

The Situation of the Gonds of Asifabad and Lakshetipet Taluks, Adilabad District

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Land Alienation

Professor Fürer-Haimendorf has detailed the problem of land alienation throughout Adilabad District during the 1930s and 1940s, the efforts to prevent further incursions into tribal land which led to a period of economic security during the 1950s and 1960s, and, lastly, the influx of Marathi-speaking immigrants into the central area of tribal population in the 1970s and the subsequent decline and economic subjugation of the Raj Gonds and other tribals up to the present time.

In this chapter, I shall concentrate on socio-economic developments which I observed in a limited area within the taluks of Asifabad and Lakshetipet during 1976–78. In the early part of the twentieth century, Telugu landlords, usually of Velma caste, extended their sway over the plains running south of Asifabad as far as the Godavari, and also into the broad valley of the Pedda Vagu. With well-established links to the administrative machinery, these Telugu landlords took advantage of an uneducated group of mobile agriculturists, who could be evicted from their land either by legal manipulation or by simply occupying land that they had left fallow in accordance with their method of cultivating their land by rotation.

The interesting difference between the eastern area, which I will now be discussing, and the central area is that in the former the structure of landlordism became established and entrenched as early as the first half of the century, while in the central highlands Gonds and Kolams remained undisturbed until much later.

The history of the development of predatory landlords in the eastern plains began with the large-scale granting of title deeds to land which was either vacant or cultivated by tribesmen whose ownership was not documented. This took place when the Nizam of Hyderabad's government decided to maximise land revenues in the area. Grants of land, known as *watan*, were offered to anyone with political influence who would undertake to extend cultivation and raise revenue, and such *watandar* also had the right to appoint *patel* and *patwari*. Subsequently, some of the remaining land was auctioned by government, usually in a manner which gave the local tribesmen no opportunity to obtain title deeds to the land they were cultivating. Changes in the right to land were often kept secret by those in locally powerful positions. Thus, such cases as that told by the residents of Venkatpur village in Lakshetipet Taluk were common occurrences:

We have been cultivating our land in this village since the time of our great-grandfathers without any title deeds. Since the earliest time, we can remember, a certain Chokka Rao of the Velma caste has claimed that he holds the title deeds to the entire 400 acres of our village. Today his son, Puskur Narsing Rao, the *sarpanch* of Ajipur and Venkatpur, still claims that he is the *pattadar*. So each year the government *patwari*, who also works for the *pattadar*, collects Rs 10 from each of us as rent for every acre that we

cultivate. But he has never given us any receipts. In 1972 the deputy **tahsildar** and the **girdawar** came to our village and told us that we had no right to cultivate our land. They threatened us with force, saying that we would have to leave our homes. Then they went from house to house bargaining with each man, saying that if we paid anything between Rs 200 and 600 we would be allowed to continue farming our land. Many of us paid as much as we were able. Some of us had to borrow the money. Some of us were unable to pay, and we had to leave. Our land, which our grandfathers had cleared from the forest, was then given to other castes who were able to pay more money than we. Again in 1973, 1974, and 1975 the same thing happened, and in 1976 again they demanded the rent of Rs 10 per acre, but they also said that if we paid more money we would be given the title deeds to our land. This is because under the Land Ceiling Act the **pattadar** has to give away his land. But none of us are able to pay anything, and we are now due to pay this and are frightened that we will lose all our land.

The few tribals that live today on the plains around Asifabad or on either side of the road south from Asifabad through Tandur, Mancherial, and Bellampalli to Lakshetipet are now either landless labourers living on the periphery of large, caste-Hindu villages, or else they live in small hamlets totally dominated by landlords. The landlords of Asifabad are largely Marathi-speaking Vaishnava Brahmins, who worked as **patwari** in the government at the time of issuing titles and managed to get large tracts of land registered in their names. In the south of this eastern area, Lakshetipet Taluk, the land became the property of two brothers, one of whom had been the police **patel** to the Narsapur rajas who had held this area as **jagir**.

This penetration by non-tribal landlords had two main effects. First, it meant that the tribal occupants of the land had to pay cash rents, which in turn meant they had to grow some cash crops. With the new road built during the 1920s from Asifabad to Lakshetipet and the rapid increase in traders entering the area and opening markets, these became increasingly profitable. Forty years ago, there was only one weekly market in the Vatti Vagu and Moar valleys; today there are six weekly markets and one daily market. The need to pay cash rents stimulated the cultivation of cash crops, and these in turn made the purchase of consumer goods possible. This vicious circle gave rise to a further penetration by traders and a shift from a relatively self-sufficient economy to one dependent on outside products and credit facilities, provided by moneylenders, a well-known trend in most tribal areas of India which has always resulted in exploitation and further land alienation.

Due to this period of oppression and to the alienation of their land, many tribals left the plains area and moved westwards and northwards into the intermontane zone where the headwaters of the Vatti Vagu River cut into the escarpment of the central Adilabad Plateau. This is an area less dominated by Telugu-speaking landlords, who feared its wildness and were not accustomed to its heavier, black cotton and mixed, sandy soils. This is an area of **kharif** (monsoon) crops rather than **rabi** (winter) crops. Thus all twelve households of the Talapet hamlet of Mangi village left the plains village to the south, called Talapet, and settled in Mangi in the 1950s. Similarly, the villagers of Gangapur, near Tilani, were migrants from just west of the main road from Asifabad to Lakshetipet, where a large Muslim landlord had oppressed them. This wholesale migration from the plains was further encouraged by government, which offered grants of 15 acres of land in uncleared forest under its policy of encouraging a reconsolidation of tribals in the interior areas, where they could be afforded a new economic security and be protected from economic penetration by non-tribal communities. In this way, the village of Bhimrelli was consolidated under a grant scheme, and the hamlet of Ginnedhari began its expansion from some twelve households to more than sixty.

The intermontane zone had never received the full brunt of land alienation, mainly because Telugu-speaking landlords were not interested in ousting the tribals from their land and

populating it with caste-Hindu dependents or in farming it themselves with hired labour. Yet they dominated the area for two purposes: rent farming and cattle grazing. Until overgrazing largely destroyed the excellent natural grass cover in the broad, flat valleys and on the hillsides, the plains cultivators used to send their stock herds into this area for summer grazing. Even today, the tribal inhabitants of such hamlets as Gutaguda and Tokeguda of Mangi village depend for a large part of their economy on grazing the cattle of plainsmen. For this reason, the previously tribal village of Mankapur in Lakshetipet Taluk is still dominated by one of the most rapacious of the Velma landlords from Mandamari, a locality near the road between Asifabad and Lakshetipet, which was once a purely tribal village but since the 1920s has slowly grown into a trading town with only a few households of Gonds, who live as wage labourers or by gathering firewood for the nearby mining towns.

The condition of Mankapur village is very interesting because it shows the indirect hold that the landlords have over this area. Some fifty years ago, two Kolams came and cleared some land in Mankapur. However, after a few years of bad harvests they mortgaged the land to the Velma landlord of Mandamari. Learning that this was an area of highly fertile soil, this landlord sent his bailiff, who was also the government *patwari*, to the villages of Selvella and Irkepalli. As *patwari*, he encouraged eight families of Raj Gonds to move to Mankapur and clear as much land as they wanted on the promise that they would be given the title to this land. The *patwari* then registered this land in the name of the landlord. The village has now grown to twenty-four Gond and forty Pardhan households. Twelve of these households have title deeds to about eight acres of land, but they do not know where this land is. They now all live either by renting land at Rs 20 an acre or by farm labour. Almost all the population is in debt to the resident shopkeeper, who is an agent of the landlord. When it was heard that a special social service officer was giving tribals titles to fifteen acres of land, many residents cleared new forest and were encouraged to apply for the title. Though *patta* were granted to the villagers, the *patwari* withheld the certificates, and forty years later the Gonds still do not know what land is in whose name. In 1968, when illicit cultivation in reserved forest was regularized, every villager was to receive the title to eight acres, but none of them have yet been given these papers. So far the villagers have sent seven joint petitions to the government in order to discover the true status of the title ownership. Each time that they have done so, orders have come to the *patwari*, who is also the landlord's bailiff, to make an inquiry. Each time he has threatened the villagers, and the matter has been hushed up. Not only is the landlord rent farming the land, which the tribals see as their rightful inheritance for having cleared the forest, but he is also over-riding their legal rights. When communist and Naxalite ideology percolated into this district in 1975, many of the tribals began to clear new forest land in an area of some 300 acres which the landlord had used for grazing his cattle. To stop this process, the landlord took advantage of the conditions which at the time had been created by the Maintenance of Internal Security Act passed by the government of Mrs. Indira Gandhi to trump up against three household heads false accusations of holding political meetings and inciting the villagers. False charges of Naxalite adherence were produced, and only after one year in prison and considerable efforts by concerned tribal supporters were the three released with the charges against them dropped.

However, the main force of land alienation in the intermontane zone has not been due to the large, absentee Velma-caste landlords, but rather to smaller local landlords, who are distant cousins of the absentee landlords but live under the same umbrella of corrupt links through the large landlords to government officials to preserve their dominance as Velma *doralu*, or landowning "big men," within a caste framework. These small landlords moved into tribal

villages and slowly took them over, initially using tribal land and then encouraging the Gonds to clear more land and moving non-tribals onto the original land. In this way Tilani, which was once a small tribal village, the seat of a Gond raja, the ruins of whose old mud fort can still be seen, and which on the ordinance survey map of 1929 appears as a small clearing in the forest, now has 580 caste-Hindu households and is a major marketing centre lying at the centre of an open cultivated plain. However, the small landlords had to operate in an area dominated by the political control of their distant cousins, and their expansion was limited to control over the villages in which they lived. The surrounding villages remained tribal but were under the domination of the absentee landlord, who may have visited the area once or twice a year, while his *gumashta*, or bailiff, who was usually also the *patwari*, collected the rents.

The rents charged by landlords in this intermontane zone were not as high as in the plains. The absentee landlords were not interested in maximising their revenues from this area or in ousting the tribals in favour of non-tribal cultivators. The existing pattern of tribal leadership was not replaced, and no non-tribals were brought in to create typical caste-Hindu villages. Yet the position of tribal leaders was undermined, as all relations with government were dominated by the landlord's network. In particular villages such as Mankapur, where the landlord had his forest grazing, a stranglehold on the tribal leadership was maintained, and one hears stories of village headmen being poisoned for standing up to the landlord's authority. But, in the majority of villages of this zone, the tribals continued to cultivate the land they had cleared as tenants, lease-holders, or sharecroppers. The major threat to their landholdings came not from the landlords, but from the ever-expanding population of new castes introduced by the smaller landlords. Here we are particularly concerned with the Perka cultivating caste. Through lending cash and grain to tribals, Perkas managed to obtain large quantities of tribal land, illegally registered in their name in breach of the Hyderabad Tribal Areas Regulation of 1949, under which all tribal-held title land was inalienable. A notorious case here is that of the village of Goegaon, which was originally a purely tribal village but has now lost all its tribal cultivators. Some seventy years ago, a group of Raj Gonds settled in Goegaon and cleared land for themselves. They soon discovered that the land had been given as a gift, *inam*, to the Muslim Abdul Qayyum Khan. They paid him a nominal rent of Rs 5 a year and were happy in the knowledge that they had the rights of a protected tenancy. After the demise of the Nizam's government, the landlord vanished, and the cultivators were granted permanent title to their protected tenancies. However, the *patwari* has continued to tell them that they must pay him Rs 200 before he can give them their certificates. None of them has ever discovered the official position as to who owns what land, though they continue to cultivate the land and to mortgage it at times of bad harvests. Pendram Jangubai told me the following story in October 1977:

Maravi Jangu mortgaged all his land to Pettem Enkaiah, a Perka of Perkapalli hamlet of Tilani, for four years. In 1972, after the mortgage agreement was finished, Maravi Jangu tried to re-occupy his land, taking men and ploughs to the field. That evening Pettem Enkaiah came with a party of more than fifty Perkas and dragged and beat the Gonds brutally with sticks. Five of our villagers rushed to help them. They were all set upon by the Perkas and badly kicked and trampled and had chilli powder rubbed in their eyes. The next day I took them all in my cart with my son Jaithu to Asifabad. First we went to the police *amin*. We showed him the wounded. He told us to wait outside. Then he came back with the Samithi president and our *patwari*. Later many Perkas also went into the office, while we were kept outside. After some time, the *amin* came out and, threatening us, told us to go back to our village and keep quiet. We left, saying we would appeal to the district collector. As we were departing, our carts were directed to the hospital, where our wounds were bandaged. A month later Maravi Jangu died, after lying on his cot in great pain. Then his

wife, Mangu Bai, went to Adilabad to see the collector. She was told that an order would be given to the *patwari* to return their land to them. *Patwari* Sattaiah later showed them only half their land, saying they could cultivate it. The other half was shown to Pettem Enkaiah. Some nine months later, Mangu Bai also died, after continually spitting blood, since she was beaten. Today we are frightened to make any approach to our *patwari* or our *sarpanch*, and none of us have done anything to reclaim our land. However, in 1976 we heard that a special collector was appointed to return land to tribals. Many of our villagers submitted petitions to the *tahsildar* for the return of our lands from the hands of non-tribals. Whenever we attended the hearings, the defendants and our *patwari* did not come and our cases were dismissed. We were told to go away and bring our *patwari*. We presume there was connivance between the *patwari* and the *tahsildar* to dismiss our just case.

