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INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRIBAL RELIGION AND ECONOMY: ANALYSIS OF KANDHA TRIBE OF ODISHA

Abstract

As far as Kandha of Kandhamal are concerned, their supreme deity has always been Dharni Penu- the Earth Goddess. Like the ancient Egyptians who used to be known as the children of the Sun God, these indigenous people of Odisha are also identified as the children of the Dharni Penu. The famous meriah festival of the region unites the community in celebrating the glory of Earth Goddess and in the process ascertains the unique cultural identity of the Knadha in the region. The main objective behind this grand ritual at one point of time used to be the blessing of the mother for a rich harvest. But with the passage of time, the tribal sentiment associated with Dharni Penu has undergone some change. Blame it market rationality, the crop that was once a gift from the goddess has now become a commodity for sale in the market. This shift, however, happened due to increasing integration of tribal community with mainstream society. Further, as the caste Hindus began to migrate in large numbers to the plains of Kandhamal, the religious practices of the Kandha underwent profound changes because of this interaction. This paper examines the establishment and evolution of relationships between caste Hindus and the tribe over time. The study adopted the political economy framework to understand the changing situations with a historical perspective. It also discusses in detail certain aspects of Kandha livelihood, socio-economic transformation, and economy during different periods starting from the earliest eras to the arrival of British and now in post-independent India. Finally, the paper concludes that their sustainable ritual based economy should be the way ahead.

Keywords: *ritual, religion, economy, society, Kandha*

Introduction

Most of the sociological or social anthropological studies of Indian villages point out very clearly the convergence of three sectors in the village community: economy (land), politics (power and authority) and religion (village rituals). These sectors intersect at the village (micro) and regional (macro)

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levels, where the interests of various social groups also meet and interact. Historically, over the years after the entry of the British and the establishment of colonial power, the weight of the forces emanating from outside the village gradually diminished (Pathy 1995). However, in some cases, outside forces continue to influence the local population in the villages even after the independence which has been the root cause of social conflicts and unrest (Mohanty 2017). An understanding of rural society will be incomplete without the consideration of these aspects.

The present paper aims to gain insight into the situation where the interaction of religion and economy poses a problem that has a historical origin. It is about the case of the Kandha tribe inhabiting Kandhamal district in Odisha. The case of Kandha is especially important as it has been complicated by the incursion of castes into the tribal area which was traditionally administered by the Kandha chieftains (*mutha*) even before the entry of the British. Their economy was uniquely strong due to growing turmeric besides the cultivation of rice which is their staple diet, and the cultivation was distinctively associated with religion with which the non-tribes interfered. The Kandha has been very possessive of their land and jealous of their autonomy. They rebelled against the British in what is referred to as the Kandha Rebellion in 1846 and they vehemently resisted the interference of the British with the *meriah*- human sacrifice¹ to their deity whose worship was indispensable for the cultivation of turmeric (Behera 1989). Although the non-Kandha entered the Kandha region and scrumptiously occupied their lands and interfered in their religion the Kandha did not offer much resistance. But the arrival of the British triggered powerful resistance against the British and the non-tribes. The Kandha continued to fight for their land against the castes that immigrated to their territories and usurped their lands even before and after the independence.

This paper also addresses larger theoretical questions with regard to ritual and its transformation in its ideology, performance, and roles over a period of time. This study aims to investigate the extent to which the dynamism of economic power influences the evolution of religion. It tries to find out whether religious ideology or religion is an autonomous entity, as any would tend to think. This needs to be interpreted from an anthropological perspective.

Anthropologists have contributed in a unique way to theories of the operations and meaning of ritual studies, politics and economy over a wide comparative range. The more recently throughout the cross-disciplinary field of ritual studies, the importance of ritual in the works of Geertz (1960, 1973), Sahlins (1963, 1972) and Turner (1967, 1969) was found among the social and cultural anthropologists. Later, the treatment of ritual in Marxist tradition can be noted in Godalier's (1975) work Comaroff (1985) and Bloch's (1986) work. Although, anthropologists have focused largely on the comparative study of the small-scale so-called 'primitive' religions of the technically less developed peoples, many others have also examined aspects of the major universalistic

religions². In the Indian anthropological study, there are few anthropologists and sociologists have examined the rituals and specific religions on the basis of political and economic aspects of it. The work of Dube (1959), Vidyarthi (1963, 1978), Marriot (1972), Appadurai and Breckenridge (1976), Sinha, et, al (1976), Dirks (1994), and Srinivas (2003) have well examined the politics and economy as a process of ritual.

There is no holistic ethnographic account of the Kandha people available (Chaudhury 1989) except Bailey³ (1957, 1960, 1970). Whereas some accounts like Boal (1997, 1999), Jena et. al., (2002), Hardenberg (2006), Pfeffer (2010, 2014), Berger (2015), and Gangte (2017) exclusively discussed the human and buffalo sacrifice of Kandha, tribe-caste interactions, and economic transactions in different parts of the state. While Pfeffer, Berger, Hardenberg, and a few other scholars of Germany are largely focusing on the ritual, shared socio-cosmic idea, and gift exchange using the concept of 'New Kinship' of the tribal people of this region, Hardenberg et al. (2017) have developed cultural studies approaches to resources and elaborated concepts such as "resource complexes" and "resource cultures."

