

Historically Pinpoint the Socio-Economic Surroundings of Undivided Cuttack District in Colonial Orissa

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Abstract

From the end of the eighteenth century, Orissa began to experience different socio-economic change that transformed patterns of production and consumption in the Cuttack region. These were the rise of colonial rule and the formally colonized by the British changed the markets for goods, capital and labour. Land Revenue was one of the traditional mainstays of British Indian Finance. 1 The land revenue administration and rent structure was deeply linked with the tenurial rights and the intermediate interest groups. The traditional tenurial expression of property rights was one of the factors in differentiation of socioeconomic status of the owner cultivator and the farmer.

Keywords: *British, economic system, social, population, caste.*

Introduction

Orissa has a history and a heritage of its own, a history replete with a saga of integration and a heritage shining with an

unmemorable glory. History always speaks of past, but heritage invariably links it with the present and both combined project the imperceptible future in unmistakable terms. The state of Orissa as it stands today comprises portions of the ancient kingdoms of Kalinga, Utkal or Orda and Kosala, which in course of centuries joined together under political, social and economic pressures to form the Oriya Society as a distinct entity in this land of India during the 12th century A.D. After the land was conquered by the British in the last century preceded by the rules of the Muslims, the Mughals and the Marathas, for over 300 years, portions of the state lay dispersed under the Bengal and Madras Presidencies and the Central Provinces and it was only in 1936 that the different Oriya speaking tracts reemerged as a separate province.¹

¹ Pradhan, A.C., *The Politics of Orissa*, Journal of Indian History, 12th session, Cuttack 1994, pp-24-29

Social Conditions of Orissa in Pre Colonia Period

Early history of Cuttack is associated with the Keshari dynasty. As stated by the distinguished historian A. Sterling, present – day Cuttack was established as a military cantonment by kind Nrupa Keshari of Keshari dynasty in 989 A.D. Historical evidence suggests Cuttack becoming capital of a Kingdom founded by Anangabhimha Deva of Ganga dynasty in 1211 A.D. After the end of Ganga rule, Orissa passed to the hands of the Gajapati Kings (1435 – 1541 A.D) of Solar dynasty under whom Cuttack continued to be the capital of Orissa. After the death of Mukunda Deva, the last Hindu king of Orissa, Cuttack first came under Muslim ruler and later under Mughals. By 1750, Cuttack came under Maratha ruler and it grew fast as a business center being the convenient point of contact between the Marathas of Nagpur and the English Merchants of Bengal. It was occupied by the British in 1803 and later became the capital of Orissa division in 1816. Before the Britishers arrival in Orissa, the Cuttack districts socio – economic condition is divergent. The scenario is changed after they changed their administration. Prior to 1872 no regular census of the district by

the simultaneous enumeration of the people had ever been taken; but several rough attempts were made from time to time to estimate the number of inhabitants. The Revenue Survey of 1842 gave the population of Cuttack as 5,53,073; a subsequent attempt at a census showed it as 8,00,000; and yet another estimate was made in 1847, according to which the district contained 10,18,979 persons, giving an average pressure of 320 persons per square mile. All these estimates were very rough, as they were made simply by counting the homes through the agency of the police and assigning an average number of inhabitants to each dwelling.² In 1855, however, an attempt was made to obtain more accurate figures, special officers being appointed to test the returns by counting the homes and their actual inhabitants in different parts of the district and thus to ascertain the correct average for each house. A Stirling, in his account of Orissa written in 1882, estimated the population of the district as 12, 96,365 persons, his calculations being based upon an enumeration of the dwellings, allowing 5 persons to each house.³

² Bandita Devi, *Some Aspects of British Administration in Orissa*, Academic Foundation, 1996, p 23

³ Mohanty, Nivedita, *Oriya Nationalism*, Manohar Publications, Delhi, 1982, pp.2-4.

