

**Colonialism, Adivasis and Migration: A Study of the Oraons of Ranchi  
District, 1830-1930**

*A Thesis Submitted to the University of Hyderabad in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement  
for the Award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

HISTORY

BY

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## DECLARATION

I, **Sunny Ruchi Ecka**, hereby declare that the work embodied in this thesis entitled “**Colonialism, Adivasis and Migration: A Study of the Oraons of Ranchi District, 1830-1930**” is submitted by me under the supervision of **Professor Bhangya Bhukya**, is a bonafide research work for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy in History** from the **University of Hyderabad**. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/ INFLIBNET.

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### CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, “**Colonialism, Adivasis and Migration: A Study of the Oraons of Ranchi District, 1830-1930**” submitted by **Sunny Ruchi Ecka** bearing Regd. No. **17SHPH07**, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Part of this thesis has been

A. Published in the following Publications:

1. **The Making of a ‘Coolie’ and a ‘Coolie Catchment District’: A History of Ranchi District and its Inhabitant from 1830-1920**, *Proceeding of the Indian History Congress, Delhi*, 2018, pp. 568-576.
2. **Tribal Migration and Tribal Resistance: The immediate outcomes of Environmental Degradation in Ranchi District, 1890-1910**, in A. Pratap, B. Paranjape and G. Shyam (ed). *Tribal and Environmental History of India: New Perspectives*, New Delhi: Research India Press, 2021, pp. 202-216.

B. Presented in the following Conferences:

1. Seventy-Eight Session of Indian History Congress, **‘The Making of a ‘Coolie’ and a ‘Coolie Catchment District’: A History of Ranchi District and its Inhabitant from 1830-1920’**, held on 28-30 December 2017 at Jadavpur University, Kolkata.
2. National Conference on Gender and Development, **‘Trafficking in Jharkhand: A new Version of Indentured Labour’** held on 8-9 March 2018 at Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth and Development, Tamil Nadu.
3. National Conference on Indigenous Epistemology: Perspectives from Within, **‘Adivasi/Tribal Studies: The Urgency of a new discipline’** held on 10-11 September 2018 at TISS Mumbai.
4. International Conference on The Migrant and the State: From Colonialism to Neoliberalism, **‘Changing Destinations of Tribal Emigration from Ranchi District, 1830-1930’** held on 29 November-1 December 2018 at TISS Patna.

Further, the student has passed the following courses towards the fulfilment of the coursework requirements for PhD.

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# CONTENTS

Declaration

Certificate

Acknowledgement

Tables

Maps/ Figures

Abbreviations

Page No.

CHAPTER 1: 15-30

## **INTRODUCTION**

Literature Review

Objective and Research questions

Research Methodology

Overview of Chapters

CHAPTER 2: 31-49

## **ORAON SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

A brief ethnography of the Oraons

Village Organisation

Difference between the terminologies of *Khuntkattidar* and *Bhuinhar*

CHAPTER 3:

50-80

**MAPPING OF COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVENTION IN RANCHI DISTRICT**

Origination of Discriminatory Acts and Policies

Administrative modifications

*Bhuinhari Survey/ Bhuinhari Settlement*

Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act, 1908

Tana Bhagat Movement (1914-1925): *a response to colonial discriminatory Acts and policies*

CHAPTER 4:

81-113

**DISADVANTAGES OF AGRARIAN HOLDINGS OF ORAON RAIYATS**

The Topography of Ranchi District

Conversion of *tanr* land to *don* land

Types of Land

Rent Structure

Indebtedness

CHAPTER 5:

114-154

**MAKING OF ORAON LABOUR**

Dhangar: *a stigmatised identity in the labour market*

A shift from seasonal to permanent migration

Commencement of Overseas migration

Dhangar mania in the sugar plantation

CHAPTER 6

155-190

**INLAND EMIGRATION: *A new journey to a land of servitude***

Recruiting Agents/ Intermediaries

Methods and mode of operation of recruiting agents

Tea plantation: *a land of paradise or land of despair*

Oraon unrest in Western Duar

CHAPTER 7

191-97

**CONCLUSION**

Appendix

Glossary

Bibliography

Plagiarism Report

## TABLES:

	Page No.
1. The number of broken <i>khuntkatti</i> villages in the district in 1927-35	46
2. The numbers of <i>khuntkattidars</i> and <i>raiya</i> t in <i>khuntkatti</i> villages	47
3. Statement showing the number of villages in which registration of lands was completed, and the number left incomplete by Lal Loknath Sahee during 1859, 1860, 1861	65
4. Work completed by the special commissioner of Chota Nagpur Tenure Act, 1869	67
5. Progress of survey and settlement operation	71
6. The productivity of <i>don</i> and <i>tanr</i> land in Ranchi district	85
7. Decrease in area of forest in Ranchi district from 1902-1927	90
8. Percentage of the total cultivable area of the various classes of land	94
9. Area of the various classes of land in Ranchi district	97
10. Area of <i>Bhuinhari</i> lands in Ranchi district in 1910	99
11. A standard/ average rent for a <i>raiya</i> t to pay per <i>pawa</i>	105
12. Emigrants from Ranchi district to sugar colonies from 1844-1864	137
13. Register of Indian labourers proceeding from the ports of Calcutta under the provision of Act no. 12 of 1837	139 -40
14. Statement showing the number of labourers into Mauritius from Calcutta from 1 <sup>st</sup> August 1834 – October 1836	143

<b>15.</b> Number of labour imported by <i>sardars</i> and contractors for Assam tea plantation	162
<b>16.</b> Mortality rate during the transit period	172
<b>17.</b> Mortality rate of labour from Chotanagpur and North-Western Province	174
<b>18.</b> Mortality rate due to variolous diseases from 1903-1905	175
<b>19.</b> Number of Oraons who emigrated to Western Duar and Assam	181
<b>20.</b> Three years figure includes the average advances debited against new labour and the average expenses recovered from the labour of Chotanagpur	184

## MAPS

	Page No.
1. Ranchi district	14
2. The main Concentration of Oraons in the subdivisions of Ranchi district	34
3. Tana Bhagat Movement in Ranchi district	76
4. Railway routes to the garden of Assam	168
5. Skeleton map of Assam and Western Duar	189

## FIGURES

1. Topological position	85
2. Hill Coolies landing in Mauritius	134
3. Emigrants from Ranchi district to Sugar Colonies	138
4. Number of Oraons who emigrated to Western Duar	182
5. Oraon Labour	188

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BSA</b>	Bihar State Archive
<b>CNTA</b>	Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act
<b>DRC</b>	Doctoral Research Committee
<b>GEL</b>	Gossner Evangelical Lutheran
<b>ICHR</b>	Indian Council of Historical Research
<b>JRF</b>	Junior Research Fellowship
<b>NAI</b>	National Archive of India
<b>OBC</b>	Other Backward Class
<b>PCAD</b>	Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes
<b>SC</b>	Schedule Class
<b>SPG</b>	Society for the Protection of Gospel
<b>ST</b>	Schedule Tribe
<b>SWFA</b>	South Western Frontier Agency
<b>WBSA</b>	West Bengal State Archive

# 1. Map of Ranchi district



Source: John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1902-1910*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

From the mid-nineteenth century, colonial anthropologists romanticised *adivasi* society as an egalitarian or homogenous society. Moreover, they maintained that they managed to remain an egalitarian society due to their geographical and cultural isolation from the non-*adivasis*.<sup>1</sup> However, much before the advent of the British, many *adivasi* communities of different geographical regions like Oraons, Mundas, Gonds, Bhils, Lambadas have already established direct contact with the non-*adivasis*. Henceforth, the claims of colonial anthropologists cannot be justified. In reality, egalitarian society was an ‘imperialistic myth’ produced by the colonial anthropologists in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857 as a part of the state-making project.<sup>2</sup> The colonial anthropologist applied this concept to *adivasi* communities to draw political, administrative, and geographical boundaries between the *adivasis* and non-*adivasis*.<sup>3</sup> However, the foundation of such distinction was already laid in the late eighteenth century itself.<sup>4</sup> From the mid-nineteenth century, an official distinction was followed by the categorisation of *adivasis* opposite to non-*adivasis* such as uncivilised- civilised, wild- tamed, ungoverned-

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<sup>1</sup> Ashoka Kumar Sen, ‘The Process of social stratification in the lineage society of Kolhan in Singhbhum’, *South Asian: Journal of South Asian Journal*, 2004, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Meena Radhakrishna, ‘Introduction’ in Meena Radhakrishna (ed.) *First Citizens: Studies on Adivasis, Tribals and Indigenous Peoples in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Bhangya Bhukya, *The Roots of the Periphery: A History of the Gonds of Deccan India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 1; Radhakrishna, *Introduction*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ajay Sakaria, ‘Shades of Wildness Tribe Shades of Wildness Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, no. 3, August 1997, pp. 729-730.

governed, backwards-modern.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the colonial anthropologists set different standards like isolation, primitive, barbaric, uncivilised, sedimentary and egalitarian or non-structured society as an important parameter to identify a community as a 'tribe'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the image of *adivasi* society as 'egalitarian' remained immutable or frozen throughout the colonial period. It was only in the postcolonial period when scholars started questioning and debunking the colonial notion of egalitarianism. Many scholars viewed social differences within the *adivasi* communities as their transformation from *adivasi* to caste.<sup>7</sup> To a certain degree, such transformation was possible till the advent of the British.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, the majority of *adivasi* communities escaped from such transformation. Nevertheless, scholars end up making such generalisations without adequate sources and explanations. The misconstruction took place as scholars' study *adivasi* communities in the backdrop of caste-based society rather than *adivasis* in general.<sup>9</sup> *Adivasi* society is like any other society, which is bound to change, and socio-economic differences are part of this change. Moreover, by undergoing a change or inclusion of internal differences, *adivasis* do not transform into caste.

Internal differences within the Oraons can be traced from the pre-colonial period, which grew over the control of village resources like land. It divided the Oraons into *bhuinhars* (original settlers of the village) and *raiya*s (late settlers). In the colonial period, where the

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<sup>5</sup> Bhukya, *The Roots of the Periphery: A History of the Gonds of Deccan India*, p. 2; Sakaria, *Shades of Wildness Tribe Shades of Wildness Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India*, p. 727; Virginius Xaxa, *State, Society and Tribes: Issues in Post-Colonial India*, New Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2008, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ironically, in the contemporary period, same parameters like primitive, geographical isolation, distinct culture are being used to define 'tribe' in the official documents and textbooks. Thereby, in this thesis I will be using *adivasi* in place of 'tribe' to reject these derogatory constructions.

<sup>7</sup> K.S. Singh, 'Colonial Transformation of Tribal Society in Middle India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 13, No. 30, July 1978, p. 1228.

<sup>8</sup> Bhukya, *The Roots of the Periphery: A History of the Gonds of Deccan India*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Virginius Xaxa, 'Transformation of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 34, No. 24, 1999, pp. 1523-1524.

British ruptured various customary practices of the Oraons, they consciously and deliberately retained the historically embedded differences of the Oraons for their own capitalist interest. However, they gave the prevalent division a new structure by introducing new sub-divisions. Alongside, a new class structure surfaced in the Oraon society as an outcome of the colonial intervention, with the emergence of Oraon *raiya*s as labourers. In the colonial period, Oraon *raiya*s were turned to constitute a cheap and abundant labour reserve for the labour market. Eventually, this impelled them to emigrate in mass from Ranchi district to overseas and inland destinations to fulfil the demand of the labour market from 1830-1930. This ultimately led to the relocation of the Oraon *raiya*s to diverse locations (like Mauritius, British Guiana, Assam and Western Duar). Altogether, this resulted in the acute proletarianisation of the Oraon *raiya*s, which reduced their position from a *raiya* to 'labour'. Alongside, they were attached to multiple identities in different destinations like '*dhangar*', '*tea tribe*', '*ranchis*'. In the contemporary period, these identities not only put a serious question on their *adivasi* identity but have also deprived them of their ST (Schedule Tribe) status and rights. For instance: in Assam, due to the imposed identity of '*tea tribe*', they are misclassified as OBC (Other Backward Class) and in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, due to the imposed identity of '*dhangar*' they are misclassified as SC (Scheduled Caste).<sup>10</sup> This shows that their condition has not improved, even in post-independence. In these destinations, they have failed to attain the basic economic and educational opportunities that their kin members have managed to receive in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal states. Moreover, due to the stigmatised identities, they are still struggling with the tag of 'labour'.

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<sup>10</sup> Indrajit Sharma, 'Tea Tribes of Assam: Identity Politics and Search for Liberation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 53, Issue No. 9, March 2018; Preeti Nangal, 'Adivasi and the Indian State: Deliberately misclassified as SC, Dhangar tribe in UP is being deprived of its constitutional rights', *Firstpost*, 29 August 2019, Retrieved from <https://www.firstpost.com/india/adivasis-and-the-indian-state-deliberately-misclassified-as-sc-dhangar-tribe-in-up-is-being-deprived-of-its-constitutional-rights-7249071.html>, retrieved on 29 /12/ 2020.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Tribal/ *Adivasi* studies have garnered the attention of various historians after the introduction of subaltern studies in the early 1980s. From here onwards, *adivasi* studies were looked beyond *adivasi* resistance or movements, which allowed historians to uncover different facets of *adivasi* history by adopting an interdisciplinary approach. In this attempt, historians have looked *adivasis* from different binaries like migration, gender, identity crisis or consciousness, environment degradation, social and economic structure, cultural crisis, education, etc. In keeping in view, the theme of the thesis, the literature review, is divided into two halves. The first half of the literature review deals with *adivasi* migration, and the second half deals with their social structure.

*Adivasi* migration is a well-acknowledged theme in the scholarly world. The migration of *adivasis* to the labour market was more commonly seen as an outcome of push factors like an agrarian crisis, environmental degradation and the British pacification policies. For example, scholars like Prabhu Prasad Mahopatra, Sanjukta Das Gupta, Govind Kelkar, Ranajit Das Gupta, Samita Sen, Pradip Chattopadhyay, Sharit. K Bhowmik saw *adivasi* migration as an outcome of agrarian breakdown or crisis (like gradual commercialisation, alienation or impossibility of further expansion of agricultural land).<sup>11</sup> In addition to the agrarian crisis,

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<sup>11</sup> Prabhu Prasad Mahopatra, 'Coolies and Colliers: A study of the Agrarian Context of Labour Migration from Chotanagpur, 1880- 1920', *Studies in history, volume 1, no.2, 1985*; p. 298. Das Gupta, *Adivasi and the Raj*, p. 234; Ranajit Das Gupta, 'From Peasants and Tribesmen to Plantation workers: Colonialism Capitalism, Reproduction of Labour Power and Proletarianisation in North East India, 1850s to 1947', *Economic and Political Weekly, Jan 25, 1986, Vol. 21, No. 4*, p. PE4; Samita Sen, 'Kidnapping in Chotanagpur Recruitment for Assam tea plantations in a Tribal Area' in Sanjukta Das Gupta and Raj Sekhar Basu, (ed.) *Narratives from the margin: Aspects of Adivasi history in India*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, p. 187; Pradip Chattopadhyay, *Redefining Tribal Identity: The Changing Identity of the Santhals of South-West Bengal*, Delhi: Primus Book, 2014, p. 71; Sharit K. Bhowmik, 'Tribal Labour in the Tea Plantations of West Bengal: Problems of Migration and Settlement', in Meena Radhakrishna (ed.) *First Citizens: Studies on Adivasis, Tribals and Indigenous peoples in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 212-213.

Nirmal Kumar Mahato and Vinita Damodaran saw *adivasi* migration as an outcome of environmental degradation.<sup>12</sup> Their study highlights the process of deforestation that made epidemics (like drought or famine) recurrent in the abode of *adivasis* during the colonial period. Ultimately, this compelled the *adivasi* communities to emigrate to new destinations in search of a new livelihood. In contrast, to the above arguments, Crispin Bates and Martina Carter relate *adivasi* migration with both economic and social factors. In their understanding, *adivasi* migration was undertaken due to economic crisis and social factors (like social exploitation or physical coercion at home).<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, according to Tirthankar Roy, *adivasi* migration has more to do than an agricultural or economic crisis. In his understanding, *adivasis* like Oraons, Mundas and Santhals had already proved their worth in the indigo plantation. Thereby, indigo planters preferred them, and this preference was carried forward to other planters.<sup>14</sup> In short, the economic crisis and their preference in the labour market combinedly led to their migration to distant destinations. Undoubtedly, the above factors were inextricably linked with each other, and they combinedly led to the out-migration of *adivasis* from their abode to far-flung destinations. In addition to the above arguments, Kaushik Ghosh and Shashank Shekhar Sinha saw *adivasi* migration as an outcome of the British pacification policy.<sup>15</sup> In their understanding, the British pushed the *adivasis* to the labour market as a political strategy to

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<sup>12</sup> Nirmal Kumar Mahato, *Environment and Migration, Purulia, West Bengal*. Retrieved from <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/PP30.pdf>. on 26/07/2017; Vinita Damodaran, 'Famine in a forest tract: Ecological change and the causes of famine in Chotanagpur, North India', *Environment and History*, Vol.1, No.2, June 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Crispin Bates and Martina Carter, 'Tribal Migration in India and beyond' in Gyan Prakash (ed.), *The world of rural labourers in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 225.

<sup>14</sup> Tirthankar Roy, 'Sardars, Jobbers, Kanganies: The Labour Contractor and Indian Economic History', *Modern Asian Studies*, Sep. 2008, Vol. 42, No. 5, Sep 2008, p. 980.

<sup>15</sup> Kaushik Ghosh, 'A Market of Aboriginality: Primitivism and race classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India', in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (ed.) *Subaltern Studies X: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 18; Shashank Shekhar Sinha, *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating tribes in Gender Studies*, Kolkata: Bhatkal & Son, 2005, p. 105.

disperse the restive *adivasis* to pacify the ongoing *adivasi* movements. One cannot rule out the possibility that the colonial Acts and policies played a crucial role in pushing the *adivasis* to the labour market to fulfil their capitalist enterprise apart from economic and social factors. The biggest concentration of *adivasi* communities (like Oraon, Munda and Santhal) in the tea plantations of Assam and Western Duar justifies this argument. In the tea plantations of Assam, these *adivasi* communities alone constituted more than 50% of the labour population. While in the tea plantations of Western Duar, they alone constituted more than 80 % of the labour population (Oraon; 51.3%, Munda; 15%, Santhal; 15%, Kharia; 8%).<sup>16</sup>

The above scholars have tended to homogenise the social fabric of *adivasi* communities by ignoring internal differences within them. By this, they have simply generalised that each section of the *adivasi* populace faced a similar burnt of economic and social transformation and the British policies. In other words, they have failed to explore the social fabric of the *adivasi* populace to understand within *adivasi* community which section became a part of the labour market. Is *adivasi* as a community became susceptible to labour migration, or does a specific section of the community become a part of the labour market? In order to figure this out, we need to move to our second section. Second section deals with the social structure of the Oraons and their co-*adivasi* communities (like Mundas, Hos, Santhals) of Chotanagpur and Santhal Pargana.

K.S. Singh, study claims that hierarchy developed within the *adivasi* communities of Chotanagpur due to the intervention of the British. In his understanding, the British created and strengthened a three-tier division within *adivasi* communities. The chief/zamindar at the top, the well-to-do headman in the middle and general mass at the bottom. Despite the existence of

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<sup>16</sup> B. Ray, *Census of India District Census Handbook: Jalpaiguri*, Calcutta: Government Press, 1964, p. 83 cited in Bhowmik, *Tribal Labour in the Tea Plantations of West Bengal: Problems of Migration and Settlement*, p. 221.

hierarchy, there was not complete alienation of one stratum from the other. Consequently, their kinship and ethnic bond remained strong, and they stood as an entity. This inhibited the contradiction of intra-*adivasi* development, which was overshadowed by the differences between *adivasi* and non-*adivasis*.<sup>17</sup>

Sangeeta Dasgupta, study revolves around the Tana Bhagat Movement. In her understanding, the society of Oraons was divided into Oraon *bhuinhars* and Oraon *raiyats*. Within Oraons, hierarchy was based on the land that was not just a source of the economy but also of power and authority. The prevalent hierarchy got strengthened with the British intervention as they directly promoted the agricultural interest of Oraon *bhuinhars* and remained silent towards the oppression of Oraon *raiyats*. The differences within the two strata were reflected in wealth, control over resources, status and authority. This further resulted in internal conflicts or tensions amidst the Oraons, which resulted in the Tana Bhagat Movement. According to her, the Tana Bhagat Movement was led by Oraon *raiyats* (mainly under-*raiyats* or non-occupancy *raiyats*), who questioned the supremacy of *pahan*, *pujar* and *mahato*, who happened to be their religious priest and headman, respectively. Simultaneously, they tried to elevate their socio-economic status through the movement. In short, Oraon *raiyats* tried to reorder their socio-economic world through the movement.<sup>18</sup>

Romila Thappar and Majid Hayat Siddiqi claim that within Munda society, social stratification began with the *khuntkatti* system in the pre-colonial period. In the colonial period, social stratification was strengthened and accelerated under the British.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Singh, *Colonial Transformation of Tribal Society in Middle India*, pp. 1227-1228.

<sup>18</sup> Sangeeta Dasgupta, 'Reordering of the world: Tana Bhagat Movement in Chhotanagpur, 1914-1919', *Studies in History*, February 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Romila Thapar and Majid Hayat Siddiqi, 'Chotanagpur: The Pre-Colonial and Colonial Situation' in R.D Munda. and S. Bosu Mullick (ed.) *The Jharkhand Movement: Indigenous Peoples' struggle for Autonomy in India*, IWGIA Document No. 108, Copenhagen, 2003.

Ashoka Kumar Sen's essay presented an in-depth study of Ho social structure. He argues that the Hos represented a stratified society that was different from the caste hierarchy. In his understanding, the Hos represented a three-tier society based on the qualitative and quantitative variation of landholdings. In their social ladder, the *mankis* and *mundas* (religious priest and headman) secured a prominent position as they owned more and the best quality of land compared to the other two, i.e., *khuntkattidar* Hos and non-*khuntkattidar* Hos. In contrast, non-*khuntkattidar* Hos or Ho *raiya*s, secured the lowest position in the social ladder, as they consisted of families with insufficient landholdings. As the landholding of non-*khuntkattidar* Ho was insufficient for survival, they took part-time jobs in the households of *manki*, *mundas* and *khuntkattidar* Hos, or they worked as day-labourers. Apart from landholdings, the differences within the Hos were visible from their day-to-day lifestyle, which includes food, housing and bride price.<sup>20</sup>

Sanjukta Das Gupta's study rejects the notion of egalitarianism. She asserts that within the Ho community, egalitarianism was only confined to the core group of founding families or *khuntkattidars* in the village. In general, differences existed within the Hos that had developed in the pre-colonial period over the control of village resources and rituals. In her understanding, in Ho social structure, late settlers (non-*khuntkattidar*) and the womenfolk were subjected to several inequalities. They were prevented from gaining access to the *khuntkatti* land, which were kept under the strict control of descent groups. Furthermore, the difference between the *khuntkattidar* Hos and non-*khuntkattidar* Hos was maintained with disparities in wealth, with the reservation of political and religious posts. In the colonial period, the social structure of the Hos remained unchanged, but there came a change in the role of village headmen and priests. They became the agent of the British administrative unit, which

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<sup>20</sup> Ashoka Kumar Sen, 'The Process of social stratification in the lineage society of Kolhan in Singhbhum', *South Asian: Journal of South Asian Journal*, 2004.

influenced their relations with other members of the village. Alongside, they emerged as a separate class within the Ho society.<sup>21</sup>

Tanika Sarkar's study on the Jitu Santhal movement is an upgraded version of her former writing, a part of Subaltern studies. Here she tries to touch the levels below the uppermost layer of the *adivasi* community. In this writing, she claims that the scholars have mainly looked at *adivasi* movements in the realm of conflict within *adivasis* and non-*adivasis*. In contrast, they have overlooked the internal differences or power play within the *adivasi* communities. In the year 1924, Jitu Santhal led a movement in Malda district. He was a sharecropper with no land, who desired to have a transformed world with no exploiter (like landlords, police, rent or courts). In this movement, he also questioned the prevailing internal differences. Simultaneously, he tried to end the internal differences by ordering the (*mondol*) headman to throw away the umbrella. Within Santhals, the umbrella was a symbol of power and prestige.<sup>22</sup>

P. K. Shukla asserts that in the colonial period, there was a growth of differentiation among the *adivasi* communities of Chotanagpur. Here village headmen gradually became part of the British administration unit. They were handsomely paid for being part of this unit and were allowed to cultivate village land at half of the usual rates. Simultaneously, a considerable part of the village land gradually passed under their control. This gave way to class differentiation within the *adivasi* communities of Chotanagpur.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Adivasi and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos 1820-1932*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan Private Limited, 2011, pp. 27-60.

<sup>22</sup> 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 in India: Becoming Adivasi*, London and New York: Routledge, 2011(reprint 2021).

<sup>23</sup> P.K. Shukla, 'Communal Property to Private Property and the Tribal struggle', in Lata Singh and Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *Colonial and Contemporary Bihar and Jharkhand*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, pp. 35-36.

Uday Chandra's study revolves around the *Sardari ladai* and the Birsa movement. In regards to the two movements, his article is divided into two halves. The first half of the article deals with a period from 1860 to 1890, and the second half deals with the period from 1895 to 1901. In the first half, he tries to explore the *Sardari Ladai* and the growing political assertiveness of Munda *bhuinhars*. In his understanding, this was the period where the colonial anthropologists were trying to categorise the *adivasis* as egalitarian or homogenous was actually a period when *adivasis* were increasingly differentiated internally in respect of colonial Acts and policies like the *Bhuinhari* Act.<sup>24</sup>

In the second half, he tries to reinterpret the Birsa Movement by departing from the previous studies that glorified the movement as 'millenarianism'. In his understanding, the Birsa Movement was not anti-colonist nor a proto-nationalist movement. To what extent one can rely on his argument is questionable. His argument put a serious question on the leadership quality of *adivasi* leaders and their long fight against the British government. He simply views the movement as an attempt to establish Munda Raj where a Munda of every stratum (like *khuntkattidars*, *bhuinhars* and *raiyats*) can live under the direct rule of the British government without the existence of any intermediaries like zamindar, *mundas* (headman), *pahan* (priest), and other local powerholders.<sup>25</sup>

Syed Umar Khalid, study revolves around the changing authority of *manki* (priest) and *munda* (headman) in the Ho village from 1830-1897. He states that Ho's social organisation was far from the model of egalitarianism due to the existence of various differences. From the *khuntkattidar* Hos or a privileged group, a village headman was selected that constituted a substantial body of the Ho village. In his understanding, during the pre-

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<sup>24</sup> Uday Chandra, 'Flaming fields and forest fires: Agrarian transformation and the making of Birsa Munda's Rebellion', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 53 (1), 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

colonial period, they played the role of intermediaries between the ruler and the Ho population, for which they often received a commission in return. During the colonial period, various Ho headmen and priests became a part of the administrative unit in Singhbhum. The *mankis* were recognised as head police officers and rent collectors, while the *mundas* acquired a right to exercise authority in his village subordinates to the *mankis*. In return, they received a certain amount of commission from their total rent collection. With time, the commission rate increased with the rent increase. This economically set them apart from the rest of the Ho population. With the expansion of agricultural land, they also managed to occupy the best quality of land for themselves and their relatives. On few occasions, few also received recognition or reward from the British for their loyalties. Nonetheless, this resulted in class differentiation within the Ho society.<sup>26</sup>

In the above scholarly works, scholars have rejected the notion of egalitarian society by showcasing internal differences within the *adivasi* communities. In this attempt, most of the above scholars have tried to couch socio-economic differences in terms of hierarchy or stratification. The term hierarchy portrays a rigid and complex social structure where one is ranked above another. In contrast, *adivasis* mainly followed horizontal differences where internal differences are practised without the notion of pure and impure, social or physical distance, and more so. Thereby, one cannot see the socio-economic differences within the *adivasi* communities in terms of hierarchy.

Apart from this, scholars have mainly emphasised how a certain section (like village priest or headman) of the *adivasi* community became more affluent than the other section of the same community in the colonial period that gave way to the class differences. Moreover,

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<sup>26</sup> Syed Umar Khalid, 'Changing Village Authority in an Adivasi Hinterland: State, Community and Contingencies of Rule in Singhbhum, 1830-1897', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 46, No. 5-6, 2018.

how internal differences brought a rift within the community that resulted in internal tensions or conflicts. Nevertheless, they missed out, how a section within the same community came on the verge of starvation or emerged as labourers in the colonial period. Unlike other scholars, Ashoka Kumar Sen gave a brief understanding of how a specific section of the Hos became day-labourers or servants. He saw this process as a result of indifferent quality and quantity of landholdings, where a section constituted less fertile and quantity of land.

In Ranchi district and other districts of Chotanagpur quality of land were not homogenous due to the topography. Indeed, this gave birth to economic differences, where certain sections managed to occupy more, and the best quality of land and the other managed to occupy less and inferior quality of the land. Consequently, this left a certain section with uneconomic landholdings. No doubt, it might have prompted this section to opt for part-time jobs to supplement their livelihood. In the nineteenth century, *adivasis* from this section formed the main reserve of the abundant and cheap labour force for the commercial enterprise of the British. Here can we see this economic inequality as a sole factor in inducing a specific section to the labour market? Undoubtedly no, to push them to the labour market, the British adopted various policies and Acts that not only accelerated the prevailing differences within the *adivasi* communities but also deteriorated the economic condition of this section in their abode. As a consequence, this section was steeped in poverty and debt. In these unbarring circumstances, they opted for out-migration as a last resort to escape from hardship and starvation. Indeed, it left many *adivasi* villages devastated and depopulated.

## **OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The paramount objective of the study is to examine the acceleration of historically embedded differences of the Oraon community and the emergence of Oraon *raiya*s as labourers in the

time frame of 1830-1930. In this attempt, the thesis prompts several larger research questions that will help us to strengthen our understanding of the following themes.

1. Is Oraon as a community became susceptible to labour migration, or within the Oraons, a specific section became susceptible to labour migration?
2. Why did the British retain and accelerate the prevailing differences within the Oraons?
3. How did colonial Acts and policies magnify the economic disadvantages of Oraon *raiyats* that impelled them to emigrate to both inland and overseas destinations to fulfil the demand for labour?
4. How did the imposed identities in the labour market stigmatise the cultural identity of Oraon *raiyats* as 'labour'?
5. How did Oraon *raiyats* respond to their proletarianisation process?

The thesis covers approximately a century from 1830-1930. The period is significant as it witnessed the high outflow of the Oraons from Ranchi district to far-flung destinations (which included both inland and overseas). From 1834, just after the end of the Kol rebellion (1831-32), the Oraons started migrating to overseas destinations as indentured labour. From here, the trend of permanent migration started, which vehemently grew with the passing years and continued for a century. However, the outflow of the Oraons sharply declined when the great depression hit the tea plantations in the 1930s.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This thesis is a descriptive and analytical study based on secondary and primary sources. The secondary sources used here are various genres of journals and academic books. The academic books are mainly collected from Indira Gandhi Memorial Library (University of Hyderabad),

St. Albert College (Ranchi), National Library of India (Kolkata). The primary sources used here are collected from digital archives (Internet archive, Dspace and Google book), National Archive of India (Delhi), Bihar State archive (Patna), West Bengal State Archive (Kolkata), Ranchi Regional archive (Ranchi), National Library of India (Kolkata), Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (Ranchi). Among the primary sources, official reports, ethnography and anthropology works, census reports, gazetteer reports, newspapers of the colonial period have been used.

## **OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

The thesis is divided into five thematic chapters, in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. The second chapter gives a glimpse of the internal differences of the Oraons in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. It tries to explain how differences grew in the Oraon community and how it was practised in their villages. Internal differences grew in the Oraons in the pre-colonial period over the issue of control of village resources. Initially, every clan group of the Oraons founded a separate village in Ranchi district, where they enjoyed equal access to resources amid their villages. However, there came a threat to the control of the founding clan over the village resources with the entry of new settlers, who were unconnected with the village's founding clan or original founders. Thereby, to ensure the control of original founders or founding clans over the village resources, new sets of rules were introduced that debarred the new settlers from taking possession of privileged landholdings, religious and political posts. This further resulted in economic and social inequality that divided the community into two sections. In the local parlance, they came to be known as *bhuinhar* and *raiya*, respectively.

The third chapter deals with the series of administrative changes and Acts through which the British tried to strengthen the gap between the Oraon *bhuinhars* and the Oraon *raiyats*. A number of *bhuinhari* friendly administrative changes, policies and Acts were articulated in the district for the protection of Oraon *bhuinhars* from further oppression and wrongful eviction of land. The most important among them was the *Bhuinhari* settlement. Like any other Acts and policies, Oraon *raiyats* remained out of the scope of the settlement. This shows that these changes overlooked Oraon *raiyats* and their condition, which not only questioned their visibility but also turned them to constitute a reserve of cheap and abundant labour. In response to discriminatory Acts and policies, they led the Tana Bhagat Movement (1914-25), and its echoes reached far-flung destinations like Western Duar, where Oraon *raiyats* comprised the backbone of the tea plantation.

The fourth chapter explores the disadvantages of Oraon *raiyats* landholding. The land quality in Ranchi district was not homogenous. This divided the agricultural land into fertile and less fertile. For instance: agricultural land in Ranchi district was divided into three classes (1<sup>st</sup> *don*, 2<sup>nd</sup> *don* and 3<sup>rd</sup> *don*) in terms of fertility and productivity. Oraon *bhuinhars*, who were the founder of the village, managed to get hold of the best land, i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> *don* and 2<sup>nd</sup> *don* land. In contrast, Oraon *raiyats*, who were the late settlers, managed to get hold of meagre and poor quality of landholdings, i.e. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> *don* land. These lands were less fertile and less productive in nature. Thereby, the lands of Oraon *raiyats* were prone to epidemics like drought or famine. Furthermore, the lands of Oraon *raiyats* were bound with high rents, along with *rakumat* (praedial dues) and *beth-begari* (forced labour). In short, these lands offered low economic security and were not viable for the survival of Oraon *raiyats*. In addition, the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878 deprived them of their forest resources that used to counterbalance their agrarian disadvantage and acted as a saviour in their difficult times. Consequently, they faced acute pauperisation in their own habitat, where acute poverty and hunger surfaced around them.

The fifth chapter tries to examine the making of Oraon labour. In this attempt, the chapter will try to problematise the identity of *dhangar* and try to map the migration of Oraon *raiyats* to the sugar plantation of British Guiana and Mauritius. In the indigo plantation, Oraon *raiyats*, who were recognised as *dhangars*, gained the label of industrious, hardy and cheap. Thereby, they were highly valued and preferred by the indigo planters. In the 1820s, this enchanted the colonial officials who were in search of the cheap and abundant labour force to fulfil the demand of the labour force in the sugar plantation after the end of slavery. Indeed, they were seen as a post-slavery solution as they fitted in the model of the plantation, which was agro-industrious. From 1834, just after the end of slavery, Oraon *raiyats* were induced to sugar plantations in British Guiana and Mauritius. From 1834-1860, they became a mania in the sugar plantation. Various attempts were used to induce them to the sugar plantation. In parallel to the sugar plantation, the demand for Oraon *raiyats* started increasing in the newly formed Assam tea plantation. In order to fulfil the demand of inland labour needs, the migration of Oraon *raiyats* was switched from overseas to Assam tea plantation.

The sixth chapter revolves around the inland destinations. From 1870, the migration of Oraon *raiyats* completely shifted from overseas to inland destinations like Assam and Western Duar. A well-organised network of recruiting agents like *akratis* and *sardars* had flourished to induce them to these destinations. In this process, they used various fraudulent methods and drafted them off to the land of servitude. Here they were forced to work in an unfavourable climate and unsanitary conditions, which led to a high mortality rate. Furthermore, one who survived had to follow a tough work regime and face severe punishments from the planters for absconding. All these interminable commercial exploitations resulted in a labour consciousness among the Oraon *raiyats*, who led a movement in Western Duar in 1916. This was interlinked with the Tana Bhagat Movement of Ranchi district.

## CHAPTER 2

### ORAON SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In the contemporary period, Oraons are divided on the basis of political ideology, religion, education, occupation, rural-urban background. This itself contradicts the concept of an egalitarian society. However, division or internal differences within Oraon society does not develop overnight. Instead, it gradually developed through various historical developments and processes. The Oraons started moving out from an egalitarian society to a considerable degree of a differentiated society from the pre-colonial period. In this process, the society was divided into two sections over the issue of control of village resources like land. In the local parlance, the original settlers of the village were known as *bhuinhars*,<sup>27</sup> and the late settlers were known as *raiya*s.<sup>28</sup> Despite the apparent internal differences, the outlook of the Oraon society looked egalitarian before the arrival of the British, as the internal differences were counterbalanced with cultural bonds and celebrations. However, the internal differences were strengthened in the colonial period.

The chapter is an attempt to give a glimpse of the internal differences within the Oraons. In this attempt, the chapter will try to answer three questions: how differences grew within the Oraons, how it was operated within the villages of the Oraons and what is the

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<sup>27</sup> The descendent of the founding family or the original settler.

<sup>28</sup> Primarily a person who has acquired a right to hold land for the purpose of cultivation by himself or by the members of family but does not include a *bhuinhari* right.

difference between the terminologies of *bhuinhars* and *khuntkattidars*? Before taking up these questions, the chapter will first give a brief ethnographic account of the Oraons.

## A BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE ORAONS

We claim bhuinhari rights because Nagpore is our fatherland. We consider Nagpore as our Gaya, Ganga, Kasi, and Prayag. The bones of our ancestors lie buried in the bowels of Nagpore. We are no colonists from the other countries, but derive our race from Nagpore. There exist in Sutiamba the ruins of our Munda fort, half a pawn east of Pithauria. We allowed the Oraons of Ruhidas to come to this country. They came peacefully and we allowed them to occupy the country in peace. I cannot say how and when the Hindus came to this country.

-Munda Bhuinhar<sup>29</sup>

Historically, the Oraons migrated to Ranchi district (central part of Chotanagpur division) after the Mundas at the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>30</sup> However, the origin of the Oraons is under debate due to their mother tongue (*Kurukh*), which has strong Dravidian affinities. Colonial

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<sup>29</sup> 'Statement of a Munda Bhuinhar' cited in *Annual Report of the Special Commissioners under the Chotanagpur Tenure Act, Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, Branch: Land Revenue, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1873., July 1873, p. 6*, West Bengal State Archive (Hereafter WBSA).

<sup>30</sup> Formerly, Ranchi district was known as Lohardaga/Lohardugga, but in 1899 the name of the district was changed to Ranchi. Further, it was organised into four administrative sub-divisions, namely: Ranchi, Gumla (1902), Khunti (1905), and Simdega (1915). In Ranchi district, Khunti subdivision included Sonahatu, Bundu, Tamar, Khunti, Karra and Torpa thanas, Simdega subdivision included Kurdega, Simdega, Kolebira and Bano thanas, Gumla subdivision included Bishnupur, Chainpur, Ghagra, Sisai, Gumla, Raidih, Palkot and Basia thanas, and Sadr subdivision included Lohardaga, Kuru, Burma, Mandar, Bero, Lapung, Ranchi, Ormanjhi, Angara and Silli thanas. The length and breadth of the district was spread over 7103.55 square miles and constituted the largest district of Chotanagpur province.

anthropologists like S.C. Roy, E. T. Dalton, P. Dehon, W.W. Hunter claims that the Oraons were the inhabitants of Deccan.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, native scholars like Mahli Livin Tirkey argue that they were the inhabitants of Indus Valley Civilization.<sup>32</sup> However, on one point, scholars agree that before migrating to Ranchi district, the Oraons, for many generations, was residing on Rohtasgarh (located in Bihar) in and around 800 B.C. Furthermore, when the Aryans invaded them, they fled in two directions. One small group migrated to Santhal Pargana and took shelter in Rajmahal hills (they came to be known as *Maler*). Moreover, the second group migrated to the north-western part of Ranchi District (which happened to be known as Oraon).

When the Oraons entered Ranchi district, the Mundas, the sole master of the country, made way for the Oraons to settle down in their ancestral land by moving towards the southern and eastern parts of the district. In the meantime, the Oraons gradually became predominant in the north-western part. This made them stretch their way up to the heart of the district, see map 2.

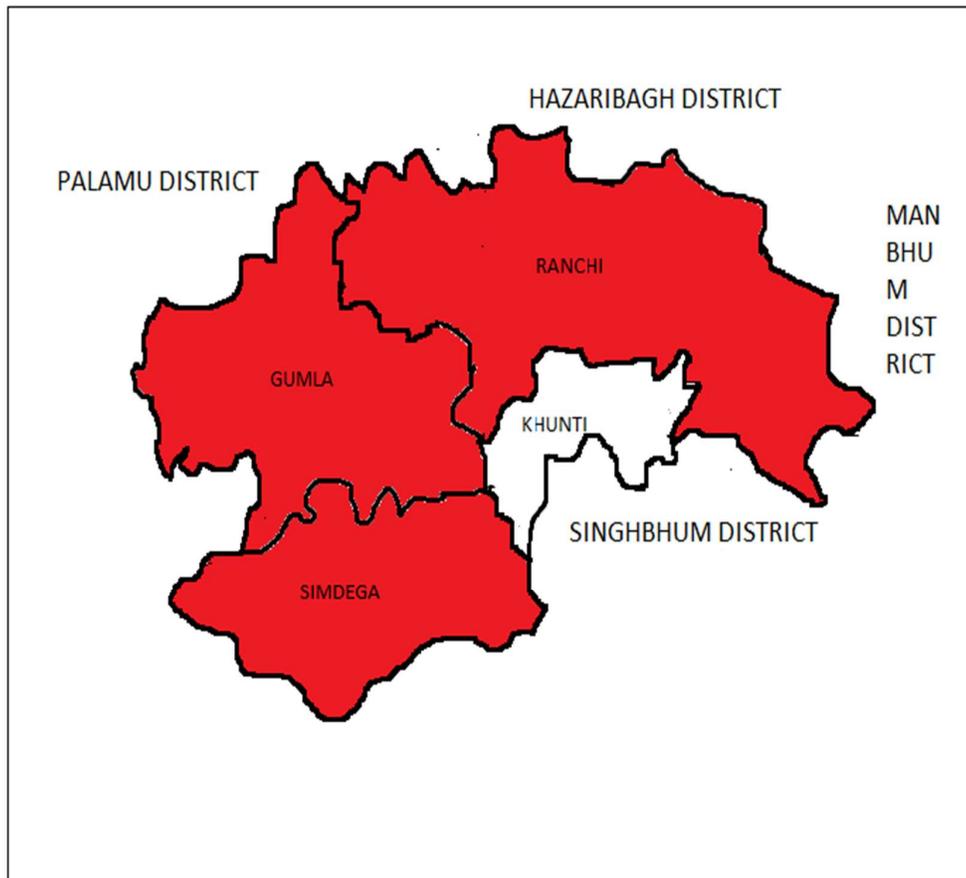
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<sup>31</sup> S.C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur: their history, economic life and social organization*, Ranchi: Bar Library, 1915, p. 51; E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1872, p. 245; Rev. P. Dehon, *Religion and Customs of the Uraon*, Calcutta: Memoirs of Asiatic Society of Bengal Press, 1906, p. 121; W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume. XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Delhi, 1877 (reprint: 1976), p. 255.