Such stories as this are typical of the oppression and alienation of tribals by caste cultivators brought into the area by the Velma landlords.

Once the network of landlords became established in Asifabad Taluk, a political economy developed quite distinct from that prevailing in the central and western areas of tribal population, where no landlords existed.

By the early 1960s, landlordism was not only firmly entrenched, but its period of predatory expansion had come to an end with the government's policies on land reform. The first and second generations of oppressive landlords were succeeded by the present third generation of highly educated people involved in politics, the legal profession, business, and contracting.

The change in the character of landlordism has been brought about by two main factors: the reduction in the rate of income from land and the implementation of land regulations. The reduction in the rate of income has been due mainly to the inability to charge rents as high as those charged previously, and also to the abolition of the landlord's right to collect revenue on behalf of the government. It has also been caused by the inability of the increasing population to make a living off the land available to it. The surplus from the land has had to feed more mouths, leaving less to be syphoned off by the landlords. As the cultivators become less wealthy (or perhaps more involved in the losses occasioned by a cash economy and the purchase of consumer goods), it is less possible for the landlord to live off the wealth of his tenants. This relationship operates because the traditional Indian system of land tenure tends to maximise, not the agricultural output for commercial gain, but the number of human dependants for political and social gain. Such a system is typical of the pre-industrial feudal structure of India.[1] However, the main factor curtailing the predatory activities of the landlords has been the implementation of land regulations and the expansion of administrative machinery, which makes it less easy for them to act as the only law in their local areas. The gradual creation of a whole package of laws relating to the power of the landlords means that their influence can no longer be wielded directly over the cultivator, but must be exercised through government agents. This means that much of their influence has to be marshalled to deal with the new bureaucracy of the land records office, the land reforms office, and the collectorate. Building up relations and playing power politics with the administrative machine through expensive and time-consuming legislative channels means a greater expenditure of energy by the landlords to achieve the same predatory ends.

The penultimate blow to the feudal rights of the landlords came with the implementation of the protected tenancy regulations of 1973. Under section 38E of this amendment to the

[1] R. E. Frykenberg, *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*.

Andhra Pradesh Land Transfer Act of 1950, all protected tenants were given the *patta* to their land *suo moto*, or automatically, by the government. This meant that the landlord lost all control over ownership and over his revenue.

Gradually the commercial capability of the landlords has been diminished. The final blow came with the government's attempts from 1975 to 1978 to get all land illegally transferred from tribal tenants to non-tribal tenants transferred back to the original tribal. A special officer was appointed to deal with this problem. Potentially, vast acreages were involved. It is not possible to estimate their extent, but in 1977 and 1978 the government put a team of clerks to work going through every record to find out what land had been illegally transferred since 1948, the date of the original Hyderabad Land Transfer Regulation. In cases brought in petitions by tribals who were aware of illegal transfers, 13,000 acres of land were restored to tribals by October 1977. However, if and when the programme begins to restore land *suo moto*, that is, automatically and without petition, many tribals will find that land they were never aware of owning is being taken away from the landlords.

The implementation of this act gave rise to a storm of protests by the landlords. At each hearing, witnesses were suppressed and land records officers paid not to attend so that cases could be dragged out in the courts. All this proved not only tiresome but expensive to the landlords, and the large ones became the prime targets of the special officer dealing with these cases. It was felt that if the power of the large landlords could be broken, the implementation of the act would go ahead smoothly and without much opposition from smaller landlords and owner-occupiers, who had acquired land illegally from tribals through the agency of the large landlords. The landlords had to resort to expensive litigation in the High Court to get stay orders and appeals.

The end result of this process has been that the landlords' direct control over the land and their ability to live off their revenues has largely been broken. Very few of them now rely on revenue from land to maintain their standard of living. Indeed, those who try to do this usually fail. The houses of many landlords are now in ruins. The vast courtyards which were formerly filled with the grain of their dependants now lie bleak and empty at harvest time. The landlords themselves often live amid crumbling furniture, with one or two old retainers in one wing of what were once ornate and spacious mansions.

The outcome of the economic factors that reduced the income of the landlords and the legislation that curtailed their powers is that their period of predatory expansion has ended. They are no longer the same wealthy power, though they still preserve a wide range of social functions as local "big men," or Velma *doralu*, as they are known in Telugu. Many now feel that if they are tied to the land as a class their future lies in the actual cultivation of their land as farm managers maximising their agricultural output rather than their human dependants. They are using modern techniques of irrigation and fertilizers to become capitalist farmers. Most have given up living on rent farming. Those who have been unable to adjust to this new economic and social climate and still cling to a mode of life based on farming by human dependants have resorted to the technique of moneylending and of taking large acreages of land under mortgage schemes from cultivators who are in their debt. This is today a highly complex game. In order to avoid having land registered in the name of the landlord, it remains in the name of the cultivator so that, in effect, the owner becomes a labourer on his own land. This involves oppressive political manipulation, the maintainance of a vigilante force, and the perpetual "squaring" of government officials, which drains the landlord's income. Such landlords are looked on as old

fashioned, but the extent of their power can still be felt in such villages as Rompalli in Lakshetipet Taluk, where out of 217 households only 3 have not lost some land to the landlord under debt-repayment mortgage arrangements.

Although by the late 1970s the power of the landlords had been largely curtailed, their earlier period of predatory expansion had pushed the tribals off the plains and into the intermontane zone and onto the plateau. The ordinance survey map of the area made in 1929, when compared with the present situation, clearly demonstrates the vast movement of people into the intermontane valleys which must have taken place. Where previously there had been only small clearings with tribal villages scattered sparsely about the valley floors, now almost the entire valley bottoms are under cultivation.

While the penetration of Telugu domination took place on the eastern fringe of the tribal area of Adilabad until the beginning of the 1960s, the upland plateau remained a largely untouched tribal heartland, as Fürer-Haimendorf has reported. But immediately after this there was a vast influx of Marathi-speaking agriculturist and other castes, who alienated tribal land and decimated the natural forests, terrorising the tribals and totally undermining their way of life.

A concomitant of this experience in the east was that by the mid-1960s a number of reform, revitalisation, and political movements had swept through the eastern area as a response to oppression, but had not affected the central area. The first of these was the development of the Shri Guru Dev Seva Mandal. Although this started in the village of Mahagaon on the central plateau under the leadership of a Gond called Kotnaka Suru, nearly all its earlier adherents were in the east in such villages as Ginnedhari, Tilani, Gangapur, Guddipet, Mankapur, and Gundela, where the worst effects of landlordism were felt. This was a sanskritising religious reform movement that involved all the educated tribals and many village headmen, though not many of the ordinary cultivators initially followed it. It was based on the teachings of Kotnaka Suru, who styled himself Maharaj, having been the pupil of a Maharashtra guru. He had supposedly become an ascetic hermit propagating a mixture of tantric, yogic, and ascetic Hinduism totally alien to the traditional tribal beliefs, though numerous scurrilous stories exist as to the true nature of his mission. He founded a society called the Shri Guru Dev Seva Mandal of Mahagaon, which now manages considerable sums of money and runs a jeep, the only tribal-owned jeep in the entire eastern area. His teachings involved ideas of *moksa* ("salvation"), totally alien to Gond religion, a ban on spilling blood, smoking, and drinking, the encouraging of new ideals of femininity and the worship of the *tulsi* plant, and the bringing in of Brahmin priests for the performance of a whole new calendar of Hindu *puja*. This has now caught on to such an extent that many Gonds in the intermontane zone have adopted *bhajan* singing, and the traditional village dramas of the Gonds have now become performances of the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

In the early 1960s, a brief wave of communist adherence spread through the eastern area under the leadership of a Gond from a village in the region of Ginnedhari. He drew his adherents from the villages which had suffered most from the oppression of Forest Department officials. He even stood as a communist party candidate in the elections, and a few villages raised the red flag. But in the end nothing came of the movement.

Also, there were two abortive attempts to set up an Adivasi Seva Sangh, or Tribal Social Council—a tribal self-help society within which the new, educated tribal leadership could develop a representative lobby for tribal demands and a cooperative movement for self-help. However, this foundered not merely on internal rivalry and corruption (all the funds were stolen by one headman), but also due to intense pressure to undermine it from the landlord class.

Once, when some members went to make a representation to the deputy collector in Asifabad, they were set upon by paid thugs in the back streets. And at another time when the leader was organizing a meeting in the village of Irkepalli over a particularly unpleasant case of oppression by Perka cultivators, they were again beaten into submission.

However, the most interesting element of the difference in the histories of social change in the eastern and central areas is the fact that the widespread alienation of land by Marathi speakers that occurred in the central area hardly affected the eastern area, other than in a few small villages around Kosara, ten miles east and some fifteen miles north of Asifabad on the borders of Maharashtra in the area of Savati, where the immigrants are Kunbi cultivators. How is the eastern area's relative immunity from Maratha incursions to be explained? To successfully settle in new areas, an immigrant needs influence over the local lower-level and middle-range government officials, which is developed through informal networks. In the eastern area, such networks were already dominated by the entrenched landlord class, who jealously guarded their domain against competition from other groups. Village officers, *patwari* largely under the control of the landlords, were unlikely to allow land to be registered in the names of recent newcomers. The paradox, therefore, appears to be that the previous usurpers of tribal land reached an equilibrium, even if an oppressive one, and subsequently protected the tribal population from further penetration. In the eastern intermontane zone, the only major force still operating to alienate tribal land is the internal expansion of the Perka cultivating castes, but this does not compare in degree with the Banjara and Maratha incursions in the central plateau zone.

In the eastern area, government is now achieving some success through a special tribal welfare officer in returning land that was alienated from the tribals after 1948. Although the real quantities of land may not be large (1,867 acres in Asifabad Taluk and 810 acres in Lakshetipet Taluk between 1973 and 1977) what has been established is that the government regulations on the inalienability of tribal land can be and are being enforced, and the value of land that was original tribal *patta* land has dropped. In order to retain that land today, it is necessary to go to the expense of litigation in the High Court or else to mortgage the land to nationalised banks for agricultural development loans.

The Changing Community Profile

The second point that I want to consider is the social effect of the penetration of Telugu culture into the tribal population in the intermontane area of the eastern region. In considering this, I will bring into perspective the overall "tribal" category applied to the Raj Gonds and associated tribal groups.

In the foregoing discussion we have seen how the economic relations of the tribal groups have changed and that, by becoming increasingly dependent on other social groups both in terms of a cash economy and in terms of the alienation of their land, the Gonds have moved away from the tribal end of the tribe-caste continuum that S.F. G. Bailey proposed [2]. Here movement is towards role specialisation, social stratification, and ethnic heterogeneity in social interaction, involving enlargement and diversification of the network of relations. Also, given Bailey's criterion that "the larger is the proportion of a given society which has direct access to

[2] S. F. G. Bailey, *Tribe, Caste and Nation: A Study of Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa*.

the land, the closer is that society to the tribal end of the continuum" (Bailey, *Tribe, Caste, and Nation*, p. 14), the economic changes must be seen to have moved the Gonds further towards the caste pole of the continuum, in that they are now thrown more into a relationship of interdependence with, rather than one of isolation from, Telugu culture.

Given this increasing interdependence and contact, it is important to determine whether or not changes have occurred in the way the Gonds see themselves in relation to other cultures and if so, what is the nature of the change. In passing I have already noticed the development of a sanskritising reform movement mimicking Telugu culture, but more important is whether and how intercommunal boundaries have altered.

