

CHAPTER IV

DONGRIA KANDHA : A BRIEF ACCOUNT

Origin and Location

According to Macpherson (1852) the term 'Kondh' is derived from the Telugu word 'Konda' (a hill). The tribe is commonly known as Khond. The Telugu people call them Gonds or Konds and the Oriyas call them Kandha (Thurston, 1909). Kandhas are one of the numerically major tribes of Orissa state. Thurston writes that the character of the Kondhas varies as much as their language. In course of time they have formed themselves into separate endogamous units and have developed considerable cultural and economic diversity. Kandhas are identified in different sub-groups such as Kutia (hill) Kandha, Desai (lowland) Kandha, Sita Kandha, Dongria (hill) Kandha, etc. The main concentration of the Kondh population is in the Phulbani district, Koraput district, Kalhandi district and Ganjam district of the state.

It is cited in the Orissa District Gazetteers, Koraput (1966) that it is only the tribes such as Dongria Kandhas and Bandas who live on hill slopes, ... locate their new settlements not beyond their areas of habitation and as such cannot be strictly called nomadic. Watts (1970) in his writings in 'The Half-clad Tribals of Eastern India' focussed on some specific features of the Dongria Kandhas. Recently, this tribe has attracted the special attention of the state Government.

Ecology

The Dongrias are high land dwellers of the rolling Niyamgiri hill ranges. They call themselves as "Dongaran Kuan" and claim to be identified as the descendants of the

legendary king "Niyam Raja". They are secluded by the rugged terrain, rolling hill ranges, green forests and twittering streams. They are little affected by the modern and sophisticated society. They have their age old forms of economy, social organisation, rituals, belief patterns and values. They are predominantly spread around the Niyamgiri hills of Koraput district and maintain their uniqueness in socio-cultural dimension. Koraput district is surrounded by Kalahandi and Raipur on the north, Bastar on its west, East Godavari and Visakhapatnam from south and Srikakulam and Ganjam from the east. The Dongria Kandha dominated areas are under the administrative jurisdiction of two sub-divisions, namely Rayagada and Gunupur.

The land of the Dongrias is situated over a high plateau ranging between 1500 ft. and 4500 ft. above the sea level. Climate of this area is comparatively cooler than that of the plain areas. May is the hottest month and December the coldest. The maximum and minimum temperatures here vary from 38°C to 11.2°C. July and August are the months with heavy rainfall. There is heavy dew during winter. Humidity is high especially in the monsoon.

Each Dongriakandha village is surrounded by rolling hills and picturesque green patches of groves. The murmuring streams and roaring water falls add to the glamour and ~~gaze~~ to their settlements. Over the hill tops the small houses of Dongrias appear as brown mattresses, strewn around the green background. Leopard, panthers and wild bears inhabit the jungles that veil the hills. Elephants are not seen in this jungle. Peacocks, forest fowls and other birds are visible in the forest close to the villages.

