CONCLUSION

To sum up, this thesis has tried to discuss the agrarian structure in colonial Orissa covering the changes made after the formation of the province of Bihar and Orissa in 1912 till the resignation of the first Congress Ministry in 1939. While analysing the agrarian structure we have tried to link it with the economic condition of the peasantry under the colonial rule and traced the development of agrarian discontentment during the period under study.

In Chapter I, we have discussed the demographic and environmental set up and its interrelationship with the agrarian life of the peasantry in Orissa. In Chapter I the discussion on the agricultural practices, and irrigation system is linked with Chapter IV where we have analysed the acreage of crops, acreage under irrigation, yield and the factors that influenced the trends of agriculture in Orissa.

As discussed in Chapter I, the population of Orissa had undergone many vicissitudes up to 1941. The factors that determined the growth of population in Orissa were the condition of health, mortality rate, occasional subsistence crisis due to natural calamities and rainfall affecting the output in agriculture. There was a reduction in the population in Orissa during 1911 to 1921 Census period. The reduction of population in Puri district was prominent in that Census. This loss of
population was attributed to the series of natural calamities, crop failures and diseases during the decade 1911-1921. In 1931, the population in Orissa increased in all the districts. In 1941, also there was an overall increase of population. In Orissa, the ratio of female population was higher than the males. It further went up in all the districts during the decade from 1911 to 1921 and after that there was a continuous decline but their number remained above that of the males during the period under study partly as a result of single male migration. The density of population in the coastal districts was comparatively higher than in the Feudatory States because the alluvial coastal plains had more arable lands that were fertile and had the facility of canal irrigation.

Being mainly agricultural, about 96 per cent of the population of Orissa lived in rural areas and nearly four per cent of the population lived in the towns. Although there was slow increase in the urban population, it remained very insignificant and there was no addition to the number of towns in the districts of Cuttack, Balasore and Puri during the period under study. The absence of large-scale industries led to the over-dependence of population on agriculture.

The proportion of males was always higher in the urban areas than in the rural areas whereas in the rural areas the number of females was
more. This was mainly because of the fact that women had a limited role in urban occupations like trade, commerce and industry etc. It is the lure of a professional or business career that attracted male immigrants to the urban centers, who left their families at their rural native place.

The literacy rate in Orissa was very poor during the period under study. Even in the 1941 census, we find the average number of male literate in Orissa as 13.14 percent of the total male population and female literate as less than one percent of the total female population. Though the number of females were more yet their literacy rate was very poor and much improvement was not noticed during the period under study.

In Orissa the percentage of people who earned their living by agriculture had an upward trend. On the other hand, the occupational activities like industry and commerce had a decreasing trend during the period of study. However, the indigenous industry e.g., spinning, weaving, bell metal industry, etc. survived at a low level of activity and output.

In our discussion on the colonial forest policy in Orissa in Chapter I we find two significant problems faced by the Oriya peasantry. First, it was the denial of access to the forests demarcated as Reserved and imposition of forest cess to use the protected forests and secondly,
restrictions on the right over trees in their own lands, which were subject to the control, consent, and share of the zamindars. This gave birth to serious discontentment in the form of the peasant movement after the mid 1930's. There were series of peasant meetings under the Utkal Kisan Sangha, which besides other demands urged for tenant's rights over trees and access to the forests.

Subsistence farming dominated agricultural production in Orissa. As rice was the principal crop, the prosperity of the agrarian population depended on the success of this crop. Chapter IV analyses the long-term trends in Orissan agriculture. The fertility of the soil was greatly affected by the floods because of the inundation of sand into the agricultural field. Heavy sand deposits sometimes led to the suspension of cultivation in those fields for many years. To clear the sands the government sanctioned agricultural loans and even free grants. But, this gesture of governmental help could not help to protect the peasantry from their distress. This was because the free grants were inadequate. Moreover, the poor Oriya cultivators were unable to obtain further loans, as they were already highly indebted due to loss of crops.

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1 See *Krushaka Sankhal*, (Oriya Magazine) vol. I, No. 10, October 1928. Moreover, as an Oriya periodical "Dagar" complained that many persons, who were unaffected, by flood managed to get the Tacavi loan through dishonest officers. See *Dagar*, 1 October 1940.
The analysis of the modern irrigation system devised by the colonial government reveals that the canals scarcely benefited peasants because of the high irrigation charges and higher assessment of their land due to irrigation. Moreover, in Orissa, the rainfall being sufficient to raise the rice crop, the need for canal water was felt only when there was a shortage of rainfall. However, at such time the canals often failed to meet the heavy demand for water. Therefore, cultivators remained dependent on the traditional irrigation system. Furthermore, the canals did not cover a significant portion of the entire cultivable land so that traditional irrigation system continued to remain important. But the limitation of the dependence on the traditional irrigation system was that during the period of scanty rainfall irrigation from traditional sources was hampered because the water level from ponds, wells and rivers fell.

