CHAPTER-II

THE PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

THE UNIVERSE:

Two villages with proportionately large Pauri Bhuyan population were selected for intensive study; and the neighbouring villages, wherever necessary, had also been visited to ensure the accuracy of data.

The Pauri Bhuyan-concentrated areas of Orissa are in the adjoining areas of Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Sambalpur and Dhenkanal district (Map-II). The community claims to be the autochthons of the area which is still known as 'Bhuyanpirh', presently under the jurisdiction of the Banspal development block in Keonjhar district. From this mainland of the Pauri Bhuyan extends the Pauri Bhuyan-concentrated areas in the neighbouring districts. Thus, the Pauri Bhuyan region now covers parts of Telkoî Banspal and Joda blocks in Keonjhar district, of Koida, Bonai and Lahunipada blocks in Sundargarh district, of Barkote block in Sambalpur district and a part of Pal Lahara block in Dhenkanal district. The acculturated sections of the Bhuyan tribe, not only live in multi-ethnic villages in the areas encircling the 'Pauri Bhuyan land' but also found in several other districts (Table-I:6). There are a number of proportionately large villages with homogenous Pauri Bhuyan population and also many other Pauri Bhuyan dominated villages. In view of the limited resources and time it was not possible to study the entire region. Considering the dimensions of the problem it was thought adequate
to select two villages, where sizeable Pauri Bhuyan population would be living for intensive study. Of these two villages, one having high proportion of Pauri Bhuyan households primarily depending on shifting cultivation and another where only a few Pauri Bhuyan still depending on shifting cultivation, were selected to fulfil the requirements of the study.

Thus, Sankarai coming under first category and Bayakumutua under second category were selected. Both the villages are old, finding place in the Government records and located in the heart of Pauri Bhuyan land in Banspal block of Keonjhar district. Sankarai is an interior and inaccessible village, the most of the Pauri Bhuyan in which primarily depend on shifting cultivation and a few only on wet cultivation. Bayakumutua is a road side village connected by an all-weather road and quite accessible by public transport service. Here the Pauri Bhuyan have a mixed economic pursuits, majority depending on settled cultivation and wage-earning and a few household on shifting cultivation. Although both the villages are located in the same geophysical region, the swiddens for shifting cultivation are still available in Sankarai whereas the area around Bayakumutua are either reserved forests or covered with new plantation by the Government.

THE SAMPLE VILLAGES:

The selected villages are situated at a distance of 32 Kms. from each other. Both these villages viz: Sankarai and Bayakumutua come under the jurisdiction of Banspal development
block in Keonjhar district. The former is an interior village, accessible only by foot from the block headquarters at Banspal, and latter is a road side village accessible by public transport.

VILLAGE SANKARAI;

Sankarai is situated between 20°.35' and 20°.40' North latitude and between 85°.20' and 85°.25' East Longitude in Banspal Block of Keonjhar district. It is one of the oldest villages founded by the Pauri Bhuyan. It is bounded in the north by Tilapasi and Banspal villages, in the south by Nungajhari village and in the west by Talabirkala and Barguda villages. Sankarai is located at a distance of 39 Kms. to the north-west of Keonjhar, the district headquarters and 9 Kms. from the headquarters of Banspal Block. Half of the 30 Kms. long road from Keonjhargarh to Banspal up to Suakati village is the part of the National Highway No.5 and the other half from Suakati to Banspal is a fair weather road. The 9 Kms. long briddle path from Banspal to the village Sankarai passes through a hill range of about 2,541 feet in height. There is another route to Sankarai from Banspal. It meandears the hill range, and is 6 Kms. longer than the stiff hilly track. Half of this route upto Dhangadi is fair-weather and the other half is a rugged foot track.

