INTRODUCTION

I

The Indian economy is predominantly agricultural. 65% of Indian population directly depend on farming (1981 Census). The problems of agriculture in India have been an area of interest for the economists. In the recent times, the agricultural scientists and political parties entered the field to tackle the problems of the farmer. The technological innovations changed the ecological setting. The social frame-work was also transformed through new legislations. There is an ongoing attempt of the Government of India at transforming this economy through a number of economic and social development programmes.

The change as a whole and the social frame-work of agriculture in particular stimulated the social anthropologists and sociologists to probe the problems of agriculture and their practitioners. They sought to understand the social frame-work of agricultural production through micro studies. The pioneers of such studies are S.C. Roy (1915), N.K. Bose (1971), D.N. Majumdar (1961,66),
M.N. Srinivas (1976). They seem to have been influenced by the European studies conducted by Evansprichard (1940), Redfield (1955), Daniel Thorner (1966), I.M. Lewis (1968), Theodor Shanin (1971), etc. The knowledge of social organisation was brought to bear on the study of social arrangements of land; and the complexity of agricultural operations as explained through division of labour by age and sex, ownership and inheritance of land, etc.

But initially there was a problem of understanding the people of India in the matrix of tribe, caste and peasant on one hand, and tribal, rural and urban on the other. Such structural and cultural continuum of Indian society is found in the studies of Redfield (1941), Beteille (1974 : 41), Sinha (1965), Dube (1955), etc.

However, the studies made by Roy (1915), Haimendorf (1948), Bailey (1957), Beteille (1974 A), Roy Burman (1975), Mandal (1975), Pathy (1976), Shah (1979), Mishra (1977), Sharma (1982), Upadhyaya (1980), Bose (1971), Hoffman and Lister (1950), tried to present tribal farmers closely resembling the other farmers of the country. While describing the tribal economy, Danda (1973) categorises 238 out of 384 tribes as agriculturists constituting around 61% of the tribal population.

Roy (1915 : 123-128) described the various operations of Oraon agriculture. Vidyarthi (1977 : 121-133)
compiled descriptive accounts of the agricultural practices of the tribes of various regions of India. These two observers are of the opinion that tribal agriculture is similar to that of the non-tribals.

It may be presumed that the majority of tribals of India practising agriculture are similar in certain aspects to the peasants. They, however, differ from peasant castes in many other aspects. "A tribe is a world within itself having a few external social ties, a caste is, by its nature, a part of a larger whole being linked by multifarious ties with other castes" (Beteille 1974: 72). To Bailey, caste society is organic and hierarchical, whereas tribes are segmentary and egalitarian (1961: 15).

II

The foundation of human society is based on the material production which is created through certain modes of production. The two aspects of mode of production are the forces of production and relations of production. Productive forces refer to society's relation to the natural forces and objects by mastering which material benefit is obtained. It is the physical or technological arrangements of economic activities.

Relations of production on the other hand refer to people's relationship to one another in the production process.
The segmentary tribal communities as a whole, are universal cooperative units visualized in different forms of kinship units. The common ties of blood, language, custom, et., among them appear not as a consequence of but as a precondition for the joint appropriation and use of the soil (Marx and Engels 1979 : 86). The primitive economic behaviour is largely an aspect of kinship behaviour (Sahlins 1960 : 390-415), in which a person receives emergency material through social determinations of social rights; and has pervasive social control of production and distribution (Dalton 1971 : 54). The fact of social obligations and expectations associated with individual role are social imperatives; and the behaviour pattern has been explained within the framework of family, fictive kin and friendship (Foster 1973 : 106-107). The primitive productive organisation tends to be a derivative of the social organisation in terms of familial and kinship relations (Nash 1966 : 23).

Another fundamental characteristic of tribal mode of production is the family or household as the unit of production, consumption and pattern of labour (Vidyarthi 1977 : 99) which corresponds to Chayanovs peasant economy. Family acts as a corporate body to earn a livelihood for the household as a whole (Majumdar 1978 : 118-119) and close unit of economic cooperation between the members of the household leads to better living (ibid : 147-148).
Dealing with the Agro-Economic problems of the tribals of Madhya Pradesh, Patel (1972: 66-67) observed that tribals hold communal interest superior to individual interest in their material life and culture. The tenure arrangement is deep-rooted in their socio-economic system. Their agriculture is subsistence with the distinguished feature that family produces enough to meet its requirement and agricultural activities are patterned on the basis of survival needs of the family (Vessuri 1983: 135). All members of the family irrespective of age and sex form the productive unit. Division of labour is organised on the basis of age and sex. Females are considered physically weak and suitable works are assigned to them accordingly. The children and the old of both sexes participate as helping hands. Hence, Stein (1950: 11) writes, "the multidimensional aspects of the generic peasant household is the presumption of a long apprenticeship which younger members of the peasant family undergo under the tutelage of their elders".

