

CHAPTER I

SOCIO - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In order to get a clear perspective on the topic under discussion one has to understand and analyse the context in which the said topic is to be studied. This is imperative for any critical analysis of the past, because it helps to sift the evidence from any form of prejudice to which the writer might have been exposed. An objective background would help in the appreciation of the problems that surround the area and the people who live there. An analysis of historical, religious, socio-cultural, economical and political aspects would help us to comprehend a reality that might even seem incredible to any contemporary person. In order to understand the political background of 19th Century Orissa, a scanty historical sketch is provided not to glorify its historical, cultural and spiritual heritage but to grasp the development of the state. This in turn helps us to understand the background of the dispersed people, the focal point of our study. Besides explaining the geographical setting, an attempt is made to clarify the terms and usages that are special to the people in the region.

In order to achieve this goal, the chapter is divided into three sections. Section I deals with the common topography and history of Orissa. Section II deals with the history of Southern Orissa, especially the Ganjam District, where the Kondh Hill Tracts are situated. This section also discusses the social, political, economical and religious aspects of Kondhs and Panos, who responded positively to the force of grace. Section III gives the historical sketch of Western Orissa, which centres upon the erstwhile Gangpur state, and analyses the social, political, economic and religious aspects of Chotanagpur Tribals: the Mundas, the Oraons and the Kharias.

1.1 Orissa in General

1.1.1 Orissa: Nomenclature

Orissa, as a region, is ancient and rich in spiritual and cultural heritage. The word 'Orissa' derives probably from a Greek word *Oretes*, the Sanskrit equivalent of which may be *Odras* or *Odrāshtra* or land of the *Ods* or *Uriyas*.¹ The term refers to rice, which has been the main crop and staple food of the country; hence, it could mean either the rice-eating or the rice-growing people.² Orissa today consists of portions of

¹ In fact, the word *orua* is widely used in Orissa since early times, which is said to be the same as the Greek word *oruza*, meaning rice. The Oxford Dictionary states that *oruza* is a borrowed word possibly from some oriental source. The *oretēs* or the *or* or *odra* means people, which may, therefore, mean the 'rice-eating' or the 'rice-growing' people. In Persian and Arabic, Orissa is represented as *Urshin* or *Ursfin* as found in the writings of the geographer Ibn Khurdabhi and also Hadud-al-Alam belonging respectively to the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. Alberoni in his famous work on 'India' refers to Orissa as *Urdavisau* which is a derivative of the Sanskrit phrase *Odra Vishaya*. It is in the early 15th century that names like *odisa*, *odisa rashtra* and *odisa rajya* came to be known and used in both public and private records. However the extent of its territory was indeterminate till the 7th century A.D. Cf. N.K. SAHU et al., *History of Orissa*, Cuttack 1989, pp. 15-16; T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, Madras 1882, p. 95.

² However, the geographical boundaries of the state of Orissa were not fixed until the 7th century. It was only during the 12th century that the territories of the erstwhile Kalinga and Utkal were united.

three ancient regions: Kalinga, Utkal or Odra and Kosala, which under political and economic pressure in the course of the centuries joined together in the 12th century A.D. to form the Oriya society as a distinct entity in India. Of all the regions, Kalinga was best known and more advanced in all respects.³

1.1.2 Topography

Orissa is situated between 17°49'N. to 22°34'N. latitude and between 81°29'E. to 87°29'E. longitude. It has an area of about 155,707 sq. km., according to the census of 1981. It is bounded by the states of Bengal on the Northeast, Bihar on the North, Madhya Pradesh on the West, Andhra Pradesh on the South and the Bay of Bengal on the East.⁴ Geographically Orissa can be divided into two major zones: the coastal plains and the mountainous regions mostly inhabited by the tribal people.⁵ The mountainous portions cover about three-fourths of the entire state as per the present configuration and hence determine the economic conditions of the state.⁶

Orissa, basically an agricultural state, depends largely on irrigation for a successful harvest. As all the rivers are rain-fed, most of them dry up during the summer. The construction of reservoirs for irrigation purposes is a relatively recent phenomenon,⁷ thus leaving the agriculture to the mercy of the often-erratic rain.

The climatic conditions also vary in respect to the type of land. In general, Orissa enjoys a tropical monsoonic type of climate like most other parts of India. During the winter, excepting northern Orissa, most of the state remains dry. The winter in the Ganjam forests can be bad, as sometimes one can notice a thin layer of ice on the rooftops.⁸ However, this is not a normal occurrence. The heat wave in Orissa can be very severe in May and June, namely till the arrival of the monsoon. Many a time the missionaries were advised not to visit people during the day, as it could be fatal.⁹

Subsequently the Oriya script originated and the famous Jagannath and the Sun temples were constructed. J. PATHY, *Ethnic Minorities in the Process of Development*, Jaipur 1988, p. 67.

³ Traditionally one could speak of Kalinga, Utkala and Kosala as the forerunners of present-day Orissa which became an administrative unit on April 1, 1936. Sardar Ballavbhai Patel, the then Union Home Minister, left no stone unturned to amalgamate all princely states with Orissa, popularly known as Mughal Bandi and Garjats. His efforts continued till the merger of Mayurbhanj, last of the princely states, with Orissa on January 1, 1949. Cf. N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer. Orissa State*, vol. II, Cuttack 1991, pp. 8 – 9.

⁴ N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, Cuttack 1990, p. 10

⁵ Ibid., p. 30; A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar 1988, p.1.

⁶ N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, p. 33.

⁷ In spite of the construction of reservoirs for irrigation there is drought and scarcity of water during summer. Ibid., p. 54.

⁸ Ibid., p. 118; Bro. Piccot described the climatic conditions of the mission: “Il y a environ un mois qu’ici deux ou trois matins le thermomètre descendit jusqu’à 5 degrés en dessus de zéro.” Piccot to Clavel, Surada, February 23, 1857, AMSFS, 7Z/5H5; However, Msgr. Rossillon sees the climate differently: “Le thermomètre descend parfois jusqu’à 15°, 10° et même plus bas, sans jamais passer 0° cependant, et c’est alors pour nous un froid de Sibérie.” P. ROSSILLON, “Cent Kilomètres sur des épaules Kondes”, in *LMC* 44 (1912), p. 340.

⁹ Here is a vivid description of the heat by one veteran missionary from Ganjam, Fr. Dupont: “Une heure après le coucher du soleil le thermomètre anglais Fahrenheit marquait 95° de chaleur dans une grande véranda, soit corridor, exposée de tous côtés à la fraîcheur de la nuit. À Aska, dans un grand bureau, le

Orissa is known for devastating cyclones and droughts, resulting in frequent famines. During the monsoon, the cyclonic storms that originate in the Bay of Bengal often cross the east coast and make a north-westward journey. As a result, the coastal areas are frequently affected by inundation while the rest of the state experiences a climatic depression that often brings relief to otherwise disillusioned farmers. There are two cyclonic peaks: one during May-July and the other during October and November.

1.1.3 Early History

In the absence of any historical chronicle of the ancient period, the history of Orissa is reconstructed on the basis of historical information contained in inscriptions, coins, literary works and archaeological findings.¹⁰

The early history of Orissa is intertwined with the great Mauryan Emperor Ashoka (272 - 237 B.C.), the illustrious son of Vindusara, who invaded Kalinga in 262 B.C., a feat that could not be achieved by his predecessors Chandragupta Maurya and Vindusara. Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism is attributed to the horrors of the Kalinga war,¹¹ that led to much bloodshed and untold sufferings of the people. This turning point in his life changed him into a benevolent king and a great missionary of Buddhism.¹²

The next great ruler of Orissa is Kharavela.¹³ He is well known for the Hathigumpha inscription (1st cent. B.C.) found at Udaygiri hill at Bhubaneswar. The inscription speaks about the achievements of Kharavela, the third ruler of the *Mahameghavahan* dynasty and one of the great rulers of the ancient Kalinga. Although a Jain by faith, he conducted extensive military campaigns and his influence was felt

même thermomètre marquait, ces jour-là, 115°. Mais sans thermomètre, quand je fus de retour à Berhampore, je reconnus bien que les jours précédents avaient été d'une chaleur exceptionnelle, car les feuilles de quelques arbres plantés vis-à-vis de notre église et déjà bien grands, se trouvaient en grande partie brûlées comme si on y eut fait un grand feu à côté." Dupont to Superior, Berhampur, August 10, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

¹⁰ N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, p. 137.

¹¹ A.C. Pradhan commented: "The Kalinga War of 261 B.C. is the sheet of anchor of Orissan history. With it begins the dated history of Orissa, even though the history of the land can be traced to a period as early as the sixth century B.C." A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, p. 9.

¹² Emperor Ashoka pursued the path of benevolence and justice. Buddhism spread in Kalinga under his patronage, and later became the state religion. Under the royal patronage the art of stone masonry developed to a great extent. Edicts were engraved on the Dhauli rocks (near Bhubaneswar) and the Jaugada rocks (Ganjam district) to announce his administrative and religious principles to the people. The rock inscriptions of Ashoka date back to the 3rd century B.C. "One of the remarkable Rock Edicts gives details of that terrible campaign: 150,000 became captives, 100,000 were slain and many times that number died in the consequent famine and pestilence". B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, New Delhi 1993, p. 322; N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, pp. 183-184; J. MURRAY, *A Handbook for Travellers in India*, London, 1929 lxxvii -lxxxiv.

¹³ There is no unanimity among historians with regard to the duration of the reign of Kharavela. However, with all probability one could conclude that he "could not be earlier than second century B.C. and later than first century B.C. Most probably he belonged to first century B.C. Kharavela was undoubtedly a benevolent monarch. He was concerned with the well being of his people. That's why he remitted taxes, dug canals and organised festivals and musical performances". A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, pp. 18, 23.

from the eastern coast to the western coast and from Mathura in the north to the Pandya kingdom in the south.¹⁴

1.1.4 Later History

The rulers following these great men are grouped under different dynasties. There were a few rulers who were known for their benevolence and building. The history of *Bhaumakaras*¹⁵ is reconstructed on the basis of a number of copper plates issued by the rulers of this dynasty. We know that out of eighteen rulers of this dynasty, as many as six were women, which is unique in Indian history.¹⁶

The *Somavamsis*, also known as *Panduvamsis*, were the next important rulers of Orissa. Their rule extended from the middle of the ninth century till the early part of the eleventh century.¹⁷ Then came the *Gangas*,¹⁸ who ruled an extensive territory with the help of a powerful army. They themselves were great warriors. They attempted to bring about harmony between *Vaishnavism* and *Shaivism*.¹⁹ The art and architecture of Orissa reached its moment of glory during the reign of Chodagangadeva (1077-1147), Anangabhimadeva III (1211-1238) and Narasimhadeva I (1238–1264). Chodagangadeva was a great warrior and builder, who “besides the Jagannath temple at Puri²⁰ and numerous forts, constructed the temples of Vishnu at Mukhalingam and at

¹⁴ N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, pp. 138, 184-185.

¹⁵ From 736 A.D., when first the first Bhaumakara king Sivakaradeva I ascended to the throne, till the death of the last of Bhaumakar ruler Dharma Mahadevi and the occupation of the kingdom by a Somavasi King Dharmaratna (960 - 995), the Bhaumakaras ruled Orissa, which was known under the name Tosali. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 191–194; A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, pp. 41 -49.

¹⁶ N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, p. 139.

¹⁷ The Somavamsis left their legacy in art and architecture. The Orissan temple architecture, which began with in the Sailodbhava period, reached its perfection in this period. Though they were ardent shaivites they pursued the path set by the Bhaumakaras in granting religious tolerance. “The absolutism of Somavamsi rulers (they were absolute monarchs) was tempered by the kings’ respect for *Dharma* (religion), the protection and welfare of the subjects, the wise counsel of ministers, and the injunctions of the scriptures.” *Ibid.*, pp. 199 – 202; A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, pp. 56 – 69.

¹⁸ The Gangas, distinguished as later or imperial Gangas from the early or eastern Gangas who ruled Kalinga about the 5th century A.D., ruled from 1038 with the enthronement of Vajrahasta V till the capture of Bhanudeva IV, a weak and imbecile ruler in 1435. Cf. N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, pp. 202 – 207; A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, pp. 79-104.

¹⁹ *Vaishnavism* is a belief that centres on Lord Vishnu as the supreme deity in Hinduism, whereas *Shaivism* upholds Lord Shiva as the supreme deity.

²⁰ Jagannath, Lord of the Universe, is really a name of Krishna, one of the *avatars* or manifestations of Vishnu. (The doctrine of Jagannath is all-enveloping, so that he could be considered as appearing in the form of Brahma and even Buddha) The immense popularity of the temple town is due to the doctrine preached that before God all are equal, both high castes and low castes. There are three deities worshipped in the magnificent temple: Jagannath, Balabhadra, his brother and Subhadra, his sister. The three images are annually drawn in procession at the *Rathajatra*, the car festival, which attracts devotees from all over the country. In times past there were devotees who would immolate themselves under the wheels of Lord Jagannath with hope of obtaining salvation. Cf. J. MURRAY, *A Handbook for Travellers in India*, p. 511.

Simachalam”.²¹ Both are found in the present State of Andhra Pradesh. It is widely known from inscriptions that Narasimhadeva I built the Sun temple at Konark.²²

In the 15th century *Gajapati*²³ kings of Orissa ruled over a vast kingdom extending from the Ganges in the north to Kaveri in the south. But in the following century they ceded a great portion of it to Vijayanagar and Golkonda rulers.

The political history following this period is one of dismemberment and annexation. In 1568,²⁴ Orissa lost her ‘independence’ and suffered from Afghan invasion (1568-78), followed by the Mughal domination (1578-1751), Maratha control (1751-1803),²⁵ and finally British rule (1803-1947): the British East India Company from 1803 to 1858 and British Administration under the Empire from 1858 to 1947.²⁶ The British annexed Orissa in three different phases – southern Orissa in 1768, coastal and northern Orissa proper in 1803, and the western hilly tracts, namely Sambalpur in 1849—and administered the areas under different administrative units, i.e. Madras, Bengal and Central Provinces, respectively. Besides these there were twenty-four

²¹ A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, p. 85.

²² Sir John Marshal, then Director General of Archaeology, stated that there is no monument of Hinduism that is at once so stupendous and so perfectly proportioned as the Black Pagoda, another name for the Sun Temple at Konark. The temple is carved in the form of a chariot of the Sun God to whom it was dedicated. There are a number of very fine carved figures of green chlorite on the walls, often erotic in posture. The temple is called black in contrast to the white washed pagoda at Puri. Cf. N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, pp. 139 –140; T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p. 97; J. MURRAY, *A Handbook for Travellers in India*, p. 514.

²³ Even the present king of Puri is considered to be a descendant of this dynasty. The office of the king of Puri is limited to some spiritual services to Lord Jagannath, the most famous of which is *Chhera Pahamara*, sweeping the chariot of the three deities during the great Car Festival in Puri. This shows the boundless devotion of the king to the worship of Lord Jagannath. Kapilendradeva’s (1435 - 1468) accession to the throne, which established the rule of Suryavamsi Gajapatis (Gajapatis means the lords of elephants), opened a new era in the history of Orissa. Cf. A. C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, pp. 105 – 139; N.K. SAHU et al, *History of Orissa*, pp. 237 - 238.