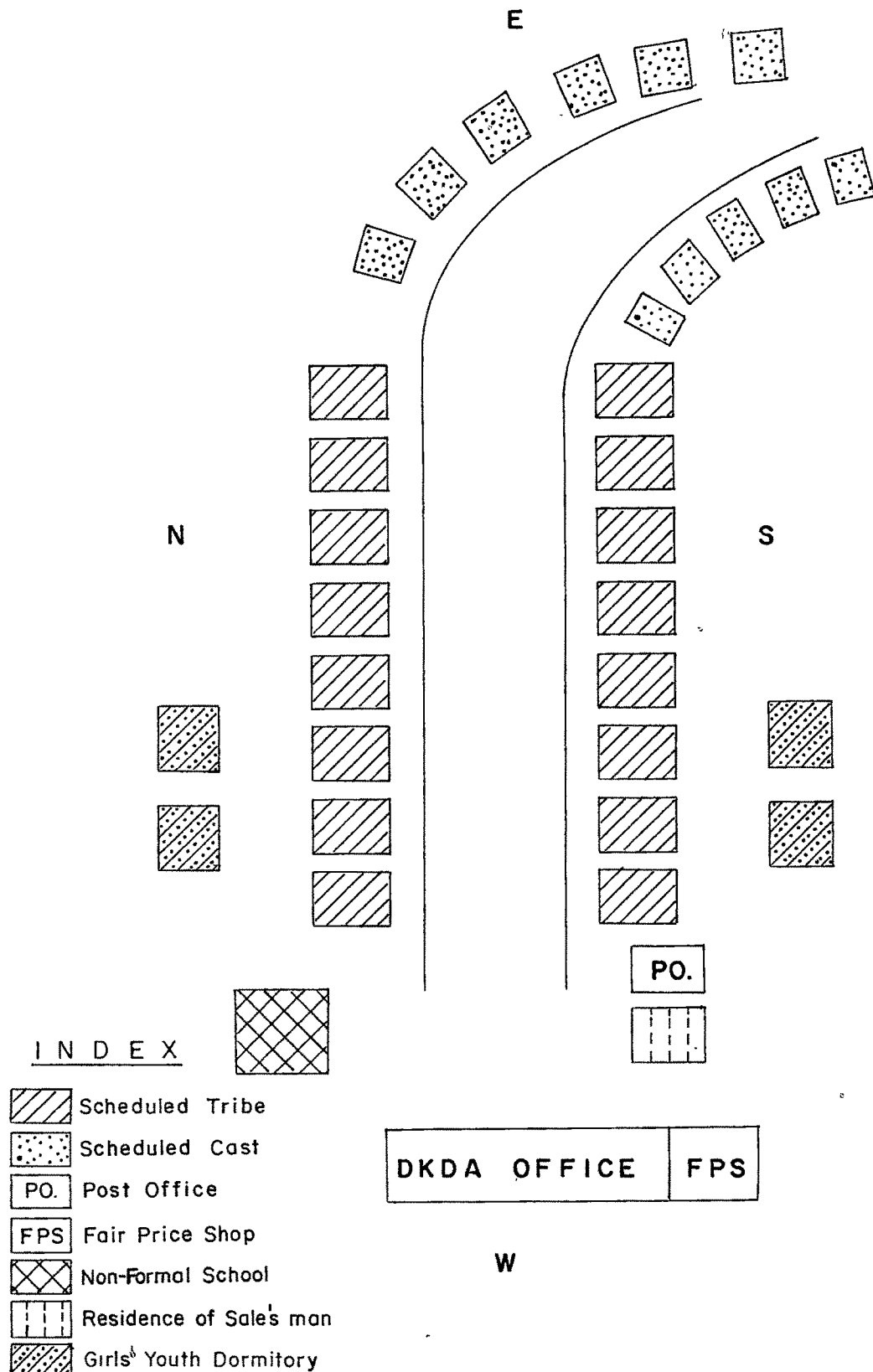
There are 67 villages and 1233 households on Dongria settlement. The total population of Dongria Kondha is 4975. Male population is 2076 and female population is 2899. Plenty of jack fruit, orange and mango trees are found on the

hills. Pineapple and bannana are extensively cultivated on the hill slopes. Sago-plam trees called "Salap" grow here and there around the villages. The land of the Dongrias can be classified into three types, such as Donger-high hill land, where Mandia, Kosala, Jahna, Suan, turmeric, ginger and small variety of chilly are cultivated. Bho[†]ta, low land is in the foot hills, where paddy is cultivated. Bodo is the kitchen garden which is more fertile than the above two types. The soil is of two types viz., red stony clay or black clay. Black soil is considered as more fertile.

