Sanguineti Raymond, Wilfredo
2006 Los empresarios y el conflicto laboral. Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch.

Schwartzman, Helen B.
1993 Ethnography in Organizations. Newbury Park: Sage. (Qualitative Research Methods, 27)

Scott, James C.
1998 Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Talego Vázquez, Félix
1996 Cultura jornalera, poder popular y liderazgo mesiánico. Antropología política de Marinaleda. Sevilla: Fundación Blas Infante. (Cultura viva, 11)

Tarrow, Sidney G.
1998 Power in Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Touraine, Alain (coord.)
1990 Movimientos sociales de hoy. Barcelona: Hacer.

Valcuende del Río, José María, y **Esteban Ruiz Ballesteros**
2002 En torno a la representatividad de las organizaciones pesqueras en la costa oriental de la provincia de Cádiz. *Eúphoros* 5: 21–30.

Ventura Calderón, Fernando
2004 Democracia y sindicalismo de Estado. Elecciones sindicales en el área sanitaria de Sevilla. Un estudio antropológico. Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo.

Ventura Calderón, Fernando, y **Beltrán Roca Martínez**
2009 The Sword of Damocles. Democratic Governmentality and State Trade Unionism in Spain. In: A. Ivarra and P. Aguero (ed.), Contemporary Studies in Ethnography; pp. 143–166. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

History, Collective Memory, and Identity

The Munda of Barind Region, Bangladesh

Shaila Sharmeen

Introduction

This article concerns the Munda of the Barind region in Bangladesh. The Barind region, located in the northwestern part of Bangladesh, covers the majority of the greater Dinajpur, Rangpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Bogra, Joypurhat, and Naogaon districts of the Rajshahi Division. There are eighteen different Adibashi groups residing in that region. The Santal, the Oraon, the Munda, the Malpahari, and the Mahalo are numerically dominant groups among the Adibashi. The smaller groups include the Rajbanshi, the Turi, the Malo, and a number of others ethnic units. The total population of the Rajshahi, Naogaon, Jaipurhat, Dinajpur and Bogra districts is around 9,53 million, of which the total Adibashi population is 2.51 percent while the Bengalis, both Muslims and Hindus, are the overwhelming majority, constituting 97.49 percent (BBS 1994). According to a Government of Bangladesh population census taken in 1991, there are 2,610,746 Adibashi in total. Unfortunately, no reliable statistics about the Adibashi people in general are available. An unofficial record published by private agencies and local NGOs in the year 1995 estimated that the entire Munda of Bangladesh population did not exceed 35,000 (Ali 1998). In the Mundari language, *munda* means "headman of the village" (Roy 1912). A Munda identifies himself as *horo-honka*, meaning "man." Hilary Standing argues in this context that: "In its original usage the term Munda meant a wealthy man or head of a village responsible to the superior landlord for tribute and revenue exaction" (1973: 5). Only under the British rule the term "Munda" became and an ethnonim to designate the Munda people. The Munda are regarded as "Adibashi" both by themselves and by their Bengali neighbours who constitute the majority in the region.

My argument is based mostly on secondary sources and Munda narratives of the Barind area. I have reviewed available literature concerning the Munda, including writings of colonial administrators, e.g., Dalton (1872), Hunter (1876), Baden-Powell (1895), as well as early ethnographies written by Indian scholars (e.g., Roy 1912). I use these sources to illustrate the early history of the Adibashi, including the Munda of the Barind region. Pioneer Indian ethnographers, such as S. C. Roy attempted to reconstruct the early history of the Munda on the basis of archaeological and linguistic data, the analysis of Hindu scriptures, and Munda oral history. I rely heavily on these works as they are the most authoritative sources in the area of Munda studies.

Who Are the Adibashi? The History of Formation of "Adibashi" as a Category

In the time of colonisation of the Indian subcontinent, members of the British colonial administration referred to the Adibashi as "backward," "savage," "primitive," and "uncivilised." Administratively, they have been treated as "tribals," and as such they

were classified as different from "castes." The colonial distinction between castes and tribes goes back to the administrative practice of eighteenth-century British officials, e.g. James Cleveland who pointed to the difference between hill and forest communities, on the one hand, and those of the plains on the other (cf. Skaria1997: 729). Still, no single term had emerged to designate them yet. During the 1820s and 1830s, the tribes were attributed adjectives such as "wild," "savage," "predatory," and nouns like "groups," "bands," "tribes," "races," or even "castes." It is by the 1840s, that they were described more consistently as "tribes," usually as "aboriginal," "forest," or "hill tribes." Still, even in 1863, an Indian academician, one "Professor Tagore," informed the Anthropological Society in London that "the aborigines of India are cannibals …" (cf. Guha 1999: 15).

