CHAPTER – III

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Indian society is vast and complex as it is the land of multiple religions, communities and cultures. Due to its diversified nature, Indian society is considered unique in more than one sense. The vast landscape, over-sized population, multiplicity of castes and communities, religions and cultures are hardly found elsewhere in the world. The vitality of Indian culture is equally amazing. It has survived the test of times. This has been possible because of a sense of Indianness and unity in diversity.

"The geographical unity of India is easily missed in the immensity and variety which only contributes to her wealth and strength and economic self-sufficiency."\(^1\)

The complexities of Indian life are interpreted in so many other ways. Major religions of the world such as Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, etc., are found here. Occupational diversity is also quite complex. We find hunters and food gatherers and shifting cultivators, who even do not know plough cultivation, nomads of different types, traders, settled agriculturists, who use plough for cultivation, artisans and landed as well as aristocracies. In the process, Indian society has acquired a composite culture, characterised by stable patterns of pluralism.

It is very difficult to say precisely how and when Indian society originated and took a unique form. There is near unanimity among the scholars that migration of many races to India has immensely contributed towards this multiple culture, but opinions differ in identifying the earliest inhabitants of India. In the absence of written records relating to this, several speculations and oral traditions have come up.

Though there is no exact record of the earliest people, but a little known history of various conquerors speaks about the vitality of Indian tradition. After each devastating war of conquest, people have somehow risen again and kept their life miraculously intact. This does not mean that changes have never taken place in this country. On the contrary, "the secret of Indian society lies in its wonderful capacity to tolerate different views, different customs, different levels of understanding."\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Gertrude Emerson Sen, 1956, Cultural Unity of India, New Delhi, The Publications Division, Government of India, p.12.
fact, "diversity in unity" and "unity in diversity" has always been the motto of Indian society. Thus, "the people of India are born of many vicissitudes of long history, each of the many stands adding its own special note of colour, or a sudden flash of gold, to the intricate pattern of national life."\textsuperscript{3}

Even after recorded history began, migrations of human beings had begun to pour their streams into India. The process has gone even up to quite modern times, though with an ever-diminishing force. Out of this background emerged our multi-coloured population with its racial mixtures, languages and groups. When we say 'we the people’ includes all of us.\textsuperscript{4} The members of the so-called primitive men are side by side living with us. “Their history can not be traced exactly and the historical anthropology which includes popular beliefs, legends, myths, tales, short history of the locality, etc., of the folk people can help us to know about the unrecorded past.”\textsuperscript{5}

Most of them live in a broad belt of central India stretching across Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and Bengal. Others are found in North-Eastern region, Himalyan region, and still others are found in odd pockets scattered through Deccan and south India, in the Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadeep Islands etc.

L.P. Vidyarthi opines that the internal movements of these people in the country tells us about the history of these tribes in particular and the tribal people in general that they cannot be considered to be the autochthones of their present tracts as continuous migration has been taking place in the tribal regions. The strength of tribal organisation has helped them to survive in a totally different kind of world. Men were warriors. They lived in forest using their skill and physical might to defend themselves against wild animals. Their life is an outcome of the balance among the forces of nature surrounding them. For example, “the Naga warriors of Assam when are invited to take part in the National Independence ceremony in New Delhi, they receive highest applaude. Their vivid dancing brings to life memories of the remote past of mankind.”\textsuperscript{6}

Co-presence and co-existence of the tribal and non-tribal people characterise composite character of Indian society. However, the number of tribal people varies in

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p.12-13.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., p.13.
different parts of India in general and also in relation to the non-tribal people. As per the 1981 Census, the percentage of the scheduled tribes in the country was 7.76% of the total population, and in 1991 they constituted 8.08%. The decadal growth of tribal population is 25.67% during 1981-91, which is more than the growth of the total population of the country (23.79%). Similarly, in absolute numbers, the tribal population is recorded at 39 million in 1971, 52 million in 1981, and 67.76 million in the 1991 Census.

Tribal population both in absolute numbers and in terms of percentage widely varies from state to state. No Scheduled Tribe has been listed in Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry. The population of some states and Union Territories consist of predominantly the Scheduled Tribes. As per the 1991 Census, the ratio of the Scheduled Tribes to general population was 94.75% in Mizoram, 93.15% in Meghalaya, 79.99% in Dadra and Nagar Haveli, 63.66% in Arunachal Pradesh, 34.41% in Manipur, 30.95% in Tripura, 23.27% in Madhya Pradesh and 22.21% in Orissa. Out of the total population of the Scheduled Tribes, 22.73% live in Madhya Pradesh, 10.80% in Maharastra, 10.38% in Orissa, which roughly constitutes 44% of the total Scheduled Tribes population of the country. In terms of absolute numbers, 71% of the Scheduled Tribes of India live in six states namely, Madhya Pradesh (15.4 million), Maharastra (7.3 million), Rajasthan (5.5 million), Gujrat (6.2 million), Bihar (6.2 million) and Orissa (7.0 million). The large tribal communities are the Gonds, the Bhils and the Santhals. A few tribes such as the Haisa, the Tangsa, the Hotang Tangsa, the Katin Tangsa, etc., have returned only single person, and the Bamdo, the Jambo Karka and the Kangoo have between two to ten persons (1981 census). According to the 1981 Census, the Andamanese including all sub-groups had only 42 persons followed by the Jarwas (31), the Chaimals (18) the Onges (97), the Aranadans (236) and the Kochuvelans (53).

Thus, the size of tribal communities varies from a few to millions. Below the minimum size, considered necessary to keep a group going, a tribe can be termed as diminutive. Above a certain size groups become viable and can stand socio-economic pressures from other groups. Between the diminutive groups and large groups, a distinct spectrum of intermediate groups can be identified who can be said to be in a

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7 Census of India, 1991, Paper 3 of 1993, Union Primary Census Abstracts of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (India/State level), pp. 6-7.
state of unstable equilibrium. They may cross the upper critical limit under favourable circumstances, but under adverse circumstances may join the diminutive category. This category may be termed as a 'small group'. Hence, on the one hand there are very large tribal communities whose number is growing, and there are tribal communities having very few members and who are on the verge of extinction, are found on the other.