Settlement Pattern

The Dongrias are used to move from one village to another within their territory. Drought, outbreak of cholera, smallpox, or fire - which is considered as inauspicious or the wrath of the earth God are the reasons for their movement from one place to the other. Individual households migrate to the villages of their kinsmen. It is a practice that the Dongria boy has to serve for two to three years in his father-in-law's house before his marriage. Very often the son-in-laws move to the father-in-laws' villages to settle. Migrating to the mother's brother's village or sister's husband's village is common. Individual destitutes either Dongria Kandhas or Desia Kandhas from different villages, often come and take shelter in the Dongria villages with the permission of the village headman. Very often the destitutes are adopted as sons by some individual Dongria Kandhas. The adopted son later changes his original clan name and merges with the clan of his adopting father. These two clans after that would be known as brother clans (tai bai), hence marriage between them is not possible. In many cases, individual adults after their marriage leave their parents' house and start their new establishment somewhere away from their village. Depletion of forest and unsuitability of cultivation sometimes induce them to shift from one place to the other.

STRUCTURE OF VILLAGE KURLI



Village Structure

The Dongrias live in big as well as small villages. These are found down the hill ranges, built near the streams. Every big village is a cluster of houses (modenilu). The houses are arranged in two rows in a linear fashion. Between these two rows, runs the main street of the village. The small villages do not have this pattern of houses.

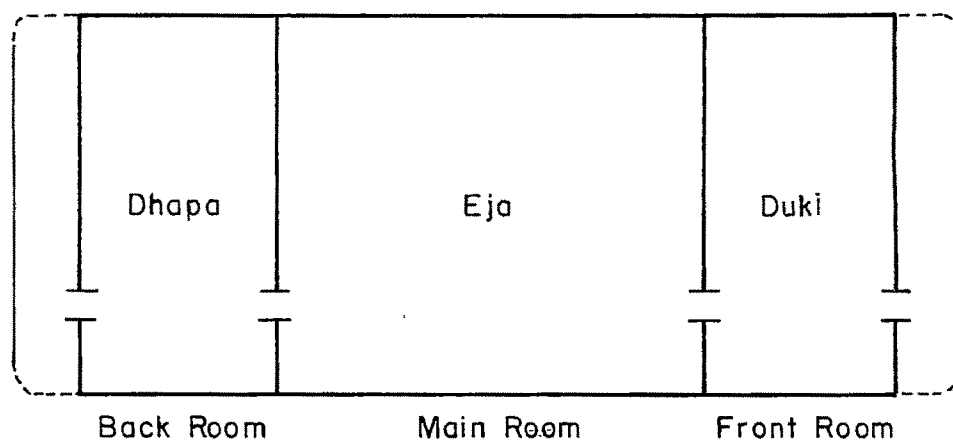
In most of the Dongria villages the Dambas reside in a separate settlement. The Dambas (scheduled caste people) are regarded untouchables by the Dongrias. There is demarcation in the households of the Dambas and Dongrias. Both the ethnic groups use separate stream beds and they have separate cremation grounds. The Dongrias speak Kui and the Damba speak local Oriya, with a typical accent.

Each village has its boundary. Besides, the settlement site has its own ritual boundary marked by a jatrakudi, the small shrine of the protector deity of the village. Each village has dormitories for girls at the back side of the two main rows of houses. Structure of a village can be seen in Fig.4.1.

Housing Pattern

The Dongria Kandha commonly lives in thatched house. The design of the house is simple and more or less similar. The rectangular floor of the house is made of clay, levelled all over. The walls are made of wooden posts. These are implanted vertically and tied with bamboo splits in a horizontal manner. Then mud is plastered to such a fence like wall. The roofs of these houses are made of wooden sticks, built under a double sloped roof that head with local grass. The height of each house is roughly eight to nine feet from the ground level.

