Studies on social and cultural change in India are explained largely through models of sanskritization, acculturation and little/great tradition. All these models assume a one-way process of change – from the low to the high castes, from the tribal to the non-tribal (be it Hindus or Christians) and from the little to the great tradition. Focusing more specifically on tribal studies, one does witness two main theoretical strands that dominate the literature. One set of studies highlights the distinctive characteristics of the ‘tribal’ be its culture, religion, kinship or marriage. Another set of literature talks about the integration of the tribes into the Hindu fold through the processes of sanskritization, accommodation and acculturation (Hinduization, peasantization are also terms used for such processes of integration). Many studies on tribal and non-tribal interaction thus document such processes of integration and assimilation losing sight of the fact that such processes of change are not necessarily unidirectional. Singh and others argue that sanskritization goes along with tribalization and offers ample instances of such processes. Thus a particular culture (or any element of culture) might include elements of both the worlds i.e. the tribal and the non-tribal and hence is essentially syncretic. In this regard, anthropologists are increasingly realizing the problematic of studying local culture or identities as distinct boundaries/entities (Steadly 1999; Bhargava 1989). Cultures or even any element of culture as Bhargava argues ‘may be more like clusters of heterogeneous elements with varying origins’ (Ibid).

The paper in this context highlights cultural synthesis and the process of cultural exchange between the tribal and the non-tribal in Kalyansighpur block of Rayagada district in South Orissa. It unfolds elements of cultural exchange through plays or locally known as ‘nata’ performed by the tribal in non-tribal localities during the supposedly ‘Hindu’ festivals. As the subsequent analysis would show, Hindu religion does not exist as a separate distinct category because many of these religious festivals discussed in this paper are less ‘classical’ and display blurring of religiosity, identities and distinctiveness. The tribal Kandha identify themselves with these festivals both as insiders and outsiders. As insiders, there is a conscious attempt to participate and create a space for themselves.
in terms of meaning and significance and at another level they are outsiders because of their strong identity with the distinct ‘tribal religion’ and hence none of these festivals take place in the tribal villages.

The focus on nata has enabled me to look at culture through the social actors who are consciously and actively engaged in the process of exchange than the classical anthropological approach of viewing culture merely as an expressive text to be interpreted.² However, even while the entry point for analysis is the nata, the paper discusses the linguistic, economic and political dimensions of the process of exchange. Consequently, the paper does not merely contribute to the study of tribal and non-tribal cultural exchange but also unearths other levels of exchange, i.e. among linguistic groups and different castes. I wish to emphasize that the non-tribal is not a homogenous category and the tribal would have different terms of relationship with different castes in the same village. For instance, in the study area, for the tribal Kandha, the Brahmins are the landlords, the saukars with whom they work as tenants, the telugu kumutis (a baniya caste) are increasingly the role models for entrepreneurship, the paikas (a warrior caste) serve as their masters (gurus) who train them to perform plays and the damba (the scheduled caste) who are treated as inferior yet play an important role in several trading activities. Any study on tribal-non-tribal interaction and consequent process of change must take into account such diverse and multiplex relationships.

The paper falls into three sections. The first section journeys through Kalayansinghpur village in Rayagada district that sets the context for the study of cultural synthesis. The second section dwells on the plays highlighting who performs, what is being performed, how and when is it being performed and its implication for the study of cultural synthesis. The third section draws on the inferences and analyzes these in the context of the problematic of the traditional models of cultural change.

Kalyansinghpur: A confluence of cultures

Kalyansinghpur block is in the district of Rayagada (The Kings’ Fort) in South Orissa and is around 40 kilometers from the district head quarters. Rayagada that became a separate district in 1992 borders the state of Andhra Pradesh. It has an area of 7,584.7 square Km. with a population of 8,23,000 (2001 Census) of which 4,61,209 constitute the tribal population. The majority of the tribal are Kandha found mainly in blocks of Gunupur, Kalayansingpur, Kashipur and Bishamcuttack. Kalayansinghpur is the block headquarters

