

MUNDA RELIGION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is concerned with the Mundas, a 600,000 strong tribe living on the Chotanagpur plateau in South Bihar, India. An attempt is made to explore and correlate linkages between certain religious and social changes found to be taking place among this group of people. A substantial body of ethnographic literature about the Mundas exists in the writings of colonial servants and foreign missionaries. This provides a point of departure and a baseline for assessing some of the many subsequent changes undergone by this group of cultivators who are traditionally organized into a segmentary lineage society and who are outside the Hindu caste system both ritually and economically.

The changes in social organization discussed here include the protective tenancy legislation enacted by the British in 1908 to prevent further alienation of tribal land to outsiders, the growing shortage of virgin land and its effect on lineage organization and village life, the growth of marketing and monetary structures, missions and education, and the increased cultural 'nationalism' of tribal people in Chotanagpur.

These changes are linked with changes in religious organization, and particularly the decline in significance of the village priest (pahan) and the observances traditionally associated with village life and which are tied in with the cycles of wet and dry rice cultivation. The importance of

village medicine men and diviners is analysed and placed in the context of the search for explanations of new problems and of old problems for which existing explanations lack credibility. Religion is seen as a charter of meaning as well as a reflector of social and economic changes and constraints. It is a product of history, and particular attention is paid, in this analysis, to the role of historical memory and traditions in shaping present ideologies.

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Notes on Transliteration

The ' in some Mundari words indicates a stopped vowel or consonant. All transliteration is approximately phonetic.

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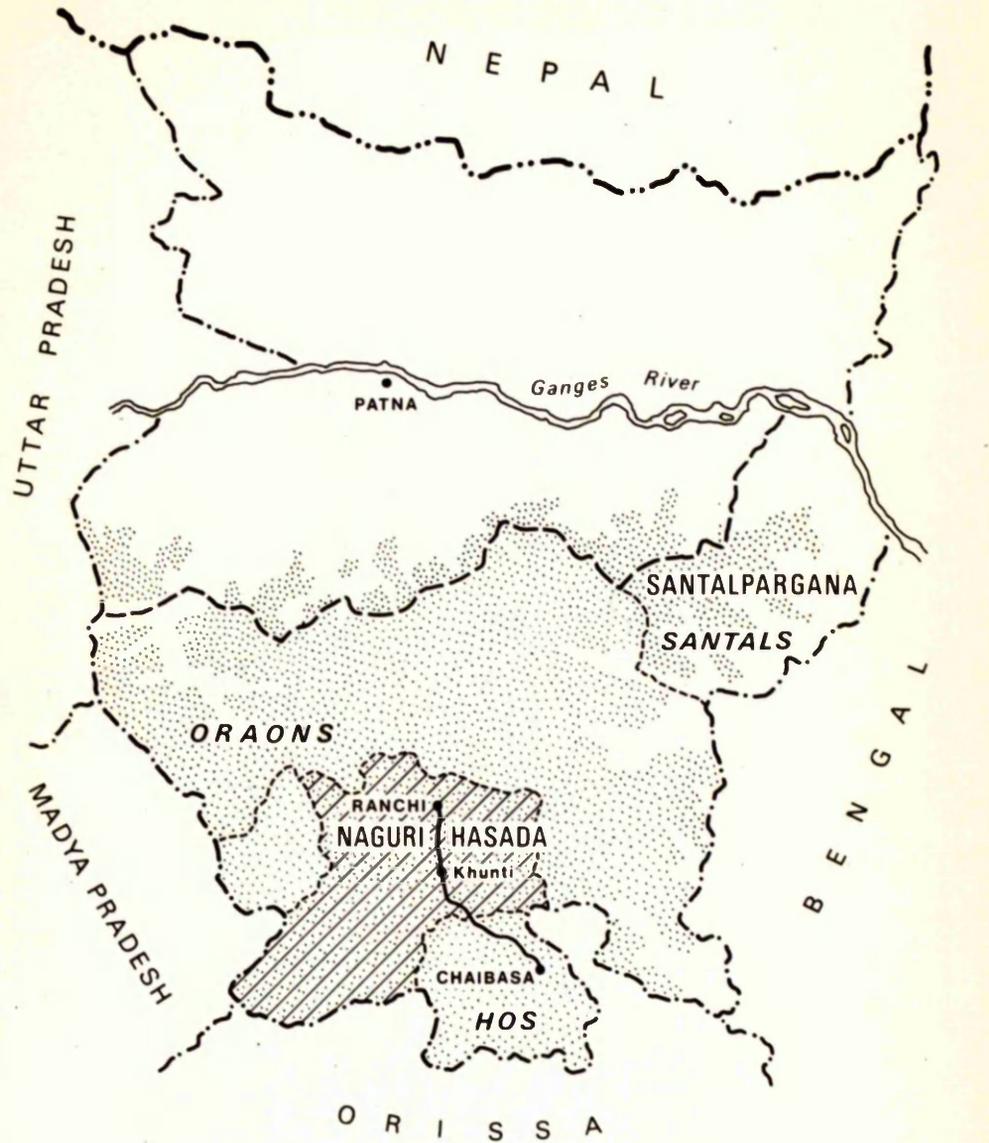
Fieldwork was conducted under the auspices of a Social Science Research Council Studentship, and I would like to express my grateful thanks to them and to my supervisor, Professor C. von Furer Haimendorf, who first suggested that I should undertake this study and gave me all possible assistance during fieldwork and in the writing of this thesis.

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Most is owed to the villagers of Sukuhatu and Kadu for making me a kinswoman.

INTRODUCTION

MAP OF BIHAR STATE



0 miles 100

- · — · — International boundary
- · — · — State boundary
- · — · — District boundary
- · — · — Border of Chotanagpur
-  Ranchi District
-  Road
-  Land over 1640 feet (500 metres)
- HOS* Tribal names

Background to the Study

The material for this study was collected during the period May 1972 to May 1973 in two Munda tribal villages on the Chotanagpur Plateau, South Bihar. This area has attracted much attention since colonial times, both as an administratively 'difficult' area, and also as an ethnological focus for many colonial administrators and missionaries with a taste for anthropology. The reasons for this interest may be sought in the writings of some of these early anthropologists.

One of the first ethnographic references is found in Lieutenant Tickell's 'Memoir on the Hodesum: improperly called Kolhan,' which was published in 1840¹ and describes the Singbhum area in the South of Chotanagpur, inhabited by a branch of the Munda tribe. The people are described as being totally different in language, manners and customs from both the Oraons, a Chotanagpur Dravidian-speaking tribe, and the Hindus. Tickell goes on to relate that,

'it is these Oraons who first give us accounts of a people called Moondas, whom they found in possession of Chotanagpur at the time of their flight into it.'²

These Mundas were,

'a wild people, living chiefly by hunting, and who offered no opposition to the Oraons settling in the fine open tracts to the northward of Sonapur.'³

Sonapur is to the northwest of Ranchi District. Tickell also assures us that 'none of the vile traits of common Hindustanee life ever offend the ear.'⁴

Later in the century, Colonel Dalton, speaking of the Santals, a branch of the same tribal group, tells us that their moral character is,

'the higher, the less their intercourse with the Hindus. They speak with abhorrence of the Hindu practice of marrying children. The women are modest, but frank, without the shrinking squeamishness of Hindu women.'⁵

They are credited, in 19th century writings, with many admirable characteristics, such as courage, cheerfulness, honesty and a noble sense of right and wrong. They are also considered to be of a quite distinct ethnic stock from that of the Hindus. Hunter states this view in 1868,

'They certainly number a million and a half and probably approach two millions of human beings claiming a common origin, speaking one language, following similar customs, worshipping the same gods and forming in all essentials a distinct ethnical entity among the aboriginal races.'

Three main points emerge clearly from this brief, but representative sample of colonial writing. The first is that the tribes were 'primitive' in the technological sense, the second is that they compared very favourably in their behaviour with the Hindu population, and the third is that they are of a distinct ethnic or aboriginal identity. This 'noble savagery' endeared them to their administrators and explains, perhaps, the considerable interest evinced in their customs and way of life. Concern was frequently expressed over the tendency for those tribal people living in close contact with Hindu settlers to adopt Hindu customs and taboos, and thus to become 'Hinduised.'

My own interest in Chotanagpur was prompted, not so much by the intrinsic ethnological interest of the area, but by present day conditions, and particularly by the effects of historical and administrative changes on a tribe traditionally considered to be ethnically and culturally distinct from its Hindu neighbours.

The 1961 Census statistics convey some idea of the contrast between the north and south of Bihar. The research took place in the Khunti Subdivision of Ranchi District, which is one of six such districts making up the Chotanagpur Division of the State. It is divided into four subdivisions.

	<u>Ranchi District</u>	<u>Bihar</u>
% scheduled tribes to total population	61.6	9.05
Average population density per square kilometre	117	267
Average % availability of land in acres	1.46	0.66

Ranchi District also contains the rapidly expanding city of Ranchi (population 200,000) which inflates the figures for the rural area, but they still indicate some of the major differences between Chotanagpur and the rest of Bihar in matters of population density, land availability and population mixture. The economic differences are offset, however, by lower crop yields, lack of irrigation and a lower proportion of cultivable land in the hills.

Chotanagpur lies at an altitude of between 2000 and 3000 feet and it was once densely forested with sal trees.

Forest still covers about 37% of the total area. Holdings are traditionally established by clearing the jungle to make rice fields. Much of the remaining forest is now classed as 'reserved', and is protected from further encroachment by the Forestry Department. Land suitable and available for clearance is becoming increasingly scarce throughout Chotanagpur.

Cultivated land is terraced and named according to productivity, but divides basically into upland (tanr) and lowland (don). In the lowland fields, the major crop is transplanted wet paddy which is sown at the start of the monsoon in June and harvested in November and December. A poor monsoon always means a poor crop as there is little artificial irrigation and few natural rivers or lakes. Don land accounts for about one third of the cultivated land, but because of its high productivity in comparison with tanr, it forms the main source of livelihood. The tanr crops, however, provide the biggest buffer against starvation and are an invaluable dietary supplement. Coarse (dry) rice is sown broadcast on the lowest of the upland terraces. Millet, pulses, maize, oil seed and vegetables are grown on tanr and in kitchen gardens. These crops are also used as exchange commodities in the purchase of kerosene, salt, cloth, hardware and trinkets from local markets.

Tribal groups are now distinguished administratively in the Scheduled Tribes and Castes legislation introduced by the post-Independence Government. The tribes and castes affected by this legislation are all classed as economically backward

and are given certain privileges such as a number of reserved jobs in the public sector and special assistance in obtaining a college education. The definition broadly follows customary usage, and in Chotanagpur, the Santals, Mundas, Hos and Oraons together form about 70% of the Scheduled Tribe population. The remainder is made up of many small groups which are, in most cases, offshoots of the four main tribes. These four groups overlap geographically but tend to be concentrated in specific areas. Thus the Hos are found almost exclusively in Singbhum, in the very south bordering on Orissa. Santals live mainly in the Santal Parganas to the east bordering on Bengal. Mundas and Oraons predominate in Ranchi District with the Oraons concentrated in the north and the Mundas in the south, but there are also many mixed villages. The 1961 census gives the following population figures for the major groups:

Santals	1,255,000	Mundas	614,000
Hos	434,000	Oraons	554,000

Culturally and linguistically, Santals, Mundas and Hos are sufficiently similar to warrant the assumption that they originally formed one group which later split and became geographically separated in different parts of Chotanagpur. These tribes still erect the megaliths for their dead which are cited by archaeologists as evidence of their settlement in India before both Aryans and Dravidians. Oraons are Dravidian speaking and almost certainly arrived at a later date, if their historical traditions are to be believed, but cultural diffusion between these tribes has been considerable.

The other three groups belong linguistically to the Austro-Asiatic category of agglutinating languages which includes certain Mon-Khmer and Himalayan tongues. Mundari is quite unrelated to Hindi, the official language of Bihar.

Tribal status differences are derived from an oral historical tradition which shows a surprising consistency from area to area. Mundas are generally conceded the most prestige as the 'leaders' of the expansion into Chotanagpur in search of virgin land and in retreat from unfriendly invaders. The Santals and Hos split off at some indeterminable point in the past and retired to their remoter corners comparatively unmolested, but the Mundas faced interpenetration and later harassment by Hindu and Moslem settlers which culminated in serious tribal unrest in the 19th Century. The Munda millenarian leader, Birsa, is now a revered historical and mythical figure in Chotanagpur. This has reinforced Munda pride in their ancestry and the struggle for its protection. Endogamy reflects this view of status.

Among the Mundas, intermarriage with Santals is generally discouraged, although its likelihood is restricted to meetings in the Assam tea gardens. Santals are considered, by the Mundas to be just a little lower on the social scale. Marriage between Mundas and Hos is also restricted, but in this case both parties claim the superior status. The Hos claim that their language and customs are purer because of their greater isolation from foreign influences. The Mundas

maintain that they are simply a breakaway from the main tribe and refer to them as Ho Mundas. Several cases of intermarriage were noted, however, and these had been accepted amicably and without stigma by both parties. Marriage between Mundas and Oraons is common and arouses little comment. The alliance of these two tribes is evidently borne out of a common historical cause against the outsider.

The term 'adivasi', a Hindi word for aboriginal populations, is used commonly in Chotanagpur to refer to the collective Scheduled Tribe population. This use is popular among the Mundas as it emphasizes what they see as their ethnic status as 'first settlers' in the area. Outsiders are referred to as diku, which appears to come from the Urdu word dikhān meaning headman or landlord. The term is, in fact, synonymous with the outsider who settled in Chotanagpur in recent centuries by obtaining land by force or guile from tribal cultivators. These outsiders were Hindus and Moslems who obtained leases from petty chiefs or rajas and who brought in their own service castes. Although mostly landless, these castes are also referred to as diku because of their association with Hindu landowners. Diku is a term of great opprobrium and to translate it as 'enemy' would not be unreasonable.

Within the two categories of adivasi and diku there are more complex distinctions to be made. There are, in a sense, two caste systems operating in Chotanagpur. Among the Hindus

who, together with the Moslems constitute about 40% of the population, there is the usual spread of Brahmins, cultivator castes and artisans. As far as this hierarchy is concerned, the adivasis are outside it. They are both autonomous and untouchable in the sense that they defy classification, except as 'jungly' or wild people, yet in contact situations they are assimilated to the status of untouchables.

The other system is tribal. It is headed by the tribal cultivator, who may perhaps be likened to the dominant caste of other areas. It is considered rather shameful for a Munda to perform the work of artisans. An expression often heard is 'we are farmers, we do not know how to work with our hands.' In fact, the division of labour is less clear cut than this suggests. Munda men make ploughs from wood and any wooden implements. Men and women make mats for the house and for spreading grain and drying foodstuffs. The iron tips for the ploughs are made by a caste of blacksmiths called Barae, along with all the other iron requirements of the village. Every village has a blacksmith, and he is paid in kind by each household at harvest time. Intermarriage and interdining with blacksmiths is forbidden, the one incurring irrevocable loss of caste and the other, a fine and usually a compensatory village feast.

Mundas may make the kind of baskets which are used for transporting foodstuffs and other goods from place to place. Baskets used in any stage of the production of the wet rice crop must be made by a special caste of basket makers, or Turis. A breach of this rule is said to result in lack of

rainfall. Pottery, weaving and leather work are performed by artisan castes who all rank lower than the blacksmith, but who are only found in certain villages, usually those close to markets where their goods can be sold. According to the District Gazetteer for 1870, none of these castes, except the blacksmith and the weaver, were found in Munda villages before the 1840's when the first markets were opened in the area. I am not sure how reliable this evidence is, but it is still the case that most villages off the main road and away from the market centres do not boast any castes from apart/a blacksmith. Weavers tend to occupy separate villages.

Castes whose status is accounted in terms of a tribal hierarchy, are almost indistinguishable culturally from one another. They speak Mundari and broadly follow Munda customs. It is almost impossible to work out a precise ranking of these tribal castes, who are rarely found together in one village and who tend to practise mutual avoidance in terms of commensality. The only intermarriage which I observed was between a blacksmith man and a weaver woman, and this confirmed the ranking of blacksmiths above weavers as the man was outcaste and had to leave his village.

The two systems overlap only at the bottom where a Ghasi caste work as drummers for both Mundas and Hindus if their services are required. They are untouchable in both systems, speak Mundari and the Hindi lingua franca (known as Sadani) and take cooked food from everyone except Christian Mundas. Otherwise, the hierarchies are mutually exclusive and Mundas

will not take food from Hindus.

Endogamy forms the major mechanism by which exclusiveness is maintained. There is no way of reinstating a man or woman who has had sexual relations with a diku or with a member of a tribal caste. This was illustrated by two cases which I observed. In one, a Munda youth was found to be having a relationship with a blacksmith girl. A public announcement was made that he was now a blacksmith and those who were known to have eaten with him since the affair were fined. In the other case, a Munda girl eloped with a Rajput youth (a diku) whom she had met at the mission school and the couple were living a precarious life hovering between their two villages as neither Rajputs nor Mundas would accept them. Assimilation of women from outside is, at least at the present time, non-existent, unless from other tribes; and this accords with a genetic ideology in which the woman plays a major part in procreation by contributing the child's flesh and blood to the man's bone.

Tribe and Caste

The Definitional Question

As I intend to use the term 'tribe', some consideration of the status of this term is necessary. I am not going to review comprehensively all the definitions which have been offered, but I shall instead concentrate on what I consider to be three basic positions in more than a century of debate. These shifts in emphasis, which may be said to represent increasing levels of abstraction, are from social or cultural

morphology to the politico-economic plane to the sphere of values, and as such, they represent also a progression in sociological thought.

The term 'tribe' has a long pedigree in literature about India. We are all familiar with references to tribes of Afghans, Rajputs, Marathas, etc., and it is not until the 19th century upsurge in colonial and missionary writings that a fully fledged distinction between tribes and castes starts to appear. This distinction was generally based on a combination of cultural, economic, geographical and linguistic features. The morphology of a tribe was thus composed of animistic or totemic worship, primitive technology, isolation and language. Though cumbersome to apply, this reflected the dominant interest of the time in culture history and the racial origins of populations. 'Tribes' came to be seen as an ethnic substratum of aborigines who preceded the Aryan invasion and were either absorbed by them or fled into the hills to be rediscovered only by 19th century anthropology.

A significant theoretical contribution to this literature came from the work of German and Austrian philologists and culture historians, who based most of their conclusions on linguistic affinities. From this school of anthropology is derived the assertion that Mundari, the language of Munda-speaking people in middle India, is related to the Mon-Khmer languages of the Himalayan ranges. Comparative philology was influential in the delineation of those groups which have been enshrined in recent legislation,

as the Scheduled Tribes, and this particular debt needs to be emphasized. More generally, 19th century anthropology concerned itself with the marking off of discrete, organic cultural entities and the identification of culture traits as 'tribal' or Hindu. Value judgements began to be made, which usually favoured the primitive tribal over his more sophisticated Hindu counterpart. There are many elements involved in these value judgements, including the image of the 'noble savage', but a major factor was the absence by and large, of a fully-articulated caste system among tribal people. As was noted, 19th century administrators tended to express strong disapproval of any manifestation of Hindu caste or religion among their tribal flock.

Historical accounts of tribes concentrated mainly on 'customs', ignoring or glossing over any similarities with Hindus and giving little information about the organic links between tribe and caste which have always existed even in geographically isolated areas. This has led to the emphasis on tribes as 'whole societies' with self-sufficient economies - a view which has had tangible repercussions in government policies towards the tribes, and perhaps more importantly, in the present-day conscious models of tribal people themselves.

After the 19th century interest had abated, there was little sociological work done in tribal areas, and the next definitional landmark may be said to be that of Bailey in his study of the Orissa Khonds.⁷ He conceptualised tribe and

caste as ideal types at polar ends of a continuum in which the major variable was the distribution of land rights and political power. Tribal society is segmentary, based on territorial kin groups, while caste society is organic, composed of economically specialised interdependent caste groups arranged in a hierarchy. Thus, we may ask the question "to what extent is this society organised on segmentary principles and to what extent is it organic?", in order to locate any particular social group.

As an exercise in definition making this contrasts favourably with the cultural morphology approach. It utilises an important organisational principle which seems to me to describe quite adequately the politico-economic reality of the Khond and his Oriya neighbour, and into which contra, Dumont⁸ the role of the colonial power may be subsumed. It has, additionally, the advantage of squaring with a fairly generally accepted Africanist use of the term 'tribe'. Unfortunately, Bailey in taking issue with Dumont over the more abstract question of a sociology of India, set up his Orissa-derived model as an all-India definition of tribe and caste, thereby, implicitly accepting Dumont's premise that 'India is one'.

At an all-India level, the definition is obviously inadequate. The Indian Constitution continues to define as 'tribes' many groups of people whose social organisation is not based on territorial kin groups, such as hunter-gatherers or those dispossessed of land but who continue to regard themselves as 'adivasis'. As the present tribe-caste

distinction is in fact based on the motley assortment of cultural features alluded to above, then it would seem to be an evident waste of time to look for definitions of tribe at an all-India level.

This search, however, has been forced upon all present-day writers on tribes in India by the recent insistence that India is one. If a single principle, such as hierarchy, can be seen as the basis of the caste system, and its spread is limited to the geographical area within which this system is found, then the cultural imperialism implied by this view insists that all residual elements be somehow assimilated to the dominant system. This is, I think, Bailey's own fear when he cautions against "a descent into hasty monism",⁹ or the attempt to subsume all social facts under one principle, and it is a pity that his own attempt at definition does precisely this.

We may now turn to the definition, or rather the view of tribes which is contained in Dumont's analysis of the Hindu caste system. As the unity of the system is to be found in ideas and values, then one way of dealing with the tribal question is to see to what extent the values of the caste system are to be found in the tribe. This essentially negative procedure raises further definitional problems as it tells us little about what a tribe is, and it is interesting that the nearest Dumont comes to offering a definition of this residual but troublesome element is in his early, dogmatic assertion, taken from Mauss's review of Rivers book on the Todas, that:

"the failure to recognise that most so-called 'primitives' in India are only people who have lost contact has been one of the reasons which retarded Indian ethnology, and sociology as a whole." 10

Tribes, then, may be defined as primitive Hindus who somehow got lost in the forest and failed to develop fully the values of higher Sanskritic civilisation. This singular view of forest and hill dwellers is a refreshing change from the insistent clamour of the 19th century culturology over pre-Aryan, pre-Dravidian aboriginal remnants which these people were deemed to represent. Yet Mauss's view is just as speculative and just as culturological as that of the writers he criticised. We cannot base a contemporary, sociological definition on ethnological speculation. It is, in any case, difficult to see why Mauss directed this criticism at Rivers, who suggests, himself, that the Todas originated in civilised Malabar and that their existing level of culture could be seen as a debased form of that extant in Malabar. It is in this sense that we are to understand the term 'primitive' in Rivers.

In a later edition of 'Contributions' we find that Dumont has revised this view when reanalysing some of Elwin's data on the Saora of Orissa. The above view is rejected as being "at the same time too ambitious and too narrow".¹¹ I do not understand what he means by this, but in a stimulating discussion of the extent to which Saora cosmology may be said to have acknowledged, indirectly, the higher status of Hindu deities, the suggestion seems to be that the Saoras are not primitive Hindus, but have become Hinduized in certain respects

by their exposure to Hindu culture. In the fundamental respect of the opposition between pure and impure, the ideas of the Saora are said to be "very sketchy"¹². Having "asserted themselves by corporate action against the outside world",¹³ they earn for themselves the label 'autonomous'. Dumont has moved from a positive to a negative view, however, as we know only that Saoras are not Hindus, but we know little of the principles upon which their social organisation is based.

In yet another rejoinder to Bailey¹⁴ we find Dumont actually countenancing the notion of tribal ideas and values as distinct from Hindu values, although he does not discuss what these values might be. There is, however, a pervasive feeling that for him they are 'primitive' when contrasted with Hindu notions; this in spite of the fact that the search for the 'primitive' is attributed to those writers who have made studies of tribes.

In short, Dumont's final, revised position, that "all people (in India) have been influenced in some degree by Indian civilization"¹⁵ has not, to my knowledge, been denied by any writer of note, whether of the culture history persuasion or of a more sociological turn of mind. Most writers have, in fact, been assiduous in the identification of borrowings, diffusion, culture contact or influence. What most of them failed to do was to consider these influences in their full context of meaning rather than as mechanical elements which cross boundaries in a cultural and social vacuum.

In a later chapter dealing with meaning and classification I shall consider the question of tribal values as they relate

to the way in which Munda people classify the human universe using idioms which are ostensibly Hindu, but which have been modified to fit with a Munda view of the world. The question of tribe and caste will then be reconsidered.

A Brief Survey of Existing Literature

The first written descriptions of the tribal population of Chotanagpur come from European officers in charge of the administration of the area. Several short reports appeared during the 19th century in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and it was certainly an era of strong amateur interest in anthropology. Unfortunately, most of these reports, though interesting to read, must be deemed unreliable as a baseline for comparison. Knowledge of the various dialects and languages was slight and the principle of intensive small-scale observation was not established. More useful clues to the state of Chotanagpur during the early part of British rule can be obtained from official records dealing with revenues, land tenure and demography. Hunter's "Statistical Account of Bengal", published in the 1870's (20 volumes) provides a useful distillation of official material at that time. Baden-Powell's famous account of the land tenures of British India (1908) gives a clear picture, both of the aims of British policy and of their interpretation of the tenancy situation.

The most reliable ethnographic descriptions of an earlier period were written by missionaries, who started arriving in Chotanagpur as early as 1845. They were responsible for most of the grammars of the various tribal languages still in use today as well as for detailed descriptions of

tribal culture. The most remarkable work in this category is 'Encyclopaedia Mundarica', compiled by Father John Hoffman, a German Jesuit Priest who worked among the Mundas from 1869 to about 1920. Hoffman wrote a definitive grammar of Mundari and followed it with the Encyclopaedia, which is best described as an ethnographic dictionary of Munda culture. Unlike most of the colonial material the study is confined to a specific and identifiable Munda area. Hoffman was well aware of the extreme cultural heterogeneity from one Munda area to another and so he was careful always to identify the precise location of his findings and of apparent cultural variations. The importance of this fact will become clear when the historical context of these variations is considered.

One of the few Indian anthropologists to work in Chotanagpur before Independence was Sarat Chandra Roy, a Ranchi lawyer who was passionately interested in the archaeology and ethnology of the tribal population. Between 1910 and 1920 he wrote several ethnographies of tribes and contributed much well-informed conjecture on the historical past of these tribes, based on archaeological finds, tribal myths and early Vedic sources. His ethnographies, unfortunately, are susceptible to the same criticisms made of colonial descriptions. His contribution to awakening and sustaining the interest of scholars in the area cannot nevertheless be overestimated. He was a founder-editor of 'Man in India' and prominent in the founding of the 'Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society'. For the period from about 1920 until after Independence, these two journals form the only significant

source of new information.

Recent research has been conducted mainly by students from Ranchi University under Professor Vidyarthi and by the Bihar Tribal Research Institute. These studies are not well-known outside India and have broadly carried on the tradition of select 'cultural' studies of particular groups, ignoring, or playing down the social relations which cut across cultural boundaries.

A more recent development has come from Japanese scholars of the Tokyo Institute of Technology. Two studies of Munda villages have recently appeared by Yamada¹⁶ and Sugiyama¹⁷ undertaken as part of the 3rd Anthropological Expedition on 'Synthetic Research of Rice Cultivating Peoples in South East Asian Countries' sponsored by the Japanese Society of Ethnology. These studies tread a theoretical path altogether different from that of contemporary British Social Anthropology as they derive from the work of German and Austrian ethnologists in the field of culture history. Father Wilhelm Schmidt, founder of the Journal 'Anthropos' 1906 is perhaps the dominant figure in this field. Its aim may be described as the reconstruction of distinct cultures or cultural complexes and the identification of borrowings and cultural diffusion, in order to make correlations between 'stages' of culture and particular economic and social patterns; and to shed light on the history of oral cultures. This approach draws freely on linguistics, philology, archaeology, classical texts and mythology. Hoffman's work was deeply influenced by this school, and it has inspired a great deal of

the work done on tribal populations in India generally.

The two Japanese studies are also based on detailed research and residence in two Munda villages and they provide reliable contemporary material for comparison, while Hoffman provides a historical baseline for assessing the many subsequent changes.

Nature and Scope of the Analysis

Two main themes emerge in the literature on Chotanagpur discussed briefly above. The first comes from the colonial preoccupation with cultural distinctiveness which stemmed from the practical problems of administering 'difficult' areas such as Chotanagpur. Some of the possible consequences of this will be considered in the discussion of Munda history in the British period. The other theme arises from the interests of scholars in the 'marking off' of cultural complexes and the disentangling of cultural elements in order that they may be labelled as belonging to one complex rather than another. I shall now offer certain criticisms of this type of interpretation and outline my own attempt to provide an alternative approach to the problems raised by ethnic distinctiveness in a culturally heterogeneous situation.

One of the results of an exclusively cultural approach to the Mundas has been a too-ready acceptance of conventional descriptive categories. Changes in religion and social organization tend to be conceptualized as 'borrowings' from one culture to another, and usually from the culture of the 'Great Tradition'. Thus, any contact between these groups which has resulted in cultural diffusion is usually subsumed

under the general label of 'Hinduisation', or in the case of Christian influences, 'Christianisation'. Cultural embroidery does not necessarily reflect the underlying reality. The concept of borrowings can have limited explanatory value, as is demonstrated by the fact that the Mundas have maintained a strong ethnic identity despite a century and a half of warnings of their imminent extinction in the steadily encroaching tide of Hinduism.

The biggest objection rests on the implications of such cultural reconstruction for a model of man in society. The cataloguing of borrowings and diffusion leaves us unable to explain why certain elements are absorbed and others resisted, and why groups may maintain recognizable identities despite the inter-weaving of their cultures over many centuries. In short, culture history excludes the cognitive man. It is a mechanistic model of behaviour, subordinating society to culture.

The Mundas of the present day are a product of a complex historical process and any study of their present day condition must be integrated with a consideration of their history in terms of both internal and external change. Population growth and deforestation on the one hand, and land struggles and the superimposition of an alien administration, on the other, are major examples of the sorts of changes involved. In following up these processes I hope to offer a sociological analysis of a particular set of variables, rather than a cultural overview. I also hope to provide a corrective to the culture history approach by considering the Mundas' own conceptions of that

history and the apparent changes in their own ideological models which have accompanied this process.

It is this latter dimension which seemed to make the study of religion the most fruitful point of focus. Following Durkheim, religion is seen as rooted in the problem of social integration, of organizing people together in a society; but it is not seen simply as a reflection of the more solid world of land tenure and political relations or as a supernatural legitimation of existing institutions. I have taken it rather as a charter for meaning which is both reflective and creative for the members of that society in that it provides ideological models which make sense of the world and which can unify experience or create new alternatives. Orally transmitted religions are particularly sensitive to institutional changes, but they are also forces of conservation, and in this way Munda religion tells us much about the maintenance of group identity in the face of external pressures.

The work and position of religious practitioners therefore forms a major part of the analysis and I have followed Douglas¹⁸ in discarding the distinction accepted by Durkheim between magic and religion. All ritual activity is treated as part of an ideology, or set of ideologies which try to 'collectivize' or make sense of the world and impose an ordering on untidy social realities.

Footnotes to the Introduction

- 1 J.A.S.B. Vol. IX, 1840, no.103.
- 2 *ibid.* p. 695
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 *ibid.* p.788.
- 5 Dalton 1872, p.44.
- 6 Hunter 1868 p.122.
- 7 Bailey 1960.
- 8 Contributions to Indian Sociology, 1st Series Vol. VI
p. 122.
- 9 Contributions. V. p. 19.
- 10 Review of 'The Todas' in Annee Sociologique 1906, quoted
in Contributions III p. 60.
- 11 Contributions III p. 60.
- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 Contributions VI p. 121.
- 15 *ibid.* p. 121.
- 16 Yamada 1972.
- 17 Sugiyama 1969
- 18 'Purity and Danger' 1966 p.40.

SECTION I HISTORY AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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Munda Perceptions of the Precolonial Period

Prior to the 16th Century, historical records are conspicuously silent about Chotanagpur, although references to barbarians living in jungles abound in Hindu literature. Similarly, maps, until about 1800, show Chotanagpur only as an undemarcated area. Early travellers appear to have made elaborate detours around the edge, commenting only on the thickness of the jungle and the ferocity of its inhabitants.

Our only record of the arrival of the Mundas in Chotanagpur and their subsequent wars with outsiders is contained in their mythology and songs. As a possible historical source this record should not be dismissed out of hand, for it constitutes a participants' model of history which is of great importance to the Mundas today. For them, it is a historical validation of their later struggles to maintain their land and identity. These myths are kept alive and refurbished. Literacy has transformed them into political articles of faith. Through them support can be mustered at least among the educated, for the Jharkand party's claim to a separate state for the tribal people of Chotanagpur.¹ The headman of Sukuhatu, one of the villages studied, gave the following telescopic account of the early history of his village:

'The Mundas once lived in the Panjab and then in the Gangetic Plain, before they were driven slowly to Chotanagpur. Their forefathers were brothers and their children came and settled in the Sukuhatu area by cutting down the forests and clearing the ground to make houses and cultivate the land.'

He then went on to relate in detail the settlement of the surrounding seven villages which together form an exogamous block of related clans.

A more detailed account of this arrival was found in a Jharkhand publication called 'Kursinama Kiliko' (The genealogy of Munda clans) which is a distillation of variants heard in many Munda villages:

'When the Mundas lived in the jungle, "Risa Munda" (an old patriarch and culture hero) was their leader. He worshipped Singbonga (the supreme being) and one night he dreamt that Singbonga said to him "Go and take your people to the South where the Hasurs once lived. In that region of thick forests, milk and honey is flowing. I shall give you that region for ever." So he gathered 21,000 people and was ready to leave. They entered the place called Jharkhand. They stayed in a place called Muruma and then they went to Omdega. There, one tribal chief called Kurumba established the village which is now called Koromba. Chutu Munda and Nage Munda settled in Chutia. It is said that by taking both their names, the place was first called Chutia Nage's region and now it has become Chotanagpur. Another chief called Sutia settled in Sutiambe.'

The account goes on to relate how the village boundaries were demarcated, political leadership was consolidated, and the area divided into parhas, or groups of related lineages with their own officials.

These accounts have a 'timeless' perspective to them. Everything recorded here happened 'in the beginning' (sida - 'first', or 'at the start'). This social organization was also a product of Munda genius alone. The diku came in a remembered past in which there are dates. Most educated Mundas, and many uneducated ones, know approximately the dates of the

nineteenth century uprisings against the diku, the anniversary of Birsa Munda's death and the dates of the various land settlements in Chotanagpur.

All the historical traditions are filled with the place names of putative migrations, and the references to the Panjab and the Gangetic Plain are interesting, as it appears to be the consensus in colonial writing on this subject that the Mundas must have entered India from the north-west, driven on by the 'Aryan invader.' These conjectures are based mainly on linguistic affinity and the evidence of archaeology, and it is a very important theme in colonial writings on the Mundas, it having been assumed from the beginning that there is an ethnic difference between the Mundas and their Hindu neighbours. A further point about names is the Munda claim over the derivation of 'Chotanagpur.' This enhances their claim to be the first clearers of the jungle and therefore owners of their land by ancestral right.

The reference, in the Jharkand text, to 21,000 people relates to another theme in Munda traditions, of the 21 clans. These are said to be the original clans of the tribe, and any others are really sub-clans which have taken on a different name. It is also notable that, when talking about villages in a historical sense, the Urdu term maujha is used. This refers to the present administrative entity and to the village in relation to the clan patti, or parha (area). Hence, this particular village was part of the seven maujha, which was another way of talking about the patti. There is a word in Mundari - hatu - which can be translated as 'village', but is

really used in the sense of settlement, or 'domestic', in opposition to bir, which means 'forest' or 'wild'.

The coming of the Oraons to Chotanagpur is likewise recorded in their own historical tradition as a flight from a stronger group. Their language, Kurukh, is said by the Reverend Hahn, who wrote the first Grammar, to be closest to Kanarese. This fits with the Oraons' own account of their origins in the Karnatic. From there they travelled up the Narbada River to North Bihar where they settled around the old Hindu Fort of Rohtasgarh. The tradition relates how they were ousted from Rohtasgarh by the Mohammedans and had to flee to Palamau in the east of Chotanagpur. They found the Mundas already settled in the area, but both traditions agree that the encounter was peaceful and the Oraons were able to settle down among the existing inhabitants. A further point of agreement is that the Oraons introduced the plough into Chotanagpur.

Population expansion had the effect of pushing the Mundas towards the south east. Village names in Palamau and the north west of Ranchi District are unmistakably Mundari, yet they are occupied mainly by Oraons. The separation did not give rise to a conflict methodology and Oraon villages in these areas retain a Munda for their village priest. Their explanation of this custom is that, having lived in the area before the Oraons arrived, the Mundas are better able to appease the local spirits. Many Oraons also adopted Mundari in preference to their own language. The existence of large areas of jungle in Chotanagpur was no doubt a major factor in

their apparently peaceful co-existence and the Mundas continued to expand into this uncleared area.

The Colonial Experience: Maharajahs and Moghuls

Chotanagpur was insulated by its geographical position, but all areas have fringes. In Moghul times, the surrounding regions were ruled by various independent and subordinated rajas and these chiefdoms were usually at war with each other or involved in political alliances to overthrow other chiefs. This instability in the borders of Chotanagpur seemed to be particularly chronic in the sixteenth century as the Moghul empire slowly declined.

The most important result of this situation for the Mundas was the gradual imposition of a raja, who later styled himself a maharaja, and who claimed sovereignty over Chotanagpur. The mechanisms underlying his rise are obscure. He built several palaces in the extreme north of Chotanagpur and has always claimed to be a Rajput. This, however, is disputed by many authorities, who think that he was more likely a Hinduized Oraon or Munda. The family chronicles, to which S. C. Roy has had access², in my opinion, support the view that he was an aboriginal. They contain an elaborate myth suggesting that the Maharaja was the son of a Brahmin woman and a serpent disguised as a Brahmin. He was abandoned and brought up by a Munda headman, who found him. His superiority in intelligence over the headman's natural son led to his being crowned as the first Raja. This seems to be an obvious example of a validation myth invented by a Hindu chronicler,

and there is evidence that in the past the Maharaja experienced difficulties in establishing his credentials as a Hindu, particularly when marrying his daughters.

The chronicle suggests that the Maharaja's rule began as early as A.D. 500 but little credence can be given to this claim. My own guess is that the dynasty arose during the later turbulent phase of the Moghul period when political pressure was being exerted on the perimeters of the plateau. It was certainly during this period that the effects of the Maharaja's rule began to be felt, as it was gradually superimposed over the customary rights of Munda and Oraon cultivators. Prior to this time, no superior right appears to have existed in the Munda hatu. There was certainly no system of land rents, as there was no superior body to receive them. The Maharaja seems to have begun by consolidating his own Estate and this no doubt strengthened a fringe area that was vulnerable to marauders from outside. It would also explain why he was able to levy taxes and make claims on hitherto sovereign tribal land.

In order to maintain the status of a Maharaja, both in terms of his claims to be a Rajput, and the necessity to protect his estate against rival chiefs, he needed both finance and labour from his subjects. Rents began to be levied, and a system of forced labour, known as beth begari was introduced to provide military service and agricultural labour for the Maharaja's estate, which expanded as he brought Hindu courtiers, priests and dependents to his court. Land grants were made to these newcomers, initially as rights to collect

the land tax only, but increasingly appearing as outright gifts of land, to which the Maharaja had no legitimate rights.

By all accounts, the adventurers attracted to the court were greedy and unscrupulous. Having obtained the lease, or patta, of a particular area they paid no attention to the claims of aborigines which were unsupported by legal documentation and many were reduced to tenant status or even deprived of their land if the rent was not paid. As the Estate grew, the Maharaja's control over the self-styled jagirdar and thakur diminished. Small fortresses began to be built and the overlords gathered their own retinues of servants and relatives. Large areas of Chotanagpur were divided into revenue units and the office of manki, or native revenue collector, was created with responsibility for the collection of taxes, or rakumat.

The Mohammedans became interested in Chotanagpur in the sixteenth century. Rohtasgarh, the fort from which the Oraons claimed to have been dislodged by the Mohammedans before their retreat into Chotanagpur, was captured or taken over by the Mohammedan ruler, Sher Shah, in 1539 when Moghul rule in Bengal was being consolidated. The real threat to the Hindu Maharaja, however, came in the reign of Akbar. In 1582 Akbar had made the first ever land settlement in Bengal, and according to the Mohammedan chronicle, Akbar-namah, he then moved in to subdue the 'Raja of Kokrah'. This was none other than the Maharaja of Chotanagpur, 'Kokrah' being an old name for the Maharaja's estate. The Moghul interest in Kokrah is said to have been its reputation for diamonds and precious

stones. It was probably also connected with the increasing strategic importance of Chotanagpur for the Moghuls. In 1591, a detachment commanded by 'Yusuf Chak Kashmiri' marched over Jharkhand to Midnapur to join the imperial army for the conquest of Orissa.³ The Maharaja was reduced to a tributary of the Moghuls, and in 1616 he was detained in Gwalior Fort for falling into arrears with his tribute. He was released twelve years later and ordered to pay 6,000 rupees⁴ in tribute each year.

The effect of these upheavals on the Maharaja's subjects must have been serious. First there was the problem of raising the tribute which no doubt necessitated further incursions into tribal land, and the settlement of more Hindu overlords to raise further taxes. Additionally there was the enormous political pressure both from the Moghul rulers, and from the surrounding independent kingdoms, some of which were probably creations originally of the Maharaja himself. During the Maharaja's period of subjugation, the Moghuls took over the administration of his estate, and the system which they imposed was taken over with little change by the British. All revenue terms in Chotanagpur thus remain in the Urdu form used in Moghul times; as in for instance, maujha for a village revenue unit.

Jagirdars turned into Zamindars, as they were converted into revenue officers in the manner described by Alexander, a British official:

'The word zemindaree, in the time of the Moghuls, signified the particular extent of land over which one zemindar, or landholder, exercises

jurisdiction; the collection of the revenues of that district was one of the chief duties entrusted to him, and the object of the greatest importance for the state.'⁵

The same author goes on to comment that

'the amount of revenue leviabale upon it became the distinguishing character of each zemindaree and it was the only matter regarding it of which a record was kept in the superior revenue offices.'⁶

Areas were sometimes entered in registers, but information regarding boundaries was 'incomplete and defective'. The same form of tenure and recording procedure was retained by the British. As officers of the Moghul government, Zamindars also had powers as civil magistrates in minor cases.

The Moghul administration marked a further step in the process which turned ancestral land into tenanted (raiyati) land, by providing a legal structure which did not recognize customary rights. In addition, when the British East India Company took over the administration at the end of the Moghul period, they found the state of Bengal 'degenerate'. 'The subjects of the Moghul empire in that province derived little protection or security from any of the (civil) courts'.⁷

Government was 'despotic' and 'corrupt':

'The government of the Moors borders so near on anarchy you would wonder how it keeps together.'⁸

When the Moghul administrators moved in, after the detention of the Maharajah, it is not clear to what extent they took over existing administrative divisions as they did in other parts of North India and how much they imposed an entirely new revenue structure on Chotanagpur. What is clear is that

by the time the British took over, Chotanagpur had been transformed throughout into revenue units which broadly reflected the clan affiliation of the cultivator, and this was the case even in areas which were not under the direct control of a jagirdar, or zamindar, as he came to be known under Moghul rule. These revenue units consisted of a number of villages, or maujha, in the new administrative jargon, each with a village headman responsible for collecting rent from the cultivators, and with an overall head, called a manki, who collected the village rents and paid them to the Moghul overlord. These clan areas were known as parha, or patti, and consisted in the main of between seven and twenty villages. The word patti, here, I take to signify 'lease' in the sense of a right to hold land corporately or to collect revenue from it.

What I would like to suggest here is that these clan areas were in fact a creation of tidy-minded Hindu or Moghul administrators, and that the present basis of Munda landholding, by which a man's right to land is validated by his membership of the dominant clan in that area, does not date back to time immemorial, as Munda traditions suggest and the British came to believe, but is a comparatively recent response, on the one hand, to sedentarisation and on the other, to the imposition of an administrative framework requiring the cultivator to produce regular revenue. This is very difficult to prove, but I will present what evidence I can in support of it.

On the first point, the evidence is strong that the present form of agriculture, involving the cultivation of wet

rice, is a fairly recent innovation. As late as 1870 large tracts of Chotanagpur were still heavily forested and peopled by nomadic Munda hunters and gatherers. Revenues were also still being levied on slash and burn cultivation in parts of the Ranchi District and Baden-Powell⁸ was recording the Munda preference for cultivating the light soils of the unterraced uplands, and their reluctance to make terraced fields to grow what they call humbul baba, or heavy rice.⁹

To this may be added the consistency of the Oraon oral tradition concerning their arrival in the area. According to them, the Mundas were jungly people, living mostly by hunting who did not resist the new arrivals. Munda traditions agree with this.

Rohtasgarh was first captured by the Mohammedans in 1539, and if we can accept the oral sources, then plough agriculture must have been introduced later than this. All the terms used by the Mundas to describe the parts of a plough are Dravidian words, and the present ritual system of the Mundas is based on a myth shared with the Oraons which conspicuously parallels a South Indian myth about the exploits of Siva, current in the area from which the Oraons say they originally came.¹⁰ As the rituals which relate to this myth concern the wet rice cycle and the obligations of a village priest, then the two would seem to go together.

On the second point, a scrutiny of the old revenue areas or patti which were still in evidence until the Abolition of Intermediaries Legislation in Bihar in 1956, shows a number of discrepancies between clan boundaries and revenue areas. The

two coincide most closely in the earlier settled area, known by the Mundas as the Naguri-disum ('country'). Here, the traditional clan panchayat is still in operation and only members of the dominant clan may take a full part in it. In the later settled Hasada area (or Latar disum, an expression meaning both lowland and recently-settled land), the patti unites a number of villages of different clan names, but with a tradition that their forefathers were all brothers, and a tendency to form exogamous units which coincide with that revenue area. Hasada villages seem to be mostly between 200 and 300 years old, and their genealogical reckoning is very shallow. Land within Munda villages is held by corporate local patrilineages, or khunt. In each village, there are two 'founding' khunt, the elder of which produces a hereditary village priest and the younger, a village headman. However, there may be any number of client lineages which have become incorporated into the dominant clan, usually through affinal links.

In sum, what I am arguing is not that there was no concept of a clan before the area was administered, but rather that the idea of a clan as a political charter for land ownership originated with the division into revenue areas. I have in mind here Sahlin's argument that "a segmentary lineage system develops in a tribe that intrudes into an already occupied habitat rather than a tribe that expands into an uncontested domain",¹¹ which is what the Mundas originally appear to have done, at least in the Hasada area. It is also similar, I think, to Bailey's argument in *Tribe, Caste and*

Nation that the present structure of territorial clans among the Khonds of Orissa is a point towards the end of a long process of political development, and can be seen as a response both to technical changes and political pressures from outside the system.¹²

British Rule

The East India Company was granted a charter for the settlement of Fort William at Calcutta in 1698. Expansion operations then began and territories ceded to, or conquered by the Company were attached to the responsible Presidency. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa thus became part of the Fort William Presidency in 1765 when the Company obtained the dewani grant from the Moghul dewan or overlord. In 1771, a treaty was made with the Maharaja of Chotanagpur, settling a tribute of 12000 rupees in return for the Maharaja's political autonomy. The policy of the British was to interfere as little as possible, particularly in an area about which they knew nothing and which appeared to be primitive and inaccessible.

Captain Camac, the Company Agent who made the settlement, reported the existence of other tenures in the area held by dependent rajas and jagirdars. He also reported that some of the tenures 'were not creation of the Maharaja of Chotanagpur, but had been gained by conquest in the first instance.'¹³ The Maharaja had great difficulty in controlling these chiefs and some outlying enclaves were not finally reduced until the end of the last century.¹⁴ These encroachments had come from Orissa and the Central Provinces.

As a result of his many wars, the Maharaja had great difficulty paying his tribute, and a government minute by the Deputy Secretary in 1832 noted that the revenue had been irregularly paid since 1772:

'the authority of the Raja over the jagirdars in his country was very imperfect, the Subordinate Rajas ... seldom paid him anything'.¹⁵

The Maharaja sought a remission on the grounds of continuing incursions from the Marathas and other invaders.

During this period, the British set the seal on the legitimation of zemindari rights in Bengal. They were motivated by the desire to settle and stabilize the area and ensure a regular fixed revenue. They accordingly took the final step in converting the Hindu and Mohammedan leaseholders into British-style landlords whose only legal obligation was to deliver the permanently fixed yearly revenue to the government in return for absolute proprietary rights over their revenue areas.

The Bengal Permanent Settlement Act was engineered by Lord Cornwallis in 1793 and, as Baden-Powell points out, the major principle governing this settlement was

'the strong conviction of the advantages of a recognized landlord with a secure title'.¹⁶

This right was subject to payment of revenue and failure to do so rendered the Zemindar liable to expropriation and sale of the lease. It was also supposed to be 'subject to the just rights of the old and original cultivators of the soil, the raiyats, dependent taluqdars and others'¹⁷; but as the settlement was made without surveying the area or ascertaining the

actual boundaries and rights of the tenures, it held out little hope that the 'original cultivators' (who had already been mistakenly labelled as raiya) would have any security from further encroachments. Furthermore, the landlord was free to farm out his estate to anyone giving him the largest profit over and above the revenue requirement; so the 'permanency' of the settlement lay in the fixed share required by the government, rather than in a fixed rent for the raiya. It seems that even then, many British officers expressed anxiety over the working of this act in areas where it was by no means clear whether the Zemindar had any proprietary right; but expediency triumphed, and it was more than a century before Baden-Powell, discussing the consequences of revenue farming, wrote:

'and as the proprietor's farmer in time grew rich ... so he too farmed his interest to others, till farm within farm became the order of the day, each resembling a screw upon a screw, the last coming down upon the tenant with the pressure of them all.'18

The application of this Act in Chotanagpur was necessarily partial. The following table, taken from Baden-Powell, shows the situation after Permanent Settlement:

District	Permanent Settlement		Temporary Settlement		Government Estates		Raiyatwari	
	No of Estates	Revenue in Rupees	No. of Estates	Revenue in Rupees	No. of Estates	Revenue in Rs.	No. of Estates	Revenue in Rs.
Hazaribagh	68		302	76,295				
Lohardagga	56	163,365	6	64,138	3	12,724		
Singbhum	1		2	18,189				
Manbhum	24		2	1,669				

Temporary Settlements and Raiyatwari tracts were areas where the government dealt directly with the cultivators, fixing their rents and collecting them itself. Singbhum and Manbhum were the most fortunate areas in this respect. Singbhum was settled as a protected estate for the Ho tribe. Mundas and other tribes in Manbhum were permanently settled

'by treating as Zeminder with a fixed revenue, the chiefs over parha or groups of villages, which the old¹⁹ native tribal organization originated'.

Hazaribagh and Lohardaga, the Munda and Oraon country, fared less well. The various semi-independent chiefships appear as government estates and were left largely autonomous except for revenue requirements. The remainder of the area was either permanently settled under a Zemindar or with the Maharaja of Chotanagpur

'as a sort of permanently settled estate, but is looked upon rather as a tribute paying chiefship, and has never been liable to sale for arrears of revenue.'²⁰

The district of Lohardaga and Hazaribagh thus became the focus of aboriginal grievances which had been simmering throughout the eighteenth century after the Maharajah (who was not himself a figure of antipathy among his subjects) had gradually lost control of his jagirdars. Meanwhile, new landholdings were still being created as the Mundas spread to the south east. New encroachments from Orissa were, however, occurring in this area as well.

The first recorded disturbance took place in this particular area in 1811. An oppressed raiya in Tamar took his case against the raja to the local court. The raja gave

false evidence and this resulted in the raiayat's conviction and life imprisonment. Other Mundas rioted and Tamar continued in a disorganized state'.²¹ A more serious disturbance broke out in 1820 in the same district. It was led by two Mundas and was put down by British military intervention.

In 1831 the biggest of all the early rebellions broke out in Sonepur, to the south west of Ranchi, when a raja's brother attempted to give away some villages by farming them out over the heads of the munda (headman) and manki. Further south, in Bandgaon, similar things were happening and the Mundas of Sonepur, Tamar and Bandgaon met in Tamar and decided unanimously on rebellious action. They raided several villages with diku landlords killing any they could find. They were soon joined with enthusiasm by Mundas and Oraons from all over the area. Many diku lost their lives or fled in terror, and by the time the militia had prepared and pushed its way through, the main force of the revolt was spent, with only sporadic pockets for the army to deal with. The affair seemed to take the officials by surprise and in 1833 Chotanagpur was hurriedly reconstituted as the South West Frontier Agency under the direct political control of a British agent.