Census Report

After the Sepoy mutiny, the first census which can be regarded as in any way approximating to the truth was taken in 1872, by which time the population had probably increased materially owing to the population had probably increased materially owing to the return of the people who had fled from their homes during this last great calamity. That census disclosed a total population of 14,94,784 souls with an average density of 470 to the square mile; and in 1881 it was found that the population had risen to 17,38,165 and that the pressure of the population amounted to 494 persons per square mile. The census of 1891 showed a large increase, the total number of persons recorded being 19,37,671 and the density 533 per square mile. A portion of the increase was due to the annexation of Banki with a population of 57,368 and an area of 116 square miles; but even if the figures for that tract are included in the previous returns, the growth of population was 16.24 per cent between 1872 and 1881 around 7.9 per cent in the decade ending in 1891. The census of 1872, however, was probably incorrect and it has been suggested that the actual population exceeded the census

figures by at least 1, 00,000. This would reduce the rate of growth in the succeeding nine years to 13 per cent; which is about what might be expected during the period when the district was recovering from the terrible famine of 1866. The progress during the next decade would probably have been greater, were it not that the district suffered generally from repeated outbreaks of cholera and that in certain localities scarcity and the great cyclone of 1885 seriously affected the growth of the population. In the head quarters subdivision, Banki remained almost stationary owing to scarcity almost amounting to famine. In the Kendrapara subdivision the great cyclone of September 1885 destroyed 45 villages in *Thana Patamundai* most of the inhabitants of which were either drowned or succumbed to the fever and cholera which usually form the sequel of such calamities, while those that survived emigrated to tracts less exposed to the destructive action of storm waves.⁴

The result of the census of 1901 was a further increase of 1, 22,642 bringing the population up to 2,060,313 an increase by 6.3 per cent, the diminution of the rate of growth as compared with the

⁴ O'Malley' L. S. S, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers*, Cuttack District, 1933, pp-41-42

previous decade being probably due to loss suffered by the movements of the people. The general increment was shared by all parts of the district and the rate of development was remarkably uniform throughout. The growth of population was least in the already densely inhabited *thanas*, Cuttack, Salipur, Jajpur and Jagatsingpur and greatest in the sparsely inhabited *thanas*, Patamundai and Aul on the sea – coast, where the construction of protective embankments led to considerable reclamation of land which had been thrown out of cultivation by the salt water floods of 1885.⁵ By 1911 census the population had increased to 2,109,139 the percentage of increase being 2.37 only. The decennial period had been marked by a series of floods leading to crop failures and outbreaks of cholera; and the facilities now offered by the Bengal – Nagpur Railway line, which had been opened in the ‘nineties’, led to a great increase in emigration, which to a certain extent obscured the real increase in the population. The census of 1921 for the first time recorded a decrease, the population falling by 2.11 per cent from 2,109,139 to 2,064,678. In 1918 the rains ceased entirely at the beginning of September and the important winter rice crop and the Rabi

crop of the following spring almost completely failed. Upon a people already in distress came the severe epidemic of influenza that swept India in the autumn of 1918. Also 93,000 deaths or 18,000 in excess of births were reported during the year. Owing to the population of the scanty water-supplies cholera and dysentery broke out early in 1919 in addition to influenza. 18,000 persons died of cholera, 13,000 of dysentery and 54,000 of influenza and fever. The total deaths rose to 1, 13,000 or 43,000 in excess of the births. In Jajpur and Kendrapara subdivisions the crops of 1919 and 1920 were again damaged by floods in the *Brahmani* River. In that period the social services were at extremely backward level in the Cuttack district. The few halting steps were taken in the direction of providing social services like education, communication and public health. There was another turning point in the census of 1931, which gave evidence of a steady recovery, the population having increased since 1921 by 112,029 to 2,176,707 an increase of 5.43 per cent as compared with 11.53 per cent for the province as a whole, and 6.79 per cent for the Orissa division. The density of population to the square mile reached 595. The decade was on the whole free from major calamities except for the period from

⁵O’Mally, *Ibid.*, p.43

1924 to 1926. Apparently the scanty and ill-distributed rains in 1924, followed by excessive rain in 1925 and a disastrous series of floods in 1926, produced those conditions of polluted water supply, undernourishment and exposure to hardships, which are all that is necessary to enable malaria, cholera and other intestinal diseases, always endemic in the district, to assume epidemic form; and mortality exceeded births in all three years. In the social strata common with the other districts of Orissa, Cuttack has a very marked excess of females over males, there being 1,117 females to every thousand males. This is true, however, only of the rural area. In the towns the proportions are reversed and there are only 850 females to every thousand males. The two local castes of fairly high status (*Karan and Khandait*) have a far larger proportion of women than those of equal rank elsewhere and among the functional groups the excess of females is greater than anywhere else in the Province. The proportion of unmarried persons is also higher than in other parts of Orissa, viz. 513 out of every thousand males and 327 out of every thousand females.⁶

