INTRODUCTION

The objectives

The objectives of this Research Project entitled "The Urban Political Elite in Tribal Orissa - A case study of Phulbani District" are:-

1. to analyse the background, nature and orientation of the political leadership at the Urban grass root levels in tribal areas of Orissa;
2. to study their levels of development and hindrances thereto; and
3. to study the nature of political societies in Urbanised tribal areas with a focus on their degree of continuity and change.

The Hypotheses

Towards realisation of these objectives, the project starts with the following hypotheses:- that the urban political elite in tribal Orissa as sampled out from Phulbani district:-

a. is traditionally patriarchal and is mostly composed of native tribals;
b. is primarily consisted of cultivators and labourers who generally hail from large size families with small income and without any status symbol;
c. is moderately educated with knowledge in the local and the state languages and not knowing other languages;
d. do have political awareness of very low order;
e. is traditionally backward and less advanced in its political involvement and leadership process;
f. has traditional, poor, and low political ideals and aspirations;
g. is not conscious, reasonable and progressive in its approach to development; and
h. is, in broad outlines and in its composite perspective, poor in background, traditional in nature, backward and non-progressive in its Orientation.
The Variables

The background, nature and Orientation of the urban political elite of tribal Orissa are not anything, which can be called objective, concrete and precise. These are subjective and diverse Phenomena. Besides, the members of the target group under study, after all, are human beings. Human nature is subjective, complex, nebulous and inexact. The study of the nature and orientation of the elite would be fruitful by collection of data on them from various angles of their life, living, and behaviour. The first and foremost thing is to have an idea of the elite profile or information on their Socio-economic background. Therefore, the first major variable used in this study is in the form of 'elite profile' or 'socio-economic information' eliciting data regarding their age, sex, caste, language, education, family size, income, occupational structure, status symbols, etc. All these would help in studying the socio-cultural setting and economic background of the elite. This background has a real and definite impact on their nature and role orientation.

The second major variable used to collect primary data on the subject is 'political awareness' through which information is sought from the elite members on their knowledge about some leading statesmen, political heavyweights, and public figures, both past and present, of India as well as Orissa; their awareness about some common political and legal issues and problems. The level of awareness of an elite member being an important factor of his political strength and political efficacy, this variable has been used to make an effective study of his nature and orientation.

The third major variable employed is 'Political involvement and leadership process' under which the sub-variables like political affiliation, political participation, political support base, methods of informing and influencing the voters, role in decision-making process, sources of meeting election expenses, etc. have been used to judge the nature, style, orientation, and depth of leadership of the urban political elite of tribal Orissa.

'Political ideals and Aspirations' as the fourth major variable has been used to assess the elite's ideals on and approaches to corruption, liquor, dowry, destruction of public property, free and fair elections, state-funding of elections, compulsory voting, abiding code of conduct, reservation, choice of
the best party, opposition for the sake of opposition, etc. This will help studying the role perception and orientation of the elite in a better way.

Through 'Approach to Development', which is the fifth and the last major variable, attempts have been made to assess the approaches and attitudes of the elite towards various aspects of development. Under this major variable queries are there in the form of (a) should Octroi tax be abolished? (b) Establishment of NAC (Urban Body) helpful or harmful? (c) Are the NAC (Urban) taxes reciprocal to the services rendered to the people? (d) Are the facilities provided by the urban body such as lighting, water supply, medical aid, sewerage and sanitation, education and library, cultural activities, etc. adequate and satisfactory? (e) Are you satisfied with the government programmes for tribal development in your area? (f) Status of women in your area with suggestions to curb exploitation and atrocities on them, (g) should deforestation and shifting cultivation be banned? (h) Suggestions regarding marketing of forest and agricultural products of the tribals, and (i) Opinion on the fields where tribals have been developed.

Methodology

This social research project has employed, in combination, the structural, functional, as well as the inductive methods and has used the techniques of observation, questionnaire, schedule, interview and documentary study. The study includes all the present as well as the previous councilors of Notified Area Councils at Phulbani and G.Udayagiri. However, altogether 54 interviewees – 31 from Phulbani NAC and 23 from G.Udayagiri NAC were available for direct interview by this researcher who interviewed them with a planned questionnaire as given in the Appendix. The questionnaire consists of both open and close-end questions. All the interviewees cooperated well during the process of interview and spoke out their mind in all frankness. The only limitation in this process was that the interviewees feared that the real data regarding their income, status symbols, family background etc. would pose them some problem by the government. But after due clarification about the purpose of research and secrecy of their personal information, they shook off their reluctance and cooperated in all their natural way. Even, many of them got curious to know
whether their views would reach the government quarters to solve their manifold problems. In collection of secondary data, competent authorities, persons and officials gave warm-hearted cooperation.

Contextual Background

The title of the project “The Urban political Elite in tribal Orissa- A case study of Phulbani district” would get just treatment if discussion is made on the Urban issues, political elite and the tribal issues and problems before we take up the main argument based on the primary data collected from the target group in Phulbani district. A thesis prepared without the contextual background and, in the case of a micro study like this, without having inductive references moving from highways to interiors would be just like an edifice constructed in the air without a foundation underneath the earth. For a systematic study of the main thesis based on the arguments over the primary data, the project starts with the first chapter named as “The Tribal Horizon”. This chapter deals with the history, demographic features including population, literacy, work participation, occupational holding, etc; society, economy, developmental aspects in general and Phulbani district in particular, besides the constitutional and legal safeguards for the tribals. Beginning with the general nature of the tribals, the chapter ends with a discussion about tribals in Phulbani district. The main study is on the tribal society of a typical nature i.e. in relation to the political elite in Urban areas thereof. Without a general discussion on the tribals, it would be inappropriate to move to a micro study on them. The secondary data given in this chapter would help a comparative study of the data inter se. Besides, it would help a comparative analysis on the levels of development or backwardness with the rest of society.

The second chapter entitled “The Urban Panorama” is virtually a discussion on the urban issues including its genesis and evolution, democratic decentralisation, the urban government, political sub-centres in urban Orissa with legal and constitutional provisions relating to urban structures in the state with their functions and a review of 1997 Municipal elections in the state duly supported by statistics. As the main study is on the
urban areas of tribal society, a background analysis on the urban problems is necessary for a fruitful and relevant research.

The third chapter i.e. "The political Elite" deals with the conceptual and theoretical perspectives, broad profiles and functional syndrome, trends of reality with the scene from tribal Orissa. As the target group of the main study is the political elite in tribal urban areas, it is pertinent to know 'who is an elite' what are his broad profiles and functional syndrome, before we deal with the main analysis.

The fourth chapter named as "The Urban Political Elite in Tribal Orissa – A study of two towns" is the core chapter of the study. An introduction about the two towns of Phulbani and G. Udayagiri under the study has been given in the beginning of this chapter as the study about them will be incomplete without it. This chapter also deals with the primary data on which the main argument of the thesis is based. It includes the critical study of five major variables such as the elite profile in urban Phulbani district, political awareness, political involvement and leadership process, political Ideals and Aspirations and Approach to Development.