CHAPTER VII
SUMMARY:

It has been already explained why two villages have been selected for conducting the present study in order to assess the status of Harijans (selecting Pana and Ganda castes which constitute the bulk of Harijan population) in caste and tribal contexts of the State of Orissa. Both the villages are multi-ethnic in composition, the difference being that tribal communities inhabit one village, and not the other.

The study shows that the pattern of interaction in Kulabira is more intricate than in Kotapur, for the simple reason that Kulabira involves three distinct categories of socio-cultural groups, namely the savarna, the asavarna or Harijans and the tribes. Here the Bhuiyan is a dominant tribe, and a section of it is Hinduized. The Hinduized Bhuiyans discriminate against the non-Hinduized Bhuiyans of the village. Even a distinct hierarchy has emerged among the four distinct commensal and connubial Bhuiyan sub-groups, viz. Rajkuli Bhuiyan, Paik Bhuiyan, Parja Bhuiyan and Pahadi Bhuiyan. This hierarchy does not permit any kind of mingling between the sub-groups; therefore, the status of each sub-group in relation to others is a fixed one. The discrimination comes to operate because of the differences in their ritual practices, distinct food habits and the type of ritual services they are entitled to render to others and receive from others. In course of time, this process of discrimination has assumed a dimension along the purity-
pollution scale, characteristic of the Hindu pattern of behaviour. It seems that the criteria determining the status of a particular sub-group is not different from those that determine the status of caste and ethnic groups relative to one another.

The Bhuiyan case is not an exception within the tribal context since the study has brought to light the hierarchy of tribal sub-groups among the Khadia and Kisan tribal communities. The division rests on the food habits of the members of different sub-groups and the nature of their avocation along the purity-pollution scale. The prevalence of several modes of discrimination is directly related to untouchability, sometimes too rigid, and sometimes a little relaxed, mostly depending on the values of dominant castes or tribes. As far as the interactions among different ethnic groups are concerned, the paramount factors controlling them seem to be their commensal, connubial and ritual service relations. In the case of tribals, ritual services do not determine the mutual interrelation between the sub-groups, but rather commensal discrimination among them persists on the basis of their respective avocations. Analysis of those facts lead to the assumption that the ethnic group wielding political power has been mainly responsible for the cultivation of those values that make for various types of discrimination along different lines. The Bhuiyan having been in power for a long time went to acquire the Hindu values to legitimatize their role as the ruler. And the
ritualization process was deliberately followed to perpetuate their hegemony. Though they cannot be regarded as superior to the caste Hindu communities in respect of ritual practices, they serve as the ideal model (reference group) for emulation by the Harijans and adivasis of the lower order in Kulabira.

Each ethnic group is separated from others by the difference in its ideology or by those beliefs and practices which are impregnated with Hindu values that control attitudes, and the formation of religious sentiments. The Ganda are divided into five sub-groups; each is defined by a specific type of food habits and occupational practices. Occupational practices are not always invested with negative values, but, in case an occupation involves any such practice, that may cause the loss of dignity owing to contact with the pollutants then it becomes ideologically negatively oriented. The Kondhria Ganda who assist the Muslim cow-slaughterers are virtually untouchables among the Ganda because they are suspected of eating beef. The Ganda (Tanti Ganda) who have accepted weaving as their main occupation look down upon those Ganda (Bajina Ganda) who are engaged in drum-beating. The priests among the Ganda are even divided into two sub-groups namely, Ganda Gosein and Birtia, the former perform auspicious rituals and the latter perform mortuary rites.

An enquiry in the historical perspective brings to light the fact that the Pana were classified into several
groups according to their geographical location and ecological background; they were identified on the basis of the mahala or the territorial regions which they inhabited under the jurisdiction of landlords of the feudal society. But the interaction among them was governed by the connubial and commensal rules prevalent among the different divisions of the Pana caste. But such territorial barriers have now virtually been disappeared with the abolition of feudal system. And the present division among them is based on their respective ritual practices and vocational pursuits. The group that engages a ritual specialist in life-cycle rituals discriminates against the group which does not do so. Though there is no distinct name or label assigned to any of them, however, the division among them is clearly noticeable in their mutual interactions. Vocations considered polluting are despised by those who have taken to more respectable vocations. The Pana drummers thus have emerged as a separate group from the Pana who play on pipe musical instruments because the mouthpiece of the pipe is made of cattle hide or of some other polluting leather. Some association with other low castes, such as, Hadi is treated with aversion by those who keep away from such people. All these indicate that a hierarchy among the various sub-groups of Pana and Ganda, on purity-pollution line, has emerged owing to the operation of several factors which determine their relative ritual status. Though the present study is intended to show the status of Harijans, specially the Pana and the Ganda, a new
hierarchical order has emerged among them which is evident from our enquiry, and this poses a new social problem. Both the Pana and Ganda do not appear to be homogeneous any more, because such divisions among themselves involving discriminatory practices, appear to be more conspicuous.