Some attempt was then made to look into the nature of tribal grievances, but on the whole, the Agency was a failure. The depredations continued unabated and no protective legislation was enacted. The agents seemed to rely more on personal intervention in specific cases, and the failure of this policy became obvious in 1858 when another major disturbance occurred.

The first mission had then been active for about ten years and the insurrection started after the police were accused of maltreating a Christian Munda until he died. The Mundas of Sonepur, Basia and Govindpur (to the south west) again took up arms. This was followed by further trouble in the same area in the following year after a Munda killed a jagirdar in a land dispute.

Finally, in the 1860's, the British appointed Babu Rakhai Das Haldar, a Hindu administrator connected with the Maharajah's estate, to enquire and survey the most troublesome areas with a view to enacting legislation. Naturally, Haldar confined his survey to the area with which he was most acquainted: that under the suzerainty of the Maharaja, which at that time covered a large part of the south west. In this area, the real issue was the unlawful conversion of land, recognized by the Maharaja himself as 'privileged', but which his jagirdars treated as raiya land. This was the original ancestral land which was redefined by the Maharaja as bhuinhari land, or 'the cultivation of the original clearers of the village'. Holders of this land could belong to any aboriginal tribe, whereas khuntkattidar (or 'lineage land holders') were always Mundas. Bhuinhari tenures were a modified form of khuntkatti and differed in two significant ways. The first was that, 'their interest in the village jungle and waste outside their tenures is no greater than that of ordinary settled raiya of the village'²², and the second was that such land ceased to be bhuinhari when a bhuinhar died heirless. These modifications struck at the

basis of the traditional system, as they prevented the customary expansion into uncleared areas, excluded the very important upland fields from the definition and allowed the conversion of bhuinhari into raiya land on the death of a local lineage (khunt), instead of the customary reversion of the land to the village stock. These modifications and the existing boundaries of bhuinhari tenancies were confirmed in the Chotanagpur Tenures Act (Part I, 1869), which covered 429 villages of the south west only, as the surveying was an extremely lengthy process. The areas known as khuntkatti which were the more recently created landholdings in the forested south east were left untouched. Between 1864 and 1867, 6590 Mundas and Oraons migrated to Assam to work in the tea gardens²³ a figure which provides some index of their disaffection at that time. Few Mundas migrate if they already have land. In 1869, the Jesuits opened a Mission in Chotanagpur, and Father Hoffman began his long study of Munda grievances by looking at the hitherto neglected khuntkatti villages. In 1874 recognizing the peculiar problems of Chotanagpur, the British Government designated the area a Non-Regulation Province and thereafter, none of the laws and regulations in force in Bengal necessarily applied to Chotanagpur.

Colonial policy and Christianity are often found to be key features in the formation of millenarian movements, and the failure of the 1869 Tenancy Act to redress the wrongs of the khuntkattidar precipitated the next stage in the battle. Mission schools had created a small class of literate Mundas

who had also found that the European missionaries were interested in their cause and prepared to assist in particular cases by championing Munda legal rights in the courts. As a result of this activity, the missions gained^a huge number of converts and the word began to spread, that Christianity was the long sought panacea and if everyone joined, all diku could be dispossessed and driven out. When the missionaries realized that their intentions had been misunderstood, they attempted to advise the newly literate leaders of the hopelessness of their plans to rid the area of long established landlords, but the leaders (sardar) accused the missionaries of being hand in glove with the diku and the British Government. This resulted in massive defections from Christianity, attacks on the missions and the start of a separate movement to fight for the 'Munda Raj'. This was called the sardar larai. In Mundari, larai is synonymous with both 'war' and 'lawsuit', and the name reflected their determination to use their newly won education in the fight. Thus larai was to be a rehearsal for the fully-fledged millenarian movement which broke out in the 1890's. The sardar wrote grand petitions to Queen Victoria and the Viceroy, menaced the Zemindars and set up a Raj, styling themselves the 'Sons of Mael' under their leader, 'John the Baptist.'

In the initial stages, they commanded a great deal of support from the peasantry. Money was raised to hire a big lawyer in Calcutta, as the missions had done much to inspire confidence in the law courts. Unfortunately, the sardar were less clever than the Hindu lawyers whom they employed and who lost no opportunity to fleece their trusting clients. Support

for the sardar declined and was soon transferred to a new prophet, a young Munda called Birsa.

Birsa Bhagwan (H: 'god') was born in a village in Tamar and received some education in a mission school. He was about twenty when he declared that he had been appointed by God to save the Munda race. Rumours spread of his supernatural powers, and people flocked to his village to hear the message that the old rituals and sacrifices should be abolished, the brahmanic sacred thread should be worn and the missionaries were to be thrown out of the Munda country. His arrest at a meeting of 6,000 armed men in 1895 only enhanced his reputation and after his release in 1899 he set about preparing a fresh uprising which was only crushed by a military expedition. Birsa was captured and died of cholera in Ranchi jail. Preparations were already being made to introduce legislation protecting the khuntkatti areas on the basis of Hoffman's extensive enquiries about the working of the 'traditional' tenancy system. The Birsa uprising helped to hurry the legislation along.

The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908) dealt comprehensively with all aspects of the khuntkatti system. Those villages in which the tenancies had remained intact were legally underwritten and recorded in a village register, and a nominal village rent (chanda) was fixed in perpetuity. In villages where a Zemindar held an established right, the tenancies were surveyed and recorded to prevent any further encroachment and to give the tenant permanent heritable rights. The level of rents for the whole district was fixed and could not be altered by the Zemindar without the consent of the revenue officer. The most important aspect of the Act was, however, the

restriction placed on the alienation of khuntkatti land to an outsider without the permission of, first, the whole village, and, secondly, the District Commissioner. This clause was later extended (C.N.T. Amendment Act 1955) to include the alienation of raiyati land held by aboriginals. Mortgages were also restricted to the type known as bhugut bandha which was a transfer of the tenant's interest in the land for the purpose of obtaining a loan

'upon the condition that the loan, with all interest thereon shall be deemed to be extinguished by the profits arising from the tenancy during the period of the mortgage'.²⁵

The object was to ensure the eventual return of the land to the tenant within a maximum length of time, in this case, seven years.

Other important rights conferred by this act on the khuntkattidar related to customary law in villages regarding the produce of trees and jungles and the right to clear jungle and convert waste into upland. This was recorded and endorsed for each village in the register of rights (khatian). The hereditary position of the munda was similarly underwritten and he was then treated as the legal, as well as the customary representative of his village. In areas where the manki had been the rent collector, he was also given official status as the intermediary responsible for the collection of village chanda. Village boundaries were fixed in accordance with the situation at the time of the survey operation.

The onus of enforcing the provisions rested on the khuntkattidar themselves. No decisions regarding sale, transfer

or mortgage could be taken without the consent of all the holders of that stock of khunt land, and by underwriting customary law, the formulators of the Act ensured that there was a good chance of its provisions being implemented. In Ranchi District, 156 villages were given intact khuntkatti status, and 449 were given part status, the remainder being raiya land leased from a superior landlord. The latter are known as 'broken' khuntkatti villages. Ranchi District contains altogether 3,954 villages and this includes those villages settled in the 1869 survey.

Some interesting information on the operation of the Act is contained in the Final Report on the Revisional Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi (1927-35). All areas covered by the Act were resurveyed in this period and illegally mortgaged or transferred land was, in certain cases restored to the khuntkattidar. The report noted with some disapproval that

'any further decay in the system since the last settlement is due to the improvidence and greed of the Mundari khuntkattidars who have in some cases evaded the law and illegally mortgaged or otherwise transferred their ancestral holdings'.²⁶

The majority of illegal transfers had occurred in broken khuntkatti villages and they consisted mostly of illegal mortgages of indefinite term from landlords or other villagers. These were either restored or converted into bhugut bandha. The remainder were mostly transfers of khuntkatti land to service castes to persuade them to settle in the village. In 'broken' villages these were only evicted if they had occupied the land for less than twelve years. The resulting figures for

broken villages were 410 restorations of land from illegal mortgages and 86 evictions of parties in unlawful possession. In khuntkatti villages, 297 mortgages were in contravention of the Act and 285 parties were evicted for unlawful possession.

These figures indicate that the protection envisaged by the 1908 Act was by no means total. The long settled diku offered a continuing temptation to convert ancestral land into cash, whether through need or improvidence. Bhugut bandha mortgages are much less profitable than the high interest mortgages of the professional money lender. In addition, the growing sophistication of the Mundas in contact with a market economy brought a demand for specialized services such as carpentry, for the provision of small stools and string beds, and repairing of bicycles. Service castes were thus increasingly being invited to settle in hitherto exclusively Munda villages. Their tenancies would then be confirmed if they could show an occupancy of more than twelve years. The status of these caste tenancies was then similar to that of a Munda raiya holding his land from a khuntkattidar to whom he paid his rent.

The other feature worthy of note is contained in the following extract from the report:

'It was found that most of the larger intact khuntkatti villages had extended their cultivated area since the last settlement by the formation of tola on the mokarari system. The system is that the munda of the parent village gives a mokarari lease to a group of Mundari khuntkattidar to reclaim a promising outlying portion of the village as yet uncultivated. The whole history of the foundation of an intact khuntkatti village is thus repeated in miniature and the leader of the group to whom the lease was given becomes the headman of the outlying

portion of the parent village when it has been reclaimed. In such cases, the headman of the new settlement pays a nominal rent to the munda of the parent village, and the tola thus formed is an independent village in all but name. As, however, village boundaries were laid down at the last settlement and may not be departed from now these new settlements could not be treated as separate villages, but were entered on the khewat (record of rights) of the parent village as tola under a separate heading ...'

Territorial expansion was, therefore, still occurring at the time of the last settlement report.

After Independence, the intermediary interests of landlords, zemindars, etc. were gradually abolished and acquired by the State. In Ranchi District this happened in 1956 and all tenants without either khuntkatti or bhuinhari status became government raiyat with the same rights guaranteed to them under the 1869 and 1908 Acts. As a recent writer remarked,

'their status is hardly distinguishable from that of the proprietors (i.e. khuntkattidar) in this regard, particularly as the government will now be the only landlord.'

An interesting side effect of this abolition was the demise of the manki, the native collector, who was an official intermediary between the khuntkattidar and the government, representing the patti (parha). Revenue collection became the job of the munda in each village and the role of the patti, which was based on a clan grouping, declined. The consequences of this will be considered in a later chapter.

The 1908 Tenancy Act arrested the deterioration of the Mundas' economic condition but it also encapsulated the land tenure system in an advanced state of disintegration. Ranchi District provides the best illustration of this, as it was

traditionally the heart of the Munda country. A mere 4% of villages in this District have intact khuntkatti status.

'Privileged' tenures, i.e. khuntkatti and bhuinhari, account for a little less than 10% of cultivated land, distributed between 1034 villages, or between a third and a quarter of the total number of villages in the District.²⁹

The Survey and Settlement Report of 1908 gives the population of Ranchi District as 910,561 persons and estimated that the total amount of land still available for cultivation was 18% of the existing stock, which would be capable of supporting another 400,000 people, or about a 45% increase in population. Between 1901 and 1961, the District population rose by 97%, but this figure is distorted by the growth of the urban sector. The growth rate in Khunti Subdivision, where the research was undertaken, was 51% during the same period. This indicates that, assuming constant conditions, saturation point as calculated by the authors of this report, has probably now been reached. The calculation was based on the average holding per family unit which was then 12 acres per 5.3 persons.³⁰ The 1927-35 Report found that this ratio was the same except that the average holding had become more valuable because of the conversion, by terracing, of upland to lowland, equivalent to one acre per holding. Intensification of land use had thus started to occur, encouraged probably by the absence of virgin land for expansion. An average holding consisted, in 1908, of one third lowland to two thirds upland, and it was calculated that one third of the produce was surplus. Nine acres, in the same proportion, was considered to be a 'bare subsistence

holding',³¹ These calculations give a rough baseline for 61.
assessing the present situation in the two villages studied.

History and the Colonial Experience

Two main themes emerge from this historical material. The first is the extent to which oral traditions have been refurbished or even created, out of the more recent colonial experience of the Mundas. Missionaries and colonial officials were prolific writers, and many of these early works are still available, although admittedly they are only read by the literate. Literacy rates are quite high, however, particularly among Christians. The traditions which deal with early migrations bear an uncanny resemblance to biblical themes, such as the flight of the Israelites. The Jharkand publication referred to above contains sections which appear to have been taken, word for word, from an early ethnography on the Mundas. The similarity between the tradition of migration from the Panjab, and the conclusions of nineteenth century writers has already been noted.

It is difficult to form any real estimate of the extent to which traditions have been created, unintentionally by these writers, but it seems that there has been, at the very least, an interplay between the two which has strengthened the Munda perception of themselves as a distinct ethnic group and has contributed towards the politicization of this identity, shown in its most clear manifestation, in the formation of the Jharkand party in 1937 on a platform of 'Chotanagpur for the Adivasi.'

The second, linked theme, is the extent to which the present day reality of the land tenure system is a product of administrative decisions made by Hindu, Moghul and British rulers. We are now in a position to make some tentative suggestions about the changes which have taken place in the land tenure system over several centuries.

A number of interesting parallels may be noted between the reconstruction of Khond history argued by Bailey³² and the speculations contained here about Munda history. Both tribes have what might be termed a mythology of disengagement. They say that they fled to the hills to escape from outsiders. Both have a history of resistance to later settlers, and both have been the subject of protectionist policies by the colonial government. Their traditions also assert that plough agriculture was introduced in a remembered past by outsiders. For the Mundas this was the Oraons, and for the Khonds, it was brought by the Oriyas. The Khonds are much more explicit in their traditions, however, about their previous methods of cultivation:

say

'The Khonds/they were once axe cultivators and knew nothing of irrigated rice. This they say, is the reason why today the Khonds supplement the cultivation of wet rice with axe fields, while the Oriyas never make an axe field. The traditions are full: first they cultivated with digging sticks, as they sometimes do today: later they got hoes. The plough, they say, was introduced by an Oriya whose name was Dolobehera, and first it had a wooden point. Later they learnt to fit it with an iron share.'³³

Among the Mundas, a number of older men had knowledge of slash and burn techniques, which they said were practised in their youth when land was more plentiful. The burning of the

jungle growth on upland fields where dry crops are rotated every two or three years, is still practised.

Whatever the method of cultivation, there is no doubt that until approximately the middle of the nineteenth century there was still sufficient forested tracts into which the tribal cultivator could expand. As the forest became more scarce, so the struggle with the diku for control of already cleared land became more fierce. If Sahlins' argument about the preconditions for the development of a segmentary lineage system is correct, then it can be suggested that the 'traditional' land tenure system of the Mundas consisted of scattered cores of agnatic kin who made clearings in the forest. When the group became too large, other clearings would be made. It is impossible to say exactly what sort of relationship existed between these agnatic cores, but the erection of burial stones in a sasan or burial ground, which may be common to several settlements, suggests that clan-type links between these local lineages were maintained. Genealogical memory is shallow and it is rare to find anyone who can remember more than three generations from the present.

The local lineage, or khunt (derivation unknown, but the Moghuls have used it to mean 'chief') is the basis of the present day khuntkatti system. The khunt may vary in size from two households to thirty or forty, but all members are co-parceners and, although land is farmed on an individual basis, each holding returns to stock on the death of a particular line. The village, or hatu, consists usually of several khunt, but always of at least two. These are the pahan and the

munda khunt, or the khunt of the elder and younger brothers who are said to have founded the village by first clearing the forest. This division corresponds to the hereditary division of sacred and secular offices in the village. The pahan khunt produces the village priest, who is known as pahan, and the munda khunt, the village headman, who is known as munda. This word originally meant a 'substantial' cultivator, but has been adopted for the whole tribe subsequently replacing the Mundas' own description of themselves simply as 'men' (horoko).

The munda is now the village representative to the outside world of administration. He keeps the land registers, collects the rent and is expected to mediate between village and officialdom. Again, it is not clear whether this office is a customary one which has existed for centuries, as colonial writers have claimed, or whether it is a comparatively recent creation, borne out of the necessity to have a representative at village level in an administered area.

The village is in fact an administrative aggregate of small hamlets, or tola which correspond to khunt areas. The pahan khunt lives in pahan tola, the munda khunt in munda tola and so on. Any other khunt in the village is usually said to consist of later settlers who have become assimilated over time to the dominant clan represented in that particular village.

The Munda clan, or kili, is exogamous and named, and all khunt holding land in a village belong to it by definition, as it is the clan which validates land holdings. There is, however no clan ancestral worship, although members

of the same clan are said to have a common ancestor. The burial grounds mentioned above are linked to clans and no outsider may be buried in them, but there is a tendency for burial grounds to be localised either in the tola or in the hatu. There is also the point that members of the pahan and munda khunt of the same village and clan should not share in each other's ancestral sacrifices. Clan areas vary in size but, as noted above, they have a tendency to be standardized. Seven villages and twelve villages are commonly found as belonging to the same clan or to linked subclans which do not intermarry. No one knows, or seems very concerned, about the precise relationship existing between khunt of the same kili and between villages of the same kili. They are simply 'brothers' (hatu-hagako or kili-hagako).

All this suggests, I think, that before the area was administered for revenue, rights in land were based loosely on membership of an agnatic core, or local lineage, that the genealogical relationship between these cores was unimportant and that there was considerable movement of personnel between the cores based on the fact that land was plentiful, but labour is necessary to convert forest into cultivation. The idea of clanship doubtless existed but may well have been more important in the regulation of marriages than in the allocation of land. It was only when clan areas became revenue units and land became a more scarce resource that clan affiliation itself, became the major criterion for distinguishing the khuntkattidar from the 'new settler'. This clan affiliation is based partly on genealogically related lineages and partly on the decisions

of administrators who 'tidied' the area into revenue units.

The concept of a village has also, I suspect, a similar history. Aggregates of tola became revenue villages, and the village is now a basic unit of Munda social structure with its own sacred and secular leadership. The pahan performs rituals for the village as a whole. Increasing pressure of land has also contributed to the consolidation of villages as distinct territorial entities. Tenants of other castes are only allowed to settle permanently if the whole village agrees, and occupational specialists, such as drummers, may be invited by the munda, acting on behalf of the village, to live there and provide a village service. Khuntkattidar may, however, invite outsiders, who are usually affines, and always Mundas to become tenants if they have more land than they can cultivate at any one time. This requires only the agreement of the khunt household heads.

Existing clan areas are known as parha in the Naguri-disum, or older area, and as patti in Latar-disum, or the newly settled area. The creation of these areas as revenue units has already been noted. In some areas the parha still operates as a clan panchayat settling cases and disputes which villagers are unable to solve at the village or tola panchayat level.

The attempt by the British Government to stabilize a very unsettled situation through legislation, confirmed these various delineations but construed them as part of an ancient and democratic tradition which, in the words of Hoffman, in his memorandum responsible for the basis of the new legislation,

showed their land tenure system to be "one of the wisest creations of prehistoric times".³⁴ This is a view endorsed by Mundas themselves, who constantly emphasize their ancient ancestry and way of doing things through myths and traditions of the kind discussed. They are also fully aware of the political advantages which protective legislation has brought them. They are not an economically weak minority in Chotanagpur, but a group with considerable political potential.

1 The Jharkand movement grew out of various Christian tribal students' associations in the mission schools and colleges in the 1920s and 30s. In 1939, an educated Munda, who called himself Jaipal Sing, took over the leadership of the burgeoning secessionist movement called the 'Chotanagpur Adivasi Maha Sabha'; and in 1949, it was renamed Jharkand, in order to attract non-adivasi support for a separate state. Since 1963 it has been in an uneasy alliance with the Congress Party, but its leadership still wields considerable influence in Chotanagpur, despite the party's long history of factionalism.

2 Detailed in 'The Mundas and their Country' 1912 p. 74.

3 Hunter 1877 Vol. 16, p. 19.

4 A Rupee is worth approximately 5 new pence.

5 Alexander J.A.S.B. 1845, p.527.

6 *ibid.*

7 Harington 1805, p.27.

8 From a letter by Scrafton to the Governor in 1763 *ibid.*

9 Baden-Powell, 1908, p.45.

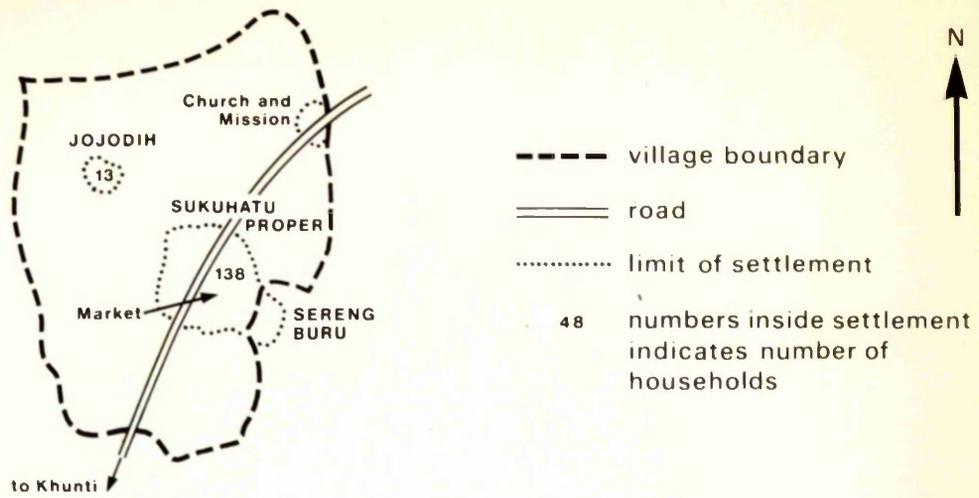
10 See p. 156.

11 Sahlins 'The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion' AA 63, 1961.

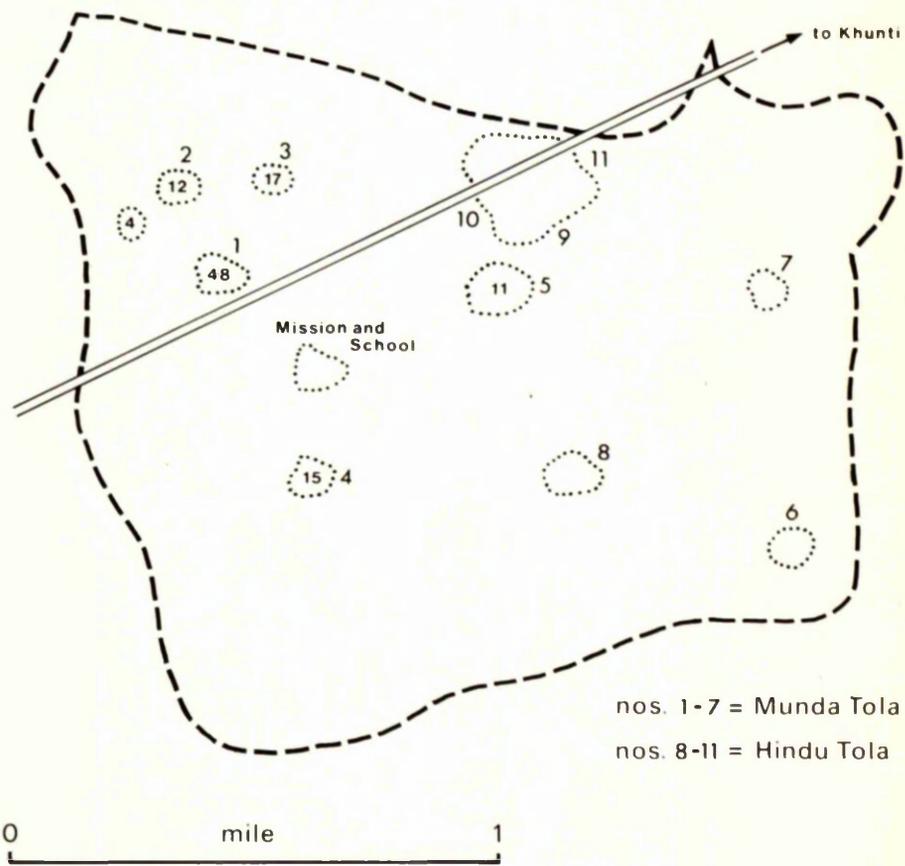
12 Bailey 1960, p. 63.

- 13 in Hunter, 1877, p. 365.
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 in Roy 1912, p. 185.
- 16 Baden-Powell 1908, p. 391.
- 17 *ibid* p. 401.
- 18 *ibid* p. 407.
- 19 *ibid* p. 493.
- 20 *ibid* p. 494.
- 21 Hunter 1877, p. 367.
- 22 Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1869, p. 34.
- 23 Hunter Vol. 16 1877, p. 299.
- 24 Chotanagpur Tenancy Amendment Act 1955.
- 25 Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908 p.2.
- 26 Taylor 1940, p. 28.
- 27 *ibid.*
- 28 Prasad 1967, p. 416.
- 29 Report on Survey and Settlement Operations 1908, p. 57.
- 30 *ibid* p. 89.
- 31 *ibid* p. 98.
- 32 Tribe, Caste and Nation 1960, pp. 50 - 64.
- 33 *ibid* p. 64.
- 34 'Special Memorandum on the Land Tenure System of the Munda Country' in Hoffman Vol. VIII p. 2388.

SKETCH MAP OF SUKUHATU (area 892.71 acres)



SKETCH MAP OF KADU (area 3111.5 acres)



BREAKDOWN OF VILLAGE POPULATIONS

SUKUHATU	No. of		KADU (Munda tolas only)	No. of	
	<u>Households/Persons</u>			<u>Households/Persons</u>	
Khuntkattidars	117	(586)	Bhuinhars	90	(501)
Raiyats	5	(24)	Raiyats	11	(55)
Tribal 'Outsiders' emp. or living in village	9	(38)	Tribal 'Outsiders' emp. or living in village	4	(22)
Blacksmiths	2	(14)	Blacksmiths	2	(13)
Ghasi	4	(19)			
Turi	1	(3)			
Blacksmith/Perae	1	(3)			
Total Tribal	130	(648)	Total Tribal	105	(578)
Total Caste	8	(39)	Total Caste	2	(13)

DISTRIBUTION OF KHUNTS

SUKUHATU	KADU						
	<u>Hh./Per./Christians</u>			<u>Hh./Per./Christ.</u>			
Pahan	13	(57)	0	Pahan	12	(83)	0
Munda	48	(258)	19(105)	Munda	38	(219)	12(54)+ 3 part(5)
Manki	27	(143)	2 (14)	Mahto	33	(187)	15(81)+ 3 part
Kuar ,	16	(70)	9 (39)	Panibhara	2	(12)	1(6)
JOJODIH							
Pahan 11	6	(27)	0				
Munda	7	(31)	0				

CHRISTIANITY

SUKUHATU	KADU	
Outsiders	8(40)	4(19)
Raiyats	5(24)	3(14)+ 1 part h.h.(1)
TOTAL (including khunts)	43(212)	TOTAL (including khunts) part of 7(14)

TRIBAL OCCUPATIONS
(Other than cultivators)

<u>SUKUHATU</u>		<u>KADU</u>	
Cultivation/Hotel Keeper	4	Cultivation/Hotel Keeper	1
Cultivation/Shop	4	Teacher	4
Hotelkeeper	1	Teacher/Cultivation	2
Teachers	6	Government Chaprassi	1
Teacher/Cultivator	2	Army (Absent)	3
Carpentry	1	Police	1
Padre	1		
Government Official	1		
Chowkidar/Cultivator	2		
Army (absent)	2		

CHAPTER II HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION TO THE VILLAGES

The Village may now be said to be the basis of the land tenure system. The land registers are made out on a village basis and spare land is allocated by the munda in consultation with village household heads. Since village boundaries have been fixed any tola formed subsequently to the Tenancy Act is always part of an existing administrative entity. The clan validates khunkatti or bhuinhari holdings in the village, in that Mundas who do not belong to the dominant clan cannot be khunkattidar or bhuinhar in that particular village but villagers, again, have the final say in the incorporation of outsiders into the village, whether as raiya of the khunkattidar or as caste specialists.

The choice of the two villages to be studied was influenced by the foregoing historical considerations and particularly from the changing land tenure situation. It seemed likely that, of all the changes taking place in Chotanagpur, those relating to land, the economic base, would have had the greatest effect. I accordingly chose one khunkatti village and one predominantly raiya village with a certain amount of bhuinhari land settled at the 1869 Survey. This choice entailed a whole set of related differences. The raiya village, which I shall call Kadu, was under the jurisdiction of a dependent zamindar of the Maharaja. Its predominantly raiya status is therefore attributable to alienation by a diku landlord. Geographically it is situated to the south west of Ranchi District, ten miles from the town of Khunti. Sukuhatu,

the name I have given to the khuntkatti village, is part of the area known as the mankipatti, or the more recently settled area in the south east of the District which retained its privileged status and simply paid a village quit rent, through the manki, to the superior landlord.

A further corollary of this difference is the presence, in the older settled area, of Hindu cultivators brought in by the zamindars to tenant alienated land. These Hindus are distinct from the Munda service castes. After the abolition of intermediary land interests in the 1950s, they were given the same status as adivasi raiya, except that they are allowed to sell their land. They consider the Mundas untouchable and 'jungly' and their presence in the area was another factor that I wished to take into account.

These two important differences which arose originally from geographical position, have taken on a cultural aspect. A line may be drawn (see map of Chotanagpur) through the District from north to south, demarcating two cultural 'zones' of the Munda territory. To the west is the old estate of the Maharaja and his dependent zamindars, known as the Naguri areas, and to the east is the later settled and surveyed area known as Hasada, where all the khuntkatti land is found. This does not mean that all land to the east of this line is of khuntkatti status. A large proportion is raiya, but the Mundas see this area as 'pure' in terms of language and culture. The Naguri area is much more heterogeneous and hence has been subject to other cultural influences to a far greater extent than the Hasada country. The Munda language shows distinct dialect differences in the two areas, and Sadani, the Hindi lingua franca, is spoken and

understood by most Naguri Mundas, whereas few Hasada Mundas are familiar with it. The contrast between these two subjectively distinguished areas also seemed to provide a good context for considering the effects of culture contact.

In choosing the villages, I attempted to keep them as comparable as possible in other respects such as accessibility to the town, the market and the mission. It is possible to place Munda villages on a continuum of accessibility to such influences and then to make a choice weighted towards greater or lesser accessibility. However, as markets, missions and towns expand rather than diminish, it can be assumed that villages will move from lesser to greater 'openness' in these respects. No representativeness of the Mundas as a whole can be claimed for any village, but the choice of two villages at the 'open' end of the continuum may be said to reflect trends operating to some extent throughout Munda society.

Kadu and Sukuhatu are both market villages equidistant from Khunti (pop. 5,000). Kadu can be reached by bus along a metalled road, and traders from Khunti travel to Kadu market which is held twice a week. Sukuhatu is situated on a dirt road and can be reached by bus only on Saturdays and only in the dry season, as the River Tajna flows across the road. Saturday is the main market day and traders come from as far afield as Ranchi. The range of goods available in both markets is almost identical.

Both villages have a subpost office with one of the villagers acting as part-time postmaster. In Kadu, he is a Hindu and in Sukuhatu, a Munda. Each village has two small

shops selling kerosene, salt, matches, cotton thread and other small items. The village teashops are a popular meeting place among those with a little cash to spare. Bicycles are bought with casual labour earnings and this enables villagers to reach Khunti and Ranchi if necessary. Khunti market is frequented by villagers with vegetables to sell, and is also a meeting place for news of relatives and occasional political meetings such as those of the Jharkand Party.

Education, for the Mundas, is still almost synonymous with the mission. Both villages have mission schools for both boys and girls, offering education in the first seven grades. Those able to proceed further have to go to Khunti to either the government or mission high schools, except for the boys of Kadu who now have a mission high school in the village. Khunti possesses a college affiliated to Ranchi University, which offers degree courses. In 1972, three Munda boys from Kadu and five from Sukuhatu were attending college.

The Kadu Roman Catholic Mission opened in 1889 and one third of the Munda villagers are converts. It is noteworthy that no Hindu converts to Christianity are found in this area. The mission has a church with two resident Munda priests, and the lower school is run by three Munda Ursuline Sisters. Sukuhatu Society for the Propagation of the Gospels Protestant Mission (S.P.G.) began in the 1870s. The church was built around 1908 and the village has one Munda padre. The girls' school is presently run by an English woman missionary who lives about half a mile from the village. The proportion of Christians is about the same as in Kadu. Both villages have

thus been exposed to Christianity for at least eighty years, but of a different denomination. Kadu and Sukuhatu act as nerve centres for the surrounding non-market villages in the dissemination of goods and ideas to more insulated areas.

Both villages are situated in areas which were actively involved in the disturbances of the last two centuries. Kadu was subject to the Jaria thakur (landlord) who was installed in the village of this name some twelve miles away. I was unable to discover the precise date at which this lease (patta) was granted by the Maharaja, but a similar grant was made to a thakur at Tilmi village, which is about five miles from Jaria and twelve from Kadu, in 1737.¹ This date was inscribed on the fortress built there by the Maharaja. As Kadu still retained, in 1869, partial bhuinhari status, it may be assumed that the Jaria thakur was not given his lease before that date and possibly not until much later. The Mundas of this area, which was known as Sonepur Pargana, formed the main strength of the Naguri rebels in the nineteenth century.

On the Hasada side, the villagers of Sukuhatu were on the main marching route between the subordinated and rebellious Parganas of Tamar, Bundu and Rahe, and the administrative headquarters at Khunti and Ranchi. They were also subject, although only in the form of a quit rent, to the landlord of Siri Pargana, whose credentials as a dependent of the Maharaja are very doubtful. Birsa Munda was known to have hidden in the village in 1895 when the British were searching for him. The final uprising in 1899 took place at Dombari Buru (hill) about three miles south of Sukuhatu. One villager still

treasures an old bayonet with which his father 'fought the British' at Dombari. Recent history is thus not forgotten and these battles recur in the stock of folklore with great vividness, if not complete accuracy.

Village Statistics, Past and Present

Sukuhatu

Sukuhatu village consists of a compact cluster of 138 households and a small tola, Jojodih, half a mile from the main settlement consisting of 13 households.² The total population, in November 1973, was 687 persons giving an average of five persons per household. Sukuhatu is a large village by local standards, as can be seen by comparing it with a block of 17 khuntkatti villages surrounding Sukuhatu. Village sizes vary considerably ranging, in this sample, from 18 households to 159 but averaging 75. Only three villages had geographically separate tola. The proportion of land per household in Sukuhatu was also the lowest in the 18 villages. It has an area of 892.71 acres, giving a gross average of 6½ acres per household. The highest in this sample was 18½ acres and the average was 9.8 acres, including waste land. The village boundaries, and hence the acreages, have been fixed since 1908. Without the figures, it is difficult to estimate accurately the population growth of the village since the Settlement, but in 1961 the Census recorded 614 persons. This is about a 9% increase in eleven years; or around 50% since 1908. My own census material suggests that, setting off births against deaths, the increase is in the region of 1% per

year. No further uncleared cultivable land exists in the village, nor have any new tola been formed since the Settlement. Jojodih was said, by some informants, to be older than the main village, and by others, to be more recently established but several generations old. The only way of increasing food production is by the conversion of upland into terraced fields and by artificial irrigation.

Wealth differences are also difficult to assess accurately. The village khatian, which was last updated at the 1927 Resettlement and Survey, records 63 stocks of khuntkatti land in which at the present time, altogether 117 households, distributed among four khunt, have a share. The smallest separate stock is 3.82 acres, and this is farmed by one household only. The largest is 45.19 acres, currently farmed by four households. The original settlement was made according to whether agnates were farming jointly or separately. The records were adjusted in 1927-35, but they do not presently reflect the actual division of land among households, as the wealth of an individual household fluctuates depending on the number of agnates in each generation. If the stocks are averaged out again, this gives almost exactly six acres per khuntkatti household - about two-thirds of the quantity estimated by the authors of the 1908 report (see pp. 19-20) to provide a minimum subsistence holding.

A further complicating factor in assessing differentials is the fertility of the land, in terms of the proportion of upland to lowland. Rents were assessed on this basis, and to take an example, we may look at three stocks of land, held by

three sets of brothers and paying the same rent of R.1 Annas 14 (about 10 n.p.). The holdings are of 6.32, 10.33 and 12.83 acres respectively. Mortgaging of fields is common, particularly when large expenses, such as weddings, have to be met. Taking these various factors into account and again using the 1908 yardstick, approximately 30 households are currently farming self-sufficient holdings, and only 16 households are above the 12 acres 'economic holding' level.

Kadu

The situation in Kadu is complicated by the large Hindu presence in the village. It is divided into eleven widely scattered tola with a total population of 2047, of which 1155 are Mundas. Here again, village boundaries were fixed at the time of the first survey and settlement; in this case in 1869. However, although the boundary is said to reflect the original customary usage of the Munda villagers, this usage has been redefined since the arrival of diku settlers in the village. Kadu is part of the territory of the Rambara clan, which is spread over twelve administrative villages, many of which also contain Hindus. The Mundas see these Hindus, with some justification, as illegal 'usurpers' of ancestral land. They were settled by diku landlords on land appropriated from Munda cultivators. This situation has resulted in a polarisation of the village into Hindu and Munda tola. The village is still referred to by the Mundas as Kadu, but in practice, the reference is restricted to the Munda tola.

As can be seen from the map, the two groups are geographically well segregated, but the Mundas are widely

dispersed in the village, whereas the Hindus, with the exception of the Telis (oil pressers), live in a close cluster of tola around the main road. The distance between tola 2 and tola 6 is three miles. The Mundas are thus split, for social and ritual purposes into two sets of tola which each have a pahan and munda and a separate burial ground. In customary terms, these sets of tola would have developed into separate villages along the lines indicated in the Settlement Report,³ but this is no longer possible, so they simply function as if the traditional process had occurred. This study focuses on tolas 1-5, which I have treated as a 'village' in accordance with the perceptions of the Kadu Mundas as it forms one ritual and social unit distinct from tolas 6 and 7 which form a different unit. Reference to 'Kadu' may therefore be understood as relating to these five tola only, unless stated otherwise.

These tola consist of 107 households out of a total of 210 Munda households in the administrative village. Hindus comprise 82 households. The tola vary considerably in size, but the distribution of the lineages (khunt) suggests that tola 1 and 2 formed the original settlement. Here, the munda and pahan khunt predominate, and the main burial ground is found. Appended to these tola is a small settlement of four houses about a mile distant which was established within this present generation by the customary method of clearing the jungle.

The comparison of administrative villages in terms of size is not a particularly useful exercise in this area, but if a sample is taken of similar size and position to the

khuntkatti sample, and then divided by the number of tola comprising each village, it can be seen that Kadu is part of a more general pattern in the Naguri area of small, dispersed tola in contrast to the more compact and larger settlements of the Hasada villages. In the Naguri sample of 15 villages, tola averaged 33-34 households in each. Of the two villages with no separate tola, one consisted of 41 households and the other of 100.

Mundas and Hindus showed a considerable overall difference in household size in Kadu. Hindus averaged 9.5 persons and Mundas 5.5 persons per household. Since 1961, the population of the whole village has increased by 473 persons. The Munda population increased by 134 so the major part of this growth has been among the Hindus.

Comparing the two samples in respect of land, it appears that Naguri villagers enjoy larger holdings overall. The village with the highest average holding per household was 29 acres (Hasada: $18\frac{1}{2}$), the lowest was $7\frac{1}{2}$ ($6\frac{1}{2}$), and the average among the sample of villages was 12.6 (9.8). Kadu itself was somewhat below average with 11 acres. Kadu is a part-bhuinhari village, however, and this factor contributes significantly to the strong economic position of the Mundas vis-a-vis the Hindus. The 1869 survey recorded 495 acres of land in Kadu as being of bhuinhari status. The village khatian, which was last updated in 1955 in preparation for the Abolition of Intermediaries Act, records 559.38 acres of land as bhuinhari. As bhuinhars have no special rights in jungle or upland, the extra land must have been gained by the conversion of upland

into terraced fields, which may then be claimed as bhuinhari land. This is another factor which indicates that Naguri bhuinhar may be wealthier than khuntkattidar. All the land assessed as bhuinhari is terraced and thus more profitable than unterraced upland, whereas khuntkatti land includes in its assessment upland and waste. Bhuinhari land in Kadu is divided into 19 stocks, of which two are service lands for the pahan and his assistant. The distribution of the remaining stocks, ranging from 8.6 acres to 95 acres, is highly variable and difficult to discover with any accuracy. Many villagers did not know whether their holdings included bhuinhari land or not, and Munda genealogical memories are surprisingly short.

Tola 5 has the largest area of bhuinhari land; 177.17 acres, shared between the 11 households of the mahto khunt in that tola and giving an average of 16.1 acres per household. Tola 2, the pahan khunt, has the smallest amount of 16.88 acres divided between 12 households. The pahan khunt of tola 6, which is part of the other Munda tola in the village proper, had retained a much larger share of 79 acres. The other 22 households of the mahto khunt in tola 1 and 3 shared 103.97 acres (about 5 acres per household), and the munda khunt, of 48 households distributed in tola 1, 4 and 7 had a total of 152.34 acres (about 3½ per household). The panibhara khunt, to which two households belong, holds 2 acres of service land for assisting the pahan. However, it must be pointed out, that the distribution of this land ranges from one field (katti) of about a third of an acre to a share of more than

30 acres.

In addition to their bhuinhari holdings, the Kadu Mundas hold an average of 6 acres per household of raiya land, tenanted directly from the government. 21 households hold bhuinhari land exclusively, and the rest of the kili are part-bhuinhar. If the figures are compared with the 1908 survey yardstick of minimum subsistence holdings, seven households fall below the self-sufficiency level and 49 are between this level and the 'economic' holding level of 12 acres. This does not, however, take into account indebtedness, which, in a bad harvest year such as 1971-2, was affecting a third of the households to a greater or lesser extent. In 1972, there were 29 acres of uncleared cultivable land within the village boundary. As it is not of bhuinhari status, it can only be allocated by the government and it may go to scheduled tribe or caste villagers only.

Village Organization: Kili and Khunt

In Sukuhatu the Pandu clan, or kili, is coterminous with the village, and hence both are exogamous. Sukuhatu is, however, part of a wider clan area consisting of seven villages (maujha) which share the tradition of a common ancestor from whom the seven brothers who founded the villages are descended.⁴ The villagers of Sukuhatu have a different clan name (Pandur) from the other six villages and this may reflect some process of segmentation. Of the seven villages forming the exogamous group, only Sukuhatu has a different kili name. The other six share the same name, and older villagers told how Sukuhatu separated from its neighbour, Serengburu, 'within their memory' because a boy of Serengburu married a girl of Sukuhatu. The most precise account of this, including genealogical details, was given by the pahan, who is probably in his late fifties. It is unlikely that villager was actually alive and aware at the time it happened, as there are only four villagers over the age of seventy, and both villages are recorded in the 1908 settlement. The incident probably took place in the previous generation, shortly before the Settlement, as the couple went to Assam. The reason for separating into two villages becomes clear when a recent case of breach of exogamy is considered. A Sukuhatu khuntkattidar took a girl from village K., within the exogamous block. Because they are nominally of different kili, they were allowed to remain in the village instead of receiving the traditional punishment of outcasting. Although they are not considered 'married', the pahan said that the breach could be

remedied by a reformatory ceremony and a feast given by the offending couple to the elders of both villages. Until this is done, the couple will find difficulty in marrying their children. In contrast, no reformatory mechanism exists in the case of a liaison between two members bearing the same kili name, and the enormity of this crime will create problems for the whole village in finding spouses. There seems no reason to doubt the villagers' account of the separation as it fits in both with the process of lineage segmentation and with the treatment of breaches of exogamy in relation to this process. The pattern of settlement also tends to confirm the original unity of the two villages. The houses overlap on the southern boundary and two houses which belong geographically to Serengburu are in fact of Pandu kili and appear in the Sukuhatu land register.

There is also evidence of individuals changing their kili over a period of time. Four out of five of the raiyat households bear the name of Has, the kili of the other six villages. They came at the invitation of khuntkattidar who were unable to cultivate all of their land, and all of them lease land from the munda khunt, which is the richest of the four. They pay a fixed rent direct to the khuntkattidar, and except for the restriction of burial place, there is no social discrimination between khuntkattidar and raiyat. There are also four households with land recorded in the village khatian, who said that their ancestors ('many generations back') came to Sukuhatu from Chondor, one of the seven clan group villages, and that they are of the Has kili. They are also khuntkattidar

and now refer to themselves as Pandu and have burial rights in the village sasan. They are from the pahan khunt and this explains why there are two separate pahan khunt in the village. If the existing khunt died out, a member of this newer khunt could then become pahan, according^{to}/the present incumbent.

On querying this state of affairs, I was told that the people from Chondor 'have been here for many generations'. The implication is that settlement over such a long period results in the eventual incorporation of raiyat into full village membership. All but one raiyati household belong to the Has kili, and so they are hagako ('brothers') in terms of the clan group; but they are not hatuhagako ('village brothers') in the sense of being khuntkattidar. This, however, is a situation which can no longer occur. First, this acceptance had to have been established prior to the 1908 Settlement, as no further claims to khuntkatti status can be entertained. Secondly, there are no longer sufficient resources to support the movement of personnel from one village to another, and the number of raiyati holdings is unlikely to increase.

R. Yamada, in his recent study of the Mundas (Tokai University Press, 1970), carried out in Tarub village, some ten miles from Sukuhatu, states that raiyati families in Tarub are the descendents of young men of affinal relation who came to the village to work and married village girls. Over time they became assimilated into the village clan and gave rise to new khunt (lineages) within the village. This explains why there are named khunt additional to the pahan and munda khunt.

Though this explanation was not offered in Sukuhatu, it is

certainly correct. The pahan and munda khunt always hold more land in a khuntkatti village and are considered to be the village founders. In Sukuhatu, the pattern of settlement segregates the pahan and munda khunt somewhat from the rest of the village, which is called latartoli (lit. 'lower hamlet'). In Mundari, latar always carries the connotation of 'later settled', as in the reference to the Hasada country as Latardisum ('low country'). This comes from the traditional Munda preference, first noted in an article quoted by Baden-Well from the 'Pioneer' (1889), for bringing the highlying fields under the plough first:

"the lower rice lands and richest and less yielding soils are reserved for times when a little capital and more easily available labour give the needful means for cultivating them".⁵

It will be recalled that villages are also built on high ground, and many contain evidence of high terraced fields which have subsequently been abandoned.

In Kadu, the clan is a much larger unit and villages with the same clan are grouped together and known as parha. Within these villages themselves, there is a higher proportion of raiyati and other households belonging to different kili. Eleven households in Kadu are raiyat in this sense, and they must be carefully distinguished from the raiyati households belonging to the dominant clan who are entitled to burial in the village sasan and who do not see themselves as raiyat in the sense that a clan outsider who leases land on the village is a raiyat. When discussing Kadu, I shall use this term only in relation to clan outsiders instead of in its more

correct technical sense of 'government tenant'.

These eleven households furnish more evidence to suggest that affines gradually became incorporated into the clan and eventually formed new lineages. Nine of them can be traced, in the last three generations, to a marriage between a village girl and a dasi (servant) who came to work in the village and was invited to settle. Two of these cases occurred in the present generation. Of the other two, one household head came because it was his FZ village and his parents had died. He acquired land, upon payment, from the village munda. The FF of the other household head came to his MB village to work, but did not marry a village girl. Of those who married village girls, all but one were connected by affinal ties (usually FZ) to Kadu. One was invited because of his ritual and medical skills.

All these raiyati households originated within the last three generations and so have not been assimilated to the stage of clan membership. However, it is probable that the mahto and panibara khunts of Kadu originated on this way, as did the manki and kuar khunti in Sukuhatu and the neighbouring villages where these khunt are found. Manki means 'assistant' to the munda, and the manki was until 1956 responsible for collecting the rent of the patti. Kuar and panibara mean 'water drawer' or pahan's assistant.

This apparent dilution of the patrilineal principle may be related to the two factors of marriage payments and land resources. Many Munda boys take work as dasi (servants) in the households of wealthier people with a shortage of labour.

They are treated very much as household members and receive their food, clothing and a small money payment for each year worked. This is a recognized way of saving up for the bride-price in poor families, and boys usually work in the house of affinal relatives. The outsiders who married village girls came on a similar basis, but they worked in the household of the girl they eventually married, and this work was the 'brideprice'. This practice is still recognized by the villagers, and the new son-in-law continues to cultivate after the death of his wife's father. However, no case of this has occurred in Sukuhatu as long as my informants could remember. In Kadu, three old widows were married in this way, but they are still raiyat. Their holdings are recorded in the bhuinhari land of the munda khunt which was registered in 1869 and cannot now be altered.

Thus, the assimilation of affines into village khunt stopped when written records of holdings were made, but it was also affected by the other variable of land availability. In a situation where this is plentiful, as it was in Chotanagpur in varying degrees until the wholesale alienation of land to the zemindars, the scarce commodity is labour, both to assist with the day-to-day work, and in the reclamation of jungle and the terracing of reclaimed fields. It was also a way of obtaining a wife. Nowadays, brideprice is paid in cash and bullocks. The economic realities were recognised by Sukuhatu villagers when they maintained that a son-in-law never inherits, as there are always other khuntkattidar to claim the land. There is still, however, a strong preference for village

exogamy. A recent marriage between the son of a Sukuhatu raiyat and the daughter of a khuntkattidar, was strongly disapproved of by the villagers, although no punitive action was taken. The boy's family was particularly annoyed as they had adopted the Pandu kili name, although they were always spoken of as raiyat by the rest of the village.

The khunt, or local lineage, regulates access to khuntkatti land (katti, probably from Hindi: 'ket', meaning fields). When a khunt dies out, this land reverts, since the 1908 Act, to the munda. This had happened once in Sukuhatu within the last forty years, making the village munda richer by 12½ acres. Before the Act, this land would have reverted to the munda khunt as a whole. The khunt also regulates succession to village offices. The pahan and munda must always be from their respective khunt. If either khunt cannot produce a successor, a member of the same khunt in another village may be called and incorporated into the clan. In Naguri villages, where the mahto khunt is usually found, the members are said to be the descendents of the third son of the village founder, and the pahan and munda khunt being the descendents of the first and second respectively. This khunt and the manki khunt used to furnish one official who assisted the munda, but since rent collection was put on a village basis, the function has lapsed, as the munda is now the official collector. The kuar and panibara khunt (both from Hindi: 'water drawer') nominally produce an assistant to the pahan. This was the case in Kadu, but in Sukuhatu the young unmarried boys of any khunt usually assisted at rituals. The difference hinges on the question of

service lands for this office. In Naguri villages, one or two fields are usually set aside for the incumbent, and so the office is hereditary; whereas Hasada villages do not have special fields.

The khunt does play some part in regulating marriages, and, at least since Hoffman's time, there has been a very specific rule. When a marriage is contracted between members of the same khunt of two different clans, further marriages may be arranged between them within the same generation, but they are prohibited in the next generation as long as the alliances contracted in the previous generation are maintained; that is while the two khunt 'remain on visiting terms'.⁶ He also records that the pahan and munda khunt may not take part in the ancestral sacrifices of the other or partake of the sacrificial meat, rice or rice beer. There was some confusion about this point when I enquired. Most informants in Sukuhatu said that the two khunt do not eat together at birth and death rites, in which ancestral sacrifices are made but they may do so at weddings and any other time. This was denied, however, by a male informant, and the consensus was that the prohibition was adhered to in some villages but not in others.

There was similar disagreement about the marriage rule but it may be related to the concepts of 'near relatives' (kupul nata) and 'distant relatives' (sangin kupul). Only the latter category is marriageable, but the precise degree of relationship which would permit marriage is subject to redefinition. The rule noted by Hoffman still holds in most

cases, but marriages in contravention of this were found in both villages and villagers said that it was acceptable (bayoga).

Married women are, in a sense, both agnates and affines, as they retain the right to be buried in the sasan of their native village and, although they have no heritable rights in land, to be incorporated as an ancestor. This occurs only exceptionally and usually in the case of divorced women who return to their natal village, or young widows who do not wish to remarry. Women are also incorporated fully into their husband's kili with respect to burial and ancestral status, and if no male householder or close agnate is present, they may conduct the ancestral rites. Hence, marriages should not take place between the children, grandchildren and greatgrandchildren of the woman and any member of her natal kili as these are all 'kupul nata'. Again, exceptions to this rule were found, and can no doubt be related to the increasing difficulty of finding spouses outside this prohibited range.

It may be noted, however, that the effect of this marriage rule is to create a form of patrilateral cross cousin marriage⁹ between the pahan and munda khunt of the two intermarrying villages. This egalitarian form of marriage, which entails the possibility of a delayed, but reciprocal exchange of women, accords with the pervasive symmetry found in ritual and the non-hierarchical structure of Munda social groups and wife giving and wife-taking relationships.