Interdependancy or cooperation is another characteristic of tribal economy (Vidyarthi 1977, Chandrashekhar 1965: 42) in which kinship plays an important role. But they are not necessarily available for immediate needs. The neighbours are rather available in the rush hours of farming or on occasions that need extra labour (Mair 1965: 71-72). Such neighbourliness is otherwise called as 'localized kindred' or 'bhāibandhu'
who constitute a close-knit cooperative unit of kinsmen determined by common residence (Varma 1977: 103). The similar group beyond the locality or village is 'samandhi', an exogamic cooperative group which not only regulates marriage but also cooperates in agricultural activities and support each other at difficult times (ibid: 102). Bose (1971: 55) calls such groups as 'bandhu' and Rizvi (1975: 21-23) as 'mitanā'.

Relationships are based on emotional and personal considerations (Stephen 1978: 167) that is what Ghurye (1963: 224-225) calls sociability - the non-institutional behaviour of individual, the best illustration of which is neighbourliness and polity etc. (Dalton 1971: 91).

Thus, agriculture as an area of interest in sociological and anthropological studies flows from the holistic studies of primitive communities. Ethnographic accounts of specific communities invariably contain a chapter on economy.

III

'The rigorous effort of self-help of the Kachāris is worthy of high commendation', writes Endle (1911: 13-14) and they not only work in closer clannish organisation for their own public works department but also on occasions like harvesting. Responding with full cheers to the request of a
person, a group of 10 to 15 individuals work only for a working meal and not for wage (Ratha 1969, 1985).

The Dudh Khariās maintain a steady economic and social progress through better economic organisation and cooperation and more permanent association in local groups. The communal labour facilitates jhum cultivation by Dhelki and the reclamation of waste land by the Pudh Khariās in plain cultivation (Roy and Roy 1937 : 516-517).

Bhowmick (1963 : 32-39) studying the agricultural activities of the Lodhās of Jhargram and Midnapur Sub-division has referred to the supervisory role and the responsibility of the head in allocating work to different family members and the variance of out-turn is dependant on the use of family or wage labour.

The Āpātānis of Arunachal Pradesh in the Eastern Himalayas have labour-gangs formed temporarily either for one agricultural season or even for a single phase in agricultural operations. The operation of such gangs resembles the sherpa's 'ngalok' (Haimendorf 1962 : 43-44). The complicated social organisation of the 'Naked Nāgās' attains its full expression in the daily work in the field of shifting cultivation and the reciprocity of work by the monosexual working-gangs (Haimendorf 1968 : 82-85). The sherpa families of modest economic status mainly rely on mutual assistance for their agricultural work. Except in
ploughing, they prefer to work in groups (each of which ranges from 4 to 12 individuals) while planting, weeding and harvesting. Besides, the boys and girls have their respective labour-gangs known as nāglōk (Haimendorf 1975: 36-37).

The mutual help in digging or puddling is observed among the Angāmi Nāgās (Hutton 1969: 74) and the practice of collective jhuming saves a vast deal of labour in fencing and scaring birds (ibid : 141).

The working-group of Lepchās of Sikkim consists partly of relatives by blood or marriage and partly by friends. Such help is repaid with similar amount of labour (Gover 1984: 95). There is a feeling of solidarity and cohesion and a sense of mutual obligation among the Mālpāhāriās of Sāntāl Prāgraṇā which pervades in all possible sphere of agriculture like ploughing, weeding, transplantation and harvesting (Kumar 1985: 217).

The Bhil villagers of Rajasthan are usually multi-clan in composition, believe in mutual economic aid and help each other at the time of sowing and harvesting. The Bhils call such working groups as 'halma' (Doshi 1971: 25-55). Among the Sāntāls, though land is privately owned, the basic principle underlying interaction is expressed in 'alo sagai' (village oneness) which affirms a kinship like unity among all inhabitants (Somer 1977: 67-68).