The village is composed of four hamlets, Bardihi, Sankarai, Jakarbandha and Nendrisahi. History of the village showed that the original settlement was at the present Baradihi hamlet of the village. Once there was large-scale death in this village which forced the people to desert it and to move to a site close to the neighbouring village of Toladihi for a temporary
period. Subsequently they founded a new village at the present site of Sankarai, which is the main hamlet of the village. Some other families left Toladihi and founded a new settlement called Totasahi. As population increased in the main hamlet some families hived off to a new place where Jakarbandh hamlet grew up. Lastly, the Nendrisahi came up as a result of further movement of some families from the main hamlet and its sister hamlets to this place. The village titular deity called 'Bhanarpāt' installed in the main hamlet is still there and for all purposes the main hamlet serves as the central place of all other hamlets. As population increased, Totasahi became a separate village independent of Sankarai in ritual and revenue matters.

The main hamlet i.e Sankarai is located on the left bank of the rivulet Jalapa, a tributery of the river Baitarani. It is surrounded by a number of hills; viz; the Banspal and Bhanar hills (above 2500 feet high) in the north, Kimra in the east, Sankarai in the south and Bharadi in the north-west. The lands in which mustard, maize and vegetables are grown lie close to the hamlets and those in which shifting cultivation is practised lie in the hill-slopes facing the hamlets. The rivulets and the hill streams provide water for washing and domestic purposes. A well was dug in the village some years back and made pucca by lining it with stone but it collapsed before it was used. There is a primary school located in the main hamlet. The bachelors' dormitory house called Mandaghar now functionally defunct is also located in the main hamlet. The shrines of the 'Thakurānī' and 'Bhanarpāt' are located near the Mandaghar. The bank of the rivulet Jalapa serves as the cremation ground.
The houses in the hamlets are scattered and built at the foot-hill. Houses have a rectangular ground plan measuring 8 feet to 12 feet in breadth and 16 feet to 24 feet in length. The walls are made of logs planted upright and plastered with mud and the roofs are straw-thatched. Each house has one or two living rooms with a front courtyard. The cowshed is constructed close to the house. Close to the settlement are Bakadí plots (backyard) used for growing maize, mustard and vegetables. In and around the village site and also in the forests and hills there are jack-fruit and mango trees in large number.

According to the Census taken in February, 1990 by (Table-II:1) the total population of the village is 492 belonging to 109 households, of which 10 households with a population of 42 persons (22 males and 20 females) belong to Ho tribe, one household with 2 persons to the Dom caste and the remaining 98 households with 448 persons (212 males and 236 females) to the Pauri Bhuyan.

The average size of a household comes to 4.57 members. There were six households having one member each and the single largest household had 11 members. Besides one-member households, 28.58 per cent of the total households had two members each and 48.98 per cent three to five members. Thus 83.68 per cent of the total Pauri Bhuyan households were small in size having up to five members. (Table-II:4).

The females outnumbered the males, the sex ratio (number of females for 1000 males) being 1113 which is quite higher than
The annual growth of total population during the period 1981 and 1990 is estimated to be 0.49 per cent as against the general growth rate of 2 per cent in the State during 1981 and 1991. Similarly the annual growth rate for the total tribal and Pauri Bhuyan in the village is estimated to be 0.47 per cent and 0.43 per cent respectively.

Classification of Pauri Bhuyan population according to age and sex shows that there is a declining trend from the early age-group of 0-4 years to 10-14 years. The working force (15 to 59 years) constituted 53.64 per cent, 58.49 per cent and 49.73 per cent among the total, males and females population respectively. Females outnumber in all except in the age-group of 25-44 years (Table-11:5).