Sukuhatu village was part of the area known before the abolition of zemindari interests as the mankipatti. Patti may

be equated with parha as they both refer to the kili, or group of kili, which is exogamous. Sukuhatu and the six villages of the Has kili form one patti. The use of the word patti instead of parha is because these groups of villages paid an aggregate rent to overlord, while retaining full khuntkatti rights. Patti comes from the Hindi word pata meaning 'lease'; and this lease was held by a representative of the group, who was known as the manki. He was responsible for collecting the rent from each village. The position tended to be hereditary to the manki khunt and it was a separate function from that of the hatu munda. The manki received a small payment from the landlord for his services. The village groups also formed a political unit analogous to the parha, but informants said that this function had relapsed 'a few years ago'. When intermediary interests were abolished in the 1950s the mankipatti was ended, and the decline of intervillage organization may be dated from this time. In the khuntkatti area, the village is now the widest political authority.

Village organization: Caste and Christianity

Service castes in Munda villages may be categorized according to whether they are dependent on Munda or Hindu patronage, or on both. In Sukuhatu, the two blacksmith families and the four Ghasi households come into the first category. They were asked to settle in the village and were given a house site and a vegetable garden. The blacksmiths receive the following payments per year from each household to which they give service:

1 maund (approximately 40 lb.) paddy at
harvesting for each ploughing iron sharpened;
2 bundles and 1 winnowing fan full of paddy
at harvesting;

1 seer (2 lb.) rice, 1 bundle gora (coarse)
paddy and 1 bundle gondli (millet) in February.

For making each household a new knife, he also receives one seer of rice, or its equivalent in money, at the ba festival in March or April. Any other new work is charged separately. Their area of operation also covers Serengburu, the village which 'split' from Sukuhatu. The growth of the villages is reflected in the recent arrival of the second blacksmith family who came about thirty years ago from another village in the same kili group. The other family could not recall their genealogy beyond the fact that they had been there for many generations. As the village is not reckoned to be more than seven or eight generations old, they may have been there from the beginning.

The Ghasis, who are all from the same family, but are divided into four households for cooking purposes, came from Baruhatu, about four miles away, about fifty years ago. They were invited by the munda and were given a house site in return for providing musical services and a village watchman, or bhandari, whose job it is to announce meetings or government notices. This job is presently held by the eldest son of the household head, and he receives 42 maund of paddy per year from the villagers. The drumming and trumpeting is paid for pro rata and each musician receives from 3 to 10 rupees per day.

plus his food and a little grain to take away. This employment is very irregular and the Ghasis supplement their income by fishing, basket making and labouring. Whereas the blacksmiths are culturally indistinguishable from the Mundas, the Ghasis are much more 'Hindu' and describe themselves as Harijans (Gandhi's word for untouchables). They speak both Hindi and Mundari and, although considered by both Mundas and other 'tribal' castes such as weavers, to be the lowest in status in the village, they assert a degree of status by refusing to take cooked food from Christian Mundas. They accept food from all other castes. The blacksmiths, on the other hand, have a special position in the village, and are in fact, claimed by the Mundas to be adivasis who lost their caste (and land) by marrying with outsiders and now have to live by working with metal. The household labelled as blacksmith-weaver (Perae) consists of a young couple who were ostracized in the man's natal village because of their liaison, and came to Sukuhatu because a Munda friend offered them a small hut. The man has lost his caste and his relatives will not eat with him because the weaver caste is lower than that of the blacksmith. The children will take their mother's caste. This household makes a precarious living out of basketmaking, metal work and field labour. Like the Turi (basketmaker) household, they were attracted to Sukuhatu by the market, which provides an outlet for casual work.

This particular family, consisting of a husband, wife and one son, came a few years before from Tamar, to the south east of Khunti Subdivision. They had left other members of the

family in their village and came seeking a supplementary cash income. Sukuhatu market has a reputation around Khunti for cheapness and good bargains, and many people travel in to buy bulk supplies of brooms, baskets, mats, clothes and tools. The growth of market centres has thus encouraged mobility among the service castes who traditionally work for the Mundas. It has also brought in castes which are recognizably Hindu. Blacksmiths, weavers of coarse cloth, potters and basketmakers all come into the category of traditional specialists. With the exception of the blacksmith, these castes have become semi-independent of the village, or group of villages which they serve; and a substantial part of their income now comes from the market, from both Mundas and Hindus. Sukuhatu does not have regular arrangements for the supply of pots, baskets and cloth, as these are now available every week from the market.

Barbers, Hindu weavers (Sawasis) and blacksmiths (Lohars) also come to the market with their goods and services each week, and one barber family living in a predominantly Munda village a few miles away, now serves a set of villages which includes Sukuhatu, in return for payments on a similar basis to that of the Ghasis. The important distinction between castes such as the barber, and 'tribalised' castes, is in the matter of status. The barber will not accept cooked food from a Munda in part payment for his services. He will only take the raw grain. Cooked food is an accepted part of the payment to the tribal castes.

The Ghasis stand midway between these two categories and

this reflects their ambivalent position in a dual hierarchy of Hindus and Mundas. They are untouchable in the Hindu hierarchy as they are leather workers and removers of corpses and other highly polluting material. They were also not an integral part of Munda village life before large numbers of Hindus began to settle in Chotanagpur; when the Ghasis probably came as well. This observation is based on the fact that they are found serving both Hindu and Munda villages, whereas the tribal castes never live in Hindu villages and only sell to Hindus in the market. The main work of the Ghasis is drumming, but whereas this occupation is polluting, because of the contact with leather, to the twice born Hindu castes, the Mundas have their own drumming tradition and most men are able to drum. There are few Munda households without a drum and there is no collective word for the concept. Each size and shape has a different name in Mundari. The Ghasis drum at some village festivals, for certain types of dancing and at weddings and 'second burials' for non-Christian Mundas, Munda drummers also drum at certain village rituals and in village dancing. At Christian weddings and at rituals performed only by Christians, the drummers are always Munda. In other words, Ghasis represent a Hindu element which is, for the villagers, opposed to Christianity and reflected in mutual commensal exclusiveness.

In Kadu, the service castes may be categorized in the same way, but there is a further variable to be taken into account. Kadu has two distinct caste systems because of the presence of a substantial Hindu population in the area. At the

head of the Hindu hierarchy are the two Brahmin families who live, slightly segregated, on the main road at the opposite end from the Munda tola. Ahirs (cowherds) and Sawasis (weavers) make up a small proportion of the Hindu population. There is one tola of Telis (oil pressers) and one of Bhagtas (rice pounders). The agricultural Majhi caste predominates, and they also press sugar cane with a recently purchased machine. The service castes work for other castes in a jajmani type arrangement; but they will work for the Mundas if paid individually. One Munda who grows sugar cane has it pressed by the Majhis. However, most of the services provided by Ahirs, Telis, etc. are performed by the Mundas themselves. Every Munda village has one or two oil presses for the common use. This lack of interdependence is reflected in commensality; none of the Hindu castes will take food from or eat with the Mundas and they, in turn, will not eat with or take food from the Hindus of any caste.

The only resident caste in the Munda tola are two blacksmith brothers who sharpen 88 ploughing irons in tola 1-4. Tola 5, which is situated at some distance away, calls on the services of a blacksmith from the neighbouring village. Their payment is roughly the same as in Sukuhatu, but, in addition there is a ceremony called Badae Ili (lit. blacksmith's rice beer) each year at which the Badae (Barae) is feted by the villagers, given a small amount of paddy by each housewife and formally 'retained' for the following year.

The other service castes upon whom the Mundas traditionally rely for their pots, baskets and cloth, are in the same

position as in Sukuhatu and its neighbouring villages. They provide goods for their patrons in the village and they also sell on the market. They live among the Mundas and take food from them and thus constitute the other caste hierarchy in the area. Again, the Ghasis occupy an ambiguous position as they drum regularly for Mundas and Hindus and take cooked food from both, but without the commensal distinction between Christian and non-Christian. They do not, however, drum at Christian weddings or rituals.

As is shown in the table (p.71), Christians form a large proportion of the population in both villages. The similarities may be noted first in the distribution of Christian households among the different lineages and among the remainder of the village. No households in the pahan khunt are Christian. This has prevented an important dilemma which has occurred in some Munda villages regarding the succession to office of the village priest. Generally speaking, the office may not be occupied by a Christian, but I knew of two wholly Roman Catholic, Naguri villages without khuntkatti or bhuinhari status where the office survives in modified form with the parish priest called in at traditional festivals to conduct Christian prayers. This does not occur in villages of mixed religion, however, and the pahan khunt tends to adhere to the traditional religion 'on behalf' of the rest of the village. Christians, as well as traditional adherents, indicated that they would fear the consequences if the village bongako were not appeased. Since the arrival of Christianity, the traditional religion has been referred to as purnadharom

(Hindi: 'old religion') by its adherents. The Christian Church often uses the word sonsar - pagan - to refer to the unconverted, but I find the Hindi designation much less objectionable.

No dilemma of contradiction arises over the office of hatumunda, who may be of any religion, although the consequences of this for village leadership will be considered more fully in the next chapter. In Sukuhatu, he is a Christian, but in Kadu the situation is rather more complex as there is an illiterate hereditary headman who professes puṇadharom and an acting headman who is literate and belongs to a small sect of reformists centred around the ideas of Birsa, the millenarian leader of the 1890s rebellions.

In both villages, the 'outsiders' are all Christians, with one exception. In Sukuhatu, they consist of one mission 'padre', one mission carpenter, four households of school teachers, one of whom is puṇadharom and teaches in a government school three miles away; one grain gola official, one hotel keeper, and one postmaster and small shopkeeper. Their educational level is higher than that of the village generally, ranging from the functionally literate hotel keeper to one graduate schoolmaster. The hatumunda and his wife are also primary school teachers.

In Kadu, the only outsiders employed in the village are schoolteachers, of whom there are four living in three households. The other household in this category came because of the schooling facilities and stay in an empty house belonging to a relative. The head is a policeman in the steel works at

Jamshedpur. All these families are well educated and Christian.

There are two significant differences between the two villages. The first is the presence or absence of commensal relations between Christians and purnadharom. The two groups do not, of course, intermarry and if, as sometimes happens, a young couple of different persuasions wishes to marry, then one of them will convert. The difference hinges on the attitude of families to the conversion of one of their number, either through marriage or through contact with the mission during schooling. In Sukuhatu, mixed households are not found at all, as the two religious groups do not customarily eat together. If a boy became a Christian in order to marry the wife of his choice, he would not be able to bring her to his parents' home to live. The only case of such a marriage in Sukuhatu was between the two schoolteachers who do not belong to the village. They are not allowed inside the house of the boy's parents when they return to visit, and their food is cooked and served to them separately. Christians may not approach the cooking hearth or enter the inner part of a purnadharom house as this would offend the ancestors.

In Kadu, these prohibitions are not found, as it witnessed by the presence of seven households in which one or more member is a Christian. In no case has this entailed the separation of cooking hearths, and at village weddings all the food is cooked in the same pot. In Sukuhatu, the cooking and eating is segregated, and this is probably the reason why the two groups do not, as a rule, attend each other's weddings.

The second major difference is denominational. The

difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic is qualitative and can only be described by saying that the Catholic mission is very much more 'easy going' and adaptable than either the Lutherans or the Anglicans, who are the main representatives of the Protestant Church in Chotanagpur. This is reflected in the extent of community participation in traditional festivals. In Kadu this was considerable, and in Sukuhatu it was almost non-existent. The Protestant attitude to tribal dancing has modified over the last hundred years from a total ban on the participation of Christians, to an espousal of dancing as an element of culture worthy of preservation. The result has been a separation of the village youth into purnadharom dancers and Christian dancers. In Kadu all the villagers dance together, except on specifically Christian occasions.

Marriage provides an interesting example of attitudes. Munda marriage may be formally terminated without difficulty by summoning the panch (Hindi: 'the five') - the elders of the villages involved - and deciding whether the brideprice should be returned, and where any children of the marriage should live. The ending of the marriage is then symbolized by the public tearing in half of a mango leaf which reverses the tie represented in the marriage ceremony by the tying of mango leaves on the couple. They are then free to remarry as if they had been widowed, and no stigma is attached to either party.

The Anglican mission does not recognize divorce and one Sukuhatu man who left his first wife and remarried in a civil ceremony at Khunti court, is now 'excommunicated', as the

Church does not recognize his marriage. This means that he and his wife are disbarred from attending Church in a decision taken by the elders, acting on the principle laid down by the diocese. In another case where a village girl left her husband because of their mutual incompatibility, the marriage cannot be dissolved and so she remains with her parents, unable to remarry and still remain within the Church.

The Catholic Church is rather less strict on this matter. While not recognizing divorce within its own terms of reference, it does not excommunicate a couple if they remarry, although the second marriage will not be given the same status as a Church marriage.

The difference in attitude between missions is one important factor in the state of relations between Christians and purnadharom. It is by no means the only factor, however, and the greater complexity of this relationship will be discussed further in the next chapter. It would be misleading to present Christians and non-Christians as two groups which are always distinct and distinguishable, as in many contexts the distinction is quite immaterial. Similarly, when talking of 'Christianity' and 'Christians', these concepts should always be mentally qualified by their native aspect. Just as Hindu ideas are adapted and 'mundarized' by their absorption into existing beliefs and practices, so Christian doctrines and concepts tend to overlay, rather than supersede those that are there already. The importance of this point will, I hope, be brought out in relation to the question of meaning and religious change.

Footnotes to Chapter II

- 1 Roy 1912 p.183.
- 2 A household is defined in the way used by the Mundas, as a group sharing the same cooking hearth.
- 3 see p. 58.
- 4 The motif of the seven brothers recurs among a number of groups of tribal cultivators (e.g. Furer-Haimendorf 1948 Book I p. 220) and its attachment to clan areas suggests that it may have been significant in the delineation of revenue areas. Seven is also an important ritual number which occurs in several contexts.
- 5 Baden-Powell 1908 p.45.
- 6 Hoffman Vol. VIII p. 2381.
- 7 ibid. p. 2380.
- 8 cf. Levi-Strauss 1949 p. 426.

CHAPTER III: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE:

CASE STUDIES

In this chapter, I shall examine some of the changes brought about in village life in the last 100 years or so, in relation particularly to customary law and political autonomy. Hoffman's work provides the main point of reference for the changing situation from 1870 to around 1915. Some corroboration and additional information was obtained from the oldest villagers, a few of whom were in their seventies.

The Mundas use the Hindi word panchayat to describe their system for settling disputes and upholding customary law, but this body is distinct from the official gram panchayat of local government. Hoffman gives a very precise account of its working at all levels, and it may be briefly summarized here. He did, himself, attend panchayats and so cannot be accused of over-idealizing. The lowest level at which collective decisions could be made was the tola panchayat, which consisted of a member of the Munda khunt living in the tola and acting as the tola munda, and the other heads of households. Minor disputes confined to the tola could be settled at this panchayat, but if it was a question of outcasting someone, then the hatu pahan had to be present. For minor offences, such as allowing ones' animals to graze on someone's crops, there would be a fine of about one anna¹, depending on the type of animal. For quarrels, the fine would be perhaps, a pot of beer and a fowl. Eating or drinking food prepared by another caste was punished by outcasting until the person paid

the required sum for the 'cleansing' ceremony (kanda). This involved a ritual and a feast of meat and rice (mandi jilu) for some or all of the villagers.

The next level was the hatu panchayat, presided over by the hatumunda. Tola disputes which could not be settled were taken to this panchayat by the tolamunda. The authority of the hatu panchayat covered disputes about land ownership, theft within the village boundaries, fights, and the taking up of an axe during a quarrel. The patti or parha panchayat covered any cases which the hatu did not wish to decide because of possible bad feeling and repercussions, any dispute between a hamlet and the parent village, or over village boundaries, disputes over the succession of a munda or pahan, a quarrel between two khunt of a village, adultery and the marking of a woman with vermilion by a member of another caste (this last is equivalent to marriage). This panchayat could impose large fines which generally ranged between 20 and 50 rupees (£1 to £2.50) but Hoffman knew of a man who was fined 100 rupees and 5 maund (100 kilos) of rice for the last named offence. The money was used partly for the kanda ceremony, if it was required, and the rest was distributed between the adjudicators.

The last type of panchayat was the public meeting of the parha or patti to which members of other villages were invited. This was called in cases of dispute about burial stones, of clan incest, and of witchcraft when the accused was a woman. Members of her own clan would then be invited. In all cases of witchcraft, the accused was entitled to a hearing at which other villages were represented. This was to counteract the

possible unfairness of a judgement by the person's own hatuhagako. In all cases involving marriage, the hatu-panchayat of both villages would take part.

The principles underlying this division of political responsibility are very consistent. It is clear that the widest level, that of the public panchayat, constitutes the tribe by proxy, and perhaps entitles us to attribute a degree of unity, at least in customary law, to the Mundas as a group. It is particularly interesting that outside parties may be called in to settle disputes about the positioning of burial stones. The Mundas have a saying which, freely translated, means 'the burial stones are the title deeds (patta) of our race'.

Sukuhatu

This may now be compared with the situation in Sukuhatu in 1972 and prior to that date. There are no tola panchayats, as Jojodih does not have a tola munda. It is unlikely that it will ever have one, as in khuntkatti areas, the office of munda is recognized only at village level. The right to succession is established in the court and the area of jurisdiction covers the administrative village, inclusive of its tola, as laid down in the 1908 survey. Tola always remain tola whereas previously they became villages; thus the tolamunda is superfluous and can no longer command any authority. Disputes must then be referred to village level.

About a year before my arrival, the hatupanchayat ceased to operate on a regular basis. Previously it had met every Thursday morning and a fine of four annas was levied on any

male householder, of any caste, who did not attend without a valid reason. This was corroborated by the English missionary who ran the school. The most immediate reason given for this breakdown was a dispute between the upper and lower tola of the village proper. A fixed rate of fine had been agreed for owners whose animals strayed into cropped fields. According to informants from lower tola, the people of upper tola had agreed to the fine but would not pay it when their animals strayed. The people of upper tola blamed the others because

'they kept scolding the people of upper tola for not looking after their animals properly, yet they did not fine them although the upper tola people were prepared to pay'.
(Informant: the pahan).

It will be recalled that lower tola, or latartola, consists of the manki and kuar khunt, who are separated geographically by a dirt road through the village, and whose fields are similarly separated.

Disputes and other matters still had to be settled, and during my stay in the village, this was occurring in an 'ad hoc' manner depending on the issue and who was involved. In the case of a dispute between people in different tola, a few men from each side would meet and settle the issue. If a fine was decided, the money was used to buy salt or some other easily divisible commodity, and all those present took a share. Such meetings were not, however, broadcast publicly beforehand by the bhandari acting on the authority of the munda, as was the case before the dispute. Major issues might still draw a large gathering from both tola, and this happened when a raiyat woman was accused of stealing 100 rupees from one of

the schoolmasters. In cases where women are involved the village women usually attend as well.

This is an appropriate point at which to consider the nature of traditional leadership in Sukuhatu. The hatumunda, Joseph, is an unpopular man for reasons related both to his genealogy and his own personality. He is a man of about 34 and he was born in Hazaribagh, north of Ranchi District, when his father was serving there as a forestry officer. The headmanship had passed in a direct line from Joseph's father's father's father, but when his father left the village to work, the office passed to his younger brother. Both men died when Joseph was a young boy and this left no direct successor, as the sons of both men were too young. Joseph and his mother returned to Sukuhatu and his mother, who is a literate and strong-minded woman took over the work of collecting rents. In the meanwhile, Joseph began to learn Mundari, as he had only spoken Hindi in Hazaribagh. During this period, battles developed over the succession, as other members of the khunt claimed the right now that no direct male heir was available. Joseph's mother took the battle to court, where she produced documentation of the khunt genealogy. The court ruled in her favour and she was able to continue as 'proxy' munda until Joseph was old enough to take over.

This is an interesting comment on the effects of codifying customary law. When the 1908 Act converted the hatumunda into an administrative office it laid down a rule of succession which was assumed to be that of customary law; that is, from the eldest brother to the eldest son. However,

customary law is variable in a way that codified law cannot be, and in a case like this, the succession would have passed immediately to the next closest agnate and then to his eldest son. The right of succession for the pahan and munda was not invariable, and the villagers formerly retained the right to reject the genealogically correct candidate if they did not think him suitable.

This more rigid interpretation of customary law in the matter of succession created several factions within the village which are still apparent after twenty years, and which militate against effective secular leadership. It is possible, however, that this old quarrel might have been forgotten if Joseph had proved to be a more dynamic and conscientious headman. He has confined his role to the minimum administrative necessities. He was only seen to attend one panchayat meeting during my stay and he did not take any part in the proceedings. He is a schoolteacher and a Christian. His fields are looked after by hired help and I have heard him scorned by other villagers for being unable even to plough. The dilemma arises from his inability to reconcile two lifestyles which are, to him and to other villagers, incompatible. The hatupanchayat still uses the customary procedures for dealing with problems such as theft or witchcraft. These involve the calling in of diviners and witchfinders. As an educated Christian with a professional position in the village, Joseph has apparently made the decision to dissociate himself from tradition, rather than to attempt a reformist leadership.

In traditional terms, leadership devolves equally on the

pahan as the hereditary representative of the senior village khunt. The present incumbent is a jolly and popular man, and he is one of the main repositories in the village of traditional knowledge. He does not, however, play a leading role in village decision making. Until two generations ago, the pahan khunt had a certain amount of service land, known as dalikatari ('fields in respect of work'). This land was cultivated by the pahan in consideration of his duty to feed the villagers at the four main rituals which he performed each year. There was also a field under his care in which certain village spirits lived. The pahan propitiated them at regular intervals and the field was never cultivated. The present pahan's grandfather secretly cultivated this field. I was not told whether any major calamities occurred because of this sacrilege, but the villagers took away the dalikatari and redistributed it among the rest of the pahan khunt. The same thing was done with the field reserved for the pahan's assistant. This went to the kuar khunt.

As has occurred quite commonly in the Hasada area, the patti disintegrated politically when its administrative functions lapsed. According to villagers, meetings of this group were held at regular intervals until a few years ago, but now 'villages settle their own problems'. The public panchayat, recorded by Hoffman, is a rather more nebulous concept, and would, in any case, only occur with regard to specific issues. Arbitration in land, boundary and succession disputes is unnecessary as boundaries are fixed and unalterable, and disputes on the other two matters usually go to court. The

public panchayat, in the sense of a strong body of traditional opinion, does exist, however. Outcasting, either because of an intercaste liaison, or through commensality, will be publicly broadcast in the market place so that the word can be carried to all the neighbouring villages. Everyone will then know how to behave should they come into contact with the person. In any case involving an accusation of misdemeanour against an individual, the accused has the right to summon support and witnesses from other villages.

Several major differences emerge between this description and Hoffman's account. The first is in the structure of the system. It is clear that, apart from ad hoc meetings, the hatupanchayat is the only body with any serious functioning potential, as the tola and the patti have succumbed to legislative changes. However, in Sukuhatu, the hatupanchayat is itself under threat, and one of the reasons for this also has its roots in the 1908 legislation. The split into upper and lower tola would have resulted in the eventual formal division into two villages, as in the case of the split between Sukuhatu and Serengburu. The lower tola would have appointed its own munda, either by transforming its senior khunt into the munda khunt, or by 'importing' one from the main village. In the course of time it would have dissociated from the main village rituals, appointed its own pahan and set up its own burial ground. Sukuhatu is a very large village, even by khunkatti standards, and its size militates against effective traditional government.

Village leadership is also undergoing a prolonged crisis.

There is a gulf between customary ways and the educated Christian villagers, which has not so far been resolved either by a complete polarisation or by a sinking of differences in respect of the practical running of village affairs. The pahan, who might be expected to provide an alternative rallying point, has forfeited the respect of the traditional villagers. It is difficult to know how far this incident of two generations ago was an isolated and untypical event, but I suspect that it was much connected with the growth of Christian influence in the village. This would have encouraged a scepticism of traditional ideas which would be scarcely possible without the existence of alternative ideas to challenge them.

Other decision making bodies are also beginning to gain prominence. The government gram panchayat covers six villages which each sends four members. These villages are not, except for Sukuhatu and Serengburu, from the same clan group. As yet, the panchayat operates independently of the traditional panchayats and there is no sign of conflict between them. It deals exclusively with questions relating to local government irrigation and agricultural extension schemes, grants and other official matters. The mukhia, or leader, is a young educated Christian from village G., and he is a highly respected and dynamic figure in his own, mainly non-Christian, village, where he has been responsible for initiating several labour-intensive improvement schemes. Unlike Joseph, he is providing effective alternative leadership, although he is not hatumunda.

The mission also has its own panchayat which impinges,

to some extent, on the role of the hatupanchayat. Christians are subject to the authority of the mission, rather than of the village, in cases which involve moral issues. For instance, a Christian man who left his wife and six children to live with a young girl in another village was dealt with by the mission panchayat, who 'excommunicated' him and demanded that he should give financial support to his family. This would traditionally have been dealt with by a joint hatupanchayat of the natal villages of the man and his wife. Compensation, probably in the form of a returned brideprice, would be given, and the rights of the children in their father's village would be established in front of witnesses from both parties.

The weakening of the village as an effective unit of social control can be seen in the breakdown of exogamy. Munda youth is well known for the comparative freedom it enjoys from parental restriction. Attitudes about pre-marital chastity are ambivalent. Hoffman records that pre-marriage pregnancies were dealt with by the expeditious marriage of the couple involved, but that a fine was levied on both sets of parents for not controlling their children. Older informants confirmed this, but said that no further stigma was attached to the couple and their child. However, in the case of liaisons between members of the same clan, the couple would be ritually driven out of the village and a stone would be erected to mark their 'death'. This is known as hargiri or banishment. The parents would then have to pay for a kanda ceremony to purify themselves and the villagers. The pahan recalled two cases of this happening during his childhood and pointed out

the stones erected at the village boundary commemorating these events.

In the absence of supporting sanctions, such as obligatory chastity, it becomes more difficult to enforce exogamy as villages grow larger. It will be recalled that the reason given for the splitting of Sukhatu and Serengburu was an incestuous liaison. This reason is also given in Yamada (1970, p.386) for the splitting of two villages with the same kili name. In the case of liaison between two villagers of different kili, the union would still not be considered a 'proper' marriage (arandi) but it would be tolerated as dopo (cohabitation).

In Sukuhatu, I knew of at least five illicit relationships between members of the same clan and one between raiyat. Abortion is freely and effectively practised among the Mundas and so unwanted pregnancies are rare. These relationships were scarcely secret and the pahan admitted that the village was powerless to act because any couple who were banished could take a case against the village to court, and if they wished to marry, they could do so without impediment in a civil ceremony. One marriage which took place between the daughter of a khunkattidar and the son of a raiyat was solemnized in a Roman Catholic Church. The couple had joined this Church from the S.P.G. especially, because the Catholics, while not countenancing marriages within the same clan, do not object to other endogamous village marriages. The S.P.G. Church, on the other hand, will not allow marriages in contravention of village exogamy.

Christianity, as well as village size, has played a direct part in the increase of such relationships. Among purnadharom Mundas, girls are married at puberty and boys three or four years later. The missions have actively encouraged parents to defer marriages by refusing, in some cases, to marry boys and girls considered too young. The preferred age for Christian marriages is thus around 17 or 18 for girls and 20 for boys. As a higher proportion of Christian children attend school, education has also played a part in encouraging later marriages. After leaving school, it is usual for girls to remain in their parents' house for a few years before marrying. Those who stay at school for the maximum number of years are also in each other's company at an age when they would traditionally be married. Of the six cases mentioned above, five involved Christian girls aged between 16 and 21. The other was a married Christian girl. The men were of both religions and all except one were in full-time education.

These are problems which the village cannot deal with in the traditional way. Banishment cannot be invoked for fear of the law, and fines cannot be enforced in the absence of an effective panchayat.

The court and the Indian Penal Code pose further challenges to customary law, and particularly to moral judgements concerning tribal exclusiveness. Indian law is weighted towards the abolition of caste distinctions, whereas tribal laws strive to maintain them. The Mundas have had much experience, in their recent history, of the power of courts,

and law suits are almost a commonplace in village life. Few families had never been involved in one, and the majority of cases concern land disputes which were traditionally dealt with by the panchayats. However, the courts are also appealed to as a higher authority which provides an alternative judgement in cases of ostracism for caste offences. Two cases were filed at Khunti Sub-divisional Court while I was living in the village. One concerned a Serengburu villager who was outcasted by the panchayat for eating food cooked by a blacksmith. This meant, among other restrictions that he was unable to use the village well until the other villagers had drawn their water. He gathered a group of witnesses, mostly from Sukuhatu and filed a complaint in the courts on the grounds of unlawful caste discrimination, maintaining that the villagers would not allow him to use the well at all. This was patently false and there were plenty of reliable witnesses to deny this. The case was dismissed because of lack of evidence, but the villagers considered it a victory for themselves and showed no sign of relaxing their total ostracism of the man.

The other case was similar but originated in the marriage between a Munda boy and a daughter of one of the village blacksmiths. The boy's FB, who was his closest agnate in the village, was alleged to have taken cooked food from the blacksmith and as a result he was ordered to give a purificatory feast to the village elders. He refused and filed a suit against the village alleging discrimination which was still pending when I left the area.

Two points are particularly striking here. One is the

strength of sanctions against breaches of caste rules despite the breakdown in other aspects of customary law enforcement. In fact, a public decision is not necessarily needed as word is quickly passed round and few defy it for fear of receiving similar treatment. Until the person has purified himself and performed the kanda ceremony, no one will assist him at busy times, take food with him, enter his house or marry one of his children. It can thus be a very comprehensive and severe punishment. The other striking point is that a person in this position should brave even more anger and that he should also obtain support from other villagers.

Obviously, the plaintiffs expected to win their case, and they based this expectation on a reasonable knowledge of the outside world and the workings of the law. It is worth noting that two men who figure prominently in both cases were members of the gram panchayat, the statutory government body, and might have obtained their knowledge through this source. Neither were Christians. If either had won, it would have been a decisive blow against the village caste system as lawsuits tend to have a snowballing effect and more such cases would find their way to the court. The plaintiffs were also aware of a degree of ambivalence among some of the educated Christians on this issue. The mukhia of the gram panchayat was openly sympathetic to their cause, but most Christians stood somewhere in the middle. Some said they thought caste distinctions were undesirable but that nothing could be done without incurring the ostracism themselves. Others thought that as the two men were both rich they should simply give the feast and satisfy

everyone. All recognized the possibility of conflicting judgements, however,

Witchcraft provides another illustration of the intrusion of the law into a traditional sphere of judgement. Accusations of witchcraft are a very serious thing and normally require a hearing before a panchayat, when arguments and witnesses can be produced. A witchfinder is then summoned to verify or reject the accusation. If confirmed, the witch was, in Hoffman's time, and possibly still in remoter villages, driven out of the village or killed. Informants in both villages recalled such cases, and one young widow living in Sukuhatu had been driven away from her natal village for being a 'witch' after she had returned there following her husband's death. Another widow was driven away from Sukuhatu about a year before I arrived. She had been accused of causing her husband's death. However, several other villagers were also much feared as witches but no attempt was ever made to remove them because the villagers said they were more afraid of the police. A perusal of the files in Khunti Police Station indicated that this fear was less of an excuse than it at first sounded. In 1968 and 1969, five complaints of unlawful accusation and threat to personal safety were lodged and in 1970, there were eight complaints. In each case, the accused person had enlisted the help of the village chowkidar, who is a paid police official and a villager, and both had gone to seek police intervention and protection. These cases then went to court under the Breach of Peace Section of the Criminal Code. A hatupanchayat meeting was therefore unlikely in any case where the accused

could command support either from other villagers or from outside.

All these factors imply the decline of the khunkatti village as an effective political entity in traditional matters. The protection afforded it by colonial legislation has had the effect of artificially stabilizing it by preventing the formation and fission of smaller units into villages; but this alone would not have caused problems if there had been more room for the expansion of new tola within existing boundaries, as was the case with many Naguri villages. Its authority has also been fragmented in various ways by the missions, the schools and the law court, but it is still recognizably a village, the key to which is the ideology of ancestral land enshrined in the right to have a stone erected in the village burial ground. For Christians, this right is modified as they do not erect stones and their dead are buried in a separate, neighbouring ground. When the mission carpenter, who was an outsider, died in 1972, his relatives asked if he could be buried in Sukuhatu. Permission had to be obtained from all the khuntkattidar, and he was buried in the Christian sasan, but to one side away from the graves of the khuntkattidar.

This ideology also encompasses the market which is seen as an organic part of the village. It was started in 1909 as a joint venture between the mission and the pahan and munda khunt. The mission was at that time building a church and it needed easier access to supplies. To start it, the mission donated 50 rupees and the pahan and munda khunt put in 11 rupees between them. A market tax is levied from each vendor

conditional on a sale being made, and the villagers organize, through a market committee, the collection of taxes and their distribution. Six khuntkattidar are given the market 'contract' each year to collect the taxes and each contractor must give 250 rupees to the committee during the year. He then keeps the rest.

The committee pays purchase tax to the government and authorizes any improvements to the market. The remainder is then divided three ways. One third goes to the mission, one third to the munda khunt and the remaining third is divided between the pahan and the manki and kuar khunt. The distribution was evidently decided in a court case which was fought between the mission and the village over possession of the deeds. The mission won because it had contributed the major part of the initial finance, and it now holds the documents. I was not aware of any residual bad feeling over this issue and the villagers continue to regard the market as their own. When I mentioned an idea which the Block Development Officer had asked me to pass on, for moving the market to a less congested part of the village, the pahan said that the villagers would discuss it themselves first and then talk to the Block Development Officer. If they wished to do it, they would manage it by themselves as it is their market and they do not wish to use the government's money.

The overall effect of khuntkatti legislation has been to give substantive support to the ideology of ancestral land and the first clearers of the jungle. The ancestral claim of the Munda tribe has received administrative confirmation. This

limited stock of land has also been made to support an expanding population with the consequent result of a further diminution of land holdings over the last sixty years.

Migration is confined in most cases to temporary sojourns in the Assam tea gardens or the mines of Orissa. Altogether 12 families had spent some time in Assam, and two in Orissa, and had returned to the village. A further ten were there at the time of enquiry, but of these, two were single men expected to return shortly, one had left his family behind and was expected back, and two were there after being driven out of the village some years ago for incestuous liaisons. Of the remaining five, all were expected to return except one man who had bought land and settled there.

Four men had joined the army, two of whom have returned after retirement. One died during service and his widow still lives in the village. Four married men were working in industry in various centres in the area and one had returned from this. The others were not expected back, however. The most significant figure, was that of seventeen families who, in the last two generations had bought or acquired land in other parts of Chotanagpur, usually with savings from wage labour. This is one factor explaining the comparatively low village growth rate of less than one per cent per year. All these families were treated as having left the village permanently and their khuntkatti land had been distributed among their agnates. Most of the men involved were part of large families of between four and seven brothers. In order to buy land, they must move a long way from their natal village

to areas where it is still possible to obtain government owned land or uncleared land. Clearly, where large numbers of brothers are involved, the incentive to seek work or land elsewhere will increase, but for families which can just get by, or who can supplement their income locally, little incentive exists to leave the village for more than temporary work. Khuntkatti land is a security which is abandoned only in the last resort.

Kadu

The panchayat system works entirely differently in Kadu. In essence, all the levels of organization reported by Hoffman are in operation. Tola meetings are not institutionalised on a regular basis, but they are called to deal with specific issues. There is no tolamunda in the customary sense, but each tola tends to have its own spokesman who acts on behalf of the others. The meetings which I attended, and which occurred, on average, about once every other week, were announced the previous evening by one of the villagers, who would walk around the tola shouting the news outside each group or houses. They concerned such matters as minor domestic disputes and the routine procedures of fining owners with straying animals. The most common cause of a tola panchayat was a dispute between neighbours after market day drinking. In both villages, there was particular concern over minor quarrels as these frequently lead to violence. The parties concerned would be brought together for a public apology, and the appropriate fine would be levied.

Hatu panchayats were not held often as there were few

matters which could not be dealt with by the tola and which concerned the Munda part of the village as distinct from the kili. It did, however, meet over the question of certain ritual mistakes made by the pahan at an annual ritual. In particular, he had failed to provide the customary number of pots of beer on this occasion.

The main political body was the parha, the clan organization, in which only Mundas of the Rambara kili were allowed a full say, although the raiyat, outsiders and tribal castes were also expected to attend. The only people disbarred were the diku Hindus. In order to give some idea of the nature and scope of this panchayat, I shall give a detailed account of the meetings during one month in early 1973.

20 February

A meeting of the parha had been announced in the market on the previous day. Women had been invited to attend also, but none, apart from myself, did so. About 250 men attended and an attendance roll was called out with one man standing up to represent each tola. Although the head of the parha is officially the raja, distinguished by his red turban, the meeting was run by the Kadu hatumunda, Birsa, who is a man of very strong character and considerable intelligence. Before getting down to the main business, Birsa took the opportunity to publicize a meeting of the Jharkand party in a nearby town, for which he was mobilizing support. Government announcements were then made. The government had agreed to postpone the collection of the year's land tax because of the failure of the rains. It had also agreed not to ask for the cost of

government supplied fertilizers during the year, as no one could afford to pay. These arrangements had been specifically requested by the village and parha leaders in the area.

After sending home a Kadu villager who was drunk, the parha went on to the main business. A procedure was first laid down to deal with people who picked up cowdung from the fields at this crucial time of year, when it was needed for fertilization. Anyone found doing this was to be fined Rs.15. No one should cut grass from the fields to sell to the market traders at this time of year, as there was not enough for the domestic animals. It was then emphasized that any dispute arising within a village, or any case where a substantial fine needed to be imposed, should be taken first to the munda and pahan, and if they could not deal with it, then to the parha raja. It must not be taken to the mukhia of the gram panchayat as this would weaken the parha. It was also pointed out that attendance at the meeting was poor and must be improved.

The meeting then went on to consider the election of a new raja, as there was some contention over the present one. It was being said in some villages that he was not properly of the Rambara kili as he was the descendent of a man who came to the village as a dasi and had stayed on as a raiyat, probably marrying a village girl. Evidently not enough generations had passed for him to be totally accepted into the kili. An elderly man then got up and spoke at length about the necessity of making a wise choice and not electing a drunkard. He then outlined the 'history' of the parha:

'Before the 'British fathers' came to India, the Mundas started the parha, and they alone made

the rules and chose the raja. Therefore the parha belongs to the Mundas and is for them only.'

The parties who originally dissented from the present choice seemingly lost their nerve under the hawkish eye of Birsa and when put to the vote, the existing raja was re-elected.

The final item discussed was a letter sent by people from one of the tola of village S., requesting help for a widow of that tola. She had one child and her husband had farmed jointly with his younger brother who had several children. Since the husband's death, the receipt for the land tax had been given to her, but the previous year, the younger brother had bribed the collector to give it to him instead. He was said to be trying to kill the woman and dispossess her of her land. She had appealed to her hatu panchayat and they had decided to ask the parha to help as it might be more effective. The parha agreed unanimously to try to solve the problem by a 'lawful and fair' division of the land between the two parties.

6 March

Some young Munda girls were on their way home from the mission to a neighbouring tola one night when they were chased by two Majhi caste boys carrying knives. Some nearby villagers heard them and came to their rescue but they were slightly hurt from falling on the rough ground and tearing their clothes. The boys were from the same tola as the girls and the attack was motivated by a court case between the Mundas and Majhis in that tola over a jackfruit tree which the Mundas claim to be their's by ancestral right. A parha panchayat was immediately called and notice of it was sent to the Hindu leaders of the

gram panchayat who were representing Majhi interests.

However, the Hindu representatives refused to attend a meeting in the Munda part of the village as they feared possible violence. As the parha consisted, on this occasion, of about 400 men armed with sticks, clubs and bows and arrows; this was not surprising. The parha agreed to come to the Hindu part of the village, and the chowkidar brought the Hindu leaders. The girls were called to relate their stories and the torn clothe were produced. The representatives of both sides then adjourned to discuss the punishment. This was Rs.500 and replacement clothing and the amount was loudly supported by the parha. Fortunately, it began to rain at that moment and everyone went quickly home. The fine was paid by the parents of the youths at a meeting two days later.

11 March

A Munda of village C. was robbed of his goats and fowls. The culprits, said to be Rajputs, took the animals to a market to sell but the owner followed them and was able to snatch them back. He reported the theft to the parha and it met to decide what course of action to take. Later it moved on to confront the culprits in their village.

17 March

An illicit relationship between two members of the Rambara kili was reported, and the parha was called to consider the punishment. As the girl was an orphan, it was decided to fine only the boy's parents. The fine was put at Rs. 1200 to be paid if the couple refused to separate.

18 March

The parha went to a village about 12 miles away at the request of a Munda there who had quarrelled with some Rajputs. He feared that they would kill him, and as the parha in his area was ineffective, he had called the Rambara parha. One of the men going with the parha said ' he is a Munda, so we must help him'. The man will pay the panchayat for its services in return.

The two major issues arising out of this account are that of the content of cases dealt with by the parha, and the nature of its leadership. In ideological terms, the Rambara parha adheres strictly to the traditional pattern of clan panchayats, but its actual political role is quite different. First, it is prepared to intervene on behalf of Mundas of other kili on the grounds that 'being a Munda' constitutes a sufficient reason for interference. Secondly, it is prepared to act outside its traditional area to assist in politically weak areas. It has, in fact, assumed an ethnic, rather than a clan, identity and its major role is that of providing a unified front against the 'diku aggressor'.

The parha system is by no means uniformly strong in the whole Naguri area, and observations by Trivedi in his 'Report on Panchayats'³ suggest that the basic structure exists all over the area but fluctuates in political strength depending on the issues involved. In 1968, for instance, the parha panchayat in the area where the man who called in the Rambara parha, was living, functioned effectively. The Rambara parha, on the other hand, was noted to be weak in 1968. All the Munda

parha together form a body known as the '22 Parha Mahasabha' which has its headquarters in Tapkarra, ten miles west of Khunti, and is presided over by a maharaja. Its inspiration seems to be ideological rather than practical, acting as a rallying point for a Munda polity by advising on the functions and code of procedure of the parha. Its Hindi name - the Society of the 22 Parha (there are said to be 22 Munda clans) suggests that significant adaptations have been made to the traditional kili organisation. This basic structure of the parha system should be noted lest it be thought that the evolution of the Rambara parha is the atypical result of a unique confrontation between Mundas and Hindus.

The present upsurge of parha activity can be traced back to the 'taking over' of key positions in the panchayat by the Kadu Brahmins. The Hindu presence in Kadu has always been a source of grievance to the Mundas and it is difficult to know whether the monopolization of the gram panchayat is simply an excuse to air a long standing grievance, or whether the Munda village leaders genuinely wanted to play a role in the government body. Trivedi's study suggests that the two panchayat systems operate independently and that the Mundas seldom evince any interest in the working of the statutory panchayats. Whichever possibility is accepted, the result was the dissociation of the Mundas from what then became regarded as the 'Hindu panchayat'. Both sides have since indulged their stereotypes of the other to the full. On the one hand, the Mundas regard the Hindus as cheats, liars and extortionists. On the other, the Hindus consider the Mundas as no better than

'wild sheep' and often asked me why I insisted on attending their primitive rituals. The place at which both sides have always met is the village market. Ever since it was started around the turn of the century, the market had been held in the Hindu part of the village, although both sides claimed it as their own creation. In fact it was probably started as a financial concern by the Hindus, as the Mundas would presumably have sited it on their own land where they could have collected the tax. In a pluralist village, the market provided the only substantive source of contention and in 1972, I arrived in time to witness a major confrontation over this issue. Both sides trade in the market, but from rather different economic perspectives. Hindus are systematic traders working to accumulate profits. Every item is weighed and measured and traders are shrewd at such tactics as holding back stocks until prices rise and other somewhat unscrupulous and profitable practices. Munda traders, on the other hand, are rarely systematic attenders at the market. They either trade to get rid of a genuine produce surplus, such as winter vegetables; or they specialize in the sale of non-manufactured goods, such as bundles of grass or domestically produced goods such as rice beer or distilled liquor. Those who sell regularly are usually supplementing a meagre income rather than accumulating a steady profit. Although some use weights and measures, many continue to use the traditional methods of making small piles of the commodity and charging a set price for each pile. They then give one or two extra items every time a pile is bought.

The Mundas have always accused the Hindu traders of cheating, profiteering and selling bad goods, and from the Munda point of view there is probably some truth in this. The market thus provided the flashpoint after an argument had occurred between a Munda and a Brahmin youth following a cycle collision. They came to blows and went home swearing vengeance. According to the Mundas, the Brahmins threatened to kill the Munda youth at the first opportunity which, of course, occurred at the next market day. The mukhia, a Brahmin, was alleged to have produced a gun and threatened Birsa, the hatumunda. A fight ensued in which the Brahmins attacked Munda traders and made off with their goods. Birsa snatched the gun and broke it by dashing it on the ground, and the mukhia was set upon by several Mundas and badly beaten. He was eventually taken by rickshaw to Khunti hospital. A parha gathering was quickly arranged and by late afternoon about 400 men had gathered in a field at the Munda end of the village. They were all carrying home-made weapons of various sorts and were in warlike mood. It was unanimously decided to move the market place to a field belonging to Birsa and to give the market tax to the parha. The next market was split between the two sites, which were about a mile apart, but by the following week everyone had moved to the new site and the parha had scored a significant and unforgettable victory.

This was evidently one of the periodic fluctuations in the relationship between the two groups which leads to an intensification of parha activity and a renewed emphasis on 'ethnic' boundaries. It is on this point that the panchayats

of the khuntkatti and the Naguri Mundas show their most significant difference. In khuntkatti areas there are no landed Hindu groups to rival the dominance of the Mundas and hence, there has been no necessity for the traditional panchayat system to adapt itself or remain viable by 'politicizing' the Mundas as an ethnic group. Having adapted itself in this way, the Naguri parha is then in a position to enforce customary law on the grounds that the essence of being a Munda is in adherence to the customary ways of doing things. The parha is able to enforce clan exogamy very much more effectively, and the extremely large fine (Rupees 1,200) imposed conditionally on the parents of the guilty couple is to be noted in this context. A similar case within the same tola of Kadu three years previously resulted only in a fine of Rupees 200, and the couple were then allowed to live together. This suggests that the severity of punishment for breaches of customary law varies with the strength of the parha.

Hoffman noted, at the turn of the century, that the Naguri panchayats always imposed much stiffer fines than the Hasada panchayats, and this has continued to be true. For instance, the Kadu pahan was fined Rupees 150 for not performing a ritual in proper accordance with custom. In Sukuhatu, a villager who cut down a tree in the sarna (sacred grove) where the village rituals are performed, was fined Rupees 4 for this act of sacrilege. An effective parha also tends to have a snowballing effect in the same way as an effective lawsuit. A successfully arbitrated land dispute is an encouragement to others to take their cases to the parha rather than the court. Far fewer

families had been involved in litigation in Kadu, although this is no doubt partly due to less pressure on land resources.

No accusations of witchcraft were made before either the hatupanchayat or the parha during 1972-3, and it is difficult to say what role, if any, the parha might play in such a situation. The only case of a public accusation in the previous two or three years involved a young village girl who married into another village and was sent home for alleged witchcraft. A witchfinder was called in and the allegation was considered proved. The brideprice was returned and the girl subsequently married off elsewhere. Only those immediately concerned in both villages took part in the meeting, and I think it would be surprising if the parha were involved because of the risk both from the police and from adverse publicity.

Caste offences were, I was told, dealt with in the same way as in Sukuhatu, that is by a decision of the tola of hatupanchayat on the outcasting and fining of the culprit. However, no cases occurred during my year's acquaintance with the village and this was because of the geographical distance which Hindus and Mundas placed between themselves. The only regular inter-caste contact was between the Mundas and their blacksmiths and no cases of this sort were remembered by the villagers.

One case of ostracism had arisen from the market dispute. A Kadu villager of the Rambara kili had been accused by the parha of passing information to the Brahmins about the proposed change of market venue. He was said to be in the pay of the Brahmins and to frequent their company. This was probably

because he had, for many years, owned a betel shop in Kadu market and had made a lot of money out of it. He was the only villager to have both maintained a regular shop and to have made a substantial profit from it. This probably put him under suspicion in the first place, as such behaviour allied him with Hindu traders, with whom he had also been friendly. The parha fined him Rupees 500, but he refused to pay and said he would manage alone. The village has cut off all intercourse with him. He cannot hire a dasi, as the boy is continuously threatened by the villagers until he leaves. It is difficult to know how long he will be able to manage without any help from fellow villagers or from outside.

The other notable points about the parha are its involvement with official agencies and political parties. In bypassing the gram panchayat, and negotiating directly with the local Block Officer over taxes and fertilizer, the parha scored another significant victory for Munda political identity. The use of the parha to publicize the Jharkand party is also part of this trend. Few villagers know what the party stands for, but its propaganda at local meetings is well designed as it appeals to a pan-Munda solidarity which is an extension of the villagers' feelings about the superiority of their way of life and of doing things.

Munda leadership in Kadu has also adapted to the changing situation. Birsa is the acting hatumunda and his father's brother's son holds the hereditary position, which passed to him from Birsa's father when Birsa joined the army. However, this man is illiterate and when Birsa returned some years ago he gradually

took over the official functions of the hatumunda which involved literacy and a knowledge of Hindi. Birsa is a highly intelligent and aggressive man whose style of conducting meetings contrasts strongly with the gentle rhetoric of articulate speakers in other panchayats I have attended. He also has many enemies both within and outside the Munda population and he is never seen without his fearsome looking steel axe for protection. He is one of the richer bhuinhar and many villagers accused him privately of altering the khatian and in various ways, of cheating his relatives in the munda khunt of land which was rightfully theirs. These allegations were difficult to follow up, but it seemed unlikely that the accusations concerning the khatian were true as certified copies of this document exist at household, village and Block level. The village register is in the possession of the karamchari or registration officer who is a Hindu. Birsa had, however, been responsible for the dispossession of at least one widow in the village whose late husband had been a raiya of Birsa's father. The land had not been recorded in the village khatian and when he died, Birsa had taken advantage of this to take back the land. Many villagers felt this to be a grave injustice, but everyone was afraid to take action.

The crux of the matter lay in ambivalence. Birsa is a particularly powerful ally to anyone who needs assistance in dealing with police or officials. During my stay in the village, about ten people received summonses to appear in court for the illegal distilling of mahua spirits. It was said that the Hindus had reported them in retaliation over the market issue.

Birsa accompanied them to court, prevented the magistrate's clerk from exacting the customary bribe and translated the proceedings into Mundari for those who did not understand Hindi. On numerous occasions, Birsa interceded on behalf of villagers with police and block officials, thereby preventing them from possible attempts at bribery. Birsa is necessary to the villagers and although he is feared and disliked by most of them, there is considerable reluctance to oppose him, particularly at a time when relations with the Hindus are at confrontation level.

Birsa' leadership has successfully adapted the traditional role of the hatumunda to meet the challenges posed by external administration and the change in economic dominance brought about by land legislation which has tipped the balance slightly in favour of the Mundas. This change in leadership pattern has been towards secularization. Birsa does not perform the customary functions of the hatumunda in village rituals. This is done by the hereditary munda. The pahan does not have an active role in village decision making. His role is to perform rituals correctly and he is under the surveillance of the secular leader to ensure that he does so. In Kadu, secular and ritual leadership has been separated in response to the recognition of a world beyond the village which needs a mediator.

Within the village, the effect of Christianity has been apparently less marked than in Sukuhatu. Girls attending school beyond the primary stage have to travel to Khunti or Torpa daily or stay with relatives during the week. This allows less

time for mixing with boys of a similar age, and parental surveillance was also much greater. Tola are smaller and more dispersed and liaisons are spotted more quickly. Two cases of abortion were much talked about by the women. One had occurred in the days when the police had only horses to travel on and before the road was built, in other words, about forty years ago; the other occurred in tola 4 in early 1973 and, when the girl died, it provoked a hatupanchayat which demanded a large restitution from the man responsible. Unfortunately, this turned out to be Birsa, and he was able to compensate the parents quietly without facing the wrath of the panchayat. These cases were much discussed in a manner suggesting that they were unusual, and I could find no evidence of the thriving business which was run by one old woman in Sukuhatu.

Attitudes towards mixed dancing and ritual prohibitions were also more relaxed. Christian villagers took the view that as long as there was not active participation in the actual ritual, the accompanying customs, such as abstention from certain types of food before village rituals, and the seasonal dancing were part of their Munda way of life which was separate from the sacrificing of animals to different spirits and other more specifically 'religious' activities. Thus, at major ritual occasions, the village acted in unity. The difference between Sukuhatu and Kadu in the matter of 'mixed' households has already been noted.

Kadu was not affected by the khuntkatti legislation except that the rights of the raiyat received further confirmation. Unlike the Sukuhatu villagers, the constant emphasis, to the

outsider, on the privileged status of their land, was absent among the Kadu Mundas. The only villager who showed concern over the status of his land was Birsa, who frequently advised me that there was no difference between khuntkatti and bhuinhari land. In ideological terms, the Kadu Mundas stressed rather their customs and their moral superiority over the diku as the distinguishing features of 'Munda-ness'. Similarly, the differences between Christians and purnadharom was phrased in terms of mutual respect for the 'customary' and the 'new' way of doing things. It was almost as if the purnadharom people had been delegated the responsibility for keeping the old ways going.

