

# **LIFE IN SONABERA PLATEAU**

**ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE BHUNJIAS  
OF KALAHANDI, ORISSA**

**NITYANANDA PATNAIK  
PRASANTA KUMAR MOHANTY  
TRILOCHAN SAHOO**



Up in the hill ranges of Gatibera amidst a picturesque physical setting there lives in the plateau called Sonabera plateau in Kalahandi district Bhunjias, a small tribe of about 7000 population having racial and cultural affinity with the Gonds of Orissa. The geographical barriers and lack of communication have been favourable to the tribal people for preserving the distinctive cultural landmarks of this little known tribe.

In such a state of isolation the Bhunjias have had continued a healthy, vigorous and colourful life devoid of any indiscriminate contact with the outside civilization. But in the recent times this isolation has broken down and there has been inflow and outflow of population to and from the plateau. As a result of such cultural contacts the traditional tribal life is being considerably disrupted and in the process of transformation. In a large measure the contact has been a serious threat to the community and in order to keep themselves off from the debasing effects of cultural contact the Bhunjias, particularly the women section of the community who are the guardian of their tribal tradition have evolved suitable measures to safeguard their identity and integrity.

This book which is written on the basis of direct observation and first hand contact with the people through intensive anthropological field investigation presents the traditional social system and cultural pattern of the tribe, types of changes which are taking place in the area and nature of problems and anxieties which have surfaced in the wake of increased external contact and communication. A suitable strategy has been evolved for all sided improvement of the Bhunjias. This strategy includes priorities of developmental programmes and ways and means of adjustment of the tribal population to the changed situation and their gradual integration in the general life of the country without undue and hasty disruption.

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**TRIBAL AND HARIJAN RESEARCH-CUM-TRAINING INSTITUTE  
BHUBANESWAR, ORISSA**

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## PREFACE

Tribal ethnography of Orissa is not only picturesque in art, music, dance and other aspects of aesthetic drives, but it is also varied in cultural patterns, social organizations and economic life. Being the native place of as many as 62 different tribal communities Orissa presents a wide range of socio-cultural and economic levels of development, starting from hunting and food gathering practices of nomadic groups to highly developed agriculture of settled peasants through the intermediary stages of slash-and-burn system of tillage, herding and specialized handicrafts of artisans, the tribes of Orissa present all major forms of productive system. Similarly, in social organization the picture is no less varied. At one end is the simplest social form of band life noticed among the nomadic tribes with temporary settlements consisting of from a half a dozen to a score or more of leaf-huts erected on the fringes of forests. At the other end is the complicated social structure comprising dual organization, and phratry and moiety systems characteristic of certain sedentary communities with solidly built permanent settlements.

Barring a few published works giving rough ethnographic sketches of some tribal communities, the large majority of the tribal communities have remained outside the scientific studies of any kind and therefore very little is known about their socio-cultural and economic life. Anthropological studies among such little known tribal communities assume a matter of great importance in the present time at least on two counts. One concerns itself in the anthropological field work among such little known tribal communities and

collection of data about their life and culture which are vanishing and are being obliterated under the impact of the effacing forces of modernization. The other relates to the identification of problems and living conditions of such tribes and application of anthropological data for the formulation of suitable location specific plans and projects for their development.

Two years back Miss Meena Gupta, I.A.S. the then Collector of Kalahandi district in a letter addressed to me proposed a study to be undertaken among the Bhunjias of Sonabera plateau. She was first to point out their primitiveness and backwardness and the need for extending necessary assistance as are extended to the other primitive tribes of the State which come under Micro projects. In response to her request an anthropological field investigation was carried out by the Tribal and Harijan Research cum Training Institute, Bhubaneswar in Sonabera and in its neighbouring Bhunjia villages all lying at an altitude of 3000 ft. above sea level in the Sonabera plateau. This book which is the outcome of this field work gives a picture of the eco-system and ethnography, problems and crises of life, felt needs and strategies for the development of the Bhunjias.

Many persons have encouraged and helped us in this research project. Of all Miss Gupta, the then Collector of Kalahandi district, deserves our special acknowledgement for all help in making arrangements for our trip to Sonabera and also for discussions with her regarding the aspects to be covered in the study which are relevant to the administration of developmental programmes in the area. Similar acknowledgements are due to Shri Banamali Pujari, Conservator of Forests, Sambalpur, for introducing us to Shri Abhinov Pradhan, Divisional Forest Officer, Khariar Division who provided his field staff to escort us to the study area and also for the accommodation in the Forest Rest-shed at Sonabera during our field work.

We owe a special debt to all these Forest Officers without whose help the field work could not have been undertaken and completed in time.

Shri Debaraj Mishra, Block Development Officer, Komna deserves a special mention for the transport facilities which he provided for our trip to Sonabera and back to Komna after our field work was over.

The hospitality extended to us by the local people and the company of Shri Ganda Singh Majhi and Shri Gangaram Majhi which we had the privilege of enjoying and their guidance in our field work throughout our stay in the study area are something which will remain ever in our memory. We express our gratitude and thankfulness to them.

Had Shri Karunakar Mishra, Office Superintendent not intervened and prevailed upon the press for printing the book expeditiously the printing would have taken much longer time and the publication would have been delayed. We are grateful to him for his help in getting the work printed in a short period of time.

T.H.R.T.I.

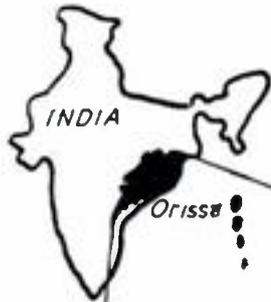
Lewis Road, Bhubaneswar  
15. 3. 1984

NITYANANDA PATNAIK  
Director

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# MAP SHOWING STUDY BLOCK OF KALAHANDI DISTRICT.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Bhunjia is a small tribe which is found in large concentration in Kalahandi district of Orissa and in its adjacent Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh. This monograph relates to the Kalahandi section of the tribe. According to the tribe, the term 'Bhunjia' means growing out of land, and the Bhunjias believe that they were the forerunners of those who were born on the land.

Russel and Hiralal have mentioned in "The Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces of India" that the Bhunjias have originated from the union between the Gonds and the Halvas. But lacking any scientific literature on this matter, it is difficult to ascertain this point. However, there exists a lot of similarities between the Gonds and the Bhunjias in respect of their economic life, social organisation, material culture and religious practices. The Bhunjias, living in the Sonabera plateau, regard themselves to be the autochthones of the area and from there they have dispersed to neighbouring areas in the plains and Raipur in Madhya Pradesh. The Bhunjias of the Sonabera plateau, which is considered as cradle land, have been able to preserve their tribal identity and cultural heritage because of the geographical barriers and inaccessibility of the mountainous terrain of the plateau.

The tribe has been divided into two main sections, the *Chuktia* Bhunjia and the *Chinda* Bhunjia, the former representing the original and poorer section and the latter the acculturated section of the tribe. The *Chuktia* Bhunjias are confined exclusively to the hills of the Sonabera plateau and the *Chinda* Bhunjias are scattered in the plains with other tribal and non-tribal communities.

Some myths gathered from the *Chuktia* Bhunjias reflect their origin from the union with the Gonds. One of the myths which indicates such admixture is given below :

“There lived a *Mathiar* or the worshipper of Goddess *Mata* in Sonabera area. A group of seven brothers of Gond community came from the west in search of wild games and shot a Sambar by means of bow and arrow. The Sambar ran away for life and fell dead at the outskirts of Sonabera village. The brothers followed and found the Sambar dead. They divided the hunt into seven shares. But surprisingly they found that the seven shares became nine. They thought that there must be someone nearby and called for him. The *Mathiar* came out and took the eighth share. Thereafter the brothers shouted for the unknown inhabitant to take the last share. Lastly, a Gond came from the Gatibera village and received the last share. Since he came at the last he was called *Patdharu*. After the shares were distributed the brothers found out seven young girls in the house of the *Mathiar* who was their father. The brothers expressed their desire to the *Mathiar* to marry his daughters. The *Mathiar* gave his consent under certain terms and conditions that they should identify themselves henceforward as Bhunjias, and not as Gonds, and live in the place where the *Mathiar* lived. The Gond brothers agreed to follow the terms and conditions and became the *Markam*, the *Bandhu barag* which can have affinal relationship with the *Netam* group of Bhunjias to which the *Mathiar* belonged”.

This legend indicates that at one point of time the Bhunjias of a particular territory were all consanguineal and no group with whom to have marital relationship. But in course of time when the Gonds came into their area marriage relationship was established with them. From this the population was divided into two inter-marrying groups, namely *Markam* and *Netam*.

The Bhunjias have no language of their own. The dialect which they speak is a mixture of Oriya and Chhatisgari. Their dress pattern is much akin to Chhatisgari also. The Bhunjias possess a fairly muscular body and are dark in their skin colour. Their stature varies from short to medium although a few cases of tall stature are noticed in the population.

The Bhunjia villages are different in size varying from as small as 7 to 10 households to as large as 50 to 60 households. Generally, the *Chuktia* Bhunjia villages located in the plateau are more or less homogeneous with an insignificant number of scheduled caste households who render services mainly of economic nature to the Bhunjias.

The houses are generally two sloped and thatched with a kind of wild grass available in the locality. A nuclear family must have one hut with open and wide front verandah, and one kitchen-shed which is built aloof from the main living hut. The custom among the Bhunjias is that several brothers may live jointly in a hut after their marriage, but each of them will have separate kitchen-shed. The cow-shed and goat-pen are either attached to the main hut or are built separately in between the kitchen-shed and the main hut. The cow-shed and the kitchen-shed are the two most sacred places and no woman during her menses is allowed to enter these sheds.

The most striking cultural landmark among the Bhunjias is that the kitchen-shed, which is built away from the other huts of a household, is fenced around so that no outsider can have any contact with the shed. In case any outsider by mistake touches any part of the kitchen-shed, it is immediately set on fire and razed to the ground until a new shed is built, the food is cooked temporarily in an enclosed space.

The *Chuktia* Bhunjias use to carry on shifting cultivation. But in the last decade, they have almost given it up as a

result of strict reservation and conservation measures which are being taken up by the Forest Department. Most of the Bhunjias have land in the valleys which they cultivate for growing paddy and pulses.

The Supreme Goddess of the Bhunjias is *Sunadei* who has imposed several restrictions on her devotees. Some of these restrictions are the use of tiles for roofing, the cots and beds for sleeping and the country husking lever *Dhenki* for paddy husking.

The Bhunjias have been following these restrictions rigidly without any violation whatsoever. In fact, when the Forest Department built an Inspection Bungalow at Sonabera with a tile roof, the Bhunjias of the area raised objections to it. But the people were finally convinced about the utility of the Government building and co-operated in the building construction work.

The Bhunjias of the Sonabera plateau cannot remain isolated any longer. The fair weather road which runs from Komna to Sonabera is being regularly levelled, widened and repaired every year, and in a few years it can be improved to an all weather road. The trucks of the forest contractors which ply in numbers daily along this road provide transport to the people for coming in and going out of the Sonabera area. As a result, there is now constant touch of the Bhunjias with the outside world and this contact has already started the processes of acculturation in the Bhunjia population.

The Governmental institutions such as Forest Ranger's Office, Co-operative Stores and Rural upliftment programmes of OXFAM, have been influencing the life of the Bhunjias with consequent changes in their society. It is noticed that the changes caused by these external forces are more pronounced in the political sphere than in other aspects of their life. The injunctions of the *Sunadei* in respect of



A Bhunjia couple of Sonabera

taboos concerning use of tiles in roofs of houses, cots and beds for sleeping purposes and of blouses or any other type of outside body wear of women are still followed as strictly as before. Kitchen-shed continues to be held sacred as a shrine, and the commensal restrictions and food taboos observed by both men and women keep them as clearly marked tribal community and help them in preserving their cultural distinctiveness and identity.

The study of the Bhunjias is important mainly for two points of view. One is related to cultural conservatism of the tribe and the forces which permit continuity of traditional cultural pattern and the other point concerns, evolution of a suitable strategy for the economic upliftment of the tribe. Anthropologists have never been interested in keeping the tribal communities as mere museum specimen for the enrichment of their scientific discipline. What they rather do is to study various interlocking aspects of tribal life and evolve or work out a strategy on the basis of such ethnographic knowledge suitable for the development of the tribe in question. So far, no systematic attempt has been made to bring about any planned change and development among the Bhunjias, who present a picture of underdevelopment, particularly in their economic life. It is the intention of this study to highlight the life style of the Bhunjias and bring to focus their significant cultural landmark, and work out a suitable developmental strategy for their socio-economic development.

## CHAPTER II

### SONABERA PLATEAU—ITS PHYSICAL SETTING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

#### Physical Setting :

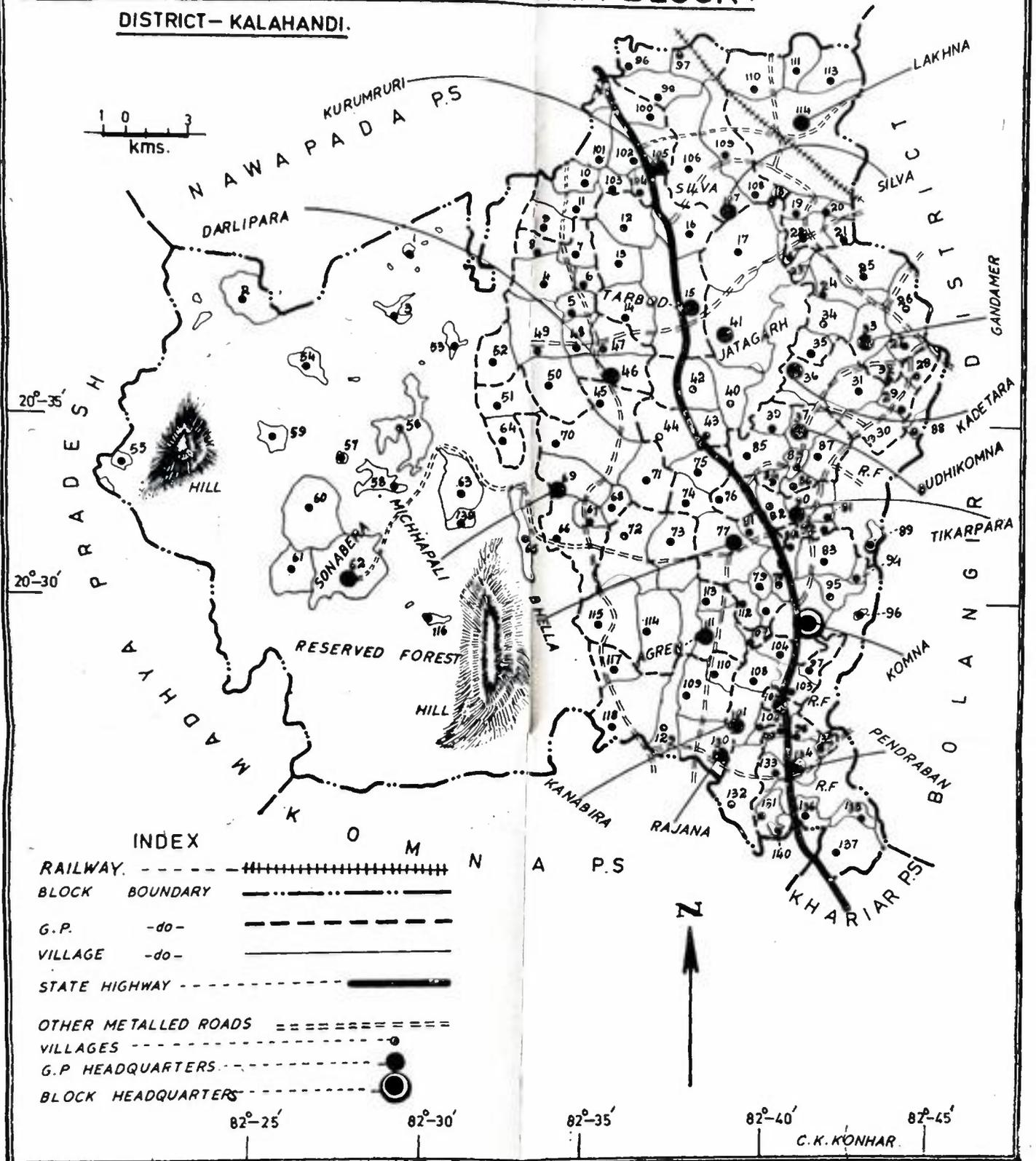
The Sonabera plateau which is the home of the Bhunjia tribe lies roughly between  $21^{\circ} 25'$  North and  $21^{\circ} 30'$  North Latitude and  $82^{\circ} 35'$  East Longitude. It was a part of the Khariar Zamindari which formed the eastern and south-eastern region of the Raipur district of Chhatisgarh division of Central Provinces till 1st April, 1936 when it was transferred to Orissa on its creation. It is now included in the Kcma block of Nawapara subdivision of Kalahandi district, Orissa. A fair weather road of about 35 kms., which crosses the Sundar river at Bhela village and thereafter runs through a series of high hill ranges and hill streams, connects the Sonabera village, centre of the 3000 ft. plateau, with Komna block headquarters on the all weather Bhawanipatna-Nawapara State high way in the plains.

#### Hill Ranges :

The ex-Zamindari of Khariar is comprised of a series of high hill ranges running almost north to south. In the west, the hill ranges of Gatibera and Patdarha forest blocks form a long impenetrable wall. Some of the main hills which are present in this area are Solhadongar, Deotadongar (717m), Supkondongar (882m), Rasdongar (871m), Maradongar (827m) and Budharajadongar (731m). These hills are steep and in some places precipitous. Sonabera plateau lies in the westernmost series, that is, the first series of hill ranges in which most of the villages of the Hill Bhunjias are

# ADMINISTRATIVE MAP OF KOMNA BLOCK.

DISTRICT - KALAHANDI.



## INDEX

- RAILWAY - - - - -
- BLOCK BOUNDARY - - - - -
- G.P. - - - - -
- VILLAGE - - - - -
- STATE HIGHWAY - - - - -
- OTHER METALLED ROADS - - - - -
- VILLAGES - - - - -
- G.P. HEADQUARTERS - - - - -
- BLOCK HEADQUARTERS - - - - -

82°-25'      82°-30'      82°-35'      82°-40'      82°-45'

C. K. KONHAR.

situated whereas in other hill ranges the Bhunjia settlements are scattered.

The second series of hill ranges of Patidongar, which originate from near Tanwat village, run parallel to the first series of hills and meet the Gurudongar and the Nimnadvita hill and finally extending towards the outer hill ranges of Koilakhola in the south where it is intercepted by the river Udanti. This series of hills include Patidongar (632m), Gurudongar big and small (733m-692m) having steep to precipitous slope.

The villages which lie in between these two series of hills are Hatiana, Bhuinpani, Chhuipani, Siyalati, Bhainsadari, Dhobei, Patdarha, Patalganga, Nawapara, Chickalchuan, Kharupani, Pandripani, Podapadar, Dhangrital and Ghatmal within the portion of Patdarha block of forests and Bhatpani, Nangalbed, Tar.kmal, and Tarlakot in the Koilakhola portion of forests.

The third series of hill ranges start from near the Bhela village, and form a line with Bajini hills ( 603 m ) which join Pippalpani and Kumudi hill ranges ending near Babebir village in the southern cutskirt where it is intercepted by Ollarjhor, a tributary of the Udanti river. Between the second and third series of hill ranges, the space is wider and several important villages, namely Darlama, Jharnamal, Makadbulli, Boran, and Nilji are located in this space.

The fourth series of hill ranges comprising Narayandongri, Kendumunda and Nageshpahad hill ranges run east-west at right angle to the previous hill ranges. In the intervening space between the third and fourth series of hills, some prosperous villages and towns of Nawapara subdivision are situated. They are Khariar, Komna, Bhela, Sinapali and Sagunbhadi, which are mostly inhabited by non-tribal peasant communities. The Choura hill (653m) range with the Khasbahal,

Bundia and Bijili hills, and the hills of Budharaja and Tandel form the fifth series along the inter-district boundary between Kalahandi and Bolangir.

With the hill range of Gatibera in the north, Manikgarh hill range extends in a semi-circular direction along the villages Maragura, Golaband, Tileimal and Halwapalli and it meets the common boundary of Patidongar, Patdarha and Gatibera blocks near Chereichuan village. The hill range of Lcdra originates near the village limits of Lodra and runs through the village limits of Jhalap, Tikrapara and Golaband also in a semi-circular way and meets the origin of Patidongar and Tanwat ghati forest blocks and makes a line with Tanwat ghati further extending towards Nawapara Railway Station. In this sector also many prosperous villages namely Dharambandha, Amanala, Kendubahada and Patalghutkuri are located.

#### **Road Communication :**

Except the 50 kms. long road from Sonabera to Bhela, there is no other road worth the name in the plateau. But there are a few cart tracks and foot paths running in different directions from Sonabera village, which the Bhunjias of the plateau use to go to market places and sacred centres. A list of such tracks is given below with the names of the road side villages, market centres and religious places.

#### **I. Sonabera-Litipara Road—**

This road passes through Gatibera, Dhekunpani, Lawapani, Jajangpani, Bhela, Powerdongar, Sionarayanpur, Bhodi, Godilbai and Litipara. The weekly market sits on every Wednesday at Litipara. People visit this market to get rice and dal and find a chance to meet many relatives who live in these villages which fall along this road. It takes nearly one day from Sonabera to reach Litipara market. A high hill, namely Podamathan and a river, namely Khajaraeb are crossed on the way to Litipara.

## 2. Sonabera-Nawapara Road—

This is an important road in the area. It crosses many villages on the way. Some of the important villages which fall along this road are Aurar, Torra, Soseng, Dhakali, Ropi-aum, Kankadbiji, Golabond, Karmali and Tanwat and finally Nawapara. Many hill ranges have crossed on the way to Nawapara. Some of these hills are Kankadbiji and Tanwat. A river is crossed at Kakadabiji also. Nawapara is the subdivisional headquarters. People go to this place to attend court and to meet officers such as S. D. O. and other officers when summoned by them for official purposes.

## 3. Sonabera-Sikasar Road—

This road touches villages of Senbahali, Jinapani, Supkondongar, Tharipani, Nagrar and Sikasar. It is one day's journey from Sonabera to Sikasar. A small dongar (hill), namely Ranimal and a hill stream is crossed on the way. A dam has been built at Sikasar and people who visit this village combine the sight seeing of the dam with their marketing of food-stuff.

## 4. Sonabera-Amamora Road—

This road touches the village Dathunam. It is a small road which does not touch any market centre or religious place.

## 5. Sonabera-Boran Road—

This road touches places, namely Dathunam, Amamora, Kukrar, Patdarha, Dabagerat, Rori, Dhobei, Kot and Boran. This is one of the important roads in the area. It touches Kot where a festival is observed in the full moon day in the month of April-May, and it also connects Boran where a weekly market is held on every Monday. This market is visited only when people go to Kot to witness festival. It is a long road and takes nearly two days to reach Boran from Sonabera and a high hill range is crossed on the way.

#### 6. Sonabera-Rajna Road—

The villages which fall along this road are Kokid, Gadagada, Badakiamba, Dudaam, Deodhara, and Kunjalpara. Some people of Sonabera have given their daughters in marriage in Deodhara village and when they go to meet their daughters, they combine it with their visit to Rajna where a weekly market is held on every Monday. It is at this market, the people dispose of the broomsticks which they make out of locally available grass and buy rice and other provisions from the market.

#### 7. Sonabera-Komna Road—

This road passes through or touches villages such as Jamgaon, Chereichuan, Bisubahal, Malimuda, Barangapathar and Bhela. This road is very important because it connects Bhela village, which is situated at the gateway of Sonabera plateau. Bhela is an important growth centre located just at the hill ranges which comprise the plateau. The primary health centre is located at this place, and there are many permanent shops situated at Bhela. The weekly market which sits on every Friday adds importance to this place. It is one of the important market centres. The Bhunjias of the plateau visit this market at Bhela to get earthen vessels which they use for storing water and for cooking purposes.

#### 8. Sonabera-Tarbor Road—

This road passes through Aurar, Godma, Kholigaon, Siletpani, Darripara, Dumarpani and Tarbor. A weekly market sits at Tarbor on every Wednesday and people visit this market to get earthen cooking vessels, vegetables and cereals. Two high hills, namely Raksha ghati and Mankadchuan, are crossed on the way. The Sundar river and Godmagaon river cut the road at Godma and Tarbor.

### 9. Sonabera-Dharambandha Road (I) —

This road touches on way such villages as Gatibera, Salepada, Korrabera, Chakadamathan, Chhuinpada, Jharlama, Bhasil, Lcdra, Dharammunda and Dharambandha. The weekly market sits at Dharambandha on every Monday. It is a very big market and people visit this market to get clothes and provisions like rice and dal. It takes two days to reach this market from Sonabera village. There are many affinal villages situated along this road. The condition of the road is good, and bullock carts can be used for transport along this road. A hill namely Jogidasana and a hill stream namely Deosil fall on this road.

### 10. Sonabera-Dharambandha Road (II) —

This road passes through Aurar, Soseng, Dhakali, Jalamdihi, Jalabela, Maragura, Jhalap, and finally touches Dharambandha. Mainly, this road serves two purposes. There are relatives of Bhunjias of Sonabera living in Jhalap and this road is convenient to go to Jhalap to meet their friends and relatives. Moreover, the weekly market which sits at Dharambandha is of great importance to the people of Sonabera because it is from here that the people buy their provisions and clothes.

### 11. Sonabera-Dharambandha Road (III) —

It is a small road which runs through Korrabera, Deosil, Bhasil, Lcdra and stops at Dharambandha. This road goes as the crow flies from Sonabera to Dharambandha and it is for this reason that the people of Sonabera and those of the neighbouring villages prefer this road to other roads leading to Dharambandha.

Of all the roads, the following three roads are most important from the point of view of the Bhunjias of the plateau because these three roads are used by them very often for going out to market places and service centres which are

located in the plains. Mentioned in order of importance these roads are (a) Road No. 7, leading from Sonabera via Jamgaon, Chereichuan, Bisubahal, Malimuda, Barangapath, Bhela to Komna (block headquarters), (b) Road No 9, starting from Sonabera through Gatibera, Salepada, Korrabera, Chakadamathan, Chhuinpada, Jharlama, Bhasil, Lodra, Dharuamunda to Dharambandha, (c) Road No. 1, leading from Sonabera via Gatibera, Dhokunpani, Lawapani, Jajangpani, Bhela, Powerdongar, Seonarayanpur, Bhodi, Godilbai to Litipara.