²⁴ In 1568, the area of present Ganjam district was conquered by Golkonda (Sultans) and in the early 17th century the districts north of the river Subarnarekha were annexed to the Bengal Subah of the Mughal Empires. However “the fate of Orissa was determined when in 1751 the Marathas conquered the central and western Orissa whereas southern and northern Orissa remained under the rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Nawab of Bengal respectively”. N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, p.3.

²⁵ During the Maratha reign, Orissa was under two administrative blocks: 1) the *Mughalbandi* area, the coastal areas (Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, etc.) and 2) the *Garhjats*, the tributary states, that were about 24 in number. The tributary chiefs paid an annual tribute in order to retain their independence. When the British took over the administration the Mughalbandi areas came under their direct rule, whereas the Garhjats obtained their semi-independence. Cf. M. DHALL, *The British Rule: Missionary Activities in Orissa 1822 – 1947*, New Delhi 1997, p. 42.

²⁶ The East India Company took control of Orissa in 1803. Even the East India Company did not unite the Oriya-speaking territory; on the contrary it was administered by five political authorities or units, i.e. Bengal and its Orissa division, Chotanagpur, the Central Provinces, Madras and the Garhjat Mahals of feudatory states of Orissa. Ganjam and other Oriya-speaking areas south of Chilika Lake remained linked to Madras; Midnapore to Bengal; Singhbhum, Seraikela and Kharsawan to Chotanagpur Division; Sambalpur and the Chhatisgarh feudatory states to the Central Provinces. Cf. N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer: Orissa State*, vol. I, p. 3.

tributary *mahals*, most of which were essentially raised to the status of princely states that maintained their semi-independent nature. A *dewan*, or Prime Minister, was appointed as a representative of the British Administration. At the close of the 19th century, more than half of the area of the present state was under the control of the 24 feudatory chiefs.²⁷

Having seen a general political sketch of Orissa, a short description of the places or the centres of activity, where Catholicism spread during the period under survey will elucidate the missionary efforts.

²⁷ J. PATHY, *Ethnic Minorities in the Process of Development*, p. 68.

1.2 Ganjam District

1.2.1 Topography

Ganjam²⁸ was the most northern district of the Madras Presidency, which was earlier called the Northern Circars. It had an area of about 8,313 sq. miles with the population of circa 1,520,088, according to the census of 1871.²⁹ With its thickly wooded hills and fertile plains, Ganjam district was one of the most beautiful districts in the Presidency. The district was divided into plains and *maliahs*. The plains were the country below the *ghats*.³⁰ The summer lasts for three months (March, April and May), while the winter is pleasant. The hill climate is extreme in comparison to the plains of Orissa. “In May the shade temperature may rise to 105° - 110°F or 40° - 43° C yet may approach freezing point in the coldest nights of December and January, with ground frost in the early hours. The cold season ends in February, after which it is increasingly hot until the arrival of the heavy south-west monsoon.”³¹ During the monsoon, which lasts from June to November, the climate is oppressive because of the proximity of the sea. However, due to the occasional shower the heat is tempered.³² Ganjam town was notorious for malaria, and for this reason it ceased to be the headquarters of the district.³³ Commenting on the inclement weather, Barbara M. Boal writes: “the climate of *kondhistan* (the habitat of Kondhs) is so notorious for its insalubrity, and the baneful effects it has on the health and constitution of strangers”.³⁴ Otherwise, the climate is pleasant and some of the plateaus and slopes are being considered as potential holiday resorts for Orissa.³⁵

1.2.2 A Historical Summary of Ganjam District

Historically Ganjam was part of the ancient Kalinga kingdom. Like the rock edict of Dhauli, near Bhubaneswar, Emperor Ashoka has left a rock edict in Jaugada. Ganjam area shared the fate of Kalinga except for occasional encroachment on its southern border, i.e. the Vengi kingdom. The Chola conquest of Vengi and Kalinga, which took place at the end of 10th century and the beginning of 11th century, had its impact on Ganjam.³⁶ Narrating the origin of the Gajapatis’ rule in Orissa, the Imperial

²⁸ Ganjam lies between 18° 12’ and 20° 26’ N. and 83° 30’ and 85° 12’ E. with an area of 8, 372 miles. It was once the headquarters of the district, but the derivation of the name (Ganjam) is unknown. Some would find the etymology in *Ganji – am* (store house of the world). But this is not a satisfactory answer to the problem. With its mountains, forests and valleys, it was one of the most beautiful districts of the Madras presidency, winning the affection of almost every officer who served in the district. Cf. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. XII, Oxford 1908, p. 143.

²⁹ T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p. 1.

³⁰ *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XII, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1908, p. 143.

³¹ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 35.

³² T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p. 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 3; *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XI, p. 144.

³⁴ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 92.

³⁵ R.K NAYAK et al., *Kondhs*, p. 4.

³⁶ The Great King Rajendra Cholan left the record of his victories on Mohendragiri, which is situated in Ganjam District. Cf. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XI, p. 145.

Gazetteer recorded: “The power of the Gajapatis of Orissa, whose descendants still hold considerable portions of the District, was founded in the fifteenth century by a minister of the former dynasty.”³⁷ As internal strife mounted among the Gajapati kings, their power also waned. About 1571 Ibrahim, one of the Muslim rulers of Hyderabad, took advantage of the uncertain rule in Orissa and made himself master of Godavari and other districts as far north as Chicacole. For about 180 years, the Ganjam district was part of the Chicacole *Circar*, controlled by the Muslim rulers from Hyderabad.³⁸

In 1752 the struggle between the French and the English for pre-eminence in India was at its height. Out of gratitude for the services rendered by the French, Salabat Jung conferred all the honours and privileges on Monsieur Dupleix, the distinguished Governor of Pondicherry. He also assigned to the French, along with the other districts of the Northern *Circars*, the Chicacole *Circar* for the equipment of the French auxiliaries. The French accordingly established themselves at Masulipatnam.³⁹ But their advancement towards north Ganjam did not make any impact on the territory. Ganjam had numerous Zamindars who were frequently annexing villages that were under the government of British East India Company and who were also quarrelling with one another. Some of them declined to pay tribute until compelled by force. Disturbances occurred with regular intervals and in an open manner between 1813 and 1832, caused mostly by a faction of eleven hill chiefs. “By 1832 the Bissoyis⁴⁰ doings became so intolerable that Mr. George Russell, first member of the Board of Revenue and name-father of Russellkonda, was sent to stop them. He proclaimed martial law, captured the Bissoyis and their forts one after the other, hanged some and transported others, and gave the district a spell of quiet. In 1836 he followed a similar policy in Goomsur, and since then there have been no disturbance of importance.”⁴¹

The hill tract attracted the ‘white man’s’⁴² attention after the war in 1836, when the ruler of Goomsur, refusing to pay the tribute to the English, took refuge among the Kondhs.⁴³ It was then that the British came to know of the horrendous human sacrifices. Thinking it to be a turbulent area, the British Government “considered it necessary for the prevention of further disturbances that the administration of criminal

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p. 99.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 101-102; *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XI, pp. 145 – 146.

⁴⁰ Bissoy or Bisaye, although an Oriya Hindu, was regarded as hereditary patriarch of a loose federation of Kondh clans and was agent for Kondh affairs to the Rajah of Goomsur. Cf. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 76.

⁴¹ *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XI, p. 145.

⁴² It’s a local name given to the British officers. People were generally frightened of them.

⁴³ In 1835, Rajah Dananjia of Goomsur failed to pay the heavy arrears that had in fact been accumulated from his father’s time, who already had fled in 1832. Since conciliatory efforts had failed, Mr. Stevenson, the Collector for Ganjam, issued an arrest warrant for the Rajah. Open rebellion broke out and martial law was proclaimed. The Rajah and his followers fled to the fever-ridden foothills. Traditional Kondh hospitality had been offered to the fugitive Rajah. The British troops found it difficult to penetrate into the fever-ridden jungles. It was at this time that Mr. Russell had arrived as the special commissioner with greater powers over the area. Cf. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, pp. 73 –74.

and civil justice in the hill *Zamindaries* would be removed from the ordinary courts and placed under the collector, and the Act XXIV of 1839 was passed giving the collector as the Agent to the Governor, Fort St. George, the necessary powers".⁴⁴ Thus, "in 1845 the Government of India created a special agency for the suppression of *Meriah*⁴⁵ sacrifices and female infanticide throughout the hill tracts of Orissa, and appointed Captain Macpherson, Agent under Act XI of 1845. All the Ganjam Maliahs, then under the Collector and Agent, were therefore transferred to him".⁴⁶ After prolonged difficulties and persuasion that claimed to have arrested the heinous crimes to some extent, the agency itself was done away with in 1862. This resulted in the retransfer of the jurisdiction to the Collector.

The people of the district may be divided into four broad categories: Uriyas (Oriyas, those who speak the language of Oriya but non-Tribals and non-Dalits), Telugus (those who speak Telugu as their mother tongue), Kondhs and Savaras. The Kondhs and Savaras, who are for the most part cultivators, inhabit the hills. They are described as being "miserably poor".⁴⁷ While the Savaras do not enter the purview of the survey, socio-economic and political aspects of Kondhs are in order.

1.2.3 People under Study

1.2.3.1 Kondhs

Kondhs, also called Khonds or Kandhs, a term given by their Oriya neighbours, are a Dravidian tribe inhabiting the South-eastern part of Orissa, particularly on the Ganjam mountains.⁴⁸ Their mother tongue is *Kui*, a Dravidian language that has some

⁴⁴ T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ The victims of the human sacrifice were called *Meriah* by Oriyas. The Kondhs called them *tokki* or *keddi*. A person of any race or age and of either sex was acceptable, if purchased, as were the children of the purchased Meriahs. Male and female Meriahs were encouraged to cohabit so that the children born out of this union could become Meriah. Cf. M.S. CHATERS, *An Account of the Religion of the Khonds*, London 1852, p. 36; K.P. BAHADUR, *Castes, Tribes and Culture of India. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, vol. III, pp. 21–22.

⁴⁶ Russelkonda (Russell's Hill), now called Bhanjanagar, was the headquarters of the Maliah tracts. *Ibid.*, p. 14; J. MURRAY, *A Handbook for Travellers in India*, p. 516.

⁴⁷ T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p. 10.

⁴⁸ The origin of Kondhs and even the derivation of the word 'Kondh' are obscure. Kondh is a word given to the tribe by outsiders. 'Kondh' probably is a Telugu word, meaning hill or mountain. Given a chance, the community prefers to call itself *Kuiloka* or *Kuienju*, which derives from the word *Kui*, the language they speak. Some scholars, such as Barbara M. Boal, prefer to call them *Kui* people, which may possibly be derived from *ko* or *ku*, a Telugu word for 'mountain'. This people occupies a vast territory filled with mountains and valleys that cannot be penetrated by either Indians or Europeans without contracting the fatal mountain fever. Some scholars are of the opinion that the word might have been derived from the Tamil word *khand*, a hill, or from *kandra*, an arrow. Others think that it is identifiable with the Oriya word *khanda* meaning an area of land calculated by the quantity of the seed sown in it. This, they say, is because the Kandhs are believed to be a race of peaceful cultivators who once lived in the plains of Orissa. There is another theory that explains the origin of Kondhs. The tribe got its name from the Oriya word for a sword, which is *khanda*. The *khand* (sword) is the totem of the tribe. This explanation appears to be most plausible. The Oriya spelling for the kondh is kandh. Cf. K.P. BAHADUR, *Castes, Tribes and Culture of India. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, vol. III, pp. 18–19; T. J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p. 65; R. CUGNET, "Lettre de M. Richard Cugnet, vicaire général de la mission de

similarity to other Dravidian languages, such as Tamil, Telugu and Kannarese in grammar.⁴⁹ The Aryan literature has portrayed them as *Rakshasas*, the black-faced demons, who accompanied Lord Ram in the conquest of Ceylon. They were under the command of Hanuman, the monkey god.⁵⁰ This needs to be attested by the standards of critical history as this could possibly be a result of some prevailing prejudices, since they were placed under some Aryan kings who took away the tribal autonomy or independence.

They prefer to call their habitat *Kui Dina* (*Kui* county), while the nineteenth century British romanticists referred to the area as *Kondisthan* (place of Kondhs). More recently some Indian writers have called it *Kondhland*.⁵¹ Most of the present mixed forests contain valuable hardwoods such as *Sal* (*Shorea Robusta*), as well as strong creepers, useful herbs, edible roots, leaves and berries. The lives of the inhabitants depend largely on the forest produce when there is scanty rain and persistent famine.

Vizagapatam, à MM. les Membres des Conseils centraux de l'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 52 (1880), p. 103; B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 21; R.V. RUSSELL, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, vol. III, London 1916, pp. 464 - 465.

⁴⁹ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 27.

⁵⁰ P. ROSSILLON, "Moeurs et Coutumes du peuple Kui. Indes Anglaises", in *Anthropos* 6 (1911), p. 998.

⁵¹ R.K NAYAK et al., *Kondhs*, p. 3. Living in scattered settlements, the Kondhs were politically under three separate authorities. M. Dhall writes: "The Kondhmals sub-division in the north was administered by Angul, the Balliguda sub-division was controlled by an Indian civilian collector and a portion of Ghumsur which was in the hill tracts was administered by an Indian Deputy Collector. The last two areas were within the Ganjam District and therefore were a part of Madras Presidency. The whole of Kondh region however was known as the Hill – Tracts Agency and these Collectors had special powers as Agents to the Governors." M. DHALL, *The British Rule*, p. 74.

1.2.3.1.1 Origin of Kondhs

Their own traditions concerning their origin are of little value, but they were almost certainly at one time the rulers of the country in which they lived.⁵² Most probably they lived originally in the plains, but the arrival of Aryans, as in other places, pushed them into the hills and mountains.⁵³ Their love for the mountains and the jungles and their desire to live freely and fearlessly motivated them to move into new terrain. Their main occupation was hunting, but sometimes a Kondh family may clear a small patch of land in the forest, set fire to it and sow the seed in the ashes. They raised few food crops yet cultivated a lot of turmeric for sale. They regarded themselves as owners and proprietors of the land that they cultivated.⁵⁴ Barbara M. Boal commented: “Their social, cultural, economic and religious life is built on the belief that they are the traditional owners of the land. Also, in Kondh language, the spoken word in the presence of one’s fellowmen and the creator is binding, needing no documentary proof of sale.”⁵⁵

1.2.3.1.2 Belief System of Kondhs

The Kondh pantheon consists of 84 gods of whom *Bura Penu*,⁵⁶ the Great Earth God, is the chief. He is the god of light, creator and sustainer.⁵⁷ The Great Bura God

⁵² It was a custom until recently for the Raja of Kalahandi to sit on the lap of a Kondh on his accession while he received the oaths of fealty. The tribal chiefs were also present for the coronation that took place in a village to which all the chiefs repaired. The Raja was also accustomed to marry a Kondh girl as one of his wives, though later she was not allowed to live in the palace. These customs indicate that the Rajas of Kalahandi derived their rights from Kondhs. They also signify that at one time the Kondhs were the masters of the forest. It was later that the royal families acquired the mastery over the land. This would also mean that the Kandhs were not subjugated by the Hindu states. It is said that they were also credited with driving away the Muslim invaders again and again from their territory. Cf. R.V. RUSSELL, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, vol. II, p.465; J. PATHY, “Colonial Ethnography of the Kandha ‘White Man’s Burden’ or Political Expediency?”, in *Economic and Political Weekly* 30/4 (1995), p. 226.