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² Bowen (1995) discusses the increasing emphasis on the role of social actors in defining and interpreting culture.
and comprises of around 5,000 households. Rayagada flanks it on the one hand and Lanjigarh (Kalahandi district) on the other. The southwest of the village has the sacred Devgiri, ‘a round hill of bare, smooth rock cave containing the lingam, pools of water and an inscription which is undecipherable’ (Koraput District Gazetter 1966). The most popular Shivaratri festival is observed here which witnesses a weeklong cultural program. K.Singpur contains remains of an old fort and is surrounded on three sides by the river Nagavali. While the river has made this area agriculturally fertile, its connectivity to other areas is poor. There is no transportation to many of the nearby Kandha villages; however this has not restricted the tribal and non-tribal interaction. People uninterruptedly walk back and forth through the river.

The physical distribution of different categories of households in K.Singhpur roughly corresponds to the caste groups. The Brahmins are concentrated in Tripathy sahi. They have migrated to the place last 70-80 years back. In fact it is said that the then King of Jeypore (feudatory chief known as Maharaja), of which K.Singhpur was formerly a part of and was the chief village, invited the Brahmins from Ganjam district and made them settle here to take care of both cultivation and worship of temples. Such process of immigration of advanced cultivators was a necessity which served the purposes of political legitimacy of the kings (who were the Oriyas from the Kshatriya caste) through fulfilling the increased demand for revenue to the colonial government that called for more settled cultivation. Such process of immigration of Oriya castes in different parts of Orissa that accompanied a simultaneous process of attenuation of rights of the tribal over land and forest has been well documented. The social formation during this period witnessed a three tier structure, i.e., a) the feudatory chief (maharaja) b) rajas/zamindars c) tribal and non-tribal cultivators.

The residents in the Brahmins locality say they are the third generation of families in Singpur. A number of these Brahmins served in the King’s court. The Brahmins who hail originally from Ganjam take pride in the purity of the brahminness by calling themselves Utkali Brahmins. They claim superiority from other Brahmins like Halua (with surnames Panda, Padhi, Pal etc.) because of the latter’s original association with the plough. Halua literally means one who holds the plough. While the Utkali Brahmins are essentially agriculturists, they get their lands cultivated by farm servants. Holding the plough itself by a Brahmin is considered ritually impure. The cleavage between these two sections of Brahmins continues to be relevant even today. Inter-marriages between these two sections are discouraged and looked down upon. While the Halua can serve as priests in temples,
the Utkali Brahmins claim the exclusive rights of serving the God on special occasions like Rath Yatra. There has been major dispute in the past on such claims between these two sections of Brahmins on serving Lord Jagannath and carrying his chariot. One such instance was narrated when the Halua Brahmins forcibly organized Rath Jatra and pulled the chariot and soon after this incident (within one year), three members of one of the families met with accidents and died. This was narrated to emphasize Lord Jagannath’s disapproval of being served by the Halua and hence reinforcing the supremacy of Utkali Brahmins. All the Brahmin families are agriculturists and own around 70-80 acres of land in and around Singhpur.

The paikas in the paika sahi are a warrior caste. Paika is derived from the word padatika meaning infantry. They take pride being the ‘descendants of the military caste who maintained the prestige of the Gajapati Kings of Orissa in battles 15th and 16th centuries’ (Koraput District Gazetters 1944). The Paika were also in the service of the maharajas. Many of the paika women used to be the kept of kings. They also maintained the tradition of dance, gettinatya etc. at the Kings court. They hold their head high and accept food only from the Brahmins (Koraput District Gazzetter 1966; Ganjam district Gazzetter 1995). The Brahmins however do not accept water or food from the Paika. In Singhpur, the Paika are not economically well off. They work on the land belonging to the Brahmins on a sharecropping basis. They are also engaged in hunting and doing contract labour etc.

