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Adivasi (Indigenous people) Perception of Landscape: The Case of Manbhum

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Abstract

This paper seeks to study the process how an Adivasi village was formed and how different sacred institutions were created in order to facilitate biological resource management. It also intends to focus on the Adivasi agency in effective landscape management that contends the romantic stereotype that they were incapable of managing resources. The essay also seeks to combat the romantic stereotype that Adivasis lived in complete harmony with nature and did not distort the nature. Though the spread of ruralisation and peasantisation among the Adivasis had serious impact on the landscape, both the forest-dependent and agriculturist Adivasis had skills to manage and reproduce natural/biological resources, based on their indigenous knowledge, socio-cultural practices and religious believes. Colonial intervention had catastrophic impact on the Adivasi landscape. With the creation of private property in land and hierarchical property structure, social solidarity and headmanship of Adivasi villages was broken down. The colonial concept of village was radically different from the Adivasi perception. Adivasi villages were transformed into revenue unit. Sacred institutions of the Adivasis faced new challenges. The essay finally argues that the post colonial policy makers as also the academicians should keep the Adivasi ideas of landscape in mind while formulating their policies and writing about them.

In colonial context, most of the landscape studies have focused on the arable parts of the landscape. The growing domain of environmental history has attempted to document 'agrarian environment' and its relation with the 'indigenous people' in colonial context. The present research deviates from this academic tradition and seeks to concentrate on the non-arable areas. In this context, this paper aims to focus on the Adivasi[1] perception of landscape in the context of the non-arable parts of Manbhum[2] district which was the abode of both the Adivasi agriculturists (Mundas, Oraons, Kurmis and Santals) and forest dwellers (Kherias and Birhors). The term 'landscape' is a complex concept. It can be seen as 'a socio-historical construct', as Denis Cosgrove, the geographer, argues. Cosgrove

[1] The word 'Adivasi' means original inhabitant. For details, see an excellent study (Rycroft 2014) on assertion of Adivasis as indigenous peoples in India. Recently scholars (Rycroft 2014:1) do not italicize the word in order to normalize its use.

[2] Present Purulia district (West Bengal, India) is a part of erstwhile Manbhum district. The district was bordered on the north by Hazaribagh and Santhal Parganas, on the east by Burdwan, Bankura and Midnapur, on the south by Singhbhum and on the west by Ranchi and Hazaribagh. This Bengal district was formed in 1833 but it was part of Bihar and Orissa during the period of 1912-1956.

and Stephen Daniels introduced the concept of visual metaphors or ways of seeing. Thus, it is a way of seeing projected into the land which has its own techniques and which articulates a particular way of constructing a relationship with nature (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988). In a similar approach, Vinita Damodaran considers landscape as 'a complex symbolic terrain for definition of Chotanagpuri identity'. She also mentions that this territorial identity was expressed by the Adivasis through stories and legends of its reclamation and reconstitution by them in better times to underline an intimate living relationship with its inhabitants. Their engagement with the forest formed a human landscape in different ways (Damodaran 2002: 87-91).

The district of Manbhum is the first step of the gradual descent from the elevated plateau of Chotanagpur proper to the plains of lower Bengal and also a part of the Ranchi pane-plain. The hills and valleys made up most part of the district (Coupland 1911:12). The natural vegetation of immediately pre-colonial and early colonial Manbhum was essentially arboreal. Actually, it was a part of the Jungle Mahals,[3] a land of moist tropical deciduous forests characterized by tall trees rising up to 40 meters to form the top canopy, a lower second storey of many species with some evergreens, then a mantle of shrubs entangled by a network of climbers (Bhattacharyay1985: 19). Valentine Ball's account informs that the environment was capable of sustaining many plants and animals. Moist deciduous forest of pre-colonial Manbhum supported a wide variety of herbivores and carnivores (Ball 1868: 58, 114-24). In this type of ecosystem, Soil-Plant-Atmosphere Continuum (SPAC) naturally exists[4] where water moves from soil through plant to atmosphere. From terrestrial plane, aquatic domain and soil system, water then enters into the pool of vegetation. The plants transpire it into the atmosphere and water also evaporates from soil. The processes of transpiration and evaporation are collectively considered as an evapo-transpiration. Different climatological parameters of the atmosphere are regulated by the water. The micro-environment of soil is completely regulated by the vegetal type, its floristic component and canopy coverage. It creates ecological loci or niches of different soil arthropods (act as the key stone community in the soil ecosystem), annelids, nematodes, bacteria, different cryptogrammic plants, root system of higher plants and mycorrhiza (a type of fungi). Soil erosion, soil pH (acid-based property of soil), water holding capacity, soil texture etc., are controlled by the vegetation.

In this environment, the Adivasis of Manbhum developed their resource management skills. Reconstruction of environmental histories of villages will allow us to piece together the rich and complex stories about the relationship between people and nature. Every Adivasi society was/is governed by its own social organization and institutions. These institutions, linked to biological resource management, were governed by religious myth and socio-cultural belief system (Ramakrishnan 2001:114). Sometimes, it is assumed that during early ages the forest and the landscape were untouched and un-manipulated, and so the forests remained pristine. The Adivasi life, at that time, was

[3] It was formed in 1805. For details of its concept and administrative geography see (Sen 2013:18-23).