**Defining Tribe**

Even though many studies of tribes of India have been conducted, there is no unanimity regarding the concept of 'tribe'. Derived from the Latin term *tribus*, the term tribe means an inhabited place. It denotes a group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor. Murdock classifies tribes with reference to patriliny and matriliny. Taylor emphasises on common physical traits, or common ancestral features as important criteria of conceptualisation of a tribe. W. H. R. Rivers defines tribe as “a social group of a simple kind, the members of which speak a common dialect, have a single government and act together for such common purposes as warfare.” Risley defines Indian tribes as “a collection of families, or groups of families bearing a common name which, as a rule, does not denote any specific occupation; generally claiming common descent from a mythical or historical ancestor and occasionally from an animal, but in some parts of the country held together rather by obligations of blood-feud than by the tradition of kinship; usually speaking the same language; and occupying, or claiming to occupy, a definite tract of country. A tribe is not necessarily endogamous, i.e., it is not an invariable rule that a man of a particular tribe must marry a woman of that tribe.” Thus, tribe is a group of people bearing a common name, occupying a territory, claiming a common ancestry and speaking a common language, observing common socio-religious rites and practices, following common manners and customs etc.

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10 Ibid., P. 6.
11 Ibid., P. 6.
12 Ibid., P. 7.
13 Ibid., P. 7.
In India, social differentiation among tribes is seen in every sphere of life. There is no knowledge regarding the actual number of communities living in India. While B. K. Roy Burman states that there are altogether 427 tribal communities. The Anthropological Survey of India (1967) has estimated the number at 314, considering a number of tribes to be constituents of groups of tribes designated by common names. In 1950 the number of the Scheduled Tribes was 212, and this number increased in 1956. Thus, the number of tribal communities is fluctuating. Even nomenclatures of tribal communities have never been uniform in successive censuses. In 1891, tribes were described as people having a tribal form of religion and in 1901, in 1911, as tribal animists, and in 1921 as hill and forest tribes, primitive tribes in 1931, tribes in 1941, and the Scheduled Tribes in 1951 and onwards, tribes of India are mentioned in Indian Census.

**Classification of Tribes**

Today, tribes are generally classified in terms of their region, language, ethnicity, level of social integration with non-tribal neighbours, economy, cultural patterns, education, etc.

**Zonal Classification**

Based on the geography of India and the tribal demography regional groups and a zonal classification of the tribal people can be worked out. B. S. Guha has classified Indian tribes into three zonal groups: (i) the North and North-Eastern area in the mountain valleys and eastern frontiers, (ii) the central or the middle belt which occupies the older hills and plateaus along the dividing line between Peninsular India and the Indo-Gangetic plains including the hills and the converging lines of the Western Ghats, and (iii) the southern zone, which falls in the Peninsular India. Dube has given four geographical regions, viz. the North and the North-Eastern zone, the Middle zone, the Southern zone, and the Western zone. Atal has given a four-fold geographical classification, viz. North and North-Eastern, West and North-Western, Middle and Southern zones. B. K. Roy Burman divides the tribal communities into five territorial groups taking into consideration their historical, ethnic and socio-cultural relations, viz. (i) North-East India, (ii) Sub-Himalayan region of North and North-West India, (iii) Central and East India, (iv) South India, and (v) Western India. Taking into account the above classifications as well as geographical, ecological,
social, economic, administrative and ethnic factors, tribes can be divided into a four-fold geographical classification along with one distinct sub-region of islands. These are: (i) the Himalayan region with three sub-regions, viz. North-Eastern Himalayan region, Central Himalayan, and North-Western Himalayan having tribes such as the Tharu, the Bhoksa, the Jounsari, the Bhotia, the Raji, etc.; (ii) the middle India region, having tribes such as the Bhumij, the Munda, the Santhal, the Ho, etc.; (iii) the western India region, having tribes such as the Kol, the Bhil, the Mina, etc.; (iv) the south India region with tribes like the Chenchu, the Kadar, the Kota and the Toda; and (v) the Island region, having tribes like the Nicobarese, and the Onge, etc.

**Linguistic Classification**

Tribals speak different languages in different regions and can be broadly classified into four main linguistic families, viz. (i) the Austro-Asiatic, (ii) the Tibeto-Chinese, (iii) the Dravidian, and (iv) the Indo-European. The first three linguistic families speak of the dominant languages spoken by Indian tribes. The Hasangs speak the Indo-European language. The central Indian tribes such as the Munda, the Bhumij the Ho, the Kharia, etc. belong to the Astro-Asiatic family. The Gonds and the Oraons belong to the Dravidian language family.

**Racial Classification**

Some scholars like J. H Hutton, B. S. Guha and D. N. Mujumdar have worked out a racial classification of tribes. The most celebrated classification is given by B. S. Guha. He classifies tribes into six main categories with nine sub-types. These are: (i) the Negrito; (ii) the Proto-Astraloid; (iii) the Mongolid, including (a) Palaeo-Mongolid (long-headed and broad-headed), and (b) Tibeto-Mongolid; (iv) the Mediterranean, having three sub-divisions, namely, the Palaeo-Mediterranean, the Mediterranean, and the Oriental; (v) the Western Brachycephals having three sub-types, that is, the Alpinoid, the Dinaric and the Armenoid; (vi) the Nordic. According to B.S. Guha, the tribals of India can be grouped into three major categories: (a) the Proto-Astraloids, they are characterised by dark skin colour, sunken

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15 Quoted in Ibid., pp. 69-70.
nose and lower forehead, the tribes such as the Munda, the Oraon, the Ho, the Gond, the Khond, etc.; (b) the Mongoloids, the tribal people of the North-Eastern region, and the sub-Himalyan region; and (c) the Negritos, and they are the Kadars of Kerala, and the Great Andamanese including the Onge, the Jarwa, and the Sentinelese.