In his multivolume work "The Tribes and Castes of Bengal" (1891), the British census commissioner Risley analysed the tribes of Bengal on the basis of anthropometric data. Risley's scheme of hierarchical classification, which divided India into seven racial "types" with dark skinned "Dravidians" (defined as the most "primitive") and the light-skinned "Indo-Aryans" (considered as the most "advanced") was an important element in the process of legitimising the British discriminatory policies. Risley noted in this context: "The existence of different races of men in Bengal, the Aryan and the aboriginal. The former is represented by the Brahmans, Rajput, and Sikhs. These generally have tall forms, light complexion and fine noses, and are in general appearance superior to the middle class of the Europeans. The Kols are a specimen of the latter. They have short stature, dark complexion, and snub noses, and approach the African blacks in appearance … the higher [a man's] origin, the more he resembles the Europeans in appearance" (1891: 255f.).

Risley has been much criticised for his scheme even by contemporary scholars (Dirks 1992). It was recognised (e.g., by William Crooke 1899), of course, that racial differences were often not so sharp in practice; that intermixing between the aborigines and the invaders had created some new castes; that tribes often became castes through the adaptation of caste customs (cf. Skaria 1997). But this recognition did not undercut the conventional British understanding that "tribals" were racially and culturally distinct from the Hindus. The British government used Risleys' scheme during an ethnographical survey of India whose purpose was "to collect the physical measurements of selected castes and tribes" (Driks 1992: 69). The list of "tribes" of India, completed in the late nineteenth century, emerged precisely from that process of "imagining" racial and cultural differences. Needless to say, the list was completely arbitrary. Certain groups, for example, such as the Kolis were culturally quite similar to the Bhils, but they happened to be classified as "castes" rather than "tribes" because they adopted settled agriculture during the nineteenth century (Government of Bombay 1901). It is in this sense, therefore, that one can describe the colonial list of tribes as an outcome of a process of "primitivisation" or an invention of "primitive society" (e.g., Standing 1973; Skaria 1997).

The term "Adibashi" appeared only in the 1930s, as they gradually acquired common identity in the struggle against policies of the colonial government and the intrusion of settlers and moneylenders (see Hardiman 1987; Bates 1995). Still, in the academic discourse of Bangladesh they were designated by the Bengali term "Upajati" (tribal), which only recently has been replaced by the term "Adibashi." The reason was to transcend the negative connotations implied by the use of the term "Upajati." Considering Adibashi as a transcendental term, i.e., free from any bias and implying equal deference for all and the respective culture they bear, the term "Adibashi" gained a wide acceptance among scholars and development policymakers in Bangladesh.

The Munda in the Precolonial Period (from 6 B.C. to A.D. 18)

As for the ethnohistorical origins of the Munda, S. C. Roy (1912) argues that the Munda are linguistically associated with the Kolarian language group. The people of this language group inhabited the highland of Chota Nagpur. However, certain recent studies suggest that the Munda belong to the Austro-Asiatic language group (Ali 1998). According to Roy (1912), the ancient homeland of the Munda was Azamgarh – that is, the eastern section of Uttar Pradesh.[1] According to Munda oral tradition, around the sixth century B.C. they began their migrations out of that region and eventually reached Chota Nagpur, Ranchi, and Bihar. Supposedly they arrived in that territory using an eastern route – through Burma and Assam (Singh 1992). In that early phase of their history, they lived in in-

1 Azamgarh was included in the Benares division of the North Western province. In the north the region was bordered by the river Gogra and by the Faizabad and Gorakpur districts; in the south – by the Gazipur and Juanpur districts; in the east – by the Balia and Gazipur districts; and by the Juanpur, Sultanpur and Faizabad districts in the west (Roy 1912).

dependent village communities that were clustered into groups called *parhas* for purposes of mutual support, and each group had a leader called *manki*. Around the fifth century B.C., those independent communities were politically consolidated under a monarchic (*raja*) system.

From A.D. 1510 onward, the Mughal rulers started their conquest of Chota Nagpur, and the Munda and Oraon principalities gradually lost their independent status. The Mughal ruler Akbar (1556–1605) reduced Nagbanshi Raja of Chota Nagpur, who was the head of the Munda and Oraon, to a *malguzar* (vassal) around A.D. 1585. Another Mughal ruler, Jahangir (1605–1627), imposed a high tribute on Munda and Oraon communities. After the amount was not paid, Jahangir invaded Chota Nagpur in 1616. The Nagpur Raja was defeated, captured, and arrested. After 12 years in captivity, he was released however under the condition of paying an annual rent. This he did by imposing a high tax in cash and kind on his Oraon and the Munda subjects. It was also the beginning of a fiscal/tax system among the Munda and Oraon. Moreover the Nagpur Raja gradually managed to bring some villages under his private ownership. He also began to surround himself with new people from Bihar (*jaigirdars*), and granted them land for settlements. Indigenous Munda and Oraon began to protest against the presence of Bihar settlers and hostility against them increased. The circumstances worsened with the imposition of various land tenure systems by the British, following their arrival in 1765.

