



IN SEARCH OF EQUITY: ORISSAN TRIBAL HISTORIOGRAPHY'S SEARCH FOR JUSTICE AGAINST COLONIAL INJUSTICE

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Abstract: Before the development of subaltern historiography, history was always an elite pursuit. Subaltern historiography has played an important role in de-elitising history and bringing forth the facts of socio-economic aspects and political events during the colonial period. In colonial Orissa, there were numerous subaltern movements in general, and tribal insurgencies in particular, all aiming for some or other form of independence from the clutch of landed aristocracy, local rajas, or the British. Tribals played a significant political role in Orissa's freedom struggle in 19th and 20th centuries. They were not at all backward in colonial Orissa's *prajamandal* movements. But it is a farce that, even after a long interval, just a few tribal leaders have gained prominence in history, which shows a gap in political history and a grave intellectual injustice. Colonial historiography portrayed tribals as criminals and blind-believers with negative activities. But the influence of Marxist and Subaltern approach has changed the historiographical scenario in the post-independent phase, which is evidenced from the extensive studies on socio-economic and cultural life of the tribals. Despite extensive studies, political history of tribals has received less attention in comparison to socio-economic history. Similarly, the history of science and technological knowledge in proverbs, health care practices, animal husbandry have not yet explored. Travesty, we are obliged to rely exclusively on inadequate colonial documents, which appear to be biased, due to a lack of indigenous records. As a result, the need of oral source, vernacular sources and artefacts preserved in museums are felt significantly. Intensive research within the conceptual framework of an interdisciplinary approach is also required to learn more about their other aspects of life and for bringing an intellectual justice.

Keywords: de-elitised history, tribal insurgencies, political role, interdisciplinary approach, subaltern historiography.

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INTRODUCTION

History is often seen as the historical struggle of humanity for greater freedom and human fulfilment. The typical individual or a subaltern group has the ability to alter history's course. On several times, the people's historic initiative has resulted in world-altering social cataclysms. Tribal's history in recent years, by the efforts of several subaltern researchers have gained a lot of traction in the discourse of subaltern history. The subaltern perspective centres around and about humans, as they are the central subject of history. As a result, it is necessary to comprehend our history from the perspective of the people, in order to validate our past in a true sense.

South Asian history has been greatly impacted by current contexts (Sivaramakrishnan 2009). The present forces its will on the past and shapes historians accounts of it. Because of this, historiography occasionally shifts depending on the circumstance and requirement. There is no exception to that generalization in tribal histories. Colonial ethnographers such as W.W. Hunter (1907), R.V. Russell (1916), W. Crook (1896), and E. Thurston (1909) made the first attempt to record the tribal history of India in order to meet their administrative needs. They attempted to explain a civilizing mission by maintaining a racial prejudice in their writings and using an uncivilized connotation for the primitive people. Some Indian ethnographers wrote on tribal people in opposition to colonial texts, hoping to include them into a nationalist framework during the national struggle. Their areas of contention were that the tribal people never stayed outside of Indian culture and that they begged for special programs to ameliorate their socioeconomic situation. In this regard, the greatest examples are the works of G.S. Ghurey (1932), B.S. Guha (1935), and S.C. Roy (1912). A new direction for tribal historiography emerged in the post-independence era, thanks to the participation of several nationalist Marxist historians. A.R. Desai (1978), B. Chandra, and S. Sarkar were among the academics who saw Colonial tribal resistances against the British government as a "symptomatic gesture" of challenge and a voice of Indian society (Ravi Kumar 2018).

However, history was always an elite endeavour before the birth of subaltern historiography in 1980s. This historiography was crucial in de-elitising history and bringing the reality of political occurrences and socio-economic foot-prints during the colonial administration to light. They paid particular emphasis in their essays to tribal techniques of resistance, the different ways they disturbed the colonial administration and fought against imperial modernity. Furthermore, in an effort to strengthen the concept of nationhood, they also highlighted the socioeconomic and political contributions made by tribes to the formation of the nation. In their articles, R. Guha (1981), D. Ardold (1982), T. Sarkar (1985), S. Dasgupta (1985), and D. Hardiman (1985) emphasized each of the aforementioned unique aspects. In tandem, tribal knowledge has gained significant traction in environmental history since the 1980s. The problems of tribal exploitation and relocation have mostly come up while talking about state government involvement in tribal ecology (Gadgil, Guha 1992).

