



PAHARIAS

The Struggle of a Tribe for Recognition



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August 2008

The project 'Social Mobilisation around Natural Resources Management for Poverty Alleviation' was launched in December 2003 by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Supporting the Government of India's commitment to expand self employment opportunities for the poor, the project specifically targeted women and marginalised communities and was implemented through 17 NGO partners in 11 districts across three states - Jharkhand, Orissa, and Rajasthan.

As part of this Project that ended in December 2007, Lokadrushti, an NGO partner in Nuapada district of Orissa, worked with Paharias, a group that was recognized as a scheduled tribe under the British rule but lost this status with the formation of the state of Orissa in 1936. It is estimated that around 1500 Paharia families live in and around forest areas of Nuapada, Kalhandi, Bolangir and Bargarh districts and are among the most marginalised in Orissa.

This study includes a socio-economic profile of the Paharia community of Nuapada district and the adjoining areas of Orissa with an analysis of their human, financial, social, physical and natural capital base and specific vulnerabilities. A sample of 24 out of a total 79 Paharia villages in Nuapada district was selected for this purpose. The study suggests immediate measures that can be taken up by the state and central government with respect to granting them the Scheduled Tribe status as well as to improve their livelihoods.

The study has been carried out by Mr. Kameshwar Choudhary, Ms Smita Mishra Panda, and Ms Sudeshna Devi from the Human Development Foundation School of Management, an institution that aims at bridging the demand supply gap of high quality management education in the Eastern part of India in general, and Orissa in particular. The primary data collection was carried out by Lokadrushti (Dr. Fanindam Singh Deo and Sri Lohitakshya Joshi), with active support from state government officials. Mr. Harshvardhan, Project Associate, GOI-UNDP Project, has facilitated and provided back-up support for the study. Ms. Judith Smith, Independent Consultant, has provided editorial support and coordinated print production.

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1. Introduction

In India, around eight percent of the population belongs to the category of Scheduled Tribes. The tribes inhabit areas spread over the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, West Bengal and the Northeastern States of Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

The term “tribes” were first included in the Government of India Act 1935¹. The term “Scheduled Castes” was used in this Act to define, “such castes, races or tribes or parts of groups within castes, races or tribes, which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as the ‘Depressed Classes’, as His Majesty in Council may prefer.”

After Independence, the Constituent Assembly of India reserved the prevailing definition of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and conferred the responsibility of compiling a full listing of castes and tribes and also the power to edit this later, on the President of India and the Governors of states.

Hence, ‘tribes’ were placed in a separate schedule in the schedules to the Presidential Order of 1950 and are today known as ‘Scheduled Tribes’. Article 342 of the Constitution of India defines a ‘tribe’ as “an endogamous group with an ethnic identity; who have retained their traditional cultural identity; they have a distinct language or dialect of their own; they are economically backward and live in seclusion, governed by their own social norms and largely having a self-contained economy.”

Other definitions for “tribes” also abound. The word ‘tribe’ is used for a “socially cohesive unit, associated with a territory, the members of which regard themselves as politically autonomous” (Mitchell 1979). The term ‘primitive tribes’ was first used by western anthropologists to represent, “a primary aggregate of peoples living in a primitive or barbarous condition under a headman or chief.” (Sills 1972)

A community that falls under these definitions but not under the Government of India’s Schedule is the primitive tribe of the Paharias of Orissa. The Paharias live in the Southwestern part of Orissa with their highest concentration in Nuapada district in Orissa. The community is also present in the adjoining districts of Kalahandi, Koraput, Bolangir, Bargarh, Nabrangpur and Rayagada². A survey conducted by NGOs Sajag and Sahabhagi Vikash Abhiyan (SVA) revealed that around 1500 Paharia families (4241 persons) live in the Nuapada, Kalahandi, Bolangir, and Bargarh districts. (see Swain and Majhi 2001:3). Although no official compilation of the total population of the Paharias is available, discussion with the leaders of the community has revealed that their strength numbers at around 7000.

¹ The Act was designed to give Indian provinces greater self-rule and to set up a national federal structure.

² As revealed from discussions with the leaders of (Paharia) Kamar Vikas Manch of Nuapada district, April 2008.

The Paharias' case is unique. They were recognized as a Scheduled Tribe during the British rule but lost this status with the formation of the state of Orissa³ in 1936. They are now officially categorized as a socially and educationally backward class/other backward classes (SEBC/OBC) in the state and are therefore excluded from the benefits of the various government policies and programmes for the development of the Scheduled Tribes.

For centuries they have also been known as Kamars in this region. The Kamars in Orissa are blacksmiths and are categorized as Other Backward Classes. However, the Paharias in Orissa, though also known as Kamars, have not taken up this profession and still follow primitive methods of living. They remain a tribe with features that are unique to them. Additionally, the Paharias share a high degree of commonality with other tribal groups in the region.

The neighbouring state of Chhattisgarh is also inhabited by the Kamars, a Scheduled Tribe that is the counterpart of the Paharias in Orissa. Studies have shown that the Kamars of Orissa are not in any manner (especially socially and culturally) affiliated with Kamars of other states. These intricacies have caused much confusion – primarily the mistaken identification of the Paharias of Orissa with the Kamars of the same state. The map below shows the geographical closeness of the Paharias of Orissa with the Kamars of Chhattisgarh.

Over the decades, the Paharias of Orissa have languished in extreme marginalization. The socio-economic profile of the Paharias reflects this exclusion: a literacy rate of 18.1 percent, which is half the literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes in Orissa; only one man has studied upto the graduate level; only two men have passed the XIIth standard; and only four men and one woman have studied upto the Xth standard. All Paharia families of Orissa are below the poverty line set by the Government of India and most of them are either landless or have "encroached" on government land. All Paharia families are below the poverty line – their average annual family income is just Rs. 3750 and 75 percent of the families have an annual income below Rs. 4000.

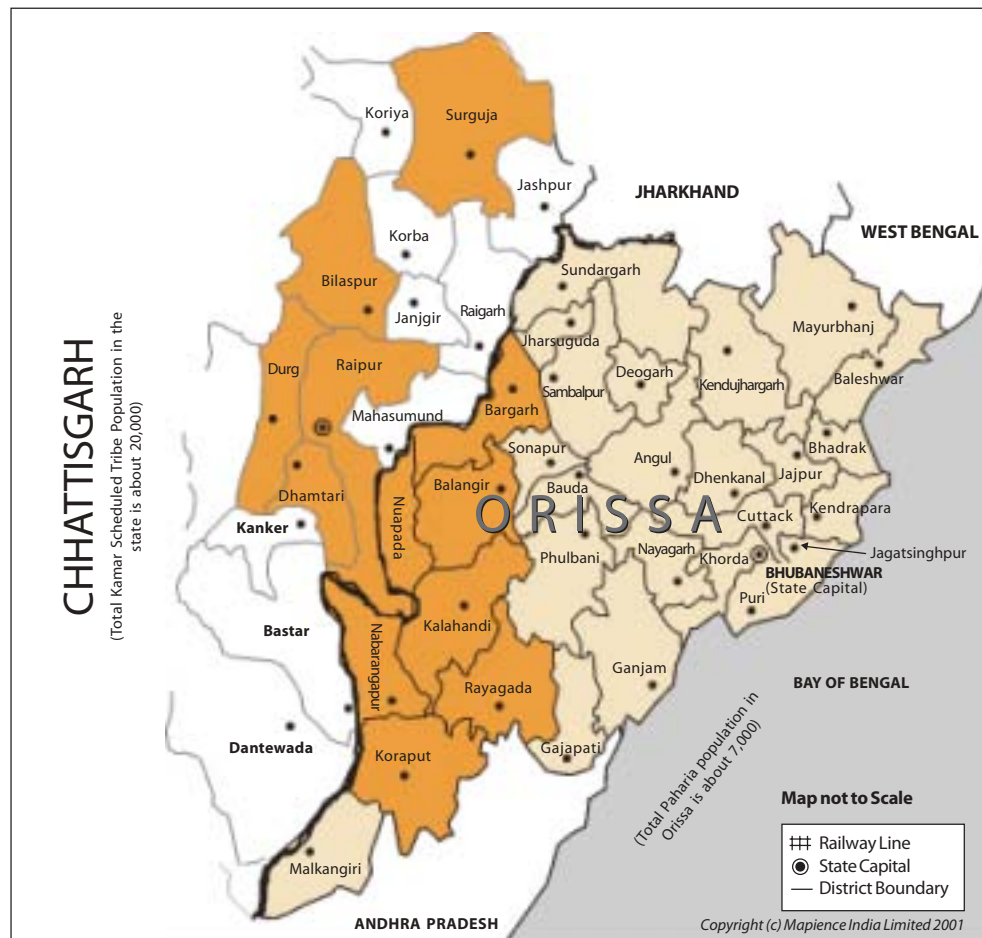
This adverse effect on the community has not been lost on anthropologists, NGOs, development agencies and government officials. However, concrete steps for the upliftment of the Paharias could not be taken due to the lack of information and research on this community.