The most distinguishing feature of the intra-group hierarchy is seen in the practice of all kinds of social and ritual discrimination that segregates one sub-group from another. The Harijans below the rank of Pana and Ganda exhibit such intra-group or inter sub-group practices; the Ghori/Hadi of both the sub-regions are occupationally divided among themselves, and this division determines their intra-group or inter sub-group interaction within the larger village community. The poorer section engaging itself in the removal of human excreta virtually constitutes the untouchables within their own community since many have taken to value-neutral vocations or jobs which do not pollute them in the process. Similarly the Harijans (Dhoba) above the Pana and Ganda in social order have been divided into two groups strictly determined by the nature of their occupation and the ritual services they receive from the various castes. Any measure taken by the government to combat the practice of untouchability is oriented towards nullifying the social hierarchy. But, this fails to attack the evils at its root because the intracaste/inter-caste discrimination does not come within its scope. In view of the rigour and rigidity of such practices among the various jatis, therefore, some
specific measures need to be devised as prophylaxis against this endemic growth of intra-caste/inter-caste discrimination.

The savarnas in these villages are no less affected by discriminatory practices among themselves. The Brahmans, Khandayats, Barika, Teli etc. are divided into different sub-castes on the basis of their ritual and vocational practices. At the level of physical contact discrimination does not operate to segregate one sub-caste from the other, but in respect of commensal practices there is some amount of discrimination. With regard to connubial rules, discrimination is sterner among the sub-castes, sometimes to the extent of complete isolation. However, there is no barrier to mobility if the members of a socially inferior sub-caste acquire some competence to perform the functions of a higher sub-caste. Among the asavarnas or Harijans, occupation and socio-economic factors have led to intra-caste gradations which still persist and prevent their social mobility.

Several efforts have been made to mobilise the asavarnas so that they may be integrated into the larger society by removing the barriers of discrimination either by persuasion or by coercion. The social workers and reformers have been active for a pretty long time trying to bring the Harijans into the mainstream of Indian social life, and the tactics have been more often persuasion. The formulation of Acts and Laws during the post-independence period are meant
to expedite social change and to provide safeguards against some ruthless caste practices. In addition to these measures education and mass media have been geared up to hasten the process of social change which will result in liberalisation of traditional norms thus ensuring more cohesion and integration in the Indian society as a whole. The outcome of all these measures of development are supposed to be projected in the present day interaction of the different caste groups in their private and public lives. But the expectations have been belied to a large measure.

The most significant change in commensality is effected by the eschewal of food habits when the Pana and Ganda came to realise that they were treated with contempt because they ate beef and carrion. This reform in the habits was initiated by their own caste activists quite early during the decade before the independence. These two Marijan castes used to collect left-over of the feasts and on festive occasions from the savarna/Bhal lok households, which debased them in the public view. During 1950 to 1960, the protagonists of reform persuaded them to refrain from such contemptible practices. At present they do not turn up at the feasts unless they are invited, but in no circumstances they collect the left-over from the dishes of the higher jatis. Both the changes brought them some amount of social dignity and recognition in their interaction with other jatis. The conformity of food habits characterises the commensal interactions among the different castes. As they
shunned the forbidden food and kept away from the pollutants they are believed to have achieved some physical purity. And this must have been one of the reasons why savarna, as well as a superior Harijan members are not so reluctant to reduce the social distance or to be in proximity with them in other transactions.

