

**Scripting Autonomy: Script, code, and performance  
among Santali speakers in eastern India**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

*To my grandparents*

*The late Kantilal and Kapilaben Choksi  
Natvarlal and the late Shantaben Parikh*

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## Transcription Conventions

### I. Transcribing Santali

As this dissertation concerns the politics of script, how I have chosen to transcribe the Santali language is an issue that deserves a few words. Some of my interlocutors requested that I use only Ol-Chiki script to transcribe the Santali in this dissertation. However, because this dissertation is meant to be read by a wider, English-reading audience, I have instead chosen to use a modified Roman script to represent Santali words. As a disclaimer, in no way am I arguing that this script is more accurate than Ol-Chiki or Santali Roman or any other script in representing the sounds of Santali. In order to make my transcription choices more transparent, I have provided a table below showing the orthography I have chosen to employ in this dissertation, and its IPA and Ol-Chiki equivalents.

Modified Roman  
(transcription)

IPA

Ol-Chiki characters

A	a	ᱠ
e	e, ε	ᱡ
i	i	ᱢ
o <sup>1</sup>	o	ᱣ ᱤ
u	u	ᱦ
t	t̪	ᱨ
k	k	ᱩ
s	s	ᱪ
c	c	ᱫ

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a distinction made in Santali Roman and Ol-Chiki between o (ᱣ, ᱤ) and ɔ (o, ᱦ). I have chosen for the sake of simplicity not to distinguish between these two characters. Interestingly, according to an ongoing research by Minegishi, Takashima, and Murmu (2010) there is no phonological contrast between o and ɔ in the Santali corpus they recorded. This suggests that this may be an artifact of missionaries, and later scriptmakers' exposure to Bengali and eastern Brahmi script where this contrast is present.

p	p	ᵐ
t	t	ᵐ
g, k'	g, k ?	ᵐ <sup>ε</sup>
j, c'	ʒ, ʃ ?	ᵐ
h	h	ᵐ
d, t'	ᵎ, t ?	ᵐ
ᵎ	ᵎ	ᵐ
b, p'	b, p?	ᵐ
ng	ŋ	ᵐ
m	m	ᵐ
ᵐ	ᵐ	ᵐ
n	ᵐ	ᵐ
n	n	ᵐ
ow	ow	ᵐ
l	l	ᵐ
w	w	ᵐ
r	r	ᵐ
y	j	ᵐ
ɖ	r	ᵐ
h (cons+h, aspiration)	(consonant) <sup>h</sup>	ᵐ
ᵐ	ᵐ/ᵐ <sup>3</sup>	.
	- ? (word finally)	ᵐ
n (nasalizer)	n	.

## II. Transcripts

The following is a key to the transcript conventions used in this dissertation:

[-] latching

[...] incomprehensible speech

*sung text*

[overlapping speech]

---

<sup>2</sup> The Ol-Chiki characters that correspond to a stop become glottalized word finally unless preceded by a ᵐ (ohot) which de-glottalizes the stop

<sup>3</sup> Like note 1 for ᵐ (ᵐ), see Minegishi, Takashima, and Murmu (2011)

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the role of script in the politicization of literacy among the Santals, an indigenous Austro-Asiatic language community in eastern India. Santals are spread throughout numerous states in eastern India and are subject to those states' official linguistic-graphic regimes, always in the dominant Indo-European vernacular. Most Santals are therefore multilingual in Santali, the different Indo-European vernaculars (Hindi, Oriya, Bangla, Assamese, Nepali, etc.), and other local varieties. Santali is also written in multiple scripts, including the dominant Brahmi scripts associated with Indo-European, a Romanized alphabet created by missionaries, and Ol-Chiki, a visually distinct script developed this century for Santali writing.

The multilingual, multiscriptal situation reveals a complex discourse in which 'literacy' cannot be associated with a single script or code. Rather, it emerges as a constellation of disparate graphic and linguistic repertoires that variably align as part of larger social and political networks. It is through the linkages constructed between social and political ideologies, material and graphic form, linguistic repertoires, and performance practices that particular graphic-linguistic constellations become icons of sociopolitical difference and are mobilized in political assertions of autonomy.

This dissertation charts the range of social and political networks among Santali speakers and analyzes their co-constitutive relationship with constellations of graphic, referential, and



performative features of language use. In emphasizing the ways Santali speakers and writers variably deploy these constellations in public spaces, schools, and media; the analysis challenges fixed, identity-based theorizations of indigenous social movements, while at the same time showing how fluid script-code alignments allow Santals to contest their social subordination and vie for control over resources in a social landscape marked by caste domination and exclusion.

Reconceiving questions of writing and literacy in light of the nexus between script, performance, and politics, the dissertation addresses several issues within anthropology, linguistics, and social and cultural theory more broadly, such as the question of ‘genre’ and its relation with literacy and graphic practice, the concept of ‘public’ as constituted by graphic circulation, the spatial and temporal dimensions of language, and the role of literacy projects in political mobilizations in indigenous and postcolonial contexts.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

High overhead, the sun was burning the pavement below. Crowds started pouring in from villages near and far, on busses and rented jeeps, people sitting on the top waving banners and banging loud drums. The mood was lively but also with the requisite amount of anger necessary for a good political rally. The streets of Rani Rashmoni Road in central Calcutta, surrounded by the towering monuments of the British Raj, gazed on by the visages of Clive, Marx, Lenin, and Indian nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose, began to fill up. It could have been just another political rally like those that the city witnessed almost every day, but this was different. Those entering were not allied with any political party. Nor were they laborers or any of the other city's constituencies huddled together to demand rights and improvement in services. The people gathered were *adivasis* from the region's largest indigenous group, the Santals, arriving from as far away as the hilly forested regions hundreds of kilometers distant to as near as the more recent migrant settlements closer to the great metropolis, coming together to demand increased recognition for *OI-Chiki*, a script of the Santali language.

The atmosphere was festive: there was a stage erected, and speakers were waxing on about the next steps being taken for increased government recognition of the script. Years before the script had been accepted as the official script of the Santali language by the West Bengal government, and a few years earlier, in 2008, the central government had finally accepted Santali as an official language of the state of India. Yet people were still showing up to protest,

demanding the implementation of Ol-Chiki script in schools and colleges. Moreover, they were asking that Ol-Chiki be the only script used to write Santali, and that Santals should be the only ones hired to teach the language and script. At the same time bookstalls had been set up on the road in the midst of the gathering. They were selling Santali-language books, magazines, and newspapers in Eastern Brahmi (Bengali), Devanagari, and Ol-Chiki scripts. In addition, there were books in Bengali and English as well on indigenous-related issues. Many magazines, banners, and even the awning on the stage had Roman script transcriptions. “Why are you not selling only in Ol-Chiki?” a young student from a neighboring Calcutta suburb asked a bookseller, as he flipped through a Santali book in Eastern Brahmi script. “We want to,” the bookseller responded. “Maybe one day.”

A few blocks up the street, a postal service employee and journal editor was preparing to take proofs to print of one of the oldest continually running Santali language magazines, *Jugsirjol*, printed in the Santali Roman script developed by nineteenth century missionaries. This magazine would be distributed all over the state of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam, and even as far away as Europe and Mexico. Ten minutes down the road from the rally in about two hours, a famous Santali poet, who had never learned Ol-Chiki script, was about to start the All-India Radio hour-long news broadcast in Santali. This broadcast would be heard in villages all over eastern India.

While indeed Santali was made an “official” language of India, one of the few tribal languages to achieve such status, and the only representative of India’s Austro-Asiatic languages ever to be constitutionally recognized, it differed from the other official languages in a few central respects. Most of the official languages of India were also the official languages of a particular state, whereas Santali-speakers are widely dispersed, living across the border regions

of the Indian states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar, and Assam, as well as the border areas of the neighboring states of Bangladesh and Nepal. There was no centralized authority that has standardized the language or created a uniform script. In addition, the language is spoken in a multilingual and multiscriptal environment, and exists, within any particular area, and in any given moment in time, as a *plural* constellation of script, code, performance, and politics. The lack of state support and group consensus has fuelled a continuation of political activity despite formal recognition of the language. This is because discussion about ‘language’ and ‘script’ are not only about recognition, but also about autonomy, an idea that does not, as this dissertation demonstrates, have a singular trajectory.

Santali is at once a unique and a typical case of the numerous struggles and social movements around language, script, caste, and autonomy in India. While the situation may differ from many of the studies of the dominant regional vernaculars in India and other parts of the world where script and code have been neatly aligned and regimented, the situation of multiscriptality in India and elsewhere is far more common for language communities who have been separated by linguistic and territorial borders as a result of colonialism and state-formation, as well as those who have been subject to continuous displacement and migration. As many indigenous communities around the world struggle to gain an equal footing in a political sphere with which they have been compelled to engage on unequal terms, while also fighting to preserve a measure of autonomy from state intervention, the creation of writing systems and programs to revive and maintain linguistic codes has become a key site of “indigenous articulation” (Clifford 2001).

In the following pages, I examine these articulations as they relate to the Santals, one of India’s largest “scheduled tribe” (or ST) communities, numbering over five million, and the

collective crafting of a Santali-language literacy from a long history of multilingualism, multiscryptality, and political struggles for autonomy. I do not (and cannot) take script or language or politics as a singular entity, but instead employ the term “constellation” to describe how scripts and codes are ideologically aligned with multiple domains of semiotic practice and crafted into recognizable forms that can be narrated and acted upon. For instance, the Ol-Chiki script, the subject of the passions that fuelled the Kolkata rally, is comprised of a constellation of multiple graphic logics, political histories, and performative repertoires that transcend its role as a simple graphic representation of the Santali sound system. Assembled through connections of multiple, independently delineated points existing relationally with other scripts and languages, Ol-Chiki links together diverse histories of reading, writing, and politics.

The term “constellation” at once foregrounds the visual aspect of linguistic practice, and at the same time underscores the ways in forms are integrated and configured through interpretive practices. While linguistic anthropology has provided frameworks through which one can analyze the differential organization of multiple semiotic features, such as the concept of register or repertoire, these theories continue to foreground discourse as the primary modality of practice. Other concepts, such as scale or chronotope, integrate the spatial and temporal features of language, but do not speak as much to the visual and material dimensions of communicative practice. Unlike these terms, constellation highlights the processes by which graphic, sonic, discursive, and artifactual modalities come together to create recognizable forms that can subsequently be circulated, narrativized, and acted upon politically.

In addition to presenting a different way of conceptualizing linguistic practice, this dissertation also argues for a re-conceptualization of politics in relation to the histories and aspirations of the Santals with whom I worked. The narratives associated with the constellations

I examine here have multiple political significations that I group broadly under the term autonomy. Autonomy, as I explain below, connects constellations of script, code, and performance with long-standing Santal discourses of freedom from the incorporation into a hierarchically organized caste and class system, manifested in historical events such as the 1855 Santal rebellion) as well as contemporary politics among Santals today.

In using the word autonomy I mean something other than a generalized notion of sovereignty, for it is not about usurping state power, nor does the term index resistance, recognition, or an independently delineated notion of identity politics. Instead, I argue that Santal relations with the state, both in their demands upon the state for self-governance as well as in their contestations over language and script stem from long-standing experiences of domination, exclusion, and struggle within the complicated social landscape of rural eastern India where numerous caste communities have asserted domination and control over resources, both economic and communicative. Ol-Chiki and other independent scripts have emerged in part as a way of asserting autonomy in a multilingual and multiscriptural milieu where languages and scripts have long been associated with caste domination. However, the continued use of multiple scripts and codes by Santals for political purposes suggests a multi-layered notion of autonomy, of which Ol-Chiki only forms one part. The use of Eastern Brahmi and Roman, either independently or in concert with Ol-Chiki provides a more complicated account of autonomy that goes beyond the assertion of a single Santal identity or unified accounts of resistance or recognition.

I trace the formation of these constellations and their political implications in the performance-spaces of Santal song and dance, in the history of the creation of scripts and their dissemination, in everyday spaces of communicative activity such as the marketplace and the

school, and in the fashioning of publics through the creation and dissemination of Santali-language media. Like the diversity of those gathering on the streets of Calcutta, I follow the circulation of these movements in settings ranging from urban political centers to the forested villages on the West Bengal and Jharkhand border, where the concerns around language and script are part of a much broader and historically rooted politics of autonomy.

## ***II. Santals and the narrative origins of Santali***

Santali is classified by linguists to be a Munda language, a branch of the Austro-Asiatic family. The morphology, syntax, and phonology markedly differ from neighboring Indo-European varieties. Almost all Munda languages are spoken in eastern and northeastern India, and all native Munda speakers are considered to be scheduled "tribes" by the Indian government. Most Munda speakers are at least multilingual, commanding at least one or more Indo-European varieties as well. Hence, there is a significant amount of code-switching and code-mixing as part of Santali speakers' linguistic repertoires.

In this multilingual situation, a conception of language remains one of the primary ways Santals narrate their distinction from their caste-Hindu neighbors. Santals refer to themselves as *hoḍ* (men) or *hoḍ hopon* (children of men), contrasting themselves from caste-Hindus, whom they call *diku*. Similarly, Santals refer to Santali as *hoḍ roḍ* (speech of men) and to the dominant Indo-European vernaculars as *diku roḍ* (speech of dikus). Though Santals employ *diku* registers in a wide range of situations, from ordinary conversation to sung performance, in metapragmatic discourse there remains a stark division between what varieties are considered community-internal and those that are seen as foreign. These distinctions are upheld in narratives of community-formation in which the telling of a creation story accounts for the organization of

Santal clans, the community-internal administration of villages, and the shared experience of migration. In addition, these stories are accompanied by a language ideology in which, unlike for caste-Hindus, who claim Sanskrit as an original language, or Muslims, for whom Arabic is the classical language, makes no distinction between an ancestral Santali language and contemporary usage. The contemporary form of speech, or *rod*, according to Santals, spoken by the first man and woman, has accompanied the various clans of *hod* through a turbulent history of migration, dispersal, and schism.

The narration of the Santal creation story occurs both during birth and death ceremonies, as well as during the festival of *Jom-Sim*, conducted to promote community well being, or the annual monsoon festival of *Karam*. It serves as a central discursive genre through which the Santal community is constituted and reaffirmed, differentiating the community of men from non-Santals through a shared history of migration, and renewing the affiliation between community, kin relations, and language. The story is usually told at night, and lasts the entire night and day, accompanied by song and rituals. While the story differs by storyteller and region, the basic outline remains the same. Versions of the story have also been well documented, even as early as the nineteenth century by missionaries (Skrefsrud 1942, Andersen 2011).

The story begins with the creation of the earth out of a cosmic emptiness, and before the Earth was all water. Then the various spirits, such as that of the great hill (*Marang Buru*), the Sacred Grove (*Jaher Era*), who were themselves created by an even greater cosmic force, ordered Earth to be raised from the sea. Animals and plants were created, and a bird couple laid two eggs, out of which the first man and woman, a brother and sister named Pilchu *Haḍam* (old-man Pilchu) and Pilchu *Buḍhi* (old-woman Pilchu) were born. The spirits brought them down the sacred drink, a rice beer called *haṇḍi*, which is still very popular among Santals and used in



ritual occasions. The brother and sister drank the beer, and danced and sang, and copulated.

Hence the human race (*hođ*) was born, in Levi-Straussian style, out of a primordial act of incest.

Seven boys and seven girls were born, and the boys were given seven clan names (*pařis*). From then, the migrations began. They group started moving, from the primal land of *Hihđi Pipđi* to other places (Andersen et al. 2011:63). Along the way, they increased their fold, and soon as they migrated, the original clan lineages were forgotten. Hence, nobody knew who their relatives were, and they started breeding together. The great cosmic force, in earlier narratives called by the name *Thakur*, was angry at this incestual transgression, and he decided to annihilate them with fire rain (63). Only two were saved, and they returned to the primal place *Hihđi Pipđi*. This time twelve boys and girls were born to them, and they decided to separate the boys and girls and take them to different countries. The clan structure was resurrected and exogamy among the clans became strictly enforced. Again, the ancestral people begin on their series of migrations.

The narrative continues, discussing the movement and settlement of the clans in other places. At one point, when they settled in the land of Champa, each clan created their own forts, called *gađ*, and thus each clan was associated with a particular location. The Kiskus or the 'Kings' lived in Koenda Gađ, the Murmus, the 'priests' lived in Champa Gađ, the Mandis or the 'wealthy' lived in Badoli Gađ, the Hembroms, the 'merchants' in Khairi Gađ, the Sorens, the 'soldiers' in Cae Baher Gađ, the Tudus, the 'performers' in Luibari Lukuibari Gađ, and so on. However, again an act of deception, where an adopted son turned against the clans and allowed invading armies of *Dikus* (foreigners) to attack the fort, further dispersed the people. Again the various clans were mixed, wandering through various "countries" (*disom*) each with a unique name. Different sub-clans ended up settling together amongst Hindus, Muslims, and others, and

from there further migrations continued, up to the contemporary period, when labor, agriculture, and political upheaval continue the series of migrations that have marked the collective Santal experience since the beginning of time.

In their stories, Santals narrate themselves as people who have been in constant migration. Yet at various points in the story, the Santals also settled, only to move again. One level of kinship structure, the level of clan, or in Santali, *p̄aris*, can be seen as emerging from the shared, and distinct, experience of migration. The clans diverge in their migratory histories, and each clan conceives of themselves as having arrived from different points on the migratory path. For all Santals, the primordial place of *Hih̄ḍi Pip̄ḍi* is shared, but once the clans begin to separate and move, we see different points of migration, illustrated by the invocation of the forts in Cae-Champa country, which allow dispersed clans to mark a shared experience. Clans are further divided into sub-units, or sub-clans, which is a genealogical unit that has experienced a shared history of migration up until the present day. Sub-clans formed through a process of what Bateson called "schismogenesis" (Bateson 1972), where schisms between clans created new clans, which then began their own migratory journey.

Thus, despite dispersal and schismogenesis, unity is affirmed within the creation story at the level of clan or *p̄aris*. The land of Champa, where all the clans lived together in separate forts, free from *diku* rule, is considered to be a period of freedom and prosperity. The forts continue to be invoked among Santals today as a means of clan identification, and I would frequently see their names used on houses and written in forms of address during my fieldwork. The *p̄aris*, though considered separate, were unified through exogamous marriage, binding together the forts in relationships of exchange and affinal kinship. Like the *p̄aris*, the Santali language also marks both unity and difference, and like clan identifications, remains stable

despite the long history of political and social upheaval and dissolution. Hence, another name for the Santali language in Santali is *parisi* ('of the *paris*?), illustrating the metapragmatic interpenetration between conceptions of clan and language.

On the one hand, we see how kinship is patterned on an experience of migration and dispersal. Yet kinship is also constructed through patterns of settlement. Throughout the vast Santali speaking area, Santals consider themselves to live in local village settlement units, called *atu*. In each of these settlement units there is a headman (*majhi*), a priest (*nayike*) and three other members that consist of the *more hor* (five man council). The *majhi* is considered to be descended from or affiliated with the first sub-clan to have settled the village. The *atu* is nested in a larger administrative unit called a *disom* (country) that is organized by an administrative head called a *pargana*. This social administration, mapped in and through networks of both kinship and specifically Santali language use, also serves to delineate local communities of *hoq* from their *diku* neighbors.

#### *The Santal as adivasi*

During my fieldwork in a rural area in the border region between West Bengal and Jharkhand in eastern India, it was very common for most Santals to refer to themselves as *adivasis* (a Sanskrit neologism for 'original inhabitants'). However in this community, the term *adivasi* was highly specific, referring not to all members of scheduled tribe communities, but mostly to Santals, although it was adopted by other Scheduled Tribe communities especially during periods of political struggle. Present-day Santal political assertion has its roots in the political economy of colonial India, particularly with respect to settlement and cultivation of land. As Sammadar (1998) notes, landlords (*zamindars*) previously used to negotiate with *majhis* for rights to settlement of Santal communities and the payment of tribute. *Majhis* controlled the

settlement of village communities, and collected taxes on landlords' behalf, and thus the *atu* and *pargana* maintained some degree of political and administrative autonomy. This flexibility was crucial in responding to the ecology of the forest environment in which Santals resided, in which cultivation cycles were highly uncertain, forests had to be consistently reclaimed in order to maintain cultivation, and migration and dispersal, part of Santal social life, could be managed.

However, as British power increased in Bengal in the late eighteenth century, new laws known as "permanent settlement" (cf. Guha 1963) were passed to ensure more regular revenue collection from cultivators by landlords (and eventually by the colonial government). In this system, revenue was to be collected directly from the cultivator at fixed amounts, bypassing the negotiations between headmen and representatives of the landed estates. For groups such as the Santals, this proved disastrous, and led to mass evictions (ibid.). Instead of being able to rely on headmen, the only recourse against eviction was litigation in the courts, which Santals, due to financial limitations and a lack of familiarity with the colonial justice system, were usually unable to pursue, or to assume high debt burdens. In 1855, as a response to increasing taxation burdens and high-interest moneylending, Santal headmen spearheaded a revolt in the Damin-i-koh area of what is now northern Jharkhand. This massive revolt spread quickly to other parts of the Santal-speaking area, all the way to Chota Nagpur and southwest Bengal. This revolt known as the Santal "Hul," lasted for almost two years, and posed a serious threat to British governance in the region. Thousands of Santals and others in the region died, and eventually the rebellion was suppressed. In response to the rebellion, the British created a special district known as the "Santal Parganas" in Damin-i-koh, in which non-Santal settlement was restricted, and high-interest moneylending was regulated.

The Santal "Hul" marked the first of a series of rebellions in which Santals joined with

other groups to challenge colonial sovereignty and administration over territory. In the early twentieth century, tribal groups organized under the term "Kherwal," and undertook a series of rebellions against British rule and missionary influence in the Damin-i-koh area. The term "Kherwal" was soon embraced by many in the Santali-speaking territory. In 1922-1923, a Santal-led rebellion in Mayurbhanj, Orissa sparked another large rebellion termed *deshgaro* or 'seize the country.' Sammadar argues that rebellions such as these in the late twentieth century illustrated an emerging territorial consciousness among tribal communities, in which the forested regions where they resided were linked through similar ecological and economic pressures, as well as a political history of revolt and rebellion.

In the late 1930's, the Munda tribal leader Jaipal Singh convened the "Adivasi Mahasabha," an organization that was meant to counter claims made by the Hindu Mahasabha to count tribals within their ranks. The leaders of the Adivasi Mahasabha argued that tribal communities were the "original inhabitants" of India, and have been subject to exploitation at the hands of upper-caste Hindus and Muslims since even before the British. Thus, they were deserving of special rights, such as laws maintaining the integrity of the headman system and communal rights over land. The Adivasi Mahasabha also advocated that an *adivasi*-majority state be carved out of the tribal majority districts of the Indian states of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. They argued that though scheduled tribe communities were linguistically and culturally diverse, they were united in the fact that they existed outside the Hindu caste-system, maintained autonomous social administration, and all had claims to indigeneity.

Santals, as one of the largest scheduled tribe communities, embraced the "adivasi" term and the movement for Jharkhand. Though at first there was some dispute, especially among

Santal elite whether they should call themselves "adivasi" or aspire to parity with caste-Hindus (Orans 1965, Sammadar 1998), adivasi political activism and the goal of Jharkhand eventually became popular in adivasi areas. Santals started referring to themselves as "adivasis" and their language as "adivasi." Adivasi became a way to politically differentiate the Santal community from caste Hindus, as well as at various points other tribal groups such as the Bhumij or Kheria. Famous Santal songs such as Ramchand Murmu's *Debon Tengon Adibasi Bir* (Stand up, we the adivasi heroes) became extremely influential in the Santali speaking areas, and sparked an efflorescence of Santali-language poetry. While Jharkhand eventually became formed in 2000, it only included the southern districts of Bihar, leaving out the neighboring districts of West Bengal and Orissa. Yet in those districts, the term adivasi is still related to the ongoing struggle for Jharkhand as well as autonomy from local caste-hierarchies, and also has been utilized by various groups in the regions to claim political autonomy vis-a-vis the state.

### *Scripting Santali*

The Munda languages were not considered "written" languages (i.e. were not tied to an alphabetic or syllabic script) until the mid nineteenth century. The first Santali "writing" was a printed volume of folk songs collected by American missionary Jeremiah Phillips from Mayurbhanj district, Orissa, and published in Bengali script in 1845. Missionaries were also active in the Santal Parganas area of what is now north Jharkhand, and in the 1870s, Norwegian missionary L.O. Skrefsrud adapted German scholar Karl Lepsius's Roman script for writing and printing Santali, subsequently establishing the first Santali-language printing press at the mission station in Benagaria, Jharkhand. Skrefsrud, who was interested in Santali literature and linguistics, printed numerous volumes such as "A Grammar of the Santali Language" (1873) and the famous "Rites and Institutions of the Santals" (1887) in the new Santali Roman scripts,

which he collected after years of sitting and recording the stories of Santali elder Kalyan Guru. Due to Skrefsrud's pioneering efforts, the Benagaria mission soon launched Santali-medium education. Skrefsrud's work was expanded by Norwegian missionary Paul Olaf Bodding who revised the Santali Roman script, and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, published numerous collections of folk tales, a five volume Santali dictionary, an extensive Santali grammar, and a full translation of the New Testament in Santali Roman script (Hembrom 2007).

By this time, in the Santal Parganas areas of Jharkhand and northern areas of West Bengal, where missionary education had taken root, the Roman script was projected as the "Santali script." The Santali Bible was, and continues to be, written in Roman script, as is most church and mission-related material. In addition, some of the longest-running Santali literary and cultural journals are written in Roman script. Santali education in the Roman script was often accompanied by a discourse that intimated that the Santali language, culture, and religion were completely autonomous from that of caste-Hindus with whom they had lived for centuries, and that the Santal were a "national" community in their own right. This discourse encouraged therefore an independent linguistic and graphic identity. The discourse of cultural and linguistic autonomy in part aimed to facilitate evangelism and draw prospective converts away from adopting "Hindu" practices, but it was also a distinctive feature of the Christian philosophy of Skrefsrud and Bodding (Carrin-Bouez 1986). However, despite the missionary emphasis on the Roman script, non-Christian (and even some Christian) Santals continued to write the language in the dominant regional script. For instance, the first non-mission Santali publication, Majhi Ramdas Tudu's "Kherwal Bongsho Dharam Puthi" (The religious book of the Kherwals [a term for Munda-speaking people]), was published in Calcutta in 1894 in Eastern Brahmi script. Santali literature's most famous poet, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu, from Midnapur district, West

Bengal, published most of his work in Eastern Brahmi script, as initially did the famous dramatist and poet from Orissa, Pandit Raghunath Murmu (Pal 2006).

Following Indian independence, the Santali area was distributed between the states of Assam, Bihar (later to become two states, Bihar and Jharkhand), West Bengal, and Orissa. While technically there was only one official language, each state continued to support Santali writing in the respective official Brahmi-based script of that state. For instance, in Bihar, the literary magazine *Hoḍ Sombad* was started to support Santali writing in Devanagari, and offered a platform to many young writers. In West Bengal, the government initiated an influential magazine, *Pachim Bangla*, published in E. Brahmi script. Simultaneously, as primary education in the official languages became more readily available in rural areas, small Santali-language magazines in the various Brahmi scripts started sprouting up throughout the Santali speaking region.

Figure 1.1: Linguistic map of India



Linguistic map of India with distribution of major languages and their alignments with political territory. The arrow is pointing to the major Santali speaking area on the border of Jharkhand (Hindi/Devanagari script), West Bengal (Bengali/Eastern Brahmi script) and Orissa (Oriya/Utkal)



However for many Santals this was as much a cause for anxiety as celebration. From the time of the missionaries, there was a conception, both among literate Christian and non-Christian Santals, that the Santals indeed constituted a linguistically homogenous “national” community. While regional differences in intonation, lexicon, and grammatical structure were recognized, these issues were overlooked in formulations of Santal linguistic and cultural unity. The new graphic “bordering” of Indian states after independence, created the curious new formation where many newly literate Santals, though they could communicate orally across borders, could not read or write across borders, since their literacy was circumscribed by the political territories in which they resided. As the various scripts were no longer part of a wider regional multigraphia, but were now semiotically tied to particular administrative territories by monographic language policies, the proliferation of Santali literature in multiple scripts came to iconize the “bordered” disunity of the Santali language community. The Roman script was still used by those educated in missions, but many non-Christian Santals felt that the script was affiliated too much with Christian institutions to project an inclusive, “national” community. In response, numerous writers and poets created independent Santali scripts that did not borrow characters from other scripts.

The most popular of these created scripts was “Ol Chiki” (writing symbol), attributed to the Santali dramatist and poet Raghunath Murmu. The script was supposedly revealed to Murmu by the Santal spirits (or *bongas*) on a hill near his village in Mayurbhanj district, Orissa in the 1930’s. Like the Roman script, the script was alphabetic, and contained an almost identical phonetic inventory as the Roman script. Yet unlike Roman, supporters claimed that the script was distinctly “Santali,” based on signs and symbols long used for communication by Santals long before alphabetic literacy (Mahapatra 2008). Each grapheme not only had a phonetic value,

but also a separate image-name, i.e., a Santali word that was diagrammatically associated with the grapheme. For instance, the grapheme for /s/, *is* ‘plough beam,’ diagrams a plough while the checked obstruent /t’/ is *ut* ‘mushroom’ diagrams a mushroom, and so on (Mahapatra 1986, 119-121). For Murmu, one of the most important goals of the new script was to unify the Santali language community, which he felt had been divided for too long by political borders. The Santals of Orissa, where Murmu was from, felt this political divide even more acutely, as unlike in neighboring West Bengal and Jharkhand, where there are large numbers of Santals in multiple districts, the Santals in Orissa were concentrated primarily in one district. Right after independence, the Santals of the princely state of Mayurbhanj waged a brief insurrection so that the state could accede to neighboring Bihar (now Jharkhand), where there was a larger Santal population; however, the Indian government quelled the uprising, and Mayurbhanj later joined Orissa. The marginalization of this population from the centers of Santali political and cultural life could be one reason for the enthusiasm and reception among Orissa Santals for the Ol Chiki script (Lotz 2007).

While the term "Santali" is often marshaled by Santali-speakers for political and ideological purposes, as well as while interfacing with state institutions, it is rarely used in practice. As my fieldwork suggests, the names for the variety spoken by Santals often carry an index of evolving political and social relations between Santali speakers and the caste-Hindu communities with which they live. As Santals call their own variety *roḍ* (speech), Bengali Hindus in the area where I conducted fieldwork referred to Santali as *thar* (muted speech). This was particularly common among elder people, and suggested a clear caste differentiation and distancing through the medium of language. However, younger caste-Hindus referred to the Santali variety as *adivasi* or *adivasi bhasha* (adivasi language), illustrating the important role of

the linguistic variety in the assertion of a distinct *adivasi* political identity among Santali speakers. Currently, especially when speakers refer to Santali in its form as a literate and institutionally recognized language, Bengali speakers often refer to the spoken variety as *Ol-Chiki*, referring to the name of the script in which Santali is taught. As the script was the main medium through which the Santali variety was reinterpreted as an institutionally recognized 'language,' the equation of Ol-Chiki script with the Santali spoken variety on the part of non-Santals suggests recognition of a new political dynamic between Santals and caste-Hindus.

### ***III. Script-Code Constellations***

Sociological and ethnographic accounts of literacy have challenged the notion of literacy as a universally acquired cognitive skill (Goody and Watt 1963, Ong 1982, Goody 2000, etc.), focusing attention on the ways in which people constitute texts and evaluate competency through a wide range of reading and writing practices (Street 1984, Besnier 1995, Gee 2010, etc.). However, these studies continue to assume an alignment between a linguistic code and a graphic array of characters, or script, failing to investigate how different semiotic modalities shape practices of reading, writing, and textual circulation and production.

An examination of reading and writing practices among the Santals challenges this assumption. Not only do Santals command multiple codes, but single codes also align with multiple graphic registers. These registers, metapragmatically delineated as script, assume ideological valences distinct from those attached to codes, such that Santali written in Roman, Eastern Brahmi, or Ol-Chiki script is not discursively considered to be the same object. Script-code alignments therefore are not isomorphic, but are socially produced through communicative and performative practices. These practices include reading and writing, which fall within the

traditional domain of the study of literacy, but also extend to other modalities such as song, dance, and drama.

This dissertation's focus on script as a communicative domain distinct from code allows another analytical approach to the study of language in which linguistic concepts are shaped in active engagement with material and visual elements. This is especially true in the production of new scripts such as Ol-Chiki, where linguistic identification is fashioned through correspondences between phoneme, grapheme, and iconic elements of the visual world such as 'fire,' 'earth,' or even 'writing.' However this conception of "script", which combines metalinguistic evaluation with graphic practice, extends even to scripts such as Roman or Eastern Brahmi, altering their signification within a field in which alignments between script and code are never settled. It is these interdependent and multiple social orderings of the material, visual, grammatical, and performative, through which concepts such as "language," "literacy," or "media" emerge. It is these orderings to which I will refer in this dissertation as a communicative (or semiotic) *constellation*.

Constellation on the one hand implies an astronomical metaphor. This is perhaps apt for a study of Santali, where stars (*ipil*) are one of the mirrors of social reality, and are often looked to for guidance. Stars exist as part of an empirical reality, and then are variably shaped into figurative domains by those that gaze upon them. These domains always exist as part of larger narratives, and stars are often seen as bringing the past into a present, with a constellation diagramming a past-present narrative onto the night sky. The metaphor of *constellation* with respect to linguistic-semiotic phenomena echoes linguist Alton Becker's call to rethink language in terms of "shape" rather than "code." "To use shape rather than code," Becker suggests, "is to invite a deictic reversal. The form constitutes reality, the latter reflects one" (1995, 237).

The use of the term constellation has precedent in social theory, and is relevant for a social-theoretic study of language and graphic practice. In outlining the task of a social scientist in his famous essay “*Objectivity*” in *Social Science*, Max Weber says:

“...because knowledge of cultural events is inconceivable except on the basis of significance which the concrete *constellations* of reality have for us in certain individual concrete situations. In which sense and in which situations this is the case is not revealed to us by any law; it is decided according to the value-ideas in the light of which we view ‘culture’ in each individual case. ‘Culture’ is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance’ “ (1969 [1949], 80-81, my emphasis).<sup>1</sup>

Weber in this excerpt argues that culture is made up of *two* parts: form (the concrete *constellations* of reality) and the ‘value-ideas’ that endow “significance” onto those forms. In contemporary linguistic anthropology, what Weber refers to as ‘value-ideas’ have come to be understood through the lens of ‘ideology,’ which “envision and enact links of language to group and personal identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology...often underpin[ning] fundamental social institutions (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, 55-56; also cf. Silverstein 1979; Schieffelin et al. 1998, Kroskrity 2000, etc.). In this view, “constellations of reality” are not seen as separate from “value-ideas” but inextricably “linked” through ideologically informed speaker organization of linguistic features into recognizable categories, concepts, and value-systems. Drawing on the concept of ideology, I propose then a new idea of constellation in which multiple semiotic modalities, though analytically separate (like individual stars in the night sky) are shaped and brought together into constellations of reality through culturally-informed evaluative processes. Semiotically, the ‘constellation’ itself could be seen as akin to what Peirce (1955) has called a “diagrammatic icon”, in which form and interpretation are intertwined. It is the contiguous and dialectical “nexus” (Silverstein 2004) between these constellations through which speakers indexically construct abstractions such as “literacy” or “media.”

Another mention of the term ‘constellation’ relevant to this project comes from Walter Benjamin, who mentions it in the last part of his provocative *Theses on the philosophy of history*. Benjamin writes:

“Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical...A historian who takes this as a point of departure stops telling the the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the *constellation* which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now,’ Which is shot through with chips of Messianic time” (1968, 263).<sup>2</sup>

In his formulation, a constellation not only connects form with significance, but also provides for a non-historicist sense of temporality in which stories of the past are assimilated within the space-time of the contemporary. Thus the creation of the constellation allows multiple pasts to co-exist within the present, connecting in temporal simultaneity events of a ‘definite earlier’ with the present moment. Benjamin’s formulation allows for the opening of the constellation to a multiplicity of divergent, and even conflicting temporalities, including ones that have the potential to reconfigure political relations. The possibilities for multiple readings of history and renderings of both space and time inhere in the iconic construction of graphic and linguistic constellations (cf. Parmentier 1985, 1987). With respect to the Santali material I examine here, it is this potential which I gloss as the “politics of autonomy.”

The term ‘constellation’ has precedent in linguistic anthropological study as well, particularly in the dialogical approach outlined by Tedlock and Mannheim (1995). Tedlock and Mannheim argue that the basic units of linguistic anthropological analysis are neither individuals (as they are in cognitive-based linguistic approaches) nor groups (as in much of anthropological analysis). Rather, they suggest,

The task becomes one of identifying the social conditions of the emergence of linguistic and cultural forms, of their distribution among speakers, and

of subjectivity itself as an embodied *constellation* of voices (8).

Unlike then a mere “assortment” or “configuration” of voices, Tedlock and Mannheim argue that the “embodied constellation” has a recognizable form, a shape which emerges and coheres out of the multiplicity and plurality present in the interactions between speakers and groups. This is what Tedlock and Mannheim refer to as “subjectivity.” In this dissertation, linguistic and graphic form, as well more complex domains such as those of media and literacy, are posited as constellations of multiple voices, linguistic forms, and interpretative ideologies, and are given an embodied shape in both material and performative practice, resulting in constellations such as that of script. Unlike the structural view of language, which sees linguistic structure as independent from social practice, the constellation takes social practice as its central, constitutive feature, in which graphic, linguistic, and material features like pulsating stars, are shaped into recognizable, and dialogic, relations with each other through specific communicative practices. It is through these dialogic relations that communicative forms come to assume social meaning.

While ‘dialogue’ implies only *two* voices in conversation with each other, the term ‘constellation,’ as implied by Tedlock and Mannheim, expands the notion to a multiplicity of interacting communicative elements. This multiplicity is implied by Bakhtin’s (1981) terms “heteroglossia” and “polyphony.” In the setting where I conducted my fieldwork in eastern India, which is a highly plurilingual and multiscrptal environment, preserving this idea of multiplicity would be essential to any sociolinguistic or ethnographic study. Consequently, I never discuss a singular practice, but a “network” of practices as well as a “network” of participants (positioned socially) that exist in dialogic relation to one another from which certain social and linguistic constellations emerge. In describing “constellation” as composed of “networks,” I allude to Latour’s (2005) theory that ‘society’ or the ‘social’ is comprised of

symmetric and topographically flat associations between action-generating elements ('actors,' including both people and 'things'). Within these larger networks of forms, practices, and objects are socially positioned networks of participants, who can expand, contract, or even reassemble constellations by fashioning different semiotic associations within any given moment of interaction (Latour 2010, Milroy 1987, Silverstein 2004).

Looking at practices and social positions in terms of networks allows an analyst to account for certain group categories such as "caste" or "tribe," in terms of actual practices, rather than an inherited or professed identity. From these networks of practice, participants, drawing on the metalinguistic and poetic functions of language (Jakobson 1956), trace intertextual and interdiscursive (Kristeva 1980, Todorov 1990, Bauman and Briggs 1992, Silverstein 2005) 'lines' that connect certain communicative elements within their interaction, resulting in multidimensional constellations. These elements include the grammatical and discursive features of communication (such as phonetic features, syntax, stress, tone, etc.), graphic features (visual form), and the modalities of communicative practice (such as performative, interactional, or artifactual modalities). These lines order these features not only synchronically but also diachronically, providing a spatiotemporal depth to the constellation.

In addition, within a communicative modality, grammatical, discursive, and graphic features together produce a set of metadiscursively recognizable "genres" (Duranti 1983, Bakhtin 1986, Hanks 1987). Genres themselves are interdiscursive "constellations," and they are also comprised of "constellations" or bundles of features which are intertextually and interdiscursively organized. While "genres" are one way in which constellations become metadiscursively entextualized, they are often not enough, for often the intertextual links that comprise a genre far transcend the specific boundaries of a named 'genre.' This is because, as



Irvine (2005) suggests, the creation of genres themselves precipitate “gaps” or “rips and tears in the interdiscursive fabric” (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1992). In situations of forced assimilation, such as those experienced by First Nations communities in the Yukon Territory, Canada, Meek has termed the various misalignments between institutional expectations (linguistic and social) and discursive genres as “sociolinguistic disjuncture” (Meek 2010). In this study I will adopt this term to show how sociolinguistic disjunctures interact with semiotic modalities that cross both performative domains as well as material domains through which Santals configure new constellations, such as forms of song and dance that are intertextually aligned with practices of writing and script. The concept of constellation therefore provides a formal way to describe ways in which performative modalities are connected beyond boundaries of code, text, or genre (cf. Schieffelin and Feld 1979, Besnier 1988, Faudree 2012).

#### *Constellations of script and code*

When I first arrived in Calcutta in 2007, I began studying Santali with a local Bengali professor. He specialized in Bengali linguistics, though his years of service at a university in West Midnapur district, an area of West Bengal that had a large Santal population had spurred him to learn Santali and explore the language in further detail. As we began the study, he told me at the very outset that unfortunately, the study of Santali was today vexed by the issue of “script.” He said that debates around “language” were confusing “language” with “script;” fights between partisans of Ol-Chiki and Roman scripts were stunting the literary and linguistic development of the language. He himself preferred the use of Bengali script, because he said it was more widely available and had the most literature written in it; Roman also had a significant corpus. The fight for Ol-Chiki, he believed, was a fruitless endeavor. This opinion was echoed by many Santals as well, including well-known writers and editors.

Opposing the linguist's view was an Ol-Chiki activist and board member of the West Bengal branch of ASECA; a bank manager by profession, but also enrolled in a Phd program in linguistics and literature at Calcutta University. His argument was the exact opposite, that the unique characteristics of the Santali language could only be adequately expressed through the medium of the Ol-Chiki script. Unlike the linguist, who argued that attention to script inhibited the development of the language, the activist argued that only due to the script did the language “develop” and eventually attain Constitutional recognition. In almost every discussion I had with anyone, both Santal and non-Santal who was involved with the production, dissemination, or learning of Santali, the issue of ‘script’ and ‘language’ was raised.

The debates around script in Santali reveal the central, though often overlooked role, of script in the construction and consolidation of national languages, especially in the emerging nation-states in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Turkey, the success of language reform involved the whole-scale replacement of the multilingual and multigraphic repertoires in use in the erstwhile Ottoman empire with the Roman script, creating the new, modern language of ‘Turkish’ (Trix 1999, Colak 2008). In Japan, on the other hand, the consolidation of a single national language (*kokugo*) resulted in the regimentation of a multigraphic repertoire, in which three different scripts functionally differentiated lexemes and morphemes within written Japanese (Unger 1996, Tranter 2008). The years leading up to Indian independence were also defined by the issue of language and script, notably the the debate over Hindi and Urdu, which, as scholars have noted (C. King 1994, R. King 2001, Ahmad 2008) was more a matter of what script should the shared lingua franca of northern India be written in for the new national ‘language.’ The idea that a single territory should have one “language” was as much, if not more so, a question of regimenting a particular script-code alignment in order to create that language.

“Language,” itself an ideological construction that simultaneously signifies a territory or community of speakers (Silverstein 1998, 2000; Makoni and Pennycook 2005), could be seen as a particular constellation in which code features are brought into alignment with a graphic repertoire through particular practices and institutional protocols.

However, despite national projects to regiment script and code and eliminate variability, language communities have continued to invent new scripts with various degrees of functionality as a result of encounters with formal literacy. For instance, in West Africa, numerous cases of new scripts have been documented, such as the Vai script, which is used for letter-writing and informal communication alongside Roman and Arabic (Scribner and Cole 1978), or the N’ko scripts, which have are employed by different Mande-speaking communities as part of a region-wide movement as opposed to the colonial language, French, and as a way of orthographically transmitting ‘traditional’ knowledge, such as healing practices (Wyrod 2008). The development of recently invented scripts for minority languages is indeed a global phenomenon, stretching from southeast Asia (Smalley et al. 1998, Sidwell 2008) to North America (Collins 1998, Bender 2002).

While the literature on national language debates and the development of new scripts have drawn importance to the debates around language and script, these studies have not focused as much attention on what linguist Udaya Narayana Singh calls “multiscriptality” (2000), or the use of many scripts to write one language or the use of a single script to write many languages. In the case of Santali, which is written simultaneously in Roman, Devanagari, Oriya, Eastern Brahmi, and Ol-Chiki scripts, one may trace both a history of the attempts (both successful and failed) of the postcolonial Indian state to align and coordinate its multiple national languages with single script regimes, while also charting how newly independent scripts emerge and

participate in an already saturated multiscriptal sociolinguistic field. Thus, unlike many of the studies of newly developed scripts, this study does not view script as a “representation” of language or “identity” (Unseth 2008), but demonstrates instead how Santals organize multiple graphic, linguistic, and semiotic resources, including newly created scripts such as Ol-Chiki, in fluid constellations to assert different, and often conflicting, political visions of autonomy. In this view, scripts, as Matthew Hull (2012) argues, do not simply represent identities or conceptually prior linguistic codes, but “mediate” relations between “subjects and the world” (13), engendering multiple, and often conflicting, social and political subjectivities, even within the same language community.

In addition, the use of the term ‘constellation’ is also premised on a concept of multiplicity that undermines dominant tropes of duality such as diglossia or “digraphia” which still dominate the study of script and language (Unseth 2008). For instance, studies of language within the Indian context have often relied on these dualities. These dualities were no doubt present in formulations such as the distinction between *Sanskrit* (perfected language) and *prakrit* (corrupted language, or ‘vernacular’). This distinction has been enlarged to encompass spatial and temporal distinctions, the former correlated with the idea of a “cosmopolis” (Pollock 1996) and “origin” (Trautman 1997), the latter with a spatially circumscribed “vernacular.” Yet as Pollock (2000, 2006) shows, around the sixteenth century the “vernacular” was infused with the cosmopolitan, with the incorporation of Sanskrit, and later Persian (Alam 2003), into courtly Indo-Aryan and Dravidian regional varieties. Even within pre-modern India we see multiple scalar indexes within literary registers that compromise the distinctions between cosmopolitan/local and originary/derived.

Following British colonialism, and the subsequent organization of the nationalist

movement in India, the Indian elite settled into what Kaviraj (1992, 49) calls a “diglossia or cultural bilingualism” in English and a regional vernacular, which allowed them to mediate between the discursive demands of the “lower orders” within particular regions, elite of different regions, and the British. The insistence on English even continued after Independence, when despite the reluctant adoption of Hindi as the “national language,” English remained entrenched as the language of bureaucracy, and according to Kaviraj, “the language of India’s nation-building was unfortunately, English” (55). Kaviraj believes this has led to increased bifurcation between an increasingly monolingual elite (not fully monolingual, but with less fluency in vernacular languages) and a regional subaltern who lacks fluency both in English and in neighboring vernaculars.

As in many parts of the postcolonial world, a vast number of studies of code-mixing and code-switching in India are concerned primarily with the relationship between English and a dominant regional vernacular (Parasher 1980, Aggarwal 1988, Sahgal 1991, Dasgupta 1993, Advani 2009, Ladousa 2014, etc.), with fewer looking at the relationship between multiple indigenous vernaculars (for a classic study, see Gumperz and Wilson 1971). Studies of multiscrptality are fewer, but even insightful studies such as Ladousa’s examination of Devanagari and Roman use in school advertising in Varanasi (2002) or Ahmed’s analysis of the use of Devanagari script to write Urdu (Ahmed 2011) attempt to complicate perceived situations of digraphia. Within the sociolinguistic milieu in the border area of West Bengal, Orissa, and Jharkhand where I conducted fieldwork, there is no such perception: English, Hindi, Bengali, and Santali, are all variably spoken or written, and there are in fact multiple combinations between script and codes in all these vernaculars. Thus, the emphasis on the dichotomy between English and the vernaculars, or between an opposition between two languages or scripts,

overlooks the ways in which different registers, both denotational and graphic, are coordinated in plurilingual and multiscrptal situations.

Through looking at language in terms of “constellation” one can examine the ways in which different registers of language and script combine and create local conceptions of the ‘local,’ ‘regional,’ and ‘cosmopolitan,’ that relies neither on transcendent dichotomies nor on mediation by a bilingual elite. Commencing the study with the idea of constellation opens up the analysis of communicative practices to multiple semiotic modalities, as well as to the differing evaluations that inform the organization of those modalities. Hence, as Burghart (1993) argues in his analysis of the Maithili movement in Bihar (near to the area where I conducted fieldwork), a multiplicity of scripts and codes are often strategically and dynamically aligned by different caste and regional groupings for use in political and social projects.

In addition to seeing code and script as distinct elements within a particular constellation known as “language,” this dissertation also aims to account for the way in which both code and script are deployed in certain networks of practices to create affective and political attachments. The study of “emotion” in relation to the politics of language has been of interest lately to historians of language politics in India (Mitchell 2010, Ramaswamy 1997). These historians account for how, in early to mid-twentieth century South India, the constellation ‘language’ came to be understood as a “mother tongue,” and how it was fashioned as a subject of devotional and affective attachment. As Mitchell notes, “the demand to be able to sing, pray, conduct business, or simply become literate in a single language now defined as a ‘mother tongue’ displaced a previous understanding of language use as determined by context, geographic location, or purpose rather than identity of the speaker” (2010, 217).

While Mitchell and Ramaswamy account for the role that affective attachment plays in

the historical development of “mother tongues” out of a complex multilingual and multiscriptural milieu, they do not attend to the networks of practices through which that emotion is generated, and how it serves to connect different elements together. In this dissertation, I aim to analyze the ways in which affective ties to script, code, and ‘language’ emerge through a linguistic anthropological notion of “performance” (Hymes 1973, Bauman 1977, Besnier 1990, Samuels 2004, etc.). In this formulation, performance, unlike its more common-sense associations, is not divorced from everyday language use, but rather is a “mode of language use, a way of speaking” (Bauman 1977, 11). It is the culturally specific manipulation of certain linguistic features through both poetic and metalinguistic processes in order to create a distinctive, interpretative frame in which attention is focused and heightened on the non-referential features of language. It is through the socially recognized manipulation of these elements in which speaking, in any society, is endowed with “esthetic and ethical value” (24).

Performance forms a critical element in the constellation I am discussing here. Script and code, I suggest, assume affective and political connotations when tied to an established set of poetic conventions that are used to “key” performance. I claim that it is through an identification with performance practices, in which aesthetic and ethical values associated with linguistic use are cultivated, that identifications with a code and, distinctly, with script are established. These identifications are not singular (and thus cannot be reduced to a singular ‘identity’) but depend on the deployment of genre and the aims of particular performances. Thus, what the Santals call *raska* (pleasure or joy) is notably attached to performance practices such as *seren-enec*’ (song-dance) or drama or social gatherings in which Santali is predominantly, though not exclusively used. Performance practices connect the aesthetic and ethical value of *raska* to code and script in different ways, consequently forming part of participants’

metalinguistic understanding of the constellation of features that comprise language.

#### ***IV. Politics of autonomy***

As I have suggested above, constellations are formed through intertextually linking various communicative elements together (including graphic, interactional, and performative dimensions of language) into a form or shape that semiotically conveys ideological potentialities. These potentialities are deployed in social action, such as in projects of social differentiation and political struggle. The Jharkhand movement and the formation of an *adivasi* political community among different Scheduled Tribe groups such as the Santals are one example of this struggle. In this dissertation, I will refer to these politics as a politics of “autonomy.”

I use the term “autonomy” to describe how communities, such as indigenous communities in India, struggle to extricate themselves from their given social conditions while also operating within those conditions. Thus, “autonomy,” while not as strong a word as “freedom” or “liberation,” more adequately describes how Santal communities’ view their own social relations and social struggles vis-à-vis their participation in a larger social order hierarchically differentiated by caste and linguistic variety. I hope to show how struggles for political, social, and linguistic differentiation through a network of practices contributes to the formation of communicative constellations, and also then how these constellations create new possibilities and potentialities for political action, realized in participants’ practices and metapragmatic evaluations.

As opposed to the popular assumption that *adivasis* are completely exterior to systems of caste, my discussion of the politics of autonomy draws significantly from anthropological and historical discussions of caste in India. *Adivasi* communities are, on the one hand, described as outside the caste system; for they never occupied a formal-occupational position within caste



communities nor did they routinely maintain ritual obligations to higher castes. However, *adivasis* have a long history of exploitation from higher caste communities in India, and in everyday social relations their social and ritual practices, such as animal sacrifice, the consumption of beef and pork, and the drinking of rice beer and flower wine are considered impure by higher caste communities. Consequently, as a result of living for generations in and among Hindu and Muslim-caste communities, *adivasis* are necessarily interpellated into a caste hierarchy. Yet, Santals, for instance, have always maintained the social binary between *hor* (people) and *diku* (foreigner) to distinguish themselves from caste communities, and sometimes, from other Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups. This distinction is cemented in part through language (cf. Carrin 2008). Nonetheless, as Banerjee notes in her discussion of the Santal Hul (1999), the *hor* category can encompass other social groups based on political affiliation as well.

Social scientific studies of India have most famously described the social system as an ideologically-grounded caste-based hierarchy (e.g. Dumont 1980), where Brahmins occupy the highest position and the Dalit (or ‘untouchable’) communities occupy the lowest rung. Yet revisionist histories of caste have questioned this structural notion of a hierarchy of castes where Brahmins occupy the highest rung while other castes submit to Brahmin’s ritual purity and social dominance, arguing that it privileges a certain perspective (that of the Brahmin) which gained prominence in the nineteenth century through the collaboration of Brahmin informants and European administrative authorities (cf. Dirks 2001). Ethnographic studies of castes in different parts of India (Marriott, ed. 1955) reveal that caste practices were not ordered on any transcendent category of “caste” but rather on local political relations of domination and subordination that were then articulated as caste hierarchy. In that edited collection, the noted

Indian anthropologist M.N. Srinivas writes in his study of a Mysore village that it was "difficult if not impossible to determine the exact or even approximate place of each caste in the hierarchichal system" (20) and the major inequality in the village was between "patrons" and "clients," whether this was between castes or between individuals (27).

While the notion of a pan-Indian caste hierarchy may not have existed in practice, the collusion of well-positioned Indian subjects with British administration in perpetuating the goals of empire subsequently created a new caste-class hierarchy. With respect to artisanal castes, KN Sunandan's historical study of Nampoothri Brahmins and Asari carpenters in colonial-era Malabar (Sunandan 2012) shows how a class hierarchy that privileged intellectual and theoretical knowledge over knowledge of production aided in the ordering of caste communities along a hierarchical gradient. Brahmins eagerly embraced and perpetuated British style education in which they were the chief beneficiaries, while Asaris resisted the attempts by colonial authorities to enroll them into vocational training schools and enroll them as labor in the development of cities. According to Sunandan, a politics of "autonomy" emerged at the intersection of already-established caste practices and integration into a class polity. He writes that "in interaction with colonial discourse of knowledge, native practices of knowing created its own categories, rules, and regulations, or in other words, a semi-autonomous field of practices" (20).

For *adivasis* and in particular Santals, caste-formation in the nineteenth century has been mediated through the category of the "primitive" (Banerjee 2006). Banerjee has argued that the formation of a "national history" in nineteenth century Bengal necessarily counterpoised the upper-caste Bengali citizen-subject with the 'primitive,' exemplified by the figure of the Santal. In the nineteenth century, Santals were enrolled as migrant laborers to clear forests and replace Paharia and Bhumij communities (also *adivasis*) in the nineteenth century. The movement of

Santals to the forests converged with an imagination of the forests, and by extension, those who inhabit it, as a repository of India's past (also Skaria 1999). Santali cultural practices, such as feasts, song-dance performance, and the consumption of rice beer (*hãṇḍi*) and flower wine (*matkom*) were also marked as sensuous practices that appeared beyond the scope of historical time (cf. Archer 1974). In addition, as Banerjee notes, the reorganization of land and labor in the nineteenth century also contributed to the mass indebtedness of Santals and other forest communities. Nineteenth century upper-caste nationalists interpreted Santal indebtedness and dispersal as evidence of dysfluency with market exchange, further reinforcing the image of a pleasure-seeking subject outside the pale, or existing prior to, the progressive time of nationalist modernity. The incorporation of the Santals into the polity as primitive tribes (from where also stems the politicized term *adivasi*, or original inhabitant) stemmed from what Povinelli (2011) has termed the "governance of the prior," or the simultaneous process of inclusion and exclusion of populations into liberal polities through a discourse of the primitive.

Consequently, the subordination of Santals during the colonial period involved social and economic exploitation along the lines of many lower-caste communities, but was also temporal. This was evident during the 1855 Santal *Hul*. Historians attempted to determine the causality of the 1855 *Hul* by focusing either on economic deprivation at the hands of upper-caste Hindu landlords, or on the superstitious and millenarian belief of Santals, by which rumors could inflame a populace to prolonged and inexplicable armed conflict. Both explanations re-assimilated Santals as a "primitive," underscoring the naiveté of a population not quite ready for modernity, and, in turn, justifying a more interventionist policy by the colonial government in Santali-populated areas. Yet, Banerjee (1999) writes, as "to the question of why rebel, the Santals said nothing more or nothing less than the time had come" (216). There was nothing

specifically 'divine' or 'otherworldly' about this act, Banerjee notes; neither was this a "millenarian hope," as Santals always explained the *Hul* in terms of a present, not a future (226).

Banerjee's argument suggests that Santals already had a parallel and autonomous (or semi-autonomous) notion of space and time that co-existed with present administrative time, which became critical to their articulation of politics. For instance, Santal creation stories are constantly told and re-told, and places within those stories, such as the land of *Champa*, where Santals lived autonomously, free from taxes and upper-caste governance, were not "historical" as in prior, but rather, according to Banerjee, a lived feature of the present, "a counter-factual to the present articulated neither as an inverse of the present...nor as an origin" (233). In addition, Santals did not identify a "past" with an (always) already existing territory such as a nation; stories of continuous displacement and migration revealed that "lands could be lost forever just as pasts were" (234).

Within the historical moment of the *Hul*, Santals demonstrated a spatiotemporal autonomy constructed in dialogue with the changing conditions brought about by colonial administrative modernity. Santal pasts, as Banerjee writes "could be invoked precisely in simultaneity with the present...[and] remained open to its own future" (234), challenging the incorporation of Santal practices into a regime of the "prior." Santals thus articulate their present as the "unfinished business" (239) of pasts marked by displacement, loss, and recovery: the location of places such as *Champa*, the experience of the *Hul*, the everyday presence of ancestors and tutelary spirits all serve to disrupt any attempts at historical incorporation of Santal experiences within the progressive temporality of history or the spatial construction of the nation. Events like the *Hul* or the displacement from *Champa* are constantly re-articulated in songs and political demands, illustrating that these historical experiences are not considered as distinctly

'past' events, but are constantly recovered through a contemporary politics of autonomy.

Following the period of the *Hul*, Santals became increasingly incorporated into the land-tenancy system of colonial rule, compelled to pay taxes to landlords and colonial administrators. During this period, as Santals were becoming ever more incorporated into the caste-system, it appeared as though political movements, such as the Kherwal movement (cf. Anderson 2008), appropriated upper-caste mores, giving the impression that advancement was linked to a logic of moving up a ritual hierarchy (the logic of unidirectional *sanskritization*). One example of this was the famed Jitu Santal rebellion in Malda, in northern West Bengal, during the early twentieth century, documented by historian Tanika Sarkar (1985). According to Sarkar, Jitu Santal argued for an “explicit rejection of Santal identity” (151) by exhorting Santals to avoid eating meat and worship Hindu gods. Yet, as Sarkar notes, Jitu Santal’s movement did not in fact argue for a reconciliation with upper-castes (151). Santali martial traditions, such as the use of bow and arrow, and song-dance were advocated, and though Jitu Santal adopted the concept of *swaraj* from upper-caste nationalists, the concept of *raj* was clearly linked to the idea of the autonomous Santal land of *Champa* (154). Thus, the adoption of upper-caste *practices*, as Sarkar’s study implies, does not translate into the adoption of upper-caste *politics*.

*Politics of autonomy/politics of class: becoming adivasi*

For large and dispersed groups such as Santals, the politics of autonomy assumes different forms, both between rural and urban populations, as well as between elites of various sorts and others within any given setting. Hence, the form of politics also functions as a way of simultaneously distinguishing different classes within castes, and autonomy assumes new meaning depending on the degree and nature of the interactions and negotiations between state and capitalist institutions and various fractions, including those along the lines of class,

hereditary status, and generation. For instance, as noted above, among the Santals it was the headmen, or *majhi*, who led much of the struggle in the nineteenth century. Thus, while colonial tenancy laws worked to undermine the legal authority of headmen, headmen and other traditional elite stood at the forefront of the newly emergent politics of autonomy. Even today one of the central features in Santal articulation of autonomy is the emphasis on the independent social organization of the *majhi-pargana* system (Kisku 2009). This "politics of autonomy" that operates in contemporary Santali-speaking areas operates as "brand of governance that favors traditional elites and emphasizes the apolitical organization around local issues that lend themselves to a dichotomy of insider and outsider" (Sivaramakrishnan 2000, 447).

While the headman system remained strong in rural areas, the early and mid-twentieth century also witnessed another hierarchy emerging between urbanized Santali elites and rural Santals. This led to an expansion of the politics of autonomy as not only one led by headmen and other 'traditional' elite, but one which was also rearticulated as part of an upwardly mobile class within the caste grouping. This divide is documented in an early ethnography by Martin Orans (1965) who examines the processes of differentiation among Santals who have moved into the industrial steel factory town of Jamshedpur, both as industrial workers and sometimes as mid-level employees, resulting in the abandonment of traditional rites and weakening of kinship ties (68, 73). Hindi-medium education in the city effected an increasing "Hinduization" which also led people to look down upon *raska*-related activities, especially the consumption of rice-beer. Yet, as in the case of Jitu Santal's rebellion, the assumption of upper-caste practices did not lead to the abandonment of a politics of autonomy. Orans in fact suggests that village solidarity networks, organized around kinship, village administration, and *raska* related activities were reconstituted in the urban setting as political networks, culminating in the increased mobilization

for an autonomous tribal-majority state of Jharkhand.

New forms of solidarity also emerged such as around language, script, and religion. Orans documents the spread of the Ol-Chiki script in Jamshedpur (105) to record and codify Santali "traditions," and the new literature and drama that arose to extol these traditions, "wholly unlike," Orans comments, "the unpretentious traditional ones" (105). What slowly emerged through urbanization, Orans suggests, was a politics of autonomy that was stratified along class lines. On the one hand, Orans says rural Santals and industrial workers maintained solidarity and autonomy (what he calls 'internal' and 'external' solidarity') through a network of pleasure-practices (*raška*), kinship, and village administration, while the elite preserved this through regional-political alliances (Jharkhand movement), literature, and script. Yet these politics, cultivated as they were through incorporation within state institutions such as schools and electoral politics, also existed in a dialogical relationship with the networks of solidarity and autonomy such as *raška* and the village headman system. Within the village areas of Jangal Mahals, which, as both Sammadar and Sivaramakrishnan note, have a long history of a politics of autonomy, these political networks inform simultaneously the networks of solidarity outlined by Orans. In this dissertation, I seek to show how the politics of autonomy is mediated through constellations which link historical practices of solidarity and political assertion with everyday communicative practices of script, code, and media artifacts.

#### *Autonomy as a communicative process*

The study of the emergence of 'autonomy' within a caste/class system and its relation to linguistic practice has long been of interest to linguistic anthropologists. For instance, Irvine (1989) describes the situation in rural Senegal that shows how labor and caste differentiation lead to the formation of cultural ideologies of autonomy and code-discreteness and vice-versa. On

the one hand, she describes the relationship between Wolof nobles and griots, two “castes,” as they are described, with two distinctly different speech styles<sup>3</sup>. However, the differences in styles are seen to be, according to Irvine, as “complementary...to the extent that a social situation defines social rank as relevant” (253). Yet she contrasts this “nonautonomous” style to the “autonomous” speech style of the Lawbe, a semi-nomadic community said to have migrated from the northern Pulaar-speaking region, and serve as woodworkers in Wolof villages. The Lawbe are bilingual, and speak both Wolof and Pulaar. Because of this linguistic fact, Lawbe are considered by Wolof-speakers to be “not Wolof.”

Irvine argues that in the Wolof ideology, nobles and griots form a foundation of the Wolof system, while the “woodworker” caste is seen as marginal. Yet she says that there may have been a strictly Wolof-speaking woodworker community before, and this “caste” may have been replaced by Lawbe labor. Thus, there is no strict relationship, Irvine argues, between caste/class and linguistic usage, but rather the notions of caste/class have shifted in response to Wolof ideologies that link the command of unintelligible varieties and differing migration patterns to “historical autonomy” from the larger caste system. Nobles and griots are assumed to have linguistically “nonautonomous” styles because their social roles, in which griots perform praise-songs on which noble prestige depends, are complementary; while Lawbe labor, seen as ‘outside’ the caste system, “are culturally assumed to have an autonomous history matching their autonomous code” (254). Consequently, autonomy and non-autonomy are part of a wider cultural ideology attributed by the dominant Wolof society onto the more marginal Lawbe.

Irvine’s formulation suggests that “autonomy” should be understood as part of a broader political economic framework in which linguistic variation and its relation to political economic factors exist in a “dialectic relationship mediated by the culture of language (and of society)”



(253). This “culture of language” does not include simply one group’s relationship to a code as an icon of their identity, caste, or class, but emerges from a relational matrix in which groups’ linguistic practices and wider ideologies of complementarity, hierarchy and marginality is situated, and depends crucially upon the social and ideological relations between *all* the relevant caste and class communities within a given sociolinguistic milieu. As in Irvine’s description of the relation between Wolof and Lawbe, Santal ‘autonomy’ is, in part, defined by an ideology among dominant-Bengali speaking castes, who consider Santali akin to unintelligible deaf-mute speech (*thar*), and who attribute a position to them outside the caste system while at the same time incorporating their labor into a caste-class hierarchy. Santals themselves have embraced this autonomy, aligning their own language ideology with the social category of *hor* against the variably non-Santal *diku* (which includes the Bengali and Hindi varieties which they themselves control). Yet this relation depends not only on the code itself, but also on *who* is speaking and what kinds of social roles the speaker inhabits. These social positions, attributed by Santals themselves, as well as constructed by the larger political-economic milieu in which they reside are critical in the formation of constellations and the politics of autonomy that they iconically index.

The relation between political economy and ‘autonomy’ as mediated through communicative practices is further elaborated by Jane Hill’s (1985, 1986) study of Mexicano peasants in Malinche, northern Mexico. She describes the situation in Malinche as comprised of village communities that live as part of a separate “peasant mode of production” and “bargain on increasingly unfavorable terms with the capitalist sector (and particularly the state) to retain their autonomy” (724). The “peasant mode of production,” according to Hill, consists of the ritual *compadrazgo* (ritual kinship) system and *mayordomia* system in which villagers are assigned to

graded hierarchies through the stewardship of holy images. This sector, argues Hill, requires a lot of expenditure, particularly of corn, but also of money, which is most often brought in through wage labor. Within this community, two 'ways of speaking' are dominant, *castellano* (Spanish), which is the language associated with all state institutions, the Church, and the capitalist wage-economy, and *mexicano* (Nahuatl) which is associated with cultivation of corn, intimacy, and identity as a *campesino* (727).

However, the communicative economy of the region is further divided by generation and to those participating in wage labor as opposed to those involved in *compadrazgo*. Older men who are involved in *compadrazgo* speak through a 'power code' in which Spanish elements are refunctionalized within a Mexicano grammatical structure. The Mexicano 'voice' is necessary to command the ritual prestige on which the peasant mode of production depends. However, younger generations who have left the village to work in the wage economy often do not command this 'power code' and instead attempt themselves into the peasant economy through the crafting of a 'pure' Mexicano, delineating a linguistic "code" from that of Spanish. This "purist code" as Hill terms it, takes Mexicano elements and refunctionalizes them into Spanish, while at the same time interpreting it as a separate linguistic 'code.' Thus, the result of this, as Hill suggests, is a bifurcated "consciousness," where communicative practice in two intertwined yet separately positioned political-economic spheres yields very different orientations toward 'code.' The "dysfluencies" between these spheres, as Hill (1999) examines in her analysis of a narrative of one elderly Don Gabriel from Malinche, reveal a moral and political orientation toward a particular network of socially and economically embedded practices associated with a way and style of speaking (Keane 2011), and demonstrate how capitalist social relations are simultaneously incorporated into daily life but also resisted. Hill's analysis of political economic

networks in Malinche parallels in many ways the politics of autonomy as it manifests itself through class, caste, and urban-rural divides among the Santals.

Hill's findings are elaborated upon by the recent work of Meek (2010) who discusses the concept of "sociolinguistic disjuncture" in relation to ongoing language revitalization efforts in the Yukon Territory in Canada. Disjunctures emerge, according to Meek, when "practices and ideas about language diverge" (50). In Meek's own work, she discusses the situation of Kaska, an Athapaskan language spoken in the Yukon, and how government efforts to revitalize Kaska have objectified Kaska in a way that paradoxically encourages increasing shift. She shows that the "Kaska" embedded in governmental discourse and institutions designed to revitalize the language is, in fact, a different linguistic practice and object, from the way Kaska is understood by the younger speakers to whom the revitalization efforts are targeted. For instance, younger speakers traditionally have had styles of speaking distinct from those of elders, whose style revitalization efforts privilege. Teaching young students a style of Kaska associated with elders as part of language revitalization efforts, Meek argues (Meek 2007), contributes to ongoing language shift. In addition, Kaska language training in school was highly compartmentalized and regimented, framed by English language and the expertise of linguists. Grammar and word lists were emphasized over the practice of interactive styles, and classes were framed in and through the use of English, creating implicit language hierarchies.

While disjunctures often impede language revitalization projects, they, when revealed or understood as disjunctures, may open up new modes of political action. Meek says that "disjunctures make salient opportunities for change, for creating or re-creating new intertextual, interdiscursive, and interactional connections and improving or building upon current practices" (160). Hence through perceived and tacit disjunctures, new linkages and constellations are

assembled that transcend the limits of institutionally sanctioned conceptualizations of ‘language’ or ‘culture.’ The articulation of disjunctures in political practice, and the attempt to bridge institutional discourses of literacy, language, or script with more everyday forms of communicative and performative practices, I suggest, form one kind of constellation through which we may examine a politics of autonomy. These politics are not separate from institutionalization, subordination, and hierarchy, and in fact, ideas of separation, whether caste, identity, or linguistic affiliation, are constructed through these encounters. Yet, at the same time, institutional encounters reveal disjunctures that then may provoke the formation of new and alternative networks through which demands of autonomy may be articulated.

### *Scripting Autonomy*

In this dissertation I draw on linguistic anthropological models in order to discuss the politics of autonomy among the Santals. I argue that looking at linguistic and graphic practice, as well as metapragmatic discourse around the idea of "script" in a multilingual and multiscriptural milieu offers a lens with which to closely examine how lower-caste (or indigenous) minority-language communities who have been simultaneously incorporated into and excluded from hierarchies of caste and class assert their demands for autonomy. I suggest that the movement for a Santal script is not, as many suggest, simply about the creation or formation of an identity, which itself is only posed in and through institutional processes of disjuncture. Rather I hope to show how the creation of independent scripts, and the continuation of the writing of Santali in multiple scripts, as well as multiple script-code constellations, emerges from the disjunctures inherent in the widespread learning of literacy and the subordination that occurs through this process. Script and language constellations are made relevant only through these institutional encounters, yet at the same time these disjunctures allow

Santals to form new networks, in which these constellations are re-conceptualized within other long-standing practices of autonomy.

Script, therefore, is linked through a new political formation with such long-standing oppositions as between *hor* (person) and *diku* (foreigner), village and *bazaar* (market), as well as the multiple temporalities, ritual relations, discourses of pleasure (*raska*), and prestige hierarchies that have recursively and dialogically informed demands of autonomy since early on in the colonial period. While language and script are on the one hand institutional artifacts that have become metapragmatically attached to specific caste and ethnic identities, these artifacts are also mobilized in new and evolving political networks and involve a whole host of institutionally autonomous practices. In examining these networks of practice, and how they form interdiscursive constellations of graphic and linguistic resources, I also hope to highlight new disjunctures that result from the negotiation between institutions, political parties, and upper-caste groups and Santali communities, and the subsequent political articulations that may arise.

#### ***V. Outline of Chapters***

The scope of this dissertation is necessarily broad, charting out the creation of scripts, and attempting to understand how script arises as a constellation of a number of different communicative practices and resources. This necessitates an examination of a number of different sociolinguistic milieus, bridging different times and spaces, and looking at how artifacts are constructed, taken up and disseminated along different social and political networks. The bulk of the fieldwork takes place in and around a small village, Jhilimili in southeastern West Bengal, where I spent most of my time. Jhilimili will be introduced more fully in chapter 3, but the most of my ethnographic data comes from in and around the Jhilimili area, including the village of Jhilimili (Bankura district), and the villages of Bandowan block (Purulia district, West

Bengal) that neighbor Jhilimili. In addition, I will draw on evidence from shorter fieldwork that I conducted in and around Calcutta, north Bengal, northern Jharkhand, and northern Orissa.

In chapter 2, I focus on the emergence of Santali-language literacy through an examination of Santali song-dance practices and genres. Here my aim is to show how literacy and a conception of literate ‘writing’ (or in Santali, *ol*) has emerged from a disjuncture between the Santali performance-space and the conventions of Bengali-language schooled literacy. I focus on how Santali performance genres, such as the *lagde* shifted in response to schooled literacy, and how multilingual performance genres became reconstituted as specifically Santali-language literacy genres. I rely on ethnographic and metapragmatic commentary on performance in particular in this chapter. My argument here is that literacy arose in the context of performance, and that Santali-language literacy is constituted by a constellation that includes both the conventions of Bengali-language schooled literacy as well as Santali-specific performance genres.

After having charted a ‘literacy-code’ constellation, chapter 3 will focus in particular on the constellation ‘script.’ In the first part of the chapter, I suggest that new Santali scripts emerge from a confluence of three different strands of graphic ideological practice: one, the material practice that is referred to broadly in Santali as *ol*, which can include ritual diagramming; two, the Sanskritic notion of *shiksha*, in which multiple scripts exist on a transcendental phonetic system; and three, a missionary-derived notion that script and sound must match exactly. I also suggest that it was through material practice and ideas of *ol* that Santals mediated relations between themselves and their spirits, or *bongas*, which they consider as entities inhabiting the same social world. Western notions of writing brought about by missionary-derived literacy precipitated a conflict between Santals and *bongas*. However, I show how Santals, as part of a

contemporary politics of autonomy, bridged the disjuncture between graphic ideologies as well as social relations through the practice of scriptmaking, in which unique scripts were created that, though presenting the same underlying phonetic structure, differed in their graphic features. The scripts then were instantiated through song within performance spaces, linking the constellation to those described in chapter 2.

