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12. Self-Rule

high stakes on all sides. But who are winners and who losers, needs to be scrutinized closely. These are the issues the present paper tries to examine in the context of self-rule at a micro setting in a tribal village Malti of the Mandar sub-division, in the state of Jharkhand. Malti is situated on the north of Mandar, on the Ranchi Lohardaga road at 29 kilometres from the capital of Jharkhand. It is a multi-ethnic village with the Oraon, the Munda, the Muslim, and the Sadan (indigenous Hindu caste groups), with a total population of 2351. There are four representatives to the Gram Sabha committee from each of the religious communities, namely, Sarna tribal (adherents of traditional tribal faith), Christian tribal, Hindu and Muslim. The village is constituted of 358 households out of which 156 and 104 are those of the tribals and the Hindus respectively and 98 those of the Muslims.

The case of Malti throws open lots of queries and issues for adiscussion on the viability of tribal self-rule in Jharkhand. The village is grappling with the problems of under development, illiteracy, corruption, deforestation, lack of irrigation facilities, mortgaging of tribal lands, unemployment, exploitation of tribal labour force, outmigration in distantbrick kilns and road constructions, tension among various communities, drunkenness, etc. The village does not have basic amenities like water, electricity, roads, decent houses, etc. This situation prevails in the village prior to Gram Panchayat elections in the state. This paper argues that Gram Sabha presents a viable alternative for tribal development as a last resort via self-rule. Nevertheless, the Act is as vulnerable as any other constitutional provisions for the welfare of tribes and that its success largely depends on the political will, honesty and commitment of all the parties involved.

A Historical Perspective

The practice of tribal self-rule in India is nothing new. There are evidences of it in the form of the traditional village administration (cf. De Sa 1975) and tribal socio-political system (cf. Roy 1915). Tribal system of governance is disturbed under the British. The changes initiated by them had a far-reaching impact on tribal social organisation, economy and polity. The tribes in Jharkhand reacted to this interference in the form of violent rebellions, such as the Tamar rebellion (1789, 1794-95), the Ho rebellion (1820), the Munda rebellion (1820-32), the Kol rebellion (1830-31), the Bhumij rebellion (1831-33), the Santhal insurrection (1855-57),

Tribal Self-Rule: Prospects and Challenges: A Case Study of a Tribal Village in Jharkhand

Joseph Marianus Kujur

Introduction

Various provisions are made in the Indian constitution for the welfare and protection of the tribal people. Correspondingly, varied approaches for their development are adopted in the post-colonial period. However, they are not effectively implemented for lack of political will and commitment on the part of the government machinery and also due to people's ignorance about their rights and duties. The 73rd constitutional amendment of 1992 and its subsequent extension to scheduled areas in 1996, of course with certain modifications, is another landmark in the direction of the empowering of the tribal people. This paves the way for the Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act, 2001. The rationale of this exercise is to convert the tribal villages into small units of self-rule. The new Act, with all its limitations, seems to be the last chance of democratizing governance and decentralizing power in an effort to encourage the notion of development amenable to local social and cultural sensitivities. The idea of 'self-rule' by tribes has an inherent philosophy that 'subjects' themselves as 'subjects' can achieve their own development and not as 'objects' as has been the case all along.

What are the prospects and the promises that The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 and the Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act, 2001 have in store for the scheduled areas particularly in Jharkhand? Does the Jharkhand Panchayat Act reflect the spirit of the central Panchayat Act and the 73rd constitutional amendment? Does the new Act have potentials to redress the grievances of the past for a brighter future for the tribals? Or is it like many other projects destined to fail? In this process of 'panchayatalsation' there are

Joseph Marianus Kujur S.J. is a research scholar at the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University.

the Khairwar rebellion (1857), the Birsa movement (1885-1900), the Tana Bhagat movement (1913-14), and so on. All these struggles may be seen as aspects of their desire and aspiration for equality and liberty. Tribes, after all, have been disempowered when there is an intrusion of outsiders into their territory.

