CHAPTER – III

Contextualising the Research Locales

This study aims to explore the dynamics of collective action for the management of local forest resources in heterogeneous social set ups. In the process, the research tries to examine, first, the possibility of collective action in heterogeneous village communities, and second, how the internal socio-economic and political differentiations affect the community’s endeavour towards successful collective action. The empirical work for the study was carried out in two village communities in the Dhenkanal District of Orissa. Before going further in analysing the specific situation/conditions in the villages, which either facilitated or obstructed the processes of collective action, it is apt to give a brief introduction to the study villages, as well as the district and the State in which they are situated. Such a narration of socio-economic and geographical features will not only give an idea of the research sites, but will also help in conceptualising the present study by linking it to a wider context.

3.1. The Orissa State

3.1.1. A Brief History

The present State of Orissa was famous in the mythology and ancient history in the name of ‘Kalinga’ and in medieval history as ‘Utkal’, both of which corresponds to the meaning of excellence in ‘Kala’ or arts. The ‘Kalinga war’, as is well known in world history, is said to have converted king Ashoka to Buddhism and non-violence, and it is considered as a major landmark in the politico-cultural evolution of ancient India. King Kharavela, who conquered Magadha to take revenge of Kalinga’s defeat to King Ashoka in the great Kalinga war, established a mighty Kalinga empire in the second century B.C. In the twelfth century A.D., the domain of Kalingan Empire was extended from Ganga in the north to Godavari in the south by king Cholaganga Deva of Ganga dynasty, who also built the famous Jagannath temple at Puri. Orissa was annexed to Mughal Empire in 1552 A.D. by king Akbar and Marathhas occupied the territory after the decline of the Moughals. Finally, the British took over the administration of Orissa in 1803. Under the British administration, several parts of the present day Orissa were under the control of then British Indian provinces of Madras,
Central Province and Bengal-Bihar Presidency. On April 1, 1912, the Province of Bihar and Orissa was created bringing together parts of Bengal Presidency and Central Province. The modern Orissa took its present form on April 1, 1936, by separating Orissa from the combined State of Bihar-Orissa, and then combining it with some of the Oriya-speaking areas of the then adjoining States of Madras Presidency and Central Province. Orissa is considered as the first State in the country to be formed on linguistic basis. After independence, in 1948, 25 feudatory States merged with the territory of Orissa, and by August 1949, all the princely States, including the big ones like Mayurbhanj, were a part of the state of Orissa.

3.1.2. Physical Setting and Location

Orissa is situated in the eastern coast of India. The state is surrounded by Andhra Pradesh on the southeast, Madhya Pradesh on the west, Bihar in the north, West Bengal in the north-east and Bay of Bengal in the east. It extends over an area of 155,707 sq. Kms. Orissa has a costal line of 250 miles along the Bay of Bengal. It constitutes 4.74 per cent of the land and 3.74 per cent of the population of India (Census of India, 1991).

The state may be broadly divided into four geographical regions, such as ‘northern plateau’, ‘central river basin’, ‘the hills of Eastern Ghats’, and ‘coastal plains’. The northern plateau, with its hill ranges and cultivated valleys stretches across Bihar and West Bengal. About 45 per cent of this area is covered with forests, and contains much of State’s primary resources like coal, iron ore and hydro-power (Sundar et al., 2001: 77). The central river basin is well irrigated and produces good crops of rice. The River Mahanadi crosses through this basin and creates a delta along with River Brahmini and Baitarani. A big dam is constructed in this region upon the River Mahanadi at Hirakud in Sambalpur District, which is a major source of irrigation for this area. The hills of the Eastern Ghats, situated in the southern parts of Orissa, including the districts of Koraput, Ganjam and Phulbani, are characterised by terrace rice cultivation and shifting cultivation. Several industries are being set up in this region, which take advantage of the mineral reserves of this area. The coastal plain along the eastern coast with its fertile alluvial soil is densely populated, comprising of 64 per cent of the total population of the State (Sundar et al., 2001). This region has the little forest cover in the State, and agriculture is the primary
economic activity of the region. This area of Orissa grows several crops like cashew, coconut, banana, rice, and thus is rightly recognised as the 'rice bowl' of the State.

The climate of Orissa is characterised by high temperature and medium to high rainfall. The cropping pattern of the State may be broadly divided into three seasons, namely, autumn, winter and summer, spreading from July to October, November to February and March to June respectively. The State grows crops like rice, maize, jawar, bajra, groundnut, black gram, horse gram, mustard, jute, etc.

