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## **Displacement, Rehabilitation and Resettlement in the Coal Mining Area of Rajrappa, Jharkhand: A Case Study of the Affected Villages**

**Abhay Krishna Singh**

Assistant Professor, University Department of Geography  
Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee University, Ranchi  
Aksrccr@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

Coal mining areas face plethora of problems ranging from environmental degradation to socio- economic devastation of the affected populace. Displacement, rehabilitation and restoration of the livelihood in general, and ensuring a stable flow of income to the project affected people in particular, are few issues faced by a coal mining project.

The present paper is a primary survey based study of affected six villages in Ramgarh district of Jharkhand under the Rajrappa Coal Project. The survey was conducted by the author as a part of ongoing University Grants Commission, New Delhi sponsored Major Research Project entitled 'Livelihood Pattern and Hazard Vulnerability of Informal Coal Carriers on the Bicycle from Ramgarh Coal Region to the City of Ranchi in Jharkhand'. Rajrappa coal mines initially had three running projects named as Project I, Project II and Project III, however, over a period of time two open cast mines (Project I and Project III) have been exhausted and abandoned. Project II is the only operative mine in the region.

The present endeavour is to investigate into the issues of displacement, rehabilitation, resettlement and restoration of livelihood of the project affected people of six villages

### **Introduction**

Minerals play important role in the economic development of a nation. Without the exploration and exploitation of minerals, the economic growth of a nation is unimaginable. The basic tenets of economic development through industrialization, however, subsume the adverse impact on environmental setup. The excavation works for minerals are bound to affect people living in these areas. How to make development sustainable, eco-friendly and all inclusive, are challenges before the nations across the world. However, it assumes manifold significance when considered with reference to the third world or developing nations like India. The conventional economic theorists argue in favour of graded sectoral growth in the economy. The traditional agrarian society needs to upgrade itself (through its surplus in labour) to manufacturing or secondary economic activities and further to tertiary and finally to quaternary economic activities. The proportionate share in the national economy or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the indicator of the health and sustainability of the economy of the nation.

In Indian perspective, harnessing and exploiting the mineral resources was the pre-requisite for kick starting the wheels of economic uplift. Coal being essential infrastructural mineral needs to be properly mined, explored and harnessed. It is required

for the establishment of large and heavy engineering industries along with production of thermal electricity. Bestowed with decent reserve of coal, India was only bound to develop its mining industries rapidly. The development and expansion of coal mining in India gave a major thrust to economic development and rapid industrialisation. Coal, which is required for fuel, is also used extensively in iron and steel industry.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA, 2016), which works under the aegis of the World Energy Council, in its report released in 2016, for the year 2014-15, places India at the third position after China and USA in coal production, in the world. The coal production refers to the formal coal mines, which are officially sanctioned and licensed by the appropriate authority. But there are some other coal mines in India, which are known as informal coal mines. These are categorised as unofficial and are largely unsanctioned. Also, these are illegally dug mines and are commonly known as village dug mines. The pilferage and continued illegal excavation of coal from officially abandoned mines also comes under informal mining. The presence of formal along with informal mining constitutes a vital element in the local socio-economic setup of coal mining areas in the state of Jharkhand.

The responsibility of coal mining under the Government in India rests with Coal India Limited (CIL). This is a public sector enterprise with a Maha Ratna Status recently given to it by the Government. It is also the largest mining public sector enterprise in the world. CIL was the first coal holding company for coal in India having eight subsidiaries at present. This has produced 431.32 million metric tonnes of coal during the financial year of 2011-12. CIL has 470 mines spread over 21 major coal fields across eight states of the country. Out of 470 mines, 164 mines are of open cast category, 275 are of underground, while 31 mines are of mixed category (open cast and underground)<sup>1</sup>. After the nationalisation of erstwhile privately owned coal mines during the fourth five year plan (1969-74) in two phases, first being January 1972 and second again in January 1973, the coal mining underwent a changeover. CCL (Central Coal Fields Ltd.) was established on 1 November 1975. It was formerly known as National Coal Development Corporation Ltd. (NCDC). CCL earned the status of Mini Ratna in October 2007. CCL is one of the eight subsidiaries of the CIL. This has jurisdiction over most of the coal fields in Jharkhand, particularly over those situated in the Rajrappa region of Ramgarh district.

The CCL is aware of the continued growth in demand for bituminous coal, used mainly in thermal power sector. It has therefore decided to increase its production capacity, resulting in the expansion of coal mining areas. This has accentuated the problem of displacement and relocation of settled villages. Rajrappa open cast mine project, which comes under the jurisdiction of CCL, has affected a number of villages by its mining activities.

Coal mining in India, particularly in Jharkhand and elsewhere, is done largely through open cast or open cut method, which involves removing of soil and rocks commonly known as 'overburden' by blasting techniques. The depth of the pit depends upon the thickness and availability of the coal seams. Once the coal is extracted, the pit moves laterally and the overburden is dumped into the previous pit. The whole area turns into a bad land, more so because post mining directives of planting trees are not carried and the preserved top soil is usually not maintained in India. In Jharkhand, the CCL as

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<sup>1</sup>Performance audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) about the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of Coal India Ltd. for the period of 2004-05 to 2009-10. The report was submitted in 2011-12.

well as the BCCL (Bharat Coking Coal Limited) have in general failed to adhere to the Mine Closure Plan directives issued by the government. Lack of strong monitoring and general indifference to the environmental concerns are some of the probable reasons.<sup>2</sup> A mine producing 40 million tonnes or more of coal in its life time (usually 15 years of operation) will therefore leave a scar of about 25 sq km in the affected area (Herbert & Dutt: 2014). The present project is designed on field based temporal study of the displaced villages (Chilam Tungri, Simraberra, Sdhu Kanu Nagar, Dhantwatand, Koihara and Kumardhara) falling under the Rajrappa Coal mines Project II in the Ramgarh district of Jharkhand. This is a running mine under the CCL, which is a subsidiary unit of CIL. CCL has been bestowed with the responsibility of not only exploring the area for mining purposes but also for maintaining the upkeep and quality of the environment. The responsibility of displacement and relocation as well as restoration of livelihoods of the indigenous and local populace, who get affected and dislocated due to mining, also rests with the CCL.

The geological structures conducive for the formation of coal seams are largely confined to the river basins of eastern and central states of India. The Gondwana coal, which is geologically found in the river basins of Damodar, Barakar, Bokaro, Brahmani, Mahanadi etc. rivers, are also the regions of high population density. In order to excavate the coal (either through open cast or underground mining method (in some cases both methods), people of these regions are bound to be affected. Displacement thus becomes precursor to the initiation of mining process. The open cast coal mines have large footprints, destruction and degradation of forested tracks along with severe negative impact upon the endemic plant and animal species being a natural consequence. The local and indigenous people not only get uprooted, but they also completely lose their traditional means of livelihood. The six villages under review have different socio-demographic composition. Chilam Tungri village is largely populated by Santhal tribe; Simraberra has mixed population of Muslims and Santhals; Sdhu Kanu Nagar has Muslim, Kurmi, Nayak, Santhal and a few households of schedule castes; Dantwatand is a predominantly Santhal village with not a single household of other community; Koihara again has mixed character having Santhals (majority), Muslims and Kurmis.

The present paper is an attempt based on primary survey to investigate the displacement, relocation and rehabilitation of local, tribal and indigenous people in the Rajrappa open cast coal mines in the Ramgarh district of Jharkhand.

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<sup>2</sup> The mines were closed, as per the directives of the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF), Director General of Mines Safety (DGMS), CSR Policy of Coal India Ltd.. The conditions for closure were imposed by MoEF & DGMS in respect of individual projects. The conditions are: 1. Mined out land relates to the measures to be implemented for physical and biological reclamation and rehabilitation of mined out land including the manner the actual site of the pit will be restored for post mining land use. 2. Water quality management 3. Air Quality Management. 4. Waste management 6. Management of coal rejects from coal washeries 7. Infrastructure – the existing infrastructure like Road, Water treatment Plant, Sewerage, Railways, Power lines, buildings etc. and their future utilisation must be evaluated on case to case basis if to be retained or dismantled. 8. Disposal of mining machineries 9. Safety and Security and also 10. Top soil management 11. Tree plantation (preferably 2500 plants per hectare). In most of the cases, as the Report on CSR of CIL during 2004-05 to 2009-10 by the CAG, GOI indicates, majority of the directives mentioned above have not been followed. These measures should have been taken for exhausted and abandoned mines.

### **Objectives**

1. To ascertain if the displaced communities are rehabilitated properly in the Rajrappa coal mining area.
2. To investigate issues related to restoration of livelihood to the affected people.
3. To look into the satisfaction level and restoration of trust deficit among the affected people.
4. To find out the problems emerging due to mining activities in the area.
5. Review of facilities provided by CCL to the affected people.
6. To examine the socio-economic and cultural environments in the displaced area.

### **Hypothesis**

1. Relocation and rehabilitation has not been properly done in the villages of the Rajrappa mining area.
2. The Project Affected People (PAP) have not been adequately and justly compensated.

### **Methodology**

The essay uses field study and household survey based on questionnaire as its methodology. Interview-based interactive sessions have also been incorporated. The researcher along with the project fellow at times has gathered information through the participative and narrative approach of quantitative techniques. The study is based upon the use of quantitative as well as qualitative techniques.

The household survey<sup>3</sup> was done during a period of August 2016 to July 2018. The author used structured questionnaire schedules and to quantify the information thus gathered from the respondents (heads of the household in this case) statistical tools are used. Long unstructured interviews were also conducted particularly in village Chilam Tungri, Simraberia and Sidhu Kanu Nagar. This informal interview cum narrative technique was invoked in order to instil confidence among the respondents who usually become reluctant and reticent when confronted with questionnaire and camera. However, once the villagers had enough trust they were more than willing to respond to the printed questionnaires also.

This particular endeavour is intended to look into the coal mining induced problems affecting both the environment and the indigenous and local inhabitants of six villages in the vicinity of Rajrappa coal mines as Project I, Project II and Project III mines. While Project I and Project III mines have been exhausted and hence abandoned the Project II mine is operative and open cast mining is in full swing here.

Mining of minerals and building up of large dams require relocation and displacement of people inhabiting the affected areas. Coal generally found geologically in Gondwana rock structure spread in the eastern part of the country with Damodar river basin having the greatest concentration of coal bearing seams/sedimentary rocks. Incidentally, these forest tracks are usually predominated by the Adivasis and indigenous people. These people are naturally the ones who have been most severely affected by the mining induced displacement. The following section tries to have an impartial and

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<sup>3</sup>The Survey was conducted as a part of ongoing University Grants Commission (UGC) Major Research Project on 'Livelihood Pattern and Hazard Vulnerability of Informal Coal Carriers on Bicycles from Ramgarh Coal Region to the City of Ranchi in Jharkhand'. Author extends his heartfelt thanks to the UGC for funding this project.

balanced view of development and displacement; and seek to understand whether they go hand in hand.

### The study area

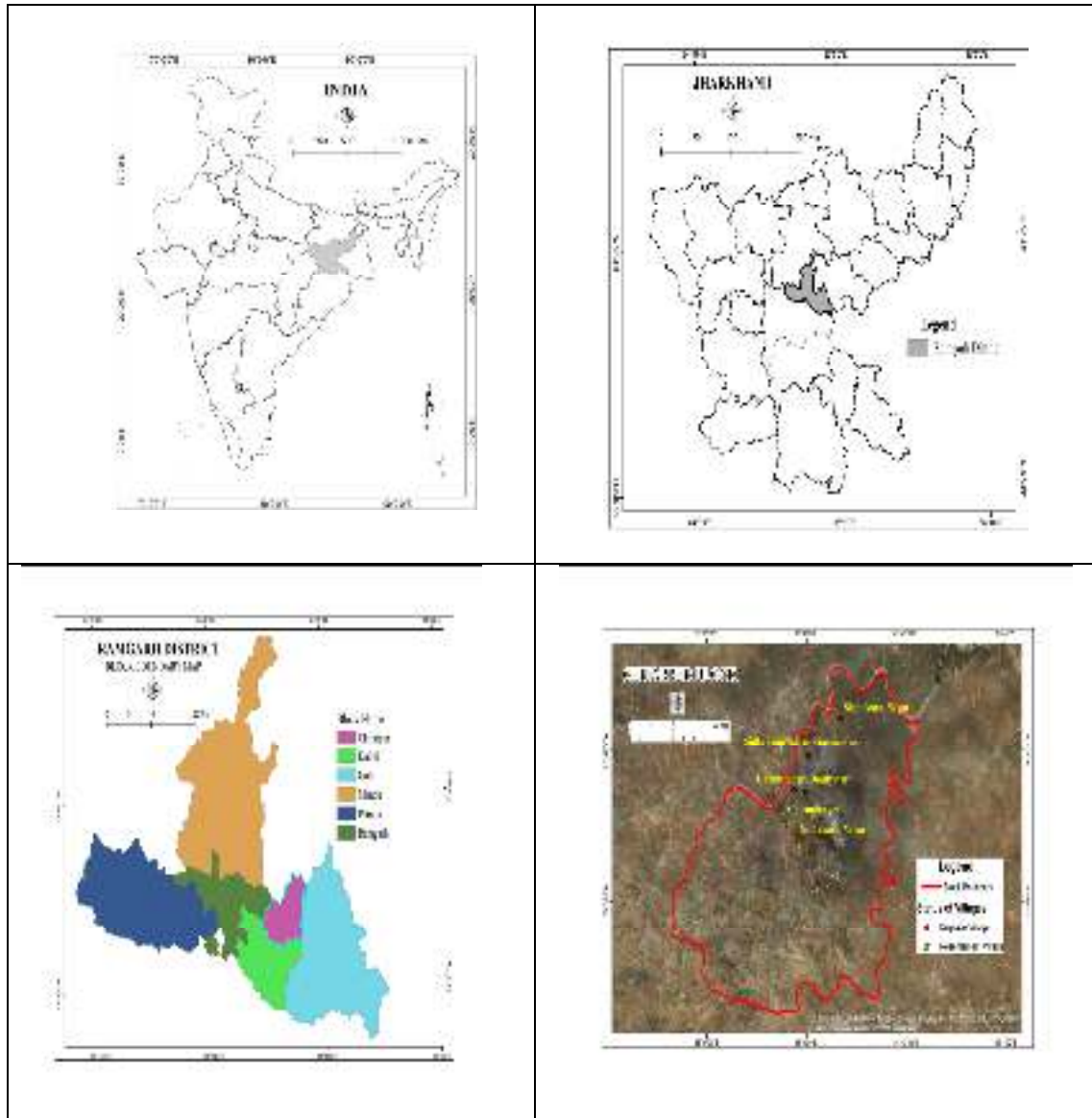
The Rajrappa open cast coal mine is situated in south-east part of Ramgarh district of Jharkhand state. It is extended from 23° 36' 0" North Latitude to 23° 38' 0" North Latitude and 85° 40' 0" East longitude to 85° 42' 0" East longitude. The Koiharamine is situated on north side and Chitarpur on the southern direction. Eastern part of the Rajrappa is bounded by Bhuchungdih and western part is surrounded by Dhawaiya. Out of the six villages in the Rajrappa coal mine area mentioned above, two villages namely Jorakhati and Koihara are rehabilitated and resettled at one place named Sidhu Kano Nagar. Chilam Tungari has been rehabilitated with the same name a couple of kilometers away from the older settlement site. Simrabera and Datwatand are still continuing at their old sites, despite officially been displaced and relocated on paper. Owing to non-fulfillment of their demands like job for every household and enhanced rate of compensation for the loss of their assets including, people of these two villages have till date refused to move out and a stalemate continues. The expansion of Rajrappa mines for phase II has therefore been jeopardised for non-compliance of Simrabera and Datwatand village. There have been talks between the CCL officials and the villagers for an amicable and acceptable settlement regarding the displacement and subsequent rehabilitation. But this has not yielded any acceptable result. An official in the CCL headquarters at Ranchi observed that unless these two villages are vacated the phase II expansion plan of Rajrappa mines across the river Damodar would not materialise.

