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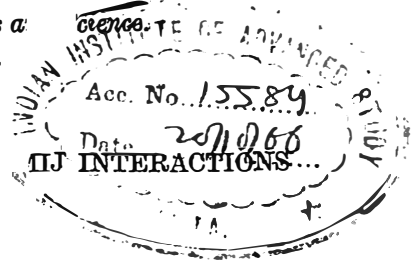
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THE MEDIA AND NATURE OF HINDU-B

By SURAJIT SINHA

A few years ago, Social Science Research Council of America organized a Summer Seminar on the study of acculturation the result of which was published in the form of an 'exploratory formulation' (Social Science Research Council, 1954). This latter article emphasized the importance of knowing about the 'inter-cultural rôles' that operate between two or more cultural systems in conjunction in an acculturative situation. Having thus known the social framework of inter-cultural interactions, the next step would be to know the contents of communication within the above structural setting. In a somewhat similar vein Professor Robert Redfield attracts our attention to the importance of knowing the 'organization of specialists' who mediate between the 'great tradition' of the city or temple-town and the 'little tradition' of the villages (Redfield, 1956, pp. 67-104).

The acculturation of the Bhumij, a Hinduized Bengali-speaking offshoot of the Munda of Ranchi (Risley, 1915, p. 75; Sinha, 1953 and 1956), however, can hardly be described as a case of conjunction between two historically discrete cultural systems. It appears to be more like one of interaction between a relatively advanced (peasant) and a relatively simple and ecologically isolated (primitive or tribal) dimension of a single socio-cultural and historic field. The Bhumij transformation scene appears to represent, essentially, a case of development of a tribal society to the level of peasantry through gradual dissolution of ecological barrier of forest-clad hilly lands between them and the so-called Hindu peasantry (Sinha, 1956 and 1957b).

In whatever way we view this phenomenon of culture-change, the 'exploratory formulation' of the Social Science Research Council as well as Redfield's conceptualization of the 'Social Organization of Tradition' stimulate us to delineate and describe the critical patterns of social interaction that mediate between the world of the 'tribal' Bhumij and that of the surrounding and penetrating 'Hindu peasantry'.

Our presentation of data will be mostly with reference to a single Bhumij-dominated village, namely Madhupur, in Chandil Police Station in the district of Singhbhum,¹ and is based on fieldwork done in the area during 1950-1952 and, again, during October 1956 to May 1957.² This village, lying at the foot of the Bhangat-Makula-Zambira group of hills, contains 174 families and 759 people distributed over five hamlets: Bhangat, Rangkar, Kenddih, Madhupur and Bandhtanr. 142 of these families, 81.6%, and 604 persons, 79.5%, belong to the Bhumij tribe (or caste). Among other ethnic groups living in the village may be mentioned: the Mahato (cultivators: 19 families, 95 persons), Kharia (hunters and gatherers and daily labourers: 6 families, 27 persons), Sahis (bark-rope-makers and

¹ Prior to Nov. 1, 1956, Madhupur was a part of the former district of Manbhum.

² Fieldwork during 1950-1952 was financed by a research scholarship of the University of Calcutta and was conducted under the guidance of Prof. Tarak Chandra Das. The work could be resumed during October 1956-May 1957 through the courtesy of Prof. Robert Redfield of the University of Chicago who arranged a research grant from his Ford Foundation Funds for Inter-Cultural Studies. Further work in the same area, specifically dealing with the 'cultural consequences of State-formation' is now being continued under the sponsorship of the Department of Anthropology, Government of India.

sweepers: 3 families, 17 persons), Tanti (weavers who have given up their traditional calling: 2 families, 7 persons), Kamar (blacksmith: 1 family, 5 persons) and Sunri (formerly wine-distiller, now farmer and petty-trader: 1 family, 5 persons). The dominance of the Bhumij in the life of the village is not merely due to their relative number, but also due to several other factors, such as holding all the important socio-political and religious offices, namely, those of the Ghatwal (headman-cum-landlord), Tanbedars (assistants to the Ghatwal), Laya (village priest); and in holding tenure rights over more than 90% of the arable land, having exclusive access to the privileged *Khuntkatti* tenures, etc.

The local traditions of the village and the genealogies indicate that, about five generations ago, the Bhumij, and perhaps a few families of the Kharia at the foothills, were the only two ethnic groups living in the village. It appears that the situation was somewhat similar in the surrounding villages too. The village was not only much more ethnically homogeneous, but there was also much less communication with the outside world than now. It was connected with neighbouring villages by footpaths or rough roads that could only be covered by pack bullocks or block-wheeled carts. There were no regular weekly markets in the area. Only during fair weather, the Baniya traders used to visit these interior villages with their pack bullocks. They sold principally salt and took in exchange paddy, lac and oil-seeds.

Madhupur exists in a considerably altered setting today. The Adra-Chakradharpur line of the South-Eastern Railway runs only two miles to the north and a motorable metalled road from Tatanagar to Purulia runs only half a mile farther away. Besides their interaction with the five other ethnic groups who reside in their own villages, the Bhumij of Madhupur regularly come in contact with about thirty other functional castes at the weekly market of Bamni, situated two miles to the south-west.

THE MEDIA OF SOCIAL CONTACTS

We shall now describe the various kinds of relationships that tie the Bhumij of Madhupur with other social groups within and outside their own village. It may be mentioned in passing that most of these latter groups regard themselves as Hindu and are Bengali-speaking.