Language

Oriya language is the mother tongue of the large majority of the Orissa people, but English, Hindi, Bengali and Telugu are also spoken. English is the language of the small English settlement, of the larger Eurasian element and of the better educated Indians. Hindi is used by a large number of Muhammadan residents of the district and by members of the police force who have been recruited from up-country. There are always a certain number of Bengalis among the professional classes in the district; and Telugu is spoken by some weavers, sweepers and others who have emigrated from the Madras Presidency. It is sufficiently common to make it necessary to employ an interpreter in the criminal courts at Cuttack. More than 96 per cent of the people speak Oriya, or as it is sometimes called Odri or Utkali, i.e. the language of Odra or Utkal, both of which are ancient names for the country now called Orissa. Oriya, with Bengali, Bihari and Assamese, forms one of the four languages which together make up the eastern group of the Indo-Aryan languages. Its grammatical construction closely resembles that of Bengali, but it has one great advantage over Bengali in the fact that, as a rule, it is pronounced as it is spelt. The Oriya verbal system is at

⁶ L. S. S. O'Malley, *Ibid*, p-44.

once simple and complete. It has a long array of tenses, but the whole is so logically arranged and built on so regular a model, that its principles are easily impressed upon the memory.⁷

Oriya is encumbered with the drawback of an excessively awkward and cumbrous written character. This character is in its basis, the same as Devanagari, but it is written by the local scribes with a stylus on a talpatra or palm-leaf. The earliest example of the language which is at present known consists of some Oriya words in an inscription of king Narasimha Deva II, dated 1296 A.D. An inscription of Narasimha Deva IV, dated 1395 A.D., contains several Oriya sentences, which show that the language was then fully developed and was little different from the modern form of speech either in spelling or in grammar. The modern period of Oriya literature begins with the writings of three eminent authors – Radha Natha Ray, Madhusudan Rao and Fakir Mohan Senapati. The first of these is regarded as the founder of a new school of poetry in Orissa and his influence is distinctly

visible in the writings of many modern writers.⁸

Encompassing Religion in different Parts

Orissa is the holy land of the Hindus, which through all its vicissitudes has held its high place in the religious esteem of the people. The *Puranas* are full of descriptions of sanctity and it is declared to be the favorite abode of the Devas and to boast a population composed, more than half of Brahmans. From end to end we are told, it is one vast region of pilgrimage (*tirtha*); its happy inhabitants live secure of a reception into the world of spirits; and those who visit it and bathe in its sacred rivers obtain remission of their sins. According to popular belief, even the victorious Musalman who led Akbar's invading host into this land of sanctity, was struck with amazement at its sacred river, the Mahanadi, its vast crowds of Brahmans and its lofty temples of stone and exclaimed "This country is no fit subject for conquest or for schemes of human ambition. It belongs entirely to the gods and is one great region of pilgrimage throughout".⁹ From the moment the pilgrim crosses the Baitarni river he treads

⁷ Dr Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. V

⁸ O, Malley, Ibid, p-47

⁹ *Utkal Dipika*, 5th July, 1902, p-15

on holy ground; and in these circumstances it is not surprising that the great bulk of the population of the district is composed of Indus, who with 21, 06,830 souls account for 96.7 per cent of the people.

Christianity was practically the only other religion represented at the census of 1931. The number of Christians (2,873) is still comparatively small and they are almost entirely confined to Cuttack town, which is the headquarters of the Baptist and Roman Catholic Missions. The labours of the Baptist missionaries in Cuttack date from 1822. The first Indian convert was baptized six years afterwards and by 1872 the total number of Indian Christians was 1911. In the famine of 1865 – 1866 over 650 children, whose parents had died of starvation or owing to the rigorous of the famine, had deserted them, were cared for by the missionaries and brought up in the Christian faith. The growth of the community in the Cuttack district has not been rapid. There are five churches of the Baptist faith and order, the largest being in Cuttack town and the others in villages not a great distance away. These churches are now united in a Church Union which it is hoped will be a nucleus for the development of an Indian church. At the present time there are under

the auspices of the Mission several primary schools for boys and girls in the *mufassal*, and in Cuttack itself there is a middle school and a boarding school for girls. Besides these there is a Women Teachers' Training class from which for many years teachers have gone to serve in girls' schools in all parts of Orissa. There is also a school for Anglo-Indian children which teach up to the Senior Cambridge Examination. This school – the Stewart School – has hostels for boys and girls attached. The Mission High School is now, in accordance with the principle of devolution adapted by the Mission, under the management of the community. A Christian training college for men has also been started. The Mission Press, which has the distinction of being the oldest press in Orissa, still continues to produce literature contributing to the educational and spiritual uplift of the people. The Cuttack Leper Asylum opened by the Mission to Lepers in 1919 is under the superintendence of one of the resident Baptist missionaries.

