CHAPTER – I

TRIBAL ECONOMY
1.1 Introduction

Forest as a source of food, fodder and fuel has enriched the tribals through the ages. Constant deforestation and degradation due to industrialisation, construction of multipurpose hydel projects, Podu cultivation and ever increasing demographic pressure, forest spread has decreased, which affected the economy of the tribals. In addition, exploitation by outsiders, middlemen, moneylenders, and the elite in their own community too amply contribute to impoverish the tribal people. Under such a situation to avoid further deterioration and to strike a rational balance between maximum development and minimum depletion of forest, an indepth study has been made with a view to study the weaknesses / strengths of the existing system and give valuable suggestions for an efficient management of forest produce in a tribal area of Orissa.

With this introductory observation the present chapter deals briefly with the tribal economy of India and Orissa and their changing scenario.

1.2 Tribal Economy of India

India has the unique distinction of having the second largest concentration of tribal people in the world. The tribals have dwelt in forest from time immemorial. They generally inhabit in different ecological and geo-climatic conditions, mostly inaccessible to other people. In a meaningful relationship with nature, not only do they directly interact with elemental forces
of nature like earth, sun, wind, rain, forest during their day-to-day life, but also
derive their means of subsistence from primary resources like land and forest,
social values, religion, ethos, spiritual norms and environmental properties as
their greatest assets. They provide a self-sustaining resource. Their way of
living makes them unique.

In spite of many adverse situations and confrontation, they are struggling
to sustain their tribal virility and cultural identity. Forests constitute one of the
main natural resources in India. Besides maintaining environmental stability,
forests play a vital role in the economy of tribal people. There cannot be any
development of forest without development of forest dwelling tribal
communities. (Burman Committee, 1982) The forest dwellers are better known
as the Children of the forest because of their dependence on various forest
produce for managing daily life. Once Goutama Budha said “the forest is a
peculiar organism of unlimited kindness and benevolence that makes no
demands for its sustenance and extends generously the products of its life
activity; it affords protection to all beings, offering shade even to the axe-man
who destroy it”.

India is losing forests at a rapid pace. Though the desirable percentage
of forest coverage is one-third of total land surface, the actual area is much less
i.e. 15 per cent. The maximum deforestation has occurred in Madhya Pradesh,
Maharastra, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir due to
industrialisation and construction of multipurpose hydel projects, mining,
laying of new railways and roads.
Forest produce provides forest dwellers with a source of additional income to supplement their agricultural wages. This income not only helps to meet the basic needs, but also supplements their requirement at the time of shortage mostly during failure of crop due to drought and cyclone.

After independence a considerable amount of funds has been spent for tribals to improve their socio-economic conditions but their situation has not improved as expected and they are much below the poverty line.

The tribals in India constitute 8.08 per cent of the total population. In Mizoram (94.75 per cent), Lakshadweep (93.15 per cent), Nagaland (87.70 per cent) and Meghalaya (85.53 per cent) according to the 1991 census, shown in the map-1.1. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal account for 83 per cent of the total tribal population.

In terms of geographical location, the distribution of tribal population is classified into the following zones shown in table 1.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>States</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Northeastern</td>
<td>Comprising Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>Undivided Bihar, Orissa, Sikkim and West Bengal.</td>
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<td>(3)</td>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>Himachal Pradesh and undivided Uttar Pradesh</td>
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<td>(4)</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Undivided Madhya Pradesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Dadra Nagar Haveli, Gujurat, Goa, Daman and Diu, Maharasra and Rajasthan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Comprising Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu.</td>
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<td>(7)</td>
<td>Islands</td>
<td>Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep</td>
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Map 1.1 Scheduled Tribe of India
The tribals remained backward and suffered from poverty, malnutrition, diseases, exploitation and ignorance in varying degrees during Pre-British period. The colonial government did not pay any attention to the development of tribal communities as they mainly concentrated on maintenance of law & order and collection of revenues. It enacted the Scheduled Districts Act in 1874 and kept large tracts of tribal areas outside the jurisdiction of normal administration. In 1935, the colonial Government introduced the Excluded and Partially Excluded Area Act in order to make the legislations of provincial Government non-applicable to the tribal areas.