[4]Duncun D Smith's lecturer on 'Water Movement through the Soil-Plant Continuum', http://www.plantecology.net/uploads.pdf accessed on 04.05.2015.

intermingled with the Nature (Roy 1912:58).[5] This stereotype is however contested by recent scholarship (Damodaran: 2006: 53).[6] Challenging ecological romanticism, Shepard Krech comments 'Many native peoples themselves draw on a tradition of texts promulgating noble imagery that has generally had deeper roots in European self-criticism than in indigenous realities' (Krech 2000: 216) . However, the truth is even more complicated than it appears. The Adivasis of Manbhum settled villages in the forests after clearing a forest patch adjacent to nearby water resource. Sometimes, they created some artificial water resource also within their village landscape (Roy 1915: 131; Bodding 1984:100-101).[7] Thus, they did change and manipulate their surrounding landscape. However, because of low population pressure and less per capita consumption, they did not generally cause large-scale ecological damage. The rate at which they exploited their surrounding resource at local scale, could keep pace with the regeneration and restoration rate of natural and ecological process. Furthermore, each and every such local societies followed some rules and regulation which may be classified into three categories i) rules created by their ignorance, believe and faith, ii) rules created on the basis of experience of senior persons and iii) religious rules invented by the village headman and priest (*layas*). These three categories may further be divided into two types, *i.e.* a) those detrimental to nature, b) nature-friendly rules. While the second category of rules helped nature to rejuvenate due to low population pressure, the first could not cause much ecological imbalance (Bodding 1993: 161).[8]

Method of site selection for a new village (*hatu/ ato*)

The Munda Adivasis founded villages which were known as *khuntkatti hatu*. *Khuntkattidars* or the original settlers of villages[9] enjoyed privileged status in the village. On the death of the founder of the village his eldest son generally became the headman and inherited his father's functions (Mahto 1989: 63). Everything within such village was common property of the members of the village family or Khuntkattidars.[10] The idea of the ownership of land of the Mundas was 'the archaic one of joint ownership by the family or by a group of agnatic families' (Roy 1912: 60-62).

In order to understand the landscape management of the district, we should understand how a village was founded. The process began when some of them under a leader explored a suitable site within the forest. In site selection, suitability depended on whether *sal*{*Shorea robusta* Gaertn. f. (Dipterocar pacea)}, *mahua* {*Madhuca indica*, Gmelin (Combretaceae)} and other trees, crystal clear water, cultivable land and irrigation facility were available or not. Another criterion was to ascertain whether the

[5] (Roy1912:58) describes the jungles of Chotanagpur as 'the primeval forests abounding in live game and edible roots and fruits'.

[6] (Damodaran 2006:53) argues that 'representation of a remote wooded landscape' is not borne out by fact.

[7] (Bodding 1984) The first version of this Santali text was published in 1887 by L.O. Skrefsrud and translated with notes and additions by P.O. Bodding in1942.

[8] *lo bir sendra* (hunting festival) is harmful to nature.

[9] For a detail account of khuntkatti, see (Roy 1912: 60-62).

[10] Circle Note of Attestation Camp No. II, Barabhum, Session -1904-1910 by Mr. Radhakanta Ghosh, Assistant Settlement Officer. P-60. Manbhum District Records (hereafter MDR).

balance between supernatural entities (good and evil spirits) [11] existed (Mahapatra 1993: 31). To determine the presence of good spirits at the selected place for village settlement one interesting test was conducted with the cock and charmed rice (Bodding 1984*:* 100-101).[12] Then, the Adivasi community cleared the jungle for the homestead fields, using the trees they had cut down for building houses while burning away the remaining timber etc. Running along the middle of the place they had chosen for the village, they kept a village street, and at the end of this they arranged a sacred grove (Bodding 1984: 16). From a Santal song, we find a clear idea of this pattern: *Okoe mae ciyalet' ho bir disam do?* / *Okoe mae doholet' ho atore paeri? Maranburu ciyalet' ho birdisom do.* / *Jaher erae doho let' ho atore paeri* (Bhowmik 2005: 17). [Who had searched a deep jungle for the first time? / Who had kept crystal clear water in the village? / *Maran Buru* had searched a deep jungle. / *Jaher Era* had kept crystal clear water in the village.].

Village became their permanent habitat which they left more or less on two occasions. If an epidemic came causing the death of men and cattle, the villagers deserted the entire village and migrated to a new place to avoid misery. There was a general belief in most Adivasi societies that unmixed good or unmixed evil was not desirable either for an individual or for the community. They believed that when this balance was broken in an individual's life, there was disease and ill health, followed inexorably by death. Similarly, there was quarrel, disharmony among families and groups in the villages, and epidemics and calamities befell on the whole community when the balance was upset in society (Mahato 1995: 16). The next occasion occurred when due to rise in population; people had to shift to a new place in search of a fresh site.

Soil classification and preparation of Agricultural fields

The soil of Manbhum is mostly covered with laterite and red soil, which is mainly composed of sandy clay, hard, dry, ferruginous gravel, which has been furrowed into countless small channels by the discharge of surface drainage. However, underneath these unfriendly textures lies a rich store of good alluvial soil. The lower slopes of these uplands are used as wet rice crop field. When the hillsides were terraced for cultivation, it appears like a series of steps varying from one to five feet in height. A long narrow rice field was made when beds of streams were shored up at intervals (Gokhale1928: 37).

