

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL'S IN KORAPUT  
DISTRICT – AN ANALYSIS OF SCHLESWIG HOLSTEIN  
EVANGELICAL MISSION SOCIETY ERA.**

**Sri Raghmani Naik\***

**Abstract**

The undivided Koraput District of South Odisha is the district, full of mountains, hilly tracts, high valleys, narrow passages and inaccessible regions. This was the natural habitat of several colourful aboriginals or adivasis. There was no ample of plain lands to cultivate. Forest was everything for them and they occasionally doing podu and terrace cultivation for their subsistence. However, it was not sufficient for them. So, the economic condition of the tribal was very low and leading the life which was miserable and deplorable. In these circumstances, the SHELMS came to Koraput on **15<sup>th</sup> May, 1882 A.D.** and introduced and implemented a handful economic measures such as plantation work, coffee gardens, established both Savings and Credit Banks to provide loan at low percentage of interest, set up Co- operative Society etc for the upliftment of the neglected and indigent, illiterate, helpless tribals and protected from local moneylenders and exploitation

**Keywords:** Tribals' economy, Local moneylenders, Missionaries, Banks, industrial School, Weaving Schools, Bethi and Goti System.

**\* Head, department of History, NSCB Jr College, Sambalpur.**

from police personnel and Government employees. It also persuaded Government to Stop Goti and Bethi system from the society. Due to the establishment of Industrial Training Schools, Weaving Schools and providing loan at low interest, the students who passed out were able to start their own business and became self independent.

### Introduction:

The undivided Koraput District of South Odisha is a district of meadows, rolling mountains, hills, and green forests, plateaus of varying heights, jumping hill streams, and vast stretch of water reservoirs. It is the natural abode of several tribal communities known as adivasis, or aboriginals. These Tribal habitats nestle around such topographical features with scenic beauty of course. In spite of such natural topography, there were no much plain lands to cultivate. The Adivasis were completely depended upon forest and occasionally doing 'Podu' and Terrace cultivation for their subsistence but it was not sufficient for them. Their economic standard was very miserable and nearly 60% of the tribals lived below the poverty line and most of them were in debts.

The main reason for their backwardness was the prolonged alienation from the mainstream of the developed society. They used to collect firewood and charcoal from the forest, work in field as labourers and do simple artisanship like mat weaving and basket making, pottery and cattle rearing. However, these means were not enough for their subsistence. Therefore, they were taking loan at high rate of interest from the Zamindars, Sahukars, Sundhis and Moneylenders on the occasion of celebration of ceremonies, buying new clothes, death ceremony and buying drinking.

Drinking habit was the main cause of their suffering and ruin of their families. When they were unable to repay loan, they were made to work days or even years together under these Mahajans till the recovery of their amounts. This was the genesis of inhuman practices of **Bethi** and **Goti** system in this area. The tribals were leading lives very pathetically and miserably and their economic standard was very low. However, with the coming of missionaries to this land, their economic standard began to improve.

❖ **Goti System:** Though hard working, the tribals were very poor. The earning of a full day, which included hard and restless labour, was not sufficient for them. At the time of marriage the tribals offered bride price to the fathers' of the girls. During their illness and other needs especially drinking, they credited from Sahukars. Unable to repay the loan with the interest, they manual offered services to the Mahajans or Sahukars and worked as bondage labourers (Goti). Thus grew up the derogatory and heart rendering institution of Goti. It was also called the "Debt Bondage." After their death, their successors continued to serve till this institution was legally prohibited in 1948 A.D. **The Bethi System** - The Estate officials beginning from the highest officer to the village head man employed Bethi labour for domestic and agricultural purposes. The estate Amins, the mustajars and the local police were all responsible for the generation of the system. The Naiks or Mustajars, by virtue of their position procured free or cheap labour of the hill men for themselves and the estate officials. There were three types' labourers known as forced and free labourer, forced and inadequately paid labour and lastly forced but adequately paid labour. Whenever, an estate peon or police constable was transferred from certain places, he usually took with him a large number of coolies who were detained for many days but paid extremely inadequate wage. They were carrying Dak, luggage of officers, repairing thatching of police quarters, station houses, revenue sheds, Taluk board schools and dispensaries etc. but getting nothing.