³ The first notable work of 1916 by Russel and Hiralal (1916/1969: 323) categorically states that the Kamars (also known as Paharias in South-western Orissa) were "exclusively found in Raipur district and adjoining states". The presence of Kamars in the Raipur tract was first recorded in 1889 (Verma 1973:114). The population of Kamars in 1911 was about 7000 persons and they lived "principally in the Khariar and Brindanawagarh *zamindaris* of Raipur district of Central Provinces (ibid)". The Khariar *zamindari* became a part of a new state called Orissa that was created in 1936. But the adjoining Brindanawagarh *zamindari* remained a part of Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh and later Chhattisgarh. So, the region in which the Kamars/Paharia lived was bifurcated in 1936. The government order issued for the formation of Orissa state clearly shows that the Khariar estate, in which the Kamars/Paharias lived, was transferred from the Central Provinces to Orissa in 1936. The ex-estate of Khariar first became part of Sambalpur district of Orissa, then Kalahandi district in 1949 and with the bifurcation of Kalahandi in 1993 it became a part of the present Nuapada district.

Against this backdrop the present study was carried out with the following objectives:

- i) Prepare a socio-economic profile of the Paharia community of Nuapada district and the adjoining areas of Orissa, and also analyse their human, financial, social, physical and natural capital base and specific vulnerabilities;
- ii) Present historical factors and processes that caused denial of Scheduled Tribe status to the Paharia community and the impact of these conditions on their socio-economic status over time;
- iii) Suggest immediate measures which can be taken up by the state government for (a) empowerment of the Paharia community, (b) enhancement of their active participation in the development processes, (c) strengthening of their livelihoods, and (d) improvement of their access to basic services.

The primary suggestion in this study is for the recognition of the Paharias as a Primitive Tribal Group by the Government of India. In 2005, the Orissa government had sent a request, to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, for the inclusion of the Paharia (Kamar) community in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) order in respect of the State of Orissa. The state government has issued the order, pending inclusion in the list, to bring the younger generation of Paharias into the mainstream by



Map: The orange-shaded districts of Orissa and Chhattisgarh roughly show the location of the Paharias/Kamars who have close interactions/relations, including marriage and kinship.

providing residential facilities students alongwith pre- and post-matric scholarships, and extending assistance to the community under the Dispersed Tribal Development Programme (DTDP). However, the Central government has not yet been able to accord the Paharias the status of Scheduled Tribes.

The primary occupation of the Paharias is bamboo crafts and secondary occupation is primitive agriculture. Besides bamboos they also collect other Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) to supplement their livelihood and income. However, most Paharia cultivators are considered “encroachers” of government land. Politically, they are weak as they lack awareness and representation. Provisions of basic services such as education, health, housing and clean drinking water are either absent or extremely poor in Paharia villages.

Given the extreme and multiple nature of deprivation of the Paharias, there is a need to adopt an integrated approach to promote their all-round development. It is essential that the government restore the lost scheduled tribe status, preferably the primitive tribal group status, so that the Paharias obtain access to benefits meant for them. However, not much progress can be made without an understanding of the Paharias as a people. Acute paucity of literature on the life of the Paharias has been a barrier to taking the first steps towards change.

2. Historical Background

The term Paharia is drawn from the word *pahar* i.e. mountain and refers to the people living in the mountains. K.S. Singh notes that the community name Paharia is “believed to have been derived from the word *pahar* meaning hills” (1998:2704). Some Paharias share this view and believe that they are descendants of a sage. They also believe that they were formerly known as Paharia, as they lived in the hills, but that ever since they took up bamboo work they have been called Kamars (Elwin 1954/2006:163). The main occupation of Paharias is basketry. A 2001 survey conducted by NGOs Sajag and Sahabhagi Vikash Abhiyan affirms that the Paharias of Nuapada and adjoining districts are also known as Kamar and Banabashi⁴ (Swain and Majhi 2001:5).

Historian, Fanindam Singh Deo, has a different opinion on the origins of the term Paharia. He holds that the term is drawn from the word *pahara* i.e. keeping guard and refers to people who keep guard⁵. This would continue to substantiate the inference that the Paharias lived in the mountains and kept guard to protect their crops from wild animals and even guard the cattle of other communities, which they took for grazing and for which they received payment in kind.

In official records, the Paharias of Southwestern Orissa are recorded only as Kamars⁶ who are classified as Other Backward Classes in the state⁷ (Bhatt and Bhargava 2005:156). Even though in early anthropological writings they are called Kamars, this does not necessarily refer to blacksmiths. In fact, in the ethnographic literature of India, S.C. Dube (1951/2003:4) finds the name Kamar used to designate three or four aboriginal and semi-aboriginal tribes and professional castes that inhabited widely separated areas. He cites Russel and Hiralal (1916/1969:323) who, as early as 1916, noted that “In Bengal and Chota Nagpur⁸ the term Kamar is merely occupational, implying people engaged in iron work.” Russel and Hiralal add, “the Kamars of the British Central Provinces are a purely aboriginal tribe and there is little doubt that they are an offshoot of the Gonds, who are scheduled tribes, nor have they any traditions of ever having been metal workers. Like most primitive tribes, they claim to be autochthonous.” (Russel and Hiralal 1916/1969:323). Verrier Elwin (1954:40) affirms, “The word Kamar or Kommar is elsewhere an occupational term meaning a worker in iron, but the Kamars of Khariar (in Southwestern Orissa) and Chhattisgarh have no tradition of this.”

Further, there is no affinity found between the Kamars inhabiting Chhattisgarh, Nuapada and adjoining districts of Orissa and those in other parts of the country. But there has been a close affinity between the Paharias/Kamars of Southwestern Orissa (Nuapada and adjoining districts) and Chhattisgarh which includes marriage relations⁹. The Kamars of Southwestern Orissa¹⁰ are locally known as Paharias and are

⁴ Forest dwellers.

⁵ Interview with Fanindam Singh Deo, April 2008.

⁶ Blacksmiths.

⁷ In the OBC list Kamars are listed, along with Loharo, at serial number 59.

⁸ Now known as Jharkhand.

⁹ Discussion with Paharia leaders during fieldwork in April 2008.

¹⁰ Erstwhile Khariar estate.

largely engaged in bamboo crafts, particularly basket-making, and in primitive agriculture. The community engaged in making iron implements i.e., blacksmiths are locally known as Lohara in this region. In other regions of Orissa, the name Kamar refers only to blacksmiths¹¹.

The District Gazetteer of Koraput district (p.95), which is a neighbouring district of Nuapada, clearly mentions that the community of iron-workers is known as Lohara. The District Gazetteer of the neighbouring Kalahandi district (p.90) states that Kamars (Paharias) are engaged only in basketry. As regards occupations in the Nuapada region, J. Singh Deo (2005:3) categorically states that the Kamars “mostly live by making bamboo baskets and other bamboo materials. Lohara people prepare all the indigenous iron implements required for the purpose of agriculture.”

The mythologies of Paharias do not mention any association with iron work or smithery. In the 1940s, Dube found that the Kamars procured all the iron weapons, instruments and implements from the Lohars, the professional Hindu blacksmith caste living in the villages. The traditional occupations of the Paharia, according to their legend, are connected with the use of the axe, and bows and arrows i.e *dahi* and *beora* (two forms of shifting cultivation), collection of forest produce and hunting (Dube 1951/2003: 5). So, the Paharias/Kamars of the Southwestern region of Orissa are not blacksmiths and are not a part of the mainstream culture. Instead, they are people of primitive aboriginal stock who have not engaged in blacksmithy in recent centuries.

The Region

The western part of Nuapada district forms the borderline of Orissa and Chhattisgarh states. This area is considered as the most inaccessible by the administration. The most primitive communities like the Bhunjia and the Paharia inhabit this area. Besides the plateau areas, there are Paharia villages in the valley and hill slopes. The community depends on forest resources and agriculture. But due to the depletion of forest resources, perennial water sources have dried up and this has hampered the sustainability of the villages. The irrigation potential of the district is only 20.01 percent against the Orissa State average of 29.16 percent (as per the Orissa Agricultural Statistics 2003-04) which makes agriculture non-remunerative. Due to past negligence¹² of the administration and inaccessibility of the area, lack of water sources, erratic rainfall punctuated with long dry-spells, lack of education combined with exploitation of the moneylenders the region has turned into a land of gloom. This has led even to cases of selling of children due to starvation – (www.lokadrusti.org, accessed 24 March 2008).

The rainfall in this region has been very erratic and unpredictable. Due to decrease in forest cover, not only in this area but the entire region, the weather conditions have further deteriorated. For instance, the average rainfall was 853.90 mm in 1967, 2247 mm in 1990 but merely 671.54 mm in 2002. ([lokadrusti.org](http://www.lokadrusti.org), accessed 24 March 2008). Table 1 provides the details of the forest cover in Nuapada district.

¹¹ Interview with the Raja of Khariar, April 2008.

¹² The region has suffered primarily because of negligence during the British rule.