However, the British policy of such isolation increased the misery of the tribal communities, and they were exposed to unhindered exploitation. Their plight was heightened by the introduction of the National Forest Policy in 1894. This snatched away their traditional rights in forests. The forest policy led to the induction of contractors, traders and non-tribal labour to forest areas in a substantial manner. The other consequences of commercialisation of forest were continued depletion of forest cover, soil erosion and decline of fertility in the soil. This further widened the socio-economic gap between the tribal communities and non-tribal communities.

It was decided on the eve of independence to recognise the aborigins, in separate schedules of the Constitution of India. Thus the excluded and partially excluded areas were enlisted in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules. To provide constitutional safeguards to the tribal communities the national government
enshrined them in the Constitution of India, which came into force on 26th January 1950.

Development does not merely imply economic growth; it also denotes social development. In India imbalance in the development front is conspicuous because economic growth has not been properly tuned to social justice.

Forest is a perennial source of food, fuel and fodder for them, and their economy is built around the forest. The government probably ignores this fact. The traditional rights of the tribal people are no longer recognised as their rights. The forest and tribal development is a major concern of the Government of India.

1.3 Tribal Economy of Orissa

Orissa is a tribal dominated state, next to Madhya Pradesh. There are 62 tribes in the state of Orissa with a population of 6.99 lakhs according to 1991 census i.e. 22.2 per cent of the total population of Orissa. The tribal population of Orissa is spread over almost all the districts of the state and concentrated in the schedule areas or agency tracts. For better administration and more effective implementation of development programs and for the benefit of scheduled tribes and scheduled areas have been demarcated taking into consideration the concentration of tribal population in different parts of Orissa. According to 1991 census, the scheduled areas of Orissa are Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Gajapati, Ganjam, Kalahandi,
Koraput, Rayagada, and Malkangiri. The most primitive tribes of India like Kondhs, Sauras, Koyas, Bondas, Parajas, Gadabas, Santalas, Matias, Gondos, are found in Orissa. The concentration of Kondha tribe is found in Kandhamala, Sambalpur, Bolangir, Koraput and Ganjam. The Koya tribe is found in the district of Malkangiri. The Bonda tribe is found in the districts of Koraput and Malkangiri. Similarly, the Gadabas are found in Koraput, Santalas in Mayurbhanj and Balasore, Soura in Ganjam and Bolangir, Paraja in Kalahandi, Koraput and Sundargarh, and the tribe Juang in Keonjhar districts of Orissa.

The tribals are basically forest dwellers. The State Government is committed to ensure speedy development of tribal communities through effective enactment of anti-exploitative and protective laws and implementation of economic, social, cultural and welfare measures in the state.

Since the fifth five-year plan, a tribal sub-plan has been formulated with the following objectives:

1. Improving the socio-economic conditions of the tribal population.
2. Strengthening infrastructure in tribal areas.
3. Protecting tribals from exploitation.
4. Promoting tribal interests through legal and administrative support.

About 44.70 per cent of the geographical area of the state has been declared as Scheduled area, which is inhabited by 62 tribal communities
including 12 primitive tribal groups. In tribal areas, developmental programmes are being implemented through 21 Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs) and 17 micro projects. During 1998-99, the flow of funds to ITDA areas was Rs.643.85 crores from the state plan, Rs.218.46 crores from the Central Plan and centrally sponsored Plan and Rs.54.29 crores from special central assistance. 20,699 ST families were assisted under different income generating schemes during 1998-99. By the end of December 1998, 145 educational buildings, 138 irrigation projects, 156 CD works and 33 drinking water wells have been completed and 20 tribal villages had been electrified.\(^2\)

Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) has been concentrated on development of tribals staying outside the ITDA areas. About 5.67 lakh tribals (as per 1991 census) in 46 pockets with a population of 10,000 or more where more than 50 percentage inhabitants are tribals, spread over 47 blocks in 17 districts, are covered under the above plan. Under this scheme, both individual beneficiary-oriented schemes and community-oriented schemes are under implementation in these pockets. During 1998-99 the expenditure was Rs.2.66 crore covering 2,173 tribal beneficiaries.

