I
INTRODUCTION

The contemporary socio-cultural environment in Orissa and many of the social and cultural processes there, such as tribal-non-tribal interaction, intra- and inter-tribal interaction, and the emerging pattern of social stratification, carry large elements from pre-colonial times. The formation of chiefdoms, nuclear civilisational areas and the early states in the pre-colonial period provide the background for these processes. So a comprehensive analysis of historical processes of tribal interaction and the socio-cultural environment must extend back, beyond colonialism. Further it is necessary to consider the various pressures which have acted on the tribal population in different periods in history.

PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

Settled agricultural society and societies of food gatherers and hunters have existed in India side by side from the earliest historical period. It is only in the river valleys that some of the latter initially settled down for cultivation. This agricultural society through slow evolution culminated in the Indus Valley civilisation c.2300 B.C.E.1 The ecology allowed numerous niches in which to maintain social insulation, but in the plains the food gatherers and hunters have been under steady

pressure from technologically superior people in various ways.

The migration of Aryan speaking peoples to India started c.1500 B.C.E. although the view that they brought into the subcontinent a more advanced and technologically superior form of socio-economic organisation is historically less likely. The confrontation, and the assimilation, of the Aryan with the aboriginals of various cultural and territorial levels led to the emergence of castes and classes in India. This society of castes and classes gave advantage to the priests and warriors to repress and exploit the Aryan peasants and the non-Aryan helots. Some unfriendly tribal groups were conquered. They were known as Dāsa. Vivekanand Jha has given some examples of tribals living in the periphery of Aryan settlements in the later Vedic period (1000 to 600 B.C.E) who were later reduced to being untouchables.

Apparently there was no term for the category tribe in the Vedic and Puranic period. It is generally accepted by historians that the expression jana meant an ethnic group and janapada its territory in this literature. There are also references to

2. Ibid, p.29.
4. Romila Thapar, op.cit., p.34.
Atabika rājya (forest kingdoms) and jana like Śavara, Kirata, Bhiṣa, Pulinda in different Purāṇas, epics, myths and folklore. The territories of Gandhara (modern Peshawar and Rawalpindi), Mandra (modern Jaipur), Kuru (modern Delhi, Meerut), and Panchala (modern Bareilly and Badaun) were tribal kingdoms, named after clans dominant in the respective area. Such a territory was termed janapada, literally the area where the jana placed its foot (i.e. walked).

Conquest and assimilation of tribal peoples into Indian civilisation has been going on for millennia. For the sixth century B.C.E, we have evidence of small tribal pockets being subjugated and annexed to the kingdoms of Magadha and Kosāla. In later periods the indigenous as well as foreign rulers like Ajatasatru (c.493-461 B.C.E) and Alexander (327-326 B.C.E.) subjugated different tribes. Under Ashoka (261-232 B.C.E.), the various rock edicts suggest that special care was taken by the government to incorporate the different tribes into the empire.

The various religious traditions active in the larger society have been available to tribal peoples in various ways. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism welcomed the tribal societies without much

obstacle. Many groups in tribal societies learned about the routes to high status in the jāti society, and so were anxious for the marks of Brāhmanisation and Kṣatriariisation.

The post-Gupta period saw the rise of many tribal kingdoms in different regions of India, extending from the Himalayan foothills to the Vindhya mountains. The new rulers welcomed Brāhmaṇas to their courts, to seek the approval of spiritual authority and to strengthen their claims to Kṣatriya status. Thus the Brāhmaṇas migrated into tribal areas and could establish their influence there. The Brāhmaṇas prepared myths and genealogies purporting to legitimise the authority of the new tribal chieftains. This tendency amongst the tribes helped adjoining Hindu rulers to bring tribal chieftains under their state system. As part of expanding their influence, Hindu rulers assimilated tribal deities into the Hindu pantheon.

10. K. S. Singh, 1985, Tribal Society in India, Manohar, Delhi, p. 27.
stone objects of worship have been easy to identify with Śiva Linga, a good example being the Lingaraja temple of Bhubaneswar where still today both the Bādus (tribals) as well as the Brāhmaṇas are the priests. The royal patronage of tribal deities again served to consolidate the legitimisation and the political power on the Hindu tribal zone. In this process, Vaiṣṇavism was important, illustrated again by Lord Jagannath of Puri, a tribal deity Hinduised as an avatar or incarnation of Vishnu.

In order to achieve Kshatriya status, some of the tribal chiefs of Central India married Rajput women and on the other hand, Rajput rulers in Rajasthan, seeking alliances with powerful groups and wishing to spread their social and political authority, entered into marital relationships across clan boundaries and the like.

The Mughals followed a policy of conquests and annexations which reached tribal kingdoms too. Early in Akbar's rule, in 1564, the tribal kingdom Garh Mandala (in present day Jabalpur


district) was captured. Later Akbar recognised tribal chiefs of Gondwana, in central India, so long as their loyalty was assured.