Table 1: Forest Cover in Nuapada district

| Particulars | Nuapada district | Orissa | Percentage Share of Nuapada |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Geographical area (Sq. Km.) | 3852 | 155707 | 2.47 |
| Forest Area (Sq. Km.) | 1849.69 | 58136.23 | 3.18 |
| Forest Department | | | |
| Reserve forest | | 26329.12 | |
| Unclassified | 0.44 | 20.55 | 2.14 |
| Revenue Department | | | |
| Demarcated protected forest | 1504.0 | 11686.44 | 12.87 |
| Undemarcated protected forest | | 3838.78 | |
| Other forest | 345.25 | 16261.34 | 2.12 |

Source: Economic Survey 2004-05, Orissa.

Paharia/Kamar Population

As per the 2001 Census the total population of Nuapada district (which has the highest concentration of Paharias) is 530,524. The Scheduled Castes are around 13 percent and Other Backward Classes about 30 percent in the district. Further, in this district the population of Paharias is 4284 which is about 0.8 percent of the total population of the district and about 2.3 percent of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the district.

In Orissa the exact figures of the Paharia population are not available. According to the Paharia leaders (of Nuapada district), the Paharias live in about seven districts of the state. Their estimates are that total population of Paharias in Orissa is around 7000. (Interview with the office bearers of Paharia/Kamar Vikash Manch, April 2008). Table 2 provides some basic information about the Paharias of Nuapada district.

Table 2: Paharias of Nuapada District (Block-wise basic information), 2007

| Particulars | Komna | Boden | Sinapalli | Khariar | Nuapada | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|
| No. of villages | 18 | 21 | 20 | 6 | 14 | 79 |
| No. of households | 306 | 335 | 313 | 161 | 163 | 1278 |
| Population Total | 1246 | 1006 | 853 | 579 | 600 | 4284 |
| Females | 599 | 505 | 427 | 288 | 270 | 2149 |
| Males | 647 | 501 | 426 | 291 | 330 | 2135 |
| No. of households Below Poverty Line | 306 | 335 | 313 | 161 | 163 | 1209 |

Source: Lokadrusti (2007). "Survey List of Paharia Villages of Nuapada District 2007".

3. Socio-economic Profile

Settlement

There are two types of Paharia villages. First, there are villages/settlements in which only Paharias live i.e. exclusive Paharia village. Second, there are villages in which Paharias as well as people belonging to other tribes or/and castes live together i.e. mixed type villages. The Paharias prefer to live in exclusively Paharia villages. In bi/multi tribe/caste villages they do not mix with others easily and generally construct their settlement/huts at a distance from other communities in the village. Paharia families maintain a close relationship within their cluster. The average family size of the Paharias was found to be only 3.13 persons, according to the Sajag and Sahabhagi Vikash Abhiyan survey of 2001 (Swain and Majhi 2001:4).

The concept of private property among the Paharias used to be very weak in the previous centuries. They practiced basketry and shifting cultivation and collected various NTFPs. According to a Paharia leader, Sukal Paharia (2008:72), “they were maintaining a nomadic life in the past. They were shifting their family where bamboo, different roots, fruits and meat were available. They were practicing the shifting cultivation for fulfilling minimum need of the family (That made them not to record any land in their name). They considered that the whole landscape is owned by Sihansani Mati (Goddess of soil) and Bhimaa (God of rain, crop, and fruits). No human being can encroach upon it because land belongs to God. In this process Government and non-tribals have taken away their land”. But they settled down gradually and have been living at the present sites for generations.

The regions in which the Paharias live and the type of economic activities they practice are not suitable for large nucleated settlements. For nearly six months a year they are engaged in food gathering. With increasing depletion of forest resources and government restrictions imposed on use of these resources, the importance of land for earning livelihoods has significantly increased.

Population and Literacy

Population

As per the Lokadrusti survey of 2004 the population of Paharia in the 24 sample villages, of Nuapada district, was 2014 persons. This comprises 1018 males (50.5 percent) and 996 females (49.5 percent). It is observed that the male population is 2 percent higher in Komna block, 0.4 percent higher in Boden block but 0.7 percent lower than females in Sinapali block of the Nuapada district.

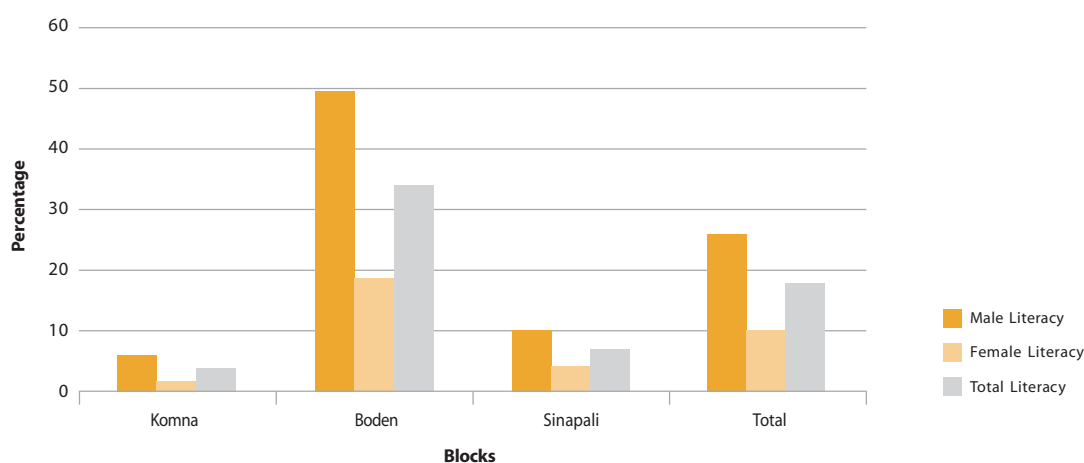
Another survey by NGOs Sajag and Sahabhagi Vikash Abhiyan shows that the population of the Paharias in Nuapada district (where Paharias have maximum concentration) has remained almost static between 2001 and 2007. The infant mortality rate under five years is found to be 128 per thousand. The survey also mentions the fear expressed by some people that “the population of Paharia/Kamar in Orissa is constantly declining and unless some special measures are taken up they may get wiped out very soon” Sajag and Sahabhagi Vikash Abhiyan survey (Swain and Majhi 2001:4).

Literacy

The extreme deprivation of the Paharias is reflected in their low literacy rate which is half the literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes of Orissa. The literacy rate of the Paharias of Komna, Boden and Sinapali blocks put together is 18.1 percent (2004 Lokadrusti survey) whereas the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in Orissa as per the 2001 census is 37.4 percent (Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute 2008). The literacy rate of the Paharias also varies from a mere 4.2 percent in Komna block to 34.4 percent in Boden block. The female literacy rate is lower than the male literacy rate.

Additionally, the Sajag and Sahabhagi Vikash Abhiyan survey of 2001 found that among the Paharias in Orissa only four men and one woman had studied upto standard X. As of April 2008, only one Paharia male was found to have studied up to graduation, and there are only two Paharia males (including the one who has graduated) in Orissa who have passed plus-two school level (Fieldwork, April 2008). Figure 1 gives the details of the literacy rate (2004) of the Paharias in three blocks of Nuapada district.

Figure 1: Literacy Rate of Paharias (Block- wise)



Source: Lokadrusti.

Occupation and Livelihood

The Paharia's means of livelihood includes basket-making, agriculture, hunting, fishing, and collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). But with the imposition of forest laws and the wildlife act, their dependence on hunting and fishing reduced and they started to rely largely on basket-making and primitive agriculture to earn their living.

According to the Lokadrusti survey of 2004, out of the 460 households in the sample, 418 (91 percent) households primarily depend upon forest resources for their livelihoods. Most of them depend upon bamboo, honey and other forest resources. Of late bamboo has not been easily available, due to deforestation¹³, and the Paharias have had to trek 25 to 30 kms to collect a headload of bamboo. This takes three days leaving the community little time, during the week, for other productive activities.

¹³ In Sunabeda region the problem is grave. The bamboo forest comes under the outer boundary of the wildlife sanctuary and a number of restrictions have been imposed with the introduction of the Forest Act and the Wildlife Act.

The bamboo items are sold, at prices ranging from Rs 5 to Rs. 100, at the local weekly *haat* (market), at adjoining villages and to local traders. The Paharias buy provisions on credit from the traders and in return are usually exploited by the latter.

A Paharia family generally earns between Rs 100 to Rs. 150, every week, from the sale of the bamboo items. This translates into an earning of Rs 14- Rs.21 per family per day. Revenues can be increased if the Paharias have access to bigger markets. In a few Paharia villages, in the plains, the local NGO Lokadrusti has formed women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and is getting them trained to upgrade their skills in bamboo crafts.

The Paharias also collect the flower of Mahul (Indian butter tree, *Madhuca indica* Gmel) (during March and April). In addition they collect *Chahar* (nut), *Kanda* (root, *Lpomoea batatas*), grasses for brooms, honey, *Harada* (Split red gram), *tendu* leaves (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), *Palsa patta* (Flame of the forest, *Butea frondosa*), *Sial patta* (tree leaves) and *Sargi patta* (*Shorea robusta*). These are sold in the local *haat* (market) and to traders. The tools used for the collection of forest produce are a sickle and a knife.