A review of the constitutional provisions gives us an insight into the framework for tribal welfare, protection and development. Of these, the provisions in article 244 and 244(A) under Part X of the constitutions have some implications for the expression of self-rule among tribes. The fifth schedule [Article 244(1)] has provisions for the administration and control of scheduled areas and scheduled tribes. The sixth schedule [Article 244(2) and 275(1)] has provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram (Sharma 2001: 234-253).

Tribal self-rule today can be best described in the extension of Panchayats Act 1996, and the Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act, 2001. Sharma (cf. 1997) explains how the tide has turned in favour of the people since the Gram Sabha has been made supreme and the state's supremacy has been challenged. But the success of the new Act will be gauged only if it addresses the issues of indebtedness, land-alienation, poverty, drinking, illiteracy, housing, deforestation, industrialization, unemployment, migration, lack of openness, exploitation, etc., (cf. Hasnain 1983: 73-114). A brief overview of the Provisions of the Panchayats Act 1996 will be in place to critique the Jharkhand Panchayat Act, 2001.

The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 - Prospects

It opens up range of prospects for safeguarding and promoting the interest of tribes. Some of the major prospects are:

- [a] The Act has a constitutional mandate and a binding law to put a legal and moral pressure on the government and its machinery to implement it.
- [b] There is a qualitative change in the very notion of tribal development. There is no mere distribution of funds but a paradigm shift which consists in its basic assumption that tribal community is competent "to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their culture identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution" [Article 4(d)].

- [c] Development is projected as collective. The approval of the plans, programmes and projects for social and economic development [Article 4(e)] is the responsibility of the entire village.
- [d] The idea of empowerment is based on the notion of decentralization. The higher levels of panchayats does not interfere with the lower.
- [e] There is a provision for accountability to monitor all kinds of financial transactions to avoid any irregularities. The funds are available to Gram Sabha as per the need and for every pie the panchayat is accountable to Gram Sabha.
- [f] Gram Sabha is supreme and is endowed with the power to have control over water [4(i)], minor minerals [4(k)], drinks [4(m)j], minor forest produce [4(m)ii], alienation and restoration of tribal land [4(m)iii], market [4(m)iv], and over the system of debt [Article 4(m)v].
- [g] There is recognition of the traditional way of settling disputes. This avoids the bureaucratization of justice.
- [h] Women empowerment gets a boost as the Act ensures one third (33%) of women participation in the panchayat.

The Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act, 2001

The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996, was enacted keeping in mind the distinctive traditions and customs of the tribal people on the one hand and their special needs and problems on the other. Following this constitution amendment, all states having the schedule areas were expected to bring about legislation in conformity with the provision of the above amendment. Jharkhand was the last among the states to go for enactment in this direction. The Jharkhand Panchayat Act was passed only in 2001. Jharkhand with a total territory of 79,714 square kilometres, has a total population of 2,69,09,428 according to the 2001 census. The total Scheduled Tribes' population according to 1991 census was only 60,44,010. An overview of the panchayat electorate in Jharkhand is placed below:

Total Panchayat	3753
Jharkhand	212
District	22
Mukhin and Deputy Mukhin	3753

District Parishad President and Vice President Mukhia in Scheduled Areas	22
ST women Mukhia	1766
Total Panchayat Samiti	589
Reserved Panchayat Samiti	212
Reserved for Women Panchayat Samiti	112
Zila Parishad in Scheduled Areas	12
Zila Parishad Electorates	370

Source: Ranchi Express, Thursday, January 31, 2002.

There are 1.30 crore voters in 37,294 wards of 3754 panchayats. About 50% seats are reserved for the scheduled tribes and the scheduled castes in non-scheduled areas. In the scheduled areas there is 80% reservation for the scheduled tribes and the scheduled castes of which 50% is for the scheduled tribes and 30% for the scheduled castes. The backward castes will have 5-10% reservation for seats in different areas depending upon their share in population. One third of seats is reserved for women in both tribal and non-tribal areas. The new Act, from the beginning, is faced with problems at two levels, viz., the level of policy, and the level of implementation.

Challenges

The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, despite many provisions, has within its own inbuilt "policy-level struggles" (cf. Sharma 1997). Instead of going into the details and intricacies of the central Act, I would like to focus on the limitations of the Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act, 2001.