⁵³ Commenting on the origin of Kondhs, Barbara M. Boal wrote: “No mythology or legend yet discovered furnishes any clue to their origin or place of descent. They believe themselves to have existed in Orissa from the beginning”. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ K.P. BAHADUR, *Castes, Tribes and Culture of India. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, vol. III, p. 18.

⁵⁵ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 360.

⁵⁶ Barbara M. Boal wrote: “Great Bura God is the Supreme Being. He is self-existing, source of all Good, Creator of the Universe, Creator of Man, Creator of the inferior gods.” *Ibid.*, pp. 94 & 274.

⁵⁷ Barbara M. Boal remarked: “Bura decided that he must create inferior deities whose functions would be to regulate the powers of nature for the use of man; to instruct man in the arts necessary to life; to protect man against every form of evil; and in return, man must seek their favour through worshipping them with food offerings they desire. But Bura also made it understood that these inferior deities were only worshipped by the sanction of Bura and Tari – for worship was due to Bura and Tari alone, and therefore these two must continue to be the first names involved in ceremonial.” So, three classes of inferior gods were created corresponding to the needs of man. To list a few important ones: *Dondo Penu* – the god of punishment; *Loha Penu* – the god of war (iron); *Darni Penu* – the god of the household who guards every home; *Danderi Penu* – this is also a kind of household god who guards the rear side of the house; *Karang Penu* – the god of illness; *Djodi Penu* – the god of rivers; *Oda Penu* – the god of paddy fields and the tiger god. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 96; P. ROSSILLON, *Moeurs et Coutumes du peuple Kui. Indes Anglaises*, in “*Anthropos*”, 7 (1912), pp. 650 – 651.

created a consort for himself, *Tari (Tani) Penu*, the earth goddess.⁵⁸ To her human sacrifices were offered.⁵⁹ Bahadur wrote: “It was incumbent on the Kandhs to purchase victims. Unless bought with a price, they were not deemed acceptable to the goddess, and, as a rule, victims from their own tribe were not thus procurable; but sometimes the Kandhs sold their children because of the economic hardships, and they might then be purchased as Meriahs.”⁶⁰ Thus the Kondhs are divided in their acceptance and worship of their supreme deity: those who worship Bura Penu as the supreme god and those who worship Tari Penu as the supreme god. The positive cult of the earth as practiced in the olden days has declined. But individuals continue to propitiate the earth⁶¹ in their own fields at the time of planting the rice seedlings and at the time of harvest, and the hamlet priests (*Janis*) make offerings when the first seed is sown and when the flowers are first gathered from the *Mahua (Bassia Latifolia)* tree.

Every Kondh village has a place of worship, the centre of kondh habitat, which is often identified with a heap of *darni* stones.⁶² Among the Kondhs, when a child is born the first thing they try to find out is whose soul has entered into him/her.

⁵⁸ *Tari* is also invoked by other names: *Darni* goddess, the earth goddess; *Jakeri* (founder) goddess; so that the central *Darni* shrine-stones may also be called *Jakeri* or Founder-stones and the shrine-keepers the *Jakeri* or Founder. “Bura God found that Tari wanting in wifely attentions and affectionate compliance, so Bura God created man from the earth’s substance, to give him really devoted service... Tari’s jealousy led her to open rebellion against Bura. Therefore she introduced every form of moral and physical evil. She introduced diseases, deadly poisons and every kind of disorder.” B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, pp. 94-95, 182.

⁵⁹ *Tari Penu*, the earth goddess, by shedding her own blood, manifested to her votaries that it had beneficial effects and persuaded them that this process of fertilisation must be continued by periodical human sacrifice in her honour. The sacrifices were offered to the earth- goddess, *Tari Penu* or *Bera Penu*, and were believed to ensure good crops and immunity from all diseases and accidents. In particular, they were considered necessary for the cultivation of turmeric. The Kondhs argue that the turmeric could not have a deep red colour without the shedding of blood. The victims could be of any race or caste, young or old, male or female, though naturally strangers were preferred. Commenting on the Meriah, Rossillon observed, “D’autres victimes humaines devenaient nécessaires en temps d’épidémie, ou autres calamités publiques. Elles étaient aussi offertes à titre privé dans certains cas de maladie ou d’infortune dans les familles”. P. ROSSILLON, “Moeurs et Coutumes du peuple Kui. Indes Anglaises”, in *Anthropos* 7 (1912), p. 652; K.P. BAHADUR, *Castes, Tribes and Culture of India. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, vol. III, Delhi 1977, p. 21; R.V. RUSSELL, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, vol. II, p. 497; B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 8; A detailed report regarding the practice of Meriah is given to the Propaganda by Mgr. Neyret, Vicar Apostolic of Vizagapatam. Cf. Msgr. Neyret to Cardinal Fransoni, Vizagapatam, November 5, 1850, APF Indie Orientali: Scrittura Riferite nei Congressi, vol. 12, ff. 1107-1109.

⁶⁰ K.P. BAHADUR, *Castes, Tribes and Culture of India. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, vol. III, pp. 21– 22.

⁶¹ The earth, say the Kondhs, was originally a formless mass unsuitable for cultivation and human habitation. But when Bura Penu [*Tari Penu*] said that human blood has to be cast in front of him, they sacrificed a child and immediately the earth received its form and became productive. However, this situation would continue only if they continued to offer sacrifices time and again. Cf. P. ROSSILLON, “Moeurs et Coutumes du peuple Kui. Indes Anglaises”, in *Anthropos* 7 (1912), p. 652.

⁶² The number of *darni* stones varies between three and twelve, but three stones always remain at the head of the heap. These represent the family: two for the married couple, *pondri riari* (this is ancient word meaning married couple) and a flat one for the child, *ronde mila*. Cf. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 365.

When a child cries a lot, then they are sure that they have not yet found out the soul. A sorcerer is then called to resolve the question.⁶³ The tribes believe that the souls of the departed are reborn as children,⁶⁴ and boys have on occasion been named *Majhilan Budhi* or the old head-woman, whom they suppose to have been born again with a change of sex.⁶⁵ Besides these cases, “Kondhs don’t believe in an inevitable cycle of life, death and rebirth. Some fresh lives are born into families in addition to the reborn ancestors – hence the need for divination”.⁶⁶ They do not eat the meat of tigers because they consider them to be an incarnation of a divinity or a demon, which will confound those who devour such animals. For similar reason they cannot eat even the animals killed by a tiger.⁶⁷ They believe in spirits, particularly the ones that are harmful. Such spirits have to be propitiated. Those who die of violent death are thought to be roaming around in the form of spirits harming persons.⁶⁸

The dead are normally buried, but the practice of cremating the bodies of adults is increasing. This could be due to the influence of Hindu culture, to which they are exposed. When a body is buried, a rupee or a copper coin is tied in the sheet so that the deceased may not go penniless to the other world. Sometimes the dead man’s clothes as well as his bows and arrows are buried with him. Kondhs identify a variety of situations that cause pollution and prescribe many purification ceremonies. At the village level, the most common pollution is caused by *Sidi Saki* or unripe death, such as tiger-mauling, death in childbirth, suicide, falling from a tree, drowning, etc. In such circumstances they consider the entire village as polluted until the traditional purification is performed.⁶⁹ The Kondh worships his bows and arrows before going out to hunt, and he believes that every hill and valley has its separate deity, who must be propitiated.⁷⁰ Regarding the belief system of Kondhs, Barbara M. Boal observed: “The

⁶³ There is a rite to find out the name through the dropping of uncooked rice. If the rice floats on the water, then the child should not be called by that name, but if it sinks, then that is the name of the child. P. ROSSILLON, “Un baptême d’enfants au pays des Khondes”, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 89 (1917), pp. 144 – 145.

⁶⁴ Barbara M. Boal observed: “Ancestors do not suffer human limitations of mobility, though in order to return to the fuller and more desirable state of the living they may seek rebirth into their kin group. When a baby begins to show decided personality characteristics (probably about six months), he arouses speculation as to whose spirit may have re-entered the living world at his birth, either temperament or physical features being the guide”. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 258.

⁶⁵ R.V. RUSSELL, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, vol. II, p. 469.

⁶⁶ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 364.

⁶⁷ P. ROSSILLON, “Moeurs et Coutumes du peuple Kui. Indes Anglaises”, in *Anthropos* 6 (1911), pp. 1001 – 1002.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 649 – 650.

⁶⁹ Purification ceremonies require a little uncooked rice, chicken’s blood, an egg, etc., with the celebrant’s fasting (not only abstaining from food but also from sexual intercourse for two or three days prior to the ceremony), and a ritual bath. Cf. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, pp. 246 – 248, 267 and 350.

⁷⁰ Otherwise the Deity may hide the animal and allow the wounded prey to escape. Cf. R.V. RUSSELL, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, vol. II, p. 474.

Kondhs have always considered their spiritual beliefs, customs and practices to be rooted and grounded in the values practiced by their ancestors before them”.⁷¹

1.2.3.1.3 Meriah Sacrifice

Here is an account of the infamous Meriah or the human sacrifice of the Kondhs.⁷² Our knowledge of it is derived from the accounts written by British officers in the middle of the 19th century.⁷³ The sacrifices were offered to the earth goddess, Tari Penu, and were believed to ensure good crops and immunity from all disease and accidents.⁷⁴ The mode of putting him/her to death varied in different places. One of the most common modes seems to have been strangulation, or squeezing to death. Sometimes the victim was cut while alive. After the symbolic wounding of the victim by the officiating priest, people cut the flesh of the victim with a knife. The persons who had been deputed by each village instantly took the flesh cut from the victim home.⁷⁵ In each village all who stayed at home fasted rigidly until the flesh arrived. The bearer

⁷¹ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 378.

⁷² The mode of performing the sacrifice is as follows: ten or twelve days before the sacrifice, the victim was devoted by cutting off his hair, which, until then, had been kept unshorn. Crowds of men and women assemble to witness the sacrifice. Since the sacrifice is declared to be for all mankind, they wish that no one be excluded. The sacrifice is preceded by several days of wild revelry and gross debauchery. On the day before the sacrifice the victim, dressed in a new garment, was led forth from the village in solemn procession, with music and dancing, to the Meriah grove, a clump of high forest trees standing a little way from the village and untouched by the axe. Here they tie him/her to a post. He was then anointed with oil, ghee and turmeric. People continue to pay their homage to him throughout the day. They love to get a smallest of relic, a particle of the turmeric paste with which he was smeared, or a drop of his spittle, etc., because these were esteemed of sovereign virtue, especially by the women. The crowd danced round the post to music, and addressing the Earth said, ‘O God, we offer this sacrifice to you; give us good crops, seasons, and health’. Cf. R.V. RUSSELL, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, vol. II, p. 474; R. CUGNET, “Lettre de M. Richard Cugnet, vicaire general de la mission de Vizagapatam, à MM. les Membres des Conseils centraux de l’Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi”, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 52 (1880), pp. 105 – 108; Msgr. Neyret presents a moving account of the infamous belief of the Kondhs in his letter to Monsieur Mermier, founder and superior of the congregation on September 6, 1850. Cf. Archives MSFS 7 Z / 5 H 5; For a detailed study of *Meriah* sacrifice and the prayers attached to it see the third chapter of B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, New Delhi 1993.

⁷³ The first observations were made by Mr. Russell during the Goomsur wars from 1835 to 1837. The earliest account of human sacrifice was submitted on May 11, 1837 to the Madras Government by Mr. Russell of the Madras Civil Service. Later, on November 24, 1837, additions were made by Mr. Arbuthnot, Acting Collector of Visagapatnam. Variations in the precise manner in which the Meriah was put to death were also noted by Capt. John Campbell and Capt. S.C. Macpherson, officers under whom the expedition to the Kondhmals took place (1837 – 1845). In June 1841, a full report was presented to the Supreme Court of India; later it was given as an address to the Royal Asiatic Society, London. In June 1841, Capt. Macpherson collected the prayers used at the Meriah sacrifice. Cf. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 185.

⁷⁴ To quote Barbara M. Boal: “All available versions of the myths of origin of the sacrifice are similar on this one point: that it began through the Earth Goddess’ insistent demand for human flesh-food and her refusal to accept any animal substitute; and that she first ‘taught’ them exactly how to procure and kill the victim and offer the flesh. Only then would she keep her side of the bargain”. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁷⁵ In times past, in order to secure its rapid arrival, they used to have a relay of men, so that they may receive it in the village as soon as possible and bury it in their places before sunset.

deposited it in the place of public assembly, where the priest and the heads of families received it. The priest divided it into two portions, one of which he offered to the earth – goddess by burying it in a hole in the ground with his back turned, and without looking. Then each man added a little earth to bury it, and the priest poured water on the spot from a hill gourd. The other portion of the flesh he divided into as many shares as there were heads of houses present. They buried the morsel in the field where they expected a bumper crop. The remains of the human victim (namely, the head, bowels and bones) were watched by strong parties the night after the sacrifice, and the next morning they were burned along with a whole sheep on a funeral pile. The ashes were scattered over the fields, laid as paste over the houses and granaries, or mixed with the new corn to preserve it from insects. On the day following the sacrifice, the Kondhs brought a buffalo calf, cut off its forefeet, and left it there until the following day. This was followed by women disguising themselves, armed like men who drank, danced and sang around the spot. The calf was killed, cooked and eaten.⁷⁶ It was a Herculean task for the British to extirpate these practices. Using a friendly approach (particularly with the chiefs), admonitions, and proposals to substitute buffaloes in place of humans, they gradually helped them to abandon the tradition of human sacrifice.⁷⁷

1.2.3.1.4 Female Infanticide

Female infanticide⁷⁸ was a prevailing practice in areas such as the *Zamindaries* of Surada, Korada and the borders of Chinna Kimedya. This was not considered to be a sin or moral evil, because the Kondhs understood that the newborn infants were not ratified members of the kin-group and thus they were not full persons.⁷⁹ The clans practising female infanticide did not offer human sacrifice to *Tari Penu*, because they believed that *Tari* is subordinate to *Bura Penu* and the Supreme Being would protect them.

Some of the reasons given to justify the practice were: First, they believed that *Bura Penu* saw evil in the first feminine creation and therefore they want to avoid

⁷⁶ Extracts from the earliest description reported to the Madras Government in 1837 by Mr. Russell of the Madras Civil Service. Cf. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 189.

⁷⁷ The purpose of the Meriah, as a rule, was to increase fertility of the soil. They hoped to obtain this by burying bits of the flesh of the victims in the fields. The British officers did not fail to point out the failures or the inefficacy of the sacrifice. They were even willing to take the blame on themselves. They tried to cure the common sickness by posting a doctor in the hill tract. Though between 1837 and 1854 no fewer than 1506 victims were rescued, the economic status of the people remained the same. The Kondh people gradually became convinced that their fields produced crops as good as formerly, and that sickness was no more prevalent. Animals were substituted for human victims, and it is believed that the Meriah horrors have finally been suppressed. Cf. V.A. SMITH, *The Oxford History of India. From the Earliest Times to the end of 1911*, Oxford 1928, p. 690; R.V. RUSSELL, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, vol. II, p. 479.