The impression gained of the *Oriya* is likely to vary with the class with which the observer comes in contact. The most highly educated classes are as intelligent as in any part of the province; but in the

village the more well-to-do people are generally divided into fractions and much given to litigation. The ordinary uneducated cultivator is superstitious and obsessed with caste prejudices; he is less industrious and slower to understand his own rights and interests than the *Bihari* peasant; but his home is neater and tidier. He is generally law abiding, conservative in his habits and remarkably free from the drink evil. The people are friendly, good humored, kindly and hospitable towards each other. The Brahmans are of a refined and intellectual type, and the karans have quiet as high a reputation for acuteness as the Kayasthas of Bihar.¹⁰

PRINCIPAL CASTES

According to the census reports of 1931, the *khandaits* are by far the largest caste in the district, numbering 5, 48,664, or more than a fourth of the entire populations. Besides contributing the largest share to the district population, the *khandaits* have strong claims to be regarded as the most interesting caste in the district; and Cuttack may be aptly termed the land of *khandaits*, just as Puri is the district of the *Chasa* caste. There is some difference of opinion as to the origin

¹⁰ Omalley, Ibid, pp-53-54, Sir W. E. Hunter's Orissa, Vol-I, pp-88-90

of the word *Khandaits*. The general view is that it means swordsman (from *Khanda*, a sword) but another explanation which has been put forward, and with much plausibility, is that Orissa was formerly divided into *Khandas*, or groups of villages corresponding to the *pargana* of Muhammadan times, and that there was over each a headman called *khandapati*, which was subsequently corrupted to *Khandait*. Whatever may be the etymology of the name, it is admitted that the *Khandaits* are the descendants of the people who formed the peasant militia under the ancient Rajas of Orissa. The *Chasas*, with a strength of 1, 53,663 persons, are next to the *Khandaits* the most numerous agricultural caste in the district. They are known to be recruited mainly from various aboriginal tribes. As their name implies, they are an agricultural caste, the members of which almost all hold land as occupancy raiyats or work for others as field – laborers. Like the *Khandaits*, they are the well-to-do peasantry of the villages.¹¹

FOUNDATION OF WESTERN EDUCATION

When the British acquired Orissa in 1803, there were scarcely a single Oriya as

¹¹ O, Malley, Ibid, pp-60-61

Government employee. “The language of the courts and public offices was Persian, and it was not till 1805 that orders were passed that in all written communication with the natives of the province the subject should be written in Oriya as well as in Persian. This order necessitated the employment of Oriya muharrirs, who though skillful enough with their iron pen and bundle of palm leaves, were skilful enough with their iron pen and bundle of palm leaves, were almost helpless when required to write on paper with an ordinary pen.” A graphic picture of the state of education prevailing here during the first half of the 19th Century of British rule has been described by Sir William Hunter like this,

“Government, not less than the missionaries, long found itself baffled by the obstinate orthodoxy of until 1838 no schools worthy of the name existed, except in the two or three bright spots within the circle of missionary influence. Throughout the length Orissa. And breadth of the province, with its population of 2 and a half million of souls, all was darkness and superstition. Here and there indeed a pundit taught a few lads Sanskrit in a corner of some rich landlord’s mansion, and the larger villages had a sort of hedge-school, where half a dozen boys squatted with the master on the ground, forming the alphabet in the dust, and repeating the multiplication table in a parrot like sing-song. Any

one who could write a sentence or two on a palm leaf was passed for a man of letters.”¹²

Even though Orissa came under the British rule in 1803, up to 1866 there was almost total absence of attempt on the part of the Government to provide the people with means of modern education. But during this period, the Christian Missionaries made some laudable contribution in developing regional language, establishment of printing press, introduction of magazines and text books and in setting up of schools, thus leading to the foundation and introduction of a modern education system in Orissa. Therefore, they can well be said to be the fore-runners of anew awakening in the field of general, technical and women education in Orissa in the 19th century.¹³

ECONOMIC CONDITION

Orissa became economically poorer during the British rule. Two important indigenous industries are salt and cotton were ruined by the British commercial policy for their own economic interest. In coastal Orissa thousands of deprived people significantly added to their incomes from agriculture by manufacturing salt.