Many scholars have identified the tribals as the aboriginals. Shoobert has classified “them on the basis of their being the earliest inhabitants, or autochthones of the Province having been pushed into the hills and the forests by the newer inhabitants, as well as on the ground of their having retained their original traits and pursued their social existence in comparative isolation.”16 Those sections which have been Hinduised also come under the aboriginal category as there is a difference between cultural practices of the caste Hindus and the former. Grigson regards them all as aboriginal, and distinguishes the hill section as either the hill tribes or as the wilder aboriginals.17 Verrier Elwin calls the Baigas the original owners of the country they occupy.18

However, the distinction of the tribes into aboriginals and new settlers is never an easy task. Indian society in modern times is a vast mixture of races having close interaction among themselves. Moreover, many of the so-called aboriginal tribes have come to their present habitat from somewhere else in India. Therefore, they cannot be considered to be the autochthones of their present tracts. Similarly, on the basis of spoken language, the early settlers of the land cannot be called aboriginals. In the opinion of Hutton, if the Indo-Aryans are an immigrant people, the speakers of Dravidian and Kherwari languages also can be immigrants.19 To him, the Negritos were the earliest inhabitants, but they did not leave any marked trace. The Proto-Austroloids, who followed them, may be considered to be the true aborigines followed by the Austro-Asiatic people, the speakers of the Kherwari language. But the languages of the first two groups are not precisely known.

Tribes no more continue as isolated groups. Though changes have taken place in tribal life due to continuous contact with non-tribals, but this has not affected all tribes in the same way. Among most aboriginal tribes, there is a tendency to embrace Hinduism. On the basis of the level of culture contact, D. N. Majumdar has classified

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16 Ibid., p.9.
17 Ibid., p.9.
19 Ibid., p.12.
tribes under various categories such as assimilated, adaptive, commensalistic (common economic pursuits with neighbours), symbolic and acculturative. Moreover, on the basis of tribals' orientation towards the Hindu social order, B. K. Roy Burman has classified tribals into those who are positively oriented towards Hindu social order, and those who are negatively oriented. Hence, on the basis of culture contact and way of life, it can be concluded that tribals are not a homogenous community. The tribes like the Bhumij, the Bhil, etc., can be considered incorporated in the Hindu social order. They have accepted caste ethos and can hardly be differentiated from the neighbouring Hindu peasantry.

The contact of tribals with non-tribals goes back to 1858, when the East India Company founded an institution known as the 'Andamanese Home' in order to establish friendly relations with them for colonising the Andaman Islanders. They provided free ration, lodging, and medical attendance as that could be made possible to deal with the hostile groups. After successive efforts friendly relations were established. Initially this relationship was established with the Aka-Bea and the Jarwa who were so hostile that it could not be possible to establish relationship with them even with the British.

K.L. Sharma observes that tribals of Bihar have been exploited by outsiders, and hence resisted the aliens. They had a peasant economy and therefore they were not isolated and primitive or pre-civilised. The tribes of Jharkhand successfully revolted against the exploitation of outsiders as they had a communal economic interest. As a result, inter-tribal contact accelerated between themselves and with non-tribals and "outsiders" including Christian missionaries. These tribes were mainly concerned with agrarian economic and political problems as revealed by the history of various tribal movements. There has been a global tribal-folk culture in the Jharkhand region irrespective of specific tribal groups like the Munda, the Oraon or the Santhal.

Tribes like the Oraon, the Munda, the Santhal, the Gond, etc., can be considered positively oriented towards the Hindu social order. These tribes have

accepted the ethos, symbols and world-view of their Hindu neighbours. “Tribal communities like the Mizos and the Nagas can be considered as negatively oriented towards the Hindu social organization. They are not aware of the ethics of Hinduism, such as the notion of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’.24 The non-tribal neighbours have affected the tribals regarding language. Many of the tribes have adopted the language of their neighbours as their own. Further, some of the tribes have even forgotten their original tribal language/ dialect.

There is a wide variation regarding economic pursuits of various tribes. Economic activities not only vary from tribe to tribe, but also vary within the same tribe. Earlier tribal life and simple, but now it has become complex like advanced groups. Tribal economy is not only an outcome of contact, of the tribal people with their Hindu neighbours, but it is also a product of their traditional culture. The complex nature of tribal culture can be seen from a thorough analysis of the performance of rites and rituals by the Nagas and the Oraons relating to good agricultural product. However, the two tribes render different modes of such practices and rituals. For example, “agriculture has become the Oraons’ principal mode of livelihood but the Oraons take an intense delight in hunting wild animals not merely for pleasure but for more serious motive behind the communal periodical hunting. Festivals are celebrated for this special occasion. This is a desire to procure a luxuriant rice crop through the mysterious magical influence of a successful hunt” 25

The opposite practice is reported by T.C. Hodson relating to the Nagas. He observes that “fishing is usually prohibited during the cultivating season, from the time of sowing to harvest home, a regulation which rests on the usual vague sanction attached to so many gennas (forbidden), but which operates in the useful direction of affording the fish in close time.”26 Hunting is also prohibited for the same reason.

Various occupations practised by the tribals can be classified as follows: (i) hunting and food gathering, (ii) shifting cultivation, (iii) settled agriculture, (iv) agricultural labour, (v) animal husbandry, (vi) pastoralism, (vii) cattle herding, (viii) working as simple artisans, (ix) employed as factory workers, (x) white collar jobs and trading, etc. Thus, on the basis of economic activities tribes cannot be termed as a

homogenous group. On the basis of economic activities, difference is found not only among various tribes but also between the same tribal community depending upon economic background and spatial difference. The Juangs in the Keonjhar district of Orissa suffer from food shortage. To overcome the scarcity of food they largely depend on wild mangoes and its kernel and jackfruits and its seeds. However, on the contrary, a large number of Juangs in the Dhenkanal district of Orissa have taken up plough cultivation. The Juangas of the upper lands of Gonasika in Keonjhar still live in semi-human condition.

The process of slow and continuous contact between the tribal communities, who practised a comparatively simple form of production, with the peasantry and artisans, with greater specialisation must have gone on for centuries. There is no doubt that the chief attraction for the tribes, when their system began to fail them as in case of the Juangs of Orissa, was greater promise of food which the more advanced method held.27 Thus, just for sustenance, tribals do not depend on one occupation exclusively. A differential occupational structure is found in a few tribe. Similarly, “in the same Islands of Andaman and Nicobar, due to conversion to Christianity, the Nicobarese are developed whereas the Sentinelese and Jarwas are not only illiterate but also at the primitive stage of hunting and food gathering and are at the verge of extinction.”28 Here the question arises how does this happen and what are the parameters which contribute towards this change?