The percentage of literacy for the Pauri Bhuyan population was 10.49 per cent. For males and females it stood at 18.39 per cent and 17.99 per cent. (Table-11:13). Among males and females it stood at 63.21 per cent and 53.81 per cent respectively as against 39.78 per cent for the total tribal population, 60.01 per cent and 19.79 per cent for the total population, 22.50 per cent in 1981. (Table-II:2). The percentage of main workers constituted 58.26 per cent. Among males and females it stood at 58.26 per cent and 53.81 per cent respectively, 53.64 per cent, 58.49 per cent and 49.73 per cent among the total, males and females population respectively. Females outnumber in all except in the age-group of 25-44 years. The working force (15 to 59 years) constituted 53.64 per cent, 58.49 per cent and 49.73 per cent among the total, males and females population respectively. Thus, they were far behind the total Bhuyan population in the State recording 22.50 per cent in 1981. (Table-II:13).
Occupationally the main work force (more than 90 per cent) still carry on shifting cultivation and forest collection and only 10 per cent depend on settled cultivation and wage earning (Table-II:7).

**VILLAGE BAYAKUMUTUA:**

Bayakumutua is situated between 21°.35' and 21°.40' North Latitude and between 80°.25' and 80°.30' East Longitude in Banspal Block of Keonjhar district. It is bounded by Pandadar and Bayapandadar villages on the west, Khuntakata and Gandijoda on the north-east and Mundala village on the south. It is located at a distance of 2 Kms. on the black topped road connecting Bombay-Calcutta National Highway No.5 at Bayapandadar to Jangira in Harichandanpur Block of Keonjhar district.

The village has four hamlets each known by the ethnic group inhabiting it. These are the Bhuyan Sahi, Juang Sahi, the Patra Sahi and the Gouda Sahi. They are also located about one Km. apart from each other. For various socio-cultural practices, each settlement functions as a separate unit. The Bhuyan hamlet is on the bank of a hill stream called Kuchia nullah and houses are scattered over a large area without any specific plan. The bachelors' dormitory (Mandaghar) is located in the central place of the village with the dancing ground infront, the primary school and the Service Cooperative Society building on one side. They have constructed their houses having the traditional rectangular ground plan. But most of the houses have mud walls instead of wooden logs plastered with mud and some houses have now fireroof of cement or naria tile.
in place of straw or weed. Here almost all houses have *bakādi* land (kitchen garden) of larger size. In and around the village site a large number of jackfruit, mango and the fruit-bearing trees are seen. The village is flanked by a number of hills on the northern and southern parts. These hills have now come under reserved forests and contain big sal trees.

The population of the village, as per the Census taken in February, 1990 by US (Table-II:2) was 543 spread over 115 households. Among them the tribal population was 464 constituting 85.63 per cent and Scheduled Castes with 36 persons claiming 6.63 per cent of the total population. Among the tribal people, the Pauri Bhuyan had 62 households with a population of 287 and the rest belong to Juang tribe. The Pano (weavers) is the only Sch. Caste found in the village.

The average size of a household comes to 4.74 members. Only one household is having one member and on the other hand only six households have 10 members or more, the largest one having 12 members. Households having only two members number 19 and those having 3-5 members constitute the biggest quota with 28 claiming 45.16 per cent of the total Bhuyan households. Only 8 households have 6 to 9 members each. Thus the proportion of small-sized households (uto 5 members) with 77.42 per cent dominate (Table-II:4).

Males outnumbered the females as there were 966 females for 1000 males which is below the mark for the Bhuyan population (1016) in the whole state (1981) (Table-II:3).
The annual growth of total tribal and Sch.Caste population during the period from 1981 and 1990 was 0.95 per cent, 1.39 per cent and 7.94 per cent respectively.

Break-up of Bhuyan population by age and sex show that there is a declining trend in the proportion of population from the early age-group of 0-4 years up to 15-24 years. The proportion of females (4.96%) in the old age-group of 60 years or more is higher than those of the males (2.94%). (Table-II:5)

The percentage of literacy in the total, male and female population stood at 12.33 per cent, 20.96 per cent and 3.58 per cent respectively. (Table-II:3)

Total main workers constituted 49.13 per cent of the total population. In case of males and females it stood at 51.37 per cent and 46.81 per cent respectively. (Table-II:3).

Occupational distribution of the main workers reveals that now about 90 per cent depend on settled cultivation and wage-earning and the rest excluding two persons who have joined service, are dependant on shifting cultivation and forest collection. (Table-II:7).