All social discriminations within the caste structure are controlled and governed by norms of purity and pollution; untouchability is only a rigid manifestation of this. The change in food habits partly redeemed their (Puna and Ganda) ritual status in the public view and led to some relaxation in all situations where both the caste groups have started interacting. Since 1960, the sphere of public interaction gradually expanded, and the number of interaction settings have rapidly increased. On the eve of elections when campaign is carried into the interior of the villages, different caste groups assemble and mingle together, and sometimes meetings are concluded with a feast or a party. The savarna political workers are eager to exhibit their liberal attitude towards the traditional discrimination in obedience to the Constitutional provisions. Caste-based discriminations are not allowed to interfere with the process of political mobilisations. This, though limited to the public sphere, influences the commensal practice at the village level whenever eating together becomes essential as a measure of unity. It is observed that the impact of political activities has been an important factor in bringing
about a significant change in the status of Harijan activists.

Public institutions have ceremonial occasions where feasting and parties have broken many of the rigid traditional discriminatory practices. As a result, a new brotherhood among the various castes has taken shape out of this mass commensal practice. It has been observed that in some cases no gap between savarna and asavarna members is maintained while eating in a public place, except when some rituals are involved. Schools specifically with boarding facilities have provided much relaxation and have ensured mobility of the commensal status of the Harijan inmates. Untouchability is no longer the criterion that determines the interactions between members of different castes when they reside in the same institution and dine together. Neither the intra-Harijan nor the inter-caste discrimination seems to be in operation in such public places. Besides, the authorities in charge of such institutions uphold the norms which are completely secular and in conformity with the Constitution of India. May be that their attitudes have been sublimated under the constraints of the newly emerging social order satisfying the democratic and secular values of the country.

The educated Harijans are aware of their rights to equality and they have been partly successful in their attempts at achieving some parity along the commensal line.
at least in public places. Some of them are more influential owing to their respective public position, such as police officers and bureaucrats; but others are no less influential due to their public eminence, such as school teacher, postmaster etc. When these Harijan officers are invited to ceremonial feasts, they are treated according to their public status which is not at all in consonance with their social or ritual status in the traditional social order. They are treated as special guests by the host, who takes all the precautions against giving them any ground for taking offence. Therefore, it can be said with emphasis that not only education but also the power and public eminence have invested the individuals with social equality and parity with caste Hindus.

The recent phenomenon in the sphere of commensality is the performance of purificatory rites to cleanse the polluted individuals when they (caste Hindus) are believed to have infringed the rules of commensal practices. The educated employed and petty business-men have to dine in hotels where no separate dining space is provided along the caste line. On return, such people invariably perform some sort of purificatory rite at home. This practice has been extended to other castes within the village community; for instance, whenever a member returns home after eating in a ceremonial feast where he is believed to have eaten with the members of the lower jati, he is to undergo a self-performed purificatory rite. And in case of Brahmans the
performance of the purificatory rite is a bit severe; he has to wash his clothes and replace his sacred thread before resuming normal activities at home.

The norms of the savarnas relating to their private sphere of life have been readopted to suit to the needs of the time. In the traditional society no breach of norms could have been leniently treated. Sometimes eating of forbidden food and eating with Harijans resulted in ostracization. In the present context there is a remarkable change, and the norms have become liberal to meet the demands of the present time.

Now the Harijans are aware of their public rights about commensal equality and are armed with the knowledge that most savarnas have started taking traditionally forbidden food items and drinks. Therefore, they assert their equal status and compel the savarna members to accept food along with them.

The changes, as shown above, have been effected only recently under the thrust of various factors which have already been analysed. Despite this a set of beliefs still persists enforcing the traditional sanctions against the Harijans demarcating the area of accessibility in interactions. All the beliefs about pollution by contact revolve round water and water sources. Though public wells have been dug for the common use the Harijans of the lowest order dare not draw water or use those water sources at their
convenience. Even in matters of food, water regulates commensality. Water-boiled food is hardly reciprocally exchanged among the adivasis, savarnas as well as among the asavarnas. Ability to serve water to a higher caste is the specific preserve of a few castes who certainly belong to the higher level of caste hierarchy and are designated as panichhuan jati. However, in the public sphere the savarnas have started showing some liberal attitude in accepting water from a person whose caste identity is either known or not known.