However, even in Bailey's work and others like Pfeffer, they have turned to ritual as a window to look at the cultural process by which people earn and live their lives and later transform it. But no one combined the three—religion, economy, and politics—to understand the holistic view of the tribe Kandha. This paper endeavors to comprehend the historical relationship between religion, specifically ritual, and economy. Hence, it focuses on the ritual *meriah*, the production of turmeric, and the market of both the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Later, analyze the change and transformation in Kandha in particular and in society as a whole.

Conceptual Framework

Many theories about the nature and origin of religion try to account for the persistence of faith and ritual. They also explore reasons for the changes that religions have undergone in the course of their history. The present study, as part of the holistic tradition of anthropology, suggests that the whole is greater than its parts. The study views religion as a component of the social system, akin to other elements, and recognizes the interconnectedness of all parts, where each influences the other to the same extent (Behera 2021). Therefore, we cannot comprehensively study religion in isolation, as it is not an independent entity. To study the dynamic nature of religion and market, the present study tries to adopt the political economy framework from a holistic perspective.

In this regard, history has a very significant contribution to make. Bayly (1983) mentioned that there are detailed speculations about the relations between the state, traders, and society. Political groups determine the area of

change, according to Bayly. In the present case, the pre-colonial state and the new economic groups, or the burgeoning middle-class, interfered with Kandha society in such a way that irreversible changes in Kandha way of life took place. This perspective endeavors to scrutinize the evolution of Kandha society through the interplay of politics and economy across various eras. The 19th-century traders and middlemen that migrated to the region during the colonial period have played an important role in changing socio-economic and political life in Kandhamal, especially in the Balliguda area. Taussig (2010) demonstrates the effect of capitalist culture and market organization on human affairs. The market uses human beings and their products as commodities for buying and selling (Taussig 2010). Furthermore, the impact of the capitalist economy on small-scale societies diminishes as time becomes less significant. Karl Marx has derived his concept of “commodity fetishism from the analysis of commodities as both a thing and a social relation”. According to him, man and society are market-driven, and Taussig (2010) argues that the capitalist markets change the concept of money as ‘devil’, besides changing social relations as those who possess money are the devil’s agents.

However, in Kandhamal, the commodification of goods has led to the acquisition of market value for items that previously held no value, and the forced introduction of new social relations has altered the previously established values of these relationships. The Kandha, having discovered commercial turmeric, sought to sell it in the market, only to find themselves ensnared by the local merchants, particularly the non-Kandha. They approached the Kandha, moving from door to door, making friends, and playing on their emotions to buy turmeric. The Kandha took the buyers as their well-wishers, superior to them, and as such had the moral obligation to serve their needs. Relationship with non-Kandha made the Kandha more conscious of the potential financial gains. When the land became a commodity after the colonial period, it became very valuable, which was not the case earlier. It brought about a significant change in the lives of Kandha when the non-Kandha settled in Kandhamal.

The existence of God or other spiritual entities in Kandha society cannot simply account for the rituals they perform. Religions show enormous variety in types of belief, degrees of belief, kinds of ritual procedures, spiritual concepts, and symbolic imagery. The relationships that religions have with the social, economic, and political structures of the communities in which they practice also vary greatly. People may perceive any religion as excessively elusive. Any simple affirmation of divine presence and revelation will not do; an assertion has to stand the test of evidence. Metaphysical problems emerge at every turn. All that may be possible in a theory of religion may be interpreted as a demonstration of the nature and meaning of rites and beliefs for those who hold and practice them and of their value for people in the context of their lives. As part of the interpretation, the theory must deal with non-rational as well as rational elements in belief patterns and practice.

Area and methods

The field study is being conducted in the Kandhamal District on a continuous basis till-date since 2014. Another fresh round of field work has started to fill the critical gap on 2022. It starts with micro-level observations and moves to a regional-level analysis of the interconnections among the ritual, politics, and economy of the Kandha tribal society. Therefore, the study concentrates on Rajaghara, a Kandha village located in K. Nuagaon Tahasil/Block of Balliguda Sub-Division in the Kandhamal district. The revenue village of Kanjamendi, located three kilometres away from Rajaghara village. The former is a Kandha village, while the latter is a multi-ethnic settlement. The village represents a typical Desia Kandha population in the foothills that they practices both settled as well as shifting cultivation. They also have close contact with the urban dwellers and non-Kandha in Kanjamendi village and Nuagaon town. The village of Rajaghara contains both Desia Kandha and Pano, a Scheduled Caste group. The other group of people, Patra, a Khatriya, stays mostly in the village Kanjamendi, who play an important role in Kandha society. All of them speak Kui, including the non-tribal Pano and Patra. In total, there are 87 households in Rajaghara, distributed in three hamlets: Gastusahi, Nediraha, and Nua-Rajaghara. Of the 87, the households that belong to Kandha are 67, while the remaining 20 are in Pano. By religion, 73 have stated to be Hindu, and the remaining 14 identify themselves as Christians. In total, there are 341 people in Rajaghara, comprising 174 males and 167 females.