In order to prepare agricultural fields, the agriculturalist Adivasis classified the undulating land and also the soil. There are three categories of rice land. First type i.e., *Bahal* is the lowest. This type mostly benefits by percolation from a *bandh* (pond) which possesses the most retentive moisture. Thereafter comes *kanali,* and at the topmost, lies *baid.* There is yet another type which is known as *danga* or *tanr*. It is called *gora* when it is used for cultivation (Coupland 1911: 19*).* The first class of *sol* or *hir (*equivalent to bahal*)* land lies in the depression between the ridges. It is good for rice cultivation as it is composed of rich alluvial soil. A narrow strip of second class low land is found in large

[11] The Adivasis belived that there were different types of *bhuts* or spirits such as household bhut, sept bhuts, village bhuts, village *devtas,* wandering bhuts, common devtas. They considered earth both as a devta and as a bhut. The village priest deals with both the deities and spirits of the village landscape whilst the Ojha deals with all the mischievous spirits who are responsible for all kinds of sickness and some spirits who have been disregarded by people.

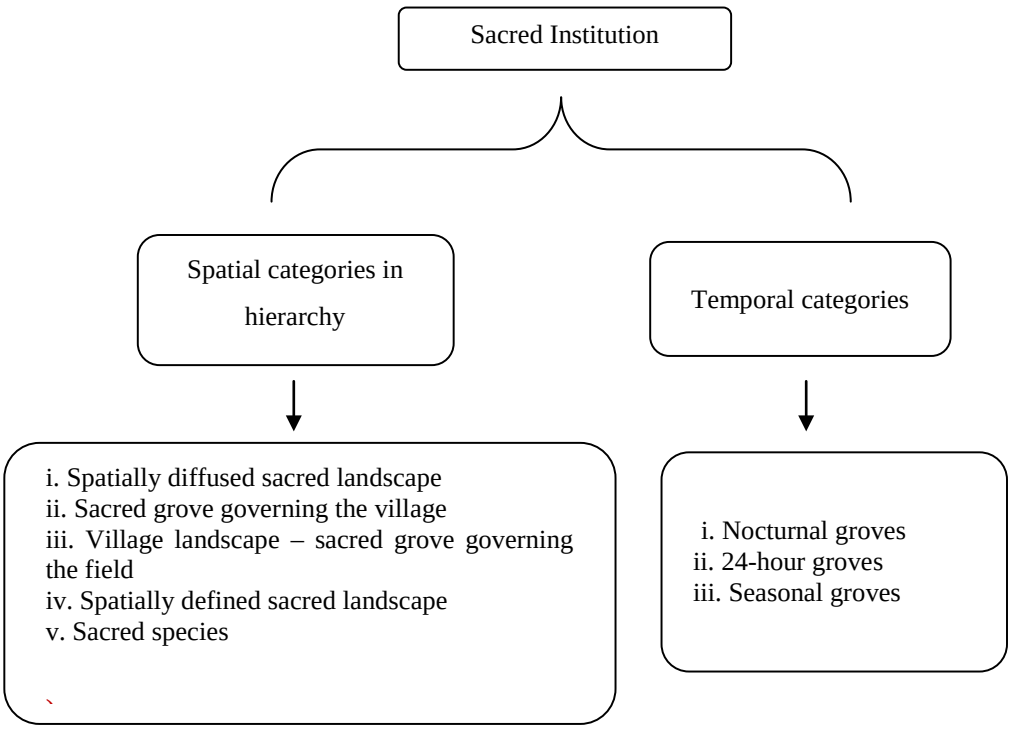
[12] Similar story was collected by the author from Sri Deben Soren, Dulalgora, Neturi,October 10, 2007.

stretches of terraced land often between baid and gora lands on either side of the stretch. These are a few fields of second class low land found at the higher end of gora land (Gokhale1928: 37).

Classification of land is also important for the construction of a bandh for irrigating agricultural lands. Thus, realizing the topographical position, soil texture and keenly observing the very capricious distribution of rainfall, Adivasi cultivators of Manbhum managed as well as utilized water. They made different types of bandhs to meet different purposes. Accordingly, these were classified into irrigation ponds, bathing ponds for human beings, cattle-bathing ponds and ponds for drinking water and religious ponds, etc.[13] For example, the drinking water and religious ponds were given special honour and were regarded as divine mother by the Adivasis.

Investing sacredness with landscape

After the establishment of a new village it was deemed necessary to set up different sacred institutions. We notice that these institutions maintained a broader social hierarchy. These were classified into two overlapping main categories, spatial and temporal. The spatial categories may be classified into five hierarchical categories and temporal into three categories.



[13] Oral history collected from Sri Sristidhar Mahato, Village & Post-Jambaid, Purulia District, W.B.November 11, 2004.