<sup>32</sup> M. L. Tirkey, *Father Constant Lieven aur Chotanagpur (1885-1892)*, Ranchi: Salesian Publisher, 1993, p. 32. Cited in Cherubin Tirkey, *Total Simulation: An existing problem in arranged marriages among the Oraons of Chotanagpur*, Ranchi: Catholic Press, 1999, p. 119.

**Map: 2.**

**The main concentration of the Oraons in the subdivisions of Ranchi district**



**Note:** Here, the researcher has prepared the map to showcase the main concentration of the Oraon population in the subdivisions of Ranchi district. They dwell principally in the north-western and central parts of the district.

Source: *Annual Report on the Survey Operations (Other than Cadastral Surveys) during the year 1907-1908*, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1909, p. 5.

In Ranchi district, they shared communal space with the Mundas and the Kharias. In comparison to the existing *adivasi* communities, the Mundas managed to exert a strong influence on the village organisation, institution, and social organisations of the Oraons. This explains the similarities between the Oraons and the Mundas social structure.

After a prolonged period of their entry, both Oraons and Mundas decided to have one Raja over Parha, who would establish peace and prosperity in the region.<sup>33</sup> As a result, they elected Pani Mukut Rai, who later established the Nagvanshi dynasty in Ranchi district.<sup>34</sup> According to myth, it was believed that Pani Mukut Rai was discovered by Madra Munda, the chief of the Munda community, near the tank under the hood of Nag. Madra Munda raised him like his own son and allowed Pani Mukut Rai to succeed him in 64 A.D.<sup>35</sup>

When the Oraons and the Mundas submitted themselves to Nagvanshi Raja, the periodic contribution was required for his upkeep, honorary attendance, and military service. Later on, these contributions were converted to fixed tributes. This made a particular section of the Oraons accountable for the tribute while the other section remained free from the responsibility of tribute or, in some cases, voluntarily paid tribute from their own will. The section that remained free from this responsibility was the original settler or the founder of the village, and the other section was the subsequent or later settlers. In local parlance, they were known as *bhuinhar* and *raiya*, respectively.

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<sup>33</sup> The *parha* is a confederacy of a number of neighbouring villages with a central organisation known as the *Panch Parha*, for the purpose of village administration and regulation of customary laws. In this village system, the whole district (territory) was divided into *parhas* (zones) consisting of from seven to even thirty villages each over which a chief resided. It is also known as inter-village political and social organisation/institution.

<sup>34</sup> Pani Mukut Rai was a non-*adivasi*.

<sup>35</sup> Sudha Kumari Sinha, *The Nagvanshis of Chotanagpur*, New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 2001, p. 6.

The name 'Oraon' is an exonym imposed on them by the outsiders or intruders, and, later on, 'Oraon' became the official term to recognise them.<sup>36</sup> The Oraons never used the term 'Oraon' for themselves, nor was it part of their dictionary. This term was new to them. Earlier, akin to other *adivasi* communities of Chotanagpur and Santhal Pargana (like Santhal, Munda, Ho, Kharia), the Oraons used their mother tongue '*Kurukh*' to refer to self or by others to recognise them. According to the Oraons, they derived the name *Kurukh* (man) from their mythical king *Karukh*.<sup>37</sup> However, in the pre-colonial period, the Oraons was renamed from 'Kurukh' to 'Oraon'.

There are many differing anthropological claims regarding the origin of the name 'Oraon'. Among them, W.W. Hunter and E.T. Dalton claim that Oraon/Uraon was assigned to *Kurukhs* as a nickname, possibly with reference to their many migrations and proneness to roam.<sup>38</sup> However, the majority of scholars point out that the outsiders coined this contemptuous name. According to the Brahmanical imagination, the Oraons were either the progeny of *ravan* (beast) or *vanar* (monkey/animal).<sup>39</sup> This argument looks quite apparent from the first one and is very similar to how Koitur or Koi, the second-largest *adivasi* community, was renamed as Gond.<sup>40</sup> The change must have happened in the medieval period, when the 42<sup>nd</sup> Nagvanshi raja, Durjan Sal who gradually became Brahmanised or Rajputised and started leasing out the *adivasi* lands to non-*adivasis*. This was the time when the Oraons got directly exposed to the dominant community, who tried to fit them into the caste hierarchy

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<sup>36</sup> Fidelis de Sa, *Crisis in Chota Nagpur*, Bangalore: Redemptorist Publication, 1975, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume. XVI*, p. 280; Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 245.

<sup>39</sup> Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Bhangya Bhukya, *The Roots of the Periphery: A History of the Gonds of Deccan India*, Second edition, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 25; Nandini Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar, 1854-2006*, Second edition, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 15.

by calling them 'Oraon', which sounds like *O-rawan* or *O-ram*.<sup>41</sup> The act can be justified as an attempt to integrate this community into the caste fold. Undoubtedly, this led to the commencement of their cultural marginalisation and subjugation. Despite this attempt, the Oraons managed to escape from the caste hierarchy.

## VILLAGE ORGANISATION

In the colonial period, three groups were identified in the villages of the Oraons: the *bhuinhars*, the *raiyats*, and the subsidiary artisan group/class. The first two groups belonged to the same community and occupied an indispensable position in the social structure of their respective villages. In contrast, artisan groups (like Chikbaraiks (weavers), Lohars (blacksmith)) belonged to the other groups and had no place in the social structure of the Oraon villages. This restricted their control over village resources. However, their labour and services were essential for the Oraons and were highly dependent on them for non-agrarian works. For instance:

Oraon tribe whose principal occupation was agriculture considered derogatory to engage themselves in non-agriculture works like weaving, basketry or wicker work, pottery, and working in iron. Thus, for performing these particular works artisan group resided in their village like Lohras who made or mend the Oraon ploughshares and other tools and implements, Ahirs, who tend their cattle, Kumhars who made earthen-ware for their domestic use and tiles to roof their huts with, Jolahas and Chik Baraik who weaved their clothes, Turis, Mahalis or Ors who weaved or plaited their baskets and Goraits

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<sup>41</sup> Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, p. 14; Srimati Satyawati, 'Guar Gahi Bakhni', *Dhumkuria*, May-June 1952, p. 10, cited in Joseph Bara, 'Alien Construct and Tribal Contestation in Colonial Chhotanagpur: The medium of Christianity', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, No.52, December 2009-January 2010, p. 92.

and Ghasis played music in their social festivities and served them in other ways<sup>42</sup>

By and large, the Oraon society was divided into two: *bhuinhars* (*addiyar*) and *raiyaats* (*gauror/gairos*). Here Oraon *raiyaats* were further sub-divided into *jeth raiyat* and ordinary *raiyaat*. The division was based on the clan structure unit and the time of their settlement in the villages. For instance: the first comers came to be known as *bhuinhar*, their subsequent followers came to be known as *jeth raiyaats*, and the later settlers were called ordinary *raiyaats*. Similarly, Oraon *bhuinhars* were the ones who came first and founded the village clan wise.<sup>43</sup> In the pre-colonial period, each clan group was attached to a particular locality or village where they selected a specific area of jungle suitable for cultivation. This composed the Oraons village, clan wise where members of the same clan resided and formed an exclusive group. For instance: village Biasi belonged to *Minz* clan, village Burha Khukra belonged to *Khalkho* clan, village Kudarko belonged to *Tirkey* clan.<sup>44</sup> This typical feature of the Oraons settlement remained permanent until the arrival of later or subsequent settlers not belonging to the original village family clan or the one who belonged to different or mixed clan groups. The late or subsequent settlers started arriving in the village in the pre-colonial period, which shifted the Oraon society from an egalitarian to a differentiated society. Relatively to this, in the colonial period, the Oraons were divided into three groups: the first comers or founding clans, the subsequent settler, and the latter immigrant.

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<sup>42</sup> Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, p. 68.

<sup>43</sup> The Oraons are divided into numerous exogamous totemic clans (*gotra*) like *Minz*, *Ekka*, *Kujur*, *Khalkho*, *Toppo*, *Tigga*, *Lakra*, *Dhan*, *Panna*, *Xaxa*, *Beck*, *Kindo*, *Kispotta*, *Kerketta*, *Kiro*, *Baxla*, *Xess* etc. The clan names are taken from birds, animals, fish, plants. Members of one clan are supposed to be the descendent from a common ancestor. Thereby, they are commonly considered as relatives like brother-sisters and this made the marriage within the same clan as a taboo. The clan's name descends from father to son.

<sup>44</sup> Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, p. 340.

The Oraon *bhuinhar* were the privileged group of the village who claimed to be the first settler and the one who cleared the jungles and brought suitable land under plough. Moreover, the areas cleared by them were called *bhuinhari* lands (included the lands locally known as *bhukheta*, *dalikatari*, *pahanai*, and *mahatoai*) of their respective *khunts*-stocks or families. These lands were hereditary in nature and invariably went to the nearest male agnates of the deceased of the same clan or *killi*. Simultaneously, these lands were not sold, mortgaged, transferred, or leased to a non-clan and, in the worst case, to a non-Oraon. The patrimonial and lineage nature of property kept the land under the stronghold of the same clan for centuries and allowed the Oraon *bhuinhars* to enjoy the propriety rights over their ancestral land. They held lands of which they consumed the whole produce. The Oraon *bhuinhars* were not liable to pay tribute for the land they and their ancestors had cleared.

Notwithstanding these exemptions, as the community progressed in the pre-colonial period, they voluntarily paid nominal/periodic tribute in the shape of grains and forest produce or *chanda* (which were in no sense rent) and rendered slight services to the Nagvanshi rajas. Despite this, their position as *bhuinhar* was always regarded as higher than Oraon *raiya*s.<sup>45</sup> They were commonly recognised as privileged *raiya*s/ tenants or well-off *raiya*s in the colonial documents or reports.

The Nagvanshi rajas were not the sovereign of the *adivasi* land and had little interference in the system/villages of the Oraons. These overlords were just entitled to some tribute and personal services, which kept the system/village in all intent autonomous. It was only in the latter part of the seventeenth century, the autonomy came under threat when the overlord Durjan Sal grew opportunistic or ambitious and started showing the sign of lording

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<sup>45</sup> John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, 1902-1910, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p. 35.

by inviting the foreigners in the land of *adivasis*. The newcomers intruded on the space and resources of the Oraons.

Ideally, in the villages of Oraons, officials like *baiga* or *pahan* and *mahato* were the central figure and were entitled to hold the secular and internal affairs of the village. This is the reason why it is commonly said that “the *pahan* makes the village (*gaon banata hai*) while the *mahato* runs the village (*gaon chalta hai*)”.<sup>46</sup> The *pahan* (*naigas*) acted as a village priest and dealt with religious affairs like offering periodic sacrifices (of a cock, a goat, a cow or a buffalo) to the village spirits, worshipping the village deities and preternatural healing. In their religious activities, they were assisted by the *pujar* or *panbhara*. In a few villages, there was no single *mahato*, and *pahan* acted as both capacities. There were some instances where more than one *pahan* existed in the village.

Contrary to the role of *pahan*, *mahato* acted as a village headman. He managed the secular affairs by maintaining the law and order of the village. Each village had its own headman and priest. They managed the whole political and religious affairs of the village and generally made annual settlements with the Oraon *raiya*s and settled disputes regarding the rent.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, these officers arrogated no pretensions to be landlords and neither exercised superior rights over the land cultivated by others.<sup>48</sup> They jointly acted as the guardian and general referee of the village and dealt with the village issues like the partition of family property or land management, offences against marriage laws, cases of witchcraft, theft,

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<sup>46</sup> B. C. Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhgga*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891, p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> S.T. Cuthbert, ‘Extract from a Report on Chota Nagpore’, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Ireland Vol. 8*, 1846, p. 411.

<sup>48</sup> Among the Oraons, the term ‘landlord’ had no room in their economic system. This concept was forced by the intruders. The *bhuinhar* considered themselves owner of the land rather than landlord.

settlement of newcomers, etc.<sup>49</sup> These secular leaders were the influential people of the village who also represented the village in the inter-village *parha* meetings. These official posts were usually reserved for the family of the original settlers where they got their function by hereditary or, in some cases, by-election. There are instances where *mahtoship* often continued in the same family for 50 or 100 years.<sup>50</sup> This helped the Oraon *bhuinhars* to maintain their monopoly over these offices for generations. Likewise, one can find a similar social structure among the *adivasi* communities in Bastar as well.<sup>51</sup> Here the founding lineage enjoyed religious and political power and superior rights over land within villages.

The *bhuinhars* were closely attached to their land in a way that it was impossible to reconcile them to deprive of it even after death. Their dead bodies were always buried in the village where their *bhuinhari* lands were located to protect their symbiotic relationship with the land.<sup>52</sup> It is also to be noted here that Oraon *bhuinhar* managed to retain his position until he held his *bhuinhari* or ancestral land. Once he lost control over his *bhuinhari* land, his position automatically degraded to a *raiyyat*. For instance, from 1830-1930, many lost their position with the consequent grounds of land alienation and were degraded to ordinary *raiyyat*.

In contrast to Oraon *bhuinhars*, *jeth raiyyats* and ordinary *raiyyats* were primarily the subsequent and latecomers. They were usually the relatives on the female's sides (like a brother-in-law or son in law, sister's or daughter's son) who were brought or settled by the

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<sup>49</sup> *Land Revenue Administration Report of the Chota Nagpur division for the year 1870-71, and the resolution of government thereon submitted to the government of India*. Revenue Department, Branch: Land Revenue, No. 69, April 1872, p. 42, WBSA.

<sup>50</sup> A. Grignard, *Hahn's Oraon Folk-Lore in the Original. A critical text with translations and notes*, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1931, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Sundar, *Subaltern and Sovereigns*, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> No. 247, dated the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1839, Extract from a letter from Da. John Davidson, Principal Assistant, Governor-General's Agent, to Major J. R. Ouseley, Governor-General's Agent, Kishenpore, p. 6, *Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes, Part-II*, Unpublished, (Hereafter PCAD-II).

original settlers or their *bhuinhar* relatives. Nevertheless, they possessed no direct lineage link with the original clan group of the village. However, we cannot deny that a Oraon man who came to be known as *raiya*t in the village of his current residence may be a *bhuinhar* in their ancestral village where their clan was the dominant one. Many Oraon *bhuinhars* shifted or dispersed to neighbouring villages from their parent village due to varied reasons like population growth. In many villages, population growth made the village insufficient for residence and cultivation. Oraon *bhuinhars* lost their preferential rights and position in the new village and were merely treated as a commoner or *praja*.

Though they were invariably Oraons and were treated as a resident of the village, they were not given any right to hold the proprietary or privileged land, official and religious post as they were reserved for the original settlers of the village. Henceforth, they had to rely on less fertile and less productive landholdings, which were uneconomic in nature and barely reached the limit of subsistence, for a detailed discussion, see chapter 4. No doubt, agrarian disadvantage aided their economic insecurity. Such rules were designed to ensure the control of original settlers over the village resources. According to rules, the Oraon *raiya*t had to secure the consent of the original settlers (usually *pahan* and *mahto*) to settle or reclaim the forest, vacant land or wasteland for cultivation. For instance: when a new immigrant came to the village and required land for cultivation, any old settler of the village who had a large portion of land was called upon by the *pahan* and *mahto* to give a portion of non-*bhuinhari* or *raiya*t land for the benefit of the newcomer.<sup>53</sup> Subsequently, the original settlers have the right to settle landless Oraon *raiya*t in the vacant land. These lands were called *rajhas/ rajhus/ raiya*t land in the colonial period. This gives us a glimpse that they were dependent on original settlers from whom they acquired economic rights. In addition to this, in their lands, they

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<sup>53</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhga*, p. 107.

owned a particular portion of produce to the Nagvanshi rajas, which was converted to rent in the colonial period. Similar to *bhuinhari* land, these lands were inherited by the male agnates of the deceased in equal shares, and no females were allowed to inherit the lands of their father and brothers.

In the Oraons society, *jeth raiyats* enjoyed a slightly higher position than ordinary *raiya*ts within the village. In important socio-political gatherings, the presence of the members of *jeth raiyat* was usually considered essential, while there were no consequences if ordinary *raiya*ts went unrepresented.<sup>54</sup> For instance: The Parha panchayat consisted of leading men from a group of villages like *pahan*, *mahto*, *bhuinhars*, and *jeth raiya*ts.<sup>55</sup> The difference can be understood with the time of their settlement that allowed subsequent settlers to establish one or two generations of their residence in the village. In the colonial period, with the administrative intervention of the British, Oraon *raiya*ts were further subdivided into occupancy, non-occupancy and under *raiya*ts.<sup>56</sup> Here *raiya*ts who have a right of occupancy in the land were called occupancy *raiya*ts, while those who do not have a right of occupancy in the land were called non-occupancy *raiya*ts. Alongside, a new class emerged from the Oraon *raiya*ts, which was categorised as ‘labour class’.

## **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TERMINOLOGIES OF ‘KHUNKATTIDAR’ AND ‘BHUINHAR’**

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<sup>54</sup> Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, p. 380.

<sup>55</sup> T.S. Macpherson and M.G. Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa Gazetteers: Ranchi*, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1917, p. 76.

<sup>56</sup> *The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act, 1908*, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1935, pp. 6-7.

Internal differences were not a unique feature within the Oraons and were witnessed within the Mundas as well. In the development of internal differences, the clan composition/organisation played a significant role among the Mundas. Like the Oraon community, each village was associated with one clan, supposedly the founding clan, forming a dominant clan. Accordingly, the village organisation was designed to ensure the control of the founding clan over the village resources. Here founding clan were given the right to enjoy the proprietor right over the land and the forest within the village. Subsequently, all the official posts like *manki* (priest) and *munda* (headmen) were drawn from them. In short, they dominated numerically, politically, economically, and socially within the village. Moreover, to validate the position of the dominant clan, the terminology '*khuntkattidar*' came into being. The term also differentiated the pater clan or families from the new settler, *eta-haturenko* (men of other villages), or *praja horoko*.<sup>57</sup> Their difference was further perpetuated by the village *sasan* (bone burial ground), where the ancestors of claimant family members were buried. Each clan had their own *sasan diri* (gravestone) in their respective villages, where they shared a burial ground, and no outsiders were allowed to use them. It was considered as proof of their ownership of land in the villages. And their membership of a particular clan family. Earlier, every clan group of the Mundas was dominant in their respective villages and formed an egalitarian outlook. However, as the entry of new settlers of different clan groups started escalating in the villages in the pre-colonial period, rules grew up in the villages to safeguard the rights of the founding clan. To an extent, the clan-based village organisation helped in creating socio-economic inequality within the Mundas.

With the above description, it is easy to conclude that the term *bhuinhari* is a local variant of the *khuntkattidar*. However, the actual difference lies in the form of land ownership.

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<sup>57</sup> S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, Ranchi: Crown Publication, fourth Reprint 2010, p.118.

The Munda followed a joint family system. Under the system, the original family's descendant was considered the co-owners of all lands within the ambit of the village. The descendent was pronounced as *khuntkattidar*, who practised joint or communal ownership with his lineage brothers over the land, forest, and wasteland. Here the property and title were supposed to remain in the family. Moreover, everything was divided equally among the families of the village. Their villages were known as *khuntkatti* village, which was located in the south and the southwest portion of the district. In these villages, the lands cleared by them was called *khuntkatti* land. For the proposed period, they managed to retain the *khuntkatti* character. However, things started changing in the medieval period, with the gradual growth of feudal properties. The raja or superior landlords succeeded in getting hold of village lands as their own share and named them *rajhus/ rajhas* or *majihiyas*, respectively.<sup>58</sup> The absorption of lands escalated under the shelter of the British. Consequently, this resulted in the breakdown of many *khuntkatti* villages where the collective landholding system or communal ownership was thoroughly broken. From 1927-35, there were 449 broken *khuntkatti* villages, see table 1.

This drastically reduced the *khuntkatti* villages. Consequently, only 156 pure *khuntkatti* villages successfully managed to survive in the district at the time of the settlement see table 2.<sup>59</sup> Of these 'intact' villages, 87 were within the Khunti thana, 59 in thana Tamar, 9 in thana Bundu, and 1 in thana Rahe.<sup>60</sup> The total area of these villages was 144 square miles, where 2, 601 *khuntkattidar* existed.<sup>61</sup> The broken villages marked the change from communal ownership to individual ownership. This is the reason why in the broken villages, the term *khuntkatti* was changed to *bhuinhari*.<sup>62</sup> Henceforth, in the colonial period, Mundas were

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<sup>58</sup> Adivasis of Ranchi district often called the landlords, moneylenders as *Dikus (exploiter)*.

<sup>59</sup> Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement*, p. 80.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, p. xxxii.

divided into *khuntkattidar*, *bhuinhar* and *raiya*s. Due to their historical precedents, the *khuntkattidars* enjoyed more privileges than the two.<sup>63</sup>

**Table. 1.**

**The number of broken *khuntkatti* villages in the district in 1927-35**

	Name of subdivision	Name of thanas	Total number of villages
1.	Khunti	Sonahatu	55
		Bundu	53
		Tamar	187
		Khunti	90
		Karra	6
		Torpa	5
2.	Simdega	Bano	7
		Kolebira	20
		Simdega	1
3.	Gumla	Basia	1
		Ghaghra	1
		Chainpur	1
4.	Ranchi	Ranchi	4
		Ormanjhi	1
		Angara	2
		Silli	10
		Burmu	1
		Lohardaga	3
		Bero	1
		Total	449

Source: F.E.A, Taylor, Final Report on the Revisional Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1927-1935, Patna: Government Printing Press, 1940, p. 29

<sup>63</sup> Peter Tete, *A Missionary Social Worker in India: J. B. Hoffman, the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act and Catholic Co-operatives 1893-1928*, Ranchi: Satya Bharti, 1986, p. 58.

**Table. 2.**

**Number of Mundari Khuntkattidar and Raiyats**

Number of thanas	Number of intact Mundari Khuntkattidar villages	Number of Mundari Khuntkattidar	Praja or raiyat under Mundari Khuntkattidar
Bundu	9	76	176
Tamar	59	615	962
Khunti	87	1909	1170
Bano	1	1	19
Total	156	2,601	2,327

Source: J. Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1902-1910*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p. 80.

Unlike the Mundas, the term *khuntkatti* was alien to the Oraons and was strictly confined to the Mundas and the Hos. The Oraons used the term *bhuinhar* as they believed in the idea of individual/private ownership, where each family came under the property-owning unit. They recognised joint ownership only with respect to public lands such as *sarna (Jahe)*,<sup>64</sup> wastelands, and jungles within the village area. For instance, it was found in some villages in the final block of Ranchi settlement (thanas Mandar, Burmu, Ranchi, Ormanjhi, Angara and Silli) that possession in the product of certain trees in the *bhuinhari khatians* belonged to all

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<sup>64</sup> In the villages, a portion of primitive forest was kept consecrated for the village spirits. Here Baiga offered sacrifices to the principal village spirits in order to keep away all harm from the village. Cited from L. Clarysse, *Father Constant Lievens, SJ*, Ranchi: Satya Bharti, 1984, p. 93.

members of a *bhuinhari* Khunt jointly.<sup>65</sup> Their idea of ownership was also reflected in their customary law of inheritance and succession of the land. For the Oraons, the land was patrimony. Here the clan validated the devolution of property to the male descendent of the deceased owner. In these circumstances, if a *bhuinhar* died heirless, the *bhuinhari* land was converted to a *raiya* land instead of the customary reversion of the land in village stock.<sup>66</sup> In any case, the land was not devaluated to an adopted son or a son-in-law (*gar-damad*) as they belonged to a different clan or lineage group. Thereby, it would be wrong to conclude that the term *bhuinhar* was used in preference to the term *khuntkattidar*.

## CONCLUSION

In the villages of the Oraons, each founding clan formed a numerical strength and genealogical depth. This made the Oraon *bhuinhar* dominant in their villages, where the rules and regulation guarded their rights and devolution of property from the Oraon *raiya*s (later or subsequent settlers). In this setup, Oraon *raiya*s were restricted from acquiring rights equivalent to Oraon *bhuinhar*, which created a socio-economic gap between the two. In the economic sector, the *bhuinhar* enjoyed the ownership of privileged land holdings/ *bhuinhari* lands. These lands were fertile and productive in nature, which was also inclined to certain financial assets like their holdings practically went tribute-free in the pre-colonial period. While in the colonial period, they were inclined to quit or fixed rent.

In contrast, Oraon *raiya*s acquired agricultural rights over non-*bhuinhari* lands, which were less fertile and productive. Oraon *raiya*s paid tribute or *chanda* for their holdings

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<sup>65</sup> F.E.A, Taylor, *Final Report on the Revisional Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1927-1935*, Patna: Government Printing Press, 1940, p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p. 34.

which were converted to rent in the colonial period. Similarly, in the Oraon society, the tag '*bhuinhar*' was proudly worn in the community as it gave them a special position in society. Moreover, one who lost the label mislaid all the privileges and political power attached with the tag. This shows how the Oraon *raiya*s became socially and economically distanced from the Oraon *bhuinhars*. These differences were strengthened by the discriminatory colonial Acts and policies and different rent structures. The next chapter will examine the administrative intervention in Ranchi district, which was followed by various Acts and policies that remained central to Oraon *bhuinhars*.

## CHAPTER 3

### MAPPING COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVENTION IN RANCHI DISTRICT

The British instituted a direct administration over Ranchi district after the outbreak of the Kol rebellion (1831-32). This is the reason why it is also considered a turning point in the history of Ranchi district. From here, the episode of administrative modification started in the district in the realm of Oraon *bhuinhar* grievances. Under the new administrative setup, a regular system of police and court was established in Ranchi district. Following this, various Acts and Policies were introduced, which remained central to Oraon *bhuinhars*. Alongside attempts were made to define and register the proprietary land to alleviate or remove the grievances of Oraon *bhuinhars*. The reforms in administrations were modified after repeated instances of Oraon *bhuinhar* insurrections for the political and commercial necessities of the British. Furthermore, a series of changes in the administration culminated in the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act (hereafter CNT Act) of 1908. In this process, Acts and policies prior to CNT Act completely overlooked Oraon *raiya*s and their tenures.

Henceforth, the chapter is an attempt to analyse these modifications and changes brought in Ranchi district. In this attempt, the chapter will try to answer two questions: why did these changes remained central to Oraon *bhuinhars* and overlooked the Oraon *raiya*s? How did Oraon *raiya*s respond to their unremitting ignorance?

## ORIGINATION OF DISCRIMINATORY ACTS AND POLICIES

The Kols aggrieved by the oppression of middlemen and, obtaining no redress in their own country, as the native officials on the spot (darogas) said they could not interfere in land disputes, and the Maharajah told them to go Shergotty, determined at last to take the law into their own hands.<sup>67</sup>

Following the Battle of Buxar in 1765, Ranchi district (before 1834, it was known as Chota Nagpur) came under the indirect administration of the British. For a long elapse of time, the district was administered as an ordinary regulation district under the Judge-Magistrate of Ramgarh. In this period, there was no attempt by the British to interfere in the internal management of the district. In this backdrop, police or the administration of justice was particularly left at the mercy of Nagvanshi rajas. The Nagvanshi rajas and his subordinates (*thicaddars*, landlords) looked down upon the Oraon population and regarded them as impure and illiterate savages.<sup>68</sup> This also influenced the British and its officials, who highly depended on them for local information. The consequence was that the epithet '*chuars*' and '*dakaits*' were indiscriminately used for the *adivasi* communities of the district whenever there was an occasion to allude to them in official reports.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, their disturbances were described as an act of plunder and rapine. In short, in the British viewpoint, the Oraons were seen as a culprit than a victim. Henceforth, even after the elapse of many years, no attempts were made to settle the disputes between the Oraons and the landlords. This led to the deprivation of any protection

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<sup>67</sup> No. 2975 dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1871, Extract from a letter from Colonel E.T. Dalton to the secretary to the govt. of Bengal Revenue Department, p. 21, *Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes, Part-II*, Unpublished (Hereafter PCAD-II).

<sup>68</sup> No. 11, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1880, From Babu Rakhai Das Haldar to the Deputy Commissioner of Lohardugga, p. 82, PCAD-II.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

or justice to the Oraon community, which prompted them to take the law into their hands again and again. It was only after the Kol rebellion (1831-32), Oraon *bhuinhars* managed to attract the serious attention of the British. From here onwards, the British started viewing Oraon *bhuinhars* as a victim whom the alien intruders have wronged in many ways.<sup>70</sup>

Here the question comes that why there was a sudden change in the attitude of the British towards the Oraon *bhuinhar* after the Kol rebellion, where they suddenly became a victim from the culprit. To an extent, this has more to do with the commercial interest of the British. Not until 1826, an official enquiry was conducted in the district to investigate the people and their land tenures. Based on enquiry, the first official report was prepared by S.T. Cuthbert, Magistrate and Collector of Ramgarh. Probably, the enquiry took place immediately after the probe of Gladstone, who around 1826, foreseeing the end of slavery, inquired about the availability of labour in India, and he was told about a community of people- *dhangars* or hill coolies.<sup>71</sup> This was the time when the British took an interest in the district and its inhabitants. Undoubtedly, the official enquiry was conducted to get a clear insight into the availability of labour in the district. In this context, Mr Cuthbert produced a lengthy report where he discussed about *Ramea* (Kharia), *Aorawan* (Oraon), *Moonda* (Munda), who were collectively described as *Coles* (Kols). Furthermore, he described them as active participants in the labour market.

The Coles (Kols) emigrate in great numbers annually in search of employment and are entertained by indigo planters and others. They are generally preferred to the labourers of other parts of the country, on account

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<sup>70</sup> Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Adivasi and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos 1820-1932*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan Private Limited, 2011, p. 115; B.B. Chaudhari, 'Towards an Understanding of the Tribal World of Colonial Eastern India', in Sanjukta Das Gupta and Raj Sekhar Basu (ed.) *Narratives from the Margins: Aspects of Adivasi history in India*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, p. 50.

<sup>71</sup> Kaushik Ghosh, 'A Market of Aboriginality: Primitivism and race classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India', in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (ed.) *Subaltern Studies X: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 17.

of their performing more work and at a lower rate. In a family consisting of four or five persons, two are left at home to take care of the family affairs, and cultivation, &c., the rest go abroad to seek service.<sup>72</sup>

Simultaneously, in the same report, *bhuinhari* and *raiyati* tenures were discussed and distinguished from one another for the first time. For instance, *boonheree-khet* or *bhuinhari* tenure went rent-free while one enjoyed hereditary right over *raiyati* tenure till they paid the rent.<sup>73</sup> Here *bhuinhari* tenure belonged to the *bhuinhars* while *raiyati/ rajhas* tenure belonged to the *raiyats*. This itself gave an overview of an Oraon society that was classified into two: *bhuinhars* and *raiyats*. It was explained in more detail in the report of John Davidson in 1839.<sup>74</sup>

Following the enquiry, the Kol rebellion broke out in the district in 1831. It was one of the deadly rebellions that created tension in the entire district. According to B.B. Choudhari, the rebellion was considered a threat to law and order.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, the movement came as a serious threat in the upcoming commercial venture of the British, i.e., to supplement slavery with the Oraon populace.<sup>76</sup> Thereby, there came an urgency to control the future uprisings to commence their commercial venture efficiently. This forced them to get an in-depth knowledge of the district and its inhabitants as the colonial power and knowledge entailed one other.<sup>77</sup> The enquiries were conducted to get an insight into the nature and motivation of the Kol insurrection

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<sup>72</sup> S.T. Cuthbert, 'Extract from a Report on Chota Nagpore', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Ireland Vol. 8, 1846, p. 413.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 412.

<sup>74</sup> No. 247 dated the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1839, Extract from a letter from Dr. John Davidson, Principal assistant, Governor-General's agent to Major J.R. Ouseley, Governor-General's agent, Kishenpore, p. 6, *Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes, Part-II*, Unpublished, (Hereafter, PCAD-II).

<sup>75</sup> Chaudhari, *Towards an Understanding of the Tribal World of Colonial Eastern India*, p. 49.

<sup>76</sup> It is explained in detail in fifth chapter.

<sup>77</sup> Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the making of Modern India*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2012, p. 9.

in the light of previous experiences and by their understanding to suppress it.<sup>78</sup> In this venture, colonial bureaucrats like Mr S.T. Cuthbert, Caption Thomson Wilkinson, and Dent helped the British to get an insight into this rebellion.<sup>79</sup> They directed towards a strained relationship between the *adivasi bhuinhars* and the landlords. In the district, Oraon *bhuinhars* saw the landlords as their born and sworn enemies who robbed them of their ancestral land and reduced many of them to a state of ordinary *raiyat*. Indeed, this antagonism between the two culminated in the outbreak of the rebellion. For instance:

The Bhuinhars and the hereditary cultivators of Chota Nagpore cling most tenaciously to their hereditary plots of land. Insurrections and affrays have generally followed when attempts were made by the chief or his subordinate farmers to disturb their rights- some attribute the Kol insurrection of 1833 mainly to such attempts.<sup>80</sup>

The movement was led by the privileged group of the Oraons, Mundas and the Hos (like *khuntkattidar, bhuinhars*).<sup>81</sup> Hence, the British firmly believed that Oraon *bhuinhars* were being defrayed or disposed of their ancestral lands by the landlords. Thereby, to bring peace in the district and to control future uprisings, there was a need for *bhuinhari* friendly administrative policies to protect them from the oppression of landlords. For instance:

The disturbance in Nagpore, 1832, were caused by no one cause so much as the dispossession of Moondas and Mankis, who are the Bhoonjers (*bhuinhars*) of Sonapore, of their lands; and until the Bhoonjers are protected

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<sup>78</sup> Ranjit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, 1902-1910, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, pp. 22-23.

<sup>80</sup> *Petition of 14000 native Christian residency in the territory of the raja of Chotanagpur*, Government of Bengal, revenue department, land revenue, A. proceeding no. 21, October 1867, p. 2. Bihar State Archive (Hereafter BSA).

<sup>81</sup> Within the Oraons, the movement was led by Budhu Bhagat.

in the possession of their lands, we never can be certain of the peace of the country.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, after the Kol rebellion, the British established direct rule in Ranchi district in 1834. Under this, they opted for the policy of paternalism to set them as the protector of the Oraon *bhuinhars*. Following this, in the realm of Oraon *bhuinhar* grievances, radical changes were brought in the administration to safeguard their land ownership. This was followed by various Acts and policies that remained central to Oraon *bhuinhars* and entirely neglected the Oraon *raiya*s.

After going through these pertinent developments, one can conclude that the British remained silent towards Oraon *raiya*s as they were not active in the movements. Thus, they were not seen as a threat to their commercial venture. However, their mass involvement in the labour migration from 1830-1930 questions the silence of the British towards the oppression and grievances of Oraon *raiya*s. One can see this as a strategy to induce Oraon *raiya*s into the labour market.

Former enquiries not just gave an overview of the origin of the Kol rebellion. It also gave an overview of the Oraon society.<sup>83</sup> From these enquiries, the British acquired in-depth knowledge of the rights, customs and even the prejudices of the Oraons that gave them a clear understanding of their historical embedded differences. This must have supported the notion of Oraon *raiya*s being more sensitive to wage-earning opportunities than the Oraon *bhuinhars*. On the basis of this knowledge, the British interpreted the Oraon *bhuinhars* and Oraon *raiya*s as privileged and non-privileged tenants, respectively. Nevertheless, they saw the prevailing

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<sup>82</sup> No. 247 dated the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1839, Extract from a letter from Dr. John Davidson, Principal assistant, Governor-General's agent to Major J.R. Ouseley, Governor-General's agent, Kishenpore, p. 6, PCAD-II.

<sup>83</sup> Choudhari, *Towards an Understanding of the Tribal World of Colonial Eastern India*, p. 49.

differences within the Oraons as beneficial for their capitalist interest. Thereby, they not just retained the prevailing differences but also tried to strengthen the internal differences by discriminatory Acts and policies. Simultaneously, the British also legitimised this difference by maintaining the difference in the rent structures of both sections in Ranchi district, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter. For instance: the rent structure of both Oraon *raiyats* and Oraon *bhuinhars* differed from each other. Oraon *bhuinhars* were obliged to pay fixed or half rent, while Oraon *raiyats* were obliged to pay rent at a higher rate. A similar pattern was followed in the districts of Central Provinces (like Jabalpur, Narsimhapur, Honsangabad, Betul, Seoni, Mandla, Sagar), where the British categorised the agricultural communities into three categories of tenants for their commercial benefit.<sup>84</sup> Like *bhuinhars*, here, the first and most prestigious tenants were obliged to pay fixed rent. However, in comparison to the Oraons, these categories bore little relation to the traditional structure of the agricultural communities. In parallel to these developments, the differences within the Oraons were stressed or promoted throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century in most official and ethnographical records and memorandum.

Undoubtedly, this disrupted the economic life of Oraon *raiyats* as no policies and Acts safeguarded their rights against the exploitation of landlords and moneylenders. Consequently, many were stripped off from their forest and land rights and were left at the end of starvation. This contributed to the sub-division of the Oraon *raiyats* into occupancy, non-occupancy and under *raiyats*. Simultaneously, they came under the easy prey of labour recruiters like *arkatis* and *sardars*. From 1830-1930, a good percentage of Oraon *raiyats* were recruited in the labour market to fulfil the labour requirement in varied destinations. Contrary to Ranchi district, in Singbhum, after the Kol rebellion, colonial policies blurred the distinction between the

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<sup>84</sup> D. E.U. Baker, *Colonialism in an Indian Hinterland: The Central Provinces, 1820-1920*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 114.

*khuntkattidar* Ho and non-*khuntkattidar* Ho by instituting the uniform rate of rent.<sup>85</sup> This might be the reason why the Hos remained invisible in the labour market for an extended period.<sup>86</sup> Thereby instituting discriminatory Acts and policies, the British wanted to achieve two goals, i.e., to control the future insurrection and to push the Oraon *raiya*s to the labour market.

## ADMINISTRATIVE MODIFICATIONS

In need to offer special protection to the immemorial rights and the legitimate interest of the Oraon *bhuinhars*, the former ordinary regulation was replaced with a new regulation XIII of 1833. Under the new regulation, there was a territorial readjustment where certain tracts were parted from the old district of Ramgarh, Jungle Mehal and Midnapore. For instance, Chotanagpur (Ranchi district), Palamu, Kharakdiha, Ramgarh, and Kunda were parted from the old district of Ramgarh.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, from the old district of Midnapore, Dhalbhum, including Ghatshila, was separated.<sup>88</sup> Afterwards, Chotanagpur province and Jungle *mahals*,<sup>89</sup> along with dependent tributary *mahals* were organised into a new agency under the name of South-West Frontier Agency (SWFA). Initially, the new agency was subdivided into three parts which were separated as Lohardaga,<sup>90</sup> Hazaribagh and Manbhum. A few years later, Singbhum also came into existence.

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<sup>85</sup> Sanjukta Das Gupta, 'A home for tribal subject: Revisiting British colonial experimentation in the Kolhan government estate' in Gunnel Cederlof and Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Subjects, Citizens and Law: Colonial and Independent India*, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019, p. 114.

<sup>86</sup> Compared to the Oraons, Mundas and the Santhals, the Hos remained invisible in the labour market for a long period.

<sup>87</sup> *Papers relating to East India Affairs viz Regulations passed by the governments of Bengal, Fort St. George, and Bombay, in the years 1832 to 1836*, The House of Common, 23 February 1838, p. 29.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> This included Manbhum and Dalbhoom.

<sup>90</sup> The district came to be known as Lohardaga till 1899 after this the name changed to Ranchi.

In the former regulation, no colonial officials were stationed in the province. However, under the new regulation, the presence of a colonial official was felt for a closer administration and for effective control. Following this, a special official was assigned to administer the new regulation in the South-West Frontier Agency. He was designated as the 'Political Agent to the Governor-General' and was assisted by an officer styled as 'Principal Assistant'. Alongside, there were other local subordinates like Junior Assistant, *munsiff* and a personal *sadr amin*. For the administration of civil justice, there were two *munsiffs*, one at Lohardaga, and one at Ranchi, while the personal *sadr amin* at Gola.<sup>91</sup>

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1834, Captain Wilkinson, who got the credit to suppress Kol rebellion, became the first Agent to the Governor-General of South-West Frontier Agency.<sup>92</sup> This is the reason why the new regulation was popularly known as the Wilkinson rule. In 1842, the headquarter of the agency was transferred from Lohardaga to Kishenpur (later known as Ranchi). The new headquarter was named after Wilkinson, who was popularly known as *AL-Kishen Saheb*. Major Ousley, who was the first Principal Assistant, later succeeded Captain Wilkinson as Governor-General's Agent.

The operations of the former regulations and the rules for the administration of civil and criminal justice and collection were suspended. It was replaced by a regular system of police and court for the administration of justice. Under the framework of new rules, the Political Agent was allowed to exercise a wide power. He was vested with the same power exercised by the Commissioners of revenue and by civil and session judges.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, his

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<sup>91</sup> T.S. Macpherson and M.G. Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1917, p. 37.

<sup>92</sup> S.C. Roy, 'Ethnological Investigation in official Records', *Journal of the Bihar and Research Society*, vol. XXI, part 4, p. 232.

<sup>93</sup> *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, 1917, p.36.

subordinate principal assistants were held in charge of the districts known as the Manbhum, Lohardaga (Ranchi) and Hazaribagh divisions.<sup>94</sup>

After a prolonged tour of inquiry of one year from 1854-55, Mr Rickett Henry, member of the Board of revenue, lower province, prepared a report. In this report, he pointed out the loopholes and uncertainty of the system that has failed to restrict the oppression of the landlords. For instance:

Though there was no complaint preferred to me, there seems reason to apprehend that the people of the district, the Coles, suffer much injustice at the hands of foreign middle men introduced by the Rajas, their Zamindar.<sup>95</sup>

After analysing his report, further alteration in the form of administration took place. Under Act XX of 1855, South Western Frontier Agency was abolished, and Chotanagpur was passed under Lieutenant-Governorship of Bengal as a "Non-Regulation Province". Since then Chotanagpur division had been administered as a division of Bengal under a Commissioner. The division included Ranchi, Manbhum, Singbhum and Hazaribagh. Under the new Act, there were changes in the designations, like the Agent of the Governor-General became the Commissioner of the division. Similarly, the designation of the Principal Assistant was altered to the Principal Assistant Commissioner, and in 1861 it was altered to Deputy Commissioner.<sup>96</sup> Other assistant agents became Senior Assistant Commissioners or Junior Assistant Commissioners.