Indian Tribes: A Comparative View

There are few tribal communities who are mainly involved in hunting and food gathering for livelihood. The Birhors, the Malers, the Andaman Islanders, the Juangs, the Chenchus and the Kadars are such communities. Evidence is given in the last chapter as to how forest contributes towards the sustenance of these tribes. The geographical area, cultural background, inter-community interaction, etc., are key factors responsible for their existential condition. Where the natural resources are plenty and accessible, the tribals find it conducive to produce food for livelihood. S. C. Roy says “though their (Pauri Bhuiyas’) economic life would appear more primitive as compared as with that of the more settled agricultural cognate tribes, such

27 N.K. Bose, 1971, Tribal Life in India, New Delhi, National Book Trust, p.22.
as the Mundas, the Hos, and the village Kharias of Chotanagpur and the plain Bhuiyas of Orissa states (earlier it was so), this difference would appear to be mainly due to unfertile soil of the Pauri country and their rude physical and social environment.”

Hunters and Food Gatherers

The Andaman Islanders

The Andaman Islanders belong to two main races. One is the Negrito population such as the Great Andamanese, the Onge, the Jarwa, the Sentinelese, and the Mongoloids like the Nicobarese and Shompen. During pre-British period, the Andaman group of Islands were predominantly tribal. They were hunters and food gatherers with a simple social organization and an animistic religion. Due to spatial differentiation, no contact was maintained by them between various groups. “There are few tribal communities who are engaged wholly in forestry and food gathering; probably Andamanese, Onges, and Shompens of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the only communities in India who belong to this category.” These are the only tribals who solely depend on forests for sustenance. Besides the division of population into tribes in Andaman and Nicobar Islands the Andamanese recognise another division, i.e., the coast-dwellers (Ar-yoto) and the forest dwellers (Erm-taga). These people being hunters and food gatherers are differentiated in terms of food supply. It was mentioned earlier that geographical condition influenced considerably their economic life. The coast-dwellers obtain much of their food from sea. They are expert in turtle hunting and fishing. In addition, to this they also hunt wild pigs and gather food from the nearby jungle. Their canoes help them not only in hunting but also for shifting from one place to another. The forest-dwellers entirely depend on forests and are well versed in pig hunting. The coast-dwellers as they have access to sea and forests. Due to spatial difference, the coast-dwellers are in a better position than the forest-dwellers in having plenty of food. The coast dwellers are semi-nomadic whereas the forest-dwellers migrate less, as transportation is a major problem for them.


Nuclear families are found among the coast-dwellers like the Aka-Cari, the Akar-Bale, etc. Bachelors, the widowers and the sprinters have their separate huts to live. Their huts are made in such a way that interaction could take place easily so that they can help each other at the time of need. It seems that though there was no inter-community interaction, communication among the same tribe in a village was especially in the hours of need. The coast-dwellers during rainy season live at the headquarters camp, which is a communal hut to protect them from wind. In this season animals are in a better position. So they hunt pigs, whose meat is the most delicious food of the Andaman Islanders. The dogs are used for pig hunting, which they have learnt from the Burmese convicts. On their way to hunt, they are on lookout for all forest products. The division of labour is conventional. Animals are hunt communally, but after toasting, women cook for their individual families. Evening meal is the chief meal of the day.\(^\text{31}\)

The hunting ground is communally owned, but the personal ownership of trees exists in an informal way. If a person sees any tree and tells everyone that he has seen a tree and its whereabouts, no one will cut it. A strong sense of generosity exists in the minds of the Andaman Islanders for which they do not cut tree as part of their community norm.

The most important problem among them is the wind. Velocity and direction of wind is not conducive for fishing. Various rituals are performed in order to please the spirits. The medicine man is credited with magical power to create evil spirits against the hostile forces including unfriendly winds. He will not be punished even if he makes others ill or kill them by virtue of his magical power. He is considered to be omnipotent and all-powerful. The role of medicine man is very important because he controls the evil spirits.

The situation has changed now as the tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands are developing contact with the outside world, and also some contact is developing among them. The British occupation of these Islands changed the cultural scenario of the tribals. After Independence, speedy change has occurred following the flow of population from the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Bihar. The migrants from these areas have emerged as dominant groups in the region. With the coming of the Christian missionaries and conversion to Christianity,
the Nicobarese have become more flexible in their traditional style of life. Modern education, legislation, etc., have brought modernisation among the Nicobarese. The other tribal groups are still professing their native religion. Hunting and food gathering is the main source of their livelihood. In addition to this, the aborigines of Nicobar Island have adopted horticulture too like the Great Andamanese and the Onge. Other economic pursuits are agriculture, government service and trade. The Shompens who are hunters and food gatherers, also engage in barter with the Nicobarese. An important result of this contact with foreign ships and people of the Andamanese is that the hunting and food gathering people have learnt use of iron.

The Maler

The Malers are one of the major tribes living in the Santhal Parganas in Bihar. The Malers practise many unique social customs. Forest influences life of the Malers in many ways. Since the Malers live in the hilly areas, hunting and food gathering supplement their livelihood to a great extent. Shifting cultivation is the main occupation of the Malers.

The Maler huts are made of leaves, grasses and bamboo collected from the forests. A Maler village is surrounded by a variety of trees, plants and creepers. The Malers collect various types of fruits, including mangoes, which are numerous in the Maler forests. It is a supplementary food for the Malers. Mangoes became a cash fruit which the Malers sell in the local market. Mahua is the most important cash crop of the Maler economy. Mahua flowers are generally collected by the women folk. Mahua flowers are used in multiple ways. Dried mahua flowers are eaten after processing and can be preserved for a long time. It is an important economic source. The main use of mahua flower is to prepare local liquor, which attracts many consumers. It is needless to say that the mahua liquor is a delicious drink of the Malers without which their life would remain an endless monotony.

The Malers also collect some edible roots and leaves for food. Forests are the source of firewood and fodder for their cattle. The Malers get everything from the forests, including water.

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The Chenchu

The Chenchus are a semi-nomadic tribe of Andhra Pradesh, entirely depend on the forest products. Hunting and gathering are the main sources of their livelihood. The Chenchus do not live permanently at one place in the forests. “They have the habit of burning their hut when someone dies in the family.”34 The Chenchus were given land by the British in 1898 for agricultural and the Government of India provided land to them in 1959-60.35

The Chenchus live in nuclear families. As agricultural activities require a large number of people they avoid cultivation. Such a way of life is embodied in their culture, hence nomadism rather than settled agriculture.