There are some serious policy level problems in the Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act (JPRA), 2001. An empirical study by Ekka and Singh (2001: 34) reveals that "contrary to a few positive elements in the Jharkhand Act, there are many provisions "incompatible and irreconcilable with the Central Act". They point out the following areas "against the very spirit of the 73rd constitutional amendment and the fifth schedule of the constitution" (ibid.):

[i] No provision for women for the position of the president [JPRA-2.21(a)]. [ii] The reservation of the position of the vice-president only for the tribals prevents other non-tribal weaker sections like the Sadans from becoming vice-presidents [JPRA-2.21(b)]. [iii] The post of the president and the vice-president are kept unreserved in the non-scheduled

areas which is in contravention to the article 243 (C) of the 73rd constitutional amendment, according to which the position of the president has to be in proportion with their population. [iv] No mention in the Jharkhand Act about the Gram Sabha or the panchayat being consulted regarding the acquisition of land in the scheduled areas for development projects as stipulated in the Central Act [Article 4(j)]. [v] No mention of the recommendation of the Gram Sabha or the panchayats prior to granting prospecting license or mining lease for minor minerals in the Scheduled Areas, as prescribed in the Central Act [Article 4(l)]. [vi] No provision to enforce prohibition or regulation of the sale and consumption of intoxicants as stipulated in the Central Act [Article 4 (m)]. [vii] No mention of the power to the Gram Sabha and the panchayats to prevent land alienation in the scheduled areas and to take appropriate action to restore any unlawful alienated land of a scheduled tribe, as stipulated in the central Act [Article 4 (m)iii]. The Jharkhand Act gives only supervisory power to the zila parishad in this regard. [viii] No mention of the Gram Sabha and the panchayats to exercise control over money lending to the scheduled tribes, as stipulated in the Central Act [Article 4(m)v]. [ix] The Jharkhand Act has no provision for the power of ownership over the minor forest produce [Article 4(m)ii] but has provision only for the conservation and management of the forest produce [JPRA-(5)ii].

When Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act, 2001 is compared with the Provisions of the Panchayats Act 1996, one finds a total watering down of the spirit of self-rule. Bureaucratic control continues. In matters of the restoration of the alienated tribal land the measures of recovery are not stringent enough. Concerning the acquisition of tribal land by government there is unwarranted flexibility at the cost of Gram Sabha. The spirit of the traditional village organization, namely confederation of villages known as parha, munda manki or parganait, is absent in the Act and there is a very limited space for participatory democracy in it. In short, the soul of self-rule is missing.

Theoretically there is surely a paradigm shift in the approach of the government for safeguarding tribal interests through Gram Sabha. However, the implementation of the new Act is problematic due to the following reasons:

It is a myth that tribal villages are homogenous. Tribal communities have been living side by side with other communities such as Jhora (blacksmith), ghasi (drummers), turi (basket-makers), and so on. Most of the tribal villages in central India not only have these non-tribal communities but also many other indigenous groups and lower caste Hindus. Even lower caste Muslims like Jolhas (weavers) have, down the centuries, become part and parcel of the tribal system of governance. The Oraon parha and the munda manki systems were applicable to all the inhabitants of the village under their jurisdiction. It is true that some communities other than the tribal have indulged in the exploitation of the tribals. In the village Malti, for instance, many acres of tribal lands have got mortgaged to non-tribals. In a multi-ethnic situation, tribals have provisions for their progress through Gram Sabha. But contractors belonging to other ethnic or religious communities are not happy with the new Panchayat Act as their influence on tribes is curtailed.

