CHAPTER 4

MODES OF SUBSISTENCE OF TRIBAL INHABITANTS

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4.1 Tribals in India, as elsewhere in the world, lead an isolated life far removed from the main currents of national life. In the past they were condemned on the one hand, as 'simple' creatures of the earth and praised on the other hand for their simplicity and honesty. The study of tribals' life, their culture and economy has been the subject matter for serious discussions by Anthropologists, Sociologists and Economists for a very long time. Out of these discussions three distinct approaches towards the tribal development emerged. They are:

(1) The 'Policy of Isolation' or 'Leave them alone';

(2) The 'Policy of Assimilation' or 'De-tribalisation'; and

(3) The 'Middle of the Road-Policy'.

Dr. Verrier Elwin advocated the 'Policy of Isolation'. The philosophy of grass-root planning during the recent times and finally the area development approach which has come to be adopted from the period of Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-75 to 1978-79) have been espoused as the most positive development strategies. A detailed discussion on the relative merits of the three approaches viz. 'Policy of Isolation', 'Policy of Assimilation' and the 'Middle of the Road-Policy' can be found in many writings of Sociologists, Economists and Anthropologists.

Tribals in India have been struggling to keep pace with the other sections of the Indian Community with regard to development of their economy. After a deep slumber tribals awoke to the desire for progress even during the British regime despite enforced isolation and paucity of resources. There is a belief that the tribals are not interested in their advancement but desire to live a lazy and indolent life but as the U.N. Dhebar Committee has clearly pointed out that "Every one who has had something to do to the tribal problem can bear witness to the burning desire of these unspoiled children of Mother India for advance and progress consistent with their motion of culture and civilised existence. The problem in relation to a majority of tribals is not, therefore, any lack of desire to march forward."
The Tribal Community as the commission pointed out "Simple, trusty, tough and hardy, quite convinced about the wholesomeness of its way of life and yet willing to change when faith and religion convince it that a change is necessary". 

With the attainment of independence the national leaders started thinking about the poorest of the poor in the community and their economic upliftment. The tribal areas were also brought under the ambit of National Planning. The launching of the Five Year Plans in our country marks a clear watershed in the history of tribals and the areas they inhabit. The approach of the Government can be summed up as "protective development". The forest based tribal economy, agricultural economy and urban economy represent the three different stages in human development. A harmonious development of these three distinct segments alone take the economy forward with a view to achieving an all-round development of nation. A multi-pronged drive was started with the adoption of planned development approach. Before one assesses the impact of planned development approach on the various segments of economy, it is essential to know the nature and characteristics of tribal economy.

It has been held that basically the problem of the economic development of tribal areas are in no way different from those of the other economically backward areas in so far as both areas have a low level of income, consumption and savings of people, indebtedness are high and health standards extremely poor.

The tribal economy is primarily a subsistence economy with the agriculture and forestry as its base. The chief characteristics of a subsistence economy also hold good in the case of tribal economy. In such an economy the production would only be limited by the internal demand for subsistence products rather than by the supply of the factors of production. Another hallmark of such an economy is the absence of market dependence and material insecurity.

4.2 AGRICULTURE:

4.2.1 Agriculture has been and continues to be the king-pin of tribal economy. About 90 per cent of the tribals are engaged in agricul-
ture and this is likely to be the predominant pattern of their economy for a long time to come. In the hills podu or shifting cultivation is practised. Otherwise, both hills and plains tribals follow the old and traditional methods of cultivation.

Like his brother in the plains the tribal is land-hungry. There are several reasons for it, besides the common desire to possess land. One is, those tribals who practise shifting cultivation are growing in numbers and the cultivation cycle is shortening, alarming him in most places. Similarly, those tribals who have taken settled cultivation are also increasing in numbers. The heavy pressure on land of an ever growing population is more and more apparent. The Dhebar Commission worked out the figures of Agriculturist and acreage under cultivation of nearly 50 districts which have a predominantly tribal population.

The importance of the tribals attached to the land which sustains them is much deeper than what can be imagined on the basis of more economic utility. In view of the high priority that schemes for economic betterment deserve in any plan of development and further because of the vital place agriculture occupies in the economic life of tribals, agriculture can easily assume very high priority in the scheme of tribal development.