Shashi (1977: 11) observes that the organisation of agriculture by the Gāḍḍis of Nilgiri is that they cultivate
the land jointly, but ripe crop is harvested separately. Families help each other in agricultural operations.

The unmarried boys and girls of Pauri Bhuyans form cooperative labour-groups in cultivation. Each family is an economic unit whose able-bodied adult members participate in all economic activities (Pattanaik et al, 1980 : 36-47). Further, Pattanaik (1984 : 60-64) observes that the Bhuyans of Kalahandi (Orissa) help each other while cleaning, firing and cultivating. The workers do not receive any payment, but are treated to a meal at noon. Similarly, the Saoras of Ganjam and Koraput organise agricultural activities based on team-spirit (Singh 1984 : 14).

Cultivation among the Oraons, though mostly a family affair, dividing the work on the basis of age and sex, reciprocal help and cooperation is sought beyond family, particularly at the time of transplantation and weeding; and other labour intensive operations (Chaudhury 1979 : 17-23). Like Pauri Bhuyans of Orissa, the Mikirs of Assam form association or clubs of young men of 12 to 20 years of age called 'Kisomar’ who work together going round the fields (Lyal 1908 : 11-12).

Halbar (1986 : 53-54) studying the Lamanis of Karnataka referred 'Mayyulu', the mutual assistance arrangements without payment of wages to cope with the rush of the work during certain phases of agricultural cycle like, sowing, weeding and harvesting. There are also instances of
helping needy brothers and relatives in the form of lending plough, bullock and implements against any payment.

Kar (1982: 38-41) is of the opinion that the seasonal restrictiveness or short working season and technological character give birth to cooperative work units like 'kamkagrima' and 'baragrika' among the Gāros. Kamkagrika is characterised as uneven exchange, whereas baragrika is balanced, and hence, is a barter par excellence. Labour is repaid by their respective groups such as men by men, women by women and children by children.

Describing the modus operandi of the agricultural production by the Hos of Mayurbhanj district of Orissa, Mishra (1987) pointed out the importance of communal labour groups constituted by the members of a lineage whose children, adult and the old of both sexes are included. They are constituted specially during transplantation, harvest and transportation of crops. The groups work for each of their members in rotation and are treated only to a working lunch.

The organisation of economic activities through kinship was observed by Vidyarthi (1977: 104) among the Mudās, the Orāons, the Hos, the Gonds and the Bhils. These activities include grazing the cattle, transplantation, weeding, harvesting, watching the crop from wild animals, etc. Bailey (1961: 11-12) points out that the condition of holding and exploiting land among the Kondhs is determined
by clan members. The right to land is achieved through one's membership in clan. Leela Dubey (1974: 100) has clearly alluded to kinship in relation to land among agricultural groups.

IV

However, intricacies of social organisation in agriculture has not been adequately dealt with either by anthropologists or sociologists or agricultural economists. The descriptive ethnographic studies on Indian tribes no doubt indicate the social base of agriculture but have not been able to achieve the analytical level of presenting the interconnectedness of different systems. Significantly they are simple descriptions of a system. The simple identification or description of institutions, or groups or categories does not always bring out the interrelations of various societal functions or surface the social imperatives of economic activities. Beteille (1974) rightly emphasises the role of the family, kinship and religion in the entire process of production. He further suggests that the simplicity or complexity of varieties of modes of productive organisations present in the tribal India need investigative techniques of intensive fieldwork and theoretical framework of anthropologists in which both technology and social organisation can be studied simultaneously (ibid: 31). Similarly, while dealing with the agricultural labourers of the South Asian Peasant
Societies, Mencher (1983: 292) emphasised to look into the agricultural process as well as the social relations of production.

The present piece of research is a small attempt to outline the role of different formal and informal groups in organising the various agricultural operations among the Kiṣāns, one of the major peasant tribes of Orissa.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The cooperative behaviour of the Kiṣāns in the form of family, lineage, clan, bad and panthi in agricultural operations is the principal aim of the study.

By and large, paddy is the main crop in the region in general and that of the Kiṣāns of the village in particular. Hence the study centres largely on paddy cultivation. The aspects of agriculture in which cooperation and interaction of individuals and groups have been studied are: land reclamation, ploughing, transplantation, weeding, irrigation, crop-cutting, threshing and storing.

