CHAPTER III
THE CONTEMPORARY CRISSAN SCENE
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The caste stratification, manifests its extreme form in the growth of completely segregated set of Harijans in each village of Orissa. The occupations of Harijans are still held to be the lowest. Till now the Harijans are found to be subjected to certain social restrictions. They are not served by Brahmins, barbers, washermen who serve the caste Hindus. They are not allowed to enter village temples and to use public conveniences such as roads, wells, tubewells etc. Inter-marriage, inter-dining remains a dream for them.

According to 1951 census the Scheduled Castes constituted 17.95 percent of total population of Orissa. According to 1961 census the Scheduled Castes constituted 15.75 percent of the population. According to the 1971 the Scheduled Caste population constituted 15.09 per cent of the population. According to 1981 census the Scheduled Castes accounted for 14.66 per cent of the population. Thus there is a steady decline in the percentage of Harijans to the general population. According to the 1981 census the general population stands at 26,370,271, and the Scheduled Castes population stands as 3,865,543. According to 1981 census 93 Scheduled Caste communities live in Orissa. Scheduled Castes constitute 15.06 per cent of the rural population and 11.68 per cent of the urban population.

The following is the table showing the list of Scheduled Caste Communities in Orissa.
### TABLE 1
Table showing the List of Scheduled Caste Communities in Orissa

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<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Amant or Amat</td>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Chandala</td>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Godari</td>
<td>51.</td>
<td>Krrunga</td>
<td>70.</td>
<td>Pan or Pano</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Bari</td>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Jaggali</td>
<td>57.</td>
<td>Mala,Jhala Mali or Zala</td>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Pap</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Bariki</td>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Kandara or Kandra</td>
<td>58.</td>
<td>Mang</td>
<td>76.</td>
<td>Pasi</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Basor or Burud</td>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Karua</td>
<td>59.</td>
<td>Mangan</td>
<td>77.</td>
<td>Patial Patikar Patratani or Patua</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Bauri</td>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Katia</td>
<td>60.</td>
<td>Mehra or Mahar</td>
<td>78.</td>
<td>Rajna</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Bedia or Bejia</td>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Kodalo or Khodalo</td>
<td>63.</td>
<td>Mundapotta</td>
<td>81.</td>
<td>Samasi</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Bhoi</td>
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<td>66.</td>
<td>Namsudra</td>
<td>84.</td>
<td>Sauntia (Santia)</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Chocchati</td>
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<td>67.</td>
<td>Paidi</td>
<td>85.</td>
<td>Sidhria</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Chakali</td>
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<td></td>
<td>68.</td>
<td>Painda</td>
<td>86.</td>
<td>Sinduria</td>
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From Serial one to 48 we find throughout the State, Serial 49 is found only in the district of Sambalpur, whereas 50 to 94 again we find throughout the State.
Among the Scheduled Castes, the most numerous in order of preponderance in the State are Pano (6,72,627), Dom or Domb (3,70,236), Gauda (3,25,053), Dhoba (3,22,216), Bauri (3,03,460), Kandara (2,48,380) and Hadi (1,01,331). Due to social awakening and penal sanction the practice of untouchability is gradually disappearing.

Prior to Government of India's passing the Untouchability Offences Act 1955, the Government of Orissa had enacted two laws; the Orissa Removal of Civil Disabilities Act 1946 and the Orissa Temple Entry Authorisation Act 1948. The laws were meant to remove disabilities of the Untouchables, who had no legal sanction beforehand to counter-act their degraded status in the Hindu society. Under the rules provided in the Orissa Removal of Civil Disabilities Act 1946, anybody who would not allow the Untouchables free access into the houses of higher caste people, hotels, common wells and other public amenities was liable to be punished with a fine to the extent of Rs.50/-. The Orissa Temple Entry Authorisation Act, 1948, prescribed imprisonment upto six months or fine extending to Rs.500/- or both simultaneously. The said two acts proved effective in the sense that they provided a legal basis for asserting the right of the Harijans. In actual practice they were rendered ineffective as they were non-cognizable and it was very difficult to punish an offender according to the provisions of these acts. The Central Act of 1955 was revised

in 1976. This was known as protection of Civil Rights Act. This time it was felt that the provisions against discrimination should be made more stringent and offences should be made cognizable. It was also felt that some administrative measures should be adopted over and above the legal provisions to accelerate the process of eradication of Untouchability.