Madhav Gadgil and V. D. Vartak have discussed the sacred groves of Western Ghats of India. They write, 'India still preserves many patches of forest which have been immune from human interference for centuries on grounds of religious beliefs. The nature of the cults associated with these 'sacred groves' indicates that they date from the hunting-gathering stage of the society, which lasted till circa 600 A.D. on the Western Ghats' (Gadgil and Vartak 1976: 160). P. S. Ramakrishnan observes spatial dimension and specificities of sacred institutions and conceptualizes a broader hierarchy of social institutions or sacred entities. Following the Ramakrishnan model, the present paper intends to study the spatial categories of sacred institutions in Manbhum. This study also looks at temporal categories of sacred institution which have not been discussed in earlier works.

Spatial Categories

i) Spatially diffused sacred landscape, the first category, belonged to the top most layer. It had the greatest zone of influence because it governed a large scale but had least specificity. According to P.S. Ramakrishnan, least specificity denotes lower number of prescription and prohibition in terms of practiced cultural norms (Ramakrishnan 2001: 114). In this category, there was a set of interacting ecosystem. Here a human being may be viewed as an integral component of the eco-system landscape function. The identification of the zone of influence is the guiding principles in demarcating the boundary for this type of sacred landscape. It influenced not only the village people but also vast majority of people in the whole region. The Damodar River is an appropriate example of this category. As it governed the social and religious life of the people of vast region, it came to pervade its entire eco-system. Among the Santals, the river was regarded as sacred where they consigned the ashes of their dead as an important mortuary ritual. This ritual was known as *Damodar Yatra*. Telkupi, a holy place is situated in the south bank of the Damodar River in Pargana Cheliama. Here, on the last days of *chaitra* (last month of Bengali calendar), *Baruni Mela* (a local festival) was organized by the Santals (Coupland 1911: 289). *Babir bandh* (Kashipur Police Station, Purulia District, West Bengal) is an example of this type of landscape. Here, the Adivasis performed a ritual named *magra sinan*[14] (Murmu 2002: 232-33). Babir bandh represents an ecosystem which has vastness and boundaries. As such, it becomes a diffused sacred landscape. This ecosystem has been transformed into a social entity and assigned symbolic meaning.

ii) The sacred grove governing the village, the second category in this hierarchy, had greater zone of influence because it governed the whole village. The religious belief system of the Adivasis of this region, as elsewhere, was closely associated with nature. They believed that the forests, hills and rivers were the abode of their gods and spirits. This invested sacredness to the nature. Every Adivasi village was governed by a sacred grove (*Sarna /Garam than*) which was a part of the primordial forest. According to P.S. Ramakrishnan, 'sacred groves are defined as small patches of native vegetation that are protected by traditional communities on the basis of cultural /religious beliefs' (Ramakrishnan 2001: 116). In Manbhum, every Adivasi village had the sacred grove

[14] Children whose teeth rise in an even numbered month (*jora mas*) were given *magra sinan* to keep away from evil spirits.

being governed by the village council. Their deities were usually in the form of unshaped stone lumps, pieces of wood, abnormal trees, water bodies etc. Individuals were therefore expected to pay respect to the sacred grove. People believed that violation of the rules and regulations related to the sacred groves would cause serious illness. At the Sarna, villagers could not tell a lie. So for confession a thief or a person committing a wrong or violating the social norms was brought before the Sarna. It was not only a place of worship and performance but it also served other socio-cultural and religious purposes. Adivasis would not do anything in the field, such as construction of pond, without worshiping the God of the sacred grove (Mahato 2002: 93).

iii) The third category of this hierarchy was the sacred grove governing the field. This type of sacred grove was located in a place of a specific crop field such as baid, bahal, tarn (upland) or kanali. As they did not interfere with the sacred grove different species were protected in the grove. Before sowing of crop, the Adivasis first made offerings to the god/goddesses residing in the field. Moreover, they did not reap their harvest before dedicating their offering to the god/goddess.[15] Thus for the entire period of cultivation the agrarian work itself became sacred.

iv) The fourth category of this hierarchy was the sacred ponds, springs and mountains. Each spatially defined landscape had well defined institutional norms. In this landscape, soil, air and water were all sacred to the Adivasis and any disturbance in it was strictly restricted due to existing myth.[16]

A Sacred Pond with her deity, Village- Nadiha, P.S.-Hura, Dist- Purulia,W.B

[15] From W. Dent, Jt. Commissioner of Chotanagpur and Jungle Mahals, To, Macsween Esqr. Sec to Govt., Fort William, 4th September,1833, para-4. Dent described a sacred grove of the Bhumijs.MDR.

[16] There were *barkana duba* ponds where bride and bridegroom were drowned to death as they polluted a sacred pond on their way to bridegroom's home after marriage. Adivasis were careful about these types of ponds and this type of myth kept them away from pollution.