THE PROBLEM:

Shifting cultivation is still practised by many communities in some form or the other in different parts of the world. In India, it continues to occupy a distinctive position in the tribal economy. The problem of shifting cultivation has been drawing the attention of the Government many years before India became independent. It is now an on-going
programme of the Government, both at the national and State level, to tackle it: In the past numerous studies on shifting cultivation have been conducted by the anthropologists in particular, most as part of ethnographic studies on tribes and no attempt was made to present a comparative estimate of different regions/communities. In the absence of adequate data the ecologists and the forest officials described it as a cause of devastating denudation of forests, a wasteful type of land use causing soil erosion and affecting rainfall and climatic conditions; and initiated legal measures under the Indian Forest Act of 1927 to control, restrict and abolish it. But such a 'total ban' approach resulted in creating serious problems to its practitioners.

After independence, the Government both at the Centre and States and Union Territories became aware of the danger of shifting cultivation and seriously thought of taking up suitable measures for its control. A beginning was made in this direction when the National Forest Policy of 1952 adopted a rational and human approach to the problem. This liberal approach, discarding the old view, called upon to view the practice as 'an organic response to certain geophysical conditions.'

"The notion widely held that shifting cultivation is responsible in the main for large-scale soil erosion needs to be effectively dispelled. The correct approach to the problem of shifting cultivation lies in accepting it not as a necessary evil, but recognising it as a way of life; not condemning it as an evil practice,
but regarding it as an agricultural practice evolved as a reflex to the physiographical character of land. For too long, jhuming has been condemned out of hand as a curse to be ashamed of, a vandalism to be decried. This attitude engenders an inferiority complex and unhealthy atmosphere for the launching of any development scheme seeking to improve the current practice." (Chaturvedi, 1953).

Similarly, Shri M.S. Sivaraman, Adviser to the Programme Administration of the Planning Commission, observed in 1957:-

"It is a mistake to assume that shifting cultivation in itself is scientific land use. Actually it is practical approach to certain inherent difficulties in preparing a proper seedbed in steep slopes where any disturbance of the surface by hoeing or ploughing will result in washing away of the fertile top soil. The tribal people, therefore, take care not to plough or disturb the soil before sowing. The destruction of weeds and improvement of field necessary for a proper seed-bed are achieved with the help of fire....In most of the interior areas, where communication is not developed and not sufficient land suitable for terracing is available, jhuming alone can be done for the present and as such every effort should be made to improve the fertility of the jhumed land." (Dhebar Commission-1961).

The change from 'total ban' approach to 'sympathetic and practical' approach in tackling the problems of shifting cultivation stimulated the anthropologists, administrators,

similar study based on the figures of 1960s. L.K. Mahapatra (1979) made an attempt to divide India into two zones for the analysis of shifting cultivation and classified the shifting cultivators into four major categories on the basis of degree of their dependence on it. These categories are (a) exclusive dependence, (b) major dependence, (c) contingent dependence and (d) marginal dependence.