Munda in the British Period: Early Settlements in the Barind (1765–1947)

In the year 1765, Chota Nagpur became a territory of the East India Company, and the first British agent of that enterprise arrived in 1770. From that time onward, to keep the Munda and Oraon away from armed conflicts between them and the alien *jaigirdar*s, the British expanded and sharpened their ideas on the norms and conventions of tribal culture, integrating colonial ideology into the structures of authoritative government. Those policies brought about fundamental changes in the social system of Bengali tribes, particularly after the introduction of the "Permanent Zamindari Settlement Act" in 1793. One consequence of that legal act was the expulsion of the Adibashi from their ancestral lands due to the migration of contract labour to tea plantation of Assam, coalmines of Bihar, and indigo plantations in Bengal (cf. Devalle 1992). As a result, the Adibashi were gradually reduced to playing only a subordinate role as a reserve labour force in the regional economic system. *The Bengalee* stated in 1886 that Santal Parganas constituted "the mainstay of the labour force" in Assam tea gardens, supplying 44.7% of all workers. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Mundari and the Santal were considered to be "the means of rendering British [indigo] enterprise possible through the whole of Bengal." These peoples were seen as "patient of labour … able to live on a penny a day, contented with roots when better food is not to be had" (Hunter 1876: 227).

Prior to the eighteenth-century, there were hardly any references to Munda presence in the Greater Bengal. Indeed, they are regarded as comparatively late immigrants to that part of the Indian subcontinent (*Bangladesh District Gazetteers* 1977). Hunter (1875) recorded that a large number of tribes had immigrated to eastern Bengal (today's Bangladesh) after having lived for a generation or more in western Bengal (Malda and Dinajpur) of British India. According to the colonial record, there was a small Munda population in the northern area of eastern Bengal after the great famine of A.D. 1770. Writing about the population of Dinajpur District in the "Census Report 1921," Thomson observed that "there is a reason to believe that the population of the district decreased during the earliest part of the last century" (Census of India 1921: 64). Barind must have been an area most affected by the famine and the subsequent depopulation. As a result, fertile arable lands of that region became uncultivated and forests appeared again in once cultivated areas (cf. Strong 1912: 61). According to Ali, "[a]ll these indicate a series of migrations of people to this tract and they were mainly the caste Hindus and well-off Muslims who comprise the agrarian feudal social order of this region, *Amlas* or functionaries of the *zamindars* and professional practitioners, as also as traders; they were called 'the immigrants of choice'" (1998: 51).

Moreover, from the colonial record it can be assumed that the migration of tribal communities of the Santal, the Oraon, the Mundari, and the Mahalis to Assam, Bihar, and to the northern region of eastern Bengal may have also occurred because of the slave trade run by the Imperial Masters and their hired men in India. The tribals were the "commodity" of that trade, having been generally imported for the reclamation and cultivation of fallow and barren lands of the northern region of eastern Bengal. Thus, Hunter (1876: 226f.) stated the following: "there is no doubt that slavery was there among the aborigines who used to provide the manpower for

'English enterprise' in this sparsely populated fertile land of Bengal." Similarly, Baxter and Rahman said: "they (the adibashi) cleared the jungles, terraced the slopes and the land fit for cultivation of winter rice" (1996: 36). Other important factors for their migration from their ancestral territory of Chota Nagpur were the pervasive changes in land management systems and revenue laws as well as the rapid immigration of foreign moneylenders, merchants, and other land-hungry non-Adibashi settlers in this region (Devalle 1992; Damodaran 2006). Due to these factors, those who found themselves dispossessed and socially disoriented decided to seek their fortune in the less colonised parts of eastern Bengal. The Munda of my study villages make an occasional reference to the history of the place of their forefathers. Thus, when I asked Krishna Munda[2] about the history of the settlement, he answered me in the following manner:

Nagpur ki Nag Raja, Gani me maha teja
Haire mor tanga, Haire mor Raja, Haire mor tang,
Tanghoa lutlia Ghatoar
Sata purusa jab, Aali Bangla me
Aruna ban katle, Ehi tanga me
Safa karle zamin, Lutlia Ghatoar
E zamin jaiga sabi lelai, Lelai Raj darbar
Hate dhori gore pori, Ho sabe hoshiar
Hoshiar se kam nahi, Dunia vitar
Haire mor tanga, Haire mor Raja

The king of Nagpur-great in his wisdom
Oh! My axe, Oh!
My king, the ruler captured the axe.
Seven generation ago we came to Bengal,
cleared the forest (*aruna bon*) by our axe.
Cleared the land, the ruler captured it, all the land
– captured by the ruler.
Our humble request (to the fellow Munda) is to be conscious.
In this world without being conscious you suffer.