Among the different kinds of *economic relations* of the other ethnic groups with the Bhumij, the following deserve special attention: supply of their wares for paddy or money at the weekly market or otherwise, by the various artisan castes; economic services such as hair-cutting, washing, midwifery, household and agricultural service; participating in the continuation of the traditional land revenue system primarily dominated by the Bhumij; share-cropping and loan of paddy.

In Madhupur today, the Bhumij have mutually obligatory relations as to procurement of crafts for paddy only with the Kamar. A single Kamar family caters to the requirement of fitting share to the plough and sharpening the sickles for all the families, including the Bhumij, of the *Tolas* Bhangat and Rangkar. For this, he gets from each family 20 seers of paddy per plough and one bundle of paddy-straw. There is no such permanent clientele relationship of the Bhumij in this village with other kinds of artisans such as basketry-makers (Mahali or Dom), potters (Kumor), brass-worker (Thenthari) or weaver (Tanti, Jolha). Basketry-makers occasionally come to peddle at Madhupur, where they sell their wares, mainly in exchange of paddy. However, the main stage of such transactions today is the weekly market. The economic relation with the potter and basketry-maker is

still quite vital: the potter supplies water-vessels, cooking pots and such ritual items as earthen lamps, terracotta horses and elephants, sacred *Sri Bari* pots for marriage ceremony, etc., while the basketry-maker supplies such essential things as *Khanchila* for storing and measuring grains, *Kula*, winnowing fan, *Chhata*, bamboo umbrella. The brass-worker merely supplies brass measures of grains, and also ornaments of the same metal. Their trade is definitely on the decline due to the difficulty of procuring fuel wood, while their subsidiary occupation of manufacturing lime by firing limestone and lime concretions which accumulate in the soil still continues. Weavers within Madhupur or in the neighbouring village of Purnapani have given up their traditional calling for the last one generation. Tantis and Jolhas from more distant villages, however, usually come to sell their goods at the weekly market. Profuse influx of mill-made cloths, brought in by traders, belonging mainly to the Marwari and Mussalman community, have pushed the local handloom weavers into a secondary position. The latter's products are now popularly regarded as coarse and out of style.

We have already mentioned that, in material transactions beyond the village, the weekly markets play a more important rôle than the direct sale to consumers in the village. The weekly Thursday market at Bamni, situated about two miles to the south-west, is the one most frequently visited by the villagers of Madhupur.¹ Beyond this, the latter visit markets situated farther away only on rare occasions: Jamshedpur (twelve miles to the south) on Monday, Balarampur (eight miles to the north-east) on Tuesday, Chandil (eight miles to the west) on Friday, Dangardih (four miles to the south) on Saturday and Adadih (three miles) on Sunday. The Bhumij visit the market to procure salt, spices, mustard oil, vegetables, fish, sweets, sugar, tea, kerosene oil, country-made cigarettes and tobacco leaves, handloom and mill-made cloths, earthen vessels, bamboo baskets, iron implements, brass pots, glass and shellac bangles, ornaments made of brass, bell metal or silver, shoes, sandals and drums. The main articles sold by the Bhumij farmer in the market are crude lac and rice. Only occasionally, he sells livestock and poultry, and a very small number, also, vegetables. By far the majority of the Bhumij families, except in the lac season, mainly come to the market to buy and not to sell.

At the market, the Bhumij comes in contact with not only the artisan castes, but also meets other farming communities like the Santal and the Mahato, and traders like the Baniya, Sunri, Brahman, Baishtom, Marwari and the Mussalman. Quite obviously, social interaction between these groups is not limited to impersonal economic transactions. It is, in a way, the great country-club of the region, where one meets one's agnates, affines and friends, and exchanges the relatively inexpensive gesture of goodwill by offering country-made cigarettes, *biri* and betel. He contents his eyes by looking at the charms of women and occasionally cuts jokes with a professional dancing girl or some other woman. The market gets more gay when seasonal festivals are near by.

The Bhumij farmer of Madhupur has permanent patron-client relationship with the following castes for socio-ritual services: priest (Purohit or Purut), Brahman; religious initiator (Guru), Boishtom; Napit, barber; Dhobi, washerman; and lowest castes like the Muchi, Ghasi, Sahis, etc., as midwife or Dhai. We shall deal with these rôles in connection with the socio-political channels of Bhumij-Hindu interaction. A few relatively wealthy Bhumij farmers in the village (only 5 out of a total of 142 families)

¹ For a detailed description of this market, read: S. Sinha—'The weekly market at Bamni, a village in South Manbhum', *Geographical Review of India*, October-December 1951, pp. 21-36.

have household servants, *Bagal*, on a one-year contract basis, who help them mainly in agricultural operations. Out of the seven servants thus working, with the exception of two belonging to the Kharia tribe, others are Bhumij by caste. It should be mentioned, however, that no Bhumij of this village works in annual contract service under any other caste in the village. Besides contractual service for a year, the Bhumij farmer also employs daily labourers, both male and female, on a temporary basis. By far the largest portion of the supply of such labour in the village is provided by Bhumijes, while the Kharia, Sahis and Mahato also come to the Bhumij farmer for work. The Bhumij, too, works in the fields of the Mahato, but he never works as a labourer under the 'very low' Hindu castes of Dom, Ghasi, Tanti, Mahali, etc.