The Gonds, with their rajas, were once the dominant agricultural group. Their community of daily intercourse was limited to Kolams, Naikpods, Wojaris, Pardhans, and Totis. As we have seen, this has now been greatly extended, and with the effects of modernization produced by schools and the reform movement, various communal boundaries have changed though the primary communal identities have been preserved. Linguistic unity remains at this time, though the influence of schooling may yet achieve a change. And there is no reason to expect that intermarriage has increased. In fact, if anything, tribal identity has been strengthened by the relatively greater degree of daily intercourse with other groups and by the administrative reification of tribal status.

Fürer-Haimendorf, writing in 1948, identified a tripartite division in the social groupings in the area:

The so-called "aboriginals", who have been settled on the land since time immemorial and subsisted principally on agriculture; the associated castes of bards, musicians and craftsmen who are economically dependent on the aboriginals and regard agriculture as a secondary occupation; and finally the castes of Telugu and Maratha extraction—cultivators, artisans and traders—the Mussalmans and Banjara (Lambada) tribes, all of whom have their own origin and cultural connections in adjacent districts and have settled among the "aboriginal" population during recent generations without being absorbed within the social system that embraces the first two groups [3].

While this basic configuration is unchanged, to what extent have the boundaries taken on different qualities in the thirty years since Professor Fürer-Haimendorf carried out the original fieldwork? Using this tripartite division into (a) aboriginals, (b) associated castes, and (c) recent arrivals of mainly Telegu and Maratha extraction, we can compare the intercommunal regulations that traditionally apply with what is happening today.

The Gonds themselves, both from their mythology and from ruined sites of past civilisations in the area, realise that they are not the first people to have lived here. But the fact remains that they see themselves as the people who cleared the forests and, along with the other aboriginal groups, have first claim to be the original occupants. In the past, Gonds saw themselves as ritually separate from the surrounding groups, from whom they would not accept cooked food. The Gonds had no caste of priests comparable to Brahmins to perform religious rituals. Each clan-deity cult group had its own hereditary priest (*katora*). Worship of the numerous other deities at various shrines could be performed by any Gond of reputation, though it is common for Kolams, another aboriginal group, to be called in to perform rituals for Gond deities other than those connected with the clan cult. As their own ritual practitioners, the Gonds see themselves as a group which must preserve its purity by avoiding contact with others.

[3] *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad*, p. 31.

As one reputable Gond once told me:

In the days of our grandfathers we even washed our feet on returning from market. But now who washes? For that reason our clan god is weak. Before we were advanced (literally "out in front"), now we are backward. We are not following the way of our clan gods. We are mixing.

Even the mainstream Hindu immigrant populations see the Gonds as having attributes of purity. If a Hindu is asked how he evaluates the Gonds' status in the varna system, he will say that Gonds seem to be perpetually performing rituals themselves and must therefore be considered as high caste.

In general status, the Gond considers himself superior to the Kolam. They will not sit on the same *charpoy* together, and initially at least the Gond will expect to sit in the presence of a Kolam, though frequent and friendly intercourse between them gives rise to an assumed status equality. Fictitious kin relations exist between them, and the Kolams have the same clan names as the Gonds, though marriage regulations are different and the Kolams do not have the same clan cult underlying their clan system. The Kolam will often act as a priest for the Gond, though there is no system of patronage or payment in this. It is merely a matter of respect towards a people who are idealised as more traditional and in closer touch with the forces of nature.

The other important aboriginal group is the Naikpods, referred to by the Gonds as Mache. They have a language of their own, like the Kolams, but in the area that I studied they all speak Telugu as their mother tongue and know Gondi, which is the lingua franca among all the aboriginal groups. Naikpod clan names bear no similarity to the Gond or Kolam model, and again intermarriage is not allowed. Their clan and lineage names are the same as those of Telugu speakers. Whereas Naikpods have been shifting-cultivators within living memory, they have now taken up plough cultivation, though they tend to be less successful than the Gonds, because they live in small hamlets on stonier ground just off the valley bottoms. The few large Naikpod villages in the valley bottoms have been entirely taken over by Telugu castes, and the tribals are now landless labourers. A traditional occupation is the making of bamboo mats for a variety of purposes; Gonds pay for such mats in grain. Once again there is no patron-client relationship along a typical *jajmani* pattern with enduring ties of interdependence. Rather than a relationship of mutual cooperation, as between the Gonds and Kolams, there is competition and resentment between Gonds and Naikpods; the Gonds often refer to Naikpods as thieves and untrustworthy, whereas Naikpods assume greater purity than Gonds because they do not eat beef and pork. Both parties refuse to accept cooked food from each other and recognize this refusal. Each assumes a higher status. On the whole the Gond avoids entering a Naikpod hamlet, and he seldom needs to. But the Naikpod, being numerically less dominant and often doing bamboo work for the Gond, often enters Gond villages, where he is forced to accept an inferior status. Generally both Gonds and Naikpods are cultivating groups and therefore equivalent, but the Gonds are wealthier.

Traditionally associated with the Gonds are seven servicing groups (I shall not describe them all in detail here), some of which can be replicated among Telugu-speaking agricultural communities. Three of these groups have specific reference to the Gonds; their occupation is tied to religious service, and, since Gond religion has a different social organization from Hinduism, these three groups are distinct from equivalents in the Hindu *jati* system.

The most important of these three groups are the Pardhans, as they call themselves, or Pataris, as they are called by the Gonds. The symbiotic relationship between communities of

Gonds and Pardhans has been established by centuries of co-existence. The Pardhans are the hereditary bards of the Gonds. They have a clan and kinship system that is an exact replica of that of the Gonds, and each Pardhan household is bound by a patron-client relationship similar to that of a *jajman* to a number of Gond households of its own clan. Pardhans receive yearly payments and dues at specific rites of passage from their hereditary patrons or *dhani*. While the Pardhans' mother tongue is Marathi, they are guardians of Gond oral tradition and ritual music, which they sing in Gondi. The Pardhan is often called upon as an arbiter of Gond custom, and I have seen Pardhans, on their own initiative, object to infringements of Gond marriage regulations. While they are not the priests of the Gond clan cult, its operation is dependent on their role as messengers and arrangers of clan rituals among the clan group, which is dispersed across the entire area of Gond population. They are the maintenance men of Gond tradition.

In a similar position vis-à-vis the Gond and performing exactly the same role and function is the Toti. Certain Gond clans have Toti bards and musicians rather than Pardhans. The number of Totis is much smaller than that of Pardhans, but as they speak Gondi as their mother tongue, it is possible to argue that they have been associated with the Gonds for longer. Having a parallel clan and kinship system, the Pardhans and Totis like to claim a brother relationship to their Gond patrons, but while many Gonds are prepared to accept this superficially, they fundamentally oppose it in serious discussion. Both Pardhans and Totis are minstrel beggars and dependants of the Gonds with a lower status, though not in the Hindu sense of a different *jati* backed up by the complex rationale of a *varna* system. While travelling with Gonds I have slept and eaten in Pardhan houses, but the Gonds have had no sense of transferred pollution through me, though no Gond will eat anything other than tea with cow's milk and food fried in ghee from a Pardhan or Toti for fear of having to pay a symbolic fine and having a lock of his hair cut off. Equally, no Pardhan would think of entering his patron's house beyond the verandah. As economic dependants, both Pardhans and Totis frequently take cooked food from Gonds.

Theoretically, at least, both Pardhans and Totis share a similar relationship to their patrons, but between them there is a gulf of acute competition and resentment. Each claims to be of higher status than the other; they do not accept food from each other; and both beg equally from their Gond patrons, in front of whom they observe mutual avoidance.

The last aboriginal service group that I will mention here is the Wojaris, referred to by the Gonds as Oja. They are few and far between and by pure omission are not registered as a scheduled tribe like the Pardhans and Totis. They are nomadic brass founders using the *cire perdue* method. A family unit arrives in a village, takes up temporary residence in an outbuilding, verandah, or under a tree, and makes cheap jewelry, cattle and cart ornaments, the mouthpieces and trumpet ends for Pardhan and Toti wind instruments, and, most important, the votive offerings and ritual objects used in the worship of various deities. This work is paid for in grain or other foodstuffs. Whereas the Wojaris have a place in Gond mythology as *pen de Wojalir* ("the founders for the Gods"), their mother tongue is Marathi. Those who work in constant association with the Gonds have adopted Gond clan names, though they are not involved in the clan-cult complex. To all intents and purposes, the position in which the Wojari stands vis-à-vis the Gond appears to be similar to that of the Kolam.

Outside this group of aboriginal service groups, there are a number of Telugu-speaking service castes which are also found living in mainstream-caste villages. Important here are the Vishwabrahma-caste blacksmiths, gold and silver workers, carpenters, stone-workers, and

brass workers. This caste wears the sacred thread of the twice born and does not eat pork or beef. They claim a high caste status within the *varna* system and will not eat the food of the aboriginals, who in turn treat them as non-aboriginals and dependants with whom they will not eat. But in matters of respect there is a great deal of ambivalence as to whether the Gond or the Vishwabrahma should stand in the other's presence. Later we will see that with the start of Hindu reform movements, Vishwabrahmas are often used as priests by the Gonds.

The last three groups of Telugu castes that have lived alongside the aboriginals are three untouchable castes. Whereas all the groups mentioned so far share the same wells, though often at different times, these three groups live in separate hamlets outside the main ambit of the village and wash and draw their water separately. So far we have not found any highly developed concepts of casteism in relations between the Gonds and the other communities, but for these three communities, the Gonds immediately adopt a caste model of behaviour comparable to that of Telugu-speaking mainstream Hindus, even though the overall hierarchical principle which structures the Indian *varna* system is absent.

Highest among the three untouchable groups are the Inkars, known in Marathi as Mahars and in Telugu as Netakani. They are low-caste weavers brought in by the Gonds for their skills, though now their profession has been totally eclipsed by mill-made cloth, and they have become an ordinary cultivating caste. Beneath them are the Bhoys, known in Telugu as Manyepu and in Marathi as Mala, who are low-caste agricultural labourers. At the lowest level are the Madgi, known in Telugu as Madiga, who are leather workers. All three are categorised as scavengers who eat the flesh of dead cattle. While these three groups stand in a hierarchical relationship to each other, for the purpose of the Gonds they are all classed as Harijans. The Gond will not greet them, and all three are expected to remain standing in the presence of a Gond and to get off the pathway to allow any other person to pass. Gond children are often heard berating each other as "dirty Madgis."

Where these untouchable communities are found in association with Gond villages, they have been founded and have flourished under the leadership of influential Gond village headmen. In the past two or three generations, it was common for a *patel* who had accumulated wealth and influence to emulate the pattern of multi-caste villages of Telengana and employ Harijan village servants.

These untouchable communities must be distinguished from the aboriginal service castes of the Pardhans and Totis. The Pardhans and Totis do not beg for alms, but ask for their traditional dues as a servicing group with a long-term symbiotic relationship. This is a deeper relationship than the mere matter of economic dependence. The untouchable, in contrast, has no standing in the mind of the aboriginal; he does not perform any traditional ritual service, as in a caste-Hindu village. His position is simply a matter of status and caste emulation on the part of the Gond. The untouchable in the tribal village accrues only the negative aspects of his low status. To equate the Pardhan and Toti with the untouchable would be to adopt a castelike model that cannot apply in the dyadic relationship between each of them and their Gond patron. Rather, we have a not untypical relationship of two specialised groupings of agriculturists and traditional bards in the Indian environment, where intercommunal barriers are, not surprisingly, affected by Hindu concepts of ritual purity.

So far this has been a brief summary of the groups which have a long-standing tradition of interaction. I am not saying that the Gonds have not had contacts with other communities, which I will shortly mention, but rather that contacts were infrequent and were characterised by a mutual barrier against intimacy. Among the groups that have traditionally associated, there is

no model of ranked hierarchy to cover all interactions. The only form of hierarchy that exists is the simple dyadic one between the Gonds and the two groups of bards. Both these groups are actively involved in clan-cult worship and see themselves as sharing the same gods—"we are the people who worship *persa pen*" (the clan gods). To this extent they are part of the Gond culture complex. And this degree of closeness necessitates the most intense and consciously sanctioned idioms of separation.