The migration of the Munda and other Adibashi, notably the Santal and the Oraon, into the Barind region of eastern Bengal increased in the course of the 1880s and took a massive scale in the decades to follow, in particular after 1921 when it went unabated for a considerable period of time. As stated above, the primary causes of the Munda migration were the economic depression in Chota Nagpur and the availability of cultivable land in the Barind region, where the *zamindar*s and *jotedar*s engaged tribals to clear the jungle and high lands (Ali 1998). The Adibashi from Chota Nagpur settled in Barind mainly as *adhiar/bargadar* (sharecroppers) under the "Permanent Zamindari Settlement Act of Bengal" in 1793, and they played an important role in the extension of agriculture in that region.

The Munda and other Adibashi settled therefore in the forest-covered estates of the East Bengali *zamindar*s and supplied most of the labour required for clearing forestland for crop production. Those *zamindar*s (mostly from Rajshahi and Dinajpur) were revenue-farmers. The role of the *zamindar*s, in functional terms, was to administer territory rather than to hold land (except for small private plots owned by them). They also maintained armies, dispensed criminal justice, enforced law and order, settled land disputes, and above all, collected revenues. In the system of entitlement, the *zamindar*s, and other grades of revenue-collectors[3] (such as *talukdar*) in Bengal, were drawn from the traditionally high-ranking literati of Brahmans (priests), Kayasthas (scribes), Vaidyas (physicians), Saiyads (aristocratic Muslims), and Maulvis (learned Muslims). The *jotedar*s belonged to the dominant village land-holding class, made up of Sheikh Muslims who ruled over landless groups in the village. Baden-Powell (1896) stated that during the survey of the Dinajpur District in 1808, Buchanan Hamilton found out that 6 percent of the cultivating population enjoyed 36.5 percent of the land leased by *raiyat*s from *zamindar*s, whereas 52.1 percent of the agricultural workforce had no land at all and worked either as sharecroppers or as agricultural day labourers under the rich tenant landlords. The landless groups were made up of untouchables – the lower caste group of Hindu religion. The Bengal agrarian hierarchy contained five strata: (Dhanagare 1976):

– *zamindar*s (big landlords) and *talukdar*
– *jotedar*s (either fixed-rent *raiyat*s-tenants or settled/occupancy holders)
– under-*raiyat*s (tenants with inferior rights)
– *bargadars*, *adhiars* (i.e., sharecroppers without any tenure rights)
– landless agricultural labourers

2 All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

3 The Adibashi-inhabited areas had sub-feudal systems of *zamindars* and sub-*zamindars*. They, in turn, rented the land to *raiyats* with occupancy rights. These *raiyats* had to pay rent either to the sub-zamindars or directly to the state. Besides the *raiyats*, there were also other tenure holders, such as *jotedars*, who often did not cultivate the land but leased it to sub-tenants (who had to make cash payment in advance for leasing the land). Moreover, the ordinary *raiyats* could have sub-tenants *korfa-ryots*, who had a different set of rights. Specifically, one category held occupancy rights and could not easily be driven off their land, while the other one had very weak cultivation/lessee rights. In the latter category were *adhi-raiyats*, sharecroppers who had to pay a sizeable portion to the landowner (cf. Ray and Ray 1975).

The Adibashi who worked as sharecroppers and agricultural labourers held therefore the lowest position in the caste hierarchy. They tilled the land and cleared the forests for cultivation, thus changing the land from a dense, humid jungle into to fertile fields. For that reason perhaps, they also claimed to be the first settlers and the real "owners" of their land. In my study villages, a few Munda, who were in their late 80s, also had similar reminiscences about their migration and the relation to the land. In accordance with their narratives, their grandfathers were sharecroppers under the *zamindar*s in British Bengal. After having made land cultivable, they settled and started cultivation. At that time, the land was allocated by the *zamindar*s in the system of *hukumnama* – the type of system in which *zamindar*s allocated land to their tenants for an unlimited period of time on the basis of how much land the tenants could clear and make arable. Over the course of time, however, this situation changed. Ray and Ray state that the Munda's clearances and construction work pushed the forest frontier back, reduced wildlife, and opened the way for further immigration of Adibashi and Bengalis from neighbouring regions. The expanding clearings and the remaining "islands" of forest were primarily allocated to landlords under the permanent settlement act (cf. Ray and Ray 1975). According to Dhanagare (1976), those tribals who adopted sedentary lifestyle and turned into peasants were quickly ousted from the lands that they reclaimed. The *zamindar*s simply preferred to rent the land to *jotedar*s for better returns (without any capital investment) rather than the tribal sharecroppers. Those middlemen, in turn, gave out land for cultivation to tribal sharecroppers (*bargader*s*/adhiar*s) in order to produce rents. In Barind, the rent was called *adhi* – a fixed share of the produce. Agriculture inputs, seed, cattle, and manure, were usually the sharecroppers' responsibility. If, however, a landowner supplied any of these, or made any cash advance to his sharecroppers during the difficult months (Aswin, Kartik), then he took a share larger than half of the produce in adjustment. Normally, the same sharecropper did not remain long on the same plot of land. The sharecrop contracts were always oral, valid usually for a year. Sharecroppers had therefore no statutory status, and hence no security of holding.