The Telugu speaking baniya caste of Kumuti in K.Singhpur are concentrated in bajar sahi (in and around the main market). They belong to the baniya caste called kumutis. They are a business community. They are engaged in agriculture but mostly commercialized agriculture. They own rice mills. They are successful businessmen and have recently built fancy, huge houses. In addition, they are also into other small-scale businesses like saree shops, grocery shops. They also make poppadum for sale. For the latter work, they engage the labour of the Kandha women. Singhpur, like many parts of Ganjam, has a distinct influence of Telugu in several ways. The Oriya dialect spoken in Ganjam including Singhpur has a Telugu accent; the language delivery is faster and sharp unlike the Oriya spoken in West and East Orissa. Even the Kandha are fluent in speaking and understanding Telugu. They admit that the kuvi, their mother tongue has a Telugu influence. They clarified ‘the Kandha in the nearby district are the same as us but the dialogue delivery is different. Our speech is faster and sharper (kati kati)’. It is said that many Oriya words used in this part of Orissa are long obsolete in the refined Oriya
language spoken in Eastern Orissa. This is due to the influence of both kuvi and Telugu language. Many words like rami (mixed), saman (adequate, appropriate), haii (yes, okay), dhangada (young) used in everyday conversation trace their origins to either of these languages. The older generation of Oriyas including the Brahmins speaks and writes Telugu fluently, while the present generation manages to speak Telugu as the latter manages speaking in Oriya. Telugu channels are quite popular among the Oriya castes. Food habits also exhibit a distinct influence of Telugu speaking people.

Damba, the scheduled caste had always been living in minority in all Kandha villages. In Singhpur, they reside in the outskirts of the block. The relationships between the Kandha and Damba are complex and different shades of this relation have been discussed by the author elsewhere (Mishra 2008). The Damba who are an untouchable caste are looked down upon by all the castes including the Kandha. Dambas everywhere primarily have a negative term of reference. Their original caste name is pana who are found in Ganjam district in south Orissa. They continued to be referred abusively during the British period. The negative term of reference continues till date. The Dambas are the traditional drummers, a positive image that is perhaps underplayed. The drumbeat, which is popularly known as Ganda Baja, is played on different occasions, i.e., marriages, death ceremonies. However this service is utilized by the Oriya castes and never by the Kandha, who take pride in their own musical traditions. The Damba apart from trading vegetables, fruits, lentils (which they buy from either the Dongria Kandha and/or other caste groups) in the main market mostly engage themselves in making country liquor and selling it to the Kandha. Of late, the damba women are employed in Anganwadi centers and schools.

Besides these, Singhpur has localities comprising of government officers in the block colony, Gaudas in gauda sahi, potters in the Kumbhar sahi etc. The government officers in the block colony are a floating population who visit places according to their workplace. Majority of them are from eastern Orissa. Gaudas are traditionally a herdsmen caste and enjoy a ritually higher status. They are one of the few lower castes from which water and food are acceptable to the Brahmins. They say that they are descended from the Yadav tribe where Lord Krishna was born⁴. They are engaged in small scale cultivation on their own lands.

The Kandha, a few of them, around 50-60 households are in K.Singhpur itself in the Kandha sahi and majority live in surrounding Kandha villages with minority damba. The Kandha supposedly the original inhabitants of these villages identify themselves as

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⁴ Bolangir District Gazetteer, 1968
‘adivasi’. The religion of the Kandha revolves around earth Goddess and other representations of thakurani (female deity). These deities are propitiated on different occasions to ensure good harvest, healthy life, protection from deadly diseases like chicken pox, cholera and others unnatural deaths. All these religious ceremonies involve sacrifices of animals. Buffalo sacrifice also known as podh puja marks the climax of all the religious ceremonies in its meaning, significance and intensity of the ritual. It reinforces the Kandha’s belongingness to mother earth thus reasserting the Kandha’s exclusive identity. They claim their origin from the mother Earth (dharni) and treat others particularly the damba as outsiders. Each Kandha village has a sacred space marked for the mother earth. The jani (priest), disari (astrologer, counsellor) and bejuni (medicine man, healer) play important roles in all religious ceremonies.