During 1952 special government orders were issued to the district magistrates and other local officials in the districts, instructing them to pay special attention to the problem of Harijans and they were requested to report the difficulties encountered by them in the execution of these laws. In view of the sweeping powers given to the police and the court and the heavy penalties prescribed in the Untouchability Office Act, 1955 (PCRA, 1976) it might be presumed that it must have been very effective in preventing untouchability and punishing the offenders. However, it is paradoxical that the cases instituted under this Act are extremely few and the convictions are fewer still. In almost all villages in Orissa, Harijans are suffering from all types of social and economic disabilities arising out of untouchability. The following illustrations will reveal the violence and atrocities to which the Harijans are victims in Orissa.

James M. Freeman in a study of Untouchability in Kapileswar Village; three miles away from the Capital of Orissa, reveals that, high caste people justify forcing
the lower castes to perform hereditary menial occupations that are the least desirable and the most defiling in society, on the grounds that lower castes and untouchables are polluting any way. In an interview with Muli i.e. an untouchable, the author reveals, "The villagers never forgot, nor did they let us forget, that we were untouchables. High-caste children sat inside the school; the Bauri children about twenty of us, sat outside on the Varenda and listened. The two teachers, a Brahman, outsider, and a temple servant, refused to touch us, even with a stick. To beat us, they threw bamboo canes. The higher caste children threw mud at us. Fearing severe beatings, we dared not fight back". This study reflects the conditions of Harijans in Villages of Orissa.

In Kuanto village in Dhenkanal district there are two tanks for irrigation purposes. One of the tanks, belongs to scheduled castes and another to caste Hindus. Due to drought conditions in the year 1966, the caste Hindus started taking water for irrigation purposes from the tank of the Scheduled Castes. They objected. They wanted to assert their rights and they told them that they can take water for drinking purposes, not for irrigation purposes. A quarrel took place and as a result one scheduled caste succumbed to injuries. The wife of the deceased was made naked and she was taken in a procession. She was raped by 8 persons. When the inquiry was going on, the brother of the deceased was also killed. This happened in the presence of

the officers who were enquiring into the earlier incidents.
In another case some important persons of Village Sabulpur
in district Cuttack collected funds from Scheduled Castes
for a feast. Among the prominent persons, there was one
Scheduled caste man. When they sat for dinner, orthodox caste-
Hindus objected to the participation of the Scheduled Caste
man in the dinner party. Whatever was served in his plate
was snatched and he was driven out from the party.\(^4\)

In Village Brahmagiri in Cuttack district, untouchabil-
ity is being practised in all respects. The Harijans are
served tea in separate tumblers. The barber and washerman
donot serve them. Brundaban Jena(former M.L.A.,) when he was
a school teacher went to attend a drama in Village Gopalpur.
He took his seat on the chair by the side of the stage. The
caste Hindus of the village did not like his sitting over
there. He was forcibly removed from the chair. He reported
the matter to the police, but instead of taking action against
the culprits the matter was put under the carpet.\(^5\)

The Harijans held a meeting near the police station
of Bhanpur. The tea-stall owner was requested to serve tea
to the Harijans who had gathered there. But he refused to
oblige. Mohan Nayak, former Member of the Parliament who
happened to be there went to the police station to lodge a
complaint under the Untouchability Offence Act 1955, but to

\(^4\) Government of India,"Report of the Committee on
Untouchability, Economic and Educational Development
of Scheduled Castes and Connected Documents",Manager,

\(^5\) Ibid.
his great surprise the Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police said he could not register the case, as he was not aware of the various provisions of Untouchability Offence Act. This shows the apathy of the Police Officers towards the problems of Scheduled Castes.\(^6\)

Untouchability in one form or the other is still practised in all the districts of Orissa. In the urban areas, some restaurants have separate utensils for serving food to their Harijan customers. The Harijans have accepted their lot without protest. In rural areas of Orissa, untouchability is acute. With greater social mobility and interaction among the various caste groups, the fear of pollution by touch, however, lost much of its acuteness. The prevalence of untouchability is stated to be mainly due to the economic and educational backwardness of the Harijans and their occupational pattern. The educated and affluent among them are generally not affected by the evil. Certain Harijan groups also practise untouchability among themselves. In Sambalpur, scavengers do not serve the Kuli Community, and Ghasis do not touch each other and the barbers do not serve them. Washermen in some areas of Ganjam district do not fetch water from the wells located in areas inhabited by Bauri Harijans. Adivasis in some areas of Sundergarh district do not drink water served by Harijans.\(^7\)