In chapters 2 and 3, I begin with a particular ‘form’ and attempt to chart its emergence both historically and ethnographically, in different times and places. In chapter 4, I proceed to look at how these forms are instantiated on a particular landscape, charting both synchronically and diachronically how script-code surfaces on buildings shape and constitute communicative practice and ideology. I look in particular at the Jhilimili bazaar, a small rural bazaar in southeastern West Bengal, and examine how different codes (Bengali, Santali, English, Hindi) and different scripts (Eastern Brahmi, Ol-Chiki, Roman, and Devanagari) interact and form different constellations depending on the genre of a particular artifact or inscription as well its position in relation to other constellations on a surface. In this section, I chart the ways in which participants evaluate these constellations and construct competing notions of space through the visible deployment of script and code. I look at how a politics of autonomy does not depend on a particular script or a particular code, but rather on how multiple script-code constellations are visibly ordered and scaled.

While chapter 4 looks at script-code constellations in a dispersed environment characterized by circulation of goods, people, and ideas, chapter 5 examines the politics of autonomy within a particular institution, namely the school. The first part of the chapter examines an oral history of an elderly schoolteacher to show how writing, literacy socialization, and the politics of prestige and class led to his embracing of a politics of autonomy at the same

time that he taught in the school. His story is not unique, and in fact schoolteachers form one of the primary bulwarks of literacy and script socialization, bridging the institutional demands of schooled-literacy with a politics of autonomy that is active in Santal villages. I argue that part of the experience in schooled literacy also led to an embracing of the Ol-Chiki script. In the second half of the chapter, I look at students' inscription practices at the high school at Jhilimili to show how they present a much starker view of language and script that is inculcated in them even before they begin classes. I examine the kinds of script-code constellations present in the school, and how they relate to the environment and institutional practice of the school, as well as the politics surrounding education and institutions more generally.

Finally, in chapter 6, I examine how Santali print media artifacts constitute a specific constellation of script, code, and practices of exchange. Through an examination of script and code choice in the production and differentiation of media genres such as “news” and “literary and cultural journals,” I show how networks of exchange and circulation vary according to region, generation, and sponsorship, and the impact of these networks on an emergent politics of autonomy. Focusing on the way newspaper and magazine editors deploy script and code in the production and dissemination of text artifacts, I show how these circuits of uptake and exchange link the media domain to other networks outlined in previous chapters. I suggest that the media-artifact, if analyzed as a constellation that links form with circulation, can serve as an important lens to show how the broader networks of Santali literacy and performance, as well as the politics that inform these networks, both change and stabilize over time.

In conclusion, I summarize the arguments pertaining to script, code, and performance in relation to autonomy, and the constellations outlined and also emergent from the various components of the dissertation. I then discuss the importance of the study of communicative



constellations and the autonomy they index in relation to the particular political and social moment in which I conducted fieldwork, when the question of *adivasi* political assertion has assumed new importance with the rise of a new wave of radical left assertion in rural and tribal areas and an upsurge of autonomy-driven social movements that are defining a new political conjuncture in contemporary India.

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<sup>1</sup> The following comes from the Shils translation (1969) of the essay. The original German of “concreteconstellations of reality” reads “die stets individuell geartete Wirklichkeit des Lebens” which translates to something like the “always individual distinct natured reality of life.” (Weber 1904, 55) I am basing my citation of Weber’s concept of “constellation” on Shils’ interpretative translation. Thanks to Lee Schlesinger for finding the original reference.

<sup>2</sup> Here Benjamin in the original text uses the German word “Konstellation” (Benjamin 2007, 139)

<sup>3</sup> The differences in all of these styles, Irvine notes, is mainly an ideological distinction; not one of actual practice

## Chapter 2

### **Literacy beyond the letter: song, dance, and the performative foundations of Santali writing**

W.G. Archer, a British administrator of the erstwhile Santal Pargana district in eastern India noted famously (or perhaps infamously) that "Santal poetry is Santal life, and Santal life is Santal poetry" (1974, 346). Indeed, as the title of his famous ethnography, *The Hills of Flutes*, suggests, Archer described Santals by their propensity to transform even the most mundane events of the day into "poetry" through song and dance. Hence, Santal "poetry" and Santal "life," Archer suggests, were preeminently defined in reference to orality; the Santal aesthetic retained a natural quality and beauty that literate societies had long sacrificed in the pursuit of civilization. Historian Prathama Banerjee has written extensively on Archer's views and the construction in colonial Bengal of the idea of the "primitive" in which Santals were cast into the realm of pure and unadulterated "culture" mediated not by history or by politics, but by a "universalist framework of poetics" that was quintessentially oral (Banerjee 2006).

In postcolonial India, the reading of Santal "life" as preeminently oral has persisted, both among upper caste Indians as well as among Santals themselves. The images of dancing and singing Santals as emblematic of Santal culture are ubiquitous in films, novels, and the cultural programs sponsored by state governments. Orality legitimates Santal difference, authenticating a notion of tradition and a politics of indigeneity that at once opposes upper-caste cultural hegemony, but also casts Santals as backward, illiterate, and underdeveloped. Defined by an orality that exists outside the scope of history ensures that Santals will never fully "catch up," an

anxiety expressed by many educated Santals to me throughout the course of my fieldwork. This, as Banerjee notes, is the "double bind" of the adivasi political subject who is compelled to construct a political history through an orality defined as ahistorical. The "double bind" is perpetuated by historians, anthropologists, writers, etc. who focus on the "oral" and "oral texts" as a way of portraying a more authentic Santal life, history, or culture (ibid).

Inspired by these ideas, I chose a different angle for my research: a focus on Santal literacy rather than orality. Explaining my project was more difficult than I expected, as many upper caste researchers assumed that I, like most others interested in Santali language or Santal culture, would naturally be studying the so-called "oral tradition." This was despite the fact that the Santali language had been written down by Santals themselves for over a hundred years, and had all the literary forms associated with written literature, such as prose, poetry, and drama. Also, this was in spite of the fact that the most glaringly politicized issue around language and literature was the question of script, an issue not obviously, or so I thought, relevant to a society that saw itself as primarily oral. Yet, as I talked to Santali writers, editors, publishers of the burgeoning Santali literary scene, I saw that oral performance was constantly invoked and valorized, both as a signifier of a hoary timeless tradition as well as a dynamic feature of present and future-oriented political projects. Moreover, in my fieldwork in rural areas, I found that Santali performance genres, assumed by both Santals and scholars such as Archer to be primarily rooted in the archaic or the 'oral,' had both significantly shaped and had been shaped by Santali encounters with literacy, and that even in the absence of material texts, reading, or writing, literacy was present in the everyday poetics of what Archer celebrates as the aestheticized orality of "Santal life."

Underlying both the romanticized notion of the "primitive" as well as its postcolonial

critique is a divide between orality and literacy. In this chapter, I reject this divide, and claim that there is an intimate relationship between what we call Santali "oral" texts and "literate" texts, insofar as literate texts are performed through oral channels without the need for inscription just as "oral" texts are routinely transcribed and transmitted through channels of textual inscription. In fact, I suggest that Santali performance comprises a constellation that intertwines oral and literate practices. Features of institutional literacy encountered in areas such as school, are reassembled via the conventions of Santali performance genres in order to delineate an independent Santali "community of readers" (Chartier 1992). Consequently, when Santals appeal to performance as a basis for political difference and cultural assertion, these performances include literacy encounters as well.

In this chapter, I aim to account for the emergence of Santali-language literacy by examining transformations in performance practice. I will first look at the critical role performance plays in socialization among Santal communities. Focusing on the relationship between two genres of Santali "song-dance" (*seren-enec*), I will examine how affective attachments between people, their spirits, and their ancestors are voiced through the combination of poetic sung text, embodied movement, and rhythm, and how acquisition of these skills is seen as critical to community membership. I then chart the impact that schooled literacy has had on these performance practices and genres, and how institutional literacy, typified through its poetic structure, has become incorporated into the song-dance repertoire in genre-specific ways.

The adopting of "literate" poetic structure into the structured "non-literate" routines of Santali performance, I argue, opens up spaces of indeterminacy by which institutional discourse is semiotically reconfigured, and marked as "Santali." Finally, through an analysis of a recorded *lagde* performance, I will illustrate how certain Santali genres of "song-dance" have incorporated

a new poetics into the discursive routine, socializing a new generation of Santals into a Santali literate and literary domain. I argue that unlike for the previous generation, who saw these new innovations as a product of a disjuncture between schooled literacy and performative socialization (Meek 2010), a new generation of Santals is socialized into a constellation of Santal ‘literacy’ that has reconfigured the disjuncture to align with an emergent Santal politics of autonomy. In this way, I claim, through the circulation of poetic form and genres, Santals become literate in their language apart from formal training in institutions such as schools as well as widespread exposure to Santali-language textual material.

### **Introductory note from the publisher**

One of the first recorded conversations I had during the beginning of my fieldwork period was with a publisher (and high school teacher) in a suburb outside the city of Kolkata (Calcutta). This suburb, which I was to visit frequently during my fieldwork, was home to many Santals who had public service jobs in the city, and was also a major junction on a direct rail line leading to the rural areas of West Midnapur in West Bengal and on to Jharkhand, the native regions of many of the Santals residing in the suburb. The suburb witnessed constant in- and out-migration of people from the Santal villages, as well as texts and ideas. Hence, it was also an ideal place for publishers, and these publishers, AKM and RH (initials) had been publishing and distributing Santali language books in Bengali and Ol Chiki scripts for over a decade. Before that, RH worked at one of the first Ol Chiki presses, also located in this suburb, before working with the railways.

Our conversation covered many different topics, but one of the central themes was how Santali language publication sustained itself (or rather, from my point of view, flourished) absent any support from the state, and why people were interested in reading, writing, and publishing in

Santali, especially in a context in which everyone was literate in Bengali and Hindi. After describing the role of independent Santali cultural and literary organizations in the advancement of Santali literature, the publisher, AK, began to talk about the history of Santali literacy. The conversation then took an unusual turn, the transcript of which I present here:

**Transcript 2.1.** AK-publisher, N-Nishaant, researcher, Santragachi (WB) (beginning from about 16:00)

1AK: teheñ aṭharo so panchas saṭ sal khon ak' iñ khon ak' santaḍi paṛsi charcha hijuk' kana likhito te,  
2likhito te, ona maḍang do mocha mocha tege kahini kudum, bhinti, sereñ duḍang, sereñduḍang palla te  
3sereñduḍang do miṭṭang bali gidar ninak' oḍang gidar khon oṭa baḍi habic' te sere ye baḍaya noa chet'  
4bakra sereñ chalak' a. santaḍ shrishṭitotto, santaḍ chet'kate ko janam akana chet'kate hec' akana, manmi  
5chet' kate shirjon akana, ona shrishṭitotto miṭṭang gidra khon ak' miṭṭang marang hoḍa ale boi do paḍhao  
6do bang huyuk'talea. Santaḍ do puthi paḍhao te dohonko sen[ḍ]aya. jen unko gidra khon ak' haram  
7buḍhi goḍom haram ṭhen khon ak' anjom em te ko baḍaya. manmi sirjonak' katha-

1AK: Today, from 1850-1860 the Santali language has been discussed in writing, writing,  
2 before that it was passed from mouth to mouth, stories, riddles, *bhinti* stories, and songs, regarding  
3 songs, songs a small child about ye little [hand gesture] to a big child will know in what regard a song is  
4 performed, [for example] Santal creation, how were Santals born, how did they arrive, how were men  
5 born, that knowledge of creation even a little kid to an old person [would know]. We [exc] don't have  
6 to read books. Santals do not learn from books. Little children from...little children learn from hearing  
7 their elders things like the birth of man.

8N: maukhik parampara taken kana-

8N: So it was an oral tradition...?

9AK: hyan maukhik parampara do bai. kintu enec'-sereñ onka ge. netar bangla jahan te bangali ko  
10 sen[ḍ]ayda, unko do miṭṭang institute--te ko sen[ḍ]aya ona ko tradition sen[ḍ]aya, kintu ale do ona use  
11 do bang, ale do kuli duḍi khilot' khilot' saò saòte hridoy sen[ḍ]a aḡu a tradition...joto ge haḍa gaḍa hah.

9AK: Yeah, well, oral tradition, but actually it is really song-dance. Now the Bengali that Bengali people  
10 learn through an institute [standard Bangla], they learn tradition, but for us we don't have a use for that,  
11 we bring our tradition forth from the heart with *kuli dudi kilot' kilot'*

In this transcript excerpt, AK had just finished discussing the independent organizations that have contributed to promoting Santal literacy. Then he begins a history of Santali literacy, framing the account in a historical register by first offering specific dates (1850-1860, line 1) and then invoking the distinction between "literate," using the Sanskritic word *likhito*, and the "oral" using the Austro-Asiatic *mocha-mocha-te* (lit, 'mouth-to-mouth' instead of the Sanskritic word *maukhik* for "oral" which I use in line 8.) In doing so, he associates the "literate" with the

present, *tehen* 'today,' while connecting the oral with the times before writing, *ona maḍang* (before). Yet, by line 6, after originally casting the oral as temporally prior to writing, the publisher shifts frames, moving from a condition of past “orality” to a present, in which “tradition,” grounded in Santali notions of “song-dance” (*enec'-seren*). He signals this shift early, when the verb tenses change from past to non-past: little kids know and will know, *badao* 'know' + *a* 'pres indef/fut,' about songs (line 3) or by hearing their elders (line 7). They learn and will learn *sendao* 'learn + *a* not from books (line 6) but from the heart (*hriday*, line 11). The change in footing is accomplished by line 9, when he starts to contrast Santals with Bengalis on the basis of “tradition” (using the English word, line 10) employing the first person-plural exclusive (*ale*) and a negative compulsive, claiming we (*exc*, ie Santals, not you, non-Santal) do not HAVE to read books (using the Indo-Aryan word *boi*, which is also 'book' in colloquial Bengali). He underscores his point yet again using the third person plural, Santals (*ko*, 3rd plural) do not/will not learn by reading books (*puthi*).

Thus, even as the publisher dismisses the characterization of the “oral” (line 9) in response to my query as a bygone tradition (line 9), he locates contemporary Santali socialization and distinction squarely within the song-dance complex (*seren-enec'*). For the publisher, “Bengali” is learned through the institutionalization and transmission of a particular linguistic variety (line 10, 'bangla'). Santals, he argues, are not socialized in that way. Rather, as he says in lines 12-13, Santals are socialized into "tradition," not through any institution, but *kuli duli khilot' khilot'*, an iconic, ideogrammatic reference to little Santal children mimicking the dancing and drum-playing of their elders.

As Samuels has argued for the Western Apache (Samuels 2004), the publisher suggests that being "Santali" is acquiring, and developing emotional attachments (from the 'heart') not

only to a linguistic code or ethnic identity, but to expressive iconicities that include sung poetic text, melody, and movement (the 'song-dance' complex). This form of socialization and distinction represent what Samuels calls “iconicity of feeling” in which what counts as specifically “Santal” socialization is the “continuity of feeling evoked by expressive forms” (11). *Kuli duli kilot' kilot'* thus iconically refers to the acquisition of the song-dance complex, and the “feeling” (or in Santali, *raska* 'communal feeling, enjoyment) associated with performance. Most Santals would be able to readily apprehend the feelings evoked by this phrase, and the performance practices it iconizes, but the meaning would be opaque to non-Santals. Only after a long explanation by my research assistant was I able to fully understand this phrase. Consequently, cultivating emotional attachments to these performative practices, the publisher suggests, is critical to Santali language socialization.

At first glance, the publisher appears to offer a somewhat contradictory picture. His discussion of literacy culminates in a rejection of printed text-artifacts which he plays a role in producing, and a positive valuation of oral performance practices, especially the song-dance complex, but no interest in the "oral tradition" as such. At the end of segment, it is clear to me that he is also distinguishing "Santali" from other languages not primarily in reference to its grammar, but as a grouping of performance practices associated with "tradition" from that of "Bangla," a linguistic variety he associates with institutionalized learning. However, he was not attempting to displace Santali on to a context-free, pure orality. Rather, as I will explore further in this chapter, he is marking certain practices as stereotypically "Santali" and suggesting that the emergence of Santali literacy cannot fit easily into the literacy-orality divide which structures conventional literary history. In this chapter, I follow up on his suggestion, arguing that the constellation of Santal literacy emerges by reconfiguring disjunctures between practices of



writing, encounters with institutional literacy, and the acquisition and circulation of performance genres. This constellation, rather than framing the encounter with literacy as a break between 'orality' and 'literacy,' displays contrasting temporal dimensions, whereby practices of reading, writing, and oral performance simultaneously reinforce a timeless, ahistorical 'tradition', while also figuring an evolving, constantly shifting political engagement with a present and future.

### **The Poetics of Literacy**

Literacy studies have been divided into the "autonomous" school, in which the literacy-orality divide is paramount, and literacy results from a cognitive shift away from oral modes of language and thought (Goody 1986, Goody and Watt 1963, Ong 1988), and the new literacy studies which have looked at literacy as a multiplicity of situated practices of handling text artifacts (Street 1993, etc). While anthropological field studies have shown, as Collins and Blot (2003) note, that social life is not "easily divided into spoken and written domains" and that both practices of speaking and writing are intimately related to power, institutions, politics, and other domains of social practice, they also argue that "situated studies have often operated with the same categories as autonomous studies, making it difficult for them to change the terms of the debate" (4).

Part of the confusion within literacy studies I suggest stems from a continued insistence that "literacy" or "literacies" should strictly delimit practices associated with inscribed texts. This insistence could be seen as part of what De Certeau terms the "scriptural economy" in which writing and reading are considered to be an autonomous domain of practice (*un espace propre*), shorn away from the multiple relations of voice within which reading and writing were previously embedded (De Certeau 1984:134). Within the scriptural economy, to become 'literate' is to adopt a certain modality of writing in which a textual object is produced by singular

authors, and received silently and visually by readers. Other modes of interaction with text are relegated to the oral or illiterate, “that which does not contribute to progress...the magical world of voices and tradition” (ibid., also Collins and Blot 2003).

Recent anthropological and historical studies have challenged this idea of literacy within the scriptural economy, arguing that in most parts of the world, textual production and reception happen through multiple channels, and it is less useful to separate what constitutes the oral from the literate. For instance, Boyarin (1992) has argued that much of the construction of texts happens not only between the reader and the text but also among “groups of readers collectively constructing given texts” (213). Chartier (1994) also insists in his history of the book that part of a historian’s job is to reconstruct the constellation of readership practices that moves beyond a silent reading of texts. In fact, he claims, it is the practice of reading, which brings the body and voice into play, which organized the production of texts in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. During this time, there was little distinction between the “oral” and the “literate,” as texts generally were read aloud and circulated. The deep-seated interaction between inscribed text and its oral and performative interpretation has been documented for many parts of the world (Besnier 1995, Boyarin 1993, Cody 2009, Webster 2006, etc.)

One way to move beyond the impasse that discussions of the “text” present to studies of literacy would be to locate the construction and dissemination of text in socially situated discursive processes. For instance, linguistic anthropologists have viewed text as a result of entextualization, “a process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit--a text--that can be lifted out of its interactional setting” and then “recontextualized” in a new discursive setting, carrying “elements of the history of use within it” (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73). Bauman and Briggs discuss the process of “entextualization” in

settings of verbal performance, and attend to the functional properties of language, such as the metalinguistic and poetic functions (Jakobson 1960), which facilitate strips of discourse to be decontextualized from one setting and recontextualized in another. From this perspective, 'reading' may be seen as a type of entextualizing performance, in which certain linguistic practices constitute the creation of 'text.' These practices are oral as much as they are inscribed, and, as Chartier notes, the performative aspect of texts, and the way they circulate between readers, has historically shaped the material form of the text-artifact itself.

Understanding text-making as a performative practice suggests that what is usually called literacy itself is an ideologically-inflected subset of performance. Thus, we may understand literacy as a feature of language socialization (Garret and Baquedano-Lopez 2002, Ochs 1988, Schieffelin 1986), and specifically, the socialization of performance, by which speaker-readers are taught to evaluate certain performative modalities as iconic and indexical of an institutionally sanctioned authority. The ideological construction of literacy thus rests on which people or institutions in any given society have the authority to construe certain performance practices as “literate,” and how these practices, when disseminated, transform existing social relationships. For instance, Schieffelin (2000) argues that for the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, literacy encounters that took place at Christian mission stations were more about transforming the social organization of performance and refashioning indices of authority than about learning to silently decipher texts. As Schieffelin notes, most literacy encounters were practiced through routinized call-and-response structures, whereby speaker-readers would imitate the sounds spoken by the teacher. In this way, Kaluli were socialized into a performance mode that stressed the authority of the teacher and the written word, in contrast with traditional Kaluli performance which emphasized an egalitarian interactional style known as “lift up over sounding” (320, also Feld

1998). Thus, it was this performance modality, which Schieffelin compares to the “sermon,” that Kaluli ideologically associate with literacy.

In many parts of the world, schools serve as the major institutional site for literacy socialization. However, even in the school, there is often more of an emphasis on using text to socialize speaker-readers into a certain way of performing particular affiliations or social identities. For instance, Leslie Moore, in her study of secular and Qu'ranic education in Cameroon notes that rote learning, or “guided repetition” is a popular mode of pedagogy in many parts of the world (Moore 2006). In this mode of socialization, Moore remarks, learning to recite and memorize texts (which are often in non-native languages) is often more important than learning to decipher the literal meaning of the text itself. In her own work with Fulbe speakers in northern Cameroon, she describes how the styles of teaching in Qu'ranic schools that emphasize the memorization of the Arabic Qu'ranic text, and the style of teaching in secular government schools, in which student-readers are taught to memorize and enact French-language dialogues are similar. In both cases, students are socialized into a certain mode of performance (“ways of speaking”), and it is expected that these practices will effect a “transformation of heart and mind” (122). The difference Moore argues is that in the Qu'ranic school, the guided repetition is intended to produce competent Muslims, in the secular schools, the instruction is intended to produce good Cameroonian national citizens. Thus, literacy among the Fulbe is understood as a mode of performance that emphasizes repetition and memorization in a non-native language. Though the goal of the socialization differs depending on the institution, in both locations the same set of practices indexes an institutionally sanctioned literacy through which students' hearts and minds are transformed.

In India, guided repetition plays an important role in both ‘literate’ secular schooling and

Brahmanical religious learning, which has been conceived of as primarily oral. For instance, Fuller's (2001) study of Brahmanical schooling in Madurai in South India shows how Brahmin students studying to be priests do not view their secular schooling literacy experiences and priestly training as fundamentally different. Contrary to popular representations of Brahmanical schooling as purely “oral,” in contemporary training written texts are also seen as authoritative carriers of ancient Sanskrit texts. However, there continues to be an emphasis on memorization and oral recitation of Sanskrit verses, with a particular attention to the “stress, pitch, and rhythm” of the words recited. Memorization of the verses is only the most basic feature of more advanced training. Fuller argues that the fact that priestly training use printed texts already assumes a basic schooled literacy for most of the students, illustrating the continuity between religious and secular education. He also suggests, moreover, that since much of Indian secular education, from arithmetic tables to college-degree programs, continues to be learned and taught “by rote” in “a language not fully understood” also accounts for perceptions of continuity among the students (30). Memorization and recitation, as well as cultivating a particular poetics, are key features of both Indian secular and religious educational experiences.

Hence, in contexts such as South Asia, “literacy” may be more associated with a particular poetics than with the simple decipherment of text. Studies in the southern Indian state of Tamilnadu illustrate this point quite starkly. For example, the features of what is usually referred to as the literary variety of Tamil, *centamil*, have transformed over the years. Currently what is now considered *centamil* is linked to the political rise of a movement known as Dravidianism, where a projected pre-Aryan classical language and poetics, embodied in a set of ancient texts known as *sankam*, has become the variety most often used in political spoken oratory in the state. As Bate (2009) notes, the mastery of this variety is connected to the

aesthetic evaluations of good speech and powerful oratory. Yet this form of Tamil is not often used in inscribed texts. For instance, a less prestigious form of Tamil is often used in mass media, such as Tamil-language newspapers (Cody 2009). Yet, as Cody (2008) ethnographically documents, rural lower-caste women who are considered “illiterate” continue to associate literacy with the mastery of a stylized variety of Tamil. This accounts, in part, for the failure in the Freirean type “literacy as emancipation” programs, for villagers understood that without control over specific varieties, whether they knew reading-writing or not, their social exclusion would persist.

Many linguistic anthropologists have argued for the importance of poetics in language socialization (Tedlock 1983, Friedrich 1986, Mannheim 1986, Mertz 1998). Jakobson (1960) delineates the poetic function as communicative activity that draws attention to the “message” or the formal features of the organization of discourse. Poetic strategies such as parallelism, repetition, alliteration, sound play, etc. establish iconic relations between linguistic form and prevailing linguistic ideologies, and set up evaluative frames by which certain stretches of discourse may assume a “detachable and recontextualizable form” (Bauman and Briggs 1990). The use of poetic language alerts an addressee or audience of the textual nature of the discourse, bringing new criteria and ideologies to bear on the resulting interpretation. Unlike the metalinguistic function, which according to Jakobson, makes explicit, discursive reference to the code, the poetic function often operates as a type of “infralanguage” (Mannheim 1986), in which social and grammatical categories are transmitted often under the threshold of awareness.

In this chapter, I will focus on the ways in which the poetic aspects of performance socialization, both the genred performance modalities of Santali song-dance and the performance modalities of institutional literacy, have precipitated disjunctures through which Santals have

fashioned new ideologies of political and cultural difference. The introduction of schooled literacy in which, as part of becoming “literate” citizen-subjects, Santals were expected to master the poetics of upper-caste, metropolitan, literary Indo-Aryan varieties, created a disjuncture between a valorized idea of “literacy” and Santali performance modalities. As a result, a new political orientation emerged among newly literate Santals that sought to reconcile the demands of schooled literacy with existing Santali performative practices. Agitating for cultural and linguistic autonomy, Santali writers created a new performative register within the already existing parameters of performance genres in which the use of Santali indexed an *adivasi* (indigenous) political identity. In doing so, I claim, they create a novel socialization practice that at once iconically encompasses the poetics of institutional literacy while maintaining and expanding the temporal and affective dynamics of Santali performance. Consequently, new texts emerge which form the foundation of a constellation of communicative practices, contributing, as I will discuss in later chapters, to the spread of Santali language scripts and media even in the absence of regular formal education in the language.

### **Santali “song-dance” and the socialization of performance genres**

When I began my fieldwork in rural West Bengal, I inquired about whether it was appropriate to record conversation and everyday interaction. People were not averse to the idea, but they found no real purpose to it, as everyday speech was little valued. However, among Santals, I was almost universally encouraged to record songs, and whenever songs were sung, people exhorted me to take out my recorder, or they would take the recorder from my hands, and record it themselves. Moreover, I also found that my research assistant, when helping me transcribe the data, was the most enthusiastic about transcribing material from sung text. Hence, I began to see that Santals did not simply celebrate *seren-enec'* (the song-dance complex) as a

metadiscursive marker of “Santal culture”, but also that there was an emotional attachment to songs, and great pleasure was taken in both performing as well as reduplicating song-forms, either through writing, recording, or transcribing. No Santal I talked with ever remarked (or so much as mentioned) “singing and dancing” as a negative community stereotype; most in fact associated the practice with a form of communal “pleasure”, called *raṣka*, which they described to me as one of the distinguishing characteristics of Santal life<sup>1</sup>.

Consequently, in addition to playing an important role in performance, the *seren* also was an important textual object among the Santals. Though I did not commonly see much spontaneous writing in Santali during the course of my fieldwork, the writing of songs was a very common practice. People would attend Santal literary and cultural programs not only to learn about literature, but also hear songs and commit them to writing. It was common also to see people have notebooks filled with different songs that they had written down. Though recording technology was now widely available on mobile phones (both audio and video) and recording was a common sight, people would still write down the songs so that they could be easily re-performed. However, written texts were not often used during actual performance in village spaces; thus, the memorization of sung text, including the rhythms and melodies, remained an important feature of Santali performance in addition to writing.

In this section, therefore, I aim to analyze the discursive organization of the song-dance complex and its textual circulation through a multi-channel performance network. These practices, I suggest, form a critical component of Santali-language socialization, allowing Santals to distinguish themselves from surrounding caste-Hindu communities. The constellation I outline here is distinguished primarily by the genred organization of the song-dance complex, and the particular grammatical-lexical features, temporal indices, and performance modes that



distinguish these genres. I will describe the discursive organization of a selection of these genres, attending to how discourses about these genres are socialized, how they generate affect, and the textual qualities of the performance. Finally, I will discuss how these song-forms circulate through larger networks of performance.

As I learned through the course of my fieldwork, what Santals refer to as “dance-song” (*enec'-seren*) is actually a complex of different, metadiscursively delineated performance genres. By genre, I am referring to a “relatively stable type of utterance” (Bakhtin 1986:60) that exists at the interactive site between the “organization of discourse” and the “organization of the event in which it is employed” (Bauman and Briggs 1992: 142). As genres are sociocultural typifications that link discourse structures to specific events, they can contribute to the study of how stable social dispositions (or *habitus*) emerge across diverse interactional domains (Bourdieu 1977, Hanks 1987). Hence, examining discourse genres of Santali performance allows one to discern not only the organization of the performance, but also the processes by which Santals typify performance, constitute a textuality, and conceive of genred performance as a socialization practice. These genres cross into various mediums, such that even if a written song-text is detached from its context of performance, the genred cues allow people to locate the written text within a performative practice.

However, as much as genres produce stability, they also are subject to instability. As generic categories are produced in diverse interactional settings, and since no performance is fully replicable, these categories can never be fully determined or determining. Intertextual relations through genre “simultaneously render texts ordered, unified, and bounded on the one hand, and fragmented, heterogeneous, and open-ended on the other” (Bauman and Briggs 1992: 147). Hence, as Bauman and Briggs argue, “the process of linking particular utterances to

generic models thus necessarily produces an intertextual gap" (149). They suggest that the way in which these gaps, essentially misalignments between performative instances of a particular genre, are managed, reveal windows into social relations of power, authority, and negotiations of social identity. Minimizing intertextual gaps within genres entails a more regimented basis for generic authority, while maximizing those gaps allows for an authority derived from innovation. The management of these gaps parallels the "centrifugal" and "centripetal" poles of dialogic discourse in general (Bakhtin 1981).

Santali "song-dance" (*sereñ-enec'*) genres span a wide range of interactional settings as well, from everyday practice to marked ritual occasions. Santals do not consider 'performance' as markedly distinct from everyday activity and life. For instance, in Santali, ordinary human speech (*rod*) and melodic sung speech (*raq*) are seen on a continuum, with *raq'* seen as a natural extension of *rod* (Prasad 1985).<sup>2</sup> In addition, genres are also characterized by differences in associated rhythm (*ru*) as well as dance form (*enec'*). Like the difference between "speech" and "melody," the genres themselves display differing degrees of poetic, musical, and performative regimentation. The degree of regimentation intertextually distinguishes particular genres. Certain genres are metadiscursively associated with particular times and places, and their poetic organization, melody, and dance all index particular social or ritual occasions. For instance, *baha* songs are associated with the spring harvest festival, *sohrae* songs with the winter harvest festival, *dong* with weddings, and *bir sereñ* with the annual hunt<sup>3</sup>; their form, rhythm, and tune all index specific settings and activities. However, other genres such as *lagde*, are specified by their ability to be performed any time or place. The *lagde* is a genre that is typified by the absence of specificity; it can be performed anywhere that there is a gathering of people (called an *akhda* in Santali), and any time of the day. *Lagde* performances thus tend to maximize

intertextual gaps, opening up the genre to transformations that include the incorporation of institutional literacy as well as an articulation of a contemporary (and future-oriented) politics of autonomy.

In the rest of the section, I will provide two examples of Santali sung-genres, one of the *baha* and one of the *lagḍe*. I argue that even though writing is operative in both cases, the minimization of intertextual gaps in the *baha* genre suggests a temporality in which performance exists prior to writing, and writing is seen as a means to preserve or perpetuate a notion of “tradition” in which the distinction between past and future is collapsed. *Lagḍe* on the other hand, because the genre tends to maximize intertextual gaps, dynamically engages with recent Santali encounters with literacy, and the genre itself becomes transformed through disjunctures between institutional literacy and the socialization of Santali song-dance practices. This renders the genre open to creating spaces for the socialization of a present and future-oriented politics that has been significantly shaped by the literacy encounter. These genres reveal how writing interacts with embodied and musical elements to form a constellation of Santali literacy that relies on both fixity and transformation, and serves to socialize Santals into a political discourse of autonomy and difference.

*Example 3.1: The Baha “um”*

One of the most highly regimented genres is the sub-class of *Baha* songs called “um,” sung during first day of the two day spring harvest festival when village houses are cleaned and people take ritual baths (“um”). In general, *Baha* songs, sung only during the spring harvest festival, and only either in the sacred grove (*jahe*) of the village or, in the case of the *um*, the courtyard of the village priest (*naike*). *Baha* dances are called *dhon*, a special type of complex

dance only performed during the rituals in the sacred grove. Both "um" songs and songs and dances in the sacred grove (taking place on the second day, known as *sardi*) call forth sacred spirits (*bongas*) into the village space. These spirits then possess village men (any man, but not women, can be possessed) who are then ritually propitiated by the villagers. The rituals performed during the festival are essential for ensuring prosperity and continuity for the village. In my research area, the Baha festival, unlike other festivals, was exclusive to Santals, and no other communities participated.<sup>4</sup> The songs were viewed as emblematic of "tradition," and along with the winter harvest festival of Sohrae, Baha was said to comprise the major cultural event of the Santals. The genre is typified by a high degree of poetic and performative regimentation.

I recorded the following "um" song during the Baha festival of 2010 in the village of Tilaboni. This particular 'um' song invoked and beckoned ancestral spirits to come to the village, and it took place in the courtyard of the village priest on the night of the "um." Only men were allowed in the courtyard, and this song was accompanied by no dance. There was light drumming and the periodic playing of the *sakowa*, a gourd shaped instrument that makes a horn sound. The *sakowa* is associated with Santal hunts as well as Santal insurrection, and often serves to heighten communal identification between men. The ritual ended with a spirit possession (*rum*) in which a few men began violently convulsing and speaking in very fast, trembling speech.

Discursively the song-text is characterized by a parallel poetic structure in which each line is related to the next through "semantic minimal pairs" (Mannheim 1986) in which morphologically identical lines differ by one lexical item that is close but not exactly the same in semantic content. The participants are divided into two groups, and there is a call-and-response performance structure. One group leads the verse and the other follows. Usually in each group

there are one or two older men who know the songs, and the rest of the group, particularly those younger, follow along. Each call and response is accompanied by the alternate group rhythmically clapping their hands. I give the first two verses of the song below with the semantic pairs in bold:

**Example 2.1.** Recorded on an eve of 'um,' Baha festival, 2010 Tilaboni

**Num** re do ho, chita  
**Narka** re do ho, chita  
**Nagu** got' nalang me  
**Buru gorhasa--**

**Num** re do ho, chita  
**Narka** re do ho, chita  
**Seter** got' nalang me  
**Hara gorkare--**

When you **bathe**, Chita (name of an ancestral Bonga)  
When you **shampoo your hair**, Chita [narka--mud used to wash hair]  
**Bring** us two [inc]  
**Earth from the hill**

When you **bathe**, Chita  
When you **shampoo your hair**, Chita  
**Arrive** to us two [inc]  
**Some mahua seeds** [mahua-tree from whose flowers is made wine].

The poetic organization of the lines closely follows the melodic organization, and iconically sets up an interpretative frame by which the *seren* is identified and judged according to genre criteria related to stereotypical ideas of performance. Along with the melodic tone and musical accompaniment, the poetic organization brings forth a performance space that is ritually and emotionally charged. As I was transcribing this tune, my research assistant told me that “Chita” and the other *bongas* called forth by this song are “old names” that would commonly not be mentioned in most other contexts. The semantic minimal pairs diagram the performance, connecting the performers and the performance space to the *bongas* (through deictic verbs of

“coming/bringing”) and to the ritual occasion (*um/narka*) as well as expressing the desire for a good harvest (*buru gorhasa/hara gokare*), one of the goals of the *baha* festival. Intertextual gaps are minimized here through mechanisms such as the alignment of poetic features and the use of a more archaic variety that Santals view in continuation with their own narrations of migration and dispersal.

The minimization of intertextual gaps through poetic structure and the organization of performance in the *baha um* songs entextualizes a certain authority that comes to typify the genre. Hence, like the creation myths (*bhinti*) and other narrations, the *baha um* songs carry with them voices of the ancestors and, as my research assistant mentioned, “ancient” spirits, in order to channel their strength and ensure a future prosperity. This authority, and its temporal significations, is also transferred into the textual inscription of the songs and the way they circulate. For instance, about a year after I recorded the full-length version of this *um*, I came across a published version in a collection of *Baha* songs (Baskey 2010). In the book, the author mentions how in recent years he has witnessed a number of mistakes in *baha* song performance, and wanted to write this book in order that the songs continue to be performed correctly. The songs are written in Santali in the Eastern Brahmi script, and are published in small booklet intended for circulation among performers. The authority of the book does not stem from the fact that it is written, but from the genred nature of the performance, in which authority is considered to stem from a tradition that is presupposed as having existed temporally prior to writing and not seen as subject to transformation or innovation.

The writing of traditional, authoritative genres such as *baha* was seen by many Santals as a way to preserve a memory and culture between the generations. As I mentioned, those singing the *um* were mostly older and middle-aged males. Younger people were not expected to know it,

and middle-aged men often learned how to sing it from older people. One of my close interlocutors' father<sup>5</sup>, who led the *um* performance in his village, said that younger people have forgotten the old ways, but that he is not worried for them because much of it now is being preserved in “writing.” Thus these genres are tied to a discourse of the “elders” that has been documented for many communities (Meek 2007). Yet the authority of writing does not go unchallenged, and is linked to the way inscriptions, like any text, is interpreted within already established performance traditions and local conceptions between the relation of genre and authority. For instance, when I circulated the book of *baha* songs which contained the *um* song, the same interlocutor told me that these songs vary from region to region, village to village. Hence, what is authoritative in one locale may not be authoritative in another, despite what a written text says. The comment illustrates that even if texts are “written,” they continue to reveal indeterminacies stemming from the already established performative socialization to which readers have been exposed.

### *Example 2.2 Lagḍe*

As opposed to the *baha*, the *lagḍe* genre appears to be much looser in both poetic as well as performative organization. As mentioned earlier, the *lagḍe* is not relegated to a particular time or place, but may be performed at any time or place. For instance, following India's victory in the cricket World Cup in 2011, people in the villages where I was doing my fieldwork celebrated by singing and dancing *lagḍe*. The most common times I saw performances of *lagḍe* were after large celebrations, like a village fair, or the *baha* or *sohrae* festivals. Thus *lagḍe* is considered a way to prolong (and eventually wind down) the heightened feelings of enjoyment created by participation in performances. Also unlike *baha*, *lagḍe* is performed by everybody: males, females, and children. Performance is organized through a call-and-response singing of

verse, punctuated then by drumming and dancing. Drumming is performed mostly by males, while singing is primarily by females; both males and females participate in dancing.

In addition, unlike the *baha* songs, which are typically situated in either the courtyard of the priest or the sacred grove, *lagḍe* songs usually bring the performance-space known as the *akhḍa* into existence. *Akhḍa* in many Munda languages is a general term used for a communal gathering, and usually includes all people, regardless of social position. In the *lagḍe*, the *akhḍa* specifically refers to the space and moment in which singing and dancing are occurring.

However, just because the organization of the *akhḍa* is loose does not mean that it is free of connections to ancestors and *bongas* that characterize Santali performance genres in general. People often told me that in older times, people in villages would dance *lagḍe* every night, and the dancing would become so vigorous, and the enjoyment (*raṣka*) levels so high that *bongas* would often join in the dance, particularly female *bongas*. These *bongas* would often be indistinguishable from human girls, but if one looked hard enough, one could tell they were *bongas* because their feet would be inverted (ie. turned 180 degrees). In the morning, following the culmination of the *akhḍa* the *bongas* would disappear. Sadly, these days, people say, *akhḍas* no longer generate as much emotion as in the older days, and the sight of *bongas* is no longer as common.

The poetic organization of the “traditional” *lagḍe* genre also differed from the *baha um*. For one, as a Santali magazine editor, MH, told me, the songs often were sung in a regional variety of Indo-Aryan known as “Jharkhandi” (now considered a variety of Bengali). They also contain multiple voices, both those of participants as well as onlookers. Voices are coordinated within these songs in terms of code structure as well as poetic structure; the use of semantic minimal pairs intertextually connects these songs to other genres such as the *um*. Yet the



bivalency as well as inclusion of multiple voices, not to mention the general diagrammaticity of the verses which themselves mark the genre as stylistically unique. The following excerpt is from a published version in a linguistic survey of Santali by a Santali government officer (Hembrom 2002) that included the song in Roman script and English translation, under the heading “folk songs in Jharkhandi Bengali.” As an example of a “traditional” *lagḍe*, MH also mentioned to me a verse similar to the one below. The bold-face type indicates the use of Santali. The italics indicate the semantic minimal pairs.

Example 2.2, from Hembrom 2002, 143.

*Upor* kuli akhḍa  
*Nāmo* kuli akhḍa  
 Akhḍa boro re jomok'  
**Gitic' jāpic' anjom-aiñ**  
 Akhḍa boro re jomok' (Hembrom 2002, 143)

The upper-lane akhḍa  
 The lower-lane akhḍa  
 The akhḍa is in full-swing  
**Sleeping, I hear it**  
 The akhḍa is in full-swing

Like in the *um* song, this song poetically diagrams the action of the verse itself. The verse begins, like the Baha *um*, with parallelism as well as a semantic opposition (*upper/lower*) in the first distich, metadiscursively framing the action that accompanies the text. Thus, the text enacts a space of multiple *akhḍas*, regardless of how many are actually performed. Lines 3 and 5 diagram the present and future-state of the ongoing action, describing how the *akhḍa* space is *jomok'* or “in full-swing.” The use of the regional variety of Bengali, which is shared by Santals and other castes, suggest that the *lagḍe* is part of a shared regional repertoire of performance forms, and not specific to Santals. A number of genres in fact, such as the *pata* songs sung in regional fairs, the *khuntḍao* songs sung at the bullfights during *sohrae*, as well as songs sung during the *karam* festival during the monsoon season are all in this regional variety. This has

been accounted for even in the early nineteenth century, when missionaries collected hundreds of songs from Santals in Indo-Aryan varieties, expressing a surprise that even though Santals were not as conversationally fluent in the Indo-Aryan varieties as they were in Santali, a vast number of songs were performed in these varieties.

This verse also exhibits a voice distinction as not present in the *um* song. There is a distinction between what is happening collectively, recounted in the Jharkhandi Bangla variety, and what is happening to the individual speaker in line 4. There the speaker, who is outside the action, notes in Santali, “sleeping I hear it.” The distinction is made not only at the level of code, but also poetics, where the line appears unconnected to other lines in the verse. Hence, through the use of the first person pronoun, as well as the code-distinction, the verse figures a Santali-speaking individual while also characterizing a Bengali speaking collective. Both of these figures are included in the verse. This suggests that the *lagḍe* genre is fluid, closer to, given the prevalent multilingualism and the conditions in which Santals live, the heteroglossia of Santali conversational style. Yet, the genre forms a critical element in “song-dance” socialization, even though it lacks the regimented poetic discursive style of genres like the *um*. Rather than generating affect through poetic parallelism, as is done in the *um*, affect is elicited primarily through the sonic and corporeal channels (melody, rhythm, and dance). The poetic text, as the verse explicitly illustrates, reinforces the performative action occurring through these other channels.

Consequently, unlike the *um*, where strict poetic regimentation and a concomitant discourse of authority minimizes intertextual gaps, the generic features of the *lagḍe* tend to maximize them. The poetic text of the genre includes multiple voices and figurations, and the general structure points to a more conversational style. The organization of the *akhḍa* as a

communal performance space that may be performed at any time, and in the ordinary spaces of the village, also characterizes the genre's lack of regimentation. Whereas the *um* entextualizes an authority grounded in the ritual components of the performance, including an ancestral temporality, the *lagḍe* entextualizes more everyday experiences, conveying a temporality not of tradition but of ongoing present and future social activity. The *lagḍe* therefore not only lacks the authority of the *um*, it also serves very different purposes. In the latter, affect is generated by excluding everyday experiences and spaces, while in the former, affect arises by recontextualizing everyday experiences and spaces through melody, dance and rhythm, infusing them with communal enjoyment (*raskā*). The fact that genres such as the *lagḍe* are considered public performances may account for the significant use of local Indo-Aryan varieties in the “traditional” *lagḍes*.

As I discussed with the *um*, *lagḍe* songs are frequently written down and circulated, both in published and non-published form. In fact, of all the genres, *lagḍe* were perhaps written down most often, illustrating the degree to which this genre is open to multiple channels of circulation. However, unlike the *um*, the reasons for writing down *lagḍe* were not to preserve these songs to be repeated. Rather *lagḍe* were often avenues through which creativity was expressed; written *lagḍe* could be freely altered to speak to particular social and political conditions. Thus people wrote down *lagḍe* that they heard as well as *lagḍe* that they may have created, and they could then circulate these songs by voicing them at *akhḍas*. These songs would then be taken up by others, who would either memorize them or write them down. Hence, the textual inscription of the *lagḍe*, as with the *baha um*, is yet another channel of a general process of genre-specific entextualization. The written channel exists alongside the oral channel in order to facilitate performance and maintain discernible generic features. In the case of the *um*, writing is seen as a

way to preserve the authority of the genre, while for the *lagde* it is seen as a way that creative expression or reflections on contemporary experiences may be actualized within the song-dance complex. In this way, Santali literacy practices are seen as general extensions of already existing performance practices, and the writing down of songs is viewed as another practical technology (like recording and transcribing) of circulating texts within the networks specified by their generic affiliation.

In this section I have claimed that Santali language socialization should best be viewed through the lens of genre and processes of entextualization rather than through any division between 'orality' and 'literacy.' In this sense the application of the term 'literacy' has little use here, for reading and writing practices are best understood as part of general genre-specific modes of entextualization. Though reading and writing may have changed or expanded avenues of circulation, ultimately they are instrumental technologies, existing alongside oral performance. Thus 'literacy,' like song, dance, and rhythm, is socialized, as the publisher notes, in and through the performance-space, *kuli duli kilot' kilot'*. The introduction of the technology of writing, therefore, does not engender a disjuncture between literate and non-literate socialization. Writing, as I have argued, does not alter the underlying entextualization processes of Santali genred performance. Instead, I suggest, the introduction of a new form of socialization through institutions such as the school bring about a disjuncture that created the metadiscursive divide between literate and non-literate practices.

Literacy therefore is not tied to writing per se, but to a form of institutionalized socialization attached to a particular code, literary tradition, and upper-caste notion of distinction and hierarchy. The disjuncture reveals itself not only in the production and circulation of text artifacts, but also in how these alternative socialization practices, including its poetics, impacts

and transforms existing Santali performance genres. The effects of literacy are especially apparent in genres such as the *lagḍe* in which the maximization of intertextual gaps as well as the public nature of performance render the *lagḍe* a medium for social and political intervention. The dividing line, I will argue, between traditional and contemporary *lagḍe* is a result, not of writing itself, but of literacy. In the following sections, I will outline how literacy emerges as a socialization disjuncture that Santals experienced through their encounter with institutions such as the school; I will then describe the subsequent recontextualization of this disjuncture within the performance space. I argue that genres such as the *lagḍe* are transformed through these literacy encounters and serve as a way that a new politically inflected and ethnically marked ideology of literacy is socialized through existing performance modalities.

### **Song, literacy, and the socialization of a Santali writer**

At a university seminar on modern Santali literature, the famous Santali poet Marsal Hembrom said that the song (*seren*) was the most important performance genre among the Santals, joining all parts of a Santal's life, from birth to marriage to death. Thus he said that it was no surprise that the first written accounts in Santali were songs, when the numerous missions in the Santali-speaking area each produced their own songbooks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He also argued that understanding the *seren* is also important in order to understand the emergence of modern Santali “poetry,” and that poetry is the most important literary genre for the Santals because of its close association with song. The first “milestone”, Hembrom claims, in the emergence of a modern Santali poetics, is with the work of the great Santali-language poet Sadhu Ramchand Murmu, who fuses “poetry” with the cadences and melody of Santali “*seren*.” By poetry, I take Hembrom as referring to a particular Indo-Aryan poetics learned in school, while *seren* connotes the genred performance practices of the “song-

dance” complex. Hembrom thus locates the emergence of a modern Santal poetics at a particular moment in literary history, when two styles that were conceived of as separate were now instantiated as one.<sup>6</sup> In this section, I will argue that the separation was precipitated by a certain disjuncture in socialization practice, where Santal encounters with schooled literacy entailed a new valuation of a domain of “poetry” that was differentiated from genred performance. Focusing on an account by a famous Santali short-story writer and poet, I suggest that the socialization into “Santali” literacy happens when the ideologically inflected poetics of schooled literacy are brought into the performance-space, taking up the iconic and diagrammatic features of Santali performance genres. In this way a literate “poetics” becomes double-voiced, iconizing both its origins in an institutional setting as well as the feelingful features typical of Santali performance-genres.

One of my primary mentors during my fieldwork was a well-known short story writer, KB. I had met him during my pre-dissertation fieldwork in Kolkata; he had a government job and lived in the same suburb as the publisher, AK. It was through extensive interactions with him that I began to grasp some of the nuances of Santali, and I was introduced to numerous writers and publishers (including the publisher AKM as well as the editor MH). It was also in his native village (and due to his connections, for the area was a political hotspot due to ongoing battles between Maoist insurgents and government paramilitary forces) where I set up a base for my rural fieldwork. One day, as we were sitting at the cycle shop of SM, one of my closest interlocutors in the village, I asked KB how he became interested in writing Santali, since Santali was not taught in schools, nor at that time (1970's-1980's) was Santali printed literature widely available. He said he always had an inclination towards writing, but recognized a disjuncture between what he was learning in school and what he was exposed to in his village. As he started

to attend primary school, one of a first generation in his family to do so, he was taught literacy not only through writing, but also through memorization and recitation of poetry. He offered an example of one of the Bengali poems he had to learn in school, a nursery rhyme attributed to the famous Bengali Nobel-laureate, Rabindranth Tagore:

Example 2.3, Told by KB, Podadi bazaar

(1) Kumorpaḍar gorur gaḍi/  
Bojhai kora kolshi hāḍi  
Gaḍi chalay kongshi bodon/  
Shonge je jai bhanne modon

(1) A cow cart from the potter's colony  
carrying clay water pots and other vessels  
The cart is going to Kongshi bodon  
and along the way to Bhanne modon

In reciting this poem, he said that it struck him as novel, and sounded unlike any of the Santali songs he heard performed when he was young. I asked him what was so different about this poem as opposed to the songs. He told me that the difference lay in the meter (in Bengali, *chanda*). Whereas Santali songs relied on various strategies of semantic and morphological parallelism for versification, KB said, in the poetry learned at school, versification occurred through a regular metrical pattern in which each verse is made up of eight moras, with each distich connected through end-rhyme. This metrical pattern, a standard form in Sanskrit poetics, and later imported into the literary registers of most of the dominant Indo-Aryan languages such as Bengali and Hindi, was, for KB, ideologically associated with “literacy.” In a later conversation, he described versification based on meter as *akhorito* (or related to *akshar*, Skt. 'letter,' *akshargnan* 'literacy,' *nirakshar* 'illiterate') whereas Santali songs he characterized the versification as *aakarito* (based on *aakaar*, Skt. 'form'). He said when he was a primary school student, he used to come home and sometimes experiment with grafting Santali words onto the meters he was learning to recite in school. Hence, 'literacy' was not simply associated with

reading and writing for KB; part of institutional literacy socialization for KB was to learn how to recite and perform a specific poetics, and through its enactment, to model oneself as a literate Bengali citizen-subject. These poetics, based on the memorization of a metadiscursively delineated metric, brought into stark contrast the socialization practices of the school and the performance practices of the village-space.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time that KB was learning literacy in school, he was also routinely exposed to Santali performance at home. He recounted his early childhood days growing up in a village, and described his father as a *rusika*, someone who was well known in the community for his knowledge and performance of songs. Because his father was a *rusika*, there would be regular *akhḍas* around his village home, where singers and poets from distant villages would often gather and perform, particularly during festival season. They would bring new compositions, and also small books of their most recent creations or compilations, which they would perform and sell at the village fairs, where people from around the region gathered for singing, dancing, and general festivities. KB recalls sometimes sneaking away these small chapbooks, and reading and copying them down as part of his own interest in writing.

However, while certainly reading and writing written Santali were part of his socialization, another part was the explicit recognition of an institutional literacy poetics within the Santali performance-space. KB emphasized to me the first time he heard the song of the famous Santali poet Sadhu Ramchand Murmu, who hailed from a nearby village in West Bengal. Murmu was a primary schoolteacher but also a poet and singer, and would often go around performing his poetry at gatherings and *akhḍas*. While Murmu himself was not present, his songs would circulate, and interested *rusikas* would memorize them or write them down and then perform them at other *akhḍas*. Murmu's most famous song was *Debon tengon adibasi bir* (Stand



up, we the adivasi heroes), the informal anthem of the fledgling Jharkhand movement, a political movement advocating for indigenous sovereignty and autonomy that swept the tribal areas of eastern India during the 1960's and 70's around the time when KB was attending primary school. At the time KB heard the performance, he did not know who Ramchand Murmu was, and, as it is not common to cite authors in communal performance, he never knew until much later who authored the song. However, KB said that when he first heard the song sung it struck him as simultaneously both “*Santali* and *not Santali*.” I asked him to explain this a little further, and he said that it was “Santali” because not only was it in Santali and it was performed as part of a typical Santali performance (with drums, dance, etc.), but it was “not Santali” because it was in *chanda*. In hearing this song, KB also recalled the metered poetry he was supposed to recite in school as well. I offer two verses of the song as an example:

Example 2.4. From Sadhu Ramchand Murmu, *Debon Tengon Adibasi Bir*

(1) Marang buru joy menabon  
 Mit' horte tadamabon  
 Bair helec' kate abon  
 Duk do mabon ñec' ñir  
 Debon tengon adibasi bir do--  
 Debon tengon adibasi bir

(3) Kol, Shoantal, Mahali, Miḍa  
 Abon joto boyak' ruḍa  
 Bhiṭa mati baḡiyate  
 Ado babon bol bir  
 Debon tengon adibasi bir do--  
 Debon tengon adibasi bir (Murmu 2011, 64)

(1) Let us (inc) say "Victory" to Marang Buru [the Great Hill spirit]  
 Let us (inc) walk on one path  
 Let us (inc) drive away together all of our worries  
 Let us (inc) stand up, we (inc) the adivasi heroes

(3) Kol, Shoantal, Mahali, Munda [name of indigenous, adivasi tribes]  
 We who are like wildcats [treated like wild animals]  
 We (inc), having been thrown out of our homeland  
 Let us (inc) no longer flee to the forests,

Let us (inc) stand up, we (inc) the adivasi heroes

In the excerpt above, one sees the stanzas comprised of six lines with a versification of four lines of 8 syllables each (syllables with codas may be assigned 2 beats) and a refrain of 10 syllables that recurs throughout the whole song. This scheme of regular syllabification, as I discussed above, is typical of the Sanskritic “metered” poetry or *chhanda* that KB learned to recite in school. Moreover, unlike most "Santali" songs KB heard, this song-text also had a regular, recurring end-rhyme scheme, in which the hemistiches are linked not by lexical items or refrains (except in the chorus), but rather by how the last syllable of one line rhymes with the last syllable in the next. For instance, in both verses one and two, lines 1-4 are parallel in that each line is eight moras each<sup>8</sup>, and that the last syllable in lines 1-3 and 4-6 rhyme. The rhyming pattern follows no set semantic scheme: in verse one, the end rhymes in lines 1-3 are all signaled by the addition of the 1st person inclusive morpheme *-bon*, while in lines 1-3 of verse 3 the rhyme scheme is unified by slight vocalic alternations (a type of 'slant rhyme'). Lines 4-6 in verse 1 display coda rhyme (*nir/bir*), while lines 4-6 in verse 2 display homonym rhyme (in line 4 the Austro-Asiatic *bir* 'forest' while in line 5-6 *bir*-Skt. 'hero'). Thus, the verses are organized by syllabic modulation and rhyme, two modes that KB associated with literacy (*akhorito*) and the Bengali literary tradition rather than with Santali genred performance (*akarito*).

Although on the one hand, the song text mirrors the poetics of institutionalized literacy, it simultaneously contains a number of iconic references that index Santal (or adivasi) specific experiences that contribute to the socialization of communal affect. First of all, it begins with a prayer to a the Santal deity, *Marang Buru*, or the “great hill spirit,” who is one of the major deities present in the sacred grove (*jaher*) of the villages, and along with his wife and sons<sup>9</sup>, one of the deities to possess villagers during the second day of the *baha* festival (*sardi*). Previously,

songs to Marang Buru were usually sung during the *Baha* ceremonies or during the creation-story *bhintis*, *lagde* songs, when they mentioned deities, often mentioned Hindu deities such as Rama or Krishna. The invocation to *Marang Buru* intertextually references regimented, ritualistic genres such as the *baha*. In addition, each of the verses are replete with the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural inclusive pronoun *abon* (and its concomitant morpheme *-bon*), which effectively includes everybody, ratifying even non-participants within the sphere of action. These participants, both interior and exterior to the action, are explicitly specified (the members of the *adivasi* tribes). The first line of the third verse mentions “Kol, Shaontal, Mahali, Mida.” which are names of all the scheduled tribes that live in the area (Shaontal is the Bengali pronunciation for “Santal”). Hence, the use of the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural inclusive in the song iconizes communal affect while also indexing a political and ethnically marked identity, *adivasi*. This term, following the Jharkhand movement, will have come to define Santali relations with non-Santals; it is now typical for non-Santals (including other scheduled tribes) to refer to Santals as “adivasi” and Santali as “adivasi bhasha.” Finally, references such as in verse 1, *mit' horte taqamabon* 'let us (inc) walk on one path' suggests the narrative of migration and separation (*taqam* 'to walk' being a verb used to characterize migration in the stories or *bhinti*); or, in verse 2, the contrast between fleeing in the “forest” (with the Santali *bir*), a standard trope of weakness during times of conflict, and the standing up of the *adivasi* heroes (Skt. *bir*), utilizes long-standing imagery in order to mold new political subjectivities.

For KB, describing the song as both “Santali” and “non-Santali,” the song diagrams the disjuncture between the 'literate' socialization practices of his schooling, and the iconic and performative socialization practices of Santali genred performance. The disjuncture however was not seen only as a rupture, but also created an indeterminate space wherein a newly conceived

Santali literacy could emerge. Recontextualizing a poetics of literacy within the aesthetics and feeling-generating iconicities of Santali performance practices, the newly emergent Santali “literacy” double-voices competing socialization modalities.<sup>10</sup> Not only does a Santali 'code' now pragmatically resemble the more 'literary' varieties of what the publisher calls 'institute' Bengali, but it also recontextualizes those poetics within the performance space. Literacy thus becomes part of the “song-dance” complex that distinguishes Santal socialization, learned *kuli duli kilot' kilot'*. In doing so, Santali song-dance entextualizes a new form of socialization, that of a politics of autonomy promoted by the Jharkhand movement. In these politics, Santals re-articulate their identities as *adivasi*, simultaneously emulating and distancing themselves from dominant governmental and institutional practices. The double-voicing both entextualizes institutionalized ideas of progress and literacy within the performance space, and also infuses them with *raṣka*, or communal enjoyment, through the strategic deployment of a poetics and performance organization that intertextually references genred performance practice.

Songs such as *Debon tengon adibasi bir*, according to KB, inspired him to pursue writing his own song-poetry in Santali. With time, the Jharkhand movement and movements for regional and indigenous autonomy opened up new avenues of Santali literacy that young authors like KB had an important, and socially recognized, role in shaping. For instance, folk drama (*jatra*) had long been a popular performance form in rural Bengal, and especially popular in the forest areas where most Santals resided was a dance-song drama form known as *cho*.<sup>11</sup> These were performed mostly in the Jharkhandi, the regional Indo-Aryan variety spoken by all the communities in the Jangalmahal area of West Bengal, including Santals (and the idiom of *sereñ* such as the *lagḍe*). However, poets like Ramchand Murmu, in addition to writing songs also wrote dramas. Drama, combining oral and written channels in a way that literate language and

literate "messages" (mainly 'social reform' like anti-witchcraft, anti-drunkenness, and exhortations to send children to school) could be transmitted. Drama groups were very popular in and around KB's village among school-going adolescents, and KB began writing Santali-language plays for various drama groups in his area. As his exposure to Bengali-language literary genres increased (such as the short story) he began recasting those genres into Santali as well.

### **Literacy and the transformation of the *lagḍe***

Songs such as *Debon tengon adibasi bir* were prevalent enough among Santals in the early 1980's that ethnomusicologist Onkar Prasad, at the time of his fieldwork, classified them into a new emergent genre known as *disom dulaḍ sereṅ* ('love of country songs') or *disom tol sereṅ* ('uplift the country songs') highlighting their ethnonational thematics (Prasad 1985, 5). However, by the time I had started my research, these songs had become incorporated into the *lagḍe* genre, and thus, thoroughly integrated into the socializing repertoire of the song-dance complex. As mentioned earlier, in the *lagḍe*, time and place of performance as well as the discourse organization remains unspecified, and often linguistic resources and intertextual gaps are creatively manipulated such that multiple voices emerge. As in Example 3.2, older *lagḍe* were typically sung in the regional Bengali variety, though they contained numerous code-indeterminacies and bivalency. They also often referred to the action occurring in the performance space (the *akhḍas*) itself, oscillating between individual voices and accounts of communal performance.

By the time I had arrived for my research, the poetic organization of the *lagḍe* had changed substantially. For instance, during most of my fieldwork, I never knew that *lagḍe* had previously been, and in some places, still are, sung in Jharkhandi; I had always heard the songs performed as a quintessentially "Santali" genre, sung in Santali and performed mostly by Santals.

Yet despite the difference in poetic organization, the combination of rhythm, melody, and dance, the underspecificity of time and place of performance, and the emergent nature of the *akhḍa* space continued to play an important role in constituting the *lagḍe* genre. I only discovered that the poetic organization of these *lagḍe* departed significantly from older conventions after discussing a transcription of one of my recordings with a well-known Santali-language magazine editor, MH. Similar to *Debon tengon adibasi bir* (Example 4.2), *lagḍe* had now, according to MH, become typified by poetic conventions that pointed to literate and literacy conventions cultivated in school settings. MH told me that present-day *lagḍe* were not like the *lagḍe* of his youth; and that, these *lagḍe* instead were examples of "*kobi ak' ol*" (poet's writing). Thus, in MH's observation, unlike the *baha* in which performance was seen as both prior and encompassing of writing, the contemporary *lagḍe* appears, as part of a new generic convention, to be based on some unspecified prior act of writing, presupposing some degree of exposure to institutional literacy. This new relationship to writing, I suggest, is recontextualized as part of a genre-specific Santali socialization performance repertoire that is employed, in concert with melodic and kinetic elements, to cultivate a newly delineated Santali-language literacy based on a politics of autonomy.

My story begins in my research assistant's village, located in the Bandowan block of Purulia district, West Bengal. This region, known for its literary activity, was home to a few generations of noted poets and writers. I had come there to stay for a few days during the Baha celebration. We had just finished celebrating the *sṛḍi*, the rituals and the Baha song-dance performed in the sacred teak grove of the village. After we returned home, my research assistant's *teyang*, or older brother-in-law, the husband of his older maternal sister, who, though he lived nearby across the border in Jharkhand, was visiting his wife's natal home for the Baha

celebration, began to lead a post-Baha *akhḍa*. He occupied the position of the *rusika*, a person who has the knowledge of song-lyrics, melodies, and rhythm, and who usually suggests which songs to sing and leads the *akhḍa*. I offer two excerpts of the first part of the performance, in order to present the structure of how songs are acquired, including the establishment of the generic classification. I will also analyze the poetic structure and discuss my conversation about the structure with MH as a result of my own particular entextualization of the performance.

**Transcript 2.2.** Recorded on 3-21-2011, Baha festival, village Kaira

Men: T (Teyang, brother in-law); TK (Tarak); J (Jawai, brother in-law); N (Nishaant, researcher); YM (other young men in village, identified with letters)

Women: CHN (Chunki); CHT (Chata); YW (other young women, identified with letters)  
[numbered by turn]

1TK: ado oka tey ben chalak' kana?	1TK: Hey where are you (dual) <sup>12</sup> going?
2T: bang bang oka ho' baliñ chalak'a aliñ do. aliñ ho' apey sào tegey menak' liña	2T: No, no I (dual) am not going anywhere. I am here with all of you.
3YM (A): ma sereñ lai pey	3YM(A): Ok, all of you, sing!
4CHT:(...)dong raha hiññ kada sey	4CHT: I've forgotten the melodies for wedding songs ( <i>raha</i> ).
5CHN:(...)nuiho'	5CHN: Me too [female-marked speech]
6TK: dong pata joto gepe hiññ?	6TK: <i>Dong, pata</i> , you've forgotten all?
7J:dong ko do bapla oḍaak' reyak' kan geya, lagḍe	7J: Dong is only for weddings, lagḍe.
8T:ar bakhan lagḍe(...) lagḍe (...) àḍti goḍa heseḃ	8T: Ok, <i>lagḍe...lagḍe...</i> let's have a lagḍe session
9YM(B):lagḍe gey	9YM (B): Ok, <i>lagḍe</i>
10T:acha lagḍe gey mittic' liñ sereñ apey kana	10T: Ok, I will sing a lagḍe for you all
11TRK:hè ma ma	11TRK: Ok, ok
12YM(N):hè hè ona	12YM(N): Yes, this is good.
13YM(H):dong do kono bon baplak' kana?	13YM(H): <i>Dong</i> , why are we (inc) at some wedding?
14T:acha lagḍe geliñ sereñ da	14T: Ok, I (dual) am singing <i>lagḍe</i>
15YM(N):hè ma ma lagḍe gey	15YM(N): Ok, ok, <i>lagḍe</i>
16T:..... lagḍe	16T:..... <i>lagḍe</i>

17YM(K):hèh	17YM(K)...heh
18T: <i>Dak' chetan poyrani hođ ko metam baha rani, bahayenam danang rey okoy kođay janga dhuđi am samang rey .bahayenam danang rey okoy kotay janga dhuđi am samang rey .</i>	18T: [singing] <i>Floating on top of the water is the lotus, people call you the "queen of flowers. You have flowered on the back-end, who will come and approach [lit 'dust their feet] in front of you? You have flowered on the back-end, who will come and 'dust their feet' in front of you?</i>
19T: <i>dak' chetaan poirani hođ ko metam baharani bahayenam danang rey, okoy kođay janga dhuđi am samang rey, bahayenam danang rey , okoy kođay janga dhuđi am samang rey .</i>	19T: <i>Floating on top of the water is the lotus, people call you the "queen of flowers. You have flowered on the back-end, who will come and approach [lit 'dust their feet] in front of you? You have flowered on the back-end, who will come and 'dust their feet' in front of you?</i>
20T: <i>dak' chetaan poyrani bahayenam danang rey ,[YM(X):danang rey] okoy kođay janga dhuđi am samang rey.</i>	20T:[singing] <i>Floating on top of the water is the lotus, you have flowered on the back-end [YM(X):back end] Who will come and approach [lit 'dust their feet] in front of you?</i>
21YW,T: <i>dak' chetan payrani hođ ko metam baharani bahayenam danang rey okoy kođay janga dhuđi am samang rey bahayenam danang rey okoy kođay janga (...)</i>	21YW, T: <i>Floating on top of the water, people call you the "queen of flowers," you have flowered on the back-end, who will come and 'dust their feet' in front of you?</i>
22[YM(X):e (...) hijuk' peseya-a delaya mitdhaao tamak got' lepey, (...) hujuk' pey dela dela .	22[YM(X): hey you all come, come on and hold this <i>tamak</i> (kettle drum), come on, come on
23YM(X):(…) hađu gey	23:YM(X): hey monkey...[curse]
24YMX:␣<205446> hijuk' meya .	24:come here!
25T: <i>sengel umul seterok' mey , okoy gey bay cherec' led mey , bahaayenaam danang rey okoy kođay janga dhuđi am samang rey , bahayenam danang rey okoy kođay janga dhuđi am samang rey</i>	25:T: <i>In the suns [lit 'fire'] shade [afternoon], nobody loved you, you have flowered on the back-end, who will 'dust their feet' in front of you, you have flowered on the back end, who will 'dust their 'feet' in front of you'</i>
26N:o acha acha,	26:N: oh, I see I see
27YM(J):ru bhagao nañ.	27:J:I am going to stop the rhythm [drumming].
28YM(Z):hijuk' mey dela, aorim bhagak'aa, hijuk' mey	28:YM(Z): Come you, hey dont stop the rhythm just yet, come here!



At the outset (lines 6-10) the performers had to negotiate what genre they were going to sing (even if it was quickly pointed out in line 7 that the most appropriate genre would be *lagde*), and then decide the appropriate melody and rhythm for the genre. In addition, as is also typical with an *akhda* space, people were constantly streaming in and out of the performance, as we can see by the constant invitations of "come here" or at the outset, "where are you going?" When the melody was finally agreed upon, the *teyang* began to sing the *lagde*, and the rest of the group, particularly the group of girls, repeated the *teyang*'s words. In any *akhada*, females are often the primary singers and dancers, while men usually play the drums, although men also direct the songs, like the brother-in-law in this example. The melody and the rhythm key the performance, and the song is learned through a structural series of lead-and-repeat cycles. The refrain is crucial to the acquisition of the song, and the repetition of the refrain, "*bahayeanam danag re, okkoy kota janga dhuḍi am samang rey*" after each cycle links one verse to the next.

The performance appeared to my research assistant and I as an example of a typical *lagde* performance. During the action, participants themselves explicitly settled on a genre classification, and coordinated what they felt were appropriate melodies, rhythms, and dance for that genre. In addition, the lyrics of the song were in a Santali-specific stylized register that is reminiscent of what Carrin (2003) has analyzed as "twisted speech" or *benta katha*. "Twisted speech" is a linguistic style in which animal and vegetal imagery serve as trope linking speech forms to both the ritual speech of both bongas and ancestors, while also serving to "conceal" the speakers' hidden intentions. "Twisted speech," according to Carrin, is aesthetically valued among Santals, for there is a common conception that "truth" in its highest form can only be ascertained through divination, and this idea is as applicable for everyday conversation, performance, and ritual oratory as it is for everyday speech (10). Hence, the referent of the

"lotus" (*poirani*) in the song, or the fire's shade (*sengel umul*) is not entirely clear. Plant imagery, Carrin claims, often indexes rites of passage rituals; my research assistant also suggested the song could be also be describing a situation where a man is romantically approaching a slightly older woman. The "twisted" nature of the verse appeared characteristic of a stereotypical Santali performance.

In order to further shed light on the meaning of the verse, I approached my research assistant's paternal uncle, MH, who was from the same village where the performance took place, and was also a well-known Santali-language magazine editor and writer. I showed him the transcript of the entire performance, and the first comment he made to me was that these songs were not "traditional" *lagde*, but instead were "poets' writing" (*kobi ak' ol*). He also remarked that nowadays most *lagde* sung in this region were composed of written poetry that had been recycled into song-form. The "original" poet's name has been lost, but this was clearly "*ol*" or writing. I asked him, what made it "writing" if there were no visible text artifacts in circulation, and it was clearly understood by the participants to be a *lagde sereñ*. He, like the writer KB before him, pointed to the meter or *chhanda*, and said that only a person literate in the schooled conventions of poetry could know this kind of meter. Thus, for both KB and MH, the poetic structure of the song text, abstracted from other elements of the performance (such as song, dance, and rhythm) temporally referred back to some prior encounter with schooled literacy, intertextually connecting the *akhda* space with institutions such as the school. Although the code and performance organization is clearly *Santali*, for MH, the poetic structure, which introduces a reference to some previous act of writing, was seen as alien to the "traditional" *lagde* form.

In order to examine the discursive properties of the text, I isolated the song-text from its

performative setting and focused on the poetic features. Here are the first two verses, excerpted from lines 18-21. The rhyme is highlighted in bold:

**Example 2.2.1** lines 19-21 of Transcript 2. Lagḍe seren.

1 Dak' chetan poyrani  
2 Hoḍ ko met**am** baha r**ani**,  
3 bahayenam danang **rey**  
4 okoy koṭay janga dhuḍi  
5 am samang **rey**  
6 bahayenam danang rey  
7 okoy koṭaay janga dhuḍi  
8 aam samang **rey**

As in Excerpt D, *Debon Tengon Adibasi Bir*, this song contains recurring refrains: lines 3-6 are essentially mirror replicas, facilitating the way in which certain hemstiches act as hooks to cycle into the next verse during performance. However, also like *Debon Tengon Adibasi Bir* the poem is structured on end rhyme and meter (*chanda*). Lines 1-4 and 6-7 are all eight syllables (or eight moras, and as noted, consonant-ending codas can optionally take two moras in Indo-Aryan verse), while lines 5 and lines 8 are four syllables, a "broken verse," another common formal feature of Bengali poetry.<sup>13</sup> In addition, coda syllables align both line-medially and line-finally, presenting a complex rhyme scheme within the initial distich and throughout the refrain. The rhymes have vocalic alignments (lines 1-2, *chetan/metam*), homonym alignments (lines 1-2 *poirani* 'lotus'/*baha rani* 'queen of flowers), and coda alignments (lines 3-5 *danang rey/samang rey* 'in back/'in front'). Although the rhyme scheme is important in what makes this text 'literary', MH specifically highlights the syllabic versification (*chanda*) in order to recontextualize the *lagḍe* within the literary genre of *kobi ak' ol* (poet's 'writing').

In addition to the poetic structure, MH also referred to code-features in recontextualizing the genre. Like the *lagḍe* presented in example 1.2 above, MH said that what distinguished these new literate *lagḍe* was that they were entirely written and sung in Santali as opposed to the

regional Jharkhandi Bangla variety (what he called *Bangla*, or *mishro bhasha* 'mixed language'). While I knew certain genres of song, such as *karam*, associated with the *karam* festival celebrated throughout the region during the monsoons, were commonly sung in Jharkhandi ("Bengali"), this was the first time that I heard that a commonplace genre such as *lagḍe* had also been more commonly sung in this variety. MH remarked that throughout his childhood, he remembered *lagḍe* only being sung in this variety, and it was only after the Jharkhand movement and the Santal language movements in which poets and writers would spread their Santali compositions at village fairs and various gatherings did *lagḍe* become sung primarily in Santali. As I was discussing the issue at a later time, a young magazine editor and high school teacher, GH, from a different region in the north of Purulia district, said that in his area, which had a smaller Santal population, *lagḍe* were still almost exclusively sung in the Jharkhandi variety.