The land revenue system is one more important link between the Bhumij and the other ethnic groups. The hereditary Bhumij Ghatwal or headman has the legal right of collecting rent from the tenants of the village belonging to the Bhumij as well as other castes; he has also the informal right to receive honorarium, *salami*, for allowing new tenants to settle on recently cleared land. The Bhumij dominate the land revenue administration in the area above the village level also. Thus, the former Sadiyal of Chingra with revenue jurisdiction over 9 villages and the Taraf Sardar of Pancha Sardari with jurisdiction over 59 villages belong to the Bhumij caste. Circumstantial evidences indicate that, even at a higher level, the chief or Raja of Pargana Barabhum, with 336 or more villages under him, also belonged to the Bhumij caste. The latter, however, for quite some time have been claiming that they are 'true Rajput Khsatriya', a claim which has been accepted by all the ethnic groups in the Pargana for several generations. Members from more than thirty other ethnic groups occupy the position of tenants under the Bhumij Taraf Sardar of Pancha Sardari.

One important point should be introduced here. For the last five generations, in particular, the Mahato and some immigrant castes from Bengal, such as the Sunri, Brahman, Boishtom and Baniya, have been steadily usurping the land of the Bhumij either on grounds of non-payment of loan taken by the latter or by payment of nominal *salami* to the Bhumij Ghatwal or Taraf Sardar. Within the village of Madhupur, however, such encroachment has been very slight.

Although by far the major portion of the land owned by the Bhumij of village Madhupur is tilled by owner-cultivators for themselves, every year there are a few cases of cultivation by temporary lease-holders on a share-cropping, *bhag-chas*, basis. In the latter case, the lease-holder is usually bound to give the lessee half of the produce of crop, mainly paddy, after deducting the amount of seed used for sowing. In 1950-51, out of 26 cases of share-cropping lease arranged by the Bhumij of Madhupur, 17 cases involved a Bhumij and 9 cases some other ethnic group, namely the Mahato, Chapua Kamar and Dom in 6, 2 and 1 cases respectively.

About 87%, out of the total of 143 Bhumij families in the village, were found to be in debt, mainly through borrowing of paddy. In 1951, out of 168 distinct cases of loan taken in paddy by the Bhumij families, in 96 cases, i.e. 56%, the lender was a Bhumij. Among other castes from whom the Bhumij of Madhupur borrowed paddy, the Mahato topped the list, both in the number of instances and in quantity; next in importance were the Sunri and the Brahman. Within the larger area of Taraf Pancha Sardari, the most prosperous money-lenders are the Baniyas of village Bamni. The Bhumij, although occupying relatively a larger proportion of cultivable land, both as a community and as individuals, never flourished

in the trade of paddy-lending on a large scale. In Madhupur only two Bhumij families have taken to this trade systematically, and even in their case, it is mostly restricted to within the bounds of the village. It appears that the easy-going, extravagant and festivoous way of living of the proud Bhumij stands in the way of their becoming successful money-lenders, who have to steadily build up their capital by leading an austere life and by making adequate calculation about their investments.

Among the above-mentioned varied channels of economic relationships of the Bhumij and the other ethnic groups in the area, the most important and enduring one appears to be the exchange of agricultural products of the Bhumij for some major crafts such as basketry, pottery, smithery and weaving. The institution of the weekly market, introduced at the local scene at a much later date, enlarges the scope of mutual dependence between the Bhumij farmer and the artisan castes. It has not only attracted several types of artisans, but has also brought in a good number of professional traders.

In political and social relations with the other groups, the following appears to be the more significant ones: participation in a common political order of Ghatwal, Sadiyal, Taraf Sardar and Zemindar, dominated by the Bhumij; sharing in peoples' council or Panchayat in common; ritual services, especially those in relation to rites of passage; ceremonial friendship; sharing in the service of medicine-men and participation in common religious festivals.

The village of Madhupur and 335 other villages were already organized into a small sovereign State with a 'Raja' (king or chief) at its head when the British first entered the district in the latter half of the eighteenth century. We have mentioned before that the political and land revenue administration was organized into a hierarchic order starting from the village to the highest level of the State (see page 26). At each level of the hierarchy, the office of the chief belonged to the Bhumij caste. During British regime the indigenous political hierarchy was allowed to function as a subsidiary police authority, working in co-operation with the regular police force of the Government. Through such political authority, the Bhumij succeeded in continuing their domination of other ethnic groups in the region. Corresponding to each of the areal units mentioned above, there are democratic people's councils, namely Gram Panchayat, Taraf Panchayat, etc., where the Bhumij and other ethnic groups participate in terms of equality in order to decide cases arising out of the violation of traditional social customs, criminal assaults, disputes regarding inheritance of property, etc.

We have already mentioned that the participation of a number of Hindu castes in specific rôles is considered to be essential in the rites of passage. Thus, members of the 'lowest castes' in the area, the Sahis, Dom, Ghasi, Mahali or Muchi, are employed as midwife, specifically entrusted with cutting the umbilical cord of the mother and burying the placenta. The midwife becomes permanently related to the child in a respectful and affectionate tie, being referred to as Dhai-ma (midwife-mother). The Napit or barber has to be present in birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies; paring of nails and cutting of hair being essential elements of all purificatory ceremonies. The Dhoba or washerman has to be present at birth and funeral, for ritual pollution is terminated by giving clothes to them for washing. The Brahman priest, belonging to the 'impure' category (that is, those whom higher Hindu castes do not employ), officiates in marriage and funeral rites, while the Boishtom Guru has to be present as *adhikari* or master of ceremonies to conduct an essential element in funeral rites, known

as *dadhikado*. Moreover, the Boishtom offers religious initiation or *diksha* by whispering the sacred names of Krishna and his spiritual consort, Radha, into the ears of the initiate. The Boishtoms also regularly visit the homes of the Bhumij and sing devotional songs to the accompaniment of the drum, *khol* and cymbals, *kartal* and receive alms in return. The Brahman priests also officiate in rites of expiation after pollution due to accidental killing of a cow, etc., or due to excretion on the body by a fly (known as *machhuppat*).