Harijans live everywhere in the State, but are concentrated in the coastal districts of Balasore, Cuttack, Puri, Ganjam. Several social organisations are engaged

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6. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
in the fight against untouchability. Prominent among them are the State units of the Depressed Class League and the Harijans Sevak Sangha. Political parties too help in the fight. The Orissa Government has given direction to its departments to enforce Untouchability Offence Act vigorously. An oriya version of the provisions of the Act has been circulated. The experience, however, is that in many cases the victims of untouchability have meekly submitted to humiliation.\textsuperscript{8}

In Bapuji Nagar in Bhubaneswar on 10 March 1982, during Holi, the Harijans refused to work as drum beaters in the procession, organised by high castes. Consequently a clash between the high castes and Harijans took place. As a result two Harijans were killed. And the six young castes Hindus, who were arrested in this connection, were released on bail.\textsuperscript{9}

In Village Nrutang in Mahanga Block of Cuttack district a violent clash took place between Harijans and Caste Hindus. Twentynine people were arrested. Out of 29, 19 were Harijans. The reason was that the Harijans dared to take mud from the fields of high castes to make pottery.\textsuperscript{10}

The then Deputy Union Home Minister, N.R. Laskar, in a letter to Chief Minister of Orissa wanted to know the steps taken to limit the rising atrocities against the Harijans. The Atrocities against Harijans had crossed the

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{The Samaj (Cuttack)}, 24 November 1982, p.5.
record, during the Congress Ministry in Orissa. In 1978 there were 135 cases of atrocities against the Harijans. In 1978, 5 Harijans were killed. There were riots against the Harijans in 8 places. Besides these, these were 103 cases of other categories of atrocities. In 1979, 3 Harijans were killed, and there were two rape cases, one arson, 6 lootings, and 31 other atrocities. In 1980, 3 Harijans were killed and there were 10 rape cases, 11 lootings, and 46 other cases of atrocities. In 1981, 5 Harijans were killed and there were 7 rape cases, 11 riots, 46 other cases of atrocities. In 1982, 9 Harijans were killed and there were 10 rape cases, 16 riots, 13 cases of lootings and setting fire and 8 other cases of atrocities.\(^\text{11}\)

Two kilometers from Aska, in Village Debavumi, one Harijan couple was put to fire-death. Both were suspected to be magicians. Khanu Nayak and his wife Kuntala Nayak were tied to a rope first. Then a red hot iron was pushed to their genital organs. Then they were thrown into the fire in broad day light in front of hundreds of villagers who witnessed this barbarous act. In the fire, the couple cried for rescue but it went unheeded. The couple was barren and had adopted a 15 years old distantly related niece as their daughter. She fell ill and was taken to hospital, where she died. Villagers suspected the death of the girl due to the magic action of the couple and punished them to death.\(^\text{12}\)

\textit{11. The Samaj, 8 June 1983, p.8.}

\textit{12. The Samaj, 3 May 1984, p.1.}
It was reported that in village Gobarndhanpur in Bolagada Police Station of Puri district, a Harijan woman of 19 years old, named Rumila Dei, was raped by a gang of 8 police constables of Orissa Special Reserve Police Force. The constables were entrusted with the duty to keep peace in the village. Rumila's husband was in Jail in a dacoit case. The policemen, taking advantage of the absence of her husband and her old father-in-law, on 26th night at 12 P.M. entered into her inlaws residence. They terrorised the entire family and dragged them out at the point of bayonet. 4 constables guarded her mother-in-law and eldest daughter-in-law, when 4 other constables raped her.13

In village Kuudapalli, in Khandpara Police Station, on 11 August afternoon, a violent clash took place between the Harijans and caste Hindus, over the location of village tubewell. Consequently, Sri Chandramani Pradhan, a caste Hindu got a bullet injury. Eight Harijan houses were gutted in fire.14

In a press release Guru Charan Tikayat and Amar Satpathy revealed some cases of atrocities against Harijans in Orissa. In Bhuban, Kuku Dakhai, Barada, Bandhadhia Villages, Harijans were given pattas of land by the government of Orissa in 1980. But some hooglians of the ruling party with the support of the police tried to terrorise and evacuate the Harijans from the possessed lands. Harijans were dragged to the police station and harassed. False cases were

registered against them. In Badachana area of Cuttack district, in villages like Arakhapur, Thangla, Mandia and Pkhare Harijans were prohibited from drawing water from village common-well. In Rasulpur Block of Cuttack district in Kalan village some Harijans were farming in encroached lands since long. They had to pay fines after the settlement of encroachment cases against them. But pattas for the said lands were not handed over to them. Twenty four Harijans were arrested for possession of encroached lands.  