#### **Economic Condition of Tribals:**

The economic life of the tribals had remained far below the subsistence level and it mainly revolved around agriculture, forest, animal husbandry and wage labour. Out of them agricultural activities, dominated as chief occupation. They were totally dependent on monsoon for cultivation. Unproductive nature of the soil, irregularity in rain fall, and low level of the technology gave a very little output and the tribals were forced to live in difficult condition. They had not been able to keep pace with other community in matter of economic development because of the difficult terrain, dispersed and unproductive cultivation, poor means of transportation, underdeveloped infrastructure base and the continuous exploitation by the Sahukars and Land lords. Thus, on the whole the economic condition of the hill tribes was very miserable and the hill men had to lead the life of extreme poverty. They were subjected to all

sorts of exploitation and oppression by the Government officials, Sahukars and money lenders (Padhi: 150-51).

### **Characteristics of Tribal Economy:**

- I. The Tribals led a relatively isolated life in the hills and forests. So, their economy was essentially a rural economy. There were many factors attributed to it such as .a) Lack of communication with outside world kept them illiterate and ignorant. b) The tribals had very inadequate access to natural resource endowment, were primitive in technology and hence very poor in living. c) Because of their poverty and ignorance they were often more exploited by various agencies. d) The quality of available land in the area inhabited by them was generally very poor and hence, less productive. e) Agriculture, agricultural wage labourers, and non-agricultural wage workers, collection of minor forest products, and food gathering were the activities which were mostly carried on simultaneously by the tribal for living f) The tribal economy mainly clustered round the forest. They depended on forest for employment, food, fodder, fuel wood, housing materials, medicines and recreation. g) Animal husbandry was also a source of their income ( Patnaik : 60-61)
- II. Besides that, the factors responsible for backwardness of tribal agriculture were (a) poor soil (b) lack of irrigation facility (c) lack of marketing (d) ignorance of the people about the new technology and practices being adopted by the farmers in the plains (e) use of primitive agricultural instruments (f) greater intensity of soil erosion on the hill slopes due to shifting cultivation and the inability and unwillingness of the tribal farmers to check it. Tribal agriculture was marked by subsistent economy; terrace cultivation or wetland cultivation sometimes created market economy for the tribes. But such practices were rather limited (Ibid).

Two major agricultural patterns practised by the tribals in different parts of the district were -

#### **1. Shifting cultivation or Jhum Cultivation**

Shifting cultivation consisted of cutting of trees. On tops and slopes of hills, burning the fallen trees and bushes and dibbling of broadcasting seeds in the ash covered soil. Good crops were harvested the first two or three years but then the rate of yield at a diminished and then the land was abandoned until it regained some of its fertility through renewed vegetation. The operation of shifting cultivation was also known as “Podu” cultivation.

Then a new clearing was opened for the fresh cultivation. The cultivation was thus shifted from one patch of land to another. Ultimately abandoning one patch after another brought large scale devastation of forest of its trial. The shifting cultivation was extensively practised in undivided Koraput by the tribes' like Bonda, Dangaria Kandh, Didiayi, Koya, Gadaba, Kuttia, Kandh, and Paraja had other Dravidian speaking tribes. The Bonda called this cultivation 'Livang' or "Kunda chas" and the Koyas called it "Lanka pad Sanad". It was also called "Sourechasa" by the Kuttia Kandh and "Haru" by Dangaria Kandh.

The major crops grown by tribals were maize, minor millet, paddy, Ragi, Jowar, Niger, Ginger etc. Apart from that, they cultivated Kandul, Biri, Suan, Fruit and vegetables at their small kitchen garden behind the house. During the month of May and June mangoes and oil seeds were collected from the forest.

## **2. Settled cultivation (or Terrace cultivation.)**

It was an important type of cultivation of Tribal. It was generally carried out on the flat of gentry sloping land in the areas, where water was available. It was wetland cultivation and here the production was higher than the Podu cultivation but the main difficulty was that such types of flat and gentry sloping lands were rarely found in the hilly regions. There were some areas where such pieces of land could be found but a considerable portion of the fields were in fact rocky covered by a thin layer of soil flatness. Flatness was the result of centuries of erosion by rain water in the hills, leaving a thin layer of soil. In the rainy seasons the fields were found wet but perhaps due to rocky nature of the terrain which generated much heat they were unfit even for wild vegetation. In winter, the soil became too dry to support even the growth of grass. Hence there was natural barrier to the availability of suitable fields of slopping land for terrace cultivation.