Sadhus or ascetics occasionally visit the village in the course of their wanderings. In the village they usually stay as the guest of the Bhumij headman who regards it as a privilege and source of prestige. During the few days of their stay in the village, people gather around them and listen to the exposition of their religious beliefs. These sittings often continue till midnight, enlivened by singing of religious songs or *Dhua*.

We may also refer here to the visit of members of the professional painter caste, Chitrakar or Paitkar, to the houses of the Bhumij and of the other castes during the months of December–February. The Paitkar carries with him one or more scrolls of paintings of the deities, Kali or Jagannath. They also paint pictures describing the fate of the soul after death and the form taken by it in heaven or hell. The latter types of scrolls are taken to houses where someone had died recently. The exhibition of the paintings is always accompanied by recitation of verses. It is interesting to note that the Paitkar goes to the house of the Santal with the same scrolls and recites verses in Santali, depicting the images of Jagannath or Kali in terms of the Santal pantheon.

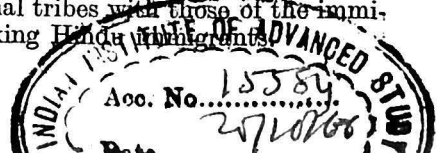
Ceremonial friendships with members of other castes are principally of two kinds, namely *Phul* and *Saya*.¹ The *Phul* or flower friendship may take place only between members of the same sex, whether unmarried, married or widowed. The essential elements of the ceremony are: taking bath together in the village tank, giving each other new clothes as presents after bath, and finally exchanging of garlands. These rites are followed by giving feasts to each other on days fixed on the occasion of friendship ceremony. Not only two persons, but two families also become thus tied by agnatic kin-like relationship; one has only to add the prefix 'phul', meaning flower, to the regular kinship term when addressing a relative of the ceremonial friend. Each family observes ceremonial pollution on the occasion of birth or death in the 'flower' friend's family. The members of the two families visit one another during the major social rites, such as the rites of passage, as also during seasonal festivals. Friendship behaviour extends to the sphere of economic co-operation through occasional offer of help in ploughing or lending paddy without interest. Through fifty-four total instances of *Phul* friendship the Bhumij families of Bhangat *Tola* come into well defined relationship with twenty other castes; most frequently the chosen friend belongs to the Mahato caste. The following rationales were presented to us by the informants as the basis of such friendship: if two persons, resembling each other in physical appearance, and belonging to different castes, establish friendship it brings good luck to both; friendship with a member of the lower caste strengthens the soul and drives away the accumulated sin in the body; it is a means of gaining social prestige, and some people utilize the friendship as a means of gaining land from the friend. Along with these, the Bhumij is also aware that such friendship is meant for 'bringing in good relations between different ethnic groups'.

¹ Cf. Biswanath Bandopadhyaya—'Ceremonial Friendship among the Bhumij of Manbhumi', *Man in India*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 274–286.

In contrast to the *Phul* variety of friendship the *Saya* variety takes place only between women, and among them is restricted mainly to married or widowed women having an equal number of children of the same sex. Unlike the *Phul* friendship, which may take place more or less regularly throughout the year, *Saya* friendships are established in periodic social movements at irregular intervals of many years. The movement usually starts with a rumour: the old man and the old woman were seen in such and such villages asking people to contract *Saya* friendship. It is believed that if such friendship be not contracted in due time, some person may die in the family and worms would ruin vegetables in the garden as well as in cooked curry. As in the case of *Phul* friendship, *Saya* friendship binds two families in agnatic kin-like relationship. In the latter case, however, the two families are not bound to observe ritual pollution with reference to the friend's family. Due to its limiting condition of operation, *Saya* friendship affects a much smaller proportion of Bhumij families than *Phul* friendship. Thus, of 67 Bhumij families in *Tola* Bhangat, only 13 families, that is 18%, are involved in *Saya* friendship, whereas 59 persons, representing 31 families, that is 46.2% of the total number of families, are involved in *Phul* friendship. Through *Saya* friendship the people of Bhangat *Tola* have become related to four other castes, namely Mahato, Kalu, Boishtom and Napit.

Although, the Bhumij, like other Hindu castes in the region, are endogamous, the regional custom of keeping concubines allows them to have access to 'fallen' women of other castes; just as the members of the other castes may have access to 'fallen' Bhumij women. Concubines may be of two types, dancing girls, i.e. *Nachni* or others, *Khaoasin* or *Rakhni*. The number of concubines maintained by a person formerly used to be an index of one's prestige status; and the Bhumij, representing the landed aristocracy of the region, were a great addict to this custom. This latter custom, however, is on the decline. Within the village of Madhupur, there are only two persons who have concubines, one belonging to the Boishtom caste, the other being a Dom.