Some examples have already been cited to highlight how connubiality remains as traditional as it had been before socio-political impacts began to build up from 1960 onwards. Some inter-caste marriages have taken place, but their acceptability has always been questionable. Even legal measures are found inadequate to force the caste members to accept the couple into their fold. There are some examples of great political steps having been taken to celebrate such marriages with pomp and gaiety so as to accord them social recognition. But these attempts have not yielded any tangible result. The only mode of escape for a couple of inter-caste marriage is to flee their locality to places where their caste identity remain unknown, and the possibility of being socially segregated could be successfully avoided. Connubiality is deeply associated with the ritual status of a caste, and therefore people are completely averse to any sort of compromise in this regard.
During the post-independence days intercaste marriage had caught the public attention, and there had been lots of debates on this issue; but people have not accepted intercaste marriage with pleasure. Marriages continue to be isogamous.

The marriage as an institution among the low castes has been to a great extent ritualised. The impact of caste Hindu practices has been strong enough to effect gradual consecration of all the marriage rites. And the ceremony has acquired considerable grandeur with the asavarna communities. Despite financial constraints they have started emulating caste Hindu marriage patterns. To some extent many of their traditional practices have withered away, but their marriages continue to be confined to their respective castes/sub-castes.

As regards ritual services, the study does not indicate any liberalisation of the attitudes of the savarna ritual specialists. Neither the priest, nor the barber, nor the washerman is prepared to render any ritual service to the Pana and Ganda as well as other Harijans. Though they have ritualised their social practices, they have not achieved any upgradation in their ritual status in terms of the receipt of ritual service from savarna specialists. Of late, an organisation has been set up at Bhubaneswar, the capital of the State, for the requisition of Brahman priests for the performance of rituals among the Harijan communities; but
only a few Harijans of urban areas enjoy this advantage. Even now many Pana and Ganda manage their affairs without their caste priests. There are some instances in which mortuary rites have not been performed by the priests. These are some of the reasons why they have failed to elevate their ritual status to a level of respectability.

It may not be out of place here to throw some light on the ritual status of the higher jatis. Rituals are being performed and people participate in them, but the sanctity of the rituals and the traditional formalities are being constantly eroded. The ritual specialists are not being trained properly since such vocations are no longer considered pivotal. A Brahman can no longer hope to lead a life of affluence by carrying on only his ritual vocation. Besides, modern education does not inculcate those spiritual values that made them die-hard protagonist of the efficacy of Brahmanic rites. When rituals are reduced to sullen formalities the ritual status of the caste is to an extent deprived of its strength, and this results from the withering of beliefs. Whereas Harijans are ritualising their life-cycle celebrations with a view to elevate their ritual status. Thus there seems to be a contradiction because the savarna are becoming secular, while the Harijans are ritualising their life-style. Though the ritual status of the Harijans has been shown to be traditionally fixed, the process of ritualisation tends towards the initiation of some structural changes in the community life as a whole.
Most social interactions in the traditional society between savarna and asavarna jati categories were determined by the notion of untouchability. Constitutional provisions have been laid down to remove the social stigma of untouchability from Indian society, and in consequence legal measures have been adopted to safeguard the rights of the asavarna jatis, specifically to ensure the rights of access to various public institutions and places. Therefore, untouchability can only be practised in some disguise in the private sphere of life. It has been observed that in the private sphere, the notion of untouchability guides more the actions of higher jatis. Though this social evil is gradually losing its force as a determining factor of social interactions, attitudinal changes are not frequently met with in order to wipe out discrimination. The responses of members of different higher jatis show that discrimination in some form or the other governs the interactions between savarna and asavarna jatis. The notion of untouchability persists because it is reinforced by the Brahmanic concept of purity and pollution which can partly be attributed to hygienic reasons, and partly to the ideology governing purity of body for undertaking sacred activities.

With the emergence of India as a Sovereign Democratic Republic, public life has been interpenetrated by politico-secular activities. The life of Harijans has been caught up in the political fabric spreading over the rural area with a wide network of influence. The reservation of
seats in the legislature has conferred on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, the privilege to enter the arena of national politics not only as citizens, but also as members of the ruling class. In the study area political activities rise in tempo during the election and then falls into a very slow rhythm, occasionally stirred to a pitch during the visits of political celebrities. However, this has provided enough motivation to make them politically aware of the rights and constitutional safeguards. As a result they are forcibly entering Hindu temples, and joint community worships are organized by them as manifestations of their political awareness. Such activities, no doubt, make some impact on the traditional values and in a slow process create a psychological base for secularization.