¹² Behuria, N.C, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Cuttack, 1996, pp-764-765

¹³ O’Malley, Op.cit, p.211

The British established their monopoly over the salt manufacture, salt trade and suppressed the salt manufacture and salt trade through private initiative. In 1863 the British government abolished monopoly over salt manufacture and salt trade and stopped manufacture of salt. The manufacture of salt was there after allowed to be carried on through private enterprise under the exercise rules of Act VII (B.C) of 1864. Under these excise rules, a salt manufacture was required to pay duty to the Government. The salt industry could not be revived anymore, because the indigenous salt could not compete with the imported Liverpool salt of superior quality. The indigenous salt industry virtually ended with the abolition of the British salt monopoly and discontinuance of Government manufacture of salt. The discontinuance of Government manufacture of salt resulted in depriving 26000 *Mangalis* (salt workers) of the means of their livelihood. Almost simultaneously, in the later half of the nineteenth century, the indigenous cotton industry was irretrievably ruined because of import of foreign cloths, made possible by water transport. The pressure on land increased due to the ruin of indigenous industries. But agriculture was found unprofitable due to the burden of land

revenue and natural calamities like food, drought and cyclone. In many cases the peasants preferred to relinquish their holdings instead of carrying on unprofitable cultivation. Between 1836 and 1896 the average land revenue per acre increased from Rs.1-9 *annas* to Rs 2-3 *annas*. During this period the *thani* cultivation in the Cuttack, Puri and Balasore districts declined by 62,66 and 43 percent respectively not only due to excessive rent but also due to agricultural depression and the famine of 1865-66. During the famine of 1865-66 more than a million people died in coastal Orissa. The famine was caused by the drought and there were practically no irrigation facilities at that time. Food stuff could not be imported from outside as "Orissa was at that time almost isolated from the rest of India; the only road leading to Calcutta across a country intersected by large rivers and liable to inundation was unmetalled and unbridged and there was very little communication by sea."¹⁴

Even though the rent was heavy, the tenants did not generally protest. As reported by British Officer Maddox, during the settlement of 1897, in the whole province, "in only a very few cases" the

¹⁴ Pattanaik, N.R, *Economic History Of Orissa*, Indus Publishing, New Delhi, 1997, pp-25-30

tenants refused to accept the rents ultimately proposed to them. As observed by the commission in the land revenue report of 1872-73, in Orissa the tenant is generally yielding and ignorant, and eminently oppressible, totally unacquainted with his rights and falls an easy prey to an unscrupulous landlord. The tenant not only paid land revenue to the *Zamindar* but also numerous other charges like *salami*, *Bethi* and *Magan*. Unable to earn livelihood from land many oriya subsequently migrated to Calcutta as labourers. During the British period no adequate flood prevention measures were adopted. As regards irrigation, the East India Irrigation and canal company was formed in 1860. The construction of canals was started in 1863. By 1889-1900, actually 93,600 acres of land was irrigated. The irrigation system was mainly confined to the Cuttack district. During the British period, due to lack of large scale industries, and slow growth of commerce Orissa did not have large urban centers; the towns were generally administrative centers like district or sub divisional headquarters. There were some religious towns like Bhubaneswar and Puri. In the Cuttack district 4.06% of the population (numbering 88,556) lived in its three towns (Cuttack, Jajpur and Kendrapara in Cuttack

district that time now they are separate districts) and Cuttack, the divisional headquarter had a population of 65,263.¹⁵ Besides, the fate of marginal farmers became unenviable. The population pressure on land, absence of knowledge about scientific input, creeping decline in village level industries made the sale of individual holdings a regular feature. The distress sale during famine conditions made the price of land low. Due to paucity of data it is difficult to show the statistics of such sale of individual holdings during the period of present study. But, it was quite visible when the number of occupancy ryots decreased and the number of non-occupancy *ryots* increased only due to large scale land alienation arising out of steep rise of rent of settled *ryots*.¹⁶ The contemporary Oriya literature had shown how the money lenders and affluent tenants were purchasing land under mortgage by conditional sale from the poor and ignorant peasant folk. But it would be wrong to brand all land sales as distress sales. The purchasers of new lands often sold their property for consolidation of holdings for improving cultivation through pre-emptive purchases. Even sometimes