The annual cycle of festivals is another important stage where the Bhumij meet all other regional Hindu castes, though in a somewhat unstructured way. Within Madhupur all the castes contribute to the communal festivals traditionally initiated by the Bhumij, such as Sarhul Parab in Vaisakh (April-May), Jantal Parab in Asarh (July), Bandhana and Goth Puja in Kartic (October) and Baram-Baita in Magh (January). Besides such village-level festivals of restricted scope where the Bhumij of Madhupur comes into contact with not more than five other ethnic groups, they go out of the village to participate in large festivals of regional importance. It may be noted that many of these latter festivals are initiated by Bhumij chiefs of the higher orders, such as the Taraf Sardar or the Zemindar of the Parganah. Some of these appear to be mainly of Brahminical origin, such as Ratha Jatra Parab at Balarampur (eight miles away), and Durga Puja at Bamni (two miles away). Others like Desh Shikar (annual hunting ceremony of the country), taking place on the day of the full moon in Vaisakh at Dalma Hills (seven miles away) or at the Ayodya Hills (fourteen miles away), belong quite evidently to the aboriginal Munda tradition. Some others, again, like the Tusu or Makar Parab, on which occasion the villagers of Madhupur take bath in the Subarnarekha river at Dulmi (ten miles away) or at Satighata (sixteen miles away), Chhata Parab ('umbrella raising festival') at Chakultor (eighteen miles away) and at Gobarghusi (sixteen miles away) and Ind Parab or Indra Puja at Barabazar (twelve miles away), appear to be a synthesis of the traditions of the aboriginal tribes with those of the immigrant lower and upper caste Bengali-speaking Hindu immigrants.



Among the above-mentioned festivals, Desh Shikar or Annual Hunting Ceremony may be distinguished by the fact that it is majorly participated by the so-called tribal groups in the area, the Santal, Pahira, Kharia and Bhumij. Some of the lowest Hindu castes, living only at the foothills, also participate in this festival. Among other special features of these festivals may be mentioned: participation being wholly restricted to the males, the occasion being also one for sessions of the country-wide Panchayat or People's Council, where long-standing disputes and cases of violation of traditional customs are brought up for adjudication. Unlike the other large-scale festivals, the former is not accompanied by setting up of temporary marts.

The other large-scale festivals, irrespective of their variation in contents, usually include the following elements: a key religious ceremony sponsored by an individual family or lineage living in the village where the festival occurs; organization of a fair where, among the usual articles sold in a market, sweets, tea, betel and various fancy toys in wood and pottery are sold; a group of men and women singing songs specially meant for the occasion; love-making; occasional visit of prostitutes; group dancing of men and women (the practice of dancing by women at a fair is now restricted only to the Santal community); dancing by professional dancing girl or *nachni* and betting on the game of dice (*Jua*). In these festivals we find the Bhumij participating in such ritual austerities as fasting and hook-swinging; taking ceremonial baths in tanks and rivers; participating in entertainments like cock-fighting, masked *Chhau* dancing, acrobatic *Natua* dancing and dancing with professional dancing girls and so on, together with the regional Hindu castes. Social interactions of the Bhumij, however, are decidedly more frequent with the lower Hindu castes than with the upper castes on such occasions.

As in the case of social contacts in the weekly market, visits to distant festival centres, in addition to expanding the social horizon of the Bhumij through contact with distant villages and with people belonging to many more castes than they could have come across in their own village, reinforces their already established kin and also non-kin relationships within the village and beyond. However, in contrast to the market, the festival is a less structured and less repetitive stage of social contacts and while there are certain economic features in the temporary marts, the aspects of entertainment and ritual dominate the scene. While the primary function of the market is the circulation of utility goods, one of the primary functions of the festivals is the circulation of artistic products, both material, such as painted and unpainted dolls made of burnt clay and wood, decorated bamboo flutes, etc., and non-material, like songs, dances, etc.

Besides such specific channels of social contact, we may also mention the fact that the Bhumij becomes related to the regional Hindu castes, by implication, through the acceptance of the concept of ritual pollution. Like the long-established (traditional) Hindu castes he has specific ideas about the acceptance of various items of food and drink from the other ethnic groups or castes. From the 'lowest' caste members (Dom, Muchi, Mahali, Ghasi, Sahis, Kharia, Pahira and Santal) or from some of the 'very low' castes (Tanti, Thentbari, Jugi or Dhoba) the Bhumij do not accept any form of prepared food. They accept chaffed rice from all the 'low' caste members (lower Boishtom sects, Kumar, Kalu, Kamar (Bengali) and Mahato) and from such 'very low' castes as the Bagdi and Chapua Kamar. Sweets are accepted from the 'high' castes and also from all 'low' castes excepting the Bengali Kamar. Water and *Muri* are taken only from the 'highest' and 'high' castes (Brahman, Rajput, Kayastha, Baniya, Tamli,

Napit and Moira) and also from the Boishtom. Cooked rice is acceptable to the Bhumij only from the Brahman, Rajput and the Boishtom.

On the other hand, cooked food is taken from the Bhumij only by the 'lowest castes', water and *Muri* by some of the 'very low' castes (Then-thari, Tanti and Chapua Kamar), in addition, while sweets can be taken by all the 'low' castes and chaffed rice, *Cheera*, by even the 'highest' castes.¹

Although the above-mentioned media of Bhumij-Hindu contacts operate simultaneously today, they appear to have come into being in a certain succession. It is known that all the ancient weekly markets were established by the superior tribal chiefs and the zemindars near the villages where they resided and also that most of the large-scale regional festivals were organized by the former. It is also evident that the Hinduization of the Bhumij tribal culture has proceeded mainly downwards from the level of super-chief or Raja of the Pargana who became Hinduized first. In other words, organization of markets and large-scale festivals and the intense phase of Hinduization in ritual life took place after the Bhumij had organized themselves into states.