On 14 November 1985, in Rasulpur village, a 16 years old Harijan girl Santilata Samala while taking bath in the village pond was heckled by 5 caste Hindu youngmen. They offered her ₹100/- to have illicit sex. The girl protested. Consequently she was stripped off her clothes. Hearing the shouting of the girl, her mother and uncle rushed to the spot. The miscreants fled. In the absence of her father, her uncle reported the matter to the Salipur Police Station. No action was taken. The miscreants threatened her uncle and forcibly took his thumb impression for a compromise. Through the matter was reported to the Chief Minister, local Member of Parliament, Superintendent of Police, no action was taken against them.  

On 14 September 1986, in Bingharpur Block of Cuttack district in Village Jari, a violence took place. The violent clashes between the upper castes and Harijans at Jari Village were not the off-shoot of an isolated incident but the result of a long-standing socio-economic

rivalry between the two communities. Four persons, includ­
ing three Harijans, were killed and nearly 70 were injured 
in the clashes. This was a sequel to an alleged kidnapping 
of a 14 year old upper caste girl by a Harijan boy. The 
Harijans were dissatisfied with the upper castes for their 
discriminatory practices. The upper castes complained that 
they were deprived of the crops from their lands by the 
Harijans. Tension had been prevailing in the village since 
July. The minor girl Bharati Samal was kidnapped by a young 
Harijan rickshawpuller, Babuli Mallik. The girl's father 
lodged an FIR with the Bingharpur Police. The boy was 
arrested and produced before the Sub-Divisional Judicial 
Magistrate of Jajpur. He remanded him to police custody and 
ordered that the girl be returned to her parents. After the 
boy was released on bail, the Harijans of Jari Village 
held a meeting and decided to bring the girl back from her 
house. But they failed to do so in the face of stiff 
resistance from the girl's relations.

Meanwhile, the Village Sarpanch, Bidyadhar Samal, 
informed the Police of the rising tension in the village. 
But no action was taken to prevent any clashes. A large 
group of Harijans ransacked houses belonging to the upper 
castes and set them on fire. A small posse of policemen 
was belatedly sent from Binjharpur. It was gheraoed by the 
Harijans before it could reach the village. The situation 
was brought under control after the local Tahasildar, the 
Sub-Divisional Police Officer and the Circle Inspector of 
Police rushed to the spot. Four Harijans were arrested and
the injured were taken to various hospitals. Despite the incident, the police took no steps to prevent further violence. Both the Harijans and the upper castes allegedly strengthened their ranks by bringing supporters from nearby villages after the violence. The upper castes attacked hundreds of Harijan houses in retaliation, set them ablaze and butchered three Harijans.¹⁷

In Village Balipur, in Athgarh Block of Cuttack district, a clash took place between Harijans and Savarnas over the location of a village tubewell. Five people were injured and an innocent primary school teacher lost his life.

On 3 September when the digging of Tubewell started the conflict took place between the Harijans and high castes in the village. There was already a tubewell in the street of high castes. The Block Development Officer ordered for the tube-well in the Harijan street. This decision annoyed the high castes in the village. When the work started, the high castes stopped the work in the Harijan street, under the leadership of Chaitanya Rout. On 15th September Chaitanya Rout while returning from the field, at Mangala crosspoint in Balipur, was attacked by a crowd of 30. One Pratap took a sharp spade and chopped off Rout's hand. After two hours, he died on the way to the hospital.¹⁸

In Village Basantpur in Khandapara Police Station, of Puri district Arjun Mallik, a Harijan boy, while trying to elope a highcaste girl named Pratima Sahu was caught. So the situation in the village became tense. In another incident in village Madhupur, it was reported that, the Harijans forcibly took the crops from the fields of the highcastes as Harijans were refused their due wage and share in share-cropping. Under poverty alleviation programme those who had taken loan from Puri-Nimapara Central Co-operative Bank were served notices for repayment. In case of and non-payment the houses/properties of the loanees were to be auctioned. Though the highcaste influential people were exempted from repayment, poor Dalits were troubled by the authorities. In Belabadi village, a poor Harijan Mukunda Behera, took loan from the said bank. Because of drought and failure of monsoon he could repay only ₹1000/-. So he requested the authorities for more time. The authorities instead of giving extension of time, forcibly ceased his belongings like spade, weight and measure instruments, old trunks, 4 and ½ bags of paddy, old cot, broken cycle and a liquid cash worth ₹747/- from his house and left him homeless. 19