Migration perhaps reflects the lesser emphasis on the ideology of ancestral land. At the time of enquiry, sixteen families and single people were working in Assam, including two single girls and one man who ran away after killing his FB and FBW for suspected witchcraft. Members of three families had died there. This is compared with ten from Sukuhatu. Of these, an estimate could not be made of the number likely to return, as their relatives did not know, but the average length of stay of all categories of person appeared to be much longer as some of these had left a generation ago, had married and bought land there. One family had settled there, but returned regularly to perform marriage and funeral rites for members of their household. Five other families had spent some time in Assam and had returned to Kadu, as against twelve in Sukuhatu.

Ten men had joined the army and six of them were still serving, as against four who had joined from Sukuhatu. Eight

men were employed in other towns or centres and one had returned from working for a private company. This compares with four and one returned for Sukuhatu. Most of the eight were professionally trained as teachers or industrial workers and not thought likely to return to their land. In discussing whether migrants would return, there was not the same emphasis among Kadu informants on the desire or obligation to return to the ancestral land, although memorial stones were always erected for Rambara migrants who died elsewhere.

The buying of land outside the village was a less significant factor in migration. About half the families presently living in Assam had bought land there, but no other villagers apart from the blacksmiths had done so. There are three blacksmith brothers and one lives permanently in Rourkela, one of the Bihar steel towns. He has bought land here, in which one of the other brothers has a share. This lack of interest in buying land elsewhere may be related to the practice, continued until recently, of inviting outsiders to the village to take up raiya land. This is a concomitant of an abundance of land, by contrast with the lack of land in Sukuhatu. It is likely that, as pressure on resources increases, more people will move away to take up land in other places. In 1973, the remaining uncleared land within the village amounted to 29 acres and this had been reserved for government designated 'special cases', such as Harijans. A young army private of the Rambara kili was recently given five acres of this in consideration of his service in an 'operational' (i.e. border) area and his impoverishment following the division of the

family holding between three brothers.

In summing up the qualitative differences between the two villages, it may be said that Kadu presents a more unified approach to the many changes which have come to the Mundas since Hoffman's time. Although less 'privileged' than their counterparts with khuntkatti land, they have been rather more successful in maintaining and adapting a Munda identity based on cultural and, in their view, ethnic differences. This is precisely because the threat to this identity has been a palpable one. The existence of Hindus, first in a position of economic dominance, and then dispossessed by tenancy reforms, but still left with a status equal to that of the Mundas, has provided a tangible reminder to Kadu villagers of what they have always fought against. The different degrees of tolerance of Protestant and Catholic missions are perhaps only part of the reason for the difference in attitude to Christianity in the two villages. In Kadu the desire for unity against the Hindus transcends this difference. The threat to group identity is the foreigner. In Sukuhatu there is no threat of an external kind. The only Hindus in the village are economically and socially weak and will always remain so. Christians here pose a threat more at the level of meaning: is being a Christian compatible with being a Mundā? This dilemma will emerge more clearly when Munda religion is considered.

Footnotes to Chapter III

- 1 An anna, now officially obsolete, is 1/16 of a Rupee.
- 2 About £60.
- 3 Trivedi 1970,p.14.

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CHAPTER IV RITUAL

The village, rather than the kili, forms the ritual community. In Kadu, the five Munda tola discussed in the previous chapters make up the village ritual community and this reflects the Munda view that, although Kadu is 'their' village, the ritual community could not include Hindus unless they were tribal castes servicing the Mundas. The Hindus perform their own rituals in line with the Hindu religious year. Neither group takes part in the rituals and festivals of the other.

The community cult rituals are the responsibility of the pahan, who is the hereditary village priest and, mythologically at least, the direct descendant of the village founder. His authority and the cycle of rituals derive from a myth, which also explains the origins of the village bongako (bonga, plural bongako: Mundari for 'spirit'). The myth is called the Asur (or Hasur) Kahani. The Asurs are said, by the Mundas, to be a race of iron smelters who lived at one time in Chotanagpur and with whom the Mundas quarrelled. Kahani is the Hindu word for story. There is no Munda word for 'story' or 'myth', but ritual story-telling is known as johar jagar, from johar meaning greetings and jagar to tell. The Asur Kahani is long but basic to the understanding of the present religious system of the purnadharom Mundas. It is reproduced here exactly as it was tape recorded in Kadu from the oldest villager who was a man of nearly eighty.

The Asur Myth

'The one who lives on high (Sirmare - meaning 'he sees everything') is called Singbonga. He is talking with his wife. They are just like a newly married couple who love each other dearly. Singbonga is sitting on his golden throne (Mundari saturangi). He is holding a rod in his hand. The couple were talking seriously to each other and saying "The Asurs have little rice on their mats and each house has only one bullock for ploughing. (i.e. "they do not cultivate"). Ranki cow (the one with long straight horns) and Piuri cow (the one with turned down horns) are telling Singbonga "the pond with lotus flowers and marsh flowers is becoming empty and we are not getting food. The leaves of the trees and jungle shrubs are dry. The flying ants and flying birds are not getting water to drink."

'Singbonga on high is getting hot because the Hasurs are busy day and night blowing their bellows to smelt iron. On hearing the reports from these cows he becomes restless and cross. He hears all these complaints while sitting on his golden throne and holding his rod, and he tells his wife that he will kill all the Hasur children. His wife says "Don't! You are alone and they are many. They are working the whole night and the whole day. You cannot fight them with bows and arrows or any other weapons. I advise you instead to play a trick on them." To this he agreed.

'Then Singbonga sent the dechua maru and kerketta birds (the fearless king crow and the shrike) to the Hasurs. They "We have brought a message for you: if you work the bellows

at night, do not work them in the day, and if you work the bellows in the daytime, do not do so at night. The pond with the lotus flowers and marsh flowers is getting empty. Ranki cow and Piuri cow cannot get water to drink or food to eat. All the grass is becoming dry and all the leaves of the trees and jungle shrubs are drying up. On high it has become hot for Singbonga", so said the birds.

'The Hasurs replied "We are Singbonga ourselves; we are big gods. We are not going to obey anyone. Since the very beginning, we are our own masters. There is no one superior to us. We will blow the bellows at night as well as in the daytime." This was their answer to the birds: "As the bananas in a bunch grow together and as flies live in swarms together, so we work together as it has always been done and in this way we get our daily food, and so we are not going to listen to anyone." This was their answer.

'Then they threw coal powder upon the dechua and ore dust on the kerketta, saying "Go! Who will you tell about it?" They went back and told Singbonga: "Old one, we have become outcasted." (Hindi: jati - caste) Singbonga said "You may go to others of your race and you will all look the same." They went and found to their surprisethat they were not different, and since then all crows have been black like coal and all shrikes grey like dust.

'Then Singbonga sent a golden vulture (sonadidi) and a silver vulture (rupadidi) and they told the Hasurs that they had brought a message ... and the Hasurs' reply was just the same. Then the Hasurs hit them with a hammer and pinched them with pincers and said "Now you may go. To whom will you

complain about it?" Then Singbonga sent lipi susan (the worshipping lark) and bandari (the observant crow) and they said "We have brought a message ...". Then the Hasurs answered similarly and threw charcoal on the crow and ore dust on the lark. Then Singbonga sent langcere lakhan (the gentle paradise bird) and bochocere kajure (the timid oriole). The Hasurs sprinkled turmeric water (Mundari: sasangda) on the oriole, and pulled the tail of the paradise bird, making it longer.

'Then Singbonga played a trick on them. There was a servant clearing the eighty one uplands and the eighty three high terraced fields. (Hindi: ekasipiri-terasisibadi). Singbonga made many pimples and wounds come out on the boy's body. Then his golden hawk (sonadidi) flew suddenly to the servant and asked if Singbonga could do some hoeing. The itching boy replied 'I am full of sores and this has made my spade dirty. You are clean so I will not give it to you'. Then Singbonga caught the boy by the hair on top of his head and shook him. He fell out of his skin and Singbonga put on this skin and went to the Hasurs. Many flies sat on his wounds and he waved them off with huhuri twigs. Many small white caterpillars were creeping on his body.

'When he reached a Hasur village, he asked 'Will you please keep me as a servant? Then the Hasurs said 'look at him.' They saw his affliction and it was horrible to them. They answered 'no we do not need any servants. Our children will also catch the affliction that you have'. Then he went to another village and asked them the same question. They

answered 'Please go away from here. We shall all catch your disease. That side in a village there is an old Munda couple called Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Buria (lit. 'the old man and the old woman with high cheekbones'). They have no children, they are childless'. So he went to find them.

'When he reached there, he said 'Hallo my grandmother and grandfather! Are you at home?' They kept him as their servant. He works by keeping the fowls from the grain. One day he asks them to search out a hen's egg for him. He says that he will eat it to help his sores. Then he went to the Hasurs to play marbles (Hindi: guli). The Hasurs had iron balls and the sore-covered boy had only a hen's egg. The Hasurs said they would break the egg and scramble it. They told him to put the egg in the place where they rolled the marbles. He put it there as a target, but they could not break it. Then he told them to put their iron marbles in place. Then he rolled his egg and broke their iron marbles with it. The Hasurs became cross. They said 'Wait, we shall tell the old couple that the paddy which they left spread on the mat, has been completely eaten up by the fowls.'

'They told the couple. The old woman was angry. She said to her husband "What shall we eat? The fowls have taken everything. We will not keep this boy with sores any more. When I asked you, you said to keep him". Then the boy picked up one seed of paddy and put it on the mat, and the mat was full of paddy. He picked up another grain and put it in the sahel (husking hole) and this was filled. He put another into a small basket and this became full. He put one more into the

hata (winnowing basket) and this was filled. The couple saw this happening and they asked 'Have you taken it from someone's house?'. He replied 'No, my grandmother and father. Singbonga is giving it'.

'Again, another day he asks them to make lupulad (bread made from millet bran), as this helps his sores. Then he took the bread to the Hasur children to play. They told him to put it down on the same spot and they tried to break it with their iron disks (Mandari: kati) but could not do so. Then they put their disks down and he broke them with his bread. They became cross and said that he could not be playing properly.

'The Hasurs could see that their iron supply was becoming short and so they asked the boy to do a divination with rice grains (chauli jang) to see what was wrong. He replied 'How can I do that when my sores make it impossible for me to sit down?' When they began to leave he called them back and said "if you give me the rice I can see lying down. Come to me in the morning". In the morning they returned and asked him what he found. He said "Offer Singbonga a white hen, then you will produce more iron." They did this and then they found some more iron and were happy.

'Some time later, the iron ran short again. The boy divined and said "You must offer Singbonga a white goat." They did and a little more iron was found, but again, the next day the supply was short. This time the boy said "You must offer Singbonga a lamb," and the supply was improved. The next time there was a shortage they asked him what to do and the answer

was that they should give a human sacrifice. They said "Boy with sores, where can we get a man for this?" He said "Go to the Doisa Pargana (revenue area) and the Kukura Pargana. There live the Mundas. You can ask them." They said "With what shall we buy it?" He said "I am giving you gold (Mandari: samrom) equal to fill two pumpkins. You can buy it with that." So they went to the Doisa Pargana and asked "Will you please sell us a person. We want to make a sacrifice to Singbonga." The people said "Beat that man who is asking for a sacrifice. Have we brought up our children for this? Beat the one who is asking such a thing." So the Hasurs ran off.

'They told the boy with sores that they could not find anyone. He asked "how did you ask them?". They said "We asked, will you sell any of your children so that we can offer one to the bonga." "What happened?" he asked. "They said "We ran away." So he said "You may sacrifice me. I am always suffering with these wounds. Day and night pus comes out of them." But the old couple are not allowing this. They said "No - who will look after us?" He told them "Grandmother and Grandfather! Let them sacrifice me. There is nothing to worry about. I am leaving these prescriptions for the Mundas. In each village I shall nominate a pahan under a tree. He will honour you and give sacrifice, once in ba parob (flower festival) once in batauli and also in mage." They said "All right, we shall not forget your words."

'Then the Hasurs took him to sacrifice. Before they started, he said "Kill one white he-goat and take off the skin to make bellows. Pound rice and marua (millet) to make flour.

All the pounding should be done by two unmarried girls who have fasted for three days. Now plaster up the furnace. The girls must blow the bellows night and day. When they go to fetch water they should use a binda (small head cushion) made of cotton thread. They must put out the fire by sprinkling water with mango twigs. I am inside now plaster up the entrance."

'As he had said, the girls worked the bellows day and night. They fetched water in new pots and used cotton thread binda. They put out the fire with mango twigs. They they opened up the furnace and saw that the boy stood there decorated with gold, silver and many other precious stones. He had a lota and tharia (bowl and plate) in his hand. The Hasurs asked if there was more still. He said "You are many brothers, you can bring out a lot. Let all the males come quickly into the furnace. Call all the boys or they will not get their share. The golden vulture and the silver vulture were flying overhead. The boy tells them to see if any more Hasurs were to be found.

'When everyone had entered, he told the women to block the entrance with ore dust and charcoal. Then he told the girls to kindle the fire and work the bellows. They poured coal on the furnace and blew the bellows continuously. As the air got hot, the Asurs started to cry and shout loudly. The women said to the boy "Oh you have played a trick upon us." He said "Go on with your work. They are fighting over the things inside." Then the women saw that blood was coming out. They cried "No, you have lied to us. Here we can see blood

coming out." He said "No, they are chewing betel nuts and leaves. What you take for blood is really their saliva". He told them to blow the bellows more quickly. When he was sure they were all dead, he told the women to break down the walls.

'When they did, only bones could be seen inside. The women said "You have played a trick and made us kill our people." He replied, "Women! I sent the shrike and the crow and you did not obey them. Will you now obey me?". They said "Yes, if we do not obey, how can we live?". Then he said, "I will show you where to live. I will leave here two followers of mine, the witchfinder (patguru) and his disciple (tura tuar). They will find you out in divination, using arua rice (polished rice), the flame of a lamp and a flayed plant stem. Do not hide yourselves from these followers. At the centre of the village there will be a Munda pahan and he will sacrifice to you under a tree." Then Singbonga was rising up to go to his dwelling place, but the wives of the Hasurs kept hold of him by the tail of his botoe (loincloth) and tried to go with him. They did not want to live alone. But Singbonga caught them by their hair and threw them down. Those that dropped on mountains became mountain spirits (burubonga). Those that fell in fields near the edges of ravines became nage spirits. Those that fell into ponds became pool spirits (ikirbonga). Those who fell upon big mountains became marangburubonga. Those who fell in forests became forest spirits (deshaulibonga). Those who fell on chondor (wooded spots near a spring) became chondorbonga. Those who fell upon stones became chandibonga.'

This myth represents a culture clash and subsequent moral victory for the Mundas. I have not given the Mundari version here, but a full text can be found in Hoffman.¹ It is interesting to note that the version which I recorded in Kadu is identical almost in every word to the version printed in Hoffman and taken from villages in the Hasada area. This reflects, perhaps, its use as an extended mantra, or chant, which is recited in a singing voice at rituals. An examination of the Mundari version reveals some use of words common to Hindi, Sadani and Uraon (Kurukh'). For example the use of guli for a marble is similar to the Hindi word goli. Duku, denoting trouble or sorrow, and jagu, meaning watchful, appear to come from dukh (Hindi: sorrow) and the verb jagna (to watch). Rupa and sona, for gold and silver, are Hindi words. Lota and tharia are brass vessels made by Hindu craftsmen and used by everyone for eating and carrying water.

A more obvious loan from Hindi is the reference to the 81 and 83 highfields and high terraced fields for which the Hindi numbers ekasi terasi are used. Mundari numbers only go to ten, and any number greater than that is formed by making multiples of these ten numbers. For instance, twelve will be gelbaria or 'ten-two'. The numbers ekasi terasi appear frequently in Mundari ritual phrases and in poems which refer to fighting in these high fields (piri and badi). The numbers 83 and 84 (terasi-chaurasi) are also sometimes used in Mundari as indicating any indefinite or large number, and the word chaurasi, according to the Elliot-Beames Glossary² was applied by the Hindus to a territorial subdivision of a Pargana

consisting of about 84 villages. It is also a ritual number for Hindus as in the '84 guru and 84 followers'³. The term 'Pargana' was introduced by the Moghuls.

There are many more examples of words and usages probably derived from the Aryan languages, and it is possible that these have crept in to the myth in recent times. However, the version recorded by Hoffman is now almost a hundred years old and is virtually unchanged. In addition, many of these apparent linguistic 'borrowings' have been, to use Hoffman's term, thoroughly 'Mundarized' by altering their endings and grammatical function to fit the sound and structure of Mundari. They thus appear as an integral part of the narrative rather than as conspicuous borrowings.

If linguistic evidence is accepted, then this myth must be dated after the time when the different cultures came into contact. If we look at some of the ideas embodied in it, the influence of Hindu or other cultures becomes more apparent. Singbonga, the Supreme Being, is a very anthropomorphic god in this myth. In no ritual statement or discussion was he pictured in quite this way, (but see p.270 for one exception). When I asked informants to describe him or his family or his activities, most laughed and protested that 'Singbonga is everywhere and he sees everything.' His family is alluded to only in the myth mentioned in the next chapter. In everyday affairs, however, he is simply an ultimate, but vague, authority, who does not as a rule interfere with human affairs, rather than an anthropomorphic deity sitting on a golden throne in the sky, with a consort who exhibits more guile than he.

The myth lays down certain ritual procedures which are also followed by Hindus and Sadans in Chotanagpur. Unmarried boys and girls play an important role in rituals because of their purity. Fasting is also a prerequisite for ritual performers. The binda (Hindi), or small circular straw plait which is placed on the head when carrying waterpots, must be made of cotton thread which has been taken straight from the spinning wheel without first being soaked in starch. This is called arua or adua from the Hindi and signifies a virgin or pure state. The impurity comes from the practice of native weavers of using the starch from cooked parboiled rice for this process. The same concept occurs with rice in the sacrifices to be offered by the witchfinder and the pahan. Arua rice is polished rice which has not been parboiled prior to husking. The diet of the Mundas consists normally of parboiled rice which retains the extra starch and some nutrient lost in the process of making the polished rice eaten by the Hindus. The explanation given by the Mundas for the use of arua rice in rituals is that parboiled rice is defiled as it is touched by the person who prepares it and therefore cannot be offered in this impure state to the spirits. However, this rice, known as tikichauli does have certain ritual uses in rites of passage. Ideas about pollution closely resembling those of the Hindus thus occur in this myth.

The pahan and the patguru both have Hindu derived names and the method of divination prescribed in the myth is used all over north-east India by ritual practitioners with a variety of names. The establishment of seven, initially female,

village spirits recalls strongly the village deities of the Dravidians, the Sat Behini (Hindi: 'seven sisters') described by Elmore⁴. Some of these are connected with particular diseases and this connection is also found among the Munda village spirits. For instance, nagebonga, the spirit of the ravine, may cause skin diseases and leprosy.

Elmore also gives an interesting Dravidian legend about the Hindu god Siva. There were once 101 invincible and immortal kings who always won in battle. The people went to Siva for help against their power, and Siva went himself to fight them in human form. He was defeated and was about to be put to death, but by a trick he caused the kings to lose their immortality and he slew them. The daughters and wives went to Siva to ask how they could live in the future. He told them to go into the world as sakti (female spirits) and torment people so that they would be fed (i.e. sacrificed to).⁵ Each element in this story is paralleled in the Asur kahani, and it will be recalled that the Dravidian speaking Uraons, who also base their ritual observances on an identical version of the Asur myth, have a tradition that they migrated from the Telegu speaking areas and could have brought the ideas with them.

The name 'Asur' belongs both to ancient mythology and to a small Mundari-speaking tribe living to the northeast of Ranchi District. In mythology, they are mentioned in Sanskrit texts, such as the Satapatha Brahmana, as being the descendants of Prajapati, the Lord of the Creation. They became evil spirits (Asura means 'not-god') and fought against

the Devatas for the possession of the earth and were overcome.⁶ They appear also in the Puranas and other later writings, as demons, giants and enemies, although in the Rigveda, Asura apparently meant a god or supreme spirit.⁷

The Asurs of Chotanagpur are a dwindling group of forest dwellers and iron smelters about whom little information can be elicited.⁸ It is very doubtful whether they are in any way connected with the Munda myth. The legendary Asur, or Asura, do seem to have their counterparts in the myth, which is certainly taken from a Sanskritic source, and the fact that they are pictured as a race of iron smelters serves to heighten the opposition between agriculture and manufacture which runs through the myth.

Hoffman was of the opinion that the myth,

'is destined to show the victory of the sun cult over a religious system previously prevalent'

and this reflects a more widely held view that the worship of Singbonga is a form of sun worship introduced by evangelising Hindu priests, although the Mundas do not, in fact, equate Singbonga with the sungod.⁹

However, it is with the possible social and economic correlates of this ritual system that I am primarily concerned, and it is apparent that the myth represents a capitulation as well as a moral victory. It is a capitulation to certain ritual and social ideas, particularly those concerning pollution. The Munda creation myth tells of the founding of the race by the first couple who were brother and sister. They were named Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Buria, as in the Asur myth.

In order to make them behave as husband and wife, Singbonga taught them how to make rice beer so that they would drink and lose their inhibitions. Rice beer is thus the traditional drink of the Mundas and because of this union, the ancestors are worshipped in each household. In the Asur myth, however, the old couple called Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Buria are childless and impotent. Their worship becomes part of the duties of the pahan, and one tree in the sarna or sacred grove of trees set aside for village observances, is known as the jaear buria or the 'old woman's tree'. They have become spirits and protectors of the village.

The nature of this capitulation to the diku culture is technological rather than ideological. The set of rituals which are laid down in the myth are those connected with wet rice agriculture in its sowing, transplanting and harvesting stages. Rice grown in the lowfields is used for the sacrificial offerings at these rituals. The change from slash and burn techniques to sedentary wet rice cultivation has been gradual in Chotanagpur. The Munda partiality for slash and burn agriculture, already alluded to, was noted by officials in the 1870s and 1880s, but by 1872, the density of population in the Lohardaga District of Chotanagpur (the present day Ranchi District) was 103 persons per square mile¹⁰, and this area could scarcely support a widespread use of slash and burn methods, as the cycle of rotation would be too short to allow for the necessary revitalisation of the soil.

The intensification of agriculture through the adoption of wet rice cultivation in the lowlands became a necessity for

the Mundas at some point in the last two to three hundred years and its economic predominance increased as land resources became more scarce. Wet rice cultivation entails a sedentarisation of populations into larger groups because of the co-operative nature of the work at critical times of the year, and the heavy labour investment in making terraced fields. The village thus becomes the important unit in terms of land rights. It also becomes the ritual community with its own priest and set of village spirits.

The Asur myth is a tacit acceptance of this change in the economic base. The cult of the village priest is dominant; but the social message is obvious. Whoever the Asurs were, they represented to the Mundas the unwelcome outsider. Nature is pitted against culture and agriculture against manufacture. The gentle birds are humiliated with charcoal and ore dust. The servant boy's eggs and bread made of millet husks triumph over the iron marbles. The poor agriculturalists are victorious over the arrogant and wealthy craftsmen. At the same time, the agriculturalists appear as righteous and long suffering. The outsiders are greedy people who practice human sacrifice, and this charge is still levelled at the Hindus by the Mundas at the present time. The stereotype which still governs the Munda view of Hindus and others is established in this myth, as is their use of the caste idiom in treating outsiders. The Asurs are told to flay a goatskin to make bellows. The Mundas themselves do not regard leather work as polluting, as they make their own drums and arrows. But others who work with leather, such as

the Ghasis, are treated as untouchable. Similarly, the blacksmith, although an essential craftsman in every village because of the use of iron tipped ploughs, is low in status as compared to a Munda. This attitude extends to other metal workers, such as gold and silver smiths, who provide the Mundas with their traditional jewellery. This is an interesting reversal of the position usually held by metal workers in Bihar and West Bengal, where they are generally of high status.

The Pahan: Rituals for the Village Community

At all village rituals, the pahan who is the hereditary village priest of the founding local lineage, is expected to provide food for a communal feast and he is usually a wealthy member of the village. In many villages, he also has a hereditary right to extra land on account of this obligation. The following account of village rituals is taken mainly from those witnessed in Kadu, where great emphasis was placed on their performance in accordance with custom.

Early in the rainy season (mid-June) he performs the first of the rituals tied to the wet rice cycle. This is batauli and it is done to protect the community from snakes and tigers during the all-important operations of weeding, 'levelling down' the soil and ploughing, and also to protect the village from the onset of 'headache and stomach ache' and other diseases which occur particularly at the beginning of the rains. Until batauli is done, the villagers may not perform the levelling down and ploughing operations at all, and may weed only before noon. In Hoffman's account of this ritual,

all the villagers turned out on the day to weed their fields and the pahan weeds a corner of his own fields first. In Kadu, some members of the pahan khunt acted as 'delegates' for the village in this respect.

The pahan first bathes, and he fasts from the previous evening. He is accompanied to the sarna, or sacred grove, by his assistant, the water drawer, and possibly by other male villagers, other than the raiyat, Christians or low castes. The sarna contains at least one sal tree left over from the sal jungle which once covered the plateau, and the pahan faces east with this tree in front of him. His assistant has cleared a space in front of the tree and has washed it with a diluted cowdung solution to purify it. Here, the sacrifices are offered and a cooking hearth (chulha) is made by digging out a trough and placing stones around three of its sides. This is for cooking the sacrificial meat. The assistant brings fresh water and some cinders on a broken roof tile for burning the gum of the sal tree as incense. On this occasion, seven fowls were sacrificed, although the precise number is said not to be important as long as it is an odd number.

The pahan first addresses himself to Singbonga, asking him to intercede with the other bongako to prevent harm from coming to the village. He takes a white fowl and after washing its feet, sets it to eat from three small piles of arua (polished) rice which he has set out before the tree. The fowl is offered to Singbonga and its throat is cut with a knife. The blood is sprinkled over the rice. He next calls the village Burubonga (mountain spirit) and offers him a red fowl

in the same way, asking him to prevent snakes, tigers and diseases from attacking the villagers and their cattle. He then calls on various of the other village spirits which dwell in rocky and forested places, offering them fowls of speckled colours and asking them to prevent harm befalling those who go looking for firewood. A black fowl is offered to the hatukhunt (village lineage) bonga (in Kadu only) and a grey speckled fowl is offered to the jaearburia, who is addressed as the founder of the village. This is the colour of fowl which is always offered to the ancestors. The jaearburia is asked to keep away from all harm from the village and to safeguard the crops, and a libation of rice beer and fresh water is poured into five leaf cups, fashioned from sal leaves and bamboo pins.

The two men then cook and eat the fowls and the remainder of the arua rice. The heads are eaten separately, and the intestines are removed and baked in the ashes. A little of this is offered to the bongako. The remaining meat and rice is cooked by boiling. Salt only may be added, and when it is cooked, a little is dropped on the ground for the bongako. The pahan returns to his house and his wife prepares food for as many of the villagers as arrive to eat it. Christians and raiyat may take part in the feast. Low caste attenders are given food from a separate pot.

Towards the end of the threshing (November-December) of the main rice crop, the pahan sends his assistant round the village to announce the date of the kolomsing, or threshing floor ritual. This takes place about eight days after the

announcement, giving the villagers time to brew rice beer for the occasion. Everyone who comes for the ritual, which takes place in the pahan's threshing ground, is fed. The pahan must also sacrifice all the fowls brought to him by the villagers and make enough pots of rice beer to provide refreshment for everyone. The fowls are sacrificed, according to colour, and sacrificial beer¹¹ is offered on the threshing ground for the ancestors by pouring it in front of a sheaf of standing paddy stalks. The fowls may be eaten by those villagers, excluding women, who belong to the founding village clan, but the heads are eaten by the pahan himself, as symbolic head of the village. After feasting, the villagers spend the day dancing and singing in the kolom.

The ritual of mage, referred to in the myth, was not actually witnessed. In Kadu, it was not performed as a village ritual, but as a kind of dancing fair, or mela (from Hindi: fair, bazaar), which attracted itinerant sellers of trinkets, sweets, etc. According to Hoffman, mage is a 'first fruits' ritual. The new season's pulses may not be eaten by the villagers until after they have been offered to the ancestors. In Kadu, the pahan khunt observed this prohibition on behalf of the village until after magemela. In Sukuhatu, the prohibition was attached to a different ritual, known as sukanburu¹². Mage is celebrated in Sukuhatu, however, as an occasion of great bawdiness. The young men 'beat the village bounds' for three nights in January, singing obscene songs, but no village ritual is performed.

The close of the agricultural year is marked by the ba

or flower festival. The flower in question is that of the sal tree, or surjom ba, and the festival takes place when it blossoms in March or April. Ba extends over three days and there are a number of prohibitions attached to it. The new spring growth of flowers, shoots and leaves, which are used both for eating and for making the leaf cups and plates used by the Mundas at big ritual occasions for feeding their guests; may not be gathered before ba. During the rice beer fermenting period before ba itself, fish and meat may not be eaten. No one may start sowing the new season's crops before the festivities are completed. Ba is a spring cleaning and 'renewal' ritual. Old brooms, pots and cooking hearths are thrown away and replaced by new ones. Houses are whitewashed and village wells cleaned out.

The first day is known as haikarakom or the day of crabs and fishes. Those villagers who wish, go to the nearest pool or stream to catch what they can. The catch must be brought hom alive, and then one fish and one crab are offered to the ancestors in the ading by the household head. Only certain types of fish are acceptable for this. They are the small grey variety found in shallow, sandy watercourses.

The second day is called katab or the day of fasting. The fast is kept by the married villagers only, and Christians do not fast. On this day, the men go to fetch the leaves from the sale, kesel and tarob (English equivalent unknown) which are all in bloom. A few strands are taken from the newly made broom and the whole lot is put outside the house door and burned with sowri (thatching) grass. The women take the ash

together with a new winnowing fan and the broom to the well. They use some of the ash to wash themselves and smear the rest on the fan and broom.¹³ Ash is a cleansing material in both secular and ritual senses. Dirty cooking pots are scoured out with ash, and ash also purifies objects with which it comes into contact. No blood may be shed on this day, and the meal which breaks the fast must be whole boiled rambara dhal (a stew made from black pulse). On katab day, the unmarried boys take firewood and a pot of water to the sarna in preparation for the ritual. The level of water in the pot is carefully noted. If the amount has increased by the following day, it is regarded as a sign of increased rainfall in the coming monsoon. If it is the same, or less, the rainfall will be likewise.

On the third day, which is ba proper, the pahan performs the sarna ritual with his assistants. The procedure is the same as in batauli, but every article used, such as the cooking pots and the winnowing fan to hold the arua rice, must be new. The fowls for sacrifice are obtained beforehand from the villagers, who contribute either money or a fowl. In Kadu, the pahan drew a diagram in the sacred spot using flour ground from lowland rice and mixed with water. This represented the sun and moon, and the houses, crops and animals of men. On each representation, he placed a small pile of arua rice for the fowls to eat and then he sprinkled the blood over the pile. The diagram is not an invariable part of the ritual, however. The order of fowls is always, white for Singbonga, red for Burubonga, black for whichever spirit or spirits protects the

village boundary and speckled for the other village spirits. A grey speckled fowl is sacrificed last for the village ancestors. Fresh water, tapan ili and sal flowers are offered at the end, also for the ancestors. Protection in the coming year against sickness in men and animals, and the depredations of tigers and snakes, is solicited, along with a healthy and bountiful crop.

The fowls and rice are then cooked and eaten as described under batauli. Meanwhile, each household head offers a fowl and rice beer to his ancestors in the ading. Everyone may then eat. The village festivities are now in full swing and dancing continues in the pahan's courtyard and round the village for at least a day and a night. The pahan and his wife have their feet washed by everyone who wishes to join in and water is liberally poured over the heads of all present as part of the ritual rain-producing aspect of the festival.

In some villages, ba is celebrated without a sarna ritual and the pahan plays no part in the proceedings except as an ordinary householder propitiating his ancestors. In this case, no other bongako figure in the ritual. Hoffman noted that this omission of the sarna ritual occurred in those villages least in contact with aliens, and this was found to be the case at the present time in parts of the Hasada area.

Another ritual, not mentioned in the myth, but performed in Sukuhatu by the pahan, is called huring ba (little flower) or herobonga (sowing ritual). This is done shortly after ba and before batauli when the sowing has just been completed. The pahan bathes and fasts and then goes to one of his fields

where the seedlings are showing through and offers a fowl to Singbonga and the village spirits asking for protection against snakes and tigers, illnesses; and requesting a good crop from the young seedlings. Until this ritual is performed, weeding is not allowed at all, and between huring ba and batauli, it should be done only before noon.

These are the yearly rituals in which the pahan is involved and their relationship to the wet rice cycle may now be considered more closely. First, it is apparent that at least two of the rituals mentioned in the myth; those of mage and ba, are not directly concerned with the cultivation of lowland rice. Mage is connected with the first eating of the pulse crop, and in particular the black pulse called rambara in Mundari (Hindi urad). Ba is concerned first and foremost with the ancestors and with the first eating of jungle produce. The other ritual mentioned in the myth, batauli, does appear to be tied to the agricultural processes of weeding and ploughing the wet fields. The pahan of Sukuhatu and Kadu both maintained, however, that the batauli ritual is the same as the ritual performed by the Oraons, and by some Mundas, which is called Kadleta. Kode means a type of upland millet in both Mundari and Oraon, and this ritual is performed at the same time as batauli to protect the millet crop from snakes and tigers. In the rituals which I observed, millet was also mentioned along with rice in the request to the bongako for protection.

Huring ba, or the ritual for sowing, which the pahan performs in a wet rice field, and kolomsing, the threshing

ground ritual performed when the wet rice is harvested, are unambiguously linked with the lowland rice crop, but neither are mentioned in the Asur myth. Of the rituals connected in the myth with the pahan, batauli encompasses both wet and dry cultivation, ba is, in some villages, not performed by the pahan at all, and mage has been 'given up' in its ritual form in both villages studied and in other surrounding villages in which enquiries were made. This suggests that the rituals laid down in the myth are those connected with upland and shifting cultivation and with gathering activities, and that they have been adapted to fit the change in technology hinted at in the Asur myth. As settled wet and dry cultivation has persisted side by side, it is not difficult to see a 'fit' between the relative economic importance of the various crops and foodstuffs, and their weight in the present set of rituals.

Millet is of economic importance mainly in the rainy season months of June and July, and shortly before the first wet rice crop ripens in November. It provides a major food for perhaps two months of the year and dry rice is of similar importance in the months of August and September. Neither crop figures to any extent in the village rituals except for millet in batauli, and also in ba where protection is sought for the crop from the bongako.

Mage is connected with the eating of the new season's pulses. The Mundas grow several different varieties of pulses, which ripen at different times of the year. The one which is particularly connected with mage is the black variety, known as rambara, but this name is applied to several different

botanical types, some wild and some cultivated. This distinction is shown in Mundari by affixing the word bir meaning forest, and hatu meaning village. This is a general distinction applying to animals and foodstuffs, and also to people, as the Mundas distinguish between themselves;

hatuhoroko, and the few remaining groups of hunters and gatherers; birhoroko (the Birhor). Rambara may be similarly divided, and the variety which ripens at the time of the mage festival in January is the wild forest bean. Cultivated rambara ripens rather earlier, and in Sukuhatu, as was noted, the eating of this new crop is tied to the mountain festival which takes place in December.

There is little forest within reach of either village at the present time, and the importance of the jungle pulses has consequently decreased. This may therefore be an explanation for the 'giving up' of the mage ritual in the form described by Hoffman, although this reason was not articulated by informants. Rambara pulse, in its cultivated form, continues to play a significant part in household rituals and is an important dietary adjunct, together with other types of pulse grown on the upland fields, from December to June. Some observance of this importance is thus retained either by the pahan khunt, as in Kadu, or by a general ban on eating the cultivated rambara before a ritual occasion close to the harvesting of the crop.

Ba celebrates the new spring growth of produce which is gathered during the summer months and the rainy season when grain is scarce. The importance of these roots, flowers and

shoots exceeds that of the subsidiary upland crops as they provide a constant source of food nearly all the year round through the practice of drying the produce in the sun and then storing it. The day set aside for fishing also indicates the subsidiary importance of fish during the part of the year when natural streams and ponds have water in them.

Several different themes, therefore underlie the rituals which are now performed on a community basis, and they reflect fairly accurately the relative importance of the activities of gathering, upland cultivation and lowland cropping. The pahan appears to be, as was suggested in the analysis of the Asur myth, connected with the last mentioned economic category, whereas the myth refers rather to rituals concerned with upland cultivation and gathering. The continued economic significance, however, of both gathering and upland cropping has meant that the rituals tend to overlay and combine, rather than supplant each other. In all the rituals concerned with the lowland rice, the pahan asks first and foremost that 'snakes and tigers', or kulabing, should not molest the villagers. Kulabing is a general expression for all wild and dangerous animals of the jungle. Such dangers are far more likely to be met when clearing the forest or gathering jungle produce than when weeding the low fields, and this suggests that the present sequence of rituals is an adaptation of older ones, developed when the jungle was extensive and the direct source of Munda livelihood.

A common theme linking the rituals is that of the danger inherent in all economic operations connected with the uprooting

of plants or vegetation. Weeding and threshing require ritual permission in the same way as does the collection of jungle produce. This ties in with the Munda view of the spirit world as a collection of essences forming part of a physical habitat such as a tree or a stream. Such operations therefore constitute an interference with the environment of spirits, and must be mediated by an appropriate ritual and sacrifice.

Rituals are also performed for the protection of the village at longer intervals. In Kadu, the pahan pointed out four special places on the boundaries of the village where, he said, a bullock, a sheep, a goat and a buffalo are sacrificed at twelve year intervals. This ritual was not witnessed. In Sukuhatu, the pahan said that such rituals were performed when he was young, but that neither he nor the last incumbent had performed such a sacrifice. The ritual slaughter of these animals is common among the Sadani speaking Hindus and it may have been taken from them. As it is a protector of village boundaries, its continuance in the more heterogeneous areas might be connected with the protection of the village against 'outsiders', as it is not connected with agriculture.

Other Community Rituals

The pahan is not connected with all rituals performed on a community basis, and other villagers (who may be of any khunt, but who must be khunkattidar) may be responsible for certain rituals. Such a villager would then be known as the pahan of that particular ritual. In the Hindu month of Phagu (February-March) the annual spring hunt, or sendera, takes

place. In Kadu, the ritual is done by the pahan himself, but in Sukuhatu, there is a special phagu pahan. On the eve of the full moon the unmarried men bring branches of the silk cotton and castor oil tree from the jungle and plant the branches on a path leading to the village spring and on another leading to the jungle. Straw, or thatching grass (sowri) is wound around each branch of the castor oil tree and each boy sets fire to it. The branch is then cut down with a single axe blow. On the night of the full moon, the pahan goes to the silk cotton tree branch on the jungle path. He smears the branch with vermilion and burns sal gum incense. He calls up Burubonga and sacrifices a red fowl, asking that the next day's hunt will be successful. Sowri grass is wound around this branch and set alight, and the boys again cut it down with a single blow. The branches are left on the path.

This ritual is a preparation for the sendera which takes place in villages which still have access to jungle. The hunt did not take place in Kadu or Sukuhatu, but a description of it, with details of the precise division of the kill and the various taboos associated with the hunt, can be found in Yamada¹⁴. His description varies little from that of Hoffman.¹⁵ The connection between the cutting and burning of the tree, and the hunt, lies in the method of hunting which entails burning the undergrowth first in order to flush the animals out. However, it probably also refers back to the practice of slash and burn or rotation agriculture, when the firing of the cut jungle growth produced a good bag of animals.

In Kadu, where ritual hunting has not been carried out

for many years, the phagu ritual is similar to the Hindu festival of holi, in which a castor oil branch is also cut on the eve of the full moon. The pahan described the branch as the phagu raja and after the ritual everyone sat down to hear the story of the raja. This is the Hindu myth from the Ramayana, of Ravana who stole Sita, the wife of Rama, and carried her off to Lanka. Rama besieged him there and cut him to pieces and burned him. The silk cotton tree is said to represent the Ravana raja because it has many heads, and Ravana is said to have had ten heads. In Kadu, the branch is cut into three pieces rather than one.

This is an interesting adaptation of the ritual which took place in Sukuhatu and which occurs generally in the Hasada area. The cutting down of branches and the burning with sowri grass is a motif which appears in other rituals, for example in ba and umbul ader. Symbolically it seems to recreate the process of jara or the cutting down and firing of the undergrowth, and the process of felling virgin forest. Sowri, or thatching grass, was used until fairly recently, and is still found in some villages, for thatching the roofs of Munda houses. Nowadays, red earthen tiles made by the local potters are generally used. The burning of branches with sowri grass is perhaps a recreation of the shifting cultivation cycle when settlements were abandoned every few years and new areas fired. The firing process is kept alive in the treatment of upland fields by firing after they have been lying fallow for two or three years. These fields are rotated and used to grow dry rice, millet and pulse crops.

In bhuinhari villages, upland cultivation is of considerably less importance. This is because at the Bhuinhari Settlement, upland was excluded, and 'privileged' tenancies covered terraced fields only. Upland could, however, be converted into terraced land suitable for wet rice cultivation, and it could then be counted as bhuinhari land. As a result, the terracing of upland has been carried out extensively in villages such as Kadu, and the practice of firing uplands is now extinct. Rituals involving fire have similarly either lapsed, as in the case of ba, or have taken on a secondary rationalisation, as in the phagu raja ritual of Kadu.

In November, the Mundas celebrate sorai, or the cattle feast. This ceremony has a great deal in common with the Hindu cattle festival which is celebrated in the same month. The cattle are not worked in the fields for the three days preceding the festival, but they are allowed to be used for threshing. Two nights before sorai, an earthen light (tati), consisting of a shallow saucer containing oil, is put in the stable. On the evening before, the cattle are serenaded and anointed with the oil of the kujuri plant, which grows wild. Dancing and singing goes on all through the night, and the villagers claim that they can hear the cattle talking among themselves and saying how much they are enjoying it! The cattle are certainly credited with a full understanding of the proceedings. On the day itself, they are allowed out to graze during the morning, and as it is a rest day for the dasi, or household servant, the householders themselves take the cattle

out. If they stray into anyone's field, no fine will be exacted from the owner.

Meanwhile, the women smear the floors of their houses with cowdung and prepare a special bread called bongalaten (literally 'bread for the ritual'). It is made from rice flour, salt and water and may be cooked only by steaming on sorai day proper. Afterwards, it may be fried or mixed with sugar. The household head worships and performs a ritual in his ading. The path to the cowshed (which is usually inside the house) is decorated by drawing two parallel lines with rice flour paste, starting about four feet outside the house door and leading to the stable. Circles, representing footprints, are drawn at intervals along these lines, side by side. The prints are decorated with vermilion, and the footprints stop at a ball of cowdung into which doob (couch grass) is stuck. The cows' feet are washed and they are stabled at midday.

The household head performs a sacrifice to goreabonga, the spirit which guards the stable, and which is also worshipped by the Chotanagpur Hindus. He makes four leaf cups and offers three cups of rice beer and one of fresh water, and three pieces of bongalaten. He then takes a red fowl and kills it by dashing its head on the horns of one of the cows. If he owns buffaloes, he must sacrifice a black fowl. The head is baked with arua rice and is used in a sacrifice to the ancestors, performed later in the day. Household members only may eat the meat of the sacrificed chicken. This ritual is done to ensure the fertility of the cattle, and the expression used is 'just as the mahua flowers drop in great quantity, so

may the cattle increase'. The fruit of the mahua tree is an important element in the Munda diet, and the flowers are used to make arki (distilled liquor). A small post, cut from this tree, is fixed outside the stable door each year at sorai. This is called the gorea khunta (gorea post).

During the morning, the sorai pahan in Sukuhatu also did a ritual on behalf of the village, though this did not occur in Kadu where sorai is a household observance only. The ritual was performed under a golaichi tree, which is sacred to Hindus. The pahan smeared three thick lines in white flour paste, and three in vermilion over the tree. He offered rice beer tablets, bongalaten in three bits, rice pounded flat, flowers and fresh water, and tied unbleached cotton thread around the tree for 'Lakshmi'. There was no animal sacrifice.

The villagers make garlands of yellow cotton thread to tie round the necks of the cattle. Young green paddy plants, doob grass and yellow flowers are hung on the thread, and these garlands are said to have special therapeutic value if they are snatched from the necks of the animals afterwards. The paddy plants are used for making medicine for headaches. The cattle are then taken out into the yard and the women perform the operation known as cuman (Hindi: ceremonial 'kissing'). They bring a brass plate, or tharia for each animal, containing vermilion, paddy seeds, and an earthen light. The women circle the head of the animal three times with this plate, daub vermilion on three places on the head, and touch the head three times with paddy seeds.

In the afternoon, the cattle are massed in the village

market place and the men bring their drums. The women stand by with bowls of rice flour paste and this is thrown at the men as they drive the cattle at full speed three times up and down the village street. The cattle are extremely frisky after their enforced rest, and the whole exercise causes great mirth, particularly for the visiting anthropologists. After the cattle have been collected and returned to their stables, everyone goes to some high ground just above the village and dances until it becomes dark. They then return to the village and dance outside the house of the sorai pahan.

The night before sorai is a particularly important one for sorcerers and medicine men. Roots dug up on this night are said to be particularly efficacious, and witches are very powerful as sorai falls on the day of the new moon, and witches come out in force on dark nights. People do not venture too far for fear of having their 'liver' stolen (imurung).

Sorai is the most Hindu of all the festivals celebrated by the Mundas. The use of flowers, pounded rice and the post (khunta) which is placed outside the door recalls Hindu ritual. The ritual performed by the pahan to Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess, is unlike the sarna rituals in that it is the tree itself which is the object of the worship and which is a personification of Lakshmi. The cuman ceremony is also a feature of Hindu ritual.

Sorai differs from cow worship in several ways, however. The purpose of the festival is said to be to compensate for the hard work and beatings which the bullocks have received

during the year. While anointing the animals with oil on the places where they are beaten, the owner says,

'We have beaten you very much. Perhaps you are cross with us. Today we are anointing you again. Do not be cross, but be happy'.

The cattle thus receive treatment similar to that of the blacksmith, who has a yearly ceremony in his name¹⁶ and the dasi, who is the object of a small ceremony each year in those households employing a servant. The object of the rituals at sorai is to protect the cattle against malicious spirits, usually of Hindu origin, which attack them and cause diseases. It is a case, therefore, of using a ritual which is Hindu in inspiration to protect property which is particularly vulnerable to Hindu spirits. Cattle are of crucial significance as plough animals in a society relying mainly on lowland cultivation, and the sorai feast probably came into vogue when this type of cultivation was adopted. As with all Hindu spirits which are potentially important to the villagers, their propitiation is done on a household basis only, and the hatupahan does not sacrifice to them in sarna rituals.

In Mundari, the word buru has many different connotations. It is mainly used in the context of burubonga, or a mountain spirit, which may be an ordinary buru or a marangburu (big mountain). It can also mean 'spirit' without having bonga affixed to it, and buru, or marangburu, is sometimes used in ritual expressions as meaning Singbonga or the highest god. It also has the meaning of 'great' or 'highest' in the abstract sense, and its other major meaning is a dancing fair, known in Hindi as mela, which is performed on a hill or piece of high

ground at regular times in the year. On such occasions a ritual is usually performed by the buru pahan who may be the hatu pahan or a different villager (provided that he is a khuntkattidar). This is not primarily a village ritual, however, as each buru is associated with a set of villages, each of which has a buru pahan who performs the same ritual either in the village or at the mountain or at both places. Two such buru take place involving Sukuhatu village. In Kadu and Naguri villages generally, buru have become mela in Hindu style and have largely lost their ritual content, although they still follow a set pattern of occurrence on the various hills.

The smaller of the two buru involving Sukuhatu encompasses the seven villages which form the exogamous clan group. The buru pahan in each of the villages performs the ritual in front of a tree near his house, and the object of the worship is burubonga. Offerings of rice beer, fresh water, pounded rice and rice flour bread are made to the bonga, and the pahan paints himself with rice flour paste and vermilion. The ritual is done after noon on the day of the buru and the pahan then takes the remaining rice flour paste and bread to the buru, together with flowers of the kokorocho plant (a pink shrub which is eaten by the Mundas). The pahan offers the rice bread again in front of a stone slab erected on the mountain. He leaves the flowers at the foot of the stone and spatters the rice flour paste over it. The buru pahan from the other six villages make a similar offering.

In the late afternoon, people begin to gather at the

buru. Kites are flown until it is too dark to see, and then the dancing begins in earnest with several large groups competing for spectators. The traditional handwoven red and white cloth is worn by both men and women for dancing. Those who do not have one, try to wear mill made clothing which is red and white in colour. Refreshments are provided by villagers who make sweets and sell boiled, salted pulses and tobacco. The women bring rice beer and distilled liquor. Hindu traders do not come to buru, although they are always found at the Naguri mela. This particular buru is known as chata-a-buru, meaning 'the mountain with a crack'. There is a fault line across the mountain which resembles an earthquake fault, and the geological formation of Chotanagpur suggests that the area is susceptible to earth tremors.

The bigger of the two buru, sukanburu, is held at the end of December on the mountain of that name some five miles from Sukuhatu. Its exact timing depends on the annual sequence of buru, which begins with marangburu (big mountain) in the Sonahatu District, north east of Sukuhatu and slightly to the south east of Ranchi city. Several buru then follow in an order which is said to represent the pattern of migration of the ancestors, and which represents the present groupings of clans. Sukanburu is a sacred mountain, and the hatupahan said that it is the 'home of the bongako'. There are several legends about it. There is another mountain, called korangburu, nearby which is also the home of the bongako. One day the two buru quarrelled and decided to test their strength by fighting. They prepared bows and arrows made from stone and

rock, and at the appointed time they started to fight. The battle went on day and night and eventually Sukanburu broke down Korangburu with its weapons. Sukanburu itself had escaped damage by ducking down every time it came under attack. Korangburu then accepted its defeat and its loss of sacred status, and now only Sukanburu is worshipped. The hatupahan recalled that, when a villager went on a long journey, he would first perform a ritual to Sukanburu, either on the mountain or in his own home, if he lived far away. He would do this by making a cup from a sal leaf and pouring fresh water on to the ground in the name of the buru. When he returned, the ritual would be repeated. Some villagers do this still.

On the day of the Sukanburu festival, the inhabitants of 'seven boundaries', or approximately twenty villages, worship Sukanburu, either at the mountain or in their own houses. A ritual is then performed on the mountain jointly by the pahan from the villages of the surrounding clan area. If any member of the pahan khunt has mistakenly eaten split, baked rambara pulse before this day, then at night, the village people hear the tiger roaring, and they know that the bongako will punish them.

The buru obviously relate to a ritual community wider than that of the village. In the case of Chata-a-buru, this is the clan, in the sense of the exogamous group of villages. For Sukanburu, the area referred to as the 'seven boundaries' is, in fact, composed of about twenty administrative villages. The buru are definitely linked with the ancestors, and the

seven boundaries referred to are perhaps a clan area which became too large and split off into smaller clan and subclan areas.¹⁷ The story of the fight between the two mountains could be based on an actual earth tremor (korangburu is said to be still falling down). It could also be a symbolic statement about interclan relations at a time when the Mundas established their claims to land by reference to the sacred mountain which 'houses all the bongako'. There is, however, no concrete evidence to suggest that clan warfare was a feature of Munda society, as was the case among the Khonds of Orissa, a group showing strong similarities to the Mundas in social and economic organization.¹⁸

It has already been noted that cultivation, for the Mundas, began at the tops of hills and ridges, and that terracing of the lower lands is a more recent innovation. Upland cultivation is of two kinds. It may be done by the slash and burn method, which was still practised by some Mundas in the 1870's, or it may involve rotation and mixed cropping. The latter method is employed among settled cultivators, as slash and burn agriculture requires greater mobility and a low population density. The clan is therefore less important, structurally, than the village in the establishment of land claims among sedentary cultivators, as rights are vested in the village. The clan regulates the right to be regarded as an ancestor, and thus to have an ideological claim on land within its area, and it serves to distinguish between khuntkattidar and raiya within a village, but the village community is the final arbiter in the settlement of claims.

The buru perhaps date from a time when this function was fulfilled by the clan, which established its claim by reference to a particular mountain, and performed rituals directed to the spirit of that mountain. The connection between mountain and upland dry rice cultivation is expressed in myth in the following story, which was also collected by Yamada in a version referring to a different buru¹⁹.

'In the old days when people ran short of rice, they would go to the buru, taking a bamboo basket (kanchi) and ask the buru to fill the basket with paddy. In return, they would promise to repay the paddy at harvest time. On returning to the buru the next day, they would find the kanchi full of paddy. At harvesting, the basket would be filled with rice of the red upland variety (ara gora baba) and would be placed on the buru. But on one occasion, a man borrowed paddy from the buru and repaid it with black-grained paddy (karhaini baba), and the buru was cross. After that he ceased to lend paddy to anyone. For this reason, people do not use karhaini rice for ritual purposes.'