The cluster approach aims at development of contiguous areas having 5,000 populations where 50 per cent or more of the inhabitants are tribals. This approach was formulated since the seventh plan period. By the end of 1998-99, there were 14 cluster pockets consisting parts of 13 blocks in 10 districts, with 52,793 tribals have been covered under the cluster approach. This programme aims at various community-oriented schemes and individual beneficiary-
oriented schemes for the development of tribals. During 1998-99, the expenditure was Rs.20.45 lakh and 276 tribals have been assisted by this approach.

Ecologically, Orissa's forests enjoy a special status because of its variety and abundance of flora and fauna, and their commercial value. By December 1997, the total forest area of the State is reported to have been about 58135.47 sq. km., which is 37.3 per cent of the geographical area of the state. Out of the total forest area of 58135.47 sq. km. in the state, the area under reserved forest, demarcated and protected forest, un-demarcated forest, unclassified forest, and other forests accounts for 26329.12, 11685.68, 3838.78, 20.55 and 16261.34 sq. km. respectively.

The tribal economy of Orissa has close relationship with the forest; it is their main life supporting system and therefore, it plays a vital role in their economy. It is observed, that the tribal population is concentrated where the forest cover is high. In tribal economy both agriculture and forest products have contributions to income. Forests give food and shelter to the tribal of the State. All kinds of edible fruits, roots, leaves, tubers, flesh of animals and birds, insects and fish from the nearest rivers are available for food and all types of raw material for house making used by them is collected from the forest. Their domestic animal graze in the forests and various medicinal plants cure their diseases. Forest keep them warm with fuel, cool with shade. It also provides different types of juice and wine. This was the situation in the past and remains unchanged that is why, the tribals think that forest belongs to them and any
restriction imposed in any manner is taken as a blatant encroachment on their hereditary right.

But the situation has changed a lot due to forest degradation and population increase. Now the availability of forest produce has decreased to such an extent that the tribal are deprived of some of their natural hereditary rights.

The tribals are allowed to collect various minor forest produces and sell to the lessees. The simple, illiterate tribal continues to be exploited by *sahukars* (*village money lenders*) and middlemen. They just sell the forest produce at throw-away prices. Hence, to save the tribal economy from the clutches of the middlemen, Government of Orissa organized Agency Marketing Society, Tikabali & TDCCOL and the Government of India has also formed an apex society TRIFED for marketing the forest produce collected by the tribals. Inspite of all these endeavours, the tribal economy continues to deteriorate.

The literacy campaign has changed the level of illiteracy of the tribals to some extent. To improve the present situation, tribal economy needs to be imparted more commercial information and value-addition process through cottage and small-scale industries.

Industries based on MFP like Tamarind Seeds (*starch making*), Mohua flower (*distillery*), Siali lai (*rope making*), bamboo (*basket making*), Nux Vomica and other herbal plants (*medicinal extracts*), Sal and Siali Leave (*leaf*
plate / khali making) should be established to help the tribal economy of Orissa.

Tribals in Orissa on the basis of their economic organisation may be classified into pastorals, shifting cultivators, settled cultivators and forest produce collectors. These occupations need not be treated as mutually exclusive. Besides these main occupations, they are also engaged in secondary occupations as daily wage earner in the nearby urban areas, food for work programmes undertaken in the rural areas. Inadequacy of irrigation, undulated nature of the land, non-adoption of scientific methods of cultivation are some of the reasons for low productivity which compels them to run to the forest for support and supplement. Indebtedness is a serious economic problem among the tribals in Orissa. The extent of indebtedness is aggravated by the exorbitant interest charged by sahukars (village money lenders) and being unable to repay the loan, works as bonded labourers (Goti) for the sahukars. Tribals are a festive-loving people. To celebrate festivals they sell their crop in advance and take loan from village moneylender who mercilessly exploits the tribal and invariably the loan becomes manifold in no time that compels the loanee to transfer his domestic animal, land and finally, unable to repay fully, serves the sahukar as ‘Goti’.