Agriculture is the subsidiary occupation of a considerable section of Paharias. But they do not own much agricultural land and those who possess small landholdings cannot cultivate enough to sustain themselves for most of the year. Some Paharia families own *patta*¹⁴ land on which they have legal ownership. But many cultivate "encroached" land either close to the village settlements or in the forest. The government fines them for this encroachment. The government has a law in place to convert encroached land, which a family has been cultivating for three generations, into *patta* land. However, the Paharias have not been able to avail of the benefits of this law due to lack of documentary evidence to prove that they have been cultivating the land for generations.

A significant number of Paharias work as agriculture labour and earn around Rs 20-25 per day, far below the minimum wage stipulated by the government. The Paharias, who do cultivate their land, do not have the means to buy external inputs for a better crop yield. They do not get any institutional support such as credit and subsidy for procuring better seeds and other agricultural inputs. The main crops cultivated are paddy, *mandia* (small millet), *gurji* (small millet) and *kulthi* (horse gram). The Paharias also own livestock: cows, goats and hen. A few families possess bullocks that are used for cultivation. In a few villages in the plains, the Paharias make use of water from canals or dams for irrigation.

Between September and December, the Paharias are engaged in paddy cultivation. From one acre of land, around 3 bags or 1.5 quintals of rice is produced. The Paharias ensure that one patch of land is cultivated by one family for several generations. They used to practice swidden (shifting) cultivation and consider it to be better than settled cultivation. But this type of cultivation stopped because of the restrictions imposed by the government. The forest department also considers the Paharias cultivation an encroachment on forest land.

¹⁴Ownership right.

Land Ownership: Nature and Type

In the 2004 Lokadrusti survey out of the sample of 24 villages, four villages have residents who are landless. In another 13 villages the Paharias have no *patta* land and all the cultivated lands are encroached. According to the Orissa Land Ceiling Act, these villagers are landless. Thus landless villages account for 71 percent of the total number of villages surveyed. In the seven remaining villages, the total *patta* land is only 21 per cent while the encroached land is 79 percent.

The Constant Threat of Displacement

Though the people have been cultivating encroached land for at least five generations, this has not been recorded. Kulthi Bai (70 years) of Adar, Jogri Bai (55 years) of Dhekunpani, Patan (70 years) of Datunam and many others are a case in point. They remain landless despite the fact that their ancestors and they have cultivated the land for over 125 years. Moreover, their homestead lands are also not recorded in their names. They have been branded as outsiders/encroachers by the forest and revenue departments. This seems ironical as some Kultha (Other Backward Caste) people who came recently to the Sunabeda plateau villages have been given land rights. The Paharias are still considered outsiders and live under the perpetual threat of being displaced.

The pattern of land ownership or landlessness of Paharias in Nuapada district is not the same across the three blocks - 27 percent (of the total families) in Boden block, 36 percent in Komna block and about 76 percent in Sinapali block. About one-half (45.4 percent) of the Paharia families have "encroached" government land and have been cultivating this for generations. There are also families which possess both encroached and *patta* lands. The size of landholding varies across villages in different blocks: in Komna block, 3 percent of the families possess *patta* land, 56.5 percent encroached land and 4.5 percent both *patta* and encroached land; in Boden block, 6.3 percent of the families possess *patta* land, 38 percent encroached land and 28.9 percent both *patta* and encroached lands; in Sinapali block, only 24.3 percent of the families possess encroached land and 76 percent are landless.

The Paharias own or cultivate three types of land locally known as '*Bahal*' (lowland which is more fertile), '*Bahali*' (middle land which has medium productivity) and '*Aat*' (upland which is less fertile). An analysis of the land ownership pattern of the Paharias reveals that the community mainly cultivates *Bahali* and *Aat* lands, which are of medium and low productivity.

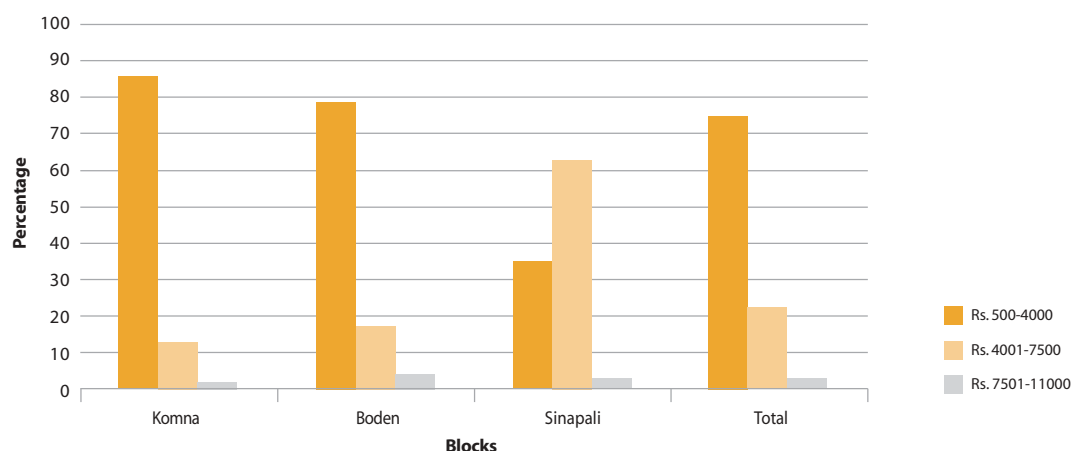
Income Distribution

According to the Lokadrusti survey of 2004, the average annual family income of the eight sample villages of Komna block is between Rs 300-3400 from agriculture, Rs. 150-2000 from forest, and Rs. 100-6000 from other sources. The average annual family income from all sources for the Komna villages from agriculture, forest and other sources comes to Rs 1181, Rs 1105 and Rs 611 respectively. In Boden block, the average annual family income of Paharias from agriculture and forest and other sources is Rs 650, Rs 1127 and Rs 980 respectively. In Sinapali block, the highest average annual family income of Paharia from other sources is Rs 2751, followed by Rs 2163 from forest and Rs 683 from agriculture. In Komna, Boden and Sinapali blocks the total average annual income of Paharias comes to Rs 2897,

Rs 2757 and Rs 5598 respectively. Taking all households of Paharias in all the three blocks, the average annual family income from all sources comes to Rs 3750. This is much less than the income limit of Rs 12,000 fixed by the government for households below the poverty line.

Further, a mere 3 percent of Paharia families fall in the income range of Rs 7500-11000 per annum. All Paharia families fall below the poverty line and in the case of eight out of 24 villages, all the families have an annual income below Rs 4000. Figure 2 provides the details in this connection.

Figure 2: Income Categories of Paharias Households



Source: Lokadrusti.

Livelihood Pattern and Vulnerabilities

The fieldwork conducted in April 2008 provided details about the livelihood pattern and vulnerabilities of Paharias in Nuapada district. The analysis is given in Table 3. Moreover, the fieldwork provided details of the availability of basic services, problems and the needed measures suggested by the Paharias in this regard. Table 4 provides the analysis of this.

Further, it may be noted that the subsistence barter economy of the Paharias is in the process of transition into a monetised economy. Their consumption pattern is also changing and their cash requirements are slowly increasing.

The subsistence barter economy of the Paharias is in the process of transition into a monetised economy. Their consumption pattern is also changing and their cash requirements are slowly increasing.

The Paharias are victims of “disguised bondage.” They take loans/advance from the middlemen/traders and are forced to sell their products at a very low rate. These loans are taken mostly for consumption before festivals/marriage or during the period of illness. They rarely take loans for investment in productive economic activities.

Commodity bondage is a common phenomenon among the Paharia community. The moneylenders give the Paharias loans/advances, during distress or illness, against bamboo products, honey and other NTFPs. The moneylenders in turn purchase these products at prices ranging from 25-50 percent of the prevailing market price. More than 75 percent of the Paharia community has fallen victims to this. This has perpetuated a vicious circle of exploitation and the Paharias are reeling under acute poverty and destitution.

