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Ethnogenesis of Ho under Colonial Shadow: Exploring Identity Question in Resource Frontiers of Jharkhand

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the processes of ethnogenesis of Ho people of Jharkhand during colonial time and its overarching implications for present-day claims for indigenous identity. The paper analyzes the colonial, anthropological, and historical writings about the Ho people to discern the contemporary realities of Ho living in the area, better known for iron mining. British intervention invariably contributed to the making of a distinct identity for the tribe and territory. Borrowing insights from the recent historical writings and conceptualizing it within the postcolonial anthropological framework, this paper reflects upon the process of indigenous identity-making and its contributions in the emergent indigenous claims to natural resources and cultural belongings.

Keywords: *Identity, Mining, Ho tribe, Jharkhand*

Introduction

The emergence of the indigenous movement worldwide and its widespread reception in the Indian context has given new opportunities to discuss the politics of tribal belongings in India. Contesting realities of tribal territorial and cultural boundaries are being re-analyzed to understand the historicity of tribal claims to places, natural resources, and ethnicity. Historical understandings of tribals have largely been neglected in mainstream academic history writings, and selected representation of tribals has imprints of biased colonial historiography. Recent academic tilt towards postcolonial revisiting

of the colonial history of tribals in India has given perspectives to conceptualize tribal identity formation processes in a specific time and space. The colonial, administrative, missionary, ethnological, and anthropological writings representing tribal life-world have obvious reflections on the historicity of one tribe in a given territory. However, they give scant glimpses of the making of a distinctive tribal identity attached to the landscape. The readings of recent historical writings in light of existing anthropological and colonial literature give a methodological advantage to negotiate and reformulate the contested debates of indigeneity for a particular tribal group struggling to articulate its rights in territory converted into capitalistic extractive resource frontier.

The idea of the indigenous claim of being original to land and territory turns out to be meaningful for a specific tribe when they have been suffocated by economic and ecological challenges posed by extractive capitalism. It is imperative to examine the historicity of a tribal community in any particular space and its distinctive ethnic identity formation process to understand indigenous claims. By understanding individual tribal cases, we can reflect upon how indigenous claims are unique and thus problematic and at the same time necessary for establishing tribal stake in cultural, ecological, and territorial rights. For this, I focus upon a tribal group, namely Ho of West Singhbhum of Jharkhand state of India, and its existence in a territory they claim as their own and call *Hodesum*. Hence, firstly, I discuss the colonial writing about the Ho people and its contribution in reifying and distorting the identity of the tribe. Then, I follow the anthropological writings and scrutinize their colonial baggage in representing Ho as an ethnographic object. Further, I present an overview of historical accounts produced by contemporary historians who have thrown new light on the colonial past of Ho and the emergence of a distinct tribal and territorial identity. The identity of place and people, centred on distinct ethnic identification and process, i.e., ethnogenesis, has been overshadowed by two contemporary phenomena, namely iron mining and left-wing extremisms or Naxalism. The mainstream portrayal and understanding of landscape now mostly revolve around symbols of extractive capitalism and Naxalism. The Ho civil society actors, now under the influence of the global indigenous movement, have tried to revitalize the idea of Ho and Hodesum and attempts are visible in various local incidents asserting indigenous identity for negotiating the right over both cultural and natural resources.

Ho as a Tribe in Nation-State

The Ho is an ethnic group constituting one of India's largest Scheduled Tribe (ST) groups, numbering 10,33,095 as per the 2011 Census. They are distributed in India's Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, and Bihar provinces. The Ho is around 11% of the total tribal population of Jharkhand and numbers 9,28,289. The majority of Ho, around 7,73,930 in number, are distributed in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand (Census 2011). The paper shall discuss this major concentration area of Ho in West Singhbhum and neighbouring districts. The Ho is Mundari speaking community, and it is believed that they branched from the original 'Munda Stock'. The original

'Munda Stock', diverged as the oldest Mahali Munda (also called Khangar, Tamaria, or Marah Munda), moved to the eastern part of the district, and underwent a process of rajputization; i.e., they changed their status from tribe to caste. The youngest branch, known as the Kompat Munda, moved to the southern part of the district (what is now called Khunti) (Verardo 9-10). The Hos are those Kompat Munda who later migrated further south (present West Singhbhum, Saraikela Kharsawan, and East Singhbhum districts officially Kolhan Division Jharkhand), into the area that is historically called Singhbhum. Many Mundari-speaking groups generally refer to themselves as people' using different variants of Ho like Hoko, Honko, Horko, Hodko, meaning the man or people (Yorke ch.1, 3). A mythological reference mentions the origin of the first man—a boy and a girl—from the Hur bird's egg, hence named Ho. This distinct self-identification by the tribe is rooted in the carving out of separate territory called Hodesum.