**Table 1**

Sl. no.	Villages in the project area	Latitudinal and longitudinal extent
1	Chilam Tungri	23° 36' 27 " North to 85 ° 39' 50" East
2	Simrabera	23° 37' 29.45" North to 85° 38' 07.63 " East
3	Sidho Kanu Nagar	23 ° 35' 9.97 " North to 85° 39' 8.39" East
4	Datwatand	23° 36' 48.49" North to 85° 39' 56.59" East
5	Koihara	23° 38' 05.82" North to 85° 40' 55.15" East
6	Kumardhara	23° 37' 27.66 "North TO 85° 40' 04.40" East



**Fig. 1**



### General characteristics of the affected villages

The six villages, which are in and around the CCL owned Rajrappa Project where open cast coal mining is in operation, are non-agrarian villages. The land beneath the top soil contains large volume of good quality of bituminous coal, which is used as fuel in thermal power plant for electricity generation and in many infrastructural industries as essential raw material. This makes the soil unsuitable for agrarian purposes. The overburden of the excavated mines has not only adversely affected the environment but also rendered the land more or less infertile making agriculture not a profitable occupation. The livelihood of most of these villages is mining related activities. The informal coal related activities include Poda (the method of burning coal stacks so that the impurities and volatilities are burned out) making and selling it by carrying it on the bicycle to the city of Ranchi or Hazaribagh. Lack of pastureland and land suitable for agriculture has reduced the Project affected people of these villages to subsistence level of agriculture and almost negligible livestock farming.

**Table 2**

Sl. no.	Name of the village(s)	No. of the household	Total population	Literacy rate	Status
1	Chilam tungri	32	250	45.55	Rehabilitated
2	Simrabera	418	2255	47.08	Yet to vacate
3	Koihara	95	550	59.53	Rehabilitated
4	Jorakhati	20	80	47.36	Rehabilitated
5	Datwatand	25	130	47.55	Yet to vacate
6	Kumardhara	N.A.	N.A	N.A	Rehabilitated

Based on primary survey conducted during Aug 2016- July 2018 in the Rajrappa Coal Region

**Table 3**

Sl. no.	Name of the village(s)	Occupational structure	Status of the house	Compensation offered	Job offered	Land offered
1	Chilam Tungri	Coal Related & Little Agriculture on C.C.L, Land	Pucca	5 Lakhs	CCL	05 Decimal
2	Simraberra	---	---	---	---	---
3	Koihara	Coal Related and little Agriculture	Pucca	25 Thousand	CCL	CCL Land being used without tenancy rights
4	Jorakhati	Coal Related and almost negligible Agriculture	Pucca	25 Thousand	CCL	CCL Land being used without tenancy rights
5	Datwatand	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
6	Kumardhara	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

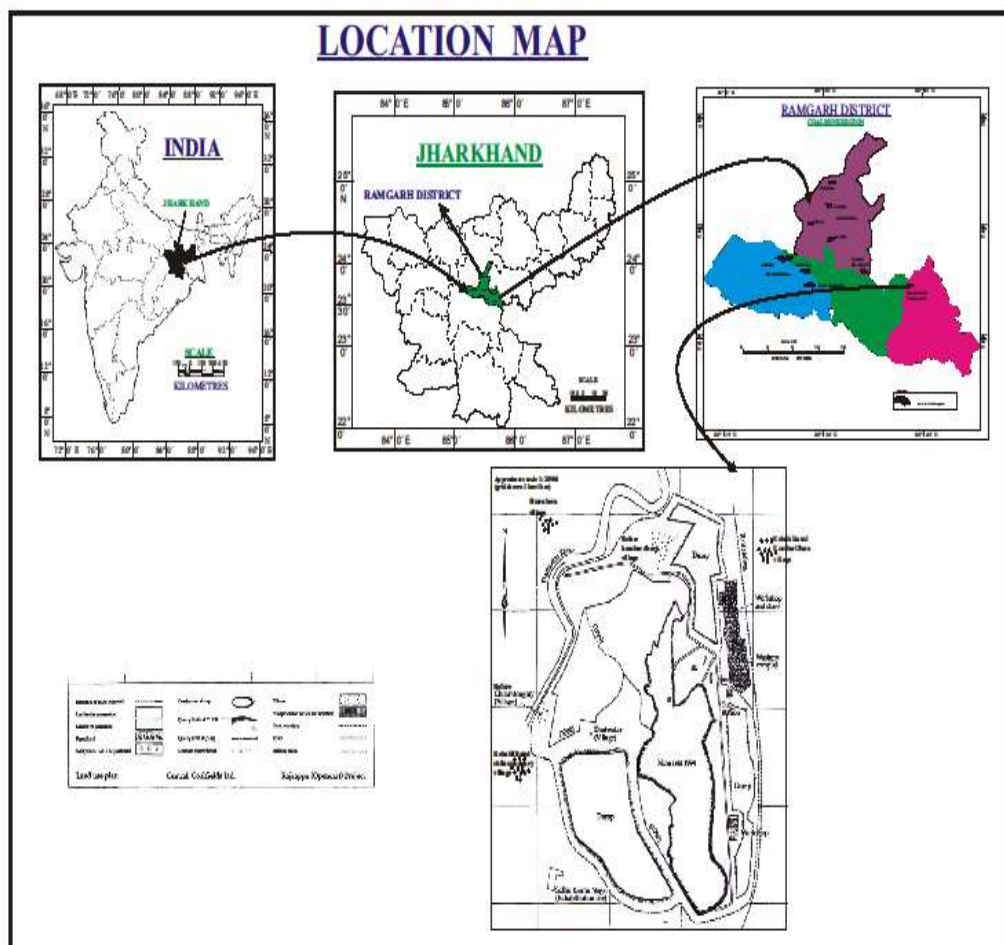
Based on primary survey

**Present status**

Out of six villages, Chilam Tungri has been displaced and relocated on the CCL land with the same name almost two kilometres ahead of the old habitation in 2012, whereas Koihara and Jorakhati have been rehabilitated and renamed as Sidhu Kanu Nagar in 1990.

Predominantly a Santhal village having only 32 households, the heads of the households of Chilam Tungri have surnames of Murmu, Marandi, Hembrom, Hansda, Kisku etc. The new Chilam Tungri is well planned village with two deep bore wells, one pond and the all weathered metal main road. This is connected with three lanes, two of which have ten households on both sides of the lane, while the third one has twelve households. The new ChilamTungri has all pucca houses unlike the old village where most of the houses were kutcha or semi pucca in nature. CCL provided five lakhs for building these houses to all the affected families along with five decimals of land per household. The old Chilam Tungri had 12 hectare of total land, people having pasture lands with meager quantity of agricultural lands. However, in new resettled area, families were not provided any separate land for agriculture and pasture except five decimals for the each household. There are plenty of unused abandoned land of CCL, which lies idle in the vicinity of the village. However, some villagers utilise this land for some rudimentary agricultural purpose with very poor yield. CCL so far has not raised any objection and the people of Chilam Tungri enjoy unbridled access to the land.

**Fig. 2**



**Table 4**  
**Displaced villages and their current position**

Sl. No.	Name of the Villages	Number of Families	Population	Status
1.	Chilam Tungri	32	300	Rehabilitated in 2012
2.	Kumhradhara	-----	-----	Rehabilitated in 2008
3.	Datwatand	30	210	Rehabilitated But yet to vacate
4.	Simrabera	418	2255	Rehabilitated But yet to vacate
5.	Koihara	110	550	Rehabilitated in 1990
6.	Jorakhathi			Rehabilitated in 1990

Based on the field work by the author

The above information is computed on the basis of primary survey based on field study by the researcher. This reveals that the population of Simreberra is the highest, with the no. of highest number of households. It should be noted here that both Simreberra and Dantwatand villages, though rehabilitated on paper, have so far refused to vacate their place. Their demands of higher compensation and jobs for each household had not been entertained by the CCL so far. The affected people of these two villages have not accepted the compensation offered and they refuse to move to the new settlement site. The planned expansion of Phase two of the Rajrappa mines have come to a deadlock, as the two villages which are to be excavated still not been vacated.

**Table 5**  
**Facilities provided to a rehabilitated village**

Facility	Previous Chilam Tungri	Present Chilam Tungri
Nearest Bus stand	Chitarpur 7 km	Chitarpur 6 km
Nearest Market	Rajrappa project market 5 km	4 km
Nearest Post office	Chitarpur 6.1 km	Chitarpur 5 km.
Neasrest Hospital	Rajrappa project hospital 4.1 km	Rajrappa project hospital 3.1 km

Based on the field work by the author

### Development vs. Displacement

Development *vis a vis* displacement is a strong debate among the activists, intellectuals and policy makers, particularly among the human right activists and those with ‘radical-movementist’ approach to displacement (Dutt Kuntala 2014). This approach believes in the paradigm which argues that mere fact of displacement of people against their wishes and not well rehabilitated, speaks volumes of the development gone wrong. Not only this, it is believed to have a tacit manifestation of neoliberalism. The neo liberalism in its drive for ever greater efficiency renders traditional livelihoods redundant and systematically devalued. Displacement is inherent in the idea of development in India through mining activities.

Another school of thought, which believes in development through exploration and exploitation of mineral resources, seems to focus more on wealth generation and economic uplift in the interest of the nation in comparison to the relocation and displacement of the indigenous and local tribal communities, thus overlooking the sufferings of the displaced or the affected people. This particular perspective further got impetus in the ‘Reformist-Managerial’ school by Cernea (2003), who views development as necessary, and displacement as unintended but inevitable outcome of the development process, the ‘pathology of the induced development’ (Cernea 2003)

All those in the helm of the affairs with decision making authority seem to have clear leaning towards the later approach to development in India. The mining induced displacement as a fall out of the development aspirations has widely been taken up by the activists, reformists and academicians. Displacement and relocation due to coal mining is a universal feature in the Jharkhand coal mining region. Land acquisition has always remained an Achilles’ heel for the government, which acquires for itself or acts as facilitator on the behalf of the private companies.

The state of Jharkhand has donned the role of facilitator in land acquisition process. It assists and encourages rapid expansion of mining by private players, as is evident from the official Industrial Policy of Jharkhand, 2001. The Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908), a potent legal shield for protection of lands of tribal and indigenous people in Chhotanagpur region of Jharkhand, has also been amended strategically by the government. It creates an impression that government is working on behalf of the private players and companies, rather than for the general welfare of the people.

A proposal of setting up of a ‘Land Bank’ containing all the information regarding the availability of lands for industrial development is seriously being worked upon by the government. The Coal Bearing Area Act (CBAA)<sup>4</sup> enables the government companies to acquire land for coal mining. But the Land Acquisition Act (LAA)<sup>5</sup> 1894 can be invoked only ‘to obtain land for erection of dwelling houses for workmen employed by the company or for the provision of amenities directly connected therewith’ (LAA 1894). In Jharkhand, most of the coal bearing areas lie under the forested tracts owned and customarily used by the tribal communities for generations for their livelihood and sustenance. The concept of public interest and eminent domain for the economic uplift of the nation allows both CBAA and LAA to take precedence over any other Acts (Guha 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act 1957, <http://coal.nic.in/cba-act.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Part VII, Section 41, page 12 of the Land Acquisition Act 1894, <http://dolr.nic.in/hyperlink/acq.htm>

The displacement and rehabilitation should ideally also include the proper restoration of the livelihood of the displaced or the PAP. Since, the livelihood includes the sustenance and informal dependence of the tribal and indigenous people through the unhindered access to the natural resources, be it water from the nearby stream and rapids, forest for wood and fuel, the fodder for the livestock etc., displacement renders them inaccessible to these natural resources so important for their survival. Because the natural resources are non- formal source of income, they are rarely recognised or documented and therefore, usually not compensated for. All these issues related to the displacement and rehabilitation of the mining affected villages needs to be verified empirically. The two perspectives, one of the mining companies (private as well as CIL and its subsidiaries) and the government on one hand and the perspectives of the project affected people related to the issue of displacement , compensation, rehabilitation and restoration of livelihood on the other hand need to be looked into impartially, at the ground level. The present effort is focused towards investigating and unearthing the grass root reality of displacement, rehabilitation and restoration of livelihoods in the project affected areas of Rajrappa Coal Mines regions in the Ramgarh district of the state of Jharkhand, based on field study and household survey of the affected villages over a period of two years.

#### **Access to informal source of income and livelihood for the displaced people of the study area**

The rehabilitation of the mine induced project affected people requires not only relocation and resettlement but restoration of their livelihood (or income restoration) and house resettlement. The income restoration becomes little dicey and difficult to roll out. The Coal India in its Resettlement and Rehabilitation policy maintains that ‘affected people improve, or at least regain their former standard of living and earning capacity after a reasonable transition period’ (CIR&R 1994). The major hurdle in the way of restoring livelihood or source of income of the affected or dislocated people is the informal source of income and livelihood, which are not quantified and hence not factored in while deciding the monetary compensation for the affected people. The informal source of income and livelihood include the unhindered access to the forest tracts, waste land (used as common resource for pasture and other activities), easy access to water resource, etc. In the present context, the study area, the Rajrappa coal mining project affected people do not seem to be wary of the displacement and relocation to new sites, as long as they are adequately compensated for.