There are no two opinions that the problem of land and the tribal rights on land they cultivate are most fundamental for a more efficient use of land resources. The Renuka Ray Committee of 1959 rightly pointed out, "The extension of the rule of law in the field of land-rights has resulted in the progressive extinction of original rights of the tribals which was their's at least by virtue of the first occupation. Even if it is not possible to reverse this process, there should be no doubt or difficulty" observed the Committee, about arresting this process and in restating tribal rights of tribal communities in land in unambiguous terms.

The fundamental problem of tribal agriculture is the land alienation problem. There have been two types of legislation to preserve tribal's rights in land. One is Protective, intended to prevent non-
tribals acquiring tribal land and the other deals with the question of land reforms as the term is generally understood. Both types of legislation have fallen short of the needs of the situation. The protective legislation could not be of much use as no arrangement for alternative credit was made. The land reforms legislation could not help the tribal because it was too intricate for him to follow.

Government of Orissa has made sincere efforts to ensure that the possession of tribals is not disturbed by the non-tribals and all non-tribals who are illegally occupying the tribals' land are dispossessed and land restored to tribals. Some of the tribals to whom the land is restored by ejecting the non-tribals, but who are not in a position to cultivate the land due to financial incapacity are being supplied with inputs like plough, bullocks, seeds, etc. through Integrated Tribal Development Agencies. In addition to these measures all the village officers of scheduled villages have been instructed to record the possession of tribals in the cultivators' columns of the land record as soon as the land is restored to the tribals panchanams. It is also being considered to file criminal cases to trespass against the non-tribals if they interfere with the possession of tribals and try to occupy the same forcibly. Thus, the Government of Orissa has taken timely steps to save the tribal farmers from the greedy plains people with regard to their lands.

A vast majority of tribals subsist on agriculture. This being the Core Sector, agriculture and allied activities are accorded a first priority in the five year plans.

The occupational pattern among the tribals of Phulbani District clearly indicate that a predominantly large number of people are engaged in cultivation while equally good number of people derive their income from agriculture as farm-labour.

The topography of the region generally inhabited by tribals demands a well-planned and rational use of land in which agriculture, forestry and horticulture may all play an integrated role and the soil
may produce most of the crops for which tribal area is best suited and at the same time not deteriorating fertility. In the tribal areas it is necessary, to carry out survey to determine the nature of the land and of the crops that can profitably be grown on it and the extension staff should educate the tribals to plan their cultivation in accordance with the above two factors.

The Government of India and the State Government have been implementing various schemes for the development of agriculture in Phulbani District. The programme planning was decided in view of the level of agriculture, land-use pattern, agronomic conditions, cropping pattern and crop intensity potential for development, etc. Much stress has been laid on increasing the productivity.

The strategy of agriculture development in tribal areas of Phulbani District envisages the area-based programme to exploit water, land and other agricultural resources, qualitative and quantitative shift in the cropping pattern through supply of improved inputs on subsidy basis to the tribal farmers. Promotion of horticulture is given importance to wean away the tribals from shifting cultivation. Improvements in dietary habits and nutrition requirements are also planned with the above strategy in view. Certain significant achievements are registered by Integrated Tribal Development Agency in the field of agriculture and minor irrigation. To relieve pressure on land and add a second string to the bow, it is imperative to develop forest economy along with agriculture. It is only when the development of agriculture is dovetailed to forestry the tribal economy could be uplifted. In the earlier chapter [Chapter-3 (Para 3. )] agricultural production of the Phulbani District has been discussed in detail.

4.2.2 Size of land holdings: The total number of land holdings in the District was 99,285 and the area operated under the above holdings was 151 thousand hectares as per the agricultural census 1976-77. The individual holdings constituted a major portion, 98.31 per cent and joint holdings 1.69 per cent of the total holdings. The area covered under
individual holdings come to 96.79 per cent and the rest was under joint holdings. An analysis of the size class of holdings in the year under reference revealed that 47.82 per cent of the total holdings came under below 1 hectare size class followed by 1.00 to 1.99 hectares size class 27.96 per cent and the rest 24.22 per cent was under 2.00 to 3.99 hectares, 4.00 to 9.99 hectares and 10.00 hectares and above size classes.\textsuperscript{12}

Irrigation has a great role to play in agricultural development in tribal areas. Its rational use helps in increasing production by enabling the cultivator to use modern inputs and adopt double cropping. In the predominantly agricultural economy of tribals based on small holdings irrigation has even greater importance. "The topography of the region in which tribals reside raises special problems such as:

1) Rocky substratum;
2) Inadequate sub-soil water supply; and
3) Drying up of water in streams in summer."\textsuperscript{13}