To summarise this traditional set of community interrelations, it is necessary to distinguish the aboriginal groups which have had a long experience of interaction: the Kolams, Naikpods, Wojaris, Pardhans, and Totis. In this group, a set of neo-caste principles operates. The three cultivating groups—the Gonds, Kolams and Naikpods—are basically equivalent though separate. This equivalence is affected by the fact that the Naikpod can now be marginally included in the Telugu caste ideology and can claim greater ritual purity by not eating beef and pork. The Gond and Kolam are more or less of equivalent status, but the Gond assumes the status of the dominant group, not only because of historical precedent, but also because the Pardhan and Toti depend on him but not on the Kolam; this is balanced for the Kolam by his being considered a truer and more traditional aboriginal who often acts as a non-dependent priest. Pardhans and Totis are considered quasi-untouchable by all groups as traditional bards and maintenance men to the dominant Gond culture.

The Gond dominance in the economic order is symbolised by the deity Anesirar, the giver of food, who is seen as a divine Gond, the son of Bhui Lakshmi, the wealth of the land. The Gond makes the analogy that he "is Anesirar. He ploughs the land and feeds the Pardhan, Toti, and Wojari. Many communities enjoy the food of Anesirar—i.e. of the Gond. The Gond's hand is above and the others hold their hand below to receive the gift of the Gond."

But the most important message which we get from this, and the reason that I have referred to a neo-caste system, is that it is not a systemic model. The traditional model is based on a series of dyadic relationships that lack any overall organization or covering ideology. What will be interesting is to see how, now that the economic order has changed and the Gonds are in an environment of interdependence with the Telugu castes, the model becomes more systemic and more and more castelike.

The earliest Hindus with whom the Gonds came in close contact were probably Brahmins. During the brief period of Maratha rule in the second half of the eighteenth century, some Marathi-speaking Brahmins obtained grants of land (*watan*); most of the Brahmin *patwari* of later ages are probably descendants of those early Brahmin settlers. Their positions as *patwari* gave them considerable power over the aboriginal landowners, and large tracts of land became the property of the Brahmins, particularly in Asifabad Taluk. These Brahmin landlords were mainly town dwellers and absentee landlords, whom the aboriginal cultivator would meet once or twice a year at most, though the Brahmin *patwari* would have been more frequent visitors to the interior villages.

While the Maratha Brahmins had come from the north, much later Telugu-speaking Velmas came from the south. While the richest among the Velmas were absentee landlords, others settled in the district and built up caste villages around them. The castes that they brought in included the Komti, the Baniyas of Telengana, who initially set up stores and moneylending agencies in the caste villages but have now spread to almost every tribal village of more than thirty houses. Also, the higher-caste Kapu cultivators and the lower-caste Parka cultivators were brought in to work the newly acquired lands of the Brahmins and Velmas, and have now taken land from the aboriginals and developed their own independent villages with

their own Komtis. Along with these came a high-caste group of weavers called Sale. At the time, when their traditional profession was being undermined, they were taking up agriculture and were in search of new land. Also, the toddy tappers, called Gaur by the Gonds, the barbers, called Dandvi, and the washermen, called Wartal, arrived. As their population expanded, many of them took up agriculture on alienated tribal land. Only among a few wealthy tribals are the services of barber and washerman used. Otherwise the aboriginal groups perform this service for themselves.

Without exception, in the pre-modern phase the aboriginal groups treated all these communities as complete outsiders. All social intercourse was minimised, and neither party would take food from the other or even make physical contact. Any intercourse that took place was in public places, and neither party would have entered each other's house. Although the aboriginals eat beef, they were not treated as untouchable but enjoyed a status approaching that of Kshatriyas because of their position as the dominant agricultural group and their past history as rajas of the area. Here it should not be forgotten that the Gond raja of Chanda had considerable traditional authority until the 1940s, and the local caste Hindus are conscious of the history of the Gond rajas in Asifabad.

The interesting overarching aspect of this traditional Gond-centred model of interaction is that it is not systemic. The position of each group is established on dyadic principles, so that it is difficult for the analyst to find an overall model or system. In order to describe them, I have had to rely on simple descriptive categories of historically established intimacy with, in the case of long-established contact, certain subtleties more involved than a simple "them and us" model based on the criterion of adherence to a clan cult. There is no reason to believe that this model would not continue to structure intercommunal relations well into the future were it not for the advent of factors that have accelerated social change, such as the increasing degree of interdependence with outsiders. In this area in the past, there have been both tribalisation and Hinduisation. Many commentators on social change on the tribe-caste frontier in India only notice the process of Hinduisation, but Adilabad was dominated by the agriculturist Raj Gond community and experienced the immigration of people from the surrounding mainstream-Hindu areas who frequently adopted the tribal model of intercommunal relations which was firmly established for the Pardhans, Totis, and Wojaris, and which appeared to be starting to establish itself for the Vishwabrahmas. However, in the recent past, after the willing introduction of three untouchable communities, there was an apeing of casteism by influential members of the dominant tribal community, which appears to have been dependent purely on individuals and not to have percolated down to the community at large. By the time of my fieldwork in 1977, the process of tribalisation appears to have been reversed to one of Hinduisation. I now want to establish this at the level of intercommunal relations, before going on to look at the factors which created it and at its broader implications.

The classical tribal model in Indian sociology is one of "them and us." That is, the so-called tribals see all other communities as equally "them" and equally to be avoided in all social intercourse. But what happens to the tribal view of "them" under conditions of social change, increased communication across the "them and us" barrier, alienation of tribal land, and geographical mixing of populations? Is there simply a greater degree of intercommunal familiarity, in which the equality of other communities is preserved but the degree of social distance and avoidance reduced, or does the tribal develop a view of "us" encompassing a wider community, in which concepts of ranking give the tribal community a positive place in a

hierarchy—the Hinduisation model? Among the Gonds it is not altogether easy to pinpoint which model is being adopted.

The Gond himself does not have a conscious model of his relations with other communities other than the traditional one of "them and us," which, judging from the statement that "we are mixing" already quoted, is already redundant, although commonly stated. In the arena of national and district politics, the Gond is increasingly aware of his status as a member of a scheduled tribe. Regulations and the privileges that go with them are becoming known and are being capitalised on by the tribal. But that is different from the view that the Gond may have in his everyday intercourse with the other communities that live in the same valley as himself, although, no doubt, the two concepts affect each other.

Very briefly, I now want to look at the way in which the Gond's perception of his relationship to the new spectrum of communities can be said to have altered. It must be said that what changes exist are not to be found uniformly spread throughout the population, but only in those sections which are experiencing increased intercommunal familiarity. Whereas previously the Gonds treated the high Telugu castes, such as the Brahmins, Velmas, Komtis, Kapus, Perkas, and Sales, as outsiders from whom they would not accept food, this has been reversed, and all Gonds admit that they will accept food from members of such castes. The fact that a form of hierarchy exists is shown by the Gonds' understanding that Brahmins, Velmas, Komtis, and Kapus will not accept food from them, whereas Perkas and Sales are at least partially understood to do so. This implies a degree of equivalence between the Gond, the Perka, and the Sale, overlain by an understanding that the non-beef-eating Hindu will not eat with the tribals. (An important thing to remember is that the real opportunities for dining together are in fact minimal, so that answers to questions are hypothetical and idealised.) Whereas a large number of Gonds see the same equivalence as agriculturists applying between themselves and the Naikpods, they see the Naikpod as still standing on his traditional dignity of not eating with the Gond. The Naikpod takes the classical position of the marginal man, trying consciously to identify with the caste order and to reject his tribal background. Such a conscious move cannot be said to exist among the Gonds. The Naikpod therefore actively wishes to treat himself as separate from the beef-eating tribal in his attempt to climb the caste hierarchy, a process in which the Gond has not become involved, except for Gonds who follow the teachings of the reform sect.

Relations with the two Telugu-speaking groups that are dependent on the Gonds, the Dandvi and Wartal (barbers and washermen) have adopted a more castelike appearance. Whereas the traditionalists saw these groups and Gonds as not taking food from each other, Gonds now look on them as of lower caste and will not accept food from them, while some people believe that they will accept food from Gonds. Relations with the three untouchable groups, the Inkars, Bhoyars, and Madgis, remain unchanged, with the same caste model as before. However, it is interesting that the Vishwabrahma is now seen as of a higher group than the Gond, as the idea of the twice born and the Vishwabrahmas' occasional role as priests among the new Gond reform sect are becoming apparent. Many Gonds are therefore prepared to say that they will eat from a Vishwabrahma, while he will not accept food cooked by a Gond.

The overall pattern of change in relationships between the Gond and the Telugu castes is that whereas before the Gond would not have eaten with any of them and would have assumed that they would not have eaten with him, now the Gond will accept food from those he considers superior and is beginning to understand that those who are inferior will eat his food—a basically

hierarchical model in which the Gond finds he has a relative position among other groups rather than outside them.

Generally, among the aboriginal groups and the associated servicing groups there is a greater degree of familiarity. Today it is more acceptable for Gonds and Kolams to share food. The Wojaris were previously considered to be a servicing group with whom the Gonds would not eat, and this distinction has not been relaxed. One group of Wojaris has taken up permanent residence near the village where I was doing fieldwork; its members have become avid followers of the reform sect and have therefore adopted a vegetarian diet. One of them is even a leader in the sect, and as such he is frequently seen eating with Gonds.

The Gond attitude towards the Pardhans and the Totis, the traditional bards, is virtually unchanged, although both Pardhans and Totis are less dependent on their Gond patrons than they were before. Many Pardhans have now acquired land and are not dependent on their traditional bardic dues. Also, knowledge of Gond custom and oral tradition is rapidly declining among the younger generation.

There has been a change in the Gond's view of himself vis-à-vis other communities. The concept of a loosely knit clustering of groups in which each pair had a dyadic relationship, that is, an ethnocentric view with a main ideology of "them and us," is becoming redundant. Today each group has a position in an overall framework relative to its role in the society. This is not merely the result of a lessening of cultural and economic isolation, but results from an enlargement and diversification in the network of social relations following greater economic interdependence. This castelike model of society based on role specialisation and ethnic heterogeneity in the overall grouping of Indian society, rather than a model of cultural separation, is now becoming the principle of orientation and group identity for the Raj Gonds.

But this is not applicable throughout Gond society. First, I am speaking only of the eastern area, in cultural contact with Telugu society. Also, in this area penetration by outsiders became established some time ago, and now that the period of predatory expansion of outsiders has ended, a period of mutual co-existence is developing. This probably cannot be said of the central area, with its more recent history of penetration and its present situation of virtual intercommunal warfare. Second, these changes are only true of a certain section of the eastern area. Typically, these changes are strongest among the new, school-going section of Gond society. Whereas the education system that was created by the Social Service Department of the 1940s aimed at Gondi as the medium of instruction in order to strengthen tribal identity and the idea of "them and us" as a model for development, the independent Indian model for development is one of education in regional languages, here Telugu, aimed towards national integration. Also, the education is aimed towards an urban, literate, and employment model of society in which anyone who leaves school fit for employment looks to the civil service for work. With this set of expectations, he wants to identify with urban values and the modified caste system that now operates in urban India. One feature that is particularly powerful is the ashram, or boarding, school concept of education being practised under the special system of education in tribal areas. In this system of education, the tribal child is seen as presenting a greater educational problem than children in other areas. That is, his home background is assumed to have a discouraging influence on his schooling. Schools for tribal boys under the new ITDA attempt to create a total educational environment in which the child boards at the school, where he is fed and clothed. This new environment is one in which boys and girls from all scheduled tribal communities and even a few untouchables live in intimate contact with each other, so that, in addition to creating a set of urban and employment-oriented aspirations, the

traditional concepts of "them and us" are undermined by the circumstances of school life. In their search for an alternative structure, school-going children are adopting the dominant Hindu caste model.

But the forces of social change do not come only from the new generation. As in many tribal societies, periods of relative deprivation and oppressive exploitation have spawned millenarian, revivalist, and reform movements and sects. The most influential of these today is the Shri Guru Dev Seva Mandal. Followers of this sect attempt not to drink, smoke, or eat meat. Adherents are found outside Gond society among the Kolams, Wojaris, Pardhans, Totis, and Vishwabrahmas, but generally the majority are Gonds. The interesting feature of this movement is that it has attracted members from the progressive element of Gond society. The leaders of the movement are all tribal schoolmasters and progressive village headmen who were educated under the old Social Service Scheme of the 1940s. Indeed, most tribal schoolmasters in Asifabad Taluk are followers of the sect's founder and leader, Kotnaka Suru Maharaj. In all schools in the eastern area of Adilabad, morning and evening prayers and hymns are chanted from the songbook issued by the reform movement. Therefore, there is a tie between education and this sanskritising movement.