In every Adivasi village, especially among agriculturalists, there were one or two separately maintained drinking and religious ponds.[17] These were sanctified as divine mother by the Adivasi people. Likewise, some ponds were abandoned for various reasons (i.e., natural biological pollution or toxification of water). People believed that the ponds had become the abode of ghosts. The concept of ghost (evil spirits *bhut gorean*) is some kind of superstition linking the devils and ghosts to pollution of toxin detrimental to life. It is important to note that the non-agriculturalist Adivasis (Kherias and Birhors) did not dig ponds. They instead used springs and ascribed sacredness on them. Sacred grove of Kherias and Birhors remained in the mountain. It was functioned as a source to generate the resource. Their regular hunting fields received the supply of animals from these sacred regions. The day when the forest Dwellers would fail in the hunting they could hunt animals or collect fruits from their sacred hills. In order to collect food from the sacred place they had pray their deity.[18]

v) The last category of this hierarchical organization is the concept of the sacredness of some species. Ramakrishnan rightly observes that this evolved with a mixture of conscious and unconscious decisions for their latent value. He also points out that socially and culturally valued species are often also ecologically significant keystone species (Ramakrishnan 2001: 117). The banyan tree (*Ficus bengalensis*) is an appropriate example. It produces fruits several times in a year. Different species of banyan tree produce fruits in different times. Due to constant supply of foods different animals depend on its fruits. The number of predators of fruit-eaters is depended on the number of fruit-eaters. Banyan tree, therefore, were and are worshiped as a sacred object by many Adivasis. Totem species of the Adivasis were also regarded as sacred species. So they imposed some restrictions to prevent any harm being inflicted on them.

Temporal categories

Adivasi village was both a social and cultural construct. In their perception nature became a cultural space as it influenced their all aspects of life. According to the Adivasi belief, the entire ecosystem was regarded as a nocturnal sacred grove. They further believed that as the entire flora and fauna slept during night, so people should not disturb them. However, certain species were considered as sacred throughout the day. According to the Adivasi belief, the entire ecosystem was regarded as a nocturnal sacred grove (first category). They further believed that all the flora and fauna sleep during night, so people should not disturb them. However, certain species were considered as sacred throughout the day (second category). The third temporal category, the seasonal grove is similar to the third hierarchical category (Village landscape – sacred grove governing the field) of the spatial categories. Kurmi, Bhumij and Munda rested their *tangies* (a tool to cut the branches of tree) on the advent of spring. This ritual is known as *Tangi-Tanga*. They kept away from cutting and injuring tender branches and twigs during the period from onset of spring to the *Sahrul* or *Baha parab* (flowering festival). This is a kind of seasonal

[17] Oral history collected from Sri Sristidhar Mahato, Village& Post-Jambaid, Purulia District, W. B. Interview: November 11, 2004.

[18] Oral history collected from Sri Kalipada Savar, an Savar old man of Sidhatar village, Post- Kuda, Purulia District, W.B. Interview: September, 09, 2006.

observance where the trees in groves were regarded as sacred and their living entity manifested in branches and twigs (Mahato 2007: 11).

Colonial Intervention

The discourse of scientific forestry was totally different from the Adivasi perception of landscape. This has been considered as 'a mechanistic science where nature, the human body, and animals could be described, repaired and control – as could the parts of a machine, by separate human mind acting according to rational laws'(Damodaran 2005: 118). The debate of scientific forestry was embedded within the scientific world view which is described by Carolyn Merchant as the 'world as dead and inert, manipulability from outside and exploitable for profit … living animate nature died … increasingly capital and the market assumed the organic attributes of growth … nature, women and wage labourers were set on a path as human resources for the modern world system.' She observed that the mechanistic worldview is a product of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century (Merchant 1992: 41-60). In view of this domination over nature it was inherent in the market economy's use of the both as resources. This domination became a natural trend in colonial Chotanagpur. In the interest of production and profit, the colonial rulers sought to dominate forest, mineral and water resources. That is why, on the one hand, there occurred large-scale deforestation in order to expand agricultural land, and on the other, forests were protected to promote other interests of colonial rulers. Thus the scientific forestry has recently been described as a 'masculine discourse' (Damodaran 2002.b: 142-44). This process of domination dangerously threatened the life pattern of the Adivasis and as a result dreadful ecological hazards appeared.

Paul Sutter has made an observation on the South Asian forest historiography. According to him it 'has been concentrated more on the social consequences than the ecological consequences (to the extent that they can be separated) of that change' (Sutter 2003: 4). Similarly, Mahesh Rangarajan has pointed out that 'one crucial aspect of historical change often neglected, is the ecological part of the story: when, why and how particular human intervention led to major transformation in the natural world' (Rangarajan 1996: 8).

Furthermore, the colonial rulers considered the land and natural resources as state property as it primarily satisfied their revenue needs. However, colonial environmental agendas were often marked by internal conflicts because there were no clear cut policies. In order to maintain ecological balance and continuous supply of timber, conservation measures were taken after the 1860s. But due to Adivasi revolts the colonial environmental policies could not remain uniform. Moreover, both the colonial government and the Adivasis sought to follow a shared environmental ideology (Sen 2011: 208).