In recasting the *lagḍe* as "poet's writing," MH pointed out two related shifts that had occurred in the genre since his childhood. First, instead of relying on morphological and semantic parallelism, *lagḍe* song-texts now followed metrical and end-rhyme patterns (*chanda*), diacritics of genres encountered in school. Socialization in institutional literacy, not in terms of reading and writing, but in terms of poetic structure, had been incorporated into the Santali performance space, and was now practiced in concert with Santali-specific rhythm, dance, and melody. Second, within the song-text, there is a shift away from a regional Indo-Aryan variety to Santali within the *lagḍe*. As I described in the previous section, the more regimented the genre, such as the *Baha um* song, the greater the exclusive use of Santali. Because *lagḍe* genres were less regimented, patterns of public speech are more apparent, such as code-mixing and the use of Jharkhandi Bangla. However in the *lagḍe* I recorded, the use of Santali within the *lagḍe* genre recast the performative function of both code and register. Santali, and Santali-specific

registers such as "twisted speech" was previously used in settings such as ritual, oratory, or everyday conversation in which addressees were other Santals. They were not, as illustrated in the previous section, frequently employed in genres such as *lagḍe*. However, following the Jharkhand movement, and the politicization of the Santali language, the use of Santali has come to occupy a much more public function. This is realized in part through its use in the *lagḍe*. The use of Santali code within the *lagḍe* recontextualizes the genre as a public and political variety, at par with Indo-Aryan, while the use of *chaanda* within the *lagḍe* indexes features of institutional literacy within the communicative framework of Santali song-dance socialization.

Hence, participants in the *lagḍe* are socialized simultaneously into a network of Santali performance practices as well as a present and future-oriented political orientation that, following the Jharkhand movement, has become newly emblematic of community affiliation. The *lagḍe* continues to link Santali performance genres to public expression, but the terms on which public expression occurs have now been transformed. Though Bengali (and in particular the Jharkhandi variety) remains the common variety in use among the various communities in the region, and though almost all Santals command the variety and employ it often, the variety is no longer contextualized within the *lagḍe* genre as the voice of Santal interaction with the larger public. Instead, discourses around literacy and the literary now frame the terms of public engagement (and also subsequent political assertion); *lagḍe* recontextualizes these discourses, previously indexed through a poetic (and therefore iconic-emblematic) disjuncture, imbuing them with the feelingful iconicity of the Santali "song-dance" complex. *Lagḍe*, now based on extant practices of writing and political discourse, entextualizes a poetics of literacy as distinctly "Santali."

The themes of the *lagḍe* recorded in the performance ranged from the romantic (as

implied in the first example) to, as will be discussed below, explicitly political. In each of these cases, communal feeling is attached to a particular experience, and, in rendering these experiences through a regimented Santali, the *lagde* performance forges identifications between the thematics of song-dance genres, a Santali code, and a literate/literary poetics. For instance in the excerpt below, taken from the last part of the recorded *lagde* performance, the performance attempts to socialize participants into understanding themselves as a singular caste (*jati*), and translate the communal feeling generated in the *akhada* space into a form of political action:

**Transcript 2.3**, excerpt from Lagde celebration, Kaira, Baha 2011, Men (M): T-Teyang, TK-Tarak, J-Jawai, SN-Santosh, K-Kandri, U-Uprum; Women (W): CHN-Chunki, CHT-Chata, S-Sukla,

5T: <i>dhorom hō bon dohoya, jati dey bon bereda , dhorom hō bon dohoya , jati dey bon bereda , ona tey gey jiwi jati do bon dohoya . dhorom ho' bon dohoy , ona tey gey jiwi jati dey bon dohoya</i>	5T:We (inc) will cultivate our religion, We will awaken our caste, We will cultivate our religion , We will awaken our caste. like that we will give life to our caste. We will cultivate our religion, like that we will give life to our caste
6K: <i>tahley chet' aro tahley cho</i>	6K:Ok, how, more, ok!
7 S: <i>hiḍiṅ kedako nitok' gey</i>	9S:I am forgetting it now .
10T,P, S: <i>dhorom hō bon dohoyaa, jati dey bon beredaa, dhorom hō bon dohoya jati dey bon beret' , ona tey gey jiwi jati do bon dohaya, dhorom hō bon dohoyaa, ona tey gey jiwi jati do bon dohoya.</i>	10T,P: <i>we will cultivate our duty, we will awaken our caste, we will cultivate our duty, we will awaken our caste, like that we will give life to our caste, we will cultivate our duty, like that we will give life to our caste .</i>
11K: <i>chunki ma.i do oka sec' banugeya-a ?</i>	11K:Where is [the girl] Chunki? She isn't here.
12CHN: <i>haani .</i>	12CHN:Yes [female particle]
13W: <i>dhorom hō bon dohoya jati dey bon bereda , dhorom ho' bon dohaya jati dey bon beret' . ona tey gey jiwi jati do bon dohoya, dhorom hō bon dohoy , ona tey gey jiwi jati do bon dohoya</i>	13W: <i>We will cultivate our duty, we will awaken our caste, we will cultivate our duty, we will awaken our caste. Like that we will give life to our caste, we will cultivate our duty, like that we will give life to our caste .</i>
14T: <i>jati dhorom tololok' gujuk' leka nelok'-a, jati dhorom tolololo gujuk' leka nelok' kan, chetey tey do jiwi jati do bon dohoya, gujuk' leka nelok' , chetey tey do jiwi jati do bon dohoya.</i>	14T: <i>Our caste duty (jati dhorom) is wavering, like it is dying, our caste duty is wavering like it is dying, How do we give life to our caste, as if it were dying , how do we give life to our caste? .</i>
15T: <i>jati dhorom tolololo gujuk' lekaa nelok'</i>	15T: <i>Our caste duty is dying...</i>

16U: <i>jati dhorom tolomolo gujuk' leka nelok' kan, jati dhorom tolomolo gujuk' leka nelok, chika.tey ,</i>	16U: <i>Our caste duty is dying, our caste duty is wavering, it is as if it were dying, how</i>
17T: <i>chetey tey do (...) chetey tey tey jiwi jati do bon dahaya gujuk' leka nelok', chetey tey do jiwi jati do bon dohoya.</i>	17T: <i>How, in what way do we give life to our caste. It is as if it were dying , How do we give life to our caste .</i>
18J: <i>arup' safao kaniñ mentey bangkhan .....</i>	18J: <i>I need to wash and clean up.</i>

This excerpt forms a continuation of an earlier *lagde* song describing Santals as part of an "adibasi jaati" (adibasi caste). The song posits that communal feeling is dying (*gujuk' leka*), and suggests that through participating together in the *lagde*, participants can renew their commitment (*dhorom*) to their community. The song thus posits a relationship between the communal feeling generated through the *lagde* and a community-based political subjectivity, or positional identity from which one participates in interactions with other castes and communities. The community as a political collective is not assumed, evident in the fact that the duty to one's *adibasi jati* must be "awakened" (*bered-a*), and "cultivated" (*dohoya* 'to place, keep') through the interaction occurring in the *akhaḍa* space. Exhorting performers to come together and move forward as a singular political community intertextually echoes the *adibasi* thematics illustrated in Example 2.4 (*Debon tengon adibasi bir*). Moreover, the poetics of the song, similar to the song presented in transcript 2.2, evinces a literary *chanda*, following an eight beat metrical cycle (with one line as a six beat 'broken verse') and a slanted vocalic rhyme scheme. Thematically and poetically, the song appears characteristic of the genre of *disom sereñ* that Prasad identified in his fieldwork, yet here no such distinction is made between *disom* and *lagde*. The political themes, rather, appear fully integrated with the *lagde* repertoire.

As MH and KB suggest, the experience of literacy for their generation was seen as a disjuncture not anchored in reading and writing practices, but in a poetics that indexed a specific

institutionalized literary tradition. The poetics, and not whether a song was inscribed, distinguished "poet's writing" from traditional *lagḍe* or other genres of Santali song-dance. As part of the Jharkhand movement, Santal poets employed these poetics to create what Hill and Hill (1986), have called a "power code," a variety that pragmatically calques "institute Bengali," indexing a dominant standard of both 'literate' and 'literary.' This code becomes in part the medium through which political messages underscoring autonomy, sovereignty, and political action are broadcast. Yet, this power code is subject to the broader socialization logic of *genre*. The code, and the messages poetically and referentially conveyed, are circulated through Santal communities not within classrooms, but, as the publisher noted, *kuli duli kilot' kilot'*, i.e. as part of a larger performance repertoire within spaces such as village fairs or *akhḍas*. This circulation establishes a composite literary tradition that both mirrors the dominant Indo-Aryan tradition learned in school, but also retains the generic features seen as critical to Santali-language socialization and community membership.

This literary tradition forms the basis of a new community of Santal readers in which dominant literary conventions are adopted in Santal performance practices. One of the most notable conventions surfacing that I observed was an increasing tendency to attribute "authorship" to certain genres of songs. Prasad, during his fieldwork in 1985, noted that he never heard Santals attribute performed texts to a single author. This was true for all genres, including *lagḍe*. KB, when he first heard *Debon tengon adibasi bir*, did not know until much later that the text was "written" by the poet Ramchand Murmu. Even in the performance I recorded above, no *lagḍe* was ever attributed to the author. MH mentioned this fact to me when he said this was "poet's writing," saying that the authors' names have most likely been forgotten. Even though assignation of author remains weak, there is a growing tendency to attribute song-



texts to important literary figures, and in doing so, recursively create a historical literary tradition that encompasses certain genres of performance like *lagde*. For instance, my research assistant was interviewing one of his paternal aunts (*hatom*) in his village, who was well known in the area for her singing. The *hatom*, MK, had been to school up through primary, but her knowledge and expertise of Santali-related knowledge was through her experiences as a performer. My research assistant had wanted to elicit from her some performances of *sarpa*, which is a genre of song that, like *baha*, is regimented, with the melodies and rhythms only known by certain experts (usually female singers). However, before *sarpa*, she insisted on singing a *lagde*. The conversation transcript is below:

**Transcript 2.4** Interview between S [Research assistant] and MK [*hatom*], vill-Kaira, date-[add], conventional line numbering

306S:tahley am do hane gayan hom gayan kada 307aar sarpa ko ho' enec' sereñ ko ho' domey 308tahley mit'tang gan sereñ tahley layok' me nijer 309kusi tege aar chet' sarpa sereñ hok aar gayan 310reyak' ge hok	S:so you used to do plays right, sing in plays? and you sang and danced ( <i>enec'-sereñ</i> ) many <i>sarpa</i> , so sing a song, tell me one song, whichever you would like, whether it is <i>sarpa</i> or a song from a play
311H:hu'	H-Yeah
312S: aar dong lagde baha sahray jaha' ge bang 313 huien	S:or <i>dong</i> , <i>lagde</i> , <i>baha</i> , <i>sohrae</i> , Whichever
314H:he' to sereñ maato domey giñ baday	H:Yes, I know many songs
315S:he' to	S:Yeah, certainly
316H: jehetu 8 bosor khon sab kak' me enec' sereñ re ona chet' ko mena enec' sereñ rusika	H:Because for over 8 years, I am a song-dance, what do you say, a song-dance <i>rusika</i>
312S:hu'	S:Right.
313H: gidra khot' mit'tan lagde giñ sereña he'se 314Sarada Prasad Kisku-oyak'	H:I am going to sing a <i>lagde</i> song that I learned from childhood, a song of Sarada Prasad Kisku's.
315S:uni ol kaday ?	S:He wrote it?
316H:uniy ol kada aar nowa ge in do poilo seđa 317sereñ tiñ do	H:He wrote it, and it was the first song I learned.
318S:hu' hu'	S:Okay
319H:săgiñ khuniñ hec' akan dhonga re duñ dec' 320akan, oka aduñ senok' kan laoriya, okam 321ediñ kan, oka aduñ senok' kaan laoriya 322okam ediñ kan eho eho laoriya, alom ediñ 323laoriya. jahā disom sariya edi teho' ondem	H: <i>I have come from a faraway country, I have boarded a small boat, Where am I going, boatsman, where are you taking me? Where am I going boatsman, where are you taking me. Eho, Eho, boatsman, don't delay, that land of truth, take</i>

324 <i>ediña jahà disom sariya edi teho' ondem ediña</i>	<i>me there, that land of truth, take me there!</i>
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In this transcript, my research assistant S continues a conversation about MK's expertise in singing and performing in drama, two performance modalities critical to the network of practices that delineate a politicized community of "readers." He requests his aunt to sing a song either from a play (*gayan*, line 306) or any one of a number of genres (line 312). The aunt responds that because she is a *rusika*, she knows a number of songs, but she will begin her performances with a *lagde* that she said was the "first" song that she learned, and one that she knew from childhood. She specifies this *lagde* by referring to its author, a famous local Santali poet, Sarada Prasad Kisku. She uses the inanimate possessive (*-ak'*) in line 314 to say that the *lagde* is "his," a practice not common in Santal song performance. S clarifies in line 315, saying that by "his" she means that he "wrote it" (*uni ol kada*). She affirms that he wrote it; pointing to, as did MH for the previous *lagde*, the origin of the text pointing towards an act of writing despite not having learned the song from any inscribed format. MK says that this is the "first song she learned" in line 316, and then she proceeds to sing the song from line 319. The *lagde* like the others discussed in this section displays a regular *chanda* versification of 8 moras each, with each disitich separated by contrasting end-rhyme, characteristic of a literate poetics that now characterize the *lagde* genre.

S elicits a number of other songs from MK throughout the interview, but only in the case of the *lagde* does MK refer to something akin to an "author" and link the song to "writing" (*ol*). The poet she refers to, Sarada Prasad Kisku, like Ramchand Murmu referred to in example 2.4, was also a schoolteacher, and an active member in the fight for *adivasi* autonomy. As illustrated in the song sung by MK, Kisku's songs also concerned political action, underscoring the movement and migration of Santals, the uncertainty of the present moment, and the hope for a

better future. Hence, the *lagḍe* genre is associated with a practice of authorial citation in a way that other songs are not, even though *lagḍe* are socialized through a similar performative mode.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, she also mentions that this *lagḍe* is the "first song" that she had ever learned, suggesting that she feels that the acquisition of this song played a critical role in her development as a stage actress and *rusika*. Like most women of her generation, MK had only limited exposure to formal schooling, only receiving a primary-level education.

Yet, the association between conventions such as authorial citation and metered poetry and her socialization into Santali performance do not stem from her experience in school, which is most often viewed in terms of disjuncture. Rather, they arise in and through participation in the Santali performance space, where MK first learned the *lagḍe*. The acquisition of this *lagḍe*, MK intimates in the interview, signaled her entrance into a domain of performance practices (which include textual practice) that presupposes Santali encounters with formal schooling and intertextual linkages between politics and performance. This domain has come to define a Santali literacy in which Santali speech genres now not only socialize participants into community membership, but also orient them towards a politics of autonomy.

When I asked MK if she knew any *lagḍe* in Jharkhandi Bangla, she said she could not recall any. For my research assistant's generation as well, the literate form of the *lagḍe* had become its assumed form. Literacy, and the politics that accompanied this literacy, had now come to define genres such as the *lagḍe*. This literacy was first and foremost socialized in the *akhḍas*, and only later, through sustained encounters with text artifacts. From an early age, people like MK and my research assistant, acquired the knowledge of an independent Santali language and literary tradition that paralleled what the publisher called "institute Bengali." Yet at the same time, the importance of "song-dance" to the socialization of this new constellation of

Santali literacy never diminished in importance, in fact, the incorporation of writing into the communicative repertoire of Santali performance created a distinct constellation encompassing multiple temporal and affective elements, exceeding the scope of institutional literacy socialization.

## **Conclusion**

I began this chapter with a small excerpt of a conversation that I had with the Santali-language publisher, AKM. In that conversation, he revalued the idea of literacy and orality, arguing that even though Santals had a long written tradition, the primary socializing encounters for many Santals continue to be through performance. Santals, he stated, do not have to depend on "books" for their socialization, but instead learn through interactions with their elders and the acquisition of song-dance. Contrasting the learning of Santal "tradition" with the learning of Bengali "tradition", he claimed that while Bengali was learned through institutions, Santali was learned *kuli duli kilot' kilot'* through the metadiscursive and poetic conventions of the song-dance complex. I argue against the idea that AK was simply restating a division between a ahistorical, transcendental "orality," attributed to Santals by anthropologists and historians, against a historical "literacy." Instead, I used AKM's statement as a departure point to investigate the performative foundations of literacy itself, and suggest that what makes Santal 'literacy' unique is that it is socialized through a set of genred performance conventions that deploy written, sonic, and corporeal modalities to both reinforce a timeless tradition while also articulating a dynamic future-oriented political movement.

In order to illustrate this, I first discussed how socialization into institutional literacy, in the case of India, as well as for many parts of the world, is viewed through poetics: a constellation of performative and textual practices which are ideologically associated with a

valorized form of institutional training. For Bengali, and other Indo-Aryan languages that Santals encounter in school, these poetics index an upper-caste, metropolitan literary tradition. Since school training is the primary index of "literacy," and all other practices are relegated to an undefined field of "orality," Santal literacy encounters have been characterized primarily as a disjuncture, where schooled literacy is seen as a competing or alternate form of socialization.

Yet in this chapter I show the process by which a disjuncture has become incorporated into Santali performance. As part of the Jharkhand movement that stressed political, linguistic, and cultural autonomy, educated and activist Santals crafted a Santali code that calques a poetics of literacy. Yet in order to generate affective attachments to that code, and the politics that it conveys, the code had to be subsumed under the socialization logic of *genre*. Thus, the code had to be first and foremost instantiated within the performance-space, and assume the form of a song-text, accompanied by melody, dance and rhythm. In this way, it could be read, disseminated, and voiced, generating the necessary affective connections that render it acceptable to audiences, already accustomed to the conventions of genred performance, as distinctly "Santali." However, the power code could not function within any given genre. Some genres, in which the genre's authority stems from the minimization of intertextual gaps, were not suitable to reinterpretation as literate genres. The *baha um* genre which I present in Example 3.1, which incorporates writing, does not presuppose encounters with institutional literacy. Other genres, however, such as the *lagde*, which had always been oriented outwards, traditionally mediating interactions with other communities, were more susceptible to creative intervention, and thus were dynamically shaped by the encounter with institutional literacy, and the emergent politics that arose from disjunctures experienced in those encounters.

The introduction of a poetics of literacy within the socialization repertoire had significant

and varying effects across generations of Santals, as my interlocutors' discussions in this chapter illustrate. Whereas before songs were strictly viewed in terms of genre, people, like the editor MH, noted the disjuncture brought about through encounters with a literate poetics when he explained to me the difference between "traditional *lagḍe*" and "poet's writing" (*kobi ak' ol*). For him, writing (*ol*) indexed a poetics of literacy that he had once viewed as alien to the genre, but now saw as part of the contemporary *lagḍe*. The composite nature of the *lagḍe*, that existed both as "song" (*sereṅ*) and as writing (*ol*) socialized Santals into a network of practices that included literary production, political assertion, and new performance forms. For instance, KB, a Santali writer, marked the beginning of his writing career by noticing how the poet Ramchand Murmu's song *Debon tengon adibasi bir*, a song which according to a Santal literary scholar brought "poetry" to the Santali *sereṅ*, was both "Santali" and "not-Santali." Though he did not attribute the song to a writer until years later, in his account, the disjuncture brought about by his exposure to the song of a famous literary figure in part led him to become a Santali writer and poet. These disjunctures felt by those encountering literacy in schools, when made manifest in the performance-space, opened up new political, linguistic, and literary horizons. The introduction of a poetics bridging institutional with performative spaces also transformed the way songs were viewed.

Unlike KB, MK did not become a "writer" in the traditional sense, but she marked the beginning of her career as a *rusika*, a song-dance expert, and a drama performer, after learning the famous poet's Sarada Prasad Kisku's *lagḍe*, which she also characterized as his (the poet's) "writing" (*ol*). Hence, the importance of literary *lagḍe* stretches beyond simply the socialization of writers, but also to performers as well. For my research assistant's generation, *lagḍe* has become synonymous with a distinct literary style and adivasi politics, as the songs performed in

examples 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate. For this generation, I saw no awareness of disjuncture with respect to the *lagde*.

This suggests that through poetics and performance, a new Santal "literary" and "literate" tradition had been established. By showing how genre operates in the performance space, and how performance genres are differentially intertwined with practices of writing, I have attempted to illustrate how literacy may be acquired in the absence of widespread circulation of text artifacts. Institutional literacy, associated with training learned in sites such as the school, carries a certain prestige and authority. However, this does not mean that it is the only site of authority within Santal society, or even a necessarily more privileged one. As I have tried to show with *baha* songs, ritual authority can be gained through performative genres that are ideologically de-linked from institutional literacy, and where "writing" is subordinate to the authority framed by the poetic and performative contours of the genre itself. Yet Santal literacy derives its authority from its public presence as well as its formation within a political social movement. The publicity is in part derived through the genres itself, such as *lagde*, drama, or village fair songs, which have always been less regimented and oriented outwards. Participating in these genres also cultivates a political identification with caste, community, and a certain history, which includes the citation of prominent literary figures. Santals now for the most part interact with other castes as *adivasi*, and this identification is socialized in and through the performance space.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how the Santali constellation of literacy does not depend on the circulation of text artifact or practices of inscription. Rather, reading in Santali is much more tied to the circulation of texts within performance space. Yet, in arguing this I do not mean to suggest that the material aspects of writing are not important. In fact, the ways in which material features of writing, such as script, assume a primary importance as one of the major

diacritics of this emergent Santali literacy is the major focus of the rest of this dissertation. However, in order to understand how graphic-linguistic constellations such as scripts are developed, circulated, and become part of Santali language socialization, one must understand the performative foundations of Santal literacy, as well as the temporal and affective features of performative genres and socialization, a sketch of which I have tried to chart here. Unlike in De Certeau's account of "scriptural economy," inscription exists alongside performance and voice, and ideologies in which graphic characters are associated with spoken language do not mimic those of logocentric conceptions of writing.

In the next chapter, I discuss how graphic practices learned in school are recontextualized within the Santali ritual and performance space, engendering a notion of script that carries with it the affective iconicities of the Santali performance space. It is this idea of script and inscription which combines with performance to form the recognizable diacritics of the new Santali literacy, proliferating in public space, and generating new modes of conflict and contestation to which I now turn.

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<sup>1</sup>There are clear parallels between the concept of *rasa* in classical Sanskrit poetics and the Santali term *raṣka*. Both denote pleasure or enjoyment and tie this pleasure to the emotive experience of aestheticized performance genres, as well contain an element of transcending ego-self and a movement toward a wider sense of *communitas*. However, whereas *rasa* is described as an "impersonal, contemplative attitude" (Chaudhry 1965, 141), *raṣka* is often described in relation to bodies (moving bodies in dance or trance, bodies altered by substance, etc.). The relation between *rasa* and *raṣka* could be further investigated in a larger study of the relation between classical and subaltern modes of aesthetic engagement.

<sup>2</sup>Prasad cites the Santal saying *roḍak' teye raḍak'* (extending from 'speech' is 'melody') 1985, 4

<sup>3</sup>This does not exhaust the list of *seren* genres. Prasad (1985) following Bodding (1929) identifies 22 different genres, I have seen reference to many more. The central point is that *seren* is genred in Santal metadiscourse.

<sup>4</sup>Although the Bengali term for *Baha* was called *Sarul*, which suggests that other castes participated at some point, but I saw none of this during my fieldwork. Most non-Santals however still referred to the festival as *sarul*

<sup>5</sup>He passed away in 2012

<sup>6</sup>Technical session on Santal poetry (Modernism in Santal Literature), Vidyasagar University, Santali language department, Midnapur, West Bengal Oct 3, 2011

<sup>7</sup>The disjuncture between non-institutional performance practices and 'schooled literacy' socialization and the effect it has on academic achievement in early stages of school is well documented in the literacy literature, most famously, Brice-Heath (1982) and also Phillips (1982)

<sup>8</sup>Since in Sanskrit poetics, a 'syllable' is the most reduced unit of sound, each unit is said to have an inherent vowel (schwa in Hindi for instance, or open-o in Bangla). The inherent vowel can be dropped however, and in this case the sound can still take a full mora (as if the inherent vowel existed). This is often exploited by poets for rhetorical



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power, the last two words in line 3 of both verses are an example of this phenomenon, making the total number of moras 8.

<sup>9</sup> Marang Buru (the great mountain), Jaher Era (the sacred grove goddess) and Moreko, Turiko (the five and the six) are the primary dieties propitiated during the Baha festival.

<sup>10</sup> Similar phenomena has been described in many societies, such as Native North America (Samuels, concept of 'ambiguous identity' 2001, 2004, Webster 2004, 2009) and Mexico (Hill 1985, 1995; Hanks 2010).

<sup>11</sup> The last chapter of Sammadar 1998 is an excellent analysis of how the *cho* was politically organized and how it affects historical memory and belonging in the Jangal Mahal region of West Bengal

<sup>12</sup> A son-in-law addresses and is addressed by elder in-laws with the dual, hence the use of the dual here

<sup>13</sup> There is much scholarly work on Bengali meter. For an overview and a list of multiple sources one can visit [http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/P\\_0292.HTM](http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/P_0292.HTM). One can also see Ray (1996)

<sup>14</sup> Other genres like *dong* (wedding songs), as the writing of Santali songs becomes more frequent, may now possibly be cited as 'belonging' to authors as well, although I have nothing in my data to support such claims except for authorial citation in text-artifacts themselves.

### Chapter 3

#### ***Ol, chiki, and scriptmaking: material, performative, and political dimensions***

*Murmu thakur ko do baba  
puthi baba ko padhao a  
Badoli konyda gadte  
likhon calak' kan*

The Murmu priests, oh my father  
read books, oh my father  
On Badoli konyda fort,  
Writing is occurring. (Santali song, Hembrom, 2001: 19)

Soon after I started my field research, I was visiting a village near Dumka, in the northern part of the state of Jharkhand during the winter harvest festival *Sohrae*. As I was walking outside, I noticed a set of drawings made with a grounded, chalk-like white substance (*holong*) at the entrance of the house. One of my hosts asked me if I knew what these were called. I said no, I had never seen them before. He said that it was a type of *ol* (writing). Not completely understanding (and also a bit tipsy from rice beer), I asked, "Do you mean like a type of *ol-chiki* (lit, "writing symbol")?" He said, no, not "ol-chiki," just "ol." Reflecting on the incident, I realized I had made a mistake in intuitively associating *ol* (writing) with an alphabetic script (*ol chiki*). The type of writing he later explained was called *khond*; it told a story, one about bongas and the history of the arrival of a lineage into the village. Just as one wrote a book or a poem; this was also considered *ol*.

In this chapter, I hope to complicate the equivalences of 'writing' and 'script' in order to reveal the different logics at work in the creation of independent Santali scripts. I begin the chapter with a discussion of graphic inscription, what my interlocutor called *ol* ('writing') in Santali, and which exists independently of any notion of script. While this "writing" does not claim to represent the phonetic structure of verbal speech, I argue that it is central in mediating social relationships, both between people, as well as between people and spirits (*bongas*). Practices of *ol* allow humans and *bongas* to converge in certain spaces and at certain times to ensure health and well-being, as well as create connections between people widely dispersed over time and space. Although these practices of *ol* continue in Santal communities, I claim that the introduction of institutional literacy brought about a disjuncture within the domain of *ol*. During the colonial period, missionaries and the colonial state did not consider practices of *ol* writing, for they failed to conform to a dominant, European notion of alphabetic writing by which the graphic character was supposed to represent the underlying phonemic structure of a language. Missionaries who worked with the Santals thus strove to 'invent' a script for the Santali language, by which the unique sounds would be adequately represented. At the same time, a Brahmanical notion of "writing" was introduced through institutional literacy in the Brahmi scripts. In this framework as well, the graphic character was subordinated to an underlying phonemic system, known in Sanskrit as *shiksha*, which informed the acquisition of literacy in the Brahmi scripts.

In the course of this chapter, I show that these disjunctures brought about a crisis in Santali conceptions of writing, and that crisis was managed through the practice of scriptmaking. Scriptmaking emerged from literacy encounters in which Santals, exposed to institutionalized literacy, and incorporated ideas of "script" within the logic of ritual *ol*. What resulted, I suggest,

was a spate of independent scripts, the most famous of which is called *Ol-Chiki* ('writing symbol'). These scripts were constellations that iconically integrated three different semiotic logics: a European logic in which phoneme and grapheme were connected through arbitrary signification, a Sanskritic logic which promoted a transcendental phonemic set over a set of widely varied graphic representations, and the logic of *ol*, in which graphic practice diagrams ritual relations with *bongas*, Santal-specific temporalities, and features of everyday life. I will show how scriptmaking, as a practice of reassembling constellations, emerged at the same time as the Jharkhand and *adivasi* political movements, providing an alternate conception of the relation between language, voice, and territory in relation to autonomy. In the last section of the chapter, I will extend these observations to look at the role of script in everyday practices. Using ethnographic data, I will focus on the ways in which script was assembled not only through material means, but also at the intersection of voice and performance, allowing people to articulate alternative social relations, both in institutional and non-institutional settings. Hence, script instantiates itself not only as a visual form, but also in performance spaces, connecting ritual practices to constellations of Santali literacy and performance. These constellations, I argue, are critical to voicing a politics of autonomy within the everyday spaces that Santals inhabit.

### **Script-Sound-Writing**

Saussure (1966) famously considered writing as "parasitic" on speech, arguing that writing was simply a representation (and a poor one at that) of an underlying articulatory-cognitive linguistic structure. This idea has persisted in much of modern linguistics (Bloomfield 1935, Chomsky 1965), which considers the proper object of study what a speaker "says" and secondary (or actually, irrelevant) what or how speakers write. Grammatologists (Gelb 1952,

Diringer 1962) usually consider the alphabet to be the most sophisticated form of writing because it best exemplifies this logocentric bias; the greatest and most advanced form of writing is one that completely and transparently reflects speech. Within classic anthropology, the logocentric bias has framed the divide between "literacy" and "orality," such that the command of specifically alphabetic writing (or writing that is connected with phonemic or lexical structure), separates the literate from the non-literate. The most famous example of this is Claude Levi-Strauss's excerpt from *Tristes Tropiques*, "The Writing Lesson" (Levi-Strauss 1992), where he introduces alphabetic writing to the otherwise unlettered Nambikwara, only to see them begin to adopt hierarchical power relations and the concomitant evils of civilized society. Logocentrism has therefore resulted in two mutually entangled effects. On the one hand, as discussed in the previous chapter with reference to the "autonomous" school of literacy studies, alphabetic writing has been considered a great, and transformative, advancement in human history, marking a divide between those who are "literate" and those who remain mired in orality. Yet at the same time, as Harris (2000) has argued, since no natural writing system has ever transparently reflected speech, the logocentric bias ensures that writing will always be considered a second-order, and faulty, representation.

Jacques Derrida (1976), in his criticism of Levi-Strauss's *The Writing Lesson*, shows using Levi-Strauss's own monograph of the Nambikwara, how the Nambikwara had a system of graphic marks in place, as well as a ritual system of name-taboos, through which hierarchical genealogies of power were organized. Hence, Levi-Strauss's introduction of name-writing did not effect any civilizational transformation, but entered into a field of power-relations which were already graphically mediated. The ethnographer, however, in reflecting back on the incident, blinded by logocentrism, attributed the reactions to the introduction of alphabetic

writing. Inspired by Derrida's work, scholars have begun to challenge this logocentric bias, and seriously consider graphic systems that do not correspond directly with the phonological or morphological aspects of oral speech. For instance, in discussing pre-Columbian American writing systems, Boone (1994) defines writing broadly as "as the communication of relatively specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent, visible marks" (15). This not only includes graphic systems such as Mixtec and Aztec ideography, as well as Santal *ol*, but also thoroughly "modern" notational systems such as music or mathematical notation. None of these writing systems communicate "language" if one were to consider "language" as oral speech. However, they all are structured systems that communicate ideas, and which can also be learned and replicated. Collins and Blot (2003) examine both Tolowa song, dance, and ritual regalia in conjunction with Anishinaabe song-pictures to show how they are structured, replicating system in which social memory is inscribed, challenging Goody's (2000) contention that an *archive* could only emerge with alphabetic writing. Collins and Blot claim that "there are no final answers, but we may be reasonably sure that writing does not occur suddenly against a background of pure speech" (164).

However perhaps a more relevant question than how we define "writing" is how and under what historical conditions has alphabetic writing achieved primacy over other modes of writing, and how have people subjected to alphabetic literacy regimes responded? Walter Mignolo (1994) provides insight into this problem when he argues that writing in its alphabetic modality was "first theorized and conceptualized" during the European Renaissance, "as an instrument for taming (not representing) the voice and language conceived in connection with territorial control" (294). Hence, in Mignolo's formulation, there remains an intimate relation between an alphabetic notion of writing and subsequent European colonial projects. While

Derrida's formulation, he argues, accounts for the erasures necessary for the triumph of logocentrism in western thought, it does not account for the logocentric "discontinuity" (308) in ideologies of alphabetic writing as it entered the New World. Mignolo charts how in the Americas, in the period following the Spanish conquest, European ideas of alphabetic literacy, imposed by both the Catholic Church and state, on colonial subjects failed to completely eradicate native writing practices. On the contrary, Mignolo suggests, "traditional writing systems among Amerindians began to merge with alphabetic writing," creating new and emergent conflicts "between the social roles of performing, in each society [European and Native], the activities related to drawing and writing" (298). These discontinuities between what constituted writing and drawing, and the social activities associated with graphic inscription, created a "conflict of consciousness" among Native communities, but also provided openings through which Natives could subvert the "taming of the voice" undertaken to convert them into Christians and vassals of the Crown (cf. Hanks 2012).

Drawing on Mignolo's observations, I would like to argue that the efflorescence of scriptmaking in the Santali-speaking areas was also a result of what he calls a "conflict of literacies" (303), brought about by both missionary activity as well as the introduction of formal schooling in the Santali-speaking areas. Both activities attempted to reduce *ol* to phonemic representation, in an effort to mitigate and minimize the performative activities associated with writing and the social and ritual relations it entailed. This created, I suggest, a conflict between Santals and their *bongas*, whose energies they would draw upon to undertake political action, exemplified by accounts of insurgencies such as the famous 1855 Santal *Hul*. Scriptmaking, therefore, was an attempt to combine European and Brahmanical ideas of script, and the legitimacy that these ideologies carry within the framework of institutional literacy, with

practices of *ol* that maintain the diagrammatic and relational features of the grapheme. Santali scripts, as emergent constellations, offered new opportunities, I suggest, to voice relations between Santal-specific temporalities, *bongas*, and territory, allowing Santals to articulate an opposing and autonomous political orientation, while also connecting graphic practice to the networks of performance discussed in previous chapters.

### **The logic of *ol***

In Santali, as in many adivasi languages, the word *ol* signifies “writing” as well as “drawing.”<sup>1</sup> Carrine-Bouez, in her study of Santal diagrams, notes that Santal ritual diagramming undertaken by priests, healers, and others are referred to as *ol*. She describes these diagrams as “formal systems of interpretation”, a “base ” of a figure “conceived of as an accumulation of points” (Carrin-Bouez 1978: 108) by which priests manipulate elements in order to mediate relations with *bongas*, both benevolent or malevolent. “To know divinities,” she writes, “is to be capable of localizing them, of naming them” (107). This diagrammatic writing, coded through regular binary alternations, compels the spirits to interact with priests and other participants so ritual action may be carried out. However, priests must be careful in managing spirits and subsequent possessions that result from the calling of spirit presences into the ritual space, for the loss of control could have severe consequences. Ritual diagramming or *ol* is a way that relations with spirits are initiated, and a means by which these interactions are directed towards the goals of healing, prosperity, and well-being.

In addition to ritual diagramming, there are also numerous other practices of *ol* which connect collectivities both to each other as well as to the *bongas*. For instance, Santals are divided into 8 major exogamous clans<sup>2</sup> but each of these clans are further divided into a series of sub-clans (*khunt*). Santals narrate their history through a series of migrations, in which over



time, an original kinship unit became scattered, first into clans, then sub-clans. Each sub-clan narrates a specific migratory history, and the founding of sub-clans along the migratory route is tied to tutelary dieties (*abge bonga*), who continue to involve themselves in the affairs of the clan. On the establishment of houses, the house spirits (*oḍak' bonga*) interact with members of the sub-clan, as opposed to the spirits of the sacred grove (*jahe bonga*) who maintain relations with the village as a whole. As I witnessed in Dumka, during the *Sohrae* festival (winter harvest), as well as during the ceremonies specifically directed to the sub-clan *bonga*, the *abge*, every house is “written” with a particular diagram of the sub-clan, called *khonḍ* or *khonḍ ol*. All houses of the same sub-clan, no matter what village, share the same *khonḍ ol*. “Writing” thus serves as a way of marking shared histories of migration and territory, as well as creating the conditions in which interactions with associated spirits take place. In addition to *khonḍ*, tattoo marks such as the *khoda* or the *sikha* are also referred to as an *ol cinha* (written symbol).<sup>3</sup> While the widespread practice of tattooing has diminished, in the missionary archives it is written that without these marks, Santals would not be allowed to undergo important ceremonies, or participate in carrying the drums or dancing (in effect, they are barred from participating in the practices which constitute in part what it means to be "Santali"). Like the *khonḍ*, tattooed designs are also connected with communication with the *bongas*, especially the *bonga Jomraj*, the Vedic god of death.

In these examples, practices of *ol* mediate triadic relationships between different people and *bongas*. People employ *ol* diagrams to call, manage, and negotiate with *bongas* in order to accomplish ritual action, such as healing or sacrifice. *Ol* in the form of *khonḍ* also allows members of sub-clans to identify shared histories of migration and infuse genealogical relations with ritual power through the invocation of tutelary deities. Finally, *ol* allows Santals to identify

with one another as members of a particular collectivity, as well as communicate with the god of death in order to facilitate a safe transit out of one's body (physical and social), at the time of passing. Writing is thus multiply addressed, both to other humans and to *bongas*, and the interpretative community of readers entailed by writing includes both entities. The convergence of these entities infuses writing and its circulation with a certain potentiality for action.



**Figure 3.1:** *khond ol* in the entrances of houses during the *sohrae* festival, Tilaboni village, 2010.

### **Script as a tripartite constellation: history of graphic practice among the Santals**

As discussed above, Santal *ol* encompasses graphic systems in which marks are not tied to an abstracted set of phonemes, but were integral to the coordination of communicative activities between Santals themselves or between Santals and the spirits (*bongas*). This differed from prevailing Brahmanical ideologies, in which the Sanskrit phonetic structure (*shiksha*) was one of the most important constructive elements of language, along with metrics, etymology, and grammar (Kelly 2006: 15). In fact, as Kelly argues, the Brahminical organization of language

developed in an oral context as a way to transmit and preserve Vedic texts. Though writing later developed as an instrument of phonetic transmission, writing or script was always a secondary concern for the Brahmins. This is why Sanskrit, the "perfected" language of the Vedas, was written in numerous scripts (scattered throughout the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia), all organized syllabically, and in a logical phonetic order (iconizing the movement of the human vocal apparatus) that iconized the way that Brahmins had long learned to memorize the traditional *shiksha* division in Sanskrit phonology (Staal 2000, Deshpande 1993). Kelly suggests that the integral way form and practice was tied into the creation of these systems show incontrovertibly that Brahmi writing systems developed primarily in reference to an already established oral grammatical system (20).

Though the Brahmins were never in control of the state, the Brahmanical ideology, illustrated by the use and the spread of the Brahmi scripts, became the preeminent way<sup>4</sup> in which sound to script relations were understood throughout the subcontinent. Hence, in Sanskrit (the "perfected language), the logical, syllabic organization of sound both preceded and superseded script. In modern Indo-Aryan languages such as Bengali, Sanskritic syllabic-phonetic distinctions are maintained in the written language, even when they do not exist in the spoken register. For instance, in Bengali (Eastern Brahmi) script, the dental, palatal, and retroflex fricatives, phonemically distinct in Sanskrit, are all given separate characters even though in the pronunciation of literary Bengali (including the "standard colloquial" variety of Calcutta), these all have collapsed to the palatal. As I was learning Bengali, my teachers explained that the maintenance of this distinction (among many other script to sound anomalies) showed that Bengali descended from Sanskrit; it just has become "corrupted" over time. As Trautmann (1997) has shown, in this Brahmanical ideology of language, Sanskrit must be considered the

ultimate referent and progenitor of all languages of the subcontinent, and this, as my experience of learning Bengali illustrates, is encoded in the sound to script relations of the writing system. Thus Brahmi writing was not supposed to transparently reflect speech in general, but rather was supposed to transparently reflect Sanskrit speech.

When the missionaries arrived in the Santali-speaking areas in the border regions of what is now West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Bihar in east India, the project of conversion resulted in the introduction of a new form of writing, distinct from either *ol* or the widespread Brahmi systems. The linguistic variety Santals spoke was clearly different from the Indo-Aryan varieties, and linguists would later classify Santali under the Munda branch of Austro-Asiatic. Missionaries were fascinated by the Santali language and created a number of grammars beginning in the mid-nineteenth century in both the Bengali and Roman scripts charting Santali's distinct morphology and phonology.<sup>5</sup> Through the production of grammars, Santali was fashioned as an autonomous linguistic object, shorn from the social contexts of its use. Having distinguished the sounds of Santali, missionaries discussed how to create a unique writing system to best represent the phonemes of the language. Missionaries such as the Norwegians L.O. Skrefsrud and P.O. Bodding, the heads of the largest Lutheran mission in the erstwhile province of Santal Parganas preferred the Roman alphabet. Bodding wrote in a letter to other missionaries that the Bengali or Devanagari alphabet, though perfectly suited for the Sanskritic Indo-Aryan languages, could not be sufficiently adapted to Santali. The Roman alphabet, according to Bodding, has been adapted to a wide variety of sound systems, and could easily represent the distinct features of Santali.<sup>6</sup> Hence, for the missionaries, writing was not seen as a product of social action and relations, but presented as a mode of representation of an abstract phonological reality. This form of writing became closely associated with the spread of Christianity, and the

institutional practices of both missions and colonial governance.<sup>7</sup>

**ĀDI ALGATE SANTALI ROMAN HOROP**  
**CET' JON REAK' HORA**  
**POYOR AKHOR**  
 (স্বর বর্গ, VOWEL)  
 (ESKAR ARAÑOK AKHORKO)

<b>O</b> অ	<b>A</b> আ	<b>Ā</b> আ	<b>I</b> ই	<b>U</b> উ	<b>E</b> এ	<b>Ē</b> ঐ	<b>Ō</b> ও
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**GOYOR AKHOR**  
 (ব্যঞ্জন বর্গ (CONSONANT))  
 (ESKARTE BAN ARAÑOK AKHORKO)  
 Noako Akhor sāote O (অ) do goyor calakā

<b>K</b> ক	<b>KH</b> খ	<b>G</b> গ	<b>GH</b> ঘ	<b>Ń</b> ঙ, ঙ
<b>C</b> চ	<b>CH</b> ছ	<b>J</b> জ	<b>JH</b> ঝ	<b>Ṇ</b> ঞ
<b>T</b> ট	<b>TH</b> ঠ	<b>D</b> ড	<b>DH</b> ঢ	<b>N</b> ণ
<b>T</b> ত	<b>TH</b> থ	<b>D</b> দ	<b>DH</b> ধ	<b>N</b> ন
<b>P</b> প	<b>PH</b> ফ	<b>B</b> ব	<b>BH</b> ভ	<b>M</b> ম
<b>H</b> হ	<b>R</b> র	<b>R</b> ড়	<b>L</b> ল	<b>S</b> স
<b>Y</b> য়	<b>W</b> ওয়া			

**KECET' TAPUK' ARAÑKO**

<b>Ḳ</b> ক̣	<b>C̣</b> চ̣	<b>Ṭ</b> ট̣	<b>P̣</b> প̣
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Mu tuḍak' (~) do eken Poyor Akhor rege beoharokā

<b>Ọ̄</b> অ̣	<b>Ạ̄</b> আ̣	<b>Ạ̄</b> আ̣	<b>Ị̄</b> ই̣	<b>Ụ̄</b> উ̣	<b>Ẹ̄</b> এ̣	<b>Ẹ̄</b> ঐ̣	<b>Ọ̄</b> ও̣
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\*\*\*\*\* NĀWĀ IPIL ★ Sohrae Lekha 2006\*\*\*\*\*

**Figure 3.2:** Chart showing the Santali Roman script and its Eastern Brahmi (lower left) and Devanagari (lower right) equivalents. From the back page of Santali-language magazine *Nawa Ipil* (Santali Literary and Cultural Society, Calcutta)

As with many missionary projects throughout the world, what ensued was a project of translation whereby native terms were collected and given new meanings in and through missionary practice (cf. Keane 2007, Errington 2008, Irvine 2008, Hanks 2012, etc.). In addition

to material inscription used to establish relations with the *bongas*, or Sanskritic sound-to-script encoded in the Brahmi script, the concept of *ol* now also came to signify a conventional, phonological literacy project tied to the creation of an autonomously delineated Santali “language” and “culture,” prefiguring an ethno-national politics (cf. Carrin-Bouez 1986). Missionaries, particularly those of the Scandinavian mission, were eager to assert the independence of Santals from the perceived yoke of Brahmanism and the dependence on resources from Europe, aiming to create an independent Santali home mission in which Santals themselves were to undertake the project of evangelization. Not only did missionaries employ their newly invented *ol* to the production of religious texts such as Bibles or hymnals, but they also transcribed and published non-Christian texts such as the *Hodkoren mare hapdam ko reyak' katha*, [The stories of the ancestors of the Santals] (Skrefsrud 1887), the Santal origin story, as well as a large collection of folklore, and studies in Santal medicinal practices (Bodding 1924, 1925, 1983). In doing so, the missionaries intertwined the Santali Roman both with an independent Santali religious and cultural sphere (by entextualizing ritual texts in published, scripted books) and a project of Christian conversion.

Today, Brahmi scripts are still the most widely used scripts to write Santali, and these scripts are also subsumed under the domain of *ol*. Yet there continues to be widespread ambivalence about the use of these scripts to represent Santali, and as such, these scripts never became incorporated into explicitly political projects. Their use is mostly conceived of as a practical matter, an acceptance of an administrative territoriality in which Santals have been divided among linguistic states, and have been incorporated into the differing graphic regimes of those states (Choksi 2014a). Unlike for upper castes, where the use of Brahmi scripts, to an extent, indexes 'Sanskrit,' evident both in the way the sound to script correspondences are

explained, as well as the mode and method of teaching literacy in vernacular schools, for Santals, the scripts do not carry these same ritual significations. In fact, the introduction of *ol* that institutionalized graphic practice and wedded it to phonology, resulted in a disjuncture within the conceptual field of *ol*, entailing several consequences for Santals, especially in relation to the *bongas*.

### **Disjunctures and schisms: *ol* in the mission archive**

As mentioned earlier, missionaries published several accounts of the Santal communities where they worked, both in English and Santali. These were published under headings like "folk tales" or "traditions and institutions,"<sup>8</sup> firmly ensconcing these stories, as per the anthropological method of the time, outside historical narratives.<sup>9</sup> However, in order to collect these data, missionaries, especially the Norwegian missionary Paul Olaf Bodding, trained a number of Santal collaborators to read and write Roman script-Santali. They were sent off into the surrounding villages to collect ethnographic data as well as life histories, and write them down in Roman script. Sagram Murmu, a recently converted Christian from Mohulpahari, near Dumka, Jharkhand, was one of the most prolific of Bodding's collaborators, noting down, in Santali, hundreds of accounts of Santals living in the Santal Parganas in the last decades of the nineteenth centuries. While many of these accounts were not published, Bodding kept the notebooks, and later donated his massive collection to the National Library in Oslo, where they are currently housed.<sup>10</sup>

While the stories encompass a vast archive of Santal life in the 19th century, as well as extensive ethnographic field research on the Santali language, I will focus here on the few that mention "writing." In particular, I describe the way the practice of writing constituted a relational schism in the nineteenth century between the Santals and the *bongas*, and the role of

administrative institutions such as the school or mission in facilitating that schism. However, before writing about the schism, I will address the role of writing in that “political” moment of insurgency, the Santal Hul of 1855. The Hul has a foundational role to play in both Santal and scholarly conceptions of the political, for it was Ranajit Guha’s discussion the *Hul* and in particular, the supposed divine role of writing in the *Hul*, that formed a cornerstone of his classic text on peasant insurgency (Guha 1983, 1988) that is seen as foundational to the school of historiography known as Subaltern Studies. As a departure point for his criticism of colonial and nationalist historiography, Guha cites an 1856 account in the Calcutta review in which the main protagonists (or antagonists) in the *Hul* narrative, the brothers Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu, recount in court how they received orders from *Thakur*, their supreme deity, on “bits of paper” upon which “words were written,” and in a “white book.” Even though as the account says, “literate” Santals deciphered the writing, the meaning “had already been sufficiently interpreted by the two leaders” (Guha 1988:80).

This account and the subsequent historical interpretation leads Guha to argue that religious agency, in order to meet the criteria of a secular historical discourse, has to be subordinated to some other explanation, thus denying the peasant's own political “consciousness” in the insurgency.<sup>11</sup> Yet in Guha's own account, I argue, he glosses over the precise signification of “writing” in Santali. What is central to the account of the *Hul* is that the mediation between the brothers and the *bongas* takes place through written texts. At this point, when literacy was not as widespread and Santali mission education had not taken hold, *ol* encompassed a wide range of written meanings, including written texts. Yet, in order to gain their powers, the brothers had to reject new forms of literacy, instead incorporating these new forms of writing within an already existing semantic-pragmatic domain of *ol*, through which *bongas* and humans



could converge to carry out the work of insurgency.

In order to illustrate this I turn to Sagram Murmu's life history of Durga Tudu, who lived during the time of the *Hul*. By the time Murmu was collecting narratives, the *Hul* had occurred a few decades earlier, and had ravaged the Santal population of the Santal Parganas. People were still coping with the effects of the insurgency, and in order to understand it better, Murmu, on behalf of Bodding, compiled a large number of *Hul* narratives, of which Tudu's is one<sup>12</sup>. In his narrative, Tudu makes a distinction between what he "saw" and what he "heard" (Anderson et al. 2011: 175), and the story of Sidhu and Kanhu falls in the latter category. The way Tudu heard the story, the father of Sidhu and Kanhu, the sons of a rich village headman, Bhogon manji, paid a Brahmin teacher to instruct them how to read and write. In order to go to the "school" (*paṭsal*), they had to pass a *baru* tree. One day they saw a mendicant under the tree who "had no arms, no legs, but had heads on both ends" (ibid.). Each time they went to school they saw the mendicant again but this time his body shape had transformed, sometimes he had legs on both ends. Finally one day they saw him like a man, and he called them over to give them a "blessing" (*bhori*) so they could write a letter to the British raj about excessive rents laid upon the people. In order to do this, he said, he would teach them how to read and write (*ol-parhao*) (177).

So Sidhu and Kanhu stopped going to school. They did not learn how to read and write according to the dictates of the Brahmin or his "school". The concept "writing" for the brothers was thus not subsumed by a phonological logic, either European or Sanskritic, or by association with institutions such as the school. Rather "writing" involved the circulation of material artifacts that mediated the power of the spirits in a way similar to ritual diagramming. Tudu goes on to say that, after skipping school and training with the mendicant, "somehow they wrote a letter (*chiṭhi ol-ke'ta*), and by seizing it with pincers made of twigs they sent it to its destination,

having passed it on from village to village" (179). This letter (*chithi*) was in fact a traditional form of Santal announcements, where thread is wound around forked twigs and circulated from village to village.<sup>13</sup> As they "wrote" this letter, and circulated it, they became silent (*konkaena*), conducted ritual sacrifices, and called themselves *Suba Thakur*, embodying the spirit whose power they would draw on to gather people and continue the insurrection.<sup>14</sup>

In this narrative, gaining the ability to "write" also involved rejecting the dictates of schooling and Brahmanical learning in favor of voicing relations with the *bongas*, not through vocal means but through graphic practice. This is evident from the fact that writing was conceived to encompass forms of announcement and ritual sacrifice excluded from a representational definition of writing. It appears, like in the Calcutta review article to which Guha alludes, that text artifacts that appear as legible forms of writing to colonial administrators, and which they, and Guha, found so fascinating were likely incorporated into this general conception of writing (*ol*). In this light then, perhaps it was not so remarkable that these artifacts mediated connections with the *bongas*. However to say that Santals were led solely by the *bongas* would be misleading; it was, in fact, the creation and circulation of written objects, within an intelligible semantic-pragmatic field, which allowed humans and *bongas* to converge at the historical moment known as the *Hul*.

During the *Hul*, writing served as a practice through which humans and *bongas* were brought together in order to carry out the work of insurgency. The insurgency resembled a ritual encounter, except on a larger scale. However, according to Tudu, the human failings of Sidhu and Kanhu, the warrior priests, notably their failure to maintain chastity, ultimately resulted in the failure of the insurrection (187). Following the *Hul*, colonial authorities increasingly intervened into the administration of the Santal Parganas, and missions saw the area as ideal for

evangelization. As missions and school were established, the schism between the literacy learned in school and ritual-material practice (all under the lexical signifier *ol*) becomes more pronounced in the archives, especially with respect to relations with the *bongas*. For instance, in one story taken down by Murmu in the late nineteenth century, the practice of phonological writing was used as a means to resist *bongas*, who often (and still do) harass humans by spiriting them away, or in some cases, even kill them.

In the story, a man recounts how his relative was ensnared in a love relation with a *bonga* lover. This story, Murmu emphasizes, "was seen, and the man is...still alive."<sup>15</sup> The account involves a flute-playing cowherd boy and a *bonga* girl who fell in love with him. The *bonga* would appear as his *hili*, his older sister-in-law with whom younger brother-in-laws have joking and highly affectionate relations. The *bonga* girl, disguised as his older sister-in-law, engages in "flirtation" and "amorous dalliance" (291) with the cowherd boy and begins to spirit him away from his room at night (293). Eventually he finds out she is not his sister-in-law, but at that point it was too late, he found himself unable to resist her invitations, and continued to be spirited away. One day, in order to escape the *bonga*, the man decides he will escape to Taljhari Mission "to learn to write" (*olok' ced lagat'*) (301). Yet, even there, the man still cannot fully sever ties with the *bonga*; she follows him to the mission and asks him to go away with her. He refuses, but afterwards goes mad longing for her. He could not properly learn to read and write. In the end, he had to undergo an exorcism ritual (303)<sup>16</sup>, calling the *bonga* back to the mission in order to "bid her farewell." Only then could he return to the mission "to learn to write" (*olok'geye calaoente ondegeye*) (ibid.).

Whereas in the *Hul* narrative, *ol* is employed by Sidhu and Kanhu to bring humans and *bongas* together, in this narrative *ol* appears as a recourse humans use to distance themselves

from *bongas*. In the story, institutionalized literacy, in this case, the writing learned in the “mission,” allows Santals to mitigate their relations with the *bongas* through a certain control over graphic inscription. For example, in this story the cow-herd boy originally thought that going to mission and “learning to write” would be enough to distance himself from his *bonga* lover, yet her memory always haunted him such that he was not able to fully master writing. Only when the *bonga* was exorcised through traditional ritual methods could the boy return to the mission, learn to write and more fully adopt an institutional, Christianized lifestyle. While the narrative suggests that institutionalized writing had the potential to distance oneself from the *bongas*, it calls into question whether writing or mission-life in general could fully rupture ties with them. The *bonga* continued to haunt the boy even though he had fled to the mission, and even prevented him from acquiring phonological writing.

Another story, collected most likely at the turn of the twentieth century,<sup>17</sup> illustrates starker consequences for people attempting to learn how to write in the face of *bonga* opposition. In this account, a little boy begins to go to school to learn to “read and write” (*olok' parhao cet'jong*). One day, on the path from school to his village, he meets a *bonga* woman who steals his pen (*kolom*) and his notebook (*khathi*). He sends his parents to retrieve the notebook and pen, but the *bonga* refuses; he then sends his brother and sister-in-law, again the *bonga* refuses. The *bonga* tells them in a Bengali atypical of *bonga* speech<sup>18</sup> (sung in the story), “tell them whose pen and notebook this is to come and get it” (*jader kolom khathi tader yapnar nia jak*). Finally, the boy comes himself to confront the *bonga* and ask for his pen and notebook back. The *bonga* says she will give him the pen and notebook back only on the condition that he deposit them at his house and return to her. The boy agrees, and takes the pen and notebook back, but does not return it to the *bonga*. The *bonga* finds him in his room at night, takes the form of the snake, and

kills him (literally, "eats" him).

In this narrative the *bonga* appears to understand the power of schooled literacy to sever relations, and seizes specifically the pen and notebook, the instruments of writing. Though the boy's parents and brother and sister-in-law plead with the *bonga*, the *bonga* only agrees to give them back on the condition that the boy abandons their use entirely. The boy, however, in his desire to learn how to "read and write," attempts to sever ties with the *bonga*, but this brings about his ultimate destruction. The story describes in clear terms the crisis engendered by the introduction of phonological literacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially with respect to relations with the *bongas*. Far from the time of the *Hul*, where textual inscription was subordinated to ritual practices of *ol*, thus gaining the power to mediate relations with the *bongas*, in this story we see a *bonga* explicitly viewing the acquisition of schooled literacy as a deliberate attempt to sever relations. *Ol* no longer mediates relations, but damages them, to the extent that it could even lead to a young pupil's death. Perhaps this tale was meant to be a cautionary one to prospective pupils; learning to write may have some benefits, but it may also portend an ominous future.

### **Scriptmaking: reassembling graphic constellations**

The time around Indian independence was a tumultuous period throughout the Santali-speaking area. The Kherwal insurrections in the Santal Parganas against colonial rule and missionary activity at the turn of the twentieth century<sup>19</sup>, and the *deshgaro* movement in Mayurbhanj, Chota Nagpur, and the Jangal mahals in the 1930s<sup>20</sup> left a lasting legacy in the region. Through these successive rebellions, as Sammadar (1996:144) notes in his case study of the Jangal Mahals, adivasis developed a territorial consciousness in which they came to understand their region as distinct, the basis of which they could agitate for political autonomy.

As Independence approached, adivasi leader Jaipal Singh and the Adivasi Mahasabha, called upon the Indian state to recognize an independent, adivasi-majority state of Jharkhand, comprising all the southern districts of Bihar, eastern districts of MP, southwestern districts of West Bengal, and the northern districts of Orissa<sup>21</sup>. Jharkhand agitations took hold in West Bengal, Mayurbhanj and southern Bihar, and Santals played a major role in the political agitations, as well as, later, in the founding of the Jharkhand political parties.

The call for Jharkhand and the upsurge in state-oriented political assertion on the part of adivasi communities in eastern India coincided with an efflorescence of scriptmaking throughout the Santali-speaking region. Independent Santali scripts were created throughout the Santal Parganas, Chotanagpur, Mayurbhanj, and West Bengal. While some have documented as many as fourteen independent scripts, the number is likely much higher (Hansdak' 2009). These scripts however shared many features. On the one hand, most, if not all, of these scripts were alphabetic, and thus did not follow the syllabic organization of Indic scripts. They also more or less followed the alphabetic outline of the Roman script, though sometimes importing features of Indic scripts. This supports the assertion that throughout the Santali speaking area there was a widely circulated idea of a *shiksha*, a phonetic template upon which individual, unique graphic forms could be attached. Secondly, in most of these scripts, there was a meaning attached to the form which went beyond the sound to phoneme correspondence. Thus the scripts' signification exceeded both the Sanskritic-*shiksha* signification of the Brahmi script, as well as the arbitrary signification attached by missionaries to the Roman script. In the practice of scriptmaking therefore, Santals could voice other relations through graphic forms outside the fixed relation between grapheme and phoneme presupposed by either European or Sanskritic graphic ideologies.

For instance, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu, the great Santali poet and author of the Jharkhand anthem, *Debon tengon adibasi bir* (Let us stand up, we the adivasi heroes), that popularized the Jharkhand movement in West Bengal, created a script called *Monj Dander Ank* (Drawings of the bliss-cave). The script (see figure 2) is explicitly divided into two sections, the “mare horop” (old script) which etch out the ritual marks of ancestral Santals, and the “nawa horop” (new script) which then combine and order these marks according to a phonological grid. Thus the graphic characters are embedded in a history of *ol* that is independent from the phonetic value of those characters. In the introduction to *Ishrod* [God-speech], which was Murmu's magnum opus that documented ritual practices and protocols among the Santals, and which was written completely in Monj Dander Ank', Murmu writes, “By understanding the system of that language (*rod*) by which the god-sound (*ishrong*) emerges from the vocal chords as human sound (*adang*), this script was created.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, Murmu attempts to combine the human phonetic unit (*adang*), which defined “literacy” under the new graphic regime instituted since the nineteenth century, with the voice of the *bongas* and ancestors (*ishrong*). Through the creation of “script,” the new priests: the intellectuals, poets, and authors, attempted to forge a *rapprochement* between the phonological-representational and the diagrammatic-ritual fields of *ol*.

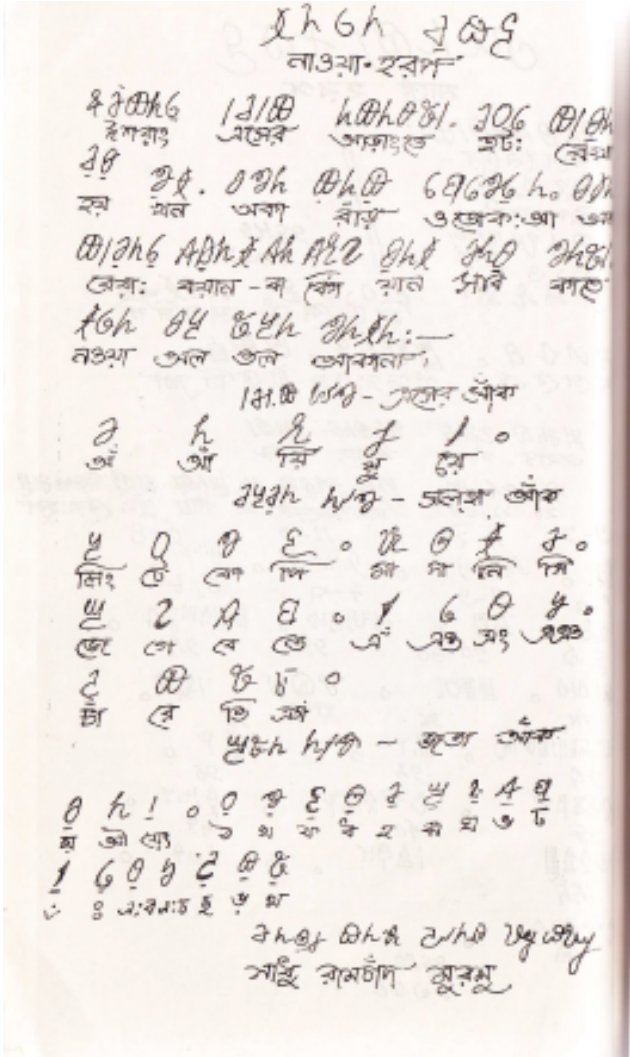
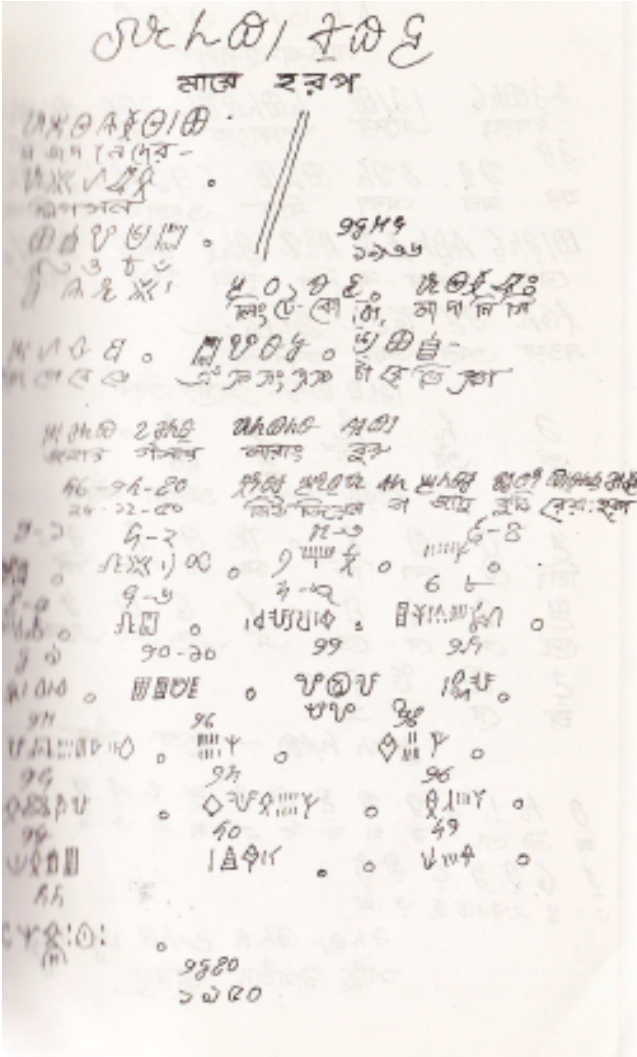


Figure 3.3: the “old” and “new” scripts, *Moj Dander Ank*’ of Sadhu Ramchand Murmu (from *Ishrod*, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu Memorial Trust: Jhargram, WB)

Of the several scripts that were created, the most popular was *Ol-Chiki* (writing-symbol), attributed to Pandit Raghunath Murmu, a schoolteacher from a village in Mayurbhanj district, Orissa. At the time of Indian independence Mayurbhanj, the southern-most dominated Santal district, was a princely state and the *raja* was especially well-regarded by the tribal population. However, following independence, the state acceded to Orissa, which sparked a massive uprising among Santals in 1948, led by Sonaram Soren.<sup>23</sup> Soren and his allies demanded that



Mayurbhanj join the tribal-majority districts of southern Bihar, anticipating the future state of Jharkhand. Though the rebellion was fierce, the Indian army eventually crushed the revolt, and Mayurbhanj joined Orissa. The Santals in Mayurbhanj experienced an acute sense of defeat and dejection, more so perhaps than in other parts of the Santali-speaking area, in addition to the physical trauma inflicted by the Indian army in the rebel areas.

It was around this time when the popularity of Ol-Chiki script increased, and then spread quickly to other parts of the Santali-speaking area, particularly around Jamshedpur, southeast Bengal (Jangal Mahals), and the districts of Hooghly, Howrah and Calcutta. These areas, particularly Jamshedpur and Howrah, were home to a first generation of Santal urban migrants who worked in industrial factories and government offices, and who also were supporters of the Jharkhand movement. They provided financial support to Murmu, patronizing the founding of an Ol-Chiki press as well as endowing branches of ASECA (Adibasi Socio-Educational Cultural Association), an institution set up by Murmu to promote Ol-Chiki in Santal villages (Orans 1965). In addition, like Ramchand Murmu, Raghunath Murmu was also a poet and dramatist, and popularized Ol-Chiki through song and drama, as well as a prolific output of written material of the script. The script therefore, endowed by a newly formed class of elite Santals in Orissa, Jharkhand, and West Bengal, and supported by an institutional apparatus, garnered much more success than other scripts before or since.

Ol-Chiki, like the other Santal scripts, was alphabetic, and Murmu justified the script specifically on linguistic-scientific grounds, arguing that neither Brahmi, nor Roman scripts can adequately represent Munda sounds such as the checked consonant series (which he called *taput'* *aḍang*) or the reduced vowel series (*gəhla*). Murmu even wrote a grammar (*Ronoḍ*) which grammatically justifies the use of the Ol-Chiki script, and which is taught along with the Ol-

Chiki script up to the present day (Murmu 2005). Keen to argue that the script was “scientific writing system devised for all Munda languages” (Lotz 2007:251-252), Murmu located the script within a scientific-linguistic discourse of literacy. Even today, many Ol-Chiki advocates extol the “scientific” nature of the script; one author I talked with even compared it with the IPA<sup>24</sup>.

Ø	Ō	Ḫ	Ḭ	Ḫ
A (a)	At (at)	Ag (ak')	Ang (aŋ)	Al (al)
[a]	[t]	[k',g]	[ŋ]	[l]
Ḫ	b	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ
Aa (a)	Aak (ak)	Aaj (ac')	Aam (am)	Aaw (aw)
[a]	[k]	[c',ç]	[m]	[w/v]
Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ
I (i)	Is (is)	Ih (ih)	Iny (in)	Ir (ir)
[i]	[s]	[h,ʔ]	[n]	[r]
Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ
U (u)	Uch (uc)	Ud (ut')	Unn (un)	Uy (uj)
[u]	[c]	[t',d]	[n]	[j]
Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ
E (e)	Ep (ep)	Edd (ed)	En (en)	Err (er)
[e]	[p]	[d]	[n]	[r]
Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ	Ḫ
O (o)	Ott (ot)	Ob (op')	Ov (ow)	Oh (of)
[o]	[t]	[p',b]	[w]	(K) <sup>a</sup>

**Figure 3.4:** Ol-Chiki letters, from <http://wesanthals.tripod.com/id45.html>

Yet even though Murmu insisted on the representational (and ‘scientific’) nature of the script, Murmu also enmeshed the script within diagrammatic and ritual relations. Like the other scripts (though in a much more systematic way) each Ol-Chiki grapheme has a diagrammatic meaning that exceeds the phonetic value. Unlike the Roman or Brahmi scripts, the Ol-Chiki letters are each named with a particular Santali word, and the shape of each grapheme iconizes the meaning of the word with which it is attached. For instance, the grapheme Ḫ which phonetically signifies 'r' is called *ir* 'to harvest' and is shaped like a scythe used during harvest season. O 't' is *ot* 'earth, ground,' while Ḫ 'l' is shaped like a hand holding a pen, and thus the letter is named *ol* 'to write, writing.' Ol-Chiki pedagogy, while underscoring the fact that Ol-Chiki has been created specifically to represent Santali phonology, also stresses the diagrammatic nature of the script as evidence of its "scientific" superiority over scripts such as

Bengali and Roman. This was made explicit in a discussion of Ol-Chiki pedagogy with a senior Ol-Chiki activist NB from Bankura district, West Bengal, who was also an intimate of Pandit Raghunath Murmu. As the interview transcript below shows, he begins the conversation by focusing on Ol-Chiki's phonetic superiority, and the importance of the glottalized consonant series (taput' aḡang) and the reduced vowels (gahla). Once he establishes the importance for maintaining the phonetic distinctions in the language within a script, he proceeds to discuss how the diagrammatic value of Ol-Chiki graphemes (over and above the phonemic value) also offers a "scientific" advantage over other scripts:

N-Nishaant, researcher, NB-senior Ol Chiki activist

6-24-2011, Susuniya

1NB: bhobhisho-te mit'ten mit'ten roman do bang tahena, ona do bang tahena na. ona do bang tahena.  
 2jehetu santali bhasha renak' nijosho bhasha renak' nijosho lipi jehetu hui ena nonde ge hijuk' len. ebong  
 3santali lipi jahan' hui ena noa do eḡak' kono lipi mit'tang jhaḡ do banuk'a.

4N: he he

5NB: natural mit'tang prakriti ak' leka te. mit'tang ut' mushroom,

6N: he he

7NB: mushroom mit'tang oka chitro kana chobi kana unka ge ona akhor tet' kana ol chiki re.

1NB: In the future, one, one [time?] Roman will not it be there. It will not be there. Since now the  
 2Santali language has its own language's own script, for this reason, here [this script] will come. And the  
 3Santali script which now exists, no other script has its features.

4N: yes yes

5NB: It is natural, it is like nature. For instance, [the letter] ut', mushroom.

6N: yeah

7NB: Mushroom, it is a diagram, it is a picture, and like that it is also a letter in Ol-Chiki.

In the above excerpt, NB argues that the advantages of the Ol-Chiki script go well beyond its transparent reflection of Santali phonemes. He emphasizes the importance of the diagrammatic relationship between form and function within the Ol-Chiki script in line 7 when he uses repeated parallelism to describe grapheme 'ut' 𑒧 /d, t/ 'mushroom' as simultaneously a "diagram" [chitro], a "picture" [chobi], and a "phonemic letter" [akshar]. In underscoring the semantic equivlances between picture and grapheme which Murmu has incorporated into Ol-Chiki, NB unites the qualities of Santal *ol*, in which "drawing" and "writing" are co-terminous,

with the Sanskrit *shiksha* system, in which the graphic unit is defined primarily by its phonemic content (Skt. *akshara*). He further elaborates on this relation by describing the letter O

“ot” /t/ ‘earth.’

8NB=er pore ot soil tahole ‘ot’ renak' akriti chet' kana? Scientistko ko lai eda dembakriti mane sim bili  
9leka apel bili leka nanarokom ko menkeda Pandit Raghunath Murmu lai keda gol ge.

10N: he he

11NB: mit'tang shishu gidra olok' padhao lipi sonkrate jodi bhujio huyuk' khan earth renak' somporke  
tahole gota prithbi asen huyuk' a.

12N: he he

13NB: ona do sombob bang kana. uni re ge nonde iskul...nonde olok' ket' koa gidra odok' ket' koa tet'  
onde acharya pun gota begat achur pe. noa sky

14N: he he

15NB: akash koyok' achur chong okare fed akana? n'el keda ko ota ha ge harup' akan leka. cheleka [...]

16mahashaoy, go-o-l ge. yaki right.

17N: o accha.

18NB: noa do huyuk' kana, asole rup. mit'tang gidra apel ho agu bang hui lena. mit'tang gidra sim bili ho

19agu bang hui lena. Nonde khon ge [...] keday prithob do burakar. biganik ko jahay ko lai keda. ac' do

20aroso ‘ot’ te lai keda, sohoj te-

21N: hyan, ‘ot’

22NB: ar mit'tang huyuk'kana oka circle kana to?

23N: hyan.

24NB: santal ak' bonga buru huyuk' na bonga ko ak' jokhen khond benao holong gol akaar--

25N hyan, gol akar-

26NB: noko naiyke ko mane nu'tum do bako badaya, menako Marang Buru ko bongaaya. menkhan ona

27nak' akriti ona nak' rup chet' kana? [...] ako do bako badaya unko do bonga geko badaya, menkhan

28asole ona do earth earth renak' rup kana ona do.

