Museum of tribal arts and artifacts in Bhubaneswar has opened up a new vista into the future direction of Orissa's tribal economy and culture. It would usher in a cultural renaissance in the State. The aim of setting up this museum is not only to help preserve tribal cultures from extinction but also to promote appreciation of a better understanding of tribal development vis-a-vis culture. It is in a way, an acceptance of the fact that no more can we afford casual approach to the life and living of our tribal brethren. Rather, we have to be more pragmatic and practical towards them than ever before.

The idea of setting up a tribal museum in SCSTRTI (Scheduled Cast and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute) located at C.R.P.F. square, Bhubaneswar was originally conceived in 1987, but materialised on March 5, 2001. The exhibits of the museum represent the elementary human cultural values that had shaped our past, are determining our present and will be guiding our future. So the Museum of Tribal Arts and Artifacts can be conceptually labelled as "Museum of Man". In common parlance, "Museum of Man" means an integrated institution which disseminates knowledge covering the human species in its totality. In the process of evolution, man acquired "culture", the ultimate tool with the help of which it tried to adapt to the different types of environmental condition. The continuous endeavour to adapt to the changing environment had given rise to variations in man himself and his culture. In the post-modern age, "Museum of Man" connotes tribal culture in its ambience as people of such cultures refer to themselves as "Sons of Man". In other words, museum of tribal cultures or tribal museum can be valued naturally as a "Museum of Man".

This museum has approximately 1900 displayed tribal artifacts in five halls. They exhibit dresses and ornaments, dhokra items, dances and musical instruments, hunting implements, fishing nets, weapons of offence and defence, personal belongings, arts and photographs.

The indigenous tools, technologies, weapons, basketry, pottery, textiles, dresses, ornaments and rural objects are losing their meaning to the new generation. Hence protection and preservation of these tools, appliances and
material traits in the museum have become a necessity to know the antecedents of human life and living.

Tribals have enriched the complex ethno-cultural mosaic of the state. Each individual tribe is unique in terms of its material culture, settlement pattern, house type, mode of subsistence, social organisation, traditional decision making institutions, language, dance, music, adornment, food habit, tools and technology aesthetics, belief system, traditional practice of health and healing etc. They have excellent creative talents, skills and power of imagination in designing art, craft and artifacts.

The dress and ornament section of the museum has 34 textile items of 8 tribes and ornaments belonging to 17 tribes. The traditional costumes include typical textile items like 'ringa' of Bonda, 'phute saree' of Santal, 'gatungkap' of Lanjia Saora etc. Bead neckless like 'tangam' of Lanjia Saora, 'Shaska' of Kutia Kondh, 'Kunti' of Juang, coin neckless like 'mecodica' of Dong Kondh, 'puste' of Koya, 'dabu' and 'lubeida' of Bonda tribes figure in the ornament section.

Dhokra and musical instruments section of the museum has 117 dhokra items of Bathudi, Desia Kondh, Dongria Kondh and Kondh tribes. Among these Dhokra items 'lionet', 'paji' and 'snake charmers' of Desia Kondh, 'ox head' of Bathudi and 'elephant' of Bhuinya tribe are quite spectacular. Besides, 13 musical instruments like horn trumpet of Kutia Kondh / Lanjia Saora / Santal / Bonda, double membrane drum of 'holva', 'flute' and 'violin' of Santal, 'changu' of Juang attract all categories of visitors including musicians.

The agricultural implements include a variety of hoes of primitive tribal groups, wooden ploughs of progressive farmers alongwith 168 tribal household objects such as 'tumba gourd container' of Dongria Kondh, siali net, siali oil extractor and siali fibre basket of Mankirdia, wine container of Paroja and wine pot of Lanjia Saora create a vivid picture of the ancient culture of a remote tribal area in the visitor's mind.