⁷⁸ As far as the origin of female infanticide is concerned, Kanchanmoy has the following to say: “The Kondh tradition had it that in ancient times two sisters, having failed to get husbands, got involved in incestuous relations with their first cousins – uncle’s sons – and the resultant social disgrace drove them to suicide by drowning. The men blamed the girls for the social opprobrium suffered by the two families and decided to destroy their female children at birth itself as a precaution against the occurrence of such scandals in future.” M. KANCHANMOY, *Changing Tribal Life in British Orissa*, New Delhi 1998, p. 47.

⁷⁹ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 121.

bringing evil to society. Explaining the problem Barbara M. Boal cited Macpherson, who reported that “throughout the Kondh country two-thirds of the feuds and clan warfare were the result of unresolved marriage disputes, and the average must have been even higher in the clans practising infanticide”.⁸⁰ Second, the bride price and its payment after desertion, plus payments for new marriages, led to innumerable misunderstandings and conflicts. Therefore, fathers very often looked upon their girl babies as ‘trouble-makers’ and found female infanticide the lesser of two evils. As the British officers and other outsiders realised, tradition, myth and folklore held great influence on Kondh society, but so did the socio-economic factors underlying the traditions. Prejudices against women had a link with endless quarrels over property in the contracting and dissolution of marriage, since Kondh women had the right to change husbands at will.⁸¹

1.2.3.1.5 Socio-cultural Aspects of their life

Kondh is a generic term that stands for various groups and subgroups. The Kondhs are divided into different groups mainly on the basis of geography and socio-cultural dispositions. Kondhs could be divided into five broad categories: *Kutia* Kondhs, *Dongoria* Kondhs, *Malia* Kondhs, *Kuvi* Kondhs and *Desia* Kondhs. The inhabitants of the Ganjam Mountains in general are shy, timid and hesitant to associate themselves with people of the plain.⁸² Exogamy is strictly observed among the Kondhs. Major Macpherson says that among the Kondhs intermarriage between persons of the same tribe, however large or scattered, is considered incestuous and punishable by death.⁸³ Kondhs are faithful to their friends and devoted to their chiefs;⁸⁴ they are resolute, brave, hospitable and industrious,⁸⁵ but these qualities met with little recognition among the Oriya Hindus.⁸⁶ Speaking about the virtues of Kondhs, T.J. Maltby commented: “They are too simple-minded to tell a lie, and prefer the truth. Death is preferred to transportation for lie.”⁸⁷ Kondhs are known for the love of their race and territory,

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 122

⁸¹ The entire chapter of M. Kanchannoy on “Female Infanticide in the Hill Tracts of Ganjam” is well documented with convincing arguments. Cf. M. KANCHANNOY, *Changing Tribal Life in British Orissa*, pp. 45 – 58.

⁸² R.K. NAYAK et al., *Kondhs*, pp. 7 - 8.

⁸³ K.P. BAHADUR, *Castes, Tribes and Culture of India. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, vol. III, p. 19.

⁸⁴ The faithfulness of Kondhs to their chief is proverbial. Probably this induced the British to stop interfering in the internal affairs of Kondh. The principle of authority is very strong among the Kondhs. The clan chief has all the power over the clan, the chief of the village over the village and the head of the family over the family. They are like kings in their respective areas. Cf. P. ROSSILLON, “Moeurs et Coutumes du peuple kui, Indes Anglaises”, in *Anthropos* 6 (1911), p. 999.

⁸⁵ Similar comments were made by Macpherson, a government officer who spent long years among the Kondhs and who had a good acquaintance with the Kondhs. Kondhs are strong, intelligent and good-natured. In times of peace they are jolly companions and in times of war dangerous enemies. Cf. Ibid., p. 998.

⁸⁶ R.V. RUSSELL, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, vol. II, p. 470.

⁸⁷ T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p. 68.

because of which they experience independence. No Kondh can imagine migrating to other places no matter what the situation may be, for only infidels migrate.⁸⁸ This is due to the strong bond that exists for both the living and the dead, between an individual and the community. The Kondhs are poor but they live with the hope that one day all their sufferings will disappear and that there will be a feast. Barbara M. Boal observed: “Man in Kui society has meaning primarily as a member of a group. His loyalty to, and place within, the kinship group goes without question, and governs the life of traditional Kondh or Christian alike. His secondary involvement is in the village community where similarly prescribed patterns are laid down for him. These regulate both his community commitments and his personal behaviour.”⁸⁹

A distinctive mark of Kondh women is facial tattooing; far from representing beauty, it portrays a period of vulnerability and aggression. The facial tattooing of Kondh women began when Kobi Upendro became a Raja. He came from the original lineage of the peacock, or *medarabonjo*, literally the one hatched from the peacock’s egg. He was a knowledgeable man but an evil one. It was from his time onwards that *Kui* women’s faces were tattooed (to make them unattractive to him) – for he used to come up and take away the attractive women.⁹⁰

1.2.3.1.6 Socio-economic life

The Kondhs are strictly agricultural people, and the salient features of their religious belief bear references to the fertilisation of the earth.⁹¹ The lifestyle of Kondhs is very simple. Their houses are made up of wooden logs, planks and a thatched-grass roof. They are a close-knit group. They practice patriarchy. At the death of the father, the eldest son assumes the leadership and becomes the head of the family. Kondhs are intimately connected with the forest and land. They cultivate *kandulo* (haricots, a kind of bean), turmeric, mustard, ginger, sesame, etc.⁹² Their cultivation is dependent on rain. When the rainfall is scanty, they turn to the forest for its products: fruits, roots, etc. They are poor even though they are known as hard workers. Since they are a shy group they depend on the Pano neighbours for the sale of their products. Using the simplicity and vulnerability of Kondhs, the Panos often exploited them. *Mohulo* or *Mahua* (*Bassia Latifolia*) is very much linked with the life of Kondhs.⁹³ It is not an exaggeration to say that this tree with its flower has saved the entire population during famine.

⁸⁸ P. ROSSILLON, “Moeurs et Coutumes du Peuple Kui, Indes Anglaises”, in *Anthropos* 6 (1911), p. 1000.

⁸⁹ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 54.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁹¹ The professions found honourable for Kondhs are agriculture, hunting and war. It is probably for this reason that Kondhs were unable to procure victims for the Meriah sacrifice and sought the help of Panos. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁹² Msgr. Rossillon observed: “Les principales céréales cultivées chez eux sont: *kudinga* le riz, *kanga* les lentilles, *ioelaka* le maïs, *kueri* le millet; à ces céréales ajoutons les haricots (*kandulo*) de plusieurs espèces”. P. ROSSILLON, “Moeurs et Coutumes du Peuple Kui, Indes Anglaises”, in *Anthropos* 6 (1911), p. 1001.

⁹³ Everything in the tree is useful: oil produced from the fruit mixed with clarified butter possesses medicinal effect, the flower is used as food (they dry and preserve them for the monsoon when they are unable to procure food), and to make liquor. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 1002.

Though agriculture is the main occupation, it is not very developed. Every village has a number of paddy fields to cultivate and a forest tract to make into arable fields. The villagers set fire to the area, as a preparation, and cultivate it for three years. They raise *kueri* (millet) in the first year and *kandulo* (bean) in the following two years. In the fifth year they allow the land to lie fallow. Then they once again begin with the cultivation of *kueri*.⁹⁴ The cleared land has to be distributed equally to all those who live in the village. Then it depends on the family members to develop the land for cultivation. The Kondhs were in a semi-savage stage and they sowed very little. The forest offered them three-fourth of their food: fruits, herbs, leaves, roots and game.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 1008.

⁹⁵ NEYRET, "Extrait d'une lettre de Mgr. Neyret, évêque d'Olène et Vicaire Apostolic de Visagapatam, à MM. les Directeurs de l'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 27 (1855), p.361.

1.2.3.1.7 Socio-political life of Kondhs

Kondhs had a definite political system that was later influenced by outsiders. Formerly, some Kondhs were under the dominion of the kings of Khurda and others were under the *Patros*. In their political hierarchy, after the Rajas and *Patros* came the *Moliko*, *Digalo* and *Podhano*.⁹⁶ In every district there was a *Moliko*, and he was assisted by a *Digalo*. A *Moliko* was always a Kondh, but as he was uneducated and unable to understand Oriya he was assisted by a *Digalo*, who as a rule was a *Pano* (panam). The *Moliko* and *Digalo* presided over the meetings and judged certain cases. Every individual gave some amount of rice as payment for their service. In every village there was a *Podhano*, which was a hereditary title. In order to obtain this position one had to be from the family of the chief and to be capable of exercising the office. The traditional Kondh leadership was strong and respected by the members. The village headman was considered to be the symbol of the group's well being.⁹⁷

Jani, the high priest, was also an important person in the traditional Kondh hierarchy. His chief function was to celebrate the community sacrifices to Bura God or Tari Penu. This office was inherited. Next in line were the priests who were considered divine. They had some practical knowledge of herbal medicine. Then came the *Darni* keeper, who represented the community in performing necessary rituals and sacrifices at the *Darni* stones. He was chosen by the deity and ratified by the community. The Kondhs were born cooperators. They lived in a community and died in a community. Individualism was traditionally non-existent and even today, despite the onslaughts of modern influence, it is only slowly encroaching upon the Kondh community. Their villages may be scattered, but their clan bonds are still very tight.⁹⁸

1.2.3.2 Panos

The Panos, a Dravidian caste,⁹⁹ form one of the largest groups of *Dalits*¹⁰⁰ in Orissa. There are myths and traditions that flood around the Pano community regarding

⁹⁶ *Patros* are the representatives of the kings. They generally belong to the Brahmin community. *Moliko* is the recognised head of the Kondh community who takes the service of a Pano with a title *Digalo*. *Digalo* is the spokesman of *Moliko* who is shy and uneducated.

⁹⁷ Some of the functions of village headman are "to preside over the traditional village council; to receive important guests; to perform certain duties for the community on ritual occasions; to be ultimately responsible for ensuring that festivals are rightly fixed, the right sacrifices and offerings arranged, duties rightly allocated, invitations to the right guests from neighbouring villages, and, if the need arises, to meet with the headman of other villages on some wider issue, one of them being elected leader for that specific occasion, and simply as 'first among equals'". R.K. NAYAK et al., *Kondhs*, p. 31.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁹⁹ Society for Evaluation, *The Panos. Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, Social Services, Research and Training, Delhi, and National Institute of Social Work and Social Sciences, Bhubaneswar, 1995 – 1996, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ The term *Dalits* denotes the people who are considered to be low in the caste hierarchy. They were formally known as *Harijans*, a term given by M.K. Gandhi, or 'Scheduled Castes', a term now in use in the Constitution of India. They are socially outcastes, economically live in misery, and religiously seemed to be polluting. However, given a chance they prefer to call themselves *Dalits*, because it conveys what they are. "The term dalit derived from the Sanskrit root *dal* which means to crack, open, split, etc. when used as a noun or adjective it means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed,

the name itself.¹⁰¹ Very little is known regarding the origin of the Panos¹⁰² and the purpose of their migration to the hills from the plains.¹⁰³ One of the probable reasons for their migration to the hills is that they belonged to an untouchable caste and wanted to avoid the caste stigma. So they did not mind living a life of hardship in the hills.¹⁰⁴ R. K. Nayak is of the opinion that the Panos were once considered as Tribals but after 1950 they were included in the list of Scheduled Castes.¹⁰⁵ This could be an added reason why they chose to live in the mountains. The Panos are considered to be of lower status in the caste hierarchy and are landless agricultural workers, often renting fields from the Kondhs. Some of them are petty traders. Many Panos are cattle dealers or hawkers. They buy herds of old animals in the Orissa plains and sell them to the Kondh villages. Some of them are petty merchants, for they buy salt and snuff tobacco at Surada or other centres in the plains and sell it from door to door in the mountain villages. When their goods are sold, 'they bring home part of their earnings and drink the rest'.¹⁰⁶

destroyed, etc." This expresses the state in which they are found. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891 - 1956) coined the term dalit to portray the "oppressed and broken victims of the caste-ridden society". L. STANISLAUS, *The Liberative Mission of the Church among Dalit Christians*, Delhi 1999, pp. 2 -3

¹⁰¹ *Panams, Pans, Panas and Panos* are the words used to refer to the group. The word Pano is probably derived from the word *Pani*, which means water. This could be a functional name as their ancestors used to carry water to the Kings. As the years went by, the people were identified with what they brought, hence they got the name *Pano*. There is yet another explanation found in the Rig Veda 6.37,74. It speaks of a group called *Pani*. This was one of the important groups, namely *Rakshasa, Asura and Pani*. It is common belief that the present Panos are the descendants of that group. However, these are popular understandings that are prevalent among the Panos themselves. Sociologists and anthropologists are yet to discover the hidden and forgotten origin and history of the Panos. Cf. Reported from an interview conducted by S. SINGH, *A Critical Study on Socio-Religious dimension of Pano Marriage*, Khristo Jyoti, Sason 1998 (unpublished).

¹⁰² Nothing is known regarding the origin of Panos. They are thought to have been Hindus but have accepted the beliefs and rituals of their hosts. For example in the Kondh hills they adopted the beliefs of Kondhs. Cf. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 22.

¹⁰³ Regarding the migration of Panos to the Kondh Mountains, J. Pathy wrote: "All accounts suggest that the Kondh purchased Meriah through the Hindu low caste Panas (Panos), who lived in and around the Kondh villages. Existing evidence points to the immigration of this caste to Kandhland less than 200 years ago. They came after being exiled from some of the neighbouring Hindu kingdoms for their alleged involvement in thefts and robbery. The Kandhas (Kondhs) gave them shelter in their villages, and they in turn acted as mediators between the Kandhas and Oriyas, and worked as weavers and traders. In other words, if the Panas were the sole procurers of the victims, the tradition of the human sacrifice by purchase of victims can at best be traced to the end of the 18th or beginning of the 19th century, which almost coincides with the East India Company's attempts to annex the territory." J. PATHY, "Colonial Ethnography of the Kandha. White Man's Burden or Political Expediency?", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30/4 (1995), p. 224.

¹⁰⁴ However, the real reason needs to be unearthed. Cf. Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, pp. 1, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Panos are one of the 93 Scheduled Caste communities in Orissa. R.K NAYAK et al., *Kondhs*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ They are presented as the laziest race in the country. Otto Waack in his work on 'Church and Mission in India', cites D.N. Majumdar that "An entire tribe cannot be criminal, nor even can a large section be so... Many members of criminal tribes do not commit any crime, neither do they have any ambivalence towards crime". These are some of the 'white man's' prejudices concerning Panos. This possibly mirrors

Kondhs found the Panos to be indispensable neighbours from time immemorial for providing certain necessities of daily life. One could speak here of a symbiotic relationship between the two.

