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Environment and Social History: Kalahandi, 1800–1950

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SUMMARY

This paper examines the social history of Kalahandi in western Orissa over the 1800–1950 period, in an attempt to explore the roots of the famine which haunts the region even today. It delineates the pre-colonial origins of the crisis, and the way Kalahandi's colonisation reinforced the problems.

Kalahandi is in the north-west portion of the present-day Orissa province, bordering Raipur (Madhya Pradesh) and the Koraput District in the west; the Koraput District in the south; Bolangir, Sambalpur and Raipur in the north; and the Koraput District and Baudh-Khondmals in the east. Originally a feudal state, with five *zamindaris* (Karlapat, Mahulpatana, Madanpur-Rampur, Lanjigarh and Kashipur),¹ Kalahandi merged with Orissa on 1 January 1948. The present-day Kalahandi district stretches across an area of 11,835 sq. km., and the breadth from east to west is roughly about 140 km. It is an extension of the Eastern Ghats. Bhawanipatana is the district headquarters.

Very little is known about Kalahandi's past. During Panini's time this region was called Tailika Janapada, and it was famous for its trade in rhino hide. It seems that its ruling family can be traced back to 1005 A.D. In a Narla Siva inscription of the 13th century A.D., the region is referred to as Kamala Mandala, which can be translated as 'lotus' or 'prosperous' region. It seems that this tract enjoyed an autonomous status until the time of Raghujji Bhonsle II, when a tribute of Rs 5,330 was extracted from the Raja of Kalahandi (some time between 1766 and 1788 A.D.).²

We are told about the *umrao* system which existed in the pre-colonial period. According to this system, tribal chiefs ruled clusters of villages, which had common lands.³ Everything was based on customary laws, including the linkages with the *rajās* and the *zamindars*. These indigenous people had played a

vital role in clearing the forests and in producing the surplus which sustained the region. Their importance in statecraft is corroborated by the fact that in 1775 A.D. the Khariar Chief married his daughter to a tribal (Gond) chief of Narra in order to strengthen his position *vis-à-vis* the Marathas.⁴ Similarly, in 1818 the tribal chiefs 'bought' the freedom of the chief of Khariar, who had been held as a captive at Nagpur because of his inability to pay Rs.1600/- to the Marathas.⁵ Their importance can also be grasped from the fact that the head of a particular Kandha family (Pat Majhi) made the young prince of Kalahandi sit on his lap during his coronation. These events not only reflect on the complex process of the peasantisation/Hinduisation of the tribals, but also the attempt by the pre-colonial ruling class to seek legitimacy from the tribals, especially the Kandhas, who made up a very major component of the tribal population.

Attempts to Hinduise this region were justified by the need for access to and control over its resources, as well as to absorb the consequent tensions. Efforts were made to create a Brahminical order, which can be traced back to the fifth century A.D., when land grants were made to the Brahmins by the Parvata Dvarakas. This trend continued, and intensified during the Panduvansis or Somavansis (6th – 11th century A.D.).⁶ The Brahminical order co-existed with the *umrao* system. It proved to be vital in securing social legitimacy for the changes taking place, which included the process of social stratification and the peasantisation of tribal society.

While discussing the specificities of the evolution of the caste structure in medieval Orissa, present-day scholars talk of the migration of Brahmins into Orissa. Thus, they point to the assignment of land grants and the process of peasantisation of tribals⁷ – a process with which the development of feudalism and social stratification was linked. This involved the migration of Brahmins from the Sambalpur-Raipur area into interior tracts such as Kalahandi, and the emergence of Brahmins from among some of the tribal population. In the pre-colonial period land grants were conferred on the ruler's family members, as well as on the upper crust of the tribal people, who desired Kshatriya status. We also have 18th century evidence of the Kandhas resisting the pressures exerted on them.⁸

The clearing of forests and the availability of agricultural space proved to be attractive to the Kultas of the Raipur-Sambalpur belt. They would also settle down at Kalahandi and, in fact, by the 19th century A.D. a conscious policy seems to have been adopted to encourage them, as they were 'industrious' in comparison to the tribal population.⁹ This label was distinctly associated with the colonisation of the region and the efforts to tap its resources by the feudal section of society and the colonists that are apparent from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. These features were to form the backbone of a Brahmin-Kshatriya-Kulta alliance which originated in the pre-colonial period, and extended its power over the indigenous people, leading to encroachment upon the agricultural space cleared by them.