Hodesum, Singhbhum and Kolhan

The Ho territory now has a historically derived local understanding of places named differently as Hodesum, Singhbhum and Kolhan. Understanding these terms are significant from the local ethno-territorial point of view as Ho people's ethnic belongings and indigeneity is submerged within these various locally understood terms for their geopolitical terrain. The administrative divisions' names and boundaries kept changing over time, but people have a strong affinity with a personalized understanding of space as one collective boundary. Historical analysis of place terminology helps deconstruct place's genealogy concerning people's identity formation.

Presently, Kolhan is one of the five political divisions of the Jharkhand, divided into three administrative districts, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum and Saraikela-Kharsawan, since 2001. West Singhbhum district forms the Southern part of the newly created Jharkhand State and is the largest district. The district spread over 21° 58' and 23° 36' north latitude and 85° 00' & 86° 54' East Longitude. The district is situated at the height of 244 Meters above sea level and has an area of 5351.41 sq. kilometres. The district is bounded on the North by the district of Khunti, on the East by Saraikela-Kharsawan district, on the South by Kendujhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh districts of Orissa and on the west by the district of Simdega and Sundargarh (Orissa). The district headquarter is located in Chaibasa. West Singhbhum is now divided into 18 administrative Blocks as follows: Sonua, Gudri, Bandhgaon, Chakradharpur, Khuntpani, Goelkera, Anandpur, Manoharpur, Noamundi, Tonto, Hat Gamharia, Chaibasa, Tantnagar, Manjhari, Jhinkpani, Jagannathpur, Kumardungi and Manjhgaon. Most Ho lives in these Blocks of West Singhbhum district (District Website; District Census).

Interestingly, the term Kolhan is colonial creation. It was used earlier to identify the area as impenetrable territory of *Kols* (another term to reify all indigenous groups under term by British administrator). The historical use of the term Kol-han (The place of Kol) differs from what is now called Kolhan Division of Jharkhand, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. The historical Kolhan was part of a larger Singhbhum comprising additional area like Porhat,

Saraikela, Kharsawan, Dalbhum etc. Over the centuries, owing to the conflicting nature of existence with local Rajput Singh rulers, the Ho continued to migrate downwards and southwards to maintain a distinct territory for themselves spread over larger Singhbhum and called it Hodesum. The split in the Singh dynasty around 1750 and repeated invasive forces in Kolhan in the 1760s transformed the Hos as the dominant power in the area (“*Representing Tribe*” 11-23). The Raja of Singhbhum had to beg the British for protection from Ho. The trilateral negotiations with the British and Rajas strongly nurtured Ho's distinct identity and awareness from 1716 to 1767. Thus, the area has distinctively evolved demographically and symbolically owing to British interference since the 1770s (Das Gupta 62-88). The British later converted this Kolhan region into 'Kolhan Government Estate' in 1837, to be identified ethnologically as major 'Ho territory' for effective administration. Creation of the Kolhan Government Estate by colonial power established this territorial identity. Currently, however, the actual distribution of Ho transcends both the Singhbhum and Kolhan (“*Representing Tribe*” 11-23) owing to India's independence and creation of new geopolitical establishments in subsequent years.

The term Singhbhum has a different geographical and geopolitical sense in historical writings. Singhbhum is a geographical term representing the southern extension of Chhotanagpur Plateau and now roughly comprises three districts East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum and Saraikela and Kharsawan. Historically, however, Singhbhum and its boundaries are ill-defined. The coinage of the term itself is disputed. It is said that *Singhdishum* in vernacular Ho means 'country of 'tree', and it is claimed as its actual connotation. Some scholars relate it with the Ho supreme spirit or deity *Singbonga*. Another theory claims that this place was named Singhbhum (Land of Singh's) on the rulers of the Singh dynasty who ruled the area from the seat of Porahat. Since the trifurcation of the Singhbhum district of Jharkhand into East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum and Saraikela and Kharsawan into three, the term is losing its significance. The official names of the district are mainly used to describe the place and people.