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<sup>94</sup> *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, 1917, p. 36.

<sup>95</sup> S.C. Roy, 'The Theory of rent among the Mundas of Chota Nagpur', *Man In India*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3-4, Sept-December, 1946, p. 167.

<sup>96</sup> S. C. Roy, *Munda and their country*, Ranchi: Crown Publications, 1912, p. 218.

Even after the installation of a well-regulated administration, the British failed to protect Oraon *bhuinhars* from further oppression and wrongful eviction. Conversely, due to the defect in the administration and the improper execution of laws, the existing situation became even worse than it was. The significant flaws in the administration were found under the Police system and Lawsuits.

### **1. Lawsuits:**

In the former administration, the nearest court was stationed at far-off Sherghatti (part of Gaya district) and Chatra (part of Hazaribagh district). However, under the new regulation, the court was stationed at Ranchi district. This was supposed to be an important mode in administering justice to the Oraon *bhuinhars*. However, due to the various loopholes, it ended up giving judgement in favour of landlords. The primary defect in the system was the communication gap. The judges and officials worked under a disadvantage by not understanding the language of Oraon communities. In this situation, usually, the judges ended up misinterpreting and giving the wrong judgements.

Similarly, the language used in the court was a mixture of Hindi, Urdu and Farsi, which was neither spoken nor understood by the Oraons. In addition to language, the inability to read and write, and above all, the lack of legal knowledge on the part of the Oraons made it impossible for them to fight the case independently. This necessitated them to hire a *muktears* on their behalf. These *muktears* usually charged high rates, making the Oraons believe that *muktears* make those win the lawsuits that paid them best.<sup>97</sup> The landlords were rich enough to do that. Simultaneously, the court cases were lengthy (usually took weeks or seldom months) and financially draining process. Henceforth, it was not possible for every individual

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<sup>97</sup> Dated 17<sup>th</sup> May 1876, From Revd. H. Onasch and 15 others to the honour the lieutenant Governor of Bengal, p. 68, PCAD-II.

to knock on the doors of the court for justice. Thereby, only a few Oraon *bhuinhars* managed to reach the court for justice. One who managed to file the case, for them, justice was not guaranteed. As in most of the cases, judgements were against them as the court usually failed to understand the doctrine of proprietary landholding due to the absence or lack of documentary evidence. The Oraons mainly relied on oral submissions, which were outweighed by the documentary evidence of landlords in the court. In contrast, the native judges called Babu often favoured landlords, who were assumed to be their brothers by the faith and caste. Unlawful practices like bribes and gifts supported this impartiality. In this context, Jagdip Oraon of village Bijapur stated:

My family has 9 kharis bhuinhari. When Gopal Babu came into our village I desired him to register this land, but he allotted the whole to the thikadar Dripnath Misr with the exception of one kanwa, which I refused to accept, for which we were fined Rs 100. I saw the thicadar handed Rs 300 to the Babu, and remonstrated at once with the latter telling him that it was a shame that he as a Government servant took bribes, but he replied that this was the amount of his dasturi.<sup>98</sup>

The Oraon as a community faced immense injustice from the agency of law. As a consequence, they lost their trust and confidence in the court. In cases where they managed to win the case, they were usually left empty-handed after selling their essentials (like produce of fields, cattle's) to cope up with the expenses of court, *muktears* and witnesses. It was only after the entry of Christian missionaries in the district, Oraon *bhuinhars* managed to taste success in their court cases.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, many converted to Christianity as a strategy to cope with the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 69.

<sup>99</sup> GEL (Gossner Evangelical Lutheran) mission first came in Ranchi district in the year 1845. The mission was followed by SPG (Society for the protection of gospel) and Roman Catholic mission (1869).

legal battles or legal complexities over land.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, in Orissa, *adivasi* communities converted to Hinduism to cope with the changes and shifts in the colonial period.<sup>101</sup>

Christian missionaries gave legal advice and assistance in the court cases that helped many Oraon *bhuinhars* to win the case. They acted as a personal guardian of the Oraon *bhuinhars*, who lent a sympathetic ear to their complaints of land disputes or issues. Similar to officials and bureaucrats, Christian missionaries also focused on safeguarding the ancient tenure of Oraon *bhuinhars*. Moreover, from time to time, they submitted memorials to the British government on behalf of Oraon *bhuinhars* to make their grievances heard and to bring justice to them. On 15<sup>th</sup> November 1867, Mr Batsch, the senior missionary of Chotanagpur, wrote a letter to Deputy Commissioner in which he stated:

The Kols, especially the Bhooinhars and not only the Native Christians, are fearfully oppressed and wronged in different pergunnahs by many of the Jagheerdars and Theekadars, and that very often in such cases of oppression the police act not as they ought to do.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the active participation of Christian missionaries in the court cases, the wrongful eviction continued.

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<sup>100</sup> In 1850, four *Kabirpanthi* Oraons (Keso and Bandhu of village Chitakoni, Nabin Pore of village Hesakota and Ghuran of village Karand) who also happened to be *bhuinhar* embraced Christianity under the GEL mission. See, S.C. Roy, *Oraon Religion and Custom*, Ranchi: Man in India Office, 1928, p. 336.

<sup>101</sup> Biswamoy Pati, 'Survival as Resistance: Tribals in Colonial Orissa', in Biswamoy Pati (ed.) *Adivasi in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2011, p. 252.

<sup>102</sup> 'The Kols, The Insurrection of the 1832, And the Land Tenure Act of 1869', *The Calcutta Review volume 1*, Calcutta: Barham, Hill & Co. Dalhousie Square, 1869, p. 135.

## 2. New police system:

With a motive to bring convenience and justice to the Oraon *bhuinhars*, a new police *thana* was established at Lohardaga and *zamindari thanas* at Palkot where the Raja resided, and on the estates of *zamindars* like Barwa, Bundu, Tamar, Silli and Bantahajam.<sup>103</sup> In the *zamindari thanas*, the power vested on *rajas* and *zamindars* who often exercised the power of '*daroga*' or similar to *daroga*. They misused their power to exploit the Oraon population by charging police cess. Due to their inefficiency, they fell short in securing peace and harmony in the district. This led to the introduction of the new constabulary Act of V of 1861. Under this Act, the *zamindari* police were entirely replaced by a new police force under a district superintendent of police. The native police were mainly the relatives of zamindars and landlords who took every opportunity to put false charges on the Oraon community. They even charged the Oraons for every single complaint. For instance: the Oraons were charged from 4 *annas* to 1 rupee for a single complaint.<sup>104</sup> The system victimised the Oraon *bhuinhars* rather than benefitting them.

These setups were totally alien to the Oraons and were opposite to their traditional setup. Consequently, it took years for them to understand the complicated deeds and paperwork related to land ownership. Nevertheless, by the time they understood the process, many had already lost their *bhuinhari* lands in the hands of landlords or moneylenders. In addition, there were many loopholes that made these setups a failure. This compelled the Oraon *bhuinhars* to take the law into their hands by indulging themselves in a new movement that lasted for four decades. In order to suppress the movement, *Bhuinhari* Settlement came into being.

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<sup>103</sup> *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, 1917, p. 38.

<sup>104</sup> From Revd. H. Onasch and 15 others to the honour the lieutenant Governor of Bengal, p. 69.

## **BHUINHARI SURVEY /BHUINHARI SETTLEMENT:**

After the Sepoy Revolt of 1857, *sardari ladai* or *mulki ladai* (fight for the country) broke out in the parts of the district. It was led by Christian *bhuinhars* (both Oraons and Mundas) in 1858 and continued for four decades. Here Oraon *bhuinhars* adopted a non-volatile approach like petition, prayer and protest to regain their ancestral land. Despite this, there were a few instances where the movement became violent. For example, in the initial year, the movement became alarming in the *pargana* Basia and Sonapur that it became necessary for the officers to despatch the detachment of native infantry from Ranchi to Govindpur to maintain law and order.<sup>105</sup> At this juncture, the question of registering the *bhuinhari* tenure was seriously discussed. Eventually, in parallel to *sardari ladai*, the survey and registration process of *bhuinhari* tenure started in the district. They both centred on the question of *bhuinhari* land.

On 15<sup>th</sup> April 1858, Lal Lokeshnath Sahi, a local *zamindar* and a sub-assistant commissioner, was deputed to define and register the *bhuinhari* lands in 572 villages where the discontent of the cultivators appeared to be most vital.<sup>106</sup> Alongside his task was to reinstate the *adivasi bhuinhars* who have been wrongly disposed of their *bhuinhari* land. Moreover, to dispose of the cases of parties who had wrongly taken possession of *bhuinhari* land within the same period.<sup>107</sup> In short, his duty was more like a survey or settlement officer where he had to satisfy or entertain the *adivasi bhuinhars* and stop the ongoing rebellion. The officer started his task in August 1860 and managed to register only 429 villages. In contrast, he failed to register 143 villages due to his untimely death on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1862. The Parganas in which he followed his investigations were Lodma, Kukhra, Udaipur, Sonapur, Doesa, Korambia, Balkude and

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<sup>105</sup> Dated 26<sup>th</sup> November 1880, Resolution- by the government of Bengal, Revenue Department, p. 88, PCAD-II.

<sup>106</sup> W.W. Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal Volume XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Delhi, 1877 (reprint: 1976), p. 386.

<sup>107</sup> No. 227, dated 31<sup>st</sup> January 1868, From Colonel E.T. Dalton to the Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal, p. 9, PCAD-II.

Basia. Table 3, gives a detail of these Parganas where the registration of *bhuinhari* land was completed and left incomplete by Lal Lokeshnath Sahee.

**Table: 3.**

**Statement showing the number of parganas in which the registration of lands was completed and the number left incomplete by Lal Loknath Sahee during 1859, 1860, 1861.**

Name of Pargana	Number of villages measured		
	Measured	Registration Complete	Registration Incomplete
Lodma	61	59	2
Khukhra	105	5	100
Oodeypore/ Udaipur	103	80	23
Sonepur	285	285	....
Korambia	9	.....	9
Doesa	6	.....	6
Basia	2	.....	2
Balkudee	1	.....	1
<b>Total</b>	572	429	143

Source: No. 933 dated 13<sup>th</sup> February 1867, From H. L. Oliphant to the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur Division, *p. 14, Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes, Part-II*, Unpublished.

However, his report was criticised from time to time for registering the *bhuinhari* lands as *rajhas/ raiyati*. There were many instances where Lokeshnath first registered the land as *bhuinhari* and later, without assigning any reasons, cancelled the registration and recorded them

to *rajhas*.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, he exempted all the *tanr* land from the registration process as, in his opinion, only *don* lands were considered as *bhuinhari*. In a nutshell, the decisions of Lokeshnath favoured landlords than *bhuinhars*. After his death, the enquiry was not continued further and was ceased. This revived the *sardari ladai*, and it continued to increase till the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1867 when the petition of 14,000 Christian *bhuinhars* (both Oraons and Mundas) was presented to William Grey Lieutenant Governor of Bengal.<sup>109</sup> The petition was applied to find relief from the oppression of landlords and rajas who disposed of the petitioners of their ancestral holdings, rights and privileges. In this regard, the petitioners appealed to define their privileged ancestral holdings and to allow them to pay rent directly into the hands of collectors without any intervention of landlords.<sup>110</sup>

In this background, the Chotanagpur Tenure Act (Act II OF 1869) was passed by the Bengal Council on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1869. The Act was specially designed to safeguard and restore the proprietary lands of *adivasi bhuinhars* and make them acquainted with the laws. This is the reason why it was also known as *bhuinhari* survey or *bhuinhari* settlement. Under this Act, special commissioners were appointed, who had the power to investigate claims to the tenures and demarcate the privileged tenures, i.e. *bhuinhari* and *majhiyas* (landlords lands). Simultaneously, they were authorised to restore the possession of *bhuinhars* who were wrongly disposed of within 20 years before the passing of the Act. Moreover, to register their name as the occupant of *bhuinhari* land in the village register. The first special commissioner was Baboo Rakhaldas Halder, who commenced the operation on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1869, and the operation continued till the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1880. Six special commissioners followed him; see table 4.

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<sup>108</sup> No. 933, dated 13<sup>th</sup> February 1867, From H. L. Oliphant to the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur Division, p. 12, PCAD-II.

<sup>109</sup> *Petition of 14000 native Christian residency in the territory of the raja of Chotanagpur*, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

**Table: 4.**

**Work completed by the Special Commissioners of Chota Nagpur Tenure Act, 1869**

	<b>Appoin tment year</b>	<b>Name of Special Commissioner</b>	<b>Villages registere d</b>	<b>Villages demarcate d</b>	<b>Villages settled</b>	<b>Villages in which preliminary enquiries were laid</b>
I	1869-70	Baboo Rakhhal Das Halдар	1,487	1,111	1,164	976
II	1870-71	Baboo Kali Das Palit Gopal Chunder Mitter	561	639	681	708
III	1875-76	Moulvi Mahomed Subhan Hyder	136	182	211	104
IV	1876-77	Baboo Raichurn Ghose	175	403	240	184
V	1876-77	Baboo Girish Chunder Sircar	123	147	186	126
TOTAL			2, 482	2,482	2,482	2,098

Sources:

1. Dated 26<sup>th</sup> November 1880, Resolution- by the government of Bengal, Revenue Department, p. 91, *Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes, Part-II*, Unpublished.
2. An account of the village system of Chota Nagpore by Baboo Rakhhal Das Halдар, p. 108, *Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes, Part-II*, Unpublished.

According to the special commissioner officers, the operation was of challenging nature which led to the slowness of progress. Halдар stated in his report that the operation was complicated due to the non-uniformity of *bhuinhari* tenures.<sup>111</sup> Besides, there was no pre-existing tenure record to look up for guidance in the ongoing operation. It cannot be denied that there were some records of Lokeshnath from his former registration process. However, it was impracticable for officers to rely on the enquiry papers of Lokeshnath. In most cases, they

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<sup>111</sup> *Working of the Chota nagpore tenures act, Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, land revenue, proceeding no. 13-15, File no. 13, March 1875, p. 4. BSA.*

were unauthenticated and not finally registered.<sup>112</sup> This compelled them to make fresh enquiries exclusively on oral evidence.

The village boundaries were ill-defined. In such circumstances, the officers faced many intricate situations in the registration process. There were many instances where Oraon *raiya*s claimed to be the proprietors on the ground that they or their ancestors had first reclaimed the land to convert their *rajhas* land to *bhuinhari*.<sup>113</sup> This attempt can be justified to elevate their social and economic position and evade high rent. Simultaneously, there were also instances where both landlords and *bhuinhars* started claiming the land of one another. For instance:

The villages in the parts of the district are known to be the most disputed tracts, where Native Christians abound, and where the contentions lie between the *bhuinhars* and the zamindars, as well as among the *bhuinhars* themselves, one claiming the land of another, together with a portion of the *rajhas* and *majhas* of the zamindar; and in the event of the latter denying the rights of either, a double inquiry is instituted as to whether one or the other is the rightful owner, or both of them are pseudo *bhuinhars*.<sup>114</sup>

The operation under Act was spread to 2482 villages situated in the 35 Parganas of Ranchi district. Even after the elapse of eleven years, the operation managed to cover not more

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<sup>112</sup> *Working of the Chota nagpore tenures act*, Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, land revenue, proceeding no. 45-47, July 1875, p. 10, BSA.

<sup>113</sup> *Representation on behalf of the Kolhs in Chutia Nagpore made by German Missionaries*, Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, land revenue, proceeding no. 51-59, July 1871, p. 9, BSA.

<sup>114</sup> *Working of the Chota nagpore tenures act*, July 1875, p. 10.

than one-twenty-fifth of the district's total area. The operation cost was around 2, 69, 887, which comprised 13, 720 pages of 69 volumes of the *bhuinhari* registers.<sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, similar to their previous administrative reforms, the *bhuinhari* Act also failed to secure peace and harmony in the district. The Act's main defect was that it only dealt with the portion of privileged land tenures like *bhuinhari*, *majhiyas* and later *bethketa*. Thereby, it exempted the *rajhas/ raiyati* tenure that comprised the majority tenure of the district. The Act took no account of *rajhas/ raiyati* land. Thereby, Oraon *raiya*s remained out of the scope of the settlement.

Following the *bhuinhari* settlement, several other acts were passed by legislatures like Chotanagpur Landlord and Tenant Procedure Act (Act X of 1879), the Chotanagpur Encumbered Estate Act (1876), Hazaribagh and Lohardugga Rural Police Act (Act VIII of 1878) and Chotanagpur Rural Police Act (Act V of 1887), Commutation Act (Act II of 1897) but none of them managed to dispose of the deep-rooted grievances of Oraon *bhuinhars*.<sup>116</sup> In contrast, Oraon *raiya*s and their tenure remained out of the scope of these Acts for an extended period of 70 years. In the year 1908, for the first time, *raiya*ti tenure was brought under an Act which was termed as CNT Act (Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act) in the history of Ranchi district.

### **CHOTA NAGPUR TENANCY ACT, 1908**

Thorough revisions were made on agrarian laws after the Birsa revolt or the *Ulgulan* revolt (1899-90). It was led by a young man named Birsa Munda, popularly known as '*Dharti Abba*' (father of earth). In 1899, he launched an armed rebellion that shook the entire district. Unlike

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<sup>115</sup> No. 11, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1880, From Babu Rakhil Das Haldar to the Deputy Commissioner of Lohardugga, p. 84, PCAD-II.

<sup>116</sup> Roy, *Munda and their country*, p. 290.

previous uprisings, he not only targeted the landlords, but he also targeted the British Government and their agents like missionaries, local authorities to establish Munda raj. He made his followers believe that "the raj of Maharani was over, and the raj of Munda had commenced".<sup>117</sup> Though the unrest was a Munda rebellion, Birsa managed to get the support of the Oraon population in good number. In addition to this, after a prolonged period of silence, *adivasi raiyats* finally came to the forefront under his leadership to elevate their conditions and to free themselves from their ongoing oppression. Under his preaching and influence, *adivasi raiyats* who were working as *dhangars* in the villages left their services.<sup>118</sup> Following this, many *adivasi raiyats* deserted their cultivation, sold their houses and cattle's.

Though the movement was short-lived, it brought significant changes in the district. The movement resulted in the commencement of the Survey and Settlement operation (1902-1910). In 1901, it was concluded that until and unless a correct record of existing tenure is not prepared, it is next to impossible to devise a radical cure for their deep-rooted discontent. From 18<sup>th</sup> February 1902, the operation started under the order of the Bengal Government.<sup>119</sup> Initially, the operation was limited to Mundas' areas, but it eventually extended to the whole district (see table 5). Under the operation, land mapping and measurement started in full force. In parallel to this, records of land rights and forest rights of the district were documented.

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<sup>117</sup> Singh, *Birsa Munda and his Movement 1874-1901*.

<sup>118</sup> Arrest of a fanatic named Birsa Munda who occasioned considerable excitement in Lohardaga District, Government of India, Foreign Department, Internal –B, File no. 117/129 Oct-1895, p. 11, NAI.

<sup>119</sup> Andrew Fraser, *The Administration of Bengal, 1903-1908*, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1908, p. 60.

**Table: 5. Progress of Survey and Settlement Operation**

Year	Survey area in square miles	Thanas or outposts with wholly or in part
1902-3	616	Khunti (except one village) and portion of Tamar
1903-4	748	Remaining part of Tamar, Sonahatu (except two villages), Bundu, Torpa (portion), and one village of Khunti
1904-5	909	Torpa (remaining portion), Karra (except six villages), Basia, Bano, Kolebira, and one village of Kochedega.
1905-6	1,618	Remaining portion of Basia, Gumla, Raigadh, Palkot, Kurdeg and Kochedega.
1906-7	854	Ghagra, Chainpur, Bishunpur, and two villages of Lohardaga
1907-8	1,140	Lohardaga, Sesai, Lapung, Bero, Kuru (except two villages), two villages of Ranchi, four of Mandar, and six of Karra
1908-9	1,219	Burmu, Ormanji, Ranchi, Angara, Silli, Mandar, one village of Khunti, two of Sonahatu, three of Kuru, and one of Bero
Total	7,104	

Source: John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1902-1910*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p. 56.

In the light of a one-year investigation by E. Lister, Bengal Act V of 1903 was passed. This Act was specially designed for *khuntkatti* tenures. Following this, the Khunti subdivision came into being in 1905, which was the hotbed of the Birsa revolt. As the former movement was a Munda rebellion, the authorities entirely mistook the character and aim of the rebellion. They firmly believed that the uprising was to regain or protect the *khuntkatti* tenure, which was excluded in the *bhuinhari* Act along with the *rajhas* tenure. Despite coming to the forefront, *adivasi raiyats* remained out of the scope of the Act. However, there came a wave of change with the Bengal Act no. VI of 1908, popularly known as the CNT Act of 1908.

As the operation proceeded, it was realised that the previous acts and expensive settlements were undertaken by officers who had fraction knowledge of the existing custom

and tenures of the district. As a result, they failed to understand the root cause of the troubles. This led to variant defects in the former Acts that renewed the uprisings again and again. Sir Andrew Fraser (Lieutenant Governor), who visited the district in 1905, enquired the progress of operation and found it satisfactory. After analysing the former acts, he firmly felt a need for sound agrarian policy in the district. Thereby, just before the completion of the Survey and Settlement Operation, CNT Act was passed on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1908, which is also considered as a Magna Carta in the history of Ranchi district. The Act was the first wide-ranging Act that incorporated Commutation Act, 1897 and Bengal Act V, 1903, with certain modifications. The Act was designed as a protective shield to protect the *adivasi* tenures (both privileged and non-privileged) from the encroachment of non-*adivasis* or outsiders by making the sale of *adivasi* lands illegal for any purpose other than arrears of rent. It also recognised the *adivasi* right over the forest and its resources. The Act prohibited the local custom of the *beth-begari* (forced labour) and *rakumat* system (praedial dues) and the arbitrary enhancement of rents. Under the Act, the power of enhancement of rent or transfer of land (under any circumstances) was given to the Deputy Commissioner. This was done to limit the growing power of landlords or zamindars in the district. Despite the above legal restrictions, the Act failed to stop the encroachment of *adivasi* land in the district. As a consequence, it was opened for further modification, which led to the number of amendments to date. The first amendment took place in 1920. It was the direct fruit of the Tana Bhagat movement (1914-25).

Unlike former Acts, this was the first Act that gave legal recognition to *raiyati* tenure. The onus of the Act was the protection of *raiyati* tenure that has been excluded from the former Acts and policies.<sup>120</sup> Undoubtedly, the Act gave security to the *raiyati* tenure against the landlords by prohibiting the enhancement of rent and ensuring the rent receipt for their cash

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<sup>120</sup> John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1902-1910*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p. 69.

rent. Somehow, it resulted in increasing the market value of *raiya* land. As a consequence, the *raiya* tenures registered under the CNT Act were gradually absorbed by the moneylenders. According to R. Tower (Judicial Commissioner), there was nothing in sections 11 and 12 of the Act to prevent a moneylender in the district from buying up the whole of the occupancy rights in any village.<sup>121</sup> Thereby, the Act became a failure as far as mortgage transfer of *raiya* land was concerned. Furthermore, the prohibition of enhancement of rent resulted in an increase in the illegal extraction of *salami*.<sup>122</sup> Subsequently, there was no special provision for the *adivasi* non-occupancy *raiya*s and under-*raiya*s.<sup>123</sup> This culminated in another episode of *adivasi* movement, which was led by Oraon *raiya*s.

#### **TANA BHAGAT MOVEMENT: *A response to colonial discriminatory policies/Acts***

Tana Bhagat Movement broke out in the year 1914 and continued till 1925. According to Sangeeta Dasgupta and Lata Singh, the movement was an outcome of internal differences.<sup>124</sup> After going through the preceding chapter, it is quite evident that internal differences existed within the Oraon community. Initially, the distinction was pronounced with the fertile and non-fertile land, reservation and non-reservation of important political and religious posts. The differences got intensified with the different rent structures. Here Oraon *raiya*s were obliged

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<sup>121</sup> Government of Bihar and Orissa, Edu and development department, Agriculture branch, August 1930, Proc. 91-93, file 2V-9, p. 7, File kept under Bill to provide for the speedy realization of arrears of rent, Government of Bengal, Revenue department, land revenue, A proceeding of May 1879, proc. 91-93, BSA.

<sup>122</sup> Sangeeta Dasgupta, 'Reordering of World: The Tana Bhagat movement 1914-1919', *Studies in History* 15 (1), February 1999, p. 16.

<sup>123</sup> According to CNT Act of 1908, *raiya*s were divided into four categories: occupancy *raiya*s, non-occupancy *raiya*s, *raiya*s having *khuntkatti* rights and under-*raiya*s.

<sup>124</sup> Sangeeta Dasgupta, 'Locating Adivasi in Colonial India', in Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah (ed.) *Savage Attack: Tribal Insurgency in India*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2014, p. 113; Lata Singh, *Popular Translation of Nationalism: Bihar, 1920-1922*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, p. 172.

to pay higher rent compared to Oraon *bhuinhars*. In parallel to this, colonial Acts and policies fully ignored or neglected the Oraon *raiya*s and their tenure for a long span of time. Undoubtedly, this might have resulted in internal tensions within the community. However, the movement was beyond internal tension or conflict.

For an extended period, the pessimistic ideas were fermenting in the minds of Oraon *raiya*s against their exclusion from the *bhuinhari* friendly Acts and policies. However, they failed to voice their anger or dissatisfaction against their injustice publicly. Nevertheless, these ideas got channelised into a movement when famine became recurrent in the district. In a nutshell, famine acted as a trigger point for Oraon *raiya*s.<sup>125</sup> Ranchi district witnessed back-to-back three famines in 1896-97, 1899-1900 and 1907-08.<sup>126</sup> The lands of Oraon *raiya*s were prone to famine. Here Oraon *raiya*s came on the verge of starvation which gave impetus to their migration to distant destinations as it was the commonest survival strategy during the famine.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, this made them question the old spirits that failed to help them in their economic distress and troubles like a failure or bad crops and high rents. Thereby, they strongly felt a need to reform their traditional religion to uplift their degraded social and economic position to the higher level enjoyed by Christian and Hindu converts of their fellow *adivasi*-men.<sup>128</sup> Thus, the interplay between the discriminatory colonial Acts and policies and the degrading economy was a driving force behind the Tana Bhagat movement.

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<sup>125</sup> Famine was also a trigger point for Birsa Rebellion. For more detail see, Sunny Ruchi Ecka, 'Nexus Between Birsa Movement and Famine in Ranchi District: The saga of two events under the time frame of 1895-1900', in Hareet Kumar Meena (ed.) *Legacy of Tribes to History of India*, Delhi: SSDN Publisher, 2017.

<sup>126</sup> *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, 1917, p. 136.

<sup>127</sup> Vinita Damodaran, 'Famine in a Forest Tract: Ecological Change and the Causes of the 1897 famine in Chotanagpur, Northern India', *Environment and History*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 1995, p. 149.

<sup>128</sup> *Tana Bhagat Movement*, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special section, File no. 54 of 1925, p. 12, BSA.

The movement originated at Bishnupur police station, in the Lohardaga subdivision, under the leadership of a young man named Jatra Oraon on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1914.<sup>129</sup> Unlike the Birsa rebellion, it was a non-violent movement that was renewed in different phases under different leadership. Jatra gained considerable influence over the Oraon *raiya*s and collected a number of followers by declaring himself as a deity or *bhagwan* of their new reformed religion and recognised no authority over him. The new reformed religion was known as "*Kurukh Dharam*", and its followers came to be known as Tana Bhagats. In this new religion, one was supposed to lead an ascetic life by prohibiting non-vegetarian food and alcohol consumption.<sup>130</sup> Subsequently, they had to give up *Mataio* (ghost-finding and exorcism) and the belief in spirit and *bhuts*. In short, they were supposed to abandon all the practices that were degrading their position in their society. Moreover, by adopting a new lifestyle, they wanted to rise high in their socio-economic structure.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, under the influence of the Devi movement in South Gujarat, many *adivasi* communities condemned these practices and adopted a new lifestyle to get a respected position in society.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Bishnupur was prone to famine and back-to-back it faced last two famines. See *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, 1917, p. 135.

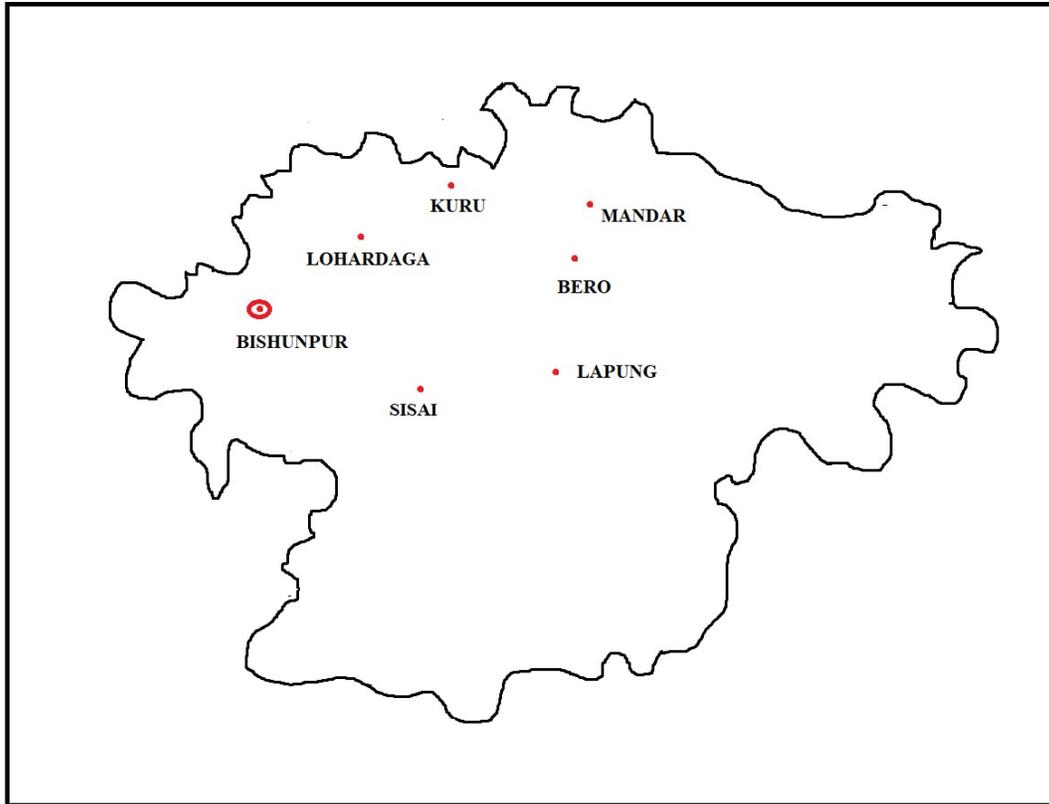
<sup>130</sup> After seven years of abstinence, these restrictions were removed by their new leader Sibua Oraon.

<sup>131</sup> Pati, *Survival as Resistance: Tribal in Colonial Orissa*, p. 250.

<sup>132</sup> David Hardiman, *The coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 140.

**Map. 3:**

**Tana Bhagat Movement in Ranchi district**



Note: Here, the map is prepared by the researcher to showcase the thanas (Lohardaga, Sisai, Lapung, Kuru, Bero and Mandar) where the movement survived.

Source: *Annual Report on the Survey Operations (Other than Cadastral Surveys) during the year 1907-1908*, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1909, p. 5.

He proclaimed that in his dream, their supreme God *Dharmesh* had promised to make him a raja of Oraon kingdom where his followers would be allowed to share the kingdom and to become rajas also. To attain his goal, he ordered his followers to abjure, ploughing the fields that failed to save them from famine and poverty and stop rendering their services as coolies

or labourers for the British government or the landlords.<sup>133</sup> He also asked the Oraon *raiyats* to stop paying the rent. The Oraon *raiyats* saw him as a liberator of their age-old grievances. Seeing his influence over the Oraon *raiyats*, the local officers arrested him under section 419/147. During his absence, the charge of the movement was taken by a woman named Mussamat Litho Oraon of Ghaghra police station. Under her leadership, the movement spread to various *thanas* of the district and outside the district (like Palamu and Hazaribagh). Furthermore, the movement's echoes also reached far-off places like the tea plantation of Western Duar where Oraon *raiyats* comprised a majority proportion of the labour force.<sup>134</sup> According to the newspaper 'The Statesman', the movement spread to 60,000 Oraon labourers in the tea gardens.<sup>135</sup>

Jatra Oraon was released on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1915, but unlike before, he took no enthusiasm to continue the movement and abandoned his leadership.<sup>136</sup> He was replaced by Manger Oraon, who failed to gain much popularity and was soon arrested. For an extended period, no leader came forward, and the movement became dormant. At this juncture, many *bhagats* or followers also left the movement. In March 1919, the movement got revived under the leadership of Sibū Oraon and Maya Oraon. Sibū, who was working as a *dhangar* in the village of Batkuri and Supa, suddenly decided to leave his work and family.<sup>137</sup> He proclaimed that God had asked him to leave his family and move around the world to reform the people.<sup>138</sup> Likewise, he ordered his followers to follow the same. Many of his followers, along with their wives and

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<sup>133</sup> *Tana Bhagat Movement*, 1925, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup> In Western Duar, the Oraon *raiyats* formed a backbone of the tea plantation field. From Ranchi district, the movement reached to the plantation field with the help of Oraon *sardars* who were active in the movement.

<sup>135</sup> *Oraon Unrest Story in court hymns to the German Baba*, *The Statesman* -April 28/1916, p. 7.

<sup>136</sup> *Tana Bhagat Movement*, 1925, p. 13.

<sup>137</sup> *Tana Bhagat Movement in the Chota Nagpur*, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special section, B Prog., file no. 86 of 1919, p. 82, BSA.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

children, abandoned their plough, cattle and homes and assembled in batches in the Sat Pahari hill in Hazaribagh district to follow their religion. According to the Excise Inspector, Mr Deane, around 4000, Oraon *raiyats* left their crops and cattle.<sup>139</sup> There was a common saying among *bhagats* that:

they are children of soil which has been created by the God and not by mankind so each of them has equal right to enjoy the production of the earth.<sup>140</sup>

Sibu ordered his followers not to cultivate the land and to pay any taxes or rents (for both land and forest) to the zamindars or landlords to whom they regarded as exploiters. Under his influence, Oraon *raiyats* stopped paying the *zamindari harai* (a plough and a ploughman for a day to cultivate the land of a *zamindar*) and *bankatti* (a tax of eight annas per house) for grazing cattle in the jungle and taking fuel from it.<sup>141</sup> Consequently, many lost their land as they were sold off for non-payment of rent to the *zamindars*. Like former leaders, Sibu Oraon and Maya Oraon also got arrested.

The movement took a turning point when Tana Bhagats came under the contact of Congress leaders in 1921. In one of the congress meetings, the congress leaders Ram Tahal Brahmachari told them that

they were the original rajas of the country who had become coolies and if they followed his advice and gave up drink and using foreign food they would become rajas again.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Tana Bhagat Movement in the Ranchi and Palamu District*, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special section, file no. 313. of 1920, p. 30, BSA.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 18-19.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>142</sup> *Political unrest in Ranchi district*, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special section, file no. 50 of 1921, p. 148, BSA.

A good number of Tana Bhagats joined the Non-cooperation movement and remained active in their meetings. Many even adopted *khadi* attire and saw Gandhi as their new leader. The movement was followed by the first amendment in the CNT act and revisional settlement operation. On the whole, the movement was a desperate attempt to uplift their socio-economic condition to stay rooted in their abode and redefine their identity of labour.

### **Conclusion:**

Kol rebellion (1831-32) was followed by series of administrative changes and Acts in the district. However, these changes and Acts remained central to Oraon *bhuinhars* and overlooked the condition of Oraon *raiyats* throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, for an extended period, no protection was granted to their *raiyati* tenure against the encroachment and exploitation of landlords and moneylenders. Indeed, this resulted in the pauperisation of this section in their own abode. Consequently, many turned landless in the early twentieth century, which subdivided the Oraon *raiyats* into occupancy, non-occupancy and under-*raiyats*.<sup>143</sup>

Such exclusion can be viewed as a part of the British government strategy to push the Oraon *raiyats* to the labour market to fulfil the labour demand. No doubt, they succeeded to induce the Oraon *raiyats* to the labour market in good numbers. From 1830-1930, there was a heavy outflow of Oraon *raiyats* from Ranchi district to far-flung destinations that included both inland and overseas. Thereby, in response to such discriminatory policies, Oraon *raiyats* led the Tana Bhagat movement in Ranchi district, and its echoes reached to Western Duar tea plantation where Oraon *raiyats* constituted more than 50 % of the labour population. Apart

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<sup>143</sup> *The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act, 1908*, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1935, pp. 6-7.

from discriminatory policies, the agrarian crisis also played an important role in pushing the Oraon *raiya*s to the labour market.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISADVANTAGES OF AGRARIAN HOLDINGS OF ORAON RAIYATS

The Oraons was an agricultural-based community, and the land was the basis of their agriculture. This allowed each Oraon family to have a few *bighas* of land in their villages which they cultivated on their account. According to Mr Slack's settlement report of the Chota Nagpur estate, in 1891, there were around 7,760 agricultural families in the Oraon community in 348 villages who held approximately 74,860 acres of land.<sup>144</sup> This indicates that they had long replaced their main mean of subsistence from hunting and gathering with settled agriculture. However, it is a moot point, exactly when they developed their agricultural skills. Many colonial anthropologists (like S.C. Roy, E.T. Dalton) believe that they developed their skills before immigrating to Ranchi district. The outside exposure helped them become more proficient in agriculture than the other existing *adivasi* communities of the region. This also facilitated them to acquire the credit to introduce plough cultivation in the area. No doubt, this gave them a sense of superiority over their fellow counterparts.

Agriculture was their chief source of livelihood, which helped them to associate with agriculture in one way or the other. Over time, they developed their social, religious and economic life profoundly in and around their agricultural mode of life. Mostly all their seasonal festivities (like *Sarhul*, *Karam*, *Nayakhani*, *Sohrai*, *Khalikhani*, *Magh*) coincided with the agricultural cycle. The festivities and rituals of the Oraons were mainly performed or celebrated before and after the harvest to increase the fertility of the soil, for the forthcoming of rain, to

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<sup>144</sup>B. C. Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhgga*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891, p. 9.

protect crops from natural (like pest attack) and supernatural calamities. For instance: *Sarhul*, one of the prime festivals of the Oraons, was dedicated to mother-earth. There was a common belief that *Sarhul* is supposed to solemnise the marriage of the mother earth with the sun to improve the fertility of the earth. Their rituals also showcased their in-depth knowledge of agriculture.

The Oraons, along with their co-*adivasi* communities, converted the district to terraces of smiling fields of paddy. In the agrarian development, they opened extensive land under cultivation by clearing the dense forest. According to the settlement report, out of a total area of 7,104 sq. miles in the district, 2198 sq. miles were under cultivation which comprised 31 per cent.<sup>145</sup> In the colonial imagination, *adivasis* lagged behind the Bengal and Bihar peasants in terms of systematic knowledge of settled cultivation. Here the projection of the British government cannot be justified as the landform in the district differed from the plain that affected the quality and the productivity level. In this respect, Mr Grimley stated that the country was undulating and, in some parts, extremely fertile, which required the expenditure of much hard labour to bring the land into cultivation.<sup>146</sup> Unlike plain, the making of cultivation land in the district was a painstaking task due to the hilly, forested and rocky terrain. To terrace these lands, Oraons implemented their skills, patience, diligence, and hard labour. In this context, Basu says,

Uraon (Oraon) in particular, are considered hardy and laborious. They are particularly distinguished for all manner of earthwork, such as preparing new

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<sup>145</sup> John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1902-1910*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p. 118.

<sup>146</sup> Chutia Nagpur Tenancy Bill in *Proceeding of the Council of the Lieut-Governor of Bengal for the purpose of making law and Regulations, Index no. XXIX*, January to December, 1897, p. 34.

paddy land by digging out terraces on slopes of ridges- a work of hard labour which the better classes of Hindu raiyats are inclined to avoid.<sup>147</sup>

Despite the hard labour, agricultural productivity varied considerably. For instance: In some parts, the productivity was extremely good, and in some parts, it was feeble. The capacity of land was highly dependent on the topological position of the terrain. Henceforth, the quality of land was divided according to its position, where the best quality of land was located at the bottom of the terrain, and poor quality of land was located at the top of the terrain. Here the best quality of land was mainly reserved for the Oraon *bhuinhars*. In contrast, the subsequent or later settlers received the low-quality land (i.e. *raiya/ rajhas* land) as there was a common trend to reserve the best quality of land to the Oraon *bhuinhars*.<sup>148</sup> Undoubtedly, Oraon *raiya*s were left with less fertile and less productive land. Thereby, from the pre-colonial period itself, their agrarian economy was fragile. As a consequence, they could not depend on agriculture exclusively. In the pre-colonial period, the Oraon *raiya*s counterbalanced their agrarian disadvantages with the forest resources. However, their forest dependency was reduced to a drastic level with the implementation of the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878. Nevertheless, it magnified their economic crisis, which left them in no position to withstand the impact of famine. On the whole, Forest Acts led to their economic marginalisation.

The current chapter is an attempt to unveil the disadvantages of agrarian holdings of Oraon *raiya*s. In this process, it will try to answer how the economic condition of Oraon *raiya*s became extremely grim with the reduction of their forest dependency in the colonial

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<sup>147</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhga*, p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> Ashoka Kumar Sen, 'The Process of social stratification in the lineage society of Kolhan in Singhbhum', *South Asian: Journal of South Asian Journal*, 2004, p. 34.

period, which later pushed them to the labour market? Before moving forward, we need first to understand the topography of Ranchi district.

## TOPOGRAPHY OF RANCHI DISTRICT

The district is located in the hilly tract, where the terrain is composed of long undulating and interfluvial ridges.<sup>149</sup> The physical conformation of the district led to the natural division of the agricultural land zone into *tanr* and *don* land.<sup>150</sup> In the Khunti subdivision, they are known as *loyong* and *piri*, respectively.<sup>151</sup> The *don* lands constitute the low terraced land, and the *tanr* lands constitute the upland. The quality of soil differed in the two due to the topological positioning. In the district, there was a high tendency for the soil to wash down at the lower level leaving behind the more substantial particles of sand at the top during the heavy rainfall. Henceforth, this naturally contributed to the distinction of the soil profile in the two.