Circumstantial evidence indicates that the earliest phase of contact of the Bhumij with the so-called Hindu castes was established through the media of: economic co-operation between Hindu artisans and tribal cultivators, hunters and gatherers from the forest, participation in the services of medicine-men and in village-level festivals and panchayats. Perhaps, at a later phase, the institution of ceremonial friendship provided additional linkage between the two groups. After some years of co-existence in the same territory, with the continued and increasing measure of economic co-operation, the Bhumij finally organized themselves into independent states covering 336 or more villages. The wealth and power of the chiefs of these states attracted Hindu ritual specialists (namely Brahmans, both Bengali-speaking and Oriya), traders, and other literati. These latter immigrants helped the tribal chief to consolidate his power and wealth. After Hinduization of the chief, at the latter's initiative, large-scale ceremonies symbolizing his sovereign status were established. Moreover, as trade flourished at the seat of the chief, it led to the setting up of weekly markets. The practice of money and paddy-lending at heavy interest also came into vogue through the immigrant traders. In imitation of the supreme chief, the lower orders of chiefs patronized Hindu ritual specialists, traders, etc., and organized symbolic festivals within the limits of their economic capacity. From then on, Hinduization proceeded irreversibly till we find the Bhumij in a phase where they habitually think in terms of a specific rank in the regional caste hierarchy and where ritual services of the Brahman, Boishtom, Napit and Dhoba has become essential ingredients of marriage and funeral rites.

It is interesting to compare very briefly with the Bhumij the cases of the three less Hinduized 'tribal' groups in the region, the Pahira, Kharia and Santal. These latter groups have contacts with the Hindu world mainly in connection with their economic life at the weekly market and elsewhere, and in joint participation in the regional festivals. Their ceremonial friendships, too, are restricted only to the lowest castes. They do not have any ritual service from the other castes.² Further, these people do not

¹ The position of the Bhumij in the regional ranking system will be dealt with in detail in a future paper.

² In the Santal-dominated village of Samanpur, however, we do find the Santal in recent years employing a kind of Brahman and Napit who are regarded 'lowest' in the region. It is said that the latter are descendants of liaison between Brahman male or Napit male and Santal females.

have any idea of the caste status of the most of the 'high' caste Hindus including the Brahman, and regard the Bhumij as the highest caste, for the latter are 'the rulers of the land'.

Thus these three tribal groups share with the Bhumij the following channels of articulation with the Hindu world: economic co-operation in the procurement of crafts and grains in exchange of forest-products, visiting the market, common service of medicine-men, ceremonial friendship and participation in festivals, but they *do not* share the following: controlling the regional land-tenure and political system where the Hindu artisans are subservient to them, taking loan of paddy or money from the Hindu traders in any considerable volume, access to the ritual service of the specialist castes and accepting a definite position in the regional caste hierarchy.

THE NATURE OF INTER-ETHNIC CONTACTS

The above-mentioned specific channels of social contacts involve a wide range of variation in the qualities of interaction, among which the following appears to be most important—reciprocity, equality, superordination—subordination, competition and accommodation.

Thus, *reciprocity* is the keynote of the social contacts of the Bhumij with the artisan castes in the procuring of wares for payments in paddy or cash. Contacts at the festivals and at the village councils are characterized, to a large extent, by the principle of *equality* among ethnic groups. In regard to land-tenure and regional political structure, the Bhumij play a *dominant* rôle, while in the ritual behaviour he accepts a *subordinate* status to that of the Brahman, Rajput and the Boishtom. The Bhumij feel *competitive* about the prosperous, hard-working, agriculturist Mahato, both for the latter's growing strength in population and increasing hold over cultivable lands and also with regard to the latter's concerted effort to be recognized as Khsatriya, paralleling the Bhumij Khsatriya caste-mobility movement.

Such feeling of competition, with reference to economy, political control and social status, exists among the other ethnic groups in the area too. However, an equally alive spirit of *accommodation* and cultural tolerance tone down the intensity of competition without allowing it to grow into violent inter-group conflicts. This latter principle allows the hand-bellow using Bengali Kamar and foot-bellow using Chapua Kamar, the small basketry-maker Dom and the large basketry-maker Mahali, the Moslem weaver Jolha and the Hindu Tanti to co-exist side by side. Similarly, the Nimayat, Madhabachri, Ramayat and Vishnuswami sects of the Boishtom caste look for their clients in the same region without indulging in mutual vilification as a means for expanding their clientele. The idea that the traditional occupation, *Britti*, of a caste should not be encroached upon by another, holds ground in this area even among the three less Hinduized tribes mentioned above. Thus, although the Pahira and the Kharia know the art of basketry-making, they make them only for their own household consumption. They never sell these to others, for that will mean encroachment upon the traditional occupation of the Mahali.

The above description brings into relief the essentially co-operative nature of inter-ethnic relationship in this area. This appears to be particularly true when we limit our observations to the formal level of behaviour. Violent conflict between caste groups as a whole almost never occurs. However, within the formal framework of co-operation a dormant feeling of

jealousy and ill-will about other groups may also be discerned. In Karam¹ and Tusu songs, for example, one finds these feelings quite vividly expressed. We found the girls of Chapua Kamar caste of village Ketunga singing the following song vilifying the Mahato caste:

‘The sheep of the Mahatos
Go from house to house.
The wives of the Mahatos, too,
Go from house to house.

They get earthen pitchers from the potter
And iron ladles from the smith;
The greedy wives of the Mahato houses
Eat from full cups.’

A few samples of the characteristic description by the Bhumij of the nature of the other castes also reveal this undertone of ill-will and jealousy.

Thus, about the Brahman we hear: ‘One cannot trust a tree warped in creepers or a man tied in thread’. The Boishtom are described as: ‘those bastard Boishtoms are fat with rice begged from fourteen houses’ and the Kayasthas as: ‘a cunning people—a caste that hides the pen in the anus; they do not listen even to their fathers. Their very name is Bangali, who only know how to ask for more. They will always try to squeeze you. Never allow them to settle in your village; the whole village will then be spoilt’. The Napit is depicted as ‘cunning and clever as the fox’ and the Baniya as: ‘a caste that trades with bags of salt, who does not allow even water to pass through the salt’.