The tested hypotheses are that the family is the unit of production;

the families of modest economic status rely more on mutual assistance between families;

reciprocity of labour among kin groups is the expression of group's cohesiveness;
with the change of kin-oriented mode of production over to individualistic mode, the corresponding change occurs in kin-groups such that the lineage or clan loses its importance as a corporate group; the multi-ethnic composition of villages influences the social interaction much beyond single communities; and the disintegration of kin-groups give way to the emergence of informal and voluntary groups based on mutual aid.

SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE

A village with a proportionately large Kisan population is selected for intensive study; and the neighbouring villages have also been covered to reach the accuracy of our description of the social phenomenon including various agricultural practices.

The Kisan-concentrated region of Orissa is the adjoining areas of Sambalpur and Sundargarh districts (Map 1). In view of the limited resources and time it is not possible to study the entire region. Considering the dimensions of the problem it was thought proper to study a village where the Kisans would be numerically dominant with a considerable size of population having agriculture as the source of livelihood and where different categories of farmers - big, small, marginal and agricultural labourers are found.
Turei-Niktimal was selected after a careful survey of a dozen of Kisan villages in the districts of Sambalpur and Sundargarh. Several field officers of government departments were consulted for the identification of a typical Kisan village.

FIELD WORK

Six months in two phases were spent in the village. In the first phase, from January to March 1985, Census survey was conducted, genealogical information, the history of migration, village settlement and the past history of the family and community as a whole were recorded. For a comfortable start of field investigation and establishment of rapport it was considered useful to interrogate people on their past, religious beliefs and practices, social customs, values and norms, family particulars such as age, sex, education and occupation. Data on income, expenditure, production, consumption and assets, etc., were scrupulously avoided in this phase. People felt comfortable and proud in remembering their past glory, cultural heroes; and their vanishing customs and traditions.

Before conducting the second phase of field work information from secondary sources were collected on land holding and transfer of land. The second phase of field work was conducted during the agricultural months, i.e., from July to October. During this period interview
with each family head through a structured questionnaire was conducted and observation during agricultural operation was made. Informal interviews were conducted with a number of elderly and affluent persons who could speak better on social customs, rituals, kinship norms, occasions of duties and obligations of kin members, emergence of new groups like bāḍ and pāṇṭhi, their structure and functions, etc. These groups of respondents were contacted for several times and they constitute my special or key-respondents.

Thus, data were collected by the help of census, informal interviews with a number of selected persons, case studies, observation and collection of recorded information from secondary sources such as administrative reports, revenue records, census handbook, District Gazetteers, etc.

RELIABILITY

Empiricism in social sciences, particularly in sociology and anthropology, depends upon degree of reliability of the data on which analysis is made. To achieve the maximum possible empirical reliability due precaution has been taken during field work.

For Census survey and interview, data from each household have been collected from the functional head who is expected to know the best on the household. In a few cases, where the heads were old and consequently incoherent, females
or widows, the information was checked up and supplemented either from next senior person of the family or the relatives. A structured interview schedule drafted in English, was used but questions were asked in Oriya only. Notes on observation or the expression of respondents too have been recorded in Oriya to minimise error in communication, in recording the local terms and pronunciations. Depth interviews, however, were conducted only after establishing sufficient rapport in the village as a whole and in families in particular. Even after all such precautions, doubts and possibility of distortion of data have been scrutinised through a few 'special or key-respondents' who were well aware of the purpose of my study and had confidence in me.

Data on the past incidences of the village and community, religious beliefs and practices, emergence of new organisations, rules and conducts of kinship and other social organisations have been collected by interrogating the elderly persons of the village. A number of work sites of pāṇṭhi, meeting of bāḍ, the Kisan Council as well as the village have been attended during the field work.

Data on land holding have been verified from revenue records. The most possible distortion is normally on income, expenditure and assets. People normally show more expenditure, less income and conceal their ornaments. To reduce distortion on these aspects data have been collected at various times in different contexts with possible verifications through related variables. For example, data
on income have been verified from various sources of income, number of earning members, crop-yield to the type and area of land under possession, number of bullocks and the size of straw heaps, etc. In spite of all these, the data cannot be presumed to be cent percent accurate. What ever reliability could be achieved depends upon the cooperation of the people, and I am satisfied with the reliability of the data to an appreciable extent.