The *don* land had a heavier soil profile that contained more clay/soil (like *nagra* soil) than the *tanr* land with a thin and gravelly soil profile. The good quality of soil allowed the *don* land to have better water retention capacity and to uphold water and moisture for a longer duration. Conversely, the poor quality of soil allowed the *tanr* land to have lower water retention capacity and to uphold water and moisture for a shorter duration after the ceasing of rains. This made the *don* land suitable for wet cultivation and *tanr* land suitable for dry cultivation. In this case, the *don* land is mainly used to cultivate rice, and the *tanr* land is used for the cultivation of coarse rice and a variety of rabi crops such as millets, pulses, and oilseeds.

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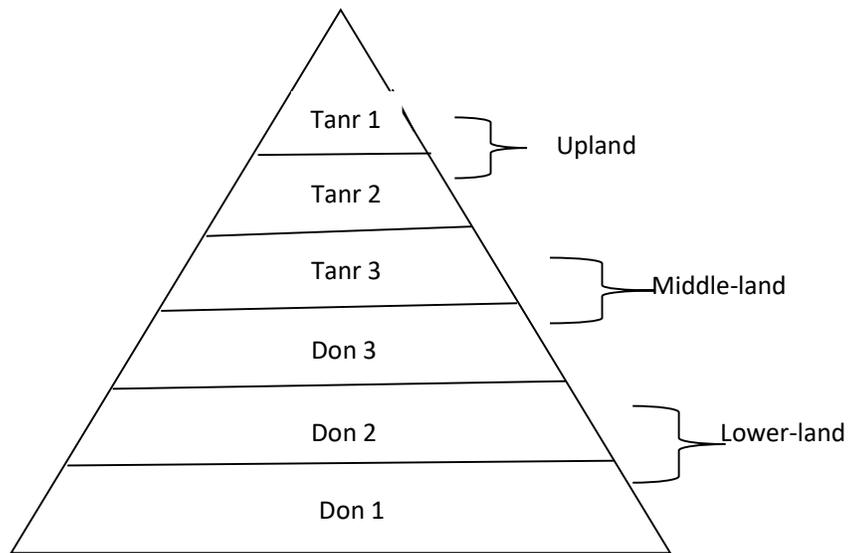
<sup>149</sup> W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume. XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Delhi, 1877 (reprint: 1976), p. 336.

<sup>150</sup> *Don* land is also known as *khal* in Kurukh.

<sup>151</sup> T.S. Macpherson and M.G. Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1917, p. 111.

These lands were further classified into three sub-classes (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>) based on their productive power. The productive power was based on the topological position of the land. In order to get a better understanding, see figure 1 and table 6.

**Figure 1. Topological position**



**Note:** This figure has been created by the researcher to give a brief idea of the topological position.

**Table. 6.**

**The productivity of *don* and *tanr* land in Ranchi district**

Ranchi District	1 <sup>st</sup> Don land	2 <sup>nd</sup> Don land	3 <sup>rd</sup> Don land	1 <sup>st</sup> Tanr land	2 <sup>nd</sup> Tanr land	3 <sup>rd</sup> Tanr land
	20	16	10	8	4	1

Source: F.E. Taylor, *Final Report on the Revisional Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi: 1927-1935*, Patna: Government Printing Press, 1940, p. 87.

The *don* lands were usually prepared by levelling and embarking on the slopes. The quality of *don* land entirely depended on their topological position, soil profile and water retention capacity. For instance, the 1<sup>st</sup> *don* land that lies at the bottom of the depression was considered as the best rice land in terms of fertility and productivity. They were more fertile compared to the other two classes because of productive soil and higher water retention capacity. The 1<sup>st</sup> *don* land covered the area of 1.18 sq. miles out of a total area of 1,207 sq. miles of *don* lands in the district.<sup>152</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> *don* land was located in between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> and was considered as second-best land. The 3<sup>rd</sup> *don* land was located at the highest reach of the terraced land and immediately below the *tanr* land. In brief, they were located above one another in a way that gave a look of the steps of the staircase.

The lower position of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> *don* land helped them retain moisture for a considerable period after rain ceasing. This allowed them to remain muddy until February-March.<sup>153</sup> The retention quality safeguarded these lands from the severity of the drought. In contrast, 3<sup>rd</sup> *don* land was prone to the failure of rice crops due to the higher position that made it difficult for the land to retain water for a longer duration. It could not retain water any longer than October, and afterwards, the land tended to become dry and hard. From the mid-nineteenth century, due to forest deforestation, the condition became more severe as the rainwater, which would have taken some days to move slowly through the forest tract, was carried off in a few hours and left no beneficial result.

In the district, there was the availability of various natural resources for irrigation. Unfortunately, it was not appropriately utilised and practically went absent from the agrarian cultivation. Simultaneously, there were no proper provisions for artificial irrigation such as

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<sup>152</sup> S.C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur: their history, economic life and social organization*, Ranchi: Bar Library, 1915, p. 121.

<sup>153</sup> Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal Volume XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, p.336.

well, *bandh* and tank. For instance: in the *thana* Ghagra out of 129 villages, there were irrigation *bandhs* in only three villages.<sup>154</sup> As a consequence, agricultural lands were highly dependent on rainfall. Thus, a poor monsoon or unequal distribution of rainfall meant either poor harvest or partial failure of crops in the 3<sup>rd</sup> *don* land. This conveys that there was no surety of fruit of labour in this land.

The *tanr* lands were usually the highest portion of the slope and were manured every year for their fertility.<sup>155</sup> Unlike *don* land, the fertility of *tanr* land was primarily dependent on their closeness to the village site than their topological position. Among the *tanr* lands, 1<sup>st</sup> *tanr* land (also known as *bari* or homestead land) was the best *tanr* land. They were nearest to the village site, where extensive manuring was done to keep the land fertile. It was used to grow tobacco, various vegetables, maize and crops that required special labour and care.<sup>156</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> *tanr* land/ *dihari* land was next to 1<sup>st</sup> *tanr* land in terms of fertility. It was located just below the 1<sup>st</sup> *tanr* land and had a good depth of soil. Moreover, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *tanr* land/ *rugri* land was very stony, with little soil depth, and was located far from the village site. The *tanr* land, which was mainly used for dry cultivation, was also used to grow dry rice for a shorter duration. An essential feature of the *tanr* land was crop rotation and fallowing. Unlike the 1<sup>st</sup> *tanr* land, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> *tanr* lands were usually left fallow at the interval of one or two years to regain their fertility.

## CONVERSION OF TANR LAND TO DON LAND

In the nineteenth century, the *don* lands gradually expanded with the population growth of both the Oraons and the non-Oraons. From 1872 to 1881, there were 2, 53,818 or 29.1% increase

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<sup>154</sup> Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, p. 120.

<sup>155</sup> The manures ordinarily used were cow dung, ashes and decayed vegetables

<sup>156</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhgga*, 1891, p. 36.

in the population of Ranchi district.<sup>157</sup> The chief staple cereal of the district was rice which was grown on nearly 62 per cent of the total cultivable area, which comprised 1,914 square miles.<sup>158</sup> Henceforth, the population escalation naturally demanded the extension of rice land/ *don* land, resulting in the exhaustion of *don* land. To cope up with the crisis, there was a gradual transformation of *tanr* land into *don* land. In 1870, W. W. Hunter noted that in the crowded villages, the line separating the *tanr* and *don* was going upwards as more and more *don* land was created out of *tanr* land.<sup>159</sup> Among the *tanr* lands, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *tanr* land was mainly converted into *don* land as 3<sup>rd</sup> *tanr* land, and 3<sup>rd</sup> *don* land had same soil characteristics. The converted *don* land was categorised as 4<sup>th</sup> *don* land. Here the question appears why the fresh *don* land was not created to cover the exhaustion of *don* land. In this context, Prabhu Prasad Mahopatra argues that the conversion of *tanr* into *don* land was less troublesome than making fresh *don* land.<sup>160</sup> To a certain extent, one can agree with his statement, but the reality lies beyond this.

Ranchi district was once strongly fortified with dense forests. During this period, the Oraons were largely dependent on agriculture in conjunction with forest resources for their subsistence. For instance, the Oraon *raiya*s suffered more or less from the insufficiency of staple food (especially in 3<sup>rd</sup> *don* land), i.e. rice, maize and various millets in certain months of the year. In these circumstances, the deficiency of staple food was supplemented by forest herbs and fruits like *mahua*. The forest was crucial for their survival, which also helped them subsist in famine-like situations. In the context, Col. E.T. Dalton says -

A small, active, well-built race, engaged to some extent in cultivation, but by choice deriving their subsistence, as far as possible, from the chase fishing,

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p. 140.

<sup>158</sup> Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, p. 115.

<sup>159</sup> Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal Volume XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, p. 336.

<sup>160</sup> Prabhu Prasad Mahopatra, 'Some Aspects of Arable Expansion in Chotanagpur: 1880-1950', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.26, No. 16, 1991, p. 1044.

or the collecting of wild fruits and the marketable produce of the jungles for sale.<sup>161</sup>

The Oraons were generally bound to the forest for their domestic and agricultural purposes like cattle grazing, medicine, fruit gathering, hunting, fishing, timber collection and most importantly, for the making of new or extension of agricultural land. Since the forest was tax-free and was loosely monitored, the Oraons unreservedly enjoyed the customary access to the forest land and resources in the precolonial period. This also allowed them to make new clearings amid forest for the new or extension of cultivable land without any interferences and restrictions. However, the emergence of colonial rule changed these dynamics to a large extent.

The forest was not seen as a valuable commodity in the pre-colonial period and was mainly used for immediate use. In short, it was an undisputed commodity. It was only in the colonial period when the question of forest arose. Under British rule, timber gained an incredible market value with the advent of railways that created a hike in timber demand for railway sleepers. The timbers mainly used to make railway sleepers were *sal*, *teak* and *deodar* and Ranchi district was rich in *sal*. Thus, the regular trade of timber started between the district and East India Railway.<sup>162</sup> In this process, a great chunk of forests was destroyed to meet the demands of railway sleepers. The situation became intense with the opening of the railway from Ranchi-Purulia (1907) and Ranchi-Lohardaga (1913). The improved communication by roads made timber more marketable later led to the sale of previously untouched forest.<sup>163</sup> In

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<sup>161</sup> Col. E.T. Dalton, 'The Kols of Chota-Nagpore', *The royal anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland in the transactions of the Ethnological society of London*, Vol.6, 1868, p. 16.

<sup>162</sup> Nirmal Kumar, *Bihar district Gazetteer: Ranchi*, Patna: Government of Bihar, 1970, p. 165.

<sup>163</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 125.

the year 1909, 1,606 *maunds* of timbers were exported through the rail route from the district.<sup>164</sup> Soon the massive scale of the destruction resulted in the thinness of the forest tract. In 1885, Dr Schlich reported that due to the large scale of forest destructions, Hazaribagh and Ranchi districts contained little forest compared to before.<sup>165</sup> Table 7, showcase the high decrease in the area of forest from the year 1902-1927.

**Table. 7**

**Decrease in Area of Forest in Ranchi District 1902-1927**

Thana	Area of Jungle (in acres) 1902-10	Area of Jungle (in acres) 1927-35	Decrease in the area (in acres)
Khunti	1,95,901	1,69,407	26,434 (13.5)
Simdega	4,57,563	3,39,136	1,18,427 (25.9)
Gumla	4,09,672	3,78,863	30,809 (7.5)
Sadar	3,96,734	3,64,942	31,792 (8.0)
Total	14,59,890	12,52,348	2,07,462 (14.2)

Source: F.E. Taylor, *Final Report on the Revisional Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi: 1927-1935*, Patna: Government Printing Press, 1940, p. 86.

Similarly, in 1915, S.C. Roy found the central and eastern parts of Ranchi district denuded of forests: *patras* or small scrub-jungles, of *sal* saplings and other trees, were scattered

<sup>164</sup> John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1902-1910*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p.120.

<sup>165</sup> Kumar, *Bihar district Gazetteer: Ranchi*, p. 165.

in the *tanr* raj, or the land of bare fields.<sup>166</sup> In fact, due to wholesale exploitation of the forest, the condition of few *thanas* became quite serious. For example, earlier Tamar, Biru, Basta, Bhaunrpahar *thanas* were known for sal forest. By 1900, hardly contained a tree from which a sleeper can be made.<sup>167</sup> The wholesale destruction of forests left an adverse impact on Oraon *raiyats*. It made few cultivable lands unfit for cultivation due to the loss of moisture caused by the radiation of heat from barren rocky hills.<sup>168</sup> From the above description, it is quite clear that the private capital interest of the British government led to the massive destruction of the forest.<sup>169</sup> In the counter-theory of wholesale destruction of forest, the colonial officials placed the blame on the continuing age-old practises of the Oraons. Here Oraon as a community was portrayed as the destroyer of their own surroundings. The officials often argued that the Oraons improvident use of forests like an extension of cultivation, grazing, *jhuming* cultivation (shifting cultivation), cutting of timber for fuel, firing the trees, etc., led to the reduction of forest tract. Among them, it was strongly believed that the vital cause for deforestation was the extension of cultivation which usually took place at the expense of the forest.<sup>170</sup> Taking this into consideration, limitations and restrictions were imposed on the Oraons to minimise their customary rights over the forest resources under the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878. Under their quantitative limitations, they were allowed to take only a sufficient amount of forest produce for their domestic and agricultural purposes.<sup>171</sup> In addition, they were restricted to fell valuable

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<sup>166</sup> S. C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur: Their History, Economic Life and Social Organisation*, Ranchi: The Brahma Mission Press, 1915, p. 39.

<sup>167</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 125.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>169</sup> Vinita Damodaran, 'Famine in a forest tract: Ecological change and the causes of famine in Chotanagpur, North India', *Environment and History*, Vol.1, No.2, June 1995, p. 146.

<sup>170</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 124.

<sup>171</sup> Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, p.126.

trees such as *mahua*, *karanj*, *asan*, *jamun*, *harra*, *kusum*, *paras*, and *am* beyond a certain grith.<sup>172</sup>

The landlords of the district carried out a similar exercise. With the growing commercial value of timber, landlords tended to curtail the Oraons customary right over the forest to reserve the forest exclusively for their own benefit. To establish their authority over the forest, they imposed a tax on the Oraons use of forest-like grazing tax and extracted illegal *salami* or increased rent for the extension of cultivable land. Further, they restricted the Oraons to reclaim waste or forest land without their permission.<sup>173</sup> On top of this, the Oraons were restricted to have even the fruits of the trees they and their ancestors had planted. Furthermore, to gain quick income, landlords began to sell the trees of the forest to the contractors, which the Oraons have saved from the axe and preserved and nurtured as their own.<sup>174</sup> It appeared that landlords tried to extract more and more profit from the forest by limiting the rights of the Oraons over the forest.

The forest was a major concern for both the British government and the landlords because of its commercial potential. In the conflicting interest of landlords and the British government, the Oraons customary right to create fresh *don* land came under strict control and surveillance. Henceforth, more and more *tanr* lands were converted to *don* land.

Overall, from the mid-nineteenth century, the *don* lands were by in large divided into four subclasses in terms of productivity, i.e., 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. According to the settlement report, the produce of an acre of each land in a normal year was:

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 129.

<sup>174</sup> S.C. Roy, 'The Theory of rent among the Mundas of Chota Nagpur', *Man in India*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3-4, Sept-December, 1946, p. 158.

Don 1 and 2.....19 *maunds* of *dhan* per acre

Don 3 and 4.....12 *maunds* of *dhan* per acre

Tanr 1 ..... 8 *maunds* of *dhan* per acre

Tanr 2 and 3.....3 *maunds* of *dhan* per acre<sup>175</sup>

Due to the topographical position, the 1<sup>st</sup> *don* (*kudar*) land remained perpetually wet, making them capable of growing rice crops of both winter and summer seasons. 2<sup>nd</sup> (*garha*) and 3<sup>rd</sup> *don* (*sokra*) land grew only winter rice crops which were cut in the month of *Aaghan* (December) and *Kartik* (November), respectively. The 4<sup>th</sup> *don* (*chowra*) land was mostly unfit for wet rice cultivation except in some favourable periods. They grew the autumn rice crop which ripened in the month of *Bhado* and *Aswin* (October). This highlights that different type of rice was grown on the *don* land. The best quality of rice was grown on the 1<sup>st</sup> *don* land while poor quality of rice was grown on 4<sup>th</sup> *don* land. The total cultivable area of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> *don* land was less in comparison to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> *don* land, see table 8. This indicates that the large population was dependent on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> *don* land. Among these lands, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> *don* lands were mainly reserved for the Oraon *bhuinhars*, while Oraon *raiya*s managed to get hold of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> *don* lands.

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<sup>175</sup> Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, p. 114.

**Table 8.**

**Percentage of the total cultivable area of the various classes of land**

<b>Name of Subdivision</b>	<b>Percentage of don I and don II to total cultivated area</b>	<b>Percentage of don III and don IV to the total cultivated area</b>	<b>Percentage of Tanr I to the total cultivated area</b>	<b>Percentage of Tanr II and Tanr III to total cultivated area</b>
<b>Sadar</b>	12.4	28.4	1.8	57.4
<b>Gumla</b>	11.8	16.0	1.7	70.5
<b>Khunti</b>	13.1	21.5	2.6	62.8
<b>Ranchi District</b>	12.2	21.1	2.	64.7

Source: John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, 1902-1910, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p. 114

**TYPES OF LAND:**

There are three sorts of land in the province, especially in the Lohardugga Division, viz, Bhuinhari, Rughus and Murghus, the Bhuinhari tenants are the descendent of those who first cleared the jungles and made the land arable. These ryots are assessed at a fixed rate and resemble in a great degree the Khodkust ryots of Bengal. The husbandman that cultivates the Rughus land pay revenue either to the Rajah direct or to the person whom he has let it called Ticcadar. For lands held on that tenure more than the Nirik of the place or the Pergunnah rate cannot be demanded. The peculiarity of Murghus tenure is that land is at the absolute disposal of the Rajah or the sub-farmer. The ryot in such land is a mere tenant at will.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>176</sup> *Petition of 14000 native Christian residency in the territory of the raja of Chotanagpur*, Government of Bengal, revenue department, land revenue, A. proceeding no. 21, October 1867, p. 1. Bihar State Archive (Hereafter BSA)

The three types of land represented different stages of development, from *bhuinhari* or proprietary land tenures to *rajhas* to landlord's private property or *majhivas*. In the early years of the Oraon habitation, all cultivating lands of the Oraons were called *bhuinhari*, which was owned by the descendants of the original founders. Here *bhuinhars* formed the sole undisputed owner of the villages. With time, the cultivating lands were further divided into *bhuinhari* and *non-bhuinhari* with the entry of late settlers. After the succession of Nagvanshi raja, the *non-bhuinhari* holdings were made liable to pay tribute to the raja.

In the beginning, Nagvanshi rulers proved to be efficient enough to protect the *adivasis* of the district from the invasion of outsiders. With time the rulers themselves became the reason for the destruction of *adivasis*. This started in the sixteenth century when Akbar learned about the existence of gold and diamond in the land of Chotanagpur. Thus, in order to get hold of this region, he invaded Chotanagpur in the year 1585.<sup>177</sup> This resulted in the inclusion of Ranchi district into the Mughal dynasty, and with this, Nagvanshi rulers were bound to pay an annual tribute to the Mughal emperor.

During the reign of Jahangir, Durjan Sal, the 45<sup>th</sup> ruler of the Nagvanshi Dynasty, was imprisoned for not paying the annual tribute to the emperor, and he was sent to Gwalior fort as a prisoner for 15 years. For the first time, he came in direct contact with some non-*adivasi* rajas in prison and was very influenced by their lifestyle. Durjan Sal returned to his kingdom in 1627 A.D and regained his throne with the help of some rajas who accompanied him from the Gwalior fort.<sup>178</sup> The outside exposure transformed him completely. He not only became Rajputised and ambitious but also developed a desire to become the lord- paramount of the district. To fulfil his dream, he invited foreigners from the plains as *jagirdars* or perpetual

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<sup>177</sup> Sudha Sinha, *The Nagvanshis of Chotanagpur*, Classical Publishing Company, 2001, p. 37.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

tenures.<sup>179</sup>With their assistance, his authority enormously augmented, and he became strong enough to extract the villages from the hands of *adivasi* communities. These villages were later granted to the foreign middleman on lease or *thikas*. Nevertheless, this was considered as the lull before the storm in the history of Ranchi district.

There disturbances no doubt originated, first, in the wrongful dispossession by zamindars and thiccadars or farmers of the descendants of old proprietary cultivators from lands which had been held in their family rent free for generations in virtue of their ancestors having been the original clearers. Such tenures, called Bhoocharry, are to be found in most of the Chota Nagpore villages, and the zamindars or farmers have for years availed themselves of every opportunity of assessing them or by ousting the old proprietors.<sup>180</sup>

From the day landlords or zamindars first obtained a footing in the district, significant changes came in the abode of *adivasis*. Firstly, with this new development, the non-*bhuinhari* holdings were called as *rajus/rajhas* or the Raja's share as these holdings fulfilled the demands of rajas or superior landlords.<sup>181</sup> Secondly, the privileged landholdings of the district were exposed to the covetous eyes of the landlords. In the initial phase, landlords remained content with the raja shares of the produce. However, as their number multiplied to an appalling extent, their desire grew to become powerful and rich. Furthermore, with no time, they started creating their own land, i.e. *majhiyas* land, for their own benefit, partly by the *rajhas* and partly by the

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<sup>179</sup> *Annual Report of the Special Commissioners under the Chotanagpur Tenure Act, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1873*, Governemnt of Bengal, Revenue Department, Branch: Land Revenue, July 1873, p. 7, West Bengal State Archive (Hereafter WBSA).

<sup>180</sup> No. 70 dated the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1859, From Caption E.T. Dalton, Commissioner of Chota Nagpore to the secretary to the government of Bengal, p. 1, *Papers relating to Chota Nagpore Agrarian Disputes, Part-II*, Unpublished, (Hereafter PCAD-II)

<sup>181</sup> S.C. Roy, 'The Theory of rent among the Mundas of Chota Nagpur', *Man In India, Vol. XXVI, No. 3-4*, Sept-December, 1946, p. 157.

*bhuinhari* holdings. In this attempt, they used all sorts of fraud and force. The result was that the landlord managed to possess the land in every district village, and these holdings compromised some of the best lands of the district. As a consequence, three tenures came into existence in the district. All three holdings included low land/ *don* land and uplands/ *tanr* land. Among the three, *raiya*/ *rajhas* holding constituted the majority of the occupied area (see table 9).

**Table: 9.**

**The area occupied by different tenures**

Name of Subdivision	Area	<i>Majhi yas</i>	<i>Rajhas</i>				<i>Bhuin hari</i>
			Area of land held by settled raiyats and occupancy raiyats on money-rent	Area of land held by non-occupancy raiyats on money-rent	Area of land held on produce rents by raiyats	Area of lands held rent-free, including waste	
Sadar	2,054	119	864	34	28	23	103
Gumla	3,504	205	1,245	147	15	26	64
Khunti	1,545	81	482	54	13	7	49
Total	7,103	405	2,591	235	56	56	216
Percentage to total area of the district	.....	5.70	36.49	3.30	.76	.76	3.04

Source: John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, 1902-1910, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p. 117.

## 1. *Bhuinhari* land:

It was the most ancient tenure among the two. It included that portion of land that was cleared from the jungles by the original founder or *bhuinhar*. Traditionally, *bhuinhari* lands formed a considerable amount of land in each village. These were the privileged and fertile land holdings that often went rent-free, and it allowed the owner to consume the whole produce. In this background, the possession of *bhuinhari* land gave the *bhuinhars* a high economic position in the district. However, with the passing years, these lands no longer continued to be rent-free as the *bhuinhars* were compelled to pay fixed or quit rent for their *bhuinhari* lands.

In the colonial period, a good portion of *bhuinhari* land was taken under the possession of landlords who converted them into their private property, '*majhihas*' or included the lands in the *rajhas*. So much was the case that in no parts of the district, Oraon *bhuinhars* managed to restrain their considerable share of proprietary rights in the land. During the survey and settlement operations, it was found that 2482 villages had lost their rights and privileges.<sup>182</sup> Here *bhuinhars* (including both the Oraons and the Mundas) managed to occupy only 216 square areas of the cultivable land in the district, see table 10. This indicates that many *bhuinhars* were ousted from their entire holdings and were reduced to the position of *raiya*s.

The *bhuinhari* tenure of the Oraons also included the lands locally known as *bhutkheta*, *dalikatari*, *pahanai* and *mahatoai*.

1. *Bhutkheta* lands were dedicated to the worship of the village spirit.
2. *Dalikatari/Pahanai*: the village *pahans* held these lands for the performance of certain sacrifices.
3. *Mahatoai*: these were the service lands that the village headmen held.

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<sup>182</sup> John Hoffman, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, vol. II B, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1930, p. 512.

**Table: 10.****Area of *Bhuinhari* lands in Ranchi district in 1910**

Subdivision	Area of <i>Bhuinhari</i> lands of all kinds in Acres			
	<i>Don</i>	<i>Tanr</i>	Uncultivated	Total
Khunti	13,137.15	17,390.49	752.27	31,279.91
Gumla	18,827.20	20,052.83	1,830.99	40,711.02
Sadar	32,720.77	27,966.99	5,169.32	65,857.08
Total	64,685.12	65,410.31	7,752.58	137,848.01
Area in square miles	101.07	102.20	12.11	215.38

Source: John Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, 1902-1910, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, p. 96.

**2. *Manjhiyas* or *Majhiyas* land:**

*Majhiyas* lands come under the immediate occupation of the landlords or their farm servants. The Oraon *raiya*s had no claim over these lands, even if they were settled on the land on cash rent for an indefinite period. These lands were either directly cultivated by the landlords or by the *adivasi* or non-*adivasi* *raiya*s on an annual arrangement called *saika*. Under this arrangement, *raiya*s were bound to pay certain pre-arrange quantities of grains to the landlords, which was roughly half the produce in a year of a good harvest.

Whenever the landlord or his assignee directly cultivated *majhiyas* lands, he was entitled to get help in its cultivation from all *chattisa raiya*s and *bhuinhars*.<sup>183</sup> Such

<sup>183</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhgga*, p. 106.

compulsory service was known as *beth-begari*. In 1910, the total percentage of *majhiyas* land within the district was 5.70 that escalated to 10.71 by 1930.<sup>184</sup>

### 3. **Rajhas/ Raiyati land:**

The lands in possession of Oraon cultivating *raiya*ts were known as *rajhas/ rajhas/ raiyati*. Under these lands, Oraon *raiya*ts cultivated land on cash rent or produce or both. In brief, these were rent bearing lands. These lands comprised the great bulk of cultivating land with 2938 square miles. The *rajhas* land included the *chattisa*, the *korkar*, the *murila chattisa*, the *uttakar*, the *betkheta*, the *maswar*.

3.1. **Korkar Land:** it was a *tanr* or upland, forest or wasteland that was converted into *don* or rice land for the cultivation of rice crops. Earlier, it was a rare practice, but with the increasing population, land conversion became quite common in the subdivision of Ranchi district. It was usually prepared with the consent of landlords. In the district, landlords often allowed the *raiya*t to make *korkar* land for three to four years, and when the land became valuable, *raiya*ts were sued for ejection as a trespasser.<sup>185</sup> However, this practice was later prevented by Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908. For three to five years, no rent was imposed on these lands and then half the usual or *chattisa* rate of the village.

3.2. **Chattisa land:** It is also known as *lekha* among the Oraons.<sup>186</sup> These holdings were the principal class of *rajhas* land beside *korkar* and *uttakar*. These holding consisted of lowland or *don* land with a quantity of *tanr* land. Usually, higher rents were paid for these lands

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<sup>184</sup> F.E. Taylor, *Final Report on the Revisional Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi: 1927-1935*, Patna: Government Printing Press, p. 88.

<sup>185</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 150.

<sup>186</sup> Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal Volume XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, p. 378.

than the other two. In addition to cash rent, praedial dues (*rakumat*) were ordinarily liable, and praedial services (*beth-begari*) were rendered.<sup>187</sup> The name *chattisa* was derived from the word thirty-six, as it is claimed that *raiyyats* need to obey thirty-six orders of the landlord. If there was no complimentary lagan *tanr*/ upland, the tenancy was known as *murli chattisa*.

3.3. **Uttakar/ Balkat land:** It consist *don* land only, usually of inferior quality. Such lands were assessed for rent generally at half the rate of *chattisa* lands and sometimes even at a lower rate. However, in some villages, *uttakar* lands were assessed for rent higher than *chattisa* where the *chattisa* rents have not changed for years.<sup>188</sup> The Oraon *raiyyat* usually paid the rent for the year in which they cultivated the land or in which they cut the crops, and in the times when no cultivation took place, no rent was paid.<sup>189</sup>

3.4. **Bhetkheta land:** Unlike other *rajhas* lands, no occupancy can accrue to such lands. These lands were given to the Oraon *raiyyats* free of rent on condition of his performing certain services to the landlord. The essential service required was the cultivation of the landlord's *majhihas* land for him. The landlord could resume such lands whenever he chose to dispense with such service in future.

## RENT STRUCTURE

The more privileged called '*Bhuinhar*', the breaker of the soil, held their lands rent-free and had to render service, such as attendance at darbars and marriages, and like Norwal, following to the field their warlike lord. The inferior class supplied food and raiment; but this obligation was eventually

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<sup>187</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 149.

<sup>188</sup> Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal Volume XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, p. 378.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

commuted to a money payment, and the cultivated lands held were termed as *rajas* or rent-paying, in contradiction to the Bhuinhari tenures which were held rent-free.<sup>190</sup>

There is little documentary evidence regarding the early history of rent. However, it appears that the rent was originated from the tribute/ *chanda*, which was supplied to the Nagvanshi rajas in the shape of forest produce like *hanrua*, *sabai*, *barni*, *kampti* etc. These tributes were initially assessed on the person of a cultivator and not on the land he held.<sup>191</sup> The idea of rent gradually grew up from this tribute in the colonial period, which was attached to the land, *adivasis* held. Simultaneously, the demand for rent tended to increase with time. For instance: the landlords and their *thicaddars* made repeated attempts to enhance the rent by force and trickery and lost no opportunity of seeking on some pretext or other to screw more out of the tenant than was their dues.<sup>192</sup> In the cases where the Oraon *bhuinhars* refused to pay the increased demand, the landlords tried to dispose of them by force and to take their land into *majhiyas* or *rajhas* holdings. Moreover, in the case of Oraon *raiya*s, landlords used to sublet their land to non-*adivais* at enhanced rates.<sup>193</sup> This laid the foundation of chronic agrarian discontent throughout the district. With this, the history of rent struggles between the Oraons and the landlord started.

In the district, the land was not measured by the rod or *bighas*. In such circumstances, rents were usually fixed or assessed by the local customary units of measurement known as

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<sup>190</sup> *Chutia Nagpur Tenancy Bill in Proceeding of the Council of the Lieut-Governor of Bengal for the purpose of making law and Regulation*, p. 37.

<sup>191</sup> Taylor, *Final Report on the Revisional Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, pp.70-71.

<sup>192</sup> Roy, *The Theory of rent among the Mundas of Chota Nagpur*, p. 158.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.* p. 164.

*pawa*,<sup>194</sup> *anna* for lowland and *kats*,<sup>195</sup> for upland. The scale for computation was 2 *kanis*= 1 *kanwa*; 2 *kanwas* = 1 *pawa*; 4 *pawas*= 1 *khari*; 8 *kharis*= 1 *bhari*.<sup>196</sup> These units do not represent any uniform superficial area but the amount of land for which a certain amount of seeds was required.<sup>197</sup> Thereby, the officials considered the units of measurement purely notional as they had no relation with the actual measurement.<sup>198</sup> Under these units, a portion of lands was vaguely described by the relative terms as large and small. As a consequence, it was quite impossible to settle rents at one flat rate. Thereby, it was common to find variation in the rate of rent. Rents were fixed per *pawa*, an area of low land which was never same in any two villages, varying in extent from one to thirteen *bighas* and while in the same village one *pawa* was often double the size of another *pawa* of exactly the same quality of land, yet both paid the same rent.<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, in cases where the rates were the same, the area under *pawa* was very different. For instance:

In one village man holding one *pawa* containing

Low land----- 1 *bighas*

High land ----- 10 *bighas*

Bari garden----- 1 *bigha* and pays Rs. 3

A man in neighbouring village holds one *pawa*-

Low land----- 4 *bighas*

High land----- 4 *bighas*

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<sup>194</sup> A portion of land sufficient for growing two or three *maunds*.

<sup>195</sup> The amount of land which can be sown by one *maund* of *dhan*.

<sup>196</sup> Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal Volume XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, pp. 259-360.

<sup>197</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 155.

<sup>198</sup> Mahopatra, *Aspects of Agrarian Economy of Chotanagpur, 1850-1950*, p. 359.

<sup>199</sup> *Rent law in ChotaNapore*, Government of Bengal, Revenue department, land revenue, proceeding no. 66-68, October 1875, p. 5, BSA.

Bari garden----- 1 bigha and pays Rs 4<sup>200</sup>

The uncertain character of the land measurement was a direct encouragement to fraud on the part of a dishonest landlord. There were many instances where the landlords manipulated the nominal standard of land measurements to extract more rents from the Oraon *raiya*s. For instance, in cases where landlords failed to raise the customary rent rates, he sought to increase his rent roll by manipulating the nominal standard of land measurement and describing in his papers as three *pawas* which was formerly two *pawas* of land.<sup>201</sup> Accordingly, then, demanded the rent. Table 10 highlights the average rent extracted from the Oraon *raiya*s, including money payment, *beth-begari* and *rakumat*.

In the district, the Oraon *raiya*s were accustomed to pay rent and a considerable amount of services for their *chattisa* holdings. These holdings usually consisted of a portion of low rice land (*don*) and some complimentary highlands (*tanr*). For the *don* land, Oraon *raiya*s paid cash rents, and for *tanr* land, they generally paid or rendered praedial dues (locally known as *rakumat*) and personal services (like *beth-begari* or forced labour).<sup>202</sup> It was assumed by colonial officers like E.T. Dalton that the rents in the district were usually low compared to the plains. Thus, the rent was supplemented by services like praedial dues and services. Even if the rent was low, it was prone to increase with the illegal enhancement of landlords. According to Webster, in most villages, rents have been considerably raised during the last 30 years.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Roy, *The Theory of rent among the Mundas of Chota Nagpur*, p. 174.

<sup>202</sup> Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, p. 78.

<sup>203</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhga*, p. 107.

**Table: 11.**

**A standard/ average rent for a Oraon *raiyat* to pay per *pawa***

Money

	Rs	A
Rent	3	0
Salami	0	2
Dushera	0	2

Labour in landlord's field

Kind

	Days
Ploughing	3
Digging	3
Sowing	3
Cutting	3
Threshing	1
Stowing grain	1
Carrying burdens on the allowance of food	7

	Seers
Ghee	1
Cotton	1
Urid Callai	5
Sirguja	4
Small beans	2
Load of woods	1
Bundles of grass	100

Source: *Working of the Chota nagpore tenures act*, Government of Bengal, Revenue department, land revenue, A proceeding July 1875, proceeding. no. 45-47, p. 6, Bihar State Archive.

The enhancement of rent also included an increase in the number and quantity of *rakumats*. In most villages, the landlords enhanced the original rents illegally, which was also condoned by the courts. There were many instances where the landlords prepared fictitious accounts for three-four years and supported this with the fabricated receipts and witnesses at the vicinity of the revenue courts and then sued the Oraon *raiyats* for arrears of enhanced rate of rent and *rakumat*.

Regarding this, Mr Van Grieken, The Deputy Collector, explains the state of affairs that prevailed in the *thana* of Mandar.

The landlords began to make fictitious entries in their book of accounts (*jamabandis*) usually from the road cess returns of 1898, and in order secure oral evidence, they managed to get a few *sadan* (non-*adivasi*) to side with them, by making them gifts of land or by allowing them to claim certain lands belonging to aboriginal *raiyats* and promising their support.<sup>204</sup>

The other method used by the landlord was a common practice throughout the district. It was subletting the villages on a temporary lease to the *thicaddars* at a high rate. Babu Ashutosh Mukherji, a munsiff assistant settlement officer, describes the history of the rise of rent in Bishunpur *thana*. 50 years ago, the rate of rent was very low in the Bishunpur *thana*, i.e. 10-12 *annas* only. This rate continued to increase under *thicaddar* until it became Re 1-4.<sup>205</sup> Likewise, there were many other examples where the *thicaddars* enhanced rent to make a profit for themselves by fair or foul means. In these difficult circumstances, the Oraon *raiyats* either attacked the *thicaddars* or abandoned the villages.

In contrast, there were also incidences where the rents were enhanced directly by the landlords. They induced the Oraon *raiyats* to execute an agreement for higher rates. In most cases, Oraon *raiyats* had no idea about the nature of the contract they were about to enter. Only after entering the contract, they realised the intention of the landlords. Henceforth, the enhancement of rent was quite common in the district, and it became the potent cause of exploitation.

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<sup>204</sup> Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, p. 100.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* p. 99.

For *korkar* holdings, Oraon *raiyats* were generally charged half the rate of the *chattisa* holdings. However, this custom was not uninformed. In some parts, full rates were charged, in some parts, the half-rate was charged, and, in some parts, *korkar* land was held free. For instance, in *pargana* Biru, full rent was charged, in *thanas* Mandar and Kuru, lands were held rent-free before the time of the *bhuinhari* survey.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, in parts of *thana* Silli, rents were assessed at 10/16 or 5/8 of the rate of rent payable on *chattisa* holdings.<sup>207</sup> The landlord behind the full rent intended to oust the Oraon *raiyat* from their *korkar* holdings.

It was believed that most of the *raiyati/rajhas* lands were uneconomic in nature. Thereby, they barely reached or exceeded the subsistence limit. In such circumstances, Oraon *raiyats* paid rents not from the profit of their cultivated land but from the wages derived from extraneous employment.<sup>208</sup> To supplement their source of income, Oraon *raiyats* often worked as farm servants (better known as *dhangar*) in the landholdings of landlords. Sometimes, they even worked in the landholdings of Oraon *bhuinhars*.<sup>209</sup> Similarly, in Seoni, most Gonds who depended on less fertile land supplemented their incomes by working as hired labour in plains.<sup>210</sup> In the early nineteenth century, many migrated to neighbouring regions like Champaran or Calcutta for seasonal work in the agricultural slack period. For instance:

They (adivasi communities like Oraon, Munda) flock to the metropolis after the close of the paddy harvest in December, work for four to five months, and

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. p. 119.

<sup>209</sup> The Oraon *bhuinhars*, who were economically efficient enough to entertain a farmhand, usually hired *dhangars* for their assistance.

<sup>210</sup> D.E. U. Baker, *Colonialism in an Indian Hinterland: The Central Provinces, 1820-1920*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 187.

then leave about May for their homes to resume agricultural work as soon as the rains set in.<sup>211</sup>

In few cases, they also paid their rent by selling an occasional bullock or a few sheep they managed to rear.<sup>212</sup>

Initially, *rakumats* was paid in kind. The most common kind of *rakumats* were *urid, sarguja, kapas, gundli, dhan, straw and kher*.<sup>213</sup> The other class of *rakumats* were *dasai, batta, bhatta, rasid, likhai, dak mushara, neg, bardoch, sarai chaul or nawa kahani, danr pancha, rafters, bamboo and ghee*.<sup>214</sup> However, later on, the kind was replaced by cash payment in most of the villages of the district. Moreover, the amount varied from Re 1 to Rs 1- 8 per unit area.<sup>215</sup> It was a most important source of oppression, as there was practically no limit to this.

A similar trend was followed in *beth-begari* (forced labour) system. Here Oraon *raiyats* were bound to perform a certain amount of free compulsory labour services for the landlords.<sup>216</sup> In most of the villages, *beth-begari* had been in vogue, and their period varied from 10-15 days service. The services were mainly utilised for the cultivation and harvesting of crops in the landlord's *majhiyas* land. Likewise, various other compulsory services were extracted from Oraon *raiyats*, such as tilling lands, building houses, carrying luggage on a journey and so forth. For instance:

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<sup>211</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhgga*, p. 24.

<sup>212</sup> Reid, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi*, p. 119.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* p. 87.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.* p. 89.

<sup>216</sup> *Chutia Nagpur Tenancy Bill in Proceeding of the Council of the Lieut-Governor of Bengal for the purpose of making law and Regulation*, p. 33.

There is no doubt whatever that the Kols of Urikel, both Christians and Pagan, are greatly discontented with the present Thakoor's rule. They say that rents have been doubled, and that in addition to this they are kept constantly on the way to and from Jhurriah in the performance of compulsory service to the Thakoor ..... They say they are constantly called upon to furnish wood, straw, lime, bamboos & for the Thakoor's use.<sup>217</sup>

The Oraon *bhuinhars* who once paid no rent and enjoyed their whole produce, with the elapse of time, were induced to pay fixed or half rent and to submit to the condition of rendering the same agricultural and other services that were extracted from the Oraon *raiya*s. Among such services, *beth-begari* was one of them.

In some parts of the district, Oraon *bhuinhars* paid no rent or quit rent for their *bhuinhari* land, but in most part, they paid rent at half rates and also rendered obligatory services to the landlords. No rent or quit rent for *bhuinhari* holding indicated that the Oraon *bhuinhars* had struggled hard to maintain their ground in that part of the district. The Oraon *bhuinhars* were generally assessed at a fixed rate which ought to be low, i.e. not to exceed 1/4 of the produce and ought in equity to range from 1/6 to 1/4, not more than that.<sup>218</sup> Unlike Oraon *raiya*s, their rents were not liable to rent increase. Nevertheless, landlords illegally enhanced the rates despite such custom and paid no receipt or gave a receipt for less rent than they have received. For instance, A man named Chachea Christian, a *bhuinhar* was made to pay rupees 20 for his *bhuinhari* and other lands, but Gouree Sunkur, the *tehsildar* gave a receipt for half the amount of rupees 8-10.<sup>219</sup> Undoubtedly, this alone opened the wide door for abuse.

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<sup>217</sup> From Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commissioner of Chota Nagpur to H.L. Dampier, Government of Bengal, Revenue department, land revenue, A proceeding of November 1868, proceeding no. 45-51, p. 52, WBSA.

<sup>218</sup> *Petition of 14000 native Christian residency in the territory of the raja of Chotanagpur*, p. 2.

<sup>219</sup> From Colonel E.T. Dalton, Commissioner of Chota Nagpur to H.L. Dampier, p. 52.

There were some Oraon *bhuinhars* who cultivated both *bhuinhari* and *rajhas* land. There were many instances where a Oraon *bhuinhar* who held a small portion of *bhuinhari* land, generally cultivated the *rajhas* land. Thereby, even if they escaped from the rent in their *bhuinhari* lands, they paid rent for their *rajhas/ raiyati* land.