29N: hya

8NB=There there is 'ot' soil [earth], then what is the form of this 'ot'? Scientists say it is spherical, many  
9say it is like a chicken's egg or an apple, Pandit Raghunath Murmu said that it is round.

10N: yes, yes.

11NB: For instance, a child. When they are learning to read and write a script, if they want to learn about

12the earth, then they have to describe the whole earth.

13N: yes yes

14NB: that is not possible. In school, in school, they make the kids write it. ? this sky

15N: yes yes

16NB: this sky turns and where does it descend? they see 'harup' akan leka?' Teacher, it's like, a circle.

17That is right.

18N: okay.

19NB: This is what happens, the true form. A child, one did not have to bring an apple or a chicken egg.

20From here, they know the form of the earth. What the scientists say, they know easily from this 'ot'.

21N: yes, 'ot'

22NB: and one thing is, it is a circle right?

23N: yes

24NB: Santals' *bongas*, during the time when [one draws] the bongas' *khond* it is a circle form

25N: yes, a circle form

26NB: these nayikes [priests] they do not know the name, but let's say they are propitiating Marang Buru

27[great hill spirit], but what is the shape, what is the form? they do not know, the bongas know. but  
28really it is the earth, it is the form of the earth, that one.  
29N: yes

For NB, the letter-shape for "ot," which is a round circle, diagrams its natural quality; the circle is the Earth's "true form" (line 18). He offers an example of young Santal students sitting in a science class, and impressing the teacher with their knowledge of the Earth's form through their learning of the "ot" grapheme. While the grapheme is "scientific" by classroom standards, NB proceeds to illustrate how the "ot" grapheme not only diagrams the natural form "Earth" but also iconizes the chalked *ol* (*holong*) used in Santal rituals. Here, in lines 24-28, he makes explicit the relation between the graphic logic of Ol-Chiki script and the ritual logic of Santal *ol*, even going to so far as to argue that the Ol-Chiki grapheme elucidates the "true" (repeating the adverb *asole* in line 28 that he used discussing the classroom Earth in line 18) form of the *holong*, which is that of the Earth (line 28). In NB's formulation, the graphic form O 'ot' (and not the phoneme 't') recursively projects two distinct literacy practices, that learned in the classroom and that practiced in ritual spaces onto the grapheme itself. Finally, after revealing the logic of Ol-Chiki, NB asserts how the iconic features of Ol-Chiki renders it a superior script in comparison to either Roman or Eastern Brahmi:

30NB: rup ona leka te menak'a. 'is' menak'a ona mit'tang. 'is'. 'is' do nahel. nahel chet'lekana [...] onka ge  
31'is'. [writes the letter 'is']. 'ol' oka menak'a a ona 'ol' do mit'tang pen-te through eday pen-te onka  
32nonka sap' akada katuk' te an apnar pen ar noa ona ti [writes letter 'ol'] noa do khejeria akriti menak'a  
33noa ol renak'. ona okte ingreji 'p' renak' ulta. tet' noa do ekdom natural khon e agu keday. joto joto lipi  
34renak' nuna utpoti menak'a. jodi onde kukli huyuk'a bangla lipi renak' chet' utpoti menak'a bako lai kia.  
35khub kom barea pea ko lai eda. 'kho' mane akash, kho mane akash. kho renak' mane akash akriti chet'  
36lekana? akriti do ado bang uduk' a. 'kho' mane akash huyuk' ina tuku ge.

37N:hehe

38NB:'do' do mane doghot, dak' doriya. noa huyuk'kana do. do renak' akriti chet' ona onka do do 'do'  
39lekage kana.

40N:hehe

41NBmit'tang barea akriti ko em puro o por chondrabindu akriti utpoti bang-

42N:bako lai daqea

43NB:laiok'a. Roman scriptre hon joto renak' banuk'a. asole natural do bang kana to. Pundit Raghunath

44Murmu nuna marang scientist e takenkana jar jone natural jinis khon [...]

30NB: the form. It is like that. 'Is' [ʌ] is one. 'is.' 'Is' is 'plough.' The way a plough is,  
31that's 'is'. which is 'ol' [ɔ] ? this is 'ol' one pen drawn through with a hand holding the pen,  
32this is a 'khejeria' shape, this is the shape of 'ol.' at the same time it is a backwards English 'p'. this he  
33[raghunath murmu] took from nature [natural] itself. All scripts have an origin. If you ask what is  
34the origin of the Bengali script, they [Bengalis] cannot tell you. Very few, one or two, 'kho' [ʃ] means  
35'sky', 'kho' means sky. 'kho's meaning is sky but its shape is what kind? The shapes do not appear.  
36'kho' means sky, that's all.

37N:hehe

38NB: 'do' [ɔ] means 'ocean', water, sea. This is what 'do' is. What is 'do's shape, it is just like 'do'

39N: haha

40NB: only one or two shapes they have given, like an 'o' on top of which is a 'chondrobindu' [the 'om'  
41syllable] but the origin, no

42N: they can not say it

43NB: it can't be said. Roman script, none have it. Actually, Roman script is not natural, right? Pundit  
44Raghunath Murmu was such a great scientist, for that reason he [built the script] from natural things...

In the final excerpt, NB delineates the unique nature of Ol-Chiki script, when he argues that, unlike Eastern Brahmi (Bengali) or Roman, every Ol-Chiki letter has an "origin" (utpoti, line 26). By "origin," he suggests that the grapheme has semantic content beyond its phonemic value. While every Ol-Chiki letter may be located diagrammatically within the landscape, only a few letters in Bengali have an equivalent origin. As Indic scripts are syllabic, some of the graphemes, whose names are isomorphic with its syllabic content, are also lexemes. For instance, in line 34, he talks of "kho" which is also a Bengali word for 'sky' (and a single syllabic unit of the voiceless velar aspirate plosive with inherent open-o), or "do" 'ocean' (single syllabic unit of the voiced dental plosive, line 38). Though they may have semantic content, unlike Ol-Chiki, they lack a "form," (*akriti*, line 41) for they do not diagram their content in any way. In a striking inversion of missionary rationality, the Roman script is last on the scientific hierarchy due to its strictly arbitrary nature. The letter-forms have no diagrammatic or semantic value, and therefore the script is not "scientific" at all. Through the practice of scriptmaking, a new criterion has emerged in which the "scientific" nature of a script lies in how successful it is at graphically voicing both properties of *shiksha* in which each grapheme has an invariable

phonetic value (largely derived from alphabetic Roman Santali) as well as the semiotic relations of Santal *ol*, in which the value of the written diagram spatially incorporates the diverse elements of ritual and landscape. Since these elements could be locally interpreted in a variety of ways, numerous forms could be imposed upon the *shiksha*, which, in the absence of standardized graphic registers, have resulted in a proliferation of scripts.<sup>25</sup>

The making of scripts has seemed to be a very common practice. I had collected numerous scripts (see appendix), and surprisingly, even in the village I conducted fieldwork I discovered someone who had also created their own independent script for Santali. Raghunath Hembrom (he requested I use his name) was an elderly man educated in the Anglican mission in a nearby town. In southwestern Bengal, unlike north Bengal and north Jharkhand, the missions did not educate in Santali Roman script, nor were church services in Santali. Bengali was the primary medium of church business. However, even then, Hembrom, though educated in Bengali, had a copy of the Santali Bible in Roman script, and was somewhat familiar, though not by any means proficient, in Roman script Santali. He said that when he was growing up, he did not think "in his wildest dreams" that Santali would become a literary language, but as he grew older, he became more and more drawn into the Jharkhand movement, and began to participate in the language movement. He said that he knew about Ol-Chiki, and knew many people involved with ASECA, yet he never learned or mastered Ol-Chiki.

Having become involved in the Jharkhand movement in his area, he set out to devise a script that would address the problems he saw in Santali written in the Eastern Brahmi (Bengali) script, especially the "checked consonants" and the reduced vowel series. For many years, he worked on his script, *Hoq Ol* (Santal script), creating a series of primers, a glossary, and, like Raghunath Murmu, a grammar in which the particular sound-to-script ideology could be

explained within a larger system of language. In his script, many of the letters had "meanings" which distinguished them and marked them as Santali. For instance the letter "r" was identified as "ro," which is the equivalent syllabic identification of the grapheme in Bengali. However, for Hembrom, what distinguished the "ro" in Santali from the "ro" in Bengali was that the "ro" in Santali meant "fly." Along with a few other consonants (what Hembrom has called *agil aḍang*, 'original sounds'), these were the 'original words' that were there from the time of the first Santal ancestors, Pilchu Hadam and Pilchu Budhi. He said that unlike Ol-Chiki, in which "r" was represented by "ir" ᳚ ('harvest'), in his system the graphic form is equivalent to the syllabic pronunciation which then is equivalent to the meaning. In this way, *Hoḍ Ol* both relates back to the ancestors, but also imports the syllabic ideology of Brahmi scripts (which is used to justify the distinctive Santali nature of the script) in the sound to script analysis.

*Hoḍ Ol* illustrates an interesting compromise between Brahmi-language literacy and an interpretation of the Santali *shiksha* that I have witnessed in a few different more recently created scripts. For instance, though *Hoḍ Ol* is organized in a fashion that mimics the Brahmi syllabic organization of script, and the names of the letters follow the Brahmi names, there are significant differences in which the script also reflects both the Santali *shiksha* as well as the integration between *shiksha* and *ol*. For one, the script is alphabetic, in that unlike Brahmi script systems, each vowel is separately represented, although the addition of an underlying dot "connects" it to the preceding consonant. Second, aspirated sounds are represented by a diacritic, and are not given a separate graphemic character. Hembrom thirdly places a heavy importance on the "checked consonant" series, providing a whole set of diacritics which attach to the vowel to create the glottalized "checked" sounds. These are called the *ayu aḍang* (mother sounds) and are seen to ground the phonetic system, and distinguish the *Hoḍ Ol* system from the Brahmi system,



in which these sounds cannot, according to Hembrom, be adequately represented. Finally, unlike in Brahmi or Roman script, and like the other Santali scripts mentioned, the grapheme itself, in uniting with the phoneme is given a semantic content. Hence, the "script" is not in fact arbitrary; what makes it Santali is that graphemes carry meaning apart from their phonetic pronunciation. These meanings are in some cases, projected back as a history of the Santal community, linking the script with the *bongas* and the ancestors.

The construction of new scripts appears then to have been a common enough practice. I met two script-creators, both elderly gentlemen, and collected samples of numerous other scripts. One difference I saw with the more contemporary scripts (such as *Hođ Ol*, see appendix A) was that they were ordered following the Brahmi system. However they all retained an alphabetic instead of syllabic grapheme to phoneme correspondence, as well as the distinct emphasis on the "checked" glottalized plosive series, that we saw in Bodding's original outline. "Scriptmaking" I argue was a distinct social practice among many educated Santals, arising in response to a disjuncture between different literacy ideologies governing the semiotic relations between graphic and verbal communicative practices. On the one hand, Santali *ol*, the writing system in which graphic marks mediated relations between Santals and their landscape, ancestors, kin-groups, and the *bongas*, since it did not conform to a logocentric conception of script, was not considered "literate" and was placed in a realm of orality or illiterate practice. Instead, the literate language of India was the Brahmanical system of *shiksha*, in which a fully elaborated syllabic-phonetic system preceded writing, and to which writing conformed. It was against this system that missionaries, using a Romanized system of writing which they considered flexible and arbitrary, attempted to create an alternative and independent sound to script relation for Santali. However, as schooling continued to occur in Brahmi scripts [Devanagari, E. Brahmi

(Bengali) and Utkal (Oriya)], the *shiksha* system continued to dominate conceptions of literacy, such that the phoneme was considered the preeminent reference to "correct speech." The missionaries, through their creation of an independent Santali phonemic system through the alphabetic Roman script, had inadvertently also created a Santali *shiksha* template upon which a process of scriptmaking could take place. Scriptmaking endows the independent Santali *shiksha* with "meaning" in which Santals related graphemes to a larger visual and spiritual field, uniting meaning with form in a single semiotic constellation. As NB suggests, the constellation combines the science of Santali *ol* (chitro-drawing) with a science of Santali phonetics (akshara). It is within these two competing material communicative logics that scriptmaking as a social practice emerged.

While I cannot definitively say what the future of scriptmaking will be among the Santals, it appears as if the practice is coming to an end. Sitting in Raghunath Hembrom's courtyard, hearing about *Hod Ol*, and how he developed it, and what advantages it has over Ol-Chiki or the Bengali script, I stare for a brief moment at his neighbor's house, in which the front is painted with a rising sun, and Ol-Chiki letters proclaiming "Hansda Bakol" (Hansda family). Hembrom's grand-nephew, just entering class 9, talks about attending "Ol-Chiki" class at the high-school [as the Santali subject, which is taught in both Ol-Chiki and Bengali scripts is referred, see Chapter 5]. It seems that it would be very difficult to supplant Ol-Chiki, especially with its large-scale circulation and committed following, with another independent Santali script. In fact many consider the only other non-Brahmi competitor to Ol-Chiki to be the Santali Roman script. The disjunctures that compelled older people to make scripts before the spread of Ol-Chiki are in part, now answered through the learning of Ol-Chiki itself. However, considering the widespread history of scriptmaking in the Santali-speaking regions, one cannot discount a

resurgence of new scripts as political and social relationships to language and literacy are reimagined.

### **The many voices of *ol*: script, performance, and social relations in a West Bengal village**

In 2010-2011, I conducted field research in the village of Jhilimili, located in Bankura district, West Bengal, on the borders of the districts of Purulia and West Midnapur, and some 40 km from Jharkhand. Every morning as I woke in my room in the panchayat guest house, I would hear young, mostly *adivasi*, students at the primary school just across the way sing a morning prayer to the goddess Saraswati, the Brahmanical goddess of learning. However, in the evening, as I would be walking back from the bazaar to my quarters, I would hear the high school girls assemble at the SC/ST<sup>26</sup> hostel for their evening prayer. The girls would organize this Santali-language prayer themselves, with no help from teachers or hostel supervisors, and all hostel girls would participate, including non-Santals. I quote the first two verses of the prayer below<sup>27</sup>:

Johar, Johar Bidhu-Chandan  
Gun bidā chachalakin  
Ol bidā geyan chachal [akin]

Budhi geyan khaṭo getiṅ  
Ḍhi dare bale getiṅ  
Dese iṅ ho diṣa eṃaṅbin

Salutations to Bidhu-Chandan  
Who offers us the knowledge of good qualities  
Who offers us understanding and the knowledge of writing!

My knowledge and understanding is lacking  
The power of my intelligence is still unformed  
[Bidhu-Chandan], Offer me direction!

On first glance, these verses assume the form of a Sanskrit prayer, and indeed people often compared it to the Saraswati prayer to the Brahmanical goddess of learning. The verses are divided according to a syllabic eight count (*chanda*), and the verses itself contain numerous

Sanskrit-derived lexemes. For instance, "bida." (Skt. *vidya*) 'knowledge,' 'gun' (Skt. *gun*) qualities, "geyan" (Skt. *gnan*) 'knowledge, understanding' 'budhi' (Skt. *budhi*) "intellect" 'disa.' (Skt. *disha*) "direction," etc. However, what marks the prayer as distinct, besides the Santali salutation *Johar* which introduces the prayer, is the emphasis on the word *ol* in line 3. As discussed earlier, "writing" was seen as secondary in a Brahmanical theory of learning, but in this prayer, performed by Santali girls at the local high school, *ol* assumes a prominent place, restructuring the indexical significations of the prayer, and resisting an interpretation as simply a Sanskritized calque. This is a prayer about knowledge and understanding, but it is also a prayer about the gift and the use of *ol* (writing) to attain that understanding.

However, the *ol* invoked in the prayer does not refer to a generalized conception of writing, but specifically indexes the *Ol-Chiki* script. Bidhu and Chandan, the addressees of the prayer, are not traditional *bongas* of Santal worship, such as those of the sacred grove, the forest, or the village boundaries, but are tied to the learning of the *Ol-Chiki* script. In fact, the story of Bidhu and Chandan was first popularized in a play written and directed by Raghunath Murmu. The scene is set in the hoary Santal past, with two ancient Santal kingdoms at war with one another. The daughter of one of the warring chieftains, Chandan, falls in love with Bidhu, but during the chaos of war, the pair is separated. Chandan leaves secret messages for him in a "code," a primitive version of the *Ol-Chiki* script that combines *Ol-Chiki* characters with drawings (hearkening to the wider practices of Santal *ol*), and Bidhu, miraculously, can read it. They use the script to meet clandestinely during the war period, both amazed that, through the medium of the divine script, they can "read each other's feelings" (Lotz 2007: 254). They marry, and are blessed, but they are thrown again into turmoil, separated, and, in a series of thrilling scenes, use the script to urgently relay their longing for each other. At the end of the play, they

disappear into the heavens, turning into *bongas* themselves, and take the knowledge of the script with them (255)<sup>28</sup>.

According to Lotz, the play *Bidhu-Chandan* was a "traditional story...reshaped to match the form of the drama, combining well-known features with newly invented details...[it is] not primarily to achieve the modernization of legendary material but...is concerned with the integration of modern contents and messages with allegedly traditional folklore" (253). Hence, in *Bidhu-Chandan*, the modern idea of an exclusively Santali "script" was embedded in a past that, as Lotz notes, in Santal conceptions of time, also exist in a present-future, and also tied to a specific pair of *bongas*, the *bongas Bidhu-Chandan* (whether *Bidhu* and *Chandan* were *actually* *bongas* before this play, or dramatic creations of Raghunath Murmu, is disputed). Though the content was not "modernized" as Lotz notes, the "form" matched the modern form of drama, which, as an important genre of Santali performance, transmitted a literary Santali through a multi-channel medium in which writing and oral performance interacted. Critical to the Santali drama, and critical to the success of the play *Bidhu-Chandan*, were the songs and the dances, and the way the use of the Ol-Chiki script organizes song and dance. The song-texts of the play, such as *Johar Johar Bidhu-Chandan*, which introduces the play, are subsequently recontextualized in a variety of other settings having to do with literacy, such as the informal Ol-Chiki schools that spread throughout the Santali-speaking in the area, and, in the case of the village where I was working, to the institutional setting of the government school itself. Even when writing in Ol-Chiki, people invoke *Bidhu-Chandan*. For instance, as I was glancing over the postcards written into the All India-Radio Santali section housed in Kolkata, I noticed that many of the postcards written in Ol-Chiki began with "Johar" and then two dotted crescents. I inquired about this, and the assistant station manager told me that it was shorthand for "Johar

Johar Bidhu-Chandan."

The play *Bidhu-Chandan* provided a performance text around the practice of reading, writing, and learning Ol-Chiki script, which could then be recontextualized in a variety of contexts associated with literacy activities. The opening prayer, through its use of language and association with a script, simultaneously indexes dominant ideas of "literacy" (European and Sanskritic), Santali historicity, and the world of *bongas*. Murmu and his supporters performed songs from the play as they visited villages to promote the script, and these songs form the critical part of the ASECA curriculum within their Ol-Chiki learning centers. Recontextualized in settings such as the school, the prayer bridges the institutional sites of literacy with the performance-space. The practice of literacy learning has begun to coincide with the relations embedded within the Ol-Chiki script, allowing the students to bring the *bongas* as well as a non-institutional history of writing into the institutional space of the school (this will be elaborated in chapter 4). The students therefore can assert an autonomous domain of literacy practice even as they continue to learn phonological writing as part of their education. This domain is articulated through voicing the co-presence of writing and the *bongas* every night through the ritual invocation, *Johar Johar Bidhu-Chandan*.



**Figure 3.5:** Jhilimili high school, boys' SC/ST hostel, Ol-Chiki graffiti *Biddā chachal kin johar bidhu-chandan* (Salutations to Bidhu-Chandan, the spreaders of knowledge). Jhilimili, WB

Though people often refer to the script as Murmu's invention, the more popular story surrounding Ol-Chiki is that Murmu went off into the hills nearby his village home, performed penance, and communed with the *bongas*, after which the script was revealed to him in a cave on the top of the Kapi hill near his native village of Dahardi, Orissa. This event is not only memorialized on the landscape of Murmu's native village, but also recounted regularly in songs and performances in different areas throughout the southern Santali speaking-region, including in West Bengal. In these performances, participants establish a relation, far from self-evident, between "writing" and "speech," while simultaneously invoking the ritual relation between priests and *bongas*. Hence, the script is doubly voiced, both as a vehicle for representing verbal speech, as well as a relation of *ol*, in which *bongas* and the priestly personage of Raghunath Murmu<sup>29</sup> and called into the performance space.

This song was recorded during the annual commemoration of the Santal *Hul*, celebrated in West Bengal on June 30. During the festival, villagers in and around the village of Jamtodia,

Purulia district gathered to celebrate the *Hul*. Both men and women performed songs and dances commemorating the exploits of Sidhu and Kanhu. However during the end of the performance, the group of men began to sing a song about the discovery of Ol-Chiki script. I had heard this song sung previously on a visit to Orissa by a singer from this area in West Bengal, suggesting that it was actively circulating in various Santali-speaking regions. I provide an excerpt of the song below:

**Transcript 3.2** *Hul Maha* celebration, Jamtodia June, 30, 2010, JV-Jamtodia men's village song group [... indicates omitted text] Recorded by SH.

1JV: parsi khatir ja gomkey gelbaaar serma din ma gomkey. eklagem taken kaan bir buru re. eklaagem 2taahen kaan bir buru re. parsi khatir ja gomkey gelbaaar serma din ma gomkey. eklaagem taken kan bir 3buru re, eklaagem taken kaan bir buru re. Bidu Chandan onol bonga jiwi janwar bir bonga, seba seba- 4tem konka len, seba seba-tem konka len.

1JV:For the sake of language (par̄si), our teacher, 12 years, our teacher, stayed alone in the forest and 2mountains, stayed alone in the forest and mountains. For the sake of language (par̄si) our teacher, 12 3years, our teacher, stayed alone in the forest and mountains. Bidhu, Chandan, the prose-form *bonga* 4(onol bonga), the animal, and the forest bongas, you mixed and mingled [with them].

5Bidu-Chandan, onol bonga, jiwi janwar bir bonga, seba seba-tem konka len seba seba-tem konka len . 6bir-buru-rem tahéy kan. kul bana ora-rem tahéy kaan. ut', putka arak', jom-tem taahéy kaan. ut', putka 7arak', jom-tem taahéy kaan. abowak', ol boyha abowak', roḍ. abowak', ol boyha abowak' roḍ. buru 8ḍhiri uḍuk' rem naam keda. buru ḍhiri uḍuk rem naam keda...par̄si baha teley baha hisid mey. enec' 9seren' teley lasarhed [me], enec'-seren' teley lasarhed. disom hoḍ teley atang mey . [p]arsi baha teley 10baha hisid mey. enec'-seren' teley lasarhed mey. enec'-seren' teley lasarhed mey .[p]arsi khatir ja 11gomkey.

5Bidhu-Chandan, the prose-form bonga, the animal, and the forest bongas, you remained silent, you 6stayed in the forest, in the homes of wolves and bears, you stayed only eating mushrooms and leafy 7vegetables. Our (inc) writing (ol), my brothers, our (inc) speech/language (roḍ), our (inc) writing (ol) 8my brothers, our speech/language (roḍ). You received it from inside a mountain cave. You received it, 9from inside a mountain-cave...we salute you with language-flowers, we welcome you with song-dance 10[enec'-seren'], receive our (exc) [salutations], the people of this country's, for the sake of language, 11[our] teacher...

12gelbar serma ...ja gomkey, ekla gem taken kan bir buru re, ekla gem tahékaan bir buru re . Bidu 13Chandan onol bonga jiwi janwar bir bonga . seba seba tem konka len. seba seba tem konkaa 14len...Murmu bakhul ren thakur baba, Murmu bakhul ren thakur baba, duk reho' amdo hoḍ dom 15bañchao manmi chintey bongam opelaakaan, manmi chintey bongam opelaakaan. disom hoḍ teley 16atang mey. par̄si baha teley baha hisid mey. enec'-seren' teley lasarhed mey . enec'-seren' teley lasarhed 17me *Rum Bonga* (possession) speech.



12:12 years, our teacher, stayed alone in the forest and mountains, stayed alone in the forest and mountains.  
 13Bidhu, Chandan, the prose-form *bonga* (onol bonga), the animal, and the forest bongas, you, silent,  
 14mixed and mingled [with them]. Salutations...a priest of the Murmu family, a priest of the Murmu clan.  
 15Even in suffering, you will save your fellow men. Thinking of men you reveal the *bongas*. We (exc)  
 16usher you [here] with language-flowers, we welcome you with song-dance.  
 17 [Spirit possessions]

In this performance, the narrative of Raghunath Murmu (referred to here as *gomke*, or 'teacher') is recounted as a ritual event, in which the script is revealed as a result of his penance and his encounter with various *bongas*. Yet in addition to voicing the relation between script and ritual practice, the singers also voice the relation between writing (*ol*) and speech (*rod*), linking both 'writing' and 'speech' to ritual performance and a denotational Santali code (*parisi*). For instance, in lines 1-2, Murmu is described as an ascetic who undergoes ritual practice "for the sake of language" (*parisi khatir*, line 1). He stays alone (*eklagem*) in the liminal space of the forest for "12 years" (*gelbar*)<sup>30</sup>. Undergoing this penance, Murmu communes with both the animal and forest *bongas*, those wild spirits that haunt the regions beyond the village priest's control, as well as the *bongas* of the Ol-Chiki script and literacy, Bidhu, Chandan, and the *bonga* of the *onol*, which means 'essay' but also refers to written prose-form. Together, with these *bongas*' help, Raghunath Murmu discovers the script in a mountain cave.

Through deictic shifts, the performers draw the audience within the ambit of the event, constructing an experience of spiritual revelation by bringing Raghunath Murmu and the Ol-Chiki script into the performance space. The singers at first direct the song towards Murmu, who is recognized as the original recipient of the revelation, referring to him in line 1 as *gomke* and using the second person singular pronoun (-em). The audience acts as an "eavesdropper" (Goffman 1981) while the performers, through a call-and-response divided between two sub-groups, praise Murmu, telling him how "you (sg)" communed with the *bongas*, suffered alone in the forest, so that "you" could bring this revelation to the people. However, when the singers

progress toward the moment of revelation (line 7), the footing shifts and no longer do they direct their address at Murmu, but direct it at the entire group of listeners and fellow performers. They use the 1st person plural inclusive to ratify the audience; it is "our (inc) writing (*ol*), brothers, our (inc) speech (*rod*). Using the 1st person plural inclusive and then linking *ol* (writing) with speech (*rod*) through parallel repetition, the singer-poet-speakers set up an iconic relation between writing, speech, and the community indicative of a new literacy ideology that is markedly different from older notions of Santal *ol*. Yet at the same time, this new literacy ideology is reconfigured with ritual signification, such that it connects the audience with the *bongas*, heightening communal feeling (*raška*) by the use of the 1st person plural inclusive within the performance-space and as part of song-dance performance. The singers shift footing again in line 7, using the 2nd person singular pronoun (-em) to refer to the addressee, while shifting in line 8 to the 1st person plural exclusive pronoun (-le) to identify themselves as separate from Murmu. Murmu is then "welcomed" (line 9) into the performance space, defined by song-dance (*enec'-sereñ*, line 9), and saluted with a sprinkling of "language-flowers" (*parsi baha*, line 9). Within the performance-space, "language" itself, emergent through invocation of a script, is transformed into a flower, a stereotypical ritual object.

The song therefore allows numerous relations to be voiced simultaneously, revealing multiple alignments between writing (*ol*), speech (*rod*), language (*parsi*), song-dance performance (*enec'-sereñ*) and the *bongas*. Murmu is described on the one hand as a teacher, or *gomke*, of the script, yet also, in line 14 as a "priest" (*thakur*), the traditional occupation of the Murmu clan (line 14, *Murmu bakhul*). Thus Murmu's persona is also multiply voiced within the song-text, infusing the practice of literacy learning (in the form of education around a script) with ritual significations. Even though there was no text-artifact present within the performance

space, and though the singers were not necessarily "literate" in Ol-Chiki script, such that they would be able to decipher the underlying phonemic structure, the script has, in a sense, been acquired through the performance. The relation between writing and speech, far from self-evident, assumed ritual significance, and the singers and audience, like Raghunath Murmu, acquire the knowledge of Ol-Chiki's iconic significations by bringing Murmu and the *bongas* together within the ritual space. Thus, at the end of the song (line 17) after Murmu, the priest, is once again welcomed into the performance-space, the *bongas* begin to possess the singers (*rum*). Human and *bonga* have been brought together, as have writing, speech, and language, materialized within the Ol-Chiki script.

While Ol-Chiki has been learned and taught through informal schools and propagated by organizations such as ASECA (Adibasi Socio-Educational Cultural Association), which Raghunath Murmu started around 1970 in order to propagate the script, its affective reach extends much beyond its networks of institutional transmission. This is likely due to songs such as the one cited above, which, in informal gatherings and performances, voices the script, much like Santali literacy, not only as a second-order representation of "language," but as a ritually-charged object that mediates communal feelings, Santali temporality, and political autonomy. As a result, spirit possessions around the Ol-Chiki script happen quite frequently. For instance, when I visited the native village of Raghunath Murmu, the script's founder, I found that people had come from all over the southern Santali-speaking area to visit the hill where the script was first revealed to Murmu and to bathe in the large ponds at the foot. People, no doubt already familiar with the narrative and the ritual signification of the script, when faced with the presence of the hill also underwent *rum*. At Ol-Chiki functions sometimes, when songs about Ol-Chiki were performed, it was not uncommon to witness men [possessions almost always occurred only

with men] become possessed by *bongas*.

Consequently, Ol-Chiki's success not only lies with the vast organization which Murmu set up, nor with the creation of Ol-Chiki printing presses (both important developments) but also with the integration of the script within this new performance-space such that Santali literacy has, to a limited extent, become equivalent to literacy in Ol-Chiki script. I remember as I was going around the village areas where I was working, I would rarely see Ol-Chiki text-artifacts in people's home. Every so often I would come across a poster with Ol-Chiki written on it, a book or magazine here or there, but when I told people I was studying Santali, the next question I would very frequently be asked is if I knew Ol-Chiki script. When I said that yes, I had learned the script, and could read and write it, all of a sudden, despite my limited knowledge of Santali and all things Santali, I was perceived as a certain type of expert. Even elderly people who I was almost certain had very limited exposure to schooled literacy, if any, would mention to me the importance of Ol-Chiki script in learning Santali.

Ol-Chiki script voices both a phonologically encoded "language," as well as a convergence between *bongas* and humans. The multi-voiced quality allows it to circulate simultaneously in multiple domains. Because the script follows a conventional model of institutional literacy, institutional domains such as schools and government bureaucracies can be compelled to accept and acknowledge the independent existence of a Santali 'language' and graphic regime. These politics, in which 'autonomy' ideologically translates into the independent existence of an ethnolinguistic community can thus be made legible to state institutions. The script can also be circulated through textual media, such as signboards, newspapers, magazines, and posters. In using the script, texts can carry political 'messages' beyond the content of what is referentially expressed. Finally, the script's circulation allows for new forms of voicing, in

which writing (*ol*) is rendered effective through performance genres such as song. In both institutional domains dominated by phonological literacy (such as the school), or domains that conventional literacy is lacking, 'script' and the 'writing' is experienced as a practice in which *bongas* and humans are brought together in an affective, and politics-generating, communion.

During the time of the *Hul*, when phonological literacy had not been as institutionalized, it is likely that writing circulated in a similar fashion. The account Guha cites, and his subsequent historiographic analysis of that account, shows us that colonial-era, governmental text-artifacts such as manuals and records were interpreted as material inscriptions that mediated between humans and *bongas*. These text-artifacts in addition to other forms of *ol* circulated from village to village, and along with performative messages (in the form of drums, pronouncement, or songs) of insurgency brought on spirit-possession likely very similar to the one that occurred following this song. In the current historical moment, I would argue, 'script' is a response to the effects of the institutionalization of writing and the spread of conventional literacy (or discourses of conventional literacy) among the Santal population. A new politics are established through the graphic, discursive, and performative constellation of script in which autonomous, generative power gained through close relations with the *bongas* is coordinated with governmental practices of the independent, (post-)colonial nation-state. The form of politics differs from the time of the *Hul*, but the role of writing (*ol*) remains crucial in creating the grounds for a politics of autonomy.



**Figure 3.6:** Spirit possession (*rum*) taking place at the foot of the *Kapi* Hill, where Raghunath Murmu discovered the Ol-Chiki script (Dahardi, Mayurbhanj Orissa)

### **Post Script: Coming full circle**

In the beginning of the chapter, I recounted a story of how I made a mistake, thinking that any reference to *ol* suggested also a reference to some kind of *chiki* (script). Fortunately, I was corrected by my host, who quickly pointed out that not all *ol* (writing) can be subsumed under *script*, and that among Santals there continues to be a wide variety of non-scripted writing referred to as *ol*. This led me to discuss the graphic ideologies that underlay literacy practice, and how missionaries and colonial authorities introduced a new literacy standard in the nineteenth century, which, I suggest, compromised the ritual effects of *ol* in creating relationships between Santals and their *bongas*. Yet, as a result of tribal autonomy movements that took place around the time of Indian independence, Santals began creating their own scripts throughout the Santali-speaking area that attempted to once again foreground the ritual nature of writing. I argued that the social practice of scriptmaking articulated the multiple logics of the

literacy encounters to which Santals had been exposed. Taking the phonemic grid which missionaries isolated in the nineteenth century in order to represent an independent (and non-Sanskritic) Santali language, Santals, schooled in Brahmi script literacy, utilized this grid to create their own version of a *shiksha*, a transcendental phonemic system (which certain phonemic features, such as the glottalized stop series or reduced vowels were emphasized) upon which numerous scripts could be grafted. However, the difference between Santali scripts was that the value of the graphemes exceeded that of the phoneme; in the words of numerous Santali scriptmakers, the Santali graphemes had "meanings." These meanings ranged from features of the landscape and everyday actions, to ritual and spatiotemporal significations, were connected to a logic embedded in the graphic practice of *ol*, in which meaning is understood through diagrammatic alternations and pragmatic effects rather than phonemic value.

As I suggested for the poetics of literacy in the last chapter, graphic ideologies in which script to sound correspondences were emphasized as the criterion to determine literacy created a disjuncture within the domain of *ol*. This disjuncture, however, was reconfigured to create new constellations, both through practices of scriptmaking, of which Ol-Chiki script, capitalizing on incipient institutional networks and printing<sup>31</sup> became the most popular, and through performance networks in which affiliations between community socialization and a literate, Santali 'code' were being cultivated. If script, as Walter Mignolo claims, aimed to "tame" the voice in order to create colonial subjects, Christians, or citizens, Santals employed script to voice alternative relationships that went beyond that of "citizen" or "subject." These relations create the grounds for a politics of autonomy in which ritual practices and alternative temporalities can be brought into domains of literacy and performance, even within institutional settings such as the school.

Currently, it appears as if Ol-Chiki has succeeded in bridging disjunctures, such that the confusion that I initially expressed between *ol* and *chiki* may in fact no longer be a confusion (or less of one). I observed this as I was returning from a festival (*pata*) which MT and SH, two of my closest companions in the village where I conducted my fieldwork. We had met a relative of one of our mutual friends in the village, a high school age girl, GK, at the fair and we were taking her back to her village before we returned. She was discussing her desire to learn Santali in high school, and was inquiring about joining a school that offered the subject. She showed us a number of Santali language books (in Bengali script) that she had purchased at the fair. I asked her if she had learned Ol-Chiki script, and she said no, but that to learn the script is one of the reasons she wanted to learn Santali in school. In fact for her, and many others, part of learning to be "literate" in Santali was to also learn the Ol-Chiki script. I told her that it was easy to learn, and briefly wrote down a few words. As the conversation progressed, we started talking discussing about GK's clan title and surname. MT explained to her that her specific sub-clan could be discerned through reading what *khond* was written in front of her door during *Sohrae*. He said that ordinary people would not be able to read it, but a *chiki*-master (scriptmaster) such as him (pointing to me) would know how to read it and affiliate it with the proper sub-clan. Of course, I had no idea at all how to read *khond*, nor any knowledge of the intricacies of sub-clan affiliations. However, since I knew the Ol-Chiki script, I was assumed not only to be "literate" in Santali (even though I was clearly a novice speaker and reader) over others who did not know the script, but also proficient in reading *ol* as well. The discourse around script itself had begun to encompass multiple practices of *ol*, providing new criteria for what constitutes literacy for Santals.

As the ritual-diagrammatic features of *ol* are brought directly to bear on the acquisition



and circulation of script, Santals identify the script with an autonomous domain which at once carries institutionally legible value (phonologically-tied) as well as value in those arenas of Santal life that are institutionally illegible, such as relations with *bongas*. Yet the rise of Ol-Chiki script in particular has also created its own set of schisms. In order to spread Ol-Chiki script, educated and elite Santals set up institutions such as ASECA (Adibasi Socio-Educational Cultural Association) to teach and distribute the materials. This institution has led agitations demanding the script be recognized by the state. Yet, in line with an ethnonational politics that stresses Santal unity over diversity, leaders of this organization have demanded that Ol-Chiki should be the *only* script used to write Santali, as it is the *only* script to represent Santali sounds properly. This imposition of single graphic-phonological regime erases the diversity of practices the script engenders as well as the diversity of existing script practices within the Santali-speaking area, amounts to a new form of institutional control over both voice and inscription. If over time, scripts such as Ol-Chiki become institutionalized along the lines of a phonological-representational model to the extent that their affective and ritual power diminish, perhaps we will see yet again new transformations in writing practices, along with new possibilities for political action.

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1For this same observation in Bhili languages, see Devy 2009:7, in particular his essay "Writing and aphasia", for Sohra, see Elwin 2008:183. This is also true for many languages in native America (see EH Boone and W. Mignolo, eds. 1994).

2 Soren (soldier), Murmu (priest), Tudu (drummer), Mandi (rich) Hansda (hunter) Kisku (kings) Hembrom (merchants),

Bhaske (cooks). There are a few more (such as Besra, Pauriya, Chode as well but they are rarer).

3Santalia, vol 8 1448, D/E

<sup>4</sup> While Brahminical modes were "preeminent" in that they eventually became institutionalized, there were a whole host of other heterodox ways of relating phoneme to grapheme in the various religious systems of India. An exhaustive study is not possible here, although more attention to these systems could yield new insights.

5 Cf Phillips, 1852; Skrefsrud 1852; Bodding1930..

6 Bodding, n.d. Santalia Ms Fol 1686, 9:2, probably written around the turn of the century

7 This assertion is echoed by A Skaria (1996) when he discusses the move from "monumental" to "fetishistic" writing among the adivasis of the Dangs, in west India. The fetish could be seen from the fact that writing was primarily seen as representation instead of being recognized as embedded in actual social relations. However Skaria's notion of "monumental" subordinates writing to the construction of a "powerful symbol" instead of seeing

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how writing is viewed as a semiotic modality which has the power to construct and sever social relations

8 See note 14

9 See Banerjee's argument on the "double bind" (Banerjee, 2006) in which she argues scholarship on adivasis, taking the Santal scholarship as her departure point, almost always falls into an ahistorical anthropologizing.

10 These are catalogued in Soren 1999. Some of these have been edited and translated in P. Andersen et al. (2011) I will be drawing on these translations as well as some of my own work in the Oslo archives.

11 The tensions within this argument are explored further in Chakrabarty (2000)

12 Hul reyak' katha. Santalia 0432 Ms 8 1448-O, M. 493. Also published, translated in full in Andersen et al. (2011) p. 173-186. For more on this see P. Andersen (2008).

13 Andersen (2008, p. 186).

14 Andersen et al., p. 179, Andersen et al. translate konkaena as 'pretending to be mad' and explain this in footnote 20. Konkaena literally means to be 'silent,' but sometimes can be used in contexts of possession too. Anderson et al. says this is evidence of Tudu's criticism of the two brothers, and thus has a negative connotation.

15 Bonga tuluc' bapla akan hor rean' [Marriage between humans and bongas] from Bodding, PO A chapter of Santal folklore. Kristiana: Ethnografiske Museums. Reprinted in Andersen et al. 2011, p.287

16 p. 303, the Saheb's "medicine" would not work, in order to exorcise the bonga, Santal healer (ojha) had to be called in order to bring the bonga back so that the man could bid her farewell

17 Mit'tan kora iskultege calak' reak' Santalia MS Fol 1686 Vol. 5, 7 2593

18 Bongas are not human, so their speech isn't considered hor (human), however in most representations and face-to-face encounters I've encountered bongas are communicating in a language grammatically and lexically similar to Santali. The use of Bengali here therefore is notable, although I do not have enough information on the registers of bonga speech to make any substantive conclusion.

19 Related in the archive as Babajiu reang katha [The story of the Babajius] Andersen et al., 216-276

20 See R Sammadar 1996 S. Dasgupta 1982

21 J. Singh, Presidential speech to All India Adivasi Mahasabha, 28 Feb, 1948. In Munda RD and SB Mullick, 2003

22 R Murmu 1997. "Ishrong eser aḍang-te hoṭok' reyak' hoy khon oka roḍ oḍok'a, ona reyak' bayan-ba beg yan sap' kate noa ol tol akana"

23 see K Das 2010 for an overview. For relation to Ol-Chiki script see, B Lotz. 2007.

24 The International Phonetic Alphabet, the script which encodes all known human phonetic distinctions. The ultimate, universal manifestation of a phonetic-representational register

25 The process of scriptmaking and the resultant script constellations have interesting parallels with the study of the generation of creoles in contact linguistics. It would be interesting to further study how the creation of scripts could further expand the scope of theories of selection, change, and competition articulated by scholars of creole linguistics such as Mufwene (2002), Baptista (2007), and others

26 "ST" or scheduled tribe is the bureaucratic designation for the groups I'm referring to here as adivasi. "SC" is scheduled caste, i.e. the lowest caste groups, also referred to by the political designation "dalit." Living quarters in high schools throughout India are often reserved for SC/ST groups as part of an aggressive affirmative action program.

27 This was taken from a recording, but the song is also found in Murmu n.d. Lakchar seren' (culture songs)

28 The use of plays to personify and showcase language is found in many parts of India. For instance King (1994) starts off his study of Hindi-Urdu with an excerpt of a Hindi nationalist play featuring the loose Begum "Urdu" and the chaste Hindu wife, "Devanagari"

29 Murmus, one should recall, as the traditional priestly clan of the Santals, so it is fitting that the founder of Ol-Chiki is also a "priest." The connection with Murmu priests and writing is invoked by the epigram quoted at the beginning of the chapter, also line 14 of the song (Transcript 3.2)

30 In Santali, the term gelbar literally means the number "12" but gelbar serma or '12 years' also signifies a unspecified amount of time, or simply 'a long time'

31 See chapter 6, also Andersen. 2008.

## Chapter 4

### **Scaling script-code constellations in a village market: a surface study**

In previous chapters, I described how two constellations, that of code and script have come together to create a domain of Santal literacy, and how this newly created domain relates to a more widespread politics of autonomy. While the first two chapters account for the way Santals created new constellations of writing, script, and literacy through performance, scriptmaking, and the reconfiguration of institutional practices, in this chapter I ethnographically chart the ways in which these script-code constellations participate as part of a larger web of relations between Santals and non-Santals in shared, but contested, spaces of everyday interaction. Focusing in particular on the various forms of inscription on the walls of the small rural market (bazaar) in the village of Jhilimili, I use the linguistic anthropological discussions of scale to show the processes by which Santals and non-Santals organize multiple scripts and codes into competing constellations, and how these constellations contribute to the creation and contestation of shared public space. I suggest that Santal and non-Santal participants construct and evaluate script-code constellations according to competing, yet mutually constitutive, metrics of place, territory, and community.

For instance, caste-Hindus, who, though fewer in number, dominate the bazaar space, tend to, along with advertisers and state institutions, vertically integrate language and script, associating the Roman script and English with national and trans-regional notions of territory while aligning the Eastern Brahmi script with Bengali, Bengali-speaking people, and the Bengali-speaking region of eastern India. In these evaluations, Santali is seen as signifying a

peripheral position in relation to the bazaar space, an ideology reinforced by Santals' own ambivalence to the bazaar as well as caste-Hindu dominance over public space in the market. Santals on the other hand, as the various posters, signboards, and other Santal-specific media visible in the bazaar suggest, position Santali along a horizontal axis that aligns Santali with nation, region, and locality through the deployment of multiple script-code constellations, in order to assert a politics of autonomy within the bazaar space against the perceived marginalization of their presence, language, and claim to public space. By appealing to the scalar dimensions of script-code constellations, I account for the ways in which Santals and non-Santal evaluate and organize script and code affordances present in Jhilimili bazaar to align surfaces with differentially valorized discourses of space, territory, and community, rendering the bazaar a dynamic setting in which an everyday politics both among and between groups is enacted.

### **The bazaar in the village: viewing the market**

Early in the morning, the small lanes of the local *bazaar* in Jhilimili fill up with sounds: people chatting, animals such as stray dogs and goats baying, and the loud honking of passing busses. The vegetable vendors, seated on a row in the lane that extends from the high school to the main square, hawk whatever small supply of edibles they brought that day, laid out together with some raw fish and clucking chickens ready for slaughter. Together with the loud noises piercing the early morning din, one can smell the freshness of hot breakfast, the frying of *luchi* (puffed bread) in sizzling vats of oil, mounds of potatoes, onions, chilies being cut up, and the sizzling of freshly fried eggs. As one wakes up in the bazaar, indeed the first sensations one feels are sonic and olfactory, a chaotic intermingling of smells and sounds.

In addition to sonic and olfactory, the bazaar is a space of intense visuality. Shops are

small and always open to the street, the wares visibly on display to passing market-goers. The shops are strung together with only thin walls separating one from another. With goods ranging from general supplies to mobile and computer products to auto parts, the shops' surfaces are visually arresting because of their intricate signs and the walls that surround and connect them. Indeed, these walls, pushed up against the road so that any market goer is compelled to interact with them, are not just inert surfaces. Rather they are dynamic interfaces, covered with a variety of graphic material that form a diverse array of constellations, modulating script and code together with image and color. The surfaces of the bazaar are a work-in-progress; Jhilmili residents are constantly painting different slogans on the surfaces, then whitewashing, and then painting again. Posters hang one on top of another, rarely taken down, so that even within a synchronic view one can get a diachronic sense of events past as one's eyes pierces through the layers of visual material. These ever changing surfaces interact with the stable surfaces of the market's institutions, the shops, some which have been closed but whose signboards still illuminate the bazaar, or government institutions such as the bank or post office, whose official signs stand alone along walls that say "no posters allowed."



**Figure 4.1:** Entering Jhilimili bazaar from the south road

Markets have always functioned as a central site for understanding politics in rural India; unlike in segregated village hamlets, they are spaces where different caste-groupings mingle, trade goods and services, and also actively contest for control over resources. In his work *Bazaar India*, historian Anand Yang underscores the important role that bazaars played in rural Indian life in the colonial period, arguing against the prevailing image popular in colonial discourse that conceived of villages as independent and self-sustaining, in which each caste had a role in reproducing the village society through a hierarchical division of labor. This trope of the 'independent village republic' supported the British rationale for increased political intervention within villages, as well as offered nationalists a powerful idiomatic recourse to an indigenous model for an independent India<sup>1</sup>. Yet, Yang argues that both of these formulations

systematically “occulted” the important role that bazaars play in rural Indian life (Yang 1999:11). A focus on rural bazaars, he claims, would have emphasized the “links, networks, and extensions that enmeshed villages within larger units of rural society organized around the marketing system” (14). These “units” he says, were where “power and influence dispersed,” and thus, bazaars act as a “container and crucible of solidarities as well as of antagonisms and contradictions of a particular locality” (16). The bazaar is the part of the village in which “extracommunity and supracommunity connections and institutions” are most visible, and have been so since much before the colonial period. Even today, the bazaar is a site characterized by circulation and flow, in terms of goods and services (market exchange), people, and politics, and therefore it is no surprise that the semiotic media dotting its surfaces iconize these networks. To examine inscriptional practices of the bazaar is also to simultaneously take into account how “extracommunity and supracommunity” connections and institutions are scaled, ordered, and evaluated within a built environment, evincing the particular solidarities and antagonisms that distinguish a given locality.

Jhilimili is located some 40 km from the border with Jharkhand state, at the intersection of Bankura, West Midnapore, and Purulia districts in West Bengal. It is about 300 km away from the nearest metropolis, Calcutta. The village of Jhilimili is comprised of numerous castes, including Santals, but is completely surrounded by primarily Santal-majority hamlets. Jhilimili's notable feature is that despite its small size, it has a rather large bazaar. In addition to shops and serving as a local transportation hub for the area, Jhilimili market also is a center for various government services, including a hospital, a post office, a local guest house (where I resided), a bank, panchayat office (local unit of village governance), offices of all the major political parties in the state, a ration shop, and a primary and secondary school. In addition, there is also an

office of the Forest Department, as well as a camp for the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Indian paramilitary police who have been deployed to stem political agitation that occurs frequently in adivasi areas. The camp had been recently expanded and strengthened due to an ongoing Maoist insurgency in the area. There is a 1 km paved road separating the upper bazaar from another crossroads, from which one can easily travel to Purulia and Midnapur districts. At this crossroads as well there is another bazaar, and the road is also populated with shops. I refer to this as the “lower bazaar” (although locals refer to it by the name of the nearby hamlet, “Podadi”) as the traffic between these bazaars is significant, such that they constitute a type of continuum.

### **Historicizing the bazaar-village opposition**

Jhilimilli is located in the area of West Bengal known as the "Jangalmahals," a vast forest tract that stretches into present-day Jharkhand and Orissa. Ecologically, the region could be characterized by its hilly and forested terrain in which cultivation cycles were highly uncertain, and demographically, it was inhabited by highly mobile populations in which headmen negotiated with local zamindars in order to cultivate land and access the forests. One of these mobile population groups was the Santals, who arrived to clear forests in the region (likely already populated by other tribal groups such as Kheria and Bhumij) and make them suitable for cultivation and rent collection. The Santals established a self-governing system under a headman, a *majhi*, and five other elders (including the village priest) who supported the village. The *majhi* is usually associated with the lineage of original settlers to the village, although, if the need arises, new *majhis* or other members of the five-man council may be chosen by the larger village assembly (*kulhi dudup'*). Having cultivated and cleared forests, Santal headmen would negotiate with local rajas<sup>2</sup> for payment of tribute. In addition to Santals, other scheduled tribe



groups which operated similarly under a headman system were the Bhumij, Munda, and Mahato who also depended on the cultivation of the forest, as well as the Kheria, who were mostly non-cultivators, and depended on forest produce. In the Jangalmahals, the forest was both the source of the region's wealth, for forest resources were used to supplement subsistence from irregular cultivation, as well as anxiety, for if fields lay fallow, the land would easily be overtaken by the forest, and villagers would have to again reclaim the land for cultivation.

Consequently, the villages of the Jangalmahals did not retain the same permanence as in the plains, and villages witnessed a constant in-flow and out-flow of labor. The regulation of village resources, including labor, rested with the village council, the *more hoḍ* (five-men), the leader of which was the *majhi* (headman). These headmen, according to Sammadar were the "pillars of political authority" in the region (1998:93), and their ritual importance can be seen even today in Santal villages. For instance, no ritual event, such as a birth ceremony, marriage ceremony, etc. in the village may be performed without the presence of the *majhi* or the other headmen. While individuals and families relocated from village to village (this knowledge is maintained by Santals who keep track of their sub-clans across numerous villages, with each sub-clan signified by the same *khonḍ* and *abge* 'lineage deity'), villages maintained their political integrity through the *more hoḍ* institutions. Groups of villages were incorporated into larger units called *parganas*, each pargana constituting a larger *disom* (country). There was an elected pargana-head who coordinated between the majhis, and there would be a meeting of the majhis and parganas during one of the annual great hunts. Santals refer to this as the *lo bir*, or, as I was told, their version of the "Supreme Court." Consequently, Santals maintained a village-based network that nested into large scale administrative units, which created a geography of movement and governance that differed from the circulation of goods and services connected

through bazaars or from the political geography imposed by state institutions and borders.

Before the British Permanent Settlement act, Sammadar notes that it was the majhis and the headmen that negotiated the collection of tribute to the local rajas and zamindars [landlords], and could vary depending on cultivation conditions and labor. Zamindars would allow groups of headmen to clear forests titled under the kingdom in exchange for settlement and tribute.

However, after the Jangalmahals came under the ambit of the British East India Company, tenancy laws (the infamous "Permanent Settlement" of 1793)<sup>3</sup>, required landlords to collect fixed revenues, headmen were bypassed and rents began to be collected directly from the individual cultivator. Many from the tribal communities could not pay the fixed rents, and they were subsequently evicted from their land. For instance Sammadar notes that in one zamindari estate alone in the area of Midnapur (near Jhilimili), within twenty-five years, 4495 acres of land was transferred from tenants, 2613 acres from Santals, and the rest from Mundas, Bhumij, and Mahatos (74). Massive and forceful transfer of land of this nature due to colonial tenancy laws was common throughout the Jangalmahal region, and the material basis of village authority, the power to distribute land and labor and coordinate payment of tribute, collapsed. Traditional rights that villagers had to forests and water resources were limited by the Settlement regime, and no longer did headmen have the right to negotiate, as any demand would have to take place through the courts. As individual cultivators did not have the ability to pursue litigation, these cases were usually lost.

However, the headman system did not disappear. The village-based institutions persisted and became politicized, organizing their communities around demands for rights to forest, water, and land. When these rights were denied, headmen often orchestrated revolts that unified various groups over multiple zamindari estates and around large expanses of the Jangalmahals.

The first major rebellion was the 1799 Chuar rebellion, starting in areas around Jhilimili in West Bengal. In 1832, the Bhumij rebellion, led by Bhumij headmen, broke out in Purulia district near Jhilimili, and led to the breakup of the Jangalmahal district in 1833, with the lands being divided among multiple districts and administrative territories. This heralded a series of revolts which took place in the areas in and around Jhilimili (Dasgupta 1984), which had their origins in different parts of the Jangal Mahals. The great Santal Hul (Santal Insurrection) of 1855 originated in the Santal Pargana district in northern Jharkhand (led by the two sons of the headman of Bognadih, Sidhu and Kanhu), but spread all over the Jangalmahals and resulted in the death of thousands of tribals. Santal insurrections in the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa again activated headmen of various tribal communities between 1920 and 1924 (the *deshgaro* movement, 'seize the country', Sammadar 1998) again posing a serious threat to colonial rule in the region.

While Yang rightly points to the notion of the village sans bazaar as constituting one of the preeminent tropes of the colonial imaginary, Santals, due to a long history of expropriation and the seizure of control over market resources by upper-castes, have, since the nineteenth century, continued to express uneasiness about the bazaar and spaces of market exchange. For example, in the late nineteenth century, Sagram Murmu, a resident of Mohulpahari in the Santal Parganas, and one of Norwegian missionary Paul Olaf Bodding's most prolific collaborators, wrote a few pages about his own life amidst his collections of songs and stories that he was to hand over to Bodding. After Murmu discusses his own journey of migration from a village deep in the jungle to the relatively more accessible Mohulpahari, he ends with some general observations on Santal history. He writes:

Sedaedo noa disomre deko jatdo celege bako takenkana, eken hođ moto gi noa disom redo bon berel pahil lena ar jotowak' apnar tege bon kami juraojong kan-

tahenkana kicric' sunum sasang mosala nokodo joto cas hotege se dare reyak'...  
ado noko deko hopon bulung bepar bepar tege noa disom teko boloyente noa hođ  
disomko ciya keda bangma noko hođ tale redo ađi upjao hoyok'kana...nonka  
lekate hođko malun' ket kate bulung sunum ađi ko kirin'takoa ar ona do dharte  
emda...ado kirin' akrin' pheđ pheđ beparte ar bulung sunum dokanteko hara idiyenkhan  
maha jor harberko ehop'keda...deko do noa disomreko rajena

In the ancient times, there was no deko caste, only we (inc) Hođ people lived here and all the work we did together on our own [kicric'] oil turmeric spices all of these [we produced] by farming or from the trees...then these deko entered our Hođ lands doing the salt trade and what did they do they did bad things amongst our Hođ people...like that they made Hođ people weak and they went to buy much salt and oil and they [Deko] would give it on credit...then they began stores that were selling salt and oil and they began to exert great power [jor harberko]...the Deko began ruling this country. (Santalia Ms. 8 1448, vol S, number XX).

The excerpt begins with the temporal "sedae" the time of the ancestors, which, in Santal narratives almost always signifies a period which is qualitatively better than the present. In the past, the Santals were alone (eken), free from upper-caste intervention, and they were united. Murmu emphasizes that during this time, most of the staple commodities that Santals now purchase from the bazaar, were available through farming and gathering. However when the *diku* (upper-caste Hindus) entered, they lured Santals to their markets with trade in salt, cheating them, and indebting them. Soon, Santals were ensnared in a cycle of debt (dhar), and commerce (kirin'-akrin'). In Santal country (*hođ disom*) the traders, profiting off the Santals, set up stores (dokan) in which commodities which used to be produced on the land were now bought and sold. Murmu narrates how the bazaar had entered the Santal world, and with the establishment of the bazaar, the *diku* commenced to rule over Santal country.

In Jhilimili, from stories I heard during my fieldwork, zamindars had given land grants to Utkal Brahmins who trace their origins to what is present-day Orissa, as well as to families of Vaishnav mendicants (known by the surname "Das"). Though it is unclear how these communities settled in Jhilimili, some people expressed that it had been at the expense of Santal

and other scheduled tribe communities during the time of permanent settlement. In addition to farming, many Brahmin and Das families also later entered into trade, setting up shops for the selling of goods. I was told that an influential group of Utkal Brahmins had convinced the government to build a road through Jhilimili instead of the nearby zamindari center of Raotoda, and thus it was there where Brahmin and Das families built their shops. The Utkal families also donated a large land area for the building of a high school, and the Jhilimili high school, located on a large tract of land just outside the main bazaar area, became very well known in the region. The bazaar was established; Jhilimili became the local seat of power, and tribal communities, now permanently settled, and barred from negotiating forest rights, were now compelled to enter in dependent relationships with the market. Basic commodities such as salt, oil, and spices were bought there, and as more consumer goods entered the market, adivasis became increasingly tied to the bazaar.

By the time I conducted my fieldwork the bazaar was a central node in the circulation of goods and people. Most people from nearby hamlets came and conducted market business at the bazaar from buying food staples and gifts such as clothes to give at weddings to recharging their mobile phones. Many Santals also worked in the bazaar, and some had set up their own shops. Yet Sagram Murmu's statement about the bazaar still resonated, and in my conversation with many Santals there was a deep ambivalence about the bazaar, with many still viewing the bazaar as a primarily *diku* space. Though most of my interactions with Santals occurred in the bazaar, and many Santals lived, worked, or spent most of their time in the bazaar, they usually referred to themselves as *atu-ren hoḍ* (people of the village). Upper-castes, though many did not live or work in the bazaar, were sometimes referred to by Santals as *bazaar-ren jāti* ('castes of the bazaar') or *bazaar-ren hoḍ* (people of the bazaar). While at any given time there were probably

more Santals in and around the bazaar, the bazaar was still subject to upper-caste moral regulation. For instance, beef and pork, which most Santals consumed, were not bought, sold, or cooked in the bazaar, though goat, fish, and chicken were regularly sold and consumed there. During the *haṭ*, which was a traveling market that occurred weekly in the lower bazaar, a nearby Santal village, which one had to enter through a long and windy forest path, hosted a beef market where Santals could purchase beef. Mahua liquor (*paṛa*), made from fermented flowers of the mahua tree, was not sold in the bazaar, nor was rice beer (*haṇḍi*). These spirits, though consumed by a number of different castes were marked as Santal or adivasi spirits, and could only be procured in peripheral Santal hamlets. However, "foreign" (biddesi) liquor: bottled rum, whiskey, or beer, was bought and sold in the bazaar<sup>4</sup>. Finally, in the bazaar area I rarely saw men or women converse openly, and if so, conversations were fleeting. This is very different from Santal villages or village fairs where men and women chatted openly, and physical signs of romance were often seen. Even though there were some Santal (and other ST) owned shops, the majority of shops were owned and operated by Utkal Brahmins and Vaishnavs. The bazaar witnessed the circulation of a variety of goods and people, yet the implicit code of conduct regulating activity within the bazaar space still indexed for Santals "diku raj."

### **Landscaping the bazaar**

Recent work in anthropology and the social sciences more broadly view space not simply as a physical location in which social activity occurs but also as produced by social, cultural, and economic practice (Casey 1997, Feld and Basso 1996, Harvey 1990, 2006; Lefebvre 1991, etc). We may conceive of "space" as differentially composed of communicative and material practices through which people semiotically understand aspects of the built or natural environment within wider discursive networks of historical and territorial belonging. Participants practice 'space' to

coordinate social inclusion and exclusion, and, much in the same way as linguistic practice, creatively transgress or reconstitute social boundaries.

Recently, linguistic anthropologists have attempted to look at how, as Blommaert et al. have noted, “space” can be seen as “constitutive and agentive in organizing patterns of multilingualism” (Blommaert et al. 2005, 198). These investigations have yielded a broad theorization of what has been called “scale,” a concept which ethnographers have employed in order to grapple with the way indexical orderings of language in everyday practice interact with global flows and movements (Blommaert 2010, Blommaert et al. 2005, Collins et al. 2009, eds., Das 2008). Recent formulations (Blommaert et al. 2014, Lempert 2012, Pennycook 2010) have attempted to move beyond the macro-/micro- (or local and global) dimensionalities that scale connotes, instead arguing that “scaling” should be analyzed as a set of processes by which participants order a range of semiotic material through shifting participant alignments along interactionally produced socio-temporal clines. Judith Irvine (2013)<sup>5</sup> suggests that the use of scale in the literature confuses ideas of the metric on which participants evaluate, align or measure, and the ways they locate particular values on any given metric. Instead she suggests that it might be more useful to attend to the specificity of how participants delineate different metrics and the ways in which these metrics are then combined to produce evaluative semiotic orders. These metrics do not have to be linear in a Cartesian sense of “measurement,” nor do they have to be hierarchical; their qualities depend on the multiple evaluations and orderings present in a given interaction.

In this chapter I argue that inscription is one way that both Santals and caste-Hindus scale the bazaar in order to assert claims over space, resources, and language. Like Blommaert’s immigrant neighborhood in Antwerp, Belgium, Jhilimili bazaar is a “complex and multiscale”

order (Blommaert 2013: 112), in which different positioned participants assert divergent modes of control through the deployment, regimentation, and evaluation of script-code constellations. As I have suggested in previous chapters, the act of writing Santali is a charged political act that arose in order to combat a caste-Hindu evaluation of the language as a localized caste-dialect (called in the local Bengali variety *thar*, or gesture-grunt language), especially in relation to language standards like Bengali or English. These evaluations accompany caste-Hindu dominance over market exchange as well as the hegemony over the physical space of the bazaar. Consequently, while for Santals inscription has formed a lynchpin of the politics of autonomy, as I will show in this chapter, these inscriptional practices occur in constant, often antagonistic, interaction with a politics of hierarchy. Challenging a notion of scale as a unified or discrete concept, I argue through an examination of the ‘linguistic landscape’ of the Jhilimili bazaar that the use of multiple scripts, and the fluid alignments between script and code, provide resources that dialogically, but also antagonistically, link different script-code constellations to caste- and community-based social orders on the surfaces of the bazaar.

The study of “linguistic landscapes,” which has entailed extensive photographic documentation and surveys of multilingual inscriptions in mostly urban environments has been steadily gaining popularity as a method of sociolinguistic inquiry (Backhaus 2007, Coupland and Garrett 2010, Gorter 2006, Shohamy and Gorter 2008, etc.). Contesting the field’s reliance on linguistic code as the object of methodological inquiry, Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) have argued for a broader notion of “semiotic landscape” to encompass the interaction between text, image, and surface. Most recently, Blommaert (2013) has suggested that Linguistic Landscape Studies (LLS) serve as a sociolinguistic and ethnographic “diagnostic of social, cultural, and political structures” (3). Thus LLS, rather than viewing public space or “landscape” as an object



of the ethnographic gaze should, according to Blommaert, be considered a method of sociolinguistic inquiry that sees “public space” as a “sociolinguistic system” requiring “detailed attention to both the microscopic characteristics of single signs and the systemic relations between signs” (15). While Blommaert and others focus on LLS as a diagnostic of the analyst, I aim to expand the scope of LLS, showing how participants variably align and scale the visual properties of inscribed text, such as script, code, image, and surface, in turn creating the bazaar as not only a complex spatial order, but also as a crucial site for political contestation that results from diverse and often opposing scalar evaluations.

### **Surveying the Bazaar: a surface study**

In the following section, I hope to present a visual survey of the bazaar, attending especially to the order and regimentation of scripts and codes on the bazaar’s surfaces. While script has been undertheorized in the study of linguistic landscapes,<sup>6</sup> I hope to show how it serves not only as a material interface between “code” and the built environment, but also provides distinct affordances through which participants can iconically and indexically scale institutions, texts, and surfaces. In multiscriptural environments such as India, as scholars like Ladousa (2002) have shown, the ways in which participants multiply align script with code shape the way they evaluate, organize, and regiment institutions such as schools. For instance, in Varanasi, in northern India where Ladousa conducted fieldwork, even though both the Devanagari script and Roman script were variably used to write Hindi and English, the use of Roman, regardless of the code, indexed a “center” which was scaled as an elsewhere beyond the confines of the provincial city of Varanasi, while Devanagari, despite being the ‘national’ script of India, indexed a subordinate “periphery,” scaled as the locality of Banaras itself. Here, script, and not code, iconized English and Hindi, respectively, and through which both advertisers and

consumers constructed a hierarchical metric that differentiated educational institutions.

In Jhilimili, this situation is even more complex than the one Ladousa presents for Varanasi. While only two languages are spoken in Jhilimili, Bengali and Santali, there are several graphic registers present on the bazaar's surfaces. Roman, eastern Brahmi, Devanagari, and Ol-Chiki scripts are all present in some combination or the other on the bazaar's surfaces. These scripts are stereotypically associated with certain codes, English, Bengali, Hindi, and Santali, respectively (see Figure 4.2, below); however as the following study will show, the scripts are variably aligned with code in a range of constellations visible on the bazaar's surfaces. This is especially true of Santali and English, which are routinely rendered in all these scripts. The widespread of variability and number of sheer combinations, as well as the different social dynamics within Jhilimili produces scalar dimensions that transcend spatial binaries like 'center' and 'periphery.' Instead one sees a complex process by which Santali speakers align Santali with multiple scripts to create constellations that simultaneously scale as trans-local, pointing to a Santali-speaking sphere that transcends the confines of Jhilimili and stretches into different states and regions of India and local, pointing to Santals' continued assertion over the space and resources of their own villages and territory. Caste-Hindus on the other hand, in routinely ignoring or subordinating Santali through means of either visual erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000) or framing (Meek and Messing 2007), attempt to relegate Santali to a hierarchically peripheral position within the space of the bazaar. Hence through examination of script-code-surface constellations, we see how different groups within the bazaar variably produce notions of "locality" and "non-locality" (Appadurai 1996, Silverstein 1998) and how these notions are interlinked with an ongoing political contestation over autonomy, incorporation, and subordination that has characterized this particular region. It is the disjuncture between these

orderings, understood most acutely by Santali-speakers, which renders script such a critical component of the politics of indigenous assertion in Jhilimili bazaar.

**Figure 4.2:** Codes and scripts within Jhilimili (in variable alignment with one another)

- ⊙ English            Roman
- ⊙ Bengali            বাংলা (Eastern Brahmi)
- ⊙ Hindi              देवनागरी (Devanagari)
- ⊙ Santali            ଓଠ ଓଠଚିକି (OI-Chiki)

***Institutional sites: the three-language/three script formula***



***Surface A (left), B (right), upper bazaar (Eastern Brahmi, Devanagari, Roman scripts)***

Like most towns and villages in India, Jhilimili has one post office and one nationalized bank. These places are extremely important for those living in and around Jhilimili, and every morning, one can see people from distant hamlets arrive to the town to line up at these buildings

before they open, carrying sundry forms in hand, waiting to deposit money, take out a loan, or in expectation for an item arriving by post. Institutions such as the post office and bank are the most visible and practical ways that villagers interact with organs of the national government; most central government transactions occur in and through these institutions, and employment and policies are coordinated by an extensive bureaucracy that stretches throughout India.

The signboards of these institutions, unlike most stores in the Jhilimili bazaar, feature three scripts: Roman (R), eastern Brahmi (EB), and Devanagari (D). The code is irrelevant, for on the sign of the post office in surface A, the sign features the word ‘post office’ in three scripts and three languages, *dākghar* (D), *dakghor* (EB), and *post office* (R), while in surface B, it is written *Punjab National Bank* in D, EB, and R. The use of three scripts for central government institutions diagrams a ‘three-language formula,’ instituted by the Indian government for education and governmental work in 1957 (Khubchandani 2008, Mohanty 2006)<sup>7</sup> that says that all national government institutions should be marked with “Hindi” in Devanagari script, as it is India's national language, “English” in Roman script, which is also a de facto official language of India, and the regional mother tongue, which is to be determined by state or region. In the case of Jhilimili, the ‘mother tongue’ is Bengali in the Eastern Brahmi script, as the institutions are located in the state of West Bengal. Neither banks nor post offices show any visible sign of Santali or the Ol-Chiki script, despite Jhilimili being a Santal-majority area (where Santali is classified as a ‘mother tongue’), or despite the fact that Santali gained constitutional status as an official language of the government of India in 2003 or official language status in West Bengal in 1976<sup>8</sup>.

While the fact that Santali or Ol-Chiki was not featured on the signboards of these institutions was generally unremarkable, it reinforced a general perception on the part of both

Santals and caste-Hindus of Santali as a peripheral language. This constellation, which scaled particular languages (via their associated scripts) as national and regional, completely erased the presence of Santali, and that, together with the fact that the language could not be used to conduct any government business, corroborated caste-Hindu perceptions of Santali as a localized and peripheral (lower) caste-specific dialect. For Santals however, this scaling entailed a disjuncture in which issues of language and script became salient. Most Santals are aware of the struggle which led to official constitutional recognition in 2003, but also recognize ‘official’ status is mitigated by the fact that the language has not been implemented in any administrative body. This disjuncture manifests itself in various politicized activities, such as a play written by a local playwright where the “Constitution” (*sombidan*) and the “Santali language” (*parisi*) are married but their married life is interrupted by the *diku* (non-Santal) administration who harasses them and makes the union impossible. In the end, Santals have to take up armed struggle in order to ensure proper implementation of the law in their villages (Hembrom 2010). This play was performed in local competitions. Another example is a Bengali pamphlet written by a Jhilimili-area resident who now works in the state government in Kolkata called *Paschimbongo sorkar olchiki-ke aini svikriti deyni* (West Bengal government has not given legal recognition to Ol-Chiki) which documents the lack of use and implementation of Ol-Chiki as per the state government’s 1976 order (Tudu 2011). This pamphlet was given to me by local youth as part of an Ol-Chiki awareness campaign in Jhilimili.

Consequently, both caste-Hindus and Santals recognize the erasure of Santali from government signs such as those of the bank and post office as an everyday fact. However the scalar effects of this erasure are different: for the caste-Hindus, it reinforces a scalar hierarchy in which the language they identify with, Bengali, is the official regional variety of both the state

and the administration, and Hindi and English are recognized as official non-regional varieties (“national” languages); for Santals, who scale both their language and the Ol-Chiki script as both regional (officially “recognized” by the state of West Bengal) and national (constitutional recognition), the erasure reinforces the perception of the *bazaar* as a diku space. Signboards such as the ones displayed on the bank or post office both reflect and constitute conditions under which Santali remains subordinate in the official institutions of the bazaar, while also opening up the space for political action and organizing around issues of language and script.



**Surface C:** *The Marang Tung Country Pargana office, Jhilimili*  
(From top to bottom Ol Chiki/Roman/E. Brahmi scripts)

In addition to administrative branches of national and state government run institutions, Jhilimili bazaar was also the central node for what Santals called their “social administration.” As I noted above, Santals have an alternative geography in which Santali-speaking villages are organized into “countries” (*disom*), with each country having an elected head, or *pargana*, who is responsible for convening meetings and discussions with the various village headmen and five-man councils. While Jhilimili is located in the state of West Bengal, it simultaneously serves as the administrative center for the Marang Tung *disom* (Big Tung), and shortly after my initial fieldwork period, the *majhi madwa*, or headman council, set up an official office where the

*pargana* would organize monthly meetings. Consequently, even though the bazaar itself was conceived of as a *diku* space, the central location and administrative importance in the lives of Santals living in nearby villages rendered the market both as a node in the larger network of Santal-specific village governance as well as a contested administrative location.

The sign in Surface C, displaying the name of the *Marang Tung* pargana council in Ol-Chiki/Roman/E. Brahmi simultaneously, reveals a political orientation that contrasts with the “three language formula” displayed on signs such as banks or post offices. For instance, the banks or post offices display both a distinction based on “nation” and “region,” but also, through the discourse of official policies that organize what languages are used for administrative business, a distinction between languages such as English, Hindi, and Bengali. Surface C, on the other hand, displays a single code, Santali, in three scripts, tying an alternative constellation of language and script to the alternative political geography to which the surface is tied. For instance, contestations over script among Santals in Jhilimili elsewhere often focus on how the Brahmi scripts such as EB or Devanagari divide the Santali community based on an externally imposed notion of territory, while Ol-Chiki, on the other hand, unites Santals across regional, linguistic, and graphic borders (cf. Choksi 2014a). However, as many within Jhilimili argue, local Santali-language production has always taken place predominately in the Eastern Brahmi script.

Surface C then displays a complex scaling that both mirrors government institutions yet also articulates a form of autonomy and Santal-specific notions of territory. The use of both Ol-Chiki and Roman unmoors the sign and institution from a discourse of region, interdiscursively linking the *Marang Tung* country to a set of institutions, organizations, and political movements that transcend the boundaries of West Bengal or the Jhilimili area. Yet at the same time, the use

of Eastern Brahmi firmly grounds the institution within the Santali-speaking communities of Jhilimili, where Santali literary and linguistic production has, as I have suggested in previous chapters, been intertwined with Bengali-language literacy and the eastern Brahmi script. Indeed all communications of the office, including the letterheads on which the pargana informs village councils of meetings and topics, are written in either Santali or Bengali in the eastern Brahmi script. The three-script constellation therefore scales a single language, Santali, which had been completely erased from the surfaces of government institutions, as simultaneously national and local, regional and trans-regional. This scale, complicating the administrative mappings of discrete territories iconized in government signboards, construes the bazaar space as both politically autonomous as well as asserts Santal claims over space that are not simply restricted to the scale of the local.