Let us take into account the 32 households of the Chilam Tungri village, who were relocated at a new place a couple of kilometres away from the older dislocated village.

Before displacement, they practised cattle farming. Their domestic animals were cow, ram, goat, hen etc., and used grassland (pasture) for animals grazing. But after displacement most of them have relinquished cattle rearing and livestock farming in want of pasture land. Now the wasteland is being used commonly as community resource in the vicinity of the rehabilitated and resettled location (New Chilam Tungri). As far as the access to forested area is concerned, relocating within a radius of two kilometres did not take away their access to some patches of vegetation covered areas, which are far and few in between.

### **Occupational structure**

Loss of income is sometimes compensated by providing a government job. This is considered to be the most realistic means to rehabilitate those who lost their houses and lands. CIL as well as its subsidiary CCL have always used this hope of job to lure people to willingly transfer their lands for the mining pursuits. However, in recent development both CIL and its various subsidiaries have been asked to downsize and cut significantly and drastically the work force in order to be able themselves to avail all kinds of loan and aides including those from the international funding agencies like the World Bank etc (Herbert & Dutt 2014), of jobs as a bargaining strategy to convince the indigenous and local communities of their share in the benefits of mining. Coal India and CCL had a good tradition of giving jobs as a replacement for the land lost to the mining to the displaced and dispossessed community till recently. However, recently a rapid reduction and curtailments of jobs in CCL has been observed.

In the case of the three villages, which have been displaced and successfully rehabilitated, only two out of the thirty two households of the Santhal tribe in Chilam Tungri, displaced and resettled in 2012, got job. The remaining households still rue and hope to get the promise fulfilled. In fact, the only major resentment among the people of this particular village is related to job and employment which was initially promised by the CCL personnel.

On the other hand, the Sidhu Kanu Nagar of 520 persons staying in 190 households have job in every household. Surprisingly, many had more than one job in a household, almost all the able bodied persons were offered job as well as a compensation of 25 thousand to each family as a replacement to the loss of houses and lands to the mining purpose.

Simraberra and Dantwatand have till date resisted and defied the rehabilitation efforts by the CCL, the bone of contention being the quantum of monetary compensation and job offer. The demand of the villagers of Simraberra is one job for each of its 36 households, as well as higher monetary compensation. CCL had conceded to give one job each to 24 out of 36 households of the village. The villagers are not relenting to the CCL offer. The livelihood of these two villages is essentially dependent upon the working upon the abandoned and dug mines of the region. There are plenty of village dug mines as well as abandoned and discarded mines (of CCL), from where informal coal carrying is done. The pilfering of coal from the officially running mines has lesser share than informal mining from dug as well as abandoned mines. Coal then used for poda becomes lighter and ready to use in households, small hotels and for other purposes. These are bought up by the coal carriers in sacks and bags on bicycle to Ranchi and Hazaribagh. Simraberra a large village that spreads across the river Damodar has an easy access to village dug mines from where they easily excavate and take away coal for poda making purpose. The satellite images of the region show patches of smokes billowing over that particular stretch of Damodar and adjacent National highway between Ramgarh and Hazaribagh. Displacement from their place would deprive the villagers from such informal livelihood opportunities. Most of the people privately admit that this would be akin to rendering them jobless as the real source of income would severely dwindle due to utter lack of substantial agricultural activities in the region.

### **Replacement land**

Another form of possible income restoration is replacement land (land for land) of equal productive value, either in another place or from reclaimed mine land. It has been

widely acknowledged that main contention between the mining induced affected people and the CCL is the issue of the compensation fixed for the land. This is the major source of discontent among the land owners. The present study found that except Chilam Tungri, none of the displaced villages of the region has been offered land other than for building house purpose. In Chilam Tungri, every household have been provided a total of 5 decimal of land at the new Chilam Tungri resettled area. In fact, the land acquired for the excavation purpose is usually compensated in monetary terms. However, the valuation of the acquired land based on its productivity always comes under question mark and usually becomes the greatest bone of contention between the land owners and the mining authorities. There have been some suggestions that PAP be allowed to select an area of similar size and productive capacity to that affected by the project, and that transitional costs, such as legal fees, moving allowance, and first harvest equivalent, be included (suggestion given by the Inspection Panel constituted to look into the World Bank assisted project of coal mining in Parej, East Jharkhand.)

### **Monetary compensation for lost assets**

However, the biggest issue in coal mining region is the rehabilitation programme for the displaced or mining affected people. Ideally, they should be resettled and rehabilitated in participative manner keeping in view their requirements, customs and life styles. Human value with their socio-economic considerations and Project economics are two important factors for framing the rehabilitation and resettlement programme.

A systematic mine plan must, therefore, involve a proper Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) package for the project/ mining affected people. Besides the above, they should be given adequate monetary compensation. This applies to land, houses and other immovable properties like wells and hand pumps. There are however some issues regarding the monetary compensation. The replacement cost is what the affected people aspire for, whereas the authorities are usually reluctant to pay at market price. The replacement cost is the method of valuation of assets which helps to determine the amount sufficient to replace lost assets and cover transaction costs. In applying this method of valuation, depreciation of structures and assets should not be taken into account.

Coal India policy has provision for 15 per cent interest for each year after acquisition, yet the presence of middle men and rate as per the date of notification instead of date of acquisition render the actual amount less than what could have been under replacement cost method. Rajrappa Project has rehabilitated three villages. The monetary compensation offered to them did not become the point of resentment and discontent. People of Chilam Tungri, were given a compensation of Rupees five lakhs along with five decimal of land each household at the time of displacement whereas the inhabitants of Sidhu Kano Nagar were given 25 thousand and three room single floor houses in 1990. These were also welcome to the villagers. However, the Simreberra and Dantwatand have rejected the compensation of the CCL. The stalemate and deadlock between the CCL and the affected people of the two villages still continue.

### **Concluding remarks**

Resistance to the land acquisition for the mining purpose has always been on the anvil of the coal mining regions of country and particularly in the state of Jharkhand. The opposition or resistance is rooted in the belief that compensation for displacement is



not commensurate with the financial gains from marketing of the coal, which calls for more socially and economically just means of benefit sharing. Consequently, discontent among the mining affected people mounts up. Rims of paper have been consumed in writing about the unjust and inappropriate treatment meted out to the hapless indigenous and local communities who are uprooted and simply displaced from their lands of ancestors, to prepare which they toiled for generations. Paradoxically, all this is done in the name of national interest and the economic uplift, expecting that benefits would trickle down to those who are being uprooted and displaced, without proper and adequate rehabilitation and restoration of livelihood. Similarly, the Government's perspective (Coal India Ltd and its eight subsidiaries in case of coal mining related displacement) and the private companies always indicate towards adequate and socially as well as economically just handling of the situation. The tribal and indigenous communities primarily face the brunt of adverse impact of mining. Being gullible and easily influenced, they usually get carried away under the influence of some vested interests, and the protest and discontent among them are thus situational and not always in consonance of the fact.

Although the perspectives of the mining affected people in this matter hold substantial water, still one cannot ignore or overlook the governmental initiatives and interventions in this matter. They are targeted towards the better handling of the issues of displacement and relocation along with restoration of livelihoods to the affected populace, while simultaneously ensuring the smooth and optimum utilisation and exploration of coal, which is indispensable in the nation's well-being and economic growth. Among the two important arguments forwarded by the social activists for the strong opposition to the land acquisition of the indigenous and tribal community, one is related to their culture. Their culture and identity has a close relationship with land. The second argument is rooted in the dependence on the land based resources for their livelihoods. Thus, the issue of displacement not only economic (monetary benefit) in nature but also pertains to the cultural identities of the tribal and indigenous people. The alienation from their ancestral land through forced evacuation severely affect the socio-cultural wellness of the affected people. The government needs to allay the fear of the tribal community by initiating measures and steps to restore confidence and trust among them.

The National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy (NRRP 2007)<sup>6</sup> makes it mandatory for all projects to undergo Social Impact Assessment (SIA) before they are approved. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is of foremost importance and SIA an essential corollary of it. The field study reveals that more efforts are needed by the government and its agencies to restore the faith of affected people. Government as well as the affected people has their own set of arguments but the solution lies in taking a realistic view of the situation.

Displacement and rehabilitation issues were investigated through field study and primary survey of the villages. The issues were handled properly and the resettlement was done satisfactorily in Chilam Tungri and Sidhu Kanu Nagar. The inhabitants of Sidhu Kanu Nagar were given good compensation. Chilam Tungri was relocated and resettled a couple of kilometers away from the older settlement and was developed as a modern village with basic facilities. However, there was resentment and discontent regarding non-fulfillment of the promise of adequate job opportunity promised by the

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<sup>6</sup> Government of India, 2007, National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 2007, at <http://www.dolr.nic.in/>

Government as a part of their compensation package. The study reveals that in other villages of the same area covered in this study, the grievance of the people revolves around the demand for job for each household, and enhanced monetary compensation. The absence of these encourages the problem of poda making that pollutes the environment.

The results of this study of Rajrappa coal project give us a mixed bag. We, therefore, need to make proper spadework on the ground for the success of the project and to serve the cause of development, not ignoring the displaced and benighted who should ideally have been the beneficiaries, and not the victims of this national project.

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## **Jani Shikar and its Contemporary Relevance**

**Anju Oseema Maria Toppo**

Assistant Professor, Department of History  
St. Xavier's College, Ranchi  
anjuoseema@gmail.com

### **Introduction**

I woke up early in the morning before sunrise, had my sip of tea and started getting ready for an adventurous trip. A few days back while getting back from work I stopped to purchase groceries where I got to speak to a few ladies of my locality. We discussed the celebration of *Jani Shikar* which means hunt by women. They asked me to join them on hunt and personally experience the difference. Previous night two ladies had come to my house to inform me of the celebration of Jani Shikar, being organised by them on the very next day. My personal diary bears witness to that day; it was 30 April 2017. As reminded of the dress code I put on my white shirt, pulled on my blue jeans, tied my shoe laces and covered my face with a *bandana* (piece of cloth used to cover hair and face). It was around 6.30 a.m., I rushed to join other ladies at a common meeting place. I could see few ladies in man's gear armed with sticks, spears, axes, bows and arrows. I greeted them with *Jai Johar* (meaning hello in the local dialect, this is common among the Adivasis of the mainland eastern part of India). They were happy to see me around and gave me a *lathi* (stick) to hold. A few more ladies arrived after me, by 8 a.m. we were around fifty in number.

*Pahan* (religious head of Adivasis<sup>1</sup>) blessed the group and directed us to march forward. Our destination was Palandu<sup>2</sup> village in Ranchi, which is 15 kms from Singh More, Hatia. With a collective shout of *Jai Dharmes*, *Jai Sarna*<sup>3</sup> we started moving in the eastward direction. I was filled with joy as this was my first experience of going on a Jani Shikar. Long back in the year 2005, I had a glance of ladies going on hunt. Today after an elongated gap of twelve years I was witnessing it all again. I could see smiling faces of ladies. There were so many like me who were going on the hunt for the first time. Our group comprised of ladies aged between 14 and 62 years. People around knew

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<sup>1</sup> The term Adivasi, refers to the indigenous population or original inhabitants of India. See Dasgupta (2016); Banerjee (2016); Munda and Mullick (2003). The adivasi communities have been put under the category of 'Scheduled Tribes' (STs) by the Government. Tribals of the mainland are popularly referred to as Adivasis.

<sup>2</sup> Palandu Village is located in the Nakmum Tehsil of Ranchi, Jharkhand.

<sup>3</sup> Dharmesh is the god of Oraons. 'Dharmesh is not the personification of an element of nature, nor the greatest among the spirits but the creator and sustainer, controller and punisher of human and non-human created beings that exist in visible as well as the invisible universe' (Roy 1915: 17). Sarna is the religion of Oraons.

me and so gave me a strange look as if I was breaking certain standard notions of feminine behaviour.

We covered the entire distance on foot and caught many small animals. Eight hens, two ducks and one pig was our catch of the day. On the way we did sing many Nagpuri songs. Earlier, Oraon songs were being sung but nowadays due to cultural interactions and involvement of Kharias, Mundas, Santals and Ho. Nagpuri which serves as a common language among them has become the medium of songs.



Fig 1: Tribal women celebrating the traditional festival of Jani Shikar near Chutia, Ranchi.



Fig 2: Tribal women on a hunting binge marking the festival of Jani Shikar at Latma toil, Ranchi.

We returned around 4 p.m. in the evening and gathered around *Akhra* (place of social and religious gathering among the Adivasis). There were few girls standing with garland in their hand. They washed the hands and feet of two senior most ladies in the group and put garland around their neck. It was announced that the festive celebration would be

held at night followed by common dining. I found them leaving behind the catch near the *Akhra* and dispersing. They insisted me to join them at night. I got back home, freshened up and enjoyed my hot coffee sitting on my swing and thinking of the day. It was around 8 p.m. I could hear the beating of *Nagras* and sweet melodious songs. I got ready and started for the final celebration.

This event generated a sense of curiosity in me to know more about Jani Shikar, and also to situate its contemporary relevance for the Adivasi women. I also felt that James Scott's theory of 'weapons of the weak' could be used to analyse this celebration as a symbolic form of resistance against any subtle and explicit forms of patriarchy. Thereby started my journey of ethnographic fieldwork, in the Oraon areas of Lohardaga and Ranchi.

### Historical background of Jani Shikar

The festival of Jani Shikar widely celebrated among the Oraon tribe has its roots in their rich oral history. The celebration valorizes the historic resistance exhibited by the women of the Oraon tribe against attempts of dislodgement of the community from Rohtasgarh fort (Ghosh 2006; Barla 2015; Grignard 1931). The fort is located in the upper course of river Sone, in Rohtas district of Bihar. Ethnic studies have pointed out varied scholastic views regarding the migration of the Oraon tribe of the Dravidian linguistic family from three places, South and south-east India, Gujarat and Harappa (Tirkey 2013: 20–24) to Ruidas which is now known as Rohtas (Pereira 2007: 462–63). However, these scholastic views are basically based upon suppositions, suggestions and hypotheses. Scholars like Sarat Chandra Roy, E.T. Dalton, P. Dheon have come with the hypotheses that the origin of the tribe was in South India at Konkan, from where they took northwards direction to Gujarat and then again migrated further northwards along the river Narmada and then eventually settled in Rohtas (Pereira 2007: 463). Whereas according to another hypotheses which proposes the migration of the Oraons from Harappa, is backed up by scholars like Asko Parpola (Parpola 1994), Mahli Livin Tirkey (Pereira 2007) and Walter A. Fairservis (Tirkey 2013). However, both sets of scholars agree that they finally settled in Rohtas. Pereira mentions that 'Rohtasgarh was the most important fortified capital' (Pereira 2007: 462). Rohtas Fort is situated on an outlying spur of Kaimur Hills, thirty miles from Dehri and 1490 feet above sea level (O'Malley, L.S.S 1906: 2–3).