A Oraon *bhuinhar* gave the same amount of labour to landlords as Oraon *raiyyat*. In the mid-nineteenth century, one of the chief reasons for agrarian dispute between the landlord and *bhuinhars* was the constant misuse of a peculiar system of *beth-begari*. Like, in most cases, landlords extracted unlimited service from both classes. The landlords were usually liable to extract *beth-begari* for limited days that varied from 10-15 days according to their requirement. However, in Bishunpur *thana*, one landlord was found to have succeeded in levying 50-60 days of labour from the *adivasis*.<sup>220</sup> Oraon *bhuinhars* rendered the following labour services: - three ploughings, three diggings, three plantings, binding two *morus*, supplying twenty or twenty-five bamboos, 100 bundles or in some cases 200 bundles of grass and two *arkattus*, carrying the baggage of the landlord in his travels on the allowance of food.<sup>221</sup> These services varied from village to village. Oraon *bhuinhars* hated to render *beth-begari* services to the landlords and often compared the service with the *dhangar* service. On few occasions, they also complained to the colonial officials and missionaries that: “I am compelled to do *beth-begari* just if I am a *dhangar*.”<sup>222</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, many *bhuinhars* embraced Christianity in the hope of having a better opportunity than others to resist the excessive demands of *beth-begari*. For instance:

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<sup>220</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 154.

<sup>221</sup> *Representation on Behalf of the Kolhs in Chutia Nagpore made by the German Lutheran Mission*, Government of Bengal, revenue department, land revenue, A proceeding 51-59, July 1871, p. 6, BSA.

<sup>222</sup> *Kol agitation in the Lohardugga District*, Government of India, Home Department, Judicial, No. 95-109, 1890, p. 3, National Archive of India (hereafter NAI).

I became Christian because I was put to much trouble by Gajdhar Deogharia. He used to make me render beth-begari almost daily just as if I was a "Dhangar". Lieven's Saheb said that by becoming Christian I would only have to render beth-begari according to former usage.<sup>223</sup>

In fact, in the mid-nineteenth century, extraction of *beth-begari* service from Oraon *bhuinhar* became the main cause for *sardari ladai* (discussed in the preceding chapter). In response to this, the commutation Act was passed in 1897. This allowed commuting the need of *beth-begari* with equivalent cash rent.

## INDEBTEDNESS

Unlike Oraon *bhuinhars*, Oraon *raiya*s (*praja*) were primarily dependent on *rajhas/ raiya*t holdings that mainly consisted of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> *don* land. These lands lagged behind the fertility and productivity level. Henceforth, crop failures were quite common in the two and were prone to epidemics like drought, famine. Hitherto, Oraon *raiya*s subsisted the crisis with the forest products like *mahua*. Under the British government, it became impossible to rely on forests due to the steady deforestation and restrictions on forest use. Under these situations, Oraon *raiya*s were obliged to borrow grain loans from the moneylenders (like *sahu*, *baniyas* or *mahajan*). With this, many Oraon *raiya*s landed in the unending cycle of indebtedness in the year of deficient harvest. For example: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the district witnessed back-to-back three famines. This obliged the Oraon *raiya*s to take loans. In their failure to repay the loans, their lands were either mortgaged or, in a few instances, many abandoned their land as they were left at the edge of starvation. These instances took place

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

during the Tana Bhagat movement (1914-1925), when many Oraon *raiya*ts abandoned their land as it failed to save them from famine.<sup>224</sup> Simultaneously, they directed the movement against *sahu*, *baniyas*.

In the nineteenth century, indebtedness became a quite common phenomenon in the district. Here most of the Oraon *raiya*ts were under the entanglement of heavy debt, and it was not an easy task for them to extricate themselves from the clutches of moneylenders. There were many forms of loans available in the district like *rina* (*zaripeshgi*), *mokarri* lease, *bhagut banda*, *karja*, *seri*, *chara*, *loan of grain*, *dadni* or *advance*.<sup>225</sup> However, unlike Oraon *bhuinhars*, Oraon *raiya*ts were only eligible for a few loans. For instance, *bhagut banda* type of loans was rarely found among the Oraon *raiya*ts.<sup>226</sup> The reason behind this was their poor tenancies which gave a low level of economic security and were bound with high rates of rent. In short, these tenancies were not commercially profitable. In contrast, *bhuinhari* tenures were commercially profitable due to various factors like fixed rent and a high level of economic security.<sup>227</sup> Thereby, professional moneylenders never saw a profitable deal with Oraon *raiya*ts and refused to lend money loans on *raiya*ti/ *rajhas* land.

Unlike money loan, paddy/ grain loan was the most prevalent loan in the district, which was taken at *dehra* interest, i.e. 50 per cent, if the loan intended for food and at *dobar* or 100 per cent if meant for seeds.<sup>228</sup> The interest of this loan tended to increase every year if a Oraon *raiya*ti failed to repay the interest on the due date. *Rajhas*/ *raiya*ti lands had no surety of good harvest, and even if there was a good harvest, a good portion of produce was taken away in the repayment

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<sup>224</sup> The movement is discussed in detail in the preceding chapter.

<sup>225</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhga*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21.

<sup>227</sup> Mahopatra, *Aspects of Agrarian Economy of Chotanagpur: 1850-1950*, p. 499.

<sup>228</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhga*, p. 20.

of grain/ paddy loan. In this state, it became next to impossible for a Oraon *raiyat* to come out from this cycle. Oraon *raiyats* suffered hardship until they had the means (like goat, cattle, land) to satisfy the demands of *sahu/ baniyas*. Nevertheless, once they were out of the means, they abandoned their abode in search of a new livelihood. Here migration can also be seen as their strategy to escape from the clutches of moneylenders who had advanced them loans.<sup>229</sup>

## CONCLUSION:

In Ranchi district, the land was the basic mean of subsistence for the Oraons. Here Oraon *raiyats* tended to possess an inferior quality of land that lagged behind the *bhuinhari* land in terms of productivity and fertility. These holdings were also considered unprivileged holding as they barely exceeded the subsistence limit and were prone to drought and famine. In the pre-colonial period, Oraon *raiyats* managed to supplement the deficiency of staple food by forest products. However, the British government brought a profound impact on the economy with the Forest Acts that restricted the access of Oraon *raiyats* to the forest. The Acts brought various restrictions over the forest that brought them under the clutches of moneylenders during the famine period. Besides this, these holdings were burdened with both praedial conditions and high rents that tended to increase with every progressing year. Indeed, with the intervention of British government, the economic condition became extremely grim that made their survival difficult in their abode. In addition, no policies and Acts were introduced to safeguard the rights of Oraon *raiyats*. As a consequence, they became easy targets of labour recruiters in the colonial period. From 1830-1930, a good percentage of Oraon *raiyats* emigrated to far-flung destinations in search of a new livelihood.

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<sup>229</sup> Biswamoy Pati, 'Survival as Resistance: Tribal in Colonial Orissa' in Biswamoy Pati (ed.) *Adivasi in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2011, p. 260.

## CHAPTER 5

### MAKING OF ORAON LABOUR

So long ago as 1827, the magistrate of Ramgarh speaks in one of his reports of a large number of Kols annually leaving the district to work on the indigo plantations of Behar and Bengal. Ever since then, a steady stream of emigrant has been flowing out of the district, mostly to the tea gardens Sylhet, Cachar, and Assam on the one side, and Darjeeling and the Duars on the other side.<sup>230</sup>

Oraon *raiya*s were the initial group who were systematically recruited as overseas indentured labourers in the sugar colonies like Mauritius and British Guiana.<sup>231</sup> However, prior to overseas migration, Oraon *raiya*s had already started their seasonal migration from Ranchi district to neighbouring destinations like Bihar and Bengal in search of work. Here they followed circular migration where they chose to migrate in the agricultural slack period, and after completing a certain period, they usually returned back to their abode. However, there came a major shift in their migration process after the report of magistrate C.T. Cuthbert. From the 1830s, the migration of Oraon *raiya*s took a sudden shift from seasonal to permanent. With this, there also came a change in their recruitment process. Here they were recruited under the indenture system, where they were bound under a contract to work for a specific time period (usually five years). Consequently, from neighbouring destinations, their migration shifted to far-flung destinations like Mauritius, British Guiana, Assam, Andaman

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<sup>230</sup>F. B. Bradely-Birt, *ChotaNagpore a little-known province of the Empire*, London: Smith, Elder& co, 15 Waterloo place, 1900, p.117.

<sup>231</sup> Indentured labour system was introduced in response to the British abolition of slavery Act of 1833. The Act came into force on 1, August 1834.

and Nicobar. In parallel to this shift, new identities like *dhangar*, *tea tribe* were imposed on them in varied destinations that stereotyped their identity as labour in these destinations. Here the chapter is an attempt to examine the making of Oraon labour. In this process, it will try to answer three questions: How did the imposed identity of *dhangar* stigmatise Oraon *raiyats*' identity as labour? What led to the shift from seasonal to permanent migration? Why were Oraon *raiyats* seen as a perennial source of labour in the sugar plantation?

### **DHANGAR:** *A stigmatised identity in the labour market*

The tribe of Indians, commonly known by the names of Hill coolies, Dhangars, or Boonahs, inhabit those extensive hilly districts to the northward and westward of Calcutta, which comprehend from two to three degrees of latitude (from 23<sup>0</sup> to 25<sup>0</sup> N.).<sup>232</sup>

In the early official reports, the catch-all term hill coolie, *dhangar* or *boonah/ buna*, were popularly used as synonyms for overseas indentured labourers. These terminologies were generally used by the planters of sugar plantations who were unfamiliar with the precise *adivasi* name. Among the three terminologies, hill coolie was a broad term that was mainly implied to the *adivasi* communities (like Oraons, Mundas, Santhals) of the districts Ranchi, Palamu, Ramgarh (Hazaribagh), Singhbhum, Dalbhum and Manbhum.<sup>233</sup> In short, it was used for the *adivasi* communities of the present-day Jharkhand state. The second terminology, '*dhangar*' was mainly implied to refer to Ranchi district's *adivasi* communities (like Oraons,

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<sup>232</sup> Thomas Henry Braim, *A history of South Wales, from its settlement to the close of the year 1844, Vol. I*, London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1845, p. 163.

<sup>233</sup> 'Coolie Labour and Coolie Immigration', in *The Cornhill Magazine, Vol. XVI, July to December*, London: Smith, Elder and Co., 65, Cornhill, 1867, p. 78.

Mundas). According to H.H. Risely, the third terminology *boonah/buna* was implied to Bhuiya, Bhumij, Bagdi, Buari, Ghasi, Kharwar, Kora, Munda, Oraon, Rajbansi, Rajwar, Santhal.<sup>234</sup> However, in comparison to the three terminologies, *dhangar* was overtly used and was commonly implied to Oraon *raiyats* in various destinations (both inland and overseas) where they emigrated to work. For instance:

The Oraons call themselves *Kurukh*, and another name which is commonly applied to them in many parts of India where they settled or where they have gone in search of work, is *Dhangar*.<sup>235</sup>

The Oraons are the more industrious and energetic; it is generally people of their tribe that, under the denomination of Dhangur, are employed to great works in all parts of India and in colonies.<sup>236</sup>

The uraons (Oraons), or as they are generally called when they are away from their own country, the Dhangas, are hard-working cultivators, being in this respect vastly superior to any of the races.<sup>237</sup>

This is the reason why in the contemporary period, they are officially recognised as *dhangar* in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Champaran (Bihar), Nepal. The origin of the term *dhangar* or *dhanggar/ dunga/ dhangur/ dhangad/ dhangahs/ dhangas* (the distorted spelling of *dhangar*) is debatable. According to Colonel E.T. Dalton, W.W. Hunter, the term *dhangar*, is a British word that was derived from *dhang* or *dang*, which denoted a hill or could be

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<sup>234</sup> H. H. Risely, *The tribes and caste of Bengal*, vol. 1, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1892, p. 163.

<sup>235</sup> John Houlton, *Bihar the heart of India*, Calcutta: Orient Longmans Ltd., 1949, p. 136.

<sup>236</sup> J. Forbes Watson and John William Kaye, *The People of India: A series of Photographic Illustrations with descriptive letterpress of the races and tribes of Hindustan, Volume 1*, London: Indian Museum, 1868, p. 65.

<sup>237</sup> V. Ball, *Jungle life in India*, London: De La Rue & Co., 1880, p. 646.

generically used for hill men.<sup>238</sup> While many colonial and post-colonial scholars like T.S. Macpherson and M.G. Hallett, P. Dehon, Robert Vane Russell, P.C. Choudhury believe it to be 'Kurukh' (Oraon dialect) word.<sup>239</sup> For instance:

Small colonies of the race are also found all over Bengal and in parts of Tirhut where they work as labourers and are known by the name of dhangars, a Kurukh word signifying a "youth" and "then a youth who labours for another".<sup>240</sup>

While S.C. Roy and Francis Buchannan considered it a Hindi term,<sup>241</sup> in contrast, locals consider it a Sadri term.<sup>242</sup> In order to understand the origin of this term, we need first to figure out the meaning of this term.

In Ranchi district, the term *dhangar* means farm servant or field servant.<sup>243</sup> Traditionally, the concept of farm servant was unknown among the *adivasi* communities. The concept of farm servant was introduced by the non-*adivasi* communities who came from the

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<sup>238</sup> E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1872, p. 245; W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume. XVI: Districts of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga*, Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Delhi, 1877 (reprint: 1976), p. 279.

<sup>239</sup> Rev. P. Dehon, *Religion and Customs of the Uraon*, Calcutta: Memoirs of Asiatic Society of Bengal Press, 1906, p. 122; Robert Vane Russell, *The tribes and castes of the Central Provinces of India*, London: Macmillan and co., limited, 1916, p. 359; T.S. Macpherson and M.G. Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1917, p. 72; P.C. Choudhury, *Bihar district Gazetteers: Champaran*, Patna: Printed by the Superintendent Secretariat Press Bihar, 1960, p. 122.

<sup>240</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers: Ranchi*, p. 72.

<sup>241</sup> S. C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur: their history, economic life and social organization*, Ranchi: Bar Library, 1915, p. 8; Francis Buchannan, *An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11*, Patna: Printed at Patna Law Press, 1939, p. 265.

<sup>242</sup> Sadri dialect is also known as Nagpuri. In Ranchi district, it developed with the arrivals of *sadans* (non-*adivasis*) and with time, *adivasis* also adopted this language.

<sup>243</sup> Russell, *The tribes and castes of the Central Provinces of India*, p. 300.

neighbouring regions. Likewise, they introduced *beth-begari* system (forced labour).<sup>244</sup> In the colonial period, the *dhangars* were found in the most significant number in larger villages where non-*adivasis* predominated.<sup>245</sup> In Ranchi district, *dhangars* were usually hired by the landlords or zamindars for ploughing, sowing and harvesting their *majhiyas* land. Likewise, when *mahajans* (moneylender) took a village on lease or mortgage, he used to hire a lot of *dhangars*, who carried on all the cultivation.<sup>246</sup> *Dhangars* were usually hired from the *raiyati* family in the month of Magh (January-February), and in return, they received daily or monthly wages, either in cash or kind.<sup>247</sup> The wages in kind varied from six to twelve or even eighteen *kats* of paddy, and the wages in cash varied from Rs 4 a year to Rs 12 or even to Rs 18 in some localities.<sup>248</sup> The wages were paid according to their strength, age and the hardness of the work they were usually put in.<sup>249</sup> However, in the beginning, farm servants used to receive their wages only in kind, which consisted of *dhan* (unhusked rice).<sup>250</sup> Thereby, it is possible that it derived from the term *dhan*. With a span of time, the term was normalised or generalised in a way that *adivasi* communities also started using the term *dhangar*. For instance, among the Oraons, the Kurukh term *jonkh* (which means young man) was interchangeably used with the

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<sup>244</sup> *Beth-Begari* was an unpaid service while *dhangar* service was a paid service.

<sup>245</sup> B. C. Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhga*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891, p. 32.

<sup>246</sup> Government of Bihar and Orissa, Edu and development department, Agriculture branch, August 1930, Proc. 91-93, file 2V-9, p. 7, File kept under *Bill to provide for the speedy realization of arrears of rent*, Government of Bengal, Revenue department, land revenue, A proceeding of May 1879, proc. 91-93, Bihar State Archive (hereafter BSA).

<sup>247</sup> Macpherson and Hallett, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazatteers: Ranchi*, p. 159

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> Basu, *Report on the Agricultural District of Loharduhga*, p. 151.

<sup>250</sup> Revd. Ferd Hahn, *Kurukh grammar*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1911, p. xi.

term *dhangar*.<sup>251</sup> Moreover, gradually, the term *dhangar* acquired the secondary significance of farm servant or farmhand among the Oraons.<sup>252</sup>

The above explanation clarifies that the term *dhangar* was neither a British nor a Kurukh term. The term originated from *dhan*, which is commonly used in both Hindi and Sadri. However, in comparison to Hindi, Sadri was more commonly spoken by the non-*adivasis* in Ranchi district. Thereby, we can closely associate the term with Sadri.

The first time the term *dhangar* made a place in the official record was in the year 1811, when Francis Buchannan came in contact with the *dhangars* in the indigo plantation.

The Dhanggar are another mountain tribe, originally from Chhota Nagpur, but Dhanggar is a Hindi word. In their own language they are called Urau (Oraon). Some years ago they began to come here, looking for temporary employment from the indigo planters; but liking the service; about 45 persons have brought their families and taken up a fixed abode. They have a language peculiar to themselves, and are a very industrious active people, who cultivate, act as a day labourers, and are willing to carry both burthens and the palanquin.<sup>253</sup>

It was in the indigo plantation itself the term '*dhangar*' became popular outside Ranchi district. Here *adivasi raiyats* of Ranchi district (like the Oraons, the Mundas) were recruited under the denomination of *dhangar* instead of their community's name.<sup>254</sup> A similar

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<sup>251</sup> Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur: their history, economic life and social organization*, p. 8.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Francis Buchannan, *An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11*, Patna: Printed at Patna Law Press, 1939, p. 265.

<sup>254</sup> The estimated number of *dhangar* (Oraons, Mundas and Lohras) in the Champaran district was around 25,000 in the year 1953. In this the numerical strength of Munda population was around two to three thousand and the strength of Lohras was also quite same. While Oraons alone constituted around nineteen-twenty thousand. See Choudhury, *Bihar district Gazttees: Champaran*, pp. 122-23.

trend was followed in other destinations as well. Soon outside Ranchi district, its inhabitants came to be commonly recognised as *dhangar*. This also influenced the European travellers who first came in contact with the *adivasi* communities of Ranchi district under the denomination of *dhangar*. As a consequence, they considered *dhangars* as the principal inhabitants of Ranchi district. For instance, Walter Hamilton stated, “The Khetauri, the Koeri and the Dhanggar are still the principal inhabitants of Chuta Nagpoor...”<sup>255</sup> Simultaneously, he conceptualised *dhangar* as slaves, which reflects in his account as well. For instance,

Theft is common throughout Ramghur, but murder, more prevalent among a particular class, which are the slaves possessed by persons inhabiting the mountainous and inaccessible interior, and of savage and ferocious habits.<sup>256</sup>

Following this account, colonial officials started considering the inhabitants of Ranchi and its neighbouring districts as slaves or bondsmen. For instance:

In South Behar (Ramghur, Midnapore and Jungle Mahal) , a great portion of agricultural labourers are slaves or bondsmen of the outcast tribes of Bhooyian, Rajwar, Ghatwar, Turi, Bokta, Cole (Kol) and Sontal (Santhal).<sup>257</sup>

This also reflects in the report of magistrate S.T. Cuthbert who considered *dhangar* as bondsman.<sup>258</sup> Till 1843, colonial officials defined *dhangar* as slaves or bondsman, but after the outlaw of slavery in India, they redefined them as paid labour, contract labour or retained

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<sup>255</sup> Walter Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindoostan and the Adjacent Countries*, vol. 1, London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1820, p. 288.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. 283; Before 1834, Ranchi district was under Ramgarh.

<sup>257</sup> The report from the Indian Law Commissioners on the subject of Slavery in the East Indies, Parliamentary Paper, 1841, vol. 28, p. 46.

<sup>258</sup> S.T. Cuthbert, ‘Extract from a Report on Chota Nagpore’, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Ireland Vol. 8, 1846*, p. 413.

labour.<sup>259</sup> Similarly, in Bihar, officials redefined *kamia* from slave to bonded labour after 1843.<sup>260</sup> Following this, in the labour market, the term *dhangar* became a synonym for labour. Thereby, in the labour market, *dhangar* was interchangeably used with labour for the *adivasi* communities of Ranchi district. Only after 1850, with the ethnographic precision, *adivasi* communities of Ranchi district were recognised by their community's name in the labour market. Despite this, in various colonial ethnographies, the term *dhangar* was commonly used for the Oraons like "The Oraons, better known as the dhangurs".<sup>261</sup> Needless to say, this was done to stereotype the Oraons as a labouring community. Though a specific section of the Oraons was involved in labour migration but there was an attempt to stereotype the whole community as a labouring community. In a similar way, Lambada as a community was stereotyped as criminals.<sup>262</sup>

In the colonial period, persistent attempts were made by the colonial ethnographers and officials to portray or label the Oraons as a labouring community. Such portrayal was clearly reflected in the ethnographic work of the Colonel. E. Dalton:

Oraon were especially created for a labouring class. They have had this so often dinned into their ears that they believe and admit it; and I have known instances of their abstaining from claiming, as authorized by law, commutation for the forced labour extracted by their landlords, because they considered that they were born to it. There are indeed some amongst them stern yeoman who cling of tenacity to the freeholds they have inherited, and will spend all they possess in defending them; but the bulk of the people seldom rise, in their own country, above the position of cottiers or labourers. There the value of labour has not risen in proportion to the advances that has

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<sup>259</sup> Dehon, *Religion and Customs of the Uraon*, p. 122; Choudhury, *Bihar district Gazetteers: Champaran*, p. 122.

<sup>260</sup> Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 222.

<sup>261</sup> Horatio Bickerstaffe Rowney, *The wild tribes in India*, London: Thos. De La Rue & Co., 1882, p. 78.

<sup>262</sup> Bhangya Bhukya, *Subjugated Nomads: The Lambadas under the rule of the Nizams*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Printed Limited, 2010, p. 240.

taken place in other parts of India; and Oraons are easily induced to migrate for a time to other climes, even to regions beyond the ‘great black water’ where their work is better remunerated.<sup>263</sup>

The main reason behind stereotyping the Oraons as a labouring community was a sudden increase in the labour demand with the end of slavery in British colonies in 1834. This was followed by new plantations opening in India that required cheap and abundant labour. This not only stressed the colonial officials to figure out a new community to fulfil the demand of labour but also to hide their capitalist interests. By portraying the Oraons as a labouring community, they wanted to justify the outflow of Oraon *raiya*s to British owned or funded plantations as a humanitarian intervention. Therefore, after *dhangar*, new identities like tea tribe were imposed on Oraon *raiya*s in Assam tea plantation. Here they were identified as tea tribes along with various communities (including both *adivasis* and caste people). Undoubtedly, this led to their cultural marginalisation.

## **A SHIFT FROM SEASONAL TO PERMANENT MIGRATION**

An insurrection (Kol rebellion) breaks out in the hill district, a ship arrives at Calcutta in demand of “free labourers”- to quell or should we say to starve the insurrection.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Edward Tuite Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta: Office of the superintendent of government printing, 1872, p. 262.

<sup>264</sup> Parbury’s *Oriental Herald and colonial Intelligence: containing a faithful digest of such information as must be considered generally interesting from the British Indian Presidencies and the Eastern Nations, Vol. I, January -June*, London: Parbury & co. publishers, 8 Leadenhall Street, 1838, p. 508.

Just after the end of the Kol insurrection 1831-32, the overseas indentured migration of Oraon *raiya*s started in 1834. According to Kaushik Ghosh and Shashank Sinha, migration was used as a strategy to disperse the restive *adivasis* to pacify the *adivasi* movements.<sup>265</sup> Here this theory cannot be accepted as much before the outbreak of rebellion, a hunt for free labourers was going on where Ranchi district was seen as the prime hunting ground for recruiting labourers for the sugar plantations. In this regard, S.T. Cuthbert had already penned a detailed report, see chapter 3. In his report, he not only gave a glimpse of the early migration of Oraon *raiya*s to the indigo plantation but also discussed about the mild slavery that, in his view, existed in the district. To support his theory, he gave a description of three bondsmen.

1. When a person receives a sum of money from another and executes a deed called a sawunk putta he becomes that person's bondsman or Sawunk for life and cannot be released from his bond, though he offer payment of the money he received.
2. A person who borrows a sum of money from another stimulating by a deed of serve the lender for a specified time or until the amount of the principal and interest be repaid.....
3. A person who hires himself for field labour, the period of which service is generally from Maugh to the end of Poos.....<sup>266</sup>

The first and second bondsmen were the rare practice, but the third one referred to the *dhangar*, which was in vogue in the district. After this report, planters and merchants of sugar plantations tried to procure knowledge about *dhangars*. Here they were guided by scanty

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<sup>265</sup> Kaushik Ghosh, 'A Market of Aboriginality: Primitivism and race classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India', in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (ed.) *Subaltern Studies X: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 18; Shashank Shekhar Sinha, *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating tribes in Gender Studies*, Kolkata: Bhatkal & Son, 2005, p. 105.

<sup>266</sup> Cuthbert, *Extract from a Report on Chota Nagpore*, p. 413.

knowledge which was mainly collected from both European and native indigo planters, who valued them for their ability to perform hard agricultural labour and their low wage. This knowledge helped the sugar planters to exemplify *dhangars* as a suitable labour force for sugar plantations. For instance: John Mackay,<sup>267</sup> a Sydney merchant and a planter, who had employed as many as 500 *dhangars* on his indigo plantations (which were situated in the districts of Jessore, Dacca, and Nadea in lower Bengal and Patna, Bahar, Tirhoot and Bhaugulpur) considered them as a fittest and cheap labour force to be employed for a sugar plantation.<sup>268</sup> This representation brought the sugar planters in a relief mode as they saw *dhangars* as a post-slavery solution. However, a wave of panic arose among the planters with the outburst of the Kol rebellion in December 1831. As the insurrection progressed in Ranchi district, it eventually deterred the planters, which ultimately became a commercial threat for the British. The movement's updates were recorded in some of Calcutta's leading newspapers and journals like Bengal Hurkaru, Jassos, Government Gazette, Calcutta Courier, and John Bull, which brought the insurrection under a considerable portion of public attention in Bengal presidency and outside India.<sup>269</sup> On 28<sup>th</sup> January 1832, the account of the rebellion first reached Calcutta in which it was stated that

In the district of Ramghur, the entire Dhanga Cole population of Chota Nagpore was in arms, roving about the country in bodies of considerable number committing the most frightful and abominable excesses, and having been joined by their neighbours.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> He resided in India for 28 years and apparently, he was the first man to import *dhangar* to the sugar plantation. In his indigo plantation, he generally employed 200 *dhangars* and on occasionally he had as many as 500. Cited in Sir George Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia, Accounts and Papers: seventeen volume, colonies, emigration, Australia, prison; West Indies; &c, session 15 November 1837 - 16 August 1838*, 1838, p. 41.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 35-36.

<sup>269</sup> 'Ramghur insurrection', in *The Calcutta Magazine and Monthly Register*, Calcutta: Samuel Smith and Co. Hare Street, MDCCCXXX, 1832, p. 55.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.* p. 55.

In the Kol insurrection, the terms *dhangar kol* and *larka kol* were popularly used in the newspapers, journals and official records.<sup>271</sup> For instance:

“The Dhangar Kol and the Larka kol-broke into unprecedentedly widespread rebellion”.<sup>272</sup>

It is noteworthy that these terms were mainly implied to the *adivasi* communities of two different spatial locations rather than for two different *adivasis*. In 1828, in regard to Ranchi district (before 1834, it was known as Chota Nagpur), Hamilton Waltor stated:

The Khetauri, the Keevi, and the Dhanggar still compose the bulk of the inhabitants.....the territory contains a large portion of the Cole and Larka Cole tribes, more especially in the pergunnah of Tamar, and the tracts situated near the hills that separate it from Singboom where there were disturbances in 1822.<sup>273</sup>

Similarly, William Dunbar stated:

The Coles inhabit a great extent of the country. In the former times they possessed the whole of Chota-Nagpore, which may now be said to be divided between them and the Dhangars or Ouraons, who came from Rotasghur. The chief men in most of the villages are still however of the old Moonda or Col tribe....the greatest part of Singbhm is inhabited by

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<sup>271</sup> The generic word *khole/cole/ kol* was collectively used for many *adivasi* communities like Oraons, Mundas and Hos despite their distinct cultural identity. This vernacular word is one of the epithets of abuse applied by non-*adivasis* to the *adivasi* who opposed their early settlement. In the year 1832, the *adivasis* of Ranchi and Singbhum district were classified into *dhangar kol* and *larka kol* on the basis of their regional belongings.

<sup>272</sup> Jagdish Chandra Jha, *The Tribal Revolt of Chotanagpur: 1831-1832, Patna*: Kashi Prasad Jayashwal Research Institute, 1987, p. 60.

<sup>273</sup> Walter Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer, Vol-I*, London: Printed for Parbury Allen, And Co., Leadenhall Street, 1828, p. 415.

Coles, and we find them numerous in Bamanghotty, and dispersed to the vicinities of Calcutta and Midnapore. The Lurka coles, as they are termed .....

<sup>274</sup>

The *dhangar kol* was loosely used to denote the *adivasis* (like Oraons and Mundas) of Ranchi district, which was also described as a *dhangar* district.<sup>275</sup> Moreover, *larka kol* was loosely used to denote the *adivasis* (like Hos) of Singhbhum district which was located in the southeast of Ranchi district. In the early official records or documents of the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the *adivasi* communities of these two districts were identified with *dhangar* and *larka*. As *dhangar* (like Oraons, Mundas) and *larka* (Ho) were the only Ranchi and Singhbhum district people who first came in direct contact with the colonial officials. The earliest encounter of colonial officials with *dhangar* took place in indigo plantation and Calcutta streets. Similarly, colonial officials' earliest encounter with *larka* took place during a military expedition in Singhbhum in 1819-20. This is how; the *adivasi* communities of two districts came to be recognised with the name *dhangar* and *larka* group throughout the Bengal presidency.

Several articles were circulated in which both *dhangar kol* and *larka kol* were portrayed as semi-barbarous, predatory, dishonest, bandits and dangerous enough to take up arms on the slightest provocation. Alongside, various opinions were thrown on their unsuitability for the labour market.

...they (dhanger and larka cole) appear to be an indolent race, much addicted to the use of ardent spirits, and so utterly beyond the exercise of

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<sup>274</sup> William Dunbar, 'Some observation on the Manners, Customs, and Religious Opinions of the Lurka Coles', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland, Vol: 18*, London: Bernard Quaritch 15 Piccadilly, M.DCCC, LXI, 1834, p. 371.

<sup>275</sup> 'The Kols, The Insurrection of the 1832, And the Land Tenure Act of 1869', *The Calcutta Review volume 1*, Calcutta: Barham, Hill & Co. Dalhousie Square, 1869, p. 147.

every useful employment, that all labour, both domestic and agricultural....<sup>276</sup>

Nevertheless, these negative accounts created uncertainties in sugar planters' minds, deterring them from relying on *dhangars*. This was very well sensed by the colonial officials or bureaucrats who tried to contradict such accounts. During this period, Major Sutherland came forward and penned a report on the insurrection to change the image of the *dhangar*.

The dhangar kols, a more peaceable tribe, were driven into the insurrection by the Lurka Kol.<sup>277</sup>

In his account, he clearly stated that the *larka kol* of Singhbhum district commenced the rebellion and later instigated the peace-loving *dhangar kol* of Ranchi district to partake in the uprising. In a nutshell, he tried to portray *larka kol*, a warlike tribe who have been criticised for their martial spirit in the early official records. In the early records, *larka/ lurka/ laraka kol* were synonymy used for the Hos of Singhbhum. The term became increasingly used after Ho militancy against the colonial army (headed by Major E. Roughsedge) during the Ho revolt of 1819-20. Here, the Hos gave a tough fight to the colonial army, who were equipped with a much more advanced weapon than the Hos. For instance:

They are represented to a resolute and warlike race, though in rudest state, and when it was found necessary to subject them to British authority, in

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<sup>276</sup> *Ramghur insurrection*, p. 81.

<sup>277</sup> *The Kols, The Insurrection of the 1832, And the Land Tenure Act of 1869*, p. 147.

1820, they made a desperate resistance against a superior force, although their weapons were bow, arrows, battle-axes and stones.<sup>278</sup>

In the colonial documents, the term *larka* was not used to romanticise the bravery of the Hos but to degrade their image. The colonial representation tried to create an impression that the Hos was a volatile, warlike, aggressive and bloodthirsty group of people with no civilisation traits. In 1832, a similar misrepresentation was reproduced to create a reputation of the *larka kol* as a “most determined and warlike” to justify their commencement of insurrection and clear the volatile image of *dhangar kol*, which was circulating in some of the newspapers.<sup>279</sup> In a nutshell, *dhangar kol* were portrayed as docile, opposite to the fierce, martial, uncontrollable savage and warlike image of *larka kols*. For instance:

The sending of arrow commenced in Sonapore. Such towns as meant to join those by whom the arrows were sent were required to return the arrows whole, and such as meant to oppose them were required to return the arrows broken. This is a custom of the Lurka Kols and had never before been generally adopted by the Dhangar Kols.<sup>280</sup>

Following Major Sutherbert, Mr Blunt (a member of the Supreme Council), Jasoos and Bengal Hurkaru newspapers tried to portray *dhangar kol* as a suitable labour force for overseas indentured migration by portraying them “peaceful, industrious and hard-working”. Jasoos and Bengal Huruku stated:

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<sup>278</sup> Account of the Kholes or Coles in *Asiatic Journal and monthly register for British and Foreign India, China and Australasia*, Vol: VIII- New Series, May-August, 1832, London: Parbury, Allen and Co., Leadenhall Street, 1832, p. 264.

<sup>279</sup> To an extent, to separate the *dhangar kol* and *larka kol*, Singbhum was initially not included in South Western Frontier Agency (SWFA) which came into being in 1834.

<sup>280</sup> *The Kols, The Insurrection of the 1832, And the Land Tenure Act of 1869*, p. 147.

Dunga (Dhangar) Coles are an industrious, hard-working race and by no means warlike, who would have preferred, had it been in their power, appealing to the law instead of the sword for protection against their oppressor.<sup>281</sup>

In 1832, Mr Blunt stated:

The Dhangar Kols of Chota Nagpore, ignorant poor and uncivilised as they are, have ever been regarded as peaceful and inoffensive race of people, who possess few wants, and who are patient and unresisting in an extraordinary degree.<sup>282</sup>

From 1834-1930, these descriptions were strategically used in the official documents and ethnographic reports to justify the British proletarianisation venture in Ranchi district. After going through the above explanation, we can clearly state that the Kol rebellion not resulted in the overseas migration of Oraon *raiyats*. In contrast, it came as a threat in the commercial venture of the British. This is one of the reasons why *bhuinhari* friendly administration and policies were introduced after the rebellion to check the future uprisings in Ranchi district. Nonetheless, there came a shift in the migration of Oraon *raiyats* to overseas destinations like Mauritius and British Guiana.

## COMMENCEMENT OF OVERSEAS MIGRATION

In 1833, the late Mr Caleer and some other gentlemen, with considerable property, embarked at Calcutta in the barque “Mercury” with 50 dhangars and

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<sup>281</sup> Jasoos, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1832, Bengal Hurkaru, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1832, cited in Jagdish Chandra Jha, *The Tribal Revolt of Chotanagpur: 1831-1832*, Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayashwal Research Institute, 1987, p. 29.

<sup>282</sup> *The Kols, The Insurrection of the 1832, And the Land Tenure Act of 1869*, p. 152.

their wives, for King George's Sound, but neither the vessel nor the adventurers have since been heard of.<sup>283</sup>

In 1834, after the end of the Kol rebellion, the first batch of 36 *dhangars* was shipped to Mauritius as indentured labourers.<sup>284</sup> Mauritius was the first sugar colony to receive *dhangar* as indentured labour, and later it was followed by British Guiana in 1838. From 1834 to 1838, a considerable number of *dhangars* were imported from Ranchi district, which was viewed as the main feeder area for Calcutta port.<sup>285</sup> For instance: from August 1834 to May 1837, nearly 7,000 labours emigrated from Calcutta port to Mauritius. Out of these, almost one half of the whole number were "hill coolies," i.e., "*dhangars, kols* or Santhals".<sup>286</sup> However, from 1836, the resentment against *dhangar* traffic started surfacing in India and England. In India, the reformists and local capitalists voiced against the sugar planters for mishandling and abusing the ignorant and helpless *dhangars* during their voyage and in the plantation field, resulting in their sickness and high mortality rate. They saw the indentured system as a 'new form of slavery. To control these abuses, and ill-treatment, on 1st May 1837, Act V was passed where the chief magistrate at the Calcutta port court had to exhibit and explain a memorandum of the contract to a *dhangar*, which was supposed to be written in both English and in their mother-tongue.<sup>287</sup> This memorandum was framed to specify the nature, the term, and the

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<sup>283</sup> *Emigration: Canada and Australia, Accounts and Papers*, p. 36.

<sup>284</sup> Brij Lal, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree: Origin and Background of Fijis North Indian Indentured Migrants, 1879-1916*, PhD Thesis, The Australian National University, 1980, p. 62.

<sup>285</sup> The three main ports from where the embarkment for sugar plantations took place was: Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

<sup>286</sup> J. Geoghegan, *Note on Emigration from India*, Calcutta: Office superintendent of Government printing, 1873, p. 2.

<sup>287</sup> The Act V, 1837 came into operation on 1st June 1837 and was applicably only to the Calcutta port. Later under Act XXXII of 1837, the same regulations of previous Act were extended to other two ports of British India;

service's wages as settled by the contract. Moreover, only after making sure that the *dhangar* had fully understood the contract terms, the officers could take their thumb impression on the contract. To what extent this Act was executed got exposed in the newspapers in a short span of time. It was often argued that *dhangars* entered into a contract without understanding the nature of their engagement. This was taken as the strongest argument in the meeting organised in Calcutta Town Hall on 10th July 1838 for preventing the exportation of *dhangars* to the sugar colonies. This meeting was attended by some prominent figures like Dwarkanath Tagore, Mr T. Dicken, Thomas Boaz and Rev. James Charles.<sup>288</sup> They contended that the previous Act, which was enacted for the protection of *dhangars*, was framed at a period where it was very well known that the *dhangars*, who formed a majority labourer, could not read. In addition, their language was unwritten. In this framework, it was possible that the Act was not executed. Consequently, Dwarkanath Tagore made his remark on his experience with *dhangars*. He stated that in Calcutta and in the indigo plantation, *dhangars* usually stayed not more than eight months apart from his family.<sup>289</sup> Then unexpectedly, how they willingly agreed to leave not only their family members (wife and children) but also their abode for a long period of five years. On this, he concluded that this could only be possible if deceitful means had been used to induce them to the sugar colonies. In this meeting, concern was also shown towards the family members of *dhangars* who were left behind. The meeting ended with a resolution where the participants requested the British government of India for a full inquiry into the indenture system and for the suspension of further shipment of *dhangar* and

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The contract was the foundation of indenture system. The term of contract was for five years, where 5 rupees was fixed as a minimum money wage for a month, in addition to ration and clothing. See Geoghegan, *Note on Emigration from India*, p. 2.

<sup>288</sup> Parbury's *Oriental Herald and colonial Intelligence: containing a faithful digest of such information as must be considered generally interesting from the British Indian Presidencies and the Eastern Nations, Vol. II, July - December*, London: Parbury & co. publishers, 8 Leadenhall Street, 1838, p. 479.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.* p. 482.

other Indian coolies. Following this meeting, an inquiry committee (also known as Dicken Committee 1838-40) was set up in Calcutta in August 1838 to inquire about the allegations and expediency to continue importing *dhangars* to sugar colonies of Mauritius and Demerara (British Guiana).<sup>290</sup> The committee was composed of Messrs. T. Dickens, J. P. Grant, W. F. Dowson, Rev. James Charles, Babu Russomoy Dutt and Major Edward Archer.<sup>291</sup> They collected written and oral shreds of evidence from the planters, returned labourers, police, magistrate, missionaries, doctors and ship captains. During the inquiry, it was figured out that the previous Acts were not of much greater practical utility in restraining the illegal importation of *dhangars*. It was also pointed out that before embarkment, various fraudulent methods like kidnapping, misinformation, misapprehension, and false promises, false imprisonment were used to a considerable extent to entrap the *dhangars*. According to Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, abduction, kidnapping, and illegal confinements were the characteristics of the early unregulated phase (1834-41) of migration.<sup>292</sup> However, these methods were not just confined to the early phase but were also visible in the later phase. According to Samita Sen, kidnapping and abduction were vigorously used for inducing labours in the tea plantation of Assam.<sup>293</sup> Moreover, similar techniques are being used in the contemporary period for child trafficking in Jharkhand state. In most cases, *dhangars* were

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<sup>290</sup> 'Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India to the committee appointed to inquire respecting the Exportation of Hill Coolies, with Minute of Evidence & c.', *Account and Papers: Nineteen Volume, Colonies, Session 26 January-22 June 1841, Volume: XVI*, 1841, p. 4.

<sup>291</sup> Nirmal Chandra Sinha, *Studies in Indo-British Economy Hundred years ago*, Calcutta: A. Mukherjee & co. 2, College square, 1946, p. 79.

<sup>292</sup> Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, 'Tribal and Indentured Migrants in Colonial India: Modes of Recruitment and Forms of Incorporation', in Peter Robb (ed.) *Dalit Movements and the Meaning of Labour in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 171.

<sup>293</sup> Samita Sen, 'Kidnapping in Chotanagpur Recruitment for Assam tea plantations in a Tribal Area' in Sanjukta Das Gupta and Raj Sekhar Basu (ed.) *Narratives from the margin: Aspects of Adivasi history in India*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012.

distantly made aware of the nature of a sea voyage, foreign labour and contract terms at the time of consenting to emigrate. The recruiters usually misinformed them that Mauritius and British Guiana were only a few-hour river journey from Calcutta but in reality, it was three-four months journey. During an examination, magistrate, J. H. Patton stated:

The Dhangars certainly did not- I very much question whether anyone of them did-I doubt whether majority even understood a word of what was said at the Police as far as concerned a great many of them, neither I nor any man in my Court could make them understand one word; others who understood a little Hindoostanee were capable of comprehending a little, but none of them admitted that they had had the contract explained to them.<sup>294</sup>

Similarly, during the examination of a planter, Mr W. F. Dowson stated:

I engaged a highly respectable Armerian- a Mr. Carapiet to proceed Chutah Nagpore, the district where the Dhaugars live. .... My orders to Mr. Carapiet were, to engage no coolie without explaining him the nature of employment, and he was to leave his country for a period of five years. It proved to be fruitless mission, Mr. Carapiet did not succeeded in procuring a single coolie, at the very time that Duffadars sent by Mr. Hughes were engaging coolies by hundreds in the immediate vicinity.<sup>295</sup>

The barring lies of recruiters brought the *dhangars* an enormous disadvantage. They suffered hardship and miseries during their long sea voyage of three-four months and in the sugar colonies. In the overcrowded ships, *dhangars* were shipped without the requisite

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<sup>294</sup> 'J. H. Patton, Esq, Magistrate of 24 Pergunnahs, Examined', in *Report of the committee appointed by the supreme government of India*, p. 96.