3.1.3. Administrative Setup
At present, the State of Orissa constitutes 30 districts. There were 13 districts in Orissa up to March 31, 1994, and it was only on April 1, 1994 — on the State formation day — that 17 new districts were created by bifurcating the erstwhile 13 districts. The 30 districts are further subdivided into 58 subdivisions and 314 Community Development Blocks, out of which 118 are tribal Blocks. There are two Municipality Corporations, namely, Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, 31 municipalities, 70 Notified Area Councils (NAC) and 124 towns in the state. Following the three-tier local government system, Orissa has 30 Zilla Parishads, 314 Panchayati Samitis and 5,261 Gram Panchayats. There are in all 50,972 villages in the State of Orissa (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Orissa, 1999).

3.1.4. Demography
The population of the State was 31,659,736 as recorded in the 1991 census. As per the 1991 census, Orissa ranks eleventh in India in terms of population. Orissa continues to be one of the least urbanised states, with only 4,234,983 (13.37 %) people living in urban areas and 27,424,753 (86.63%) in rural areas. The density of population is 203 per sq. km. As per the 1991 census, out of the total population of 31,659,736, the Scheduled Case population was 5,129,314, which was 16.2 per cent of the total population. The Scheduled Tribe population of the state was 70,32,214, which constituted 22.21 per cent of the total population.

The literacy rate of the state was 49.99 per cent as per 1991 census. The literacy rate for males and females were 63.09 per cent and 34.68 per cent respectively. The female literacy rate of Orissa (34.68 %) is quite less in comparison
to that of the female literacy rate of the country, which is 39.29 per cent. The literacy rate for the rural areas in the state is 45.46 per cent, which is slightly higher than the country's literacy rate for rural areas (44.69 %). The literacy rate for the urban areas in the state is 71.99 per cent.

3.1.5. Forest cover

As per the Forest Department record of government of Orissa, the classified forests spread across an area of 57,167 sq. km., which is nearly 37 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The per capita forest cover in the state is 0.15 hectares. However, the spread of the forest area in the state is highly uneven, with districts like Phulbani having 54 per cent of its land under forest cover, whereas districts like Balasore has only 6 per cent (CPSW, 1994: 31). Notwithstanding the forest department record of 37 per cent land under forest cover, the actual forest cover in the state is very less owing to the degradation and denudation of the forest area. As per an estimate, dense forest having a crown density of 40 per cent or more in the state is only 26,101 sq. km. and open forest (having a crown density of 10 – 40 %) is 20,629 sq. km., and the remaining land is ‘forest’ only in the forest department records without any tree cover (Sundar et al., 2001: 17). The forests of Orissa are mostly sal dominated (43 %), with some areas of mixed deciduous and teak forests in coastal plains and Eastern Ghats, and mangroves along the coast (CPSW, 1994).

From the management perspective, the state forests have been divided into three categories, namely, reserved forests, demarcated protected forests and undemarcated protected forests. The reserved forests have been under the direct control of the state forest department, which enjoys not only property rights over such forests but also management responsibilities. But, in the case of protected forests, the management rights and responsibilities are conferred on the forest department, whereas the property rights on the land remain with the state revenue department.
3.2. The Dhenkanal District

3.2.1 A Brief History

Dhenkanal was an erstwhile princely state, which was annexed to the Indian Union in 1947. Prior to its merger with independent India, it was ruled by several dynasties. As per the Nasik Rock inscription, the oldest available record about the history of the district, during 2nd Century A.D, Dhenkanal was a part of the Sattabahana Empire, which became a part of the Gupta Empire in the 3rd & 4th Century. During the 6th & 7th Century, the region remained under the sway of the Bhauma Karas, and during the 8th and 9th Century the Sulki dynasty ruled over some part of the Dhenkanal state.

By 16th Century A.D, some portions of the region were being ruled by a sabara chief named ‘Dhenka’. However, the tribal chieftain was defeated and killed by one Sridhar Bhanja, who named the region as ‘Dhenkanal’ after the sabara chief ‘Dhenka’. In 1529 A.D, Gajapati Prataprudra Deva, the king of Orissa mainland, instructed one of his commanders Hari Singh Vidyadhar to attack Dhenkanal. Hari Singh defeated the Bhanja king and became the first ruler of Dhenkanal kingdom, who also shifted its capital from Karamul to Dhenkipidha and ruled the kingdom till 1594 A.D. After Hari Singh Vidyadhar, 18 other kings ruled over the Dhenkanal kingdom. Shankar Pratap Mohindra Bahadur, who ruled the state from 1918 to 1947, was the last king to rule Dhenkanal.