The place finds its mention in the folk songs and stories of the Oraon tribe that unfolds their glorious past.

#### Song 1

Namhae purkhar rahechar re  
Rohtas Patena nu rahechar-2  
(Koonathan 1999: 107)

(Our forefathers once lived there. They lived in Rohtas and Patna)

Aside the oral sources, there has always been paucity of historical evidences and there hardly exists any literary sources to validate the authenticity of Oraon kingship over the fort. Since the Adivasis during those times neither had the culture of recording history nor did they develop it. The Gazetteer of Shahabad records that 'the Oraons allege that they held the country between Rohtas and Patna. They explain that Rohtas was long held by their ancestors...' (O'Malley, L.S.S 1906: 17). It would be interesting to check the

authenticity of multiple sources which indicate that Oraons had a kingdom. While reviewing the work of various scholars, I came across similar views on the Oraon kingship over Rohtas. Majority of them have accepted that Rohtas was once the seat of power of the Oraons (Roy 1915; Pereira 2007; Dheon 1906; Tirkey 1989; Tirkey 2013).

However, the same set of scholars have differed in their opinions, regarding the ousting of Oraon's from Rohtasgarh. S.C. Roy is one such prominent Indian anthropologist, who has thrown light on the rule of Oraons over Rohtas. He holds Cheros responsible for their expulsion from Rohtasgarh. But he has also made reference of the first Muhammadan conquest of Bihar by Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin Bhaktiyar Khilji in the year 1193 AD (Roy 1915: 24). Ikhtiyaruddin popularly known as Bhaktiyar Khilji was a Turkish military general of Qutub-ud-din-Aibek (founder of Turkish dynasty in India) who had attacked Bihar on his way to conquer Bengal (Mehta 2011: 81–82). According to Tibetan chronicler Taranath of the 15th century, Bhaktiyar had captured the monastic town of Vikramsila and Nalanda and made Odantapuri a Turkish military headquarters (Habibullah 1967: 57). During his raids in Bihar, he had acquired information of the routes to Bengal (Chandra 2011: 70–73). Bengal, then, was considered fabulously rich for its resources and flourishing foreign trade (Chandra 2011:70–73) with South East Asia, Persia, Arabia and the Mediterranean (Suhrawardi 2015). The conquest of Bengal would give him prestige and also a strong footing in the country (Habibullah 1967: 57–58). Hence, it is being presumed that Rohtas, being an important town en route to Bengal, captured the attention of Bhaktiyar and, therefore, Bhaktiyar moved towards Rohtasgarh, which was then ruled by the Oraons, with an ambition to capture it.

### **Adivasi narrative of the capture of Rohtasgarh**

Oraons folk songs mention the Turkish designs and intrusion into the Oraon territory, with the help of a local spy, an *Ahir*<sup>4</sup> milkmaid named Lundari (Roy 1915: 26; Barla 2015: xvii).

#### **Song 2**

Ahirin( Gwalin) bhaiya ko badi daga dela  
Rohtas garh baini lutyon gela,  
'Baini' ka mure Raja pagdi bandhai  
Jani ka mure Raja pagdi bandhai.

(Ahirin (milkmaid) has cheated our brothers. Rohtasgarh has been plundered sister. King ties turban on 'sister's' head. King ties turban on the head of a woman.)

Lundari had advised the Turks to attack the fort on the occasion of *Sarhul* or *khaddi*, the popular festival of Oraons (Kiro 2014: 30-31). They were informed that celebration involved merry making, dancing and consumption of traditional alcoholic drink *Hariya* (Pereira 2007: 462). She also added that tribal men often become insensate after drinking, hence would be an easy victory for them. Relying on her information they planned to launch a sudden invasion during the festival. It was late night and the celebration had almost come to an end, but still melodious songs could be heard. People were weary and tired after the day's celebration and merry making. Women were busy in

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<sup>4</sup>Ahirs belong to the ethnic group of Northern India. They are involved in cow herding, cattle breeding and carpentry works. Romila Thapar identifies them as tribes of indigenous origin. See Garg (1992: 113), Thapar (2004: 149).

re-settling things before going to bed. Two ladies had gone out of the fort for making arrangements for the very next day. On their way, they found Turkish army marching towards the Rohtas fort. Alarmed and dismayed, they rushed to the fort. Womenfolk were taken aback, by the message of these ladies who were still gasping. They turned towards their men but found them in deep slumber, under the influence of intoxicant (Tirkey 2013: 56). They hurried to defend the fort. It was a do or die situation. Without being hesitant, they dressed themselves as men, equipped themselves with lethal weapons (Kiro 2014: 30–31) and advanced towards the enemy under the leadership of Oraon Princess Sinagi Dai and her friends Champai and Kaili Dai (Bhagat 2013: 93-94).

### Song 3

O Dekha,  
Aye gelain raja beti Sinagi Dai  
Sathe-Sathe Champa, kaili  
Aur sobhe Janana Man  
Mude Feta, Hathe Chinyari  
Mardana Bain Ke

(O see the king's daughter Sinagi Dai has come and along with her Champa and Kaili and all the ladies, with turban tied on their head and bows and arrows in their hand, becoming like men.)

Folk songs and stories reveal, how courageously Oraon women had put up a pitched battle. They even applied tricks like use of chilly powder to blind and puzzle the enemy (Bhagat 2013: 90–96). Excellent use of weapons by these ladies could not be resisted for long by the Turks. They were forced to retreat. Finally, women were successful in driving out the enemies in their first attempt (Tirkey 1989: 61). However, Turks were not dismayed and planned the next attack on the same day of the celebration. They had enough time to reinforce their ranks. However, the tribesmen could not imagine that the enemies would regroup and launch another attack. Though Oraon women were taken aback by the turn of events, but once again they disguised themselves as men and defended the fort. This time they drove the enemy to the other side of the bank of river Sone (Tirkey 2011: 177). While retreating, a few soldiers of the Turkish army saw Lundari the milkmaid and caught hold of her. They charged her for the wrong information she had provided them. As per her advice they expected men to be senseless due to consumption of intoxicants during festival, thereby an easy victory (Tirkey 1989: 61). But found this completely wrong for they were defeated consecutively. It meant that men were in their senses during the celebration. Lundari stood quietly aside giving ear to their charges. She now revealed that not men but women were fighting the battle in male attire (Pereira 2007: 462). It was far beyond the imagination of the Turks that women could be such fierce warriors.

Hence, to check the certainty of the information they decided to observe the troops, from the other side of the river Sone. Turk soldiers hid themselves behind the bushes on the bank and acted as watchdog from distant place (Bhagat 2013: 90–96). The weary and tired champions came near the bank, they sat down comfortably and started cleaning their face and drinking water (Bhagat 2013). They implied both hands either for splashing water on face, or for drinking (Kiro 2014: 31). The Turks were completely disillusioned because men rarely possess this natural gesture, they rarely use both hands. They felt ashamed of having suffered two consecutive defeats from these brave women, whom they had considered delicate and fragile. They then began drawing out plans for



the third attack on the same day of festival with firm determination (Bhagat 2013; Pereira 2007). This time they did not wish to bring shame to the male hegemony. As the attack was launched, ladies were no more in shock or surprise. Like skilled knights, they were ready to defend the fort against enemy attack. They defended their bastion valiantly and seemed to have an upper hand in the initial stages. But the commander of the Turkish army realised the need to boost the morale of his forces. He started shouting continuously revealing the true identity of challengers, in order to arouse their male ego (Bhagat 2013: 90–96). He was successful in his mission. The ladies could not resist the fierce onslaught of the Turks for long. The Turks stormed into the fort and began ruthless killing and massacre of their enemies (Pereira 2007).

Nevertheless, the brave leaders of the women's army Sinagi Dai, Champu Dai and Kaili Dai managed to save the life of many tribal men and women by safely rescuing them through a secret passage (Bhagat 2013; Roy 1915: 26). Some of the rest who fell in the hands of the enemies, were brutally tortured. Women were forcefully branded with hot iron rods on their faces, hands, necks and legs. Three dots in a straight line were branded on their forehead as reminder of the three battles fought, and for the realization of the fact that they had lost the third battle (Turkey 2011). These dots which were a sign of defame for them is now seen as a symbol of victory of the Adivasi women. Though women lost the third battle, yet princess Sinagi and her friends became the epitome of valour, courage and honour. These Oraon women chose death to dishonor or slavery. The historical tale of valour and masculinity of these ladies led to the concept of Jani Shikar.

### Interpretation of the narrative

It is thought provoking that though majority of the scholars have maintained the same narration of the event, they have come up with different findings regarding the invaders. Scholars have interpreted the narrative differently. Some scholars have held Cheros, one of the tribal communities, then residing in North Bihar (presently in Palamu, Jharkhand) responsible for the flight of the Oraons (Roy 1915). Roy illustrates that the tribe was driven from the area by the Cheros, who were considered to be staunch rivals of the Oraons and whom they considered *Mlechchas* or unclean (Roy 1915: 23–28). According to Roy, the non-Hindu tribals Cheros were often addressed as *Mlechchas* by the Hindu neighbours. Being defeated by them, the Oraons migrated to Chota Nagpur before 2nd century AD. In support of this Roy cites the District Gazetteer of Shahabad which outlines 'the traditions that Rohtas was once the seat of their rule lingers among the Kharwars, Oraons and Cheros' (Roy 1915: 33). He holds that ruling Oraons were defeated by the Cheros who later assumed power. Oraon scholars like Mahli Livins Turkey, R.O. Dhan, Narayan Bhagat and Diwakar Minz have supported this supposition, and have accepted this explanation. The second argument is put forth in the Bengal, Bihar and Orissa Census Report of 1911, which reads as, 'the tradition of Oraons relate that they held the fort of Rohtasgarh till Ousted by Hindus' (O'Malley 1913: 402). This report is supported by the tradition of the Oraons still residing in Shahabad district. They narrate stories in which they blame Hindus for their condition then and even now (Kujur 1989: 33).

The third probability is the ousting of Oraons by the Muhammadans. This contention is supported by folk songs and folk stories and description given by scholars. Roy states that Muhammadans' first conquest of Bihar was in the year 1193 AD (Roy 1915: 24). Eminent historian A.B.M. Habibullah's explanation of the route of invasion of Bhaktiyar



Khilji can be stated in support of migration of Oraons, 'A year after his success in Bihar i.e., about 1204–05, Bakhtiyar set out on his second adventure in the lower Ganges valley. Taking available forces with him he marched so swiftly through the unfrequented and difficult Jharkhand region in South Bihar' (Habibullah 1967: 58). Habibullah has also referred to Minhaj-us-Siraj's, *Tarikh-i-Ferozsahi*, which mentions that Bhaktiyar moved towards Bengal in 1204 AD as Bakhtiyar's outset for Bengal. This ascertains that Rohtas fort was not invaded for the purpose of ruling but for an easy access of route to Bengal. Hence his success over Rohtas led to exodus of Oraons.

This argument can also be supported by the explanation put forth by Herbert Risley. He writes that the Muhammadans had driven the tribe from Rohtas (Risley 1892: 139). Folk songs and stories speak of the enemies as 'Mlechchas' or '*turuks*' which have been generally identified with the Muslims. They were often viewed as outsiders, outcastes and untouchables and so were called Mlechchas. The word *turuk* denotes the Turks. This word has been often used by tribesmen for referring to enemy.

Another fact which loosens the grip of other suppositions is that, 'the tribal solidarity is monolithic which remains unaffected by intra-tribal or inter-tribe rivalries' (Singh 1979: 65). Communities do not engage in inter-tribal warfare. Hence, it is presumed that Cheros cannot be accepted as brutal invaders. It is difficult to reconstruct this history due to paucity of evidences however this line of argument based on literary evidences and oral sources seems to be more valid in comparison to other suppositions.

Besides these, there is another argument that points out at the invasion of the Turko-Afghan ruler Sher Shah Suri and the Mughals. But it should be noted that their invasion was in a later phase i.e. around 16th century. Detailed account of Sher Shah's annexation of Rohtasgarh is cited in *Tarikh-i-Shersahi*, but it relates to a different incident which was directed towards a Hindu king (Sarwani 2006: 73–78). However, there is no denial of the fact that Sher-Shah and the Mughals had acquired the fort and exercised their power over Rohtas but still a definite narrative or an answer to whether who should be attributed to the ousting of the Oraons from Rohtas is yet to be ascertained.

In close proximity to this theory of Muslim invasion, arguments are extended about the celebration of Jani Shiakr after twelve years. The celebration has its own significance. There seems to be three prominent views, first relates, that the king, being pleased with the victory of women twice, had ordered the celebration of the festival yearly. But owing to the objection by the elder members of the tribe, it was decided to hold the festival once in twelve years (Kujur 1993: 102). Second and third supposition is based on fieldwork, tribal activists and writers like Barkha Lakra, Vandana Tete, Aloka Kujur, Vasvi Kiro and Mahadev Toppo hold that the Oraons consider 12 year as an era and secondly they emphasize that three battles were contested in a duration of 12 years between oraon women and the turks. Hence, the festival of Jani Shikar is celebrated after every 12 years to commemorate the victory of tribal women. Whatever the reason may be, the ladies eagerly await for twelve years to go on hunt.

### **Contemporary relevance of Jani Shikar**

Tradition of celebrating Jani Shikar every twelve years have travelled across generations with the same zeal and enthusiasm and has been inscribed in their folklore.

#### Song 4

Baro bachare Jani Shikar, Jani ka muri raja pagdi bandhai.  
Naon jagale raja Jani Shikar, Jani ka muri raja pagdi bandhai.<sup>5</sup>

(After twelve years Jani shikar is held, King is being addressed and told that *Pagdi* (turban) is tied on the head of a woman. King is informed that the hunt was undertaken in nine forests. King Pagdi is tied to the head of a woman).