West Singhbhum district is the largest district area wise (7224 sq km) of Jharkhand having 17% of total forest and 99% iron reserve of Jharkhand. The majority area of this district is Saranda Forest constituting 2,11,840 acres of forest cover. The forest region itself has 25% iron of country and 90% iron ore reserve of Jharkhand state. This iron is a good quality reserve having 58-67% iron contents in ore (Dungdung 46). The ore body's low sulphur and phosphorus make it the best quality iron for steel manufacturing. The availability of iron resources makes the political ecology and claims to Ho indigeneity a contested issue. The district is not very densely populated, given its forest tract, and has 208 people per square km. The West Singhbhum is classified as Scheduled Area District vide the Scheduled Areas (State of Jharkhand) Order, 2007 (C.O. 229) and have around 67.31% of its population as (10,11,296 out of total 15,02,338) tribals (District Census). Present West Singhbhum overlaps with most regions of British Kolhan Government Estate

and what Tickell (743) as corrective recourse tried to rightly call as Hodesum or Ho people's country.

Colonial Representations of Ho

The colonial administrator and missionaries made the initial attempt to write about Ho. These colonial writings about Ho are available in official letter communication and some published memoir etc. Edward Roughsedge, Samuel Richard Tickell, E T Dalton, Rev. A Notrott, LB Burrows, JA Craven, WG Griffith, LSSO Malley, AD Tuckey, and Wilkinson are important to name in this regard (Misra 18-19). However, these colonial writings on the Ho were directly linked with the purpose of administration of the area. The information was selected to fulfil the objectives of imperial rulers.

The first British Army officer to enter into Singhbhum was Edward Roughsedge, who arrived in the area in 1820-21. After surveying the area, he briefed through a letter to Secretary Metcalfe in Calcutta about the area and people (“*Representing Tribe*” 52). He was amazed by the physical built of Ho people and compared them to wild buffaloes (Streumer, “*Wakkaman*”). After the Kolhan Government Estate formation in 1837, Samuel Richard Tickell was appointed as assistant to the area to look after the tax collection. Tickell was interested in knowing the area and people and therefore started learning Ho words and started taking notes on his routine conversation with locals and court meetings. He later produced his notes as a 'Memoir of Hodésum' in 1840.

“On calm summer evenings (Ho) are fond of assembling at their doors to listen to the flute, the girls sing in concert, the younger ones go through the quiet, demure dance of the country, and papa and mama sit aloof looking approvingly on, and solacing themselves with a little Eely [rice beer]; while twilight lingers their happy laughing voices, or the wild humming melody of their songs is heard. The language of their songs is poetical and pleasing. The men and musicians are generally in the centre of a large circle composed of women locked with their arms around each other. All step with the greatest exactness in tune, and the effect is most singular and pleasing” (qtd. in Streumer “*Wakkaman*”).

Tickell was perhaps the first to give Ho a distinct linguistic identity and suggested it diverge from Munda root. This identification was based on his attempt to learn the native language and divulge it into a scholarly language understanding. In 1840 he published two key works, ‘Grammatical Construction of Ho Language’ and ‘Vocabulary of the Ho 'language’’. These two become a key source for scholars interested in the languages of Indian people (“*Conceptualization*” 4). Later these articles were analyzed to find an affinity between Mundari and Mon-Khmer languages of South Esat Asia. It also helped reconstruct various conjectural assumptions about the migration of the Munda people to the central Indian tribal belt.

These initial works were followed by information on Ho in a detailed and lengthy discussion of the Chotanagpur area and people. Edward Tuite Dalton served as Commissioner of Chotanagpur from 1857 to 1875. He travelled to Singhbhum from 1863 to 1872. Dalton's monumental work *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* contains substantial detail about the Kol tribe

of the region. He invariably used Kol world to designate Mundari tribe and Ho as Larka Kol, a distinct linguistic variant of Kol. Dalton has aptly summarized the characteristic personality of the Larka Kol as of those, who

"From their jealous isolation for so many years; their long occupation of one territory, and their contempt for all other classes that come in contact with them, especially the Hindus, probably furnish the best illustration, not of the Mundaris in their present state, but of what, if left to themselves and permanently located, they were likely to become. Even today, the exclusiveness of the old Hos is remarkable. They will not allow aliens to hold land near their villages, and indeed if it were left to them, no strangers would be permitted to settle in the Kolhan" (qtd. in Misra 18-19).