The Pana and Ganda political leaders have set up elaborate political network in order to get the required number of votes to be elected to the State legislature. If a candidate belongs to an influential political party the organization spreads over in a wide network reaching down to the grass-root level, no matter whether he is a member of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe. The organisation of the network gets activated during electioneering and also it functions in a subdued form when election is over, especially when the Harijans want to place their demands or voice their grievances. This type of political participation has made them aware of their status as a pressure-group that can to some extent influence decisions at various political levels.
Another important aspect of this network is that political activists and progressive members of *savarna jatis* act as link men and propagandists for the Harijan cause. The healthiest outcome of this kind of cooperation has not only reduced tension and discrimination between the *savarna* and Harijan communities, but also has forged cordial links and contacts across the caste frontiers. The political pressure-groups become active whenever Harijans in an organized manner come forward to place their demands for setting up of schools, construction of roads, wells and for providing medical facilities to them within their locality, as well as for offering other basic amenities to them for the improvement of their living condition. Usually the pressure-groups have Harijan leaders in the reserved constituencies, and the group activities involve a good number of Harijan activists who have been canvassing and bargaining for power. Moreover, politicization of the Harijan communities has helped them to achieve some measure of respectability, and forge solidarity among various Harijan *jatis*.

A good number of Harijan families in both the study villages have received government assistance in terms of land, money as subsidies, and loan for undertaking gainful economic activities, and occasional employment to raise their economic status. Now there is a sense of social security amongst them and they have some respite from exploitation. Some of them, a little higher in the economic scale, have
gone over to vocations that yield modest income without demeaning their dignity. The hereditary vocational practices no more fascinate them because other avenues of income have opened up. The new opportunities have given them a taste of freedom and dignity. Their life-style has also undergone some change towards the better under the impact of mass media, through their contact with the urban people and the literate group who have broader outlook fostered by their newspaper reading, listening into radio and intimacy with the village-level government officials.

There is little doubt that several welfare measures and legal provisions have brought the Harijans into the mainstream of social life, though politics is the main door of entry. It has been observed that discrimination against them sometimes assumes acute form when they seek to redress the wrong done to them. They resort to legal measures, hoping that the remedies are within their reach. But more often than not their attempts are foiled by the cunning of the litigious savarnas or the lawyers defending the accused who can twist the law to interpret the case in a different light. The legal provisions are not adequate enough to mitigate their miseries. And one failure makes them too diffident to have the same recourse again.

All the findings point out that the status of Harijans has been changed towards some respectability, and no more they suffer from humiliation nor are they treated with contempt by their savarna neighbours in the
interactional settings in the public sphere. Their vocations, food habits, ritual practices conform to *savarna* norms and the impact of secularization is clearly discernible. Still a great deal of work has to be done so as to provide a solid base for the translation of egalitarian ideals envisaged in the democratic pattern of the emerging social order in India.

Sorting out two villages was prompted by the similarity and contrast in the multi-ethnic structure of the study areas. The researcher intended to observe different interactional settings where the Harijans came in contact with the *savarnas* and other Harijans of the lower order. The practice of untouchability and social discrimination could only be observed in such contexts. The analysis of such situations showed that the discrimination is sparked off by the twin notion of purity and pollution, and no other reasons for discrimination came to the surface. In course of personal contact and interviews with the *savarnas*, the researcher has been able to ascertain what ideas prevailed behind the practice of untouchability. Many informants were of opinion that the Harijans ate the forbidden stuff and were not very clean in their habits, and they did not perform proper purificatory rites. Some of them thought that they were ritually impure because their social institutions and life-cycle activities and celebrations were not properly ritualized. So the researcher found it as an imperative to
concentrate on the study of their commensal practices through
observation and interviews. The stress on commensality is
likely to reveal the cause of the persistence of the belief
in untouchability.

The observations throw some light on two categories
of practices which constitute the core of the thesis which is
investigative and analytical rather than purely exploratory.
The practices of commensality and practices of connubiality
constitute the very fabric of the ethnographic material which
the researcher has collected; so they were mapped out in
detail so as to determine what factors actually determined
their lower social status relative to savarnas. In the
context of our observation status has been treated as a
function of variables like ritual service and vocation and
the constants like commensal and connubial rights which are
biologically important for survival.