In contemporary Jharkhand, apart from the Oraons the women from different Adivasi communities including Mundas, Santals, Kharias have joined the celebration. The latest celebration of Jani Shikar was in the year 2017. The hunt after 12 years is carried between the months of April to June. However, the date is fixed by village councillors<sup>6</sup>. Before any such programme of hunt is organized a particular village makes an agreement with the tribal heads of another village (Kujur 1989: 175). A general instruction about the hunt is conveyed by the women of the Pahan's family to all the tribal women living in the area. This is done a day before the celebration. This holds information regarding place or destination of the hunt and time to get together and start early<sup>7</sup>. It is quite interesting to note that hunt is not carried out in the forest but on the way to the chosen village. Women of any particular village form a single group which consists participants of all age groups from that very particular area. Only a single group can lay claim for hunt in a particular area and no two group is allowed to venture in a particular area.<sup>8</sup>

As per the instructions, on the day of the hunt women dress up as men and assemble near the Pahan's house and start off early in the morning. They cannot go unnoticed while moving in a group dressed as man in shirt-trouser, t-shirt-jeans and armed with sticks, spears, axes, bows and arrows, with songs of joy on their lips. It can also be observed that they are supported and encouraged by the community members to go on hunt. The folk songs reveal the interest and support of the society.

#### Song 5

Hudim koi bhawron pello, bali koda gusan ballu rye,  
Jani Shikar kaloi hole, bali koda gusan ballu rye.<sup>9</sup>

(A young black girl is addressed, she is informed that ballu (sword) is near the door. If she goes for Jani Shikar (Jani- women, Shikar- hunt), sword is kept near the door).

The group of female hunters is generally a mixed one, as it includes girls and women of all age groups. In particular, everyone above 13 years is a part of it. Once they start their journey they move in west to east direction to reach the destined village as it signifies prosperity followed by a presumption that in doing so they ward off evil spirits

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<sup>5</sup> See Kujur (1993:103).

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Barkha Lakra a tribal activist and writer on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2017 in Ranchi, Jharkhand. Interview with Mahadev Toppo tribal activist and writer on July 2, 2018 in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with the Pahan of Letanga Toli, Ranchi in hindi on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2017.. He is the religious head of three villages – Latma, Choriya and Hesag.

<sup>8</sup> Information received in an interview with Phulkeria Tigga (29 years) on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2017. She is a resident of Aine village Lohardaga, belongs to the Oraon tribe and is a housewife. She explained that hunt has been carried out in their village and now other group cannot be entertained.

<sup>9</sup> See Barla (2015).

of the village.<sup>10</sup> In the way, they hunt minor animals as hens, goats, pigs etc. On reaching the destined village, they go round, look for their prey, and then the catch is a team work. It is amusing to observe them applying techniques, making a circle to confine, using traditional weapons and then tying the animal upside down in a bamboo with the help of rope. Cheering each other, laughing at the miss, running together, singing songs in praise of Sinagi Dai, makes the hunt lively and entertaining.

However, it is often seen that villagers hide most of their animals and let loose only a few. Villagers know that since it's a traditional festival they cannot stop women from hunting. But if women are forbidden by the villagers not to hunt a particular animal, they generally abide by it. But this seems to be very rare, as tribesmen know the significance of the celebration. Pyari Linda one of the participants of hunting group of Hesag village, Singh more, Ranchi said, 'We hunt animals that come in the way, mostly chicken, hen and goat are killed and no one resists us as villagers are aware of this tradition'.<sup>11</sup> After a complete exploration, they start retreating, with a good number of minor animals tied to the bamboo stick. It is the duty of the ladies of the visiting village to go on *shikar*, in a couple of days, to the next village.

On their return, these successful *shikaris* are welcomed by their own community girls and ladies, who had stayed back, due to some unavoidable circumstances. According to tribal custom, their feet are washed and wiped and garland is put around their neck. After a warm welcome, the hunted animals are brought to the Akhra, the place made ready for the celebration that continues the whole night. Mass cooking is followed by common dining at night. Men join women's merry making at night. Beating of *nagara*, singing the songs of Jani Shikar after a long gap of twelve years, holding hands and dancing to the rhythm, well represent the joy of victory be it now or then. The essence of the festival lies in the representation of power by tribal women and their victory.

In the present era of modernisation and westernisation where traditions are virtually on the verge of extinction the observance of the festival is important for upholding tribal culture. Hence its observance has been made mandatory by the *Pahans*. It is ascertained that women from each and every tribal family living in the village joins the hunt. An amount of three hundred rupees is charged from all those who fail to participate in Shikar. Amount varies from village to village, however maximum amount has not exceeded five hundred rupees.<sup>12</sup> Keeping the obligations aside, the thrill and excitement of going on hunt after a long time remains the same. It is thought provoking to see some ladies going on hunt, with their babies tied on their back with shawl or towel, referred to as *betra* in *Kurukh* (dialect of the Oraons). A common feeling of unity persists amongst women during the celebration.

### Challenging societal structure

It is often presumed that Adivasi women are independent and free from patriarchal sway. But this is more or less an idealistic notion of Adivasi egalitarian society and lacks concrete material reality. In different aspects of social life, women do enjoy status and freedom, as for example in the choosing of husband, pre-marital sex, seeking divorce,

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<sup>10</sup> Shanti Xess, (30 years), gave this information in an interview conducted while she was engaged in hunt and was moving towards Latma toil. Generally most of the women I interviewed hold the similar view – Galo Linda (Kanke, Ranchi), Phulkeria tigga (Rampur, Lohardaga), Preity Linda (Hesag Village, Ranchi).

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Pyari Linda in Hindi on 25th May 2017 in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

<sup>12</sup> Based on the interview of tribal women of villages of Ranchi and Lohardaga like Latma toil, Dibdih, Aine village, Simpur village, Ramgarh village etc. All of them mentioned figures around Rs.300-500.

drinking, dancing and others. But these cannot be the sole parameters for placing women as equals. Though patriarchy is not rooted among Adivasis, yet the prevailing dominant culture with its inclination towards strong patriarchal norms has left its imprints on the Adivasi psyche as well. Women in general are expected to do the daily household work, raise children, take care of the family and be equal partners in agricultural operations in the village. This is common tendency visible among the tribes of Jharkhand.

In this phase of modernization, the status of an Adivasi women can be examined through development variables as ownership rights, economic rights, religious positioning and political participation. Adivasi women suffer from several economic, political and religious disabilities (Barla 2013). They are debarred from share in the ancestral property (Rao 2005). It can also be observed that role played by tribal women in rural and urban bodies is weak, they are neither involved in dispute resolving panchayats, nor in village-level decision making (Kerketta 2014). Moreover, in the field of religion, women participate in popular tribal festivals but are excluded from most rituals. A female cannot perform the religious duties as Pahan. Tribal women are also subjected to social evils as witchcraft and are also prone to sexual abuse by contractors and the outsiders because of their relatively free attitude of participation in wage employment (Sundar 2001: 429). This brings to question, as to how do tribal women resist against male domination in a society which claims to be egalitarian?

Since tribal women rebelling against male domination is actually unheard, it is difficult to bring out women's resistance against their male counterparts and needs a study of the tribe from within. James Scott illustrates that resistance are not always organized or are visible, there are less visible forms of resistance as well. This less visible forms of resistance is often exercised by the weak, the marginalized without disturbing the equation of the society. Scott has expounded numerous weapons of relatively powerless groups as 'foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson and sabotage' (Scott 2008: xvi). By using these weapons they hardly come in conflict with the dominant groups or break the existing norm. Thus, the resistance goes without any verbal or physical confrontation.

The exclusive women celebration of Jani Shikar can be seen as a symbolic resistance against the established notion of patriarchy. The celebration helps women to assert themselves. Dayamani Barla, a tribal rights activist of Jharkhand, in her interview with Hindustan Times, said that 'Jani Shikar was a symbol of tribal empowerment, feminist movements might have surfaced in the 1960s but the hinterlands of Jharkhand has experienced women power years ago, when tribal women defeated invaders in two consecutive battles'.<sup>13</sup> Elwin writes that the celebration of the festival is a mock at masculine power (Elwin 1975).

In a man's clad she hides her feminine characteristic of being emotional, tender, gentle and compassionate and projects masculine characteristics as aggressive, assertive, forceful, dominant and independent, which society terms as brave façade. The celebration can also be viewed as a way of showing disregard for the division of labour which defines women's role in the household. It also acts as a reminder for men that hunting was not always a male monopoly but even women used to go out on hunt (Singh 2001: 113–23). But in resisting men she never comes in open confrontation with the established authority. Although, the celebration does not make a huge difference or places her on an equal footing in all the spheres but this is a bid to create her individual space. It indeed reminds men of the power of women and their importance in the society.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview conducted by *The Hindustan Times*, Ranchi and published on April 30, 2017.

Jani Shikar can also be seen as a medium of preserving the culture and for promoting the Adivasi society as an egalitarian society. Aside these, the festival is also a reminder for *Dikus*<sup>14</sup> who try to interfere in the tribal life. Centuries ago they had taken weapons to protect the tribe and even today through this practice they make it clear that they would not hesitate to repeat the same if needed. Hence, it can also be seen an assertion of Adivasi identity.

To conclude, the custom of Jani Shikar promotes the hunt by women and thereby rejects the exclusive right of male over hunting. The practice, which had begun centuries ago as a commemoration of the victory of the Oraon women over the Turks, is in fact the assertion of multiple aspirations of women. Though for a day, it gives an opportunity to women to project themselves as superior and dominant. The festival does not lead to an open confrontation with men for political, economic rights but rather opens doors of negotiation for future. Besides this, the memories of the act transcend the durational gap between the festival celebration, to preserve the Adivasi identity which indeed is very important.

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<sup>14</sup> The term diku is used for outsiders, non-tribals and exploiters (Munda and Mullick 2003: VII).

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## **(Re)Constructing Dwelling: Transient Architecture of Rabari**

**Chintal Sharma**

Young India Fellow  
Ashoka University, Haryana  
chintalsharma@live.com

### **Abstract**

To a sedentary modern society, permanence of structure in shelter is a prerequisite in defining its architecture. In the light of this, it is pertinent to revisit the definition of shelter in its most basic form. The Rabari pastoral nomads due to their constant mobility and lack of an elaborate transport system, have been able to define shelter which is both vulnerable and responsive to their basic needs. And yet, the shelter presents a distinct cultural imprint. This paper explores the dwellings of this nomadic community by de-constructing their life into components, daily life, negotiations with landscape, resources and climate, and their place in the contemporary world. Eventually the thesis concludes by forming a narrative of re-constructing their idea of dwelling and their relation with a sedentarized society.

### **Introduction**

To understand what it means to dwell, it is important to define the built environment which allows for the act of dwelling. Dwelling allows an occupied space to make it a place. In order to understand the transformation of space to a place, act of dwelling is understood by understanding what it means to create a built environment.

Clifford Geertz has declared, 'Man, is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun' (Geertz 1973: 5). The statement implies that the society we occupy is a construct of the myths we have spun to create this reality. Hence, the myths have a direct implication on our built environment. Tim Ingold searches for the meaning of built environment 'not, that is, on what a built environment means, but on what it means to say that an environment is built.' (Ingold 2000: 174). To answer, he tries to distinguish between what is built and what is not built. The built environment as 'any physical alteration of natural environment, from hearths to cities, through construction by humans' (Lawrence 1990: 454).

To define architecture Ingold distinguishes animal architecture and human architecture on the basis of volition of design of the construction (Ingold 2000: 175). It is evident that humans build houses of diverse kinds while animals construct forms of dwelling which are constant for a given physiological setting. This distinction points out that human beings, as opposed to other animals, build not only as a result of intuition which is a resultant of physiological needs but rather human beings build to respond to their sociological setting as well.



Vagadia Rabaris are pastoral nomads migrating within the state of Gujarat for larger part of the year. The Rabaris have a permanent house in their native village. While for the most part of the year, they are migrating in search for fodder; during the monsoon months, they return to their village.

In order to understand building as a social act, the current paper deals with observing the daily life of Vagadia Rabari. There are two ideas which determine the design of the built environment, the community's response to climatic conditions and building as a social act; various components of their lives are documented to corroborate the theory. It has been assumed that there are three acts which largely contribute to the design of dwelling, daily routine, loading and unloading the camp and setting up the camp.

Farming community and the nomadic pastoralists share a symbiotic relation. After the crop has been harvested, the livestock of the pastoral community feeds on the plantation stubs while fertilizing the farmer's land in return. The nomadic Rabaris migrate from farm to farm in search for fodder. While they occupy one farm for setting up their camp, their livestock is taken to graze the farms in the vicinity as well. A camp is set for at least three or four days to allow the livestock to graze the neighbouring farms.

A unit family of Rabari typically consists of parents and one or two children. Elders who cannot commute longer distances stay behind at the village residence. Each family unit occupies one camp. The most basic camp is defined by an ensemble of two *charpoy*s, two metal posts, a piece of canvas large enough to cover the charpoy and three bamboo sticks. Children and women of the house occupy the two charpoy for sleeping while men sleep on the ground encircling the pen of the livestock.

A group of nuclear families travelling together is called a *vandhyo*; the number of nuclear families travelling may vary from three to four up to ten families. Typically, the vandhyo travels with three kinds of animals, loading animals which are camels, livestock animals consisting of a herd of sheep and goats and security animal which is a dog, depending on the herd size the vandhyo may have multiple dogs. Loading animal is responsible in determining the nature of camp set up. The camp set up has to be mounted on to the loading animal during the period of migration. Hence, components to create a camp have to be kept minimal. Due to constant migration with minimum utilities, the camp is fragile and vulnerable to climatic conditions. Therefore, the camp demands flexibility in its structure of architecture to respond to changing climatic conditions during the year as well as during the day.

Constant migration with limited supplies increases the community's dependency on their surroundings. The pastoral nomadic Rabari essentially carry the objects needed to construct a camp, a pen for their livestock and vessels and non-perishable groceries. The pastoral nomads are dependent on their surroundings for ensured daily water supply. Water supply can be a natural source or collected from irrigation facilities of farmers or from surrounding factories. Perishable food items are bought from surrounding shops every once in a few days. The pastoral nomads are also dependent on their surrounding for procuring firewood, which is not carried from one farm to the other.

Dependency on their landscape can be inferred by observing the cycles which make up the lives of the Rabari. There are various movements and cycles which compose a larger season of migration. Daily cycles include grazing trips which range from a few meters to a few kilometres and at least a trip to water source; these are predetermined cycles which continue for the entire year. Contingency cycles include migration from farm to farm which may happen at least once in a week. These cycles are

pre-determined and respond to a unit of time which corresponds with their cycle of buying perishable supplies for cooking, which primarily includes vegetables. Apart from the daily cycles and contingency cycles, there may be transaction cycles like visit to bank and religious cycles during festivals and festivities.

The men of the vandhyo spend most of their time tending to the needs of their livestock- sheep and goats. For a larger part of the morning and afternoon, the men set out with their livestock in search for grazing fodder. Meanwhile, the women are engaged in food preparation and collecting water for daily needs. The men essentially do not spend time on neither the camp site nor the camp.