Fig. 4.2

HOUSING PATTERN OF DONGRIA'S

Each house consists of three rooms. The middle one (called Ejah) is the biggest of three and is used as the Kitchen-cum-dining-cum-sleeping room. The size of the room is 12'x13' and height is 8' or 8½'. The front room (Duki) is used for hens, cocks, sheep and sometimes by the guests. The room at the backside (Dahpa), used exclusively by the women during their monthly period, is almost of the size of Duki. Two verandahs in front and back are found. The roof is slanted over the verandahs in such a way that it leaves a height of two and a half feet to three feet from the ground. The entrants have to crawl to get into the houses.

After the construction of the house, the walls and floor are cleared and plastered with mud and cowdung, so as to make it habitable. Then wooden or bamboo-made doors are fitted to it. No windows are provided in the house. The Housing pattern of Dongrias can be seen in Fig.4.2.

Social System

Some social institutions of the Dongria Kandhas are presented here as follows:

Family

The family is the smallest social unit among the Dongrias. Simple, small families and large or joint families are found among Dongrias. The compound families among them are found when a group consisting of a man and two or more wives and their children or a group formed by the remarriage of a widow or widower having children by a former marriage. When several brothers live together along with their spouses and children under common family head, this also leads to large and extended families. These large and extended families, in most of the cases, are split into smaller nuclear families and set up separate settlements. In order to minimise the

probability of dissension and quarrel between wives of brothers and to find alternatives to the shortage of land, they split in to smaller families. But in some religious and economic activities there remains a continual relationship between these small families. As the Dongrias are shifting cultivators they require more manpower and hence they need to have polygyny.

Residence

Residence among the Dongria Kandhas is patrilocal. A girl after marriage lives with her husband in his residence. It is also seen that a man after marriage may form a separate household and settle in the locality of his own father or in the village of his father in-law. But in the latter case he seeks the permission of the village head to settle there.

Lineage

Mostly the Dongrias remember the names of their ancestors upto the generation of their grand fathers, but rarely beyond that. However, beyond the extended family in a village, a linkage may include a few other nuclear families living in other villages, which can be geneologically linked. The members of such a lineage trace their descent for regulating exogamy for other social practices.

Clan

A clan is a kinship group. The unity of a clan is symbolised by a common name. The members of a clan tend to live together in a definite territory. Clan is associated with a larger group of territorial organisation or 'Mutha'.

This Dongria tribe is divided into a number of clans such as, Wadeka, Jakasika, Kadraka, Pushika, Praska, Sikoka, etc. and each member of such clan group associated with their respective Muthas, viz., Wadeka Mutha, Jakasika Mutha, Kadraka Mutha, etc. Members of each clan, although found in different villages of Dongrias habitation, come under one 'Mutha' administration. Each of the Dongria Kandha clans is further subdivided into sub-clans namely the Mandal, the Bismajhi, the Jani and the Pujari. It is difficult to trace the founder of the sub-clan.

Inheritance and Succession

Inheritance is patrilineal. Daughters do not inherit any property. Therefore, a man without a son becomes heirless and after his death his property is enjoyed by the members of his lineage. Descent is traced in male line, hence it is patrilineal. After marriage a daughter leaves her parents' house and settles with her husband. Since membership is counted unilaterally by the relationship through the father alone, it makes the family patriarchal.

Marriage

Arranged marriages or marriage by negotiation, marriage by capture, and marriage by service are prevalent among the Dongria society. When the boy is in infancy, his father goes to the girl's house with the marriage proposal. The girl's father receives many such proposals. But he usually agrees with the proposal that comes first to him. His agreement with the proposal is ensured by the acceptance of wine from the son's father. Marriage is postponed till the girl attains puberty. During the period from the day of engagement till the day of marriage, exchange of gifts and presentations take place between the two parties. In the meantime if any other

young man captures the girl and takes her away, a serious dispute arises between them and heavy compensation is demanded, both by the girl's father and by the father of the boy with whom the negotiation was held.