***Regimentation and variability: advertising in Jhilimili bazaar***



***Surface D: surface of a shuttered storefront facing the road leading to the upper bazaar (Roman and Eastern Brahmi scripts)***



In the bazaar, most space not claimed by signboards for commercial enterprises, is quickly appropriated and re-inscribed, often with advertisements for a wide array of goods, services or entertainment. Within anthropology and linguistics, advertising has often been seen as a particularly rich site for linguistic innovation and language contact, but as Piller (2003) notes, the use of different languages in advertisements, while appearing variable at first glance, is highly regimented according to dominant ideologies, reinforcing widely held stereotypes and cementing social hierarchies. The import of particular choices often depends on the way participants evaluate particular genres of advertisement, and the way those advertisements interface with larger political and social discourses. For instance, residents of Varanasi, India differentiate the regimented use of Roman and Devanagari script in school advertisements (as opposed to government signboards) along the lines of center and periphery, which align axes of space and class (Ladousa 2002). In Japan, the use of English and the Roman script interdispersed with Japanese scripts perpetuates a perception of cosmopolitanism among a largely monolingual elite (Haarmann 1989), while the use of English and German together in advertisements in Germany reinforce a class divide in which the elite are bilingual (Piller 2001)<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, in addition to institutions, advertisements also reveal spaces of contestation, proliferating stereotypes that link code, script, and social position, and engendering new scales in relation to various audiences. In Jhilimili bazaar, advertisements are important because they also represent a window into public discourse, for unlike in many places, most people do not pay to place advertisements on the surfaces of the bazaar. Rather posters are generally placed on the numerous surfaces which are not claimed by shop signboards, such as the abandoned shop building on Surface D (above). Because access is not regulated, the surfaces of the bazaar display a wide array of advertisements for goods, services, and announcements for social

gatherings. Surface D, for instance, displays advertisements for health services, degree-granting institutions, and construction material, all common services availed by villagers. Hence the advertisements displayed here are characteristic of a rural bazaar such as this one.

Unlike official institutions, which display a three-script formula, advertisements mostly display a combination of two scripts, eastern Brahmi and Roman, although code usage is variable. On the left side of Surface D, we see how an advertisement for a local doctor (doctor signified by the retroflex /d/ affixed with a long /a/) in Eastern Brahmi script is overlaid with a construction advertisement for "Mickey's TMT Bar," a metal product used in strengthening homes, in Roman script. To the right of this poster is a list of advertisements for schools. In this list, all the universities that have their origins outside West Bengal (though they may operate correspondence study within the state) such as the "Dravidian University" or the "Jain Vishwa Bharati" Institute are all rendered in Roman script, as are their subjects such as "MA (Education)" or "MA (Social Work)." The only school not in Roman script is the name at the bottom, the "Pondit Raghunath Murmu Rashtrabhasha Bikash Bidyapith" (Pandit Raghunath Murmu School of National Language Development). It is unclear what exactly this university is focusing on; Pandit Raghunath Murmu is the inventor of the Ol-Chiki script, and "Rashtrabhasha" or "National language" is usually a term reserved for Hindi, the *de jure* national language of India (though certainly not *de facto*). The most recent posting is one for a "*pratijogita*" or sports competition between local villages and clubs sponsored by the CRPF, with only the acronym rendered in Roman script. The CRPF stands for the Central Reserve Police Force, the federal Indian government's paramilitary police force which has been deployed in the region to combat Maoist insurgents.

Bhatia (2000) describes the intermingling of local Indian languages and English as a case

of “glocalization” or “optimization,” yet in Jhilimili, advertisements such as these show that both advertisers and audiences also make certain assumptions about the relation between code and space, influencing, in turn, the distribution of scripts on the bazaar’s surfaces. For instance, I often heard people in Jhilimili speak of English, rarely spoken in the bazaar though omnipresent on its surfaces, as a language of elsewhere. This ‘elsewhere’ was conceptualized either as a vague reference to nation or to a description of English as an “international language.” Bengali on the other hand, like in the government institutions, was seen as the language of Jhilimili bazaar. The scalar distinction between purported codes influences the distribution of script present in advertisements. For instance, all the universities that are affiliated with some place outside West Bengal have their advertisements in Roman script, while locally based institutions such as the “Pondit Raghunath Murmu School of National language development” are in eastern Brahmi, despite being national in scope. Within Bengali language advertisements, such as the one for the soccer match, acronyms for national government institutions are written in Roman script (such as “CRPF”). National brands such as “Mickey’s TMT Bar” have their brand logo in Roman script, indexing a presence beyond locality or region, while the same poster simultaneously displays an eastern Brahmi/Bengali language slogan, *oṭuṭ shokti cintar mukti* (flawless strength, free from worries) targeting the concerns of local consumers.

Even considering the complex variability of these advertisements in terms of language and script distribution, any icon or index of Santali is lacking. Thus, despite Santals forming the majority of consumers in the bazaar, the advertisements assume an operative digraphic scale in which Roman script indexes a non-local elsewhere while the eastern Brahmi script indexes the local or regional. Even the “Raghunath Murmu” university, which explicitly references the founder of Ol-Chiki script, has no Ol-Chiki or Santali in its title. Consequently, like in Japan or

Germany, in which advertisements use linguistic and graphic resources to create social stereotypes, in Jhilmili, advertisements construct the stereotypical consumer as a Bengali/English reader, reinforcing the notion of a literate subject as one who commands both (and only) those script-languages, and also casts the bazaar as a space where Santali is absent.



**Surface E:** adjacent surface of a building wall some distance down from Surface D (Left side poster, from top to bottom, Ol-Chiki, Roman, and bottom information in Eastern Brahmi)

However, advertisements that display Ol-Chiki are slowly becoming more visible on the bazaar’s surfaces, such as this advertisement for a “Santali-medium school” that was recently started in a nearby village to Jhilmili. While educational advertisements on Surface D were mostly in Roman or Eastern Brahmi, patterned along scalar divides between local and non-local, the advertisement on the left-hand side of Surface E, displaying a constellation of scripts (Ol-Chiki/Roman/Eastern Brahmi) contrasts markedly from either of the two former constellations.

The advertisement's header reads in English, "All India Santali Education Council," transliterated simultaneously in both Roman and Ol-Chiki script. Though the grammatical code is English, the use of Ol-Chiki, like on Surface C, marks the advertisement as specifically Santali, yet the simultaneous use of Roman, following the general advertising pattern in the rest of the bazaar also creates an institutional affiliation between the school, located in a nearby village, and a national Santali institution that spans regional boundaries ("All India.") Consequently, through script modulation, the advertisement interdiscursively links a Santali-specific trans-local scale, iconized by the use of Ol-Chiki, with the general discourse of an elsewhere iconized by Roman and present on Santali language advertising. The school name and heading is supplemented (in the bottom half of the advertisement) with most of the relevant details (barring some words like "SYLLABUS") all in Bengali in the eastern Brahmi script. The school's location is in "Taldangra, Bankura, West Bengal" which is in a nearby village.

Hence the advertisement both at the same time mirrors and diverges from the pattern of advertisements in Surface D. The Ol-Chiki/Roman reference to "All-India" projects Santali (and by extension, Santali-language education) transcends the particularities of both the local area of Jhilimili, where the school is located, and also any particular region of India. This constellation indexes the dominant discourse of Ol-Chiki, which seeks to deterritorialize Santali and unite Santals across the different regions of India. This "all-India" Santal collective, made up of Santal populations of various states, is referred to in songs and performance that accompany formal and informal Ol-Chiki education as well.<sup>10</sup> Yet at the same time, the advertisement figures the Santal reader-viewer as not proficient in Ol-Chiki, such that all relevant information is given in Bengali and eastern Brahmi. The advertisement reconstitutes the digraphic scale of Roman/Eastern Brahmi (present in the advertisements in Surface D), in which Santali is entirely

erased, as Roman-Santali/Eastern Brahmi, creating a scale in which a Santali politics of autonomy emerges as trans-local and multi-sited in relation to the territorially delimited Bengali script-language. This constellation I suggest is one of the central ways script is utilized as part of a contestation over the status of Santali within the bazaar. The constellation on this advertisement connects this particular school (and the tokens which identify it) with other local organizations, such as the All-India Santal Students Association (see example 1 below), embedding in the bazaar an extended, and politicized landscape that does not follow either the institutional boundaries projected by the three-language formula, or the digraphic scalar distinctions evident in Surface D. Next to the advertisement is a poster for a Bengali jatro (folk drama) *Era Shotu [These Enemies]*, all completely in eastern Brahmi script.



**Figure 4.3:** A Banner from a program in a village bordering the bazaar. This is from a local branch of the "All India Santal Student Organization". The script combination (from top to bottom) Ol-Chiki and Roman is the same as in the school advertisement on Surface C, except for in this case, the Roman and the Ol-Chiki are rendering Santali lexical items. Though codes may shift, the script combinations link both this and the school advertisement in surface E to a wide network of local Santal institutions that scale Santali as "all-India".

*Scripting performance: marketing performance genres in the bazaar*



*Surface F: A building wall from the lower bazaar. Santali drama posters (A, B, Eastern Brahmi script) alongside Bengali (Eastern Brahmi) and Hindi (Roman script) film posters*

The vast majority of Santali tokens in the bazaar are a special genre of advertisement for the hugely popular Santali drama or *gayan*. During the late winter-early monsoon seasons (before the first sowing), traveling theater companies from various parts of the Santali-speaking area, including Jharkhand and Orissa perform one-night Santali dramas in nearby villages. These dramas are sponsored by local village committees, and because these dramas require considerable time and funds, they rarely garner a profit. Instead, committees aim to attract a large local audience to the dramas, bringing people to the village and thereby raising the village’s prestige. At the same time, the drama posters precipitate discussion in the bazaar itself; I have witnessed on numerous occasions people stopping to read the posters, discussing when and

where a particular drama will occur, and commenting on the playwrights, theater company, stars, and the sponsoring village. In fact, drama posters, because they are pointing to a particular place and time, attached to a particular village, and interdiscursively connect the bazaar's surfaces with a large, multi-regional performance network, create a relationship to place and territory that is distinct from the scalar discourses entailed by the use of Ol-Chiki.

These posters, as one can see from two different ones in Surface F (tokens A and B, above) have a similar form. They contain stark black and white contrasts, have a combination of large and small text, and feature the star performers and their names very prominently in the center. In this way they are very much like the Bengali drama posters in Surface D. Yet what distinguishes these posters from Bengali language drama posters, or other posters advertising films, etc. is the sheer amount of text visible on the poster displays. These posters, exclusively rendered in Santali using the Eastern Brahmi script, employ flowery poetic language and long elaborate titles to excite the reader about the upcoming drama. For instance the long subtitle on poster "A" in Surface D:

[In small letters] Berel hođmo amak' ñelte lob ena/idi mea-ñ dalan ođak' inren  
kukmu rinic' kunąmi [Big letters, title] Nenđa tahe-ena Fagun Kunąmi

[In small letters] Your unripe, turmeric-colored body, seeing it I became greedy, let's go, I will take you to my house, my dream-wife, [like a] full-moon, [in Big letters] Our appointed meeting time was the full-moon day of the month of Fagun [late Feb-early March].

In the advertisement you have each of the first line ending with the morpheme '-ena' (middle voice, pperf), the second line ending with the noun *kunąmi* ('full moon'), while in larger letters these morphemes are then repeated in the title of the drama *Nenđa tahe-ena Fagun Kunąmi* 'The appointed meeting time was the full-moon day of Fagun.' This sets up the dramatic introduction to a play, a story of why the two lovers could not meet on that appointed full-moon



night. This type of poetic language is not employed in other advertisements on the bazaar (in any script-code combination). The poetic language draws attention to features of the Santali code over or in addition to the script, as part of a genre convention specific to Santali drama posters. The formal-grammatical "message" indexes the Santal performance-space and the Santal village (*atu*). Often times these posters, such as the poster on Surface F, explicitly reference a non-conjugal sexual relationship (the 'greed' for the 'turmeric-colored body' being an illustrative example). These kinds of relationships, common and more visible in Santal villages and fairs, are morally sanctioned in upper-caste Hindu communities, and therefore are not seen within the bazaar. Hence, these posters bring in aspects of Santal life in the villages, such as the physicality of romance between young lovers, within the space of the bazaar, but delimit their consumption to Santali readers.

One primary medium through which Santali literature, performance, and political ideas circulate across the borders of administrative territories is through drama. For instance, much of the popularity of the Ol-Chiki script could be credited to Raghunath Murmu's drama *Bidhu-Chandan*. Hence, many of the large drama groups perform in many states, and the origins of these drama groups, as well as the directors, writers, and actors of the dramas are facts of which the public is well aware. For instance, the advertisement in Surface F is from the "Jarpa" theatre group, one of the most famous theatre companies from Mayurbhanj, Orissa (the same area of Orissa where Raghunath Murmu invented his Ol-Chiki script). Most people with whom I talked knew that the Jarpa group was from Orissa. Thus, the drama discursively was discussed as part of a circulatory network that extended beyond West Bengal, extended across the border into Jharkhand and Orissa. However, almost all drama posters (you can see another Santali drama poster in token B) in the bazaar were rendered in the Eastern Brahmi script.

When I asked a local resident of Jhilimili who used to direct a touring drama company which performed throughout the Santali-speaking region where and how he commissioned his posters, he said that the drama company had nothing to do with the posters. Instead, he said, “local” [he used the English word] village committees who sponsored the drama produced and disseminated the posters, aiming to attract the largest possible audience in order to bring prestige to the village, and, if lucky, recuperate some of the expense. Thus, while he scaled the drama production as not tied to any locality, pointing out all the various states and regions that they regularly toured, publicity (and poster-production) were explicitly positioned as “local.” Unlike the Ol-Chiki/English combination, which is seen to be invariant across different Santali-speaking regions, the scripts deployed on drama posters index region-specificity. For instance, while the poster of a popular drama, *"Chemek' Chemek' taḍam tam, okoy koḍa janwai tam"* [Hey girl] You have a sexy hip-shaking walk, which boy will be your husband?" displayed on the walls of Jhilimili bazaar relates all the relevant content in eastern Brahmi script (Surface G, below), a poster for the same drama (and relating the same content) sponsored by a village committee in the nearby state of Jharkhand relates the content in Devanagari (since Hindi is the official state language of Jharkhand).

Consequently, while Ol-Chiki advocates demanded that media, literary texts, and other circulating text-artifacts be written solely in the Ol-Chiki script, I never heard anyone in Jhilimili, including supporters of Ol-Chiki, comment that drama posters should be written in Ol-Chiki, and I never saw a drama poster written in Ol-Chiki. Drama posters also never had multigraphic script combinations, but instead, like posters of a similar genre for Bengali-language plays, were only in eastern Brahmi. The drama posters introduce yet another metric that complements the Ol-Chiki metric, yet, unlike with Ol-Chiki, does not vertically integrate

scalings of local, regional, and national. Even though drama viewers, producers and performers consider Santali dramatic performance as transcending region, they also associated what Goffman (1981) would call the “principal” of drama posters with local village committees. In addition, the posters, like many of the text artifacts written in Santali/eastern Brahmi, index a specific performance event, locatable in space and time. The presence of multiple graphic registers allows Santals within Jhilimili to scale their language as national/international as well as local in a non-hierarchical fashion through the functionally differentiated deployment of Ol-Chiki/Roman and eastern Brahmi respectively, on the bazaar’s surfaces. While the scale may be “local,” it is a notion of local that does not subordinate Santal village life and performance networks to region or nation. Santali drama posters are both integrated and differentiated within the bazaar space, forming a competing claim to the Jhilimili area that underscores the centrality of the village, and Santal (or tribal-) majority spaces. In this sense, the presence of drama posters on Jhilimili’s surfaces echo broader Santal attitudes about their relationship to the *diku* bazaar.



(Eastern Brahmi)



(Devanagari)

**Surface G:** A Poster for the same play, "Chemek' Chemek' tadam tam, okoy kod.a janwai tam" '[Hey girl] You have a sexy hip-shaking walk, which boy will be your husband?' in two different locales. On the left, taken from the lower bazaar in Jhilmili, West Bengal. On the right, from the nearest railhead to Jhilmili in the state of Jharkhand. On the left the advertisement is in Eastern Brahmi script, and on the right, in Devanagari script (the dominant script of Jharkhand, where the official language is Hindi). Other than that all the Santali-language grammatical content [poetic introduction, title, names of actors, etc.] remains the same. This variability in script presentation and consistency in code is one way in which Santali-language dramas are localized.



*Surface H: Building wall from lower bazaar, adjacent to Surface F (Left poster, Ol Chiki, right poster, Eastern Brahmi)*

While drama has long remained one of the most popular forms of performance, the rise of televisions and affordable VCD technologies in rural areas has created a large and burgeoning market for films. While there is no theatre in Jhilimili, there used to be several running video parlors where people (mostly male) went to view films, but now with the advent of television, most video parlors have shut and films are screened in private residences. Occasionally however, like drama, villages would also sponsor film performances as well (see Surface J). The arrival of film in places like Jhilimili has created, like in many parts of India, a market that has diversified along linguistic lines. Thus, one sees advertisements for various types of films, including Hindi (see Surface F), Bengali (Surface H [B]) and Santali (Surface H [A]). While the Santali industry is more recent than the other two, which have roots stretching back to the colonial period, it has quickly garnered a large market share in places like Jhilimili, and therefore advertisements such as the one in A above are increasingly visible on the walls of Jhilimili bazaar. The viewership for both the films and the posters are restricted however to Santals; I

never saw or heard a caste-Hindu watching or purchasing a Santali-language film, much less know about the stars, directors, or songs. Bengali and Hindi films however were consumed by both caste-Hindus and Santals. Yet even in the situation of unequal viewership, the popularity of Santali films in Jhilimili, and the sheer availability of films in the marketplace show that Santals have been quite enthusiastic in supporting the industry, and that Santali films have in many ways coincided with a politics of autonomy that seeks to assert an alternative cultural space to the dominance of Bengali or Hindi popular culture.

On surface H, to the right there is a poster for a Bengali film "Shotter Bijoy" (The victory of truth) [B], and to the left a poster for a Santali film "Pund Ayang" (White Cobra) [A]. The form of Santali film posters mirrors the form of Bengali/Hindi film posters or Bengali drama posters. As one can see from the two adjacent posters on Surface E, in both posters the film's title is magnified, and embedded within a larger visual frame showing the films' characters in various action shots. The only other information is the name of the director/producer, and then a series of other smaller film advertisements below in the "Also Available" [written in Roman script] section. In the Santali film poster itself, linguistic information is kept at a minimum, in contrast to the Santali drama posters which display elaborate forms of poetic discourse. The primary distinction between Santali film posters and Bengali ones is that of script, and that too only in the main title, with the Santali poster in Ol-Chiki while the Bengali film poster was in Eastern Brahmi. Originally I had thought that Santali film posters were in Ol-Chiki because many of these films are made in the neighboring state of Jharkhand, but then I realized that even Santali language films shot in Calcutta (in West Bengal) or even one film I came across that was shot and produced in Jhilimili itself all displayed Ol Chiki/Roman title combinations. The script constellations on Santali video films and video film advertisements align with other Ol-

Chiki/Roman tokens such as the school advertisement in Surface E or the banner in example 1.

The use of Ol-Chiki on the film posters serves multiple functions. On the one hand, with very little text on the poster itself, the script immediately distinguishes a Santali film from a Bengali one, such that a viewer familiar with the Ol-Chiki script could instantly notice it during a walk through the bazaar. Roman transliteration then allows readers not proficient in Ol-Chiki, which describes most Santals in Jhilimili, to then understand which movie is being advertised. However, unlike dramas, Ol-Chiki has also become a generic convention for the marketing of most Santali films. Dramas, which are mediated through “local” organizations such as village committees, local printers, etc. are tied to Jhilimili and the region by both participants and poster-makers. Film posters, on the other hand, are created to circulate well beyond the Jhilimili area, and to markets in other parts of Santali-speaking area, such as Jharkhand and Orissa, where Ol-Chiki is also popular. Thus the commodification and distribution of film, where the goal is to create and respond to viewership markets, has different scalar dimensions than the drama, where the aim is for village committees to attract the largest possible audience to a single showing.<sup>11</sup> Ol-Chiki therefore in part signifies for viewers’ participation in a wider commodity network, creating a spatial conception of a Santali market that stretches beyond the region or territory in which they reside<sup>12</sup>.

The linking of Ol-Chiki with the creation of a trans-local Santali market also had its roots in the networks through which Ol-Chiki, as a signifier of a trans-local politics of autonomy spread. For instance, most Santals I talked to suggested that the vast majority of Santali films were shot in the nearby industrial hub of Jamshedpur, about 100 kilometers away in Jharkhand. Jamshedpur, which is also the nearest city to Raghunath Murmu’s home village of Dahardi in Orissa, was where one of the first Ol-Chiki printing presses started and where Ol-Chiki received

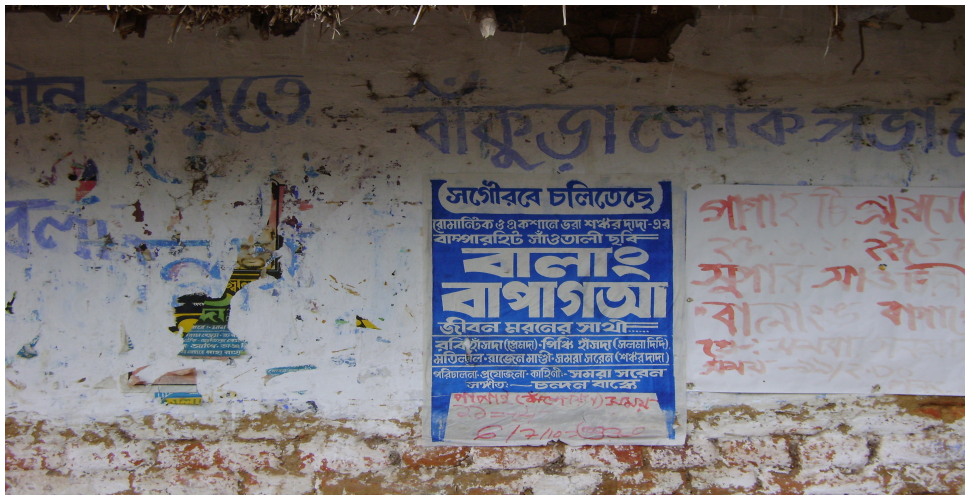
its largest sponsors (mainly from Santals who had jobs working in the steel factory there, cf. Orans 1965), and during this period it also emerged as a the place where Santali films received its first patronage. The linking between the spread of Ol-Chiki and Santali language films was made apparent when I met a couple who lived in nearby Jamshedpur, an industrial steel town in the neighboring state of Jharkhand, who were well-known in places like Jhilimili for their role as singers, actors and producers in Santali language films. The couple also had long-standing ties with the family of Raghunath Murmu, the founder of Ol-Chiki script, having grown up close to the family in Orissa.

Yet Ol-Chiki is not the only script in which films were packaged; in fact the marketing of and dissemination of film-related publicity comprised a complex constellation of various scripts which pointed to the scalar complexity underlying the ways Santal consumers and producers evaluated commodities and managed the market. For instance, in the few music stores of Jhilimili bazaar, Santali film and music VCDs are visible, alongside Bengali and Hindi. However, while the Bengali VCDs (as we see in Surface H) are exclusively in the Eastern Brahmi script, Santali VCDs are in Ol-Chiki/Roman, Roman, and Devanagari scripts. All of these scripts are in use in Jharkhand, contributing to a perception that Santali video and music commodities mainly come from a different ‘region’ than Jhilimili or West Bengal. Thus, even though Ol-Chiki/Roman is the most popular combination for the marketing of music and film disks produced within Jhilimili and other parts of West Bengal, the diversity of scripts used in the marketing of these disks complicates the idea of a unified Santali market apart from the political and administrative territories in which they reside. Unlike films in the dominant Indo-European vernaculars, the constellations present on Santali videodisks still carry with them the marks of particular states and regions.





*Surface I: Visible VCDs at the VCD stall, Upper Bazaar (Eastern Brahmi, Roman, Ol-Chiki/Roman combinations)*



*Surface J: Between Surfaces D and E in the Upper Bazaar (Eastern Brahmi script)*

Yet, not all advertisements for Santali films act as commodities in the way discussed above. The posters and VCD covers, as I mentioned, are tied to specific commodity flows, and

the script alignments map out particular scalar conceptions of territory that extend beyond the bazaar. However, when advertisements are not linked to commodities, but are indexical of performance (screenings) they feature a different script-code constellation, constructing yet another scale onto the bazaar space, and forming another genre altogether, distinct from the commoditized film genre. For example, in Surface I, the poster for the explicitly labeled “Santali film,” *Balang Bapagao* [We two (inc) will never separate] is in Eastern Brahmi script. The poster also uses a Bengali code that employs numerous English-derived lexemes such as “romantic,” “action-filled,” and “bumper-hit,” typical of film advertisement genres generally.

The text of the poster is given below, with the Santali in italics:

Shougauraber cholteche: Romantik ar ækshon e bhora Shankar dada-er Bamparhit  
Shoantali Chobi: *Balang Bapagao* : Jibon ar morener shathi

Running with great pride: Romantic and action-filled Shankar Dada's Bumper hit Santali  
Film: *We two (inc) will never separate*: Together in life and death.

When I asked people about the Santali film poster in Bengali, most people found it unremarkable. The style of the poster is typical for film showings of Hindi or English movies too at local cinema halls or sponsored by various groups, all of which are usually in Bengali code/Eastern Brahmi script. However the use of Bengali in these and other advertisements for Santali script showings do not appear to map the same scale as posters for Santali drama, which brings the Santali village-space and performance-space into the bazaar, both in the text as well as in the conversations the text sparks. Nor do they serve, like Santali video-film advertisements, as part of a trans-local commodity flow. Rather, they appear like a default commercial film presentation advertisement, rendering the "Santali film" indistinguishable from other advertisements of this genre within the bazaar's landscape.

The fact that commodities specifically marked for Santals operate most recognizably

through script variation iconizes a circulation flow that necessarily must traverse administrative and political borders. Santali itself is erased by both government institutions and mainstream commodity markets, and it is the erasure of the language which informs caste-Hindu evaluations of Santals as subordinate and local. Yet through multiple graphic modulations and by linking commodities in a constellation of graphic practices, discourses, and ideologies, script variation in Santali scales a polyvalent notion of territory that does not exclusively map on to any region or state. The video films, both as marketable commodities and as performance events, gather around them a community of consumption (cf. Foster 2007, 2008) that informs political claims to space and territory and also the commodification of Santali as a local script-language (existing as part of a constellation of locality within the bazaar space) as well as one that transcends locality.

### ***Scripting Politics: Graffiti in the Bazaar***

By far the most common form of inscription in the bazaar, and the only form of inscription that involved actual writing on surfaces (with the exception of shop signs and shop information) is political graffiti. Every election, the walls of Jhilimili bazaar would be whitewashed, or new spaces would be found and painters would be hired to re-inscribe the surfaces with the names of candidates and directions for which symbol voters should choose. In addition, parties put up slogans advertising their party platforms, as well as graffiti to call passersby to various rallies and assemblies sponsored by political parties. In every election cycle, Jhilimili becomes a contested political space, and this graffiti reveals both how the election cycles and political spaces of liberal democracy intersect with the scalar politics that I have been describing thus far in the bazaar, as well as the limits of these politics. In particular, I will look at the uniformity of script and code choice among political parties, and how these politics arise at the intersection of both state imposed and locally conceived notions of space and

territory.

Political graffiti is ubiquitous throughout the state of West Bengal, where much of the spare wall surface is covered in references to party politics. Even the villages around Jhilimili bazaar, where inscription on wall surfaces was generally rare, political graffiti was present, and the remnants of successive campaigns could still be seen inscribed on the walls (offering a visual history of the political transformations in the region). However, as Yang mentions, the bazaar is a nodal site for the circulation of political power in addition to goods and people, and it is in the bazaar where local politics, and its visual manifestation (graffiti) is most evident. In Jhilimili bazaar, most spare surfaces are covered in political graffiti, and thus party politics forms an inextricable and integral part of the bazaar's surfaces.

In West Bengal, as in other parts of India, formal political activity is highly dependent on the organization of political parties, and the way localities are connected to different political networks. While political parties operate at different organizational levels, from highly localized and regional elections (such as the school committee elections or the village council elections) to the largest election, which are national Parliamentary elections, all party mobilization is done by local committees and local organization. In addition, the vast majority of political organizing occurs within a particular administrative territory, and there is very little organizational crossover between party units in different states of India. For instance, even though the state of Jharkhand was only 40 km. away, I never saw political parties in West Bengal, or West Bengal branches of national political parties, organize rallies in neighboring states, though it was common sight for parties to organize bus rides from the bazaar to rallies in Calcutta, the state capital, almost 300 km. away. Due to the rules governing elections, all elections occurred within administrative units. Electoral organizing and election cycles demarcate a scale in which different

administratively delineated territories become important at different times, but in which all of these territories lie within the administrative state (in this case West Bengal). Within the built environment of the bazaar, it is the constellations of political graffiti that mediate this particular scale.

The political situation in Jhilimili differs from other parts of the state, and this is directly related to the politics of indigeneity and autonomy in the region. At the district level, the most dominant party is the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), a national party who held control of the West Bengal state assembly for 34 years in partnership with other left parties. The party lost its first election since 1977 in 2011 during my fieldwork period to the Trinamool Congress (TMC)-Indian National Congress (INC) alliance, parties that have a very minimal presence in the Jhilimili bazaar<sup>13</sup>. The CPI-M, though a national party, has its strongest center of control at the party offices in Calcutta<sup>14</sup>, the state capital, but also, during the beginning of its rule, devolved power to local committees and established village councils (*panchayats*) which promoted more local governance. Hence, early on the CPI-M operated on a system of grassroots organizing, especially in rural areas like Jhilimili, that involved combining leftist policies such as land reform with propaganda campaigns and intimidation.

In Jhilimili, the Communist Party's main electoral opposition was the Jharkhand Party factions. The movement for Jharkhand started before independence when tribal political activists in Ranchi (in what is now Jharkhand) convened the Adivasi Mahasabha (the great council of *adivasis*, from where the term *adivasi* originated and became politicized) called for an independent, tribal-majority state to be formed out of the tribal-majority districts in five states: West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. They called this proposed state *Jharkhand*, which meant the land of *jhar*, which are the hilly, forested tracts that characterize the region. In

the decades following Indian independence, the Adivasi Mahasabha transformed into a political party, the Jharkhand Party, and the main goal of the party was to agitate for a separate state of Jharkhand. Crucial to Jharkhand politics was the construction and performance of an exclusive *adivasi* culture in which tribal distinction was emphasized. This included a return to supposed "traditional" Santal, Munda, Ho, or Oraon, etc. religious and performance practices. Jharkhand politics also facilitated the rise of language as a marker of ethnonational identity, and the production of tribal-language literature and the circulation of independent scripts also occurred within the context of this movement. The Jharkhand movement spread throughout region, and established regional bases in the tribal-majority districts in all of the concerned states, though their power was greatest in Bihar, three adjoining districts of West Bengal (Bankura, Purulia, and West Midnapur) and the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa.

In 2000, the Government of India, after nearly 70 years of agitation, submitted to part of the Jharkhand movement's demands. Two independent states, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, were formed out of the tribal-majority districts of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, respectively. The tribal-majority districts in Orissa, as well as the three districts in West Bengal that bordered Bihar (now Jharkhand) were left as part of their respective states. The truncated Jharkhand state fell far short of the Jharkhand Party's demands, and did not in fact create an adivasi-majority state. Thus the victory was bittersweet (Mallick and Munda 2003). Yet despite the failure of the districts of West Bengal to be included in a separate Jharkhand state, the Jharkhand party factions continued to electorally operate in the region, and act as a regional, indigenous alternative to the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Jharkhand Party in West Bengal soon split into numerous factions, with local leaders leaving the larger party to form their own factions. The splits hurt the Jharkhand Party at the higher levels of electoral politics, leading to a series of

electoral failures at the state and district levels, where the CPI-M continued to hold a tight grip (Ghosh 1993). Yet at the local levels of government, such as at the level of village council (*panchayat*), which was the first and most intimate level of elected government in rural areas, the Jharkhand party factions held sway in many adivasi-dominated areas. In the Jhilimili village council, for instance, the local Jharkhand Party faction, headed by a well-known Santali playwright from a nearby village, has held a majority in the village council for the last 20 years.<sup>15</sup>



*Surface K* the national headquarters of the “Jharkhand Anushilan Party” sign in Eastern Brahmi script (lower bazaar, Jhilimili)

In Jhilimili, party politics, like the trading of goods and services or functioning of government or other administrative services, are part of the everyday activity of the bazaar. While during the months preceding and proceeding a given election, political activity certainly increases, party activities, such as the provision of services to party cadre, the organization of rallies in the bazaar or nearby villages, and the coordination between the populace and elected

officials are full time activities. Once certain leaders are affiliated with a party, their status increases within the village area whether or not they hold elected office. For instance, the leader of the local Jharkhand faction, whose “national” headquarters were located in Jhilimili, was a noted Santali playwright and respected person in the village though at the time of my fieldwork, he held no political office. Neither did the leaders directly under him. In fact, political office, which in the case of the Jharkhand party was relegated to seats in the local *panchayat*, was apportioned to a few junior leaders, while other leaders were involved organizing. During my time in Jhilimili, I spent a lot of time at the local Jharkhand party office (see below) in the lower bazaar, and in fact my closest interlocutors were members of the Jharkhand party. Party politics in Jhilimili therefore integrated the scale at which liberal politics operates (such as the various election cycles and the underlying notions of territory that accompany elections) with the other scales at which various political movements, institutions, and everyday practices operated within the bazaar.

The primary way that political parties made their presence known on the linguistic landscape was through direct inscription on the bazaar’s surfaces. This included writing on house fronts that were located on the main roads in and out of the bazaar, as well as most of the available empty surfaces on the walls between or separating the various commercial buildings in the main market areas. I am loosely terming this mode of inscription as “graffiti.” In studies of Western societies, the term "graffiti" usually references a transgressive genre of inscription: an embodied, non-alienated form of "counterpublicity" (Warner 2002), or as "counterliteracies" that challenge dominant conceptions of who has access to public urban space (Conquergood 1996, Pennycook 2010). However, from my experience in Jhilimili bazaar, I found no example of this type of "graffiti." As I have tried to show in this study, in places such as Jhilimili bazaar,



access to public space is not restricted in the same way as it is in the urban spaces referenced by Warner or Pennycook. Instead notions of "order" such as cleanliness, demarcated notions of private property, or commoditized notions of space, are subordinated to the political, in which various groups jockey for control of public space and resources, and establish relations primarily through patronage, force, and displays of power and influence. Thus, the situation in Jhilimili is more akin to what Peteet found in the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem (1998), where graffiti does “not merely send messages or signify defiance, [but] their mere appearance gave rise to arenas of contest in which they were a vehicle or agent of power” (140). In rural India, like in Palestine, all graffiti is political, and serves to produce and reproduce public space as contested political space.



*Surfaces L (left), M (right); some distance away from each other, upper bazaar (Eastern Brahmi script)*

During my fieldwork, the Jharkhand party was the dominant local party in Jhilimili bazaar, and thus the surfaces of the bazaar were covered with green colored graffiti (the official color of the all the various Jharkhand factions). The symbol of the local faction, the Jharkhand Anushilan Party, whose "national" headquarters is in the lower bazaar (see surface K), is the kettledrum (*tamak*), one of the major drums used in Santali performance (seen on Surface L on the left). The *tamak* iconizes Santali performance at the same time that it operates as a symbol of a political party. The symbol of another Jharkhand faction, the Jharkhand Party (Noren), the party from which the Jharkhand Anushilan Party split, is the hatchet or *kapi* (seen on surface M on the right) another item that is commonly used in the area and which is taken up in Santali songs as an index of courage. This Jharkhand faction is based primarily in an adjoining district.

The party graffiti has a simultaneous effect of creating the bazaar space (or the regional space, of which the bazaar is a node), which technically lies within the territory of West Bengal, as Jharkhand. All the Jharkhand factions (including the ones in the neighboring state of Jharkhand) have green as their primary color, this being the original color of the Jharkhand Party, and all, in their names, refer to *Jharkhand*. Yet unlike in the neighboring state of Jharkhand, where "Jharkhand" has become isomorphic with the state, in Jhilimili, Jharkhand exists as a political space in which a regional and indigenous autonomy poses itself outside and against the West Bengal state. Hence, the blanketing of the bazaar with green Jharkhand graffiti reaffirms the inclusion of this area in the political territory of Jharkhand, even though it was left out of the existing administrative territory of the Jharkhand state. The incorporation of local politics (the main Jharkhand faction is run by a village inhabitant,) symbols which index adivasi cultural practices, the explicit reference to Jharkhand, and the color green all serve to territorialize the bazaar as "Jharkhand," despite the bazaar's location in West Bengal.

Yet at the same time, the Jharkhand factions, even as they present themselves in opposition to the West Bengal state and the dominant Bengali cultural hegemony of the CPI-M, are still very much part of state politics. Although Jharkhand factions have to various degrees supported the use of Ol-Chiki, no party graffiti is written in the script; all Jharkhand graffiti is in Eastern Brahmi script. In addition, most of the graffiti follow the same form as graffiti from other political parties (such as the Communist Party) that can be found all over West Bengal. For instance, in Surface L, the words are written:

Jharkhand Andolan Shomonoy Monch-er Prarthi Probir Banerjee-ke Ei Chinh-e Bhot Din

To the Jharkhand Movement Coalition's Candidate Probir Banerjee, Give (pl, imp) your vote to this Symbol (loc).

The graffiti is rendered in Eastern Brahmi script/Bengali code, and uses the standard phrase seen all throughout West Bengal, "ei chinho Bhot din" (vote for this symbol). While the Jharkhand parties can only be found in this part of the state, the Eastern Brahmi script and this specific phrase structure, illustrate features typical of the genre of political graffiti throughout the state. The phrase structure, along with the color-coded Eastern Brahmi script indexes a style of political discourse that is shared across party, caste, and regional lines. Even if the code differs, the pattern does not, and the use of Eastern Brahmi script along with the generic discourse conventions still prevails. For instance, what seems to be a Jharkhand Anushilan Party graffiti from the upper bazaar (Surface M), exhorting voters not to vote for the competing Jharkhand Party (Noren) reads, along with its "hatchet" symbol, in Santali, in Eastern Brahmi script:

Noa chinho-re Bhot em-pe alom.

Do not (imp) vote (pl, imp) for this symbol (loc).

While the use of Santali might also be here to distinguish the much less publicized

Jharkhand Party (Noren) faction from the dominant Jharkhand Anushilan faction<sup>16</sup>, there is nothing that draws the viewer to its usage. The Eastern Brahmi script blends in with the political graffiti surrounding it on the surface, all of which is in Eastern Brahmi script, and the green lettering matches with all other Jharkhand Party graffiti. Since most Santali readers' primary reading language is Bengali, the words may have appeared as a Bengali calque, with two simple lexical substitutions in the stereotypical imperative phrase. Indeed in a few casual conversations I had about this graffiti, people did not seem to immediately articulate any notable metapragmatic distinction. Unlike in the drama posters, the code does not appear to play a role in determining the genre, and code distinctions are only slightly (if at all) relevant in the interpretation.

Thus, even though the ideology of Jharkhand Party and Jharkhand party activists places itself outside of and in opposition to the state, arguing for a uniqueness to this region premised on indigeneity and a discourse of economic and social inequality, the script-code constellations utilized by the Jharkhand Party interdiscursively connect party activities not to a scale of indigenous autonomy that views itself as separate from the state or administrative territory, but rather articulates autonomy firmly within the electoral and administrative confines of the West Bengal state. The party symbols (hatchet or kettle-drum) connect the party to icons of *adivasi* autonomy cultivated in the larger Jharkhand movement, yet they do not carry the same iconic and indexical significations as the Ol-Chiki script, which was explicitly formulated as a linguistic and graphic icon against dominant political and administrative spatial orders. In addition, the use of Santali in Jharkhand graffiti is also not significant, for it does not mark difference, but actually replicates the standard form of the political graffiti genre. Hence the Jharkhand parties operate within the general structure of the political genre as inscribed within this particular landscape.

The "Jharkhand" scale is one that would be unrecognizable to either someone from Jharkhand or from someone from another region of West Bengal; yet it is recognizable to everyone, Santals and caste-Hindus alike, within Jhilimili bazaar. It confirms Jhilimili's location as a liminal place in which multiple spatiotemporal ideas of territory, state-imposed and autonomous, emerge as part of an intertwined political constellation displaying a scalar order that complicates stark divisions between local and non-local, or indigenous and non-indigenous.



**Surface N** (left, Eastern Brahi script, upper bazaar); **Surface O** (right, Ol-Chiki script, lower bazaar)

While the signs in Surfaces L and M address the viewer as voter, voting is not the only activity that happens in relation to political parties. As I mentioned earlier, participation in party politics is not limited to election cycles; parties regularly hold rallies and other organized events throughout the year in order to galvanize cadre, organize platforms, and consolidate support in areas and regions of the state. Thus, parties do not merely address bazaar denizens as voters (as in the directives in surfaces L or M) but also as party supporters or cadre as in the sign in Surface

N. For instance, in surface N one sees both Jharkhand Anushilan Party graffiti (whitewashed in green) superimposed next to the characteristic blue-lettered graffiti of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), with its iconic red hammer and sickle in the top right corner. Both signs, rendered in the Eastern Brahmi script, urge supporters to attend various political meetings. In these signs, the sponsoring party calls people to the meeting through a combination of the use of the imperative *dak* ('call' in Bengali), accompanied by the place of the meeting, and an imperative commanding people to go to that place on that particular date (*cholo*, 'go!'). These meeting calls also inscribe politicized notions of space upon the landscape, for they connect local residents to other locals in the region by "calling" addressees to a particular place on a particular date.

On Surface M, one sees two competing messages, each having to do with the current political unrest and Maoist insurgency in the region. On the top left, in the green, the Jharkhand Anushilan Party (JKAP) is "calling" people (*Jharkhand Anushilan Party-r dak-e*) to a political meeting in Lalgadh (*Lalgadh cholo!*) for the celebration of the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, the leader of a tribal uprising of Munda peoples in the late eighteenth century. Lalgadh, which is located in the adjoining district of West Midnapur, is significant as this is where, in 2008, local residents organized an uprising against police brutality as well as Communist Party cadre, an insurgency later labeled by the Communist-led state government as "Maoist" and subject to a severe police crackdown.<sup>17</sup> Directing supporters to go to Lalgadh on Birsa Munda's birthday brings the past and present of tribal insurgency onto the landscape of the bazaar. Alongside this graffiti on Surface M, the CPI-M, also known by its coalition name the "Left Front" has another "call" with opposite intentions. It reads *Jangli shontrash-er pratirodh Bamfront-er dake* (Against uncivilized/wild terrorism, the Left Front calls), heralding a huge meeting (*bishal*

*shomabesh*) in Jhilimili itself (therefore no *cholo*). The CPI-M graffiti is in characteristic blue, and replicates the official state line on the insurgency, using the words *shontrash* [terrorism] to describe the insurgency, creating an opposed valence to the adjacent Jharkhand Anushilan Party graffiti.<sup>18</sup> However, both inscriptions share discourse and script conventions, constituting, both interdiscursively and visually on the surface, a characteristic genre of political inscription.

In this respect, surface O presents a distinct variation, combining the scale of political discourse characteristic of a wider regional politics with the particular demands and scalar features of Ol-Chiki. It is the only example I found in the bazaar of political graffiti that is not by a party that competes in electoral politics, and it is the only example that is not in Eastern Brahmi script. Instead, it was written by the local branch of the West Bengal of the Adibasi Socio-Educational Cultural Association, the organization started by Raghunath Murmu to promote Ol-Chiki, calling local Santals to an Ol-Chiki rally in Calcutta (such as the one described at the outset of this dissertation). The graffiti is in Ol-Chiki, yet at the same time, it replicates the discourse convention of the political "call." It reads:

ASECA-ak' **hoho** dareak' kan 26 September 2009 Kolkata **cholo**.

ASECA calls [a meeting] on 26 September 2009, Go to Kolkata!

The words, though they might be in Santali voice the standard genre of the political speech, in which **hoho** is used in a syntactically identical way as **ḍak-e**, and is understood to have the same meaning. The inscription employs the standard Bengali-derived phrasing Kolkata **cholo**, directing the addressee to come to Kolkata for the meeting. The main difference, however, is the script. While ASECA, the principal group of the call, has state branches all over the Santali-speaking area, each state branch politically operates independently in that state, attempting to politically affect policy regarding Santali language and Ol-Chiki script implementation. Hence,

though ASECA is not a political party, their goal is political, and like a political party, and the legitimacy of political claims are also expressed in terms of constant organization along the same lines as a political party. This graffiti, limited to a specific sub-set of Santal viewership (those that can read Ol-Chiki as well as those who are involved or actively support Ol-Chiki) scales the political ‘call’ in a different manner than do the calls in surface M. The use of Ol-Chiki iconically links this ‘call’ to other Ol-Chiki tokens on the bazaar, scaling the constellation as distinct from the local or regional sphere of politics represented by the more conventional political graffiti. Yet the discursive content of the call simultaneously recalls the stereotypical genre of speech associated with these politics. The inscription reveals the dual nature of ASECA politics, and of the Ol-Chiki movements in general: while the agenda it pursues is construed in many ways as translocal and opposed to the location of Santali within the local script-languages of the administrative territories, it still has to conduct politics within those territories, and thus articulates its demands in a voice specific to the political inscriptions of West Bengal.



***Surface P**, upper bazaar: A Jharkhand party response to the Maoist insurgency and state accusations of “terrorism” against the party, on a wall adjacent to Surface N: “We do not want murders, we do not want terrorism, we want food to nourish our hunger! We do not want exploitation, We do not want repression, We want autonomy! Complements, Jharkhand Anushilan Party” (Eastern Brahmi script)*



### ***Santali in the Diku Bazaar --***

In the previous section, I discussed how many Santals have considered the bazaar a "diku" space. Most businesses in the bazaar are owned and operated by non-Santals, even though most of the customers are Santals, and the vast majority of shops employ Eastern Brahmi script (see Figure 4.1). The use of Eastern Brahmi script is consistent with the general attitude that this script is the most widely available to readers of all castes, as well as the equation of eastern Brahmi with the standardized regional language, Bengali, and the use of Eastern Brahmi as the script mediating the general commodity market. Yet, although most caste-Hindu Bengali speakers do not consider Santali as an established regional language, and relegate it to the status of a local dialect does not mean that some have not responded to the increased activism by local Santals around the question of language and script. As Ol-Chiki has gained increasing visibility in the bazaar space, in addition to having been recently introduced in the local school system (see Chapter 5), some caste-Hindu shopkeepers have attempted to integrate a Santali "code" on to their signboards. However, as I will suggest in this section, many Santals have remained ambivalent or critical to *diku* attempts at incorporating Santali on these signboards. This is in part because Santals view caste-Hindu shopkeepers as not having the knowledge of the particular scalar politics that underlies and governs the use of Ol-Chiki or Eastern Brahmi Santali. Caste-Hindus, in displaying new combinations, scale the use of Santali in manners that reinforce, in many cases, the hegemony of Bengali and the locality of Santali. Moreover, Santal evaluations of script usage, I argue, do not solely depend on an evaluation of the script or code itself, but also who is using it and how.



From top-left going clockwise, **Surface Q** (Easter Brahmi script), **Surface R** (top right, from top to bottom, Eastern Brahmi, Devanagari, Ol-Chiki, Roman), **Surface S** (bottom, from top to bottom, Ol-Chiki, Roman, Eastern Brahmi)

During my research period, I saw an increase in the attempt by caste-Hindu shopkeepers to target Santali viewers and readers through the use of Santali-language or Ol-Chiki script on their signboards. The increased use of Santali, especially in the form of Ol-Chiki script, had much to do with the recognition, especially by the local school system, of Santali as a legitimate language, and the increasing numbers of students and others who were learning Ol-Chiki script. When I first arrived at the bazaar in early 2010, the medicine shop (Surface Q) on the road going from the upper bazaar to the lower bazaar was the only shop that visibly projected an explicitly

delineated Santali code. Unlike the other genres or constellations we have been discussing, the shop *translates* rather than *transcribes* the shop name in Bengali and Santali, both in the Eastern Brahmi script. The painted sign, which said *Kuchra Oushudh Dokan* 'Spare Medicine Shop' on the top line, repeats itself in the bottom line with *Ran Dokan* 'Medicine Shop.' The only lexical alternation is between 'oushudh' (Ben. medicine) and 'ran' (Sant. medicine). Though shops often employed different scripts (Roman and Eastern Brahmi), nowhere else in the bazaar did I see a constellation of translation, drawing attention to the alternation in code.

In fact, the shop owner, when he learned I was there to study Santali, intentionally pointed the sign out to me (even though I had noticed it before), proudly asking me if I could understand what the bottom line meant. I asked him why he had the sign written in Santali, considering every literate person in the bazaar would understand the words "oushudh dokan," the standard name for any medicine shop. He replied, "*dekhe oder bhalo lage, oder ananda hocche*", "when they see it, they like it, they feel good," not specifying the 'they' but implying his Santal customers. Though the shop owner himself did not speak Santali, he felt that the code distinction painted on his wall helped him establish a better rapport with his Santal customers. His evaluation of Santali therefore was not one that aligned with the trans-local or regional scales outlined above, but rather as a way of pleasing customers who otherwise would not see their language in print. The excitement and pride with which he viewed his use of Santali also had the simultaneous effect of reinforcing the hegemony of Bengali and the scaling of Santali as a subordinate or local regional dialect.

During my research period itself, I witnessed two shops (Surfaces R, S) place Ol-Chiki script on their signboards in addition to the Eastern Brahmi and Roman scripts. One of these shops (Surface S) was the village bookstore, popular among school kids, and run by a local

powerful family of Utkal Brahmins. While the store mainly stocked Bengali and English books, there were increasingly Santali books and magazines as well, both in Eastern Brahmi and Ol-Chiki, as well as Santali-language textbooks for school. The Ol-Chiki along with the Roman and the larger Eastern Brahmi signage coincided, notably, with a rise in Santali language distribution and student interest in Santali. The store in Surface Q was a homeopathic dispensary run by the local primary school teacher, who recently commissioned what he termed a “multilingual” signboard, writing the words “Homeo Seba Sadan” (Homeopathic clinic) in Eastern Brahmi, Roman, Devanagari, and Ol-Chiki.

When asked about their choice to use Ol-Chiki script on their signs, the owners of both the bookstore and the homeopathic clinic referred to the fact that they live in a ‘tribal’ area so they should also use the tribal language, which in this case was a distinction along graphic rather than linguistic lines. Referencing the “tribal area” as the motivation for placing Ol-Chiki script on the signboard suggests that there is a recognition, at least among the younger shop owners of the dominant bazaar castes (Brahmins and Vaishnavs) of an adivasi/Santal politics in which the Ol-Chiki script is employed to make a competing claim on territory. However, the scale at which Ol-Chiki operates in tokens such as the ones referenced in the previous sections transcends delimited notions of region or territory. In fact the script is most often used to iconize networks of organization, flows of commodities, or other institutions that scale Santali as beyond the notion of territory implied by the shop owners’ comments. Indeed the use of Ol-Chiki on each of these surfaces reinforce these scalar distinctions; in Surface S, the Ol-Chiki/Roman combination is significantly smaller than the Eastern Brahmi one, something which I did not see on Santal-produced Ol-Chiki tokens, and in Surface R, the Ol-Chiki follows the Eastern Brahmi, also a position I did not see on other Ol-Chiki tokens within the bazaar. In reframing a translocal

scale as a local one through the use of Ol-Chiki, caste-Hindus create new scales that again serve to subordinate Santali within an established linguistic and graphic hierarchy.

The disjuncture between the Santali and caste-Hindu scalings of language and script surfaced in my conversation about these signs with the local sign-painter. The painter is a Santal, who resides in a nearby hamlet, and while he is not the only sign painter in the bazaar, he is one of the most established. He has been responsible for painting many signs, including Surface Q. I asked him why Santali storeowners and operators did not use Santali in their signboards, and he responded that Santals preferred Ol-Chiki, but since most Santals did not know Ol-Chiki, they were not going to use Santali. While this assertion is not uniformly agreed upon, the painter analyzes the lack of Santali-language tokens through the metric of Ol-Chiki, in which Santali is scaled at a position beyond the locality of Jhilimili bazaar. It is this scaling, the painter suggests, that should be a critical component of any display of “Santali” on signs.

When I asked him in particular about Surface Q, which he himself painted, and why he used Eastern Brahmi to write Santali, he said that the reason was because the shop-owner was a “diku,” and did not understand that Santali should be written in Ol-Chiki. The constellation on Surface Q therefore, according to the painter, resulted not from his role as the “animator” of the sign, but was attributed to the sign’s “principal,” the *diku* shop-owner (Goffman 1981). Commenting on Surface S, which did display Ol-Chiki, the painter voiced similar skepticism, saying that the Ol-Chiki was not “nice” (*napay*) because the painter was a *diku* and he, as a Santal, could have done a better job. Thus, even if Ol-Chiki was used, both the “animator” and the “principal” were non-Santals, entailing a negative evaluation of a script that on other metrics would be highly valued. The painter compared this inadequate use of Ol-Chiki to a recent painting of a private residence that he did, where he painted a Santal family’s clan name on their

home entirely in Ol-Chiki script (Surface T), citing a positively valuated instance of Ol-Chiki in which principal, animator, and script diagrammatically aligned.



*Surface T: ‘Hansda bakol,’ the Hansda family home (Ol-chiki)*

When I asked other Santali students and teachers about the use of Ol-Chiki on the Mahamaya book stall, they remained ambivalent as well, mentioning immediately that those who ran the store were “*diku*,” seemingly negating the significance of the script’s usage. The ambivalence about the signboards expressed by Santals indicated that the signs, even though responding in part to Santali political movements, did not display, as the sign-painter suggests, appropriate configurations of script and code, nor the appropriate alignments between principal and script. While it was not necessary that those involved in Santali literary production necessarily be Santal (there were non-Santals involved in magazine production for instance), the way one deployed scripts such as Ol-Chiki or eastern Brahmi had to align with appropriate participant frameworks that did not subordinate Santali speakers and hearers to caste-Hindu and Bengali language hegemony in order for the configuration to be understood as politically significant by Jhilimili’s Santali speakers. Failing to scale Santali according to the metrics constructed through political struggle, such as the Jharkhand movements, the use of Santali in the

*diku* bazaar reinforced the scalar disjunctures that precipitated and perpetuated political organizing around language and script.

The ambivalence expressed by many Santals at the use of Ol-Chiki or Santali (Eastern Brahmi) by non-Santals suggests that the bazaar space is differentially scaled depending on participant evaluations of script-code constellations on the surface and the participant networks which are indexically associated with those constellations. For the Santal viewer having been exposed to Jharkhand and Ol-Chiki politics, as most have in Jhilimili, Ol Chiki-Roman constellations (or through variable use of Ol-Chiki) evident in posters and on commodities, the performance circuits of Santali drama which connect the bazaar space and translocal circulation spheres to local village or Jharkhand party scales all point to a locally understood politics of autonomy as one of the significations. The Santali of the shop signboards however, formulated and commissioned by caste-Hindus, are missing this index, incorporating visual icons of the Santal language within the larger hegemonic scalar framework of the bazaar, in which Santali is seen as a preeminently local and subordinate language, only to be expressed in a tokenistic form.<sup>19</sup> The fact that Santals repeatedly raised to me that the principals of these signboards were dikus, who do not participate in these politicized networks through which these other graphic material objects circulate, and therefore scale Santali script-code constellations in ways not consistent with those involved in these networks, created new disjunctures and spaces for political contestation within the linguistic landscape of the bazaar.

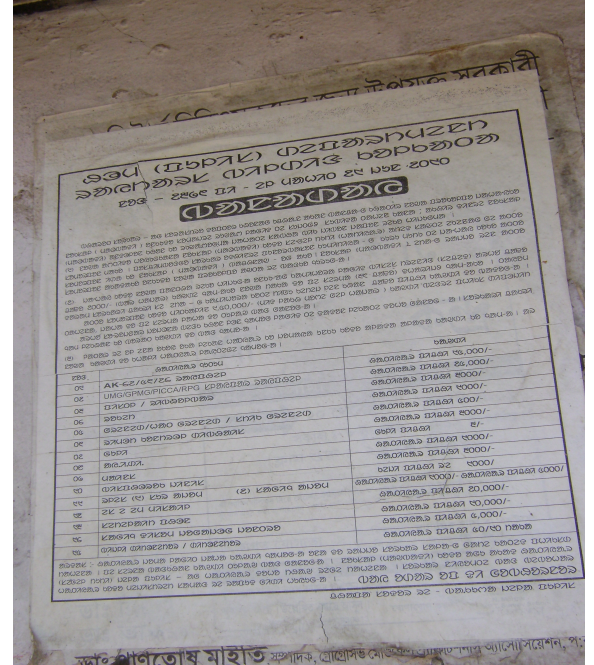
### ***Code, script, and counter-insurgency: state interventions***

In the first part of the chapter I discussed how after British permanent settlement laws broke down the political authority of village headmen systems in negotiating taxation, resulting in widespread evictions of tribals, tribal areas have always been sites of widespread agitation.

The state takeover of forests, the establishments of the bazaar, and the entry into market and credit-debtor relationships with *dikus* in conjunction with long-standing ideas of adivasi autonomy discussed in this chapter created a situation in which many adivasi groups, often under the authority of headmen, struggled to regain some of their traditional rights and privileges. Yet, under colonial police and property regimes, as Sammadar's analysis of police records stretching from the colonial period into the post-colonial shows, the demands for the restoration of long-standing, negotiated rights to forests, land, and water resources were interpreted as criminal acts (Sammadar 1998).

Criminality instead of being seen as tied to individuals, was tied to "community" such that criminals were frequently identified by their caste/tribe affiliation. Changes in policing and administrative practices in the nineteenth century fixed and categorized certain castes (such as in this case, tribal communities) as criminal-prone or insurgency-prone communities (Goodwin-Raheja 1996). For instance, police and historians classified revolts, even though they involved multiple communities, by the community affiliation of the leaders, thus the "Bhumij rebellion" or the "Santal Hul." Community-by-community, Sammadar argues, the entire region of the Jangal Mahals, became criminalized. The Jhilimili area has long had an association with criminality, even before the most recent Maoist insurgency that was occurring in the region at the time of my fieldwork. Periodically, as either part of earlier periods of Maoism in the 1970's, or at various points during the Jharkhand movement, the region has been subject to intense state surveillance. For instance, a permanent encampment of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Indian government paramilitary unit has been stationed at Jhilimili for decades; the tribal area of which Jhilimili is part, and the discourse of the *adivasi*, while at once a politically valorized terms within a politics of autonomy, have also become synonymous with anti-state criminality.





**Surface U** (left, Santali/Eastern Brahmi)/**Surface V** (right, Ol-Chiki), upper bazaar, adjacent surfaces

The Santali-language posters on surfaces U and V in the upper bazaar address the “adivasi” as insurgent, inscribing this long-standing history of police intervention in adivasi communities on the bazaar’s surfaces. The scale of “counter-insurgency<sup>20</sup>,” targeted specifically at, in this case, Santals, oscillates between criminalized exclusion and attempts at incorporation into the state's coercive ambit. Interestingly, as one can see in the examples above, the state uses both Eastern Brahmi/Santali constellations and Ol-Chiki/Santali constellations in its counter-insurgency strategies. The use of these constellations when viewed in conjunction with one another, creates a distinct network in which Santals are not the “authors” or “principals” but figure as insurgent-prone “addressees” in counter-insurgency discourses.

For example, the poster in Surface U reads, in Eastern Brahmi script-Santali, "See. Bee. Ai. [CBI] renak' wanted (sablagito): gyaneshwari express renak' case do" 'CBI's wanted (wanted), in the case of the Gyaneshwari Express.' The poster refers to a famous incident that

occurred on May, 28 2010 in the neighboring district of West Midnapur, some hours away from Jhilimili bazaar, where a sabotaged rail track resulted in a train accident which killed approximately 140 people and injured an additional 200 people.<sup>21</sup> As the area was in the "Jangal Mahals" the police and state quickly blamed local political groups who were alleged to be allied with the Maoists.

Even though the poster was disseminated by the CBI, the Central Bureau of Investigation, which is the federal investigation bureau (akin to the FBI in the United States), the poster is all in Eastern Brahmi script. However, the fact that it is all written in Santali distinguishes this announcement, since government announcements are never otherwise written in Santali. All announcements for government schemes or government events that I saw advertised in the bazaar are always related in Bengali in Eastern Brahmi, in general the script-code constellation that iconized state governance. Even though nobody on the "wanted" list is Santal by caste, there is an implication that Santals specifically should be targeted as allies for information in the fight against insurgents, as tribal populations like the Santals are seen by government officials as generally sympathetic to insurgent groups or anti-state actors.<sup>22</sup> The Eastern Brahmi script localizes a directive from a remote central government agency (the CBI); the Santali code targets a Santali speaking-reading population as the prime population that would have knowledge or collaboration with insurgent groups. The use of Santali in Eastern Brahmi script, unlike in other contexts such as dramas, indexes a different, and more ominous scale, linking the language with national counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism strategies and the police powers of the state.

On an adjacent wall (Surface V) is another government directive poster, labeled *Home (Police) Department, Writer's Building, Kolkata, [in black background] Banaday* 'Home (Police) Department, Writer's Building, Kolkata, Money Exchange' This poster is also marked on the

surface because it is in Ol-Chiki script (perhaps the longest and most detailed Ol-Chiki notice on the surface landscape), and it is a government notice, a genre in which use of the Ol-Chiki script is otherwise non-existent. The poster announces an arms exchange program started by the state government of West Bengal whereby armed Maoist insurgents are able to exchange arms for cash rewards. The table below the notice lists the names of arms and how much money one can get for exchanging them. For instance, in the first row, exchanging AK 46/47/48s will bring Rs. 15,000 while in the second row, sniper rifles will bring in Rs. 25,000. Unlike the poster on Surface U, which targets Santals as allies of insurgents (or general carriers of information on insurgent activities) Surface V targets a politically aware Santali speaking-reading population as the insurgent group itself. Santals are discursively interpellated as not only carriers of information, but also as carriers of the arms which make the insurgency possible. Thus again, state intervention into the Santali public sphere inscribes the scale of “counter-insurgency” onto the landscape, where Ol-Chiki is used to address *adivasis* as anti-state (or 'criminal') actors, attempting to subordinate them to the so-called 'rule of law' through cash incentives.

The extensive use of Ol-Chiki in this directive is remarkable in that it raises the question as to why the state chose to publicize its arms-for-cash program in a script in which there is limited literacy to begin with. The notice is marked in its extensive use of Ol-Chiki, to which I could find no other parallel in my survey of the Jhilimili bazaar. The use of Ol-Chiki on one directive and the use of Eastern Brahmi on the other also raises a question as to why one organization (the national-level CBI) chooses to publicize in Eastern Brahmi, and why the other (the state-level West Bengal Home [Police] Department) chose Ol-Chiki. Following the scalar network-based approach that I have taken here, one explanation could be that national government, whose directives are remote, follows the dominant scale of locality, casting

“Santali” as an even more local variety than “Bengali,” in what for them is a tribal, insurgency-prone area.

Yet, unlike the “wanted” poster which is in Eastern Brahmi, the use of Ol-Chiki in the poster in Surface V may be a way for the district government, which is associated with the Eastern Brahmi script, to incorporate counter-insurgency within networks of tribal autonomy, of which the Ol-Chiki script is a salient indexical icon. Yet, the uniqueness of such efforts may also have another indexical signification, suggesting that the state is only willing to do this in the context of combatting an insurgency, and thus demands for tribal autonomy (as the Jharkhand party protests express in the political graffiti in Surface P) are linked with "terrorism" and anti-state activity. The use of the Ol-Chiki script to target insurgents implicitly links the movements for Santal autonomy, and the translocal scale to which this movement is evaluated with the ideology of Maoist insurgency, which also transcends particular region or territorial boundaries.<sup>23</sup> The curious use of Ol-Chiki script to issue a directive about arms-exchange fits indexes a discourse of the continued criminalization by the state of Santal (or in general, adivasi) demands, whether in the cultural domains of rights to language and script, or in the economic domains of rights to land, forests, or water, as well as the overriding narrative of political-cultural-economic autonomy, creating a new scale within the bazaar space that evaluates Santal political demands as a local, regional, and national law-and-order issue.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a survey of the bazaar in a small rural village of southeastern West Bengal. I have chosen to present this bazaar because it forms an important background in the everyday life of residents of this region, and thus, a crucial site for the politics

I am trying to delineate here. The bazaar is a place where most villagers visit regularly to accomplish their daily activities, and is a site of constant circulation of goods, services, and people. Thus it forms a circulatory node between the outlying hamlets, which are predominately Santal and tribal-dominated, and other parts of the region, country, and world. I have tried to show that in addition to goods and services, the bazaar also forms a site for the circulation of semiotic media, as well as political solidarities and antagonism. Considering that script is an important political facet of the politics of autonomy, I have shown how script-code constellations inscribed on the bazaar space derive their meaning both from their visual contrasts within the built environment itself, and how contrasts between particular tokens are interdiscursively associated with broader institutional networks as well as networks of circulation and exchange. I then show how participants within the bazaar, both indigenous Santals as well as caste-Hindus scale these networks to politicized spacetimes which map multiple, contested notions of territory and landscape onto the bazaar. Thus, while the bazaar may be constituted as a *diku* space, where caste-Hindus continue to subordinate Santals and Santali to a confined notion of locality and exteriority, Santals have reinscribed the space using the diverse array of script and code resources available, constituting it as a Santal-specific space at multiple levels, creating divergent and opposing scales of locality, region, and even nation upon the bazaar's surfaces.

Yet, importantly I have also mentioned how script-code constellations only operate politically in the particular ways in which they are evaluated by participants and associated with different networks. As with any discourse event, these constellations are evaluated and organized by participants according to prevailing political and scalar ideologies. For instance, in the case of non-Santal uses of Ol-Chiki, Santal audiences often view them as belonging to networks and scales that are exterior to the ones involved in the creation and dissemination of

Santal-specific Ol-Chiki tokens, lacking the political indices contribute to the assertion of Santal-specific scalar evaluations within the bazaar space. Consequently, I have argued, it is not simply the use of a particular script or code that automatically indexes a certain kind of politics or identity position within the built space. Rather it is how people locate these graphic and visual distinctions within participant frameworks, and organize them along metrics that link language, community and territory, which then recursively generates the semiotic meaning of particular tokens.

In this chapter, I have deliberately presented the analysis as a visual survey. Instead of focusing on particular script-code constellations, I have tried to let the reader experience the bazaar as I experienced it, and eavesdrop on some of the conversations I had in the bazaar that connected with the visual material I have present here. In describing the rich scriptural environment that exists in everyday space in this small corner of rural India, I demonstrate how people deploy the array of resources at their disposal to articulate political positions and “emplace” (Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003) their ideologies within public space that is both exclusionary and hierarchical, yet at the same time democratic. In the following chapters, I examine how this variety is instantiated in more regimented institutional space as well as through the creation of media, extending the analysis I have begun in this chapter. I show how these spaces, scales, and networks, though differentiated, interact, forming a dialogic web of relations in which Santali-specific literacy practices and the political domain that it engenders, emerge. The bazaar presents the diversity of complex and multiscalar constellations that while at first appearing chaotic, display the affordances that inform the more regimented elaborations discussed in later chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> This trope of the ‘independent village community’ was critical in colonial attempts to understand and organize culture, and develop theories of indirect rule. This was notably developed by Henry Maine in the context of India, and informed the discourse of nationalist struggle, such as the swadeshi movement and later Gandhi’s concept of *swaraj* (self-rule), see Mantena 2010

<sup>2</sup> “Raja” literally means kings, but often these meant local landholders (*zamindars*) who had gained some kind of title, both in pre-colonial and early colonial periods.

2. Permanent Settlement Act of Bengal, 1793 regularized the tenure of landholders (*zamindars*) giving them effective property rights over their holdings. This allowed British colonial authorities to extract regular taxation from landlords without entering into negotiations. This formalized the relationship between government officials and landlords, as well as between landlords and tenants, and thus eliminated the informal negotiations between various community leaders and local officials that characterized previous tribute regimes. Because tax payment was guaranteed by law, landlords evicted tenants who could no longer generate the required revenue. Permanent Settlement was the first instance of a Western-style private property regime instituted in India. See R Guha (1982)

<sup>4</sup> This was true in 2011, however by 2012 the selling of liquor was banned by the government in the bazaar (since there no officially licensed liquor shops)

<sup>5</sup> I am particularly drawing on Irvine’s discussant comments during a 2013 American Anthropological Association panel entitled “Scaling Linguistic Diversity: language standardization as a scale-making project” (organized by Sonia Das and P. Kerim Friedman). Meek (2010) has a similar reconceptualization of “scale” in terms of spatial and temporal “axes of interpretation”

<sup>6</sup> Some attempts to understand ‘script’ in the context of linguistic landscapes have been initiated in the study of multisciplinary milieus, see Ladousa (2002) for the study of script-code alignments in school advertisements in Varanasi, or Daveluy and Ferguson (2009) for script politics among indigenous communities in Nunavik, QC Canada

7 In 1957, the Government of India laid out the ‘official’ three language formula in which schooling was to be conducted in the “regional language” or “mother tongue,” Hindi, and English. In 1964, the policy changed and Hindi was not mandatory for non-Hindi speaking regions (Mohanty 2006). National government business is usually conducted in the standard “regional language” in this case Bengali, Hindi, and English. State government business is conducted in either Bengali or English.

<sup>8</sup> Santali was included in the Indian Constitution’s schedule 8 by constitutional amendment in 2003 (a timeline is presented in Hansda 2004) along with numerous other minority languages, the official recognition of Santali was ordered by the Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe welfare department, Government of West Bengal in 1979, with the recommendation that it be in “Ol-Chiki” script. This has not been implemented due to numerous conflicts over script, especially with supporters of Roman and eastern Brahmi (Tudu 2011)

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent review of the various works on language and advertising cited in this section, see Piller (2003)

10 For instance a popular song written by Raghunath Murmu: *Bharot disom talare, abo menak’bon...*

*Assam khon ehop’ kate Bihar Bengal sec’ te, Orissa dhabic’, dada, mit’ letar ge*

*Rod ho tabon mit’ ge, rod ho tabon mit’ ge Chedak’ babon miduk’, dada, ol podon re?*

We are in the middle of this country, India. Beginning from Assam, down to Bihar and Bengal,

All the way to Orissa, my brother, in one continuity. Our speech is one, Our speech is one,

So why are we not one, my brother, in our reading-writing? (Murmu, n.d.)

<sup>11</sup> Drama companies on the other hand will receive their payment regardless, having negotiated beforehand their fees with the sponsoring committees, therefore they are not as concerned with advertising.

<sup>12</sup> This assertion could be expanded in light of the recent linguistic anthropological literature on both how language serves to create notions of ‘commodity’ and the markets in which they circulate (Agha 2011; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012, 2014) and how language itself is commodified under conditions of capitalism (Heller 2003, 2010), or chapter 6 of this dissertation for more discussion

<sup>13</sup> Or rather *had* a minimal presence in the bazaar, the recent Panchayat elections in Jhilimili were won by the Trinamul Congress, changing the dynamics between them and the Jharkhand party

14 The party office at Alimuddin St. in Calcutta controls all the functioning of committees in West Bengal

<sup>15</sup> See note 12, Trinamool has had a spectacular rise displacing CPM at the state level and Jharkhand at the panchayat level, during the most recent elections after my fieldwork. The consequences of this on the political scene are as of yet unknown to me

<sup>16</sup> Which as I saw never used Santali in any of the Jharkhand party’s other political material, though in political oratory, it, like all the political parties in the area variably employed Santali. The issue of the preference for Bengali in written materials and the use of Santali in spoken political oratory could be a subject for further research.

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<sup>17</sup> The result of the uprising was a vacation of the state apparatus from the area. The action created a situation of revolt, and pretty soon local groups also began allying with armed cadre from the Communist Party of India (Maoist), a banned political party which supports armed overthrow of the state. Since then Maoist insurgents along with a local syndicate that spearheaded the Lalgadh revolt (the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities) have been active in the area, targeting police as well as the ruling CPI-Marxist functionaries. This has invited an armed response, with the Indian central government, battling Maoist insurgencies in multiple states, sent in central paramilitary forces, and currently the region is under armed occupation. The reference to Lalgadh is clear, the Jharkhand Anushilan Party, though not allied with the Maoists, is using Lalgadh as well as the history of tribal insurgency to bolster their anti-CPI-M politics as well as their message of indigenous and regional autonomy. (see Chapter 7 for an extended discussion of this situation)

<sup>18</sup> The date on this rally is 31 January, but most people at the time would know that this an old "call" because the CPI-M office in Jhilimili had been closed for much of the time I was conducting fieldwork due to ongoing threat from insurgents associated with the Lalgadh uprising and the newly banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) factions.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed the way Ol-Chiki or Santali was professed in these examples is similar to the kind of recognition politics that is prevalent in liberal settler states such as Australia (see Povinelli 2002).

<sup>20</sup> This is taken from Ranajit Guha's (1983) famous analysis of colonial historiography of tribal and peasant insurgency (of which the Santal Hul was part), "The prose of counter-insurgency"

<sup>21</sup> Local insurgents allied with the People's Committee against Police Atrocities that originated in Lalgadh (near Jhilimili) were alleged to have cut rail tracks in order to disrupt train traffic. The conductor of the trans subcontinental Gyaneswhari express (Calcutta to Mumbai) did not notice the damaged tracks at night and as a result some of the bogeys derailed. The train had been derailed for a while, when an oncoming freight train, unaware that derailed carriages were strung along the opposite track, proceeded full speed on the tracks, and slammed into the derailed cars, killing all those aboard the derailed carriages.

<sup>22</sup> The police distrust of tribal populations and scouring of villages for insurgents is one major reason for the start of the current phase of the insurgency, hence the name "People's Committee Against *Police* Atrocities".

<sup>23</sup> This is a move that many Ol-Chiki activists would deny, explicitly claiming their activities are "non-political." The relationship between Santali intellectuals and the Maoist movement is complex, although I did not hear any explicit support of the Maoists in Jhilimili; the relationship to the movement must be understood in terms of a longer-standing demand for the politics of autonomy, which I have briefly discussed elsewhere (Choksi 2014b, chapter 7)



## Chapter 5

### Institutionalizing autonomy? : scripts, schools and the politics of education

*M.A. B.A. babu-m pas keda,  
Bajar-sohor babu-m, dolan keda.  
Opis rem cakri, diku tem roða,  
janam parsi babu-m bohoy keda.*

*Parsi tamem at'-leda,  
lakcar tamem bohoy leda  
eðel tulam lekam oðang-a.*

*-Dong sereñ  
Motilal Hansda*

Oh my son, you've passed your M.A. [Masters],  
you've passed your B.A. [Bachelor's]  
You set up a house in the bazaar  
You work in an office, you speak in *diku*  
Your birth language has wafted away in the wind.