This paper is based on data collected through extensive fieldwork. Techniques such as interviews, observations, and focus group discussions have been used to collect data. The study also uses oral narratives on the experiences of various rituals, particularly *meriah*, and related market information as a crucial source of data. Most of the information have been collected from the field by means of in-depth interviews with Kandha, non-Kandha officials, and other relevant stakeholders. The study has collected information on the political and economic activities of the Kandha from other villages, with a particular focus on Rajaghara village, to ensure the authenticity of the data.

***Meriah*, Turmeric and Market Economy**

There are many studies on the tribal economy and way of life, including the effects of large dams, industrial enterprises, and development projects on tribal communities; however, there are none that address the relationship between the tribal religion and economy. However, it is important to note that Agrawal (1980) based on his study in the Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh argues that there are no separate categories of “religion” and “economy” in the Hindu universe. He uses the category “religio-economic” for it and said the *jati* relations are both economic as well as religious and these operate at different levels of the network. Considerably, he the study analyse the religion and economy as separate category as well as a category which serves the

purpose of human life. As previously said, it involves both the ritual *meriah* and the production of turmeric in Kandha, as well as other economic factors that contribute to changes throughout time.

The emergence of turmeric as a resource was rooted in international trade⁴ colonialism and state-building. Turmeric is an indigenous root crop that the Kandha used and collected in the hills even before the entry of the British to Kandha lands (Boal 1999: 25). But its specific connection with *meriah* comes to light only through the writings of colonial government and the literature in this regard claims that Kandha practised the *meriah* and placed the flesh in the turmeric field to increase the colour of turmeric and productivity of the soil. Kandha were indeed producing turmeric for a long time. What is clear from the literature is that the colonial government was more interested in possessing the forests for timber and other forest wealth. They found two groups, Kandha and Pano, as a hindrance to their mission, while the Patra and others showed interest in the colonial efforts to subdue Kandha. They successfully entered the Kandha lands on the pretext of suppressing the *meriah*. Kandha economy was vested in the forest since the people lived in the jungle. Neither the Kandha were interested in the politics of the princely kingdoms, nor were they interested in trade and business of the East India Company or the Indian business community. As stated by MacPherson;

“The Kond economy was a primitive agricultural one. It produced rice, oils, millets, pulse, fruit, tobacco, turmeric, and mustard. Konds also raised buffaloes, goats, pigs, and poultry” (1865: 63).

The British learnt about the Kandha, forest and their wealth through the non-Kandha. In this regard, both Patra and Pano interpreted Kandha's life for the British, whereas Pano were protective of their own life on one hand, as they knew the brutal side of the Kandha: killing and sacrificing; the Patra on the other hand maintained to remain in good books of the British by reporting the 'crimes' of the Kandha. They tried to gain the favour of the British by contriving a strategic way, one that terrified the Kandha and weakened them. The British could have access to the forest surreptitiously if they had the Kandha, as they were ferocious in dealing with wild animals; additionally, the Patra demonstrated the harsh nature of the Kandha to the British. Furthermore, the Patra sought to establish a clear distinction between the Kandha and the Pano. Due to their inherent need for proximity to authority and their eagerness to acquire education through Christian missionaries, the Pano were susceptible to persuasion and attraction, which could lead them to disengage from the Kandha. Patra also provided the British with additional information about the timber and other useful resources available in this dense forest. The British knew that this could give little potential to enhance India's general economy, but they kept timber marketing a secret while promoting turmeric as reckoning the tribe as having agricultural culture. Hence, they started addressing the tribe as an agricultural community. But it was the

update that has been given to them by the plain land people with whom Kandha has a cordial relationship.

“Despite its permissivity, Kond agriculture was capable of “resulting in no small share of rural affluence”. The extent to which a Kond community enjoyed such affluence depended on “the capricious climate,” most notably local weather and animal activity, which varied across communities from year to year” (van den Bosch 2007: 203).

The Patra were well aware that only the ritual had the ability to bring together and regulate the unruly Kandha. They were aware of the method by which they gained access to the Kandha region. The Patra recognised the festival of *meriah* but they never attempted to suppress this as their belief system also supported the virtues of self-immolation and self-sacrifice to gods and goddesses. Perhaps, they valorised the religiosity of Kandha, and their uncritical view indicated their approval of such practices. Kandha observed the manner in which the Patra of the Balliguda and Nuagaon region upheld the royal affiliation and attended to the tribal deities, thereby embracing Hinduism. Kandha perceive the religious beliefs of the higher Patra or King as closely aligned with their own religious system. This was one manner in which they aligned themselves with the dominant religious framework. However, the Pano, who is considered akin to a sibling to the tribe, is not brought closer than they are presently due to their categorization as untouchable and their exclusion from the Hindu realm. The Pano, similar to the Patra, are unable to acquire the land of the Kandha due to their subordinate status and reliance on the Kandha for their livelihood.