In the traditional society marrying according to
one's choice was not permissible across the caste frontiers
and this prescription is not any exception to the context of
human society in any part of the world. The restraints
imposed on this choice were meant to ensure cohesion within
one's own caste and the preservation of an individual's
status in the caste hierarchy by limiting such interactions
that may involve either loss of status or levelisation that
may wipe out the distinctions among the castes. So the study
of connubiality was taken up to reflect all the indices of
status distinctions from vocation to ritual privileges. The secularisation of commensality and connubiality as measures for assuring social mobility of Harijans could only be seen as effective factors of social change either in matters of commensal practice or in respect of intercaste marriage but nothing beyond that.

The core concept for the determination of status has been untouchability or pollution which governs all types of interactions in different settings whether private or public. The other two major concepts have been commensality and connubiality as practices and ideological frame determining the status. Ritualisation is rather the external phenomenon of the beliefs, ideas and notions that govern the rules of both the practices. Whenever such a situation was studied much care was taken to map it out according to its ritualistic relevance, so that secular situations could be sorted out. Categories of ritualised practices and secular practices were analysed to determine the cultural factors that mark off the status of a particular caste, specially the Pana and Ganda. There has been little scope within the body of the thesis to analyse the secular practices; but whenever secular interactions took some ritualistic tinge, such situations were carefully analysed.

This method of analysis has been consistently practised, so as to map out the dynamics of social life in these multi-ethnic communities by treating some factors as
constant and some others as variables. The tradition persists through changes as societies and cultures are dynamic entities. During the post-independence period no revolutionary change has taken place in rural Orissa so as to restructure the traditional society in the village. All the functions of community life are being achieved within the multi-ethnic structure of the village; and therefore, the present analysis has been intended to flick off structural properties and the functional coorelates of the structural elements defining the limits of the status of the Pana and Ganda and the status of Harijans in general in the Orissan context. As far as practicable the methodological consistency could be maintained within the nexus of relationships of the castes as these emerge out of their interactions.

The interactional settings provide the pattern for the exploration of ethnic relationships. They are arranged in gradation along a line having upper limit as the public and the neither limit as the private. One that is more public is less ritualistic, while the private sphere shows a marked degree of traditional values determining the altitude of a member of a savarna caste or tribe towards his Harijan neighbours.

The position of the Pana and Ganda in both the sub-cultural regions is not different from other Harijan castes, except in respect of their social status within the
social order. Just before independence, the Harijan castes too low in the social scale were virtually segregated from the village community and the interaction with savarna/Bhalok was so minimal that they appeared to have constituted a separate social block (Fig. 7.1). Even the public institutions were closed to them, untouchability being the determining factor controlling all transactions except when they were required to render some services like agricultural, menial and social, without any kind of physical contact. But this isolation is disappearing with the expansion of activities in the public sphere, mostly of economic and political nature owing to the legal force emanating from the Constitutional safeguards. The institutions under the government control have been opened up for the Harijan communities.

State or Government is the pervasive force in all the public sector activities and the policy of the State has been designed to ensure equal rights for all citizens. All the changes in the social status of Harijan communities have been initiated by the State as the supreme agency that has come in a big way to uplift the position of Harijan castes and other backward communities who had suffered from all kinds of deprivation before independence, when State did not interfere in the matters of civic society unless some problems arose for the administration. It is the Welfare State in independent India that forged the mechanism for
social change and came forward to ensure the Harijans their
demands, thus trying to liberate the members of these
communities for the realisation of their potentialities.
Members of these communities are not able to exercise their
rights as they are not enlightened enough to comprehend the
implications or to resort to the safeguards in their own
interest. Education, whether formal or non-formal, can only
help them acquire the ability, so that they may enter the
mainstream of national life which will certainly raise their
social status and liberate them from the trammels of communal
life.