Dalton also produced a table enumerating different dialects of the Kol tribe. Ho language got due attention in his survey work about the people of Chottanagpur. Rev. A. Notrott, in his Grammar of Kol Language, identified the distinction of Ho dialects among other Mundari groups. Similarly, L. B. Burrows wrote on Ho Grammar and meticulously observed how changes in time and environment necessitated linguistic differences in Ho, Munda and Santhal dialects ("*Conceptualization*" 4). This according to Sen, led to Ho the dignity of a distinct language. Census operation in British India also contributed immensely in collecting information about Ho life. W. G. Griffiths, a Methodist Church missionary, in his *The Kol Tribes of Central India*, distinguished the Kols of central India from that of the Chhotanagpur region. W.G. Griffiths writes:

The tribes themselves should be carefully distinguished from the Munda tribes of Chhotanagpur, which are frequently called Kols in their generic sense. There is a specific Kols tribe in that area. However, a group called the Larka Kols, or Hos, was famous for insurrection in the year 1832, and a part of the district of Singhbhum is called the district the Kolhan after them (qtd. in Misra 20).

Russel and Hiralal in *The Tribes and the Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (1916/1975) provided discussions about the Ho and distinguished the Kol or Ho as a great tribe of Chota Nagpur, which has given its name to the Kolarian family of tribes and languages. A part of the district of Singhbhum near Chaibasa is named the Kolhan as the special home of the Larka Kols. Still, they are distributed all over Chota Nagpur, whence they have spread to the United Province, central provinces and central India (Misra 19). Russel and Hiralal have provided descriptive details about Ho legend of origin, strength, sub-division, totemism, marriage, custom, religion, witchcraft, funeral rites, inheritance, physical appearance, dance, social rules and offence, caste panchayat, occupation and language etc. (Misra 19).

The British policy of enumeration and identification of tribe and caste resulted in the census. The census documents produced during the colonial period have demographic data and a certain clue to distinct culture and customs of people living in remote, secluded areas of the country. There are accounts about Ho in various colonial census reports conducted by B.C. Allen in 1901, L.S.S. O'Malley in 1911, P. C. Talents in 1921 and A. E. Porter in 1931. In an independent census in 1931 of Mayurbhanj princely state, M Laeequddin

collected information about Ho (Misra 19). Notwithstanding their inadequacy, these reports have been the source of information for future researchers. These reports later become an administrative tool to understand and create policy documents for Ho.

The Hindus have traditionally called Adivasi of areas as Kol. The use of the word Kol today for indigenous people is less prevalent and now considered derogatory. Tribal people prefer to call themselves Adivasi a term popularized by a social worker, Thakkar Bappa, since the 1930s. The later British writings and reports of the Kolarian tribe helped create and reify tribal ethnic identity as Munda, Ho, Kharia, Birhor, Asur, Baiga and Bhil, etc. (Yorke ch.1, 3). Similarly, in colonial writings, we find various terms for Ho. They have been referred to as Kol, Larka Kol or Larka Ho because of their bravery and eagerness to fight with any encroachers ("*Representing Tribe*" 14). Still, they have been identified as Ho in colonial documents as a distinct tribe over the years.

Anthropologisation of Tribe

Anthropological monographs about the Ho's followed the colonial writings and bear uncanny imprints of the colonial mode of representation. Anthropology, a Western discipline, has its authoritative method and theories and could be now unapologetically considered part of a larger colonial project of domination and rule. The Indian anthropologists who were initially inquiring about tribal people of India were doing research mostly in the framework developed in universities of the West. This beginning in the early period of the 20th Century led to undisputed *anthropologisation* of 'India's tribal peoples—a term that Roycroft (81) uses to refer to the anthropological impetus that directed cultural policy about the Scheduled Tribes in independent India". The tendency continued in a contextualized understanding of tribal as anthropological subjects by nationalist anthropologists to weave tribal territory and identity within the national fabric of emerging modern India. The local terms and conceptualization were seldom considered worth highlighting while discussing the identity and territoriality of tribals.