The case study consists of two Vagadia Rabari vandhyo. Members of both the vandhyo came from in and around Bhachau district in the western part of Gujarat. During the period of case study, they were located 10 kilometres away from Bhachau village during the time of the site visit. It was observed that the vandhyo do not set up their camp adjoining the farms located in immediate proximity of the highways, rather their camps are set up at least two to three belts of farmlands away from the arterial roads.

The dirt road adjoining the farm they were settled in, was a single lane road made primarily for farming vehicles. This road accessed a large parcel of land which was utilized for farming. While the entire parcel of land belonged to multiple farmers, it is common for farmers to own a number of farms cultivating different crops. There were three migrating groups occupying the parcel of land, two were Vagadia Rabari while one was a Fakirani Jat group. Both the Rabari vandhyo were occupying neighbouring farm lands. The vandhyo had occupied the farm a day before site visit and would continue to live for at least next three or four days.

Their possessions during the migration were limited primarily to their livestock, a shawl or two, a bamboo stick and paraphernalia required for food preparation. These men did not own loading animals. Therefore, this dang did not set up a formal camp. The nature of occupancy of land was defined by storing food preparation utilities on a part of the farm. Analysing from a physiological view, in both the cases the perception of dwelling is similar. Absence of a camp set up, in the case where only the men were traveling, did not change their idea of dwelling. In both the cases, the men do not directly interact with the camp set up. It is primarily the women and the children who utilize the camp during the day as well as during the night. One vandhyo consisted three consanguineous families migrating together. The three families belonged to different villages and had been migrating together since the previous season of monsoon. The dang consisted of only men who were migrating with their livestock. While these six men were not related by blood, they belonged to the same village and like the other dang they had also been migrating together from the previous monsoon season.

The social organization of the Rabari is consists of two units; one happens at the level of household which consists of a nuclear family and some casual workers, the other is at the level of migrating group (vandhyo). The entire family consisting of men, women and children migrate together with their animals (young and old). A large vandhyo consists of 10 households which could include households from different villages, while small dangs are restricted to households sharing close relations.

Khazanov explains 'in the case of nomads, primary kin group consists of closely related families which migrate all around the year, or parts of the year to pasture together' (Khazanov 1984: 127). Each individual family is financially autonomous

and owner of their share of livestock. A family generally consists of parents and their children but in some cases, members of a family may not be migrating due to medical reasons or if they have adopted alternative lifestyles. In the case of families observed, not more than two generations of the same family were migrating together.

In case of the Vagadiya Rabari, while monetary transactions are handled by the women of the house, it is the men who primarily look after the livestock and engage in everyday routines affecting the animals. Ownership of livestock is credited to the head of the family. Transformation from child to man is marked by the distribution of livestock between father and son, however, the transaction may not be equal. Henceforth, the son is economically self-sufficient yet the family as a household divulges in joint production and joint consumption.

Two cases are discussed in this paper one migrating group consisting of three families, were related to each other through kinship, while the other migrating group consisting of only men, did not necessarily share kinship. The families travelling together did not come from the same village. While the families were travelling together for about eight months now, come monsoon, they could well be traveling with a different set of families. The reason for the break up could be based on unequal demand of fodder for their livestock, productivity of pastures, distance covered, and state of distance covered. Although the deciding factor in composing a migrating group is the shared resources. The other migrating group consisting of only the male members belonged to the same villages and had similarly been traveling together since the previous monsoon season. In both cases, it was observed the monsoon season marks the completion of one cycle of migration.

### **A day in the life of Vagadia Rabari**

A typical day starts between 4:00 am and 5:00 am for the men and women of the vandhyo while the children are yet asleep. After the men and women have cleaned their mouth with some warm water the women begin preparing tea. The men and women share some tea and the women get to the task of preparing the first meal of the day while the men tend to the livestock. The men milk their livestock to acquire the quantity required for the day while also feeding the young animals. After the young ones are fed, they are moved into the pen where they will remain for the rest of the day. By 7:00 am, children wake up and start their morning by drinking tea after they have washed their mouth with warm water.

It is at 10:00 am, the individual families eat their first meal near their respective charpoys. After the first meal, the men set out to graze their livestock, male children may or may not accompany their fathers for grazing while the girl children stay back with their mothers. At 11:00 am the women of the vandhyo gather and leave the camp to collect water if the water source is not available on the farm they have set up their camp. The children may accompany their mothers. In case the water source is further away than a few metres, the women take the camels along to fetch water otherwise the camels remained tied around the camp. The camels feed on the weeds which are grown on the peripheries of the farm which distinguish one farm from the other hence they are tied on the peripheries.

After returning from collecting water, the women create shade for the young ones in the pen by hanging a few blankets on the periphery of the pen. The women may also hang the canvas over the charpoys which creates a shade where the women will

collectively sit together during the afternoon. For a couple of hours in the afternoon the women and children may enjoy a siesta in their respective camps.

After sunset between 6:00 pm and 7:00 pm the men return with their livestock. For the second time in the day they begin acquiring milk (which will be used for the second meal) and feed the young animals. The young animals are brought out from the pen and instinctively the young ones find their mothers. In rare cases when the young one is turned away by their mother, the men may have to forcibly direct the young one to another lactating mother sheep or goat. Meanwhile, the women prepare the second meal. By 8:30 pm, the families enjoy their last meal of the day and retire. The mothers and children occupy the charpoys while the men locate themselves around the pen.

Choice of location for activities provides an insight into the family unit's response to social conditioning and gender dynamics. While interaction of objects is seen as the collective migrating group's response to physiological needs. Hence, the amalgamation of the two forms a basis to understand the Vagadia Rabari in the context of their environment. The purpose of documentation of their daily lives helps understand the fragility in their lives. The fact that they are constantly on the move limits the number of possessions which can be carried while migrating and hence they are extensively dependent upon their environment to provide for most utilities. Also, the other reason for possessing minimal number of items is the mode of transportation; camels are the only loading animals and hence, they have to manage their possessions minimally.

If the inanimate items carried and the items acquired were to be compared, it would indicate that majority of the items they carry are components which make up their camp and only those ingredients which are not perishable. For all perishable items, the Rabaris negotiate with their surroundings.

It was observed while tracing their daily routine that the Rabaris are extremely sensitive to the changes in their environment. There are two stages at which their sensitivity is reflected, one is at the level of the individual and other is at the camp level. So, at the individual level it was observed that changing climatic conditions altered their habits. The most notable change was the change in the positioning of the charpoy. Each family of the vandhyo travel with two charpoys, a few bamboo sticks and a canvas for the construction of their camp. Additionally, they may also carry a tarpaulin for occasional and infrequent rains. Out of the two charpoys, one is higher and the other one is lower. The higher charpoy becomes a permanent, structural member of the camp composition and lower one holds a rather arbitrary place in the structural system. The higher charpoy for all the families across the community correspond to a fixed cardinal directional system. The direction for the charpoy marks the shift in the position of the sun.

Tracing the daily lives of the Rabari lends a lens into the primary utilities in a life as a pastoral nomad. Components of their daily lives form cycles attributing to a larger season corresponding to migration. Observations derived from daily activities have been segregated into three components, the nature of activity, location of activity and the interaction with objects. The three components help derive relation between the pastoral nomads and their environment.

When considered the built environment as response to physiological needs, interaction with objects exemplifies the community's response to a minimal lifestyle as a result of life on the move. Choice of location elaborates building as a social act.

The two migrating groups are observed to be able to document a typical day in the life of Vagadia Rabari. Gender division has been considered as a parameter to document

their lives; men, women and children have distinct roles to perform exemplified by documenting various activities which take place during the day.

### **Locating the camp**

**Rationale for location**—When moving from one camp site to the other, the primary focus to identify a camp site is the availability of fodder. The distance between two camp sites is approximately 5-7 kilometres. Along with the considering the availability of fodder, a water source is identified which will sustain the livestock for the next few days.

**Rationale of camp set-up**—The farm occupied was nearly 3-4 acres. The farm was accessible by a 3-meter-wide dirt road. One side of the farm was abutting a dirt road while the other three sides were surrounded by other parcels of farm lands. Two high tension pylons were placed in the parcel of land occupied.

The camp was set up towards the rear end of the farm. A pen was constructed for livestock; four feet high with plastic net. The shape of the pen resembled a square and at the corners, the three families had laid out their charpoys along with their other possessions.

Each family owns two charpoys; one is higher while the other is lower. The higher charpoy is used to place valuables during the day. Spices and flour are stored in containers which can be plastic or steel, vegetables are kept in polythene bags and oil in plastic or steel containers which have a handle to hang it. Spices, flour and vegetables are kept on the higher charpoy. Two metal posts with a circular profile at the upper end are placed at either ends of the charpoy. Through the two circular profiles, a bamboo stick is rested. The oil container is hung at either ends of the bamboo stick. Each family carries multiple blankets which are also kept on the higher charpoy. The saddle for camel is also kept on the higher charpoy at one end vertically aligned with the shorted edges of the charpoy.

The charpoy legs have four cylindrical profiles located somewhere between the length of the legs. This profile is used when a mosquito net has to be suspended from the bamboo stick covering both the charpoys. On warm and sunny afternoons, a canvas is suspended over the charpoys to create shade.

Orientation of the two charpoys changes during the year. Holi marks the shift in the orientation. The higher charpoys are at all times during the day fixated while the lower charpoy may be oriented differently during the day time according to need. During the day time, the lower charpoy is used to rest and sit. The higher charpoy after Holi has longer side of the charpoy is aligned north-south with the head resting in south direction.

Children sleep on the higher charpoy and the women sleep on the lower charpoy. Men sleep around the camp set up and do not follow any orientation. Men sleep on the ground without any bedding, they use their turban to rest their head on the ground.

In the case of the vandhyo consisting of only men without camels, the possessions carried are minimum. They did not carry material to construct a pen, the livestock was gathered and the men slept around the livestock during the night to protect them and prevent them from straying away. As the camel is the primarily utilized to carry instruments for setting up camp, men traveling without camel did not have the luxury to carry their charpoys. The men store their possessions in sacks which becomes their camp.

**Camp as a structure**—essentially defines the elements, in their structural capacity, which are responsible for making the camp a sound structure. There are two types of

such elements, fixed components of the structure and the components which are rather arbitrarily placed. Fixed components of the camp include the higher charpoy, bamboos rested on the charpoy to create a shade while the only component which is arbitrarily placed is the lower charpoy which accommodates the changing daily lifestyle uses.

**Camp as an assembly of objects**—This section is a continuation of ‘camp as structure’. To differentiate between the camp as a structure and the camp as an assembly of objects is to distinguish between a defined space and what becomes a place. Additions in the camp which do not add structural value but play an integral role in creating a home for the pastoral nomads. This is not to say that structural elements do not play a role in creating a home but rather this section can be viewed as a step forward after the creation of the framework of the camp. When the camp is examined as an assembly of objects, one begins to see the multiplicity of the functions which are performed by the objects carried. The blankets, which may be carried to provide warmth become a bedding during the day time, while the saddle becomes a foot rest during the night.

**Fragility of camp**—Pastoral nomads on account of being constantly mobile carry components to create shelter. Due to the restrictions which come with being on the move, their shelter is minimal. This makes the shelter vulnerable to the forces of nature with minimum combating tools. Hence, the shelter is constantly transforming itself to adapt to climatic disturbances. The shelter transforms during the day to negotiate with sunlight. The camp sees the addition of a canvas to create shade while for the pen of the livestock, blankets are hung to create shadows where the livestock huddles up. Each migrating group may deal with climatic disturbances differently. In some cases, instead of using canvas to create shade, the charpoy is stationed at an angle underneath which the women sit during the afternoon. During monsoon season, a couple of inches high plinth is made from clay around the camp to prevent flooding. In addition to the canvas, a plastic cloth is hung large enough to cover the two charpoys. While there may be minor variations in the method of negotiating with climatic disturbances, the principles and tools of combat remain the same.

### **Loading and unloading of camp on camel**

The loading animal employed by the Rabari is camel. A caravan may consist of a single camel or multiple camels depending upon the size of the caravan. It was observed that camels are treated as a collective property of the caravan. However, during the shuffling within the migrating group, the family which owns the camel takes the animal during the shuffling. It is important to note that formation of a migrating group is done on a premise to acquire necessary utilities as a collective.

Men spend majority of the day fulfilling the responsibilities of a shepherd; the livestock requires to be grazed and fed water. Men spend most the day away from the camp in search for grazing fields occasionally foraging for water sources. Meanwhile, the women occupy the camp for most duration of the day. If men look after the livestock, women are responsible for the camp. As the camel is primarily used as a loading animal, the camel stays back at the camp while the livestock is taken for grazing. Women make sure the camel is taken to a water source and is well fed. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that women take up the responsibility of disassembling of the camp as well as the loading and unloading of the camp. While the men may help in settling the camel, the women of the family meticulously disassemble the camp.

The process of disassembly of the camp simultaneously takes place along with the loading of the belongings on the pack animal. Children may assist their mothers to

supply each article in the sequence of loading. The camels are made to sit on the ground and the process of laying the possessions begins. A thin piece of cotton cloth is laid over the camel back. This cloth is large enough to cover the hump of the camel as well as the rest of its stomach. The shape of this cloth is more or less rectangular. Over the piece of cloth, *atharyu* is laid. The *atharyu* has a cut out in the centre where the hump fits. The thin piece of cloth was laid before *atharyu* to prevent it from getting dirty. *Artharyu* is made from two-three pieces of cotton cloth layered and stitched together. The *artharyu* is longer on the four edges giving it a drooping shape. Over the *atharyu* another rectangular thin piece of cotton cloth is laid. This piece of cloth has cotton string attached to the four edges. This piece of cloth is tucked from the edges. All the blankets are neatly folded and laid equally on either sides of the camel hump. Eventually a folded blanket is laid to cover the hump. Saddle is kept on the top. The saddle consists of two compartments which are divided horizontally by a wooden section passing through the centre of the saddle. The saddle has a cotton belt with a triangular metal ring at the other end of the belt. On the other parallel side of the side, a metal ring is attached to the saddle. A leather belt and a rope are tied to the ring. The cotton belt is wrapped around the belly and the two belts tied to the circular metal ring are passed from the triangular ring attached to the belt to fasten the saddle on the camel back. The saddle is shaken while tightening the rope and the leather belt. In both the compartments of the saddle, remaining blankets are placed.

Another article of cloth is placed over the blankets. This article is called *kandhar* and it is used to carry household items like vessels and containers. The *kandhar* has a slit in between through which it slides through the middle vertical bar of the saddle. During the process of filling it up, the edges of the *kandhar* are rested on the saddle. The *kandhar* has various sewn notches through which a rope is passed to fasten the items kept inside. Remaining blankets are placed in the two compartments of the saddle. This is done to make a comfortable seat on the camel, where the children will sit. Another piece of cloth with a hole in the centre is slid through the middle bar of the saddle. This is a decorative piece of cloth which covers all the articles which have been loaded.