<sup>295</sup> 'Mr Dowson, Esq. planter, Examined', *Report of the committee appointed by the supreme government of India*, p. 139.

accommodation, food, drinking water and medical facilities.<sup>296</sup> In such circumstances, mortality due to dehydration, starvation, drowning or sea sickness was common. One can get a clear understanding of their poor condition from figure 2.

**Figure: 2.**

**Hill coolies landing at Mauritius**



Source: Illustrated London News, 6th August 1842, pp.193-4.  
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/india/docs/coolies.htm>  
accessed on 9/10/2020.

Regarding the condition of *dhangars*, Lord Brougham shared an account of a vessel having carried over 150 hill labourers where out of the whole population, ten died in the vessel

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<sup>296</sup> It was noticed that majority ships employed for the importation of coolies from India, carried 200-500 coolies each. See *Emigration from India, The Export of Coolies, and other labourers, to Mauritius*, Calcutta: Thomas Ward & Co., 27 Paternoster Row, 1842, pp. 6-7.

during a voyage of four months.<sup>297</sup> This makes a mortality proportion of 1 in 15. In the sugar colonies, *dhangars* were mainly employed under the planters, who were former slave-owners. Here *dhangars* were neither “treated nor fed well, but were obliged to work hard, late and early”.<sup>298</sup> In short, they received inhuman or slavish treatment from the planters and were kept under strict surveillance. The incidences of contract violations were quite rampant in the sugar plantation. The planters violated the contracts, and no justice was given to the *dhangars*. In the contract, a certain amount was fixed as a money wage, but there were incidences where planters paid no money wages to the *dhangars*.<sup>299</sup> In other cases, planters paid money wages after making the various deduction. For instance, a rupee monthly was deducted to repay the voyage expenses and another rupee to repay the advance amount of six months made to them previous to their departure.<sup>300</sup> Under this setting, many ended up becoming indebted to the planters after the end of the contract. This highlights that *dhangars* who were brought under the name of indentured labourers turned out to be new slaves in the sugar plantations.

This brought the British government of India under criticism for promoting a new kind of slavery. On 29th May 1839, the importation of *dhangars* along with other Indian labourers to the sugar colonies was suppressed as a precautionary measure on the ground of humanitarian concern to protect their humanitarian protagonist image. During this period, there was also a demand for *dhangar* in the tea plantations of Assam.<sup>301</sup> Hereby, this ban can also be seen as an attempt to divert the importation of the *dhangar* population from sugar colonies to Assam tea plantation. For instance: In 1839, Captain Wilkinson, the first Agent to the Governor-General, South-Western Frontier (later known as Chotanagpur), tried to

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<sup>297</sup> Geoghegan, *Note on Emigration from India*, p. 9.

<sup>298</sup> *Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India*, p. 171.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>300</sup> *Emigration from India, The Export of Coolies, and other labourers, to Mauritius*, p. 8.

<sup>301</sup> The first tea industry in Assam was formed around 1839.

convince the *adivasi* communities of Ranchi district to migrate to Assam tea plantation to support the British commercial interest within India. In this regard, he informed them that if they would proceed to Assam for tea plantation,

they would never receive less than three rupees per mensem, for their labour and would be allowed land to cultivate, free of expenses, for a period of five years, and have their travelling expenses to Assam paid at the rate of two rupees per mensem.<sup>302</sup>

Despite such an offer, he failed to induce them to emigrate to the Assam tea plantation. Besides, there was a fear among *adivasi* communities that he would send them to sugar colonies like their other kin members under the delusion of such a proposal.<sup>303</sup> John Davidson, another officer, made a similar attempt, but he faced the same fate.<sup>304</sup> Thereby, at this period, the importation of *dhangar* to the Assam tea plantation proved to be unsuccessful. A similar attempt was made in the 1870s as well, which proved to be a success where the emigration of *Oraon raiyats* was completely diverted from overseas to inland destinations.

The inquiry committee submitted their full and final report on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1840 and did not favour uplift the ban. In their view, permission to renew *dhangar* traffic would weaken the moral influence of the British government of India throughout the world and deaden or utterly destroy the effect of all future remonstrances and negotiations respecting the slave trade.<sup>305</sup> This came as a serious blow to the planters of sugar colonies, and soon hue and cry started for the upliftment of ban. Within a few years, the ban started hitting the plantation economy with a shortage of labour supply. Thereby, to maintain the plantation system's

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<sup>302</sup> *Emigration from India, The Export of Coolies, and other labourers, to Mauritius*, pp. 46- 47.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> *Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India*, p. 9.

economy, the British government of India lifted the ban for Mauritius in 1842 and for British Guiana in 1844. With the green signal, the traffic of *dhangars* restarted to the sugar colonies after a short interruption under a number of enactments. During the 1840s- 1850, an estimated two-fifth or one-half of emigrants originated from Ranchi district.<sup>306</sup> From the 1850s, the importation of *dhangar* in sugar colonies started declining, and by the 1870s, they were almost replaced by the Dalit population of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Ironically, this period also witnessed the categorisation of caste and tribe. Thereby, one can also see this as an attempt to divert the population of caste and *adivasi* populace to two polarised destinations. Table 12 and Figure 3 represents the decline in the importation of *dhangars* to sugar colonies from Ranchi district.

**Table. 12.**

**Emigrants from Ranchi district to Sugar colonies from 1844-1864**

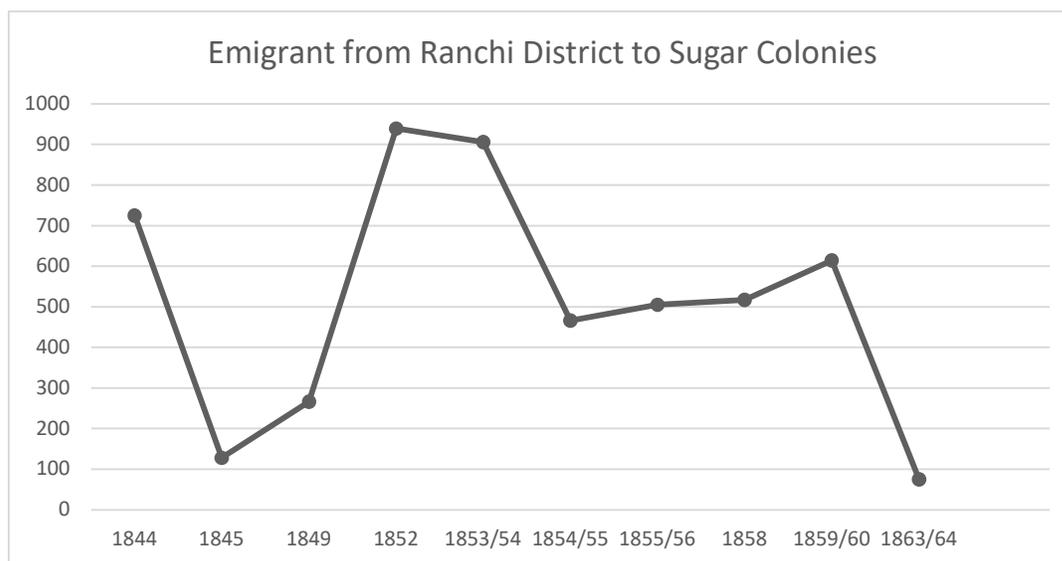
1844	1845	1849	1852	1853-	1854-	1855-	1858	1859-	1861-	1863-	Total
				54	55	56		60	62	64	
725	128	267	939	906	466	505	517	750	614	75	5, 892

Source: Brij Lal, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree: Origin and Background of Fijis North Indian Indentured Migrants, 1879-1916*, PhD Thesis, The Australian National University, 1980, p.123.

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<sup>306</sup> Johannes Gerrit de Kruijf, *Guyana Junction. Globalisation, localisation, and the production of East Indianness*, Dutch University Press, 2006, p. 57.

**Figure 3.**



**Note:** This is a statistical representation of table 12 and it highlights the increase/decrease in the number of emigrants from Ranchi district to sugar colonies.

According to colonial reports, the importation of *dhangars* was gradually stopped or declined to sugar colonies “partly from the competition of the tea districts and because of heavy mortality at sea”.<sup>307</sup> Here, it cannot be denied that the newly opened tea plantation in Assam struggled for the cheap and abundant labour supply. From 1830-1860, tea planters of Assam were repeatedly pleading the British to take significant steps to fulfil the scarcity of labour in the tea plantation.<sup>308</sup> Thereby, discontinuing the importation of *dhangar* in sugar colonies can be seen as the strategy to shift the *dhangar* population to Assam tea plantation.

<sup>307</sup> Geoghegan, *Note on Emigration from India*, p. 71.

<sup>308</sup> Kaushik Ghosh, ‘A Market of Aboriginality: Primitivism and race classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India’, in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (ed.) *Subaltern Studies X: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 15.

In the indentured labour system, the whole voyage journey of a *dhangar* was documented from the point of their recruitment to their departure from the sugar colonies. According to Kathleen Harrington Watt, this documentation made a significant difference between the slavery and indentured labour system.<sup>309</sup> The British administrators recorded *dhangars* name, age, height, destination, caste, ship, contract period, nature of a contract, date of the agreement, and particular mark, see table 13.

**Table: 13**

**Register of Indian labourers proceeding from the port of Calcutta, under the provision of Act no. 12 of 1837**

N o.	Na mes	Cast e and fro m whe nce	Pe rio d of co ntr act	Nat ure of cont ract	Da te of co ntr act	De sti na tio n	Age	Hei ght	Particula r mark	O n wh at shi p	Contract with whom	R e m a r k s
16	Bis Ram (Bo y)	Dha nga, Nag pore	Fi ve ye ars	Free labo urer s	29th Dec ember 18 37.	De me rar a	Yrs 18	Ft. In 4 10	.copper, mole left temple	W hit by	J.E. Mathews, esq	
61	Beet lain	Ditt o	Dit to O	Ditt o	Dit to	Dit to	16	4 7	Dark brown, none	Dit to	Ditto	A g e n t s , M e s
79	Ram deea l	Ditt o	Dit to	Ditt o	Dit to	Dit to	20	5 2	Brown, small pock	Dit to	J.Cameron	

<sup>309</sup> Kathleen Harrington Watt, 'The Legacy of Indentured Labor' in S. Ratuva (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity*, Singapore: Springer Nature, 2019, p. 1773.

81	Fatungaw	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	22	5 2	Black, on the forehead	Ditto	Ditto
82	Gohabhur Sing	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	23	5 4	Brown. Ears bored, marks on the back	Ditto	Ditto
83	Doyalle	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	28	5 4	Brown, right ear bored	Ditto	J.E.Mathews, esq
85	Boobun Sing	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	24	5 4½	Brown, small pock	Ditto	J. Cameron
86	Chuttea	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	20	5 2	Dark brown, small pock	Ditto	Ditto
87	Beer Saw	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	22	5 4	Brown, on the nose	Ditto	Ditto
88	Burgun	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	20	5 0	Brown, left cheek cut-mark	Ditto	Ditto
89	Aukul	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	20	4 11	Brown, ears bored	Ditto	ditto
90	Durreewa Sing	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	25	5 4½	Dark brown	Ditto	Ditto
91	Juggoroo	Ditto	Ditto	Sirdar	Ditto	Ditto	29	5 3½	Black, none	Ditto	Ditto
92	Bejo	Ditto	Ditto	Free laborers	Ditto	Ditto	23	5 4½	Brown, right shoulder	Ditto	Ditto

s r s . G i l l a n d e r s , A r b u t h n o t & C o

Source: 'The Hill Coolies in British Guiana', *Accounts and Papers: Twenty One Volumes, 16 Session -11 August 1840, Vol: XXXIV, pp. 26-29.*

According to the recorded information, in 1837, out of 415 Indian registered labours for British Guiana, 30 % of labours were recorded as *dhangar*.<sup>310</sup> In which the majority of them belonged to the age group of 20-30 years, which was seen as the desired age group for a sugar plantation. In the sugar plantation, men's desired age group was from 18-30 and females from 12-35.<sup>311</sup> Concurrently, in the sugar plantations of British Guiana and Mauritius, *dhangar* men formed the majority of emigrants while the number of women and children remained negligible, see table 14. This was viewed as a serious problem as planters desired to procure women equal to men, not only due to their engagement with agriculture. Nevertheless, in the sugar plantation, women were seen as an essential part of production and reproduction.<sup>312</sup> Apart from this, they were highly recommended to secure the *dhangar* men in the sugar plantation. In the context of their importance, Charles Bury, a sugar planter, stated:

The introduction females (if possible, in equal numbers with the men) should form a main feature in any extended system of immigration. It would tend to remove disputes and crime amongst them; and further, be the means of rendering them contented with their lot in the colony.<sup>313</sup>

As a consequence, various strategies were adopted to induce females in a sugar plantation. In one strategy, *dhangar* men were sent back to recruit their wives or other females from their kin.<sup>314</sup> In the year 1841, 48 Mauritius labourers were examined who returned back to Bengal. Out of them, the majority belonged to *dhangar*. During the examination, many stated

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<sup>310</sup> 'The Hill Coolies in British Guiana', *Accounts and Papers: Twenty One Volumes, 16 Session -11 August 1840, Vol: XXXIV, pp. 16-29.*

<sup>311</sup> Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia*, in *Accounts and Papers*, p. 23.

<sup>312</sup> Madhwi, 'Recruiting Indentured Labour for overseas colonies, 1834-1910', *Social Scientist, September-October 2015, Vol. 43, No. 9/10, JSTOR, p. 56.*

<sup>313</sup> Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia*, in *Accounts and Papers*, p. 45.

<sup>314</sup> Bates and Carter, *Tribal and Indentured Migrants in Colonial India*, p. 176.

that they were accompanied by their wives, who helped them make good money on the plantation. For instance: Juggarnath Mate returnee from Mauritius, stated,

I am a Dhangur, used to cultivate land in Chota Nagpore, I came to Calcutta with Roghoonath here present; I have brought back rupees 294; I could never save any money from my old trade as cultivator; I took my wife and four children.....the oldest boy earned three rupees the last month; he had been sick before; my wife earned two rupees a month for one year, and three rupees per month for two years...<sup>315</sup>

Similarly, Jadoo, another returnee from Mauritius, stated:

I went with Roghoonath, and I am a Dhangur; I have brought with me 220 rupees; I took my wife with me; she is sick on board; she earned first two rupees, and then three rupees per month.<sup>316</sup>

The indenture labour system was not designed for the betterment of labours. Instead, it was solely meant for the commercial benefit of the planters and the British.<sup>317</sup> Thereby, such false narratives were merely used to promote family migration from Ranchi district. Despite such efforts, throughout 1830-1870, the number of women and children remained negligible in the sugar plantation.

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<sup>315</sup> 'Hill Coolies: Copies of Papers respecting the Exportation of Hill Coolies, received from the Government of India, in continuation of those presented to the House of Commons on 11 June 1841', *Account and Papers: Nineteen Volume, Colonies, Session 26 January-22 June 1841, Volume: XVI, 1841, p. 53.*

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Rana Pratap Behal and Prabhu P. Mahopatra, 'Tea and Money versus Human Life': The rise and fall of the indenture system in the Assam tea plantations 1840- 1908', *The Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 19, April 1992, p. 2.*

**Table 14:**

**Number of Labourers introduced into Mauritius from Calcutta, from 1st August 1834  
– October 1836**

Name of vessels	Date of Arrival	Men	Women	Children
Sarah	1st August 1834	39		
Atlas	2 Nov 1834	36		
Vesper	13th January 1835	167		
Peter Proctor	15th February 1835	50		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Edmond Castle	30 Nov 1835	146		
Elizabeth	14 Dec 1835	77		
Protector	15th December 1835	179		
Sir Herbert Taylor	19th January 1836	208	2	1
Drongan	5th May 1836	70		
Edmond Castle	8th June 1836	46		
Sir John Rae Ried	15 Jun 1836	15	1	
Thalia	17 September 1836	312	18	2
William Wilson	18th September 1836	62		
Nerbudda	27th September 1836	288		
Africanus	5th October 1836	75		
Indian Oak	17th October 1836	204		
Emmee	21 October 1836	211	15	4
Juliana	28 October 1836	394	24	3
Sophia	19 November 1836	335	10	5
Cavendish Bentinck	22 Nov 1836	259	26	
Henry	23 Nov 1836	20		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
--	-	-		-
Apollon	12 October 1838	98	1	
William Lockerby	24th October 1838	109	3	
Cahmere Merchant	- October 1838	234	12	
	Total	12,994	198	51

Source: 'Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India to the committee appointed to inquire respecting the Exportation of Hill Coolies, with Minute of Evidence & c.', *Account and Papers: Nineteen Volume, Colonies, Session 26 January-22 June 1841, Volume: XVI, 1841, pp. 194-5.*

## DHANGAR MANIA IN THE SUGAR PLANTATION

In the 1830's Negros, the newly liberated ex-slaves of the sugar colonies, were often represented as drunken, lazy, idle, difficult to manage and uncontrollable.<sup>318</sup> This was due to the end of the absolute control of sugar planters over Negro population, who served them as slaves for years. The end of slavery gave the Negro population a choice to say no to the plantation work. This made it difficult for the sugar planters to induce them to continue their sugar plantation service. There were many instances where they showed opposition to work in the sugar plantation. With the choice, they also got hold of bargaining or negotiating power. Altogether, they became difficult to manage or control. Simultaneously, they became an expensive labour force on the plantation.

In the 1820s, the upcoming situation was already predicted by the sugar planters, who were in serious doubt regarding the possibility of inducing the existing Negro population to work in the sugar plantation after abolishing slavery. Though they found immediate relief for a short period with the introduction of apprenticeship. Under this, ex-slaves had to work for sugar planters for four to five years mandatorily. This was a remedial measure to safeguard the planter's interest from the immediate scarcity of labour. Despite this, tension and anxiety were stimulated among the planters before the end of the apprenticeship. In this regard, on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1836, John Gladstone addressed a letter to Messrs. Gillanders Arbuthnot & Co., of Calcutta, in which he stated:

You will probably be aware that we are very particularly situated with our negro apprentices in the West Indies, and that it is matter of doubt and

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<sup>318</sup> *Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India*, p. 170.

In a similar way, the local populace of Assam was stigmatized as lazy, indolent or addicted to the use of Opium for showing reluctance to work in Assam tea plantation. See Percival Griffiths, *The History of India Tea Industry*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967, p. 101.

uncertainty, how far they may be induced to continue their service on the plantations after their apprenticeship expires in 1840.<sup>319</sup>

Consequently, they started their search for an alternative labour force before and after the abolition of slavery. In this crucial period, *dhangar* emerged as the best alternative source for Negro population.

In 1834-6, the successful introduction of *dhangar* in Mauritius generated their demand in British Guiana. Moreover, a considerable number of them were soon employed in the two colonies where planters praised the utility of *dhangars*. In this regard, Mauritius planter Ma de la Riviere stated:

of the Coolies from Calcutta as being the best workmen employed in the island, whether Coolies from other parts of India, or Africans. We said the Calcutta Coolies were more docile and worked harder than any other labourers.<sup>320</sup>

Such favourable reports generated more curiosity within the planters to get access to *dhangars*. Soon, *dhangars* became a hot topic among the sugar planters. Many planters made their private inquiries to know their efficiency and from where and how to procure them in good number. The inquiries made the planters believe that the *dhangar* could prove advantageous to the plantation economy and be procured from Ranchi district. Related to this, Robert Scott stated:

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<sup>319</sup> *Hill Coolies: A brief Exposure of the Deplorable Condition of the Hill Coolies in British Guiana and Mauritius, and of the Nefarious means by which they were induced to resort to these colonies*, London: Harvey and Darton, Gracechurch Street, 1840, p. 4.

<sup>320</sup> *Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India*, p. 8.

I have taken much pains to gain information relative to the labourers of Bengal, commonly called Coolies or Dhangars. My attention was first directed to them by their successful introduction into the Mauritius, and the very favourable reports of their subsequent good conduct and usefulness. It then became an anxious question, whether those men can be brought here also, to supply the deficiency of labour which is pressing so heavily upon the colony; my inquiries have led me to believe that they can, and with great advantage to the community.<sup>321</sup>

From 1830-1850, the demand for *dhangar* was so high that various attempts were made to import more *dhangars* in these colonies. The agents (*arkatis* or *duffadars*) were appointed in India to seek out more *dhangars* and ship them off under a contract to sugar plantations. To fulfil the demand and make a profit, the agents often used fraudulent means like forwarding various labour in the name of *dhangar* to the sugar plantations.<sup>322</sup> From 1830-1850, there was an obsession for *dhangar* in the sugar plantations. The question which is posed here is what made them ideal labour for sugar plantations. The range of social, commercial and racial reasons had been put forward by John Mackay, a Sydney merchant, Mr J. R. Mayo, Messrs Collins, Revell, Mackellar, Scott, Bury and Howard.<sup>323</sup> The majority of them resided in India, for 10-30 years and out of their experience, they put forward these reasons. In their understanding, *dhangars* were hardy, cheap, industrious, habitual migrants, agriculturally based communities and free from the caste and religious prejudices.<sup>324</sup> All these qualities made them a prolific labour force according to the model of the sugar plantation. In the later period, for the

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<sup>321</sup> *Emigration: Canada and Australia, Accounts and Papers*, p. 40.

<sup>322</sup> Henry G. Dalton, *The History of British Guiana, Vol. 1*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855, p. 469.

<sup>323</sup> Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia*, in *Accounts and Papers*, p. 34.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

same reasons, they were depicted as first-class labourers and preferred by the planters in the tea plantation of Assam and Western Duar.

### **1. Cheap and industrious:**

Planters aimed to secure labour numerous, cheaply and experienced for the profit of the plantation economy. According to planters, these criteria were fulfilled by their new invention '*dhangars*'. In this regard John Mackay asserts that:

They (*dhangar*) are quiet, docile and industrious. The total cost, including passage here and back, at the end of their apprenticeship, which is generally five years, together with food, clothing & c. is no more than five Spanish dollars per month, or 5 s. per week, which you will allow is cheap in any country.<sup>325</sup>

The *dhangars* who were preferred by the sugar planters had already gained a reputation of industrious, hard-working, reliable and docile in their former workplace. They were seen as experienced labour who knew the nature of plantation work and to work under European employees. In short, their general utility had been proved in the indigo plantation.<sup>326</sup> This reputation was reproduced to fulfil the characteristic of a reliable alternative labour force in the sugar plantation. Later, the same was used in the tea plantation of Assam and Western Duar.

The *dhangars* were also seen as low-priced labour in the indigo plantation. In the indigo plantation, they were usually paid from rupees two to rupees three (from 4s to 5 s.) per month.<sup>327</sup> This created an outlook among the sugar planters that *dhangars* were accustomed to

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>326</sup> Tirthankar Roy, 'Sardars, Jobbers, Kanganies: The Labour Contractor and Indian Economic History', *Modern Asian Studies*, Sep. 2008, Vol. 42, No. 5, Sep 2008, p. 980.

<sup>327</sup> Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia*, in *Accounts and Papers*, p. 36.

low wages and to low maintenance. Thereby, they were seen as profitable for the economy of the sugar plantation. In the sugar plantation, their minimal money wage was one-third of the newly liberated Negro population. The money wages of free labourers at the Mauritius:

	<b>£</b>	s.	d.
Net wages of the coolie (dhangar), at 8s. a month-----	4	16	-
Food and clothing-----	4	2	-
Gross annual receipt of the dhangar ----	<b>£</b>	. 8	18 -
Wages of the free labourer, negro or mulatto, at one dollar, or 4s a day -----	73	--	-
Deduct the necessary cost of food and clothing -----	4	2	-
Net receipt <b>£</b>	. 68	18	-
Wages of the free labourer, negro or mulatto, at half dollar, a day -----	36	10	-
Deduct the necessary cost of food and clothing -----	4	--	-
Net <b>£</b>	. 32	8	- <sup>328</sup>

According to planters, the variation in the money wages was due to the difference in their muscular strength. In their understanding, Negro population had better muscular strength than *dhangars*. In reality, the difference in the money wages was due to unlike bargaining or negotiating power. Negroes who were dominant in the sugar plantation had better bargaining or negotiating power than the newly arrived *dhangars*. Thereby, Negroes demanded high money wages, which forced the planters to look for more *dhangars*. According to Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, the planter's preference of *dhangar* over Negroes or ex-slaves was a strategy

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<sup>328</sup> *Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India, p. 8.*

designed to secure cheap and steady labour.<sup>329</sup> Alongside, it was highly believed that due to their low negotiating power, they could be maintained at a low cost without any adequate facility. In this regard, one of the planters alleged that

In their (dhangar) own country they have but little rice, and eat snakes, lizards, rat, mice, & c. their clothing is simple and scanty, and they eat only once, rarely twice, in 24 hours.<sup>330</sup>

According to sugar planters, *dhangars* were accustomed to precarious scanty food and amenities. Thereby, it was believed that they could survive without proper food and services like clothing, medical facilities, and housing. This is one of the reasons why, in most cases, *dhangar* only received rice and salt and clothing from their masters.<sup>331</sup> On the whole, planters saw *dhangars* as a source of enormous profit, which were expected to perform the same description of labour as Negroes with low maintenance and low wages.

## 2. History of early migration:

Number of the Hill coolies (this also include *dhangars*) annually come down from their own country to the plains in search of employment. On these occasions they leave their families at home, and remain absent for several months at a home. They do not object, it appears, to make engagements for longer periods, some of them having been known to remain seven years in an indigo factory.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Bates and Carter, *Tribal and Indentured Migrants in Colonial India*, p. 161.

<sup>330</sup> Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia*, in *Accounts and Papers*, p. 24.

<sup>331</sup> *Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India*, p. 7.

<sup>332</sup> Braim, *A history of South Wales, from its settlement to the close of the year 1844*, Vol. I, p. 165.

The *dhangars*, who already had a history of early migration, was considered as habitual migrants. It was highly believed by the sugar planters that compared to other communities, they could be easily persuaded to leave their abode and to migrate far-off places. In short, their early migration was translated into their willingness or readiness to migrate to distant destinations.<sup>333</sup> During the ban, many indenture migration supporters argued that *dhangars* who participated in internal migration in search of employment should not be deprived to migrate to the sugar colonies where they could earn higher wages or improve their economic condition.

There is no doubt that they were migratory, but they preferred to proceed to the plains searching for employment for a short duration and then often returned to their abode. Their intentions were not to settle down in an alien land, and like any other communities, they were equally attached to their land and family. Prior to a sugar plantation, they emigrated to neighbouring destinations like Bihar and Bengal proper, from where they usually returned back to their family and abode. In fact, they never had any intentions to go beyond the sea to an alien land.

### **3. No-caste boundation:**

Uday Chandra asserts that the caste and *adivasi* dichotomy had no role in making the *dhangar* a suitable labour force.<sup>334</sup> In contrast, A. Major believes that caste and *adivasi* ideas played a significant role in shaping the desired labour force for a sugar plantation.<sup>335</sup> In the

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<sup>333</sup> Bates and Carter, *Tribal and Indentured Migrants in Colonial India*, p. 160.

<sup>334</sup> Uday Chandra, 'Kol, Coolie, Colonial Subject: A hidden history of caste and the making of modern Bengal', in Uday Chandra, Gier Heierstad and Kenneth Bo Nielson (ed.), *The Caste Politics in West Bengal*, London: Routledge, 2015.

<sup>335</sup> Andrea Major, 'Hill Coolies': Indian Indentured Labour and the Colonial Imagination, 1836-38, *'South Asian Studies*, 33 (1), 2017.

sugar plantation, planters had a set of an idea for their desired labour force. In their understanding, people who were free from caste prejudices formed a better set of labourers as they could be indulged at any description of employment, which might be considered low or degrading by the caste people. In this respect, one of the sugar planters, John Mackay, stated

Unlike the Hindoos or Mahometans, the Dhangurs entertains no prejudices of caste or religion, and they are willing to turn their hands to any labour whatever, as far as they are capable. Neither are they unwilling to partake of any kind of animal food, the worst description of which would be luxury to them.<sup>336</sup>

The caste and *adivasi* dichotomy were visible in the labour market from the 1830's itself. In the labour market, caste and *adivasi* people were categorised into two different kinds of work. For instance: According to John Mackay, *dhangars* were fittest to be employed as a labourer of the ground and as cowherds and shepherds, whereas Hindus and Mahomedans were best suitable for mechanics and domestic servants.<sup>337</sup> Similarly, J.R. Mayo stated that

All over India there are castes of people who have persuaded one occupation from generation to generation, from time immemorial. There is caste of Gualah herdsmen, the caste of Bheriwallah shepherds; and the caste of Aheer, who are both herdsman and shepherds. These castes are fine people, and would serve for the like purposes in this country; and there are other castes which would do for particular employments such as gorawallahs, domestic & c.; but for agricultural, and general purposes, I would prefer employing the Hill coolies of Bengal, especially as they are not only a fine race of people, but free from caste.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia*, in *Accounts and Papers*, p. 24.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

Planters had a brief idea of caste prejudices, restrictions and taboos towards certain kinds of work. For a similar reason, it was believed that planters preferred *dhangar* over caste or plain people in the indigo plantation.<sup>339</sup> Thereby, to avoid any inconvenience and disappointment, they looked for caste free people. In the sugar plantation, *dhangar* was considered a desirable labour force. It was assumed that they could perform any difficult or demeaning work that the caste people objected to doing.

#### 4. Familiarity with agricultural work:

The description of labourers called Dhangas or Hill people, from Huzzareebaugh and Chota Nagpore, are better adapted for the purpose of cultivating the rocky soil of Mauritius, and looking after the canes, than any other description of men who emigrate, and they appear to be preferred by the sugar planters.<sup>340</sup>

According to Anil Persaud and Biswamoy Pati, indentured labourers were recruited on their ability to work as agricultural labourers.<sup>341</sup> The sugar plantation was agricultural orientated where one was required “to clear the forest and extract timber, carry manure, dig and prepare the land for planting, also to take charge of horses, mules and cattle of every description”.<sup>342</sup> This kind of work generally demanded agricultural skills. Thereby, the planters

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>340</sup> *Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India*, p. 171.

<sup>341</sup> Anil Persaud, ‘Transformed Over Seas: “Medical Comfort”, abroad Nineteenth Century Emigrant Ships’, in Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mahopatra (ed.), *Labour Matters: Towards Global Histories*, Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009, p. 22; Biswamoy Pati, ‘Situating Adivasis in Colonial India’, in Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *Adivasi in colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011, pp. 12-13.

<sup>342</sup> ‘The New Slave Trade in the East’, in Robert Walsh and John Jay Smith (ed.), *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science and Art, Vol. VI, September-December 1838, Vol. XXXIV*, Philadelphia: Published by E. Littell & co., 1838, p. 141.

were concrete to their choices, and utmost attention was being paid to the selection of the person to whom they wanted to recruit in the field. The planter's explicit depiction of their ideal labour was someone who can adapt and adopt agricultural related work easily. They ensured that the person whom they chose in their plantation field should have been a real agricultural labourer in their own country. The sugar planters who were connected with India had known that there was a "tract of the country in India to the north-west of Calcutta between the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> deg. of north latitude, inhabited by a race of hardy agriculturists called "Hill coolies, Dhangons or Boonahs."<sup>343</sup> According to them, *dhangars* who were accustomed to agricultural work were fittest to be employed as labour for the sugar plantation work.

They (dhangar) are particularly expert in the use of the axe and hoe, and with a little instruction would make excellent shepherds and cow-herds.<sup>344</sup>

In the sugar plantation, *dhangars* were considered equal to European coolies, especially in using hoes and grubbing roots.<sup>345</sup> The *dhangars* were entirely used in the labour of fields, and Black and Negros in the feeding the presses and the boiling.<sup>346</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the term *dhangar* was officially used to recognise Ranchi district's *adivasi* communities (like Oraons, Mundas). From the 1830s to 1850s, the term *dhangar* was attached to various distorted meanings like a slave, bonded labour, contract labour

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<sup>343</sup> Henry G. Dalton, *The History of British Guiana, Vol. 1*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855, p. 468.

<sup>344</sup> Braim, *A history of South Wales, from its settlement to the close of the year 1844, Vol. I*, p. 165.

<sup>345</sup> Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia*, in *Accounts and Papers*, p. 24.

<sup>346</sup> *Hill Coolies: Copy of a letter from the Secretary to the Government of India*, p. 171.

and retained labour. These meanings converted the term *dhangar* as synonyms for labour in the labour market. Consequently, it stigmatised the identity of Oraon *raiyats* as labour in various destinations where they emigrated under the denomination of *dhangar*.

Oraon *raiyats*, who formed an important source of the labour force in the labour market came to the notice of sugar planters due to their early engagement in the indigo plantation and metropolitan cities. Sugar planters who needed cheap, reliable, experienced and abundant labour saw them as the best alternative for the Negro population. With this, Ranchi district became the earliest recruiting ground in the Bengal presidency for indentured labour. After moderate success with them since 1834, various attempts were made to induce the Oraon *raiyats* population to fill labour scarcity in the sugar plantation. From 1830-1850, a sizeable number of Oraon *raiyats* were employed in Mauritius and British Guiana's sugar plantation. Here they were brought under poor condition, where many died in their ship journey and one who survived faced slavish treatment from the sugar planters.

However, after the 1850s, Oraon *raiyats* emigration gradually started declining in the sugar plantations due to their high demand in the Assam tea plantation. By the 1870s, their migration was switched entirely to inland destinations like Assam and Western Duar's tea plantation, where they were considered as first-class labourers.

## CHAPTER: 6

### INLAND EMIGRATION:

*A new journey to a land of servitude*

The labour of the Ranchi district is chiefly found in the tea plantations- in the country called by the *Bhotan* i.e. the tea gardens of the North of Bengal and also in Assam.

- Father Liefman (Ranchi)<sup>347</sup>

1870 saw a complete shift of Oraon *raiyats* immigration from overseas to inland destinations. The inland destinations mainly covered Assam, Western Duar, Sunderban, Andaman and Nicobar Island. In these destinations, their precise *adivasi* name was commonly used in place of *dhangar*. Despite this, the reality remained unchanged, as, within the Oraons, *raiyats* comprised the majority populace of the labour force in these destinations. In comparison to the four destinations, Oraon *raiyats* chiefly emigrated to Assam and Western Duar's tea garden, forming a principal labour force. In the two destinations, a varied system was followed. In Assam, Oraon *raiyats* had to enter into a contract, while in Western Duar, Oraon *raiyats* had to enter into no contract. Despite some variations, the two destinations showcased a similar work environment and analogous patterns of abuses that have grown up around the recruiting system and in tea plantations. The well-organised network of recruiting agents like *akratris* and

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<sup>347</sup> *Royal Commission Labour in India: Written Evidence, vol. IV, Part: 1: Bihar, Orissa with Coalfields*, London: Printed and Published by his majesty's stationary office, 1930, p. 98.

*sardars* had flourished in both the destinations to induce Oraon *raiyats* in the tea garden. Inevitably, from 1870-1930, a good proportion of the Oraon *raiyat* population emigrated from Ranchi district and formed a permanent labour force in the two destinations. Here the chapter is an attempt to understand three questions. Who were these recruiting agents, and how they functioned? What kind of conditions prevailed in the tea gardens of both destinations? How did Oraon *raiyats* react to their ongoing exploitation in the tea plantation?

### **RECRUITING AGENTS/ INTERMEDIARIES**

Assam tea industry was established in 1839 with a motive to end the monopoly of China over tea. In the initial or experimental period, planters faced serious setbacks due to their inexperience and lack of knowledge of tea plantations. However, from the 1850s, the tea industry started growing popular and attracted a number of tea companies that sprang up overnight to venture into a new commercial enterprise. Consequently, new tea plantations were extensively opened in the uninhabited forest lands of Assam. For instance: by 1859, there was fifty-one tea garden in Assam.<sup>348</sup> Following the success in Assam, tea plantations commenced in Darjeeling (1858-59) and Western Duar (1874). By the late nineteenth century, India became a leading tea producing and exporting country in the world by surpassing China. For instance, in 1866, only 4% of British tea imports were from India, it increased to 38 per cent in 1886 and 59 per cent by 1903.<sup>349</sup> Undoubtedly, the tea industry in India became a lucrative business for the British government.

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<sup>348</sup> Sir Percival Griffiths, *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 5 Winsley street London W1, 1967, p. 70.

<sup>349</sup> Amalendu Kumar Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977, p. 34.

In the tea plantation economy, labour played a vital part in the tea production, opening and extension of tea gardens. Nevertheless, the failure and success of any tea plantation depended highly on the availability of abundant labour. From the nineteenth to early twentieth century, labour supply remained the primary concern of the tea planters in Assam and Western Duar.

From the initial period onwards, planters struggled with the scarcity of labour supply. They requested the British for the supply of *adivasi* communities (like Oraons, Mundas and Santhals) of Ranchi and their surrounding districts from time to time. Despite their best effort, they failed to retain this crowd in the tea plantation till the 1850s. In this context, Leonard Wray stated,

The chief difficulty complained of in Assam, is the want of sufficient labour, but how this can be, when Coolies are taken to the Mauritius, I cannot comprehend.<sup>350</sup>

This compelled them to depend on the local labourers. These local labourers soon found the tea industry unprofitable due to low wages. On the other hand, planters were also in no mood to increase their wage as they wanted to retain labour at a low cost. As a consequence, many local labourers deserted the tea plantation while others refused to join. By 1860, the local labourers almost disappeared from the tea plantation.<sup>351</sup> This gave an excuse to the tea planters to recruit labour from distant destinations. The initial importation of labour from distant

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<sup>350</sup> Leonard Wray, 'Tea and its production in various countries', *Journal of the society of Arts and the Institution in union, Volume IX, From November 23, 1860 to November 15, 1861*, London: Published for the Society, By Bell and Daldy, 1861, Fleet Street, 1861, p. 145.

<sup>351</sup> *Papers regarding the Tea industry in Bengal*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1873, p. 132.

destinations took place from 1858-1862.<sup>352</sup> Furthermore, by 1863, labour importation took impetus under the indenture system, and the number steadily rose.<sup>353</sup>

A similar fate was experienced in Western Duar, where the tea industry started in 1874. Due to the local population's scarcity, tea planters recruited labourers from Nepal, Chotanagpur and Santhal pargana.

The cultivation of tea is being largely extended in the Western Dooar of Julpigoree district, and promises to be very successful and remunerative. No difficulty is encountered in procuring labor, as the Pahareeas from Darjeeling and Dhangurs from Chota Nagpore come to the gardens for employment in large numbers.<sup>354</sup>

Within Chotanagpur, Ranchi district remained the principal hunting ground for the cheap and best labour for both Assam and Western Duar's tea plantation. According to the census report of 1921, out of thirteen lakhs inhabitants of Ranchi district, three lakhs were enumerated in Western Duar and Assam's tea plantation.<sup>355</sup> Oraon *raiya*s, who was considered a first-class labourer, was heavily recruited in these two destinations. For instance, in western Duar: "The majority of labourers are Uraons, who are the best class of 'junglies' and form the backbone of the force."<sup>356</sup> As the tea industry started flourishing in both destinations, there was a cry for "labour, more labour". To procure regular and a legitimate labour force supply from

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> In Assam, indentured system was started under the Act of XIII of 1839 was abolished in 1926.

<sup>354</sup> *The Hindoo Patriot, Volume: XXIII, Number 37*, 11 September, 1876.

Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/dli.granth.45283/mode/2up?q=western+dooar> on 28/12/2020.

<sup>355</sup> *Royal Commission Labour in India: Written Evidence, vol. IV, p. 98.*

<sup>356</sup> J.C. Arbuthnott, *Report on the Tea Garden of Labour in the Duars of Bengal, in Madras and in Ceylon*, Shillong: Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1904, p. 2.

distant destinations (like Ranchi district), planters deployed both licensed and unlicensed recruiting agents like *sardars* and *arkatis*.<sup>357</sup>

A large number of natives and Europeans, tempted by a considerably and rarely increasing demand and high prices offered for labour in Assam and Cachar have established themselves as local agents at the sudden stations of conducts in the Chota Nagpore Division and adjoining districts for the supply of free emigrants to Assam and Cachar.<sup>358</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these recruiting agents or intermediaries remained an inseparable part of the labour market. In historical parlance, they were popularly known as coolie/labour catchers. They used both legal and illegal means to procure or catch the labour force. According to Kaushik Ghosh, *arkati* (which were restricted to the Assam tea plantation) belonged to the plain or upcountry men.<sup>359</sup> In contrast, Rana Pratap Behel and Prabhu Prasad Mahapatra assert that *arkati* belonged to the same class of people who emigrated as labourers and moved among them.<sup>360</sup> Contrary to the above observation, Father John Hoffman claimed that *arkati* belonged to the service class of the *adivasi* village like

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<sup>357</sup> In the contemporary period, similar kind of recruiting agents have mushroomed in the rural parts of Jharkhand state. They mainly target the *adivasi* girls in the age of 11-16, and thereafter trafficked them to metropolitan cities like Delhi, Pune etc. to fulfil the increasing demand of domestic help. Every year thousands of *adivasi* girls are trafficked where some are rescued by NGO's and countless goes untraceable.

<sup>358</sup> *Free Emigration to Assam: Correspondence regarding the existing arrangements for the emigration of coolies from the Chota Nagpore Division to Assam and Cachar*, Government of Bengal, General Department, Branch: Inland Emigration, File no. 4, serial number of file 1 to 5, January 1889, p. 1, West Bengal State Archive (hereafter WBSA).

<sup>359</sup> Kaushik Ghosh, 'A Market of Aboriginality: Primitivism and race classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India', in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (ed.) *Subaltern Studies X: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 46.