¹⁵ Pradhan, A.C., *The Nationalist Movement*, Amar Prakashan, 1991, pp-3-5

¹⁶ Patanaik, N.R., *Economic History Orissa*, Indus Publishing, New Delhi, 1999, pp-25-30

the small lands of sub-tenant came under such sales only for their failure to continue the agricultural operations. Without any external assistance this type of land sale only changed the ownership of holdings but not possession and swelled the rank of share-croppers which became a new feature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century agrarian economy of Orissa. The phenomena of large scale distress sales arising out of eviction from holdings and resumption of service tenures led to pauperization but not to depesantisation altogether. The ownership of holdings changed hands but the peasants continued to cultivate as 'pahi' ryots or as share-croppers of the holdings they sold. His resumption of service-tenure made the position of tenure -holders deplorable because in many cases by distress sale they were converted into '*pahi ryots*.'

Orissa, an integral part of India with continuous frustration of capital formation that ushered in a crisis in her today's agrarian economy because of British exploitation. The study of the societal change of Orissa, comparatively an underdeveloped region in eastern India prompts to look backward and introduce a picture of the land and its people under the historical perspective since the twentieth

century dawns in this region with the forces of freedom struggle. In the British period Orissa's economy was at a very low level of development with low per capita income and without preconditions for industrialization. One of the remarkable features of the British rule in Orissa was maximization of revenue through land settlements. The net collection of revenue in 1901 was increased by 20%, compared to the settlements of 1837 and it was further increased by 53% in 1933-36. The maximization of revenue was justified by the government since expenditure in civil administration and works of public utility had increased. The British raj also anticipated that restoration of law and order in through country side would create a congenial economic environment to enhance cultivation process. But the supposed peasant's prosperity was quite illusory. The proverbial poverty and misery imposed on the peasantry was proved by the recurrence of natural as well as man made scarcities arising out of natural calamities like famine, drought, and floods through out the period of the present study.

GENERAL LEVEL OF PRICES

The tremendous rise in the price of rice, the staple food-stuff of the district can

be gathered from the figures of the decennial price averages given below. The principal rise occurred between 1855 and 1865, the figures for the former year being 51.7870 kg. to a rupee, and that of the latter 22.2730 kg to a rupee. In the great famine (**Na'nka**) year of 1866, the figure was 9.1070 kg. to a rupee which indicates how enormously the price of rice rose with the outbreak of the famine. The steady rise in prices was attributed to the improvement

of communications bringing the district into touch with outside markets and allowing the cultivators to participate in the export trade. However, this reason is not applicable for the year 1866 due to great famine in Orissa which took a heavy toll of human and animal lives.

The following table shows the upward trend of the decennial price level of rice from 1837 to 1930:

Period		Kilograms per rupee
1837-46	:	40.3099
1847-56	:	54.0638
1857-66	:	26.6679
1867-76	:	25.0723
1877-86	:	19.8377
1887-96	:	17.0010
1901-10	:	13.1007
1911-20	:	9.0137
1921-30	:	8.0619

Source: Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers (Cuttack) E.R J.R. Cousins, 1933, P. 144

The prices of other articles of common consumption had also increased considerably. The following table shows the rise in prices of other articles between the year 1911 and 1930:

Name of articles	Quality	Price (in rupee)	
		1911	1930
Wheat	Per kg.	3.38	5.69
Dal	Ditto	2.24	10.00

Salt	Ditto	1.81	2.50
Ghee	Ditto	43.53	82.50
Cotton	Ditto	19.00	34.29
Tobacco (leaf)	Ditto	10.19	17.13
Sugar	Ditto	4.96	8.00
Kerosene oil	Per tin	1.75	3.37

Source: Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers (Cuttack) E.R J.R. Cousins, 1933, p 144

The following table shows the harvest prices of certain important crops for the period 1935-36 to 1941-42: (Kilograms per rupee)

Year	Commodities Price						
	Rice	Wheat	Gram	Mustard	Jute	Tobacco	Sugarcane
1935-36	13.980	.....	12.197	66.786	.....	.....	12.695
1936-37	15.296	.....	14.579	9.193	.....	.....	11.276
1937-38	15.297	.....	14.929	8.294	.....	.....	11.484
1938-39	15.172	.....	.....	5.742	.....	.....	6.736
1939-40	10.087	9.331	.....	7.464	.....	.....	9.331
1940-41	10.245	8.782	.....	6.786	2.332	.....	8.782
1941-42	8.993	.....	.....	.....	5.638	.....	.....