Ara gora baba is sown by broadcasting on the unterraced fields. Nowadays it is grown in rotation, usually after firing the accumulated growth. Before sedentarization, it was probably the main crop, along with millet, grown by the slash and burn method. It is known as 'red paddy' because of the red flecked appearance of the grains, and this seems to account for the association of 'redness' with the mountain. If a fowl is to be offered to the buru, it must be a red one, and red paddy is always used in sacrifices which call specifically for upland rice. Karhaini paddy is grown a step further down the slope, in fields which are high but terraced. It may be either broadcast or transplanted, but the latter method is more common. It bears thickish black grains when ripe. Its

cultivation represents a technical advance on the method used for red paddy, as it then becomes possible to control irrigation to some extent, and transplantation requires the use of a plough and a degree of sedentarisation.

Repayment of a debt of red paddy with a basket of black paddy is a symbolic statement about this change. No wonder the buru was cross! It was the beginning of its fall from omnipotence. Black grained rice remains taboo in a ritual sense, however, and it is tempting to connect it with the ambivalence signified in ritual by the colour black. Black animals are sacrificed to malicious spirits which are likely to harm either the village or the individual, and their use is often recommended to people suffering illness or other misfortune.

In June, just before the start of the monsoon rains, the women perform a ritual for good rainfall. The date is announced in the village beforehand, and women from an odd number of villages, usually 3, 5 or 7, take part. Rice and money are donated by the villagers and the women take it to make rice beer. Some of the women dress as men and bring two branches of the chakonda tree, after which the ritual is named, and one branch each of soso and madⁱ (bamboo). These are planted in a line outside the hatupahan's house, facing from north to south. A spot in front of the trees is smeared with cowdung and the pahan makes an offering of rice beer to Singbonga, dropping it on the ground in three places, and asking for a favourable monsoon. He then lights some earthen tati and places them on the sacred spot.

Those women who dressed as men then sing and drum, while other women, wearing saris, dance in the usual manner. While they are dancing, the men must stay away, and the pahan goes back to his house and shuts the door. The women dance and drum through until morning, and drink the ili which they have prepared.

This ritual has similarities with another, observed by the women only, and performed only every twelve years. This is called janishikar in Sadani and holoe in Mundari, and means the 'women's hunt'. This is the only time at which women are permitted to hunt, and to do so, they dress up as men and go off in a party carrying sticks and claiming any animals that they find on their way. The hunt is generally arranged between reciprocating villages, and certain animals, plus a large number of pots of ili, are generally made available for the hunt. The women may, however, kill any stray animal which they find, and the owner will not be entitled to compensation.

Various essentially non-informative reasons are given for this custom, such as the women's complaint that they are excluded from the annual hunting and have therefore instituted one of their own. The most interesting suggestion came from an educated Munda in Khunti, who said that the custom began when the Mundas were fighting the Mohammedans. The men were captured and the women decided to go to their aid. They dressed up as men and gathered near, but they were thirsty and went first to drink. Being women, they used both hands to drink, whereas men use only one, and so when the enemy saw them

they knew that they were not men.

This kind of rationalisation in terms of some historic event, which is invariably connected with the struggle between the Mundas and the diku, was met with as an explanation for many customs in which the original meaning has been obscured, and this reworking of meanings has the effect of keeping the custom alive and flourishing.

Certain themes emerge in the rituals confined to either sex. Women are forbidden to hunt, and thus may not join the phagu ritual hunting. They are also forbidden to attend the cutting and firing of the phagu branch. The only other taboos on their behaviour concern ploughing and climbing onto the house roof. If any of these prohibitions are breached, the rains will fail. The connection of women with rainfall is expressed positively in the yearly da gama bongu. The phagu rituals represent the activities of hunting and forest clearing, both of which are dangerous operations requiring the propitiation of burubonga, on whose territory they encroach. Similarly, ploughing may be regarded as an operation which encroaches on the habitat of the bongako, although it is carried out only on the lower terraced fields. The prohibition regarding the roof is less obvious, but it may be recalled that roofs were formerly thatched with sowri grass, which is used to fire the undergrowth for upland cultivation and which symbolizes perhaps, the nomadic aspect of shifting cultivation.

The implication is that operations on the land upset the buru, who is also the object of clan worship; and if these operations are performed by women, who are outsiders to the

clan, the buru sends a drought as punishment. Menstruating and pregnant women are also regarded as a potential danger to hunters, who may not eat the head meat if their wife is in either condition. If they do, then the hunt will be spoiled; and if the hunt is unsuccessful, the crops will also fail. Rainfall and fertility are thus associated together in women, and their potency is utilized in rainfall and hunting rituals in which only women may take part. However, they can only do so if the operations of hunting and of bringing the branches from the forest, are performed by women dressed as men.

The final ritual to be considered here, which is performed on a community basis, is confined to Naguri villages. This is badae ili, or 'blacksmith's ricebeer', and it takes place one week after ba, when the threshing and winnowing work is all completed. Each housewife then gives the blacksmith one hata baba, or winnowing fan of rice. He takes half of it home and the housewife retains the other half to make ili on his behalf (ili made by the blacksmith is polluting to a Munda). The feast is done on a tola basis on different days, and the pahan and munda are invited to each one. When everyone has gathered, the blacksmith and his wife have their feet washed by one or two of the villagers, and they reciprocate in turn. The ili is served to the blacksmith first, and then to his wife. The blacksmith is formally re-engaged for the following year, and the munda and pahan calculate the number of ploughing irons in the tola as a form of village 'census'. Everyone drinks ili and dances the jadur dance which is in season at that time of the year.

The Household: Ancestors and Rites de Passage

The ancestors are known collectively as haramburia (old men and women) or haramhoroko (the old people). The word haparambonga is used to denote very distant ancestors, and is a distributive of haram (old) signifying 'all the old ones'. They dwell as spirits in the ading, or inner room and are also referred to as adingbongako. Their worship should be done on all community ritual occasions, such as ba, mage, batauli and kolombonga (The last of these is a ritual performed at threshing time). The ancestors are worshipped also at the time of a buru. A daily propitiation is also performed before each meal, the food being offered first to the ancestors, and a few grains of rice being dropped on the floor. A similar procedure is followed with rice beer.

At the major rituals, adingbonga usually incorporates the sacrifice of a fowl. This is always of the colour known as hera, which is predominantly grey, with speckles of different colours. The sacrifice comes after the offering of rice beer and water in three or five leaf cups, and may be dispensed with, if a fowl of the right colour is not available. For buru rituals, rice bread and ili only are offered. The ritual is performed by the male household head or his eldest son. When the household head is a widow, the nearest agnate of the deceased husband, or a son of about twelve years upwards may do it. If there are no suitable male relatives, the widow or her daughter may perform the ritual herself, but may not eat the head of the sacrificed fowl.

Ancestors are not recalled individually beyond two, or

at most three, generations. The pahan of Sukuhatu said he could remember four generations by name and he thought this was exceptional. The Kadu pahan could remember three, and these were only his male ancestors, although women are included equally in the worship. Interest in genealogy is minimal and when households divide, as they normally do as soon as brothers marry, the worship is carried on separately in the different households. The youngest son usually retains the ading, or the original house, and there is no particular efficacy attached to the original ading, nor do brothers return to the original house for rituals.

Apart from the community rituals, there is one ritual done by each household to celebrate the eating of the new rice, or jom naoa. This is done in September or early October when the first of the upland rice crops is harvested. This is the ara gora baba or red paddy, and it may not be eaten before jom naoa. On this occasion blood must not be sacrificed, and the leaf cups in which the offerings are made, must be of the soso tree and not the sal tree. Soso is much used as a protection against all types of malicious spirits and evil doers. Besides the red paddy, the offerings consist of unhusked, boiled dhal (husked, baked dhal may not be eaten until after sukanburu), bread from the flour of the new rice, rice beer, and two types of jungle plant; utu ara, which is a type of leaf, and saru ara, which is a long white tuberous root, probably of the taro family.

At the present time, jom naoa is performed by each family on a day of its own choosing after the completion of the

upland harvesting. Hoffman records a ritual done by the hatu pahan two days beforehand and also on the morning of jom naoa itself. The date was fixed by consultation and public announcement. The pahan bathed and went to one of the high fields filled with standing paddy. He fixed an arrow in the ground and asked Singbonga to protect the village from tigers and snakes during the reaping. He sacrificed a red fowl naming all the village spirits mentioned in the Asur myth. He then cut a few ripe ears, and villagers followed suit, taking enough for the jom naoa feast. After this was threshed, the feast was held. The pahan returned to the same field on the day of the feast and offered another red fowl to the hatu bongako, together with the new rice and flat rice (taben) made from the new crop. This is offered on three places on a specially cleaned spot. He then went home taking the arrow with him, and cooked some of the new rice. Afterwards he returned again to offer a little of it to the hatu bongako. The household ritual followed later in the day.

This village ritual seems to belong to a time when upland rice was economically more significant than it is now. It involves the concept of the 'dangerous operation' requiring the propitiation of the bongako whose habitat is to be disturbed in the harvesting. Nowadays, the ritual is done after the harvesting, and the hatu bongako are not mentioned in the ritual. The ritual performed in Hoffman's time is an interesting synthesis of buru and hatu bongako rituals. The hatu bongako collectively receive a red fowl which is normally reserved for burubonga. The arrow is presumably a symbol of

protection against kulabing, or the wild animals living in the forest. This suggests a connection with slash and burn and rotation agriculture, with their emphasis on the dangerous consequences of operations on the upland habitat of the burubonga and the risks of attacks by wild animals. The present feast is very similar to that of the Hindus who celebrate the eating of the new rice in Aghan (November) and the present feast may have been influenced by it.

The first threshold ritual in an individual's life takes place five, seven or nine days from the time of birth. The day chosen is the first odd day after the navel falls off. It is known as chati (Hindi: purification). Both mother and child are unclean from the moment of birth until this purification is performed, as also are the women who have been in contact with the pair. The husband is unclean only if he has been cooking for his wife during this period. Normally, the mother retires to a corner of the outer room, taking an old mat with her. She may not touch the cooking hearth or enter the ading during this period.

On the day of the ceremony, the barber is called to shave the men and paint the feet of the women with red dye (narta). The mother smears the house floor with cowdung and removes the soiled cloths and the mat used during the birth. The cloths are taken by the women who acted as midwife (usually a Ghasi or blacksmith woman) and boiled in an earthen pot with water and ashes. All the clothing touched by the women during these intervening days must be boiled in this way. The baby is then bathed in water containing turmeric, and is left with

the father or a suitably clean relative. The mother may not touch it again until she is purified.

The women's party makes ready to go to the village spring or stream (dari). The midwife carries the boiled cloths, and the mother takes the earthen pot in which they were boiled and in which she puts a piece of the birth mat and a bundle of straw. She also takes oil, turmeric and vermilion in separate leaf cups. On the path to the dari, she sets fire to the piece of mat with the straw and turns quickly away, as no-one should see it burn. It is not necessary to burn the whole of the mat, although this may be done. If the party meets anyone on the path, no greetings are made because of the state of impurity of the women. At the dari, the midwife scrubs the cloths clean downstream from the women who are bathing themselves. Afterwards, everyone anoints their bodies with oil and turmeric. The midwife and the mother then perform the following ritual while standing in the water. The midwife scoops some water in her cupped hands and pours it into the mother's hands. She throws it to her right three times in succession. She then scoops water into the hands of the midwife who throws it three times to her left. They finish by saluting each other with the customary Munda greeting, johar. The earthen pot is taken to a nearby gully and turned upside down. Polished rice in a leaf cup is put underneath the pot, and it is daubed with vermilion in three places. One of the women may ask the bongako not to harm the child, and the pot is then left there. The leaf cups containing the remaining oil and turmeric are torn up and thrown in the

stream, or buried in the mud.

On returning to the house, the midwife and the mother wash each other's feet. The other women then also wash the mother's feet, and an old woman brings a tharia of water with dub grass in it and sprinkles everyone present. She also sprinkles the inside of the house where the mother has been lying. An alternative form of final purification is done with the specially prepared rice beer (tapan ili) which may not be drunk by anyone outside the household, or by the mother's bauhonjar, her classificatory elder brother-in-law (in practice this means almost all the men of her husband's generation in the village who are older than himself). This ili is sprinkled on all the women, and then a little is mixed with the blood of a freshly killed white fowl and given to the mother, three times, to drink. It is also given to the women who came into contact with her during the impure period. This method of purification is more usual in Naguri villages where the mother may also not enter the ading or touch the cooking pots until she has eaten the flesh of a hera fowl offered to the ancestors.

The child is usually named on the day of purification. The process is known as saki nutum, and the saki, or namesake, is generally a friend or relative, chosen beforehand, whose name the child will take. The relationship between the namesake and the child is then one of familiarity and assistance of the kind associated with ritual friendship. This has generally replaced the method of naming a child after one of its ancestors by placing a copper coin and some dub grass in a

plate of water and dropping in a grain of arua rice while saying the name of a particular ancestor. When a grain hits the grass, the name spoken is chosen. This was the usual procedure in Hoffman's time, and I saw it in Sukuhatu on one occasion. The sakinutum now bears a close resemblance to the Christian concept of the godparent, and the namesake is expected to provide small gifts and a quantity of drink for the ceremony. This person also furnishes the child with a length of unbleached cotton thread which is tied around the child's waist until it is two or three years old. After the naming formalities, everyone drinks ili, which is squeezed in a pot of fresh water by the men, to obtain the liquid and then served by the women (at weddings, ili is always served by the men). Rice and dhal are served to the guests, and the parents may break their day's fast.

This purification admits the person into the tribe. The expression used for this is horojatiae, that is, it has 'come into its caste' (from Hindi jat: caste). If the child dies before this ceremony, it does not receive full burial rites and the shade is not recalled to the ading. The body is buried separately in the same way as people who have died accidental deaths. A further initiation ceremony must follow before adolescence in order that the child may marry. This is tukui lutur, or 'ear piercing', and it is usually done when the child is between one and two years of age.

The piercing may only be done by men, and only some men are considered suitable. They must have steady hands, and they must not be the sort of men who have humbul rea, or

'heavy souls'²⁰ and whose touch therefore turns everything bad, particularly food or rice beer. Members of the child's family are also excluded from performing this operation. Rice beer and food (ili-mandi) are prepared for the occasion, and the mother's brother and the child's saki are expected to attend. The mother prepares boiled rice bread, and a thin metal wire is purchased from the market. This is shaped afterwards into a ring which is worn by the child. The piercing is done in the courtyard outside the house, and a paila of red upland paddy is poured on the spot. A stool is balanced over this, and the mother's brother or other relative takes the child on their lap. Two men then pierce the ear simultaneously. The saki then takes the child and comforts it. Vermilion is applied to the ear to sterilize it.

These ceremonies are done in modified form by Christian Mundas. The mother and child purify themselves at chati by bathing and burning the birth mat, but the impurity associated with the cooking pots is disregarded by most Christians, and the mother is not required to confine herself to one part of the house. The barber is not called and the ceremony is described as a thanks giving for the safe delivery rather than as a purification. A feast is held for the relatives. Ear piercing is performed by everyone and must be done prior to marriage.

The wedding ceremonies are exceedingly complex and may continue over two years or more. They consist of a series of ceremonies which establish the betrothal and the marriage payments, and then the publicly expressed approval of the

couple to be married. There may then be a series of courtesy ceremonies extending over a year or more, if the girl's parents are unwilling to let her join the boy immediately. These are to maintain the good faith that the marriage will eventually take place. All the ceremonies may be performed in some variant by both Christians and punadharom Mundas. In some cases they have been renamed by the Christians, and it is generally the case that Christian weddings are less elaborate and consist of fewer ceremonies than those of punadharom Mundas.

A go-between (dutam) is usually appointed, who may be of either sex, married or unmarried. In the case of a Christian marriage, the dutam is quite often a friend of one of the young persons involved, as there is a growing tendency among the more educated Mundas for young people to choose their own marriage partners. For non-Christians the first step in the proceedings is the consultation of omens. This is done by the boy's party while they are on their way to visit the girl's house for the first time, and by the girl's party when they return the visit. The omens must be satisfactory on both journeys. Omens are noted only within the boundaries of the two villages, and they may be favourable or unfavourable. Unfavourable omens are anomalous events, such as the leaves of a tree moving when there is no wind; they are generally indicative of early death or sterility. The principle of likeness also operates. A bird of prey seen swooping portends that one of the couple will be carried off by a tiger. Favourable omens obey the same principle. A girl seen carrying a pitcher of water from the well indicates that the

marriage will be a success and that the girl will be hard working. A fuller list of omens, all of which are still extant, can be found in Hoffman.²¹

When the boy's party first visits the girl, it is not customary to approach the point directly, but to engage in a metaphorical discussion, such as 'we saw a ripe pumpkin on the roof of your house and have come to ask the price of it'. On this first visit, the girl's relatives wash the feet of the visitors as a token of respect, and the couple are asked if, after having seen each other, they will assent to the marriage. This assent is given in the presence of several village elders who act as witnesses. The party is then given food, which is reciprocated on the return visit.

The next stage is the fixing of the brideprice, which is done at the boy's house. Only the men of the girl's party attend, and the elders from both villages again act as witnesses. In the ceremony which I attended, the men first washed and brushed their teeth before going out to the field to view the bullocks which were proposed as brideprice or gonong uri (cattle payments). The merits and demerits of the animals are carefully discussed, and the three which were offered were eventually accepted. The girl's relatives then throw earth at the three animals to signify their acceptance. Only when agreement has been reached, does the cooking for the feast begin. For this, one or two goats are usually killed. The boy and a companion are dressed up and carried to a specially constructed bower of sal branches outside the house, and ili, brewed by the boy's relatives, is offered first to the ancestors and then to the two boys, to drink. The girl's

party then drink the ili. It is not given to anyone else. The fathers of the couple ritually enquire of each other the names of their respective kili and then give each other a cup of ili. This ritual enquiry is repeated by the mothers of the pair at the actual wedding in the girl's village.

The bullocks are tied to a specially purchased rope and given to the girl's party to take home with them. This rope then becomes the excuse for a return visit from the boy's party which is called paga otong, or 'following the rope'. The party visits 'to see if the gonong uri have arrived safely' and to collect their rope. The final meeting before the wedding ceremonies proper, takes place in the girl's village when three or four men go to fix the date and pay any remaining gonong. In Hasada villages, the gonong is fixed for non-Christians, at two bullocks, twenty rupees, two handwoven cloths for the mother and grandmother, a dhoti for the younger brother, and a mill made sari for the girl and her other sisters. In Naguri villages it is higher, but fixed for non-Christians at three bullocks plus the above mentioned cloths. After the payments have been completed and the date fixed, a further feast of goatsmeat is given.

This is a very bare outline of the ceremonies which may take place before the actual wedding. Their performance is often dependent on the state of relations between the two parties, and any of them may be missed out without impairing the validity of the marriage. An interesting insight into the delicacies of these arrangements came from a ceremony which I attended for a Christian Sukuhatu girl. This was paga

otong or the fetching of the rope by the boy's party. Ten adults and numerous children attended for this, and as it was the karam season of dancing (karam is a festival celebrated by the Sadans and by some Mundas), they brought a new sari for the bride. Their attendance for what was considered to be a trivial ceremony, provoked ill-concealed hostility from the girl's family as they were then expected to provide a meal of goatsmeat and rice. The grumbling from the kitchen was deliberately loud and such as to leave the boy's party in no doubt about their feelings. This was the second occasion on which the party had come in full force; and on the first occasion they had eaten a goat and a pig. A further visit was expected from the men for the fixing of the wedding date. This would make three expensive meals even before the actual wedding.

Against this grumbling, the boy's mother explained very loudly and in detail the reasons why the party had come on this occasion and in such large numbers. The first point of contention was the brideprice. This girl is a Christian, and Christian families frequently ask for higher payments on the grounds that their daughters are more educated. In this case, the girl's family had fixed the payment at two bullocks, sixty rupees and the customary cloths. There was thus an element of 'getting one's money back' in the shape of some good meals. The second reason was that when the girl's party had visited them for the settling and collecting of the brideprice, the boy's party had provided two goats for the feast; but the party only ate one of them, thereby ensuring that

they would get a return invitation to eat the other one, probably after the wedding. Once it has been set aside in this way, the animal cannot be used for any other purpose, and the boy's party further pointed out that in the meantime it will grow much bigger. A third reason was that it was then a year since the brideprice was paid and the boy's parents were expected to provide new sari for the girl at all the big festival occasions.

The protracted visiting which occurs in wedding arrangements is an indication of the strains found in affinal relations. There is no institutionalized inequality between bridegivers and bridgetakers, and the ideal set out in the symbolism of the marriage ceremonies is of two families uniting in love. This is very often far from the reality. This particular marriage ended within months of the final ceremony and the girl returned to her parents. At least half of all young married women run away from their husband's home, as far as I was able to estimate, within the first year of marriage. Some return, but others may live at least part of the time with their parents during the early years at least, or run away with someone else.

The wedding itself extends over nearly three days. Preparations for the feast are made in the girl's house, and they include the digging of a long trench over which the cooking can be done, the husking of large quantities of rice, and the preparation of plates and cups from sal leaves. A structure of sal branches is put up outside the house. This is called the janda, and the ceremonies take place under it. The barber's

wife comes to apply narta to the feet of the women. The boy's party travels overnight to avoid the attention of witches and evil spirits and when they arrive, early on the following morning, they are given a special place, some distance from the house, on which to sit. The approaching party is met by the girl's party who dance towards them warily, avoiding direct encounter. Drummers are usually hired, and the Mundas also drum at their own weddings. The men carry long poles or scythes with burning straw tied around the end. The two parties sing warlike songs, each denigrating the other side and making a mock show of force with their weapons and sticks. When they are close enough, three elder female relatives on each side take a lota (brass vessel) each of water and some mango twigs and sprinkle each other with water. They then stuff beaten rice into each others' mouths and the meeting usually culminates in the six liberally pouring water over each other.

From the time that he enters the village boundaries until his admittance into the house of the bride's parents, the groom must be carried by one of his male relatives. Similarly, after the ceremony, the bride is carried from her parents' house to the village boundary by a member of the groom's party, and again from the boundary of his village to the house. In the process of turning the groom into a 'son' of his wife's parents' house, and of the village, and the bride into a daughter of her husband's parents and village, both are vulnerable to the attacks of witches and malicious spirits, who may follow their footprints, or take a little

earth from a print for purposes of sorcery. After the meeting of the two parties, the visitors are led to their special spot and the boy is carried to the door of the girl's house, where he finds his entry ritually blocked by the girl's sisters and younger female relatives. They sing songs angrily demanding to know why the boy has come and why he is taking their friend away.

In Kadu, this is quickly halted by the payment of one or two rupees to the girls, who then open the door. In Sukuhatu, a longer ritual takes place. The bride's mother and two other senior female relatives bring a bowl of water and wash the feet of the groom and his companion, both of whom are at this time being held by relatives. They are sprinkled with mango twigs dipped in water and then the process known as chuman²² is performed for each boy. Fresh cowdung is thrown around the feet of the visitors to counteract sorcery and two girls walk around the boys three times in succession, almost, but not quite, touching them with a mango twig, wrapped in an oil-soaked cloth and alight at both ends. While doing chuman, the women take rice bread, warm it over their oil lights and press it on the cheeks of the boys. Each woman then takes a husking pole and pretends to hit the groom on the cheek, saying "If you are greedy (i.e. if there is not enough food for your wife) we shall beat you like this." This episode causes great amusement in the girl's party, who vent a ritual hostility on the groom. The boy, for his part, was seen on one occasion to become extremely cross, particularly when someone exhorted the bride's mother to 'burn him with the dibri'

(the small light). Payment is made to the doorkeepers and the boys are allowed in and are given food cooked separately in a new pot. The place where the two were held is washed over with mud, again as a protection against witches.

During the day of arrival, special dancers are often hired to entertain the party, and the groom's party may bring its own dancers for a rival display. The dances are done by Mundas and are known as paiki.²³ Both parties keep up their singing of wedding songs which vacillate between sympathy and welcome for the girl and complaints about the hardships and sorrow of married life. The couple are also teased and comments are made about their physical appearance and capacities. The bride generally remains secluded inside the house with her companion.

At some point during the day, a ceremony called da'ma' ('cutting the water') is performed by the young women of the girl's village. Two large round earthen water pots (chatu) are needed for this and are purchased from the potter. Before they can be taken into the house, a purification is performed similar to that done for the boy and his companion when they arrive. Two piles of red upland paddy are put on the ground in front of the house door. The pots are placed on top and chuman is done by the bride's mother and one other woman. They are then taken inside and put down on two leaf plates, which are also used later in the ceremony. The paddy is used for sowing later in the year along with other remaining red paddy which figures in the wedding ceremonies.

For the cutting ceremony, two unmarried girls must fast

before carrying the pots to the well. They first do the chuman ceremony over the pots, and tie the lips with arua thread and dub grass. The two girls then lead the procession of women to the village well. Two others carry a sword and a bow and arrow respectively. (In Naguri villages, these are carried, and the cutting is performed, by two fasting, unmarried boys.) The pots are filled with water and are set down on their leaf plates. They must not touch the ground. The two girls (or boys) turn their backs to the pots and grasp their weapons behind them in their left hands. Helped by the others, they 'cut' the water in the pot, three times in each one while an elder female relative asks 'Whose water are you cutting?', and the girl replies with the name of the girl to be married. When this ceremony is repeated in the boy's village, they answer with the boy's name. The pots are then hoisted onto the heads of the two girls, each of whom has a new cotton binda, or head cushion. The pots must not touch any part of the girls carrying them, and must be put straight onto the head. A new white or turmeric yellow cloth is thrown over the two pots, and the girls walk side by side to the house with the Ghasi drummers following behind. Just before reaching the house, the girls break into a special dance called dumkuch which is used only at marriages and at 'second burial' rites. At the house, the pots are set down on a parkom, or string bed, with the cloth still covering them. These pots of water are used for bathing the couple later in the ceremonies.

For the major part of the ceremonies, many puṇadharom Mundas engage the wife of the barber (thakurin), a practice

found among the Sadans, while others prefer to carry out the procedures themselves. Weddings attended by the barber's wife are thus very similar to Sadan weddings, as the same barber's wife is engaged, whereas all-Munda weddings are rather less elaborated in terms of their symbolism. The water cutting ceremony is not universally performed, and the Mundas of Kadu did not do it. This may perhaps have been because the Kadu Hindus did, giving this ceremony an association with Hindus. The symbolism of the water cutting is transparent in its representation of the young couple by the two water pots, and their future virility by the cutting of the water in the pots. Such clear symbolic representations are not usually found in Munda rituals, where there are few visual symbols, and their meaning is diffuse rather than clearly distinguished in one particular sense. This suggests, therefore, that the present style of ceremonies, involving the thakurin as officiant, are an elaboration of a more simple ceremony.

In Sukuhatu, the thakurin plays a major role in the remaining ceremonies, which are done during the night following the arrival of the groom. She takes several mango leaves, removes the central vein and rolls them up. With arua thread, she ties three leaves to the boy's right wrist and two to his ankle, and two to the girl's right wrist and two to her ankle. When I enquired as to the meaning of this, it was said to symbolize the sexual connection of the couple, but the precise significance eludes me. Among some Sadans, there is, however, a ceremony of marrying young girls to a mango tree when they reach puberty. For the Sadans, generally, the mango fruit is

a symbol of fertility. The Mundas use it as a purifier when sprinkling water, but it does not figure in any other context.

Among the Munda, it can only be seen, perhaps, as a cultural 'borrowing', as it does not have any particular bearing on the girl's social status. There are no puberty rites or first pregnancy rites, and the change of status from girl to woman is not marked by any dramatic change other than marriage. The marriage itself, is considered finalized by the application of sindur (vermilion) and the payment of bridewealth cattle, but it is worth noting that divorce may be socially recognized by the tearing in half of a mango leaf in front of the assembled village.

The tying of the mango leaves is followed by dulda, or ceremonial bathing. A yoke of a plough is brought out and placed on the ground, facing east. A plantain leaf is placed over it. The couple are brought out of the house and they sit on the yoke, the girl in front of the boy, facing towards the east. The girl's mother sits behind, after she has first walked around the yoke three times. The two girls who are fasting draw a brass pot of water from the two pots and then with one of them walking clockwise and the other anti-clockwise around the yoke, they sprinkle the three with water from their mango twigs. They do this three times. The three on the yoke then clean their teeth and tongues and spit onto a leaf plate, which is carefully kept afterwards to avert the attention of witches. The girls then sprinkle them with water again. The twigs, plates and toothbrushes are taken away by the groom's party who buy them in their own village.

The final ceremony is that of putting sindur (vermilion) on the boy and girl. The barber's wife usually officiates. She draws a diagram on the house floor with rice flour and water. This consists of a rectangle embroidered at the edges with representations of branches. This is said to represent the jumda under which the wedding takes place. A yoke is drawn at each end, and the young couple sit behind the two yokes with the girl facing east. Vermilion is put in each corner of the rectangle and in each square of the plough, and a pile of red paddy is poured into the middle, where a circle of rice flour represents the central pole of the jumda. At this stage, the girl is carried to her place in the bamboo basket in which the groom's party brought the wedding cloths. She must not step on the floor as she is vulnerable to all sorts of dangers. At this point, she belongs neither to her own, nor to her husband's, lineage. The men who carry her in the basket refuse to put her down until they are paid their fee, which is about five rupees. The thakurin is also paid at this point, and she also receives five rupees. She is paid separately for her other services. The girl is placed on a large leaf plate spread on a bamboo mat.

The thakurin asks the boy if he is prepared to keep the girl. He answers 'yes' and she turns to the girl and asks if she will take him his food when he goes to plough. She answers likewise and then her relatives give her presents of sari to take to her new home. She used one of these to cover her forehead, and one of her young companions demands a fee for the uncovering. The thakurin instructs the boy how to mark

the girl with sindur. He touches his chest and forehead and then makes a long mark down the girl's forehead. Everyone watching shouts haribol (Hindi: 'praise god'). While this is going on, the men hold up cloths to curtain the area around the couple. The girl is marked three times and then she marks the boy in the same way. Finally, the boy makes a last big mark on her forehead, and she reciprocates.

The chuman ceremony is performed with arua rice, dub grass and an earthen light. The thakurin rubs the diagram off the floor and receives another $1\frac{1}{2}$ rupees for this. The floor is then washed over with cowdung after the remains have been scraped up and put alongside the toothbrushes and twigs for removal and burial. These are all precautions against witches and evil spirits. The farewell to the bride is then usually made as soon as possible after the wedding feast, as the party must take their leave at night. The particular concern over this matter is in order to prevent a jealous person casting a spell against the bride's fertility. The wedding gifts are put in a box (usually a tin trunk, purchased in the town market) and the party take the hind legs of one of the goats killed for the feast. The bride is carried to the edge of the village by a member of the husband's party.

The bride's parents and relatives follow and at the edge of the village the bride is finally handed over. Her parents admonish her to be a good wife and not to bring disrepute on them by adulterous or other antisocial behaviour. They ask the groom's parents to be patient with her if she makes mistakes and to teach her if there is work she cannot do. In a ritual

reply, the parents-in-law say:

'We are quarrelsome people; if she does not learn properly, we shall beat and scold her; she has a back to receive blows and an ear to hear our scolding.'

It is not customary to praise the bride at this point or to promise an easy life. The father then hands her over formally to the groom, saying

'If any misfortune occurs, do not come and say that I did not make her over to you. If bad times come, will you abandon her?'

The groom answers that he will not and the girl is then asked the same question.

At the groom's village, the girl is again carried. Her arrival is usually greeted by drumming, and she is taken inside the house and made to sit on a bamboo mat. The ceremonies which took place in the girl's house from the time of the arrival of the groom, are repeated, but with the positions of the boy and girl reversed. Ceremonies involving the bride's senior female relatives are performed with the groom's relatives. In the bride's house, the groom is placed on the right of the bride, in his own house, he is on the left. An additional ceremony is also performed to admit the girl to the household and its ancestors, before she eats a meal there. She takes off one of her cloths and throws it into the courtyard. She then boils this cloth with ashes and leaves it to dry. A fowl of the colour known as hera is killed by dashing it on a gandu, or small wooden stool. After the cloth washing, the girl serves rice beer to everyone. When the evening meal is cooked, she serves food for herself and her husband and

they eat together. The body of the sacrificed fowl is also eaten by the couple. The girl may now do the cooking for the household.

Consummation takes place after this ritual, which is called mandi chatu (cooking pot) and it is not necessary for the repeated ceremonies to be performed first. After the couple have been locked up for the night, the rest of the household kill a large cock and eat it for supper. Return visits are paid to the wife's village about a week after the marriage.

In Christian weddings, the ceremonies which take place after the arrival of the groom are replaced by a church service and a modified version of the traditional affair under the jumda, but without the water cutting and the yoke ceremony. Sindur is usually applied, and oil and turmeric are put on the couple. The symbols of resistance against the groom, the precautions against evil spirits, the traditional songs and the symmetry of the ceremonies are all preserved in Christian weddings. In Kadu, there has been a general tendency towards simplification among puṇadharom adherents as well as among Christians. Villagers said that they had given up some of the traditional ceremonies as they were too expensive and time consuming. There has evidently been some Christian influence in this respect. In Kadu, Christians and puṇadharom adherents attend each other's weddings freely whereas in Sukuhatu they do not, and practices have polarized to some extent.

The full ceremony is known as arandi and is only done for the first wedding of each person. In general, it is the

payment of brideprice which confers full status on a marriage and subsequent full inheritance rights on the children. Many marriages result from prearranged elopements, and widowed and divorced people always remarry unless they are past the age of childbearing. Provided that the brideprice is paid and witnessed, these marriages are of equal status to the full arandi marriage; but disputes can arise over the inheritance of children from a second or subsequent marriage when two or more sibling sets are due to inherit. The children of a cohabiting couple are in a precarious position as they are often denied a share in their father's property by his classificatory brothers who can use illegitimacy as a way to press their own claims. Such cases are occasionally brought to court, if the complainant can rely on sufficient witnesses to support him. Cases of this sort lead to considerable friction, and accusations of sorcery are common. There is thus strong pressure on the parents to have the full arandi ceremony, despite the expense.

The two consistent themes running through the ceremonies described above, are protection against evil spirits and the expression of symmetry between bride-givers and bride-takers, and between bride and groom. A wedding is a dangerous affair as it involves the transfer of a woman's reproductive powers from one group to another. The bride is thus the main target for jealous witches and malicious spirits which seek to sabotage her fertility. The groom may also be a target, and I knew of one Sukuhatu man who blamed his sterility on the spell cast by a witch on his wedding day. At least part of

the reason for the excessive fears of such machinations seems to lie in the ambiguity of a married woman's status. On marriage she becomes a member of her husband's clan, but she also retains residual rights in her own clan. There is no clear cutting off point at marriage and women make frequent and extended trips to their natal villages particularly if their parents are left without anyone to look after them. The practice of adopting a son-in-law, a not uncommon event in the past, has lapsed, and the marriage ceremony perhaps reflects the growing contradiction between the dual rights of women and the increasing 'patrilineality' of land holding groups.

A bonga which causes a particular nuisance to young unmarried women, is garasibonga, who is sometimes identified with the Ikir or Burubonga, of the woman's village. This bonga attaches itself to the bride's new cloth and follows her to her husband's village where it attempts to cause harm to the woman's first born child. The Ikir or Burubonga of the mother's brother's village was often divined as a cause of sickness among young children. A woman who returned to her natal village from Sukuhatu for the birth of a child complained that its death shortly afterwards had been caused by jealous witches in her village.

Marriage alliances thus create uneasy relationships between affinal groups, and this unease is reflected in the marriage rites. In a society dependent on land under permanent cultivation, marriage has far reaching structural consequences. It heralds the break up and division of the

household unit and its land, and the displacement of one generation by the next. Among shifting cultivators or 'frontier' settlers faced with the possibility of further expansion, marriage does not have quite the same significance in the cycle of household disintegration, as the young couple set up a separate hut and rights in land do not constitute a fixed interest for each household.²⁴ The elaboration encountered in Munda marriage ceremonies, much of which is shared by the Sadan speaking Hindus, may be explained in these terms.

The final ceremonies in the life of an individual may be spread over two or more years from the time of death to the severance of all connection with the living on becoming an ancestor. The ceremonies are held in a different order in Hasada and Naguri villages, and their significance is therefore altered. I shall describe the Hasada ceremonies first and then look at the Naguri variations.

Full burial rites are not accorded to those who die accidental deaths, women and children dying before the purificatory chati ceremony, or women dying in childbirth. They are buried separately in a high field along with the low caste people, and no memorial stone is erected. Raiyat are also buried separately, but will usually have a memorial stone erected in their village of origin. The Mundas formerly cremated their dead, according to earlier records, and buried only those suffering from some form of impurity. The change to burial, though gradual, has been influenced greatly by Christianity, and now burial is the main form of disposal.

Cremation is, however, still done in many villages during the very hot weather; and the remains of a person killed by a tiger are always cremated; otherwise it is said that the tiger will return and dig up the remains from the grave.

A death is announced by loud wailing from the women who gather at the house. Messages are sent to as many relatives as can be expected to travel to the funeral within a day. If the death occurs in the morning, the burial normally takes place in the afternoon or evening of the same day. Burials are not done before noon. The women prepare the body by smearing it with oil and turmeric and dressing it in a new cloth. The men go to dig the grave and prepare a bamboo palki, or stretcher, on which the body is carried to the grave. If the deceased used a parkom (string bed; Hindi: charpoy) in his lifetime, this may be used instead. Before the body is taken out, a winnowing fan is put to the left side of it. One person holds the right hand of the deceased, and another puts paddy seeds into it. These are thrown down three times into the winnowing fan. This ritual is called roa aragu (throwing down the seed) and is performed to prevent the dead men from taking any of the house property with him.

Ghasi drummers and trumpeters accompany the funeral procession. The body is carried out of the house head first by senior male relatives or villagers, and the women carry a plate of uncooked usna (parboiled) rice and some dhal, and other personal items such as tobacco, salt and chillis. Ili and arki (spirit) are also taken if the person was fond of drink in his lifetime. Clothing and personal belongings are

usually taken and all these items are buried with the body. Christians put in uncooked food, clothing and money only. A clear distinction is made between personal and household articles. Thus, axes, sickles and other implements do not accompany the man after death, and cooking pots, brooms, etc. are not put with a woman's body. On the way to the grave, the palki is put down three times in each of three separate places.

The grave is dug in such a way that a rectangular platform is formed at the bottom, on which the body is laid to rest. Bamboo poles are laid across it and this effectively prevents depredations by wild animals. A piece of old matting from the person's house is laid across the poles and the food and personal belongings are put on this mat. When the procession reaches the grave, the body is carried around it three times clockwise and is then put down on the ground by that end of the grave where, eventually, the feet will lie. In Hasada villages, the head is put to the south. The men then lift the body into the grave. A young female child, who may be a younger sibling, a daughter or a granddaughter, real or classificatory, is lifted up and is passed over the open grave three times by two relatives. A branch of the bael fruit tree is brought and a length of cotton thread is tied round it and dipped in karanj oil. This is set alight and then the eldest son or male sibling, or other, close male relative, takes the lighted branch, and with his right eye covered, he is led three times anticlockwise around the grave. The branch is then thrown in. Everyone throws in a handful of

earth and when the grave is half full a length of arua thread is lowered in and pressed down with a new pot. This enables the spirit to escape from the grave. The earth is heaped up into a mound on top and a three-pronged golaichi twig is pushed into the mound. The palki is inverted and left on the mound. Sometimes it is also broken in half. The Christian burial is the same except for the elements connected with the magical number three. A broken earthen pot containing water is left by the grave.

After the burial, the women precede the men to the spring where they wash their faces, arms and legs and clean their teeth. Three leaf cups are brought and put by the water and three used toothbrushes are placed by each one. Standing in the spring, three of the women address the deceased saying,

'now you do not like us and have you have left us, now we are giving you water for drinking, washing and cleaning your teeth. Please do not come asking for water again'.

They scoop water three times into each cup and then flick water over their shoulder three times. They leave the spring without looking behind them. The men come afterwards to wash themselves but do not perform any ritual. When everyone has returned to the house of the deceased, they are purified with ili ranu sprinkled with tulsi twigs.

The house door is then opened. Before the burial, ash is carefully spread in one corner of the house and covered with an inverted winnowing fan. When the party returns, the ash is scrutinized for signs of marks which might indicate the cause of death. Footmarks resembling those of a cat indicate

that witchcraft is responsible. If there are no marks at all, or if the marks are indeterminate, it is generally decided that the death was a natural one. This ritual is not generally performed unless the relatives have some reason to suspect malice. The ash is then swept away and cowdung applied to the floor.

On the night of the second day after death, the women start to take food for the shade of the deceased, which hovers around the grave between burial and its recall to the ading three, five or nine days after death. Rice, rambara and possibly chicken are put in layers in a leaf cup with the meat at the bottom and the rambara at the top. Fresh water is put in another and the cups are set down by the grave and covered with a winnow. A stool and some firewood may also be brought. The women call the dead person's name and invite him or her to eat. If the soul is not fed properly it is inclined to pester the relatives at night by calling out their names.

One or two days after burial, the barber is called to shave the men and cut their hair, and the utrud bonga ceremony is performed. This is to ask the ancestors to admit the deceased to their company. A deora (witchfinder) or some other man of special knowledge about this ritual, officiates. A pit about a foot deep is dug by a tree close to the house of the deceased. A collection of seeds from the year's sowing is taken to the pit. These are usually red paddy, rambara, hore and rahri (all pulses of both a wild and cultivated type). The relatives gather at the pit and a fire is kindled inside

it. The officiant says the names of each household member and other close relatives in turn, and at each name, he drops a seed into the fire. He asks the ancestors to accept responsibility for feeding and caring for this person now that he no longer belongs to the household and the tie between the deceased and his relatives is severed. A hera (grey) fowl is sacrificed and the blood spilled into the pit. The relatives eat mandi dal jilu (rice, dhal and meat) and drink ili afterwards.

The ceremony of calling back the soul must be done within the same phase of the moon as that in which the death occurred, and it is usually done as soon as possible in order to settle the shade and prevent it from bothering the relatives. The ceremony is called umbul ader, or shade calling, and umbul means shadow or shade in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense. It is the umbul which hovers around the grave after death. Between the burial and umbul ader, no meat or fish may be eaten in the household of the deceased.

The barber is again called and the men are shaved. The married members of the household bathe and fast during the day, and the ceremony is done in the evening after dark. The men prepare the cooked food intended for the umbul. A black fowl is plucked and the feathers thrown away. They must not be burnt. One left leg is removed, the remainder, including the head, is roasted or boiled in salt and water. It must not be fried or spiced. Whole boiled rambara pulse and parboiled rice are prepared. A little of each food is then

placed inside a leaf cup. The Mundas put the meat at the bottom, the rambara in the middle and the rice on the top. The low castes reverse the order.

The women prepare iliranu in a bowl of water and sweep the floor of the ading. The leaf cup of food is placed in one corner, together with a cup of water, and a gandu (stool) is placed in front of it. One of the women brings a winnowing fan of rice flour and winnows it gently on to the floor in front of the cups. Any flaws in the surface of the flour are carefully noted. Three men remain in the house and the remainder go to call the umbul, taking the fowl's leg, dragged on a piece of string, a sickle, a ploughing iron, two straight sticks of the tiril plant, one of the marang (big) atkir and one of the huring (small) atkir plants, some sowri grass, an odd number of leaf cups, iliranu, fresh water, arua rice, an earthen light and a stool. The broken earthen pot left at the grave after burial is also taken. From the moment of leaving the house, everyone is silent and the procession moves quickly to that place on the path to the graveyard where the body was first put down. The spot is sprinkled with water and three sticks are erected so that they form a triangle on which the upturned broken pot can be rested. The sowri grass is placed over the top of the sticks. Three or five leafcups are put in front of this 'house', and iliranu and fresh water are offered to the ancestors. The household head asks the ancestors to accept the umbul as an ancestor, so that it may be relieved from its present state of discomfort 'where it stays under the tree with no one to care for it.'

The cups are then emptied of their contents on to the ground and are torn into pieces which are thrown into the house of sticks. The fowl's leg is swung three times over the sticks and arua rice is given to each person present. The head of the house sets fire to the straw and as the sticks burn down everyone throws rice at the fire, shouting to the deceased to come home, because his house is burning down. The head of the house then picks up the remaining tiril stick and smashes the inverted pot with one blow. The party quickly returns to the house without looking behind, and one man brings up the rear, striking the ploughing iron with the sickle.

When the party returns, they find the door shut fast and barred. The following ritual conversation then occurs. The party knock on the door and ask 'Who is there?' The men inside remain silent, and the party repeat the question three times. Finally, the men say 'What do you want?' The women reply

'We are guests. Will you not accept us? We have come for shelter from a far off place. Will you not be kind enough to keep us for the night?'

Those inside answer

'Who knows what kind of people you are? Who knows if you are thieves and robbers or not?'

The people outside reply

'No. We are neither thieves nor robbers. We have had great sorrow, but now we have brought happiness with us.' (Mundari: 'Duku rele taikena, suku rele autada.')

The men say

'Then you may come into this house,'

and the door is opened. Everyone sits quietly in the outer room to allow for the passage of the umbul. No lights may be used. After a while a man calls 'Kokorocho', the imitation of a cock's crow, three times, and then they proceed to the ading to examine the flour and leaf cups. Any marks found either on the flour or in the food are usually interpreted as a sign that the umbul has returned in the form of an animal, such as a cat, snake or lizard. If no marks are found at all, the ceremony should be repeated, but in practice, some sort of indication is always found.

The final admittance to the company of the ancestors occurs when the relatives can afford the cost of jangtopa, or bone burial. The Mundas erect both burial and memorial stones to their dead. Burial stones (sasandiri) are laid flat, raised on small stones, one at each corner. They are always put in the graveyard (sasan) in Hasada villages. New sasandiri are seldom laid except in new settlements, so one stone represents all the direct descendents of the person for whom it was originally laid. The final ceremony thus consists generally of buying a bit of earth or bone from the grave of the recent dead under the ancestral stone. Memorial stones (bo'diri or bid diri; lit. 'head stones') may be erected at the head of the grave of a wealthy or influential man, or in any part of the village. In Sukuhatu, no sasandiri or bo'diri had been erected within the present generation because of the great expense of locating and bringing a stone of appropriate size. Human labour only may be used for this task, and many goats are required to feed the entire village and work force.

Only those eligible for burial in the sasan receive a 'second burial'. The umbul of people who die accidental deaths become muabonga, a sort of ghost condemned to hover in a perpetual limbo, particularly in the vicinity of graveyards, in which case it would be known as muamasanibonga (masan is the same as sasan). A separate sasandiri is never put up for an unmarried woman, or for a married woman in her husband's village. She has the right both to burial and to a sasandiri in her natal village if she dies leaving offspring. It is then the responsibility of the offspring to go for the commemoration of the stone. Married women are generally commemorated in the sasan of their husband's village, however, but they must not be put under the same sasandiri as the father, father's brother and elder brother of their husband. This problem is overcome by segregating the men and women, and putting the women, unmarried boys and children under one stone. Sasandiri are not found in Christian burial grounds, but in Sukuhatu there were several old bo diri (headstones) commemorating wealthy Christian khuntkattidar of a previous generation. In Kadu, some Christians are still buried in the sasan and commemorated under the ancestral sasandiri.

Jangtopa, or bone burial, must be completed before any further arandi (full marriage) rites can take place. In Hasada villages it is more often called diri chapi, or stone washing. The essential rite which may not be performed, is that of sinduri tika, or the application of vermilion, and this may be deferred for several years after the couple have been living together, if the parents are unable to afford the expense of

diri chapi. The expression used is toroe chetanre kako sinduri tika (now he is ash, they do not make tika). This is an apparent reference to the former practice of cremation.

A small earthen pot, newly-thrown, is used to collect the handful of earth from the grave, which is used as a symbol of the bone as Hasada villagers do not usually dig up an actual piece of bone. Baked seeds of paddy, rambara, hore (pulse) and jondra (maize) are put in the pot along with cotton seeds and surguja oil seeds. Small cakes of steamed or boiled rice bread are threaded on a string and tied around the neck of the pot, and an image of the person, made from doob grass and cotton thread, is put inside the pot. One pot is prepared for each deceased person to be 'reburied'. The pot is carried from the house to the sasan by an unmarried girl who has fasted, and she is accompanied by an unmarried boy carrying a bow and arrow. The Ghasi drummers also accompany the procession. All the sasan diri are first swept and washed, and sprinkled with water from a mango twig. The earth underneath the appropriate stone is hollowed out to make a space for the pot. The boy is then brought to shoot his bow and arrow at the pot after it has been placed under the stone. He may only shoot once and if he missed, it does not seem to matter. A black he-goat is killed and its blood sprinkled on the stone. Rice beer, a grey fowl and puffed rice (lawā) are offered to the ancestors and scattered on the stones. Rice flour paste and vermilion are also liberally daubed on them. After the ceremony, the visitors eat a feast of mandi dal jilu (meat, pulse and rice) and drink ili.

The Naguri burial ceremony is substantially the same except that they do not pass a child over the grave or lead a male relative around the grave with the lighted taper. The new pot and length of thread are not put in the grave, and the golaichi twig is not used. The body is put with the head to the north, as among Hindus and unlike the Hasada Mundas who point the feet 'in the direction from which our ancestors came'. Any personal belongings which are to be buried are first broken in half. Cooked food and water are left in leaf cups, and a broken pot is put by the grave. There is no scattering of ash on the floor of the ading to disclose the cause of death, but it is said that if there is not enough soil to fill up the grave properly, then the person has died 'before their time'.

The Kadu Mundas do not take food for the umbul, as in Sukuhatu and there is no intervening period during which the umbul is said to roam around the burial ground or try to return to its former abode. Some Naguri villagers do feed the umbul, however, for about three days until the kaman ceremony is finished. It is difficult to say why some do and some do not, but it was noticed that the feeding took place in villages notably uninfluenced by Christianity, and it may be that the Kadu villagers have imbibed Christian notions of the fate of the dead. The lack of feeding is also no doubt related to the fact that the umbul ader, utrud bongga and 'second burial' ceremonies are all done together, sometimes several years after the death. After a few days, the barber is called to shave the men and cut their hair. The women have their nails pared.

This is known as kaman, after the Hindu ceremony of purification. After kaman, the Mundas say, they 'forget the dead'.

The dead may not be forgotten indefinitely, though, and the ceremonies are postponed only until the finance is available. During the intervening months or years, the family may not use oil in cooking their food. The second burial is called jang halang in Naguri, and means 'to pick up the bone'. As it is a major family expense, it is usually done for several members at a time, particularly if any women are involved. In one ceremony which I attended, it was performed for the mother and elder brother of the household head plus three children of the mother who had died during the first year of life and who are thus included in the mother's pot. The ceremony was fixed to coincide with the marriage of a younger brother. This meant that expenses could be combined and sinduritika performed.

Two earthen pots (chuka) were prepared, one of which was slightly smaller and was for the woman. Boiled rice bread and baked gangae seeds (sorghum) were hung on a cotton thread and tied around the necks, and a large round rice bread was placed on top and underneath each pot. The pots were carried from the house by two unmarried fasting boys. The party followed, carrying the broken pot from the grave (or a substitute, if it no longer exists), and this contains cooked rice and turmeric, two pots of fresh water, a leaf plate of baked rice, the unsqueezed fermenting rice for making ili, a dish of oil and a winnowing fan of parboiled rice. The Ghasis

followed, drumming.

Three images were made from thread and paddy stalks, to represent the three dead children. Meanwhile, the men were digging the graves to take out a piece of bone and the women's party arrived to wail and sing. The bone should preferably be of the second or third finger or toe, but the first bit to be discovered was considered satisfactory. Three small pieces of bone were carefully chopped off and the remainder put back. Two hollows were made at the side of one grave, and one hollow was made at the side of the other, making three altogether. Water and cowdung were mixed in the broken pot, and the solution was poured down one of the hollows into each grave and brushed down with mango twigs. The bones were then placed in the hollows and covered with ashes. After a little poking, they were pulled out and the ash brushed into the grave. They were again washed over with a mixture of rice, turmeric and water from the broken pot. Finally, the bones were washed over with the fermenting rice and water poured from the broken pot.

The bones and the three images were placed in their respective pots, along with a handful of parboiled rice. The two boys squatted in front of the grave, holding the pots, with the rice, oil and some fermenting rice arranged before them. The remaining food and grain was thrown in each grave and the earth was piled back. The participants then came to pay their respects to the dead. The women were first, and using their right hands, they dropped in a handful of rice and a leaf of oil and fermenting rice into each pot. This was

done either once or three times by each person. The men followed, using their left hands. Many brought coins and extra rice of their own to put in the pots. The remaining rice was thrown around the grave. The women started to dance the dumkach²⁵ to accompany the pots home, and the boys carried them to the courtyard where a binda (straw cushion) and rope is fitted to each pot. They are hung under the outside eaves of the house where they remain until the following day. Before any more dancing or drinking is done, everyone goes to bathe.