The study conducted by P.D. Saikia and Chitra Kalia (1979) covered inter-state data on the swidden cultivators of North-easter India. A number of studies, highlighting the socio-economic features of a particular region or particular community, were conducted by different scholars and are published in different journals; and the Government have highlighted the importance of careful tackling of the problems of shifting cultivators while implementing various schemes to wean the practitioners. In some of these writings though provoking observations have been made. It has been regarded as 'a way of life' (Chaturvedi, 1953), 'a part of culture as anything else and a real way of life for the people' (Tripathy, 1952), 'a stage in the socio-cultural development of the tribal people' (Elwin, 1960) 'a part and parcel of their culture' 'a way of life', 'rituals, social organisation and the recreational activities are so much intervened with the practice' (Mahapatra, 1972-73) and the 'core of culture of many tribes' (Cenderet, 1990), 'Practice, inextricably intervened with the entire gamut of socio-cultural and economic pursuits' (Mishra, 1987-88) 'a technique evolved by the people in their effort to meet the challenges of the difficult physiography' (Sachchidananda, 1989). All these approaches from outside are right on their own ways. Some of these are incomplete, as
shifting cultivation is not always viewed from the angle of those who practise it. Moreover, the Government in particular has been adopting various ways and means including massive investment in Podu preventive programmes in recent times to wean the communities away from this practice. Still the practice continues unabated and several tribal communities of Orissa and in other parts of the country still cling to it, they have adopted various changes in other aspects of their lives under influences of various kind. It is a common method of cultivation in the forests and hills of the tribal areas of Orissa. In such a situation it is natural to reflect on the underlying motivation in keeping the practice alive. While looking for an answer and a solution to the problem and simultaneously persuading the communities to give up shifting cultivation through provision of viable alternatives, experts and social workers have ultimately concluded that the practice of shifting cultivation is a part and parcel of culture and "each case of swiddening has to be studied in its specific historical, physiographic, and socio-political context" (Sachchidananda, 1989). But no many comprehensive studies to focus on the rhythm and pattern of shifting cultivation influencing all aspects of socio-cultural life of the group practising it have so far been made.

The research, presently undertaken among the Pauri Bhuyan tried to outline historical and the geophysical conditions in the emergence of the practice on one hand and its socio-cultural ramification on the other. In specific terms the
present study attempts to seek answers whether shifting cultivation is

(a) an organic response to the geophysical conditions of the area.

(b) an adaptation resulting out of historical reasons brought about by interference by the administration, plainsmen and moneylenders,

(c) has bearing on integrative mechanism like socio-political organization, religious practices and myths,

(d) as conducive for the people having simple technology and

(e) pivot to other economic activities for their survival.

It also seeks to outline the extent of interdependence between the shifting cultivation and different aspects, techno-economy, food habits, myths, rituals, leadership, social system, aesthetic life, etc. of the Pauri Bhuyan. With these objectives a micro-study among the shifting cultivating Pauri Bhuyan, a section of the Bhuyan tribe has been designed.

METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION:

In course of undertaking official tours in the region the scholar had visited the Pauri Bhuyan areas located in different blocks mentioned earlier, on several occasions since the year 1968. This has helped him a lot in selecting the sample villages, establishing rapport with the villagers, in clear understanding of various aspects of their culture and also in compiling first-hand information about the region and on the life-ways of the inhabitants. Finally, intensive studies were undertaken in both the selected villages during period from
February to December 1990 in four phases of 10 to 15 days duration each. The visits had been planned in a manner so as to facilitate direct observation during important operational stages of their various economic pursuits and associated socio-religious rites.

Thus the study was based on the collection of data from both primary and secondary sources. Techniques of data collection included direct observation, wherever needed, supplemented by immediate interrogation and in-depth personal interview for qualitative and descriptive data and through filling up schedules for quantitative data from primary sources. Further, case studies were also recorded for supplementary data. Relevant data from available publications and unpublished reports were also collected and compiled for analysis and incorporation in the study.

ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY:

The subject matter of the study has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter deals with the introduction which inter alia contains the basic features of shifting cultivation, communities in Orissa carrying on shifting cultivation and an ethnographic profile of the Pauri Bhuyan, the tribe studied.

The second chapter outlines the problem and the methodology of the study containing the universe, the sample villages, problem and the methodology of data collection.

Chapter-III depicts a comprehensive picture of the practice of shifting cultivation starting from its nomenclature,
location of swiddens, ownership of swiddens, selection and distribution of swiddens, techniques of cultivation, associated rituals, guarding and harvesting.

Chapter-IV is devoted to analysis of the relation of shifting cultivation, with the economy and society of the Pauri Bhuyan.

Summary and conclusion thereof are presented in the concluding Chapter-V. This is followed by tables, notes, appendixes and select bibliography.