During interaction with the local people, instances came to notice where for generations some served a sahukar family as a bonded labour in lieu of their major food and little clothing. Taking advantage of their ignorance, and innocence the sahukars purchase Adivasi land after arranging permission for
the Adivasi from the revenue authorities by both pressure and pursue as transfer of Adivasi land is prohibited from sale to higher caste people by legislation. To save the tribal from the vice like grip of unscrupulous moneylenders, spread of education is most possibly a plausible panacea. The NGOs who are invariably outsiders easily skip over such situation and thereby do practically very little in the direction of restoration of Adivasi land through legal means. In several cases taking advantage of faith imposed by the Adivasis on them, the village moneylenders who also speak their language do help them financially at the dead of the night, without any deed or documentation exploit them financially. They also incite and instigate the innocent adivasis to complain against the NGOs and other local authorities and thereby get the thorns cleared from the path of their exploitation, once they know that such people are supporting the cause of Adivasis. Social habits are in no way less responsible for their poverty. The community compulsions pressurize them to incur loan. A member of the community irrespective of his financial position is bound to entertain the entire community and this compels him to approach the moneylender and once he takes the loans, he remains a loanee throughout his life.

In order to save them from this exploitation, the Government of Orissa has created ITDA, DRDA, AMCS, TDCC, and LAMP in different districts of Orissa.

Tribals are invariably forest dwellers, living in unhealthy condition. Due to their traditional and cultural backwardness, poverty and casteism they lag
behind in the race of development and prosperity in this modern world. Some of the characteristics of tribal economy in Orissa are as follows:

(A) Gathering roots and fruits for consumption, hunting and collection of forest produce and cultivation are the main source of the tribal economy. The quantity of production and consumption are regulated by the size of the family. Shifting cultivation or podu cultivation is still practised in some of the tribal areas of Orissa.

(B) Settled cultivation is another economic development of the post-independent era. Due to settled cultivation, agricultural labour has become a significant economic activity in the life of tribal people. Besides, tribals engage themselves in small-scale industries, mining, and other economic occupations to supplement their income. It has been observed that according to the 1991 census, the literacy rate of tribal has increased compared to past census in Orissa. The data on category wise literacy rate by sex in different blocks of Kandhamal district are presented in table 4.1 of chapter 4. Educated tribals do get government job, due to the reservation policy of the state. The Adivasis are aware of different methods of enriching their economic condition due to literacy campaign and effort of NGOs and also to some extent due to efficient management of their procured forest produce. However, this awareness is far from the expected level.
1.3.1 Changing Scenario

The popularity of Barter system has considerably reduced in the tribal economy, which now depends on the local market condition and has undergone visible change due to improved transport system and procurement network. For their collected forest produce though they are not required to invest any money to improve the quality of different forest produce, they require processing units which has been organised in the area on co-operative basis. Legal restrictions like *Orissa Money Lender Act* on the village money lenders, who advance money much before the procurement and collection season for different agency goods and collect the same at a much cheaper price, has enabled the tribals to get competitive price for their crops and forest produce.

Since forest produces have varied use in the preparation of medicines, dyes, household articles, traders use to penetrate into interior tribal pockets for procurement of such goods and procure the same at throw away price, as some such goods are not locally marketable. However, there is competition amongst such traders and it has been observed that such traders even offer a better price than the price fixed for procurement by the cooperative agency. By this the marginal profit of the traders certainly decreases giving scope for better and higher price for the tribal collectors of forest produce.

Introduction of several protective measures, exposure of tribal youths to the modern civilization, their entry into government service through reservation have gone a long way to save their families and their community at large from
the various types of exploitation. The role played by the community
development blocks, tribal development blocks, tribal development agency,
integrated tribal development projects, tribal development cooperative societies
in improving the socio-economic condition of the tribals has generated
awareness in the target areas. It is now observed that the illiterate, innocent,
gullible tribals have started demanding their legitimacy in every system and situation.

Though by and large, there is improvement in the economic condition of
the tribal people and ruthless exploitation of the colonial feudal days has been
substantially controlled, much more has remained to be desired. It is heartening
to learn that in the tribal areas, collection of minor forest produce will not be
leased out to the contractors and regulation of such collection is being given to
the local people through the gram panchayats as per the Government of Orissa

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