There is, in the process of empowerment, a clash of interests. Vested interests at every place either in bureaucracy and political party or in the village itself try their best to throttle the process of tribes' empowerment. In the political and bureaucratic circles the stakes are quite high. Provisions for direct transactions with government with a view to control exploitation and corruption hits the bureaucrats, politicians, contractors and petty brokers. Hence, non-cooperation from them is not quite unexpected. The experience of Bihar is an eye opener in this regard. According to a report by Mishra (2002: 1), within 6 months of its existence after a gap of 23 years, Bihar Panchayat Raj came under attack from bureaucrats and politicians. At Bihar the B.D.O. allegedly gunned down a mukhia. Near Sheikhpura, the election of candidates "not backed by a senior Congress leader" led to the killing of nine political workers, including a mukhia and zila parishad member. In Jehanabad, a pramukh and the BDO are not in talking terms. Nearly in all Panchayati Raj bodies, the elected bodies are at loggerheads with either bureaucrats or MLAs, MLCs and MPs. After the Panchayati Raj elections last year there were at least 300 killings related to conflicts in such bodies. There were by polls for over 1,700 Panchayat seats in Bihar including 104 that of mukhias mainly due to the killings of the functionaries elected in the Panchayat polls which concluded in April last.

An analysis of these reporting shows that these are conflicts of interests. A battle between entrenched vested interests and new social forces seems to be emerging at the grassroots. Bureaucrats seem to be uncomfortable about the powers of the panchayat. There is also lack of awareness and understanding among elected functionaries and officials. Anti-social elements are getting elected and politicians are using them. "The officials do not want to lose their unquestioned power and the elected functionaries overreact to their newly acquired status" states Tej Narayan Singh, who has been working on Panchayati Raj in Bihar for the last 35 years (Mishra 2002: 1).

Polarization and segmentation of village population on the basis of caste, religion and ethnicity defeats the purpose of the people's democracy. The politics of majority-minority and antagonism among various parties will be a hindrance to the development of the village. In the entire country in general and in Jharkhand in particular caste, religious and ethnic tensions are on the rise. Prospects of poll violence, intimidation, booth capturing and blood bath in some of the sensitive areas cannot be ruled out. The panchayat elections in Bihar after 23 years had the same experience. According to Khan (2002: 10), the Bihar panchayat elections for 8,452 panchayats, held in 6 stages left 100 dead and many injured. At least 588 people with criminal background were elected. Out of 1,30,563 mukhia posts, criminals occupied more than 500. Police had arrested 40,000 criminals to control violence. The Government had borrowed 1,15,000 rifles from neighboring states. The Government had appointed 50,000 police and 57,000 home guards. When police refused to go on duty for fear of violence, the government ensured each for 10 lakhs.

Besides, the so-called extremist attacks on the police are on the rise. Some outlawed outfits had boycotted the last Assembly elections. Even in the village Malti, posters were pasted on the strategic places allegedly by the MCC, threatening to chop off the hands of those who first exercised their franchise. If such a situation prevails even before the Gram Panchayat comes into existence, there is no guarantee that things will improve after the elections.

There are problems for Gram Sabha not from outside but from within their own community, viz., from the tribal elite. These elite have on the one hand benefited from the constitutional provisions to the scheduled

tribes without really identifying themselves with their own community. The idea of the tribal empowerment through powers to the Gram Sabha is liberative but it "may not necessarily lead to empowerment of all tribal groups of a given region/territory" and "empowerment of tribes may even fall short of the ideals of equality and social justice as embodied in the concept of citizenship" (Xaxa 2001: 221). Among various tribes in a given territory there is sure to be rivalry and competition for the control and management of the resources made available to them through the Indian constitutions. Thus the numerically or economically dominant ethnic groups may exercise power over the others. Not only this, even if there is homogeneity in a village, the elite of the tribe turning exploiters of their own tribes-people cannot be ruled out. Similarly, there is every possibility that despite tribal society being relatively more egalitarian than the others, women will continue to be ignored in the decision making process, or worse still the elite tribal women themselves will perpetrate exploitation of the other less privileged ones. Thus the "tendency within tribal society towards greater monopolization of power by the elite section of that society" defeats the spirit of the new Act (ibid.).

There is confusion in the mind of the people about the role of the Gram Sabha and the Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat is going to be the elected body, whose job is basically the development of the village. It is at the service of the Gram Sabha and has to be accountable to the latter. Some people fear a confrontation between the office bearers of both the institutions. This confusion is aggravated because most of the tribals are illiterate and ignorant. They are not politically conscious. They are not aware of their own rights and duties. They are not even aware of their own rights bestowed on the Gram Sabha. In the village Malti majority of the Gram Sabha members are totally illiterate hence vulnerable to exploitation.