Table 3: Livelihood Pattern and Vulnerabilities of Paharias in Six Sample Villages

| | | Vulnerabilities | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Livelihood Activity | Duration | Nature | Period | Remarks |
| 1. Forest-based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bamboo collection and basket making <i>Mahula</i> collection <i>Tendu</i> leaf collection <i>Chahar</i> collection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entire year in all villages (less in rainy season) About two months (March/April in 3 villages) Only in one village in April (less/ not in others) Mainly in one village in February | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult access to forest due to extreme heat and less availability of bamboo. Difficult to procure bamboo due to overflowing/flooding of streams and also due to tenderness of bamboo shoots and menace from mosquitoes. The slow drying of bamboo and the difficulty in the sale of bamboo products are incidental effects of the monsoon. Difficult to collect forest produce during the months of extreme heat and heavy rains. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer season (April and May) Rainy season (especially July/ August) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bamboo craft is the primary occupation and source of livelihood. Harassment from officials during bamboo collection reported in a few villages. Other forest products supplement livelihood. |
| 2. Agriculture-based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Own collection Agricultural labour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 5-6 months (May- October) About 3 months (June- August) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majority are landless; government land is encroached upon and cultivated for generations, but not yet regularised. Less/ no work especially during heavy monsoon months. Low labour wage (private)- Rs. 20 to Rs. 25 only. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rainy season esp. <i>Srdban</i> (July) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food shortage in rainy season. Productivity is low; practice of subsistence agriculture-paddy, small millet and pulses are grown. |

| | | Vulnerabilities | | |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| Livelihood Activity | Duration | Nature | Period | Remarks |
| 3. Labour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Government works Stone cutting/ breaking Brick Kiln | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In two villages (in December/January) One village only- for a month (March/April) One village only (in March) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate government wage work available (but wage rate @70/-), and in few villages. In one village, the Paharias faced discrimination in the allotment of work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Other wage work also inadequate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labour work available only for a few and for a limited time in a year. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low availability of labour work. Cases of discrimination found in allotment of NREGA work. Very low wage in non-government labour work. No work in rainy season (July & August) when alternative income source required the most. Lack of political representation at Panchayat level (not elected due to small population). |

Source: Fieldwork (Participatory Rural Appraisal) in April 2008.

Table 4: Availability of Basic Services, Problems and Suggested Measures in Five Sample Villages

| Service | Nature of available service and its location | Problems | Suggestions for improvement | Remarks |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|
| Education | Adar Village: Primary School – in the Village; Secondary School-5kms; Highest education obtained -3 rd standard (boy) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher absenteeism Distance of school and children's safety on the road | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check teacher absenteeism School in the village | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressed eagerness for education |
| | Mahulpadar Village: Primary School-15kms; Secondary School-4kms; Highest education obtained-7 th standard (girl) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nalla overflows in the monsoon hence difficult to reach school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational provision/ support like that required by scheduled tribes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only one graduate in the whole Paharia community in the state |
| Health | Chhatarbandli Village: Primary School-3kms; Secondary School-3kms; Highest education obtained - 3 rd standard (boy) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No government educational support like that provided to scheduled tribes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholarship, food and uniforms | |
| | Kenduguda Village: Primary School - Neighbouring village; Secondary School-8kms; Highest Education obtained -7 th standard (girl) and 10 th standard (3 boys) | | | |
| Health | Jayantpur Village: Primary School – Village; Highest Education obtained – 10 th standard | | | |
| | Adar Village: Primary Medical Facilities-5kms, Hospital – Block Head Quarters (80 kms) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of medical facilities, dependence on quacks | Set up Primary Health Centre and Hospital at the Panchayat headquarters | Lack of medical facilities forces the community to depend on quacks |
| Health | Mahulpadar Village: Primary Medical Facilities-4kms; Hospital-25kms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Zilla Swasthya Sevaks visits rarely (once in 3-4 months) | | |
| | Chhatarbandli Village: Primary Medical Facilities-3kms; Hospital-8kms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First witchcraft and later doctor | | |
| Health | Kenduguda Village: Primary Medical Facilities-10kms; Hospital-40kms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilities available at a distance and are expensive | | |
| | Jayantpur Village: Primary Medical Facilities-5kms; Hospital-30kms | | | |

| Service | Nature of available service and its location | Problems | Suggestions for improvement | Remarks |
|----------------|--|--|--|---|
| Drinking water | <p>Adar Village.: A well and a tank – 1 km</p> <p>Mahulpadar Village: Distance from dam – 2 kms</p> <p>Chhatarbandli Village: Nearby nalla (stream)</p> <p>Kenduguda Village: A well in the village</p> <p>Jayantpur Village: School handpump, tubewell – 1 km</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High fluoride content in hand pump water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tubewell/boring for groundwater Need drinking water arrangement in the village Piped water from nearby river | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe and clean drinking water is not available in most villages Government may consider relaxing the population size requirement to install tubewell |

Source: Fieldwork (Participatory Rural Appraisal) in April 2008.

4. Social Organization of the Paharias

Social Organization of Paharia/Kamar of Orissa

The pattern of social organization of Paharias is different from the Hindus. They are divided into four got (clans) which are further divided into several sub-groups. The clan-wise division of the Paharias is as follows: *Sori* (a forest creeper) – 16 sub-groups, *Netam* (tortoise) – 12, *Markam* (reverse of tortoise and hostile to crocodile) – 8, and *Jagat* (ancestors) – 4. The 16 *Sori* sub-groups are Katpharia, Khandangiya, Pardhaiya, Sewayan, Oadia, Singuliya, Kawaramya, Ambaliya, Nayepaniya, Nagrajiya, Pandariya, Ambamotiya, Boleghatiya. The 12 *Netam* sub-groups are – Mataliya, Dongriya, Sarajharia, Neikaha, Ranidiya, Kukudadiya, Bhomkadaniya, Toiebhuyan, Dandapaliya, Mesrajharia, Kawaramdiya and Jipripaniyan. *Sodi* and *Netam* marry with each other. But they do not marry within themselves, i.e. they practice clan exogamy. (Discussion with Paharia community leaders, April 2008).

The origin myths of the Paharias/Kamars and Hindus are different. Their social organization is also different. The Hindus are organized into a highly hierarchical caste system. But the Paharia society is based on equalitarian rights (Deo 1997:421). All the Paharia clans are totemistic, but Hindu clans are named after ancient sages, particularly amongst the upper castes. The primitive Paharia/Kamar people find no place in the Hindu socio-religious order. Hindus consider themselves superior to the primitive tribal people, but the Paharias/Kamars have their own claim of being autochthonous and superior to others even though they may recognize the dominance of Hindus and certain tribes in the secular domains of wealth and political hegemony.

Cultural Beliefs and Practices

The culture of Paharias is quite different from Hindus but very much similar to the Kamar tribes of the neighbouring Chhattisgarh. Their socio-cultural relations/linkages are stronger with the Kamars of the neighbouring parts of Chhattisgarh. (Fieldwork, April 2008).

Religious Practices

The Paharias worship their household, clan and village deities like *Mait*, *Maa*, *Gangadi*, *Sunadi*, *Rupadi*, *Budharaja*. They have a distinct set of gods and goddesses compared with the Hindus and other religious communities. However, many of their gods and goddesses are the same as those of scheduled tribes like the Gonds and Bhunjias in the Nuapada region and the Kamars of Chhattisgarh. Like other tribes, their places of worship are extremely simple and many of their rituals are performed by the traditional *Jhakar* (priest) who belongs to their own community or another tribal community.

Festivals, Clothes, Jewellery and Food Habits

The Paharias observe many festivals and *Jatras* (religious procession) related to forest and agriculture that have more in common with the tribal people in region.

Unlike Hindu women, married Paharia women do not put vermillion in their head. Men wear Sialdor (a small piece of cloth tied around the waist) which is not the case with Hindus.

The dependence of Paharias for food is on forest resources like roots, vegetables, birds and animals besides some agricultural produce. This is not so in case of the non-tribal communities in Orissa.

Language and Material Culture

The Paharia people speak their own Pahariya language (Paharia 2008:71) at home. Their language is influenced by Havli and Chharisgarhi (Mishra nd: 2). It has some commonality with the language spoken by the Kamar tribes of Chhattisgarh. The Paharias also speak Oriya, which is the main language in Orissa state.

The material culture of Paharias/Kamars of the Nuapada and adjoining districts of Orissa clearly indicate that they still have the traits of primitive communities. They use very simple tools which are handled manually¹⁵.

Marriage

The practice of endogamy is prevalent among the Paharias. The marriage takes place between the two *gots* (clans) viz. Sodi and Netam of the Paharias. Similar to the Hindus, intra-clan marriage is forbidden among the Paharias. But the Paharia girl, in contrast to the Hindus, has a lot of autonomy in the selection of her spouse. There are four types of marriages practiced among the Paharias¹⁶ and, except for the marriage by negotiation, none of the other types have any similarity to the customs of the Hindu society.

Primitiveness of the Paharias

It is only in the British period that we come across the reference to "Kamar" for the first time. V. Ball (1880) in his work *Jungle Life in India*, (p.588) wrote, "proceeding along the bed of the valley I came upon two colonies of a wild race of people called Kamars by their neighbours." The Raipur District Gazetteer notes that the presence of Kamars in the Raipur tract was first recorded in 1889 (Verma 1973:114). Deo (1997:419) states that in the 19th century some Paharias (besides other tribals like Gonds and Bhunjia) were landholders and *gaotia-thekeदार* whose job was to collect land revenue in the Khariar estate as per the British records of revenue settlement of 1891 and later years. In 1916, Russell and Hiralal (1916/1969:323) in their work *The Tribes and the Castes of the Central Province of India* (volume III) considered Kamar a Dravidian tribe and an offshoot of the Gond tribe. [But Dube (1951:5) does not concur with this.] In his 1947 article, S.C. Dube in the journal *Eastern Anthropologist* (volume I, p. 27) considered Kamar as the food gathering and hunting community, which maintains tribal solidarity and distinctive culture. He

¹⁵ Their main occupation is basket-making in which they use small iron knives in cutting and processing bamboos. The baskets of different sizes are woven by hand. During cultivation, the Paharias use wooden ploughs with iron ploughshare and bullocks. They mainly use a sickle and a knife in the collection of NTFPs like honey, tikur (arrowroot), and roots.