In case of Orissa, the subaltern historiography retains its importance as the state is a gathering place for many ethnic communities. There were various subaltern movements in Colonial Orissa, as well as tribal insurgencies in particular, all were aspiring for independence from the landed nobles, local rajas, or the British. Some tribes, such as the *Kandhaas*, *Savaras*, *Cols*, *Bhuiyans*, *Juangs*, *Gonds*, *Binjhals*, and *Mundas*, may be cited as having played a substantial political role in Orissa's liberation struggle in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, justifying a true sense of mass movement. In Colonial Orissa's *Prajamandal* movements, they were not in any way backward. However, since colonial period to till twenty-first century a long thread of tribal historiography has been straightened with many curls in between. Those curls were due to the need of time.

Given this context, this work has made a modest attempt to place tribal people in particular and subaltern groups in general within the historical flow of Orissa. Along with broad objections, this empirical study also identifies key points in both pre- and post-independent historiographies. This essay criticizes colonial historiography for being biased and biased toward colonial propaganda, while tacitly endorsing post-independent historiography



for bringing to light some of the dark corners (absence of caste system, conception of cosmology, myths, legends, folk songs, fighting tactics) associated with tribal life that were not addressed during the colonial era. Ultimately, this advances with significant obstacles related to recording tribal history. The study finds that there are still gaps in the political history of tribal people despite the socioeconomic history being rich. In a similar vein, their science and technology are not well studied. Furthermore, it finds that the primary shortcoming of tribal historiography is its ongoing quest for justice, without which it is impossible to envisage intellectual justice.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

Before the beginning of the so-called subaltern school of historiography, writing of history was mostly centred on elite people, particularly rulers, thinkers, politicians and other elite groups. There was very little or scanty research on subaltern people in general and tribals in particular. In India's tribal movements, Kumar Suresh Singh has identified three main periods. During the first phase (1795-1860), tribals and non-tribals banded together under their traditional chiefs and subordinates to fight the colonial authorities' new administration and taxing system. The tribals attacked the *zamindars* and money lenders who served as intermediaries between them and the state in the second phase, which lasted from 1860 to 1920, and they also opposed the colonial administration. During this period, the movement's leadership developed from the ranks of peasants, educated tribals, or outsiders who had found a foothold among the tribals. The third phase, from 1920 to 1947, saw tribals become more involved in national and agrarian activities, as well as the creation of special tribal state (Pradhan 2015: 180-181). Orissa was not an exception to the above-mentioned generalisation. Here many tribals insurgencies came to existence and left behind several long-drawn consequences.

In the context of general writing of history of Orissa, it was largely written by colonial officials and Bengali scholars during the colonial period, but a few Oriya intellectuals such as



Pyarimohan Acharya, Jagabandhu Singh, Krupasindhu Mishra, and Binayak Mishra also wrote on Orissa's history and culture. Following independence, a number of factors enabled research on various aspects of Orissan history and culture, including the establishment of university departments, the popularity of the subject in universities and Colleges, the expansion of museums and archives, archaeological excavations, improved library facilities, financial support from the UGC and the ICHR, and, above all, competent guidance (Pradhan 2015: 12).

Orissa has a long history; however, there are little historical studies and literature. Many endeavours have been undertaken in two major ways to develop Orissa historiography: the compilation of complete volumes and the creation of textbooks. R.D Banerji released two comprehensive volumes titled *History of Orissa* in 1930-31. These volumes were created using the data that was available at the time. Dr. H.K. Mahatab wrote two books about Orissa history. M.N. Das edited the book *Side-lights on Orissa History and Culture* in 1977. Prabodh K. Mishra and J.K. Samal published *Orissa's Comprehensive History and Culture* in four parts in 1997 (Pradhan 2015: 11).

COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL DEPICTIONS OF TRIBAL SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

During Colonial period, there were many British officials who had observed the daily life of different tribals of Orissa for their Colonial empire purpose. The English used to think themselves, as the most civilized people across the globe. By bringing transformation, modification and alteration in many aspects they used to think of justifying their rule in colonial world. They termed their involvement with the tribal groups of several tribal tracts a "civilizing mission". They had a very negative perception regarding the tribal culture. In their observation, economy and society are two very primitive aspects that the tribals were leading. However, while looking for a civilizing mission they were making a sincere survey into socio-economic life of the tribals. It may be the possible reason why there are some



colonial records, which throws light on them and helps in sketching out a historical picture.

