to its older state by restoring the older relationship.

63 Manasjyoti Bordoloi, "Impact of Colonial Anthropology on Identity Politics and Conflicts in Assam" *Economic and Political Weekly* 44 no. 20 (2014): 47 – 54 ; Alpa Shah, "'Keeping the state away': democracy, politics, and the state in India's Jharkhand." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 1 (2007): 129-145.

64 Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 194-197.

delineate, recognize and de-recognize a tribe as such and the power to be the arbiter of 'tradition.' Conflicts that arose as a result of the gaining of political experience by the tribes and this new found power of the ethnographic state continue to this day as several scholars have noted in their works on contemporary India. This simultaneous transformation of the tribe and the state completes the dialectic relationship that I had hypothesized in the "Introduction" of this paper—a dialectic brought about by the failure of the colonial State to engage in a tryst with the tribes.

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