3.2.2. Physical Setting and Location

Situated in the central part of Orissa, Dhenkanal district lies between 85° 58' to 86° 2' East longitude and 20° 29' to 21° 11' North latitude. The landlocked district of Dhenkanal is surrounded by Keonjhar district in the North, Cuttack district in the South, Jajpur district in the East and Angul district in the West. The Dhenkanal town is situated on the National Highway 42, which runs from Cuttack to Sambalpur. The district constitutes 2.95 per cent of the total geographical land and 3 per cent of the total population of Orissa (Census of India, 1991).

The information about the district was gathered from several secondary sources like District Census Handbook, District Gazetteer and official website of the district (www.dhenkanal.nic.in).
Geographically, the district can be divided into three natural divisions: the southern hilly region, the river valley region with tribunals, and the northern hilly region. The district has mainly five varieties of soil, namely, Alluvial soil, Red loam soil, Sandy loam soil, Gravelly soil and Cleaving loam soil. Climate-wise, the district is usually hot with high humidity during April and May, and cold during December and January. The monsoon generally breaks during the month of June. The district has a moist climate with two distinct climatic zones, i.e., the northern region, which is comparatively less moist and the southern and south-eastern region which is more moist and humid in nature. The climatic variation has influenced the formation of different flora and fauna occurring in the region.

3.2.3. Administrative Setup
The presently existing Dhenkanal district was created on April 1, 1994 by bifurcating the erstwhile Dhenkanal district into two separate districts, namely, Angul and Dhenkanal. The newly created district has 8 Blocks (talukas), namely, Dhenkanal Sadar, Gondia, Odapada, Hindolo, Kamakshya Nagar, Bhubana, Parjang, and Kankadahada. The district comprises 172 Gram Panchayats, 8 Panchayat Samitis (Taluka Panchayat) and one Zilla Panchayat.

3.2.4. Demography
The population of Dhenkanal district was 9,47,870 as per the 1991 Census. The decadal growth rate of the population for 1991 – 2001 was recorded to be 12.46 per cent, and thereby total population reached up to 10,65,983 by 2001. The Scheduled Castes constituted nearly 16 per cent of the total population of the district numbering a total of 1,51,914 as per the 1991 census. The district has a considerable number of Scheduled Tribe concentration, which accounted for 13 per cent (1,20,226) of the total population (Census of India, 1991). The density of population in Dhenkanal district was recorded to be 206 per squire kilometer as per the 1991 census, which increased to 239 by 2001. The district has an urban population of only 78,112 (8.25 %), while the major chunk of the population (91.75 %) live in rural areas.

3.2.5. Forest cover
The Dhenkanal Forest Division, one among the 28 Forest Divisions of Orissa, constitutes five territorial Ranges located at Dhenkanal, Hindolo, Sarangi, Kamakshya
Nagar East and Kamakshya Nagar West. It also has one Wildlife Range, located at Kapilas Zoo. The forest area of Dhenkanal region may be described as north Indian tropical moist deciduous, which also includes good bamboo species in it. The forest is further divided into several sub types, such as Northern tropical semi evergreen forests, Late rite semi evergreen forests, North Indian Tropical moist deciduous forests, North Indian tropical moist peninsular sal forests, Northern tropical dry deciduous forests, Moist Bamboo forests, and Dry deciduous scrub. The dominating species of the forest include: sal, teak, jamun, kasi, sunari, simili, etc.

3.3 The Study Villages

The empirical work for the research was carried out in two village communities, namely, ‘Nagiapasi’ and ‘Krushna Kumar Pur’ (K.K. Pur), situated in the vicinity of Kapilas Reserved Forest in the Dhenkanal Sadar Block of Dhenkanal district of Orissa.

The Dhenkanal Sadar Block has a total population of 1,22,374, out of which 18,275 (15 %) are Scheduled Castes and 17,382 (14.2 %) are Scheduled Tribes (Census of India, 1991). The block comprises 357 wards, 23 Gram Panchayats and one Panchayat Samiti.