### **Water Falls :**

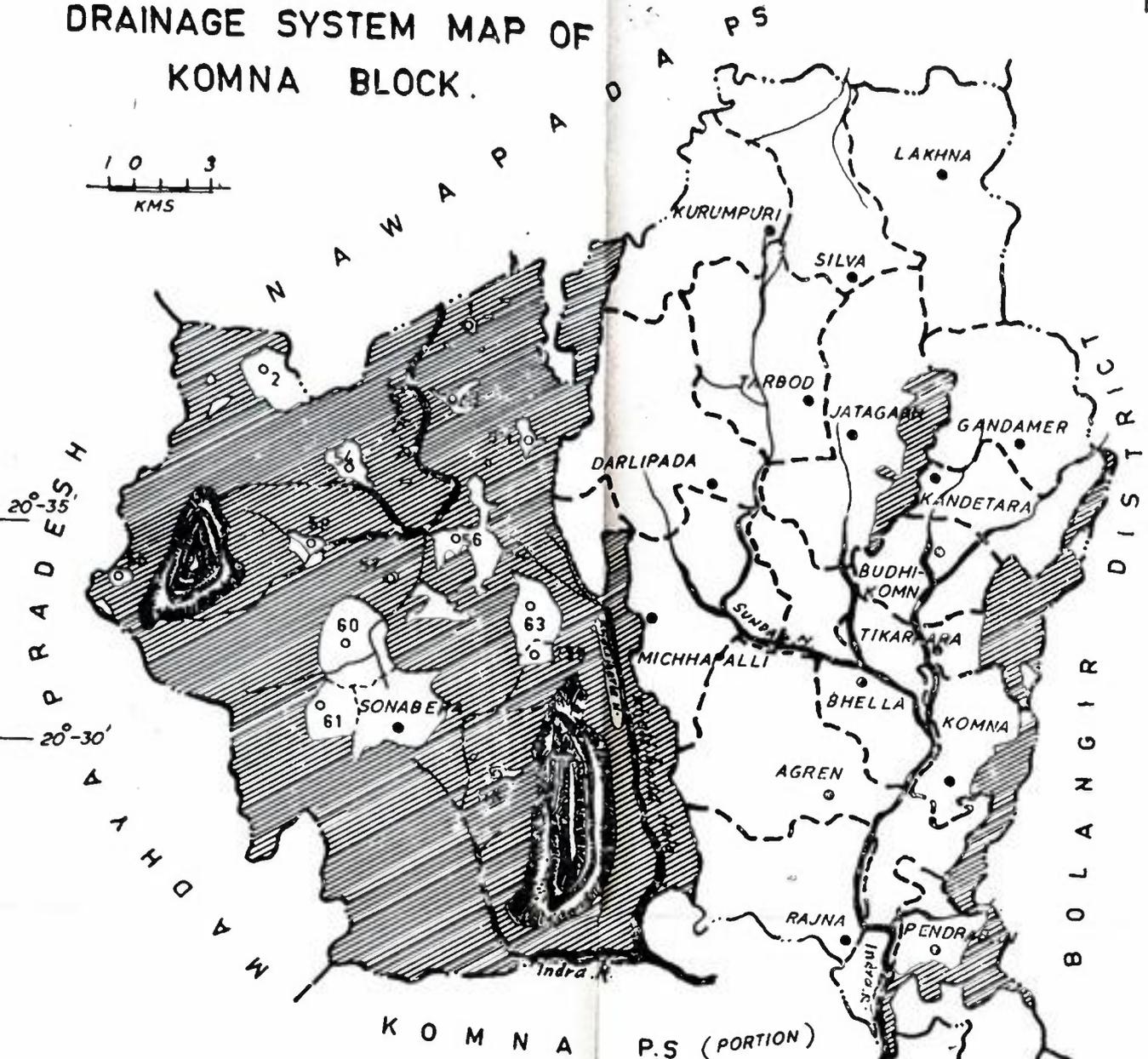
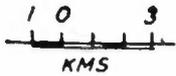
A number of water falls on the Jonk, the Indra and the Sundar rivers are present at Gatibera, Patdarha, Manikgarh and Patidongar forest blocks. Some of the important falls are Kharaldhas (50m) and Seniadhas (25m) on the Jonk river, Gaidhas (25m) over Gaidhas nalla, Parewadaha fall (22m) on the Indra river, a fall on Pandujhala nalla (40m) and another on Hijrachuan nalla (50m) and Gobra fall (50m) at the origin of the Sundar river.

There are two hot water springs, one located at Patalganga between Patdarha and Gurudongar forest blocks and another at Chandrasil in Manikgarh forest block. The water of these springs is sulphurous.

### **Drainage and Water Supply :**

The Khariar region is located amidst four main perennial rivers, namely the Jonk, the Indra, the Sundar and the Udanti. The Jonk river originates from the north-western outskirts of Patdarha forest block and flows northward through the old Jumtagarh fort (in ruins) and thereafter descends to the plains on the foot-hills of Manikgarh block near Maragura and meets the Gaidhas nalla and another nalla at Tileimal. It flows in the heart of the Sonabera plateau and drains out the major areas of Gatibera block, whole of Manikgarh, Ranimal, Kechhupani, Musarangi, Kendubahada, Lodra, part of

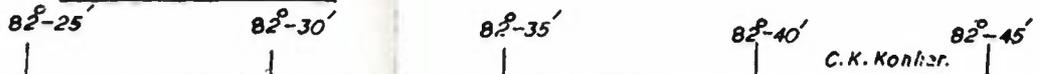
# DRAINAGE SYSTEM MAP OF KOMNA BLOCK.



## REFERENCE.

- BLOCK BOUNDARY — — — — —
- RIVER & NALA
- HILLS
- FOREST AREAS

- G.P. BOUNDARY — — — — —
- VILLAGE -DO- — — — — —
- STUDY VILLAGES ○
- G.P. HEADQUARTERS ●



C.K. Kohler.

Patidongar and Tanwat ghati. It leaves the Zamindari boundary at Khariar Road and thereafter flows into the Mahanadi river.

The Indra river originates from the Kukrar region of Madhya Pradesh and enters into the Patdarha forest block where it is met by two important streams, one from the north and the other from the south, and proceeds eastward in a straight course across the block, and before reaching Jhanamal it is met by two other perennial hill streams, one from the north and the other from the south called Khalijharia nalla and Dusarjhor respectively at the gateway of Gurudongar and Patidongar blocks. After emerging out of the hill section beyond Rajna, it meets the Sundar river near Da:agaon.

The Sundar river originates from near Gobra village located in between Patidongar and Tanwat ghati forest blocks. It flows towards the east for some distance and then turns to south till it reaches Khambhai village. Thereafter, it proceeds towards south-east up to Bhela and from this village takes a straight southern course to meet the river Indra near Da:agaon.

The river Udanti has originated from Madhya Pradesh and flows straight in west-east direction in the southernmost portion of the hill ranges. On its bank in the eastern border of the hills lies a pilgrim centre called *Samlei Dei* temple at Phalchib village. Two most prosperous Bhunjia villages, Paliyalpara and Baijalpur are located on its bank in the plains. It has taken a straight easterly course in the plains and meets the Tel river near Borda.

Vast areas in the north-west, east and the southern portion of the Patdarha forest block are drained by the Indra river. Some portions of Patidongar, Gatibera and Gurudongar

are also drained by this river. The remaining portion of Patidongar, a portion of Tanwat ghati including Tandel, Dharamsagar and Buddharaḥa are completely drained by the Sundar river and its tributaries. The water parting line between the Jonk river and the Indra river is the foot-path from Majagaon forest block to Kholigacn forest block and along the valleys up to Sonabera. Further, it passes over the ridges of Tanwat ghati where it meets the watershed line between the river Jonk and the Ong.

The Anlajuba, Jampani and Masankond forest blocks are drained by the river Ong. The watershed line between the river Ong and Jonk is the foot-path from Lakhna to Anlajuba, Junadi and Dharuabata of Jampani forest block. Most of the areas of Sonabera plateau are drained by the river Jonk excepting the areas along western inter-state boundary from Jharisama to Kamar and Seonaryanpur to Supkondongar. The water partings here are Supkondongar, Kudladongar & Jharlamdongar. The aforesaid areas are drained by the tributaries of the Son river and Khadder nalla which flow into the river Pairi in Madhya Pradesh.

The areas down below the Sonabera plateau, i.e., portions of Lodra beyond Tileimal, Ranimal, Kechhupani, Kendubahada and other forest blocks are drained by the river Jonk.

Southern portion of Patdarha, Kududi, Pippalpani, Nageshpahad, Narayandongri, Kendumunda, Chireipani, Koilakhola, portions of Choura and Choulmachin are drained by the Udanti river. All these rivers are narrow in their upper reaches in the upland hill regions, but in the lower reaches they are quite shallow with wider banks. The Sundar and the Jonk are full of sand with very much constricted water course. As a result, the water is confined at places in some pools during the summer.

People residing near the river depend upon them for their water supply. During the summer, the people residing at a

distance of five kilometers and even beyond this distance from the rivers of the plains have to walk to these sources to fetch water due to scarcity condition in their area. Some people have wells, and recently minor irrigation projects have been set up at suitable places to meet the needs of water for drinking and irrigation purposes. When the wells dry up during April or even before, in most of the localities the people depend entirely on the rivers and minor irrigation projects for their water supply. Though dug wells have been installed in large villages recently, still then the people continue to depend upon natural sources as before.

### **Rocks :**

The rock types around the area are Granite Gneiss calcisilicate rocks, and highly metamorphosed and epidotised basement complex (peninsular gneiss and granite) consisting of rocks, belonging to the Khondalite group and Charnockite group. The Khondalite group is composed of the Garnetsillimanite Graphite Schists and Gneisses with interbanded Quartzites, Silliminite quartzites, Crystalline lime stones, Calciphyres, & Calgranulities. The Charnockites are Hyperthenegranite gneisses which have undergone considerable retrograde metamorphism. These rocks are intricately folded and refolded and at places sheared.

### **Soil Types :**

The soil types found in the area may be broadly classified into (1) Black cotton soil (2) Lateritic and Red soil and (3) Alluvial deposits. The entire plains of Khariar fall to the zone of Black cotton soil intercepted with Lateritic and Red soils in the vicinity of mountainous regions. The bordering areas between Orissa and Madhya Pradesh near Narayandongri (Sinapali) are characterised with Red loam soil and Lateritic soil.

### **Black Cotton and Alluvial Soil—**

Most of the agricultural lands in the area conform to Clay loams or Black cotton soil. The soil type characteristic of the area being rich in aluminium and ferromanganese compounds is noted for high moisture holding capacity. In the broken country between the hills and the plains, the Black cotton soil is present and it is comparatively deeper and richer than the soil of other parts of the areas because the humus from the hills are constantly washed down and deposited in the valleys. The soil is fine grained and dark coloured and contains high percentage of Magnesium carbonate and calcium Carbonate. It is highly retentive of moisture and contains much iron, lime, magnesium, aluminium and potash. But the soil is poor in phosphorus.

### **Lateritic and Red Soil—**

The oldest rock constituting the basement of most of the mountains, i.e. Granite Gneiss and Crystalline schists within other subordinate rocks rich in ferromanganese minerals give rise to Red matured soils on weathering. These types of soils are noticed in the slopes and ridges. The soil texture is coarse due to the presence of more of coarse sand. Gradually with the increase in fineness in proportion of sand and increase in silt and clay, it is formed into Loam and Sandy loam soils. The areas under the *Sal* patches in Gatibera and Patdarha forest blocks are characterised by this soil. The Pure *Sal* area in Amodi block is also characterised with good depth of Sandy loam soil. However, this type of soil is very much limited and is located in a very few geographical formations, mostly, confined to the plains, flat valleys and gentle slopes where the site is not subject to the constant run off and erosion like portions of Amlajuba, Bajakhaman, Kendubahada, the encroached areas of Pipalpani block, part of Dharmasagar and Belgarh.

### Temperature :

The climate of the area is of monsoonic type. It receives most of its rains by the south-west monsoon which generally breaks in the middle of June and rains continue up to the end of September with a few occasional showers during October and in the winter months. Winter starts from November and lasts up to the end of March in the plateau and hills, but it is of shorter duration lasting up to January in the plains. The temperature, as recorded at Nawapara centre, rises in summer up to 44.4°C in the maximum and 27.2°C in the minimum and falls in winter to 25.6°C in the maximum and 13.3°C in the minimum. The average temperature records 33.2°C in the maximum and 23.8°C in the minimum. The temperature at Sonabera plateau goes down considerably during winter and nights are very cold and at some places ground frost is noticed. The plateau remains somewhat cooler even during the summer due to its high altitude than the plains.

### Rain fall :

The average annual rainfall for the last 10 years is 1,096.54 mm and seven months in a year remain dry in the area. In the recent past, the rainfall has been very inadequate causing drought in some years. It is the experience of the people in the plateau that frost fall has decreased with its rain fall also. The reason which they attribute for this decrease in rainfall is the destruction of forests which are rampant in the present time.

### Natural Calamities :

Floods are unknown to the area except some casual inundation of the rivers Indra and Sundar. The unprecedented flood in the Udanti river in September, 1977 washed away the crops on both sides of this river. The river changed

its original course and pushed through a nalla across the areas which were under *Teak* plantation and washed away all the poles and sapplings.

Unlike the flood which is most uncommon, drought has been very common in the recent years from 1962-63 onwards and as a result, the agricultural activities are adversely affected almost every year. Drought and failure of crops, excessive heat and acute scarcity of water particularly in the plains have resulted in the break out of epidemics and migration of people to better localities. The Sonabera and Gatibera plateau where the man-land ratio was in proper balance have started experiencing imbalance in this ratio on account of the flow of the plains' people to these hills. Many Kulta and Teli families coming from Paikmal and Padmapur areas are found to have settled down on their newly reclaimed farm lands in the Sonabera plateau. Similarly, many milkmen have also infiltrated into the plateau with their herds of cattle in search of better pasturage. The immediate consequences of these uncontrolled infiltration of the people into the hills are discontentment and anxiety which have surfaced in the indigenous population, and unless proper measures are taken in time from now to abet flow of outside population the situation is bound to be explosive and serious.

The hill areas of Boran, Komna, Patdarha, Kholi, Ghatmal and the interstate border areas are unhealthy where the people suffer from malaria, diarrhoea, dysentery and other infectious diseases. Stomach trouble is very common in the plateau during the dry months due to muddy and unclean drinking water. No medical facilities are available and the well-to-do persons sometimes take help from the medical centre located at Bhela only in serious cases. Otherwise most of the people resort to prayer and supplication to *Sunadei*, the Supreme Goddess of the plateau for cure.

### Forests :

The Khariar ex-Zamindari of which the Sonabera plateau was an important part, now forms part of the revenue subdivision of Nawapara in Kalahandi district of Orissa. For convenience sake, most of the matters which are discussed in this book related largely to the whole of the hilly area of Khariar. One of such matters is about the forest, and the detail about the forest types which are presented below cover the whole of Khariar.

The geographical area of Khariar which is in our mind is bounded on the north, west and south-west by Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh, on the east by Titlagarh and Patnagarh subdivisions of Bolangir district and Padmapur subdivision of Sambalpur district and on the south-east by Dharamgarh subdivision of Kalahandi district of Orissa. About 70% of the forests of Khariar ex-Zamindari are located on the western and south-western portion of the area. A sizable population of the forests is also located in the north-western and northern portion of the area.

The forests of Khariar are mainly of northern tropical dry mixed deciduous type. A patch of *Sal* forest appears in the extreme north is extending over to Kendubahada and Musarangi blocks of dry mixed deciduous forests. *Sal* forests of a poor type are also noticed in the areas of Kokid, Kutrabeda, Sonabera and portions of Patdarha block. Other species of trees which appear are intermixed with *Sal*, *Bija*, *Sahaj*, *Dhaura*, *Haldu*, *Sisoo*, and *Harida*.

*Teak* predominates in most of the areas in Ranimai block. specially around Bamini nalla and extending up to Katingpani village and southern limits of Ranimai block. Sporadic occurrences of *Teak* in scattered pockets are met with at Gatibera and Manikgarh blocks of forests, in the village limits of Patora on the banks of Patora nalla and Jonk river. An extensive

patch of *Teak* is found from Telimal village to Golabandh village in Manikgarh block.

The forests which are found in Patdarha, Patidongar, Gurudongar and Adipita blocks are characterized by northern tropical dry deciduous type. But most of the blocks of Sinapali range are extending from Southern boundary of Adipita block, south and west of Patdarha and northern boundary of Koilakhola block to Ghatmal, Dumerbahal and over to Nageshpahad, Chireipani, Choura and Khasbahal blocks. Similarly a few blocks in Khariar range, namely Choulmachi, Gochki, Kudal, Buddharaja, Dabahal A & B, Luhakhan-Phulgharia, Bijili, Hatpada and parts of Dharmasagar are also dotted with natural patches of *Teak*. The natural *Teak* forests are generally associated with such important species as *Ternalias*, *Pterocarpus marsupium*, *Adina cardifolia*, *Anogeissus latifolia* and *Dendrocalamus strictus*. But in portion of Patdarha, Koilakhola and Adipita blocks both *Teak* and *Sal* occur side by side adequately and regenerate naturally.

*Salia baunsa* (*Dendrocalamus strictus*) is found extensively in areas of Ranimai, Gatibera, Manikgarh, Dharmasagar, Tandel and portions of Patdarha block. It occurs in patches in Choura, Gurudongar and Patidongar forest areas. In many places the bamboo forest has been degraded due to high incidence of illicit felling and removal of young shoots (*Kardis*) by local people. The tribal people, namely the Paharias are found living in small groups near places where bamboo is available. They make excellent baskets of different kinds out of bamboo splits. In some areas the Bhunjias serve as middlemen, who buy baskets from the Paharias and sell them in local markets. Otherwise, the Paharias themselves carry their finished products to nearby market places for sale. Another species of bamboo, namely *Bamboosa arundinacea* is seen in scattered patches along the hill streams and in low lying areas in Lodra, Manikgarh, Gurudongar and

Nimra forests. The reed bamboo (*Polystachyum pargacile*) is found near Jhardama and Sindursil in Gatibera and Patdaha blocks of forests. Due to biotic interference like uncontrolled felling of trees, unregulated heavy grazing and annual fires most of the forests are in the process of colossal depletion.

Most of the forest blocks have been encroached upon, and there has been wanton destruction of vegetational cover with reckless felling and removal of forest growth mostly by people from the plains and contractors. So many of the forest blocks have become almost barren. The devastation of *Teak* forest and *Sal* trees has been phenomenal. The valuable species such as *Bija*, *Haldu* and *Harida* are also gradually disappearing due to unrestricted grazing, illicit felling and forest fire. The practice of shifting cultivation which is now abounded to considerable extent has also been responsible for the destruction of the forest growth in the area. As a result of these evil practices, many places which are once covered under thick forest have become almost barren and in many areas valuable forests have reached an alarming state of depletion from their original thick vegetable composition. Their retrieval and restoration to the original condition is out of question. However, concerted efforts and heavy investment in terms of money and labour may help regeneration of forests in some places of the Khariar ex-Zamindari area.

### Revenue Villages within Forest Blocks :

The Forest Department of the Government of Orissa have recently carried out a survey in the forests of Khariar division with a view to demarcating the reservation of forest blocks. The boundary survey maps, prepared during the demarcation and survey of the boundaries, do not give any idea of the Revenue villages located inside some the newly delineated forest blocks. In the absence of any distinct

boundary line, it becomes convenient for the people to encroach into protected forest areas. A list showing the Revenue villages situated inside forest blocks without any ring line is furnished in the table below. It is necessary to provide ring lines showing the limits of the village boundary, so that the people of these villages have sufficient idea about the village forest line within their respective village boundary and do not feel need for encroaching upon either protected or reserve forests.

TABLE—I

Sl. No.	Name of the Blocks.	No. of villages.	Name of the villages.	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5
1	Gatibera	21	1. Kutrabeda 2. Sonabera 3. Gatibera 4. Soseng 5. Kokid 6. Godma 7. Deosil 8. Aurar 9. Seonarayan- pur 10. Tikarpara 11. Garbhata 12. Jogimunda 13. Sinmuri 14. Balipakhna (Singidarha) 15. Kamar	The present track map (4" = 1 mile) does not show the boundary of any village. There are no boundaries (ring lines) to distinguish the forest areas from the village areas. The demarcation started in some villages have been left half way.

1	2	3	4	5
			16. Borar 17. Jalamdai 18. Dhakili 19. Bhabsil 20. Jamgoan 21. Rupiaum	
2.	Koilakhola			Demarcation is completed and map has been prepared. Much forest areas have been left out.
3.	Choura 'A'	2	1. Guma 2. Palama	Good forest areas of natural <i>Teak</i> , <i>Bija</i> and <i>Mundi</i> etc., have been included in the village limits of Guma and Palama.
4.	Masankonda	2	1. Chuhura 2. Khandadhap	The existing villages have not been shown in the 4" = 1 mile block map.
5.	Patdarha	12	1. Kurdanjharia 2. Kathpar 3. Jhipapahad 4. Chitapani 4. Budhital 6. Kaptiama	The present block map does not show the boundaries of the Revenue villages situated inside.

1	2	3	4	5
			7. Khursikabha 8. Samipada 9. Dhobighat 10. Bhainsmunda 11. Patdarha 12. Dhatunam	
6.	Ranimai	2	1. Bargaon 2. Bhanjipani	The ring lines of the encroached villages have not been correctly shown on the ground.
7.	Kendubahada	1	1. Bhainsadarha	An old village existing since 50 to 60 years does not find any place in the recent 4" = 1 mile trace map.

### Forest Produce :

The main products of the forests of Khariar are timber (logs, planks and poles), Charccal, Firewood, Bamboos, Kendu leaves, Myrobolans, Mohua flowers, Mohua seeds, Sal seeds, Sisali fibres and leaves, Simul Cotton, Soap nuts, Gums, Resins and medicinal plants.

The tribal people of the area use timbers for construction of their houses, firewood for cooking their food, wood for plough and their agricultural implements, brushwood and thorny plants for making fences and hedges, bamboos for roofing, fencing and making walls for their huts and grasses for thatching their houses. They collect all these materials

from the nearby forests to meet their requirements. Similarly, they also collect many kinds of roots and tubers, fruits and flowers from the forests to supplement their food and medicinal requirements. The bamboo shoots (*Kardi*) are a great favourite food-stuff of the tribal people. They also depend upon the forest for grazing their cattle. The people living in the plains have also developed the taste for *Kardi* and *Hanclua* (dried bamboo shoots) which make tasty pickles.

Previously, *Teak* was extensively used for making doors, windows and furniture. Now the *Teak* is getting scarced and not even within the easy reach of the people. They have switched over to the use of *Asan*, *Dhaura* and *Jamun* wood for constructional purposes. Whenever larger timbers are required for making doors and windows such wood as *Bija*, *Haldu* and *Gambhari* are preferred. *Karla* poles are used as rafters because they resist attack by termites. Bamboos are used for fencing the kitchen garden. Timbers collected from *Bandhn* and *Babul* are used for making bullock-carts.

Huge requirements of Timbers and other forest products came up in the wake of extensive constructional programmes under the Five year plan schemes. To meet the heavy demands of the public, the Defence and of the Railways, the forest products particularly timbers, which were primarily consumed by local people, have found their way to outside market centres within and outside the State. Improvement of road communication has helped transportation of timbers from the forest areas to external market centres. Similarly, many other forest products such as medicinal herbs, shrubs, roots and firewood which were confined to local use have found their outlet to outside market centres in an increasing manner. Following this, the forest products are not only depleted but also the local people have been put to a great disadvantage in meeting their essential requirements.

A list giving yield of minor forest produce in demarcated, protected and *Khesra* forests of Khariar division for three years from 1975 to 1978 is furnished in the following Table-2, and Table-3 shows the forest blocks under Khariar ex-Zamindari.

TABLE—2

Description of Produce	1975-76		1976-77		1977-78	
	in Qntls	Amount	in Qntls	Amount	in Qntls.	Amount
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mohua Flower	110787.00	290816.19	91654.49	240593.15	644550.00	198741.84
Tamarind	...	...	425.00	5000.00	1046.00	9075.00
Dhatiki flower	214.64	1670.00	222.14	3400.00	722.00	5526.00
Bamboos (in Nos.)	6253319	100050.00	9952 RM	183582.00	...	242832.69
			231497	48720.00		
Antia bark	...	...	1074.00	9500.00	853.00	34300.00
Grazing fee	...	8836.68	...	7000.00	...	4054.09

Genduli & other	13607.47	80760.00	3429.77	62335.00	1618.43	81568.00
Gums	...	...	...	...	...	500.00
Lac	7379.25	82301.00	11005.46	124200.00	5187.65	90904.00
Myrobalans	5380.30	5390.00	3370.00	20800.00	430.00	22125.00
Neem seeds	220.00	1800.00	611.00	8925.00	775.00	3325.00
Kusume seeds	...	...	...	...	40.75	14750.00
Chiranjji Seeds	...	...	...	...	...	...
Sunari bark	...	...	...	...	...	...
Arjuna bark	...	...	...	...	...	...
Mohua seeds	697.60	5129.55	2792.90	18490.00	175.00	1153.95
Siali fibre	...	...	...	...	25.00	1155.00
KHESRA FOREST						
Bamboo (in Nos)	379446	6607.00	33700.00	8903.00	3973.00	10530.00
Minor Minerals	...	65795.47	...	64285.48	...	167702.92

The Tabele--2 shows that if proper care should be taken to manage the forests on scientific lines it will provide ample employment opportunities to the local tribals with sufficient scope for their economic development.

TABLE—3

## FOREST BLOCKS OF KHARIAR EX-ZAMINDARI

Sl. No.	Name of the Block	Zamindari Zapti Forest handed over to F. D. (in acres)	Forest area as per previous working scheme. (in hectares)
1	2	3	4
KHARIAR RANGE			
1	Choura	8,700.00	5,762.00
2	Beldongri	160.00	85.00
3	Bundia	1,200.00	428.00
4	Satparlia	2,200.00	192.00
5	Bijili	200.00	33.00
6	Gharlasani	100.00	85.00
7	Rankapur	250.00	121.00
8	Chandel	1,100.00	...
9	Khamatarai	575.00	275.00
10	Khairbhadi	600.00	202.00
11	Lachhipur	1,700.00	113.00
12	Risipiti	90.00	24.00
13	Dharamsagar	7,500.00	2,005.00
14	Karlakote	1,000.00	303.00
15	Budharaja	1,250.00	169.00
16	Chakadongar	111.00	41.00
17	Hatpada	117.00	...
18	Latabanji	98.00	...
19	Choulmachi	7,500.00	2,275.00
20	Bajini	8,000.00	2,833.00
21	Munjei	1,250.00	...