Your language is lost,  
Your culture has wafted away,  
Floating away in the wind, like a piece of cotton.

*-Dong sereñ [wedding song]  
Motilal Hansda (from *Sarjom Umul* 2:2, Jan-March, 2011 p.7)*

In the previous chapter, I discussed how script-code constellations inscribed on the built surfaces of the bazaar created an interactive environment, generating a web of relations through which through which politics are imagined and enacted. One of the central features I pointed out was the stark contrast between the state institutions in which code/script was regimented and

Santali was excluded and the surrounding public environment, in which multiple scalar constellations competed for public space and visibility. The surfaces of state institutions, I suggested, diagrammed the government's three language/three script formula, the policy practiced in both education learning as well as government administration, but in doing so erased Santali despite the language's status as an official language of the state of West Bengal and its recognition under the Constitution of India.

However, I deliberately left out one important institutional site in my study, namely the high school. The school is a critical node where the institutional apparatus of the state and public sphere politics converge, and in which multiple salient political, economic, and social issues are expressed through the idiom of language and literacy instruction. Unlike other government sites in which Santali was not institutionally recognized, the structure of the school is such that although it is subject to centralized institutional regulation, it also must respond to political demands from the local community. At the interface between these two oppositional domains are the teachers, but more importantly, the students, who are organized in governmental caste categories, and who transform the institution from the inside to reflect a specific form of adivasi politics cultivated through literacy socialization in non-institutional spaces. Examining the struggle around schooling in Santali language, as well as investigating the specific site of one village high school where I conducted fieldwork, I aim to offer a window into how linguistic and script practices refract competing hegemonic formations.

In India's rural areas, schools provide one of the few economic outlets apart from agriculture. Moreover, due to their vast reach in rural areas and the importance of the role of education in both state policy and rural aspirational economies,<sup>1</sup> schools have also become a critical political interface between regional political parties, metropolitan ideologies, and rural

political assertion. In West Bengal, I suggest, the politicization of the school and of language instruction that arose with the rise of Communism has rendered the school one of the major sites of conflict over the institutionalization of the Santali language, script standardization, and issues of caste control over local resources. In this chapter, I wish to propose two interrelated claims through my examination of one rural school in the village of Jhilimili. First I will argue that the school forms a unique institutional node, which an adivasi politics of autonomy, created, in part, through the interaction between formal ideologies of literacy cultivated in the school with other domains of Santal social life, actively seeks to intervene and transform. As a result, because the school is a site of social and cultural prestige, students and teachers are involved in cultivating certain practices and adopting social personae which then "emanate" (Silverstein 2013) outwards to influence other domains (also Agha 2003).

Yet these practices of autonomy, though created through encounters with institutional practices, often explicitly seek to transform those very institutional practices, generating, in turn, new bases for the distribution of cultural and social prestige. By looking at the discourse of script and practices of inscription on the school surfaces, in this chapter I complicate unidirectional models of institutional emanation by showing how the politics of the school and the politics of other domains exist in a dialogical relationship with one another, such that to influence the school is to translate certain demands into institutionalized practices which then come to occupy positions of social and cultural prestige.

### **Hegemony-Emanation-Transcursion**

The school, as an institution that both regulates linguistic activity and disseminates linguistic ideologies, is but one node in a large number of "molecular processes" (Gramsci 1985,

183) in which a certain form of linguistic hegemony is constituted. In using the word "hegemony," I follow Gramsci's formulation, later elaborated upon by Williams, which looks at relations of domination and subordination not only in terms of "political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships...a lived system of meanings and values--constitutive and constituting" (Williams 1977, 110). Hegemony allows one to analyze class relations not simply through the lens of the "economic," "cultural," or "political," but illustrates how relations of domination and subordination occur at the sites of practical activity and lived "common sense" that incorporate all of these domains.

In this sense, as both Williams and Gramsci argue, hegemony cannot be reduced to institutions. For instance, in addition to "educational institutions," Gramsci describes circulation (in the form of media), "the relations of conversation between the more educated and less educated strata of society," and the relations of speakers of perceived "local dialects" to those of more prestigious "national varieties" all as central processes in creating a hegemony which perpetuates class relations in a given society (Gramsci 1985, 183). Williams elaborates on this "molecular" approach to hegemony when he writes that by simply examining institutions, one cannot describe an "organic hegemony". On the contrary, because it is not simply 'socialization' within the institution, but a specific and complex hegemonic process, it is in practice full of contradictions and of unresolved conflicts. That is why it must not be reduced to the activities of an 'ideological state apparatus'" (Williams 1977, 118).

Looking at social relations of hierarchy through the lens of hegemony has allowed sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists to examine how certain linguistic varieties become valorized as politically salient outside particular institutions, and how these varieties come to

gain hegemonic status. For example, Woolard (1985) describes the case of Catalonia, where 40 years of dictatorship had virtually erased the use of Catalan, the regional variety, from formal institutional use (including education). As a result, almost everyone in the region, and especially in urban centers such as Barcelona, was compelled to become bilingual in Castilian, the 'national variety' of the Spanish nation-state. However, even though for years Castilian enjoyed public prominence, and Catalan had almost no public presence, Woolard found that in Barcelona among both native-Castilian and Catalan speakers, the Catalan variety evoked more positive responses, and was considered to be of higher status. Woolard explains this finding using by showing how even though government positions required the use of Catalan, the labor market of the region continued to be dominated by Catalan speaking bourgeoisie who controlled the private sector, and who frequently asserted their status over both government functionaries and their workers through the use of Catalan. The economic prestige of Catalan worked in concert with the use of Catalan by the Catalonia peasantry as well as the left and other groups who struggled in opposition to the Franco state (again characterized by their use of Castilian). Catalan then was employed as a variety that upheld class relations, while simultaneously being employed in order to challenge the state. This has led to the establishment of a particular hegemony in the city of Barcelona, one in which, as Woolard notes, conservative Catalan nationalist parties have seized upon in their demands for autonomy or independence.

Woolard's work on Catalan reveals that one cannot simply examine institutional practices in order to show how hegemonic relations between different varieties are settled. Rather one must show how institutional practices are connected with a range of different social domains, such as public sphere politics and labor markets. Woolard also emphasizes that hegemony is a social process, and thus, is never fully determined. Any given set of hegemonic practices

generates oppositional practices as it seeks to control them. Sometimes an attempt at hegemony, as the Franco state attempted through the institutionalization of Castilian, actually generates a new hegemony, such as the case of Catalan nationalism, a novel form that grew out of the conditions under the Franco state.

This means that though institutions do not determine hegemony, they act as sites through which a range of political practices collide, including institutional practices supported by the state, differential access to labor markets and the struggle for economic position, as well as public sphere politics especially when the institutions themselves are subject to contestation. British rule in India, and by extension, the postcolonial Indian state, has been famously described as "dominance without hegemony" (Guha 1997). While the postcolonial state has certainly established a measure of tacit support among its inhabitants, like in Catalonia, hegemony, partly as a result of government policies, has resulted in a range of oppositional politics which seek to transform institutions such as the school. The way in which the state seeks to contain these politics and presences evince how, in fact, "hegemony" arises from negotiated interactions among political actors, which create temporary stable alliances, but which, at any time, may again transform into relationships of conflict.

Instead of seeking to discount institutions altogether, I would prefer to view institutions, following Silverstein (2013), as centers of "emanation." By "emanation," Silverstein refers to institutional centers which radiate cultural prestige along "tiered nodes in a network of sites of practice, generative centers of semiosis, and paths to their peripheries" (363). Silverstein's example is, of course, oinoglossia, "wine talk" in which a set of discursive practices categorize both qualities of a particular comestible ('wine') and persons consuming that comestible along a grade of connoisseurship and prestige, creating an institutional "register effect." This discursive

register manifests itself not only in the interactions between connoisseurs of wine, but also in text-artifacts, such as wine-tasting guides, high-end events, such as wine-tastings, and educational institutions, such as schools of oenology. The register of "wine-talk" then radiates outward through communication networks to interactions with other comestibles such as coffee or chocolate, constituting, in fact, what is considered a "prestige comestible." In describing institutions as emanating centers, Silverstein looks at how certain discursive and material practices become reconfigured through specific "ritual centers," which he labels as "institutions," assuming new and distinct values (such as "prestige") and then spread to other interactive settings. "Emanation" could be one example of how "hegemony" is extended through social spacetime; for instance, in Silverstein's formula "wine-talk" through institutional emanation, becomes a hegemonic discourse with respect to the evaluation of prestige comestibles.

While "emanation" is useful in understanding how institutionally restricted practices come to signify a culturally sedimented discourse of "prestige" more generally, the model fails to show how the ways in which flows of circulation are inherently dialogic. Institutions, such as the school that I will be examining, are nodes that lie at the center of numerous different networks, for instance labor markets, political patronage, local community politics, as well as state or nation-wide governmental regulatory regimes. They are privileged in that they produce "educated" citizens, a marker of prestige, as well as increased access to restricted labor markets. However, as these discursive regimes as well as persons educated in these regimes circulate outward to other social domains, the changes in these domains often come back to the institution in terms of demands which seek to alter institutional definitions of "prestige" and the discursive registers that are institutionally recognized as success.

Consequently, as opposed to "emanation," a more appropriate description of the

circulation of discourse and power at the institutional node of the school would be what Kelly and Kaplan (1994), drawing on Bakhtin, have called in the context of colonial Fiji, “transcursion,” or “a dialogical process whereby...a structure of power is articulated within alien terms and material, and thereby is remade even as it remakes” (128).<sup>2</sup> The focus on “dialogue” does not suggest, as Kelly and Kaplan note, a situation of equality or concord; rather “transcourse” is a process shot through with social struggle, domination, and inequality. However, despite the domination, the hegemony can only be explained in terms of partiality, and the forms produced are, as Kelly and Kaplan argue, “dialogically produced transformations...that could ramify through one or more systems” (or communicative domains).

Combining Silverstein’s notion of “emanation,” with its nodal and radiating architecture, with the dialogic notion of “transcursion” opens up the structure of hegemony to the concept of constellation. Whereas the focus on the bazaar provided a broad overview of multiple constellations, a focused view on the school, especially from the point of view of Santals (who have always been constructed as exterior to mainstream stereotypes of the educated or literate citizen), will analyze the way one particular institutional node is connected to various other social sites, and how that node both radiates a socially valorized register of prestige (through a discourse of ‘education’ or ‘literacy’), but also how it is transcursively reshaped by new and oppositional forms of politics that seeks to transform the very institutional practices to which they were exposed. The current way that students transform the space of the school through inscription in such a widespread and public way is one example.

In this chapter, I will examine these processes through two interrelated stories. In the first section, I will show how two schoolteachers co-construct a historical account (through the structure of an interview), that traces the trajectory of early Santal experiences with the



institution of school, the process of inhabiting the institutionally valorized social persona of a “schoolteacher,” and how in that process, an oppositional politics was articulated through the idioms of language and script as teachers attempted to spread valorized discourses of education to other social domains. In the second section, I will ethnographically examine the discursive practices at one rural high school, focusing in particular on how students manage multiple scripts on the school ground and leverage in particular Ol-Chiki script to inscribe their space as both prestigious (following the register of education and literacy) and at the same time institutionally autonomous. I show how practices of inscription, and graphic forms themselves while emanating from these institutional boundaries, also create the grounds by which institutional framings are undermined.

### **The Teachers’ Lesson**

Partha Chatterjee argues that "the school teacher was probably the most ubiquitous figure in the recent expansion of political society in rural West Bengal" (Chatterjee 2004, 65). He cites the work of Bhattacharya (2001), who shows how in two districts of West Bengal, there has been a long history of teacher involvement in local politics, from Gandhian organizations in social work to spearheading local Communist Party committees after Independence. As alternative forms of authority, such as that of the landlord-tenant relation, broke down, teachers, who were paid by the state and whose authority did not rest on landed relations, began to broker disputes. Teachers also mediated between the governmental authorities and villagers, as they worked everyday with villagers from a wide variety of backgrounds, but also were trained in the bureaucratic protocols of various government bodies. These domains, as Chatterjee noted, were "differentiated by deep and historically entrenched inequalities of power" (66). The

teachers' respect, as well as their politicization, emerged from their liminal position between these two domains.

In his work on the spread of rural Communism, Ruud (2003) describes how teachers, who spearheaded left politics in rural Bengal, formed a new rural middle class, what he calls a "rustic *bhadralok*." *Bhadralok* is a Bengali word that means 'respected sir,' and as Ruud argues, the *bhadralok* "was defined by his education. His claim to fame was as an intellectual, not as a warrior, not as a businessman" (73). The archetypal *bhadralok* were colonial-era metropolitan (Calcutta-based) intellectuals such as Raja Rammohan Roy or Swami Vivekananda, and literary figures such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, and especially Nobel-laureate Rabindranath Tagore. The colonial, Calcutta-based *bhadralok*, their ambivalent relationship to the colonial state, and their nationalist politics has been the subject of numerous historical discussions (Sarkar 1989, Chatterjee 1993, Chakrabarty 2001, etc). However what is more interesting here is how these metropolitan ideas spread in rural society. Ruud describes how the spread of education in rural societies allowed certain people from rural backgrounds to access metropolitan education, and thus cultivate themselves as *bhadralok*. In addition, the *bhadralok* literary canon often times presented harsh criticisms of both inequalities brought about by the organization of caste-based, patriarchal landlord-based village society as well as by the injustice and oppression wrought on ordinary people by the colonial state.

Analyzing in-depth a six year diary of Selim master, a Muslim schoolteacher in a rural village in Bardhaman district, West Bengal, Ruud shows how metropolitan Bengali literature and the adoption of a *bhadralok* stance contributed to criticisms of "village society" and a drive towards intervention. Village societies were seen as non-modern units in which political change was necessary; "development" (*unnoyon*) and "change" (*poribortan*) were two of Selim master's

favorite words (Ruud, 77). The strategy, he argues, was multi-pronged, involving the creation by groups of teachers and new rural educated people of social clubs, the promotion of initiatives of "social development," expansion of school infrastructure, as well as the holding of frequent poetry readings and cultural functions that celebrated metropolitan Bengali literary culture. Hence, social "upliftment" meant fighting against the conservative tendencies in village society (along lines of caste, gender, and land inequality), in addition to pursuing the expansion of state services in village society and the promotion of metropolitan Bengali literary culture. Consequently, Communist Party politics, which in large part was led by teachers, was accompanied by a spread of *bhadralok* metropolitan Bengali literary culture throughout the rural areas. As described by Ruud, the figure of the school teacher was critical in the enmeshing of metropolitan Bengali language and culture with a new political culture, that beginning from 1973, served to establish the longest-running Communist government in India's history. Grassroots political movements, existing in dialogical, transcurative relations with practices of institutions such as the school, generated both a valorized discourse of education as well as effected political change at the level of state power.

Jharkhand politics, and the cultivation of a literary Santali as well as the spread of Santali script, occurred in a parallel fashion, although with some crucial divergences. However the figure of the schoolteacher still looms large in these new adivasi political movements. For instance, the creator of the Ol-Chiki script, Raghunath Murmu, and the most influential poets and songwriters of the Jharkhand movement such as Ramchand Murmu, the author of *Debon Tengon Adibasi Bir* (Let us stand up, we the adivasi heroes!), and Sarada Prasad Kisku, were all schoolteachers. Though Santals were generally much poorer and had less access to resources than people from higher castes, a quota system that was put in place after Indian independence

ensured that a certain number of government posts were set-aside for members of the Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities, of which Santals, and other Munda-speaking peoples were part. These posts allowed a first generation of teachers to become trained in Bengali-medium schools and in the literary canon, and then these teachers went on to teach and start schools in local, predominately Santal communities. Like teachers in other parts of West Bengal, these schoolteachers often times were the only "literate" members in their communities, and mediated between Santal institutions, village communities and an ever expanding state apparatus. However, though they were trained in metropolitan literary culture, there was a concomitant feeling of loss and compromise that accompanied this training as well.

While many Santal schoolteachers adopted similar social positions as teachers from middle Hindu and Muslim castes such as Selim master, underscoring the need for social reform, the register of "education," as it promoted a metropolitan Bengal culture over regional difference, placed in stark contrast the gulf between Santal lived experience and the *bhadralok* socialization inculcated by the school. The most obvious disjuncture was in the medium of instruction, as Santal schoolteachers had to teach Santal students in a linguistic variety which they all, to various degrees, commanded, but would rarely use to each other in spaces outside the school. Hence, as the Jharkhand movement progressed, and the presence of schooled instruction in Bengali spread to Santali areas, language became a major site for conceptualizing Santal difference, both from within and outside the space of the school.

This history was made apparent to me not only in reference to Santal literary history, but also in everyday interactions between contemporary teachers, writers and poets. For instance, I recorded an interview between two schoolteachers, MH, an editor of a well-known literary magazine in southern Purulia district, West Bengal and GPS, an elderly gentleman also from

Purulia district, born before Indian independence, and a senior writer. Both interviewer and interviewee are former schoolteachers. The interview reveals how two different generations of writers co-construct a narrative of the way in which Santali literary production was cultivated within the context of educational institutions, reconfiguring notions of prestige in the larger community. Yet, as I suggest, the narrative also opens up the “zones of transcourse” by which a politics of autonomy, particularly around issues of language and script, are embraced as the teachers, though more firmly ensconced within the institution, at the same time try to bridge the institution with political and social commitments to movements like Jharkhand. The embracing of language and script, particularly by the senior writer GPS, I suggest, shows how the experience of teaching within an institution and the structural disjunctures that structure those institutions led to a subsequent politics of autonomy focused around the forms of language and script.

The interview took place at the home of MH, in the small southern Purulia city of Bandowan (around 12 km. from Jhilimili bazaar). Both MH and GPS hail from villages in the forested regions surrounding the city. The questions were asked by MH, but the interview itself also included my comments as well, thus it was more like a three-person conversation led by MH. MH begins the interview with the question of “education” and “literacy,” for GPS grew up at a time when state penetration into Santali-speaking areas was low. GPS then describes his initial exposure to what was to later be called “literacy”, and how it was mediated both through socialization into the Bengali language as well as through class position within Santal villages. The transcript excerpt illustrates this dynamic below:

Transcript 6.1 (Bandowan, Purulia) MH (editor), GPS (senior writer), N (Nishaant-researcher)

14MH: Bandwan gey, aar ona bidal to olok' 15padhak' reyak' nonka bebosthaa do bang 16tahëkaanaa tehen leka do	MH: In Bandowan and during that time, there was no arrangement for education [ <i>olok'-padhak'</i> 'writing-reading'], like today?
17GPS: bang	GPS: No
18MH:to chika leka tey am olok padhak'-em 19sëda keda ?	MH: So how did you learn to read and write [ <i>olok'-padhak'?</i> ]
20GPS:ëd ona do <i>Nit' huñ disay geyaa</i> mentey 21met'teng puthin ol kada. Onarey ol menak'a. 22ado in duñ gupiyañ, siyok'-in , kaḍha-yañ. Ado 23kisaḍ ko oḍak' rey e~ Bijoy Besra ñutuman 24unku kisaḍ koren hopon-e paḍhao kowa.	GPS:I have written about it in a book, " <i>Now I remember.</i> " In that book it is written. So I was a cowherd, I plowed, I planted. But then, there was in a rich household, one Bijay Besra. He used to educate the children of the rich households.
25MH:achcha, ona aturen ge uni do?	MH:I see. Was he from the village?
26GPS:hë ona aturen gey. unku do Sirishgora 27khon ko sen kana ac' baba teyko	GPS: Yes, he was from the village. He and his father's family were from Shirishgora.
28MH:hë	MH:Ok.
29 GPS: ëd ado ona... jahà oḍak' re ko paḍhak'-a 30onday sen kaatet' kidup' katet' in duñ japak' 31kak'-aañ. he', ado japak' kak' khaac' ado 32bangla tegey roḍa. " <i>Ki rey Tuiyow, lekhbi nã 33ki?</i> "	GPS: and so then... that house where they studied, I went there once having eaten dinner and was looking through the window, so I was looking through the window, and he said in Bengali, " <i>Hey you, will you write, or what?</i> "
34N:uni to ona...Bijoy--	NC:So him, that--Bijoy?
35GPS:Bijoy Besra-	GPS: Bijoy Besra-
36N:Bangla tey roḍ-a?	NC:--He speaks in Bengali?
37GPS:Bangla tei roḍ-a.	GPS:He speaks in Bengali.
38N:oh	N: oh
39MH:Ado unku ren gidraì paḍhao kodo...ë kisaḍ 40hoḍ uni ṭaka ko emaya?	MH:So he teaches rich kids...do the rich kids give him money ?
41GPS:onday jom nu joto anej dhanec'- [MH: -o-]	GPS: they give him food, grains, paddy [MH:oh]
42GPS:-ar jahây ko ...toyaa , gotom , hë , 43jomey nama	GPS:milk , clarified butter, .....yeah he receives food
44MH:-ar jahây gidra ko paḍhak'-a unku do 45beton lagao kaoya ? [GP:he'?] jahây koren 46gidra onday ko paḍhak' a unku do beton	MH:and all the kids do they have to pay? all the children [GPS: what?] those who study [ <i>paḍhak'</i> 'read'] there do they have

47lagao kaoya ?	to pay?
48GPS:Unku do khali kisaḍ hoḍ oḍak' ren gey.	GPS:They were only from rich households.
49MH:achcha achcha. Ado am hò onkay 50metam kana.	MH:I see I see. And you told him?
51GPS:ado in hò onkañ "...kirey Tuiyow likhbi 52na'ki ?," ado roḍ hò bañ roḍ daḍek' tahèna-	GPS: so I was like, [he said] <i>Hey will you write or what?</i> Then I couldn't say anything, I was speechless.
53MH:-maney bangla dom buja ? [GPS:he'?] un 54samayem bujet' tahèd-aa ?	MH: You mean you did not understand Bengali? [GPS: what?] at that time?
55GPS:hè hè un. Ado un khac' do khaḍi maṭi 56onatey ot rey olet' tahena.	GP:Yeah, yeah [I did] So from then, I wrote in the rocky dirt, on the ground
57N:hehehe	NC:hehe
58GPS:ot rey , silet ko banuk'-aa . khata 59banuk'-a, chet' ho' banuk'-aa . o , a , bangla 60tey. he'~	GP:on the ground, there was no slate, there was no notebook, nothing, I wrote on the ground, o, aa (Bengali letters) in Bengali

In the above excerpt, MH asks GPS about his first encounter with “literacy,” glossed in Santali as *olok'-paḍhak'* (reading-writing, line 15). GPS however says that when he was growing up there was no institution such as the school, and what he understood as education was an individual initiative undertaken by members of rich households of the village (*kisaḍ ko oḍak'*, line 23), such as Bijoy Besra, to educate the children of rich households (*kisaḍ ko ren gidra*). He contrasts this situation with his own in line 22, when he describes himself as a cowherd and planter, someone who performs agricultural labor, and thus not *kisaḍ* (wealthy), and not someone who would normally have access to literacy, had it not been for fortuitous circumstances.

Hence, in GPS's narrative, class divisions within the village first mediated access to education. Though everyone appeared to be Santal by caste (or at least the teacher, Bijoy Besra, since that is a Santal surname), GPS divided the village into poorer people like himself, and the rich ones, and it was the latter that had access to literacy. GPS then proceeds to describe his own original literacy encounter as highly serendipitous. Beginning in line 29, he recounts how after

he finished his daily work and meal, out of curiosity, he looked through the window, when he was called out "in Bengali" by the rich Santali teacher, "Hey you, will you write or what?" (line 33).

The use of Bengali to interpellate GPS hearkens back to both class divisions as well as the ideological associations of "Bengali" with literacy. It surprised me (line 38) Bijoy Besra, who was a Santal, would speak in Bengali in the village with other Santals. However, as the course of the conversation continued, MH clarified for me that it was common for rich Santals to speak in Bengali during that time as a sign of class distinction. The rest of the transcript excerpt explicitly draws out the relations between class and language. MH discusses whether the children had to pay and again GPS emphasizes that they were all from rich households, and paid in kind to the teacher.

GPS continues the narrative toward the end of the excerpt, again voicing the rich Bijoy Besra calling out to him in Bengali "Hey will you write or what?" (line 51). GPS said he was rendered speechless, and MH asks him in line 53 if he, as a poor cowherd Santal, did not understand Bengali? For MH, the implication is that because of the classed structure of the literacy encounter, language would render a poor Santal "speechless" (line 52). GPS, however, quickly brushes this suggestion aside, saying that of course he understood (line 55), suggesting that even though he was uneducated he could still understand Bengali, and, in line 55-6, there is an almost a seamless transition for GPS from being initially called to write to producing scripted Bengali characters in the dirt on the ground. In the narrative co-constructed by GPS and MH, it was GPS's interpellation by a rich, wealthy Santal that happened, crucially, in the Bengali language, which effected his transition from a poor, illiterate cowherd boy into a future schoolteacher and (Santali) writer.



Hence, for GPS, what MH glosses as “reading-writing” (literacy, or later ‘education’) was not embedded in any institution nor was it attached to the state. Rather, the dialogic narrative constructs the discourse of literacy through extant class relations among Santals themselves, in which Bengali had been identified as the primary language of both literacy and class distinction. It was, therefore, a chance encounter, an interpellation not by any institution, law, or state agency, but by a neighbor and a fellow Santal through which the hegemonic relation was established and perpetuated. Like in Woolard's Barcelona study, in these villages as well, class hierarchies and economies of prestige emerged in everyday interaction, with the use of Bengali language, as both GPS and MH underscore, playing a major role in indexing class distinction.

Later in the interview, GPS proceeds to say how a group of rich Suris (liquor-brewing caste) organized, with government help, a primary school in a nearby village. Though GPS was scared to go, he braved the thick forests and the *kuḍi ko jaher* (sacred grove of girls, i.e. witches' grove), to go to school and become educated. He describes how he mastered both Hindi and Bengali as he attended different schools, and also discusses a network of people, both upper-caste schoolmasters who assisted him, and wealthy Santals who offered to pay his fees so he could continue his study. At one point he narrates how one particular rich Santal, Sitaram Mandi, as particularly proud (*netar gorob*) that through his help, GPS succeeded as a "man" (*hod*) (line 213), indicating that GPS's movement through the institutions of schooling was a matter of pride for Santals across class divides.

GPS slowly climbed up the education ladder, and passed his class 11 secondary examinations. He was considering entering college but failed to get the money together; however, he was asked by another Santal schoolteacher if he wanted to join a new government

school near his village as a primary teacher. He took the job, and worked there and, later, at other schools as well. At this point in the conversation, MH shifts footing, and asks him about his career as a Santali writer. How did he begin this career? GPS responded that he wanted to make Santals understand the importance of “education” (‘reading-writing’) and thereby “reform” society, but since Santals would not read articles or books, he did this, like most of the famous poets at the time, through song. MH agreed with him, and addressing me said that in song, the messages would get across to both illiterate (*nirokhor*) and literate (*sakhar*), and everybody would enjoy it. Thus, at this point, when discussing the emergence of GPS as a Santali writer, one sees the beginnings of a conceptual division between “illiterate” and “literate,” with the writer, schoolteacher, or person who had gone to school as morally valorized over the one who had not. Yet, still, in both MH and GPS’s discourse, the song (*seren*) also maintained its importance, transcending this distinction, and uniting Santals of different social status together<sup>3</sup>. MH and GPS expand this in the transcript excerpt below, where they discuss GPS’s written songs, and the pathways of their circulation:

Transcript 6.1.2 (Bandowan, Purulia) MH (editor), GPS (senior writer), N (Nishaant-researcher), from line 467

467MH: olok’-a ahob-ena , seren olok’ ona 468seren akhḍa rey	MH: You began to write, you wrote songs, they sung them, right, in the <i>akhras</i>
469N: seren ol?	N: written songs?
470MH: aa~dong, maney bapla ... (jokhon) onday 471ko seren-a. Lagḍey ko seren-a--	MH: aa~ <i>dong</i> , meaning they sung [them] during weddings, they sung [them] as <i>lagḍe</i>
472GPS: hoi he'	GPS: Yeah, yeah...
473MH: porob rey ko seren-a--	MH: They sung them in the village fairs--
474GPS: hoi hoi	GPS: Yeah, yeah
475MH: nui-ak’ ona seren ko	MH: [to me] his songs
476GPS: he'	GPS: yeah
477MH: .seren rey do nahak’ message henaak’ - 478a...samaj susaḍ	MH: the songs, they had a message-- social reform

479GPS:hoi hoi samaj susaḍ--	GPS: yeah, yeah social reform
480N--he' to amak' prothom ol sereñ taahe' 481kana?	N: Oh so the first writing you did, it was songs right?
482MH:ona olok' reyak' mul bisoy kodo chet' 483tahe' kana? ona-ona sereñ ko reyak' mul 483message e~ chet' do memen teyak' tahe' kana?	MH: What were these songs mainly about ? What were the main messages in these songs, what did they say?
484GPS: ona do oney baḍic' samaaj khoc' do 485susaḍ samaj sec' bon.	GPS: They were about how we (pl, inclusive) go from a bad society to a good society
486MH: olok' bon seḍaya.	MH: How we should learn to write ( <i>ol</i> ).
487GPS:olok' bon seḍaya	GPS: How we should learn to write--
488MH:hādi ñu bon bagiya--	MH: We should give up drinking rice beer
489GP:hādi ñu bon bagiya. pata enec' bon bagiya	GPS: Let's give up drinking handi, let's stop dancing at the village fairs
490MH: hehehe	MH: hehehe

In this part of the conversation, MH begins by telling me that GPS's songs attempt an intervention into Santal society, classifying it as "social reform" (*samaj susaḍ*). These songs were incorporated, as MH mentions, into already established genres such as "dong" or "lagḍe." However, the songs were not, according to both MH and GPS, about community pride. They were about, as GPS says in response to MH's question about their "message" (line 484), reforming society from a "bad society" (*baric' samaj*) to a good or 'developed' society (*susaḍ samaj*). A good society according to MH and GPS consisted of one where people acquire a moral orientation associated with the larger discourse of education: most importantly they know how to how to write (*ol*, lines 485-486), as well as give up drinking *handi*, the ubiquitous rice beer drunk at most Santali social events (lines 487-488). For GPS, the songs also exhorted fellow Santals to give up dancing at village fairs, something that MH, laughing embarrassingly (line 489), brushes off, indicating that during GPS's time, the new rural Santal elite were even

more radical in their conception of what constituted a "good society," even including limits on dancing<sup>4</sup>.

Similar to Selim master in Ruud's account, both GPS and MH deploy a discourse of literacy (learning how to 'write') to propagate a model of moral cultivation that excluded marked Santali practices such as drinking rice beer or dancing at village fairs. However, the way they went about approaching this agenda of moral reform was through already established genred channels of Santali performance. In Ruud's account, social reform was also spread through cultural performances in which metropolitan Bengali literature and a metropolitan variety were considered to mark off a specific form of moral (and classed) cultivation. In GPS's account of his early life, Bengali too was used to call him into the literacy encounter. However, in this case, the schoolteacher foregoes Bengali in order to pursue a message of social reform in Santali. This variety of Santali, however, as argued in chapter 2, was novel, indexing literacy both in the poetic form of the written/sung Santali, and in the content, which aimed to transform Santal society from "bad" to "good."

The Santali language was thus reframed in order to educate, modernize, and politicize rural Santal society, similar to contemporaneous efforts that Ruud illustrates for Bengali. Yet while Bengali-language mobilization linked the rural areas with both state institutions such as the school, as well as metropolitan politics such as Communism, efforts to modernize Santali society through a reformed Santali-language entailed a politics of autonomy that actively opposed the state and its institutions. This is exemplified by GPS's own experience, who, like many Santali activists, gained social standing based in large part through his position as a state employee, but, whose position also led him assume a leadership position in the Jharkhand Party, then a fledgling party in Purulia district that advocated that the Santal-majority areas in West Bengal be included

in a separate, adivasi-majority state of Jharkhand. Consequently, the implementation of a modernized, reformed Santal society was not simply about adopting social markers of class or cultivating literary sensibilities, though that was important. It was also about aligning oneself with a network of political parties and social-reform institutions affiliated with the Jharkhand movement, and actively promoting cultural and political autonomy<sup>5</sup>.

At the beginning of the interview, GPS describes how his first encounter with literacy was not through state institutions. Rather it was in his own village, through his interactions with upper-class Santal residents of his village, where he, a cowherd boy, became interpellated as a literate, and educated subject. The everyday use of Bengali among Santals coincided, according to MH, with a class divide that existed at a time when “rich” and educated Santals used Bengali among themselves and as the de facto language of education. Even before schools had become established in the village, class differentiation through a fledgling, non-institutionalized discourse of literacy, aligned with the Bengali script and language, was already occurring in Santal villages among Santals themselves. Yet by the time GPS finishes his story, and state schooling had become well established in the villages (aided in part by the work of people like GPS and MH), a zone of transcourse emerges in which many students and teachers with most at stake in those institutions begin to oppose (or at least create spaces autonomous from) the state. This is illustrated by GPS at the very end of the conversation, where he discusses his support of Ol-Chiki, his disaffection with the West Bengal state, and projects of autonomy:

Transcript 6.1.3 (Bandowan, Purulia) GPS (senior writer), N (Nishaant-researcher), from line 1630

<p>1630GPS:he'h ar olok' paḍhaak' reyak'  31gormanṭ do tis chay benaao primary-re  32tisey chaluy-a baay chaluy-a. abo bon  33chalao-a...hēh~, gidra bon padhao kowa.</p>	<p>GPS:--yeah and regarding literacy. When will the government want to do anything? When will it start primary schools, it won't start primary schools. We (inc) will start primary schools. We will teach the children</p>
<p>1634N:apnar tey--</p>	<p>N: On one's own--</p>

1635GPS:apnar tey h�h...pa�hao kowaa bon 36h�h, abo ol chiki santa�i bo s�da hocho 37kowaa, ar competi�on remaam sorkare 38jaha' ba jaha'naak' lekanak' ge competi�on- 39e doho ochowak, aboren ko jitkarak' khaac' 40ko, h�h porikkha ko pass khac' ko...chakri ko �nama	GPS: On one's own, yeah...We will teach them, We will teach them Santali in Ol-Chiki we will put them in competition in the government or whichever competition, our [inc] [children] will succeed...yeah they will pass their exams they will get jobs---
1641N:chakri ko njaamaa	N:they will get jobs
1642GPS:onka bon benao kowa, ado ona do 43bang menda ko la�hayabon ostro, la�hai do 44ona h� kana; h�h khali ostro tey la�hai 45kaatet' ona a-laka dokhol nonte do inak', 46onte do amak', ontey do bang bhagiya, 47ontey do harmadak' , hehehe	GPS: we [inc] will do it like that, I am not saying we should fight with weapons, but this is a fight too; yeah fighting only with weapons, then all of these things come up, this over here is mine, that is your's, over there is no good, over there is the harmads' [Communist militia]
1648N:ontey do nowa nowa chalak' kana	N: over there it is happening like this
1649GP:chalak' kana.	GPS: it is happening

Evincing a lack of confidence in the government, GPS in this excerpt forcefully asserts that though the government promises to initiate education in Ol-Chiki script, they will never implement their promises, and ultimately the duty of educating children so that they will succeed will fall on “us” (*abo-we 'inc'*, line 1632). The teaching of Ol-Chiki script, GPS argues, will empower children in the highly competitive education and labor markets, though how exactly remains unspecified. However, the reference to competition and the markets suggests that GPS views the teaching of Ol-Chiki Santali as an incipient hegemonic process through which Santals, by learning their own language in their own script, will have a greater chance of succeeding than they do now (line 1642-47). At the end of the excerpt, GPS compares this struggle with the current Maoist rebellion in which opposition against the state and Communist party militias (*harmad*, line 1640) is taking place in the form of armed struggle. He argues that only armed struggle will not solve the problem, and that refashioning the linguistic and graphic marketplace is also a necessary fight (*la hai*, line 1644).

The concluding section of the interview, where GPS argues that Santals need to fight for

a degree of autonomy from the state, both in terms of their education (Ol-Chiki script) and in terms of their political sovereignty (in the form of Jharkhand), suggests a different conception of education, literacy, and cultivation than the one that drew GPS into education at the beginning of the interview. Indeed it was GPS's mastery of literate Bengali, as well as his connections with upper-class Santals who promoted the use and learning of Bengali, that allowed him to succeed as a schoolteacher. Yet, it was his generation of privileged Santals<sup>6</sup>, and the generation after him represented by MH<sup>7</sup>, who worked to transform the discourse in the public sphere, from one where education meant to affiliate with the state (or a *diku* educated class), to one where education and cultivation led one to advocate for Santal autonomy.

This vision of an autonomous Santal society followed a class logic that was deeply influenced by prevailing theories of modernization and social reform, emphasizing a discourse of cultivation that depended on the criticism of many prominent Santal practices. However, the vision also provided an alternative form of socialization for younger Santals, in which a politics of autonomy has come, in many ways, to form an integral part of becoming an educated, literate subject. In the conversation, MH and GPS, both schoolteachers, construct a narrative of both their own moral transgression as well as a transgression in the discourse of literacy and education in general among upwardly mobile rural Santals. While the knowledge of Bengali, as well as the Bengali script, was now a taken for granted aspect of education, it was no longer a sufficient condition within the current conditions in which autonomy was becoming valorized as part of a Santal-specific (and non-institutional) discourse of literacy. The younger generation was no longer simply interpellated as a literate subject through their command of Bengali, but also now through discourses of Santali and Ol-Chiki cultivated in performance spaces, villages, and through the political activities of local Santal elites. The effects of these transgressions are no

more evident than on the struggles within and around the institution of the school itself.

### **School Life: Contestations and inscriptions**

As I began fieldwork, I was excited to learn that the high school in the village where I was staying had a “Santali” subject. The headmaster, an Utkal Brahmin English professor from a neighboring district, told me that the school had a “multilingual philosophy,” equally considering English, Bangla, or, as he called it “Ol-Chiki.” It had been about eight years since Santali (or “Ol-Chiki” as most non-Santal teachers referred to the class) had begun being taught, however unlike English or Bengali, which were taught from class 1, Santali was only taught from class 9. Even though most students were more comfortable in Bengali, the numbers of students opting for Santali as their “first-language” from class 9 had rapidly increased over the past few years. However, as I found out, the teaching of Santali at the school was far from a settled matter; in fact it was still very much a divisive issue. This was in part because the teaching of Santali, and the introduction of the Ol-Chiki script as a medium of instruction was part of a larger project of Santali political assertion into domains from where these demands had previously been excluded.

One crucial domain was the school, long dominated by upper-caste teachers and, as noted above, a bastion of Communist party politics. Even now, Santali presence at the school, both in the administrative hierarchy as well as in the curriculum was minimal, though Santali students were struggling to challenge these embedded institutional practices. In this section I will look at my own complicated relationship within the school space, as well as focus on how Santal students actualize an alternative zone of transcourse within the bounds of the institution, particularly through the creative deployment of scripted graffiti on the surfaces of the institution. In doing so, I show how Santali politics, cultivated in part outside the school collide with



normative hierarchies within the institutional space of the school, and in turn, theorize a way of looking at institutions that takes a wider set of practices and politics into account beyond established institutional routines and hegemonic practices.

On my first visit to village I met SM who had only the previous year been appointed the new Santali teacher. Hailing from a village in the neighboring district of West Midnapur, he had completed a BA in Santali from Vidyasagar University, which had just implemented degree-level Santali before he entered college. He, like most others of his generation, had not learned Santali formally at school, and he had entered college aiming to study Bengali literature. However, he was active in the ASECA school in his village, and had completed the ASECA syllabus to the highest level, placing at a very high rank in the district competition. Thus, he was very fluent in Ol-Chiki script, and also subscribed to the ASECA ideology that Ol-Chiki was the only proper script in which Santali should be taught. He also edited and published an Ol-Chiki literary magazine, which he self-financed together with one of his college friends. His political outlook, which stressed the importance of linguistic affiliation, script politics, and a strong sense of Santali autonomy, was characteristic of a new generation of educated Santals, directly influenced by the activities of people like GPS and MH.

During the first part of my fieldwork, I talked with him, and he was excited that I was learning and studying Santali, and said that, provided I received permission from the secretary of the school managing committee, the politically elected body that acted as local overseers of the school, I would be allowed to sit in and record Santali class. I received the requisite permission and started sitting in occasionally and recording. Soon, throughout the village (and neighboring villages) everybody knew that the researcher from America was sitting in on, as the non-Santals said, “Ol-Chiki” class. Both Santals and non-Santals noted it, and mentioned it to my

companions and I. After having returned to the village after the school began a new session, I asked SM when I could begin sitting in and recording the class again. He told me that it would be better if I stopped sitting in on the class. I asked why, and he said, politely, that even though nobody has objected thus far, somebody might complain in the future, which is why he would feel more comfortable if I did not attend. Initially, I was confused by this statement. If nobody had objected, and I had the requisite permissions from the headmaster and the secretary of the committee, why was the teacher prohibiting me from the classroom? I realized later that the teaching of Santali itself, even after all these years, was divisive and precarious. I had entered into a political field in which I was unprepared, and the teacher, himself becoming more aware of the school's and his own position in this field as the Santali teacher, appeared to be exercising more caution than previously<sup>8</sup>.

I learned more about the situation when I interviewed the former (and first) teacher of Santali at the school, BH. BH now taught at a different school, but he still lived in the village. He is originally from the neighboring state of Jharkhand, as was most of the first batch of Santali-language high school teachers, since the universities in West Bengal at the time did not offer Santali at the degree level. The story starts when BH was in college; he was part of a multi-state organization of students called the All-India Santali Students Association (*Bharot Jakat Paṭhuḡ Gaonta*), started in West Bengal, but actively involved students in Jharkhand as well<sup>9</sup>. In 1979, the Communist government in West Bengal had acceded to Pandit Raghunath Murmu's demands that Santali be included as an official language of the state, and that the official script be Ol-Chiki. However, for decades there was no action or implementation of this order. The students organization filed a case against the West Bengal Secondary Board of Education (WBSE) at the Calcutta High Court, and BH and his comrades went to various schools

in Santali-majority areas to pressure headmasters into accepting Santali as a subject. The court eventually agreed with the student organization, and the School Service Commission (SSC)<sup>10</sup> in the listing of 158 new positions at West Bengal high schools listed four high schools in Bankura district for the teaching of Santali. One of them was in this village. BH and four others gained positions.

Yet when BH began teaching in 2002, there was still no Santali class available. Neither the headmaster, nor the school managing committee, which was majority non-Santal at the time, showed any interest in creating a Santali-language class, and BH began teaching other subjects. This situation revealed the misalignments between state-level administrative rules, and the local politics of managing schools. The managing committee, controlled by political parties, has to take action and agree to the creation of the post, but, in the case of the teaching of Santali, they actively sought to work against the creation of the post. The headmaster of the school told BH that no “permission letter” has arrived from the state education authorities, and therefore Santali-language class could not be implemented. Since there was no initiative on the part of the headmaster and managing committee to seek the permission letter for an already sanctioned post, Santali-language education remained at an impasse.

What ensued was a combination of legal and political maneuverings by Santali political organizations. According to BH, the district level ASECA branch organized a number of demonstrations, surrounding the school and disrupting daily activities. As the managing committee would not take action, these political organizations compelled the headmaster to write the state education authorities requesting the permission letter so that Santali-language education in Ol-Chiki script be implemented. Others have told me that the local Jharkhand Party faction also played a major role in this mobilization. BH again filed a court case requesting immediate

implementation of the court order. On the day of joining, BH along with an armed police contingent ordered by the court, marched up to the school to teach the first Santali-language class. BH noted that his first class, class 9, had only nine students. Today, less than a decade later, class 9 Santali has over 100.

Hence the beginning of Santali-language education at the school was a major event in the village. BH attributes the managing committee's resistance to “lack of interest,” but it is doubtful that a “lack of interest” would escalate into such an acute conflict. As noted earlier, the school and the bazaar were a project of powerful upper-caste Utkal Brahmins, who still had a lot of influence in the area. In addition, as people suggested to me, the school had also become a center of Communist Party politics. People frequently mentioned to me how the school used to be one of the best in the area until “its reputation was ruined by party politics” meaning that the teacher ranks were filled with political cadre. The resistance, therefore, to Santali-language education was not simply about the teaching of language, but also about preventing these oppositional political formations, of which the learning of Santali language in Ol-Chiki script was one manifestation, from gaining institutional legitimacy. When I asked BH why so much resistance for Santali-language education, especially if the majority of students were Santal, BH said that the managing committees had been dominated by non-Santals. He did not elaborate, but his comments suggest that there was an attempt to maintain a systematic exclusion of Santal political voices in institutions such as the school.

The teaching staff and administration was still dominated by non-Santals. Both the headmaster and assistant headmaster were Brahmins, and most of the teachers were Bengali-speakers of various castes, many from outside the area and unfamiliar with local and tribal politics. However the students were mostly of tribal, and particularly Santal background. The

school campus was large and sprawling: on one side were the classroom and office buildings, and immediately adjacent to those buildings were the hostels where the students stayed. The hostels were by government regulation specifically reserved for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students, and because Santals were the majority Scheduled Tribe population, Santal students were the majority living in the hostels. However, there was also a sizeable representation of other Scheduled Tribe groups such as Munda and Bhumij, and a less sizeable representation of Scheduled Caste (SC) students. There was a separate hostel, at the rear of the campus, for the Kheria Sabar caste, who were much more economically and politically disadvantaged than other Scheduled Tribe communities, and still resistant to schooling.<sup>11</sup>

The hostels were also segregated by gender. On one side of the classroom buildings was the sprawling boys' hostel, comprising of three large buildings, each separated by class year. The hostels were basically large rooms where all the boys slept together on the floor. The boys' compound was not separated by any wall, and formed part of the vast school complex, visible to all who entered the school grounds from any part of the of the surrounding roads or paths. Boys roamed freely in the bazaar, and to the nearby lakes and ponds for baths. On the other side was the girls' hostel, which was a much newer complex, and which had boundary walls. Unlike the boys' hostel, girls' movements were much more circumscribed, and entry in and out of the hostel complex much more regulated.

The school therefore was comprised of two competing institutionalized spaces, one was the Bengali-dominated school space (classrooms, office buildings, etc.) and the other was the Santali-dominated hostel space (hostel buildings). As I will show, despite the official multilingual policy, the official surfaces of the school, inscribed and sanctioned by school authorities or teachers, shows no concordance between either languages or scripts, two of the

major demands of the various Santali political movements. Rather, the school's surfaces display a marked preference for Bengali and the eastern Brahmi script. There is no administrative attempt, neither on by the school authorities or the teachers, to incorporate Santali or Ol-Chiki onto the various surfaces of the school, though these surfaces are constantly inscribed. Yet, immediately adjacent to the school, and also on the school grounds are the hostels, where the students have fully inscribed an alternative history of education and literacy onto their walls. The use of Ol-Chiki, the references to Raghunath Murmu and discourses around Ol-Chiki, as well as a reinterpretation of the institution itself through the use of multiple scripts in direct juxtaposition to the surfaces of the classroom buildings creates a visual transcursive and dialogic constellation, shot through with the disjunctures elucidated by GPS and MH in the previous section.

### *The classrooms*

*Surface 1: plaque outside the staff room, administrative building (Eastern Brahmi script)*



As GPS notes, the patronage of schools by wealthy elite and political leaders was a crucial way of garnering political power in rural areas. As a result, the buildings of rural schools

(including the hostels) are filled with plaques of one kind or another. For instance, like all the other plaques outside classrooms (as well as all other official school titles), the plaque on Surface 1 is rendered in an official variety of Bengali, mentioning on the top the “Paschim Bangla Shikhasachiv” or the official secretary of the West Bengal department of education, who inaugurated this teacher's room for the Jhilimili Kalyan Niketan School. Not only do these plaques link the school with the official state ministries, but they also link them with particular individuals (all of whom are attached to the Communist Party). These plaques appear throughout the school grounds, and delineate the school space from the rest of the bazaar, in which the school, though functioning in part through local governance, is indexically connected to the metropolitan nodes of state power. This is accomplished through ritual markings of the school space with the name of the West Bengal state government, individuals of rank within the state government, a formal variety of Bengali used to commemorate this inauguration, and the exclusive use of Bengali script.

When I first arrived at the school, the school buildings were not inscribed except for the occasional graffiti. However around mid-way through the term, the teachers decided to ornament the school buildings, giving each of the classrooms a name and inscribing that name onto the school walls. Each classroom was named after a famous author or scientist, most of whom were figures from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century “Bengali Renaissance.” Rooms were named after scientists such as Prafulla Chandra Ray (see Surface 2, below), Hindu reformers such as Swami Vivekananda, or authors such as Manek Bandhoypadhyay. Most if not all were upper-caste reformers that are key figures in Bengali *bhadralok* history, and whose lives and works were crucial to the modernizing project of Bengali reformers into rural Bengal (as outlined by Ruud). The naming of the rooms, therefore, reveals a Bengali metropolitan bias that

is critical to a state-sponsored and Bengali upper caste/upwardly mobile-class project of reform, modernization, and cultivation. The school, as Ruud shows, has always been a critical node through which this hegemony, which has educational, linguistic, and political components, has been disseminated (if not through education itself, than through schoolteachers, on whose initiative the classrooms were named and painted). In a nod to adivasi history, one of the classrooms was named “Birsa Bhavan” referring to the Birsa Munda uprising in neighboring Jharkhand.<sup>12</sup> Though the Birsa Munda uprising has certainly been important to adivasi politics, and especially in the Jharkhand movement, in this area it has much less relevance than the 1855 Santal Hul, led by Sidhu and Kanhu, which is commemorated by a state-sponsored holiday.



**Surface 2:** classroom building named after famous Bengali chemist Prafulla Chandra Ray (1861-1944). The sign reads “Acharya [teacher] Prafulla Chandra Bhobon [hall]” (Eastern Brahmi script)



## *The hostels*

If one glances slightly to the left of the classrooms, one would see the buildings of the boys' hostel. In fact, unless one asked, the buildings would seem to form a continuation with the school campus, as students continuously shuffled between one and the other. While the hostels in some ways mirror the school buildings, they also project clear marks of distinction and autonomy. Like the school buildings, the hostel buildings are commemorated with plaques, and Bengali script is used to name the hostel buildings after famous people. However students select and inscribe names not from the history of Bengali metropolitan culture, but from a Santali history that has been expressly affiliated in the recent discourse with this new politics of autonomy. While this history is now spoken about in Santali class, even those not taking Santali know these names and their historical import, as it is a commonly told and retold in popular drama and song. Here is an example of the inscription from the Class 8 and 9 hostel building:



***(Lft) Hostel Building 1, Surface 3: “Sidhu-Kanhu Bhobon” (Rt) Hostel Building 2, Surface 4: “Pondit Roghunath Murmu Kokho” (Eastern Brahmi script)***

The plaques displayed here are similar to the plaques seen in the picture of the administrative buildings; they link the hostels to particular moments in the institutional history of the school. The hostels themselves are products of the largesse of the state government, and the plaques let the students who live there know that they are the beneficiaries of proactive educational schemes undertaken by the state bureaucracy and the ruling party. For instance, on hostel building 2, the building was inaugurated by “Sri Upen Kisku” a Santal member of the state assembly from neighboring Raipur district, and, at the time, minister of the Backward Classes department in the Communist government. However, the students have given names to the building which are ignored in the wider Bengali and metropolitan-centered discourse of the school, instead giving names such as “Sidhu Kanhu Bhubon,” indicating the leaders of the 1855 Santal rebellion in northern Jharkhand, Sidhu and Kanhu (Surface 3), and “Raghunath Murmu Kokho,” indicating the founder of the Ol-Chiki script (Surface 4); names that have come from a history that has been posited within the public sphere as part of the Jharkhand movement and general Santali cultural and political assertion.

While this history is not taught in school, except for in the Santali class, it is assumed most students are aware of this history. In the villages, young Santal children learn this history from a young age as the Santal Hul celebrations are commemorated in their villages, and the Ol-Chiki script is celebrated in songs and cultural programs. Naming the hostel after these figures, in the Eastern Brahmi script, marks the hostel as an institutionally legible Santal space, intertwining the history of a Santali politics of autonomy with institutional practices of the school, such as the use of Eastern Brahmi and the naming of buildings to project an alternative history of the discourse of literacy and education.



**Lft-Hostel Building 1, Surface 5: “Bidu Chandan Kin Johar Bidu Chandan” Rt-Hostel Building 1, Surface 6: “Bidda Ayo” (Ol-Chiki script)**

In addition to naming the hostels in Eastern Brahmi with famous figures from Santal history, students have marked up the outside of the building with Ol-Chiki script. Each of the two major hostel buildings of the upper-level classes have Ol-Chiki prominently displayed on the outward entrances, and this graffiti is the only visible Ol-Chiki displays anywhere on the school campus. The decision to place Ol-Chiki was not articulated to me as an explicitly political one, but in my conversations, many of the students expressed the belief that Ol-Chiki was “their” script, and thus should be displayed on “their” buildings. This is in contrast to the surrounding villages I visited, where Ol-Chiki displays on entrances and within the village setting were not very prominent.

In the case of Hostel Building 1, which is where the younger secondary students reside, the Ol-Chiki graffiti clearly indexes the learning and training of Ol-Chiki within ASECA schools. On the left, in prominent Ol-Chiki, is written “Bidhu Chandan Kin Johar Bidhu Chandan” (Bidhu Chandan-dual, salutations Bidhu Chandan). As discussed in Chapter 3, Bidhu and Chandan were famous *bonga* lovers who, in a play written by Raghunath Murmu to spread

the Ol-Chiki script, used Ol-Chiki to secretly communicate their love for one another. At the beginning of most informal ASECA-affiliated Ol-Chiki classes taught in the villages and Santal settlements, students say a prayer to Bidhu and Chandan that begins “Johar Johar Bidhu Chandan” [Salutations to Bidhu and Chandan]. This prayer is also sung every evening at the girls' hostel.<sup>13</sup> Through the spread of Ol-Chiki, Bidhu and Chandan have become *bongas* who are affiliated with literacy in general, but especially with the specific literacy domain iconically indexed by the Ol-Chiki script. On the right is another door upon which Ol-Chiki letters are prominently stenciled, “Bidda. Ayo” or 'Mother Knowledge.' The word “Bidda.” is of Sanskrit origin, from the word *vidya* 'knowledge,' but this type of knowledge refers specifically to one gained through some training, practice, or study. Recently it has come to mean knowledge gained through education. By writing “Mother Knowledge,” students are acknowledging the importance of literacy and educational training.

However, in rendering this in Ol-Chiki script, the students are indexing an educational trajectory that differs from the one promoted by the school. Through the graphic use of the Ol-Chiki script, students are voicing both the ASECA movement and a politics of autonomy, both of which serve to fashion a domain of literacy informed by, but distinct from the metropolitan-based literacy that dominates educational training. It is these politics, and the zones of transcourse in which they operate, which have resulted in the eventual (and reluctant) institution of Santali-language instruction within the school. Yet the “Ol-Chiki” class is far from competing



*Figure 5.1 Hostel Building 1 from the outside (Boys, classes 7-8-9),*

on an equal level with Bengali or English, and the politics that inform the teaching and learning of Ol-Chiki are subordinated to other political and educational agendas within the institution. Yet in the hostels, the students, who are all young adolescents, while simultaneously inculcated in the literacy culture of dominant castes, Bengali, and metropolitan culture, are also independently creating spaces that semiotically align the institutional space of the school to the political and cultural movements in the villages and communities where they reside. Thus, students in part construct the school as a node of prestige despite institutional policy.



*The doors of Hostel Building 2 (Classes 10-11-12), Lft-Surface 7 (Roman and Ol-Chiki scripts), Rt-top-Surface 8 (Roman script), Rt bottom-Surface 9 (Ol-Chiki script)*

The ornamentation of entrances and thresholds are important features in constituting material connections between dwellings across space. Many Santals decorate their houses with the name of the sub-clan, or the forts of their sub-clan, and some do it in Ol-Chiki script<sup>14</sup>. In Hostel Building 2, which houses upper-level students (classes 10,11,12), students decided to

decorate the entryways with combinations of Ol-Chiki and Roman scripts both as a way of invitation to guests as well as to inscribe the hostel space in such a way to index the various Santali-specific scales discussed previously. For instance, in the adjacent surfaces 7 and 8, the combination of Ol-Chiki and Roman echo the combinations that were seen in the bazaar that scaled the Santali language as extending beyond conceptions of local or regional. On the top of Hostel Building B, the students have inscribed “welcome” in English (see photo below), inviting visitors into the hostel space, while underneath, on the doors, they have written “Sagun Daram” [welcome] in Santali-Ol-Chiki on Surface 7, and “Sagun Daram” in Santali-Roman on Surface 8. Hence we have an English translation, as well as non-standard Roman Santali<sup>15</sup> and Ol-Chiki Santali combination all on the doors. The one script that is absent from this is the Eastern Brahmi script, which the students have omitted in marking the doors. Surface 9 reads “Jhilimili” in Ol-Chiki script, the name of the village, and also the name of the high school. The doors form a counter-point to the signage and inscriptional practices in the school, where the Eastern Brahmi script is primary on all markers of affiliation, and the Roman script is secondary. The signs and graffiti, and in particular the script which these inscriptions employ, comprise the material architecture of the zone of transcourse, cultivated in spaces such as the bazaar or political rallies, and then recontextualized as part of an institutional discourse outside the hostel surfaces by the students themselves.

In fact, the graffiti on the hostel grounds reveals an ever more intensifying use of Ol-Chiki, and the use of Roman, while continued, is minimized. This is likely due to the fact that some of the students are becoming increasingly proficient in reading and writing Ol-Chiki due to the Santali subject now taught in school, and this extends to the decorations of the hostel itself. Due to this ever-increasing presence of Ol-Chiki in their living space, as I learned through my

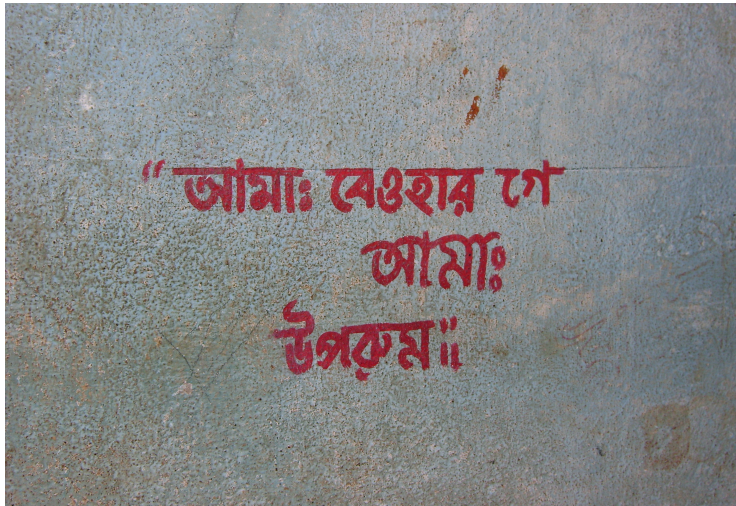
conversations with the students, Santal students who chose not to take Santali, and were not proficient into Ol-Chiki, were also coming to increasingly identify with the script and begin learning it out of the classroom. Both in Hostel 1 and Hostel 2, the entrance into the hostel is importantly marked or inscribed with Ol-Chiki (or Ol-Chiki/Roman combinations). One may recall how Bijoy Besra, the Santal teacher who was educating children at his home, called GPS through the window, asking him in Bengali, “Hey will you write?” For him, as he was called into education, or “literacy,” it was mediated through a Bengali address. Now, as young students enter the hostel from different villages to study and educate themselves, they are greeted with signs and markers in Ol-Chiki script.

While Ol-Chiki, though taught as part of the curriculum, still has only a marginal position within the school itself, it occupies a preeminent position on the outer hostel surfaces. The increasing importance given to Ol-Chiki by the students themselves in one way may explain the dramatic rise in numbers of students opting for Santali as a second language in the school. Many older Santal students whom I talked with chose not to opt for Santali in part because they were educated their whole life in Bengali and making the move to learning a new (schooled) language from class 9 would be difficult. In addition, all Santal students were also fluent speakers in Bengali, and preferred the Eastern Brahmi script even when writing Santali. Yet the number of younger students taking Santali has risen to over 100 in class 9 alone. This can be attributed to many things, including expanded career opportunities as state support of Santali increases under political pressure. Yet, the rise in student enthusiasm, evident both in increasing enrollments as well as the widespread visibility of in particular Ol-Chiki on the hostel surfaces also reveals a different constellation for what constitutes “literacy” for a contemporary Santal student, inscribed on the school space not by administrators or teachers, but by students themselves, who



are connecting their experience of education within the school to the politics of autonomy without.

*Hostel 2, Surface 10 (lft, E. Brahmi), Surface 11 (rt, E. Brahmi), Surface 12 (bottom, E. Brahmi) with Class 11 students*



While on the doors and outer walls of the hostel Ol-Chiki and Roman were the preferred and most prominent scripts, within the hostel itself, Eastern Brahmi-Santali was still seen throughout the interiors of hostel space, and among private communications between the students. Even in Santali class, use of Eastern Brahmi to write Santali was very common; during my time sitting in on Santali class, most of the students were writing their notes in Eastern Brahmi and using Eastern Brahmi script-textbooks, even though all new textbooks were printed in Ol-Chiki. One could write in Eastern Brahmi for the exams, exam questions were written in both Ol-Chiki and Bengali scripts (see appendix B), and either script was acceptable for writing all exams and school assignments. In addition, the use of Eastern Brahmi to write Santali was widespread among communications between the students. I found this out when I received permission by the hostel superintendent to pickup some of the trash students would throw out onto the hostel grounds (the grounds were covered in discarded paper, notebooks, etc.) Much of this trash was Santali-language written material such as personal notes (like love letters) and song transcriptions. I even saw some parts of dramas written as first drafts. However almost all this material was in Eastern Brahmi-Santali, except for school assignments, some of which were in Ol-Chiki.

Thus, even if the medium of Ol-Chiki evoked enthusiasm and identification, an examination of everyday writing at the school showed the script as linked with an institutionalized agenda for education rather than everyday writing and communication, while Eastern Brahmi was the script used for most literary production and letter writing among the students. While Santali in Eastern Brahmi did not make much of an appearance on the outer hostel surfaces, it appeared on the inner-surfaces, and like in surface 10, which is on a wall facing the students, or surface 11, which is on a stool. Surface 10 reads *amak' beoharge amak'*

*uprum* 'your behavior is your identity' while surface 11 reads *dulaḡ begor dulaḡ okoye ema-m* 'without [giving] love who will give you love?' These are popular proverbs that circulate and are inscribed for inspiration among the students.

Another notable display of Eastern Brahmi script within the hostel is the displays of Santali-language drama posters taken from the bazaar. For example, in Surface 12, the students (some of whom are pictured above) took down posters of Santali dramas from the bazaar and placed them in their room. These drama posters, all written in Eastern Brahmi, formed the backdrop to their room. As we saw in the previous chapter, these posters are ubiquitous in the bazaar, and they index through their use of poetic Santali as well as Bengali script, narratives of the village and the social relations that occur there. They also are central sites in the socialization of a literary and political consciousness among Santals, indexing the Santali performance space. These students, even while they are studying, are fans and followers of drama performances, are always on the lookout for posters in the bazaar and attending dramas in villages nearby the school. In fact, on the few occasions I watched dramas, many of which last all night, I would see students from the hostel and school there in attendance, after which they would, dreary-eyed, cycle back to attend that morning's class. The drama posters and Eastern Brahmi-script proverbs evoke sites of Santali-language socialization that are not affiliated with Ol-Chiki script, but still form part of a larger domain of language and literacy that are learned outside the institution. In everyday writing practices at the school, Santali in the Eastern Brahmi-script forms the majority of Santali-language text artifacts produced. Yet, as part of a public presentation, these are given less prominence on the outer hostile surfaces than Ol-Chiki and Roman scripts. Yet the evocation of these sites, and incorporation of them into the hostel space show socialization sites where the hegemony of Ol-Chiki still does not reach.

*Hostel Building 2, Figure 5.2 from the outside [WELCOME in Roman letters stenciled across the top]*



*Hostel Building 2, surface 13: picture of Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, leftover from a school program*



In this section, I have tried to show the school space as one where competing hegemonies interact. The school thus sits at the node of numerous cross-cutting networks and discourses. On the classroom side, the institutional bureaucratic apparatus of the state and the upper-caste/class

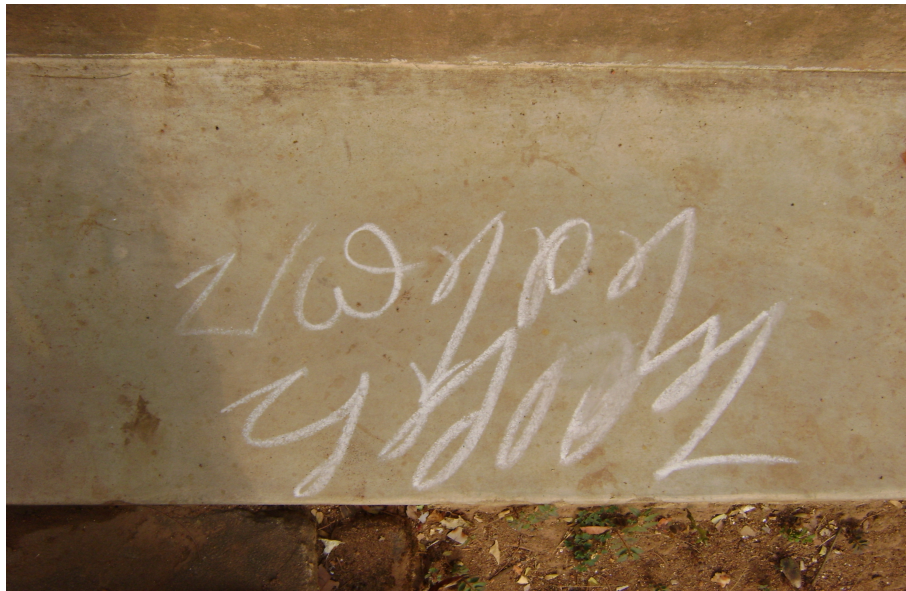
politics of culture promoted by the state, political parties, and the educated sections of Bengali rural society characterize preeminently the institution. The importance of the school and the power of school teachers have derived from its role in Bengali politics, in which socialization is indexically anchored to a metropolitan *bhadralok* society, even though school personnel are primarily from rural backgrounds. The importance of learning English and Bengali language, and the curricula are both constructed through this dominant discourse of literacy. Santali language instruction on the other hand was forcibly made as part of the curriculum through a series of political struggles, and was also resisted by school authorities. Yet, in the end Santali language instruction was accepted into the school, and ASECA-trained teachers were hired. However, as I found out later while negotiating my own position as a researcher in the village, the Santali teachers and the position of Santali-language instruction remains a sensitive and politicized issue.

On the other side of the school are the hostels, in which mostly Santal students reside. While it is clear that the hostels are connected to the institutional apparatus of the school (by features such as plaques marking their institutional character), the students themselves have collectively created the hostels as spaces of alternative socialization. Whether one studies Santali or not, the entryways and walls of the hostels are replete with Ol-Chiki inscriptions. These inscriptions point to the alternative institutions developed outside the school by organizations such as ASECA, which have promoted Ol-Chiki. Prayers to Bidhu-Chandan, exhortations to study properly, inscriptions that speak to visitors, as well as those that hearken to the students' own sense of institutional belonging (in the inscription that says “Jhilimili” for instance) are displayed prominently. Inside the hostels as well we see proverbs in both Bengali-script and Ol-Chiki-Santali as well as Santali-language text artifacts taken from the bazaar and

recontextualized within the hostel quarters. The hostel experience for many students is a critical part of coming to school, as the majority of their time is spent in the hostels with other students from different villages throughout the area; students they may have never met otherwise. Close friendships are also formed there in the hostels. Consequently, though the school as an institution subordinates Santali language instruction and Ol-Chiki script in its official capacities, the socialization into the networks of Santali literacy intensifies as children come to school, particularly for the ones who stay in the hostels.<sup>16</sup>

Yet even these hegemonies are always partial and dialogic, rendering the school as zone of transcourse. Local school authorities had to accept Ol-Chiki instruction under sustained political pressure, just as Santal students have to accept Bengali metropolitan hegemony as part of their trajectory towards educated citizens. No school programs revolve around the celebration of Santali culture-heroes, but Bengali Renaissance figures such as Rabindranath Tagore, one of the cornerstones of the Bengali metropolitan hegemony that is critical to institutionalized education in West Bengal, is often celebrated. For instance, as the school celebrated the Saraswati puja, the celebration to the Hindu-Brahmanical goddess of learning, a picture of Rabindranath Tagore was brought into the hostel and remained there, celebrated by students as well (Surface 13, above). In addition, the Santali language curriculum includes numerous translated short stories by Rabindranath Tagore, Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay, and other famous mostly nineteenth century Bengali authors. Learning Santali in school remains, in part, learning Bengali metropolitan culture (albeit in translation), and the inequality is corroborated by the fact that there are no Santali authors included in translation in the Bengali or English-language syllabus. Hence, though the introduction of the Ol-Chiki script, and the enthusiasm to inscribe Ol-Chiki within school spaces poses a visual challenge to this hierarchy, student

participation in school-organized programs as well as the necessities to complete the syllabus reinforces institutional hierarchies. This is brought into the hostel space as well, where traces of this hegemony, such as the picture of Rabindranath Tagore, intermingle with Ol-Chiki inscriptions and references to Santali culture heroes such as Raghunath Murmu.



*Surface 14: the word “Jhilimili” (the name of the high school, and village) scrawled by a student in Ol-Chiki script in the entranceway to the headmaster's office and teachers' staff room.*

## **Conclusion**

In talking with an elderly man from the village about GPS's age, I asked him when he was younger if he ever thought Santali would be used for writing, and he responded immediately, “not even in my dreams.” This man went on to write songs in Santali, and even invent his own script (Hoḍ Ol, see chapter 3). Walking on the school grounds, an English teacher and Bengali-speaking Vaishnav by caste, told me when we were discussing my own research work, that he never saw students so excited as the Santal students are at this school about their “script.” Indeed, a glance around the school campus, looking at graffiti scrawled by students on the pathways, in addition to the decorations of the hostel walls makes this evident,

both for Santals and non-Santals such as the schoolteacher. Writing has been embraced by Santal students; no longer the stuff of dreams but everyday practice, and writing in Ol-Chiki script, which for many Santals in the neighboring villages is still unreadable, has become ubiquitous on the school grounds.

In this chapter, I have attempted to examine the changes in terms of hegemony, looking at how institutions such as the school sit at the cusp of multiple competing hegemonies. Drawing on the work of Woolard, Silverstein, and Kelly and Kaplan, I have argued that the school is not a privileged site of hegemonic dissemination; rather it functions as a transcursive node, cut through by multiple economies and networks of prestige. Hence, in order to understand the school we must look at how values attached to literacy, language, and script are created in practices and political mobilization outside the school, and how these values dialogically come to shape the curriculum. Following Ruud, I argue that the school became a politicized site during the rise of Communist politics in rural Bengal, where an expansion in education and a consolidation of Bengali metropolitan politics accompanied a program of reform by educated rural citizens (mostly who were schoolteachers) and Communist mobilization. Hence the school was one point in a network which included party, local elected bodies such as the panchayat and the school managing committee, and the state bureaucracy, all of which functioned to solidify Communist control in the area. The politics that undergirded this hegemony was one not only of class struggle, but also of a Bengali metropolitan culture through which the party, and educated rural reformers such as schoolteachers, attempted to incorporate Bengali rural society into this hegemony.

Affirmative action policies ensured however that Santals were to a minimal level represented in the school. I then offer a picture of how a politics of autonomy was cultivated



through specifically Santal encounters with education. Using the narrative of an elderly schoolteacher, and famous Santali author and Jharkhand party activist, I show how Santal encounters with literacy were originally not through the state, but through class relations within the village itself. GPS learns how to read and write by learning from rich Santals in the village, who at the time spoke a Bengali that distinguished them as wealthy, upper-class, and educated subjects. GPS was interpellated into this mode and drawn into this trajectory, which eventually resulted in his own position as a government schoolteacher, once the government established schools in his area.

Yet though GPS never studied Santali (only Bengali and Hindi), and never taught in Santali, he was of a generation that actively wrote and disseminated a modernization message in Santali. This was primarily done through songs, and then publishing in state-sponsored magazines. In addition, he became involved in Jharkhand party politics (which he has continued up until today), and later, actively played a role in the propagation of Ol-Chiki script. Unlike when he was growing up, where speaking and writing Bengali was a mark of class distinction, as a salaried schoolteacher during this time, class distinction became about articulating a politics of autonomy that included Santali-language learning and Jharkhand. Though these teachers were firmly ensconced in the governmental apparatus, in their public activities they promoted an oppositional politics through literary activities, political organization, and the establishment of alternative institutional structures (like ASECA or local Santal clubs focusing on literature or culture). GPS emphasizes that the government has “their” schools, but it is doubtful they will ever help “us” (*abo'we-inc'*). The education of the modern Santali subject, according to GPS, followed a trajectory distinct from the institutional trajectory of schooled education (in Bengali), the latter of which he himself was an enabler.

On the one hand, having been socialized through the school constitutes a person as “educated.” Yet the very discourse of education as I have shown is subject to contestation, and at the school, unlike in other government institutions, that contestation occurs locally. This is why the school is an interesting site of analysis, for in it one can see how the competing, partial hegemonies that comprise that public sphere of a village manifest themselves within an institutional setting. Both GPS and MH used their institutional privilege to help cultivate a certain politics among the Santals with which they lived, and these politics, over a span of a generation, led to Santals demanding the institution of Ol-Chiki-Santali instruction at the school. Current Santali teachers, like BH, were among those who advocated for the institution of Ol-Chiki at the state level, even petitioning the courts to demand implementation of state initiatives passed to support Santali instruction in Ol-Chiki. Yet as we see, court orders or bureaucratic demands were not enough to implement Santali language instruction. The school was and is subject to more than bureaucracy, but responds to local politics as well. The resistance to Santali language instruction was not simply a resistance to teaching of a “language,” but to continue and maintain a certain caste-Hindu dominance at the school. Only through concerted local political action, such as the intimidation of school authorities, surrounding the school, preventing daily functioning of activities, and eventually calling in the police, did Santali-language instruction begin.