The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 gave the landlords (*zamindar*s) wide jurisdiction, but such high revenues forced levies on Adibashi cultivators, who frequently revolted (e.g. tribal movements in the 1820s and 1830s; the Santal rebellion of 1855–1857; and the Kherwar movement of 1870). These rebellions expressed a strong resentment toward all oppressive aliens, both British and those from the Greater Bengali region (cf. Skaria 1997; Hardiman 1987). After a series of such agrarian movements, a number of Adibashi decided to support the "Bengal Tenancy Act" (1885), which was an effort to define rights and duties of tenants in relation to their landlords. Nonetheless, this piece of legislation addressed the massive demand for reform only unsatisfactorily, although it did pave the way for the establishment of a land reform commission in 1938. The commission was given the task to investigate the possibility of bringing the actual cultivators into a direct relationship with the state. In the months leading up to independence, a new tenancy bill was introduced, but it was not enacted until after the Partition of 1947. The colonial policy meant that the Adibashi had little economic choices and no say in administrative affairs, and decisions were made for, not with them.

The Munda in Pakistan Period (1947–1970)

The Partition of 1947 and the following decades severely affected the social and economic life of the Adibashi, both directly and indirectly. The Hindu *zamindar*s left and the Muslims became the new landlords. Muslim Bengalis in the Adibashi-inhabited areas suspected the Adibashi of being Hindu loyalists. Such nationalist sentiments were imbued with a mix of "racial" prejudice and a lack of knowledge about the tribals (Shafie and Mahmood 2003). In 1947, the majority of Adibashi in Barind were still sharecroppers under *zamindar*s. There is however no accurate information on how much of the land was cultivated by the Munda, the Santal, the Oraon, and other Adibashi before the Partition of 1947. Following the Nachol uprising[4] and during later periods of intense communal violence in the 1950s, many Adibashi fled from their homes after direct violent attacks and other forms of abuse committed by influential local and Bengali Muslims. The Munda had to flee together with Hindus and other Adibashi, leaving behind all of their belongings. In this situation some of them migrated to India, while others returned to the Barind region after a couple of months in exile. On returning home, however, they frequently found their land

4 Protesting the unreasonably high portion claimed by the landowners, many adhi/barga cultivators, including Adibashi Santal, Munda and Oraon, rose against their landlords in the Rajshahi area in the late 1940s. This movement was known as Tebhaga-three-part-movement. Santal from Nachol in Rajshahi were in the forefront of this movement. For details, see e.g. Tarapada Roy 1983.

declared "evacuee property." Other returnees were unable to reclaim their land because it had come under control of local Muslims, although officially, it was the Secretary of the Revenue Department who administered the land as the appointed custodian.

Some studies demonstrate that the Adibashi were indeed negatively affected by the "Zamindari Abolition Act," losing their land tenure in the course of the 1950s, in particular during the time of communal riots in 1951–52. Several Munda interviewees recounted those events and the associated harshness and suffering. Thus, Rantu Munda (85) narrated to me what follows:

My grandfather got land from the Hindu *zamindar* when he had left the country in 1947. But we lost our forefather's possession. During the *hangama* [most of the Munda termed the situation after the partition of Bengal and abolition of the *zamindari* system as *hangama*] we had lost our claims on the land that our grandfather had cultivated. He got the land as a *hukumnama* from the *zamindar*. The local *jotedars* [Muslim landlords] had forcibly driven us from our lands (recorded interview, November 2008, Mahapara, Niamatpur).

Similarly, Noren Munda (about 70), from Khaspara, narrated the history of the *zamindari* period and the painful effects of the "Zamindari Abolition Act." He stated that his father was a sharecropper under Kali Narayan (*zamindar* of Naogaon). The family had a plough and a pair of oxen. According to him:

Our days were passing quite smoothly. In those days, the price of commodities was low. There were dense forests and we could find birds and animals to hunt and ponds were filled with fish. When *zamindari* abolition became law, the *zamindar* called all the tenants and distributed land … to those who used to sharecrop his land. The *zamindar* was happy with my father's work so he gifted him twenty *bigha*s of land. But the situation became critical after the *zamindari* abolition in 1950s and the frequent communal riots in 1951 and '52. Many of us had flown to India as we found ourselves in an insecure position. When the situation had calmed down, we came back. But we found that our land had been illegally captured by local Muslim *jotedar*s. We could not claim our land because we [had] lost the legal documents of our lands (recorded interview, November 2008, Khaspara, Niamatpur).