In chapter II the analysis of the land revenue settlement and rent structure in Orissa during the British rule reveals some of the fundamental problems in the system. The temporary settlement that was given to the people of coastal Orissa was designed to revise the land revenue at intervals of thirty years, and to derive maximum revenue for the Government. These periodic revision settlements apart from its positive benefits like granting of rights over land, maintenance of the record of rights etc. had an adverse impact on the agriculture as well as
on the economy of the common peasants. As the survey work usually took a very long time, the sowing of seeds in the land during the season was either delayed or postponed. Even when there was no cultivation, the raiyats had to pay the rent out of their savings or by making a loan.

There was no rational basis to the calculation of rent on agricultural land. The socio-religious status of the tenantry and degree of property right over land were factors that mattered, not so much productivity. The question of poverty and the economic status of the peasantry were systematically neglected. Despite frequent promises to settle rent on the basis of productivity criteria before the beginning of each temporary settlement, in reality no definite principle was followed for assessing just and equitable rent. The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, which was unsuitable to Orissa conditions, was extended to Orissa in parts as required from time to time till the Orissa Tenancy Act was passed in 1913. In the absence of a fixed and specific rule of assessment, the Settlement Officer enjoyed a lot of discretionary power that sometimes brought an erroneous over-assessment of rent on the cultivators.

The agrarian society was divided into two different interest groups, i.e., the privileged, and the non-privileged tenure holders, which was purely on the basis of the social hierarchy. The privileged tenants paid a
lower rent than the unprivileged tenants did. As a result, the common peasants had to bear the rent burden. This led to the development of the resentment among the peasantry.

In Chapter III we have discussed the land tenure system, the zamindar tenant relationship and tried to link it with the overall socio-economic condition of the peasantry. There was great diversity in the land tenure system in Orissa that existed prior to the British rule. While recognising the old titles of tenure holders the British Government reduced the number and variety of such tenurial rights. The Zamindari system was allowed to exist in Orissa. In Bengal and Bihar the Zamindaries were settled permanently who paid a fixed land revenue to the Government, but in Orissa the majority of the Zamindari estates were temporarily settled and a few Zamindaries were permanently settled. The Zamindars in Orissa were conferred by the British Government the right to inherit and transfer by sale or gift or otherwise of the whole or part of their estate. They were accorded right to collect rent from the raiyats, right over fisheries, forests and wastelands. They were also given the right to grant lease and to create sub-ordinate tenure. Each zamindar had to pay a fixed amount of revenue which was fixed either permanently or for a certain period depending upon the estate which was permanent or temporarily settled. In case the zamindar failed to pay the fixed
revenue to the government, his estate was liable to be sold by public auction.

The government introduced stringent sale law like sunset law, which aimed at steady collection of revenue. The sale law to a certain extent encouraged the zamindars to extort money from the tenantry by illegal ways. Some of these illegal exactions were zamindari collections (called magan), collections for marriage expenses of zamindar's wards, on special festive occasions etc. The British Government did not take any stringent measure to stop the practice of illegal exaction. Though official notes and policies sounded warning against such illegal practice, it was allowed to exist for the benefit of the colonial/zamindari interest to the detriment of the common peasantry.

In some cases the government made enquiries about complaints of illegal exactions and found the allegation true and imposed fines on the landlord. But mere imposition of fines was not adequate as the landlord could make up for the fine they paid by some other illegal exactions from peasants. As a result the practice of these illegal exactions continued throughout the period under study.

These landholders were mostly absentees who lived outside their estates. They rarely visited their estates and left the management of their estates with their local agents who were sometimes unscrupulous and
corrupt. As a result of this there was a brewing tension in their estates between the tenants and the intermediary agents. The inimical relationship between the landlords and the tenants became manifest during the non-cooperation movement and was generally evident in the 1930s and 1940s. The government officials occasionally talked of impartial justice between the two partners in the land. But, the concern rarely took the form of action by the Government. A noticeable change was felt for the first time in the agrarian relations during the tenure of the first Congress Ministry in 1937-39. The colonial government in Orissa was not critical of the negative effects of absentee landlordism, which was the root cause of chaos and confusion in the estates and conflicts between the tenantry and the sub-proprietary class.