After the negotiation is resumed the boy visits the girl's house. If the girl's father offers food to him, it seems he has accepted him as his son-in-law. After these events, the girl's father with his kinsmen and clan brothers proceeds to the boy's house to settle the bride price (the cash or kind what is given to the father of the girl by the father of the boy). Generally it varies from Rupees five hundred to five thousand or more and 45 to 50 kilos of rice and four tins of liquor. Once the bride price is settled, both the parties inform their respective clan members about the marriage and according to other ritualistic norms marriage is solemnised. Marriage rituals are observed by the poor and rich alike. Marriage within a clan is prohibited, because boys and girls of the same clan are considered to be brothers and sisters. This arranged marriage is considered as prestigious.

Marriage by capture is the preferred type. Divorce is rare among the Dongrias. Polygamy is practised by the capable Dongrias.

Ritual Friendship

Ritual friendship among the members of the same sex is very common among the Dongria community. A male calls his friend as 'Sai', or 'Tane' and a female calls her friend as 'Ade'. It is a persistent relationship that determines each other's behaviour and also percolates to family domain. This two family relationship continues for one generation or two.

Friendship for Drinking

People of different age groups make this friendship to get salap juice to drink from each other's trees in turns. This kind of friendship is transitory, flexible and informal. Very often it cuts across other group friendship. The members of each group meet together at the foot of the salap tree and enjoy drinking salap along with cheers, chatting and gossiping around the fire. The members forming such groups often develop some idea or opinion, which may have important bearing on the socio-political and economic activities of the community. This friendship, sometimes leads to group rivalry and quarrels.

Sadar Ghar

It means "the place of decision making by the elders". It is situated in the centre of the village. The earth Goodness is installed in the eastern wall of the Sadar. This is the place where the musical instruments, the bands and sticks, occult materials and dried sheaves of corns are hung from the inner roof. The young boys gather on moonlit nights to beat the drums and sing songs in this place.

Dhangdi Benta (Girls' Dormitory)

Dhangdi refers to a mature girl. Dhangdi benta implies the place or house where the mature girls of the Dongria community sleep together at night and sometimes also found there in daytime. These houses are located at the backside of the rows of habitation and the walls of these houses are found decorated in white and red colour.

There is a tendency on the part of every Dongria Kandha boy to attend the Dhangdi benta and to sleep with a Dhangdi.

As the Dhangras (young boys) do not have specific dormitory to sleep, they usually sleep in smaller groups in the corridors of some households. From there they set-out to attend the Dhangdi benta enmasse. They visit the bentas and meet the grown up girls of different clan groups but not of their own clan. They usually go to attend the Dhangdi benta of other villages. The young boys attend the dormitory late in the evening and spend the night and leave the place before dawn. There is no hard and fast rule that one young boy who sleeps with a girl today will sleep with her tomorrow. But it so happens that after repeated visits to the same dormitory attending the particular girl very often includes him to develop love and attachment for the particular girl and he stops attending other Dhangris. A husband never allows his wife to sleep in Dhangdi benta, but he himself can not stop going there, though clandestinely.

Mutha Organisation

It was an administrative unit imposed by the Zamindar kings in the past. It refers to the group of villages identified by a particular clan group such as Wadeka, Kakasika and Kadraka, etc., as stated earlier. The mutha territory is not so well defined because the people of one mutha are found in different villages and these villages are scattered over other mutha areas. Though the villages come under one mutha, they are not necessarily situated adjacent to each other. The constituent village of a mutha has its own political assembly and each village celebrates the Maria festival (buffallo sacrifice) in turn. Other constituent villages of the same mutha are supposed to whole heartedly co-operate and participate in this maria festival, though they do not necessarily contribute for the same. Inter-mutha conflicts sometimes strengthen the intra-mutha unity and solidarity.

