INTRODUCTION

India is a land of unity in diversity and so is Indian life and culture. The tribals inhabiting this country, speaking different dialects and following distinctive ways of life, customs etc. within their different natural environments, contribute to the many-sided splendour of the Nation, which is unique in the world. The socio-economic life of the tribals with its problems provides an excellent scope for and source of inspiration to the inquisitive and adventurous geographers.

The tribal people of India live in forests, hills, plateaus and naturally isolated regions. They are variously called Vanjati (forest caste), Vanvasi (forest inhabitants), pahariya (hill people), adimjati (primitive caste), adivasi (aboriginals), janjati (folk communities), anusuchit jan jati (scheduled tribes), and such other names signifying their ecological, economic, historical or cultural characteristics. Among these nomenclatures the most popular term is adivasi (aboriginals) while the constitutional name for them is anusuchit janjati (scheduled tribes).
There are, according to 1971 Census of India, altogether 427 tribal communities in the country. Their total strength, according to the 1981 Census, comes to 51,628,638 which, makes 7.76 per cent of India's total population. Of these, 94 per cent live in villages and about 85 per cent engage in agricultural activities. Thus bulk of tribal population in India consists of agriculturists, though they supplement their incomes and food requirements with their handicrafts, hunting, gathering and fishing.

Tribal agriculture, however, is characterized by uneconomic holdings, land alienation, indebtedness, lack of credit facilities and lack of irrigation facilities in undulating terrains. Use of traditional skills and primitive implements is also a salient feature of tribal agricultural economy. In general, they raise only one crop per annum (during the rainy season) and have to fall back upon their subsidiary occupations, namely bamboo basket making, rope making, iron and wood work, spinning and weaving etc. with their traditional skill and primitive tools and locally available raw material in the forests and hills. They make objects which they need themselves and the surplus is for barter or they sell their products.
in weekly markets. The supplementary sources of income are gradually decreasing because of the poor quality of their handicrafts. Their style of life is marked by seasonal and agricultural festivals, ancestor worship, rite de passage, drinking, dancing and singing.

It will be appropriate at this stage to describe the major process of transformation of the economy of the tribes in the context of the development of the national economy as a whole. The major thrust of change is from the food gathering to the food production stage or from tribal economy to settled agricultural economy. The reasons for this are four. First, there is a ever increasing pressure of population on land. Then, there is enhancement of culture-contact situations in which the tribals adopt the cultivation techniques and practices of the advanced non-tribal peasant communities. Thirdly, reservation of forests for commercial exploitation not only restricts but also erodes customary tribal rights in forests and in many cases, eliminates the possibilities of shifting cultivation. Lastly, there is a development strategy to restrict and readjust shifting cultivation so as to minimize the incidence/the degradation of the soil,
to promote terrace cultivation, to apply new agricultural technology in the tribal areas and to accelerate the pace of the flow of capital in these areas.

Under these circumstances, technological and structural changes are taking place in the Baghelkhand region, though on a smaller scale as compared with the changes in the tribal areas of the north-east of the country. The pace of the transformation of tribal agriculture has been quickened with the application of dry farming technology to settled agriculture in the region. At present, much of the settled cultivation is at subsistence level and majority of the tribals produce not marketable but what has been described as the 'marketed' surplus. They are forced to sell their produce to buy their necessities. However, pockets of modernized agriculture are emerging in the Gond and Oraon dominated areas of the region. Incidence of cash cropping is also being reported from Baghelkhand. However, this is a region where process of modern economic development has been started only recently.

Tribes constitute a unique feature of Baghelkhand. Recent realization of natural resources of the region, with
the changing socio-economic values, has resulted in a clash between old and new values. A large share of forest and mineral wealth is extracted from the tribal areas, but tribals themselves remain largely unemployed and are not able to enjoy its fruits. Majority of tribals are engaged in agriculture and related activities. But agriculture alone is unable to improve their socio-economic condition, and thus, most of them are caught in the vicious circle of indebtedness and land alienation. Hence, the study of man-land relationship in such a large area and other phenomena which are significant from social, economic and political points of view, is timely. Therefore in 1985 the present researcher conducted an intensive survey, covering almost all the seasons of the year, of the important tribal areas of Baghelkhand. The aims of the survey were as follows:

(i) to study the socio-economic condition of the tribal people and the factors responsible for their poverty;

(ii) to study the tribal methods of farming in relation to their natural and cultural environment;
(iii) to study their handicrafts and cottage industries as a supplementary source of income;
(iv) to study the existing marketing conditions for the agricultural and forest produce, herbal medicines etc., and the finished products of the cottage industries;
(v) to study the means of transport in tribal areas;
(vi) to study the incidence of literacy among the tribals and its impact on agriculture;
(vii) to study their settlement patterns and house types; and
(viii) to study the attitudes of tribal people towards different types of tribal welfare programmes and to visualize the techniques of development programmes most suited to them.

