

VILLAGE SURVEY MONOGRAPH OF
BHUMIJ DHAN SOL



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VILLAGE SURVEY MONOGRAPH

ON

BHUMIJ DHAN SOL

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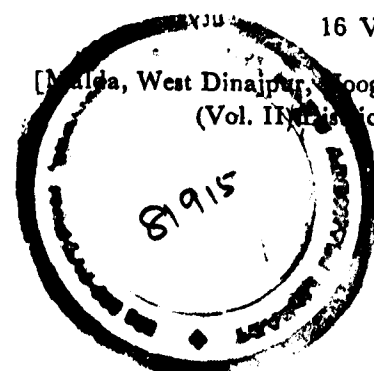
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FOREWORD

Apart from laying the foundations of demography in this subcontinent, a hundred years of the Indian Census has also produced 'elaborate and scholarly accounts of the variegated phenomena of Indian life—sometimes with no statistics attached, but usually with just enough statistics to give empirical under-pinning to their conclusions'. In a country, largely illiterate, where statistical or numerical comprehension of even such a simple thing as age was liable to be inaccurate, an understanding of the social structure was essential. It was more necessary to attain a broad understanding of what was happening around oneself than to wrap oneself up in 'statistical ingenuity' or 'mathematical manipulation'. This explains why the Indian Census came to be interested in 'many by-paths' and 'nearly every branch of scholarship, from anthropology and sociology to geography and religion'.

In the last few decades the Census has increasingly turned its efforts to the presentations of village statistics. This suits the temper of the times as well as our political and economic structure. For even as we have a great deal of centralization on the one hand and decentralization on the other, my colleagues thought it would be a welcome continuation of the Census tradition to try to invest the dry bones of village statistics with flesh-and-blood accounts of social structure and social change. It was accordingly decided to select a few villages in every State for special study, where personal observation would be brought to bear on the interpretation of statistics to find out how much of a village was static and yet changing and how fast the winds of change were blowing and from where.

Randomness of selection was, therefore, eschewed. There was no intention to build up a picture for the whole State in quantitative terms on the basis of villages selected statistically at random. The selection was avowedly

purposive; the object being as much to find out what was happening and how fast those villages which had fewer reasons to choose change and more to remain lodged in the past as to discover how the more 'normal' types of villages were changing. They were to be primarily type studies which, by virtue of their number and distribution, would also give the reader a 'feel' of what was going on and some kind of a map of the country.

A brief account of the tests of selection will help to explain. A minimum of thirty-five villages was to be chosen with great care to represent adequately geographical, occupational and even ethnic diversity. Of this minimum of thirty-five, the distribution was to be as follows :

- (a) At least eight villages were to be so selected that each of them would contain one dominant community with one predominating occupation, e.g. fishermen, forest workers, jhum cultivators, potters, weavers, salt-makers, quarry workers etc. A village should have a minimum population of 400, the optimum being between 500 and 700.
- (b) At least seven villages were to be of numerically prominent Scheduled Tribes of the State. Each village could represent a particular tribe. The minimum population should be 400, the optimum being between 500 and 700.
- (c) The third group of villages should each be of fair size, of an old and settled character and contain variegated occupations and be if possible, multi-ethnic in composition. By fair size was meant a population of 500-700 persons or more. The village should mainly depend on agriculture and be sufficiently away from the major sources of modern communication such as the district administrative headquarters and business centres. It should be roughly a day's journey from the above places. The villages were to be selected with an eye to variation in terms of size, proximity to city and other means of modern communication, nearness to hills, jungles and major rivers. Thus there was to be a regional distribution throughout the State of this category of villages. If however a particular district contained significant ecological variations within its area, more than one village in the district might be selected to study the special adjustments to them.