The Birhor

The Birhors are a Hill tribe. They are found in Bihar and Orissa. “Though wild, they are very harmless race. They are to be found living only on tops and spurs of the hills, cultivating absolutely nothing and living absolutely on monkeys, birds, jungle roots, and herbs. They also tame monkeys and teach them to dance, and are sometimes found in the villages making a living in this way. They also make the dhole or drum used by the Kols at their festivals.”36 The Birhors migrate from one place to another when exploitation of the forest products gets over in a particular place. Mostly they live in the midst of the forests where they could get sufficient games for hunting. The Birhors are experts in monkey hunting and wander extensively in search of it. Sometimes they are invited by some municipalities in South India to hunt monkeys just to put an end to the monkey menace in their localities.

Hunting and food gathering are the main source of their sustenance. Rope-making is a subsidiary source of their livelihood. “Rope-making and monkey-catching are two favourite occupations which distinguish the Birhor food groups from the other aboriginal communities in Chotanagpur”37 They collect various fruits, roots, etc., that

37 Ibid., p.68.
the Birhor women barter in the local market along with ropes. They are very poor, and live in conically shaped small huts constructed with the branches of trees and leaves. It is a taboo to touch plough among the Birhors, says L.P. Vidyarthi. S.C. Roy writes: “As they cultivate absolutely nothing there is very little hope of their ever taking to an agricultural life.”

The flesh of monkey is the main source of delicacy among the Birhors. Evidence is also available that the Birhors used to eat human flesh. Sarat Chandra Roy describes “the Birhors as cannibals, devouring the flesh of their aged parents, whose end had come near and survival found highly improbable, so that the good qualities of the deceased may be inherited by the descendants.” There are some other peculiar customs among the Birhors. The Birhors devote their entire life to secure immunity by the help of magical powers against those malevolent spirits as believed to be the cause of death.

The Kadar

The Kadars are mainly in Trichur and Palghat districts of Kerela. The name Kadar is derived from the term ‘Kadu’ that means ‘forest’. The word signifies that the kadar life is closely associated with the forests. The Kadars are a forest-dwelling wild tribe who live in thick forests. Though the Kadars live in dense forests, they have established social contacts with other tribes in the locality, but no inter-marriage is reported. The Kadars are basically hunters and food collectors. Collection of jungle products is the main source of livelihood. They collect roots, fruits, tubers and honey, hunt animals and go for fishing. They barter forest products for rice, chillies, opium, tea and cloth.

Digging stick is the principal tool for digging out roots and tubers. They also have stone and iron headed sticks. The iron headed sticks are now used frequently. Regarding the use of these iron sticks the Kadars have a myth that their was a Golden Age in the past when the jungle was full of fruits trees and edible animals, especially black-monkeys. In those days even the digging stick was not required. “It was the foolish digging of unnecessary holes by which little boys and girls brought disgrace

38 Ibid, p. 8
39 Quoted in V. Raghavaiah, 1972, Tribes of India, Vol. 1, New Delhi, Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, p. 77
and with it the burden of digging stick fell on the tribe."40 Honey collection occupies a vital part of food gathering. Various legends are related with it at the time of honey collection. The Kadars are expert in fishing. Even children can catch fish. The Kadars hunt animals with the help of dogs, and they are fed properly for this purpose. Today, many of the Kadars have become settled agriculturists, agricultural labourers, basket makers, mat-weavers and petty businessmen. A few are engaged in government services as forest guards and peons. The Kadar women contribute to the household income. They are involved in animal husbandry, collection of fuel, fetching water and other economic activities. The Kadars observe endogamy. They do not have clan organization. It is a unique feature as clan occupies a central place in tribal culture. The Kadars profess Hinduism. They do not eat white monkey as it looks like man but black monkey is their favourite food. They are used to tea and some of them are opium addicts.

The Juang

The Juangs are found in Keonjhar and Dhenkanal districts of Orissa. However, the greater concentration of the Juang population is in Keonjhar district. The Juangs are one of the aboriginal Mundari speaking Scheduled Tribes of Orissa. They are primarily hunters, food gatherers and shifting cultivators. Barter economy prevailed among the Juangs. The Juangs are rigid and culture-bound people. They believe in supernatural powers and spirits.

The Juangs have a strong faith in their religion, and it guides their social activities. Festivals, rituals, and ancestor worship are quite common. The institution of priesthood is quite strong. Unlike the Kadars, the Juangs have a strong clan organization. Every clan has a totem, which is recognised by its members. “Clan exogamy is strictly adhered to while selecting the marital partner, despite the free mixing between young men and women within the premises of their youth dormitory or outside it.”41 The rigidity of customs had attracted attention of several British administrators and ethnographers like Dalton and Elwin.

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40 Mukul Chakraborty and Deepak Mukherji, 1971 Indian Tribes, Calcutta, Saraswati Library, p.53.
Colonel Dalton met the Juangs in 1866 while he was engaged in settling a boundary dispute between Keonjhar and Bonai States. Women, he says “had not amongst them a particle of clothing, their sole covering for purposes of decency consisted in a girdle composed of several strings of beads from which depended before and behind small curtains of leaves.” In the old days, all men remained without clothing. The leaves which the Juangs wear, they believe, are full of magic, and are to be carefully protected.

Elwin says, “it is indeed an amusing sight to watch group of old women with long sticks hovering round a Juang dance watching for any scrap of leaf that may fall down.” From this it seems how particular they are towards preservation of social values which concerns their existence itself. They narrated an incident to Verrier Elwin. Once upon a time a girl was eaten by a tiger because she disobeyed their customs. Another story is that an official came to a village and gave clothes to the peoples and asked them to burn their leaves. They believed the official and accepted the clothes. Rice and millet are staple food for the Juangs. Various kinds of rice cakes are made by them. They prefer both fish and meat. The remote forests of Keonjhar and Pal Lahara are rich with wild animals. The Dihuri (the priest) plays an important role at the time of hunting. He collects bows and arrows and keeps them in an auspicious place a night before the hunting is in operation. He sleeps alone in the dormitory so that maximum purity can be maintained. A hunter has to sleep either on the left or the right side. Appearance of a woman in front of hunting party is considered a great taboo. After reaching the jungle, a chick is sacrificed. A host of rituals are performed through the Dihuri before a hunting party starts hunting. The hunting game is offered to village ancestors, and liver is offered to the God, who has helped them in hunting. The major portion is given to the hunter and the next comes the priest in the booty.