1	2	3	4
22	Ekloi	9,000.00	...
23	Pipalpani	5,500.00	...
24	Suklibhata	500.00	90.00
25	Gardhanakachhar	1,182.00	879.00
26	Nimna	692.00	288.00
27	Kudal	6,500.00	1,682.00
28	Gochki	200.00	202.00
29	Guma-Palenbasa	1,200.00	...
30	Khirmal	5,500.00	2,035.00
31	Dottosagar	200.00	81.00
32	Khasabahal	3,424.00	1,416.00
33	Gurudongar	60,00.00	5,161.00
34	Kumudi	1,200.00	627.00
35	Lambipani	...	...
36	Debahal	...	...
37	Ranidongar	...	...
38	Luhakhan-Phuljharla	...	...

### Rights and Concessions :

The rights and concessions which the people were enjoying during the Zamindari period to meet their needs of timber, firewood and grazing are also being enjoyed by them in the present time. The details of these rights and concessions are mentioned in the "Wazib-ul-urz" of the erstwhile Khariar Zamindari system. It is necessary to give here some salient features of those concessions.

Extracts from the "Wazib-ul-urz" regarding collection of forest produce of various types are given below.

a) "Tenants and their halias, and the sukhbasis (landless people) possessing not more than the required heads of cattle, may graze their cattle free. In case of grazing cattle on lands outside the village boundary the tenants may graze free four heads of bullocks or buffaloes per plough in use and for cattle beyond this number, will pay grazing fee at ordinary rates for the 8 heads in excess and at professional rates for the excess cattle".

"Ordinary rates are double the tenant's rates and the professional rates are double the ordinary rates. There are no tenant's rate for horses and mares, the ordinary rate for which is 4 annas per head".

Tenant's rates :

Buffalo	...	4 annas
Cow and Bullock	...	2 annas
Goat and Sheep	...	1 anna'

b) "About collecting firewood, grasses, creepers, roots and leaves, tenants, their halias and the sukhbasis may collect and remove free the produces for their own bonafide use".

c) "About collecting fencing materials the same as under (b)".

d) Rules for collecting bamboos :

Tenants and their halias or any other inhabitant of the village may remove free trees of 2' in girth of unprohibited species such as *Dha*, *Amla*, *Karda*, *Salai*, *Arjun*, etc., for constructing their huts or buildings and for agricultural purposes. Royalty shall be paid for trees of prohibited species of girth above 2'.

The prohibited species are *Saguan, Bija, Sahaj, Sisoo, Sal, Khair, Bandhan* and *Achu* or *Bakli*".

e) "Fruits and perishable products :

The Zamindari has right over the fruit trees. Tenants and other villagers may enjoy the fruits free. In case of their selling fruits, they shall sell only to such contractors as selected or appointed by the Zamindar".

"Rights over trees":

a) "Fruits trees—

Rights have been recorded on the pattas. The produce of fruit trees as well as timber of the dead trees belong to the right holder. The tenant loses his right over the trees. The Zamindar has right over such trees as *Mahul, Harida, Char* and *Kendu*. The disposal of the produces of such trees is regulated by the provisions mentioned in "Wazab-ul-urz".

b) "Other trees—

The tenants may remove free for the bonafide use of small and miscellaneous trees of girth upto 2' standing on the holdings".

c) "Grass :

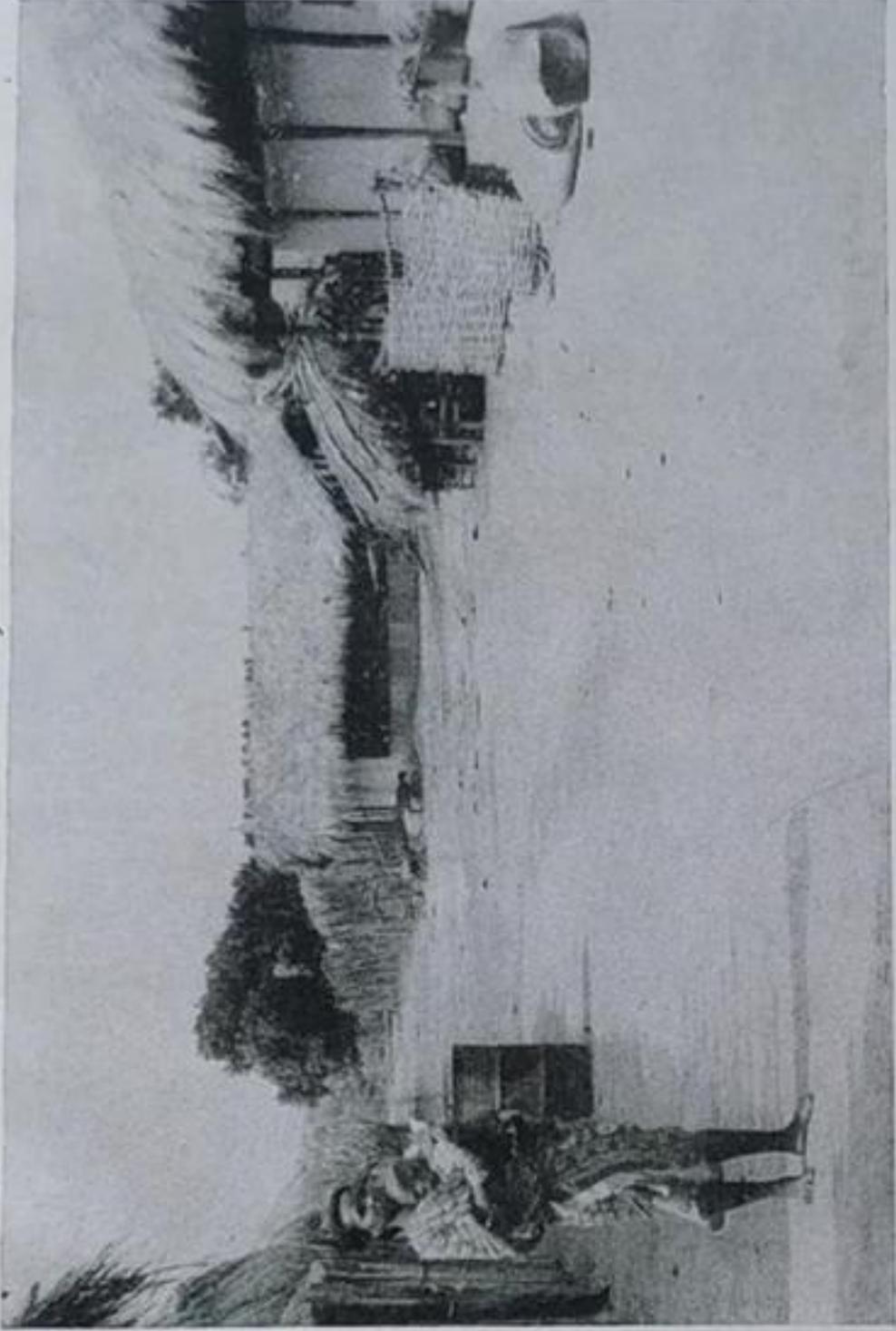
Grazing on the lands of the holdings belong to tenants".

Wild Life :

The Khariar area was once very rich with varieties of wild animals. But the destruction of the rich vegetation resulting in disturbances of shelters and breeding places, there has been considerable depletion of wild life in the areas. Moreover, with the opening of the area through the development of roads, the wild animals have been exposed to hunting by those who possess guns. Nevertheless, some of the rare species of wild animals are met with within the forest of

Gatibera, Patdarha and other forest blocks of Sonabera plateau. These species include wild buffalo (*Babunos bubalis*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), bears (*Melurinus ursinus*), tiger (*Panthera tigris*), wild bear, hyaena, chital, barking deer and wild dogs. Among the birds pea-fowls, partridges, hill myna, bulbuls are the main species. Various types of snakes are also found in these forests. Some of the varieties are Indian python, cobra and some types of Kraits.

The Jonk and the Udanti rivers have varieties of fishes in the deep gorges and reservoirs near water falls. Magaras are reported in some places.



A view of the village, Sonabera

## CHAPTER III

### THE BHUNJIAS - THEIR DISTRIBUTION AND MATERIAL CULTURE

#### Distribution :

According to the 1971 Census the total population of the Bhunjias in Orissa is 7410 (Males-3510 and Females-3900) and their main concentration is in Kalahandi district. Their distribution in different districts of the State is furnished in the Table-4

TABLE—4

Sl. No.	Name of the District	Population
1.	Kalahandi	5673
2.	Koraput	1635
3.	Sambalpur	53
4.	Dhenkanal	32
5.	Balasore	13
6.	Keonjhar	4
	Total	7410

In Kalahandi district, they are confined to Nawapara subdivision and in this again their main concentration is in the Sonabera plateau of Komna block. They are concentrated in a group of 17 villages covering an area of 44213.44 hectares (1,10533.40 acres of land) in the plateau. All these villages come under Sonabera Panchayat. Besides this core area, there are a few villages in the plains having a sizable population of the Bhunjias. But unlike in the plateau, where most of the villages are predominantly inhabited by the Bhunjias, in the plains also the Bhunjia population is scattered in different villages in which scheduled castes and other castes are preponderant.

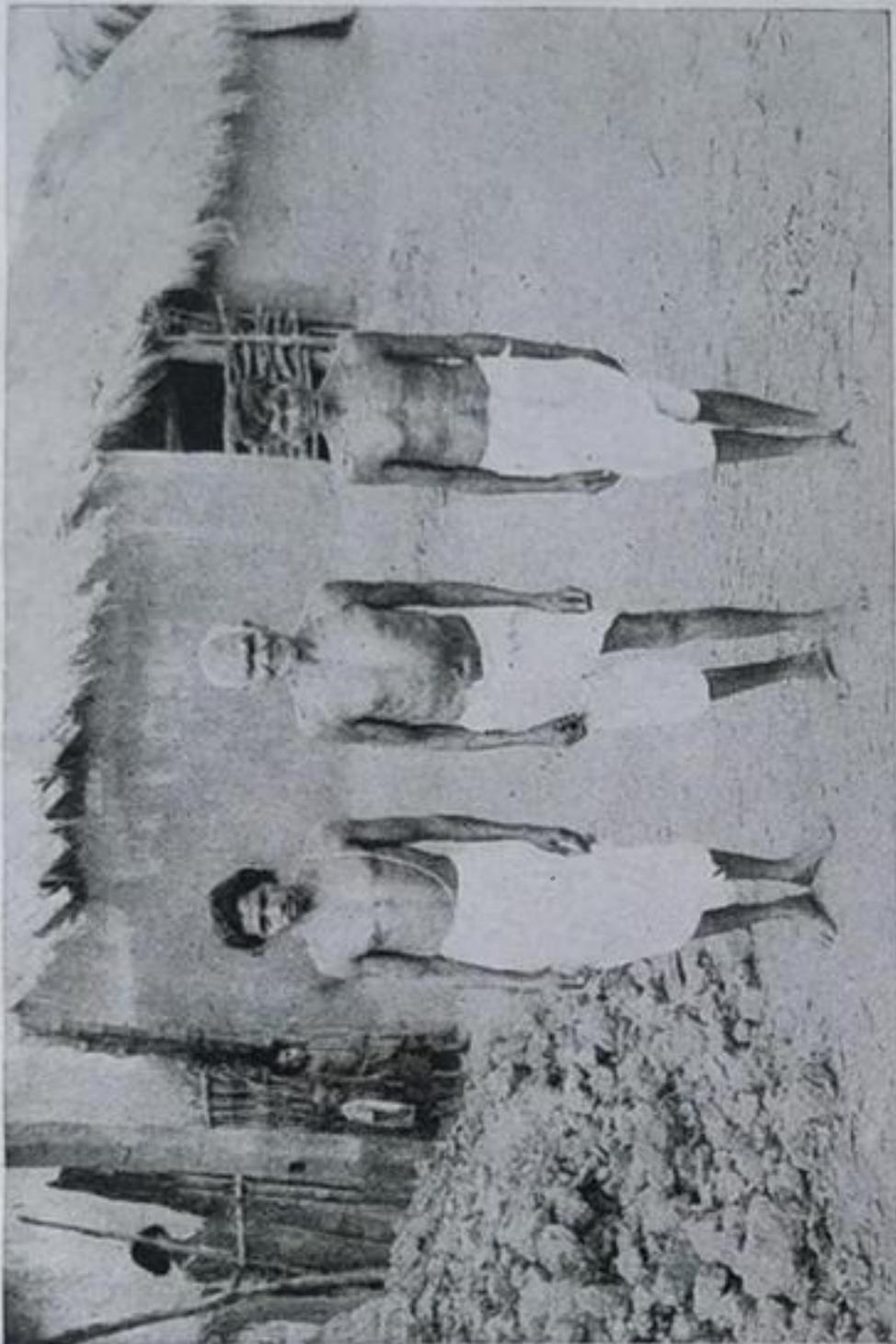
Before taking up other matters it is necessary to give an idea here about the settlement pattern in the plateau and distribution of the Bhunjias in their immediate neighbourhood in the plains.

#### Settlements in the plateau :

The following table shows the main villages, their hamlets, ethnic composition and total number of households in the plateau.

TABLE—5

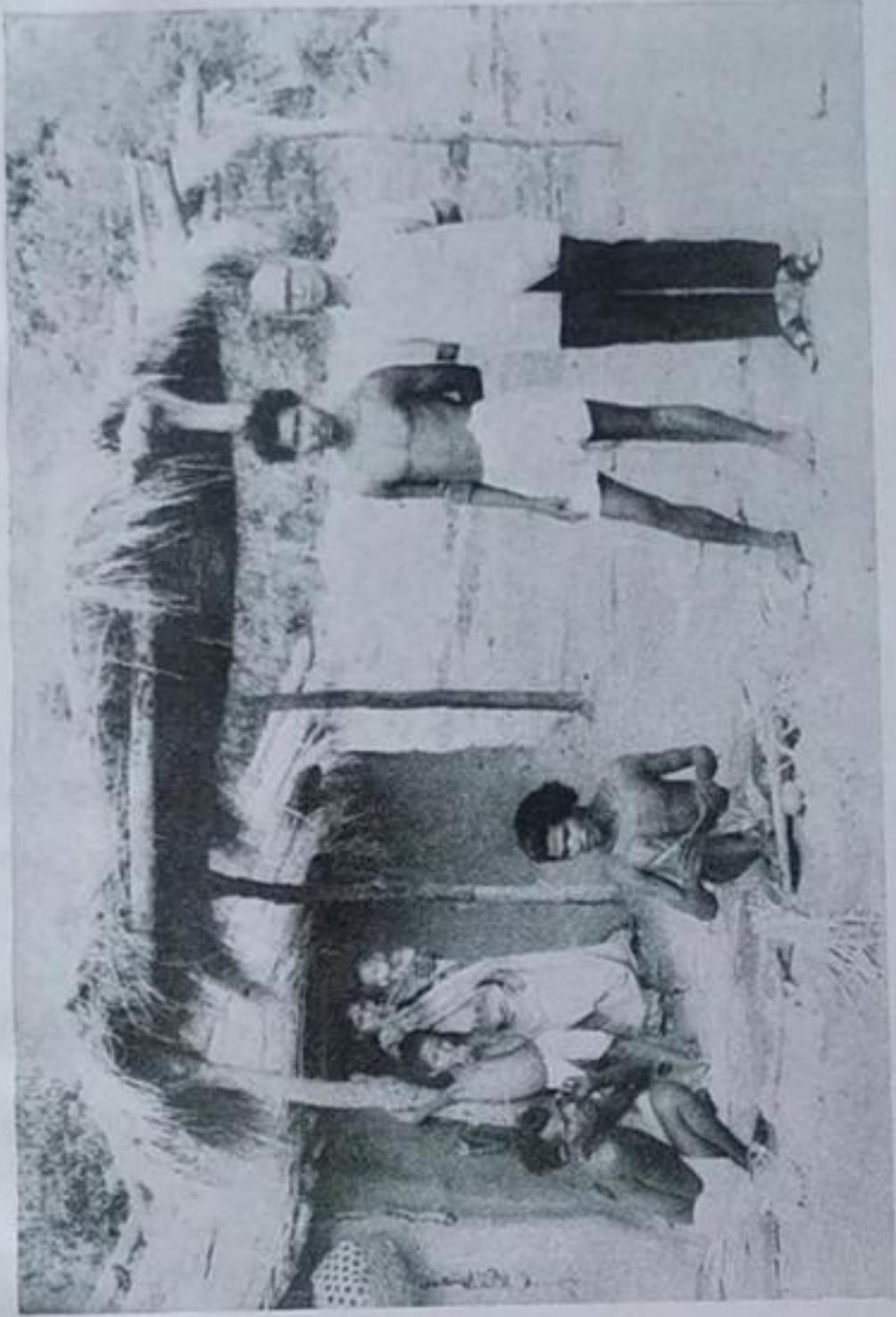
Sl. No.	Main village	Hamlet	Ethnic composition	Number of households	
1	2	3	4	5	
1.	Sonabera	1. Sonabera	Bhunjia	60	
			Ganda	7	
			Teli	5	
			Binjhal	1	
			Brahmin	1	
			Lohora	1	
			Penka	2	
			2. Gadabhata	Bhunjia	20
				Mali	1
			3. Senbahil	Bhunjia	7
4. Mahulpada/ Jogimunda	Binjhal	1			



Gonds of Gatibera

1	2	3	4	5
			Kulta	5
			Kalanjia	2
			Muslim	2
			Teli	4
		5. Nakapada	Bhunjia	7
			Kulta	7
			Teli	1
		6. Dathunama	Paharia (Kamar)	7
		7. Khadanga	Paharia (Kamar)	12
2.	Gatibera	1. Gatibera	Gond	60
			Ganda	14
			Gour	3
			Brahmin	3
			Paragonia	1
		2. Salepada	Bhunjia	—
			Paradhia Munda	—
		3. Dhekunpani	Paharia (Kamar)	12
			Bhunjia	1
			Rauta	18
		4. Dehelpada	—	—
		5. Badapadar	—	—
		6. Sinamunda	—	—
3.	Korrãberã		Bhunjia	15
4.	Bhabsil		Bhunjia	24
5.	Deosil	1. Deosil	Gond	10
			Paharia (Kamar)	7
		2. Gundupani	Paharia (Kamar)	7

1	2	3	4	5
6.	Soseng	1. Soseng	Gond	25
			Rauta	1
			Ganda	2
		2. Godma	Gond	12
3. Dhakali	Gond		12	
		Paharia(Kamar)	1	
4. Kaunsel		Paharia (Kamar)	1	
	7. Rupiaum	1. Rupiaum	Gond	20
2. Jadajharan		Gond	2	
8. Talabera		Gouda	1	
		Gonda	4	
9. Jalmedai		Bhunjia	7	
10. Seonarayanpur		1. Seonarayanpur	Bhunjia	2
		2. Bachhadhara	Bhunjia	3
		3. Kumarkhata	Bhunjia	5
		4. Jharlama	Bhunjia	12
		5. Bhabakapani	Gond	1
11. Junapani		1. Junapani	Bhunjia	12
		2. Thalipen	Bhunjia	3
12. Aurar			Gond	12
			Kamar	17
			Rauta	2
			Sabara	1
13. Kechhapakhan		Gond	6	
14. Jamgaon	1. Jamgaon	Gond	12	
		Bhunjia	12	
		Rauta	1	



Nityananda Patnaik, Director, T.H.R.T.I.,  
with the Paharias

1	2	3	4	5
		2. Garapada	Gond	6
15.	Chereinchan-khol	1. Chereinchan-khol	Bhunja	7
			Gond	1
		2. Gadagada	Paharia (Kamar)	20
16.	Kokid		(No household)	
17.	Gadagada		U.S.	27

#### Settlements in the plains :

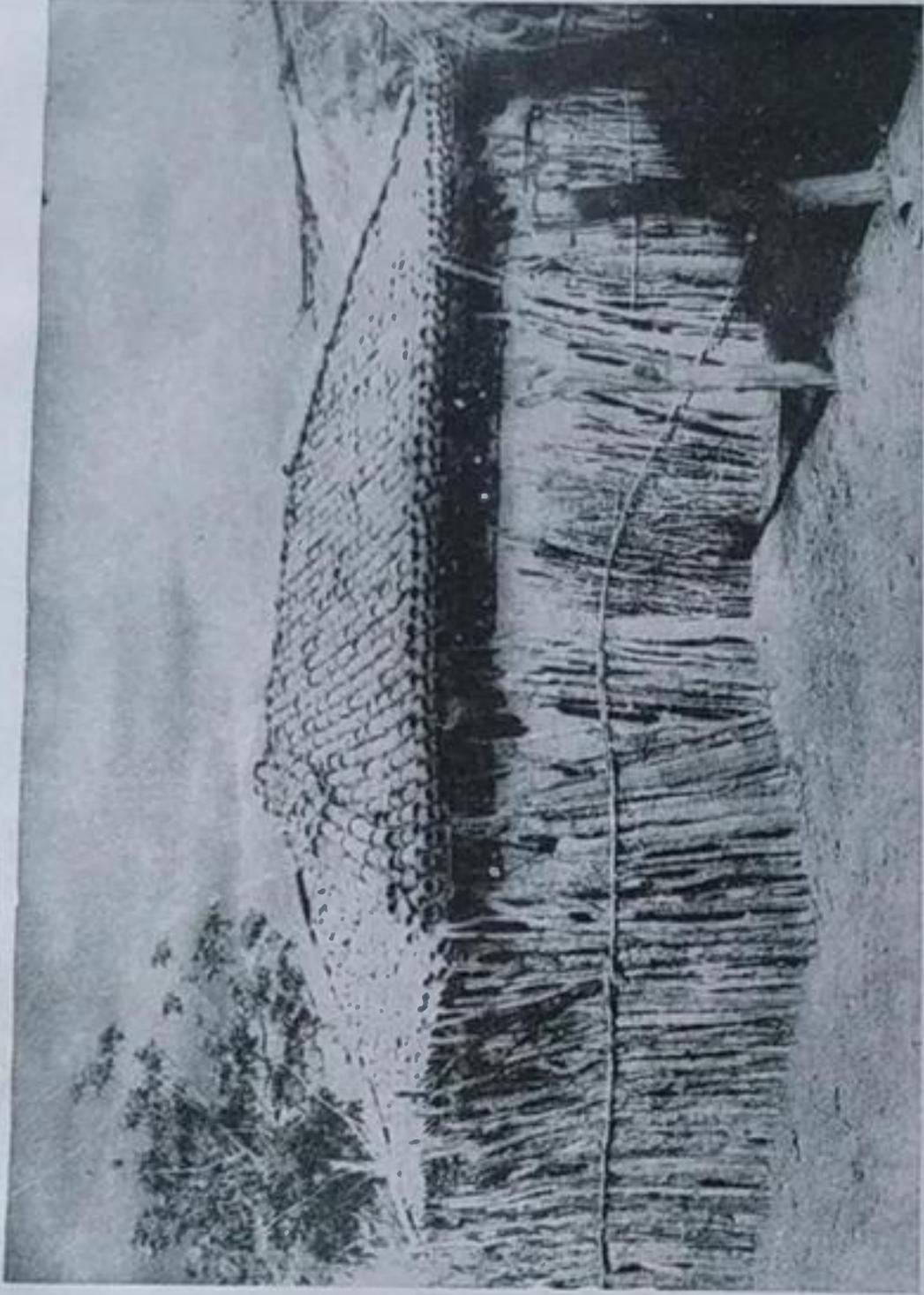
The settlements which are mentioned in this section are located in the plains which lie to the north-eastern, eastern and south-eastern parts of ex-Zamindari of Khariar. In the south-eastern region, there is concentration of the Kondh, locally known as *Kacheria* or *Saderia* Kondh, around Hathbandha and neighbouring villages on the southern side of the Udanti river. Very close to this area are villages namely Sinapali and Gatibera where the Bhunjias are found intermixed with the Gonds.

Away from this area around Lakhna which is situated in the north-eastern region is the area of the Binjhals. Lakhna Railway Station on the Raipur-Vizianagram Railways is contiguous to Padmapur subdivision of Sambalpur district where Binjhals are found in large concentration. A village is situated on the south-western region of Lakhna on the Komna-Nawapara road. The Bhunjias are living in this village and the neighbouring villages are inhabited by the Gonds. Komna itself is inhabited by Binjhals and Saoras and there is not a single Bhunjia household in this village.

Coming back to the south-western region there are certain villages such as Nangalpur, Bhatapani, Pudapadar, Dhangrital and Talakot which are largely inhabited by the Gonds with a sprinkling of Gours. These villages lie in the uplands which form the southern most portion of the long dongarlands of Kalahandi district, stretching from Dharambandha in the north to Arkholi and Dongargaon in the south. These dongarlands form the border between Madhya Pradesh in the west and Kalahandi district in the east.

In the northern-most portion of this dongarlands, there are some settlements lying to the south of Dharambandha which are homogeneous Bhunjia villages. Some of these villages are Katingpani, Jharlama and Jhalap, which are approachable from Lodra village which is situated to the south of Dharambandha. Close to this area there are such villages as Amla, Chitarama and Sindursil located on the side of Madhya Pradesh which are areas of Gond concentration. In the north-eastern side of this region are villages such as Ranimunda, Babebir and Bairgaon which have a sizable Bhunjia population. If someone travels westward from Ranimunda, he would come across a village called Jogabhatta which is situated in the border between the hill regions and the plains. In this area there are also Paharias (a small tribe) who carry on basketry in bamboo for their livelihood. The Bhunjias who live with them purchase baskets from them and sell them in the local weekly markets.

To the east of Lodra village close to the eastern border of the hill ranges are some villages, such as Maragura, Talabera and Golaband which are predominantly occupied by the Gonds. The dam which is being built now across the Jonk river will soon submerge the area around Maragura village. The area to the north of Dharambandha village is inhabited by the Bhunjias in large number. The important Bhunjia villages



Gond house, Gatibera

in this area are Sethjampani and Amanala where the Bhunjias make mats in a kind of locally available hard grass called *Khada*. This is a special craft of the Bhunjias which is found nowhere else except in this area. The Bhunjias of the village Aimiripani manufacture hillbrooms out of locally available grass. These hillbrooms and the mats which are made by the Bhunjias are in great demand in the locality among the caste Hindus.

In between the hill ranges lie wide open spaces where many Bhunjia villages are located. Some such villages are Kholigaon and Chereinchan where many Bhunjia families live and carry on hunting, food gathering and shifting cultivation for their livelihood. The main gateways to these interior places which are locally known as *Kholi* are Barkot and Rajna both being located in the plains close to the eastern border of the hill ranges. These two places provide passage into the middle portion, whereas Boran and Baijalpur to the southern portion and Dharambandha and Lodra to the northern portion of the hill ranges.