The alternative perspective regarding Patra’s proximity to Kandha can be traced back to a mythological narrative whereby the mother goddesses manifested in a visionary encounter with their priest, expressing dissatisfaction with the way the Kandha celebrated the festival⁵. Consequently, the Patra assumed the roles of both their religious leaders and political leaders. This alliance resulted in remarkable, albeit slow, transformations in the social and economic circumstances of the Kandha, accompanied by political sway. Currently, the Patra have assumed the role of counselors to the Kandha, providing guidance on several matters, including the *meriah* celebration. In the past, they would request permission from Patra to arrange the ritual. However, they are currently looking for a favorable day for this reason. Additionally, Patra determines the dates for the celebrations in various *muthas* to prevent any conflicts. In the pre-colonial era, the Patra were considered their monarchs. Over time, the Patra dynasty gradually assumed a position of uncontested authority, wielding significant influence in various aspects of community development. This included their engagement in agricultural practices and techniques, active participation in markets, religious initiatives, and involvement in local political affairs. Kandha holds the belief that Patra, being the superior offspring of the land, possesses a higher comprehension of

ceremonial and political administration. The mother goddess expresses great satisfaction with these individuals. The Patra community residing in the hill region has intentionally minimized the importance of the *meriah* celebration, perceiving it as a regressive tradition. In an effort to align them more closely with Hinduism, they try holding the Pano and their children at bay.

On the hill, the Pano and Patra worked as traders like Teli (oil extractors) and Sundi (distiller) (who carried the bundles of salted fish, cheap cotton garments and cosmetics from one weekly market to another). In course of time, Patra stopped such itinerant trade as they accumulated sufficient wealth to start a business in small towns down the hills and entered into wider economic structures. Now, they are also financiers for the Kandha advancing loans and getting the lands of Kandha mortgaged or undertaking *benami* transactions with fewer formalities as they know the mind of the Kandha very well: how their money paid back; how to keep them in their control; how to extract money from the Kandha. The Pano continue to walk around the Kandha villages with the exchange of goods with what they purchased in the nearest market like Balliguda. The local markets are now in the hands of Teli, Sundi and even Patra, while Pano remain in the business of bullock and buffalo buying and selling.

It is clear from above that the Patra's motive to associate with the Kandha through religion and maintain friendly relations implies controlling the economy of Kandha and taking the upper hand over them. Another important implication is to keep the Brahmin away from the Kandha by bearing the priest at the Hindu temples, particularly at Pattakhanda of Mahasingi. The Patra are also temple priests of *Kali* or *Durga Maata* in Kandhamal even though they are non-vegetarians and belong to Kshatriya *varna*. These temples are where Patra are priests and permit the sacrifices of goats and chickens, and if it were Brahmin priests, such sacrifices would not have been allowed. Thus, by holding a key position in the Kali temples and by not discouraging the Kandha to give up the sacrifices or organising *Kedu* festivals they can successfully prevent the entry of Brahmin priests. As already discussed, only after the worship of Mahasingi, the Kandha are allowed to celebrate *Kedu* at different places, since this place in Mahasingi has gained a reputation as the main place of worship. Furthermore, the paddy cultivation of Kandha by clearing the jungle and levelling the ground is taking place under Patra of Mahasingi. According to the information collected in Rajaghara village different Patra were sent to every *mutha* suggesting the *mutha* heads organise the ritual on the auspicious day suggested by him for high productivity and improved economy of that place. They may directly contract with others like Teli who could buy and sell the products in the plain or take products from the village down the hill for sale. In this kind of interaction and control of the economy of Kandha, the Pano are kept aside who have been in association with the Kandha for ages as intermediaries between the Kandha and others.

The hypothesis is also developed by Leeson (2014), applying his economic theory about human sacrifice to Kandha, argues that it is a method of protecting property rights by which the practice enhances the security of the property. It prevents resource accumulation and few people or the community itself plundering others. What it means is the following. Human sacrifice does not allow the wealth of the community for a long time and it helps maintain the same structure for a long time. The surplus could induce hierarchy in society. Therefore, in the name of ritual, the members spend away whatever surplus is available through the sacrifice. He makes this argument against economic irrationality (cf. Hunter et al 1957:59). Applying the economic formula, he makes his point clear about the rationality of Kandha.

According to Leeson's logic, the expenditure incurred on the *meriah* practice would have ruined the Kandhas' wealth. Acquiring a victim from within the society would harm itself and buying it from outside obviously would have been very hard, treacherous and exorbitantly expensive. However, if the Kandha had practised the *meriah*, they must have done that in a very calculative and judicial manner. It is unlikely that the Kandha resorted to this practice to that extent there was such a need for the colonial government to determine eliminating this practice if it were not the scheme of Patra. Since turmeric and *meriah* have a close connection indeed, it is still in conspiracy, why does turmeric suddenly get attention? Why does it become so important for Kandha to produce? While their economy was mostly hunting and gathering.