After independence intense research has been carried out on the history of Orissa. But the history of the tribal people of Orissa has not drawn much attention. The studies on the tribal groups mainly focus on socio-economic and cultural aspects of their life. Contemporary studies on them mainly focuses on current-problems such as displacement and Hindu influence for a changed socio-cultural life and other contemporary problems. Let's have a brief understanding of some colonial historical records as well as post independent studies and to see how they have presented a picture of Orissan tribal life to the world.

Generally speaking, tribals of Orissa were divided into two groups like the plain people and the *Dongariah* in colonial records (Senapati, Kuanr 1980: 470)¹. During 19th century, in Orissa there were around 4 lakhs of tribal people. Historian Pyarimohan Acharya has termed them as forest people and black colored people. Those tribals were *Kol*, *Bhumija*, *Santal*, *Mundkal*, *Kandha*, *Gond*, *Jherakband*, *Juanga*, *Savara*, *Sauras* and others. Being a contemporary observer, he stated that the *Juargas* of *Dhenkanal*, *Keonjhar* and *Hindol* were still wearing leaves. Among these tribals many of them were practicing Hindu rituals (Acharya 2012: 22-23). Amos Suttan, an English agent in Colonial Orissa was engaged in the task of Christianizing *Savaras/Sauras* of Ganjam. In his own narrative he has given a full detail of *Savaras/Sauras* social and cultural aspects. His account also says many of the problems that he faced among them while doing conversion (Sutton 1833). Both Andrew Sterling and G. Toynbee Colonial historians made similar kind of studies on *Koles*, *Kandhas* and *Sauras* primitive economy (Sterling 2014: 55-60). All of the Colonial narratives mentioned above maintain racial bias as a means of demonstrating their superior status and defending their efforts to bring about civilization among the native people.

Sir John Campbell, an English agent of the British was involved after the suppression of the *meriah* system² as well as female infanticide in several tribal tracts of Orissa. His personal narrative is an insightful source on it, who criticized them as barbaric and uncivilized (Campbell 1861: 244). Before



Campbell, Lieut. Macpherson acted as a *meriah* agent in Ganjam and Cuttack regions of Orissa. His involvement in it earned him a negative impression on the tribals and made him to think the essentiality of a civilizing mission. Hence in his monograph, he emphasized on the opening of roads through the tribal tracts and making possible for a conducive atmosphere for the promotion of an interaction between the tribals and the surrounding Hindu population (Macpherson 1842: 92).

The exiting colonial historiography has shed a beam of light on the economy of tribal people in general, agriculture in particular. As per their bias observation the tribals of Orissa used to practice very primitive form of agriculture – like slash and burn cultivation (Bell 1945: 70; Risely 1892: 397). Tribals like *Sourabas*, the *Hos*, the *Santalas*, the *Bondas* and the *Gadabas* were among the major practitioners (Bell 1945). They used to take the help of very primitive form of irrigation system (Dalton 1973: 145; Codben-Ramsay 1910: 181). E.B. Codben-Ramsay mentioned in the official district Gazetteer of feudatory states of Orissa that, *Kandha* of Kalahandi and Nayagarh were doing wet cultivation (Codben-Ramsay 1910: 224). Report of 1863 of Richard Temple gave an insight into the cultivation pattern of the *Kandhas* (Temple 1908: 20). Little later another colonial officer, T.J. Maltby wrote expansively on this agricultural aspect and conclude that people were using very primitive method of agriculture. He went on writing that tribals used to plough their land with cows as well as oxen (Maltby 1918: 56; Dalton 1973: 195). Buffalos were also used. Very traditional forms of agricultural contrivances were used by the tribals like wooden plough, large hoe sickle, axe wooden knife. *Dal*, pulses, Gram, Oil seeds, pumpkins, groundnuts, ginger were generally produced by them. They too had the habit of producing tobacco, cotton, coarse, strong leaf (Dalton 1973: 195). H.D. Taylor and D.F. Carmichael mentioned about the production of wheat (Talyor 1869: 2), mango jackfruit, orange, lime palm and mahua (Carmichael 1869: 8). Sir John Campbell, Lieutenant Macpherson and W.W. Hunter talked about the old form of agricultural practice. Ultimately, the entire agricultural approach was perceived as antiquated and antithetical when viewed through the lens of British modernism. They did not value the self-sufficient