There are some very important places of pilgrimage located in the eastern border of the hill ranges close to the plains. One of such places is *Samlei Dei* temple near Phalchib village. It is located on the bank of the Udanti river on the eastern border in the southern most region of the hill ranges. A fair weather road which runs almost parallel to the Udanti river connects this temple with Sinapali village in the plains. Halfway between Sinapali and Phalchib, lies a village called Baijalpur near Nilji village. This village is one of the main settlements of the Bhunjias. As the village is located in plains, there is very good fertile land around it and the Bhunjias carry on wet cultivation in these lands and have become prosperous. In this sense, Baijalpur represents the most prosperous Bhunjia village in the

southern region of ex-Zamindari of Khariar. As the temple at Phalchib has broken down, a new temple has been built in another place called Patiyalpara near Baijalpur and the icon of *Samlei Dei* has been installed in this new temple.

Similarly, there is another place of pilgrimage which is as important as the *Samlei Dei* temple. Here a hot spring called *Patalganga* is located and it is near a village called Kot which is also located in the eastern border of the hill ranges. A reservoir has been constructed at the spring and water from the spring over flows the reservoir and flows down in the form of a hillstream.

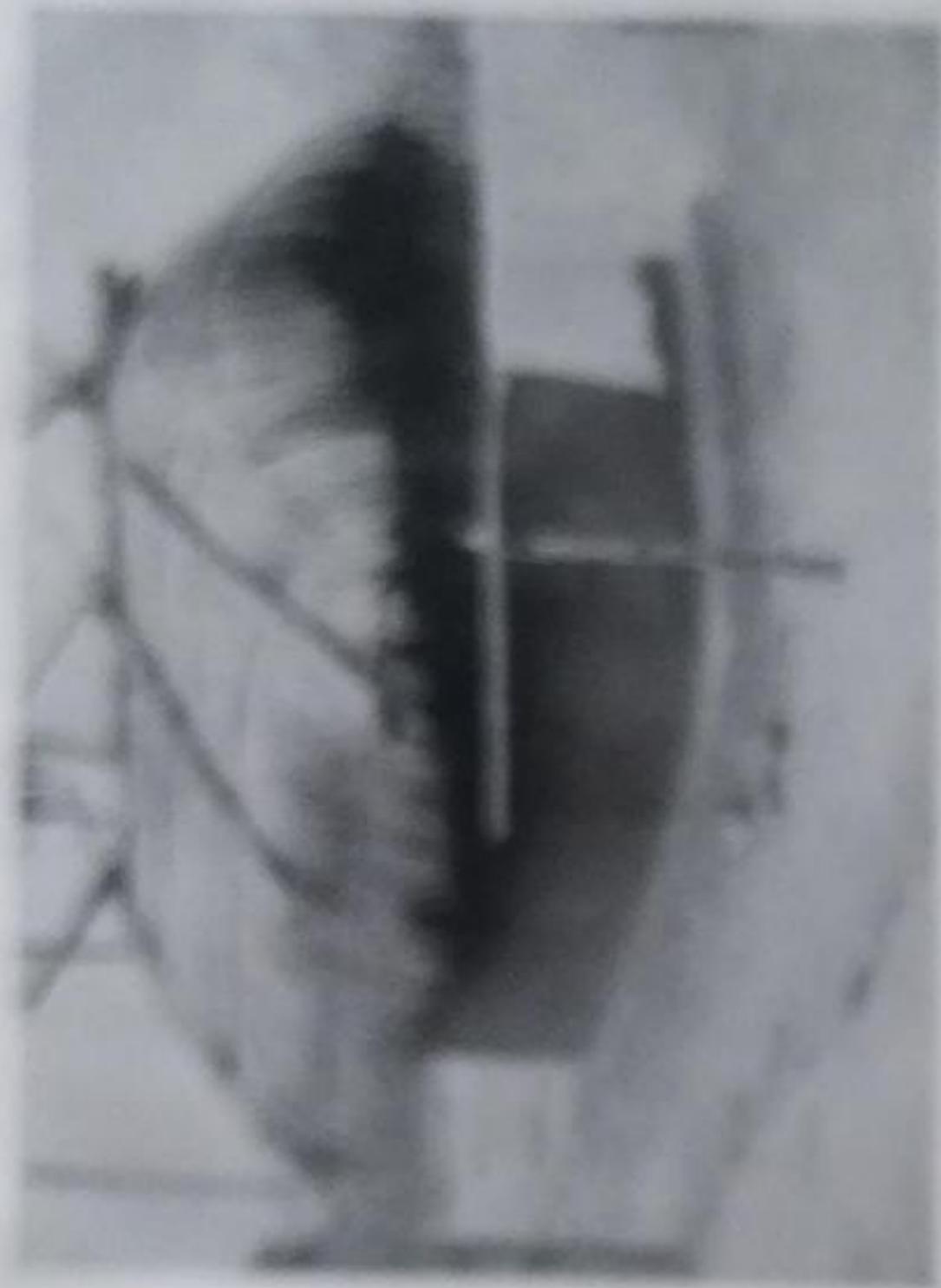
Kot is inhabited by a sizable population of the Bhunjias and it is in this village that a *Jagannath* temple and a *Siva* temple are located. During the car festival which is held at both Kot and Patiyalpara the Bhunjias and other communities, both tribal and non-tribal, from nearby as well as far off places gather in large number in these pilgrim centres to witness the festival. They also visit Bhela village where the car festival is also observed. In the north, Dharmabandha village attracts large crowd of Bhunjias and other communities during the car festival.

#### Material culture :

#### Location and Pattern of the village—

As described earlier, the Bhunjias are divided into two groups, *Chuktia* who lives in the hills and *Chinda* who lives in the plains. The life-way presented in this book is related to the *Chuktia* section of the Bhunjias.

The villages of the *Chuktias* are generally of linear pattern in which there may be one main street with one or more subsidiary small lanes running out of it. The individual houses are located on either side of the village streets.



A typical Bhunjia house

In the case of big villages small lanes emerge from the main village street and run in convenient directions with houses built on either side of the lanes.

The Bhunjia villages vary in size having houses ranging from 8-10 households to 50-60 households. Most of the *Chuktia* villages are situated in the valleys and plateaus sometimes in the foot-hills. Invariably, the villages are located near some sources of water like perennial streams and rivulets from which the people draw water for drinking and other purposes. Each village has a boundary in which many gods and goddesses reside to protect the village from the infiltration of evil spirits,

#### House Types—

The lay-out of the houses of the Bhunjias is of a peculiar type. Two or three or more households take a wide open space and build their individual houses there. A Bhunjia household has generally three houses, one which is bigger than the other two serves as the living-cum-store room, the second hut built adjacent to it by its side is the cattle-shed and the third hut, which is the smallest and built a little away in front of the living room, is the kitchen-shed which is enclosed all round.

The Bhunjia houses are small in size, sufficient to accommodate a married couple and one or two children. A Bhunjia household comprises of one main house (*Kudia*) with an open verandah (*Beska*) in front and a kitchen-shed (*Rosaghar*). Besides these two main houses, there is a cow-shed and fowl-pen located at a little distance from the main house. The size of the main house varies from 25 ft. into 12 ft. to 25 ft. into 17 ft. and the size of the kitchen is around 9ft. into 7 ft. The height is within 7 ft. There are no windows in the house. The main house and the kitchen-shed have a

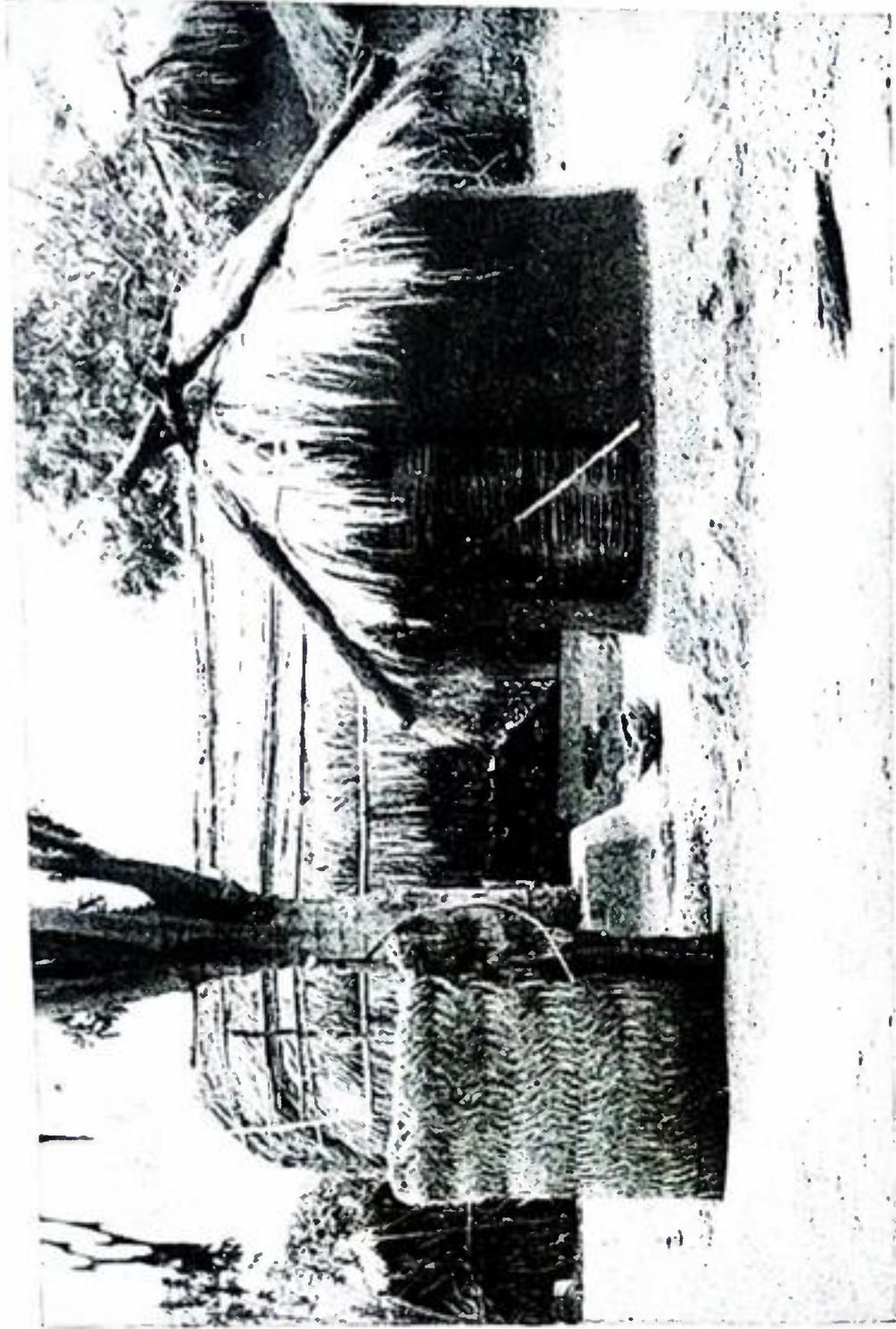
door each in front which serves the purpose of both entrance and exit. The walls of the houses are made of wooden poles stuck vertically on the ground close to each other with a plaster of mud mixed with cowdung. The outer surface of the wall is given a thin plaster with locally available white or red earth. The roof is thatched with wild grass collected from the nearby forests. The cow-shed and the goat-pen are made of wooden planks.

All the houses are mud built and thatched with wild grass. In the living room and kitchen-shed, only doors are provided. The houses and the surrounding areas are kept very neat and clean. The walls are plastered with red and white earth and the verandah either with cowdung or with any coloured earth. In many houses floral and animal designs are either drawn or painted on the walls of the room. It is a taboo among the *Chuktias* to use any kind of tiles or country made *Khapars* for thatching purpose. Therefore, in no *Chuktia* village a tile thatched house is noticed in the plateau.

#### Kitchen-shed as a sacred place—

The kitchen-shed is most sacred place of the Bhunjias. Therefore, it is built in a convenient place separated from the living and other rooms and enclosure of bamboo or timber paliasses is given around the kitchen-shed. No outsider is allowed to come any where near the kitchen-shed, let alone any physical contact with it. In case any outsider touches any part of the kitchen-shed, the entire shed is razed to the ground and the thatch is immediately burnt into ashes.

Utmost sanctity is observed in matters of cooking food in the kitchen-shed. No member of the house is allowed to eat food inside it. Even no charred wood from any outside is used in the oven inside the kitchen-shed. All these



Kitchen-shed, Bhunjia house

restrictions indicate the rigidity with which the practice of pollution and purity is associated with the works of cooking inside it. No satisfactory explanation could be found out for such rigid practices. But one thing is certain that the Bhunjias are very much conscious of their identity as a tribal community separate from all other tribal communities and for some reason or other they want to maintain this identity uncontaminated by external forces.

#### Contents of a Bhunjia house—

The household appliances in a common Bhunjia house are not many. The most common household belongings comprise of mats (*Champ*), earthen pots, mortar and pestle (*Musel*), gourds (*Tumba*) for storing water, leaf umbrella (*Mayur*) and some hunting implements, fishing traps (*Chapa*), digging sticks, sickle (*Hansia*) and axe (*Tangia*). Some households have spinning wheel (*Rohidan*) because some Bhunjia families carry on spinning cotton thread. Besides these appliances, they have cooking vessels, utensils, clothes and baskets for storing food-stuffs and forest collections. The clothes are kept hanging from a bamboo pole set against the walls in the sleeping room.

#### Dress and Ornament :

The dress of the men comprises of mainly a piece of cloth and the well-to-do people wear under garments and shirts. The women wear only sarees but they have no habit of wearing blouses and under garment. Men do not use any ornaments whatsoever. But the women do. The ornaments, which are common among the Bhunjia women, are necklaces made of beads and coils, glass and brass bangles, anklets and ear-rings made of either aluminium or silver (clip type). The Bhunjia women comb their hair in a very decent manner. With the help of a bulky tassel, they arrange

their hair into a massive bun at the back of their head and fix pins into it to keep the hair in position.

Some peculiarities are marked in the dresses and ornaments of the Bhunjias. These peculiarities are more observed among the women rather than men.

## CHAPTER IV

### LIFE CYCLE

#### Birth :

After marriage, pregnancy is very much liked among the Bhunjias. A woman who has no capacity to reproduce children is not liked by them and the status of parenthood, which levels the father as *Baba* and mother as *Aya*, is higher than the couple having no children in their society. Pregnancy indicates rebirth of one of the ancestors which is taken as a curse in some cases and boon in other cases. Not all ancestors are benevolent and therefore the people apprehend difficulties in the case of rebirth of malevolent ancestors.

Among the Bhunjias a male child is preferred to a female child. The simple reason given by them is that when the female child grows up and gets married, she leaves her parents' house and goes to live with her husband in his house. In this case the family having the female child loses a member as well as her contributions to the economic wellbeing of the household. This situation does not arise in the case of a male child because the Bhunjias are patrilocal and in most of the cases the male members continue to stay in the households of their procreation and work for the economic development of the households.

Some of the preliminary symptoms of pregnancy (*gagedi ohariba*) are stoppage of menses, nausea, vomiting, and with the abdominal protuberance, the pregnancy becomes conspicuous. After a woman is conceived, she observes several restrictions. Some of the restrictions are as follows.

She should not go to the burial ground and come in contact with dead body. She is restricted to do hard work like carrying heavy loads of fuel from the forest and carrying things of heavy weight in the advance stage of pregnancy. She is forbidden to take sacrificial meat.

As soon as the woman feels the labour pain, an elderly woman of her lineage having experience in delivery is immediately called for to assist the woman. In case of difficult delivery, the help of a medicine-man is taken and some herbal medicines practised by him, is applied to her. After the child is born, the elderly woman acting as the midwife cuts the umbilical cord with an arrow head.

#### Post-natal care :

After the birth of the child, the mother undergoes several restrictions, which she observes for a period of more than three months. The mother is given some medicines such as soup prepared out of boiled horse gram, the juice of a plant called *bhuinbara* and the bark of *mankadnasa* another plant on the first day of birth along with rice gruel. In the succeeding days she is kept on a restricted diet, which comprises of rice gruel mixed with salt.

#### Tonsure Ceremony :

On the sixth day, all the lineage members are invited to participate in the ritual. On this day the mother is led to the nearby river or to the hillstream, where she takes her bath. With her the accompanying members also take bath. The presence of her brother's son (nephew) is necessary on this occasion and therefore, he is invited earlier to attend the ritual. Her brother's son makes new oven within the enclosure of the kitchen-shed and cooks food there in new earthen pots. It is the custom among the Bhunjias that all the old used earthen pots are thrown away from the kitchen-shed on this day.

After the sacred bath in the river, the mother and other women return to the house, where the birth takes place, they stop at the entrance of the house and warm up the baby. The process of warming up is done like this that a lamp is kept burning on a heap of paddy in front of the house. They warm up their palms with the help of the light of the lamp and

place their warmed palms gently on the body of the baby. After the warming up ceremony is over, the other children of the family as well as the neighbouring households are given food to eat and thereafter, all the members of the household including the assembled relatives and guests take the food.

Sometime in the morning the baby is shaved by the nephew with the help of a new blade. This custom of ceremonial shaving is repeated again after three months and the same nephew is invited to prepare the act of shaving and a feast is arranged to feed the assembled guests.

#### **Puberty Rites :**

Before the puberty rites take place, the girl has to undergo a ritual which is called as *Kundabara*. This ritual takes place at the age of ten and all the girls of ten years of age of a village undergo this ritual at a time. On the day of the ritual the respective parents invite all their relatives living in the village to attend the ceremony. The girl, younger in the age of the village, prepares caps made of palm leaves and put it on the head of the girls and takes them to the nearby river. All the girls take a ceremonial bath in the river and return home. After bath, all the girls walk seven times around an arrow fixed on the ground. Thereafter, a feast is arranged to entertain the assembled guests and relatives. Unless the *Kundabara* ritual is celebrated, no girl marries and once a girl has undergone this ritual, she is forbidden to take food in the house of other and market place.

The puberty rites are observed in the same way with certain differences. The girl who has attained puberty is kept confined for a week in one of the rooms of the house. Food is served to her at that place and she is not allowed to mix with others. During this period she is considered unclean and any contact with her is considered defiling. It is tabooed that she should not look at the face of any male member either of her household or her village.

She is given normal diet by her mother on first two days and on the third day the son of her mother's brother prepares a type of ragi gruel mixed with sun-dried rice and molasses and gives it to her and also to seven small girls of the village. On the seventh day her mother, mother's sister and other female relatives accompany the girl to the nearby river and anoint a turmeric paste mixed with *mohua* oil over the body of the girl and all including the girl take bath in the river. At this spot her mother and mother's brother's wife (*Ata*) boil some water in an earthen pot and deep the clothes used by the girl into the boiled water and rinse them properly and dry them in the sun. After the bath every body returns home but the girl, who undergoes the puberty rites, goes straight to her *Ata's* house with the earthen pot on which the clothes are washed. On the way, she throws the earthen pot and goes alone to her *Ata's* house. On reaching her house, she is given a new brass pot filled in with water which she carries to her own house and with the brass pot enters into the kitchen-shed and starts cooking food in a new oven made by herself for this purpose. With her admission into the kitchen-shed and with meals having been prepared by her, she is considered free from any ritual pollution, which was caused by the first course of menstruation. Like the *Kundabara* ritual the puberty rites are a necessary condition for the girls to undergo before they are married.

## Marriage

### Rules of Marriage—

As previously described, the tribe is divided into two exogamous moieties; *Netam* and *Markam*. Bhunjias of *Chuktia* group may marry in the *Chinda* group of the tribe but not in his own moiety. Marriage in one's own village may prevalent but not within one's own lineage group either in the village or outside of the village.

### Marriage seasons—

There is no definite month in which all marriages are supposed to take place. Generally, most of the marriages are held after harvest so that no difficulty is faced to meet the marriage expenses.

### Procedure of Marriage—

Most of the marriages are arranged marriage in which negotiation is held between the parents of the bride and bridegroom to settle details regarding the date on which the marriage will take place, number of guests and relatives to be invited and the kind of feast to be arranged for them and presents to be given to the bridegroom. The Bhunjias do not have any custom of paying bride price and the payment of dowry is a newly introduced phenomenon in their society.

The step, which starts further negotiation leading to marriage, is the first visit of the son's father to the proposed father-in-law's house. This visit is called *tokildekha*. In this meeting the son's father is able to know whether the to be daughter-in-law's father is willing to give her daughter or not. If the girl's father agrees, further procedure of negotiation goes on. The second phase of negotiation is known as *magen*. In the second visit, the boy's father goes to bride's father's house along with his five friends and relatives. They take with them five kilograms of rice, 500 grams dal, two kilograms of molasses, one packet of leaf tea, one bundle of bidi and leaves of Indian hemp (*bhang*) to the residence of the proposed bride. In the meeting of both of the parties, the details of the marriage proposal are settled. In this meeting the girl's father gives his final consent regarding the marriage of his daughter. At last the date of the marriage is fixed by both the parties.

The next step of the marriage is *byhaghar* in which the actual marriage takes place. Day preceding the date of

marriage, the bridegroom's father arranges a feast (dinner) for the friends and relatives. On the marriage occasion both bride and bridegroom put on new clothes. The day on which marriage takes place, the bridegroom party consisting of bridegroom, his friends and relatives go to the bride's father's house. The marriage is solemnized thereby walking around the sacred post and the ceremony is conducted by a traditional priest known as *Dinwari*, who is a member of the tribe. The groom's party stays there for a period of three consecutive days. The bride's father provides raw food items to the members of the bridegroom party. Some of the members of the said party cook the food items and serve these among themselves. The boys and girls of both the parties sing and dance in a competitive spirit. The neighbouring Harijans play drums and music at the marriage ceremony. After the marriage ceremony is over, the bride and the groom return to the latter's house along with the friends and relatives and participate in a feast previously arranged by the bridegroom's father.

#### Death Rites :

When death takes place in any household, other members of the house send the death news to all the members of their lineage. On getting the death news, the near and dear ones and their kith and kin visit the bereaved family to console the members of the family and make arrangements for the burial of the dead body. The dead body is given a bath and covered in a new piece of white cloth. Thereafter, the body is laid on a bamboo frame of the type of a ladder and carried to the burial ground. On the way, the son of the deceased person's wife's brother (nephew) throws paddy grains on the path and at the burial ground anoint turmeric paste on the face of the deceased person.

A trench of six feet into four feet into five feet in dimension is dug by the relatives in the burial ground. A

new cloth is spread on the floor of the trench on which the dead body with face upward is laid with some new clothes covered over it by the relatives. These new clothes are given by the relatives, who are present in the burial ground. Thereafter, the trench is covered with soil packed from top to bottom. Stones are also kept on the pits so that the jackle and other animals may not dig out the soil and get the corpse.

After the burial is over all of those, who participate in the burial ground, go to the riverside and take bath. After bath, each person will hold a crowbar and take two to three drops of water mixed with root of a plant called *rigunkuta*. This is a process by which the pall-bearers and others, who participate in the burial work, get themselves ritually purified.

After the rites of purification is observed, the eldest son of the deceased man floats two small brass plates on the water. One of these plates contains oil and the other contains the cut hair of the deceased man. The idea behind this work is to determine the cause of the death of the person. If it is a natural death, the oil does not spread but accumulates on the water. If it is a death by disease, the oil spreads into several drops. If neither these conditions are responsible for the death of the person, in that case the oil spreads into a long bar on the water. After the ritual bath is over, all of them return home, wear clean clothes and keep aside the old ones for cleaning. No members of the family take food on that day except tea, which is only for men not for women. For the following two days the family members live on only rice gruel. On the third day, all the related members of the family are invited for the mortuary feast. The nephew sprinkles cow's milk all over the house, throws away all the used earthen pots and cooks food in the new pots. After the food is cooked, he does the shaving of the eldest son of the deceased. After the shaving is over, the

eldest son ~ puts on a new cloth and then proceeds to the burial ground with cooked food placed in three leaf cups. One cup contains rice, the second curry and the third water. He places these three cups at the place, where the deceased is buried, sits sad at the side and calls the deceased to get up and have the food. Thereafter, the eldest son and others, who have accompanied him to the burial ground, return to the village and make arrangement for taking food. The feast, which is cooked on this occasion, consists of sun-dried cooked rice and curry prepared out of local available vegetables.

The wel-to-do persons among the Bhunjias may supply dal on this occasion but it is not a comon practice. After the feast is over, all the invitees give consolation to the members of the bereaved family and leave for their respective villages.

## CHAPTER V

### LIVING CONDITION

#### Environmental Sanitation :

The Bhunjia settlements have generally a tidy appearance. The rocky terrain in which the settlements are located does not make the settlements muddy during rainy season nor does the rain water stagnate in temporary pools in the village street on account of sloping topography of the site. However, the leaves which fall from the trees are found in and around the village and the cowdung pits, which overflow during rainy season and the garbage, which are generally thrown outside the households, make the surroundings insanitary to some extent. This is more so in the rainy season than in other seasons, which are relatively dry and keep the settlements neat and clean. Both men and women take bath regularly everyday. In this respect the women are more regular than men because no woman before bath can enter the kitchen-shed and the work of cooking meals is the prerogative of the women.

The Bhunjia houses are kept very neat and clean by the women folk. The floor of the house is plastered daily with cowdung mixed with red earth and the surroundings of the house is swept clean.

#### Preparation of Food :

Rice is the staple food of the Bhunjias. Sun-dried rice is most common among them and the women do not take parboiled rice on ritual ground. However, the restriction is slackened at times if the rice is parboiled at home and not brought from outside that is the rice is husked by means of mortar and pestle by the housewife and is cooked in the kitchen-shed. The men and women are non-vegetarian. But

the women are forbidden to take chicken due to some customary injunctions. While the *Chuktia* Bhunjias, who represent the primitive section of the tribe, consider domestication of pigs defiling and polluting, the *Chinda* Bhunjias, who represent the advance section of the tribe, do not observe any such taboo in the matter of either keeping the pigs at home or eating pork.

The Bhunjias grow minor millets, *bajara* (*Pennisetum typhoideum*), pulses and various types of vegetables in the uplands adjacent to their villages. Various preparations of millets and vegetables cooked with rice gruel are their food habits. Their diet is also supplemented by roots and tubers, fruits and flowers which they collect from the nearby forests.

#### Food Habits :

An adult takes two meals a day once at the midday and the other in the evening just after sunset. But the children do not follow any such timings in taking food and take any number of times which the food supply of the family will allow. The Bhunjias are completely teetotalers and in this respect they stand distinctly separate from other tribes of the State. Their drink comprises of tea, both men and women are very much addicted to tea. In almost every house one can come across one oven either in the front verandah or in the outer room of the house where tea is prepared and served to the adult members of the household. As supply of milk is a problem among the Bhunjias, raw tea not mixed with milk is their common drink.