The Kandhas in and around the villages of Singhpur practice settled cultivation. They share a close relationship with the Brahmins; the latter are their landlords, masters, patrons and moneylenders. Singhpur also has few Dongria Kandhas living close to the Niamgiri Hills. They are relatively (compared to the Kutia Kandha in Singhpur) isolated. They are agriculturists but cultivate only on the forestland known as ‘dongar’. Unlike the Kutia Kandhas, their interaction with the plains is limited only to selling of vegetables, lentils, and turmeric in the daily market. They also come down during the popular Shivratri festival where many marriages (marriage by capture) solemnize. It is interesting to see the difference between the Kutia and the Dongria Kandhas. The Kutia Kandha claim superiority due to the Dongria Kandhas’ limited interaction with the Oriyas and Telugus, their costumes, skills in cultivation etc. They also feel that Dongria Kandha are wild and can be harmful. Dongria priests are however invited to do the worship during Buffalo Sacrifice because they feel that they have the expertise in chanting the hymns to the Earth Goddess. A buffalo is usually sacrificed by a Dongria Kandha. Brahmin landlords are invited for ensuring that nothing untoward happens (anticipating trouble from the Dongria Kandha). Dongria males are usually seen with an axe on the shoulder. They consider themselves economically inferior and say ‘we are hungry people’.

The Brahmins however have a cordial relationship with the Dongria Kandha who are treated with amusement but also with respect. The relationship is translated on many occasions through ritual friendship (mita, sangata). Such ritual friendship witnesses a series of obligation through exchange of items like rice, turmeric, bananas, sweet potatoes etc.
Cultural synthesis through *natas*

While cultural synthesis can be studied through several elements of culture, this paper treats *nata* as the entry point to reflect on the cultural exchange between the tribal and non-tribal and also among several castes. *Nata* is derived from the word *natya*, which conveys meanings of dance, music and dramatics. While *Natya, gananatya, lokanatya, Jatra* might share a lot of historical, literary features with its counterpart in west Bengal and Bihar, *natas* as they are perceived and performed in Singhpur are different in many ways and some of these differences will be explored during the course of the discussion. *Natas* might form a part of *Jatra* but are less organized, performed on a lesser scale and are less professional. Unlike *Jatra* troupes, the *nata* troupes would not move very far and usually perform either in the same village or at the most nearby village. At the same time, *Natas* like *jatra* are necessarily performed on religious occasions. In fact they are an integral part of many local religious festivals like Ghataparba, Shivratri, Dussehra in Singhpur.

*Nata* has a dubious character. It has elements of both sacred and profane. It is sacred because it centers around religious occasions, performed on highly marked sacred places (temples, temporarily erect sacred spaces). Its sacred character also draws from the fact that the themes are often drawn from Hindu *puranas* and mythology apart from folk tales and stories. At the same time, it is disassociated from the religious festival as its sole purpose is entertainment and hence is performed after all the formalities of the festival are completed and the ritual is over. Thus while during the *puja*, the usual principles of purity and pollution are applicable (where these are necessary), all these are at the same time relaxed though *nata*. Sadler (1969) decodes the form and meaning of festival and argues that all festivals have a spirit of both religious and irreligious. One must note here that *nata* is not the festival itself but accompanies the festival without which the festival is incomplete yet the festival itself is usually associated with the religious only. There is a thin yet important boundary between the two. The following section deliberates on who performs, what is being performed, how it is performed and when it is being performed. While the anthropology of performative art focuses on the details of the performance as a text, significance of the context in which such performances take place is usually ignored. I argue that the occasions in which these *natas* are performed are equally important because these festivals themselves are essentially syncretic and help contextualizing the *natas*.

*Natas* are performed by organized groups of relatively younger boys. The *Paikas* in Singhpur are the original performers of *natas*. They monopolize this art through their traditional service (of performing the same) to the then ruling families. Of late, during the
last five-six years, the tribal Kandha have been performing *natas* in Singhpur. The Kandha of a particular village form a *nata* group and they are trained for months together by their master (*guru*) who is usually a *paika*. All *nata* groups look for the best masters and get trained. Some masters are more reputed than others. Hence, the *nata* groups go to distant villages to be trained better. These masters (*gurus*) though not highly educated, are well versed in music, rhythm (*chanda*) rhymes and presentation. The *nata* group unlike the *Jatra* artistes in many parts of eastern Orissa 5 necessarily belongs to one caste or tribe and preferably from one village. Most of these *nata* groups are not merely known by their caste/tribe but also village, hence goes the names as, Ambodala *nata* party (village name), *patbandhia* (village name), *paikas* (caste name) etc. Females are usually not a part of the party but in very few cases, the group includes smaller girls (11-14). Otherwise as in many traditions of *natya*, men master the art of being women. The males performing female roles in fact take pride in that because it is an art that is challenging. During my stay, on the day of the *nata* during Dussehra, one of the members of the Kandha *nata* group proudly introduced himself to me saying ‘I am the one who will be the *heronie* (heroine) today’.