Umbul ader is done in the evening following jang halang. The ceremony is similar to that done in Hasada villages, but there is a much greater air of levity about it on account of the degree of drunkenness among the participants. Consequently, less attention is paid to the minutiae of the occasion which is observed so carefully among the Hasada Mundas. The one difference is that two women walk anti-clockwise around the house of sticks, one pouring water and the other pouring rice beer. After umbul ader, the visitors are given rice and dahl. No contributions are made or expected by the household on this occasion.

On the following day, the witchfinder is called to do utrud bongga. He digs three holes in front of the house door and sits in the doorway, with the holes in front of him, holding a winnow containing geradiri, the slag which remains after the blacksmith has smelted iron. His face is blackened with charcoal and oil and he wears a turban made from a straw rope with a bunch of chirchati twigs fixed in it. A young boy sits

nearby, holding the old broken pot fixed on a stick of sal or tiril, and containing smouldering charcoal, dried chilli and dog and pig manure. He fans the smoke from this concoction onto the deora with sal leaves as he sits in the doorway singing the Asur myth. This operation is called damad sukul (smoking the son-in-law). While this is going on, the women come to the pits and, using their left hands this time, they put charcoal, cotton seeds and mustard seeds into the first hole; oil, cotton and mustard seeds and a little cooked grey fowl into the second one; and over the third hole they wash their hand. The men follow, using the right hand. The deora is given the johar greeting and the earth is then put back into the holes. The deora takes the turban, chirchati twigs, winnowing fan and the pot on the pole and sticks them into a white ant hill (nidir bunum).

The pots are then taken to the sasandiri by the same boys, accompanied by the dancers and drummers. The stones are washed down by the women and rice flour paste is sprinkled on each stone. Unbleached cotton thread is tied around the upright stones (bo diri) and they are daubed with vermilion and decorated with flowers. The pots are placed on the stones and the contents emptied out. The money is removed and kept to cover the expenses of rice beer and the 'hire' of the two boys. A few paise are left in the pot. All the decorations of the pot are removed and thrown away. The stone is raised and a hollow made underneath. The contents of the pot are swept into the hollow and the pot is smashed or broken into three pieces, and either left on top of the stone or swept

underneath it. The stones are lowered back into place and a senior agnate then performs a ritual, asking the ancestors to accept the deceased as a member of their company. He places three piles of rice on the stone and kills a hera fowl by dashing its head on the stone and dripping the blood over the rice. Ili is also dropped in three places. The fowl is cooked and eaten afterwards by the household. The participants then go to wash themselves and the dancers lead everyone back to the house. Later, a feast of rice and meat is given.

Munda funeral ceremonies present many fascinating problems in the analysis of symbols, and there is not the space for an extended consideration of this question here. Certain basic points may be made. Inversion of the normal order is a major theme. The body is brought out of the house feet first, and the bier is afterwards inverted on the grave. The pot which is left by the grave and figures in all the subsequent ceremonies, is old and broken. In many respects, funerals present an inverse of weddings. In wedding ceremonies, the ritual of walking three times around a person or object (e.g. in the case of walking round the plough on which the couple are sitting) is reversed at the grave by having the body carried around it anti-clockwise. At weddings, the rice used for ritual purposes must be arua (polished) whereas at funerals it is always usna (parboiled). S. C. Roy also points out²⁶ that in Oraon ceremonies (which are identical in most respects to Munda ceremonies), the left hand is always used in the various funeral observances, whereas at weddings, the right hand is always employed. Symmetry takes precedence

over inversion for the Mundas, however, as men and women alternate between their right hand and their left hand in jang halang and utrud bonga. As in all Munda ritual, the symmetry of the sexes is emphasized, so that in one act the women will use their left hands and in another, the men will use their left.

Funeral observances also stress the 'traditional' method of disposal. In the Santal cremation ceremony, the eldest son, or close agnate, lights the funeral pyre with his left hand, by putting a lighted bael branch with cotton tied round it into the mouth of the corpse and then averting his eyes.²⁷ This is symbolically enacted in Hasada funerals, and the image of the deceased as 'ash', or as being in 'fire and wood' recurs in ritual references in all the ceremonies. In jang halang, the bone to be buried under the sasandiri is 'cremated' after being dug up and before being placed in the pot.

A number of differences emerge between Hasada and Naguri observances. The funerals observed were ascertained to be representative, generally, of their respective areas, from inquiries made of women married into the village. Hasada funerals are more magical, in that a variety of methods are employed to ensure that the shade of the deceased does not trouble them, and that it does not remove with it, the prosperity of the household. These fears about the recent dead were not encountered among Kadu villagers, who stressed their desire to forget the dead. In Sukuhatu, the major concern was in cutting off all contact with the dead as soon as possible

and thus freeing the relatives from the responsibility for the welfare of the soul.

A major difference lies in the timing of the post burial ceremonies, and this bears on the question of the ultimate fate of the umbul, the shade of the deceased which becomes an ancestor. In the Naguri area, the shade makes this transition in one stage, as all the later ceremonies are performed at the same time. Between burial and second burial, therefore, the shade lives in the fields or forests. It is not provided with sustenance by the living, who do not worry about it. Neither was it noted to be troublesome to the living before it received the final rites. The purpose of the umbul ader ceremony is to recall the shade to live in the ading; but the purpose of jang halang is to unite the umbul with the company of the ancestors, and particularly the clan ancestors, for whom the groups of stones are erected.

In the Hasada area, umbul ader is done three, five or nine days after the death to bring the umbul back to the ading; but it also has the result of freeing the relatives from the burden of caring for it, and the prayer to the ancestors, said by the household head in front of the straw house which is erected in umbul ader, makes no specific reference to the return of the shade to the ading, but emphasizes the shift in responsibility for the umbul from the household to the ancestral company. These are pictured as living in a world which is a mirror image of the present one. The ancestors are asked to share their harvest with the new shade and allow it to use their chairs and beds, and drink

their ili. This cutting off of contact is emphasized again at diri chapi when either bone, or earth from the grave, is reburied under the sasandiri. The utrud bonga ritual is a further demonstration of the cutting off of contact and responsibility. Seeds and meat are thrown into a pit in front of the house door, and burnt or buried to signify that no more food is to be given.

If this apparent superfluity of ceremonies for the umbul creates a contradiction regarding the fate of the shade, it is a contradiction of which the Mundas are not aware. There is a duality in their thinking about ancestors which enables haramhoroko to be regarded as both a collective property of the founding village clan, assimilated, for the purpose of community worship, with the other village spirits; and as bongako resident in individual households and the object of household worship.

The Mundas may be compared, in this respect, to other tribal groups in Middle India. The Saora, an Orissa hill tribe speaking a Mundari language, share many concepts with the Mundas and live in an area which borders on Chotanagpur. When studied by Elwin in the 1940's, they still derived a large part of their livelihood from shifting cultivation. Plough agriculture was important only in the lower lying areas inhabited by the Saora. Saora funeral rites consist of a cremation, for all except those dying accidentally, and then a ceremony similar to jang halang in which a piece of bone kept in a pot is buried under a stone. This ceremony may not take place for several years, and the shade continually bothers

its relatives for sacrifices during this period. 'Soul houses' of wood and thatch are sometimes erected over the grave to shelter the shade until the final rite which joins it with the company of ancestors living in a world very similar to that of the living. The shade is definitely not returned to the house, and its visits are feared and discouraged.²⁸

The Raj Gonds, also at one time shifting cultivators, but mostly settled plough cultivators when they were studied by Von Furer-Haimendorf in the 1940's, perform a rite after the funeral to join the sanal, or shade, to the company of ancestors living in field and forest. The land of the dead is again similar to the land of the living. A later ceremony admits the sanal to the company of the clan god and the ancestors.²⁹

This appears also to be the import of the Khasi two-stage mortuary rites, in which the bones of the cremated deceased are collected and placed first in an individual stone cist near the house or on the outskirts of the village and then later, when finance permits, transferred to the 'big stone', often some distance away, where all the bones of matri-clan members are taken.

There is an interesting, and parallel symmetry in some respects in the Khasi rites, in that men may be cremated in their affinal villages and most of the ritual tasks may be carried out by men or women of the same matri-clan as the deceased. The Khasis also erect both male and female stones which are respectively upright and flat. The symbolism, here,

seems to be fairly obvious.³⁰

The ceremony of recalling the soul is a feature of many low-caste groups in Chotanagpur and also in parts of north Bihar.³¹ It does not figure among shifting cultivators in the instances which I have been able to check, the belief being that the shade joins the other ancestors in a similar world, or in 'field and forest'. It is conjectured that the Munda concept of the fate of the shade has changed with sedentarization and that the company of ancestors was previously associated with the buru, or ancestral mountain, where the clan sasandiri was found. Buru rituals were thus directed at the buru and the company of ancestors. When sedentarization severed the link between the buru and the prosperity of the clan, it had a similar effect on the position of the ancestral spirits. Among the Saora, the ancestors are very much in evidence as a major source of trouble if their worship is neglected. For the Mundas, the ancestors give little cause for concern. They may cause minor stomach and headaches to household members if their worship is neglected but they never cause any misfortune of a more serious kind. Some doubted whether they even caused minor ailments and maintained that the ancestors are benevolent and ineffective. They are thought by most people to protect the household, however, and their worship is seldom neglected by household heads.

At umbul ader, the shade is recalled by striking a sickle on a ploughing iron. The ploughing iron is a symbol of the household as an economic unit. Brothers do not share

ploughing irons when they separate their hearths, nor do they share ancestors. Haramhoroko have become household bongako whose protection encompasses those household members only; but they have retained a wider significance in a collective sense as an object of propitiation by the village priest on the same basis as other village bongako, and following the pattern laid down in the Asur myth. Here, though, they are not true ancestors, for Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Buria, the old couple, are impotent and no longer the founders of the Munda race.

The Deora: Healing and Protection Rituals

The role of the deora is difficult to define with any precision, as each practitioner defines his work slightly differently and uses a variety of techniques. The word deora is evidently of Indo-Aryan extraction, and it is common to both Oraons and Mundas. Various other words of Hindi origin are also used to describe the deora, such as bhagat and sokha (magician). Some deora made a distinction between themselves and bhagat in terms of the type of work which they performed, while others maintained that they were the same. All these practitioners are, however, concerned with the protection of the individual and the household, and are thus a complement to the pahan.

Recruitment is not hereditary and each village may have arbitrary numbers of deora. Recruits should spend at least three years learning the skills under the direction of one or several deora. There is a tendency for sons to be trained by fathers, but recruits may come from anywhere, and practice of

the art is not necessarily confined to any one village. No special or unusual skills seem to be required. In 1972, Sukuhatu had five practising deora, three of whom were training, between them, eight recruits. Of these eight, four were from Sukuhatu. In Kadu, there were five deora and none had recruits although one had been training two boys in the previous year, and one man was passing on the knowledge gradually to his son. Women do not, as a rule become deora, but a famous woman bhagat was said to live in a village some five miles from Ranchi, and to be consulted by people from many miles around. Villagers of other castes may also be practitioners, but they do not describe themselves as deora. They are always called bhagat. In Sukuhatu, there was one Ghasi bhagat. In Kadu, they were all Munda.

The deora's work may be divided into protection and divination. Most purnadharom (and some Christian) households, call in a deora several times a year to perform protective rites for the household. In the month of Asarh (July), after the beginning of the monsoon, the deora is called for borada' bonga ('dirty water' ritual). The adult members of the household fast from the previous night and shut away the desired number of fowls for the sacrifice. The deora also fasts, and everyone bathes beforehand. The ritual is done in the outer room of the house on a spot newly washed with cowdung. The deora sits facing east and holds a winnowing fan containing arua rice. He burns sal gum incense and offers three piles of arua rice to Singbonga. All the village bongako are called upon, and the deora then sings the Asur kahani in a high

monotone voice, treating it like a set of mantra. At intervals, he kills a fowl and offers it to the appropriate spirit. The order is rather different from that used by the pahan. A white fowl comes first, but it is followed by a black fowl, and both are taken to each household member to be touched on the forehead by the feet of the fowls. The black fowl, in this case, is for chandibonga in Sukuhatu and for hatukhunt bonga (village lineage bonga) in Kadu. This latter spirit is also identified, in Kadu, with haramburia (the ancestors, or old people). A red fowl follows the black one, and the household ancestors receive a grey speckled fowl, which is dedicated, but not sacrificed, in the ading by the household head. This ritual is to protect the house against the 'dirty water' which brings diseases at the beginning of the monsoon, and against snakes and tigers during the coming agricultural operations. It is also aimed at evil spirits generally, and particularly against witches and people who cast spells through the evil eye and through evil thoughts. The fowl which is dedicated but not sacrificed is held over until after the harvesting, when the deora again performs a ritual of protection for the gathered crops of the household. If the harvest has been a good one, the fowl is then sacrificed. The meat of the fowls is the property of the household, but the heads are cooked separately and eaten by the deora. For performing a ritual, the deora receives about 1¼ rupees and his food. From households to which he is called regularly, he receives a seer (2 lb.) of rice twice a year and a seer of various grains whenever he is called out on other occasions.

He is also called if a household is suffering from poor crops or other misfortunes. In the case of a poor harvest, he may be asked to do baba roa aragu. Baba is paddy, and roa means both the seed or grain, and in other contexts, the 'shade' or umbul. Aragu means to make less or to lower. The deora stands a bundle of paddy stalks against the outer wall of the ading and sacrifices a white fowl to Singbonga. In the ritual which I attended, he also sacrificed a pigeon. This was the only occasion on which a pigeon sacrifice was observed. Another aragu ritual, performed by the deora, is horo roa aragu. Horo is a person, and roa, in this context, would appear to mean the person's shade. It is done when a person is just recovering from an illness or an attack by witchcraft, and so the meaning of the name would be 'the lessening of the soul', referring to a fear that the person might have died. As it is done when recovery is well on the way, it is a form of thanks, as well as an attempt to ward off any further attacks. In the case of a straightforward illness, a white fowl is offered to Singbonga, but if the agent was thought to have been a witch, a black fowl is killed instead and it is taken to a white ant hill for the sacrifice and eaten on the spot. All the remains of the ritual are then left behind on the hill.

Another major concern of the deora is the ritual known as soso bongga or enda ruar. Soso is the marking nut tree, which gives off a caustic black juice which can be used for marking purposes. It is widely used in protective rituals to guard against the activities of malicious agents. Enda ruar

means to 'throw out and restore'. This ritual is done once a year during transplanting to ward off the evil eye and sorcery which may attack the lowland crops. It is also done after weddings in the groom's house following the first visit to the young couple to the bride's parents. The ritual is to counteract any harmful agents which might have followed the girl from her natal village.

A diagram is drawn on the floor of the outer room. This is basically rectangular in shape with wavy lines around the outer edge. The lines of the rectangle are drawn first in rice flour and water, secondly in charcoal and third in red earth taken from the cooking hearth. A plant is drawn on the right of the rectangle, and there is an opening in the lines at one end. A handful of arua rice is put in the middle of the drawing and a hen's egg is balanced on top of the rice. A soso twig is split at one end and balanced over the drawing so that it holds up the egg. The diagram was said to represent the Asur myth. The outline is the furnace and the opening is the space through which the bellows were blown. The leaf outside the furnace is a paddy plant. The egg represents the egg used by Singbonga to defeat the Asurs at marbles.

The deora sits before this diagram, sifting the arua rice in his winnowing fan, and singing the Asur kahani in the form of a mantra and calling on the bongako for protection. The ritual is generally performed at night and takes several hours, as there are many stops in the middle for refreshment. There is no sacrifice in this ritual and the egg is afterwards baked and distributed among the household members. In the

case of a post wedding ritual, it is given only to the bride and bridegroom. The articles used in the ritual are thrown away outside on a path, but the eggshell is kept and put in the eaves above the house door along with some soso branches. The soso branch used in this when it is performed for transplanting, is put in a lowland field to guard the growing rice crops.

In Hoffman's version of this ritual, the diagram was said to represent the earth, and the wavy lines around the edge were the sea. This interpretation is the same as that given by Toppo³² in his study of the Oraon among whom this ritual is a central religious observance. The egg is offered to their supreme spirit, Dherme, who is sometimes equated with Singbonga. It is interesting that a ritual which forms the main community observance among the Oraon, should be used by the Munda as efficacious against malicious and peripheral spirits.

The deora's divinatory powers are most commonly employed in cases of sickness, theft and witchcraft. In sickness, the deora combines the role of diviner with that of healer, and treatment is usually a combination of sacrifice and native medication. Deora may, however, treat sicknesses without resort to divination or ritual, and in such cases their role approximates to that of the baid, or native (usually ayurvedic) healer encountered all over India.

Many different methods of divination are found. One of the most common is through the use of rice grains. The deora pours arua rice grains into his left hand. He may invoke

Singbonga first as the mediator between himself and the trouble making spirit by asking the supreme spirit to make the cause manifest in the divination. He drops a few grains on the floor and then, with his forefinger, strikes the ground three times and draws a circle three times around the rice. After calling out the name of the bonga which he thinks may be responsible, he then pairs off the grains, and if there is an even number, this indicates that the bonga under suspicion is not responsible. This is repeated until the same answer is received either way, three times in succession. If more than one bonga is suspected, the counting will be repeated. Singbonga may also be first invoked as a possible agent of the sickness. The required sacrifices are determined in the same way, although for Singbonga, Burubonga and those bongako connected with a specific colour of fowl this is generally a formality. If the sick person does not begin to recover, however, it may be because a more substantial sacrifice, such as a goat or a sheep, is required. This is known as duku piti nam, or 'finding out the sickness'.

The sacrificial animals are then dedicated to the spirit requiring them. They are given arua rice to eat, and a feather or a claw may be taken to signify the setting apart of the promised sacrifice (agom) which is performed when the person has recovered. The 'promise' is recorded by hanging a bundle of sal leaves or a small earthen pot containing the remaining arua rice and the claw or feather in the eaves inside the house. This is taken down at the time of the sacrifice.

The process known as chau- jang
 (@hau- means rice)

which is referred to in the Asur myth, is in fact a whole set of processes used by deora in divining sickness. Arua rice is always used, and each deora has his own special method. Some use a winnowing fan and a grinding stone on which to drop the grains. Others put the grains into a sal leaf and scrutinize the resulting pattern. Secrets were jealously guarded and little information could be obtained on the nature of the pattern sought by the deora in chauli jang, but at least one deora implied that he looked for the shape of the bonga in the rice.

The perception of patterns is also the object of another method using fresh water (garha da) drawn from the well of the patient's village first thing in the morning. The deora lights a small earthen light (tati) and fills a four-tailed leaf cup (kata puru) with oil. He puts four wicks inside the cup and lights them. After invoking the help, either of Singbonga or of his personal guru, he drops oil into the fresh water one drop at a time, and scrutinizes the pattern made by the oil on the surface of the water. One Sukuhatu deora also used this method with the urine of the patient. When arua rice or fresh water is brought to the deora, he usually attempts to divine or guess the age, condition and circumstances of the patient without being told.

The other main method of divination for sickness which was encountered, is panji, or gurudiri - grinding stone divination. Three paila (measures of about a seer) of red upland paddy are required for this, and it is done in the courtyard of the patient's house, whereas the other methods

can be done anywhere. Two of the paila are emptied onto a freshly cowdunged spot, and the remaining paila of rice is levelled off and fixed into the pile of paddy. The stone is balanced on this paila, so that the surface is flat and it can be turned without friction. Three marks of red vermilion are made on the stone. A young unmarried boy is said to be the ideal subject to squat on the stone, but on one occasion, this task was performed by another deora. This is a major and expensive ritual for the household, which is not resorted to until other methods have failed, and several deora may come to assist. Singbonga is first invoked, both as mediator and as a possible cause. As he calls out the name of a bonga, the deora throws arua rice at the man on the grinding stone. The stone will turn of its own accord when the correct diagnosis is made.

The deora commences with the village spirits, and then goes on to less established spirits, such as the ghosts of people who died unnatural deaths. Only if no success is achieved here, does the deora go on to the possibility of the cause being a witch. Several causes are general elicited, each requiring a sacrifice, the nature of which must be determined by the same method. The deora then asks the stone to tell who is to perform the sacrifice and where it is to be done. The agom (sacrificial promise) is then hung in the eaves of the house. No time limit is set on the performance of this sacrifice, and the promise may be renewed indefinitely by taking down the old pot or sal leaves and hanging up new ones.

A variety of medicines may also be made up and given to the patient. These consist mostly of roots ground up into a powder or made up into a paste for swallowing. The generic term for Munda native medicine as opposed to that given by the dispenser at government centres, is retranu (lit. 'root medicine').

Any of these methods of divination may yield the answer that a witch is responsible. In such a case, the witch is not named directly for fear of reprisals, although there is generally tacit agreement between the diviner and the family of the patient as to the identity of the malefactor. If witchcraft is divined, the deora directs his efforts towards protecting the household from further harm by mantra, often invoking the deora's 'personal' deity, which can stop the witch from inflicting any more evil.³³ Medicine is also given and a sacrifice may be promised if the witch ceases to trouble the patient.

'Witchfinding', in the sense of divining an accused person's guilt or innocence, is not often seen. Fear of reprisals, of both an external and internal kind, is strong among deora. Some denied that they had the ability to find witches at all, but others said that they were only prepared to do it in villages where they were unknown. The method described by Hoffman³⁴ is substantially the same as the grinding stone divination used in cases of sickness, and this method is still extant in Kadu, where a young girl had been accused of witchcraft shortly before I arrived. In Hoffman's account, the whole village assembles and the person sitting

on the stone describes, while in a trance-like state, the location of the witch's house, the number of the witch's children and similar details, thus leaving no doubt as to the person referred to. In Kadu, the accused was already named, and guilt was determined by the movement of the grinding stone when the person's name was called out.

In Sukuhatu, the grinding stone method was not used at all by deora, and a person wishing to establish the guilt of a supposed witch beyond any doubt would travel to a marangdeora ('big deora') or bhagat in some other village and receive his answer while the deora was in a trance state. Although many accusations were made during my stay in the village, none were made explicit at village level, in the way described by Hoffman. One method was, however, described to me by a Sukuhatu deora. He calls an unmarried boy, who brings with him two bows and arrows, which he holds one under each arm. The names of suspects are called out and when the guilty person's name is reached, the bow and arrows will 'raise themselves', so that one is poised in front of the boy and one is poised behind him as if ready to 'shoot' the witch. A similar method using bamboo poles was also described, but neither was witnessed.

Similar methods are used to catch thieves, but grinding stone divination was considered to be the most efficacious in both villages. While it was freely used in Kadu, however it was never seen to be employed in Sukuhatu, although the possibility of its use was discussed in one particular case of theft within the village. In Sukuhatu, divining a thief was

considered to be as dangerous as divining a witch, and so the services of a deora in a different village were generally utilized.

A variety of cures may be used by the deora apart from the administration of oral medicines. Hakaranu ('hanging medicine') is worn by practically all villagers, including Christians, both as a prophylactic and as a cure for existing ailments. This is made up of a compound of roots and leaves, often mixed with the dried parts of dead animals. Many, though not all, of the elements reflect the principle of analogy with the particular complaint, such as the dried fruit of kadru, which is bumpy in appearance and is used in the treatment of mumps or swellings. The parcel is tied up in a leaf or put inside a small metal tube and hung around the neck, waist or wrist.

Sickness 'sweeping' is a common method of curing. This may be done in conjunction with the taking of oral medicine. It is also commonly used to relieve snakebite. The patient sits on the floor with the deora and he burns sal gum and recites mantra. Using a twig extracted from the household broom made on the day of the ba festival, he shakes it to and fro, parallel with the floor. If the sweeping is successful, the sickness gradually leaves the patient, passing downwards through the body and out through the toes. The sweeping is performed each day for an odd number of days and on each occasion the length of the twig is measured. If on a given day it has become shorter, then the deora stops the treatment after the next odd day. If it has become longer (a hypothetical possibility) the treatment is continued the next day.

If the length remains the same, he leaves the patient for two days to watch for any improvement. Sweeping is also done with a sal leaf, and in the case of a visible sore or wound, the affected place is swept with the leaf to the accompaniment of mantras.

Another type of removal is by sucking or pulling the poison or an offending object out of the patient's body. One particular instance may be described to illustrate this process. An elderly woman came to Kadu, which was her daughter's village, to consult a deora who was thought to be particularly good. She was suffering from stomach pains. She lay on a mat and the deora burnt sal gum and said a mantra. Several sal leaves were brought, and oil and turmeric were mixed in a leaf cup. He took up a leaf and passed it three times over the patient's stomach, and then dipped it in the oil and turmeric, studying it for a moment to see if any extraneous objects were adhering to it. He felt the patient's stomach and then applied the leaf to a particular place and pulled the skin hard. The leaf was then put in the cup of oil. The process was repeated several times and each leaf was put into the cup. When he had finished, he took up the oil and examined it for foreign bodies. A small black object was spotted and pointed out to me. I found it quite unrecognizable, but the deora declared that it was a piece of skin of sukrijilu (pig's flesh), and that a black pig's hair had also come out during the pulling. The verdict was that a witch had attempted to poison the woman by sending poison into a meat curry recently eaten by the patient.

Poison sucking is performed in a similar way. The deora

sucks at the part causing pain and ejects the 'poison' into a leaf cup. The poison is then burnt.

The deora is usually called in the case of a difficult or prolonged childbirth. He may perform a divination with chauli jang to discover the agent responsible and then offer the appropriate sacrifice on the spot. He may also ascribe the difficulty to some past misdemeanour on the part of the woman, particularly in relation to any pre-marital adventures. In such a case, the woman is told to name her old lover, and the deora then cuts a turmeric root in half to signify the complete severance of this previous relationship.

The other main aspect of the deora's work is the exorcism of evil spirits from a patient. This is usually accomplished with mantra adjuring the spirit to leave the sick person and offering it sacrifices, to be made on a spot (usually on a white-ant hill) outside the village. The patient may also be smoked with chilli to drive out the bonga, and in one case which I witnessed, a deora spent a whole night in a state of semi-trance singing to a patient. After a spirit has been driven out, it may be caught in a pot or iron tube (putungi mered) and 'nailed out' or fastened to the ground to prevent escape.

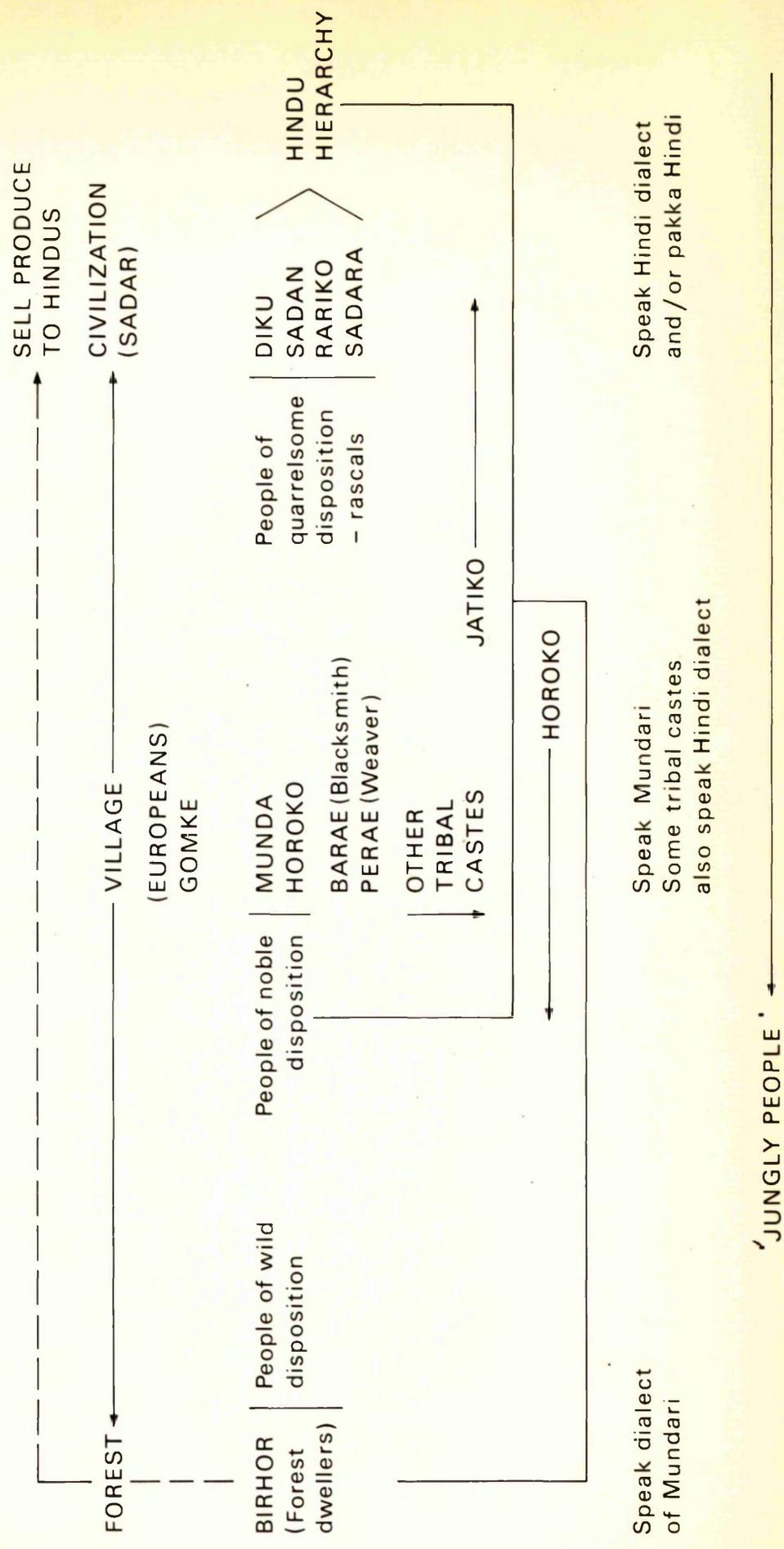
The deora is a practitioner of almost infinite resourcefulness, and the extent of his role in village life may have important social correlates, as I hope to show in a later chapter. His methods and techniques are evidently borrowed from a wide variety of sources, and the extent of this borrowing is, I will suggest, socially significant.

Footnotes to Chapter IV

- 1 Hoffman Vol. Vi p. 1648-1658.
- 2 Elliot-Beames 1845 p. 151.
- 3 ibid p. 159.
- 4 Elmore 1915 p. 37.
- 5 ibid.
- 6 Enc. Religion and Ethics Vol. II 1909 p. 158.
- 7 Wilkins 1882 p. 18.
- 8 Some ethnographic details are contained in Hoffman Vol. I p. 243.
- 9 ibid. p. 243.
- 10 Hunter op.cit p. 246.
- 11 This Rice beer is brewed specially for ritual occasions and may not be drunk by affines or outsiders. It is known as tapan ili, or 'beer for sacrifice'. If tapan ili is not available, ili ranu, the white tablet of ingredients used to ferment the rice beer, may be used instead after dissolving it in water.
- 12 see p. 180.
- 13 This burning ritual occurs in Hasada villages, but was not witnessed in Kadu.
- 14 Yamada 1970 pp. 105-9.
- 15 Hoffman Vol. XI p. 3202.

- 16 For a description see p. 187.
- 17 But note the recurrence of the number 'seven', again in relation to clan areas. It supports the idea that the 'seven boundaries' is a standardized measure for marking clan territories.
- 18 cf. Bailey op.cit.
- 19 Yamada 1970 p. 139.
- 20 See p. 255.
- 21 Hoffman Vol. III p. 829.
- 22 See p. 176.
- 23 See p. 274.
- 24 See, for example, Elwin 1955 p. 54.
- 25 See p. 204.
- 26 'Oraon Religion and Customs' 1928 p. 181.
- 27 Campbell J. B. O. R. S. Vol. II 1916 p. 450.
- 28 Elwin 1955 pp. 139-200.
- 29 Furer Haimendorf 'The Afterlife in Indian Tribal Belief' in Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 1953 p. 37. (The Frazer Lecture 1951).
- 30 Roy 'The Megalithic Culture of the Khasis' Anthropos Vol. 58 pp. 520-556.
- 31 Russell 1916, p. 28.
- 32 Toppo 1964, p. 63.
- 33 For the Mantra see p. 267.

HUMAN CLASSIFICATION AMONG CHOTANAGPUR MUNDAS



CHAPTER V

THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE: MEANING AND CLASSIFICATION

The Munda universe is classified into the animate, which encompasses humans, animals, bongako and heavenly bodies; and the inanimate, which includes all plant life as well as objects which are inanimate in our sense of the term. The distinction is mainly brought out in the formation of pluralities. Suffixes are used to indicate a plurality of two (king) and any number greater than two (ko) when referring to animate objects. Pluralities of inanimate objects cannot be expressed in Mundari, except where context makes this clear. Classification thus distinguishes living things into, first, ji-jontuko (all men, animals and insects), sing-sandom (all trees and woody plants), and tasad-rura (all grasses and herbs). Plants are inanimate because they have no umbul, but all living things are endowed with ji, which is the life principle or essence. Animals are thought to have a rudimentary sort of umbul which does not survive after death, but they are chiefly distinguished from plants because of their ability to move and feed, that is, they are human-like in their behaviour, but they are different from men in that they have no mon (mind) and thus no responsibility for their actions.

Death is caused by a loss of ji and if it leaves the body, the person collapses and death follows in a short time unless the ji returns promptly. The umbul (which is also known interchangeably as roa, perhaps from the Arabic ruh, meaning 'soul'), leaves the body freely during sleep and

wanders about causing dreams in the possessor. If the roa or umbul stays away for too long, the body becomes ill and wasted, and death results if it does not return. After death, the umbul returns to the ading as an ancestral spirit, or ading bonga. There is some confusion about the fate of the ji. According to Hoffman¹, the ji of man is immortal and goes to bitar pur (the country below) or paromdisum (the country beyond) where it receives appropriate reward or punishment from Singbonga. Bitarpur is the name used by the Oraons to describe the home of the ancestors. It is 'under the earth'² and the Oraon ceremony of calling the soul is concerned with ensuring that the soul is accepted in bitarpur by the other ancestors.

I found little trace of this conception about the fate of the ji. Bitarpur was not taken very seriously, although one or two informants thought it possible that the ji went to another world or to paromdisum (used by Christian Mundas to denote heaven). It was generally thought that the ji disappeared into the air at death, and some informants insisted that the ji does not survive the body. The expression used was ji seno-a-jana: 'the ji has gone completely.' The umbul was the main focus of concern and although the ancestral spirits live in the ading, at least nominally, they were often referred to as if they lived in a separate world which was much the same as the one which they left at death.

The concept of punishment after death is also little in evidence, but the possibility was sometimes alluded to in the case of a particularly wicked deed. The victims of murder

are excluded from full burial rites on the grounds that they have died an accidental death. Murderers are not subject to any ritual prohibition. When I remarked to a Kadu informant that I thought it strange to exclude the murdered rather than the murderer, I was told that the murderer 'would surely be punished by Singbonga in the next world'. The exclusion of murdered persons is, of course, perfectly consistent and logical in terms of the general exclusion of those dying accidentally, but my (non-Christian) informant evidently appreciated the moral overtones of the judgement which I was presenting. I would suggest, in this case, that Christianity has been largely responsible for introducing this particular doctrine of personal punishment after death, and that Hoffman was in fact reaping the rewards of his own evangelical efforts when he recorded this version of the fate of the ji!

Differing opinions were also encountered on the question of interpreting the marks left by the umbul in the flour sprinkled inside the ading. The difference centred on whether the umbul returned in the shape of the animal whose prints could be seen, or whether the umbul became the animal. This distinction is linked with the Munda theory of personality which ascribes to each person a shade (umbul) which can be likened to a quality (raisi) of a particular animal. A person with a tiger-like quality (kula raisi) inspires fear and tends to be a village leader; a person with a cat-like quality (pusi raisi) is a perennial grumbler etc. When the umbul wanders in dreams, it is seen in the shape of the animal to which it is likened. The umbul is also endowed with a quality

of slowness or quickness which is related to the animal to which it is likened. This has important practical consequences, as a person with a noticeably slow or 'heavy' shade (hambal roa) has a similar effect on objects around him. If he commences the season's planting, the paddy will take much longer to grow than usual. A heavy souled person will not be allowed to perform such operations as ear piercing or the castration of animals. He will, however, be asked to take the first rice from a new rice bale, as the remainder will then last longer. The quick or 'light' souled person is the opposite of this in each respect.

Animals are used as metaphors throughout Munda thinking. An animal seen in a dream always represents a man and a man always represents an animal. If the animal enters the house then a human visitor is portended. If anyone dreams of a human death, then it is a sign that the person dreamed of will lose a domestic animal. Certain people are believed to have the ability to turn into wild animals, particularly tigers, and although this ability is generally linked with the practice of witchcraft, it is also said to occur when a person becomes angry or outraged. His behaviour is thus associated with wildness, and the tiger is the main metaphor of the wild and its attendant dangers.³

The type of umbul possessed by a person can be inferred from their behaviour if it shows marked similarities with those connected with a particular animal. It can also be inferred from the animal prints or marks (manda) found upon the flour spread in the ading at umbul ader. In this event, the

manda are interpreted as an indication that the umbul has returned in the shape of the animal with which it has an affinity. It is a small step, however, from this interpretation to the one suggesting that the umbul has 'changed into' an animal in the sense of being reborn on earth in that shape. Linguistically, the two ideas can be expressed in the same way. It is the idea of 'rebirth' (nawa janum: Hindi: newbirth) which changes the interpretation and brings it closer to the Hindu theory of reincarnation. Out of four umbul ader ceremonies which I attended, in only one was it unambiguously stated that the umbul had returned to the ading in animal-like form. In the three others, opinion was divided on the matter and there was some difficulty over the question of how the umbul could return to ading and become another living being simultaneously. Only one informant was able to surmount this difficulty completely by suggesting that umbul ader was a purely nominal ceremony as 'how can a shade return to the house?'

Rebirth does not involve any notion of karma, or cumulative merit from this or any other life. This was clear from the fact that all informants except one (see below) were agreed that men are always reborn in animal form, and that this form was somehow connected with the raisi or quality of the person. The umbul is never reborn as a human. Individual actions in the present life were considered immaterial to the form of one's future birth. One man only gave an interpretation allowing for the possibility of karma. He had returned from army service for his father's umbul ader and jang halang in

Kadu. His father was reborn as a cat and the son felt that this was all right as he can still be reborn as a man in the next life if he is 'good' in his life as a cat. He further rationalised the difficulty noted above by suggesting that the umbul returns to the ading and the roa, conceived as a separate entity, is reborn in a new form. Roa was said to be the same as atma (Hindi: 'soul').

It was evident that Munda thinking about the fate of the dead allowed much room for innovation and reinterpretation by those people aware of different theories on the matter. Both Christianity and Hinduism have well developed theories about the after-life, and such a theory is, on the whole, lacking in Munda thought. I found that this question evinced little curiosity among informants, even among Christian converts. Words to describe such a life, as distinct from the ancestral company, are all borrowed from Indo-Aryan sources and have, according to Hoffman, been mostly introduced by missionaries to fill a conceptual gap. Missionary effort has nevertheless introduced an awareness of the question among those living in contact with Christians, and Hindu ideas have also percolated through, particularly to those employed outside the village. These ideas do not challenge the Munda view so much as augment it in areas where it does not have much to say, and invite synthesis through a process of rationalisation when contradictions become too obvious.

In Munda mythology, all matter was created by Singabonga when the earth was covered with water. This was done with the aid of the tortoise, the crab and the worm. Each one attempted

to build up the soil on top of the water but only the worm was successful as he was able to swallow the earth to bring it up to the surface. Singbonga made the bullock and the plough and tried to level off the earth, but this proved to be very difficult and the country has always remained bumpy and hilly. After he had made the forest, he created Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Buria out of clay, but the models were trodden on by the horse and so Singbonga remade them and took them to the forest where it was safer. He gave them ji and told the couple to live in the forest in future. Later, he taught them to cultivate and gave them eyesight. He created time and divided it into day and night, and yesterday, today and tomorrow. He sent rain for the crops and taught the couple how to worship him with grains and white animals. Finally, he taught them how to make rice beer so that brother and sister would become husband and wife.

The world created by Singbonga in Munda creation myths is strictly a Munda universe. No reference to other castes is to be found and the universe is clearly defined as being the forest. There may be a reference to deliberate isolationism on the part of the Mundas in that portion of the myth dealing with the creation of the first couple. The clay models were broken by the horse, a symbol perhaps of a rejected culture (the Mundas almost never use or keep horses. The only ones seen in the area belong to itinerant traders and local officials). In one version of the myth, however, the tiger (the symbol of the jungle) appears and saves the models from any further depredations by the horse by chasing it away. Singbonga showed

his pleasure with the tiger by endowing it with great strength and a fearsome roar.

All spiritual beings are bongako, and this term is applied to ancestors, ghosts, tutelary spirits and personal deities. Bonga also refers to the performance of any ritual act since, like all Mundari words, it is both noun and verb. Hoffman makes some interesting suggestions on its derivation, one of which relates it to the idiom describing death. 'To exist' is 'to be present', and this is indicated by mena, in the case of an inanimate object, and mena plus an appropriate personal affix for animate beings. 'To die' is 'not to exist', or 'not to be present', and this is indicated by bano. The sentence 'This person is dead' is thus rendered as bangaya or banoga. Hoffman considers⁴ that bonga derives from this usage, in that bongas are simply the shades of those who once lived. However, if this is so, then the concept of a bonga has since undergone considerable change. There was no suggestion that the numerous vindictive spirits which trouble villagers were necessarily the shades or ghosts of the dead, although the spirits mentioned in the Asur myth could perhaps be viewed as the shades of the Asur women. Hoffman saw the animate universe as a continuum from men to ancestors to bongako, and it is certainly true that ancestors and all other spirits are collectively known as bongako, in practice, however a material distinction is made between the two categories. Ancestors never demand sacrifices or behave capriciously. Other bongako may be independently vindictive and their motives are not always open to scrutiny. Singbonga and haparombongako

(ancestors) punish the living from moral authority.

Singbonga punishes offences which affect the community or which offend against the traditions of which bonga is author (Haram kajiketejanae - lit. 'the Old One has ordered it this way'). These offences include incest, human sacrifice, breaches of avoidance rules in respect of certain categories of kin, and the incurring of pollution through mixing with other castes and through the condition known as tiju-u-oko (the presence of fly larvae or eggs in open wounds). Unless expunged, either through the expulsion of the guilty party or through the kanda (purification ceremony) in which a white animal is sacrificed, such offences are liable to bring punishment on the whole community in the form of epidemics, crop failure or other collective misfortune.

Haparombongako only visit misfortunes on their household and only then if their proper worship is neglected or if prohibited persons enter the ading or approach the cooking hearth. They inflict headache and stomach ache. Any worse individual infliction is always ascribed to a village bonga or witch. Divination seldom reveals haparombongako as the causal agent, although Singbonga may be revealed in this context. Singbonga is seldom revealed as a sole cause, however. He is usually in company with a village spirit, in which case it is said that Singbonga has sent his agent to punish the living for some transgression.

Bongako are rarely conceived in anthropomorphic terms. Singabonga is conceived of as a power which is 'everywhere' and which cannot be seen by the human eye. Singi means 'sun' but

it would be erroneous to equate Singbonga with a sun god.

Singi also denotes daylight and time in different contexts.

The Mundas deny that Singbonga is the sun or that he lives in the sun. Indeed, the question of where he is to be found is considered nonsensical although he is occasionally linked in a metaphorical sense, with the sky, or described as being 'on high' (sirmare), as in the Asur myth. He is also often pictured as being in the company of the village spirits and directing their activities. This is in line with the often expressed view that, in the final analysis, only Singbonga knows why things are as they are. This does not, of course, prevent the continual search for a more immediately satisfactory answer through divination. The anthropomorphism of the Asur myth, where Singbonga has a wife, is not sustained in other representations of Singbonga.

Village bongako usually have a territorial referent which is reflected in their name. In this case, the bonga does not 'live' in the stream, forest or mountain, but is an essence of it. If such a bonga troubles a person who strays into its habitat, it manifests itself as a strange noise or as a falling branch of a tree on a still night. Of the bongako derived from the Asur myth, only one now has a specifically female identity. This is Ikirbonga, the pool spirit. In divination, Ikirbonga is very often linked with Burubonga as a jointly acting causal agent. This may be another metaphorical statement of sexual symmetry. Male and female are equally responsible for misfortunes.

Apart from well established village bongako (each

boundary has its own set of bongako) there are numerous bongako of a more peripheral nature which congregate around the village. Some of these are also itinerant and I was often told of 'household' bongako which accompanied families to Assam or other places. These are distinct from haparombongako and are usually worshipped for a specific purpose. 'Wealth' bongako which trade good crops or prosperous deals in return for regular sacrifices are one variety. Another variety is the bonga which acts as a personal tutelary to a witch or deora. Many of these have Hindi or Sadani names.

Ghosts are particularly troublesome to villagers. They are the shades of people who have died unnatural deaths, and they are generally called mua or mua masani (masani is a graveyard where clan outsiders are buried). Murdered persons usually become bongako of the 'household' type, as their shade returns to haunt the murderer until he agrees to make a regular sacrifice to it. The other ghosts wander around their old home in a dispossessed state as they have not been recalled to the ading. They seek the company of the living by appearing in various forms to unsuspecting villagers on lonely paths. Their mode of appearance is similar to that of the village spirits, and they can also appear as animals in the likeness of their umbul. They may cause frights and temporary sickness in this way. The churin, or the ghost of a woman dying in childbirth, is particularly bothersome, as in northern India generally. She causes trouble to men who happen to pass near her, a form of revenge it is said, for her untimely fate. When she is buried, thorns are driven into her

feet to prevent the ghost from escaping. Her appearance is always heralded by a moving light or flame in the darkness. She is also conceived anthropomorphically as a shape with a hollow back. This is perhaps a symbol of the empty womb, reversed in death.

All bongako, except for Singbonga and haparombongako, may be called upon to assist in sorcery. There is no clear cut distinction between witchcraft and sorcery, but there are various modes of description which help to pinpoint the precise nature of the instrumental use of magical powers. All such knowledge is theoretically available to everyone, but a major distinction is made between those who keep a household bonga (bonga manating tana) and worship it in the hope of getting greater prosperity, or protection against misfortune, or who worship it because their ancestors did so; and those who have a personal bonga working on their behalf against other people. They are known as najomani, and this means 'poisoner'. The other users of sorcery are of course the deora, who are described as the witches enemies and who can employ counter sorcery in case of an attack.

The best description of najomani (or najom) which I was able to obtain, came from an elderly Christian deora, or baid, as he called himself. Sukuhatu was his mother's brother's village and he had attended school there. He was one of the few people prepared to talk at length about witchcraft. Some suspected that I was in league with the government in an attempt to stamp it out. The following is a synopsis of his tape-recorded description:

'Witches poison people because they are jealous of them. They can either do it themselves personally or they can ask their bonga to do it. They prepare a special type of poison (najom honda kenteva lit. "they make a poison stew") by catching various types of insects and keeping them in a new unfired earthen pot. When the caterpillars grow on the dead bodies, the witches bake them and ask their bonga to send them to the tiger (I take this to mean that the caterpillars are imbued, by the bonga, with the destructive power of the tiger; but the reference is not entirely clear). The witch eats these caterpillars and begins to obtain power. All witches have a guru (teacher) with whom they meet on dark nights under a tree. The guru instructs them about casting spells and saying mantras. Some people have seen witches gathering to dance. They take a black cat which is really a tiger (bagho chandibonga) but which comes in the disguise of a cat. They put lights on its head and the women dance round wearing brooms around their waist instead of cloths.'

'Witches try out their power first on their husbands or their first born sons. They send a poison spell (ban - Hindi 'arrow') with the help of their bonga. They prove their ability by killing a male member of their family. The other way in which they hurt people is to put the poison in their food. They take an unfired earthen pot and put the head of a cobra inside it. They cover it with earth and water it and sow the seed of rambara (black dhal) inside it. As the plant grows, the poison goes into the fruit, and this is put in the person's food. Another way, is to catch some kulabindiram (tiger spiders). These are the pale coloured spiders which live in holes as tigers live in caves. They are very poisonous and they are kept in mustard oil. The witches smear this oil onto people's cloths when they are hanging out to dry, or they smear it on the plough handle. Witches also keep poison in their nails and then they can slip it into anyone's food or drink. This is done especially at feasts.'

'The witches call especially on chandibonga to help them. There are many chandis, and they are named according to the place where they live. If it lives in an edel tree (silk cotton) then it is an edel chandi. If it appears as

any sort of animal then it is a bagho chandi (tiger chandi). The knowledge of witchcraft (najom) runs in the family. If a man or a woman is najomani, then they will pass on the knowledge to a son or daughter or daughter-in-law. Even if this person does not want to learn, the najombonga will force them to because it wants to have the sacrifices. Mostly, it is women who are witches and they teach their son's wives, but sometimes men are witches. Those who have their own najombonga can turn themselves into a tiger by rubbing the base of their spine on a white ant hill. They do this so that they can eat meat (i.e. they can kill the village animals).'

'The deora can stop the spells sent by a najombonga if they are more powerful. They send the spell back to the najomani. They can also bind witches (najom bandunu). They wait until the witch is going to fetch water and then they make her pot stick to her head or her knee. After a while the deora will release her.'

This account covers most aspects of the beliefs about najom, and its practitioners as far as I could discover them. Although the knowledge may be gained by seeking a practising najomani as a guru, it is generally believed to have been obtained in a semi involuntary fashion through the najombonga worshipped by a parent. The clinching factor which makes a person a najomani as opposed to being a casual experimenter with sorcery or poisonous substances is the possession of destructive power obtained through the worship of a personal bonga. This bonga may be of any variety, such as a buru, ikir, churin, etc. Chandibonga, in various manifestations, happened to be the personal favourite in Sukuhatu. In Kadu, personal najombongas were known simply as najombongako or nasanbongako (from Sanskrit to 'destroy').

Poison is of two sorts. Snake venom injected by a snake,

and the naturally occurring poisons in plants, are called bisi. If a death is due to bisi, it is generally understood as an accidental death. Made up, or manually extracted poisons, are known as maura and this designation covers the compounds used to tip arrows in tiger hunts or to poison vermin, as well as the poisons used by witches. When this latter interpretation is intended, however, the word najom is used, and this covers both manual administration and poisoning by a spell. These spells are called ban and are a kind of magic arrow which the najomani directs his najombonga to send. Ban are of various kinds, for instance, cigarettes (chungi) can be poisoned by sending a chungiban, burning pains in the limb may be ascribed to sengelban (fire ban). One of the deoras in Kadu told me the following mantra to counteract the ubiquitous ban in all its forms:

'Ban chale ban bandho, ageya ban chale ageya ban bandho, bajar ban chale ban bandho, lohar ban chale lohar ban bandho, pani ban chale pani ban bandho, koyla ban chale koyla ban bandho, najari ban chale najari ban bandho, hukka ban chale hukka ban bandho, kesa ban chale kesa ban bandho, bande guru misana ke laig ja bajar.'

translation:

'Fire ban - bind it, lightning ban - bind it, iron ban - bind it, water ban - bind it, charcoal ban - bind it, evil eye ban - bind it, hookah ban - bind it, hair ban - bind it, thread ban - bind it, bridegroom ban - bind it. Guru, bind them all together and do not let them come'.

Ban are thus of two types. One entails the sending of poison into an object, such as hair, thread or water. The other type is the nasan ban, such as the lightning ban, or the bridegroom ban which destroys fertility. These are the

'destructive' bans. The guru is the deora's personal bonga. Mantra to counteract witchcraft are always in the Sadani language.

The evil eye (najari) is also a form of witchcraft which may be exercised consciously or unconsciously. If it is cast onto a field of grain, for instance, it can cause the whole lot to wither and so diversionary techniques are used to counteract it. A whitewashed, upturned pot on a pole is usually placed in lowland fields and vegetable plots. This diverts the gaze and turns it onto the pot instead. Najari ban is used by witches to hurt other people or make children cry. It is sent by reciting a mantra while looking 'malevolently' towards the house of the intended victim. There is a great suspicion of anyone who is too voluble in praise of someone's crops, animals or children. It is feared that such praise hides jealousy which will be transmitted through the evil gaze.