The Panos have their own language, but they quickly learn the dominant language in their vicinity. “Thus, in Phulbani, a large number of Panos call themselves *kui Panos*, since they speak *Kui* (Kondh language) at home”.¹⁰⁷ Though the origin of the Panos lies in obscurity,¹⁰⁸ they have been part of the *Kui*-speaking community and have been influenced by the beliefs and practices of the Kondhs. They are so flexible that they speak *Kui* like their mother tongue and their life style and religion is firmly rooted in Kondh culture.¹⁰⁹ “In Koraput district the Panos live with the *Kuvi* Kondhs, *Dongria* Kondhs, and *Konda Doras*; in Ganjam district, with the Saoras and Kondhs; in Phulbani district, with the *Maliah* Kondhs and *Kutia* Kondhs”.¹¹⁰ But the Kondhs consider them socially inferior.¹¹¹

1.2.3.2.1 Pano Belief System

The Panos’ belief system does not conform to the Hindu pattern, but rather to the dominant cultural and religious practices of the place. Like their tribal neighbours: Panos believe in a world of spirits. In general, there are two kinds of spirits: benevolent and malevolent. Benevolent spirits do good and protect the human beings. If offended, they withdraw their protection and allow the person to be vulnerable to the attacks of malevolent spirits. There are some spirits that are by nature malevolent. They roam around the area looking for victims and they dwell in odd places, like “steep cliffs, high trees, dense vegetation, deep ravines, waterfalls, caves, deserted houses, burial grounds, cremation sites and so on”.¹¹² Unnatural deaths are caused by the malevolent spirits.

the existing prejudices, particularly when they are compared with the shy, introvert and community-bound Kondhs. O. WAACK, *Church and Mission in India. The History of Jeypore Church and the Breklum Mission (1876 - 1914)*, Delhi 1997, pp. 36 – 40; F. MOGET, *Early Days of the Visakhapatnam Mission 1846 – 1920*, Bangalore 1997, p. 246.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p 8.

¹⁰⁸ The whole question centres on whether one considers their origin as Tribals or Dalits. Some like R. K. Nayak and Bailey are of the opinion that at one point they were considered as Tribals but later were included in the list of scheduled castes – and so they are considered untouchables. But if one assumes that the Panos were once Tribals, then they are not Hindus. Anthropologists in general are of the opinion that the tribes, who have their traditional religion, do not come under the fold of Hinduism. Cf. Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, p.9; R.K. NAYAK et al., *Kondhs*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, p. 8.

¹¹¹ The Kondhs consider the Panos inferior not because they procured human victims for the sacrifice nor because they brought the victims through abduction or fraudulent means, “but because they did it for purposes that were deep-rooted not in their own religious values but in Kondh”. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 292.

¹¹² “A person killed by a tiger turns into a dangerous spirit, which roams around in the jungle in search of victims. The family of the victim is temporarily excommunicated till the stipulated sacrifices are made to rectify the relationship resulted in the death of the person. A person dead by this kind of unnatural death is either buried or cremated far from the village, mostly in the jungle. This site is normally avoided for

Panos believe that *gramdevta*, the village deity, protects the village. She is propitiated regularly with offerings. The village priest is responsible for keeping the deity happy.¹¹³ Panos believe that harm can be inflicted on a person, including taking the person's life away, through a magic spell or black magic, which the Panos call spiritual means. They also believe in witchcraft. Witches are not respected but feared, as their sight might bring evil to any one. The concept of evil eye is also deep-rooted among the Panos. Though a witch can cause disease or bring other serious disorders to the family or to individuals, the spell can be removed or rectified by another, more powerful witchdoctor.¹¹⁴ Some of the tribal priests are invited to perform certain rituals of the Panos.¹¹⁵ They believe in the ancestral spirits that protect them.

The ancestral spirits protect their household from possible dangers, and provide it with good bounty. The family must always apportion a share for them during feasts and festivals. Ancestral spirits can also be erratic, just like living human beings. If they do not receive due attention, they might make their displeasure known by way of sending diseases, or effecting a crop failure, sickness to the domestic animals and so on. Persons dying unnatural or violent deaths turn into malevolent spirits. They are not accepted among the ancestral community, and hence ceaselessly roam around looking for company. No death ritual is performed for such spirits.¹¹⁶

Like the Tribals, the Panos consider the family in which a child is born impure for 21 days. This period ends after the *ekoisia* ceremony¹¹⁷ is performed, in which the mother takes a purificatory bath and washes her clothes. The baby is also given a purificatory bath. The relatives, neighbours and village elders are invited for the occasion, which concludes with a feast.¹¹⁸

Deaths can be natural – old age, sickness, etc – or unnatural. Persons dying a normal death are given a normal farewell. On the third day following the death of the person the relatives gather at his home for the purificatory rites. Some cooked food is taken to the grave for the deceased.¹¹⁹ Besides the ceremonies following the death of the family member there is also a common ceremony that is performed annually. “On *Kartika amavasya* (new moon of November), the Panos perform a collective community ceremony for the ancestral souls. All the ancestors are remembered on that

fear of being attacked by the tiger. The site itself is sealed by a *gunia* doctor.” Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, p. 45.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 43.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

¹¹⁵ “Kondh *beju* and *bejuni* in Bissam Cuttack area, and *dissaris* in South Koraput, are hired by Panos, to perform reparatory rituals in times of sickness, death and impurity.” Ibid., p.55.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

¹¹⁷ *Ekoisia* is a purificatory ceremony performed on the 21st day of the birth of a child. Till then, not only are the mother and child considered to be impure, but also the entire family. After this purificatory ceremony the mother is allowed to enter the kitchen and to cook food. After this ceremony, the child is also accepted as a member of the community.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

day. The households also perform rituals in their houses. The village priest officiates at the community sacrifice, which is followed by a community feast.”¹²⁰

1.2.3.2.2 Socio-economic life of Panos

The Panos are skilful basket makers. Their baskets with different designs are sold easily in the tribal market. The Tribals need the baskets for various storage purposes. Traditionally, the Panos were also known as weavers. They wove their own clothing and that of the Kondhs, who, not being mobile, found it difficult to obtain clothes from outside.¹²¹ Panos are talented musicians. They provide musical services for the many non-tribal families in the area, on the occasion of marriages, initiation ceremonies, death ceremonies, and various other ceremonies.¹²² Besides providing victims for the sacrifice (animals have now replaced human victims), they carry messages, such as the summons to councils or field-work.¹²³ The Panos are richly rewarded for their musical services by the non-Tribals. This trade provided seasonal employment to quite a number of Pano families in the area.¹²⁴ However, being the servants of the Kondhs, the Panos had no right to own forests nor to undertake any agricultural activities without their approval. They were landless for several generations. With the changing times, and in the course of land settlement, some Panos have managed to obtain land in their own name.¹²⁵ Many ‘well-to-do’ Kondhs have employed Panos in their hill plots for agricultural labour.

The Pano traders move from house to house, collecting agricultural surpluses and forest products from Kondhs and paying them in cash or with other items the latter need. Though they do not get a good price for their produce, the Kondhs are happy to obtain them at their own doorstep. With an extensive amount of produce and an inability to market them, the Kondhs are happy to be relieved of their marketing responsibility. The Panos also understand the Kondh economic cycle well and know their seasonal necessities. This way the Kondhs can devote more time to agricultural activities and to social interaction.¹²⁶ In speaking about the occupations of Panos, the outsiders mirror existing prejudices: “weaving, trading and theft”. However, there is at least one group of Panos who have taken to thieving as their main profession.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

¹²¹ The demand for the clothes woven by the Panos could also be another reason as to why Panos migrated to the hill tracts. Traditionally they were the major suppliers of clothes to the Tribals. Cf. Ibid., pp. 39, 63.

¹²² Their musical instruments consist of *mahuri* (pipe), *dhola* and *badya* (drums). They were paid for their musical service in kind. They are not only good instrumentalists, but also good singers and dancers. Ibid., p. 38.

¹²³ B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 23.

¹²⁴ Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, p. 64.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

¹²⁷ One can't generalise and apply this to Panos as a group. There are some villages that have taken to robbery, one such a group is “Jayantira Panos” of Jajpur area in Orissa. They have some prescribed rituals to be followed before they set out for their work. They have their reasons for such practices. For a

Outsiders might see the Panos as parasites who exploit the poor Tribals. But the reality is different. They help the Tribals during the lean months by bringing provisions to their doorsteps. They advance credit and provide the basic necessities of the Tribals. They exchange old and infirm animals.¹²⁸ Describing the Panos, Col. E. T. Dalton, who is known for his contribution to the ethnography of Eastern India, wrote:

The low bastard Hindu people called Pans [Panos], already noticed as procurers for the Meriah sacrifices, are numerous in Boad [Baud] . . . The Kandhs associate with them on a more equal footing, allowing them to hold land and share in the village festivals. They also ply their trades as weavers, and the poorest of them work as farm labourers, cultivating land belonging to Kandhs and making over to their landlords half the produces as rent.¹²⁹

The forest also offers the Panos some income through leaf plates, brooms, ropes and mats. The Panos' economic wretchedness is described in the following words: "During the months of March to May food is in short supply. All agricultural produce would have been consumed by this time and the people solely depended upon the availability of food from the jungle. Some forest flowers and roots are still available in the jungle. These are collected, processed and eaten. Mangoes are available from April."¹³⁰

1.2.3.2.3 Political System of Panos

There is a *Panchayat* in all the areas where the Panos live. Elucidating the purpose of Panchayat, the Society for Evaluation states: "It is an assembly of people which is constituted to settle disputes or to rectify a social transgression or wrongdoing within a community, according to its code of conduct."¹³¹ Besides acting as a guardian of the community and settling inter-caste disputes, the *Panchayat* played a pivotal role in the social, economic and religious development of Panos. The village headman is called *Bada Nayak*, senior head. He is responsible for the well-being of the community and his word is final in village meetings. He is assisted by the *Sana Nayak*, the assistant head.¹³² The Panos are widely scattered, although their larger concentration is in the districts of Phulbani, Koraput and Ganjam.¹³³

1.2.3.3 Symbiotic Relationship between Panos and Kondhs

The Tribals and Panos have been living a symbiotic life for generations. There have been cultural exchanges, socio-economic reciprocity and sharing of modern

detailed study on the Jayantira Panos see M. BEHERA, *The Jayantira Pano: A Scheduled Caste Community of Orissa*, K.K. MOHANTY (ed.), Bhubaneswar 1991; B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 23.

¹²⁸ Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, p. 13.

¹²⁹ E.T. DALTON, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal: Tribal History of Eastern India*, Calcutta 1872, p. 299.

¹³⁰ Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, p. 81.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 95 - 96.

objectives as well.¹³⁴ Their relationship is mutually beneficial.¹³⁵ Since Panos are considered culturally inferior, no intermarriage normally takes place and inter-dining as a rule is avoided.¹³⁶ It is believed that the Tribals brought Panos to perform certain roles, both economic and social. Traditionally every Kondh village designated three Panos for specific functions. One such role was the *Barik*. Describing the role of the *Barik*, Barbara M. Boal wrote: “The role of barik was of a social nature. He assisted the village headman in organising village meetings and carrying messages to different villages and also liaising between the Tribals and outsiders. He assisted them in interacting with different government offices whenever necessity arose.”¹³⁷ The second was the role of the *goudia* or herdsman, an important one for economic development. The Kondhs, who preoccupied themselves with the cultivation of their hill plots, could not tend their cattle. Hence they required the service of the Panos as *goudia* or herdsman, for which they were given a just remuneration in kind (usually daily portions of cooked food). An annual grant of paddy rights and other items needed by the Panos were also provided.¹³⁸ Women from *goudia* families assisted their husbands in tending the cattle. Finally the Panos were employed as *Jhatenis* (sweepers). Very often women were employed for this role. The remuneration was mostly in kind.¹³⁹ Panos also sometimes performed the funeral ceremonies of Kondhs.¹⁴⁰

1.2.3.3.4 Panos and Meriah Sacrifice

Generally, the Panos are considered inferior to Kondhs. But those who supply sacrificial buffalo were considered equal.¹⁴¹ One of the important functions of Panos was to provide sacrificial offering for the Meriah sacrifice. Before the British visited the hill tracts, the Meriah sacrifice involved human victims. Speaking about the Panos, Bannerman, Magistrate of the Ganjam District in the 1840s, described “a set of infamous wretches who carry on a trade in the blood of their fellow-men”.¹⁴² In distinguishing the two groups, Kondhs and Panos, Macpherson had this to say about the latter: they were “excluded from the property in land and from power to practice the only honourable art (farming); and depressed by a sense of social inferiority; a mean,

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 102.

¹³⁵ Radhakant Nayak is of the opinion that their mutually beneficial relationship goes back to the pre-history times. Cf. R.K. NAYAK et al., *Kondhs*, p. 10.

¹³⁶ If it occurred the entire family has to undergo a ritual cleansing. B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 23.

¹³⁷ “When the headman tells him to call a village meeting or to give any information to the villagers, he gives the message in a loud shout either in the evening or early morning, when all are in their homes”. Ibid., p. 11; Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, p. 61.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁴⁰ P. ROSSILLON, “Moeurs et Coutumes du peuple kui, Indes Anglaises”, in *Anthropos* 7 (1912), p. 656.

¹⁴¹ As a sign of their acceptance as equals, those Panos who provide victims for the sacrifice were given a turmeric bath, along with the elders of the village. Society for Evaluation, *The Panos: Study of a Scheduled Caste Community in Orissa*, p. 56.

¹⁴² B.M. BOAL, *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*, p. 24.

false, mercenary and thievish race, who live chiefly upon the ignorance, the superstition, and the industry of the primitive (Kondhs) as low priests, brokers, pedlars, sycophants and cheats”.¹⁴³

Living in remote jungles inhabited by fierce animals and impenetrable to outsiders, and surviving in a malaria-infested terrain, the Kondhs led a simple life, but one filled with ignorance and superstition. They attributed their ‘backwardness’ to the anger of God and to the spirits. How long must they still live this secluded and withdrawn life? How long have the Kondhs to wait for the dawn? Oppressed in every corner of life, marginalized and despised by outsiders, the Panos looked for a time of plenty and prosperity. Will their dreams be a reality one day?

1.3 Gangpur

The three major aboriginal tribes of the Gangpur State among whom Christianity took a deep root are also included in the study. They are the Austric-speaking Mundas, their kinsmen the Kharias, and the Dravidian-speaking Oraons. A better understanding of their acceptance of Catholicism would obviously require a thorough investigation of their social, economic, political and religious background. Even though they came under different political administrative units, most of the tribal inhabitants of Gangpur share a common heritage with their kinsmen of Chotanagpur and still maintain their roots in Chotanagpur. In fact, the Gangpur State itself was part of Chotanagpur division until 1905 when it became part of the Orissa division.