The irrigation facilities available in the Phulbani District has shown in detail in the earlier Chapter. Dr. B.D. Sharma in the report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1986-87), while reviewing the Sixth Plan (1980-85) expenditure on Tribal Sub-Plan of Orissa pointed out that an outlay of 349.75 Crores out of Rs.527.31 Crores or 66.33 per cent of the total is relatable to Power and Major and Medium Irrigation Projects which is the highest amongst all the States having Tribal Sub-Plans.\textsuperscript{14} The sectorwise outlays and expenditure of the tribal Sub-Plan of Orissa (1980-85) are as follows:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Sector} & \textbf{Outlay} & \textbf{Expenditure} \\
\hline
Agriculture & 25.99 & 25.58 \\
Allied Services & & \\
Cooperation & 9.22 & 5.16 \\
Rural Development & 42.08 & 28.46 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
Irrigation & Flood Control
(a) Major & Medium Irrigation 140.12 132.09
(b) Minor Irrigation 20.23 20.95
Power & Energy 209.63 165.32
Industry & Minerals 5.99 12.51
Transport 27.92 21.78
Social & Community Services:
(a) Education 18.91 17.37
(b) Health 6.32 45.63 8.48 51.11
(c) Nutrition 5.40 3.29
(d) Others 15.00 20.97
General Services 0.50 0.50
Total: 527.31 463.46


4.3

FORESTS:

4.3.1 The tribal economy has agriculture and forestry as the base. It is intimately connected with the forests and their economy. This relationship has been recognised and articulated in terms of clear policies and programmes right from 1894 when the First Forest Policy was formulated. For a vast number of tribal people the forest has been their well-loved home, their livelihood and their very existence by exploiting the forest produce. The tribals have been supplementing their meagre incomes. "It keeps them warm with its fuel and cool with its grateful shades." 15

From times immemorial the tribal people have enjoyed freedom to use the forest and hunt its animals. This has given them a conviction that remains even today deep in their hearts that forests belong to them. This situation continued up to the middle of the 19th century. Gradually people from outside entered the forests to exploit the forest resources.
With the extension of Government control over the forest wealth a new chapter in the relationship between the tribals and forests was opened. This results in the enunciation of "The First Forest Policy in 1894". The present Forest Policy is based on a resolution of the Union Government in the Ministry of Food and Agriculture in 1952. The policy owes its existence to a policy that was laid down in the latter half of the 19th century.

"The sole object with which State Forests are administered is the public benefit. In some cases the public to be benefited are the whole body of tax-payer in others, the people of the tract within which the forest is situated; but in almost all cases the constitution and preservation of forest involve, in greater degree, the regulation of rights and the restriction of privileges of user in the forest area which may have previously been enjoyed by the inhabitants of its immediate neighbourhood. The regulation and restriction are justified only when the advantage to be gained by the public is great; and the cardinal principle to be observed is that the rights and privileges of individuals must be limited, otherwise than for their own benefit, only in such degree as absolutely necessary to secure that advantage.

The policy classified the forests into four categories and laid down the conditions regarding conversion of forests into agricultural lands. In this connection, it is appropriate to quote the relevant portion: "Wherever an effective demand for cultivable land exists and can only be supplied from forest areas, the land should ordinarily be relinquished without hesitation, and if this principle applies to the valuable class of forests it applies a FORTIORI to the less valuable classes."

Another declaration was made in 1952. Before initiating a new policy in 1952 the policy makers took note of the following factors:

(i) The population of the country had increased by 40 per cent between 1894 and 1950 resulting in relentless pressure on forestry and waste land to secure more land for agriculture;
The importance of forests in mitigating the rigours of climatic conditions had come to be better understood;

The importance of forests in the economic field, such as the development of agriculture, industry and communication was better understood; and

The two great World Wars brought to the fore the hitherto unsuspected dependence of national defence on forests.

The two essential aspects in which the policy statement of 1952 different from that of 1894 related to "the balancing of the needs of the local population consistently with the national interest and the replacement of intermediaries who exploit both the forests and the local labour for their own benefits."  

The National Forest Policy of 1952 recognised the following six paramount needs of the country.

(i) Evolving a system of balanced and complementary land-use;

(ii) Need for checking denudation in mountain regions, erosion along the banks of great rivers; invasion of coastal tracks by sea-sands and sand dunes in Rajasthan desert;

(iii) Establishment of tree lands outside forests;

(iv) Need for increasing supplies of giving small wood to people and particularly fire wood, to release cattle dung for manure in rural areas to step up food production;

(v) Need for sustained timber and other forest produce for defence and industry; and

(vi) Need for maximising revenue in perpetuity consistent with the above objectives.