During the late 1700s, the Marahattas used force to bring the tribal chiefs of Chhatisgarh and Orissa under their rule as tributary rulers. They carried on occasional raids over vast regions. Their main aim was to extract as much revenue as possible from the tribal area.

So, in the pre-colonial period the technologically and materially superior people exercised pressure in different forms on tribal societies. It includes military conquest, social assimilation through the caste system, and ideological domination through religious beliefs and institutions. All these served to bring tribal peoples into the wider social order and the corresponding world of religious ideas; texts and symbols. The tribals also faced various pressures in different ways from different centres of power; often their rulers turned also to Brāhmaṇas in search of legitimacy, enabling the latter to penetrate tribal areas. The centralised government of Mughals pressurised them through military conquest. Finally they had to face the occasional raids from the Marahattas and to pay exorbitant tribute.


19. Ibid.
COLONIAL PERIOD

During the colonial period, the pressure on the tribals increased a lot. As the integration of colonial economy proceeded, money-lenders, traders, thekedars, rajahs and zamindars exploited them.20 The administrative apparatus of colonial rulers spread to the heart of many formerly unadministered tribal areas.21 Not only the police and the revenue officials, but also missionaries reached them in various ways.

TRIBAL RESPONSE

To such varied pressures in different periods the tribals have responded in different ways. Some of them have accepted a low caste position in some places.22 Others have aspired to high ranks and formed their own kingdoms.23 Yet other groups could not cope with the external pressures and withdrew into inaccessible areas24 — or, at other times, have revolted against

exploitation.26

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many of the processes mentioned above had their beginnings earlier but gathered momentum during the colonial period and are continuing still. So it has attracted the attention of the historians, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, political scientists, administrators and even tribal leaders. Some of them have highlighted the damage done by the non-tribals' movement into tribal areas and pleaded for isolating the latter from the non-tribals.26 Others have highlighted the positive effects of the integration and pleaded for total assimilation of tribal society into non-tribal society.27

Still others generalise upon current processes and offer different theories. Nirmal Kumar Bose28 studying the Oraon and Juang tribal society and the Hindu modes of tribal absorption concluded that Hinduism is able to absorb the tribes due to Hindu 'catholicity' and its being a 'federation of faiths'. He saw the caste system as a 'principle', 'an ideal' that Hindu society has

27. G.S.Ghurye, 1959, (2nd ed.) The Scheduled Tribes, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, (1943, Bombay)
evolved to form a unity out of a diversity of communities and cultures. He remarked that Hindus, being superior economically, are able to impose their culture on the tribals because culture flows from an economically dominant people to a poorer one when the two are tied to form a larger productive organisation.

Srinivas\(^{29}\) recognised the process that a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals and ideology and way of life in the direction of high, especially twice-born castes. Srinivas' 'dominant caste' can be compared with Bose's economically dominant group. These studies show that, living in close proximity and being tied into a larger productive organisation, the economically inferior tribe and caste are bound to be influenced by the socio-economically superior Hindu society; in due course they get absorbed in the expansive and encroaching Hindu society. This process does not reach those tribal groups who have managed to keep clear of this encroaching society.

The studies of F.G.Bailey\(^{30}\) and Surajit Sinha\(^{31}\) show the processes under which the tribals are moving, "from tribal pole to caste pole" and along "tribe caste/peasant continua".


D.G.Mandelbaum\textsuperscript{32} found the process as being gradual and undramatic and as being accelerated by the opening of new communications to the tribal areas.

All the above studies notice the trend of movement of tribals into the world of castes and of peasantry; yet this process of assimilation may not be universal.

Though there are many instances of tribals being totally absorbed into caste society, and in many places they are in the process of being absorbed, it is important to ask why numerous tribal groups continue to maintain their distinctive tribal identity today. Surajit Sinha\textsuperscript{33} has tried to answer the question by locating different mechanisms through which the tribal people retain their identity. For this analysis he relies on the studies by Orans, Asim Adhikary, Roy-Burman, B.C.Sinha and P.K.Mishra.

Adhikary's\textsuperscript{34} study of Birhor, living near Sundegarh town in western Orissa, shows that although the tribal people exchange their forest produce with paddy and other necessities of life from the settled peasantry almost daily, they come back to their

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forest in order to preserve their meaningful culture there, without being disturbed by the plainsmen.

Navalakha's study of Bhils of Banswara, Rajasthan, notes the hostile stance of the tribal against the dominant Rajput as a means of ethnic survival. Here the Bhils have withdrawn to rugged terrain and maintained an aggressive attitude towards the dominant Rajputs.