Exploring Self-Rule at a Micro Setting

The functioning of Gram Sabha in Malti village prior to the Panchayat elections in Jharkhand has been marred by controversies. Only a few tribal members attend the weekly committee meeting of Gram Sabha. In nine months of my stay in the village I discovered that four representatives each from the Muslim and the Hindu communities, were conspicuously absent most of the time. Only one of the four Muslim committee members

was present at some of those meetings. The rest did not seem convinced that Gram Sabha would bring about any substantial change in the village. A Muslim contractor told me later, "Gram Sabha will never succeed in the village. You need professionals for development works. The tribals at the helm of Gram Sabha cannot run the projects. They are simpletons". In fact, like him there were many others belonging to non-tribal communities who were disillusioned by the notion of decentralisation through Gram Sabha. A teli (oil presser) graduate Rakesh, who was a temporary acting secretary of Gram Sabha, told me, "How can Gram Sabha be a substitute for the state rule? I gave up participating in the Gram Sabha's activities because some of its members think that they are the sovereign rulers". The present secretary of the Sabha who is a tribal Christian, told me another side of the story, "Rakesh was only a temporary acting secretary. He was removed from the job because he was not interested in the public welfare. He only wanted his welfare".

In one of the weekly meetings of the Sabha, Kailash Baitha, a dhobi (washerman), who has a clout among the Sadans, came drunk and shouted at the members present, "What has your Sabha done for me so far? It is useless to have meetings". There were two others from the Muslim community who too were drunk. They also expressed the same sentiments. Their behaviour was much to the annoyance of the tribals who told me quietly later, "Had they continued disturbing the meeting for some more time, we would have given them a thrashing. It was good for them to have left the spot at once". The Sabha president and some of the tribal committee members told me that they were trying to bring unity among the villagers because that was pre-requisite for the success of Gram Sabha. They attributed its ineffectiveness to the poor response by other communities. On the contrary, members of other communities blamed the tribals for disunity, "there used to be very good unity among the tribals and non-tribals but after the double murder case there is mutual suspicion and mistrust". It should be noted that on the night of January 2, 2000, two men, Suresh Lohra and Dhaneshwar Sahu, both belonging to the Hindu caste groups, were dragged from their homes to the akhra (dancing yard), beaten up, and burned to death. The tribals said, "The deceased were involved in waylaying and theft and they deserved to die. After their murder there is peace in the village". The tribals still claim that their relationship with the caste Hindus is good if not for the interference of non-tribal vested interests, "They are big

manipulators and want us to continue fighting so that short of money we may mortgage our lands to them. They do not have any land but are living on the lands of the tribals".

There are provisions in the new Act for settling the disputes in the village so that there is no harassment in thana (police station) or in kachhari (court). Heterogeneity of the village poses a problem for the smooth functioning of Gram Sabha, as there are clash of interests. The utopia of "village republic" and "Gram Swaraj" is contested not only conceptually but also practically. The notion of 'community' as envisaged in the Panchayat Act is missing in the real situation. One hardly finds a sense of 'belonging' to the village community.

There is a competition for the common property resources among various communities on ethnic lines. The elders of the village narrate how there used to be many large mango groves that have now disappeared. The forest cover in the vicinity, too, has been depleted forcing the villagers to walk more than 15 miles to fetch firewood and fodder. The two ponds and a dam in the village are used for fisheries, bathing, washing, etc. Gram Sabha wants to have control over the ponds to put fish and share the profit among the villagers. Some powerful non-tribal contractors, however, manage to bag the auction every year in the name of the poor caste Hindus. The secretary of the Sabha told me with determination, "This year we forgave the contractor. We want to maintain good relationships. But next year Gram Sabha should put fish in the ponds. Everybody will benefit from it and not a few individuals".

The tussle is likely to take place between the politicians, bureaucrats and Gram Sabha for the control over resources like minor forest produce, minerals, water and forest, etc., and their management. Some powerful non-tribal leaders have always expressed their displeasure at the enactment of the Act. "The Act is partial to the adivasis and discriminates against the non-adviasis", says a kurmi minister who was instrumental in organising a massive rally of the kurmis against tribals' demand for 60% reservation.