In Hatibadi Sevashram School, 27 kms. from foothills of Similipal, a Harijan student of Class VII Bhimsen Patra was driven out from the School. On 13 July 1987 24 Harijan students, were kept semi-starved in the hostel. They protested against the school teachers for their alleged misapp-

ropriation of ration-items and placed the complaint before the Sub-Divisional Officer.²⁰

In Badababejuri Village in Patnagarh Police Station 60 kilometers from Bolangir, a clash took place between Harijans and highcastes, in which 2 persons died and one was seriously injured. A Harijan boy named Jagat Tandi was first attacked by a small boy of highcaste as the Harijan boy had allegedly stolen fish from the paddy field of the highcaste, Bhupa Sahoo. After this Bhupa Sahoo along with some of his high caste friends rushed to the spot with weapons. The Harijans resisted. Consequently a clash took place. As a result Chhelia Sahu died on the spot and Kainru Sahu was injured. When this news spread all the village highcastes were organised and killed Lakhan Tandi a Harijan.²¹

In another incident, in the residence of Sarat Kumar Jena, a Congress (I)M.L.A., Sulochana Dei, Age 20, was molested by the M.L.A.'s brother. She used to come daily for sweeping and cleaning his residence. The M.L.A's brother called Sulochana to clean the latrine near the bath room. While she was coming towards the bath room, she was forcibly taken inside the bath room and was raped. Sulochana came out crying and complained to, one Khetramani. Jointly both of them called on many sweepers nearby and were organised. Then they gheraoed the M.L.A's residence. When tension mounted M.L.A., his brother and others present in the quarters left the place through the backdoor. Later police rushed to the

²⁰ The Samaj, 6 August 1987, p. 3.
spot and controlled the situation. But no one was arrested.  

In Rambha Police Station, of Ganjam district in Badrampalli village, a 46 years old Harijan, Saura Behera died on 26th August due to Police torture. Saura's son Bhima was booked in a theft case. The Police Officials came to arrest Bhima. When they did not find Bhima, on the spot Saura was beaten to death. But the Police reported it to be a case of suicide.  

Sura Sethi, former member of the Legislative Assembly reported that out of 62 vacancies during the period 1984-86 the Harijans were to get 9 posts and Scheduled Tribes 15 posts in Administrative Services of Orissa. But the government violated the reservation policy and recommended 62 general names without considering the case of Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes.  

It was reported that in Village Goutiadarata in Gangapur Police Station 60 kms. from Berhampur a violent clash took place between Harijans and high castes on 18th October 1991. The High castes in order to take revenge on that might attacked the Harijans and set their houses on fire. Twentytwo residential sites of Harijans were put to ashes. Two Harijans died on the spot and 15 Harijans were injured. Later 15 high castes were arrested by the police in this connection.  

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It was reported that in Village Balarampur Mali Mallick, a Harijan was harassed by the villagers in his house. When his wife and daughter protested they were beaten by the said villagers. In this connection, an F.I.R. was lodged against the culprits in the Kunjanga Police Station. In another incident, in Tirtol Police Station in village Gobardhanpur, one contracter tried to take mud from the house premises of Surendranath Malik for road construction purposes. Mallik along with his two brothers tried to prevent the contractor. Consequently the said contractor along with his friends attacked and injured Mallik and his brothers. Out of fear Surendranath Mallik did not report the incident to the Police.26

The Harijans in Sandhya Village in Biramaharajapur Police Station, organised a sit-in in front of the residence of the local Sub-Collector (the former Sub-Divisional Officer). They complained that the high castes forcefully took away the paddy from the fields of the Harijans. The Police failed to take any action.27

In Village Gobindpur, it was reported that, on 28 February night, 70 houses were set on fire in Dhenkanal district. The high caste boys, while playing cricket, wounded a Harijan woman by their ball. This precipitated a conflict between the highcastes and Harijans. It was further reported that property worth of Rs.70,000/- were lost in this incident.28