The standard of living of the Oriya agriculturists was very poor in colonial Orissa. The periodic natural calamities like flood drought and cyclone, that Orissa was often exposed, contributed to this poor economic condition. Due to lack of sufficient security of each or alternative source of income the small agriculturists' recovery from the damage caused by the natural calamities had been slow. The government measures for irrigation supply or new agricultural technology (like improved tools, fertilisers, seeds etc.) and agricultural loans were
insufficient and did not cater to the requirements of a large section of the peasantry.

In our analysis of the acreage under different crops in Chapter IV, we find the winter rice crop occupied about 92 to 98% of the cultivated area during the period under study. Rice cultivation depended largely upon the rainwater, water from rivers and canals where such facilities existed. Natural calamities like cyclones, flood and drought badly affected the rice crop. The system of double cropping to compensate for the loss of one crop was not widespread. It was limited to some areas in each district. The district of Cuttack had more areas under double crop in comparison to the districts of Balasore and Puri because of better irrigation facilities. The output of crops was more in the irrigated areas. However, in the years of well-distributed rainfall, the unirrigated area had good harvest. The acreage under double crops largely depended on irrigation. Therefore, the higher percentage of double cropped area was found in the irrigated area particularly in the river side and canal irrigated land.

Some of the important factors that influenced the trend of cultivation of various crops in Orissa were discussed in Chapter IV. These were rent burden on the peasantry, uneven distribution of rainfall and above all inadequate irrigation. In Orissa the output of a crop
depended upon the irrigated area rather than the acreage under the crop. As the scope of irrigation was limited in the three districts, and the low lands besides the rivers were subject to frequent floods, it affected the out turn of the crop and therefore, deteriorated the economic condition of the poor farmers whose only source of income was from the land.

As discussed in Chapter V, Orissa did not have any self-contained agrarian code up to 1913. Prior to that it was governed by the Rent Act of 1859 and the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885. These Acts were not adequate to cater to the needs of the agrarian community in Orissa, which were revealed by the settlement operations. Therefore, the need for a separate agrarian code for Orissa was seriously considered by the Government and accordingly the Orissa Tenancy Act, 1913, which aimed at removing the ambiguities, defects and anomalies in the existing laws was passed. Apart from codifying various interests on land, the Orissa Tenancy Act, 1913 defined the tenancy rights and recognised the rights of tenants to transfer their holdings without the consent of proprietors. However, the Orissa Tenancy Act, 1913 was not free from defects. It did not help to reduce the rent burden on the peasants. Like the Bengal Tenancy Act, it also favoured concentration of large holdings and promoted landlordism particularly absentee landlords and thereby did not contribute in
bringing any change in the pattern of cultivation and production and in the socio-economic life of the peasantry. There were attempts to bring amendments to the Orissa Tenancy Act by the Oriya members of the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council. These amendment proposals were not considered because the Government felt it unwise to temper with the Act and argued that the Act was satisfactory and was working well. The unwillingness of the Government to amend the Orissa Tenancy Act was part of the colonial policy to retain the loyalty of the proprietary class.

The formation of the Orissa Province in 1936 was followed by the formation of the popular Congress Ministry in 1937. The Congress ministry favoured enactment of agrarian legislations and amendment to tenancy laws in order to give protection to the common peasantry. The agrarian reforms introduced by the Congress Ministry, i.e. the Madras Estate Land (Amendment) Bill, Orissa Tenancy Amendment Bill, Orissa Moneylenders Bill etc., were progressive in spirit being intended to redress the agrarian tension and rural indebtedness in Orissa.

Except the Madras Estate Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill, all other Bills were passed into Acts. The Congress Ministry represented popular hopes but it faced difficulties in undertaking full-fledged reforms due to the limitations of the working of the provincial autonomy.
The stand taken by the Congress Ministry while bringing out radical agrarian reforms like the Madras Estate Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill, Orissa Tenancy Amendment Bill, and the Orissa Moneylenders Bill points to the fact that the popular ministry had developed an understanding of the distress that the peasantry suffered during the colonial rule. The ministry tried to integrate the agrarian reforms and the peasant question with that of its struggle against colonialism. However, the leaders openly admitted their difficulties in undertaking full-fledged reforms. Inspite of the limitations of the working of the provincial autonomy within the parameters of colonialism and the brief period for which the Congress remained in power, the legislations brought by them revealed their appreciation of the problem of agrarian sector under colonial rule.

The popular and representative character of the Congress Ministry, to a certain extent, reflected the ideals of the Left and distanced itself from the pressure of the rightwing forces so far as the agrarian reforms were concerned. The analysis of the nature and role of mobilisation of peasantry by the Congress leadership and its efforts at translating the popular hopes recorded in the Election Manifesto points out their strategy to expose the limitations of the colonial rule and constitutional provisions for safeguarding the interest of the people in general. But
their failure to take more radical steps may be attributed to the limited scope of partial autonomy under the Act of 1935. Moreover, it was not possible for the Congress leaders to undertake a fight to the end with the landed elements and vested interests.