From the late 18th century onwards, colonial intervention initiated a process of transformation in Manbhum, which led to major ecological degradation. Due to the growing demand of the railway system, which required immense quantities of logs of sal (Shorea robusta Gaertn. f. [Dipterocar pacea]) to make sleepers for the railway, pressure was placed on the forest of Jungle Mahals (Profenburger 1999: 135). The opening of the main line of the Bengal Nagpur Railway through Kharagpur and Jhargram (1898) had a

profound impact on the forests of the region. Deforestation was carried out by two groups of peoples: a) the *zamindar* (landowner) by recruiting indigenous people on different forms of contract, notably *nayabadi* (new tillage) and *junglebary* (land tenure)[19] and b) the colonial rulers by employing European companies, such as the Midnapur Zamindari Company, to collect wood. From 1883 onward, the Midnapur Zamindari Company took on a lease of forest land from the zamindars and sold the timber for shipbuilding and the production of railway sleepers.[20]

During the latter part of the 18th and throughout the 19th century, the first priority of the colonial government was the expansion of agriculture and encouragement of cultivation. In a letter dated 17 January 1768, Edward Baber addressed John Shore as follows: 'There is very little land cultivated in the whole extent and a disproportionate part of it capable of cultivation; the soil is very rocky, the country mountainous and overspread with thick woods which render it in many places impassable' (Samaddar 1998: 46). In the 1880s, W.W. Hunter noted that a large portion of the waste land was cultivable and was being cleared continually to be cultivated under three types of tenures: nayabadi, *ahrat* (embankment), and *jalsasan* or water supply (Hunter1887: 320-21). The land revenue policy of the British was to colonise land aggressively for agriculture and commodity production [21] 'at the expense of forest tracts and to exterminate all wild and dangerous game' (Damodaran 2005: 118). H. Coupland mentions the practice of paying of 'rewards… for the destruction of three tigers and seventy-nine leopards' (Coupland 1911: 2).

In pursuance of the above objectives, the British rulers embarked on the policy of promoting private land ownership and commercialization of forests. The Tenancy Act of 1885 and Rent Act of 1859 attempted to transform the established agrarian structure. The Tenancy Act clarified the tenure holder's right who had got it from another tenure holder or proprietor. Secondly, they adopted the policy of encouraging artificial irrigation. The colonial rulers used existing bandhs and encouraged the digging of new ones to increase the area under irrigation.[22] To quote a recent study: 'In many areas the natural limits of arable expansion had been reached, especially the more open parts of southern and eastern Manbhum and in the Jharia coalfields'.[23] The opening of coal mines, in particular, brought agricultural expansion to an 'abrupt end'. The demand for land increased with growing population pressure. Restrictions were imposed on customary concessions. Junglebary leases replaced nayabadi ones (Mahapartra 1991: 24).

[19] A junglebari tenure was a lease of a specific area of land at a fixed rent. This lease was given to a tenant in consideration of the grantee clearing jungle and bringing the land into a productive state. For jungleburi, see (Hunter1887: 332).

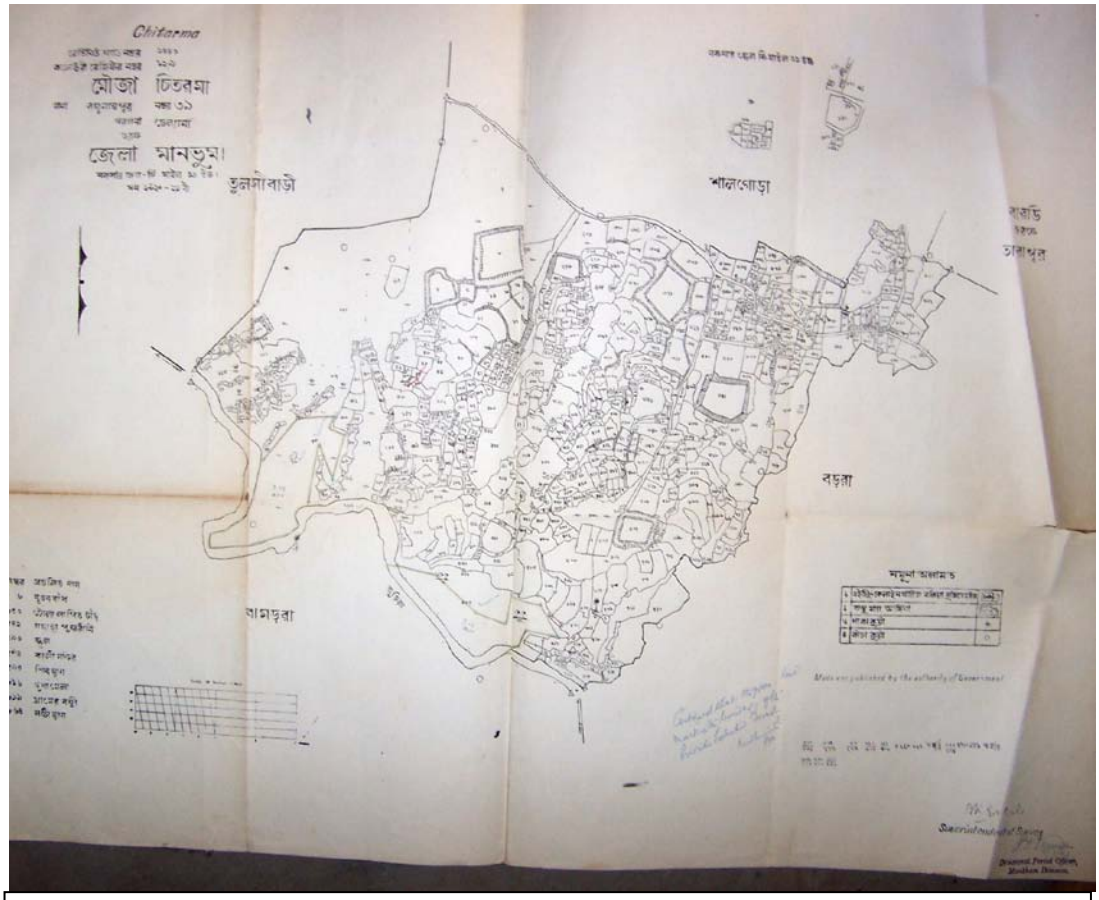
[20] Circle Note of Attestation Camp No. II, Barabhum, Session -1904-1910 by Mr. Radhakanta Ghosh, Assistant Settlement Officer, p. 51. MDR.