Fateh Narayan Deo's reign (1831-1853) saw an attempt by the Kandhas to resist the changes that were taking place – loss of lands they had cleared and cultivated, desertions into the hills and forests, disruption of the agricultural cycle, and scarcities. Their adversaries were very powerful, and nature seemed to need appeasement through human sacrifices. The *mariah* sacrifice was regarded as a necessary survival strategy – a point that is sometimes lost sight of in portrayals of the 'violent' and 'wild' Kandhas, and their 'zeal' for sacrificing humans. Although projected as something they had practised for generations, it is highly probable that it was actually invented to cope with the sweeping changes which had devastating effects on them, which we have discussed. The fact that the *mariah* had to be bought, and, in this remote tract the *zamindars* charged between Rs 20 and Rs 25 for each of them, not only reflects on the importance attached to the *mariah* sacrifice, but also on how the *zamindars* made profits out of the sacrifice.¹⁰

It is worth noting that the first reference to scarcities occurs in 1853. Campbell, who was briefly present in connection with the 'burden' of suppressing the *mariah* sacrifice, refers specifically to the failure of crops in the hills and the plains of Kalahandi, and desertions due to famine and disease. He also refers to 'ruined tanks'.¹¹ These are evidence for pre-colonial crisis and migrations – a state of affairs that worsened substantially in the colonial period.

The suppression of the *mariah* sacrifice provided the basis of what was to be a feudal/colonial alliance. This was perfected during the reign of Udit Narayan Deo – the '28th king' of Kalahandi – who succeeded his father in 1853. The alliance was put to test in 1855. The Kandhas had not forgiven Macneill, the Agent, who had arrested Rendo Majhi, the head of the Borikiya Kandhas, and kept him at Russelkonda for his complicity in the *mariah* sacrifice. During Macneill's tour of Kalahandi in December 1855, he had Rendo Majhi tied and exhibited as a warning to the Kandhas. The latter retaliated, and were joined by the Kuttia Kandhas. The legendary Chakra Bisoi seems to have become a major icon of this rebellion. The Agent was cornered by the rebels, and had to be rescued by Dinabandhu Patnaik, the Kandha Mahal *tahsildar*.¹²

It is quite possible that the anti-*mariah* offensives in the mid-nineteenth century gave impetus to the process of desertions by the indigenous people, accompanied as they were with terror – burning and plundering of grain, which may correlate with the food scarcity observed by Campbell in 1853. In 1856 Elliot saw abandoned land, which 'had been once cultivated', along with 'extensive wastelands'.¹³ Thus, the anti-*mariah* crusade may have given the indigenous people the first major push of the 19th century into the hilly, forested interior of Kalahandi. For the tribal folk it was back to square one – the lands they had cleared and cultivated were lost, and they had to begin all over again.

Dongarchas (shifting cultivation) was adopted not because it was 'dear to their heart'¹⁴ but because there was no other alternative. Some of the tribals who did manage to survive in the plains continued with the old practice of settled

agriculture. Nevertheless, for the vast majority, the beginnings of ‘modernity’ spelt doom.¹⁵

The process of devastating the environment was, however, only just beginning. Around this time Kalahandi – incredibly – still had frost and snow in winter. The people managed two rice crops a year, and, according to Elliot’s testimony there were common tanks and wells shared by all.¹⁶ However, the beginnings of a shift away from rice production were evident. Clearing forests for cultivation, the problems of cultivating on hill tops, and water constraints all led to a greater dependence on *mandia* (millet), *ragi*, *kotkee*, etc. The *dongarchasis*’ diet began to shift from one that was based on rice to dry crops. This also implied drinking *mohwa* instead of *handia*.¹⁷ What needs to be emphasised is that, as with *dongarchas*, the change in diet was a response to forces that were largely external, and over which the people had very little control. Their re-orientation to these changes was part of a resistance/survival strategy.

Kalahandi came directly under colonial rule during Udit Narayan Deo’s time, in 1863, and this was formalised by the *sanad* of 1867. It must have been a prized acquisition for the empire, going by the fact that it was the only Orissan princely state to be accorded a nine gun salute.¹⁸ A region that had seen a very limited level of capital proliferation¹⁹ was dragged into the colonial system, as well as its associated features – viz.: market forcest, price fluctuations, money power, etc. The Kandhas, Gonds, Dombs and Gowdas were again disrupted, this time by the force of the profit motive. There was a rapid increase in the traffic in and export of grain and artefacts, culminating in 1883,²⁰ when the railway line up to Rajnandgaon was inaugurated. The ‘food scarcity’ of 1868 may have been the first symptom of these upheavals.²¹

During the tenure of Udit Narayan Deo, a deliberate policy was adopted to encourage the Kultas to occupy the agricultural areas.²² They were needed to provide the state with far greater resources than the ‘unproductive’/‘lazy’ Kandhas. Such epithets not only fail to comprehend the pre-capitalist nature of tribal production, but also the systematic terror and land alienation that the tribal folk were exposed to. The same attitudes had a crippling effect on agriculture and, in fact, created the basis for a crisis-ridden system from which recovery was impossible. Furthermore, forest restrictions and high rent demands were imposed, hitting both those who had been forced out to the hills and those who had stayed on in the plains. Added to all this was the menace of the Kultas, who had been constantly outmanoeuvring the Khonds and the other indigenous people.²³