farming practices of the tribe. Additionally, they were unable to comprehend the indigenous knowledge and secret science included into their farming methods. Believing that the irrigation method was archaic, they continued to instruct them in new techniques (Campbell 1864: 265).

In the context of barter economy and industry, there are also adequate numbers of sources as well as scholarships. W.W. Hunter's account also claims that tribals used to prefer a barter system. His stalwart claim is that their ignorance did not let them to give up barter practice. Money was refused to straight-away (Hunter 1877: 221-223). The very fact had been accepted by Herbert H. Risely, when he stated that the tribals considered trade as a degraded occupation (Risely 1892: 397). In order to understand this aspect in great detail some other colonial records may be consulted like of T.J. Maltby's Ganjam district manual (Maltby 1918: 60), manual prepared by C.D. Maclean (1885: 9), the monumental report prepared by R.V. Russell and R.B. Hiralal in 1916 etc. (Russel 1916: 470). However, they all wrote about the tribal economy negatively, treating it as a degraded one once more.

In order to prove themselves a Good Samaritan the British projected only negative things much, which could help them in justifying their changes and laws for their subjects. As an officer Indrabilas Mukherjee in his settlement record commented on *Bethi* and *Begari* system among the tribals of Orissa as feudal servitude. The tribals were asked to give free physical labor towards the Rajas, landlords, the royal staffs, the *mutha* chiefs and to the government officials (Mukherjee 1938: 33). Substantiating this, another contemporary record prepared by B.S. Deo, brought a similar remark that there was severe physical exploitation (Deo 1939). In a similar way economic exploitation of tribals by the money-lending class like local *Mahajanas*, *Sahukaras* and *Sundhis*, has been elaborated vividly in the records of E. Thurston (1909: 62), L.N. Sahu (1942: 45) and McAlpin (1909: 37). As per their narration landed aristocracy used to cheat tribals by falsifying the amount of landed money or by demanding fifty percent of interest. In the post independent era, N.R. Patnaik has also dealt with this aspect.



Political colonization was followed by economic colonization during the British rule. Tribal tracts were also dragged into the economic colonization fold with a clear-cut motive of revenue extraction. Official records prepared by D.F. Carmichael (1869: 9), H.D. Taylor (1869: 3) and T.J. Maltby (1918: 11) were mouthpieces to understand the process of early imposition of nominal tax on tribals and then fixing it on them in a permanent way. G. Toynbee had mentioned in his account on Orissa that though the British imposed tax on the tribals, still they had to face lots of opposition from them (Toynbee 1873: 250). Work of historian Nihar Ranjan Patnaik (1997: 370-375) gives a second-hand idea about this. F.G. Bailey in early 1960s through his work has given a beautiful narration on the gradual increase of tax amount in order to do developmental works in varied tribal regions (Bailey 1996: 183). Researcher Barbara M. Boal mentioned that initially the tax was imposed on voluntary basis. It was of 3 annas per plough, in *Kandha* areas (Boal 1982: 12).

Some nationalist writers of the colonial era also wrote with a liberal voice about tribal people, supporting the idea of unity in variety and cultural distinctiveness. R.D Banerji in his *History of Orissa: From the earliest times to the British period* had noted briefly on some of the tribals like the *Kandhabas*, the *Kui*, the *Savaras*, and the *Bhuiyas*. His narration was basically on their language, geographical setting and population. It may be seen as a socio-cultural study (Banerji 2014: 11-12). However, a number of studies centred on Orissa tribes have been conducted in the post-independence era in an effort to explore new areas of appreciation and contradict the Colonial negative construction. Moreover, they have attempted to conceal a number of murky aspects of tribal life that colonial writers failed to mention in all of their works. A summary and citation of some of the significant works have been provided for a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution or flow of historiography.