It is interesting that some of the strongest adherents of this sect are the women, who daily perform puja in front of the *tulsi* plant symbolising the longevity of their husbands. And, in villages where the sect is strong, the women gather every morning to chant its songs. Those who are influenced by this movement at school find reinforcement for it at home.

The effect of this sect has not so much been the direct propagation of a casteist ideology. In fact, being involved with gaining salvation through devotion, it attempts to reach everybody, irrespective of race or community. Firm followers say that if they meet another wearing the *malla* beads which are the symbol of sect membership, they will share the same food and the same *charpoy* even if the other is an untouchable. But fortunately for the believers, this cannot be put to the test as no untouchable has yet tried to join. The main effect of the sect, along with the cult of Tirupati Venkateshwara, followed by a growing number of Gonds, is that it involves Gonds in a religious ritual whose symbolic content they do not understand, as it is left to Brahmin priests who are hired to perform the ritual. They therefore see themselves more as an interdependent section of the wider Indian society, and find themselves in an arena of greater contact with other communities. This sect has given rise to a whole new series of religious rituals and festivals, such as Hanuman Jayanti, Shri Rama Naomi, Ganapati *puja*, Shankar Ratri, and others.

However, to say that the effects of education and reform movements are simply moving the Raj Gonds into the arena of the wider Indian society pure and simple is not entirely true. Gond identity still remains important, and, with the comforting barrier of "them and us" behind which to shelter, the educated followers of reform movements have adopted revivalist tendencies. They are aware that their oral tradition is being undermined by the growing lack of interdependence between themselves and the two traditional bardic groups, many of whom are now living by agriculture. Also, the children of the Pardhans and Totis, with their traditional training in verbal expression and in living by their skills as orators, have had more success than the old dominant cultivators in education and in obtaining civil service employment in the posts reserved for tribals. Educated Gonds and the followers of the reform movements, feeling themselves threatened by the loss of their position as the patrons (*dhani*) of a dependent group, are trying to write down their oral tradition. In the process, the myths are gaining a large number of Hindu elements which were not there before, such as elaborate validations for

deifying the cow and not eating its flesh. But the ultimate aim is to build up a new ethnic identity in the plural world into which they now find themselves moving. However, this new plural world, in which a castelike hierarchy is becoming evident, is not finally crystallized and therefore contains a number of anomalies. This is exemplified by the activity of the Gondi Basha Prachara Kendra, the Society for Spreading the Gond Language.

Its main aim is to devise an original script for Gondi and to gain government approval for it. But, paradoxically, its letterheads and printed pamphlets are in Telugu, reflecting the anomalous standpoint and the frustrations of its members.

Educational Change

Many officials and local politicians see education as the lynch pin on which progress among the tribal population now hangs. Arguments given to substantiate this are varied. Education, not being a hard gain, is a gift which the dominant non-tribals who control local politics feel will not give the tribal too great an advantage over other communities. Also, the vast quantities of aid available for tribal education are seen as worth attracting into an area because of the spill-over effect that they have for other communities. Frequent accusations have been voiced by tribals that funds available for schools did not reach their destination and that non-tribal boys are utilising the facilities notified for tribals. This seemingly harmless aid has therefore been positively encouraged on the basis of a prejudice that the tribal was "stupid and ignorant." This became an important motif in political speech-making by party workers in the game of winning political support. I remember particularly well the Panchayat Samithi president telling me that the tribal was so backward that all development aid spent was money down the drain and that what was needed was better schools to make him more intelligent and better roads so that he would have a chance to travel and see what his chances for self-improvement were. By emphasizing education, attention could be diverted from land reforms, irrigation projects, and other more directly commercial benefits. The feeling can best be summed up as a paternalistic one that says "the tribal is a backward child who does not deserve hard commercial aid until he has become more like us."

The superstructure of education has made great quantitative progress in the last forty years, though what it may have achieved qualitatively must be discussed separately. Before 1940 there were no educational services among the Raj Gonds. The only exceptions were a few wealthy village headmen who privately employed Muslim tutors for their own children and the children of friends who shared the expenses. At that time the Nizam's government was in power, and Urdu was the language and script used in all administrative dealings.

The establishment and development of two teacher-training centres in the 1940s has been described in detail, and here I shall confine myself to discussing the present situation in Asifabad Taluk, particularly in Wankdi Block, which includes most of the tribal villages of the taluk. With the creation of Wankdi Tribal Development Block and the start of Panchayati Raj in 1959, the education system was expanded. Today there are fifty-eight primary schools, two high schools, and ten special tribal boarding schools, known as ashram schools. Since the creation of Andhra Pradesh in 1963, the medium of education has been Telugu, using the Telugu script.

Whereas the early system of education was to provide the aboriginal peasant with a basic modicum of skills to deal with outside influences on his agricultural economy and to stand

on his own feet, nowadays the education system has a different aim—to educate children for employment while providing a grounding in literacy for those who will continue to work the land. One of the government's main policies is that, with pressure on land, there should be protected employment for tribal and backward-caste communities. A quota of protected jobs therefore has to be filled, and tribal education schemes are under considerable pressure to provide candidates to take up the posts made available. Unfortunately, this type of targeted development program leads to quantity only. Many of the resulting candidates are promoted through the system irrespective of their abilities, and they then find it difficult to pass the matriculation exam at the end. If the tribal were prepared to take up labouring work of a semi-skilled nature in urban industries, this would be enough. However, he is seldom prepared to enter employment where he will meet very few members of his own community. Also, this requires registration at employment exchanges and travelling to interviews, which is very difficult given the poor communications in the tribal area. The end result is frustrated aspirations.

The main problem faced by the education system is that village primary schools, particularly boarding schools, provide a useful and desired service by taking children off their parent's hands at an age when they are not productive members of the household. Parents are eager and continually petition for more and better school facilities. While children rise automatically through the system up to standard seven, very few pass the examination to go on to high school. In 1975–76, only 15 percent of all students were able to pass standard seven. While the school system intends to turn out tribals capable of taking up employment, it is largely unable to do so. The recent ***Study of Tribal Manpower Resources, Adilabad District*** concludes that "the available scheduled tribal manpower is short of the present requirement"[4]. Although statistically and in terms of planned development the educational changes that have taken place are only achieving a minimal target success, far more important are their repercussions on social organization.

One of the most interesting findings of the manpower resources report is that 63 percent of a sample of post-matriculate students, when asked what employment they would like to take up, replied "teaching in that it facilitates their appointment in their native place where they can educate their fellow tribesmen" (Pratap, ***Study of Tribal Manpower Resources, Adilabad District***, p. 51). While the altruistic motivation to "educate their own tribesmen" sounds very fine, I believe that this reply in fact reflects the opportunities that a tribal teacher has in the village organization. It is these opportunities and the role that tribal teachers as a group play that is significant in motivating students to join their ranks.

I have already mentioned that tribal teachers have become the leaders of the reform and revitalisation movements among the eastern Gonds, but have not explained the reasons for this. Those who were trained in the first special tribal teacher-training centres and continued their careers as teachers are now headmasters of the tribal boarding schools. As such, they are the most senior tribal government employees living in the villages of a department that has considerable funds to dispense. Unlike the elected members of the ***panchayat***, they are not involved in the machinations of politics to hold their position as the main link between village and government, and, unlike the ***patwari***, (village land-revenue officers), they are not involved with the politically sensitive issue of land, which often involves ***patwari*** in the power politics of

See D. R. Pratap et al., ***Study of Tribal Manpower Resources, Adilabad District***. It is interesting to note that IN 1941 Fürer-Haimendorf gave a tribal literacy rate of 0.6 percent. See C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, "Aboriginal Education in Hyderabad," pp. 87–106.

dominant landlords. Their work is purely involved with their own community, obviating any intercommunity competition. They have therefore become established as the main brokers between the people and the government; the boarding school is used by all government officers to sleep in and hold meetings in when they tour the villages; and because he collects supplies for the schools, the master is the only officer in the village who has to go weekly to the government offices.

Besides commissions that he gets and favours that he can dispense in deciding whose children can attend the schools, he is the one person in the community who has a thorough knowledge of how government works and should be handled, an essential requirement in the lives of cultivators. Also, he knows about government schemes and aid programmes from which people can benefit. This knowledge is not only useful in itself, as he and his family can make the best advantage of all aid available, but it means that others interested must go through him. More important, again, is that, being a broker, he has one foot inside his own community and one in the outside world. He is therefore able to appraise the standing of the tribal from a broader perspective than others. It is this "other view" which enables him to criticise the standing of his community constructively, to assess what change is needed, and to be in a position to influence decisions.

With few exceptions, the tribal schoolmasters have all obtained considerable wealth and authority. They have large holdings of land gained either by purchase or by making the best of opportunities. The majority have irrigation wells and diesel pumps, and often employ labour to work their land. This wealth again puts them in competition with the traditional village headmen, ***nar patla***, whose authority and home-based power they can often challenge with their own influence outside the community in government circles. Fürer-Haimendorf wrote in 1944, after the completion of the first year of the teacher-training scheme, that:

Anyone familiar with conditions in the backward tracts of rural India, where not all land is settled and the minor Government servants, seldom controlled by touring officers, are a very real power, will realise the grave disadvantage under which this system places the Gonds. Without spokesmen of their own community, they are exposed to many a petty tyranny and exploitation by these non-aboriginals ruling their villages. The ending of this tutelage and the installing of progressive Gonds as village-officers in areas with a predominantly tribal population are as important an aim of the scheme for rehabilitation of the Adilabad Gonds as the establishment of schools. ("Aboriginal Education in Hyderabad," p. 8.)

It is interesting in the light of this that although nowadays many Gonds are educated and have taken on the jobs of village officers they find that, working in a system in which they are a weak minority, they are unable to achieve very much for themselves or for their community. The manpower resources report (1977) remarked that educated tribals generally preferred not to look for employment in revenue department posts except as lower division clerks, where they were not involved in local political machinations. The intention of the early training scheme was to create a corps of tribals working in government service who would be able to represent their community to government, but this aim has not yet been achieved. Rather, Gonds shun personal involvement in government, preferring to leave the government work to others and to build up a corps of people within their communities who know at least how to operate the administrative and bureaucratic regulations. The position of a teacher in the special tribal schools fulfils exactly these requirements.

It is then interesting that, although educational progress has many quantitative problems and, because of targeted goals, its quality is low, it has had an important effect on local

leadership. At this stage of development, despite the fact that cultural barriers are changing, the overall community still looks inward, and educated Gonds do not yet feel able "to stand on their own feet."

Planned Development

Since Fürer-Haimendorf studied the Raj Gonds in the 1940s, a major change has been the development programmes aimed at the scheduled tribes. Although India underwent considerable industrial development between 1970 and 1977, equivalent rural development was limited to the energetic programmes of the Green Revolution in the Punjab. Rural development is seen as crucial, not only to supply the towns, but also to expand a market for the consumption of industrial products. Also, the continued lack of development in rural areas, coupled with an expanding population, creates an ever-increasing pool of unemployed labour, giving rise to political instability. Under the populist policies of the Congress Party since the Green Revolution, development has been aimed at the backward minority elements of the rural population. A central agency, the ITDA, has been set up to distribute vastly increased funds to the tribals through the block development offices. In August 1976, the Planning Commission finalised the allocation of Rs 455.3 million for tribal development in Adilabad District. In total, the overall expenditure on tribal development for Adilabad District from 1974 to the end of 1977 was Rs 741.2 million, financed from a number of sources. The estimated expenditure on tribal development in the same area for 1977–78 alone was Rs 2,788 million. This increase has had a great effect on life in tribal villages, not only because of the actual development aid which has reached them, but more significantly because of the mushrooming of government and administrative attention paid to their lives.