1.3.1 The Topography of the Gangpur State

Gangpur,¹⁴⁴ at the beginning of the 20th century, was a tributary state of Orissa, in the British Bengal Province, lying between 21° 47' and 22° 32' N. and 83° 33' and 85° 11' E., with an area of 2,492 square miles. It is bounded on the north by the state of Jashpur and the Ranchi District; on the east by Singhbhum; on the south by the states of Bonai, Sambalpur, and Bamra; and on the west by the State of Raigarh in the central provinces. Gangpur consisted of a long undulating tableland about 700 feet above the sea, dotted here and there with hill ranges and isolated peaks which rise to the height of 2,240 feet.¹⁴⁵

The plateau is enriched by rivers, which pose a threat to the inhabitants with their seasonal floods, causing enormous destruction. The principal rivers are the Ib, which enters the State from Jashpur and passes through from the north to the south to join the Mahanadi in Sambalpur, the Sankh, and the south Koel. The latter two meet in eastern Gangpur, and the united streams, under the name of Brahmani, flow south into

¹⁴³ This is yet another example of an outsiders’ prejudice against a group, which scored low in terms of character or submission, especially when compared with the Kondh neighbours. Such condemnation today would be erroneous and offensive as many groups of Panos are highly responsible and are attracted to the welfare of those around them. Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Gangpur comprises a major part of the present civil district of Sundargarh in the state of Orissa. Although the State was under the Orissa division, it enjoyed its semi-independent character until the independence of India and later became part of the Sundargarh civil district of Orissa State.

¹⁴⁵ *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*. Vol.XII, Oxford 1908, p. 140.

the plains of Orissa.¹⁴⁶ The confluence of the Koel and the Sankh is said to be one of the most beautiful spots in Gangpur. According to a local tradition, the sage Parasara is said to have become infatuated with the fisherman's daughter Matsya Gandha here. The offspring of the two was Vyasa, the reputed compiler of the *Vedas* and *Mahabharat*. As with most Indian rivers, these too run dry during the summer months. Hence, the adjacent forest offers food to the hungry tribes whenever they were unable to cultivate their land, as well as refuge to various wild beasts.¹⁴⁷

1.3.2 The Historical Situation of Gangpur State

The prehistory of Gangpur awaits a clear solution to several problems. Since the state did not enjoy total independence, its political history is limited to that of its neighbouring states. The documentary evidence needed to construct a historical background is scanty.

It was probably during the time of the Gangas (1038 - 1435) that Bonai and Gangpur were consolidated as separate political units, and regarded as feudal states.¹⁴⁸ In his efforts to trace the origin of Gangpur kingdom, C. W. E. Connolly wrote: "The earliest chiefs of Gangpur that there is any information of belonged to the Kishori Bans, and were descendants of the famous Kishori Bans of Puri, who after their defeat by the Mahrattas fled in all directions, one line settling here."¹⁴⁹ Gangpur continued to be under the control of the Chauhan rulers of Sambalpur till 1818, which itself belonged to the Maharajahs of Nagpur. In the meanwhile, the British invaded Orissa in 1803 and soon after tried to expand their power to other parts of the territory. Major Broughton conquered Sambalpur in January 1804. Though in the Treaty of Deogaon of December 17, 1803, Raghujji Bhonsla ceded the territory of Cuttack to the East India Company, he was unwilling to part with the territory of Sambalpur, but the chieftains and Zamindars were unwilling to return to the Maratha authority and "voluntarily surrendered to the British Government". They declared their willingness to pay the tribute that the British Government would fix.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Gangpur was also ceded in 1803 to the British East India Company by the Treaty of Deogaon but was restored to the Maharajah in 1806. It reverted to a provisional engagement with Madhuji Bhonsla in 1818 and was finally ceded in 1826. In 1821 the federal supremacy of Sambalpur over Gangpur was cancelled by the government, and a fresh *Sanad*¹⁵¹ was granted to the chief. In 1827, after the permanent cessation, another *Sanad* was granted for a period of five years, but

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ N. SENAPATI (ed.), *Orissa District Gazetteers: Sundargarh*, Cuttack 1992. p. 54.

¹⁴⁹ However, "the local traditions of Gangpur mention the existence of a Kesari line with sixteen kings who ruled over Gangpur. It is said, they had their headquarters variously at Belsaragarh, Junagarh, Masabiragarh, etc." Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁵¹ A *Sanad* is a (i) charter or grant, giving its name to a class of states in Central India held under a Sanad, (ii) any kind of deed grants. Under the *Sanad* the chief was formally recognized and permitted to administer his territory subject to prescribed conditions, and the tribute was fixed for a period of 20 years, at the end of which it was liable to revision. Cf. *Indian Year Book*, Bombay 1930, p. 11.

this was allowed to run until 1875 before it was renewed. The last *Sanad* was granted to the chief in 1899. The state was transferred from Chotanagpur to the Orissa Division in 1905. At the turn of the century the recorded population had increased from 191,440 in 1891 to 238,896 in 1901. With the establishment of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, which runs through the south-eastern corner for about 70 miles, Gangpur had the potential to develop trade and commerce. About the same time when the actual parish at Kesramal in Gangpur was established, the inhabitants of Gangpur numbered around 260,000, of which the Oraons alone constituted 60,000.¹⁵²

Villages in Gangpur are held either on feudal tenures or on farming leases. The feudal tenures date back to early times when the vassals received land grants for rendering military service. The other villages are leased to small farmers, called *Gaontias* or *Ganjhus*, who pay a fixed annual rent and are remunerated by lands, called *Bogra*, which are held rent-free.

After the *Kol* insurrection of 1831 – 1833, a new province called ‘South Western Frontier Agency’ was created under Regulation XIII of 1833, which later (in 1864) was called *Chutia Nagpur* (Chotanagpur) with a commissioner acting in the name of the governor-general. Gangpur was transferred to the Agency. In 1891 fresh *Sanads* were granted to Gangpur and Bonai which regulated their relationship with the British government.¹⁵³ On October 16, 1905, Bonai and Gangpur were transferred from the control of Chotanagpur to that of the Commissioner of Orissa. In the following year, the Office of a Political Agent was created for the Orissa states under the commissioner. In 1912, Bihar and Orissa were constituted as a separate province,¹⁵⁴ and “the Orissa states continued to be under the Orissa Division till 1922, when the Political Agent was designated as Political Agent and Commissioner, Orissa Feudatory States, and placed directly under the Governor of Bihar and Orissa”.¹⁵⁵

1.3.3 The People under Study

1.3.3.1 Oraons

The word *Oraon* is probably derived from *horo*, man, a Mundari word, and a similar word *Koro* is found in *Kurukh*, the language of the *Kurukhs*, another name for the Oraons.¹⁵⁶ The *Kurukhs* are said to have migrated from the Karnatic region. They split into two groups: one following the Ganges, occupied the Rajmahal jungles; the other, much larger, occupied the north-western corner of Chotanagpur. Their language, akin to Kanarese, indicates that they must have originally come from the south and gradually displaced the Mundas from many of the areas in the Ranchi plateau, which

¹⁵² F. J. BOWEN, *Father Constant Lievens: The apostle of Chotanagpur*, London 1936, p. 155.

¹⁵³ A *Sanad* was granted to the then Raja Raghunath Sekhar Deo, in order to show his power and position vis-à-vis the British. Cf. N. SENAPATI (ed.), *Orissa District Gazetteers: Sundargarh*, p. 61.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ The Oraon tribe today prefers to call themselves the *Kurukh* people and their language *Kurukh*. For the sake of uniformity and to avoid confusion, Oraon is used in this work.

they now inhabit.¹⁵⁷ It may be also mentioned that, according to the Oraon traditions, the tribe had a long and happy stay on the banks of the Sone River, in what is today the Shahabad district.¹⁵⁸

The Oraons are perhaps best known as *Dhangars*,¹⁵⁹ not only in the Chotanagpur region but also among their kinsmen in other parts of the country. Their language is also called *Dhangar*. The name Oraon is given to them by their Hindu neighbours.¹⁶⁰ For some unknown reason there seems to have occurred a split in the tribe: the *Nagpurias*, the *Kisans* and the *Dhankas*. “Many thousands of Nagpuri Oraons are found in Gangpur, their villages studding the country side by side with *Dhanka* and *Kisan* villages. The bulk of the Oraon population of Gangpur, however, is made of *Kisans* (in Hindi it means farmers) or *Gangpuria Oraons*”.¹⁶¹ The *Dhanka* Oraons are rather numerous in Gangpur. Their tribal language does not seem, any more than that of the *Kisans*, to offer important points of difference from the Nagpuria, or standard, Oraon. A few words may be peculiar to them.¹⁶²

1.3.3.1.1 Religious Practices of Oraons

In religion, the attitude of Oraons is one of reverential fear towards the spirits, and this expressed itself in a dependence on, a propitiation of, and a prayerful submission to these spirits.¹⁶³ The beneficent spirits were arranged in a hierarchical order with Dharmes at the top, who saw all that men and spirits did and thought.¹⁶⁴ The sacrificial offering to him must be white (either fowl or goat), and it must be made facing east. This particular rubric is not observed for the rest of the spirits. Dharmes, the supreme god of light and life, is the creator god of Oraons. He is both good and powerful. The desire of the righteous is to live with him after death; yet homage and

¹⁵⁷ There are various theories relating to the origin and migration of Oraons. S. C. Roy locates their original home in Deccan, whereas Col. E. Dalton assigns their origin to the western coast of India, but their own legends and folk tales narrate the Deccan or Konkan as their original home. From there they migrated to the Chotanagpur plateau via Shahabad and Rohtas. Cf. S. FUCHS, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, New Delhi 1973, p. 177; C. SAHU, “Oraon Dances of Bihar”, in R. D. TRIBHUWAN et al. (eds.), *Tribal Dances of India*, New Delhi 1999, p. 245.

¹⁵⁸ L. CARDON, *On the Oraon Tribe*, APBS, India 1 –General, p. 1; F.A. GRIGNARD, “The Oraons and Mundas: From the time of their settlement in India”, in *Anthropos* 6 (1909), p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ The official and recognised name of Oraons is *kurukhas*, but strangers call them *Dhangars*, which means “slaves”. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ P. TETE, *The Kharias and the History of the Catholic Church in Biru*, Ranchi 1990, p. 40.

¹⁶¹ L. CARDON, *On the Oraon Tribe*, p. 1.

¹⁶² Sometimes the *Gangpuria Oraons* are referred to as *Berga Oroaons*, which stands for *Belkha Oraons*, i.e. Oraons of the kingdom. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶³ F. DE SA, *Crisis in Chota Nagpur*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁴ Besides Dharmes (Sun God), the Oraons worship other village deities like Deasuli, Sarna, Burhia, Darka, Deswali and Gairahi Khunt. Cf. N. DUARY, “Oraon Dances in Chotanagpur: An Impact Study”, in R.D. TRIBHUWAN et al. (eds.), *Tribal Dances of India*, New Delhi 1999, p. 255; F. DE SA, *Crisis in Chota Nagpur*, p. 31.

sacrifices to him are meaningless, precisely because he is so good.¹⁶⁵ The *Dandakatta*¹⁶⁶ (crossing the stick) is one of their most important ceremonies, for it is performed at every venture of social consequence, at feasts and festivals, and at the commencement of every important event in the life of Oraons. A white fowl is sacrificed to appease him. Oraons believe also in evil spirits, which are to be propitiated with sacrifices during sickness and times of calamities.¹⁶⁷ L. Cardon observes that “other spirits, of a distinctly malignant character, do not live among us as a rule, they are tied up in some unknown place, whence however they can be occasionally released at the call of a sorcerer or a witch; then they play a havoc on the lives of men and beasts, cause illness, spread epidemics etc.”¹⁶⁸ The worst superstitious practices are those connected with the hereafter.¹⁶⁹

1.3.3.1.2 Socio-cultural Background

The child receives its name from its grandparents or from one of the ancestors.¹⁷⁰ People of non-Oraon caste are naturally outside of the community, and food, as a rule, is not taken with them. But, apart from this, they are treated with consideration and even kindness. The fact that the Oraons of Gangpur eat with the Mundas is remarkable, but incontestable. It is one instance of their many departures from the customs extant in the rest of the tribe.¹⁷¹ Oraons believe that the mother is defiled from the day of her delivery. She is debarred from entering kitchen for the fear of defiling the cooking utensils. She is expected to stay in a corner of the house where her food is handed to her. On the ninth day, when the *Chathi* ceremony takes place, she

¹⁶⁵ L. CARDON, *On the Oraon Tribe*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁶ Dandakatta, is a ritual act of thanking the Supreme God, Dharmes, for all the blessings received such as, good crops, numerous head of cattle, healthy children; at the same time it is also an intercession for happiness and prosperity. The purpose of this ceremony is to obtain protection from evil and misfortune caused by natural calamities and sickness. Cf. B. TIRKEY, “Oraon Approaches to God and spirits”, in *Sevartham* 7 (1982), pp. 26-27.

¹⁶⁷ P. TETE, *A Missionary Social Worker in India: J. B. Hoffmann, The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act and the Catholic Co-operatives 1893-1928*, Roma 1984, p. 4; “Strange as it may seem, the chief duty of the Naiga, the heathen priest is not sacrifice; praeternatural healing comes first. When a man falls sick, when epidemics break out, his it is to discover to which kind of harmful spirits the visitation is due. Once the harmful spirit is discovered propitiatory sacrifice is performed according to the prescribed ritual. It is the *naiga*, the heathen priest to determine whether a goat, a cock, a cow or a buffalo is offered for the sacrifice”. L. CARDON, *On the Oraon Tribe*, p. 8.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶⁹ As soon as a dead body has been taken out to be carried to the funeral pile on the *masra*, a stop is made: and the mourners strew the house floor with fine wood ashes; then, before starting themselves, they lock the door carefully. As soon as the home is reached after the ceremony, those ashes are scrutinized for footprints of fowls, snakes or cats, or for marks left by a thread. From these signs a judgement is made whether the deceased has been taken to the bosom of Dharmes, or swallowed up by the devils. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁷⁰ The desiccated umbilical chord of the infant is buried in one of the common rooms where the cattle spend the night. This often reminds them of their native place. “*A paddà nù enghai kuddà gararkì ra`ì*; in that village my naval-string lies buried”. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3 - 4.

purifies herself in the river and the infant's fluffy hair is cut, for it is considered to be unclean.

The Oraons generally regard their deceased as part of their family. Oraons cremate their dead like their Hindu neighbours. This may take place either immediately or after the bodies have been laid in a village grave for six or eight months. In either case, the ashes are collected in an earthen vessel and buried close to their house. Later the ashes are ceremonially carried on a particular day, when the river has practically no water, to the riverbed where they are deposited in the family *kunddis* (deep round holes).¹⁷²

The Oraons are divided into many exogamous clans, called *gotras*. Very often the name of the clan is taken from a fish, bird, animal, vegetable, etc. They respect their totemic animal or bird, and its killing or harming is prohibited. Traditionally the *Dhumkuria*, or youth dormitory, played an important role in instructing the youngsters in their way of life in the community. It was a school where the youth were initiated into the multifaceted reality of life. It is in front of the *Dhumkuria*, in the *Akhra*, that youngsters learn to sing and dance.

1.3.3.1.3 Economic and Political Conditions

The descendants of the Oraon village founders were known as *Bhuinars*.¹⁷³ Although there was no joint ownership of land, they were the owners of the *Bhuinari* village lands. The *Mahto* (the village headman) and the *Pahans* or *Naigas* (the village priests) must belong to the *Bhuinari Khunt* (the lineage of the village founders), and they alone were entitled to enjoy the fruit of the village service lands.¹⁷⁴ The political organization of Oraons is similar to that of their tribal neighbours, the Mundas. The Oraons have a confederation of several villages, called *Parha*. A *Parha* normally consists of either 7, 9, 12, 21, or 22 villages. An annual meeting of *Parha* is called *Parha Jatra*, when the communities of a *Parha* settle all their disputes and confirm their tribal solidarity by means of a big feast.¹⁷⁵ The Oraon is one of the largest agricultural tribal communities. Due to depletion of the land, man ratio, rough topography,

¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 14-15.