Unusual Demand of Turmeric in Kandha Land

Why turmeric was so important for Kandha? Of course, turmeric had great value when both Indian princely states extended their rule over the Kandha due to its medicinal and ritual importance which had been used very frequently on ceremonial occasions. Afterwards, it assumed the market value during the colonial regime. The non-Kandha Hindu caste groups only discovered the unique production style of the Kandha through shifting cultivation. They also found that the Kandha had excellent knowledge of the cultivation of turmeric. To take advantage of the increased market value, the non-Kandha Hindus and Pano undertook the role of middlemen. Later, with the entry of the colonial rulers into the area, this production was brought to a different level. As the flora and fauna were exploited more and more, the British government began to suppress various rituals of Kandha associated with turmeric⁶so that the Kandha could focus on the production only, without losing their time, money and energy on these 'wasteful rituals'. The rulers supported the knowledge of Kandha, and the tribe felt the turmeric must be having an excellent value outside their society. As they began to concentrate on their development, they realised that they needed cash, and it could be obtained through turmeric. The government officers got access to Kandha's hills on the pretext of suppressing *meriah* with the aid of non-Kandha. They tried to loot

the Kandha hill, the valuable timber and other necessary raw material. But neither Kandha nor anyone else tried to protest against the British soldiers or protected the Kandha from their exploitation. No one has recognised the contribution of the Kandha in the turmeric market, either in the Indian market or in the international market. As the Kandha began to move towards a market economy, it broke the social-economic structure of the tribes. Kandha, who had never seen the market came into the city. By this, Kandha's political scenario began in association with the non-Kandha caste community. This way they got into the hierarchy of political, economic as well as religious life of the world around them.

As the Kandha's product, turmeric, gained popularity in the plains, the mediators, the Pano, lost their position and even became redundant as a result of the Kandha's exposure to the cash exchange market and their direct interactions and business dealings with non-Kandha traders and businessmen. Hence, the other non-Kandha like Patra, Teli, Khauda (blacksmith) and Sunari (goldsmith) etc., visited the Kandha villages and provided necessities like oils, sickles, axes, hoes, clothes, ornaments, aluminium pots and so on. Hadi, who make baskets with reeds and bamboo and Kumbar of Kanjamendi, used to sell their items of baskets and pots. Some hawked soaps, eateries, hairpins and sarees, dhotis etc., by going around the villages. They exchanged their items either for cash or in-kind, that is, grains or forest products.

Kandha's Economic Change and Religion

Given the preceding discourse, it might be imperative to consider the Kandha's economic transformation and its correlation with the current issues they were confronting. As the Kandha are in transition from food gathering to food production, and in either case, the natural needs of survival are met. Their conceptualisation of life can be seen as an integrated relationship of spiritual and natural worlds, and in this regard, the spiritual relationship has taken a dominant role in organising the natural world wherein the Kandha have been dependent on the former as much as they depend on the latter. However, their relationship is viewed as a metaphysical relationship and verbalised in the metaphoric sense of mother-child relationship- spirit as the mother, who has power and authority over the child. They are in mutual obligatory relationships; the mother has to protect and nurture the child by meeting its needs and the child also has to take care of the mother with respect and satisfy her in all respects. The productivity of soil which is the main means of living to satisfy the Kandha's natural needs, the exchange of the products of the soil is basically to meet the same needs only. Therefore, the Kandha never think in terms of surplus or savings for tomorrow. The *salap* of the sago tree and fruits of various trees and animals are meant for meeting their natural needs only, but not for sale or savings. In this regard, turmeric is also considered to have more 'use value'⁷⁷ in the beginning, but later, it has acquired more

'exchange value' than others, for it has special significance among the non-Kandha for its ritual as well as medicinal value. But this exchange transaction is only in line with the traditional primitive mode of production: sacrifices are made in exchange for blessings and productivity of the soil.

The turmeric obtained the 'exchange value' more with the entry of the British who brought in the Forest Laws and encouraged the Kandha to grow more turmeric by cutting down the forest and killing animals such as elephants, tigers, antelope etc. Not only turmeric but also the skins, tusks of the elephant and spices had export value; the Forest Department opened up Depots for collecting these items from the Kandha on cash payments. Further, some Kandha also sold these items to non-Kandha either in the towns or others such as Pano or people who visited them at their villages in the hills and paid either in cash or in-kind such as clothes, pots, pans, axes, knives etc. What is important here to note is that a large majority of Kandha individuals were quite unaware of the value of the coins, or currency and also simple calculations. Mostly, whatever was handed over to them they used to take home in good faith, neither did they have the capacity to argue if they thought that they were being cheated. They lived as powerless, physically or mentally, and the non-Kandha was endowed with more articulating and convincing capacity. In these exchange practices, they had been exploited by not getting proper value for the items that they sold.

As the Kandha started depending on industrial or manufactured goods more and more, there was a demand for more cash. Therefore, they had to produce more that brought them cash, but their metaphysical means was to please the *Dharni* goddess and other divine beings such as ancestors as described before in connection with the rituals of shifting cultivation. The ideas of divine intervention besides their hard labour made them accept the gods and goddesses and rituals of Hindus such as *Doli*, *Holi*, *Akshya Tritiya*. The worship of Maa Laxmi during the month of *Margasira* while observing *Mana Osa Gurubar* which is popular among the Odia populations is most important. In this worship, the panicles of paddy are collected and arranged nicely along with other ritual objects and worshipped every Thursday during the month.

It is also believed that the loss of money due to misfortunes is due to Maa Laxmi's departure from home for some reason. As long as she is worshipped, she will bless the family with wealth but she will leave if once she is dissatisfied by taking away all the wealth with her. In contrast, as per Kandha's traditional belief, as already stated, misfortune is the result of casting an evil eye or sorcery with the help of a deity who is befriended by a bad person of the community. Again, to get the favours and increase of wealth etc., the deity has to be revered and worshipped very regularly and some even go to the extent of offering their own blood flowing from the self-inflicted cut. As the deities are not there in the house one has to either forest grove field *Dharni* post or shrine etc., to worship and re-establish harmonious relations with the deities

through sacrifices.