The first ethnographic book on the Ho was published in 1927 titled *Hos of Seraikella* by the University of Calcutta written by A. Chatterjee and T.C. Das (Misra 19). This book depicts Ho life and social structure based on department field trips, emphasizing documenting change. The impact of Hindu values on tribal culture has been analyzed along with detailed ethnographic data on village organization, daily life, manner and customs, ossuaries, kinship and social organization, religion and physical features. D. N. Majumdar, a trained anthropologist, established the ethnographic study of Ho and published profoundly. His *A Tribe in Transition* in 1937, followed by *The Affairs of a Tribe* in 1950, based on his series of fieldwork in the region for almost 25 years, produces a structural-functional analysis of Ho. Then P. K. Dasgupta in 1978 from the Anthropological Survey of India presented a study of change due to industrialization in Ho of Singhbhum. Misra in 1987, in a crisp monograph, examined structural change among Ho's living in Orissa (Odisha), adding regional perspective to existing literature. P.C. Hembrom (87-92)

reflected upon the cultural identity movements. Ethnographic doctoral works describing political structure by Yorke in 1976, religion and social transformations by Verardo in 2003, forest and environment by Hebbar in 2003, forest commons and natural resource conflicts by Sareen in 2015 etc., has helped in weaving a unique identity of Ho as a tribe of Jharkhand.

Historical Revisiting of Tribe

Historiography of Ho started in post-independence India, which tried to understand the colonial past from documents produced by colonial writers. There are very limited written accounts that can reflect upon life and the people of Chhota Nagpur during the period before the British. The knowledge available in colonial and early anthropological writings reflected the British period. The major concern of tribal historiography has largely described social uprisings against outsiders and their contextual relations with local princely rulers. These studies have given very scant merit to tribal life forms and their mode of self-representation. These writings were nationalistic, depicting tribals as anti-British and thus crediting their revolts within the ambit of the larger freedom struggle of India.

J. C. Jha, in *Kol Insurrection in Chhottanagpur*, has described the role of Ho as fierce fighter. The two early writings referring to Ho history are C. P. Singh's *The Ho Tribe of Singhum* and M. Sahu's *The Kolhan under British Rule*. S. K. Sen, a local district court lawyer in 2008, has given a detailed overview of Ho social unrest during 1820-1858. There is a surge in historical writings about Ho in the last twenty years to reconstruct the colonial past of Ho society and culture. Asoka Sen, based in Singhbhum has devoted his career to Ho history and produced several key texts in 2011, 2012 & 2017. Sanjukta Das Gupta with her *Adivasi and Raj* has dig deeper into British policy and its impact upon tribal economy. Paul Streumer, in his *Land of their own* highlighted the ethnogenesis of Ho and role of colonial administrator Tickell. These writings have given ample scope to establish the distinct identity of the Ho tribe and their territory and have provided an opportunity to create a gospel of tribal belongingness based on historical evidence. This historicity can provide opportunities for people to reclaim the rights of self-identification and natural resources.

Origin Myth of Ho and Hodesum

Although historical accounts of the origin of the tribe have been corroborated by S.C. Roy (1-19) in *Mundas and their Country*, the common Ho can only recall the story of the mythical origin of their community and the communities of his near vicinity based on Asur legend. There is a great deal of similarity in the story of origin, provided by colonial writers like Tickell, Roy and told and written by local Ho in Singhbhum. In the village, they gave broken stories and could not narrate everything at a time. Only village priest (*Deuri*) could recite some part of it in proper detail. The creation myth of the Ho people depicts their indigenous mode of analysis of geological and environmental phenomena. As per their myth, there was only water, in the beginning, so Singbonga decided to make land. For this, he created a turtle released it in the water. The turtle brought the mud up, but the land could not be formed; it would float away. Then Singbonga made a crab with five hands-on on each

side, but the crab also could not succeed. Then Singbonga, by rubbing dirt on his thigh, made two earthworms, one male and one female. He released them into the water. These worms entered deep inside the mud beneath the water and had offspring, multiplying in large numbers. These numerous worms keep defecating soil, and after a few days, the earth emerged above the water. Where worms have made more soil, the hills and mountains appeared, and where water remained, lakes and seas were formed. Ho believes that earth exists above the water, and to date, worms remain inside water and keep making land and hills, whereas the crabs and turtle stay sides of water bodies laying eggs on embankments.

Singbonga, after the creation of undulating land, decides in consultation with crab, turtle and worm to create Surmi-Durmis having hands and feet that can level the earth. They tried levelling the mountains and filling in the valleys but could not complete it. Singbonga sends tigers, bears, dears, and elephants to help Surmi-Durmi. They together plough and level many hills. Then they planted trees and plants, and jungles were made. Hos still believe that Surmi- Durmis formed several pools (tank) and springs during an ancient time. Some people compare Surmi-Durmis with spirits (bongas), but some think they were the Asurs. Village Shaman (*Devan*) refers to them as Asur Bonga and Surmi-durmi Bonga.