¹⁷³ "A small presence of Oraon tenants claim to be *addiyar*, i.e. to have sprung from the original settlers who cleared the primeval jungles and first put into value the fields still today in the possession of posterity. It is in this particularised sense that the word *addyas*, or rather its Hindi equivalent *bhuinari* has found its way into the CN tenancy Act". In common Oraon parlance, the word *addi* (ancestral) has a much wider application. Every Oraon styles himself in his heart an *addyas* by reference to some settler of the first hour. Every Oraon treasures up the name of his ancestral village and cherishes the memory of his ancestral fields. People residing out of their ancestral villages are particular, when they afford it, in carrying the remains of their dead to the *Kunddi* of that village. Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁴ The *Mahto* is the secular head of the village. He is responsible for the protection of the village from any external threats. He is respected by every member of the society. The *Pahan* is the religious head of the village. He is responsible for the sacrifices and offerings made to gods and the spirits. He acts as a mediator between people and the mystical powers. These two offices are important and they are responsible for the well-being of the community. P. EKKA, "Messianic Movements among the Chota Nagpur Tribes", in *Sevartham* 4 (1979), p. 22; C. SAHU, "Oraon Dances of Bihar", in R.D. TRIBHUWAN et al. (eds.), *Tribal Dances of India*, New Delhi 1999, pp. 246 – 247.

¹⁷⁵ S. FUCHS, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, pp. 152-153.

uneconomic land holdings, poor quality of soil, lack of irrigational facilities, lack of job opportunities in the industries, and a lack of specialisation, a large number of Oraons migrated to the neighbouring states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal as well as other parts of the country.¹⁷⁶

Just as the Mundas, so too have the Oraons a value-system enshrined in their traditions and socio-religious practices. The Oraons are guided concretely by their cultural, social and religious values which provide the basis for Oraon morality. Oraons believe that God has given human beings the command to be honest, truthful and generous and that he rewards them for their good deeds and punishes them for evil ones.¹⁷⁷ Next to God, Dharmes, the village *Panchayat* is considered to be the supreme authority among the Oraons. The *Panchayat* settles all disputes within the tribe, and the *Panchayat*'s decisions are binding. *Panchayat* counsellors delight to feast on the produce of a fine or of the fees exacted when a case has been judged.¹⁷⁸

Every Oraon is expected to abide by the norms of the tribe. Any breach of behavioural norm is frowned upon and sanctions are incurred against the offender.¹⁷⁹ Oraon dances, besides being a source of entertainment, also have a magical significance attached to them.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ The life of Oraons is centred around agriculture. Therefore, the land plays an important role in the life of the people. F. A. Grignard is of the opinion that in times past in order to fecundate the earth, more particularly when there was drought they spilled the human blood. Cf. F.A. GRIGNARD, "The Oraons and Mundas", p. 11; N. DUARY, "Oraon Dances in Chotanagpur: An Impact Study", p. 254.

¹⁷⁷ D. BARA, "Oraon Marriages: Socio-cultural Context", in *Sevartham* 14 (1989), p. 64.

¹⁷⁸ L. CARDON, *On the Oraon Tribe*, p. 19.

¹⁷⁹ P. PONETTE, "Oraon Ethical Values", in *Sevartham* 9 (1984), p. 57.

¹⁸⁰ D. BARA, "Oraon Marriages: Socio-cultural Context", p. 64.

1.3.3.2 Mundas

The Mundas,¹⁸¹ one of the tribes of the central zone, are found on the plateaus and mountain belts north of the Krishna River and south of the Indo-Gangetic Basin. Sarat Chandra Roy, one of the authorities on the tribes of Chotanagpur, was of the opinion that before the arrival of the Aryan tribes in northern India, there were traces of the Mundari dialect in the Gangetic Plain.¹⁸² Most authors apply linguistic analysis in their efforts to determine the prehistory of the Mundas.¹⁸³ The tribe is divided into many clans or *kili*, which are endogamous in nature.

1.3.3.2.1 Religious Beliefs of Mundas

The Mundas have their own myths of the creation of the world and of the origin of man. At the head of a multitude of spirits is *Singbonga*, also called *Haram*, the Creator God. He is the Supreme Being, literally the *One* or more exactly, the *Old One*. He is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent.¹⁸⁴ *Singbonga* is neither the sun nor dwells in the sun, though he is in heaven. He is identical with the *Haram* of creation. In other words, in primordial times the creator was called *Haram*.¹⁸⁵

Mundas believe in spirits (*bongas*).¹⁸⁶ There are hosts of them, such as *Burubonga* (spirit that dwells on hilltops), *Ikirbonga* (spirit of the deep waters), *Nagebonga* (spirit in the ravines), *Dasaulibonga* (spirit in wooded spots), *Condor Ikirbonga* (spirit in groves near a pool of water) and *Candibonga* (spirit in rocky places).¹⁸⁷ These *bongas* (spirits) are invoked and propitiated either to ward off

¹⁸¹ “The name ‘Munda’ is a Sanskrit word and means ‘Headman’. It is an honorific title given by the Hindus and hence became a tribal name”. S. CHAND and P. BHINGRA, “Folk Dances of the Mundas”, in R.D. TRIBHUWAN et al. (eds.), *Tribal Dances of India*, New Delhi 1999, p. 186.

¹⁸² P. TETE, *A Missionary Social Worker in India*, p. 1.

¹⁸³ Commenting on the origin of the Mundas, P. Ponette refers to the migration theory proposed by W. Schmidt; namely, the Mundas could have reached India along a south-eastern route, hopping from island to island where traces of rare agglunative language can still be found all along the route. Stephen Fuchs has recently proposed with some cogency an alternative route, by the north, over the Himalayas, that led them into India through the Himalayan passes in Himachal Pradesh and Nepal, a theory which recent linguistic research would seem to favour. The whole hypothesis of the Munda migration based on linguistic analysis is inconclusive, as language affinity does not necessarily imply their identity. There is no documentary evidence, or at most very little, to support this hypothesis. Cf. P. PONETTE, “The Evolution of the Munda Tribe”, in *Sevartham* 7 (1982), p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ “He (*Singbonga*) is the one whose ‘arm is like a load of poles’ (who is omnipotent), whose ‘ears are like the flapping ears of an elephant’. Who ‘sees with twelve eyes and hears with thirteen ears’ (is all knowing) the one who ‘on a blue thread eyes on winding rope, climbs and descends, winding and unwinding’ (whose presence extends to every place), the one who is ‘from the very beginning and from all eras’, and whose ‘chest like a stone’ (permanent, unchangeable).” Cf. A. VAN EXEM, “Tribal Religion at the Crossroads”, in *IMR* 3/2 (1982), p. 87; P. TETE, *A Missionary Social Worker in India*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ The original meaning of the word ‘bonga’ as found in the writings of Hoffmann, was moon. “Thus *Singbonga* meant ‘moon of the day’, just as ‘*nida bonga*’ meant ‘moon of the night’. The word ‘bonga’ meaning ‘spirits’ is only a modern, derived meaning”. M. TOPNO, “Spirits in the Life and Belief of the Mundas”, in *Sevartham* 3 (1978), p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

impending harm or danger or to appease their displeasure caused by their living relatives' negligence in offering them their timely dues (food and drink). P. Ponette is of the opinion that the spirits do not have any divine status and hence one could very well conclude that the Mundas are monotheists.¹⁸⁸ The village god who takes his abode in the *sarna* (sacred grove) is propitiated by sacrifices offered by a *Pahan* (the village priest). It is fear not love that prompts them to offer sacrifices to the many *bongas* or spirits.

Affirming the influence of the annual agricultural cycle on the festivals of Mundas, Susan Chand writes: "The religious aspects of Mundas are closely related with the annual agriculture cycle and the recurring rites of passage. The main festivals include *Mage*, *Phagu*, *Sarhul*, *Hon-ba*, *Batuli*, *Dasai*, and *Sohrai*. The folksongs are accompanied by folk dances. The celebrations accompanying these festivals, songs and dances provide occasions for collective action and build up social solidarity."¹⁸⁹

1.3.3.2.2 Socio-cultural Background

The ethics of the Mundas are rooted in their religious faith and in the communal structures of their society, the tribe. A Munda finds salvation in and through his tribe. And it is through the tribe that he preserves his life and remains linked with the *Singbonga*. Therefore, the state of an outcaste is akin to death. By an infraction of the code of conduct established by the community, one voluntarily severs the connection with the origin to which one owes the preservation of life.¹⁹⁰ In this context, it could very well be said that any offence committed against the tribe is also committed against the Supreme Being, the *Singbonga*, and that whatever offends him also hurts the tribe.¹⁹¹ The dead are buried in a north-south direction with the head turned towards the east to remind them of their true home which is said to be in the north, somewhere in the Gangetic valley. The head turned towards the East would mean the orientation towards God (sun).¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ P. PONETTE, "Ethics of the Mundas", in *Sevartham* 4 (1979), p. 114.

¹⁸⁹ S. CHAND and P. BHINGRA, "Folk Dances of the Mundas", in R.D. TRIBHUWAN et al. (eds.), *Tribal Dances of India*, New Delhi 1999, p. 188.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁹¹ Regarding the ethical life of Mundas, Philip Barjo comments: "The greatest offense to Singbonga is the breaking of the more important of these regulations, unwritten and handed down by ancestors. These include exogamy, endogamy and monogamy in marriage and conjugal fidelity. Not only the offenders themselves but the entire community is appropriately punished by Singbonga for the non-observance of these great ethical values." P. BARJO, "The Religious Life of the Sarna Tribes", in *IMR* 19/2 (1997), p. 46.

¹⁹² J.M. KUJUR, "The Kharias and their Dances", in R.D. TRIBHUWAN et al. (eds.), *Tribal Dances of India*, p. 132.

1.3.3.2.3 Economic and Political Situation

The Mundas organised themselves into independent village communities, and each community is said to be the proprietary body owning all the land outside the village boundary. The Mundas have a democratic form of government. They did not allow their own Rajas to interfere in the village administration, which was considered a family matter. The administration of justice was carried out by a village chief who was a direct male descendant of the original founder of the village. It is generally understood to mean that *Singbonga* exercises much of his authority on earth through the *Panchayat* or the village elders and that the authority of the *Panchayat* derives from *Singbonga*. The *Panchayat* interprets the tradition, which is a special gift from *Singbonga* through which he voices his commands.¹⁹³ Mundas are agriculturists who transformed the forest into arable land. Hence the forest tract of Chotanagpur belonged to them. Like other Chotanagpur tribes, Mundas too depend on the forest for their subsistence, i.e. for their fuel, timber, honey, *lac*, *Mahua* flowers, medicinal herbs and oils, etc.¹⁹⁴

Inheritance among the Mundas passes only to sons. Failing these, the property goes to the brothers of the deceased (if any). In the world of the Mundas, the daughters do not belong to the family and as such have no rights to family property. Women have an exclusive right over their ornaments. However, they do not inherit any share of the family property. It is a custom with the Munda to raise stone-monuments over their dead. And if the Mundas move away from a place, these monuments remain to indicate their former presence.

Dancing is the inevitable accompaniment of every gathering, and it is one of the primary elements of their socialisation. Dancing and singing by both men and women in the village *akhra* signifies a feeling of mutual cooperation amongst the Mundas. They have a variety of dances suitable for special times and seasons. There are specific songs and dances associated with the annual cycle of tribal festivals, *Jatras*, socio-religious functions and life cycle events. The motion is slow and graceful with a monotonous singsong being kept up throughout the dance. The steps are in perfect time and the action wonderful.¹⁹⁵

1.3.3.3 Kharias

It is said that the original occupation of the Kharias was to carry *Dhoolies* or litters, and the name itself seemed to have been derived from *Kharkharia*, a palanquin or a litter.¹⁹⁶ They are also cultivators and collect forest produce.¹⁹⁷ The Kharias, who are said to have had their home originally somewhere in Central Asia, came to India together with the proto-Australoid group, via China and Burma.¹⁹⁸ The movement of

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁹⁴ S. CHAND and P. BHINGRA, "Folk Dances of the Mundas", p. 187.

¹⁹⁵ R.V. RUSSEL, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, vol. III, p. 516.

¹⁹⁶ J.M. KUJUR, "The Kharias and their Dances", p. 128; R.V. RUSSELL, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, vol. III, p. 452.

¹⁹⁷ Kharias are basically agriculturist and their implements of cultivation are very similar to those of their agriculturist neighbours. J.M. KUJUR, "The Kharias and their Dances", p. 128.

¹⁹⁸ P. TETE, *A Missionary Social Worker in India*, p. 4.

peoples brought the tribe to the regions of Ayodhya, where they settled down for some time, and then later to Rohtosgarh. The Kharias are divided into three groups; the *Paharia*, the *Dhelki* and the *Dudh* Kharias. Among the three groups, the Hill Kharias are shy by nature, for the presence or intrusion of a foreigner would impel them to move to a new forest. The Dhelki Kharias are mostly found in the Gangpur and Jashpur regions. The ancestors of the Dudh Kharia marched to the plateau of Chotanagpur and settled down along the southern Koel and the Biru region.¹⁹⁹

1.3.3.3.1 Religious Beliefs of Kharias

The Kharias believe in a Supreme God, the creator and ruler of everything. They call him *Maha Ishwar*– the great God, or *Sakhi Gosain* – the all-seeing Deity or *Ponomeshor* – living rock, names possibly borrowed from Hinduism.²⁰⁰ They worship the sun (Bero), but it is not identical with *Maha Ishwar*. Pious Kharias, with hands joined and touching the inclined forehead, salute the sun every morning before brushing their teeth. The head of each family offers sacrifice, but on solemn occasions, the village sacrificer performs the rituals. The Kharias believe that since *Ponomeshor*, the Supreme God creates *Dubos*, the world of spirits, they are subject to him. Commenting on *dubos*, Marianus Kujur observed: “They find the presence of *dubos* everywhere. The belief in *dubos* among Kharias is so manifesting that some people call their religion ‘animism’. The Kharias believe in three types of *dubos* ‘namely’ ancestral *dubos*, benevolent *dubos* and malevolent *dubos*.”²⁰¹ They also propitiate evil Spirits or *Bhuts* by means of sacrifices. It is fear, not love, which prompts them to worship these spirits.²⁰² The Kharias believe in witches who are deemed to be wicked women who have power to harm others.

The Kharias make a clear distinction between the soul of man '*jiu*' and his shade '*chain*'. These are kept united as long as a man is alive, and though his shade may

¹⁹⁹ Fr. Kujur remarked: “The three endogamous groups (*Paharia*, *Delki* and *Dudh*) of the Kharias are further divided into exogamous clans like Dundung (eel), Kiro, Kerketta, Soreng, Kullu, Tete, etc.” J.M. KUJUR, “The Kharias and their Dances”, p. 129.