¹⁶ Marriage by negotiation is the most common form. The initial steps of proposing marriage lie with the groom's family. Another form is *Paisamundi* marriage. In this type of marriage, a girl is allowed to choose her spouse. However, this practice has reduced now. The third type is *Udhaliya* marriage. In this type of marriage, both the boy and the girl elope and stay outside their homes for three to four days. After getting societal approval for the alliance, the boy's parents invite the couple to come home. Then the marriage is solemnised. The fourth type is *Ghicha-tana* marriage which refers to marriage by coercion. If the girl refuses the alliance, then the boy forcibly holds her hand in public and carries her to his home. Afterwards the girl might consent. This is followed by the marriage ceremony and feast (discussion with Paharia community leaders, April 2008; see also, Singh 1994).

observes that they lived in small groups and their semi-permanent way of life was not suitable for large population cluster. Some of them, who had settled down, were gradually abandoning *podu* (shifting) cultivation and taking to basket making. Again in 1947, Dube in his article in the journal *Man in India* (xxviii, pp 138-139) affirmed this view. The Paharias share the same legends/myths as the Kamars of Chhattisgarh, who are officially classified as scheduled tribes, and also with the other tribes, like the Gonds, who live in the Nuapada region of Orissa.

So, it is evident that the Paharias/Kamars of Nuapada and adjoining districts are primitive people.

Interactions with Other Communities

The Paharias interact with the tribals and Hindus of Nuapada region and also with the Kamars of Chhattisgarh. They have strong intra-community bonds and prefer to live in relative isolation from other communities and caste. The Paharias, and the Bhunjia and Gond tribes as well as the Kultha, Mali, and Gauda castes live in close proximity in many areas. Though they remain socially distinct, they interact, influence one another and develop mutual adjustments. The Paharias interact with the caste Hindus for mainly economic reasons.

Each tribal group maintains distance from the others and has a separate Panchayat for handling their intra-community affairs. Apart from mutual borrowings, the tribals within themselves and with non-tribals have also undergone a process of competition, conflict, and compromise. In this process, some communities, particularly the Paharias, have been marginalized, exploited and pushed to extremely interior and difficult ecological pockets like the plateau areas of Nuapada district.

Relations/Similarity with the Kamars of Chhattisgarh

A recent survey by Sajag and Sahabhagi Vikash Abhiyan in 2001 stated that due to serious “depletion of bamboo forest towards the end of the 19th century some Kamar families from the Raipur district of recent Chhattisgarh state migrated to Orissa in search of new bamboo forest. The Kamars... in Orissa have been living either inside or in the vicinity of the forest areas in Nuapada, Bolangir, Kalahandi and Bargarh districts since then” (Swain and Majhi 2001:5). The report shows a clear link between the Paharias/Kamars of South-western Orissa and the Kamars of eastern Chhattisgarh.

The report also observes that the Paharia people of Orissa never consider themselves different from the Kamar tribe of Chhattisgarh. Marriage takes place between the Paharias of Orissa and the Kamars of Chhattisgarh. During festivals and social ceremonies people from these places assemble and visit their relatives' homes by crossing the state political boundaries (Swain and Majhi 2001:11). However, due to the tribal status accorded to them, the Kamars of Chhattisgarh are more developed than their counterparts in Orissa. Table 5 provides the details of some of the important features of the Paharias and Hindus of Orissa and the Kamar tribe of Chhattisgarh. The orange-shaded portion of the map shows the distribution of Paharias (Kamar) of Orissa and Kamar tribe of Chhattisgarh.

It can be affirmed that besides their historical claim, the Paharias (Kamar) of South-western Orissa even now meet all the criteria to be officially categorised as a primitive tribal group by the government.

Institutions and Organizations

The Paharias have their traditional “*Sama*”¹⁷ (society) to govern their socio-cultural life. It is a traditional community-based institution – a traditional Panchayat headed by the male community leaders of Paharias. Yet, there is no doubt that the Paharias are very deprived and poor. There is also internal segmentation in their society in terms of distribution of power and income.

The Paharias are part of the statutory Panchayati Raj system but they lack representation and voice because of their small size of population. This calls for political intervention at the institutional level. Formation of women SHGs in Paharia villages is a recent institutional intervention that has become popular. However, it is reported that only a few SHGs are able to work on income generation activities and move beyond only a savings approach. Their sustainability will be a serious problem when the promoting agency withdraws support. This intervention requires attention and SHGs need to be encouraged to undertake income generation activities.

Table 5: Features of the Paharias and Hindus of Orissa and the Kamar tribe of Chhattisgarh

| Salient Features | Paharia/Kamars of Orissa | Kamars of Chhattisgarh | Hindus |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| Origin | Mahadeo myth/Kachara Dhurva | Mahadeo myth/Kachara Dhurva | Brahma origin |
| Language | Bilingual (Oriya and Paharia) | Bilingual (Hindi and Kamari) | Oriya |
| Main occupation | Mainly bamboo crafts (basketry) | Mainly bamboo crafts (basketry) | Many |
| Secondary occupation | Agriculture, collection of NTFPs | Agriculture, collection of NTFPs | Many |
| Clans | Netam, Sori, Jagat, Markam | Jagat, Netam, Sori, Markam, Marai | Bhardwaj, Kashyapa, Nag, Markandeya |
| Marriage | By negotiation (most common); also by elopement, capture, intrusion (girl's consent essential) | By negotiation (most common); also by elopement, capture, intrusion (girl's consent essential) | Mainly by negotiation (girls consent not always essential) |
| Child birth | Traditional method-Umbilical cord cut at home by an arrow | Umbilical cord cut by arrow (boys) and knife (girls) | Both traditional and modern (in hospital) |
| Disposal of dead | Burial/cremation | Cremation | Cremation |
| Main gods and goddesses | Mait Maa (mother earth), Gangadi, Sunadi, Budharaja, Bhima, Dula, Baburai, Lachma, Jhakrani, Dangardebata, and Mahadev | Dharti mata (mother earth), Dulha deo, Thankur deo, Buda deo, Pogri deota, Gata-dooma, and Mahadev | Jagannath (Krishna), Durga, Laxmi, Shiva, and Mahadev |
| Festivals | Dussehra, Baisakha, Nuakhai, Holi (Fagun tihar), Asarkhena/Chauldhua | Harlie, Pora, Nawakhai, Dewari, Chherchera, Fagun tihar (Holi) | Nuakhai, Rath Yatra, Dussehra, Rakhi purnima, Shivrata, Sri panchami, Holi, Diwali, etc. |

Note: There are some similarities between the Paharias and the Hindus because of the influences that the Hindus have had on the Paharias over the years and ever since the Paharias started to live in the plains.

¹⁷ Committee of respected Paharias.

5. Denial of “Scheduled Tribe” Status, Its Impact and Their Claim

Denial of Scheduled Tribe Status

Several factors are responsible for the exclusion of the Paharia (Kamar) community of Orissa from the Scheduled Tribe status. Till 1936, the Paharias (Kamar) of Khariar zamindari were officially classified as Scheduled Tribes, along with the Kamars living in other parts of Raipur district of Central provinces. Till 1936, the Paharias (Kamar) of Khariar zamindari were officially classified as Scheduled Tribes, along with the Kamars living in other parts of Raipur district of Central provinces (the Khariar zamindari was part of the Central Provinces till 1936). In 1936, the new state of Orissa was created and the Khariar zamindari was made a part of this state. At that point in time, the Paharias (Kamar) lost their tribal status in the new state of Orissa. The Orissa government listed them as a Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC)/Other Backward Classes (OBC) (see Bhatt and Bhargava 2005:156). The Kamars of Raipur district continued to be a part of the Central Provinces and did not lose their Scheduled Tribe status.

The Paharias of ex-Khariar zamindari (now Nuapada and some adjoining districts) were mainly known as Kamars during the British time. Anthropological literature on the subject, like the works by Ball (1880), Russel and Hiralal (1916), and Dube (1951) provide the evidence to this effect. The Paharias mainly live in the mountains and forests. Their primary occupation is basket making for which they use bamboos from the forest. They have never been blacksmith who make iron implements for agricultural purposes.

The Kamars (blacksmiths) of the regions of Orissa other than Nuapada and adjoining districts, have never had Scheduled Tribe status and are a part of the Hindu caste society. They justifiably have the other backward class (OBC) status. The Paharias of Nuapada and adjoining districts (ex-Khariar zamindari) have been officially recorded only as Kamar (not Paharia) and hence they were clubbed with the Kamars of other regions of Orissa and officially categorized as other backward classes. This linguistic confusion regarding Paharia and Kamar has led to the denial of the Scheduled Tribe status for the Paharias with the creation of Orissa state in 1936. In this connection, Deo (1983:1) rightly observes that in the ex-Khariar zamindari region of Orissa, “The historical linkage has largely been glossed over in the whole exercise of identification of tribals to be scheduled.”