The people had not entirely given up the path of confrontation and self-assertion. A cycle seemed to be over when Udit Narayan Deo died in 1881: his death was the signal for a rebellion. Their survival strategy made them determined to oust the Kultas. Appeals were made to the Chief Commissioner to solve their problems, and when nothing was done to redress their grievances the Kandhas, Gonds, Gowdas and Dombs ‘attached’ the property of their rivals in broad daylight, unaccompanied by any personal violence. Out of the 142 villages

‘plundered’, 69 villages belonged to the Kultas, 27 to the Telis, 17 to the Malis, 12 to the Gonds, 9 to Kombhars, 6 to Gowdas, and one each to the Joshis and the Mohantis.²⁴

These actions were widely perceived as just and fair. The composition of the participants demolishes the label of ‘Kandha rebellion’, ascribed to this movement. Similarly, the details of their actions show how, although the Kultas were the central target, other exploiters were not spared. What is remarkable is that, on the appeals of the colonial administrators, most of the ‘stolen’ property (viz.: cash, brass utensils, ornaments, cows, buffaloes, etc.) excepting the grain – which they saw as something that originally belonged ‘to them’ – was returned. The indigenous people, thus raised a moral issue which the feudals/colonialists could never grasp. Even some of the grain was returned, and although the Kultas alleged that vast amounts of grain were not returned, the indigenous people accused the former of exaggerating the amount taken by them, and simultaneously confessed that they had consumed a portion of it.²⁵

When Berry reached Khariar (April 1882) he seemed to be quite clear about the problem of the Kandhas. However, the Kultas could not be left unaided. His efforts to win over the Kandhas by issuing land leases did not produce any result. The indigenous people wanted the Kultas to go, since even if settled as *ryots* under the Kandha Majhis they would ‘eventually come forward and oust them from their villages’.²⁶

The ‘bent arrow’ and the ‘rope with a knot’ circulated in different parts of the state, and signalled the beginning of the rebellion in which some Kultas were killed. We need not go into all the barbaric details of the counter-insurgency operations; it is enough to note that about 13 Kandha villages and the grain which they preserved were burnt down.²⁷ Needless to say, these actions, which united the feudals and the colonialists, reinforced the already existing crisis.

These events coincided with an intensive drive to tap forests – stealing them from the people who had managed to survive in the plains, and from those who had been displaced. Severe restrictions were imposed on the use of forests. Timber products were needed to build the railway line connecting Kalahandi to Rajnandgaon. Each sleeper of the railway line – which became operational in 1883 – not only contributed to the devastation of Kalahandi’s ecology, but also led to the sufferings of those who worked at the site with meagre or no wages, or those whose lands were taken over, without any compensation.²⁸

The countering of the ‘Kandha’ rebellion and the rail link were complemented by the two summary settlements of 1883 and 1888.²⁹ Under the direct supervision of the colonists, who had taken over Kalahandi’s administration since 1882, these had far-reaching consequences. They polarised and legitimised features already visible in the pre-colonial/colonial period – viz.: the loss of land of the indigenous people and their shift into the hilly and forested interior. Thus, most of the good lands and most of the villages passed on to the Brahmins and the Kultas. The former dominated the north-east, the latter, the south-west. The

formal abolition of the *umrao* system dealt a further blow to the position of the tribals.

The summary settlements significantly reinforced the process of social stratification, which had originated in the pre-colonial phase. The social/power structure was dominated by the *raja* at the top, who had five or six *zamindars* (who were members of the ruling family) under him. The *raja* held the *khalsa* land directly under him and granted *maufi* tenures to gods and Brahmins. The state paid a paltry amount to the British, called *peshkush*. This amounted to Rs 16,000 in 1938. However, the resources siphoned off were massive. In 1894 the total income of the state was Rs 111,000; in 1933-34 its total land revenue alone was about Rs 212,698; and by 1938 its total income stood at Rs 625,000. In a period of 44 years the total income of the state had increased by more than five times.

The *zamindars* also contributed to the perfection of the exploitative system. The *zamindars* had sub-*zamindars* under them, who were quite powerful, and levied their own tolls and taxes. The colonial administration was closely aligned with the *zamindars*, and by the twentieth century the former's presence was felt in the remotest corners of the state.