In this respect an interesting incident is worth noting. It is pointed out earlier that when the Forest Rest-shed was built by the Forest Department at Sonabera village, the Bhunjias raised objections against it and did not co-operate in the construction of this building. The then Forest Officer incharge of this project convened a meeting of the leading

members of the village and of neighbouring villages and served unlimited quantities of tea to each and every Bhunjia, who attended the meeting. After the tea was served, the Forest Officer explained to them the need for having a Rest-shed in their village for occupation of the visiting officers. The first dose of tea was very effective in moderating the objections and when they were served tea for the second time at the end of the meeting, all their objections had vanished altogether and they co-operated wholeheartedly in the construction of the Forest Rest-shed.

Tobacco is very popular among the Bhunjias. It is smoked by rolling it in either *sal* or *kendu* leaves or chewed by making it powder. But the habit of taking tobacco and smoking country *bidi* or cigarette is confined to men only and women are completely free from this habit.

#### Health :

Compared with the physique of the neighbouring Gonds, who are rather strong and stout, the Bhunjias look not so strong and appear to be unhealthy. In the Sonabera plateau the Gonds possess better lands and are better cultivators and also better-fed than the Bhunjias and therefore, a difference in physique between these two communities is noticed. The Bhunjias labour hard in their fields from morning to till night and due to scarcity of adequate food supply, they get less food to eat. In fact, the roots and tubers, fruits and flowers, which they gather from the nearby forests and the animals, which they hunt in occasions, supplement their cereals, which they produce from their fields. The food-stuff gathered from the silvan surroundings provide better nutrition than the food-stuff, which are yielded from the sources of agriculture and horticulture.

#### Common Diseases—

The common ailments among the Bhunjias are stomach trouble, malaria, skin disease and cases of tuberculosis.

Some of the other diseases with which the Bhunjias are afflicted are rheumatic, epileptic and arthritic complains, cough and cold, dysentery, diarrhoea, and menstrual irregularities.

#### **Causes of the Diseases—**

Illness of any kind is believed to be caused largely by malevolent deities and evil spirits. Violation of social and religious taboos also cause bodily ill health. Although some people think that untimely bath, irregularity in taking food, rigorous climate of the area may be responsible for physical ill health. The witches and the sorcerers who are found among the Bhunjias in almost all the villages cause illness through black magic. It is the belief among the Bhunjias that every serious disaster or epidemic takes place following infringe and violation of social and ritual taboos. The tigers play havoc in the area where the people break rules of their society.

#### **Medical Therapy—**

As soon as a person falls ill, the common practice is to consult the traditional medicine-man called *Jhakar*, who is a herbalist and use herbal medicines prescribed by him. The people in general know the common remedies for minor physical complaint and minor injuries. Whenever a person sustains injury, which causes bleeding, a paste made out of the roots of a plant called *Khandadhari* is applied over the wound. In addition to the herbal medicine magical incantations are considered effective means to check bleeding.

Similarly, the leaves of *Sahaj* tree are made into a paste and applied to the forehead of the patient suffering from fever. The same paste is also used for getting relief from headache and pain in any part of the body. Epileptic fits are cured by using barks of a tree called *Ranu*. The process used for the application of the bark is as follows :

The barks of the tree are boiled and this water after it is moderately cooled, poured over the patient. This poured water falls on a hot iron rod over which the patient is held so that the steam coming out of the hot iron touches the patient. This steam is believed to cure epilepsy. There is a simple herbal medicine for curing cough and cold. The person, who suffers from cough and cold, chews three to four yellow myrobalan (*Terminalia chebula*) and swallows the juice of the myrobalan. Dysentery is cured by taking two to four *Sal* seeds twice daily in empty stomach continuously for two to three days.

#### **Mental Therapy—**

If the herbal medicine is not effective the patient loses patience and resorts to the practice of divination. He calls for a diviner, who is skilled in spirit possession and knows the techniques of detecting the spirit, who is supposed to cause the disease in the patient. On reaching the patient's house the diviner starts performing necessary rituals to get himself possessed by the spirit. As soon as the diviner is possessed with the spirit, he declares the particular evil spirit, who has caused the illness and the reasons for this and prescribes the required therapy and curative measures.

The observations, which are given above, give an impression that the Bhunjias are tradition bound and depend upon the traditional methods and are not interested in allopathic treatment. In fact, it is not so. The nearest health centre providing modern medical facilities is located at a distance of 50 kms. from the centre of the Sonabera plateau and the road which connects the plateau with block headquarters, where the health centre is located, is not suitable for bus communication. The trucks of the forest contractors, which ply on the road, are not convenient for carrying the patients to the health centre. There is no medical practitioner in the whole area of Sonabera plateau. During rainy season

the road gets damaged at several places by the torrential hill-streams and it becomes extremely difficult to cover the distance even on foot. Under these circumstances it is but natural that the people continue to believe in super natural-beings and seek their mercy and blessings at the time of their illness and other difficulties,

## CHAPTER VI

### ECONOMIC LIFE

The economic life of the Bhunjias is very simple. It is of subsistence type. In order to maintain their subsistence, they pursue wet cultivation which includes low land paddy cultivation in small chunks along with the practice of shifting cultivation in small measures and with the usual pursuit of forest collection. The output from land and the collection from the forest provide them just the bare minimum. Whatever food one gets, he consumes it without thinking much of the future because of sheer poverty. The land holding is small in size as far as the low land paddy cultivation is concerned. So also the production out of this land is scanty due to the primitive method of cultivation, which has been followed by the people since time immemorial. Besides agriculture, they have other economic pursuits like hunting, gleaning, animal husbandry, fishing and wage earning.

#### Shifting cultivation :

The Bhunjias are in the habit of carrying on shifting cultivation, which they call *Bewar* a term used by the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh for such type of agriculture. The forest clearing and cutting starts in the month of February (*Magha-Falguna*). All the people in a village join hands to do this work for one another by turn without any payment for their labour. Such co-operative labour is available to each household only for a day, and on this appointed day the labour force tries to cover the entire area assigned to the household for shifting cultivation. The voluntary workers are provided with food once at noon time.

The felled trees and the cleared brushwood are left in the clearings for a month or so to be dried up and in the month of April they are set on fire. The firing is also done for every household on team basis. The dried leaves, twigs, branches and small trees are collected into several heaps and these heaps of combustible matters are set on fire. The ashes are ploughed into the soil with the help of a hand-hoe and no bullock drawn plough is used for ploughing the clearings.

The seeds of *Ragi* (*Eleusine corocana*), *Kango* (*Setaria italica*), *Suan* (*Panicum paludosum*), *Kodus* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*) and *Jhudung* (*Vigna unguiculata*) mixed together are sown broadcast in the clearings and one after another they start ripening in their proper seasons. A small variety of brinjal locally called *Bhejera* is also grown along with ragi in the swidden. The *Suan* crop ripens first and the people eat it right in the clearings by frying them. Both *Kango* and *Suan* are harvested in the month of September and are consumed at the field, right after harvest. *Ragi* takes a little more time for ripening and it is harvested in the month of November and December. The crop is brought home and stored in bamboo baskets. Both rice and *ragi* are the principal food-grains of the Bhunjias and these crops are never sold for cash. But the cashcrops, which they grow consist of oil seeds and sugarcane, which they sale in exchange for paddy.

The crops which are grown in the second year are *Gulji* (Millet) and *Biri* (*Phaseolus mungo*). The brinjal plants which were grown last year continue to survive and bear fruits in the second year also. The firing of the clearings does not do harm to the brinjal plants, which continue to provide vegetable even in the second year. *Gulji* ripens in September and *Biri* in October and November. While *Gulji* is used as food, *Biri* is sold for cash. In this area *Kandula* (*Cajanus cajan*) is not grown by the people because the frost, which falls during winter in the area, destroys the crops.

In some places *Ramtila* is grown in the third year of the swidden plots but the general practice is to leave the clearings from the third year to recuperate.

A clearing is left fallow for 3 to 4 years after which it is again taken up for growing crops.

The Bhunjias grow *Bajara* (*Pennisetum typhoideum*), *Janha* (*Sorghum vulgare*) and cucumbers in the lands around their houses, which are known as *bari* lands. These crops are followed by mustard crop, which is grown in the same *bari* lands.

#### Wet Cultivation :

Besides shifting cultivation, the Bhunjias carry on wet cultivation in the plains. Paddy is grown in the plains. Paddy is sown broadcast in the lands, which are situated at higher level, where there is no source of water for irrigation. But in the lands, which are in the lower level of the valley near hillstreams, paddy is transplanted after the soil is properly cultivated, puddled and levelled.

The cultivation cycle starts with ploughing in the month of May which is followed by manuring and sowing of seeds before the onset of rain. Towards the end of August, the cross-cultivation and weeding of extra paddy seedlings are over. Watching of the paddy fields starts throughout October-November and harvesting is done in December and continues upto January.

The practice of raising seedlings is something peculiar, which is worth mentioning. Certain patches of lands are fixed where seedlings of paddy are raised. Generally, these seed beds are located very close to the land, where the seedlings are transplanted. Logs of wood and thick branches of trees cut from the nearby forest are transported to the site and

arranged in several heaps on the seed-beds. 50 cents of land require nearly five cart-loads of wood for this purpose. Then heaps of wood arranged on the seed bed are set on fire and the soil of the bed all over is completely charred and burnt. This process of preparing the soil for raising the seedlings is known as *Dahi* cultivation. Thereafter, the seed-bed is thoroughly ploughed and the soil is levelled for raising the seedlings. The Bhunjias distinguish the soil of the seed-bed, where the wood were burnt from the ordinary soil in the lands, which are not subjected to any kind of firing. They call the former type of soil as *poda mati* (charred soil) and the latter type as *kancha mati* (raw soil). The seedlings grown in charred soil are stronger and healthier whereas those grown in the raw soil are weaker and feebler. There are other qualities of charred soil which the Bhunjias enumerated one after another in course of interview with them. For example, the charred soil does not allow any weeds to grow and therefore, the labour or the cost required for weeding is entirely nil. Moreover, the plants grown in charred soil are absolutely disease free and therefore, use of pesticide is not required.

The local varieties of paddy which they cultivate are *Sankarai*, *Banskanthia*, *Dubraj* and *Jalli*. There are also other local varieties of paddy like *Setka*, *Kuli* and *Bairi-guntha* which take a period of three to four months for harvesting. High yielding varieties of paddy crops are still unknown to them. There is no reservoir present to store the flowing water for future use, so all the lands are rainfed and the Bhunjias practise wet cultivation and produce one paddy crop in a year. In addition to the low land, the Bhunjias cultivate upland *art jami* and also prepare kitchen garden (*bari Jami*). Recently few Bhunjia households have been able to have dug wells and could grow cash crops like sugarcane and vegetables like banana, brinjal, tomato, cabbage and chilly.

### Implements used—

The agricultural implements used in paddy cultivation include wooden plough for tilling the soil, spade for softening the soil, sickle for reaping the corn and above all cart for transportation of crops. They also use the following implements for their specified purposes such as the shovel and crowbar for digging the earth, axe for felling the trees and knife for cutting the branches of the trees and bushes.

### Ownership of land in Cultivation—

In the Bhunjia society land is owned individually. The land for which there is the revenue record in the name of a person is known as *abadi jami* and the land for which there is no record is known as *anabadi jami*. The quantity of land for settled agriculture is less, and moreover cultivation of this type of land only gives them paddy and not the other cereals and pulses for which the people take resort to shifting cultivation in spite of the restriction imposed by the Forest Department of the State Government.

### Ritual observed—

The Bhunjias worship the Goddess *Sunadei* and *Matimata* for better harvesting. They perform a number of rituals to appease the deities and spirits before starting with the cultivation. One of it is that on *Akhitritia* day the head of each household keeps a handful of paddy before the *Chounra*, a sacred clay pedestal on which a *Tulsi* tree is planted, worships it and goes to the paddy field to sow the seeds. The ritual is observed by all the Bhunjias after it is being observed by the *Pujari* before the Supreme Mother Goddess *Sunadei*. Before preparing the soil for sowing the seeds, the head of the household sacrifices a fowl in the field for the sake of *Matimata* and starts work.

### Natural Perils—

The people have observed that the quantity of frost fall has been diminishing year after year. In the past, the entire area was covered with frost during winter in an extensive manner. But it has considerably diminished in the present time. The fall in the past was so much that it was killing all the bean plants and seed crops such as *Kandula*. But the extensive frost fall was most favourable for getting a bumper paddy crop. With the gradual diminution of frost fall, there has been a corresponding decline in the productivity of the paddy crop. The yield diminished by almost five times of what was produced from the same amount of land ten years back. The people attribute the decline of frost fall to the extensive destruction of the forest.

The paddy fields are more or less open to the ravages of wild animals. Unless they take pains to keep constant watch over these fields and drive away wild animals, they can hardly expect to reap a good harvest. Untimely rain and frost fall also affect the growth of the plants, which result in poor harvest. The Bhunjias have also no control over parasite, weeds, insects and other pests which ruin the crops.

### Division of Labour :

Division of labour on the basis of sex among the Bhunjias is understood through the typical allocation of different types of work between men and women by the society. Adult males as well as females work in the agricultural field. But ploughing is done by males only. Hunting and use of bow and arrow are taboo for women. Fishing, rearing of animals, collection of forest produces and selling of commodities etc. are done both by men and women. Mainly, women are engaged in all domestic works. In some cases and in circumstances men also help the women in

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Bhunjias busy in ploughing

domestic works. Felling of trees for shifting cultivation, ploughing, broadcasting of seeds in the field and thatching of huts are done by men. In the construction of houses, specially in the preparation of mud-walls the women take active part. Both men and women engage in wage-earning in the local area. Even children below twelve years of age are engaged in this work.

The sex wise division of labour among the Bhunjias is detailed in the following table.

TABLE—6

Work	Sex
1. Agriculture.	
Ploughing	Men
Sowing	Men
Weeding	Men and Women
Reaping	Men
2. Food quest-	
Collection of roots and tubers	Men and women
Catching of birds, hunting and fishing.	Men
Plucking leaves from the jungle	Men and women
Collection of <i>Sal</i> seeds and <i>Mohua</i> flowers.	Men and women

Work	Sex
3. Household tasks-	
Thatching the house	Men
Plastering the house	Women
Sweeping	Women
Marketing	Men and women
Cleaning the cow-shed	Women
Preparing leaf cups and plates	Women
Washing utensils	Women
4. Food preparation-	
Chopping fire wood	Men (in some exceptional cases women also do)
Husking of paddy	Women
Winnowing	Women
Cooking	Women
Serving food	Women
Slaughtering and sacrificing goats and chickens	Men
Worshipping deities in communal rituals.	Men
5. Entertainment-	
Singing	Women and men
Dancing	Women and men

### Forest Economy :

#### Gleaning—

Next to agriculture, the Bhunjias depend upon the forest to supplement their subsistence. Their output from agriculture is so poor that they have been depending upon the forest. In fact, their food is greatly supplemented by roots and tubers collected from the forest round the year.

The food materials collected from the forest have seasonal variations. Chances of getting edible fruits are greater in summer till the onset of rain.

The items of forest collections and their use are detailed in the following table.

TABLE — 7

Items of forest collections	Use of items
1	2
A. Fruits	
<i>Kendu</i> , Mango, Jack-fruit, Mahua, <i>Charkoli Annlakoli</i> , Date-palm, Tamarind, <i>Jamu</i>	Collected both by men and women and consumed by them. Dried mahua flowers are sold for cash.
B. Roots and tubers	
<i>Keukanda</i> , <i>Sadrikanda</i> , <i>Bathadikanda</i> , <i>Pitkanda</i> , <i>Sinkanda</i> , <i>Batkanda</i> & Arrowroot ( <i>Tikhur</i> )	Consumed, eaten and used as medicine. ( <i>Keukanda</i> is used for intoxicating the fish in the water)
C. Eggs	
Eggs of jungle hen, peacock and pigeon	Collected for special dishes.
D. Miscellaneous	
i) Green leaves, various kinds of fodders and grasses	To feed domestic animals and thatch the huts.
ii) Timber, bamboo	Construction of house and making of house materials
iii) Twigs	Used in dahi cultivation.

1	2
iv) <i>Sal</i> seeds, <i>Mohua</i> seeds, Lac, Resin and Honey.	Sold for cash
v) <i>Kendu</i> leaves, <i>Sal</i> leaves and <i>Siali</i> leaves.	Used for own consumption as well as sold for cash. Used in leaf cup and plate making and <i>bidi</i> making.
vi) Fire wood.	Used in cooking

### Hunting :

Hunting is one of the traditional occupations of the Bhunjias. There is no specified time when they start their hunting activities. During leisure the Bhunjias go to forest for occupational hunting and bird trapping. The hunting implements include a bow and different types of arrows, a knife and an axe. They are not expert archers but their skill in hunting is quite adequate. In hunting expedition they hunt and catch wild bear, *sambar*, deer, *kutra*, hare, mongoose, peacock, pigeon, parrot and jungle fowl. They bring the prey either alive or dead. The prey is equally distributed among the friends, who participate in the hunting. In case of a big hunt its meat is distributed among the villagers. Women do not participate in the hunting expedition. The zeal to hunt is gradually diminishing day by day due to the restrictions enforced on hunting by the Forest Department. Thus, now a days it is more an individual affair rather than a communal concern.

### A brief account on Forest Economy :

For the following economic benefits, the Bhunjias largely depend on forest.

1. Collection of fruits, roots, tubers and other edible food items for their own consumption.

2. Hunting and catching of wild animals and birds and collection of eggs.
3. Cutting of trees and its branches for fuel and *dahi* cultivation.
4. Grazing of cattle, goats, sheep and buffaloes.
5. Collection of different forest produce such as seeds and leaves of various trees either for their own consumption or for sale and
6. Working as wage labourers in forest plantation, cutting of trees and timbers for the Forest Corporation and in making forest roads.

#### **Animal Husbandry :**

Animal husbandry is not so popular among the Bhunjias. But they domesticate animals and birds such as cow, bullock, goat, sheep, buffalo, dog, fowl, pigeon and parrot. The number of domestic animals are negligible in the villages. The animals and birds reared for meat are goat, sheep, fowl and pigeon. Buffaloes and bullocks are used in drawing plough and cart. Goat and fowl are also reared for sacrificial purposes.

Generally, no special food is given to the animals and birds. They entirely depend on natural grazing in the forest. Sometimes the Bhunjias sell these livestock to meet their contingent expenses. They take the milk of the cow.

#### **Fishing :**

Fishing is another source of getting food for the Bhunjias. Though they are not expert fishermen still then they catch fish to a very considerable extent. In rainy season they catch fish from the local reservoirs and perennial streams

nearby the village. But the practice is very occasional and irregular. They catch fish in two ways. Firstly, they catch fish by using *Thapa, Singa*, bow and arrow. Secondly, they grind and crush the *Keukanda* and throw it into the water to make the water intoxicated. After eating the small particles of *Keukanda*, fishes become intoxicated and senseless due to its bitter taste and float on the surface of the water. The local varieties of fishes are found like *Seul, Bambi, Magura, Prawn, Rohi* etc. in the reservoirs and streams. They consume fish and often sell for cash. It adds to their economy in some way.

#### Wage-earning—

The poor Bhunjias take up wage earning as an economic pursuit to supplement their economy. Now some of them are working as daily labourers in the Forest Department nursery, and also as earth movers for the construction of forest roads. The wage rate is Rs. 5/- per day per man. Sometimes, the Bhunjias exchange labour among themselves at different phases of agricultural work. Also at the time of thatching and construction of new houses they exchange labour among themselves. Very often when one works in the agricultural field of a well-to-do family, each labourer gets an amount of Rs. 3/- as wage along with a working meal in the midday.

#### Weights and Measures :

The Bhunjias are not yet acquainted with modern system of weights and measures. They still continue to make economic transactions with their traditional system of weights and measures, which has become out-dated now and it provides scope to the unscrupulous traders to exploit the innocent tribals. The weights and measures adopted by the Bhunjias for trading purposes are volumetric in nature. They are described in the Table 8 by their local terms and equivalents.

TABLE—8

Local term	Local equivalent	English equivalent in Metric System
1 <i>Mana</i>	4 <i>Ada</i>	3 Kgs. 200 gms.
25 <i>Ada</i>		20 Kgs.
1 <i>Mana</i>	8 <i>Sola</i>	3 Kgs. 200 gms.
1 <i>Sola</i>	2 <i>Didha</i>	400 gms.
20 <i>Mana</i>	1 <i>Khandi</i>	64 Kgs.

#### Market places :

Although the *Chuktia* Bhunjias live in the hills, which are difficult to access, they are not without contact with outside world. One of the avenues of their external contact is the weekly markets, which they visit to get their daily necessities, to dispose of their produce and to meet relatives and friends. All the weekly markets are located close to the borders of the hill ranges on both the sides of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The important market places, which the Bhunjias visit on different days in the week are mentioned below :

- 1) Dharambandha—It is located in the north of the area and the market sits on Monday. The market is fairly big and since it is located in the plains, there is a very big gathering of people on every market day at this place. The Bhunjias who live on this side in villages such as Amanala, Sethjampani, Lodra, Maragura, Talabera and Jharlama visit this market on Monday.
- 2) Bhela—This village is situated in the plains on the eastern side of the hill ranges. It is one of the important gateways to the interior of these hills. The weekly market is held on every Friday at this place. The Bhunjias even

from very far-off places visit this market. Bhela village is, so to say, a small township in which several shops of grocery and stationery are located. There is also a Primary Health Centre and a Co-operative society. The purpose of the visit of the Bhunjias to this place on the market day is multipurpose. They not only buy their immediate needs but also contact the health centre for medical advice and for medicine and Co-operative society for agricultural and other types of loans. The enlightened ones among the Bhunjias find a chance to meet the local M.L.A. on the market day and discuss their problems with him.

- 3) Rajna— On the same eastern side in the plains but much closer to the hills is the village Rajna, which also serves as an important gateway to the middle portion of the hill ranges. The weekly market of this place is held on every Tuesday and this place witnesses a large gathering of Bhunjias on every market day.
- 4) Udyanban— This village is situated on the main road between Komna and Nawapara. This place has developed to a market centre of middle order in the recent times. Some very rich shops particularly cloth shops have come up in this place. People of the surrounding villages including those located in the hills visit this place for marketing and particularly for purchasing clothes. Some hotels have come up in this place and these restaurants including the tea stalls have been of great attraction to the visitors.
- 5) Boran— This village is located very close to the eastern border of the hill ranges and it is the gateway to the pilgrim centre of *Patalganga* spring to Kot. The Bhunjias of villages located in the southern region of the hills visit this place on Monday, when the weekly market sits at this place.



Selling sal seeds at the Depot, Sonabera

- 6) Nilji— This village is situated in a very strategic position. It is located on the bank of the Udanti river to the east of Baijalpur, the most prosperous Bhunjia village in the plains and Patiyalpara, one of the pilgrim centres where the car festival is held every year. The weekly market sits on every Friday at Nilji. The Bhunjias, who live in and around the market centre and of the southern most region of the hill ranges, take advantage of this market.
- 7) Mainpur—The Bhunjias of Orissa side also depend upon the markets located in Madhya Pradesh in the eastern side of the hill ranges. There is a sizable Bhunjia population in Madhya Pradesh and the Bhunjias of both Orissa and Madhya Pradesh have economic and social relationship with one another. Some of the important market centres located fairly close to the eastern border of the hill ranges are Mainpur, Amamora, Nagar, Sikasar and Nawapara. A visit to these places on the market days serves two purposes; meeting with agnates and affines, and buying and selling at the markets.

Thus, in nutshell, the above description gives a picture of the economic activities of the tribe. Their economy shows a subsistence type having been worsen day by day due to the multiplicity of needs and declining of income sources. Whatsoever, agriculture is the main occupation supplemented by shifting cultivation and other allied economic activities. In spite of their hard labour in raising various kinds of crops and selling various commodities the Bhunjias fail to lead a life of plenty and prosperity.

## CHAPTER VII

### SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The Bhunjias may be grouped into four sections on the basis of their habitation. Those who live in the hills and in the most inaccessible areas of the plateau are called *Chuktia*. Those living in open space in between two hill ranges are called *Kholarajia*. The third group who lives around Nawagarh area is known as *Nawagharia* and those living in the plains near the town and roadside villages are called *Saharia*. The *Saharia* Bhunjias are addressed by the *Chuktias* as *Chinda* Bhunjias. Of all these groups, the *Chuktia* Bhunjias are the most primitive and backward and follow their traditional pattern of life.

The *Chuktia* Bhunjias claim a higher social status than the other sections of the tribe. The Bhunjias of the former section consider themselves ritually pure than the other sections because they observe all social customs and follow all ritual practices, which are the characteristics of the tribe. In fact, it is the women of the *Chuktia* section of the tribe who are very conservative and strictly follow the traditional food habit, dress pattern and their socio-cultural practices. For example, no *Chuktia* women are found to have use any nose ring or any blouse. They never take any food at the market place or in any house other than that of their own. They are very strict in observing the traditions relating to preparation of food at home. They do not allow any outsider to have physical contact with the kitchen-shed and follow strictly the mannerism concerning preparation and serving of food. They are so strict in matters relating to commensal habits that

- 6) Nilji— This village is situated in a very strategic position. It is located on the bank of the Udanti river to the east of Baijalpur, the most prosperous Bhunjia village in the plains and Patiyalpara, one of the pilgrim centres where the car festival is held every year. The weekly market sits on every Friday at Nilji. The Bhunjias, who live in and around the market centre and of the southern most region of the hill ranges, take advantage of this market.
- 7) Mainpur—The Bhunjias of Orissa side also depend upon the markets located in Madhya Pradesh in the eastern side of the hill ranges. There is a sizable Bhunjia population in Madhya Pradesh and the Bhunjias of both Orissa and Madhya Pradesh have economic and social relationship with one another. Some of the important market centres located fairly close to the eastern border of the hill ranges are Mainpur, Amamora, Nagar, Sikasar and Nawapara. A visit to these places on the market days serves two purposes; meeting with agnates and affines, and buying and selling at the markets.

Thus, in nutshell, the above description gives a picture of the economic activities of the tribe. Their economy shows a subsistence type having been worsen day by day due to the multiplicity of needs and declining of income sources. Whatsoever, agriculture is the main occupation supplemented by shifting cultivation and other allied economic activities. In spite of their hard labour in raising various kinds of crops and selling various commodities the Bhunjias fail to lead a life of plenty and prosperity.

neither they use fire from outside to light the oven in the kitchen-shed nor do they allow even their married daughters to enter the kitchen-shed. No member of the household is allowed to take food inside the kitchen-shed. The Bhunjias of the other sections do not follow these restrictions so rigidly as the *Chuktias* do. It is for this reason that the other three sections are considered low in social rank than the *Chuktia* section. On the whole, the *Chuktia* Bhunjias represent the original Bhunjia tribe and they have the style of life, which stands for the tribal identity.