Women are accused of being witches more often than men are accused. In Sukuhatu, five women were well known for their witchcraft, but no men, and in Kadu, one woman and two men were generally pointed out as witches. The men were said to be witches because the mother of one and the wife of the other had both been witches in their lifetimes. A spouse is automatically suspect as it is reasoned that one partner will be unable to keep the knowledge from the other. This conflicts, in a sense, with the baid's statement that a female witch always uses her spouse or first born son as a target for her first poisoning attempt, and a discussion of this point

will be found below.⁵

Finally, witches are identified with tigers and this suggests a homology between the tiger which personifies danger and destruction in the forest or the wild (bir), and the witch, who personifies these dangers when they affect the village or the domestic environment (hatu). A further analogy exemplifies this. Wild rice, which smothers the slower growing cultivated rice, is called najombaba. The witch embodies all that is antisocial, destructive and wild. She destroys her spouse or first born son. At feasts, she gives people poison instead of festive food. She kills domestic animals. Witches are described as 'eating' their victims (najmani horoko jomtanako) when they kill them by poisoning or with a magic spell. Until the British Government made a concerted attempt to suppress the practice, witches detected in divination by a deora were usually killed.⁶

The question of evil and the acquisition of knowledge by practitioners of magic is dealt with in several Naguri myths obtained from the old men of Kadu. The first of these relates the separation of Singbonga from Barandakora, his elder brother, and it forms a prelude to the question of the introduction of evil in the form of nasanbonga:

'Singbonga and Baranda lived together at the mountain which was their home. One day they went to visit the people when they were celebrating a feast. Everyone was singing and dancing and drinking ili, and the brothers were very pleased to see them so happy. After they had started for home, the air became heavy with rain and a stormy wind came up. When the rain started they sought shelter. Singbonga went under the mango and tamarind

trees and Baranda went into the jungle. There he found a shelter, which had been made by the Asurs from leather, and so he stood underneath it. Singbonga went to search for him and found him under the leather roof. When he saw that water was dripping onto Baranda's head, he said sadly that because of this impurity they must divide their kingdom and live separately. Baranda agreed with this and said that he would take three parts and Singbonga should take two parts. Baranda would have a red fowl, goat or buffalo in sacrifice because he is called marangburu and he would take the Nagapur (Naguri) country. Singbonga would have a white animal in sacrifice and his area was to be Latar disum (Hasada area). Baranda remained in the mountain, but Singbonga went to live on high (sirmare).'

Nasanbongako (destructive bongas) were introduced in the following way:

'Singbonga had two wives. One day while they were both drunk they had a quarrel, and the younger wife pushed the elder one out of the house. The senior wife was very cross, and turning round and round, and waving her lahanga round her body, she asked Burubonga (Baranda) to harm Singbonga's only son who was the child of the younger wife. The child became ill and his mother told Singbonga of the cause. They went to search for the senior wife and they found her in a field where she had become a bright light with flames issuing from her mouth, and fierce big eyes and a long tongue. Baranda came and helped Singbonga to put her in a basket and advised him to take her to the thakur tura deota (the chief guru of the witchfinders). The deota tried to get rid of it by taking it to many villages (there follows a long list of villages up and down the Naguri country). At one place the owner of a pond opened the basket and all his fish immediately died. Eventually, they took her to Kaled village where the people were digging a pond. They had decided to bury her there. The senior wife did not want to be buried, however, and she agreed that in future she would not trouble anyone provided that they gave her arua rice regularly. So she was turned into a bonga and is called nasanbonga or purnakhuntihankarbonga (lit. 'bonga of the old lineage') and is worshipped twice a year in every household by the deora.'

In the Naguri area, Baranda is Burubonga, or the mountain spirit to whom a red fowl is sacrificed, and who may be identified as a clan god in terms of the association of a clan with a particular mountain. He is also represented in these myths as the elder brother of Singbonga. In other words, he was superior to Singbonga until his subsequent fall from grace and later identification with the principle of evil (nasanbonga). I have already suggested that the decline in omnipotence of Burubonga is connected with sedentarization and the change to a predominantly wet rice economy, and these myths lend support to the contention that Burubonga was once of greater importance than he is now.

The Hasada Mundas were largely unfamiliar with both the name Baranda and the myths, and in sarna rituals in the Naguri area, the mountain spirit is still called Burubonga. The name Baranda thus figures only in references to magic and witchcraft and in household rituals. Barandakora is also worshipped by the Sadans. In the myth describing the separation of the two brothers, Singbonga takes for his kingdom, Latar disum (low country) or the Hasada area. This is, for the Mundas, the area of cultural 'purity', where there are almost no Hindu landholders and where Munda language and culture is said to flourish unsullied by the diku influence. Baranda, on the other hand, takes the Naguri country where aliens have moved in, taken land and introduced foreign ideas. In other words, they have made Naguri culture 'impure', and this is paralleled by the impurity suffered by Baranda when he shelters under a leather roof made by the alien, and hence

impure, Asurs.

These myths are in a sense a complement to the Asur myth, as they repeat the themes of moral victory and capitulation. Burubonga loses his position of superiority by becoming impure in the sense of losing his caste and being associated with the principle of destruction (nasan). This principle is then enshrined as punakhuntihankarbonga, or bonga of the old lineage. The duality of Burubonga is expressed by the change of name. Burubonga is the village spirit propitiated by the pahan in sarna rituals. Barandakor (Baranda the man), a spirit also of the Sadans, is associated with witchcraft and loss of caste. This association forms the basis of the moral victory. The forces of evil, in the form of nasanbonga, were introduced by outsiders. This was clearly formulated by people in both villages who stated that there was no witchcraft (nasan or or najom) before the diku came. These myths thus contribute to the ethnic stereotypes held by the Mundas which cast them as noble, simple and pure, at least before the diku arrived; and the diku themselves who are evil, cunning and impure. Like the Asur myth, these myths of Baranda may well have stemmed from a non-Munda source, but their interpretation by Munda bards is a highly original one, concerned particularly with the demarcation of an ethnic boundary of a physical and social nature.

Munda statements about non-Mundas are generally dogmatic and uncompromising. They emphasise the separateness of the Mundas in terms of their customs, character and way of life.

The true Munda is a cultivator and never an artisan. The idiom of caste pollution is used to describe this separateness, which is maintained through endogamy and restricted commensality. Any outsider is liable to be classed as a diku, with all its overtones of hostility, in situations such as that of the Kadu market dispute,⁷ where Munda identity is being stressed to the exclusion of all other considerations. However, the inflexibility so noticeable in verbal pronouncements is less evident in practice. The Mundas are dependent on a wide range of service castes to provide for their needs, and the relationship between these village service castes and their Munda patrons is no different, except in respect of marriage and commensality, from the relationship between one Munda and another. Caste stereotypes may be invoked if a quarrel breaks out, but this is not a common occurrence. Only one such quarrel was observed during the year, and this was settled in the same way as any minor village dispute.

This interdependence is reflected in various prohibitions and practices which maintain the opposition between cultivator and artisan. Many Mundas know how to make baskets and umbrellas and various types of mats from bamboo, date palm and other fibres. These articles are made by the Turi, a basketmaking and weaving caste who supply the Mundas either on a village basis or through the local market. They supply, in particular, the winnowing fans, sowing baskets and any other article connected with wet rice agricultural production; and it is these items which may not be made by the Mundas

themselves. If this rule is broken, it is said that there will be a drought that year.

This interdependence is brought out symbolically in the Munda dance, known as paiki (sword or stick fencing). This is done by one or two individual male performers, and there are one or two dancers in most villages, who perform at weddings, buru or feasts of any kind. The performer wears a brightly coloured costume which is basically red in colour with multi-coloured streamers and ribbons sewn around the ankles. He carries a sword and metal shield. The dances and the dancers imitate the fights and wars which are said to have taken place between the tribe and the diku. Mundas and Munda blacksmiths may dance the paiki and they must be accompanied by Ghasi drummers and not by Munda drummers. Before a dance is performed, the paiki dancer worships Burubonga by sacrificing a red fowl, and the Ghasis sacrifice a black fowl to Kali. Opposition and interdependence are enshrined in the paiki dance. It depicts the struggle between Munda and diku, yet it cannot be performed without diku drumming. The sacrifice of black animals is always associated with dangerous spirits, sometimes of a Hindu nature. The shields used by the dancers are also made by Hindu metal workers and not by the village blacksmith.

There was also some suggestion that this opposition is given symbolic expression in ritual inversion. In the umbul ader ceremony (recalling of the shade), the Mundas make up the leaf cup of food for the umbul by putting the meat at the bottom, the rambara pulse in the middle and the rice on the

top. The village caste people reverse the order of the rice and rambara. Particular attention was paid to this point at the ceremonies which I attended, and it was clearly of some importance, although no one offered an explanation for it except in terms of a custom laid down by the ancestors. The possible significance of such inversion as a statement about caste boundaries occurred to me only after leaving the field, and so other examples of this kind may well exist. Unfortunately, I failed to explore the point further.

Idioms of Separation

I shall now consider the way in which these various political boundaries are drawn by looking at the idioms used to express inclusion, exclusion and incorporation.

The term Munda was first coined early in the nineteenth century by British officials. Its specific meaning is 'substantial' or 'wealthy' and it may describe any cultivator of substantial means. It is now used mainly in the sense of village headman. This is a hereditary position held by an agnatic descendant of the village founder, and the Munda lineage usually has the biggest holdings. The use of this term on a tribal basis is thus of recent origin, and it is only in overtly political contexts that Mundas will refer to themselves by this name to distinguish them from outsiders.

Normally, they refer to themselves simply as 'men, or 'human beings' a term which also describes their language. The word horo (plural horoko) thus describes a human body, a human being, a means of communication and a separate race and

is part of a further, tripartite classification of the universe into men, animals and plants. It also carries the meaning of 'completeness', in the sense of 'to grow into a man', or of a grub to become a fully fledged insect. This is, I think, suggestive of a certain social isolation in that they did not find it necessary to devise ways of classifying the universe of men. The extension of the term horo to include non-Mundas is thus a complicated question. The term dikuhoroko would be perfectly understandable to a Munda as signifying diku human beings, yet to be a human being is really to be a Munda, and so there is a tendency either to use the term jati (from the Hindi word for 'caste') to talk about the diku, who thus become diku-jatiko; or to talk about dikurariko, and rari here signifies 'those of quarrelsome disposition'.

Horo is, therefore, opposed in some way to diku, but to understand this opposition, we have to know who is diku. The term diku refers basically to the Hindu caste hierarchy. Landowning Hindus and Mohammedans are diku, and the use is extended to all those castes who serve them and whose language is Sadani, the Chotanagpur Hindi dialect. Europeans, such as missionaries and anthropologists are not diku, but pundihoroko, or white human beings. However, in the case of white missionaries or still remembered colonial officials, the term of respect, Gomke, meaning 'lord' or 'respected person' is more often used.

Turning to the tribal hierarchy, the picture becomes more complex, as the tribal castes are etajatiko, or 'other

castes', yet in everyday contexts, they are horoko as opposed to diku rariko. Blacksmiths are baraehoroko rather than baraejatiko, but a question phrased in terms of 'what jati is he?', will elicit the answer baraejati.

The Munda view of the social universe can be seen on a spectrum from the forest or wilderness to civilization as it is represented by the Hindu division of labour. (see p.252) Both extremes are undesirable, as is illustrated by the position of the Birhor, or forest dweller, who is really a nomadic Munda. Just as Mundas represent wildness and junglyness to the diku, so the Birhor represents these negative qualities to the Munda. Yet the forest and its associations of wildness are also positive qualities. The forest provides food and its spirits control the rainfall. Mundas are able to turn into tigers by performing certain magical operations in the forest. If they enter the village they then personify destruction and are associated with witches, but if an angry man turns into a tiger in the village and then runs into the forest he is a noble man and respected. Birhors, on the other hand, are in the habit of turning into jackals, the symbol of the scavenger who is neither inside nor outside the village, and though Birhors live in the forest, they nowadays subsist by selling twine ropes to Hindu traders.

I shall now consider the ways in which separation is maintained by seeing what use the Mundas make of the Hindu purity and pollution idioms. I have already indicated the use of jati to describe something which approximates to the Hindu caste, and which I take to be a Hindi loan word. However,

this concept seems to have undergone some cultural elaboration since it passed into the Munda vernacular. It has become a general classificatory tool, and I will note some of its usages here.

It can indicate a caste or tribe affiliation, and is also used in the sense of members of one class, or kili. Jati-kiliko are members of an exogamous clan, or blood relatives. A person becomes bejati, or outcaste, when they break caste rules on intermarriage or commensality. In other contexts, jati may be translated as species or genus. All plants and animals have a jati, as do categories of plants and animals, for instance edible food, or red fowls. It is used to classify men in ways other than their caste, such as a class of beggars or a class of good men, and it also has the meaning of disposition, in the sense of 'what kind of man is that', or 'what is his character like?'

There are a whole range of meanings which signify the right and proper state of a person or thing. A child enters its jati when it is purified after birth and a boy enters his jati when he marries and becomes subject to caste laws. An animal enters its jati when it is castrated or when it has become domesticated, and a burial stone is jati when it has been inaugurated with a sacrifice. The same expression describes the admission of a daughter-in-law to her new house to make her eligible to receive ancestral offerings. A child which likes to be cuddled is a jati hon and a person who 'keeps himself to himself' is similarly described.

Finally, jati describes a magical property of an

implement such as a hunting axe or an arrow. It is a sort of spirit or essence which is lost if the object is not correctly used. An arrow, for instance, loses its jati when used to shoot a jackal.

I have not so far come across this degree of elaboration in any other ethnographic literature, and it may be that the Mundas are culturally unique in this respect. I suspect, however, that most Indianists have tended to interpret the concept of jati too narrowly in equating it only with caste and then implying that it carried always a connotation of hierarchy. It seems to me that the Munda idiom is a very logical extension of the term, which seems to imply here separation rather than hierarchy, order rather than disorder and the proper state of objects, animals and persons generally.

It is this latter use which perhaps comes closest to the Hindu ideas of purity, but I am not satisfied that it exactly corresponds. Pollution, in terms of the eruption of the organic into the social universe, clusters around the usual events such as childbirth and death, although it should be noted that there are no menstrual taboos. Pollution of this type may be said to be of the dangerous contact kind. People who do not observe taboos become ill or are hit by other misfortunes.

The other context is which purity and impurity operates is in what Dumont calls the 'religious division of labour' and the permanent attribution of a certain level of impurity to particular occupations.⁸ It appears that the Mundas have

such a notion which serves to mark them off from their artisan castes. Two concepts are important here. One is humu which means defilement of a physiological, social and metaphorical kind, and the other is jutha, or jutid, which is evidently the Hindi loan word for a state of pollution. Humu coincides with our own concept of dirt, in that it can be extended to cover moral reprehensibility as well as actual filth. Humu can also describe the general notion of social impurity entailed in a breach of caste rules, but the key to the impurity itself lies in the meaning of jutha. This may be translated as 'touch' and can carry the neutral connotation of touching with any part of the body. More specifically, it means defilement by saliva or by food touched by a low caste person. All saliva defiles, whether of animals or men and it is likened to a form of bodily poisoning, as jutid refers also to the saliva of a snake and the swellings caused by contact with any sort of poison or snake venom.

Thus a person incurs impurity, by eating any food defiled by saliva, but he loses his caste, by eating food touched or cooked by another caste, or by marrying into another caste. He does not lose his caste by performing the function of any other caste. It is, for instance, perfectly permissible to learn the trade of the blacksmith and still remain a Munda, although there is an interesting proviso to this. A Munda may make any of the iron implements of the blacksmith except the needle which is used by Munda women to sew their mats. This case seems to parallel that of the sowing baskets which must be made by the basket maker caste.

The same applies to weaving, which may be performed by a Munda provided that a different method of soaking the thread is used from that used by the Perae who soaks it in the starchy water in which parboiled rice has been cooked and which is then jutid, or defiled by touch. No occupation can be said to be intrinsically impure. Leather working is usually left to the Ghasis and shoe-maker castes, yet bows and certain types of drum are made by Mundas, and these require the use of leather thongs and skins.

It seems to me that although there are obvious correspondences or parallels in the values of Mundas and Hindus, there are also very significant differences. I suggest that, for the Mundas and other tribes in India with a history of disengagement from the dominant culture exemplified in a sustained effort to hang on to their territorial autonomy, the dominant value which articulates their system is endogamy, and that the hierarchical appearance of their caste system is belied by their notions of purity and impurity and their classification of the social and organic universe.

To be a Munda is to maintain a balance between the two ends of the forest/civilisation spectrum. To be organically undifferentiated is to be with the Birhor, and they are despised because they are scavengers. They cannot plough or work the land. They are dondo - a term which means foolish and which is also applied to anyone not knowing the techniques of agriculture. They are dependent on Hindus for part of their livelihood. To be a Munda is thus to be a cultivator and have no dependence on a superior group of people. Artisans

are inferior, not because their occupations are polluting but because they are not cultivators and are thus in a relationship of dependency. Separation from them rests on what is almost a racial ideology. People of other castes are of different species and different blood, so assimilation is excluded.

The ethnicity of the present day Mundas rests to a large extent on a colonial fiction. They have not cultivated the land from time immemorial. The land tenure system which was encapsulated by colonial legislation is not the system which was created by their ancestors in the beginning of time, as their myths would have it. Their religion is largely borrowed from the Dravidian Oraons and their values have not, as Dumont recently put it, 'escaped the influence of Indian civilization'.⁹

But if the analysis is left at a statement about influences, then it is still culturology, for it is apparent that Hindu influences can be turned into tribal values, and what is borrowed takes on a meaning consonant with its new context. This is why to call the Mundas a caste would be to describe only a partial reality and to discuss their values only as emulation of those of the Hindu caste system is to be guilty of a cultural imperialism not different in its essentials from the insistence that tribes in India represent an unsullied remnant of the non-Aryan population.

Footnotes to Chapter V

- 1 Hoffman Vol. XII p. 3619.
- 2 Toppo 1964 p. 95.
- 3 It should be noted that the Mundas go out of their way to avoid open confrontations and displays of anger towards each other. Great emphasis is placed on the public mediation of disputes, the dissipation of bad feeling and the reproof of all parties for the fact of quarrelling in addition to the actual rights and wrongs of the case.
- 4 Hoffman Vol. II p. 614.
- 5 See p. 325.
- 6 Hoffman Vol. X p. 2921.
- 7 See p. 131.
- 8 Homo Hierarchicus 1966 p. 49.
- 9 Contributions Vol. VI p. 121.

SECTION III RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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CHAPTER VI

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CHAPTER VI VILLAGE CASE STUDIES

Summary of Sections I and II

In Section I, an attempt was made to set the scene by examining the history of Munda society through documentary evidence and also through the subjective interpretations of the Mundas themselves. Munda beliefs about their past were seen to affect their present behaviour and attitudes towards those people whom they consider to be outsiders and who traditionally posed a threat to Munda autonomy through the alienation of Munda ancestral land.

Present-day Munda society cannot be understood outside the context of British colonial policy, and particular attention was paid to the background against which policy decisions were made. The major feature of British legislation was the attempt to 'protect' the customary rights of tribal cultivators against further alienation, and to give security of tenure and a degree of protection against summary sale to those cultivators who had become raiya, or tenants, of non-tribal landlords. This was done by legally endorsing the customary rights of bhuinhar cultivators in the Naguri area, and khuntkattidar in the Hasada area, and imposing a ban on the alienation of tribal land to non-tribals or to lineage outsiders. In 1955, this ban was also extended to include tribal raiya land, thus giving legally enforceable protection to Mundas as a whole against any further loss of land.

Of the three main types of tenure, the khuntkatti system is closest to the traditional ideology of ancestral lineage

land. It differs from the bhuinhari system in three main ways. First, the village quit rent is fixed in perpetuity, whereas bhuinhar are liable to rent enhancement, particularly if they improve their holding by converting higher terraced lands into lowland. Secondly, khuntkattidar have absolute rights in the use and disposal of upland, waste and trees within the village boundary. Bhuinhari land does not encompass rights in untterraced upland, which is assessed as rai-yati land. Thirdly, until the dispossession of Zamindars and intermediaries, bhuinhar were subject to a diku landlord who was nominally a lessee of the Maharajah of Chotanagpur and who lived in the area from which he extracted revenue, in company with a retinue of servants and dependents. Khuntkattidars paid a quit rent through their manki to a petty raja or Zamindar who lived far from his revenue area and who had little interest in it except as a source of revenue. This difference forms one of the main bases for the subjective distinction between the Naguri Mundas and the Hasada Mundas, in which the Hasada are seen as culturally and linguistically 'purer' than the Naguri Mundas and hence the upholders of Munda traditions.

The present-day situation was also seen as part of an on-going process rather than as the result of a sudden change or upheaval. Factors intrinsic, as well as extrinsic, to the situation were considered. These were population growth and movement and the effects of deforestation on territorial expansion.

In Chapter 3 I went on to consider the effects of these

various factors on two villages located, respectively, in the Hasada and Naguri areas. The main differences between them may be briefly summarised at this point. In Kadu, the part bhuinhari and part raiya Naguri village, the average size of holding was larger than in Sukuhatu, the khuntkatti Hasada village. In addition, bhuinhari land in Kadu was more valuable than khuntkatti land in Sukuhatu, as it consisted of lower lying terraced land of greater productivity than the unterraced land which forms an average one third of the land with khuntkatti status. Kadu also had a less critical population-land ratio than Sukuhatu. A small amount (29 acres) of uncleared cultivable land still remained within the village boundary in 1972, and one new tola had been formed within the previous twenty years. Sukuhatu had no further land for expansion and no new tola had been formed since the original khuntkatti settlement was made. The possession of khuntkatti land was seen to act as a restraint on migration, except as a temporary expedient, whereas in Kadu, this restraint was less apparent, particularly on those holding only raiya land.

Kadu was split into small, scattered tola which were divided in community terms between Mundas and Hindu pursuing mutually exclusive life-styles and maintaining a strict separation phrased, on both sides, in the idiom of the caste system. The Kadu Mundas were also part of an effective, functioning clan organization, or parha, which was seen to have adapted to the changing world in its handling of cases and in its role of boundary maintenance between the two opposed communities within the village. Sukuhatu by contrast, had

ineffective village leadership and no political organization wider than the village itself, to which issues could be referred. Although there were no Hindu landholders to pose a political threat, Sukuhatu and the surrounding villages supported a small but growing landless Hindu population which lived by serving the local people on a cash for goods basis, and by selling through the local markets. Their presence in the village posed problems in relation to their status and this was reflected in uncertainty about commensality. In Kadu such problems did not arise as the Mundas and Hindus kept apart, thus minimising the possibilities of unstructured situations.

The position of Christians also differed. In Sukuhatu, Christian and non-Christian did not usually eat together or share a common cooking hearth, whereas in Kadu, there were no commensal restrictions. This was related partly to the difference in attitude of the two missions involved, but also to the question of identification. Kadu Mundas stressed an 'ethnic' identity based on their own perceptions of their situation and constantly re-strengthened by the continuing presence of a powerful Hindu interest group. This identity embraced Christian and non-Christian alike in unity against the diku. In Sukuhatu, 'being a Munda' ideally meant being an adherent of the old religion as the defining characteristic. Christianity was thus a form of 'impurity' to the Hasada Mundas in so far as it impinged on their perception of the Hasada area as the bastion of Munda tradition.

The lack of an effective panchayat system in Sukuhatu was related to the question of village size and the problem of

enforcement created by larger and larger units unable to divide in the traditional way, and without effective leadership. This had made the enforcement of traditional judgments, such as those relating to village exogamy and tribal endogamy, particularly difficult. The extension of administrative and legal powers into the sphere of customary law had also posed problems for village discipline and for tribal autonomy. In Kadu, the parha organization had been able to transcend these problems more effectively. In sum, the effective enforcement of that customary law which did not directly conflict with the laws of the wider society, meant that villages under the jurisdiction of the parha still held together as moral communities, whereas villages without a functioning political organization did not.

Social Change and the Community Cult

The community rituals performed by the pahan recreate the ideal order of things in their careful prescription of the 'correct' time for collective activities, such as sowing and food gathering. They also symbolize the moral order based on the laws laid down by Singbonga and the ancestors as to the correct behaviour and way of doing things. It is to be expected, therefore, that changes of the type summarized above will affect the status of the community cult as a collective representation of the ideal order, and the pahan as its village guardian.

It was noted in the section describing the pahan and

the community rituals that in Kadu great emphasis is placed on the performance of these rituals in accordance with 'custom'. This emphasis is lacking in Sukuhatu. Some sarna rituals tended to pass unnoticed by everyone except the anthropologist. There are several reasons for this. First, the date of the ritual is not announced publicly in the village beforehand and so anyone wanting to discover the date in order to brew the required pot of beer has to search out the pahan to enquire. In Kadu, the rituals described in that section are always announced in the market place and almost everyone makes beer. Secondly, the prohibitions attached to certain activities such as ploughing, sowing and gathering new spring produce are adhered to by only a few conscientious members of the pahan khunt. The Christians generally ignore them altogether, and thus their significance as a community observance is greatly diminished. In Kadu, they are not ignored, except in specific cases, such as that of eating the new pulses, where the pahan khunt observes the prohibition 'on behalf of the rest of the village.'

The third major reason is the question of communal feasting. As was explained in Chapter III, the dalikatari land, originally vested in the pahan khunt, had been confiscated by the village panchayat and had been redistributed. This land was intended to provide for the communal feasts held after the sarna rituals, to which every villager was invited. These feasts no longer take place as the present incumbent says he is unable, and feels under no obligation, to feed the villagers in the customary way. As a token gesture, he may feed one or

two fellow lineage members. The Kadu pahan holds dalikatari land and is obliged to feed everyone who goes to his house after a sarna ritual. There are usually a substantial number of people after each ritual, but the village feast as described by Hoffman, where every man, woman and child automatically attended, is no longer a feature of any of the villages with which I came into contact.

In Sukuhatu, communal restraint has given way to individual restraint in respect of community rituals. When asked why they did not observe the ritual prohibitions, Christians replied that such observances were part of the 'old religion' and therefore they should not take part. Others said that it was sufficient for a few people to observe them on behalf of the rest, and a few people suggested that, since the Christians had given them up, no calamities had befallen the village, therefore there was no need for everyone else to observe the prohibitions. This reasoning was also applied to ancestor worship, by some puhadharom families, as an excuse for non-observance or irregular observance.

This latter is, however, more of a rationalisation than an inherent reason for giving up certain practices. An expression often heard in Sukuhatu was 'Christians step both sides.' This referred to the fact that many Christian households still performed rituals proper to the 'old religion' as a form of insurance policy. The rituals most notably retained by Christians were those performed by the deora for household protection and for divination.

The batauli, kolomsing and ba rituals all took place in

Sukuhatu. At batauli, there was no ritual weeding by the villagers. Kolomsing was performed on the pahan's threshing ground. Two other members of the pahan khunt attended, and they were fed by the pahan afterwards. There was no dancing and singing in the threshing ground or communal drinking, as was the case in Kadu. Rice beer was prepared by each household for its own kolom ritual only. As in Kadu, mage did not take place as a ritual in Sukuhatu. The young men toured the village singing bawdy songs but without any accompanying ritual. The pahan said that mage had been given up because the Christians objected to the bawdiness, but as this was the major remaining feature, it seemed a rather lame explanation.

The ba festival in Sukuhatu displayed the characteristics of a village celebration to a much greater extent. It occurs at a time when little work is being done, and it has the atmosphere of a Bank Holiday about it. All the villagers prepared special foods and most people brought sal flowers from the forest to decorate their houses. After performing the sarna bonga, the pahan was accompanied, dancing, back to the village, by all the unmarried puhadharom boys and girls, and everyone came to watch the dancing, ceremonial feet washing and water throwing which took place in the pahan's courtyard. No Christians took an active part in this, however, and no Christian girls and boys take part in any dancing connected with puhadharom festivals. The attitude of Sukuhatu Christians towards ba and other puhadharom festivities is analogous to that of the agnostic who bakes a simnel cake for Easter day but eschews religious 'observances'. As all work in the

villages ceases completely for ba, Christians tend to join in the holiday atmosphere. A similar phenomenon is beginning to occur with Christmas day. This has become something of a village holiday.

The declining status of the community cult in Sukuhatu parallels the decline of moral and political authority at the village level. The rituals are still performed; it is their credibility as a collective representation which has declined. In this process, the role of the pahan in Sukuhatu may be compared with the role of the pahan in Kadu. In both villages, a decline in the secular authority of the pahan was noted. In Sukuhatu this was coincident with a decline in ritual authority; the villagers are no longer interested in his rituals and scepticism has been induced by the affair of the cultivated 'sacred' field. In Kadu, the work of the pahan was of much more interest to the villagers. Any mistakes which he made, such as not providing the correct number of pots of rice beer at a ritual, were held against him, and his performance was evaluated and compared in this respect with that of his predecessor.

The present incumbent in Kadu was generally considered to be a good pahan, despite certain mistakes which he made during my stay. He evidently performed the rituals diligently as the village had not been troubled by tigers and snakes during his tenure, and the harvests had not failed. Despite his ritual importance, he was not a leader in the sense described by Hoffman. Secular leadership was the province of the munda; although the traditional role of the pahan as elder

statesman was recognised at the parha meeting¹ where villagers were told to take their grievances first of all to the pahan and munda. This did not, in fact occur. Disputes were either settled informally in tola panchayats or referred to the parha raja.

The community cult has not declined in credibility in the way demonstrated for Sukuhatu, but it has modified in response to changing patterns of leadership. Authority is compartmentalised. The pahan is concerned with sarna rituals which are part of the old way of doing things and the traditional customs. The munda represents modernity and literacy, and his present authority stems particularly from his success in confronting the Hindus. The community cult appears clearly as a 'boundary marker' in a situation of periodic confrontation and those aspects of the sarna ritual concerned with separateness have become particularly prominent. After dealing with the customary list of bongako, the Kadu pahan adds an invocation against malicious and wicked (satan) bongako of 'other places' which attempt to do harm to the village. He also sacrifices a fowl for siman satr (H. 'seven village boundary spirits'), a concept taken from the Sadans, but appropriate to the pahan's concern with safeguarding threatened boundaries.

This concern with 'marking off' the Munda universe in Kadu is reflected in the extent of community participation in, and interest in the rituals, festivals and dances. The stronger status of the community cult in Kadu is also related to the more effective political organization of the parha.

This can uphold such customary law as does not run directly contrary to the law of the courts, such as that relating to incest and exogamy, as well as having also adapted to deal with non-traditional problems and situations.

It can be seen from this analysis, that Christianity has not played a straightforward role in the decline of traditional religion. In Sukuhatu, the presence of Christians is used as a rationalisation for a process which is, in reality, considerably more complex. This became apparent after Sukuhatu was compared with Kadu, where Christians and puṇadharom Mundas have adopted a common vision of their 'ethnic' identity, and the cultural and moral components of which it is comprised.

New Models for Old: Causes, Morals and the Role of the Deora

The work of the deora in Sukuhatu and Kadu may first be compared. Of the five practising deora in Sukuhatu, one was a Ghasi and the other four were Munda khuntkattidar. These four took the view that there was no difference between a deora, a baid and a bhagat, although the bhagat is more usually associated with witchfinding. However, one of them summed up the present situation when he said,

'people do not go to the bhagat anymore, as they are very expensive. Deora can do the work of bhagat, as they know how to catch witches (najom bandunu saritanako).'

All five maintained that their powers became greater and their medicines more efficacious, the farther away the location of a client's village. Treating a fellow villager was least

satisfactory and if a deora gave medicines to his wife they would not work at all. The five also stated independently that they had learned their art from 'seven masters'. Like the 'seven boundaries', this appears to be figurative and it reflects the magicality of the number 'seven'. Recruits do, however, go to several teachers during their training, and there is a certain amount of rivalry between practitioners as to their relative skills. This is coupled with an acknowledgment that some were 'junior' to others in terms of the length of time in which they had practised their skills. There was also a predhan (Hindi: master) of the deora, who was acknowledged by all the village practitioners. He was a Lohar (blacksmith) living in a village about four miles from Sukuhatu and was responsible for initiating a display of skills called monsa (derivation and meaning not known) which takes place about every year, and in which the deora of that area display their versatility in piercing their cheeks and tongues with iron rods and swallowing fire for the benefit of the spectators. Unfortunately, I was unable to see this at first hand. It was 'cancelled' that year because of sickness, but I was able to compare reports about it from a number of people.

Non-Munda deora were said to be different from Munda practitioners. In this context, both the blacksmith predhan and the Ghasi were referred to as Harijan deora, and this is the only context in which I heard the blacksmith described as a Harijan. Several differences were mentioned. Harijans worship Kali as their guru, or deota, whereas the Munda guru

is Mahadeo. Harijans do not know how to catch witches, as Kali does not help them in this respect. They use different medicines (ret ranu) and different mantras. Harijans also use physical mutilation as a symbol of their calling. For the Ghasi, these consisted of long gashes made in a line on the inside of the thigh.

Suli, the Ghasi deora, or bhagat, as he called himself, described his acquisition of knowledge in the following way: On sorai amawasya (the moonless night of the sorai feast) he took an axe and went to a grave to dig up a piece of skull. (Any skull is equally satisfactory for this purpose). He then buried it under the floor of his house, and for the next seven days he kept a fast, taking only unboiled pulse and water or distilled liquor. He sat on the spot over the buried skull for several hours each day and night, and meditated, after first ensuring that no-one would see him and thereby render the skull useless. While he meditated, he asked Kali and Muabonga (the skull was now a muabonga, or ghost, as it had been disturbed from the grave) to give him knowledge. As he had perfect faith, he was rewarded, in his dreams, with knowledge of where to dig for medicines and how to use them. The axe with which he dug up the skull was used to make the gashes in his leg to give him the power of the bonga. He also learned more of the art from five Munda deora and two Harijan bhagat.

Mangra, one of the Munda deora, described a different experience: while he was apprenticed to 'seven deora' (five of them Munda) he desired, at one stage, to give up the work

as it was difficult and dangerous. He immediately fell sick, and when he was almost dying, agom (divination) was performed, and the cause was revealed to be his desire to stop worshipping his bonga (Mahadeo). The divination said that he would only recover if he continued to learn. With the help of his wife he got up from his sick bed, smeared cowdung on the sacred spot beneath the golaichi tree and did a puja (Hindi: ritual) for his bonga. After that he was cured.

Magical powers obtained through worshipping a deota, or guru, were also described by the deora. One claimed to be able to turn cooked fish into live fish. Fights with witches figured prominently in these descriptions. Mangra told how, on one occasion, he was sitting in his house when he suddenly sensed that a witch was hovering around, hoping to cause him trouble. He decided to invoke the aid of his deota, who caused wasps to come out of the house wall, although not a single hole could be seen. The wasps went straight to the witch, and began to sting her. She ran away crying 'ajana, ajana!' (help!).

Training for new recruits begins three days after the full moon and continues until just before the sorai feast in November. I attended the sessions given by Mangra for four young men, one of whom was his son. The training took place at Mangra's house, and each session began at about nine at night on a Sunday when most people were retiring to bed. Mangra, his wife and the recruits all bathed beforehand. Two of the boys were just starting to learn, one was coming for a second year, and Mangra's son, Dibi, was taking part for the

third year in succession. The recruits sat on the floor in the outer room of the house around an earthen tile of live coals and an oil light. Sal incense was burnt on the coals at intervals. Three conch shells which were blown at random intervals either by a recruit or one of a large number of young spectators, lay on the ground nearby. The proceedings were quite public and other women besides myself came to watch. Mangra's wife took an active part in the proceedings, shouting instructions and singing mantra. An initial puja was done to Mahadeo with an offering of golaichi flowers and incense.

The singing then began in earnest with a long mantra to call up Mahadeo. His various dwelling places were detailed at great length. Marang Mahadeo Baba (the big god Mahadeo) lives in Khunti where there is a Hindu shrine in his honour. He also lives in Sonahatu, Sukanburu, Marang Tajna Garha (river), Pan Buru, Rangruri and many other places, the names of which I could not catch. With the exception of Rangruri, these are all natural habitats, such as rivers and hills, rather than temples. During the singing, two of the recruits went into a trance which began with the shaking of the fingers and gradually increased until the arms, trunk and head were shaking violently. The state of dissociation lasted about a minute, and only the two older boys achieved it. Dibi, Mangra's son, showed the greatest facility and dissociated altogether three times. Mangra's wife explained that Mahadeo had entered them and that they would become more skilled in time.

The sessions continued for about an hour and half, and took place at weekly intervals. They consisted solely of

singing and chanting, and after each occasion, the recruits went to Mangra and his wife and knelt in front of them. The couple both touched the head of each boy and said a brief mantra. The two recruits who were able to go into a trance, became more proficient over the weeks, in that they became more violent and leapt about uncontrollably, beating the air and the ground with their rod. No attempt was apparently made to teach them how to divine or look for medicines, although other things may have been taught on occasions which were concealed from me. My impression was that this type of knowledge came through direct experience. Most deora were usually accompanied by an assistant who helped them in their day-to-day work.

The autumn sessions culminated in a ritual called jalisusun (jali dance) at which the recruits are said to have obtained sidi (Hindi: 'knowledge'). Early on the Sunday morning before sorai, the recruits gathered in Mangra's garden. The recruits, their parents, Mangra, his wife, his brother and his brother's wife had all been fasting since the previous evening and had bathed that morning. Mangra's garden contained a sacred fenced-off area around a golaichi tree and a tulsi tree. This was dedicated to Mahadeo. A Shivaite trident made of iron was also stuck in the ground in front of the trees and daubed with vermilion. All those who had fasted and bathed entered the compound and worshipped Mahadeo with milk, sweets and flowers. Two of the recruits went into a trance and one knocked down the brush fence around the sacred area.

Afterwards everyone washed again and retired to prepare for the dance. That afternoon found the boys dressed in sari and wearing ornaments borrowed from their wives and sisters. Mangra did not change his dress, but he accompanied the dancers by banging a brass plate with a conch shell, and singing. The dancers carried a variety of makeshift instruments, including a bicycle bell. The purpose of the dance is to beg for rice at each house in order to make beer for the initiation (sidi).

This occurs on sorai amawasya (the dark night of sorai) and is a test of the recruits' ability and the degree to which his chosen deota is helping him. The recruits are sent to fetch medicinal plants from the forest. If their knowledge is good, and they have followed the correct ritual procedures then they bring the right sorts of plant back with them, and no witch is able to harm them. I was not able to see any of the recruits after their ordeal or to obtain any clear account of their progress. Mangra was not the sort of man to admit of anything less than perfection in his activities or the activities of his recruits.

Harijan deora or bhagat proceed in the same way, according to Suli, in so far as they apprentice themselves for a year or more with a practising bhagat. It is difficult to see how Harijans and Mundas can be as different as the deora made them out to be. The only verifiable differences were the type of deota worshipped, and the refusal of Harijans to take part in witchfinding, although the claim that they did not know how to catch witches was probably untrue. The mantra

taken from both types of practitioner were virtually identical and were all spoken in Sadani or in corrupt forms of Hindi or Bengali. The medicines used were also of a similar composition.

Kadu presented an entirely different picture in many of these respects. The five deora were all Munda, three of whom were members of the Rambara kili. The other two were raiyat. The oldest of them was Champa, a village raiyat who was probably in his seventies. He recounted how his grandfather had been invited to settle in Kadu when a young man, as the village had no deora at the time. Champa's grandfather's brother had also been a deora and so his own village had had too many to do the work. Since then, the art has been handed down to the next generation. Champa was passing on the knowledge to one of his sons. Champa said that there was a difference between a deora and a bhaqat, although nowadays they tended to do the same work. Deora are the ones who perform the annual protective rituals for households, whereas bhaqat are called in when questions of guilt arise or when any form of sickness appears to be caused by the jealousy of another person. This accords to some extent with the distinction made by the Sukuhatu deora between the medicine man and the witchfinder. Champa saw the role of deora as preventive, in that he is called on to perform borada, deotan (to Singbonga's elder wife) and sosobonga for the household each year. He also dispenses medicines and cures various ailments by 'sweeping'. Champa described himself as a hatadeora (winnowing fan deora), a term which refers to his

technique of sifting rice in a winnowing fan while singing protective mantra. The bongako called upon by Champa were Singbonga, Baranda (or Buru), Ikir, Purnakhuntihankar (bonga of the old lineage) and Churin. He had no personal deota.

Two of the other deora took a similar view of their role, although Champa and his son had the monopoly of the regular household rituals. Neither of these two other deora worshipped a personal guru and their work mostly involved the performance of the soso ritual², and the dispensing of medicine, both within the village and in villages where they had built up an admiring clientele. Efficacy was not considered to be linked to distance from the home village as it was among Sukuhatu deora. More concern was expressed at the position of a widowed deora who had no one to assist him in his ritual preparations and whose powers was said to be greatly reduced for this reason.

Of the other two deora, one called himself a bhagat and said that he had changed from being a deora since he had given up performing bonga in people's houses at the prescribed times. He had given this up in deference to the predominantly Christian population of his tola, and after he had performed his last sacrifice, he had taken all the remains, including the head of the fowl, and had 'drowned' them in the river, thus signifying that he would no longer take part in such rituals. His son's wife informed me confidentially, however, that although he had given up doing the rituals in his own house, as his son is a Christian, he still did bonga in the houses of other people. Here again, the role of deora was

seen as that of providing a regular service in annual household rituals. This bhagat described his present work as that of medicine man and diviner. He had learnt his art originally from Champā.

The remaining deora was rather more like his counterpart in Sukuhatu. In front of his house stands a golaichi tree and a mound in which a Shivaite trident is embedded. Here he periodically worships Ma Kādeo whom he described as a particularly useful bonga for the deora. He does not, therefore, claim a personal deora in the sense that this term is used in Sukuhatu, but the idea is a similar one. The monsa referred to by the Sukuhatu deora is not performed in Kadu or its vicinity, and this deora emphasised that he did not mutilate himself in that way. He had learnt his art from an old Munda deora who lived in Kadu and has since died. The year before my stay he had taught two boys from a village a few miles away. At the end of their tuition, they had been initiated (sidi). The deora had pierced his thigh and had squeezed out a little blood for each initiate to suck. He had then placed a tilak (Hindi: caste mark) on the forehead of each boy. This man also tended to call himself bhagat rather than deora, but he was called in sometimes to perform the household rituals.

This deora was the only one in Kadu to have been in the course of training recruits. Champā, the old deora, gave a different version of the ceremony for the initiation of a deora, which was based on his own initiation as a young man. A winnowing fan of arua rice is brought to the deora's

courtyard and tipped on to the ground. A wooden paila is inverted over the rice and a grinding stone is placed on top. An unmarried boy squats on top of this stone and a villager asks Singbonga to tell them whether the potential deora is suitable. The turning stone indicates Singbonga's acceptance. This ceremony is performed also for a new pahan, if the existing pahan khunt dies out.

This method of initiating a deora was not practised in Sukuhatu, where jalisusun and sidi formed the only initiation, and its existence in Kadu suggests the major difference between the deora in the two villages. Recruitment by divination is a village affair. Acceptance by Singbonga indicates that householders may safely ask this deora to perform the regular household rituals. The deora becomes, like the pahan, village property, and is paid regularly for his services. His work, of whatever kind, is then centred on the village. Deora or bhagat initiated by their guru, or teacher, have no greater claim to legitimacy than anyone else. In Sukuhatu, household rituals were performed not only by deora but by anybody who knew the procedure. Thus, a large number of men were active in this sphere, although none would be described as a deora. They simply performed the rituals in exchange for a meal or cash. They were frequently from outside the village, and men who knew the rituals were often called to their mothers' or sisters' villages to perform sosobonga or aragu. The Sukuhatu deora, or bhagat, is thus not village based or legitimated by the villagers as a monopoly practitioner within that village. He works by

building up a clientele over a wide area amid competition from other practitioners. Rivalry in Kadu was confined to an occasional comment about the comparative lack of ability of a fellow practitioner in treating sickness. No rivalry can exist over the performance of household rituals, as these are done on a long-established service basis. In terms of the distinction made by several of the practitioners themselves, Kadu tends to have deora, while Sukuhatu tends to have bhagat.

There were no Harijan deora or bhagat in Kadu or its immediate vicinity, and the reason for this may be sought in the tendency to see the deora as the household equivalent of the pahan. A deora who enters a house to perform a ritual which may entail entering the ading, or partaking of rice beer inside the house can only be a Munda of the same village clan if he also enters the ading. This is why, in Sukuhatu, the Lohar was referred to as a Harijan deora, whereas a Lohar is not usually accounted a Harijan. This is doubtless one reason why practitioners of other castes like to dissociate themselves and their methods from their Munda counterparts.

The rituals performed, and the techniques of divination, also differed in the two villages. Bora-da bonga, at the onset of the monsoon, and deotan, or purnakhuntihankar (bonga of the old lineage) did not take place in Sukuhatu. The only household rituals performed by a deora regularly were sosobonga during the transplantation, and the rituals connected with aragu.³ The emphasis in the two latter is on protection against jealousy and witchcraft, whereas the emphasis in the two rituals performed only in Kadu is on protection against neutral

but potentially malicious bongako.

The other category of ritual performed by a deora or bhagat, is that of divination. This may best be compared by looking at some examples. All the methods described in Chapter IV were used in Sukuhatu except for panjidiri or gurudiri (grinding stone divination). One particular instance illustrates the diversity of methods and results very well. B was the widow of a khunkattidar. She was in her early thirties and had three daughters. The two younger girls were ill for several weeks with fever and stomach trouble. B's husband had spent much time in his wife's natal village as his ancestors had obtained raiyati land there and this land was still farmed by the descendants. When her daughters became ill, B suspected a garasibonga, or bonga or the child's mother's brother's village. As her children still had a claim to some maintenance from the land in her natal village, this was a logical fear. She therefore called in the deora of her natal village, her own brother, and her husband's brother, who farmed the raiyati holding there. She also called a deora from Sukuhatu. Duku piti nam and duku agom were performed to reveal first the cause of the sickness and secondly the nature of the required sacrifice.

The four men were each given arua rice and a sal leaf, and they dropped the grains on to this leaf in the manner already described, but using the leaf rather than the floor. In the case of the elder girl, the Sukuhatu deora found that it was Burubonga from the girl's natal village (Sukuhatu), and and the girl's mother's brother got the same answer. For the

younger girl, the deora from the mother's village found that it was a garasi Ikirbonga, and the mother's brother also got the same answer. The troublesome bongako were then 'caught' in the sal leaves and tied up with string. The deora ordered the bongako to remain inside the bundle of leaves until such time as the children recovered and the sacrifice was to be performed. The sacrifice was also determined in the same way as the cause, and two red fowls and a goat were promised. The bundles were hung in the eaves outside the house.

The younger child failed to improve and so about a week later B called another of the Sukuhatu deora. When he came, he brought the girl to sit by the ading door, facing east, while he looked at the umbul (shadow) cast by some rice grains in a sal leaf. He then touched her head with the leaf and called on a succession of bongako, ranging from village bongako to spirits unheard of except in the incantations of the deora. He asked them to take away the girl's trouble (duku). He then chastised the evil agent, which he announced was a najom chandi bongga sent by a Sukuhatu witch who suffered from bad eyesight and was jealous of those with normal vision. He told the witch to stay away, and he recited mantras similar to the one recorded in the previous chapter. He divined the sacrifice by dropping rice grains onto a container of water and noting the colour, or tinge, of the different grains. A 'promise' to give one white, one black, and one red and white fowl was accordingly tied in a sal leaf and hung in the outer eaves. This deora also gave the girl medicine

pounded from roots to take in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. He said that if she was not better in three days he would do a further divination. He also made disparaging comments about the inability of the other deora to diagnose and treat the case properly.

The girl continued to show no improvement, and a little while after, B sent some more arua rice to the deora of her natal village. She also sent a sample of the girl's urine to the Sukuhatu deora who had diagnosed witchcraft. By the time the child had recovered, B had five bundles hanging in her roof, all promising goats and fowls. She said that she would call in all the deora and perform all the sacrifices eventually.

This one case provides a model for divination as it is done in Sukuhatu. If a sickness fails to respond, then other deora are called in, a variety of methods will be tried, and a different diagnosis will usually be given each time. Notwithstanding the charge that a previous deora has given a wrong diagnosis, the client will still perform all the sacrifices promised in the agom bundles hanging in the eaves. I was also told that these sacrifices will be performed regardless of whether the person (or animal) recovers, as otherwise, the bongako concerned will cause more trouble to the household. Needless to say, the deora takes a large share of the sacrificed animal.

A parallel case in Kadu may be compared with this. The nine month old baby son of Maru, a bhuinhari cultivator, had been ailing for many weeks. He coughed persistently and

became very thin. Medicines were obtained from two of the village deora and when these failed to work, three of the deora came in succession and divined with rice grains. The first diagnosed a hatukhuntbonga (a modality of Ikir) and sacrificed a red fowl. The second sacrificed a red fowl for Barandabonga and the divination on the third revealed two ghost bongako (a churin and a mua) to be responsible. The churin had been the baby's grandfather's sister. No fowls were sacrificed on this occasion. The bonga was done with the leaves of baelpatra (used in the symbolic cremation of the corpse) and sal incense, to send the troublesome ghosts away.

Eventually all the village deora decided jointly to perform a panjidiri, or grinding stone divination, in which three of them were to take part. This number was for ritual reasons. The divination was performed as described in Chapter 10, but with a deora, and not an unmarried boy, sitting on the grinding stone. No one appeared to share my scepticism about possible cheating by the deora, and most of the village came to watch. One deora steadied the man who was squatting, and Champa, the old man, threw arua rice at the stone and called out the names of the bongako in turn, starting with Singbonga. Champa occasionally consulted the watching crowd about bongako which he might have missed. The stone turned a great deal in both directions, but only an anti-clockwise turn counted as an affirmation. The sacrifices were determined in the same way, and the result was one white fowl for Singbonga, one red fowl and one old female sheep for

Baranda, one grey fowl for the ancestors, two black fowls for the ghosts and one brown fowl for Bo-diri, a bonga of the Sadani villagers which nevertheless lives in a Munda tola and is particularly malevolent. Finally, the stone was asked which deora of the village was required to perform the sacrifices. The stone turned when the names of two of the deora were called out. One of these was not present at the divination. Afterwards, the paddy was measured to see if the quantity had remained the same. A reduced quantity would have indicated that the patient would not recover.

Specially brewed rice beer was then drunk by everyone present, as this is an important occasion. The bundles of rice in sal leaves were prepared by two of the deora for putting in the house eaves, and feathers of the appropriate coloured fowls were put in the bundles. They were tied up with bachom grass which is used for sewing mats together, and before they were hung up, bonga was performed for Singbonga and Baranda with sal incense, arua rice and rice beer. The myth recording the separation of the two brothers was sung in mantra form. The fowls promised in the sacrifice were dedicated by being given arua rice. Each member of the household was then touched with the promised fowls (a red fowl was surrogate for the sheep). The mother and child, and the ading doorstep were each touched with the bundles of sal leaves and then they were hung in the outer eaves of the house. The bundles for garasi bonga and the ancestors were hung in the roof of the ading. It was stressed that no sacrifice will be performed unless the patient recovered. When I left the

village two months later, the sacrifices had not been made as the child was showing no obvious signs of improvement. No further divination was done and no one suggested that the panjidiri had been wrong. In the last analysis, it was said, only Singbonga could make the child better, and he was not to be influenced by sacrifices.

In Kadu, divination was not an everyday occurrence, as it was in Sukuhatu. It was only done in the case of a persistent illness after the deora's medicines or other methods such as sweeping had failed to work. If a divination was requested, it would first be done with rice grains (chauli jang) and panji diri would only be done in a particularly serious case, doubtless because of the great expense involved. All the deora have to be paid, rice beer has to be provided for all the spectators and the bill for sacrifices is always large. The exceptions to this are theft and witchcraft cases, which nearly always involve a panji diri. The only expense involved here is that of payment to the deora, which is between one and two rupees. Panji diri was not performed in Sukuhatu, although the method was known. Other methods were favoured.

Before considering these divination ceremonies more closely, the question of causation must be examined, as other differences emerge between the two villages. Evans-Pritchard's study of the Azande⁴ first drew attention to the dual concept of cause operating among a people who ascribe some or all of their personal misfortunes to witchcraft. Here, witchcraft provides the answer to the question of why a particular person

is afflicted at a particular time; a question to which scientific rationalism can only answer 'coincidence' or 'chance'. A similar dual concept exists in Munda thought, and it is not confined to the imputation of witchcraft. Bongako can, independently of humans, cause misfortune in order to obtain a sacrifice. If this is revealed by a divination, medicine may be given to alleviate the symptoms of the sickness, but improvement will only be expected if a sacrifice is also given or promised as well. An example from Sukuhatu illustrates this. Mangra, the deora, was called to treat a child suffering from an eye infection. After studying his rice grains, he announced that the infection was caused by excess acidity in the child's stomach (amulpit), but that this was in turn caused by the Burubonga of the mother's brother's village. He gave haka ranu (hanging medicine) to put round the child's neck and he also ordered a sacrifice of a red fowl to be made as soon as possible.

In a case where a witch is said to be responsible, the witch is the last link in a chain of intermediary causes. G recounted how he had been taken ill at a wedding feast after drinking rice beer. The beer had been poisoned (maura) and had caused him to vomit. The poison had been put there by a poison ban sent by a chandi bongga which was acting on the instructions of a witch living in the village.