The government primary school building, which was being extended, came under government scrutiny for the misappropriation of funds. A local Congress MLA allegedly slapped a contractor on complaints that the latter had misappropriated huge funds and had used sub-standard

materials in the building. As the reporting goes, in that tribal dominated village by and large people approved of the action of the local tribal MLA as heroic but the members belonging to the contractor's Muslim community took out a procession to the Mandar Block and burnt the effigy of the MLA. In fact, the MLA had acted on the complaint of the villagers about the corruption involved in the building construction. When the supporters of the contractor protested the action, not a single villager came out openly in support of the MLA or even openly lodged legal complaints against the culprits although it was suspected that the protest march was meant to cover up the misdeed.

Politicisation of bureaucracy and criminalisation of politics are two sides of the same coin. Gram Sabha has to face the challenge in every step. The culture of corruption is not going to change overnight. In recent times, the Malti Gram Sabha has shown how to handle petty crimes in the village. The village unit of Gram Sabha has come down heavily upon those who violated the norms of the village. When four persons including a tribal and three Sadans were caught red-handed for illegal fishing in the village dam, a meeting was convened at once to settle the matter. They had hardly been able to catch a kilogram of fish, yet they had to deposit Rs. 800/- as fine for their misadventure. Another incident where two tribal Christians were involved in thrashing a gaderia (shepherd) mistakenly, for damaging their crops, were fined Rs. 1000/- for the latter's treatment and as compensation for the days he would not be able to earn his daily wages. Besides settling such disputes, Gram Sabha was flooded with applications to settle land disputes between two parties either within the family or outside. In short, if there is a matter of common interest within the jurisdiction of Gram Sabha it is expected to settle it. It is a matter of disgrace for the party concerned to be penalised by the Sabha.

Social evils, like drinking, need to be addressed by Gram Sabha but lack of family resources compel the villagers to resort to brewing liquor and selling it in their homes. In the past they had tried to ban it but without any success as a lady brewer told me, "If we ban brewing liquor in our village, our men go to another and come back drunk. It is safer and better for our people to drink at home". Of course, this evil can be eradicated through education and awareness. The De-Addiction Centre, situated in the premises of the Mandar Catholic Church, has

been sending its team for bringing awareness among villagers, of the evil effects of drinking. However, there has been no substantial success so far. Gram Sabha is endowed with the right to control brewing of liquor and penalizing the defaulters. But it is up to the cooperation of the villagers to make this provision a success.

Some villagers take pride in narrating how Malti has always been in the limelight for various achievements. Some five years ago when a boy from Malti was allegedly slapped by the B.D.O. of Mandar, there was demonstration in the Block to protest the action of the officer. Jatra had gone for some work in the Block but the B.D.O. apparently without giving him a hearing slapped him in public. The news spread like wild fire. The Mandar college youths were up in arms. They burnt the effigy of the B.D.O. They proudly say how in front of everybody the victim from Malti was asked to slap the B.D.O. in return. When asked about the development programmes in the village, they are elusive, "After the incident of slapping the B.D.O., our village does not get projects from the government. They are taking revenge on our village". Tribals complain that the BJP government has been very partial in allocating red card to the caste Hindus, who are basically BJP sympathisers. That is why the tribals boycotted the function of Dukha Bhagat, MP, and the BJP chief of Jhatkhand, who paid a visit to Malti. The tribals argued, "Dukha Bhagat is a member of the BJP party so why should we participate in the function? If he belonged to JMM or any other party we could have attended his meeting. His government is not for us". Dukha Bhagat did announce the 'anyodaya' (development of all) project for the village besides inaugurating the community hall. There were a few Muslim representatives on the dais with Mr. Bhagat. Some tribals came only to see the fun.