It is a unique feature of these village surveys that they rapidly outgrew their original terms of reference, as my colleagues warmed up to their work. This proved for them an absorbing voyage of discovery and their infectious enthusiasm compelled me to enlarge the inquiry's scope again and again. It

was just as well cautiously to feel one's way about at first and then venture further afield, and although it accounts to some extent for a certain unevenness in the quality and coverage of the monographs, it served to compensate the purely honorary and extramural rigours of the task. For the Survey, along with its many ancillaries like the survey of fairs and festivals, of small and rural industry and others, was an 'extra', over and above the crushing load of the 1961 Census.

It might be of interest to recount briefly the stages by which the Survey enlarged its scope. At the first Census Conference in September 1959 the Survey set itself the task of what might be called a record *in situ* of material traits, like settlement patterns of the village ; house types ; diet ; dress, ornaments and footwear ; furniture and storing vessels ; common means of transport of goods and passengers ; domestication of animals and birds ; markets attended ; worship of deities, festivals and fairs. There were to be recordings, of course, of cultural and social traits and occupational mobility. This was followed up in March 1960 by two specimen schedules, one for each household, the other for the village as a whole, which, apart from spelling out the mode of inquiry suggested in the September 1959 Conference, introduced groups of questions aimed at sensing changes in attitude and behaviour in such fields as marriage, inheritance, moveable and immoveable property, industry, indebtedness, education, community life and collective activity, social disabilities, forums of appeal over disputes, village leadership, and organisation of cultural life. It was now plainly the intention to provide adequate statistical support to empirical 'feel', to approach qualitative change through statistical quantities. It had been difficult to give thought to the importance of 'just enough statistics to give empirical under-pinning to conclusion', at a time when my colleagues were straining themselves to the utmost for the success of the main Census operation, but once the census count itself was left behind in March, 1961, a series of three regional seminars in Trivandrum (May 1961), Darjeeling and Srinagar (June 1961) restored their attention to this field and the importance of tracing social change through a number of well-devised statistical tables was once again recognised. This itself presupposed a fresh survey of villages already done ; but it was worth the trouble in view of the possibilities that a close analysis of statistics offered, and also because the 'consanguinity' schedule remained to be canvassed. By November 1961, however, more was expected of these surveys than ever before. There was dissatisfaction on the one hand with too many general statements and a growing desire on the other to draw conclusions from

statistics, to regard social and economic data as interrelated processes, and finally to examine the social and economic processes set in motion through land reforms and other laws, legislative and administrative measures, technological and cultural change. Finally, a study camp was organised in the last week of December 1961 when the whole field was carefully gone through over again and a programme worked out closely knitting the various aims of the Survey together. The Social Studies Section of the Census Commission rendered assistance to State Superintendents by way of scrutiny and technical comment on the frame of Survey and presentation of results.

This gradual unfolding of the aims of the Survey prevented my colleagues from adopting as many villages as they had originally intended to. But I believe that what may have been lost in quantity has been more than made up for in quality. This is, perhaps, for the first time that such a Survey has been conducted in any country, and that purely as a labour of love. It has succeeded in attaining what it set out to achieve ; to construct a map of village India's social structure. One hopes that the volumes of this Survey will help to retain for the Indian Census its title to 'the most fruitful single source of information about the country'. Apart from other features, it will perhaps be conceded that the Survey has set up a new Census standard in pictorial and graphic documentation. The schedules finally adopted for this monograph have been printed in an appendix.

New Delhi
July 30, 1964.

ASOK MITRA
Registrar General, India.

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A Passage To Bhumij Dhan Sol, *Tout Ensemble*

"I began to doubt how far the normal idea of progress was beneficial for these people and, indeed, whether this was progress at all in any real sense of the word. It was true that they could not be left cut off from the world as they were. Political and economic forces impinged upon them and it was not possible or desirable to isolate them. Equally undesirable, it seemed to me, was to allow these forces to function freely and upset their whole life and culture, which had so much of good in them....."

We cannot allow matters to drift in the tribal areas or just not take interest in them. In the world of today that is not possible or desirable. At the same time we should avoid over-administering these areas and, in particular, sending too many outsiders into tribal territory.

It is between these two extreme positions that we have to function. Development in various ways there has to be, such as communications, medical facilities, education and better agriculture."