[21] See (Thirumali 2006: 249). Thirumali has shown in his article that 'through the agricultural conquest and cultural superimpositions during colonial period the Adivasi hamlets were attached with the revenue villages'.

[22] (Pati 2006: 175-176) has rightly pointed out that 'some of the complexities related to the agrarian intervention, the production process and the social stratification that emerged are not discussed for constraints of spaces'.

[23] (Mahapartra 1991: 22) in his fine grown study has shown the interrelationship between class structure, class conflict and rate of surplus extraction in Chotanagpur division during colonial period.

The ‘agrarian invasion’ brought a dramatic change in the land-use pattern (Richard 1985: 5-6). Cultivation was extended even to remote, hilly and wild areas like Tundi, Baghmundi and Matha. Writing in 1911, Coupland comments on ‘the extent to which the area brought under cultivation has increased during the last 20 years’(Coupland1911: 120). From 1884 to 1904, the area terraced for rice increased by 80% in Tundi, by 15% in Matha, and by 43% in Kuilapal. Tundi is a hilly area in the extreme north, while Matha lies to the west of the Bagmundi range. Kuilapal was the ‘wilder’ portion of the district. In 1911, Coupland described ‘the extension of cultivation in the district as a whole during the last twenty five years as approximating to 20 or 25 per cent,’ and noted that ‘the destruction of jungle in order to bring land under cultivation areas which are unlikely to remain cultivable more than a few years at the outside is common almost everywhere that any jungle remains’ (Coupland1911: 120).



Map 1. Mouza Map of a Village, Manbhum District, photograph taken by the author

The colonial authorities parcelled out the Adivasi landscape (Damodaran 2002: 87-91; Sivaramakrishnan1999: 80). Survey and settlement operations were conducted, new

'villages' being created in the process.[24] In the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 'village' designated 'any local area in which a survey has been made and record of rights prepared under any enactment for the time being in force, the area included within the same exterior boundary in the village map finally adopted in making such survey and record, as subsequently modified by the decision (if any) of a court of competent jurisdiction'.[25] In 1920, the village was further defined as 'the area which for the purposes of such survey and record-of-rights may be adopted by the Revenue officer subject to the control of the Commissioner as the unit of survey and records'.[26] The colonial authorities were striving to create villages as revenue units (Map 1). As Ranabir Samaddar writes, 'the whole process of defining a village, denoting boundaries of jungles, clarifying various types of settlement, locating various types of land and classifying them, became ridden with tension'. Village was created and again recreated as a revenue unit. Here there was no space for social solidarity[27] of the Adivasis.

In order to create a village it was necessary for the settlement officials to demarcate exact location between villages or forests. They also demarcated the actual location of grazing land. When a village was recreated, land, water body and trees were also transferred from one village boundary to another village boundary. Due to arrear of rent, villages were sold and thus village after villages were broken down (Samaddar 1998: 73-90). Therefore, colonial creation of a village was a well defined space and inhabitants were also counted and administered. The resources of villages were appropriated through the apparatus of colonial state. Here the village became a lowest administrative unit of the British Raj (Sen 2008: 7).

The British agrarian intervention fostered 'landlordism in rural Chotanagpur' by legitimating the Adivasi chiefs as landowners (zamindars) (Damodaran 1998: 864). But at the same time, colonial authority was gradually superimposed on the feudal authority of the Rajas when they were subjected to a new taxation system (including rent to be paid in cash, excise and other levies) (Damodaran 1998: 864). While chiefs or Rajas of Manbhum were transformed into zamindars, sub-infeudation occurred and new intermediaries 'emerged from among the holders of jungle clearing tenures in the nineteenth century' (Mahapartra 1991: 22). Thus, the British agrarian invasion led to the spread of different kinds of land tenure and formed horizontal stratification.[28] The expansion of stratification and consequent increase in gross rental created extra pressure of zamindars on tenants. As a result, it increased legal disputes and tension in rural society. With introduction of hierarchical property structure in villages the headmanship in villages were broken down. These also adversely affected community ownership of resources like land, forest and water and their intimate relationship with nature.

[24] Circle Note of Attestation Camp No. II, Barabhum, Session -1904-1910 by Mr. Radhakanta Ghosh, Assistant Settlement Officer, pp.45-46. MDR.

[25] The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908, Chapter-I, Section-III, p. 6, 1952, Patna: Superintendent Government Printing.

[26] Ins. By s. 4 (1) of the The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act(Amd.), 1920(B. O. Act 6 of 1920).