Stressing on tribal religion, Bhairabi Prasad Sahu mentioned that, since medieval period, there was a continuous attempt for Hinduisation of tribals through land donation and expansion of agriculture. Agriculture brought tribals into *Sudra* fold of Hinduism. Many of them also got the status of *Khandayts* or *Kbshetriyas*. It was also an ongoing process even



during the colonial regime (Sahu 1985: 180-192). K.N Thusu, who had studied the *Pengo Prajas* of Koraput, stated Lord Jagannath's *Mahaprasad* was used symbolically for purification of the tribals (Thasu 1977: 15). The inspiration of Hinduism was so much so on the tribals that they (*Kutia Kandhas* and *Didaji*) went on inventing different Gods as well as Goddess including the *Dharma Pinnu*, the smallpox Goddess (Guha, Siddiqui, Mathur 1968). Anthropologists like F.G. Bailey opined that the *Kandhas* turned into *Paikas* and *Khandayats* (Bailey 1996). Just a decade before, B. Dhal conducted a comparable investigation into the evolving cultural landscape of tribal people to highlight the impact of Hinduism. This study made a significant contribution to the socio-economic enrichment of tribal history. He maintained that the tribal community has been greatly influenced by Hinduism in a number of ways (Dhal 2012: 129-145). For the tribe, modernization in the last few decades is still having an impact on their way of life, therefore the process of transition is still happening (Padhy 2010). This fact has been explored in the last decade only.

Researchers like Sitakanta Mohapatra (1974: 77-80), Gopinath Mohanty (1964: 26-28), R.N. Dash (1979: 74-75), N.K. Jit (1984: 261-280) and B. C Roy (2009) have given a bold insight into the socio-cultural as well as economic life of the tribals. Nihar Ranjan Patnaik in his write-up titled *Economic life of the tribals* discussed vividly about the burning cultivation, agricultural productions, barter economy, animal husbandry and other aspects of economic life with a moderate tone (Patnaik 1997: 370-370). But at the same time, while studying tribal society by drawing a historical and cultural background, he has criticized some of the inhuman practices like human sacrifice (practiced by the *Kandha* tribe) based on blind belief system (Pat) (Patnaik 1997: 74). The same aspect of tribal people was also specially dealt by researcher Felix Padel only a few years before (Padel 1995). Verrier Elwin conducted an exclusive study on the Bondo community's way of life, focusing mostly on their primitive way of living based on ethnological observations without offering criticism of any kind (Elwin 2023). Jayanti Dora further enriched it by discussing about the social and political life of the *Gond* tribe of Western Orissa in her

latest scholarship by drawing an elaborative picture from past (Dora 2015: 33-41). By doing so they have strengthened and straitened the tribal historiography.

By emphasizing on some of the new areas of tribal society and living, some recent scholarly contributions have taken a completely different track from the traditional tendency of history writing that centre around socio-cultural and economic lifestyles. Over the past twenty-thirty years, a number of intriguing myths and legends with tribal origins have been included in historical writing (Tripathy, Basa 2006), along with lovely tribal songs and tales (Mahapatra 1991; Pattnaik 2013). These investigations were conducted in a wholly anthropological manner to comprehend their way of life and worldview. Many of the indoor and outdoor (animal fight) sports and martial arts that were popular in their culture have recently been studied in greater detail and incorporated into historical writing (Panda 2018). Tribal societies, particularly those of Koya, Bonda, and *Kandhaa*, have been commended for their caste lessness and uncomplicated outlook (Lewis 2017). A kinship-oriented life in tribal society is being solemnized by long-standing proverbs and rituals. According to Peter Berger's most recent studies, the general public does not challenge its rulers; rather, they accept them as leaders. As a result, both the ruled and the rulers in tribal societies are exclusively accountable for their own life cycles (Berger 2023). Scholars like J.K. Samal, Purna Chandra Das, Subash Chandra Bholá, K.C. Jena, Pradipta Chaudhury (Choudhury 1991) and many others who have worked on the economic aspects of Orissa in general have also given a small touch on the subaltern group in general, tribals in particular.