The situation has changed among the Juangs. Food gathering, hunting and shifting cultivation have been substituted by agriculture. This change is due to the efforts made by the government and the tribe-caste interaction. Agriculture and

42 Quoted in Verrier Elwin, 1948, Notes on the Juang, Man in India, Vol. XXVII ,No. 1 and 2, p. 47.
43 Ibid., p.39.
44 Ibid., p.39.
development characterise the Juangs today in Orissa. However, in other parts of India hunting and food gathering still continue along with shifting cultivation.

**Shifting Cultivation**

"Shifting cultivation as the Principal means of livelihood is found among the tribes of North-Eastern region such as in Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and some parts of Assam, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar etc." The hill cultivators generally inhabit in different hill tracts of the country such as the North-Eastern region tribes in Rajmahal Hill area and in Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The Lushai, the Sema Naga, the Rengma Naga, the Ao Naga, the Khasi, the Garo and many others of this region practise shifting cultivation. The Juang, the Kharia, the hill Bhuiya, the Kutia-Kandha and the Khond, etc., of Orissa, the Kamar, the Reddy, etc., of Andhra Pradesh, the Baiga of Madhya Pradesh, the Maler of Bihar, the Birhor of Orissa and Bihar are mainly shifting cultivators.

The practice of shifting cultivation is known by different names. In Assam it is known as Jhum, in Orissa Podu, Dahi and Kamana, Penda in Madhya Pradesh. Besides, some tribes have got their own names for shifting cultivation. The Birhors call it Bewar, the Malers refer it Khallu, the Ao Naga call it, Tekongul, and the Kamar practise three types of shifting cultivation known as Dahi, Beora, and Guhad. In English it is described as slash- and- burn or Swidden or simply shifting cultivation. Under this practice, a particular family or community uses a patch of land for cultivation. After preparing the land by cutting trees and burning them, seeds are sown and covered with ash.

The tribal communities who practitise shifting cultivation have their own logic behind it. Some of them find it easy, whereas a majority of them do it as a matter of principle. The tribal people who do not possess essential equipments such as plough, bullocks and iron implements, manure, etc. continue with this mode of cultivation. Most tribes practise it as an integral part of their culture. Hence, they are proud of continuing this practice. "The only people who have exalted this type of cultivation into a regular culture, and have adopted it as a symbol of their tribe, differentiating them from others, are the Biaga." Every Baiga who has yielded to the plough feels

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that he is standing on *papi-dharti*, on sinful earth.\(^{47}\) Shifting of site and even of village is quite common. Rituals are performed at every step in shifting cultivation. Worshipping and animal sacrifice are parts of such rituals.

The selection of patches for cultivation is very crucial decision. A lot of other factors are taken into consideration such as supply of water, suitability of soil, extra land for cultivation, etc. The Maler Paharias strongly believe “if the jungle is cleared without any ritual sacrifice, the *gossaiyan* (spirit) concerned becomes angry and sends epidemic and other bad diseases to the offenders.”\(^{48}\) Similarly, “among the Ao Nagas *Phurung* ceremony rites are performed at the time of first visit after burning, offering a fowl for good crop.”\(^{49}\)

Shifting cultivation is related to tribal myths and is the product of their culture. Some tribals practise it in order not to hurt the mother earth by plough cultivation. A great majority of people of North East Frontier Agency with very few exceptions practise shifting cultivation on the hill slopes, even on precipitous one and this is closely linked with their social customs and mythology.\(^{50}\) Shifting cultivation as a subsidiary means of livelihood is found among some of the tribal communities of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala.

Though modern occupations are not widespread among tribals, some tribes like the Santhals, the Mundas, the Oraons, etc., are working in tea gardens of Assam and North Bengal. Some also work in factories as labourers. In the same way, the Bhils and the Gonds are engaged in industrial labour in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

Animal husbandry is the main source of livelihood among the Todas of Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu, the Gujars of Himachal Pradesh and the Bhotias of Uttar Pradesh. The Todas are the most popular among the tribes of India because of their unique cultural customs as polyandry and buffalo-herding. The Todas are a purely pastoral tribe. All their activities are centred round the buffalo-keeping and rituals associated with this.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p.107.
Even dairy work is followed by certain rituals for the care of animals. The milch cattle are considered sacred and are attended by men especially. Among the Todas milk of the sacred animals is churned in diaries, and it is regarded as pious for temples.\textsuperscript{51} The Todas of Nilgiri Mountains practise no agriculture. They are employed in industrial arts. Milk and dairy products are the main source of their livelihood.

The tribals like the Agaria, the Abor, the Baiga, the Gond, the Kota, the Kurumba, the Mismi, the Naga, etc., are good artisans. The tribals like the Bameha of Gujarat, the Bhot of Uttar Pradesh, depend mainly on trade and Commerce. Barter continues to be the main mode for acquiring necessities of life in lieu of the indigenous products. Familiarity with market and other livelihood avenues are known to most tribes engaged in arts and crafts in particular.

An Overview

The preceding discussion brings out that the tribals are poor, and isolated from rest of the World. Continuity of tradition and its survival have been possible because of optimum utilisation of natural resources by the tribal people. Struggle against natural calamities and perpetuation of belief in supernatural powers and evil spirits have acted as binding force for continuity of tradition. Despite force of the tradition and perpetuating isolation, some changes have occurred among the tribes of India, though change has always been uneven.

It is true that the tribes are no more an isolated entity. They are found in every field, that is, administration, politics, professions, etc. But this process of development has not permeated equally into each and every tribal community in India. Some tribal communities can hardly be differentiated from the non-tribals, while a good number of them are at the stage of food gathering. The Mundas, the Oraons, and the Santhals have made social contacts with non-tribals for higher economic pursuits in life.

Uneven development can be seen at the regional level as well. It is a fact that the tribals of North-Eastern region are considered as most ‘advanced. Next to them are the tribals of Chotanagpur and tribes like the Bhils of Madhya Pradesh, Maharastra, Rajasthan and Gujrat, the Minas of Rajasthan, the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, etc.