Another probable reason for the exclusion of the Paharias from the Scheduled Tribe status seems to be official oversight. Officials¹⁸ involved in the listing of Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes in Orissa, in the past, were mostly from the other regions/communities of the state. They probably knew of Kamars only as blacksmiths who are part of the Hindu caste society, and hence clubbed the Kamars/Paharias of Nuapada and adjoining districts (ex-Khariar zamindari) in the other backward class category (Interview with Jitamitra Singh Deo, April 2008). This incorrect classification has continued for over six decades after Independence and it is only very recently that the Paharia/Kamar community and some NGOs have taken the initiative to restore the lost Scheduled Tribe status.

¹⁸ Of the British Raj.

Impact of Denial of Scheduled Tribe Status on the Paharias

The Paharias have been doubly deprived due to their exclusion from the Scheduled Tribe category. Their counterparts, viz. the Kamars of Chhattisgarh are considered a primitive tribal group and, hence, get special support from the Central government for their development. This is in addition to the benefits they get under the policies and programmes meant for Scheduled Tribes in general. Paharias receive no development benefits from either the general or the special programmes meant for Scheduled Tribes in the country.

The main impact of this denial has economic, educational, and political repercussions. For instance, the Paharias do not get the educational benefits provided by the government to the Scheduled Tribes viz. stipend and post-metric scholarship, welfare schools and special schools called *kanyashrams* for girls. Reservations are available for higher/professional education for Scheduled Tribes. The Paharia are not eligible for such benefits. Due to extreme poverty, the Paharias have not been able to support the education of their children on their own and this makes them educationally more marginalized than the Scheduled Tribe communities of Orissa.

The Scheduled Tribes can get “*patta*” of government “encroached” land without showing any proof of earlier occupancy, however, the Paharias have to prove that they have been cultivating the same land for the past three generations¹⁹. In most cases, they have no adequate documented proof and so do not receive any institutional agricultural support in the form of loans, subsidies, seeds, and fertilizers, as that provided to the Scheduled Tribes.

Politically also the Paharias have been disempowered because of the denial of the Scheduled Tribe status. They do not have reservation in political representation and thus their political representation is nil at all levels, including at the Panchayati Raj Institution level.

Claim for Scheduled Tribe Status and Action

Criteria for Scheduled Tribe Status

The Government adopts certain criteria to declare a community as a Scheduled Tribe. The tribal people are known to live close to and in symbiotic relationship with nature. The main criteria used to include a community in the Scheduled Tribe list are:

- Traditional occupation of a definite geographical area;
- Distinctive culture which includes a whole spectrum of tribal way of life i.e. language, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, etc;
- Primitive traits depicting occupational pattern, economy etc; and
- Lack of educational and technological development.

¹⁹ Since they fall under the category of Other Backward Classes, the Forest Act clause requires a minimum cultivation of land for the last three generations, whereas Scheduled Tribes are exempt from this.

It is observed that the Paharias (Kamars) of Nuapada and adjoining districts constitute a primitive stock of people. They have lived in close proximity to nature. Their dependence on nature is very high as they rely heavily on the forest for procuring bamboos and for other NTFPs. They have a distinct pattern of social organization, culture and way of life. They are highly marginalized in terms of education and use primitive tools and technology.

Paharias' Demand and Government Action

The Paharias have made efforts to regain their lost tribal status and promote their development. In 1998, they registered an organization known as "Kamar Vikash Manch". The Manch now has 27 members who are chosen by village level committees. No formal election takes place and the members are elected, by consensus, on the basis of their leadership and mobilization qualities. The Manch has organized village level meetings in Nuapada district, two rallies at the district headquarters, one rally at the block headquarters, and three meetings with the Chief Minister and other ministers and officials.

The main demand that the Manch puts forth is for the inclusion of the Paharia community in the Scheduled Tribe list. Other demands include the declaration of the Paharia/Kamar villages/hamlets as revenue villages, adequate land for agricultural activities, transfer of village forest to them, provision for raising bamboo forests, creation of employment opportunities, removal of restrictions on collection and marketing of NTFPs and bamboo products, provision of amenities like primary school, all-weather road, electrification, community hall, Anganwari centre, easy institutional credit facilities, stopping displacement due to declaration of national park and sanctuaries, and initiating all-round development programmes (Swain and Majhi 2001:14).

Noted leaders of the region have also drawn attention to the plight of the community and have raised the demand for their inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list. Additionally, in the office circular of 2001 (letter dated 23 February 2001), the Collector of Nuapada District clearly noted that the "people belonging to the Paharia caste are the most underdeveloped and live in very difficult situation in the forest and other interior areas of the district. Quite a few of them do not possess ration cards and do not get proper facilities for health check up, immunization, school facilities and largely remain out of the developmental schemes". The Collector then proposed to hold a workshop to formulate an action plan for the development of the Paharia community.

On 19th February 2005, The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Department of Government of Orissa sent a letter to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), Government of India for the inclusion of the Paharia (Kamar) community, as per the recommendations of the state Tribal Advisory Council, in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) order in respect of the State of Orissa (Department letter No. 6866 dated 19.2.2005).

The Orissa Government has very recently issued an order (dated 19 April 2008) underlining the continued "extreme poverty and remoteness of the habitation" of Paharias (Kamar) in the state and their inability to obtain the benefits of socio-economic development programmes despite its recommendation to the Government of India for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list. The state government has issued the order, pending inclusion in the list, to bring the younger generation of Paharias into the mainstream by providing residential facilities students along with pre- and post-matric scholarships, and extending assistance to the community under the Dispersed Tribal Development Programme (DTDP). However, the Central government has not yet been able to accord the Paharias the status of Scheduled Tribes.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

The Paharias are an extremely marginalised community. Their elaborate/involved interactions with the forest has both been a foundation of their symbiotic bond and for their bodily and cultural survival. Living with the forest, they are not oriented to live out of it and fail to cope with the outside world. Simultaneously, they are in a state of transition and need to be supported through the process of change.

Paharia women form a sizeable part of the work force in NTFP collection, bamboo works and the agriculture sector. Despite their vital economic role not only outside the household but also within, they face varied types of gender-based inequalities. The existing patriarchal hegemony, lower literacy and the working ethos of the Paharia society marginalise them. They suffer from a number of social abuses at home including domestic violence, early widowhood, and lack of elementary health care. A few NGOs, like Lokadrusti, have intervened in some villages through the formation of women SHGs. The aim is to develop the natural resource base through women's groups so as to improve access to resources and livelihoods and to foster partnership with the Government and its agencies.

Suggestions

- i As Paharias suffer from multiple deprivation and exclusion, a sectoral and piecemeal approach to their development will not be of much significance. What is required is an integrated approach to promote their all-round development. It is also essential to adopt a participatory approach to their development in which they are enabled to become a partner rather than a mere beneficiary of development policies and programmes.
- ii The first immediate measure required to promote their development is to grant the Paharias (Kamar) the Scheduled Tribe status. In fact, it is strongly held that the Paharias should be recognized by the government as a primitive tribal group (PTG), which would entitle them to special government schemes like micro-projects for their overall development in a short span of time. Their claim for this is substantiated by the fact that they are still in the process of transition from a hunting-gathering stage to settled agriculture. A large number of Paharias still live in largely inaccessible areas in the mountains and forests. To enhance development efforts, it is suggested that a comprehensive survey of this community be conducted in the region.
- iii To address the problem of livelihood related vulnerabilities, there are certain specific measures that need to be taken on an urgent basis.
 - The government needs to provide *patta* of homestead land to the landless Paharias and also other Paharias who do not have this land. There is a need to provide *patta* for "encroached" government land as Paharia cultivators have been cultivating this land for generations.
 - In addition, the government should provide agriculture support in the form of subsidies and loans for buying agriculture inputs like seeds, bullocks, and land improvement/development. This will help raise the productivity of the land and increase income. In this regard, watershed development will also be useful.
 - There is need to augment the availability of bamboos, particularly in the months of extreme heat