POLITICAL ASSESSMENT IN TRIBAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Coming to the question of the assessment of the role of tribals from political point of view a few works are there. Despite they participated significantly both in the freedom and *Prajamandal* movement, very few tribal leaders have come to limelight or have been given place in history. In this regard, P.K. Mishra was a harbinger in a modern sense as he opened



up this aspect in the arena of Orissa history. He appreciated the participation of tribals in the freedom struggle of Orissa and opined that they played an important role in it (Mishra 1990: 52-63). Similar kind of appreciation was made on the Col tribal by Arun Das little later who again forwarded the political role for further research (Das 1996: 65-70). In his research, Atul Ch. Pradhan stated that there were many autonomous tribal movements or *melis* in Orissa, all of which were centred on personal complaints. Anti-Colonial movements were sparked by tribal participation in the congress. However, they were just concerned with their own liberties. Freedom for them meant freedom from outsiders like *zamindars*, *thikadars*, and money lenders. They desired to keep their customary land and forest rights, as well as their customs. The *Kandhas* fought against the colonial ruler's attempts to remove the inhumane *Meriah* sacrifice with this goal in mind. Ratna Nayak's *Bhuyans* revolted because they wanted to be able to choose their own ruler. The Dharani *Meli* was an outspoken opponent of *bethi* and rent hikes (Pradhan 2015: 182). B. Pati enhanced the post-independence era's anticolonial thesis by incorporating a variety of colonial agrarian and economic strategies that upset and repelled the tribal people against the colonial government (Pati 2018).

However, both R.D. Banerji and G. Toynbee had acknowledged the large-scale participation of *Kandhas* in the *Khorda* revolt of 1817 (Banerji 2014: 555; Toynbee 1873: 198-199). The same has been made by Dandapani Behera. In a very elaborative manner, he projected social, economic, political and religious causes of tribal uprisings of Ghumsur in the 19th century. As per his description, Kamala Lochan Dora Bissoi and Chakara Bissoi represented as tribal leader against Colonialism and this represented a mature phase of tribal revolt (Behera 1994). *Paikas* of Orissa were helped in a significant way by the other tribals too in their fight against the British (Mishra 1994). The revolt of 1857 in Orissa was predominantly a tribal rebellion. Guerrilla method of fighting was basically a tribal innovation. The *Keonjhar meli* of 1868 under Ratana Bhuiyan Chief, where the *Santals*, *Cols*, *Ranas* and *Bhuyans* participated, the *meli* of 1891-92, under the leadership of Dharanidhara Bhuiyan, the *Malkangiri* uprisings of 1879-80 under the leadership

of Toma Dora, the *Kalahandi* uprising (*Kandha*) of 1882 and the participation of tribals in the freedom struggle of Orissa are few examples of tribal people's dedication and involvement. Those were against the erosion of customary rights over forests, exploitation of money lenders, too much of restrictions on the use of forests and enhancement of forests basically (Pati 2013: 53-55). Biswamoya Pati in his most recent scholarship on tribals, boldly appreciated their participation in the national struggle of Orissa against the Colonial construction as 'criminal tribe' (Pati 2018).

Inspired by the nationalist thoughts the tribals of Orissa had also participated in different no-rent movement in late 1930s. In princely state of Gangapur region of Orissa, under the leadership of Nathaniel *Munda*, there was a no-rent movement. Around 5000 tribals had participated in it and 32 were shot down to death and 19 were injured during the course of police firing. Gandhian ideology had also deeply impacted on them. Adivasis gave up meat and liquor some extent. They also gave up beef consumption, to some extent adopted spinning of *Khadi* and stopped early marriage (Pati 2001: 4204-4212).

Despite of long years of interval, there are petty number of researchers who have some extent assessed the political importance of the tribals in the shaping of the freedom struggle of Orissa. Scholars like H.K. Mohatab's *Bisoi leaders of 1855*; N.R. Pattanaik's *Laxman Naik: A study of Tribal Patriotism* (Patnaik 1992) and *Biplabi Nirmal Munda (Odia)* (Patnaik 1999); Pravat K. Mallick's *The first Tribal Uprisings in the state of Gangpur and Madri Kalo* (Mallick 2007: 95-99) and *Non-Tribal participation in a tribal movement, Dhananjay Mohanty and the Gangapur Munda Movement of 1936-39* (Mallick 2010: 112-117); Nivedita Mohanty's *Jaipal Singh Munda, 1938/39* and D.C.J. Paikray's *Tribal Rebellion in Orissa during the 19th Century: A study on its impact on Kendujbar, A Feudatory state* (Paikray 2011)³ are some of the exclusive studies, which have celebrated the political role of several leaders. Their political assessments say that there was a self-consciousness or motivation among the tribals during the colonial period. That was the reason shown in a recent scholarship by Sujit K. Chhatia. In his scholarship, he has pleaded that their consciousness was natural and

continuous while explaining *Santali* language movement in Mayurbhanj (Chhatia 2013: 139-145).