### **Women in Tribal Economy:**

In rural areas women performed a major part of agricultural operations like breaking clods of earth, weeding transplanting, harvesting, threshing and winnowing, and they did most of the work of caring for the dairy animals and marketing of their products. They also lent a helping hand in other small industries like rope and basket marking, pottery, handloom weaving, food processing etc (Ibid: 66). Thus, the burden shared by the women for the socio-economic development was twofold, one on the domestic front and the other on the economic front. The difficulties of getting water and fuel, for looking health services, educational facilities for

children etc. stood as obstacles to run their domestic front smoothly. In addition, they had to adjust with a number of adverse situations while working as a wage labourer. The tribals women played major role not only at home but also outside home.

Such was the economic condition of the tribal on the eve of coming of SHELMS to this district. The mission society keenly studied their standard of living and income sources and thereafter, introduced and implemented certain economic measures for their economic upliftment.

❖ **SHELMS:** The evangelical activities of Koraput district had started with the formation of Schleswig-Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society (SHELMS) on **19<sup>th</sup> September, 1876 A.D.** in the Northern part of West Germany. The motive behind this mission was nothing but to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to all the people of the world to believe Jesus Christ, the only savior. This mission society was built on the foundation of belief and prayer. This mission came to Koraput District on **15<sup>th</sup> May, 1882 A.D.** and heralded a new epoch for the economic development for the tribals.

### **SHELMS and economic upliftment of the tribals**

The tribals were very indigent and impecunious at the time of their conversion to Christianity. They were isolated, neglected and backward people of the society. So, for the improvement the mission society took some constructive steps by bringing handful of welfare economic schemes Such as:

#### **A) Establishment of Vocational Training Centre**

The mission society wanted to give training to the students and educated people to enable them for earning their livelihood with proficiency. So, an Industrial school was set up at Koraput where **carpentry, blacksmith, pottery and weaving** were taught (Tauscher: 154). Rev. E. Gloyer in his report says that “**at Koraput an industrial School** combined with a presswork was established for the benefit of mission and Church (Gloyer : 37). Every day with Morning Prayer these institutions used to start their daily works. The students who were in the hostels had to attend the regular morning and evening prayer session conducted in the institutions.

- a) The Mission Society had established a **Tea Department Labour Association (TDLA)** with its headquarters at Koraput. Young boys from Jeypore Estate were recruited and

engaged in Tea garden to tend the tea cultivation. They were also sent to **Assam**, which was the sole work of TDLA.

- b) The mission Society also planned to set up **Vocational training School at Koraput in 1902 A.D.** The objective of this vocational training was to enable the members of the castes to learn the practical trades which were usually confined to certain castes only. This craftsmanship taught students not only of vocational schools, but also of all mission boarding school to train them to become able craftsmen. Within a short period, it was noticed that, learners were able to start their own business and began to earn their livelihood. Under this scheme, it started **vocational school at Salur and weaving school at Koraput**. Rev. Hubner Sr. took some training and prepared himself as an Industrial Missionary and started **vocational school at Koraput in 1905 (cultural : 578)**.
- c) Besides weaving, the mission Society also give training on making baskets, weaving mats, carpentry, blacksmith work, bamboo weaving, pottery, etc.
- d) **Three -year training** was given for the carpentry and smithy students and one year course for masonry and brick lying. This institution was developed with the help of missionaries' aid. It is interesting to note that the production of the weaving institution was once exported to Germany, which was highly praised.
- e) Financial help was raised to qualify **craftsmen, carpenters, bricklayers, masons and brick makers**.
- f) **Weavers Co-operative Society'** was organized to serve the poor weavers in imparting training. The then **Nabarangapur Co-operative Central Bank** extended loans to the individual members of the weaver's Co-operative society to improve in their own business (Secretary Report). The Church Council was assigned to take care for the development of the school at **Nabarangpur, Weaving school** at Koraput and **agricultural farm at Nandapur**. Later on various committees were formed for the development and growth of these institutions (Church Council-1966).
- h) The JELC, Jeypore established a weaving Training School in the year 1960 to assist the poor weavers of the undivided koraput District in order to build them up as skilled weavers and to help them to earn their livelihood. A Society called "the Koraput Weavers' Co-operative Society was formed."(Jungjohann: 161). **It was registered in 1956** and the District Collector, Koraput, reported that 'there were 609 members with