—Jawaharlal Nehru

The first bus to Lalgah was missed. Passengers, bound for different other routes, waiting at the bus-stand in Midnapur town, pitied me for my predicament. They all chuckled at the impending plight, in which, they fancied, I might be landed the same day. The weather had fallen sharp and a flighty piping wind beat about the town. The people in the bus-stop did not commiserate with me for the possible inconveniences, that might be caused by the flying, rumbling clouds, a black speck like a swallow in the tumultuous, leaden chaos of the brazen sky of June ; they were more

and starvation and smothered with cankers and diseases, the people here live a very meek life a life, laden with tears, sorrows and tragedies, only to survive with unfathomable grief in this vast world. They grow like death in life, yet they labour hard, with every drop of moisture not in the men's bottles and flagons in the form of cider raining as perspiration from their foreheads and cheeks, under the monochromatic burning summer sky. And the inevitable question awaits an answer, "Why so?"

In conclusion one has to agree with Sri Asok Mitra, when he says, "Pundits will always say that this is a country with an ancient culture, with a degree of sophistication and capacity for abstraction which is not always apparent on the surface, discrimination born of an under-current of ancient heritage and so that explains. But one has also seen how grinding poverty, the absence of clear drinking water or the absence of elementary privacy can erode human nature. This is an experience which has to be endured to be fully comprehended". (Now, dated June 2, 1967.)

The opinions, here and hereafter, are exclusively mine, made in a personal capacity. They do not represent the views of the Government.

Calcutta,
The 4th September, 1966,
The 13th Bhadra, 1888 Sakabda.

Sukumar Sinha

A Tribute In Quietude

*"But love, though misdirected, is among
The things which are immortal, and surpass
All that frail stuff which will be—or which was."*

To the Lodha, Bhumij and Mahato villagers of Bhumij Dhan Sol who love to live and live to love life through religion, songs, magic and witchcraft, through expansive joy in liberty and suffering sorrow in confinement, I offer my unstinted respect in unrestrained emotion. They live far away from our society in their own world in freedom, not stifled by the noise, dirt and disturbance of a town, nor prejudiced by any urban sense of values. They worked in jungles and some of them in the agricultural fields and they do so even now. By the legacy of foreign rule the Lodhas were stigmatised as criminals and forced to live a life of isolation, humiliation and sufferance. They were punished more for crimes that they had not committed than they would have been if they had committed the crimes. More sinned against than sinning, the Lodhas were dubbed as sin-born. The post-Independence period apparently rescued them from the bondage after the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act, but the pathos of their life was not so easy to go. Understanding and appreciation alone could redeem them and assuage their agony. I am now "left with the inconsolable memory of the treasure I went into" their village to find and I shall cherish it as a priceless possession, for which no word is a worthy tribute.

To Sri Asok Mitra, I.C.S., Registrar General, India, and Secretary to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, who knows the tribals, the people and the culture of our country so intimately, I pay my profoundest regards and present the Monograph with some diffidence. Throughout my work and in all my thoughts I was inspired by his great tradition.

Dr. Pradip Kumar Ganguly of Presidency College, Calcutta, was not disinterested in this village ; rather his direct help many a time by way of original suggestions stimulated me to make the Monograph as much comprehensive as possible. His friendly association and scholarly interest have bound me in deep gratitude.

Prof. Satyesh Chakravorty of Presidency College, Calcutta, kindly helped me in preparing the Map of West Bengal, locating the villages selected for survey and also in suggesting certain new methods of approach to this study. I am indebted to him for his scholarly assistance.

Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose, the celebrated Anthropologist, now the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, has been a source of great inspiration to me throughout. I remain grateful to him for the helpful guidance and invaluable suggestions given to me many a time.

Lastly, I cannot but remember my dearest father Sri Shyama Pada Sinha, who responded to the affectionate call of his son in improving upon the Monograph, wherever he felt it necessary.

Calcutta,
The 4th September, 1966,
The 13th Bhadra, 1888 Sakabda.