The Permanent Zamindari Settlement Act of 1793 was abolished in 1950. The Act aimed at empowering the rent-receiving *zamindar*s and at prohibition of the practice of subletting the land. While subletting was forbidden, the new legislation did not regulate precisely the relationship between owners and sharecroppers, and those who depended on sharecropping received no protection under the new law. Some scholars state that the Adibashi were unaware of the legal intricacies involved in the payment of taxes and in transfers of inherited land (cf. Ali 1998), and they identify Adibashi's widespread illiteracy (including the lack of knowledge of land laws, tenure rights, tax obligation, transfer and division of inherited land, and land record system) as possible reasons for their massive land loss. On the other hand, a number of Munda interviewees also accused local moneylenders and Muslims landlords for their landlessness. Foresh Munda (in his 60s) narrated the following:

We had only one crop a season. During the difficult months Aswin and Kartik, we had fallen in a situation of starvation. Without having any alternative, my father borrowed 10 *maund*s of paddy from a moneylender of Jinarpur village. The term and condition of the loan was that in the harvesting period my father had to pay a total amount of 17 *maund*s. That year harvest was very bad. The moneylender pressed my father to pay back his loan immediately. My father was unable to repay and that *mohajan* [moneylender] managed to take possession of our 4 acres of land. From then we turned into day-labourers (Interview, November 2008, Khaspara, Niamatpur).

Other Munda interviewees of my locality recounted their experience with the fraudulent practices of Muslim landowners: as the Munda had little knowledge about land transfer issues, they easily fell into the trap of landowners. Lalon Munda shared his own experience in the following words:

I was in my early 20s, and newly married. My father passed away. I inherited 10 *bigha*s of land from my father. I needed money to build my own house. I borrowed money from a Muslim landowner with a condition of repaying the money after the next harvest season with 50 percent interest. According to his demand, I gave my fingerprint on a blank paper. The rainy season came, and I started to till my land. The landowners sent his men and asked me to stop the work. They told me I had no right to till as I sold all the land to that landowner. I trusted the landowners, but he abused my trust. I was unaware about the land transfer law and afterwards I lost my claim to the land. The landowners made me landless and a day labourer (Interview, September 2008, Mahapara, Niamatpur).

The independence and the separation of India and Pakistan in 1947 rested on the Hindu-Muslim premise of *di-jati-totto* (theory of two nations)[5]. The

5 British India was divided into two separate nation-states, India and Pakistan, on the principle of religious identity. India was to be the state of Hindu people while Pakistan was to be ruled by Muslims. The partition took place by virtue of the "Two-Nation Theory" of Mohammad Ali Jinnah. For further details see Verma 2001.

Pakistani sense of nationalism, both in East Pakistan and West Pakistan, emerged from a common religious sentiment. Consequently, the Bengali Hindus and the Adibashi were categorised as non-Muslims by the Pakistani government, and they were looked upon as anti-Pakistani and "nonbelievers." After the dissolution of British rule in 1947 and the abolition of the Permanent Settlement Act in 1950, the Adibashi's socioeconomic and political situation actually worsened, and those of them who depended on sharecropping received no protection under the new law whatsoever.

The Bangladesh Period (1971–1980s)

During the period of the Bangladeshi Liberation War in 1971, the majority of Munda and other Adibashi of the Barind region fled to India as refugees. Due to their religious identity as Hindu, the Muslims who were opponents of liberation and collaborators of the Pakistani army frequently attacked the Adibashi people: their houses were burnt down and their belongings destroyed. Rani Bala Munda told me that she and her husband, together with her relatives and neighbours, had left the village for India four months after the start of the Bangladesh Liberation War. She also stated that many Adibashi did not return to their villages, as they felt insecure and threatened (Interview, September 2008, Khaspara, Niamatpur). After nine months of the Liberation War (March 1971 – December 1971), the Munda, the Santal, the Oraon, and other Adibashi returned to by then already independent Bangladesh. Those who had their own homesteads settled down, while those without property settled on their relatives' land or on the land of Muslim landowners for whom they worked as *adhiar* (sharecroppers) and eventually became bonded labour. The Munda who served as bonded labour recounted their past as follows:

> Our landlords called us to work whenever they wished. They used us for house repairing, clearing the cowshed, or even bringing bathwater from the pond. We also have to send our wives and sons for their household works. There was no cash payment, they offered us only meals. We were served separately and after having our meal we had to wash the plate by ourselves. We had no say at that time. We had to obey them because we were staying on their property and they were so powerful (Interview, December 2008, Khaspara, Niamatpur).