The themes as has been said earlier are drawn from Hindu mythology, puranas and also folk tales. Thus the titles of *natas* are *Draupadi Haran* (Abduction of Draupadi), *Sita Haran* (Abduction of Sita), *Haravati haran* (Abduction of Haravati), the story of Ram, *Bhutkeli* (story revolving around ghosts) etc. One of the residents on my questioning about the themes said that ‘most of these *natas* are abduction stories’. The male bias through the performers (who are mostly males) and the themes (women are projected vulnerable through these abduction stories) is striking in *natas*. These stories deviate from the classic text of Valmiki’s Ramayan and conforms more to the version of Ramayan handed down by Oriya poets at different periods of time. Stories from such literary texts are further converted to performative texts as these stories need to be presented in a poetic style with proper rhymes and rhythms. Deviations or reinterpretations of original epics through performance by the tribal or otherwise are common (Kapp 1989). Such texts are available in the local market, which are utilized by the *gurus*. Each play, however, has smaller episodes of humor (through jokes or others), suspense, which are drawn from the folk tales and not necessarily a part of the original themes. These smaller episodes are performed by special characters that are known as *dwari* (a comedian), *alkam* 6 (a smaller

5 Chhotaray 2002

6 This word is essentially a Telugu word used in Oriya.
character who wears special costumes like a wild animal or representing a particular caste depending on what is being depicted on the stage). The Kandha as some of the Brahmin residents explained to me memorize the exact content and style of dialogue delivery, which is a combination of Sanskrit language with rustic language. They charge rupees Rs.2000 for the performance from the local organizing committee in most cases who are the Brahmins. The Kandha who also work as tenants with the Brahmins negotiate for time and space for their training. The Brahmins invite these Kandhas to perform in their localities during Dusshera.

The artistes in a poetic style perform the natas and hence music and songs are important elements. The musical instruments used are the tabla, mrindagam, cymbals and harmonium (none of these are tribal instruments). A separate group who sits in one corner of the stage while the artistes perform on the center stage plays these instruments. Thus the training of the Kandhas includes dramatics, songs as well as instrumental music; most of these are non-tribal instruments. The natas are performed in an interactive style, exhibiting perfect coordination between these two groups on the stage and the audience. The performance is far from being a monologue. Different lines are sung in chorus (with both the groups on the stage) with loud music of the instruments. To prevent monotony and boredom, special characters like dwari and alkam perform smaller episodes of comics, suspense that includes a variety of themes. The audience waits for these characters to come and responds to these scenes through claps and laughter. Such response also is related to the familiarity of these themes, which are mostly part of the everyday life. Natas are performed usually throughout the night. The audience comprises of people from all castes in the village and nearby villages.