By the end of 1920's there had been a greater awakening among the masses, and the peasantry and labour had developed a 'keener sense of their rights, and a stouter spirit of self-assertion and resistance', and took a livelier interest in public questions. Chapter VI focussed on this awakening of the peasants which was an important development in the late colonial period. The colonial administration provided the ground for the Indian nationalists to transform and redirect this mass awakening for giving a serious challenge to the mighty British Government under the leadership and guidance of Gandhi. The non-cooperation movement was the first experiment of mass political action against the British Raj on all India basis that 'elicited from the British a changed attitude to political agitation' and the need for 'continual reformulation of political strategy in a rapidly changing context'. But this change in British policy

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was designed to protect the colonial interest and did not bring any radical change in the attitude to the peasants in Orissa.

The peasant movement under the Kisan Sangha in the 1930's worked as a prelude to a greater mass movement organised to attain the long cherished goal i.e. complete independence that came in the shape of the Quit India Movement in 1942. It set forth the democratisation of the national movement that saw large-scale participation of the masses i.e. peasants, tribal, workers and others. The socialist brand of leaders helped in the process of bringing to light the agrarian problems and radicalised the peasantry who actively participated in the agrarian agitation under the banner of the Utkal Kisan Sangha.

The Congress consolidated its position and achieved its mass base in rural areas by helping in the formation of the village wing of the peasant organisations such as the Kisan Sabha and the Lok Sabha. The village people took keen interest in the meetings of the Kisan Sabha and Lok Sabha and the Congress, as the issues discussed in the meetings had a direct appeal to their self-interest. The activities of the Kisan Sangha and the Congress crystallised the genuine grievances of the

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4 The organisation of the Kisan Sangha and taking up of the agrarian question by the Congress was aimed at furthering the 'long term goal of the national movement'. See Bipan Chandra, Indian National Movement: The Long Term Dynamics, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, p. 78.
peasants that had emerged during the British rule. They exerted pressure on the government to take effective measures to redress the grievance of the agrarian community particularly at the time of natural calamities.

The Kisan Sangha and the Congress in Orissa initially fought for a common goal of uniting the peasant masses and then involving them in the anti-colonial political activities. Attempts were also made to win over the support of the townsmen to the peasants cause. Resolutions were passed for bringing a change in the existing agrarian relations and official policies. Some of the important resolutions that were passed for abolition of the Zamindary system, appointment of experts to teach better method of cultivation, construction of strong embankments for protection from flood water, reduction of irrigation charges, better irrigation facilities, rights over trees, and amendments in the Forest Laws and tenancy laws, abolition of *bethi*, abolition of illegal taxes etc.

The British response to these demands has been discussed in Chapter VI. The colonial Government took several measures to combat the peasant movement as well as the freedom movement. During the non-cooperation and the civil disobedience movement the government gave clear instructions on action to be initiated against the leaders, government pensioners and the press and considered seditious and
violent agitation against its administration as a grave misconduct. It felt that many of the features of the movement were expressly designed to lower the prestige of the government. The government viewed the non-co-operation movement as a movement to paralyse the Government. It gave strict instructions to watch and observe the working of the Kisan Sangha and Seva Samitees in order to ascertain whether these bodies were resorting to unlawful methods. Government organised propaganda seeking co-operation from the people for smooth running of its administration. The Government never wanted to lose the traditional influence exercised by the ruling Chiefs and the Zamindars at a time when its own administration was threatened by the growing spirit of nationalism.

The agrarian agitation in coastal Orissa, that were guided either by the Congress or the Kisan Sabha or both, was partly anti-landlord in nature but it gradually developed to form a joint forum of struggle with the Congress to prioritise freedom from the colonial rule. The political conferences and the peasant conferences that were organised during the 1936-39 phase widened the mass base of the Congress and at the same time, it pushed forward the demands of the peasantry seeking immediate redressal of their grievances. The provincial election of 1937 and the formation of Congress Ministry generated high hopes among
the peasantry. The agrarian legislation introduced by the Congress Ministry, attempted to remedy the agrarian distress faced by the peasantry. But it failed to meet all the demands and hopes of the peasants because of the limitations of the partial autonomy under the 1935 Act. By the end of 1939, the discontented leaders and the peasants could see the inevitability of a greater movement to secure their just rights by putting an end to the British rule. The period that followed witnessed intensive fight with the colonial forces. During the Quit India Movement in 1942 the Congress and the peasants formed a joint front in order to push the colonial government out of India.