The survey was conducted in January, February, June and September, 1985. Field investigations were carried out from Shahdol in different tribal areas of the three districts of the region, namely, Sidhi, Shahdol and Surguja. From each district at least six villages were selected for the survey. The selection of the villages was done on considerations of nearness or remoteness of the
villages from towns and roads or railway lines. Predominance of tribals in the population, situation with respect to the forest etc. which determine the communicability and accessibility of these areas and the extent of contracts the tribals have with non-tribals. For the purpose of survey, the techniques used during the investigations were observations, interviews, and enquiries on the basis of a structured schedule. The data collected has been processed through various statistical methods such as averages, percentages, standard deviation etc. The Government records and other published work available have also been consulted in order to make the study comprehensive.

The present work deals with the tribal habitat. The subject matter is discussed under three heads, 'Physical Basis', 'The Economic Base', and 'Tribal Population and Welfare'. The physical basis of the region is discussed in six chapters. The first chapter is 'Historical Background', dealing with the ups and downs during four periods of its history, namely ancient, mediaeval, pre-independence and post-independence eras. In the second chapter, relief, geology and mineral resources of the region are discussed. The third chapter deals with the climate of the region and the fourth chapter throws
light on its drainage system. The patterns of flora and fauna are discussed in the fifth chapter and the sixth and last chapter deals with soils and agricultural lands of the region and the problem of soil erosion.

The second section i.e. 'The Economic Base' comprises the seventh, eight and ninth chapters. 'Economic Status of Tribals' describes various economic activities of tribals, in brief. The eighth chapter entitled 'Agriculture' discusses the methods of tribal cultivation and livestock rearing and songs, dances and festivals relating to the various agricultural operations. The ninth chapter is on 'Cottage Industry' and analyses the problem of the revival of the dying handicrafts and cottage industries based on local resources and labour. This chapter also discusses different kinds of markets, marketing of agricultural and forest produce, tribal weights and measures and the monopoly exercised by non-tribal traders. This chapter also describes the transport system of the region and its impact on the tribal way of life.

The third section 'Tribal Population and Welfare' comprises the tenth and eleventh chapters. The tenth chapter, 'Tribal Villages and Settlements', analyses
patterns, distribution and growth of the tribal population. It also examines economic, social, and cultural characteristics of the tribal people. The chapter further deals with tribal villages, settlements, house types and material used in the construction of houses. The eleventh chapter, 'Tribal Welfare', describes the attitude of the Government since colonial times in respect of tribal welfare. It also contains a detailed account of the Integrated Tribal Development Programmes (ITDPs) relating to the tribal areas of Baghelkhand. In this chapter suggestions have also been made for the improvement of the socio-economic condition of the tribals of the region.

Field studies have indicated that there has been an unplanned and haphazard progress in the region. There is need for the formulation of a national policy on the development of agriculture in the forested, hilly and rugged terrain of tribal dominated areas. Side by side, tribal handicrafts and cottage industry should also be developed for their socio-economic uplift.

The conclusion deals with the crux of the tribal problem which is essentially one of the requirements of food and other necessities of life, for which the tribals mainly depend on forest resources and agricultural produce.
The present researcher realises that there may be some shortcomings in the thesis. This was because of paucity of data. There have also been some difficulties due to the vast extent of the region under study. Isolation, remoteness and inaccessibility have been other limiting factors. In spite of the best efforts on his part, it has not been possible to cover all aspects of the tribal economy of Baghelkhand.

The present thesis is a modest attempt at suggesting solutions to the problems facing the Baghelkhand tribals. There is room for further research in this area of studies. However, the author has described the lifestyle of the tribals of the region, the understanding of which, it is hoped, would be of some help to the planners.