In the economic sector, the Munda had therefore functioned as agricultural labourers and as reserve labour force exploited seasonally. This was their main source of income. The majority of the Adibashi in Barind had no land of their own (Bleie 2005). In this situation, moneylenders, traders, pawnbrokers, fellowmen, and family members were important sources of finance in the informal sector of rural economy in Bangladesh. Indeed, the tribals received about 80 percent of the loan from local moneylenders. Remaining outside of governmental monetary regulations, the village moneylenders, mostly Bengali Muslims, played therefore a decisive role in determining the fate of the Adibashi through contractual obligations of money-lending. The Munda usually took loans before the cultivation season or at Aswin and Kartik, as well as during the lean season just before the harvest. Credit from local moneylenders carried interest rates starting around the equivalent of 100 to 280 percent per annum. The high interest of loans usually led to the loss of the land which was seized by moneylenders (cf. Shafie and Mahmood 2003). The Munda Adibashi also sold their labour to these people at a discount of up to 50 percent, two or three months before the harvest (Ali 1998). One crop season, the lack of economic opportunities in agriculture, as well as absence of organized political participation forced them to adapt to those exploitative conditions.

The Present Situation of Munda in Barind (1990s to Present)

In the beginning of the 1990s, further changes took place in the Barind region. Peoples of this region began using a new technology for irrigation (such as the deep tubewell). This allowed an intensification of agriculture from one cropping to three cropping seasons and an extension of cropping lands, and resulted in commercialisation of rice agriculture and a higher demand for agricultural labourers. In addition, the government devised several developmental schemes that eventually included also Munda communities. The participation of the Munda in electoral politics increased, and NGOs have begun working to "develop" the Adibashi of that region. These developments, along with the increasing movement of people, have led to fundamental changes in the livelihood of the Munda, as they respond to new pressures and take advantage of new opportunities. The political and economic contexts indicate, however, that the opportunities are still quite limited. Though Munda people have started expanding the socioeconomic-political networks beyond the existing village settings, the majority of Bengali landowners still control land and politics, and Munda

labourers are more or less dependent on their patronage.

On the economic front, the commercialisation of agriculture has led to the expansion of market economy in rural areas, which in turn has created job opportunities for the Munda, in both agricultural and nonagricultural sectors. This has made space for negotiations regarding labour conditions between Munda and Muslim landowners in villages, thus improving the bargaining position of wage labourers. Opportunities to work inside and outside their villages and better wages motivated Munda to abandon the old pattern of patron-client relationships. Instead, they are attempting to redefine and reconstruct their relations with Muslims in the economic sphere, which suits their emerging sentiments of self-esteem and dignity. Notably, they have preferred to remain in their own villages and expand their agricultural and nonagricultural activities locally to improve their economic conditions without abandoning their agricultural villages.

On the political front, Munda have begun to raise their voices to criticise the existing political powers and demand their "rightful" share. The importance of their votes in electoral politics has enabled them to gain certain negotiating powers as they develop connections with government offices and political parties. In the changing political circumstances, it is no longer possible for the powerful Muslims and faction leaders to capture external resources flowing into the village or exploit the minority people as a vote bank for their own personal gains. Since 2007, the government's initiatives to establish rights for minorities and poor people have allowed the Munda to demand their share of state benefits. Land reclamation policies have helped them to recover land lost 15 to 20 years ago. They have regained the customary rights to their village ponds which were captured and held by powerful Muslims for several years.

Munda now openly complain about corruption, embezzlement, and bribery in relation to development programs and the distribution of state resources. Through such criticism, there emerges a new public image of a desirable sociopolitical community that applies the language of "fairness." There is also a growing awareness among young Munda women and men to gather knowledge, which help them to consciously educating themselves to do new things for improving their condition by interacting with the wider society. Interestingly, they are not content to blindly follow the instructions of NGOs – namely, to get educated, find a white-collar job, and develop identity politics in order to improve their socioeconomic and political status.

The Muslim landowners have invariably attempted to exert their influence over the distribution of natural resources, and the Munda were placed in a vulnerable position regarding resource availability. The introduction of prepaid cards for purchasing irrigation water has enabled Munda to demand their "due" share, and they have acquired even greater ability to demand their equal share from deep tubewells through the new discourse of "community of cultivators with equal access." Increased economic opportunities in the agricultural sector, institutional backup, and legal support have provided Munda with opportunities to participate and demand their share of government resources. These factors have provided them with a context in which to expand, reformulate, and redefine the relationships that they develop with Muslims in the process of negotiation.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Munda migrated to the Barind region from their ancient place in Chota Nagpur after the arrival of the British. Over the course of time, more Munda labourers were brought by local landowners to the district of Dinajpur in order to make the land cultivable to pay taxes to the British ruler. Some others came from Chota Nagpur to seek their fortune after being dispossessed from their land. They settled in the Barind as sharecroppers of the *zamindar*s. From the beginning of the British period up to the 1990s, the Munda had little economic choice and no say in economic exchange relations or administrative affairs, as decisions were made for them, not by them. The landowners were only interested in them as an easily exploitable labour force. This scenario has begun to change in the course of the 1990s, due to technological developments in irrigation and the commercialisation of agriculture, as well as introduction of government programs for development of ethnic minorities.