When are these natas performed? Natas would accompany a particular religious festival. These festivals are ghapatrapra, shivratri, dussehra that are essentially syncretic. Ghata parba is celebrated in the months of April-May. This festival is meant to worship the village deity. This is usually performed by the paikas. While there is no written document available, Ghapatrapba has its origin in the tribal religion, the corollary of which continues to be significant among the Kandhas even today. The original tribal festival of worshipping village deity is known as Ma bulani or worship of thakurani (deity). Such process of aryanisation of many tribal deities in Koraput and Ganjam district has been documented (Rath 1989). The theme of Ghapatrapba is similar to the tribal festival of Ma baulani who is worshipped for the welfare of the people, specifically seeking protection from chicken pox and other deadly diseases. Ghapatrapba witnesses an interesting blending of tribal and Hindu religion. The festival lasts for a period of seven days. On the
first day, a temporary shade (known as ghanta ghara) is made for the worship of the deity. The sword, representative of the deity (one might note here that sword is symbolic of Goddess durga, more generally shakti in Hindu religion) is brought in from the temple Thakurani and installed at the feet of the deity (which is made of clay specifically for the purpose of this festival). The Paika priest initiated the worship of the deity with vermillion, sandalwood, flowers and, sacred brass utensils (huge pots). These pots would be carried (with the deity, sandalwood and flowers) by a group of 4-5 girls (pre-puberty) who go around the village and collect whatever offerings (usually rice, raw vegetables) are made by each household irrespective of caste. As and when the girls walk through the different localities within the village, women from each household come out, wash the feet of the girls and give the offerings. On the last day, these offerings (these offering would have been collected at the temple complex) would be thrown at the outskirts of the village. This is symbolic of taking out the evils of the diseases from the villages and ensuring good health of its residents. The deity visits the village through the priest who gets possessed with the spirit and dances continuously in a state of trance. The original elements of the tribal religion are apparent through the descending of the deity through the spirit possessor, the worship of the deity in a thatched hut, and further worship of the deity by non-brahmin priest. Hindu elements of sword, feet representative of the deity are equally marked. Apart from the synthesis of tribal and Hindu religion, Ghataparba is also significant as it brings together different castes, linguistic groups where caste hierarchy succumbs to the sanctity of the ritual that is performed by non-brahmins. While worship of village deity is done in other parts of Orissa, say for instance Western Orissa, the procedure is very different. It is dominated by the Brahmins and excludes the lower castes.

Shivaratri, which is known as Shivtari jatra is very popular in Kalayansighgpur. God Shiva is worshipped at the sacred hilly rocky cave known as Devgiri. Many popular folk tales, mostly oral in nature, center on the origin of Devgiri and related themes. Some of these form part of the natas. The popularity and purity of Devgiri draws from the fact that the white lingam with five faces (known as Panchamukhi Lingam) has evolved originally through the rock. In the spirit of the true Hindu religion, a Brahmin priest worships the lingam. Menstruating women are strictly forbidden to visit the lingam. On the day of the Shivratri, all the people from K.Singhpur and nearby villages across castes and tribe assemble for the ritual. Compared to ghataparba, this is celebrated at a much larger scale and with great fanfare that includes both sections of the Kandha from the nearby villages both plains and hills. The ritual is followed by a weeklong celebration, known as jatra that includes series of varieties of cultural programs. Many stalls are placed which sells variety
of items ranging from household, eateries, children’s toys etc. Businessmen (Telugu and others) from Rayagada district, Bisamcuttack and some from Singhpur put up these stalls. The cultural programs which starts on the second day witnesses nata, films, (Oriya, Hindi, Telugu), record dance (also known as naked dance), tribal dance mainly by the Dongria Kandha. These are performed at night. It is interesting to see how the jatra exhibits different traditions, the so-called little and great, traditional and modern, classic and folk, all under the same roof. These are played simultaneously to ensure that the stalls continuously receive streams of visitors and the latter are free to subtle between programs. The Dongria Kandha utilizes this auspicious occasion to solemnize marriages (marriage by capture). While more detailed research on the syncretic character of the jatra through the different cultural programs is however needed, one could argue that the characterization of Shivaratri as essentially a Hindu festival turns a blind eye to such process of cultural exchange that this festival accompanies.