Singbonga was very pleased to see beautiful earth full of mountains, forests, and tanks. Then he thought who will remember and make offerings after Surmi-durmis, so he used soil (some say from an egg of Hur bird) to make a creature similar to Surmi durmi but having a different face, eyes, nose etc. then he breathed life into this statue and named this creature as Luku. However, unlike other creatures, Luku does not mingle with other species. Singbonga using his right rib made another creature into the form of a woman and named her Lukmi. Singbonga made the first human beings male and female as Luku and Lukmi to let them live in unison (Deeny 70-71). Though they started living together as brothers and sisters, they keep putting a husking pole when they go to sleep between them. Thus, they could not mate and give birth, whereas other species reproduced naturally. Singbonga intervened, gave them the yeast (*ranu*), and trained them to ferment rice beer (*diyang*). When they consumed the rice beer and slept, they could mate. Then they started living as a couple and gave birth to progenies.

When Singbonga, humans and other species could live and talk with each other. There was no differentiation between the supernatural, natural and human world. However, after a ritual sacrifice, Luku incidentally saw Singbonga was eating the left out and licking the fallen blood from the earth. Then Singbonga using the juice of marking nut tree (*soso*) seeds, blinded Luku and his eyes became black. Then was the last time a human could see Singbonga. Similarly, when the oxen, could not acquire fodder, after repeated requests to his master, man, to feed them properly, he got disgusted with human behaviour and decided not to speak with them anymore. In Ho, several versions of a creation myth are related to the origin of earth, hills, forest, and man. More than depicting people's beliefs, these myths also resonate with their

indigenous philosophy towards nature and its relationship with supernatural forces. These myths are linked, highlighting the importance of human phenomena with natural landscape in which they have lived so long, depicting their ecological ethnicities.

Ethnogenesis and Ho indigeneity

Sen in *Representing Tribe* (11-28) has outlined the Ho ethnic formation process. According to him the Mundari speaking people around the 10th Century entered Singhbhum and carved a distinct Ho identity over the years. It is argued by Sen that when they entered the Kolhan region of Singhbhum, it was occupied by Saravak Jain Brahmins. The Jain first penetrated this jungle and found copper in the area. When Ho spread in the region and defended this territory, Jains migrated from the regions slowly. They also encountered Bhuiyans in different pockets of the area and came in conflict with them. The Bhuiyans took the help of Rathor Rajputs to defeat brave Lakra Kol. This resulted in Porhat Rajputs conquering the area and extending its suzerainty over Ho territory by the 13th Century. Later Singh Rajas, self-divided into three estates, entered in constant negotiations with Bhuiyans and Hos throughout history. Hos considered Singh Rajas as an ally rather than a ruler and enjoyed a certain degree of independence in the southern Jungles of Singhbhum (Damodaran 44-76). Because of the conflicting nature of existence with Singh rulers, Ho migrated downwards and southwards to form a distinct Kol-han (Hodesum) for Ho Honko.

The split in the Singh dynasty around 1750 and repeated defeats and invasion forces in Kolhan in the 1760s made the Hos the dominant power in the area. The Raja of Singhbhum had to beg the British for protection from 'Col, a tribe of the plundering Banditry' (*“Representing Tribe”* 11-28). The dominance of Kol gave rise to the relative independence and new identity of Ho Honko to the Mundas of the central and southern part of Singhbhum. Though their first settlement in the area is disputed, they identify themselves as indigenes autochthones or first inhabitant or adivasi of the place. They cultivated a distinct identity and awareness for themselves from 1716 to 1767 and therefore this process has been called ethnogenesis by Streumer (*“Land of their own”* 20-22). The time changed Larka Kol into 'Ho Honko of Hodesum'. Streumer, thus concludes that Ho never came from anywhere they came into existence in Hodesum.