While there is not space here to go into every aspect of the development programme, I shall look at small irrigation schemes in some detail to analyse their effect on the Raj Gonds. The emphasis placed on such schemes is revealed by the fact that in 1977–78 they received 41 percent of the overall development budget, while the general agricultural development budget was only 28 percent of the total. The rationale behind this was that in Adilabad District the scheduled tribal population has large average holdings of land. Due to the allotment of title land under the Social Service Department of the 1940s, the average holding is eleven acres per household. The type of agriculture is almost all upland, extensive cultivation of single-crop sorghums and small millets, often sown together with various pulses. New varieties of sorghum which are not drought resistant require irrigation, as does wet rice cultivation and market gardening on these very fertile, mixed, alluvial and black cotton soils. With irrigation it should therefore be possible to make the most of the large land holdings and enable at least two crops a year to be harvested. Aiming a development budget at this grossly under-utilised resource should therefore yield good returns. Such go the utopian arguments of the development economists and politicians. However, reality is often at variance.

In 1975–76, funds for irrigation projects for scheduled tribals were released through a credit institution called the Land Mortgage Bank (LMB). Under this scheme, the cultivator was loaned money to undertake the building of a well himself, using local know-how and labour at a low rate of interest to be paid back over twelve years through increased harvests. If the well was a failure, the cultivator's land was to be taken on mortgage by the government and the loan repaid over a number of years through the cultivator's harvest while holding the land in his name. Targets were set for the amount to be distributed, and officials went into the villages to

get support from the tribals to take loans. Government officers approached many of the less wealthy tribal leaders, such as headmen of small villages and minor tribal officials, who all had large holdings of land and were respected members of the community but who, unlike the wealthy leaders of the community, did not have the capital to go ahead with their own schemes and had been unable to raise finance in other ways. Under this scheme, thirteen cultivators in the village of Ginnedhari were persuaded to take loans varying from Rs 1,500 to Rs 6,000 (this compares with an estimated income from an average land holding of eleven acres of Rs 3,000 in a good year). All the thirteen had to pay the junior officials of the Land Mortgage Bank between Rs 100 and Rs 200 to have their applications processed. Finally the loans were sanctioned and, without supervision, each person was given the money. Two of the applicants had bad harvests that year and used all the money for household expenses. Eight of them started work on digging wells. In two cases they ran out of cash before reaching water. In five cases they reached water but failed to line the well, either due to lack of funds or due to an inability to get cement, so that in the next monsoon season the well caved in. Only in one case was the well successful, but even then it was not deep enough to store sufficient water to actually irrigate a crop, though the well has subsequently been deepened and is operating. One person built a small dam across a stream to irrigate a small garden, but he had mixed the mortar incorrectly, and the dam was swept away in the rains. Another built a small earthen barrage dam to irrigate one acre of paddy, but the barrage over-flowed, was destroyed, and swept the soil off the levelled paddy fields. The last two applicants purchased diesel engines to lift water from perennial streams, but one was delivered incomplete and unusable, while the other broke down after three weeks' work, and the owner was unable to repair it. Due to lack of supervision and to expecting people to adopt a technology of which they had no previous experience, all but one of the projects failed, and the other was successful only because the cultivator put considerable personal investment into it. However, the tragedy was that next year the LMB officials came to collect the first installments on the repayment. All the cultivators understood that the government would take all their land until they repaid the debt. Here there appears to have been a lack of communication. As a result of this, the applicant who had made a success began his repayment, one applicant sold two acres of paddy land and paid off his debt in full, and four others mortgaged their land to moneylenders at vastly inflated interest rates and paid off the loans in full. The two with pumps had the rusting remains confiscated for auction and were told that the outstanding debt would be collected next year, and the next absconded temporarily but subsequently had all his household brassware confiscated until he attended the bank to settle the claim. Basically, twelve out of the thirteen were harmed by the development loans granted to them. The government target for distribution of loans was reached, but subsequently all the unpaid loans were annihilated by the government, and no increase of irrigated land was achieved at all. The scheme was thus considered a failure by the development office.

Subsequently, in 1977 the government again wanted to increase the irrigated land. However, due to the failure of the last scheme the contracts for the twenty-seven wells to be dug in the village were offered to an outside contractor. The villagers were very upset, saying that the contractor would be dishonest and not build the wells properly and that they would collapse after only a short time, as had the colony houses built for a nearby village after it had been burnt. They said that he would bring outside labourers into the village, who would cause trouble and probably steal from their houses.

Although this is only one example of the planned development schemes, it follows a common pattern. It is only possible to come to the general conclusion that development plans which are pushed on the Raj Gonds tend to do more harm than good and have become an integral part of the risks that backward cultivators suffer due either to the vagaries of nature or to the vicissitudes of human beings. The Raj Gonds often sum this up by saying, "Once we feared the tiger, but now we fear the block development officer." In fact, in all my travels in Asifabad Taluk I met with only one government-funded small irrigation scheme which was running successfully, and which belonged to the tribal member of the Legislative Assembly, though it should be mentioned that another one was almost successfully completed by the end of 1977. However, this does not mean that tribals are not aware of the advantages of irrigation and agricultural development. Eleven irrigation wells are successfully working in Wankdi Block, all privately financed by Raj Gonds. Overall development is making progress among the Raj Gonds, and people do want and understand the benefits that it brings. What is lacking is the proper implementation of development programmes, a fact of which the Raj Gonds are well aware.

Beyond the question of straight economic harm done to what is an economy under stress, two further effects of the failure of planned development projects are to be considered. First, such projects have a considerable effect on the credibility of local leadership. Many argue that it is a waste of funds to give aid to tribals at all; help should be given to those in the best position to take advantage of it and to maximise the return on it as an investment. There is an understandable tendency to want to give aid where it will be put to best advantage. Many state this as an argument in favour of not giving aid to the backward and scheduled tribal groups, who are least likely to show a return on hard investment. However, within the confines of the government's policy to develop scheduled tribals, the tendency is again to give aid to the more advanced and progressive sections of the population. Here there is a complex and unconscious selection process, whereby those people who stand politically in the forefront of the community receive government aid. Typically, a village-level worker, in his attempts to get the targeted number of applications for irrigation wells to be dug, went to the headman, Pendram Jangu, of the small hamlet of Kereguda, consisting of fourteen houses, and persuaded him to take a loan to construct a well. Under this scheme, a small advance was given to Pendram Jangu to start work, and at each subsequent stage the work was to be inspected and further payments made to cover the work done. Pendram Jangu employed his villagers to do the work but the inspector never came, he never received the payment, and the well collapsed in the rains. This left the village headman indebted to his villagers and destroyed his standing in the community. The person who should have been able to mediate between the village and the outside world had introduced an unacceptable risk into the community by trusting government. In this way, his role as mediator in the village was destroyed, and the fragile structure of community cohesion was badly undermined. In this damage to the social organisation of small communities by undermining the delicate balance of social structure lies the long-term ill effect of planned development. This process is, I believe, one of the main reasons Fürer-Haimendorf says:

The most striking impression one gains of the Gonds after thirty years of absence is an incipient disintegration of the traditional structure of Gond society. Village communities led by headmen, most of whom were men of strong personality and authority, used to be characterised by a pronounced sense of solidarity and corporateness. Today there is much less cohesion and mutual helpfulness among Gonds, and many of the prominent men have learnt to seek short term advantages by cooperating with wealthy newcomers unmindful of the damage done to other Gonds, and indeed too shortsighted to see the danger to their own position.[5]

Second, one of the major spill-over effects of the planned development programmes is the degree to which the shift from an isolated economy and a social structure with a horizon of limited dependence to a wider horizon of dependence on external factors has been accelerated. This is but another aspect of the general rate of increase in economic dependence of the scheduled tribal's economy on a dominant and generally exploitative economy.

Administrative and Political Change

The post-independence philosophy of developing backward areas has led to fundamental changes in the social environment of the Raj Gonds as they become increasingly involved in the ever-expanding web of government. The political requirement of developing the area has created a need for better communications so that government can reach the areas which it intends to administer more actively. For a culture and economy based on relative isolation in the past, improved administrative protection is necessary. If you let government in, you also open the area to the forces of exploitation.

Ever since Wankdi Block was made a Tribal Development Block with special privileges and increased budgets, it has been a focus of manipulation by local power politicians. In 1959, the Panchayati Raj Act was extended to this area, and scheduled tribal leaders were appointed to positions of considerable influence in the hopes of creating a grass-roots democracy. In the system of elections adopted in Andhra Pradesh, the villagers were to elect a head of the village committee, known as **sarpanch**. These **sarpanch** in turn sat on a block council, **samithi**, and elected a **samithi** president who sat on the district council, **zilla parishad**. At the village level, the elections worked well enough, with tribal leaders being elected as the **sarpanch**. However, the elections for the **samithi** president became a vehicle for non-tribal Congress Party workers, who finally got one of their members, the brother of a wealthy shopkeeper and moneylender, a Komti, elected. The scheduled tribal sarpanch complained about this on the grounds that a tribal development block should have a tribal as its president. The president promptly took a tribal girl as his wife, got a stay order on his election as president, and fought the case up to the High Court on the grounds that he was a scheduled tribal. To do this he had to sell his jeep and borrow extensively from local Brahmin landlords, the financiers of the Congress Party workers, whose main interest was not to support the populist policies of the Congress Party but to stifle the implementation of such policies as the Land Reforms Act by infiltrating the local administrative bureaucracy.

The president finally won his case and gained control as the representative of the tribal block. He was then in a position to control the distribution of government aid on a wide scale, from such small matters as the channelling of fair-price sugar and kerosene to the control of rural cooperative credit schemes and the channelling of funds for road building and for sinking drinking-water wells. The village **sarpanch** found themselves in the invidious position of owing support to Congress Party workers, who were financed by the landlords with whom they were in constant conflict over land rights. In their attempts to repossess land mortgaged to moneylenders their village headmen were often powerless to represent them, as the **samithi** president put pressure on them by channelling government loans away from their villagers. Indeed, when three tribals were accused of being Naxalites by the landlord and were arrested, sufficient pressure was brought to bear on two **sarpanch** to testify falsely against the accused.

The situation had reached such proportions by 1976 that the **panchayat** hierarchy was purely a vehicle of factional politics. The administrative machinery had been taken over by the politicians. The situation was appraised, and the administration decided that the only remedy was to abolish the post of **samithi** president, so the **sarpanch** were made directly responsible to the deputy collector as a special officer. As government had to admit, the creation of a grass-roots democracy had failed. But worse than this, the attempt had considerably damaged the existing structure of community leadership, which was often seen to be in league with, or at least made powerless by, the exploiters of the tribal economy. In this sense, the damage done is that dependence on other communities in the economic sphere was allowed to extend into the administrative sphere.

In the past, leadership was based on inheritance, and its dynamism had depended on the flexibility of residence patterns and the mobility of villages. As new leaders developed they hived off and started new communities, and the success of a new village depended on the qualities of its leader. The geographical mobility of villages has been a vital factor in the economic and cultural form of Gond society. The village as a symbolic, economic, and political community is centred on its headman (**nar patla**), who re-affirms his position every year at the Durari festival in March. Symbolically the **nar patla** represents the recreation of the community every year, despite the fact that other, more wealthy individuals may develop within the village and wield greater political power; such other "big men" are loosely described as **patla** and lack the epithet of **nar**, meaning village. It is this symbolic unity of the village in the **nar patla** that has nearly always been reaffirmed in the elections of political representatives to the outside world. In the elections for government office these **nar patla** were elected rather than individual leaders, although they were frequently not the best suited as individuals to take the necessary strong stands in the factional politics that characterised the Panchayati Raj. Therefore, while there was an administrative reification of symbolic political structures, those structures were undermined by the invidious position in which these leaders were placed. When the traditional leadership is weakened in this way the entire structure of village politics founders.

In the traditional structure of Gond society, the answer to this dilemma would have been that as leadership in a given village crumbled and the village was gradually taken over by external political domination, its population would gradually have moved away and started new villages under new headmen, thus preserving the dynamic of political leadership. However, administrative regulations have prevented this geographical mobility. This has happened in two ways. First, Forest Department regulations have forbidden the clearing of new forest areas and the expansion of existing cultivation. In the past, due to various forces, including the flux of leadership, groups of individuals from a number of villages would start cultivating a new village in virgin forest or else would occupy a deserted village site. Not only have government regulations prevented the establishing of new village sites, but they have also created a shortage of land at a time when population growth has put pressure on land. Second, this pressure on land, combined with the new administrative code of title ownership, has changed the value put on land within the community. Previously, land was the property of the cultivator by right of conduct. Whoever was seen as cultivating the land was the owner, in combination with a permanent right of ownership vested in the original clearer of the land. Land was not a saleable resource but was enjoyed for the produce that it gave. It was not communal property in that it belonged to any group such as a lineage or clan. Any permanent rights over land which existed were the right of the village headman, who accepted the cultivator in his village community. Without the permission of the village headman, which was given through symbolic

representations, including the permission of the entire population of the village at the festival of Durari, an individual would find it difficult to cultivate a piece of land. However, with the onset of administrative and bureaucratic concepts of registered ownership, land became a saleable resource. The village headman no longer had right of veto over who should own the land, but rather the government exercised these rights through the issuing of title deeds. The government rather than the community therefore became the arbiter of village membership, and the social dynamism inherent in community life became subject to external influences.