Roy-Burman has analysed that, for strategic purposes, specially to maintain a friendly 'buffer' state to check an enemy and to use the tribal as a 'bridge' for trade and commerce with neighbouring countries, some rulers had deliberately allowed certain tribal groups to remain tribal e.g., the Kuki tribes played 'buffer' role for the Meitei of Manipur in relation to Naga tribes, the Miri tribes played a 'bridge' role between Abor tribes of Arunachal and the Ahom kings of Assam.

B.C.Sinha and P.K.Mishra show that the rulers, in order

to exploit the jungle resources through the tribals, have forced the latter to live as hunters. In both these cases the rulers used the tribals to capture elephants; the former study covers the Garo hills of Bangladesh and the latter the Kota hills of Mysore.

Orans' study of the Santhal shows that, in the beginning, they conceded rank to the dominant Hindus and tried to emulate the latter to attain higher rank within Hindu society. When they discovered that the 'rank-paths' for improvement were blocked by the dominant group, they tried to achieve status for themselves through tribal solidarity movement and in the process maintained a distinct tribal identity.

In addition to the above mechanism, Surajit Sinha has shown that the numerous ecological niches, and the modes of long range intra-tribal and inter-tribal communications have also helped tribals preserve their own ancestral worldviews. But his analysis refers only to situations where a single tribe is under pressure from its neighbours.

The studies of N.S.Reddy, D.G.Mandelbaum, Saileswar


Prasad, and S.C.Dube have focussed on intra-tribal and inter-tribal interaction involving more than one tribe.

N.S.Reddy, analysing the interaction of different tribal groups and castes in Kummari village in Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh, has observed that the highly developed caste system of plains affected the tribals to the extent that the several tribal peoples maintain status ranking among themselves. He also observed occupational specialisation amongst them and concluded that given the necessary conditions, something approaching a caste system can evolve, with its own peculiarities, even without the intervention of Brahmins or caste-organized Hindus. Mandelbaum also observed caste-like interaction and functional specialisation among the four tribes i.e., Toda, Kota, Badaga and Kurumba of Nilgiri Hills. These two studies show that the dominant models around the tribal groups affect them even though they do not have access to, or do not accept, the overall ideology of the caste system.

Saileswar Prasad has analysed a situation of three

43. Saileshwar Prasad, 1974, Where the three Tribes Meet, Maheswar Publications, Allahabad.
44. S.C.Dube, 1950, 'Inter Tribal Relations', Man in India, 30, pp.70-79.
47. Saileswar Prasad, op.cit., pp.136-140.
tribes, i.e., Maler, Mal Paharia, and Santhal and non-tribals in interaction in Bihar. He observed cultural borrowing between the non-tribals and tribals, and the processes of competition, conflict and compromise between them. In concluding that cultural differences between the three tribes are due to ecological factors, he appears to over-stress the latter, amounting virtually to ecological determinism.

S.C.Dube\textsuperscript{48} has studied three cultural areas where the different tribal groups interacted with each other though they had different value systems: Koyas and Hill Reddys in Warangal; Gond and Kolam in Adilabad; and Gond, Bhunjia and Kamar in Bindranawagarh.

In Warangal the Hill Reddy consider the Koyas as inferior because the latter practise cow sacrifice. They do not accept food from Koyas but at ceremonies they interact with each other.

The Gond and Kolam of Adilabad differ in their languages, economy and physical features. The Kolam practice cow sacrifice and so are looked down upon by Gond, but on social and religious functions they invite each other.

The third cultural area is Bindranawagarh of Madhya Pradesh where the three tribes — Gond, Bhunjia and Kamar — interact with each other and have come to a mutual adjustment. The latter two

\textsuperscript{48} S.C.Dube, 1950, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.70-79.
acknowledge the higher social status of the Gond. All of them have their separate panchayats but the combined panchayat is presided over by a Gond man. Dube shows that the Gond are more Hinduised than the Bhunjia and Kamar, and the latter groups have zealously maintained their traditional culture. He has not studied these tribes over an historical period, however, and so he has not analysed why the Gond are more Hinduised than the other two groups. Why do the Bhunjia and Kamar still persist with tribal culture though all of them were exposed to similar pressures from non-tribal society?

ORISSA: THE SETTING AND THE PROBLEM

This study focusses upon a similar situation in Chhatisgarh region.\(^4\) It will concentrate on the area east of Chhatisgarh only, which has been called Paśchim Odīsā (western Orissa) in the 20th century. The reasons for this limitation, other than keeping the study manageable in size, are discussed below. Nevertheless, most of our analysis will hold for the entire region.