Even then however, Santali-language instruction remains a tenuous part of administrative and curricular practices. It is clearly subordinate in a hegemony in which metropolitan Bengali literature and history (and this includes English instruction as well) are emphasized. The naming of the buildings, the programs celebrated by the school, and even the Santali-language syllabus illustrate this. Yet the institution is not just comprised of teachers, curricula, and administration,

but mostly of students. As demonstrated, they arrive at the campus socialized in discourses of literacy which had been cultivated in their villages at various cultural programs, celebrations, and through, in some cases, village-level instruction in the Ol-Chiki script. With the addition of Santali-language instruction in the school, the students are emboldened to instantiate these alternative discourses on the school grounds, constructing their hostel spaces as transcursive sites of emanation, where Santali-Ol Chiki is primary, but which also comprises of Santali-Bengali and Santali-Roman as well. Bengali metropolitan culture does have a place, though it is more peripheral. As these politics become situated and concentrated, the students are transforming the institutional site, altering its emanative potential. While the students are becoming educated, they also construct the meanings of education, and part of that construction is Ol-Chiki script. Thus, as I said before, students who do not know Ol-Chiki, or non-Santal students who live in the hostels, are interpellated by these inscriptions and the hegemonic trajectories they index, much in the same way GPS was interpellated by the schoolteacher's call to literacy.

Institutional sites exist between multiple sites of practice, and thus emanations occur in transcourse, where values associated with one site are able to transform those occurring in another site through the circulation of both people and semiotic material (such as linguistic and graphic signs). Institutions such as the school are important in that they act as conduits at many analytical levels, including the labor market. Passing through school is an essential part of increasing ones chances at finding employment, at gaining the requisite literacy skills to navigate bureaucracy, and also becoming a reformed, educated, and cultivated citizen. However, each of these markers of prestige is subject to politics that exist, in an unequal relation, outside their determinate domains. For instance, Santali-language activism created the posts of Santali teachers, and these posts have steadily been increasing, such that studying Santali does not limit

one's labor prospects (although it does more than say studying Bengali or English). Within Santali communities currently there is a respect for one who knows “Ol-Chiki,” such that for many, knowledge of Ol-Chiki constitutes “literacy” in Santali.<sup>17</sup> This is a product both of political activism that sought to link the learning of Ol-Chiki script with a politics of autonomy, as well as the institutionalization of Ol-Chiki at school and the embracing of the script by students at the school. Thus, when students come back to their communities, it is a matter of pride that they have proficiency in the Ol-Chiki script.

Finally, the market of class distinction that, since GPS's childhood, was in part constructed by knowledge of literate writing in the dominant register (Bengali) has changed, such that knowledge of Santali and the Ol-Chiki script has become part of becoming a cultivated/educated subject<sup>18</sup>. This was the goal of activists like GPS, actualized by the way in which Santali language and Ol-Chiki script are seen as critical to education and learning by the students themselves, and illustrated by the visual-graphic examination of their hostel spaces. While the school has been an important institutional site that emanates discourse in dialogic ways, in the following chapter, I will examine the circulatory networks in which these discourses spread. To pay attention to how Santali-language media and the circulation of script-forms constructs the networks through which hegemonic practices dialogically interact, one can see how cultural prestige is cultivated and transformed.

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<sup>1</sup> See Rudolph and Rudolph, eds. (1971) on the nexus of education and politics in India, for a more recent account, Ladousa (2014).

<sup>2</sup> At the level of the study of language and linguistic structure, Hill and Hill (1986) have, also following a Bakhtinian approach, called this “translinguistics;” where form, voice, and power have multiple sites and exist in dialogical relations with one another in the utterances of indigenous Mexicano speakers. (Also see Hill 1985, 1995 or for an overview Mannheim and Tedlock 1995)

<sup>3</sup> The recourse to the song recalls the discussion of enec’-seren as the bulwark of an alternative domain of Santal literacy, with ideologies of education and literacy existing in a constellation with Santal performance performances; see chapter 2 of this dissertation.

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<sup>4</sup> The debates around ‘dancing’ and social movements rising up by newly educated students was a general feature of ‘social reform’ in the the 70’s and 80’s. The senior writer KB (mentioned in Chapter 2) told me that during his high school and early college years he and other Santali students were on the forefront of agitating to shut down popular region-wide festivals (*pata*) such as the one at Jhilimili, which, ironically, were venues where Santali literary production and Jharkhand movement politics spread the most through songs. Most people of KB and MH’s generation no longer hold this attitude toward village festivals, although older writers like GPS obviously still do.

<sup>5</sup> For a recent example of the elite vs. non-elite adivasi and its relation to the politics of indigeneity and “Jharkhand” see Ghosh (2006) where he explores this question in relation to transnational and state discourses as well as ongoing social movements.

<sup>6</sup> A generation also represented by people like Raghunath Murmu, the inventor of Ol-Chiki script, Ramchand Murmu, the major poet of the Santali language, Sarada Prasad Kisku, a mentor to people like MH, and others. The interview with GPS, though different in the specifics, is an illustrative case of how many teachers came to embrace Santali literary cultural production as they continued to work within educational institutions.

<sup>7</sup> This generation includes editors like KM (Chapter 3), writers like KB (Chapter 2), as well as many others.

<sup>8</sup> Of course the reasons for this was never entirely clear; perhaps the teacher felt targeted, monitored, or evaluated, which all are understandable reactions when a foreign researcher is sitting, recording, and transcribing your daily classroom interaction. However, that does not mitigate the fact that the teaching of Santali itself was a politically fraught enterprise, and the larger school was under pressure and scrutiny from the community due to declining performance standards.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 4, example 1 for a photo of a banner and brief description of this organization’s local activities

<sup>10</sup> The state organ which oversees the placement and recruitment of public school teachers for higher secondary education

<sup>11</sup> The relation between Santals, a politically and economically dominant scheduled tribe community and the Kherias is fraught, and *adivasi* and Jharkhand discourse, while empowering Santals has also disempowered Kherias. In Jhilimili, like in other places in the Jangal Mahals, Kherias though populous were invisible, living in the margins and having very little political voice. For more on these politics (as manifested in forest rights campaigns) in the adjacent area of Jhargram see Sivaramakrishnan (2000).

<sup>12</sup> While I am not sure, I suspect that this was likely because one of the teachers was inspired by a short story on the Munda uprising written by a famous Bengali writer, Mahashweta Devi, of which the students performed a play.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 3

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 4, surface T

<sup>15</sup> By non-standard I do not mean a reference to a standardized language; instead I am talking about the standard Santali Roman script developed by missionaries and used in Santali-Roman publications, etc.

<sup>16</sup> I was made aware of this through informal conversations with students. In addition, some writers have told me that it was actually in the hostels where they first became aware of “Santali” as a literary and political object, including its graphic manifestations. One well-known writer, who is also a supporter of Ol-Chiki, told me that he did not know even how to speak Santali that well since he grew up in a primarily Bengali-speaking village until he entered hostel life.

<sup>17</sup> On many occasions I was considered more “educated” by Santals because I knew how to read and write Ol-Chiki, even though my competence, obviously was at a much lower level

<sup>18</sup> Whereas before people believed that knowing Santali would limit chances at employements, during my time I was starting to hear stories that even caste-Hindu Bengali employers would expect Santals to “know their language” and if not, that Santals should feel ashamed. Whether these stories are accurate or not is unknown, but what it points to is a general shift in attitudes by Santals themselves on the relation between knowledge of their language, script, and labor markets.

## Chapter 6

### **Circulating scripts, creating networks: script-code constellations in Santali-language media**

In charting how script-code constellations are constructed and disseminated among both Santals and non-Santals, I have failed thus far to analyze the production and consumption of circulating text artifacts. In the first chapter, I deliberately subordinated an analysis of the "text-artifact" to practices of performance, arguing that encounters with text artifacts must be seen in concert with the socialization of Santali performance. The previous chapters, while emphasizing practices of inscription and graphic emplacement on built surfaces have not provided an account of the ways in which these styles and emplacements are artifactualized, exchanged, and circulated, and how these processes configure new constellations over space and time. In this chapter, therefore, I turn attention to what could be broadly called Santali-language "media:" newspapers and literary magazines that link generations of Santali-readers within political networks, binding them together through a variety of social vectors, including region, religion, and institutional authority. I suggest that an analysis of these text-artifacts, and particularly the ways in which script and code are selectively deployed, reveals a social field which is both connected and fractured, illuminating shifting political solidarities and alignments among different writers, editors, and readers of Santali-language material, as well as showing how, within specific networks, the politics of autonomy are both sustained and transformed.

The emphasis on this chapter will particularly be on print media. I choose print media in part because other media (such as drama posters and Santali-language film) have been discussed

in earlier chapters. In addition, the printed artifact was and continues to be one of the major vehicles for the original entextualization of the Santali language in script-form, and remains one of the primary forums where conflicts around script-code alignment, and contrasting ideas of territory, autonomy, and literacy that underlie these alignments, manifest themselves. I chart how certain script-code constellations are materialized into circulating text-artifacts, and how these objects are taken up in larger networks of semiotic mediation. I therefore do not view "media" or "media practice" as an independent domain, but as a field of circulation and mediation. Consequently, I aim to situate this field, through an examination of printed text-artifacts and how they are produced, exchanged, read, and recontextualized, in concert with other semiotic networks outlined in previous chapters. These entangled networks stretch from the performance spaces in Santali villages, to the walls of village bazaars and school hostels, in which conceptions of Santali-language literacy and ideas of autonomy are cultivated. In this chapter, I claim that these networks are sustained through the objectification of script-code constellations within a broad range of text-artifacts that are then circulated, linking these constellations with persons and communities through practices of exchange.

### **Artifactualization-Circulation-Exchange**

When I first went to Calcutta for a Bengali-language immersion program in 2007, I started to take elementary Santali lessons on the side with a retired professor of linguistics who had worked on Santali and had helped produce a teaching manual. The first day I met with him, he offered me a variety of magazines written in different scripts, saying that West Bengal had the most Santali-language publications, and most of these were written in the Bengali or Roman script. He suggested the lack of media in Ol-Chiki as an argument against why Ol-Chiki should not be adopted. Later, when I visited a tribal-language bookstore, I discovered numerous

magazines in all scripts, but I also found that the proprietors had made a special attempt at stocking books and a few magazines in Ol-Chiki as well. During that brief summer, I procured magazines and books from all parts of the Santali-speaking area, including northern and southeastern West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar, and Assam. My first encounter with Santali occurred through text artifacts written in a plethora of scripts, coinciding with my interest in exploring and analyzing practices of writing and script. During my second visit, in which I undertook pre-fieldwork research, when I said I was interested in learning Santali, I was first introduced to a number of magazine editors, writers, and publishers (of both books and magazines and journals) all in Calcutta and nearby suburbs. Every time I met someone, I was given numerous copies of magazines, books, and newspapers, each revealing different script-code alignments, though all offered to me as examples of Santali-language media.

As my first, and most important, relationships were with those involved in the production of Santali-language text-artifacts, and as I saw this as a primary site for the contestation over orthography and script, naturally I viewed the domain of "media" as playing an important, if not primary, role in my project. Yet, when I left the urban space of Calcutta and began research in the rural areas of southeast West Bengal, I realized that even though there were numerous (if not more) people involved in the production and dissemination of media, and that these processes could not be understood except in relation to other communicative practices. These practices include Santali genred performance, which has been critical in the articulation of both Santali "literacy" and the spread of independent scripts such as Ol-Chiki (chaps 2, 3), as well as graphic inscriptions on built environments (chapter 4, 5). Linguistic anthropologists studying media have long argued that one cannot examine how media circulates apart from understanding the way these objectified discourses interact with a wide range of other communicative practices.



For instance, Spitulnik (1996) argues in her study of Zambian radio of the importance of understanding how mass mediated discourses and everyday interaction co-construct each other through the tracking of the phrase “Hello, Kitwe.” Gershon (2010), following the literature on language ideologies, has coined the term “media ideology” in order to account for how people’s beliefs about media shape how people construct, consume, and deploy media objects and forms. Agha (2011) reconceives the term “media” in terms of “mediatization,” which “link[s] processes of communication to processes of commoditization” (163). He suggests, “mediatization” exists only within larger networks of “semiotic mediation” such that the “messages conveyed by mediatized objects are routinely recontextualized into non-mediatized forms of semiotic mediation” (164).

In these formulations, “media” itself is not a site of study, nor are there assumptions about a producer/consumer binary which structures the media interaction. Rather, what is called “media” is the result of interlinked semiotic processes of circulation, artifactualization, and exchange that delineate specific constellations that can be broadly grouped within the domain of “media.” In this chapter, I will attempt to chart a “biography” (Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986) of these artifactual constellations, and look at the “assemblages” (Latour 2005) of people, objects, and scripts that comprise the networks that sustain these artifacts’ production and dissemination. I will also suggest that the processes by which communicative practices are artifactualized<sup>1</sup> often vary according to genre, which in the case of Santali, fall along the lines of “news” or the “literary-cultural journal.” The genres through which Santali-language are rendered as media-objects lie at the intertextual intersection between more general conceptions of what constitutes a media form, political discourses around the objectification of language and script, as well as the specific networks within which these objects circulate. I examine how these

genres are both delineated and contested by attending to the metadiscursive discussions of participants around these media artifacts as well as by detailing the distinct formal and material properties of the artifacts themselves, including the various alignments of script and code.

In chapter four, I discussed the growth of digital technology and how Santali video films and music disks, as circulating commodities, serve to construct the space of the bazaar through the visibility of their packaging and display in particular. I failed to mention print media because on the one hand the circulation of printed artifacts, such as magazines and newspapers, are not as visible on the surfaces of the bazaar. Yet on the other hand, describing the distinct pathways of the circulation of these media, their long and important history in the development of Santali scripts and literacy projects, as well as the way they are taken up in explicitly politicized and ideological projects, requires separate treatment. Moreover, the continued growth of print media in languages such as Santali, which do not have comparable state-commitment of resources or a mass-media market like other dominant languages, in an age where digital technologies proliferate, also demands more detailed exploration. In fact, what I noticed about these media, both when documenting the history of the emergence of Santali-language media artifacts as well as the contemporary practices around them was the importance they served in mediating exchange relationships. Unlike video films or music disks, print media had a certain propensity to be exchanged, often for little or no money, and these artifacts had a special role in mediating the building of institutional and political networks among groups of Santals, and aligning persons across space and generation. The special way in which these media artifactualize script-code constellations and then circulate in exchange relationships is important when discussing the ways in which discourses of autonomy spread.

## **Networks of exchange: scripts, states, and artifactual histories**

The explosion of print media in both Europe and its colonies is often linked to the phenomenon of "print-capitalism." In fact, according to the famous formulation by Anderson (1991), the origins of nationalism lie in the "explosive interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communication (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity" (43). The capitalist mode of production gave rise to the drive to "produce" news and information as a saleable commodity, and market that commodity for consumption. According to Anderson's model, the commodification of print both presupposed and entailed a "monoglot-reading public" (43) which would consume the news, and, in doing so, develop something akin to a national imaginary. "Print-capitalism" therefore provided the ideological ground that linked an individual to a state, while also positioning individuals within markets. Analytically, the study of print-capitalism and media markets more generally, has understood the interaction between media-objects and people along a market-based binary between producer and consumer. In Anderson's model, the "cultural roots" of nationalism lie within the process of consumption, by which monoglot publics, who are all engaged in the process of consuming single-language news within a given territory, begin to see themselves as a collective.

In contrast, Jeffrey's study of the explosion of Indian print media between 1970-2000 in multiple languages (Jeffrey 2000) highlights how consuming publics themselves are actually quite diverse, but the unity arises within the class of producers, most of whom, though they write and produce in different languages, are aligned with the "national elite" (9). They excelled, Jeffrey argues, in localizing national agendas through the production of print, and thus newspapers often maintained close alliances with the national and regional state as well as

regional political parties, even as they marketed themselves as offering an independent and adversarial voice.

Recent case studies have reassessed the presumed modes of reading (reception), questioning the relation between the production and circulation of media and extant national territories. For instance, in describing the coverage of the Ram Janmabhumi movement in north India in the early 1990's, when Hindu right-wing organizations were organizing to destroy a centuries-old mosque and build a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Ram on its site, Rajagopal (2001) argues that Hindi-language and English-language media constituted a "split public," in which both producers' and consumers' values and expectations of what constitutes "news" were fundamentally shaped by different values and expectations. While the coverage of the Hindu right movement was much more diverse in the Hindi-language media, taking seriously the cultural and religious claims of the movement, the English-language press, according to Rajagopal, focused on the movement through a primarily "political and legal" lens, viewing it as an aberration, and obscuring how the movement gained legitimacy and mobilized its vast following.

While Rajagopal's analysis of the "split public" relies on an intrinsic divide between denotational "languages" (Hindi/English), Cody's discussion of two Tamil-language newspapers presents how linguistic organization of media reveals distinction even within a single linguistic code (Cody 2009). Cody suggests that even within the "Tamil-language" press, papers differ both in material form, as well as the ways the form interacts with the pathways of circulation, structuring how audiences engage with these papers. One paper, Cody suggests, presents a more conversational style as well as numerous pictures and short, brusque headlines, while the other presents a quasi-standard variety of "low" Tamil, longer headlines, and literary

supplements. The former paper is supposed to be read aloud, and circulates primarily in public spaces, while the latter paper is intended to be read silently at home. Cody argues that the material form of these papers in concert with their circulatory pathways help constitute their respective audiences, who differ not only in expectations of what constitutes "news," and how it should be read, but also along lines of class and gender.

However to always define an audience through readership may be misleading. While Rajagopal and Cody both discuss "mass" media, whose communicative networks span over vast swaths of territory, and are often the primary sources for "news," in whatever way it is conceived, minority language media plays a much different role than mainstream news-media. For instance, in a study of Buryat-language media in Russia, Graber (2012) argues that most Buryat-speakers receive their news from Russian-language sources. Buryat-language media, which started as a state-sponsored enterprise to incorporate the Buryat-speaking regions into the Soviet Union, has now become a secondary media source, with a dwindling number of speakers proficient in reading and writing the language after decades of Russification. Yet Graber claims that Buryat-language media continues to survive, in part by serving not as an informational source but "as an enregistered emblem of Buryat social personae" (133). The target audiences, Graber suggests, are not the presumed monolingual Buryat speaker-reader, but middle-class readers, mostly speakers of Russian, aspiring to maintain identifications with the language. Buryat-language media thus is not about conveying "information," because if it were, it would have long been subsumed under the much more prevalent Russian-language media. Rather, Graber observes, Buryat-language newspapers circulate alongside Russian-language ones, thus forming a "subset or subnetwork within a larger, multilingual, and increasingly Russian-speaking Buryat people" (134). Graber's work shows how artifacts are evaluated not only according to

differing values of what constitutes news, but also differing values attached to particular registers or linguistic varieties.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, although minority-language media serve very different functions than mass mediated artifacts, they are still construed (by Graber and her journalist consultants) as tokens associated with standard media genres ("newspapers," "magazines," etc.). In multilingual and minority-language settings, the domain of "media" arises at the intersection between genred ideas of media form, and the networks through which these artifacts are circulated and exchanged. For minority-language media, such as Santali, these ideas are taken from encounters both with dominant-language media as well as the networks of Santali-literacy outlined in previous chapters. I hope to show on the one hand the material features of media as well as their pathways of circulation form not just one but multiple subsets of a multilingual, Santali-identified reading public. These subsets are constituted by multiple constellations of script and code, the ideological and intertextual associations between form and specific media genres, and how, notably, these artifacts are exchanged. I will describe three networks of exchange below, and show how these networks emerged at the intersection of state policy and political organization, as well as how the form of media artifacts is related to practices of exchange within these specific networks.

The relation between mediation and networks of exchange is highlighted by the history of publication of Santali-language text artifacts. The first printing press devoted to publishing exclusively in Santali was set up in the late nineteenth century by Norwegian missionaries at the Benagaria mission in what is now Jharkhand. The type was set to a modified Roman script developed by missionary L.O. Skresfrud. The first book, a songbook called *Benagaria Seren' Puthi* (The Benagaria Song Book), was printed in 1871 (Hembrom 2007, 119). The press began

publishing numerous books, including collections of Santal stories, as well as Bibles and hymnals in Santali. Together it also published a broadsheet, *Hođ Hopon ren Peđa* (Santal "Guest"), which allowed the mission to network with its expanding following in villages as far as North Bengal and even Assam. While the term *peđa* directly translates to "guest" it also implies a much deeper relation and set of social practices. *Peđa* is not simply a "guest," but any relation who is settled in a distant place, and the receiving of a *peđa* in one's home or village entails specific rituals of hospitality, often associated with *raška* (communal joy). The magazine circulated along with people active in the mission as they moved back and forth from different Christian settlements throughout the area. In a letter dated August 17, 1900, one of the chief missionaries at Benagaria, a Dane named H.M. Borreson, sent a letter from Benagaria to Baidyanat, a Santal who was leading a group of Christians in Dinajpur, in what is now the border area between West Bengal and Bangladesh. He writes:

Gel turui maha tayom-re marang kulhi duđup nonde hoyok'talea, more hođ in' kolkoa handan' kob galmaraoako...[nuko] dhorom puthiko idi toraoma ar em n'ama...noa songete tinudi "Hođ Hopon-ren Peđa Sakam in' kolam kana jemon ape onđem boehape pađhao jođi...

In the next 16 days we will have a large meeting here, I will send five people over there to talk with [you all] over there [about what happened]. They will bring you some religious books and together I will also send the *Hođ Hopon-ren Peđa* magazine to you [sg] over there so that you [pl] [our] brothers may read it (MS Fol 4190, p. 132 [p.408]).

The letter suggests that like the exchange of religious texts, the exchange of the magazine was viewed as a gift brought about as part of a hospitality relation. The artifact, itself typified as a *peđa* (guest), was taken up in larger networks of the circulation of people and exchange that characterized dispersed institutions such as the Santal mission. In addition to *Hođ Hopon-ren Peđa* (later, in 1922, renamed *Peđa Hođ*) the Catholic Church started publishing a similar magazine *Marsal Tabon* ('Our light') in 1946 [1]. Both of these magazines contained church-

related information, but also literary material, such as poems, essays, and stories. They were each published in the modified Roman script. Consequently, the production and dissemination of Roman-script Santali material, has been central in creating an institutional foundation for the spread of Christianity in Santali-speaking areas.

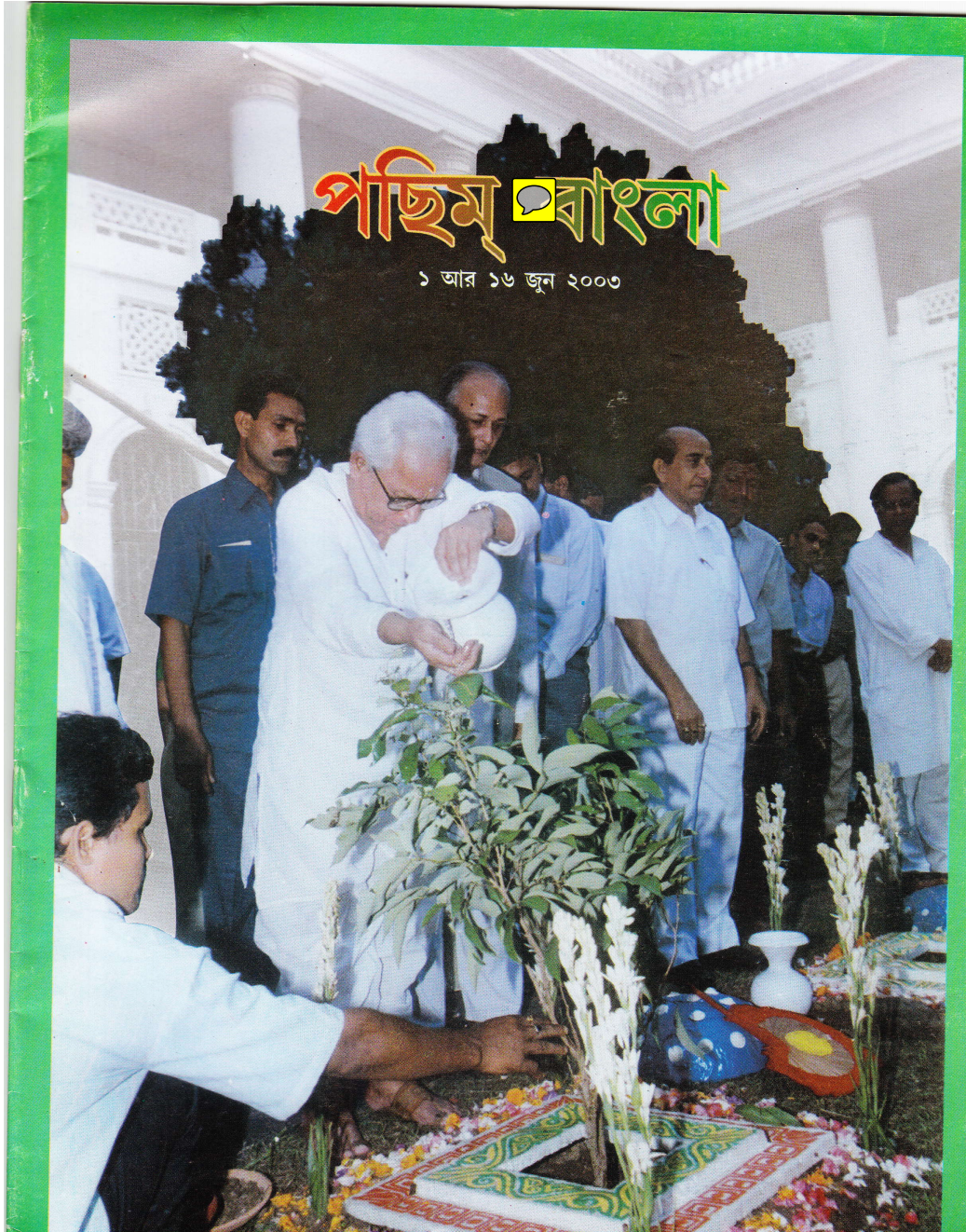
Following Indian independence, the states, like in Graber's discussion of the Soviet Union, made an attempt to reach out to its minority populations through the publication and dissemination of magazines. In 1947, the Bihar government started a Santali-language magazine "*Hoḍ Sombad*" (Santali News) under the editorial leadership of Dr. Domon Sahu Samir. Samir was not a Santal, though he was well versed in Santali and had numerous contacts among Santals in the region, commencing a long line of non-Santal editors of Santali-language publications. The publication on the one hand aimed to promote literary production in Santali while also providing an interface between Santals and the state. Since Hindi in Devanagari script had been proclaimed the official script-language of a multilingual Bihar, *Hoḍ Sombad* was published in a slightly modified Devanagari script (Hembrom 2007, 186). The choice of script and the state-sponsored nature of the publication made it such that the primary circulation was within the state of Bihar, although I had found that writers in Purulia district, West Bengal also had published and read the magazine. In 1956, the West Bengal state government began publishing a similar Santali-language magazine, *Galmarao* (Discussion) in Eastern Brahmi script (Bengali), later to be renamed simply *Pachim Bangla* (West Bengal) (ibid., 216) [2]. In both of these cases, the aim was to draw in a Santali literary and cultural elite into the state sphere through participation in the magazine, while also creating state-sponsored networks for the dissemination Santali-language material in the rural areas in state scripts.

In addition to the state media, beginning from the late 1950's, the movement for





*Figure 6.1: Marsal Tabon (Sahebganj, Dumka Jharkhand)*



*Figure 6.2: Pachim Bangla (Kolkata, West Bengal)*

Jharkhand and the assertion of a distinct domain of Santal literacy, resulted in the formation of numerous small-scale organizations based in rural areas, which created a third major network in which the production and exchange of Santali-language media artifacts took place. These organizations were usually financed by a small elite, and were a way by which newly literate Santals, as well as burgeoning writers (such as GPS, whose life story I discussed in chapter 4), could participate. They also acted as a means for writers to gain prestige and create a local network of literary, linguistic, and politically inclined people throughout different groups of villages. These magazines operated very similarly to the "little magazine," small-scale and alternative Bengali-language publications that were burgeoning both in metropolitan centers such as Calcutta, as well as in district towns throughout West Bengal and neighboring states with large Bengali-reading populations. Little magazines, as Nag (1997) notes in her study of Calcutta-based publications, were "never started with an eye towards business" but "readership" instead is "solicited among intellectual acquaintances and sought to be extended with the help of specific intellectual allies who at least share their political agenda in principle" (112). These magazines rarely made any money, and, as Nag remarks, were often distributed for free without any compensation (*ibid*). They were also characterized by irregular circulation, in which magazines were often discontinued and new ones started depending on the shifting alliances of different members of the collective as well as unreliable sources of funding. Thus, instead of being seen as a saleable commodity, these magazines were produced and exchanged in a way that allowed local organizations to cohere around certain principles, which then fractally conferred prestige upon individuals involved in creating and disseminating these magazines.

Little magazines had flourished in West Bengal since the time of Independence. The rise of the Communist Party and the spread of Left politics, outlined in chapter 5, further increased

the number of Bengali-language little magazines published in West Bengal's rural districts. However, as I argue in chapter 5, Santals responded to the spread of Bengali metropolitan culture by creating their own institutions, which at the same time mirrored those of their Bengali counterparts, yet also were positioned as autonomous from them. Thus, even though Santali was not taught in schools, and had very little infrastructure for literary publication, Santali-language little magazines proliferated in the Santali-speaking area. For instance, as the editor MH told me, in Purulia district, located in southeast West Bengal where I conducted fieldwork, during the 1970's there were around 22 Bengali little magazines in circulation and more than 16 little magazines in Santali. Thus, he told me with great pride, there were almost as many Santali little magazines as there were little magazines in Bengali, quite a feat considering the lack of printed Santali literature and the absence of formal education in the language. These little magazines were likely sustained by both an emergent Santali elite as well as expanding networks of literacy in which performance practices played a crucial role. Like the Bengali magazines Nag discusses, Santali little magazines were often discontinued depending on the formation and breakdown of different communities. Some, if members of the group gained salaried employment or other source of employment, continued for quite some time; sometimes the group split and the number of magazines proliferated. However, in all my conversations with editors, magazines never were able to turn a profit. Yet their publication and distribution, conceived in terms of reciprocal exchange, allowed for the formation and sustenance of local political networks. Consequently, it is no surprise that some of the most active members of Jharkhand political groups, or other indigenous political formations, were magazine editors, contributors, or distributors.

In this section, I have described three networks of exchange that inform the production and circulation of text artifacts in Santali. Within institutions such as Santal missions of the

Northern Churches, magazines were seen in concert with a whole range of practices primarily revolving around connecting various mission groups through the circulation of people and artifacts for the purposes of continued evangelization, and the expectation that people and artifacts would be received through practices of hospitality. Magazines were intended to be read aloud in groups, along with discussions and the study of religious texts. These magazines were written in Roman script, the same script in which both religious texts (such as the Santali Bible and Santali hymnbooks) were written, as well as mission-produced cultural texts. The use of Roman script created a consistent Santali linguistic sphere in which congregational news and creative writings in Santali published in the magazines formed a continuum with the printing of Santali religious texts. On the other hand, state-sponsored media production and dissemination arose from an attempt to incorporate and institutionalize Santali within a process of Andersonian national unification. States were formed on the basis of unified script-languages, even though most of these states were multilingual. In the case of states like Bihar and West Bengal, Santali was not given any representation in school or government, but rather supported through the production and dissemination of text artifacts. These publications were characterized by the use of the official state scripts (Devanagari in the case of Bihar, Eastern Brahmi in the case of West Bengal) to write and publish the language. The network projected by this form was imagined as co-terminous with the territory within the state border. The third network consisted of the production and dissemination of text artifacts within groups of local, rural-based elites. Like the mission-based media, this network was itself mediated primarily through practices of exchange, where the exchange of text artifacts served to align or realign shifting community and political solidarities, and confer prestige on individuals through those alignments. Yet, the artifactualization of these discourses occur simultaneously with the circulation of "mass" media

of the sort Jeffrey discusses in the dominant Indo-European vernaculars as well. The domain of Santali media, therefore, I will argue, is not dependent on the use of a particular language or script, but rather is delineated through the use of multiple languages and scripts, as well as practices of reading, circulation, and exchange that at the same time iconizes but remains distinct from other mass-mediated forms. I will discuss this in relation to the domains of Santali literacy as well as the politics of autonomy that inform these domains.

### **Scripting Santali media: the creation and dissemination of media genres**

In this section, I will examine how various alignments of script and code, material form, patterns of circulation, and social and political ideologies intersect to create distinct media genres. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in West Bengal, I will focus on the ways in which participants delineate two major genres of Santali-language media: one called "news," and another explicitly termed the "literary and cultural journal." Both these genres, I argue, exist as a continuum, where "news" is mostly identified by Santals with a Bengali-speaking/reading public (of which they also form a part), and the "literary-cultural" domain is mostly identified with Santali-language literacy and an autonomous political domain. Yet, as I hope to show, these two genres, rather than being mutually distinct, actually interpenetrate each other, forming a domain of "Santali" media, whereby the "literary-cultural" is made present in the "news" and vice-versa. These interpenetrations are made evident most notably through the variety of alignments available through script and code. However, generic distinctions emerge in the different patterns of production, the networks in which the artifacts are exchanged, as well as the ways the artifacts project their audiences. I will also suggest that these genres, though metadiscursively labeled as such, also contain numerous fissures and ruptures, providing a ripe site for contestation. Looking at how these ruptures are understood by tracking how publications

are circulated in and around the area of West Bengal where I conducted fieldwork, I aim to reveal the interdiscursive connections which link media form to the larger constellations outlined in the dissertation thus far.

### *The "News"*

During my fieldwork in and around the Jhilimili bazaar, I remember sitting on the stoop of the bicycle garage at the lower bazaar crossroad and everyday a deliveryman on a bicycle would come and deliver copies of the Bengali-language newspapers *Anandabazaar Patrika*, *Bartaman*, and *Pratidin*. *Anandabazaar Patrika* came daily in the morning from Calcutta, although different insets would be placed inside depending on which part of the state it was being distributed. It was the more high-brow of the three, and was the most common paper read by the Bengali metropolitan middle-class. *Bartaman* and *Pratidin* had branch offices in metropolitan towns, and their headlines were bolder and more sensationalistic. As the papers were delivered, a steady stream of people would come to the stoop and begin to read, handing out sections to one another. Unlike in Cody's (2009) fieldwork in rural Tamilnadu, people rarely read the papers out loud, but mostly silently, unless there was a headline that captured someone's attention, then they would mention it as part of conversation, and the paper copy would be passed around for everyone to examine.

As the conflict between the Maoist forces and the state paramilitary forces increased, there were increasingly more and more headlines which people broadcasted to one another.<sup>3</sup> Politically-motivated killings, calls for general strikes, and news of battles between Maoists and state-forces made the daily delivery of the newspaper an eagerly awaited event, even if now in most villages there were at least a few households with access to multiple 24 hour Bengali-language news networks. News also became a subject of conversation during 2011 when the

Communist Party of India (Marxist) lost power in the state elections for the first time in 38 years. People crowded around paper copies, passed them around, and headlines were brought into conversation. Depending on who was there, different parts of the newspaper were brought out in conversation and discussed. For instance, after the Democrats lost the 2010 mid-term elections in the United States, people would often point to the paper and discuss these events with me, asking me questions about the American political system.

The discussion around "news" thus focused mostly on general political events on a local (such as a Maoist attack in a particular village), regional (state and district), national, or international scale. These discussions were mediated in and through Bengali, and supplemented by the constant stream of "news" from 24 hour television stations. Newspapers were also generally aligned with certain political positions. For instance, *Bartaman* and *Pratidin* were virulently anti-Communist, and were seen to toe the line of the largest opposition party in the state, the Trinamool Congress, and its leader, Mamata Banerjee. *Anandabazaar Patrika* was also seen to be anti-Communist though less forcefully than the other two. I rarely saw copies of the Communist-party newspaper *Ganashakti* (People power), which were ubiquitously displayed on public boards in urban centers such as Calcutta. 24 hour news stations also had their own political alignments: the popular news channel *24 ghanta* (24 hours) was viewed as a mouthpiece for the Communist party, while the other numerous channels generally took an anti-Communist, pro-Trinamool perspective.

Generally, people categorized "news" in relation to state politics, and saw reporting as mediated through alignments with all-Bengal political interests. Thus, even the reporting on the Maoist conflict in the local area was evaluated by residents as filtered through the metropolitan discourse from where these papers are produced, and the position of the reportage (mistaken by



no one to be 'objective') assigned to the paper's political position at the level of the state.

Sometimes there was even mocking and derision at the reporting by these papers on the local conflict. For instance, I remember people laughing at an article in *Anandabazaar Patrika* about how people in the Jangal Mahal area were so poor and underdeveloped (thanks to negligence by the Communist government) that they were even eating red ants to survive, and thus they would naturally turn to Maoism. In fact, red ants were eaten, but, as I tasted firsthand, they were crushed and used for their potent and spicy flavor to supplement staples of rice and vegetables, and not as a source of subsistence.

In addition to the daily delivery of the major Bengali newspapers, every so often the newspaper deliverer would also drop off a copy of *Adibasi Sombad* (Adibasi News), published in the nearby sub-divisional town of Khatra (about 20-30 mins away by bus), and edited by a non-tribal editor. The paper was published on broadsheet newsprint, and was exclusively in the Bengali language. However, a number of features distinguished it from the standard papers. There was obviously the name, which refers explicitly to the political identification by Santals and other scheduled tribe as a result of participation in the Jharkhand movement. The title is also anchored by two pictures, one of Birsa Munda, who led the Munda rebellion in 1874 in Chotanagpur, Jharkhand, and the other of Sidhu Murmu, one of the leaders of the 1855 Santal *Hul*. Above the title is written in Bengali, *sara bharoter adibasider prothom purna doirgyer shombad patrika* (The first complete newspaper for all of India's Adivasis) [3-A]. Hence, the scale of the public that the paper assumes is markedly different than that of the "mass" Bengali-language newspapers. The Bengali-language papers, though their circulation stretches beyond the state of West Bengal, are much more oriented to regional, and state-demarcated, politics, and

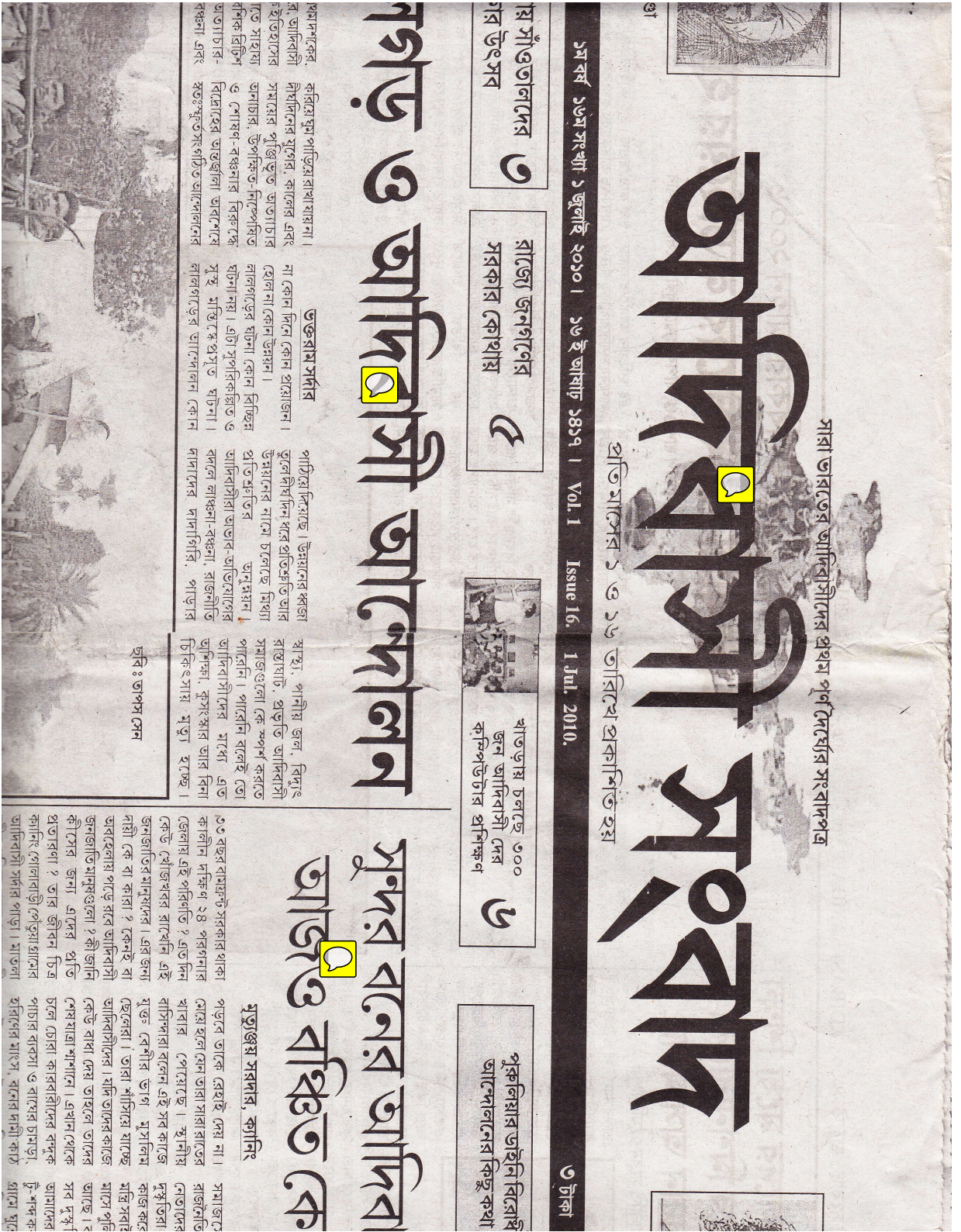


Figure 6.3: Adibasi Sombad (Khatra, Bankura West Bengal)

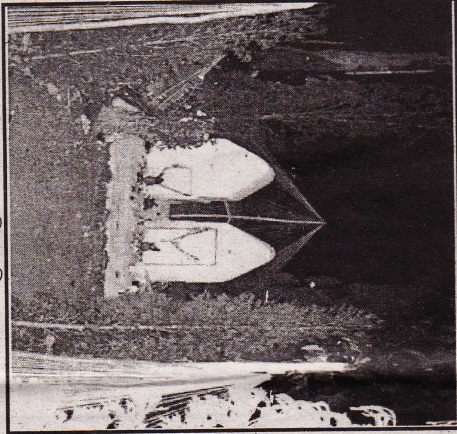
ইসদা

## অনুষ্ঠান

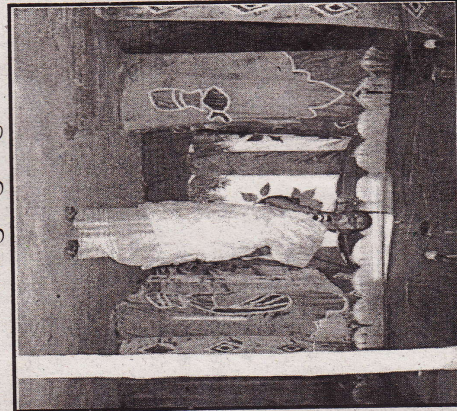
## ফটো ফ্যাশ

দিবাসী সিদু-কানু মুরমু উইহার গাঁওত। তে এবারেও তাঁদের সংগঠনের ২৪তম মধ্য দিয়ে ৩০ জুন হল দিবস পালন। সার অনতিদূরে রাস্তামেটিয়া সিদু-কানু গণে পালিত হল হল দিবস। সারাদিন র বিস্কুট দৌড়, তীর-ধনুক ছোঁড়া, বেল (পুরুষদের), মহিলাদের চেয়ার আবৃত্তি, যেমন খুশি সাজে প্রতियোগিতা এবং হল দিবস সম্পর্কে বং সারারাত ধরে সাঁওতালী নাটক র আয়োজন করে। মোট সাতটি দল যোগিতায় অংশগ্রহণ করে। সংস্থার পয় মুরমু জানালেন জাতি, ধর্ম, বর্ণ এই আশাদের আয়োজিত হল দিবসে র অনুষ্ঠানটিকে সম্বন্ধ করেন। আবারও এই উৎসবকে আরও ব্যাপক মানুষের দিতে।

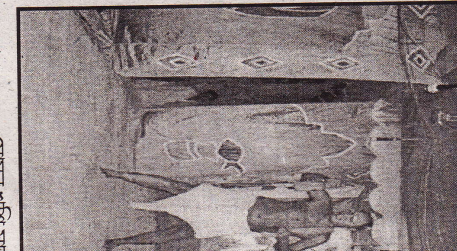
ছবি : আকাশ টুটু



সিদু-কানুর শহিদ বেদি।



সঙ্গীত প্রতियোগিতা।



যেমন খুশি সাজ

## খাত্তায় চলছে ৩০০ ঘণ্টা আদিবাসী ছেলে-মেয়ের কম্পিউটার প্রশিক্ষণ

দীপা গোস্বামী

খাত্তা আদিবাসী কালচার অ্যান্ড ডেভেলপমেন্ট সেন্টার পরিচালিত মাইক্রোসফট গোল্ড সার্টিফায়ড পার্টনার কলকাতার আর.এস.এন. (প্রা.) লিমিটেড কোম্পানীর 'উইন-কম্পিউটার শিক্ষা কেন্দ্রের



Figure 6.4: Adibasi Sombad (cont.)

their reportage follows this orientation. *Adibasi Sombad* however, even though it is published from an even more 'local' area (no other papers are published from the town of Khatra), and though it is published solely in the Bengali-language, projects its readership to be "all of India's adivasis." This idea of "all-India" provides a local alternative to the demarcated administrative territories of the state of West Bengal where news usually circulates, aligning the reader with a scalar discourse that connects this paper to Jharkhand politics, imagined on an "all-India" territory.

Like the Bengali mainstream papers, readers' classification of this paper as "news" does not prevent it from mixing current-event and feature-related stories. However unlike the Bengali newspapers, all of these stories assume an explicit orientation to a local form of Jharkhand politics. For instance, on the front page of the July 1, 2010 issue, the headlines discuss the Maoist-supported uprising in Lalgadh in terms of an *adivasi andolan* (adivasi social movement) [3-B], or the question of why tribals in the Sunderban forests in southeast West Bengal are still marginalized (*Sunderbon-er adibasira aajo banchito kaeno?*) [3-C]. Feature news reporting focuses on cultural festivals of tribal communities, particularly Santals, such as the recent *Hul maha* (Insurrection Day) celebrations [4-A] or government-sponsored programs, workshops, or seminars for STs (glossed as *adibasi*) such as computer workshops for tribal children in the local area [4-B]. Other sample copies I collected all featured similar stories.

Consequently, the reportage of *Adivasi Sombad*, though mostly concerned with local events from the immediate region in and around the Jhilimili bazaar, but sometimes from other parts of West Bengal or the surrounding states, still manages to project an "All-India" scalar orientation through its strategic use of national "adivasi" language, as well as a notion of "Jharkhand" which aligns with the political movement active in places like Jhilimili, recasting

local events as part of a larger political struggle that is beyond the state-centric (or metropolitan-centered) discourse of the Bengali language newspapers. The use of the Bengali-language or Eastern Brahmi script does not render this newspaper part of the "Bengali" media; instead it links the newspaper to a Jharkhandi political idiom in which Bengali is the primary medium (mirroring the Jharkhand party political graffiti displayed in chapter 4). The Jharkhand constellation, which aligns script, form, and content, also is evident in the manner in which this paper circulates. For instance, from what I saw, at least in Jhilimili, the paper mostly circulated among a strata of Santals who were either active in Jharkhand or Jharkhand-affiliated politics. Thus, the paper's pathways of circulation served to reinforce the alignments between people, territory, and political affiliation that, as I have suggested, is an important feature of a politics of autonomy.

While *Adibasi Sombad* was in Bengali language and script, most of the other "Santali-language" newspapers I collected published in West Bengal were bilingual, although they varied in terms of script-choice.<sup>4</sup> The two other papers I saw circulated in the Jhilimili bazaar besides *Adibasi Sombad* were two other Bankura-district based publications *Lahanti Patrika* 'Progress newspaper' and *Sar Sagun* 'Good omen.' Unlike *Adibasi Sombad*, these papers were not delivered as part of the newspaper run, and were either delivered by post or through agents, most of whom were well-known in the community. For instance, my personal subscriptions to both papers were facilitated by local agents whom I had met by chance during the course of my research. I then received the paper every two weeks (they were both fortnightlies) through the mail. The distribution network thus parallels those that Nag writes for Bengali-language little magazines in Calcutta. The people who I saw regularly receive the papers were either Santali-language schoolteachers, editors and activists, or people involved in Jharkhand politics. I saw

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**যাডুখণ্ডে চার বধে স্থায়ী সরকার থাকবে**

ভোলানাথ টুডু, রীতি ৫- দীর্ঘ দিন পর যাডুখণ্ড রাজ্য স্থায়ী সরকার পেল চার বৎসরের জন্য। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী অর্জনে যুগ্ম বিগত ২০ ই মেজুয়ারী ২১ খরসোয়া বিধানসভা উপ-নির্বাচনে ২৭৪৪৬ ভোটের ব্যবধানে বিজয়ী হন। তাঁর নিকটতম প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী ছিলেন যাডুখণ্ড বিকাশ গোচার কুম্ভা গোপারাই। অর্জনে মুক্তা বিজয়া হওয়ার পর সাংবাদিকদের বলেন যাডুখণ্ডে এবার চার বৎসর স্থায়ী সরকার থাকবে এবং যাডুখণ্ডের

**অধিবাসীদের জমি রক্ষায় ডেপুটেশন বর্ধমান**

নিঃ সঃ, আদালতগোল, বর্ধমান ৫- আদালতগোল - দুগাপুর শিলাখণ্ডের আদিবাসী সমাজ দলনী বর্ধমানের সমন্বয়ে গঠিত অল ইন্ডিয়া আদিবাসী কন-অর্জনেশন কমিটির উদ্যোগে বিগত ২৫ মে মেজুয়ারী ২১ এক প্রতিনিধি দল বর্ধমান জেলা শাসকের নিকট ডেপুটেশনে সামিল হন। কমিটির মূল দাবী ছিল আদিবাসীদের বাস ও জমি হস্তান্তর বা অ-আদিবাসীদের মধ্যে হস্তান্তর যাতে না হয় তার জন্য কঠোর ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করতে হবে। আদিবাসী পরিবার বসবাসকারী বাস ও জমিগুলিকে রক্ষণ করতে হবে, অনাদি বাসীদের জমি বিক্রয় হওয়া প্রতিবন্ধী ও নকল দলিলগুলি অবিলম্বে বাতিল করতে হবে ইত্যাদি।

**বিষ-ভারতীতে সাঁওতালী পি.জি. চানুর দাবী**

নিঃ সঃ, বীরভূম ৫- শান্তিনিকেতনের দাবীপত্র গ্রহণ করে ইতিবাচক কথা বিধ-ভারতী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের সাঁওতালীতে পি.জি. চানু সহ আপন বাজানোর দাবী জানানো সারা ভারত সাঁওতালী লেখক সংঘ। বিষ-ভারতীতে সাঁওতালীতে ডিপ্লোমা কোর্স চালু আছে, কিন্তু পি.জি. চানু না

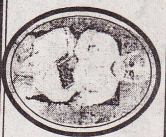
Figure 6.5: Lahanti Patrika (Chatna, Bankura, West Bengal)



# ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ

ଡକ୍ଟର ମଧୁସୂଦନ

ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ - ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ



## ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ

(ଓଡ଼ିଆରେ)

ଓଡ଼ିଆରେ ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ ପଢ଼ିବା ପାଇଁ ଏହା ଏକ ଉତ୍ତମ ଉପାଦାନ ଅଟେ । ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ ପଢ଼ିବା ପାଇଁ ଏହା ଏକ ଉତ୍ତମ ଉପାଦାନ ଅଟେ । ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ ପଢ଼ିବା ପାଇଁ ଏହା ଏକ ଉତ୍ତମ ଉପାଦାନ ଅଟେ ।

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ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ ପଢ଼ିବା ପାଇଁ ଏହା ଏକ ଉତ୍ତମ ଉପାଦାନ ଅଟେ । ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ ପଢ଼ିବା ପାଇଁ ଏହା ଏକ ଉତ୍ତମ ଉପାଦାନ ଅଟେ । ମଞ୍ଜୁସାରୀର ଇତିହାସ ପଢ଼ିବା ପାଇଁ ଏହା ଏକ ଉତ୍ତମ ଉପାଦାନ ଅଟେ ।

Figure 6.6: Lahanti Patrika (cont.)

copies around the bazaar every so often, such as at the bicycle stand I frequented or other small shops in and around the bazaar. However, unlike the Bengali dailies, these papers, like *Adibasi Sombad*, were rarely passed around and not read aloud. The biggest attraction, as with most Santali-language publications, were the Santali language crosswords, on which people enjoyed to work collectively. However, though these papers did not circulate as widely or regularly, they were always present. At village fairs or festivals, old copies would be bought and sold, suggesting that their appeal, unlike the Bengali dailies, did not rest in how current they were.

Yet these publications were still categorized by both the editors and readers as "news." They were published on newsprint and were at most four or five pages, much smaller than either the Bengali-dailies (which had multiple sections) or the *Adibasi Sombad*, which had around 8 pages. They also explicitly stated that they were "bilingual papers" with each paper displaying in the banner, in English, "fortnightly in Santali and Bengali." As in *Adibasi Sombad*, each paper's title in the banner was flanked by pictures of heroes from adivasi rebellions, such as Sidhu and Kanhu and Birsa Munda, aligning these papers with a politics of autonomy of which these rebellions form a historical foundation. Also, like with *Adibasi Sombad*, both *Lahanti Patrika* and *Sar Sagun*, though published from nearby locations within Bankura district, the same district as Jhilimili bazaar, address themselves in the banner to "adivasis" at an "all-India" level. *Sar Sagun* proclaims in Bengali to be "India's greatest published Santali-Bengali newspaper" (*Bharot-er sorbadhik prakashito Shaontali-Bangla patrika*) [7-A] while *Lahanti Patrika* addresses India's "adivasis," with a line across the top in Bengali stating that it is "All-India's politically struggling adivasis' own, self-sufficient, and non-party affiliated publication" (*Sara Bharot-er shongrami adibasider nijosvo, nirbhorik, o nirpokhe pakhik*) [5-A].

In addition, and unlike *Adibosi Shombad*, the title pages of these papers, all Santali-



language words, are in both Bengali and Ol-Chiki scripts, and they also contain Roman/English-language material as well [5-B, 7-B]. Thus, the script-code constellations of the banners in each of these papers iconize a scale which attempts to move the discourse of the “adivasi” beyond the local or regional, similar to various tokens on the surfaces of the bazaar, and, as we will see later, a critical feature of the "literary and cultural" genre. However, while the use of Ol-Chiki/Roman combinations appeal to a pan-local Santali politics, the prominent use of Bengali-script in the banners, as well as the Bengali-language, indexes a more regionally demarcated territory. Hence, the banner presents itself as a complex scalar constellation, combining pan-local as well as a regional political discourses through a unique layering of script and code, forming a distinct, bilingual genre of "Santali-language news."

Yet despite the similarities in banner organization, the linguistic and graphic organization of *Lahanti Patrika* and *Sar Sagun* differ, and these differences reveal the various semiotic networks involved in their artifactualization and exchange. *Lahanti Patrika* is organized along strict lines of script-code delineation; three out of the four pages mostly deal with current events and are all in Eastern Brahmi (EB) script/ Bengali code. Like the *Adibasi Sombad*, most of these events relate local happenings in and around West Bengal and Jharkhand, and casts these events within a Jharkhandi political idiom. For instance, in a copy dated 1 March 2011, the top headlines read in Bengali, the "Jharkhand government will remain set for four years," a feat for a state notorious for its fluctuating governments [5-C]. Beside the headline is another Bengali headline, "Adibasis send a deputation for protection of land to Bardhaman [a city in West Bengal]" [5-D]. Lower down the page, even news relating specifically to celebrations of insurrections, such as the birthday of famous nineteenth century tribal rebellion leader Tilka Majhi (*Baba Tilka Majhi-r jonmo dibos udjapon*) is related in Bengali language/EB script. The

first page of the paper contrasts markedly to page 3 of the paper, which appears as a separate inset in the paper and is entirely in Santali/Ol-Chiki script. For instance, this section has a separate banner heading, in which the name of the paper (*Lahanti Patrika*) is repeated *only* in Ol-Chiki script, with no accompanying text in either Bengali or Roman script [6-A]. Underneath the title is written in Santali/Ol-Chiki the words *saonhet' lakchar* 'literature-culture' [6-B] and in smaller font is a phrase *saonhet' ge jiwī -- lakchar do bisi mang* 'literature is [our] life, culture is [our] bones and blood' [6-C]. The banners are anchored not like in the front page with leaders of tribal insurrections, but with stalwarts of the Santali literary domain: on the left is a picture of Pandit Raghunath Murmu, the founder of the Ol-Chiki script, and on the right is a picture of Santali poet Sadhu Ramchand Murmu [6-D].

The page 3 section of *Lahanti Patrika* is thus clearly delineated from the "news" genre that comes before it, both in terms of content, page organization, as well as in terms of script and code. "News" is cast as current events, and is entirely in the Bengali language/script; it thus mirrors "news" in a Bengali daily. The only difference is that unlike the Bengali dailies, the political orientation is not towards state politics, but the indigenous local politics of the Jharkhand territory of southwest West Bengal. Thus, the paper serves to promote and disseminate politically oriented information similar to papers such as *Adibasi Sombad*. However, page 3 separates itself out from the rest of the paper by articulating an independent Santali "literary and cultural" domain, in which Ol-Chiki is the exclusive script, Santali the exclusive language, and in which the content is not directly related to news events. Instead, the page features debates, such as in this issue [6-E] on religious practice, or in other issues, songs, poetry, or biographies of Santali literary figures. Hence, within the organization of the paper itself, an autonomous "literary and cultural" domain is carved out through the use of Santali-

code, Ol-Chiki script, and content related to the emergence of Santali literacy. Yet even though there is a page related to literature and culture, the news genre predominates; it is this unique constellation of Jharkhand-oriented news (in Bengali) and cultural and literary material (in Santali/Ol-Chiki) which recursively renders the artifact as a token of Santali news more generally.<sup>5</sup>

However not all papers organize linguistic and graphic diversity in the same way as *Lahanti Patrika*, which is, in the samples I collected, anomalous in this respect. More typical of the Santali newspapers I collected was *Sar Sagun* published by a Santal author and editor from the nearby city of Bankura, West Bengal. The paper does not show a neat divide between Bengali-language 'news' and Santali-language 'culture' in the same way as *Lahanti Patrika*. Rather certain news stories are related in Bengali and others in Santali, but both are in the Eastern-Brahmi (Bengali) script. However, the number of Bengali-language stories outnumber Santali-language ones. For instance, in a June 7, 2011 issue of *Sar Sagun* there were 10 Bengali-language stories and 4 Santali-language ones. In an issue dated March 23, 2011 there were 16 Bengali-language stories and 2 Santali-language ones. These numbers are typical for any given issue of the paper. Thus the actual amount of Santali-language material does not differ from that of *Lahanti Patrika*; it is merely that the Santali-language material is blended in with the Bengali-language material, forming intertextual continuities both in terms of content (news-event) and script choice. For instance, the news related on the front page of the June 7th issue discusses local events in southeast Bengal such as the upcoming ration relief of Rs. 2 rice [7-C], a story about a local soccer player who made his name in a professional match [7-D], or a blind Santali student who received high marks on his class 10 board exams [7-E]. All of these events are related in Bengali language/E. Brahmi script. However on the bottom left of the front

**আজ্ঞে**  
**জাতীয় দিবস**  
**নয় কেন**  
**হুলা দিবস!!**

গরতের সর্বাধিক প্রকাশিত সাঁওতালি - বাংলা পাক্ষিক

**সাগুণ**

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Sar Sagun Fortnightly in Santali & Bengali

Mob. - 9474669653/9434346510 Ph. No. (03242) 244230 \* 7th June, 2011

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**দুর্টাকা কেজির চাল জঙ্গলমহলে**

সাগুন সংবাদপত্র: জঙ্গলমহলের তিনটি জেলা বাঁকড়া, পুরুলিয়া ও পশ্চিম মেদিনীপুরে যতগুলি রকম আছে সেখানের সব জ্বরের গরির মানুষই পানেন ২ টাকা কেজি দরের চাল। এতদিন পর্যন্ত শুধু আদিবাসী তাই বোনেরা এই সরোগে পানতেন। এখন থেকে জাতি, ধর্ম, বর্ণ নির্বিশেষে সর্বজ্বরের সাধারণ গরির মানুষই এই সরোগে পানেন। চাল প্রকল্প অনুযায়ী ২ টাকা কেজি দরে মাগে ৩৫ কেজি চান পেতেন আদিবাসীরা। এতদিন বছরে ২৪ হাজার টাকা আয় এমন আদিবাসী পরিবারই ২ টাকা কেজি দরের চাল পেতেন। এই উর্ধ্বশীমা বাড়িয়ে এখন করা হল ৪২ হাজার টাকা। কারণ ২৪ হাজার টাকার নিয়ম চাপু থাকায় অনেক পরিবারই এই সরোগে পাচ্ছিলেন না। তবে সাধারণ গরির মানুষদের সম্পদে বছরে ৩৬ হাজার টাকা পর্যন্ত আয়, এমন পরিবারই এই সরোগে পানেন।

**দৃষ্টিহীন ভারতীয় সাদা মাধ্যমিকে সহন**

সাগুন সংবাদপত্র: বাংলা সাঁওতালি ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের দ্বিতীয় ভাষা। দ্বিতীয় ভাষায় অঙ্ক ও পড়ানো করতে হয়। আর সেটা যে সহজ কাজ নয়, তা দ্বিতীয় ভাষাকে মাধ্যম করে যাঁরা পড়াশুনা করেন তাঁরাই একান্তে উপলব্ধি করতে পারেন। তার উপর আবার যদি দৃষ্টি প্রতিবন্ধী হয় তাহলে সেটা যে অসম্ভবের স্তর করার চ্যালেঞ্জ। যুগ যুগ ধরে এখন প্রতিবন্ধকতার মধ্যেই বহু সাঁওতালি ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের দ্বিতীয় ভাষা বাংলাতেও উল্লেখযোগ্য নম্বর পাবার নিদর্শন রয়েছে। ২০১১ সালের মাধ্যমিকে উত্তরপাড়া লুই ব্রেন সোসাইটিয়াল হাইস্কুল ফর সাইটলেসের আধাপিক অধ্যয়ী স্থাপনা বাংলায় জোরদার মার্চ ২০১০ পেয়েছে। জাতি অনুযায়ী থেকেই দৃষ্টিহীন। এই প্রতিবন্ধকতা কখনই দূর করতে পারেনি তাদের। জম্মীর বাংলাদেশ সাতকের তিনটি নিরে পরবর্তী জীবনে শিক্ষকতা করার ইচ্ছা আছে। এই স্থল থেকে এক বছর সাতজন দৃষ্টিহীন মাধ্যমিক পরীক্ষা দিয়েছেন। এতেকয়েক উচ্চশিক্ষায় আগ্রহী।

**এখন বাংলার হিরো বুদিরাম টুডু**

সাগুন প্রতিবেদন: যতদিন গড়োছ শ্যামনগরের বুদিরাম টুডু ফুটবলের মাঠে ততই সাফল্য অর্জন করতেন। সাদা পোশাকে যাওয়া শুধুমাত্র সাতের ট্রফি জয় নয়, তার পরে ইস্টবেঙ্গলের হয়ে লাল-হলুদ জার্সিতে বিভিন্ন সময় বাঁকড়া টুটুয়ার সঙ্গে অগাভাগি করে জালে বল ছড়াতেন দেখা গেছে প্রতিপক্ষের



আলে বল ছড়াতেন দেখা গেছে প্রতিপক্ষের

এবং ফুটবল তরফটিকে। সাতের ট্রফির

সেমিফাইনালেও ফেলডয়েজ-এর বিরুদ্ধে

একমাত্র গোলটি বুদিরামেরই করা। এবং এই

জয়শুক গোলের মাধ্যমেই ৪৩ বাতের মতো

ফাইনালে উঠল বাংলা দল। গত ৩২শে মে

গুয়াহাটির নেহরু স্টেডিয়ামে দু-গোলে

বাংলার দল এগিয়ে ৩১ বাতের জন্য

ভারতসেরা হল। ইদিনি বেঙ্গলার ১৮ মিনিটে

Figure 6.7: Sar Sagun (Bankura, West Bengal)



## মালপত্র গিৰিবিৰ সৈঁদেরা পৰব

সাগুন খবৰিয়া, নায়ায়নগড়, পশ্চিম মেদিনীপুৰ : পশ্চিম মেদিনীপুৰ জেলা বেনাং নায়ায়নগড় ব্লক মাৰি মাজুওয়া কোথাঃ উদ্যোগতে ১৯৯৮ সাল খন যাও গে ৫ বৌট দ মালগদা বিৰ সেপেয়া আর ৬ বৌট বিলোঃ দ কেলেথাই নাই কাতা বেলটি বিনাই পাহালখটরে পয়ব কৌই এনা। পাভারে সেগেড আর কুড়মা এনেচ সেরেও৭ সেপেয়া কৌই এনা। পৰব টাভিৰে একেন সানতাড় খে৭গেবিনী কো ২৫-২৬ হাজাৰ কো জাৰুওয়া লেন বেই পোকান পাট কোদ একেন পোকো কোথাঃ গে তাঁহে লেন। পৰব টাভিৰে সাঁতে হুড লোকোণে হাতি পাউয়া পোকান কেই আভি যাসতি গে তাঁহে কানা। আৰিসান কো পৰব টাভিৰে হাতি পাউয়া পোকান হুদি কতেঃ কুকনি তেজাৰে বাভায় এনা - সানতাড় কোথাঃ পৰব দ হাতি পাউয়া বেগৰ বাং সাকি সভতা। পৰব কমিটিলেন সভাপতি পঙ্কৰ হাঁসদা সেন খন বাভায় এনা - সমাজ বেনাঃ আৰিচালি, লায়-লাককাৰ জিয়াড দহয় গে পৰব কৌই আচেয় বেনাঃ আৰাল যস দ। সেপেয়া বিৰ খন শিক্ৰিয়া কো কুনাই ৰুজা, সগে এমান জিয়ালিকো যাসতি সেপেয়া দতেথাঃ কো তাঁহে কানা। নওয়া বিবরে নিঃ অক্কে কুল-বনা-তাৰুপ এমান বিৰ জিয়ালি কেই কো এথাঃ কনা তাঁহে কানা। লেস আ সৌগেড এনেচ বে পুইলা ঠাও কো, হাটেট কো, বিলাই আৰিকনী সমাজ সুসাঁৰ গাঁওত, দসার দ মুড়কাটা নাচাৰ গাঁওত, তেয়াৰ দ বিয়াখাটি বি. জে. নাচাৰ গাঁওত। কুড়মা এনেচ বে পুইলা ঠাও দ - সুবিৰ শবোন, লুডুমা - কুটিকাৰ। দসার দ ধনঞ্জয় মুৰুম, ৰাজৰীধ - নায়ায়নগড়, তেয়াৰ দ বিনিকাল মাতি, বাখা মিলিটাবে হেড কো হাটেট কো। শিবনী চাপাল আখতা পৈতা লেকেডে সেচের কো তাঁহে কানা - পাবগানা পঞ্চানন হাঁসদা, সসীৰিয়া পঙ্কৰ হাঁসদা আর অনভুইয়া খবৰিয়া সকেলনাঃ হেবের এমান গোলক কো।

## সানতাড় বাহুড়িয়া চেতান দেকো

(contd. from p.j.-1) সানতাড় কোয় বাভায় আচো কেঃ লেআ বাং টাকা দ বায় এম দতেথাঃ কানা। যা কিছু কৰাও তেনা আইস আপালত তানাতেগে নিয়াসো হোমোঃ আ। অন্য টাঠাৰেন সানতাড়কো বাকো সিগিল দতেডে আকাঃ খাতিৰ নওয়া বিটাৰ বেনাঃ তাঁৰ দ লেকুচিনী আসেকা টাঙ্গা সেনকো লাদে আকা। নওয়া খবৰ বাভায় কতেঃ বিল মঙ্গল দ নকেই অমকি এমাকো কানায়। নিকুচিনী আসেকা চাপলেনে আয়বুভেন কো রাগি য়াঁগাও আচেঃ কো সেন এদ নওয়া দ সানতাড় সাঁওতা বেন গগাঃ সৰম বুভেঃ বেনাঃ কামি কানা। নজে দ যাহান আপোস বেনাঃ দ বানু আকা। আর অন্য কাখা জোয়াত লাগিঃ টলাপাড়া সানাম হুডকো চেপাও এঃ লেআ।

## সাঁওতালি সংস্কৃতি বিষয়ক আলোচনা

সাগুন সংবাদপাতা, বেলাপা, পশ্চিম মেদিনীপুৰ : পশ্চিম মেদিনীপুৰ জেলা বেলনাৰ নিকুচিনী আসেকা চাপাৰ উদ্যোগে আগামী ৩০ জুলাই, ২০১১, সাঁওতাল সংস্কৃতি বিষয়ক আলোচনা সভাৰ আয়োজন কৰাঃ। আলোচনাৰ স্থান নিধিৰিত হৱেৰে নিকুচিনী হাটকো। এদন অতিথি হিসাবে উপস্থিত থাকবনে শিবম মাৰি নিত্যানন হেবের মঙ্গল।

## সাগুন শিকড়ী - ৬২ - সূত্রত বাক্য

১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	১০	১১	১২	১৩	১৪	১৫	১৬	১৭	১৮	১৯	২০	২১	২২	২৩	২৪	২৫	২৬	২৭	২৮	২৯	৩০
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### চেতন-কাভাৰ :

- (২) সানাম খনাঃ জেলেও গাতি, (৪) বংমা উনক দ হুডকো জম কোওআ, (৫) বে বিলোঃ ব্ৰেদী টাণে খাৰি লেকা এগেঃ আয়, (৬) হৰিলা চাটাঞ্জী স্কটি বেন এহুতমান হুড, (৭) ১০ জনপথ বেন এহুতমান হুড, (১১) গালখাৰাও, (১২) ৰহুড অৰিচ, (১৫) য়াহাৰে ডাহাৰ চাগা আকা, (১৬) মায়াং চেপেচ জিয়ালী, (১৭) সংসাৰ, (২২) কুচি, (২২) উনক জিয়ালী দ দনেকো স-গেয়া।

### সাগুন শিকড়ী-৬২

- “সলহে”  
 কঁয়ে-এতম : ১) মঙ্গল, (২) তাজে, আখা, (৪) লাজাও, (৬) লতা, (৮) কাহনী, (৯) হাভাৰ, (১২) টুনটা, (১৩) বিতি, (১৫) ডাহাৰ, (১৬) কুয়া, (১৭) মঞ্জ।  
 চেতন-কাভাৰ : ১) মমতা, (৩) আহলা, (৫) লেলা, (৭) লকা, (৯) হাও, (১০) হৱা, (১১) নেতা, (১২) টুনী, (১৪) বজা, (১৬) কুডুম, (১৮) টাটায়া, (১৯) জহাৰ।

## আড় পুথি গলেমারাও খন মহলে

(contd. from pg.-2) লেনা। ন সেরমা আখাট বেনা ১৯ মাহিত বিলোঃ। গোপীনাথ মরুম বেন হপন তেঃ কাটিচ এ আজাৰ বাভাঃ তে মাদুলী এমান কোয় হৱ আকাঃ তাঁহে কানা। ছিঃ চেঃ কোচয় হঃঃ আকালা। যত লাড়া গিডি কাঃ মে। অকা কাখা খাঁজন কতেঃ গোপীনাথ হপন তেঃ দ অড়া চলাও কতেঃ সানাম কাখা কুই সাঁও তেয় অজ্ঞান এনা। খানগো গোপীনাথ বিনিচ অড়াঃ সোমকে দ বৈদনাথ বিনিচ উন কানায় মেতে দয়ায় এগেৰ আডিস কো। আর অন্য খন গে য়াঁপাৰি দ লেতাড হুদি লেনা। গোপীনাথবাবু

Figure 6.9: Sar Sagun (cont.)

page is a story about how a *diku* man molested a married Santal woman (*Santaḍ baḥḍiya chetan deko herelak' jak' joḍet'*) [8-A]. Though this is equally local-interest "news," it is related in Santali/Eastern Brahmi script.

Other Santali-language articles include a write up of the quinquennial festival *mak' mode* in a village in Bankura district, a discussion between village headmen regarding a dispute between people from different neighboring villages [9-B], and a small news piece on the beginning of the annual hunt [9-A]. While all of these articles feature news items that concern local happenings in Santal villages, they do not contrast significantly in content from other news events related in Bengali. Rather code alternations appear to recursively diagram an idea of locality in which "news" is unevenly split between those that relate to larger concerns (related in Bengali), and those concerning happenings in Santal villages or Santal-specific festivals (related in Santali), both of which are tied together through the use of the Eastern Brahmi script.

The majority of Santali newspapers I collected published in West Bengal were in the bilingual Santali-Bengali format. Of the 5 newspapers I collected in this format, all fortnightlies published on broadsheet newsprint, only *Lahanti Patrika* was both bilingual and digraphic (in Ol-Chiki script). The other papers, including *Khondroḍ* (Purulia), *Dis-Hudis* (Birbhum), *Sar Sagun* (Bankura), and *Desh Dorbar* (Calcutta) were all organized with alternations between Santali and Bengali code, but with uniformity in script (Eastern Brahmi). When a reporter from *Sar Sagun*, an English teacher by profession and Santali news reporter by interest, came to interview me, I asked him why the publication was bilingual? He responded to me by saying so that "they" i.e. the government, would understand the problems and issues of *adivasis* and the Jangalmahal area. While I did not actually see any non-Santal speakers receive or read a copy of *Sar Sagun*, it was suggestive that the producers of the paper imagined the "state" as an

anonymous addressee of what was considered “news,” an ideology that subsequently determined code choice. Readers of *Lahanti Patrika* as well mentioned how the paper serves to broadcast adivasi concerns to both the state and a general public. For instance, a government officer, Motilal Kisku, writes in his congratulatory note to the paper on the "bilingual newspaper's" 22nd anniversary, "this newspaper's main goal has always been to make the public aware of adivasi problems and their solutions, and also to attract the government's attention [on these matters]" (Kisku 2011).