The Kandha who never cared much either for cash or wealth have understood that the non-Kandha are after these two things that are giving them power and authority in society. They have also started thinking that the source of wealth or cash is the blessings of deities besides their hard work. The Kandha accepted the equation that non-Kandha have drawn between the deities: the earth goddess *Dharni* is nothing but the mother goddess whom the non-Kandha worship as Durga or Kali or Parvati. Other goddesses are similar to the goddesses of the Hindu religion. So, when the Kandha began to worship Maa Laxmi, they started considering *Dharni* and Maa Laxmi as equal and same. As *Dharni* could be brought into their house, they could bring Maa Laxmi who was another form of *Dharni* and worshipped her like any non-Kandha. Such worship, it is believed, would increase their wealth.

Either in the past or now, the Kandha are known for their lack of interest to save their cash or give serious thought about the future. As soon as they got some cash, they drank it away or would have lavish eating. They try to work hard but save little towards the end, depending more on the favours of benign deities by offering sacrifices and organising rituals. Unlike the peasant labourers in Columbia and mine workers in Bolivia of South America, Nash (1972) and Taussig (2010), who find the cash in the capitalist economy as Devil in the Catholic worldview, here we find the Kandha's cash and prosperity transcending to the spiritual world of blessings of the goddess who could be Maa Laxmi or *Dharni* who should be satisfied with sacrifices. Since the earth belongs to the goddess and her permission is sought whenever a piece of land is brought under cultivation and hence more turmeric can be granted only by her so that they can earn more cash for meeting their natural wants and desires. Thus, few of the Kandha are now found in this kind of traditional pre-capitalism following the non-Kandha.

The socio-economic differences that emerged gradually after colonialism can be found in Rajaghara, where out of 87 households, 33 households (39 percent) earn less than Rs. 10,000 per year i.e., nearly 40 percent of the households are Below Poverty Level (BPL). The rest of them earn between Rs. 11,000 and Rs. 50,000. If that BPL is considered proletariat, they work as wage labour particularly slack agricultural season though most of them possess land less than 5 acres which are hardly sufficient for them to live on; they have to depend on labour. They are engaged in various activities such as road lying, construction etc. They work hard to earn but do not save much. Few households, i.e., about 12 households that earn between Rs. 30,000 and Rs. 50,000 are in a better position than the rest. These are households that try to become members of the Panchayat or any other Committees also outside the village. While the traditional leadership depended on inheritance, they now participate in the constitutional democratic electoral system on competition which requires lobbying inside the community as well as outside with the non-

Kandha too. The positions give them honour and prestige which the Kandha aspire. Thus, there is a sort of class difference within the community.

In the above scenario, the economy of Kandha, the proletariat, exchanged their labour for the cash wages fixed by the non-Kandha who largely engaged them. However, in the village they worked either for cash or kind or most often an exchange of labour by working in each other's lands; in the towns they invariably worked for cash and bought food materials in the market run by the non-Kandha, exchanging cash with which several of them were not familiar. The government in the post-independence era set up institutional arrangements for the growth of turmeric and purchase of it and also a collection of minor forest produce for better prices where the goods are exchanged for cash with proper accounting.

A light on Change and Transformation

Before the colonial period, the Kandha lived in and around the forest entirely depending on it by food gathering and hunting. In other words, they were at the mercy of nature and also suffered from the vagaries of seasons (Chaudhury 2004). They lived in an intimate relationship with nature and used very simple technology to exploit their environment. Such relationship has been well preserved in their mythology and folklore. They learned to exploit nature with divine intervention, which, in other words, they acquired the required knowledge by experience. As a part of the story of the mother goddesses, they tell how they originated from *Tari Penu* and *Tada Penu* etc., wherein, they justify their worship as she is the mother who takes care of them through replenishing the fertility of the soil and the forest sources and blesses them with abundant means of living (Chaudhury 1989). So, they felt the need of satisfying her with the most precious offering, a human being that signified their utmost devotion and later on, it was substituted with buffalo.

The second phase of Kandha life is a gradual change in the late pre-colonial era adapting to shifting cultivation. Later, as they observed non-Kandha such as Patra, they also encountered another set of related beliefs along with settled agriculture. As a result, they revised the earlier beliefs with appropriate logic in response to the new ideology, technology and social conditions. New all Kandha rite came in as a mediator between nature and Kandha in a more organised manner with a specialist like *Jani*. With this, the interaction and relationships between the nature/deities became more complex in that the demands of the nature/deities increased with the increased needs of Kandha due to increased interference of the global political economy. In the process, the mass society of Kandha gradually distanced itself from nature and moved towards the non-Kandha society while *Jani* maintained the original proximity

with nature. Now, it could be understood how the Kandha who were depending upon forest and forest products and, later on, became a settled agricultural society leaving their traditional world and agricultural practices behind.