Negotiating Resource Frontier and Ho Identity

However, *Hodesum*, in common parlance, is now transformed into *Lauhanchal* -a place of iron mining. This transformation could be understood historically by conceptualizing what one anthropologist has called making a 'resource frontier' (Tsing 5101). The development of resource extraction in every part of the world has given rise to resource frontiers of this kind. In these frontiers, capitalist production has subsumed the traditional economy within its fold, creating challenges for local subsistence-based economies. Tsing writes

“...resource frontiers grew up where entrepreneurs and armies were able to disengage nature from its previous ecologies, making the natural resources that bureaucrats and generals could offer as corporate raw

material. From a distance, these new resource frontiers appeared as the 'discovery' of global supplies in forests, tundras, coastal seas, or mountain fastnesses. Up close, they replaced existing systems of human access and livelihood and ecological dynamics of replenishment with the cultural apparatus of capitalist expansion" (Tsing 5101).

These "frontiers are conceived as relational zones of economy, nature and society; spaces of capitalist transition, where new forms of social property relations and systems of legality are rapidly established in response to market imperatives. Customary property rights on the resource frontier can be seized by powerful actors in crucial political moments, preparing the territorial stage for more intensive phases of resource commodity production and accumulation" (Barney 146). The resource frontiers can also be understood as zones of neo-liberal exceptions as conceptualized by Aihwa Ong. Recognizing a geographical place as a 'special economic zone' or industrial hub has emerged in the neo-liberal global economy. Such places could be understood as detached zones beyond mainstream societies, characterized by "special spaces of labor markets, investment opportunities, and relative administrative freedom" (Ong 19). This imagery of iron resource frontier and specialized mining zone as '*Lauhanchal*' overrides the cultural-historical understanding of place as Kolhan or Hodesum. These zones are represented in terms of their economic significance. They are now largely controlled by corporate capitals, rules, and regulations to make the global economy and national industrial developments.

Capitalism, conflict and Ho identity

The 'resource frontiers' in every part of the world are also characterized by resource conflicts of diverse kinds. These areas are a hub of civil unrest and armed warfare all over the globe. Mining areas like Singhbhum in central-eastern India have plunged into a 'slow war', between state security forces and local extremists called Naxals (Dungdung 91-142). The insensitive policy towards tribal has been the major reason behind the rapid rise of the Naxal base in the mineral bearing areas of the country (CSE 20-21). Some 40 per cent of the mineral-rich districts in the top six mineral-producing states are affected by the movement. Naxalism is potentially a fight between disgruntled Marxists and the State over the right to resources amid mounting poverty and disparity in the region. West Singhbhum has seen the rise of Naxals violence along with mining development. Saranda is a story of despair and loss for local indigenes, converted into a resource frontier and an extremist conflict zone. It is said that these violent conflicts emerged because of illegal encroachment over the natural resources of innocent tribals. However, tribals are not the one who is at the forefront of Naxal leadership. They are utilized as paid foot soldiers by the Communist Marxist, as and when required. Further, many massive anti-Naxal operations have found innocent tribals easy prey, killed in crossfires.

The resource frontier such as Singhbhum represents the typology of zones where capitalism and conflict coexist, entangling local indigenous people without any rescue from the side effects of both. The making of

resource frontier in Singhbhum has changed the identity and historicity of place and people for time to come. Mining is established sturdily, and until the last chunk of iron ore remains below earth, the capitalistic craving will keep the place alive as Lauhanchal. The real challenges for people in this situation are historically claiming their indigenous roots and claiming over benefits of mineral-induced development in the area. The mining, which started way back in colonial times, does not profoundly impact the living standards of local ho people.

Conclusion


Having outlined the historicity of a tribe and the process of their ethnogenesis in a given territory identified as an iron resource frontier, this is imperative to comprehend the life of local Hos and their ethnic identity as entangled in the shadow of colonial, anthropological and ethnohistorical academic representations along with lived realities of an extractive corporation, left-wing extremism and state policies. It is amply clear from the discussion above that different representation of tribal identity and territory in the British period have usually been depicted from ethnocentric and authoritative viewpoints of colonizers and followed by anthropologists. The post-independent historiography, which has given major attention to understanding tribal negotiations with the British in the form of so-called revolts and social unrests against the colonizers, are described in similar colonial terms and categories; However, recent historical studies in Ho territory has given fresh and exciting insights to establish the originality of Ho in their Homeland Hodesum. The decolonized historical writing and research have given the community much needed moral strength to establish the Ho claims to distinctive and territorial identity. The post-independence marginalization has created the need and necessity for Ho to take cognizance of the idea of belongings to place and claims for indigenous status. The existing political ecology of tribal regions in India must be understood and analyzed by advocating tribal self-representation supplemented with scholarly underpinnings which takes specific histories of individual tribal communities and territories into account.

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