In the above region different tribal groups as well as non-tribals are living in close proximity and interacting with

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\(^4\) The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908, X, p.3, "To the east of Nagpur plain, separated from it by a belt of hilly country, lies the great plain of Chhatisgarh, comprising the open country of Raipur and Bilaspur districts, and forming the Upper basin of Mahanadi river .... To the east of Chhatisgarh lies the plain which forms the middle basin of Mahanadi comprising Sambalpur Districts and the states of Sonepur, Patna and Kalahandi". The latter region was taken out of Chhatisgarh Division and added to Bengal in 1905 except two zamindaries i.e. Khariar and Padampur.
each other in their own ways. Some tribal groups retain their distinct identities though some others fail to do so. The Kandh, the Gond, the Binjhal, the Bhunjia and the Paharia have been in close proximity to Hindus, Muslims and Christians over several centuries and have been under steady pressure from them. Under such circumstances a series of questions may be posed: Why did the Gond and the Binjhal try to achieve Kshatriya status? What are the processes through which they proceeded? Why did the Bhunjia and the Paharia withdraw to the interior whereas the Gond, the Kandh and the Binjhal decided to stay on though all of them were exposed to similar pressures at the same time? Why did the Bhunjia and the Paharia refuse to be absorbed in the jati society? How were they able to preserve tribal culture despite being under great pressure from the non-tribals? Why did the Kandh, the Gond and the Binjhal revolt? Why did the service performing jatis participate in the revolt? Why did the tribals not join the revolt en masse?

Prior to 1976, historians writing on the history of Orissa concentrated mainly on the study of administrative and political history. They did note in one or two paragraphs the socio-economic conditions of the people but only as an addition.
to their narration of the history of the royal dynasties. These historians did not pay serious attention to the social history of the people.

During the last few decades scholars have produced a number of studies on the socio-cultural history of Orissa. But these studies, except A. Eschmann et al. edited, The Cult of Jagannath and Regional Tradition of Orissa, concentrate on coastal Orissa.


alone, and there is a tendency to generalise about the history of Orissa from the perspective of coastal Orissa. This may be for two reasons.

First, there is a general belief that all of the sub-regional kingdoms in Orissa, i.e., Kaḷinga, Utkala, Oḍra, Kośala, and Toṣaḷa were integrated into one unit under the Somavamśis in the 10th century and later under the Gangas in between 11th and 12th centuries, giving birth to the regional empire of Orissa and Orissan culture. However, it was actually after the 12th century that the sub-regional kingdoms and traditions developed their distinctive pre-modern characteristics.

Secondly, it is observed that the sub-regional studies are scarce and the material available for an elaborate study is scanty. The archeological remains of the area are still left unexplored. Attempts to use the oral tradition of pre-literate societies who were predominant in western Orissa have not been made seriously.

A few attempts\(^\text{52}\) have been made by scholars to utilise

the myths and rājapuraṇas to construct the historical picture of western Orissa. But all these scholars have accepted information in these myths and rājapuraṇas as a chronology of the history of western Orissa without critically evaluating it in relation to other historical findings. These writings indicate that their authors were guided by the heroic vision of the Chauhan Rajputs. Some of them were even sponsored by the ruling Chauhan chiefs of the locality. So there works have tended to become a new version of the earlier rājapuraṇas.

On the other hand, some scholars totally discarded these as fanciful, poetic imaginations and stories. No attempt was made to correlate and evaluate all these sources together to reconstruct the history of western Orissa.

None of the above historians has utilised the unwritten sources, i.e., folksongs, tribal myths, and contemporary evidence relating to the common practices and cultural beliefs of the tribal and caste groups.

The present study is an attempt to reconstruct the history of a sub-region of Orissa by critically evaluating the literary

53. B.C. Mazumdar was sponsored by the Raja of Sonepur and S. Mallick by the Raja of Bolangir.

sources, myths, oral traditions and contemporary practices and cultural beliefs of the tribal and jāti societies living there and comparing these with other available historical evidence. This will help to balance the earlier tendencies in the historiography of Orissa.

So far we have discussed briefly the steady pressure on the tribals from the plainsmen in all-India perspective through several historical periods. We also reviewed the literature on the tribal interaction. This helped us to understand the problem to proceed further.

In the second chapter we shall consider the historical experience of western Orissa during the pre-colonial period. It includes the early state and its disintegration, resumption of the process of state formation, growing stratification, the role of ideology. We shall also evaluate some of the rājapuruṇas.

In the third chapter, we shall introduce the five tribal groups for our present study and their interaction with each other and with non-tribals.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters cover the colonial period. Here, we have tried to show how the colonial penetration of western Orissa intensified the process of stratification, increased the pressure on tribals and gave an edge to the outsiders. Then we consider the differential response of the
different tribal groups to the pressure of the new forces. We shall consider the tribal-peasant movement of the nineteenth century in the fourth chapter, the Kandh meli in the fifth chapter and the withdrawal response of some tribal groups in the sixth chapter.

Chapter seven tries to draw together the major findings of our study.