So far, the Kandha were fulfilling their needs and the needs of their community. At this point, the Kandha assumed the economic model of existence and the situation shifted from self-interest, or serving one's own interests, to serving the needs or wants of other communities. This further illustrates how the formerly self-centered Kandha evolved into self-critical and other-focused individuals. It indicates that they evaluate themselves against others and have a strong desire to belong to the other dominant community. However, they also recognize that they should not lose their tribal identity because it affords them certain privileges. They also recognize that worshipping the mother goddess is necessary because it gives them a distinct identity and unites them all, fostering social solidarity and unity. They simultaneously glanced around, seeking identification with the same deities as the dominant non-Kandha community, and realized that their mother goddess did not need any more killing people to get her satisfied. Since the aforementioned provides a general framework, it is crucial to concentrate on the specifics of the interaction between Kandha and non-Kandha. In this context, we will take note of Bailey's highly pertinent observation:

"The Kandhamal are a high tableland, sharply cut off on three sides from the plains around by a precipitous range of mountains, and inhabited by an aboriginal people called konds. They are still today the most numerous elements in the population. But at least three hundred years ago Oriyas (A native of Orissa, of any caste, is called an 'Oriya'. His language also is 'Oriya'. In the Kandhamal there is also an Oriya caste.), who are Hindus, began to push up from the plains and established from field settlements in the hills" (1957:7).

With the entry of others, Kandha who were self-centric initially got worried to make contact with the people of the plain. But at the same time, they also felt that it would help get their needs met. The basic need at that time was salt and clothes. And as part of the forest economy, they had started improving their technology of cultivation. The hill slopes were cleared with the help of these middlemen and regulated sequence of activities and cleared up the pathways in the forest and brought either side of the footpaths under the cultivation and named such areas as *podu*. As it had a primitive way of cultivation which required more time to make it more productive. While their needs were met, the Kandha continued to meet the need of the outsiders by exchange of forest produces for salt, clothes, iron implements and it also resulted in the growth of the economy of the middlemen and other outsiders. This was an introduction of the market into the Kandha area. By this interaction, slowly, shifting cultivation got developed with the system of community and collective ownership.

Kings of the princely states were interested to be in contact with the Kandha for the forest products and control of the predatory bands that were stealing the crops at the foothills; they were not concerned with the social and political organisation. They did not even interfere with methods of exploring the material world of the Kandha. The only way to contact these people was through the middlemen and so the kings appointed their representatives, Patra, who maintained a friendly relationship with the tribal people. In this regard, Bailey states,

“The administration can scarcely be said to have extended to the villages. The civil functionaries were concentrated in the cities and larger towns; the judicial administration was equally centralized, courses of law being established only in the same local officials having their headquarters in the towns who were responsible for the patrolling of the main routes” (1960: 164-165).

Not only the king's representatives but also other non-Kandha immigrants maintained very cordial relations with the Kandha, respecting the tribal customs and practices of the Kandha. Such a strategy helped them to exploit the tribal people by selling clothes and other commodities at escalated prices. In such a situation, there was a gap in the area of communication as the tribal people did not know Odia. The Pano could fill this gap as they were the first caste to get into the Kandha area and learned the Kui language of Kandha and took up the role of mediator or intermediary between the Kandha and the non-Kandha merchants and others as well. They became a part of the Kandha community and even married their women.

The increased interaction with the Pano and the king's representatives made the Kandha readjust and redefine their needs and increased participation in the market with the increased area of shifting cultivation. A variety of crops were also grown, to suit the demands of the market. In course of time, shifting cultivation carried on communal or collective ownership and the use of labour changed to individual ownership of land with the land being distributed to individual households. In this way, the systems of terrace and wet cultivation developed with the emerging trends of private ownership of land. Increased use of inputs, increased use of labour, and the active role of the market changed the entire social, economic and political life of Kandha. Further changes occurred after 1836 AD when the British extended their authority over the tribal areas. As Bailey states the situation in 1957 as follows:

“The Oriyas who arrived in the Kandha villages were the newcomers; they have taken the best land of Kandha. The religion and language were different from those of the native habitats. They took concubines, but rarely wives. They live in separate villages. They claim and derive the adjective sita, by which they distinguish themselves from Konds, from a word meaning ‘the learned ones’ or ‘the knowledgeable ones’. Oriyas assert that before coming to

the Kond lived like 'beast of the jungle' and knew nothing of the proper cultivation of rice. It was the Oriyas, they say, who taught the Konds to wear cloths, while once they had gone naked. Finally, like settlers elsewhere, the Oriyas shock off metropolitan control and retained only the loosest ties with Hindu Rajas on the plains. The relationship of the two races is till typical of settlers frontier. But the movement has been stopped for more than a hundred years. Although, the Oriya villages throw off small suburban settlements, there is no longer a drive from the edge towards the interior of the tableland" (1957:7).

With the existing relationship and market connection, the tribe who depended on the forest for food were now resorting to the collection and gathering of minor forest produce only to supplement agricultural produce. They were cultivating small pieces of land and making themselves fit the new conditions that the plain area people had created, but continue to depend upon their primitive agricultural implements and methods of cultivation. They were raising mostly one crop during the monsoon and sometimes went for a second crop in the winter.