Conventional practices included the recruitment of forced labour. This was supposedly abolished in 1923, and a cess was imposed in lieu of it. Nevertheless, the practice continued, and monetisation coexisted with feudal exploitation, crippling the people. Then there was *rasad*—forced supply of various items. The state had monopoly rights on almost everything, so commodities ranging from forest products to grain were 'bought' for paltry amounts.³⁰

A highly organised mechanism of trade developed, through which the *darbar*, *zamindars*, *goantias* and traders made massive profits. An *ex-raja* of Kalahandi has written of the province's 'golden past', and he relates how 50,000 tons of paddy was exported to Bengal during the 1943 Bengal famine.³¹ One can well imagine the huge profits made through this, especially as during the preceding phase, grain was not allowed to be exported out of the state, in the name of preventing scarcity.³²

Among the other ways adopted to extract money were the innumerable cesses, which assumed alarming proportions between the 1880s and 1940s. These included *nistar* (forest cess), at 2 annas per rupee of rent paid; a *patwari* cess at 1 anna per rupee of rent paid; a cess at Re.1 annually on industrial castes; a *sukhabasi* cess on the landless at 4 annas per hearth a year; a hospital and a school cess; and, *magan* for every occasion considered important by the royal household. The concept of compensation to those whose lands were taken over, or, remissions/suspensions in years of crisis was unknown.

The magnitude of the problem can also be judged from the level of enhancement after settlements. Thus, the 1911 settlement led to a 30% enhancement for the villages, with a 50% hike for individual peasants. Similarly, the 1922 settlement was marked by a 60% increase for the villages and a 100% rise

in the tax paid by the *ryots*. The land tax in Kalahandi was also higher than the neighbouring states. And, seen, in the perspective outlined above, one can well imagine the pressure on the peasants and tribals in the region, and how perpetual crisis became virtually part of the system.³³

At the village level the Brahmins and the Kulta *goantias* dominated the power structure. They were the landed elements, who also dominated money-lending and the grain trade. One should mention here the indigenous internal exploiters within tribal society, who might either seek upward social mobility, and get fused into the caste system, or continue to identify themselves as tribals. It may be relevant to refer here to the 12 Gond villages which were ‘plundered’ in 1882. And, although we have no evidence of Kandha *goantias*, it is highly probable that some, among those who stayed behind in the plains, acquired these rights and became absorbed into the caste system. We can also refer to the Dombos who emerged as creditors.³⁴

The *goantias* were landed elements. Every village was held by a *goantia*, and the *maufi* villages had *sikmi goantias*. The built-in logic of parasitism is demonstrated by the fact that *goanti* rights were frequently auctioned off to the highest bidder. The power of these *goantias* pivoted around their tax collecting role, with which came vital privileges. They owned the best land (*bhogra*). They could reclaim waste land and take over land surrendered by ejected peasants. They were supposed to construct water sources, and, were originally rewarded by the *darbar* for these. However, although the water systems were built through the recruitment of forced labour, they were subsequently stolen from the people. Between Elliot’s time (1856) – when access to water was relatively easy – and the post-summary settlement period, water system rights were appropriated and monopolised by the *goantias*. The *goantias*’ power stretched, without any legal basis, into the *dongarla* area. They tapped the *dongarchasis* and appropriated the resources that were obtained.³⁵

The villages had some officials – viz.: Jhankar, Chaukidar and Nariah. Besides, service tenures were held by washermen and barbers. The occupancy tenants had no rights. Some of them leased out portions of their land to others in return for paddy or cash rents. The *sukhabasi* were those who held homesteads not above 0.25 decimals. Together with the agricultural labourers they worked for others. The normal working day was eleven hours for which in the early part of the 20th century men received 3 seers of paddy and women half that amount. This became 25 paise for males in 1942 and 37 paise in 1945. The forced labourers were recruited from among the occupancy tenants, *sukhabasis* and the agricultural labourers.

Large parts of Kalahandi were not surveyed even up to the 1940s. Most of the *dongarla* area was part of this unsurveyed region. Although not assessed systematically, the tribal folk inhabiting them were sometimes taxed on the seed capacity of the strips they had cleared for cultivation, or, the number of ploughs and axes owned by them. In the 20th century, settlements were made quite

frequently (in 6 to 20 years) with these people.³⁶ The mode of assessment and the regularity of the settlements, coupled with the nature of cultivation, made things extremely difficult for the people in the *dongarla* area.

Seeing things in the perspective I have delineated, a highly parasitic system had emerged to siphon off resources and sustain itself. The people worked under very difficult conditions. However, what they produced could sustain the landless, for example, for 4 to 6 months after which they had to live on *ragi*, mango stone, edible roots and tamarind seeds. Given this, in order to survive they had to search for alternatives: loans, which pushed them into a debt trap, or migration to far off places such as Assam, where they were classified as 'criminal tribes'.