Finally, it is evident that the relation of the Bhumij with any other caste cannot be defined in terms of a single quality such as equality, dominance, etc. With the same caste, the quality of interaction depends upon the specific context of social contact. Thus, the Bhumij meets the Boishtom on a plane of *equality* at the village council and at the festivals; in patron-client relationship in ritual service and in ceremonial friendship their relationship is guided by the principle of *reciprocity*; in the caste hierarchy and the scale of ritual pollution the Bhumij is in a *subordinate* position while in the regional land-tenure and political structure they *dominate* the Boishtom.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

The various ethnic groups, castes and tribes, with whom the Bhumij are in contact, may be grouped into six categories in terms of a progressive series in the decrease of frequency in social contact and also in the feeling of social intimacy. This is being presented in terms of qualitative and impressionistic judgements rather than in quantitative terms (cf. Diagram I).

The first group includes the three ‘tribal’ peoples, namely the Kharia, Pahira and Santal, the various artisan castes, the barber and the washerman. The above people often live in villages dominated by the Bhumij, have long been associated with the latter in economic transactions and join the Bhumij in the traditional village-level festivals. The Bhumij consider the above castes as essential parts of their familiar community life.

The second group includes the Mahato, who have quite frequent contacts with the Bhumij in ceremonial friendship, taking loan of paddy and so on.

¹ S. Sinha—‘Expression of Social Sentiments in the Songs associated with the Karam Festival of Manbhum’, *Man in India*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1957, pp. 93-118.

DIAGRAM I

SOCIAL DISTANCE : THE BHUMIJ OF MANBHUM AND OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

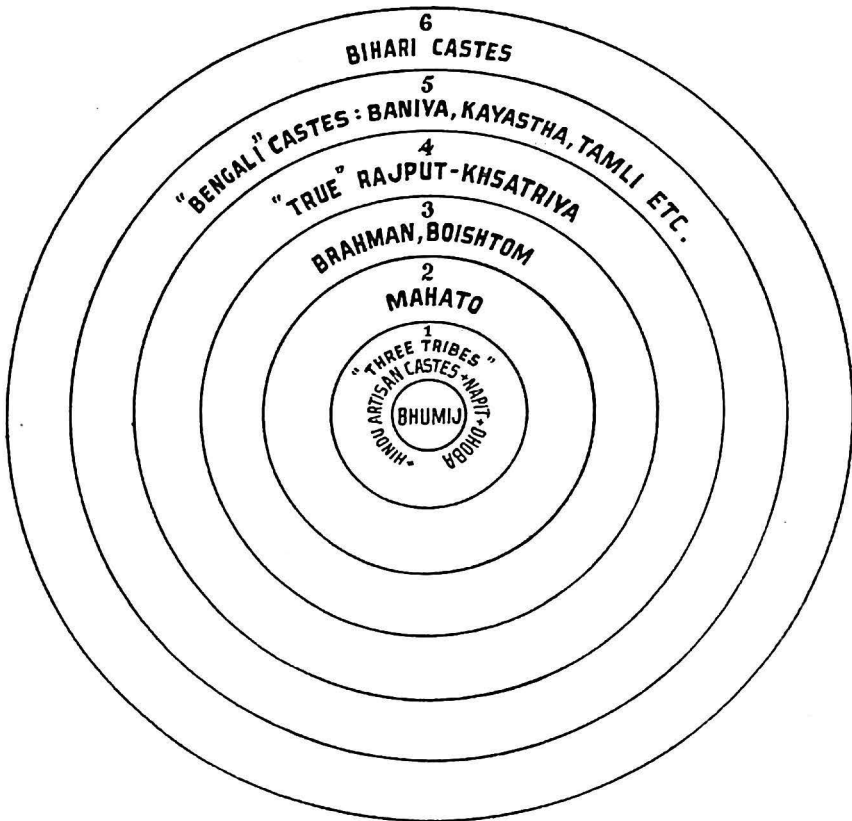


DIAGRAM II

SOCIAL DISTANCE : THE ABORIGINAL MUNDA OF RANCHI AND OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

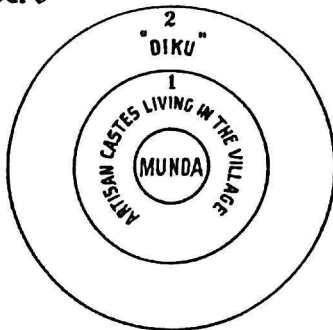
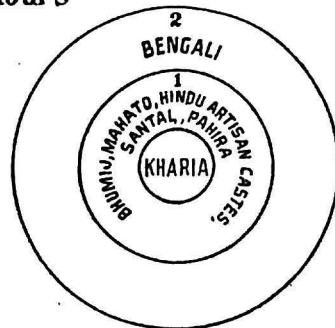


DIAGRAM III

SOCIAL DISTANCE : THE KHARIA OF MANBHUM AND OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS



Yet, due to their numerical strength and growing economic prosperity, the Mahato appear to the Bhumij as being relatively powerful and autonomous whom the Bhumij cannot conveniently dominate. The Mahato thus remain beyond the inner circle of castes included in the first group.