### Social Strata :

Socially the tribe is divided into two exogamous moieties; the *Netam* and the *Markam*. The term *Netam* stands for *niji banshi*, a group of people who are consanguineal relatives and the term *Markam* stands for *suraj banshi*, a group of people who are affinal relatives. According to the distribution of deities and their associated ritual duties each moiety is again divided into several non-intermarrying groups known among them as *barags*. A list of *barags* of *Netam* and *Markam* groups is given below.

#### (A) *Barags* of *Netam* group :

- |                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. <i>Barge</i>      | 6. <i>Dabi</i>      |
| 2. <i>Barik</i>      | 7. <i>Dandasena</i> |
| 3. <i>Bhoae</i>      | 8. <i>Disari</i>    |
| 4. <i>Bhanrgadia</i> | 9. <i>Naik</i>      |
| 5. <i>Chhatriya</i>  | 10. <i>Sarmat</i>   |

#### (B) *Barags* of *Markam* group :

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. <i>Pujari</i>       | 3. <i>Suara</i>        |
| 2. <i>Majhi</i>        | 4. <i>Ambarukhia</i>   |
| ( <i>Bada Majhi,</i>   | 5. <i>Dumerbaharia</i> |
| <i>Pat Majhi</i> and   | 6. <i>Sasangia</i>     |
| <i>Kuankar Majhi</i> ) |                        |

7. *Mallik*
8. *Jhakar (Raija Jhakar)*
9. *Patia*

The *barags* bearing such surnames as *Barge, Barik, Bhoae, Bhanrgadia, Chhatriya, Dabi, Dandasena, Disari, Naik* and *Sarmat* belong to *Netam* moiety and those having surnames such as *Pujari, Majhi, Suara, Ambarukhia, Dumberbaharia, Sasangia, Mallik, Jhakar* and *Patia* belong to *Markam* moiety.

A *barag* consists of a number of families which are related to one another by blood. The *barags* are distinguished from one another by surnames which the people use after their names, for example, *Majhi* is one of the *barags* and the people belonging to this *barag* are called by the term *Majhi*. Some *barags* are subdivided into subsections, for example, *Majhi barag* is subdivided into three subsections such as *Bada Majhi, Pat Majhi* and *Kuankar Majhi*. As a rule each moiety is exogamous and the groups, which a moiety comprises of, are non-intermarrying groups. All the people of a moiety consider themselves to be related by blood with one another. A person belonging to any surname group of *Markam* moiety can marry in any surname group belonging to *Netam* moiety and vice-versa. Most of the Bhunjia villages are composed of both members of affinal and consanguineal groups and therefore, marriages are held not only outside but also within the village. In otherwards, because of heterogeneity in composition of Bhunjia villages in terms of affinity and consanguinity, the Bhunjia villages are not strictly exogamous. There is a popular proverb, which is referred to by the Bhunjias when any discussion relating to marriage is held with them. The proverb is "there is no village without having water supply. Similarly, there is no village without having *bandhus* (affines)".

### Family :

Family is the smallest social unit among the Bhunjias. Nuclear family is the most common among them. It consists of parents and their unmarried children. Joint families comprising both married and unmarried brothers living together are most uncommon in the Bhunjia community. The size of the family varies from three to ten or even more members. As soon as the son gets married he establishes his own family in a separate place in the same village. He builds his own house and lives with his wife separate from his parents and parental house. A daughter leaves her father's house after marriage and goes away to live with her husband. The unmarried sons and daughters continue to live with their parents till marriage. In the case of the death of the parents, the unmarried brothers and sisters stay with their married brother till marriage. The head of a Bhunjia family is, usually, the eldest male member of the family. Thus, the Bhunjia family is patrilineal, patrilineal and patriarchal.

In a Bhunjia family adult members contribute their might to their livelihood. Nuclear family has many advantages over joint family. It minimises conflict and tension among the brothers and promotes economic stability in the family.

Bhunjias are so poor that they do not afford to have a larger house to accommodate more members than what a normal nuclear family comprises. Naturally, to avoid inconvenience in staying together, separation of brothers from one another takes place soon after their marriage. Though the brothers live separately, they continue to co-operate with one another and also help each other in difficult situations.

### Marriage :

In Bhunjia language marriage is called as *byhaghar*. The Bhunjias believe that marriage is a union of a man and a woman for procreative and economic purposes.

Cross-cousin marriage is in vogue among them. A man can marry either his father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter.

### **Laws Regulating Marriage—**

The tribe is strictly endogamous. For marriage purpose, the tribe is divided into two exogamous moieties; the *Netam* and the *Markam*. Marriage within the moiety is strictly prohibited. Following the rules of marriage inter-marriage among the *barags* belonging to a moiety is taboo because they are related as brothers to one another.

There are no restrictions in marriage between the *Chuktia* Bhunjias and the *Chinda* Bhunjias. But in such case a rite called *dudh-pani* is performed when a *bandhu* washes the mouth of the bride with milk before she is taken in as a member of the groom's group.

Incestuous relationship is a taboo among the Bhunjias.

Adult marriage is in vogue among the Bhunjias. A boy gets married when he is around twenty years and in the case of the girl the age may vary from fourteen years to eighteen years.

### **Types of Marriage—**

In Bhunjia society monogamous marriage is practised. But after leading the conjugal life for a number of years if no child is born, the man may marry for the second time. Consent of the first wife is taken before a second marriage.

Marriage by exchange is also common among the Bhunjias. In this case a man marries his sister's husband's sister. Cases of marriage by elopement are very rare among the Bhunjias. A boy, who falls in love with a girl, elopes with her for three or four days. After this period, he returns home with his eloped mate. But the boy and the girl feel sorry and beg apology to the elders of the village who, thereafter,

pardon them and their marriage is regularised by having a feast arranged out of the penalty paid by the father of the boy.

Levirate and sororate types of marriage are prevalent among the Bhunjias. But such cases are not common among them. In case the younger brother is not willing to marry the widow of his deceased elder brother, she continues to stay in her house and enjoy the property as usual.

#### **Divorce :**

Marital ties are broken when one partner divorces the other. Divorce is socially permitted under such grounds as extra-marital and illicit sexual affairs of either of the partners, frigidity of the woman, indolence or quarrelsome nature of the wife and ill-treatment of one partner caused by another. In case a married woman elopes with her lover deserting her husband, the latter gets a strong ground to divorce the former.

#### **Kinship :**

The Kinship system in Bhunjia society extends in two directions, namely the direction of the father's family of origin and mother's family of origin, the former is called consanguineal and the latter the affinal. Thus the Bhunjias may be called a bilateral group.

The Bhunjias use both classificatory and descriptive kinship terminology. The use of classificatory terminology by them refers to the application of the same relationship term in addressing most, though not all persons of the same generation and sex. As for example, they use the term *bhai* to address their younger brother and husband's younger sister's husband. They use the term *dada* to address elder brother, wife's elder brother and husband's elder sister's

husband. They use the same term *ata* to address their father's elder sister, father's younger sister and mother's brother's wife. Similarly, they use the term *bai* to address elder sister and wife's elder brother's wife. It is noticed that the Bhunjia kinship terminology is not purely classificatory. They also use descriptive kinship terminology. To test the fact, the following examples may be cited. They address their mother as *aya*, whereas they address their husband's mother as *aai*, and father's father as *dadi* and mother's father as *aju*. They address their father as *baba*, father's elder brother as *badu* and father's younger brother as *kaka*. They use the prefix *ah* when they use the term *shadhu* in addressing wife's elder sister's husband and wife's younger sister's husband, and *samudi* in addressing daughter-in-law's father, and *Nehna-bhai* and *Nehna-bai* in addressing father's sister's husband's son and father's sister's husband's son's wife.

A list of Bhunjia Kinship terminology is given below.

### Kinship Terminology :

Terms of relationship	Terms of reference	Terms of address
1	2	3
Father	<i>Baba</i>	<i>Baba</i>
Mother	<i>Aya</i>	<i>Aya</i>
Elder brother	<i>Badadada</i>	<i>Dada</i>
Younger brother	<i>Sanadada/Bhai</i>	<i>Bhai</i>
Wife's elder brother	<i>Dedhasala/dada</i>	<i>Dada</i>
Wife's younger brother	<i>Sala</i>	—
Husband's elder brother	<i>Bade</i>	<i>Bade</i>
Husband's younger brother	<i>Deoresh</i>	—

1	2	3
Husband's elder sister's husband	<i>Dada</i>	<i>Dada</i>
Husband's younger sister's husband	<i>Bhai</i>	<i>Bhai</i>
Elder sister	<i>Bai</i>	<i>Bai</i>
Wife's elder brother's wife	<i>Bai</i>	<i>Bai</i>
Husband's elder brother's wife	<i>Bai</i>	<i>Bai</i>
Wife's younger brother's wife	<i>Nani</i>	—
Younger sister	<i>Nani</i>	—
Father's elder brother	<i>Badu</i>	<i>Badu</i>
Father's younger brother	<i>Kaka</i>	<i>Kaka</i>
Father's elder brother's wife	<i>Badi</i>	<i>Badi</i>
Father's younger brother's wife	<i>Kaki</i>	<i>Kaki</i>
Father's elder sister	<i>Ata</i>	<i>Ata</i>
Father's younger sister	<i>Ata</i>	<i>Ata</i>
Mother's brother's wife	<i>Ata</i>	<i>Ata</i>
Father's sister's husband	<i>Mamun</i>	<i>Mamun</i>
Mother's brother	<i>Mamun</i>	<i>Mamun</i>
Husband's father	<i>Mamun</i>	<i>Mamun</i>
Father's sister's husband's son	<i>Nehna-bhai</i>	<i>Ahe Nehna-bhai</i>
Father's sister's husband's son's wife	<i>Nehna-bai</i>	<i>Ahe Nehna-bai</i>
Mother's brother's daughter	<i>Sali</i>	—
Wife's younger sister	<i>Sali</i>	—

1	2	3
Wife's elder sister	<i>Badasashes</i>	—
Father's father	<i>Dadi</i>	<i>Dadi</i>
Mother's father	<i>Aju</i>	<i>Aju</i>
Father's mother	<i>Amma</i>	<i>Amma</i>
Mother's mother	<i>Budhi Aai</i>	<i>Budhi Aai</i>
Husband's mother	<i>Aai</i>	<i>Aai</i>
Husband's elder sister	<i>Aai</i>	<i>Aai</i>
Grand son	<i>Nati</i>	—
Daughter's son	<i>Nati</i>	—
Grand daughter	<i>Natin</i>	—
Daughter's daughter	<i>Jhinatin</i>	—
Husband's younger sister	<i>Nan</i>	—
Wife's elder sister's husband	<i>Shadhu</i>	<i>Ahe Shadhu</i>
Wife's younger sister's husband	<i>Shadhu</i>	<i>Ahe Shadhu</i>
Husband's younger brother's wife	<i>Deoranis</i>	—
Daughter-in-law's father	<i>Samudi</i>	<i>Ahe Samdui</i>
Daughter-in-law's mother	<i>Samuduni</i>	—
Elder brother's wife	<i>Bohu</i>	<i>Bohu</i>
Younger brother's wife	<i>Boharis</i>	—
Elder sister's husband	<i>Bhat</i>	<i>Bhat</i>
Younger sister's husband	<i>Babu</i>	—
Husband	<i>Dulaes</i>	—
Wife	<i>Lekiya</i>	—
Daughter-in-law	<i>Bhachi</i>	—
Daughter's husband	<i>Bhacha</i>	—

**Joking Relationship :**

Among the Bhunjias joking and jesting relationships exist between a man and his elder brother's wife (*bohu*) and a man and his father's mother (*amma*). Jokes and jests are not exchanged between a man and his grand father (*dadi*) and a man and his mother's mother (*budhi*). Basing on this joking relationship, the Bhunjia society permits sororate and levirate marriages.

**Avoidance Relationship :**

A married couple may not address each other by name. When asked by other, neither the husband nor the wife will utter each other's name. Avoidance relationship exists with one's wife's mother and with his younger brother's wife (*boharis*). Similarly, a woman has avoidance relationship with her husband's elder brother and with her younger sister's husband. A woman does not utter the name of her husband's elder brother. For maintenance of avoidance relationship certain taboos like physical touch, vocal exchange and touch to the usable articles of the elders are observed.

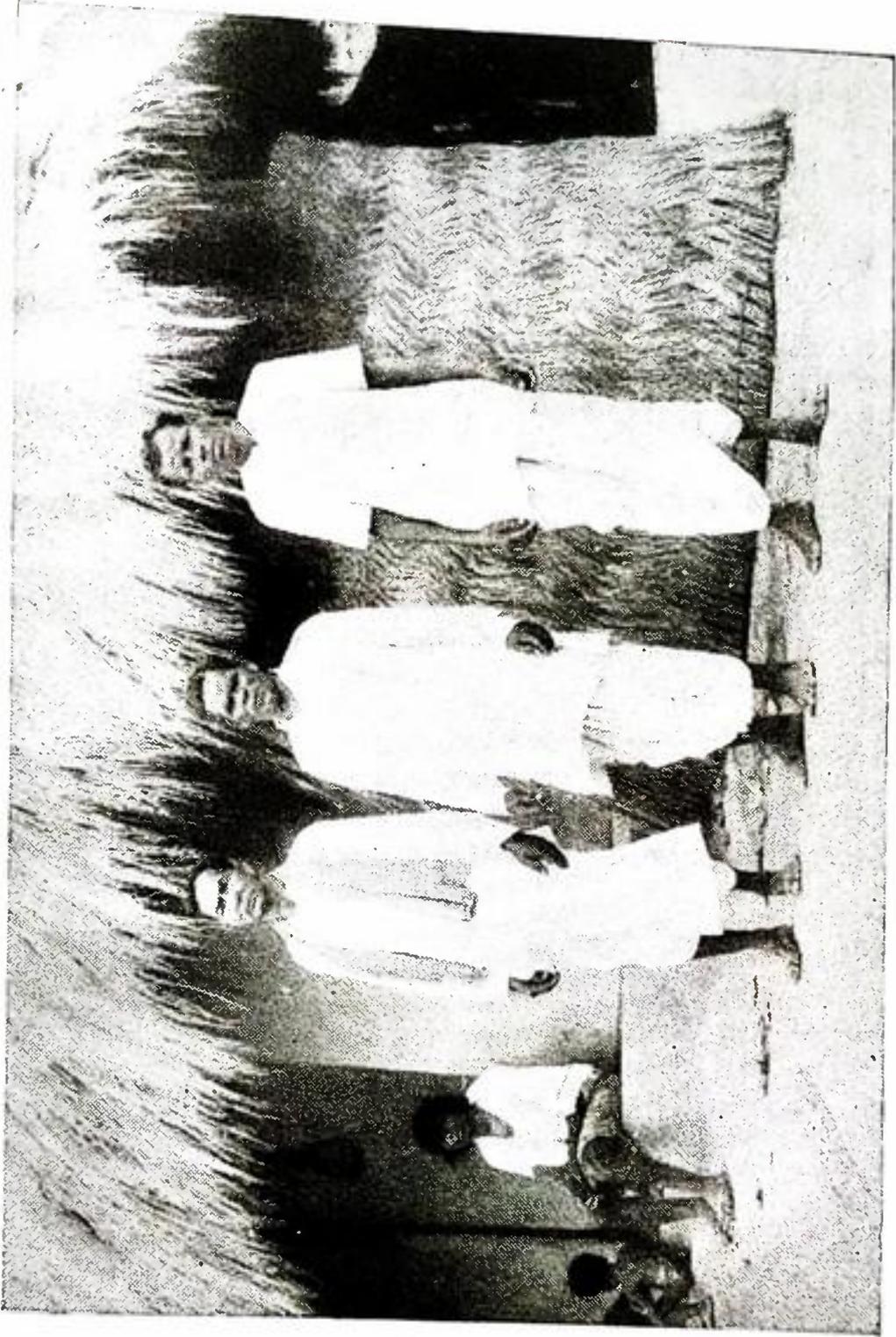
## CHAPTER VIII

### POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Political organization of the Bhunjias comprises of all institutions by which uncodified customary laws are enforced, and order, conformity and solidarity are maintained in their society. The traditional political structure of the Bhunjia society is organized at two successive levels, i. e. at the village level and at the regional level. At the village level the traditional village council plays supreme role while at the regional level the inter-village council is convened when necessary to decide inter-village disputes, which are beyond the jurisdiction of the village council. In the early days, the Zamindar of Khariar was at the apex of the traditional political structure of the Bhunjias. Sonabera was under his administrative control. *Makkadam*, designated hereditary representative of the *Zamindar*, was in charge of the Sonabera plateau. Hence *Makkadam* was the *de facto* secular chief of the people of the area including the Bhunjias for all the political purposes. After independence Zamindari became obsolete and the modern political infrastructure cropped up which was superimposed upon the traditional political framework of the Bhunjias causing noticeable changes in the political behaviour of the people.

#### **Zamindar and Makkadam :**

Prior to independence the entire Sonabera area was under the administrative jurisdiction of Khariar *Zamindar*. The Bhunjias, as his subjects, were under his subjugation. The *Zamindar* appointed representative called, *Makkadam* of Sonabera to carry out administration of this tract. The



Three leaders of Sonabera

post was hereditary and was attached with rent free service lands called, *Makkadamme*.

The *Zamindar* used to visit the Sonabera plateau casually on elephants and horses with his admirers as a routine check-up to the administration but mostly for hunting. They were cordially ovated by *Makkadam*. During the journey the *Zamindar* was being carried in a *handola* (palanquin) from place to place in accompaniment with the *Makkadam*.

The *Zamindar* too pays visit to *Sunadei*, the Supreme deity of the Bhunjias. He attaches due regard and has great devotion for the deity. On the occasion of annual worship the *Zamindar* offers clothes and umbrella to adorn the deity. The *Makkadam* usually organizes the function. The villagers contribute cash and kinds in the form of ghee, sun-dried rice, incensed sticks, etc. and perform the *Puja* with great pomp and ceremony. Besides that, the *Makkadam* also adjudicates and settles disputes concerning land, interpersonal relationship and breach of customary laws. In fact, *Makkadam* was virtually the head of the inter-village council of the Bhunjia community.

### **Village Council:**

Each Bhunjia village is an independent socio-political unit having its own village council and a group of traditional leaders. The Bhunjias upheld justice through the functioning of the traditional panchayat system. Their traditional village council comprises of a corporate body of elderly male members called *bhal bhai*. The traditional office bearers of the village such as *Pujari*, *Chhatriya*, *Katariya* and the eldest male members of all *barags* are the bonafide members of the council.

The council of elders do not meet regularly. It is not obligatory for all the villagers to be present when a meeting

is summoned to discuss matters concerning the village affairs. The women do not participate in the meetings of the council of elders but they can be summoned as parties in the disputes and as witnesses.

The main function of the council of elders is the maintenance of social equilibrium. As a judiciary body it settles disputes relating to matters like quarrels, breach of taboos, partition of joint families, inheritance of properties and deviant behaviours such as adultery, illicit sexual behaviour, incest and irregular marriage. It fixes the date of seasonal rites and festivals, and clearing and cutting brushwood meant for *dahi* cultivation.

The village council has the authority to pass judgement in all cases concerning the members of the village only. In all the individual cases the judicious and knowledgeable persons of the council recall and interpret the relevant customary laws and apply those to the cases in question. In case of serious violation of norms and values of the society the council of elders are empowered to excommunicate the offender from the society. The judgement of the council is final and binding upon everybody in the village.

The meeting of the council is convened as and when required. The members of the council sit down either in an open space or on the verandah of an elderly member. Concerned parties of the case along with witnesses are summoned to attend the meeting. One of the senior judicious elders presides over the meeting. The next step of the meeting is as follows. The meeting starts with a brief statement of the principal case-history with which the council is going to deal with. Then the concerned parties are asked to give their respective statements and plead for their own favour. The members of the council start crossexamining the parties with their witnesses to find out the truth. When the members of

the council are satisfied that the fact of the case has been properly established then the provisions of the relevant customary laws are discussed and applied to the case. They illucidate, reiterate and interpret their unwritten laws and with their judging power they come to an unanimous decision. In case if there is difference of opinion among the members regarding the settlement of disputes, the majority opinion is accepted. The council of elders always give impartial judgement which is more or less based on consensus. The final decision of the council is binding upon both the parties.

#### **Inter-village Council :**

In case of inter-village disputes the delegates from the council of elders of all the concerned villages assemble in a meeting to discuss and decide the issue. This adhoc body functions as the inter-village council. The head of the inter-village council for 84 Bhunjia villages is *Kurha*. Previously, *Makkadam* was acting as the ex-officio *Kurha* for 84 Bhunjia villages. *Kurha* is the chairman and chief spokesman of the inter-village council. On the occasional demand of special situation the session of the inter-village council is convened.

It functions as an adhoc arbitration committee to decide conflicts between two villages or among the parties belonging to different villages. The complex nature of cases often necessitates the formation of the arbitration committee. Its functions are to adjudicate and settle disputes concerning land, interpersonal relationship, breach of social custom, etc. which can not be decided at the village council. The decision of the arbitration committee stands final and binding. People of the area honour and obey the decision of the committee.

#### **Tradition and Change :**

The political structure of the area has undergone some radical changes. The remarkable changes are the abolition

of the Zamindari system and a switch over from a system of traditional political organization to a well defined democratic system of statutory political organization.

At present informal way of settling disputes and formal way of settling disputes are in operation side by side in existence with the council of elders, the adhoc arbitration committee as well as the statutory Gram Panchayat.

A considerable change took place with the involvement of Sarpanch and ward members in the informal way of settling small disputes and legal matters. Cases such as theft, quarrel concerning land and interpersonal relationship are settled in an informal meeting of both the traditional leaders and the modern leaders. In case of deviation from the norms and values of the Bhunjia society the case is only settled by the traditional council of elders. But now-a-days there are Bhunjia leaders who are acting as members of the council of elders as well as ward members of the Gram Panchayat. The non-Bhunjia ward members of the Gram Panchayat do not participate in the meeting.

More complicated cases of theft and disputes concerning land and interpersonal relationships and the cases which can not be settled by the council of elders are settled by the Gram Panchayat. If the litigants of the case are not satisfied with the decision of the Gram Panchayat, the case is referred to the court of law. Besides it, cases of suicide, homicide, and any kind of theft and damage of public property are decided in the court of law.



Shrine of the Supreme Goddess, Sunadei

## CHAPTER IX

### RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Bhunjias believe in many gods and goddesses who are worshipped by different ritual functionaries in different months in different ritual occasions. According to the Bhunjias, Sonabera is considered as the original settlement of the tribe.

#### The Supreme Deity :

*Sunadei*, the main and original Supreme deity, is installed in a shrine at this village. She is believed to be the Supreme deity and placed in a separate class. If properly appeased, She brings rain and thereby prosperity to the village.

The different ritual functionaries who offer worship to different deities reside in this original village. The functionaries who are connected with the worship of *Sunadei* are mainly of three types. The first category of the worshipper is called *Pujari*, who offers food and prayer. The second category of the ritual functionary is called *Chhatriya*, whose duty is to hold umbrella wide open at the time of worship. The third category of the functionary is called *Katariya* on whom the responsibility of sacrificing the animal falls. All the three ritual functionaries are found residing at Sonabera which is the original seat of *Sunadei*, the main deity of the Bhunjias.

#### Other Deities and Spirits :

As discussed earlier in the chapter, social organization the tribe has been divided into two exogamous moieties and each moiety is subdivided into a number of *barags* and each *barag* has got a specific designation. Each of the designation

is associated with the worship of a particular deity and the nomenclature of the designation has been derived from the nature and function of the ritual duty assigned to it. For example a section of the Bhunjia community is known by the surname *barge* who worships earth goddess (*Mati Deota*). The people bearing the surname *barge* are known as *Mathiar* a term which is derived from the term *Mati* (earth).

Different sections of people belonging to both the divisions of the tribe have been assigned different deities to worship. Every section has a place of origin of its own and the abode of the deity which is assigned to it is located in this place. For example, *Sunadei* is assigned to the section called *Pujari* whose original habitat is Sonabera village, where the shrine of *Sunadei* is located. Similarly, *Thakur Deota* is assigned to the section called *Bada Majhi* whose place of origin is traced to Gadagada village and it is at this place the shrine of the *Thakur Deota* is located. According to this distribution of different sections of the tribe, the section to which a particular deity is assigned is wholly responsible for worshipping as the priest of the deity and people belonging to other sections have the privilege of participating in the worship but not in the priestly functions of the deity. In other words, the priestly services concerning the worship of a particular deity become the prerogative of a particular section of the Bhunjia community and no other section of the same community has any right to encroach upon this prerogative. For example, to discharge the priestly function of the earth goddess is the prerogative of the *Mathiar* (people bearing the surname *barge*) and no other people of the community except the *barge* has any right to act as priest of the earth goddess.

The Table-9 gives the names of the deities, the sections or the communities to which they are assigned, original location of deities, months in which they are worshipped and other details of the ritual calendar of the tribe.

TABLE-9

Sl. No.	Name of the Deity	Direction in which Deity's abode is situated	Barag of the main worshipper.	Ritual designation of the worshipper	Village to which the worshipper belongs	Month in which Deity is worshipped	Nature of offerings	Main reasons of worship	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Thakur Deota	North	<i>Bada Majhi</i>	<i>Siraratan-bala</i>	Gadagada (Salipada Hamlet)	October-November	Buck, Coconut, Milk, Ghee	For good health.	
2.	Mania Buddha	East	<i>Pat Majhi</i>	<i>Pat Majhi</i>	Kokidgaon	October-November	Buck, Cocount, Milk, Ghee	For preventing illness particularly fever.	
3.	Buddimai	East	<i>Jhakar</i>	<i>Bhandar-gharia</i>	Jamgaon	November-December	Buck, Cock, Coconut Milk, Ghee	For preventing small-pox.	
4.	Pataguru	East	<i>Mallik</i>	<i>Patamaddi</i>	Barkote	February-March	Buck, Fowl Cocount	For a happy and prosperous life and for the wellbeing of the society.	
5.	Sunadei	Central place of the Bhunjia country.	<i>Pujari</i>	<i>Patiha</i>	Sonabera	September-October.	Buck, Parrot	i) For having sufficient rain and for bumper crop. ii) For blessing the barren women with children.	On this occasion Bhunjias of 84 villages assemble at Sonabera & worship <i>Sunadei</i> . In the month of March-April a ritual is observed which is called sanctification of seeds. On this occasion the <i>Chhatriya</i> of the village supply 5 kgs. of paddy seeds for the purpose. These seeds after they are sanctified are distributed among all the Bhunjias of the villages.

Contd.....