In addition to them, scholars like, H.K. Mohatab (1957; 2016)⁴, Nivedita Mohanty (2005: 339-349)⁵, Chandi Prasad Nanda (2008) and N.R. Pattanaik (2009) through their works like *Sadbanara Pathe*, *Oriya Nationalism*, *Vocalizing silence: Political protests in Orissa 1930-42* and *Hidden Treasures of Tribal Patriotism: Reflections on Tribal leaders of Colonial Orissa* respectively have done some extent political assessment while discussing the freedom struggle of the province. But travesty, despite long years of research, no new name of male and female tribal leaders has come to forefront, who had made a special effort against the British or exploiter class other than the few leaders mentioned in the colonial records.

CHALLENGES FOR WRITING TRIBAL HISTORY: CONCLUSION

In the contemporary historiographical scenario, the problem of tribal displacement of Orissa, problem of property rights has drawn a profound attention from several scholars since last quarter of 20th century. Scholars like Walter Fernandes, G. Menon and P. Viegas (1988), P.M. Mohapatra and P.C. Mohapatra (1997), Gandham Buliliyya (2006), S.G. Dash (1998), L.K. Mahapatra (1999), Robin Mearns and Saurabh Sinha (1999), B.B. Mohanty (1997: 1-7), N. Patnaik (1972), G.K. Srichandan (1993), A.K. Tripathy (1992: 115-133), J. Ambagudia (2010a: 14-20; 2009b: 131-140; 2007c: 135-159), R.J. Hardenberg (2017) have contributed much through their research keeping tribal people at center. In their research, they have argued that in the name of development, government exploiting them, by making them displaced. Monotonous research on tribal displacement and displease got a new flavor in the end of the first decade of 21st century when R. Rath mentioned that current development projects are also very much detrimental to the long drawn indigenous life and culture by studying *Kandha* tribe of Kandhamal district especially (Rath 2010).



Scholars such as R. Rath, R.J. Hardenberg, and P. Berger have conducted particular anthropological studies in numerous tribal areas recently in an effort to better comprehend the concept of cosmology. Rath learned about the *Kandhas* cosmic thinking while researching the present development initiatives in the tribal area of Kandhamal. He also discovered a few minor inconsistencies in their belief system and practice of human sacrifice (Rath 2010). Similar to this, Hardenberg was able to investigate the tribe's cosmological concept while following the latest social protest of *Dongria Kandha* of the Koraput region against a multinational corporation protesting mining in Niyamgiri hill (Hardenberg 2017). In a same vein, P. Berger investigated numerous facets of the *Gadabas'* cosmological knowledge while researching Orissan tribal civilization in general, special feeding practices, and food sharing in particular (Berger 2015).

To write something introspectively in an unbiased manner on the tribal groups, scholars are generally facing lots of challenges. Few of those are: *a)* tribals were not in the habit of either mentioning themselves in any form of literature or prepared any kind of literary references as they were illiterate; *b)* literary evidences that are generally consulted while writing on them are all colonial records, hence biased materials. Those records were prepared in a special model which had justified their position as well as their interference in the tribal matters; *c)* colonial studies on tribals are primarily socio-economic and cultural studies. Further those records have stressed much on negative things of their life. No single scientific record has been discovered in relation to their political involvement against the oppressor; *d)* travesty again that no oral source has been recorded or Collected on the matter of political involvement; *e)* lack of interest among modern scholars to work on them; *f)* language is also a barrier between the researcher and the subject people; *g)* there are still a lot of unanswered questions in this domain, which requires extra attention, in part because tribal scholars rarely participate in their own historical study; *h)* lastly, pre-digested negative perception on tribals also obstructs scholars some extent to not to go for research on them.