Rev. R. Tauscher as the president of the Society (Saraf: 1959). The then Collector Mr. S.N. Mishra recommended to the Government for the upliftment of the institution. 'I request that Government will consider the responsibilities of helping these boys who will ultimately work for the development of this backward area' (Mishra -1955).

Again Mr. T.N. Saraf (I.A.S., Secretary to Government of Industries, Dept. Bhubaneswar, on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1959) recommended to the Secretary to the Government of Industries that "The society has received an order of 5000 kitchen towels from West Germany. It appears that the intending importer is Rev. T. Jungjohann, Breklum of Germany, 'I am bringing this to your attention in the hope that you could do something to make it possible for the society to export the kitchen towels and earn some foreign exchange'" (Saraf -1959).

- i) Many Christians and non-Christians had availed of ample opportunity to work in this institution which helped them to develop their economic standard.
- j) Besides these, a converted Christian after passing out standard three was immediately appointed as pastor. Any one, who knew writing and reading, was appointed as Gurus, catechists and preachers. The illiterate ones were appointed for household work, marketing, cooking, manual work, plantation work and in agricultural field etc. by the missionaries. So, it was facilitating the ways of earning for their livelihood.
- k) The Mission Society introduced a systematic way of agriculture, plantation programmes and **coffee gardens** for the tribal so that it could provide job opportunities to unemployed people for their subsistence.

#### B) Establishment of Savings and Lending Banks

a) To provide financial assistance to the trained people and poor converted Christians, the missionaries started **Koraput Savings and Lending Bank** in the year 1903 (Cultural -578) and "from which 1,034 farmers and weavers in 155 villages had profited.

b) Agricultural loans were also provided to the farmers for the development of agriculture. In view of this, the missionaries were lending money personally in order to save the poor people from the clutches of the indigenous money lenders, Sahukars and Zamindars, who used to charge high rates of interest and the people remained in heavy debts and were leading the life of dire distress and dismal (Ibid). This Bank was converted into '**Small Saving Bank**' in the year 1906 A.D. The effective annual interest rate it fixed was **5%**, whereas the interest rate



usually charged by the money lenders was as high as **350-400%** during that time (Ibid). Money was lent to both the Christians and the non-Christians and most of the time the people of higher caste were availing of the benefits (Ibid).

c) The main objective of the saving and Lending Bank was to elevate the economic conditions of the debt-ridden people. The pioneering missionaries who had undertaken this task were Rev. Timmcke and Rev. Huber.

d) A **Credit Bank** was organized, where weavers and cultivators could get money (Ibid). In the early period Rev. F. Hubner was in-charge of this work till 1906 A.D. and thereafter Mr. Weber (Ibid). After that, Rev. Tauscher again reported that as a good number of the Christian were weavers much was done to upgrade their primitive handloom so as to enable them to do better and quicker works (Ibid). This yeoman effort of the missionaries later on helped the people immensely for economic subsistence.

#### **Impact of mission society' economic activities on tribals**

The cause of exploitation, which was the worst curse for tribal economy, was significantly removed because of the initiation of mission society in various economic activities. The practices of Goti and Bethi system which were widely prevalent in the district were discouraged due to continuous persuasion by the mission society to Government. Due to vocational training of various work like making baskets, mats, carpentry, weaving and bamboo work etc the trained people got loans from the mission society and started their own business. It helped the people to earn their livelihood and goe protection from local moneylenders and policemen. They were no more dependent upon others. It was a great economic impact upon the people for long run. The missionaries also built market complexes and bought acres of land for the permanent income sources for the maintenance of churches and salary for the employees. At present, the economic standard of the converted Christians is far better than that of the non - Christians in this district.

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