- and heavy rains when there is inadequate supply. A special emphasis needs to be placed on the Paharia's requirements under the recently started National Bamboo Mission.
- There is a need to provide market support and network/linkages for sale of their bamboo products and other NTFPs at fair price and especially so in the period when demand for these products is low. For this, a Paharia member-based two-tier co-operative institution (village and district levels) needs to be developed and all products should be collected and sold by the co-operative in the market. This will also check distress sale.
 - Also the quality of bamboo crafts should be improved. For this, the Paharias require skill upgradation and should be trained accordingly. The Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) scheme could help in arranging training programmes for their skill upgradation.
 - It is essential on the part of the government to ensure that the wage works under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and such schemes are made available to them adequately especially during the months of serious food scarcities viz. July/August and April/May as during these months their bamboo crafts/basket making is adversely affected due to extreme heat and heavy rains.
 - It is also advisable to provide them training and resources for taking up alternative livelihoods. This is especially important for the Sunabeda plateau area which has been declared a sanctuary already by the government. The concern of the forest department is to reduce pressure on the forest to ensure conservation of biodiversity. In fact, the department has initiated banana and jackfruit cultivation in a few Paharia villages and is exploring possibilities with other departments for promoting sericulture. Other avenues could be goatery and pisciculture.
 - Livestock can be a good source of income and livelihood for the Paharia people living in the hills and forests. But it is observed that this sector has not been paid much attention to by the Paharias. Given the huge potential of fodder around Paharia villages, livestock could be a good source of income if adopted on a large scale for commercial purpose.
 - The Paharias face the problem of chronic food deficiency. The Public Distribution System has helped but it needs to be further strengthened to ensure adequate provisions.
- iv The government needs to pay special attention and make special provisions for the education of the Paharias. Schooling facilities should be provided in/close to the Paharia villages. As they are poorer than the neighbouring Scheduled Tribes, the Paharia children need to be provided with books, uniform, and meals at school. The problem of teacher absenteeism can be handled by offering incentives to teachers (e.g. monetary benefits and choice of transfer). Parents should be given an effective role in the village development/education sub-committee which can be formed in each Paharia settlement. They may also help in the management of local schools, in addition to the active role of the Panchayat Sarpanch. Adequate provision for vocational education would also be beneficial.
- v Adequate health facilities like well-run sub-centres and Primary Health Centres have to be provided at the Panchayat level near the Paharia settlements. Mobile health vans with doctors and paramedic staff need to make regular visits, especially to remote Paharia villages, at least once a week/fortnight²⁰. The task of monitoring and providing feedback should be entrusted to a village development/health sub-committee of Paharias which could be formed in each settlement. Sufficient supply of medicine also has to be ensured. The Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) centres also need improvement in their functioning.

²⁰ Currently such visits are rare, occurring once in three or four months.

- vi Provision for the supply of clean drinking water to the Paharia villages has to be made an important priority. Tubewells should be installed for which the Rural Development department may relax the existing population size criteria for the Paharias. Handpumps could also serve the purpose in many villages. In fact, there are handpumps installed in some Paharia villages. But in several cases, they were found to be non-functional due to lack of repairs. The villagers could be provided training and resources to handle such problems. There are also some villages where fluoride content is high in groundwater and hence there is the need for an alternative source of drinking water. Given the extreme poverty of a large number of Paharias, it is essential that some special provision is made for adequate housing.
- vii The Paharias also emphasized the need to build adequate physical infrastructure facilities like concrete roads, electricity, telecommunications and also public transport. They are not willing to remain disconnected any more or withdraw from the larger society, the development process and its benefits.
- viii Some Paharia leaders emphasized the need for intervention to tackle the problem of alcoholism which is an important cause of various familial and societal discords in their community.
- ix The government needs to constitute a special agency/officer for promoting the integrated development of Paharias. It will be more appropriate to adopt a partnership approach in which NGOs, Paharia community based organizations and Panchayati Raj Institutions would work together and draw upon their strengths for the development of the Paharias.
- x It is essential to make provisions for the representation of the Paharias at the Panchayati Raj Institution level so that they can participate better in the process.
- xi There is a need to form a village development (sub-committee) in each Paharia settlement with due representation of the poorer section and women. This (sub-committee) should be given the authority to participate in the supervision and monitoring of development programmes at the Panchayat level and also the management of basic services like school education, health/ANM centres, and provision of drinking water, particularly in the concerned Paharia villages/hamlets. Such institutional innovation would help better implementation and supervision and check corruption at the local level, besides making Paharias an active participant in the process of their own development.
- xii Given the existing gender inequities amongst Paharias, women have to be systematically organized to be active agents in the development process. There is a need to make provision for adequate orientation, wider exposure and regular monitoring of the SHGs to build their capacity in the desired direction. They need be guided not only by short-term considerations of meeting the deposits targets but also by long-term considerations of sustainability.
- xiii In the case of the displacement issue of Paharias in the Sonabeda plateau area, which has been declared a wildlife sanctuary, there is a need for sincere mutual consultations and discussions between the Government and the Paharias. Only a process of voluntary relocation of the people on the periphery of the sanctuary with a sound rehabilitation package can yield fruitful results for both the well being of the people and the wildlife. Collection of NTFPs by the Paharias should not be stopped because this will bring disaster to their livelihood and life.
- xiv NGOs can play an important role in facilitating the development of Paharias. They would bring in a concern for growth as well as welfare and could initiate dialogue with the government, to utilise the cultivable wasteland and degraded forest land. The priority would be the planting of species suitable for meeting the local needs. A few NGOs are already working with the Paharias for social mobilisation and formation of SHGs. This process needs to be further intensified and broadened.

- xv The Orissa government has recently initiated the process to pay special attention to the Paharias in all development and welfare programmes until the Paharias regain their lost Scheduled Tribe status.
- xvi Finally, it needs to be realised that the Paharia people have a knowledge base rooted in their centuries of experiences, practices and living with nature. Generally, the outside development agencies bring with them knowledge gained from formal education and training. They mostly treat the local knowledge as unscientific and irrelevant, and hence outrightly reject it. They impose on the local people their own formal knowledge and kill the knowledge system of the locals. There is a need to adopt a participatory approach, involving intensive interactions with the Paharias and nurture a natural learning process for all involved. The summary of suggestion is provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of Suggestions for the Development of the Paharias

| Development Issue | Suggested Measures |
|--|---|
| 1. Development Approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated approach (not sectoral and piecemeal) • Targeted approach • Sustainable and participatory approach • Partnership approach |
| 2. Addressing Livelihood Vulnerabilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land <i>patta</i> for landless Paharia families, Homestead <i>patta</i> for those who do not have it • Recognition of rights and granting of <i>patta</i> of “encroached” land • Agricultural support (as loans and subsidy) to raise productivity and income • Augment supply of bamboos, especially in the lean season, by undertaking bamboo plantation on government wasteland and community land (National Bamboo Mission may help) • Train for skill upgradation of bamboo crafts (Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana may help) • Marketing support for sale of bamboo products and other NTFPs (formation of cooperatives) • Provision of training and resources for taking up alternative self-employment and semi/skilled wage works— especially animal husbandry, goatery, etc • Government wage employment works particularly during the months of food shortage (April/May and July/August) |
| 3. Exclusion from the Scheduled Tribe category and classification as Other Backward Classes leading to deprivation from the benefits of Scheduled Tribe status | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to be accorded Scheduled Tribe, rather Primitive Tribal Group, status, at the earliest to promote all-round development of the Paharias • Only the Paharias or Kamars of the ex-Khariar Zamindari (Nuapada district and six adjoining districts) should be accorded this status, not the Kamar of other regions who are blacksmiths and in the Other Backward Classes category • The state government may consider issuing an executive order/ instruction to pay special attention to provide benefits to the Paharias under the existing general welfare and development programmes till the Scheduled Tribe status is restored to them. |

| Development Issue | Suggested Measures |
|---|--|
| 4. Basic Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up schools in/near the Paharia villages Provision for books, uniform, stipend and scholarship and meal at school Vocational education and training Set up village development committee in Paharia villages/hamlet with authority to participate in the management of local schools Incentives for teachers to work in the Paharia areas |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well run Primary Health Centre/Health Centre at Panchayat level Regular visits of mobile health team Adequate supply of medicine |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drinking water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Install tubewells after the relaxation of the population size criterion for the sparsely populated Paharia villages Install handpumps and train villagers on their maintenance In areas of high fluoride content in groundwater, alternative source needed |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for house construction (include special provision under Indira Awas Yojana) |
| 5. Political/ Institutional | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for special provision to promote their representation at the PRI level Formation of village development committee in every Paharia village/ hamlet to participate in the process of development and ensure their share. The committee must have effective representation of the poorer Paharias and women. |
| 6. Social Problem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce/stop the habit of drinking alcohol which is a cause of many familial and societal discords. Some social welfare organizations may help |
| 7. Physical Infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect the Paharias with the larger society Construct concrete roads, supply of electricity, telephone connections and public transport system |

Annexure–1

List of Key Persons Interviewed in Orissa

1. Deputy Secretary, Department of Panchayati Raj, Govt. of Orissa, Bhubaneswar.
2. District Forest Officer, (Territorial), Khariar office, Nuapada district.
3. Additional District Magistrate, Nuapada district, Nuapada.
4. Sub-Collector, Nuapada district, Nuapada.
5. District Welfare Officer, Nuapada district, Nuapada.
6. Block Development Officer, Khariar Block, Khariar, Nuapada district.
7. Mr Abani Mohan Panigrahi, Secretary, NGO – Lokadrusti, Khariar, Nuapada district.
8. Dr. Fanindam Singh Deo, Lecturer, Dept. of History, Titlagarh College, Bolangir district.
9. Dolaman Singh Babu, NGO - Friends Association for Rural Reconstruction (FARR), Khariar office, Khariar, Nuapada district.
10. King Jitmitra Singh Deo, Ex-Khariar Estate, Khariar, Nuapada district.
11. Office-bearers of the Kamar Vikas Manch, Bhainsadani, Nuapada district.

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