To conclude, from the colonial historiography to the modern scholarship titled “*Santali Language Movement*” and *emphasis on prevailing kinship in tribal society* it’s a long historical journey that the tribal history has seen. With the birth of subaltern historiography, history became de-elitised. Participation of Marxist and subaltern scholars brought new limelight in the history of tribals. In the flow of colonial historiography of Orissa, tribals had been portrayed in a negative way. Behind doing so, colonial masters had a clear motive of the justification of colonial intervention and presence in tribal belts. This also enabled them to start a civilizing mission by introducing western education, health practice and many other such programs and colonial rules and regulations thereby to colonize them. Therefore, the colonial historiography or their assessments were as part of their colonial propaganda to Colonize and prelude to their intervention.

Lion share of historical records or researches have been talking on their socio-cultural and economic life and much less on their political importance. The large extent socio-economic studies have been influenced by the then prevailing trend of Marxist approach in post-independent India. Simultaneously, there is another possibility that majority British interventions came centring round mostly the socio-economic activities which was termed as a “civilizing mission”. This is again significant in terms of their participation against the colonizers as the British intervention in their socio-economic life displeased them completely that followed another trajectory of tribal participation in several independent uprisings and national movement. Hence tribal history can’t be read completely or understood fully without socio-economic study. Again, this had a close connection with their political life. The topic of displacement has gained attention from academics recently as they examine various development initiatives. Thus, it follows naturally that the current era, as acknowledged by Sivaramkrishnan, has had a significant influence on the direction of tribal historiography. The trend concurrently showed similarities to the national trend.

Even after a great deal of research, there are still some uncharted territories that require investigation and documentation. These include the knowledge concealed in their proverbs, their science of health care, the preparation of weapons, household



items, plantations, irrigation, tilling contrivance preparation, house construction, knowledge related to natural beautification, the preparation of kid-friendly entertainment, the process of animal domestication, animal breeding, and, if any, inter-tribal fighting and marriage. Certain Orissa tribal people have been the subject of some exclusive research. However, a comparison analysis is needed to determine which tribe believes in blind faith more and which tribe believes in less, as well as which tribe is more liberal and actively engaged in learning and which tribe is less, and so forth. In addition to these, study on the roles played by men, women, and seniors in domestic matters and general socioeconomic life is still lacking.

Despite long years of research, not even a single tribal man or woman leader or semi-leader has been identified other than the names mentioned in various colonial records, who had played a significant role during the colonial period. Due to lack of indigenous sources on them, it becomes a matter of great difficulty to assess their political importance. Similarly, the availability of indigenous sources could have helped in highlighting good or positive things in relation to the tribals. In this critical juncture, oral source, contemporary vernacular newspapers, personal autobiographies of various *Odia* officers who worked there may be collected from different libraries and archives and taken into consideration to enrich their history in general, social history and political leadership-cum-participation in particular. Further, court, police, jail and judicial records are to be consulted to find out other leader's name, identification and contributions. To explore more about their political role, intense research is need of the hour within the conceptual framework of interdisciplinary approach. While various artifacts housed in various museums are thought to demonstrate their unique cultures, oral sources should be used as a means of understanding and exploring hidden information in a variety of contexts. Additionally, it is important to urge indigenous scholars to participate in this study. By doing so, intellectual justice for the marginal community can be achieved for a better and harmonious society on the one hand, and the scope of justice under the banner of sustainable development goals can better be enlarged from the limited version of socio-economic justice.



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NOTES

¹ Lieutenant Elliont gave a narration regarding the fact in 1856.

² *Meriah* system used to stand for human sacrifice. For the materialization of their expectation, tribals used to offer human blood to their Gods as well as Goddess. In this regard mostly human baby or kid were preferred.

³ Paikray celebrated the political role of Dharanidhar Bhuyan in the Bhuyan revolt against the colonial government exclusively without attributing much importance to the public or other semi-leaders.

⁴ Specially on tribals and the dynamic leadership of Chakara Bisoi, H.K. Mahatab has given a beautiful narration in this book and on peasants His own autobiography is an exemplary one.

⁵ Especially on the leadership of Jaipal Sing Munda and tribal participation in late 1930s a small narrative has been given. Emphasize has been given to Jaipal Munda, but other leaders or semi-leaders role not was not explored.

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