Source: Orissa statistical Abstracts Published by Directorate of statistics & Economics Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

GEENERAL LEVEL OF WAGES

In 1805, Sawyers, Stone-cutters and tailors were paid Rs.4.00; Bricklayers, Blacksmiths, Carpenters and Gharmis (thatchers) got Rs.3.00 and grass-cutters, sweepers and other menial servants Rs.2.00 a month. Since the beginning of 20th century the movement of wages for the principal classes of labourers showed an upward trend.¹⁷

The following table shows the level of wages for the period 1910 to 1930

Class of Labourers	Wage rates per day (in rupee)		
	1910	1920	1930

¹⁷ Behuria, N.C, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Cuttack District, 1996, pp-487-489

Blacksmith	0.50 to 1.00	0.62 to 1.12	0.75 to 1.25
Mason	0.50 to 0.75	0.62 to 1.00	0.75 to 1.25
Carpenter	0.50 to 0.75	0.62 to 1.00	0.75 to 1.25
Gharami	0.20 to 0.25	0.25 to 0.37	0.31 to 0.50
Unskilled labourers	0.19	0.25	0.31
Ploughman	0.19	0.25	0.31

Source: Indian Labour Journal, 1930

The figures in the above table relate to labourers in the towns. In the rural areas the village artisans and labourers were remunerated for the most part in kind than in cash. The village carpenter, black smith, washer man and barber were regarded as servants of the community, and generally held service lands known as Desheta Jagir, services connected with them continued to be performed. In addition, they used to receive an annual contribution from each household, which was generally about 14 kg. paddy per plough (or equivalent in form of paddy sheaves at harvest time) in the case of the blacksmith and the carpenter, and the same amount per head in the case of the washer man and barber. The vast majority of agricultural labourers were paid in kind.

Generally there were two categories of agricultural labourers, namely *Haliyas or Kothiyas* (ploughman) and *Mulias* (labourers). The first categories were permanently employed, and were bound to their employers by a nexus of debt which they must discharge before they left their service. They received about Rs. 5.00 to Rs.10.00 a year in cash, or Rs. 0.12 to Rs.0.19 a day in cash, or 2.100 to 2.800 kg. paddy, on those days on which they worked. If he did not sleep on the premises of the employer, he was given a small plot on which to build a house and one-fifth to a quarter of an acre of land which he was allowed to cultivate with seeds and ploughs provided by his employer. He was also allowed from the harvest 4 to 8 sheaves of paddy for each acre ploughed

and 8 to 12 sheaves for each acre reaped. The women and children added to the family earnings by casual labour in the fields. The second category was agricultural labourers, and was generally paid in kind, his daily wage being sufficient paddy to yield 2.300 to 2.800kg. Of rice. When paid in cash the usual wage was about Re.0.31 a day. Some of them had a little land of their own for cultivation.¹⁸

STANDARD OF LIVING

Cuttack is one of the coastal districts of Orissa characterized by summer, high humidity nearly all the year round and good seasonal rainfall. In comparison with other districts; it is the most thickly populated district. It is a fertile district traversed by many large rivers which throw out a network of distributaries sometimes reuniting and some times bifurcating as they pass across the plains. Actually the British arrival the economy Orissa was broken down. They soon after their conquest started experimenting with various revenue systems which caused immense hardship to the people. Inconsistent and oppressive policy of the government resulted in miseries and sufferings of the people to a great extent. Owing to lack of proper investigation into