<sup>360</sup> Rana Pratap Behel and Prabhu Prasad Mahapatra, 'Tea and Money versus Human Life: The rise and fall of the Indenture System in the Assam Tea Plantations 1840-1908', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol 19, April 1992, p. 152.

weavers, blacksmiths.<sup>361</sup> The service class were an integral part of the *adivasi* village on whom *adivasis* were highly dependent for their non-agrarian work. As they were the resident of Oraon village, they were familiar with the public and private affairs of the Oraons. The lower rank police like *chowkidars* (watchmen) also backed them, who happened to be from the service class.<sup>362</sup> With time they earned immense unpopularity among the *adivasis* of Ranchi district for using notorious and undesirable methods for recruitment. They were often described as man-seller, the scum of the earth, a heartless scoundrel or man-eating tiger.<sup>363</sup> In 1890, there were around 5,000 *arkatis* operating in Ranchi district.<sup>364</sup>

*Arkatis* were a professional recruiter who used to work under various contractors. They charged a handsome commission from the contractor who hired them to recruit labour. The average commission they received per head was Rs 25.<sup>365</sup> There were also times when they managed to make Rs 200- Rs 400 a month.<sup>366</sup> The man who purchased labour from them used to get as much as Rs 60 from the contractors who on their account received Rs 80-120.<sup>367</sup> On the whole, the contract system was quite expensive. Soon this started becoming a pain for the planters, and they began searching for a cheap and reliable alternative. They saw *sardari* system as a new solution to cheapen the recruitment process.<sup>368</sup> To promote *sardars* against contractors,

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<sup>361</sup> Father Hoffman, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica, Vol. 1*, Patna: Superintendent Government Printing, 1950, p. 154.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.* p. 155.

<sup>363</sup> *Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1906*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1906, p. 23.

<sup>364</sup> Behal and Mahopatra, *Tea and Money versus Human Life*, p. 153; Ghosh, *A Market of Aboriginality*, p. 46.

<sup>365</sup> *Repression of Abuses connected with the emigration of coolies from Chotanagpur to Assam and Chachar*, Government of Bengal, General Department, Branch: Inland Emigration, File no. 15 of 1888, Serial no. 24 to 32, p. 27, WBSA.

<sup>366</sup> Ghosh, *A Market of Aboriginality*, p. 46.

<sup>367</sup> *Repression of Abuses connected with the emigration of coolies from Chotanagpur to Assam*, p. 27.

<sup>368</sup> Samita Sen, 'Commercial recruiting and informal intermediation: debate over Assam tea plantation: 1860-1900,' *Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 44, No.1*, January 2010, p. 11.

planters started putting allegations on contractors for conducting abuses in recruiting districts and recruiting labourers of unsatisfactory character. For instance: Many planters contended that

contractors merely look to making up a batch of the number ordered with the first coolies that come to hand, and the consequence is that men are sent up some of whom are weakly and unfit for any kind of work, while others are men who have never done a day's field work in their lives (such as Brahmins, Chutrees, &c.) and who are about as useful in a tea garden as they be on boardship.<sup>369</sup>

Consequently, the *sardars* (private agents), who cost half of what labours got through contractor cost, became popular among the planters of Assam tea plantation.<sup>370</sup> From table 15, one can get a glimpse of their popularity. As they were in high demand, they recruited more labourers compared to contractors. In the Cinnamara tea plantation of Assam, *sardars* used to receive Rs 20 per head.<sup>371</sup> Besides, they used to get Rs-1 or 2 worth of work done by the men they recruited. However, with the increasing competition for labour supply, *sardars* gradually became expensive with time. There were instances where an adult *sardar* received as high as Rs 115.<sup>372</sup> Till 1915, both *sardars* and contractors continued working simultaneously and afterwards, *sardars* were made the only recruiting agents for Assam tea plantation.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> *Papers regarding the Tea industry in Bengal*, p. 50.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48.

<sup>371</sup> 'Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Labour in India: Assam (fourth Meeting: Silchar)', *Royal Commission Labour in India: Written Evidence, vol. V, Part: 1: Bengal (excluding coalfields and Dooars)*, London: Printed and Published by his majesty's stationary office, 1930, p. 103.

<sup>372</sup> *Report of the Assam Inquiry Committee, 1906*, p. 32.

<sup>373</sup> Griffiths, *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*, p. 281.

**Table: 15.**

**Number of labours imported by Sardar and contractors for Assam tea plantation**

Year	Sirdar	Contractor
1881	3,998	1,802
1882	5,714	2,738
1883	6,107	4,323
1884	9,506	5,627
1885	5,066	3,623

Source: *Repression of Abuses Connected with the Emigration of Coolies from Chota Nagpur to Assam and Cachar*, Government of Bengal, General Department, Branch: Inland Emigration, File no. 1064 of 1887, August 1893, p. 2, West Bengal State Archive.

The *sardari* system recruitment officially started under the Amendment Act of 1870.

It was often argued by the planters that they imported cheap and reliable recruits. For instance:

According to Mr Sinclair (planter)

We have all along recruited our laborers through our own garden sirdars, and have found that to be the cheapest mode of securing good and serviceable men, for they bring away their whole family, who have never been to abscond, and who tend one another in cases of illness, whereas those recruited through contractors, being variably single men and women, when they fall ill have no one to attend to them, and die off.<sup>374</sup>

Similarly, Major Clark, Deputy Commissioner, stated:

The system of recruiting by garden sirdars is becoming very popular, and the result are said to be very good. My own experience confirms this. The number of coolies so recruited to the present time, however, only bears a small proportion to the whole number imported. The class of labourers selected by the garden sirdars is said to be, and doubtless is, far adapted to tea factory work, and there is a great gain by the terms under which they were introduced

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<sup>374</sup>*Papers regarding the Tea industry in Bengal*, p. 50.

to the garden at once, acquiring a happier connection with their employer, their fellow laborers, and the garden generally.<sup>375</sup>

The garden *sardar* was the returnee labours who belonged to the same *adivasi* of the potential recruit. For instance: many returnee labours were urged to become *sardar* after completing their contract in Assam tea plantation and after experiencing the tea garden condition first hand for a minimum of 1 or 2 years in Western Duar. Unlike *arkatis*, they were active in both Assam and Western Duar and directly worked under the garden manager.

Men from the Ranchee district employed in our gardens now go down and bring up their relations and friends in large number.<sup>376</sup>

Planters usually gave them advance money to recruit their immediate relatives, friends or known people. In the temptation of advance money, many failed to resist becoming a *sardar*. However, in cases where they were unable to bring any new recruit, they had to return all the advances made to them by their manager. In a few cases, tea labours themselves used to approach the manager to become a *sardar*. There were also instances where tea labours took this as an opportunity to abscond from the tea plantations.<sup>377</sup> In Assam tea plantation, around 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of *sardars* absconded from the garden and never returned back.<sup>378</sup> The *sardars*

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid. p. 45.

<sup>378</sup> 'Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Labour in India: Assam (forty-fifth meeting: Silchar),' in *Royal Commission on Labour in India: Written Evidence, Vol. VI- Part-1, Assam and Dooars*, London: Printed and Published by his Majesty's Stationary Office, 1930, p. 66.

periodically visited their native villages for the purpose of recruitment. Few *sardars* also viewed this as a paid vacation.<sup>379</sup>

Though the outlook of the *sardari* system was quite similar in both destinations, but in Western Duar, the *sardari* system was free from all restrictions, while in Assam, the system was under the restriction of Act VI.<sup>380</sup> In Assam, the task of *sardar* usually ended after the recruitment process, while in Western Duar, their task continued even after the recruitment. In Western Duar's tea plantation, labours worked under the name of their *sardars*, who recruited them. Here the *sardars* were made responsible for giving monthly wages and advances to their labour.<sup>381</sup> They often looked after their labourers, supervised them and exercised control over them. In short, they were responsible for the well-being of their labourers. For instance: "If coolies die or abscond, the loss falls on the *sardar*, not on the garden."<sup>382</sup> In return, a *sardar* received commission on the number of labour he sent for work. The commission varied from Rs 2 to 5 per head.<sup>383</sup>

## **METHODS AND MODE OF OPERATION OF RECRUITING AGENTS IN RANCHI DISTRICT**

The intermediaries or recruiting agents usually had their own methods and mode of operation. For Assam tea plantation, their first task was to procure as many as Oraon *raiya*s through all

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<sup>379</sup> Tirthankar Roy, 'Sardars, Jobbers, Kanganies: The Labour Contractor and Indian Economic History', *Modern Asian Studies*, Sep. 2008, Vol. 42, No. 5, Sep 2008, p. 991.

<sup>380</sup> 'Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Labour in India: Assam (forty-fifth meeting: Silchar), p. 124.

<sup>381</sup> These advances were first recovered by the sardar and then they recovered the same from their recruits.

<sup>382</sup> *Report of the Assam Inquiry Committee, 1906*, p. 126.

<sup>383</sup> John F. Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteer: Jalpaiguri district*, Allahabad: Printed at the pioneer press, 1911, p. 108.

sorts of fraudulent methods like kidnapping, false promises.<sup>384</sup> There were only a few cases where Oraon *raiya*s were voluntarily or willingly taken to Assam after giving them a clear picture or full knowledge of the condition of work, mode of living, net income, housing and so on. In most cases, recruiters induced young men and women by false hopes of easy labour, cheap living and good prospects with a lucrative salary.<sup>385</sup> For instance, Oraon *raiya*s were often persuaded that they would earn Rs 20- 30 per month.<sup>386</sup> However, in reality, they earned between Rs 8-15. There were also instances where recruiters ply their targets with drinks to secure their consent.<sup>387</sup> One of the prominent methods to induce Oraon *raiya*s in the Assam tea plantation was by giving advance payments to clear out their debts.<sup>388</sup> For instance, agents always kept their eyes on the Oraon *raiya*s who were under debt. Moreover, soon as they figured out anyone under debt, they used to mark them down. Then go and tell the *mahajan* (moneylender) that those people wanted to go away. In response, *mahajan* usually went down to those people for his money repayment. During this period, agents used to successfully get the consent of the helpless Oraon *raiya*s by giving advances to clear out their debts. In short, they used to persuade Oraon *raiya*s to emigrate Assam tea plantation by giving them advances. This was one reason why many *adivasi* communities of Ranchi district refused to take famine loans from the government officials during the famine outbreak. There was fear among the *adivasis* that if they would accept famine loans from the government officials, they would later be forced to go to Assam tea plantation for that advance.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> *Arkatis* mainly kidnapped those with whom they had a better chance of getting away with.

<sup>385</sup> *Royal Commission Labour in India: Written Evidence, Vol. IV, part 1, p. 102.*

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>388</sup> *Repression of Abuses connected with the emigration of coolies from Chotanagpur to Assam and Chachar*, Government of Bengal, Judicial P.V, Branch: Emigration (Inland), file no. 1064 of 1887, August 1893, p. 27, WBSA.

<sup>389</sup> Hoffman, *Encyclopaedia Mundarica vol: 1, p. 156.*

For recruiting agents, epidemics like famine were the best time to recruit a sizeable number of Oraon *raiya*s. This was the period when they did not have to put much effort to induce them. For instance, the success rate of *sardars* was highly dependent on the agricultural condition.<sup>390</sup> In the case of bad harvest, famine, or drought, they managed to secure a sizeable number of Oraon *raiya*s for tea gardens. However, in a good harvest, they had to struggle to secure a scanty number of recruits. For instance: from 1890-1910, Ranchi district witnessed back-to-back three famines, which resulted in the alarming increase of Oraon *raiya*s emigration to the tea garden of Western Duar.

After this process, agents forwarded their recruits either to district depots or Calcutta depots. In the year 1879, there were 14 depots in Ranchi district.

- a) 1. Depot at Karu, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Deputy Commissioner Office
- b) 1. Depot at Dorunda, 3 miles from Deputy Commissioner Office
- c) 2. Depot at Hindpirhi, 1 mile from Deputy Commissioner Office
- d) 1. Depot at Hesel, 1 mile from Deputy Commissioner Office
- e) 5. Depot at Old Ranchi, 1 mile from Deputy Commissioner Office
- f) 3. Depot at Tantani Bagicha, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Deputy Commissioner Office
- g) 1. Depot at Palandu, 7 miles from Deputy Commissioner Office<sup>391</sup>

These depots were like small jails where Oraon *raiya*s were temporarily housed as private prisoners. For instance: One of the free depots in Ranchi district

consisted of solely small house about 40 feet by 16 feet, with scarcely any ventilation, the only opening being a small doorway in front. In this shed the coolies are housed, here they sleep and cook also and are only allowed out

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<sup>390</sup> S.M. Akhtar, *Emigrant Labour for Assam Tea Gardens, Lahore: Model Town, 1939*, p. 59.

<sup>391</sup> *Travelling allowances of Inspectors of Emigrants: Soliciting sanction of the Government of India, Finance and Commerce department, to the grant of a horse allowance of Rs 25 per month to the civil Surgeon of Lohardaga for inspecting the coolie depots of Ranchi, 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 1880*, Government of Bengal, General P.V (Emigration (Inland)), File: 8, proceeding no. 1, January 1880, p. 23, WBSA.

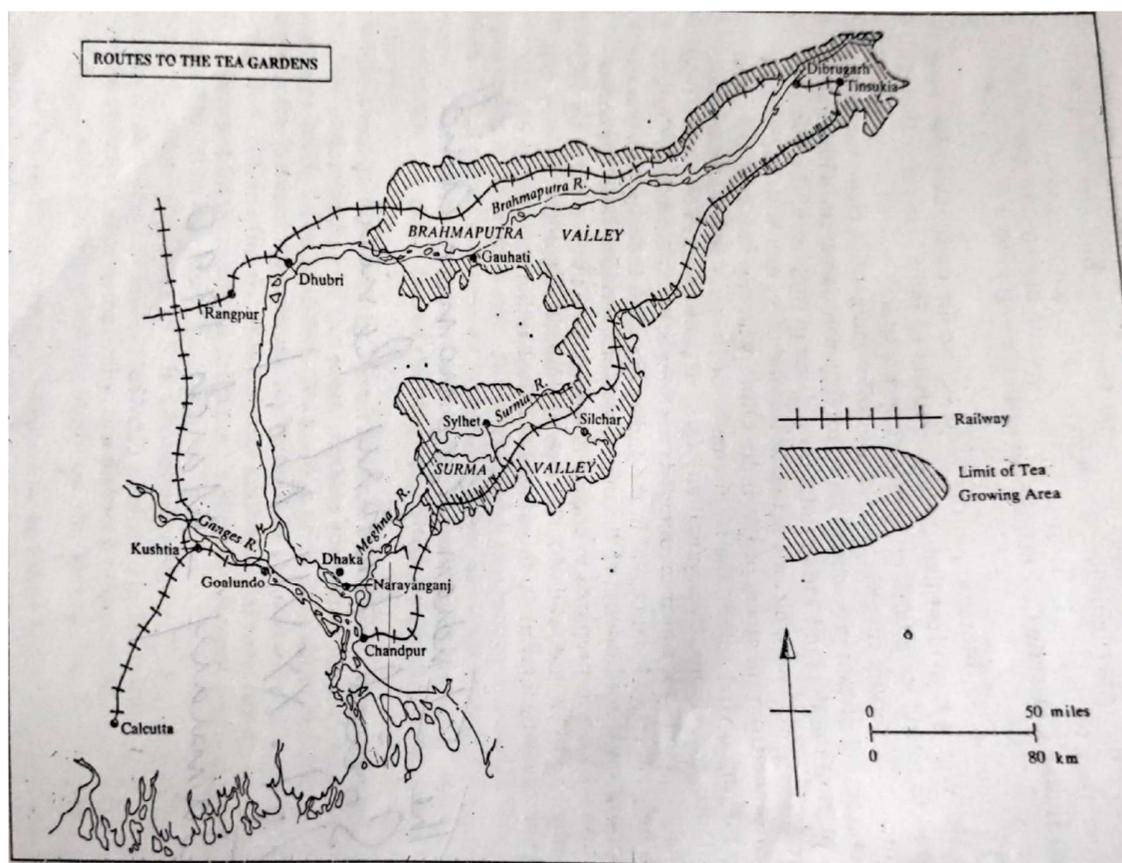
one or twice a day or the purposes of nature. Water is obtained from a well close to the depot...<sup>392</sup>

Here different batches of labourers were kept at the expense of labour agents until a sufficient number of labours were got together to make up a transport. This often resulted in overcrowding. Here Oraon *raiya*s were kept under the surveillance of a watchman for day and night. In the depots, labourers who were brought under fraudulent means like kidnapping were kept under false names to manipulate police or victim family inquiries. From here, Oraon *raiya*s were rushed down to Calcutta, and then they were handed over to the contractors; thence, they were hastily send off to Dhubri (Goalpara), where the registration took place under the indenture. Here, the recruiting officers showed little care to explain to the labourers the nature of the contract into which they may enter. In that way, in most cases, the Oraon *raiya*s entered into a contract without understanding the nature of the contract regarding wage, period, locality and eventually drafted off to various gardens. Initially, they were drafted off on steamers or boats from Dhubri to Assam tea plantation. Later on, the mode of transportation was replaced by railway to reduce the length of the journey.

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<sup>392</sup> *Free Emigration to Assam*, p. 3.

**Map: 4. Railway routes to the tea gardens of Assam**



Source: Ralph Sholmowitz and Lance Brennan, 'Mortality and migrant labour en route to Assam, 1863-1924', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, January-March 1990, p. 315.

In Western Duar, *sardars* were the main agents to recruit the Oraon *raiya*t for the tea plantation. *Sardars* were sent to their native village during the recruiting season (generally began after rain between October and March).<sup>393</sup> For this work, they generally took the help of men and women from his own '*patti*' or gang to assist him/her.<sup>394</sup> They generally selected those men and women for assistance who have not been long enough in the garden and have not lost

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>394</sup> Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteer: Jalpaiguri district*, p. 108.

touch with their native village and relatives.<sup>395</sup> Then they used to induce their close relatives and friends by asking them to accompany them to the tea garden to take up lucrative and pleasant work. One who decided to accompany the *sardars* were not taken to any depots but used to camp out along the roadside on an isolated open tract.<sup>396</sup> After being inspected by the manager assistant at some convenient centres, Oraon *raiyats* were forwarded to tea gardens by road or railway. Initially, they proceeded to the tea plantation of Western Duar by road. However, after the introduction of the railway, Oraon *raiyats* were imported with the help of the railway to save time. The journey expenses (for both road and railway) were taken care of by the garden managers. The cost of recruitment used to come around Rs 12 per head, in which Rs 2-4 included the charges of railway fare.<sup>397</sup> From Ranchi district, three road routes were opted by the *sardars* to lead Oraon *raiyats* in the tea plantation of Western Duar:

1. through Gaya district, which men living in the north and west of Lohardaga district (Ranchi district), including Palamu and west of Hazaribagh, take, then on to Sahibganj, on the Ganges, across through Purnea district of Jalpiguri.
2. through Hazaribagh to Giridih or Barrakar across Raniganj and Sahibganj through Purnea and on to Jalpaiguri. This route the men of Hazaribagh and Lohardaga and south Palamu adopt.
3. through Ranchi on to Purulia, and then across as in the above cases. Men of Lohardaga and the Tributary states generally adopt this route.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid. p. 108

<sup>396</sup> J.C. Arbuthnott, *Report on the Tea Garden of Labour in the Duars of Bengal, in Madras and in Ceylon*, Shillong: Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1904, p. 2.

<sup>397</sup> *Report of the Duars Committee 1910*, Shillong: Printed at the Eastern Bengal and Assam Government, 1910, p. 59.

<sup>398</sup> *Repression of Abuses Connected with the Emigration of Coolies from Chotanagpur to Assam and Chachar*, Government of Bengal, Judicial P.V, Branch: Emigration (Inland), file no. 15 of 1888, Serial no. 24 to 32, p. 21, WBSA.

In the second and third routes, Oraon *raiya*s were generally taken by the main road. However, in the first route, Oraon *raiya*s were taken by jungle roads, and shortcuts were taken along the base of hills.<sup>399</sup> In these routes' abduction of labours was a serious issue. Here *arkatis* often intercepted the Oraon *raiya*s by false representation, personations, inducements and force. Afterwards, they rushed them down to Calcutta, where the Oraon *raiya*s were sold to various contractors and managers of gardens who were on the lookout for labourers. They were then sent to Dhubri and then were drafted off to various Assam tea plantation gardens under false names and agreements.<sup>400</sup> In one of such incidences, a *sardar* named Howa Uraon of Western Duar was attacked by the *arkatis* on his way and was forced to enter into a contract along his labourers. For instance:

In last Magh, I (Howa Uraon) went to Ranchi to bring free labour coolies for my saheb, Mr. Harriot and I collected fifteen persons, five men and ten women, and was on my way back, when at Pabna Basti, a day's journey from Ranchi, ten or twelve men met us and stopped us, and asked us to enter into engagements and go to the coolie depot. We refused saying we were going to Darjeeling as free labourers and would not enter into agreements. These men then began to force us and beat us, I was beaten with sticks. We five men also fought and drove off these men. I succeeded in bringing away all my coolies.<sup>401</sup>

These incidences were quite frequent in road routes. As a consequence, *sardars* often lost hold of their labours *en route*. Furthermore, in order to avoid these incidences, they started opting for the rail route.

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>401</sup> *Repression of Abuses Connected with the Emigration of Coolies from Chota Nagpur to Assam and Cachar*, Government of Bengal, Judicial P.V, Branch: Emigration (Inland), file no. 1064 of 1887, August 1893, p. 2, WBSA.

## TEA PLANTATION: *a land of paradise or land of despair?*

They (labour) have found themselves set down in a swampy jungle, far from human habitation, where food was scarce and dear, where they have seen their families and fellow laborers struck down by disease and death, and where they themselves have prostrated by sickness, have been able to earn less by far than they could have done in their homes.<sup>402</sup>

Assam tea plantation started flourishing in 1860, and the extension of the tea garden necessitated the requirement for more and more labour force. Here the priority was given to the recruiters and the process to mobilise cheap and abundant labours. In contrast, little provision was made for the health and the wellbeing of the labours. Here Oraon *raiya*s were brought in crowded steamers without any adequate arrangements of proper food, sanitation and medical assistance. For instance: According to W.W. Hunter,

As labour trade increased, the accommodation for conveying the coolies became alarmingly inadequate. They made the passage in crowded open boats, or in still more fatally crowded steamers without the least attention to cleanness or proper diet, and sometimes without medical assistance of any sort.<sup>403</sup>

There was not much difference in the importation of the labour force for sugar plantations (of Mauritius and British Guiana) and tea plantations (of Assam). Nevertheless, the Oraon *raiya*s faced a similar fate in the new destination. The labour importation witnessed a high mortality rate among the labours in the transit itself, see table 16.

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<sup>402</sup> *Papers regarding the Tea industry in Bengal*, p. xviii.

<sup>403</sup> W.W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, London: Smith Elder & co., 1897, p. 256.

**Table. 16.**

**Mortality rate during the transit period**

<b>From May 1863 to January 1868</b>				
	<b>Coolies embarked</b>	<b>Mortality During voyage</b>	<b>Percentage of Death</b>	<b>Duration of voyage</b>
Assam	55, 352	1,712	3.14	1 month
Lakhimpur	52, 155	2, 456	4.70	1 month
Sylhet	2, 473	82	3. 31	2 weeks

Source: Francis C. Maude, William Davison, and Charles H. Haswell, *Journal of the Society Arts, Vol. 17, no. 852, March 19 1869, p. 293.*

Those who managed to survive their dreadful journey failed to adjust to the new climate and unhealthy garden. This resulted in staggering mortality, as a good percentage of labourers died after landing on the tea plantation. According to Amalendu Guha, as many as 30, 000 out of 84, 915 labourers who landed between 1863 to 1866 died just within the span of less than three years.<sup>404</sup> The officials often argued that the high death rates were caused by the cholera outbreak and the bad selection of emigrants. For instance: According to Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet (Mr O'Briens):

The high death-rate observable on some gardens is due to the practice of importing cheap and bad coolies, eg. a North-Western costs about Rs 15 and is likely to die in his first year, whereas a good jungle coolie (like Oraon,

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<sup>404</sup> Guha, *Planters Raj to Swaraj*, p. 18.

Munda, Santhal), who thrives in this climate cannot be imported usually under Rs 100.<sup>405</sup>

Here it needs to be noted that the Oraons, Mundas and the Santhals were the favourites of planters and the labours of up-country or North-Western province were their least favourite.<sup>406</sup> In their stereotypical understanding, *adivasis* had better physique and adaptability power than the upcountry labours, allowing them to stand the change in climate and surroundings, leading to less mortality. Besides, they argued that as the agents often import more up-country men who are less compatible with the new climate, it leads to a high mortality rate in the tea plantation. However, in reality, the garden's mortality statistics failed to show any considerable difference between the death rate of the *adivasis* and the up-country labourers, see table 17.

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<sup>405</sup> Rev. Charles Dowding, *Tea Garden Coolies in Assam: A letter by The Hon'ble J. Buckingham, C.I.E, Replying to a commutation on the subject which appeared in the 'Indian Churchman'*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co. 1894, p. 10.

<sup>406</sup> In the Assam tea plantation, labourers were categorized into 1<sup>st</sup> class, 2<sup>nd</sup> class 3<sup>rd</sup> class and 4<sup>th</sup> class according to the preference of planters. Among the three classes, the Oraons, Mundas and the Santhals were considered as 1<sup>st</sup> class labourers. See Ghosh, *A Market of Aboriginality*, p. 34.

**Table. 17**

**Mortality rate of labour from Chotanagpur and North-Western Province**

Nationality	Annual Strength		Number of Deaths		Death rate per mile	
	1891	1892	1891	1892	1891	1892
N.W.P and Oudh	37,888	42, 697	2,008	2,521	52.7	56.1
Chota Nagpur	1,30, 623	1,36,058	5,374	6, 657	41.1	48.9

Source: Rev. Charles Dowding, *Tea Garden Coolies in Assam: A letter by The Hon'ble J. Buckingham, C.I.E, Replying to a commutation on the subject which appeared in the 'Indian Churchman'*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co. 1894, p. 11.

By this, it means that mortality was not related to any specific community. Every labourer was on the same page where they had to go through similar insanitary conditions and harsh climate that resulted in sickness and mortality. Thereby, the planter's explanation for a bad selection of emigrants cannot be justified. Moreover, the outbreak of cholera gives a clear hint of the unhealthy garden and overcrowded steamers. The labourers did not bring the diseases, but it was generated due to the overcrowding and the garden's local condition. These gardens were located in remote and unhealthy localities. Many unhealthy gardens were opened without proper investigations and suffered from defective water supply and unsanitary conditions.<sup>407</sup> Undoubtedly, this gave birth to variolous diseases like cholera, blackwater fever, anemia, diarrhoea, etc. Table 14 shows that the mortality rate in Assam tea plantation due to

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<sup>407</sup> Dowding, *Tea Garden Coolies in Assam*, p. 21.

dysentery was high in comparison to other diseases. The disease normally spread due to contaminated food and water.

**Table: 18.**

**The mortality rate due to variolous diseases from 1903-1905**

	1903-04	1904-05
Mean strength	88,792	82,144
Death from-		
Cholera	164	163
Diarrhoea	333	291
Dysentery	751	542
Malaria fever	287	212
Anaemia	587	438
Respiratory disease	577	538
Other causes	685	627
Total	3,384	2,811

Source: Resolution on Immigrants Labour in Assam for the year 1904-05, Proceeding of Commerce and Industry, Branch: Emigration, no. 2854, August 1905, p. 704, National Archive of India.

In Assam tea plantation, the miseries of Oraon *raiya*s were not just related to harsh climate change or unhealthy gardens. In addition to these settings, they had to undergo through hectic work routine and harsh punishments. Here labourers had to follow a nine-hour work schedule in a week with one day rest.<sup>408</sup> During manufacturing season, labourers were expected to do overwork where their work carried on from six in the morning till five in the evening, which often stretched till night.<sup>409</sup> There were also instances where the labourers were

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<sup>408</sup> *Report of the Assam Inquiry Committee*, p. 137.

<sup>409</sup> Nitin Verma, *Producing Tea Coolies?: Work, Life and Protest, in the Colonial Tea Plantations of Assam, 1830-1920s*, (D.Phil submitted in Berlin University), 2011, p. 121.

compelled to do the extra task to discipline them.<sup>410</sup> For their overwork, they were often underpaid. Besides, their advances and the cost of recruitment were recovered by their monthly wages. Labour was not given their full wages at the time of their illness. Consequently, little or no savings were left in the hands of many labourers at the time of their expiration of the contract. This often closed their doors to return back to their abode as the journey from Assam to Ranchi district was long and expensive. Moreover, without a good saving, it was an impossible task. Contrary to this, those who managed to save their savings also failed to return back. Only 5 to 10 per cent of labourers managed to return to their abode after the expiration of the contract, and the rest returned to a fresh contract.<sup>411</sup> This indicates that the majority of labourers became a permanent labour force. The question posed here is why labourers did not return to their abode after the expiration of the contract? This has much to do with the importation charges of new labour. In Assam, importation charges were quite expensive, and for planters, funding labourers for their long journey to the plantation was a kind of investment. Thereby, planters had no interest in losing control over their labourers. Over a while, planters tried various strategies to strengthen their control over their labours even after the contract or agreement expiration. Some of the strategies were as follows; the planters promoted family migration to keep their labour rooted in the plantation field even after the contract's expiration. They often used their family members as a tool to convince or blackmail them into staying back or into renewing their contract. In a few cases where the agreement of a man and his wife expired simultaneously, women were often enticed into a fresh agreement without the permission of their husband. After that, the husband was forced to renew his contract to stay back with his wife.<sup>412</sup> Another prominent strategy was the opening of liquor shops near the

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> *Repression of Abuses Connected with the Emigration of Coolies from Chota Nagpur to Assam and Cachar*, August 1893, p. 3

<sup>412</sup> Dowding, *Tea Garden Coolies in Assam*, p. 40.

garden. This tempted the labours to use their savings to buy liquor. In these cases, at the end of the agreement, labours were left with no savings in their hand, and besides, they were left with big bills against them at the grog shops.<sup>413</sup> In this situation, they renew their agreement to obtain a bonus to wipe out some of their debts.<sup>414</sup> The bonus was another temptation for the labours to renew their agreement. On the plantation, labours received a bonus from Rs 3 to Rs 12 to renew their agreement.<sup>415</sup> This soon created an impression about Assam in Ranchi district that “*practically no one who goes to Assam ever returns.*”<sup>416</sup>

In the tea garden, labourers were kept under the surveillance of a *chowkidar* (watchman). This made the act of desertion extremely difficult. Moreover, one who tried to escape from these hectic work routines and unhealthy garden if caught were severely punished or imprisoned.<sup>417</sup> Labours who longed to go back to their abode often tried to escape from the garden. Around 2584 absconded from Assam tea plantation in 1877, 9855 in 1884, 6432 in 1897 and 10244 in 1900.<sup>418</sup> To catch the runaway labour, reward money was offered to the locals.<sup>419</sup> Simultaneously, dogs were also trained for this purpose.<sup>420</sup> Flogging was a frequent episode in the tea garden, where planters flogged their labourers for short work and for absconding. Women and children were also not spared from these harsh punishments. For instance, the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur stated:

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<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.* p. xiii.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>415</sup> *Report of the Assam Inquiry Committee*, p. 68.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.* p. 120.

<sup>417</sup> The Act VI of 1865, empowered the planters to arrest the runaway labours without any warrant. See Rana Pratap Behal, ‘Forms of Labour Protest in Assam Valley Tea plantations, 1900-1930’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 20, no. 4, Jan 1985, p. 20.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20.

<sup>419</sup> *Papers regarding the Tea industry in Bengal*, p. xxii.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*

A large body of coolies left the garden, and came to the station complaining of ill-treatment. They stated that both men and women had been flogged; in cases of women, they had been tied to a post in porch of the mangers house, their cloths lifted up to their waists, and they had been beaten on the bare buttocks with stirrup leather, by the orders of the assistant manager.<sup>421</sup>

In a few instances, severe flogging even resulted in the death of the labours. For instance:

On the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> July, eleven lately imported coolies ran away from the garden into the jungles intending apparently to try and find their way through the jungles, instead of going along the high road. On the evening of the 1<sup>st</sup> instant they returned to the garden, and were then made what Mr. Colvin calls, an example of by being thrashed by him across the back of legs with a cane and then, "when he had tired himself", by a syce named Guru Dayal.<sup>422</sup>

In some cases, labours were also imprisoned or locked up for days. For instance: in 1884, two officers of Dum-Duma tea-estate were charged with the offence of keeping labour under illegal restraint.<sup>423</sup> Such instances gradually created a bad image of Assam in the recruiting districts. Undoubtedly, Assam became quite unpopular among the Oraon *rai*yats. This might justify their shift to Western Duar in the late nineteenth century, where they were free from any legal bindings. According to Mr G.P. Cooke (Asansol):

Coolies prefer to go to the Duars so as to avoid the discipline of the Assam gardens and the long term of agreement. Coolies who sign the contract are

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<sup>421</sup> 'Coolies in Assam Tea Garden', *Hansard's Indian Debates, Session 1890 (53 & 54 Victoria)*, p. 41.

<sup>422</sup> *Order on the case of a European Planter of named Colvin, Charged with flogging his coolies in death of one of them*, Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, Proceeding no. 160, September 1868, p. 86, WBSA.

<sup>423</sup> Mr. Bradlaugh, *East India (Assam coolies)*, London: Printed by Henry Hansard and Son, 1889, p. 74.

aware that if they abscond they can be brought back by force and made them to serve out their term. A contract deters them because it is like a fixed term of imprisonment passed on them.<sup>424</sup>

Similarly, Mr. Pickford (Chaibasa) maintained:

A common reason for emigration is that one member of a family goes up to Assam to earn money to help to pay off the family debts. If the period of contract were made shorter this would conduce to more people going for this purpose, once the idea was thoroughly understood. That is why people go readily to the Duars instead of Assam. If you mention "Assam" to a villager it conveys the idea of hardship; the "Duars" have no such name, people can go there and come back as they like.<sup>425</sup>

However, the hesitancy to go to Assam was only valid to the Oraons. The other *adivasis*, like the Mundas and the Santhals, continued their migration to Assam and comprised only a few per cent of Western Duar's labour population. In 1911, the Mundas and the Santhals numbered 11, 672 and 10,857, respectively.<sup>426</sup> This brings us to another question: was this shift an outcome of British government strategy? To an extent, it was an outcome of the British government strategy to separate the *adivasis* of the similar location to two different destinations to avoid any labour unrest or protest in the tea plantation, which was gradually growing with time.<sup>427</sup> For instance, from 1904-5 to 1920-1, there were 141 cases of rioting and unlawful assembly in the Assam tea plantation.<sup>428</sup> The frequent occurrence of a collision between the labours and managers also led to the appointment of Assam Labour Inquiry Committee of 1906.

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<sup>424</sup> *Report of the Assam Inquiry Committee*, p. 28.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>426</sup> Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazeteers: Jalpaiguri*, p. 38.

<sup>427</sup> Labour unrests took place due to varied reasons like extraction of excessive work, low wages, deduction for short-work, against physical coercion or confinements and so on.

<sup>428</sup> Griffiths, *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*, p. 378.

This highlights that by dispersing the major *adivasis* like the Oraons and the Mundas in two locations, they wanted to control the activities of *adivasis* that could go against the lucrative tea business. Table 19 and figure 5 highlight the shift of the Oraons from Assam to Western Duar.

Nevertheless, the Oraon *raiya*s emigration was shifted to Western Duar. There was a prevailing idea that Oraon *raiya*s temporarily immigrated to Western Duar after harvest and then returned back in the rainy season after earning a little. This idea was supported by Shashank Shekhar Sinha, who claimed that Western Duar was relatively closer to their homeland. Thereby, they followed circular migration.<sup>429</sup> In reality, despite being free from the contract or agreement, only 10% of the labour force was on a constant move.<sup>430</sup> Moreover, the majority of them formed a permanent labour force by taking up land. Planters allotted lands to control their mobility and to bind them down to a certain garden. Besides, labourers were tied down to the garden by their advances and were not allowed to leave the garden until they paid off their gardens' advances. These advances were often considered as a bond by the labourers as it restricted their mobility.<sup>431</sup> In the Western Duar tea plantation, the Oraon conditions were as depraved as in Assam.

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<sup>429</sup> Shashank Shekhar Sinha, *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating tribes in Gender Studies*, Kolkata: Bhatkal & Son, 2005, p. 113.

<sup>430</sup> Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazeteers: Jalpaiguri*, p. 109.

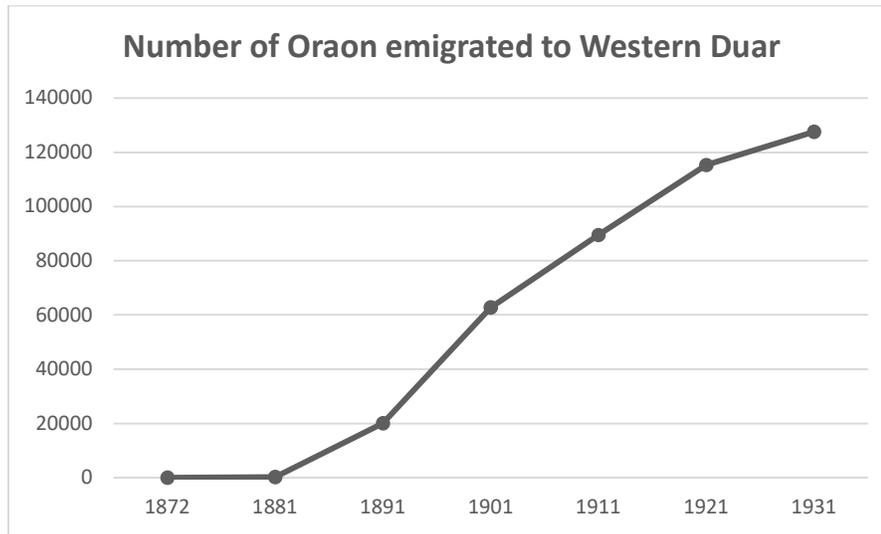
<sup>431</sup> *Report of the Duars Committee 1910*, p. 113.

**Table: 19**  
**Number of Oraon emigrated to Western Duar and Assam**

Years	1872	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Assam	212 (a)	N/A	17, 736 (a)	23, 861 (a)	28, 583 (b)	42, 213 (c)	52, 516 (d)
Western Duar	N/A	210 (e)	20, 051 (f)	62, 844 (g)	89,483 (h)	115,350 (j)	127, 530 (k)

- a) B. C. Allen, *Census of India, 1901, Vol. IV. Assam Part I Report*, Shillong: Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1902, p. 158.
- b) J. Mcswiney, *Census of India, 1911, Vol. III, Assam, Part I Report*, Shillong: Assam Secretary Printing Office, 1912, p. 135.
- c) G.T. Lloyd, *Census of India, 1921, Vol. III. Assam Part I Report*, Shillong: Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1923, p. 127.
- d) C. S. Mullan, *Census of India, 1931, Vol. III. Assam, Part II*, Assam Govt. Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publications, Branch, 1932, pp. 246-247.
- e) Ranajit Das Gupta, *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 10.
- f) C. J. O'Donnell, *Census of the Lower provinces of Bengal, 1891*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893, pp. 286- 288.
- g) E. A. Gait, *Census of India, 1901. Volume VIB, Part III*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902, p. 98.
- h) L. S.S. O'malley, *Census of India, Bengal 1911, vol. 5 part .III*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1913, pp. 179-181.
- i) W.H. Thompson, *Census of India, Bengal 1921, vol. 5 part II*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1923, pp. 171 -172.
- j) A. E. Porter, *Census of India, 1931, Vol.V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part II Report*, Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1933, pp. 236-238.

**Figure 4.**



**Note:** This is a statistical representation of table 19, and it highlights the increase/decrease in the number of Oraon emigrants from Ranchi district to Western Duar.

Western Duar, which was located in the remote of North Bengal, was prone to malaria and blackwater fever (*Kala-azar*). In fact, here, tea gardens faced the rage of malaria and black water fever all-round the year.<sup>432</sup> Here labourers faced the repeated attacks of these diseases, and only the fittest of the fittest managed to survive. To an extent, this led to a high mortality rate in the tea garden. For instance: A. J. Copplestone, (medical officer) concerning Blackwater fever stated:

Towards the close of last rains in a dry hot break, I was sent for by the Manager of the Tea Estate, and found that in one section of the cooly lines a number of them had died after a very rapid illness which appeared to have been cholera. Soon I found out that it was something else, viz. that strong healthy men and women were taken ill, and in three or four hours fell into a collapse and died.<sup>433</sup>

<sup>432</sup> Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri*, p. 46.

<sup>433</sup> A. J. Copplestone, 'Black Water Fever in Duars', *The Indian Medical Gazette*, 36 (5), May 1901, p. 197.

Western Duar was not under the British Government's supervision, and thereby no inspections were undertaken in the matter of sanitation, wages, tasks, or general management of the garden.<sup>434</sup> The tea garden maintenance was entirely left in the hands of garden managers who had no direct contact with their labourers. This led to many cases of abuse, which was often overlooked. Unlike Assam, abuses in Western Duar failed to receive much public attention. This tried to portray a wrong picture of harmony and wellbeing of labours. Like Assam, labourers who failed to complete the given task were often flogged or had to go through other severe punishment. The labourers work routine started from 7 am till 6 pm with two hours leave.<sup>435</sup> The time routine often tends to stretch beyond the stipulated hours during the manufacturing period. Here Oraon *raiya*s had to work (like hoeing, pruning and plucking) under intense climate conditions. The low wages prompted them to do overtime or procure part of subsistence by working outside the plantation (like railway construction, road). The wages in both Assam and Western Duar were comparatively the same. In 1910, the average monthly wage in Western Duar was Rs 6 for men, Rs 4-8 for women and Rs 2-8 to 3 for children.<sup>436</sup> The initial advances debited against new labours were recovered from their monthly wages for six months to one year of their arrival.<sup>437</sup> Table 20 highlights that the recoverable amount was usually high in comparison to the wages.

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<sup>434</sup> Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazeteers: Jalpaiguri*, p. 109.

<sup>435</sup> Ranajit Das Gupta, *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 68.

<sup>436</sup> *Report of the Duars Committee 1910*, p. 7.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

**Table: 20.**

**Three years figure includes the average advances debited against new labour and the average expenses recovered from the labour of Chotanagpur**

Seasons	Average advances per coolie recruited, recoverable from the coolie			Average expenses per coolie recruited including recruiters pay, paid by the garden		
	R.	A.	P.	R.	A.	P.
1904	12	2	3	6	11	2
1905	15	12	8	11	15	0
1906	12	15	0	8	6	5

Source: *Proceeding of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee in the recruiting and Labour districts, 1906*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1906, p. 124.

In most cases, excessive interest rates were charged from their wages, leaving the labourers with an insufficient living allowance (*kharcha*), which they received every week. Labour full payment or wage was kept on hold until they managed to clear out their advances, and till then, they had to survive on a low living allowance. For instance:

	Rs	a.	p.
Average monthly wage earned by a man.....	4	9	0
Living allowance for man at Re. 1 per week, 31 days to month .....	4	6	10
Towards debt to sardar per mensem.....	0	2	2 <sup>438</sup>

<sup>438</sup> Ibid. p. 112.