Hunting implements of 22 tribes including the primitive groups, 36 items of fishing nets and crafts of 15 tribes add to the speciality of the museum where axe of Kondh, spear of Paroja, sword of Oraon / Bonda, knife of Dongria Kondh and bow - arrows of all the tribes attract researchers and commoners alike. Besides all these, the presence of net -traps of Mankirdias / Kutia Kondh / Santal / Kisan, Gunstick of Juang, fish basket of Bonda, fishing traps of Gond enhance the beauty of the museum.
The attraction of the arts and photographs section includes snaps like 'shaman' and 'anital' of Saora, Koya dancing girls, women of Bonda and Dongria Kondh with traditional costumes and sketches drawn by tribal children at school.

Saora shrine crafts like 'Manduasum' / 'Jenanglosum', Dongria Kondh shrine crafts like 'Kateibali' / 'Meriah' post / 'Kandruduma' displayed on the open air platform inside the museum and Saora shrine crafts like 'Jodisum' / 'gunwar rang' beneath the trees beyond the museum premises amuse visitors of all hues.

Above all, five typical huts of Santal, Juang, Gadaba, Saora and Kondh constructed within the institute's ambit provide an opportunity to the interested public, researchers and foreign visitors to have a feeling of the tribal habitat in its natural ambience.

Orissa has been a repository of one of the world's finest cultural heritages. Throughout its ancient history, it has attracted many saints, philosophers, pilgrims and invaders, who have shaped the mosaic texture of art and craft of the land much to the applause of international tourists and scholars. This wonderful land of fascinating beauty, girdled by verdant hills of India's Eastern Ghats on one side and the surging waves of Bay of Bengal on the other, is also a virgin land of tribal culture. It has the highest percentage of tribes and ranks third amongst all Indian states in terms of tribal population. So tribal culture forms an important part of the colourful spectrum of Orissa. Besides, Orissa is the homeland of the largest variety of tribal communities numbering sixty-two, including 13 primitive tribal groups, which are now at various stages of socio-economic development. They express their cultural identity and distinctiveness in their social organisation, language, rituals, festivals including their dresses-ornaments and arts-crafts. Every facet of their life is intimately connected with religious belief, ritual practices, livestock sacrifices and beliefs in supernatural power. It is these aspects of their culture that give solidity to their social structure. With the advent of time, traces of borrowing from Hindu religious ceremonies are noticed among the tribals of Orissa.

The tribes of Orissa have retained the rich and varied heritage of colourful dance and music forming an integral part of their festivals and rituals. It is through art and craft that the tribals seek to satisfy their inner urge for revealing soul and to express the joy of life.

The artistic skill of tribal people is not only confined to dance and music but also manifested through their dress-ornaments, handicraft-wall paintings, wood carving-decorations etc. The exquisite wall-painting / exotic floral designs of Santals, the pictograms of Saoras depicting stylistic figures of plants and animals are the best examples of colourful tribal art. Likewise, the multi-coloured
designs of animals / human beings decorated on the walls of "Mundaghar" in Juang tribal community are indeed works of rare artistic excellence. Besides all these, the wood carvings of Kondh, metal work of Bathudis, bamboo basketry work of Juangs are also exquisite specimens of tribal artistry.

As tribals constitute a major segment (21.13% of total population, numbering 81.45 lakhs as per 2001 Census) of Orissa, non-tribals living in close proximity with them for centuries are considerably influenced by tribal traditions and cultures. Both tribals and non-tribals in Orissa are influenced by each other's lifestyle to a great extent. That is why Orissan culture is an integrated, composite culture. The supreme God of Hindus, Lord Jagannath, had been the God of primitive tribe, Savaras or Saoras. Half-hewn wooden deities of the adivasis (schedule tribes) have great iconographical similarity with Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. The tribal society of Orissa has undergone great changes under the impact of new economic and political forces. In the name of development their society and culture should not be distorted or disintegrated. It is the duty and responsibility of the modern civilization to preserve the valuable ingredients of the endangered tribal culture and tradition with all its distinctiveness and purity. It is expected that the Museum of Tribal Arts and Artifacts will have a positive and constructive contribution towards this goal.

The writer is a Bhubaneswar-based freelance Journalist and he lives at Qt. No.VR 3/2, Unit-3, Bhubaneswar.