Poverty of the Malti village forces majority of the youth to seasonally migrate to the brick kilns of Gaya, Siwan, Nawada and Saharsa in Bihar. Some of them go to Calcutta. Others are compelled to work in road constructions in Agartalla, Tripura and some northern states. "We have no choice but to migrate with our wives and children" says Birsa Oraon, who has been seasonally migrating to Nawada every year from February to May. He continues, "There are so many tribals working there. It is like mini-Chotanagpur. We get hanria (rice-beer) there. In fact, one can make more money by selling ricebeer than by carrying

bricks". But there is exploitation there as well, "The contractor does not pay us enough. He keeps half our money for himself so that we do not run away from the bhatha (brick kiln). One has to work hard there to survive. But when we come back home after four months of stay in pardesh (an alien land), we have at least 3000 rupees in each one's pocket". This is one kind of migration that is due to impoverishment. There are many others who leave the village and settle down outside because they have better prospects of job, education and upward economic mobility.

Women participation in Gram Sabha will have to be encouraged. Some male members still think women are incapable of any serious discussion. In one of the important meetings of the Christians' Sabha, menfolk were busy seriously discussing the issue. In the middle of the meeting a group of women barged in, "Why do you not include us in your meeting. We also have something to say," said Mrs. Pushpa, who lost her husband last year. "Women are not required today. We are having something very important" retorted an elder". Pushpa was angry, "It is an important meeting that is why we want to join you. You cannot have unilateral decision on the matter. Besides, you menfolk cannot decide properly without women's help". Initially five women entered the jonkh erpa and sat down together. By the time the meeting ended there were 12 women inside, who had sneaked into the house one by one according to their convenience.

Conclusion

With the new Panchayat Act, most of the villagers, especially the tribals, hope that their dreams of a dignified life will be fulfilled. They are hopeful that the new Act will bring them equality and justice. They hope that their alienated lands will be restored to them. They want to have control over the resources and their management. They believe that the new Act will provide them a mechanism to be masters of their own destiny without falling prey to the bureaucratic set up of the government. Malti is a poor village without the basic amenities like water, electricity, means of communication, etc. The Act endows Gram Sabha with powers to make its own plan and budget. In an ideal situation, the intervention of Gram Sabha should facilitate prosperity, progress, harmony, and unity. But given the complexity of social relationships in the village it is

going to be a very difficult task to accomplish the objectives set out in the Act.

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12. Faith, 2

Conclusion

The inter-relationship between Christian faith and tribal culture can be analyzed at the level of culture and of structure. While we have observed that there are some very fundamental differences at the level of culture, we have not dealt with the structural differences between the two. Tribal theologians see an inextricable link between inculturation and evangelization, with no separation between them whatsoever. The incarnation was within the context of the Jewish culture and yet Christianity contextualized itself in the 'local soil' wherever it was established in America, or Africa or India - or in a tribal milieu where tribal culture, customs and rituals are recognized.

Indian culture cannot be equated with the dominant Brahminical Hindu culture. How can an oppressive culture be the mode of liberative expression for the oppressed? There is a rationale for a *dalit* theology, *dalit* Christology, *dalit* Church as much as for tribal theology, tribal Christology and tribal Church. Therefore the understanding of 'paganism', 'superstition', 'animism' has undergone a sea change. The contact between Christian faith and tribal culture has mutually enriched each other. The liberative aspects in the *sarna* undo the 'oppressive' in the Church, and the positive elements in Christianity remove the 'negative' in the *sarna*. To preserve the traditional faith and enable it to cope with modern conditions in India should be the aim of the tribal Church. Christ must be presented to people in a relevant manner, addressing the main issues they are grappling with in their daily lives. At the same time he must be allowed to transform society from within. There is, in this process, an opportunity for tribal culture to transform the Church from within.

In a particular culture there are certain external identifications like dress, food behaviour, and so on. There are also internal ones which run deep, such as, values, ethos, world-views, pattern of behaviour, and so on. *Sarna* and Christianity are two different ways of perceiving, experiencing and expressing reality. Within each of them there are variations depending upon space and time. However, there are processes by which values, ethos and behavioural patterns

of each help each other to bring dignity to every human being and instill reverence and respect for each life. The converging values of hope, communion, holism and interdependence in both the traditions need to be emphasized as they have the potential for bringing the *sarna* and the Christian communities together.