Cause without a malicious agent, or what we would call 'natural' cause, is also accepted. It is in the 'natural' order of things for people to grow old and die. The precise timing of such a death will only interest relatives if they

have reasons for suspecting their kinsfolk of malice. The deaths of younger people seldom pass without at least an implicit accusation of malice either on the part of a bonga, or a witch or a conjunction of the two. Sudden sickness, in otherwise apparently healthy people or animals, and particularly if it persists for some time, is seldom accepted as a fortuitous occurrence.

Sickness and misfortunes in Sukuhatu were generally ascribed, either by the victims or by a divination, to one of four categories of ultimate cause. These were the village boundary spirits, a whole range of ghosts, 'household' bongas and semi-Hindu spirits who were chiefly mentioned only in connection with the malicious damage which they caused, witchcraft, and 'natural' cause. Village spirits were revealed only in divination, and the most virulent and often mentioned ones were Buru, Ikir and Chandi. According to one of the deora, these three can cause any and every type of damage. They can be called upon by anyone (not just a witch) through mantra, sacrifices or fasting. This deora also maintained that Buru and Ikir are generally benevolent and protective bongako when they act in their own right. They only become bad when called upon for help by a malicious person. This interpretation was disputed by Mangra deora, who said that these bongako could all cause different kinds of misfortune if their worship was neglected and they could also work as najombonga (witch spirit). When revealed in divination, Buru and Ikir were not linked with a witch except in some cases where they were mother's brother's village

bongako and were said to have been directed by a malicious affine. Chandibonga was almost always linked with a witch, and a divination which revealed a chandibonga was a synonym for witchcraft.

The next category of peripheral bongako also includes those which act on the bidding of a sorcerer, but there were several which were generally held to act in their own right. Churinbongako (ghosts of women dying in childbirth) were sometimes revealed by the diviner. The household spirits were a common source of trouble. These included marangbonga, duarhariabonga (spirit of the house doorway), sekaribonga (a hunting spirit worshipped by many individual households), birsabonga (forest spirit) and orkabonga (spirit of human sacrifice). Nearly all purnadharom households worshipped one or more of these bongako regularly, and some Christian households also quietly sacrificed to a bonga formerly worshipped by an ancestor. The advantages bestowed by these bongako were of a dubious nature. They were said to protect the household against misfortune, and in the case of dhangoreabongako (wealth spirits) they were supposed to give prosperity to their worshippers. However, they were also quickly aroused to malice, either by the neglect of their worship, or by an accident, such as an animal straying near their shrine, which was usually a tree or cleared spot in the back garden or courtyard. The orkabonga was particularly menacing. The ancestors of three village families were said to have been human sacrificers and it is said that the ghosts of the sacrificed come to haunt the descendents until they

agree to worship the ghosts regularly. Orkabonga continues to cause trouble, in each generation however, and blindness and insanity were particularly mentioned as visitations of the sins of the fathers.

Spirits of obvious Hindu origin included karam (or karma) bonga, gorabonga (stable spirit), which is also worshipped as a household spirit, Devi-mai, Kali-mai, Mahadeo and Parbati. These were said to be capable of working for a witch with the exception of Mahadeo, but I never heard them accused of this. They were more usually associated with specific diseases or epidemics, such as the association of Devi-mai and Kali-mai with smallpox. A sacrifice was performed to them in the event of an outbreak.

Natural cause may be illustrated by example. The baby daughter of K was suffering from a condition known as ponni. This appeared to be a form of malnutrition as the child was thin and did not put on weight. Her parents explained that this was caused by the poor quality of the mother's milk, with no suggestion that a dual cause was operating. However, it is conceivable that, if the child had been a boy a further explanation would have been forthcoming. In another case, the childless widowed sister of a Sukuhatu man had returned to live in his house. She was middle-aged and has been ailing for some time before she died. Her brother told me that she had died from sickness only. No witchcraft or bonga was involved. She was, again, a woman with no heritable rights in village property.

The last, and most often mentioned cause, was that of witchcraft. This was revealed in about two thirds of the divinations which I attended, and it was also the most frequently named cause in cases where no divination was performed. Some accusations made to me whilst I was living in Sukuhatu, may be considered. L's daughter had been sick for some time when Mangra was called in to divine and give treatment. The girl said that she was woken by a bonga every night. She could not see it, but felt a numbing, tingling sensation of fear when it appeared. Mangra's divination revealed a najom (witch) chandibonga to be the culprit, and he treated her by 'sweeping' (see Ch.IV). The girl was in the penultimate class of the village school and was said to be very clever. According to her mother and to Mangra, the najom, identified only as hatu hagako (a 'village brother') was jealous of her success and sought to harm her.

Several informants told of a villager who had joined the army some years ago. On returning for leave two years previously, he had bought arki (liquor) from Pidi, one of the four notorious village witches. One or two days later, he felt a sudden pain in his stomach and died very soon after. He had been poisoned by Pidi, said my informants, because she was 'jealous of him.'

Patara told how his son who was aged about nine or ten, was killed by a chungi ban - a spell cast by a witch to poison the cigarette which he was smoking. The boy often smoked in the houses of friends, so his father could not be sure who was responsible, but, he said, it was due to the jealousy of

hagako (brothers). His wife had died suddenly while the family was working in Assam. Patara said that her death was certainly caused by jealous hagako in Sukuhatu, who could harm a person even in Assam if they were jealous of that person's wealth.

The father of the three Ghasi brothers living in Sukuhatu was 'poisoned' with a cup of rice beer at a wedding where he was playing the drums. He died two days later after violent vomiting. He was poisoned by some villagers because, said his eldest son, he was a much better drummer than they were. His daughter added that Sukuhatu was 'famous for poisoning'.

J, a middle-aged woman, was sick on several occasions when I visited her. On one visit I asked her if she had been to the government dispenser in the local health centre. She replied that there would be little point in her taking the medicines as they would not cure the jealousy which lay behind the sickness. Her family was at that time involved in a lawsuit with hagako over disputed lineage land. Her two sons were also studying in Khunti college and her relatives were therefore jealous of their academic success. A divination had been performed and this had, predictably perhaps, revealed witchcraft by hagako. J concluded, 'these village people - we know what they are like.'

Of the four deaths which occurred while I was living in the village, three were accompanied by accusations of witchcraft from persons apparently known but never mentioned by name. The fourth was that of a very old widow for whose death

little motive could have been found. It is not an exaggeration to say that a degree of paranoia over witchcraft and poisoning existed in Sukuhatu. As soon as I arrived, I was advised not to accept food and drink from anyone. It was admitted that I was safer than most people as I was an 'outsider' in the sense of not being a kinsman, but jealousy, it was said, knows no bounds.

Accusations tend to fall into two categories. One relates to kinsmen, or hagako, of one's own lineage khunt (lineage) who have an interest in the same land and who would therefore stand to gain from any reduction in the number of claimants. Into this category falls all the cases which involve the 'poisoning' (in whatever fashion) of sons by their father's hagako; of brothers real and classificatory, holding a share of lineage land, and of wives who may otherwise produce more sons. The use of a ban to cause sterility or barrenness in a relative or his wife, also comes into this category. This type of accusation occurs only between khuntkattidar, and between landholders of the same khunt.

The other category is the rather more diffuse one of 'jealousy'. It is more diffuse because all witchcraft accusations tend to be phrased in this way. It is possible to distinguish, however, between the type of accusation discussed above which relates to landholding and the possibility of actual gain through the act of witchcraft, and the accusation which states that A has something which B does not have. B is therefore jealous of A and tries to harm them. In this type of accusation, persons of any caste or status may be

involved.

I collected about forty accusations of witchcraft made in the last two years, of which the ones cited above were fairly representative. About half fall into the first category and half into the second. There were, in addition, several accusations which concerned the activities of the notorious village witches.

Several people recounted seeing, or seeing evidence of, these najomani turning themselves into tigers. For instance, N and her daughter-in-law went to the forest one evening to fetch firewood and saw B, a reputed village witch, there also. When they returned, they saw a light inside B's house and a tiger outside, carrying off a village dog. The next day, B complained of stomach pains and vomited. N inspected the vomit and spotted large chunks of meat in it. Accusations of this type were not, however, great in number. The same event, doubtless stereotyped, tended to be recounted over again.

In Kadu, the same remarks about dual causation apply. In divination the same four categories of explanation were found, but Singbonga and haparombongako (ancestors) also figured as causal agents in divination, as for instance, in the one already described. This was not seen to occur in Sukuhatu. Of the village spirits, Buru, Ikir and Chandi were similarly the common agents of misfortune, necessitating a sacrifice divined by the deora. Buru and Ikir were said not to act as witches' assistants except in the modality of Baranda and nasan bongako (destructive bongako) who figure

prominently in the myth of Singbonga, and Baranda.

Ghosts such as churin and muabonga were also known causal agents, but Kadu villagers did not keep household bongako of the type described for Sukuhatu. The reason for this was given to me by Champa, the old deora. The grandfather of Birsa, the acting village munda, was reputed to have buried a great deal of money in a nearby field. Many years ago, Champa and three other deora went to dig up the treasure at the owner's request. The grandfather was said to have worshipped a dhangorea (wealth) bonga and one day during the digging while Champa was working in the fields, the bonga had appeared to him and poured out silver in front of him. It told him that he could have all the treasure as long as he promised the bonga two of his grandchildren in return as a human sacrifice. The deora had already dug to a depth of several feet, but as soon as Champa recounted his story, they abandoned the search and filled up the hole. Champa was asked to 'remove' the bonga from the field and take it somewhere else where it would not cause any trouble, so one night he went to the spot, taking a bamboo basket and he sang to the bonga all night to entice it into the basket. He then took it to a tree away from the tola and told it to stay there. There were, said Champa, three such bongako in the vicinity at one time, but at the request of villagers he had removed them to other places as no one wanted to worship them. Such bongako were said to be bad as they will certainly give prosperity to those who worship them, but they are likely to kill their worshipper 'at any time'. In other words they are

totally capricious and malevolent. These bongako were also said to be worshipped by the Hindu Majhi caste, and this was why the caste had become so prosperous.

Household bongako did not therefore figure as agents of misfortune. 'Borrowed' spirits were also less in evidence. The term satanbongako, presumably taken from the Christian concept of 'satan', covered a residual category of purely malicious spirits. Mahadeo was established and worshipped by one of the deora, but was apparently benevolent and not cited as a bringer of diseases. Bo-diri, a spirit of the Majhi caste, was a different matter and was described as 'very vicious'. The name means 'headstone' in Mundari, and this referred to a phallus shaped stone about a foot high which was in a field belonging to a Majhi, but within the boundary of one of the Munda tola. It was in keeping with the attitude of Kadu Mundas towards the Hindus that bongako associated with the local Hindu population were either rejected, as in the case of dhangorea (wealth spirit), or were regarded as malicious as with bo-diri. The large range of miscellaneous and generally malicious spirits found in village, household and the revelations of Sukuhatu deora, were either unknown, or considered unimportant in Kadu.

The total number of accusations and statements about witchcraft collected in Kadu are summarised here. The bhagat of Kadu treated an elderly woman by 'sweeping' after his divination had revealed that the sickness was caused by a najom ban (poison spell) sent by a man who lived nearby and who knew her quite well. The bhagat had 'read the man's umbul

in a sal leaf.' The motive for this was not revealed, but the woman was a widow with a life interest in her husband's estate. The accused may well have been an agnate.

Maru's wife suspected husband's brother's wife of being responsible for the sickness of her youngest son, for whom the panji diri described above was performed. The two households lived and cultivated separately but the houses were adjacent and there was a long history of feuding between them. Each accused the other of using their bongako and ban in jealousy against their relatives. Maru's wife was very disappointed when the panji diri failed to reveal witchcraft as the cause (possibly due to the astuteness of the deora) and she made no secret of her belief that her sister-in-law was responsible. When this woman's child was bitten by a dog a day or so later, Maru's wife was elated at what she considered to be justice from Singbonga. When both children failed to improve, their mothers both took arua rice to a bhagat who lived three or four miles away 'to find out who was the witch.' Neither subsequently revealed the answer, if indeed one was given.

B, the deora complained one day of a burning pain in his arm. He suggested that it was a sengal ban (fire ban) sent by a jealous person, but he did not bother to consult his rice grains. The diagnosis appeared to be based as much on the symptom as on the conviction that one of his relatives wanted to hurt him; 'burning pains in the arm are always caused by sengal ban'.

Some years ago, a Kadu girl who had been married in

village C was sent away from her husband's village for alleged witchcraft. She had been accused of turning into a tiger and eating the village livestock. She returned to Kadu and panji diri was performed by three deora to establish her guilt or innocence. However, said informants, 'everyone knew she was a witch' and after this was confirmed, the deora were able to 'take the bonga out of her' by singing mantra to it and then binding it to a white anthill.

Two years before my arrival, the pahan tola of Kadu had been the centre of a celebrated witchcraft case in the area. Bandu, whose parents were dead, had long suspected his father's brother's wife of using witchcraft against himself and his family. One day he went to work in his vegetable garden and dug up some noxious roots, the smell of which caused him to faint. He decided that his aunt had put them there to kill him, and when, shortly afterwards, two of his children died suddenly, he needed no further proof. He followed his aunt and uncle to the fields one morning and killed them both with an axe. He then gathered his wife and children and fled to Assam. Opinion about the accusation was divided. Some believed the story of the roots, but others, including several of his own agnates, considered that he had 'got his desserts' when his wife and another child died shortly afterwards in Assam.

The other statements were concerned with establishing the credentials of alleged witches. Birsa's mother was said to be a witch because of her effect on children. They cried and fell sick if she looked at them as she had a visage 'like

a tiger' (kul-lika leltana-e). Ukari, a middle-aged widow, had not been a witch when she came to Kadu on her marriage. However, her mother-in-law had 'forced her to learn' although she was unwilling. Now 'she knows everything that witches know'. I was advised not to eat in her house.

All of the specific accusations were made between bhuinhar with mutual property interests. None of the raiyat were accused either of being witches or of harbouring jealous thoughts which might lead them to witchcraft. There were few accusations in comparison with those made over a similar period in Sukuhatu, and witchcraft was not a very potent force in the village. It was conceived of more commonly in the idiom of wildness, of tigers, cats and broomsticks. Kadu villagers entered each other's houses more freely and there was no generalised fear of eating and drinking in a neighbour's house.

The concept of witchcraft exists on two levels. On the one level there is the personification of wildness, destruction and anti-social behaviour. This is the form of the village scapegoat. On the other level, there is the sorcerer witch, who uses powers and methods theoretically available to everyone to hurt his fellow villagers. Scapegoats must by definition be in the minority, but everyone may be a sorcerer. The effect will simply be to heighten one's distrust of neighbours and close kinsmen and to give explanations increasingly in terms of sorcery. In Sukuhatu, it thus crops up as the source and explanation of such diverse events as adultery (the adulterer uses enticing medicines), a poorer harvest than one's neighbours, success outside the village context in employment

or education, and any misfortune which befalls a member of a khuntkatti household.

In the context of 'jealousy' or 'envy', accusations play an obvious part in the attempt to scale down social differences and bring villagers back 'into line'. Such differences threaten cohesion as they take people's loyalties outside the village framework and make them answerable to a different authority or a new set of social relations. In Sukuhatu, witchcraft accusations may therefore be accounted a partial answer to the problem of maintaining village cohesiveness, rather than as a disrupting force, villagers who 'step out of line' run the risk, real or supposed, of mystical attack. The question of the truth behind these accusations cannot be ascertained, and is, perhaps, irrelevant; although the poisonous recipes I was given were real enough. The point was that everyone believed in the possibility and imagined their neighbours to be quite capable of such an act.

The other type of accusation stems from the problem of pressure on land stocks in a community unable to expand its resources. Village households are mainly of the two generation nuclear type. As soon as sons marry, there is pressure to divide the property and set up separate hearths. In Sukuhatu, only two khuntkatti or raiya households consisted of brothers sharing the same cooking hearth, and in one of these the elder brother had chosen not to marry. In Kadu, there were seven joint households containing two or more married brothers. In general terms, the bigger the holding, the less pressure there is to divide at marriage. In Kadu, the joint

households were those with the biggest holdings and the largest shares of bhuinhari land. Enmity between brothers was a popular theme in Sukuhatu. It was considered almost impossible for them to live together after marriage as 'wives quarrel' and hagarege-paga-urungoa - 'a rope grows between brothers.'⁶ In a village where nearly everyone is agnatically related and most holdings are inadequate to provide a year's full food supply, the tensions are played out in accusations against those who would stand to gain most by the removal of a relative. In addition, the insularity of Sukuhatu brought about by the encapsulating nature of khuntkatti legislation, has encouraged people to stay in the village or to return after working away, in order to claim their ancestral land, thus exacerbating the shortage.

In Kadu, there were less accusations of this type and no direct accusations of the type alleging jealousy in relation to a fellow villager's assets. Landholdings in Kadu are larger and more productive, and the village is less insular in terms of its pattern of migration. There are also more clan outsiders holding raiya land and having therefore less relatives in the village with whom to quarrel over land. Their holdings are ancestral and their emotional attachment to the land may well be less than that of the khuntkattidar. The children of raiya also showed a greater tendency to move elsewhere and find employment. The holdings of raiya families were smaller than those of clan members (who all had a share in bhuinhari land) and supported a limited personnel. However,

the jealousy which was such an institutionalised part of life in Sukuhatu and which encompassed even unrelated persons, scarcely existed in Kadu. Cohesion was achieved through the identity of being a Munda, and this encompassed bhuinhar, raiyat, Christians and working villagers. Hence, no attempt was made to exclude any of these categories, either through commensal restrictions or through the institutionalised jealousy of those who had improved their position through employment or education.

It may be that anti-witchcraft legislation has also affected the extent of witchcraft accusations. The cases of witchcraft recorded by Hoffman appeared to be more of the scapegoat variety where the witch, frequently an old widow, was either killed or driven away from the village. Accusations were tried in public by a diviner and punishment was immediate for those found guilty. The evil was purged and harmony restored, albeit very temporarily. Witches are still sometimes driven away, but there is undoubted fear of police action, and the existence of no less than three known and feared 'witches' living unmolested in the village perhaps lends strength to this argument. As one Sukuhatu woman said, 'because of the police we can do nothing about witches and so now we just try to protect ourselves against them.'

Such protection is the province of the deora, who entertains his own private fantasies about his role as the witches' enemy. In Sukuhatu, he acted particularly as a diviner of individual misfortunes. Divination was 'built in' to his performance, and he presented himself as engaged in a

perpetual struggle against witches and malevolent bongako. Although in theory 'natural cause' was agreed to be a possibility, in practice, diagnosis always involved divination, and divination always elicited a malicious agent. In about two-thirds of such cases, witchcraft was alleged but no direct accusation was made by the deora himself. It was left to the client to indulge his own suspicions, encouraged by indirect hints from the deora. The deora thus reinforces the prevailing trend in explanation by telling his clients what they want to hear, and he contributes to the general atmosphere of suspicion in the village. In this context, the famous village witches prove useful. If challenged to make a direct accusation the deora will usually hint that it is the one of/three women. However, when pressed for a reason why witchcraft had been used, the reply was always the jealousy of the victim's real or classificatory brother (haga). There was no suggestion that the haga had utilized the services of a known witch. It was, instead, a way of deflecting tensions onto a more diffuse target. Everyone knew what these women were like. As they could not be removed, the villagers just had to put up with them, and they served as useful scapegoats for the behaviour of the rest.

In Kadu, divination was not built in to the treatment. Medicines would first be given, and the rice grains would only be consulted if the patient failed to improve after a reasonable length of time had elapsed. Because witchcraft did not figure as a major causal explanation, divination rarely revealed it. In fact, it was noted on only one occasion and this was for a

woman who came from another village to consult the deora.

'Scapegoat' witches did not figure in the revelations of the diviners either, and there was general agreement among deora that witchfinding was not a good thing to be doing. The only other example of such a divination which I was able to discover, concerned the girl from Kadu who was driven away from her husband's village for alleged witchcraft. She was pictured, however, as an involuntary witch, and the deora were able to 'drive the bonga out of her.'

The question of the link between morality and misfortune is difficult to answer in specific terms. There are breaches of morality which are connected with misfortunes and which are said to affect the community as well as the individual. Hoffman refers to the punishment of the whole community by Singbonga and the ancestors for such breaches as incest, pollution and breaking of ritual prohibitions before sarna rituals. My evidence suggests that these causal links between morals and misfortunes have largely broken down. In Sukuhatu, for instance, incestuous liaisons were common, but villagers felt that, although Singbonga was displeased, there was little that they could do about such matters as there was no effective discipline. The enforcement of ritual prohibitions was another problem as Christians did not recognise their necessity. The ancestors gave only stomach-ache and headache to their negligent and non-Christian descendents. In Kadu, traditional law was enforced by modern penalties, such as heavy fines, but the old reasoning substantially remained. Laws were laid down by Singbonga and the ancestors, therefore they should

be obeyed. It seemed that Singbonga was prepared to accept modern penalties in place of the customary sanctions of expulsion or expurgation in a kanda ceremony, however, as no cases of either sanction were witnessed in either village.

Both Singbonga and the ancestors figured as causal agents in the Kadu panji-diri for the sick baby. As these agents do not act out of malice or caprice, this indicates a continuing link between morality and misfortune. It should be noted, though, that little interest was shown in the possible transgression. Villagers were content to note that a link existed, as 'Singbonga does not act unfairly'. When divining, a Kadu deora always includes a white fowl for Singbonga in the eventual sacrifice, just in case he had been offended. This was not so in Sukuhatu, nor were the ancestors ever revealed in divination. This postulated breakdown in the link between morality and misfortune accords with the general picture sketched for Sukuhatu. Customary law was persistently disregarded and social and ritual sanctions had fallen into disrepute. Traditional explanations had lost their credibility.

A major category of spirits causing harm in both Kadu and Sukuhatu were the hatubongako (village spirits) of the Asur myth. Hoffman described these as being generally benevolent village protectors who only caused trouble if their worship was neglected or their dwelling place disturbed or mutilated, for instance by the cutting down of a tree at the spot. No moral transgression was involved. It was merely a case of offering the correct sacrifice of a particular colour

of animal. This is still broadly the case, but it seems that such bongako additionally inflict apparently capricious harm, that is, without the above mentioned provocations. Indeed, in no cases in which these bongako were involved, was it suggested that they had been provoked in any of these ways. They were described as 'greedy for a sacrifice', or simply as 'very bad'.

Burubonga is a particularly interesting case. He is generally agreed to be the most powerful bonga after the Supreme Being himself and he is invoked after Singbonga in the sarna ritual order. His dual aspect is carefully separated in Kadu by the distinction made between Baranda and Burubonga. They are the 'same bonga' but the operations of the 'bad' modality (Baranda) are distinguished from the 'good' or neutral modality (Buru). This enabled Burubonga to be seen in a favourable light as village protector. In Sukuhatu, the duality was combined in one. He was both protector of village boundaries and malevolent spirit. In Sukuhatu, the sarna cult was becoming discredited, however, and the hatubongako provided ready vehicles for transformation into largely malicious spirits for deora looking into their earthen lamps and rice grains for explanations.

The peripheral and mostly malicious spirits, of which there was a great proliferation in Sukuhatu, show evidence of having been introduced in the last 100 years. Hoffman mentions some of them and comments, disapprovingly, on their appearance in Munda villages since he arrived in the area in 1869. In fact, his evidence suggests that they became

particularly popular in the 1890's and the early part of this century; a time of great social upheaval in the area, which also saw the beginning of millenarian activity. New prophets and new bongako were doubtless eagerly grasped. The bongako referred to in this context by Hoffman were mainly the household bongako which promised wealth and protection from misfortune. The more obviously 'Hindu' bongako may have appeared more recently, as they do not figure in the writings of Hoffman. If any of these bongako were ever popular in Kadu, they have dropped out of favour in recent times; but it is notable that Kadu was a comparatively peaceful village in the late 19th century, the bhuinhari settlement having been completed in 1869.

The postulated change in the nature of causal explanation, at least in Sukuhatu, can be related first to the severance of links between morality and misfortune. Offences once thought to bring misfortune on the community have become so common that the traditional explanation has lost its force. Secondly, contact with Christians, Hindus and other 'outsiders' has brought an awareness of new alternatives to replace the old ones. Thirdly, explanations in terms of jealous relatives and capricious spirits have, in any case, considerable credibility in a village which is prone to factionalism and quarreling over scarce resources, and where community religion has largely given way to private observances.

Robin Horton, in a recently published paper⁷ suggests that when a person is seeking to place an event in a causal context, his choice will depend on how wide a context he

wishes to bring into consideration and what area of experience he considers relevant to the event. If misfortune is morality-linked, one needs only to look to the customarily known link between the failing and the causal agent. If this link is put into doubt, other explanations will be sought. There must be other agents, or different manifestations of known agents, which can be called into explanation.

This search for a causal agent for almost every sickness or misfortune was painfully apparent in Sukuhatu. Villagers would go from one deora to another and receive a different answer on each occasion. Each illness provokes a flurry of self-questioning. When B's daughter first became ill, B said she was sure that it was because a goat had eaten some of the leaves of the tree marking the shrine of a household marangbonga. The bonga was hastily propitiated, but the child did not improve. The deora were then called in and made their various diagnoses. Blame shifted to a witch in B's natal village who was sending a burubonga to make the child ill. From there, it moved to a jealous relative in Sukuhatu and so on. Each new area of experience gave rise to more possible causes: N was 'killed' by a jealous relative because he had been given the 'contract' for collecting the market tax that year. The new models are comprehensive enough to accommodate a whole range of new experiences within them.

The role of the deora in promoting this process may now be examined. First, the deora played a different role in both villages. In Sukuhatu, his prominence in village affairs appears to have increased as the role of the pahan and the

status of the community cult has declined. His methods and scope of activity have expanded to cope with his increased role as a vehicle of explanation. To understand this expansion we must look outside Munda society to the activities of practitioners among the Hindu population. The Sukuhatu deora have adapted the methods of Hindu practitioners to their needs. Hindu diviners, soothsayers and venom sweepers, variously known as bhagat, sokha, mati and ojha are found all over Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. Divining is a major part of their trade, and some are shamanistic,⁸ in that their personal deota speaks through them while they are in a state of trance. Some are itinerant and all of them tend to operate independently of village boundaries.

E. Toppo⁹ in his study of Oraon religion, records their prevalence in Oraon villages as wandering, independent magicians who, unlike the Munda deora and his Oraon equivalent, do not remain long enough in a village to take advantage of the considerable social and psychological knowledge of the village deora. Explanations are thus couched in the idiom of impersonal spirits, often with Hindi or Bengali names. The language of these magicians is a corrupt form of Hindi, Bengali or Oriya which derives its efficacy from the fact of being said rather than from its content.

The deora and bhagat of Sukuhatu all said that they had learnt part of their art from Harijan practitioners. Three of them had spent periods of time in Assam where they had picked up further knowledge in the polyglot community of the tea gardens. Two of the Kadu deora, including the oldest one,

Champa, had worked in Assam, but said that they had learnt their art from Mundas in the Kadu area. Knowledge gained in Assam was considered, in Kadu to be ritually dangerous. My next-door neighbour in Kadu, who was the nephew of a village deora, had started to learn the art while working in the tea gardens. He had given it up after some time as he found it 'too dangerous,' but he had a history of mental instability, and while I was there he became balu (mad) and posed a great problem to his family who had to guard him all the time. The deora were consulted and all agreed that his madness was caused by his mystical experiences in Assam. The bonga which had become his familiar spirit in Assam, would not now leave him, and he was also said to have retained a number of dangerous magical artifacts, such as a corpse's finger and some medicines, which should have been thrown away. The deora removed these offending articles from the man's house and disposed of them. They later attempted to exorcise the bonga by singing to it all night and commanding it to come out. Black fowls were sacrificed for this spirit. The treatment had limited observable success, but it illustrates the attitude of Kadu villagers and their deora towards the kind of practices taken from low-caste Hindu diviners and common in Sukuhatu.

Material from Kadu, and from Hoffman in earlier days, suggests that deora are not traditionally shamanistic. The adoption of a personal guru or deota is a comparatively recent phenomenon and limited to certain areas. No special ability or unusual characteristic is required to become a deora, and

Munda deora are not 'set apart' or marginal, as in the case of Harijan practitioners who can use their position both as a possible means of status advancement and as a way of transcending their own marginality by voluntarily setting themselves apart. For instance, Suli, the ghasi bhagat never took cooked food from the Mundas or any other caste, as Kali, his deota, had forbidden him to do so.

The situation in Sukuhatu suggests that the traditional role of the deora is changing. Mangra was encouraging his recruits to go into trances, although he was never known to do so himself. The trance state was described as 'Mahadeo entering the body' and the implication was that all knowledge came from Mahadeo. Cases of this type of possession were confirmed from watching other young deora in the area at work. All gave Mahadeo as their guru and performed a regular sacrifice of sweets, milk and flowers for him. They said that Mahadeo came to them in dreams and gave them knowledge about their art. There was no suggestion that he actually spoke through them, but rather that he told them privately whatever they wanted to know while they were in the state of trance. The usefulness of this is obvious. Witchcraft accusations are fraught with danger, particularly if they involve a fellow villager. This is why deora almost never make direct accusations. However, an accusation revealed through the all-knowing Mahadeo has greater legitimacy and is less dangerous for the deora, who becomes, in this context, simply the vehicle of the god.

At the same time, the Sukuhatu deora were also showing

signs of 'setting themselves apart.' Long matted hair, after the fashion of Shivite ascetics, and shaggy beards were popular among the younger deora, and beef eating was generally eschewed. There was little evidence of these changes in Kadu. The one deora who had a shrine to Mahadeo did not invoke the god during divination. Such methods and techniques were not unfamiliar to them, however, particularly from contact in Assam, but they were generally not utilised. The emphasis on independence from village boundaries was also a feature of Sukuhatu deora, and this accords with the increasingly 'neutral' types of explanation being given and with the type of practitioners which they sought to emulate.

Conceptions of bongako have not remained unaffected. An obvious example of a borrowed technique, is the practice of 'catching' a bonga and imprisoning it inside an earthen pot. This was sometimes done when a rice grain divination was performed. Instead of hanging a sal leaf in the house eaves containing the rice grains which symbolised the promised sacrifice, the Sukuhatu deora put the grains and some copper-coins inside the pot, closed it with a sal leaf and hunt it up in the same way. The process was, however, described as the confinement of the offending bonga so that it could do no further harm to the sick patient. When the patient had recovered the deora would return to free the spirit at some spot away from the village and appease it with a sacrifice. This process puzzled me at first, as the notion of catching a bonga did not seem to fit with villagers' conceptions of bongako as non-anthropomorphic and identifiable either by their

dwelling place or by some external sign only, such as a cracking twig or other noise. The very essence of the idea of a bonga was, in fact that it was a being which could not be seen. Yet in this divination, they were pictured as caught up in the personal fantasy battle of the deora as beings which could be brought under control in a very tangible way.

It was illuminating, therefore, to read Toppo's account of this divination as performed by a Hindu diviner in an Oraon village.¹⁰ The diviner 'calls up' all the potentially troublesome spirits with mantra, and asks Mahadeo to direct the rice grains in such a way that, out of five rice grains dropped on the floor, the same grain out of the five will separate from the others five times in succession at the name of the correct spirit. He then picks up the grain between his thumb and finger, followed another two of the grains, in such a way that they will stick to the first grain. These grains are said to be the spirit overcome by the mantra, and the diviner then addresses the spirit with a further mantra, ordering it to leave the body of the sick person, and to enter the singhi - a small iron cone made by the village blacksmith which has been provided by the patient's family. The cone is then shut, placed inside an earthen chuka, or small pot, and taken to be 'nailed out' on a white ant hill. A hole is dug and the chuka is closed with stones and the diviner offers a goat to his own guru, charging him to ensure that the spirit does not return to the sick person's body. It seems that this is the model from which the deora was taking his method. New

threats require new strategies. This method, it should be noted, applied only to bongako of the more recently introduced variety, and in Kadu, a similar technique was used to rid the village of its unwelcome 'wealth' bongako.

How do these changes operate at the symbolic level?

Turner¹¹ tackles this question in relation to Ndembu shamans.

He starts by pointing out that,

'in divinatory symbolism, the cognitive aspect is more pronounced; in the symbolism of life crisis rituals and rituals of affliction, the orrectic aspect, that concerned with feelings and desires, is clearly dominant.'¹²

He goes on to discuss the shaman as an upholder of tribal morality and a rectifier of disturbed social relationships.

He,

'redresses breaches in the social structure, enunciates the moral law, detects those who secretly and malevolently transgress it and prescribes remedial action both on the social structural and the cultural levels in the form of redressive ritual.'¹³

At the symbolic level, therefore, symbols at public rituals represent many meanings at once. They fuse structural, moral and emotional elements together. The divinatory symbol, on the other hand, distinguishes one sense sharply from others. The sal leaf in the roof stands for the sacrifice to be given to the bonga. It does not represent, as in a sarna ritual, such diverse themes as the offering to the ancestors, the livelihood of the community, the household cooking hearth and so on. Cognitive symbolism of the kind involved in divination is impersonal and divorced from public symbolism. This change from diffuse to cognitive symbol as an ongoing process, is

particularly apparent in Sukuhatu in the decline of public ritual and the pre-eminence of the deora. Mutual reinforcing processes between society and public ritual cease when social change is radical enough to undermine the credibility of symbols carrying multiple meanings.

In Sukuhatu, the diversity of divining methods displayed a far greater use of cognitive symbolism than was found in Kadu. The Kadu panjidiri divination entailed a considerable use of diffuse symbolism. The grinding stone, an indispensable instrument in every household, was balanced on a measure of upland paddy. The use of this paddy in rites of passage and in the new rice ceremony had already been noted. Although a subsidiary crop at the present time, its emotional significance to the Mundas is considerable. It is a symbol of a preferred form of cultivation and hence a preferred way of life. After the divination, the amount is measured as a reduced quantity would indicate that the patient will not recover. It is thus a symbol of life itself.

There are many other 'public' symbols in the panjidiri divination. It is always done in the patient's courtyard. Rice beer, one of the most 'public' of all symbols, is served to everyone. Since this must be brewed in advance of the day, this precludes the sort of 'off the cuff' divinations found in Sukuhatu, where diviners are always given arki (mahua liquor) to drink, unless rice beer happens to be available. Arki is a neutral drink which may be taken in the company of any caste. At panjidiri the promised sacrifice was taken to each household member in turn to be touched and then to the ading door. This

is a set of acts carrying multiple meanings in which the deora uses the same set of symbols as those used by the pahan in sarna rituals. In Kadu, the deora is playing a supporting role to the central cult. He protects the household while the pahan protects the village. In that role, he has no alternative model of explanation to offer, and no alternative is called for while the sarna cult flourishes. The deora of Kadu have just as much chance of contact with Hindu diviners as their counterparts in Sukuhatu. They are acquainted with the methods used by these practitioners, but they do not use them.

Ndembu shamans are seen as upholders of the existing order in a society without centralised political institutions. Sukuhatu deora are ultimately modifiers and innovators in a situation of social change, and in this respect they may be compared with two other societies in India in which shamanistic practitioners play an important role.

Berreman¹⁴, writing about the Pahari Hindus in the western Himalayas, describes a situation which has certain parallels with the one being discussed here. The Paharis are 'looked down on' by the plains Hindus as 'the hillbilly stereotypes of other cultures'¹⁵ for their unorthodox and degraded practices. The two cultures keep as aloof as possible. The shaman plays the most important ritual role in Pahari villages:

'He is the key man in virtually every instance of traditional religious worship. He often determines which puja will be performed, which sacrifices will be offered, which pilgrimages undertaken, which new gods worshipped and, in the long run, which ones

will fall by the wayside. Styles and fads of worship, means of correcting troubles and treating diseases, are largely in the shaman's hands.¹⁶

The shaman may be of any caste, though Berreman suggests that they are more often Bajgi (blacksmith) than Brahmin. Berreman sees the shaman as 'cultural policy maker' - a shaper of collective experience, rather than a follower.

Pahari society is insular, despite the encroachment of government agencies and schools. Few villagers escape from this insularity to take jobs outside the hills. The likelihood of this is even less among low-caste Paharis. The insularity of the hill village seems to be reflected in the lack of variation in religious practices from caste to caste, despite the usual distinctions of purity and hierarchy. Berreman finds that 'they do not possess significantly different religious subcultures.'¹⁷ This may well be the type of climate in which shamans flourish, and all these points find parallels in Sukuhatu.

Returning after a ten year interval, Berreman found that a young Blacksmith had enjoyed a spell of considerable fame as a shaman possessed by a god new to the village and considered particularly efficacious by clients from a wide area. The youth had gradually acquired all the elements of an 'outsider' by fasting, scourging himself and living as a hermit. Berreman saw his rise to fame as essentially a means to status advancement for a low caste person who finds all other avenues blocked to him. However, such a phenomenon could only occur in a society which offered a favourable

climate to such manipulation. After an initial surge of enthusiasm, the fortunes of the blacksmith shaman had gradually declined to the point where he was being eclipsed by other practitioners and deserted by his clients.

It seems to me that Sukuhatu offers this type of climate also. Here, the deora is becoming a cultural policy maker in his own right by manipulating symbols of the cognitive, as opposed to the public and emotive kind; but his hold on the public sympathy is, by virtue of this, precarious. He is open to competition from other policy makers in a way in which the pahan, or village representative, cannot be. To have a rival pahan would be inconceivable, whereas competition and rivalry is of the essence among shamans. The pahan holds office on a hereditary basis, but the deora achieves his position through the acquisition of knowledge that has no formal limits. A dissatisfied client may go to another practitioner with different methods or categories of explanation. Thus, we might expect to see the instability noted in the position of the Pahari shaman manifesting itself eventually among Sukuhatu deora. In Kadu, the strong tendency for deora to be recruited within the family, gives this position a semi-hereditary basis, and also militates against the growth of much competition among practitioners.

For a comparative example from tribal India, I turn to the Saora, a hill tribe of Orissa, studied by Verrier Elwin¹⁸. They are related linguistically to the Mundas. Elwin's background data is rather scanty as he is concerned with Saora religion 'sui generis' and not with sociological formulations,

but certain features may be established. The lack of political centralisation is striking. Villages are not bounded units based on clan affiliation as are Munda khuntkatti villages. The basic and only grouping appears to be a localised, shallow patrilineage (birinda) which is exogamous and has its own burning ground, memorial stones and funeral officiants. Women do not change birinda membership on marriage. There is no village political or ritual leadership except, according to Elwin, in the villages of Ganjam District where the Saora are more in contact with their Hindu neighbours. Here they have a village priest (buyya) who performs protective rituals, and a village headman who represents them to the government. Saora hill villages have no priestly cult. All rituals are performed by shamans who may be either male or female. Elwin divides them into five categories, but for our purposes they fall conveniently into two; those who have a tutelary spirit spouse, go into trance and can, between them, officiate at all rituals; and minor practitioners who do not have tutelaries or go into trances, but are confined to dispensing medicines, taking omens and so on.

Hill villagers still practise shifting cultivation and, according to Elwin, writing in 1955, 'most' of their livelihood still comes from this source, although they are settled rice cultivators as well. Hill men spend large parts of the year away from the main settlements tending their ash gardens. The absence of clan organisation and exogamous groupings larger than the birinda (which appears from Elwin's

scanty data to be always smaller than the village, with perhaps several birinda sharing the same village) suggests that the Saora became settled cultivators very recently in comparison with the Chotanagpur tribes. Some villages, mentioned by Elwin, are still small patrilocal groups in the remoter parts of the hills where shifting cultivation is the staple method. It also suggests that a priestly cult of the kind found among the Mundas is unlikely to occur among shifting cultivators living in small scattered groups. We might also reconsider Elwin's contention that the Ganjam villages had adopted a priestly cult simply to emulate their Hindu neighbours. These villages are lower in altitude than the villages of the Koraput region where the 'non-Hinduised' Saora live. The Ganjam villagers probably took to settled cultivation earlier than their hillier neighbours as Ganjam contains large tracts of fertile lowland suitable only for wet rice cultivation. The appearance of a priestly cult, unifying the larger settled villages is likely to be a response to this change rather than a mere borrowing for the sake of emulation.

To return to their neighbours higher up, Elwin provides some interesting information on the Saora pantheon. The ancestors are particularly important as agents of misfortune. They constantly punish the living with misfortune and sicknesses, accusing them of shirking their obligations to the dead by letting them go hungry or thirsty in the afterworld (which is largely a mirror image of the world of the living). The Supreme Being (Kittung) is a rather capricious and fallible

spirit who is said to have made mistakes during the creation which then had to be put right by other spirits. A large number of spirits, many with Hindu names, appear in the pantheon and they are nearly all associated with a particular disease. Hill gods are particular dangerous to people who trespass on their territory. All in all, the pantheon is a punishing one. It is also largely morally neutral as, with the exception of ancestral obligations, misfortune is conceived of as caused simply in order to obtain a sacrifice for the agent. The gods are said to be 'greedy for food and wine'.

Shamans are the medium in all these demands, and I find it interesting that both Elwin himself and Turner, who wrote a recent critique of his book¹⁹ see the shaman as ultimately a redresser of disturbed social situations and the upholder of tribal morality in its widest sense through the restatement of ideal social relations. This undoubtedly an important aspect, particularly in a politically uncentralised society where the shaman, being independent of village boundaries, restates his message over a wide area, but it is difficult not to draw a parallel with the Sukuhatu data in seeing the shaman as first and foremost a vehicle of social change. The Saora shaman flourishes in the larger villages where a lack of coherent political or clan organisation creates serious problems in upholding village unity. This rested previously, one might guess, on the ancestral cult of the birinda, as the only structural principle underlying the scattered groups of shifting cultivators.

The Saora have no priestly cult to unify the larger hill villages which, as Elwin admits, are prone to factionalism and quarreling. The shaman's role is thus analogous to that of the deora in providing an explanatory model. Possession by a tutelary spirit spouse who is always a Hindu deity, is the main method used by the Saora shaman in divination. I quote from Elwin, who says that:

'all ceremonies are constantly disturbed by shamans and shamanins ('female shamans') who fall into trances and are visited by gods and ancestors who, it is supposed, are attracted by the smell of wine and meat.' 20

Ancestors perpetually bother their descendants even after the final funeral rites, which turn them into fully-fledged ancestors, have been performed. Shamans, who are responsible for divining and interpreting the demands of their ancestors, explain their persistence by the imperfect state of the underworld where they do not get good harvests and the palm trees do not produce good wine. Shamans have, of course, been there and so they can give a clear picture of the land of the dead. The tutelaries of shamans are regarded as the 'highest' in the pantheon and these deities are the 'officials' of the underworld, the ancestors being the 'peasants', according to the Saora view.

Here we have both the reflective and creative aspects of religious change. Hindus provide the officials and government servants of this world, and for more remote Saora, the official is perhaps the only Hindu with whom they have any contact. The symbolic validation of 'this world' statuses is one side of the coin. The creation of the conditions for

their acceptance is the other side. The shaman's part in this may be likened to the writing of an essay. The author is constrained at the outset by his data and the minimum level of common classification and meaning required to make the work acceptable and understood, but the process of writing is such that his conclusions may differ from his beginning ideas. By choosing a particular method of divination, a shaman or deora may be led to explanatory conclusions that are different from his initial set of received ideas. Contact with other models of explanation and a wider network on social relations places him in an ideal position to introduce new idioms and values.

Footnotes to Chapter VI

- 1 Described on p. 124.
- 2 See p. 238.
- 3 See p.238.
- 4 1937 pp. 63-83.
- 5 Described on p. 62.
- 6 The 'rope', in this context, obviously refers to the rope in the marriage ceremony which brings the bridewealth cattle to the girl's house. Thus, it is the 'wife' which grows between brothers.
- 7 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science' Africa 37 1967.
- 8 I use this term rather loosely to indicate possession by, and control over, a personal spirit (deota) rather than in Eliade's sense of an ecstatic whose soul can visit the underworld at will. (Eliade 1964 p. 5)
- 9 Toppo 1964 p. 70.
- 10 ibid p. 72.
- 11 'Ndembu Divination' Rhodes-Livingstone Institute Paper 1961.
- 12 ibid p. 15.
- 13 ibid p. 21.
- 14 'Hindus of the Himalayas 1969'.

- 15 ibid p. xxi.
- 16 ibid p. 134.
- 17 ibid p. 136.
- 18 Elwin 1955.
- 19 'Aspects of Saora Ritual and Shamanism' in Epstein ed.
1967 p. 181.
- 20 op.cit. p. 370.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

As a final question, it may be asked what it is that sets off the Mundas from other groups in the population, and particularly from their old enemies, the Hindus. It is apparent that the Mundas have moved, over a long period of time, in two main directions. One is towards an economy increasingly similar to that of the Hindus, and the other is towards a greater degree of cultural separateness which may, in its most extreme manifestations, be described as an ethnic identity.

In the first respect, the changes in technology and mode of settlement which have resulted from population expansion the necessary intensification of land use, are paralleled among certain other hill populations in India, and comparison along these lines may be fruitful in that it avoids the vexed question of origins and cultural differences and enables us to compare a number of groups hitherto considered in isolation as representatives of disparate cultural strata.

Professor von Furer Haimendorf has commented¹ on the similarities between Munda religion in its present form, and the religion of the Raj Gonds. The Gonds share a similar history to that of the Mundas. They were at one time shifting cultivators, and have always preferred to cultivate the light soil on the flat tops of hills by the rotation method still extant among the Mundas. Their own history records an era of fighting with the 'Mussalman' or 'Turkal', which parallels the Munda legends of fights with the 'Turku' at a time when the

Moghul Kingdom was being consolidated.² Later, the Raj Gonds suffered dispossession under the Marathas and the Mundas suffered under a variety of Hindu rajas and landlords. Colonial policies have played their part in protecting and separating these many tribes from further dispossession of land, and likely absorption into the Hindu caste system.

It is, therefore, not surprising that great cultural similarities are found among Mundas, Oraons, Khonds, Gonds and so forth. Groups which allocate and cultivate land on a clan basis are likely to have clan gods and clan priests to propitiate them. Similarly, tribes which settle as predominantly wet rice cultivators are likely to live in larger settlements and adapt their social, political and ritual organisation to their new mode of settlement. Village priests thus tend to take over from clan priests, and village spirits become more important than clan spirits.

Whether these changes are ascribed to culture contact or not is unimportant, but as settled tribal cultivators tend to have similar traditions about the introduction of plough technology from outside then it is quite likely that cultural innovations had their inspiration in the same way. The point is rather than tribes have existed in the past, and continue to exist, as autonomous entities rather than as cultural isolates. As Dumont has pointed out³, this is evident in the religion of the Saora which is not opposed to Hinduism but is rather, autonomous of it in the sense that it borrows and adapts from Hinduism but is not absorbed by it. This process has occurred also in Munda religion. The adaptation of the

Asur Myth from what is obviously a Hindu source, is a good example of this.

It may be suggested, therefore, that discussions of the origins and ethnic affiliations of the Mundas and other tribes are irrelevant to our understanding of their present situation and of the mechanisms which maintain their separateness. The contention of Mauss⁴ that tribes are simply Hindus who have lost contact, is of no consequence to the sociologist who has eschewed the search for origins on the grounds that these do not, of themselves, explain the continued persistence over time of any particular group, nor do they help us to understand why groups classed by philologists and culture historians as belonging to different ethnic stocks can nevertheless display such great similarities in social organization and culture.

The other direction in which the Mundas appear to be moving must now be considered. This is the tendency towards a politicization of Munda ethnicity, which has reached its furthest development in the secessionist Jharkand movement. In the last hundred years, the inspiration for this politicization has undoubtedly come from the protectionist assumptions and policies of colonial administrations and from the influence of missionary activity on Munda thinking. British colonial policies tended to assume, rightly or wrongly, that tribes like the Mundas were cultural isolates and hence, that what was needed was a policy to restore the situation to what it was thought to have been prior to the wholesale alienation of land. Munda beliefs about the golden age of the past were thus given ample legitimation in the attitudes and

policies of the British Administration.

Colonialism did not, however, start with the British, and the Moghuls also, unwittingly perhaps, played a part in strengthening the tribal political system by creating administrative units from clan territories. This effect is still in evidence today in the functioning of the parha organization in bhuinhari areas.

The years of British rule and missionary activity have produced a cultural feedback which was also quite unintentional. Attempts are being made by the Jharkand party and its sympathisers to revitalize the 'traditional' religion of the village priest. This is known, by its proponents as sarnadharom, sacred grove religion, and the adherents have formed themselves into a samaj or society, on the lines of a Hindu reformist sect and have codified the procedure which is said to be followed at all sarna rituals. This movement has had little effect in the Khunti area as yet and information about it was supplied by Philip Ekka S. J. who has carried out fieldwork in the area north of Ranchi District. Jharkand publications detailing the Munda view of their history and ancient rights do, however, circulate freely and their message percolates through to the villages. It is salutary to read in them accounts which were obviously written by the missionaries and anthropologists of the last century and which are now being used as authoritative documents by the Mundas themselves. The oral tradition has turned full circle.

E. R. Leach⁵, writing about Burmese and Assamese shifting cultivators, pointed out that externally imposed change,

defined as

'action by a paramount power which artificially stabilizes certain aspects of the cultural situation in a particular locality in defiance of inherent tendencies towards flux and modification' 6

is likely to have the effect of exaggerating racial or cultural differences among the population by creating or maintaining an economic independence which would otherwise have disappeared.

The Mundas were already settled cultivators when legislation was enacted, but Leach's hypothesis can be said to hold true for them also. Since the 1908 legislation, Christianity has made far greater inroads than Hinduism, and the number of Mundas describing themselves as Hindus in the ten-yearly censuses has gone down steadily. The movement towards greater intensification of agriculture and technological sophistication will doubtless continue but, unlike the change from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, it will take place largely in a cultural and political vacuum.

It would be wrong to suggest, however, that the tendency towards cultural and political separateness is solely a result of more recent colonial interventions. This would be to do the Munda view of the world an injustice, as their war against the diku goes back well before the arrival of the British and possibly before the arrival of the Mohammedans too. Whether they are the descendents of early Aryans who wandered off to the jungles, or the aboriginal remnants of an autochthonous people will probably never be settled, but their technical mode of existence and its cultural expression is not that of

Hinduism with its emphasis on the opposition of pure and impure. The basic opposition in Munda thought might rather be said to be that of the forest (bir) and the settlement (hatu), as befits a people whose preference has always been for upland crops and forested areas.

A Revision of the Concept of 'Borrowings'

Borrowings from other cultures should not be seen only as a mechanical emulation, or as the first step in being 'swallowed up' by a stronger culture. I have tried to point out their role in strengthening conceptual boundaries, and caste may be seen as an example of this, if it is accepted that it constitutes a borrowing from Hindu culture.

The areas of religion most resistant to external influences are those concerned with life crisis rituals and the community cult, as these use orrectic or diffuse symbolism. The importance of community rituals may decline, but no metamorphosis into a Hindu cult has yet occurred. Borrowings are absorbed more readily into the residual cults of the deora and magicians and this suggests that these cults are more responsive and adaptive to social change than either community or life crisis rituals. On this point, the Kađu material suggests that the residual borrowing of Hindu spirits strengtens boundaries at the symbolic level, in that it confirms such spirits as malevolent and capricious in their activities, as are Hindus themselves. In Sukuhatu, however, Hindu spirits were more in evidence and were viewed with greater ambivalence. The extent of such borrowing may perhaps be correlated with

the degree to which the outside group is seen to pose a threat. The Kadu Mundas are constantly reminded of the unwelcome Hindu presence as powerful rival interest group on their land and in their market. Borrowings between them are minimal and residual. Hindus can never form a powerful interest group in Sukuhatu as they have no access to economic resources. They will probably thus remain a minority itinerant population, serving as vehicles for certain cultural innovations and adding further bongako to the village cosmos.

Final Amendment

I have talked rather loosely about 'the Mundas' and 'Munda society' and when discussing their historical and demographic background it is difficult to do otherwise. It is important also, to see the various groups in Chotanagpur as engaged in a continual redefinition of their parameters and relations to other groups. However, in many respects, the Mundas constitute a tribe in the least rigorous sense of the word. Their reactions to other groups are not always unified or consistent, and their response to changes affecting their society depend on a concatenation of factors which may be sociological or purely fortuitous. I have tried to demonstrate some of these responses in two comparable, but in many ways contrasting, villages, but no general representativeness can be claimed for the analysis.

One of the advantages of focusing on religion in the process of social change, is that a more 'inside' view may be obtained. One of the perils of a systems approach is that it

can lead to a preoccupation with bounded groups as irreducible units about which generalizations may be made. A similar preoccupation with group boundaries 'per se' glosses over the question of how these are maintained and altered, and the part played by cultural innovators in this process, as well as in the search for meaning and explanation which may be independent of any significance for boundaries or political separateness.

Footnotes to Conclusion

- 1 verbal communication.
- 2 Furer Haimendorf 1948 Vol. I, pp. 6-12.
- 3 Contributions III 1959 p. 60.
- 4 Noted and discussed on p. 24.
- 5 Unpublished Ph.D thesis University of London 1947.
- 6 *ibid.* p. 280.

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