Here, if we examine how the economy changed over a period of time from the forest base to agriculture, there is a change in the socio-economic life of Kandha groups that practiced agriculture than the ones who continued to depend on the forest. In all the groups, the association between Kandha and forest has started breaking though they consider this as the main resource and faster in some cases and slower in some other. Turmeric is considered to have substantial impact on the economy of the Kandha tribe where there is influence of the Patra and other non-Kandha through turmeric trade. Through this and other means as stated above they could possess the lands of Kandha and sold them to others. In this regard, Bailey notes the following:

"If there no-one buys land from the warriors (i.e. Patra), how were they able to meet such contingent costs as deaths, marriage or the need to buy plough cattle without selling land? The most probable explanation- assuming that rites, which are the main expense, were conducted on the same scale- is that estates were not reduced to the margin of disintegration, not because everyone was richer in the old days, but because the joint-family was still a flourishing institution. So long as partition does not take place, the devastating effect of multiple inheritances is avoided and contingent costs fall upon estates of a size sufficient to meet them. The principle is the same as when a slump may eliminate a small business and be survived by big business." (Bailey 1957: 92)

Finally, it can be said that, the relationship between Kandha and non-Kandha was an economic one. The non-Kandha who entered the Kandha-region sprawled the market system and got immensely benefited. They took interest in the Kandha's economy through the production of turmeric and acted as

middlemen in the process and got themselves richer and became a lucky community.

Conclusion

In this paper, the subject of how to see religion in relation to anthropology is posed. One way to look at it is how religion helps sustain the social structure; however, this method doesn't seem to be the best one to use when analyzing the dynamic aspects of rituals or religion. Alternatively, it is considered that the political economic approach with its dynamics nature would be able to answer the question of religion as it changes along with the political economy; each of them become cause and effect. Here as the study of Kandha society makes clear about close link between political economy and religion where religion is not causing problem but having invisible power and a contribution and at the same time it gets influenced. It also tried to demonstrate that the present lies in the past and the anthropologist has to decode events of the past for getting insights into the present. As far as the present situation in Kandhamal is concerned the history, interconnections among the land, ritual, ethnic identity, economy and politics have to be taken into consideration when attempts are made to solve the conflicts and tensions for better governance and harmonious living. The relationship of religion and market is crucial is to understand the social function of the society like Kandha. It is true that society and the local community are never fully isolated and autonomous from other influences, both in the present and the past.

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Notes

- 1 Meriah is not a Kondh term, but the British applied it to denote human sacrifice prevalent among them. The term Meriah was perhaps a corrupt form of the Kondh term 'Mervi' which refers to the Kondh god Mervi Penu, a brother of the Earth Goddess Tari Penu, for whom human sacrifice was to be observed. The Kondhs believed that human sacrifice would give them good crops and protection against all diseases and natural disasters (Chaudhury 1989).
- 2 Following the lead of Tylor's (1871) theories, Frazer (1890), Otto (1958), James (1933, 1940), among others, stressed the primacy of religious ideas as the basis of religion, born out of pseudoscientific explanations or emotional experiences.

- 3 F.G. Bailey's entry into the ethnography scene about the tribes of Odisha marked a dramatic change, with his writings in 1957, 1960, and 1970 based on the most reliable and authentic information he collected during his anthropological fieldwork. The shift of theory and interest came down to Asia and India in a specific, extended case study method, sanity, on the issues of the clan, conflict of interest, and tone of conflict exhibited in his study among the Kandha and neighbour warriors as well as the Pano caste. He emphasizes village-level politics, the exchange of the political system with a new form of the economic system, and extensively talks about the changed social system. Land in the market, political complexity, affluence of others, political caste, transecting the village boundaries, village council, and multiplex roles are his gifts to the world of anthropology. He holds a fine understanding of the relationship between caste and tribe; the comparison he draws with huge statistical data provides immense value for the research.
- 4 A Brief Backdrop of Spices' Trade History of spices dates back to 6th century BC, if not long, long before that. Spices from the Asian continent were carried by caravan to ports of the Mediterranean Sea or the Persian Gulf and thereafter to the market places of Athens, Rome, and other cities, where they were sold at exorbitant prices. During 1497 and 1498, British, Italian, Portuguese navigators undertook voyages to Asia in search of spices. Vasco da Gama of Portuguese landed in Calicut (Kozhikode, now) in Kerala on May 20, 1498, reported about the Malabar region, the inexhaustible land of spices in India. Since then the Portuguese started trading directly with India. Between A.D. 1605 and 1621, the Dutch managed to drive the Portuguese out of the Spices Islands achieving a monopoly in spices trading. However, in A.D.1799 the Dutch East India Company went bankrupt due to many reasons and the Dutch ports of Malabar Coast were taken over by the British. By the end of the eighteenth century, the United States entered the scene of world spices trade (especially pepper), the most remunerative trade of the time.
- 5 According to some other version the priest of the earth goddess had a dream in which he saw a person with physical features - hairs on their ears – similar to that of a Patra. The goddess informed him that a person with such physical features should worship her as she was not satisfied with the worship of the Kandha. Then, the people went in search and found out that the Patras were having such features. So, they requested them to come and organize the worship of their Goddess (Behera 2014:79)
- 6 In the account of Boal, he talks about the exploitation of the British and Ronal Hardenberg expresses his idea while talking about meriah suppression.
- 7 Marxist concept. See Taussig (2010: 130-133)

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