The Bhil

The Bhils are one of the largest tribes in India. They have occupied a large territory in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujrat and Maharastra. “The Bhils due to their intensive exposure to alien social-cultural and political systems are one of the most widely known and studied tribes.” The Bhils were given due recognition by the Rajputs. There was no village council among them. The elders were approached when required. They speak Bhilli which belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of language. The Bhils also speak fluently the language of the region of their habitation. Being settled agriculturists they are better off, and are in Government jobs. Some of them are agricultural labourers and factory workers.

The Mina

The Minas are mainly found in Rajasthan. Agriculture is the main source of their livelihood. They use the improved agricultural methods for better production. The Minas also depend on animal husbandry. The chowkidar Minas were ported to be involved in theft, robbery and dacoity.

The Gond

The Gonds are a largest Scheduled Tribe found in India. They are concentrated in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharastra and Orissa. However, the largest concentration of the Gond population is found in Madhya Pradesh. Their mother tongue belongs to the Dravidian language family. They are well versed in the regional language as well. The Gonds come under the category of the major tribe as well as one of the developed tribes in India. They are settled agriculturists. They are ploughmen and their women are reported to be experts in transplantation of paddy. Animal husbandry is another source of their income. Their occupational structure has become complex now a days, and the Gonds are now found in every field. Some of them are musicians, government servants, academicians, mining labourers, agricultural labourers, etc. Sometimes the Gonds cultivate the forestland controlled by the Government. However, the Raj Gonds are the land owning community among the

Gonds. Many of them are even landless and migrate to other places in search of work.

Now the question arises: Why some tribes are developed whereas others are considered as backward. The role of the British administration, Christian missions, nature and culture are important factors in socio-economic transformation of the tribal people.

Role of Christian missionaries in the transformation of tribal society by setting up schools and colleges and health centres is quite important. As a result of conversion to Christianity and contact with Christian missionaries many tribes have been educated and employed in modern areas.

The process of Christianisation started in Chotanagpur in the middle of nineteenth century, and the Christian missionaries started providing active services to the tribals preaching a different mode to their life. Christianisation offered a different world-view. The process of conversion put tribes into inter-state and national socio-religious network. A sense of superiority occurred among the converts, originated among them and they treated the non-converts as inferior as they remained to their traditional way of life. As a result some tribes such as the Khasis, Oraons and Mudas after have taken up new jobs. "The christianised Khasi, Munda and Mizo, etc., are heavily modernized and many of them would rather consider their non-tribal neighbours as primitives" 53

Education

There is a wide range of variations so far as the educational level of tribes is concerned. The tribes such as the Bhils, the Gonds, and the tribes of the North-Eastern, region especially the Nagas and the Mizos, have high literacy rate. Moreover, there is a wide gap between male-female ratio of literacy.

Education plays a vital role in integrating tribals with the. The level of education is, therefore, a major index for measuring the level of tribal development. Inspite of Constitutional provisions and governmental efforts, literacy level has been very low among tribes, and a wide gap between the literacy level of the general

population and the tribal people is quite alarming. According to 1991 Census, the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes was 29.6 per cent against the general literacy rate of 52.21 per cent. 29.6 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes population in the age-group of seven years and above is found to be literate according to 1991 Census; the literacy rate being 40.65 per cent for males and 18.19 percent for females. This percentage is much lower than the literacy rate found among the males and females in general population. Various studies suggest that the indifferent attitudes of the tribal children and their parents towards a superimposed urban middle-class oriented education system are the major cause of illiteracy among them. Article 350 (A) of the Constitution specially provides adequate facilities for instruction in mother tongue at primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups. But this special provision is yet to benefit tribal children so far as the problem of language is concerned. Elwin observes, “for a tribal family, to send its grown-up girl or boy to school is essentially a matter of economics; and entails dislocation in the traditional pattern of division of labour in the family. Many parents cannot afford to send their children to school.” Since tribal economy is basically agrarian, or hunting-gathering type of subsistence level where involvement of the entire family is warranted, sending the grown up children to school is an economic loss to the entire family. Moreover, the early marriage of the tribal girls due to cultural practices is one of the major causes of high rate of dropout of girl students and unequal gender literacy rate. The Bhil Katarias do not favour female education and dropout among the girl students is very high. However, all the tribes do not show same level of literacy. Some of the tribes, specifically in North-Eastern states and central industrial belts, return a large percentage of tribal literates. The tribes converted to Christianity, children from the upper economic strata and educated background have stronger motivation for education and thus have higher literacy rate.

54 R.C. Verma, 1995, Indian Tribes Through the Ages, New Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, p.90.
T.B. Naik’s study of the Bhils in the Jhabua and Dhar districts of Madhya Pradesh shows how the state sponsored education programme after 1947 created self-confidence among the educated young mass. It is because of the educational qualifications even up to middle class changed the life of the Bhils. The young men participated in the Jati Panchayats and have challenged the traditional supremacy of the village chief (Tadvi). This phase was associated with the introduction of Panchayatraj. The young educated people learnt the mechanisms of the Panhayats. They were noticed and treated in a better manner due to their education. This act motivated people to realise the value of education and most of the educated Bhils took part actively in local politics. It is because of education that today the Bhils are not only settled agriculturists, but are also found in other lucrative government jobs.

The British also influenced the life and culture of the tribal to a great extent. The historical evidences are available in this connection which are provided in the writings of S. C. Roy, S. C. Dube, K. S. Singh, N. K. Bose, B. K. Roy Burman, etc. The opening of roads and communications and land grants to the Brahmins in the tribal areas of Chotanagpur and Ranchi encouraged outsiders to settle in the tribal areas. Earlier the Hindu rajas ruled the region. They used to receive their dues either in the form of cash or in kind. When the British rule was extended to this area, the rajas had to pay the Government tribute in cash. When the demand increased from the Government side, it became a problem for the tenants who inhabited this part of the country. Soon the peasants from Hazaribagh, Gaya and Manbhum began to establish themselves in the lower valleys of Ranchi district which was the homeland of Mundas and Oraons. The small non-tribal tenants made out a new way of making money and became money-lenders. The tribals knew little about accounts. Therefore, the money-lenders found it easy to apply all dubious ways to extract money from the tribals. In course of time different castes became a part of the Munda economy.