The National Forest Policy stated that "while therefore, the needs of the local population must be met to a reasonable extent, national interest should not be sacrificed because they are not directly discernible, nor should the rights and the interests of future generations be subordinated to the improvidence of the present generation."

...
There is clear-cut departure from the old policy and this affected the tribals and their rights on forests. The U.N. Dhebar Commission mentioned the following points of great concern to the tribals:

(i) The old policy envisaged the release of forest land for cultivation subject to certain safeguards. The new policy withdrew this concession.

(ii) The old policy had left a margin for the supply of the villagers' needs from the outlying areas in the reserved forests. The new policy decided that there should be village forests for this purpose.

(iii) The old policy did not touch the private forests of the tribals. The new policy applied some controls to them.

(iv) The old policy did not touch free grazing in forests. The new policy sought to bring it under control. Fees were introduced and grazing was to be kept to the minimum.

(v) The new policy made one important concession. It admitted that while it was emphatically opposed to shifting cultivation, persuasive and not coercive measures should be used in a sort of missionary rather than in an authoritative manner to attempt to wean away the tribals from their traditional axe cultivation.

4.3.2 Impact of new policy: The impact of the new policy on tribals was clear in so far as their rights over forests were concerned. The tribals who formerly regarded themselves as the Lords of Forests, though a deliberate process were turned into subjects and placed under forest department. In this connection it is worth quoting the observations of U.N. Dhebar Commission. "The traditional rights of the tribals were no longer recognised as rights. In 1894 they became "rights and privileges" and in 1952 they became "rights and concessions". Now they are being regarded as "Concessions". The authority of the State Government consolidated and the tribals gradually lost control over the forests. "The basic reason", as pointed out by Dr. B.D. Sharma, "for this uni-directional change is the general conceptual distortion about the tribal economy and its relationship with forests. It has reinforced the consolidation
of the economic interest of the State and losing of tribals' effective control under heavy odds.\textsuperscript{21}

The present situation in the forest regions inhabited by the tribals is quite complex. There is divergence between the State policy and the tribal interest. There are also compulsions of the local economy and pressure for their optimal utilisation in a larger regional or national perspective. The people's development and the forestry continued as two "non-intersecting segments". A clear policy frame taking all the diverse factors into account remains to be worked out. While all other factors in any scheme will be extraneous, the two elements are primordial, viz., the forests and its inhabitants. Therefore, there has to be a synthesis of these two interests.\textsuperscript{22}

Dr. B.D. Sharma has diagramatically represented man-forest relationship. According to him there are two distinct phases. In the first phase the early relationship between man and forests is indistinguishable and next comes the stage of early struggle where the relationship is intimate. There is a transition from Phase I to Phase II with a change in mode of production in the field of agriculture. The economy transforms itself from primitive stage to advanced agriculture. In the second phase the relationship of men with forests becomes more distinct with the emergence of small urban groups. At the end of Phase II man emerges as an industrial man.

4.3.3 Forestry in Phulbani District: Details of the forest wealth of Phulbani District have been discussed in the earlier Chapter-3 (para 3.2.2). The forests besides being an inexhaustible source of wealth also provide employment to the forest dwellers. The forests supply the raw materials required by various local based industries existing in the District. Based on the raw materials available in the forests, many forest-based cottage, small and even medium industries could be established for the benefit of the tribals. The potentialities, the industrial development based on the locally available raw materials, the problems associated with the industrialisation of the District and the prospects of the establishment of industrial units on the basis of the raw material


available in the district would be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters viz. "Strategies for industrialisation - an Empirical Study" and "Industrialisation in Phulbani: Problems and Prospects."

4.3.4 The relationship between the forests and the tribals experienced many stressed and strains. Inspite of the fact that the tribals were the lords of the forests in the past, their rights and privileges have been so regulated that the tribals feed frustrated. The administrative authorities have been imposing considerable restrictions on traditional rights and privileges of tribals which resulted in bitterness between the tribal population and the forests department.