I would like to express sincere gratitude to my academic advisor, Professor Akio Tanabe, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies (ASAFAS), Kyoto University for his valuable comments and suggestions during the fieldwork and writing the manuscript.

References Cited

Ali, Ahsan
1998 Santals of Bangladesh. Fulgeria: Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology. [University Diss., Calcutta]

Baden-Powell, Baden Henry
1896 The Origin of Zamindari Estates in Bengal *The Quarterly Journal of Economic* 11(1): 36-69. The MIT Press.
1895 The Permanent Settlement of Bengal. *English Historical Review* 10/38: 276–292.

Bangladesh District Gazetteers
1977 *Bangladesh District Gazetteers*. (Prepared by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.) Dacca: Bangladesh Government Press.

Bates, Crispin
1995 Race, Caste, and Tribe in Central India. The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry. In: P. Robb (ed,), The Concept of Race in South Asia; pp. 219–259. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Baxter, Craig, and **Syedur Rahman**
1996 Historical dictionary of Bangladesh. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press.

Bleie, Tone
2005 Tribal peoples, Nationalism and the Human Rights Challenge: The Adivasis of Bangladesh. Dhaka: University Press.

Bureau of Statistics
1994 Bangladesh Population Census 1991. Government of Bangladesh. Dhaka: Ministry of Planing.

Census of India
1901 Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency. Bombay: Government of Bombay Press.
1921 Pt. X Bombay Presidency-Report. Bombay: Government of Bombay Press.

Crooke, William
1899 The Hill Tribes of the Central Indian Hills. *The Journal of the Anthropologica Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 28 (3/4): 220–248.

Dalton, Edward Tuite
1872 Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal. Calcutta: Office of The Superintendent of Government Printing.

Damodaran, Vinita
2006 The Politics of Marginality and the Construction of Indigeneity in Chotanagpur. *Postcolonial Studies* 9/2: 179–196.

Devalle, Susana B. C.
1992 Discourses of Ethnicity. Culture and Protest in Jharkhand. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Dhanagare, D. N.
1976 Peasant Protest and Politics – The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal (India), 1946–47. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 3/3: 360–378.

Dirks, Nicholas B.
1992 Castes of Mind. *Representations* 37: 56–78. [Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories]

Government of Bombay
1898 Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government. Vol. 366: Survey Settlement of the Talukdari Villages of Jhalod. Bombay: Government of Bombay Press.

Guha, Sumit
1999 Environment and Ethnicity in India. 1200–1991. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society, 4)

Hardiman, David
1987 The Coming of the Devi. Adivasi Assertion in Western India. Delhi: Oxford University Press

Hunter, William Wilson
1875 A Statistical Account of Bengal. Vol. 1: District of the 24 Parganas and Sundarbans. London: Trübner and Co.
1876 A Statistical Account of Bengal. Vol. 3: Districts of Midnapur and Húglí (including Howrah). London: Trübner and Co.
1975 The Annals of Rural Bengal. Delhi: Cosmo Publications. [Reprint]

Ray, Ratna
1975 Land Transfer and Social Change under the Permanent Settlement. A Study of Two Localities. *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 11/1: 1–45.

Ray, Tarapada (comp.)
1983 Santal Rebellion. Documents. Calcutta: Subarnarekha.

Ray, Rajat, and **Ratna Ray**
1975 Zamindars and Jotedars. A Study of Rural Politics in Bengal. *Modern Asian Studies* 9/1: 81–102.

Risley, Herbert Hope
1881 The Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary. Calcutta: Frima Mukhopadhyay.

Roy, Sarat Chandra
1912 The Mundas and Their Country. (With an Introd. by E. A. Gait.) Calcutta: The Kuntaline Press.

Shafie, Hasan A., and **Raasheed Mahmood**
2003 The Plight of an Ethnic Minority. The Munda of Northwest Bangladesh. *Asian Anthropology* 2/1: 161–177.

Singh, K. S.
1992 The Munda Epic. An Interpretation. *India International Centre Quaterly* 19/1–2: 75–89.

Skaria, Ajay
1997 Shades of Wildness Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56/3: 726–745.

Standing, Hilary
1973 Protective Land Legislation in the Ranchi District of Bihar. Ranchi: Mimeo.

Strong, F. W.
1912 Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers: Dinajpur. NL Publishers.

The Bengalee
1886 English Daily Newspaper: Calcutta

Verma, Anand K.
2001 Reassessing Pakistan. Role of Two-Nation Theory. New Delhi: Lancer Publishers.