The debt structure was linked to a vicious cycle of prices and seasons, which produced a trap from which recovery was impossible. Foodgrain prices were lowest immediately after the harvest, and dearest immediately before the harvest. For example, the price of rice fluctuated between 12.130kg and 16.800kg. per rupee and that of mandia between 20.527kg and 29.857kg per rupee in 1912. Similarly, the price of rice rose from 18.660kg. per rupee in September 1918 to 8.864kg. per rupee in March 1919, and that of *mandia* rose from 23.325kg. per rupee in April 1918 to 11.662kg. per rupee in March 1919. In 1933-34 the price of rice was 31 seers per rupee in December, but was 20 seers per rupee between July and September. In the same period, the price of mandia was 40 seers per rupee in April, May, January and February and 32 seers per rupee between July to November and March. Local factors such as rumours about impending scarcity, as well as general features affecting the colonial economy (e.g. the First World War and the Great Depression) also reinforced the problem. And a harvest 'boom' might actually be followed by scarcities, because of the hoarding of grain by traders.³⁷ The local traders profited immensely, and settled down in 'masonry houses' at Bhawanipatana.

By the end of the 19th century, a brisk trade of selling cloth and purchasing grain had developed. Rice that had been appropriated from the indigenous people was a high priority trading item.³⁸ This demolishes the dichotomy often made between the 'traditional', 'subsistence' sector and the modern 'cash crop' sector.

The death-blow to agricultural production was thus rooted in the systemic crisis, and not in the increase of population from 133,483 in 1871-72 to 655,194 in 1931 (or 15.92 lakhs in 1991, which is only 5 % of the total population of the state of Orissa).³⁹ The 20th century witnessed a polarisation of the affluent landed elements – *raja*, *zamindars* and the *goantias* – on one side, and the agricultural labourers, poor peasants and shifting cultivators on the other side. The latter were systematically sucked dry by the feudal/colonial system.

The problem for the shifting cultivators in the *dongarla* area was made more acute due to soil erosion and the consequent damage to the ecosystem. The water retention capacity of the soil was severely diminished. This point is of some significance, given the rainfall data outlined in Table 1.⁴⁰

<i>Range in mm</i>	<i>Number of years</i>
901-1000	3
1001-1100	2
1101-1200	6
1201-1300	7
1301-1400	2
1401-1500	8
1501-1600	11
1601-1700	2
1701-1800	2
1801-1900	2
1901-2000	1

TABLE 1. Rainfall data for the years 1901-1950

The average annual rainfall was not particularly low: between 1902-3 and 1907-8 it was 55.83 mm.⁴¹ The problem of soil erosion/water retention ability of the soil is also relevant to the devastation by floods which struck the plains in 1927.⁴²

The cropping pattern and the irrigation details for the 1946-50 period⁴³ also demonstrate the crisis in agriculture production (Tables 2 to 4).

Paddy	348217.23 acres
Ragi	13820.46 acres
Kudo, Gurji, etc.	158710.2 acres
	(total 520747.89 acres)

TABLE 2. Acreage of crops, 1946-1950

Cropped area:	520747.89 acres
Irrigated land:	641021.00 acres
Area for which irrigation was not available:	120273.11 acres

TABLE 3. Irrigation details, 1946-1950

1. Government controlled reservoirs:	irrigation –	2637
2. -do- which do not serve the purpose of irrigation –		824
3. Reservoirs in <i>ryoti khata</i>	irrigation –	1013
4. -do- which do not serve the purpose of irrigation –		132
5. Wells	<i>pucca</i> –	114
6. -do-	<i>kutchra</i> –	9976

TABLE 4. Number of water reservoirs, 1946-1950

These are very rough estimates which, most probably, do not take the shifting cultivators into account. Nevertheless, all these features together account for the sporadic scarcities and droughts throughout the region, up to 1950. In fact, records of these are as frequent as the visits of officials compiling the annual administration reports, or of census officials (Table 5).⁴⁴

<i>Year</i>	<i>Nature of crisis</i>
1856	Food Scarcity
1868	-do- (first official reporting)
1897	Famine
1899	-do-
1919-20	-do-
1922-23	Partial scarcity
1925-26	-do-
1929-30	-do-

TABLE 5. Nature of recorded crises, 1856-1930

This list is only the official perception, which may camouflage the real picture, as the Kalahandi *darbar* did not publish annual administrative reports. In confirmation, Cobden-Ramsay mentions the absence of food scarcity in 1900,⁴⁵ following the region's second officially reported famine in 1899.