Dusshera or Dassara as is known among the Kandha is well known in the whole belt of central and east India. Dusshera is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm and with the spirit of togetherness. This is one festival when all the married daughters visit their parent’s place particularly among the upper castes. It witnesses a series of ceremonial exchanges (cloth, sweets) between families. The festival lasts for four days. On the first day that is known as sashti, young Brahmin men (in silk dhotis) from the Tripathy Sahi collect sacred water from the river and start the puja in the Durga temple which is situated in the Brahmin locality itself. The temple does not have any anthropomorphic images. The temple is considered the original shakti peetha where Goddess durga is symbolized through a stone and a sword. It is said that the Brahmans who were initially entrusted with the task (by the kings) of managing the temple, are not merely expected to do regular worship but it needs to be done with utmost sincerity and highest devotion. Any negligence, relaxation would invite the wrath of the Goddess. The destructive potential of the deity is well acknowledged. Instances were narrated when a former Brahmin priest was punished for such relaxation. Originally human beings were sacrificed which is replaced by sacrifice of goats. Goats are sacrificed on the day of the astami (the third day) and the prasad is distributed among the households. The temple has a lot of open space and has a well-defined cemented boundary from all the sides that marks off the sacred space. The place is well decorated during the four days with fancy lights, loud speakers with popular folk songs and also Bollywood songs. On the day of the dussehra (fourth day) the effigy of Ravana would be burnt at the market place which witnesses large number of people from the village and nearby Kandha villages. On the same day, nata is perfomed in the evening.
This marks the completion of the ritual and the festival. The Kandha people perform *nata* in the Durga temple complex.

**Implications**

How best then one can study the local culture/s in Kalyansighpur? Does the evidence suggest a process of sanskritization (through the tribal kandhas’s participation in *natas*) or acculturation? The analysis clearly suggests the limitations of these models for a variety of reasons. The first, while many studies have discussed about the tribal playing Ramayana either arguing it as a case of sankirtization or even syncretism, what is noticeable in this case is that the tribal kandhas never perform *nata* in their own village, or in the Kandha locality in Singhpur itself. Hence, it is not a blanket emulation of a Sanskrit culture. What needs to be emphasized is the role of the actors (Brahmins, Paikas, Telugus) and the Kandha who actively participate in this process of exchange. The Brahmins inviting the Kandha to perform in their locality in a highly marked sacred space and the *Paika* training them to perform are clear indications of such deliberate process of cultural exchange. For the tribal Kandha, the festival of buffalo sacrifice, worship of *ma baluani* remains the most significant rituals that characterize ‘their’ religion. They involve the non-tribal (particularly the Brahmin sahukars and the Telugu Kumutis) through asking for contributions (money), and witnessing the ritual. The Brahmin landlords are invited specifically to ensure the smooth functioning of the festival.

Secondly, while at one level, the tribal kandhas do absorb elements of Hindu religion through *natas*, practicing of dowry system (along with bride price) etc, this does not make them more Hindus and less tribal. They proudly identify themselves as *adivasi* (only on probing, they say they are kandhs). The political undertone of the identity of *adivasi* needs to be taken note of. The Kandha particularly the plain Kandha are highly politically aware of their status. Most of them live in Government aided colonies (named as Indira Awas), avail of government loans and subsidies. The local M.L.A and the M.Ps are from Kandha community. Such increasing political attention strains the traditional patron-client relationship that has existed between the Brahmins and the kandhas. One of the Brahmin patrons thus, lamented ‘they are no more the same kandhas. Earlier, we simply had to show our finger, the work used to be done. Now, we need to go personally and request them to come and do the work. They have their own networks, before we know what the latest Government scheme is they know it. They are getting smarter’. A younger member of the Brahmin patron families added ‘earlier they used to call us *babu* (sir), these
days they call us *bhaina* (elder brother). Kandha are big people these days. They are getting highly educated. Most of the Kandha work on a sharecropping basis on the Brahmins’ land (the capital provided by the Brahmins and the latter labour and ultimately the produce is divided in equal proportion). The tribal Kandha are increasingly getting influenced by the Telugu Kumutis’ spirit of entrepreneurship and are exploring commercial agriculture. Such influence is part of the global capital culture. Thus one of the young Brahmin man observes ‘the kandhas these days wear watches, have T.V.s in each house, borrow V.C.R to watch films, ride cycles, wear t-shirts and drink coke’. Such changes are neither a characteristic of Brahmin nor Telugu culture but increasing globalization. While globalization and its impact on local cultures needs to be researched further, what is clearly visible is that K.Singhpur exhibits a confluence of cultures of Telugus, Oriyas and tribal both when seen culture as text (the historical material available on the cultural synthesis) and culture through the actors/agencies. Neither the tribal nor the non-tribal can be looked upon as fixed identities or neatly separated cultures, each has elements of both.

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