Economic Life

Dongria Kandhas' economic life is at subsistence level. They are basically shifting cultivators and horticulturists. Collection of forest products and rearing of life stock, viz., buffalows, goats, cows, pigs, hens and ducks enables them to maintain their livelihood. Their economy is mainly determined by their income from the hills, cultivation of cereals and pulses and horticultural products like, banana, pine apple, mango, orange, jack fruit and other products like turmeric, ginger, etc., on one hand and their lavish expenditure on observances and celebration of festive occasions apart from their daily consumption on the other. Addiction to liquor makes them prone to spend more and thus fall a prey to the exploitation of the Damba neighbours. Inability to calculate profit and loss, even the rate of interest and ignorance on fixing the price of certain forest and agricultural products make them constant sufferers at the hands of their Damb neighbours and outside business men. Excessive leaning on tradition and superstition shatters their economic life. Lack of knowledge of technology and its use in agriculture, makes them dependent on nature. Barter system of economy still prevails in the community. To procure loan and to spend more for the festivals and functions never make them build up their economy better than ever before rather make them pauper. Women are regarded as the economic assets. They contribute equally, even more than men in cultivation, collection of fire wood, forest products and selling the same in the market. Apart from cooking food and rearing children, they toil hard in the hills and thus contribute to the family's economy in no less measure than their male counterparts.

Attitude and Ideology

Dongria Kandhas are very much after sensual pleasure and have positive attitude to life. They are upright,

indomitable, honest, truthful and straight forward. Co-operation, brotherhood, equality, hospitality, respect for order and discipline and love for peace are very much found among them, though they are illiterate and ignorant of modern trades of life. Though they seem to be materially poor, they are not culturally impoverished. They have abounding faith on supernatural power, which according to them controls their life. Hence, they take pride in appeasing the super natural power, seek blessings to enjoy their life to the full brim. They have a predominant belief in magic and witchcraft.

They are courageous, ferocious and aggressive. They believe in vigorous sex life. Their conjugal life is marked by love and affection. Freedom from the material race keeps them in joyous mood, free from tension, worries and anxieties. Amid poverty there is richness of heart. Every one feels equal with the other. There is no feeling of frustration among them hence no case of suicide and imolation.

They attach little value to money, but value more their trait of honesty and faithfulness. They have self pride and dignity, though they pay little attention to their attire and style.

They have a limited world view. They never give up their age-old traditional values. They are more conscious of their present than what is going to happen in future.

Life Style

The Dongria Kandha's dress consists of two cloths. One Khadi (lion cloth) used by male is 20 feet to 25 feet in length and 1 foot and a half in width. The Kandha wears it in such a manner and the cloth is tied at his waist several times tightly and the embroidered end of the cloth comes down as a flap in the front while the other end falls at the back. A


Kandha woman wears a cloth of four to five feet in length and two feet in width. The first one is wrapped round the waist with a knot in the front and the second piece hangs around the waist. The other end of the same cloth passes under the arm and tied to form a knot at the backside of the neck. Both men and women prefer to use white coarse clothes throughout the year. In winter they use ganda (a coarse blanket type cloth).

Ornaments

Both the male and female Dongria Kandhas use ornaments in ears, nose, neck, arms, wrists, etc. Males use two nose rings in left and middle portion of the nose whereas females use three nose rings. Even the young children of both sexes are found with ornaments fitted to their body parts. Ornaments are usually made of silver, brass and gold. The male members keep long hairs which are tied in a knot at the backside of the neck. They use a comb and a small concave pipe made of brass, both decked to the hair. It is used for holding pika. A brief Kati (knife) remains hanging always from their left side at the waist and a small axe also hangs from their left shoulder at the back side. Females use small knives and pins made of brass or iron tugged to their hair.