The eternal crisis drove people to cattle-lifting and burglary, which can be interpreted as a part of their survival strategy. The total absence of sex related crimes, the virtual absence of dacoity (5 cases in 1910; 2 cases in 1935-36), the theft of foodgrain and the small amount of valuables stolen in comparison,⁴⁶ indicate the nature of 'crime'/'criminality'.

The structure of power and the social hierarchy, coupled with the crisis system and the problems of survival, perhaps explain the virtual isolation of Kalahandi from the nationalist movement that swept many of the princely states. The only record is related to an attempt to establish an Adivasi Sevamandal by

Apudu Sahoo at the Kashipur *zamindari* in November 1947. This sought to educate the Kandhas and Dombs, and campaigned against *begari* and free supplies. This body was outlawed and the four-anna Kandha and Domb recruits were arrested and beaten.⁴⁷

When Kalahandi merged with Orissa on 1 January 1948 it raised the hopes and aspirations of the people. However, the fact that the *goantias* remained, implied the retention of the local agency of exploitation on which the crisis system was based. Moreover, by the time the *goantia* system was formally abolished in 1956, they had re-structured and consolidated themselves. Thus, the power and position of the *goantias* have remained intact, like those of the Oriya landlords.⁴⁸ The limited possibility for land reform in Orissa has prevented any major re-structuring. Bonded labourers were ‘detected’ in Kalahandi in 1976, and the system exists even today. The daily wages were Rs 4 in 1975, and is between Rs 8 and Rs 10 today. The length of a working day is the same even today.

CONCLUSION

The above narrative has described various specificities associated with Kalahandi. By focusing on the pre-colonial origins of the crisis, I have contested scholarship that overemphasises the links between colonisation and the devastation of the forests and the suffering of the people, and implicitly glorifies the pre-colonial period.⁴⁹ By delineating stages in the evolution of colonialism,⁵⁰ including its alliance with the feudal order, I have attempted to explain its profound impact on the people and the forests. And by emphasising the intricate relationship between the people and the ecology of Kalahandi, I have explored the under-development of the region in terms of its social history.⁵¹

The continuation of the crisis since independence has made Kalahandi a metaphor for famine.⁵² The symptoms of this crisis have been evident, since the 1970s, in features such as landlessness, migrations, increased debts, dacoities, robberies, and burglaries. Modern sources also refer to rioting, suicides and an increase in drunkenness, which are new elements both of protest and of a response to an eternal crisis that threatens to obliterate the people (Table 6).

Year	Nature of crisis
1954-55	Drought
1965-66	-do-
1974-75	-do-
1984-85	-do-

TABLE 6. Crises from 1954 to 1985

From the 1980s up to the present, the region has seen the stabilisation of the famine/drought/scarcity situation.⁵³

Plans for developing the region, as well as most of Western Orissa, are yet to take off. In Kalahandi, the irrigation facilities remain highly deficient.⁵⁴ As pointed out in a recent study, the few irrigation projects that have been undertaken so far are mostly in the form of renovating or expanding the age-old irrigation tanks owned by the ex-royal families or the *ex-goantias*. Moreover, the peoples' representatives own irrigated lands, and do not depend primarily on agriculture for their living. Besides, demand for irrigation systems among these people, and other politicians, is not aimed at improving agriculture, but to develop industry. The level of support for the Indravati project, compared with the relative silence on projects like lower Sundar, Indra, Sandul and Udanti – which would benefit the chronic drought-prone areas – can be cited as evidence to illustrate this point.

NOTES

¹ Kashipur, one of the *zamindaris*, merged with the Koraput district.

² Nilamani Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, *Orissa District Gazetteers: Kalahandi*, Cuttack, 1980, pp. 41, 42, 50, 58.

³ Foreign Dep./A Political I Branch, March 1883 Nos. 59-83; National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter, NAI); hereafter Berry's Report. This is a classic colonial stereotype, which created a precedent for subsequent studies that veiled the contradictions and conflicts, and which has tempted even some present-day scholars to romanticise the pre-colonial land system.

⁴ Elliot's Report on Kalahandi State, 28 July 1856, cited in Senapati and Kuanr, *op.cit.*, as supplement, pp.457-82 (hereafter Elliot's Report); F.Deo, 'Tribal-Non-Tribal Interaction with Special Reference to Nawapara Sub-division, Kalahandi District in western Orissa', M.Phil. dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University 1984, unpublished, p. 39.

⁵ D.P.Tripathy, 'Proposed Gazetteer of Nawapara Sub-division', Accession No.44, p.50. Sambalpur University Archives, Burla, cited in F. Deo, *op.cit* p.40.

⁶ Senapati and Kuanr, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

⁷ See for example, B.P.Sahu, 'The Brahminical Model Viewed as an Instrument of Socio-Cultural Change – An Autopsy', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 1985 and his 'Orissan Society : Past and Present Manifestations' paper presented at TDSS Pune 1987, unpublished. F.Deo, *op.cit* ., pp. 38-37.