The procedures and methods of selection of these two villages have been discussed elaborately in the previous chapter. The villages are situated to the east of Dhenkanal town, the district headquarters, at a distance of 5 kilometers from each other. The following paragraphs attempt to introduce the villages by indicating their location and other basic information. The following maps exhibit the location of the study area, indicating also the Dhenkanal district’s position in the state of Orissa.
Maps Locating the State, District, Block and the Study Villages

Source: mapsfindia.com
Location of Study Villages in the Dhenkanal Sadar Block

Map of Dhenkanal Sadar Block

Study Village 1
Nagiapasi

Study Village 2
K. K. Pur

Kapilas
Reserved Forest

Source: District Census Handbook, Dhenkanal
3.3.1. The Village ‘Nagiapasi’

The Nagiapasi village, situated towards the east of Dhenkanal town, is one among several other villages of the ‘Beltikiri Gram Panchayat’ of Dhenkanal Sadar Block. The village is represented by 3 ward members in the Beltikiri Gram Panchayt. A narrow pakka road, which runs from the district headquarters to Kapilas temple (Siva Temple), is the only thoroughfare to get access to the village. After traveling nearly 30 kilometers on the Dhenkanal – Kapilas Road, one has to take a left diversion and catch a kachha road, which runs amongst thorny bushes, and go further about 3 kilometers to reach Nagiapasi village. The village constitutes 155 households with a total population of 1500 as per the 1991 census. The total land area of the village is 350 hectares, including village wasteland, gochar, forest and other non-agricultural lands, as per the 1991 Census.

The settlement pattern is very much organised in Nagiapasi village, with houses on both sides of village lanes. There are different colonies belonging to different castes. The Scheduled Tribes colony existed in the beginning of the village, and that of Scheduled Castes at the end. The housing pattern for Scheduled Tribes were observed to be unsystematic and unorganized, with their huts scattered here and there. Further, the newly built pakka houses, constructed under the Indira Awas Yojana, were also not properly ordered. However, the Scheduled Castes colony was observed to be organised, with houses situated in lanes. The Karana settlement had the widest road in the village followed by Khandayat and Gopala settlement.

The village offers schooling up to 10th standard, with a Primary, Middle and a High School existing within it. Nagiapasi has two temples and a place of worship for village goddess (Gram Devti). It also has four village common rooms (kotha ghara), out of which Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes possess one each. These common rooms are the gathering places for villagers, where they relax, play cards, gossip and discuss about their day-to-day affairs and problems. The Scheduled Tribe youths, particularly, also use their common room for sleeping during night times. The village also has one Anganwadi Kendra, which, however, was not functioning at the time of fieldwork.
3.3.2. The Village K. K. Pur

Situated to the east of Dhenkanal town, the village Krushna Kumar Pur (K. K. Pur) is one among the other villages of Kaimati Gram Panchayat. The revenue village K. K. Pur also consists of other three hamlets, namely Biradia, Ambanali, and Kadua. However, for the present empirical purposes only the main K. K. Pur village was taken into consideration. Despite the village consisting of four hamlets, including the main K. K. Pur, however, in real practice they are all separate entities, having both geographical as well as social distances. Each hamlet is considered to be a separate social unit, with its own caste structure and jajmani relations. The village K. K. Pur is positioned in the Dhenkanal – Kapilas Road, which also connects Nagiapasi village with Dhenkanal, at a distance of nearly 25 kilometers. K. K. Pur constitutes 85 households making a total population of about 700. The total K. K. Pur revenue village including three other hamlets mentioned above constitutes 649 hectares of land including wastelands and forest as per 1991 Census.

Unlike Nagiapasi, the housing pattern in K. K. Pur is very much scattered in nature. The Dhenkanal – Kapilas main road passes through the village and therefore, one can find the colonies of the village on both sides of the road. The Scheduled Caste households were observed to be dispersed and settled mostly on the two sides of the main road. However, the Scheduled Tribe houses of the village were clustered, and situated in close proximity to each other. The village K. K. Pur has a well organised Brahmin colony, which consists of 15 households. Most of the houses in this colony were pakka in nature.

The village contains only a Primary School, which provides education up to class five. For high school education the children of K. K. Pur either go to Nagiapasi or to Kaimati. A few others also travel to Beltikiri, the neighbouring Gram Panchat, for such purpose. Community life in K. K. Pur was not that organised as in Nagiapasi. Only the Scheduled Tribes have maintained their common room (community hall) in the village. On further inquiry, it was revealed that the village had a few community halls in the past, which were not maintained properly and thus became extinct. During the time of fieldwork, the villagers were observed to be working forward to revive such community halls in their village.

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