The priestly castes, Boishtom and the Brahman, whose presence is considered to be essential in the major rites of passage of the Bhumij form the third group. On a formal level the Bhumij are very respectful of these priestly castes; they kiss the dust of the latter's feet and also sip the water that is washed out of the latter's feet. However, with all these, the Brahman and the Boishtom remain somewhat aloof from the Bhumij with their esoteric knowledge and ritual avoidance of food and drink from the Bhumij. Among the two, however, the Boishtom appear to have more frequent interaction with the Bhumij, partly because of the former being relatively more numerous than the Brahman and also because the Boishtom regularly visit Bhumij homes as wandering mendicants, singing devotional songs to the accompaniment of the musical instrument named *Tuila*.

The fourth group includes the so-called 'true' Rajput-Khsatriyas who form the principal landed aristocracy in Manbhum. From a distance the Bhumij look up to these people as leading the most honourable and gorgeous pattern of life, worthy of imitation.

The next group includes certain castes who are labelled by the Bhumij as 'Bangali', thereby referring to the castes that came relatively recently from West Bengal.¹ They include the Kayastha, Baniya, Tamli and Moira. Most of these castes are regarded as 'clean', that is those from whom water may be accepted by the Brahman, and many of them are literate. The 'Bangali' castes are characterized by the Bhumij as being extremely reluctant to do manual labour, clever, ever cheating the 'simple-minded' Bhumij, educated and having a refined style of living in food, dress and linguistic usages. The Bhumij are also aware that the Bengali look upon them as low, crude and uncivilized people.

Finally, we come to the most recent immigrants in the area, the 'Biharis', who include all those castes who came from northern and western Bihar and speak the Bihari dialect of Hindi. Many of them serve in the police force or are as forest guards under the State Government.

The terms 'Bangali' and 'Bihari' are used by the Bhumij in a somewhat similar manner as the term *Diku* or 'alien' by the Munda in regard to all outsiders (see Diagram II) excepting two or three artisan castes living in their village, with whom they have long-standing intimate association. However, we shall not be too far wrong in saying that the tribal in-group feeling to the rigid exclusion of the out-group, a feature characteristic of aboriginal Munda tradition, has been considerably toned down among the Bhumij. Though the Bhumij as an ethnic group do maintain an element of exclusive 'we' feeling, as being the acknowledged autochthones of the region, and for their feeling that Parganah Barabhun is a territory belonging to the Bhumij, their intimate social contacts today include some fifteen artisan castes and 'three' relatively small tribal groups. These latter groups lie close to the Bhumij's sphere of 'we' and are definitely not treated as 'aliens'. Near the opposite extreme are the 'Bangali' castes. But even these are not out-groups to the same extent as the *Diku* are for the Munda. The Bhumij not only speak the same language as the Bengali but worship many of the same gods and observe nearly the same series

¹ It should be noted that this category 'Bangali' does not include all the Bengali speaking people in the region, for all the groups in the area (including the Bhumij) excepting the Santal speak Bengali.

of festivals in the region (Sinha, 1953). Even more remote than the 'Bangali' are the Bihari who do not even share the same language with the Bhumij.

It should be mentioned that due to the formation of socio-economic classes among the Bhumij, the description of social distance series needs some modification. The above picture fits in with the level of average Bhumij cultivator; but Bhumij society today includes at least the following socio-economic classes: the cultivator, the village Ghatwal, the Sadiyal of several villages, the Taraf Sardar of fifty or more villages, and finally the Raja of the Parganas (who has disconnected himself from the Bhumij society). It is safe to state that the higher we move from the level of village Ghatwal, interaction with the so-called 'Bangali' castes becomes more and more frequent while intimate social contacts with the members of the three tribal groups, the artisans and the Mahato become less frequent. Thus we find that the most frequent associates of the Taraf Sardar of Panch Sardari belong to the Baniya, Moira, Kayastha and Boishtom castes.

It is interesting to note that the situation of the three less Hinduized tribal groups in the area approximates the situation of the aboriginal Munda of Ranchi district. The social distance diagram of the former may be described in three concentric circles (see Diagram III). The main distinction of the situation of these three 'tribes' from that of the Munda is that while the Munda maintains himself as the dominant group in their own region, the Santal, Kharia and Pahira consider themselves as subservient to the dominant Bhumij in Manbhum.

The field of Bhumij-Hindu interactions may be viewed from another angle as follows. The Bhumij accept instruction from the Brahman and the Boishtom as to correct ritual behaviour. The Rajput Khsatriya represents his most cherished model, one of material and ceremonial splendour. The Bhumij also look up to the not-too-trustworthy 'Bengali' castes for the higher 'style of life' in food, dress, language and education. The Bengali castes, especially the wealthiest among them, are often referred to as the 'gentry', *babulok* or *bhadralok*. The Bhumij feel themselves superior to the various artisan castes and consciously imitate very few things from them. In fact, they try to avoid those of their own traditional traits, such as eating fowl, the meat of pigs and cattle, leviration, group dancing by women, etc., which are symbolically characteristic of the social status of these castes. Through prolonged, intimate contact, however, the Bhumij have become familiar with the pantheon and socio-religious cults of these castes and have incorporated many of their ritual idioms and gods in their own pantheon (Sinha, 1953).

Thus, the Bhumij look up to a few castes with whom they have relatively little social intimacy and about whose motives they are often suspicious, while they look down upon and avoid incorporation of traits which are characteristic of castes with whom they have most frequent and long-standing contacts.

The above data have been presented in rough outline to indicate fruitful lines of enquiry in the comparative study of Hindu-tribal interaction processes and their results in different areas. Careful delineation of the media of contact, the qualities of interaction and resultant range of social distances seems to provide a reliable concrete basis for abstracting the more generic processes in the tribal transformation scene.

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