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6.	Kachhen	North	<i>Kuankar-Majhi</i>	<i>Laudi-dhatia</i>	Tadagaon	November-December	Fowl	For the overall well-being of the community.	
7.	Kalhaguru	North	<i>Syara</i>	<i>Syara</i>	Surlabat	November-December	Fowl	For good health.	As the people say, "There is no doctor in our country, there is none to help us when we are ill, you are our herbal medicine, you are our doctor, you are our every thing. Pray you to keep us well".
8.	Buddharaja	North	<i>Sasangia</i>	<i>Sasangia</i>	Sosenga	March-April	Buck	—	In earlier days the deity <i>Buddharaja</i> was worshipped by the people of <i>Majhi barag</i> of Bhunjia community. Now this deity is exclusively worshipped by the Gonds of the locality. According to the Bhunjias the deity was transferred to the Gonds as a sort of brother's share ( <i>Bhai-bhaga</i> ). <i>Mohua</i> flowers are available in the month of March-April when the deity <i>Buddharaja</i> is worshipped at Sosenga. On this occasion the <i>Mohua</i> flower is offered to the deity.
9.	Kachhu (Tortoise)	North	<i>Dandasena</i>	<i>Dandasena</i>	Kachhu-Pakhan	December-January	Buck, Fowl	For the wellbeing of the community.	

Contd.....

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Paradhana	South	Chhatrriya	Chhena-dharria	Khadang	November-December	Buck, Coconut, Milk, Ghee			
11. Maity (Earth)	Under-ground	Barge	Mathiar	Sonabera	September-October	Buck, Fowl, Pig	For bumper crop.	Though pig is offered to the earth goddess the Bhunjias do not eat pork.	
12. Indarpudia	—	Bhose	Pijarolia	—	December-January	Fruits, Fowl	For happy and prosperous life.	The deity <i>Indarpudia</i> presides in the kitchen-shed. The worship of this deity is done in the kitchen-shed by the head of the household.	
13. Kalha-bhaira-somanath	East	Barik	Jalahari	Badapadar	November-December	Buck, Fowl, Coconut	For sufficient food.		
14. Sanyasuraj	Present in every household	Disari	Kasi	—	September-October	Coconut, Cucumber, Pumpkin	For preventing fever and mishap in life.	Worship of the deity takes place in every household.	
15. Mandal	South & West	Bhanrgadia	—	Kelbera	December-January	Buck, Fowl	For bumper crop.		
16. Dharani	West	Bada Majhi	Siratan-bala	—	November-December	Buck	For preventing illness of all kinds.	As the people say, "We are all in the forest, Pray you to have your look on us, drive away snakes, tigers and other wild animals and save us from all types of dangers."	
17. Gadimai	West	Bada Majhi	Sira	—	December-January	Buck	For the wellbeing of the society.		

Contd.....

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18.	Viemsen	—	—	—	—	March-April	Fowl, Wine	For a bumper <i>Mohua</i> -crop. This worship takes place at Sonabera.	
19.	<b>Dumba</b> (Spirits of dead married persons)	The ancestral spirits have their abode in their kitchen-shed where they are worshipped in several occasions. In some cases a separate shed is built attached to the kitchen-shed for these spirits but this separate abode is not very common.	Elders of the house holds worship the <i>Dumba</i> .	—	—	—	Coconut, Milk, Ghee	For the wellbeing of the households.	
20.	<b>Mirchuka</b> (Spirits of dead unmarried persons)	The ancestral spirits have their abode in the courtyard of the house where a wooden pole is fixed to the ground where they are worshipped in several occasions.	Elders of the households worship the <i>Mirchuka</i>	—	—	—	Coconut, Milk, Ghee	For the wellbeing of the households.	

### Linga Worship :

Close to the Sonabera village on its south-western side, there is a very big banyan tree under which exists a stone of the shape of a *Linga* (phallic symbol of *Siva*). There are four small heaps of stones on the four sides of the *Linga*. According to the people, each of these heaps of stones represents a *Chhatriya* (who carries umbrella at the time of worship). As pointed out by the people, the speciality of the banyan tree is that though it is very old and large it has no adventitious roots from the downwards and its branches which are very massive have spread in all directions giving shade to the *Linga* under the tree. Another speciality which is revealed by the people is that it stands on the rocks without much anchorage of the roots as in the case of an ordinary banyan tree found elsewhere.

This place witnesses a very large gathering on the fifteenth day of the fifteen day festival, which is observed in the month of October-November at the time of *Dasahara* at the shrine of *Sunadei* in the main village. On each day of the festival a lamp is kept burning at the shrine of the *Sunadei* and on the fifteenth day the festival is diverted to the place where the *Linga* exists under the banyan tree. Many people from far and near assemble at this place on this occasion and most of them visit this place not only for participating in the festival but also for seeing themselves the specialities of the banyan tree which are widely known in the locality.

Another festival as big as the previous one, which was observed at the time of *Dasahara*, is also observed under the banyan tree in the month of March-April. The speciality of this festival is that the *dahi* (slash-and-burn type of cultivation) for the first time in the year is performed at this place. The main activities of the *dahi*, which are performed on this occasion, include laying on the ground the logs of wood which are previously cut from the nearby jungle and

setting them on fire. One can see half burnt logs of wood and wooden charcoal in the place where they are burnt to inaugurate the *dahi-chas* for the year.

There is one more point to be discussed about the ritual activities of the Bhunjias. The Table-9, previously given, reveals that the major concerns of the people are related to their food, security, health and wellbeing. In most cases the deities are worshipped to make the people free from all kinds of illness particularly fever and smallpox. Similarly, their major concern is about the supply of food and safeguard against wild animals. In a situation where modern medical practices are not available in the area and are not within the easy reach of the people, any dependence on the super natural being for their mercy and goodwill and for their protection against evil spirits which are believed to cause illness is but natural. Similarly, where improved agricultural practices and irrigation facilities are not available for better production from land, offering sacrificial animals and prayers to gods and goddesses are the inevitable approaches to super natural forces for their help in protecting the crops against natural hazards and calamities. Dependence on gods and goddesses for better health and for better crops is largely expressive of the helplessness of the Bhunjias of Sonabera plateau where modern medicine, improved agriculture and other facilities which are required for better standard of life are conspicuous by their absence.

#### **Divine Injunctions and Commensal Rules :**

The *Chuktia* Bhunjias do not use any country made husking lever (*dhenki*). They husk their food-grains like paddy and *ragi* with the help of mortar and pestle. Their Supreme mother Goddess called *Sunadei* has prohibited them from using three things, (1) use of country made husking lever (*dhenki*), (2) Use of any kind of *charpai* or cot and (3) Use of tiles or *khapars*. In obedience to such divine prohibitions



A shrine in Sonabera



A shrine in Sonabera



A shrine in Sonabera

the *Chuktia* Bhunjias do not use husking lever as is used in the plains for husking food-grains. They also do not use any kind of *charpai* or cot and therefore, sleep on the floor and no *Chuktia* uses tiles to thatch his house.

The *Chuktias* keep poultry and also eat chicken. But they do not keep pigs and even the consecrated pork is forbidden to use as food among them. The pig sacrificed and offered to the village Goddess is buried at the place of worship.

Several strict commensal rules are observed by the Bhunjias. In this connection a custom called *Kundabara* practised among the Bhunjias is worth mentioning. As soon as a girl attains nine to ten years of age she undergoes this ritual and observes many restrictions which are performed in a group for all the girls aged nine to ten years old of the village. The important items of ritual performances observed on this occasion are the massaging of oil and anointment of turmeric paste on the body of these girls. This is a public affair and the girls who undergo this ritual are anointed with turmeric paste mixed with oil in the public.

A girl is free to eat in any family so long as she has not undergone the *Kundabara* custom, but she is prohibited to take food outside her own family after she has been through this ritual. The restriction is so rigid that she is not allowed to take food even in a Brahmin family. The girls who have already observed *Kundabara* custom and the married women are not allowed to eat anything at the market centres. It is because of this restriction that they resist themselves even the most delicious items of food like sweets at the weekly hats, which they visit to get their daily necessities. Such restrictions are not strictly observed by the men folk of the community.

Among the Bhunjias, the habit of taking tea is most common and it is confined to men only. Tea mixed with

molasses and milk is the favourite drink among the men folk of the tribe and the habit of drinking any kind of alcoholic drink is conspicuous by its absence. The Bhunjias do not have any taste for liquor and in this respect they are distinguished from all other tribal communities who show a definite craze for it.

### Religious Places and Festivals :

There are several religious places around Sonabera village. Some of them are located very close to the village and others at some distance from it. A few of them are located outside the plateau in the plains. A short account of some of the important sacred spots which are visited by the Bhunjias of the plateau is given below.

#### 1. Gauthas (Near Lodra)—

A shrine dedicated to *Siva* who is referred to as *Bhagawan* by the Bhunjias is present at this place. An ascetic belonging to Gond tribe worships the deity as the priest. A festival takes place at this place in the month of April-May when people from far and near gather at this place to witness the festival.

#### 2. Patalganga—

A shrine dedicated to the deity *Bhagawan* is present at this place. A brahmin priest worships the deity. During the festival which takes place in the month of April-May many people gather at this place to witness the festival.

#### 3. Sosenga—

Two important deities, namely *Buhdharaja* and *Viema*, are worshipped at this place and a *Majhi* and a *Chhatriya* of Bhunjia tribe are incharge of worshipping them. All the Bhunjias of the plateau assemble at this place in the month of March-April and hear devotional songs relating to these deities.

After the festival is over, people continue to stay there for a month or so, for collecting *Mohua* flowers. Temporary leaf shelters are built by the Bhunjias individually and in these shelters the Bhunjias live during their period of stay at this place with their respective family members. Each household tries to collect *Mohua* flowers as much as possible during this period. We have come to know that a household can collect three bags of *Mohua* flowers in the maximum during the month.

The area around Sosenga is full of *Mohua* trees and *Mohua* flower is the principal food for most of the Bhunjias of the plateau. Sosenga occupies a very prominent place in the sacred geography of the Bhunjias for two reasons, one as the seat of the *Buddharaja* and *Viema*, the two most important deities of the tribe and other as the area with abounded *Mohua* trees. Thus, an annual visit to this place in the month of March-April is compulsory for each and every Bhunjia household living in the plateau.

#### 4. Sankarji Linga—

On the bank of the Jonk river near Senbahil village, there is a sacred place where the deity, namely *Sankarji Linga*, is enshrined under a very big banyan tree. The festival takes place at this place in the month of April-May and on this occasion this place witnesses a large gathering of Bhunjias.

#### 5. Jamgaon—

A very big festival is observed at this place in the month of December-January and the deity, namely *Buddimai*, is worshipped by the *Jhakar* of Jarna village. Many Bhunjias visit this place on this occasion and participate in the festival.

## 6. Sonabera—

Sonabera village is the seat of the deity, namely *Sunadei*, who is the main and Premier deity of the Bhunjias. A fifteen-day long festival is observed during *Dasahara* in the month of September-October and during this period the deity is worshipped with all ritual elaborations. All the Bhunjias of different villages gather at this place to celebrate the festival.

The main ritual functionaries who are associated directly with the worship of the deity are (1) *Pujari*, (2) *Pat Majhi* and (3) *Chhatriya*. One Parsuram Pujari (*Markam*) of Sonabera village serves as the main priest of the deity. Through his prayers and ritual incantations he enlivens the deity. One Agni Majhi (*Markam*) of Sinmudi village serves as the *Katariya*, whose duties are to sacrifice animals at the time of worship. One Bisram Chhatriya (*Netam*) of Sonabera village is responsible for holding the sacred umbrella at the time of worship.

On the fifteenth day of the festival, the visitors and the worshippers gather at the place where the deity called *Sankarji Linga* is located to celebrate another festival which is held at that place to worship the deity.

### **Tribe-Caste Integration :**

The *Jhakar* (*Pujari*) also worships Hindu gods and goddesses on certain occasions in addition to his religious duties for the tribe. For example, there is a custom among the caste Hindus to offer special prayers and worship the village goddess at the time of marriage. This worship is called *Dheangansa* (worshipping the goddess). This worship is done on the day following the first day of the marriage ceremony called *Mangan*. The concerned household invites the *Jhakar* to perform this ritual. A band party is arranged for this purpose and the *Jhakar* is brought to the place of worship



Deities worshipped by the Gonds

in accompaniment with music. The institution of *Jhakar* is present not only among the Bhunjias but also among the Kondhs and Gonds who live with them in the locality. A *Jhakar* of any of these three tribal communities serves the purpose for *Dheangansa*. In case of any difficulty, if the *Jhakar* is not in a position to perform the worship himself, he can depute his assistant to perform the ritual.

As the caste Hindus take the help of the *Jhakar* of the Bhunjias on marriage occasion and ritual purposes, in the liked manner the Bhunjias take the help of brahmins and astrologers to determine *lagna*, i.e. the auspicious moment in which the marriage will take place. Except these cases of mutual help the Bhunjias on the one hand and the caste Hindus on the other, worship each others deities on many festive occasions. For example, the religious festivals which take place at several religious places which witness large gatherings of both tribals and non-tribals, amply provide such mutual adoption of each others deities and belief systems and modes of worship.

As a result of contact with outside areas, some of the leading members of the tribe have introduced into their community certain Hindu gods and goddesses and ritual paraphernalia connected with such deities. For example, Ganda Singh Majhi, an elderly person and one of the members of Sonabera Gram Panchayat had made arrangements ten years back for the transport of idols of *Jagannath*, *Balabhadra* and *Subhadra* from a village called Palidihi, situated in Fuljhar of Madhya Pradesh. One Jagannath Barik, Kulta by caste carried these idols from Madhya Pradesh to Sonabera. As there was no shrine for these deities, Ganda Singh Majhi kept them in the front verandah of his house for eight years. In the meantime, he got a small shrine constructed at the outskirts of the village and shifted the deities from his house to this place. The villagers contributed their labour for

the construction of the shrine, where the deities are now installed. A brahmin of Kumtimunda village near Bhela is now appointed to offer priestly services to the deities. The villagers have donated two acres of land to meet the living expenses of the priest and ritual expenses of the shrine out of the produce from such land.

The major festival connected with the *Jagannath*, is the car festival. A wooden chariot is constructed by the people of the village and the three deities are brought out of the shrine and placed on the chariot which is driven along the village street from one end to the other. People of the neighbouring villages gather at this village on this occasion and take part in the festival.



Jagannath temple in Sonabera village

## CHAPTER X

### HALF A CENTURY'S CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE BHUNJIA COMMUNITY OF SONABERA PLATEAU

According to the Bhunjias of the plateau many changes have taken place in their life and habitat for the last fifty years. The changes and the consequent developments which have taken place in the Sonabera plateau have persuaded and articulated by the leading members of the Bhunjia community are reproduced below in verbatim :

#### Pre-Independence :

It is our experience that life was much better during the feudal dispensation than in the time after independence. At that time we used to carry on *Bewar* (shifting cultivation) and *Dahi* cultivation without causing any destruction to the forests and we were growing *ragi* which was our staple food. The soil was so fertile that about ten to fifteen *Khandis* of *ragi* were grown from one acre of land under *Dahi* cultivation. The entire plateau was inhabited exclusively by us with a few families of Gonds and Paharias and there were no outsiders and no cases of theft and encroachment. Life was very peaceful and without trouble.

#### Post-Independence :

After independence statutory Gram Panchayat was introduced in the area. The Sarapanch and other members of the Panchayat were elected by adult franchise. Three Sarapanchs had so far been elected for the Sonabera Panchayat. The first one was Sangram Majhi and second one was

Agram Singh Majhi. Both of them belong to Bhunjia community. But in the third election ( 1975 ), Padmn Singh Dharua, a Gond of Gatibera village, became the Sarpanch. There were eleven members in the Panchayat. The main criteria for selection of Panchayat members and Sarpanch were their forwardness and intimate contact with general public, Government Officials and also their power of speech. The Gram Panchayat had chalked out many developmental programmes such as digging of wells and construction of roads for the improvement of the area.

It is our experience that not much improvement have taken place in the area although the Gram Panchayat was introduced to promote development in the area. Vested interest and selfish motivation have become uppermost in the mind of those who occupied positions in the Gram Panchayat. The Sarpanch of the Gond community tried more for the development of his own village than for the other villages which are included in the Panchayat. Governmental agencies came in and started implementing some developmental schemes. For example, tanks were dug in many places to store and conserve water for irrigation purpose. But most of them do not contain any water and therefore are of no use. We are now facing acute scarcity of food and this scarce situation has reached now a critical point.

Our favourite food is *Mohua* flowers. We fry the flowers and make them jelly like and store them for use whenever required. *Mohua* flowers are very delicious and nutritious. We don't feel hungry and thirsty if we take a ball of *Mohua* jelly followed by drinking of water a few times in little quantities. *Mohua* flowers help our bowels clear.

As pointed out above, after independence various Governmental agencies started coming in to visit the places in the plateau. The visit of the Forest Officers is more frequent than the Officers of other Departments. The Officers

found it difficult to stay over night in the area because there was no suitable accommodation for them. In view of this the Forest Department have built a Forest Bungalow at Sonabera. It was built by one Balaram Bhoi who was D.F.O. at that time. He took our helps and got the bungalow constructed. It was for the first time that *Khapars* (countrymade tiles) which were used for thatching the roof of the bungalow, were introduced in the area. But since *Sunadei*, our principal village Goddess, has prevented us from using tiles for our houses none of us have adopted this innovation.

The Forest Officers have prevented us from carrying out *Dahi* cultivation. As a result, we are not able to get *ragi* which we were growing extensively in the lands under *Dahi* cultivation. It is our experience that unless the soil is burnt it does not help in growing paddy. The paddy plants weather away when they are grown in raw soil, not burnt in the process of *Dahi*. Weeds do not grow in the burnt soil and insects do not affect the crops. But the crops, which are grown on the lands and are not charred by the *Dahi* process, are affected by weeds and insects. As we don't have a large number of cattle, we don't have much cowdung to manure our lands as the Kultas do. For this reason discontinuance of *Dahi* cultivation has been a great loss to us and therefore we are now facing a great scarcity of food. Our experience shows that there has been considerable reduction in frost fall as it used to be years back. When there was thick frost fall the production from land was very good but with the decrease in frost fall there has been concomitant decrease in yield from the land.

Although there are several hillstreams and a few rivers are flowing in the area, we face scarcity of water, particularly drinking water, in most part of the year. Most of the hillstreams go dried in summer season and there is no other source from which we can get water for irrigation

purpose. As a result, the crops grown in the plains suffer for want of water. Some of us have dug-wells of our own and used water from the wells to irrigate our vegetable gardens. We are now growing such vegetables as brinjal, tomato, cabbage, cauliflower and chilli. Some of us have started growing sugarcane. We have taken growing of vegetables and cash-crops out of our own efforts without taking any assistance from the Government whatsoever. The problem of water can be solved by putting dams across certain perennial rivers, which are flowing in the area. For example, construction of a dam across the Jonk river, at the point where the Barura river and the Hatikhal river have met, will form a big water reservoir which will irrigate vast areas of Sonabera Gram Panchayat. Supply of water alone will not solve the problem unless other agricultural inputs are supplied in time to us for taking up cultivation of paddy and other crops in the plains. The most essential needs in this respect are plough, bullocks and seeds. There are two market places, namely Lathor and Kamarpuri, located in the vicinity of the plateau, where the plough and bullocks are available on market days and the farmers go to these market places to buy bullocks. We have no funds to buy different agricultural inputs and therefore, the Government should come forward and help us with financial assistance to have our required agricultural inputs at liberally subsidized rate.

As regards drinking water, we have some *kuccha* wells in our villages from which we draw water for drinking and bathing purposes. Recently, Government have sunk some tube-wells with hand-pumps attached to the wells for drawing water. These wells have been a great help in solving the problem of drinking water. Previously, there was a divine restriction to take water from a *pucca* well. It is for this reason, most of the wells from which we draw water for our domestic consumption have not been lined with stones and no cement is used to make them *pucca*. But this

restriction is being gradually relaxed because of our contact with outside world. For example, we do not hesitate to take water from the *pucca* well which is located in the compound of the Forest Rest-shed.

One major difficulty, which we are facing in this area, is that there is no dispensary or any type of curative centre. Moreover, there are no doctors either allopathic or ayurvedic or homeopathic in any of our villages. Whenever somebody falls ill, he has no other way but to wait until the illness leaves him voluntarily. If it does not happen, his condition becomes worse and he has no other alternatives but to wait for the death to come and take his life. We have great interest in using modern medical practices to cure ourselves and to lead a healthy life. Those of us who can afford to meet the expenses of allopathic treatment go long distance to Kantabanji or Bhela where hospitals and other curative centres are located.

*Sunadei*, our Supreme village Goddess, has not denied us to take the help of modern medical practices at the time of illness. She has not imposed any restriction on us in this regard. Our feeling in this is that if the doctors are not present and if hospitals are not available in the area where then do we go? In such a situation it is not our fault; but to pray our gods and goddesses and offer sacrifices to them for their blessings to get ourselves cured at the time of our illness. One of the major needs of the area is a curative centre with adequate provisions of medical staff, equipments and medicines to take care of the health of the people, who live in this inaccessible hilly areas.

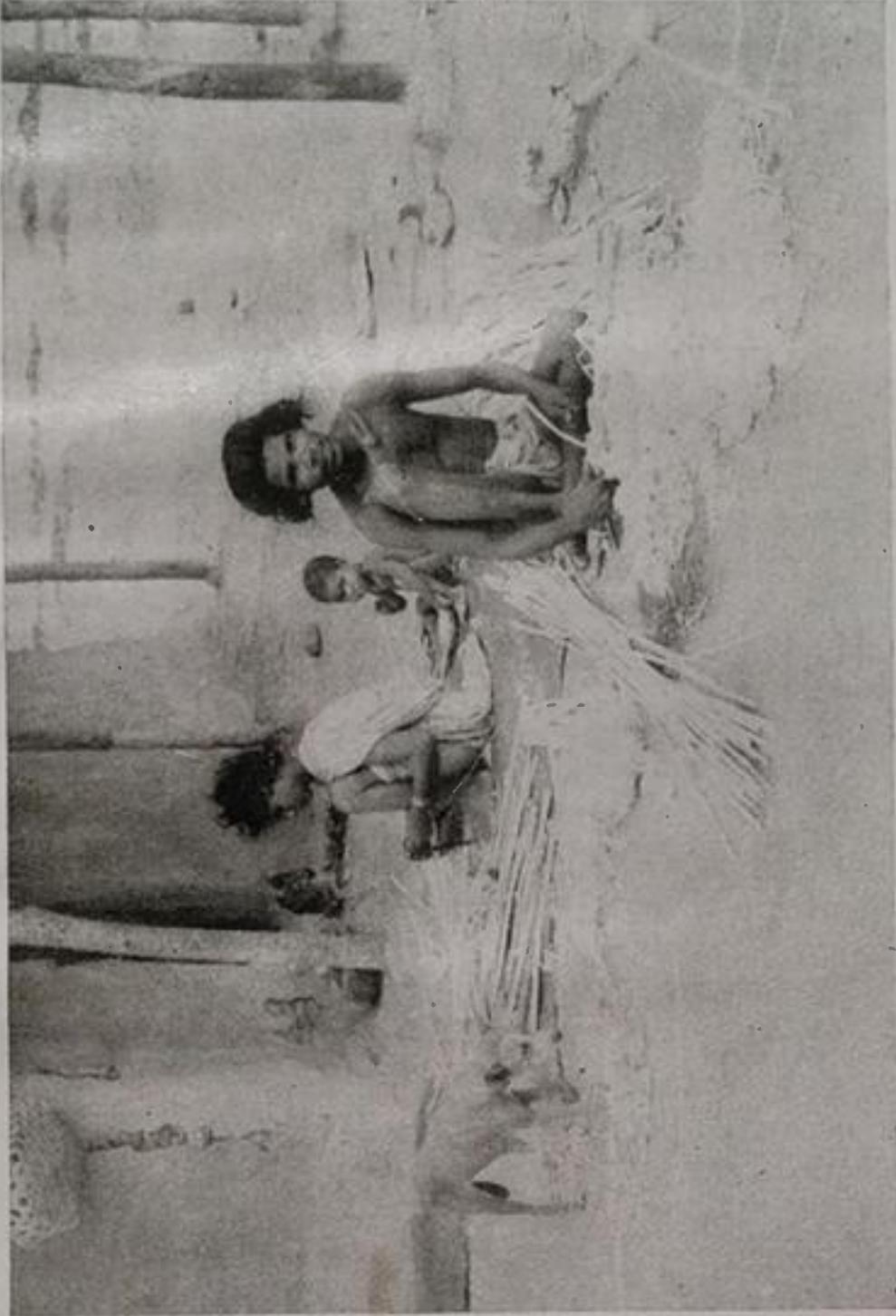
We have been increasingly feeling the need for loans for the improvement of our traditional agricultural practices and other aspects of our economic life. We have experienced a famine in 1965 in this area. All the crops had failed surreptiously in that year and there was no food to eat. Many

people died for want of food and suffered from several serious diseases. At that time the Government came forward and advanced loan to tide over the difficulties. This loan was called 'Government loan' and an understanding was given to us later that this loan was not to be recovered from us. With this understanding we neglected the repayment of the loan. But in reality this loan remained outstanding on us and we were liable to repayment of this loan. Our wants were growing day by day and in the meantime, we needed more loans. Few years back one organization, namely OXFAM\* came to the area and started implementing some of its developmental programmes in the area. We approached the OXFAM for loan. At one time 40 people of different villages received loan to the extent of Rs. 200/- each for the improvement of their agriculture. After a week or so the OXFAM wanted them to return the loan. By that time the loanees had already spent the money and found it very difficult to pay back the loan at such a short notice. In such a situation the OXFAM contacted the grain-golla located at Bhela and arranged loan of the same amount to each of the loanees for repayment. As the people were harassed by the OXFAM they lost all their faith on the organization, which was finally wound up its activities and surreptitiously left the area without informing the people. We have some very bitter experiences of working with OXFAM and we do not want such organizations to work in our area.

Another point which we like to say is that this plateau was originally inhabited by us and now with a few household of Gonds, who lived scattered in different villages. In course of time some households of Paharias locally known as *Kamars* migrated into the area and lived in symbiotic relationship with us and with the Gonds. The Paharia settlements are very small comprising five to ten consanguineally related households. All the Paharia settlements are located in clear patches of land in thick forests close to the sources of

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\* Oxford Committee for Famine Relief.



Paharias at work

bamboos, which they use for making baskets. Bamboo basketry has been the main source of their livelihood and shifting cultivation at places and collection of honey and other forest produce supplement their income. Of all these communities living in the Sonabera plateau, the Paharias are the poorest, most malnourished and lead a very wretched life.