Both the charpoys are then loaded on the camel and tied from all the four sides using rope. Edges of the saddle have wooden protruding pieces which are used to tie the charpoys. The charpoys are upturned and horizontally aligned with the camel. The legs of the charpoys are covered with cloth coverings. Pots are upturned and rested on these legs. The cloth covering prevents the metal legs from making noise when stuck against the steel pots.

Articles are loaded on to the camel keeping in mind the comfort of the camel as well as properties of the article being loaded. For example, water pots are placed inverted on leg of the charpoy to have it readily available when required during the journey. Most blankets are tucked onto the camel before placing other articles to prevent the camel from developing rashes as the blankets act as buffer between the courser articles and the camel.

Meanwhile, the men disassemble the pen of the livestock animals. The men gather their livestock and the children may help keep the livestock rounded together preventing them from escaping. The process of unloading unfurls in the same sequence as loading. Again, the women engage in the activity while the men will be busy. The process of disassembly and loading of the animal takes between 15 minutes to 30 minutes. Generally, this takes place during the first half of the day as the livestock would have exhausted neighbouring grazing fields and have to be taken to new ones.

### Weekly movements

Weekly movements are contingencies and may or may not correspond to the Western perception of the unit of a week. The movements basically correspond to the shifting of camp from one site to the next. Camp site is changed when the grazing of neighbouring farms has exhausted plantation stub supply. Typically, the livestock belonging to a vandhyo of 3-4 families takes 4-5 days to exhaust plantation supply of farms covering a radius of 4-5 kilometres. After this exhaustion the camp site is moved.

**Firewood**—*Prosopis juliflora* is abundantly available in Kutch. *Prosopis juliflora*, locally known as *gando baval*, is fiercely invasive and multiplies without much effort. The farmers use dried baval to demarcate their farms as the shrub is thorny and prevents trespassing. Baval is also used as firewood. Firewood is collected either while returning from collecting water or sometimes secured from the baval fences laid out by the farmer. Firewood is not collected on a daily basis but rather stored to suffice for a few days depending on the time to be spent on a designated farm.

**Ration**—Flour, oil and vegetables are bought once in a few days. The ration is bought from nearby shops. Ration was stored in plastic as well as steel containers. Steel containers were bought while the plastic containers could be reused from buying other commodities. In the case where only the men were traveling, storage of ration was more frugal. Flour was stored in a steel rectangular box container. Vegetables and spices were stored in polythene bags. Flour, vegetables, spices along with necessary vessels used for cooking were packed into a sack to prevent predators from attacking their supplies. These supplies were kept in on the farm where they would set up their camp.

### Seasonal migration

After about a year of migrating together the families return to their respective villages during monsoon months. For 2-3 months during the monsoon season, the migrating group returns to their village and settle in their village homes. The herd, all the members of the family as well as the paraphernalia carried along to sustain the nomadic life is brought back to their respective villages. The livestock are grazed in and around the village as the landscape becomes greener during monsoon.

There are other occasions when the vandhyo returns to their village, a week or two during Diwali. For Navratri the vandhyo may or may not return to the village, but they definitely make a visit to their *kuldevi* temple. During Holi if the son in the family has gotten married recently, the son's maternal uncle has to circle the fire of Holi with him and his bride in the first year of marriage. The mother of the son may return to the village to witness this festivity but the entire vandhyo does not return to the village.

It is not necessary that only families residing in the same village migrate together. But the families migrating together are related by blood. Before setting out after monsoon, a migrating group is made considering the resources required to sustain a pastoral nomadic life. This migrating group had been traveling together for 6-7 months now and prior to this the families had been traveling with different set of families.

Another migratory group encountered composed of only male were traveling without their wives and children. While the larger pattern of migration was similar, the kinship within this vandhyo was different. While the men belonged to the same village, they were not related by blood.



### **Nomadic pastoralism in the contemporary world**

British India did not recognize pastoral nomads and hence they were isolated whereas the newly formed India tried to 'integrate' them after 1947 (Edwards 2010: 184–206). The Nomadic Tribes' Day Conference held in Delhi 1960, clearly suggested the pastoral nomads to sedentarize.

'This Nomadic Tribes' Conference strongly recommended to the Government of India for allocation of substantial funds for the rehabilitation of nomadic communities so that they stayed at a place, build their own houses and subsisted as a good citizen of the community. Such a course would also wean them away from criminal tendencies if and where they exist consequent on the nature of their unsettled lives' (Gooch 1998: 42).

As a result of being cast out, a large population of Rabaris have either begun to sedentarize or opt for long distance migration to other states where the pasture is abundant (Edwards 2010: 193).

This section looks at the impact of modernization on the Rabari who remain in the state and continue to live a nomadic life. This section also attempts to answer the motivation for their lifestyle despite the neglect and often being labelled as criminals for their mode of lifestyle. The pastoral nomads lead a life which is an antithesis to the settled life. The definition of a modern life adheres to sedentarization as preliminary requisite. Sedentarization also gives rise to the idea of possession of property as an act of ownership. But in the case of the pastoral nomads, the idea of ownership, when on the move, is different.

As the Vagadia Rabari have been exposed to the modern world, they have begun to adapt to modern ways. However, modernization in their context is vastly different from the settled members of the community. The general perception of pastoral nomads indicates to their being primitive. However, they are trying to grapple with technology the same way any 'modern' citizen does.

The Vagadia Rabari have access to mobile phones. The fact that they are constantly on the move, raises the problem of recharging the battery. It is also important to note that while they maybe in contact with urban centres once in a while, most of their lives are spent on farms in remote locations. So, as a solution to this problem, a lot of the Rabari turn to solar charging. They carry a solar panel which supplements for the entire migrating group. So, their migratory lifestyle may be perceived as primitive in general opinion, the fact is that to sustain themselves, they are constantly adapting to technology. Also, their adaptation of technology vastly differs from how a settled citizen might adapt.

Pastoral nomads lead a fragile life; to fulfil their physiological needs they are constantly negotiating with their environment. Traditional knowledge has historically equipped them with the ability to sustain their life as pastoral nomads. Daily tasks in the shepherd's life requires knowledge from various domains, which is traditionally acquired. Knowledge about soil quality distinguishes pastures with greater nutritional value.

Close association with their livestock as an exercise of several generations has equipped the pastoralists an understanding about the requirements of their livestock. The community has adopted a communication method which consists various sounds to command their animals. To cure disease in animals, chemical drugs are being used. But before Kutch became accessible and hence globalized, ethno botany and ethno veterinary sufficed medical care of animals as well as humans.

Modern schooling system was brought to India during colonization. As the pastoral nomads were largely disregarded from the system, modern education is neither inclusive of the challenges faced by the pastoral nomads nor does it acknowledge the traditional knowledge required to sustain life as a pastoralist. Content taught by the schools and the life lead by pastoralists is tangential. The community's exposure to this capitalist economic model has resulted in a realization to pursue formal education. The foremost challenge faced by the community is the disconnect between their context and the context of the education.

Two direct implications of formal education on the life pastoralists were observed during the site visit. One of the migrating groups consisted three nuclear families, the children were aged between 2–11 years. All the children of this migrating group had completed 3–4 years of formal education system before dropping out. The children along with their mothers are again leading a migratory lifestyle.

Enrolment in formal school requires sedentarization which disconnects the children from the migratory life. As the schooling does not formally encourage pastoralism as a way of life, the migratory lifestyle becomes irrelevant to their lives. Correspondingly, traditional knowledge which is passed down from one generation to the other is immaterial and hence, lost.

In the vandhyo where only the men were traveling, it was observed that because their later generations were educated, they adopted alternative lifestyles. Sedentarization in this case resulted in an alternative lifestyle for the children as well as their mothers who had stopped migrating to look after their children. The second generation was educated just enough to opportune blue-collar jobs. Traditional historical knowledge was passed down through tales and myths, while traditional ecological knowledge will be lost. One of the women of the clan quipped, '*Bhaniye toh mel uthar se!*' This roughly translates as 'only education can rid us of our misfortune'.

An article published by *Pastoral Times* (31st March, 2018) 'From Herders to Truck Drivers to Herders' informs that camel breeding has once again been revived as a commercially viable activity. This movement may instil pride in the community for their mode of lifestyle. The article informs that AMUL has launched a Camel Milk Chocolate while Aadvik Foods of Delhi has begun manufacturing products from camel milk. This is significant step in recognizing the pastoral nomads as modern citizens of the country.

### Conclusion

The transient nature of architecture gives a model of the most basic form of shelter which can be considered a built environment with a certain level of cultural design. There are two parts of the statement which need to be elaborated, the first being, the model of architecture in pastoral nomads is the most basic form of shelter and the other being, the shelter having a degree of cultural forbearing.

The shelter is termed as the most basic model of architecture owing to the constant state of migration. The architecture does not have the advantage of a ready built environment as in the case of permanent settlements. At the same time, unlike in the case of hunter-gatherers, the act of building does not begin afresh on a daily basis. Essentially, migration requires for the pastoral nomads to deconstruct their camp but they do not abandon the components of the camp. In the case of hunter-gatherers, the material of the architecture may be intentionally selected but the material is largely occupied from the surrounding. This could lead us to believe that the material to build does have a cultural memory.

If the premise of cultural memory can be defined by the materiality of the camp, it means that the act of migrating with components, which eventually make up the camp, is an indication that the camp has a cultural design. The evidence of this can be attributed to the fact that they carry their shelter when moving from one camp to the next unlike hunter-gatherers for whom the act of building becomes a part of their daily lives.

By distinguishing between the shelter of hunter-gatherers and pastoral nomads it is proven that the camp has a cultural memory, it yet remains to be proven that the shelter of the pastoral nomads is the most basic model. Here again, permanent architecture is brought in to questioning; the permanence in architecture creates an environment which can be distinguished from the natural environment. What this means is that when act of building happens on a daily basis in different locations, the act of dwelling becomes the first layer of built environment but in the case where architecture is permanent, the consequent acts of building are adding to an already existing structure of a built environment. By the continuous processes of co-opting and constructive making, the complexity in the shelter increases. This continuous activity allows for the expression of architecture to resemble the mental representation of the environment we perceive.

In the process, the architecture begins to dwell in an artificially created environment rather than the natural environment. While in the case of a pastoral nomad's shelter, constant mobility ensures that the shelter remains in a natural environment and does not reach the level of complexity of a permanent shelter. At the same time, the shelter has a cultural memory expressed through the materiality. Hence, it can be concluded that the pastoral nomad's shelter is the most basic model of shelter with a cultural design.

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Pages from the Old Records

## **A Relook at Santal Revolt 1855–56**

**Sanjay Nath**

Assistant Professor, Department of History  
Jamshedpur Co-operative College, Jamshedpur  
sanjaynath09@gmail.com

This contemporary account, being reminiscences of Mrs R.E. Barton Jones, resident to Birbhum, written in her later years, was published in *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. LIII, Part I, Serial No. 105, January-March 1937 (35–38). It is set against the backdrop of the Santal Hul of 1855–56, which for several months posed a real threat to the authority of the British Government and the zamindars at different places like Birbhum, Burdwan, Berhampur, Raniganj, Deoghar, Bhagalpur, Purnia, Munger, Barh and Patna. The contemporary accounts generally highlight the state of uncertainty and helplessness that prevailed in the officialdom and among their henchmen. The present account deviates from this general trend to recall the danger and a sense of disenchantment at more intimate level faced by a British family residing at Birbhum in the wake of the Santal insurrection and how they were successful in evading the danger. The British family consisting of father, mother, two young women, one among them was the author herself and five little children had to leave their house in the face of an imminent Santal attack. But since everybody in the surrounding area was fleeing due to fear, the Barton family could not get a suitable conveyance to leave for their intended destination, Burdwan. As an alternative, they remained at Birbhum hiding inside a local Hindu zamindar's large and comfortable house. The zamindar was very courteous and friendly to his guests throughout their period of stay at his house. But as the Santal rebels were fast approaching there, the zamindar himself as well as the British family had to run away for safety. They took different routes for their flight. The British family moved towards Burdwan and they had to follow a trail of devastations left by a passing group of rebels at this route. The family, however, reached Burdwan safely and after sometime left for Calcutta to be out of danger altogether.

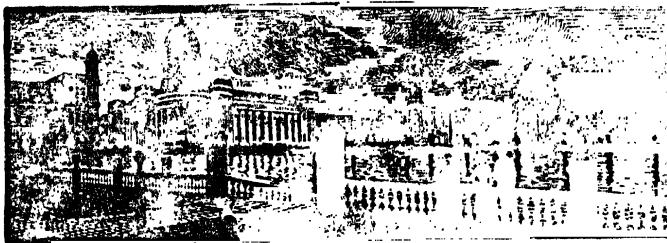
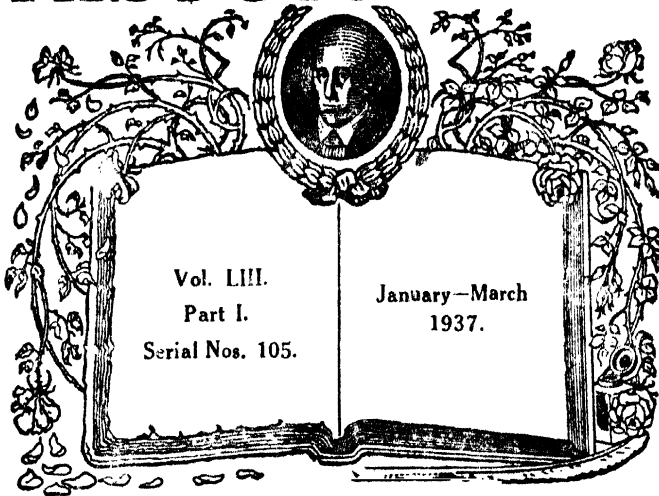
The present account captures the general mood of the time and reflects the fear of the zamindars and the powerful British officials. It is a testimony to the fact that the British authority was successfully challenged in the area now known as Santal Parganas. It also sheds light on Indo-British relations in pre-mutiny days when mutual trust and respect was not a distant possibility.