the land tenure system and the resources, here was over assessment of taxes which resulted in heavy arrears every year. The ultimate burden of over assessment fell upon the poor cultivators which broke the economic backbones of the people. Maddox in his final report on the 1897 settlement wrote;” The great general opinion of the officers who have for years worked among the people and gained their confidence is that 80 percent of the rural population are more or less permanently indebted to the Mahajan (landlord) , proprietary tenure holder or *Zamindar*.” The next decade 1921-30 was a period of distress in various forms. The aftermath of war was effectively felt in every field of activity. There were natural calamities resulting from floods necessitating extensive distribution of *Taccavi* loans (mainly given to poor farmers for rehabilitation or to improve crop cultivation or to buy seeds. It is given by the government.) and gratuitous relief. The decade was not free from adversities. Ruinous floods occurred in 1933, 1934, 1937, 1939 and 1940. The flood of 1937 was the highest in the living memory causing several breaches in embankments and spreading sand over cultivated lands and causing damage to crops. Other floods of the decade also caused considerable

¹⁸ Ibid.pp-496-498

damage to crops. The British had not taken any step to mitigate their suffering in 1936, Jajpur subdivision was subjected to the devastation of a cyclone, greatly damaging crops, while the lower regions of the district were over run by tidal waves. There was partial failure of crop in 1933, 1937, and 1939, and the harvest of 1940 was very poor. In spite of these adverse conditions, the people were engaged in agriculture, industry and other avocations.¹⁹ The freedom movement got strengthened at the growth of economic nationalism. The peasant movements that broke out in 1920s and 1930s provided further impetus to the freedom movement in Orissa. Excessive land revenue, forcible collection, unlawful eviction, forced labour and other illegal exactions of the landlords, recurring famines and increasing poverty were some of the basic causes of the agrarian unrest. From the time of the non-cooperation movement, peasant movement came to constitute an integral part of the freedom movement. A prominent role in the freedom movement was played by the peasants of Orissa²⁰.

Problem and Reason of Poverty

Orissa as a separate ethnic entity may be identified with the interests that

could hardly be ensured in the prevailing conditions. Since none were literate enough to become aware of their rights and legal mechanism that could ensure the enjoyment of such statutory rights, tillers of the soil never turned to the court to mitigate territory of Kalinga. In other words Rajendra Lal Mitra; “Orissa’s people lived happily and contented for ages under a national government with every opportunity to cultivate the arts of peace and promote the prosperity of the father-land.” In course of time this glory declined, reaching its nadir during the British rule when the state was disintegrated and merged into the neighboring states. The proverbial poverty of Orissa was more or less a 19th century economic phenomenon. This indicates a poor quality of life, a degraded standard of living, and lowest rate of economic growth, and stagnation in all sectors of economic production. Political stability under the British *Raj* did contribute little to the growth in production and people carried on economic activities along the traditional lines. The resources were so limited than any crisis like famine and drought they suffered the worst. Various socio-economic forces were in operation to retard the economic growth during the colonial period. About 90 percent of the

¹⁹Ibid., pp.502- 503

²⁰ Op.cit., pp.643-644

total population of British Orissa lived in the villages. This increase in population was nothing so alarming when we compare this with the growth rate of European countries during this historical phase. The growth by half in 80 years cannot be held responsible for systematic impoverishment by being a heavy pressure on agrarian economy. The increase in population could have been turned into good account had there been any positive strategy to create employment for the rising workforce in some wealth-bearing sectors. Even mechanization of local industries would have absorbed the whole of it to productive advantage. In absence of job space to employ them, they had to subsist on land, there being no other option for survival. Artisanal productions of various kinds, ranging from basket making to carpentry and blacksmith were a part of the communal economy of a village. A village often constituted an autonomous system of economy, the output serving only to satisfy the needs of the community.²¹ The artisans sold their products at the local markets, often to meet their daily expense on all heads except food grain which they might procure in exchange of their goods. We do

²¹ Samal, J.K., *Economy of Colonial Orissa: 1866-1947*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, pp.18-20

not have any evidence of British Policy in the positive to help the artisan class improve the condition of their production. There was any measure taken to organize them into manufacturing guilds or cooperative societies. This makes British economic policy so defective and flawed as a growth oriented plan for the general upliftment of the condition of the masses. Only after 1936, sugar factory of Rayagada, paper mill at Brajarajnar, glass factory at Barang were set up. The concentration of people on land was further aggravated by the rapid decay of village industry. Silk and cotton cloth of Orissa, to name the best among the turnover of the economic system, had found good market for their fine texture and durability.²²

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²² Ibid., pp.27-28



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