With the growth of population in the plains, many non-tribal communities have started migrating to the plateau with a view to carry on farming and settle down permanently. Slowly and steadily, the outside people infiltrate into our area and grab our land and dispossess us from the land, which we have been cultivating from earliest times. For example, very recently, some Kulta families have migrated from Sambalpur and other places and have settled down in the area. In connivance with local officers they have been able to acquire land taking the plea that they are *Sukhbasis* (landless people) and have also purchased land from the residents of the area. The Kulta in general are very skilled farmers and at the same time they are very cunning in expanding their farming by various ways. We apprehend that time may come when the local tribal people will be dispossessed of their lands and these Kultas and other outsiders like Oil-men (Teli), who are the most progressive farming communities of Padmapur and Gaisilet police stations of Sambalpur district, have already started infiltrating into the area and have started reclaiming forest areas and raising paddy, sugarcane, oil-seeds and vegetables, will be the owners of all the lands in this area. A concrete case of migration of a Kulta household reveals many things which have far reaching implications and consequences.

This case is related to the migration of a man named Gokul Bhoi of Kulta Caste of Mundapalli village located in the Gaisilet police station of Sambalpur district.

This is how the migration of Gokul Bhoi to the area took place. A man from Amamula village located in Madhya Pradesh sold a bullock to a Kulta farmer of Bhanjibahal, which is located near Nawapara. This particular farmer has migrated from Bodasambar in Sambalpur district and has settled down in Bhanjibahal. The bullock which was sold to him left the place while it was let loose for grazing and returned to its previous owner at Amamula village. Suspecting that the bullock might have come back to Amamula, the purchaser went to that village to get back the bullock. From Nawapara he walked the distance through Sonabera plateau. He got his lost bullock at Amamula and returned to his own village. On his return journey he passed through Sonabera village and found out vast stretches of good fertile lands lying unreclaimed under a thick cover of shrubs and small trees.

This particular person is related to the nephew of Gokul Bhoi, who often visits him to take information about availability of suitable lands in the vicinity of Nawapara area for his settlement. The nephew informed him about the land that he had seen in and around Sonabera village. Gokul Bhoi was very much interested and both of them went to Sonabera and proceeded further upto Amamula village. Gokul Bhoi preferred the Amamula area to Sonabera for his purpose and decided to settle down in the former place. In fact, he did so and started cultivating a small portion of land lying fallow in Amamula village and stayed there alone for a year or so. Subsequently, some difficulties arose and therefore Gokul Bhoi deserted the place and came down to Sonabera, where he settled down with his family and some of his relatives.

There were two large Muslim land owners, who lived in one of the wards called Mahulpada of Sonabera village. One of them was anxious to dispose of his lands and go away elsewhere to take up some business. It was to his good fortune that Gokul Bhoi had come to his place when the



A progressive Kulta farmer

Muslim land owner was in search of a purchaser for his land. Gokul Bhoi purchased ten acres of his land at the rate of Rs.300/- per acre. He reclaimed this land and started cultivating paddy, sugarcane and vegetables. Later he added ten more acres of land, which he got from the Tahsildar in the capacity of a *Sukhbasi* (landless labourer). The land that was given to him was of the type called *Makkadamme* which was a kind of land-grant enjoyed by the village headman during the feudal regime. After the Zamindari abolition came into effect such land-grants were abolished and taken away from the grantees under the provision of ceiling surplus land and distributed among the local landless households. The lands, which were given to Gokul Bhoi, were originally under the possession of a Bhunjia family of Sonabera, who was the headman of the village and was given this *Makkadamme* (rent free land) for the services he was rendering to the village.

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It is our observation that though changes in many aspects are quite imminent but we noticed no change in some of our ritual aspects. For example, the banyan tree under which *Sankarji Linga* is seated and *Sunadei*, the Supreme mother Goddess of our tribe, who have been in existence from time beyond memory, show no change and represent the static part of our life. In the vicinity of Sonabera village there are only twelve villages, which have now increased to



Sugarcane field of a Kulta farmer in Sonabera village

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Our feeling is that the mountainous terrain of our habitat has many disadvantages and constraints for development. For example, development of road communication in this area is bound to be more expensive than similar developmental programmes in the plains. In order to minimise the expenses which are ecological barriers, demand some officers particularly those of the Forest Department, propose consolidation of smaller settlements into a few larger settlements so that necessary growth impulses and inputs can be invested in a few places instead of spreading it in a wider areas. In this respect we have certain observations. Generally, the tribal villages are small in size and are scattered in bigger areas. The people of each village have their lands close to their settlements and have also emotional attachment to it. In such a situation people would not like to leave their own settlements and go out to live elsewhere. Moreover, the terrain of the plateau is such that it is not possible to get vast areas in a particular place for such proposed resettlements with sufficient plain lands around such settlements to carry on settled cultivation.

In our opinion, the most important needs of ours in this area are three : (1) Land, (2) Water and (3) Road communication. If suitable measures are taken to meet these needs, the living conditions of the people can be improved in a very short span of time.

Although the Sonabera plateau is included in the Komna MADA (Modified Area Development Approach) pocket it is not a part of the Scheduled areas of the State. Naturally, there is no legal bar prohibiting non-tribals migrating into the area and owning land by purchase or some other means and settling down as permanent inhabitants of the area without any permission, whatsoever, from the concerned authorities. The Sonabera plateau is a resource rich area and the density of population is 56 persons per square km. Naturally, with the gradual development of road communication and movement of trucks in and out of the area, the process of infiltration of outsiders into the area has already started and the more progressive and enterprising sections of the population will no doubt have an advantage over the indigenous backward population in the process of tapping the local resources for their economic advancement. Unless some suitable measures are taken from now to check the flow of external elements into the area the milder forms of resentment, which have surfaced, may turn into a cloudburst of inter-community encounters and bloodshed.

## CHAPTER XI

### STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Bhunjia is not only a small but also a little known tribe of western Orissa. According to the people the term is derived from *Bhum*, the land and *jia*, on which to live. The tribe belongs to the Dravidian racial stock and the people speak a dialect, a form of Chhatisgari, which is practically the same as Baigani. Though the Gonds live side by side with the Bhunjias in the same habitat, the latter never speak Gondi, the mother tongue of the former.

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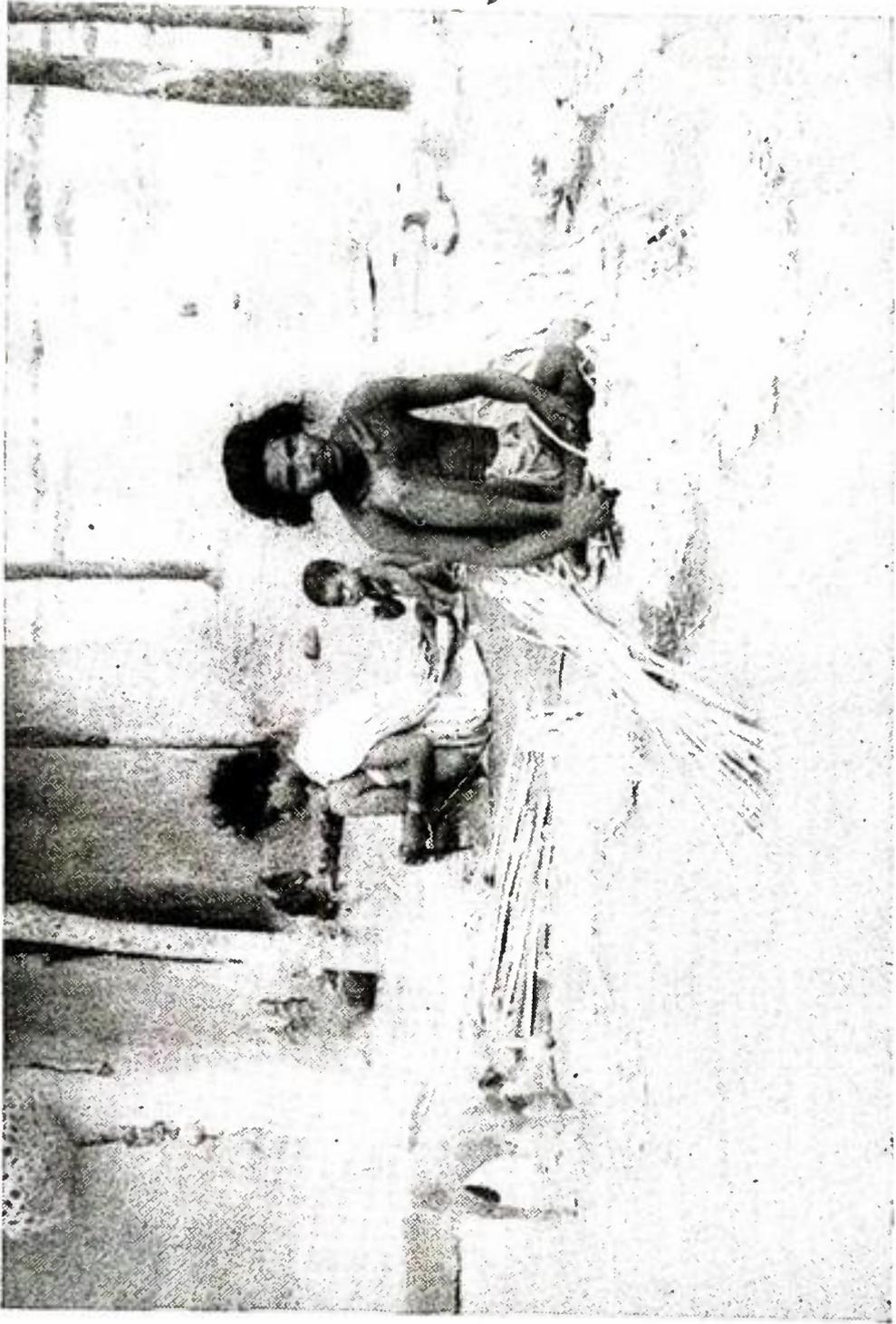
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Like all other tribal communities of Orissa the Bhunjias are educationally very backward. Almost the entire bulk of the population is illiterate. According to the 1971 census only 379 persons (Male-349, Female-30) were enumerated as literate among the Bhunjias in Orissa. Of these literate Bhunjias, 298 literate persons (Male-276, Female-22) belonged to Kalahandi district.

The Sonabera plateau ranging from 610m. to 915m. in elevation and the immediate neighbourhood, which was part of the erstwhile Khariar princely State, are the homeland of the Bhunjias. Geographically, it forms the central part of the Dandakaranya region (17°50' North-20°0' North and 80°15' East-84°0' East), a well-demarcated physical unit representing the dominant plateau character. The country is full of high hill ranges, which run in north-south direction along the inter-state boundary between Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. In between the mountain ranges are wide open fertile lands dotted with Bhunjia villages. The rivers like the Jonk, the Sundar, the Indra and the Udanti have flown through the area providing openings for cross-country movement of people. The habitat is very rich in timber and minor forest produce and teeming with wild animals, which are in the process of depletion resulting from wanton and unrestricted annihilation of forest growth.



Paharias at work

bamboos, which they use for making baskets. Bamboo basketry has been the main source of their livelihood and shifting cultivation at places and collection of honey and other forest produce supplement their income. Of all these communities living in the Sonabera plateau, the Paharias are the poorest, most malnourished and lead a very wretched life.

With the growth of population in the plains, many non-tribal communities have started migrating to the plateau with a view to carry on farming and settle down permanently. Slowly and steadily, the outside people infiltrate into our area and grab our land and dispossess us from the land, which we have been cultivating from earliest times. For example, very recently, some Kulta families have migrated from Sambalpur and other places and have settled down in the area. In connivance with local officers they have been able to acquire land taking the plea that they are *Sukhbasis* (landless people) and have also purchased land from the residents of the area. The Kulta in general are very skilled farmers and at the same time they are very cunning in expanding their farming by various ways. We apprehend that time may come when the local tribal people will be dispossessed of their lands and these Kultas and other outsiders like Oil-men (Teli), who are the most progressive farming communities of Padmapur and Gaisilet police stations of Sambalpur district, have already started infiltrating into the area and have started reclaiming forest areas and raising paddy, sugarcane, oil-seeds and vegetables, will be the owners of all the lands in this area. A concrete case of migration of a Kulta household reveals many things which have far reaching implications and consequences.

This case is related to the migration of a man named Gokul Bhoi of Kulta Caste of Mundapalli village located in the Gaisilet police station of Sambalpur district.

This is how the migration of Gokul Bhoi to the area took place. A man from Amamula village located in Madhya Pradesh sold a bullock to a Kulta farmer of Bhanjibahal, which is located near Nawapara. This particular farmer has migrated from Bodasambar in Sambalpur district and has settled down in Bhanjibahal. The bullock which was sold to him left the place while it was let loose for grazing and returned to its previous owner at Amamula village. Suspecting that the bullock might have come back to Amamula, the purchaser went to that village to get back the bullock. From Nawapara he walked the distance through Sonabera plateau. He got his lost bullock at Amamula and returned to his own village. On his return journey he passed through Sonabera village and found out vast stretches of good fertile lands lying unreclaimed under a thick cover of shrubs and small trees.

This particular person is related to the nephew of Gokul Bhoi, who often visits him to take information about availability of suitable lands in the vicinity of Nawapara area for his settlement. The nephew informed him about the land that he had seen in and around Sonabera village. Gokul Bhoi was very much interested and both of them went to Sonabera and proceeded further upto Amamula village. Gokul Bhoi preferred the Amamula area to Sonabera for his purpose and decided to settle down in the former place. In fact, he did so and started cultivating a small portion of land lying fallow in Amamula village and stayed there alone for a year or so. Subsequently, some difficulties arose and therefore Gokul Bhoi deserted the place and came down to Sonabera, where he settled down with his family and some of his relatives.

There were two large Muslim land owners, who lived in one of the wards called Mahulpada of Sonabera village. One of them was anxious to dispose of his lands and go away elsewhere to take up some business. It was to his good fortune that Gokul Bhoi had come to his place when the



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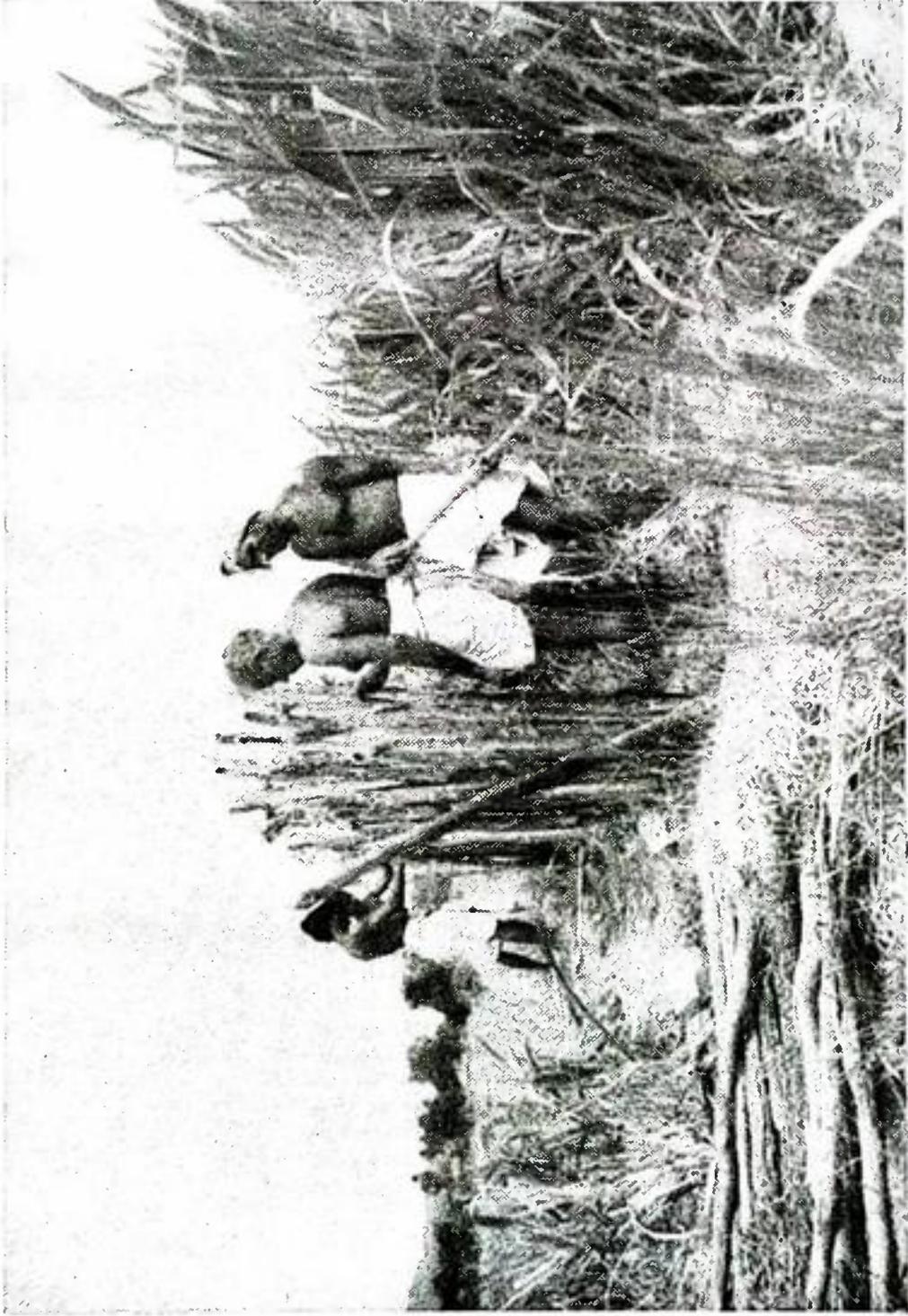
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The Bhunjias are divided into three broad divisions, the *Chuktias* or the highlanders living in the plateau, the *Khôlarajias* or the valley dwellers living in spaces in between hill ranges, and the *Chindas* or the plains people living in the open country beyond hills and valleys. While the *Chuktias* represent the traditional section at one end the *Chindas* stand for the advanced section of the tribe at the other end of the folk-peasant continuum. But the *Kholarajias* are in a transitional stage undergoing cultural transformation from the folk culture to the peasant culture.

The distinguishing cultural features of the Bhunjias are their social organization and several socio-economic taboos imposed upon them by the village Goddess named *Sunadei*, the Supreme deity of the tribe. The uniqueness of the Bhunjia social structure is the division of the tribe into two exogamous moieties; *Netam* and *Markam*, each of which is comprised of a number of non-intermarrying *barags* or lineage groups. Each *barag* is composed of kinsmen of paternal lineage and has a lineage God, the priest of which belongs invariably to the *barag* in question.

As regards the taboos, the important ones are

1. Kitchen-shed kept out of bounds,
2. Any kinds of tiles forbidden for thatching purposes,
3. Any kinds of cots prohibited for use,
4. Country husking lever debarred from use and
5. Adult women and pre-puberty initiated girls prohibited to take any kind of food at market places and in any house other than their own.

The most essential concern, which is focussed in all these restrictions, is to keep the tradition and culture of the tribe unchanged and unaffected by external contact and

maintain their cultural pattern in the purest form. In all societies particularly tribal societies the women, to put it broadly, serve more than men as the guardian of their cultural traditions. It is perhaps for this reason mainly that the women have been put under rigid commensal restrictions. Generally, the kitchen-shed in traditional societies comes under the domain of women and therefore it is guarded against all polluting effects of contact by alien agents. Things like *charpais* or any kinds of beds or cots and country husking lever (*dhenki*) are symbolic of modernized technology, which are the characteristic of the local peasant societies. And any use of these things means, according to the contra-acculturative stance which stresses the values in the tribe's way of life, not an advancement but rather a degradation of culture.

The Bhunjias have been carrying on two types of cultivation one of the conventional type of slash-and-burn method of cultivation in the hill slopes and the other of the exceptional type of *dahi* cultivation in which twigs and branches with logs of trees are cut in nearby forests and transported to a plot of land in the plains, where every year these logs and twigs are burnt and seedlings of paddy are raised in the charred soil mixed with ashes.

Recently, the Bhunjias have found it most disadvantageous to carry on *Bewar* cultivation. But they have been continuing the practice of *dahi* cultivation in spite of the harassment which they suffer in the hands of the Forest Officers. Their main contention is that *dahi* kills weeds and insects and the seedlings which grow become disease resistant and give better yield. These results can be achieved by the application of fertilizers and pesticides. But lack of supply of these inputs in the plateau and want of funds to get them from wherever they are available and difficulties of transportation and underdevelopment of road communication

all in union create problems for replacing the traditional methods with improved agricultural practices. What is suggested to be done in this situation is that as the Bhunjias have now become change-prone it is necessary to set up an agricultural depot in the central place at Sonabera with sufficient credit facilities for getting plough, bullocks and other inputs so that the people can easily avail themselves of these facilities for their development.

This is only one of the purposive developmental strategies which will not only usher in a new life style, full of hope and aspiration for prosperity, but it will also remove to a great extent the dissatisfactions that have surfaced in the wake of the stern measures of the Forest Department against harmful methods of cultivation. Irrigation facilities and soil conservation measures are essential prerequisites for agricultural development. The plateau is endowed with many rivers and streams which can be harnessed for irrigation purposes putting dams in suitable places across these sources of water. For example, the Jhara river which flows on the southern side of Sonabera village can irrigate hundreds of acres of land around this village.

The problem of life in the plateau is not only beset with squalor and poverty but also with disease and malnutrition. For the vast multitude of humanity which leads the life of age-old apathy and resignation the only recourse open to them for getting relief from pain and suffering is *Sunadei*, the Mother Goddess who is believed to cure all kinds of diseases and keep them hale and hearty. Those who take a rather poor view of tribal life, particularly the assimilaticnists consider such elements as animism or animatism, the core ideal of tribal religion, nothing but a mark of inferiority and primitive character. In the same vain they take the ritual practices such as the worship of *Sunadei* as superstitious.

In our opinion it is most unfortunate to hold such a view about tribal life. One who will take stock of the present situation in tribal areas such as the Sonabera plateau can come to the realization immediately that the views mentioned above are unjustified. The age of opportunities which has placed at our command, the latest scientific discoveries and technological progress for solving the problems of poverty, ill health and malnutrition have not yet dawned in the hills and dales of the plateau. Even an ordinary physician of any discipline, allopathic or homeopathic or ayurvedic lives miles away and a health centre of very common type is located miles and miles away. Even though the people are well aware of the efficacy of modern medical practices and very much anxious to avail themselves of such assistance for which there is no divine disapproval, the geographical barriers and the distance pose formidable obstacles and insurmountable difficulties on the part of the Bhunjias in getting medical aid whenever needed particularly in emergencies. Under such circumstances opening up of a health centre at Sonabera with sufficient staff and medicines is of immediate need of the people.

Another pitiable point, which is more deplorable than any other aspect discussed so far, is the lack of educational facilities and low literacy level in the area. It goes without saying that literacy is the best weapon for socio-economic change. In other words, with the rise of literacy level and the spread of education the people become articulate and capable of perceiving, interpreting, criticizing and finally transforming their society from the primitive stage to the advanced stage with the world around them. In view of this, the strategy for their development should include establishment of educational institutions at suitable places in the area. One Ashram School at Sonabera and several Sebashram Schools in its hinterland will surely help in eradicating mass illiteracy and bring forth a strong desire and determination



Sebashram School Chairman with his wife

in the indigenous population to struggle for a new social order.

Like any other tribal areas in the country the Sonabera tribal belt is hilly with difficulties of road communication. On the one hand centuries of isolation has resulted in their cultural stagnation and on the other hand contacts with outsiders have given rise to many anti-acculturative reactions to stop, the debasing effects of cultural contact and safeguard the tribal diacritical marks. As a result their emotional integration with the main stream of the country, which is desirable for the growth and development of the Nation, has suffered a serious set-back and the economic base of the tribals has remained as weak as before. Added to the situation of stagnation and poverty, the mass illiteracy and cultural apartness have militated against their availing of the constitutional safeguards and protective legislations meant for them.

Taking advantage of the backwardness of the Bhunjias many cunning non-tribals, skilled in farming and trading have infiltrated into the plateau to seek their fortune. The plains in places, particularly deltaic regions, river valleys and coastal plains, have been very much over-crowded and consequently their inhabitants have been migrating to less densely populated and resource-rich areas for work and also for finally settling down, if possible, on a permanent basis. The Sonabera plateau provides both the conditions which attract inflow of outsiders. The density of population does not exceed 56 per sq. km. in the plateau and the area is rich in minerals, timbers and minor forest produce, the annual yield of which in terms of money comes to about eight lakhs of rupees. There are also vast areas of fallow lands which can be made cultivable and habitable, after reclamation of vast stretches of pastoral lands which make herding and tending a very profitable concern.

In fact, hundreds of cattle herders have got into the area with large herds of cattle and buffaloes and have spread throughout the plateau in different groups. Similarly, many herdy peasants of Sambalpur and Bolangir districts, particularly the Kultas, who are very efficient in agriculture have infiltrated into the area, and have taken possession of large tracts of cultivable lands either by purchase from the local tribals and by grants from the Government or by encroachment. The local tribals consider such infiltration of external elements a serious threat to their very existence in their own home land. The migrants to the area are equipped with advanced technology and are far advanced in both crop and animal husbandry as compared with the indigenous tribals who are so to say at a pre-agricultural stage in technological development. Naturally, the gradual expansion of the former over the lands of the latter have put forth a simmering discontent in the minds of the indigenous people suggesting a tribe non-tribe encounter and upsurge to take place not in distant future.

The measure that is apt to control the situation is to recognize the Bhunjias as a primitive tribe and to declare the Sonabera plateau as one of the Scheduled Areas of the State which will consequently bring into force in the area the laws regulating land transfer and money lending. Keeping these points in view a location specific micro-level plan properly informed by scientific understanding and insightful vision can be prepared. It is hoped that if its implementation be made purposive resolute, it will without doubt generate growth and development in the area so that the tribal people in consequence can enjoy an everlasting freedom from poverty, disease and illiteracy.



Cow-herd in Sonabera

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Dr. Nityananda Patnaik, M.Sc. Ph.D., is now working as the Director of the Tribal and Harijan Research-cum-Training Institute, Bhubaneswar. He was formerly a Director of National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad and Visiting Fellow of Indian Institute of Advance Study, Simla. He is the author of Integrated Tribal Development Planning for Keonjhar district, Caste and Social change, Tribes and their Development, Cultural Tradition in Puri and Co-author of Handbook on Paudi Bhuinya and The Kondh of Orissa.

Shri Prasanta Kumar Mohanty is an M.A. in Anthropology (Social Anthropology), and at present working as a Research Assistant in the Tribal and Harijan Research-cum-Training Institute, Bhubaneswar.

Shri Trilochana Sahoo is an M. A. in Sociology and Social Anthropology and at present working as a Research Assistant in the Tribal and Harijan Research-cum-Training Institute, Bhubaneswar.