Food

The staple food of Dongria Kandhas are ragi gruel and rice of small millets like Suan, Kangu and Kosala. They take different fruits, roots, green vegetables like beans, gourd, Jhudunga and a few trailing plants. Roots like Ranikanda, Nangla Kanda are also eaten, Kandula (red grams) is used as dal. They do not eat papaya, pine apples, plaintains as their food. They relish buffalo flesh, mutton, chicken, pork and beef. Wild goats, deer, peacocks, wild fowls, pigeon

and other birds are also found in their menu sometimes depending on their availability. Rats and reptiles,  and fresh fish available in the streams are also preferred to vegetable items. Their morning meal consists of ragi gruel and rice of small millets. The midday meal consists of ragi gruel and some boiled green leaves or vegetables. And the evening meal consists of rice of small millets, Kasala, mandia, suan, etc. and sometimes rice of paddy. Food is cooked with mustard seeds, castor oil, turmeric powder, salt, chillies and garlic.

Drinks and Drugs

The Dongrias are mad after drinking liquor. They like country liquor prepared out of jackfruits and mahua flowers. They prefer to drink Sago palm or Salap juice available from the Sago palm trees, particularly in the winter season. They use various narcotics and stimulants prepared of raw tobacco leaf and ash, and smoke them with the help of a pika made of siali leaf. Young and old, men and women derive pleasure in it.

Relation with the Damba Neighbours

The relationship between the Dongria Kandhas and their Damba neighbours is significant from the point of view of understanding the socio-economic and overall development of the former. The Dambas are scheduled caste people and treated as untouchables by the Dongria Kandhas. The Damba are a Dravidian caste of weavers and menials found in the hill tracts of Vizagapattnum and in Koraput district of Orissa. They weave clothes for the use of the Dongria Kandhas in this region.

Dambas are subordinates and so are used as servants by the Dongria Kandhas. One of the Dambas serves as a barika in every Dongria Kandha village. He acts as a messenger and interpreter of the Dongrias. He carries messages to different villages and summons meetings in the village; attends meetings with other leaders and helps them in finding solutions to their problems. He acts as a negotiator, a middle-man in the sales of produce and gives advance for lease of standing crops and fruits bearing trees. He arranges loan for the Kandhas from other Damba neighbours, helps in marriage negotiations, in fixing bride price, etc. The Gaudia, another Damba servant acts as the cattle grazer and the Jhateni (the street sweeper of the Dongria village) is also selected from them.

Some of the Dambas are extensively engaged in trade and they are more knowledgeable about the outside world than the Dongria Kandhas. A few deal in country liquor and also supply other essential articles to the Dongrias.

This brief account of Dongria Kandhas brings the setting to fore and focusses their socio-economic and cultural aspects of life. This is essential as background knowledge for analysing and interpreting their needs and problems with regard to education (as perceived by them) and also in comprehending the extent of influence exerted by education, ~~per se~~, in the next succeeding chapters.

REFERENCES

- Das Patnaik, P.S., Hand book on Dongria Kondh (unpublished)
Report No.4, Tribal and Harijan Research-cum-Training
Institute, Bhubaneswar, 1970.
- Dongria Kandha Development Agency, Brief Notes on Dongria
Kandha Development Agency (unpublished), Kurli,
Chatikana DKD Office, 1988-89.
- Government of Orissa, 'District Gazetteer', Koraput District,
Cuttack, 1966.
- Mac Pherson, Samuel (1852), "An Account of the Religion of
the Khonds in Orissa", Journal of the Royal Asiatic
Society, Vol.XIII, 216-274 in Nayak, P.K., Structure
and Function of Clan Feud among the Dongria Kondhs.
Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Utkal University, 1984.
- Nayak, P.K., 'Structure and Function of Clan Feud among the
Dongria Kondhs. Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Utkal
University, 1984.
- Pattnaik, N., and Das Patnaik, P.S., 'The Kondh of Orissa',
Tribal and Harijan Research-cum-Training
Institute, Bhubaneswar, 1982.
- Thurston, E.G., 'Castes and Tribes of Southern India', Vol.III,
1909, PP.357-367.
- Watts, Neville, A., 'The Half Clad Tribes of Eastern India',
Eastern Printers, Calcutta, 1970.