Inevitably, this reduced them to an insufficient diet which usually included little rice.<sup>439</sup> For many labourers, dal, potato and onion were a sort of luxury in the living allowance of Rs 1 per week.<sup>440</sup> During the price hike of staple food, also, the living allowance was not increased. This led to a poor diet which was inadequate to sustain good health in the long run and often led to sickness (like anemia, dropsy) and then resulted in absenteeism from work. In this condition, labourers did receive their living allowance, but their debt to the *sardar* increased. Eventually, this reduced their prospects to clear their debts and accordingly, many remained permanently or hopelessly in debt.<sup>441</sup>

### **ORAONS UNREST IN WESTERN DUAR**

In the beginning, riots or unrest were quite uncommon in Western Duar. With time, sporadic labour unrest started when labours started raising their voice to articulate their demands and against their exploitation and oppression. Most of these unrests were restricted to the local sphere. For instance, one such incidence took place in 1906. The Santhal labours caused a local disturbance against the hike in the price of rice. The Munda and the Oraon labourers later joined this in Dam Dam and Chalsa garden, and unitedly they looted the market.<sup>442</sup> However, it was soon suppressed by the police. Among the discontents, major unrest took place during the First world war. This unrest was the extension of the Tana bhagat movement (1914-1925) which was led by Oraon *raiyats* in Ranchi district. The Oraon *raiyats*, who led the movement, comprised a good percentage of Western Duar's labour population. From November 1915, the

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid. p. 111

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>442</sup> Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazeteers: Jalpaiguri*, p. 110.

movement started spreading rapidly in Western Duar's tea gardens and managed to reach 60,000 Oraon labour.<sup>443</sup> The unrest survived till mid-1916.

a movement which began amongst the Oraons of Chota Nagpur has spread to 60, 000 Oraon coolies in the tea gardens of this district who ever since November last had been holding meeting's at night and singing hymns to the "German- Father", whom they invoke as if he was a god, calling on him to come and drive out English, whom they compare to devils, and give an independent Raj to the Oraons.<sup>444</sup>

The movement came into notice when Bania Oraon, Landha Oraon and Mongra Oraon were arrested for spreading the movement in the tea gardens.<sup>445</sup> They happened to be garden *sardar* who periodically visited their native villages to bring new labourers for tea gardens. Here we can comprehend that *sardar* played a crucial role in spreading Ranchi district's Tana Bhagat movement to Western Duar's tea gardens. They spread the movement by conducting secret meetings and singing hymns. The hymn is as follows:

German Baba is coming,  
Is slowly slowly coming,  
Drives away the devils Manaldanal  
Cast them adrift in the sea,  
Suraj baba (the Sun) is coming,  
The devils of the Oraon will be driven away and cast adrift in the sea,  
Tarijan Baba (the stars) is coming,  
Is slowly slowly coming,  
Is coming to our very courtyard,  
The chigri devils will be driven away,

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<sup>443</sup> *Oraon unrest story told in court hymns of the 'German Baba'*, The statesman, April 28/1916, p. 7.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

And cast adrift in the sea<sup>446</sup>

This was a non-violent movement, where the 'German baba' was frequently used as a metaphor of 'liberty' and 'devils' as the British Government. In the background of this unrest, the First world war was going on where Germany and Britain were against each other. This resulted in the scarcity of food grain and a hike in their prices. While enquiring about the scarcity and hike, Oraon *raiyats* came to know from the *mahajan* (moneylender) that it was caused due to the war where the colonial rule was coming to an end. This made 'Germany' their liberator. According to Oraon *raiyat* leaders, Germany's victory over Britain will liberate them from all the hardship and suffering in both the abode and tea garden. Gradually, the unrest started attracting non-Oraon labour force of tea garden, and there were assumptions that the unrest might turn to a non-violent discontent. This alarmed the planters in the tea garden. Henceforth, to stop any disturbance, garden *sardars* (who were not involved in the unrest) were made special constables and held responsible for maintaining peace of the gardens and armed police stationed at dangerous places.<sup>447</sup> Though the unrest was short-lived, it reflected a rise of labour consciousness among the Oraon *raiyats* against their exploitation and oppression.

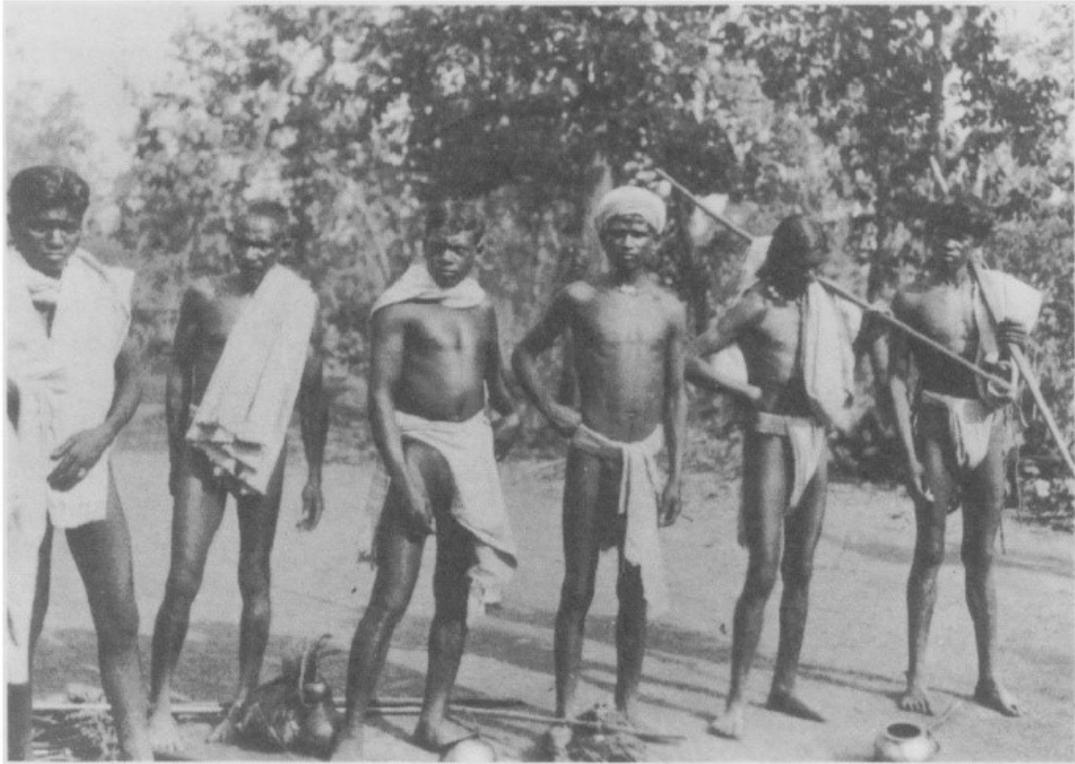
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<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

**Figure. 5**

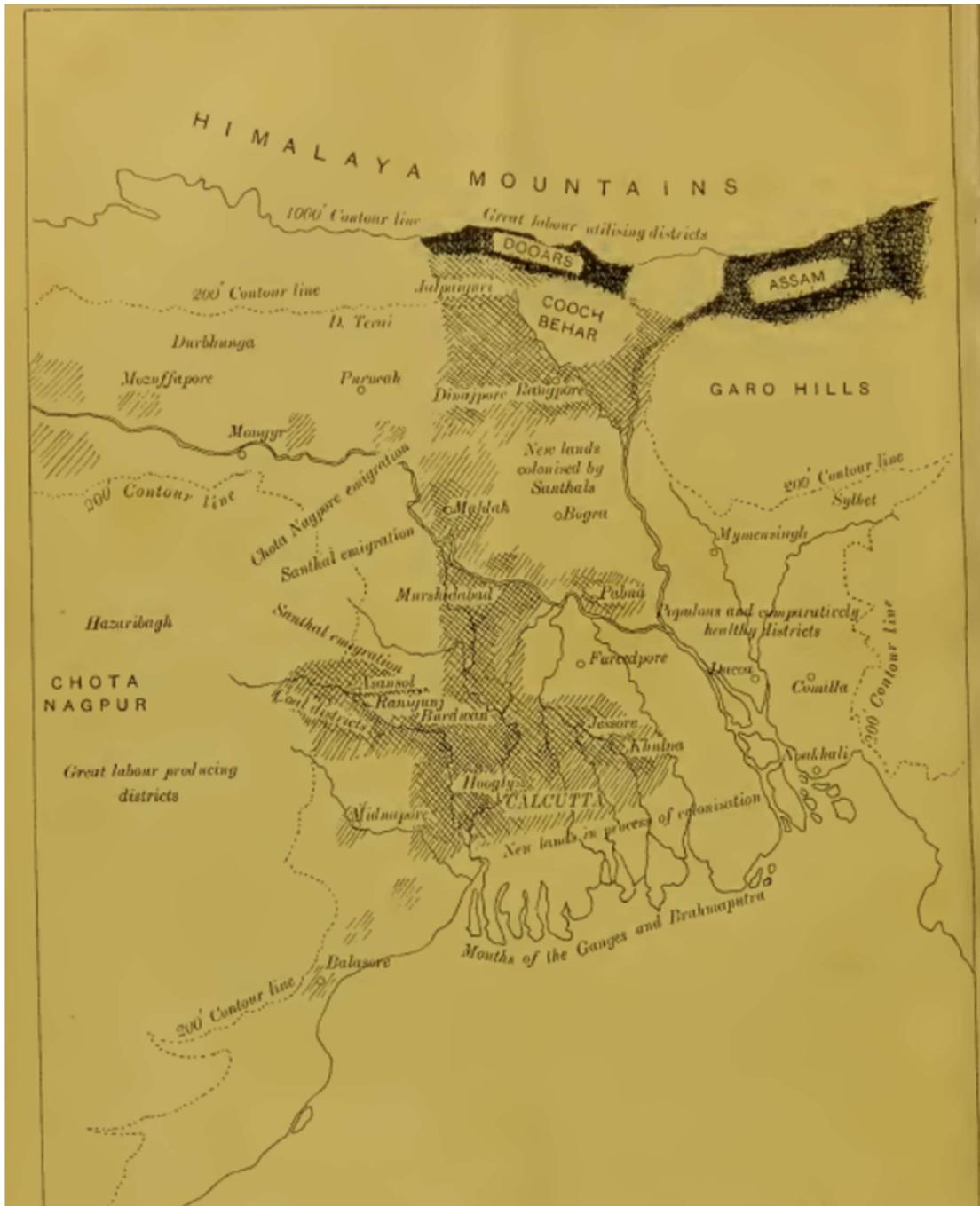
**Oraon Labour**



Source: From the Mansfield Collection in the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge cited in Vinita Damodaran, 'Famine in a forest tract: Ecological change and the causes of 1897 Famine in Chotanagpur', *Northern India, Environment History, Vol.1 No.2, White Press, 1995, p. 142.*

Map: 4

Skeleton map of Assam and Western Duar



Source: Captain S. R. Christophers and C. A. Bently, *Malaria in the Duars*, Simla: Printed at the Government Monotype Press, 1911.

**Conclusion:**

Oraon *raiya*s were deceived to Assam and Western Duar with a hope of good fortune. However, they found themselves trapped in a state of servitude in the two destinations. From 1870-1930, a good proportion of Oraon *raiya*s emigrated to these two destinations. Here they had to undergo a harsh climate, rigorous work environment, unhealthy garden and low living conditions for which they were poorly paid. Those who tried to escape these gardens were severely punished, which often led to their death. The continuous oppression prompted them to resist the condition in which they were under. This led to the rise of labour consciousness among the Oraon *raiya*s, which led to sporadic unrest in the tea plantation, which was viewed as a threat to the lucrative tea business. Oraon unrest of 1916 was a significant one in the history of Western Duar. It was the continuation of the Tana Bhagat movement of Ranchi district.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The thesis debunks the imperialistic myth of ‘egalitarian society’ that was formed and propagated from the mid-nineteenth century by colonial anthropologists to delineate *adivasi* communities from the mainstream society. In fact, this was the period when differences within the *adivasi* communities were increasing.<sup>448</sup> Within the Oraons, internal differences started increasing with the British administrative intervention. The British administrative setup included a new legal system, revenue administration, evangelisation, western education, etc., that brought drastic changes in the socio-economic structure of the Oraons. However, this does not suggest that there were no socio-economic differences within the Oraons prior to the colonial period. Internal differences existed within the Oraons prior to the colonial period. However, the prevailing differences were strengthened or accelerated in the colonial period. Indeed, the differences were visible in the migration process where a specific section of the Oraons became a major part of the labour market from 1830- 1930. Henceforth, the thesis has contributed towards understanding the acceleration of historical embedded differences in the colonial period, with the Oraon *raiya*s emerging as labourers. In this attempt, the thesis has covered five thematic chapters.

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<sup>448</sup> Uday Chandra, ‘Flaming fields and forest fires: Agrarian transformation and the making of Birsa Munda’s Rebellion’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 53 (1), 2016, p. 5; P.K. Shukla, ‘Communal Property to Private Property and the Tribal struggle’, in Lata Singh and Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *Colonial and Contemporary Bihar and Jharkhand*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, pp. 35-36.

In chapter 2, we saw how the Oraons started moving out from an egalitarian society to a differentiated society prior to colonial rule. In this process, the society was mainly divided into two sections, over the control of village resources like land. In the local parlance, the original settlers of the village were known as *bhuinhars*, and the late settlers were known as *raiya*s. In this structure, Oraon *raiya*s were debarred from taking possession of privileged landholdings and religious and political posts. On the whole, it distanced them socially and economically from the Oraon *bhuinhars*. Despite the existence of differences, the outlook of the Oraon society looked egalitarian prior to the colonial period.

In chapters 3 and 4, we saw how the prevailing differences were accelerated and were made visible by the different rent structures and discriminatory Acts and policies. Oraon *bhuinhars*, who was interpreted as privileged tenants in the colonial period, were obliged to pay fixed or quit rent. In contrast, Oraon *raiya*s were obliged to pay rent at a higher rate. This was accompanied by various Acts and policies which were central to Oraon *bhuinhars* and were completely ignorant of Oraon *raiya*s. Undoubtedly, this disrupted the economic life of Oraon *raiya*s as no policies and Acts safeguarded their rights against the exploitation of landlords and moneylenders. Consequently, many were stripped off from their forest and land rights and were left at the end of starvation. This contributed to the sub-division of the Oraon *raiya*s into occupancy, non-occupancy and under *raiya*s.<sup>449</sup>

The economic condition of Oraon *raiya*s was further deteriorated by the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878. From chapter 4, we came to know how Oraon *raiya*s were dependent on less fertile or less productive landholdings that were uneconomic in nature and barely reached the subsistence limits. Undoubtedly, they had to undergo agrarian disadvantage where they

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<sup>449</sup> *The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act, 1908*, Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1935, pp. 6-7.

struggled to maintain their livelihood exclusively on agriculture. In the pre-colonial period, they balanced their agrarian disadvantages with forest resources. However, there came a shift in the colonial period with the Forest Acts that restricted the accessibility of forest resources. Undoubtedly, this left no opportunity for them to withstand famine and drought. Moreover, they came under the unending clutches of moneylenders. Thereby, in the state of acute pauperisation, many opted for migration as a last resort for survival. Consequently, in the nineteenth century, a new class evolved from the Oraons, i.e., the labour class. On the whole, in the colonial period, Oraon *raiya*s were pushed to the margins.

One of the main findings of this thesis is that the British retained and accelerated the prevailing differences as a strategy to fulfil their capital interest. In 1834, slavery was going to be abolished in the British colonies, and there was an urgency for a new labour force to supplement the slave population. Thereby, in the 1820s, the hunt for a cheap and abundant labour force was going on. This was the period when colonial officials came across Oraon *raiya*s in the indigo plantation, where they were popularly identified as *dhangar*. Here they have already gained a reputation of hard and industrious. This enchanted the colonial officials, who saw them as the best alternate for the slave population. However, before they could progress, the Kol rebellion (1831-32) took place, which came as an obstruction in the path of their capitalist drive. Thereby, after the end of the Kol rebellion, a detailed study was made on the land tenures of Ranchi district and its inhabitants. Here colonial officials came across the prevailing differences of the Oraons, which seemed profitable for their capitalist interest. Nevertheless, they retained and accelerated the prevailing differences to induce Oraon *raiya*s in the colonial labour market. Consequently, from 1830-1930, there was a heavy outflow of Oraon *raiya*s from Ranchi district to far-flung destinations that included both inland and overseas destinations. Here we also find that the acceleration of internal differences and migration of Oraon *raiya*s were interconnected.

Sanjukta Das Gupta and B.B. Choudhari argued that after the Kol rebellion of 1831-32, *adivasi* communities were viewed as victims who had been wronged in many ways by the alien intruders.<sup>450</sup> However, the British discriminatory Acts and policies gave a different outlook. The thesis highlights that the British viewed only a certain section of the Oraons as a victim. The British concentrated on certain sections of the Oraons, not because they were seen as a threat to law and order,<sup>451</sup> but they were considered a threat for their commercial venture.

Chapter 5 and 6 deal with the overseas and inland destinations where Oraon *raiyats* migrated to fulfil the demand for cheap and abundant labour. From 1834, the Oraon *raiyats* were induced to overseas destinations like Mauritius and British Guiana to fulfil the demand for cheap and abundant labour force in the sugar plantation. Here they were recruited under an indenture system where they were bound under a contract to work for a specific period (usually five years). Till 1850's they were in high demand in these destinations as they were considered the ideal labour force for sugar plantations. Planters preferred them as, in their understanding, Oraon *raiyats* were hardy, cheap, industrious, habitual migrants, agriculturally based communities and free from the caste and religious prejudices.<sup>452</sup> The same preference was carried forward in Assam tea plantation, where they were in demand from 1839. The demand was not fulfilled in the initial period, which forced the Assam tea planters to depend on local labourers. However, local labourers showed the least interest in continuing this work due to low wages, which left the planters in great distress. In order to solve the labour problem in Assam tea plantation, the migration of Oraon *raiyats* was completely shifted from overseas to

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<sup>450</sup> Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Adivasi and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos 1820-1932*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan Private Limited, 2011, p. 115; B.B. Chaudhari, 'Towards an Understanding of the Tribal World of Colonial Eastern India', in Sanjukta Das Gupta and Raj Sekhar Basu (ed). *Narratives from the Margins: Aspects of Adivasi history in India*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, p. 50.

<sup>451</sup> Chaudhari, *Towards an Understanding of the Tribal World of Colonial Eastern India*, p. 49.

<sup>452</sup> Sir George Grey, *Emigration: Canada and Australia, Accounts and Papers: seventeen volume, colonies, emigration, Australia, prison; West Indies; &c, session 15 November 1837 - 16 August 1838*, 1838, p. 34.

inland destinations. From the 1870s, the migration of Oraon *raiya*s started to inland destinations like Assam and Western Duar. Here they were considered as 1<sup>st</sup> class labourers.<sup>453</sup> In order to induce them to these destinations, various intermediaries like *akratis* and *sardars* were recruited by the planters. Among these intermediaries, *akratis* used various fraudulent methods like kidnapping, misinformation, misapprehension, false promises and false imprisonment to induce them to these two destinations. In Assam, Oraon *raiya*s had to enter into a contract, while in Western Duar, they had to enter into no contract. This is why scholars like Shashank Shekhar Sinha claim that *adivasis* preferably followed temporary migration in Western Duar.<sup>454</sup> In contrast to these claims, Oraon *raiya*s became a permanent labour force in both these destinations.

In both overseas and inland destinations, Oraon *raiya*s faced a similar fate. Here they were opened for commercial exploitation like torture and impoverishment. In both sugar and tea plantations, they were confined to an isolated area far from their home, without any adequate rights and no protection against their employers, and had to undergo a physically exhausting nature of work with a low wage. Furthermore, in parallel to their migration, multiple identities were imposed on them like *dhangar*, *tea tribe* in these destinations. These identities left a long-lasting impact on Oraon *raiya*s.

According to Joseph Bara and Samita Sen, the term *dhangar* originated from the British word 'dhang' or 'dang'.<sup>455</sup> However, the thesis rejects it and consider it a Sadri word

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<sup>453</sup> Kaushik Ghosh, 'A Market of Aboriginality: Primitivism and race classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India', in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (ed.) *Subaltern Studies X: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 34.

<sup>454</sup> Shashank Shekhar Sinha, *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating tribes in Gender Studies*, Kolkata: Bhatkal & Son, 2005, p. 113.

<sup>455</sup> Joseph Bara, 'Colonialism, Christianity and the Tribes of Chhotanagpur in East India, 1845-1890', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Volume XXX, no. 2, 2007, p. 196; Samita Sen, 'Kidnapping in Chotanagpur Recruitment for

that originated from the word ‘*dhan*’. Moreover, it claims that the term was not coined by the British but by the non-*adivasi* landlords to recognise a farm servant. From indigo plantation, the term gained popularity outside Ranchi district, where Oraon *raiyyats* and their co-*adivasi* communities were recruited under the denomination of *dhangar*. In chapter 5, we saw how the term *dhangar* became synonyms of labour in the labour market that stigmatised the identity of Oraon *raiyyats* as labour in various destinations. Nevertheless, all these contributed to the proletarianisation process of Oraon *raiyyats*, which eventually reduced them to the position of labour.

In response to their proletarianisation process, Oraon *raiyyats* led Tana Bhagat Movement in 1914 in Ranchi district. By 1916, its echoes spread to the tea plantation of Western Duar, where Oraon *raiyyats* comprised 50% of its labour population. According to Sangeeta Dasgupta and Lata Singh, the movement was beyond opposition to the landlords, moneylenders and the British government. In their understanding, the movement was opposition to internal differences.<sup>456</sup> Undoubtedly, internal differences prevailed within the Oraons, but the movement was not restricted to internal differences. The thesis showcase that the movement took place against the proletarianisation process. Through the movement, Oraon *raiyyats* tried to redefine their stigmatised identity of labour. Consequently, they also made a desperate attempt to improve their socio-economic conditions to elevate their socio-economic position to stay rooted in their abode and to avoid migration.

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Assam tea plantations in a Tribal Area’ in Sanjukta Das Gupta and Raj Sekhar Basu, (ed.) *Narratives from the margin: Aspects of Adivasi history in India*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, p. 185.

<sup>456</sup> Sangeeta Dasgupta, ‘Locating Adivasi in Colonial India’, in Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah (ed.) *Savage Attack: Tribal Insurgency in India*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2014, p. 113; Lata Singh, *Popular Translation of Nationalism: Bihar, 1920-1922*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, p. 172.

On the whole, the thesis rejects the notion that Oraon as a community was susceptible to migration.<sup>457</sup> Within the Oraons, it was Oraon *raiya*s who became susceptible to the migration process from 1830-1930. No doubt, economic degradation remained a major cause for their migration to far-flung destinations. However, their migration was equally backed by the colonial Acts and policies. In fact, it was these Acts and policies that magnified the agrarian disadvantages of Oraon *raiya*s and prompted them to become a major part of the labour migration. No doubt, the outmigration of Oraon *raiya*s from Ranchi district contributed to changing the district's demographic picture.

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<sup>457</sup> Samita Sen, 'Kidnapping in Chotanagpur Recruitment for Assam tea plantations in a Tribal Area' in Sanjukta Das Gupta and Raj Sekhar Basu, (ed.) *Narratives from the margin: Aspects of Adivasi history in India*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, p. 183.

APPENDIX 1

**Oraon (Dhangar) in north western province**



Source: W. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Province and Oudh, Vol. 4*,  
New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999, p. 279

## APPENDIX 2

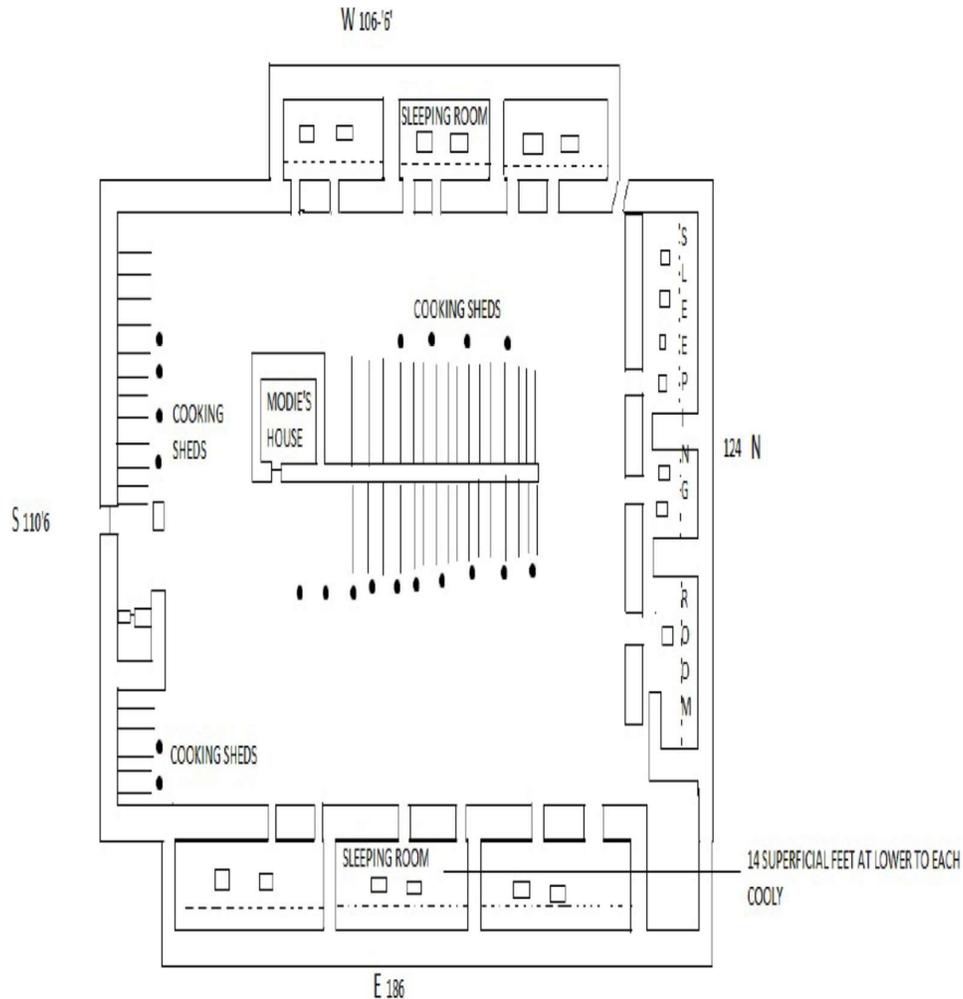
### Adivasi women on their way to a tea garden



**Source:** F. B. Bradely-Birt, *Chota Nagpore a little-known province of the Empire*, London: Smith, Elder & co, 15 Waterloo place, 1900, p. 175.

### APPENDIX 3

A (Plan of Hazaribagh) registered depot constructed by Mr Saubolle.



**Note:** The walls were made of sun-dried bricks and roof are tiled.

**Source:** *Free Emigration to Assam: Correspondence regarding the existing arrangements for the emigration of coolies from the Chota Nagpore Division to Assam and Cachar*, Government of Bengal, General Department, Branch: Inland Emigration, File no. 4, serial number of file 1 to 5, January 1889, p. 9, West Bengal State Archive.

## APPENDIX 4

### Form of description of emigrant for Assam

(sd.) Dasserad

His mark X

#### FORM OF DESCRIPTION OF EMIGRANT

Name of labourer	Father's name	Age	Sex	Caste	Residence			Period of Residence
					Zillah	Pergunah	Mouzah	
Dasserad	Munyeteri	18	Male	Kerwar	Lohardugga	Sompur	Puttron	One year

I hereby certify that before the with-mentioned Dasserad signed this contract, I personally explained it to him.

John Binning

Local Agent, for Employer

**Source:** *Free emigration –Relative to the case of the family of five persons, residents of Hazaribagh, who were recruited for service in the gardens of the Khoong Tea Company, Limited, in Assam, Government of Bengal, General Department, Inland Emigration, No. 6-10, file no. 11, August 1885, p. 15, West Bengal State Archive.*

## APPENDIX 5

### The Progress of Operation Under the Chota Nagpur Tenure Act



Source: *Working of the Chota nagpore tenures Act*, Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, Land revenue, proceeding no. 13-15, File. No. 13, March 1875, Bihar State Archive.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Addiyar:</i>	<i>the descent of the original settler of the village</i>
<i>Arkati:</i>	<i>coolie/labour recruiter</i>
<i>Awab:</i>	<i>charges levied from a tenant other than rent</i>
<i>Baiga:</i>	<i>village priest of the Oraons</i>
<i>Bandh:</i>	<i>the embankment with which the water of the channel is dammed.</i>
<i>Bhuinhar:</i>	<i>the descent of the original settler of the village</i>
<i>Bhuinhari:</i>	<i>land of original settlers</i>
<i>Bhutkheta:</i>	<i>land dedicated to the worship of the village spirit</i>
<i>Beth-begari:</i>	<i>forced labour/ praedial service without payment</i>
<i>Bigha:</i>	<i>unit of land measurement</i>
<i>Chanda:</i>	<i>a form of tribute</i>
<i>Chick Baraik:</i>	<i>weaver</i>
<i>Chowkidar:</i>	<i>watchman</i>
<i>Dhangar:</i>	<i>farm servant</i>
<i>Dharti Abba:</i>	<i>Father of earth</i>
<i>Dakait:</i>	<i>Dacoit</i>
<i>Diku:</i>	<i>exploiter (mainly used for landlords and moneylenders)</i>
<i>Don:</i>	<i>the low terraced land</i>
<i>Etahaturenko/ prajahoroko:</i>	<i>men of other villages (term used by the Mundas)</i>
<i>Gauror/ Gairos:</i>	<i>late settlers or comers (term used by the Oraons)</i>

<i>Ghar-damad:</i>	<i>house son-in law</i>
<i>Jhuming:</i>	<i>shifting cultivation</i>
<i>Kala-azar:</i>	<i>blackwater fever</i>
<i>Khuntkattidar:</i>	<i>the descent of the original reclamer of a village (term used by the Mundas and Hos)</i>
<i>Khuntkatti:</i>	<i>a system of jungle reclamation (term used by the Mundas and Hos)</i>
<i>Killi:</i>	<i>clan</i>
<i>Lohar:</i>	<i>blacksmith</i>
<i>Magh:</i>	<i>a month corresponding to mid-January to mid-February</i>
<i>Mahajan:</i>	<i>moneylender</i>
<i>Mahto:</i>	<i>headman</i>
<i>Mataio:</i>	<i>ghost finding</i>
<i>Majhiyas:</i>	<i>landlord's private property</i>
<i>Non-khuntkattidar:</i>	<i>late settlers</i>
<i>Pawa:</i>	<i>local unit of land measure</i>
<i>Pahan:</i>	<i>priest of the Oraons</i>
<i>Pahanai:</i>	<i>village pahans held this land for the performance of certain sacrifices</i>
<i>Patti:</i>	<i>gang</i>
<i>Parha:</i>	<i>a confederacy of a number of neighbouring villages with a central organisation known as parha panch</i>
<i>Praja:</i>	<i>commoner</i>

<i>Raiyat:</i>	<i>late settlers</i>
<i>Rukumat:</i>	<i>praedial dues</i>
<i>Sadan:</i>	<i>non-advansi</i>
<i>Sardar:</i>	<i>leader /labour recruiter (in tea plantations sardar was mainly used to recognise labour recruiter)</i>
<i>Salami:</i>	<i>premium paid to landlords on acquiring a tenancy</i>
<i>Sasan:</i>	<i>burial ground of the Mundas</i>
<i>Sasandiri:</i>	<i>gravestone</i>
<i>Tanr:</i>	<i>a land constitutes the upland</i>
<i>Tikas:</i>	<i>lease</i>
<i>Thana:</i>	<i>police station</i>
<i>Zamindar:</i>	<i>landlord</i>

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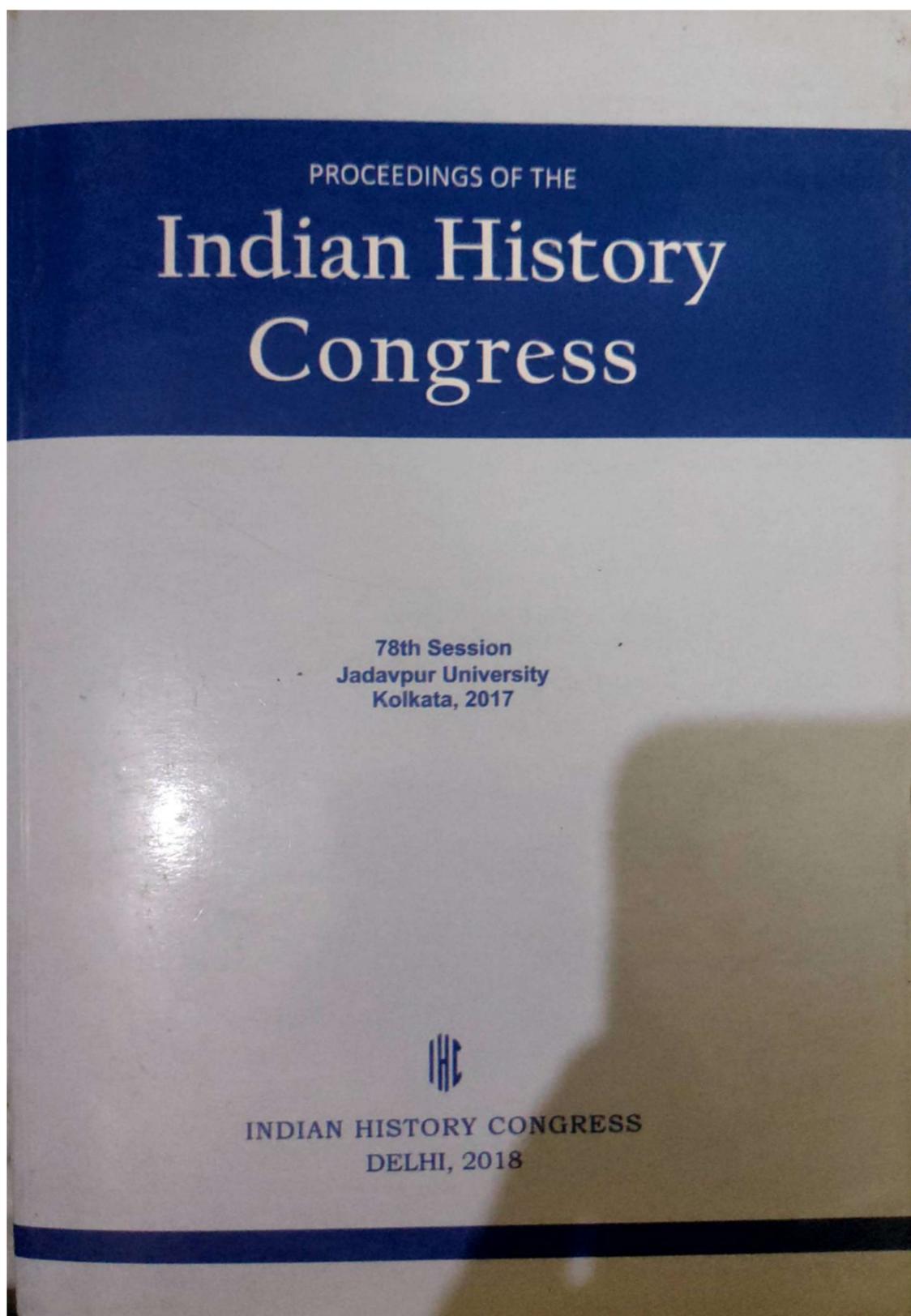
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**PUBLISHED PAPERS**



## PROFESSOR B.B. CHOUDHURI PRIZE

### THE MAKING OF A 'COOLIE' AND A 'COOLIE CATCHMENT DISTRICT': *A HISTORY OF RANCHI DISTRICT AND ITS INHABITANTS FROM 1830 -1920*

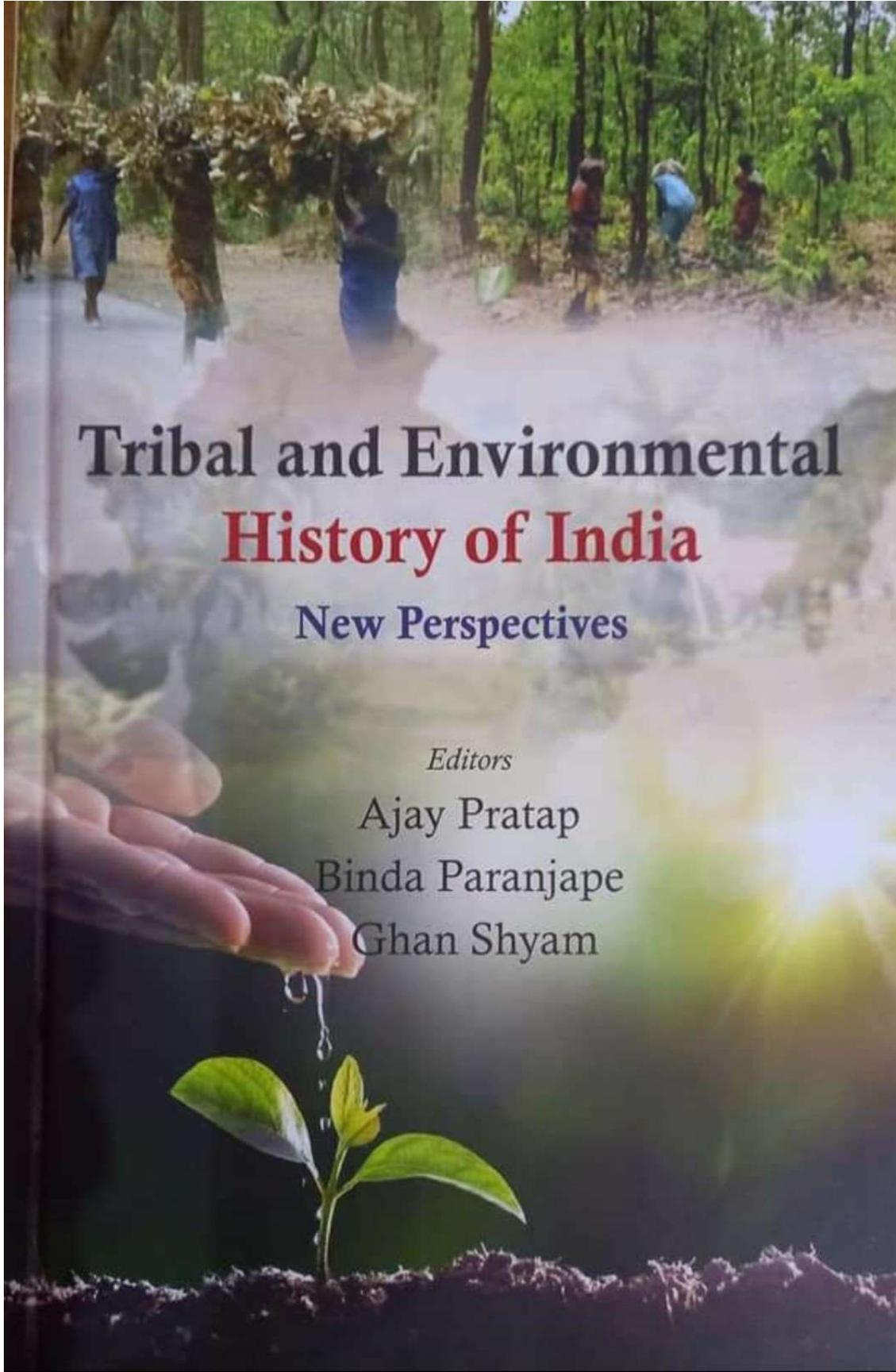
Sunny Ruchi Ecka  
Hyderabad

Ranchi district, an abode of Oraon and Munda, is an example of an ordinary place that emerged to rise in status to become a 'coolie catchment district' through a process of historical journey. Until 1830s, the central portion of Chotanagpur that eventually became Ranchi district was overlooked by the colonial regime for almost sixty years of their rule and they remained confined to the northern part of Chotanagpur. Colonial troops entered the territory of Chotanagpur in the year 1770 under the leadership of Captain Camac. After ten years (1780) a district, under the name of the 'Ramgarh hill tract,<sup>1</sup> was established with its headquarter alternatively at Sharghatti (now in Gaya district) and Chatra (now in Hazaribagh District).<sup>2</sup> During these years, the central portion saw repeated uprisings of Oraon and Munda. Despite the above fact, no tough stances were taken by the colonial authority to control future uprisings. Unpredictably, the attention of the British administration shifted towards central part with the outbreak of Kol Rebellion (1831-32) at Sonepur Pargana.<sup>3</sup> This, later on, resulted in the formation of Ranchi district.

#### **Nexus between Kol insurrection and the birth of new district:**

Kol insurrection is considered to be a deadly movement of three tribal communities i.e. Oraon, Munda and Ho. They brought turmoil to the parts of Chotanagpur and in due course of time it became a serious threat for the existing Rajas and *dikus*<sup>4</sup> of Chotanagpur. Immediately, after the suppression of this rebellion, Nagvanshi Raja, Jaggernath Nath Deo wrote a letter to the Governor General to inform him about the disturbing incident and demanded justice by giving punishment to the Kols:<sup>5</sup>

Until these rebels receive the chastisement they deserve, it is impossible to maintain rule, for they have not only plundered a vast deal of property but have put to death several of the nobles. If they are not punished they will in 3 or 4 years become more insolent and audacious. They will destroy every man of rank who has a yet by some mean or other saved his life and property and carry off whatever he may accumulate in the meantime.



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 ❖ *M. M. Sharma*
12. Tribal Revolts and the British Raj 160  
 ❖ *Abha Shukla Bajpai*
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14. Munda Protests and Forest Policies of the Colonial Period 188  
 ❖ *Radha Devi*
15. Colonial Rule and Criminal Tribes of the United Provinces 197  
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This is to certify that **Sunny Ruchi Ecka** presented a paper titled – “Changing Destinations of Tribal Emigration from Ranchi District, 1830-1930.” at the International Conference on *The Migrant and the State: From Colonialism to Neoliberalism* organized by Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna Centre in collaboration with Labour Resources Department, Government of Bihar in Patna on November 29-December 1, 2018. We sincerely appreciate her paper presentation as well as active participation in the conference and making it a success.

Pushpendra Kumar Singh

Professor and Chairperson

Mithlesh Kumar

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Professor Ishrat Alam  
Secretary  
Indian History Congress

30 December 2017

# Colonialism, Adivasis and Migration: A Study of the Oraons of Ranchi District, 1830- 1930

*by* Sunny Ruchi Ecka

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