²⁰⁰ In explaining the names of God, Paulus Kullu wrote: “The Kharias call God by the name *Ponomeshor*, which some non-Kharias consider a borrowed form of the Hindi word *Parameshwar* (All powerful supreme being). For the Kharias the name *Ponomeshor* is not a personal or proper name, it is a qualitative or attributive word. This word literally means a stone, rock which is alive, strong, immovable, impenetrable, etc.” Cf. P. KULLU, “Figures of Christ in Kharia Religion”, in *Sevartham* 10 (1985), p. 100. When sacrifice is exclusively offered to God, the term *Sakhi Gosain* is addressed, which is translated as all-seeing-God by some, but according to P. Kullu, it actually means ‘God as Friend’.

²⁰¹ Enumerating the world of spirits, J. Kujur wrote: “The Kharias believe in the existence of soul, which after death remains as a spirit. The Kharias personify and deify the dead ancestors. The ancestral spirits are known as *Burha* – *Burhi* (old man and old woman). They are benevolent and look after the family... The *Raksa Dubos* literally means protecting spirit. They believe that *Ponomeshor* has created *Raksa Dubo* in order to protect the village from enemies. It signifies that *Ponomeshor* is the protector of the whole humanity. The *Raksa Dubo* is believed to have a fierce look so that the evil spirits are afraid to enter into the village... They offer sacrifices to evil spirits not out of love but out of fear. They think that by offering sacrifices to them they can pacify them and thus avert illness and calamities. Among many spirits considered to be evil witches, *Chordevan*, *baghia*, *churil*, *mua*, etc some people call these evil spirits as *bhuts* (spirits).” J.M. KUJUR, “The Kharias and their Dances”, pp. 130 - 131.

²⁰² P. TETE, *A Missionary Social Worker in India*, pp. 4 - 5.

sometimes become visible, never so his soul. The shade is hardly of any use to him.²⁰³ The ethical behaviour of the Kharias is inherent in their religious beliefs. Misconduct in their behaviour would cost them degradation in the hierarchy of status.²⁰⁴

1.3.3.3.2 Socio-cultural Background

Kharias have a variety of folksongs and dances. They vary according to the season. Every season has a typical song, which must not be sung outside the season. In the same way, dances are limited to a particular season.²⁰⁵

The simplicity and gentleness of the Kharias won them many friends even among the European missionaries. Their generosity and docility were very much lauded. Some of the missionaries even went to the extent of comparing them with their kinsmen. "The fickleness of the Oraons and the self-conceit of the Mundas, make no part of their character; and all the missionaries that have come into familiar contact with them acknowledge that their feelings are refined and nearer to our standard".²⁰⁶

1.3.3.3.3 Economic and Political Situation

The father as the head of the family has authority over its members. He alone may dispose of the family's property, and everybody in the house is expected to obey his commands.²⁰⁷ The office of the *Pahan* is hereditary among the Kharias. In return for his services he holds, free of rent, a certain amount of paddy fields. Kharias do not generally marry off their children before they reach the age of 18 or 19. It is the parents' duty to find a suitable partner for their children. It is generally believed that children who marry on their own bring disgrace to the dignity of the family. *Panchayats* among the Kharias function, with a few exceptions, along the same lines as those of the Oraons.

1.3.4 History of Economic Oppression Leading to 'Bethbegari', Forced Labour

This short analysis of the Oraons, the Mundas and the Kharias does not portray the historical background that led to the state of *Beth-begari*, forced labour.²⁰⁸ In an

²⁰³ L. CARDON, *The Kharias and their Customs*, Louvain 1923, p. 4.

²⁰⁴ The Kharias believe in an endless transmigration of the soul or *Jiu* into men and beasts, and even into plants; for according to them, animals and plants have, like human beings, their own souls that are bound to be born again. They have no hell or heaven. As punishment, the soul of a wicked man after death reincarnates into some lower beasts, a pig or a dog for instance, while the soul of a good man, as a reward, revives into a human being, but always a man of the same tribe. They consider adultery, incest, theft, false testimony, calumny, neglect of parents when old, insulting or striking them, as morally wrong and very bad. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁰⁵ J.M. KUJUR, "The Kharias and their Dances", p. 133.

²⁰⁶ L. CARDON, *The Kharias and their Customs*, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁰⁸ Here is a copy of a *Kamia bond* which a man had to sign for the interest on the loan of a paltry sum of Rupees 2. "I do hereby agree that in lieu of the interest on the principal amount advanced by the above-named creditor to me I will serve under the said creditor as a kamiyan, tilling land, digging ground, cutting wood, going abroad tending cattle, going to the jungle, etc., and doing such other works. I do further agree that I will not claim any pay or remuneration for my services besides the usual allowance of

attempt to explain their degrading condition, M. Vanden Bogaert proposes four distinct periods that developed in the life of Tribals up to the present day. However, this essay will limit itself to just three periods: 1) the Original or Tribal Society, existing in the plateau since prehistoric times, 2) Feudal Society, imposed during the Moghul period and 3) Capitalist Society, imposed during the British colonial period.²⁰⁹

1.3.4.1 The Original or Tribal Society

The peace-loving Tribals of Chotanagpur knew no alienation from their property until the emergence of their 'Raja', or chieftain, about 500 A.D.²¹⁰ These chieftains were probably natural leaders whose function became hereditary. The Raja was considered to be at the service of the tribal community -- especially during the threat of foreign invasion, when the Tribals would gather under the leadership of their Raja, to defend their territory. The Tribals felt an urge to contribute regularly to his upkeep. The Raja possessed or claimed no sovereignty over the land, exercised no particular authority over the village administration, and levied no taxes. The land belonged to the villages; the Mundas, on certain occasions, redistributed it according to each one's needs. Thus, one could say that the Raja was truly a servant of the community. The *adivasis* (the original settlers or Tribals) were proudly declared that they were the true Rajas of the land.

1.3.4.2 Feudal Society

In 1585, Akbar, the Moghul Emperor, sent a force under Shahabaz to subdue the Raja of Chotanagpur. In 1616, Akbar's successor, Jahangir, demanded a tribute of Rs 15,000 from the Raja Durgan Sal. As he was unable to pay this exorbitant amount, he was imprisoned at Gwalior between 1616 and 1628.²¹¹ This was the first prolonged contact of the Chotanagpur Raja with other rulers and their imperial splendour. On his release, he began to introduce many new ideas and practices into his territory. He

coarse grain for food, etc., as prevalent in the neighbouring villages and that I will be entitled to discontinue my services under the said creditor from the date on which I shall pay up the full amount advanced without any interest to the said creditor... In case I discontinue my services without paying off the debt or fly away to some other place the said creditor shall be entitled to realise the amount advanced by him with interest from my person, and in case I die before the debt is paid up, my heirs shall be liable for the payment of the said debt under the above-mentioned terms". A. NADER, *The Ignatian Land*, Calcutta 1925, pp. 24-27.

²⁰⁹ Vanden Bogaert proposes four periods that are like solidified layers, superimposed on each other. They are 1) the Socialistic Society, introduced after Independence; 2) the Capitalistic Society, imposed during the British Colonial period; 3) the Feudal Society, imposed through the Moghul conquest, and 4) the Original or Tribal Society, existing in the Plateau since prehistoric times. Cf. M. VANDEN BOGAERT, "Social Transformation of a Tribal Society. Fall-out of Evangelization in Chota Nagpur", in *Sevartham* 11 (1986), pp. 19-35.

²¹⁰ The Nagbansi line of Rajas seems to have taken charge around 500 A. D. "The Oraons declare that they were in Chutia Nagpur (in *Kurukh* it is called *Kurkha*, Oraon land) before the birth of Phani Mukuta Rai, the first Nagbansi Raja; and the present Raja claims to be the 52nd in descent from Phani Mutuka". F.A. GRIGNARD, "The Oraons and Mundas", p. 17.

²¹¹ The 41st Raja Bairi had submitted to Mughal Emperors in Delhi, but his successor the 43rd Raja Madhu Singh initially resisted the yoke of Mughal dominance but later yielded to the pressure and assisted them in conquering Orissa. Since Durgan Sal was unable to pay the tribute he was taken prisoner. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

introduced Brahmin priests, Rajput courtiers and warriors, and other caste Hindus brought from outside. He even went to the extent of contracting marriage alliances with the neighbouring Hindu Rajas.²¹² The new officials were given rights to supplies from the villagers who used to pay rent as well as offer their services to the king. The new system of service grants or *jagir* and its new beneficiaries or *jagirdars* were a burden on the people. The newcomers were used to a landlordism that the Tribals were ignorant of.

Gradually the rights to service grants were interpreted as property rights, and through the cleverness of their officers, many villages were reduced to rent-paying tenants. Thus, the hereditary lands of the *adivasis* were slowly slipping away from their hands. To add to this, the Raja also introduced temporary leaseholders or *Thikedars* into the area. They too joined the *jagirdars* in exploiting the people. This was the beginning of the landlord system and of a systematic robbing of the ancestral property of the *adivasis*. The people became restless, as a result. There were even some recorded tribal insurrections. Not satisfied with their nominal possession of the villages, the leaseholders or *jagirdars* pleaded with the Raja to grant them rights over the land.²¹³ The loss of land had its adverse effects on the socio-political and economic conditions of the people, whose freedom to relish both the produce of the land and the land itself was snatched away from them.

1.3.4.3 Capitalist Society

In 1765, grants of the Diwani (the office of Prime Minister) of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were made over to the East India Company by the Moghul Emperor Shah Alam II. This affected the tribal population to a large extent. Although Chotanagpur passed into British hands, an effective administration was not established before 1834.²¹⁴

On June 4, 1809, the Zamindari police system was introduced when the Raja was ordered to establish police stations. The new police system exacerbated the displeasure of the peace-loving tribes, giving an upper hand to the Zamindars, who maintained an organised body to execute their well-planned drive towards the elimination of the proprietary rights of the tribes. To make matters worse, the petty officials of the new police system were brought in from Bengal and Bihar. This infuriated the Tribals of Chotanagpur as a whole and the Mundas in particular. Consequently, there was a series of uprisings of both the Mundas and the Oraons. After the uprising of 1811, Chotanagpur was brought under the direct administration of the East India Company (in 1817), depriving the Raja of his position and thereby reducing his standing to that of a tributary chief.²¹⁵

1.3.5 Tribal Insurrections

²¹² A. KANJAMALA, *Religion and Modernization of India. A Case Study of Northern Orissa*, Indore 1981, p. 56.

²¹³ P. TETE, *A Missionary Social Worker in India*, p. 6.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

From 1789 onwards the villagers revolted repeatedly but they could no longer avail themselves of the leadership of the Raja. The British, interested in peace and revenue, subdued the Tribals and at the same time tried to legislate in their favour. Thus in 1809 they introduced the judiciary system. The law of proscription convalidated all usurpations and also opened the door to more impudent outrage. To add insult to injury, the court was situated at Chatra, a day's journey away for the poor tribal (who would thus lose a day's wage). Besides, the lawyers generally belonged to the class of exploiters and did not know the local language of the Tribals who usually produced no document to support their claims.

In 1820, a great insurrection occurred against the *jagirdars* (those who held leases) and the *thikedars* (those who oppressed the Tribals). Besides these, the Tribals also hated the Hindus and the Muslims, because they were normally the moneylenders and made enormous profits. The Tribals were hardly able to bear their heavy load, which degraded them and led to inhuman conditions.²¹⁶

1.3.6 Messianic Movements

Between 1895 and 1900, and again at the beginning of World War I, various prophets (*Bhagat*) arose among the Tribals. The *Birsa movement* among the Mundas between 1895 and 1900 and the *Tana Bhagat movement* among the Oraons during World War I were millenarian and messianic and prophetic in character.²¹⁷ At this time Birsa Bhagawan²¹⁸ became prominent among the Mundas with his movement to exterminate all that was anti-tribal and hence foreign.²¹⁹ The Oraon leaders and the followers of the Messianic Movement call theirs the *Kurukh Dharam*, or the real and original religion of the *Kurukhs* or Oraons.²²⁰

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

²¹⁷ Van Exem wrote that the Tana Bhagat movement, started by Jatra Oraon at the time of the First World War, was not only a refusal to pay rent, but also a drive against the spirits. The very name, Tana Bhagat, is derived from the cry of Jatra's followers, *Tana, Baba, tana butanike tana* – 'pull them out, pull them out, pull the spirits out'. Cf. A. VAN EXEM, "Early Evangelization of Chotanagpur", in *IMR* I/4 (1979), p. 358; P. EKKA, "Messianic Movements among the Chota Nagpur Tribes", in *Sevartham* 4 (1979), p. 21.

²¹⁸ Birsa Bhagwan, also called Birsa Munda, a former Protestant, preached a message of liberation from the slavery of the *dikus*, the foreigners. He considered himself the saviour of the Mundas. His teachings were a strange mixture of religion and politics. He propagated Hindu ideals of ritual purity and asceticism, while at the same time encouraging his followers to defy the government by disobeying the officials. He forbade the worship of idols and taught his followers to worship the one God. Influenced obviously by Christianity, he preached a millenarian message promising that the final kingdom was reserved for those who followed him. He claimed to possess certain magical powers that would turn even the bullets of enemies into water. Birsa found it easy to incite his followers to revolt. On Christmas Eve of 1899, he ordered a general massacre of the Rajas, the Zamindars and the Christians, who had left him on the advice of the missionaries. His anticipated pardon from jail was interpreted as the result of his magical powers. However, he later died in jail. Cf. S. FUCHS, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of the Messianic Movements in Indian Religions*, Bombay 1965, pp. 21-46; P. EKKA, "Messianic Movements among the Chota Nagpur Tribes", pp. 21-33.

²¹⁹ The term 'foreign' is not restricted to non-Indians but applies to all those who are non-tribal and in particular to those who deprived them of their hereditary right over the land.

²²⁰ S. FUCHS, *Rebellious Prophets*, p. 35.

In discussing the Tribals, A. Van Exem observes that “their social organisation, their well balanced laws of marriage and inheritance, their pre-democratic form of leadership according to which community decisions are taken with unanimity, their innate sense of justice, all point to a highly civilised past”.²²¹ They led a hard life close to nature, following the seasons on which their economy depended. Their cultural and moral richness was obliterated when in their distress they found no one to cling on to except the magicians and sorcerers who assured them of a brighter, bounteous future.

1.4 Conclusion

Reduced to miserable conditions, the illiterate and ignorant Tribals longed for a saviour from within, but their prayers and sacrifices to different *bongas* or *bhuts* or spirits did not alleviate the misery inflicted upon them. It would be unfair to accuse the spirits of failure, despite the many sacrifices offered, to mitigate the suffering caused by the pernicious human avarice. Their *Dharam* or religion offered neither temporary relief nor a permanent solution to their problems, which eventually reduced them to a nomadic state. In their distress they longed for a messiah who would not just give them economic assistance but would also restore them to their former status, a status stemming from the control of their ancestral land. The loss of their traditional lands led to an identity crisis. It is significant to note that the desire for liberation from their oppressors was not totally absent. Certain illustrious men had the courage to oppose the oppressive power structures. Yet the insurrection did not succeed because of the lack of dedicated leadership. One wonders how long they will have to wait for their Lost Paradise!

²²¹ A. VAN EXEM, “Tribal Religion at the Crossroads”, in *IMR* 3/2 (1982), p. 85.