The status of the Harijans in modern India is no
longer determined by any caste specifics since the aim of the
government is to build up a casteless society, and remove
all kinds of social discrimination. But the status of the
Harijans in the villages has remained what it had been within
the social order, though certain fundamental rights have been
granted to them as to the other citizens of the State. In
addition to this the Harijan castes have been awarded certain
privileges which may help them exercise their rights through
development and accordingly exercise their politico-social
rights. As it has been argued earlier that the status is the
composite of rights and duties, the Harijans have been
accorded equal status with the savarna jatins. In the
village, the community and not the State intervenes in social
affairs unless these affairs drift towards politics or are
linked with political goals.
The communities in the study villages are dominated by the caste Hindus (Kotapur) and the caste Hindus and Hinduized tribes (Kulabira) who maintained leverage of influence because of their ascendancy in the hierarchy. So the social status of the Harijans is more often equated with their ritual status which in no way conforms to the criterion of equality of status. Thus the Harijans in all kinds of social interactions suffer from overt discrimination in the hands of the caste Hindus and Hinduized tribes. Some members of the Harijan castes who have acquired respectability and recognition in their social status do not go all out to elevate the corporate status of all the Harijan castes. However there is some mobility of individual caste positions, if members of a Harijan community have organized their life-style as per the Hindu religious prescriptions and proscriptions. Complete realisation of equality of status with caste Hindus can be achieved though secularisation of all the practices in the village communities which seems well impossible in the present context. A map showing interaction (Fig.7.1) clearly indicates that as the Harijans move along a continuum, from social to political, to expand the sphere of their social activity they acquire secular status which is at its highest in the political sphere, while some civic activities (i.e. village school, village Panchayat meeting etc.) are quasi-ritual. Because in the civic sphere a person's liberty to assert rights may not be curtailed unless the transactions involve any social practices like performance of rituals or commensal
interactions. As the sphere narrows down to the purely social level of interactions between *asavarnas* and *savarnas*, both of them abide by all the traditional rules of untouchability and other associated forms of discrimination. This further leads us to infer that with the broadening of the sphere of public activities, the age-old restraints will get relaxed and may finally wither away though the future is not well nigh imminent.

![Spatial Dimension of Interaction and Social Discrimination](image)

**Fig. 7.1** Spatial Dimension of Interaction and Social Discrimination.

Status as far as it relates to the playing of roles may vary from situation to situation as the roles vary. In the traditional society, the roles of the Harijans were rather restricted to the intercaste (*savarna-asavarna*) interaction settings, which have been discussed earlier. In
such settings, the Pana and Ganda as well as other Harijan castes rendered their vocational services to the **sava\-na jatis**. And as their traditional callings were of demeaning nature they enjoyed lowly positions in the social order. But at present they have found easy access to broader spheres of value-neutral vocational activities. Their participation in such activities ensures them a parity of status with the caste Hindus, particularly in the civic sphere.

In the civic sphere the Harijans exercise their rights, and job opportunities are wide open to them according to their competence. Any Harijan who comes to occupy a respectable position in the public sphere plays his role without any conspicuous hindrance and thereby achieves the equality of status, but often they are covertly discriminated against. Observation of their political participation, which is almost secular and public, clearly indicates that as citizens of the country they enjoy equal status in the domain of political activities. They are neither discriminated against, nor their rights are curtailed by any covert discriminatory practice. However, there has not been any significant change in the village communities, where they are still looked down upon and are expected to play their traditional caste roles with regard to **sava\-na jatis**. The real mobility has taken place in the politico-legal sphere. Educationally and economically they are making slow progress, but these hold the real key to their status mobility vis-a-vis the **savarnas**.
The picture of the status of the Harijans in the present context is composed of rights as guaranteed by the Constitution, certain privileges like reservations to exercise their rights to enjoy the opportunities for holding posts of esteem and responsibility. The legal safeguards against untouchability has further restored dignity to their status as citizens of a Welfare State. Therefore, there is some definite improvement in their status as compared to their status in the past.

The Ganda have absorbed some tribal rituals and customs while the Pana have emulated Hindu practices. The Ganda acquired some dignity in the status hierarchy because of their being in a tribal context where certain tribes and Harijan castes are lower to them in the status hierarchy. The Pana are worst discriminated against because they are the lowliest in status hierarchy in the study village. At present owing to the pace of economic progress, in more advanced district like Cuttack, the Pana have acquired greater mobility in the status hierarchy than the Ganda who inhabit a backward area vying with the tribals for government assistance. So the tribal context, in which the Ganda once enjoyed relatively a higher status than the Pana relatively, does not benefit them any more.