This is admirably demonstrated by the application of protected tenancy regulation in Ginnedhari. When the village was first established about fifty years ago, the father of Kumra Jangu cleared and cultivated about twenty-two acres of land upstream of the village in the centre of the valley. Some ten or so years later the absentee Brahmin landlord from Asifabad claimed that the land which Kumra Jangu's father had cleared belonged to him. He brought government survey officers, who showed Kumra Jangu's father the title deeds to the land, and Kumra Jangu's father was forced to submit to this. However, as a palliative he was told that his name would be entered on the land register as the cultivator of the land. From that moment on Kumra Jangu's father became a sharecropper, and half the harvest had to be given to the Brahmin landlord. Jangu's father found this arrangement unsatisfactory and decided to vacate the twenty-two acres and clear a new area of forest. Subsequently the land was rented out and sharecropped by a number of villagers. However, in 1950 it was decided that all tenants or sharecroppers should be registered as protected tenants and given certain inalienable rights to their tenancy. The name of Jangu's father was found on the land register as the cultivator under a sharecropping agreement, and he was given the protected tenancy papers, not understanding what they were and not having cultivated the plot of land mentioned for some years. Acting like most Indians would have done, he kept this certificate and gave it to his son on his death, neither of them realising its importance.

Between 1960 and 1962, the headman of Ginnedhari came to an agreement with the Brahmin landlord to purchase the land. Money was exchanged and a deed of sale transacted. The headman began to cultivate the land and even sunk an irrigation well and installed a pump irrigating eleven acres.

With the increase of education in the community and through the auspices of the tribal schoolmaster, Kumra Jangu discovered that under section 38E of the Andhra Pradesh (Telengana Area) Agricultural Lands and Tenancy Act as amended in 1973 all protected tenants had been declared the title owners to their land. He canvassed opinion on this to make certain that he had the backing of the relevant officials, forcibly occupied the land at the start of the 1977 ploughing season, and successfully evicted the village headman who had paid for the land. The headman lost not only his money but also his entire investment in the improvements to the land.

It is not important that the village headman was himself overridden by the law of the land; what is important is that administrative regulations have now become a significant element in defining the community. Whereas previously village membership was recognized through symbolic representations of community consensus at the festival of Durari, it is now at least partially decided through a hierarchy of government officers. Traditionally land was the main defining principle of the village. It was for the village headman to show the new immigrant an area of land which he could cultivate or an area of forest which he could clear. If a man intended to migrate to another village, he would first come to a verbal agreement with that village through the office of the village headman as to which area of land he might cultivate. Then at the festival

of Durari at the beginning of the ploughing season, this would be ratified by the headman accepting his offering of two coconut kernels, some pulse cakes, onions, and sorghum seed. These offerings form an integral part of a ceremony in the name of the spirits of the village boundary, Siwa Auwal and Siwa Marke, a particular attribute of the earth mother goddess of the village, Natna Auwal. The remains of the offerings are then distributed to every householder and cultivator in the village. He takes these offerings, sanctified in the name of the earth mother goddess who is specific to each village, to the land that he is to cultivate that year. At the field he prays to his clan deity, associating it with his land, and, placing the offerings in front of any bush or shrub growing on the land, he symbolically cuts the shrub down. This ceremony, often called **podela paimar** ("striking the bush"), is referred to by its other name, **kuta mohtur**, by Fürer-Haimendorf [6]. This not only gives him the right to that land for that year, but, more importantly, the acceptance of the offering signals his inclusion in the community. If his offering had not been accepted he would be **ale:da manwal**, meaning that he could not attend any village councils or take part in village ceremonies. This is only a temporary exclusion from the community which carries no supernatural sanctions and is not a total excommunication from the tribe. However, it does mean that although the man is not physically thrown out of the village he cannot rely on any of its institutions for support.

With the present scarcity of land and the power of the administration to determine rights of ownership over land, the community is no longer so much a religiously and economically defined corporate grouping, although its symbols may still operate. The new bureaucratic element has become a significant variable which creates basic changes in the nature of community cohesion. Previously, the development of factions within the village would have been limited. Any party which wanted to challenge the leadership of the village would have either been ostracised and unable to attend the village council or participate in any of its corporate religious festivals or would already have left the village and started a new one. Traditionally each village had a single faction, and any factions that existed would be separated into different villages and their rivalry therefore minimised, though inter-village factionalism did exist. However, in the new administratively dominated environment this mobility is no longer possible, and the inevitable internal rivalries mean that the village community is now a divided entity. This implies fundamental changes in the nature of Raj Gond village political structure. Previously, the symbolic and political unity of the unifactional village was represented in the single office of the **nar patla**, which was inherited by the eldest son of the previous holder. The ability of the village headman to exercise political authority would have determined the success and the size of his settlement. Under the good leadership of prominent leaders, certain villages became large and thriving communities with many households. However, with the onset of administrative norms for community membership, the political and symbolic aspects of community leadership became separate functions. Political rivalry can no longer be accommodated by hiving off new communities, as new land is not available. Instead there is a fragmentation of the institutional structure of the village. The **nar patla** still acts as the symbolic focus of the village in his hereditary role, but the actual political power lies elsewhere, either with other individual "big men" or with various officials of the village, such as the schoolmasters. But the interesting thing is an element of cultural lag which means that the **nar patla** are still elected to the administrative office of **sarpanch** in the majority of villages, although they are no longer necessarily the people who wield the real power. Panchayati Raj did therefore theoretically

bolster the traditional village institutions, but in practice the *panchayat* system was stripped of its effective powers and turned into a vehicle of intercommunal power politics, in which the traditional leaders were often ineffectual. This only further undermined their position in their villages, as they became bankrupt brokers between the people and government and in many cases lived off the ill-gotten gains of development aid channelled through party political support groups.

The problem that this creates is that the ideal channels of administration become ineffective. In traditional societies, where roles are multiplex and bureaucratic norms are not understood, the individual finds it difficult to approach a government officer when the channel of communication through his community leaders has broken down. Whatever the quality of individual officers, those that manage to do their job best are those who are prepared to spend time with people. Such officers as these are preferred by the villagers, who tend to find bureaucracy impersonal and unresponsive. Inherent in this are not merely the well-known problems of Indian bureaucracy, bound by regulations and red tape, but also the problems of the poor cultivator's narrow social horizon. He tends to see the administrator as somebody with power and influence who will only take action on his behalf as a personal favour. Therefore the petitioner is willing to give gifts to the government official to get wishes fulfilled, even though he does not know the regulations well enough to understand whether or not his demands can be carried out according to the rule book. Under these circumstances, the gift is an attempt to create a bond between the petitioner and the official. The official often expects payment for his services, and the villager is prepared to pay in the hope that the official is then bound under an obligation. The gift gives the villager some means of leverage over the official, which he otherwise feels is lacking. It is essentially an attempt to create favour, though by the bureaucratic rules it is defined as corruption. Whether it is corruption or an attempt by people who do not understand the inherent obligations placed on the civil service, it gives rise to a new form of community management based on patron-client relations and the buying and selling of favours, which further undermines traditional forms of leadership as it becomes entrenched in village life.

While it is a mistake to say that favours and patron-client relationships based on economic gain have never been a part of the political activity of a community, the fundamental change that has taken place is that these are now dependent on an external force. In effect, there has been an increase in dependence and exploitation in the field of economics. The resulting increase in relations across cultural barriers has affected intercommunal relations, as we have already seen.

The resulting administrative reification of the village is a new feature of Gond society. The days have passed when villages divided, new settlements were started, and abandoned village sites were left to be overtaken by the forest. A new element has been imposed on the village from above. The village is now a permanent institution which must be able to deal with internal division and dissension. Couple this with the new reform and revitalisation movements, the new avenues for leadership, and the influx of other communities into the arena of village life, and it is clear that Raj Gond society has undergone great changes in the last thirty years.

Internal Cohesion — The Symbols of Unity

The early policies of tribal development planned by the Social Service Department in the late

1940s and early 1950s intended to delimit a geographical area in which the tribal population would be administratively separated from other populations. Within this area non-tribals would not be allowed to own land. The idea was that the unity and strength of Raj Gond culture should be allowed to continue within this protected zone, which would artificially recreate the conditions of relative isolation that had been destroyed by the penetration of caste peasants. By preventing land alienation, it was hoped that the traditional economy of the Raj Gonds would be allowed to continue and that the cultural distinction between the Raj Gonds and caste peasant societies could be preserved. This has not happened, and the basis of Raj Gond economy has changed to one of interdependence on others. I have described the effects that this has had on intercommunal relations and on the Raj Gonds' perception of themselves within a new plural society. It now remains to look at internal perceptions and symbols of unity and to see how the social structure of Raj Gond society has itself undergone transformation.

I have discussed how, due to economic changes, Raj Gond society is beginning to assume a place within the plural structure of hierarchically arranged social groups that defines the form of Indian society. Given this, it is important to see how this new position affects the internal structuring of Gond society. In this section I therefore want to discuss changes in the religious and kinship system of the Gonds, which are closely interlinked. One fundamental aspect of the Gonds is a clan system bound up with complex religious motifs that define "Raj Gond" as a separate entity. Raj Gonds define themselves as the people who worship *persa pen*, the Great God, a term applied to all the varied clan deities. To be a Raj Gond is therefore to be a member of a clan and to be identified with a clan cult.

The Gond descent system is based on the vertical division of Gond society into four phratries, each of which worships one particular clan deity or one particular pair of deities. But the phratry is not the corporate religious group. Corporate worship of the clan deity is carried out by each of the clans which make up the phratry. Each clan has a shrine to its clan deity at which ceremonies are performed twice yearly. As the clans are dispersed units with a membership scattered throughout the area of Raj Gond population, the clan cult forms the main mode of unity of the clan. The descent system, defined by the clan cult, is the structure around which the Raj Gond kinship system operates. Being a Dravidian-speaking people, the Raj Gonds have a Dravidian kinship system, with all the connotations of an alliance system which L. Dumont has described [7]. Each clan group is allied with other groups through a system of preferential marriage between the children of close affines. Thus the descent system, activated by the corporate worship of clan deities, binds the society together through a system of marriage alliances. The continuance of the Raj Gonds both as an identifiable system and as a system able to unify its membership structurally is therefore dependent on the continued operation of the clan cult. It is thus important to look at the changes that have been wrought in this cult. The importance of the clan cult to Raj Gond cohesion based on a "them and us" model can be seen from the statement of one reputable village headwoman who told me, as I have already quoted:

In the days of our grandfathers we even washed our feet on returning from market. But now who washes [to preserve the purity of the clan deity?] For that reason our clan god [*persa pen*] is weak. Before we were advanced, now we are backward. We are not following the way of our clan gods. We are mixing.

See Louis Dumont, *Hierarchy and Marriage in South Indian Kinship*, and M. P. Yorke, "Kinship, Marriage and Ideology among the Raj Gonds: A Tribal System in the Context of South India."

As an agnatically defined cult group, the clan is divided into any number of lineages (*kita*). Most of the lineages only have importance as local lineages, the descendants of a particular ancestor who lived in one locality. Such lineages are called *kutma kita*. However, within the clan there are two particular lineages which relate to the organisation of the clan cult. First is the *patla kita*, the lineage of the keeper of the clan-deity shrine. The shrine, its environs, and the ritual objects are in his charge, and the position is inherited by primogeniture within the lineage. The second lineage is that of the priest, *katora*, and is called the *katora kita*. The priest officiates at all the rites to the clan deity. In no sense does he gain any divinity from this himself, and in all the prayers he joins the congregation, even though he is the ceremonial leader on whom devolve many of the arrangements for the highly complex rituals. However, the most important aspect of the clan cult is the role played by the traditional bards, who are either Pardhans or Totis. The Pardhans and Totis have a clan system which is parallel to that of the Gonds. Traditionally the members of each respective Pardhan or Toti clan served as bards and cultural maintenance men for the clan cult of their Raj Gond patrons. Every bard had his *dhani*, or patron, who was the head of a Gond household of the same clan as his own. The relationship between the bard and his patron is a highly complex one. The bard performs specific ritual functions for the household and is paid both annually and at specific rites of passage for each member of the household, with the service being inherited patrilineally.