Sukumar Sinha

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CHAPTER I

THE VILLAGE

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- Location with reference to the district
- Reasons for selection
- Location of the village and its neighbourhood
- Location with reference to important centres of administration
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- Transport and communication
- Physical aspects
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- Growth of settlement in the village
- Reasons of immigration to the present village
- Some important landmarks in the history of the village
 - (a) *Epidemic*
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FAUNA

According to the reports of the elderly people in the village, the surrounding forests were infested with wolves, wild pigs and wild elephants as far back as thirty or forty years. But now a days, these wild animals are almost rare. Of course, wild elephants sometimes appear and cause widespread damage to the houses and to the standing crops. Three years

ago, a wild elephant appeared in the village and damaged the huts of the Bhumijes. Hare, the favourite chase of the Lodhas, Bhumijes and the Santals (belonging to neighbouring villages) can also be found in large numbers. Some of the game-birds, like jungle-fowl, pea-fowl, are occasionally found. There are also many venomous and non-venomous species of snakes. The following list will give some idea about the fauna.

A—ANIMALS

Local Name	English Name	Scientific Name
<i>Kath Birali</i>	Squirrel	Sciurus tristriatus (Darker, three narrow white subequal stripes on back side) Sciurus layardi (Brown; three longitudinal place band) Sciurus palmarum (tail equal to body, smaller variety)
<i>Khatash</i>	Indian palm civet (also called toddy cat) Bengal-civet Small Indian civet	Paradoxurus hermaphroditus Viverra melaccensis Viverricula indica
<i>Khargosh</i>	Rabbit Hare	Oryctolagus cuniculus Lepus cuniculus
<i>Nekre Bagh</i>	Wolf (Indian variety)	Canis pallipes
<i>Neul</i> (<i>Beji</i>)	Mongoose Ruddy mongoose	Herpestes auropunctatus (no neck stripe, nor black tail tip) Herpestes smithi (no neck stripe, black tail tip) Herpestes vilticellis (black neck stripe, black tail tip) Herpestes urva (white neck stripe, no black tail tip)
	Crab eating mongoose	Felis chaus Sus cristatus
<i>Bon Biral</i> <i>Buno suor</i> (<i>Ban Baraha</i>)	Jungle cat Indian crested wild bear	

Local Name	English Name	Scientific Name
<i>Mahula</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Stal</i>	Indian jackal	Canis aureus
<i>Khenk Sial</i>	Fox	Vulpes bengalensis
<i>Shushura</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Sajaru</i>	Indian crested porcupine	Hystrix indica bengalensis
<i>Hunral or Hyaena</i>	Striped hyaena	Hyaena hyalna

B—BIRDS

<i>Akopako</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Kak</i>	House crow	Corvus splendens
<i>Kokil</i>	Indian cuckoo	Cuculus mycropterus
<i>Kali Doel</i>	Magpie robin	Copsychus saularis
<i>Kath Thokra</i>	Woodpecker	Dinopium bengalensis
	Indian spotted wood-pecker	Picus macei
<i>Khayer</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Gurur</i>	Adjutant stork	Leptoptilus dubius
<i>Gobar Chunra</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Ghughu</i>	Spotted dove	Streptopelia chinensis
	Ring dove	Streptopelia decaocto
<i>Chanchar</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Chil</i>	Pariah kite	Milvus migrans gocinda
<i>Tia</i>	Indian parakeet	Psittacula krameri
<i>Chandana</i>	Large Indian parakeet	Psittacula eupatria
<i>Timtimi</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Titir</i>	Grey partridge	Francolinus pondicerianus
<i>Tuntuni (Dorji)</i>	Tailor bird	Orthotomus Sutorius
<i>Lakshmi Pencha</i>	Barn owl	Tyto alba
<i>Hutum Pencha</i>	Brown fish	

gave way to the violent storm. As the village is situated in the fringe of the jungles, the extent of damage was not severe, though, of course, most of the livestock of the village were killed. For its severity, the cyclone has left its stamp on the mind of the people.