The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) document has given clear indication regarding the relationship between Forest Department and Tribals. It has been stated that Tribal Economy and Forest Department are mutually dependent. It has also emphasised the fact that of linking forestry programme with the economic development of tribal population is a must. There is no gainsaying the fact that tribals are benefitted as "Wage earners". In forestry operations, they are saved from exploitation by middlemen regarding the sale of minor forest produce but the forestry projects have not been designed to strengthen the tribal economy. This situation demands a new awareness for forestry planning in tribal areas.

A positive approach becomes essential in the context of economic development of forest dwellers. The forest department should try to inject a spirit of cooperation and collective action among the tribals. This may prove a drain on the resources of the department but in the long run it may prove to be "A well calculated attempt at solving the problem of unemployment among the tribes and assuring them of their due share in the forest wealth. Much more important is a sense of partnership and participation in the improvement of National Wealth."

4.4 In India at present there are 437 Scheduled Tribes with a total population of 5,16,28,638 and out of this there are 62 Scheduled Tribes in Orissa with a population of 59,15,067. As per the 1981 Census, this constitutes 22.43 per cent of Orissa's total population and 11.46
per cent of the total tribal population of the country. Though the popu­
lation of Orissa State is only 3.8 per cent of the country's population, 
the number of Scheduled Tribe constitutes about 11.5 per cent of India's 
tribal population. In terms of tribal population, Orissa is next only 
to Madhya Pradesh. Orissa thus occupies a unique position among the 17 
States and 2 Union territories.24

A majority of these Scheduled Tribes in Orissa known as 
"Adivasis" in common parlance, live in hilly and forest regions, which
are mostly inaccessible and isolated. Their economy is largely self suffi­
cient, unstructured and non-specialised. Their social system is simple
and needs are few. Though the Scheduled Tribes in Orissa are generally
in a State of social, educational and economic backwardness, until rece­
ently due to historical reason, they have their own distinctiveness, socio­
cultural and economic milieu. 62 Scheduled Tribes in Orissa speak as
many as 74 dialects. Their cultural heritage is rich and varied acts
as an unifying force. The skill, aptitude and inclinations of different
tribal groups in different regions of the State are different. At the
one end of the scale are nomadic food gatherers and hunters and at the
other end, highly enlightened agriculturist and horticulturists. The
tribal areas of Orissa therefore present an extremely complex socio­
economic panorama.25

The number of Tribal population in the Phulbani District
was 2,79,276 accounting for 39.18 per cent of the total population of
the District as against 22.43 per cent in the State and 11.46 per cent
in India as a whole. Of the 62 tribes notified in Scheduled Tribes for
the State as many as 29 tribes are found in this District. Of these,
five tribes, viz., Gond, Kandha, Saora, Kandha-Gauda and Kotia are numeri­
cally important. These five tribes together constituted 96.21 per cent
of the total tribal population of the District. Kandhas alone constituted
89.11 per cent of the total tribal population. Tribal people are found
throughout the Boudh-Khondamal (Phulbani) District but their concentration
is larger in Baliguda sub-division followed by Khondamals and Bouth.

The tribal people in the Phulbani District live mostly in
far off interior regions inside the forests. Their primary activity is
cultivation of land by primitive methods, hunting and collection of forest produce. They constitute the weaker and the most neglected section of the community. In some of the other Districts of Orissa, the tribal people are being absorbed in the main stream of life by working in mines, factories, road construction, etc., but the tribal people of this district are not yet exposed to such forces of economic advancement. Majority of them still work on land, but the yield is extremely low due to primitive methods of cultivation and lack of irrigation facilities. Most of them are also landless. The harmful practice of shifting cultivation is widely prevalent among them. They cultivate only the traditional crops and a second crop is practically unknown to them. Due to inadequate transport and marketing facilities they get very low price for their products. The economy is not yet monetised and as a matter of fact, barter prevails on a large scale. The village weekly markets are of great economic importance in the life of these people. They are often exploited by the local merchants and the non-tribals. These people have also their peculiar social customs and practices. Much of their income is spent on rituals and drinks. They have practically no savings. Indebtedness is a common feature with them. They have to borrow heavily in the lean season from local money-lenders against promise to repay the loan in kinds after the harvest. Much of their produce is thus spent in repayment of debts and as a result, they have to live in a vicious circle of poverty and debt.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Verrier Elwin's thought - provoking book a "Philosophy NEFA", wherein he has given copious illustrations from classical literature, p. 145.


5. Ibid, p. 3.


10. Ibid, p. 132.


22. Ibid, p. 11.

23. Dr. Ramaiah, P., Tribal Economy of India, Published by Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1981, p. 89.