The emic structure, or mythical charter, of the clan-cult system is contained in a highly elaborate oral tradition. At certain specific ceremonies the bards are paid to recite and sing the myths reflecting this tradition. They are the guardians of religious knowledge, and in the past they depended for their livelihood entirely on purveying and transmitting the oral tradition for their clan patrons. As well as being the purveyors and transmitters of the oral tradition, they also act as the communications hub of the clan-cult group and as the maintenance men for its customary regulations. In their role as bards they periodically visit the members of the dispersed clan-cult groups, performing their profession, announcing the times for ceremonials, collecting sacrificial offerings, and generally disseminating news and gossip of the affairs of the group. Not only do they bind the group together in this way, but they also act as expert arbiters of customary practice. They are often able to recite the genealogies of the lineages better than their patrons, and they are often more aware of the details of marriage regulations. I was once present at a council meeting called by the family bard, who had objected to a secondary marriage between a son of a priestly lineage and a girl of a non-priestly lineage.

In this role the bards act as maintainers of much of the fabric of the clan-cult system and of the alliances that bind it together. However, this role is dependent on their being able to gain a living from their patrons by acting as traditional bards. What has happened today is that the Raj Gonds no longer seem prepared to patronise the bards in the way that they did before, and the bards have also gained a wider horizon so that new generations find opportunities for making a livelihood outside their traditional role. The economy of the few Gonds who still live in the plains, have largely lost their land, and are now landless labourers has suffered to such an extent that they can no longer support a non-productive activity, and their ritual life has lost much of its symbolic content and form. However, it is not easy to say the same for the Gonds in the intermontane and plateau areas to the west of the eastern region I am discussing. The change in the economy is not so much one of a movement from wealth to poverty as a greater dependence on the wider economy of India. Today surplus in the economy is more likely to be expended in paying debts to moneylenders, gaining vital favours from government officials, and, above all, in purchasing consumer products, such as cloth, soap, radios, and more varied

foodstuffs than are available locally. But a more important factor than changes in the economy of the patrons is changes in the rural economy of India. The growing sense of insecurity in peasant economies occasioned by the shortage of land and the rise in population has set off a counter-reaction in a rush for land as the only available form of lasting security. Many of the Pardhans and Totis have also felt this as they have seen their traditional role being eroded. The emphasis is no longer on making a living from learning the traditional skills as bards and maintainers of Gond social regulations but rather is on the skills of peasant agriculture. This move away from the traditional profession has also been assisted by the new educational facilities open to tribals and by reserved jobs in government posts. The traditional bards have been able to take greater advantage of the educational opportunities available than have the Gonds. Their background in verbal skill enables them to get higher qualifications than their patrons, whose home environment is oriented towards agriculture. This ability and the reserved opportunities open to them as tribals means that they now aspire to education and government employment, for which they are preferred above the other tribal communities.

All these factors have meant that the main mechanism for the maintenance of the central symbol of tribal identity is no longer operating with the same efficiency as in the past. The result is a clear lack of deep understanding of the ritual and symbolic tradition that existed in the past. Knowledge of the oral tradition is already deteriorating. Many of the myths which Furer-Haimendorf collected in the 1940s are no longer fully understood. Group identity and cohesion, insofar as they are maintained by oral tradition and ethno-history, are weakening. The Gonds themselves are well aware of this, and many educated Gonds are beginning to write their myths down. However, the written myths lack a great deal of the detail that exists in the spoken versions. Also, as these versions are recorded by the Gonds who have greatest contact with the wider Hindu culture of India to which they aspire, many previously non-tribal elements are being introduced, such as reasons for worshipping the cow, which was formerly a sacrificial animal. These ideas are being particularly encouraged by the Shri Guru Dev Seva Mandal reform sect.

This weakening of clan identity is most powerfully indicated by a relaxation of concepts of ritual purity. The clan cult acted as a symbol of separation between the Raj Gonds and other communities. Worship of the clan deity involved the preservation of the individual's ritual purity and the purity of the entire household. In the 1940s only a Gond was allowed to enter the house of a Gond, and on returning from a place where non-Gonds gathered, such as marketplaces, every Gond used to wash himself ritually with water as an act of respect for the clan deities. However, such symbols of separation have now fallen into almost total disuse. And, as I have quoted, traditionally minded Gonds see this lowering of standards as a cause of the relative increase in the backwardness of their people. Although the relative backwardness may or may not be greater, their perception of it indicates the relaxation of the formerly held symbolic indices of ritual separation between "them and us."

The greater economic interdependence between the Raj Gonds and other communities has clearly led to a lowering of cultural barriers and to increased social interrelations. What were previously powerful symbols of internal cohesion are no longer being observed with such rigidity.

Although the symbols of unity are being relaxed, the more critical structures that bind the Raj Gonds together as a social group remain unchanged. Language remains a unifying force, and the existence of a separate ethno-history allows them to see themselves as separate. There is no perceivable movement towards intercommunal marriages. As such, Raj Gondness

remains a symbol of identity, but the degree of cultural and economic isolation has greatly lessened, though within the plural structure of Indian society Raj Gonds are now more able to see themselves as one group among many rather than as a particular group closely associated with a few other similar groups such as the Kolams, Naikpods, Wojaris, Pardhans, and Totis.

Conclusion

Change in social relations is largely initiated by changes in economic environment. The end product is due to what A. R. Beals calls "the interplay of many factors " [8]. The forces which activate the dynamism of society are finally only a contributory factor in determining the resulting social configuration. Patricia Caplan, in her study of the changing relations between high and low castes in a village of western Nepal, writes, "Economic change is most likely to take place when the village is not a self-sufficient unit " [9]. This model of social change follows the pattern for most of caste India, where each community and village is linked with a complex network of ties of interdependence. However, this model cannot be applied to the Raj Gonds, for whom the antithesis of interdependence, isolation and separation on a "them and us" model, operated. The economic change that has occurred is not a relative change in the environment but rather is an enlarging of economic networks with the outside world and the development of interdependence—a radical and absolute change in the economic environment, not a relative one; in fact, a change-over from isolation to interdependence.

The baseline model for the ideal type of traditional Raj Gond society is of the quasi-dominance of the Raj Gonds, relatively isolated in the vast and underpopulated Mughal Empire. Increased wealth, the building of large forts, and the employment of various caste service groups brought in Hindu influences, which were tribalised by the Raj Gonds, who preserved their dominant position. However, with the exponential increase in India's population, pressure was put on their relative isolation. The rise in population occasioned an influx of caste peasants, requiring an extension of centralised authority. This authority was more amenable to influence from, and more easily manipulated by, the more powerful immigrants. In the competition for resources the immigrants, backed by the power of government, managed to alienate the primary means of production—land. This reached a crisis point in the 1930s when the government also reserved the forests, so that Raj Gonds were caught between their land being taken away and not being allowed to clear new forest land. Improved communications and government policies of improved land registration and revenue collection increased the requirement for cash. As the Raj Gonds mortgaged or sold their land, or had it illegally registered in the names of Brahmins and Velma landlords, they found themselves moving into economic dependence on powerful outsiders. The landlords who obtained land from the tribals farmed their dependants for rent and invested the proceeds in moneylending. If loans could not be repaid, the land was given to immigrant cultivating Telugu castes. The situation gave rise to the Babijheri uprising of 1939 (see chapter 3) and later to sympathies with the Communist and Naxalite parties in the 1960s and 1970s.

[8] A. R. Beals, "Interplay among Factors of Change in a Mysore Village." Patricia Caplan,

[9] Patricia Caplan, *Priests and Cobblers: A Study of Social Change in a Hindu Village in Western Nepal* , p. 85.

In the 1940s, as a result of the fortuitous coincidence of the unease created by the Babijheri incident and Fürer-Haimendorf's anthropological investigations, the Nizam's government adopted a policy of trying to restore the Raj Gonds to a position of economic independence. Numerous landless tribals were granted new land to cultivate, existing holdings were registered on inalienable title, and parallel programmes for social development were initiated. The intention was to preserve the tribals' economic and cultural independence and to develop them to a level on which they could compete with the immigrants. Due to the historical circumstances of national independence and state re-organization, the tribal development policy was not properly implemented, and the process of economic subjugation returned. Cultural concepts such as "them and us" were no longer applicable, as the Gonds found themselves more and more dependent on the new dominant communities, and they began to see themselves as having an integral position in a new economic and class-based hierarchy.

The domination of the Raj Gonds in the eastern area of Adilabad District by Brahmins and Velma landlords and their interdependence in the new economic order did protect them from the onslaught of small peasant farmers from Maharashtra who came later into the central area. This domination by caste-Hindu landlords is the main feature of the new structure of interdependence; a structure in which the Gonds have a new role as cultivators in an economic arena where trade and cash cropping have involved them in increased relations with other communities. New nation-building policies of integrating minority groups, while affording them protected development, encouraged this interdependence. Thus social change has taken the form of a breakdown of local self-sufficiency and an opening up of frontiers with the outside. This has not modified the character of existing social relations, but is a radical move creating new social relations in a hierarchical caste model.

However, it is not as simple as this. Identity is not affected only by external factors of economic change. Faced with these changes, the Gonds themselves have actively tried to direct their changing identity. The administrative concept of "tribal" rather than the indigenous one of *adivasi*, or aboriginal, with all its connotations of a privileged minority, has become a new banner to wave. The more modernised Raj Gonds who have adopted this new identity as tribals within an Indian hierarchy have resorted to the cultural mechanism of a semi-reform and semi-revivalist movement with new norms of behaviour and social interaction to allow them to operate in the enlarged network of social relations in which they find themselves.

One of the major changes in the area has been the development of the special tribal development programmes, around which the new administrative concept of "tribe," as opposed to *adivasi*, has developed. Government improvements in the national infrastructure have opened the area up for cash cropping and the purchase of consumer products, increasing dependence on outside economic factors, including the ubiquitous moneylenders. Education has attempted but so far has largely failed to provide alternatives to cultivation as a means of livelihood. The main effect of education has been to create a new elite leadership at the local level and to create greater social interaction across previously rigid intercommunity barriers. Agricultural development programmes themselves have achieved little progress, though they have shown the way for enterprising individuals to intensify and rationalise their farming techniques. And the new techniques are gradually being taken up.

However, the inability of the traditional leaders to operate in the new local political structures has largely undermined their position, while the previous dynamism of local leadership, which was based on mobile residence patterns, has broken down. This has taken place along with a combined shortage of land to clear and the imposition of legal parameters to

land ownership. The traditional population pattern of small, isolated villages which often moved or at least had a mobile population has begun to change, so that today certain tribal villages are becoming large and permanent settlements of a multi-ethnic composition, in which the pattern of local leadership is based on factional politics similar to those found in the multi-caste villages of the Indian plains, with strong links to and involvement in the national political framework.

Along with this general movement towards greater economic interdependence and a broader horizon of intercommunal contact, the special relation between the Raj Gonds and their traditional bards, the Pardhans and Totis, has begun to break down as the bardic groups begin to rely on cultivation for their livelihood. This in turn has affected the position of the Raj Gonds, who were previously the politically dominant land-owning group, but are now becoming another group of less-advanced peasant cultivators in the nexus of the plural society of India. While castelike parameters are beginning to become the determinants of social identity among the educated young, revitalisation and reform movements which are closely associated with the special tribal educational system are beginning to reshape the mythical basis of group identity.

The new identity that the Gonds are developing as one community in a wider, more integrated society, while having a castelike character, is developing into a reformed version of their identity of a tribal group. The Raj Gond language and clan cult, while being mixed with many Hindu elements, are being emphasized as an important element in a new identity of tribal ethnicity. This new tribal status is gaining further reality under the special regulations for tribal development. Land reforms, boarding schools, and privileges in agricultural development schemes all reinforce this identity. Whether or not such schemes actually achieve their aim of altering the economic structure of society, they are preserving a politically defined cultural identity in which the Raj Gonds see themselves as a tribe within an integrated Indian society.