(c) *The Great Famine of 1943 and its impact on the village*

Hardly had the bitter memories of the cyclone died out in the hearts of men, when the shadow of the Great Bengal Famine crept in. Sorrows and sufferings of the people of this region knew no bounds. Most of the poor people of the surrounding areas had migrated to Midnapur, Jhargram and other urban areas. But fortunately, the people of this village were not the worst victims of the Famine. In the worst phase of the Famine, the people fell back upon the roots, tubers, fruits and chases, thanks to the abundance of jungles in the vicinity of the village. The Lodhas, who mainly live on the wild chases of

the forests and even on some kinds of snakes, were not hard hit. Still, the Famine has left alarming accounts of the untold miseries and sufferings deep into the memories of the people. The people keep account of the ages of their children as also of the important events with reference to the Famine. Not only that, there are three girls in the village, who have been named *Akali* i.e., Famine, to commemorate the fact that they were born in that hard year.

(d) *The tragedy of 1961*

About three years ago, a grim tragedy engulfed a section of people in the village. The Mahatos of the neighbouring villages raided the Lodha huts and smashed them. It is alleged that they took away all their cattle and smashed their utensils. All the Lodhas fled away *en masse* from the village and took shelter in the local Office of the Block Development Officer. The conflict arose after the alleged criminal assault by a Lodha on a minor girl belonging to the Mahato community.

CHAPTER II

PEOPLE AND THEIR MATERIAL CULTURE

Brief ethnic composition of the village

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Legend of origin

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Birth

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CHAPTER II

PEOPLE AND THEIR MATERIAL CULTURE

A. BRIEF ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE VILLAGE

The village, as already said, is composed of three distinct ethnic groups ; of these, the Lodhas and the Bhumijes are

Scheduled Tribes and the Mahatos are Caste Hindus.

In the following the population of the village is shown caste-wise :

TABLE 3

Caste/Tribe	No. of households	Persons	Males	Females
Lodha	35	174	90	84
Bhumij	17	88	45	43
Mahato or Kurmi	3	19	12	7
Total	55	281	147	134

The early history of these people has not yet been fully known. A misty veil still hangs over their real origin, primitive abode and original occupation. Yet, these are the people who were once the masters of the soil. The early history of these people with all their joys and sorrows, hopes and fears have not been recorded in the annals of history. It is bound to be a tough job for any one to trace them out. But the antiquarian interest of the anthropologists has not allowed their antecedents to pass into oblivion. From their folk-tales and folk-lores, legends and myths, some of their past accounts, however meagre they may be, have been rescued.

Lodha

The Lodhas are an *ex-criminal* Tribe of West Bengal. A tribe, which regards the Brahmans as its sons-in-law and hesitates to take water from them, a tribe, which does not accept the spiritual superiority of the Brahmans, the Lodhas are an object of careful study for the anthropologists, the psychologists, the criminologists and the administrators. The

study of a tribe, which claims to be the descendants of *Jara Savara* who had shot Lord *Srikrishna* in the remote *Dwapara* era, a tribe which claims Lord *Jagannath* of Puri to be their original godhead, is bound to be an object of antiquarian interest.

1“The tract along the western border now known as the Jungle Mahals, which is still covered with the remains of forest, was the home of nomadic tribes who lived on jungle prdoucts and the spoils of the chase. Among them were the Savaras, a powerful race that can be traced as far back as the *Aitareya-Brahmana* and other aboriginal tribes who spread over the country from the Ganges to the Godavari. Their descendants may be identified with the nomadic Sahars of the present day and the Lodhas, as a tribe of hunters, as their name (a corruption of the Sanskrit *lubdhaka*, *i.e.*, hunters) implies.”

Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India mentions Luda Savaras as one of the sub-tribes of Savaras. Most probably, the Luda Savaras, referred to above, are akin to the Lodhas of

1 A. Mitra—District Handbook of Midnapore, 1951, p. xv.