The idea that the papers are speaking to both a general public as well as the government, whether they are, in actuality, or not, reveals an implicit orientation in the characterization of these artifacts as "news." By casting the artifacts in Bengali language and script, the papers translate local adivasi-specific concerns into a regional idiom of "news," mirroring in many ways the mainstream Bengali-language newspapers. The Santali language material, however, reveals a different orientation. In papers such as *Sar Sagun*, an alternative alignment between community and locality is employed to relate certain news items, indexed by the use of Santali code in Eastern Brahmi script. This speaks to other instances of the use of Santali/Eastern Brahmi constellation, such as in drama posters, flyers for local events, handbills, etc. In *Lahanti Patrika* however the use of Santali-Ol Chiki demarcates a separate space characterized as literary and cultural, not grounded in any particular place or event, but portraying discussions regarding a projected Santali community. This domain draws on circulating discourses that positions Santali literacy and autonomy at a trans-local scale, intertextually connecting these objects to the Ol-Chiki constellations on signboards, video disks, movie posters, etc.

In addition to the bilingual newspapers, I saw a few circulating papers strictly in Ol-Chiki script. Some of these were freely distributed as part of a general drive to promote Ol-Chiki in





rural areas. For instance, in the Jhilimili bazaar, copies of *Setak'* ('Morning'), published from Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, were freely distributed by local youth, together with a Bengali-language pamphlet, published by a Santal government worker in Calcutta, outlining why the state government has failed to properly institute Ol-Chiki script in government institutions<sup>6</sup>. Other papers, such as *Falgun* ('Spring') published from Orissa were available at village fairs as an example of Ol-Chiki newspaper. In each of these cases, Ol-Chiki publication indexed both displacement and futurity, in the sense that these artifacts were offered as examples from other states (i.e. not West Bengal) where Ol-Chiki publication and literacy was more predominant, as well as an example of the future of Santali-language news media in West Bengal if Ol-Chiki is fully adopted. Thus, their exchange aligned participants with a future-oriented project of Ol-Chiki production.

When I returned after my fieldwork in the summer of 2012, I already saw this future trajectory beginning to be actualized. *Manbhum Sombad* ('Manbhum news') [10] a long-running local Bengali language newspaper published from the town of Purulia with a Jharkhand tilt<sup>7</sup> started to publish a Santali-language edition [7]<sup>8</sup>. This edition was similar to the Bengali-language edition, with a greater emphasis on tribal issues. This edition, unlike other Santali newspapers, was not only the first parallel Santali edition of a Bengali-language newspaper I saw, but also the first regularly published paper entirely in Ol-Chiki script that I collected from West Bengal.

### ***The Literary and Cultural Journal***

In addition to newspapers, monthly, quarterly, or half-yearly magazines circulate quite extensively in the Santali-speaking areas of West Bengal. These magazines are characterized both by their strict insistence on the use of Santali code, the uniform script of their content

(though the script itself varies), and by the English label "literary and cultural journal." This metadiscursive label, characterizing the genre as a whole, is usually featured, in English-Roman, on the title page of most of these journals. In this section I will analyze the "literary and cultural journal," discussing under what conditions these magazines are produced, disseminated, and consumed. In addition I will focus on the material form of these magazines, and how they are regimented in terms of script and code to the extent that they act as one of the major sites through which script-code constellations are crystallized into artifacts of exchange, consolidating regional and local political networks. Finally, focusing on the historical formation of one such local network of editors in a region where I conducted fieldwork, I will look at how, within networks of exchange, script-code choices in journal production reveal ruptures between different generations. I argue that a younger generation of editors, empowered by changes in technology as well as new means of dissemination, are transforming the idea of autonomy through renewed interest in publication and circulation that contrasts (or even conflicts) with elders within the same network. I end the section with a comparison between local networks of publication and government-sponsored networks.

"Literary and cultural journals" are almost always started by groups, usually led by members who have a steady source of salaried income. These groups, referred to in Santali as *baisi* 'group,' *gaonta* 'organization,' or by the Bengali, *sabha* 'meeting-group,' are started in the name of promoting Santali literature, culture, and language. However, they also simultaneously serve a political purpose, acting as organizational vectors through which Jharkhandi politics, Santali-language literacy, and a politics of autonomy are articulated. As I suggested in Chapter 5, the formation of these committees function as a way of obtaining a prestige within Santali communities which institutional or economic privilege alone could not guarantee.

Central to this economy of prestige are exchange relationships, and one of the most prominent artifacts that mediate these relationships is the printed journal. Editors and other members of a particular committee would print and publish magazines at significant cost to themselves<sup>9</sup>. Copies of the magazines would frequently be offered for free or at a very nominal price, such that it would be impossible for publishers to completely recover costs. The magazines circulate primarily through a multi-tiered distribution chain in which editors give copies to committee members (some of whom are also editors of their own journals) who then distribute them to people they know. Consequently, the publication and dissemination of magazines, like the Bengali little magazines Nag discusses, had very little to do with economic profit. They serve on the one hand to unite members of these groups, all of whom share particular commitments stemming from allegiance to certain localities and political positions, but also to certain larger ideological networks where notions of Santal "literature and culture" are mediated through script-choice and institutional arrangements at varying scales.

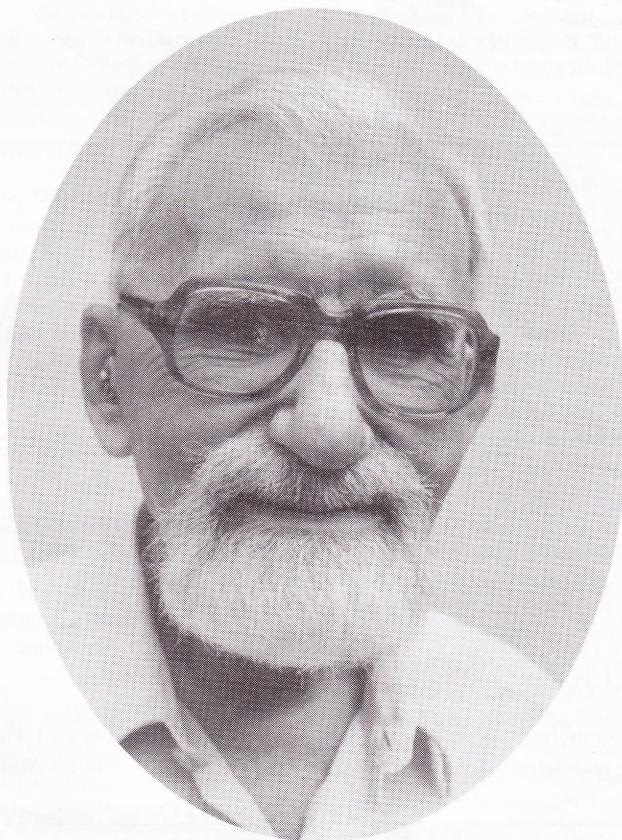
As discussed in the previous section, some of the oldest Santali-language publications have been in Roman script-Santali. In West Bengal, this is also the case, magazines such as *Jugsirjol* published by the *Santali onol ar legchar bāisi* (Santali Literary and Cultural Society) a Calcutta-based collective made up mostly of civil servants either from North Bengal or of Christian background, has been in continuous print for 42 years. The title page has the name, *Jugsirjol*, written in Roman script along with the appellation, *Monthly literary and cultural journal in Santali*. The magazine, like another magazine *Nawa Ipil* (New Star), published by the same group, serves as a primary mouthpiece for the promotion of Roman script, frequently featuring articles promoting the use of Roman script and pointing out the defects of Ol-Chiki.

SANTALI ONOL AR LEGCAR BĀISI DEĀK ARĀN

# JUGSIRIJOL

Monthly Literary & Cultural Journal in Santali

41 Serma :: Gelaĳ Lekha :: Me 2011



Phr. John Baptist Panepinto  
(1911 - 1990)

*Figure 6.11: Jugsirjol (Kolkata, West Bengal)*

Yet at the same time, the multiscryptality that prevails in the Santali-speaking region is recognized. For instance, on the inside cover, there is a statement written in Roman-Santali stating that submissions to *Jugsirjol* will be accepted in Roman, Bengali, Devanagari, or Ol-Chiki scripts, with a disclaimer that all articles will be printed *only* in Roman script (*olko eken Roman Akhor Santalitege chapa sodorok'a*).

In promoting the Roman script, the magazine promotes a view of Santali "literature and culture" that is deeply grounded in the missionary tradition. For instance, the May 2011 edition is dedicated [11] to Father John Baptist Panepinto, an American Jesuit missionary who edited the Roman-script Santali magazine *Marsal Tabon* from 1956-1990 and wrote dozens of plays and short stories in Santali. In an editorial for the same issue, the editor emphasizes the influence that dozens of missionaries have had on fashioning a Santali literary tradition, and also underscores that the oldest literary journals, *Peḍa Hoḍ* and *Marsal Tabon* have been missionary-directed publications [8-B]. The magazine's circulation follows the institutional routes of Santali Christian missions, primarily featuring articles from West Bengal and northern Jharkhand, where missionary influence has been the strongest. However, in interviews in southeast Bengal, where missionary influence has been less, I found that copies of the magazine were circulating among Santali-language teachers and editors. The "Santali Literary and Cultural Society" which published the journal also allied with numerous other organizations such as the *Gota Bharot Santali Sahitya Sabha* (All-India Santali Literary Association), which opposes Ol-Chiki and supports literature and education in Roman script-Santali, as well as church organizations such as the Missionaries of Charity. Thus, the journal is artifactualized simultaneously through a material process (Roman script) as well as through the variety of associations and institutional networks, such as religious networks, in which the journal circulates.

While *Jugsirjol* operates within a network that has been established through the long-standing circulation of Roman-script Santali language magazines that have been facilitated through missionary expansion, other well-established Santali-language journals have arisen through the strength of local organization in rural areas. These organizations, started by local elites, usually schoolteachers, try to cultivate a Santali literary class by promoting regular meetings and supporting the production and dissemination of "literary and cultural journals." While organizations mainly begin with one or two journals, the journals tend to proliferate with succeeding generations, although publication and distribution remain sporadic. For instance, the Bandowan area of Purulia district, just adjacent to Jhilimili bazaar, has a strong history of social organization among Santali communities. In 1976, the famous poet Sarada Prasad Kisku, also a primary school teacher, helped start a social welfare organization *Susaq Gaonta* [Social welfare club], which was influential for upstart writers such as GPS (who was interviewed in Chapter 4) as well as on the following generation of writers, such as the editor of *Tetre* magazine, MH. As part of the club's activities, Bhabot Soren and Sarada Prasad Kisku edited a magazine called *Susaq Dahar* [Road to social development] which featured the work of many writers in the area.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the club and mentor figures such as Sarada Prasad Kisku also helped younger writers and editors begin their projects. In 1976, MH, at that time a young schoolteacher from a small village in Bandowan block, started, with the help of Sarada Prasad Kisku, *Tetre* magazine [12]. The magazine, which became very influential in the area among writers, editors, and others, ran until 1993, closed down, and then was recently restarted last year. Another Kisku acolyte, KM, also from a village near Bandowan in Purulia district, began *Sili* magazine in 1981, which has been running continuously to date. These magazines are

distributed through networks that had already been established through organizations such as *Susaq Gaonta*, and the now numerous clubs and organizations that have started in Santali villages in the area.

For instance, *Tetre* is distributed through a large network of committee members throughout West Bengal [13], but most of these members have connections to the Purulia literary scene, either through residence or kinship. Local bazaars also carry copies of the magazines, which are physically brought to stores by editors or committee members. In Jhilimili bazaar for instance, I saw copies of *Tetre* and *Sili* circulating more than any other magazine. The editors, MH and KM, were well known in Jhilimili, appearing as invited guests in cultural programs and local fairs, and speaking on issues relating to language, literature, and community. The journals' circulation and reception act in concert with other domains of Santali literacy, where articles or plays published in these magazines are performed in drama competitions that happen during village festivals. For example, a local Jhilimili playwright told me that he had written a play (Hembrom 2012) after reading an article I had written in *Tetre* about scholarly research conducted on Santali language and literature in different parts of the world. The article, which was a simple literature review (Choksi 2010), became the grounds for an insurrectionary play where people were demanding why, if Santali was being talked about around the world, it was not being used in local administration.<sup>11</sup> In addition, while watching a drama competition with *Tetre* editor MH, he was telling me how certain dramas performed during the competition had been published before in *Tetre*, and have now become thoroughly recontextualized as standard drama performances seen in the area.

However, in the case of Purulia-district publications one can track certain differences in what constitutes a "literary and cultural journal" over generations. This is illustrated by the



varying uses of script. Earlier journals such as *Tetre* were written solely in the Eastern Brahmi script. Even today, unlike most "literary and cultural journals" the title page of *Tetre* continues to be only written in Eastern Brahmi [12-A], with no English-Roman (except for the last page) [13-A]. As Santali was not institutionally taught, and the Jharkhand movements and a concomitant Santali literary domain emerged in Purulia independently of the rise of Ol-Chiki, the Eastern Brahmi script was the medium of literary expression. *Sili* on the other hand is much more typical of most "literary and cultural journals" published in West Bengal today. These journals feature, on their title page, a constellation where the title is written in Ol-Chiki/Eastern Brahmi/and Roman scripts, a constellation also featured prominently in Santali newspapers as well. On the April 2011 title page of *Sili* [14], it is written in Ol-Chiki-Santali and English-Roman "Sili: monthly literary and cultural journal," and only the title is, additionally, in Eastern Brahmi. This script combination marks off a particular domain of Santali media which, in West Bengal, emerges through the interaction between these script forms.

The editor of *Sili* insists that Ol-Chiki was added in the 90's as a response to mounting political pressure by readership and ASECA (the Adibasi Socio-Educational Cultural Association, the primary institution supporting Ol-Chiki script) to feature Ol-Chiki prominently on the cover page. However *Sili* is not alone in this; all journals currently in print which I collected (except for the recently restarted *Tetre*) have a similar combination on the title page, though the inside matter is all in Eastern-Brahmi script. Both editors of *Sili* and *Tetre* claim that the Santali movement in Purulia is primarily about *language* and not about *script*. This claim, in addition to the fact that most of the writers, committee members, and readership is unfamiliar with Ol-Chiki script, justifies the continued use of Eastern Brahmi in these magazines.



**Figure 6.12: Tetre (Kaira, Purulia West Bengal)**

‘তেতरे’ ँगमः ठाँड

- १। नरेन्द्रनाथ मानडि, २, माखला हरिसडा, पोः - रघुनाथपुर  
जेल्ला - हगली। मोः- ९८३२३२१८१५
- २। सन९ सरन  
अनुषद विभाग, रवीन्द्रभारती विश्वविद्यालय  
५७, वि. टि. रोड, कोलक. ग - ५०
- ३। मनोज मुरमु  
स्ट्रीट नं. ८०, कोयाटार नं. ८/१८ डि  
चित्तुरङ्गन, जेल्ला - वर्धमान। मोः- ९९३०८८७१३०
- ४। अरुन कुमार सरन  
C/o - धनीराम सरन, Qr. No D. C. - 29,  
Central Excise Staff Quarter,  
HUDCO Colony, Bidhan Nagar,  
Durgapur - 12  
Mob : 9800194175
- ५। श्यामचरन सरन (शिक्षक)  
बराडुम हायर सेकेण्डरि स्कूल  
पोः बराबाजार, जेल्ला - पुर्कलिया, मोः- ९९३२५९२५८
- ७। सुनील हंसदा (शिक्षक)  
बेरुग्राम बाङ्कव विद्यापीठ, पोः-सादिपुर-बेरुग्राम  
भाया-काटोया, जेल्ला-वर्धमान  
मोः- ९८३८७७७३९३/९८९९९५३००२
- ९। सुई बुक स्टल  
C/o - सुधीर टुडु  
बडदहि, पोः - जेरोबावाडि, जेल्ला - पुर्कलिया  
मोः- ९९३०८९११८२
- ८। रूपछादि हंसदाः  
२०१, बांगलो, साईथ सहिड, ँडगपुर, पश्चिम मेदिनीपुर  
मोः- ९८९५८९१८९८
- ९। गोगुञ्ज प्रसाद सरन  
उदलबनि, पोः बान्दोयान, जेल्ला - पुर्कलिया।  
मोः- ९५८९८३३३३
- १०। सुनील बरन मुरमु  
C/o - बन्ना राय ठोथुरी  
२३, सारदा पल्ली, डमेश्वर, पोः- सारदापल्ली  
जेल्ला - हगली। मोः- ९८३८८९३३११
- ११। बादल हेमबरम  
70/9, Seven Tank Estate, Dumdum Road,  
Kol - 2, Mob: 9051504591
- १२। हरिपद मुरमु, कौटोसोडा, पोः कुमुडक, जेल्ला - पुर्कलिया।  
मोः- ९९३२३९५७१८
- १३। सतारङ्गन किस्कु (जे. ई.), एम. आर/ए. सि. विभाग,  
इछार्ण रेलवे, सि. एन्ड टारुडु ठोयार्कशप, लिलुया,  
जेल्ला - हाण्डा। मोः- ९८९९०९७७९९
- १४। कमलेश्वर सरन, मडेल स्कूल रोड, रघुनाथपुर,  
बाडग्राम, पश्चिम मेदिनीपुर। मोः- ९७९८२८७९२
- १५। रूपछादि हेमबरम, श्रीपल्ली, कैदुयाडिहि, बाँकुडा।
- १७। पदक चन्द्र किस्कु  
लेक भिला एपार्टमेन्ट, फ्लाट नं - २, फास्ट फ्लोर,  
१७७, मानिकतला, पोः - माखला, उत्तरपाडा, हगली,  
मोः - ९८३७८८८३०५३
- १९। बिनय मुरमु  
आकाशवानी कलकता, (सानताडि विभाग),  
इडेनगार्डेन, कलकता - ९०० ००१
- १८। ड. सुरेन्द्र नाथ मानडि, यशोदासा, B. P. H. C.,  
आलिपुर दुयार, मोः - ९९३२१७१५०५
- १९। रामसुन्दर बासके  
१५-ए/२९ भारती रोड,  
बि-जेन, दुर्गापुर - ५, मोः- ९८९८५८५१९८
- २०। गनेश मानडि  
ग्राम - महेश नदी, पोः - ताल मारा,  
थाना - नेतुडिया, जेल्ला - पुर्कलिया,  
पिन - ९२३१२१,  
मोः - ९९३२९२८२१२
- २१। जगन्नाथ सरन  
टालाई रोड, ँतडा, बाँकुडा।  
मोः - ९८३८५०९१२२
- २२। सारिधरम हंसदाः  
नुननुन गेडिया, बाडग्राम,  
मेदिनीपुर।  
मोः - ९८९८८८९३००

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EDITOR - MAHADEV HANSDA • Mobile : 9002764513

Figure 6.13: Tetre (cont.)

Govt. of India Regd. No. : 53124/84  
ପଞ୍ଜୀକୃତ. ପଞ୍ଜୀକୃତ. ପଞ୍ଜୀକୃତ. ପଞ୍ଜୀକୃତ.

ଶିଳି



**SILI**

*Monthly Literary & Cultural Journal in Santali*

Vol. No. 31 (୩୧ ସେରାମା, ୮ ଲେଖା) □ April - 2011

ମାସାପଢ଼ାଓସ୍ତିଚ — କଲେକ୍ସ ନାଥ ମାନଡ଼ି ।। ଗନଂ-୧୦ (ଗେଲ) ଟାକା ସୁମୁଂ

*Published from Purulia District*

**Figure 6.14: Sili (Sirishgora, Purulia, West Bengal)**

Contrary to the claim that the literary movement in Purulia is primarily about "language" and not about "script," younger editors hailing from areas around Purulia, and who have been introduced to Santali writing and editing through the very same local networks, have chosen to publish their magazines almost exclusively in Ol-Chiki script. One reason for this is that following Raghunath Murmu's visit to West Bengal in 1979, and the expansion of the "Santali Bhasha Morcha," whose primary aim was the expansion of Ol-Chiki script, script became a major semiotic form around which discussions of language, literature, and culture was organized.<sup>12</sup> While for MH and KM the issue of script is neutral, insofar as the major aim was to maintain and perpetuate the project of Santal literacy started by people such as Sarada Prasad Kisku; for a younger generation, script became an issue inextricably intertwined with the politics of autonomy.<sup>13</sup>

This new ideology subsequently impacted the ways in which the "literary and cultural journal" genre was constituted for a new generation of editors who were mentored through these local committees. For instance, one of the first magazines of the newest generation, *Saonta Arsi* (Society's mirror), edited by a younger editor who grew up in a village in Purulia district with a strong history of literary organization, is published primarily in Ol-Chiki script. The title page [15-A] features information in Roman script-Santali, English, and the rest of the content in Ol-Chiki. While the literary content is in Ol-Chiki, the advertisements within the magazine are mostly in Eastern Brahmi, even if the object being advertised is in Ol-Chiki, like an advertisement for another Purulia-based magazine published by a younger editor, *Sarjom Umul* (Shadow of the teak tree) [16-A].

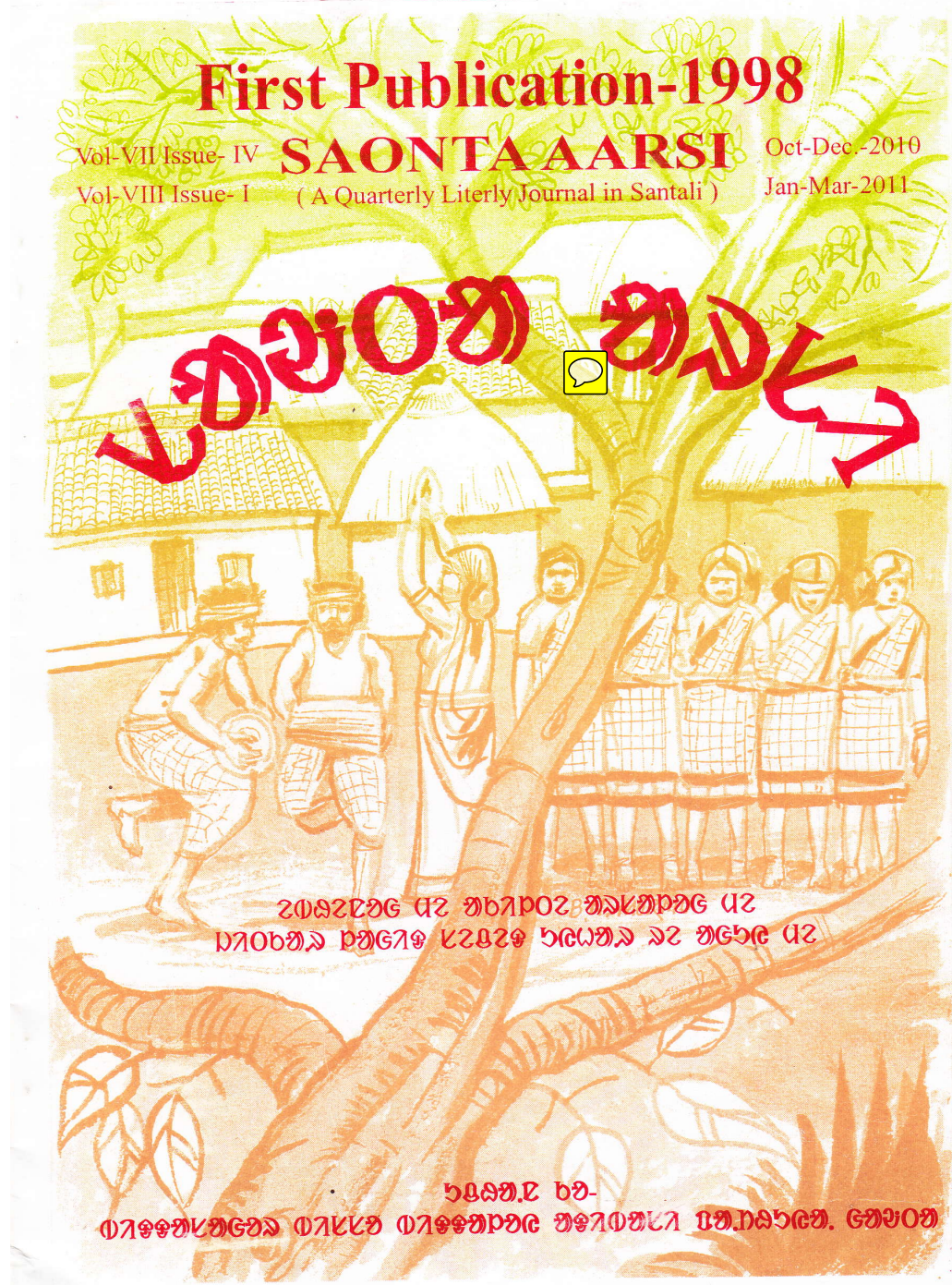


Figure 6.15: Saonta Arsi (Chilkigarh, West Midnapur, West Bengal)







The same editor has also published books as well in Eastern Brahmi script, and book advertisements by local authors in the magazine are related in Eastern Brahmi, like an advertisement for a Santali short story collection *Le Chaonra Le Bhaonra* [18-A]. This suggests that the magazine editors, though supporting Ol-Chiki, also leverages the use of Eastern Brahmi to speak to the multiple audiences who comprise the network, including those of older generations, low levels of Ol-Chiki proficiency, and differing ideological orientations.

Another magazine (referenced above) *Sarjom Umul* is much more recent than *Saonta Arsi*, with only two issues having been published at the time I met the editor, GM, an English-language high school teacher in Purulia district. This magazine also is in Ol-Chiki script, and in conversation with GM he mentioned to me that he, like many of his peers, believe that the use of a single script, Ol-Chiki, is necessary in order to unite Santals. However, as the cover of the second issue suggests, the editor and the *Sarjom Umul* committee have also been influenced and shaped by the local literary movement that took place in Purulia district. On the top of the title page is the title in Ol-Chiki along with pictures (at the top left) of Raghunath Murmu and (at the top right) Sidhu Murmu, the leader of the *Hul* [17-A]. These pictures mirror similar imagery in Santali-language newspapers like *Lahanti Patrika*. Except for here the "adivasi movement" signified by Sidhu Murmu, the leader of the *Hul*, and cultural significance of script, signified by Raghunath Murmu are joined together, anchoring the magazine.

However, though the magazine maintains a commitment to Ol-Chiki, the magazine cover art features Sarada Prasad Kisku, the poet from southern Purulia district, who is considered to be the progenitor of this local network. All of his works, with their titles notably displayed in Eastern Brahmi script, are featured in the background [17-B]. The editor, GM, is also a committee member of *Tetre* magazine, and I met him at MH's house where he had arrived to

pick up copies and distribute them. Inside the magazine, there also advertisements for other locally produced journals, such as *Tetre*, *Sili*, and *Saonta Arsi* [19-A, 19-B], with their titles in Eastern Brahmi script. These advertisements illustrate the local exchange network in which the journal is enmeshed. I received the magazine at the house of MH, where the editor had come to pick up copies of *Tetre* and ask questions to MH and senior local writer, GPS. In greeting them (and me), after doing the ritual *Johar* greeting, he gifted all of us copies of his magazines, a practice I saw frequently among editors and publishers.

Charting the history of the "literary and cultural journal" in one small part of West Bengal, I have attempted to show how within the same regional area, processes of artifactualization differ between generations, even though they continue to be linked within networks of exchange. The literary movement started in the area in concert with demands for Jharkhand and creating a separate domain of Santali literacy. Text artifacts in Santali were seen to mediate those goals, and through practices of production and exchange, these artifacts transformed into "literary and cultural journals," a special class of artifact distinct from other media artifacts. Older generations, as I have tried to show above, created these journals as a platform for Santali literacy in which writing in a regimented Santali code constituted the main material process of artifactualization. The journals configured a media domain for Santali literacy, and in doing so, engendered new economies of prestige in which authority was linked up to publication and exchange (often in terms of gift exchange) of these artifacts, along with participation in various events promoting these journals.

While the same economies operate for a younger generation of editors, the domain of Santali literacy has now been taken for granted. No longer do magazines seek to establish an autonomous domain of Santali literacy, but rather are produced in a milieu where publishing a

To ~~Dr.~~ Nishant Das

The cover of the journal 'Sarjom Umul' features a central black and white portrait of a man with glasses. The portrait is surrounded by several tilted rectangular panels containing text in Santali script. At the top left is a small portrait of a man, and at the top right is a small portrait of a man with his hands in a prayer position. The title 'SARJOM UMUL' is written in large, stylized Santali characters at the top center. Below the title is a line of text in Santali script. At the bottom of the cover, there is a laurel wreath and the name 'Ganesh' in a stylized font.

SARJOM UMUL

সারজোম উমুল

A Tri-Monthly Literary and Cultural Journal in Santali.

Vol.No.-1 Issue -2 January-February-March 2011

Editor :- Ganesh Mandi, Asst. Editor :- Manojit Tudu

ପଞ୍ଜମ ପଞ୍ଚାଙ୍ଗ - ଚନ୍ଦ୍ର ଚକ୍ର, ପଞ୍ଚମ ପଞ୍ଚାଙ୍ଗ - ଶ୍ରୀ ମନ୍ଦିର ପଞ୍ଚାଙ୍ଗ

Figure 6.19: Sarjom Umul (Maheshnadi, Purulia, West Bengal)



journal is no longer remarkable, and, if the editor is a schoolteacher or writer involved in political or literary organizing, even expected. The rise of digital technology and offset printing, and the ease in which Ol-Chiki can be printed without relying on a press has further increased the number of journals produced in Santali. The impetus has shifted from *language* to *script* in the sense that script has now become, for a younger generation, the salient semiotic modality expressing an autonomous "literary and cultural" domain. While Ol-Chiki magazines continue to circulate less among readers than Eastern Brahmi magazines, they are beginning to become widely available. As described in Chapter 4, more and more of the current generation of students are now embracing the reading and writing of Ol-Chiki script as a distinctive practice of expressing autonomy, and with that, readership in the script will continue to grow.

The networks in which literary and cultural journals and Santali-language newspapers circulate overlap in many respects. However, while the "news" maintains a close connection in projecting Santali distinctions as part of a wider orientation towards Jharkhand politics (in which Bengali language and an orientation to state and non-Santal publics are evident), the "literary and cultural journal" carves out domains in which Santali is more strictly delineated in terms of both code and script. Though the newspapers are published more regularly, there are a greater number of journals published and they are more widely available. For instance, Santali-language news was not sold in the Jhilimili bazaar, it was received either through local newspaper distribution or via post. However, the local bookstall always had in stock and available copies of literary and cultural journals for purchase. These were usually hand-delivered to the store by the producers, and were locally produced publications. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I used to purchase magazines from the bookstall and I asked the bookseller whether people used to buy the magazines. He said rarely; editors or committee members used to drop them off and copies

used to just sit there. One year after I finished my long-term fieldwork, I went back to the same bookstore to purchase magazines. The number and variety of magazines increased and I asked the bookseller again the same question; he said that people were indeed buying magazines and interest was high.

As I have tried to show in this section, literary and cultural journals were a way through which certain networks of exchange between poets, authors, community members, and institutions crystallized. Script-code variations, I suggest, reveal how these networks transform, and how particular genres are recontextualized depending on what networks the artifacts circulate and the differential position (along certain vectors, such as generation) of those participating in those networks. Yet, the production and dissemination of these journals are also related to authority. Editors, who usually are already positioned as elite relative to most other Santals, use the production of journals and the committees of interested authors, students, dramatists, song-dance performers, etc. to gain a legitimacy that their class position and salary does not automatically guarantee them. The appeal to "culture," "language," and "script," provides a way that editors can connect disparate political registers, such as the language of recognition, the politics of autonomy, communal joy (*raska*) and the socialized difference that Santals express vis-a-vis Hindu and Muslim castes.

Yet those among whom the journals circulate do not uncritically accept this authority. For instance, a close interlocutor and Jharkhand party leader would often sit in my room flipping through magazines such as *Tetre* and *Sili*. He had respect for the editors, but when he would talk about some of the committee members, he would say derisively that many of them think that because they had salaried employment and that they were involved with publishing magazines they gained respect and authority within the Santal community. On the contrary, he, in an

opinion I heard among many Santals, including editors and publishers, argued that the locus of traditional authority lay in the majhi-pargana (village headman) system, and magazine committees in no way competed with that form of authority. Yet at the same time, my interlocutor, who was not related to a headman family, also gained his own authority in the community through his position in the local Jharkhand Party faction. Thus, magazines constitute a semiotic artifact that mediates multiple institutional networks, and through which notions of authority within those networks are ideologically brought together or shorn apart for different local political projects.

### ***State interventions and misalignments***

I have described two networks in which "literary and cultural journals" circulate and how through that circulation, they are understood to be mediatized genres. The last network I will mention is that of state-produced or state-supported journals, that is the "official" Santali-language "literary and cultural journals" produced with patronage from the West Bengal state government. While the state only produces one (or two) journals, these journals, since they, unlike the other networks discussed above, are produced within a network in which people are linked through their status as a citizen of a given administrative territory, rather than some other relation (kinship, hospitality, mentorship, or religious affiliation), they provide a ripe terrain for contestation. From my conversations with an older generation of writers, such as MH and KM, the magazine *Pachim Bangla* [West Bengal], published by the Government of West Bengal Backward Classes Welfare Ministry in Calcutta, was influential in their exposure to literacy. Like journals today, it circulated on college campuses and ST hostels, where copies would be passed around and read, exposing students to writing in Santali from throughout the state. It also

provided people templates on how to write literature in Santali-Eastern Brahmi script.

Unlike other journals, *Pachim Bangla* maintained, even until the early 2000s, an insistence on the strict use of Eastern Brahmi-Santali in the title page [2-A] as well as all content. Unlike many other magazines, visual imagery on the title pages usually consisted of photographs of Santal villages, either juxtaposing visions of development and traditional pastoral scenes or featuring people engaged in some kind of marked traditional activity, such as agriculture. Unlike the other magazines, *Pachim Bangla* did not have a history of being enmeshed in local politics, yet, according to interviews; it remained critical to the cultivation of a generation of writers in various parts of the state.

However, by the time I conducted fieldwork, the former editors had said that the journal was effectively out of print due to neglect from the ministry, and I was unable to find any recent copies. Old copies were, however, still available at village fairs and literary programs, and I procured a number of copies from the early 2000's, suggesting that copies are still read, bought, and sold, regardless of their out-of-print status. In 2007-8, the Communist government in West Bengal organized a "Santali Academy" along the lines of the already existing "Bangla Academy." Thus, there was an attempt to institutionalize Santali along the lines of Bengali, although many authors and editors I talked to suggested it was a way that the Communist government was attempting to marshal political support among Santal elites in light of growing political unrest in the Santali-speaking areas following Communist attempts at economic liberalization and privatization. The "Santali Academy" sought to bring together authors and editors embedded in different networks, including the leaders of ASECA, who militantly supported Ol-Chiki, Roman-script editors, and the vast network of authors who wrote and published in Eastern Brahmi and who had varying opinions on the question of script. The

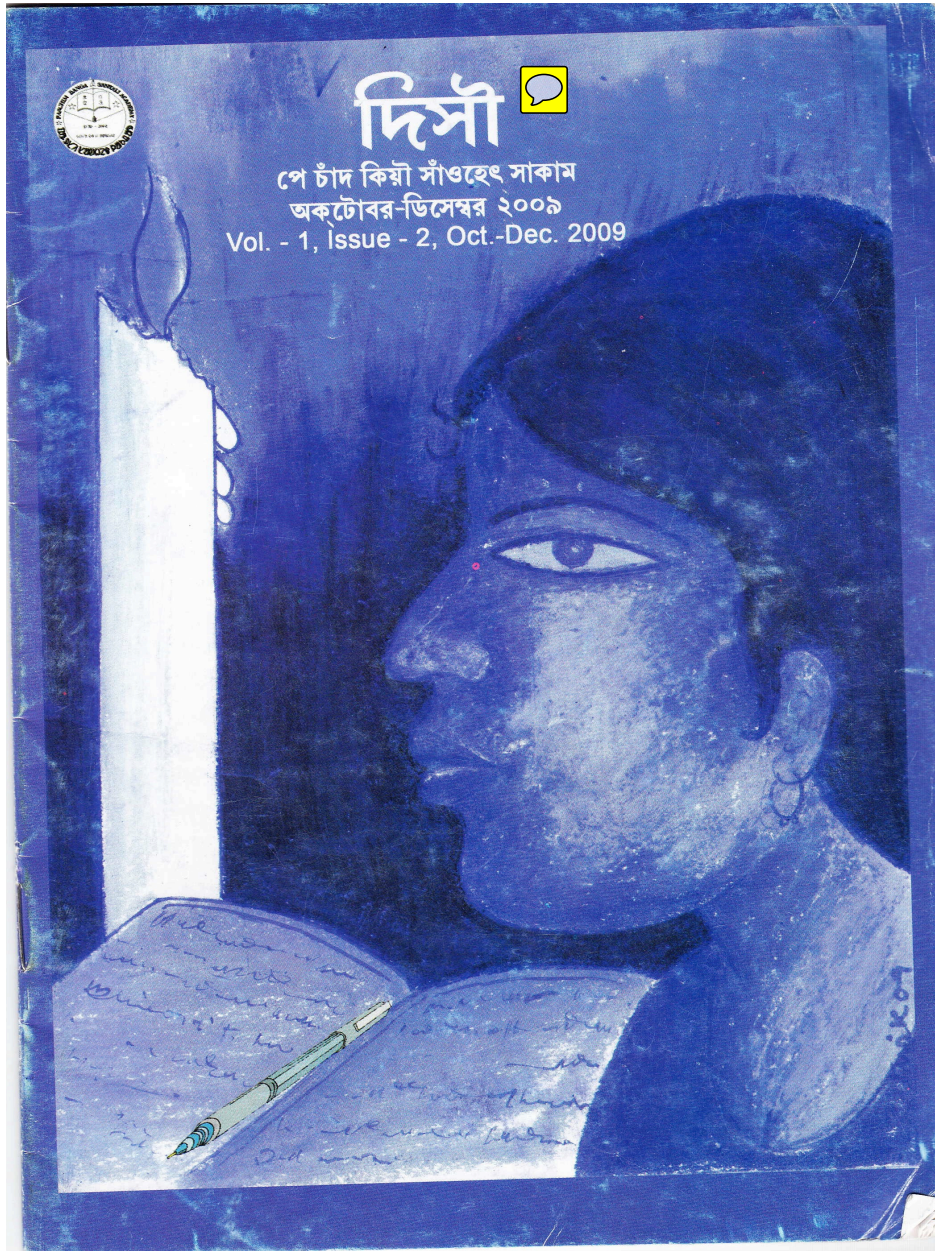


nascent "Academy" was fractured almost immediately along the lines of script, and the government, according to the participants I talked to, sided with Ol-Chiki advocates, causing some senior writers to resign. Some writers, such as the eminent Dhirendranath Bhaskey, also publically resigned for political reasons, particularly the government's handling of the Maoist insurgency in the Santal-dominated Lalgadh area.

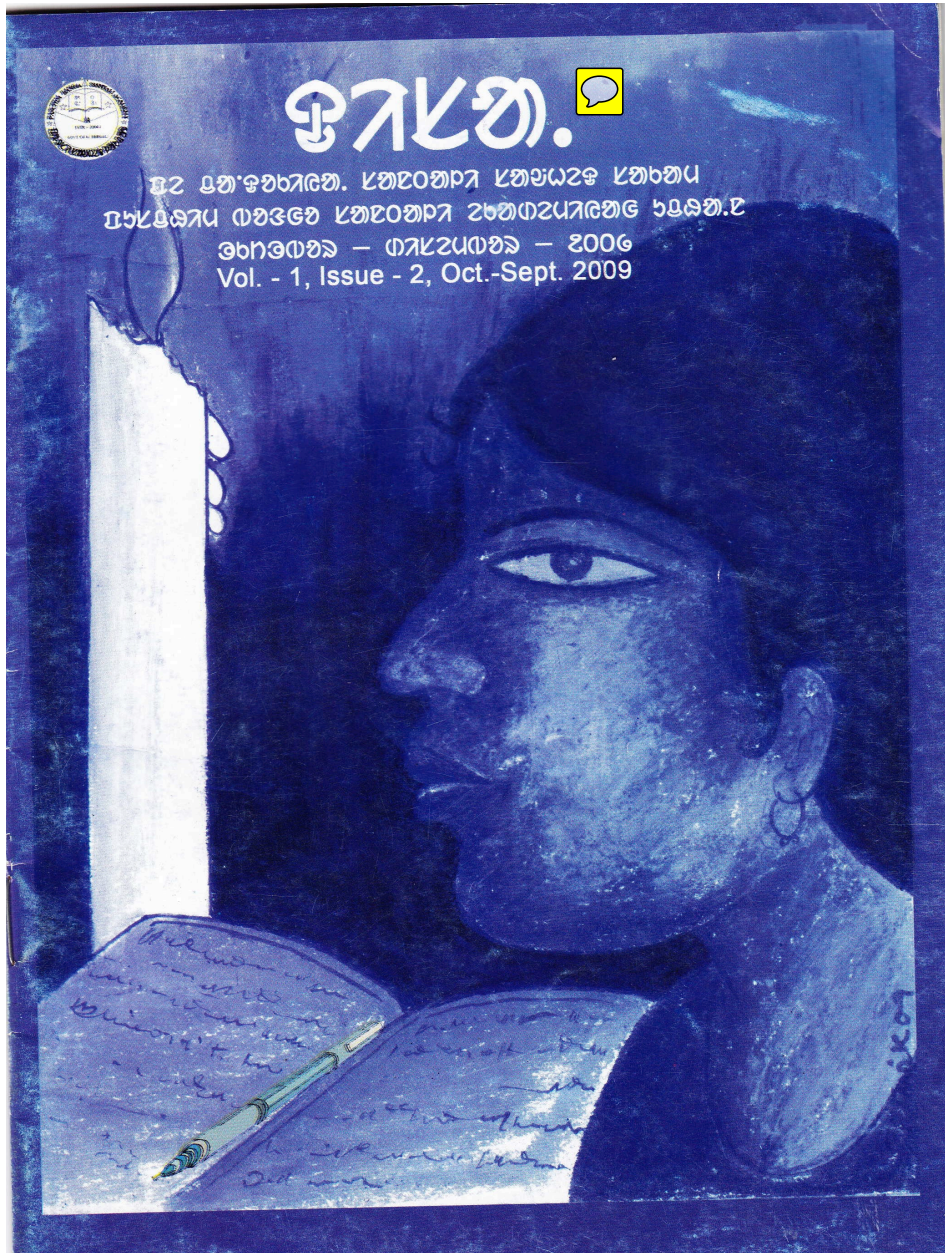
By attempting to incorporate or recognize Santali institutionally, the state government indirectly contributed to greater polarization around the question of script. Script not only became a medium through which different networks congealed or ruptured, but also a form around which people struggled for state resources, and the concurrent prestige that these resources brought. Whereas before, during the publication of *Pachim Bangla*, the magazine functioned similarly to the Soviet-sponsored Buryat language newspapers examined by Graber (indeed it was published for a while by the Ministry of Information), and disseminated a certain view of literature and culture to the tribal margins of the state, the emergence of the Santali Academy revealed the state's imagination of a unified Santal citizen of West Bengal to be a fantasy. What emerged from the disputes and fractures was the state-sponsored publication *Disa* (Direction). These publications continued to be informed by a monoscriptural bias (inherent in an idea of a unified reading public), yet the bias was continually challenged by the question of *script*. Because of the misalignments between state practice and the issues surrounding script, *Disa* had to be published simultaneously in two editions each issue, one in the Eastern Brahmi script [21] and the other in Ol-Chiki [22]. The issues look exactly the same, with the same cover art and the same content. The only difference is that the Ol-Chiki cover [22] has slightly more information, letting us know that this was a publication of the West Bengal Santali Academy. Though most everyone who would be reading the publication would likely be familiar with the

Eastern Brahmi script, the government had also allied itself with a political project that sees Ol-Chiki script as the single script for Santali.

Consequently, the publication and dissemination of *Disa* constituted yet another semiotic network in which artifacts attained meaning through circulation. In this network, bureaucratic imaginaries of language planning (single-script Santali media), government attempts at incorporating its Santali-speaking minority within the ambit of state sponsored cultural institutions, and the fractures around script coincided. Many writers construed the magazine as well as the institution it represents, the Santali Academy, as an object of political struggle, discussing it, like Bengali-language newspapers, as part of a political party apparatus. Factions supporting different scripts were said to be linked to different political parties, and the positions of the Santali Academy and the layout of the magazine itself was often considered to be a reflection of the agenda of the party in power (during most of my fieldwork, it was the Communist Party of India-Marxist, which was said to support Ol-Chiki script). Yet, even though the magazine was the source of so much contention, I rarely saw it circulate in the rural areas where I conducted my fieldwork. The only time I saw it was at local fairs, where I bought a number of back issues that were on sale, both in Eastern Brahmi and in Ol-Chiki. I even did not see the magazine circulate much among the writers and editors I talked to. This suggests that though the Academy, which had a large amount of resources, and the magazine was an object of significant debate, the actual reach was quite limited. It appears therefore that the local networks of Santali publishing, dissemination, and distribution, which by this time had become so strong and robust in the Santali-speaking areas, has mitigated the impact of state intervention within this domain.



**Figure 6.21: Disq (Eastern Brahmi edition; Kolkata, West Bengal)**



**Figure 6.22: Disq (Ol-Chiki edition; Kolkata, West Bengal)**

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyze the processes by which multiple script-code constellations come together within a social field of mediation and circulation in order to recursively constitute the domain of Santali-language media. Following recent linguistic-anthropological work on the subject, I argue that "media" itself not be understood as an autonomous domain, but as a constellation emerging from interrelated processes of artifactualization, circulation, and exchange within institutional or regional networks. In articulating these relations, I attempt to move beyond the binary of producer/consumer or production/reception that inform much of media analysis, and instead view the production and reception of both the message and the form of media artifacts in terms of a continual process of de- and re-contextualizations within certain political-economic networks. Doing so, I suggest, allows one to analyze the production and circulation of Santali-language text artifacts not only as part of a larger domain of Santali "literacy," which include numerous networks of practice which influence how text artifacts are taken up, but also to take into account the ways that script-code constellations employed in the material organization of such artifacts intertextually align with already-established pathways of circulation and mediation.

While at the outset of my research, I suggested that "media" would be a primary site of study, I soon found out that in order to explain "media" one must situate text-artifacts within the multiple networks in which they emerge and circulate. Tracking the material organization of the artifact, and in particular, the script-code constellations they employ, I claim that these artifacts not only display textual 'content,' but that this form indexes particular genres that structure the way a public will engage with it. For instance, Santali-language "news" in West Bengal is oriented in part toward a Bengali-dominated news media in which local events are cast in

relation to political programs. Thus, beyond the newsprint and the broadsheet, which materially renders these artifacts as "news," there is also the feature of "content," which is the relating of local and regional events through the lens of regional politics, as well as the script-code constellation (Bengali/Eastern Brahmi) that this genre employs<sup>14</sup>.

However, as I have suggested in this chapter, Santali-language newspapers serve a different function than Bengali-language newspapers, in that they also are emblematic of a politics of autonomy. This in the one hand allows them to simultaneously scale events as more 'local,' concentrating specifically on the West Bengal/Jharkhand border region (the "Jharkhand" cultural area) not covered by mainstream media, as well as 'pan-local', reinterpreting these events to have an import at an "all-India" adivasi level. Yet the newspapers also vary in the kinds of script-code constellations they deploy. Some deploy only Bengali/Eastern Brahmi, others Ol-Chiki/Santali and Bengali/Eastern Brahmi, and many others, Bengali-Santali/Eastern Brahmi. Currently there is a greater shift to exclusively Ol-Chiki newspapers as well. Though these newspapers share many material, linguistic, and ideological features, tying them within the same genre, the differences, particularly in the organization of script and code, also reveal contrasting ideas of the nature of Santali-language news, what kinds of publics the 'news' addresses, and the kinds of politics of autonomy of which the news should be emblematic.

In addition to newspapers, I have also tried to situate the other major genre of Santali print media, the "literary and cultural journal" within institutional or local political networks. These journals are almost always monolingual publications, and have been exclusively set up to promote Santali-language literacy. They started in the early nineteenth century as Christian missionaries sought to disseminate literary and cultural production in the Roman script, thus linking already established practices of exchange and hospitality in Santali communities to the

circulation of text-artifacts. Thus, journals were used to consolidate wide-ranging institutional networks, and not used primarily to establish capitalist markets of readership. Even today, as I have shown, Roman script journals work in concert with other institutional networks to spread a version of a politics of autonomy that stresses Roman-script literacy and missionary practice, while also recognizing literary production in multiple scripts.

Yet the vast majority of literary and cultural journals are published, like Bengali-language "little magazines" through informal literary networks in particular regions. As shown also in the previous chapter, these networks have been essential in cultivating an alternate form of prestige among educated Santals, mediated by text-artifacts such as journals and accompanying meetings, literary gatherings, and programs. Yet, unlike the Roman-script journals (or ASECA journals in Ol-Chiki), the script-code constellations vary according to local and generational conceptions of what features are salient for the dissemination of Santal literacy and politics of autonomy. For an older generation in southern Purulia for instance, Eastern Brahmi script indexes the 'code' of Santali literacy in a situation where participants stress *language* over *script*, thus defaulting to the script that is most widely read. Yet for the younger generation of editors, though locating themselves within the same genealogy and participating within the same networks of exchange, "script," and in particular, the Ol-Chiki script, becomes the salient ideological feature for the constitution of the genre.

Finally I discussed state-directed approaches, and the importance that text artifacts have for language planning. Like in Graber's discussion of Buryat-language media in Russia, in West Bengal, the state attempted to use media as a way to incorporate its minority-language speakers into a monolingual-monographic territory. However, the growth of local political networks and the Jharkhand movement, as well as the demand for the institution of Ol-Chiki script compelled

the state to alter its approach. At the same time, while multiple script-code constellations still persist to a varying extent in most Santali-language publications, the state's approach has been to divide publication evenly among two completely monolingual/monoscriptural identical journals in order to accommodate demands from different sections promoting Santali literacy. This rift reveals the different ideas of what constitutes a sufficient Santali-language "literary and cultural journal" as well as the state's institutional response. However, local networks have become so entrenched in the various Santali-speaking regions of West Bengal, that the state's reach and influence in terms of publication has diminished. The state is no longer a primary actor in the Santali-language media sphere, although it continues to play a role.

Text artifacts have played a significant role in consolidating the social networks that have grown around the political project of Santali literacy. From the beginning of Santali printing, where Santali literary journals were disseminated along with religious texts and mission publications as part of traveling groups, to the current situation where they are printed in multiple script-code constellations throughout the Santali-speaking area, journals and newspapers have served to promote regional, political autonomy, spread and consolidate institutional networks, catalyze the formation and maintenance of local trans-generational organizations, and created an interface between local elite and the state. Each of these networks, and the social practices that constitute these networks, determine how these artifacts come into being, are generically classified as "media", and are exchanged. Understanding not only what these media "say" but what they iconize and emblemize requires not only a close analysis of their material form and pathways of circulation and the wider political and social networks outlined in the dissertation co-constitute each other. We can thus understand the diverse ways territory, community, and autonomy are aligned through an analysis of how linguistic and graphic resources configure



media artifacts and the pathways in which these artifacts circulate.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “artifactualization” to describe the process by which script-code constellations are materialized (through technological processes of typing, printing, binding, etc.) and are rendered as objects of exchange between persons. In a way this speaks to the literature on “commodity” particularly in the sense of Appadurai (1986) where he argues that a commodity is “anything intended for exchange” (9). However linguistic anthropologists have questioned this notion of commodity, for instance Agha (2011) who sees “commodity” as discursive registers which align people and things in relationships of exchange (also for reviews of the literature on commodification and language, see Heller 2010 or Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012). I have chosen instead of commodity to focus on the term “artifact” because it emphasizes the process of materialization that I am concerned with in this chapter, as well as analytically separates the object from exchange.

<sup>2</sup> For another comparative case, see Margret Bender’s work on the Cherokee syllabary where she convincingly shows how different expectations of what the syllabary means to Cherokees and non-Cherokees in North Carolina then construct the domains in which they syllabary is used and what it signifies, such as media used for tourism or for religious purposes. (Bender 2002)

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion

<sup>4</sup> I used a variety of methods to collect and track newspapers. For two papers (Sar Sagun and Lahanti Patrika), through encounters with distributors (discussed later in the chapter), I bought a subscription. Thus these papers were generally mailed to my flat in Calcutta, or back issues were gifted to me on numerous different occasions. The other papers I received through a collection of either circulated copies, either from different informants, or purchased at bookstalls at fairs or Santali-language programs. For most of the papers discussed here, even though I discuss one copy, I have obtained multiple copies and thus the findings presented are generally relevant across the multiple issues I obtained.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, *Lahanti Patrika*, though relating all its Santali-language content in Ol-Chiki script relies heavily on advertisements from touring Santali dramas. As we saw in Chapter 4, Santali drama posters are all in Eastern Brahmi script, and the advertisements are no different. This suggests that while the advertisements are trying to appeal to readers which they assume will prefer to read Santali in Eastern Brahmi, the paper itself is trying to cultivate a very different type of readership. The “reader” interpellated by these publications therefore is not a singular Andersonian national consuming subject, but rather multiply interpellated and fragmented.

<sup>6</sup> Tudu 2011. This publication is also referenced in Chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> The name “Manbhum” was the old name of Purulia district, West Bengal while it was still part of Bihar state, before it was annexed to the state of West Bengal. It is still used by those who want to assert a separate political and cultural identity for the Purulia area.

<sup>8</sup> On my last visit to the area in 2014, the paper had ceased publication of its Ol-Chiki edition.

<sup>9</sup> While the issue of funding is important, I did not find it appropriate to inquire about the exact nature of how these magazines were being funded. Sometimes the editors told me that they availed government grants for minority languages (by such bodies as the Central Institute of Indian Languages) but this was not common. For the most part from what I ascertained, funds were raised through a combination of editors and committee members who formed part of the network.

<sup>10</sup> I discuss the following publications as an example of a genealogy of one particularly strong organization(centered in this region) that has maintained continuity over the generations. While I am not sure about how this replicates itself in other contexts, this group and the publications I sample that have come out from it are highly regarded in the local area where I did fieldwork, and also has had significant influence on the Santali literary scene in West Bengal more generally.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>12</sup> The role of the “Bhasha Morcha” in transforming the focus Jharkhandi politics from language to script was explained to me in an interview with the *Sili* editor KM.

<sup>13</sup> This is also in no small part to advances in printing technology as well. The rise of digital off-set printing in rural areas, computer technology, and Ol-Chiki fonts made it much easier than before to print and publish in Ol-Chiki. Older generations had to rely on printing presses, which at that time were primarily in Bengali.

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Younger generations of editors can type (or have typed) all the matter in *OI-Chiki*, and have the digital copy printed off at a nearby press. However to attribute the enthusiasm for *OI-Chiki* to a mere change in technology would be misleading, in fact it was the technological availability combined with the new ideological importance of script to politics which created the conditions under which *OI-Chiki* publication could flourish.

<sup>14</sup> The relation between form and content in what constitutes “news” is examined in detail by Bell (1991).

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion: The many meanings of autonomy

2011 was a historical year for Jhilimili, the Jangalmahal region, and the state of West Bengal. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and its allied leftist coalition had held continuous power in the state for 37 years, the longest running elected state government in India. However, social upheaval following the government's attempt to forcibly seize farmland for factories in the regions of Nandigram and Singur in West Bengal signaled the beginning of the end for the leftist government, as the rural base, many of whom benefitted from the land reforms brought about by the government decades earlier, started to turn away in large numbers from the party (Banerjee 2007, Bhattacharya 2007, Sarkar and Chowdhry 2009, Mukharji 2009, etc.). Shortly after the revolts in the agricultural heartland of West Bengal, the forest and hill regions, dominated by *adivasis* (the majority of whom are Santals) started to see significant unrest, this time centered primarily around police atrocities in the region of Lalgadh, a very short distance from Jhilimili (Bhattacharya 2009, Bishnu 2009, Sarkar and Sarkar 2009, Bhattacharya 2010, etc.)

As I have mentioned periodically throughout this dissertation, by the time I arrived for my fieldwork, Jhilimili and the entire region (the districts of Purulia, Bankura, and West Midnapore) was considered by the state and central governments as part of a so-called "Red Corridor," an active guerilla war-zone stretching throughout the *adivasi* dominated central belt of India, from Maharashtra in the west; to Chattisgadh in central India, where members of the

banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) had wrested control of entire districts from the state government; to Jharkhand. As tribal residents started organizing against the police and Communist party officials, the Jangalmahal area where I worked was now labeled a “Maoist” region; paramilitary forces, with an already long-standing presence in the area (see Chapter 4), were deployed in larger numbers, with state-of-the art weaponry. At the same time, political party leaders from all major parties had to flee, targets of either Maoist-allied reprisals or paramilitary recrimination. Paramilitaries, with little knowledge of the local landscape, and not conversant in either Bengali or Santali, patrolled the bazaars and villages with orders to shoot and arrest with minimal interrogation or suspicion; Maoist-allied groups shut down roads by burning busses, forced villagers to attend rallies, and subjected the markets to multi-day shutdowns.

It was in the midst of this highly charged and violent political situation that I began my research. Initially, most people advised me against going to the region, considering the danger involved. However, a few visits to Jhilimili facilitated by one of my mentors KB, and the introduction to friends in the Kherwal Marsal Gaonta in Jhilimili allowed me to be confident that I could undertake such a project in relative safety. Yet, despite my confidence, the periodic police inspections of my quarters, the presence of daily patrols in the bazaar, and the near total shutdown of the bazaar and transport into and out of the village due to strike calls by Maoist-allied organizations, reminded me that the situation was far from normal.

The political context in which I conducted fieldwork undoubtedly shaped the findings, conclusions, and general arc of this dissertation. Yet, one can legitimately ask, what is the purpose of studying questions of language or script at a time of intense political conflict? Usually, issues involving *adivasis*, especially when they flare up (as they often do) in the form of

armed struggle against the state, are often interpreted by scholars and others as primarily driven by the struggle for resources, “*jal, jangal, jameen*” (water, forest, land) (cf. Louis 2000, Damodaran 2006, etc.) In the Indian context, the struggles around resources exist in a curious grey area between legal and constitutional guarantees on the one hand, and the unwillingness of the state, carrying out so-called development agendas that continue to favor upper-caste elites on the other, to implement these guarantees (cf. Sundar 2009).

Despite the dominant explanatory discourse centering around resources or “development,” however, the question of language and script was continually raised by all actors involved in the conflict, including both by the supporters of the Maoist struggle as well as by the government. Like the struggle for resources, issues of language and script, so important in mediating long-standing demands for autonomy, also occupy a liminal position between the demands of struggle and state attempts at recognition and incorporation. For instance, in an article in an influential social science journal, Amit Bhattacharya, a professor of history at a well-known Calcutta university and sympathetic to the Maoist cause, documented the “alternative development program” that the Maoist-allied factions were implementing in the Jangalmahal region. In addition to road and agricultural development, he mentions “the promotion and spread of the Santali and Kurmali languages and alchiki [sic] script”

(Bhattacharya 2010, 19). He writes further:

As a result of globalization and the domination of one language over another, thousands of indigenous languages had already gone into oblivion all over the world. . . In fact the Lalgarh struggle has put forward the demand of the restoration the near extinct languages of the people. The reality is that in areas where people’s struggles are very strong, the possibility of the regeneration of local languages is a reality, and the local artists, writers and singers make their mark in their respective field of activity (ibid.)

While Santali is not even close to going into “oblivion,” and literary activity is burgeoning, Bhattacharya’s description and rhetoric emphasizes the consideration of language and script as

part of a general demand for, as Bhattacharya argues, leftist goals of “creating a new society fit for human living” (21).

I suggest that the yoking of language and script, along with the discourse of endangerment and linguistic hegemony, with a radical leftist program stems from an attempt to align Maoist discourse (steeped in the language of class struggle and economic inequality) with practices of autonomous politics outlined in this dissertation, of which script-code constellations form an important element. Demands for “autonomy” are mediated through constellations of script, code, and performance, and are intimately linked with Santali perceptions of struggle, both past struggles (Chapter 3), as well as current everyday politics in such quotidian domains as marketplaces (Chapter 4) and schools (Chapter 5).

These constellations, and the scripts, codes, and performance repertoires that comprise them, are diverse, and do not necessarily align with the language of endangerment or “people’s struggle.” Yet, there are times when radical leftist discourse and everyday practices of autonomy converge in spaces like the *akhḍas* of Santal performance. For instance, Duyker (1987) shows how during the first major radical left uprising in the 1970’s, when hundreds of Maoist (CPI-Marxist-Leninist) cadre left urban centers like Calcutta to fight in rural and *adivasi* areas, Santals in the Jangalmahal region selectively incorporated the discourse of the Maoist left into performance repertoires. These alignments are similar to the way both Jharkhand politics and Santali-language literacy has been more recently incorporated with Santali projects of autonomy, differentiation, and struggle through the transformation of performance genres (Chapter 2). The creation of “a new society” therefore is one that, for Santals and others in the region, manifests itself in communicative activities like performance and scriptmaking, as well as in Santali language media-production (Chapter 6), and in places like the market, where interdiscursive

linkages to alternative discourses, such as those with the radical left, are negotiated, transformed, or severed.

At the same time that intellectuals supporting Maoist and Maoist-allied groups discussed the issue of language, the government and opposition parties were also preparing for the upcoming elections. During the campaign, the events unfolding in places like Jhilimili and nearby villages were considered important, not because Santals or other tribals comprise politically powerful voting blocks, but due to a highly charged media environment in which the complicated political conflict unfolding in the region became sensationalized in 24 hour news feeds and graphic headlines and pictures dotting the front pages of the regional Bengali and English dailies. The Communist government, who had recently banned the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and was being accused by opponents for creating the situation through systematic neglect of *adivasi* ‘development’, went on the offensive, placing advertisements in the major Bengali dailies of what they have done for the “adivasis.”

Included in the list, along with agricultural and educational subsidies typical of resource-based development discourse, was providing the “gift (*dan*) of recognition of the Ol-Chiki language.”<sup>1</sup> In conflating language with script, the government was projecting a discourse that was typical in school and educational institutions, where non-Santals typically referred to Santali-language education as “Ol-Chiki” (Chapter 5). The government argued that it had expanded *adivasi* opportunity through official recognition of language and script, ensuring legal provisions and state support. While anyone who has spent time in rural areas knows that implementation of these legal provisions has been the result of ongoing struggle by local communities, the advertisement, which appeared in the Calcutta edition, is likely not intended to target strictly Santals or *adivasis*, but also a general population of metropolitan voters for whom

the “Ol-Chiki language” along with “underdevelopment” has now become a potent signifier of adivasi struggle beyond the Santali-speaking areas. The opposition leader Mamata Banerjee, who used her platform as railway minister to rename many Indian railways trains in her ultimately successful bid to wrest power away from the ruling Communists, renamed with much fanfare and state and national media coverage, a local train “Ol-Chiki express” in her attempt to show solidarity with the state’s adivasis. In her speech she said, “The Kharagpur-Purulia Intercity Express will be named Olchiki Express to honour Santhals. I believe this much needs to be done for people who have been neglected for years.”<sup>2</sup> This is the only train in India named after a script.

The point of this is that the Ol-Chiki script/Ol-Chiki “language” has come to assume several significations, both within Santal-internal discourse and in the larger discourse of regional and national politics. On the one hand, the “recognition” of Ol-Chiki by the major political parties as well as the intellectual supporters of Maoism align the script and the politics of autonomy that the script mediates with a language of “endangerment,” loss, “neglect,” and underdevelopment. In doing so, the use of Ol-Chiki as a way to appeal to metropolitan Bengali audiences continues to perpetuate inequality, enfiguring a primitive ‘other’ that serves as either an object of the state’s beneficence or as the embodied, originary subject of revolutionary action (cf. Banerjee 2006a, 2006b).

Yet at the same time, script and language serve as a site by which Santal discourses of autonomy interface with the state and mainstream political parities (both liberal and radical). I have tried to show this in my discussion of Santal encounters with literacy, both in the ways Santals negotiate state institutions such as the school (Chapter 5) and in the development and propagation of Santali media (Chapter 6). The political field in India is not a settled one, and the



place of minority groups such as *adivasis* within that field, are constantly evolving and transforming. Charting the changing ways script-code constellations are aligned and deployed opens up, I believe, a new way of analyzing the mutually constitutive relationships between everyday interactive practice and wider political trends and activities. The situation I faced in 2011, a historic election year occurring in the midst of a low-level armed rebellion, reveals the serious consequences that these relationships entail, rendering nuanced analyses of the kind that linguistic anthropology offers, all the more urgent and necessary.

While the government and far-left groups were battling, both literally on the terrain of the villages and forests of the southwest West Bengal and discursively in the media, I, in my conversations with people in Jhilimili and surrounding areas, heard expressed a strange feeling of entrapment. The usual schedule of fairs, festivals, and drama performances was cancelled due to problems with police permissions, as well as ongoing strikes and transport shutdowns undertaken by Maoist-allied groups. A relative environment of safety and security, in which people were confident to roam at night, was shattered by police patrols or sounds of fire exchange. I personally felt this when, one day when I was returning from an evening game of badminton at the outskirts of Jhilimili bazaar, a member of the paramilitary forces picked me up and questioned me harshly. Later when they found out I was a researcher from abroad, I was let go, but had I been a local, as people told me afterwards, the situation would have been much worse.

This feeling of “caught-in-between-ness” manifested itself in Santal literary spaces as well. As an article in the *Indian Express*, a nationally circulating Indian newspaper, noted, many authors and editors in the Jangalmahals had to “relocate” to urban towns from their villages due to the ongoing violence. Stories by such authors as Sarada Prasad Kisku, Badal Hembrom, Marsal Hembrom, and Durbin Soren, all of whom I met in the course of my research, publishing

in magazines like *Tetre*, wrote stories about families who were trapped in between Maoist and state violence, struggling to cope with death, abduction, relocation, and the realities political tug-of-wars.<sup>3</sup> This feeling of being caught in between spoke to my own experience in Jhilimili, and has also been referenced in other scholarly accounts of *adivasi* areas in India caught up in violence between radical leftist groups and the state (cf. Sundar 2008).<sup>4</sup> This feeling, I suggest, is in part due to the misalignments between the state discourse of “law and order” or “development” as well as the radical left discourse of “people’s struggle” with the prevailing constellations of autonomy cultivated in the sites, spaces, and practices laid out in this dissertation. It is in these sites of everyday practice, the *akhḍa*, the school, the marketplace, or in the newspapers and magazines which circulate, where ideas of autonomy emerge through the configuration of constellations of ideas and form, and where linkages to other discourses, whether that of development, class struggle, or land rights are articulated.

“Autonomy” therefore cannot be reduced either to “resistance” as the radical left discourse might have it, nor can it be seen as an example of a “cunning of recognition” (Povinelli 2002). Linguistic anthropologists have shown us that the complex interplay between form, structure, and ideology prevents us from viewing a delimited set of simple pragmatic or performative acts as an act of “resistance” (Gal 1995, Mannheim 1998, etc.), while at the same time showing how inequality is perpetuated through tacit commitments to linguistic ideology that are replicated in the way institutions use language (Bauman and Briggs 2003, Hill 2009, Meek 2011, etc.) Yet communicative practice is also a creative process. As Monica Heller argues, “part of the ethnographic problem is to discover where interactions fit in temporal and spatial webs, and how the resources at stake circulate, are valued, and how conditions alternatively

orient participants to specific interests and ways of doing things, or are loose enough to allow for innovation, creation, invention, production” (2013, 107).

As I have tried to suggest in this dissertation through my study of script, code, and performance, “autonomy” is both constrained by the continued interaction with structures of hegemony, which include caste-relations, state power, and discourses of the ‘primitive,’ which continue to subordinate Santals, the Santali language, and Santali linguistic expression. Yet at the same time, the interactions with institutional practices such as schooled literacy, missionization, dominant Indo-European languages and scripts, writing, and the incorporation into the nation-state created disjunctures where established patterns of Santali performance, or interaction with *bongas*, and ritual events were creatively reinterpreted to form new domains and constellations of linguistic and graphic forms and communicative practice. Thus “autonomy” exists at the interstices of form and ideology, invention and assimilation, and resistance and recognition. It is the exploration of linguistic form and patterns, as well as interaction, which reveals the ways in which the many meanings of “autonomy” are interpreted, enacted, and disseminated, and how and when these meanings align with other discourses of struggle or recognition.

### **Looking forward**

In focusing on the intersections between script, code, and performance, and its relationship with a concept of autonomy, this dissertation opens up numerous lines of future research and inquiry in both linguistic anthropology and the study of South Asian (or postcolonial) societies and politics generally. First, the focus on graphic practice, not as a representation of linguistic practice more broadly, but as a form that itself has properties distinct from other linguistic forms, deserves to be studied in its own right. The study of graphic

communication, which has a long history in linguistic anthropology (Basso 1974, Frekko 2009, Bender 2010, Hoffman-Dilloway 2013, etc.), can be further developed by looking at situations where participants actively, and variably, organize multiple script systems in a wide array of constellations, mediating and effecting social and political relations among and between communities and individuals. The dialogic nature of script, the multiple scales in which a script may operate, as well as its visual and material nature (with its concomitant ritual, artifactual, and spatial potentialities) are areas of research which can be taken much further, both in ethnographic contexts such as India as well as many other parts of the world where multiscriptality is a norm.

Secondly, the issue of “code” in linguistics and linguistic anthropology and has been contentious. While we know that code boundaries are not fixed in social interaction, and that one cannot organize speech communities or “cultures” around boundaries of linguistic code, which for most people are fluid or sometimes non-existent (Hymes 1968, Gumperz 1968, Irvine 2006), people around the world affiliate themselves and their practices with ideas of “language” or “script.” Thus, it is not enough to criticize (or ‘disinvent’) the idea of code, as it is, as Makoni and Pennycook argue, “to understand the interrelationships among metadiscursive regimes, language inventions, colonial histories, language effects, alternative ways of understanding language, and strategies of disinvention and reconstitution” (2009, 137). I have tried to disinvent the idea of “code” in this dissertation by disaggregating it into elements of script, performance, and politics, but have continued to retain the concept. The Santali “language” in its various manifestations is important for people, and through the idea of “constellation” I have tried to show how Santali speakers reconstitute and reconfigure their language in various sites of practice, disjuncture, and assemblages of material and graphic form, ideology, and affective social relations. Such an approach I believe may offer a different idea of “code,” that moves

beyond looking at it strictly as a metadiscursive or ideological object, and taking into account its affective and organizing potential within a larger domain of communicative practice. The relationship between code, affect, and other dimensions of communicative practice, I believe, are sites in which further research can be undertaken.

Finally, the question of ‘performance’ is one that has been very important to this dissertation. Performance, as many have argued, has a checkered meaning, and is often used as a way to other, or render in some ways “exotic” minority or indigenous communities (Banerjee 2006b, Lemon 2000, Samuels 2004). Yet, linguistic anthropologists have also shown how “poetics” and “performance” are critical to all forms of linguistic interaction, broadening insights from the study of indigenous or minority language communities to a theory of interaction more generally (Bauman and Briggs 1990, Silverstein and Urban 1996, etc.) This study follows recent trends in linguistic anthropology, showing how performance practices and textual practices are thoroughly intertwined, and how both disjunctures and alignments between conceptions of “text” and performance repertoires are mediated through institutional protocols, social hierarchies, as well as longstanding performative traditions within a given community of practice (cf. Carr and Meek 2013). Thus how performance structures ideas of textuality, materiality, and social relations are areas where more research can be conducted.

This dissertation represents a humble attempt at exploring the limits of script, code, and performance, while also grappling with the questions of autonomy that inform the current political movements and struggles in contemporary India. I have tried to show how theory and politics are not distinct, but that by considering them together as part of a discursive constellation, one can expand the conceptual horizons of both.

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<sup>1</sup> *Adibashi kolyane nojirobihin gurutto paschimbonge* (Unprecedented importance being given to adivasi development), advertisement taken out by West Bengal government, *Anandabajar Patrika* (Calcutta edition), February 3, 2011

<sup>2</sup> *Mamata to centre: pull out Jangalmahal forces*. The Times of India, October 7, 2010.  
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Mamata-to-Centre-Pull-out-Jangalmahal-forces/articleshow/6703395.cms>, accessed 8/25/2014.

<sup>3</sup> *Tribal writing stands up to Maoist fear, very creatively*. Indian Express. October 3, 2010.  
<http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/tribal-writing-stands-up-to-maoist-fear-very-creatively/691718/1>, accessed 8/26/2014

<sup>4</sup> see in particular the afterword to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

**Appendix A:  
Santali scripts**











Ona reak gorhon do nonka leka :

৐	৐	৐	ঐ	ঐ
O	O	O	E	I
আ	আ	ঐ	ঐ	ঐ
A	A	E	E	U
জ	জ	চ	চ	ন
J	Jh	C	Ch	N
ঝ	ঝ	প	ফ	ম
B	Bh	P	Ph	M
গ	গ	ক	খ	ন
G	Gh	K	Kh	N
দ	ধ	ত	থ	ল
D	Dh	T	Th	L
ঢ	ঢ	ট	ঠ	ন
ᱛ	ᱛ	ᱛ	ᱛ	ᱛ
D	Dh	T	Th	N
স	র	র	হ	য
S	R	R	H	Y
চ	প	ক	ঠ	
C	P	K	T	
১	২	৩	৪	৫
1	2	3	4	5
৬	৭	৮	৯	০
6	7	8	9	0

**Figure A5: Santali horop (unnamed)** Basta Hembrom, Mayurpara (North Dinajpur) West Bengal. From *Citrighutu Express* (Kolkata) 1:5, p. 4. March 2011.

**Appendix B**  
**Santali educational materials**

<p style="text-align: center;">ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷା ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ପଢ଼ି</p>		
ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି
୧) ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩ ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩ ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	୧
୨) ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩ ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	୬
୩) ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	୧୬
୪) ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩ ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	ପଢ଼ାପଢ଼ି ବାରି ଶିକ୍ଷାପଢ଼ି ୧୫୦୫୩	୨୨
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**Figure B1: Table of contents from Santali class textbook, class 9.** Kolkata: West Bengal board of Secondary Education.

Table of contents + original language

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|---|----------------------------|
| 1. <i>Nankar re hoḍ hopon ko reyak' bidoron</i> (Santali) | Chottray Desmanjhi         |
| 2. <i>Chuṭi</i> (Bengali)                                 | Rabindranath Tagore        |
| 3. <i>Kongka</i> (Santali)                                | Girijol Tudu               |
| 4. <i>Dilgariya sikariya dhuḍu</i> (Santali)              | Gorchand Tudu              |
| 5. <i>Ato oḍay</i> (Bengali)                              | Saratchandra Chattopadhyay |
| 6. <i>Biggan reyak' jug ar abo</i> (Santali)              | Dhirendranath Bhaskey      |



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