The narrative also reminds us of a memorable Shyam Benegal film *Junoon* (1979) based on Ruskin Bond novella, *The Flight of the Pigeon*. In the film, a British family, ravaged by the rebels of 1857, takes shelter in the house of a kind-hearted Hindu zamindar, Ramjilal. However, Ramjilal is soon forced by a powerful Muslim zamindar, Javed to send the family to his house. The real cause behind this shift is Ruth, the ravishing girl of the family who is devastated after witnessing her father being slain in a church, attacked by rebels led by Sarfaraz. Javed wants to possess Ruth who lives in perpetual fear. But her widowed mother Mariam repels every move of Javed to wed her daughter. The film takes a new turn when Ruth starts showing signs of developing tender feeling for Javed. The film is all about human relationships placed against the tumultuous years of 1857.

Although the similarities in the two accounts are fascinating, a comparative reading is not always fruitful when the real is set against the unreal. One is a contemporary record, another is a fiction, drawing inspiration from an historical event.



# BENGAL PAST & PRESENT



JOURNAL OF THE CALCUTTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Through the Santal Rising 1855-56

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(Being reminiscences of Mrs. R. E. Barton Jones, resident to Birbhoom.)

*The following extracts from the Reminiscences of the Santal Insurrection, 1855, are taken from the manuscript letter of Mrs. R. E. Barton Jones, who recorded these notes during the latter years of her life. They have been kindly communicated by Mr. Charles A. Dobson, Educational Officer, Holkar State, Chiman Bagh, Indore, son of the writer. These reminiscences show a degree of mutual trust and friendliness between Europeans and Indians, which successfully withstood and lightened the trials of these troublesome months.*

Our family was then resident at Beerbhoom, and consisted of Father, our Mother, two grown up young women, their daughters, viz. myself and sister, and five little children. I leave it, therefore, to the imagination to depict the consternation into which we were thrown when it became an assured fact that the quiet, guileless, and more than friendly Santal folk had suddenly become a furious maniacal mob, murdering, plundering, and recklessly destroying all that came within their reach. Planters, zamindars, and private individuals, whether Hindu, Moslem, or European all were ruthlessly butchered, and all they possessed devoted to utter destruction.

A life of peace and security had rendered all of us careless of danger, knowing how much our parents were respected and loved by all classes. We were soon shaken out of our false repose, and reproached ourselves with bitter regret for not having given heed to the many and frequent warnings we had from the authorities, and other friends who had spoken forcibly of our misplaced confidence in these honest but semi-savage people. While these betook themselves to places of safety, we and few others as foolishly trustful as ourselves kept on the even tenor of our way, confident and peaceful.

Alas! this did not continue very long. One evening a near neighbour, who had shared our confidence, burst into the house with a face of such horror and despair as to fill our hearts with vague fears scarcely less than his.

"Fly, for God's sake, fly: There is no time to be lost.

They are in force on the other side of the river. They may cross over any moment. Scores of their victims, wounded or killed out-right are being brought in. They spare none. Fly: For the children's sake, fly! If you had seen what I have witnessed you would not hesitate a moment. My horse is ready. I am off!"

On being asked where he was going, he said, "I cannot tell. Some place far from the murderous reach of these friends."

And then he was gone.

For a moment we looked at each other in hopeless anguish, and then Father said, "Let us commend ourselves to God, and ask His guidance". How he poured out his soul in prayer for us all. Then rising he calmly told us to put a few things together for a hasty journey. Calling the only servant, who being childless had not gone to hasten the flight of his family, Father consulted him as to some means of conveyance. While he went out to secure this we packed a few necessary articles, and some food for the children.

About an hour after, the man returned, sad and crest-fallen, saying that all he could get were two bullock carts, *dumnis*, as all were flying with their families, and would not come for any consideration. With something very like despair in our hearts at the thought of the very slow progress we should make, we almost made up our minds to remain where we were, but Father overruled this, simply altering the destination. Instead of making for Burdwan, as intended, he decided that our first step should be in an opposite direction, and to the house of an old Zamindar, who would do his best to keep us secluded till there was a lull in the storm, and more rapid means of conveyance could be obtained to remove us out of the district altogether. Father said that he would then accompany us but he deemed it wiser to stay back himself for the present, watch the course of events, and prepare for the longer journey that he at first had had in contemplation.

With all our haste we were not able to leave before the small hours of the morning, but as the savages were feasting and making merry across the river, we had time enough to reach our retreat. After an hour or so we left the high road, and cut across jungles of sal wood and scrub. For the time our hearts were more at rest regarding the Sontals. Still having but a small escort, self-tormenting dread often shrank in horror at the sounds we heard from wild beasts that abound in these districts.

As through the night so also the next day we were in much fear, anxiety, and the utter distress of the poor little ones. Thank God by nightfall we arrived at our destination, and were most kindly and warmly received by the gallant old Zemindar. His own office was entirely given over to our use. This was a large room with a spacious verandah all round, adjoining his own dwelling, and fitted with every convenience, and with due regard to privacy. We could not have been more comfortable else where.

One bright morning on awaking we were conscious of a silence and a gloom impending over us. Not only had the old man not come to pay his usual genial morning call, but we saw him officially dressed, and with a gloomy brow betake himself to his public outdoor business place, kept prepared for the purpose, except during the Rains, under a magnificent banyan tree. A large number of his people were in attendance, and Oh! the cold clutch at our hearts there were two or three Sontals armed with bows and arrows amongst them awaiting the Zemindar.

One of our most astute servants was sent by us dressed as a coolie to mingle among the men unobserved, to hear and learn all that was being

discussed. Half an hour later all dispersed and our man returned cautiously and unseen. Mother, then, after learning all particulars immediately sent him off for whatever conveyance could be obtained, and set us at work to pack up our few belongings.

Meanwhile our host continued sad and in gloomy reverie, and we had to send asking him to come to us. This he did with slow reluctant steps, then seating himself, and putting his hands together, said,

"I am dying of shame and humiliation, but so long as I and mine live to protect you, no harm shall come to you".

"What has happened?" said my Mother. "I saw some armed Santals, and I fear our presence has brought you trouble."

"Yes, the men in a body have been incited to kill us all, but those who came are friends, and wished to warn us. They will try to delay the attack. Remove to our private dwelling into the zenana, and we shall defend all to our utmost, and with our lives".

As I happened to be the only one in the family who was able to converse fluently in Hindustani, I was a great favourite with the old gentleman. He used to pass some hours daily talking to me, especially as I was always ready to give him any information he asked for, and also helped him to understand my Mother's very indifferent Hindustani. There was in consequence a very warm friendly feeling between us. The poor man's distress was genuine, and we were all much touched by it.

To proceed, in an hour between 10 and 11 a.m. we were on our way back, and God forbid we should ever again endure the horrors of another such journey. Rumours being afloat that the military were coming, and would make Beerbhoom their Head-quarters, the insurgents did not enter that town, but passing by the outskirts had already gone over the very roads we were taking. They left behind them to mark their savage track homeless Hindus some killed outright, some wounded, and household goods scattered all along their route as being too cumbersome to take. Husbands looking for their wives and children, frantic women rushing about seeking for their children and husbands, loud and piercing wails and shrieks announcing that the search for some had ended among the dead or wounded, through the midst of all these terrifying sights and sounds we made our slow and painful way.

This devastating tornado of human passions had over-whelmed the places we were going over sometime during the small hours of the night, while at the time we were on the road it must have been between two and three in the afternoon. But for God's Infinite Mercy delaying the knowledge of this we might have left too early, and just in time to fall into the clutches of the very maddened people we were so eager to avoid. What the result would have been it was not different to guess with the fearful scenes around us.

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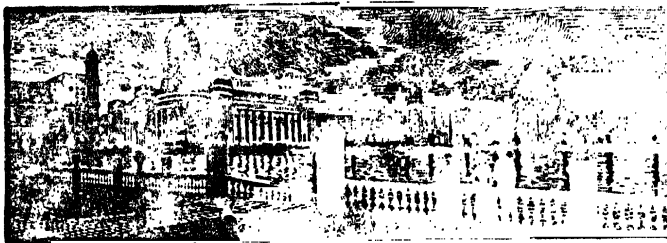
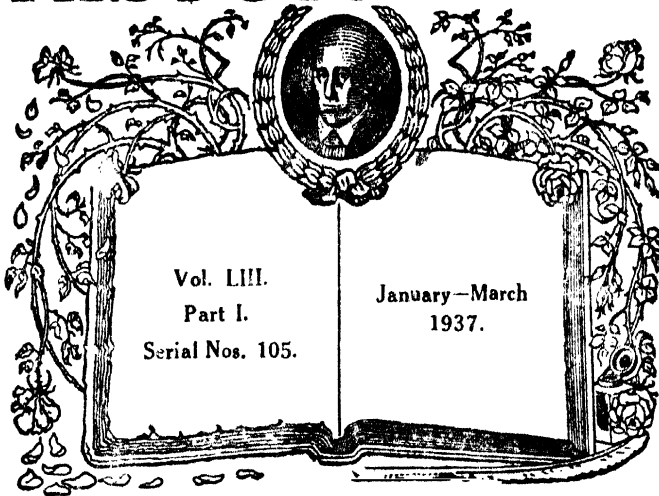
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At the time each place was so taken up with its own horrors, believing itself and its surroundings to be the only victims of the outbreak that no thought was given to other places which were believed to be in perfect security. It was thus many weeks before we were aware of the death of a very near relative and his only children, two sons grown up to years of promising manhood."

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# BENGAL PAST & PRESENT



JOURNAL OF THE CALCUTTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Through the Santal Rising 1855-56

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(Being reminiscences of Mrs. R. E. Barton Jones, resident to Birbhoom.)

*The following extracts from the Reminiscences of the Santal Insurrection, 1855, are taken from the manuscript letter of Mrs. R. E. Barton Jones, who recorded these notes during the latter years of her life. They have been kindly communicated by Mr. Charles A. Dobson, Educational Officer, Holkar State, Chiman Bagh, Indore, son of the writer. These reminiscences show a degree of mutual trust and friendliness between Europeans and Indians, which successfully withstood and lightened the trials of these troublesome months.*

Our family was then resident at Beerbhoom, and consisted of Father, our Mother, two grown up young women, their daughters, viz. myself and sister, and five little children. I leave it, therefore, to the imagination to depict the consternation into which we were thrown when it became an assured fact that the quiet, guileless, and more than friendly Santal folk had suddenly become a furious maniacal mob, murdering, plundering, and recklessly destroying all that came within their reach. Planters, zamindars, and private individuals, whether Hindu, Moslem, or European all were ruthlessly butchered, and all they possessed devoted to utter destruction.

A life of peace and security had rendered all of us careless of danger, knowing how much our parents were respected and loved by all classes. We were soon shaken out of our false repose, and reproached ourselves with bitter regret for not having given heed to the many and frequent warnings we had from the authorities, and other friends who had spoken forcibly of our misplaced confidence in these honest but semi-savage people. While these betook themselves to places of safety, we and few others as foolishly trustful as ourselves kept on the even tenor of our way, confident and peaceful.

Alas! this did not continue very long. One evening a near neighbour, who had shared our confidence, burst into the house with a face of such horror and despair as to fill our hearts with vague fears scarcely less than his.

"Fly, for God's sake, fly: There is no time to be lost.

They are in force on the other side of the river. They may cross over any moment. Scores of their victims, wounded or killed out-right are being brought in. They spare none. Fly: For the children's sake, fly! If you had seen what I have witnessed you would not hesitate a moment. My horse is ready. I am off!"

On being asked where he was going, he said, "I cannot tell. Some place far from the murderous reach of these friends."

And then he was gone.

For a moment we looked at each other in hopeless anguish, and then Father said, "Let us commend ourselves to God, and ask His guidance". How he poured out his soul in prayer for us all. Then rising he calmly told us to put a few things together for a hasty journey. Calling the only servant, who being childless had not gone to hasten the flight of his family, Father consulted him as to some means of conveyance. While he went out to secure this we packed a few necessary articles, and some food for the children.

About an hour after, the man returned, sad and crest-fallen, saying that all he could get were two bullock carts, *dumnis*, as all were flying with their families, and would not come for any consideration. With something very like despair in our hearts at the thought of the very slow progress we should make, we almost made up our minds to remain where we were, but Father overruled this, simply altering the destination. Instead of making for Burdwan, as intended, he decided that our first step should be in an opposite direction, and to the house of an old Zamindar, who would do his best to keep us secluded till there was a lull in the storm, and more rapid means of conveyance could be obtained to remove us out of the district altogether. Father said that he would then accompany us but he deemed it wiser to stay back himself for the present, watch the course of events, and prepare for the longer journey that he at first had had in contemplation.

With all our haste we were not able to leave before the small hours of the morning, but as the savages were feasting and making merry across the river, we had time enough to reach our retreat. After an hour or so we left the high road, and cut across jungles of sal wood and scrub. For the time our hearts were more at rest regarding the Sontals. Still having but a small escort, self-tormenting dread often shrank in horror at the sounds we heard from wild beasts that abound in these districts.

As through the night so also the next day we were in much fear, anxiety, and the utter distress of the poor little ones. Thank God by nightfall we arrived at our destination, and were most kindly and warmly received by the gallant old Zemindar. His own office was entirely given over to our use. This was a large room with a spacious verandah all round, adjoining his own dwelling, and fitted with every convenience, and with due regard to privacy. We could not have been more comfortable else where.

One bright morning on awaking we were conscious of a silence and a gloom impending over us. Not only had the old man not come to pay his usual genial morning call, but we saw him officially dressed, and with a gloomy brow betake himself to his public outdoor business place, kept prepared for the purpose, except during the Rains, under a magnificent banyan tree. A large number of his people were in attendance, and Oh! the cold clutch at our hearts there were two or three Sontals armed with bows and arrows amongst them awaiting the Zemindar.

One of our most astute servants was sent by us dressed as a coolie to mingle among the men unobserved, to hear and learn all that was being

discussed. Half an hour later all dispersed and our man returned cautiously and unseen. Mother, then, after learning all particulars immediately sent him off for whatever conveyance could be obtained, and set us at work to pack up our few belongings.

Meanwhile our host continued sad and in gloomy reverie, and we had to send asking him to come to us. This he did with slow reluctant steps, then seating himself, and putting his hands together, said,

"I am dying of shame and humiliation, but so long as I and mine live to protect you, no harm shall come to you".

"What has happened?" said my Mother. "I saw some armed Santals, and I fear our presence has brought you trouble."

"Yes, the men in a body have been incited to kill us all, but those who came are friends, and wished to warn us. They will try to delay the attack. Remove to our private dwelling into the zenana, and we shall defend all to our utmost, and with our lives".

As I happened to be the only one in the family who was able to converse fluently in Hindustani, I was a great favourite with the old gentleman. He used to pass some hours daily talking to me, especially as I was always ready to give him any information he asked for, and also helped him to understand my Mother's very indifferent Hindustani. There was in consequence a very warm friendly feeling between us. The poor man's distress was genuine, and we were all much touched by it.

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