But this problem may further be investigated since the scope of this thesis is restricted to the study of status of Harijans in the State of Orissa in caste and tribal contexts. But there is relative discrimination among the various Harijan castes which hampers solidarity amongst them,
and this to some extent retards their status mobility. And further each Harijan caste is sub-divided into a number of sub-castes. This fissiparous tendency among various Harijan castes and within a particular caste may be taken up for further study, which may throw more light on the nature of ritualisation and preference of vocations as determinants of status among them. Another area that remains on the fringe of our investigation is that the members of the Harijan community who have acquired higher positions as employees in the urban and industrial sectors or as important political dignitaries, rarely keep an intimate contact with their own caste members, and this estrangement is partly responsible for the slackening of the pace of development of Harijans.

The purpose of this study was to objectively assess in Orissan context the nature and extent of social change, particularly in the rural sector. India became independent in 1947 and in January 1950 the Indian Parliament adopted a democratic and secular Constitution for ensuring welfare administration in the country. Traditionally India comprised a caste-ridden hierarchic society. Casteism was the real stumbling block on the way to achieving an egalitarian society free from any social discrimination.

Indian Constitution is a powerful and well-designed layout providing a basis to build a discrimination-free society in India, and it envisages total upliftment of the weaker sections of Indian society, particularly the Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes. According to the provisions of
the Constitution special attention has been paid to bring about overall upliftment of these communities. Constitution guarantees equal opportunity and equal status to members of these communities in public life. The hallmark of Indian Constitution has been to create an egalitarian social order in India. Therefore, the relevance of the present study is to assess the nature and extent of social change in Indian society in Orissan context, particularly in respect of Scheduled castes, the ex-untouchables or asavarna communities of Indian society.

However, the asavarna jati leaders reject the appellation 'Harijan' for them, because they consider it a derogatory term, and they prefer to be designated simply as 'Scheduled Castes'. There may have political implication in this move, because the latter term is a Constitutional one, with which certain Constitutional safeguards and privileges are bound up.

It has helped us assess to what extent the impact of specific measures adopted under the Constitutional provision has been effective to bring out changes in the position and status of the Harijans in the rural sector. We may as well infer on the basis of our investigation that in the civic sphere of interaction and in political activities they have acquired dignity and parity with others which may, in course of time, lead to their liberation from all stringent discriminations in their social transactions with the savarnas.
To sum up it seems quite evident that the picture of the status structure based on the people's feelings in both the study areas is very much integrative and coherent, and it can be brought into focus in all its dimensions, if we present a model as shown below.

**Fig: 7.2 Model of Status-structure.**


A; B, C, AND D BLOCKS: STATUS-STRATA OF ANSVARNAS AND ADIVASIS.
We have tried to visualise the workings of this social structure in terms of two sorts of interaction; that is, the castes/tribes (in blocks) enjoying parity of status, interact without any discrimination, and castes/tribes vertically placed in the hierarchy interact according to the traditional norms in which discrimination in varying degrees persists. As shown earlier in our model of interactional space (Fig.7.1), the difference between the traditional structure and the emergent one, seems to be the outcome of Constitutional reforms which have been visible mainly in those interactional spheres where the State intervenes. The emergent status hierarchy is still largely determined by the social (Hindu) values of purity and pollution although some of the peripheral interactions are changing as a result of the liberalisation enforced by the Constitutional provisions. The model therefore represents the substratum on which some modifications have been wrought, and the status of the Harijans vis-a-vis others are decided by their location in the particular sphere of interaction. Now each Harijan caste though stratified, maintains its social identity and strives for economic security by staying together without any overt attempt at breaking away from the elevated positions of certain other Harijan castes. This structure has, of course, come under the pressure of a superstructure, mainly political in nature, which has produced the emergence of the progressive forces. As long as the functions of all caste-based interactions remain ritualised and so long as the agrarian economy and the religious attitude and feelings are
not changed this status structure in rural Orissa is likely to remain as the rock-bottom of the superstructure of Indian rural society. The researcher however has immensely been intellectually stimulated by the incisive writings of two native scholars, that is, N. K. Bose (1949, 1967) and M. N. Srinivas (1962) in this regard.