The Mundas were the Khuntkati system of land tenure. Under this system, the land belonged to the lineage, but the owner could extend the right of use to others. The land was owned jointly by a group of agnatic families. The country which the Mundas occupied was a dense forest and they meant to keep it always for themselves. Each family made in the virgin forest its own clearance which was called the Hatu,
later on known as Khuntkati, or the village of the family of original settlers.\textsuperscript{58} When the traders and moneylenders asked for land to cultivate, they were given land. When the demand of the Government increased, the distress became acute. Land-alienation took place. The attacks on the land-system of the Munds and on their rights to the villages that they had themselves established, appear to have commenced in the eighteenth century and have been in active progress till the present days\textsuperscript{59} It seems that this problem has a long term affect-on tribal land. “Tribal land-alienation is acute in Central India, where they, as first settlers, reclaimed land, even forest land and started cultivation. They were later on followed by non-tribals who are now controlling a major portion of the resources, particularly land even in those remote areas.”\textsuperscript{60} This was a direct result of the opportunity the government provided to the non-tribals to settle with the tribals. It can be argued that the Government made it possible knowingly or unknowingly to exploit the tribals by taking advantage of the laws made by themselves. Evidence is available in this connection that “the Brahmin settlement in the tribal areas was not a peaceful operation. There were conflicts between the Brahmin emigrants and the tribals over the extension of the forest boundary, collection of rent, sharing water etc.”\textsuperscript{61} But this is one side of the tribal-non-tribal interaction. Tribal development in Chotanagpur area is in fact a result of the tribal non-tribal interaction.

The tribals of Chotanagpur such as the Mundas, the Oraons, the Hos, and the Santhals are ahead of other tribals. Permanent cultivation of rice has undoubtedly has brought prosperity to several tribal people. Production has gone up from 1959 onwards. Some tribes have been providing surplus rice. Traditional economy is replaced by monetary economy, and demand for consumer goods is steadily going up. Change has also taken place in style of life, including dress pattern, hairstyle, use of cosmetics, etc. Now they are practising plough cultivation in place of Slash- and-burn cultivation or food gathering. In fact, a whole package was introduced with the new inputs such as crops, knowledge of seasons, network of markets, trade and

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p.97.  
\textsuperscript{60} Budhadev Chaudhuri and Sunita Chaudhuri, 1981, On Some Tribal Problems in Budhadev Chaudhuri (ed.), Tribal Development in India Problems and Prospects Delhi, Inter-India Publications, p.85.  
\textsuperscript{61} K. S. Singh, 1985, Tribal Society in India: An Anthropo-historical Perspective, New Delhi, Manohar, p.54.
settlement. The tribal non-tribal interaction has brought changes in many ways. Production provided some new rituals and practices. The agricultural castes imparted skills for better cultivation. Exposure of the tribals to the non-tribals made them more pragmatic and concerned people.

**Tribe: A Cultural Entity**

From the above descriptions, it is clear that tribes never exhibit a uniform cultural pattern. While some of the tribes are highly acculturated, others continue to live an isolated life. While some of the tribes have developed substantially both economically and educationally, others are at the primitive stage of life away from the benefits of development and education. Three patterns could be ascertained: (i) developed tribes; (ii) having development at the threshold; and (iii) without any mark of development. There are some tribes which have uneven development among its families and members. Hence, tribal development has both spatial and ethnic dimensions.

Tribes are not homogenous, hence not a single cultural entity. They have diversity nearly corresponding with their ethnic and cultural differences. In this sense, every single tribe of a particular locality is an entity in its own way and exhibits a distinct set of cultural traits. However, at the macro level, many tribal cultural traits are similar and overlapping with each other. Based on their socio-cultural practices, including feasts and festivals, marriage rituals, disposal of the dead bodies, social relationships, world-view, and interaction between various systems, a definite common pattern seems to be existence. In this sense, 'tribal culture is different from cultures of the non-tribals.' “The tribals of Bihar exhibit ‘part-cultures’. Despite being independent entities, there is an “aggregation of cultures”, being one entity in the context of Bihar. Tribes in Bihar also retain tribal characteristics in spite of being peasants.”

Members of a tribal community identify themselves on the basis of culture. Their world-view goes together with their tradition. Tribal people are proud of the legends and myths and their origin and existence. Belief in supernatural powers and

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62 Ibid., p.53.

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sprits constitutes a unique component of tribal culture. Moreover, matriliney, polyandry, polygyny, youth dormitory, supremacy of the elderly members are the special features of tribal culture, and make the tribes as a common cultural entity.

The Bhumij as a Cultural Entity

The Bhumij is a minor tribe, and it is mainly concentrated in the states of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. Traditionally the Bhumijes were engaged in military service. They were considered brave and had taken part in various tribal revolts against the authoritarian administration of their rulers, not for their personal gain but for the benefit of the nation as a whole. Among all such revolts, the most popular was the Bhumij Revolt of 1832 also known as the Ganganarayan rebellion. In fact, the Bhumij have shown their bravery time and again, and for this they were rewarded with land for cultivation. Once upon a time the Bhumijes were Zamindars. “The landlords belonging to the Oraon, the Munda, the Bhumij, the Tharu, the Khasa and some other tribes employed serfs annually or until they paid back loans extended to them.” 64 The available literature on the Bhumij suggest that the Bhumijes are in a better position compared to some other tribes of Bihar and Bengal. Agriculture has become the principal mode of their livelihood, and wage labour, food gathering, etc supplement it.

Our main concern is to locate the Bhumij in relation to other tribes. Economically, the Bhumij are neither ‘developed’ nor ‘backward’. They cannot be compared to the developed tribes such as the Nagas, the Mizos, or with the backward tribes such as the Maler, the Birhor, or the Jarwa of Andaman Island. Culturally can be placed at the top. It seems that the Bhumij culture does not necessarily follow economic development, and at times the two do not go together. Though the Bhumij cannot be equated with developed tribes, but they are considerably integrated with other tribes and non-tribal people. The Bhumij, in fact, have already been incorporated in the Hindu social order says B.K. Roy Burman. Many tribes have adopted the Hindu way of life and consider them to be a part of Hindu culture. In spite of their long-term association with the Hindus, they have retained some of the indigenous cultural traits as Surjit Sinha observes.