[27] Adivasi people had their common property as they collectively used land, water and forests. In their society headman played an important role.

[28] Circle Note of Attestation Camp, Manbazar, Session-1920-21, p. 55. MDR.

With the transformation of villages from solidarities to settlement units in Manbhum, a decline of the *mandal* or *pradhan*[29] as an institution occurred. Mandal became an ordinary *raiyat* and his rights became also transferable (Samaddar 1998: 89-94). Private property was created by transforming the former tribute paying structure into rental property (Mahapatra 1991: 11). *Mukarari*[30] leases were increased through the middlemen. After gaining a foothold in the region, the moneylenders got both the Rajas and the tenants into their clutches. As Suchibrata Sen informs: 'The *mandals* were forced to sell to Bengali *mahajans* who stepped into their places. In both cases, the result was the break-up of the *mandali* system'.[31]

In the wake of the agrarian invasion and forest destruction, came environmental deterioration. In 1855, Henry Ricketts reported the total absence of trees in Purulia town.[32] In 1863, Major J. Sherwill and Captain Donald Mcdonald described the landscape as 'hilly, stony and broken', and added: 'The soil is poor.'[33] In 1867, 49.05% of the district was under cultivation. By 1908-1909, the area under cultivation had increased to 59%, fallow land and cultivable wasteland was 7%, and the remaining 34% consisted of land not available for cultivation (Mahato 2010).

The impact of official policy was visible over the water bodies like rivers and ponds. Deforestation caused huge amounts of soil erosion by rainwater and the subsequent deposition on the bed of the river, reducing its depth (Coupland 1911: 5). The shallowness of the river increased the turbidity of its waters, making them contaminated. This, in turn, affected the health of the hunting and gathering Adivasis, in particular the Savars and Birhors.[34] The colonial masters tended to see the bandhs merely as water bodies and thus divested these of the holiness ascribed to them by the Adivasis. The Advasis not only ascribed different ecological and economic qualities to the ponds but also personified them. The colonial rulers employed them for irrigation, taking no account of the land-water-vegetation relationship. The clearing of vegetation surrounding a pond and /or upstream of it accelerated soil erosion. The resulting siltation of the pond started a chain of ecological degradation such as a decrease in water volume, an increase in nutrient concentration, an increase in the productivity of pond ecosystem, and, ultimately decreasing oxygen levels in the water. This led to a decrease in green plants and their replacement by blue-green algae, which generated toxins and foul smell, causing death of the water fauna; a dreadful process known as 'eutrophication'.

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[29] Mandals were pillars of Jungle Mahals as their functions were to help in reclamation, extension of agriculture and village affairs etc.

[30] The term mokarari indicates a permanent tenure on fixed rent. These tenures were created invariably on receipt of some *pan* (considerable money). Thus the tenures were sometimes described as *pan baha* mukarari.

[31] For the breakdown of mandali systems see (Sen 1989: 63).

[32] Henry Ricketts, 'Reports on the Agency Administration', in *Selection from the Records of Bengal Government*, vol.-XX, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta1855,pp. 2-3

[33] Note of the Map of Pargana Pandra, Sherghor, Mahesrah & Chatna, Main Circuit No. 5 & 9, 1862-63. The survey was conducted by Major J L Sherwill and Captain Donald Mcdonald.

[34] Oral history collected from Sri Kalipada Savar, Savar old man, Vill-Sidhatarn, Dist.-Purulia, 27th March 2003.

Agrarian intervention and creation of colonial forestry had a catastrophic impact on the forest Dwelling Adivasis like Birhors and Kherias. With the destruction of forest ecosystem, the traditional food items of the hunters and food gatherers got reduced. There is a story narrating how their sacred hill lost its sacredness: the forefather of the Adivasis used to place an empty winning fan in the morning in front of the doorstep of a cave on a hill. With the grace of their deities, they used to collect the winning fan, full of food staff in the evening. But one day they reluctantly found not only the door of the cave closed but also the winnowing fan empty.[35] Thus, the locality was out of the holly touch of the deities.

Conclusion

The Adivasi communities managed their village landscape with their own indigenous knowledge system during pre-colonial and early colonial period. Possessing the ability to generate resources, the agriculturist Adivasis had modified nature and also actively maintained it in a diverse and productive state based on their indigenous knowledge, socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs. Likewise, forest dwellers also had skills to manage and reproduce natural/biological resources through various means. It was not seasonal but took long years unlike agriculturists. Adivasi community life was constructed through symbolization, represented by their sacred institutions and myths. This reminds us of Anthony Cohen's 'symbolic construction of community'. There was social solidarity in an Adivasi village where land, forest and pond were not transferable commodities and had common access. But the scenario has been changed during the colonial period. The British aggressively colonized land for the expansion of commodity production through the agricultural conquests, trade and commerce and later on through mining. Colonial administration partitioned Adivasi landscape and converted a village merely into a revenue unit. They delineated boundaries of jungles, clarifying various types of settlement, locating various types of land and also classifying them. Colonial creation of villages disrupted the social solidarity of the Adivasis. Neither the post colonial policy makers nor the academician or influential persons still take the Adivasi ideas of landscape seriously.

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