⁸ R.K.Ramdhyan, *Report on the Land Tenures and the Land Revenue System of Orissa and Chattisgarh*, Vol. III, Berhampur, p.110. Sahu, *op.cit.*, refers to the process of tribal chiefs being assimilated into the *varna* system through the process of their Kshatriyaisation. Senapati and Kuanr, *op.cit.*, pp. 55-56.

⁹ Foreign Dep./Pol.A Branch July 1882, Nos. 396-429, NAI.

¹⁰ Senapati and Kuanr, *op.cit.*, p. 52. John Campbell, *Human Sacrifices in India*, reprinted, Delhi, 1986, pp. 52, 244.

¹¹ *Ibid* pp. 244, 246.

¹² Elliot's Report, op.cit.; H.K.Mahtab et.al (eds) *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa* Vol. II, Cuttack, 1957, pp. 3-4; Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p. 59.u. The reference to the '28th king' is striking, and emerged directly out of the drive by the feudal chiefs in the 19th century to trace their lineage. This drive had a competitive logic, betrayed any sense of history, and was born of a desire to prove their 'ancientness'. 'The Brief Histories of each of the 24 states (1909)', Crown Representative Papers, India Office Library, R/ 2 (285/1) gives us some idea about this.

¹³ Elliot's Report, op.cit.

¹⁴ R.K.Ramdhyani, op.cit., p. 109.

¹⁵ In fact, in Elliot's Report, op.cit., there is a reference to two classes of Kandhas – the 'open country' Kandhas and the 'Pahariah' (hilly) Kandhas.

¹⁶ Campbell, op.cit., p. 244; Elliot's Report, op.cit..

¹⁷ According to Campbell, op.cit., p. 19, *handia* (made from rice) was their common drink. *Mohwa* is distilled from the *mohwa* tree.

¹⁸ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., pp. 59-60; *The Imperial Gazetteer* Vol. XIV, Oxford, 1908, p. 293; *Memoranda on the Indian States*, 1940, Calcutta, 1940, p. 112. Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p. 40.

¹⁹ Elliot's Report, op.cit., refers to the predominance of the barter system and the fact that the one rupee coin was the only currency in use.

²⁰ For details, Biswajit Das 'Communication and Power Structure: A Sociological Analysis of an Orissan Village', Ph.D. thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Dep. of Sociology, 1990, unpublished, p.231

²¹ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p. 40.

²² According to Elliot's Report, op.cit., the Kultas were already a distinct caste during his visit. What I am arguing is that a pre-colonial trend was to become a conscious policy during Udit Narayan Deo's time. There is reference to this in Berry's Report, NAI op.cit.

²³ Foreign Dep./Pol. A Br. July 1882, Nos. 396-429, op.cit..

²⁴ Based on Berry's Report, op.cit.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. It perhaps needs to be mentioned that 70 out of the 72 people 'believed to be killed' were Kultas. The terror campaign saw the unity of the feudal/colonial forces, with some of the *zamindars* joining in to burn 9 villages; Berry burnt 2 villages and Prendergast burnt 2 villages; the grain collected by the Khonds were burnt. Berry hanged some prisoners, people were whipped and flogged; *ibid*; Foreign Dep./Pol.A Br. July 1882, Nos. 523-526, NAI. Andrews H.L.Fraser, *Among Indian Rajas and Ryots*, London, 1912, pp. 133-145 refers to the 'Khond rising' and Berry being honoured with the 'Companion of Order of the Indian Empire' for his role. Foreign Dep./A Genl. I Br. March 1883, Nos. 1-5 NAI refers to the zamindars of Thumal, Lanjigarh, Kasipur and Mahul Patana being given loans of Rs 41,000 each at 5% interest for their 'loyal conduct' during this phase.

²⁸ Foreign Dep./Pol.A Br. July 1882, Nos. 396-429, NAI. R.K. Ramdhyani, op.cit., p. 112 and Mahtab et.al. *Report of the Enquiry Committee : Orissa States*, Cuttack, 1939, p.197 refer to the recruitment of forced labour. Ramdhyani, op.cit., p. 112 cites a 1928 case, when land was acquired for building a railway line, without the payment of any compensation.

²⁹ J. Das, *Final Report of the Land Revenue Settlement in Kalahandi District Ex-State Khalsa Area 1945-56*, Berhampur, 1962, p. iii.

³⁰ Ramdhyani, op.cit., pp.110-11; *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* Vol. XIV, op.cit., p.294; Mahtab et.al op.cit., p. 195; *Report on the Administration of Kalahandi for 1933-34*, Kalahandi State Press, p.1; Foreign Dep./A.Genl. I Br. March 1883, Nos. 1-5, NAI. We may add here that out of the total 69,194 holdings in 1946-50 Brahmins had 2461, Kultas had 2196, Gonds had 13,725, Kandhas 11,910 and Dombs had 12,350. Thus, although the Brahmins and Kultas together had 4,657 holdings, land was heavily concentrated in their hands with the others having small holdings. (Between the 19th century and 1948 Kalahandi had between 5 and 6 zamindaris.)

³¹ P.K.Deo, 'Kalahandi : From Rice Bowl to Starvation', *The Statesman*, May 13-14, 1987.

³² Ramdhyani, op.cit., p. 117.

³³ Mahtab et.al p.195; J.Das, op.cit., pp. 12, 16; Ramdhyani, op.cit., pp. 112, 115. Mahtab et.al refer specifically to the high rents collected at Kalahandi compared to the other western Orissan states like Patana. The highest rent collected at Patana was Rs 1-8-0, whereas at Kalahandi it was Rs 6-11-0.

³⁴ J. Das, op.cit., p.3; Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p.99. Berry's Report, op.cit.

³⁵ J.Das. op.cit., pp. 7, 9, 13, 16, 22-23; Ramdhyani, op.cit., pp. 109, 111, 113, 115; Elliot's Report, op.cit.

³⁶ Ramdhyani, op.cit., pp.109, 115; J. Das, op.cit., p. 10. Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., pp. 234, 269, 274; thus, there were settlements in 1904-05, 1911-12 and 1922-23; *ibid.*, 269.

³⁷ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., pp. 229-31; J. Das, op.cit., p.3; Report on the Administration of Kalahandi for 1933-34, op.cit., p. 16.

³⁸ L.E.B. Cobden-Ramsay, *Feudatory States of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1910; reprint Calcutta, 1982, p. 207.

³⁹ *Memorandum of the Census of British India 1871-72*, London, 1875, p. 248. Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p.71; 'Socio-Economic Profile of Kalahandi District', pp. 1-7, unpublished.

⁴⁰ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p.33.

⁴¹ Cobden-Ramsay, op.cit., p. 196

⁴² Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p. 141.

⁴³ J. Das, op.cit., pp. 7-8.

⁴⁴ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p. 141.

⁴⁵ Cobden-Ramsay, op.cit., p. 205. Unfortunately, Gail Omvedt ('Worst in Hundred Years: The Kalahandi Drought', *Manushi*, no. 97, November-December 1996) does not see the over-all context of Cobden-Ramsay's observation, which sought to highlight the 'golden age' of this princely state, since it was taken over by the British in 1882.

⁴⁶ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., pp. 303-4; Report ... administration of Kalahandi, op.cit., pp. 14-15.

⁴⁷ Private Papers of Sarangadhar Das, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library file No.129-30, November 27, 1947.

⁴⁸ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p. 292; J. Das, op.cit., p.3. The compromise with the structure of landlordism at the time of Independence accounts for this; for details, Biswamoy Pati, *Resisting Domination: Peasants, Tribals and the National Movement in Orissa 1920-50*, New Delhi, 1993, chapter 5.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Madhav Gadgil, 'Towards an Ecological History of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XX, 1985, pp. 1909-1913; and Ramchandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Western Himalayas*, New Delhi, 1989. While their central premise correctly contests the imperialist position about

the impact of interventions related to the forests, they remain by and large favourably disposed vis-à-vis the pre-colonial situation. Sumit Guha, in ‘Kings, Commoners and the Commons: People and Environments in Western India, 1600-1900’, unpublished, contests such an assumption. The research now being done on early medieval state formation will undoubtedly throw significant light on the subject.

⁵⁰ Some studies focus on different facets related to the making of the colonial forest policy. E.g., Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism*, New Delhi, 1995, Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces 1860-1914*, New Delhi, 1996 and Amar Farooqui, *Colonial Forest Policy in Uttarakhand, 1890-1928*, New Delhi 1997.

⁵¹ What has been projected is not a ‘passive’ history but shows human struggle, inventiveness, oppression and resistance, more in the line with Jean Chesneaux’s position; cited in David Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change*, Oxford, 1988, p.11.

⁵² For details related to the present-day situation see Biswajit Das and B. Pati, ‘The Eternal Famine: Poverty, Food Scarcity and Survival in Kalahandi (Orissa)’ Occasional Paper no. XC, Centre for Contemporary Studies, New Delhi, 1994, unpublished, Field Notes 2 at the end of this collection and P. Sainath, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts*, New Delhi, 1996.

⁵³ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., pp. 140-142, 235, 304.

⁵⁴ Senapati and Kuanr, op.cit., p. 124.

